The Disappearance Of Captain Danson

By

Glenn Davis

Cover Illustration by

Ana K. Quintero

[Contact her for your own art illustrations at anakvillafraz @ fiver.com]

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Prelude

Three men sat at one end of a table. The table was long and could seat up to thirty people. The conference room was empty except for the three men who were speaking in hushed whispers. There were no windows in this room and only one door. It was a room that held many evil secrets.

The man, seated at the head of the table, looked at his companions, “Then we are agreed?”

A man with dark hair and a pointed beard replied, “If we are caught, this will be treason.”

The blond-haired man across the table from him laughed. The first loud noise that had been heard in the room since the conspirators had begun their meeting. The other two men looked taken back.

“We will not be caught! This plan is foolproof.”

“Then we are agreed?” the man at the head of the table asked again.

Both of the other men nodded.

They all stood and picked up the glasses in front of them.

The man at the head of the table raised his glass in a toast, “To our plan. To the United Raiders. To the capture of the U.A.F. Gallant!”
Chapter One: The Dream
[These events take place in the year of Elniyn 6082.]

Sandy sat quietly on an observation deck. She was looking out through the windows as the stars and planets passed by. The U.A.F. Gallant, the starship on which Sandy and her family lived, had many observation decks. The decks were wide halls, sometimes 30 - 40 feet across, that went three-quarters of the way around many of the 150 levels of the gigantic starship.

Some of the observation decks were for walking or jogging. Some were linear parks. The one Sandy had chosen this time was themed as a museum. Like all the observation decks, there were plenty of comfortable chairs and tables by the windows looking out over the stars and planets around them. But behind her there were statues, display cases, relics, and holograms of past civilizations. Brass plaques or video displays explained what each one was. Here, amid the memory of thousands of years past, Sandy looked out into infinity.

Sandy was so captivated by the wonders spread out before her eyes that she did not hear the gentle footsteps behind her.

“Good afternoon, Miss Langlish,” came a cheerful voice.

Startled, Sandy jumped.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“That’s ok,” said Sandy rotating her comfortable chair around to face the man. He did not look anywhere near his fifty years. He wore his standard uniform: black shoes, black dress pants, and a green pull-on shirt with his gold command stripes.

“Do you mind if I sit down?”

“Of course not, Captain Danson.”
Sandy swirled her chair back around as Captain Danson sank into the seat next to her. Unconsciously, Sandy brushed back her shoulder-length, light brown hair as her blue eyes once again gazed out the window.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” said Captain Danson.

Sandy nodded.

“I’ve been travelling through space for nearly 30 years, and yet each time I look out at the stars I’m struck with awe. There is always something new, something fascinating. Space is an odd term for the place where the light and energy of millions of stars dance and play. It is even more amazing when you think every planet moves in an exact orbit, never missing a step, not even by an inch.”

“Isn’t our God, Elniyn, wonderful to be able to design such a terrific universe?”

“He certainly is, and the universe isn’t even the greatest of His wonders. You know, I once heard of a planet where most of the people believe all this,” Captain Danson waved his hand at the stars and planets outside the window, “happened by accident. They believe there is no Elniyn and that all this made itself.”

Sandy stared at him in disbelief, “Really? That doesn’t make sense. Everyone knows things don’t make themselves.”

Captain Danson laughed, “Intellaleti are strange creatures. We tend to believe what we want to believe or what we’ve been taught to believe, regardless of how obvious the truth is or how illogical our belief system is.”

Sandy thought about Captain Danson. She liked him and enjoyed his company. In her experience, it wasn’t very often she found an adult, besides her parents, who didn’t make her feel like she was two years old. Many talked about things she didn’t understand or care about.

But Captain Danson was different. Even though he was the busy captain of a starship with over 100,000 people on it, he always had time to stop and talk to anyone... even if they had just turned fourteen. And he didn’t use terms like ‘young lady’ or ‘little gentleman,’ No, he treated you
with friendly respect and made you feel important. He was almost like an extra grandfather.

“Had any more adventures since you solved The Gallant Mystery and saved Mr. Tern’s life?” inquired the Captain.

“No,” replied Sandy, blushing at the memory of her first few weeks on the U.A.F. Gallant. “Adventures are too nerve-racking for me. I’d rather search out new recipes on KIP.”

“You like to cook?”

“I love to cook. It’s fun picking this and that and designing an entire meal so that it is both nutritious and delicious. I want to be a professional chef someday.”

“We could certainly use more of those,” replied Captain Danson, with a twinkle in his eye.

“I found a recipe for Rovern Brownies yesterday. I haven’t tried it yet, but it looks good. I am going to try it out tomorrow. When I bake some, would you like to try them?”

“It would be my pleasure. I don’t often get home-baked treats. I’ve never tried Rovern Brownies before. I’d love to try something new.”

“Would you like me to bring them to your apartment when they’re done?”

“Why don’t you bring them to my office.” Captain Danson glanced around to make sure no one was near. Then he whispered in her ear, “I get the three o’clock munchies.”

Sandy giggled.

“Captain Danson to Main Control,” came a voice over Captain Danson’s miniature communicator, pinned to his left shirt pocket.

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Tapping a small button, he replied, “On my way. Seven minutes.” He stood up, “Back to work.” He smiled, “Thank you for the pleasure of your company.”

“It’s my pleasure,” said Sandy.

Sandy was too excited to stay on the observation deck for very long after Captain Danson left. Imagine being able to bake something for the Captain! Sandy hurried along the corridors, each one painted in different, light and friendly colours. She took the ElLift to her home level.

“Mom,” she said, flying into the kitchen, “can I make some Rovern Brownies tonight?” Sandy’s eyes shone, “Because Captain Danson said he would like to try some.”

“That’s quite an honour.” Mrs. Langlish’s eyes twinkled at her daughter’s delight. “Ok, right after supper. Now, you can wash up and help me with this stew.”

“What’s the excitement?” asked Scott, Sandy’s fifteen-year-old brother, coming into the kitchen.

“I’m going to bake some brownies for Captain Danson!”

Scott didn’t quite see what was so exciting about that, but he loved his sister, and if it made her happy, it made him happy. “That’s great,” he replied.

That night Sandy spent three hours comparing recipes, finding the ingredients [including running to a late-night store for two of them], mixing them all together, and baking them. Rovern Brownies took some time because they were built up in layers. Sandy would have to take the brownies out of the oven every fifteen minutes and add a new layer of ingredients. She made two dozen, one dozen for her family and the other dozen for Captain Danson.

When Sandy went to bed, her excitement kept her awake longer than usual. Eventually, she fell asleep. Sometime during the night, Sandy had a dream. Of course, everyone dreams every night even if they don’t remember it. This dream was different…

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In her dream, Sandy saw herself searching her bedroom for her favourite doll, Rosanne. She had had Rosanne since she was two years old. Although Rosanne was worn out with love, she always had a special place on Sandy’s bed. Sandy looked all through her room without finding Rosanne. Suddenly a cold fear gripped her, had someone stolen Rosanne?

Then the scene of the dream totally shifted. Sandy found herself standing alone on a dirt path in a valley. In front of her, the trail forked. The left path was crooked, but it ran through a grassy meadow and beside a gentle stream. Flowers were blooming, birds were singing, small animals were playing. It looked like a peaceful and enjoyable place to be.

The path to the right ran straight... straight into a dark, dangerous forest, as dark as the forest she had been trapped in on Vaug IV. From out of the darkness came the roars and growls of wild animals. Somehow, Sandy knew that was the path she should take.

Gulping and not taking too much time to think about it, Sandy saw herself going down the straight path into the forest. Since the trail was shrouded in darkness, she could not see any end to it. As soon as she stepped into the woods, a man in shining clothes appeared right beside her. A sudden peace flooded her, and her fear fled. She knew the Man beside her was really Elniyn, her Friend and God. From time to time, as she walked down the trail, a wolf or a trepan would leap out at her with its teeth bared. The Man would always step in front of her to protect her.

In the morning, Sandy woke up with the dream still vividly in her mind. She knew it had to have some meaning, but it puzzled her.
Chapter Two: Captain Danson?

Sandy was thoughtful during breakfast that day. After breakfast, the Langlish family had a devotional time. During that time, each person took a turn reading from the Book of El, then they would discuss the passage, and someone would pray. After that, they discussed anything special that had happened or that they had planned for the day.

It was during this time Sandy told them about her dream. They all discussed it for a few minutes, knowing since dreams are often in a language of their own, they can be challenging to understand. The consensus was that Sandy’s dream meant she would face some kind of difficult problem, but if she did the right thing, Elniyn would protect her from all harm. Then Mr. and Mrs. Langlish and Scott placed their hands on her and said a special prayer. After which, Mr. Langlish left for work. Scott and Sandy settled down to do their school work, and Mrs. Langlish prepared to act as both teacher and homemaker.

Mrs. Langlish let Scott and Sandy out of school a little early so Sandy could take her brownies up to Captain Danson before three o’clock. She put the brownies in a small box and skipped down the hall to the ElLift.

“Slow down,” complained Scott.

“Well, hurry up then,” said Sandy, holding the ElLift door open for him.

The ElLift only went as far as the level below the top floor. They had to walk down several halls to reach the special ElLift that went to the top floor, where Main Control was located.

Sandy’s heart was beating wildly as they entered the final ElLift. Not many people, except high-ranking officers, ever went to the top level. It was the smallest level because the only rooms on it were the Main Control (where the officers ran the starship), the Captain and Co-Captain’s offices, a conference room, and, of course, a bathroom.
As they stepped off the ELLift, a security man stood in front of them. He wore the standard red and black security uniform except for a gold stripe on the outside seam of his pants. He was a member of the Security Elite. This branch of the Security department was responsible for the safety of the captain and senior officers.

“Can I help you?” he asked politely.

“We’re here to see Captain Danson if he’s not too busy,” said Scott. “He said Sandy could come up and bring him some of her brownies.”

The security man seemed a little confused, but all he said was, “Follow me.”

He led them down the short hall to a door on the left. Scott looked longingly at the door at the end of the hall. It was only a few feet away, yet behind that door was Main Control. How he would love to get a look inside and see all the officers busy running the Gallant.

The security man pressed the intercom beside the door.

“Captain Danson, there are two children here to see you.”

Sandy was much too excited to be resentful at being called a child. Besides Captain Danson would know better.

There was a moment’s hesitation. Then a slightly startled voice replied, “Send them in.”

The security man pressed a button. As the door slid noiselessly into the wall, he stood aside to allow them to enter. The only other time they had been in the captain’s office was when they had been rescued from Vaug IV. Then they had been too excited and relieved to take in much.

Captain Danson’s office was a large room painted in a light, relaxing blue. A few paintings hung on the walls. They showed peaceful scenes with plenty of trees, streams, and animals. Captain Danson even had a few small statues of animals spread tastefully around his office. A private bathroom was off to the right. They saw Captain Danson sitting behind a large semi-circular desk with a computer tablet in his hands.

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There were two other people in the room. One was a blond-haired man with blue eyes, dressed in civilian clothes. He was standing to the left of Captain Danson. The other, standing on his right, they recognized as Lt. Grace Williams, the Senior Science Officer. Lt. Williams’ slender 4’ 7” form was covered with short reddish hair with striking white markings. A bushy tail with a white tip swished behind her. Her head, with its long nose, whiskers, and pointed ears, gave her a decidedly fox-like appearance.

All three people had turned to look as Scott and Sandy entered the room. There was a thin, professional smile on the captain’s lips.

“What can I do for you?” he asked.

He seemed surprised to see them; although, he tried hard not to show it. Scott wondered for a minute if Sandy had only imagined her conversation with Captain Danson the day before.

“My sister baked some brownies for you, Sir,” said Scott, not quite sure of what he should say.

Sandy stepped up to the desk. With a smile, she handed the container to Captain Danson, “They’re the Rovern Brownies we talked about. I brought some of them for you.”

“Thank you, young lady, they’re my favourite.” Captain Danson rose and offered his hand to Sandy.

Sandy froze. Her mind trying to grasp what she was feeling. Ever since she had stepped into the office, she had felt something was wrong. They had talked several times. Now, Captain Danson didn’t even seem to know her name.

Scott nudged her to shake hands. Sandy’s eyes travelled from the hand to Captain Danson’s eyes. Then she knew. She didn’t know how she knew, but she knew.

“You’re not Captain Danson!” she blurted out.
The room went silent as a grave. All eyes stared at Sandy in astonishment. They were too shocked to speak.

At last, Captain Danson found his voice, “Of course, I’m Captain Danson. We’ve met before,” he paused as if thinking, then went on, “Miss Langlish. You and your friends were a great help to us in uncovering the plot against Mr. Tern.”

Sandy shook her head slowly and swallowed hard. “You’re not Captain Danson,” she repeated firmly.

“Well, who do you think I am?”

“I don’t know, but you are not Captain Danson,” she said for the third time. “Where is he? Have you hurt him?”

“Mr. Langlish,” said Captain Danson addressing Scott, “I think you had better take your sister home. She’s obviously not feeling well.”

Scott nodded, pulling Sandy toward the door, “I’m sorry, Captain.”

“That’s ok,” said Captain Danson with a smile. “We all make mistakes… and thanks for the brownies.”

When the door closed behind Scott and Sandy, Captain Danson turned to Lt. Williams, “What just happened here must remain confidential. I cannot have false accusations and rumours spreading.”

“Of course, Captain,” she said, picking up the tablet from where it had been laid on the desk and handing it back to Captain Danson.

Captain Danson took it. He signed it. As he handed it back, he said, “I want you to run an immediate DNA scan on myself and all senior officers in Main Control.”

“That’s not due for another six months, Sir,” replied Lt. Williams.

“I want it run now… today. If anything comes of this, I want concrete evidence that it is false.”
“Yes, Captain.” Lt. Williams turned to leave.

As she was opening the door, Captain Danson added, “When my scan is complete, I want you to personally take the results down to the Langlish family. Judge, and report to me alone how well they accept it.”

“Yes, Captain.” With a swish of her bushy tail, she was gone.

Captain Danson turned to the blond-haired man, “I don’t like this. It could spoil everything.”

The cool blue eyes of the blond-haired man appeared thoughtful, “This could work in our favour. The scan will prove that you are Captain Danson. We were wondering how to get the scan done early and on record, now that is taken care of.”

“That girl and her brother foiled our assassination attempt last year. I think she’s trouble.”

“We’ll see how she reacts to the scan. If she is going to be trouble, we’ll take care of her.”
Chapter Three: Why Don’t You Believe Me?

Scott didn’t say anything until they were alone in the ElLift. He loved his sister and very seldom spoke harshly to her… but this, time he was furious.

“I have NEVER been so embarrassed in my life! Telling Captain Danson that he wasn’t Captain Danson! How could you!”

“He wasn’t,” protested Sandy in a subdued voice. Why didn’t Scott believe her? He knew she never told lies.

“He was Captain Danson. I know him, too. He looked like Captain Danson. He talked like Captain Danson. He acted like Captain Danson. He WAS Captain Danson. Get that into your brain! Now you’re going to have to go back and tell him you’re sorry.”

They got off the Main Control ElLift and began walking down the halls to the ElLift that would take them close to their home.

“I’m not sorry,” Sandy said firmly. “And I am not going to apologize for the truth.”

“Sandy, don’t be stubborn.”

“Captain Danson might be in danger. We’ve got to find him!”

“That shouldn’t be hard. He’s sitting at his desk in his office.”

“Scott, you’ve got to believe me… that wasn’t Captain Danson. I know it wasn’t. Elniyn wouldn’t want me to lie to make you or anyone else happy.”

“We’ll see what mom and dad have to say about it,” commented Scott grimly.

They rode the ElLift down to their level in silence.
When the door opened a ball bounced inside, startling them. Outside was Dick with a grin spread over his freckled face. Dick was the same age as Sandy and had dark brown hair. Scott, Sandy, Dick, and Dick’s sixteen-year-old sister, Janna, had shared many adventures as they worked to solve The Gallant Mystery last year. Since that time, they had continued to be friends.

Scott glared and pushed past him. Turning to Sandy, he said, “Coming?”

“Not yet. I need time to think.”

Dick entered the ElLift with Sandy and picked up his ball.

“You two have a fight?” he asked in surprise, as the ElLift doors closed. Dick was always scrapping with his older sister. “I’ve never seen Scott so mad!”

Sandy nodded.

“Wow! You two never fight. What’s this about?”

Sandy did not reply. Dick wasn’t offended at being ignored. He just continued throwing his ball into the air and catching it. His ability to not react was one of the things that irritated his sister, so he learned to do it well.

Two levels down, Sandy left Dick on the ElLift and made her way to the observation deck, where she had met Captain Danson the day before. Sitting down, she stared out at the stars. It looked so peaceful out there. Why couldn’t it be peaceful inside, too? Hot tears rolled down her cheeks. Why was it when you had something wonderful planned, it was always spoilt?

Crying is fine for a while, but it has to stop sometime. Reality must be faced. It was about twenty minutes later when Sandy slowly got up. With her eyes glued to the floor, she shuffled off to the nearest public washroom to wash out her eyes. Then she headed back to the ElLift to go home and see what her parents would say.
As she approached the ElLift, she saw Dick was still there, bouncing his ever-present ball and whistling. He had waited for her out of curiosity.

“Just thought I’d wait for you,” he said casually, catching his ball and pressing the ElLift button. “Going to tell me what’s up?”

Sandy shrugged, “I was just up in Captain Danson’s office...”

“Wow!” exclaimed Dick. “I haven’t been there since we were rescued from Vaug IV. Did you get to see inside Main Control?”

Sandy shook her head, “I just went to his office, with Scott, but he wasn’t there.”

“So, what’s the big deal?” Dick bounced his ball off the walls of the ElLift. “Just go back later.”

“You don’t understand. I saw a man in Captain Danson’s uniform, who looked like Captain Danson, and said he was Captain Danson, but he wasn’t. I know he wasn’t.”

Dick grabbed his ball. He shot Sandy a strange look. “Why don’t you think he was Captain Danson?”

Sandy stamped her foot in anger, “I don’t think! I know! I just don’t know how I know, but I KNOW.”

“I agree, you don’t think,” said Dick in the sarcastic voice he usually reserved for his sister, Janna. “I do think... and I think you’re crazy.”

The ElLift stopped on the next level and the door opened. Dick kept tossing his ball and catching, totally unconcerned that Sandy was glaring at him. A man entered the ElLift and it continued its journey to the next level. Dick wouldn’t have paid any attention to the man at all except that he noticed a curious J-Shaped scar below the man’s lip. Dick was always interested in anything out of the ordinary. However, neither Dick nor Sandy noticed that the man never gave the ElLift any instructions. On the other hand, he did not appear to be paying any attention to them.
As the doors opened on their floor, Sandy’s heart sank. What were her parents going to say? Had Scott already told them? Was she going to be in trouble?

Dick was first off. He went down the hall bouncing his ball and whistling. Sandy stepped into the hall and began heading to her apartment, right across from Dick’s apartment. Her feet felt like they were made of lead. Every step increased her dread. The man with the scar also left the ElLift on that level.

As Dick got to the door of his apartment, he called out to Sandy, “I’ll see you tomorrow.” Then he added with a grin, “Or maybe it will only be someone who looks like me.”

Sandy was too wrapped up in her thoughts to care about Dick right then. Silently she entered her family’s apartment. It was a spacious, tastefully decorated, three-bedroom apartment. Sandy headed straight for her room.

“Is that you, Sandy?” came a voice from the kitchen.

“Yes, Mom.”

“Will you help me with supper, please.”

Reluctantly, Sandy changed direction. At any other time, she would have been thrilled at helping, but right now she wanted to be alone. Her mother noticed something was wrong as soon as Sandy stepped into the kitchen. Sandy tried to put on a brave smile, but mothers are rarely fooled.

“What’s wrong, Sweetheart? Didn’t Captain Danson like the brownies?”

“Didn’t Scott tell you?”

“Scott hasn’t come in yet.”

“Oh.”

“What happened?”

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“We went to Captain Danson’s office. There was another man there. He looked like Captain Danson and he said he was Captain Danson, but he wasn’t.” Sandy paused, blinking back tears. “I know he wasn’t. Scott didn’t believe me… and neither did Dick.”

Mrs. Langlish wasn’t quite sure she had heard Sandy correctly. Captain Danson wasn’t Captain Danson? In any case, she gave Sandy a huge hug and held her close for several minutes. To Sandy, it was the most comforting thing in the world to have those loving arms wrapped around her.

Kissing Sandy on the forehead, she said, “We’ll talk about it later. Right now, you had better stir that sauce, or it will burn.”

Sandy smiled gratefully and picked up a spoon. It wasn’t long before Mr. Langlish came home from working at the furniture store he owned. He was followed closely by Scott, who had a terrific sense of timing when it came to meals.

Soon the family was seated around the dining room table. Mr. Langlish offered a short prayer of thanksgiving to Elniyn. Then dinner was served. Sandy slowly picked at the food on her plate. She wasn’t hungry and her mind was a million miles away. Suddenly, she felt Scott kick her under the table. Crossly, she glanced up at him. With his head, he motioned to Mr. Langlish.

“I asked you if you were feeling ok.”

“Sorry, Dad. I didn’t hear you. I guess my mind was wandering.”

“What’s the matter?”

Sandy’s eyes went back to her plate of half-eaten food. She picked up a morsel of food. Then she set it back down absent-mindedly.

“It’s… it’s kind of hard to say…”

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“It’s not hard at all!” exclaimed Scott, still upset with Sandy. “She flipped out in the Captain’s office and told Captain Danson he wasn’t the Captain!”

“I don’t like the tone of your voice, Scott,” said Mr. Langlish calmly, but with an edge of warning in his own voice. “And I don’t understand. Of course, Captain Danson is the Captain of the Gallant.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Scott replied respectively, controlling his voice with an effort. “She looked Captain Danson in the face and told him he wasn’t Captain Danson, but some imposter. I have never been so embarrassed in my life.”

Mr. Langlish turned to Sandy, who was slightly red, “You accused Captain Danson of being an imposter?”

Sandy nodded with tears forming in her eyes, “He wasn’t Captain Danson.”

“He looked like Captain Danson. He talked like Captain Danson. He was Captain Danson,” muttered Scott.

“Scott, your father is talking to Sandy.”

“Sorry, Mom.”

“What makes you think he wasn’t Captain Danson?”

Sandy jumped to her feet with a flaming red face, bumping the table and causing juice to ripple over the edges of the glasses.

“I don’t think. I KNOW!” she exploded. “It wasn’t Captain Danson and I KNOW it! Why doesn’t anyone believe me?” She stormed off to her bedroom with the tears flowing freely.

Shocked silence reigned around the table for a few minutes. Without a word, Mr. Langlish began to rise. His wife placed her hand upon his. Mr. Langlish searched his wife’s eyes and, finding the answer to his unspoken question, sat back down. Slowly and thoughtfully, he picked up his fork.
and continued eating. The other two did the same. The meal went on in an almost ghostly solitude.

Scott’s mind was reeling from Sandy’s unexpected outburst. Whether she was right or wrong, he knew Sandy felt what she had said very deeply. He began to feel ashamed of the selfish way he acted, thinking only of his own feelings and not his sister’s.

It was about ten minutes later when the sound of a door opening reached them. Moments later, a shame-faced Sandy entered the dining room. Her eyes stared at the floor as if it was the most exciting thing in the universe. Actually, it was only a common diamond pattern shined to perfection by a loving Mrs. Langlish.

Her voice faltered with emotion as she spoke, “I’m sorry, Dad. I sinned and I was wrong to lose my temper like that. I… I… try to control it, really I do, but sometimes it sneaks away on me. I’ve asked Elniyn to forgive me. Now I am asking you and Mom and Scott to forgive me.” The tears were running down her face. “I am sorry that I am such a disappointment…”

She was interrupted as her father’s loving arms encircled her. Words could not express the comfort of that caring touch.

“You’re not a disappointment to us, Sweetheart. Get that idea out of your pretty head. We’re very proud of you, and we will always love you no matter what you do or what happens. You are forgiven. And I know you will continue working on your temper until you win. I have every confidence in you.”

Sandy stood there for a few minutes without saying a word. She was just enjoying and drawing strength from her father’s hug. When she looked up into his eyes, she could see the love there… and a few glistening tears of his own. He slipped his hand in hers and led her back to her place at the table.

“Finish your meal, then we’ll talk.”

Mrs. Langlish gave Sandy’s hand a little squeeze as she sat down.
“I’m sorry, too,” said Scott.

The rest of the meal was finished in uncustomary silence. But this silence was a comfortable, thoughtful silence where each person appreciated the other’s company, not the trouble, embarrassed silence that had reigned before.

After the meal had been cleared away and the dishes done, the family went into the living room and sat down. Mrs. Langlish put on some soft music, praising the wonders of Elniyn. She went back into the kitchen and returned with a cup of steaming hot tain for Mr. Langlish and herself.

Mr. Langlish sipped at his tain for a few minutes. His eyes were closed as he allowed the soft music to penetrate his mind and remind him of the love of Elniyn. The rest sat in silence, listening to the music and waiting for him to speak.
Chapter Four: Irrefutable Evidence

Before long, Mr. Langlish’s eyes opened. He turned to his daughter.

“Sandy, tell me exactly what happened,” he said softly.

Sandy explained all that had happened.

“Is that right, Scott?” he asked when Sandy had finished.

“Yes, Dad.” Scott turned to Sandy and said in a low voice, “I am sorry I was so angry with you. I guess I was more concerned about my embarrassment than I was about you. Will you forgive me?”

“Yes, I forgive you,” said Sandy. “I understand how you felt, and I’m sorry I embarrassed you.” She looked at her father, “Do you believe me when I say that man is not Captain Danson?”

Mr. Langlish reflected for a moment before replying, “I believe my loyal and intelligent daughter really believes he is an imposter. I don’t know Captain Danson well enough to decide for myself. Is that fair enough?”

Sandy nodded. “But what are we going to do?”

“That’s your decision, Sweetheart. Your mother and I will support you, whatever you decide to do. But let’s consider the options. You could hold onto your belief, but not do anything about it…”

“I couldn’t do that,” interrupted Sandy, “because the real Captain Danson could be in danger. I have to help him if I can.”

Mr. Langlish continued, “You could report what you believe to Security, in this case, Sgt. Walters. He would want evidence. He would want to know why you believe what you do.”

“That’s the problem. I don’t have evidence. I’m not even sure how I know he’s an imposter, but I know.”

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“I understand how you feel,” said Mrs. Langlish, “sometimes we just know something is right or wrong. We pick up on it subconsciously, but often there is a trigger.” She paused. “Think carefully over everything Captain Danson said to you - both of them.”

Sandy closed her eyes and thought. “I just saw it in his eyes, they weren’t the same.” Minutes went by before she added hesitantly, “He called me a young lady, like I was a child or something. He’s never done that before.”

Mr. Langlish smiled, “That is something; although, people can change their expressions. Keep thinking. Maybe there is something more.” He turned to Scott, “Scott, while Sandy is thinking, maybe tell us again what was said in the office.”

“Well, a Security Elite officer took us into his office. There was another man with him and Lt. Williams. They looked surprised to see us. I told him Sandy had brought him some Rovern Brownies. He smiled, and Sandy gave him the brownies. He said thank you and that they were his favourite. Then Sandy…”

“That’s it!” interrupted Sandy. “The man in Captain Danson’s office said Rovern Brownies were his favourite, but Captain Danson told me yesterday he had never tried them before. How could they be his favourite if he had never had them before?”

“Maybe he was just being nice?” suggested Scott.

“In that case, he wouldn’t have told Sandy he had never had them before,” replied Mr. Langlish.”

“And why were they surprised? Captain Danson told me I could bring them to his office today around three o’clock.”

Mr. Langlish said, “We now have some reasons to suspect this man is an impostor; however, it is hardly evidence for Security.”

“You mean we can’t report it?” asked Sandy.
“Of course, we can report it. The question is whether they will believe it or not. We’ll go talk to Sgt. Walters tomorrow at lunchtime.”

“What if he doesn’t believe us?” asked Sandy.

“One step at a time. You always go as far as you can see, and when you get there, you’ll be able to see further. Let’s pray and commit this situation into the hands of El. Then how about a game of Resky?”

“That’s a good idea, Dad,” agreed Scott. Sandy nodded. Mrs. Langlish smiled.

The next day Mr. Langlish closed his furniture store for the lunch hour and came home. He and Sandy walked down to the Security Office. Dick and Janna’s father, Cpl. Lewis, was in the outer office making entries on his computer. He looked up as they came in.

“It’s good to see you,” Cpl. Lewis said, standing up and holding out his hand. He had a strong liking for the Langlish family after they had cleared him of treason the previous year.

Mr. Langlish shook his hand, “It’s good to see you, too. I believe we have an appointment with Sgt. Walters.”

“Yes. I’ll see if he is ready.” Cpl. Lewis talked into the intercom, then looked up. “You can go in. He’s waiting for you.”

Sgt. Walter’s office was small but comfortable. The walls were covered with fine Theoakian wood, with a few paintings and his diploma decorating them. His quality, Theoakian wood desk was shined to perfection. The only thing on it was a computer console.

“Won’t you please have a seat?” he said politely; although, there was a hint of displeasure in his voice.

Mr. Langlish and Sandy sat down in soft, comfortable chairs, which adjusted themselves automatically to the person sitting in them. Neither Mr. Langlish nor Sandy felt very relaxed just then.
“I don’t want to waste your time, Sgt. Walters, so I’ll come right to the point,” began Mr. Langlish. “My daughter wants to report a curious situation.”

“I know all about it,” replied Sgt. Walters. He nodded toward his computer console. “Since you are in my district, I received a complete report on it this morning from Commander Hankan.”

“Who is Commander Hankan?” asked Sandy.

Sgt. Walters looked at her for the first time. Clearly, she was not on his most favourite person list at the moment. “He is the Commander of Security on the Gallant.” His eyes went back to Mr. Langlish. “Commander Hankan was informed of Miss Langlish’s accusation by Captain Danson. Captain Danson insisted on having a DNA check run not only on himself but also on each Main Control Commander. As I’m sure you are both aware, everyone’s DNA structure is unique and, of course, impossible to duplicate. The test results will be in later this afternoon. Lt. Williams is coming down this evening to personally go over the results with you.”

“You’ll see I’m right,” said Sandy quietly.

Sgt. Walters looked at her again, “If Captain Danson is an imposter, do you think he would have insisted that we do a DNA scan?” He looked back to Mr. Langlish. “I realize a young lady can have quite an active imagination, but for her father to believe such a far-fetched story is quite irresponsible. Can you imagine the damage a rumour like this could have if it got out? Do you have any idea of the hurt and inconvenience you’ve caused him? I’ve served under Captain Danson for a good many years, and he is the finest Captain I’ve ever known. To be honest, this incident disturbs me.”

“I’m sorry you feel that way,” said Mr. Langlish getting up, “because what I want is the truth. I will not rest until I have it.”

“We’ll have it this afternoon. After this, I trust you will instruct your daughter to control her imagination better. Then, hopefully, we can put this unpleasant incident behind us.”

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“She controls it very well and I am proud of her.”

Sgt. Walters looked as if he was going to make an unpleasant comment, but changed his mind. “As I said, Lt. Williams will let you know the test results.”

“We appreciate that,” said Mr. Langlish. He and Sandy left.

As they walked hand-in-hand down the corridors toward home, Sandy said, “He didn’t even listen to what I had to say.”

“That’s because he had already made up his mind.”

“Those tests will prove I’m right, won’t they, Dad?”

Mr. Langlish did not answer.

“Won’t they, Dad?” repeated Sandy, a trace of concern in her voice.

Mr. Langlish gave her hand a loving squeeze, but said, “I don’t know, Sweetheart, I don’t really know.”

The rest of the day seemed to drag on for Sandy. She was worried about the test results. Would they prove her right? If they were infallible, they would have to prove her right… but then, why had the imposter been so eager to have the DNA scan run?

Supper came and went with still no word from anyone. It was about 7:00 o’clock when the doorbell finally rang. Mrs. Langlish went to answer it. Lt. Williams and Lt. Stern, Sgt. Walter’s superior, were standing there. Mrs. Langlish invited them into the living room, where the others were waiting. She asked them if they would like a cup of tain.

Lt. Stern declined, but Lt. Williams said, “I’d love one.”

Lt. Williams sat down with her bushy tail tucked nearly along the side of her right leg. She took the cup of tain Mrs. Langlish offered her and then set it down gently on the low table in front of her. Lt. Stern remained standing behind her chair.
“Well,” said Lt. Williams, looking at the anxious faces staring at her, “let’s get down to business. As you know, at the Captain’s request, I ran a DNA scan on all the Main Control officers. Let me explain the process so you get an idea of what is done.

I have a portable scanner, which I run over a person’s body. This reads their DNA structure and sends it to Cita, our onboard computer system, to compare with what we have on file. The results are almost instantaneous.”

“Why did it take so long to get the results then?” asked Scott.

“Good question. Cita is located in Gallant’s top security area, and it would be almost impossible for anyone to break in and alter the records, especially without leaving a trace. However, determined people can do a lot of things.

There are also two other databases in the Empire that contain this information. They are independent of each other and are Read Only. What that means is someone would have to be physically present in their top security facilities to make changes. One is located on our capital planet of Royiana, and the other is located in the Knight Command Center. The Knight Command Center, as you may know, is secret. No one knows its location except the knights, the Emperor, and a few of the Emperor’s top advisors. Comparing the results with these two databases is what took the time. When we do our mandatory six-month officer scan, we only compare it with Cita; this was an extra level of caution insisted on by Captain Danson.”

Lt. Williams paused and took a sip of her tain, then continued, “I am telling you all this so that you understand. For the results to be changed in favour of an impostor, someone would have to break into three separate top security facilities - the location of one of which is unknown - and escape all three times undetected.”

“This sounds like you are leading up to some bad news,” said Mr. Langlish.

“The only news possible,” broke in Lt. Stern. “The test confirmed the identity of Captain Danson as Captain Danson.”

“That’s impossible!” exclaimed Sandy.
“Sandy, let’s hear them out,” said Mr. Langlish.

“There’s nothing more to say,” said Lt. Stern. “We have investigated this claim and found it without foundation. As far as we are concerned, the case is closed.” Lt. Stern watched Mr. Langlish closely as he continued, “I trust we can count on you to consider it closed as well.”

“I said I would do whatever was necessary to discover the truth.”

“And we know the truth now, don’t we?” persisted Lt. Stern.

“It would appear so.”

Sandy looked at her father with pleading eyes, but he motioned her to be quiet.

Lt. Stern did not seem convinced, “I looked up your record before we came. You are a fine man with a good reputation. You’ve worked hard and made a successful life for yourself and your family. You had to wait five years before your dream of working on this starship became a reality. Don’t throw it away on a foolish fantasy.” He glanced at Mrs. Langlish to see if she would support him. The clear, green eyes which looked back at him told him it was pointless to ask.

Lt. Williams held up her paw. “Lt. Stern, you have done what is needed. I know you want to get to your son’s rapball game which starts in twenty minutes. You go ahead. I can finish up here."

“I can stay.”

Lt. Williams twitched her tail and said firmly, “That won’t be necessary. I just need to finish my cup of tain.”

Mrs. Langlish showed Lt. Stern out and returned.

After taking a sip of her tain, Lt. Williams commented, “I take it you are not convinced? The evidence is overwhelming.”
“My daughter is reliable and trustworthy. She would not say something like this unless she was sure.”

Lt. Williams fixed her reddish-brown eyes on Sandy. Her eyes were not as harsh as Lt. Stern’s had been but full of curiosity. “Tell me why you believe what you do.”

Sandy started at the beginning and explained everything about how Captain Danson had been acting differently. Lt. Williams listened without interrupting. She would twitch her tail or cock her head to one side as she considered Sandy’s story.

When Sandy was finished, Lt. Williams put down her cup and stood up. “Thank you for explaining it to me. I can see why you feel the way you do, but I can’t ignore the scientific evidence.”

“Is there any possible way the test could be faked?” asked Scott. “You did say that ‘determined’ people can do a lot of things.”

Lt. Williams smiled her foxy smile. “Yes, I did say that, but I don’t see how it could be done.”

Mr. and Mrs. Langlish walked her to the door.

“Thank you for taking the time to come and talk to us personally,” said Mrs. Langlish.

“My pleasure. Thank you for the tain.”

“As a scientist, you must love puzzles,” commented Mr. Langlish.

Lt. Williams looked at him curiously. “As a matter of fact, I do.”

“Then, merely as a theoretical exercise and puzzle, it might be interesting to figure out a way the results could be faked.”

“I like puzzles that have a solution.”

“Every puzzle is impossible until someone solves it.”
Lt. Williams gave him a brief nod. With a swish of her tail, she disappeared down the hallway.

When Mr. and Mrs. Langlish re-entered the living room, Sandy asked, “What did Lt. Stern mean by throwing away your work?”

Mr. Langlish managed a slight smile, “Don’t worry about it, Sweetheart. Truth has a cost, and integrity can’t be bought.”

*****

Lt. Williams was deep in thought as she made her way up to Captain Danson’s office. She had been ordered to report on her meeting with the Langlish family as soon as it was finished. Captain Danson was sitting at his desk alone as she entered his office.

He looked up, “How did it go, Lt.?”

“It went well. I explained the DNA tests and evidence. They were polite about it all.”

Captain Danson studied her, “But you don’t think they were convinced? Did they offer any counter-evidence?”

“No, I don’t think they were convinced, but they have no reason for their belief. As a scientist, it confuses me.”

“Well, some people are not stable. I don’t know how they missed that in the application process. Do you think they will pursue it?”

“Maybe. It’s impossible to say,” said Lt. Williams, thinking that the Langlish family seemed to be one of the most stable families she had ever met.

“That will be all. Dismissed.”

As soon as Lt. Williams left, the blond-haired man came out of the bathroom.

Captain Danson turned to him, “Do you think she suspects?”
He shrugged. “It doesn’t matter. Without evidence, she can’t do anything, and we will only create suspicion if we overreact.” He paused. “However, the Langlish family is a different matter. They will have to be dealt with.”
Chapter Five: A Kidnapping

Scott and Sandy were sitting beside a small pool, fed by a nine-foot waterfall, in the Woods IV park. Their friends, Dick and Janna, were with them. The park was a fantastic combination of real, artificial, and holographic objects. No one would ever think they were on a starship as they wandered through the woods!

“To think, this is where it all began,” said Scott.

“What do you mean?” asked sixteen-year-old Janna.

Scott was still taken with her dark hair, sparkling green eyes, and winning smile. “It was here you and Dick took us on our first day on the Gallant.”

“…and where my dad was shot, which sent us on a big adventure.”

“Now here we are on another adventure,” commented Sandy sadly.

“A non-adventure you mean,” said Dick. “A disappearing Captain Danson who hasn’t disappeared isn’t much of an adventure.”

Sandy bit her lip, keeping back what she wanted to say.

“I wonder what else is in Woods IV?” said Scott trying to change the topic.

“They hide things,” said Dick. “I found a cave, I don’t think many people have.”

“Really?” said Scott. “Where?”

“Follow me.”

Dick led them down several paths until they came to a place where a blue line seemed to be flashing in the middle of the air.

“See that line?”

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They nodded.

“That warns you when you are approaching the wall, so you don’t walk into it. I wanted to walk all the way around the room, so I was following the wall, which is a lot harder than you would think, when I found it.”

Dick walked beside the flashing blue light until he came to a hill. It was a gentle slope, about 10 feet high at its crest. The hillside ended about 5 feet before the wall light. Dick walked between the hill and the wall, with the others following him. A few yards later, the light did a 90-degree turn; although, it looked like the woods continued in all directions.

“This is actually the corner of Woods IV,” explained Dick.

They all turned around to face the hill. There in its side was a hole about 3 feet high. Dick crawled through the hole. Scott followed and then the two girls. After a short tunnel, they came out inside a cave-like room, about 20 feet around and 6 feet high. There was a dim light coming from an imitation miner’s lamp in one corner of the room.

“Neat,” commented Scott, running his fingers over the rough, rock-like interior.

“You never showed this to me before,” complained Janna.

“You were probably too busy admiring yourself in a mirror,” shot back Dick.

After a few minutes of looking around, they all crawled out and began heading back to the waterfall.

As they were going along, Sandy commented, “I wonder where the Gallant is headed.”

“We were on our way to Puntus for a medical training mission,” replied Dick. He could be trusted to know all about the Gallant’s destinations and the planets they stopped at. “But we were re-routed to Capadoncia for reasons unknown.”
“Know anything about Capadoncia?” asked Scott, testing Dick. It was a game he had of trying to get Dick to admit there was something he didn’t know about the Gallant’s business.

Dick grinned. “Capadoncia is a small planet, hardly populated at all because of its semi-desert landscape. There are only three major cities of over a million people on the planet. The rest of the planet is controlled by local warlords who rule from small towns and often fight each other. Two of the cities are members of the Empire. No one else is.”

Scott laughed, “You win again.”

“Dick’s head is full of useless knowledge,” said Janna.

“Your head is just an empty sphere to hang your hair on!”

Janna fumed, trying to think of a comeback for her sharp-tongued brother.

“I wonder why Capadoncia?” asked Sandy.

Dick shrugged, “They didn’t release that information. What difference does it make? Anyway, we’ll be there in about a week.”

The week passed uneventfully. Sandy was unusually quiet. Mr. Langlish had said nothing about their situation until he had had a chance to consider all their options.

The day after the Gallant arrived at Capadoncia, Mr. Langlish made an announcement at the supper table. “I have booked a seat on a shuttle going to the city of Collian. I am going on a buying trip for the store, but, while I am there, I am going to drop into the Interstellar Patrol Headquarters. I will present our case to them.”

“And if that doesn’t work?” asked Sandy.

“Then we will have to figure out a way to contact a Knight.”
“A Knight!” exclaimed Scott excitedly. Knights were the legendary crime fighters of the El Empire. They answered only the Knight Commander and the Emperor. Knights roamed the Empire looking for evil-doers and fighting on the side of the weak and oppressed, no matter what the odds were.

“In any case,” continued Mr. Langlish, “we must not talk about this to anyone yet. And don’t let anyone know the real reason I am going down to Collian.”

“Not even Janna and Dick?” asked Scott.

“Especially Janna and Dick. Their father is on the security detail for this level. We do not want to put him in an awkward position.”

It was about an hour before bedtime when the Langlish family sat together in the living room playing a game of Minra. It was a balancing board game with marbles rolling into different areas of the board. Players worked as teams to get their marbles in the right places and prevent their opponents from doing so. Scott made an exuberant move that accidentally knocked one of Sandy’s marbles off the board. It rolled across the floor and under the couch against the far wall.

“Sorry, Sandy,” said Scott jumping up. He lay down on the floor in front of the couch. “It’s against the wall. I’ll have to move the couch out.”

Scott moved the couch out just far enough for him to crawl behind it.

“I’ve got it,” he said, standing up.

He looked over at his family. He was just in time to see his mother coming into the living room with a water glass. Without warning, her legs seemed to give out. She slumped to the floor. Mr. Langlish half rose from his chair to help his wife when he collapsed. Sandy threw a scared look at Scott, then fell off of her chair, unconscious. Before Scott could react, everything went black.

Scott’s mind seemed foggy. Slowly, he opened his eyes. What he saw was the white ceiling above his head. Turning his head slightly from side to side, he saw that he was wedged between the wall and the couch.
He remembered what he had seen before had he blacked out. His entire family had collapsed. Straining his ears, he listened for sounds... any sounds. All that greeted him was an eerie silence.

Scott struggled to stand up. He pushed the couch away so he had more room to maneuver. When he was able to get to his feet, he looked around. The apartment was empty. His first instinct was to call out for everyone, but some inner sense told him not to make a sound. He slipped out from behind the couch and looked in every room of the apartment. It was empty.

He had a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach as he sat on a chair to think things out. His mind went over the events of the evening. A shiver of fear raced down his spine as he realized someone must have been listening to them. He glanced around; maybe it was video. They had heard his father talk about contacting Interstellar Patrol and perhaps even the Knights, and they had acted. Somehow, they had kidnapped his family. They had missed him because he had been behind the couch. But soon, they would realize their mistake and come back. He looked at his watch. 10 o’clock. He had been out for almost an hour.

What should he do? Should he run next door and talk to Cpl. Lewis, his friend’s father? He was with Security. But this was obviously connected with Captain Danson being an imposter. He would be putting himself and all the Lewis’ in danger if he did that. No, he needed to hide, to figure things out, to find his family. But first he had to get out... before they came back. However, he would need supplies.

As quietly as he could, he went to the closet in his room. He took out his backpack. It was small, but it would work. Then he crossed to the kitchen pantry and packed all sorts of tinned food, remembering silverware and the can opener. When he was finished, he looked at the backpack with satisfaction. It would last him for 4 to 5 days. By then, he would have a plan... he hoped.

He was about to leave when he remembered something. He went into his room, grabbed his copy of the Book of El, and stuffed it into the top of his backpack. Quickly, he left the apartment and disappeared down the hall.
The next day when Cpl. Lewis came home for lunch, as they were sitting around the table, he said to Dick and Janna, “I am afraid I have some bad news for you.”

“What? Janna’s bought all the nail polish on the ship?” teased Dick.

“I’ll paint your nails when you are sleeping,” threatened Janna.

Cpl. Lewis scowled, “This is serious.”

Janna and Dick looked at him expectantly. Mrs. Lewis set a casserole on the table and waited for her husband to speak.

“Sgt. Walters and I received notice today that the Langlish family was escorted off the Gallant last night.”

“What!” exclaimed both Janna and Dick in unison.

“Apparently, they were unwilling to drop that wild story about Captain Danson being an impostor. So Captain Danson had the Security Elite escort them to Collian last night. He has generously paid for their trip back to Maxon. I believe that is where they are from. Mr. Langlish will have to put his store up for sale, and when they are settled, they can send for the rest of the things in their apartment.”

“They didn’t even say goodbye,” said Janna in shock.

“You mean Scott didn’t say goodbye,” commented Dick causing Janna to blush. But he had a puzzled look on his face.

“They probably didn’t have a chance. This happened quickly. Even Sgt. Walters and I did not know about it until this morning.”

“Isn’t that unusual?” asked Dick. “I mean, you guys are usually there whenever anything security-related happens on this level.”

Cpl. Lewis shrugged, “Normally, but this was a high-level decision, and carried out by the Security Elite. I must say, I am surprised at Sandy. I wouldn’t have thought she was the type to spread wild rumors. And, of course, it was totally irresponsible of Mr. Langlish to support her in it.”

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“Unless, of course, she was right after all,” commented Dick.

“Now, don’t you start…” There was a threatening tone to Cpl. Lewis’ voice that no one wanted to cross.

The rest of the meal continued in silence. Janna and Dick were having a hard time accepting the fact that their friends had gone.

When Cpl. Lewis had returned to work, and Mrs. Lewis was in the kitchen, Janna whispered, “I can’t believe they didn’t email us or something.”

“Maybe they did,” responded Dick. “I haven’t checked my email today, have you?”

“No, I’ve been working on that stupid Math.”

Dick grunted, then nodded to his room.

Nothing was in Janna’s email box except a couple of notes from friends and the latest issue of her beauty tip magazine. When Dick logged into his account; however, he noticed a strange email.

“Look,” he said, “this is an anonymous sender from the cafe in the Level 145 amusement park.”

Dick open the email. It only had two sentences: Where it all began. Don’t be followed.

Janna scanned the email again, “That sounds like Scott or Sandy, but they are on Capadoncia.”

Dick tapped the screen, “It was sent at 10:45 today.”

“It doesn’t make sense,” said Janna, completely confused.

“There is only one way to find out.”

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Chapter Six: Finding Captain Danson

Sandy felt tender fingers stroking her forehead. She tried to remember where she was and what had happened. Slowly, she opened her eyes. She was lying with her head on her mother’s lap, who was, indeed, caressing her. Her mother’s face had a bruise on it. The bruise brought back to Sandy what had happened.

Sandy sat up, “Where are we?”

She looked around, her eyes taking in the surroundings. She was sitting on the bottom bunk beside her mother in a small white room. Across from her, her father was sitting at the bottom of another bunk bed. There did not appear to be a fourth wall, but Sandy knew it was the invisible force field of a prison cell. Outside the force field stood two men in general maintenance uniforms.

“Where’s…” Sandy began.

Mr. Langlish held up his hand to silence her. The men, apparently, had not realized they had missed a person. He did not want Sandy to give that fact away.

“How are you feeling, Sweetheart?” Mrs. Langlish asked.

“I’m fine.”

“You were right,” said Mr. Langdish, nodding his head toward the force field.

Sandy looked into the cell across the hall. There she saw Captain Danson looking back at her.

“Captain Danson!” she said jumping up. “Are you alright?”

“I’m as well as I can be in a cell on my own ship,” he said, with a mixture of humour and disgust.

“That’s a funny bed in your cell,” said Sandy.
Captain Danson turned and glanced at his bed. It was a single bed with a metal cover about three feet over the mattress. It looked like the kind of human scanning machine that might be found in a medical lab.

He looked back at Sandy, “They kept me strapped onto it until about a week ago.” He paused, “I am just sorry you and your family had to get dragged into this.”

“So am I,” said a blond-haired man walking into view. Sandy recognized him as the man who had been with the fake Captain Danson. “You and your brother are getting into a bad habit of putting your noses into our business.”

The man paused in front of the cell and glared at Sandy, ”You are the only one who recognized our impostor. Even your brother…”

He stopped as his eyes searched the cell. His eyes narrowed, and his voice became harsh as he looked at the two U.R.’s disguised as maintenance men.

“Where’s the boy?” he demanded.

“There was no boy,” answered one of the men. “We searched the apartment. This is all there was.”

“He was there,” insisted the blond-haired man. “I heard all their voices before we gassed it. You incompetent buffoons just missed him!” He tapped his communicator, “Haygich, take McLulets with you and immediately go to the Langlilsh apartment. The boy is still there. Hold him until we can move him inconspicuously down here.”

“Who are you,” demanded Captain Danson.

The blond-haired man pivoted to look at him. “I am the architect of your demise. You may call me Lord Hemann. And your time, Captain, is over.”

“You’re not going to hurt him!” cried Sandy.

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"How touching," said Lord Hemann mockingly, turning back to look at her. "No, we are not going to kill your precious Captain. We thought about it at first, since he is no longer any use to us, but, then we thought, why not make a profit? We have a friend who would pay dearly to have a prestigious Captain as a slave in his Ribbiean mines." He paused, then laughed at Sandy, "And you, Miss Nosy, have just earned the right to be the free bonus we are going to throw into the deal."

"No!" exclaimed both Mr. Langlish and Captain Danson in unison.

Lord Hemann laughed. Then he nodded to his two "maintenance men." They brought over a large garbage bucket, about three feet wide and seven feet long. Its gravity repellers floated it about two feet above the floor. The top looked like it was full of debris from an apartment renovation. By grabbing two hidden handles, the men lifted the top layer off, revealing an empty cavity within.

The two men drew their guns. As soon as Lord Hemann turned the force field off on Captain Danson’s cell, they fired. Captain Danson collapsed to the floor unconscious. The men picked him up and dumped him into the garbage bucket.

Lord Hemann turned around.

"You can’t take Sandy," said Mr. Langlish.

Mr. Langlish was standing in front of Mrs. Langlish, who was standing in front of Sandy.

Lord Hemann laughed again. "You really think that is going to stop me?"

"Please, don’t take her," pleaded Mrs. Langlish. "She can’t hurt your plans anymore. Please, show mercy and leave her here with us."

A voice from the cell next to them said, "Yeah, leave her. Then let me at her."

Sandy thought the voice sounded familiar, but she couldn’t place it right away.
“As entertaining as that idea is, we have already made arrangements,” said Lord Hemann.

Sandy gasped in recognition, “Hal Brestorm!”

Hal Brestorm had been a professional U.R. hitman whom she and her friends had helped capture.

“Oh, you didn’t know he was still onboard?” said Lord Hemann. “He’s been cooling his heels down here after his trial and waiting until Captain Danson could deliver him to an execution station.”

He waved his hand to his two accomplices. “Let’s get this done.”

Lord Hemann turned the force field off on the Langish’s cell. When his two men fired, Mr. and Mrs. Langish fell to the floor unconscious. One of the men fired again, and Sandy went down. The other man scooped her up and dumped her on top of Captain Danson. The lid with the fake debris was replaced. Slowly, they pushed the bucket down the hall. Lord Hemann reactivated the force field.

“When are you going to let me out?” asked Hal Brestorm, as Lord Hermann turned to leave.

“You’re lucky I don’t kill you for your failure. One of our top leaders was convicted and executed because of you. In fact, if some of my friends knew you were still alive… you wouldn’t be. But I like to keep my options open. Just hope I find a use for you. Until then, here you stay.”

It was several hours later that Mr. and Mrs. Langlish regained consciousness.

“They’ve taken our girl,” groaned Mr. Langlish. He was holding a sobbing Mrs. Langlish. They sat there holding each other for a long time, drawing what comfort they could from the other’s presence and touch.

After a while, Mr. Langlish said, “Sandy may be out of our care now, but she will never be out of Elniyn’s care. He will look after her where we cannot. We have to trust Him.”
“I know,” said Mrs. Langlish softly. “We have trusted him for most of our lives. He has brought us through everything this far. It’s just… with Sandy gone and Scott missing… it’s so hard. I want to be there for them. I want to help them, but there’s nothing we can do. I just feel so helpless.”

“I’m sorry,” said Mr. Langlish.

“Sorry about what?”

“I know you didn’t want to leave Maxon and live on a starship. If we had stayed, none of this would have happened.”

Mrs. Langlish managed a weak smile, “Yes, I would have liked to stay in our nice little home in the country, but I agreed with you that this would be the best for our family. And none of this is your fault, so don’t go trying to take the blame. It is the result of evil men doing evil things, but, as you said, Elniyn is still in control. I just wish that meant that bad things wouldn’t happen.”

Mr. Langlish stood up and began pacing, “Because Elniyn has given us free choice, He doesn’t stop bad things from happening, but He does redeem them if we let Him. He can take whatever happens and turn it into good.”

“I hope He works a miracle for Sandy so that nothing bad happens to her, and she is brought back to us.”

“You know,” said Mr. Langlish suddenly, “I believe we will have Sandy returned to us. Remember the dream Sandy told us about? She had a choice to make, and if she made the right one, it would lead to danger, but Elniyn would be with her and protect her. I think she was given that dream for encouragement at this time. Somehow, it will come out ok.”

Mrs. Langlish contemplated his words. She let her mind play over what Sandy had told them of her dream. Maybe her husband was right.

Mrs. Langlish looked at him, “Let’s pray about it and for Scott wherever he is.”
There in the loneliness of their cell, with their hearts breaking for their missing children, they knelt by the bed. As was their habit, they began with a time of praising Elniyn for Who He is and thanking Him for the blessings He had given them over the years. They thanked Him for Scott and Sandy, recognizing that their children were precious gifts from Him and that He cared more for them than they ever could… although, that did not seem possible. Then they made their requests known, requests for safety and for being reunited. When they finished, there was still a sense of sadness, but fear had been replaced with peace.
Chapter Seven: A Plan

Dick and Janna were sitting beside the waterfall in Woods IV. Indeed, this was where it had all begun last year when Sandy had witnessed their father being stunned and framed for treason. They had all worked together to clear Cpl. Lewis, their father, and solve The Gallant Mystery. Now, here they were again...

“Maybe that message was just one of your friends playing a joke,” said Janna. “There’s no one here, and we know Scott and Sandy are somewhere between here and Maxon by now.”

“Not possible,” stated Dick emphatically. “No one but Scott or Sandy would know to send a note like that.”

“Well, nobody’s here!” said Janna, her temper flaring.

“You’ve got all the patience of a want-to-be beauty queen late for a contest!”

“I don’t have to stand here to be insulted.”

“No, you could be insulted anywhere,” Dick’s sharp tongue lasted out.

Janna was about to stomp off in a huff when a voice came from the trees to their right. It was a voice they recognized.

“Quick, in here.”

Dick and Janna looked around in surprise. There, among the trees, they saw Scott. Scott quickly turned and went back a little way into the “forest.” Dick and Janna went after him.

“Why aren’t you with your family?” asked Janna when they had caught up to him.

“Did they leave you behind?” added Dick.

“What are you talking about? What do you think happened?”

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“Dad told us your whole family was escorted down to Capadoncia and given passage back to Maxon, because all the trouble you guys were causing,” said Janna.

“That’s not what happened.” Scott proceeded to tell them exactly what had happened.

“That’s definitely not Security procedure,” said Dick, when he was finished. “That means Sandy was telling the truth. An impostor is sitting in the Captain’s chair.”

“But how did they beat the DNA test?” asked Janna.

“I have no idea,” replied Scott, “but somehow they did it.”

“I’ll figure it out,” promised Dick.

Janna snorted in disbelief.

“That was very lady-like,” commented Dick.

“Will you two stop. The important thing right now is finding my family and exposing the fake Captain. How are we going to do that?”

The three of them stood thinking.

“I suppose we could tell Dad,” said Janna.

“I don’t think so,” said Scott. “No offence, but he is not very high in the Security branch. If he believed us and started asking questions, he would just end up getting fired or worse. And we would be no further ahead.” Privately, Scott thought that it was unlikely that Cpl. Lewis would believe them, but he did not want to voice his doubts about their father.

Again there was silence.

“We have got to find someone in high authority that we can trust.”
“Well, Scott, who would that be?” asked Janna. “The only person we ever really met from The Top Floor was Captain Danson… and we know that’s not going to help us.”

“I think we should just do it ourselves,” said Dick stubbornly. He hated turning things over to adults.

“What about that Lt. - what’s her name - that visited you?” asked Janna.

“Lt. Williams?” asked Scott doubtfully. “She didn’t believe us, but she did seem open-minded.”

“Well,” said Janna, “if she saw you after she had been told that your family was escorted from the Gallant, that should raise some kind of questions in her mind.”

“For that matter, we should just march Scott into Main Control and prove to everyone that Captain Danson is an imposter,” declared Dick.

“I thought about that,” said Scott. “But that could place my family in more danger. If the fake Captain Danson is exposed, then there wouldn’t be any point in keeping my family captive. However, they could also take out their revenge on them just out of spite.”

Dick considered, “You do have a point. We have got to find your family before going public. You realize, of course, whoever ‘they’ are, are going to be trying hard to find you and make you disappear, too.”

Scott nodded. “I know I have to be very careful; we don’t know how many are involved in this conspiracy.”

“I don’t think there are very many of them.”

“What makes you think that, Dick?” asked Scott.

Dick enjoyed reading about military battles and strategies when not poking his nose into the Gallant’s business.
“An operation this size and this dangerous would require careful planning and training. The more people who know about it, the greater the chance of it being found out. Even a rumour would send it up in flames. No, they would have to plan exactly how many people it would need, and they would not involve or tell anyone else. I would guess, depending on what their ultimate goal is, that they would need ten to twenty people.”

“That doesn’t seem like very many to take over a starship,” said Scott doubtfully.

“You forget that they have already taken control of the Gallant. At the right time, the fake Captain Danson can lead them into an ambush and order the shields dropped or a surrender. Their friends don’t have to know the plan, just where and when to be.”

“Now you are scaring me.”

All three stood in silence. The danger that surrounded the Gallant seemed overwhelming.

“So what about Lt. Williams?” said Janna. “Do you think she will help?”

Scott considered, “She’s our only chance of getting any high-level help.”

Dick shrugged, “I wouldn’t count on her, but I guess it’s worth a try. How would we contact her?”

“Just call her,” said Janna in the condescending tone that irritated Dick so much.

“Sure, and get us all arrested,” replied Dick sarcastically. “She is the only one from Main Control that has had any contact with the Langlish’s. If they are watching anyone, it would be her.” He added, “…and us.”

“What else is there?” asked Janna.

“I’ll think of something. And we will ask her to meet you here at 7 o’clock tomorrow night. Then we will come and find out what happened.”
“I don’t think that would be smart,” said Scott. “If they are watching you and you keep coming here, they might get suspicious. With a good search, they would probably find the cave. Come after school the next day and see if you can sneak some food to me, as I will probably be out by then.”

Everyone agreed to the plan.

Later that evening, Janna and Dick were watching a popular program on their computer in the living room. Their dad was sitting in his favourite chair, looking at the sports results and upcoming games.

Mrs. Lewis had just come in with a steaming cup of armeer for her husband when she heard Dick mutter to himself, “…how to send a secret message…?”

“What was that, Dick?” she asked.

Dick looked up at her, his quick mind working for an explanation, “I was thinking of how to send secret messages to my friends. Sort of like a secret club.”

Mrs. Lewis laughed, “When Tom and I were courting, we used to write notes on paper and pass them when we went by each other. It was fun and a lot more personal than emails or texts. Remember that, dear?”

Mr. Lewis gave a grunt that could have been ascent or could have been a cover-up for forgetting.

“That’s a great idea,” said Dick.

When Mrs. Lewis left the room, Janna whispered, “And how are you going to pass it?”
Chapter Eight: Elniyn, Help Me!

Sandy woke up with a jolt. Glancing around, she saw she was in an enclosed cart made of rough wood. They were bumping along a road riddled with potholes. An oppressive heat beat down on the roof, making beads of sweat appear on her forehead.

The cart was totally enclosed with an iron bar door at one end and three small barred windows on each of the other sides. There were two long benches, one on each side of the cart. The sun shining through the windows indicated it was mid-morning… somewhere.

Sandy was sitting on one bench with her wrists chained to the wall behind her. Directly across from her sat Captain Danson with a black hood over his head. His shirt had been taken off. His wrists were also chained to the wall behind him.

“Are you ok, Captain Danson?” Sandy asked.

“Sandy?” Captain Danson turned his head to where he thought the voice was coming from. “So they did take you, too. Is there anyone else here?”

“No, just us.”

“And where are we?”

As Sandy looked through the back door bars, she answered, “Some sort of prison cart in a very primitive town. All the buildings I can see are either mud brick or tents.”

“Do you have any idea where we are?”

“Dick said the Gallant had changed course to Capadoncia.”

“Capadoncia? Then they have sold me to one of the warlords down here.” Captain Danson was thinking that escape was going to be next to impossible. Even if they did manage to get out of wherever they were headed, they would be surrounded by desert. The chances of finding their way to a city for help would be astronomical. His heart was sinking fast.
However, he didn’t say anything because he didn’t want to discourage Sandy any further. “Do you see anything else?”

“There is a rather nice-looking convertible limo behind us. Lord Hemann and another man are in the back seat. The other man has black hair and a short pointed beard. He’s dressed really fancy.”

“That’ll be the local warlord. Probably the man who bought us.”

“Why did they put a hood on you and take your shirt off?” asked Sandy.

“Probably so I can’t be identified. If any friend of the Empire saw me and reported it, there would be an invasion they would not soon forget.”

The prison cart hit a deep rut that jarred both of them, making the chains dig into their wrists.

“I don’t suppose that limo is on wheels too?”

“No. It’s an anti-gravity rider.”

Sandy continued to describe what she saw as they jerked along. As they moved further into the city, the tents became rarer, and most of the buildings were made of mud brick. However, some impressive looking buildings were made of stone.

The cart bumped to a stop. Sandy strained to see what she could out the front window.

“We’ve stopped at some kind of huge metal gate. It appears to be in some sort of stone fortress.”

“It’ll be the warlord’s castle,” said Captain Danson. Things were going from bad to worse.

The gate swung open and they passed through, followed closely by the limo. There was a depressing finality about the way the gate clanged shut and locked.
The driver pulled up beside a small door in a stone wall. He jumped down and unlocked the iron bar door on the cart. Then he jumped into the cart and unlocked Sandy’s wrists.

As Sandy sat rubbing her wrists, she looked at their jailer. He was a man with leathery skin, burnt bronze by the hot sun. He wore old clothes and his black hair was ruffled, giving the very distinct impression that he didn’t care what he looked like and that personal hygiene was too much work.

The man turned to Captain Danson. He unlocked one wrist. With one hand, he pushed Captain Danson’s arm back and up, forcing his head to go down almost to his knees. With his other hand, the jailer pulled out a pair of handcuffs. He clasped one half on Captain Danson’s upheld hand. Swiftly, with the skill of a practiced man, he unlocked the other wrist and brought both arms down together to be cuffed. He gave Captain Danson no opportunity to resist.

Next, he motioned for Sandy to jump out of the cart, which she did. Then he pushed Captain Danson to the edge of the cart.

“Jump,” was his-one word command.

“It’s about two feet to the ground,” Sandy said quickly.

Captain Danson jumped out of the cart but lost his balance when he landed and tumbled forward. He twisted as he went down so he landed on his side and not his face. The jailer jumped down and hauled Captain Danson to his feet. He was covered in the dirt of the courtyard.

Lord Hemann and the other man were laughing. The other man put out his hand to snatch the hood off the Captain.

Lord Hemann reached out and touched his arm, “Not yet.”

The man turned to face Lord Hemann with a snarl on his lips, “Do not touch King Zeholeth!”

Lord Hemann withdrew his hand. As King Zeholeth nodded toward the door, the jailer swung the door open. Then he pushed Captain Danson
and Sandy through it. Right inside the doorway, stone steps wound down in a circular fashion. The staircase was lit by oil lamps fastened to the wall.

“Steps,” said Sandy, not wanting Captain Danson to trip.

Sandy held onto Captain Danson to help him down the steps. He went as fast as he could without tripping. He did not want the jailer to give him a push for being slow.

At the bottom of the stairs, they all stopped. Lord Hemann and King Zeholeth came around to the front of them. King Zeholeth ripped the hood off of Captain Danson.

They were in a dusty hall that ended in a stone wall. On the left side were six small hard cold stone cells with iron bars for doors. They were all open and empty. On the right side was a simple stone wall; although, about twelve feet of it, from floor to ceiling, was covered with a metal plate. The metal plate had dents and dark red stains on it.

“Ah, the great Captain Danson,” said King Zeholeth. “Welcome to your new home.”

Lord Hemann looked startled.

“You are going to be my personal slave... an Empire starship Captain washing my feet.” He laughed at Captain Danson’s expressionless face.

Captain Danson thought about asking them to let Sandy go but realized that would never happen. The more important they thought she was to him, the more danger she would be in.

Lord Hemann interrupted the irritating laugh, “What are you talking about? We agreed that you would use him in the Ribbiean mines where he would never be seen again. If anyone sees and reports him...”

“None of my people would dare do that!” snapped King Zeholeth. “And I paid for him. I will use him where and when I choose.”

“We agreed...”
“I am King Zeholeth. Are you demanding something from me in my own kingdom? Do you want an adjoining cage? I can find a use for you too!” His face was turning purple with rage.

Lord Hemann realized that King Zeholeth was arrogant enough to carry out his threat without considering that the consequence would be a painful death at the hands of the United Raiders.

“No, I was merely advising you, your Majesty.”

“When I want your advice, I will ask for it,” said King Zeholeth. He added with a laugh, “And I will tell you what to advise me.”

A wave of his hand dismissed Lord Hemann. Lord Hemann bowed slightly and disappeared up the stairs before the King could change his mind.

King Zeholeth nodded to the jailer. The jailer pushed Captain Danson into one cell, locking the door behind him. Next, Sandy was placed in the adjacent cell.

The small cells had dirt floors and stained stone walls. One bed was resting against the far wall covered by a half disintegrated blanket. The mattress on the bed was thin, with holes worn through it. There was also a small table with one chair opposite the bed. A bucket in a corner functioned as the toilet. Sandy felt sick just looking around.

“Tomorrow you will start your new duties,” said King Zeholeth to Captain Danson. “Then we will see how great you really are.” With a laugh, he ascended the stairs.

Sure enough, the next morning the jailer reappeared with another man. The man was muscular and dressed in tan shorts and a shirt with the sleeves ripped off to display his muscles.

He sneered at Captain Danson, “I am Kaafi. I am your supervisor who will train you in your new duties.”

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He nodded to the jailer, who opened the barred door. Captain Danson stepped out. Kaafi threw what used to be a white shirt, but was now dirty, stained, and torn, on the ground in front of Captain Danson.

“Put that on. NOW.”

Captain Danson obeyed. There was no point in causing trouble... yet. Sandy watched him follow Kaafi up the stairs and out of her sight. The jailer glanced at Sandy before following the others.

Sandy was left alone until the jailer returned at noon with a bowl of soup, a piece of cheese, a stale piece of bread, and a glass of water. He opened the door and set the tray down on the small table.

Shooting a quick sideward glance at Sandy, he said, “The soup is good. My wife made it. It will give you strength but do not tell anyone. Eat quickly, and I will return.”

It was obvious he was nervous about being caught. The soup, apparently, was not part of the standard prison fare. The tray he put in Captain Danson’s cell contained only the cheese, bread, and water.

“Thank you,” said Sandy going over and sitting down as he left. Dipping the bread into the soup made it a little easier to eat... but only a little.

Half an hour later, the jailer was back to collect the dishes before anyone could discover the extra bowl.

As he exited the cell with the dishes, Sandy said, “Elniyn loves you.”

The man locked the cell. Then looking at Sandy, he said, “I would be careful where you said that Name. If the king or his servants hear you, you will be punished.” With that, he turned and left.

It was a long, boring day for Sandy. Late in the evening, the jailer returned and unlocked Captain Danson’s cell. Soon Kaafi appeared, pushing Captain Danson ahead of him. He shoved the Captain into his cell, sending him sprawling on the dirty floor. He clanged the door shut as

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Captain Danson dragged his exhausted body onto the bed. Kaafi and the jailer left.

Captain Danson spied his meager supper. Warily, he sat down and began eating.

“Are you all right, Captain?” asked Sandy through the bars.

“Yes. Everything went well; although, it doesn’t look like we have much chance of escape unless Elniyn sends us a miracle.” He failed to mention that he had spent the day doing every dirty job his tormentors could think of, as well as being jeered at and kicked whenever they thought he wasn’t doing well enough. His ribs and legs were bruised from the rough treatment.

“I know Elniyn will send us a miracle.”

Sandy remembered her dream and shared it with Captain Danson.

“That’s encouraging,” he commented softly, as he laid his bruised body down and went to sleep.

The same routine was followed for the next five days. A couple of nights the jailer sneaked down the stairs with a bowl of soup for Captain Danson. He would stay while the Captain ate it and then disappear with the empty bowl.

The sixth day was different. In the late afternoon, Sandy heard a commotion at the top of the stairs. Captain Danson came rolling down the stairs followed by the jailer, Kaafi and King Zeholeth. Kaafi picked Captain Danson up and tossed him into the cell. The jailer locked the door.

“You have disappointed me, Captain,” said the King. “You have disobeyed me. You must learn your place. You are mine now, and no one can help you.” He turned to Kaafi, “Go get Brutis.”

When Brutis came in about ten minutes later, he proved to be a massive werewolf; even Kaafi looked small beside him. His body was covered with short, coarse black hair. His snout was drawn back in a snarl. His cruel eyes took in the room and everyone in it.
“Now, you will learn what it means to disobey me,” said the king nodding to the jailer. The jailer started to move toward the Captain’s door when King Zeholeth’s stopped him, “No, the girl’s.”

A look of terror rippled through the jailer’s eyes. He looked to see if he had heard correctly. He had. With a trembling hand, he tried to put the key in Sandy’s lock. He was shaking so badly he couldn’t get it in.

“Give it to me,” snarled Brutis, snatching the keys and shoving the jailer out of the way. The jailer fell to the floor and remained there, watching in mounting fear.

Brutis grabbed Sandy’s hand and yanked her out of the cell.

Sandy screamed, “Let me go!”

“Let her go!” demanded Captain Danson. “She hasn’t done anything to you.”

King Zeholeth only laughed.

Brutis clamped a cold metal disc on each of Sandy’s wrists and ankles. He tossed her, like a rag doll, onto the metal part of the wall so the front of her body was against the wall. The discs and the wall were magnetic, so Sandy was held in the position she had landed. Sandy’s head had smashed against the wall as she landed, stretched between floor and ceiling. A bruise appeared on her forehead, and a little trickle of blood crept out of her nose. Brutis went over to her and adjusted her limbs so that her skin was pulled tight. Brutis then moved over to a cupboard. Opening it, he withdrew a thin, cruel whip.

“No,” yelled Captain Danson.

Sandy turned her head so she could see what was happening out of the corner of her eye. The whip… the snarling snout… she didn’t want to see any more.

“Elniyn, help me!” she yelled as she squeezed her eyes shut.
Chapter Nine: Will She Help?

Dick was leaning against a wall bouncing his ball. He was keeping an eye on the ELift that brought the officers down from Main Control. He had come up with a plan to pass the note to Lt. Williams. Janna was close by Lt. Williams apartment. When Dick signalled her that Lt. Williams was on her way, she would tape the note to the door and disappear. That way, hopefully, Lt. Williams will see it before anyone else noticed it and maybe look at it out of curiosity.

At six o’clock, Dick began to worry that maybe Lt. Williams was going to be working late. He had told Scott to meet her at seven o’clock. Then the ELift door opened. Lt. Williams walked out, swishing her tail as she had the habit of doing. Dick breathed a sigh of relief. She would probably be at her apartment in five minutes. As Lt. Williams walked down the hall, Dick sent Janna a one-word text message: Go.

Lt. Williams was surprised to see an envelope taped to her door. She had never even heard of a thing like that before. She took the envelope as she stepped into her apartment. Once inside, she opened it and read:

Please meet with me alone at seven o’clock by the waterfall in Woods IV. Don’t tell anyone. Very Important. Scott Langlish

Lt. Williams twitched her whiskers. Very strange, she thought. Perhaps some kind of joke? Scott Langlish is halfway to Maxon by now. She was on the verge of calling Security when her curiosity got the better of her. Still, she was a cautious person. She went to her bedroom and put on something she very rarely wore... her gun belt.

Scott was hiding behind a tree just inside the entrance of Woods IV. He wanted to see if Lt. Williams would betray him by sending in others. It was only six-thirty when Lt. Williams walked in. No one had come in before her. He waited. No one followed her in either.

Scott worked his way around to the waterfall. There she was, sitting nonchalantly, dipping the fingers of her left paw in the pool. Although she
appeared oblivious to her surroundings, her sharp ears had already picked up Scott’s approach.

“I’m over here,” said Scott from between the trees.

Lt. Williams patted the seat beside her, “Come here.”

“I’m not sure it’s safe.”

“Then don’t come.” Lt. Williams had no intention of walking in among the trees where an ambush could easily be set.

Scott stepped out from the trees. He approached her cautiously, keeping an eye out for anyone nearby. Lt. Williams watched him curiously. He stopped but remained standing when he was close to her.

Lt. Williams stood up, twitching her whiskers. “You are Scott Langlish. What are you doing here? Why aren’t you on your way to Maxon? Where is your family?”

“I had to find someone I could trust. I really hope that is you.” Scott eyed her for a moment. Then he told her everything that had happened, except he omitted any mention of Dick and Janna. He did not want to put them in danger if Lt. Williams turned out not to be a friend.

When he had finished, Lt. Williams sat back down swishing her tail back and forth as she thought. It was a lot of information to take in. Its implications were far-reaching. It might mean Sandy was right, and the Gallant was in the hands of an imposter. Or, there could be other explanations. Suppose she helped Scott, and Captain Danson turned out to be the real person. In that case, she could be demoted, possibly jailed for conspiring with enemies of the Empire. But, on the other paw, if she didn’t help Scott, and Captain Danson was an imposter, Scott would soon be captured. Then whatever evil plan was underway would succeed. Hundreds or thousands of lives could be at stake, besides the Langlish’s lives.

As she thought about it, she realized that her decision hinged on whether she believed Sandy or her science. There was no record of anyone beating a DNA scan before. But, of course, if it wasn’t for ‘first
times,’ science would never move ahead. Her tail wagged faster as she thought.

Scott waited patiently as she calculated things. He knew everything depended on Lt. Williams. If she turned against them, everyone would be after him. In his mind, he played out how quickly he could run into the trees and disappear. Of course, woods would be a natural element for Lt. Williams. Escaping from her in them would be next to impossible.

“I need to check some things out,” said Lt. Williams finally. “But, until I know more, we need to keep you safe.”

“Are you going to tell anyone?”

“If I tell anyone, and you’re right, then we’re all in danger. If I tell and you’re wrong, then I’m in trouble anyway. It will be a secret until I do some research. I also need to see who is trustworthy.”

“I’m sorry to put you in such a position. I didn’t know what else to do… and I’m afraid for my family.”

Lt. Williams studied him with compassion.

“You’ve been hiding out here?”

Scott nodded.

“Well, that won’t do. You can stay at my place on Officer Row.”

Scott looked shocked.

“It’s the safest place until we figure what’s going on. Come to my apartment on the Officer’s Deck at 10:15 tonight. At that time of night, you shouldn’t run into too many people on the way. The Security Elite does a walk around on the hour, so don’t be early.”

“I’ll grab my backpack and be there. I don’t know how to thank you.”
“Leave your backpack. It will only draw attention to you if you happen to run into anyone. Just look like you are out for a late-night stroll.”

At 10:15 sharp, Scott rang Lt. Williams doorbell. She immediately opened the door and let him in.

“Did you meet anyone on the way?”

Scott shook his head, “It was pretty deserted.”

“Good. The guest bedroom is in there.” Lt. Williams indicated a door on his left. “Never leave this apartment. If anyone comes in but me, hide. There is a computer in your room. I have given it a fake address, so it’s safe to use, but don’t tell anyone where you are. If you break these rules, you’re on your own. Understand?”

Scott nodded.

Lt. Williams smiled, “There’s a late night snack on the dining room table. I thought you might be hungry. And you’ll have to make your own meals when I am at work.”

The next day, after school, Dick and Janna went to Woods IV. When Scott wasn’t at the waterfall, they headed for the cave. Inside scratched in the dirt, they saw a scrawled message: New Home. Contact Later.

“It must have worked out,” said Janna.

“I hope so,” replied Dick, rubbing his foot across the message to erase it.

Dick spotted Scott’s backpack in the corner, all neatly packed.

“We’ll take this with us,” he said, picking it up. “That way no one will ever know Scott was here.”

Dick and Janna left Wood IV and headed to the nearest ElLift to go home. They failed to notice the man with the J-shaped scar loitering nearby, watching them.
Lord Hemann strolled passed the Langlish’s cell, stopping at the one beside them. He eyed Hal Brestorm, who looked calmly back at him.

“I have found a purpose for you, if you’re interested. You can redeem yourself.”

“I’m listening.”

“I want King Zeholeth assassinated and Captain Danson dead, with no evidence that he was ever there.”

“And the girl?”

“Her too.”

A gasp escaped from Mrs. Langlish in the next cell, which was ignored by the two men.

“For my usual price.”

“You are in no place to bargain. Seeing how badly you messed up the last time, you should be doing this for free.”

“Danson and the girl I’ll do for free. The King, I want to be paid for.”

Lord Hemann considered, then replied, “Very well.” The force field was turned off. “Go to Guest Apartment 253. Wait there until I can get you off this ship. After that, we will up oars. You can contact us at the usual place for payment when the job is done.”

As Hal Brestorm walked past the Langlish cell, Mrs. Langlish called out, “Elniyn loves you.”

Hal stopped, turning to look at her. She was standing there looking pale, but confident. Standing behind her was her husband, with his hands on her shoulders.
“You don’t know the things I’ve done,” said Hal beginning to move on.

“I’ve done worse.”

Hal paused and looked back at her, “This I’ve got to hear.”

“I was a rebel against El even though He created a beautiful and perfect universe. It was because of my sins and rebellion that El sent His Son, Elniyn, to die for me. I have the blood of the very Son of El on my hands. There is no greater crime than that. Yet Elniyn loved me - and you, too - so much that He was willing to die on our behalf so we could have amnesty from El. You can experience love, peace, and joy greater than you have ever known if you accept His offer of amnesty as I did. You can live a new life, a forgiven life.”

Hal’s cold, dark eyes bore into her, “I stopped living a long time ago.”

“It doesn’t have to be that way,” said Mrs. Langlish, returning his look without flinching even though the coldness of his stare seemed to penetrate her bones.

Hal shook his head as he walked away. “Religious nut,” he muttered to himself. Then louder to be sure the Langlish’s heard, “And that’s not going to spare your daughter.”


Chapter Ten: Unexpected Friends

Brutis raised his arm. With a snap, he sent the whip whistling through the air. The whip’s tip slashed across Sandy’s back, splitting her blouse and leaving the red line of a welt streaked on her back. Sandy screamed in pain, a scream that echoed in the underground dungeon and invaded Captain Danson’s ears with horrifying clarity.

Twice more, in quick succession, the whip fell accompanied by the screams of a girl in pain. A ripped blouse and three bloody stripes across her back testified to the efficiency of Brutis’ aim and evil skill.

“STOP!” yelled Captain Danson.

Brutis paused. He looked from Captain Danson to King Zeholeth. Sandy was heaving great sobs. King Zeholeth’s eyes gleamed with self-satisfaction as he glanced at Captain Danson, before giving two slight nods to Brutis.

Twice more the whip fell to the screams of the tortured girl. Captain Danson went pale. Never in his life had he felt so helpless. He thought of Sandy as the daughter he had never had.

King Zeholeth looked back at Captain Danson with a smirk, “I will say when it’s time to stop.”

He looked to Brutis. Then gave a nod toward Sandy’s cell. Brutis yanked Sandy off of the magnetic wall. He unclasped the metal discs from the sobbing girl’s wrists and ankles. Shoving her into her cell, he locked the door. Then he tossed the keys to the jailer, who was still lying on the floor watching in horror. Slowly and painfully, Sandy picked herself off the floor and crawled on the bed. She had never experienced such searing pain in her life. Her back felt like it was on fire and every little move brought a fresh spasm of anguish.

“This is on you, Captain,” King Zeholeth said, “and your stubborness.”

“No,” replied Captain Danson softly, but firmly, “This is all on you.”

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King Zeholeth considered before answering, “Ok, tonight was on me to show you the consequences of your actions. But,” he paused, “if we must continue this tomorrow, it will be on you because you now know the consequences of your actions. So, tomorrow we will try again.”

With that King Zeholeth ascended the stairs, followed by Brutis. The jailer picked himself up off the floor. Without even glancing at his two prisoners, he shuffled off and disappeared up the stairs as well. Captain Danson and Sandy were left alone. The soft sobs coming from Sandy’s cell were tearing his heart apart.

“I am so sorry, Sandy.” Captain Danson sat down on his bed and put his head in his hands. Never in his entire life had he felt his heart being ripped from his chest or deeper despair settling over him.

After a few minutes of silence, a weak voice came from Sandy’s cell, “What did he want you to do?”

“He wanted me to call him my god and saviour,” said Captain Danson.

Slowly and stiffly, Sandy stood up and shuffled to her door. She put her hands on the iron bars and leaned against them for support. Captain Danson went to his door when he heard Sandy moving about.

“That would be denying Elniyn,” said Sandy weakly. “You can’t do that. Not now. Not ever.” A stronger Sandy would have been stamping her foot defiantly, but it was all she could do to get the words out.

“I can’t let them hurt you again.”

“You cannot deny Elniyn,” repeated Sandy. “He gave His life for us. He suffered worse for us. We cannot deny Him.”

“If I don’t, they will whip you again tomorrow… maybe even to your death.”

Sandy let out a deep breath before replying, “If that is what it takes. I will not deny Him… and you will not either.”

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Captain Danson did not answer.

“Promise me,” insisted Sandy with all the energy she could muster.

“I promise,” said Captain Danson softly. Denying his love and commitment to Elniyn were not options. He knew that. But he had to figure some way out. He couldn’t let Sandy continue to be tortured. They must escape. Now it would be even harder, for the King and his minions would know how desperate he was. They would be more on guard than usual. Give me an idea, show me the way, he prayed silently.

Around midnight Captain Danson was pacing his cell. Sandy’s soft moans had stopped about an hour ago as she fell into a fitful sleep. Her screams still echoed in his mind though, as he tried to work out a plan of escape. Every scenario he came up with seemed to either end up with them being caught or killed. He was tempted to think that being killed might be preferable to remaining in the King’s torture chamber, but he knew that was not Elniyn’s way. If only they would take out their anger on him, he could handle it… but to stand by helplessly… that was worse than any physical pain…

It was then he thought he heard footsteps on the stairs. He went to the cell door just in time to see the jailer with a small flashlight coming down. He was about to call to him and plead with him to let them go when the jailer put his finger to lips. The jailer seemed very nervous as he came to Captain Danson’s cell.

In a voice, barely even a whisper, he said, “I will help you escape, but you must take my wife and me with you. We cannot stay here.”

Captain Danson nodded.

With trembling hands, the jailer unlocked his cell. Captain Danson stepped out and the jailer relocked the door.

As he passed a thin, round rod about six inches long to Captain Danson, he whispered, “Put this in her mouth. She can bite down on it when in pain. We cannot have her screaming or crying when we move her or we will be caught and killed… or worse.”
Again Captain Danson nodded as he took the cylinder. It was soft so as not to damage Sandy’s teeth when she chomped down on it, yet hard enough that she would not bite through it. The jailer unlocked Sandy’s cell and stood back as Captain Danson entered.

Gently, Captain Danson put his hand on Sandy’s shoulder. She moaned as she began to stir. The jailer looked worried. Captain Danson knelt beside Sandy and whispered in her ear what they were doing and the importance of silence. Sandy nodded with tears in her eyes. Carefully, the rod was slipped into her mouth so she could bite on it. Then she shook her head slightly to indicate she was ready to be picked up.

Slowly Captain Danson lifted her, being careful not to touch her sore back. He had tears in his own eyes as he saw the stripes across her back. Sandy squeezed her eyes shut and clenched the rod with her teeth as spasms of pain shot through her. She was determined not to make a sound. Her strong will held out even as tears rolled down her cheeks.

When he was standing with Sandy in his arms, he put one hand on the top of her head and stroked her hair to comfort her. To Sandy it reminded her of her mother and father’s loving touch, and she gave a little sigh.

After they had left the cell, the jailer locked Sandy’s cell and led them up the stairs. When they got to the door, he signalled them to wait while he peered outside into the darkness to see if anyone was about. The courtyard was in darkness except for a couple of dim lights. The King did not like to spend unnecessary money. The courtyard was deserted.

The jailer came in and whispered, “It’s clear. Follow me and stay close to the wall. My house is right next to the dungeon so I can monitor the prisoners.”

The jailer was hugging the wall as they moved along. Captain Danson, carrying Sandy, came as close behind him as he could. They progressed by one wooden door, which apparently led to the main prison. Then they passed a darkened window close to another door. Captain Danson noticed that by this door an aircar was parked. It was an older model, a clunky old boat by modern standards. It had two seats in the front and three in the back, although four people could squeeze in, in a
pinch. The large engine compartment in the front was deceptive because, even in its prime, this beast of a car could only do 200 miles an hour. It also had a large trunk compartment in the rear. It’s faded brown and white colouring fought with the caked dirt and rust to be seen. It was resting on the ground, but when activated, it would ride on a cushion of air about two feet off the ground.

Slipping inside the door, the jailer held it open just wide enough for Captain Danson to step inside. The room was in total darkness.

“Straight ahead,” hissed the jailer.

They went straight forward into another dark room. As soon as they were in, the jailer closed the room’s door.

“Watch your eyes,” he said as he flicked a switch.

Captain Danson and Sandy blinked their eyes at the sudden light. The jailer put a thick cloth across the bottom of the door to prevent any light from showing under it into the room they had just moved through.

Glancing around, Captain Danson saw they were in a kitchen. A stove and refrigerator were against one wall. A small counter, with cupboards above and below, was along another wall. There were no windows in this stark room, although there was another door in the far wall. A rough wooden table and chairs were in the centre of the room.

That door opened and a woman entered. Her short, dark hair was streaked with gray. Her plump figure matched her round face and friendly smile. Her twinkling eyes looked much younger than the wrinkles on her face testified that she was. She was the kind of person that you instantly liked and made you feel at home.

“Bring the girl in here and set her on the bed,” she said to Captain Danson.

Her husband objected urgently, “We have to leave right away. The longer we stay, the greater the chance we will be caught.”
“This will only take ten minutes, but we are not going anywhere until I get some healing oils on those wounds. We can’t risk them getting infected. So, you just make the Captain and yourself a nice cup of armeer, and us ladies will be out as soon as we can.”

The jailer shot the Captain a look that said, “It’s pointless to argue with her.” Out loud he added in a grumbling voice, “Leave that rod in her mouth. Any sound will be dangerous.”

Captain Danson gently set Sandy down on the bed and returned to the kitchen. The woman closed the door and carefully removed Sandy’s blouse so as not to tear open the wounds again. Softly, with a skilled hand, she applied the healing oils. While even her light touch made Sandy wince, the oils soothed the burning and relieved the stinging.

“Why are you doing this?” asked Captain Danson as he watched the jailer making the armeer.

“I couldn’t stand seeing the little girl hurt,” was his simple reply. “Mirium agreed we had to do something. This was it. We all escape together, or we are all caught together.” He handed Captain Danson a steaming cup of armeer.

“You’re more than a jailer. If you weren’t, you would be content with what you have and not willing to risk it for any cause,” observed Captain Danson as he took a sip of his armeer.

The jailer took a sip from his cup as he studied Captain Danson. Then he replied, “I was a rebel leader until King Zeholeth’s soldiers caught me. I spent months in that dungeon without breaking. He was going to kill me in the end, but my wife pleaded for my life. So, he made me a jailer so that I could watch what was happening to others. In many ways, it was crueler than killing me.”

“King Zeholeth does not seem like the type of man who would listen to a woman’s pleadings.”

A half-smile slipped out on the weather-worn face, “No, he is not. But my Mirium is the best mid-wife in his territory. He wants the best for his officers. She told him that if he killed me, she would never deliver
another baby… and she wouldn’t have. He keeps me alive and keeps me here so she will come back when she goes out to do her work. I keep telling her to forget about me and just keep going, but she always comes back.” He paused, “Now we are both either getting out or going to the grave.”

The bedroom door opened. Sandy stood there wearing a tan coloured, loose-fitting blouse. She still had the rod in her mouth. Slowly, she stepped into the room. She was moving stiffly, but steadily. The oils helped. She tried to manage a weak smile at Captain Danson, but the rod made it look awkward.

Captain Danson sat his half-drunk cup of armeer down on the table and went over to her.

“Can we go now?” the jailer pleaded with his wife.

“Yes, we can go now, Arphax,” she replied, with just a touch of mockery in her voice.

Arphax looked at Captain Danson and Sandy, “This is what we are going to do. Captain, you will lie down on the floor in the back of the aircar. The little girl will lay on top of you, and Mirium will cover you with a blanket. I am going to slip into the trunk. Mirium will drive us out of here as if she were on the way to an emergency delivery. If they search the car before opening the gate, we are all caught. Once we are in the town, we will stop and I will get out of the trunk and take over driving.”

“What then?” asked Captain Danson.

“That’s as far as you need to know for right now.”

“What are the chances they will search the car?”

Mirium answered, “Depends who is on guard duty. If it is Abishai, he is lazy and will simply open the gate. If it is Ziba, he usually searches. We won’t know until we get there.”

“So if you really believe in this Elniyn God, start praying we get Abishai,” said Arphax. “Ready?”
Captain Danson and Sandy nodded.

“I am going to turn off the light. Follow me straight through the living room to the front door. Then you know what to do.”

Without waiting for an answer, he clicked off the light and opened the kitchen door. Silently they followed, Sandy tried to move as quickly as she could. When the front door opened, Captain Danson and Sandy went to the back of the aircar. Captain Danson lay on the floor. Mirium helped Sandy get in. Sandy was wincing and tears were flooding her eyes, but the brave girl made not a sound. Mirium placed a rough woollen blanket over them. She then went to the driver seat and started the engine. The aircar groaned and rose on its cushion of air before it began moving toward the gate.

“Here we go,” whispered Mirium.

The aircar hummed through the ghostly quiet courtyard until it came to the castle gate. The guard tower rose 20 feet above the ground and had a Vetica gun pointed down to show any intruder that resistance was futile. Mirium stopped and talked into the intercom.

“I have an emergency delivery in district 3,” she said.

“Is that so?” came a male voice.

“Yes, Ziba, that is so.”

“Very well, I’ll be right down.”
Chapter Eleven: Abandon Ship

Scott lay back on his bed, thinking. He had been at Lt. Williams’ for two days now. He might be safe, but it wasn’t helping his family any. Lt. Williams had said she was working on something but had not elaborated. He felt helpless and frustrated. Somewhere his family was in trouble… but where? It was a massive ship. And what could he do?

He had sent Dick and Janna a cryptic message saying that he was safe, but they could not meet yet. He wanted to discuss things with them, but he did not want to lose Lt. Williams’ support by disobeying her. He knew he would have to be content with waiting and praying. Never had he prayed so earnestly before; although, it did not seem to be doing any good.

That evening when Lt. Williams came home, she had a twinkle in her eyes. Scott noticed it the moment he saw her.

“You figured something out,” he said.

“Yes, I did,” she said, giving a foxy grin and waving the computer tablet in her hand. “I don’t know how they did it yet, but I can prove Captain Danson is a fraud.”

“How?”

“No time to explain it now. I’ve asked Commander Hankan to meet us at The Fountain on Level 33 in half an hour.”

“Commander Hankan? Are you sure he can be trusted?” said Scott doubtfully.

“Absolutely. We have been friends and work companions for years, and his DNA checked out both times.”

“What do you mean ‘both times’?”

“Later, later. What I want you to do is go down to The Fountain first and find a booth out of sight. I want to prepare him, then I will motion for
you to come over and introduce you. After that, I will explain the new evidence I found. He will have to believe us.”

“What about my family?”

“Believe me, he has a better chance of figuring out where they are and rescuing them than anybody else.” She paused. “You had better get started. Take the first ElLift. The less time you are in the corridors, the less chance of being recognized.”

Scott nodded but seemed unconvinced.

“This really is the best way,” said Lt. Williams as Scott opened the door.

“I hope so, everything depends on it,” he said as he left.

As Scott was walking toward the ElLift, he sent Dick a quick text: Drinks after Rock Slide shooting. Now. Stay out of sight. Don’t be followed.

Scott walked into The Fountain and was seated in a two-person booth. He sat so that he had a view of the door. The main feature of The Fountain Restaurant was a model of the symbol of the El Empire, two hands holding a galaxy, rising above a pool in the centre of the room. A stream of water shot out of the top of the sculpture and cascaded down into the pool, with coloured lights playing over it.

Scott ordered a glass of Rago Juice. He kept his eye on the door. A few minutes later, he saw Janna and Dick walk in. They noticed him but said nothing as they took a booth close to the door. Next, Lt. Williams walked in. She noted where Scott was sitting and sat in a booth on the opposite side of the room. She still had her computer tablet in her hand.

She smiled and waved her paw as a man in a security uniform with a gold command stripe entered. He was tall and solidly built. He had black hair with bushy eyebrows and a face that looked perpetually grumpy. Despite that, his face tried to conjure up a smile when he saw Lt. Williams.
Sliding into the seat across from her, he said, “What’s up, Grace? You made this sound very important.”

Lt. Williams waited until they had ordered and received their drinks from the waitress before replying, “It is. Did you have the Langlish family escorted off the Gallant and flown back to Maxon?”

Commander Hankan’s eyebrows moved closer together, “Captain Danson gave the order directly to Security Elite, but I saw the report. I must say, I completely agree with the Captain’s decision. They had the potential to bring disruption to the ship and did not appear to be willing to listen to reason. You talked with them yourself, I believe.”

Lt. Williams nodded, “Who was in charge of removing them from the ship?”

“Sgt. Joktan. He’s a good man. I read his report. Why all these questions?” asked Commander Hankan confused. “This is over and done with.”

Lt. Williams motioned to Scott. Scott brought his drink over and slipped onto the seat beside her. Scott felt nervous as the dark eyes in the Commander’s stern face seemed to penetrate his very soul. The Commander was not a man you wanted against you!

“This is Scott Langlish. His family was not escorted from the Gallant but kidnapped. They are likely being held somewhere onboard against their will.”

Silently Commander Hankan studied Scott.


Scott began. It was nerve-racking talking to that frowning face which never seemed to change expression. Scott had no idea if what he was saying was making an impact or not.

When Scott finished, Commander Hankan pressed his communicator and said, “Sgt. Joktan.” All the time, he kept his eyes
trained on Scott. Lt. Williams, who knew him much better, knew he was considering not only what Scott had said, but all the possible implications.

Seconds later a voice came over the communicator, “Yes, Commander. What can I do for you?”

“I understand you were in charge of removing the Langlish family from the Gallant.”

“No, Sir. That was not a Security Elite issue, even though it involved the Captain. It was handled by the regular Security. Just a second, I’ll pull up the report.” There was a pause. “Yes, just as I thought. It was handled by Sgt. Walter, who is in charge of Security on their home Level.”

“It seems I was misinformed. Thank you for your time. I’ll check with him.”

“No problem, Sir.”

Commander Hankan cut the connection. He turned his gaze to Lt. Williams, “It was Sgt. Jokan’s name on the report I received.” He looked back to Scott, “But that doesn’t mean your sister was right about Captain Danson. He did pass the DNA test, remember.”

“I can help with that,” said Lt. Williams, with a sparkle in her eye.

The stern face turned back to her, which didn’t bother her in the least. She was used to her friend’s ways and expressions.

“You know how a DNA scan was faked?”

“No. But I can prove that it was faked.” She put her tablet on the table and scrolled up. “As you know, after Sandy’s accusation, Captain Danson insisted not only on a DNA scan for himself and his officers, but also that it be checked with all three independent databases. That is unusual as we normally only check with our own Cita database.”

“He was removing any doubt as to the validity of the results.”

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“Exactly. And, again, as you know, the Captain’s identity was confirmed by all three databases.” She showed the Commander on her tablet the three identical results.

“I don’t see how this is helping you.”

Lt. Williams smiled her foxy smile, a smile that told Commander Hankan that something unexpected was coming.

“Yesterday morning, I did another DNA scan on Captain Danson without him knowing it. And I ran that scan through all three databases. Our Cita computer came back with a match to Captain Danson as before.” She paused, her voice could hardly contain her excitement as she continued, “But the other two databases came back as NOF - Not On File.”

Scott gasped.

“Are you sure you didn’t make a mistake?” asked Commander Hankan.

Lt. Williams scrolled down to the new results and handed the tablet to him.

“I don’t make those kinds of mistakes. Sometime between those two scans someone altered the records onboard knowing how unlikely it was that the other two databases would be rechecked for years.”

“Did you use your encrypted ID to check the Royiana and Knight databases?”

“Of course, that’s the only way I could access them.”

“Then whoever is in Captain Danson’s chair has already received a report, which is sent to the senior commanding officer, when those two databases are accessed. He has to justify the added expense. Now he knows that you have evidence of who he is. You are both in danger.”

Lt. Williams had forgotten about that report in her search for the truth. She could be a very focused person. Details, like expenses, weren’t
high on her priority list when she was the on trail of something she found interesting.

“What about my family?” asked Scott. “Do you have any idea where they would be held?”

“It’s a big ship. They could be in thousands of places,” said Commander Hankan. *If they are still alive,* he thought but did not say aloud. “However, there is one very practical and logical place they could be.” He entered his code on Lt. Williams’ tablet and began searching through information. “Yes,” he said after a few moments, “It is very likely they are…”

He was interrupted by three long beeps on the intercom which were broadcast over the entire ship.

“That’s the Red Alert warning!” exclaimed Commander Hankan.

The beeps were followed immediately by an announcement, “This is Captain Danson speaking. There has been a Glaincor leak in Engineering that we have not been able to contain. It is beginning a chain reaction that will undermine the Gallant’s structural integrity in less than 24 hours. Fortunately, we are close to the planet Livoso. This is a small planet that is uninhabited, but well able to support life. We will be in orbit in less than an hour, at which time we will begin our emergency evacuation procedures. There is no need for alarm as we have plenty of time to evacuate before the Glaincor reaches an explosive level, putting our beloved Gallant out of action. We will wait on Livoso until the Empire sends assistance. Your Level Security Officers and other Security personal will direct you and assist you in abandoning ship. Again, there is no need of fear for personal safety. We have plenty of time to get everyone off the ship.”

Lt. Williams looked confused, “That doesn’t make sense. There are multiple safeguards. It is virtually impossible to have a Glaincor leak that destructive.”

Commander Hankan pressed his communicator, “Lt. Stern.”

“Yes, Commander,” said a voice moments later.
“How is that Glaincor leak possible? Why wasn’t I informed?”

“It was sabotage, Sir.”

“Sabotage! By whom?”

“We have reason to believe that Lt. Grace Williams was the saboteur; although, the motive is unknown at this time. I understand you are friends. Do you know where she is?”

“No. Did you check her apartment?”

“Just leaving it. It’s empty, but it does appear that a co-conspirator was staying with her.”

“Ok. I’m on my way to Main Control.”

Commander Hankan ended his call. He looked at Lt. Williams and said, “If they didn’t report to me when this was first discovered or even when they searched your apartment, then they suspect me of being involved. They were probably tracking my transmission. We have got to get out of here now!”

Scott looked up as two Security men with drawn guns entered The Fountain. They were glancing around.

“Too late,” he muttered.
Chapter Twelve: A Safe Hide Out

“Did I mention emergency delivery?” Mirium’s voice stressing her concern, “Captain Ticane’s wife is in pain. Mother and baby are both in danger. Search if you want, but it will be you explaining to King Zeholeth why you delayed me to when his favourite officer is in mourning because one or both of them dies.”

There was a pause, then Ziba grunted, ”Fine.” As the gate began to rise he added, “If you’re lying to me, your husband will never leave here alive, and I will track you down myself and turn you into Desert Cat food.”

Mirium ignored him as she pressed the accelerator. The aircar shot out of the castle and down the street. Soon they were zipping through the town, which was deserted at this time of night. They had almost passed entirely through the ramshackle old town when Mirium brought the aircar to a sudden stop beside a dark alleyway. She jumped out and opened the back door. Captain Danson and Sandy were shaken up, but able to scramble up and out of the aircar.

While Captain Danson and Sandy were struggling to get out, Mirium opened the trunk. Her husband crawled out, coughing with all the dust.

“Quick,” Mirium told him, “Get in the car and get out of here.”

Arphax nodded and stumbled to the driver’s seat.

“They can’t see us here,” whispered Captain Danson.

“Of course not,” commented Mirium as the aircar sped off, “but they will see it leaving the town, and if it takes too long, they will know it stopped. We cannot afford that.”

Mirium led them into the dark alley.

“Aren’t we too close to the castle?” asked Sandy nervously.
“Won’t they search the town when we are found missing?” added Captain Danson.

Mirium smiled, “Hopefully they will follow the car, but if they do search the town, we are going to be in the one place they will never look.”

Mirium led them down the dark alley and across a side street into the next alley. As they approached the next street, Mirium motioned for them to cling to the wall and blend in with the darkness. A man was staggering down the road. He had obviously been entertaining himself at one of the local bars. Following a short distance behind him was a woman who had also obviously been drinking, screaming, and yelling at him. From somewhere up the street, someone yelled for them to be quiet. Then a baby started crying.

Mirium waited in the shadows of the alley until the man and woman had disappeared down the street. When things quieted down, she motioned them to follow her as she moved on. It would be dangerous if they were spotted by anyone who might later remember them.

When they reached the small town’s edge, Mirium pointed to a single-story stone building about 500 yards away. It looked relatively large, and a light shone out a couple of open windows.

“That is the Sisters of Mercy hospital,” whispered Mirium. “We will walk slowly over to the building as if we were taking our daughter to the hospital. Once we get to the wall, we will sneak around the building’ back to the other side. Not far away is another small building, where they keep the patients with contagious diseases. I know the Sister in charge of that building. She will let us hide in there. It is unlikely the king’s soldiers will search it.”

“Won’t we get sick?” asked Sandy.

“They are usually have low occupancy, but, in any case, the risk is better than being caught by the king.”

Mirium and Captain Danson walked with Sandy between them as if they were taking her to the hospital. And far as they could tell, no one saw them; however, one could never be sure. When they reached the wall,
they melted into the shadows and stood still. Earnestly they surveyed the
town looking for any signs of life, anything that would tell them someone
was watching. It looked like a ghost town in the eerie moonlight. The
baby was still crying, but otherwise, no other sound was heard.

Carefully, they crept along the wall and around the corner. The stone
building they were moving around had a lot of window openings. There
was no glass in these windows. The shutters were on the outside and
fastened open so that, hopefully, a breeze would blow through the building
and keep it reasonably cool. Tonight was not such a night. The stillness
of the air seemed to amplify the heat. As they passed several of the
windows, ducking under the openings to prevent being seen, they heard
the occasional cough or the movement of the night nurse.

They reached the far corner of the building safely. There did not
seem to be anyone in the rooms at the back of the building. Looking
across the yard with its sand and cacti, they saw the other stone building.
It was much smaller than the main building, but still with the same design
and open windows.

“We will need to get over there as fast as we can,” whispered
Mirium, “because anyone who looks out a window and sees us now will
know we are not supposed to be here.”

“I don’t think I can run,” said Sandy. “It would hurt too much.”

“Sorry, dear, I had forgotten.”

“I’ll carry her,” said Captain Danson.

Gently, Captain Danson picked Sandy up, being careful not to touch
her back. Quickly they crossed the yard and came to the front door.

“Wait here,” said Mirium as she disappeared into the building.

The minutes seemed to drag by like the snail slipping across the
porch. The door opened and Mirium beckoned them inside. Captain
Danson set Sandy down and followed her through the door. On the right
side of the door was a nurse’s station with a desk and chair made of rough
wood, a large cabinet, and a sink. Beyond that were 10 beds with a
transparent material over them that was supposed to help contain whatever contagious disease the patient had. Two of the beds on that side of the room were occupied. On the left side, there were 16 beds, identical to the ones on the other side of the room. Four of the beds were occupied. Moans came from one bed as the sufferer tossed in a fevered sleep.

At the end of the hall, a woman stood with a flashlight, holding a door open. Mirium went past the woman into the room beyond. Captain Danson and Sandy followed. As soon as they were in the end room, the woman shut the door.

“My name is Jarry,” she whispered. “This is the Dying Room. Patients are moved here when there is no hope of recovery. No one comes here, so you will be safe.”

She shone her flashlight around the room, revealing eight empty beds, a small table, and three chairs. There was one window in each of the three walls. Then she shone the light on herself so they could see that she was a young woman in her twenties. She had short and straight blond hair and dancing blue eyes, in spite of the burdens of caring for the sick and the dying.

“During the day you must be careful not to be seen through the windows; although, very few people come this way or even look at us. If the king’s soldiers happen to come and look in the window, you must lay on the beds completely covered with the blankets and cough as if you are dying. They will not stay long.”

“Thank you for risking so much for strangers,” whispered Captain Danson.

“Did not Elniyn do the same?” she responded with a smile. “Sister Lynn will replace me during the day. We will bring you what we can for meals and drink. I will ask her to bring you some books and maybe a game or two.” With that she turned and left, closing the door behind her.

All three were exhausted. They lay down on the beds and, despite the oppressiveness of the heat, were soon asleep.
The next two days went by very slowly. There were a couple of books to read and board games to play, but not much else to do. The heat made everyone feel miserable. Sisters Jarry and Lynn would come in and talk for a while when they were on shift. They were both wonderful ladies from “the big city” who loved Elniyn and had dedicated their lives to helping those less fortunate.

Captain Danson kept a watch at the windows in case anyone came looking. No one did. The only scare was when a couple of the king’s soldiers walked around the main hospital, but they did not venture toward the contagious disease building. Captain Danson smiled to himself as he thought their report would probably read something like: Thoroughly inspected the hospital and all buildings with no sign of escaped prisoners.

On the evening of the third day, the door opened and Arphax walked in. Mirium ran over to him, hugging and kissing him. She had never expressed her concern for her husband, but it had always been there just below the surface.

Arphax smiled, returning her embrace. He glanced around the room. Both Captain Danson and Sandy were sitting on their beds. Captain Danson rose. He offered his hand and Arphax shook it.

“That you so much for what you have done,” said Captain Danson.

Sandy joined him at his side, “Yes, thank you.”

Arphax smiled at them, looking as unkept and unwashed as usual.

“I have crashed the aircar in a ravine 200 miles from here. Once they find it, it will still take them some time to reach it and realize no one was inside.” He looked at his wife, “Bilklam gave me a ride back to about five miles from here, and I walked from there. No sign of the king’s soldiers.” He looked over to Captain Danson, “Bilklam is going to Collian to let Interstellar Patrol know about our situation. It will take about a week, if he isn’t delayed too much by the King’s patrols.”

“That’s great news,” said Captain Danson. “I need to get back to my ship and get that impostor behind a force field.”
“Thank you, Elniyn,” said Sandy.

Arphax gave her a quizzical look, “Why do you thank Elniyn? He did not save you when you called out to Him in the dungeon. You have the scars on your back to prove it.”

Sandy looked at him, “No, He did not save me right then. But He did save us… He sent you. If He hadn’t, we would still be there and I would have a lot more scars - if I was even still alive.”

“You have a lot of trust in Someone you don’t even know is real.”

“I do know He is real, and I know Him. Being an Eler is not about believing certain things, it is about really getting to know Elniyn.”

Arphax shook his head as if rattling new ideas around, then went to talk to his wife. Sandy settled back down on her bed. Her back was doing a lot better since it was being bathed in healing oil twice a day. But the stinging, burning sensation was still there if she turned or twisted the wrong way.

It was during the next day that Sister Lynn came in with a bit of news.

“Brutis was brought into the hospital last night. Apparently, when you escaped, King Zeholeth thought Brutis had some knowledge of it. He has been in the torture chamber. Yesterday, when they were finally convinced he knew nothing, they tossed him out the castle gates. A couple of the sisters found him and brought him to the hospital, poor thing.”

“Poor thing!” exploded Arphax in anger. “He was a monster. Do you know how many people he has whipped and tortured for King Zeholeth? He got what he deserved.”

Captain Danson nodded his agreement.

“How bad is it?” asked Sandy.
“He will probably not survive more than a couple of days even, with our help. All we can do is give him drugs to lessen the pain. We had to put him in the back bedroom by himself.” Sister Lynn looked out the window at the hospital, “It’s actually in this closest corner. The Sisters there have to keep the door to his room locked so that none of the other patients slip in to try and take revenge.” She shook her head sadly as she left the room.

When the door closed, Sandy said, “I have to see him, to talk to him.”

Arphax stared at her in shocked disbelief.

“Not possible,” he said at last. “It’s too dangerous. If you were seen, we would all be recaptured. Besides, you heard what Sister Lynn said, he will be dead in a couple of days. There’s no point in risking everything for a little payback.”

“I must see him,” insisted Sandy in a serious and determined voice.

“No,” said Arphax firmly.

Sandy bit her lip to keep silent. A look of defiance flashed in her eye. She was going to see Brutis if she had to sneak out in the middle of the night to do it.

Captain Danson came to her rescue. “I don’t think it’s a wise idea either, but I think Sandy has earned the right to see him if she wants.”

“I need to talk to him.”

Arphax looked at Captain Danson. He rolled things around in his mind. He knew there was no way he could stop them if they were determined. He wondered if Sandy was really just a spoiled brat who always needed to get her own way; although, that had not been his impression until now.

“You heard what Sister Lynn said,” continued Captain Danson. “Brutis is in a locked room, in the corner of the hospital closest to us. When it gets dark, we can slip across. No one will see us. I can help
Sandy through the window. She can say what she needs to say to get her closure. Then we can return. If anything goes wrong, I can climb through the window and get her out.”

Closure was the furthest thing from Sandy’s mind, but she kept silent. If that’s what they wanted to think, and it got her over there, fine.

As Arphax considered things, he glanced at his wife. She appeared to be on Sandy’s side. Although she said not a word, her eyes spoke volumes.

Finally, he shrugged, “We three will go tonight. Mirium, you keep watch at the window. If you see anyone around or looking out of the hospital windows, give us a bird call to warn us.”

When it grew dark outside, Arphax, Captain Danson, and Sandy made their way through the outer hospital room to the door. Sister Jarry was sitting at her desk. She gave them a questioning glance but said nothing, even though her life was on the line as much as their lives. They knew what they were doing, she trusted. Since her life belonged to a Greater One, she could rest in that confidence without fearing the actions of others.

They kept in the shadows along the side of the building until they came to the corner. Their destination was across the yard. They paused and looked around. All seemed quiet. Carefully, Captain Danson picked Sandy up. Quickly, they dashed across the yard until the darkness of the hospital wall swallowed them up.

Captain Danson set Sandy down. He motioned for her to stay where she was while he and Arphax moved to the window. They peeped inside. There was a small lamp burning that threw ghostly shadows around the room. The wooden door was shut, presumably locked. On a bed against the wall, opposite the door, lay Brutis. Even Captain Danson shuddered at the sight of the large werewolf torturer. His head was wrapped in bandages as were parts of his arms. The rest of him was under a drab blanket. He certainly did not look like he was in any shape to hurt anyone.

Captain Danson motioned to Sandy. As she approached, he whispered, “I don’t like this. You don’t have to go through with it.”

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Arphax noticed a slight twitch in Brutis’ ears as he heard the faint noises outside, but Brutis made no other movement.

“I must speak with him,” Sandy whispered back insistently.

“Be careful. And don’t go too close to him. He may look like he has no strength, but you never know.”

Captain Danson helped Sandy through the window. She grimaced as she stretched her sore back, twisting to get inside. Once inside, she looked around, then moved softly to the bedside. Brutis opened his bloodshot eyes and looked at her, but remained motionless.

Neither Captain Danson nor Arphrax had any idea what Sandy was going to say. They were both shocked as her words reached their ears.

In a low voice, Sandy said, “I want to tell you that I forgive you.”

Brutis’ mouth twitched, and his eyes betrayed his confusion. Sandy looked at him, smiled, and reached a decision. His eyes followed her as she moved closer to the bed. She knelt beside his bed and took one of his gigantic paws in her hands. Captain Danson almost had a heart attack! He knew that even in Brutis’ weakened condition, that paw could inflict severe, perhaps fatal, damage to Sandy.

Sandy tenderly stroked his paw and said again, “I forgive you. Elniyn forgives you. He loves you and wants to forgive all the bad things you have done if you will let Him.”

Sandy continued to stroke his paw as his eyes watched her, not sure of what to think. Sandy did not hear the aircar door slam in front of the hospital, but Captain Danson and Arphax did. They exchanged worried glances.

Sandy was jerked to attention by a harsh voice in the other room demanding, “Open that door or I’ll blast it down.”

Her eyes went wide open in horror as she recognized the voice. Hal Brestorm, the United Raider assassin she and her friends had helped
capture! The key was rattling in the door. In seconds it would be open. No time to scramble out the window now. Quickly, she dove under Brutis’ bed, stifling the scream of pain from her raging back. No one realized more than Sandy that her life was now in the hands of Brutis.
Chapter Thirteen: A Daring Rescue

The two Security men spotted Scott and Lt. Williams immediately because they were sitting, facing the door. Commander Hankan was mostly hidden from view by the high back of the booth bench; although, they could see his black hair rising over the top.

When the men moved forward, Dick and Janna were seated behind them. Dick whispered something to Janna, who nodded.

“Get out of that booth with your hands up,” commanded one of the men. Slowly, they walked slowly toward the booth.

Scott and Lt. Williams slid out with their hands up. Commander Hankan also raised his hands, still clutching the computer tablet, and slipped out of the booth. He turned to face the two Security men. The man who had spoken was sneering as he saw Commander Hankan. His finger tightened on the trigger. Commander Hankan suspected that these two men were either bribed or United Raiders, posing as Security Men. He highly doubted their guns were set on the mandated stun setting.

Suddenly, Dick let out a war yell. He cannoned into the two men from behind, startling everyone and sending all three of them sprawling across the floor. Dick quickly scrambled up as Janna rapidly threw three chairs on top of the prone duo. They were cursing and trying to regain their feet as Commander Hankan’s stun blasts sent them into unconsciousness.

“Out the back door,” Commander Hankan ordered.

Lt. Williams headed through the kitchen, followed closely by Scott, Janna, and Dick. Commander Hankan came last, making sure no one in the restaurant would hinder them. The kitchen staff stared in astonishment as the five of them passed through, but no one moved to stop them.

Once outside the back door, Commander Hankan took the lead.
“Quick, follow me,” he said. “We have to disappear before anyone else finds us.”

Scott, Janna, and Dick had to almost run to keep up with Commander Hankan. Lt. Williams just scampered along without difficulty. Commander Hankan led them to the closest ElLift. As he waited impatiently for the doors to open, he kept glancing around. When the doors did open a man and a woman stood there.

“Out!” he barked.

They were startled by his abrupt command. Since they weren’t moving fast enough for his liking, Commander Hankan handed the tablet to Lt. Williams and grabbed each one by the front of their shirt. He lifted them up and placed them outside the ElLift where they stood, still unsure what had happened to them.

“In!” he ordered.

Scott, Janna, Dick, and Lt. Williams quickly stepped inside. Scott caught a glimpse of Lt. Stern coming around the far corner of the hall as the doors were closing.

As soon as the doors were completely closed, Commander Hankan spat out crisp short commands, “Level 6. Section G. Emergency Speed. Anonymous.”

Instantly they felt the ElLift move. Scott, Janna, and Dick grabbed the rail on the back wall to steady themselves. Commander Hankan and Lt. Williams seemed perfectly at ease. The movement of the ElLift was something like a ride at the amusement park. This was very unusual as normally ElLifts had no sensation of movement. However, in two minutes, they had rocketed to their destination.

When the doors opened, they stepped out into an empty cell block in the brig. All the cells had green lights beside them, indicating the force fields were turned off. The guard station to the left was unoccupied.

Commander Hankan looked at Dick and Janna, “Who are you two?”
Scott spoke up, “They are my friends. I told them where we were meeting in case I needed help.”

“Well,” said Commander Hankan, “we’re all in this together now.”

“Did we just come down here to hide?” asked Dick. “I feel the need to pulverize someone.”

“You couldn’t pulverize a stuffed bear,” commented Janna.

Dick opened his mouth to shoot back a sarcastic remark, but Commander Hankan interrupted him, “You were both very brave and probably saved our lives, at least mine. And, no, we did not come down here to hide. You never win playing defence.”

“That’s what I’ve always said,” replied Dick. “Let’s pulverize these villains.”

Janna just shook her head in disgust.

“What did that anonymous thing mean?” asked Scott.

“As a high-ranking Security officer, I can turn off the tracking on the ElLift. The reason we can do that is so that Security can move around the ship without being tracked. It comes in handy if we need to surprise someone who has access to that information, which is confidential, but not classified.”

“So,” chimed in Lt. Williams, “no one has any way of knowing where we are.”

“Why are we down here?” asked Dick.

Commander Hankan sat down at the guard table. He held out his hand for the tablet. When Lt. Williams placed it in his hand, he began searching in the tablet. “At the end of this hall are the maximum security cells.”

The hall they were in had 50 cells, 25 on each side of the hall. At the end was a door marked: Maximum Security. Authorization Required.
“So...?” said Dick.

“At the moment there is only supposed to be one prisoner in maximum security with two rotating guards. I think you three have met him. It’s Hal Brestorm, the assassin you helped capture last year.”

Janna gasped and Dick said, “I didn’t know he was still onboard.”

As Commander Hankan continued to work with the tablet, Lt. Williams explained, “Hal Brestorm was convicted in court of capital crimes, but we don’t execute people on the Gallant. So he was being held until we stop at a planet with the Empire approved facilities.”

“That’s what I thought,” said Commander Hankan placing the tablet on the table and looking at them. “There is more food going into maximum security than one prisoner would need. And there are only three men, in rotating shifts of two each, guarding him. That duty should be spread among the security force. The only reason to limit it is if someone did not want anyone but those three men to know what was happening in there.”

A light dawned on Scott, “You think that’s where my parents and sister are being held.”

Commander Hankan nodded, “But we do have a problem. How do we get in? If we can’t surprise the two guards in there, then not only will we be involved in a gun battle, but also, they will alert Impostor Danson where we are to send more help.”

“Can’t we just take the ElLift and stun them before they realize who is coming? They won’t be expecting us,” said Janna.

“Great idea, Miss No-Brain,” said Dick sarcastically, “except no ElLift goes into maximum security.”

Commander Hankan frowned at Dick, but said to Janna, “It would have been a good idea, but your brother is right. The only way in there is through that door. It can only be opened from the inside or with a ten-minute time delay, and there is a vidcam that allows them to see anyone
approaching the door. Somehow, we have to get them to open the door without suspecting a trap.”

“Can we wait until they evacuate?” asked Scott.

“There is no Glaincor leak,” said Lt. Williams. “That is just Impostor Danson’s way of getting everyone off the Gallant, presumably so he can get his own crew onboard without a fight. If those men are part of Impostor Danson’s gang, they are not going anywhere.”

“I think you’re right, Grace. Does your foxy sense have any ideas?”

Lt. Williams wrinkled her nose and twitched her whiskers as she thought. “Nothing is coming to me right now.”

“I have an idea,” said Janna.

“I hope it doesn’t die of loneliness,” commented her brother.

Commander Hankan looked at Dick sternly, “Any idea is better than nothing.” He looked at Janna, “What is it?”

“Scott and I could say we have permission from the Captain to visit our uncle Hal. When they open the door, you stun them.”

Commander Hankan looked uncertain, but Lt. Williams spoke up, “I like it. Only say that you are authorized by Captain Danson to visit your uncle before you evacuate.” She glanced at the Commander, “How long have these three been on guard duty?”

Commander Hankan consulted the tablet, “Looks like about three weeks.”

“Then they wouldn’t know without checking the records whether Hal Brestorm has had visitors or not over the time he has been here.”

“It certainly won’t hurt to try,” said Commander Hankan.

“I should be the one to do it,” broke in Dick.
“It was your sister’s idea, so she can decide who goes.”

“Scott and I will do it.”

“Ok, here’s the plan…” Commander Hankan explained what he wanted each one to do. Dick felt left out, but there was nothing he could do. Commander Hankan did give him a few words of encouragement about his daring plan that helped them to escape from the restaurant. This helped his bruised ego a bit.

A few minutes later Commander Hankan and Lt. Williams were hiding behind the wall of a cell on opposite sites of the hall. Each had a gun drawn and ready for use. Scott and Janna nervously walked up to the door and punched the intercom.

“What are you kids doing here?” demanded a grumpy voice.

Janna waved an official-looking document on the tablet at the camera as Scott replied, “Captain Danson authorized us to have one last visit with Uncle Hal before the evacuation.”

“He’s not…” the guard stopped himself. “Hold that up so I can see it better.”

Lt. Williams had deliberately made the document fuzzy so it could not be seen clearly. Janna dutifully held it closer to the camera.

“There must be something wrong with this camera,” he complained. “Stand back while I open the door.”

Scott and Janna stood to one side, making sure to stand out of Lt. Williams’ line of sight to the door. It was her job to stun the guard who opened the door. The door opened. The Security man glanced around. Then, seeing no one but Scott and Janna, he stepped through the door and took the tablet.

“What is…” was all he had time to say before Lt. Williams’ stun beam lay him on the floor, unconscious.
Already on the move, Commander Hankan rushed through the door. The second Security man was rising from the table in the guard room. Before he realized what had happened, he was hit with a stun beam.

As soon as they were all in the Maximum Security section, Commander Hankan shut and locked the door. Scott immediately ran down the hall, searching for his family. He found them three cells down. Turning off the force field, he rushed in and gave them both a hug.

Mrs. Langlish was crying tears of joy and Mr. Langlish said, “I’m so glad you’re ok. We’ve been praying hard for you.”

The others came up as Scott, glancing around the cell, asked, “Where’s Sandy?”

Mrs. Langlish choked on a sob while Mr. Langlish answered, “They’ve taken her and Captain Danson to be slaves in a Ribbiean mine.” He paused, “But a man named Lord Hemann released Hal Brestorm two days ago to go down to the planet to kill them both, plus some king.”

“No,” said Scott in shock.

Mrs. Langlish gave him another hug, “Remember the dream. Elniyn is with her. He will protect her.”

Mr. Langlish looked at Commander Hankan and said urgently, “We need to send people down to rescue them immediately.”

“That’s going to be a little complicated.”

“Why? Aren’t you the Commander of Security? Can’t you relieve the fake Captain Danson from command?”

Commander Hankan’s voice was firm as he explained the situation. He ended by saying, “It is likely that, when the evacuation is complete, the Impostor Danson has a substitute crew hidden nearby to board us. They will then take control of the Gallant. We may end up in a war zone fighting for our lives before we can help anyone else.”

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While Commander Hankan had been speaking, Lt. Williams had wandered into the cell across the hall. She was studying the machine that hung above the bed.

Turning to Mr. Langlish, she asked, “What is this?”

Mr. Langlish shook his head, “I don’t know. That was Captain Danson’s cell. He said they kept him tied under it for the first week and then let him up to roam his cell.”

Lt. Williams continued studying it. Suddenly, she gave a couple of foxy hops and clapped her paws in delight.

“I’ve got it! I’ve got it!” she declared excitedly.

“What do you have, Grace?”

“I know how they beat the DNA tests! It’s so simple, it’s genius.” The excitement gleamed in her face. “This is a scanner. The Imposter Danson must have been wearing a receiving or transmitting device under his clothes. When I scanned him, either this scanning device sent the DNA code up to me or my device was redirected down here. Either way, I was scanning the real Captain Danson down here, but thinking I was scanning the Imposter Danson in the office. That’s why all the records matched! Later, someone put the fake DNA in Cita, but, of course, they couldn’t change the other two databases... and under normal circumstances, they wouldn’t have to because we only check Cita.”

“Now that you have solved that mystery, we need to get out of here,” said Commander Hankan.

“I thought you wanted to hide here because it was the last place they would look for us,” said Scott detaching himself from his mother.

“In the regular cell blocks with multiple exit points, yes. In Maximum Security there is only one exit, and we could easily be trapped if someone comes to check on things.”
Commander Hankan dragged the two unconscious Security men into different cells. He searched them to make sure they had no other weapons or communicators on them. Then he turned on the force fields.

“Let’s go.”

He led the way out of the Maximum Security area and closed the door behind them. He programmed the tablet to warn him if anyone tried to unlock the door with the time delay. That would let them know if the U.R.’s were about to discover that the Langlish’s had escaped.

They made their way to the guard station in another section of cells and sat down. Lt. Williams went into the small kitchen to make them all a cup of tain.

“The evacuation should have begun,” commented Commander Hankan. “It will take seven to eight hours to complete, depending on the distance to the landing zone on the planet. Sometime after that, we will be boarded by U.R.’s. We have to come up with a plan to either stop them or self-destruct the Gallant. We cannot let it fall into enemy hands no matter what the cost.”
Chapter Fourteen: Fighting With A Killer

The door burst open. Hal Brestorm strolled in, his quick eyes taking in Brutis and then surveying the rest of the room. Captain Danson and Arphrax were crouched under the window. Captain Danson was prepared to leap through the window, if need be, to get to Sandy; although, he knew he would be dead before he got halfway through. Hal was much too quick for that kind of surprise.

Hal’s dark blank eyes stared at Brutis.

“King Zeholeth thought you knew where Danson and the girl went.” He paused, then continued, “You didn’t tell him. I wouldn’t have either. But I did you a favour. When they wake up tomorrow this sand-blasted territory is going to be looking for a new king.”

Brutis’ eyes showed his comprehension.

“Now I want you to return the favour and tell me where those two are. They are the reason you are here, dying. I can, at least, get revenge for a comrade.”

The three listeners held their breath while Brutis considered what Hal Brestorm had said.

After what seemed like an eternity, he rasped out, “Collian.”

Hal nodded. “Makes sense that they would try to reach the Interstellar Patrol headquarters there. Might already be there. Still…”

He looked at Brutis, who stared unflinchingly back at him. Then, without another word, he turned and marched out. A few minutes later, the aircar door slammed again and he was gone.

A frightened nurse came in. She helped Brutis take a few sips of water. Then she left, locking the door behind her.

Painfully, Sandy crawled out from under the bed. Once again she took Brutis’ huge paw in her tender hands and gently stroked it.

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“Thank you for not telling him where I was,” she said.

Brutis gave a slight wolfish smile.

“Brutis…” Sandy began and then paused. “Brutis is not your real name, is it?”

Brutis’ eyes registered his surprise as he slowly shook his head. He hadn’t thought of his real name since he was a teenager. He had abandoned it and taken a tough nickname when he began his cruel line of work. A tear rolled out of the corner of his eye as he thought about his family, and where he had come from.

“What is it?” asked Sandy, continuing to stroke his paw.

“Mowreh,” he croaked.

“Mowreh is a good name. Mowreh, I want to tell you again that I forgive you. More than that. Elniyn loves you. He wants to forgive you and give you complete amnesty for everything evil you have ever done. All you have to do is tell Him you are sorry and ask Him to come into your heart and life, to be your Saviour and new Lord. That’s all.”

Mowreh rolled over what Sandy had said. He had hurt many people in his life, but she was the first one who had freely offered forgiveness. This Elniyn must be Someone very special…

“You know what I would really like?” asked Sandy.

A slight shake of his head indicated that he did not.

Sandy smiled, “When I get to heaven, I want to find you there, take your paw and go for a walk in a beautiful meadow.”

Another tear rolled out of Mowreh’s eye, but all he said was, “Go now.”
Sandy gave his paw an extra pat. Then she pulled a chair to the window so she could climb out. As she was halfway out the window, she heard Mowreh croak out, “See you there.”

It was with a glad heart that she slipped into Captain Danson’s strong arms. Carefully, they made their way back to their room. Mirium was anxiously waiting for them. Her husband explained everything that had happened and what Sandy had done.

Then he added bitterly, “He deserves death, not forgiveness.”

Sandy opened her mouth, but Captain Danson spoke first, “What Sandy did was courageous. And, if you correctly understand the Book Of El, you will know that we all deserve death. None of us deserves forgiveness.”

Sandy nodded, “Every wrong thing that we do is pain and torture to El. There is no greater crime than torturing the Creator of Life. He not only refuses to defend Himself, but also personally paid the penalty for our crime so He could offer us complete forgiveness.”

Arphrax turned away in disgust and looked out the window. There was no way he would accept that he and Miruim were in the same category as Brutis. He had done what was needed for survival; Brutis had enjoyed it.

Three more days passed slowly. During that time, Sister Lynn told them that Brutis - or Mowreh - died of his wounds. Whether he had made a genuine commitment to Elniyn or not, Sandy did not know, but she hoped for the best. King Zeholeth’s eldest son took the throne. Arphrax did not think that he would be any better than his father.

As night was approaching on the sixth day after their escape, Arphrax said, “Now is the time to leave. We cannot meet Interstellar Patrol here as that would endanger the sisters and the hospital. Sister Jarry has agreed to drive us to the foot of the mountain and drop us there. Interstellar Patrol will meet us at that place.”

“How far is it?” asked Captain Danson.
“It is about a six-hour trip. Sister Jarry should almost be back by the
time the sun comes up. If she is stopped on the way back by the king’s
men, she will say that she went to pick up a sick person, but it was a false
report.”

The four of them crept into the back of the ambulance and sat on the
benches beside the empty stretcher. Sister Jarry climbed behind the
driver’s wheel. The ambulance jumped forward and they were off. Sister
Jarry was a wild driver as she plowed ahead without headlights - just the
moonlight to guide her. Sharp turns, to miss suddenly looming boulders
and bouncing over sand dunes, kept everyone holding on for dear life.

Sister Jarry came to an abrupt stop at the entrance to a small
canyon. She hopped out and opened the back door. Her motion-sick
passengers tumbled out, happy to be on firm ground.

Sister Jarry laughed at their green faces, “Sorry, I’m used to getting
places in a hurry. Matter of life and death sometimes.”

“Sister, if you ever want to be a Flyer pilot, just let me know,” said
Captain Danson, grateful that they were all still in one piece.

Sister Jarry pulled out a couple of large bags from the back of the
ambulance.

“Food and blankets while you are waiting for your ride, since you
may be here from hours to days,” she said. “If you go around those
boulders to your left, you will find a little stream. Not too many people
know about it. If soldiers come, you can go further back into the canyon
and hide among the boulders.”

“Thank you for all your help, Sister Jarry,” said Mirium.

The others expressed their appreciation as well. Sister Jarry smiled,
hopped in, and sped off. The moonlight showed the yawning mouth of the
canyon. They could not see how far back it ran, but there were definitely
large rocks and boulders lining both of its steep sides.

Captain Danson handed the blankets around.
“Try to find a spot that is more sand than dirt,” he suggested. “We might as well try to get a little sleep. Arphrax and I will take turns on watch. I will go first.”

No one objected. The ground was hard, but the waves of sand blown in by gusts of wind made it a little more comfortable. Sandy and Mirium fell into a fitful sleep. Neither Arphrax nor Captain Danson slept; although, they took turns lying down.

In the early morning light, everyone was awake and sore.

Captain Danson handed Mirium a pot from one of the bags, “Why don’t you two girls get us some fresh water, and I’ll see what there is for breakfast.”

Captain Danson was rooting in the bags to see what kind of food there was when he heard a voice behind him, “Hello, Captain.”

He turned around slowly. There, at the back of a large boulder just inside the canyon mouth, stood Hal Brestorm holding a gun pointed at him. Arphrax also looked up from where he was.

“How…?” asked Captain Danson.

“I didn’t quite believe Brutis, and if you had made it to Interstellar Patrol, there was very little I could do immediately. So I decided to hang out here and watch. You never know what you might see.” He left the shelter of the rocks as he approached them. Glancing over his right shoulder at the boulders that hid the stream from view, he called out, “You girls get back over here.”

“Run!” yelled Captain Danson.

Hal smirked, “I hope they do, Captain. There is nowhere they can go, but they can get that fear rush before I find them.”

Sandy and Mirium stepped out from behind two different boulders to Hal’s right and a little behind him. In their hands, they each held a mud ball. As they raised them, a slight noise or instinct made Hal turn in their direction. Before he realized what had happened, he was hit in the face.
with two mud balls, one right after the other. Dirt and mud streaked his face and got into his eyes and mouth.

He never lost the grip on his gun, but, sputtering and cursing, he instinctively raised his hands to try to get the dirt out of his eyes. Captain Danson tackled him to the ground. A couple of gunshots were fired wildly but missed everyone. Although struggling to see, Hal was still an experienced fighter and killer. He brought the gun butt down hard on Captain Danson’s head, stunning him. Through blurred vision, he saw Arphrax running toward them. Instead of attacking him directly, Arphrax jumped on his gun arm. The pain made him release the gun, but Arphrax, thrown off balance, fell backward onto the ground. Sandy raced across to the gun and kicked it away from Hal Brestorm toward Arphrax.

As Arphrax reached for the gun, Hal Brestorm freed himself from Captain Danson’s prone body. Struggling to his feet, he raced up the canyon and among the boulders strewn along the side. Arphrax fired a few shots in his direction, but they went wide.

Captain Danson moaned as he returned to consciousness. He looked around afraid of what he would see. To his surprise, Hal Brestorm was not in sight and his three companions were safe.

Captain Danson shook the dirt off as he stood up. When Sandy had explained what happened, he commented, “We’re not out of trouble yet. A man like Hal Brestorm probably has extra weapons in his camp. In a few hours, he’ll be back.”

“But we won’t be here,” said Mirium excitedly, pointing at three approaching spaceships.

They all turned to watch the approaching spaceships. One pulled out ahead, flew over their heads, doing a quick survey of the canyon, and jutting out rocks. All the spaceships were two stories in height. The morning sun gleamed off the scarlet and silver hulls, which identified them as Interstellar Patrol vessels.

The ship which had surveyed the canyon returned. All three were in a straight line in front of Captain Danson and the rest. Slowly, the centre one landed. The other two remained on alert. The entrance ramp in the
nose of the patrol ship was lowered. Two men, in the green and brown everyday uniform of Interstellar officers, descended the ramp with drawn pistols in their hands. Their eyes were scanning for any sign of danger.

“Friendly, aren’t they,” commented Arphrax under his breath.

“You have to remember,” replied Captain Danson, “that they are out of their jurisdiction, and all they have to go on is the report of your friend. As far as they know, this could be an ambush.”

The two officers stopped at the bottom of the ramp.

“Carefully, toss your gun over here,” one of the officers said to Arphrax, who complied.

“I am Captain William Danson of the U.A.F. Gallant.”

The officer ran his eyes over Captain Danson’s dirty work shirt and torn pants. It certainly did not give the appearance of a captain’s uniform.

“Strange that we have had no report of a missing captain.”

“There was an ingenious United Raider plot to take control of my starship. I was replaced with a duplicate and, with Sandy here,” he gave a slight nod of his head toward Sandy, “sold to King Zeholeth.”

“Sounds pretty impossible,” he said skeptically.

“Which is why Sandy was the only person to recognize that an impostor had taken my place.”

Neither officer seemed convinced, but they moved, one to each side of the ramp.

“You two come onboard,” he said.

All four started moving forward.

“Not you two,” the officer said firmly to Arphrax and Mirium.

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“They helped us escape,” objected Captain Danson. “Without them, Sandy and I would still be in the dungeons of King Zeholeth.”

“Perhaps, but they are not citizens of the El Empire. We have no authority to taken them from their home country. They stay.”

“If you leave them here, they will be captured and killed!”

“There is no confirmation that they are in any danger. They stay.” He motioned toward the ramp with his pistol, “You two get onboard.”
Chapter Fifteen: Secondary Control

“I have a plan,” said Lt. Williams. She took the tablet and brought up the blueprint of level 5. She stabbed her finger on a small room near the centre of the floor. “We go there.”

Commander Hankan took the tablet, considering Lt. Williams’ words.

“The Security Center is very close to that,” he said with an edge of doubt in his voice.

“They will be focused on the evacuation. Besides, it is our only chance of taking back control of the Gallant before we are boarded.”

“Can we do it?” asked Commander Hankan. “Only two of us have any experience in this. It’s not like flying a shuttle.”

“It sort of is. Only a larger scale.” Lt. Williams twitched her whiskers, “Listen. I’ll do the technological part. You do Navigation. The others will just have to follow the directions we give. It will work. It has to. Cita can do the heavy lifting, at least, on this short-term basis.”

“The timing will have to be near perfect.” He paused. “But you are right, it’s our only chance.”

“We should wait here until it is almost time. We need to make sure we have the element of surprise.”

“No. Surprise is important, but if they think of their weakness and secure the room before we get there, then we will have no chance. Better to go now, secure it for ourselves, and risk discovery.”

“Go where? Do what?” asked Dick. Nobody had understood what Commander Hankan and Lt. Williams were talking about.

“You’ll see in a few minutes if they haven’t remembered to take our access out of the system. Follow me.”
Commander Hankan rose from the table and strolled to the ElLift. The rest followed obediently. When the doors opened, he stepped aside and allowed them to enter first.

When he stepped in, he said, “Level 5. Section D. Anonymous.”

Since this was only one level below where they were, it was only a minute before the doors opened. Both Commander Hankan and Lt. Williams had drawn guns, set on stun, ready for instant use. The hall was empty. Most of the Security personnel were on the floors with living quarters or in the shuttle bays, preparing for the evacuation.

Lt. Williams led them down the hall. Commander Hankan brought up the rear. They had to turn down two different corridors before their destination came in sight. At the end of the corridor, there was a Security-Lock door. To open it, a person had to place their hand on the reader. All the finger and handprints had to match and the hand temperature had to be natural. If the match failed, the reader sides would instantly fold inward, trapping the hand and person until Security came to release them.

Lt. Williams put her paw up to the scanner. She glanced back at the others, “Here goes…”

Moments later the door opened. They all stepped inside.
“Wow!” exclaimed Dick and Scott together.

“This looks like Main Control,” said Dick.

It was a large room. They had entered through the side wall, with the room’s back to their left and its front to their right. In the centre of a dais, at the back of the room, was the Captain’s Chair. Slightly behind the Captain’s Chair, and to the left, was the Communication Desk. In the same position, but to the right was the Co-Captain’s Desk, which on the Gallant belonged to the navigator, Lt. Togarmah. On the main floor, in front of the dais, were the desks of the Chaplain, Security, Fleet Commander, Onboard Weapons And Defence, Engineering, Science, and a station for a life support technician. Along the front wall was a gigantic view screen. On the sidewall, opposite the door, were a series of small view screens. Unlike the Main Control, a bank of cabinets was on the wall behind the Captain’s Chair. A small room in the back corner was the bathroom.

“It’s Secondary Control,” explained Lt. Williams, going over to the Navigation Desk. “Main Control is on top of the ship. A good position for everyday operations. But if it becomes damaged or, sometimes, when we are going into battle, we shift operations down here.”

Commander Hankan had been busy at the Security Desk.

“There,” he said with satisfaction. “I have disabled the outside hand reader. Now the door can only be opened from the inside.”

Mr. Langlish, who was holding his wife’s hand, said, “So, you are going to divert all the controls down here. Then the false Captain Danson and his gang can’t control the Gallant from Main Control, right?”

“That’s the idea,” confirmed Lt. Williams.

“We’ll help however we can,” said Mr. Langlish, “but there must be a U.R. gang nearby waiting to board our ship. Do the few of us really have the skill to defend the Gallant from an attack?”

“Have faith,” whispered Mrs. Langlish.
“We won’t have to defend the Gallant,” replied Commander Hankan. “That is where we need precise timing. We will monitor communications, but allow them to think they have complete control. Then, when the last shuttle with innocent people has left the Gallant, we will take control, jump to Rank Speed, and they won’t know where we have gone. When we drop out of Rank Speed, we will send a message to U.A.F. Headquarters and any nearby U.A.F starships for help. The Daring is in the vicinity, I believe.”

“But Mom and Dad and everyone from the Gallant will be targeted on the planet,” objected Dick.

“They have the Flyers and Battle Shuttles to defend them until we can get help and return. I do not like it either, but it’s the best we can do.”

Lt. Williams sat down at the Communication Desk so she could monitor the progress of the evacuation. Commander Hankan plotted the course they would take from the Navigation Desk. He entered everything so that at the touch of a button, they would move through Sub-Rank Speed to Rank Speed for half an hour. Then they would drop into normal Speed near the planet Jilwern. Lt. Williams left Communications and moved to her Science Desk to program the computer switch from Main Control to Secondary Control.

Dick amused himself by sitting in the Captain’s Chair. He twirled around to face the cabinets.

“What’s in there?” he asked.

Lt. Williams looked up from her work, “Secondary Control is designed to be self-sufficient for about a week in case of a lockdown. In there are extra weapons, food, drink, emergency medical supplies, and things like that.”

“Weapons?”

Commander Hankan glanced up at Dick, “Don’t even think about it.”

Mrs. Langlish looked at Janna, “Why don’t you help me see if we can fix a meal? It’s been a while since we have eaten, and I’m sure we could all use some nourishment.”

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Commander Hankan stood up, “Things seem to be progressing well. It should be about seven hours before the evacuation is complete. While Mrs. Langlish and Janna are working on dinner, I would like you three to help monitor the various ship’s systems. Scott, you can listen in on the communications and keep us updated if anything happens. Dick, you can sit at the Onboard Weapons System. Get Cita to teach you basic operations just in case we do need to defend the ship. And Mr. Langlish, you can monitor Cita running through Engineering checks. Let us know if anything flags. Flying a starship at Rank Speed puts a strain on everything. Cita will handle most of the operations for the short term that we need them, but we have to be prepared in case more is needed. Get Cita to familiarize you with the basic operations on your desk so that if Lt. Williams or I give you an order, you will know what to do.”

Everyone went to their assigned desk and began getting personalized instructions from Cita. Mrs. Langlish and Janna went to the cabinets. There they discovered a water machine with hot and cold water, a couple of hot plates for cooking, dishes, and lots of powdered and canned food.

“This is going to be a challenge,” said Mrs. Langlish cheerfully. She preferred to cook with fresh ingredients, but knew she had to make do with what she had. Under her skillful directions, she and Janna soon had a meal underway.

Before long, a delicious smell was permeating the room. Everyone started to feel hungry. Mrs. Langlish had Janna take each person a drink of their choice to their work station.

Then she said, “Someone should pray for supper.”

“Mr. Langlish, you can lead us in that,” said Commander Hankan.

“Elniyn, we thank You that You have protected us. We thank You that You are in control, even when we feel so out-of-control. And we thank You now for this food. So Be It.”

Mrs. Langlish dished out her hard work and Janna carried the plates to the various stations.

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“This is amazing,” said Commander Hankan after taking a few bites. “You two made this out of what you found in there? You ladies are very talented.”

Mrs. Langlish smiled in acknowledgment of the compliment. Janna blushed with pleasure.

The hours passed slowly. Mr. Langlish, Scott, and Dick were busy learning all they could in a short time. Janna went to the Life Support desk and kept her eye on the various screens for anything abnormal. Mrs. Langlish sat down at the Chaplain’s desk as she thought her time could best be used in prayer and encouragement. A continual scan of the surrounding space was placed on the main view screen where they could all see the shuttles leaving and returning for new passengers.

Finally, Commander Hankan said, “Scott, put the Main Control Communications on the intercom. They must be getting close to being done now.”

In about half an hour only two shuttles were left onboard.

“That’ll be for the Main Control personnel, but I bet the only people left onboard are Imposter Danson and his gang,” said Commander Hankan.

“What’s that?” asked Dick excitedly, pointing to growing a rectangular shape that had appeared from behind one of the planet’s three moons.

Dick ran his fingers over his keyboard, and a circle appeared on the viewscreen where he wanted them to look. As the shape drew closer, they could make out a spaceship of the size that would have a crew of a couple hundred.

“That’ll be the U.R. ship with the invaders,” said Commander Hankan. “Lt. Williams, let’s get out of here.”

“What if there really is a Glaincor leak?” asked Janna.
“Then we will explode sooner rather than later,” replied Commander Hankan bluntly.
Chapter Sixteen: An Act Of War

Neither Captain Danson nor Sandy moved toward the Interstellar Patrol Ship.

The officer on the right said with another wave of his gun, “I have ordered you onboard. If you don’t comply, I’ll stun you and drag you onboard.”

“I am Captain Willian Danson of the United Alpha Fleet Gallant,” repeated Captain Danson. “These people have been placed under my protection and are my responsibility. We will not leave without them. If you stun us, forcing us to abandon them, I will personally bring charges of Dereliction Of Duty against you and your partner.”

As the officer rolled the possibilities around in his mind, Captain Danson continued, “Taking us all is the only safe choice for you. If I am not who I say I am, then you can arrest me and return my two friends here, if you wish. If I am who I say I am, then your duty is clear. Believe me, I make a better friend than an enemy.”

“Very well,” said the officer.

All four trudged onboard and were directed to the back of the ship, where there were six cells. They were all searched and then put in separate cells.

“We’re hungry,” said Sandy quietly, as the force field went up. “Could we please have something to eat?”

“After we do the DNA scan on you all, then we will see about breakfast.”

The second officer left and returned with the portable DNA scanner. They lowered the force field just long enough to scan each person.
“Which DNA database do you use?’ asked Sandy.

The officer looked surprised that she would know about the different databases, but replied, “Our Head Quarters uses the one on Royiana.”

“Mirium and my DNA won’t be in any databases,” said Arphax.

The officer looked at him, “Your DNA should not be in any databases. If it is, you have a problem…”

With that, they both left. Half an hour later, the second officer returned with four breakfasts. They weren’t the best tasting, but they were filling.

It was about four hours later when the officers returned. The senior one pressed the button to eliminate the force field around Captain Danson and Sandy’s cells.

As they stepped into the hall, Sandy said, “I thought it took a lot longer to get DNA results.”

The second officer smiled, “Not for Interstellar Patrol. We have priority at Royiana.” He offered his hand to Sandy, “By the way, I am Corporal Madai and my partner is Sergeant Ronan.”

Captain Danson offered his hand to Sgt. Ronan. Sgt. Ronan took it, but there was a hint of resentment in his eyes. He did not like having his job threatened.

“I’m sorry for my aggressive language,” said Captain Danson, “but it was essential that we all come together.”

“What about us?” asked Arphax when the officers showed no sign of releasing him and his wife.

Sgt. Ronan looked at him, “Until we get all this sorted out, you are going to stay there.”
Arphax looked like he was about to object, but Captain Danson raised his hand as he said, “Patience. When we are aboard the Gallant, you will be an honoured guest.”

The two officers, Captain Danson, and Sandy went up to the cockpit on the second level. Captain Danson and Sandy sat down at the table in the back of the room. Cpl. Madai went to get Captain Danson a cup of ameer and Sandy a glass of ladseen juice. Sgt. Ronan sat down at the controls.

“Where are we headed?” asked Captain Danson.

“We’re going to the Gallant,” replied Sgt. Ronan. “That seems to be where all the answers are.” He paused, then added, “Strange, that the U.A.F. still has no knowledge of a missing Captain. Very careless of them.”

Captain Danson did not respond. They were headed back to the Gallant, and that was all the mattered.

“We’ll be able to free Mom and Dad and find Scott,” said Sandy happily.

Captain Danson smiled; although, he knew it would not be quite as simple as that. The impostor would have to be exposed first. Would that be easy or hard? Would there be fighting? All unknowns.

Cpl. Madai set their drinks in front of them. He was about to sit down when Sgt. Ronan motioned him to his seat in the front.

“We have a problem,” said Sgt. Ronan. “The U.A.F. just informed me that the Gallant has diverted course to the planet Livoso because of a Glaincor leak in the engines. They are evacuating the ship.”

Cpl. Madai began new navigation calculations.

“A Glaincor leak?” said Captain Danson. “That doesn’t sound right. There is something else going on. There’s a different reason the impostor wants my crew off my ship.”

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Cpl. Madai looked over at Sgt. Ronan, “There is good news. Livoso is closer. We can make it with one more jump. Livoso has three moons. I suggest we jump so we come out in the shadow of the moon, Kinor. That will give us a chance to scope things out while, hopefully, not being detected ourselves.”

Sgt. Ronan nodded, “Do it.”

“Shadow of the moon?” asked Sandy confused.

Captain Danson’s mind was elsewhere, but he answered almost automatically, “The shadow of the moon is a place close to a moon where it is hard for scanners to differentiate between objects like asteroids, small spaceships, floating debris, and the like.”

Cpl. Madai glanced back at them, “It will still take a few hours to get there.”

Sandy stood up, “May I make lunch?”

Sgt. Ronan looked at her. It would be good to give her something to do to keep her mind occupied, even if she messed it up.

“That would be nice,” he said. “The kitchen is right down the hall.”

Sandy was pleasantly surprised with the compact but versatile kitchen. Her eyes ran over the supplies, her mind considering the various possibilities. Before long, a delicious smell was floating out of the kitchen and into the cockpit. The three men were suddenly famished.

Sandy appeared at the cockpit doorway, “It’s just about ready. I’ll bring it in here, but first, I want to take some to Arphax and Mirium.”

Cpl. Madai stood up, “I’ll help you.”

The two of them took the meals and drinks down to the cell area. Cpl. Madai opened an area in the force field so that Sandy could pass the food.

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in. Back in the cockpit area, they all sat down and Sandy served her meal. She beamed with pleasure as all three complimented her on the delicious and nutritious lunch.

It was five hours later when the Interstellar Patrol ship appeared in the shadow of Kinor. Sgt. Ronan and Cpl. Madai were busy at the controls. Captain Danson stood behind them, watching everything closely. Sandy stood a little behind them, wanting to know what was happening, but trying to stay out of the way.

“Look, there’s a ship coming out of the shadow of that moon,” said Cpl. Madai. “Looks like a class 4, with a possible crew of a couple hundred.”

Sgt. Ronan watched it and muttered to himself, “What’s it doing here? And where is the Gallant? There is no sign of it.”

“I see a few shuttles heading to the planet’s surface,” said Cpl. Madai. He used his scanners to magnify them and then plotted their destination. “I found your crew, Captain.”

There, near a beach, a large camp was being set up. It covered more than a mile as about 100,000 people were being organized into emergency tent shelters, meals were being prepared, medical and security stations were being set up and more. All the Flyers and most of the shuttles had landed around the perimeter of the gigantic camp. The last few shuttles were landing.

“What are they doing?” Captain Danson asked himself. “According to protocol half of the Flyers and a quarter of the shuttles should constantly be providing a protective covering. But they’re all on the ground.”

“What is that?” asked Sandy.

Her eyes were on a small view screen that looked out into space. Seven blips had just appeared on it. Cpl. Madai switched it to the main view screen and magnified it. Seven ships of strange design had just dropped out of Rank speed. They were in three rows. Two on each side.
and three in the middle, but a little further back. Cpl. Madai began running an identification check on the ships, but Captain Danson recognized them.

“Those front two are Tricotian warships, the back two are troop carriers, and the middle ones are cargo ships.”

“Tricotian warships in Empire space!” exclaimed Sgt. Ronan. “That’s an act of war!”

“Get me through to the command centre on the ground immediately,” commanded Captain Danson urgently.

Moments later, Captain Danson’s Co-Captain, Lt. Togarmah, appeared on the screen.

“Captain, where did you go with the Gallant? You should be on a shuttle coming down here.”

Captain Danson ignored his question, “Why are all the Flyers and shuttles on the ground?”

Lt. Togarmah looked confused. “That was your orders, Captain. You said the Tricotians were sending an unarmed supply ship across the border to help, and to keep our vessels on the ground to avoid any accidental incidents.”

“That order is now countermanded. You have two Tricotian warships approaching along with two troop transports and three cargo ships. Get our ships in the air immediately. The Flyers are to protect our people on the ground and repel any ground assault. The Battle Shuttles are to engage the Tricotians. The main target will be the cargo vessels. If we can destroy those, they have no reason to violate our space. Captain Danson out.”

“Why will taking out the lightly armed cargo ships stop the attack?” asked Sgt. Ronan.
“Undoubtedly, the U. R.’s sold as many of my crew as would fit in those ships as slaves to the Tricotians. The Tricotians expected to be in and out quickly with their prize and without the Empire ever knowing what happened. With the cargo ships destroyed, there is no prize, only risking a war - which I doubt they planned on right now.”

The Tricotian ships moved closer.

“Put me through to the Tricotian Commander,” said Captain Danson. “Let’s see if we can end this without bloodshed.”

Moments later, the Tricotian Commander flashed on the screen. He was a muscular man with icy blue eyes, and a scar running across his forehead. He was dressed in a dark brown military uniform. On his right hand was a signet ring, revealing that he was more than just a normal commander.

“I am Captain William Danson of the United Alpha Fleet Gallant,” said Captain Danson in a firm voice. “You have violated our treaty and crossed into Empire space.”

“We were invited to aid in a rescue,” the commander responded smoothly. “And you do not appear to be on your bridge.”

Captain Danson was well aware that the Tricotian had guessed they were in the shadow of the moon and were intensifying their efforts to identify them. When that happened, a mere flick of his finger would send a reign of death down on them.

“I am in the command shuttle. Your deception is exposed. You will not find us either defenceless or unprepared. Your U.R. allies have abandoned you. If you want a full-scale war, then you can have it. We will send you home like a whipped bogta with his tail between his legs.”

The Tricotian Commander, as well as Captain Danson, saw 1,000 Battle Shuttles rising from the planet’s surface and heading for them.
“If our allies have truly abandoned us, Captain, then where is your precious Gallant.”

Captain Danson knew that if the Gallant was in enemy hands, they had no hope of successful resistance. The Tricotian Commander knew it, too.

“If you want this war,” said Captain Danson grimly, “you will find out where my Gallant is, but it will be the last thing you learn in this life.”
Chapter Seventeen: A Small Thing

Scott was still monitoring communications when a notification came in.

He sounded confused as he said, “Someone claiming to be Captain Danson is trying to contact us.”

The Gallant had dropped out of Rank speed and was just sitting in space. They had sent a message to United Alpha Fleet Headquarters. The U.A.F. Daring was heading to Livoso at top speed; although it would take them five days to reach it. The plan was that when they received confirmation that the Daring had secured the situation, they were to return.

“It could be a trick,” said Lt. Williams. “Impostor Danson knows he has to take Secondary Control if he is to regain control of the ship.”

“Put it on screen,” said Commander Hankan.

Scott obeyed. Instantly, Captain Danson appeared on the main view screen. He was wearing a dirty, ripped shirt and black pants with holes in them. The pants might have been part of an original uniform, but it was hard to tell.

“How do we know you are the real Captain Danson?” inquired Commander Hankan.

Captain Danson allowed himself a slight smile, “Because I have indisputable proof.” He motioned to someone off-screen. Sandy moved to his side. Cries of joy and relief broke out in Secondary Control. Everyone wanted to talk at once.
Just then, an alarm began sounding from the Security desk. Commander Hankan quickly went over to see the cause.

“What’s happening?” asked Captain Danson.

“We had the Gallant on lockdown, but someone has blown open a bay door and a shuttle has escaped.”

“Nothing we can do about that now,” said Captain Danson. “I want you to return here immediately. We will board a Security detail and sweep the Gallant for Impostor Danson and any of his gang that are still there. Then we can get our crew back onboard.”

“Great to have you back, Captain,” said Lt. Williams.

Captain Danson smiled.

When, five days later, the U.A.F. Daring arrived, everything was getting back to normal on the U.A.F. Gallant. The ship had been swept, but all that was found were three dead men in Main Control. One was Impostor Danson with a gunshot through the centre of his forehead: the price of failure. Lord Hemann was nowhere to be found. Presumably, he had escaped in the shuttle along with the rest of the plotters. The Tricotians had returned to their side of the border at Rank speed.

Everyone was back onboard and returning to their daily routines. Captain Danson, Commander Hankan, Lt. Williams, and the Langlish and Lewis families were sitting in the conference room on the top level of the Gallant. Everyone had their favourite drink in front of them. They had just finished going over the final form of the report to ensure that all the details were correct.

“Just think,” said Captain Danson, leaning back in his chair, “how such an insignificant thing can make such a great impact.”

“What do you mean?” asked Sandy.
“If you had not offered to make me some Rovern Brownies, this United Raider plot would never have been discovered in time. The Gallant would be in United Raider hands, and many of the 100,000 people onboard would have been sold as slaves in the Tricotian Republic and the rest killed.”

“Nothing is insignificant in the plans of Elniyn.”

*****

Epilogue

Sister Jarry took the bandages off the man’s face. Once again, she rinsed out his eyes. They had become infected from dirt that had been rubbed in. For a while, she had thought he might even lose his sight, but tender care had flushed the dirt out and brought the infection under control. She was confident that there would be no permanent impairment.

When she had finished, the dark eyes looked around the hospital room, taking in every detail. Then he looked at her. She stopped herself from shuddering. She had often thought over the last few days, how empty and hollow those eyes appeared to be. Still, there was hope for everyone to experience the love of Elniyn.

The man stood up and headed for the door. He had no word of thanks for all her efforts which had saved his eyes.

“I wish you would stay for another couple of days,” said Sister Jarry. “Just to be sure that we got everything.”

The man stopped at the doorway and looked back at her. He did not respond to her comment, but said, “Sister, do you believe in vows?”

Sister Jarry looked confused, “I certainly believe one should not make vows rashly.”

“Sister, I have killed many people in my lifetime, but I vow to you that I will not kill anyone else...”
Sister Jarry’s heart gave a little leap of hope. Perhaps her kindness had reached this man. Then his next hard, cold words crushed her.

“…until I have killed that brat, Sandy Langlish.”

*****

We have reached the conclusion of this story, but Scott and Sandy, with their friends, will be back in another exciting adventure as Hal Brestorn plots his revenge in My Life For Yours.

You can keep up-to-date on new adventures in the El Empire at www.El-Empire.com.

Have you read Scott and Sandy’s first adventure? Learn what happens when they first moved onboard the U.A.F. Gallant. See the sample chapter below.

*****

Books In The El Empire

Scott And Sandy #1: The Gallant Mystery

Scott And Sandy #2: The Disappearance Of Captain Danson

Scott And Sandy #3: My Life For Yours

Dragonslayer #1: Codename: Dragonslayer

Star Action #1: New Beginnings

Star Action #2: Song Of The Universe [coming soon]

The Challenger Detectives #1: The King’s Crown [coming soon]

Order your Kindle or Paperback copy from Amazon: search ‘El Empire Glenn Davis’

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A Note From The Author:

I hope you have enjoyed this story of the El Empire. While you can read the Backstory on www.El-Empire.com, I did want to make a couple of notes.

In the El Empire universe, Earth has become the Lost Planet. People in other parts of the universe know the events of earth’s history up until the time of the Flood when all contact with Earth was lost. So while they know about Redemption through a small portion of Earth history and prophetic revelation, they do not know the Personal Names of the Triune God as we know them. They use the following names:

**El** is the Father, although it is sometimes used of God in a general sense.

**Elniyn** is the Son of El, although both are equal and co-eternal. It is Elniyn Who became a human being and willingly offered His life as a sacrifice for our sins to restore our relationship with God. We are privileged to know Him as Jesus Christ.

**El Pneuma** is the Spirit of God at work in the universe. We know Him as the Holy Spirit.

**The Book of El** is a collection of known Earth history, prophetic revelation, wise sayings, and poetry. It is now a closed book, i.e. no more can be added to it. While it is highly valued, it is not considered to be inerrant like the Bible. The believers [Elers] would give their lives to have a copy of the Bible just as many people on Earth have sacrificed their lives so that we can have the Scriptures commonly available in our own languages.

We, who know the reality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit along with the Holy Bible, are truly the most blessed people in the universe!

God bless,
Glenn
CHAPTER 1: A NEW HOME

'The U.A.F. Gallant! What a great name for a starship. I just know we're going to have tons and tons of fun living here. Sandy and I will explore every square inch... except for the restricted areas. Then maybe...'

"Scott Langlish!"

Scott jerked his head around. His mother was looking through the serving window of the kitchen, into the dining room where Scott and Sandy sat working at the table. She had an excellent view from there.

"Don't daydream when you're supposed to be doing your school work."

Glancing down at his Math workbook, Scott saw he had only done two questions in the last half hour. One of them was wrong. He had written 5 square yards instead of 5 squared. From across the polished, wooden table, his thirteen-year-old sister snickered. Scott was a year older than Sandy.

"Sorry, mom," he replied in what he hoped sounded like a subdued voice. He didn't know how she could expect him to concentrate their first day living on the largest class of starship ever built. It was like a city flying through space!

"I know this is exciting," she continued with a twinkle in her eyes, "but your school work still needs to be done. As soon as you finish your day's goals, you may go out and look around."

Scott sighed and looked back down at his workbook.

For the next hour it was all Math and Science. Boring stuff when compared with exploring one of the largest starships ever to sail the outer reaches of the galaxy, but what must be done, must be done.
The Langlish family had just moved onto the Gallant starship after Mr. Langlish had finally gotten permission to open his furniture store on the gigantic starship. It was amazing how much red tape and security clearances had to be passed before a family could live on the Gallant. It was understandable because spies or criminals would be extra dangerous when the Gallant was sent on secret missions. Still, it had been frustrating, even Scott and Sandy had been interviewed a couple of times.

Although large sections of the Gallant were empty [they always were except in times of relief operations or war], the starship still carried over 100,000 people. Most of the people were military personnel and their families. But some of the people, like Mr. Langlish, were civilians who had seen the opportunity of not only selling to the people who lived on the starship, but also to the people on the remote planets that the Gallant visited and protected.

Mr. Langlish had leased an apartment on Level 45. He and Mrs. Langlish had been there several times getting it ready, but late last night was the first time Scott and Sandy had seen it. It was a medium-sized apartment with three bedrooms, a bathroom with a tub almost big enough to swim in, a family room, a study, a dining room, a living room, a storeroom, and a kitchen.

"Finished!" declared Sandy closing her books with satisfaction. She went into the kitchen.

Moments later Scott was at her side. He rubbed his hand through her shoulder-length, light-brown hair. "So am I."

"Don't Scott," she complained, ducking out of his reach.

The musical notes of the doorbell interrupted them. Mrs. Langlish walked between Scott and Sandy, separating them on her way to the door. She pressed the Open button and the door slid noiselessly into the wall on the right side.
Three people stood in the light blue hallway. The first one was a tall, slender woman with short, black hair. She looked to be about forty. In her hands was a tray with a towel covering the top of it. On her left was a teenage girl. She had her mother’s dark hair, only longer, and dazzling green eyes. The other person was a boy of thirteen. His hair was a dark brown, like Scott's, and freckles were dotted over his grinning face.

"Hello. I'm Mrs. Lewis," said the woman with a friendly smile as she introduced herself.

"I'm Mrs. Langlish."

"We're your neighbours across the hall. Janna's just baked some of her special chocolate-chip cookies and we thought you might like to try them."

"That was very thoughtful of you. Won’t you come in?"

Complete introductions were made. The girl's name turned out to be Janna and the boy's name was Dick. Soon they were all seated in the comfortable family room chairs and couch except for Mrs. Langlish. She went into the kitchen to start making a pot of tain, then returned to ask the young people if they would prefer milk, rejer juice, or lemonade.

"Milk." said Sandy at once, "It's the only thing that really goes with ..." Sandy stopped when she caught her mother’s eye. Silently it warned, “Where are your manners? Guests first.”

“...chocolate-chip cookies,” finished Dick.

“Actually, may I have a cup of tain as well,” asked Janna.

“Of course,” answered Mrs. Langlish with a smile. She glanced at Scott with an unspoken question.

Scott secretly wished he could have a cup of tain as well to impress Janna, but he knew his mother might not allow it so he decided not to risk asking.
“I’ll have milk, thanks.”

Mrs. Langlish returned with the drinks on a small tray. Sandy passed the milk around as Mrs. Langlish poured the tain into three cups. Soon Mrs. Langlish and Mrs. Lewis were chatting like old friends. Where Scott, Sandy, and Dick were concerned, the cookies and drinks simply seemed to disappear. Janna nibbled on a cookie and sipped her tain with a contemptuous eye on Dick, who had just gulped down the last of his milk and was helping himself to his fifth cookie.

"That's enough, Dick," said Mrs. Lewis who had also noticed.

"But mom..." began Dick. He caught a glint in her eyes that said no more. It was amazing how much a mother’s eye could communicate!

"Let's explore," said Sandy wiping a milk mustache from her face.

"We'll show you around," offered Janna as she set her empty cup gently on the low table.

"They've got some really neat places,” added Dick.

"You can eat out if you like." said Mrs. Langlish as they went to put their glasses in the dishwasher, "Do you two have your cards and POI?"

"Yes, mom," replied Scott and Sandy in unison.

"Good. Be sure to be back by six, because Sgt. Walters is coming to talk with us about life here on the Gallant."

"We will."

When they were standing in the outside hall Janna asked, "What would you like to do first?"

"What is there to do?" asked Scott looking around and trying to remember all the things they had read about the Gallant.
The hallway seemed to stretch away in both directions almost into infinity. Every 150 feet it was intersected by another hallway. All the main hallways in the Gallant were 15 feet wide. The walls were painted in light, friendly colours. Each section was a different colour. On the doors were printed in neat, black letters the apartment number and the family name of the people who lived there.

"Let's go to the amusement park," suggested Dick.

"Great idea," said Sandy.

Janna made a face as if to say she could have thought of a better idea; however, she said nothing as she led the way to the ElLift. Stepping through the doorway onto the ElLift, they could feel the light pressure of the ElLift as it adjusted to their number and weight.

“All to Amusement Park section three,” said Dick.

There was no sensation of movement even though they were zooming through the belly of the Gallant toward their destination. A couple of minutes later the door slid open and they were in the middle of the amusement park, which was two levels high. They were surrounded by different rides, games, and concession stands. Bright, lively colours were everywhere giving the park a festive look. Laughter, squeals of delight, and an occasional groan of disappointment floated through the air.

"Let's go on the Crash Fighters," said Dick as they wandered through the park.

"That is so childish," commented Janna with scorn oozing from her voice.

"No, it's not!" responded Dick, "Crash Fighters are exciting. Com'on Sandy, you're not scared, are you?"

"Of course not. I love bumping into people and so does Scott."
Scott blushed. He had been thinking about how beautiful Janna was, and he didn't want to say anything to offend her. "That was a long time ago," he managed to mutter.

Sandy looked at her brother in surprise, "But..."

"Forget it," said Scott, his voice a bit firmer, "You and Dick go and play."

Sandy frowned at the way her beloved brother was trying to sound 'grown-up' to impress Janna. She shook her head in disappointment as she set off after Dick, who was already on his way to the Crash Fighters. She soon forgot about Scott and Janna though as she climbed into her Crash Fighter. It was a circular ball with a seat and controls in the very centre. With the controls, the ball could be made to roll in any direction in the arena including up the slanted walls. The seat and controls were padded and fixed so that no matter how the outside of the ball spun the inside stayed straight and level. The object of the game was to push or bump or trick your opponent down the court, which was about double the length of a tennis court, and across his own goal line. There were always lots of surprises as the two players bounced off the walls, ceiling, floor, and each other.

For the next hour and a half Sandy and Dick enjoyed the rides in the park. Scott and Janna wandered around. They tried a few of what Janna considered the more dignified rides. Scott would have rather been zipping along with Sandy and Dick but, on the other hand, he enjoyed Janna's company.

"If you two kids are finished, let's get something to eat," said Janna in her superior voice as Sandy and Dick came off of a ride.

"Don't talk like an adult!" snapped Dick, "'Cause you're not. You're only fifteen, so there!"

"Well, I don't sleep with a stuffed gaboo bear."

Dick didn't miss a beat, "And I don't spend two hours in front of a mirror admiring myself!"

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Scott and Sandy looked on in surprise as Dick and Janna glared at each other. They would never have dreamed of talking like that, and they could well imagine what their parents would have said if they tried. It would not have been pleasant!

Cautiously Sandy ventured, "I do feel a little hungry." She half expected that they would both turn on her.

Instead, Dick grinned at her as if nothing had happened, "There's a good Holburger place two levels down."

Janna headed for the nearest ElLift with Scott following.

Dick was still grinning. He knew he had scored one on Janna. "Sometimes she gets too haughty for words. You can't let her push you around. I guess Scott's probably like that too."

"No, he isn't," protested Sandy loyally.

"He will be soon."

"Not Scott."

By that time they had reached the ElLift where Janna was impatiently tapping her foot. Dick flashed her one of his broad, impish grins. They entered and were quickly zoomed to their next destination.

As they were getting off the ElLift a man who was just getting onto it smiled at them and said, "Hello. How are you, ladies and gentlemen, doing this evening?"

The man was medium height and obviously in good shape. His dark brown hair matched his merry, brown eyes. He was wearing a uniform that consisted of a green pull-on shirt, black dress pants, and black dress shoes.

"I...I..." stuttered Janna.
"Fine, thank you, sir," replied Scott politely, "How about you?"

“Great," said the man with another broad smile as the doors closed cutting them off.

"Do you know who that was?" squealed Janna in excitement.

"Yes," said Dick, "and you made a complete fool of yourself...as usual."

It was apparent the man was an officer in some division and Scott was trying to remember what the green represented. He knew quite a few of the colors: red for security, blue for medical staff, purple for science, white for the chaplain corps, yellow for the fleet pilots and commanders. But the meaning of the green eluded him.

"It was Captain Danson!" whispered Janna ignoring her brother.

"Wow," said Scott, "the captain of the Gallant."

"It was nice of him to notice us," said Sandy impressed by the handsome leader.

"He is nice...and sooo handsome."

"And single," commented Dick maliciously.

Janna went a deep red and bit her lip in silence.

In victory, Dick led the way to the Holburger restaurant. It happened to be a fully computerized one. The young people punched their orders into a machine on the wall and then sat down at one of the nearby tables. A few minutes later a light blinked and their orders were ready. The Holburgers were delicious. Dick had two because, as he said, "I'm a growing boy" to which Janna commented, "He's a pig."

When they had finished their Holburgers Dick said, "Let's blow their minds on level 33."

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For once Janna smiled, "I think that's the first good idea you've had."

"Which puts me one up on you," shot back Dick.

Level 33 didn't look very special when they got there. It was like an apartment level with the same wide halls. The walls were painted a light brown, with white doors and black lettering. The only strange thing was that the doorways and intersecting halls were spaced further apart than normal.

"This is my favorite one," said Janna as she led the way to a nearby door. The lettering read 'Woods IV'.

Janna pressed the entrance button. As the door slid open she stepped aside so Scott and Sandy could go in first. When they did, they had to stop and stare in amazement. It was like stepping out of the Gallant into the middle of a light forest.

A stone pathway wound around bushes and trees. No walls were in sight. Even the doorway behind them had vanished. The ceiling looked like a sky with light, fluffy clouds actually floating across it. The sound of running water reached their ears.

Janna and Dick laughed at the startled expressions on the faces of Scott and Sandy.

"It's an advanced Grum 3D projection on the walls and ceiling," explained Janna.

"And most of the bushes and trees are fake."

"When Dick first came in here he climbed one of the trees and hit his head on the ceiling although it's two levels high," laughed Janna.

Dick rubbed the top of his head at the memory, "At least I didn't ask how they managed to grow it."
Scott wasn't paying attention. He reached out to where the wall was. He could feel it with his fingers but his eyes told him it was merely air, for there were trees beyond it and, yes, he saw a deer moving...

"Fascinating," he mumbled.

"If you want to know where the door is you just say 'open' or 'door' or clap your hands or make any loud noise," said Dick clapping his hands. Instantly the door reappeared behind them with the phone speaker and button on its right side.

"Let's go to the waterfall," said Janna pushing passed Scott.

She half ran down the path, forgetting for a second her grown-up airs. As they went along they came across several other paths, but Janna stuck to the main one. Soon they came to a nine-foot waterfall flowing into a small round pool. A thin river snaked its way into the woods.

"Is it fake too?" asked Sandy.

Dick dipped his hand into the water and splashed her, "Does it feel like it?"

"No," squealed Sandy jumping back.

"At night they put a 3D of the stars up there," said Janna looking at the ceiling/sky, "It looks wonderful."

"I'm sure it does," said Scott.

"Try and find me!" said Dick to Sandy as he dashed down another path.

Scott and Janna sat down on the pool's edge as Sandy wandered off in search of Dick. In a few minutes, Sandy came to a clump of trees. It reminded her of a similar thicket they had in their backyard before they moved. She ran her fingers over the bark, half lost in thought. It sure felt real enough.
'I'm going to miss our old home,' she thought, 'but living on the Gallant is going to be fun, too. There are so many things to do and see.'

Absent-mindedly looking through the trees she saw two men talking. The man with his back to her was wearing the black dress pants and red, short-sleeved shirt of a security man. The other man was wearing everyday clothes - a light brown shirt and navy blue pants. The second man had jet black hair and, what Sandy really noticed, a long twirly mustache.

Suddenly the security man collapsed. Sandy saw a small gun in the other man's hand. Without thinking, she screamed. Jerking his head up the man stared into the trees, but couldn't quite see Sandy. For a minute he hesitated. Then the sounds of the other young people calling out for Sandy reached them. He shoved the gun into his pants and under his shirt. Turning, he disappeared into the bushes.

Scott was the first one to Sandy's side. She didn't say anything, only slowly raised her hand and pointed to the still body of the security man. When Dick saw the man he brushed passed them and ran to him. He rolled the security man over onto his back.

Looking back at Janna, who was standing in the trees, he exclaimed, "It's dad!"

CHAPTER 2: A TRAITOR?

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Look for this adventure and others as they become available on www.El-Empire.com. You can also read the Back Story for the El Empire and much more. Check it out!

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From Codename: Dragonslayer

Chapter 1

NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS

The floor of the rectangular room was covered with a thick, tan carpet, the kind which invites bare feet to shuffle across it. The walls were hung with bright curtains in the royal colours of scarlet, white, and purple giving the small room a sense grandeur. Along the left wall was a bar with a variety of non-alcoholic drinks. On the right side were five velvety-soft chairs semi-circling a table. A computer screen was embedded in the table under a glass cover at each seating place. On the ceiling was the three-dimensional symbol of the El Empire - two semi-transparent hands holding the stars and planets of the Empire.

Alone in the room, relaxing in one of the chairs, was a youth of sixteen. He was wearing the blue and white uniform of the students of the Reman Academy. A forgotten drink of exotic Rago juice was tilting dangerously in one hand as his light brown eyes were glued to the last pages of an exciting adventure book: Strikemaster In Trouble.

A sign escaped from Carl, as he set the book down on the table. He remembered his drink just in time to save his uniform from a sticky wash.

Taking a deep sip Carl said to himself, "I'm glad I'm not the hero type. Nothing exciting ever happens to me, and that's just fine. This adventure stuff sounds just too uncomfortable for me."

"Pardon?"

Carl hadn't noticed the door opening behind him. He turned his chair around to face the tall, skinny man who had just entered the room. The man was wearing the uniform of the Empire Security Elite - a scarlet, pull-on shirt with a gold stripe down each sleeve and black pants. A pistol was strapped on his right hip. The man was Scott Anderson, Carl's pilot/
bodyguard on what was about to become the most life-changing trip of Carl's life.

"Oh, nothing. I was just mumbling to myself. How long 'til we get to Yekin?"

"Ten to twelve hours, depending. But we'll be stopping on Hesnortor to re-fuel in about half an hour."

"Can't the Pure Delight go any faster?"

"Hey, my friend," replied Scott rubbing his hand through Carl's short brown hair, "this is one of the fastest spacecrafts in its class. Nothing but the best for the nephew of Lord Nelson. But why are you in such a hurry to get back to school?"

Carl ducked and laughed. "It's only because this is my last time. Three more months of boarding school and I'll be free!" Carl sighed, "Well, not free really. I get to go back and help Uncle Nelson in his company. Which reminds me, you work pretty closely with Uncle Nelson, don't you?"

Scott shrugged, "I've been assigned as his bodyguard quite often, if that's what you mean."

"Have you noticed anything strange about him lately?"

"Strange?" Scott looked surprised.

"Oh, I don't know." said Carl groping for the words to describe an inner feeling, "He just seems more grumpy than he used to be."

Scott grunted, "I'm sure the Emperor's top advisor has more than enough problems and worries to make him a little grumpy."

"I suppose you're right. It's just that he seemed more touchy - or even distant somehow. It's probably my imagination."
"Undoubtedly." Scott turned to go, "I'm going to prepare for our landing on Hesnortor."

"While you're re-fueling I'll wander through the spaceport. I want to see if I can pick up another Strikemaster book."

"Why? Everyone ever written is available at your finger tips." Scott nodded to the computer screens.

Carl shook his head, "It just not the same. You need the feel of a good book in your hands."

Scott frowned, "Still I wish you wouldn't. After all, I'm responsible for your safety until you get back to school."

"Don't worry, you won't fail your duty. I'm not important enough for anything to happen to me. And even if I was, it certainly wouldn't happen on a barren piece of rock like Hesnortor."

*****

Carl wasn't far wrong when he described the planet Hesnortor as a barren piece of rock. Only it and a few other fuel stations existed in the Middle Zone, which was a large, mostly unpopulated area of space between the major populated areas of the Gractor and Neborn systems. Hesnortor had no atmosphere. It's 40,000 inhabitants lived in a domed town connected to several spaceports by enclosed tubes.

"They haven't got it," muttered Carl as he stepped out of a bookstore in terminal 3. "Maybe they have in T5."

Carl headed for the underground passage to Terminal 5 unaware that a pair of eyes were watching him. They belonged to a man about 40 years old with pre-maturely gray hair. His cold, black eyes were set in a weather-beaten face - some said they were the eyes of man without a soul. The hands were callosed, but the fingernails were neatly trimmed back. A cruel scar ran down his cheek where a slicerblade has touched it long ago. A gun was strapped in low in gunslinger fashion on his hip.

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Terminal 3 was connected to Terminal 5 by a long concrete tunnel. Few people used the tunnel since there was seldom a real reason to change terminals.

Quickly Carl walked through the twisting tube. He wanted to be back before Scott came looking for him. No point in getting in trouble if it wasn't necessary. Suddenly, as he came around a corner, he stopped dead in his tracks. He had just entered a long straight stretch about midway between the two terminals. Halfway down it five youths had an older man pinned against the wall. For a moment Carl could do nothing. Laughter and faint pleading flitted into Carl's ears.

The five hoodlums had their backs to Carl. Their victim was slumping against the wall with his eyes closed. No one had seen Carl.

"If I back up now no one will ever know I was here," thought Carl. "I can call the police. They would be too late to help that man, but maybe they could catch those guys. It's the only thing I can do. I'm not trained in fighting. I'm not a hero. I'll have to get help. I can't do anything, I'd only get myself killed too...without helping the man. No point in both of us dying."

Still he remained motionless, his eyes glued on the scene. His heart argued loudly with his mind and fear ravished his stomach. Sweat broke out on his forehead as the conflict which raged within. "If I leave I'll never be able to live with myself...and if I don't they'll kill me, too. Sometimes things have to be done no matter what happens, but is this one of those times? If I could save the man my duty would be clear, but I can do nothing except get myself killed..."

Just then the leader raised a Slicerblade. Its short energy beam could cut through flesh and bone like waving your hand through the air.

Something snapped inside Carl. Without thinking he yelled out, "NO!" and started running toward them, hoping he would die quickly.
From Star Action #1: New Beginnings

Chapter: 1 Kidnapped

"Come on, Janet, give me back my book!" exclaimed Peter.

"Come and get it," was the lively response from his blue-eyed sister.

A cool, gentle breeze swept across the small clearing where Peter and Janet had enjoyed a picnic lunch under Axin's hot sun. Peter was now laying on the grass looking up at his sister who held out his book with a teasing gleam in her eyes. Peter closed his eyes and pretended to relax.

"What are you doing with the Book of El anyway?" Janet asked, disappointment showing in her voice. "You're not an Eler."

"I know, but the book has a lot of interesting things to say. Besides, it's small enough to carry with me."

“You could carry a thousand books on your Tphone!”

“I know, but there is something special about a real book.”

Janet tossed the book at him, "Get out the Flying Disc."

Picking the book off his chest, Peter commented, "I've just eaten enough to fill a Centaur and you want me to go hopping all over the place playing catch? Have a heart!"

"You're only a year younger than I am so quit acting like you're fifty. Get the disc and play like a seventeen year-old should and I'll whip you."

"That'll be the day!" laughed Peter jumping up. He slid the Book of El into his back pocket. "Get ready for the fastest game you've ever played."
After fifteen minutes of intense racing, jumping, and catching, they collapsed on the soft, bluish-green grass. In a few minutes their laughter died down. They lay panting and soaking up the sun. Janet tighten up her blond pony-tail which had loosen with their strenuous game.

Soon faint voices reached their ears. As the voices grew steadily closer, they realized the people were on a path which would take them right through the clearing. Although they didn't like the idea of having their picnic disturbed, they paid no attention to the sounds. Peter nibbled on his unfinished lettuce, tomato and onion sandwich. Janet absent-mindedly plucked a weed from beside their picnic blanket.

The buzz of conversation from the approaching group flowed their way on the breeze. Suddenly, Peter sat straight up, a look of terror in his eyes. He had heard one phrase in the conversation clearly: "This must be the biggest thing the U.R.'s have done in a long time."

"What is it?" asked Janet confused by his reaction.

"U.R’s," he hissed.

Then she understood as fears lanced her own heart. The U.R.'s were the largest criminal organization in the known universe. They were infamous for their ruthlessness. They would not hesitate to kill anyone who might happen to be in their way. Every law enforcement agency from local police to the gigantic U.A.F. Starships always kept a sharp eye out for any of their activities.

Scrambling up, Peter yanked Janet to her feet. Together they raced for the cover of the trees on the far side of the clearing. It was too late. The U.R.'s walked into the clearing before they reached the edge of the woods. Two of them were carrying an unconscious man. Instantly, they spotted Peter and Janet fleeing.

"Grab those kids!" rang out a commanding voice, "Smith may have a use for them later, if not we can always use them to show the Captain we mean business."

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Two stun beams shot out from the intruders and struck Peter and Janet. The teenagers tumbled to the ground unconscious.

It was hours later before they began to stir. Janet was the first one to partially open her eyes. She squinted because of the bright light and slowly moved her head to take in her surroundings. She was laying on a bunk in a prison cell. It had three white walls, at least, they were supposed to be white, but the walls were so stained with mud, dirt and possibly blood that they seemed black and brown. A man was sitting on the bunk across the small room from her. The fourth wall was - presumably - an invisible force field. As her eyes adjusted, she opened them completely. Slowly she swung her legs over the side of the bunk to sit up. It was then she saw Peter laying on the floor at her feet.

As she knelt beside him, Peter groaned. She helped him as he struggled to sit up. He began rubbing the back of his head. The first thing he noticed was the man sitting on the far bunk watching them. He appeared to be about forty. The top of his head was bald, but brown hair, with a few traces of gray, semi-circled the rest of it. He was wearing a bright blue, pull-on shirt which identified him as a member of the U.A.F. White letters printed on his left breast pocket read: CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER.

Janet followed Peter’s gaze up to the man. They knew that U.A.F stood for United Alpha Fleet and that a U.A.F starship patrolled and protected planets, like Axin, on the outskirts of population centers. They had even been onboard the U.A.F. Daring starship when it had been in orbit a couple of years ago. Their parents had taken them to visit a couple of the entertainment decks. They had enjoyed a leisurely family day and had returned home in the evening.

Smiling the man stood up, "Praise El, the U.R.'s didn't kill you."

Puzzled, Peter and Janet stood up as well. Crossing over the few feet between them, the man extended his hand.

"Hello, I'm Dr. Kana of the starship, Courage."

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As they shook hands, Peter said, "I'm Peter and this is my sister, Janet."

The terror they had felt a few hours ago had subsided into the “pit of stomach” fear that gnaws at your insides when you are confused and don’t know what is about to happen.

"I wonder why the U.R.'s kidnapped you?" asked Dr. Kana, more to himself than to them.

Janet spoke up a little too quickly to hide the fear within her heart, "They probably thought we heard more about their plans than we did. Why they kidnapped us instead of killing us, I don't know."

"El must not have wanted them to."

Janet ignored that comment and began pacing the small cell. "What I would like to know is where we are now? What are they going to do with us?"

"We're onboard one of their spaceships for sure." Dr. Kana shrugged his shoulders, "But that's all I know. I woke up in here, too."

Peter sat down on the stained bunk Janet had woken up on. He rubbed his head again as he concentrated deeply, trying to understand their situation. He looked at Dr. Kana and said slowly, "You're the real reason we're here. They took us because they thought we were in their way of escaping with you. So, the important thing is why they kidnapped you."

Shaking his head slowly, Dr. Kana sat down on the bunk opposite Peter. "You're right, Peter, but I haven't the slightest idea why they kidnapped me. All I know is that I had just finished a meal at The Taste of Home with Captain Caspian, Rev. Flynn, and a few others and decided to go for a walk. I was hardly outside the cafe before they grabbed me. I yelled. When the others tried to come to my rescue they were pinned down by fire from across the street. I think a Security Elite guard was killed."
That’s the last I remember until I woke up here.” He paused, then commented, “I guess it's all in El's hands now."

"How can you say that?” exclaimed Janet irritably, “El - even if He exists - is not here, He doesn't know..." 

Dr. Kana spoke softly. He did not want to upset Janet further as he explained, "El is everywhere. He is not seen, not always felt, but He's always there." A chuckle escaped from his lips. He tried to hold it back, but the way Janet had just glanced around the small cell made it impossible. "No, He's not a spook either."

"Even here you're spreading your Elniyn lies," laughed a man from the other side of the force field.

All three turned to look at the speaker in surprise. They had been so involved in their conversation that they not heard anyone approaching. He was a middle-aged man with a hawk-like nose and big bushy eyebrows. He was dressed in a purple, silk shirt with a low V showing some of his chest hair, a wide black belt and crimson pants. He had a low slung gun strapped to his right leg. There was something about the man, something unexplainable, that radiated a feeling of evil.

“Your Elniyn can't help you now," the man continued mocking, "You're in my hands… the hands of The Boss." 

Dr. Kana gave a short snort at this remark, but The Boss paid no attention and went on, "I want to welcome you aboard my spaceship.” He flashed a grin as he gave a bow from the waist. “We named it the United Raider Death." 

“U.R. Death,” muttered Janet, "cheerful name.” 

"You two Axinians are an unexpected bonus, but you should consider yourselves very lucky."

"What do you mean?” asked Peter. Somehow he hadn't quite seen how being kidnapped by U.R's was 'lucky'.

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"He means we're lucky he didn't kill us," said Janet dryly.

"What?" responded The Boss, his eyes growing wide in mock surprise, "Kill two perfect specimens of a past civilization?"

"Just because Axin hasn't taken the interest in some modern things other people and planets have is no reason to call us a past civilization," said Janet, her patriotic temper flaring.

"I didn't mean it that way, although it's true. Since your people, in general, haven't left your planet and moved about the universe, you two are about to become part of a rare species." A wicked grin spread over his face.

Even though they weren't exactly sure what The Boss was getting at a feeling of horror crept over the three prisoners.

"That's right," said The Boss, watching their faces and enjoying every minute, "in an hour I will blow up the planet Axin."

"No one is that..." Janet couldn't think of a word to describe it, but looking at The Boss's scornful expression she knew she was wrong.

"When you're caught you will be put to death," predicted Dr. Kana.

"I would already be on death row if I got caught," sneered The Boss. "They can't execute you more than once and the reward is great."

"What is your 'reward?'" asked Dr. Kana.

With a casual wave of his hand, The Boss bragged, "Fifty million Wefors and a place in the Inner Circle."

"That's not much considering what you're doing," commented Dr. Kana. Personally, he doubted that someone as flamboyant as The Boss would ever be invited into the U.R.'s Inner Circle. They hadn't remained hidden this long by being colourful and drawing attention to themselves.
The most popular theory among law enforcement was that they were low-key business people or government officials who blended in with their surroundings. That certainly could not be said about The Boss. “I don’t understand how are you going to get even that by blowing up a planet?”

"That's not for you to know… yet." The Boss turned and, with a laugh, disappeared down the hall.

Chapter 2: Out Of The Fire…
From Scott And Sandy #3: My Life For Yours

Prologue

The Space Liberator’s bar on Backarac was nearly deserted. The owner/bartender moved slowly back and forth behind the bar wiping the countertop. He puffed on a cigar, pausing only to take sips from a whiskey glass as he worked. He appeared to be in his sixties. A patch covered one eye, which he had lost in a battle long ago. His good eye was watchful, constantly surveying the room and the few customers. A casual observer may have dismissed him as a colourful, harmless old man. No one who knew him ever tangled with him.

He took the cigar out of his mouth long enough for another sip of whiskey. He glanced over at two men in a corner booth. He had named his bar the Space Liberator because most of his customers were good at liberating goods - and sometimes lives - from their rightful owners. And those two regular customers in the back were very good liberators, although not often seen together.

Right now, the two men were talking in low whispers as they sipped at their drinks. One of the men had reddish hair and an unkempt beard which held the suds of a previous drink. His dark eyes fixed on his companion. The second man was slim, clean-shaven, with neatly trimmed short brown hair and light-greyish eyes.

“What do you think he wants?” grunted the first man.

The second man gave a slight shrug, “Don’t know. If he wants to kill us, we might as well face him here.”

“You think that’s it?”

Another shrug, and then a slight nod toward the door, “We’re about to find out.”

Both sets of eyes turned to study the newcomer. The man was a couple of inches under six feet, but muscular. He was dressed in a black collared shirt with matching black jeans, which would allow him to easily fade into the shadows. A gun was strapped to his leg in gunslinger
fashion. His soulless black eyes took in the room in an instant. They fixed on the two men in the booth - sending shivers down their backs.

Without a word, he moved leisurely to the table. With a slight jerk of his head, he motioned that he wanted them both to sit on the same side of the table. The bearded man picked up his drink and scooted around the table. The black-eyed man sat down. He slid slowly around the table until he could see both the men and the room.

A middle-aged waitress approached. Her red lipstick was a little too bright, and her eye shadow was a striking blue. Strands of blond hair escaped from a bun on her head while black roots testified to its true colour.

“What do you want?” she asked the newcomer, slurring her words together.

“A Fireball.”

“Ks,” she replied as she ambled over to the bar.

The three men remained silent until she had returned with the drink and left again.

“What do you want us for?” asked the bearded man. “You always work alone.”

The newcomer took a sip of his Fireball. “Yes, I do. But in this case, I need a team to flush my bird out.” He paused as he considered them. “Each of you has a good reputation. One of you I will hire, and then you can assemble whatever type of team you’ll need.”

“What’s the job?” the first man asked again. Now that he knew he was not on the man’s hit list, he was building in confidence. To have one of the most skilled men in the galaxy say that he had a good reputation in the criminal community made him feel good, real good.

“I have vowed to kill Sandy Langlish...”
The first man interrupted, “...you mean that little girl on the Gallant who interfered with two of your hits?” He tried to conceal a smug smile. Many jokes had floated around on how Sandy had foiled the famous assassin Hal Brestorm.

The slim man heard a slight noise under the table and slid a little closer to the end of the seat. The unseen trigger was pulled, and the bearded man disintegrated into a pile of foul-smelling ashes.

The black eyes of Hal Brestorm bored into the other man, “Any comments?”

“No, sir,” he replied steadily. “It looks like you have made your choice.”

Hal holstered his gun. “There is no way I can get on the Gallant. What I need you to do is get her off the Gallant.”

The man rolled various possibilities around in his mind.

Hal continued, “You are not to harm her in any way. She’s mine.”

“And any others with her?”

“Optional. Can you do it?”

“Yes, but it may take a while to set up.”

“Fine.”

“I’ll contact you with the plan when things are in motion.”

Hal nodded. The slim man stood up, tossed some coins on the table, and left.

Hal finished his Fireball. Then he walked over to the bar. He placed a couple of bills on the shiny countertop.

Causally he inquired, “Seen anything interesting lately?”
The bartender shrugged, “Just a couple of friends having a good time. Same old, same old.”

Hal nodded and left. The bartender pocketed the bills. You didn’t run a place like the Space Liberator by being interested in other peoples’ business.

Chapter One: Assassin’s Target

In the Year of Elniyn 6082

Captain Danson scanned the latest reports on his desk computer. With a touch of his finger, he flicked the off button. It had been a long day, but now he could go home and relax. The Gallant was on course. Everything appeared to be running smoothly on the gigantic starship that carried 100,000 people - both military and civilian.

He started slightly as his intercom buzzed.

Leaning back in his chair, he said, “Danson here.”

“Captain, this is Evans with Security Elite.”

Captain Danson knew that Evans was the security man on duty at the MC Exclusive ElLift. His office and the Main Control operational room were on the very top floor of the Gallant. There were only four main rooms on the top floor, so it was the smallest floor on the entire ship. The MC Exclusive ElLift was the only elevator that went up there. It was always guarded by an Elite Security man to ensure no unauthorized personnel went up.

“Yes?”

“There is a young lady here who has just arrived onboard. She insists on seeing you. Her name is Sister Jarry. She says she knows you from Capadoncia.”

Captain Danson’s mind quickly turned over the events that had taken place on Capadoncia. He and Sandy had been kidnapped and taken down to that inhospitable planet. Sister Jarry was one of the ones who

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had helped them escape. He smiled as he remembered the crazy ambulance ride she had taken them on. But what was she doing here?

“Send her up.”

Captain Danson smiled when the door opened and Sister Jarry was ushered into his office by another Elite Security man stationed on the top floor. She was dressed in a conservative white blouse and grey skirt. Her short blond hair framed a normally cheerful face, but now her clear blue eyes held a worried expression.

As Captain Danson rose to greet her, he gave a nod of dismissal to the Elite Security man. He shook her hand gently and led her to a couch and a couple of comfortable chairs surrounding a small table in the corner of his office. The couch and chairs were covered with a soft, velvety light brown material. The low table looked like it had been made from a tree stump; although, she could tell that it was artificial.

Sister Jarry’s eyes took in the elegant office, with its light, relaxing blue walls. Captain Danson’s desk was a dark brown polished wood. Along the edge of the desk, intricate scenes from the Gallant’s history had been carved. A few peaceful nature paintings hung on the walls, and several small statues of animals perched on top of pedestals. There was a small room off to the right, which she assumed to be a private bathroom. The whole room gave off the peaceful atmosphere of a nature lover. Still, at the same time, there was an aura of authority was present.

“It is good to see you again,” said Captain Danson.

“I had to talk to you.”

There was an urgency in her voice, but Captain Danson remained calm and unhurried.

When she had sat down in one of the chairs, he asked, “Would you like some ameer, tain? Or perhaps a cold drink?”

“Tain will be fine. One cream and one sugar, please.”

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Captain Danson went to the drink dispenser on the wall, which was molded like a tree trunk. He punched in her order and then added a cup of ameer for himself. He brought the two steaming drinks back and sat down.

When they had each taken a sip, he asked, "How can I help you, Sister Jarry?"

Her eyebrows furrowed, "It's not what you can do for me, Captain. But I am worried. You see, shortly after you left a man was brought into our clinic. Apparently, he had gotten dirt into his eyes, and then he was caught in a sudden sand storm - which we get from time to time - that severely aggravated it. Anyway, he was brought into our clinic. I thought for a while that he might lose his sight, but we were able to clear the infection and restore his sight. Just as he was leaving, he turned to me and vowed that he would kill that brave girl you had with you, Sandy Langlish. He seemed like the type of man who could do it."

Captain Danson nodded grimly, "Hal Brestorm. A hired assassin."

Captain Danson tapped a miniature communicator on his shirt, "Commander Hankan."

Commander Frank Hankan was the Security Commander onboard the Gallant. He oversaw both the Elite Security force responsible for the safety of the Gallant’s officers and the regular security force, that kept the peace and investigated disturbances and crimes.

Seconds later a voice responded, "Yes, Captain."

"Please come to my office. Also, send one of your men to see if the entire Langlish family can come immediately to the conference room."

"Yes, sir."

Captain Danson turned to Sister Jarry. "Would you like to stay? I can arrange for a guest apartment."

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“That’s very kind of you,” said Sister Jarry standing, “but I really want to get back to my clinic. I’m afraid things aren’t any better since the king’s death.”

“I am sorry to hear that, but I understand. There is a shuttle leaving in about half an hour, which can take you to Sheron. From there, you can get a connecting flight back to your home. I appreciate you taking the time to tell me this in person.”

“I thought it would be best that way.”

Sister Jarry left just as Commander Hankan entered. Commander Hankan was a big, solidly built man. His black hair and bushy eyebrows sat on top of a face that looked as if it had been sucking sour tyon fruit.

Captain Danson sat back down behind his desk. Commander Hankan sat opposite him.

“Is there a problem, Captain?”

“Yes, Commander. Hal Brestorm has sworn to kill Sandy Langlish.”

Commander Hankan’s face was impassive as he considered the information. He followed Captain Danson across the hall and into the conference room. It was a bright room painted a baby blue, with windows, looking out to the stars, lining one wall. In the centre of the room was a large oval table surrounded by 30 comfortable chairs. Each seating space had a computer monitor under glass, although it could be raised above the surface of the table if desired.

Captain Danson sat at the head of the table and Commander Hankan sat to his right. A few minutes later, Mr. and Mrs. Langlish and their two children, Scott and Sandy, were ushered in.

When they were seated in the chairs closest to Captain Danson, Mr. Langlish asked, “What’s the matter, Captain?”

Captain Danson glanced at Sandy. He loved the fourteen-year-old like she was his own daughter. They had been through a lot together when they had both been kidnapped. Her courage and commitment to
Elniyn had left a deep impression on him. Next, his gaze rested on Scott. He was a year older than his sister and very protective. His short dark brown hair contrasted with his sister’s shoulder-length light brown hair. Then he looked at Mr. and Mrs. Langlish. Mr. Langlish also had short brown hair, brown eyes, and would have been about six feet tall when standing. Although he wore a concerned look at the moment, his face was always friendly. He was a civilian who owned a quality furniture store on the Gallant. Mrs. Langlish was a little shorter than her husband, but she also had brown hair and eyes. She was the type of person who instantly made you feel comfortable in her presence.

Captain Danson had great respect for the entire Langlish family. For a brief moment, a pang struck his heart as he thought that he would never have a family, let alone a loving family like this one. He looked straight into Mr. Langlish’s eyes as he replied calmly, “We have just received credible information that Hal Brestorm has sworn to make Sandy his next target.”

A gasp escaped from Mrs. Langlish. Scott grabbed his sister’s hand, giving it a comforting squeeze. There was nothing he would not do for his sister. Sandy’s clear blue eyes looked straight at Captain Danson. It was a family joke where she had gotten blue eyes when everyone else in the family had brown eyes.

“There is no danger on the Gallant,” said Commander Hankan flatly. “It is the safest place you could possibly be.”

Commander Hankan seemed unaware of the irony of his words considering that not long ago Captain Danson and Sandy had been kidnapped off the Gallant, and an imposter had seized control of it.

The irony was not lost on Captain Danson, who gave a half-smile and said, “What Commander Hankan means is that we have been and are on high alert for Hal Brestorm. There is no way he can get aboard this ship.”

Mrs. Langlish spoke up, “But he could contract someone to do it for him.”

“No,” said Commander Hankan abruptly. He did not mean to sound rude. It was just his regular to-the-point style of speaking. “With a man
like Hal Brestorm, this would be a matter of pride. He will do the job himself.”

“He will try to do the job himself. But he will fail,” corrected Captain Danson.

“Of course, he will fail,” responded Commander Hankan as if no other option had even entered his mind.

“But,” said Captain Danson, “as a precaution Sandy, and your whole family, will be under the protection of the Security Elite until I am satisfied there is no danger whatsoever.”

Commander Hankan’s thick black eyebrows narrowed a bit. He did not like the idea of his Security Elite being used for this job. The Elite was for the protection of the senior officers or high ranking government officials. The regular security department should be the ones to handle an assignment like this. However, a glance from Captain Danson told him this was non-negotiable.

“Don’t worry,” Commander Hankan said confidently, “it will be unobtrusive, but it will be secure.”

“Thank you, Captain, Commander,” said Mr. Langlish as the family rose to leave.

Chapter Two: A Special Trip
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