

Just One Man

By Chuck Sonnenburg

Kim wasn't the first human I'd met, but he was the first I ever had to work with. I suppose it might have made others uncomfortable, having to spend so much of the day alongside one. That's probably why he was assigned to me, because I wasn't particularly concerned. Fear begins with ignorance, and I wasn't ignorant on the subject of humans. Yes, they were intimidating; it was hard not to be intimidated by someone who stood nearly twice your size. Their strength was impressive too. I saw one put a dent in sheet metal with only one punch, and another flip over a cart. They could kill a person easily, but instead of being afraid of them you just needed to be cautious, to understand humans, hard as it might be sometimes.

Like it or not, humans are a necessary part of our society now. Unlike us, humans actually grow stronger with work, provided they are kept well nourished and allowed sufficient rest. And they live nearly three times as long as people do, which means a human slave was a real investment. Their only serious drawback is their limited minds. Give them a list of a hundred things, and you're lucky if they can remember a fraction of them ten minutes later. But it was all right; they could still learn how to do simple tasks and their brains were more adaptive than computers, which meant that humans were preferred to automation in areas where you didn't need absolute precision.

Every once in a while there would be a movement of some kind to allow the humans their freedom. I've heard the arguments dozens of times, and yet I still can't quite comprehend it. What would they do? Probably spend all day mating in the public parks, that's what. Don't misunderstand, it's not that I don't like humans; I just think they need structure in order to survive. Without Nebulon laws in place they would collapse into anarchy.

When I first met Kim I wasn't quite sure what to expect. I'd heard about the success other law enforcement officers had in other cities with human assistance, but I wanted to reserve judgment until I actually saw one in action. Yes, their strength if properly controlled could be a valuable asset in a hostile situation, and their two extra senses could aid in finding evidence, but law enforcement requires intelligence and diplomacy. It's hard for anyone to be diplomatic with a six-foot giant.

Kim was actually early the first day he was assigned to me. I was waiting on a bench outside the Detainment Center, casting my votes for the day's issues. I prefer to wait until it's nearly over, that way I can see the final results right away. There wasn't much today, just the question of whether to increase tariffs on electronic goods coming in from the Geldonin Republic. I voted no. There was no sense in risking a potential trade war with the Geldonians while simultaneously encouraging slothful behavior and simple-mindedness. Just as I was transmitting my ballot he arrived, eclipsing the morning sun

like a living monolith. He said nothing, waiting for me to acknowledge his presence. I liked that about him, he knew when to keep his mouth shut.

I took the time to look him over carefully before I spoke. I wanted to be very careful not to spook him on his first day. “I am Investigator Pohn,” I told him when I was satisfied. “For now I will allow you to address me as Pohn, but if you abuse the leeway I give you all privileges, including that, will be revoked. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir. I mean, yes, Pohn.”

“Good. Now, your job is to observe, so I want you to pay close attention to things. Try to make note of everything, no matter how small. They can make a big difference.”

“I will,” Kim said. “Anything I notice I record here,” he pulled a small infopad out of his pocket. “That’s what they taught me to do at Breshtel.”

“Indeed. Come along then, we’ve got work to do.”

As Pohn and Kim walked down the street people stopped and stared. There were humans in Kyahn City, of course, but none of them wore the green sash that indicated a position in enforcement. Although from the way he towered over his four-foot partner, his arms thicker than a person’s legs, the rhythmic sound of his heavy feet hitting the walkpath, it was obvious that if anyone could enforce something, it’d be him.

The sky was a beautiful amber and a warm breeze was blowing. The weather bureau¹ had announced there would be three hours of rain during the night to meet this month’s quota. The management -or mismanagement in this case- by the K-Province Weather Regent had stirred up a political hornets nest, and the only question on everyone’s mind was who would be elected to the coveted position.

As we turned the corner onto 3rd Avenue I noticed someone had tacked up a holographic projector to show support for Councilor Htof Borrs for the Weather Regent position. Frowning, I stopped and pulled out my slip and slid it over my finger to connect to the network. Shapes appeared in my mind’s eye as I queried for information. I couldn’t help but scoff as I terminated the connection and put the slip back in my pouch. “Who in their right mind would appoint someone with a level two fluid dynamics rating to Weather Regent?” I asked aloud.

“Yes sir,” Kim replied.

¹ Nebulon had long ago mastered the science of controlling the weather. Their primary duties were to ensure the proper amounts of precipitation to maintain plant life and fresh water supplies. It was also possible to make quite a bit of money on the side by scheduling the weather to accommodate the wealthier parts of society. Perhaps the summer blizzard was going a bit too far.

I gave him a brief glance before we continued. “Not all questions require an answer, Kim.”

“I know, Pohn. I was just agreeing with you.”

“Well, that’s comforting,” I remarked. As if I needed a human’s reassurance. “I’m sure you follow politics.”

“Actually, I do,” Kim said. I smiled despite myself. “Borrs has been an opponent of human rights since he came to office three years ago. His filibuster was responsible for postponing the anti-pain statute by one full session.”

“Yes, but that was for personal reasons,” I said. “Borrs was receiving funds from a consortium of pain houses operating out of Pylan. He was looking out for his bank account.”

In addition to the three senses of sight, sound, and taste, humans possessed a bizarre ability called “touch.” This sense contains a different series of individual sensations, much like the different colors we see. They can discern changes in temperature, for example, or tell if someone is contacting them, even through clothing. But the most obvious were the two main sensations: pain and pleasure. Pleasure is akin to having a pleasant dream, and is achieved through a variety of means. The most obvious is in reproduction, which is sometimes a problem because humans don’t mate at any one time of the year as we do, and as a result they may procreate any time the mood strikes them, which seems to be quite often.

Pain is the unpleasant sensation. I’m told it’s like listening to high-pitched noises for a really long time; you just want it to stop. Pain houses offered the public the opportunity to watch as human pain thresholds were tested and wagered upon. Needless to say, I supported the banning. The last thing you did to a slave race that was bigger and stronger than you was provoke it. The same with Kim, really; be open with him, show a little concern, and there was little chance he’d try to part my head from my shoulders.

“Whatever his motivation, he was in the wrong,” Kim said. “He had no respect for human rights.”

“Opposing human rights and supporting pain houses are far from being one in the same,” I said. “It’s typical of the naïve to claim otherwise, but just because a Nebulon doesn’t believe in pain houses doesn’t mean they want humans running about unsupervised.”

“So, that means you’re just supervising me, Pohn?” His tone was pitiful, but I wasn’t going to hide the truth just to spare his feelings.

“Would you expect them to let you roam the streets, enforcing the laws on a whim?”

“I can enforce the laws,” he said. I detected the tiniest twinge of defiance in his tone.

“Can you recite the entire legal code?” Kim said nothing. “I take your silence as a ‘no.’”

“That’s unreasonable,” he said.

I shook my head. “How can you enforce the laws if you don’t know what they are?”

“Fine. If I memorize the legal code, will I be allowed to work on my own?”

“Of course not. It’s against the regulations to have a slave operate unsupervised.”

“But if they pass the Human Rights Bill-“

“The Human Rights Bill is never even going to get to popular vote,” I interrupted, cutting this ridiculous thought short. “As much lip service as people may pay to it, the fact remains that a free human populace would be nothing but trouble for Nebulon society.” He started to talk but I held up my hand. “Later. We’ve work to do.”

Our first stop was at a tavern called Yutrix². It wasn't as seedy as the name implied, but there was suspicion that they traded in a drug called "sharp." Supposedly it left the user with a sense of euphoria and omnipotence, which often led them to do really stupid and dangerous things. Illegal, of course, but the problem was in finding the manufacturers, and every lead always went back to an empty lot or factory or spacestation. We were fairly certain the suppliers were actually Nebulon's working for Syls Holk, who had some legitimate if seedy businesses throughout K Province including Euphorics, pain houses, and culinary tissue harvesting³. They were good at staying one step ahead; that was where humans like Kim came in.

Smell, as it's been described to me, is like tasting the air. A human can use their sense of smell to detect a wide variety of substances, such as vehicle exhaust, fires, even if someone has been using certain drugs. I saw a human who was so good he could tell you what you had for lunch just by smelling your breath.

² "The Pit"

³ It's illegal to knowingly cook or consume any sentient species by interstellar treaty. However, that proviso doesn't prevent the growing of sentient tissues independent from the organism. Allegations run rampant that some CTH plants create clones for sale to the Geldonians, a spider-like humanoid race who prefer to eat their food while it's still alive.

That's what made humans so useful, they could smell the smoke left behind by anyone who had used sharp, even if they ventilated they place. They could smell it on your clothes or in your hair. It was perfectly legal too, because you can't outlaw a person from using their senses. So while a scanner would've required a warrant, a human could do the same job, and no one would even know what he was doing.

At the door was four and a half feet of muscle named Pol. His skin was bluer than most, probably from using illegal strength enhancers. It still didn't matter, considering his bulked up chest was the size of Kim's head. "No humans," he said defiantly as we walked up. "House rules."

Of course, Pol knew that the statute would allow any enforcer into any business regardless of "house rules." It wasn't going to stop him from arguing it, and unfortunately I was required to exhaust all peaceful alternatives before we forced our way in. "I know you're just stalling for time, Pol," I said, keeping my hand on my laser to be safe. "You should know it won't matter. You can spot the odor of sharp, right Kim?"

"Like burnt mint," he said. I noticed that he adopted a pose that, while being non-threatening, demonstrated the size advantage he had over the bouncer.

"Doesn't matter," Pol said, "'cause he ain't goin' in. And don't bother sicing your pet on me; he won't be the first human that was carted off in a bag."

They were ventilating the place, I could hear it. "You make me call in the armored unit I'll be veeeery upset."

"And that just breaks my heart—" He was cut off by the most shrill sound I'd ever heard. The sound seemed to travel down my spine and cause my body to spasm. I glanced up and noticed that Kim was running his claws along the slate tile that was on the lowest part of the roof.

"Pohn, I'm bored," he remarked. "When will the armored unit arrive?" The terrible sound repeated, and I found myself closing my eyes to try and shut out the noise. "I don't want to do this all day."

"Make it stop!" Pol said, his hands over his ears. "You can't—" Before he could say anything Kim pulled the laser out of the blue hand. I looked up into Kim's face and considered activating his pain implant. He had leaned down so that his face was inches from Pol's, and I could almost sense the malice.

"My brother died in a pain house," he said in a voice that sounded like cracking concrete. "Tell that to Syls." He reached out and I thought he was going to hit him, but instead he grabbed the door and pulled it open, ducking to fit through the low opening. I passed the shocked bouncer and followed him in.

“You’d better start restraining yourself,” I warned him as our eyes adjusted to the dim interior. “Too much testosterone impairs the judgment. I know you don’t want the division chiefs to eliminate it all together.”

I could tell he wanted to protest, and I understood why. He hadn’t harmed anyone and the situation remained under control, but I couldn’t let that stunt pass without comment. I didn’t want to set a bad precedent on his first day. “Yes, Pohn,” he said.

“Good. Avoid violence unless I give the word, or you’ll go back to the labor camps.”

The tavern was populated with the typical dregs of Kyahn City, including some Robellians.⁴ There was a group at the bar who had been talking in a low voice since we arrived, sipping at alcoholic drinks. In a couple of the booths I could hear the bubbling of Euphorics as it was rising up from the liquid nitrogen temperature it was stored at. I noticed the couple giggling in the corner, obviously using on synops.⁵ Ah, young love. In the back there were a few patrons engaged in some VR equipment that ignored us. By and large, though, Kim and I were the center of attention. Phlid recognized me from the last time I’d checked out the place. “Pohn,” he said with what passed for a smile amongst Robellians, “you’re just in time, I was frying some mints to try out this new drink-“

“Don’t insult my intelligence,” I said. “Even your customers know that humans can tell the difference-“

“And what a strapping example of the specimen you have,” Phlid interrupted. “Always a pleasure to pour a drink for the occasional homo sapiens.”

“Do you smell sharp?” I asked, ignoring the barkeep.

“Excuse me, I am conducting business here,” the Robellian said with irritation. “Listen, enforcer...”

“Kim,” he said.

“Kim. Is it really worth risking your neck for as little as they pay you at the division?”

“They don’t pay me,” Kim said. “I’m property of the city.”

⁴ Similar to Nebulons but with gray skin and larger eyes, not to mention a more mercenary interest. Robellians had been largely responsible for the limited harvesting of humans before Earth was declared a wildlife preserve. They used to enjoy probing the locals in uncomfortable places just to see their expressions.

⁵ A chemical used to allow two people to experience the same thoughts and sensations. Higher quality synops is expensive, but a low grade substitue was available on the black market.

“Exactly! I have connections that can get you bought out by an associate of mine for a very unique opportunity.”

“I do hope you’re not thinking of bribing him,” I remarked as Phlid pulled a holoprojector out from under the bar and set it up in front of Kim. “You know the statute says-“

“This doesn’t concern you, upbreed,” he snapped, then entered his activation code for the projector. Three human females appeared, making poses which I presumed were supposed to be suggestive. “A friend of mine used to run a pain house in the northern part of the province. Since the passing of the statute he’s re-orged: pleasure house! Same principle, but other, more... enjoyable competitions. As you can see, he’s been acquiring some very appropriate stock.”

Kim looked them over. “Blond, brunette, redhead,” he observed. “Full lips, long hair, ample chest... I think I see what you have in mind.”

“And they say humans are slow on the uptake,” Phlid said with a laugh. “He needs human males to fill out his group.” He rattled off a series of terms that I admit I’ve never heard before, being unfamiliar with human mating customs. “Plus he’ll be supplying you with some helon ointment, eh?” his laugh getting the implication across.⁶

“Kim, I know this is tempting, but-“

To my shock he held up his hand to silence me. “Pohn, please,” he said. He looked at the women the way one looks at a well-cooked salb beast. “The chance to live out my years in perpetual physical pleasure,” he said, “doesn’t come along every day.” He reached across and tapped the projector absentmindedly. “But I do have a mind. However limited you may see it, it’s still mine, and it’s important to me to use it.”

“This is the chance of a lifetime,” Phlid said. “Don’t be a vacuum-head. You’re-Hey!”

“Oops,” Kim said as he hit the cycle button and switched to a different hologram. “Sorry.”

“Hmm. That looks very much like the diagram for the Kyahn City Data Center,” I said, getting a closer look. “Those look like the markings of the security system layout if I’m not mistaken. You know that’s classified material,” I added as Phlid deactivated the hologram and threw it under the desk.

⁶ Helon ointment was often used during Nebulon mating to help facilitate reproduction, stimulating the glands to prep the body for mating. In humans it was an extremely powerful aphrodisiac. In the most noteable case two humans continued mating under its influence even after both their pain implants had been activated.

“Illegal search,” he said with rage. “You can’t just go prying through my records without my consent.”

“It was an accident,” Kim said with an exaggerated shrug. “You know how us vacuum-heads are.”

Maybe a judge would toss it out later, but we had legitimate grounds to bring him in, and there was no doubt I’d find sharp residue on his hands or clothes. But there was no time to react as Phlid activated a button behind the bar, causing a panel in the ceiling to open and release a rather unwelcome surprise.

A Morna Roach is about three feet wide in just about every direction. They’re not especially fast, but they possess fangs that can pierce anything short of ceramic armor, and a deadly venom that will bring down a leviathan. They were genetically engineered bio-weapons created more than a century ago, and hence can be trained. “Human!” Phlid shouted as the creature scurried to turn itself around, hissing as its black mandibles flexed in anticipation. Kim didn’t hesitate; he hoisted his legs onto his barstool and leaped across the room to a table, then another. I had my laser on Phlid. “Call it off,” I warned, the whine sounding as I readied the weapon to fire. Before I could react a force cage dropped, shielding him from me as he laughed that annoying little probe-loving laugh.

“Why don’t you shoot it?” he offered with a chuckle, causing the patrons to duck. The other disadvantage of the Morna Roach is that it’s tissues contain traces of primitive explosives to prevent enemy soldiers from killing them in battle without taking them with it. In this confined space a laser would probably kill Kim and me and most of the patrons.

“Kim,” I called, “I’m giving the word.”

“Thank you, sir,” he called, and I wasn’t sure if he was being sarcastic or not, but he jumped onto the floor and grabbed one of the chairs. He held it between himself and the Morna Roach, blocking it every time it leaped at him. On the fourth try he stepped aside and hit it with the chair, causing it to land on its back. He tried hitting it with the chair, and while he did manage to crack it’s shell a little the chair was in pieces after the swing.

It was already starting to get back on its feet when Kim turned to one of the tables. They were held to the floor with three screws, but he heaved at it until I heard wood cracking and the table coming free. He awkwardly dropped it on top of the roach and proceeded to jump on it, one hundred eighty pounds of unstoppable human mass. There was a sickly cracking and an unthinkable screeching noise as Kim continued bouncing on the table until all movement beneath him stopped. Panting he stepped off the table and examined the remains. I signaled for the armor unit just in case Phlid tried anything else, but he was so stunned that it turned out to be unnecessary.

As they carted Phlid off I examined the table. Sure enough, the top was blackened from heat. "You were lucky you didn't set it off," I remarked.

"Well," Kim remarked, "I thought that the table would contain most of the explosion, and anything left would've been directed at me. It would've put that thing out of action for sure with minimal damage to anyone else."

"Yes," I admitted. "Good work."

Word of the incident quickly spread and it became a major story across the province. Once a scan of Phlid's person showed samples of sharp we had the ball rolling. Enforcer investigators were going over the tavern with a fine tooth comb while he himself was pumped for information on his collaborators. But even with the possibility of turning up a major drug source for the area the main story was still Kim. That a human had helped bring them down, and had so effectively worked with law enforcement, was giving the human rights movement a focus.

I cast my final vote for the day and flipped over to the network, only to find another editorial on Kim's involvement for our division. This one made the argument that all investigators be partnered with humans, a recipe for disaster in my opinion. It wasn't jealousy, but the fact was that Kim was pushing the envelope and that I set up where those boundaries were was what allowed him to pull it off.

"Good morning," I remarked as Kim strolled up. Earth's rotation is twice as long as our own, so humans slept every other day. Apparently the price of their strength was exhaustion, because Kim usually slept six times as long as most people. "Seems you're still striking quite a blow for the human cause."

"If it leads towards freedom," Kim said, "then that's fine with me."

"You're not getting on that kick again," I said as I slid the slip into my pouch.

"It's important to me," he said, obviously restraining his passions.

"All right. So tell me," I said, "What would you do with freedom if you had it?"

"Well," Kim said, apparently trying to think, or what passes for thinking in humans. "If I were free I could make my own decisions on what I would do."

"Your own decisions." I couldn't keep the skepticism out of my voice. "What kind of decisions would you make?"

"Well..."

"You say 'well' a lot," I pointed out. "Just answer the question. What kind of decisions would you make?"

"W- I'd decide where I wanted to work, for one."

I nodded. "So, you don't want to work here."

"I didn't say that," Kim replied.

"You just said that if you were free you'd decide where you'd work. Clearly that means you don't want to work in your current job."

"I just want to be able to decide."

"Where else could you work?" He didn't say anything. "You can't work anywhere else, can you? You're not trained to do any other kind of work. Or do you prefer working in the labor camps?"

"No," he said, dejected. "But I want to work here because it was my choice."

"What possible difference does that make? If it was your choice or not, the result is the same, so why should it matter?"

Kim wouldn't look at me. "It matters," he said quietly.

"If you could stop your heart from beating," I said, hoping to simplify things for him to understand, "would you?"

"Of course not," Kim said, trying not to look upset. "I'm not stupid."

"That decision is made for you," I said. "No conscious control, and yet you don't seem to resent your heartbeat."

"That's not the same thing."

"Let's move on," I said. It seemed obvious that he wasn't going to be logical about this point. "What other decisions would you make if you were free?"

"Wel-" He caught himself. Humans can learn new things, eventually. "I was thinking, if I were free, I might try to become a citizen."

I really didn't want to laugh, but it was so ludicrous and so out of the blue I couldn't hold it in. "You can't be serious!"

"I could try," he said indignantly. "It doesn't hurt to try."

"You'd never pass the test," I said, my self-control finally winning out. "Not once, and certainly not every year."⁷

"How do you know," he said so quietly I almost didn't catch it.

"All right," I said, deciding once again to try to teach instead of just rebuking his nonsense. "Power supply is down in Anthwip. It is suggested that, at a cost of four billion isons we build a new ion reactor to supplement the power supply. Should we, and why?"

"Yes," he said without hesitation. "Ion power is cheap, non-polluting, and the citizens would be allowed to continue without disrupting their lives. It also would provide new jobs."

I nodded. "Not bad, for a human. There's just one small problem." I gave him a moment to try and think of it; he didn't. "There is no city of Anthwip. I made it up."

"I thought it was just an example," he said, sounding slightly frustrated. "I didn't know there was no such place."

"That's the point," I said. "The purpose of the annual citizen tests is to ensure that only intelligent people pass. Democracy is dependent on an educated populace. Could you imagine the chaos if we allowed any moron to be able to cast their vote on issues? Society would crumble, because the intelligent would be shouted down by the dumbest among us."

"Maybe," Kim said. "But that was a trick question."

"No, it was a question that would have allowed criminals to illegally receive four billion isons if you had anything to say about it. Your ignorance would have polluted the system."

"Who can keep track of all of that off the top of their head?" Kim asked hotly. "Who knows how many cities are on this planet?"

"I do," I informed him. "Four hundred eighty-seven."

"But don't you take the time to research the issues every day?" Kim asked. "You find out all the facts before casting the vote, you don't just use your memory."

"Yes, but I don't waste my time looking up whether a fictional place exists. I analyze the latest studies on the issue. You would be too busy trying to look up the correct terminology."

⁷ Citizens were allowed to vote in the popular elections held daily. For order's sake the Council decided what would and would not go to popular vote. All citizens were required to pass an intelligence test every year to ensure their competency in this government.

"Shouldn't I be given the opportunity to try?" he insisted.

"If you were free?" I said. "Perhaps. But it's pointless anyway, since you're not free and you're not going to become free. There's simply no reason to make you free."

"I want to be free," he said. "That's reason enough."

"How about this," I said, hoping he would see the point. "How about if I make you free, but you have to do whatever we tell you and you still have to have your implant. Would that satisfy you?"

"No, 'cause I wouldn't really be free."

"But your whole view of freedom is skewed. You seem to think that freedom is doing what you would do anyway and doing something futile. You just want freedom in name, that's the point."

"I want the freedom to decide those things myself," he said stubbornly. "I want to make the choice myself, even if the choice leads to failure."

"You want the opportunity to fail?" I couldn't help but shake my head at him. "That kind of poor judgment proves you shouldn't be free." He opened his mouth to reply, but I cut him off. "That's enough for now. Perhaps we'll discuss the issue more later, but for now we have work to do." He was obviously unhappy that I cut his nonsense short, but he listened. Humans, however much they might talk about freedom, will quickly crumble in the face of authority.

With enough coaxing Phlid was willing to give up another Robellian named Lopht who was also distributing sharp out of a café on the west side. This time we were airlifted in with an armored unit so we could quickly get in before they had a chance to destroy the evidence. When we got inside it turned out we hardly needed Kim; the haze of sharp was actually visible. "I take it we've found what we were looking for?"

Kim was coughing. "You're correct. It's over—" He started really gagging. "It's overpowering."

With the site of two fully armored enforcers and Kim's blossoming reputation Lopht did little more than curse as we locked up him and his employees.

It was exactly what the division had hoped: topple the group from the bottom up. Unfortunately for them, Lopht wasn't as forthcoming as his business relation was, but that had little impact on Kim's media popularity. Things got even more crazy when Councilor Ruhn Dyen brought him to a rally for human rights.

The backlash from the all of this was a protest that people's rights were being trampled on. That telepathic narcotics were closely regulated and illegal in criminal investigations set a precedent - according to some - to ban the use of humans in any kind of enforcement. Other, less extreme groups, merely demanded that the courts not allow any evidence gathered from ESP abilities like smell and touch.

Pohl remained in the midst of it all, silent; overshadowed by a human for the first time in his life. It wasn't something any Nebulon would have expected.

It was around two in the morning when the first report came in. A Robellian scrap dealer brought in her human, protesting her innocence about something. It took Investigator Twor and the desk officer several minutes to pry the details out of them. Apparently someone had activated the human's implant during the night without permission or provocation. The Robellian was insistent that it wasn't her, although she had every reason to lie: she could be charged under the anti-pain statute for activating the implant without cause, and lose custody of her human to boot. However, her insistence persuaded Twor to accept her story; even if she wanted to mess with the human for fun, she could've found better ways to try to get around the charges than trying to lie to them.

Things became more clear a half hour later when a report came in from a hotel manager that three of his domestic humans had their implants activated. One of the three had fallen down some stairs during the incident and broken her leg, which was causing a real brouhaha. It was obvious that somebody had breached the system and activated the implants, which was even more serious of a crime. As the senior-most enforcer on duty Twor took charge of the case and began looking over the records of activation. She was shocked to find a list of eighty-seven activations within the past hour; more than what you normally saw in a month for the entire province.

Twor wasted no time grabbing an infopad; she'd need to get detailed information from all the victims and their owners and try to piece together how this happened. Random prank maybe, but it didn't feel like it to her. She cross-checked the implant IDs with the record of their last place of ownership and the names of the bearers. She read them off one by one; it was child's play to remember a list this small. However, she almost forgot it all when she read the last name on the list.

"What is it?" grumbled a prunish-looking Galdorian on the display. "I was sleeping."

"I need you to check on the human in cell 119B," Twor said firmly. "It's urgent."

There was a high-pitched sigh and the Galdorian shuffled out of view for a moment until a security camera in the hall showed him climbing some stairs. He arrived at the room and entered the passcode to activate the door. "Hey, primate!" he shouted. "Rise and shine." He shuffled out of sight into the room, but his voice came through loud and clear, until...

“It looks like his status ain’t to good,” the Galdorian finally remarked.

Twor had never met Kim, but she knew he was an enforcer who had worked hard to try overcome the handicap of being human. She hoped it wasn’t what he implied.

“Yep,” the Galdorian said, “he’s dead all right. Can I go to sleep now.”