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“Rift”

by Kellan Meigh

Chapter Five

“Dirtside For Now”

Morning had come to *The Dark Claw*, the first full day of dirtside operations on Hasmalan. Denise was in the sickbay very early with Temmet, checking on a special patient from the Golden Gate community.

“Jenna, are you ready for this?” she questioned while the Med-bay crew prepared the Comeri femme for some corrective surgery on her knee.

“I will be overjoyed to no longer need a cane.” the dark-haired female replied. “I have used that cane ever since I was injured during the Tunn Incursion. I am told I might have to stay overnight after the surgery, something about keeping an eye out for a blood clot. I will have to try to deal with it, I think that’s what Earthers say.”

“You will not be the first Comeri to use our surgical facilities, according to our logs. We have probably the best Auto-Surgeon systems in the Elazi military. Mostly because we have all the latest updates.”

“To tell the truth, I am scared.” the Security Specialist offered up. “I am not a very good patient. One, I do not like Comeri doctors. They are too cold and unprofessional. Two, I have lost family members to stupid little things, mistakes made by those same doctors.”

“Well, you will have Doctor Tannen’lan overseeing your surgery and his surgical team are all highly skilled. We will be back before you’re out of surgery so we’ll be here when you come out of the anesthesia.”

“Thank you for that,” Jenna offered, her eyes drooping a bit from the pre-surgery meds given her.

“Also, if you have any members that need to be seen by our med crew, let us know.” Denni offered up. “We’re going to be here for a while, so if there is anything we have that you need, let’s get it to you.”

Temmet and Denise left the primary sickbay and headed down to the surface so they could get that recon party going. As they made the ramp, the maintenance crew in bay three lower *Vaar* side were going through the final procedures to put the Maxi-Lifter’s Number One section together. It was kept knocked down onboard *The Dark Claw* and it was only assembled as needed.

“Tem, have any *Heth* on the Maxi?” Denni asked, smiling at him with that mischievous smile of hers. She already knew the answer but it was an opportunity to needle him. She watched him cringe before he answered her in a quiet voice.

“I have exactly ten *Munar* as commander of a Maxi. That’s how long it took me to bounce the whole thing off the ground with a dummy load attached.” he replied. “You know, it is kind of cool out here.” he added, hoping to change the subject before she continued to bug him. The morning had started at fifty-one Decit or about Sixty Degrees Fahrenheit and it would get warmer, but they had no historical records to go by as to how much warmer it would get.

“Now aren’t you glad we brought our jackets?” Denise put hers on, taking a moment to straighten out her dark green cape on her shoulders. “Almost didn’t find my cape clips this morning in my room. Speaking of that, any progress from billeting?”

“The Billeting Specialist says he might be able to free up a set of adjoining rooms for us in a few rotations.” Tem slipped on his jacket and zipped it up. “Wow. Not used to cool weather like this.”

“Should try Earth at my family’s cabin during the winter. How about Zero Decit or less?” She was scanning around for Utility Eight, the vehicle that had been designated for command use and currently assigned to her for the day.

“Your vehicle is over there,” the XO stated, guiding her in the general direction of the bow of the ship. “Zero Decit? That’s what, freezing? That would be cold. How much heavy gear do you have to wear if you’re not wearing armor with an environmental mesh under it?”

“I have an Earth United States Air Force issue N-3B hooded arctic-rated parka and the F-1B pants that go with it. Similar to our Sevas cold climate suit. The armorer in Roseville put a tail vent in the pants for me by my request. He also made a sheath for my tail from similar materials that would snap into place when it was cold enough to warrant it.”

“I wondered about that.” he mused. The two of them got themselves situated in the front seats, powered up the vehicle that was about the size of a small Earth-based Sport Utility and headed off toward the Golden Gate community. “We need to pave this road with that Quik-Pave additive. Soil seems to have enough small aggregate in it.”

“At least the Navy Seabees cut a nice level road, even if it’s not paved.” She retorted. After a few moments, Denni brought up what must not have been obvious to the XO; “Tem, you’ve been speaking English with me, ever since we got up this morning.”

He was gobsmacked for a few moments, until it dawned on him that she was right. “This is crazy, Denni. It’s seamless, like I’ve spoken English my entire life.”

“Well, after being on Earth for three months, I have to concentrate to speak Elazi. It’s like speaking English on Earth was making me use it exclusively. I grew up speaking both languages but I always preferred Elazi. Now, if I walk up to a conversation in Elazi, I speak Elazi. If the convo is in English, I use English. I really don’t have to think about it, to tell the truth. It’s just feels like a normal thing.”

“Sa’Vesi speaks English quite well.” Tem offered up. “Marlett is becoming quite fluent, too.”

“Sa’Vesi says I speak English more than Elazi after our first Earth posting.” Denni zipped her jacket up some more and adjusted the heater in the cab up a few notches. “We’re in late Summer, almost fall right now. I’ll bet it snows here in the winter.”

“Snow? That’s going to be an issue. We need to fix the hull before it starts snowing, if that’s the case.”

The short drive out to the Golden Gate community was proving to be an uneventful one so they had enjoyed the scenery on the way. The landscape around them reminded the ambassador of Earth in the lower Northern California foothills, near her parent’s cabin. Some of the trees looked similar to oak trees while others looked like cedars, firs and willows. The low shrubs and flowering plants were quite pleasing to the eye after being onboard a mostly monotone-painted ship.

They came to a bridge that crossed a small river, one that looked to be a military style structure. On the other side, the trees were still kind of sparse but everything looked healthy. She wondered if Earth would look this way if they stopped using fossil fuels. Elazia had broken their dependence on fossil based fuels when the Bil had landed on her home world, bringing a new level of technology with them. Their plant-based fuels were very clean-burning and quite renewable.

The road started to climb upward, not a steep incline, just a gentle rise. The community was now within sight ahead of them, on the plateau of a low hill. Actually, this location was a good choice, since it gave them a vantage point to look for trouble headed their way. They were close enough now that they were starting to pass fields planted with what must be food stocks. Some plants looked to be corn, wheat and beans, others were obviously tomatoes or squash and there were a few she had no idea what they were, maybe a local food stock. At the gate, they were being met by Colonel MacLachlan and Commander Jacob Muncie.

“Good morning!” the Colonel offered as he shook hands with both of them. “I see you brought out your vehicle for this recon trip. Not sure everyone will fit in it, though.”

“We have the Maxi-Lifter on the way for that. The crew cabin will hold twelve personnel besides the pilot and co-pilot.” Tem pointed out. “Um, sounds like that’s it coming right now.”

The small group watched as the huge lifter came into view, circled wide of the crops and sat down on its twelve sets of landing wheels just a short walk from them. It was big, meant to lift and transport a ship the size of a medium Earth-based ocean-going Naval Frigate. In a pinch it could lift a larger ship but nothing as large as *The Dark Claw*. The legs were about seven feet tall to the underside of the deck at full extension and the deck itself was over eight hundred Earth feet in length.

“Where in hell did you stow that thing in your ship?” Jacob asked, clearly stunned by its sheer size. There were twenty articulating nacelles on each side and what looked to be thrust cones mounted to the rear of it. “Can that thing go into orbit?” he questioned.

Temmet smiled at the Commander and answered. “First question, we keep it knocked down until we need it. It’s stowed in seven different bays in sixteen pieces. Takes about thirty Earth minutes to assemble and be flight worthy if I have an experienced assembly crew. Second question, yes it can go orbital at maximum loadout.”

“Is it possible to bring part of *The Golden Gate* down from orbit with that lifter?” Hank asked. “The ship was designed to break down into three pieces. We were to leave the empty cargo section behind in orbit and return to Earth with just the command and the drive sections. We would like to bring down the remaining pods that malfunctioned and didn’t release from the cargo rails.”

“We could do that. In fact, I think we could just bring the whole thing downstairs.” Tem agreed. “I’ll talk to the Skipper about this. I’m sure she would agree to your request.”

The pilots and technicians from the lifter had made their way to the gates of the community, conversing amongst themselves in Elazi. They saluted Tem and Denni before lining up at what might be considered parade rest. There were three buff-tan Elazi males present and one Bil, a silver-scaled female with jet black hair and blue eyes.

“This is our crew.” Temmet explained. “Pilot Tarver’lan, Co-Pilot Kevven’lan, Loadmaster Everet’lan and Load Specialist Namaralla.” Temmet explained. “Specialist Valenna Namaralla used to work for the company that built this Maxi-Lifter. She will be the one deciding how to lift the reactors, since she is the most knowledgeable one onboard.”

“Is pleasure to be working with all many of you this today.” she offered up. “Me is sorry I bad speaking English. Many is find hard for Bil to speak English.”

“You will do just fine. Several of our crew today speak Bil, so you won’t be lost.” Jacob offered up. “Well, looks like our crew are ready to rock and roll.”

Chief Valdez and Petty Officer Anderson arrived from the community with Comeri Spec Nine Devvin D’keechlar and Spec Five Mavver K’vennetjan. Mavver turned out to be the tallest Comeri female Denni had ever met. She was easily a full half-*Catre* taller than Sa’Vesi. The crew from the community were carrying tool kits and dressed to get as dirty as needed to get the job done. While the crews introduced themselves to one another, Hank asked a question.

“Did you get to see Jenna this morning? I know she was about ready to jump out of her skin when we dropped her off this morning at your ship. By the way, thanks for the loan of the vehicles.”

“she’s probably in the middle of her surgery right now.” Denise replied. “Our Auto-Surgeons are the best, Colonel. If you have crew that need some specialty medical needs, send them over. I told Jenna and I’ll tell you; whatever you need that we have, just ask. We’re here for the long haul and I hope we all leave here together when it’s time.”

“About that,” Jacob asked, “We’re almost four hundred souls. That’s not counting the Bil that might want to return home, either. Do you have room for all of us?” Temmet smiled widely to that question.

“As a war ship, we normally have over five thousand ground troops, their support groups and at least two squadrons of various spacecraft onboard during an action. Since things have been quiet, we don’t have the full compliment onboard right now, just one squadron. Most of the ship is not in use, to the point we set up a huge roller rink, a regulation-sized *Skechin Ball* field and four basketball courts by taking down some non-structural interior bulkheads. Without reverting them back to rooms, we can still hold well over four thousand in some comfort.”

“That’s a huge ship, then.” Commander Muncie mused. “I really would like a tour, when we have time.”

“We can do that. For now, we need to get back to *The Dark Claw*.” Temmet explained. “We kind of promised Jenna we would be there when she came out of surgery.”

“Do you mind if we tag along?” Hank asked. “I’m sure she would appreciate the support from all of us.”

“You can do that.” Denni replied with a smile. “Just don’t say I didn’t warn you about Temmet’s driving.”

Teval Kovvelan put his gear in the back of the largest vehicle, making sure it was secured correctly to a lashing point. This would be a long trip, actually the longest trip he had ever been on in his life. Veran Terranan was already seated and looking over the maps on his padd when the younger male sat down in the cab with him.

“Teval, I am glad you are going with us.” he offered as he reached over and squeezed the younger Hasmali’s arm. “This will be a hard trip, since we will be running fast to our destination. In the older times when we still had our fliers, one sunrise to the next sunrise would get us to the Hoomania outpost and back.” That made Teval nod in agreement.

“I have been to the wrecks South of here, on those long paved roads to nowhere when I was very small.” Teval replied. “How glorious it must have been, to fly far up in the sky.”

“Ask Gemma, she remembers. She was a director aboard the biggest flier we had brought back from a non-flyable condition. It is still there but cannot fly any longer. The alloy bones of it are old and fractured, no longer able to support it while in flight.” Veran put forth. He pointed out a spot on the map as he continued. “there are more of those fliers, just waiting for us right here but our laws now prohibit us from going to the ruins of the cities of the others, the ones that left long ago. If the court had their way, I would have a flimsy in hand right now rather than my padd.”

“Some day, maybe the court would change their stance, eh?” Teval asked.

“Farla Terranan would say no.” Veran stated firmly. “My brother keeps things manageable by retaining the old laws that are easy to remember. I could tell you of a time when the laws were in many volumes of books and a person called a law-speaker would argue a person was innocent when many saw the crime happen by eye.”

“I could see the reason for keeping the old laws.” the young male offered up. “Look, there is Farla coming with the Sector Troopers. Maybe it is time to go now?”

“Yes, it is time, as soon as he takes the lead vehicle.”

Teval watched as the small retinue consisting of the mayor and the troopers in powered armor loaded up into the lead truck. Once that truck started to move down the road, the others followed close behind it, out of the compound gate and to the gravel road.

Teval looked at his padd, finding the maps loaded into the memory core. He followed the track they would take with his finger, noting a few prominent landmarks they would use for navigation. The young Hasmali wondered how things were in the past, when these padds could be used to communicate over vast distances and some of the smaller ones, the stories seemed to indicate they could use them to converse with one another over incredible distances, farther than one could drive in seven sunrises.

When he would ask Gemma Barrenan about these things, she would always change the subject to something else. Some say she tried to keep the devices working correctly after the court said to dismantle something they had called a network. Maybe that was why she was now barred from officially holding any significant position within the community.

The young brown and black Hasmali watched the scenery go by, smiling at the crops he had helped to plant this year. Even as the area Constable, he helped out whenever and wherever he could. The crops this year covered the land for as far as he could see, signs of a bounty this cycle. He remembered the cycle when the Coomeriani had come, obviously not of their wishes during the harvest period. Parts of their damaged ship had fell among the crops, setting them on fire. There was also that one very big piece of machinery that impacted the town fire prevention building. It was ironic, losing the fire suppression equipment to fire. At least the Coomeriani had replaced what had been damaged or lost when they had been confronted by the Hasmali.

Teval Kovvelen hoped this trip would be uneventful. Maybe, just maybe these new people had just stopped to do repairs and would leave soon. He was pretty sure their arrival had something to do with the Great Star Eye winking a handful of sunsets earlier. Gemma didn't want to talk about the Great Star Eye with him, either. Some say she knew exactly what it was and how it worked. He often wondered how the *Wise One* had gained such information.

Denise and her small group had made their drive back to *The Dark Claw* only to find some Earth military ideas had been incorporated into the area around the temporary buildings being erected and the zone reserved for parking. Quik-Pave had been used to stabilize the soil and the local landscape had given up a large number of *Sketchen Ball* -sized rocks. The stones had been

painted white and carefully arranged to delineate parking areas and pathways. There was now a slot with a sign marked "Utility Eight" in both English and Elazi, waiting for them.

"Well, your Seabees sure have rubbed off onto our people." Denise offered up as she looked at their handiwork. By the sign designating their parking area, someone had made sure a charger had been stationed for them. Tem took the time to plug in their vehicle and start the charging cycle before they entered the ship, just to top off the batteries. While they were walking up the ramp into Bay Three Vaar lower, Henry looked around in complete amazement.

"This, is the biggest honkin' ship I have ever been on," he commented, thunderstruck by the sheer size of this construction. "If I had not watched you land this thing with my own eyes, I would highly doubt it could take off and go orbital. How long did you say this thing was, anyway?"

"It's roughly two and a quarter kilometers long and it's about two hundred and twenty-five meters tall. It weighs so much the regulations say not to land three of them next to each other on a small planet at the same time. That might possibly cause the planet to wobble on its axis."

"So, we're talking what, in the millions of metric tons displacement?" Jacob asked. He was just as intrigued by *The Dark Claw* as Hank was.

"Try in the tens of millions of metric tons, or as we would say, tens of millions of Deci-Zet." Temmet replied. "Technically it's classified as to the actual weight."

"Commander Hone'lan, is it just my imagination or has your English improved from yesterday?" Hank asked. It seemed like the XO was getting better at the English idioms and catching things that only a seasoned speaker would catch on to.

"I'm on the third series of program cartridges now. I guess this set teaches idioms, slang and subjective speech, whatever that is. Also helps to put together swear word sentences that makes your point very clear."

"Yeah, should have heard what he blurted out this morning when he stubbed his toe. It was colorful." Denni offered up. "Better than anything my father has ever thrown out for nobody's consideration." That made the Earthers laugh.

"The corridors are pretty wide." Hank mused as they were making their way to sickbay. Walking down the middle of the corridor, he couldn't touch both bulkheads at the same time.

"The corridors have to be this wide." Denni replied. "You've seen Sa'Vesi and Marlett's powered armor. The older Twenty-threes and Fifty-fours are much bigger than the Mark Sixty-One and the Mark Eighty. You need room for two of them to pass without either one having to turn sideways. That pretty much dictated the corridor size. Also, we found this pale green paint to be kind of soothing to the mind, in case you're wondering. It's a common color throughout the ship where it might be occupied by personnel. Some work areas, though have either white or gray paint on the walls."

The foursome walked into sickbay where Temmet signed them all in at the reception desk. He consulted a screen on the wall that was in all Elazi text, then guided them down a short hall. At the correct room, they could see the nursing staff raising the head of Jenna's bed and adjusting the oxygen mask she was wearing. The monitoring equipment was connected up, some bags of fluid were hung on stands, then the lead nurse waved them in.

"She should be around in just moments." the very pale gray female offered up as she checked the fluid flow. "Everything went well, no surprises." she added in English. "Commander McLachlan, it is good to meet you. As you have no doubt been told, if any of your crew has a surgical need, send them over. What is ours is yours."

"Thank you for the gesture." he added, trying to read her name plate. "I guess I need to learn to read Elazi, too. For the life of me, I can't make that name out."

"Call me Sa'Vena, please. The familial name is Trasc'lan. I am a Surgical Specialist Grade Nine."

"Trasc'lan. Okay, I think I see the characters, then." He looked at Temmet's name plate, then Denise's in turn. "Your plate says, House of Trasc? Am I right?"

"You have it." she agreed. "Oh, here comes our patient back to us now." She turned and lifted the head of the bed a bit more and tucked the blankets around Jenna further. "Commander D'mol, can you hear me?"

"Um, I don't want to go to school, Mother." she replied in a small, shakey voice, muffled just a bit by her oxygen mask. "My knee hurts, I wanna stay home." she kind of slurred out.

"Commander, how do you feel?" Sa'Vena asked carefully, checking her pulse and looking at the displays for any abnormalities. Thankfully the display was blue nominal for her.

"I, um, I'm floating, sort of. Somebody turn the gravity back on?" she asked as she tried to open her eyes. After a couple of deep breaths to clear her head, she looked at the nurse, blinking to clear her vision. "Surgery went okay? I'm fixed? My knee is good now?" she questioned.

"You're surgery went very well. As soon as you're more alert, I want to get you up and walking just a bit."

Jenna finally forced her eyes to focus, smiling at the quartet of faces looking back at her with concern. "What a reception committee. I must do this more often."

"Glad to see you back among us." Hank put forth. "Feeling no pain?"

"No pain." she agreed. "Drop a nuke-tipped torpedo on me, wouldn't feel a thing, except maybe a little twinge in the repaired knee." She lifted her oxygen mask and wiped at the drool coming from her mouth with a handy towel, hoping nobody saw that. "Damn, I'm high as the stars!" she blurted out, trying not to giggle.

“You should be good to go back to the Golden Gate community tonight or you can stay overnight. Your choice.” Sa’Vena offered up. “You might want to stay, we’re serving spaghetti with roasted garlic bread for last meal.”

“Spaghetti?” she questioned. Jenna had heard of it but they had never fixed it on Hasmalan due to a lack of a cook that knew how to prepare it.

“Stay overnight.” Denni suggested. “The spaghetti is worth it and you can use the digital library while you’re recovering.”

“I will stay, then.” she agreed. The nursing staff switched her from wired monitoring to wireless, then one of the nurses brought her bags of fluid around to her on a stand. They carefully brought Jenna to her feet after removing the oxygen mask, slowly, letting her get her balance by using the rolling stand her IV fluids were attached to for stability. “Looks like I’m going for a walk now.” she said with a lopsided smile.

“Let’s go easy, Commander.” the Specialist ordered. “Start with your good leg and please take short steps. We’re not going far the first time.”

“I will see you later, Hank.” the Comeri female offered with a wide, drug-induced smile on her face as they carefully made their way out into the hall.

The Colonel took another bite of his cheeseburger, almost in tears it tasted that good. The fries were outstanding and the ice-cold cola was just right to him. “So, you eat like this all the time?” he questioned.

“Well, there is Elazi and Bil fare onboard, too.” Tem replied. “Up in the all ranks galley, there are Comeri offerings and A’Pari fare that is I guess, Middle-east or Italian meets Mexican, sort of?” He looked to Denise for support.

“Um, Persian-Italian fusion in a traditional style but Spanish spicy is a close explanation.” she agreed. “They make a thing like a personal pizza that’s really good and a dish that’s a pasta dish with plenty of vegetables in it with a bean paste on the side. You can ask for the dish to be mild, too.”

“This is all so weird.” Jacob commented. “Jenna said she had crewed on *The Dark Fang* and it has a small shopping area in the center of the ship. She didn’t know if *The Dark Claw* had the same thing or not.”

“We have a small zone of shopping on the Korra’karammi, not like the huge one on the Korra’kiventi.” Denni put forth. “It’s only one deck between a few frames, more of a wide corridor with shops to buy odd uniform items, some off duty clothing shops, you can borrow Earth video game units in a few of the shops and we have two bars. I heard the Korra’kiventi has brothels for both sexes.”

“That’s what Jenna said about the . . . Korra’kiventi. I hope I said that right.” Henry stated.

The Ambassador sat her burger down and looked at the head of the Golden Gate community. “Not to change the subject, Colonel but I’ve been tasked by our Skipper to set up a diplomatic attaché while we’re dirtside.” Denise brought up. “I have been told Jenna is the unofficial diplomat for the Comeri so who would be your diplomat or contact person?”

“That would be me.” Jacob put forth. “If you have a gripe, I’m the man.”

“Okay, we would like to put a wireless terminal in your office, one with video and voice capabilities. You and I could work out a set number of days and hours that we would both be in our offices at the same time to deal with issues. I don’t see a big problem but I can tell you with all honesty, some of our personnel can be kind of rowdy at times.”

“I understand, Denise. Power-wise, what do you need for power to run a terminal?”

“Well, the equipment is Elazi based but it will run on one hundred and fifteen volts, sixty hertz alternating current. Two or three amperes, I think. Supposed to be run on one hundred and four volts, fifty-two hertz but it can tolerate the higher voltage and frequency.”

“We can cover that.” Hank stated. “I have a request, though. We have nine vehicles and two construction mechs, all battery powered that need batteries. We didn’t anticipate running them for so long on the original batteries we brought with us from Earth.”

“That’s something we can handle for you.” Tem agreed. “Either we can repower your units with new batteries or I’m very sure we can install entirely new motors and speed controllers. All of our vehicles are electric and we keep enough ready spares for a five year tour around a planet.”

“So, that’s your mission profile? Five year missions?”

“Five Elazi years, or solar cycles as we call them. Keep in mind, the days are thirty-one Earth hours and the cycle is four hundred and eighty-seven days. Once the mission is over, we will be putting into a space dock for refitting.”

Hank was confused now. “You keep stores to go that long without replenishment? How do you hide that much food and consumables on this ship? Granted, it’s gigantic, I’m just going by what I know of submarines and how they have to store their goods. My brother is or maybe now he was a Navy Submariner.” That comment made Tem smile.

“We store items in the food lockers, between double wall bulkheads, under the decks and above the overheads. There is also a very elaborate system of cold and deep cold storage. Some things are kept freeze-dried and our line chefs are highly skilled at making them taste fresh again.” the XO explained. “We also have an extensive hydroponics section that provides fresh vegetables and helps with oxygen replenishment. Now that we’re dirtside, we will most likely do some planting of winter crops and next cycle, summer crops.”

“I have to say,” the Colonel put forth, “This ship is flat-out amazing. Where do I sign on?”

An hour later, the Earth contingent had returned to the Golden Gate community and the Elazi transportation specialists that had traveled with them were looking over the vehicles in need of repair. The situation didn't seem dire to either tech as they made notes, took pictures and wrote down measurements. The Earth transportation Navy NCOIC was assisting them, making sure they had answers to their specific questions.

Transportation Specialist Grade Eight Harmon Kett'van was making some final measurements on an empty battery pack housing sitting on some stands. The Elazi were sure they could repower everything, it seemed to be just a matter of creating adapter trays to take the smaller, more efficient Elazi batteries.

"Petty Officer Robertson, you say this is a ninety-six volt pack. How many amperes will the pack need to supply? I need to choose a battery that has enough power so the pack will have proper output."

"I think it needs twelve hundred. Looking that up for you now." the mahogany skinned PO3 replied as he thumbed through the manual for the vehicle in front of him. "Yeah, I was right. It needs twelve hundred amps at ninety-six volts."

PO3 Mark Robinson watched as the two Elazi techs selected and sat a very small battery into the open battery pack and made some measurements around it. "Erm, isn't that battery too small in output?" he questioned. That particular battery was small, like a standard sized Earth car battery.

"No, this battery is a ten volt, thirteen hundred amp sealed battery." Harmon pointed out. "It can provide full amperes for fifteen Elazi hours straight. After that, it can pull one-half rated amperes for another eight hours. That's without heatsinks or fan cooling."

"I think I have an idea." Specialist Grade Five Mervet Kivvet'lan offered up. He had actually drawn up a very detailed technical drawing on his padd that he showed to the others. "We have enough room for a heat sink plate on the bottom for the batteries to sit on, then heat sinks that are air cooled to attach to the sides of each battery in the row. Petty Officer, would ninety volts be sufficient or do you need one hundred? Those are our choices."

"Our chargers are one hundred and ten volts so maybe a one hundred volt pack?" Mark offered up as a suggestion.

"That would be acceptable." Mervet replied. "I will send this drawing to the fabrication shop right now. Tomorrow, we will bring batteries, spare cabling, their connectors and the trays. We will get you rolling again."

The Petty Officer picked up the alien battery that looked entirely too small, holding it up next to the batteries that had come out of the casing. The one he had in his hands was clearly less than a quarter of the size of the originals. Shaking his head, he wondered about what else the Elazi had in store for them.

That afternoon, the Bil welcoming committee arrived just as it was suggested they would. There were five Bil in total, The de facto President of the community and four of his cabinet members. They all seemed like they were very excited to meet the new temporary inhabitants of Hasmalan.

“We are very be glad to meeting all of you!” Severan Gan-Dalleria blurted out, going down the line of Command-grade officers from *The Dark Claw* and shaking hands with everyone. The blue-scaled male was practically bouncing off the ground with joy. “I am very hoping you all will helping us to fix minor problems with all us community powering grid? Yes? No? Yes?” he asked.

“You must excuse Severan,” the next to greet them, a rose-toned female Bil with the silver-gray hair offered up. “He has tried to learn proper English from the members of the Golden Gate community but as you might have noticed, he is just a male in that respect. I ask your indulgence in the matter.”

“I understand.” Denise offered up. “I’m Ambassador Sa’Krista Denise Andrews’lan.” she offered.

“I am Venerria Del-Kevellan, one of the Advisory Council members. It is good to meet you, Ambassador.”

“Venerria, this is our Captain of the Ship, Wing Commander Na’Risa Tavvit’lan and our Executive Officer, Division Commander Temmet Hone’lan. The tall ones in armor are Sub-Commander Sa’Vesi Kevvit’lan on the Zel side and Trooper Grade Seven Marlett Vennet’lan on the Vaar.” The short gray one on the end is Flank Commander Jessett Kavren’lan, our Science Officer and technically, the third in command.”

“I am not short!” he blurted out, smiling at them. “Well, not as short as some Southern Sweptlanders.”

“It is good to meet you Mere Kevellan.” Na’Risa offered in Bil.

“It is good to meet you, Commander. You speak my native language quite fluently.”

“About that. You will find out eventually, there was an issue with your people and ours in our past.”

“Not bad, I hope.” Venerria posed.

“It was bad.” Na’Risa confirmed. “Your people invaded our home world for what the Earthers call bauxite. It took less than a rotation for the deed to be done. An expedition party had arrived with serious damage to their ship. They were in need of aluminum plates to do repairs so we assisted them. I have to preface this as saying we were trans-atmospheric but not inter-galactic at the time.

“They liked what they saw and left us with the assumption they would return to trade in aluminum. Well, we were wrong. A year later, they had returned and subjugated our planet. We

have the largest open pit mine in all the known worlds. We even think it may be causing the planet to wobble a bit on its axis.”

“Oh no.” the council member blurted out.

“We finally regained control one solar cycle on your Haveras Deemlet Day, when your people left us in charge of things so they could celebrate. We took control of several battle cruisers and went to your homeworld to discuss things. We almost put you back to pre-metal days.”

“Gods, I knew our people were domineering but that seems harsh, to do that to the Elazi race.” It was clear Venerria was upset over this. “What happened next?”

“We accepted the Bil Homeworld surrender on specific terms. No more space piracy by the Bil, only peaceful trade. In return we would repair what we damaged and the Bil would build our ships. We even have Bil on our planet that were born there and they are now able to be Elazi citizens.”

“I had wondered about your ship. It seems to be a Deltrey class heavy cruiser, maybe a second generation?” The council member mused.

“Fourth generation. It’s only ten cycles old so it’s new by our ship standards.” Na’Risa offered up. The Bil femme nodded in agreement, then gestured toward the combat tower.

“On the way in, I observed you have some damage to your hull. There are a few of those left among us that built similar Deltray class ships in the Bil-Cmela orbital shipyards. Would you like help with the repairs? I don’t know if it was brought to your attention, it will possibly begin to snow here in less than ninety suns. We’re starting our end of warm season harvest in thirty suns but I have personnel to loan to you, if you would like.”

“We would appreciate your engineer’s take on our repairs. Normally what we would fix away from our homeworld would be a temporary fix, not full rebuilding.”

“The humans say “*Bush Fix*” for something like that.” the Bil female offered up. “We would be quite willing to help out in any way we can. There is one thing, though. We were in hopes when you leave here, we can travel with you. Our time here on Hasmalan has been good to us but I think we all are not interested in making this world our home. The Hasmali are not really that friendly.” That concerned the Skipper to hear that.

“We have not met the Hasmali yet. I understand they didn’t want a road from their Northern community to the Golden Gate community.” Na’Risa was starting to put together an idea of what the Hasmali were like. They seemed to be very insular in nature.

“We were greeted by a ‘Get back in orbit and go away’ party when we landed. It took them many sets of seasons to find us at that. We honestly thought they were joking with us but it turns out they do not want anyone sharing their planet. Seems they have this thing against technology. They have a small amount of tech but they just don’t like it. Kind of like the Tunn race.”

“Odd you would say that.” Na’Risa put forth. “We finally made an agreement with the Tunn to share their Jump Drive technology. We did agree not to retrofit any existing ships for a number of cycles but it was argued by the Ambassador’s mother to allow two ships that had just the keels laid down to have Jump technology. Having that technology has really helped with our exploration and general transportation needs.”

“I am unfamiliar with this “Jump Drive” technology, but the Tunn were here not that long ago.” Venerria offered up. “They jumped, I guess, into this system, came down to the surface, visited with us then jumped out. You would at least think they would have given someone with Jump technology our coordinates.”

“Did they at least give you the coordinates?” the Commander asked. This could be a boon to them if they knew where they were.

“Yes, they left the coordinates. Wrote it out right on top of our meeting table the night before they left.” The Bil looked down, the back to the Skipper. “They wrote it out in Tunn. It might have been a practical joke on us that in the end wasn’t that funny. We do not have a single community member that reads Tunn.”

“Ambassador Andrews’lan and her aide both speak Tunn and I think Sa’Krista reads it a little bit, too. Let’s go talk to her.”

Several *Heth* later, Denise was using a high-tech version of a white board in Bay Five Lower *Vaar* side to work out what the coordinates were. She had wrote out what was scribbled on the table top and now she was looking at it from a few *Catre* away, in hopes it would come to her.

“This is a dialect I have seen before, I’m sure. A few of the numbers I can make out but several of the characters don’t make sense. They would be key characters, too.”

“These are the number six, I’m sure.” Sa’Vesi put forth, making a decoded set of characters below the Tunn writings. “I think this is the number two.” She drew that in and stepped back by her boss to study some more.

“You sure about the six?” Denni questioned. “I mean, if we go by normal conventions, that’s on the other side of the center of the galaxy. The Earthers would have their minds blown to know we’re that far from our arm of the Milky Way.”

“Okay, if it’s not a six, then maybe a three? Denni, that doesn’t seem right either.” Vesi brought up a program on her padd used by ambassadorial groups to decode the writings. The software confirmed the number six, wasn’t one hundred percent sure of the two and made a positive on a seven. “Still seems wrong, doesn’t it?”

“Turn your head like this,” Denise suggested, leaning her head to the left as she looked at her scribblings. “The Tunn write bottom to top, right to left. Now what does it say?”

“It says, we’re a butt-load of light years away from home.”

The Ambassador made a few rough calculations on her padd, bringing up a celestial map and sending it to the white board. Inserting the Tunn information, it was apparent they were over nine thousand, five-hundred light years away from home.

“What if the numbers are inverted? You know, like the *Sa’naani* and *Fask’aal* do?” Vesi suggested.

“Um, that astro-location is better and that places us closer to our arm of the Big Star galaxy.” The third possibility once calculated put them outside all known space. “So, let’s see if this has been mapped by a deep space probe.” they pulled the latest mapping probe data that was available in the core and superimposed it on the galactic map. Zooming in to the coordinates, they found a system with eight planets, consisting of two small rocky planets near the star, two more farther out with the fourth one seeming to be a life-viable planet, a fifth planet that was just a small orb and a gas giant in the sixth orbit from the star with two more small planets past the big gas planet.

“Huh. That looks like this system.” Denise commented. Further study showed the asteroid belt between the small orb and the gas giant that was expected so they ran some numbers. “That I don’t like. Almost thirty-five Earth years by Rift drive. Well, at least we know where we are.” That made the tall one offer a suggestion.

“You know, one of the Golden Gate crew said the wormhole opened for short durations at least once a month. Maybe we can send a probe or a beacon through with a message to let everyone know where we are.”

“Brilliant idea!” Denni blurted out. “Somebody will hear it and send help by Jump Drive.”