



# CHILDREN OF LIGHT

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Excerpt:

"Do you think they killed her?" said Orfin, with a shake in his voice.

The Ambassador looked up from his thought. "I doubt it, at least not outright. There's another purpose at work in these creatures. Can't you feel it?" He looked at Orfin who nodded. "They shuffle around like submissive apes, but they want something from us. Do you know what it is?" Orfin shook his head. "It's our carbon! That's why they're always sniffing our direction. They transform carbon dioxide to oxygen. They like our carbon dioxide. We're just *carbonators* to them. My guess is that they'll try to keep her breathing, even though she violated their code."

Orfin was trying to take it all in. It made sense, but not entirely. "But if they *need* our carbon dioxide, what did they do before we were here? I mean, it must be occurring naturally on this planet, or they couldn't have survived here."

"Now you're pushing it. There are some security issues that I can't betray," Costance stiffened.

"You mean, you know something, and won't tell me!" challenged Orfin. "Damn you! Borthid might be in danger." He was ready to leap across the table and take the fat man by the throat.

"Don't act noble with me," countered the Ambassador. "You've lost your partner and can't access your Ceretrak. I know why you want her back. Face it, she's certainly not an *Alpha*."

Orfin was raging inside. But, while he was flushed with heat, his tone was cold as ice. "I have her access code. What I need is help, and you are going to give it to me!"

Costance's face flushed, but he contained his reaction. His voice was suddenly conciliatory, "Of course, you're concerned," he began, "your partner is in danger. I'm in a dilemma. I have classified information that may help you, but how do I know that you won't betray my trust if I divulge what I have been sworn to protect?"

Orfin could sense the progression of his logic. "How about if I were to offer some collateral?" he countered through gritted teeth.

"What do you have that I could possibly need?" challenged Costance with a patronizing tone.

"How about a functioning Ceretrak?" answered Orfin reaching into his pocket and pulling out the two wrist rings. He set them down on the low table.

The Ambassador sat up quickly. "With the access codes?" he queried.

"Yes, I'll give you the stupid codes, but first, you level with me!"

"Well," began Costance, settling in for a display of his superior knowledge, "You have to remember that this is highly classified information. If you breathe a word of it to anyone, your life will be forfeit, not to mention my diplomatic privilege."

"Get on with it," barked Orfin.

"You asked why they need our carbon dioxide when they have been here for so long. We do not believe that the Froggies are native to this place. In fact, we do not believe that this planet has been here for more than a few annual cycles. When this pocket of atmosphere was discovered, it was thought that it had been overlooked in previous deep space scans. When the computer records were reviewed, however, the astro scientists concluded that it wasn't *missed*. Rather, it wasn't *here*!"