



# *The Sword Review*

*Fantasy, Science Fiction & More*

***Currently Inside***  
***"Verid"***  
***by Selena Thomason***

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# Verid

*Selena Thomason*

Verid was on the bridge of a decrepit starship. As she prepared the premier's lunch, a couple stale rolls and a small block of cheese, she discreetly watched the Elani around her.

Most of the Elani were along the edges of the room; they made an inner wall several people deep. They were huddled together partly for warmth, but also for comfort. Sometimes they would assure each other that the cold and hunger were temporary, that one day the Elani would reclaim their rightful place at the top of interstellar society and once again enjoy lives of art and science and prosperity. Such hopeful stories only comforted the children. Everyone else knew it had been this way for a very long time.

At the center of the bridge, their leader Premier Halwyn and his first officer Lt. Brice stood over a computer console. Their attention was focused on something the sensors had picked up. A ship, it seemed.

"Do you recognize the configuration?" the premier asked.

"No. Look at the markings though. It's that new race the traders on Borath were talking about." Lt. Brice responded.

"Yes, humans, I remember." Halwyn paused to marvel jealously at the ship. "It's so big."

They were silent for a moment and Verid knew they were already seeing the human ship and all its contents as theirs.

"Did the Borans have a language update for these humans?"

"Yes, it's already loaded in the translator."

Halwyn looked up at his first officer. He seemed torn between being angry and being grateful. "And how did we pay for that? Does your contact like treva ale? That's the only thing we can afford to trade."

"He likes treva but he wouldn't trade the update for just some ale." Brice looked at the floor. "However, he did drink a substantial amount of treva ale at our meeting. I was able to steal the update while he was intoxicated."

Halwyn was silent for a moment then replied, "Good work."

It was sad to see the Elani resort to thieving so much. They hardly even seemed to feel remorse or awkwardness about it anymore. Such a shame, Verid thought. The Elani didn't used to be thieves. Before the cataclysm that destroyed their homeworld, the Elani had considered stealing distasteful. But somewhere along the way, their desperation had overwhelmed their manners.

"Engage the translator and hail them," the premier ordered, then quickly added "But wait, we should be appropriately dressed. Verid, bring my jacket and the lieutenant's, and his weapon. We want to make a good first impression."

Verid disappeared into another room then returned with a regal overcoat for the premier and an officer's jacket and firearm for the lieutenant. She tidied up the area that the viewscreen would display, shooing about ten Elani from the background of the shot. They were ready. They took their positions, Premier Halwyn in front with Lt. Brice behind him at his right shoulder and Verid at his left.

Brice opened the channel.

"Greetings, I am Premier Halwyn of the Elani. We welcome you and offer our assistance."

A neat-looking man in a clean uniform responded.

"Hello, I am Captain Michael Merrimore of the Earth Cruiser Hawking. We're explorers and are new to this region of space."

"Then our meeting is fortuitous for we can offer some assistance. I'd be happy to provide you with star charts and information in exchange for whatever supplies or currency you have to trade."

"Sounds wonderful. Would you like to come aboard and meet in person to discuss the details?"

The Elani tried to hide their surprise and delight, but Verid knew them too well.

"Of course, we'd be happy to," was all Halwyn said.

"We'll transmit docking procedures." Merrimore turned away from the screen and seemed to be directing someone to send the information.

Lt. Brice nodded confirmation that they were receiving the data.

"We'll see you shortly then." Merrimore concluded.

"Agreed."

After the channel closed, Halwyn and Brice stood in shocked silence for a few moments. Finally, Halwyn shook his head.

"That was too easy." He said. "These humans must be an exceedingly gullible race."

"Or so arrogant that they can't imagine we're any threat to them." Brice added as he checked the displays. "Their ship is quite large and in very good condition. Based on preliminary readings they seem to have a wealth of food and other supplies."

"A historic find to be sure, one we are not going to let slip through our fingers."

Halwyn turned to Verid. "Get our portable translators. And bring a bottle of treva ale. We should bring a token of friendship to our meeting with Captain Merrimore."

Verid nodded and headed for Halwyn's quarters, the only individual living space on board. It also served as his office and general storage.

Verid retrieved all three of their portable translators, as well as one of the younger bottles of treva. As she headed back to the door, she caught her reflection in a mirror. No one could see her so she stopped to examine the image. As she did, her reflected face changed to that of Merrimore. The vertical ridges characteristic of the Elani slowly smoothed away and became a human face. Verid rubbed a finger over the flat forehead and cheeks then ran a hand through the fine, straight hair. It felt very different from the coarse, matted mane she had worn moments ago.

Verid stared at the human reflection. Could these really be the same humans Zara encountered so long ago, the ones the Doorway brought into Kedrin space? They certainly resembled the form Zara had taken at her Choosing. When Verid had heard the Borans talking about a new alien species called humans, she had thought it was just a coincidence.

But now, faced with them and their obvious resemblance to the form of the last Kedrin monarch... it was too much to believe, too much to hope for. Verid thought briefly about returning home to Kedru as fast as she could. She wanted to tell the Council, to tell everyone, that the old stories were true, that humans did exist and weren't just the product of a heart-broken leader's imagination. But she couldn't leave now. She had to see what the Elani would do. Knowing the Elani as she had come to, she knew she may even have to protect the humans from them. No, she would stay

for now and send word to Kedru at the first opportunity. She changed back to her previous appearance and returned to the bridge.

Halwyn and Brice were hunched over the computer console.

"See?" Brice said, pointing to something on the screen. "That's the engine core. And these are the crew quarters. Each is more than twice the size of one of ours. I'd say we could comfortably house more than six people in each."

"It's still not enough."

"I know, but we could convert the cargo bays into living quarters as well as some other underused space."

"What about food?"

"The galley is well stocked. Plus they seem to grow food in a hydroponics bay here."

"Really? They grow their own food on that ship?"

Brice nodded. "Yes, it seems to be designed for long-term space travel."

None of the Elani ships were, Verid knew. That was part of their problem. With no homeworld to return to in order to restock, refuel, and repair, the Elani had become scavengers, living off what they could find or steal.

Halwyn was lost in thought, perhaps suddenly realizing that the Hawking represented more than just a quick fix. "Do you think we can use their food-growing technology?"

"I don't see why not."

"But at some point it will break down, need maintenance, repairs?"

"Like everything. But perhaps their computer database explains how to use and maintain the technology."

Yet another mistake the Elani had made in their rush to the stars, Verid thought ruefully. Elani ships only stored the information needed for their immediate voyage and relied on updates from the master computer on Elani for everything else. Once the ship-board technology began to fail, there was often no one on board who knew how to fix it.

"Perhaps, but we can't take that chance. We'll have to leave one of these humans alive to keep everything in working order." Halwyn must have seen Brice's objection before he even stated it because he quickly added, "With the ability to grow our own food, we could afford to feed one more person."

"Agreed."

"What do we know about these humans?" Halwyn asked.

"Not much. They have only recently developed long-range space travel."

"Children, then." Halwyn added. "That accounts for their naiveté at least. What about their biology?"

"Their biology is unremarkable. No protective ridges, no redundant nervous system. Low tolerances to heat and cold. They are quite fragile."

"A lesser species for sure."

"So it would seem."

"Yet their resources are considerable."

"A true inequity."

"One that I am prepared to remedy." Halwyn responded. "Do you think the Derian toxin will work on them?"

"There's no way to know until we get a sample of their DNA."

"But it works on most species?"

"Yes, except Derians of course. They developed it in their war with the Beorn, so I know it works on them. I've also known it to be used successfully against Gimmins, the Baral, and sadly the Elani.

"Yes, obtaining it cost us seven lives. But those deaths will be worthwhile if the toxin allows us to take control of the Hawking and its vast resources. Do we have enough of it left?"

"Just enough for one, maybe two more uses."

"So we have to be sure."

"Yes. That's why I plan to obtain a sample of human DNA during our visit."

"Very good. Let's get ready to meet these humans and relieve them of their undeserved riches."

Lt. Brice left the bridge, but Premier Halwyn remained at the console, cataloging the wealth that would soon belong to him and his band of displaced Elani. Finally, he thought, he could clear his bridge of its ring of huddled bodies.

Verid remained as well, watching and listening from the periphery. Verid's people, the Kedru, were fascinated by the Elani. They considered the speed with which the Elani developed a thriving, space-faring society to be legendary. It is said that the Elani took to space travel as if they had found their ancestral home among the stars. The fact that such a huge percentage of them were off-world at the time of the tragedy is the only reason the Elani survived at all.

However the Elani had made a critical error. While they were often in space, away from home, they continued to rely on the centralized government on their homeworld for all their resources. The sum of Elani knowledge and wealth was stored on Elani Prime. The Elani considered it

safer there. A ship could be destroyed and its resources, crew and information lost. But they never imagined their homeworld and all on it could be destroyed.

Elani civilization would never be the same. Without the resources and knowledge of their homeworld, the surviving Elani were lost. They had nowhere to refuel and nothing to restock with. When the shipboard technology began to break down, there was no one to repair it.

The Kedru considered the Elani's story a cautionary tale for all space-faring species. The Kedru knew that the Elani's mistakes in their rush to the stars accounted for their current state. But the Kedru also blamed themselves. Their policy of only observing other species, never interfering in another culture's development, had cost dearly. The Kedru berated themselves for not at least backing up some of the Elani's knowledge base, saving a copy of it off-world somewhere. But they hadn't seen the disaster coming either and the Kedru had been hesitant to interfere.

The Kedru's policy of non-interference changed greatly after the fall of the Elani. Perhaps the Kedru's continued fascination with the Elani, as well as their desire to discreetly help them, came from their regret at not interfering sooner. Verid knew that was part of why she was on Halwyn's ship. She felt a little responsible for the Elani's situation, for her people not acting sooner to protect them.

Near Verid, a mother held a child who looked especially sick. She was rocking him and weeping softly. Verid pulled a vial out of her pocket and handed it to the mother who glanced nervously at Halwyn. But he was still facing away from them, intent on the computer display.

Verid put a finger to her lips to indicate silence then whispered to her, "It's alright. Give it to him. It will make him comfortable at least."

The mother took the vial gratefully. Halwyn called "Verid" from across the room, causing a momentary panic in both Verid and the mother. But Verid quickly saw that he was still absorbed in the Hawking and its treasures.

"Yes, Premier," Verid replied as she headed toward him.

"Check with Brice to make sure preparations are complete. We cannot afford for this to go wrong."

"Of course."

The first thing that Verid noticed when they boarded the Hawking was that all of the humans' uniforms were clean and pressed, not just the captain's.

Five humans met them. Verid recognized the captain, and tried to determine who the others were by their uniforms and their position relative to Captain Merrimore. She noticed immediately that one of the humans had a firearm stowed on his hip. He seemed to be the wariest and most watchful of the humans. Verid assumed he was the security officer and wondered if he disagreed with the Captain's decision to allow strangers on board. He certainly seemed anxious about the Elani and ready to spring into action if something went wrong.

Merrimore extended one of his hands towards the premiere in a startling and unfathomable gesture. Halwyn backed away in alarm. Merrimore seemed to sense that Halwyn found the gesture threatening and quickly withdrew his hand.

"Welcome aboard Premiere Halwyn. This is my first officer Cdr. Michaelson."

A woman stepped forward, began to extend her hand then thought better of it. Verid noticed that she only had three stripes on the shoulders of her uniform instead of the four the captain had, so she presumed the stripes indicated rank.

Halwyn responded politely to the commander, "A pleasure to meet you."

"And this is my head of security, Lt. Cdr Mitchell." The one with the weapon, Verid noticed. She had been correct. "And my chief of communications, Lt. Craig." Only two stripes, Verid noted. "And our helmsman, Ensign Santos."

Halwyn grew impatient with the introductions. He didn't care to know the names of Merrimore's inconsequential crew. He decided to move things along.

"Hello all." He said. "This is my first officer, Lt. Brice and my personal aide Verid. We've brought a gift to commemorate the meeting of our peoples." Verid handed him the bottle. "It's treva ale, a traditional Elani drink. It is given and shared in friendship."

Verid wished he hadn't added that last part. It was true, but not in this context.

Merrimore took the bottle and seemed to have no idea that the Elani's gesture was insincere. They are so trusting, Verid thought. She hated that such a good quality was being used against them.

"Thank you." Merrimore said. "Our conference room is this way. If you'll follow me..."

"Where is the Elani homeworld?" Merrimore asked as they walked down the hall. "I've never heard of it."

Verid could see annoyance tightening around Halwyn's eyes.

"No reason you should have." The premier instructed. "It is many light years away. No one aboard has been home in ages. We're explorers you see, a space-faring people. We prefer space to solid ground."

"It's strange that we have never heard of you." Merrimore ventured.

The tightening began to extend down the ridges on Halwyn's face.

"Ah, well, it is as I said, the Elani homeworld is very far away. Also, most Elani aren't as friendly as we are, I'm afraid."

They arrived at the conference room door.

"Here we are," Merrimore said as he stood in the doorway and let the others file past him. Lt. Brice bumped into him and Verid knew DNA harvesting had begun.

"Pardon me." Brice said, managing to actually seem sorry.

Merrimore was unfazed. "It's alright. Let's have a seat. We have plenty to discuss."

The captain was upbeat about his new friends. More than the rest of his crew, he seemed unconcerned about his new friends the Elani. He seemed so excited to meet a new alien race that he had forgotten to wonder whether or not they were friendly. The first officer and security officer appeared somewhat less sure and watched the Elani discreetly. Verid noticed that the security officer kept fingering his firearm as if to make sure it was still there.

"It sounds like we are in a position to help one another," Merrimore said. "We can provide you with the supplies you mentioned."

Halwyn took his cue, "And in exchange, we will provide you with star charts for this region along with information we've collected during our travels. I propose that we adjourn to prepare our items for trade, and then meet again tomorrow to conclude our business."

"Agreed. But before you go perhaps you would like to tour our ship and sample some of our cuisine. Our chef is quite good."

Verid could almost feel Brice's heart leap from across the room. She also noticed that the security officer thought to object but then caught a glimpse of the determination in Merrimore's face and remained silent.

Halwyn managed to make it sound as if they were staying only to avoid offending their host.

Merrimore was delighted and assigned Ensign Santos to give them the grand tour. Lt. Cdr. Mitchell volunteered to accompany them on the tour. Verid knew his motives were driven by security not hospitality. But Merrimore didn't object. He seemed satisfied with the arrangements and left the party to oversee preparations for the trade.

Verid caught Halwyn's attention. "Premiere Halwyn, may I be excused? I'd like to return to our ship to begin preparations."

Halwyn eyed her strangely but agreed.

"This way, Premiere Halwyn," the ensign said. Halwyn and Brice followed the young man. Mitchell followed them, watchful as always.

As they walked away Verid could hear the ensign describing the ship's features, all things the Elani already knew. But they pretended to be surprised and impressed.

Verid knocked on the captain's office door.

"Come in," Merrimore called from inside.

As Verid entered, Merrimore said "I was just going over our list of items for trade. Would you like to take a look?"

"No, captain, we have more important things to discuss."

"Alright." Merrimore motioned to a chair but Verid didn't understand the meaning of the gesture. Merrimore decided it didn't matter and went on. "What do you want to talk about?"

"I have come to warn you that your crew is in danger."

This provoked an immediate reaction. Merrimore stood and came from behind his desk. "What? How?" Anger and concern had replaced the open friendliness Merrimore's face usually displayed. Verid found she was saddened by the change.

"The Elani are deceiving you. They desire your ship and its contents. They only entered into negotiations with you so they could get the DNA sample they need to make sure a toxin they have will be sufficient to exterminate your crew."

"Where is this toxin?" he demanded. Merrimore was becoming agitated. He probably wished he had listened to his security chief.

Verid rushed to reassure him. "Don't worry; it's still on the Elani ship. They plan to release the toxin into your air supply when they return tomorrow for the trade. You are safe until then, but you must not under any circumstances allow them to return to your ship or send anyone else over."

Merrimore returned to his desk and thumped at something on the surface of it. "Michaelson." He said to it.

"Yes, sir." It responded in the first officer's voice.

"Where are the Elani right now?"

"You mean Halwyn and Brice? They are in the mess with Santos and Mitchell. The third is with you. Isn't she?"

"Yes. Don't let any other Elani on board, no matter what. And don't let them return. Have Mitchell escort them to the airlock as soon as they're

through eating. Watch them carefully but don't let on that anything's wrong."

"Will do. What's going on?"

"I'll explain everything shortly." Merrimore tapped the desk again and looked up at Verid. He was silent and seemed to wrestle with his words, as if he couldn't decide what to address first.

Verid wondered if he was regretting the openness he had shown the Elani and if he would be more guarded with new species in the future. She wondered if he was berating himself for allowing his trusting enthusiasm to endanger his crew.

"Would they really murder my crew just to get our ship?" He nearly whispered.

"Yes."

Merrimore sat back behind the desk. He seemed dejected, regretful, Verid thought. She hated to see him that way.

"Captain, I won't allow the Elani to harm you or your crew. You must believe me. As long as you don't allow the Elani back on board, you are safe."

"I don't understand how they could-" Merrimore didn't even finish the sentence. The magnitude of the barely averted disaster weighed heavily on him. Verid saw that he was still struggling with it, replaying and criticizing his actions, his openness.

"The Elani are desperate, Captain. There are nearly a thousand people crowded into that ship. All of them are under-nourished, many are close to death. Half will die of starvation before reaching adulthood. They look at you and see a lesser species - they do consider you a lesser species -

hoarding resources that should be theirs. They feel justified in exterminating you to gain what they need."

"I don't understand. Aren't you Elani?"

"No, of course not," she said as if stating the obvious. "I am Verid of the Kedru."

Merrimore was unconvinced. "But you look like the others."

This annoyed Verid and she turned away, instinctively wanting to put some distance between her and this incomprehensible human. She was reminded of why Kedru didn't usually reveal themselves to other species.

"Monoforms are so attached to appearances," she muttered to herself.

It was said that the Dasa couldn't be trusted with knowledge of the Kedru, that their simple minds couldn't grasp the Kedru's true nature and would thus always misunderstand or fear Kedru. Verid didn't believe it. She considered it the remains of a Kedrin sense of superiority that hadn't been completely vanquished yet. She hated the term Dasa. Just having a word that meant "all who are not Kedru" seemed wrong to her. Monoforms have value, she thought. All species have value.

She turned back to Merrimore. "I'm sorry Captain." She began. "I didn't mean to... I mean, I'm not used to having my person determined by my physical form. I'm just not accustomed to that way of thinking, although I do understand why monoforms would believe such - that if someone looks Elani then they must be Elani. But surely you also know that appearances can sometimes be deceiving."

"Yes, I know that all too well. So, you're not Elani but you look Elani."

"Yes, I am currently in Elani form."

"Then you're a shape shifter."

"Exactly."

"Why don't you prove what you are saying by changing shapes?"

The suggestion made Verid uncomfortable.

"Captain, I am not here to entertain you. And Kedru do not shift in the presence of monoforms."

"Why are you pretending to be Elani?"

"To study them. The Kedru learn about other species by becoming them. During our experimentation phase, we try on many forms. Then when we come of age, we chose one to remain in for the rest of our lives, in order to learn about it in depth."

"Are you still in this experimentation phase?"

"Yes." She smiled at him, hoping to establish some commonality between them. "We are both young and new to the universe, Captain, learning as we go. Don't criticize yourself too harshly for your openness with the Elani. Being optimistic and believing that people are essentially good are both positive traits. I hate that they were used against you in this case."

Verid wasn't sure whether or not she was getting through to the captain. He remained silent and tapped his fingers on the desk for a few moments.

"And these Elani?" He said finally. "You seem devoted to them even though they would massacre my crew for our supplies."

"You don't understand. You don't know what the Elani used to be, all they have been through. I feel for them, I value their existence, their culture. But I couldn't let them destroy you."

"I appreciate that."

"I'd appreciate it if you would you proceed with the trade."

Merrimore's face flared in anger and disbelief.

"You can't seriously expect me to trade with them after what they planned to do!"

"I wouldn't ask you to do anything that would jeopardize your crew. I promise you that. But the Elani desperately need those supplies and anything else you can spare, especially some of your ship-board farming technology and information on how to use and maintain it."

Merrimore stood and walked away from Verid, choosing instead to stare at the Elani ship through a portal.

Verid knew she was asking a lot but she couldn't let the opportunity pass. "Captain, put yourself in Halwyn's place, with a ship full of starving people. If they can learn to grow their own food like you do, they could sustain themselves. They wouldn't resort to such desperate measures. The Elani aren't naturally aggressive Captain. Before the cataclysm they were peaceful people who would never have resorted to thieving and murder. Think about it. You wouldn't just be helping the Elani."

Verid could see he was considering it, that his anger was dissipating and he was beginning to feel for his "enemy."

"I have brought the star charts and information Halwyn offered to trade." She handed Merrimore a small cube. "You and your crew will be safe as long as you don't let the Elani back on board or take anything from them."

Looking at the cube in his hand seemed to rekindle his suspicion, remind him of his earlier mistakes.

"How do I know this cube doesn't contain the toxin?"

Verid was hurt; she wasn't used to being mistrusted. "Why would I warn you if I intended to help them destroy you? You can trust me Captain. You can. Have your people check out the datacube. If they are satisfied

that it is what I say it is then put the supplies in a cargo container and release it into space. The Elani can claim the supplies from there. Just make some excuse to cancel tomorrow's meeting and don't, under any circumstances let any Elani back onboard."

"Agreed."

Verid returned to the Elani ship and found the bridge ringed with mostly sleeping Elani. Through a barely open door, she heard Halwyn and Brice making final preparations for the extermination of the humans. The mother Verid had helped looked up from her sleeping child and whispered, "They've been looking for you."

"It's alright." She replied.

Verid heard Halwyn and Brice heading back onto the bridge so she faded into a group of Elani.

"Hawking has raised their shields and disengaged the docking link." Brice said when he reached the console.

"What? Open a channel."

Merrimore appeared on the screen.

"Captain Merrimore, is there a problem?"

Merrimore gave no hint that he knew his crew had been in danger. "Not at all. However, we won't be able to have visitors for a while. Our doctor has detected a virus making its way through my crew. For humans it's relatively harmless, but our doctor fears it may be fatal to Elani physiology. As a precaution I have placed the Hawking under quarantine. I couldn't live with myself if accidental exposure to one of our germs were to wipe out your crew."

Halwyn was stunned. Verid knew that he was also deeply offended by the notion that humans were strong enough to handle this virus but not the Elani, as if the Elani were not clearly the superior species in every way.

Halwyn tried to salvage the situation. "But our trade! I have the star charts you wanted."

"No need."

Verid stepped forward. "Yes, there is no need. I have already provided Captain Merrimore with the agreed upon information."

"You! We were looking for you."

"I was aboard the Hawking. I happened to be there when the doctor told Captain Merrimore about the outbreak. Their doctor scanned me to be sure I hadn't been infected. Since I knew we wouldn't be able to return to the Hawking, I gave Captain Merrimore the information before I left."

Halwyn was furious. The ridges on his face blanched until they were hard white lines running up and down his tan face. "What have you done?" Halwyn moved threateningly towards Verid.

Merrimore tried to distract him. "Oh, I almost forgot our payment." He turned away from the screen to give an order and a cylinder was launched from the Hawking.

"They've fired something at us." Brice studied the display.

"Wait," Merrimore said from the screen before Brice cut him off.

Halwyn's rage focused on Verid. "You've ruined everything! Don't you know what you've cost us?" Halwyn motioned to two of his guards. "Get her. Throw her out the airlock."

The guards moved towards Verid as she backed into Halwyn's quarters. As soon as she was out of sight behind the door, she shifted into an energy form and headed for the window.

She heard Brice call, "Premier Halwyn, you might want to take a look at this."

"What is it?"

"It's food and other supplies."

"Are you sure?" Halwyn replied as he moved to the console to see for himself. "Well, bring it aboard then."

Verid was glad Merrimore had come through with the supplies despite the Elani's aggression towards his crew. That surely said something positive about his character, about the character of humans.

Before leaving the ship, Verid heard the guards try to explain to Halwyn why they had come back empty-handed.

"She isn't in there." They said.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. She's gone."

Verid jumped into the cold emptiness of space, satisfied that this little band of Elani would be okay at least.

Merrimore looked up from his desk to see Verid standing just inside the closed door.

"How did you get in here?"

Verid didn't understand his question at first, and then said simply "It must be very limiting to be trapped in solid matter all your life."

"Perhaps. But never having been anything else, I suppose I wouldn't know."

"Pure energy forms are much more convenient, especially for traversing the void of space."

"I will have to take your word for it."

"I wanted to thank you for helping the Elani."

"I wanted to thank you for saving my crew."

"Humans are a kind and honorable people. They must be allowed to continue on their course. In fact, I would like to study humans further. Perhaps you would allow me to stay aboard for a while and observe."

Merrimore smiled. "Do you think you would fit in?"

"Perhaps." Verid's form morphed into a human version of her previous Elani form, complete with a Hawking-style uniform. "How's this?"

"I thought Kedru didn't shape-shift in the presence of monoforms."

"We don't usually. Monoforms generally don't react well to sudden, physical changes. But I trust you. We do have trust between us now, don't we Captain?"

"Yes we do." Merrimore smiled.

"My people have encountered yours before, you know. Long ago."

"Really?"

"Have you truly never heard of the Kedru?"

"We have some stories of shape-shifters, but none mention the Kedru by name."

"Ah, well, the humans we encountered were very far from home. Maybe they never returned to... what's your homeworld called?"

"Earth."

"Yes, Earth."

"Well, we're here now. Our species have officially met again and this time the knowledge won't be lost. I'll make sure of that."

This made Verid smile.

"I still have the ale you brought. Now that we are truly friends, shall we share it?"

"Agreed."

Merrimore pulled the bottle and two glasses from a cabinet behind his desk. "I'll make you a deal. I'll tell you about humans, if you tell me about the Kedru."

"Now that's a good trade." Verid said as Merrimore poured the treva.

Copyright 2005, Selena Thomason

Selena Thomason writes mostly science fiction, but sometimes feels called to other forms and genres. Although she holds a B.A. in Drama, writing continues to be her first love.

Cover: "Science Station Alpha 1"  
Bill Snodgrass  
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Bill Snodgrass began writing during his high school days. In the winter of 2003, however, he embarked on the journey of becoming a published fiction author. Bill writes fantasy, science fiction, and other fiction, all grounded in Christian values and appropriate for readers of all ages.

In addition to his writing, Bill is on the editorial staff of ***The Sword Review***

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