Her hunting eyes twitched.

She whirled around, cursing for having let some decrepit pastry barker distract her. Ghost collided with a towering mountain of ebony body armor. She thought her assailant another Avalan, but his electrical pattern spoke of something else entirely. He was Qurl. Even worse, he was Datha Qurl. Bigger, black, and clawed like her. The soldier blocked her knee to his groin, the feint allowing her to slam the top of her skull into his lower jaw. They both staggered back.

Ghost's finishing kick was interrupted by hands grabbing her from behind. Her hunting eyes painted a new aura. One more her size and vaguely familiar. Ghost's reaction was a mixture of instinct and panic, her heel coming down hard on a boot to break the grip.

"Yitzen!" The contralto voice was female. "Stop, it's me! Tenzen Rane!"

Spinning, Ghost swept her second assailant off her feet, catching a glimpse of tumbling calico braids and a face not much different than her own. Just darker and even more feral. *A Dathia*, she recognized. No idea on who they were calling to. Did they have the wrong target? Doubtful, considering she was the only Qurl on the planet.

A third set of armor materialized to her right from beneath its cloaking camouflage. Another Dathia. She charged in before Ghost could bring her ear fans into play.

Swearing, Ghost ducked under the other's rush, sending her attacker flying. She transformed her momentum into a fluid pivot and broke into a dash toward the bay's beckoning waves.

The other rolled to her feet. "Ten, Hale, don't let her get in the water!"

"I've got her, Senna," the first Dathia yelled, hurtling into her. The impact drove Ghost into the recovering Datha's vise-like embrace. This time her arms were pinned to her side, the imposing male lifting her off the ground. "Suria, enough of this!" he bellowed.

Her ear fans rose in a grasp for the first probability that would get her out from under this ambush.

"Oh no you don't," the one called Tenzen spat.

Something bit into her neck with a serpent's hiss.