

CHAPTER 1

“How do you find a telepath?” Mike asked. The small group of humans and CATS all looked back at him. Nobody had an answer. “HAZZ, you said you found others when you were first learning to think-talk. Do you think you could find them again?” Mike asked.

“HAZZ SMALL ONE then. Not know how to tag. Have to find new,” the big CAT responded. *“Tell all CATS to scan for humans that think-talk. Need more CATS other places,”* he said, reminding everyone of the need to place CATS outside of the Federation.

“Can you reach out to ask all the CATS to start scanning?” Lyle asked. “We need to find others as fast as we can. It’s going to be up to you CATS to find more human telepaths, I’m afraid. Our humans don’t have the range.”

Anita and Jillian looked at each other and, at a nod from Jillian, Anita spoke. “They will probably be suppressing their abilities. And they will probably be in areas with low populations. I have pretty good control, but I can’t spend a lot of time in high population areas. I can’t take more than a week in a city like Miami before the thought noise becomes too much. Jillian can shut it all out, but she may be the exception, not the rule. And unless she is in an active conversation, I don’t believe the CATS could find her. How many know even now she can initiate think-talk? I have known two other humans with the gift; one committed suicide and the other went insane. It can be a difficult gift to bear.”

“We still have to try,” Lyle insisted. “Fiona, there has been research in this field. Can you look at the results, maybe get some leads?” Jillian’s mother made no response. Lyle looked at the group. “Anybody else have ideas?”

Jillian finally spoke up, “We have to decide how we’re going to use what we’ve learned about the Nobavi. Mike has tried to draw out more information from KNHEROSHI and by listening to the others. None of them know much. KNHEROSHI wonders why we don’t know about them and why they only “woke up”

when the MURKATZ arrived. We've set this process in motion with the captured MURKATZ, but so far we haven't used it on the rock ship. We better have a really good story if we go forward with this idea because they have a history with the Nobavi." Jillian's words brought everyone back to the central question of whatever plans they made. How could the Nobavi be on Earth and humans not know about them?

Mike had been nodding in agreement with Jillian's words. Now he said, "We might be able to find more telepaths, but they won't do us any good if the MURKATZ know they are humans. The ones on the rock ship already killed the human crew on the ship they captured so they know they weren't Nobavi. KNHEROSHI questions how humans can be the Nobavi's pets if we don't know about them. And he knows SAMI is very proficient in using telepathy, the big CATS, less so. The CATS have skirted the truth with their story about SAMI, but they haven't actually lied.

"True," said Lyle. "He is the only one like him. He is very smart and probably believes he is smarter than most CATS. He does often give instructions to the big CATS, although usually he's just passing those instructions on from MING or a human."

SAMI had jumped onto the table around which everyone was sitting. *"SAMI smart. SAMI is only one. SAMI not lie. SAMI likes think-talk with KNHEROSHI. He not care SAMI is small CAT. KNHEROSHI not think-talk with other MURKATZ. They not smart like KNHEROSHI. SAMI secret-listens to others here and on ship. Not smart like KNHEROSHI."*

"SAMI are you saying KNHEROSHI really is smarter than the other MURKATZ," Mike asked. "Is he smarter than the commander of the rock ship?" The diminutive CAT nodded "yes" in answer to both questions. "When he think-talks with you is it like when the MURKATZ think-talk to each other?" Everyone was paying attention to Mike's questions now.

SAMI looked at HAZZ for help in answering. ***KNHEROSHI think-talks with SAMI like CATS and humans think-talk. He sends images but many words. When he think-talks with MURKATZ is images, few words. KNHEROSHI thinks Nobavi use words but think images what MURKATZ must do. He thinks maybe Nobavi here use words to think-talk***

with humans. He waits to know if Nobavi make MURKATZ kill for quiet. Other MURKATZ here afraid to think-talk now.

“Thank you, HAZZ, that explains some things,” said Mike. “It isn’t enough to pretend we are Nobavi by using telepathy. We, you, will have to actually compel them to turn on each other in some fashion. That’s a whole new ball game. Anita, you’ve experimented a little with this. How does it work?” Mike asked, looking at the older woman across from him.

Dr. Anita Bordeaux was a petite black woman, native of the small Caribbean Island where the group was meeting. The original group of three women and one CAT had grown so they had moved the meetings from her house to the Quinn-Connor owned Big House. They had added four men and a half-dozen or so of the enormous Siamese type CATS to these meetings. The specific CATS attending varied, but always included HAZZ, SAMI, MING and MARX. The other CATS took turns so they didn’t outnumber the humans. Others were usually linked in by one of the attending CATS. Anita was aware that Jillian’s younger sister, Megan, often sat out of sight, right outside the room where they were meeting, listening to the discussion. The teenager was very bright and completely serious in her consideration of each point that was raised.

“I have experimented with giving them little nudges to do things, but without them knowing the suggestions come from outside themselves. They are highly suggestible if you send images of what you want them to do. I haven’t tried to make them do anything that might cause them to become agitated or aware they are being manipulated. I don’t know how they would react to that. No idea if they can be compelled to do something they don’t want to do,” Anita told the group.

Lyle, frowning, said, “We know they can be compelled because the Nobavi compelled them. We just don’t know if our human telepaths can compel them. And how you will feel about doing it.” he added, looking first at Anita then at Jillian. They decided it was time for everyone to think about all the issues raised and come at it fresh the next morning.

They had a few more days before Ethan and Megan would have to leave and Fiona had come to appreciate her husband’s thoughtful observations after each meeting. It was the second time

he and Megan had come to the island in less than a month, and he was overseeing Department of Agriculture business remotely. Jillian loved having her parents and sister on the island, especially in this late stage of her pregnancy, and was glad at least her mother would be staying a little longer.

Lyle had time to talk with Anita, sometimes with commentary from SAMI, when he took her home after each meeting. Since she frequently stayed for dinner, it was often well after dark before they made the drive. Lyle usually took the perimeter road rather than the cross-island road to give them more time to talk. Mike, Jillian, MARZI and frequently HAZZ and RIZA discussed ideas and concerns when they were alone in Little House at night. Henry and Ethan went fishing every day, sometimes joined by Mike or Lyle. Mike enjoyed the questions and opinions the two older men shared. Lyle, Jillian, Fiona, MING and MARX usually found time to sit and talk while Mike focused on reworking the protocols for soldier-CAT training. MARX and JASPER both contributed their ideas for the protocols and for a wide range of other topics. Mike valued their input. Megan silently listened to many of the adult conversations.

All ideas were welcomed and carefully examined. They were trying to find a way to save Earth from the approaching fleet of MURKATZ that intended to kill and eat both humans and most of the animals on the planet. HAZZ, with his incredible telepathic range had located the alien minds out in space. Initially the CATS hadn't allowed humans to know about their ability to think-talk but had finally told them when it was clear the aliens weren't going away.

The captured MURKATZ were all from a small scout ship sent out from what they called the "rock ship" which was camouflaged to look like a chunk of space rock. KNHEROSHI had been almost killed by his ship mates and left to die in the Federation. "Doc Mike" had saved KNHEROSHI's life and taught him to speak English and he and the alien were developing a level of trust. The others had been captured in the Suronese Union after their ship crashed. The CATS had linked both Jillian and Anita to the MURKATZ and Anita had tried some gentle manipulation. Now the aliens believed their feared enemies, the Nobavi, were on Earth. The little group of humans wondered if

they could use that fear to save Earth. They just needed more “Nobavi.”

Fiona would be staying on the island for at least another week. One of the kittens, a female named MINNI, showed a definite preference for Fiona’s company when she came to watch Jillian at work each day. Fiona was following Jillian’s lead by narrating MINNI’s antics. Jillian had asked MING if this was a planned bonding after noticing the kitten’s attraction to her mother. MING had not given a direct answer but observed that Fiona did not have a CAT living with her. Jillian decided to just let things develop naturally.

After one session, Jillian had asked Megan to go for a swim with her before dinner. As her pregnancy progressed, Jillian found floating in the warm salt water took pressure off her back and ankles. She loved spending time in the water letting it carry her extra weight. Jillian had always been active and found the changes to her body difficult to adapt to as the child growing inside her got larger and had an increasing effect on her body.

Megan had proven to be especially good at narrating the kittens’ actions. As they floated on the gentle waves, Jillian said she wanted to hire her to work at the compound for the summer if Megan was interested. It would give her a chance to earn some credits of her own before starting university in the fall. Megan had readily agreed. That settled, they floated in the warm water talking about Megan’s early entry into university and some of the problems that might arise because of it. Jillian had entered university when a year younger than Megan but had spent most of her time, when not in classes, at the Department of Agriculture working on her own project. Being younger had never been an issue for Jillian. She hadn’t been very interested in the social life at the university. Megan, on the other hand, was highly social and was afraid her being younger than most of the other students was going to be a problem. Jillian said it might not be as bad as she feared since Kenessee Capital University had a higher number of students enrolling a year or more early than most other universities in the Federation. And, she would have several cousins on campus to help show her the ropes. Lyle had done that for Jillian.

“So, how does it feel to be able to hear other people’s thoughts,” Megan asked after a few minutes of silent floating.

Jillian wasn't surprised her sister had picked up on that. Like Anita, she knew Megan had been listening to the group discussions. "I don't usually listen to others," she said. "Anita says she doesn't understand how I can just shut everyone out completely; she can't do it and sometimes she gets overwhelmed if she is in a city. I would hate that." Jillian was silent for a moment, then continued, "It's really confusing if the person isn't concentrating on talking to you. Thoughts just jump around all over the place. Things come and go that aren't related, it can be a lot of random nonsense. I guess that's why I just shut it out – it's not conscious, it just happens. Imagine what it must be like for the CATS!" She stopped talking and looked at Megan to see if she understood.

"I get that," Megan said. My brain seems to send out random thoughts all the time, even when I'm trying to concentrate. Mom says that's normal. Our brains aren't wired to concentrate on one thing to the exclusion of everything in our environment. It's a survival adaptation. But what about when you are think-talking to someone?

Jillian laughed, and said, "It's just like talking only without making a sound. It's easier with a human, well, with Anita anyway, than with the CATS. Their thought patterns are different, their whole way of thinking with each other is different. We usually say out loud what we are thinking because it seems to make it easier for the CATS to understand us. I don't have to do that with HAZZ anymore. And maybe that's true for any human-CAT bonded pair. I know Lyle and SAMI think-talk all the time without speaking out loud. I'm learning how to focus on who I want to think-talk to so I'm not just throwing thoughts out there and hoping they will be heard by the right person. It makes it easier to understand why SAMI had such a hard time with learning control of near think-talk. I can reach out to HAZZ and Anita easily now. I can also connect with Mike, and we can think-talk even though he can't initiate contact with me. If I concentrate, I can connect to Mom, Dad, Lyle and Henry. Haven't really tried with anyone else. There usually isn't a reason to think-talk so I just don't most of the time. I'm not so good at what the CATS call secret-listening. MING says my own thoughts get in the way. HAZZ helped me connect with the MURKATZ. Their thoughts

are somewhere between CATS and humans, but I don't understand their language. All I can do is receive images from them," Jillian said with a shrug.

"When we did our experiment, it was me thinking the words and SAMI linking me to the three MURKATZ. I thought and said the words in English with an image, directly to their minds and the translator broadcast them in their language, so they heard with their ears and in their heads. HAZZ could think the words in their language. He's picked up a lot more of it than I was aware of, but he's been listening to them longer than anyone else."

"So why do you need human telepaths? Why can't the CATS just pretend to be the Nobavi?" Megan asked.

Jillian considered how to answer the question. "Apparently humans can lie even when using telepathy – at least to alien creatures. The CATS can't do that – they can't pretend to be what they aren't. They also won't use think-talk to try to manipulate or compel behavior. The CATS can always tell when a human is lying because they are such strong telepaths and are sensitive to human emotions naturally. MURKATZ aren't used to many emotions to begin with and know nothing about human emotions. Mike pulled KNHEROSHI out during the experiment and neither Anita nor I have attempted to connect with him. Mike says he's an anomaly in so many ways, and we're being very careful where he is concerned. We also have to remember these are warriors and not as bright as the technical and scientific class, or of the leaders. The scientists and leaders will be more like KNHEROSHI or maybe much smarter." Jillian noticed they were getting too far out and suggested they swim back in. They would need to go in for dinner soon anyway.

Fiona was waiting for them on the beach when they got back to shore and handed them their towels. She had a huge grin and said they needed to go to Little House right away. "What's going on, Mom?" Jillian asked but her mother just laughed and headed off down the beach towards the gate to Jillian's house. Jillian and Megan followed behind her.

Mike and Ethan met them at the French doors that opened on to the back deck. Mike told Jillian she had to close her eyes and keep them closed. He led her into the house and finally stopped and said she could open her eyes. Everything she had

ordered for the nursery had arrived earlier in the day. Suzzanna had called Mike, and he had left the barn and come home to put things together and move the furniture into place. Ethan had come to help when he returned from fishing. Suzzanna had made up the crib, hung the pictures and placed the accessories where Jillian had said she wanted them. The nursery was ready – it just needed a baby to be complete. Jillian burst into tears and hugged everyone. “Hormones,” Ethan whispered to Mike, “how well I remember!”

CATS

Quinn understands why we will not be a mind weapon, but other humans do not. CATS must be strong on this, MING mentally said to the CATS who served as members of her advisory circle. HAZZ shared that if he had known about the creatures the MURKATZ called Nobavi he could not have delivered the message Quinn had asked of him. He still had the urge to tell the MURKATZ the truth, but Quinn said their knowledge of the Nobavi wasn’t known ahead of time and HAZZ hadn’t knowingly lied, just delivered a message. Most CATS agreed with that perception.

The more important topic for discussion was all the SMALL ONES being born or to be born soon. The training facility for older SMALL ONES was full of birthing boxes for the females to choose from and use for the births of those soon to be born. Several of the first ten brought in for breeding had already delivered. The older adolescents had all been shipped to either the Texas or Florida sites for final training. Once again, the older SMALL ONES would have most of their training done outside or in the barn. Many of the new SMALL ONES were going to be very loud and the FEMALES would have to work hard to cover their baby noise. There were twenty-five pregnant females on the island, and about a dozen more off the island. Of the CATS off-island, only FIZZ would be giving birth for the first time. Mrs. Loreen had decided to visit relatives in Florida near the Q-C Bioengineering training site so she could call in Dr. Fitz if he was needed.

Mike had performed another sonogram on SHIRA. She was carrying three over-sized kittens. He didn't know if she would be able to deliver them on her own or if he would have to perform a cesarean. They appeared to be developing normally, but there was great curiosity about the possible effects of the additional genetic modifications made to JASPER's parent's DNA. JASPER knew his mother died giving birth to him, but he had been assured that even if Mike wasn't there, Dr. Steve could deliver the SMALL ONES and SHIRA would be fine. At just under 40 pounds, SHIRA was one of the largest FEMALES, but JASPER was significantly bigger at more than 50 pounds. Mike was equally concerned about MARZI and her SMALL ONES. He had performed a cesarean to deliver her first litter. She had managed the second litter of three on her own. But she was carrying four large kittens this time and she was one of the smaller FEMALES. MARX had asked HAZZ to link him with BRUCE. MARX explained there might be difficulty for MARZI because the SMALL ONES were big. If she needed surgery for these SMALL ONES to be born, Mike feared it would be dangerous to carry future litters. He wondered if she should continue having SMALL ONES. BRUCE and MARZI must think on this. Although BRUCE was scheduled to come back to the island a week before the SMALL ONES were due, Mike was afraid they might come earlier.

Human-level sentience brought problems the CATS would never have to face as simple animals where there was no thought of the future, instinct guided decisions and behavior, cats did not bond for life, males took little or no interest in their offspring, they had a natural place in the world. But these were CATS and those things had been replaced by the concerns created when intelligence and thought dominated instinct.