

**Galactic Liberty**

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE PLANET EXTERR

An infinite number of stars appear like white pinpricks in the black firmament of space.

As we look to the left, the blue-green orb of a habitable planet, EXTERR, enters view. Beyond it, we see the crescent of the planet's sole moon.

An ominous ship of massive size, a FARNORIAN INTIMIDATOR, passes into orbit about the planet. Bright beams of scarlet light LANCE DOWN from the vulture-shaped ship towards the great northern continent on this side of Exterr.

Small global defense ships, EXTERRAN DEFENSE FRIGATES, are streaking up from the planet's surface, but their MEAGER laser weaponry does nothing to penetrate the Farnorian Intimidator's shielding. Even worse, two more Intimidators are MOVING IN.

EXT. EXTERRAN SURFACE - CITY OF ARLINGA - AFTERNOON

Down on the Exterran surface, beautiful crystalline skyscrapers in downtown Arlinga CRUMBLE in the blink of an eye as the Farnorian ship's laser weaponry STRIKES them.

SCREAMING people of every description and every nameable race crowd the streets as they RUN for their lives towards the public spaceport.

Largest in population are humans, the planet's native race. One pair of humans, ALEX SPENCER and CRYSTAL SPENCER, is CUTTING ACROSS the crowd's flow into an unused alleyway.

EXT. ALLEYWAY IN ARLINGA

When they reach the alleyway, young Alex stops to catch his breath. He is about eighteen years old, not very tall, and lean, with short black hair. As he GASPS for air, his hazel eyes turn to Crystal, his sister. His eyes are wide, indicating that he is very scared.

Crystal looks a bit older, around twenty-two. She is at least two inches taller with long brown hair, blue eyes, and a more muscular build. She STOPS suddenly and turns to him with concern.

CRYSTAL SPENCER  
Come on, Alex, we have to go!

ALEX SPENCER  
Go where, Crystal? It isn't safe  
anywhere in the whole city of Arlinga!

CRYSTAL  
Just a little farther, and we'll be all  
right.

Crystal starts running.

Visibly holding back a curse, Alex races after her.

ALEX  
Why are we doing this, anyway? We ought  
to be going with everyone else towards  
the evac ships.

After shaking her head:

CRYSTAL  
No time to explain.

ALEX  
Come on, Crys. Mom would've taken the  
time to explain.

Crystal HITS THE BRAKES so hard that Alex nearly collides  
with her. He gasps when she whirls and scowls at him.

CRYSTAL  
Mom and Dad are dead, do you understand?  
Dead! If you bring it up again, you  
jerk, I'll... I'll leave you here!

They stand silent for a moment. A sudden BLAST startles  
them, and they look back the way they have come.

A bright laser FLASHES into a building at the point where  
they entered the alley and sets it CRUMBLING.

As he suddenly whirls back to his sister:

ALEX  
Have it your way, Crys. Let's just go,  
okay?

Without a further word, Crystal turns around and leads the  
way down the alleyway.

ALEX  
How in the galaxy could the Farnorian  
Kingdom attack Exterr, anyway? This is  
supposed to be the capital!

CRYSTAL

Where have you been for the last year, a barn? They've been threatening insurrection for months. They have the latest offensive weaponry. I doubt our defense fighters are making a dent in them.

ALEX

I know, but they're no match for the Galactic Starfleet! Shouldn't they be here?

After she SIGHS impatiently:

CRYSTAL

You must be the most naïve idiot in our million-year history, you know that? We're near the Galaxy Core. The fleet is spread out in the galaxy's Outer Arms. You're the science expert; you tell me how long it takes to travel that distance.

Alex is silent for a moment as they continue.

ALEX

Wow... two days at least! Even more if they bring in the capital ships! Arlinga will either capitulate or be destroyed before the fleet arrives.

CRYSTAL

Exactly. Next time, think before you say something stupid.

Alex scowls, but he says nothing in retort.

EXT. AIR FORCE HANGAR IN ARLINGA

When the pair emerges into the open, Alex is visibly awed to see that they are nearing an AIR FORCE HANGAR.

Besides Alex and Crystal, there is no activity.

ALEX

Oh, wow... a hangar! How did you know this alley would lead us here?

CRYSTAL

I've learned a lot of secret routes while working in the city planning office. Not to mention from serving in the space army for a couple of years.

ALEX

Yeah, that follows. But Crys, won't they be annoyed that we're stealing one of their craft?

With a half-smile towards her brother:

CRYSTAL

Borrowing, Alex. I'm sure they're all up there fighting. We'll be able to escape the city.

ALEX

But... you can't fly!

CRYSTAL

You can.

They STOP as they near the hangar doors. Alex is incredulous:

ALEX

No way! I haven't flown military craft before!

Crystal crosses her arms imposingly.

CRYSTAL

You're going to fly if I have to hold your hands on the flight yoke. Come on, Alex, we need to get out of here! This place is probably a big bull's eye, and--

A laser blast FLASHES through the sky and LANCES into the flight control tower, cutting her off as the top of the tower CRASHES to the ground.

Alex holds back another curse and leads the way to the one craft remaining, a shuttle-type craft.

ALEX

Well, we're going to die anyway, so we might as well go in a glorious crash.

CRYSTAL

I just love your optimism.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Alex seats himself at the craft's port controls as Crystal sits down at the starboard controls. When they have both STRAPPED IN, Alex starts up the ENGINES.

ALEX

While I'm busy getting us killed, you might want to look for the weapon controls. If they start sending fighter craft--

CRYSTAL

Right. I'm on it.

EXT. AIR FORCE HANGAR

As Alex gently engages the drive, the shuttle lifts up off the deck and exits the hangar. As soon as the shuttle is out, lasers begin BOMBARDING the hangar. It COLLAPSES in seconds.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Tears form in Alex's eyes as he sees what has happened in the viewscreen. He goes into panic.

ALEX

Oh, holy... we were almost killed! We almost died, Crys!

With an impatient SIGH:

CRYSTAL

You can't jump at every little thing, you crybaby. Get us out of here, or we will die.

Alex frowns as he clears the tears from his eyes.

ALEX

As soon as we get out of this, you're on your own, you got that? I hate it when you talk to me like I'm a little kid.

CRYSTAL

Then grow up and quit acting like one!  
This is serious business, Alex. People  
are dying from this attack. Those  
Farnorians... they can't be reasoned  
with. They'll destroy the whole planet  
of Exterr if they think it'll help them  
gain independence. Oh, I wish I was  
still in the army. Then, I could do  
something.

ALEX

I can't have you die on me, Crys.  
You're all I've got now.

Crystal looks at him in surprise.

CRYSTAL

What about Amy?

ALEX

Dumped me like a rock yesterday. Said  
she was stringing me along the whole  
time.

Crystal is suddenly apologetic:

CRYSTAL

Ouch... I'm so sorry, Alex. No wonder  
you're so discombobulated. If I'd  
known...

ALEX

You'd have still gotten me here. We'd  
still have a chance.

Contemplating his words silently, Crystal examines some  
sensor readings.

EXT. CITY OF ARLINGA

The city center is SMOKING IN RUINS now. Mass PANIC is  
still in full swing.

As Alex and Crystal's shuttle SOARS AWAY from downtown, the  
BARRAGE extends to the city's outskirts.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

CRYSTAL

Alex, this is really bad. This planet hasn't been attacked in a thousand years.

ALEX

Where should we go?

Crystal is silent for a moment.

CRYSTAL

I have some old army buddies down in Port Yarvis. Maybe they can take us in for a while.

ALEX

Port Yarvis, eh? I've heard that called a den of iniquity. Aren't you concerned about your innocent little brother being tainted by the sin there?

CRYSTAL

Hmph. A little sin might do you some good, you know. I bet you've never even thought about making out with a girl.

Alex opens his mouth to respond, but a sudden laser blast FILLS the viewscreen, cutting him off.

EXT. SKY ABOVE ARLINGA

The shuttlecraft ROLLS to starboard, very narrowly missing the laser beam.

The laser neatly STRIKES and SETS FIRE to a minor municipal building on the surface.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

ALEX

Too close for comfort. Setting course for Port Yarvis.

CRYSTAL

Good. Now, answer me: have you even considered being with a girl?

Nearly SHOUTING in irritation:

ALEX

Of course I've thought about it! What guy hasn't? You know, I expect this teasing from adolescent bullies, not my grown-up sister.

Crystal is apologetic:

CRYSTAL

All right. You're just so serious all the time. You need to have fun, Alex.

Another couple of laser blasts RAIN DOWN nearby, but not as close as before.

ALEX

Oh, like now?

CRYSTAL

Right. Point taken.

She frowns in concentration as she examines her readouts:

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

Uh oh.

ALEX

What do you mean, "Uh oh"?

CRYSTAL

Landing ships are headed towards the city center. Nothing headed our way, but... this is very bad.

ALEX

Yeah. I think I'm beginning to understand. Can't we shoot them down?

CRYSTAL

In a transport shuttle? You've got to be kidding.

ALEX

What's to stop them from destroying all our cities?

CRYSTAL

Not nearly enough, Alex. This world has become far too complacent. Too many politicians with bloated egos are in the Congress. Port Yarvis may not be safe. We'll need to get off-world.

ALEX

Whoa, wait a minute. In what, exactly?

CRYSTAL

In this, of course. We should be able to get to Karsus from here.

ALEX

Do you honestly think we can get past their ship?

CRYSTAL

Of course. The sublight engines are about the best things these shuttles have.

Gritting his teeth:

ALEX

All right, Crys.

As he PULLS BACK on the flight yoke:

EXT. SKY ABOVE ARLINGA

The shuttlecraft begins to ASCEND towards space.

Not far above them, a similar craft takes a GLANCING HIT from a laser and starts to SPIRAL DOWN towards the ground.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

A call comes over the speakers in Alex and Crystal's shuttle. The pilot's sonorous baritone voice is distressed, but clearly not panicked:

JEREMY FOX (O.C.)

S.O.S.! S.O.S.! I'm hit; I'm going down. Ejecting in five seconds.

CRYSTAL

It's Jeremy Fox!

ALEX

Your fiancé?

CRYSTAL

He's the only Jeremy I know, Alex. We've got to help him!

As he turns the yoke:

ALEX

Absolutely. He's the only boyfriend of yours that's ever been nice to me.

Crystal opens her mouth to argue but closes it again.

EXT. SKY ABOVE ARLINGA

As Alex and Crystal's shuttle comes close to the descending one, JEREMY FOX ejects from the ruined craft. His blue Exterranean Defense helmet conceals most of his blonde hair, and the helmet's visor protects his blue eyes. On the back of his white flight uniform is a parachute, which he DEPLOYS five seconds after his ejection.

When he sees Alex and Crystal's shuttle pacing him, we can see his eyes narrow slightly. He TAPS a button on his wrist communicator before raising it to his mouth.

JEREMY

Exterranean Shuttle number Arlinga-Seven,  
please respond.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Smiling at his sister:

ALEX

I think he's about to accuse us of stealing the shuttle, Crys.

CRYSTAL

Knock it off.

Crystal taps a button on her console.

CRYSTAL

This is Exterranean Shuttle number Arlinga-Seven.

The line is SILENT for a moment.

JEREMY (O.C.)

Crystal Spencer!?

As a big grin crosses her face:

CRYSTAL

Hi, Jeremy.

JEREMY (O.C.)

Whoa... how in the world did you get that thing in the air? You can't fly!

CRYSTAL

Alex is at the helm.

JEREMY (O.C.)

Ah, that explains it. But that doesn't explain how you were able to get to the shuttle in the first place.

CRYSTAL

The Air Force base was empty of personnel when we reached it. This shuttle was the only craft there. Not one second after we got into the air, the base got destroyed.

JEREMY (O.C.)

Wow. You're pretty lucky, girl.

EXT. GRASS FIELD - FAR OUTSKIRTS OF ARLINGA

Fortunately, the BLOWING winds carry Jeremy away from the city's populous inner outskirts and to the wide-open far outskirts.

He lands well on the ground and takes off his parachute.

Meanwhile, Alex and Crystal's shuttle lands nearby. When he reaches it, the boarding ramp lowers, and Crystal is there to greet him. They HUG and KISS passionately. Jeremy is slightly taller than Crystal.

CRYSTAL

Come on, we're getting out of here.

JEREMY

Right. The admiral ordered a full retreat.

Crystal's mouth gapes open.

CRYSTAL

Full retreat?

JEREMY

I hate it, but it makes sense.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

As he accompanies Crystal into the shuttle's cockpit:

JEREMY

After all, there are three Farnorian Intimidators in orbit, and we have barely enough firepower to kill a rabbit. Arlinga, Port Yarvis, and several other major cities are already in ruins.

ALEX

Three Intimidators!?

JEREMY

I'm afraid so, pal. The Air Force is useless against those ships. Want me to copilot?

Alex's eyes WIDEN in surprise.

ALEX

Sure, Jeremy. Thanks.

Jeremy takes over at Crystal's position. At the same time, Crystal settles in at a console behind her brother.

JEREMY

It's the least I can do for you saving this craft. Let's get off Exterr as soon as possible.

ALEX

Absolutely.

EXT. GRASS FIELD

The shuttlecraft TAKES OFF and climbs swiftly.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Jeremy taps some buttons on his console.

JEREMY

I'm bringing our weaponry online. No telling if those ships have fighter craft to throw against us.

CRYSTAL

Jeremy, any news from the Galactic Congress?

JEREMY

I haven't heard a peep. That's probably the only building they left standing, but I imagine that's what Farnor's ground troops are for. Our army is going in, but I don't think they'll be coming out.

CRYSTAL

What can we do about this?

JEREMY

Nothing, I hate to say. Not here, at least. This attack came too much by surprise, Crys. I tried to warn the admiral that the Farnorians were a threat. My colonel had promised to back me up, but he went back on his word. He changed his tune very quickly today. The Galactic Starfleet is still spread out in the outer reaches of the galaxy. They can't defend Exterr anymore, but I hope I can get them here to defend other central worlds. That was my colonel's dying request. He promoted me to lieutenant colonel one second before his shuttle was destroyed.

Alex and Crystal both turn to Jeremy in surprise.

In hushed excitement:

ALEX

We get to go to the Outer Arms?

JEREMY

I have to go. I'm not endangering you guys. The instant we get to a safe world, you're staying put. Both of you.

CRYSTAL

Jeremy, my brother and I have very little left to lose. I can't lose you. Please, my dear, bring us with you.

ALEX

Yes, Jeremy, please!

Jeremy looks at Crystal and Alex in turn, and then he SIGHS and shakes his head.

JEREMY

All right, you two. But you'll have to do exactly what I tell you.

ALEX  
Absolutely, Jeremy. Thanks.

JEREMY  
Where were you guys planning to go?

CRYSTAL  
We were thinking of Karsus.

JEREMY  
Karsus... yes, that's a good place to start. We can't stay there long, though, just long enough to refuel. That might be next on the Farnorians' hit list. Karsus has no defense compared to Exterr.

ALEX  
What could Farnor want with Karsus?

JEREMY  
All the mining and manufacturing there is a valuable resource, Alex. And it's at the crossroads of the two longest galactic routes. If Farnor controls that, they could bring the whole Galactic Democracy to a halt.

ALEX  
Wow. Maybe I am a bit absent-minded.

Jeremy puts a hand on Alex's shoulder in a brotherly manner.

JEREMY  
It's okay, Alex. You have seen more today than you ever have before, but it isn't over yet. I'm afraid you'll learn a lot more than you want to on this trip.

EXT. NEAR SPACE - THE EDGE OF EXTERR'S ATMOSPHERE

The shuttlecraft BREAKS THROUGH the atmosphere and into outer space. The craft executes a partial orbit around Exterr and shoots away towards the outer system like a bullet, making it hard for the Farnorian ships to reach them.

The Farnorian Intimidators seem too occupied with their PLANETARY MAYHEM to take much note of the fleeing shuttle. Each of the three ships continues to BLISTER Exterr's cities with powerful laser blasts, and many of their landing craft are streaming towards the planet's surface.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Alex looks visibly distressed by what he sees.

ALEX  
Oh, man... this is horrible.

JEREMY  
Yes. It looks like they're intentionally prolonging this. I wish we could hit them where it hurts.

Jeremy frowns as he examines his readouts.

ALEX  
What's the problem?

JEREMY  
Their ground troops have seized the public spaceports. The civilian populace is grounded.

ALEX  
Ouch. Good thing you dragged me away from going to the evac ships, Crys.

CRYSTAL  
But that means no one else can escape. We'd better get to Karsus ASAP.

ALEX  
I have the navigational computer working on our course. As soon as it's done--

A beep SOUNDS from Alex's console.

ALEX  
There we go. Now engaging the superlight drive.

He taps a key on his console, and the stars in the viewscreen slowly begin ELONGATING from points to solid lines, and then:

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE PLANET EXTERR

The shuttlecraft BLAZES OFF and DISAPPEARS as it goes to superlight speed.

We then turn to the three Farnorian craft orbiting Exterr.

INT. BRIDGE OF THE FARNORIAN INTIMIDATOR ODIN

We suddenly enter the sparse, military bridge of the ODIN, the Farnorians' lead ship. The Farnorians are humanoid in shape, but their facial features are rather feline in appearance. They have facial fur.

Standing in the middle of the bridge is the tall, imposing COUNT SOLAG, whose fur is jet black. Beside him is the female CAPTAIN VARTH, a full head shorter.

ENSIGN BORLA, also female, is at a forward scanning console.

ENSIGN BORLA

Captain Varth, a shuttlecraft has broken orbit and fled to superlight speed.

CAPTAIN VARTH

One single shuttle? Pay it no heed, Ensign Borla. We have our victory.

COUNT SOLAG

I wouldn't be too confident, Captain. These Exterrans are cleverer than you give them credit for. Especially the native humans. I advise you to track their course.

CAPTAIN VARTH

Very well, Count Solag. Ensign?

ENSIGN BORLA

Extrapolating... interesting. They're heading directly for the Karsus system.

As his eyes NARROW venomously:

COUNT SOLAG

Karsus... what could they want there?

ENSIGN BORLA

Judging from their low fuel supply, it's the farthest world they can reach.

COUNT SOLAG

Interesting. I want a full list of all the worlds they can get to from Karsus. That's a major crossroads.

CAPTAIN VARTH

Could there be a problem, Your Eminence?

After considering the matter in silence:

COUNT SOLAG

There could be, Captain. There very well could be.

CAPTAIN VARTH

Then I'll detail a commando team to tail them immediately.

COUNT SOLAG

But they must do no more than tailing at this point, Captain. Not until we know what those people are up to.

Captain Varth bows respectfully to the count.

CAPTAIN VARTH

As Your Eminence commands.

COUNT SOLAG

After the commando team has been detailed, ready a security team to accompany me to the surface. I plan to meet with the Galactic President within the hour.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE PLANET EXTERR

A white shuttle EMERGES from the Odin and aligns itself to the vector that our heroes' shuttlecraft had taken. Then, it TAKES OFF at superlight speed.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT - SOON AFTERWARDS

As the shuttlecraft makes its way towards Karsus, Alex sits alone at the helm, his arms crossed. He gazes towards the forward viewscreen, but it is clear that he is depressed about the recent events.

Jeremy emerges from the rear of the shuttlecraft with two mugs. In an upbeat tone as he offers one to Alex:

JEREMY

Have some of the best brew in the Exterr Air Force, Alex.

Alex SIGHS sullenly. Softly:

ALEX

I'm not thirsty.

A look of worry crosses Jeremy's face for a moment as he sits down.

JEREMY

Are you okay?

ALEX

Of course I'm not okay! You saw what was happening to Arlinga, and to Exterr. One of the first laser blasts hit our house, Jeremy.

JEREMY

I'm sorry, Alex. I didn't know. But at least your parents are off-world. They're okay, my friend.

Alex closes his eyes and begins CRYING softly.

ALEX

No, they're not, Jeremy. We got a message around noon; they were killed trying to get to Yunor from Farnor. A Farnor craft shot their shuttle just inside the Yunor system. They're dead.

Jeremy's eyes widen sadly. He rubs Alex's back gently.

JEREMY

Oh my, I had no idea. I'm so sorry. Crystal didn't say a thing about it.

Alex stops crying and faces Jeremy.

ALEX

Don't bring it up, or she'll shout your ears off. I almost wish I'd been in the house when it got hit.

JEREMY

No, you don't, Alex. I'm so glad the two of you are alive.

ALEX

I bet Crystal wishes I weren't. She thinks I'm just a problem.

The sound of a SUDDEN FOOTFALL causes Alex and Jeremy to look up immediately.

We follow their eyes to Crystal, who has halted just before entering the cockpit. Her eyes are wide with shock.

CRYSTAL

Alex... no! How in the galaxy can you think that?

ALEX

I keep getting in your way. I've been doing that since we were little. If it weren't for me--

CRYSTAL

If it weren't for you, Alex, I'd never have gotten this crate out of Arlinga. Jeremy might still be waiting for help that might never come. So please don't talk like an idi... I mean, like that.

ALEX

Well, I can't help feeling that way sometimes when I hear certain things from you.

CRYSTAL

I'm sorry. Mom's always telling me to be more careful with what I say. I'll try to honor her that way, Alex. And you.

Alex and Crystal look into each other's eyes for a moment.

ALEX

Thank you, Crys.

Jeremy proffers the full mug to Alex again, and this time Alex takes it.

ALEX

Now then, Jeremy, what do we need to know before we get to Karsus?

JEREMY

Have you studied about that world in your classes?

ALEX

Yes. The Karsians nearly succeeded in inciting a galactic civil war a hundred years ago. As a result, they were stripped of their planetary armed forces. Over the past century, their business has boomed as their population has gone from bellicose to industrial.

JEREMY

There are still bellicose elements in their population, of course. Exterr had a major role in ending the civil war before it began, and as a result there are Karsians who harbor ill feelings towards Exterrans. If they ever found out that your parents were spies for Galactic Intelligence, you might even be in danger.

Alex looks AGHAST at Jeremy:

ALEX

They weren't spies; they were art dealers!

Crystal frowns at Jeremy:

CRYSTAL

They were spies, all right. But Alex should not have learned this yet, Jeremy.

ALEX

What!?

JEREMY

Alex, why would the Farnorians be interested in killing art dealers? And Crystal, your brother deserves to know the truth.

Alex looks away towards the viewscreen.

ALEX

You're right. They must have discovered something on Farnor. Something of vital importance.

EXT. GALACTIC CONGRESS BUILDING - ARLINGA, EXTERR - LATER

The great Galactic Congress building is one of the only structures in downtown Arlinga that was spared destruction during the Farnorian bombardment. Guarded by three immaculately clean fighters, a sleek white craft LANDS in front of the Galactic Congress's entrance.

As we look at the white craft's boarding ramp, the door slides open with a WHOOSH, and Count Solag follows his honor guard out of the craft.

Military FANFARE sounds up from the Farnorian soldiers stationed around. Numerous Farnorian guards fall in on all sides to protect the Count as he makes his way into the building.

Beyond the perimeter that the Farnorians have established, numerous Exterrans observe the procession. We can see utter CONTEMPT on many faces, but also bleak DESPAIR on many others.

INT. CENTRAL ROTUNDA - GALACTIC CONGRESS

Count Solag's procession makes its stately way through the wide-open Central Rotunda of the Galactic Congress.

Their route ends at the back, where grand double doors await. Farnorian soldiers posted at these doors swing them open soundlessly when the procession arrives.

INT. PRESIDENT'S GRAND OFFICE - GALACTIC CONGRESS

As the procession makes its way into the office:

FARNORIAN GUARDSMAN HAKEL

All rise for His Eminence, Count Solag,  
the Warmaster of the Kingdom of Farnor.

Count Solag steps forward to stand before the desk of PRESIDENT HENRY VERNON, a late-middle-aged human who faces the count with stoic defiance. When Vernon does not stand, the guards flanking him take his arms and lift him out of his seat.

With a reverent bow:

COUNT SOLAG

A pleasure to meet you once more,  
President Vernon.

PRESIDENT VERNON

I wish I could say the same, Count Solag. Kindly inform me why you have invaded the sovereign soil of the planet Exterr, not to mention the Galactic Congress.

COUNT SOLAG

An interesting question, Mr. President. Did you not personally veto the Kingdom of Farnor's petition to secede from the Galactic Democracy, which every citizen of Farnor had signed and which the Congress's Secession Committee had approved?

PRESIDENT VERNON

Prior to the veto, I had my experts closely examine that petition, Count. Over seventy-five percent of the signatures were conclusively forged, and I have recordings of pleas from numerous Farnor citizens--most notably Farnor's Crown Prince--that their signatures were obtained under threat of execution.

The Count's eyes widen slightly, but he shows no other sign of surprise.

COUNT SOLAG

Most interesting. What you heard were perjuries, Mr. President, nothing more. I have notarized testimony from the Crown Prince to that effect.

One of the count's escort hands him a computer pad. The count then presents it to the President.

COUNT SOLAG (CONT'D)

I have come to present the petition once more, Mr. President. I shall not depart until it has been signed into law. And if you will not do it, I shall provide a successor who will. And you will be punished appropriately.

The President nearly loses his composure:

PRESIDENT VERNON

Come now, Count Solag!

The President regains self-control:

PRESIDENT VERNON (CONT'D)

You don't wish to add to your already lengthy list of transgressions, I'm sure. You may have the fortune of being punished with exile for this invasion. If you persist and murder me, however... well, Farnorians tend not to last long at the Largus Prison World.

COUNT SOLAG

Is that so, Mr. President? What about Exterranean humans? You see, I do not intend to kill you. That would be too easy a punishment for your crimes.

PRESIDENT VERNON

I have committed no crimes, Count.

COUNT SOLAG

That's for a jury to decide, Mr. President. It is my conclusion that your government no longer functions as a democracy but as an autocracy. In my authority as Warmaster of the Kingdom of Farnor, I place you under arrest. Guards, prepare to escort President Vernon to my shuttle for transport to Farnor.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

Very good, sir.

EXT. GALACTIC CONGRESS BUILDING - SOON AFTERWARDS

Count Solag's procession escorts him out of the congress building and to his shuttle.

A Farnorian officer awaits him at his shuttle's boarding ramp. The count stops in front of this officer.

COUNT SOLAG

Any news from the Odin, Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT HARGON

Yes, sir. They have been interpreting the scans of the shuttle that blasted off earlier. Three humans were aboard. Two had identity chips from the Exterr Armed Forces. One was Major Jeremy Fox of the Exterr Air Force, and the other was formerly Sergeant Crystal Spencer of the Exterr Army. She has been a civilian for a year now. The final one was eighteen years old, and we believe him to be closely related to Spencer.

COUNT SOLAG

Spencer... that name sounds familiar to me.

LIEUTENANT HARGON

Yes. One of our ships at Yunor reports that a shuttle carrying the art dealers Robert and Denise Spencer was destroyed. Their vector was coming out of the Farnor system.

COUNT SOLAG

I see. Who destroyed their ship?

LIEUTENANT HARGON

My apologies. We have not identified the assailants, Your Eminence.

COUNT SOLAG

Most intriguing. Thank you, Lieutenant. Take President Vernon up to the Odin. I must make sure that his successor upholds our petition to secede.

LIEUTENANT HARGON

Yes, sir.

Lieutenant Hargon boards the count's shuttle. Moments later, the shuttle LIFTS OFF for outer space.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE PLANET KARSUS - SOON AFTERWARDS

Alex, Crystal, and Jeremy's shuttle EMERGES from superlight speed. We follow the shuttle as it banks towards planet KARSUS, a generally brown world with some blue here and some green there.

As the Exterranean shuttle disappears towards the planet, the trailing Farnorian shuttle enters view and veers to the left.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

The globe of Karsus dominates the forward viewscreen.

JEREMY

Welcome to planet Karsus.

CRYSTAL

Yes, I've been here before.

Alex gazes at the world with apparent distaste.

ALEX

Looks like they don't use pollution control like they should.

CRYSTAL

Not every world is as affluent or environmentally conscious as Exterr, Alex. Of course, many of the people that own companies here live on other worlds. Many of them live on Exterr.

ALEX

And they can get around Exterr's environmental regulations just like that?

CRYSTAL

Believe me, Alex, I don't care for it, either.

With a BEEP from the communication system:

SPACE TRAFFIC CONTROLLER URNATH (O.C.)

Exterran Air Force vessel, this is Karsus Space Traffic Control. Identify yourself.

Jeremy TAPS a button on his console.

JEREMY

This is Exterran Shuttle number Arlinga-Seven, origin Exterr. Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Fox speaking. We request permission to land in Karsus City.

URNATH (O.C.)

Permission granted, Colonel. I send your landing pattern now. Follow it precisely.

JEREMY

I shall, STC. Thank you.

URNATH (O.C.)

Space Traffic Control out.

The communications line closes with a short BURST of static. Alex turns the yoke to follow the landing pattern.

CRYSTAL

Such wonderful people skills these Karsians have.

JEREMY

Agreed, they're not very sociable, but they're generally faithful allies.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE PLANET KARSUS

The shuttle banks to starboard as it enters the landing pattern towards Karsus.

EXT. SKY ABOVE KARSUS CITY - AFTERNOON

The shuttle descends into the atmosphere of Karsus and follows its route downwards. Seen from above, Karsus City is a sprawling metropolis with great skyscrapers extending thousands of meters into the air.

The shuttle makes its way to the massive southern spaceport and to its assigned landing bay. It lands perfectly.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

While the craft powers down with a DESCENDING WHINE, the occupants UNSTRAP and stand up.

JEREMY

A perfect landing, Alex.

ALEX

Thanks, Jeremy. What do we do now?

JEREMY

Now, for fuel and supplies. You and I can handle that. Crys, why don't you watch over the shuttle for us?

CRYSTAL

My pleasure.

Crystal puts her arms around Jeremy, and they kiss briefly.

JEREMY

Then we'll see you soon. Come on, Alex.

ALEX

See you soon, Crys.

CRYSTAL

Take care, guys.

Jeremy leads the way towards the back of the shuttle.

EXT. LANDING BAY 41

The shuttle's landing ramp extends. Jeremy and Alex then leave the shuttlecraft.

We follow them as they walk, and we see that the cylindrical landing bay, although spartan, is in good condition. Alex looks up towards the hazy sky with WONDER and more than a little DISGUST.

ALEX

I've never smelled such acrid air in my life. It feels like my lungs are on fire.

Jeremy smiles:

JEREMY

You've been very spoiled on Exterr, my friend. This is far from being the worst environment in the galaxy.

As they near the bay's door, it opens with a HISS to reveal a KARSIAN SECURITY GUARD, KELCHA. A representative of her race, this Karsian has a saurian appearance.

Alex visibly tries not to look taken aback, but he does not succeed.

SECURITY GUARD KELCHA

Lieutenant Colonel Fox?

JEREMY

I am he.

KELCHA

What services require you?

JEREMY

I need a full tank of standard shuttle fuel.

KELCHA

Very well. Shuttle be refueled in ten standard minutes. Since you are active duty, we charge to Galactic Armed Forces. When departing?

JEREMY

Within thirty minutes.

KELCHA

Very good.

Kelcha signals to the door, and a metal-clad android enters the bay. Alex watches with unconcealed wonder as the robot deftly brings a fuelling hose to the shuttle and begins the FUELLING.

Kelcha makes a GRATING sound that seems like a LAUGH. Alex's reddening cheeks show that he interprets it as a laugh and becomes embarrassed.

KELCHA

A robo have you not seen before?

ALEX

Never doing work. Of course, I live in Arlinga on Exterr. All our robos are college science projects. I've finished... well, a few.

KELCHA

Ah, yes. Many strange people there. Everything they see here as if seeing it for the first time. But we see not the usual number of ships from there today.

JEREMY

I must report that something terrible has happened, security guard. The Farnor Kingdom has invaded Exterr.

Kelcha is plainly shocked.

KELCHA

What? How possible?

JEREMY

We're on our way to find out, and to get the fleet here. They're spread out on the Outer Arms.

Suddenly, Alex looks up with a thoughtful frown. We follow his gaze, and for a brief instant a bright GLINT appears in the sky.

We turn immediately back to the characters.

JEREMY

Alex? What is it?

ALEX

I saw something up there, Jeremy. I saw a metallic glint in the sky.

KELCHA

Odd. Nothing should be on approach vector.

Kelcha pulls out an intercom device.

KELCHA (CONT'D)  
Kelcha to STC Urnath.

URNATH (O.C.)  
Urnath here.

KELCHA  
We may have problem. Unauthorized ship  
in approach lanes.

The line is silent for a moment.

URNATH (O.C.)  
Yes, I pick up something. All signals  
from shuttle are dampened, so we saw it  
not.

JEREMY  
STC, this is Lieutenant Colonel Fox. Do  
your readings indicate a possible origin  
for the craft?

URNATH (O.C.)  
Yes... readings indicate Exterr was  
origin.

Jeremy and Alex turn to each other meaningfully.

JEREMY  
Is it Farnorian?

URNATH (O.C.)  
Can't say for certain. But probably.

JEREMY  
STC, a Farnorian task force has just  
attacked Exterr. That ship may have  
pursued us here.

URNATH (O.C.)  
Acknowledged. Will monitor ship. Will  
send defense force, if necessary.

JEREMY  
Thank you. We'll make our visit as  
brief as possible.

URNATH (O.C.)  
Understood. Security Guard Kelcha, help  
as possible. I will tell you about  
other ship's actions.

KELCHA  
Agreed.

URNATH (O.C.)  
Urnath out.

JEREMY  
We'll be back soon, guard. We need to  
go get some other supplies.

KELCHA  
Guide robos will point out the way.

JEREMY  
Thanks. Let's go, Alex.

INT. SPACEPORT CORRIDOR

Jeremy and Alex emerge from the door to their landing bay  
and find themselves in a sparse corridor. Jeremy walks over  
to a silver-plated robo nearby, Unit BETA OMEGA TAU  
(B.O.T.).

JEREMY  
Where can we find food and weapons?

Alex's eyes widen in shock at the mention of weapons.

Pointing down the hallway, the robot speaks in a pleasant  
female voice:

ROBO UNIT B.O.T.  
One hundred twenty-one meters down the  
hallway, you'll find Honest Belgik's  
Supply.

JEREMY  
Ah, Belgik is the owner, then.

ROBO UNIT B.O.T.  
Yes, sir.

JEREMY  
Thank you.

Jeremy and Alex begin following the corridor in the  
indicated direction.

ALEX  
Weapons? Is that really necessary,  
Jeremy?

JEREMY  
I hope not, Alex. But we can't be too  
careful. Have you ever fired a weapon?

ALEX

Uh, no. I really don't want to, either.

JEREMY

You may have to. Don't worry, I'll teach you all about it.

ALEX

Thanks. So... do you know this Honest Belgik?

JEREMY

He was my C.O. when I was an ensign in the Space Navy. He must have liked my piloting, because he promoted me to Junior Lieutenant and then to Lieutenant.

Jeremy frowns slightly, indicating that his injury is a sore subject:

JEREMY (CONT'D)

Then I broke my leg in a fighter accident,...

Jeremy's face relaxes again:

JEREMY (CONT'D)

...and I transferred to the Exterr Air Force to become a JAG investigator. I wonder how he wound up here.

We follow the pair as they follow the corridor past several landing bays.

INT. SPACEPORT COMMERCIAL AREA

They soon come to a covered commercial area of the spaceport. Alex observes the hustle and bustle with interest.

Jeremy leads the way to a shop labeled with alien lettering.

ALEX

If I'm right, that says Honest Belgik's.

JEREMY

Very good.

INT. HONEST BELGIK'S SHOP

Alex and Jeremy enter the shop. In stark contrast to the sparse spaceport corridors, this shop is bright and flashy, with signs all about. Everything is marked with the alien Karsian script, but for the most part this is supplemented with the more familiar Galactic Standard writing.

Jeremy hands a basket to Alex.

JEREMY

Why don't you get us some standard rations, Alex? I'll go look at the weapons.

With a nod:

ALEX

Sure thing, Jeremy.

We first follow Alex as he finds the rations aisle and starts looking at the wares. Softly to himself:

ALEX

I've never even seen most of this before.

But then his eyes widen as he looks near the bottom.

ALEX (CONT'D)

But I've had this!

He picks up some ration packs.

We turn to Jeremy, who is examining numerous deadly looking weapons. He picks up a couple of sample pistols and tests them in his grip.

BELGIK, a green-skinned bald-headed humanoid of the Selvran race, comes up to him. He speaks with a definite accent, but his Galactic Standard is quite clear:

BELGIK

Well, I'll be a son of a pistol! Hello, Fox.

Jeremy salutes Belgik smartly.

JEREMY

Hello, Captain.

Belgik laughs and extends his hand. Jeremy shakes it.

BELGIK

No, I'm retired now, very recently.  
What's an up-and-comer like you doing in  
a dump like this?

JEREMY

On my way to the Outer Arms. Belgik...  
the Farnorian Kingdom has attacked  
Exterr.

Belgik's eyes narrow in apparent anger.

BELGIK

I tried to warn the Space Navy not to  
station all the ships in the Outer Arms.  
Something like this was bound to happen,  
what with the increased taxation of the  
Inner Arm trade routes. But with all  
the stink I raised, the higher-ups  
practically forced me to retire.

JEREMY

Ouch. I'm not sure, but my shuttle may  
have been one of the only ones to escape  
Exterr. My fiancée and her brother  
saved me when my craft was shot down.

BELGIK

I see! Who's the lucky lady?

JEREMY

Crystal Spencer.

Belgik's eyes widen. He continues in a hushed tone:

BELGIK

You mean... they're the kids of the  
galaxy's best spies?

JEREMY

Exactly.

BELGIK

If I had a nickel for every time they  
saved my hide... Fox, you take what you  
need. It's on the house.

JEREMY

How will you cover it?

BELGIK

Don't worry about me. I have quite a  
retirement fund, and business is good.

They turn when they hear Alex approaching.

ALEX

I didn't mean to interrupt.

BELGIK

Quite all right. You're Alex Spencer, aren't you?

ALEX

Yes, sir, I am.

BELGIK

You're the spitting image of your old man, except that's definitely your mom's hair. I'm retired Captain Belgik. Your parents have saved my skin more times than I care to remember, Alex. It's good to meet you.

Belgik and Alex shake hands.

ALEX

Same here, sir. It's just... I never knew until today what my parents really did. I thought they were art dealers.

BELGIK

That's their cover story, yes. And they sure know enough about art that it's credible.

JEREMY

Belgik, I hate to give you more bad news, but Robert and Denise Spencer have been killed in action.

Belgik's eyes widen in shock.

BELGIK

Killed? How?

ALEX

They were entering the Yunor system from the Farnor system. Shot down by Farnorians, according to the people who called us.

BELGIK

Wow, that's a shock. Your parents were usually excellent about maintaining their cover.

JEREMY

Unfortunately, we can't stay long. From all appearances, a Farnor shuttle has pursued us from Exterr. We'll take three Arblast-brand laser pistols and three laser rifles of the same brand.

Belgik nods.

BELGIK

You know your weapons, Fox. You must be a right proper investigator. I'll get everything bagged up for you. Let me know if there's anything else you need.

JEREMY

Thank you, Belgik.

EXT. LANDING BAY 41

As they return to the landing bay with their arms full, Alex and Jeremy look up to the sky.

A faint glint appears briefly overhead.

KELCHA

It is definitely Farnor craft. Responds not to STC's hails.

JEREMY

They must be tailing us to find out what we're doing. Well, I'd love to disappoint them.

KELCHA

Planetary security goes to them now. Will at least distract them while you escape.

With a thoughtful frown:

JEREMY

But if that's one of Farnor's newer military shuttles, the security force will be in great danger.

KELCHA

Sadly, yes, but it is their job.

JEREMY

Then we shall do ours.

KELCHA

I took liberty to get you take-off clearance, and your third person has your cleared escape route ready.

JEREMY

Thank you, guard. We appreciate this. Farewell.

KELCHA

Farewell.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Crystal is strapped in at her position. Alex comes into the cockpit before Jeremy and sits at the helm. They have stowed their bags in the shuttle's aft storage bins.

CRYSTAL

We have clearance to break for space.

Jeremy takes his seat and straps in.

JEREMY

Then let's be on our way, Alex.

Alex taps a button, and we hear the engines STARTING UP. He smiles when he sees a read-out.

ALEX

I love having a full tank. Now lifting off.

EXT. LANDING BAY 41

The shuttle lifts up from the deck of the landing bay and begins following its path spaceward.

EXT. SKY ABOVE KARSUS CITY

In the little-clouded skies above Karsus City, three Karsus defense craft converge on the Farnorian shuttle. One is above the shuttle, and the other two are behind the shuttle on either side.

KARSUS SECURITY OFFICER ILVAK (O.C.)

Attention, unidentified craft. This is Karsus Security. You are in violation of Karsus airspace. Heave to, and prepare to be boarded.

The Farnorian craft continues on its way with no sign of hesitation... and no response.

INT. ILVAK'S SHUTTLE

ILVAK is sitting behind his pilot and copilot. All three are Karsians. Ilvak taps a button:

EXT. SKY ABOVE KARSUS CITY

A weak warning shot instantly FIRES from Ilvak's shuttle across the Farnorian craft's bow. Still, the intruders give no recognition.

INT. ILVAK'S SHUTTLE

ILVAK

Attention, unidentified craft. You are in violation of Karsus airspace. Heave to, and prepare for boarding. If you fail to respond, you will be disabled or destroyed. You will not receive another warning.

We follow his gaze to the viewscreen, which clearly shows the intruding craft. It shows no signs of slowing down in any way. Ilvak taps a different button.

ILVAK

Wingmates, open fire. Attempt to disable the intruder if possible.

COMMANDERS OF SHUTTLES #2 AND #3 (O.C.)

Aye, sir.

EXT. SKY ABOVE KARSUS CITY

The Karsian shuttles #2 and #3 close in on the Farnorian shuttle and OPEN FIRE at nearly point blank range in the direction of the intruder's engines. With startling speed, the shuttle rolls so that the lasers FLASH BY harmlessly.

The intruder executes a swift circle downwards and comes up behind shuttle #3. Bright lasers SHOOT from the Farnorian craft and drill through shuttle #3's rear hull, sending the shuttle into an EXPLOSIVE oblivion.

Meanwhile, the other two Karsian shuttles have come about and are flying towards the enemy with lasers BLASTING. The intruder dodges most of these, and his shields ABSORB the rest of the shots.

He waits until the Karsian shuttles are near, and he SKEWERS shuttle #2 with a laser blast into the engines. The victim BLOWS UP at once.

ILVAK (O.C.)  
Attention, all craft.

EXT. UPPER ATMOSPHERE OF KARSUS

We suddenly see the Exterranean shuttle as it nears the edge of Karsus's atmosphere.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

ILVAK (O.C.)  
An extremely dangerous foreign shuttle  
is in Karsus airspace. Avoid it at  
all--

Static suddenly replaces Ilvak's transmission. Crystal checks her readouts grimly.

CRYSTAL  
They have all been destroyed, Jeremy.

Jeremy shakes his head.

JEREMY  
That's unfortunate. At least their  
sacrifice has given us a good lead.

ALEX  
The Karsians' weapons didn't make a dent  
in our pursuers, did they?

CRYSTAL  
Not so much as a ding in the door panel,  
I fear. I almost wish we could come  
around and sock it to them, but our  
weapons are comparable to the Karsians'.

JEREMY  
You're right. We need to continue on  
our way.

ALEX  
What's our next destination?

JEREMY

We need to go along the Karsus Trade Route to Yunor. There are many worlds along that route, and our pursuers may not guess our ultimate destination. The Space Navy fleet has a presence there. Yunor is also along the way to Selvra, where the fleet commander is currently.

ALEX

Very well. We have enough fuel for the trip, according to the computer. It will be ready to engage course when we're far enough from Karsus.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE KARSUS

The shuttle emerges from Karsus's atmosphere and turns towards its destination. In moments, it BLAZES into superlight speed.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE EXTERR - LATER

Around the verdant world of Exterr, we can see two Farnorian ships passing in their parking orbits.

INT. PRESIDENT'S GRAND OFFICE - GALACTIC CONGRESS

Count Solag has taken over the President's office. A KNOCKING is heard on the door.

COUNT SOLAG

Enter.

The door SWINGS OPEN to admit Farnorian Guardsman Hakel. There is no expression on his face.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

Your Eminence, Captain Reto of the Intimidator Renard wishes to communicate with you at your earliest convenience. We have routed it to this office.

COUNT SOLAG

Thank you, Guardsman.

Solag taps a button, and the room's large viewscreen activates. CAPTAIN RETO appears on this screen. The captain bows his head.

CAPTAIN RETO

Your Eminence.

COUNT SOLAG

Greetings, Captain. What have you to report?

CAPTAIN RETO

I have unfortunate news, Your Eminence. At Karsus, our shuttle... lost the Exterranean shuttle that escaped from here earlier.

Count Solag reacts only by narrowing his eyes slightly, but noticeably. His tone takes on an icy edge:

COUNT SOLAG

Explain, Captain.

CAPTAIN RETO

The Exterranean shuttle landed on Karsus and took on supplies. Immediately as it was lifting off again, three Karsus defense shuttles converged on our shuttle. By the time our people had defended themselves, the Exterranean craft had vanished. Karsus's planetary surveillance has no record of the direction taken by the Exterranean shuttle. Their superlight signature is extremely unclear.

COUNT SOLAG

I see. This is most unfortunate, Captain. Karsus is the galaxy's crossroads. They could be going anywhere. Tell our shuttle to report back here immediately.

CAPTAIN RETO

Yes, sir. I deeply regret this mistake, Your Eminence. I am prepared to take full responsibility.

COUNT SOLAG

You are a worthy officer, Captain. Despite the rumors, I do not execute people for making mistakes. Talk to our spy network, Captain. Give them the shuttle's description and ask them to keep a look out.

CAPTAIN RETO

I shall do so, Your Eminence.  
Fortunately, we have conclusively identified the third occupant, who is also the pilot. It is Crystal Spencer's younger brother, Alex Spencer. Only eighteen years old, but he's already graduated from college with honors.

COUNT SOLAG

Most interesting. Thank you, Captain. Any word yet about the elder Spencers' demise?

CAPTAIN RETO

Not yet, my lord. Our intelligence people are still sifting through the Yunor records.

COUNT SOLAG

Very well. I have no further orders. Thank you for the information, Captain.

CAPTAIN RETO

My pleasure, Your Eminence. Captain Reto out.

Captain Reto disappears from the screen.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

I have additional findings to report, Your Eminence.

COUNT SOLAG

Proceed.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

The Odin is well on its way to Farnor with former President Vernon.

COUNT SOLAG

Very good, Guardsman.

There is no sign of insincerity or deception in either Hakel or Solag during the ensuing statements. Hakel delivers his report with candor.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

In addition, we have verified the evidence of tampering in the former President's communiqués, Your Eminence. A highly placed official did indeed place records in the computer system indicating that our petition signatures were obtained illegally. Only the President could have updated those records, Your Eminence. Including the recording of His Highness denouncing our claims.

COUNT SOLAG

I knew it all along, Guardsman. I deeply appreciate the hard work. Of course, you realize that we will probably be imprisoned for what we have done here.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

For our people's freedom, Your Eminence, I am willing to pay any price.

COUNT SOLAG

As am I, Guardsman. What else?

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

Nothing for now, sir. Everything is currently under control.

COUNT SOLAG

Until the Space Navy gets here. Thank you, Guardsman.

Bowing deeply:

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

My pleasure, Your Eminence.

Standing straight, Hakel leaves the office and CLOSES the door. The count then bows his head as if in prayer.

COUNT SOLAG

Great God of Truth, please grant me the time needed to bring the truth to light. The Galactic Democracy must know the entirety of what the President has done. When I have done so, I will willingly submit to the Goddess of Fate.

EXT. SUPERLIGHT SPACE - A FEW HOURS LATER

We see our heroes' shuttlecraft moving through superlight space. At this great speed, the approaching stars appear as lines, and there is no light from the receding stars.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT AFT CHAMBER

In the shuttle's small aft chamber, Alex gazes out the porthole while chewing slowly on a ration bar. He is obviously lost in thought. Crystal enters the room.

CRYSTAL  
Hard to hide on a shuttle this small.

ALEX  
Must be, 'cause you've found me.

He pulls out another ration bar and offers it to her.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Hungry?

CRYSTAL  
Yes, thanks.

She takes the ration bar and joins him at the porthole. They both eat slowly for a moment.

CRYSTAL  
Alex, I'm sorry I've been so hard on you.

ALEX  
Someone has to be. Mom and Dad have spoiled me terribly, Crys. I realize that after everything I've seen today.

CRYSTAL  
Well, Alex, you are the good kid. I caused them nothing but trouble. They never wanted me to go into the military, but I went, anyway. I'd have thought they'd be glad to get rid of me.

ALEX  
They did love you, Crys. They just didn't know how to show it. Unfortunately, neither of us can trouble them anymore.

CRYSTAL

But at least we can make a difference.  
The Farnorians will pay for this once  
the Space Navy gets to Exterr.

ALEX

You know, Crys, I've been thinking.

CRYSTAL

Uh oh, I'm manning the lifeboats.

Alex laughs. Then, his expression turns serious again.

ALEX

Unfortunately, you may not like what I  
have to say. Something doesn't add up,  
Crys.

CRYSTAL

What is there to add up? Farnor has  
invaded Exterr illegally. It's that  
simple.

ALEX

I don't think so. I've been looking at  
our sensor logs. The Farnor ships were  
very careful to leave the Galactic  
Congress undamaged, as well as Exterr  
Parliament. They chose a time of day  
when all the delegates were working and  
not in one of the other buildings where  
they might have been killed. Would they  
have been so careful if they were trying  
to take over, Crys?

CRYSTAL

Wow. I must admit... you've got a  
point, brother. That means they wanted  
something. Or someone.

ALEX

I think they wanted to get attention.  
I'm not fully up on current events, but  
I think it might have to do with  
Farnor's recent petition to gain  
independence.

CRYSTAL

Of course. It stands to reason that they would want it passed. And three ships are not sufficient to maintain control for very long, not when the Space Navy finally arrives. And they will arrive when the news finally gets out. I don't understand, though. I thought that the President presented evidence that many of the petition signatures were illegally obtained-- either forged or gained by force. His evidence included an audio excerpt from the Crown Prince of Farnor himself.

Alex gazes out into space for a moment in silence.

ALEX

Interesting. You may not like what I'm about to suggest.

Crossing her arms:

CRYSTAL

Maybe not, but go ahead.

ALEX

Suppose just for a moment that President Vernon was not being honest.

With a frown that can curdle milk:

CRYSTAL

You're right, Alex. I don't like that suggestion in the least. It borders on treason. You'd better justify it before I beat the stuffing out of you.

ALEX

Well, consider this. Everyone who had a hand in presenting that evidence was either the President or someone on his direct payroll. I thought that it was normal procedure for the Congressional Secession Committee to present such evidence. Didn't they approve Farnor's petition?

Crystal's frown lessens as she considers this.

CRYSTAL

Unanimously. By the galaxy, Alex, you're right. But... this is merely evidence of irregularity, not of wrongdoing.

ALEX

You're right. But suppose the leader of Farnor's task force is seeking that evidence right now.

CRYSTAL

My goodness. And President Vernon has much to gain by keeping Farnor as part of the Galactic Democracy. Their productivity generates a great deal of tax money, and they control much of the Farnor Route, the most heavily used superlight route in the Outer Arms. But then there's our parents, Alex. The Farnorians hunted them down and killed them.

ALEX

According to what we were told.

CRYSTAL

Are you trying to play with my mind, Alex?

ALEX

No, Crys, I just want to know what's going on. If they had information that would undermine the Farnorian attack, then yes, the Farnorians did kill them. But if their evidence was against President Vernon, I doubt that the Farnorians would risk anything in Yunor space. After all, there's a naval station there.

Crystal puts her hand to her head.

CRYSTAL

All these implications are making my head hurt, Alex. I'm a civil servant. Expressing such ideas would get me fired, or worse.

ALEX

Well, look where it got our parents.

CRYSTAL

You obviously know how to make an argument, Alex. I just hope that you take all the evidence we find into account before you make any conclusions. If you don't--

ALEX

Believe me, Crystal, I fully intend to.

JEREMY (O.C.)

We're coming up on the Yunor system.

Crystal turns to the doorway.

CRYSTAL

We'll be right there.

Turning to her brother again:

CRYSTAL

Not a word of this to Jeremy, okay? Not yet. He likes you very much, but his military status would force him to consider your views a security risk. You need solid evidence before you confront him.

Alex nods:

ALEX

I understand.

As they leave the room, we follow Alex and Crystal into:

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Alex and Crystal resume their positions.

JEREMY

Yunor is a major port of call in this part of the galaxy. As a result, there are a great number of restrictions in Yunor's near space. Fortunately, the Space Navy's base is far enough from Yunor that it is not in Yunor's restricted space.

ALEX

I understand.

JEREMY

The Yunora are fairly pragmatic, but not to the same extent as the Karsians. They are generally easy-going, but they can be hard to deal with during busy times. Just take it easy, and you'll do fine.

ALEX

All right.

Alex looks at his readouts for a moment. Then:

ALEX

Prepare for realspace reversion in five seconds.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE PLANET YUNOR

Five seconds later, the shuttle drops out of superlight speed near Yunor. As we follow the shuttle, we see the blue orb of Yunor in the distance and a great space station much closer.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

The space station fills the shuttle's forward viewscreen as Alex turns towards it. Meanwhile, Jeremy is keying on his console.

JEREMY

The Yunor Naval Space Station is still at condition green. I imagine that will change when they hear what I have to say.

CRYSTAL

Yes, I certainly expect so.

JEREMY

I'm transmitting my recognition code to them now.

After a brief moment, Crystal's console BEEPS.

CRYSTAL

They are hailing.

JEREMY

On-screen, please.

A human Space Navy officer, CAPTAIN WILLIS, appears on the screen. He is bald-headed with a well-tended, mostly gray mustache.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Welcome to the Yunor Naval Space Station, Lieutenant Colonel Fox. I am Captain Gerald Willis.

JEREMY

Thank you, Captain. We are on our way up to Selvra to meet the fleet commander.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Then we can save you a few hundred light-years, Colonel. The fleet commander is visiting here.

JEREMY

Quite fortuitous, Captain. We come bearing urgent news from Exterr. The planet has been attacked and overrun by three Farnorian Intimidators. We may be the only ones who escaped.

Captain Willis is visibly shocked.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Farnor has attacked Exterr?

JEREMY

Yes, sir.

After a moment, Willis regains his composure.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

I see. Admiral Harding will be most interested with this information. Unfortunately, the warships are scattered in the Selvra Sector, and getting them together will take a day at least. Do you plan to come aboard, Colonel?

JEREMY

Very soon, Captain. Beforehand, I would like to survey the site where the Galactic Service Agents Robert and Denise Spencer lost their lives.

Willis nods and looks down at something on his desk.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

I can point out the site easily enough. Unfortunately, what with the admiral being here, I haven't had the time to detail a full investigation yet. I can only thank my stars that he wasn't here to see the explosion. Have you had the training to investigate shuttle destructions, Colonel?

JEREMY

That's one of my primary duties on Exterr. You said you haven't done a full investigation yet?

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Exactly. We've merely done some preliminary scans from here. I'll send you the full report that we have so far.

JEREMY

Understood. We'll return with our findings as soon as possible.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Thank you, Colonel Fox. Captain Willis out.

The captain's image disappears from the screen to be replaced by the view of the space station.

Jeremy frowns thoughtfully. Softly:

JEREMY

I smell a rat here.

ALEX

I agree, Jeremy. When we were contacted, we were told that a Farnor craft had done the damage. That sounded fairly conclusive to me.

JEREMY

Well, I sincerely doubt that the captain was lying. But he may not know the whole truth.

CRYSTAL

The transfer is complete, guys. Let's see... this indicates that our parents' shuttle entered the system early this morning on a vector from Farnor. Before it could get to safety, a silently running craft came out of superlight speed behind it and blew it away. The offender escaped before it could be apprehended or identified.

JEREMY

Then the moment of identification should soon come. Hopefully, examining the drive emissions will provide clear evidence. Alex, set course for the crime scene.

With a nod:

ALEX

Aye, sir.

As Alex performs some course corrections:

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE YUNOR

The shuttle moves away from the planet and the space station.

EXT. NEAR YUNOR'S ASTEROID BELT - MINUTES LATER

The shuttle comes to a full stop not far away from a debris field, which is about five million kilometers away from the solar system's asteroid belt. We can see the field of asteroids off in the distance.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Crystal and Jeremy begin to take readings of the wreck.

JEREMY

The cause of destruction is clear enough. The laser went into the drive unit. I'm surprised that the debris is not finer.

CRYSTAL

And I'm picking up vestigial human remains. There is very little DNA left, but there's enough. It's Mom and Dad, all right.

Everyone is silent for a moment.

JEREMY

I'm so sorry, guys.

ALEX

We'll be okay, Jeremy. Thanks.

CRYSTAL

Yes. I'm detecting an intact hull plate, Jeremy. A hundred kilometers away.

JEREMY

I'm scanning it.

As he does, his eyes widen in shock.

ALEX

What's wrong, Jeremy?

JEREMY

I'd better run this scan again. It can't be right.

When Jeremy reruns the scan, Alex looks over at his console. Grimly:

ALEX

There's no mistaking it, my friend. In defending themselves, our parents blew off one of their assailants' hull plates. The outside of that plate cannot be identified, but the interior definitely can.

JEREMY

And I have identified it. Conclusively. President Vernon owns the Exterran company that made this plate and the craft that it once protected. That company's sole consumer is the Galactic Secret Service, the President's protectors, also known as the S.S. For whatever reason, Alex and Crystal, President Vernon had your parents murdered. But this makes no sense. I had assumed that they had some strategic information that Farnor did not want them to deliver. There isn't a single intact data crystal to give us any inkling of what they knew.

CRYSTAL

Alex has some hypotheses that you may not like, Jeremy. Hypotheses about the President.

JEREMY

I don't like what I see here, Crystal. Alex, tell me what you think. I promise I'll keep my mind open.

With a nod:

ALEX

Then get ready for an earful.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE YUNOR - MINUTES LATER

The shuttlecraft again approaches the naval space station.

JEREMY (O.C.)

My goodness, Alex.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

JEREMY (CONT'D)

I wish your implications didn't make so much sense. The President is obviously up to something. If he illegally denied the Farnorians' petition, it certainly provides motive for Farnor's current activities.

ALEX

Yes, we need to find out what's going on as soon as possible.

Jeremy turns to Alex.

JEREMY

Alex, the S.S. is capable of anything. It's too dangerous for civilians to be involved. You and Crystal are staying here.

As he turns to Jeremy with a frown:

ALEX

Jeremy, we're already in the thick of it. It's my duty as a citizen to see that the facts come to light. I admire you for trying to protect us, but I can't back off. I must see this through.

CRYSTAL

So must I, Jeremy. Besides, my love, you need someone to protect you.

Jeremy looks at Alex and Crystal in turn and then sighs.

JEREMY

Oh, laser pistols, your parents would kill me. But I have to warn you guys again, do exactly as I tell you.

Crystal's eyes widen as she looks at her readouts.

CRYSTAL

Jeremy... I'm getting odd readings in front of us!

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE YUNOR

A dark ship appears between the shuttlecraft and the space station. It is three times the size of the shuttle.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Urgency enters Jeremy's voice:

JEREMY

All stop!

A bluish glow begins to fill the viewscreen. Alex taps some buttons swiftly, but the new ship continues to grow larger in the viewscreen.

CRYSTAL

They have us in a tractor beam!

ALEX

What in the galaxy is going on? How did they appear so suddenly?

JEREMY

They must have a masking device. And the only people who have a working masking device, I believe, are the President's Secret Service. Crystal, send an S.O.S. to the base.

CRYSTAL

It's already transmitting. They're scrambling a squadron of fighter craft.

JEREMY

Good. Then hail our assailant.

CRYSTAL

I'm trying, and so is the station. Our new friend does not respond to either.

JEREMY

Then send our findings directly to Captain Wills immediately, in case we get pulled in.

CRYSTAL

I'm sending now... the station has received our transmission, Jeremy.

JEREMY

In that case, I'm opening fire.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE YUNOR

Lasers FIRE from the shuttle's bow towards the tractor beam sources on the black craft, but the black hull absorbs the blasts without protest.

Loosing powerful LASER VOLLEYS, a squad of twelve one-person fighter craft closes in swiftly. These are single-wing craft that move nimbly through space.

Wings on both sides of the black craft begin to OPEN FIRE on the fighters, but the fighters dodge the shots with agility.

As they come within a few meters of the black intruder, they break off into four flights of three fighters each. The front flight comes over to the front and FIRES on the tractor beam emitters.

The middle two flights come on either side of the unwelcome guest and fire disabling BLASTS to the laser projectors on the intruder's wings.

The final flight comes to the rear of the craft and OPENS FIRE on the intruder's engines.

Before the lasers are disabled totally, the intruder manages to SKEWER one fighter on its port side and one on its aft. Both fighters EXPLODE instantly.

However, the forward fighters succeed in disabling the tractor beam, and the shuttle PULLS AWAY swiftly.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Crystal's console BEEPS.

CRYSTAL

It's the squadron commander, Jeremy.

JEREMY

On audio.

COMMANDER IAN BELTOR

That's two you owe me now, Fox! See you at the station.

With a grin:

JEREMY

Lieutenant Beltor, you old rascal! They put you in charge of a fighter squadron? What in Exterr are they thinking?

BELTOR

I have no idea. By the way, that's Commander Beltor now, Major.

JEREMY

Well, Commander, I'm now Lieutenant Colonel.

BELTOR

Ah, good. We'll catch up as soon as we've buttoned up this thing... whoever it belongs to.

JEREMY

See you soon, Beltor. Thanks.

As they close in on the station, an insistent BEEP begins sounding on Crystal's console. She gasps when she sees what is happening. Urgently:

CRYSTAL

Commander Beltor, get out of there!  
That thing's about to self-destruct!

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE YUNOR

As the black ship begins to EXPLODE, the fighters flee the scene. Only five manage to outfly the explosion, including Beltor's fighter.

INT. DOCKING BAY C - YUNOR NAVAL SPACE STATION

The station's docking bay is a vast, flat area with ships of every description. Our heroes' shuttle lands gingerly on the docking bay deck as the surviving fighters make their landing.

The shuttle's boarding ramp lowers at the same time COMMANDER BELTOR leaps down from his craft. His face is lightly scarred with a couple of rough lines down the right side, perhaps from a previous flight accident.

When he gets to the shuttle, Jeremy, Alex, and Crystal have all emerged onto the bay's deck.

BELTOR

Fox, what in the name of the Democracy is going on? Who were they?

JEREMY

They were the President's Secret Service.

Beltor's mouth gapes open in astonishment.

BELTOR

You must be joking.

Jeremy shakes his head sadly.

JEREMY

I'm afraid not, Beltor.

BELTOR

Why would they be after you?

JEREMY

I would guess it's because they didn't want anyone to know that they had killed Robert and Denise Spencer.

BELTOR

What the... how do you know this, Fox?

JEREMY

We've investigated the wreckage. I found a panel that could only have come from an S.S. ship, and the laser damage to it matches the lasers from the Spencers' shuttle.

BELTOR

Oh, man. Why would the S.S. have it out for those... um, art dealers?

JEREMY

No need to hide the truth from these two. These are their offspring, Crystal and Alex. Crystal is my fiancée. My friends, this is Commander Ian Beltor.

Crystal and Alex shake hands with Beltor in turn.

BELTOR

Glad to meet you. Please don't believe anything this rascal has told you about me.

CRYSTAL

We'll have to see about that.

BELTOR

Please come with me, guys. I'll take you to see the captain. Our techs will service your shuttle.

Beltor leads the way through the door that opens into the station.

INT. CAPTAIN WILLS'S OFFICE

Captain Wills has a spacious office. He sits reading a report on his screen, and his eyes widen with shock. He is startled when he hears a BEEP from the door. Standing up:

CAPTAIN WILLS

Enter.

When the door has slid open, Beltor leads the way into the office. Jeremy, Crystal, and Alex follow him. Wills comes around his desk to greet them. Beltor and Jeremy salute the captain, and Wills returns it.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

At ease. Thank you for coming. I've looked at your findings, Lieutenant Colonel Fox. Most distressing indeed. Why would the S.S. want to kill two of the Democracy's most accomplished agents?

JEREMY

We don't know much for sure, Captain. These are Crystal and Alex Spencer, daughter and son of Robert and Denise Spencer. They heard a fairly thorough-- and erroneous--report about how their parents perished.

Wills turns to Crystal and Alex.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Please tell me about this report. I did not authorize the release of any information, since we had not finished investigating.

CRYSTAL

We got it soon before local noon in Arlinga on Exterr. We were told that our parents' shuttle was shot down by Farnorian craft soon after entering the Yunor system from Farnor's direction.

Wills frowns thoughtfully.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

And then three Farnorian ships converge on Exterr.

CRYSTAL

Exactly, sir.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Very suspicious. The Secret Service kills your parents and implicates the Farnorians soon before Farnor's attack on Exterr. Why? What does the S.S. have to gain?

ALEX

If I may, sir?

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Go ahead, Mr. Spencer.

ALEX

Sir, I speculate this has something to do with Farnor's petition to leave the Democracy. The Congress passed that petition. However, President Vernon turned it down, citing evidence that the congressional committee should have presented. Including a recording from Farnor's crown prince.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Yes, that does seem fairly irregular. The committee's investigation should turn that up. But it's only conjecture, not real evidence of wrongdoing.

JEREMY

And unfortunately, Captain, our examination of the Spencers' wreckage turned up no useable recordings. The Spencers might have obtained evidence against the President, and the S.S. stopped them from revealing it. Besides, Captain, Farnor's force is not enough to hold Exterr for long when the Space Navy arrives. They did not damage the Galactic Congress building. They may feel the need to perform their own investigation.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Yes... if their petition truly was justified, then that would fit. But they chose the wrong means to prove their point.

JEREMY

I completely agree. They killed my commanding officer in their attack. I came here on his orders to get help.

Captain Willis crosses his arms and walks pensively to his large porthole, which looks out over Yunor. Since the station is over the planet's terminator, only half of the visible part of the planet is illuminated by sunlight.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Whatever their reason, we cannot permit Farnor to occupy Exterr. But if President Vernon was engaged in illegal activities, he must not remain in office. We need to find out. Therefore, Lieutenant Colonel Fox, I have an optional mission for you.

Turning to Jeremy:

CAPTAIN WILLIS (CONT'D)

Someone must go to Farnor and seek an audience with the Crown Prince. This could be risky, if Farnor is mustering its military strength for a full invasion. However, all the scheduled trade and transport ships have come and gone from there as planned. Do you accept?

JEREMY

Yes, Captain, I will go. I suppose I must bring the Spencers with me, as well. If I left them here, I'm entirely certain they'd hijack a Space Navy shuttle and come after me. I cannot allow that.

Willis smiles.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Yes, I'm proud to say that my nephew is also like that. Very well, Colonel. I invite you to rest for a short while before continuing. Meanwhile, I shall speak with the admiral about the situation on Exterr.

JEREMY

Thank you, Captain.

INT. OFFICER'S MESS HALL - A LITTLE LATER

Soon, Beltor sits with Jeremy, Crystal, and Alex at a table in the officer's mess hall. The three guests eat hungrily, especially Alex.

BELTOR

So, how was good old Exterr before the invasion?

JEREMY

Everything was going pretty good. But then everything went to pieces when those Farnor ships appeared. They've caused a great deal of damage to Arlinga and Port Yarvis. Our lasers were no more effective than flashlights against their Intimidators.

BELTOR

Ouch. I wonder how they managed to get those things past us. Thanks to numerous anomalies, the only safe superlight route from the Farnor Kingdom goes through the Yunor system.

ALEX

Well, I'd imagine they could find some backdoor routes. But it would probably take their ships over a week to get to Exterr. Could they stop outside the solar system and realign to the correct route?

BELTOR

No, not with a ship as big as an Intimidator. The trade routes are strictly controlled to prevent large ships from circumnavigating the Yunor solar system and avoiding taxation. It's a big reason why the outlying systems here don't much like the Democracy, and they especially dislike the President. Except for Yunor, which makes a pretty profit. Only military ships are not taxed, but they still need to stop and be recognized. I'm not surprised that Farnor is trying to secede. I have to warn you, Fox: your status as an Exterr Air Force officer won't be the key to their warm and fuzzy hearts.

JEREMY

So I gathered. But the truth must be discovered before we have an even bigger mess on our hands.

The instant everyone has finished eating, a BEEP issues from Beltor's wrist communicator. He raises it to his mouth.

BELTOR

Commander Beltor here.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Commander, scramble your remaining fighters. I want you to accompany Lieutenant Colonel Fox's shuttle along the Farnor Route as far as the boundary between the Inner and Outer Arms. We're receiving a superlight distress signal from a Farnorian Intimidator there. It's facing towards Farnor, not Yunor, and we have no record of it stopping here.

Beltor and Jeremy share a look for a moment.

BELTOR

Yes, Captain. We'll go see to it.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Thank you, Commander. Captain Willis out.

BELTOR

Jeremy, if this was one of the same Intimidators that attacked Exterr--

JEREMY

Yes, I'll definitely recognize it, Ian. I took each Intimidator's transponder code.

CRYSTAL

So did I, actually.

BELTOR

Then let's get this show in the air.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE YUNOR - MINUTES LATER

The Exterr Air Force shuttlecraft soars out of the space station's docking bay, and five fighter craft follow it.

BELTOR (O.C.)

You're running this show, Fox. Feed us our superlight coordinates.

JEREMY (O.C.)

My pleasure.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

JEREMY

Has the computer finished the superlight calculations yet?

ALEX

Just about... there we go.

Tapping a few buttons:

JEREMY

Now transmitting the calculations.

A brief moment passes.

BELTOR (O.C.)

Results received. The squadron has laid them in.

JEREMY

Then engage superlight in five... four... three... two... one... now.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE ABOVE YUNOR

The shuttle and the five fighters STREAK into superlight speed simultaneously.

EXT. INTERSTELLAR SPACE - NOT MUCH LATER

The group soon returns to normal space. Ahead of them, the Odin sits dark in space. Except for interstellar dust, there are no other objects occupying this empty region.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

JEREMY

It's pretty conclusive. This is the Odin, one of the ships that attacked Exterr. I wonder why they're here... and how they got past Yunor unnoticed.

BELTOR (O.C.)

Well, let's see if they'll respond to a hail.

INT. BRIDGE OF THE ODIN

The Odin's bridge is dark with a couple sparking consoles. Captain Varth stands with Ensign Borla.

ENSIGN BORLA

Verified, Captain. This is the shuttle that escaped from Exterr.

CAPTAIN VARTH

Most intriguing. And ironic, if they are here to answer our call. Perhaps they can shed some light on our mysterious attacker.

ENSIGN BORLA

They are hailing us, Captain.

CAPTAIN VARTH

Respond.

Borla TAPS a button on her console.

JEREMY (O.C.)

This is Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Fox of the Exterr Air Force.

CAPTAIN VARTH

I am Captain Varth of the Farnorian Intimidator Odin. Thank you for answering our call, Colonel.

JEREMY (O.C.)

You can thank me, Captain, by explaining Farnor's attack on Exterr. Your ship participated in an attack there. You can also explain how you circumnavigated Yunor.

The captain sighs.

CAPTAIN VARTH

I shall, Colonel. But an unknown assailant has attacked and disabled us. Our primary dorsal power cable has been severed, and we must repair that before life support fails.

JEREMY (O.C.)

Very well, we'll help you with that. Then we'll have to sit down and have a long talk.

CAPTAIN VARTH  
 Agreed. Now transmitting the location  
 of our power cables.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

JEREMY  
 We have your data, Captain. We'll stay  
 in touch.

CAPTAIN VARTH (O.C.)  
 Thank you, Colonel.

JEREMY  
 Lieutenant Colonel Fox out.

After the communication line has CLICKED shut:

ALEX  
 Something's wrong, Jeremy. I feel  
 there's something she hasn't told us.

JEREMY  
 There's a lot that she hasn't told us.  
 Don't worry, we'll get it out of her.  
 Commander Beltor, we're moving in to  
 repair the Odin's power cable.

BELTOR (O.C.)  
 Lead the way, Colonel.

JEREMY  
 Move us in, Alex.

ALEX  
 Yes, sir.

EXT. INTERSTELLAR SPACE

The shuttle leads the way to the Odin's massive dorsal  
 section, which has clearly suffered a direct hit.

A small, SPARKING hole has been gouged into the ship's  
 surface. The hit clearly drilled through a protective  
 casing and into a cable, severing it neatly in two.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

The damaged wire fills the forward viewscreen.

CRYSTAL

Wow, this looks bad.

ALEX

The damage itself isn't as bad as it looks. The cable was cut cleanly. Of course, an active power cable is too dangerous to work on directly, but there's another way. With some careful laser work, a fighter can weld it back together. Of course, the Odin will need to get it fully repaired in spacedock pretty soon.

JEREMY

Excellent idea. Commander, how do you feel doing that surgery?

BELTOR (O.C.)

Sounds like a plan, Colonel. I'll set my lasers low and give it a try.

ALEX

Yes, you want a low-power, constant burn.

BELTOR (O.C.)

Understood.

EXT. INTERSTELLAR SPACE

Beltor's fighter moves gingerly around to the hole and carefully enters. He aims his port laser emitter directly at the gap in the power cable. Then, he FIRES a low-power, continuous laser burst.

As the laser strikes the cable, the cable MELTS on both sides of the separation and fills the gap.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

JEREMY

Amazing, Alex. The cable is melting together.

ALEX

Thanks. All right, Commander; that should be good enough.

BELTOR (O.C.)

Roger. I'm pulling out.

EXT. INTERSTELLAR SPACE

As Beltor ceases fire and pulls away, the cable FUSES together, and the Odin's running lights COME ALIVE.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

CRYSTAL

That's doing it, guys. The ship is powering up.

JEREMY

Excellent. Let's hail them again.

Crystal TAPS some buttons.

CRYSTAL

Hailing frequencies open.

JEREMY

This is Lieutenant Colonel Fox calling the Odin.

Captain Varth's feline visage appears on the screen.

CAPTAIN VARTH

I deeply appreciate your fast work, Colonel. In five minutes, our oxygen would have been gone.

JEREMY

You'll need immediate work done when you return to Farnor, Captain. May I come aboard so we can meet in person?

After giving Jeremy a nod:

CAPTAIN VARTH

You can land in our forward starboard shuttle bay. I look forward to meeting you, Colonel.

JEREMY

Thank you, Captain. Lieutenant Colonel Fox out.

Captain Varth disappears from the screen, her image replaced by the image of the Odin's damage.

JEREMY

Take us to their shuttle bay, Alex.

ALEX  
My pleasure.

EXT. INTERSTELLAR SPACE

The shuttle leads the way to the specified shuttle bay, which is open to admit them.

INT. SHUTTLE BAY 1 OF THE ODIN

The shuttle and the five fighters land perfectly within the shuttle bay. Everyone emerges from the vehicles as a three-person security detail, led by Ensign Borla, approaches them.

ENSIGN BORLA  
Welcome aboard. I am Ensign Borla.

JEREMY  
Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Fox. These are Crystal and Alex Spencer, and this is the fighter leader, Commander Ian Beltor.

ENSIGN BORLA  
Very good. May I ask the other fighter pilots to stay with their craft?

BELTOR  
Of course, Ensign.

Beltor turns to his fellow fighter pilots.

BELTOR  
Please remain here and service the fighters.

The pilots salute him in unison. His second in command responds vocally:

MAJOR SANDRA JERVIS  
Yes, sir.

BELTOR  
Thank you.

Beltor turns to Borla again.

JEREMY  
All right, Ensign, please lead the way.



CAPTAIN VARTH

There is little justification for such an attack. Our primary purpose in going there was to confront and arrest President Vernon.

Jeremy and his companions look surprised, but only mildly.

JEREMY

Arrest? On what charge?

CAPTAIN VARTH

On the charge of illegally blocking our petition for independence. The evidence that he presented was fabricated, Colonel. Count Solag remained behind on Exterr to retrieve the evidence from Vernon's computers. And believe me, he has found it. I can show you. The Count is also seeking evidence that Vernon has been exceeding his constitutional authority in other matters.

JEREMY

So, why are you out here on your way to Farnor?

CAPTAIN VARTH

Well, Colonel... I was bringing President Vernon to Farnor to be arraigned formally.

JEREMY

It sounds like something has gone wrong, Captain.

CAPTAIN VARTH

Deeply wrong, Colonel. You see, an obsidian ship somehow pulled us out of superlight speed at this position. They disabled us and used some new atomic technology to remove Vernon directly from his cell. I have no idea who they were.

Jeremy scowls to himself.

JEREMY

I know who it was, Captain. The President's Secret Service. They've been experimenting with atomic teleportation. Unless I miss my guess, Vernon is on his way back to Exterr right now.

CAPTAIN VARTH

By the gods... we can't let it happen! He'll put a stop to everything!

Regarding the captain sternly:

JEREMY

Some of which should never have happened in the first place, Captain.

CAPTAIN VARTH

I know, Colonel. Count Solag fully expects to live out the rest of his life in prison.

JEREMY

If the President gets back to Exterr, I doubt that the count will have that opportunity. But you can't go back, Captain. One hit to your power cable, and you could be done for. But before I go back, I need clear evidence of the President's wrongdoing.

CAPTAIN VARTH

Lieutenant Commander Revis?

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER REVIS

Yes, Captain.

Revis pulls out a small data screen and presents it to Jeremy.

COMMANDER REVIS

I have compiled a list of what Count Solag found in the President's computer, Colonel, as well as a notarized deposition from Farnor's Crown Prince.

Jeremy looks over the evidence quickly.

JEREMY

Very good. I was actually headed towards Farnor to speak with the Crown Prince myself. This evidence will save me the trip. With this, I can arraign President Vernon myself.

CAPTAIN VARTH

Thank you, Colonel. I was concerned that you might not believe this.

JEREMY

The S.S. disposed of two people much earlier today, Captain, two close friends of mine. I knew that your people could not be occupying Exterr long-term because you only took three warships. Now, for my final query, how in the world did you manage to get here without going through the Yunor system?

With a sly, feline smile:

CAPTAIN VARTH

Ah, yes. Commander Revis, please explain.

COMMANDER REVIS

Yes, ma'am.

Commander Revis taps a button on the table in front of him, and a spiral galaxy appears on the screen in the wall at the foot of the table.

Circular lines divide this galaxy into four concentric circular regions, much like an archery target. The bright, innermost circle is labeled as the Galaxy Center. The next region outward is the Galaxy Core. The remaining two regions are the Inner and Outer Arms.

At the five o'clock angle, right on the border between the Galaxy Center and the Galaxy Core, a dot is labeled Exterr.

At the seven o'clock angle, in the middle of the Galaxy Core, a dot is labeled Karsus.

At the eleven o'clock angle, well within the Inner Arms, a dot is labeled Yunor.

Directly above Yunor, not far within the Outer Arms, is a dot representing Selvra.

At the ten o'clock angle, a reasonable distance from the border with the Inner Arms, a dot represents Farnor in the Outer Arms.

Then three lines appear. One links Exterr and Karsus and is the Exterr Way superlight route. The Karsus Trade Route links Karsus, Yunor, and Selvra. Finally, the Farnor Route begins at Farnor and passes through Yunor.

All three routes terminate in the Outer Arms. Only the Farnor Route does not penetrate the Galaxy Core; the other two just barely brush by the Galaxy Center.

COMMANDER REVIS

As you know, this is the rudimentary superlight chart of the galaxy. There are, of course, other worlds and minor superlight routes that are not represented here. However, a Farnorian patrol along our current route discovered an interesting byway while monitoring smuggler activity. You can go directly from Karsus to the Farnor Route midway between Farnor and Yunor.

Revis taps a button, and on the diagram, a two-segment line forms the path that he has described. The vertex of this line is nearly a one-hundred-eighty-degree angle, so the line appears to be very straight to the casual observer.

ALEX

If I may ask--oh, I'm sorry.

Alex looks a little embarrassed.

JEREMY

Go ahead, Mr. Spencer.

ALEX

Thanks, Colonel. If my eyes don't deceive me, that looks like a bit of a dogleg in that byway a few hundred light-years away from Karsus.

COMMANDER REVIS

I'm glad you noticed that. Yes, that dogleg is extremely important. If you go straight there, you will come dangerously close to a black hole. Fortunately, the course correction is only half a degree, so you can do it at lightspeed if your navigational computer is programmed correctly. Of course, no legitimate traders would dare use this shortcut, or it would become dangerously overused.

ALEX

Very interesting. And I guess it isn't known too widely because we have no major worlds along it.

COMMANDER REVIS

Precisely.

Jeremy frowns thoughtfully.

JEREMY

How close is that route's intersection with the Farnor Route?

COMMANDER REVIS

About five hundred light-years from here, in the direction of Yunor.

JEREMY

Quite close. Then the S.S. might have learned about it, if they tracked you with superlight sensors.

CAPTAIN VARTH

How could they pull us out of superlight? I don't quite understand that.

JEREMY

They have plenty of top-secret stuff in the works, Captain. One of their projects has been to make a large-scale gravity generator. It can simulate a mass the size of a small planet, and they can project it into the path of a ship moving at superlight speed. That will force the superlight engine's automatic safeties to come on and drop the ship to normal space. I would surmise that they tested it on you. And they seem to have advanced hull plating that makes laser weapons less effective. And earlier, they tried to capture us. They have a masking device.

CAPTAIN VARTH

Most interesting. But why is the S.S., of all organizations, developing such technology? Unless Vernon has more in mind than we can fathom.

JEREMY

Now that is a very uncomfortable thought, Captain. I'm not overly fond of his policies, but this is the first clear case of wrongdoing that I've seen.

CAPTAIN VARTH

The Count believes that there may be more. He thinks there's evidence that the President is trying to become a dictator. That's one reason he remained behind on Exterr.

JEREMY

With the way our constitution is structured? That's almost impossible, Captain.

CRYSTAL

Not anymore. I don't know if you realize this, but our constitution has been heavily amended over the past couple of years to give him more and more power. The President has justified it based on incidents not unlike this one. If he makes his way back to the speaker's podium, he'll have a strongly sympathetic audience that may give him even more power. We need to go after him.

JEREMY

Agreed. I thank you for talking with us, Captain. We need to see if we can head off the President.

CAPTAIN VARTH

Best of luck, Colonel.

EXT. INTERSTELLAR SPACE

The Exterranean shuttlecraft launches from the Odin's shuttle bay and is followed by its five escorts.

JEREMY (O.C.)

Headed back to Yunor, guys?

BELTOR (O.C.)

Who, us?

INT. COCKPIT OF BELTOR'S FIGHTER

Beltor smiles in a cocky manner in his small cockpit. No more than one person would ever fit in the craft.

BELTOR

Someone needs to come along to save your tail, Fox.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

JEREMY

Understood, Beltor. Thank you. We're going to see if we can try the shortcut. Alex, plot a course to get us to that route's terminus.

ALEX

Yes, sir.

JEREMY

Meanwhile, I'll try to contact Yunor through the spacecom relays. Open a channel, Crystal.

Crystal taps a button.

CRYSTAL

Channel open.

JEREMY

This is Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Fox  
calling the Naval Space Station at  
Yunor. Please come in.

After a brief delay:

CRYSTAL

We're getting an audio response, Jeremy.

JEREMY

On audio.

Crystal did some more tapping.

JEREMY

Colonel Fox here.

CAPTAIN WILLS (O.C.)

This is Captain Wills at the Yunor  
station. What have you found out,  
Colonel?

JEREMY

I've discovered that it was the S.S. who  
attacked the Farnor ship, Captain. This  
was the Odin, one of the ships that were  
at Exterr. You may find this hard to  
believe, but they had arrested President  
Vernon and were taking him to Farnor for  
arraignment.

CAPTAIN WILLS (O.C.)

Arraignment? Did they have evidence to  
arraign him?

JEREMY

Indeed, and they have provided it to me.  
They even have a notarized deposition  
from Farnor's Crown Prince indicating  
His Highness's approval of the  
secession.

CAPTAIN WILLS (O.C.)

By the stars. Where is the President  
now?

JEREMY

The Secret Service has rescued him. I  
can only assume that he's returning to  
Exterr.

CAPTAIN WILLIS (O.C.)

A very unpleasant assumption, but also highly likely. Did you learn who was in charge of the Farnorians' actions there?

JEREMY

Count Solag, sir, who is still there. He thinks there's even more evidence of malfeasance.

CAPTAIN WILLIS (O.C.)

I know the Count, Colonel. He would do nothing without a factual basis. You must return to Exterr immediately. Is Commander Beltor listening?

BELTOR (O.C.)

Yes, Captain, I am.

CAPTAIN WILLIS (O.C.)

Commander, I want you and your squad to accompany the Colonel. He will be in grave danger alone.

BELTOR (O.C.)

It will be a pleasure, sir.

CAPTAIN WILLIS (O.C.)

Oh, and did you discover how the Odin got around Yunor?

JEREMY

Yes, sir. The Odin's officers told us about a little-known route that the fringe element uses. We're going to use that to save time.

CAPTAIN WILLIS (O.C.)

Very good, Colonel. Contact me when you arrive at the Exterr system. I'll see what I can do to expedite a task force.

JEREMY

Thank you, Captain. Colonel Fox out.

Crystal taps a button, ending the communication.

ALEX

I have our superlight course solution, sir.

JEREMY

Very good. Send it to the fighters.

ALEX  
My pleasure.

After a moment:

BELTOR (O.C.)  
We have it, Colonel.

JEREMY  
Lay it in, and engage in five... four...  
three... two... one... now.

Starlines begin filling the forward viewscreen.

EXT. INTERSTELLAR SPACE

The shuttlecraft and the five fighters ZIP OFF into superlight speed. Moments later, the Odin enters superlight speed in the opposite direction.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE AROUND EXTERR - A LITTLE LATER

Two Farnorian Intimidators continue to orbit Exterr.

INT. PRESIDENT'S GRAND OFFICE - GALACTIC CONGRESS

A human, the Congress Speaker GARY HUTCH, sits across from Count Solag. He is clearly SURPRISED by what he is reading.

SPEAKER GARY HUTCH  
By the stars, Count... if only I'd known  
about this!

COUNT SOLAG  
I am not surprised that you were unaware  
of this, Speaker Hutch.

SPEAKER HUTCH  
But I should have been. And I'm just as  
guilty as President Vernon is; I gave  
him my full support, including approving  
these constitutional freedoms. One more  
successful motion, and he could have  
become a dictator.

COUNT SOLAG  
That's the last thing this democracy  
needs.

SPEAKER HUTCH

Democracy? After all this butchering to the constitution? At least I have time to set it right. But I cannot condone your invasion, Count Solag, no matter your intentions.

COUNT SOLAG

I am fully aware of that, Mr. Speaker. I will yield myself to justice once Farnor has its independence.

SPEAKER HUTCH

Very good. I will recommend that the petition for independence be approved without delay. Has President Vernon been arraigned yet?

COUNT SOLAG

It's been a while since I heard from the Odin. Too long, in fact.

Someone KNOCKS on the door.

COUNT SOLAG

Come in.

Guardsmen Hakel enters the room. He is obviously very nervous.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

My lord... we have a communication. It's from Captain Wills in the Yunor system. He commands the naval space station.

COUNT SOLAG

Yes, I know him. I'll take it, Guardsman. Thank you.

The guardsman nods in apparent relief.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

Yes, sir.

Hakel leaves the room. Count Solag taps a button on the desk, and the viewscreen activates to show Captain Wills. The captain gives the count a disapproving look.

CAPTAIN WILLS

I see you're occupying the President's office, Count.

COUNT SOLAG

Not to worry, Captain. This is not a permanent arrangement.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

I'm glad we both agree. I have unfortunate news, Count. Your precious warship Odin was attacked near the boundary between the Inner and Outer Arms. The warship is still intact, but the Secret Service recovered President Vernon.

The only indication of Count Solag's distress is that his eyes WIDEN slightly.

COUNT SOLAG

Very interesting, Captain. And are you aware of what has transpired here?

CAPTAIN WILLIS

Fully aware. Were it not for the evidence of President Vernon's actions, this would be going too far, Count. Even for you. Speaker Hutch, are you a prisoner?

SPEAKER HUTCH

Not at all, Captain. Things have been relatively quiet since the initial attack.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

But that will change when the S.S. returns with the President. I'm sending a task force to try to stop him. I want your word, Count, that your ships will not attack. My people will not attack them. They may fire only in self-defense.

COUNT SOLAG

You have my word, Captain.

SPEAKER HUTCH

I believe it is pertinent to point out, Captain, that the President is dangerously close to having absolute power.

Captain Willis's eyes narrow.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

You have evidence of this, Mr. Speaker?

SPEAKER HUTCH

I have concrete evidence. If one more minor motion were passed, he would have it. He cannot be allowed to make it.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

I fully agree.

STATIC suddenly begins to blur the captain's image.

CAPTAIN WILLIS

... will send ... immed-...

And the image suddenly DISAPPEARS.

SPEAKER HUTCH

What the--

COUNT SOLAG

We're being jammed.

The count taps a button on the desk.

COUNT SOLAG

Count Solag calling the Renard. Come in.

Some incoherent static BLASTS FORTH from the comm channel, and it is suddenly CUT OFF. Guardsman Hakel abruptly enters the room.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

Count... the Secret Service is surrounding the building!

SPEAKER HUTCH

There's nothing I can do to stop them.

COUNT SOLAG

I know. Guardsman, I want them kept out of the building. Especially if President Vernon is with them.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

We will do what we can, Count.

The guardsman leaves the room.

COUNT SOLAG

For your safety, Mr. Speaker, you can't be seen with me. Please return to the Congress Hall.

SPEAKER HUTCH

Yes, Count. Meanwhile, I'll see what provisions I can call on in case the President does make it in here.

EXT. SUPERLIGHT SPACE - SOON AFTERWARDS

The Exterranean shuttlecraft and the five escorting fighters make their way through superlight space.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT AFT CHAMBER

Crystal sits while gazing out the porthole at the stars, a mug in her hand. We hear FOOTSTEPS from the corridor, and Jeremy enters the chamber.

JEREMY

Hello, dear.

CRYSTAL

Hi, Jeremy.

He sits down next to her and puts an arm around her. She leans into his embrace.

JEREMY

How are you holding up?

CRYSTAL

I've been thinking quite a bit. How could all this happen, Jere? The President's power is supposed to be kept in check.

JEREMY

Yeah, Crys, it's supposed to be. But that doesn't make it so. I wish everything could be simple. All I really want is you and me.

Crystal looks into his eyes.

CRYSTAL

As long as there's room for Alex in that picture. He still needs me, I think.

JEREMY

A little bit, yes. But he's handling this better than I expected. I could never have dreamed what he deduced. I think he might have untapped Valor abilities.

Crystal's eyes go wide.

CRYSTAL

But... you know what happened to the Valor!

JEREMY

I sure do. Five centuries years ago, the evil Galactic Empress Darla butchered every last one of the Valor Guardians. The people barely succeeded in deposing her. That was the start of the Galactic Democracy. But Crystal, heredity does not always determine who has Valor abilities.

CRYSTAL

You're right about that. Some of the most famous ones were born to normal people. Perhaps you're right about my brother. He may be a little naïve, but he's very good at figuring things out.

JEREMY

Unfortunately, I think this mission is taking away his naïveté. But I'm glad to have him along. Not to mention you, my dear.

They gaze silently into each other's eyes for a moment before kissing. A few seconds into the kiss, the ship suddenly JUMPS, and the starlines in the porthole suddenly revert to points.

CRYSTAL

What's happening?

ALEX (O.C.)

Guys! Get up here!

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Jeremy and Crystal swiftly enter the cockpit. In the viewscreen, we see a great dark spot in the space ahead. The faint ring of light around it is very large in the viewscreen.

ALEX

We've been pulled out of lightspeed.

Jeremy looks at his readouts.

JEREMY

When we were pulled out, our momentum put us dangerously close to the black hole. We're nearing the no-return point. Reverse thrusters, maximum power, immediately!

ALEX

Thrusters are already reversed. Shifting power to maximum.

Alex taps some buttons. An audible WHINE is heard, and the shuttle TREMBLES, as it attempts to pull away from the dark spot in the middle of the viewscreen.

CRYSTAL

Structural integrity is seriously taxed.

JEREMY

But we're pulling back, and just in time. Try to raise our friends.

Crystal does some keying. Beltor's voice suddenly sounds over the comm, with great concern:

BELTOR (O.C.)

... repeat, can you hear me?

CRYSTAL

We hear you, fortunately.

BELTOR (O.C.)

Thank the stars. Two of my craft went after the ship that pulled us out of superlight, but it got away immediately. Jumped to lightspeed. It was similar to the S.S. ship that attacked you in the Yunor system. If it had been ten meters closer to the black hole, we all would be goners.

JEREMY

I think that was the idea.

After a moment, the TREMBLING dies down.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

But we're okay now.

BELTOR (O.C.)

Glad to hear it. Too bad you don't owe me another one.

JEREMY

No, I'd rather get my current debt to you paid off. Alex, can we get back on course to Karsus?

ALEX

Yes, barely. But first we need to program a segment away from the black hole to be safe. It'll cost us some time.

JEREMY

But not our lives.

He pats Alex's shoulder.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

Thank you for saving those, Alex. Now I owe you.

ALEX

My pleasure, Jeremy. And unlike Commander Beltor, I hope I won't have to collect.

JEREMY

I do, too. Now then, let's get back on course.

EXT. SPACE NEAR THE BLACK HOLE

The shuttlecraft and its escorting fighters turn away from the black hole and JUMP to superlight in unison.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

Once the shuttle is safely at superlight speed, the three occupants sit back and sigh with relief.

JEREMY

Now there is a real danger along this route. I'd pay the tax in Yunor any day to avoid this.

With a big grin:

ALEX

What, you don't like almost getting sucked in by a black hole?

JEREMY

It's not something I look forward to, I can tell you that. I wish we could rest when we get to Karsus, beyond refueling the shuttle. I've been on the go since before dawn. Today's events make the manslaughter case I was investigating seem insignificant.

Alex sighs:

ALEX

They make everything I've ever been through seem insignificant. Except my parents' death. They've protected me from everything, it seems. I do appreciate it, but I wish they hadn't. They'd never have allowed me to do anything remotely dangerous; that's probably why I enjoyed my piloting lessons so much during college.

CRYSTAL

Well, I think their protectiveness stemmed from all the ugly things they saw on the job.

She grins.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

All that second-class artwork they had to look at.

Alex and Jeremy both smile in response.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE NEAR EXTERR - LATE NIGHT, ARLINGA TIME

The two Farnor ships continue orbiting Exterr.

A squad of five obsidian Secret Service ships suddenly APPEARS, dropping out of superlight speed. We focus on the middle one, which is the largest.

INT. BRIDGE OF THE SECRET SERVICE SHIP JUSTICE

President Vernon stands near the ship's leader, CAPTAIN UNFERTH, a most unpleasant-looking man. As he gazes at the Farnor ships, which dominate the viewscreen, Vernon's quiet voice TREMBLES with barely controlled anger:

PRESIDENT VERNON

They're going to pay for doing this to me, Captain Unferth. As will all of the Outer Arms territories.

CAPTAIN UNFERTH

Definitely, Mr. President. The Secret Service will be your adamant fist. Provided that we are well paid for our services.

PRESIDENT VERNON

You have no need for concern, Captain. You will be generously compensated for rescuing me. Are you ready to get me back into the Congress building?

CAPTAIN UNFERTH

Absolutely, Mr. President.

There is no mistaking the EVIL LEER that comes across Vernon's face.

PRESIDENT VERNON

Very good, Captain. Let us proceed.

Captain Unferth TAPS a button on his armrest.

CAPTAIN UNFERTH

Attention, all craft: engage top-secret communication mode. Engage masking devices in five seconds from... now.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE NEAR EXTERR

The five ships shimmer and DISAPPEAR from view.

INT. BRIDGE OF THE SECRET SERVICE SHIP JUSTICE

However, the Farnorian ships still appear clearly on the viewscreen.

CAPTAIN UNFERTH

Now, helm, take us in.

LIEUTENANT YATES

Yes, Captain.

As Yates pilots the ship, the planet begins to fill the viewscreen. The ship is headed for Arlinga.

INT. CENTRAL ROTUNDA - GALACTIC CONGRESS

The scene is deadly quiet as Count Solag emerges from the President's office, accompanied by Guardsman Hakel. His guards and soldiers are facing the main entrance, their laser rifles primed.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

What could the S.S. be waiting for, Your Eminence?

COUNT SOLAG

Perhaps they await the President's return. We must not fire the first blast. Has there been any success getting through their jamming?

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

Not yet, Your Eminence.

COUNT SOLAG

Keep trying, Guardsman.

EXT. LOCAL SPACE NEAR EXTERR - MOMENTS LATER

The Exterran shuttlecraft and the five Space Navy fighters emerge from superlight near Exterr. They head directly towards the planet.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

JEREMY

Crystal, open a channel to the lead Intimidator.

Crystal does some keying on her console.

CRYSTAL

Channel open.

JEREMY

Farnor craft, this is Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Fox of the Exterr Air Force. Please come in.

The line is silent for a moment. Then Captain Reto appears on the forward viewscreen.

CAPTAIN RETO

This is Captain Reto of the Intimidator Renard. Captain Varth told us to expect you, Colonel. I know, this occupation is illegal--

JEREMY

Forgive the interruption, Captain, but I have a larger concern for the moment. Have you discovered any Secret Service ships here?

CAPTAIN RETO

Not overtly, Colonel. However, five ships entered the system not long ago on your vector. Their exteriors were jet black. Before we could scan them, they simply vanished.

JEREMY

They have masking devices, Captain. Where is Count Solag right now?

CAPTAIN RETO

He's in the Galactic Congress building. Our communications to the surface have been jammed, and we can no longer scan around the building.

JEREMY

I'm not surprised.

Jeremy turns to Crystal.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

Try opening a channel to Galactic Congress.

Crystal taps some buttons, but a negative-sounding CHIRP comes from her console.

CRYSTAL

We can't get through, either.

Jeremy turns to the viewscreen.

JEREMY

A naval task force is on its way from Yunor, Captain. Please cooperate with them.

CAPTAIN RETO

As long as they don't attempt to blow me away, Colonel, you have my word.

JEREMY

Good. We're headed to the surface now. We do not intend to harm the Count, but he will be under arrest.

CAPTAIN RETO

On the Count's orders, I cannot stop you. He has discovered all that is needed to send President Vernon to prison for a long time. The Count is prepared to take all responsibility for his actions.

JEREMY

Excellent, Captain. Please be sure to send the evidence off to Captain Wills at the Yunor Naval Station. Send it to me, too, if you don't mind.

CAPTAIN RETO

I shall, Colonel. Be careful on the surface. Our troops are all in and around the Congress building.

JEREMY

I understand. I'll return soon, Captain. Lieutenant Colonel Fox out.

Captain Reto disappears from the viewscreen, his image replaced by the view of Exterr's surface.

Alex looks very CONCERNED as he considers something.

ALEX

In and around the Congress, he said.

JEREMY

That's right, Alex.

ALEX

I just had this unpleasant thought, Jeremy. What if the S.S. is going to burn the building down with the Count inside?

Jeremy and Crystal both GAPE in surprise.

JEREMY

If they combined the firepower of five S.S. ships, it would look like one of the Intimidators did it. By the stars, how diabolical. If that's their intent, we must stop them immediately. While we're on our way, I'm going to read up on the evidence against our dear President.

EXT. GALACTIC CONGRESS BUILDING - EVENING

Count Solag and Guardsman Hakel emerge from the Congress building to face the Secret Service agents standing around. However, they suddenly look to the sky in surprise.

The lead S.S. ship, the Justice, appears in the evening sky and lands in a circle that the S.S. agents have left.

Guardsman Hakel addresses the count softly:

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

Sir... how in the galaxy did they appear from nowhere like that?

COUNT SOLAG

A masking device, I gather.

The Justice's boarding ramp extends, and President Vernon emerges, surrounded by Secret Service guards. The President strides to the bottom of the pure white steps that lead up from the ground level to the door.

PRESIDENT VERNON

I trust that you have enjoyed your stay in the Galactic Congress, Count Solag. Unfortunately, your visit is at an end. I want you and every single one of your cat-men out of the building, or I won't be responsible for the consequences.

COUNT SOLAG

I find that interesting, Mr. President. I find it more interesting to note that you were legally arrested and should be arraigned on Farnor right now. Your computer contains all the evidence that is necessary.

PRESIDENT VERNON

Well then, Count, I must congratulate you. If you will allow me to take the Congress Podium, I will immediately renounce my authority.

COUNT SOLAG

I'm afraid that I cannot believe that, Mr. President, not after the most recent motion that you have written. If the Congress passes that motion, you will become the galaxy's supreme dictator. It will only take you ten seconds to recite that speech, and the Congress will have no alternative but to vote. My guards and I will not allow it, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT VERNON

Indeed, you are a fool, Your Eminence. I do not need to take the podium in this particular building to achieve my ends. Farewell.

The President turns upon his heel and strides back towards his ship.

Guardzman Hakel appears to be even more confused.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

What could he mean?

COUNT SOLAG

I'm unsure, Guardsman. He could only speak from another podium if--

His eyes widen suddenly:

COUNT SOLAG (CONT'D)

Evacuate the Congressmen.

GUARDSMAN HAKEL

What?

COUNT SOLAG

Immediately, Guardsman! Vernon's going to destroy the building.

Solag and Hakel run into the building.

EXT. SKY AROUND THE GALACTIC CONGRESS BUILDING

The other four Secret Service craft unmask not far above the tremendous Congress building, arranged like the vertices of a massive diamond. Their laser emitters begin glowing red with charging energy.

Not far above, the Exterranean shuttlecraft and its five companion fighters are swiftly descending to the S.S. craft.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

JEREMY

Warning: the Secret Service is charging weapons. Commander Beltor, you have liberty to stop them at all costs.

BELTOR (O.C.)

Just what I love to hear, Colonel. Fighters, name your targets.

MAJOR SANDRA JARVIS (O.C.)

Left.

LIEUTENANT JAY GARNER (O.C.)

Right.

LIEUTENANT NEMOY ALVERS (O.C.)

Top.

ENSIGN GAIL PETERSON (O.C.)

Bottom.

BELTOR (O.C.)

Cool. I'm with you, Peterson.

EXT. SKY AROUND THE GALACTIC CONGRESS BUILDING

The fighters split up and open fire on the four S.S. craft, successfully hitting the charging laser emitters.

EXT. GALACTIC CONGRESS BUILDING

President Vernon and Captain Unferth look upwards in dumbfound as they see the attack.

PRESIDENT VERNON

What in Exterr is going on up there?

CAPTAIN UNFERTH

Oh, no! That shuttle... that's the one that was snooping around the wreckage of the Spencers' ship. I thought it got knocked into the black hole near Karsus.

Vernon turns to Unferth with a scowl that can curdle milk, and the captain RECOILS immediately.

PRESIDENT VERNON

Some agents are beginning to outlive their usefulness, Captain. Be sure that it is not you.

CAPTAIN UNFERTH

Right... yes, sir. What now, Mr. President?

Vernon considers this. He turns towards the door to the Congress.

We follow his gaze and see that Count Solag is there, relatively unprotected.

PRESIDENT VERNON

Bring Solag to me. Then, we're getting out of here.

CAPTAIN UNFERTH

My pleasure, Mr. President.

EXT. SKY AROUND THE GALACTIC CONGRESS BUILDING

A raging dogfight has broken out between Beltor's squad and the Secret Service craft. Even though the S.S. craft have bigger guns, they are no match for the fighters' speed and atmospheric maneuverability.

Beltor and PETERSON have their opponent entirely outflanked. The S.S. craft tries to get them in his sights, but it cannot keep up with their swift strafing runs. It explodes very soon.

Jarvis's victim tries to lure her into crashing against the side of the Congress building, but her craft and her skills are equal to the task. She disables the S.S. craft's engines, and it smashes into the building's side.

GARNER's prey leads him on a perilous chase through the skyscrapers that remain nearby. Garner is not quite as polished, but he has no problem keeping up. Garner succeeds in taking out his opponent's engine in a curve, and the S.S. craft crashes onto an empty space of roadway below.

ALVERS successfully foils his opponent's attempts to get him into his sights, and he takes out the S.S. craft's engines in the middle of a steep upward climb. The craft continues climbing through inertia, but then it comes tumbling down towards a group of S.S. agents that narrowly avoids getting crushed.

Meanwhile, the Exterr shuttlecraft descends towards the Justice.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

JEREMY

Our friends have taken out all four S.S. craft. That leaves the President to us.

Crystal GASPS from her station.

CRYSTAL

Look at this!

As she taps a button, the viewscreen shows what is occurring on the ground. Captain Unferth and others are dragging Count Solag and Guardsman Hakel onto the Justice.

JEREMY

That's Count Solag! There's no mistaking him.

Alex frowns in thought. Softly:

ALEX

He's not showing it, guys, but... somehow... I know that the Count is in grave distress. I don't know how to explain it.

JEREMY

We can worry about explaining that later, pal.

The minute Solag and Hakel have been brought aboard the Justice, the ship rises from the ground.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

We need to go after them.

ALEX

I'm on it.

EXT. SKY AROUND THE GALACTIC CONGRESS BUILDING

The Justice swiftly pulls away from the building and heads southwards. The Exterranean shuttle follows in close pursuit.

JEREMY (O.C.)

Beltor, we're going after the President. See what you can do to get the situation under control at Galactic Congress.

BELTOR (O.C.)

My pleasure, Fox. Happy hunting. Jarvis and Alvers, take care of Colonel Fox.

MAJOR JARVIS (O.C.)

Yes, sir.

LIEUTENANT ALVERS (O.C.)

Aye, sir.

The two fighters swiftly move to flank the shuttle.

EXT. SKY ABOVE ARLINGA

We follow both the Justice and the Exterranean shuttle as they race southwards towards the outskirts. They reach the broad, grassy far outskirts before the shuttle and the fighters come within weapons range of the Justice.

INT. SHUTTLECRAFT COCKPIT

The tail of the Justice dominates the shuttle's forward viewscreen.

JEREMY

We need to fire carefully to keep from killing everyone aboard.

CRYSTAL

Of course. We must give President Vernon the opportunity to rule over a spacious prison cell.

JARVIS (O.C.)

Lasers ready, Colonel.

JEREMY

Open fire.

EXT. SKY ABOVE ARLINGA'S FAR OUTSKIRTS

Lasers LANCE out from the shuttle and both fighters. The Justice attempts evasion. Jeremy and Jarvis have impeccable aim, however, and their lasers SKEWER both engine units on the Justice at once. The Justice falls in a controlled but inexorable descent towards the ground.

EXT. GRASS FIELD - FAR OUTSKIRTS OF ARLINGA

The Justice SLIDES on the ground for a good distance before coming to a sudden HALT. Immediately, the shuttlecraft and fighters make a controlled landing near the Justice.

The shuttle's landing ramp lowers, and Jeremy, Alex, and Crystal emerge cautiously. Jarvis and Alvers quickly join the trio at the back of the shuttle, easily avoiding poorly aimed laserfire from the Justice. Alvers is a male, green-skinned Selvran.

Alex looks at his laser pistol very uncertainly.

ALEX

Are you sure I need this thing?

His answer is a laser blast from the Justice that hits the shuttle's side harmlessly but with a loud, muffled BANG.

CRYSTAL

Does that answer your question, genius?

ALEX

Quite well, thanks.

We turn to the outside of the Justice, where Captain Unferth and two S.S. guards await. Calling towards the shuttle:

CAPTAIN UNFERTH

I don't know what you want, but you will be paid handsomely to desist immediately.

We turn back to Jeremy and the others.

JEREMY

I'm afraid I can't accommodate you. I'm here to arraign President Vernon. What use do you think he'll have for you once he becomes a dictator?

CAPTAIN UNFERTH (O.C.)  
 No need to be concerned for me,  
 Lieutenant Colonel Fox. Don't be too  
 surprised I know your name.

JEREMY  
 You shouldn't, either, Captain Unferth.

Jeremy suddenly leans around the corner and POPS OFF a shot. He is back in safety before the reply HITS the shuttle plating.

Meanwhile, Jeremy's blast STRIKES the guard on Unferth's left, knocking him out.

Crystal has sneaked around the shuttle's other side, and she exposes herself for just long enough to get off another SHOT.

The enemies are not expecting it, and Unferth's other guard FALLS unconscious immediately.

JEREMY  
 Last chance, Unferth. Allow me to  
 arrest Vernon before it's too late.

CAPTAIN UNFERTH (O.C.)  
 Too late for what, Fox? The outer  
 worlds are getting much too uppity.  
 When Vernon does what's necessary, the  
 galaxy will be safe and secure once  
 more.

JEREMY  
 Iron fists do not gain safety and  
 security, Captain.

With seemingly impossible synchrony, Jeremy and Crystal both jump around and FIRE at Unferth. He is momentarily confused, and he is HIT by both stun blasts.

Jeremy leads the way carefully to the Justice.

JEREMY  
 Alex, can you still feel something from  
 the Count?

Alex frowns thoughtfully.

ALEX  
 I'm not... wait, I do sense him. He's  
 unharmed. Jeremy, what is this?

JEREMY

I think you may have Valor abilities,  
Alex.

Alex gapes in reply.

ALEX

Are you serious?

JEREMY

We really should discuss it later.  
Right now, we need to take some people  
into custody.

Alex nods.

ALEX

I'll do what you say, Jere.

CRYSTAL

So will I, my love.

JEREMY

Great. Major Jarvis and Lieutenant  
Alvers, please watch over the sleeping  
beauties out here.

Jarvis and Alvers look down at Unferth's unpleasant  
features.

JARVIS

It will be a pleasure, Colonel.

JEREMY

Thank you, Major. Let's go.

INT. HALLWAY OF THE JUSTICE

Jeremy, Alex, and Crystal make their way carefully into the  
hallway of the Justice towards the bridge.

A pair of nodes suddenly extends down from the ceiling near  
the door to the bridge.

Leaping into a closet to the right:

JEREMY

In here!

Alex and Crystal have barely leapt into the closet before a  
pair of lasers from the nodes BLASTS the floor.

ALEX

Looks like we're getting a warm welcome.

JEREMY

Yeah, right.

Jeremy swiftly pops off a laser blast that DESTROYS one of the nodes.

JARVIS (O.C.)

Is everything all right in there?

Jeremy turns towards the rear door.

JEREMY

Security lasers, Major. We got one, but the second one will be hard to hit.

JARVIS (O.C.)

Allow us.

Jarvis and Alvers appear in the craft's rear door just long enough to fire at the second laser node. Jarvis misses by a millimeter, but Alvers connects and BLOWS UP the node.

JEREMY

Thanks for the help.

The three carefully come out of the closet and resume their cautious journey to the bridge. We follow them until we can see into the bridge, where the President and Lieutenant Yates are holding laser pistols to the heads of Count Solag and Guardsman Hakel.

INT. BRIDGE OF THE JUSTICE

Jeremy, Alex, and Crystal aim their laser pistols at the President and his guard.

PRESIDENT VERNON

If you value this worthless cat's life, you won't come any further.

JEREMY

You're speaking of a high count of the Farnor Kingdom, Mr. President. I've seen all the evidence of what you've been doing. Transforming the Democracy into a dictatorship is against the very core of our constitution.

PRESIDENT VERNON

Spare me your idealistic babble,  
Colonel. Our constitution does nothing  
to assure peace or security. A prime  
example is that it allows an important  
realm, such as Farnor, to just pull out  
of the Democracy. And of course, the  
courts can't sentence vile criminals  
such as Count Solag to the death they  
deserve.

JEREMY

Well, I think it is fully sufficient for  
dealing with traitorous heads of state.  
Mr. President, you are again under  
arrest. I believe you already know your  
rights. You and your guard are to drop  
your weapons immediately.

Vernon considers the matter for a moment.

PRESIDENT VERNON

Very well, Colonel.

Turning towards Yates:

PRESIDENT VERNON (CONT'D)

Do as he says.

Simultaneously, the President and Yates drop their pistols  
and raise their hands.

JEREMY

Thank you. Hands behind your heads.

As the President and his guard put their hands behind their  
heads, Alex frowns slightly. Suddenly, his eyes widen with  
realization.

ALEX

Jeremy, wait!

The President suddenly pulls a small pistol from behind his  
head and fires at Jeremy, but Alex has already grabbed  
Jeremy and pulled him to the floor. As soon as they are  
down, Alex FIRES a blast, but the President ducks and flees  
the room.

Crystal aims her pistol at Yates, who is momentarily  
dumbfounded.

CRYSTAL

Hands where I can see them!

Yates immediately shows his empty hands.

Alex helps Jeremy stand up.

JEREMY

Wow... now I'm sure of your abilities,  
Alex. Get after Vernon.

ALEX

Yes, sir.

Alex runs back into the hallway.

COUNT SOLAG

Thank you for saving us, gentlemen.

JEREMY

Don't thank us too heartily, Count. I'm  
afraid you're under arrest, also.

The Count nods.

COUNT SOLAG

I understand.

INT. HALLWAY OF THE JUSTICE

Vernon flees the hallway and suddenly turns right into the  
reactor room. Alex follows him.

INT. REACTOR ROOM OF THE JUSTICE

The Justice's reactor room contains all manner of  
technology. The most significant item is the superlight  
reactor, a massive object with colorful light pulsating in  
the translucent central bubble.

The President aims his laser pistol at the reactor.

PRESIDENT VERNON

Hold it, Mr. Spencer! I'm sure you know  
what happens when laserfire hits a  
superlight reactor.

Alex's eyes widen in surprise.

ALEX

You know who I am?

Vernon snorts contemptuously.

PRESIDENT VERNON

I know the names of all traitors and their relatives. Your parents got exactly what they deserved.

Scowling, Alex levels his pistol at Vernon's head.

ALEX

How do you know what my parents deserved, Mr. President?

PRESIDENT VERNON

Don't be dense, Mr. Spencer. They should have seen Farnor's treachery for themselves, but instead they decided to bring to light my humble efforts to keep the galaxy whole.

ALEX

You're unbelievable, President Vernon. You sound like the ancient audio recordings of Empress Darla. You deserve to spend the rest of your days behind bars.

Vernon sneers at the young man.

PRESIDENT VERNON

Behind bars? Wouldn't you rather kill me and have your revenge?

ALEX

Death is too easy a fate for you, Mr. President. Lower your weapon.

PRESIDENT VERNON

Not a chance. If I can't save the galaxy from Count Solag's sedition, I'll destroy us all.

The President's finger tightens on the trigger.

As if on instinct, Alex throws his laser pistol towards Vernon's.

A laser beam SHOOTS out of Vernon's pistol, but Alex's pistol intercepts and absorbs the beam with a SNAP before the beam can strike the reactor. A glowing shard breaks off of Alex's pistol and strikes Vernon's hand.

With a HOWL of pain, the President drops his weapon and cradles his injured extremity.

Alex jumps in quickly and scoops up both weapons. He aims the President's pistol at its owner.

Vernon looks at Alex in terror.

PRESIDENT VERNON

How in the galaxy did you do that?

Alex smiles nebulously:

ALEX

You're the one with the Secret Service, Mr. President. You can find out for yourself.

INT. CONGRESS HALL - GALACTIC CONGRESS BUILDING - NEXT MORNING

The great Congress Hall is filled with congressmen from all around the galaxy. On a raised staging platform in the middle of the floor, Speaker Hutch sits with numerous people around him.

SPEAKER HUTCH

The Galactic Congress shall come to order.

The conversation in the hall dies down.

SPEAKER HUTCH

Thank you. My fellow congressmen, I regret to inform you that President Henry Vernon is the primary suspect of serious crimes against this government, and therefore he has been placed under arrest. The evidence that he committed these crimes is solid and staggering, and I was shocked when I saw it. According to the constitution, I will serve as the head of government pending the results of his trial. If he is found guilty, we must remove the amendments that he has introduced to turn the Democracy into a dictatorship.

Hutch holds up a computer pad.

SPEAKER HUTCH (CONT'D)

In the meantime, we have another matter of importance to discuss: Farnor's independence. As you know, the Secession Committee approved this request initially, but President Vernon denied it. Judging from recent evidence, his reasons for doing so were false. It is unconstitutional to force a realm to remain part of the Democracy. Therefore, much as it pains me, I approve this secession request. Farnor Congressmen, I hope that you will remain allies of the Democracy.

The seating balcony for Farnor's delegation lights up in yellow.

SPEAKER HUTCH (CONT'D)

We recognize the delegation from the Kingdom of Farnor. Please be heard, Congressman.

Farnor's balcony turns blue, and the Farnorian CONGRESSMAN FORSON stands up. His voice reverberates over the chamber's speaker system.

CONGRESSMAN FORSON

Your Honor, The Kingdom of Farnor is grateful for this approval. Rest assured, we fully intend to coexist peacefully with the worlds of the Democracy, and all Democracy residents have freedom to visit and trade legally within Farnor space.

As Forson sits down, his balcony light turns off.

SPEAKER HUTCH

Thank you, Congressman Forson.

Hutch references another computer pad.

SPEAKER HUTCH (CONT'D)

Additionally, I must also recognize Count Solag. Even though his methods were admittedly deplorable, he fully exposed President Vernon's treachery in fabricating evidence to deny Farnor's petition. He cannot be here in person, regrettably.

Hutch waves his hand toward Jeremy, Alex, and Crystal, who are sitting near him.

SPEAKER HUTCH (CONT'D)

Finally, I must recognize three people who risked their lives yesterday to help resolve Farnor's occupation: Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Fox of the Exterr Air Force; Crystal Spencer, a valuable employee in Arlinga's planning office; and her brother Alex Spencer, the most brilliant young scientist in the galaxy. Please welcome them.

Jeremy, Alex, and Crystal stand up to great applause. Hutch shakes hands with them in turn.

EXT. WRECKAGE OF THE SPENCER HOUSE - CITY OF ARLINGA - LATER

Alex and Crystal carefully approach the wreckage of their house. It definitely appears to be a total loss.

CRYSTAL

Mom and Dad willed the house to us, but... there's nothing left of it.

ALEX

No, Crys, but at least we're still here. And they willed us their money, of course.

He sighs.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Wow. What a day we had yesterday.

CRYSTAL

But I'm glad we were together, Alex. Now we know something new about you.

ALEX

Yeah. I have Valor abilities. That's going to take some getting used to. But at least we can reference the library; the Farnorians left that standing. Perhaps the history datacards will help me fully understand these new abilities and how to use them responsibly.

Crystal puts a hand on his shoulder.

CRYSTAL

I hope so. You saved Jeremy's life yesterday, Alex. Thank you.

ALEX

I'm glad to do it. I know how much he means to you, Crys.

She punches his shoulder lightly.

CRYSTAL

But I'm not going to go soft on you, either, just so you know. I'm going to break you of being the spoiled kid as soon as possible.

Alex grins.

ALEX

Thanks. I really need that. In that case, I won't go easy on you, either.

CRYSTAL

Glad to hear it. I'm going to take a look around back, pal. Be right back.

ALEX

Okay.

Crystal carefully makes her way around to the back of the house.

As Alex gazes at the ruins, a brown-haired young woman comes near him from a neighboring yard. AMY GRANT is only a little bit shorter than he is, and she is eighteen, as he is. She holds back uncertainly.

AMY GRANT

Um... hi, Alex.

He turns to her immediately, and a big grin fills his face.

ALEX

Amy! I'm so happy to see you.

She smiles happily as he pulls her into his arms.

AMY

I'm so happy you're all right. I didn't mean those terrible things I said a couple of days ago, Alex, really. I was just so confused by what I was really feeling. I love you deeply.

ALEX

I love you, too, but don't go too easy on me. I've been such a spoiled brat.

AMY  
Ah, self-realization.

After gazing into each other's eyes for a moment, they kiss.

AMY  
I'm so proud of you for being a hero,  
Alex.

ALEX  
Hero? I did what I had to.

AMY  
Why don't you tell me about it?

ALEX  
I'll tell you everything. Amy...  
there's something I've found out about  
myself, besides how badly spoiled I've  
been. I have Valor abilities.

AMY  
Somehow, I've always known, Alex.  
You're always so kind and perceptive.

She turns to the ruined house.

AMY (CONT'D)  
I also heard your parents died  
yesterday. I'm deeply sorry, Alex.

ALEX  
Thank you, Amy. All part of the story.

Crystal comes back to the front. She smiles when she sees  
Amy.

CRYSTAL  
Hello, Amy.

AMY  
Hi, Crystal. I'm so sorry about what  
happened yesterday... to your parents  
and to your house.

CRYSTAL  
I appreciate that, Amy. Mom and Dad  
perished for what they believed in:  
liberty for everyone in the galaxy.  
They would have wanted it that way, and  
so do Alex and I. As for the house--

Alex speaks up a little mournfully after his sister has  
trailed off:

ALEX

A lot of memories here. But if I'm to move on with my life, it may be best to sell this land and move elsewhere. I've always thought it was too crowded here.

AMY

Whatever you do eventually, my parents say you can stay in the garage apartment for a while. It's far enough from my room for their liking.

Alex smiles happily at Amy.

ALEX

I appreciate that, Amy. I might take you up on that.

AMY

Now then, Crystal, what's Jeremy up to?

CRYSTAL

He's helping look over the damage at the Air Force base. It will be expensive to rebuild, but at least Exterr is finally going to spend the money to buy real defenses. Farnor's attack proves that it's necessary.

ALEX

I don't especially like it, but it's needed. Why don't we go for lunch? Then you can hear all about our adventure, Amy.

AMY

The first of many?

ALEX

Who knows? But I hope you'll be there next time, Amy.

AMY

It will be my pleasure, Alex. With two girls protecting you, nothing can go wrong.

They all laugh lightly. Crystal and Alex give a sad look to the remains of their house. Then, they join arms with Amy as they leave the scene.