

GalaxyForce

By Andrew Kellie

Act I Part I

The dropship shuddered and Sauze Kath grabbed a handrail. It was a long descent to the planet below, where his mission was to take place. He glanced down at his armor as best he could, the helmet's chin clanking softly on the GalaxyForce emblem. It was freshly repainted after his last mission, the burn marks invisible now. He thought back to that with almost a laugh now. The mercenary his squad had been sent after did a good job of rigging his base, but Sauze Kath had never failed once. Never. Smiling to himself, he winked twice with his left eye. His Heads Up Display, or HUD, flashed once and activated. He opened up a communications channel with his squadmates, while staring out of the viewport at the sky. The planet was beginning to take clearer shape now.

"Sauze, something up?" Luna Eyeth was the first to join into the comm. She was the team's Long Range Expert. Well, that was the official classification. She liked Sniper better. Sauze smiled at the sound of her voice.

"Nope, just checking in before landing." While he talked, he used his right eye to bring up the mission details. Selecting the red GalaxyForce icon with a blink, he looked over the summary. The planet was freshly colonized within the last thousand years, and already needed help from GalaxyForce. Apparently some militia had set up a fortress by a ravine, and taken a bunch of colonist captive. Nothing special.

"I'm fine, thanks for checking in. Excited to try out this new scope, though!" Just then, Maiylene Lamand spoke. She was the squad's medic, and another good friend of Sauze.

"We're an elite squad assigned on missions to Fringe space, and the most exciting thing is a new scope. I knew should have been a Specialist." They shared a laugh, and Sauze tried contacting Sev. He was the only one of the four-person squad not in the comm channel.

"Sev, what's up?" One of the four armored figures shook his head, and Sev Ejef joined the chat. Sauze glanced out the viewport again, and saw the planet approaching.

"Nothing. Looking at some designs." Sauze smiled, and Maiylene laughed. Sev was the most distant of the group. He was also the newest member, though the term didn't really fit anymore. The squad had been together for about five or six years now. Still, while Sauze, Luna, and Maiylene were all good friends, Sev never really joined them. Sauze could not discount his efficiency and skill, though. As the Demolitions Expert, Sev had saved the day more than a few times.

"Sev, do you always have to be looking at your plans? Talk to us! Like I say, you never know who's gonna die on a mission!" Luna was a little morbid at times, but Sauze often appreciated the gallows humor.

"Aren't you a ray of sunshine?" Sauze saw Maiylene shake her head. Before he could say anything, a communication from the Orbital Bay overhead cut in.

"Take the autopilot off and go into a nosedive! Quickly!" Sauze took no time to react. There had been a time, once, when he froze at an order. He was told to detonate a base early, while there were still troops inside. He took a second to consider the moral implications, and as a result his father was killed. Kale Kath had raised Sauze in the military from a baby. There were still rumors around the various

stations that he had been shooting before he could talk. It was really only partly true. But when that split second's decision impacted him, Sauze learned. He learned there was no time to question, only to act. He had been faced with similar situations many times after, and had never hesitated. And he had a perfect mission record.

"I've got the autopilot off! Nosedive down initiated!" Sauze wrestled the controls downward and gunned the ignition. It should have been the team's pilot handling this, but two missions ago he had been injured during a ship battle with a criminal syndicate. Krammer Melejev, an Tauradonian, had been piloting the ship they were in when the criminal syndicate's leader launched a collection of charges at the ship. Several had locked on to the main viewport, and shattered it instantly. The 'floorplanters' or magnetically charged gravity enhancers in the AutoAk armor had saved Sauze, Luna, Sev, and Maiylene, but Krammer was pulled out.

He managed to activate one, but was too far out and it snapped his leg. As he was in his sealed suit, he survived, but both of his legs had been broken by the time they pulled him in. One, from when he was pulled out, and another when a torpedo hit his leg. If he was wearing substandard armor it likely would have vaporized him. With elite armor, the force simply shattered it. He should have died. But instead he managed to survive, albeit in a large amount of pain. Now he lay in the infirmary ward, spending most of his time sleeping and having surgeries. Focusing back on the nosedive, Sauze tried to drive the controls harder.

"Get low to the ground and fly outwards. Further orders when we are ready." Sev spoke, more excitedly now.

"What's going on? Are we being attacked?" Before anyone could answer, the ship spun as Sauze pulled it into a horizontal position. Above them loomed a massive fleet of ships of a kind Sauze had never seen before. Maiylene gasped, and Luna slowly clasped her hands around her rifle. A white blast suddenly enveloped the main viewport, and Sauze stepped back. Then there was a small sizzling sound, and the ship hopped up. The engines then stopped running, and the ship dropped like a rock. The low level shields were down, and the Life Support Systems were offline. An Ion Blast, Sauze concluded.

"Everyone, seal your helmets!" Maiylene's worried voice came through the comm. Sauze did it with a few eye movements, while the others pressed the clasp on the back. The suits of armor were impeccable. Ordered from AutoAk, main supplier of armor to the Mnzak Galaxy, they were top of the line. Only elites got the fully outfitted version Sauze and the others wore now. They were fitted to your body and took several point blank missile blasts to scratch. In all his time with this suit, the only thing that had been damaged was the GalaxyForce decal.

"We're going to have to jump. If this thing shatters, or flames up, or some shit like that? We're in trouble. Blast doors open, and jets powered!" The AutoAk elite armor also had a very nice feature; jets on the feet. When activated the suit would seize up and you could either move up short distances or have a parachute-less parachute. Sauze powered them up but did not activate them, stepping over to the blast doors. Sev swung them open and leapt out backwards. Sauze ushered Maiylene and Luna past him, and then jumped out. Waiting a few seconds, he activated the jets. They caught him, and though the armor jerked up he was cushioned. Above him, the ship continued plummeting down. Thankfully, it still had some momentum, and it would not drop right on them. Sev was the first to touch down on the ground, and signalled in over comm. Next was Luna, and then Maiylene.

"8831 safe landing." He repeated the message taught so many times. In the event of a ship crash or a jump, when safely landed say your ID and 'safe landing' or 'injury'. Few times was a jump necessary, but Sauze still practiced it often as part of training. A few metres away he saw Luna, standing still. No doubt she was scanning for location and trying to contact the orbital bay. He did the same, and established a connection with her.

"What could that have been?" She asked incredulously, as the both found their coordinates. Sauze then spotted Maiylene and Sev running over.

"Ion Blast was the weapon. The question is, who were those ships." Just as a comm link was established with the Orbital Bay, a massive explosion sounded and the ground shook slightly. The ship had finally hit, and was wreckage a short distance from here. The squad would have to retrieve anything useful from the crash before anything. Not because GalaxyForce was hurting for money, regularly receiving more money than the colonization effort. They would need equipment if they were stranded, no matter how temporary it would be. Luna had brought up a map, and transmitted it to everyone. Meanwhile, Sauze spoke to the Orbital Bay.

"We're downed but alive. Transmitting coords for pickup." He sent the coordinates and looked over the map on his HUD. He hadn't asked who those ships were, because it wasn't relevant to the mission. For all he cared, they could be anyone. What he knew was that they fired on a GalaxyForce ship, thereby declaring themselves hostile. Honestly, this was a good thing. Sauze hadn't had a serious ship battle with opposing fleets in quite some time. He had directed ships before, and it was quite the experience.

"We're under attack, you'll have to wait. Do not concern yourself with the ships, and do not attempt to complete the original mission." Sauze frowned. The original mission should still be completed. On those times when a team was pulled out for unrelated reasons, the mission was often left uncompleted forever. Not that Sauze cared about some Fringe space colony, he simply did not want faith in GalaxyForce down. To him, GalaxyForce was the saviour of the galaxy. But many people did not support it, either for its enormous amount of funding, its overly bureaucratic procedure, or some other ridiculous reason. Sauze found those people extremely selfish. He had said so himself to a protestor outside of a ceremony at which he had been given a Honours Patch for thwarting a terrorist attack on Cybin's palatial district. They didn't recognize that GalaxyForce was protecting them! Besides, it could do no wrong. It was perfect in every way, or so he saw.

"Should we seek a settlement, or remain here?" He waited for a reply from the bay, who's comm channel had closed. A burst of static filled his ears, and he heard a frantic cry.

"We're under attack! I repeat, under attack! Commander 8831, head to a settlement and establish camp there! We have---" The comm ended abruptly. Suddenly Luna cried out over the open channel. Sauze heard what sounded like thunder and staggered back staring up. The sky was clouded orange, and he could see wreckage of the Orbital Bay cascading out in every direction. The fleet they had come up against had actually succeeded in taking out the Orbital Bay. Sauze had assumed either the fleet would be driven back or the Bay would escape. This came as a serious shock.

"Wreckage won't hit here, we're safe for now. But we better head to the nearest town. I guess we could be here a while." Luna motioned off behind her. Sauze checked the oxygen levels, and found them stable. He clicked the release on his helmet, and retracted it. AutoAk helmets could either be removed, or retracted. This spread the thin metal into the back of the suit, allowing for carrying room.

Luna did the same, as well as Maiylene and Sev. Sauze took a good look at them, making sure everyone seemed ok. Sev was smiling through the short fur on his face. This kind of danger was sure to excite him. Being a Hygriphodon, he had a short fur all over him and a pushed up nose. He had eyes farther in to his head, and they were a hazel brown. He was also significantly shorter than the rest of the group.

Luna was the same species as Sauze; human. They had both enlisted early, and were among the first humans in GalaxyForce. Sauze had been brought by his father as a baby, while Luna enlisted later on off the streets. Her hair was bright blonde, and was up in a ponytail as was standard for missions. His hair was an extremely light blond, almost white. It was cut military regulation short, and kept there. Her eyes were a bright blue, while his were more of an icy blue. Maiylene was a Kerisian, which meant her skin was a light green. She also had freckles beneath her nose, and slightly longer fingers than a human. Her hair was a dark purple also in a ponytail. Her eyes were the same colour as her hair, which made for a nice color scheme.

"Nice to breathe unfiltered air." Maiylene remarked, taking in a deep breath. Luna unholstered her pistol and checked it for ammo.

"So, who do you think they were?" Sev stepped forward with a grenade launcher. Sauze frowned at him.

"Not relevant." Sev raised his eyebrows, loading the grenade launcher. Maiylene brought her helmet back up, and was accessing her HUD, locating a nearby town that's path would take them past the ship wreckage.

"Not relevant? Not relevant?! They just knocked a GalaxyForce transport out of the air without a problem! You gotta wonder who they are." Sauze shook his head.

"All we need to know is that they are hostile. As they are do not appear to be a current registered enemy, I cannot refer back to the database. So we won't know who they are until given instruction. Besides, the bay said not to concern ourselves with it." Sev clicked the cap of his grenade launcher closed.

"Yeah, well look what happened to the bay." He held the grenade launcher with both hands, finger on the trigger. Sev was always ready for combat, and sometimes Sauze wondered if he wished for it. Not that such a thought was bad, Sauze was always wanting for a new challenge. So far no enemy had given him one.

"Regardless. Let's head to the ship crash site. Maiylene, you got a good settlement?" Maiylene nodded, and retracted the helmet again.

"Head straight direction 3. I'll check the direction device every once and a while." They headed off, Sauze next to Luna in front and Sev behind Maiylene in back. Sauze brought up his helmet, and activated weapon tracking. He pulled out his sidearm and made sure it was connected. The HUD had a great feature than would allow connection to weapons if they were properly outfitted. Once connected, this allowed for targeting, ammo count, and for the snipers; enhanced scoping. Making sure his assorted weapons were connected, he dropped the helmet and turned to Luna.

"Because whatever transmission we're able to send from this town will take ages to make its way to Cybin, should we continue on with the original mission?" Luna gave him a sad look.

"But I thought we could spend some time together! We haven't had an actual date in like six missions, and they've been so often now that we barely have time to just hang out. Besides, weren't we told disregard the mission?" Sauze took her hand in his.

"The situation's changed, and those were temporary orders for an assumed attack. We could complete it quickly and still have time to ourselves before GalaxyForce sends anyone." The squad drew closer to the crash site, which according to the map was over a large hill. Sauze took a second to examine the planet more closely. The ground was a mixture of sand and a substance much like gravel. There was little wind at these levels, but the sky was still in a flurry because of the Orbital Bay's explosion.

"Only if you promise we'll spend some time together." Sauze squeezed her hand, and smiled. Nearing the top of the hill, they drew their weapons.

"I promise." Sauze took out his sidearm and glanced over the top of the hill first. The guns were just in case any aggressive natives or soldiers of the attacking fleet beat them to the site. He looked over and ducked back, bringing up his helmet. The others did the same quickly.

"Down! Down! We have 6 possible hostiles!" It was times like these he appreciated the comm system in the helmet. You could be yelling as loud as possible and no sound would escape the suit. The other people in the comm channel might not appreciate that, though.

"On my count, Sev and I will come around from either side of the hill with weapons drawn. Luna, you'll be up here lying down for support. Maiylene, you'll be at the bottom on my side for backup. Assume position." The four went to their respective spots with weapons ready. No one was breathing heavily, and no one's hands were shaking. You only made elite if you were always ready for any fight.

"Remember, only return fire as per procedure." Sauze saw through his visor Sev hang his head for a second.

"3...2...E" Luna brought her scope up and centered it on the head of one man. He oversaw the others, who picked through the wreckage. He was also the only one not with a helmet.

"Halt! As our authority as representatives of GalaxyForce, we demand that you remove yourselves from the wreckage of this ship." The man jerked his head up, and Luna followed with her scope. Sight was off, but she was still dead on.

"Get them!" Four of the men pulled out their guns, while a fifth ran over to a speeder and powered it up. The overseer went to get his gun, unaware of the sniper trained on him. Knowing Sauze might want to question him, she dropped the scope and took off the man's arm smoothly and quietly. He didn't even realise for a second, and his troops certainly didn't. Sev launched grenades with perfect precision, careful not to hit the wreckage or the speeder. Sauze called Maiylene in as he ran forward. The first man aimed at him, but was downed with two choice shots through the visor. The second tried to pistol whip, but was caught by a grenade and rolled back screaming. Maiylene ducked around, and took out another soldier with her pistol. Sauze kicked the final one down, and delivered a bullet straight into his head. With the motion of one hand, he directed Luna to the soldier on the speeder. He was frantically trying to gun the engine when all of a sudden a bullet carried his head off his shoulders. Now it was only the overseer, rolling around on the ground holding his arm.

"State your name and your affiliation." The man glared at him, and tried to spit through his tears.

"GalaxyForce monsters! You know well who I am! Or are you one they keep in the dark?" Sauze pressed the barrel of his gun against the man's face, between his eyes.

"Name. And. Affiliation." He pressed down on the man's chest with his boot, while Sev motioned for Luna to come down.

"I'll tell you my affiliation, because I am proud of it. I am Zenian, Zenian forever!" Sauze's eyes widened. Surely that couldn't be true.

"And yes, the Zenians just destroyed that orbital station. But that won't be all we destroy. Just wait, until your beloved G1 is in ruin! Then where will your loyalties lie?" Sauze furrowed his brow, and fired. The bullet ended the man's life instantly, and Sauze stood up.

"Did he say Zenian?" Sev dropped his helmet and began reloading his grenade launcher. Maiylene, Luna, and Sauze dropped theirs as well.

"Yes. Yes he did. I don't know how it's possible, but he did." Everyone stood thinking for a second. This seemed highly unlikely, but his armor matched the markings of the fleet above. Not only did the Zenians have soldiers, they had ships. This didn't make any sense.

"So...the question is; does he mean *those* Zenians?" Luna was referring, of course, to the Zenian Political Party. Currently, they were locked in a political struggle with G1. G1 was the government of the Mnzak Galaxy, and the most widely accepted government. Even if you didn't want to be with them you were a part of them no matter what. Sauze respected the government, as any patriotic citizen would, but he often found that they bogged down GalaxyForce. GalaxyForce was funded by G1, though, and so they had to have a say. There are a few sectors in the Mnzak Galaxy who refuse to join G1 and set up their own governments, but these never really go anywhere.

But as if all of a sudden, the Zenians had sprung up. Sometime in the beginning of this year, a major government of multiple Fringe Space sectors appeared and demand that they be put in place as the Galactic Government. G1 denied their request, and so began this drawn out political battle between the two. From what Sauze had heard, Zen Callistar seemed pretty evil. Zen was the leader of the Zenians, and he was shown as very evil. Sauze had no way to know the truth, but he knew G1 had the galaxy's best interests at heart. So he did not support the Zenians. And now they had an army they were attacking GalaxyForce with? Clearly, Ceitevorate Adams was right with his accusations. Kalanth Adams was the leader of G1, official job title Ceitevorate. He had been the target of much slander from the Zenians, while what he said was simply the truth. And now, looking at the dead Zenians, Sauze wondered if G1 knew about this. Or if GalaxyForce did.

"You guys think....you think GalaxyForce knew about this?" It was Sev to voice the unpopular opinion. Sauze turned and glared at him, even though the thought had just been on his mind.

"Are you suggesting GalaxyForce was aware of Callistar's fleet? Because G1 is clearly unaware, and that would mean you believe GalaxyForce is hiding things from the government." Sauze was clear in his loyalty, but the curiosity was overwhelming. Sauze did not believe that GalaxyForce would ever hide something from G1, but at the same time the attendant on the bridge had acted very oddly when telling them to concern themselves with the ships. It didn't matter; his loyalty was the same.

"Sauze, I'm not suggesting anything. I'm questioning something." Sev began to pick through the wreckage, pulling out ammo clips and medical supplies. Sauze bit his tongue and turned to Maiylene.

"Let's try and get to the village before one of those suns sets. Are we on the right track?" She brought the helmet back up for a second, before retracting it and nodding. After being sure that the wreckage was picked clean, they headed out again this time taking the speeder.

After a short drive filled with idle chit-chat, a town finally came into view. As they came nearer, though, the squad realised something was wrong. Buildings burned and things were smashed all over the ground. Two large metal tables were used as barricades by the door to the best protected building,

but they didn't appear to have served their purpose. They were pocked with bullet holes. They halted the speeder and got out. Sauze stepped forward and heard a splashing noise. Still fresh blood pooled beneath his feet. This raid was recent, he determined, as Luna extinguished a fire.

"What do you suppose happened? You think it was Zenians?" Maiylene looked up from the blood on the ground, testing it for age.

"I am not sure. But I do know one thing. This was the village who had lost a few people to that militia fortress in the ravine. Same coords. You don't think---" Sauze was interrupted by Sev.

"Found a dead soldier! Definitely Zenian. Also, lots of dead townspeople." Sauze walked over and crouched by the soldier's body. One of the arms of his armor was scorched, suggesting he had caught fire from the buildings.

"If we want to escape here, we need to send a signal. Our suits cannot amplify a large enough signal. This means we'll have to either find a town that hasn't been destroyed, or head down into the ravine and search there." Sev cocked his grenade launcher.

"I'm all for the ravine idea. Confined spaces are where she works best." Luna took Sauze aside while Sev showed off his newest modification on the grenade launcher to Maiylene.

"Is this really a good idea? We have no idea what's happened here, and what we're up against with the Zenians. For all we know they've taken over the militia fortress and we're walking into a deathtrap. I know we're good, but we don't have experience with this." Sauze stared hard at the burning village for a second.

"We could always do it with stealth. Infiltrate the station, determine the threat, and proceed from there." Luna nodded slowly, and motioned for Maiylene and Sev to come over.

"The plan is infiltration. We get in, figure out what's happening, and send a signal. I'm sure GalaxyForce will want to know all of this, so number one priority is conveying that we have information on the Zenians and what happened here. Sound good?" Sev was smiling widely.

"And here I thought those silent disabling charges would never come in handy. I'm in." Maiylene nodded in agreement, helmet back up and looking at the map to find the ravine. Luna grabbed Sauze's hand and pulled out her pistol. He nodded, and looked up at the sky. The second sun was just setting.

"We'll make camp here for a few hours, and strike late at night." The group broke apart, setting up a small camp in a hollowed out building. Maiylene had the coords of the ravine, but without satellite the base could not be found. Three tents were set up, two from the crash and one that came as part of Maiylene's medical equipment. Sauze was first at watch, using a shift system. When it came time for him to go to watch again, the group would set out for the ravine base. Luna was willing to stay up with him for the first bit of his watch shift, but retired in remembering the importance of adequate energy. Soon, the others were all asleep, and it was just Sauze with his thoughts.

When Sauze was awoken for his second shift by Sev, he immediately began a weapon check. Most important thing to do before a mission is ensure your weapons are in perfect condition. Once he was sure, he brought up his helmet and went over his HUD devices one by one. It was a pointless thing to do, but he had been taught that before a tactical strike it was important. He had done it before falling asleep the day before, but he still felt compelled. Once everyone was ready, Sauze took the lead heading towards the ravine. They weren't at all sure what they were up against, but Sauze naturally assumed the

worst. It was a good strategy when you were unsure; you want to be as prepared as possible. When the jagged edge of the ravine came into sight, he halted and put his hand up flat.

"Head on, Luna." Luna brought up the scope form fitted to her helmet visor. She lied down and inched to the cliff ledge. She moved the barrel from left to right, searching for the base's entrance. There wasn't a single guard outside, but that didn't mean anything. They could be trying a disguise. Just as she was about to relay the lack of base of the comm, something caught her eye. A huge rock formation stuck out of one wall, on an extremely flat level. Beneath a large section, a side was shaved off perfectly. It wasn't natural, she concluded.

"Got a visual on what could be the entrance. Negative on hostiles." Sauze strode over and stared. He used the built in feature of the HUD to zoom. It wasn't as effective of combining it with a scope, but he spotted what Luna was referring to. She stood up, and gestured across.

"We'll have to go around and rappel down onto it." Sauze nodded and used the map to determine the best course. He was about to head off when Maiylene pointed.

"Wait! Guys, you see that thing of water down there? If it was an underground lake exposed by the ravine's formation, it would be long gone. They must be using it as a cooling system or something." Luna drew up the scope again and zeroed in on the water. From what she could see, the bottom was stone. Or perhaps metal...

"We can access the water by rappelling down from here. I've got an idea as to what next." Sev walked to the edge of the cliff, and looked down.

"Remind me again why we can't just use our jets? It'd be so much easier." Maiylene glanced at the long drop down.

"Because we need to conserve power for the life sustaining systems of our armor. Who knows how long we'll be out here?" While he spoke, Sauze fired the super-thin rappel cable from the upper right arm of his armor and swung down. The others followed in suit, with Luna doing a quick sweep of the ravine once again to be sure of the lack of enemies. When Sauze was at a reasonable distance, he activated the slash feature and dropped into the water. Sev and Luna did the same, but Maiylene was less willing and waited until she was closer. All four of the squad members in the water now, they moved on to working out a way in.

"I've got this. I found the piping filter. Let me use a few water-proof charges and we can get in through here." Sev knocked on a sizable metal grate at the bottom of the water pool.

"Will we fit through there even with our armor? I mean, this will definitely be less practical even if we do fit." Sauze sized the grate with his eyes, before glancing down at himself. Any armor, especially advanced series, was bulky. AutoAk made theirs as thin as possible, but it was really unavoidable. Sev laughed at the answer and pulled out one of his charges.

"Oh please. The pipe's big enough, and this charge will create a very nice hole where it opens up out here." He set it and jogged back. The others did the same, and Sev configured it within his HUD. Over the comm, he broadcasted the time.

"5...4... 3...2...E" The charge was noiseless, but did its job well. It was as if the grate and surrounding metal were just removed. Unfortunately, the pipe was larger than expected. Water flow increased significantly and Sev, who was admiring his handiwork, was pulled in onto his side. His legs had been pulled out from under him, and he spun to regain proper positioning. Sauze dived down in, swinging his feet first. Luna went next, followed by Maiylene.

"I'm ok, I'm fine. Just like a waterslide." Sev reassured the squad over the comm, before readjusting himself. The pipe stopped its incline, and they all slammed into one another. The water level was higher than it should have been, and because of the pipe's height restraint they had to stay crouched. This left only the top of their helmets visible above the water. Sauze pushed past Sev and used his water-vision HUD application to render the water as completely clear. Gazing on ahead, he saw that the pipe did not end for quite some while.

"We're going to have to get out here. I'll open the pipe up safely." Sev suddenly pushed the three others back.

"Already taking care of it. In 3...2...E!" The pipe rocked, and they were carried through a jagged hole. Sauze landed on a desk and rolled into ready position, assuming enemies. Instead, it was just the four of them. The lights were out, and everything was empty. He scanned the building for life, but found jammers in place for scans. It appeared abandoned, at least for this room. He turned to the door, careful not to make a noise.

"What do you think you're doing, Sev? If there had been hostiles in this room, our stealth plan would have failed!" Sev, who was climbing off of the overturned filing cabinet he had landed on laughed.

"I checked. It was a proximity bomb with the direction set downward. That means that if there was any movement down below it would have begun the countdown, which I could have stopped. It didn't, so I activated it manually." Sauze grumbled something about procedure in the comm channel before returning his attention to the door. He pushed it open a few centimetres and waited for his HUD to go wild with hostile warnings. Instead, more darkness. The water was still gushing from the pipe, and flowed past him into the hall. It had been shin level and rising when the door was closed, so Sauze could only wonder what would happen when it reached every corner of the floor.

"Seems empty. Everyone, night vision for your HUDS. Once we clear this floor we'll head down. Luna stepped into the hall first, wielding a pistol. She assumed ready position at one door, and then knocked it open. More darkness, but the room was a bit more wrecked. A desk overturned, and papers all over the floor.

"This place belonged to a militia, right? I guess this is where they worked from." Maiylene opened another door and found much of the same. Sauze was focused on the water that was now millimetres tall consistently.

"That means this is the top floor. It is best, tactically, to keep crew quarters on the bottom. The next floor up can be weapons and gear. Then you put work areas. In event of a hostile takeover, the crew can get up to the weapons before the enemies get to the crew. I'm guessing if we find anyone it will be bottom floor." Sev burst through another door and frowned.

"Probably right. So let's head down there, because all the machinery up here seems to have been destroyed. Yep, you heard me. Take a look at this." Sauze stepped over and took a look. Sev had found two force field generators behind a locked door. The lock was shot off and laying in the water on the floor. The force field generators were shot as well, but with more strategic placement.

"That means someone's been here that wasn't militia. My guess is those soldiers we fought." Sev turned to him in an instant.

"You mean the Zenians." Sauze kicked in another door and found more trashed rooms. He noted a bit of blood but was unable to examine it before the water washed away.

"I mean nothing. We don't know if they are Zenians, or simply supporters of Zen Callistar. I've thought about it, and decided that the Zenians having an army is simply implausible. They would have attacked already." Sev shook his head, but didn't respond. He went off with Maiylene to examine the next hall over, as Luna was on the last door of this one. She opened it, but found it wouldn't budge. Sauze spotted a hole lower down, perfectly shaped to a bullet. He shot the door handle and pulled it open. A body rolled out with blood all over its chest. The species could not be properly determined, but Sauze could guess that it was a member of the militia. It appeared he had been sitting behind the door, and rather than break it open the attackers had shot him through the thin metal.

"Gross." Luna moved the body aside and walked into the room. It was better preserved than the others, but was still dark and empty. Someone must have cut the power, Sauze decided. Water quickly picked up the body and carried it out. He and Luna went to join Maiylene and Sev in the other hallway, but found that the water was becoming harder to simply walk through. It was above knee height, and steadily rising. Sauze thought about returning to the original room to cover the hold, but was interrupted by Maiylene over the comm.

"Sauze, Luna! We found something!" Sauze pushed through the water while Luna examined a mark on the wall. It was scorched in a way that a regular bullet would not cause. It was then she stared down to the third hallway, the one unvisited, and saw a large machine. She started wading through the water to reach it, while Sauze joined Sev and Maiylene. They were standing in front of a hole in the wall, into a hole that lead down for quite a distance. Water now poured down through cracks, and it was clear the hole was not clean cut. An explosive had gone off, and it had hit the wall hard. Sauze blocked the water off with an overturned desk in case there was anyone down there who suddenly became suspicious. It was only then that he became aware of the fact that the building was still enclosed all the way down. He took another look at the explosive's effect, but Sev beat him to the explanation.

"This is how someone got in. They blasted up to here and then just took a thing out of the wall to get in. That's what happened; now we know what happened to the people. You see, they were able to get up just fine with all the debris as well as climbing. But it would be tough getting down. So they've either killed everyone, or taken them down to lower levels. Either way, we're gonna come across a lot of bodies." Maiylene took a look down, and then glanced over at Sev.

"But why didn't they just walk out the front door? Who's to say they didn't?" Sev took Maiylene by the arm and guided her around the corner. The door was loaded with explosives. If anyone tried to open it from either side the explosives would have made a crater. Sauze took a good look at the door before he heard Luna's voice over the comm.

"We can head downstairs - I've found the life support for the lower levels." The group waded through the now waist high water to meet her. Sev and Maiylene took on the remaining doors of the hall while Sauze examined what Luna had found.

"Well, this is strange. It has a circuit monitor, see, to sound an alert if it is unpowered. Well, the circuit monitor says it was unpowered at some point yesterday, but it's online right now." Sev, grenade launcher held high, walked over.

"Isn't it obvious? The guys that took this place just turned off the oxygen for the downstairs levels, waited a bit, and turned it back on. That way it's just them and anyone still alive from this floor" Sev pulled the circuit monitor off the wall and examined it.

"Yep. Only one loss of power. Clearly intentional, because that means someone had to actively turn the power off. Remember how they cut the power? Well, these things run on backup generators. So they actually had to come over here and deactivate those generators." Sauze examined the circuit monitor before clicking it into a wall mounted case and sealing the case.

"This water's going to be everywhere pretty soon. The life support will be fine, but if that circuit monitor gets damaged the actual cables might suffer a little. Also; excellent deduction, Sev." Sev nodded towards Sauze in thanks before heading to the end of the hall where Maiylene stood.

"There's a door over here that leads down a set of stairs. Should we head down?" She inclined her head at the large metal doors with the stair sign beside them. Sauze took the handle and waited for a second. He then stepped back and held his left wrist up with his hand flattened back. A tiny laser beam activated. This was another feature of the AutoAk armor, a small laser that could cut through nearly anything. It required power, though, so Sauze knew he had to use it sparingly. He cut a small square through the door and pushed it out. He then rested his sidearm inside the square and viewed the staircase with his HUD. No hostiles. He then diverted half his HUD to a remote camera. These are detached from the shoulder, and are about the size of a fly. He sent it through the square and waited.

"Doesn't look like the door is armed with anything, we can head through." He called back the remote camera while Maiylene opened up the door. The staircase was quiet and pitch black. It was even dark in the HUD view. Sauze activated his helmet light, and told the others to do so as well.

"We detect movement, they go off. In the mean time, be on your guard." They started down the stairs with weapons ready, sure not to slip in the water that now trickled down the steps. Sauze stepped back and closed the door, preventing the water from flowing down. He then took the lead with gun held level. They turned the stairs and waited. No one was there, but Sauze's HUD picked up movement a short distance away past a door. The staircase ended here, and they would be entering the second level down now. He deactivated his light and the others did as well. He pressed on ahead and spotted a man on the ground. He was shuddering slowly, and blood leaked out of his back in two places. In a whisper, Sauze addressed him through the helmet. You could have several comm channels online at once, and they could be configured to either sound through the helmet or not.

"We are here to help. What happened?" Sauze played the part of helpful rescue, when in fact he had a gun held behind the man. If this turned out to be a trap Sauze was prepared. The man flinched at the noise of a voice, but turned slowly. Sauze moved the gun out of sight and addressed the man again.

"Are the people who hurt you still here?" He removed the opacity filter on the visor so that the man could see his eyes.

"Brought us down here." His voice was choked and he coughed up a bit of blood when he finished. Sauze called Maiylene over and asked her on a quiet comm channel to address his wounds minimally.

"Who? Where are they now?" Maiylene injected a sedative and began dressing one bullet wound. It would be impossible to remove the bullets now, but maybe if he survived.

"They took the rest....they have us down there." Maiylene wiped some blood away and stepped back to get a tourniquet. Sauze holstered his gun and looked the man in the eyes through his visor again.

"Who? Who took the rest down there?" Before the injured man could answer, his head exploded. The blood coated Sauze's visor, but dripped off of the anti-stick surface. His helmet altered a liquid's molecular makeup to make it extremely viscous. Sauze looked up and saw a soldier like the ones

they had fought before frantically reloading a single shot pistol. Sauze stood up and rushed the man. Grabbing him by the neck, Sauze took his legs out from under him and brought him to the ground.

"Who are you?" The man reached for his pistol, refusing to speak. Sauze gestured to Luna, who took him out with her gun. He waved the others back and crept forward. The second floor was largely empty, and that man he had just killed was likely a guard. The weapons had been cleared off the racks, and everything was overturned. Sauze felt a drop, and looked up to see water dripping through the roof. This must be near the tunnel they had discovered; no other area was weak enough to let water through. The squad pressed on, clearing the second floor fast. By now they knew that below was where their enemies awaited. A squad of regular troops might be terrified right now, but Egplink squad was coolly confident.

"Where do you think we'll find a transmitter, or even a signal booster?" Sev looked behind an overturned shelf and looked at the others.

"I'm starting to wonder the same thing. We can hope we'll find one below. Worst case, we get on a salvageable vehicle and travel to another town not destroyed." Just as Sauze was about to continue, the auditory sensors picked something up. They were designed so that when activated, they would pick up noise of a living creature moving. They wouldn't pick anyone else in an AutoAk suit up, as the armor had special soundless boots as part of the full suit. But somewhere on this level, someone had moved. The others had picked it up too; he didn't even need to warn them. They ducked down and began searching. It was then that Sauze spotted the door to the staircase; a clear one on this level.

"I see someone through the glass of the door. He's got his back to us." Sev pointed to the glass doors, and Sauze's HUD locked on instantly. The man hadn't seen them yet, but was in a position to alert anyone below the second he did. Maiylene then raised her hand up flat. A symbol for 'hang back'.

"I've got this." She raced over and put her back to the wall beside the door. She then opened it in a flash and used her surgical saw to slash the man's throat. Before he could make any noise, she pulled him through the door and shot him. All GalaxyForce weapons had silencers, so that the only noise was the click of the gun. Sliding the bloody surgical saw into her specialty medic armor, she admired her work. Luna put a hand on her shoulder.

"Nice work Maiylene. Now I've got a plan..."

Sauze walked down the stairs and into the enemy's level. There were soldiers everywhere. Next to him was Luna, walking casually. At any second Sauze was expecting the soldiers to open fire. But Luna's plan worked.

"Hello...Comrade. Just coming down to report no activity." Sauze nodded at another soldier. The helmet he wore felt strange. But Luna was right. Wearing the enemy soldiers' armor sets worked. They had hastily dressed up in the armor of the dead guards and were now infiltrating the compound. Luna had taken a mobile comm and kept it in her helmet. It would sound like she was speaking to herself if she used it, but she was still in contact with the others. The goal right now, though, was to spot a transmitter. Transmitters were almost massively amplified comms. They could not maintain a constant speech flow, though, and sent messages. A signal booster would boost their comms to a larger frequency, but not enough to contact GalaxyForce. Only enough to reach the nearby planets, which was also an option.

"Hey, Gax! Sergeant says the fleet in orbit's gonna be done repairing soon and we can abandon this installation." Sauze took a second to realize the man was referring to him. He coughed once for effect, and responded.

"Excellent. We'll be out soon, huh?" The enemy soldier studied him for a second before relaxing. Sauze couldn't help but notice the man's gun was unloaded.

"You comin' down with something?" Sauze smiled. The cough had worked. Luna took him by the arm and addressed the man.

"He needs some fuckin' water. Just taking him over now, idiot doesn't know when to get a drink. Hey, you know if they're getting that Transmitter workin' yet?" Luna used a deep, gravelly voice that worked well. The enemy soldier laughed.

"Just like you, Gax. The Transmitter's working all right, why'd you want to know?" His acceptance of Luna's put on voice surprised Sauze. Luna was quick to reply, and perfectly avoided suspicion.

"Wonderin' if we can send a signal about those other primate towns out there. Like to save one for myself, you know?" The soldier laughed and gave Luna a fist bump. Once past him, she breathed a sigh of relief. Sauze now knew that there was a transmitter. It would likely be kept by a wall for access to power. Said wall could not be the wall by the tunnel because although the walls were sealed in the cables were exposed and some were damaged. It also couldn't be the wall with the staircase, as it took up most of the access. It likely wouldn't be on the same wall as the bunks that lay in plain sight. That left the wall down the corner. He gestured with his head to the single hall access to Luna, and they headed off. When they reached the end of the hall, a grotesque sight awaited them. Six people chained by their hands and legs to the wall, either unconscious or half-alive. At the far end Sauze spotted a Transmitter. One of the prisoners spotted them and started shouting.

"Let us go! Let...us...go..." He sagged back down and blinked a few times. Next to him, a woman was struggling against the chains on her legs. It was no good, though. They were trapped well. The man at the end next to the transmitter was very clearly dead when Luna and Sauze arrived next to him. Because of their disguise, they could not acknowledge the prisoners. There weren't any guards in the room, but it was too risky until their mission was completed. Luna stood in the hall as a distraction while Sauze set to work sending a mission. He spotted the 'All Hail Zen' image plastered over the previous militia's emblem, and cringed. These people were at the least huge supporters of Zen. Sauze could only wonder what they were doing out here.

"Oh, hey. What's going on? Me? Not much, just waiting here. Can't wait to get off this rock..." Sauze overheard Luna making conversation and began working faster. He relayed a message to the GalaxyForce base in the nearest sector. It read that a group of supporters of Zen Callistar had attacked the Orbital Bay and several Civilian Encampments. It also went over the army and Egplink Squad's IDs. Once it was sent, he breathed out in relief. Just then, a man chained on the wall cleared his throat.

"I guess you aren't going to be able to save us, huh? Probably best to just destroy the base fully." Luna had walked off distracting whichever soldier had tried to come down the hall, so Sauze wasn't perfectly safe.

"We'll try. I can't promise anything." He walked straight out, not making eye contact. It was unlikely they would save them, and Sauze had been taught that although such a thing was necessary to the greater goal, he should feel sadness for leaving them. He didn't completely, but he did have the

knowledge that such a thing was unfortunate. Meeting up with Luna outside, he approached like a regular soldier.

"We ought to get back upstairs for guard duty, huh?" Luna nodded, and apologized to the other soldier. Once back up, Sauze and Luna changed back into their AutoAk armor. Maiylene and Sev had grown quite bored and were itching for a fight. Sauze talked about the prisoners, but explained that it just wasn't feasible to go after them. The group was divided on what would happen regarding the matter.

"Can we really just leave them? It seems immoral." Maiylene was adamant that the squad free the prisoners. Sev wanted a fight, but he didn't care if it was involving prisoners or not. Luna appreciated that the prisoners should be saved, but also understood that returning to GalaxyForce was important and the risk was too high. Sauze didn't care about the prisoners.

"I've got an idea. This'll be fun, too. We lure the soldiers up, and take 'em out in manageable groups. That way, I still get to blast some guys to pieces, and you can rescue the prisoners. See, if we draw them up to this floor, I can take a bunch of them out with charges. You and Maiylene fight them, then run up the stairs. Once you get there, assume defensive position. Luna opens the doors and the water pushes them all down. Sound good?" Throughout his lengthy plan, Sev was unloading and loading his grenade launcher smiling. Sauze agreed that the plan sounded good, and the prisoners would be able to provide some valuable intel. He and Maiylene took position on floor two, while Sev laid the charges.

"I'll toss a grenade in an run. I get to the stairs and activate the charges on your say. Let's go." With all the charges planted, Sev headed down the stairs. A few seconds later, an explosions sounded and Sev cam barreling up the stairs. Sauze remembered not to shoot the first wave, instead to give Sev the call. When the first dazed soldiers appeared, Sauze called up. One second there was a huge group of soldiers, the next blood was flying everywhere. One man had lost both his arms and tried to throw himself at Maiylene. She cut him down with a few shots and backed up. Another group of the soldiers arrived, and the few remaining charges took them out. By estimate, Sauze figured that half of the soldiers were left. More rounded the corner and were beaten back by bullets. When the clips that Sauze and Maiylene were dwindling, they nodded at each other and raced up the stairs.

"Go! Luna, go!" Maiylene and Sauze pressed themselves against the walls and waited. Luna pulled the door back and fell into Sauze. Water exploded through the door and cascaded down the stairs. The four GalaxyForce soldiers had activated their floorplanters and struggled against the current. Wave after wave burst out taking down the soldiers, no matter how many men tried to get up. Eventually the soldiers simply stopped coming, and Luna forced the door closed against the current. The squad now had the unfortunate job of going through and making sure the soldiers were dead. Each wielding their short-range gun, they went from body to body. It was something they had done many times, but was still slightly unpleasant. Once finished, they headed down the stairs.

"I didn't realise we let this much water in! It's up to my knees." Maiylene splashed some water and continued forward.

"I say we scavenge the base for anything important. Maiylene, you go tend to the surviving prisoners. The rest of us will look for more information we can give to GalaxyForce. If anyone encounters any soldiers, take them alive for interrogation." The group split up, each heading to a different side of the room. Sauze rooted through papers on desks, finding them all blank. The water had

already destroyed many, and Sauze was beginning to wonder if it was a lost cause. Just then, Luna opened up a channel.

"Got a big file folder over here! Sauze, you'll want to take a look at this." Sauze waded over to her, and opened the folder up. It was not empty, but the information was not incredibly useful from what he could see. The first few pages were plans for a installation in the town while the fleet repaired and...

"They write of another fleet. Or even two? Look, it says 'repair and wait for the others'. This is great! Back here, it's even got tactical plans. We've got to get this to Cybin!" Sev pulled a paper out and looked over it.

"The thing is, what if they don't want this information in Cybin?" Sauze and Luna turned to him, retracting their helmets. It was easier to speak this way and he had already done it.

"What do you mean, Sev?" Sev shrugged, and placed the sheet down on the table. Sauze could tell he was about to voice the unpopular opinion as he always liked to.

"I'm just saying. Maybe GalaxyForce already knows this stuff about other fleets. But maybe Cybin doesn't." Sauze sighed. Sev was under the impression that GalaxyForce was covering something up, which it couldn't have. It would be impossible, it simply wouldn't happen.

"Sev, that doesn't make any sense." Sev smiled and walked past them down the hall to join Maiylene. Sauze stored the file folder in the storage slot at the back of the AutoAk armor, and continued looking. A few minutes later, Maiylene and Sev stepped out of the hall.

"I...uh...managed to save a few. Do you want to come take a look?" Sauze agreed, accepting that the file folder they already had was all they were going to find.

"It seems that a soldier guarding them had been instructed to euthanize them when we attacked. So he shot a few of them before leaving. One guy was already dead, but I managed to save three others. They're in a lot of shock right now, so I've got them asleep up on some tables. It's going to be hard moving them." Sauze took a look. They were all doing remarkably well. The other three bodies were now floating in the water. Sev took a look and walked back out. Sauze and Luna followed him, while Maiylene tested for infection. It was just a matter now of waiting until the prisoners could walk to leave. They had already decided that Sev would destroy the wall to allow access to the tunnel for easy exit, so nobody really had to work on anything. Sauze continued to search the floor, when he found an unopened door. Trying the handle, he found it locked tight.

"Got a door that could use a little blast over here, Sev." Sev happily bounded over and blew the lock up. Sauze yanked the door open and gasped.

"No way..." Inside was a working computer. A laptop, to be specific. It had the original militia's emblem on it, but seemed undamaged. That likely meant the Zenians had been using it. He crouched down by it, careful not to take it off of the desk. If he dropped it into the water, it would be a disaster.

"They've got records on this thing! I think they transferred them from a mobile storage unit." Sev took a look too, and Luna approached behind them. Maiylene had sent her a message over the HUD comm, and so she had her helmet back up.

"Wait a minute...this is all wrong. It talks about Zen Callistar's plan to form a lower level of government, one governing the Fringe space. That's not what he wants at all! It also has 'GalaxyForce Related Civilian Death count' and a bunch of planet names with population numbers...but none of these are in the database? What?!" Sev stepped back, sucking in breath. While Sauze tried to make sense of

what he assumed was nonsense, Sev stood agape. Sev was a rational thinker. But he was also always wondering. It started in his want for excitement. Even as a youth he had needed more of anything he could get. And now he was unsure. A horrible idea was forming in his head, but he knew not to voice it. For Sauze would be loyal to GalaxyForce no matter what, and it would not help the situation to have expressed concern about the records they just found.

"We'll take these too. I'll use the AutoAk mobile storage unit." Sauze pulled the mobile storage unit out from its slot on the helmet, which he brought up specifically for the purpose. Sev left the room, joining Luna and Maiylene who were both in Maiylene's makeshift medical bay now.

"How are they doing?" Maiylene turned with a syringe in her hand, and pointed at one man. He was lying down, but blinking a lot. Luna was giving him some clean water from the AutoAk's supply.

"He's just woken up, and the woman there is looking well. Still waiting on the last man." Sev nodded, as Sauze walked into the room.

"I've got some records from the laptop. It ran out of battery before I could check it further, though. I've got it in the storage slot, but I don't have much more room. How are they doing?" Maiylene helped the man who was awake into a sitting position.

"I'll let him tell you. He's not willing to give his name, but he'll try and answer some questions." The man nodded weakly.

"Are the people who imprisoned you supporters of the Zenians or actually employed by the Zenian Government?" The man looked at him for a second.

"Zenians. They're the Zenians. Why would you ask that?" Sauze stared at the man. Obviously something was up.

"Because the Zenians have made no moves with the use of military before. They are - were not hostile." The man stepped off of the table.

"Well then explain this. And explain what we were shown, too. Yeah, that's right. I'm not afraid to say it." The man, more recuperated now, stood up to his full size. He looked Sauze in the eye and waited for a response.

"I don't know what you mean." Sauze replied coldly. On another table, the woman slowly woke up. Maiylene rushed over and began helping her.

"What I mean...is that you're no better. We saw the reports. The Zenians haven't been the only ones fighting this war." Sauze stepped back.

"War? What do you mean 'war'? There's no war. You're not making sense." The man sat back down, no longer trying to match Sauze in intensity.

"Sir, you are misinformed. GalaxyForce and the Zenians have been fighting out here for just under a month. We've kept our heads down and pretended not to notice. Lot of good that did us." Sauze was about to reply when a massive explosion sounded and the base shook.

"Sev, I thought I told you to wait..." Sauze turned to see Sev standing right next to him, white faced.

"Not me." The group turned splashed through the water into the main room. Water was pouring down through the roof, and another explosion sounded. The man Sauze had been talking to raced out as well, and held onto the wall for support. Maiylene was helping the woman through the hall when a third explosion hit. They both fell over into the water, and Maiylene struggled to help the woman up. The unconscious man was still in the room.

"We don't have time! We need to get out of here!" Luna saw Maiylene staring back down the hall and pulled her away. The six of them now ran up the stairs. Sauze reached the top first and saw water gushing down from the first floor.

"The explosion hit the upper doors! We're about to be flooded in! Sev, open up that tunnel quick!" Sev raced over to the wall where the tunnel was located and began placing explosives. The woman was hit by a wave of water and was washed down the stairs. Luna helped her up and they all gathered around a desk while Sev worked. Just as the water level reached their waists did he activate the bombs. The squad and the two survivors raced out into the tunnel which quickly began taking in water as well. More explosions pounded the base, but the six of them were safe for the time being. Eventually the tunnel turned upwards and it became more of a steep hill. The survivors of the soldiers had a tough time making it up, but Maiylene and Sev helped them. Sauze was the first to reach the top, and was surprised to discover that the tunnel let out under one of the blasted out towns.

"It's safe, everyone out!" They all climbed out of the hole and took a second to catch their breath. Up in the sky, a massive gunship bombarded the base. It took Sauze a second to realize that it was a GalaxyForce ship, the stark red symbol flashing on the side.

"They must have assumed we made it out. They're just making sure the Zenians are dead." As the words left his mouth Sauze realized he was rationalizing. It didn't make sense to rationalize, so he shut up and watched.

"I'll radio in with the comm." Sauze, with his helmet up, prepared to open a channel when the man yelped out. He turned to Sauze.

"Are you crazy? They'll kill us! You sent that message to them - they know we know! Look, I know where a ship's hidden. We kept one in the town that they never discovered. Let's just take it and get out of here." Sauze rolled his eyes.

"GalaxyForce would not kill us. I know you think they're covering something up but they simply wouldn't be able to. Look at the facts; some planet would have noticed before and said something." The man stared at him for a few seconds before standing up.

"Anyone else who wants to take the ship is welcome. No one stood." The man began walking away when all of a sudden the gunship in the air turned.

"I've made connec---" Sauze was cut off as the gunship opened fire. Massive laser blasts sailed towards the town. Sauze stood up and gasped. Everyone brought their helmets up and scrambled. The woman survivor began limping after them, but was a little slow. The man was already raising the ship out of the small crater. It was a junker but it looked like it could fly. He swung open the door and went for the controls. Sauze and the others joined him, Luna opening up the bay doors for a better view of the gunship.

"See? They're firing on us! I told you!" Sauze ignored the man and sat down the pilot seat. This could all be solved if he could simply meet with the captain of the gunship. As the ship prepared to lift off, the other survivor came into view. She hadn't quite made it in time, and the ship was already lifting. The ground was exploding all around her and she made a desperate attempt to get in. She made it half through the blast door opening, clinging on with her arms. Sauze and the man sat in the pilot seats, so it was up to Luna, Maiylene and Sev to save her. But as the ship took off, the gunship launched its own ship after them. A missile caught the ship on its side, and it swung violently. The woman lost her grip, and went tumbling down to the ground. It was a long drop, and there was no chance that she survived.

They flew through the volley of attacks, and it was only when Sauze avoided the ship that engaged them did the man realize what he was doing.

"You're going to get us killed! Just leave!" Sauze shook his head. The man abruptly got up from the co-pilot's seat and walked away.

"Nex, you've got to understand! We've -" Sauze heard Luna trying explain what was going on, but the man simply pushed her aside. Sauze realized this was the first time he had heard his name; Nex. He hadn't even bothered to learn the woman's name. Sauze swerved to avoid the ship attacking them once again and pulled up to dock with the battleship. If he could just explain that it was only them and no hostiles, this would all stop. When he docked, the ship stopped attacking and returned to the bay. He opened the door, followed by Luna, Sev, and Maiylene. Nex hung back waiting.

"Hello? It's just GalaxyForce soldiers! No threat!" He opened the airlock door and found himself faced with a squad of troopers aiming their rifles right at him. Special control rifles that could disable AutoAk armor, purchased from said company as well. They contained Ion Charges specially manufactured and very hard to acquire elsewhere.

"Could I please speak to the captain of this gunship?" One of the soldiers stepped forward and kept his gun trained on Sauze.

"You are under arrest, sir. This is off the record, so I don't need to read you any rights." Luna, Sev, and Maiylene stepped out from behind him and were immediately grabbed by soldiers. Nex picked up a sidearm from the wall of the ship and prepared to attack. Sauze stepped away from the soldier.

"You can't arrest me! Do you want my ID? Elite Commander 8831. I'm Sauze Kath. Luna Eyeth is Elite Long Range 8831. Maiylene Lamand is Elite Medic 8833. Sev Ejef is Elite Demolitions 8834. We have a survivor from a mission onboard that ship as well." Nex cursed and stuck the gun in his pocket. He had slipped on a GalaxyForce tunic and some pants for disguise, but that wouldn't help now. Still best to keep the gun on him. Two soldiers rushed into the ship and told him to walk out. He did so with one hand covering the gun. If worst came to worst he could shoot his way back into the ship.

"I repeat, Mr. Kath. You're under arrest. Don't you think if we had a valid reason we would have made you provide your IDs? No, this is different. You're if we don't kill all of you on the way to the prison. Everyone, weapons on the ground and armor off." Suddenly the man who had his gun pointed at Sev exploded into blood and gore. Two grenades ripped through the other soldiers, and Sev was kicking out at the woman who was about to shoot Maiylene. Luna sprung forward and gunned down the two soldiers who held her, while Nex shot down the two on him. Sauze made no move, but did not protect the soldier in front of him as Maiylene took him down.

"What are you doing? We just killed these soldiers! GalaxyForce soldiers! We need all of this explained now!" Sev stared at him incredulously for a few seconds, then reloaded his grenade launcher and stepped back into the ship. Nex followed him.

"What are you doing? We need to find the captain! Come on!" Luna walked over to Sauze cautiously.

"Sauze, that isn't an option right now. The GalaxyForce personal her are obviously not the ones we want to be talking to. We need to get to Cybin and tell Kalanth Adams himself about what's happened here, ok?" Sauze could not find the right words. This didn't make any sense, and now a bunch of people were dead.

"I don't feel good about this. Can we at least try--" Another group of soldiers rounded the corner and opened fire. A stray bullet caught the airlock control and it started smoking. Sev spotted this and tried to get back to Sauze and the others. He pushed through the ship door but found he was unable to open the airlock. Sealed into the ship now with Nex, he watched as Luna, Maiylene, and Sauze fought back. This time Sauze attacked, but it was more out of confusion. He shot down one soldier's legs, and shot through the neck of the other. Luna shot through one soldier, but stumbled over a body and toppled over. Two soldiers grabbed Maiylene by her wrists and yanked her down another corridor. Luna stood up in time to try and save her, but one soldier slammed the barrel of his gun into her temple. Sauze grabbed the man and shot him from under his head, and then shot the remaining soldier. Turning the corner, he found that Maiylene was missing.

"Luna! Luna how are you feeling?" Sauze ran to her side and helped her up. She pushed a few loose strands of hair from in front of her eyes and cringed. There was no bruising, the hit had been fairly light.

"I'll be fine. We need to get Maiylene." Sauze turned to Sev, talking through the airlock. He couldn't see him, but he could faintly hear him talking.

"Sev! Don't try to blow the airlock. I know you've got your AutoAk on, but the explosion might just damage the ship. You're good at calculating, I know, but you can't take the risk. Pilot the ship out into space and wait for our instructions." Sauze heard Sev's agreement, then Nex's voice as well.

"What about me? Don't I get a say?" Sauze sighed. He understood where Nex was coming from, and he almost admired him in a way. He had stayed confident and capable throughout this whole ordeal, and it seemed now that the advice he given should have been taken.

"Nex, we'll get you to safety as soon as this gets sorted out. For now we need you to remain patient. Luna and I are going to rescue Maiylene and escape, don't worry." Nex didn't respond. Sauze turned back to Luna and helped her up.

"They took Maiylene down this way. Before we go, I need to speak to the commander. I want to find out what's happening. They rounded the corner that Maiylene had been taken and heard the click of boots heading down the hall towards them...

Maiylene went slack for a few seconds in the soldiers' hands, and then snapped up and crushed someone's neck. The other soldier tried to shoot her but she took his legs out from under him and shot him with his own gun. She was free, but had no idea where the soldiers had taken her. There had been a number of twists and turns. She ducked into the nearest room she could find and waited. It was a little closet space with a few shelves, but nothing useful. She grabbed the door handle and pushed it open an inch. No one there. It was then she remembered that Sauze and Luna could still be alive. Sure enough, when she checked on her HUD, they were alive. Sev was as well, but she couldn't lock down his coordinates.

"I'm ok. I've escaped." She transmitted the message via comm and stepped out into the hall. Sauze and Luna were a floor above and a ways away. Simply meeting at one area would be tough if soldiers arrived.

"Maiylene! We'll come get you." Maiylene put her back up against a wall and glanced around the side. Two soldiers but neither one saw.

"No! You go speak to the captain and find out what's going on. I know it sounds stupid, but we're still not entirely sure about anything. I'll look around for any information we can use. Remember, we've got to bring everything that's happened to the Ceitevorate on Cybin." Maiylene shut off the comm and drew her pistol. Also in her hand was a syringe. A few days ago, before the start of the mission that got them into this mess, Maiylene had been thinking about using one of her medical syringes as a weapon. Not that violence was really her thing, but it seemed like an interesting prospect. Now she had the opportunity to test it out. It was tough even hurting fellow GalaxyForce soldiers, but clearly they didn't feel the same way about her. As she leapt out and fired the first shot, she wondered what her family would think. They were already unhappy.

"Ugh!" The second soldier dropped over, a knockout syringe sticking out of his neck. Definitely unhappy. Maiylene was from the Lamand line of Kerisians. The royal family of a nice-sized island in a deep sea. A tropical paradise, and Maiylene was to be a queen. Many people wondered why anyone could leave that. Maiylene had simply found it boring. Studying all types of medicine in her free time, she had pleaded with her parents to allow her sister to succeed them. But they would not budge, so she stowed away on a transport and removed herself from the royal line on a space station. They had sent many aides to request her return, but at that point she was already training at GalaxyForce to become a medic. It could have been worse, she reminded herself.

"Luna, Sauze. Are we killing these soldiers? I just don't feel good about it." Maiylene waited for a response but figured they must be busy. Doing what, she tried not to think. Eventually she came across what she was looking for; a ship database terminal. Used to access records, crew, logs, and all sorts of stuff. Casually sliding her mobile storage unit into one of the slot, she began browsing. It immediately became odd, as the HUD would not work with many files. The ship's official classification was not picked up. AutoAk's HUD would pick up ship classification, people's names, dates, planets and ship names. If focused on, it would then provide a full report. But it was not picking up several people's names, planets or ship names. That meant they were not in the official database. She looked over some logs and was immediately confused.

"Luna? Sauze? This log isn't making sense. It's talking about strikes on colony worlds that don't exist." There was a burst of static, and then Luna's voice came through slightly choppy.

"They know we're free onboard the ship. Jammers are in place, so comm isn't going to be working. HUD connection would still be fine, though. Conta--" The channel closed and could not be reopened. Maiylene suddenly felt very alone. She could not reach Sev, either. But HUD connection would still be working, so the terms in the logs should have been identifiable. As she read on, it sounded worse. They were recording attacks they had made not only on the Zenians, but on colony worlds like the one the squad had just been on. It didn't say anything about Zenian control of the worlds, though. To Maiylene it almost sounded like GalaxyForce was...

The ship suddenly shuddered and Maiylene fell forward onto the console. The steady hum of the engines beneath her feet had gone away, and the ship was now floating. She took a look outside a viewport and saw the stars no longer moving. Before, it had been orbiting planet. Now it had the danger of crashing into the planet. Suddenly, Maiylene heard stomping coming from down the hall. She began downloading files, but as the stomping grew closer she had to flee. Climbing onto the console, Maiylene found that the vent was wide enough to fit her in her armor. She swung her legs up first and

back in so that she could observe through the grate. A large group of soldiers turned into the hallway and stopped.

"I told you. The guards are dead, see?" They gestured to the bodies of the guards, which Maiylene realized she had forgotten to hide. Then another realization came to her; she had left the mobile storage unit plugged in. If they saw it they would know she was in the area, and any exit she could take with the vent would be covered.

"We know she's on the run, so she wouldn't have stopped here. That means" The soldier was cut off by another. Maiylene was staring at the GalaxyForce emblem on their armor, wishing it was any other enemy.

"Sir, there's something plugged in at the terminal! She must have been spying on the records!" The first man looked down at it, and yanked it out of the socket.

"Listen. Now it is imperative we do not inform the base. If they knew we had fugitives - fugitives who know! We'd be dead in a heartbeat. Right now we need to focus on tracking the three on the ship down, and leaving that ship outside alive." He handed the mobile storage unit to another GalaxyForce soldier and the group spread out around the few halls. Covering the exits in case she decided to reappear. But Maiylene couldn't leave without the mobile storage unit. So she carefully inched around to another vent opening. It seemed there was now two soldiers stationed per hall, and she had four hall exits. Who she figured was the man in charge was doing rounds through each hall as well. This could be possible. As she prepared, she tried hard to forget they were GalaxyForce. No matter what though, it was impossible.

Opening the vent, she rested her gun on the ledge. Regular GalaxyForce armor had the typical flaw of exposing a bit of the neck. The tunic had been raised to counter this, but there was still that sliver. Her rounds were rapid and dead on. The two bodies dropped and instantly she was crawling backwards and heading to another vent exit. She had picked it so that the soldiers were killed as the main man rounded the corner. Two more direct hits, and onto another vent. They fell easily, but now it was on to the hardest one. Crawling as fast as she could, she took out the man first with a shot to the forehead. The two soldiers watched him fall and pointed their guns around frantically. She caught one with a shot before the other realised the shots were coming from the vent. With few options left, Maiylene sprung out of the vent and tackled the soldier. She pulled another syringe from the case on her side and drove it into the exposed neck. The person almost immediately drifted off.

"Sorry." She whispered in her helmet and began searching for her mobile storage unit. It occurred to her now that this group hadn't wanted further GalaxyForce inquiry as to the state of the squad. Why, Maiylene did not know. The man had said something about how they would be dead if GalaxyForce found out. She thought back to the reports she had read, and a feeling of dread came across her. Could GalaxyForce really be killing its own and others to keep something a secret? But what could the secret possibly be, in relation to the Zenians? It just wasn't adding up. But no matter what they might be hiding, the measures they've gone to hide it were clearly breaking more laws than she could count. Not only that, but it was just evil. It was more important than ever that Cybin find out about this now. But first she had to get to Sauze and Luna and warn them. The corridors were still a dangerous place, especially with the reason the troops had to find her.

Having made it safely across the first floor, Maiylene now stood in front of a teleport. Teleports had been invented by a brilliant scientist some time ago, so long few people actually remembered how

they work. But Maiylene had found them fascinating during her first few weeks of stay at GalaxyForce, and decided to study up on them. It was essentially breaking whatever was being teleported into its base of protons and the like, and then transmitting those using faster than light technology. The same scientist who had invented them had later died in a teleportation-related accident that was kept very quiet by the manufacturers. Stepping through, she selected the next floor up. Expecting it to be surrounded by soldiers, she fired off a shot upon arrival. It was empty, surprisingly. She checked on her HUD and found Sauze and Luna were by the bridge. It then occurred to her where all the soldiers might be.

Sauze kicked another onto the floor, but could not bring himself to fire. He and Luna had dispatched several soldiers on their way to the bridge, and Sauze still felt bad. They had all tried to kill them, but still he could not fight back fully. TO his knowledge, this could still be a big misunderstanding. He was very reluctant to actually kill until he learned exactly what was going on. As the doors to the bridge swung open, Sauze readied himself for the worst. Despite that, what happened next he could not have prepared for. No soldiers opened fire, but a grizzled man walked over.

"Jax?" Luna turned to Sauze, who stood rigid. Inexplicably, he retracted his helmet. He wore a look of pure shock. The man, Jax, nodded.

"Tis I, Sauze Kath. Who'd a thought we'd end up meeting again. And out here o' all places." Jax was dead. Long dead. Sauze remembered the news, as he personally had been told in the Overseer's office. A big terrorist attack had been prevented, but at the cost of a group of elites. It had been kept quiet, as the public was just beginning to feel safe after the assassination of the previous Ceitevorate. Sauze had even seen the cadaver and attended the private service. He and three other trainees.

"I'm sure it was quite sad for you, Sauze. If I recall, you were me greatest subject." To become an elite, you had to show great strength in your area of expertise. Quite exclusive. But to be an Elite Commander as Sauze was took even more. Not only did you have to show extremely high skill as a commander, but you had to be trained by a specially selected Elite Commander. These were elite commanders who not only passed the tests below with flying colours, but were deemed proper to train. And Jax was the best of them. He had trained Sauze for several years, becoming even a father to him after the death of his real father.

"How." It wasn't stated as a question. Sauze just mumbled the word how. This entire day had been the most confusing of his life. Nothing made any sense, and now somehow Jax was alive. Sauze came to the possible conclusion; he was dreaming. No other way. But the understanding that you were dreaming was supposed to end the dream. He continued to think hard, but nothing ended.

"Are ye wondering how I stand before you? Quite simple, really. Caliemán had me killed. Not really, o'course. Just for all a' your sakes." Sauze really didn't understand now. Caliemán; Jane Caliemán, the Galactic Enforcer. Now she was being mentioned?

"What do you mean Caliemán had you killed? Jax, what's going on here?" Luna was growing impatient. Sauze could tell. But she didn't understand why seeing Jax here was so incredibly strange. And as he thought this, something dawned on him. Jax seemed to be stalling. And one of his lessons, of all engraved into Sauze's mind, was never to let the enemy stall. In this case, Sauze realized, Jax was the enemy. He had clearly ordered the arrests or killings of the squad. No doubt about it, really. But Sauze still had questions.

"Ya see, Sauze, all these men and women here? They're all as dead as me. Some o' 'em never existed." Sauze furrowed his brow again, more questions forming. But he still had the most important two.

"Jax." He began. "Why did you have your soldiers kill us?" Jax shook his head, the ragged grey beard swaying.

"Simple misunder--" Before he could finish, Maiylene burst through the door. The soldiers instantly brought up their guns and aimed at her. She walked slowly over to Sauze, staring up at him. Deciding it was safe enough, she dropped her helmet in as the others had. Jax stared at her for a second before smiling a toothy smile again.

"Like I was sayin' Sauze, it's a big misunderstandin'." Maiylene stifled a laugh at Jax's accent. It was a thick, Scottish sounding voice that did sound quite comical if you didn't know the man behind it.

"Misunderstanding? Really?" It didn't even occur to Sauze to question his response. Maiylene and Luna were still unsure, but Sauze immediately holstered his gun.

"Excellent. So what's really going on? We need to be fi--" A shot sounded off, and all of a sudden Jax was lowering a smoking Ion Gun. Luna's armor seized up, and when she tried to thrash out she crashed over. Maiylene was able to bring her helmet up before the same thing happened to her, ending on the floor. Sauze drew his weapon and stared at Jax. Jax waved the soldiers back and smiled at Sauze.

"Sauze ma' boy...this is yer flaw. This is what's wrong with you. Ya know what makes it worse? You haven't shot me. If it was me in your boots, son, I'd a pulled the trigger before green over there was hit." Sauze glanced down at Maiylene with a quivering jaw.

"But...why?" Jax levelled the Ion Gun and waited. He provided no reply, merely waving the gun around. Sauze didn't move.

"Boy, us here don't exist for a reason. We don't exist so that if any o' this ever gets out we can be removed with ease. Now shoot me." Sauze looked frantically from Jax to Luna. She stared up from her deactivated armor.

"...No...?" Sauze's voice began wavering, and he looked back down at Luna. When he looked back at Jax, Sauze found that he looked angry.

"Dammit, I trained ye better than this! Why won't you shoot me?" He walked straight up to Sauze and pressed the Ion Gun against his chest.

"Sauze! Whatever you do, make sure it's the best choice for us all!" Luna nodded at him from in the armor. Sauze picked up his gun, and looked Jax in the eye. He then bent down and manually activated Luna's helmet. It sealed up around her. Maintaining eye contact with Jax, Sauze loaded the sidearm. Jax was smiling now. Sauze held up the gun to Jax's chest, and rested his finger on the trigger. He then acted faster than he ever had before. In one fluid movement he stepped to the side from Jax and fired. At the same moment, he brought his helmet up. The sidearm, with its massively powerful bullets, tore through the viewport and let the vacuum in. The viewport shattered into larger sections and began sucking people out with force. Jax nodded at him before dashing out of the room. He turned and sealed the door behind him, locking out several soldiers. Not one bothered to take a shot at Sauze, too busy clicking on their helmets and trying to find something to hold onto. Sauze grabbed both Maiylene and Luna before letting the vacuum pull them out.

"Sev! Sev, head around to the front of the ship!" The static cracked away and Sauze's message got through. In a flash, Sev and Nex were piloting above them. Lowering down, it opened the main door.

There was a miniature airlock system that allowed it to simply open its door in the middle of space. Sauze pushed Maiylene through first, then took Luna in his arms and climbed in. Once inside the airlock and back in normal air, Sauze retracted his helmet and took a deep breath. The move he had just made was a risky one. If any soldier had taken a shot at him and hit, it could have failed entirely. But Jax had always said a good mission is not without its risks. But Sauze no longer felt comfortable thinking of Jax's teachings. To top it all off, he still didn't know why all this was happening. While Nex set the ship to pilot itself around the dark side of a nearby planet, Sauze and Sev worked on disabling the Ion effect. After a short while, Sauze managed to reverse it. Luna and Maiylene instantly began shaking their arms and legs.

"That was so...so...so horrible. I never want that to happen ever again. I had an itch for like the entire fucking time!" Luna took the armor off and began scratching her arms through the tunic. Maiylene was stretching her arms when her eyes suddenly widened. The others were sitting down when she began speaking excitedly.

"Oh my gosh, you will never believe what I found! When I was wandering around the lower floor, I accessed a terminal. It had the craziest stuff, and I think what that old guy said gave it some sense." She brought up her helmet and activated the MSU. The others brought theirs up as well, with the exception of Nex. She sent the documents through the file sharing application and began explaining.

"He was talking about how all the people were 'dead', or they didn't exist. Well, activate 'smartsearch' on your HUD. It will not recognize any of this stuff. Names...ships...or colonies that were supposedly exterminated to keep word down. Word of what, we don't know. Something to do with the Zenians." Sev suddenly began laughing. Everyone brought down their helmets and stared at him. He looked from person to person as the laughter died down.

"Don't you get it? I'm right. I was always right." The squad members exchanged glances and looked back at Sev. Nex sat down in the circle they had formed and waited for a response as well.

"I've always wondered if I was ever going to find excitement. I don't know what's up, but nothing's ever really been enough for me. So I'm always hoping for something crazy that'll really be a switch. So I began to...you know, look around and see if anything was coming up. In some restricted files." Sauze arched an eyebrow. Sev looked over at him dryly.

"C'mon, you already know I got into GalaxyForce instead of a prison sentence. Shouldn't come as that much of a shock. Anyway, there was never anything explicitly said, but there was always that bit of funding that slipped away or those soldiers MIA who hadn't been on the battlefield. So I wondered if something was going on. I wondered this for the longest time!" He pumped his hand, and then calmed himself understanding the gravity of the situation. Sauze studied Sev for a second. What he said was true, about his joining GalaxyForce to escape a prison sentence. Sauze didn't know all of the details, but he did know that Sev had stolen some explosives back on his home world and messed around with them somehow. No one was hurt in the explosion that followed, but the repairs came together at several thousand dollars. Sev had taken an unusual option of offering to serve in GalaxyForce in exchange for avoiding a prison sentence. The explosion was also how he lost one of his fingers, now replaced with an electronic prosthetic.

"So...we all have to be in agreement. What do we think is happening here?" Sauze addressed the group now, glancing at Sev suspiciously for a second. Nex moved forward and looked around the group.

"Well, I'm fairly sure what's going on. What you've got there, Maiylene, is only confirmation. GalaxyForce and the Zenians are battling in Fringe space, but for some reason GalaxyForce doesn't want this information out to the public. They're keeping it quiet by destroying a bunch of colonies out here, and then removing them from the records." Nex backed up again, waiting for anyone to continue. Luna followed up next.

"But why? That's the question. We know that GalaxyForce is going to some pretty far measures to keep this from G1, but for what reason? And if we are going to believe this idea, then what's with the whole political thing? Why would Zen Callistar keep that up?" The group sat in silence for a few seconds. Before anyone could answer, the console began beeping. Nex jumped up and raced over.

"Uh...we've got a *lot* of ships incoming." He took manual control and pulled the ship away from the planet. A fleet of ships was descending on the battered GalaxyForce gunship. It was the Zenian fleet!

"We sort of disabled the engines earlier...they aren't going to be able to dodge any shots or escape. So they're kind of doomed." Sev bit his lip while the group watched. Sauze straightened up.

"I have an idea. For now, we will help GalaxyForce." The others turned in shock. Luna sighed deeply.

"Sauze, I thought we'd been over this. GalaxyForce is clearly not what either of us thought it was!" Sauze smiled at Luna and took her arm in his.

"Not quite what I meant, Luna. Look at those ships. They're docking at all the airlocks. If we head around and dock there, we could just join in the fight. Essentially, we'd be taking out the GalaxyForce soldiers while keeping the Zenians back. And I can see that Sev is already preparing." Luna nodded, and turned to look at Sev. He was holding a sack of explosives, rooting through and pulling out several potato-shaped devices.

"I've got a plan. Do what Sauze said, but use explosives. See, we could be taking out the GalaxyForce soldiers while sealing the Zenians into their own ships." The others nodded. Again, it was only Nex who objected.

"I don't understand why you all are so keen on heading back there again. If I recall correctly, you barely escaped with your lives last time. Are you really just heading straight back?" Sauze shrugged and checked his sidearm for ammo.

"Don't see why you're worried. You get to stay behind with the ship." Sauze slipped the sidearm back into its holster and looked out the viewport again.

"Now get piloting." Nex rolled his eyes and flashed the ship forward. They swerved around to the safe side and docked at a random airlock. The squad members brought up their helmets and assumed ready position. The airlock doors swung open and Sauze fired. One of the two guards stationed crumpled over. The other didn't notice immediately, but a second or so he jumped up. He didn't have enough time to even get his hand on his gun before Maiylene shot him through the head. The squad raced off, leaving the two bodies. Nex poked his head out through the airlock and looked around. Everything looked clear. He reached down and grabbed one of the bodies, pulling it into the ship. Taking the armor, he switched it for his completely useless tunic. Along the hall, he heard more gunshots go off. Picking up a gun, he ducked back into the ship and closed the airlock.

Sev turned a corner and fired his grenade launcher wildly. They had gone up a floor and found where the main conflict was happening. No one had even realized that four of the soldiers were in fact

elites. Neither did they realize that more GalaxyForce soldiers were dying than Zenians. Sev ran backwards and began lining the wall with bombs. He whistled over the comm and the others raced out. He raced to the other halls accessed by where the battle took place and armed them as well. Standing back, he took a second just to watch. When done, he activated the bombs. The walls were torn apart and the floor collapsed through. A single GalaxyForce soldier got out of the disaster, but a chunk of the upper floor took care of him. The Zenians were trapped in the corridor they had been attacking from, unable to bridge the hole. Sev peeked out from behind another wall and glanced down. The weight of the debris had broken down two floors. One of his better jobs.

"Sev, we've got another fight up that way! Last airlock on the level though." Luna cut into the comm and Sev snapped back into action. Following the rest of the squad through the busy corridors, Sev splattered any GalaxyForce or Zenian troopers to come into the view. Sauze reached the end of the corridor and sent Sev down with Maiylene. He and Luna took a side passage that would give them access to the main hall the airlock let into. Sev turned the corner and let loose a volley of explosives. As his one hand manned the Grenade Launcher, he began clicking the condensed high power bombs onto the wall. Once enabled they would attach themselves to a surface with a sharp set of claws. Sev had once used the device against a particularly angry enemy base commander.

Back when the 'cool' thing to do was to take over planets already part of G1, the squad had been sent to eradicate a base and rescue a bunch of civilians. Because it wasn't some Fringe space colony people actually cared what happened, and so it wasn't a simple option of nukes. At some point during the battle, Sev had ended up on a catwalk with the base commander. He knocked Sev's Grenade Launcher off and prepared to knife him. But as he leaned in for the slash Sev enabled one of the bombs and shoved it into the man's face. It had begun eviscerating him, and Sev took the opportunity to fight back. He kicked the commander off the catwalk and activated the bomb. It was still one of his proudest moments.

Sev, focusing back on the present, clicked on another bomb and switched to the next hall. It was then that he ran out of ammo in his Grenade Launcher. He stopped to load another clip in when Maiylene was suddenly yanked past him. He turned and had his grenade launcher grabbed out of his hand. Looking up, Sev noticed that the entire place was full of Zenians. Across the room Sev saw Sauze and Luna captured as well. The Zenian that had taken Sev's Grenade Launcher then wrestled him to the ground. Another one ripped the bombs out of his hand and looked at a few of them. A large group of GalaxyForce soldiers rounded the corner at the same time, and were met with a massive explosion. The Zenian, having used all of Sev's bombs, pulled him up and slammed him into the wall. As Sev was pulled through the airlock, he detonated the bombs he had been laying and watched the explosion. It was a little early, though, and as he was dragged away the ground fell downward. It was caving in right at his heels.

"Someone, get away! Come on, we've got to be able to break free!" Maiylene was frantic in the comm, and Sev tried to escape. They had somehow disabled a bunch of systems, but he found he could still access some. Likely a short range ion field. Those could knock out weak systems and were often implanted in bullets. Sev found he couldn't power up the jets, but that the flamethrower in the wrist was working. Going out on a limb, he activated it. The hall lit up, but nothing caught fire save for a single Zenian. The others stepped behind him where he could not reach and continue to twist him and shove him along the wall. At one point he caught sight of Sauze and Luna being pulled into a ship. It was then

that Sev remembered Nex. He would be waiting quite some time for them to come back if the Zenians captured them. The capture would also likely end in death unless someone did something quick. If Nex had been wearing Elite AutoAk armor, they could have simply opened a comm channel, but no such luck. When the Zenians tried to get him through the airlock Sev struggled as much as he could.

"Everyone ok?" Sauze sounded worried over the comm, but still confident. Sev tried to deliver another kick to the Zenians holding him before responding.

"A little manhandled but still alive. How about Maiylene and Luna?" He was tossed into the back room of a little ship, and watched the door lock. They were now officially in prison.

"I'm good. How are we getting out now?" Luna sounded a little shaky. He looked over and saw her holding Sauze. Maiylene stood up and spoke.

"I'm fine too. I say we cut through the door and head back into the Gunship before they take us out --" she was interrupted by the Zenian ship's departure from the GalaxyForce gunship. Sev craned his neck and watched as a Zenian flagship grew closer and closer through the viewport.

"So we know Zenian policy on prisoners, right? Torture and eventually kill. So we know we need to do something now." Sauze stepped away from Luna and cut through the lock of the door. Everyone had lost their weapons during capture, but still felt confident enough to take on a few Zenians. Sev kicked the door down and wrapped his arms around the neck of the first one. Sauze and Luna felled the other two, while Maiylene collected their weapons from a bin. Sev's Grenade Launcher was short quite a bit of ammo but still working. Suddenly, the ship passed into the flagship. Sev tightened his grip on the Grenade Launcher and prepared for a fight. What he was not prepared for, however, was the Zenian approach. They all held weapons, but at their sides. The one at the very front was without a helmet, and addressed the group.

"Before you open fire, may we have a moment to discuss this?" Sauze levelled his gun and cleared his visor. They made eye contact. Sauze opened a comm channel first to the squad.

"Any movement and we fire. Do not remove the opaque blind from your helmets. Do not retract your helmets." Finishing with them, he addressed the man.

"What have we to discuss? You attack a GalaxyForce ship and take us prisoner. Do you plan to beg for forgiveness?" The man smiled, and glanced at the others of the squad. Looking back at Sauze, he continued.

"I notice you neglect to mention that this entire group has gone rogue then. You attack GalaxyForce as well, so pointing fingers is not going to work. We received a transmission from one of our soldiers on the colony below. A group of Elites attacked them. I assume that was you?" Sauze clutched his gun angrily. This man had no right to talk about him attacking GalaxyForce. It wasn't his fault. GalaxyForce forced his hand.

"Cut to the point. Why not just kill us now?" The man stared at him for several seconds without blinking.

"My friend, you are on our side! We both seek to eliminate GalaxyForce for its despicable ways. You have already encountered the level of treachery commonplace, but it goes much farther than that." Sauze frowned inside his helmet. Despite the fact that soldiers in GalaxyForce's employ had made attempts to harm them, but inside Sauze still believed in GalaxyForce. He just knew that in the end, Galactic Enforcer Caliemann and Ceitevorate Adams would sort it all out and everything would be back to normal. And his blood still boiled when someone insulted GalaxyForce.

"That's not an answer. Why have you brought us here? And what do you mean by farther levels of treachery?" Luna stepped up beside Sauze with a gun behind her back. Because after finishing his question, Sauze had told her to prepare to take a shot. Sev was twirling a grenade in his hand, his finger twisting the pin and uncurling it. The tension in the air was like smog.

"I am the current leader of the Zenians. I know your friend there was preparing his or her gun because I was stalling, so there's a straight answer." The man smiled and looked over at Luna. Sauze did not tell her to lower the gun. Sauze widened his eyes at the implication of the words. He was speaking to Zen Callistar?

"Well, Mr. Callistar, I know enough about you to not want to be associated with any of this." The man stared at him confusedly for a second before smiling.

"I am not our glorious leader. Well, no wonder you've gone rogue. You've only barely scratched the surface, my friend. You see, Zen Callistar is what we are fighting for." Sauze rolled his eyes. This man was being deliberately vague with his answers and Sauze was growing tired.

"You're not making this clear. What do you want us for?" A look of annoyance crossed the leader's face but Sauze didn't notice. He did, however, direct Luna to be ready.

"I will get to the point. The Zenians are being oppressed by GalaxyForce. They have captured our glorious leader Zen Callistar, and are keeping it from the public. We have tried to get the information out that they have been brutally slaughtering us, but they've kept it quiet." Sauze didn't believe them. If Zen Callistar was a captive, how could he continue to have political presence against G1's Ceitevorate Adams?

"I don't buy it. You haven't said why you want us yet. Get to the point. Fast." The leader scowled and cleared his throat.

"Make the information known. Get it out there that this is happening. You should have no trouble betraying GalaxyForce a second time." His casual remark at the end was the last straw. Sauze gave the go ahead for both Luna and Sev. Luna whipped out her pistol and fired. Sev clicked the pin out and tossed the grenade. Luna's bullet collided with some invisible barrier, as did the grenade. Sev remotely disabled it with his HUD before assuming defensive position. Not a single Zenian moved, though the leader looked slightly cross.

"And here I thought you were going to be agreeable. I guess I'll ship you back to the Gunship. You do know what's going to happen to it, right?" Sauze shook his head angrily. He should have figured that they would have some kind of defense.

"Once you're on there, we're going to send a message straight to the GalaxyForce base three quadrants in. You know, the secret one. Actually, I guess you don't know. Because they kept you in the dark, huh?" The man's tone took on an angrier sound, and he brought up his hand. The soldiers raised their weapons.

"What'll sending a message do?" Maiylene stepped out from behind Sauze and addressed the man. Sauze realized he didn't know either. The man laughed.

"We're going to tell them that there are four elites somewhere on the ship who know all about the colony extermination. Can you guess what'll happen?" Sauze stared pensively at the man. There it was again, a reference to GalaxyForce's attack on civilian colonies. There was still no confirmation of this, other than guesses. And now the lying Zenians spoke of it. Sauze didn't believe that such an event would take place.

"Take them into custody. I've already used a heavy Ion Field to disable their movement capabilities, but it'll wear off once the ship leaves. Have them in binds by that point. Eight soldiers walked over, and Sauze realized he couldn't move. The Heavy Ion field had indeed removed movement, and he could not resist as clamps were clicked around his wrists behind his back. These produced an Ion Field as well, but only enough to stop a low level gun. It was unimportant, though, as he would be unable to accurately fire the laser that could cut through them. That was one of the biggest flaws of general clamps, their weak strength.

G1 no longer used regular clamps when transporting prisoners, after a rather bad event that took place while Sauze was still in training. The last Enemy of War from the great Colony War had been caught and was being transported into a courthouse where his trial would take place. An ally he had met during his hiding waited hanging from the top of a large spire. When the Enemy of war came into view, the ally had simply used a sniper beam weapon and sliced through the clamps. He then dropped a container of thick tear gas and they both fled. It took almost a year to find either of them after that. And so clamps were produced by AutoAk and subsequently purchased by G1.

Sauze activated the rear camera of his suit, but because of the Ion Field was unable to lean down and get a good look at the clamps. What he was able to do the second they were pushed into the ship was check to make sure everyone was prepared. They were sent into the back room again, and the lock was replaced with a quick magnetised lock.

"How's everyone feeling?" The close range comm was basically impossible to disable, as they each received the frequency incredibly fast.

"I'm alright for someone captured for the second time in twenty minutes. What did he mean about messaging that base? I didn't quite get it." Sev was quick to respond, and his question made Sauze think. He had seen the leader calling over to the ship as they left, so the message had probably already been sent.

"I don't know. But I've got a bad feeling." Maiylene's voice was quiet, and Sauze could tell she was a bit nervous. They all were, with one day being completely different than the next. Nobody had any idea of what to expect. Suddenly, Sauze heard the Zenians in the cockpit yelling. The Heavy Ion Field had worn off, and they were just starting to regain movement. Sauze looked through the hole not covered by the magnetised lock. A ship was whipping past them. It took Sauze a second, but he realized where he knew the ship from.

"It's Nex! He's flying outside. I'll try and get the door down!" Sauze stepped back, and threw himself at the door. His muscle mass combined with the weight of the armor was enough to splinter the door. It only took a few kicks to fell it after that. Sauze raced right to the viewport and began jumping around. The others did as well, still managing to knock down the Zenians even without use of their hands. Sauze assumed that Nex had spotted them, as the ship's darting slowed and he went to dock. The second the doors opened, the squad was rushing through. Sauze turned and realized that it was not Nex in the pilot seat, but a GalaxyForce soldier. Before anyone could fire, the soldier lifted off his helmet.

"Don't worry, I scored some armor off one of the guys you killed. Not as fancy as yours but it blocks a bullet. So, mind explaining where you fucking went?" He raised his hands up in the air and looked from person to person. Sev retracted his helmet and smiled.

"Sure will, as soon as someone cuts me free. Also, let's get out of here. I don't really want to stick around and see what the message did." Sev turned and waved the clamps at Nex. He nodded and piloted the ship away from the Zenian ship.

"I've got a laser cutter somewhere back here. Who knew all the supplies we loaded in here would actually come in handy?" As Nex turned away, his words sank in to Sauze. Nex had really just been a struggling colonist before this. Sauze hadn't even considered how he was feeling. And so he thanked Nex when he cut off Sauze's clamps. The ship was now above the gunship, facing it downwards.

"We were fighting when the Zenians captured us. Then they kind of asked us to fight for them, and gave us a bunch of lies about Zen Callistar. I'm still not sure we weren't talking to him." Sauze dropped his helmet and smiled. The system of 'dropping' the helmet was so efficient. Instead of having to take it off, it would just retract into the suit.

"Anyway, we've got to go. I still say we just speak to Ceitevorate Adams an--" Sauze was cut off by Luna. She pointed at the GalaxyForce gunship. Everyone turned. In a swift motion, the ship exploded from multiple points. Zenian ships flooded out from the wreckage, escaping even further explosions. This continued until not even the framework remained. Sauze felt a lump in his throat. That hadn't been the Zenians. Sev laughed nervously.

"You don't....that wasn't because of...you know....what that guy said? That the base would think the ship had stowaways that knew about the colonies? I mean....they didn't...." Maiylene turned away from the viewport. Watching enemy soldiers die or killing evil GalaxyForce soldiers in defense was one thing, but watching a mass extermination like that was too much to bear.

"Sev, I hope you aren't right. I honestly hope you aren't right. Because I cannot see a world where GalaxyForce would kill its own soldiers." When she finished speaking, Luna walked over to Sauze and leaned against him. Nex took a deep breath, staring out at the devastation. Unblinking, all he could do was look at the wreckage. Sev gulped and sat down on the floor rolling a grenade in his hand. It was a while before Sauze spoke. He was still the commander of the squad and needed to move on.

"Alright everyone. Now more than ever we need to get to Adams. Nex, set coordinates for Cybin. Stepping away from Luna, he put his hand on Nex's shoulder. Looking at Nex's features, Sauze guessed that he was still in his early twenties. It was easy for Sauze to forget that others could be affected by this kind of thing much more than he was. Nex nodded and smiled a weak smile. He sat down and plugged in the coordinates. Sitting down with Luna, Sauze tried to distract himself with technical thoughts. Upperspace, to be precise.

Upperspace was the mode of travel used by almost everyone in the galaxy. Back when the citizens of Cybin had first left the planet, space travel took decades. It was around that time that the Ancient Ones had been discovered. A race of monstrous space-faring beasts, the Ancient Ones could only live in space. It was discovered that they could open holes in what many considered the very fabric of the universe. This allowed them access to a fifth dimension where distances were drastically shortened and the speed of light was so high it was almost nonexistent. With the discovery of this new realm, it was only a short time before the scientists were at work. A group of scientists based on Cybin discovered that 'Upperspace' as they called it was accessible via fast paced energy transfer.

With this discovery, the galaxy became a much bigger place. Colonies were set up in many places and contact with new alien species was established. The original group of scientists went on to contribute work on the anti-free radical project that they then used to live to a healthy age of 842. After

several accidents of people simply disappearing into Upperspace, the coordinate system was established. This allowed ships to exit properly without worry of accidentally missing the spot and ending up past Fringe space. It was an elegant system, but did have its flaws. If two ships were in the same place, they would both be ejected from Upperspace. This could lead to some bad accidents. Also, ships could be pulled out of Upperspace. This would happen if a disruptive beacon was in place or an Upperspace barrier was in place. Sauze had been caught in both of those many times. They should have been harder to acquire, really. Considering the amount of uncivilized independent planets in the Outer Rim and Fringe Space, it could often be a problem.

Bringing Sauze back to the present, Sev stood up and yawned. He took a look at the console, and once he was satisfied that Nex had set the coords properly he began removing the armor.

"Nex, I'm gonna bring down one of the bunks in back and have a rest. No point in staying up waiting to get to Cybin. I mean, it's going to be a few days." Sev nodded at Sauze and walked to the back. Luna sat up and looked at the back.

"I think I'll do the same. This whole thing's been tiring. We really don't even need anyone in the cockpit. How many bunks are there?" Nex spun the pilot chair around and grinned.

"We outfitted this thing with the four worst mattresses on the planet. Have a good night." Turning back around, he stared out the viewport. In Upperspace the stars and planets were still visible, but it was as if they were being seen through a kaleidoscope. It was already blurred into streaky lines from the speed of Upperspace, and this effect only made it more interesting.

"I'm gonna have a rest too. You coming, Sauze?" Maiylene stood and stretched. Luna was still taking off her armor. It was quite easy to do, simply retract the helmet first. The lower section clicked into three sections, one for each lower leg and one for the torso. The upper half had the arms and the chest section. It was a bit heavier but very easy to store with a collapsing mechanism.

"I'll be there in a bit." He waved at them both, and sat down beside Nex. He looked over and furrowed his brow. Sauze took a deep breath. Being a commander meant you had look after your crew.

"So, Nex. How are you doing?" Nex shot him a confused glance and turned away from the viewport.

"I'm...ok. This has been a lot, you know? But I try not to let it faze me." They both smiled. Sauze gestured at the ship's control board.

"I noticed. So, I guess you know how to fly this thing pretty well. You a pilot?" Nex laughed, but it sounded a bit hollow.

"Stowaway who loved ships. I had made some bad choices on Cybin, and wanted to get a fresh start. Heard about a colony ship leaving, jumped on at the last second. Turns out the pilot wasn't quite cut out for the job and died halfway there. I took control and got the ship to a safe landing. It was originally supposed to go back and get some more supplies, but we just met up with some other cities on the planet and they got us started." Sauze whistled. Not anything he was guess.

"Yeah, sounds like I was all set. Flash forward four years, and I'm being shot at while the whole town burns around me. And I think you know what happened from there." He raised his eyebrows and turned back to watching the space go by. Sauze stood up and walked into the back room to take a look at the bunks. He tried not to worry too much about Nex. It was clear he was pretty resilient. Sauze took a look at his other squad members sleeping peacefully and smiled. They hadn't had a nice moment like this since before the start of the mission. He took off his armor and piled it beneath his bunk. Climbing

in, he felt his eyelids drooping almost immediately. Drifting off peacefully, Sauze imagined their arrival at Cybin and ending this crazy mess.

The ship rocked and lurched. Luna felt blinked awake and felt herself sliding. Suddenly, she was on the ground next to her bunk. The ship was whipping around, and waking the others. Sauze was already in the cockpit, and Sev was frantically strapping his armor on. Just as Luna was about to stand off Maiylene tumbled off of her bunk and landed right on her. They pushed apart and felt another jerk of the ship.

"What the fuck is happening?" Luna pushed her bright blonde hair from in front her face and began putting on her armor. Sev pointed out towards the viewport.

"Someone pulled us out of Upperspace! There's a fucking barrier and now someone's firing Ion Bombs at us!" Once he was fully suited up Sev dashed out into the cockpit. Luna and Maiylene brought their helmets and followed him. Sauze was flicking switches on the dashboard while shaking Nex. There was a bit of blood running down his forehead.

"Maiylene, I need you! He hit his head on a bulkhead, you've got to seal the wound!" Maiylene set to work immediately, snapping out of her groggy state. Luna took a look out the viewport and cursed. There was a GalaxyForce base dead ahead, and several ships were exiting the bay. GalaxyForce Bases had strange shapes. To maximize space and capability they were built in a cylinder shape with the ends in a cone shape. This allowed for engine and power space in the cones while putting rings of crew quarters and ship space on the inside. And now their Ion Bombs were firing repeatedly straight at the ship.

"We're losing shields! Ah shit, now we've got no weapons. They're gonna aim for our Oxygen Supply pretty quick!" Luna began shaking. This could easily be the end. Suddenly a massive ship appeared between them. Luna instantly recognized it as the Zenian ship that had attacked the Gunship in what felt like days ago.

"It's the Zenians! The barrier caught them too!" Sev began cursing and took a look at Maiylene and Nex. He was still out, but Maiylene had halted the blood flow.

"Listen. We need to get onto another ship *fast*. Our best bet right now would be to simply find a way out of the barrier. There's got to be a back route." Sauze looked doubtful even as he said it, but Luna understood that it was their only chance. Zenian ships began launching out to combat the advancing GalaxyForce troops, and an all out battle began. Sauze was literally counting the seconds until the Ion Bomb wore off. Luna held his hand and watched. The second it was off they were gunning the engines. When the light changed from blue to green Sauze blasted the ship forward. It swerved past the Zenian ship and peeled away from the conflict. Suddenly, a GalaxyForce fighter darted out towards them. Two missiles launched and Sauze yanked the controls. One missed but the important thin was that one connected. The impact took Luna off of her feet.

"Sauze, what's he doing?" Sev gestured to the ship. It was getting unusually close for an attacking ship. Another shot blasted the engines apart, and left the ship dead. Then the most curious thing happened. Luna stood up just in time to see the other ship turn, and then feel their ship start to drag along.

"He's got us in a fucking tractor beam!" The ship pulled them towards the base, and they could do nothing. Once it was by the now empty bay it pulled them in and dropped them. The ship crashed

against the floor and error messages began blaring. The door burst open, and Sauze gasped. Jax stood, smiling.

"You all are goin'ta have a great time wit' me. Ya' see, if I turn ye in I'll be back with GalaxyForce. And I think that's worth your lives. Now get walkin'. I will disable them suits-" He gestured with an Ion Gun "So make it easy on yourselves and lose the helmets." Sauze glared at him and retracted the helmet. It would do more harm to get disabled. The others dropped theirs as well and stared uncomfortably.

"But what about Nex? He's in no shape to walk." Maiylene gestured at Nex's unconscious body. Jax pulled out another gun and swiftly shot Nex in the gut.

"Problem? Solved. Now get goin', lass." Maiylene nodded and stood up to join the others. Jax grinned.

"And toss yer weapons down in here. I know what you're like." They complied hesitantly, before stepping out of the ship. Luna took one last look at Nex before Jax slammed the door. It was so hard to see him there, his death essentially their fault. They had rescued him and then lead him to his death. Luna could only imagine how Sauze was taking it. She could tell he liked Nex. But instead of tears he simply glared at Jax. Luna thought she saw a tear roll down Maiylene's cheek, but ignored it for her sake. Upon reaching the exit of the base, Jax turned and swung his gun around dangerously.

"We just got a' get in that lift and head up. The base Officer ought 'ta enjoy this. So I want ye all to get into the lift one by one. But just 'ta make sure you don't try anything, I'm keeping tha' blonde girl up here." Luna felt her heart pause. She turned to him and felt her hands shaking.

"Now get in. I'll bind her up right and join ya." He attached a set of clamps to her hands behind her back, as well as a set on her legs. Finding himself all out of clamps, he snapped a chain off one of the ship loaders. He attached it to her one wrist and shoved the other end into vent before sealing it again. Smiling at his handiwork, he walked back towards the lift. Before he made it, though, the base rocked. Luna tried to twist and watch out the bay, but was unable. From what she figured, the Zenians had breached the shields. That meant they had very little time before the base was destroyed.

The group in the lift suddenly lurched forward and dropped out of sight. One of the lift's cables had snapped and they were now careening downwards. Jax let out a yell and smashed the doors to the open. Before he entered, he gave Luna another look. She shivered. Giving a mock salute, he closed the lift doors. Luna suddenly felt very scared. The ship rocked again and she fell over. The chain hurt her wrist but she couldn't readjust to fix it. The base took a rough turn, and she tumbled dangerously close to the open lift shaft. The chain was all that saved her. The clamps, though, had Ion Fields and this meant that if she had fallen the jets would not have saved her. It also meant she could not bring her helmet up.

Suddenly, she heard a thunderous noise across in the bay. Slowly wiggling herself over, she took a look. A Zenian fighter had crashed straight through the Air Field. That was not what worried her, though. What worried her was that the Air Field looked slightly damaged. If even one of the modules was broken the field would fail and open the ship bay to the vacuum of space. A lone figure exited the Zenian ship, staggering around before collapsing.

As he began to pull himself up, Luna realized that she needed to get out of sight. Not something easily done when bound up tight. As she tried to wiggle back, she caught the Zenian Soldier's eye. He pulled out his gun and slowly began walking over. She held her breath and began waiting. Suddenly, a

gunshot rang out across the bay. The Zenian Soldier dropped down next to her, blood pooling beneath him. Luna heard no other sound, and could only stare at the dead Zenian Soldier.

Act I

Part 2

Sauze held onto Maiylene and Sev as the lift plummeted. When it ran out of cable it was going to swing to its side, and they needed to be ready. Now that Jax was gone they could bring up their helmets, and they had. The AutoAk armor would hopefully absorb most of the impact, but there was the unlikely chance of a broken bone that they couldn't afford right now. All Sauze could think of was Luna still trapped in the upper levels. If she was dead, Jax would have hell to pay. The base shook again and the lift spun. It was about the same time that it ran out of cable, and so the lift dropped to its side. The opening now lead to a door, but one they could not open by themselves. Sauze set to work with his laser.

"Sauze, I know you're upset. Believe me, I am too. But we have to think that she's still alive. And if she is still alive, she'll be able to get free. Even if she can't, we can still get to her. But for the moment...maybe we should go after the Upperspace Barrier. Take it out, retrieve her, and leave." Sev could not face Sauze as he said it. Sauze knew very well why he couldn't as well. It was indeed what Sauze would never be able to do, but what they needed to do. And so it came to him to decide what to do. Because it always fell upon the commander to make the tough choices. He didn't respond right now, instead finishing cutting through the door. He stood back to allow Maiylene and Sev out first after checking it to be clear.

"So...I guess we find another lift then? If any of them still work." There was an uncomfortable silence as Maiylene activated the lift to the left of the one they had just taken. When the doors opened Maiylene yelped over the comm and sidestepped a shot. Jax stepped out smiling and immediately fired off a few shots. Sauze quickly dispatched instructions over the helmet comm.

"Sev and Maiylene. I need you to trust me. Run away. Behind me, take the corridor and just run. Once you're a bit away start working on that Upperspace Barrier." He didn't give them time to respond, and they didn't take any. As soon as he finished they both broke away and raced down the hall. Sauze turned and fired the laser along the roof. Several panels fell and formed a barrier behind them. Turning back to Jax, Sauze dropped his helmet.

"Listen to me you fucking dead man. Where is Luna." Sauze pulled up a miniature pistol concealed in his boot and pointed it straight at Jax's head. Jax brought up his gun as well and snarled.

"Oh, you know. Put a few bullets in her and followed you ta' here. Now are ye' going to fight me like I taught ya'?" Sauze's blood boiled and he launched himself at Jax. They collided and began throwing punches. Sauze was stronger, though, and tossed Jax away. He slammed into the wall next to the lift and activated it. It lowered out of sight, while the doors stayed open. Sauze was on him in an instant, slamming his hands down on Jax's face. Stepping away, he pulled up the pistol. It was time to finish this. Jax slid forward and took out Sauze's footing. Both on the ground now, they resorted to smashing each other. Then, Sauze saw an opportunity and took it.

Pushing Jax forward, Sauze spun him and dangled him over the edge of the lift shaft. Real panic appeared in his eyes and his movements became jerky and uncoordinated. Sauze simply stared coldly at him. He let him dangle for a few more terrifying seconds before pushing up his leg and sending him down into the darkness. Sauze heard a few seconds of a scream but stood up without listening to it. His job now was to get to Luna. Sev and Maiylene wouldn't have trouble shutting down the Upperspace Barrier by themselves. He turned around and brought up his helmet. He felt bad about separating from

the others on purpose, but could not have forced them to abandon a chance at survival because of what he needed to do. If Luna was still alive he had to find her. If she was dead he needed to be sure of it.

Rounding another corner Sauze came across another set of lifts. They were both busted as well. But he was in luck finding them, as in a base lifts were stationed on either side of the cylindrical centre. That meant if he followed the wall he was at now, he would arrive at another set. This floor was mostly ship repair stations save for the two bays, so he wouldn't be navigating an endless maze of rooms like up in the crew levels. Speaking of crew, it was oddly empty down here. Ships and attendants should have been much more commonplace. That is, of course, unless the Zenians had already entered the base. As he glanced around, he noticed the alarm had gone offline long ago. Feeling a lump in his throat Sauze raced on. In luck, one of the lifts was operational. Opening up a comm channel he began speaking to Maiylene and Sev while climbing into the lifts.

"How are you both doing? I'm alive and unharmed. Jax is dead." There wasn't a reply for a second, but Sauze wasn't too worried about them. Their suits reported that they were alive for the time being. If Luna's suit was online and not hampered by the Ion Field he could have rested easy. But such was not his luck. As the lift began to carry him up Sev responded.

"We've found the Upperspace Barrier's generator. Thing is, there's a huge battle going on. We've got Zenian Soldiers and GalaxyForce just killing each other all over the thing." Sauze frowned, standing still in the lift.

"So? Just lob a few grenades and you should be fine. What's wrong?" Maiylene entered the channel as well.

"The GalaxyForce soldiers are literally dying all over it. They've packed such a tight defense that a grenade would only change a living wall to a dead one. They really don't want the Zenians taking it out." Sauze noticed that neither Maiylene nor Sev asked him why he wasn't there. They both knew.

"Sneak through the battle and kill the GalaxyForce troops from whichever side is least defended. Then let the Zenians do their work. Meet me up by the ship bay when you're done." They both hesitantly agreed and ended the channel. The lift doors opened up and Sauze dodged a shot. Reaching for his pistol, he realized Jax had knocked it out of his hands on the lower level. He really wasn't in the right state of mind right now.

"Sauze? Wait, it's me!" Sauze raised his eyebrows and looked out. Nex was standing in front of the doors holding Sauze's sidearm. Luna stood beside him with her pistol and rifle. Luna was unharmed, but Sauze could see that Nex was leaning slightly to the side. Remembering the angle Jax had shot Nex at, Sauze figured the bullet had missed his vital organs. When it actually happened, Sauze had been to angry at the sight to even consider that. But now they were both alive and he was so happy. He felt like they would have no trouble escaping now, with the whole team back together. Suddenly, a comm channel opened. Just as Sauze had been about to drop his helmet, too.

"Sauze! Sauze! Sev's been shot! I'm not seeing a pulse! The Zenians took the Barrier Generators, and they're arming the whole level with bombs. We're trapped in an engine room, and Sev wo--" The channel suddenly cut out. Sauze quickly found Sev and Maiylene's life signs in his HUD. Maiylene was ok. Sev was at danger level. He dropped his helmet and found himself shaking.

"They're going to die."

Chapter #

Nex grunted at the pain of his gunshot wound and approached Sauze. Handing him his sidearm, he gestured to the Zenian ship. It was battered but better than the ship they had arrived in.

"I'm in no condition to fight. So how about you tell Maiylene and Sev to seal their suits and get as far away from the explosion as possible? The bombs go off and we pick them up in the ship." Sauze took a look at Luna. He couldn't risk her or Nex again. But at the same time, it was unlikely Maiylene could escape with Sev in his badly injured state.

"You and Luna take the ship down. I'll make sure they make it out." Luna reacted visibly to this, shaking her head.

"I'm not letting you go down there by yourself. It's way too dangerous, even for you." She looked him right in the eye. Sauze cursed under his breath. It was too dangerous, he would be killed instantly. But there had to be a way.

"Sauze...we might have to leave them. The Upperspace Barrier's already down; the Zenians deactivated it. Perhaps we could wait until after the explosion to try and locate them?" Sauze looked over at the pained Nex, still clutching his wound. His words were like poison. But Sauze couldn't see a way around it.

"Nex...take Luna and go to Cybin. I will find Maiylene and Sev and ensure that they get to safety." Nex looked at him for a second. Luna was shaking her head and telling him that she wouldn't allow it. He nodded at them both.

"I'll catch up. Now both of you need to get to Adams. Tell him what's going on." Sauze stepped back and watched as Nex and Luna hesitantly stepped into the Zenian fighter. It was just as well; there was only room for about four. As they lifted off and left Sauze turned back to the lift.

"Maiylene? Get as far away from the blast range as you can. Even...even if you have to leave Sev. I'm coming down to retrieve you." Sauze knew the location of an alternate bay, having seen a floor plan on his way to the lifts down below. He took the most direct route he could figure, calming Maiylene as he went

"Sauze....Sauze, they're gaining! I can't keep pulling him! No!" Maiylene was choking through tears at being forced to either die or leave Sev behind. Sauze himself felt sick as well, but had to be strong for the good of the others.

"Maiylene. Maiylene, listen to me. You have to leave him behind. It is for your sake. Do you think Sev would want you to die trying to save him?" He waited for a response, only hearing muffled sobs. As he waited he found a set of stairs. Much safer than the lift right now. Running down them, he reviewed a plan. He would arrive at the bay and cut through the floors with his laser. Using his rappel cable he could then pull her up. It should work perfectly. And so when he arrived at the bay and found it with ships, his hopes went up.

"I-I-I-I left him! I had to! I h-h-h-had to." Maiylene was crying now, and Sauze felt a heaviness in his heart. Knowing himself that Sev would die was bad enough, but having to have left him? That would never leave a person. Suddenly, Sev's entire suit presence went offline. That was not necessarily an indication that he was dead, but merely that there was not a living being connected to the suit. If he had simply died Sauze would have been told, so for now it meant that Sev was not connected to his suit via the thin biowiring panel above the wrist. This monitored life signs amongst other things. For all Sauze knew Sev had simply woken up and climbed out of his armor!

"I'm coming down the hall to where you are! What...what do you need me to do?" Maiylene's sobs were dying down but Sauze could still tell that she was in pain. He was as well. Having known Sev for quite some time and considering him a good friend, this was very tough. But he couldn't think about that right now. His job was to make sure that Maiylene remained alive.

"Once you get to my exact location, look up. I'm going to carve out the three floors above you. Of course, you'll want to watch out for debris. But once I've done that you're going to have to take a hold of my rappel cable and let me pull you up." Maiylene took a few seconds to reply, and Sauze could tell she was still crying. It was the gasping for air that tipped him off.

"Ok...ok, I'm here." Sauze had already begun cutting away pieces of the floor and was onto the second floor down. He would be extending the laser's reach to its maximum.

"Look out." He finished work on the third floor down and clicked the laser off. Activating his rappel cable, he began tossing it down. The small figure of Maiylene appeared in the hole and took hold of the cable. Once he was sure she had a good grip he began pulling it in. It was magnetised, so she wouldn't have too much trouble staying on. Just as she was at the floor below him, the base shook violently. Suddenly there was a deafening crash and the base shook to its side. Sauze saw, at the very bottom of the hole, the floor literally being ripped away by a massive explosion. The Zenian bombs must have gone off!

"Maiylene!" He looked down and saw that she was no longer holding onto the cable. The force of the explosion had pushed her onto the floor below his level. He tried to contact Luna and Nex, but found them out of range. That meant they were already out of the sector.

"I'm ok. There's something on top of me, but I'm unharmed." Her voice was shaky now, but the hints of crying were gone. Sauze couldn't tell if that was good or bad.

"I'm coming down to get you. Hang on." Sauze took a hold of the edge of the hole and swung himself down. A large section of debris likely blown over by the explosion rested on top of her. Sauze pulled it up and helped her up. Together they climbed up into the bay. Selecting the closest ship, they jumped in and set the coordinates for Cybin. Once it had taken off, Maiylene dropped her helmet. Her face was red and blotchy and tears still rolled down her cheeks.

"Sauze...did I kill him?" She sat not quite looking at him but over his shoulder. Sauze launched the ship into Upperspace and dropped his helmet as well.

"Oh...Maiylene. Of course not. You had to leave him. The choice was no longer yours." She sniffled and nodded.

"I think I need to lie down. Does this ship have any bunks?" Looking in the back, Sauze found one. He desperately needed a rest as well, but figured she needed it more.

"There's one. I'll wake you when we get to Cybin." Maiylene began pulling off her armor while blinking back further tears.

"Thank you." Walking into the back room, Maiylene half-smiled at him. Sauze took a deep breath and turned his attention to the viewport.

Sauze was sitting drifting in and out of sleep in the pilot chair when a light started flashing. It caught his eye a few times before he fully awoke. Taking a look, he saw that a distress call was coming from the sector he was now passing through. In this model of ship a distress call would slow your travel through the sector so you would have time to decide if you were going to pursue it. Understanding

that his mission was too vital to stop for a distress call, Sauze dismissed it. Immediately after the light stopped flashing it began again. That meant more than one person was emitting a distress call. More alert now, Sauze dismissed it. Another one appeared. New ones appeared faster than he could dismiss them. Curiosity piqued now, Sauze brought the ship to a halt. Before exiting Upperspace he notified Maiylene. Taking a hold of her shoulder, he gently shook.

"Maiylene? Maiylene, it's time to wake up." She blinked and sat up straight away. He stepped back and began passing her armor.

"Is everything ok? Are we already at Cybin?" Sauze noticed that she had been crying more while she slept but did not remark.

"I'm getting a ridiculous amount of distress calls in this sector, possibly over 100. We're going to take a quick check and see if everything's ok." Maiylene nodded and began putting her armor back on. Sauze stepped back out into the cockpit and exited Upperspace. Maiylene stepped out just in time to watch. The stars seemed to adjust themselves and everything became clear. The first thing Sauze noticed was the shrapnel and debris. It was everywhere. The second thing he noticed was the Zenian fleet. The same one they had seen destroy the Orbital bay, and the same one who they had seen at the base hours ago. It was attacking a massive fleet of GalaxyForce ships, thought it appeared to have received reinforcements. There was also another group of ships flying around, with further new markings. Sauze recognized these, however.

"A Planetary Militia!" Most planets had their own space-based militia in case of attack. And in this battle, it seemed as though they figured they were under attack. And who knew, perhaps they were. Maybe they just didn't realize who was attacking them.

"What's going on? Where are we?" Sauze checked the reports. They were in the Midi Rim. That meant the Zenians were much closer to home than Fringe Space. And that meant much greater danger towards civilian lives. If Sauze recalled correctly, both GalaxyForce and the Zenians were guilty of committing mass murder of innocents. GalaxyForce to keep things quiet and the Zenians to take more footholds into the galaxy. Now it was more important than ever that Ceitevorate Adams find out what was happening here.

"Wait! What's that massive ship over there?" Sauze took a look at what Maiylene indicated and raised his eyebrows. It appeared like a large box with a triangle at the front. It was heading for the sun of this system. There were three planets in total that orbited it, and one combined Planetary Militia. Sauze had a sinking feeling. GalaxyForce would not be able to fight off the Zenians and then make sure that all the civilian witnesses were dead in time. Someone would get away. So they would have to take the next step.

"They're going to blow up the sun..." The words left his mouth in a whisper but inside he was screaming. They could not, of course, 'blow up' the sun. What they could do was create a reaction that would cause it to rapidly increase its size before collapsing in. They could instantly wipe out the planets and the Zenians.

"We need to stop them then. We need to stop them right now. My guess is that that thing is controlled from the main flagship over there. We get on, stop it, and get off so we can still make it to Cybin." Maiylene pointed at the flagship while outlining her plan, and Sauze nodded in agreement.

"We'll have to work fast. Let's go." Taking control of the ship, he powered it straight on at the massive flagship. It might be a bad idea, considering the risk they were exposing themselves to, but they could not let GalaxyForce murder all of the innocent people on the planets below.

"What can we do, though? Even if we could get close to that ship, how would we stop it? It's not like they're just going to let us dock!" Sauze frowned. It was true; flying a Zenian Fighter they would have less of a chance at even getting close.

"I have an idea. But it's a little risky. Just...hold on tight." Maiylene grabbed the corner of a wall and braced herself. Approaching the flagship, Sauze slowed down. He guided the fighter downward and under the flagship. Bringing it up, he got as close as he could without danger of collision. The sensors of the flagship would have picked him up by now but would not be able to shoot at where he was. Slowly he rotated the ship so that the entrance was facing the flagship above. In space, there really was no way to determine if you were upside down or not. It still felt weird looking out the viewport, though, and seeing the bottom of a flagship like a wall. Turning to the door, he looked over at Maiylene.

"Make sure your helmet's sealed. We're going to be blowing a hole right up here and climbing in. When we get in I fully expect to be facing some hostiles. I grabbed your pistol from Nex, you'll need it." Removing her pistol from his holster, he passed it over. Accessing the door, he readied the high power miniature explosive that could be removed from the left kneecap of AutoAk armor. It didn't matter if your job was Demolitions Expert; as an elite it was expected you would need to use an explosive at least once.

"Here we go." He attached it to the flagship and gently guided the fighter slightly to the left. Waiting until they were clear, he activated the bomb. In a flash the section of flagship above them was in pieces and hunks of metal were floating out. He jerked the ship back towards the right and opened the door. Climbing out, he and Maiylene clambered up into the flagship. Around them a few bodies floated, those likely of technicians and others without sealed armor. Flagships and other larger vessels had areas they could seal off in events like these. For instance, Sauze would probably only have to walk a short distance before finding a sealed metal wall. These could be activated in the full ship view in the bridge.

"Let's go. We're going to have to do some walking and cut through a few layers before we find the bridge." He and Maiylene walked slowly, the entire sealed section of the ship now full of vacuum. The AutoAk armor helped with the steps. Soon enough they came across the first metal wall that had been pulled out. Not wanting to make it obvious that they were onboard the ship, Sauze decided it would be best to keep the vacuum contained in here. That meant either heading through the vents or taking a maintenance entrance. Spotting a maintenance entrance by the end of the hall, Sauze directed Maiylene to it.

Maintenance Entrances were used when a section of a larger ship had to be sealed up. This could be because of vacuum or because the O₂ mechanisms had shut down. Either way, they had airlocks preinstalled and could only be opened from inside. They also worked as a way to transport troops securely to an occupied section of the ship. Well, Sauze knew for a fact that if you cut into one through the wall beside it the airlock would still function. You would walk into the chamber before the airlock and use it as normal.

"Get ready. We might have someone coming through here." Maiylene brought up her pistol while Sauze cut through the wall with his laser. Cutting a sizable piece, Sauze kicked through and looked

around. Nobody yet. As Maiylene began activating the airlock, Sauze took a look at his power reserves. Still a bit, but he really needed to charge the power cells. If they ran out, he would be in trouble. It would render the armor almost entirely useless. It would still move and still protect him from most attacks, but those would really be the only capabilities. Without an HUD there would almost not be point in even wearing it.

"Got it open. Let's head in." Maiylene pulled open the airlock door and they squeezed inside. It was really supposed to be used one person at a time, but they needed through quick. Once the automated machine had filled the room up with oxygen, Sauze and Maiylene pulled the second door open and ran out. Turning a sharp corner, they found that the network of access tunnels was completely dark.

"Lights on. Conserve your power though; no night vision." She affirmed in the comm and they both activated their lights. Stepping into what felt like a maze, Sauze stuck to the left. It was the easiest thing to do when confronted with multiple options. All they needed to do was find a ladder up so they could access the next floor up. Sauze calculated that the bridge would be two floors above them and have its own Maintenance Entrance. They could take them by surprise and stop the remote controlled ship from destroying the system.

"We've got to hurry. Look for a ladder." He and Maiylene searched but found none. Just as Sauze was about to open the nearest entrance and try their luck above, Maiylene spotted something.

"I've got one! A ladder! It looks like it heads up quite a ways." She clicked one of her lights off of her helmet and held it up. The ladder went all the way up.

"Must be a new design. Speaking of which, why do you think they've got it so that the lights are out in here?" They began the climb up.

"I don't know. Power, maybe? Wait, I got it! They must be powering that weapon thing wirelessly from here! If we can knock out the power, we won't even need to stop them controlling it. That's where they've taken the power for the lights then." Sauze reached the second level and climbed off the ladder. It would be easy to find the bridge access.

"Do you want to know why that's not good?" Maiylene climbed off as well and he helped her to her feet.

"Why?" They turned the corner and began running up a ramp. The bridge was straight ahead, and it was more important than ever that they get there.

"We knocked out a large section of the ship. That's a lot of extra power." Maiylene cursed and they stepped up their pace. Arriving at the Maintenance Entrance, Sauze quietly opened the airlock. They crept through the airlock quickly as no procedure was necessary. Just as Sauze was about to open the door they heard talking.

"I'm not lying! They were at ta' base, and by the gunship. If we don't do something, these idiots will expose us. I know fer' a fact that some of 'dem escaped!" Sauze clenched his fists. The accent sounded Scottish. And he knew that voice well. Too well, right now. Maiylene tried to hold him back but he was already barging through the door. Over the comm, he spoke calmly.

"To him, Luna and Nex are dead. Let's keep it that way." Sauze tackled Jax to the ground and shoved the barrel of his sidearm in front of Jax's mouth. His eyes were wide he began flailing with his arms. The few guards remaining who hadn't already joined the skirmish in space hesitantly drew their

weapons. Maiylene stepped out and gunned them all down. It was only the captain and two technicians besides them now. Jax gave up resisting, and Sauze pulled back his gun.

"I told ya! This is them here, come to finish me off!" Stepping away, Sauze kept his gun on Jax. Maiylene trained hers on the Captain.

"Turn off the weapon. You know the one we're talking about. Turn it off or we cut its power. Your choice." One of the technicians stood from his chair. The captain, an angry looking woman, shook her head. The technician froze and put his hands in front of his face. Waiting a few more seconds, Sauze pulled Jax off the ground. Gun still pointed at his head, Sauze pushed him over to the captain and launched his rappel cable. Jax, realising what he was doing, balled up his fists. Sauze turned instinctively and braced himself. Jax launched forward, retrieving a knife from his boot.

Sauze spun and stuck out his leg. Jax swung out his arm and made himself vulnerable. Sauze brought his leg up and tripped him. As he went down, Jax tried to no avail to drive the knife into Sauze's neck. It clashed against the armor and dropped. Sauze whipped out his sidearm and crouched in a ready position. Maiylene went to aid him, but thought better of it and motioned the captain to sit down in a chair. She then began tying the captain in with Sauze's rappel cable that he had cut. Jax kicked up onto his feet and rushed Sauze again. This time Sauze made no move to dodge, just stood still.

The second he was close enough Sauze grabbed Jax's shoulder with his free hand and pulled him forward suddenly. Jax stumbled slightly and Sauze kicked out his legs. Dropping to his knees, Jax tried to back up. Sauze crouched on his level and moved in close faster than Jax could flee. Holding his sidearm steady, Sauze fired it. Still holding onto Jax's shoulder, he pulled him into the bullet. Jax convulsed, and his hands shook at the now bleeding wound. They stared eye to eye for a second as Sauze put away the sidearm. Jax spat in his face and fell over clutching the bullet wound. Sauze kicked him back onto his knees and motioned Maiylene over with his hands.

She pushed the chair the captain was tied to over before taking the technicians captive. Sauze launched another length of rappel cable and tied Jax to the back of the chair. Before returning to Maiylene, Sauze punched Jax in the jaw. A tooth fell out, and blood began dribbling onto Jax's unkempt shock white beard. Sauze stood up and walked away, not giving another look. It may have been harsh, but Sauze counted Jax partially responsible for Sev's death. If he had bore the full amount of the blame Sauze would have been much less kind.

"Oh good, you're done. These two over here won't tell me how to shut off the weapon. Good news is, they were the ones piloting it. Sauze dropped his helmet and smiled at her. Turning to the technicians, he brought out his sidearm again. Blood oozed off of the barrel from Jax's gunshot wound.

"Are you saying that if I killed them, the weapon would stop it's flight towards the sun?" Maiylene smiled.

"That's exactly what I'm saying." The technicians looked worriedly at one another. One opened his mouth to speak, but shut it after a look from the other.

"You know...maybe they're lying. Maybe if we kill them, the thing will keep going. And what could we do then, Maiylene?" Sauze looked over feigning worry. This was just a show, the goal being that the technicians would stop the weapon and no more blood would have to be shed.

"Well...we could cut the entire power supply of the ship. No artificial gravity, no oxygen...I guess a lot more people would die. So really, we should just start with that. Unless these two have no qualms

about condemning everyone on this ship to death." Both Sauze and Maiylene looked at the technicians. A few seconds passed before one of them cracked.

"Fine! Fine! Look, if you access that console over there and cancel the trajectory, it won't be moving. Then you can disable the power connection. The passw--" The technician spat out a load of blood and slumped over. The other one yelped and caught a bullet in the face. Sauze and Maiylene turned around, Sauze bringing up his helmet.

"Put your fucking weapons down or I swear to god I will kill you both." The captain stood next to the chair, blood dripping from both of her arms. She had slipped through the cable somehow, even while it slashed her arms. Sauze was not too worried, though.

"Skeptical, I see. You think I haven't killed someone wearing AutoAk armor? Well I fought the in the fucking Colony War. Yeah, older than I look, huh? Now lay your weapons down and walk away." Sauze made a big show of holding up his sidearm out in front of him. If what she said was true, Sauze guessed she was just over 100 years old. With Anti-Free radical drugs only just becoming popular it was hard to remember sometimes.

"Here! Here! Look, I'm put--" Catching her off guard, he spun and dropped to the ground. The only chance now to save the system was destroying that console the technician had mentioned. Letting off a volley of shots, Sauze rolled and grabbed Maiylene. They both jumped forward and shot at the Captain. One shot hit her shoulder and she dropped her gun. Sauze grabbed it and tossed it to Maiylene.

"We aren't going to kill you. I can see that destroying the console has stopped the weapon. So I'm going to stun you and we're going to leave." Maiylene, held both her pistol and the Captain's gun up while Sauze powered up his stunner. She glared at him even as he zapped her, and collapsed over with a hating expression on her face. Maiylene examined the gun she had picked up.

"This is the same one Sev was shot with. Only one Zenian had this type, though." Sauze took it from her hands and examined it.

"No wonder. These things are top of the line. Manufactured by AutoAk as well, and the only thing I can think of that slices it like butter. The bullets don't actually do that much damage themselves, but just the prospect of essentially being without armor going up against one isn't that nice. That's how much force they pack, though." Sauze holstered the gun along with his sidearm. It might come in handy, though he hoped it wouldn't.

"Sauze, wait! How are we going to get back to the ship before someone finds these two?" Sauze stopped for a second. Turning around suddenly, he dashed over to the control panel. Maiylene glanced down at the stunned captain before following him.

"I can give us a direct path to a ship bay. Watch this. Just seal up a path...drain the oxygen....and there we go. Once the O₂ comes back online in there we can stroll through without worry. Just hope there's a ship available." He stepped back from the console and turned to a door on the far left. Maiylene opened it up and cautiously looked through. Sauze's plan had worked; the lack of oxygen had killed any wandering soldiers and the metal blast doors meant nobody would get in.

"I've also sealed up the other ways in here. It will be a while before anyone reactivates that thing." He and Maiylene ran through the door and into the sealed passage. As they drew nearer to the ship bay, the flagship began rocking.

"The Zenians must be attacking! We've got to get out of here fast!" Maiylene raced ahead of Sauze and opened the door to the ship bay. It was devoid of people, but there were two ships left. As he

and Maiylene raced towards one, the flagship took a tough shot. They both slipped over onto the cold metal floor. A Zenian fighter appeared outside the Air Field and let loose a volley of shots. Satisfied, it continued attacking elsewhere. Most of the shots were caught in the shields but one passed through and collided straight on with the ship Sauze and Maiylene had been headed for. A large chunk burst off of the ship and landed between the two.

"Shit, Sauze we got to go!" He and Maiylene stumbled up and jumped into the remaining ship. The flagship was suffering some serious damage. As Sauze piloted the familiar GalaxyForce ship out of the bay, the flagship began twirling on a jilted angle. He didn't stick around to watch what happened next, instead entering coordinates for Cybin. Maiylene was staring, helmet down, at the deactivated weapon.

"Can you believe GalaxyForce has that kind of tech? I never saw that when we were Elites." Sauze agreed with her, but her choice of words disturbed him.

"We're still Elites. We still are. This isn't the real GalaxyForce; we'll still be Elites when we get this sorted out with Adams." Maiylene smiled and nodded. Indeed, Sauze had no intention of letting this keep him from staying an Elite in GalaxyForce. To be honest, Sauze had no idea what he would do not in service to G1. Really, what else could he do if he wasn't in GalaxyForce? Sure, he and Luna had spoken about plans for the future. That was a possibility. But Sauze always figured he would die in the line of service. It was bound to happen at some point, that one time he would face someone who could best him. It was the only likely thing for Sauze.

"Yeah...but what happens if we can't? I mean, I would only want to stay in GalaxyForce. But say that's just not a possibility after this. I'm only realizing now I don't know what I would do." Maiylene sat down on one of the benches along the side walls. Sauze dropped his helmet and sat across from her. The ship had jumped into Upperspace and now all that was left was to wait.

"I mean...you've got a future ahead of you after this. But I don't, really." Sauze smiled internally at the relevance of his thoughts prior to the conversation. But upon focusing on Maiylene's words, he realized he didn't understand.

"What exactly do you mean? What future do I have that you don't?" Maiylene smiled at him, but he sensed a bit of sadness.

"You have Luna. You've also got a well paying office job the second you want one with GalaxyForce for your service as a commander. But me? I'm a medic. Best option would be some tiny little hospital." She wasn't really looking at Sauze, merely staring forward. Sauze hadn't even considered this. Just as he had been thinking; he saw no likely future outside of GalaxyForce. But he was fine with that.

"Well..." He found himself unable to pick the right words. A life after GalaxyForce wasn't what he wanted. But thinking about it now, there might be a point when he could no longer serve. What then?

"I think about this a lot. I wonder what's going to happen when I can't fight for GalaxyForce anymore. Because it's great and all, but I deserve a real life. Don't you ever think about this?" She blinked and looked up at him. Sauze took a deep breath and considered what she was saying. Deserving a real life.

"Why wouldn't you call serving in GalaxyForce a real life?" He was nervous. This was something he had never given any thought. To him this was the life he was going to have. One day he would be out

of GalaxyForce, but that day would not come for quite some time. Maiylene stared at him for a second before responding.

"Because this is not any kind of life. This is service, and although it is service that I love doing it is still service. One day you won't be serving GalaxyForce, and what you experience after that will be your real life." She waited a long moment. Sauze wasn't sure how to react.

"I suppose you're right. Well...what would you like to be doing after you retire from GalaxyForce?" Maiylene smiled and Sauze knew this one to be without sadness.

"Really? All I'd like is to continue practicing medicine. But in a place where I'm motivated to do so. I don't want to return and become queen of " Sitting back she looked at him expectantly. It took Sauze a second to realize she was waiting for him to speak.

"I've never considered it. And you know what? Thinking now, wondering what I'd like to do...I can't think of anything. And from what you've said, this makes me nervous." Maiylene raised her eyebrows and went into deep thought for a few minutes.

"Maybe you just need some more time to think. That's go--" The console began beeping, and Sauze leapt up at the opportunity to remove himself from the conversation. Taking a look, he found that a ship was nearing theirs at a dangerous speed. Considering this ship was a GalaxyForce troopship, the OS was programmed to send alerts when something came close. Troopships were generally used for moving up to four squads from place to place within a sector. That meant they shouldn't come into contact with other ships, even GalaxyForce. Sauze didn't pay much attention, but decided to see if he could place where the approaching ship had left from to keep him busy. He didn't want to return to the conversation with Maiylene.

"Whoa!" The ship was suddenly pulled out of Upperspace as a result of coming into contact with something else. Sauze stumbled back and took a look through the viewport. A GalaxyForce fighter was darting around them, opening fire. This puzzled Sauze, for they were in a GalaxyForce troopship. There should be no reason for hostilities. Unfortunately, he could not see in to the other ship from this distance.

"What's going on?" Maiylene bounded over and took a look out. Sauze spun the troopship and powered up the Upperspace drive once more. Troopships were not equipped with that many weapons, and Sauze didn't want to risk a fight right now. He used the unorthodox maneuver of flying directly past the fighter as a way to avoid fire while preparing to jump. It was as they passed that Maiylene yelled.

"Holy shit, it's Jax! He escaped!" Sauze looked over at her in confusion. Before he could ask, the ship jumped into Upperspace. Immediately he got the report that a ship was nearing them. Diverting power from the sensors, Sauze pushed the ship as fast as it would go. They were going to outrun the ship, but only barely.

"That was Jax! I saw his face as we passed by! He escaped the flagship!" Maiylene was frantic, pointing to the viewport where they had nearly collided with the fighter. Sauze was unsure what to think.

"It couldn't have been, though. We'd tied him up and I shot him...his jaw was broken!" Maiylene shook her head.

"He escaped somehow. Maybe when the captain broke free of her cable it loosened his? I don't know. That was him; I'm sure of it." Sauze slammed his fist against the wall. Maiylene wouldn't be lying, and it would be pretty hard to mistake someone else for Jax. At the same time, it would make sense if

Jax was piloting. Why else would a GalaxyForce fighter have fired on them? Looking back at the console, he saw that it had fulfilled his request. Just before they had been pulled out of Upperspace, he had tried to detect where the fighter was coming from. It had come from the sector they just visited; the one where Sauze had left Jax to die.

"We need to get to Cybin now more than ever. If we can beat Jax there, he'll come looking. Luna and Nex will have already spoken to Adams, probably. He can have Jax arrested and this whole thing will be over." Maiylene nodded in agreement and sat back down on the bench. The previous conversation forgotten now by both of them, Sauze sat down as well. They were close now to Cybin, and close to ending this ordeal.

Sauze blinked his eyes open and immediately sat up straight. He had given Maiylene use of the portable sleeping bag and promised to alert her if anything happened. He must have fallen asleep in the pilot chair. Looking over, he saw Maiylene still asleep in the sleeping bag on one of the benches. They were still in Upperspace, but very close now. Within the hour Cybin would be greeting them and Jax would have his guns armed. Letting Maiylene sleep a little bit longer Sauze decided to examine the weapons of the Troopship. Two Burst Cannons; nothing special. Nothing that could defeat Jax in whatever Fighter he had commandeered.

Sauze couldn't believe the man was still alive. He had died more times than Sauze could count now, each time somehow returning tougher than before. Thinking back now, Sauze understood why he had been selected as a trainer. Clearly he was near invincible. As Sauze thought of the times he had assumed Jax dead since this all started, he realized something. Here he was trying to kill his own mentor and gunning down GalaxyForce soldiers. When had this happened? It still seemed so impossible that Sauze tried to remember if he had been put into a simulation at any point recently. This sudden transition was a tough thing to wrap one's mind around.

As Sauze thought more and more about this, he realized a very grim truth. No matter what, he could never be the same person again. Because even if these people trying to kill him were not the real GalaxyForce, he would know in his heart that they had all been at one point. Jax wasn't always the head of a secret sect bent on exterminating civilian colonies. Before this he had been a friend. And so many others had been friends of someone. And in killing them Sauze had done more than fend off enemies. He had ended lives of dedicated soldiers like himself. But as he had always thought, a good soldier could not consider such things. If you were to think of every enemy vanquished as a person the guilt would be what killed you in the end. Sure it wasn't all that healthy but it was how he dealt with it.

"Hey. Where are we?" Maiylene slipped out of the sleeping bag and stood up stretching. Sauze saw now the flecks of blood on her GalaxyForce tunic as she went to put her armor back on. It only reinforced the idea that so many were dead.

"Somewhere close to Cybin. Inner Rim. Jax is still hot on our trail but we're going to beat him there. Should actually only be a matter of minutes now. Better get ready." She nodded and finished putting on her armor. Leaving her helmet down she sat down next to Sauze.

"So...what do you think is going to happen? I mean...how will this all be resolved?" She spun her chair around smiling. Sauze shrugged.

"We'll get to Cybin and head over to Adams's office. Luna and Nex will probably already be in consultation with him. Jax won't be able to attack us once we're in the city, so we don't really have to worry about that." Maiylene nodded and looked out the viewport.

"Yeah. But how will Adams do it? Because obviously G1 is without a military if GalaxyForce has gone rogue like this. He can't exactly demand their surrender." Sauze laughed. Maiylene was getting the part of GalaxyForce they had fought mixed up with the real GalaxyForce.

"He's still got whatever part of GalaxyForce Caliman controls. You know, the Galactic Enforcer? She'll take care of the rogues and the Zenians. I've met her a few times, and I can guarantee she's not mixed up in this." They both sat in silence for a minute or so. Maiylene went to say something then went silent.

"You...you had met Jax before too." Nobody said anything after that. Sauze knew why Maiylene had been afraid to say it, but he didn't take it that way. She hadn't meant it as criticism of his character judgement, she meant it as a true statement. Simply one he could not respond to. They waited a few more minutes before the ship signalled that they were approaching Cybin. Sauze grabbed the controls tight and Maiylene sat nervously in the chair to the left of him. They both had their helmets up and HUDS online, prepared to plot the best course individually. The plan would only work if they could get away from Jax. There shouldn't be too much trouble, though; it would be mostly empty around Cybin at this point in time.

Or so they thought.

"What?!" Upon exiting Upperspace, Sauze and Maiylene came face to face with a massive fleet of GalaxyForce ships. The weapons were powered up, and the ships were advancing fast. Sauze and Maiylene sat in silence for a good four seconds before they received a message that Jax had dropped from Upperspace and was behind them. Sauze, blinking once, jumped into action and sent the ship barreling downwards. He passed underneath the GalaxyForce fleet and headed straight for Cybin. Their presence didn't make any sense, but there wasn't time to ponder that now.

"Jax is following! I'll get some targeting on!" Maiylene set to work activating the weapons while Sauze spun the ship. If Jax shot them down it was highly likely the impact would be fatal. For him, anyway. His jets would run out of power before he could get all the way down. Maiylene might have enough, but even then she would have to avoid his fire again. So it was imperative they escaped.

"Aw shit, he's knocked out our shields! Sauze, the Palatial District is just over there. Adams will be in the tower!" Sauze nodded and pushed the ship as fast as it would go. Jax was relentless in his attacks and the Troopship was suffering badly. As Sauze approached the bottom of the tower a particularly bad shot hit the engines.

"We're gonna fall out of the sky! Ah man, there's only one thing to do now." Sauze brought the ship up abruptly, startling Jax for a second. Peeling back, he headed for the top of the tower now. Jax landed and raced in through the door of the tower, out of view now. Sauze diverted power from the engines quickly to the weapons, enough for one shot. Rapidly approaching the tower now, he fired twice at the glass walls of the top floor. The glass shattered and Sauze spotted Ceitevorate Kalanth Adams stumbling back. Bringing the ship around again, Sauze sent it straight up. He then turned and shot through the roof of the Troopship with his sidearm. The power cells exploded behind him into a flurry of sparks, and the gravity turned off.

"Jump!" Sauze wrapped his arms around Maiylene and activated the jets. They both spiraled out of the ship and into the open air. Sauze powered the jets to maximum, and they both slammed into the roof of the Ceitevorate's Tower. It was raining, presently, and Sauze instantly felt himself sliding off of the roof. Not enough power to activate the jets again, so he activated his rappel cable and activated the hook. It dug in to the slippery metal just as he slid over the side. Maiylene tried to grab on but spun on the rain-slick precipice and toppled over.

"I'm good; I've got jets. I'll meet you with a ship by the wind--" The range ran out as she fell down the monstrous tower. Sauze lost sight of her quickly in the rain, but trusted her to be fine. She no longer registered on his HUD; he was the only Elite in range now. This bothered him. Swinging down with the cable, he pushed himself into the Ceitevorate's room. Adams was standing still, and Sauze saw the outline of a gun beneath the sleeve of his robe. He immediately dropped his helmet and stood up.

"Hello! Mr. Adams....don't shoot me. I'm with GalaxyForce. Listen, you aren't going to believe this but I've seen it with my own ey--" Sauze was interrupted as the door burst open. Jax walked in and pointed a gun at Sauze. Sauze drew the gun he had taken from the Flagship Captain and stepped between Jax and the Ceitevorate. Jax moved to stand in front of the blown out window and grinned.

"Well, well, well. Looks like ya' made it me' boy! And I bet yer' awful happy now, ain't ya'?" Sauze smiled widely and nodded. In the back of his mind, he wondered where Luna and Nex were. But they had probably already visited Adams, and this was without a point. They were probably with Caliemán right now.

"You guys are done for, Jax. Adams is right here; he's going to know all about what you're doing with the Zenians. Yes, Ceitevorate, I said Zenians. You'll find out plenty once this man is dealt with." Jax lowered his gun and began laughing. Sauze glared at him, and stepped away from the Ceitevorate so that both he and Jax stood by the destroyed windows.

"I told ya', Adams! He thinks we've gone rogue!" Sauze continued to glare at Jax for a second before turning to Adams. Adams cracked a smile and Sauze shivered. It was a malicious look.

"Well that is interesting, isn't it." Sauze looked from Jax to Adams as the two stared forward. Jax wasn't making any sense.

"I stopped him, though! Can ya' imagine if he'd told someone who didn't know?" Jax laughed, and Adams shot him a look.

"Actually, you fool, two others have already told me. Ages ago, too. So you stopped nothing and protected no one. Luckily I had them dealt with." Sauze was confused now. Very confused. Adams mentioned two others telling him; Luna and Nex?

"But....I took care of the others! I was chasin' him down! I did ma' best!" Adams snorted, and looked over at Sauze. Sauze was simply trying to comprehend what was going on. He heard only the impossible.

"Well you failed, Jax. You've done nothing but fail since this problem emerged." Adams slowly lifted up his hand, for what reason Sauze didn't know.

"But...we can kill 'im, and start that new Galaxy! Like you said, we'd rule over all! We'll be emperors!" Adams let his sleeve fall to reveal the same gun Sauze now held.

"Did I say 'we' would rule, Jax? Oh well." Adams shot Jax once in the chest and once in the leg. Jax let out a horrible scream and staggered backwards. Adams delivered a final shot to Jax's head, and the eruption of blood sent drops all over Sauze's face. The now headless body collapsed and dropped

through the broken window into the rain. Sauze felt sick, and almost vomited. Wiping away Jax's blood, he turned to Adams cautiously.

"Ceitevorate...do you know? Jax and a bunch of others wer--" Adams spun on his heel and aimed the gun at Sauze.

"Of course I know, you fool. Who do you think told him to? Oh, don't act so shocked. I'm surprised you didn't already think I was a part of it. What a loyal soldier you are." The word loyal cut Sauze deeply. It was true; he was loyal. But this simply couldn't be happening.

"But it's not quite time to begin phase two yet, my friend. So in the mean time, you can join Jax. If I recall, he was your mentor. He was there when you saved my life...Sauze." Sauze knew that the Ceitevorate's words were meant to distract him from his impending death. And they worked. He couldn't move away, and tears slowly welled up in his eyes.

"Goodbye, Mr. Kath. If only your friends...Ms. Eyeth and Mr. Cerlin were as lucky to die. Oh well." It was the mention of Luna that brought Sauze back into the present. Even if he felt ready to die, there was still her to think of. He stepped away as Adams fired, but the bullet caught him on the ear. Suddenly all sound was too loud and then he couldn't hear anything at all. Stumbling back, he realized there was no way he would be as lucky next time. And so he stopped standing up, and let the rain push him down. As he fell backward through the sharp drops of water Adams looked over the edge. Sauze quickly lost sight of him, closing his eyes and preparing for death.

Act 2

Part I

Maiylene leapt into a nearby transport and apologized to the driver before tossing him into the street. She took off and shot up into the air towards the tower. As she flew up, Maiylene spotted something falling from the tower. Using her HUD too zoom in, she realized it was a body. A body sans head. It crashed to the ground below her in the middle of a crowded street. People began running and screaming, but her attention was no longer on that body. It was on the body in full AutoAk armor sailing down from the tower. It was indeed Sauze; the HUD identified him without his helmet on. Realizing what would happen if he hit her ship with much speed Maiylene zoomed up to catch him.

"Sauze!" He landed on the thin metal roof and crashed through. As she was piloting merely a transport and not any kind of ship the engines were not that powerful and she immediately began her descent.

"What happened?" The transport ducked into a steady flow of traffic. Maiylene had no idea where they would go but knew to get away. Sauze looked at her for a second, and she saw blood flowing from his ear. As the transport slowly moved forward she tended to the wound.

"I...Adams knew. And he tried to kill...can we talk someplace safe? Do you know somewhere?" Maiylene thought for a second. The only safe place she could think of was her old apartment. In between joining up with GalaxyForce and leaving her home she had purchased a small apartment on Cybin with the money she had taken. It would still be there, even if empty.

"Yes. Just hang on." She took a look at Sauze's face and saw tears under his eyes. Solitary, though. It was like he had gone to cry, but been unable. Either way, when she looked into his eyes, she saw immense sadness. His ear was bandaged slightly but the internal injuries could not be treated. Any deafness might be permanent. Trying not to think about it right now, Maiylene navigated through the streets to her old apartment. The building was much more run down than she remembered it, but her apartment was still there. Touching down the transport, she helped Sauze out. The two of them walked over to her apartment. It was DNA activated, so there was no key to remember. Once they were in she laid Sauze down on her bed and began taking his armor off to look for more injuries.

"Go right ahead...tell me everything. I'll try to treat your ear." Upon finding no further injuries save for some bruising, she slipped his tunic back on. The armor would only get in the way though, and so she left it on the chair.

"Uh...let's see. Adams knows about the whole GalaxyForce thing. He's a part of it." Maiylene gasped and felt a shiver run down her spine. Sauze leaned up slightly and she began to stitch up the area where the bullet had torn open a large section.

"Jax is dead, but Luna and Nex are alive. My guess is they're being held somewhere." Maiylene let out a breath in relief. When only Sauze had fallen out she had been worried Luna and Nex were already dead.

"Anything else? Did Adams mention why it was all happening?" Maiylene dabbed some ointment on the smaller open wounds, readjusting herself on the bed to have better access to the wound. Sauze closed his eyes and thought.

"Wait! Yes! He said something about 'Phase 2' coming and Jax said something about how they would be emperors because of the plan." Sauze, exhausted for information, laid back down. Maiylene

worked on applying some infection preventing material to the wound while she mulled over the information.

"That can't be good. Did he mention if Caliemán was involved at all?" She looked down to see a pained, vacant expression on Sauze's face. She finished wrapping up his ear and sat back against the opposite end of the bed. Uncomfortable in the stiff armor she took hers off as well. The two sat in the room for a while, Maiylene simply staring at Sauze. He appeared on the verge of tears but did not once actually cry. After some time he spoke again.

"Maiylene. I don't know if Caliemán is involved or not but I would guess so. I do know one thing, and that is that Luna and Nex are alive. We need to find them. Once we are together as a squad we can consider what to do next. But for now, freeing them is our goal." Maiylene nodded slowly. Sauze laid all the way down on the rough mattress and closed his eyes.

"I need some sleep right now. If possible, could you wake me in about an hour?" Maiylene told him that she would, and almost the second the words were out of her mouth Sauze was asleep. She removed her tunic and sat down in the chair next to the one with their armor sets on it. Without anyone else to talk to, Maiylene decided she had to distract herself from worrying about Nex and Luna. Looking over at the sets of armor on the chair, Maiylene suddenly got an idea. She pulled her tunic back on and grabbed the chestpiece of the armor. Clicking it on, she brought up the HUD and accessed the database of GalaxyForce soldiers.

Bringing up a map of Cybin, she located her apartment on it. If what Sauze said was true and Jane Caliemán was involved in the conspiracy, her base might be where Luna and Nex were being held. That would be where Maiylene and Sauze could search when he woke up. She found a quick route and saved it. Preparing to take the armor back off, she suddenly remembered something from her medical training. Elite AutoAk armor was connected to your body through biowiring at a node located on the wrist. This monitored all sorts of things by simply hacking in to your body.

Someone in her class had wondered if there could be any detrimental effects of this. Although it was quickly cleared by the Galactic Health Administration, a few studies had shown that the biowiring could easily be controlled remotely to shut down your heart. The node in the armor connected to a small wire surgically implanted that headed to your heart and brain. It was suggested that if someone hacked the AutoAk armor they could simply kill you instantly. And suddenly Maiylene felt very nervous. She didn't know too much about the capabilities of the Galactic Enforcer, but assumed they could track where soldiers were. And maybe they could stop your heart wirelessly if you went rogue.

Maiylene, giving it a bit more thought, decided to be on the safe side. There was no reason to ditch the armor entirely, but disconnecting the biowiring might be a good idea for now. Really, if they were going to shut down her heart it likely would have already happened, but one cannot be too safe. Taking off her armor, she reached in and folded the node back. It was set to automatically connect magnetically, and so simply turning it around effectively thwarted it. She would remind Sauze when he woke up. With little else to do, Maiylene decided to take a rest. Careful not to fall asleep, she leaned back and closed her eyes. Such was necessary with this great confusion going on.

When she opened her eyes and looked around, just about an hour had passed. The clock on the wall was no doubt wrong but she remembered the previous time. Standing up, she stretched her arms up into the air. Before waking Sauze she quickly slipped her tunic back on. Walking over, she lightly shook his shoulder.

"Sauze? Sauze, an hour's passed." Sauze sat up and blinked a few times. Looking down at his mostly exposed body he laughed a little bit and put on his tunic as well. She mentioned to him the biowiring hypothesis as they suited up in armor.

"So, while you were asleep, I found us a quick route to Caliemans's on-planet base. I was thinking that's where Luna and Nex might be." Sauze nodded and brought up his helmet. Maiylene was a little concerned.

"Sauze..." She began "You seem to be feeling much better." Sauze pulled up his sidearm and checked to make sure it was loaded. Taking a deep breath that Maiylene heard over the comm, he responded.

"I'm focusing on the fact that Luna is alive. I'm not thinking about any of the betrayal or death. Once we're back together as a squad we can worry about that." He held open her door and they walked out into the light. Cybin was supposed to have simulated darkness for night, but more often than not the city lights provided enough anyway. Heading over to the transport Maiylene had taken the other day, they found it torn open and scavenged.

"Nice neighbourhood." Looking around, they saw no other means of transportation. Bringing up the path Maiylene had selected Sauze checked to see if it was feasible for walking or not. It was, but they would take a bit longer. That time was precious.

"We could always steal another transport. I mean, we already have to worry about getting caught. Besides, there's still a possibility they believe we're both dead. They might not be looking for us." As they walked toward the busier street, Sauze contemplated the idea.

"They'd have found that my body is gone by now. Adams won't be sure until he sees the corpse, so we'll have to act fast. Maiylene stepped out into the road with this permission and jumped into a transport. Sauze followed her in, gently lifting the driver out and dropping him onto the sidewalk. This area of Cybin had much busier streets than most. Generally, streets on Cybin did not allow transport traffic. Instead they used a tram system where passengers could get on and off at select stops. Considering the service required only that you buy a pass, it was much more popular. But renovating the streets of one of the largest planets wasn't an easy or cheap thing to do. Considering Cybin's size, it would be quite some time before the tram system was completed. The amount of hijackings was also quite unfortunate, considering the fact that the trams were automated and could be easily reprogrammed.

As the transport he and Maiylene had stolen rose up above the others and turned, Sauze looked over the map again. They would be passing through a sector where Trams were in use, as it turns out. That meant they could try to fly over and possibly be chased by the police force, or walk. It wouldn't be a good idea to get on a tram. The stops would not match up with where he and Maiylene needed to go and their armor would be fairly noticeable. He sent the map with the tram sector outlined to Maiylene.

"Oh, shoot. Should we try to fly over?" Sauze looked out the side of the open transport and found the tram sector with his eyes. There were a few GalaxyForce police ships circling the area. This was really a good thing, in terms of safety. Trams needed to be above ground due to their weak engines, and this often meant that suicidal folks would leap in front of them. If police were monitoring the area they could remotely stop the tram and save the person's life. Easier than when transport roads crossed crevasses and someone's engine failed. Sauze had seen a bit of that and it was quite unfortunate.

"Land it over there; we'll walk." Maiylene took the transport down behind a building in an empty lot and the two stepped out. Tram sectors were typically less populated by pedestrians, so he and Maiylene would arrive quicker now. If they could just get across a few streets they would be near the Galactic Enforcer's base. He wasn't looking forward to seeing Caliemán, but hoped he wouldn't have to. Best case scenario they could get in and rescue the others. Assuming they were even there.

"Alright, how are we going to get over? There are way too many trams to just stroll across." Maiylene gestured out to the whizzing trams going past. There were four lanes for trams, two going left and two going right. That meant that judging gaps was much harder. Even if they got past one lane the other lane's timing would be completely different. Before he could say anything, a patrol of police soldiers rounded a corner and stopped cold. Sauze and Maiylene slowly looked over. The captain was nodding at one of the others.

"I've got a feeling we're not going to like this. Follow me." Sauze grabbed Maiylene's wrist and pulled her behind a building. Last he saw the police soldiers they were starting to follow he and Maiylene. Turning a corner he launched his rappel cable to the top of a building. Thankfully there was enough left in the suit to reach the top. He only had a short length left, but there wasn't exactly a place to resupply right now.

"Climb...quick." Maiylene launched her own cable and they began climbing. The police soldiers raced into the alleyway and raised their weapons. Sauze reached the top first and pulled Maiylene up.

"Halt! Surrender or we will open fire." Sauze dropped his helmet long enough to crack a smile at them before he and Maiylene turned from the edge of the building. Maiylene took a look over before joining him.

"They're trying to climb up! Where are we going to go?" Sauze took a deep breath. In front of the building the trams whirred past. Not too fast, but faster than he would have liked. He took a step back.

"Oh no. Oh no...you aren't thinking....seriously?" Sauze nodded at Maiylene and pointed forward. Maiylene let out a whimper and nodded. Sauze, stepping closer to the back of the building, broke into a sprint. Leaping off the edge of the building, he slammed onto the top of a tram. Losing his footing he slipped onto his back and began to slide off. Digging in with his hands he pulled himself back into a standing position. Maiylene landed onto the tram behind him, using her floorplanters to stay up. Sauze chose not to activate his just in case a quick jump was necessary. The police soldiers on the roof of the building tried to jump onto trams as well, but were not as efficient. Only two soldiers actually made it. Sauze, bringing up his weapon, tried to locate them. Starting behind Maiylene, they leapt onto the next lane over.

"Maiylene, try and take care of those guys before they hop closer up!" Maiylene deactivated her floorplanters and turned with her pistol. Sauze leapt over to the next lane as well, searching for an easy way off. They still needed to get out of the sector. Turning back, he spotted a police ship approaching.

"Oh shit..." The bottom of the ship opened up and police soldiers dropped out. Two landed on the tram behind Sauze's and started opening fire. Just as Maiylene picked off one of the two from the roof another dropped onto her tram.

"Maiylene!" The soldier grabbed her from behind and forced her arm up into the air. Sauze couldn't get in a shot without fear of injuring Maiylene, but couldn't let the police soldier kill her. Leaping to the tram behind him, Sauze prepared to fight the closest two. One ran at him brandishing

a staff while the other tried to take aim with a submachine gun. Sauze grabbed the one rushing him and snapped his neck. The other one gasped and lowered the SMG. Sauze kicked him off and watched with a cringe as he was caught between trams going in different directions. Turning back to Maiylene he raised out his arm. It was a regrettable decision he would have to make but one he would have to make if he wanted to save Maiylene.

"Floorplanters NOW!" Launching the last of his rappel cable, he hooked it around the attacking police soldier's lower leg and yanked. The soldier lost his grip on Maiylene's leg and fell flat onto his face. The cable went taut and the soldier was pulled off the tram. Trying desperately to bring Maiylene with him he grabbed her by the ankle. Thankfully she had activated her floorplanters as Sauze had asked and was safe. The soldier slipped off the tram and began to be battered around between the two lanes. Sauze held the cable up for a few seconds before cutting it. Maiylene stumbled slightly on her tram and leapt on to the next lane. There were still three police soldiers advancing from farther down the lane, but Sauze and Maiylene were quickly approaching the end of the sector.

"We've got to jump over! If we can land on the trams headed in the other direction we can lose these guys and get to the base." Sauze was certainly thankful for the comm system right now. The wind was whipping past so quickly there was a deafening howling noise all around him. Maiylene made it onto the opposite-facing tram lane and immediately vanished from view. Sauze tried as well, but was knocked in mid air by one of the police soldiers. The soldier crashed into the side of one tram and was ripped in half instantly while Sauze grabbed onto the side. He kicked the window in and pulled himself inside the tram. He was heading the other way now, after Maiylene. The tram was empty, thankfully, but he was now unable to easily get out. Forcing the door open, he took a look up. The only way up would be to accurately time a jump.

"Sauze? Sauze, I'm off. Come to me, ok?" Sauze located Maiylene on his map and noticed with alarm that her position was coming up fast. The jump would have to happen now. Standing with his back to the final lane, Sauze counted up to five. On the fifth count he yanked himself up. It was almost perfect. Unfortunately, because it was only almost perfect, another tram clipped his leg. The pain was unbearable, but the AutoAk armor prevented his leg from being torn off. There was the possibility of a break, though. That might be the worst thing to happen right now. And just as he thought this, the tram took a turn and Sauze slipped off.

Squeezing himself in as tight as possible, Sauze managed to avoid hitting any other trams. Unfortunately, he was now on the ground unable to stand. Not only because of his leg but because trams were passing inches above his head. The only way to get out now would be to crawl. And so he did, dragging himself towards the platforms across the lane. If only someone needed a tram; they could summon one and they would stop. That would ease the pressure. It was then that he remembered Maiylene had made it out.

"Maiylene? Maiylene, I need you to click a red button. It should be on a post somewhere." Maiylene took a second before responding.

"OK, I've pressed it. Everything alright?" Sauze watched as the trams slowed down and picked up his pace. The platform was a short distance away now. Finally reaching it, he climbed up and laid down on the solid ground.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Sort of. Come meet me where I am now, ok? I might need a doctor." Maiylene giggled and ended the comm channel. Sauze propped himself up against a wall and retracted the lower

section of his right leg. The armor automatically went to retract the other leg but he halted the process. Pulling up the leg of his trousers he cringed at the sight. It wasn't a break but the leg was badly damaged. Maiylene wouldn't be able to do anything right now while they still needed to get to the base. Standing up, he pushed the trouser leg back down and extended the armor. Maiylene appeared at the end of the street and rushed over.

"What happened?" They began heading in the direction of the base. It was then she noticed his limp.

"A tram clipped me. You can't do anything for it right now, though. After we get Luna and Nex, though, I will need as much morphine as you can spare." Maiylene made a quiet worried noise and they continued walking. Several times they had to back behind a building as a squad of Police Soldiers or even regular militia walked past.

"Is it just me or has GalaxyForce seriously been upped? I mean, if they're looking for me, why out here? Seems weird." Sauze pointed at a squad of soldiers. Maiylene shrugged as they crept by.

"Maybe whoever dropped those extra Police Soldiers called in." Sauze nodded and stood up. They were a block away from the base. It was a possibility that the Police Soldier ship had called in, but something still seemed amiss. The soldiers weren't just patrolling; they were heading somewhere. With more time perhaps he could have figured it out, but right now Luna and Nex were the priority. Approaching the base, Sauze pulled Maiylene aside.

"Alright, here's the plan. We head in one of the entrances to the side and locate prisons and interrogation rooms. Splitting up is too dangerous so we search together. If we find them, the four of us shoot our way out. If we don't, we retreat quietly." Maiylene agreed, and the two snuck in to the compound. It was actually fairly empty, for all the soldiers about. Reaching an entrance, he and Maiylene found it oddly easy to get in. The halls were mostly empty, and there wasn't a sign of any soldiers. A single attendant stumbled upon them, but Maiylene sedated him and hid him in a closet.

"I've got a directory over here! The two main interrogation rooms are down this hall, sort of. They're on either side of one big block, so we'll have to work fast." Maiylene scanned the directory and sent it to Sauze. The interrogation chambers were directly opposite to each other in a square of walls. There was a large open chamber in front of them, and they were both accessible through there. Nodding at Maiylene the two of them set off down the hall. The large chamber was empty, so Sauze and Maiylene set to work at the first interrogation chamber. It was locked but Sauze blasted the door open with his silenced sidearm. Inside, Nex was sat in a chair with his hands clamped to the table. When he saw them he lit up.

"You came! Listen, Luna's in the other room! If you cut off these clamps, I'd be glad to assist you in her rescue." Maiylene activated her laser and slashed through the clamps. Standing up, Nex took a deep breath and rolled his hands. Sauze picked through a bin by the end of the room and came up with a sizable rifle.

"Don't break it." He tossed the rifle to Nex and stepped out of the room. If what Nex said was true Luna was so close to him now. Racing down the hall he didn't both to shoot the lock, instead smashing the door in with his hands. Luna was indeed inside, clamped by her hands as well. She spotted him immediately tears formed in her eyes. Sauze dropped his helmet and raced over to her. Nex and Maiylene caught up and started cutting the clamps.

"I didn't think I'd ever see you again! Oh my god...Luna...." Maiylene freed her and Sauze grabbed her in his arms. They began kissing madly while Maiylene grabbed her a weapon.

"Sauze! Oh Sauze, I missed you so much!" She was crying into his shoulder and he was smiling so widely. Sauze felt so much better now, reunited with her. Nex, hesitant to break up their reunion, turned to Maiylene.

"They took our armor and weapons; I have no idea what happened to them. But I say we just get out now." Maiylene nodded as Luna and Sauze stepped apart. Passing Luna a rifle, Sauze sighed deeply. Now was the time to get out. If the situation was similar to when he and Maiylene had come in they wouldn't even need to fight their way out.

"Let's get out of here. You guys can have your touching moment once we're all safe." Maiylene hugged Luna quickly while Sauze nodded at Nex. The four stepped out into the hall and prepared to return to the large chamber. Nobody had their helmets up; it was better right now considering half the group was without armor. Sauze stepped forward into the chamber and stopped dead. There was a chair in the middle of the room. In that chair was a woman. And that woman was a woman he knew very well. Glancing over, he found both the exits blocked by a wall of soldiers each. The woman, still sitting in the chair smiled. Luna, Maiylene and Nex stepped up behind Sauze, each one glancing around.

"Hello Sauze. Did you miss me?"

Act 2

Part 2

Sauze held the others back with his hand. Best not to risk any shots when the room was so heavily guarded. It was obvious now why entering the compound had been so easy; Caliemán had known he was coming.

"Hello Jane. Fancy meeting you here." Jane Caliemán stepped out of the chair and gestured him over with her finger. Sidearm held tight in one hand, he stepped out from the hall and walked over. She looked into his eyes and brushed a strand of hair away from his face. He stepped away coldly. They didn't need this right now. He didn't need this right now.

"Sauze. It's been so long. How are you?" She held her hands together and Sauze realized she was unarmed. He knew the others would be waiting for him to make a move. Perhaps pull his gun on her and demand release. Or maybe even capture her and force the guards to drop their weapons. But Sauze knew he wouldn't be doing that. Right now, though, it would look like the best plan to the rest of the squad. As he and Jane stared at each other, Nex stepped out of the hall. The soldiers instantly aimed directly on him. Their laser sights nearly covered his face, sending a very clear message. He stepped back into the hall shivering.

"I've been well, Jane. Up until recently, of course." He smiled at her, but made no attempt to make it believable.

"Ah yes, until recently. I heard about what happened in Fringe space, Sauze. I'm deeply sorry for how certain members of GalaxyForce acted." Sauze didn't blink, standing in silence. Jane picked up on it and took his arm in her hand.

"I hoped you would know I would never authorize your death. Really, I don't think I could ever do that. Not after all those years." Jane smiled deeply, still holding his arm. Sauze was unsure how to proceed. She made it sound like the events that happened were not her doing. Did that mean she wasn't involved in Adams's plan?

"Jane...I had hoped you didn't. But after an unfortunate meeting with the Ceitevorate I kind of lost hope." He smiled after speaking, matching Caliemán. The others of the squad were likely perplexed. Here was the Galactic Enforcer; head of GalaxyForce! No doubt it would be hard to understand why Sauze hadn't done anything yet. She wasn't even wearing armor, simply standard GalaxyForce attire. Noting the Galactic Enforcer patch on her tunic, Sauze couldn't help but be somewhat happy. Back on Base 0803-09 they had talked about how exhilarating it would feel to wear one. But, as he had to remind himself, those days were long gone.

"Don't worry, Sauze. It's all been a misunderstanding. If we can just talk, it'll all be sorted out." Sauze's eyes widened. He had spent enough time with Jane Caliemán to know when she was sincere. This was one of those times. The others were skeptical; he could tell from the tiny clicks of boots shifting. But it didn't matter; this was amazing news. He almost felt like laughing, but maintained composure.

"What are you planning to do, then? How can we fix this?" Jane put both her hands on the chest of his armor and smiled. He felt so reassured now.

"Oh, I can have some talks." She turned her head to move the hair from in front of her eyes and leaned back from him. Sauze was about to ask how that would work when he glanced over at the soldiers. They were still prepared to fire.

"Now that we've got this all under control, maybe you could tell the soldiers to stand down?" Jane looked over at them and nodded. They lowered their weapons, some stepping into the room and some leaving down the hallway. Sauze was still a bit wary of the ones remaining, but was more focused on the news from Jane. Luna, Nex, and Maiylene stepped out into the room now while the soldiers dispersed. Nex gave one a dirty look while Luna rushed over to Sauze. Jane glanced at Luna and raised her eyebrows.

"So who are your friends here?" Sauze looked back at Luna, Nex, and Maiylene. They all looked very suspicious, especially Nex.

"Introductions will be in order later. For now, we should get to work on taking care of the corrupt GalaxyForce groups. You are aware of Ceitevorate Adams's involvement, right?" Jane looked at him confusedly for a second before taking in a deep breath. Nex was looking around the room now, searching for something. Jane took a step back from the four of them and began to speak.

"Sauze...when I said we could get this sorted out...I meant I could get Adams to stop trying to kill you. You and your friends would be guaranteed a position when it all goes down." Sauze backed up and felt his hand tighten around his sidearm. Jane was a part of this too. His first instinct was to run away, to just flee. But of course that couldn't happen. He simply couldn't believe someone he had loved so much was a part of this.

"You mean...you mean you're with Adams? You're supporting him?" Jane smiled and flipped a length of hair back.

"Well...yeah. I mean, sure. Some of the things that have happened are less than perfect. But you don't know this vision he has." Sauze looked at the rest of the squad. They were clutching their weapons tightly, fingers itching on the trigger. He didn't want them to kill Jane, but there was a fairly good reason why one might.

"Jane...what is his vision? What could have enticed you so much that you would let the slaughter of civilians go by unnoticed?" Jane looked away and Sauze thought he saw her wince. The soldiers that remained in the room began to get antsy, flipping their guns up and down.

"Well...I mean, there's going to be a big switch. And he said that when I happens I can rule too..." Sauze felt sick to his stomach. The room began to switch back to that rainy night on the tower. Jax screaming that Adams had promised they would rule together. Jax, stunned by the bullets, stumbling back towards the edge. Jax without his head falling off the tower. Looking at Jane, Sauze felt like he was going to break down into tears.

"Jane...Adams said Jax would rule as well." Sauze brought up his gun, holding it out. Jane Caliemann made no move to get away. They both knew he couldn't shoot her. Feeling tears begin to form, Sauze cast the gun to the ground. Turning to Luna he put his lips to her ear.

"Run." He kissed her on the forehead and turned back to face Caliemann. Pulling out the High Power Gun kept hidden, he began shooting around Jane. The soldiers flocked to him, smashing him down to the ground. He managed to gun down a few, drawing them all near. The hallway was open now, a perfect time for the others to run. Even though they could, nobody moved. Luna was firing at the soldiers to no avail, tears in her eyes. Nex was struggling against Maiylene's grip as she tried to pull them both out. Sauze heard him yelling something, but only caught a bit before the soldiers knocked him unconscious.

"Wait! Where's Sev? Isn't he with you?" Sauze, already on the verge of tears, let himself black out. The last thing he saw was Jane standing off to the side crying.

Blinking awake, Sauze was immediately surprised to find that he was still alive. He was tied to a chair without his armor, tunic or trousers, but he was alive. Looking around he realized he was in the Ceitevorate's chamber at the top of the tower. There was a camera set up by the wall, deactivated. Sauze tried to look behind himself to see if the glass was fixed, only to realize that he couldn't move. Nothing. That was why the cable was so weakly tied; he was sedated as well. Heavily sedated, as far as he could tell, due to the complete lack of movement. Blinking was the most that he could manage, after several minutes of testing.

"Here he is, all woken up. Marbs, turn the camera on." Adams passed by Sauze, followed by a short Tauradonian man who Sauze figured was Marbs. Adams walked over and stood next to the chair. As Marbs activated the camera, Adams put his hand on Sauze's shoulder. Sauze noticed out of the corner of his eye that Adams had a metallic looking handle on a table to the side. Marbs nodded and ran over out of Sauze's sight. Adams stepped away from the chair and in front of the camera.

"Greetings, G1. It is I, Ceitevorate Kalanth Adams. You may be wondering what is going on." Sauze realized that this was an official live broadcast. It was rumored that one of these could hijack all broadcasting programs, but Sauze hadn't believed it. Then again, considering how Adams addressed the audience as G1, it was a possibility.

"I am here to do three things. The first of those things is to tell you that the Zenians have been defeated. Yes, the long political battle is over." Sauze waited. This was not going to be good; Adams had the camera trained on Sauze.

"Your wonderful leader has made sure that the Zenians will not overthrow us or impose their evil regime upon you." Adams took a break to smile at the camera. Turning to Sauze, he looked down briefly before returning to the camera.

"Now...G1, we need to have a talk. This isn't working, how we've got it right now. Imagine if the Zenians had beat us out with their mass in the Fringes. That wouldn't have been good for any of us." He took a step closer and his smile vanished.

"That is why I am imposing Decree 4277-101. G1 will be changed slightly to better ward off this kind of thing." Sauze felt nervous. With what Jax and Caliemann had been saying he was worried this would go south.

"4277-101, or the Adams Decree, will allow one leader to control all of G1's territory more completely. The democratic system that has failed us time and time again will be gone, leaving room for a more prosperous empire. The military will control all G1 colonies and other planets will be colonized with force." Sauze noted that Adams didn't mention room for anyone else. Jane and Jax had been so cruelly tricked. But perhaps it wasn't cruel if they were so ready to go along with it.

"In short, the Adams Decree will allow the military to rule our colonies. And it shall allow me to control the military." Adams smiled and Sauze was repulsed. He had an devilish, evil smile.

"And G1, now that you've swallowed that pill, I have something to show to you." Adams stepped away from the camera to show Sauze strapped down. Grabbing the metallic handle off of the table, Adams stepped back.

"I want to make it very clear how important this is. We will not accept insubordination or rebellion. Adams clicked a switch on the handle and a steel blade slid out of a slit in the top. Heat emanated from it, apparently some kind of heating device. No doubt one touch would cause a burn. Sauze began panicking. These knives were used to slash through metals and make factory work more easy. But Adams seemed to have a thinner, small one. It was clearly spring loaded, too, based on how quickly the blade shot out of the handle.

"If anyone - **anyone** betrays us, they will be dealt with. They will be dealt with in a very extreme way, simply because we will not tolerate it. I'm sorry, I meant...**I will not tolerate it.** His voice was icy now, and he turned to Sauze with the blade in hand. Resting his elbow on Sauze's forearm he placed the blade just above Sauze's forehead. Carefully and precisely, he began cutting Sauze above his right eye. He then dragged the blade down. It started above his right and slashed all the way down to his chin. For added effect, below the eye Adams shook his hand slightly. Stepping away, Adams turned off the knife and dropped it to the floor. Sauze was in a world of pain. He couldn't see over the eye the blade had passed through, blinking too late and catching the heated blade right on his eye. As it was searing hot, the knife had cauterised the wound as it went, leaving a hideous disfigurement instantly. Sauze started to cry but tears only fell from his left eye. Adams faced the camera again, completely serious.

"Thank you, G1, for listening." He kicked the camera off its stand, dropping it to the floor. Sauze noticed that it was still broadcasting, effectively knocking out any other broadcasts anywhere for good. Marbs went to pick it up and Adams shot him in the stomach. Sauze tried not to watch but was in so much trauma that he could only stare. Lifting him up, Adams shoved Marbs out of Sauze's view. There was a scream that trailed off, leaving Sauze to understand that the windows had not yet been fixed. As Adams walked over towards Sauze, Sauze felt more pain than he had ever experienced in his life. Not just physical pain but complete emotional ravaging as well.

"Did you get all of that, Sauze? I just want to make sure you understand the implications." Sauze couldn't respond, of course, and could only let Adams continue.

"Some people declare that they have taken over the world. I considered that. But do you know what? I thought to myself; why take over the world when only a galaxy could serve you?" He smiled as if thinking back on a fond memory.

"And I did it. I've taken over the galaxy. I admire your effort to stop me; every good villain needs a hero. Except that this hero is going to rot in a pit underground where light will never touch his disfigured face again." Adams had clearly gone mad. He was raving now and Sauze could see his hands shaking. Power could do bad things. It could tear people apart and hurt many. But this...this was power at its most dangerous.

"Thank you for your time, Sauze. I'll have someone take you out. I hope you'll like your new living quarters." Stepping away, Adams left Sauze's field of vision. A minute or so later someone appeared with a syringe. Almost the second they injected him with it darkness swallowed him up again. It was such a relief this time.

"Hello." Sauze woke up and instantly backed away from the voice. He was lying down somewhere. It was dark; too dark. He went to activate his helmet light only to remember he didn't have his armor anymore. It was a strange feeling.

"It's ok. If you're in here too that means we're in the same situation." As Sauze's eyes adjusted to the level of light he realized he was in a deep pit of some sort. The walls and floor were a cold grey metal, and he couldn't see up to the roof. There was a slot in the wall a few metres up. Sitting by one wall was a malnourished man with long hair and a scruffy golden beard. Sauze would have responded but was busy identifying a strange feeling deep inside of him. It wasn't sadness, it was more like acceptance. He didn't know why, but it made him feel very uneasy.

"You can hear me, right? Hello?" At this point, Sauze decided to respond to the man. It wasn't like he had anywhere to go.

"Hello." There was silence for a few seconds. Sauze hated the darkness down here; he could barely even see the other person. Inching closer, he strained his eyes to get a better look.

"So...why did they throw you down here?" Sauze looked over the man. He had an air of sadness about him that Sauze hadn't seen before.

"Well...perhaps introductions are in order. I'm Sauze Kath." Sauze put his hand out but the man didn't shake it, merely nodding.

"I'll bet you know me. From what I've heard, you should know me well." Sauze wore a puzzled look. What could he have meant by that? The man smiled and Sauze saw missing teeth.

"The name's Zen Callistar. Does that make you want to kill me? I would not be surprised." He didn't seem at all worried by the admission. Sauze gaped, trying to match the man in front of him with images G1 provided. Sitting down in this dark hole, though, he came to a sudden realization; G1 never had provided any pictures! How clear it was now, the lying of G1 and GalaxyForce. Still, the mention of Zen Callistar's name made him cringe. A long time ago he would have been confused. Now he simply accepted it.

"You were captured? When?" Thinking back now, Sauze remembered that when he and the rest of the squad had been taken by a group of Zenians, they had mentioned something about Zen being held captive. His eyes widened as he remembered this.

"I was captured a long time ago. I tried keeping track of the days, but....I don't know. Lost count." Sauze looked around the room cautiously. The slot on the wall was the only feature he could really make out. Noticing him staring up at it, Zen nodded.

"That's where they drop the food and water. I had the idea of starving myself at first, but I decided I would wait and see. And it worked out!" Zen smiled almost wildly. Sauze realized he likely hadn't seen a person in quite some time.

"Worked out? In what way has it worked out?" Sauze stood to his feet and took a clear look around the room. Squinting, he still couldn't make out the roof.

"Don't you see? You're here now!" Zen stood as well, stumbling slightly. Sauze took a look at his legs and saw that they were not those of a malnourished man. He must search for a way out every day.

"What does my being here have to do with it? Now we're both trapped." Zen smiled, approaching him in the darkness. Sauze suddenly heard something thunderous above and felt the ground shake.

"If they've had to put someone else in here..." he paused as the pit rocked again. "They've gone too far." Before Sauze could respond there was a massive explosion. The top of the pit was ripped away and Sauze could see up. Recognizing the familiar Cybin skyline, he smiled. Zen yelped and covered his eyes. For him, being without light for quite some time, there could be some serious effects. A person

suddenly raced up to the edge of the hole created by an explosion. They wore a scarf over their mouth and carried a grenade of some sort.

"What the hell?" Before any help could be given, though, the person was gunned down. Several GalaxyForce soldiers passed around the hole, firing out at some unseen foe. Putting two and two together, Sauze realized who they were firing at. Suddenly, he heard a voice calling out. A familiar blonde woman reached the edge of the pit and tossed down a rope.

"You're alive! She said you'd be here!" Sauze smiled widely and grabbed a hold of the rope. Climbing out, he looked back down at Zen Callistar. He still covered his eyes, shaking trying to find any type of shade. Luna looked down and pointed.

"What about him?" Sauze looked down, brushing dust off. Shaking his head, he took Luna's arm. They ran out into the street, only to have to skid to a stop and avoid a projectile. Looking around, Sauze couldn't believe what he was seeing. Cybin had become a warzone. GalaxyForce squads raced around opening fire on civilians and tossing grenades into buildings. Two large robots lurched at the end of the street; more technology kept hidden from the rest of GalaxyForce. Luna pointed him in the direction of an alley and they both ran for it. While she had her tunic and trousers on, he was in only underwear and an undershirt. Not prime for running through a battlezone, and inevitably a piece of shrapnel hit him across the chest.

"Sauze? Sauze!" He stopped running and fell over, picking the sharp metal out. She faced him and blinked widely. Sauze knew that the disfigurements Adams had inflicted would be bad, very bad. She likely would have seen them in the broadcast but here were the scars in real life. Two soldiers entered the alley and she gunned them down instantly, still focused on Sauze.

"We'll get you to Maiylene soon. I promise. For now we have to find some way out of here." Sauze stood again, looking around. Above them a missile dropped from the sky to a few streets away, shaking the ground. Sauze stumbled slightly and stepped out the other end of the alley. There were two people wearing scarves clutching guns on one end. Luna arrived beside him, holding her gun. Behind them, a group of soldiers spotted the alleyway and began to walk down. At the other end, the two people in scarves were blown into pieces by a grenade. They were trapped. Trapped, that is, until Sauze looked down. They were standing on a grate.

"Down!" He and Luna stepped apart. Tearing the grate off, he helped Luna into it. Climbing in himself, he grabbed Luna's gun and took a few shots from between the bars. Satisfied that the soldiers would not pursue them, Sauze and Luna ducked into the tunnel. The sewer system of Cybin was a difficult thing to navigate, with tunnels ending abruptly and sections that drop off into the undercity. A steady flow of water passed by their ankles, but it stopped a few turns later. Sitting down, Sauze looked over at Luna. Her hair was messy on one side and she had a bit of blood on her face. He had never been so happy to see her.

"Luna...so many people I believed in have betrayed me. Time and time again during this ordeal I have gotten my hope up only for it to be shattered again. And now I've been permanently marked of this. But I don't feel sad." Luna sat down next to him and put her arm around him. He had many questions as to the locations of the others and what was going on aboveground, but he needed this answered.

"After it became clear that nobody was going to help us, I really lost hope. I was distraught. But I woke up with this scar on my face and didn't feel as sad. And I'm scared that I'm losing my humanity."

Sauze had a pained expression, staring off not at anything in particular. Luna looked at him slowly, waiting until the noise of explosions above would die down for a minute.

"Maybe..." She began uncertainly "Maybe it's because you don't have to hope anymore. Maybe now that there aren't any other options, you can't be sad at the possibility...at the possibility of losing them. Because it's just us now. You've tried telling people and it hasn't worked. So you need to take action. We need to take action." Putting emphasis on the 'we', Luna finished. Sauze looked over at her startled. She had gotten it exactly. They both stared at each other for a few seconds before he leaned in and kissed her. The ground rocked again above them and they broke apart.

"Thank you." He nodded at her, smiling. They stood up and stepped out of the sewer pipe, looking for a main tunnel. Luna knew where they needed to go, evidently, so he followed her. Along the way, they caught up.

"Where are the others? They're alive, right?" He didn't want to go through losing another squad member. Although Sev might almost be lucky at this point; he didn't need to live through this. He had died knowing justice would be served, a good death if Sauze could think of one. Still, he would give so much for Sev to be standing here again.

"We raced out of Caliemans's base and tried to head back to Maiylene's apartment. It was when we got there that the broadcast began...I couldn't watch it. Nex went for a walk to lose some steam, and ended up walking right into the military advancement." As she paused for breath Sauze felt his hands sweat. Nex couldn't be dead. Seeing his worried look, she shook her head.

"No, he lead them away and doubled back, so we decided to go look for you. Nex and Maiylene were searching one area, but I got a tip you might be by the tower. Flash forward a bit, and there you are." Sauze nodded, breathing a sigh of relief. That meant they would be heading back to the apartment to meet back up with the others.

"Oh...Maiylene told me about Sev. She said you had to tell her to leave him; that must have been incredibly tough for you. I'm sorry." He sighed sorrowfully, thinking back on the memory; screaming into the comm that she had to leave him while hating himself for saying it.

"Thank you. By the way, how did you end up at Caliemans's base?" Luna looked through a grate as they passed before they continued.

"It was interesting. Nex and I got to Adams's tower. So we head up the lift at the bottom and rush in. We're both rambling, telling him all sorts of things. He acted all interested, and called a bunch of officers up to 'consult'. We were both pretty suspicious, but they overpowered us pretty quick. Then they just took us to Caliemans's base and locked us up for a bit." She nodded, finishing the tale. Sauze raised his eyebrows.

"Better than I had it. By the way, I have to ask you something." Luna turned them around another corner and peaked through a grate. Shaking her head, she looked back at him while pushing loose strands of hair behind her ear.

"Sure thing." They started walking again while Sauze tried to word it. He could tell from the distance to the explosions that they would be nearing the apartment soon.

"How did you deal with the betrayal of GalaxyForce? For me, it was especially hard. GalaxyForce was almost everything of my life. But I know my attachment was unusual; my reaction would be different. So thinking back, after you were caught by Adams. How did it feel?" Luna stopped walking, thinking for a second.

"I joined GalaxyForce at a fairly young age. I haven't really told anyone why I joined, but it will help with my explanation." Sauze nodded and they both sat down in the tunnel across from one another.

"Before I joined up, I was living on Cybin." Sauze nodded, slowly feeling the ridges of his face where the knife had cut him. Her family was likely well off, if she was on Cybin. During the human expansion into space, most settled out in the Midi Rim. That was during his father's time, back when signing up with the galactic military was the best way to survive. It provided food, money and shelter. For many humans without planets it was perfect. Few humans actually made it to Cybin right after the expansion.

"I was a baby at the time. My family arrived on Cybin...and left me off at the closest orphanage." She smiled coldly as the words left her mouth. Sauze winced slightly. That was an unfortunately common occurrence, and something Sauze couldn't stand. As someone who believed much in honor that made him sick.

"I lived in and out of the orphanage. Most of the times I'd find myself on the streets. I stayed out of the Undercity as best I could, but one time I went too far down looking for some food." She shrugged.

"A group of people decided they were going to pick on me for some fun. I was getting pretty scared, so I lashed out. Actually ended up taking them all down with my bare hands." Sauze smiled at her. Nobody could say either of them wasn't tough.

"I headed back out and spotted someone putting up a GalaxyForce poster. So I applied. It was kind of like GalaxyForce saved me." Sauze waited for her to continue.

"Now, knowing that GalaxyForce betrayed me...at first I was shocked. GalaxyForce had been a saviour. But now I realize that this is not what I joined into. Fuck, Adams wasn't even Ceitevorate when I joined up. It's changed, and it's changed for the worse. But we've gotten out, and that's what is most important." Sauze grinned and helped her up. They continued to walk for a bit, mostly describing in detail what they did during the time between Luna and Nex leaving and Luna rescuing Sauze. When they reached another grate, Luna opened it a sliver. Happily, she pushed it all the way and helped Sauze through. He pulled her up and they looked around.

"The apartment is just down this street. But be careful, there are soldiers in these parts too. They went for the more populated areas first, but some will be out here." He and Luna crouched down and began walking past a building. Sauze began to recognize the area that he and Maiylene had flown over when leaving her apartment. They were fairly close. Just then, they heard the noise of GalaxyForce soldiers. Not marching orderly, but kicking down doors and firing shots into the air. They likely wouldn't be taking prisoners, just generally causing a scare.

"Why are they doing all this? I thought Adams said it was just going to be control?" Luna gestured back the way they had come.

"A bunch of people fought back, so they decided to just go around all over the place flipping their shit. We've got to be real quiet, considering you're practically naked and I'm low on ammo." Sauze nodded and they crept back behind a building. The violence went on for a short while as they approached the apartment, until most of the places had been ransacked. The soldiers were now keen on setting as many fires as they could, evidently. Sauze and Luna were just about in the clear, until one soldier spotted them. Grinning, he pulled up his rifle and started jogging over. Luna aimed at him, only to have the gun shot right of her hands. The soldier hadn't told any of his team mates that he had seen

them; Sauze's mind instantly began working. Ducking behind a overturned palate, he waited until the soldier was closer. Earlier, he had found some wire on the ground. He had picked it up, not really with any use in mind. Now he had the perfect plan. As the soldier passed the palate looking for Luna, Sauze ducked out and caught the man's neck with the wire. Standing behind him, he yanked and smashed the man against the wall. Luna stepped out from behind the other wall smiling.

"Nice work. Now before anyone else sees him, we've got to get to the apartment. They probably won't have hit it; it's basically abandoned at this point." Sauze nodded and they began running through the streets. The GalaxyForce soldiers had just moved on without notice, so they had a good chance. Once they arrived outside the apartment Sauze stopped to catch his breath. Luna ran over and knocked twice on the door. Maiylene's face appeared in the window before the door opened; a safety measure. Sauze caught up with her and they stepped inside. Maiylene was waiting for him smiling. Luna passed him a gun while a pair of trousers was procured from a drawer.

"You're lucky that Nex had an extra pair in his safe house." Sauze looked around and found no trace of Nex, in fact. Maiylene closed the shutters and grabbed her own gun off the table. Taking a look over at him she immediately dropped it.

"Sauze! Ok, I can try to do something...but it's already cauterized. I don't know..." She winced at the sight of his scar. Odd how the doctor had more trouble with it than Luna.

"No time. Where's Nex?" Maiylene passed him a short range communicator to clip into his ear before answering.

"He said he needed to check up on some people. He also said he could get us some better tech. You should have seen the little safe house we went to!" Luna pressed her hand against his chest. He looked down at the grey undershirt. It was not much, and it would not stop a bullet by any means.

"We don't have your tunic, or any armor. I'm afraid you're going to have to wear this for now." He nodded, examining the gun Luna had given him. It was a fairly simply gun; no high-power rifle.

"What happened to those guns you got at Caliemans?" Sauze looked around, not spotting them.

"One was already broken when we took it and Nex has the other. He'll be back with something better---wait." Luna touched her earpiece.

"It's Nex. He says that downtown Cybin's been completely wasted. He's found something underground, though, and needs us to get there." Sauze stroked his chin, standing by the door. His finger caught on the jagged lines of the scar and he dropped his hand suddenly.

"Hold on. GalaxyForce can't have taken over everywhere yet, right? Well, what if we just go rally the planetary militias? You know, of the Inner Rim. We could attack Cybin and take it back." Luna smiled and nodded.

"I can't believe you're right back on it. That is just admirable." He grinned at her and began thinking about this plan. Being back with the others, even if they weren't right there, was such a good feeling.

"If we gather up the planetary militias from the Inner Rim, we can fend off GalaxyForce and strike back here. We'll have to leave right now, though, which might be a problem." Maiylene pointed at the earpiece.

"But what about Nex? He says whatever he's found is important." Luna bit her lip, looking over at Sauze. Sauze didn't want to be separated from her ever again, but somebody had to investigate what Nex found.

"Maiylene, would it be possible for you to go find Nex while Luna and I put my plan into action?" Maiylene nodded worriedly.

"One thing though; the communicators won't work once you're off planet. They're using Cybin frequencies. Contact will be cut off again." This was not a decision he made easily. He didn't like not being able to keep in touch with the others, but the planetary militia idea was the best one they had right now.

"It's regrettable, but we've gotten through worse. Now go meet up with Nex before GalaxyForce does." Maiylene nodded and checked herself over for tools. Her armor was still on, but the power was out. She had actually removed everything except the plates on the calf and the plates on the forearms, allowing for greater mobility. Without power, wearing the entire suit was fairly pointless. The helmet had been detached, and she held it in her hand.

"See you in a bit, guys." She stepped out the door and slipped the helmet on. Pulling up her pistol, she raced off into the streets following Nex's directions. Turning to Luna, he pointed outside.

"We need to find a ship, and fast. If we want to make it to the Inner Rim before an Upperspace Barrier is set up, the ship needs to be fast. Now where do you think we can find a fast ship within the next hour?" Luna threw her hands up, stepping towards the door.

"I don't know, but it's going to have to be close by. We don't have armor through - especially you. That means this can't be a 'guns blazing' operation. We're going to need to sneak through the streets." Sauze nodded, loading the gun he had been given. Such a tactic was not really his style but it was manageable. Luna pushed the door open and stepped out cautiously. Sauze removed the earpiece he had been given and slipped it into his pocket as he walked out.

"There's a few side passages just this way. If we go through here, we'll come out around the borders of the Industrial District. The factories have probably shut down right now; we're bound to find something in there." They headed between two buildings, keeping close to the wall. GalaxyForce soldiers might be going through this area right now and they needed to be ready for a fight. Turning, they raced on ahead towards the next alley. It was thrilling, in a way, being off on this adventure. He glanced over at Luna and grinned. Suddenly, they heard voices. Ducking behind a trash bin, Sauze and Luna listened.

"So, you two head up this side. You two take that side. Just toss your smokers through the window and fire a few shots. Once you're finished the street report back." Sauze quietly took a breath and began inching back along the alleyway. They were out of sight, but the soldiers might decide to investigate through here next. As they crept, the explosions of smoke grenades began to sound and a few shots fired off. An old tactic of blinding and scaring, and one not particularly impressive.

"If we here them coming, get your gun ready. We aren't exactly in a perfect position to fight, which means we need to strike first." Sauze pulled his gun up as they got back. It seemed, however, that the GalaxyForce soldiers were preoccupied with another street and the two of them made it into the final alleyway. At the end of this one they could sneak into the industrial district. Creeping ahead, both Luna and Sauze stopped dead at the sound of soldiers running. Past them, a large group of GalaxyForce armored soldiers opened fire. They hadn't seen Luna or Sauze, instead shooting down another street.

But now the alleyway was blocked. Sauze smiled and crept behind one. Luna took cover behind a piece of wreckage and pulled out her gun. Sauze, grabbing one soldier, snapped his neck. Before he could do anything else, though, a knife stuck into the body. Looking ahead, Sauze saw a group of rioters attacking. He was surprised to see that these people had actually organized themselves into a fighting force.

"Luna! Move on in!" Luna, from behind her cover, took out one of the soldiers. Jumping over, she yanked the knife from the corpse. One of the rioters was shot in the head, and the body dropped over. Sauze tripped on the corpse as he began to run, and went down. One of the soldiers turned around at the sound of his grunt, raising a gun. Before he could fire, though, Luna shot out with the knife. It cleaved through the soldier's armored jacket and caught him on the throat. He stumbled back and stepped into a jagged bottle. Helping Sauze up, Luna passed him the knife. The rioters would hold off the soldiers for a while, at least enough for them to escape.

"I see an open door over there in to a factory. Let's get in before we're spotted!" Luna pointed at a building and they ran towards it. Just as they reached the door a ship flew overhead. It landed on the roof of the factory across the street and several heavily armed soldiers stepped out. Sauze realized that GalaxyForce must be looking for someone in this sector. It took him a second to figure out who that might be.

"Get in, they've got commandos on us." He and Luna dashed in to the factory and began looking around for any sort of ship. The factory floor was empty, but a mess of debris on the stairs looked promising.

"Commandos? Why the fuck are they sending them out here?" Luna jumped on to the stairs and tried to spot them. Sauze climbed the stairs, glancing around the top floor. Commandos were rarely spotted, as thankfully they were rarely necessary. A Commando was typically sent in to a warzone, or a situation where brute force would work best. Unlike Elites, who were assigned to situations where surgical precision was necessary or where the mission was high priority, Commandos were used as a hammer. A group of them was dropped in and essentially let loose without rules. Often enough the objective was simply chaos. This time, though, it appeared to be more specific.

"We're screwed if they reach us. Keep in mind these...things...are trained to break skulls. Not to pick off a target at 50 metres." He pulled Luna up into the top floor. There were a few assorted engines but no fully built ships. That was unfortunate; Sauze had been hoping the first factory they would look in would be a ship manufacturer.

"We can't head back down at this point. I say we use the windows and head over one building. Luna shattered the window with a kick and looked out. The Commandos were probably attacking the residential district Sauze and Luna had just come out of now, so there was a little time. But Sauze had no idea if there was enough.

"Let's do it, then." Luna stepped out onto the sill of the window and leapt across. As Sauze waited for her to climb through the other window he traced his scar idly. It was still hard to think that he no longer looked the same at all; Sauze was unable to represent how he appeared in his mind anymore. Seeing that Luna had made it in, he jumped over the street after her. Inside, they stood atop a catwalk that wound its way around a massive factory floor. Hanging in the ceiling was a speeder, directly next to a platform. Not something they could use to leave the planet, but something they could fly.

"Can you fly?" He directed Luna to the controls, crouching in the back. The Commandos would try to follow them, and he might be able to slow them down. Luna sat down at the controls and cracked her knuckles. A good portion of the wall had been blown out, and she positioned the speeder towards it.

"It's been a while since I flew an actual speeder...more used to your typical GalaxyForce fighter. I've got it, though." She engaged the ship's ignition and lifted away from the platform. The clamps detached automatically and all of a sudden they were flying out of the building quickly. It was a little unexpected, but Sauze maintained his balance. What was more unexpected was the group of commandos on the roof preparing to fire. There were different variants of Commandos that you might come across, but none of these were official. It was simply their choice of weapons. Sauze was dismayed to see that this group was split between heavy weaponry and rocket launchers. The miniguns began whirring and Luna yanked the ship aside.

"Fly!" Sauze aimed at the soldiers but his bullets simply bounced off of their armor. As the speeder turned to get out of the street and past the factory, the Commandos took aim again. This time, though, one of the rocket artillery guys jumped off and landed between Sauze and Luna. Another tried, but missed and ended up denting the ground. Commando armor was bulky and heavy. That said, it was no surprise when the speeder began to sag. Sauze, realizing the severity of the situation, tackled the Commando head on. Sauze was a very muscled, powerful man. But the Commando did not budge against the tackle. That was never the plan, anyway. Sauze wanted him distracted from Luna.

"Hold on, Sauze!" Sauze, with one hand, gripped a metal bar. Luna dipped the speeder, sending it to its side slightly. The Commando, in his weighty armor, tumbled off towards the ground. Free of the heavy soldier, Luna brought the speeder up. They weren't headed in any precise direction, simply going to the areas likely not as badly hit. That would be where they might find a ship. As they went along through the air, though, the damage did not lessen up. It looked like GalaxyForce had been unfortunately thorough.

"What the hell? Did they just carpet bomb the whole fucking planet?" Sauze pointed out across the expanse of war-torn land. Just then, they heard ships firing. Looking ahead, Sauze saw two ships flying in circles. One was a GalaxyForce Striker, a type of ship most often used to attack space stations and bases. The other was a junker, appearing to have been held together with tape. They were exchanging shots, the Striker overpowering the junker fairly quickly. Sauze knew well that this ship, however bad it looked, might be their ticket out. And he didn't want to let GalaxyForce ruin that too.

"Take us over the Striker, but be slow!" Luna nodded, and spun the ship around. Facing the Striker, she moved over and up. As they passed over the Striker, Sauze pulled up the knife he had retrieved from the dead GalaxyForce soldier and dropped over the side of the speeder. Landing on the cockpit's viewport, he immediately regretted the decision. The viewport was slippery and not that much of a surface, so he ended up sliding down the front on his knees. Grabbing on with his hand to halt a massive fall, he brought up the knife and drove it into the glass.

The pilot, through the viewport, began panicking and swerved the ship around. Holding fire on the other ship, this let them get to a safe distance. Sauze brought the knife down again and succeeded in cracking the glass. The pressure change would have killed a normal pilot, but GalaxyForce pilots were outfitted in suits to protect themselves. With this one crack, though, the structural integrity of the glass was compromised. The pilot was really worried now, as the inside of a Striker was literally the cockpit.

There was a chair and nothing more. And so when Sauze actually broke through there was nowhere to run.

"Bye!" Sauze hoisted the pilot up and yanked him from the chair. He slipped over Sauze's shoulder and spiraled out of view. Sauze jumped in to the Striker and flew it over to the junker. It would have been nice to take this ship, but it simply wouldn't be a good idea. The planetary militias wouldn't react well to more GalaxyForce, and it only could fit one person. Opening the cockpit, he set it to autopilot and motioned Luna over. She grinned and brought the speeder to his feet. He stepped out and waved at the pilot of the Junker. There were several people staring out the viewport in awe and a few waved back.

"I'll bring us around to the door. Let's hope they'll be a little thankful." Pulling the speeder up to the door, Luna halted it in the air. The door swung open and Sauze saw an airlock's mechanisms begin working. He stood aside to let Luna step in before following her. The speeder was still floating in the air when the door closed, unlike the Striker. It had crashed shortly after Luna had picked him off of it. Turning to look at her, he smiled. The airlock's second door opened immediately, as there was no vacuum to fill. He and Luna stepped in to be greeted with thanks and happiness. There was a large group of people inside, all roughed up and tired.

"Thanks very much! We were doomed for sure. Do y'all need a ride off-planet?" The pilot shook Sauze's hand, keeping one eye on the console. Sauze took a look around at the other people as the airlock shut behind him.

"We would much appreciate that. Does this thing fly?" The man smiled. He was a Tauradonian, one of a motley green color.

"I can assure you that it flies. We'll take a while to get anywhere, but at least we'll be away from here." Sauze nodded at him, and turned to look at Luna. She took his hand in hers. Sauze took a deep breath, searching for a place to sit.

"Thank you. Does this ship have a place to sleep?" The Pilot tipped his brown hat and returned to the console. Someone else directed them through a few halls to an empty room. Sauze hadn't realized just how big the ship was from outside, but there were several rooms. He and Luna laid down in the bed, just as the ship jumped to Upperspace.

Nex peered down the hole with a look of fascination on his face. It was tough to see how far it went, but tossing a torch down earlier had illuminated a metallic passageway at the bottom. That had been interesting enough before the torch had gone out. Not just had it gone out; it was deactivated. Someone had spotted it and deactivated it with the intent of keeping the passage dark. And now Nex could hardly resist the temptation to delve right in. But he couldn't, as he had to wait for Maiylene. She had told him of Sauze's survival and that he and Luna were headed off-planet to look for planetary militias. It was a good idea, but Nex didn't feel all that good at the prospect of splitting up the group again.

"Hello? Please, help me!" Nex turned at the sound. It was surprising that someone was still alive in this area. It had been hit first and badly, most people either dead or gone. So when he turned, he was even more surprised to see the man relatively unharmed. There was a large gash across his arm, but he was doing much better than most of the bodies around. Taking a look, Nex noticed the man was severely malnourished. His ribs were visible and his face was hollow.

"Hey man, wait a minute. Why aren't you dead? This area was fucking blasted less than an hour ago." Behind his back, Nex slowly wrapped his hand around his gun. It wasn't like the man could overpower him easily, but people would do crazy things when they were hungry. Nex remembered such things from years ago when he was robbing to keep food on his plate. The man smiled, showing miserable teeth.

"I just got here. Well, I just got out of the ground. Mind explaining what's going on?" Nex was suspicious on many accounts. Maiylene still hadn't arrived, so it was literally the two of them alone in a large section of the city.

"What do you mean you just got out the ground? Were you stuck in a hole or something?" The man laughed sharply before going into a coughing fit.

"You could say that. My name is Zen Callistar, by the way." Nex whistled and took a step closer. What the Zenians had said so long ago was true; Zen Callistar was indeed alive. Now, Nex had no reason to like Zen Callistar. Hell, the Zenians had destroyed Nex's home and killed everyone he knew. But he had to concentrate on two facts. One being that those Zenians were not under Zen's order, and the other being that survival was most important right now. The enemy of your enemy is your friend, as the saying went.

"Well, Mr. Callistar. You're certainly lucky, aren't you?" Zen smiled again, this time more cheerily. Nex couldn't believe the man wasn't dead. From what Zen had said about being in a hole, Nex figured he and Sauze had been in the same prison. Zen would have been there much longer, though. Amazing he hadn't simply given up.

"Do you mind if I tag along with you? I'm unarmed and defenseless; the next GalaxyForce soldier I come across will use me for target practice." Nex looked back down at the hole. It was looking less inviting now, the shadows almost crawling up the sides. There wasn't much point to investigating it anyway. If Zen joined up with he and Maiylene they could help Sauze and Luna convince the planetary militias to fight.

"Sure thing. We just need to wait for my squad mate to get here." It was a little presumptuous saying Squad mate, but Nex figured that at this point he was basically part of the squad. Once Maiylene got here, she could patch up Zen and they could set out. Or so he thought. Both he and Zen turned at the sound of a yell and saw Maiylene dash out into the street. She skidded to a stop and turned. Behind her rolled out two bulky vehicles with large blockades fastened on either side. Soldiers were standing on either one, firing at her.

"Oh shit, look out!" Nex tried to pull Zen into an alley, but tripped. Maiylene was nearing them now, but the vehicles were gaining. When Nex hit the ground, he looked over and saw the hole he had discovered. It was less than perfect, but it was a shot. Maiylene stumbled and dropped to her knees. It was seconds now until one of the vehicles crushed her. Leaving Zen off to the side of the road, Nex dashed over. He wrapped Maiylene in his arms and jumped aside. The vehicle missed them by centimetres, rolling to a stop when the driver noticed. The second one, stuck behind it, began to fire aimlessly at the buildings around. Massive chunks broke off and began falling to the ground. Nex landed hard on the ground, holding Maiylene on top of him. She opened her crunched eyes and stared at him. For a second, they stared at each other.

"Friends, look out!" Zen stumbled over, his ability to walk remarkably good for someone who had spent several months in a small pit. One of the vehicles began turning, and caught him on the hip.

He rolled back and slipped into the hole. Hanging on with one hand, he called out for Nex. Nex smiled clumsily and helped Maiylene off of him. They both stood up, only to crouch back down dodging fire. Nex pulled up a hand grenade, the only one the group had. It would have to work. Climbing up onto the side of the vehicle, he pulled the pin and lodged the grenade into the attached barricade. Dropping back down, he and Maiylene raced away. They were standing a short distance away from the pit now, towards Zen to help him up. Nex shielded Maiylene with his arm, waiting for the explosion. At first he didn't think it came. But then his feet were moving through the air and he wasn't walking.

"Wha--" Zen's voice was drowned out as sound suddenly returned to Nex's ears. The hand-grenade had actually been much more than a standard model, something he really should have checked. The force was still pushing, and Nex could feel blood flying from his ear. Something hit him in the back of the head and he lurched forward, spitting out a tooth. Suddenly, he was not above ground anymore. He was tumbling into the hole, arms flailing. Turning in what felt like slow-motion, Nex looked up and saw Maiylene falling as well. Zen was without grip on the edge, sliding along the wall.

As he was looking up, he saw the wreckage of the vehicle roll on top of the pit before all light was blocked out. Bracing himself, Nex prepared to hit the ground and die. It turns out that he was lucky, though, as the fall was shorter than anticipated. Enough to hurt, but not to kill. Zen had picked up some friction against the wall and touched down more gently, from the sound of it. As Nex's eyes strained for light, he reached out to try and catch Maiylene. Suddenly, he felt a force collide first with his arms and then with his solar plexus. Maiylene had landed on top of him, and was now coughing. He took her hand and helped her to her feet.

"Are you alr--" He was cut off as Maiylene embraced him, their lips touching. They stood against the wall for a few seconds before breaking apart. He saw her smile deeply before she left his field of vision. The darkness was powerful, and he was barely able to see anything. So when Zen put his hand on Nex's shoulder, he whipped around preparing to attack.

"Where are we?" Nex was still a little shaken up from both the explosion and his kiss with Maiylene, but took a deep breath and tried to address him.

"I don't know. I guess there's something down here, and one of the bombs opened it up." Nex wasn't completely focused on the task at hand, but he tried his best. The most obvious option would be to start walking until they reached somewhere with light. That said, they had no idea what they were walking into.

"We can walk straight on. Uh...each of you grab one of my hands. I'll lead us in one direction." There was grappling of hands for a few seconds before Maiylene and Zen found his hands. He took a step forward, feeling with his foot if it was a wall or not. It was not, and so he began walking. As the group walked in nervous silence, Nex thought about Maiylene. Had saving her twice led her to that? Maybe it was just the shock. Sadly, he decided it probably was. Just as he was about to resign himself from the hope, she squeezed his hand gently. He had no time to consider the implications, though, as the group heard the crack of boots not their own.

"Ah, shit. This can't be good." He whispered, crouching down. The others followed upon the pull on their hands. Nex let go of them for a second to ready his hands. If there was a bunch of GalaxyForce soldiers down here he didn't want to die that easily. As the noise got closer, Nex saw a light in the distance. It came from around a bend in the hall, but was approaching rapidly. The second the light fell on them they would be discovered.

"Quick, get as close to the walls as you can and stay quiet." He heard quick shuffling before quiet. If there was a single beam it would pass them. Which would be ideal, especially if the torch was held by a GalaxyForce soldier. As the light came around the bend, Nex flattened against the wall and held his breath. To his relief, it was a single beam. But the people it illuminated were strange. There was a single GalaxyForce soldier standing behind the man with the torch. The group was of five people, four of them in strange grey jackets. He couldn't make out much, but he could tell they were too well dressed to have been living down here, and not dressed as any type of soldier. The only logical decision to make would be to follow them, then.

"I've said it before and I'll say it again. We need some lights out in these tunnels! What harm could it do?" One of the people in the grey jackets stopped inches away from Nex to speak. The man with the torch kept it trained on the rest of the hall, but turned his head.

"Like the Emperor said, it's to prevent escapes. We've got the exit in the middle, right? What if a bunch of *them* just strolled through a big illuminated hall and out the door?!" The person in front of Nex shifted and their knee almost hit his face.

"We have armed guards! Would it be that easy?" The other man snorted, lowering the torch. Nex was concentrating on it as if he could hold it there with his mind.

"Yes, several armed guards. Against several thousand. How well would that work, do you think?" The soldier of the group stood impatiently, no doubt anxious to get back to wherever they were describing.

"But it's a maze out here! They couldn't identify the signs!" The soldier, now ready for the conversation to end, prodded the man holding the torch with the barrel of his gun. The man sneered at the soldier and the group moved on. The time to act was now. Nex rose up quickly and cupped his hand around the mouth of the last person of the group. He smashed their head into the wall and dropped the body to the ground. Maiylene and Zen did the same, leaving only the soldier and the man with the torch.

"Zen, grab the torch. Maiylene and I'll take out the soldier." He raced at the soldier, hearing the light taps of Maiylene's feet beside him. The light suddenly swung along the corridor before turning onto the eyes of the man who carried it. Nex grabbed the soldier by his neck and swept his leg along. Maiylene delivered a kick as he went down, taking him out.

"Stop! Don't hurt me!" The man whose torch had been stolen cowered in its glow. Zen shook the torch once before sweeping it around the corridor. Nex plucked the gun from the dead soldier and looked it over in the light. Far better than the measly pistol he carried.

"We won't kill you. Just close your eyes." The man did as asked, and Nex knocked into his forehead with his knee. It wouldn't kill him but it would knock him out for some time. There really was no reason to be so kind; they were travelling with a GalaxyForce soldier. This meant they were the enemy.

"Everyone ok?" Zen passed Nex the torch, stepping into its beam. Nex handed him his pistol, all set now with the rifle he had looted. Shining the light at both Zen and Maiylene, he smiled.

"I'm fine. Thank you..I don't know your name." Zen laughed slightly, casting a shadow of his sunken features.

"I'm Nex Cerlin. This is Maiylene Lamand. Maiylene, this is Zen Callistar." He felt kind of awkward simply introducing Zen Callistar. The man was well known, unfortunately for him.

"Well, I certainly recognize that name. You can give me the details later, Nex." Nex felt his hands sweat as she mentioned his name. Had they both always felt this way, and he simply hadn't noticed? Thinking back now, he remembered how they had talked for quite some time in the Zenian prison. It hadn't been obvious now, but they had spent more time together. Even after Sauze was captured, sending Luna off to find him. He and Maiylene had searched around together, defending from soldiers. Maybe it had just happened.

"Now, they were heading back the way we came. I say we go the other way. If someone is expecting them down there, we don't want to stroll in." The others agreed, and they continued on walking. The torch's light wasn't that great, but it was a steady beam and they were always able to see ahead. Fairly soon, they rounded a corner and nearly walked in to a metal wall.

"What the hell? They came from this way; how did they get through this?" Nex kicked at it and pushed to see if there was any door, but nothing gave. Before he could say anything more, Zen pointed up. There was a keypad on the top of the tunnel next to a sign. The sign was some random shape, but the keypad was very standard. Luckily, Nex knew how to get through any Keypad he saw.

"Wait one sec. I've got this." He reached up and began inputting a stream of numbers. It might look random, but Nex knew it as a key that would open up the stored data inside. Once that happened he could simply get the code and unlock the keypad. As it worked, Zen began discussing what the group in the hall had said.

"That one person said 'them' like there was another group of people down here. To me, it sounded like they were being contained." Nex finished breaking through the keypad's security and got the code. What Zen said was true, the dialogue between the two people clearly implied that people were being kept captive. Which people, Nex wondered, would exist beneath Cybin's surface and have to be contained by GalaxyForce?

"Door's opening up." He entered the code and looked over at the metal wall. There was a small grinding noise and the door dragged open. The three of them stepped into the room cautiously, weapons up. This room did not feel safe. Zen, holding Nex's pistol, flattened against the wall by the door. The room itself was not of much interest, merely a few tables and chairs. Almost looked like a meeting room. Finger to his lips, Nex took hold of the door handle. Maiylene crouched behind the table, gun up and trained at the door. Nex yanked the door open and pulled up his rifle. Nobody was on the other side, but the group was suddenly aware of a deafening noise.

"What the fuck is that? Is there a conveyor belt factory down there?" Zen clamped his hands over his ears, stepping back from the door. Nex stepped through, rifle raised. The noise was loud, but he didn't see a source. He didn't see a source, that is, until the rounded a corner.

"Holy...Zen, Maiylene? You'll want to see this." The two ran over to him, looking to see what he was pointing at. When they did, their jaws dropped as well.

"What is that? What's going on here?" Maiylene pressed her hands against the glass in front of them, unblinking. Zen shook his head slowly. Before anyone could say anything, a gruff voice sounded.

"Hey, who...get them!" Turning around, the group was faced with a large group of soldiers. Behind them were injured civilians, clamped at the wrist and legs. The shuffled slowly and timidly.

"Look out!" Nex threw himself out, catching a bullet in his arm. Zen dashed away from the soldiers down a set of stairs, while Maiylene caught Nex. Looking around, Nex saw that they were doomed. Suddenly, Maiylene was pulling him up and they were running backwards. Slamming in to the

glass, they both crashed through and began to fall. As Nex hit the ground, he got a very good view of the sight that had transfixed the group seconds earlier. A massive factory floor stretched out beyond them, thousands of battered people chained up and working. Then the soldiers were rushing down another set of stairs and Nex was up, holding Maiylene's hand as they ran.

Luna awoke in the soft bed of the junker ship to nothing bad. This came as a shock. She expected to wake up to the sound of gunfire, or perhaps in the flaming wreckage of the ship. At the very least she expected to find Sauze pacing about the cockpit anxiously waiting for the ship to arrive. Instead, when she rolled over, she found him still asleep. For a minute, she stared at his peaceful face. The scar that ran from top to bottom was indeed awful. She couldn't imagine the pain he must have felt or the devastation at the thought of disfigurement. It didn't matter to her, though.

"Hmm...Luna? Is everything ok?" He woke up worried just as she had. But as it quickly became apparent that everything was indeed ok, he leaned back with a smile.

"Everything's fine. How are you feeling?" She pushed some of her hair from in front of her face and sat up stretching. He took a deep breath and sat up as well. This was so strange to Luna now; waking up happily in a normal bed. It was something that had been so common place only a few weeks ago now.

"I'm feeling alright. Sleep certainly helped." He gave her a kiss and they both got out of bed. As she got dressed, Luna wondered whether the plan to ask the planetary militias for help would work. There were several places where it might fall apart, but it was the best option Luna could see. If they could gather up a big enough army, Cybin's GalaxyForce defense would be breached and the planet would be taken back. The military presence there might already be dwindling, considering how many planets Adams wants to control. At the same time, though, leaving many Inner Rim planets defenseless could end poorly as well.

"I'm gonna go check on the pilot and see where we're at. I'll see if there's any food, too." Sauze, already dressed, stepped through the doorway. Luna slipped her shirt on and tried to push down her hair. It was a tangled mess, and without a reasonable comb or shower here she realized she would just have to accept it. Not great, but better than some other things that had changed since Adams took over.

"Hey, you two. Don't mind my asking, but what are your names? I mean, we recognize you over here, but nobody really knows you." The pilot beckoned Luna and Sauze over to the main room. She tried one last time to make her hair presentable before giving up and joining them. There were a few random seats sitting around, but most of the group stood. Luna counted eight in total, plus Sauze and herself. The pilot gestured to Sauze, nodding.

"I believe y'all should recognize this man here, from our Ceitevorate's broadcast." The members of the small gathering instantly donned sour expressions. Luna understood why not only on a personal level but for these people as well. They had been normal folks living their lives before Adams threw the world into chaos. Apparently, from what she had been told, the broadcast was still going on. The camera was left active, effectively knocking out all types of media. This alone separated most planets from one another.

"Hello. I guess you guys are the lucky ones, huh? Good job. We just barely made it out, but two of our friends are still down there. My name is Sauze." The others raised their eyebrows, clearly

impressed that it wasn't simply Sauze and Luna still alive. The pilot nodded at him and raised his hand at Luna.

"And you helped him escape, I'm guessing. What's your name?" Luna smiled at the everyone in the room, trying to seem nice.

"I'm Luna, I'm with Sauze. We've kind of been at the heart of this whole thing ever since it started. That's why Adams decided to make an example out of Sauze." The pilot nodded gravely, before being directed to the console.

"Oh, hold on a second. We're passing by a planet and there are some old distress signals." Sauze jumped out of his seat. Luna stood too, knowing what they could do next. This was where their plan would be put into place.

"We need to go down to that planet. Right now." Sauze crossed his arms, standing next to Luna. If the Planetary Militia down below was willing, they could begin to take back Cybin. The pilot looked at them incredulously.

"Are you crazy? We can't go down there. GalaxyForce will have left nothing but bones - we don't want to give them a new hunt!" Sauze raised his eyebrows, then smiled and shook his head. Luna looked over nervously. She didn't want any confrontation; these people had been very nice in giving them a place to sleep and a safe passage off world.

"No, GalaxyForce was still on Cybin when we left. We saw the whole fleet deploying and flying around over the planet." The pilot shook his head slowly, and Luna began to worry.

"That...that wasn't the fleet. That was the fleet assigned to guard Cybin. Do you no know what's happened?" Luna caught a look from Sauze. He was worried, as was she. If what this man said was true, their entire plan was doomed.

"We know what happened. There are still a bunch of free planets. If we can get their militias together, taking back Cybin will be easy! That's why we're here!" Luna shifted nervously. There was no way Adams could have taken the entire galaxy already; the plan would still work. She didn't like this talk of hopelessness one bit.

"Son, I can take this ship from Upperspace. I will show you what the planets of the Inner Rim look like." Luna took a deep breath. This didn't sound like guessing. This sounded like futility.

"Good. Land at the nearest planet." Sauze stepped away from the pilot, looking at everyone else uneasily. Luna saw his expression and took his hand in hers. Perhaps it was true. If so, what could they possibly do?

"I don't know about landing, but I'll see what I can do." The pilot gave them both a look for a second before sitting at the console. The others dispersed, some heading to the other rooms or sitting down in the chairs. Luna looked at Sauze.

"What if he's right? What if these planets are done for? Do we have another idea?" Sauze looked her in the eyes before leaning back against the wall. She noticed that he automatically began tracing his scar with his finger as he thought deeply.

"We'll go farther. There has to be a place that Adams hasn't taken over. But I'm sure this will be fine. It's not like he's..." Sauze's voice trailed off as the ship exited Upperspace. The planet below, Lexadaan III, was flaming. Even from space they could see the devastation. Three GalaxyForce ships shot past them, paying no attention. They had finished their job, evidently. Luna cringed at the sight of the

disaster. Sauze was speechless, standing against the wall. The pilot shook his head and prepared to launch the ship again.

"Wait. Take us to Celanth." Celanth was a planet close by, also a part of the Inner Rim. It was a largely industrial planet, but it had a surprisingly large population. GalaxyForce couldn't have taken it without a fight. Luna silently wondered if a fight would really be the best idea. Based on the damage to Lexadaan III, a better thought would have been evacuate.

"Sure thing. You need to know, this is happening everywhere. We saw the ships leaving with our own eyes, and there were enough to take the whole Inner Rim." Sauze narrowed his eyes, while Luna walked over to one of the chairs. This was worse than either of them had anticipated. Leaning back, Luna closed her eyes. She wondered what Nex and Maiylene were doing right now. If they were still alive. This was really a mess. She had fought battles without fear many times before, but this was different. This was not a battle. This was trying to stay alive. It had felt like such a sudden transition from fighting for something to fighting against it.

"Here she is." The ship dropped after a quick Upperspace trip to the planet of Celanth. Luna didn't want to look. She didn't want to see the inevitable. Upon hearing the dismayed noise Sauze made, she looked up. Celanth appeared battered and dead. There was not a single ship in the vicinity. Not bothering to stand up, she covered her eyes with her hands and sagged over. Perfect.

"Now, are you going to be coming with us? We figure things won't be so bad out in Fringe space." Sauze took a look at him before giving a curt nod and sitting down next to Luna. She gazed up at him and saw immense anger and sadness on his face.

"It'll be ok. We'll meet up with some more planetary militias in Fringe space. Then we can fight back." Sauze smiled at her and brushed some hair from in front of her face. It fell right back but she smiled anyway. This was something she knew they could work through. It didn't matter the size of the army; they could take them on. What she secretly wondered, as she lay her head on his shoulder, is if they could win. The grotesque image of Celanth disappeared as the ship jumped to Upperspace, and Luna took a deep breath. It would be a while until they were near Fringe Space; especially in this ship. She expected over a week. That time might be the most nerve racking of all; not knowing.

"I'm going to go do some thinking in our room. You're welcome to join me." Sauze gently lifted her head up and stood from the chairs. As he walked away, Luna felt a new worry come about; if the galaxy was destroyed when they arrived in the Fringe space, Sauze would hold himself accountable. She closed her eyes and hoped for Nex and Maiylene before rising up as well. She might as well get some rest; she would have a lot of time to catch up now.

Maiylene struggled to her feet, feeling the sharp pieces of glass slash her body. Nex lay beside her, clutching his arm and grimacing. Thinking of the gunshot, she helped him up and they began to run. The factory floor was one level beneath the one they were on now, theirs being some kind of platform around the entire area for controlling the machines. The soldiers that had attacked them began running down the stairs, some going after Zen and some chasing them. Ducking into a side room, she found a large table and several blank boards on the walls.

Tipping the table, Nex pushed it against the door. That might stop the soldiers for the time being; she didn't know if they had seen them enter the room anyway. To be on the safe side, she and Nex opened the door at the end of the room and ran in. It connected to a second place with the same

type of table, but also had a set of stairs. They both headed up, running out of breath, to find an entirely different level. The place was like a maze. Stowing away in the nearest janitorial closet they could find, Maiylene and Nex finally stopped running.

"Are you ok? How's your arm?" Maiylene took his arm and began inspecting the wound. If she had salvaged any of the medical supplies from her armor when it failed, she might have been able to treat it. But it looked like a fairly small wound. The bullet hadn't actually entered his arm, thankfully, instead catching him on the side and taking out a nice section. He had thin, muscular arms, so there was some damage done.

"I'm fine, I'm fine. How are you? Are you hurt?" Maiylene plucked some shards of glass from the back of her shoulder and nodded.

"Yeah, just about. I can't believe we escaped." She dropped the glass into a small bin before checking to see if there was any more. It was hard to tell whether she hurt because she had been slashed or hurt because there was glass lodged in. Thankfully there were only a few injuries and he was alright.

"We escaped because of you! I never would have just leapt through the glass, but it definitely worked." He smiled at her, and she saw his gaze linger. She knew perfectly why, too. The feelings had been developing for a while, after their adventure looking for supplies. Then, when he raced out and saved her from being hit by the vehicle, she had mostly been in shock. And so she kissed him. It felt excellent, and now she was sure the feelings were true. She hoped he felt the same way.

"We wouldn't have escaped at all unless you hadn't taken that bullet aimed for me. You're my hero!" She embraced him and they sat for several seconds holding each other. It was the sound of stomping boots that brought them back to reality. The soldiers were near now.

"Get ready to take them out by their knees." Nex put a finger to his lips and positioned himself towards the doorway. The sound of the soldiers' boots grew closer until she knew that they had broken through the table barricade. The sound of factory machines was worse now too, so one door would have to be open.

"Look at this, you idiots! They set up that barricade as a distraction! They just walked through here and out the other door!" Both Nex and Maiylene breathed a sigh of relief. The soldiers didn't realize they were hiding in the closet, assuming they had simply walked through the next door down. Until they ceased searching, though, she and Nex were in danger. It occurred to her that Zen would still be out there, and there was no doubt in her mind that they would kill him. She hated to let him die, but they didn't know him that well. Actually, they knew of him plenty. But the real person was simply another refugee. Saving him would risk both their lives, something Maiylene was reluctant to do.

"They're leaving. Should we look for Zen?" Nex stood up, still holding his arm. Maiylene stood as well, looking away uncomfortably.

"I don't know. We only just met him, and the main goal is our own survival, right? At the same time, I hate to leave him." They both looked at the door for a few seconds, before Nex pulled up his rifle using his good arm.

"I don't want him to die. Even if he isn't really a part of our group, he's still Zen Callistar. You want that kind of guy on your side." Maiylene smiled and held up her pistol as well. This was true; as someone who saves lives she hadn't really been prepared to leave him. She was just wondering if it was

the best decision. What she hadn't realized was that it didn't matter if it was the best choice. It mattered if they had the firepower to make it the best choice.

"Let's do it then. While we look, we can also figure out what's going on down here. Because I notice we haven't brought up the point of *there is a giant fucking factory below Cybin*." Nex grinned at her and they both checked to make sure their weapons were ready. Maiylene opened the door and Nex leapt out. No GalaxyForce soldiers in the immediate vicinity, but Maiylene spotted movement. In the room they hadn't checked, a group of men and women in suits sat around the table. The room was guarded by four heavily armed soldiers. The people in the suits were discussing something, and Maiylene felt sick to her stomach when she saw who led the conversation. Kalanth Adams stood, his back to them. The other people had no idea there was anyone else in the hall. Really, if she wanted to, she could kill Adams right this second. And she wanted to so badly.

"Don't. Don't even consider it. Those guards will rip you to shreds. Just walk away, and we can get Zen." She nodded, silently admiring his resolve. She knew he wanted to kill Adams just as much, and yet he made the right decision. She let her hand brush his as they backed away, before they turned and headed out into the factory. The workers saw them, but made no attempt to speak. They were resigned to their little section of conveyor belt. As Maiylene and Nex crouched and began to head through the mess of machines, they got a good view of the set up.

"This is so weird. I mean, where did all these people come from? They're all chained up, so they obviously aren't here on their own account." He pointed at one man who stood still at his section of the conveyor belt. A chunk of machinery came along, and his job was to affix a smaller wire on to it. Maiylene figured it was some kind of production line where the parts were constructed at the very top of the line and built up along the way.

"Maybe they've been here for a while." Maiylene shrugged and stepped past a break in the line. When she turned, she saw a group of soldiers running along the platform above. They turned and began racing up a rickety looking set of metal stairs. Glancing up, Maiylene spotted a figure on one of the catwalks all the way near the top.

"It's Zen!" Nex pointed up and they both stood to their feet. If the soldiers got their hands on him up there, it wouldn't be good. Both Nex and Maiylene knew what they would have to do, but were not optimistic about it. Their bullets would work best on shots through the neck, so they would have to get up close. That might end poorly.

"Maiylene, I'll go alone. You--" Maiylene cut him off with a kiss and they both began running for the stairs. Racing up, Nex took out the slowest soldier. Maiylene tossed his body off the catwalk and they continued. Zen was at the highest level of catwalks, and the soldiers were nearing him. They would have to do something. Suddenly, Maiylene spotted the guards from Adams's room run out. Behind them stood Adams, glaring. Nex waved before continuing to run. Adams produced the heated knife he had used to disfigure Sauze and tossed it while the guards began to open fire. Maiylene saw the knife heading straight for Nex and jumped ahead. She caught it in her hand just before it collided with him. Stepping up the pace, they nearly ran into the soldiers. It was now or never.

"Go!" Maiylene pushed Nex ahead while going at the floor of the catwalk with the knife. When it sliced through completely, the weight of the soldiers caused it to buckle and begin to go on an incline. Several soldiers slid off, while Nex leapt over them. She jumped onto the unmoved railing and joined

him in taking care of the final soldiers. Looking back, she saw Kalanth Adams had raced up the stairs as well. He stood on the side of the catwalk she had just cut off, gun in hand. It was aimed directly at her.

Act 3

Part I

Sauze and Luna stepped out into the cockpit when the ship rocked. The pilot was yelling and people were running around frantically. The ship had been yanked from Upperspace, through what Sauze assumed was a collision. His blood ran cold as he saw what was outside the viewport. A GalaxyForce Striker was headed straight for them. Sauze held Luna close, kissing her. This was the end, after so long.

"I love you." They prepared for the explosion that would rip the ship apart. Nothing came, though. The Striker slowly moved to the side of the ship and docked. Sauze held his weapon up and nodded at Luna. This was good; if they were planning on boarding the ship, it would be easier to fight them off.

"Everyone back off. If you have weapons, prepare to use them." Suddenly, the console began beeping. Those who had remained in the main room all froze and glanced over at it. The pilot, lowering his rifle, looked over.

"They're trying to send us a message." Nobody moved, weapons still trained on the door. The pilot nervously opened the message.

"Sauze, I know you're on there. Please, hear me out before you kill me." Sauze's eyes widened. His steady aim faltered, and he slowly lowered the gun. That was the voice of Jane Caliemán.

"I was an idiot. A total idiot. I don't blame you if you tell me to fuck off. But I can help you." Luna looked over at Sauze nervously. He waited for the message to continue.

"You were right. What you said about Jax, it was true. He was just using both of us. And right after he sent out that horrible broadcast, he sent for me." There was a pause, and Sauze closed his eyes for a second. Her voice sounded broken and weak. Even if she had been on the wrong side of this, he still didn't want her to be hurt.

"I managed to escape. I was in hiding for a day or so. Then I saw this ship leaving, and I saw you and that girl getting on board. So I followed." Sauze was about to say something to the pilot when the message continued.

"I know you. You won't have given up yet. I can help with whatever you're doing." The others looked suspiciously at Sauze. They wouldn't know from her voice, but when they saw her they would become very angry. He needed to address the group first. Even Luna looked worried.

"That is Jane Caliemán. I don't want anyone to hurt her until we hear the whole story." He walked over to the console and allowed access via the port. She had already docked, and was likely standing ready to come in. He understood that this could easily be a trap, but was prepared to take the chance. The doors opened and he got ready to fire. Jane Caliemán, completely alone, stumbled into the ship. He saw her dragging her left leg for a split second before she leaned against the door of the ship.

"It's just me. I swear." Sauze didn't lower his gun. While never hurting him herself, Caliemán had supported Adams. That was just as bad. Caliemán put her hands up in a sign of surrender.

"Believe me. I know what you're thinking. I supported Adams. Just...I don't know where else to go." She looked into his eyes. He looked away for a second, unsure of what to do. Here she was, begging for forgiveness. He didn't know if that was something he could give.

"I guess that means you don't want me here. Fair enough. Good luck." Taking his silence as an answer, she turned away and prepared to walk back into her ship. Sauze saw the back of her left leg and cringed at the grisly poorly-dressed open wound.

"Wait. Come back onboard." She turned around incredulously. The pilot raised his eyebrows, waiting for something from Sauze.

"Jane, you could easily be here to kill me. Or maybe it's that Adams has a tracking device installed in you, and now he knows where I am. It might be that you're just spying on me. But you know what? I'm going to trust you. Because either my trust will be placed upon the right person, or the fact that you are deceiving me after I've trusted you will cause you to make the right choice." She smiled and collapsed into the ship. Luna caught her, looking over at Sauze. Her eyes pointed down at Caliemán and back up.

"Captain, where are we?" As Luna helped Caliemán sit down, the pilot set to work on the console of the ship.

"Midi Rim. Still in a dangerous place, if you ask me." Sauze looked over at Caliemán. Her wound was bad, but somehow he didn't think the people onboard the ship would be too happy with Jane Caliemán's presence on the ship. She was, after all, the Galactic Enforcer. Most people wouldn't see any difference between her and the GalaxyForce soldiers responsible for this.

"Drop us off on the closest planet, if you could. I think we've stayed long enough." The pilot narrowed his eyes, staring at Sauze. Reluctantly, he began plotting a course for the nearest planet. Sauze walked over to Luna, gesturing to the hallway.

"Are you crazy? We can't head down to the closest planet!" He looked back to where Jane lay unconscious on one of the chairs.

"I have a feeling Adams is going to be looking for her. We get to the planet, commandeer some GalaxyForce ships and demand he personally retrieve her." Luna smiled for a second before shaking her head.

"Who's to say he wants her alive? He'll just blow up the ship. Remember what happened with the gunship? GalaxyForce ships have bombs built in them for this exact purpose." Luna's words suddenly struck Sauze. GalaxyForce ships could be remotely located and detonated. Even if she hadn't meant to, Jane had led Adams to them.

"Detach the ship!" Sauze pushed the pilot out of the way and closed the door of the ship. He forcibly detached the GalaxyForce Striker before yanking on the controls. The junker ship spun away from the Striker, narrowly avoiding the explosion. He had timed it perfectly, but the near miss threw the rest of the passengers off.

"She was trying to blow us up!" One Tauradonian man gestured wildly at the blacked out Jane. Stepping in front of him, Sauze shook his head slowly.

"No, it was Adams. He's got explosives in every GalaxyForce ship." The man glared at Jane before backing off. Luna raced over, staring out the viewport. The pilot, apparently unmoved by the close explosion, turned back.

"Do you want to head down to the planet or not?" Sauze looked over at Luna, then down to Jane.

"Like I said. They'll kill us instantly." Sauze thought hard. There had to be some way they could circumvent the location and explosive technology. Perhaps if they could rewire it...

"I have a plan. We're assuming the GalaxyForce ship we take will just be landed somewhere. Well, where would it be landed other than a base? If we can get into the base, we'll access the database and report the ship destroyed. That way it won't show up in the system!" Sauze cracked his knuckles and grinned. Luna nodded at him, and they walked towards the pilot.

"We'll need to be dropped off on the closest planet. Fast, too. Thank you for your service." The pilot made no noise, returning to plot the course. On the chair, Jane was blinking awake.

"What....what happened?" Luna helped her to her feet, grimacing at the sight of the wound on her leg.

"We've got a plan. Adams won't know what hit him." Luna smirked as the ship began to move. Sauze plucked a tiny plastic bag marked 'Medical' off the wall before heading over.

"What happened to your leg? It looks like it was slashed with something." Luna helped Jan turn around as Sauze rolled the leg of her pant up. The medical kit wasn't much, but it might prevent infection.

"It was Adams and that stupid knife of his. You know, the heated one? He tried to hit my stomach but when I turned away I slipped. My leg went up into the air as the knife stopped its initial burst of heat. That's why it's kind of cauterized at this part." Sauze nodded as he began smearing a clear gel on the cut. It seems many had been victims of the infamous heated knife. Finishing up, he rolled the pant leg down and stood. Jane limped over to the viewport and looked out. Sauze, following her, saw the planet looming in the distance. There were GalaxyForce ships buzzing around, but only a couple. He could see that the entire planet had not been ravaged like those of the Inner Rim. It made sense, really.

If Adams wanted to make his plan work, he needed to make examples. So Cybin, his own kingdom, was demolished. All that stood was his tower. A clearer symbol could not be made. As one progressed from Cybin into the Inner Rim, they would find that the planets were ravaged and destroyed. The Midi Rim could then become Adams' subjects, to fearful to ever venture forward. The display of ruthlessness was prominent, while still allowing for citizens to worship Adams. It was unfortunately clever.

As they approached the planet preparing to land, Sauze went over Adams' plan quickly in his head. He was now kind of all the Galaxy under G1's rule. As Cybin was at the centre of the Galaxy, it was the obvious place for G1's location. That meant that Adams would likely stay on Cybin as well. The ring around Cybin of stars known as the Inner Rim would all be his territory as well. There wasn't a single sector in the Inner Rim not part of G1.

The same likely went for the Midi Rim. It was the Outer Rim and Fringe Space that Sauze was unsure about. Few areas of the Outer Rim were part of G1, those that were now probably fleeing to other planets. The scarce planets in Fringe Space were mostly colonized by G1, but there were areas completely unexplored. Sauze wondered how Adams would take those over.

"We're touching down. I guess GalaxyForce doesn't care who arrives; it's leaving they're against. Any last words, Kath?" Sauze gave the pilot a small nod and stood by the door. When it opened up, the three of them left the ship. The minute it left off, they were on high alert.

"We need to find the closest base. Now, I'm guessing they've set up in a big building. So find the biggest building you can, and we can start heading over." They looked around for a few minutes before Luna pointed.

"There. Looks like a big warehouse." They began walking, not bothering to run the large distance. Presently, they were in a blown out street. The warehouse was likely five streets away. The most important thing was not to be spotted. Sauze assumed that by now, looking inconspicuous wouldn't work. If Adams had a list, there would be three people at the top. Those three people now crept around a building. Every once and a while, they would come across a scared person out in the streets. Sauze guessed most were at home hoping for safety. They probably didn't realize how good they had it.

"Warehouse is coming up. We need to get our eyes on a ship, then erase it from the database." Sauze looked around the next corner and saw a group of GalaxyForce soldiers. The soldiers were headed straight for them.

"Duck!" He stumbled back, but the soldiers had already caught a glimpse. His gun was low on ammo, and Jane was unarmed.

"It's him! Attack!" The soldiers whipped out their guns and raced around the corner. Sauze scrambled back, opening fire. After three soldiers dropped, he found his clip was empty. Preparing for the sure pain of being shot, Sauze winced. But no bullet came. Opening his eyes, he saw the last soldier dispatched with a bullet to the head. Luna holstered her gun and offered Sauze a hand up.

"You can thank me later." Jane emerged from behind a metal bin open mouthed in awe. Luna smiled at her, before reaching down to pick up two guns.

"Sauze, take this. It's got a few bullets. Same for you, Caliemán. Now, we could spend all day picking clips out of these corpses or we could run into that warehouse and get going." Sauze loaded the gun and the three began walking toward the warehouse. As luck would have it, there were several ships secured outside. They needed a GalaxyForce ID to be opened, though.

"I hope it still accepts this. Jane reached into her pocket and retrieved a bloodied ID. Sauze laughed at the sight.

"You've still got it?" As the ship accepted her card and began to open, she smiled. The inside had room enough for the three of them, as well as some fancy weapons.

"I decided to hang on just in case. Now aren't we all happy? Anyway, I've got the number. Let's get this thing erased." Sauze stepped up to the door and listened. Nothing on the other side.

"Hopefully there'll be a terminal right near the door. I need you two to cover me while I work. Don't show that you have guns, though, unless someone else draws." They both nodded and Sauze slowly opened the door. It looked empty, for the time being. Cautiously stepping in, he located the terminal. It was nothing special, but he would have to take some time to erase the ship. Activating it, he brought up the ship in the database. Available to him was a list of the ship's pilots and missions. Unavailable to him was the option of erasing the ship from the GalaxyForce database.

"Jane, you've got an admin login, right? I need you for this part." Jane stepped over and entered in her details. Sauze watched nervously as she worked to erase it.

"Alright, I'm about done. Just got to--" She was cut off by a gasp. The three turned and saw an armored soldier holding up his gun.

"Wait a minute! Shit, you're that guy!" The man opened fire, which normally wouldn't have been anything to worry about. AutoAk armor could take bullets like nothing. Unfortunately, Sauze was not wearing AutoAk armor. So maybe that was the reason he didn't react quickly enough. Taking a

second before leaping aside, Sauze felt a sharp pain in his abdomen. He ducked down and charged. Taking the soldier out at his legs, Sauze snapped his neck and dragged the body up.

"The gunshots were loud. Let's go." Casting the body into a small room off to the side, Sauze motioned to the others to leave. It didn't matter if the ship had been erased or not now; they had to get out. As the group ran towards the ship, Sauze felt with his hand the area which now burned with pain. Gingerly poking it, he stumbled at the increase in agony. He didn't know if the others had seen it, but knew that Luna wouldn't want him going through any kind of plan knowing he had been shot. It was best, he decided, to keep it to himself until after they had lured Adams here. Tucking the grey overshirt into his trousers, he dabbed away a bit of the blood through clenched teeth. When he caught up with Luna and Jane, they were already climbing in.

"Who wants to fly?" Jane stood back near the entrance allowing Sauze in. He gestured to Luna, who took the controls.

"Best pilot I know. Besides, we both need to be ready to make the demand. There's got to be video comm somewhere on here. I'll open it up, tell Adams if he wants you back he'll have to come get you. He shows up, we capture him." She nodded and leaned against the wall. Sauze suddenly felt a little bit dizzy. It was coupled with a tickling sensation on his leg. Moving away from Jane and Luna, Sauze took a look. He recoiled slightly when he did. There was a large amount of blood being lost. It appeared the bullet had buried itself in good. As Luna took the ship off the ground, Sauze winced while covering up the wound again.

"I got a little bruise in that fight, anyone see any meds around here?" Sauze would tell Luna after the plan with Adams succeeded. No reason to worry anyone right now, especially with such an important mission ahead of them. Jane nodded and plucked the standard kit from the ship's wall.

"Need me to dress it? I got a more advanced training when I was platcom." Sauze smiled and shook his head. Turning away, he gulped down a few painkillers and pressed some gauze against the wound. Tying it loosely around his stomach, he turned back around and headed over to the viewport.

"Make sure to take us away from the planet. We want this to be in open space so we can maneuver around and into his fleet." She piloted the ship up out of the atmosphere and away. Sauze examined the video comm. It was on GalaxyForce channels, which meant that it would still be operating. Clearing his throat, Sauze began recording a transmission directly to Adams. Jane stood in the background awkwardly.

"Hello Mr. Kalanth Adams. I suppose you remember me well enough. Anyway, I would like to bring your attention to something." Sauze stepped aside for a minute, allowing clear view of Jane.

"If you want her, you'll have to come get her. And don't bother trying to blow up the ship, we've taken care of it. Now, I'll hand her over...but I won't deliver. You won't be able to track us, either, which is why I'll transmit the coordinates along with this message. See you. Soon." Sauze paused during the ending, giving time for a sinister smile. Ending the recording, he attached coordinates and sent it off. The coordinates he attached, however, were not theirs. They were several clicks forward, so that Luna could fly their ship right into the GalaxyForce fleet. That way Adams couldn't know which ship was theirs no matter what tracking programs he might use.

"So, I guess we just wait." Luna swiveled the chair around and sighed. Jane examined the wound on her leg, still leaning against the wall. Sauze paced, trying not to focus on the pain of his gunshot wound. Often times it would spike and he would almost collapse. It seemed the painkillers hadn't helped

in the slightest. As the time passed, it got even worse. He began to find it difficult to stand, and considered simply telling Luna and Jane. Before he make up his mind, though, a fleet appeared in front of them. The ships in the fleet were organized as neatly as could be, with their backs to the ship Sauze inhabited now.

"Go...fly up into there." There was one large flagship and about eighty fighters and strikers. It was very daunting. Opening up a disguised video call, Sauze contacted Adams.

"That's right, we're nowhere to be seen. But rest assured we're here, old man." Sauze grinned at the camera, hoping the sweat on his brow wouldn't be noticeable. It wasn't as a result of worry, but more so the strength it took to keep himself standing. As Luna slowly began to inch their ship in the direction of the Flagship, Adams returned the call. Sauze kept a straight face staring into the screen, focusing on thoughts of ending the destruction Adams had brought. Although Sauze would like so much to end Kalanth Adams' s life, they had to take him alive. Sauze wouldn't be responsible for any more murder than he had to be.

"I suppose you've hidden yourself in my fleet then, haven't you. I guess you're more of an idiot than I thought." Adams snarled, and for a second Sauze saw his eyes spiral. They glittered with pure madness.

"Have you ever considered how many mortal lives a god is worth?" Sauze understood now. Adams hadn't simply gone mad. He believed himself a god, a being that decided fate. And the most dangerous kind of madman was the one who thought what he was doing was right.

"See you in a moment." Luna began pulling the ship back slowly. They had to consider the possibility of escape at this point. Sauze didn't know what Adams had planned, but it wouldn't be good. Suddenly, the space all around them exploded into color. Fires ended just as they began. A short few seconds later, the fleet of eighty ships was gone. All the fighters and the strikers were now simply floating debris. And in front of them, in line with their ship, was the GalaxyForce flagship. It began to lumber ahead slowly. Sauze gasped. Adams had just ended so many lives for no reason other than to secure Sauze. He clearly felt no remorse. And now they were the only ship left floating in front of the flagship. They would be toast in seconds. And of course it was this moment that Sauze's vision began to blur at the edges. Golden dust rained down across his eyes and he felt himself slowly begin to lose his balance. He leaned against the wall sluggishly and began sliding down. Jane noticed, and pointed to Luna.

"Something's wrong with Sauze!" Her words didn't reach his ear. Blinking back darkness, Sauze craned his neck to watch out the viewport. The flagship's small cannons began to target and power up. He let his head hang down, ready to die. Either way, this was it. Field of vision beginning to ripple like a pond, Sauze gave up resisting and dropped to the floor. It was on his way down that he saw something massive collide with the GalaxyForce flagship, tearing it in two instantly. Then he couldn't feel his arms or legs anymore and let his eyes close.

Act 3

Part 2

Without any type of defense, Nex turned to face him. The Ceitevorate was glaring at him, gun waving around madly.

"Well hello there, you three. As it just so happens, I dealt with your friends not minutes ago." He switched the gun's aim to Maiylene, who put her hands out. Maiylene clutched Adams's knife in her hand but could not make any move. The gap between the two sections of catwalk made short range attacks impossible. Nex, realizing this, took a deep breath. Zen gulped and glared at Adams.

"It was funny, really. It was Sauze and that girl, last name Eyeth. Fooled them real good, made them think I was there with them. My flagship's probably sifting through the ashes of their ship now." Nex felt his blood boil but he couldn't do anything. His hand was inching towards the holstered gun, but it Adams saw him pull it out one of them would be dead in an instant. If only Nex hadn't holstered the gun while climbing over the falling soldiers.

"Now I'm going to ask you to shed all your weapons and allow my soldiers to take you as hostages. Nex turned his head and saw a group of soldiers descending from the catwalk above. Now they were well and truly trapped. The soldiers arrived behind them and drew their weapons.

"What choice do we have?" Zen hung his head and allowed the soldiers to attach clamps at his wrists. Nex took a look at Maiylene and closed his eyes. Reaching down, he unclasped his holster and let it drop. Hitting the bottom of the catwalk, it slipped over the side and fell down into the factory. Nex watched it fall, noticing that despite their presence the workers continued to toil away at the factory. It still wasn't clear what they were making, even. As the holster hit the ground, Nex had his arms yanked behind his back and clamped. Guns were aimed at his head from several angles. It was now only Maiylene who still held a weapon; Adams's knife.

"I'll take that knife back, little girl." Gun still trained on her, Adams reached out his hand. Maiylene took a deep breath. The blade of the knife was retracted right now. Nex stared at the activation switch, waiting for her to hand it over. When activated the blade shot out quite rapidly before heating up; Nex could see why Adams employed it so frequently. Maiylene held it out in her hand, flat surface facing Adams. Gun level, Adams reached out to take it. As his hand wrapped around it, Maiylene snarled and pressed the switch. The blade shot out and flashed Adam's flesh. He yelled and stumbled forward. Teetering on the edge, he reached out to grab the bar. Maiylene let go of the knife and surrendered to the soldiers, watching Adams fumble to keep his balance. Angrily, he took a hold of the railing with the injured hand. With the other, he began firing. Bullets tore through the armor of several soldiers, ending their lives brutally. Maiylene, Nex, and Zen ducked down to avoid fire.

"Hey! Sir, stop!" The soldiers were defenseless, unable to escape or fight back. When Adams regained his balance and composure, he halted the fire. Of the twenty or so soldiers, nine remained. Nex stood up slowly, not bothering to resist against the clamps against his wrist. Adams picked the knife up off of the catwalk and took a look at it. It was slick with his blood. Looking down at the sizable slash on his hand, he glared at Maiylene. Pocketing the knife, he backed away down the catwalk. The traumatized soldiers spent several seconds looking at the dead bodies before escorting Nex and the others up the catwalk stairs.

"He just killed them! He didn't even bother trying to aim! It was like he was just killing for the sake of killing..." The soldiers were distraught by the ordeal, clearly. Nex didn't care. They were

GalaxyForce; they should have been used to this kind of brutality by now. As they reached the top of the stairs, one of the soldiers turned to the others.

"So, he's just issued us some orders. We're supposed to take these three to one of the meeting rooms and set 'em up for execution. You know, binds and a white sheet?" The others didn't make eye contact, nodding and mumbling affirmation.

"He says we need to set up some cameras, too. I guess he's gonna make another galaxy-wide broadcast, huh?" The man looked over at Nex, and they locked eyes. He brought his helmet back up awkwardly to read further instructions, when everyone knew there were none. As five of the soldiers escorted them to a meeting room, the others headed off to gather supplies. And so there were a few uncomfortable minutes spent kneeling on the ground waiting. Nex tried to talk to Maiylene but the soldiers wouldn't let them move. As the white sheet was laid out and the cameras set up, Nex began to get a sinking feeling in his stomach. The soldiers were just finishing up when who Nex figured was the captain spoke.

"Wait a minute. Adams says something's gone wrong with the flagship and he can't do this right now. He wants us to kill them...on the broadcast." Nex held his breath. It was going to happen now. His entire body was alert, as if he was waiting for some kind of release. His muscles were tense and he was completely on edge. This was what it felt like to wait for your death. The room was silent for a few seconds before one soldier broke down into tears.

"I can't do this! I can't kill them!" For a moment, Nex wondered if they might have a chance. The other soldiers turned in surprise, staring at the man. One spoke up.

"But...I mean...we've killed our share of enemies, right? Why can't you do this one?" The man had ragged breathing through his tears.

"This is wrong! You know what, I couldn't kill anyone like this. This is just sick...we're putting them down like animals!" The captain furrowed his brow.

"So you'd rather let them have weapons? I don't know if you know, but all three of these people are dangerous criminals." The man choked another sob and shook his head.

"Why are they dangerous criminals? For trying to help people? Mark, I need you to tell me this. Do you honestly think what Kalanth is doing is right?" Everyone turned to the captain. He looked from face to face, speechless. Before he could say anything, another person stepped over to the crying soldier.

"You know what? He's right. This is sick. This whole thing is sick. I can't be a part of this any longer." She looked at the seven other soldiers expectantly. After a few seconds two men got up and joined her. They said nothing. There was now a divide in the room. Five soldiers remained loyal and three stood with the crying man. In silence, the group of loyal soldiers began to diminish. Soon enough, the captain was the only one left. He took a look at the eight deserters before holding up his gun.

"I'm not strong enough." It was a tiny whisper laced with misery. Before anyone could act he swung the gun up and shot himself in the head. There were horrified gasps and most of the soldiers averted their eyes to the grisly sight. Nex slowly turned himself around, unflinching at the horrific view. Standing up, he approached the soldiers.

"If you want out, we are now allies. I think it would be much appreciated if we could have use of our hands." One of the soldiers deactivated his clamps, as well as Maiylene's and Zen's. They both stood,

and Maiylene rushed over to Nex. Holding her close, he let out a deep breath. That feeling of waiting for death was one he never wanted to experience ever again.

"So...what do you think we should do?" One of the soldiers tapped Nex on the shoulder. He smiled at Maiylene and faced the soldier.

"Our best option would be leave immediately. I'm guessing you guys aren't the only soldiers in this place, so it's probably better to just get out. I don't know about Maiylene and Zen, but I didn't believe for a second what Adams said about Sauze. Our best idea would be locating them." The soldier nodded slowly. One of them suddenly piped up.

"Hey, I bet we could get to that cruiser they've got in the hangar before anyone realizes we've deserted!" One of the soldiers carefully looked around the hall outside.

"Let's go, then. Be quick about it, guys. We need to get these three to the hangar safely." They group of soldiers headed out into the hall, guns raised. Nex went for his gun but upon remembering its location decided his fists would have to do. Waiting until both Maiylene and Zen were out, Nex stepped into the hall and looked around.

"The hangar's just this way. Once we get into the cruiser we can make a break for it." They all began jogging down the hallway in their large group. After nervously rounding a few corners, they found themselves on a platform above a ship hangar.

"This is all underground? How do we get out?" Nex looked around and saw no obvious answer. The cruiser, centerpiece of the hangar, sat in the very center. It was sleek and a navy blue color, set apart quickly from the grey and red color scheme of the other ships.

"We can open the roof. I'll open the control panel, you guys get into the ship." One soldier ran along to the other end of the platform and began keying in various numbers next to a control panel. Nex dropped down from the platform with a thud and felt a slight twinge of pain from where the bullet had grazed him. He would have to get it looked at if this campaign ever ended.

"Let's head in. You know this is one of Adams's private cruisers, right? Basically, we'll have smooth sailing out to where ever we need to go." The soldier passed identification and yanked open the cruiser door. Everyone climbed in except for Nex, who waited for the single man still up on the platform. He was almost done opening the roof. It was just as he began the process that the others arrived.

"There they are! Take the three terrorists and kill everyone else!" The man shut the control panel just as he was gunned down by several GalaxyForce soldiers. Nex heard the roof begin to slide open and ran inside. There were two seats in the cockpit, one for a navigator and one for the pilot. Sitting down, he activated the engines and lifted off. Gunfire was hitting the viewport and the hull, but this was no ordinary ship. If the Ceitevorate flew in it, it had to be safe. Enabling the shields, he blasted out through the opened roof. It was underneath what had been an abandoned building for quite some time, one that could apparently slide apart. Zen frantically searched the skies around them.

"Go! They're already heading over!" Maiylene took the seat next to him, examining the controls. He flew the ship forward, away from the building and up into the sky. Two GalaxyForce fighters descended upon them almost immediately, but did not attack. Glancing behind him, Nex waited for an explanation.

"Maybe...maybe they think the Ceitevorate's in here? I guess that's it." Nex grinned and prepared to jump. His destination was the Inner Rim where Sauze and Luna had set off to. If they could meet up it would be easier to fight against Adams. Also, he would have to tell Sauze that the fleet

orbiting Cybin had mostly been sent away and that the real force now was land troops. This was based on observations made rocketing away from Cybin, though, so he would need some input from the soldiers.

"Wait, are we going to attack the ships?" One of the GalaxyForce soldiers pointed at the two ships escorting them. Nex shook his head as he finished keying in the coordinates.

"Why would we? It'll be nice not to be under constant fire, and I think it would look mighty suspicious if the Ceitevorate's ship arrived completely alone. Let's keep them around for a bit." Maiylene smiled at him and launched the ship into Upperspace. A few seconds later they were alerted that the two ships were following them.

"They actually bought it. That's great! Now, let's work on getting to the nearby Inner Rim planets. Sauze is probably by one of them." Before anyone could say anything, one of the soldiers piped up.

"If he is, he's dead. Adams didn't leave anything behind in the Inner Rim. You say he knows what to do, right? In that case I'd think he'd head off to the Outer Rim." Nex turned slowly. This was bad news. This was very bad news. If Sauze wasn't dead it might now be impossible to find him.

"Let's...let's see what we get in the Inner Rim. If he isn't there we'll try somewhere else." Nex felt shaken up by this. To be fair, it was likely they would manage to find Sauze. He was always at the front of whatever was going on. That didn't mean Nex felt safe about what was happening.

"Look, we've got about a day's travel to the closest planet. Even with the engines on the this thing we aren't going to get there immediately. Let's all get some rest; I'm sure Adams has some kind of facilities on this thing." Nex stood up and set the ship to Autopilot. Just in case something happened, it was good to be prepared. The soldiers kind of dispersed to the rest of the sizable cruiser. Nex knew there would be a guard barracks in one room that they could head to. There were seven of them compared to the standard guard of eight. That left him, Maiylene, and Zen.

"You two go on ahead. I'm going to stay here for a few minutes." Zen nodded at them and sat down in the pilot's chair. Nex looked over at Maiylene and smiled. The two headed out of the cockpit to search the ship.

Sauze Kath awoke with a start and instantly began struggling. He was bound down to something by his hands and feet, but it was with flimsy metal braces. Snapping himself free, he sat up urgently. Around him was a sterile white room filled with different supplies, all looking very clinical. Two frightened doctors stood at the end of the room, staring directly at him. Before he could do anything, his eyes closed again and he leaned back down. He wanted to scream at them, ask where Luna was, find out what was going on. But the oddly shaped blue object affixed over his mouth and nose pumped out more gas and he went back to sleep.

"Sauze? Sauze, are you awake?" Opening his eyes, Sauze blinked slowly and listened again. He could have sworn he heard someone's voice.

"Sauze? Please, answer me!" This time it was more clear, and he felt that somehow he recognized it. Shifting around slightly, he found that he was lying on his back on something very cold. When he opened his eyes fully he saw something white ahead of them, a large flat surface.

"Sauze! Come on!" He slowly lifted his head up off of the ground. Things were starting to come into better focus and he found he was able to think clearly. It was then he recognized the voice calling his name as Luna's. Looking around, he assessed his situation. He was in a small room with a lack of identifying features. Across from him was a large glass wall, and pressed against it was Luna. With a hoarse voice, he responded to her.

"Luna! Luna, what's going on!" He glanced at his reflection in the glass and saw that he still wore the same clothes, but they had been washed and the blood had been removed. His pants had been shortened on the right leg up to his kneecap, though. There was a white slip of fabric wrapped around his waist, and when he moved into a kneeling position it brushed against his left leg. When it did he felt something cold. Luna was saying something, but Sauze was now staring at his leg. Where his right leg should have been there was a strange bit of metal. It was in the rough shape of a leg but looked very rough and mechanical.

"What do you remember? Try not to look too much at your leg, it's not done." Sauze was dazed. He no longer had a leg. Words could not describe how disconcerting that was.

"I know...I know. They said you had an infection from a bullet wound and they needed to amputate." Sauze closed his eyes and turned his head away from the frighteningly skeletal structure in place of his leg.

"Now...what do you remember last? Can you think of what happened before you blacked out?" Sauze racked his brain. Luna said it was an infection from a gunshot wound. That would explain why he had been feeling so bad when they were trying to get Adams. Thinking back, he focused on remembering what had happened. Adams had destroyed the fleet, and then something had happened...he had fallen over. He had seen something crash into the GalaxyForce flagship.

"Something....something hit the GalaxyForce flagship." Luna nodded worriedly. While she formulated a response, Sauze tried to stand up. It felt odd standing with a metal leg, but the worst part was that it didn't feel all that different. He wanted it to feel alien to him, but it felt nearly the same.

"It was a Zenian battleship. They rammed the flagship and prepared to leave, but we messaged them and asked for help." Sauze stepped gingerly over to the glass through which Luna stood.

"We're with the Zenians right now?" He looked around suddenly more nervously than before. The Zenians were not as bad as GalaxyForce, but their ship was still certainly not where he wanted to be.

"We didn't really have a choice...I was pretty sure you were dead and GalaxyForce was going to be on the scene any second." Sauze nodded slowly. He wasn't sure what the consequences of being picked up by the Zenians were going to be, but based on the fact that neither he nor Luna could leave their rooms, he was worried.

"So are we being held here? Are we prisoners now?" Luna bit her lip and thought for a second. While she did, Sauze quickly tried the door of his room. It didn't budge at all with pushing and there was no handle to pull it open.

"I don't think we're prisoners. At least not forever. They're working on setting you up with a better looking prosthetic, and I guess in the mean time they don't want us running around. I've been trying to count the days we've been here, and I'm guessing it's about four since you blacked out." Sauze raised his eyebrows and turned to her.

"What do you mean? I've been out for four days?" Luna nodded sadly. He grimaced at the thought. Who knows what could have happened in the four days he had been unconscious? For all he knew, the galaxy had been destroyed!

"Have you received any reports? Has anyone said anything?" He was frantic now, pacing around. Luna shook her head.

"They give me food and water but don't really talk to me. They're generally just soldiers who've been assigned to watching us. That doesn't matter, though. Now that you're about done, we should be released soon. It's just..." Luna trailed off nervously. Sauze slowly turned from examining the door and looked at her.

"What's wrong? What is it?" He looked past her, examining her chamber for any signs of a problem. It was actually much nicer than his, furnished with a bunk and toiletries. He supposed because he was only placed in this room between procedures, they decided he didn't need anything like that. Waiting for Luna's response, he stood awkwardly.

"When they first brought us in, they kind of detained us. I think they thought we were GalaxyForce soldiers. But when they saw you, they recognized your face from Adams's broadcast. They took you quickly for treatment, leaving me and Jane with the soldiers." Sauze took a step back. He hadn't even thought to ask where Jane was. Looking now, Sauze couldn't spot her in Luna's room. There wasn't a wall of glass on Luna's other wall, either. She wasn't here.

"Someone suddenly identified Jane, and they split us up immediately after that. I don't know where they took her, but they just brought me right here and told me that everything would be ok in a few days." Sauze felt a sinking feeling in his chest. They better not have killed her. If they had killed Jane, he and Luna were not safe. Just because they weren't targets didn't mean the Zenians weren't dangerous.

"I don't think they killed her. She was injured too, right? Maybe they're helping her." Luna looked tired. Sauze guessed she hadn't been sleeping much.

"Don't worry, we'll find her." He left out that they might not find her alive. What had at first been a seemingly kind rescue was now very suspicious. Suddenly, there was noise outside his door. He and Luna looked at one another as the door opened. Two soldiers and a doctor stood outside.

"I told you he would wake up. Sir, we're going to finish your new leg. Could you please lie down on the stretcher we have here?" Sauze looked suspiciously at them. On one hand, he didn't want to allow himself to become defenseless. On the other hand, if they wanted to kill him it would have happened already. He decided it would be best to have a fully functioning leg before making any plans of escape.

"Alright. Can you tell me what happened to Jane Caliemann? I want to stress that she is no longer a part of GalaxyForce." Unsure of whether the Zenians were up to date with GalaxyForce's most wanted list, Sauze told them first thing.

"We will speak to both you and Luna Eyeth after your procedure is over." Sauze looked into the eyes of the soldier who spoke for a few seconds before lying down on the stretcher. Metal braces were clipped around his wrists and ankles just like before, hopefully for safety measures. Sauze faintly remembered how little force had been required to break through them before. As the stretcher continued on, Sauze had a blue device fitted over his nose and mouth again. It began dispensing gas as they arrived at the operating room that Sauze had woken up in before, and he passed out quickly. His

eyes closed as the other doctors prepared the various prosthetics. He silently wondered if he would be himself when he woke up.

Luna was sitting on the small bunk provided in her room when she heard Sauze's door opening. Rushing over to the glass that separated their rooms, she watched as Sauze stepped through the doorway. He was walking a little awkwardly, but his leg looked rebuilt well. As his right pant leg has been cut off, she could see just how well they had built it back. It was almost impossible to tell where the prosthetic began. The door closed and Sauze rushed over to the glass.

"Are you ok?" Luna put her hand to the glass, examining him for any signs of further injury. He had been through quite a lot. Nodding, he leaned in.

"They're bringing us out for a 'meeting' in a few minutes. If things go south, we have to be prepared to go." Luna looked skeptically at Sauze, and then down to his injured leg.

"You're not in any condition to be making daring escapes. It will probably just make things easier for the Zenians." Sauze frowned, moving his leg around.

"I can run. It doesn't feel all that different. I mean, I'm still a little woozy from the painkillers, but that wouldn't stop me." Luna smiled at him and shook her head. Of course he would still try. He would have been ready to leave before they'd gotten him a new leg!

"Only if we absolutely have to. Besides, we still need to find Jane." Sauze nodded, and stepped away from the glass. Luna sat down on the stiff bunk and waited. About a minute later, the door swung open.

"I am Cikvar, speaking as current head of the Zenians. I would like to have a word with both you and Sauze Kath." Luna glanced over at Sauze and stepped out cautiously. She would have felt better with a gun, but the Zenians had taken their weapons. Now that Luna thought about it, there was no way she hadn't been a prisoner here.

"You two may not know it, but currently you are regarded as freedom fighters." Luna raised her eyebrows. This was definitely news to her. It didn't make sense, either. Her first reaction was to accuse this Cikvar of lying, but really there wasn't any reason. The Zenians hadn't lied to them yet, despite what it seemed like. Sure they weren't exactly a group of heroes, but in desperate situations one had to pick the lesser evil.

"How is that possible? First of all, where would anyone learn that we are indeed fighting for freedom? Secondly, who is there left to believe us freedom fighters?" Cikvar smiled at Sauze, taking his eyes off Luna. Immediately she assessed the possibility of attacking him. Lesser evil and all, they were still in danger. They would be in danger no matter what until they were free and Kalanth Adams was dead.

"Let me answer your second question. We Zenians are not the only force remaining. No, there is another. Have either of you studied history?" Luna had loved learning about history as a trainee in GalaxyForce. Without much opportunity on Cybin, she had caught up during her training.

"I have. What does that have to do with it?" Cikvar looked over at her, eyes gleaming. He gestured around.

"This...this is all a product of a certain history that tends to be forgotten. Some time ago, the previous Ceitevorate began the Fringe Space Colonization Initiative." Luna and Sauze nodded. This was not new information. Ever since the Outer Rim had been explored and mostly inducted into G1, there

had been a growing population without enough space. Fringe Space, the literal edges of the galaxy, had many planets simply without life. It had made perfect sense.

"Yes. What of it?" Luna could tell that Sauze was getting impatient. Glancing over at the guards, she saw they had their weapons loaded. If Sauze tried anything he would be dead.

"The focus on Fringe Space did not leave much for the Outer Rim planets recently brought into G1. Quickly, the Outer Rim planets began fighting between each other for the rare shipment of supplies from G1." Luna sighed. She knew well about this. This unrest had eventually caused several attacks on Cybin, some of which were fairly recent. The Outer Rim's problems were an issue commonly overlooked.

"These planets went from enemies to allies, though. Thus began the great Colony War, during which the Outer Rim retaliated with such force that the Ceitevorate stepped down. During the process, many documents were lost. When the Outer Rim was finally contained as best it was, an entire sector of colonies in Fringe Space had been forgotten." Sauze raised his eyebrows, and Luna gaped. She had heard about the confusion after the war ended, but didn't realize anything that serious had happened. The worst thing to come out of it was the increase in terrorist attacks on G1, or so she had thought.

"Those colonies were destined to die. And in fact, a few did. Sitting there, waiting for shipments from G1 while they worked on getting farms set up. They waited and waited for those shipments." Sauze and Luna looked at each other awkwardly. Cikvar had an anger in his eyes.

"The shipments never came. Do you know what it's like to step into your own street and see people dying? But we survived. And we became better than G1." Luna widened her eyes. Cikvar had gone from discussing a piece of history calmly to ranting of his own tragedies.

"If you couldn't tell, we were those colonies. We banded together and formed the Zenians, under Zen Callistar's rule. A government to do better than G1. Zen said we would do it politely. But Zen failed." His clenches his hands into fists.

"Personally, I was looking forward to taking G1 with violence. And then they captured Zen and imprisoned him. It gave me the perfect excuse." Luna spotted Sauze narrowing his eyes. She felt the same way. This was no longer a normal conversation.

"What is your point, Cikvar?" Cikvar looked over at Sauze, the fire in his eyes dying. Luna gulped, hoping for Sauze's sake he had this temper in check.

"Yes, I still have to answer your question. Who else is there to think you heroes? Well, those Fringe Space colonies are still here. And many have evolved as we have." Luna looked over at Cikvar suspiciously. What was he saying?

"The Fringe Space colonies have banded together into a sizable resistance. Apparently, they learned about you from some junker ship. They are quite powerful, as a matter of fact. If they were to ally with us, we would be unstoppable." Sauze stood up straight instantly and shook his head.

"Us? There is no us. And don't think we're going to ally with you, either." Cikvar put up his hands and nodded.

"Fair enough, fair enough. Just let me finish. GalaxyForce is currently fighting that resistance. If you want to stop Kalanth, you will want that group fighting back." Luna glanced over at Sauze. She was uneasy; this Cikvar was a shady man.

"Thank you for the tip. We'll head over there and help them out as soon as you release us." Cikvar smiled, but didn't move. Looking over at Sauze, Luna spoke up.

"Where is Jane Caliemman? We're taking her with us." The corners of Cikvar's mouth flipped up into a cold grin.

"Ah yes. I figured that the only way those resistance members were going to join us was if they were told to by someone else." He didn't elaborate further. Sauze stepped forward and grabbed Cikvar by the collar of his tunic. The second his hand touched the fabric the guards sprang up and aimed their guns.

"Don't. Touch. Me." Cikvar pushed Sauze back, glaring at him. Turning to Luna, he smiled. The guards behind him didn't take their aim off of Sauze.

"Once you save those brave fighters from GalaxyForce, you're going to direct them to my group. Because I would really hate for Jane Caliemman to suffer in any way." Luna looked up at him with cold eyes. The guards walked over and pointed their guns directly at both her and Sauze.

"Why? So that you can ascend to the throne of the galaxy after Adams is dead? Do you think we'll allow that?" Luna glared at Cikvar. Stonily, he brushed her hair away from her face. She jerked back but the soldiers jabbed her with the guns.

"You know what I think? I think that you can't do anything about it. Now go and get the resistance troops. Then you can have Jane back." The soldiers pushed both her and Sauze down a few halls before they were in the bay again. There was a box with a few weapons next to a Zenian ship. Luna looked in, and found two high-power sidearms. One for her and one for Sauze. Picking them up, she looked them over before passing one to Sauze. Cikvar strode out and opened the door to the ship.

"I'm sorry it had to be this way. But think of it like this; we're going to get rid of Adams and start a better galaxy. You really can't be opposed to that." Luna and Sauze stepped into the ship quietly. They would have to do it, too. Not just because of Jane's danger, but because there was no way Adams would be killed without a big enough group to do it. If the Zenians and this resistance allied together, there was a chance Adams could be defeated. Still, that only left more problems. As the doors closed up, Luna silently wondered if there was ever going to be a happy ending.

Nex was woken up by the sound of gunfire. Rolling out of bed, he yanked on his tunic and trousers. Outside, someone was shouting. Getting his boots on, he grabbed the pistol off of the table beside the bed and rushed outside. Two of the GalaxyForce soldiers were dead on the floor, and Zen was nowhere to be seen. Nex ran back into his room and woke Maiylene.

"Quick, get dressed and grab a gun!" Running back out, he ran into two other GalaxyForce soldiers. They had helmets on now, an odd detail considering they hadn't before.

"What the hell is going on?" The soldiers looked at each other and back at Nex. One then dropped his helmet, revealing a new face. It was then that it dawned on Nex. Unfortunately, it was too late. Maiylene rushed out of Nex's room in time to see him swatted down on the ground. Struggling to fight back, Nex fired at the soldier's exposed head. A bullet hit the man square between the eyes and he slumped over on top of Nex. The armor was too heavy for Nex to move and he could only watch as Maiylene was captured as well. The soldier still there trained his gun on Maiylene and spoke something in his helmet. Another group of soldiers stepped into the ship through the door and grabbed both Nex and Maiylene. As they were dragged out, Nex spotted something out of the corner of his eye. It was a nothing more than a bench by the viewport to anyone else. But Nex could tell that it was a safety container. Of course the Ceitevorate's cruiser would have one. All you had to do was slip in and seal it. It

could then only be opened from the inside. For a second, he saw the lid move. Then he was being pulled through the door and lost sight of it.

"You two are criminals, you know." One of the soldiers poked Nex in the face with his gun. Nex rolled his eyes and checked to see if there was any way he could break free. Unfortunately not; both he and Maiylene were secured tightly by the soldiers. He heard gunfire coming from the cruiser, and guessed the soldiers that had deserted were now all dead. That depended, of course, on who was inside the safety container.

"So, Harlo, do we take 'em straight to Adams? Or do we just get to kill 'em right here and now?" Inside the cabin of a GalaxyForce ship, the seven or so soldiers that had found them now discussed their fate. The one; Harlo, shook his head and removed his helmet.

"I've got an idea. Airlock in this thing is fucked, you know? Can't be opened right. Let's throw 'em both in there and head back to Cybin. Adams wants 'em alive anyway." Nex didn't move. If they were placed in a broken airlock, that would be very bad news. They wouldn't be able to enter the ship and the only way out would be into vacuum. They would have no chance to escape. It was at this dire moment, though, that Nex noticed Zen was not onboard.

"Wait, wait! Let's put 'em in the airlock, right? But how about we just go ahead and continue the mission anyhow? The battle's gettin' pretty fierce out there in Fringe Space, why not help?" The soldiers began laughing, and Nex looked over at Maiylene in alarm. They were going to be kept in the vulnerable airlock for quite some time. There was no way they were going to be free.

"Alright, alright! Here, help me get 'em in." Nex and Maiylene were shoved into the airlock. Before it could close, Nex made one last attempt to break free. Shooting his arm out, he grabbed the soldier closing the airlock and yanked him in. The door was activated and it slid out to seal just as the man fell forward fully. The door crashed into the soldier's neck and crushed it instantly. Nex then tried to move forward but was stopped by the remaining group. As the door was sealed properly he watched the soldiers debating over whether to kill them. Then one of them flew the ship into Upperspace and Nex leaned back. This was going to end poorly.

It was several hours later before anything interesting happened. The ship dropped out of Upperspace very suddenly, startling Nex and Maiylene into combat stances. The soldiers looked around confusedly, before one walked over to the airlock angrily.

"What did you do?" Nex raised his eyebrows. What was likely some kind of Upperspace Barrier, the soldiers believed to be Nex and Maiylene. Suddenly, Maiylene spoke.

"I guess our nanomachines stopped your Upperspace drive. If you want it fixed you're going to need to let us out." They had no nanomachines. No, Maiylene had just secured their way out. Very cleverly, too.

"She says they broke our drive thing!" The soldier glared at her and yelled to the pilot of the ship. He looked over.

"Tell her to fix it then!" The soldier opened up the airlock and pointed his gun at Nex. Stepping aside, he let Maiylene out. He then closed the airlock before Nex could do anything.

"If you do anything else I'm opening the airlock. He'll be killed." Maiylene nodded and took a look at the console. Nex had no idea how she was going to do this, but he hoped she was prepared to fight. Then he realized her plan. Casually, she turned the shields off and removed power from the

weapons. Nex watched as she slowly removed power from every section of the ship. Finally, she pressed a few buttons he couldn't see and stepped back.

"It should work soon." She returned to the airlock without any intervention from the soldiers and smiled. They began talking amongst themselves, waiting for the ship to return to Upperspace. Maiylene turned and kissed Nex. When they broke apart, she whispered in his ear.

"Oxygen." Nex's eyes widened and he smiled. Maiylene leaned back smugly and they both waited in silence. Within the minute, the soldiers began stumbling and collapsing. One hauled himself over to the airlock and banged against the glass with his fist once before slumping down.

"I've got it on a power rotation. A few minutes and it'll come right back on." Nex laughed, amazed at the plan. The soldiers really shouldn't have put them in the airlock; it just proved that nothing could stop their escape. As the last one died and the oxygen slowly came back on, the airlock door opened up.

"Also on the power rotation. To think it's as easy as clicking a few buttons." The two stepped into the ship's interior, now littered with the bodies of the soldiers.

"They should have gotten some better armor." Nex kicked one of them before heading over to the console.

"Did you figure out what stopped us?" He began looking around for signs of failure somewhere in the ship. Nothing came up.

"Considering there isn't anything wrong with the ship, I'd say someone's set up an Upperspace barrier." Nex shook his head and stepped back, turning from the viewport.

"Who would have an up--" Maiylene was cut off by an explosion that sent them both to the ground. Nex scrambled to his feet only to topple over when someone collided with the ship. Grabbing a gun from one of the dead soldiers, he pulled himself up the wall and took a look through the viewport.

"A ship's docking with us! They've used an ion blast!" Helping Maiylene up, they ran to either side of the airlock. Someone would be stepping through any second, and Nex wanted to get a good look at them. He had no idea who would be docking with them all the way out here. Whoever had the balls to attack a GalaxyForce ship was someone they might want as an ally, though.

"The door's going to open. When it does, get that gun ready." Maiylene nodded at Nex and the two waited for the airlock door to open. A second later it flew across the ship, blasted off of its hinges. Three soldiers stepped in and aimed their weapons at Nex and Maiylene. They weren't GalaxyForce; that was a relief. It was less of a relief when they didn't lower their guns.

"We're not GalaxyForce! We're with Sauze Kath!" These people were attacking GalaxyForce ships. That meant they had a large enough force to do so without worry. Sauze likely would have run into them by now if this was true. Hopefully mentioning him would do something for these guys.

"Sauze Kath? You're his allies?" Nex and Maiylene nodded hurriedly. It was startling, the effect a gun pointed at your head could have. The group of armed men looked at each other and one took off his helmet.

"That's amazing. You know what? We've teamed up with Sauze and Luna. They're at our flagship right now. Seeing as your ship is going to be dead for a while, we could take you there." Nex looked over at Maiylene. It was sketchy, but these were people who attacked a GalaxyForce ship. They could be valuable allies. And if what they said was true about Sauze and Luna, it was all the better.

"That'd be great. It's good to see that there are people fighting back against GalaxyForce." The armored people stepped aside, allowing room into their ship. Nex stepped through and breathed a sigh of relief. When Maiylene was in, the ships disconnected and they prepared to fly away.

"Well then. Hey, should we do it now?" A woman began speaking to the man who had initially spoken to Nex and Maiylene. He shook his head.

"No, let's wait until we get to the flagship. It'll be way more funny." Nex wasn't really listening to them, instead focusing on Maiylene.

"How are you feeling? Are you ok?" She nodded and smiled at him. Both turning, they looked around at the soldiers in the ship. They looked fairly advanced for a group organized solely to combat GalaxyForce. This made Nex somewhat nervous, but it certainly wasn't a bad thing. After a few minutes of silence, the ship arrived at what Nex assumed was the flagship. It was a massive thing, large despite the fact that most of it was obscured by the confines of the viewport. As the ship docked, Nex and Maiylene got ready behind the soldiers. It would be so good to see Sauze and Luna alive and well. As the doors opened and they followed the soldiers out, though, Nex saw no sign of Sauze or Luna. It was now that he began to get a sinking feeling in his stomach. Before he could say anything, a man walked out of a corridor off to the side. The soldiers standing around Nex and Maiylene drew their weapons, holding them at their sides.

"So these are the two you picked up. And you're sure they are part of Kath's group?" He looked at them from across the room, examining their every feature.

"Yes sir. What would you have us do with them?" The man strode across the room and gestured with his hand. The soldiers moved aside, giving Nex a good look at this person. He sneered at them, then stepped back a few paces and grinned.

"This is absolutely perfect. Absolutely perfect! You will all receive promotions for this, ladies and gentlemen." Nex tried to push past the soldiers and talk to the man, but in a flash the soldiers all had their weapons trained on the two of them. One shoved Nex to the ground and pushed his head down with the barrel of a gun. Maiylene was smart enough not to try anything, but she did move the barrel from Nex's face with her foot.

"Take them to the cells. Separate them, too. I'll follow up shortly." Nex was yanked up off the floor and told to follow a group of soldiers. It was as they started to walk away that he realized Maiylene was not with him. Looking around, he saw her being led off by a different group of soldiers.

"Maiylene! Don't--" One of the soldiers grabbed him by the shoulder and slammed him into the wall. When he slid down to the ground, he immediately felt horrible. When he spat, a glob of blood and a few teeth splattered all over his trousers. He was pulled back up again and pushed forward, still bleeding out of his mouth. When they finally arrived at what was presumably his cell, he was tossed in and left. The door locked as he landed on the floor. Rather than getting up and finding a way out, Nex decided it would be best just to lie there for a while.

Sauze flipped the last switch and gestured to Luna. The two of them raced out of the ship's bridge and back to the small bay in which they had left their ship. The GalaxyForce attack on the resistance had been surprisingly small and manageable. The only ship left, as well as the one they were standing on, was the command ship. It would have been a problem had they not disabled the shields. That, and set attack drones upon the command ship straight from its own drone storage. This

combination did mean they had to leave though, and it meant they had to leave quickly. Arriving at their ship, Sauze ducked in and began powering it up. Luna leapt into the pilot's chair and blasted a hole through the walls, before flying out.

"You alright? Injured?" Sauze wiped sweat off of his brow and set his gun down against the wall. Looking at Luna, he saw no injuries.

"I'm alright. How about you?" She flew the ship a good distance away from the command ship before turning to ask him. He nodded and looked through the viewport.

"I'm fine. Now let's talk to the resistance guys and get Jane back." He banged his fist against the wall, still angry over the matter. He just couldn't believe that they were actually going to do this.

"There's got to be a way, right? Can't we just tell them that the Zenians are corrupt?" Luna began piloting their ship slowly to where the resistance ships were gathering. Sauze leaned against the wall and thought hard.

"I suppose so...we'd have to make it very convincing. If they found out, it would probably mean death for Jane. How about we inform the resistance, but go ahead first in case the Zenians try something? They might be planning to kill Jane the second the resistance arrives." Sauze nodded to himself as Luna guided the ship over to the resistance group. They requested docking with the largest ship, assuming it was where whoever was commanding this group was. When the doors opened, Sauze was met with quite the surprise. The man in the doorway gasped and shook his head.

"No way. No way! It's you! Sauze Kath!" Sauze couldn't believe it. Standing in front of him was Zen Callistar, completely alive.

"Zen Callistar? I thought you would've been killed ages ago!" Sauze stepped into the resistance ship, staring incredulously at Zen.

"Nice to see you too, Sauze. Listen, we have a problem. You know Nex and Maiylene?" Sauze stopped walking and looked over at Zen.

"I do know them. How do you know them?" Zen sat down in one of the chairs, and nodded at a technician.

"We were traveling together. They picked me up on Cybin, and we were all headed out here to find you two. Unfortunately, GalaxyForce took our ship. I managed to hide but they took Nex and Maiylene." Sauze and Luna looked over at each other. This was bad news. If GalaxyForce had captured Nex and Maiylene, it probably meant Adams was going to make a big show of executing them. That or he had simply wanted to do it himself.

"Well, the resistance here picked me up. We were going to go and look for you, but then GalaxyForce started attacking. You showed them pretty quickly, huh?" Sauze closed his eyes and tried to think of where Nex and Maiylene could have been taken. It was then that Luna spoke.

"Listen, Zen. We need to speak to whoever is in charge around here. Remember the Zenians? Well, a man named Cikvar controls them now, and he's got our friend hostage. The only way he's going to let her go is if the resistance allies with the Zenians." Zen's face turned deadly cold. He looked over at Sauze with a look of disgust.

"You say Cikvar has control of the Zenians?" Sauze and Luna exchanged glances before nodding. Zen closed his eyes for a few moments before sighing.

"Alright. Alright, I'll do something. Give me a few minutes." Zen strode off into the ship, leaving Sauze and Luna alone with other members of the resistance. They mostly just worked in silence. After a bit of time, Zen came back. Sauze noticed he held a new, more powerful gun in his hand now.

"The resistance will ally with the Zenians. I would love to get back there and help to finish this fight with GalaxyForce." Zen's voice was flat and dark now. Sauze was about to say something when Zen shot him a look.

"It's under control. Go on ahead, tell Cikvar the resistance is on its way." Sauze gave Zen a short nod and walked back into the ship with Luna. As they left the resistance group and set the coordinates for the Zenian flagship, Sauze looked over at Luna.

"What do you think that was all about? I hope Zen isn't really planning to get the resistance and the Zenians together." Luna stepped away from the pilot seat and shook her head.

"I doubt it. I mean, did you see the way he fumed when you mentioned Cikvar? Weird thing is, he's kind of got a right to the whole Zenian faction. If he's with the resistance, doesn't that mean he kind of has to have them together?" Sauze shrugged and retrieved his gun from the floor.

"No idea. Let's just focus on getting Jane back so we can find Maiylene and Nex." Luna nodded and sat back down at the pilot seat.

"Should we try and find them first? Surely it would be easier if we just killed Adams beforehand." Sauze nodded, sitting down next to her.

"Maybe. But who's to say Adams hasn't thought of the same thing. For him they might just be insurance." They both looked out the viewport glumly for a second.

"Assuming they're even alive." Luna said what they were both thinking. The rest of the trip back to the flagship was mostly in silence. When they did finally arrive, the atmosphere of the ship was very dark. Luna landed the ship in the bay they left from, and they both stepped out to meet Cikvar. He smiled at them warmly. This time, two of the many soldiers guarding him held a screen. It was deactivated presently, but Sauze felt he didn't want to see what it might hold.

"Hello friends. I assume the resistance troops are incoming?" Cikvar looked back and forth between Sauze and Luna. Angrily, Sauze nodded.

"They should be here any time now. So can we have Jane Caliemann now?" Cikvar nodded and put his hands up in the air.

"Of course! What, did you think I would keep her even after your great service? Gentlemen, bring out Ms. Caliemann." Across the bay, two soldiers walked out. They had their hands on Jane's shoulders, but she pushed away the second she saw Sauze and Luna.

"Jane!" She rushed over and wrapped her arms around both of them. Her skin was pale and her eyes were sunken.

"There you go. Unharmful, if not a bit shaken." Sauze looked up at Cikvar. This didn't make much sense. He was just giving them Jane, even without confirmation that the resistance was on its way. Immediately Sauze was on his guard.

"Now, on to our next order of business. I'm sure you're aware of the fortifications around Cybin; Ceitevorate Kalanth's base." Sauze blinked once. So this was when the other shoe dropped.

"You will breach Cybin's defenses and begin a battle. In doing so, you will allow me to attack Kalanth with less of a fight." Sauze took a step forward, now eye to eye with Cikvar.

"We aren't doing anything for you anymore. We've gotten you the resistance group, you've given us back Jane. We're done." Cikvar laughed, and Sauze cringed. The laugh was a very cruel one, something that a murder might let loose before pulling the trigger.

"Oh, don't be silly. Of course you're still going to be working for me." Luna and Jane both stepped up next to Sauze, listening. Sauze shook his head slowly.

"I don't know why you think we would. We are leaving right now." Cikvar turned to the two guards holding the screen. Nodding, he looked back at Sauze.

"It's a shame, then. If that's how it is going to be, I suppose we can just execute your friends." The screen turned on, and Sauze flinched at the images. Two feeds were visible on the screen, of two different cells. One showed Maiylene leaning against the wall crying. The other showed Nex lying face down in a pool of blood. Curling his hands into fists, Sauze leaned in to Cikvar. Faces almost touching, Sauze whispered very grimly.

"If you do not fucking let them go right this second I swear to god--" Sauze was cut off by a guard stepping between them.

"Look at that, Sauze. You don't have a choice, now do you. I would suggest you drop your weapons right now. Oh, and look at that. The resistance fleet has just arrived." Sauze stepped back, tearing his eyes away from the screen. Looking over at Luna and Jane, he sighed. Dropping his weapons, Sauze let his arms hang at his sides. Cautiously, Luna let go of her weapons as well. As the guards scavenged the weapons, Cikvar made a transmission to the resistance fleet.

"Could your captain enter our bay over here? I'd like to discuss our plans." Cikvar gestured to Sauze and then to the side of the bay. He, Luna, and Jane walked over and stood to the side of the wall. In about a minute or so, another ship entered the bay. When it landed, Cikvar looked at the guards. They lowered their weapons and stepped back. The doors opened up, and Zen walked out.

"Wait...Zen? Zen Callistar? Is it really you?" Cikvar was completely taken aback. Zen stared at him for a second before nodding.

"Hello Cikvar. It would appear you've done well in commanding the Zenians while I've been gone." Cikvar didn't say anything, simply staring at Zen.

"Oh, don't worry. You can keep control. I think I've found my place with the resistance. But perhaps we can work something out?" Cikvar relaxed and nodded agreeably. Sauze glanced over at Luna.

"I think I know what he's doing. He wouldn't want to simply come back and take over. Cikvar would try to kill him so that his master plan would work. No, Zen is going to make himself the opposite of an obstacle. Clever." Zen and Cikvar headed away from the bay, presumably to discuss tactics. A group of guards then strode up to Luna, Jane, and Sauze with their weapons drawn.

"We're taking the fleets and heading to Cybin. You're going to be staying in your cells until we get there. Come on." His voice was thick and commanding. Sauze, already defeated by the sight of his captive friends, let the guards lead the way. When they arrived at the first cell, the guards pushed Sauze in and shut the door. This time there was no glass separating the rooms, only cold white walls. There wasn't a bed, either. Sauze hoped the lack of facilities meant the cells were very temporary, but had no idea how long it might take to get to Cybin. Sitting down, he closed his eyes and tried to remember happier times.

Zen stood up from the table and shook hands with Cikvar. Already, both the resistance fleet and the Zenian fleet were on their way to Cybin. Something in his gut told Zen this would be his last battle, whether for good or for bad.

"When we arrive, the resistance fighters and my Zenians will enter the fray immediately. I've got...a special force working on taking care of the ground troops. As GalaxyForce's defenses are broken down, it will be up to the two of us to take care of Mr. Kalanth Adams. Does that sound good?" Cikvar gestured at the plans they had written. Zen nodded, taking a look at Cikvar before they headed up to the bridge. That was where they would be stationed until a path had been cleared to Adams. Now, Zen was no fool. It would not be the two of them killing Adams. Zen would end up dead, too. Which meant he had to act first. There was no question when it came to Cikvar. As they headed up to the bridge, Zen began making conversation.

"How long do you think it will be before we're at Cybin?" Cikvar, apparently surprised that Zen would want to talk to him any further, took a second to respond.

"Not too long. This flagship is pretty fast, we should be there within the day. I've got the men geared up for the fight already." Zen already knew how the flagship flew. He had flown in it. But interrupting Cikvar's thought process was the best way of staying alive. He had already dodged what would likely have been an immediate assassination by not opposing Cikvar's control of the Zenians. That hardly meant he was safe, though. As they headed up the stairs, Zen continued.

"Have you heard anything from Sauze Kath? He seems like a valuable ally to have had." They entered the bridge and sat across from one another at a new table by the viewport. In a few hours, Zen would begin his plan. And this was how he would.

"Oh, no we haven't." Cikvar betrayed himself. There was that edge in his voice that let Zen know he was nervous. It was that edge Zen would act upon. But he needed to wait until they were closer to Cybin. And so, as the time passed, Zen introduced himself to every person in the bridge. He also received updates as to where they were. When they were close enough, he would begin. There could be some consequences, though. Zen was almost completely sure Cikvar had Sauze and Luna somewhere on the ship. No doubt there were going to be sent in as a distraction and end up dead. That couldn't happen. So it needed to happen just outside of Cybin. And when Zen was notified that they would be arriving at Cybin in a few minutes, he stood up and faced Cikvar.

"You're sure you haven't heard anything from Sauze?" In his pocket, Zen wrapped his hand around the high power sidearm given to him by the resistance ship's captain. It was loaded and ready.

"No, nothing. Why do you ask?" Zen looked him in the eyes and smiled. Behind them, in the viewport, the stars came into focus and the grisly scene of Cybin exploded across the viewport. Cikvar hadn't noticed, but the fleet had arrived.

"I ask..." Zen paused, staring at Cikvar intensely. "I ask because after he notified me of you, I personally flew him to the Inner Rim." It wasn't true, of course. But Zen could see in Cikvar's eyes that implications had set in. Cikvar had just realized that Zen knew perfectly well where Sauze had gone. He would know that Zen was lying to him, and he would likely understand why.

"Well...that's interesting." Zen took out the high power sidearm and held it in front of himself. Looking up, he glared at Cikvar.

"Let me ask you again. You are absolutely sure you haven't heard from Sauze?" Cikvar looked at him for a few seconds before answering. Behind him, the fleet of resistance ships and Zenian ships began moving towards the GalaxyForce fleet stationed around Cybin.

"Zen, you were never fit to control the Zenians. I've accomplished so much in the time that you've been dead. And now I'm going to see to it that I accomplish much more. Guards!" Zen held his gun up and looked around. The guards were very confused.

"Anybody going to kill me? No? Alright then. Cikvar, make your pleas." Cikvar fumed at the guards before shaking his head.

"I have all five of them captive. Kill me and they die." Zen was surprised by this. But it didn't matter. Leaning back, he shouted.

"Please retrieve the five prisoners and bring them to the bridge, officer. Tell the workers it is under the order of Zen Callistar." The guards saluted and rushed out into the hall. Looking back at Cikvar, Zen smiled.

"You know, when I said 'make your pleas', that was when you should have told me why I shouldn't kill you. You got it all mixed up, didn't you?" Zen held the high-power sidearm up and fired three times. Cikvar's smoking corpse hit the floor of the ship with a thud, molten liquid streaming out. Sitting down in the commander's chair, Zen began an announcement. In front of him, the first ships were making contact. The battle was beginning.

"Your loathsome leader Cikvar was corrupt. He is no longer in place. Instead, it is I; Zen Callistar! GalaxyForce could not kill me and they can't kill you either. Now, friends, this is the most important battle of our lives. Those in the resistance and the Zenians will remember today as a day filled with sadness but a day of victory all the same. As I leave to join the fight, consider this; we are at war not because of us, but because of them." Zen signed off on the speech and stood up. Just at that moment, the doors swung open and five dishevelled figures stepped in. Nex and Maiylene raced over the second they saw him, while Sauze, Luna, and Jane looked around the room.

"Good to see you, ladies and gentlemen. This is the time for action. I've got the resistance fleet and the Zenians combating the entire fleet. We should be able to head down and attack Adams in his tower." Sauze, kicking at the smouldering remains of Cikvar, nodded.

"Let's do it then. Everyone ready?" As the group affirmed their willingness, Zen handed out several high power rifles taken right off the wall of the bridge.

"Very well. It will be an honor to server." The group headed off towards the ship bay, an uneasiness in each one's heart.

Act 4

Part I

Sauze stood beside Jane as she piloted the ship toward Cybin's surface. Around them GalaxyForce, resistance, and Zenian ships were blown to pieces. Several times shrapnel had crossed past their viewport, occasionally including a limb or two. As the ship set down, Sauze felt himself begin to sweat. This was the battle everything had been leading up to. This was also the battle he didn't know how to win. It just seemed so wrong, to fight Adams. In his heart he knew he couldn't pull the trigger on the Ceitevorate. He could, however, tie him up and beat him into unconsciousness. It was not Sauze's place to kill Adams. Even if not for Sauze's morals, death almost seemed like something too nice. No, Adams needed to stand trial for his crimes.

"This way! The tower's just ahead!" Sauze saw Nex running forward carrying his rifle. This man, who had simply gotten caught up in the violence, was now an integral component. It was Sauze's fault that he was here, and it would be Sauze's fault if he died. Beside him was Maiylene, who gave Nex a kind smile. Thinking back now, Sauze remembered how all she wanted was to lead a life outside of this. It was his responsibility to make sure she could do so, and so far he had all but certainly failed. Behind those two were Zen and Jane. Both powerful people, and both intelligent people. They didn't need to be a part of this, but still they were. If they were killed Sauze would take it upon himself as well.

"I know what you're thinking, Sauze, and you're wrong. It isn't your fault if someone here dies. We're ready for anything that comes at us, and you can only help in that." Finally, of course, there was Luna. Looking over at her, he couldn't help but smile at how well she knew him. Nodding at her, he raced forward to follow Nex. As the tower grew closer and closer, Sauze felt even more ready than before. It was as they approached the door that the first shots began to go off.

"What is--take cover!" Sauze leapt behind the blown out wall of what might once have been a building and took a look. There was a large group of soldiers stepping methodically through the barren street, headed straight for the tower. They opened fire as the group scrambled to get to cover, never changing course. They moved together at such an exact pace that it was almost robotic. It was then, as they got closer, that Sauze realized. They didn't appear robotic. They were robotic. Zen suddenly rose from behind his cover and took a shot with his rifle. It ripped right through the head of one of the robot soldiers, vaporizing it instantly. Unfortunately, the now headless robot soldier continued walking and firing.

"Everyone into the tower!" Nex knocked one of the doors open and leapt in, taking a few shots as he went. One took out the chest of a soldier, and it immediately dropped over. Sauze raced across the open street, keeping the door open for Luna and Maiylene. When he got inside, it was only Jane and Zen outside. They took care of the last of the robots before standing up. It was when they turned around, however, that three more groups appeared at the end of each street. Zen grabbed Sauze by the arm.

"I can call in some of my troops and keep these things from getting in. You guys head up and find Adams." Sauze shook his head instantly. While it was true that Zen and a squad of Zenian soldiers would be good, there was no way they could hold off that many robots.

"You'll have better chances racing them up with us. Come on" Sauze tried to pull Zen in, but he didn't budge.

"Yeah. And you'll have better chances if they're held off for a bit. Listen, this is going to be my last battle. I know it. I'd rather die keeping you lot alive than I would from a stray bullet upstairs. Just go." Sauze looked him in the eyes, but before he could speak Jane stepped back out.

"Maybe this will be your last battle. That doesn't mean you have to die. Anyway, I figure I owe it to you. I did help put you in that prison pit." Zen raised his eyebrows, then gestured to an overturned pallet by the building.

"Good luck, guys." Zen shut the door and Sauze heard gunfire. Looking at the others nervously, he began to walk up the stairs. It was quite a long way, and they were met with robot guards on the very first floor. While it wasn't that hard to take care of them, nobody really had armor and it was tough firing the sizable rifles. If this was what they could expect from each floor up to the top, it wouldn't be long before somebody faltered. On the second floor, one of the robots got a shot off that nearly missed Luna. She ducked, but in doing so was unable to fire. As a result, one robot was around a bit longer and caused more damage. By the third floor, on which Nex was knocked into a wall by a robot soldier using close quarters weaponry, the group knew they needed to try something different.

"Next floor, when you head up the stairs, don't open the door immediately. Instead, fire through the door. The doors are pretty tough, but so are our rifles. We could have better cover that way." This strategy worked remarkably well, until several floors later when they found the doors were more reinforced. One of the robots opened the door from the inside and slammed Sauze against it, causing Luna to stumble back. She fell down the stairs as the last robot was finished, but managed to stay unharmed. It was when she came back up, completely pale, that Sauze knew there was something wrong.

"I...I heard sounds down the building. I think the robots outside just got in." It then became a race, and a very clumsy one. Each floor the squad was more tired and each floor was harder and harder. This went on until, near the top, one of the robots shot Maiylene twice. One bullet hit her gut, and the other took off the lower part of her leg completely. She dropped over as Sauze took care of the robot, gasping for breath. Nex was by her side in an instant, trying to help her up. Through her choked cries, she spoke.

"Leave me here...I can't fight and I can't climb the stairs...I'll slow you down." Luna began crying shaking her head and looking away. Sauze stared at her, unable to do anything. Below, the sound of advancing robots grew louder. As no one could offer anything, Nex broke the silence.

"I'll stay. I can fight off the robots as they come and protect her. Don't say anything, Sauze, because I'm not leaving her here and she can't come with." Sauze stared at Nex for a few seconds before wrapping his arm around Luna and heading for the next stair case. He gave Nex a nod as they passed and headed up the next set of stairs with Luna. Brushing away her tears, she loaded her rifle again and took out the next floor of robots with ease. As they neared the top, the sounds of robots got farther and farther away. Sauze had no doubt that Nex would fight until he was dead. Unfortunately, he would probably be dead fairly soon. As they got to the final floor, two robots guarded the door. They were dispatched fairly quickly. Opening the door, Sauze prepared to strike. Instead, they were in an airlock-like room with two switches. At the end of the room was a door without any obvious way to open it. It was then that it dawned on Sauze; both switches had to be activated to open the door.

"Come on, quick!" Luna took the one closest to the staircase back down. Sauze took the one closest to Adams's room. When they both pulled the levers, a hideous grinding noise sounded. All of a

sudden, A wall shot out between Sauze and Luna. It went so fast that he couldn't say anything, simply watch it close. Another trick by Adams. He heard her shouting through the wall, but the sound was too faint and he couldn't hear what she said. Before he could try to reverse it, the door at the end slowly slid aside. Behind it stood Ceitevorate Kalanth Adams. Smiling, he stepped back into the room. Sauze walked in, never taking his eyes off of Adams. The room didn't look that different from when he had last been here, tied to a chair and mutilated. The only difference was that now the tables had turned and Sauze had the advantage.

"Is there anything you want to say, Kalanth Adams? Any reason you want to give?" The two began circling the room, staring each other in the eyes.

"I would like to say that I am quite proud of you, Sauze. You should have died ages ago. But somehow you keep on living." Sauze nodded, continuing to stare at Adams. Eventually, they both stopped walking around and stood staring at each other. Behind Adams was a table with some small black box object on it. Sauze couldn't quite see it from where he was but did not pay much attention.

"So, what do you seek to gain from this? You hoping to become the next Ceitevorate after I'm disposed of?" Sauze looked at Adams in disgust. Of course that's what he would think.

"Maybe I don't seek to gain anything, Mr. Adams. Maybe I just want to save the galaxy from you." Adams smiled slyly and shook his head. His hand slowly began to reach back behind himself.

"Oh, Sauze. Everybody has that one thing they like most. Everybody has that one thing that means more to them than saving the galaxy." Sauze looked at Adams coldly.

"What are you getting at, Ceitevorate?" Adams sighed and rolled his eyes. Smiling, he pointed past Sauze to the door through which he had come in.

"What if I told you she was dying right now?" Sauze whipped around , cursing himself for doing so. It was his natural response to want to help Luna, and in turning around he had proved Adams right. When he turned back Kalanth Adams was face to face with him. He held the small black box Sauze had seen earlier, only now Sauze recognized it as the hilt to Adams's knife. The two began wrestling around the room, pressed together. Adams finally managed to bring the knife hilt up, and shoved it against Sauze's heart. They were pressed together on either side, Sauze's heart on one side and Adams's chest on the other. All it would take was the press of the button and blood would spill. So Adams, in his rage, fumbled with the hilt and pressed the button. Sauze heard the metallic noise as the blade left the inside of the knife, and waited for death.

"No...no..." Feeling no pain, Sauze opened his eyes. Adams had stumbled back, knife sticking out of his chest. Somehow, Adams had pointed it the wrong way. Dropping to his knees, Adams began sputtering and gasping. Shaking his head, he looked up at Sauze with crazed eyes. Sauze stood still, watching Adams writhe. There was nothing that could be done at this point. Adams would be dead in minutes.

"You know what, Adams? I wasn't here to kill you. I was here to do what was right. But you never even considered that." Adams glared at Sauze, as tears began to form in his eyes.

"That's what is....that is your problem. You're so loyal...." Adams dropped from a kneeling position to the floor. Curling up, he glared at Sauze. Sauze took a few steps back, heading for the door.

"You know what, Kalanth? That may be. That could very well be true. But then again, I'm not the one dying alone on the floor right now." Sauze flipped the lever and left the room. Luna looked back and followed him.

"What happened?" She wiped some of Adams's blood from Sauze's face. Sauze looked at her and sighed wearily.

"Adams is dead by his own hand. Are you alright?" Luna nodded worriedly, before smiling. When they reached the next level down, she pointed to a control board.

"I found the signal broadcast for the robots and shut them down. The battle with the fleet was won, too!" She grinned widely, and began kissing Sauze. He nodded, and looked back up the stairs.

"As nice as it is that this is over, I can't help but feel sorry." Just then, Nex appeared at the bottom of the stairs. He was aiding Maiylene up, and slowly they were making their way to the top.

"When the robots stopped working, I figured you guys had something to do with it." Nex put a hand on Sauze's shoulder and nodded at him. The four of them looked out one of the windows at the sky above. A few of the ships were falling out of orbit now, but there wasn't much left they could hit. The group began walking down the stairs, talking to one another. It was nice to catch up. Sauze didn't really feel in the mood for too much conversation, simply listening instead. Nex and Maiylene spoke of their adventures in the factory beneath the ground, while Luna and Sauze recounted meeting up with Jane and their plan to lure Adams to outer space. When they reached the last floor, though, everyone became silent. It was here they would have to be greeted with the deaths of Jane and Zen. Stepping out, they found themselves in a battlezone littered with death robots. There was a Zenian troop transport nearby, with several dead bodies around it. Walking over solemnly, Sauze looked. It was then that the group heard yelling.

"Over here! Over here!" Looking up, Sauze was amazed to see two figures on the rooftop of a massive council building. There were fortifications set up across the roof, even some made of broken robots. The two climbed down a rickety fire escape before rushing over. As they got closer, Sauze confirmed that it was Zen and Jane. The others were completely incredulous.

"I don't believe it. I just don't believe it." As a full group of six now, they all simply stared at each other. It was Zen that broke the silence.

"I'm going to assume that Adams is dead." Sauze nodded gravely. Looking from person to person, he saw now how affected they were as well. It was not the best ending, but it was not the one Sauze had chosen.

"In that case, I'm going to call for a cruiser. You can fill us in on the way up." Sauze nodded at him and looked up into the sky. It was over."

The End

Act 4

Part 2:

Epilogue

Sauze looked out at all the different beings present. The events of Kalanth Adams's regime were in the past, but their effects were not. So much still needed to be sorted out before the galaxy could function again. And so Sauze had worked with the Zenians and the resistance to set up a meeting. That was where he was now, to suggest some ideas. The effort to rebuild everything destroyed was already working very well. Much of Cybin had already begun to get fixed up. As all the citizens returned home and all the workers were freed, people began working together to set things back to normal.

As for the factory, once the slaves imprisoned there were freed, it became a jail for all those who supported Adams. Be they troops or businessmen, they were imprisoned there until they could be properly dealt with. Sauze went over this in his speech to the assembled group. But of course, the main issue was how to proceed as a galaxy. It was then that his idea was put out. GalaxyForce would be controlled by the government of G1. But in the event that G1 issued orders that went against GalaxyForce's code, they would become separate organizations and GalaxyForce would have a right to arrest the issuer and support of those orders. It was also suggested that the Ceitevorate not be the only one in power. Sauze agreed completely; the position of Administrator could be created. This would be someone to keep the Ceitevorate in check, but also to perform smaller tasks for the Ceitevorate.

After that, they had to decide what the new government would consist of. It really ended up staying mostly the same, but Sauze hoped that new laws on colony control could help prevent this issue in the future. As well as that, most planets already signed on with the G1 government stayed. This was good, it meant efforts could be focused on reaching out and expanding the region of government. Lastly, as most of the council members in G1 were now dead or missing, it was decided that the current Zenian government could provide a surrogate organization as new members were selected. Some people were reluctant, but were reminded that there wasn't much else of an option.

Finally, it came down to deciding who would lead. Zen Callistar took the role of Ceitevorate, partially because the Zenians were the surrogate government and partially because nobody else had any experience leading like he had. Next came the new role of Administrator. Jane was selected for this, as it wasn't much of a switch from her job as Galactic Enforcer save for that she was no longer associated with military. To her, this was perfect. Finally, there was the job of Galactic Enforcer. It was a surprising unanimous vote that helped Sauze take the position. It would be different, but definitely a new experience. He was looking forward to it quite a bit, as well as working with his platoon commander and wife; Luna Eyeth.

As for Maiylene and Nex, they mostly left the radar. Zen set Maiylene up at the first open hospital on Cybin and soon enough she was the most celebrated medical professional. Nex stuck around with her, deciding to organize and lead the group working to fix up Cybin. This branched out into the neighbouring planets, and soon anywhere in distress. While the galaxy began to grow again, Sauze went down in history as the man who saved it.