**Summary**

Britannia invaded Japan 7 years ago and since then many citizens of Japan have attempted to rise up in rebellion against the empire with little success.

One day on a hiking trip, the student council from Ashford Academy discover a cave filled with lion and catlike drawings. Within the cave, they discover a huge robotic lion that is one of seven pieces to a giant robot named Voltron: the Defender of the Universe.

Will Voltron be enough to free Japan?
"Why isn't this just perfection everyone?" trilled the voice of a curly-haired blonde in designer hiking boots and a leather jacket, "The way the sun meets the lake and the mountain air whipping in your face! It's the perfect day for a hike to Lake Kawaguchi!"

"If... you say so... Milly," coughed a lanky, dark-haired teen behind her, currently bending down on his knees, heaving large gasps of air.

"See Lulu? That is exactly why you shouldn't always be skipping out on gym class. What on earth will the ladies think of a man that isn't even strong enough to sweep them off their feet?" the blonde, Milly, teased with a quirky grin to the boy.

"Lelouch doesn't need the muscle," said another teen of seventeen years behind them said. "While he may be frailer than a twig, he has the brains to make for it."


Almost all of the members of the Ashford Student Council were out hiking by the magnificent Mt. Fuji. Unfortunately, Nina wasn't able to attend as she had 'other' plans, but said that she hoped they had fun. They were trying to get to one of the beaches by Lake Kawaguchi to celebrate the new addition to the Student Council.

His name was Rai, a mysterious, tech-savvy, silver-blonde haired, seventeen-year-old young man that arrived at Ashford about a week ago. Milly and Lelouch had found him wandering around Ashford grounds in nothing but what appeared to be rags and numerous injuries. After getting him fixed up at the nurse's office, Milly's grandfather, who owned the school, offered him a place to stay so long as he attended the school as a student. He agreed as he didn't have anywhere else to go.

Also accompanying them was Kallen Stadtfeld, the sickly daughter of a Britannian noble that often missed school due to illness.

Unbeknownst to all but Lelouch, however, Kallen's real name was Kallen Kozuki and was really of both Britannian and Japanese descendant and was also a current member of a Japanese resistance group her late brother had started after Japan was invaded. Until Japan was liberated, though, she was forced to play the role of a sickly Britannian nobleman's daughter that could barely seem to stand on her own two feet. A position that she hated with every fiber of her being.

A blue-haired boy named Rivalz Cardemonde, the student council secretary, was currently piggy-backing Kallen up the mountain path. He was a happy-go-lucky guy and was always willing to help others, especially girls. He took it upon himself to carry the 'crippled' student council member up to the mountain and was currently doing an excellent job, even though he was panting nearly as hard as Lelouch.

"Doing alright there, Rivalz?" laughed an orange-haired girl named Shirley Fenette, a fellow member and school swim club member, at Rivalz's predicament.

"Yep! Yep! I'm good, don't you worry about me!" the blue-haired boy smiled, "Don't worry Kallen, the lake isn't that far from here!"
"Thank you…" Kallen muttered in her faked timid voice. She hated the position she was in right not, but Kallen had to admit that deep down, she was quite touched that Rivalz was willing to carry her all the way to the lake.

As everyone laughed at Rivalz's determination, no one noticed a green-haired, yellow-eyed woman followed them not too far behind.

o~o

The lake water was crisp and clear as the crew found a spot to set up at the lakeside beach. Shirley was already in the water floating on an inflatable water bed. Suzaku, Rai, and Rivalz had pulled out some water guns and were battling it out. At one point, they dragged a reluctant Lelouch in too, even though he seemed more interested in dodging the attacks to get out of the water than fighting back. Milly and Kallen were on the shore tanning under an umbrella.

After about an hour of fun in the water, Rai returned to shore and emptied a heavy-looking backpack he had brought along with him. The items inside included a small satellite, headphones, a receiver, and what appeared to be a homemade Geiger counter. Adjusting the headphones on his head, Rai listened to a faint electronic beeping and a multitude of voice murmurs. They were all so muffled together he could only pick out a few words he understood, though.

"Rocking out to something?"

Rai jumped with a gasp as he looked to see that Milly and everyone else in the group had left their activities and snuck over to see what all the equipment was about. Rai removed the headphones before speaking to them.

"It's nothing important," Rai responded, trying to sound casual.

"Why did you bring all of this equipment out here, Rai?" Suzaku asked, eying it suspiciously. "It looks similar to the stuff the military uses."

"I didn't steal it if that's what you're thinking," Rai defended, before smiling proudly, "I built all this."

"You built all this?" Rivalz asked in amazement before Rai swatted his hand away when he attempted to touch the satellite. "How? When?"

"I-I don't know," Rai admitted, scratching his head with a small blush, "I've always had a knack for building things like this, but I can't seem to recall from where. Either way, though, I designed the satellite to reach as far as the edge of the Solar System, though it works a little better at night."

"You mean out to Kerberos?" asked Kallen in amazement. "Why so far out?"

"Stop, Rivalz!" Rai exclaimed when Rivalz attempted to poke the Geiger counter this time. Rivalz reeled back, pouting. He just wanted to have a look, was that asking too much?

"Now Rai," Milly purred with a mischievous smirk on her face, "if you're going to remain a member of the student council, we can't be having any secrets now can we~?"

Rai sighed. 'Well, the cat's out of the bag now,' he thought.

"Okay, fine… long story short, I've been picking up alien radio chatter."

"..."
"...Come again?" Kallen asked as everyone else stared at him like he just grew an extra set of eyes.

"...D-did you just say, aliens?" Shirley asked tentatively.

"Okay, so you're a little cuckoo, I'll keep that in mind for the next cross-dressing ball," Milly said with a playful shrug.

"No, I'm serious!" Rai protested as he pulled out a notepad with the word 'VOLTRON' written across on the top and child-like drawings of robots and aliens below it, "They all keep repeating one word: 'Voltron!' I didn't know what it meant at first, so I did a scan of the surrounding land of Area 11, and this area," he pulled up a map on his laptop with several blinking points. The biggest one was where they were now, right next to Lake Kawaguchi, "I've never seen a radiation spike like this, but when I saw that the Lake wasn't closed off because of it, I figured it could maybe be this 'Voltron' thing."

"So that's why you wanted to come here to celebrate! So you could investigate further," Suzaku realized as he remembered that Rai insisted going to Lake Kawaguchi to celebrate his addition to the Student Council.

"But that doesn't explain how you pinpointed the location of this radiation Rai," Lelouch said.

"That's where this Geiger counter comes in!" Rai explained, snatching it from Rivalz, who was holding it, causing him to pout again, "I noticed that the repeating series of numbers I keep hearing looked like a Fraunhofer line."

"Frown-what now?" asked Rivalz, confused.

"Fraunhofer line," Suzaku explained, "I learned about this during my military training in the Engineering Department. It's the number describing the emission spectrum of an element. The head of the department said that the military used to use this a few years ago when Area 11 was first established to locate the major sakuradite mines to use for the Knightmare Frames."

"Exactly, thank you, Suzaku," Rai continued, "that's what I've been picking up, except this element doesn't exist on Earth; that's what led me to the conclusion that this could be the 'Voltron' thing I've heard in the chatter. So I built this Geiger counter that's specifically designed to locate it."

"Wow!" Shirley sounded impressed, "And here I thought Nina was the school's tech genius."

"It's pretty cool, really," Rai said rummaging around in his bag again before he pulled out a sheet of paper, "The wavelength looks like this."

"Rai, can I see that?" Lelouch asked as if realizing something. Rai handed the paper over, and Lelouch stood up and held the parchment in a way that the wavelength was right in front of him. The others watched as the chess master glanced between the paper and the mountain range surrounding Lake Kawaguchi.

"Wha… What is this?" he whispered mostly to himself, though the others heard him as well.
"What are you doing?" asked Kallen curiously.

"Guys, look at this," Lelouch expanded the reading to show them. "This reading matches the mountain range, exactly."

"Holy Britannia, you're right!" Shirley exclaimed in realization. Everyone else shared various levels of surprise as well.

"So?" asked Rivalz, "What does it mean?"

"Rai," Milly asked, "how accurate is that counter thing of yours?"

"Um… I haven't tested it out yet, but it should be able to pick up right away."

Milly simply smirked one of those smirks, which depending on the day, could make the other members of the student council fear for their lives.

"Everyone… who wants an adventure?"

-o-o-

Using Rai's Geiger counter (that was surprisingly effective) as a guide, the group soon found themselves deep within the forest surrounding Lake Kawaguchi. Milly seemed uncharacteristically determined to find out what Rai's Geiger counter was picking up. The only time she was as determined as she was now was when something outrageous was happening at the Academy and offered a kiss from a member of the Student Council as a prize. It happened far too often, much to the ire of the other members.

"How much further Rai?" asked Milly. As Rai knew how to use the Geiger counter, he was the one leading the group; he had Rivalz holding the small satellite that went with it to pick up the reading.

"According to the readings… it's right around…" Rai stopped in his tracks as they came to the edge of a clearing. On the other side of the area was the opening to a cave.

"...Here."

"Inside that cave?" asked Rivalz.

"Well, where else would it be coming from?" Suzaku asked.

"Okay," Shirley said, shrugging her shoulders, "we found out where this 'Voltron' energy thing is coming from, can we go back to the lake now?"

"No way, Shirley!" Milly exclaimed, "I know it's weird for me to say this, but we should check it out! Who knows what could be in there!"

"Exactly!" Shirley nearly shrieked, "What if there's some dangerous radioactive… stuff in there, and we end up getting infected?! I could get cancer or have one of my children be born without legs!"

"Shirley, calm down," Lelouch reassured the green-eyed girl, "there's nothing to worry about here. Besides, if this area were radioactive, it probably would have been closed off to the public for authorities to deal with it. Heck, the lake would be closed so that the authorities could deal with it."

This seemed to calm Shirley down if only slightly, though she still seemed hesitant to explore a mysterious cave that they happened to find in the middle of the forest.
"Look, Shirley, it could be nothing," Suzaku said, "we'll just have a look at the entrance. If there's nothing there, we can leave."

"Exactly!" Milly appraised. "Simple and clean curiosity, that's all."

"Well… okay, if you say so."

"Well, come on! I want to see this!" Rivalz exclaimed, running toward the cave entrance, dragging the sickly Kallen behind him, who 'struggled' to keep up.

"Rivalz, slow down!" Milly called running after him, Rai following close behind.

"Well, let's-"

"Woah!" Rivalz's holler interrupted Suzaku, "Guys! Check this out!"

Alarmed by Rivalz shout, Lelouch, Suzaku, and Shirley were quick to follow into the cave.

What they saw made them freeze in awe.

On the walls of the cave were drawings. Drawings of a giant blue lion. It seemed every wall of the cave told a story about it. Some had images of people bowing and worshipping it, while others showed the lion performing acts of great heroism. It was stopping a meteor from crashing into the earth, spreading rain over fields of crops. It went on and on.

"What is all this?" asked Lelouch, looking at the drawings.

"It looks like… drawings of a lion goddess?" Kallen guessed.

"There aren't any lion gods, or goddesses, in Japanese mythology, right Suzaku?" asked Milly.

Suzaku shook head in denial.

Rivalz looked closely at the markings of the lion; he noticed one of the drawings had dust covering it, so he swiped his hand over it to get a better look. Suddenly all of the pictures started glowing a bright blue. Rivalz yelped and jumped back.

"Rivalz! What did you do?!" shouted Kallen in alarm.

"Nothing! I just touched it! That's all!" the boy defended in a panic.

Suddenly, the ground beneath them glowed bright blue in a circular shape and suddenly gave way. The group slid down rapids of water, screaming at the top of their lungs. It ended in a waterfall that led to a shallow pool at the bottom. Everyone groaned as they picked themselves up, now soaked from head to toe. Rivalz groaned as he straightened and blinked. When his vision finally cleared, he was slack-jawed, as was everyone else.

"Lions are everywhere…" Rivalz muttered as the group stared at the glowing orb with a large mechanical lion inside.

Chapter End Notes

AN: Well, this came out a little later than I anticipated. It was because I just went
through a massive stack of midterms last week and I was trying to do the entire first episode of Voltron first before I started posting this (I'm currently about 2/3 the way of getting it on paper) but let's say I lost my patience.

Anyway, for those of you who took the time and looked at my 'Story Ideas' page, you'll see that I have made a couple of changes, one of them being the absence of Nina. I'll be honest with everyone... I don't like Nina, and I know a large amount of the CG fanbase doesn't like her either. If you are familiar with the Code Geass series, you should know why. But at first I needed her for someone to fill in Pidge's techno-savvy shoes, so at first, I was going to torture myself into writing Nina's character, but then after doing some research on the Code Geass wiki, I stumbled across Rai.

For those who don't know who Rai is, he's the character you play as in the Code Geass video game: Lost Colors. I have never played the game myself so I don't know how to write the character, so sorry for those who have played the game and see Rai as a bit OOC, but I'll try my best (feel free to offer me behavior advice for him). Since the player technically is 'in his shoes' in the game, you develop his character depending on what path you take for him. I guess I'm making up another path for him, which would be the 'tech-genius path.' Haha! But fasten your seatbelts, for the little I do know... I have some pretty big plans for him (evil laugh).

Anyway, I'm going to stick true to my promise when it comes to my other two stories. Once I've finished writing the pilot episode and chapters for Voltron, I'll be sure to publish another chapter for one or both of my other stories, so don't worry they aren't dead, but remember college will always come first for me.

So, I hope you enjoyed this first chapter; the next chapter will be posted in the next few days so I can pace it out until the 'episode' ends. R&R and stay tuned!
"What is that? Is that the 'Voltron'?" Shirley asked nervously, staring at the giant robot lion. The lion itself had blue metal with metallic legs and torso. The face of the lion looked like an ordinary lion with bright, glowing yellow eyes and a white muzzle with blue on the edges.

"It must be..." Milly said, unusually severe and shocked.

"I haven't seen any Knightmare Frames this advanced or in this design before, not to mention it's way bigger!" Suzaku said. Being a member of Earl Lloyd Asplund's Engineering Corp allowed Suzaku to know about a lot of the military's weapon projects, but as far as he knew, there was no mention of a weapon like this.

"Me neither," said Lelouch, shaking his head.

"But then why is it here?" Kallen asked.

"I don't know," Rai admitted, still in absolute awe of the giant robot, "but this must be where I'm getting all those crazy readings from!"

Lelouch started approaching the lion, seeing that there wasn't anything or anyone here to stop him from doing so. The other student council members followed close behind. "It looks like there's some kind of force field around it, so it should be okay to approach."

As they walked closer, Rivalz kept his eyes on the lion. The teen couldn't explain it, but it felt like the lion was eying him. "Um, does anyone else here feel like this thing's staring at them?"

Everyone looked at him like he was nuts, "No..." Kallen said with a raised eyebrow.

"...Yeah, the eyes are totally following me!" Rivalz exclaimed, sounding anxious and his movements becoming antsier.

Lelouch was standing right in front of the force field, and he put his hands on the surface. His eyes squinted in concentration, "I wonder how we get through this..."

"Maybe you just have to knock," Rivalz said sarcastically and did just that, rapping his fist against the translucent shield. He yelped when it felt like a jolt of electricity ran through his body. The forcefield glowed with a blinding light before vanishing from around the lion and the platform underneath suddenly lighting up. The ground beneath everyone also rumbled as they all stared at the lion in shock.

Suddenly an image of seven lions, each looking similar but each a different color, fly high into the sky like shooting stars. In a flash of light, the lions were gone only to be replaced by a gigantic robot with red and green arms, orange and blue feet and shins, to yellow and purple knees and upper legs, and the head with the same glowing yellow eyes inside the mouth of a black lion. The figure swung its sword of fire across the sky, lighting it for the universe to see.

"Woah!" Rivalz muttered in awe as did everyone else. "Uh... did everyone just see that?!"

"Voltron's a robot!" Shirley shouted in shock.
"A huge… huge awesome robot!" Milly practically squealed in excitement.

"And this thing is only one part of it," Kallen added, "I wonder where the rest of them are?"

"If that's the case, then what is it doing down here?" Lelouch asked, "And why isn't it with its other pieces?"

"I don't know," Suzaku muttered, "but it's still incredible."

"I know for certain now that those aliens I heard are looking for this thing," Rai confirmed.

The lion suddenly started to move on its own as it lowered its head in front of the students. Shirley immediately started screaming in fright, scared that it might eat them. That turned out not to be the case, however, as the lion's mouth opened right in front of Rivalz to reveal a pathway inside of it.

Skeptical, but still curious about what was inside, Rivalz approached the platform and walked in. The other students followed close behind. Right before the lion closed its mouth, though, another person also snuck on behind them. The green-haired woman quietly found what looked to be a small sleeping chamber in the back of the lion and snuggled into the area without anyone noticing.

Rivalz quickly took the path up and found what looked like the pilot's control room with a single chair in the middle of the room. Looking around, Rivalz took a seat and crossed his legs with a smug smile.

"Well, here we go-woah!" Rivalz didn't finish as the seat suddenly pushed him forward to the front. Once it stopped, the room started glowing in a bright blue aura, and futuristic control screens popped up in front of Rivalz. The other student council members weren't too far behind him, all of them staring in wonder at the advanced technology inside.

"Woah!"

"Cool!"

"Wow!"

"Alright, very nice!" Rivalz said with a laugh as the main screen in front of them turned on to show the inside of the cave they were just in.

"Okay, uh, everyone," Shirley said nervously, "I think I just need to point out, just so we're all, you know, aware. We're in some kind of futuristic, alien, cat head right now."

Just as the words left Shirley's mouth, Rivalz felt another jolt of electricity run through him, from the top of his head, all the way to his toes, penetrating him to his very core. His ears suddenly filled with the sound of a soothing purr.

"Woah! Did you guys just hear that?!" asked Rivalz, looking back at them almost frantically.

"Hear what?" asked Suzaku cautiously.

"I-I think it's talking to me!" he exclaimed before turning back around and examining the controls. Finally, he hesitantly pressed a couple of buttons seemingly at random.

Outside, the blue lion jolted and leaped to its feet, roaring loudly. It almost sounded excited.

"Okay, got it," he said with a grin, "now let's try this!" Rivalz pushed the controls forward, and the lion shot out of the mountain cave like a rocket and flew into the sky, and as it was descending to
the ground, it did a front flip before using missiles in its legs to glide across the field. It then shot into the air again with a series of corkscrews. Everyone inside the head was screaming at the top of their lungs. They held onto either the pilot seat or Rivalz himself for balance.

"RIVALZ!" screamed Kallen as the lion did a few more flips, "YOU ARE. THE WORST. PILOT. EVER!"

o~o

Meanwhile…

"What in King George's name is that?!” exclaimed Viceroy Cornelia li Britannia, seeing the blue lion swooping around near Lake Kawaguchi. About a few miles away from where the lion was found, a small military base had been set up upon Earl Lloyd Asplund's request, believing it could function as a good practice sight for the Lancelot Knightmare Frame that Suzaku piloted. Cornelia was visiting the base to ensure everything was in order only to receive a shocking surprise at the blue lion's appearance.

"It appears to be a flying, lion-like Knightmare, Viceroy!" a soldier next to her reported as he lowered his binoculars, sounding just as shocked and intimidated.

"I can see that you fool!" Cornelia exclaimed angrily, "What I mean is, is that Knightmare one of ours? And if it is, why wasn't I alerted about it?"

"Alerted about what?" the voice of Lloyd Asplund asked behind her, followed by Cecile Croomy, his assistant.

"Asplund, why wasn't I alerted about this test-run?!" Cornelia demanded.

The Earl blinked, "Test run? I don't recall authorizing a test-run on any Knightmares." He took the binoculars from the soldier next to Cornelia to see for himself as Cecile pulled out one of her own.

"I don't believe that Knightmare is one of ours Viceroy," Cecile informed Cornelia, "and if it is, the engineering corps wasn't aware of it… Lloyd?"

The Earl slowly lowered the binoculars. His mouth was open with his tongue hanging out and eyes sparkling with stars, drool descending his chin. "I don't know whose that is… but I want it!"

o~o

The blue lion landed on the ground once more and began bounding around like a mountain lion. Everyone inside the head held onto something as the ride continued.

"Isn't this awesome?!" exclaimed Rivalz with a broad grin.

"Make it stop!" yelped Shirley, who was starting to look a little green, "Make it stop!"

"I'm not making it do anything; it's like it's on autopilot!"

Suddenly, the lion's back legs fired it off the ground, and the lion ascended into the sky.

"Rivalz!" shouted Lelouch, "Where are you going?!"

"I just said it's on autopilot," he explained hurriedly, "Ah- it says there's an alien ship approaching Earth, I think we're supposed to stop it!"
"What did it say exactly?" Milly demanded.

"Well, it's not like it's saying words, more like feeding ideas into my brain… kind of!"

"Wait, if this thing is what the aliens are coming for, why don't we just like, I don't know, give to them? Maybe they'll leave us alone?" Shirley suggested, "Sorry lion, nothing personal."

"Or we end up giving it to them, and they turn on our planet!" Lelouch argued. "This the first time we're contacting other life outside Earth, we have no way of knowing if they're hostile or not. If we give this to them, maybe not even the Britannian Empire can stop them."

Everyone seemed to agree with Lelouch's statement and were glaring at Shirley. Her eyes widened in realization at that possibility and had the decency afterward to look a little sheepish.

"Oh… nevermind then."

It wasn't long before the lion exited the Earth's atmosphere and entered open space. The group didn't have time to admire the stars though, as moments later, a huge purple ship with flashing purple lights appeared in front of them like a bolt of lightning, and twice as fast.

"Holy Britannia! Is that really what I think it is?!" Milly shouted in fear and astonishment at seeing a real alien spaceship.

"...They found me..." Rai whispered in horror. Lelouch glanced at him suspiciously. What did he say?

After floating and observing the UFO for a few seconds, the ship started rapidly firing purple lasers at them.

"We need to get out of here!" Kallen ordered, sounding uncharacteristically frightened.

"Hang on!" shouted Rivalz as he pulled on the controls, and the lion flew off at top speed. Even though Rivalz had little to no idea what he was doing, the lion seemed to know what to do as it maneuvered and dodged all the attacks with little to no effort.

"Okay, I think I know what to do!" Rivalz exclaimed.

"Rivalz, be careful!" shouted Suzaku, "This isn't a simulator!"

"And you don't think I know that Suzaku?!" he replied as he helped maneuver the lion around the lasers. He then pushed down on one of the control levers, and the lion's mouth opened wide and fired a powerful blue beam directly at the side of the ship. It sliced through it like a sword, causing massive explosions.

"Let's try this!" Rivalz smiled as he flew the lion closer to the ship, scrapping the lion's claws on the other side, leaving deep gashes, causing explosions as well.

"Nice job Rivalz!" Lelouch praised.

"Okay, I think it's time to get these guys away from our planet!"

o~o

"Lord Zarkon, the escaped prisoner, and his people found the Lion. It attacked us and is heading out of the system," the commander of the warship reported to the overlord on the computer screen. The shadowy figure on the other side narrowed his eyes.
"Follow that lion and alert all ships in the area to intercept. Capturing the Lion is your first and only priority."

"Yes, your majesty. Full power, after the Lion."

o~o

"Oh, no!" Milly gasped as the ship started picking up speed behind them.

"They're gaining on us!" Kallen exclaimed.

Lelouch's eyebrows furrowed, "It's weird, they're not trying to shoot us. They're just chasing!"

"Okay, seriously, now we think having aliens follow us is good? I'm not on board with this new direction, guys!" Shirley exclaimed.

"Where are we?" asked Milly looking around.

"Edge of the Solar System," Rai gasped in awe, looking at a distant moon to the side, "That's Kerberos, Pluto's moon!"

"That's impossible!" Suzaku exclaimed, "It takes the most advanced spaceships decades to get out this far! We got out here in five seconds!"

Suddenly, a swirling, sparkling wormhole, like a vast swirling ocean, appeared in front of them.

"What is that?!" Shirley nearly shrieked at the sight of it.

"Uh, this might seem crazy, but I think the lion wants us to go through there!" Rivalz explained hastily.

The gang looked at the vortex. There was no telling what was on the other side of it. There could be more dangers. Despite these possibilities, though, their instincts told all of them to go. But they all knew that whatever was on the other side they needed to know what it was, desperately.

"Where does it go?" Kallen asked Rivalz, urgently.

"I-I don't know… Lelouch, what should we do?"

"Why are you asking me? Ask Milly; she's student council president."

"You're more experienced with this than I am Lelouch. You're the chess master, not me, so what's the best move to make right now?"

Lelouch stared at Milly in shock for a second, realizing the hidden meaning in her words. As much as he wanted to deny it, he was still technically a prince of Britannia, and now it was time to act like one.

He furrowed his eyebrows as his brain worked on overdrive. If they went through this... thing, there was no telling if they would come back. A minute on the other side could equal a century or more on Earth, though the opposite was possible as well (though Lelouch was leaning towards that possibility being pure bogus from science fiction space movies). He had left Nunnally behind, and while he trusted Sayoko to keep her safe, once word got out about the seven of them going missing, his identity as Lelouch vi Britannia could be exposed. Should his face make it on the news, Cornelia, Euphemia, or someone else from the military could recognize him, and there'd be Britannia soldiers swarming Ashford Academy faster than he could say "I am Zero!"
Not to mention that the Black Knights would be awaiting further orders from him ever since they made their debut at the hotel jacking just over two weeks ago. Since then, they haven't done much but assist the police in taking out drug cartels and exposing corrupt politicians and businessmen, but he could tell that they were all anxious to take their 'Knights of Justice' charade a step further, and without him, they could do something rash and ruin everything. But from what he could tell, Ohgi, whom he had placed as second in command, seemed to be the most level-headed of the Black Knights and wouldn't take too many risky chances. It appeared he had no choice but to trust them until he and Kallen got back.

However, if he found out what this lion, and it's other pieces, was capable of, and convinced the others, including Suzaku, to help him, he could use this Voltron to defeat Britannia. Not to mention that there seemed to be little to no chance that the lion was willing to turn around and go back to Earth, even if they tried. Plus, even if they did manage to turn around, the aliens would no doubt follow them, and possibly invade Earth. This would endanger not only Nunnally and Japan, but the whole world as well.

Once everything was thought over, there was no choice in the matter.

Clenching his teeth in frustration, he finally spoke, "Whether we like it or not, the lion seems to know more about what's going on than we do. Besides, I doubt we can force it to turn around. Not to mention that those aliens will follow us back to Earth as this lion seems to be their target. From the way things look, we're going to have to trust it. But if we're in this together, we should decide as a group."

Everyone took a moment to look at one another, all of them, though some reluctantly, seemed willing to go through with this, after all, they wouldn't be alone in this.

Rivalz sighed, "Alright, guess we're all ditching class tomorrow."

With that said, Rivalz urged the lion towards the wormhole, which almost immediately upon entering, closed behind them, the alien ship pursuing them missing it by seconds.

Chapter End Notes

AN: And here's part 2!

Anyway, so now the Ashford students have officially left their Solar System, what dangers await them next and what did the Galra captain mean by 'escaped prisoner'? Dun, dun, duuuun! Anyway, the next chapter will be up in another two days, and hopefully, the entire pilot episode will be finished in two weeks at the latest.

Also, forgot to mention this last chapter but Rai's voice actor for my fanfic is going to be Vic Mignogna, just imagine Edward Elric's tone and voice.

Until then, R&R!
Everyone within the lion held onto the walls and chair for dear life as they traveled at breakneck speeds through the wormhole. They were going so fast it felt like their skin was peeling off. Out of all of them, Rivalz strangely seemed to be the calmest. Fortunately, it didn't last long as the lion exited the wormhole seconds later, which closed behind them. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

"Woah…” Rivalz muttered, "That was-

Before Rivalz could complete his sentence, Shirley couldn't hold her lunch any longer. She vomited to the side of the control panel, making everyone cringe in disgust. Milly and Kallen even wrinkled their noses to block the smell as they were the closest to the poor girl.

"Sorry," she muttered in embarrassment before hurling again.

"I'm surprised you took this long, Shirley," Milly commented with sympathy, still wrinkling her nose.

"I don't recognize any of these constellations…” Suzaku observed, "...we must be a long, long way from Earth."

"The lion seems to want to go to this planet," Rivalz informed them as they approached a planet that looked very similar to Earth, "I think... I think it's going home."

With a burst of speed from the lion, it soared towards the lush planet full of forests, mountains, and oceans almost identical to Earth. Unfortunately, the group didn't have time to enjoy the scenery as they held on for dear life again as the lion descended. Lelouch and Milly were holding onto the back wall while the others were hanging onto Rivalz's pilot seat.

"Guys, personal space! Rai, your breath is killing me!" he complained.

"Uh, is it just me, or is anyone else having second thoughts about flying through a mysterious wormhole?" Shirley asked, "Why are we even listening to a robotic lion anyway?!"
"It got us away from that alien warship, didn't it?" Rivalz pointed out.

"I don't know if you noticed," Kallen hissed, "but we're in an alien warship!"

"What's up with you, Kallen? You don't normally act like this." Milly noticed with a raised eyebrow of suspicion.

Kallen growled, "Look, I'm frustrated with this situation and terrified because Rivalz is the one flying this thing!"

"Hey! What's that supposed to mean?!"

"Everyone, knock it off!" Lelouch exclaimed, "No one's happy to be in this situation, but we're here now!"

"Lelouch's right," Suzaku agreed, "if we're going to get through this, we need to do it together!"

"So, what do we do?" asked Rai.

"First, we need to know where we're going," Lelouch deduced, "Rivalz?"

"I... don't know," Rivalz admitted. He looked around at the others who were staring at him, "I'm sorry the lion's not talking to me anymore. Wait! Wait, wait, wait! Shhh! Listen. I think I hear something."

"I hear it too," Milly said.

"Yeah," Shirley said, "it sounds like a... high-pitched squeal..." Before anyone could ponder what it was, Rivalz's fart finally made itself present. Disgusted reactions emanated from the group as they all covered their mouths and noses to block out Rivalz's fart as the boy himself smirked in amusement.
"But seriously, there's a castle up ahead," Rivalz said. Everyone looked up as the mechanical lion approached a mountaintop overlooking a vast ocean. The mountain itself seemed to form around a large white metallic building consisting of seven spires, with cyan blue outlines and windows. The formation made it look like a mystical castle from the Middle Ages of Europe with a few touches of the Empire's futuristic Knightmare Frame tech. The group stared in awe as they descended further towards the structure. The sun shone off the castle, making it look like pure silver. It felt like they had stepped into a fairytale of old, and judging from everything that had happened to them so far, it wasn't too far fetched.

The lion slowly descended towards the castle as its eyes glowed a bright yellow, followed by the cyan blue lights of the castle lighting up as well. The lion landed at what appeared to be the entrance to the castle, and bent down with an open mouth, waiting for its passengers to exit.

"Everyone, keep your guard up," Lelouch warned them.

"Something wrong?" asked Milly.

"No, Lelouch is right," Suzaku agreed, "we were already attacked by aliens once already, we don't want that to happen again."

The group of seven cautiously exited the lion and looked around, taking in the landscape. Then suddenly, the lion jolted and stood back up.

"No, no! I knew it was going to eat us! No!" Shirley shrieked as she leaped behind Lelouch. Instead of eating them, though, the lion roared mightily at the door, loud enough to shake the ground. The door glowed cyan blue in its outlines and opened, kicking up dust as it did so. It wasn't long before the castle was free to be entered.

The group looked at the entrance in a mixture of shock and awe as Shirley peeked out from behind Lelouch.

"Oh, the door is open," she spoke robotically in realization before turning to face the lion, "I guess I was wrong about you."

Deciding not to waste time investigating, they cautiously entered the castle. It was pitch black save for a few faint outlines of cyan blue along the walls, floor, and ceiling. Despite this, it was still hard to see where they were going, so they kept bumping into each other.
"Hello?" Shirley tentatively called out after wandering around for a while. The group stopped and stared at her as if she was crazy. What if whoever was in here was dangerous? She could've just given their location away.

"You know," observed Rai as the group came to a stop at a stairwell, "from the size of the lion, I expected these steps to be bigger…"

Suddenly the room illuminated with a blue beam that shined down on the group, allowing for more of the castle's layout to be visible. The place they were in appeared to be a ballroom of sorts with the stairwell in front and glowing lanterns off to the side.

"Hold for identity scan," a computerized voice spoke as rays of blue light and mist rose up from the floor, rolling over their bodies in a scanning motion. It felt like they were being covered in a warm blanket as it ran over them.

"Why are we here?" Lelouch demanded as the scan finished its job, "What do you want with us?!"

The computer didn't answer. Instead, the same mist that surrounded the group during the identity scan rose up and filtered into the unlit lanterns that lined the walls, illuminating a path that led out of the ballroom.

"I guess we're going that way," Suzaku said before following Lelouch.

The farther the group walked down the halls of the castle, the more 'mist lights' seemed to turn on as if guiding them somewhere.

"Hello?" this time, Milly's voice echoed throughout the castle after a while of walking. As they went further into the castle, Milly, Shirley, and even Rai seemed to take turns calling out into the darkness, hoping for signs of life.

The group walked through hallway after hallway. Descended or ascended staircase after staircase until they finally reached what appeared to the center of the castle. The metallic doors leading inside slid open for them. It led to a large circular room with the center a few inches taller than the rest of the floor, and similar circles surrounding it. A central control panel stood at the head of it. Surrounding it were several pod-like objects, all with the same cyan blue outlines that matched the rest of the castle's decor.
"Where are we?" asked Rivalz, speaking for the first time since entering the castle.

"This is some kind of... control room!" Rai exclaimed in realization as the central control panel's buttons suddenly lit up. Gears shifted, and steam emerged from one side of the room, along with the sound of sliding doors opening. Two pod-like structures rose from the floor. The windows were partially transparent, allowing the group to at least see the outlines of two people inside of them. From what could be made out, it appeared to be a man and a woman.

"These-these two aren't dead, are they?!" Shirley asked, mildly freaked out.

Shirley soon got her answer as the pod suddenly glowed, and steam billowed from beneath it. The blue shell that surrounded the figure seemed to dissolve into sparkles of stardust, fully revealing the woman inside.

The woman wore a long blue and white dress, had dark-colored skin, sea-foam colored hair that descended in long waves down her back, pink crescent shapes around her eyes. Her most distinguishing feature was her pointy elf-like ears, with purple triangle-shaped earrings hanging from them. And to top it off, she had a golden circlet-style diadem around her forehead with a single blue gem in the center. She looked very similar to some elfish people found in some videogames on Earth.

The woman's eyes snapped open as she gasped, extending her hand as if to grab something that was in front of her, even though nothing was there.

"Father!" She cried as she stumbled out of the pod, and would've fallen if Rivalz hadn't rushed over to catch her.

The woman groaned, gripping Rivalz's arms to balance herself and looked up drowsily at the teenager that caught her.

Now that Rivalz had a good look at her face, he saw that the woman was quite beautiful. He blushed before flashing her one of his trademark smiles. "Well, hello there," trying to act charming.

"Who are you? Where am I?" the woman asked, speaking in a thick Britannian-like accent that would have made several of Lelouch's half-siblings jealous.
"I'm Rivalz, and you're right here in my arms," he answered smoothly.

The woman looked up at him curiously.

"Your… ears."

He raised an eyebrow and looking in the direction of the body part, "Yeah…?"

"They're hideous," she said bluntly, as she stood on her own two feet he took a small step away from him, still staring at his eyes in disgust, "What's wrong with them?"

"Nothing's wrong with them!" Rivalz exclaimed defensively, "They heard exactly what you said about them-whoa!"

Rivalz was caught by surprise as the woman suddenly gripped his ear, twisted him around, and forced him onto his knees, holding his right arm behind his back. For a slim looking woman, she was incredibly strong, and Rivalz had to fight back the tears because of how hard she was holding his ear.

"Who are you?!" the woman demanded, "Where is King Alfor?! What are you doing in my castle?!"

"A giant blue lion brought us here! That's all we know!" Rivalz cried out, struggling not to break down in tears. His suffering finally came to an end, though, as the woman let go and addressed the other student council members.

"How do you have the Blue Lion? What happened to its paladin?" she asked, "What are you all doing here? Unless… How long has it been?"

"Look, lady, we don't know what's going on or what the hell you're talking about!" Kallen exclaimed defensively.
"Can you tell us who you are?" asked Lelouch a little more cordially, "Maybe we can help you."

"...I am Princess Allura of planet Altea." she answered as she approached the central control panel, "I've got to find out where we are, and how long we've been asleep." Allura put her hands on both sides of the control panel, which lit up in bright cyan blue, and a translucent screen appeared in the center of it.

"Okay," Suzaku said, looking at the screen along with Rai, "that's how that works."

Suddenly, the second pod opened as well to reveal a tall, white-skinned man with orange hair and a bushy mustache. He also had pointed elf-like ears and blue markings at the corners of his eyes. He gasped as he saw Rivalz.

"Ah! Enemy combatants!" the man exclaimed as he jumped from his pod and attempted to jump kick Rivalz, who quickly shifted out of the way. The act resulted in him nearly falling to the floor. Still, the man managed to regain his balance by holding onto Allura's sleeping pod.

"Whoa, quiznack! You're lucky I have a case of the old sleep chamber knees." the man also spoke in a think Britannian accent just like Allura. "Otherwise, I'd grab your head like this, wrap you up like so - and one, two, three - sleeping time!" he said, demonstrating everything with hand gestures and snapped his fingers at the end.

"Oh yeah?" Rivalz smiled smugly, "Well before you did that, I'd," he jumped and kicked into the air in a mediocre karate move, "like that."

"Oh, really? Well, how could you do that when I've already come at you with this? Ha, ha, ha, hey!" the man retaliated with fake karate moves of his own. It didn't seem to intimidate Rivalz in the slightest.

"Rivalz," Lelouch groaned in annoyance and embarrassment at the display.

"It can not be," Allura suddenly gasped.

"What is it?" the man asked, suddenly alarmed.
"We've been asleep for ten thousand years!"

o~o

(Flashback)

Everything was in flames around them. It was their final battle against Zarkon, the leader of the Galra, and the Alteans had lost horribly. A purple battleship approached the castle as the face of their enemy appeared on the computer screen before them.

"Zarkon!" King Alfor growled.

"Your fleet has been destroyed Alfor, I will be there shortly to claim Voltron."

As the screen switched off, a massive purple laser shot at the castle, damaging it significantly. The Castle quickly lost power.

"Father," Allura spoke to the man before her, "we must form Voltron and fight before it's too late!"

"It's already too late," the king replied, "We must send the Lions away, we can't risk them falling into Zarkon's hands!"

"We can't give up hope!" Allura exclaimed desperately, hoping to change her father's mind.

"I am sorry, daughter," the king approached Allura, placing a hand on her cheek lovingly, "if all goes well, I shall see you again soon."

The last thing Allura remembered before blacking out was seeing her father's face and his voice telling her he loved her.

o~o
Allura grit her teeth, "Planet Altea and all the planets in our Solar System have been destroyed! Coran, Father, is gone, our entire civilization… Zarkon!"

"Zarkon?" everyone questioned semi-unison.

"He was the king of the Galra," Allura explained, "a vile creature, and an enemy to all free people!"

Before anyone else could comment on this, Rai suddenly gasped and then yelled, holding his head like he was in immense pain. His left eye also burned in agony for a moment. He could hear the muffled voices of his classmates exclaim in worry as he collapsed onto his knees. Images he'd long forgotten flashed through his mind, along with the terrifying face of a monster. And suddenly, Rai remembered.

"Rai!" Shirley asked urgently, kneeling down by the blonde, "Rai, are you okay?"

"Yeah…” Rai muttered, "I-I remembered something!"

This caught everyone's attention, especially Lelouch and Milly's, as they were the ones who initially found him in his amnesiac state.

"What did you remember?" asked Lelouch in curious urgency.

"That Zarkon guy… I was his prisoner!" he revealed as he gritted his teeth in hatred.

Everyone gasped at this. How was this possible? And if it was true, how did Rai escape and end up at Ashford of all places?

"Are you absolutely sure, Rai?" asked Milly.

"Positive." was the response.

"He's still alive?!!" Allura exclaimed in shock before scowling in anger, "Impossible!"
"I can't explain it, but it's true! He's searching for a superweapon called Voltron!"

"He's searching for it because he knows it is the only thing that can defeat him," Allura explained, "and that's exactly why we must find it before he does."

o~o

Levitating purple crystals glowed in a way they hadn't in millennia. A hunched figure gasped as if she had been holding her breath for an extended time, and had just come up for air. The woman emerged from the chamber, her eyes a bright yellow and dark indigo skin. On her face were markings that looked like tears of blood descending from her eyes, and long white hair flowing down behind her hood.

"The Blue Lion has returned," she reported approaching the Galra who stood by a window of the ship, proudly gazing at his fleet, "and now I sense a resurgence of Altean energy."

"Alfor's daughter lives… How?" Zarkon asked, turning to the woman for answers.

"I know not… but it is time to reclaim what is rightfully ours."

"Yes, I shall wipe that foul race from the universe forever, and take back Voltron. Contact my commanders."

o~o

At another area of the universe, a few hours away from the planet Arus, where Allura's castle rested, another Galra ship was patrolling the area. The commander inside was just reattaching his mechanical arm when he was called for an audience with Zarkon.

"Commander Sendak, the Princess of Altea is alive and is hiding in your sector; we believe she alone knows the whereabouts of the remaining Lions. Your battle fleet is the closest to her location. Retrieve her and the Lions. With them all, the Galra Empire will be unstoppable." Zarkon ordered.
"I fight for the empire," Commander Sendak replied, on bended knee, "I conquer in the name of Galra. No foe has ever stood in my way, and none ever will. Vrepit sa! Set a course for Arus."

O~O

"Princess, you must eat," Coran said, "it's been ten thousand years!"

"I'm not hungry," she replied, shaking her head.

"Wait, ten thousand years?" questioned Rivalz, "That's like one thousand plus ten."

"That's times ten, Rivalz." Kallen corrected.

"Whatever!" he shrugged.

"I haven't eaten since breakfast and I starving," Shirley said, eying the weird green alien food hovering in front of them. It didn't look like the most appetizing thing in the world, looking more like mashed up veggies covered in boogers than anything else.

"Yeah, but you've thrown up at least five times," Milly pointed out in slight disgust.

"That's true," she nodded. Unable to hold back her appetite anymore, she tentatively picking off some of the goo and tried it. The taste wasn't terrible (it didn't taste amazing either though), but the texture was definitely something to get used to. Shirley nearly gagged as the substance seemed to slide down her throat like a slimy avocado.

As Shirley and Milly were sampling the Altean food, Lelouch, Rai, and Suzaku took a moment to truly admire the details of the palace. It was simply extraordinary and far more beautiful than anything the Britannians could put together. The technology was so advanced they might as well have stepped into a sci-fi movie. At the same time, though, they could definitely sense something supernatural about the castle, almost like it was alive.

"I can't believe your civilization made such advanced technology ten thousand years ago," Suzaku said in awe. "It must have been an incredible place."
"Yes, it was," Coran said sadly, "but now it is gone, and we're the last Alteans alive."

Allura's eyes flooded with tears as she hugged Coran, sobs racking her body. Lelouch clenched his fists, not out of anger towards Allura, but more to himself for choosing to leave Nunnally. The circumstances may have given him little to no choice, but he could have figured out something had he thought hard enough. He wouldn't be able to hold Nunnally the way Coran was holding Allura for a very long time now, if ever.

The two separated, though, when a squeaking sound came from the sleeping pod. She gasped in delight at seeing a small group of Altean mice, waving and smiling at her. "Looks like we're not the last after all."

This was short-lived, though, as the control panel suddenly started beeping in alarm. One of the screens glowed a bright red as a screen opened to reveal a purple Galra ship slowly approaching the planet.

"A Galra Battleship has set its tracker to us!" Coran gasped.

"How did they find us?" Allura asked, holding the mice in her hands.

"Did they follow us!?" asked Rai in alarm.

"No, they didn't," said another female voice coming from the control room entrance. Turning to the sound, and the group saw a green-haired woman with golden-yellow eyes wearing what appeared to be a loose straight jacket with its buckles undone.

Suzaku recognized her immediately, "Hey! You're that-"

"C.C.," Lelouch interrupted Suzaku, "what are you doing here? How did you get here?"

"I snuck onto that lion when you weren't looking. And I must agree with Kallen on this one Rivalz, you're flying could use some work."
"Lelouch, who's this?" Milly asked suspiciously.

"This is C.C. We're... uh..."

"Accomplices," C.C. replied nonchalantly, "and as for why I'm here, I thought I made it clear to you, Lelouch. I don't let my contractors die, hence why I'm accompanying you."

"Contractor? Lelouch, what's she talking about," Shirley asked accusingly.

"We can discuss that later," C.C. answered before Lelouch could, "if I'm not mistaken, we have an alien ship about to attack this castle correct? How long before they arrive exactly?"

Suzaku gave both C.C. and Lelouch a look that clearly said, 'we WILL discuss this later,' along with similar looks from most of the others, Allura and Coran included.

Coran did answer C.C.'s question, though, "At their speed, let's see... carry the two... I-I'd say maybe a couple of days?"

"Good, let them come," Allura said with a determined look. She then turned and at the seven Britannians, Honorary, Half-Blooded, and Full-blooded. "By the time they get here, you seven will have reformed Voltron, and together, we will destroy Zarkon's empire."

"Princess," Lelouch said, getting right down to business, "if there are seven of these lions, how are we going to find the rest?"

Allura didn't say anything as she put the mice back down. She led the group to the main bridge of the castle and walked towards the center of the room. A large crystal directly above her head shone down with a brilliant blue light around her. She closed her eyes in concentration.

"King Alfor connected the Lions to Allura's life force," Coran explained, "she alone is the key to the Lions' whereabouts."

Allura's eyes suddenly opened again, and the blue beam expanded around her. As a result, the light separated into multiple particles surrounding the room and engulfing everyone in it. The lights
dimmed, allowing only the blue lights to be visible. That is when everyone realized that the particles were stars. They were standing in a 3-D model of the entire universe.

"These are… coordinates!" Rai suddenly realized, seeing all the stars and planets floating around them.

"Hey look," Suzaku said, seeing an image of the Blue and Black Lions side by side on one of the planets, "the Black Lion looks like in the same location as the Blue Lion."

"Look at your primitive synapses firing away in their little brain cage," Coran commented, seemingly quite impressed how smart this simple human indeed was. Suzaku seemed to catch on to what Coran was saying, however, and to put it simply, he wasn't that amused.

"Very observant," Allura said with a warm smile, "that's because the Black Lion is in the castle."

"To keep the Black Lion out of Zarkon's hands, King Alfor locked it in the castle," Coran explained, "it can only be freed if the other six lions are present."

"As you've found, the Lions choose their pilots," Allura further explained, "it is a mystical bond, and can not be forced. The quintessence of the pilot is mirrored in their lion. Together, they form something greater than science can explain."

The princess moved her hand swiftly, and the coordinates move in one direction as if on a computer screen. The image of the Black Lion floated in front of them, but slowly approached Lelouch, "The Black Lion is the decisive head of Voltron. It will take a pilot who is a born leader and in control at all times. Someone whose men will follow without hesitation. That is why Lelouch, you will pilot the Black Lion."

Allura waved her hand again, and this time the image of a green lion appeared, next to a planet that seemed to be covered in a lush green jungle. "The Green Lion has an inquisitive personality and needs a pilot of intellect and daring. Rai, you will pilot the Green Lion."

"The Blue Lion," Rivalz smirked cockily at the mention of his lion, "is the most confident and friendliest of the Lions. Relying on optimism of the situation to keep the team together. As you already do, Rivalz, you will pilot the Blue Lion."
"Called it!" Rivalz smirked.

"The Orange Lion is caring and kind," Allura continued as the image of another lion appeared by what looked more like a meteor than a planet. It hovered in front of Shirley, "Its pilot is the one who puts the needs of others above their own. Their heart must be mighty. As the leg of Voltron, you will lift the team up and hold them together."

"Me?!" Shirley squeaked in alarm, pointing to herself.

"The Yellow Lion is the most diligent of the Lions," a yellow lion appeared by a planet that seemed to shine like stars by Milly. "Knowing when goals must be accomplished and when keeping the others focused on their goal. Milly, the pilot of the Yellow Lion, will be you." Milly hummed in thought, as the lion did seem to match her personality in the 'getting things done' department.

"The Purple Lion is the most honorable of the Lions," Allura said as she materialized the image of the Purple Lion, though it wasn't connected to any coordinates. "That is also why it is one of the more difficult ones to control. The one who pilots it must be someone who is not ashamed of their beliefs and is willing to stay true to them as well. Because of this, Suzaku, the Purple Lion will be piloted by you."

At the mention of beliefs and values, no one, except C.C., noticed how Lelouch seemed to glare subtly at Suzaku. It appeared he was still bitter about how Suzaku refused to join the Black Knights after they went through the trouble of rescuing him.

'This could become a problem,' C.C. thought to herself.

"The Red Lion is temperamental and the most difficult to master," just like with the Purple Lion, Allura allowed the Red Lion to materialize, but there weren't any coordinates with it. "It's faster and more agile than the others, but also more unstable. Its pilot needs to be someone who relies more on instincts than skill alone," the Red Lion hovered in front of Kallen, "Kallen, you will pilot the Red Lion."

"What?!" exclaimed Shirley in disbelief, along with most of the other student council members, "Kallen? Seriously?!" Though their doubt was understandable. Kallen had yet to reveal that 'Kallen Stadtfeld' was just a front and that she was really Kallen Kozuki, a terrorist, and elite knightmare pilot.
"Unfortunately, I can not locate the coordinates to the Red or Purple Lions yet. There must be something wrong with the castle. After ten thousand years, it might need some work."

"Don't worry, we'll find them soon," Coran said, "They don't call me 'the Coranic' for nothing… It's because it sounds like 'mechanic,' so uh… Coranic… Mechanic. It's not- it doesn't sound exactly like it, it's similar."

All seven of the lions suddenly came to life, roared, and ran around their respective pilots and shooting off into the sky like shooting stars. Everyone shielded their eyes as the lights of the castle allowed Arus's natural light to enter the room. They watched in awe as the legendary hero, Voltron, stood before them with all the colors of their respective lions, the head of the black lion revealing his face, wielding a magnificent sword.

"Once all the Lions are united, you will form Voltron, the most powerful warrior ever known. The Defender of the Universe!"

The image of the warrior vanished into sparkles, leaving everyone watching in shock, wonder, and even a little fear. The robotic warrior was far more impressive than any knightmare frame model they've seen. However, it was still intimidating to know that the seven of them would be the ones piloting it. Even Suzaku was nervous. Sure, he was the pilot of one of the most advanced knightmare frames in the world right now. The Lancelot he could handle, but a giant robotic lion? Would it feel the same way or not?

"Awesome!" Rivalz exclaimed as a brief moment of silence.

"Wait. Okay, so we're going to be in there and flying lions," Shirley spoke, "got that part. How do I insert in the legs? Also, is this going to be a long trip? And if it is, should I use the toilet first? You guys have those, right?"

"We don't have much time," Lelouch said, taking command as he was to be the leader of Voltron, "Milly and I will go after the Yellow Lion. Rivalz, you take Shirley and get the Orange one," he glanced at C.C., "C.C., will you go with Rai and get the Green Lion?"

"If I must," the immortal shrugged nonchalantly.

"Suzaku, Kallen, you two stay here. When you find the Purple or Red Lions go get them." The two of them nodded in understanding.
"In the meantime, I'll get the Castle's defenses ready," Allura said, "they'll be sorely needed."

"I'll ready some pods, and load in the coordinates so you can reach the Green and Yellow Lions," Coran spoke as he proceeded to do just that.

Milly, Lelouch, Rai, and C.C. followed Coran to the pods that he prepared for their journeys. They had sleek silver vehicle outlines with neon blue around the edges that seemed to be a trademark of the castle. While they loaded in, Shirley and Rivalz returned to the Blue Lion.

After the two groups got settled in the pods, he handed Milly and Rai a device, "These are the coordinates for the Lions you'll be looking for. Once you land, they should lead you right to them."

Rai, being the most techno-savvy of the group, pressed a blue button on the device. It caused a screen to pop up that had the image of the planet where the Green Lion was located. Milly followed the action, seeing where the Yellow Lion was.

Shortly after, the three teams were launched into the atmosphere of Arus, two in pods, and the other in the Blue Lion. Lelouch and C.C. piloted the pods as Milly and Rai sat in the passenger seats. A computer screen soon appeared in front of them with Coran's face on it. The same happened for Shirley and Rivalz in the Blue Lion.

"We can only keep the wormholes that lead to the other Lions open for about two of your Earth hours," Coran explained to them, as the wormholes opened in front of them. They shimmered like the ocean in the evening. "So you'll have to be quick about your work. The good news is, according to my readings, all three planets are relatively peaceful. So if you do get stuck, they could be relaxing places to live out the rest of your lives."

"Wait, what?!/Say what?!/Come again?!" were the responses that followed. None of them realized that Coran was joking as they could quickly locate the Blue Lion, and the two pods also had tracking devices in them.

"Well, enjoy the trip!"

"Wait a minute!/Hold on!/I did not receive the memo for this!" the protests went silent as the pods and lion disappeared in the wormholes.

Chapter End Notes
Hope you all enjoyed it and that this answered some questions you may have had. If there is anything that still isn't clear to you please let me know I'll answer it to the best of my abilities.

Hope you enjoyed the chapter. R&R!
Rise of Voltron Part 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lelouch and Milly's planet looked almost like a giant diamond from afar, the entire planet's surface shined like a thirty-carat jewel on a ring.

"Oh!" Milly swooned as the planet's sun glimmered off of it, "What I wouldn't pay to have that as my wedding ring."

"Milly focus," Lelouch chastised, "we're here to find a giant lion, not admire the scenery."

"Such a spoilsport Lulu," Milly slightly pouted but then became serious, "seriously though, who's that C.C. character. What sort of name is 'C.C.' anyway?"

"Milly-" Lelouch sighed in exasperation as they pod landed on the surface, "Look… I'll explain everything later; right now, we need to focus on the objective."

Milly scoffed as the two exited the pod. The grass and vegetation that surrounded them shared the same glimmer, and shining metallic glow as crystal. Even some of the different bugs they spotted scurrying in the grass sparkled the same way. Far off to the left appeared to be a city made out of the crystal spires if the hole-like windows within them were any indication.

"It's like we landed on a living diamond," Lelouch observed as Milly activated the device Coran gave to them. "At least the air breathable. Which way to the Yellow Lion?"

"Um… looks like a few kilometers this way," Milly said as she started heading towards a bedazzled forest to the right.

"At least most of this is flat ground…" Lelouch muttered low enough so Milly couldn't hear.

After about a half-hour of walking along the forest path, they came across another crystal spire village. This time, however, they were close enough to spot some of the natives. From what they could see, there were three different types of people. One looked exactly like them, with no extra features or limbs. Another had pointed ears very similar to Allura and Coran. The only difference
was that they had large feathered wings on their back in different colors, from speckled to solid colors. The third looked like a water creature, with scales lining their arms and legs, webbed hands, and gills on their necks. One thing that they all had in common, though, was that they all sparkled the same way that the crystal surrounding them did.

"Hope we're not trespassing like this…" Milly muttered nervously.

"Do we have to go through the village to get to the Lion, Milly?" Lelouch asked.

"Well," Milly said, looking at the map, "we can go around, but the fastest way is through the village, yes."

Lelouch bit his lip thinking about the best course of action. They had already been on the planet for a half-hour. This meant that they had another ninety Earth minutes. But they had no idea how much farther the Lion was either. "We have no choice; hopefully, they won't ask too many questions."

"What type of questions?"

Milly and Lelouch jumped at the voice from behind them. Turning around, they saw that a fish-like and a bird-like native had somehow snuck up behind them. They both had blue hair and gold eyes, the wings on the bird-like native were a mix of mahogany and brown like a Kestrel.

"Are you two aliens?" asked the fish-like native asked innocently.

"Err… well," Lelouch blushed, not quite sure how to answer.

"Were you sent by the Great Lion?" asked the bird-like native after he saw the device in Milly's hands.

"The Great Lion?" asked Milly, suddenly interested where this was going.

"Uh-huh!" the boys nodded, the fish-like being continued, "the Great Lion lives on that hill on the other side of the village. No one knows how long she's been there, but just yesterday, the light that
surrounds her shined brighter than ever."

"The light that surrounds her?" Lelouch asked.

"Yup! Over yonder! The Lion's light protects our kingdom from the evil that curses the heavens," the bird-boy proclaimed.

Lelouch and Milly looked at one another; this certainly sounded like the Galra Empire. Had the Galra tried to attack this planet before? Did this lion have some power that kept the Galra away?

"Can you take us to this Great Lion?" Milly asked with a friendly smile, "My friend and I are here to see her."

"Why?" asked the fish-boy, "Why do you want to see the Great Lion?"

"Well, young man," Milly bent down on her knees and smiled. Lelouch instantly knew that Milly had this covered, "what if we told you that there are others like your Great Lion out there?"

The boys didn't answer; they only looked at the blonde in wonder. Was it true? Were there more lions?

"And… what if we told you that the sisters of the Great Lion need her help? And without her, the darkness that is kept from this world will spread to others? Once she has rejoined them, they can destroy this darkness forever and ever?"

"And you have come to bring the Great Lion to her sisters?" asked the bird-boy.

"Yes," Lelouch joined in, "if you take us to her, we can reunite them. Wouldn't you want to see your family again after thousands of years apart?"

It seemed to convince the two boys of how important the Great Lion was, and if there were more of them out there, that meant more protection for their planet.
"Destroy the darkness? That would be a glorious day!" bird-boy exclaimed in excitement, before pulling Milly's hand, "Come! We'll take you to her!"

Lelouch and Milly smiled in accomplishment. This may be easier than they thought.

o~o

Just like Milly and Lelouch, C.C. and Rai were having little to no trouble on their planet. However, unlike the diamond planet, the world they landed on was covered in thick forest and swamp, filled with a large amount of familiar and unfamiliar flora and fauna.

As they exited the pod, Rai led the way, keeping his eyes on the device at all times, although he did send curious glances at C.C. every now and again.

"Something on your mind?" she finally asked after Rai glanced at her for about the seventh time.

"Huh?!" Rai sputtered, nearly dropping the device, "Wh-what, are you talking about."

"Well, I'm sure you aren't glancing back at me just for giggles. This is about what happened back at the castle, isn't it?"

"We-well, yes, I-I mean you did just sneak onto the Blue Lion without us noticing, and Lelouch and Suzaku are the only ones that seemed to recognize you so..."

"I've already told you that Lelouch and I will explain everything to you when we retrieve these lions. Better for it to be repeated once than multiple times, facts could get mixed up."

"I guess…” Rai muttered as they continued walking. They walked for about another ten minutes before the bushes to their right rustled. Rai jumped back in alarm before a creature leaped out before them that seemed to look like a mixture between a rabbit, chipmunk, and caterpillar.

C.C. smirked, "Careful boy, I hear they can smell fear."
"Heh, guess I'm a little jumpy," Rai laughed.

They continued through the jungle until they came to a calm river. However, what Rai was more interested in was the canoe parked on the shore. It looked like any other ordinary canoe except that the head of it was in the shape of a roaring lion. They heard a moan to their left, turning to their left they saw what appeared to be an oversized sloth, almost as tall as Coran.

C.C. blinked in surprise at its size while Rai yelped and leaped behind her for cover. She rolled her eyes as if to say, 'Oh, what a gentleman, letting the woman fight his battles.' The sloth didn't attack them though and only seemed to study them curiously as Rai peaked out from behind C.C’s shoulder. Really, how dangerous could a sloth be anyway?

"It's just a… whatever that thing is…” Rai said.

"A giant sloth?" C.C. asked bluntly.

"...Maybe?"

The sloth then seemed to notice the device in Rai’s hand before smiling and walking over to the canoe. It then made a gesture to follow him.

"I-I think he wants us to get in his canoe," Rai said.

"Then let's go," C.C. said as he walked towards the sloth. Seeing Rai’s hesitation, C.C continued, "I think we can both agree that compared to everything that's happened to both of us, this is close to nothing."

Seeing her point, Rai followed behind the green-haired witch to the canoe. Extending his paw like a gentleman, the sloth helped C.C. into the boat, and Rai followed right behind. Once they settled, the sloth began rowing the canoe gently down the river. As they proceeded down, more of the rabbit-squirrel-caterpillar critters popped out from the hedge surrounding them. They seemed to wave and sing to them in harmony as they glided along. C.C. couldn't help but giggle at how adorable they were, and even Rai smiled as well. They entered a stone archway that led into a long tunnel, and the top of the entrance had a very similar picture of a lion, like the ones they first saw in the cave back on Earth. The sloth-thing certainly seemed to know why they were here and what they were looking for.
"I wonder if Lelouch, Milly, Rivalz, and Shirley are having as good a time as us?" Rai wondered out loud.

o~o

"WAAAAAHHHHH!"

"NONONONONONONONO!"

Unlike Lelouch, Milly, C.C., and Rai, Shirley and Rivalz's planet was anything but peaceful! They had arrived on the asteroid shaped planet just as the others had but were almost immediately shot down by Galra fighter jets. The 'peaceful' world they had been sent to was now a mining colony for the Galra. And they just so happened to be trespassing.

They were both currently screaming their heads off as Rivalz struggled to steer the Blue Lion out of range of the Galra lasers and missiles. However, it didn't take long for one of them to hit the Blue Lion, causing it to start crashing towards the surface. Fortunately, Rivalz managed to regain the Blue Lion's balance inches before they hit the ground, and the chase was at it again.

"I THOUGHT CORAN SAID THESE PLANETS WERE PEACEFUL?!!" Shirley screamed hysterically.

"MAYBE 'PEACEFUL' MEANS SOMETHING ELSE IN ALTEAN!" Rivalz replied nearly in the same hysteric as Shirley.

After regaining balance once again, Shirley took a moment to activate the device with the coordinates. "Uh, according to these coordinates, we're right on top of the Orange Lion," she looked out the screen of the Blue Lion to see the opening to one of the mines that the Galra robots were heavily guarding. The lion had pulled up a zoomed-in image of the entrance, "It's below there where they're mining for the ore. They don't even know the Lion is there… or maybe they just got here, and they're digging for the Lion? I don't know, what do you think, Rivalz?"

"Who cares? Just go get it! I'm dropping you down there!"

Shirley paled, "Me? Down there? No, no, nononono…!" she shook her head vigorously.
Rivalz gritted his teeth, "Yes, I'll cover you!" he gripped the controls and soared towards the entrance, dodging the laser blasts left and right. Those that hit did little to no damage to the lion's mechanical body. When it hit the ground, it charged towards the cave entrance, crushing robots beneath its paws in the process.

Shirley, however, was having a full-on panic attack, "We-well what if the Orange Lion doesn't work? Wh-what if I can't get in the mine? What if I start crying? It's too late; I'm already crying!"

Rivalz could only send her a nervous, sympathetic look, "Sorry, Shirley, no time for questions!"

Rivalz then hit a button on the dashboard, and Shirley disappeared into the floor, screaming. It felt like one of those waterslides where the floor vanished beneath your feet before the ride began, and just the anticipation of waiting for it to open made Shirley hate those slides. This felt ten times worse, considering that immediately after, she was spat out of the Blue Lion's mouth onto the hard stone surface of the planet. She narrowly avoided hitting her head on a rock as she rolled to a stop at the cave's entrance.

A series of lasers immediately came shooting towards her, but Rivalz and the Blue Lion quickly blocked them. Scared, but not wasting this distraction, Shirley scurried toward the platform that would lead her down into the mine. Fortunately, she remembered her dad had taught her how to hardwire a car if hers, or a friend's, ever didn't work for some reason. So it was easy for her to find the generator and start tampering with the electrical wires.

"Oh sure, just drop me off on an alien planet, that's cool, Rivalz, a great way to treat a lady," she angrily muttered to herself she picked and pulled wires. "It's only occupied with mean purple aliens that want to kill me but whatever. Just ignore them and connect with a big, orange mechanical cat! Easy-peasy! Yeah, that makes total sense! Perfect sense!"

At some point in her rambling, she managed to make the cart work as it jerked downward. As it descended, the tunnel began to light up in orange-colored markings of a lion just like on Earth. As Shirley gazed at the images, all of the fear she felt before began to fade away.

"Wow… cool!"

When the cart stopped at the bottom of the tunnel, Shirley quickly jumped out and leaped behind a pillar that the Galra had put in place to keep the cave from collapsing. It seemed the Galra had already made themselves at home on this planet. Along the walls of the tunnel were more pictures of lions. It appeared that Shirley was in the right place. The roof shook as sounds of the fight above continued; it seemed Rivalz was keeping them busy, but how long would he last?
"Okay, I'm in a giant hole. Now what Shirley?" she asked herself. If she remembered correctly, all Rivalz had to do was touch the lion drawings and then they started glowing. She didn't notice there were drawings on the floor as well until she stepped forward to reach the wall marking, unknowingly stepping on a floor drawing. The orange glow appeared once again, startling her. Turning around, she saw two more lion drawings, the one she had stepped on and another further away from it. Then on the wall across from her appeared to end in a circular symbol on the wall.

"Oh… pretty! Now how do I get through that?" she asked herself before turning around to see a giant drilling machine becoming visible thanks to the cave's glow, "Hmm… that'll work!"

o~o

While Shirley got busy trying to get the drill to work, Rivalz and the Blue Lion got hit with another blast from the Galra cruisers. Rivalz prayed Shirley didn't take much longer as he was having a hard time keeping these guys at bay. Glancing back, Rivalz saw that one blast hit a little too close to the cave entrance, only to realize that they were aiming for that the entire time!

In desperation, he shot the Blue Lion into the air, which then used its tail cannons to blast them out of the sky.

'Hurry up, Shirley!'

o~o

Back on the diamond planet, the two native children had led the pair to a path that led up the mountain. Lelouch groaned at the number of steps they would have to take just to get there. As they approached the levels, though, Milly and Lelouch noticed that the two children had stopped moving, as if they were hesitant to keep going.

"Why'd you stop?" asked Lelouch.

"We are forbidden to go further than this," the bird-boy explained, "only those called by the Great Lion can climb the steps."
"And since you are the ones the Lion called, you have to do it," the fish-boy added.

Lelouch and Milly looked at each other with raised eyebrows. These people seemed a bit too superstitious, even for them. Their trains of thought were cut short though when the steps to the stairs, mainly the pictures of the lions themselves, started glowing a bright yellow. It left not just Milly and Lelouch in awe, but the native boys as well. Had they taken a step back from the mountain, they would have seen that the mound in its entirety was lighting up in bright yellow light.

"I think that's your cue, Milly…" Lelouch said as Milly nodded in agreement, before smiling and started skipping up the stone steps.

"The mountain has never done this before!" the bird-boy exclaimed in wonder.

"The Great Lion is excited!" the fish-boy added.

Lelouch could only smile at their innocence.

Milly was panting a little as she made it up to the last flight of stairs. When she made it to the top, though, there wasn't anything there. There was only a large stone carving of the lion at the very center. Walking towards it, she hummed in thought. Shouldn't the lion be here?

Milly then yelped as the ground beneath her began to rumble, the craving of the lion lighting up and splitting apart the floor. Milly quickly leaped to one side avoid doing the splits herself. When the top was completely open, Milly looked apprehensively down, seeing only darkness. Raising her eyebrow, she expected to see the Lion. She lifted her head and looked around, was something else supposed to happen?

Milly then shivered as she felt a soft purr echo from the hole, and immediately it filled with light so bright, Milly had to cover her eyes not to be blinded. But any apprehension that she felt before wholly vanished as well as she grinned and leaped into the hole, knowing full well her lion was waiting for her.

"YAHOOOOOOO!

Down below, Lelouch and the two children stumbled as the ground shook beneath them. Looking up, they see that the top of the mountain might as well look like a separate sun. Finally, out of the 'sun' emerged a stunning yellow feline mecha, the light itself had seemed to radiate off of it.
Lelouch could only smile while the two boys looked on, their eyes sparkling in awe. In the
distance, in the village where the boys lived, a chorus of cheers filled the air.


Back on the meteorite planet, below the surface, Shirley finally managed to get the drill thing to
work, and it wasn't long before the wall in front of her came tumbling down. Jumping off, she
could stare in wonder at what was in front of her. Just like with the Blue Lion on Earth, the Orange
Lion was also within a forcefield of the same color. Its eyes glowed a bright yellow and seemed to
have a little bit of red outlining on its plating. She also noticed that compared to the Blue Lion, this
lion seemed to have much more armor on. It reminded her of the more heavily armored Glasgows
that were made more for close combat.

Out of everyone in the Student Council Shirley was the one who got scared the easiest (besides
Nina), however looking up at the Lion, she strangely didn't feel fear at all, in fact, she felt
completely safe and calm as if the Lion was assuring her of just that. Slowly, she began to approach
the particle barrier that surrounded it.

"Okay, you can do this," Shirley told herself. She got closer and, though feeling a little ridiculous
doing so, waved at it, "Um… Hi, I'm Shirley, and I guess I'm supposed to be your pilot… so um…
yeah, I'm going to get you out of here… I hope…"

Shirley honestly wasn't quite sure what to do. When they found the Blue Lion on Earth, all Rivalz
had to do was tap on the particle barrier and poof, the Blue Lion was free. She figured that would
be the best place to start. So she tentatively touched the forcefield, and just like Rivalz, it reacted,
glowing just as brightly as the one on Earth, releasing the Lion for the first time in a millennium.


Gritting his teeth, Rivalz spun in the air and proceeded to dive-bomb the Galra cruisers that
continued to attack the cave. The Blue Lion let out a roar as it's jaws enclosed around the wing of
one, ripping it off before it exploded. Hovering in the air, the Lion continued to shoot down any
cruisers it saw with its tail cannon. Turning around, Rivalz's blood ran cold. Their next action made
Rivalz's blood run cold.

"Oh no!" he shouted as he saw several cruisers aiming all of their ammunition at the cave entrance
and around it. They were going bury Shirley alive along with the Lion!
Desperate, Rivalz raced after them, shooting as many down as he could, but one missile managed to fire just as the cruiser blew up, and there was no stopping its trajectory!

"SHIRLEY!" Rivalz screamed in horror as the missile made contact with the entrance, causing a massive explosion, thick black and red clouds of smoke filling the area, blocking the view of what happened. Sweat dripped down Rivalz neck, and his eyes could only look in horror as it finally cleared to not only reveal that the entrance had been sealed…

But half the mountain had collapsed into itself.

o~o

For Rai, it felt like the river they were on went on for miles as and miles, and if there was one thing that Rai did know, even in his partially amnesiac state, was that he hated waiting! And when he was forced to wait, thoughts would start forming in his head with no control whatsoever, just like a mob of hungry koi fish receiving their daily meal.

"I know the Princess said that this is supposed to be my lion, but what if she's wrong? I mean, she's probably not wrong. She's a princess, but I'm not a pilot, even though... I've always wanted to be a pilot. I mean, I read all the fighter manuals, but never got to do the simulator. But, hey, I can't be all that worse than Rivalz-"

As the teen continued to ramble, the sloth looked at C.C. as if to ask: 'Is he always like this?' C.C. only shrugged in response as she had never gotten close to Rai until now. The canoe, however, continued down the stream into another long cave with more lion carvings on the side and green moss growing along the walls.

"-but what if I get in there and it doesn't respond? What if I get in there and it's too big, and my feet don't touch the pedals? WHAT IF THERE AREN'T EVEN PEDALS?"

"Well, if you keep rambling like that, you're going to get more than just your tongue in a knot," C.C. said with an amused smirk. Rai blushed in embarrassment. C.C. continued, "I might not know much about this Voltron that the Princess speaks of, but I do believe that you, Lelouch, and the others were brought here for a reason. If she believes the Green Lion is to be piloted by you, I see little reason to doubt her."

C.C. couldn't see Rai's face as his back faced her, but the teen now had a small smile of reassurance on his face, taking a little bit of comfort in her words. Before he could say thank you, he gasped as they finally approached the end of the river. The path that led away from it had thick
curved vines and trees in the way, and the middle was what appeared to be a sizeable ancient temple also covered mostly in vines.

After the boat docked on the shore, the pair departed, waving thank you to the strange sloth that escorted them. They approached the stone temple, passing by two more large lion statues on the way. The markings on the ground they also saw started to glow bright green as if sensing Rai’s presence, creating a trail that led up the stairs of the temple.

As the two walked closer to the temple, more markings appeared on the steps, until they led into the most significant cluster of vines at the top. Rai seemed completely entranced as they stopped at the bottom like something was calling to him. Rai then swallowed, hesitation still very present in his head.

"Well?" asked C.C., smirking and folding her arms, "What are you waiting for?"

Hearing C.C.’s words, Rai quickly shook the nervousness away and ran at full speed up the steps to the top. After the stairs ended, he then proceeded to climb up the large vines, some with quite a bit of difficulty because of how thick they were. He was panting as hard as Lelouch would be after a light run when he finally reached the top. After taking a moment to catch his breath, Rai looked around, suddenly confused, there was nothing up here but vines.

Rai was about to leave in disappointment when a low growl was heard right below him. Looking down, he was soon greeted by a brightly glowing green light. He could feel the energy radiating from it. Grinning, he leaped down into the mess of vines, the lights shining brighter after he landed.

"WHOO-HOO-HOOOOO!" he cheered.

Back on the ground, C.C. was leaning against the pillars that led up to the temple. Suddenly the ground beneath her shook, and a roar filled the air, making her stumble. Looking up in bewilderment, she saw that at the top of the temple, the vines had begun to glow and shake. Then they suddenly dispersed, revealing a huge green lion was rising in the air with burning yellow eyes.

In spite of herself, C.C. couldn't help but give an impressed smirk as the wind blew her long green hair back.

"What did I tell you?"
Rivalz was panicking. Now that the cave had been destroyed, likely killing Shirley, the Galra forces were focusing all their firepower on him as he struggled to outmaneuver them with the Blue Lion. Gritting his teeth, Rivalz attempted to turn around and fire at the ships again, only for the Blue Lion to get shot down by more lasers. He was completely overwhelmed!

"Oh, no, no, no! Going down! We're going down!" Rivalz panicked as they crashed to the ground. In desperation, he pulled the controls as hard as he could, which managed to have the Lion roll along the ground and land upright. However, it was still somewhat damaged as it attempted to rise. Red warning lights flashed everywhere inside the cockpit. Rivalz shook his head as he had been jostled during the fall, only to look through the screen to see several missiles heading towards him.

"Oh, no!" he gasped. He could only close his eyes and look away, awaiting death and hoping it would be painless.

Before the missiles could strike, though, a massive mechanical beast came shooting out of the ground, landing between the Blue Lion and the rockets, which promptly exploded on the impact of the new arrival. From the clouds of smoke, a massive Orange Lion came clambering out before leaping into the air and crushing the Galra cruisers beneath it, causing them to explode.

It stood up and turned to face the Blue Lion. "Rivalz, you okay?"

Rivalz gasped, "Shirley! I thought you were dead! You jumped in front of all those shots to save my life?!"

Promptly a screen appeared in front of Rivalz to show Shirley in the cockpit of the Orange Lion. It looked identical to the one Rivalz was in, except the seat, all of the gadgets and buttons inside were orange colored. She didn't appear to be hurt if a little frazzled. She must have been in the Lion already when the mountain caved in.

"Well, actually, I was trying to get out of the way. Thankfully, what this thing lacks in speed more than makes up for in armor, and man can it take a beating!"

The conversation was brought to a halt, though when more Galra cruisers came flying down, shooting lasers at the two lions.
"We've got incoming!" Shirley exclaimed, looking towards the shots with her lion.

The two prepared to engage the enemy again when another screen popped up, this time in both their lions. It was Allura. "Paladins! Please hurry back! I can't hold the wormhole much longer!"

Rivalz didn't need to be told twice, "Let's get out of here!" he exclaimed as he and Shirley blasted off into the air with their lions the wormhole straight ahead. About halfway there, Shirley felt herself jolt forward as she was hit by one of the cruisers, causing her lion to spin as it continued upwards.

"Oh no, not again!" she nearly wailed as she felt nausea begin again. She put her hand over her mouth in an attempt to keep the food down.

"Keep it together, Shirley, the wormhole's closing!" Rivalz said, just as the lions made into them before it closed behind them.

o~o

The control room doors slid open as Shirley and Rivalz walked in, both groaning. Shirley was holding her head while Rivalz massaged his lower back. Lelouch, Milly, C.C., and Rai were already there waiting for them, alongside Suzaku, Kallen, Allura, and Coran.

"You made it!" Allura said with relief as they entered.

"Yeah," Rivalz frowned, flexing his arm, "Just barely, that was a nightmare! I almost puked out there! I felt like Shirley!"

"Think how I felt," Shirley retorted, "I am Shirley!"

"Yeah," Milly smiled, looking at Lelouch, "we had a tough time too," Lelouch smirked in amusement. C.C. rolled her eyes as Rai snorted a little.

"Did we find the Purple or Red Lions yet?" asked Lelouch.
"Allura just located them," Coran said, "there's a bit of good news and bad news. The good news is that both lions are in the same place and nearby. The bad news is, they're on board that Galra ship that's now orbiting Arus… but wait! Good news again, we're Arus!"

Lelouch's eyes widened in shock, as did everyone else's, "They're here already?!"

"I thought you said it would take them two days to get here! Not two hours!" Kallen exclaimed in anger.

"Apologies," Coran said a nervous smile, "it seems my calculations were a bit off. Finger counting is more of an art than a science."

His explanation, though, was cut short as a large screen appeared in front of them, drawing everyone's attention to it. The image that appeared showed a purple-colored alien, one of the Galra. Much like the rest of his kind, he had purple fur and skin, long catlike ears, and in his right eye was what appeared to be a large round mechanical eye. His left eye had no pupil and was completely yellow. He had a healthy, muscular physique, making him look very intimidating.

"Princess Allura, this is Commander Sendak of the Galra Empire," the Galra addressed them, earning several gasps from many in the castle. Lelouch and Kallen were only ones who didn't seem afraid of him, only glaring at the Galra in defiance. The way he addressed them reminded Lelouch and Kallen of the nobles of Britannia back home. The very thought made their blood boil.

"I come on behalf of Emperor Zarkon, ruler of the known universe. I am here to confiscate the Lions. Turn them over to me, or I will destroy your planet."

Chapter End Notes

I got inspiration on Milly and Lelouch's planet from the Crystal Empire from MLP. Just imagine the inhabitants having the same crystal design as the crystal ponies.

Hope you enjoyed this! R&R!
"Alright, let's not panic!" Lelouch said as soon as Sendak's transmission ended.

"Not panic?" Shirley asked, her voice already shaking, "The scary purple alien thing is driving his battleships toward us. We only got five lions-"

"Technically only four working lions," Suzaku pointed out.

"That's right, thank you, Suzaku. Four working lions, and a castle that's like ten thousand years old!"

"Actually, it's ten thousand, six hundred years old," Coran informed them and adjusted his collar as if about to give an important presentation. He always loved speaking about his proud family line. "You see it was built by my grandfather-"

"Thanks, Coran, thank you for that," Shirley interrupted, pinching Coran's lips shut, much to the man's shock and disappointment, "See? Now is the perfect time to panic!"

"No, it isn't!" Milly argued back, "If anything, now's the time to put our heads together and come up with a plan! We won't win this battle if we act like a bunch of wild dogs chasing their tails."

"Wait!" Allura exclaimed in realization, "This castle has a particle barrier we can activate!"

"Okay," said Kallen, "and how long will that hold?"

Coran pulled up an outline of the Galra ship on the screen in front of them. The main cannon on the battleship highlighted in red. "The barrier won't hold Sendak's ion cannon forever. The Galra technology must have advanced since we fought them last."

"Panic now?" asked Shirley, still trembling.
"No," Lelouch said firmly, "we just need to figure out our plan of attack, and figure it out fast." Lelouch's brain was working in overdrive to try and figure this out. However, there were so many unknown factors; he was having a hard time thinking of a plan. After all, this would technically be their first official battle with the Galra. He didn't count their scrimmage on Earth or Rivalz and Shirley's retrieval mission since the first didn't count as a 'battle,' and Lelouch wasn't present in the later.

Rivalz spoke up, raising his hand, "I say we pop through a wormhole and live to fight another day."

"I second that, yes," Shirley agreed immediately, "I mean, we tried to find all the lions, right? Gave it the old college try, couldn't do it. We only have four; we can't form Voltron. I-I mean, I guess we could form a snake? Or a worm! To go through the hole, Rivalz was talking about."

"Then it's settled," Rivalz said before smirking flirtatiously at Allura, "Allura, you ride with me." He then leaned his head towards Coran, "One of you take the old guy." Coran began fuming in rage at the comment.

"Wait! We can't just abandon Arus!" Rai protested, "The Galra will keep destroying planets and capturing prisoners until we stop them!"

"That may be true," Suzaku said, "but if you think about it, the Lions are ultimately the Galra's targets. If we leave Arus, the Galra may follow us and leave the planet alone. That's what happened on Earth, remember? There must be some planets the Galra are willing to let be."

"Yeah!" Rivalz nodded, "Then we form the snake thingamajig, and we sliver out of here!" He made slivering motions with his arms to emphasize.

Milly spoke, "But now Zarkon knows the Lions are back. Even if we do run, how far will we get before they catch us, not to mention the number of planets and people he'll kill just to do it? It's only going to get more dangerous from here on out! Also, if I may add, judging by their complexion, those Galra guys could use some beauty sleep… or a facial, I'm just saying."

"Exactly!" Rai agreed, "About the Lions and all that, not the facial thing… although I'll agree with you on that too."
"Besides, why don't you use your quiznacking head for a moment," Kallen protested, glaring at Suzaku. Coran and Allura flinched and gaped at Kallen as if she just said a foul word. "Did it occur to you that Sendak could just destroy Arus, and then come after us anyway? Staying is our only option!"

"First of all, I don't think you used that 'quiznack' word correctly, and second you don't know that!" Suzaku objected, gritting his teeth.

"We're not abandoning these people!"

"We're leaving!" Suzaku shouted.

"We're staying!" Kallen yelled back, with more vigor than they ever witnessed back at school, but everyone was too caught up in the situation to notice.

"Leaving!" Rivalz exclaimed.

"Staying!" Milly and Rai proclaimed together.

"Snake!" Shirley cried in panic.

"ENOUGH!" Lelouch roared with a tone of finality, showing pure fury on his face, "Listen to yourselves! Arguing isn't getting us anywhere! I've said it once, and I'll repeat it if we want to survive this; we need to work together!"

Everyone else turned their backs to one another, the votes to leave and stay divided in half. Suzaku, Rivalz, and Shirley stood on one side wanting to go, and Rai, Milly, and Kallen on the other wishing to stay and fight. C.C. stood off to the side, observing.

Letting out an exasperated sigh, Lelouch turned to the one person in the room who may know what to do, "Princess Allura, these are your lions. You've dealt with the Galra Empire before. You know what we're facing better than any of us. What do you think is the best course of action?"

For the first time since the new paladins arrived in her castle, Allura felt doubt and fear swell
inside. For truth be told… she didn’t know what to do. It had literally been thousands of years since she had faced the Galra. As much as she hated to admit it, Shirley was right. Without the Red and Purple Lions, they couldn’t unlock the Black Lion to form Voltron, and she knew that they needed Voltron to win this war. With Sendak on his way to destroy the planet and only four working lions, there was no way to know if it would be enough to beat them.

"I-I don't know," Allura admitted, looking down at the floor in dismay.

"What do you mean you don't know!" Kallen exclaimed in frustration, which only seemed to make the princess falter more.

"Perhaps… your father could help," Coran said, catching their attention.

"My father?" Allura asked in confusion.

"Wait," Rivalz said, voicing everyone's confusion, "I thought you said her father was dead?"

"Well… not exactly."

o~o

Allura followed Coran down a dark corridor, pitch black except for the neon blue glow of the Altean symbols on the walls and ceilings. A large door slid open in front of them, revealing a holodeck interface on the inside — a glowing light in the very center.

"Coran," Allura gasped, "what is this?"

"King Alfor knew there was a chance he might never see you again. So his memories, his very being, was stored in this computer for you.” Coran explained as Allura approached the glowing orb of light.

Allura reached out her hand to touch it as the orb rose into the air. Suddenly, blue sparks expanded, growing in size, turning from blue to yellow, showering the dark room, filling it with light. The pretty scenery changed from a dark room to a field of lush green grass and beautiful magenta
flowers — mountains formed in the distance and white puffy clouds floating in the crystal blue sky. If the inside of the room still didn't smell of metal, Allura would have thought that it was real. Her eyes shimmered with unshed tears as she never imagined she'd see anything of Altea again.

A metallic ringing filled the air. A ray of blue light arose from the holodeck, forming the body of a man. It was transparent as a ghost, but he still looked as sharp and regal as when he was alive. His skin tone was identical to Allura's with icy blue eyes, silvery-white hair, and white and yellow battle armor with a long blue cape adorning his form. Despite this, though, King Alfor's eyes looked tired and worn but still held the immense love they always had.

"Father!" Allura gasped and ran towards the holoform, "Father, it is so good to see you!"

"Allura, my only child, how I've missed your face," the image said with a sad smile.

Despite her happiness, though, Allura could barely hold back tears of despair. "I'm so frightened! A Galra ship is set to attack, and I don't know what to do," the princess explained, all but collapsing at the image's feet, "Please, Father, I need your help."

"I would do anything to take this burden from you," Alfor responded sadly.

"I don't know if we should run, to preserve what we have, or stay and risk everything! I want to fight, but the paladins of old are gone… I know what you would do," she said, gazing up at the man as if she were only a child.

"I scattered the Lions of Voltron to keep them out of Zarkon's hands. You urged me to keep them and fight, but for the greater good of protecting the universe, I chose to hide them."

"I think I understand," Allura said.

"No daughter," Alfor said, "You were right. I made a terrible mistake, one that cost the universe countless lives. Forming Voltron is the only way to stop Zarkon. You must be willing to sacrifice everything to assemble the Lions and correct my error."

o~o
It didn't take long for Allura to exit the room her father resided. When she entered the control room once again, she was now wearing a full-body white jumpsuit, with purple, black, and pink outlines. Her hair was styled into a messy bun with ringlets by her ears. The look on her face and fire in her eyes all but told the paladins, C.C., and Coran her answer.

"You seven paladins were brought here for a reason," Allura said, no tremor present in her tone whatsoever. "The Voltron Lions are meant to be piloted by you, and you alone. We must fight and keep fighting until we defeat Zarkon. It is our destiny. Voltron is the universe's only hope. We are the universe's only hope."

Lelouch responded with a sentence he never thought would come out of his mouth again in his lifetime. But it still held the same finality as when he was commanding the Black Knights as Zero. It was a tone that left no room for argument. "We're with you, princess."

C.C. only grinned in anticipation as the other paladins nodded, some reluctantly, in agreement.

'This just got interesting…'

O~O

Allura led the seven paladins to a dark room that suddenly lit up with light as they entered. Within it, in a semi-circle against the wall, were seven pods almost identical to the ones Coran and Allura woke up from. Only instead of people inside, there were seven identical suits of armor. They looked almost like the armor that medieval Britannian knights wore, just with a bit of a sci-fi flair added to them. They consisted of dark gray to light black full-body undersuits and topped with stiffer segments of white armor, and just like Allura's suit, they each had a large 'V' showing on the chest plates. The only differences in them were each had a different color outlining it: blue, red, yellow, black, purple, green, and orange.

"Your suits of armor," Allura presented as the paladins walked up to their corresponding color, examined it, mumbled in admiration and amazement at the design.

"Cool!" Rai said.

"Nice," Kallen grinned.
"Outstanding," Lelouch breathed.

"Neat," Shirley said.

"Love it!" Milly exclaimed.

"I'll take it," Suzaku said.

"This is going to be awesome!" Rivalz squealed like a fangirl as he looked at his blue armor with stars in his eyes.

"Princess," Coran said, pulling at his mustache as he eyed them with skepticism, "are you sure about this? They aren't exactly the best and brightest the universe has to offer."

"No, but they're all we've got," In any other situation, Allura would have shared her caretaker's same opinion, but time was of the essence.

"Paladins of Voltron!" Lelouch proclaimed with a smirk on his face, shared by all the others, "Suit up!"

Armor was placed, belts were buckled, plates were adjusted, helmets were mounted, and (for Shirley and Milly) hair was pulled up in buns. It wasn't long before the new Paladins of Voltron stood before the Alteans, an air of confidence surrounding them all.

Allura placed her hand over a glowing table in the same room, a symbol glowing brightly in the middle. The blue outline then vanished to reveal six handle-like objects which levitated before them, each corresponding to a color of the paladins.

"The Bayard is the traditional weapon of the Paladins of Voltron," she explained as the Bayards all floated towards their respective wielder, "it takes a distinct shape for each Paladin."

Once the Orange Bayard landed in Shirley's palm, the object glowed a bright orange before narrowing and widening to form a very sturdy and versatile bow. A quiver of arrows appeared behind her back along with it. She hummed in slight skepticism as she never really used a bow or
any other weapon in her life. Still, if the princess said it took shape depending on who wielded it, she'd have to figure it out.

The Red Bayard found its way to Kallen's hand, which immediately shifted into what looked like a sizeable gloved gauntlet with what appeared to be silver opening that was closed in the middle. She raised an eyebrow in confusion she nearly leaped back in surprise as three long claw-like blades appeared between her fingers. They looked almost identical to that of Wolverine's claws from the X-men. Smirking, she raised the clawed cestus to her face the same way she'd seen the famous X-men do on the movie covers, a matching wolfish grin spreading across her face.

When Milly got hold of the Yellow Bayard, it also glowed until she felt what appeared to be metal in one hand, and a handle of something in another. After the light cleared, she quirked her eyebrow in intrigue as a scythe attached to a silver chain appeared in her hands with yellow outlining it. Milly had seen ninja from old Japanese anime and movies wield a weapon like this. A kusarigama, she recalled. Grabbing hold of the chain just below the handle, Milly twirled it around in a tight circle before grabbing hold of the handle stop it.

"Stylish, functional, and deadly," the Yellow Paladin smiled mischievously, "the perfect combination."

Suzaku reached for his Bayard, which took the form of a traditional Japanese katana blade but seemed to have the handle of a longsword, mixing both Japanese and Britannia sword styles. Then the purple band on his wrist created a transparent blue shield, making him look like a sci-fi knight in shining armor. The Honorary Britannian smirked as he swung the katana around a few times before striking a finishing battle pose.

Rivalz held his Bayard as it shifted into the form of a rifle. Confidently, he laughed as he aimed the gun around, pretending to shoot at oncoming enemies.

Rai's Bayard turned into an arrow-like blade, glowing a bright forest green. He swung it around, pretending to slice at an invisible threat. It was the smallest of all the Bayards, but it also seemed to be the most agile and most comfortable to control.

"Aw! You got a cute little Bayard, Rai," Rivalz teased. Rai smirked and struck Rivalz with it, which sent out an electric shock through the secretary's body, causing him to cry out in pain before falling to the floor, twitching slightly. Milly and the others all laughed.

"Yeah," the platinum blonde said, smiling smugly, "it is pretty cute."
The only one who hadn't received his Bayard was Lelouch, whom Allura turned to with a show of regret on her face.

"Lelouch, I'm afraid your Bayard was lost with its Paladin."

The former prince simply shrugged. He probably would be useless on the front lines anyway with his lackluster body, unless he was inside his lion. And if all else failed, he could always use his Geass. "I'll just have to make do then."

o--o

Back in the control room, the Paladins, Allura, and Coran pulled up the image of the battleship once again, planning their course of action.

"You'll have to retrieve the Red and Purple Lions from Sendak's ship," Allura explained.

"That's a pretty big ship…" Suzaku said.

"Yeah," Kallen said, "how are we going to know where the Lions are?"

"Well, it's not a matter of we," Milly said, "it's more of a matter of you two." Suzaku and Kallen blinked in confusion.

"The Prez is right," Shirley said, "once you get in, you'll be able to like feel its presence and track it down."

"Yeah, you know how Rai felt that crazy energy back on Earth by the lake?" Rivalz asked.

"Yeah…” Kallen said with Suzaku slowly nodding.

"Hey! Didn't you make fun of me for that?" asked Rai accusingly.
"Yep! And I'm proud of it, but it turns out it's exactly like that mumbo jumbo."

"Kallen, Suzaku, remember, though the Red Lion is more than the Purple, both of them are extremely temperamental. You'll have to earn their respect," Allura said.

Kallen and Suzaku both tensed, Lelouch and C.C. being the only ones noticing. Unlike everyone else, who just found their lions and *poof* instant connection and new mechanical cat to ride, they were both going to have to work to ride their lions. Just like everything else they had to do in their lives, whether against or for Brittania. They had to earn it.

However, they received some reassurance when Lelouch placed his hands on their shoulders. They could do this.

"Alright," said Lelouch, "here's our plan of attack..."

:o:

Shirley and Rivalz soared above the atmosphere of Arus, approaching the Galra battleship cautiously.

"*The Galra Empire knows about the Blue and Orange Lion...*"

Meanwhile, Milly and Rai flew in with their lions from behind, carefully so that the battleship didn't notice. They weaved in and around the asteroids before them.

"...*However, the advantage we have is that they don't know we have the Yellow and Green Lion as well. Shirley, Rivalz, you two will act as decoys by pretending to give yourselves up...*"

"Attention Galra ship," Rivalz said after seeing the Galra picked up their signal, "do not fire, we're surrendering our Lions."

Shirley gulped, "I hope this works..."
"...While Sendak is distracted, Milly, Rai, Suzaku, Kallen, and I will sneak onto the ship in the Yellow and Green Lion. Suzaku and I will go to find the Purple Lion, while Kallen and Rai find the Red Lion. Milly will guard our exit. Rivalz, Shirley, find some way to take down that ion cannon."

Milly and Rai both landed on the underside of the ship. Making sure that the Lions would stay in place, Rai exited and used his Bayard to cut a clean hole in the wall, allowing the five to sneak in.

Meanwhile, a set of giant doors opened in front of the Orange and Blue Lion. Not knowing what would happen next but remaining calm, Rivalz spoke through the commlinks in their helmets, "Milly, what's your ETA?"

"We're in," came the reply as the helmet's lower mask vanished, sensing there was oxygen available around the paladins inside. The team deduced that they in a power room, seeing as several bolts of purple lightning were connecting to the roof and floor. The walls and place, in general, were dark, the only light present was the faint glow of dark purple light along the walls. Even without the dim lighting, the team could immediately feel that there was something off about the ship. Lelouch, out of habit, activated his Geass, as if he anticipated an enemy leaping out behind the metal walls. Like the Castle, it felt alive, but with a much more sinister and evil presence surrounding them, making them all the more eager to get the Lions and just. Get. Out!

o~o

From the pilot room on the other side of the ship, Sendak quickly took action to obtain the Lions. "Activator tractor beam."

From outside, a bright purple light began to emerge from the opening doors in front of the Orange and Blue Lions.

"What's that thing?" asked Shirley.

"I think that's our signal to get out of here!" Rivalz shouted. He yanked on the controls of his lion, causing it to leap out of the way of the purple beam that came shooting out, just in time. Shirley followed suit, the beam hitting nothing but space.

Sendak grit his teeth angrily, "They lied to us! Launch fighters!"
Hatches opened on the sides of the ship as dozens of fighter jets were launched out already firing at the duo.

"Shirley, you dismantle the ion cannon while I take these jerks on a space ride!" Rivalz said, grinning in anticipation as he launched his lion into the pool of fighters.

"Copy that!" she replied, tightening her grip as she too sped off, this time straight towards the ship. Rivalz began to give her covering fire maneuvering and dancing around fighters, blasting beams while also getting them to shoot at each other from time to time.

o~o

Back inside the ship, Suzaku cautiously looked around the corner in search of patrols. Finding none, he gestured to the others to follow him. Lelouch, Kallen, and Rai emerged after him while Milly squatted to the ground behind them, covering their exit as planned. She gripped her kusarigama tightly in her palm, giving off a faint golden glow.

Rai suddenly stopped, looking down the dimly lit hall. It suddenly seemed to get larger and more prolonged the more he stared. A vast array of disturbing images flashed before his eyes. A dark cell, surrounded by several other creatures, robots dragging him along the hall someplace, the screams and cries of others filling his ears. The feel of a surgical needle impaling his left eye.

Rai gasped and nearly stumbled backward. He panted as he attempted to regain his composure.

Milly acted fast and steadied him before he could tip over. "Rai, what's wrong?"

"I-I've been here before!" Rai realized as everyone else stopped moving to listen, "After I was taken away from Earth, somehow, they brought us here."

"Wait, 'us'?" asked Lelouch, alarmed. Rai made no mention of there being others with him.

"My mom, and my sister, and I, we were all captured," Rai nodded, holding his head, before snapping his head up in realization, "They could still be here! I have to rescue them!" he tried to run down the hall, but Lelouch stopped him for a moment.
"Do you know where they could be located?" the exiled prince asked seriously. This was the first time Lelouch honestly felt real empathy towards Rai. If he were in Rai's shoes, he too would do the same, especially for Nunnally, and maybe even Euphemia.

"Yes," Rai nodded vigorously, "I remember where the prisoners are held!"

"Alright, we'll get them out," Lelouch said, but Kallen then grabbed his shoulder.

"Lelouch," Suzaku said, "I know we shouldn't endanger innocents, but we probably won't have time to free them! We have to find the Lions and get back to Arus! Who knows how long Shirley and Rivalz can keep them distracted!"

"But we can't just leave prisoners here either!" Kallen exclaimed at the Red Paladin, "They have families and friends waiting for them too, you know! Isn't that what Allura said we are? 'The Universe's only hope?' How can we give that hope if we can't even save half-a-dozen prisoners."

"Kallen's right Suzaku. Besides, we can free prisoners, and still get the Lions if we split up," Lelouch said firmly, "Milly and I will go with Rai to get the prisoners out of here. You two go find your Lions."

"By ourselves?!" Suzaku exclaimed in disbelief.

"It's just a minor change of plans," Milly said, "and like we discussed back at the Castle, you two are the only ones who can find the lions anyway. You'll be fine. You just have to keep focused on the goal. Those are the words I live by."

"In both a good and evil way," Lelouch muttered under his breath. Milly, fortunately, didn't hear him.

Before the topic could be discussed any further, the sound of opening doors to their left filled the area. Their time was up for now.

"Run!" Lelouch half-whispered, half-shouted, as he, Milly, and Rai ran in one direction, while Kallen and Suzaku ran in the other.
The Red and Purple Paladins panted as they ran down the hall, having no real idea where they were supposed to go.

As they ran, a thought came to Suzaku as he watched Kallen easily keeping up with him. Unusual, especially for someone not allowed to participate in P.E. due to 'health' problems.

"You-you've never been 'sick' from school, have you, Kallen?"

The redhead scowled in annoyance. Were they talking about this now?

Fortunately, Kallen was rescued from having discussed this as the pair came to an intersection leading down three halls. "Great, now which way?" Kallen growled.

Suzaku looked from one hall to the other just as frustrated. His eyes eventually fell onto one of the two identical symbols in between the chambers. The glowing purple Galra emblem. For a moment, he couldn't look away from the image, no matter how angry it made him feel inside. The sharp edges and sinister formation embodied the race's ruthless and cruel nature to near perfection. Suzaku, no matter how reluctant, already noticed that this race was a lot like the Britannian Empire back on Earth. He could tell that Kallen, and especially Lelouch also saw the parallels, and already hated the Galra for it.

'No,' he shook his head, 'Brittania can still change for the better; there is still hope. The Galra have been doing this for thousands of years longer. This. Is. Different…' but for some reason, no matter how much he repeated this mantra, he couldn't quite bring himself to believe it wholeheartedly.

"Suzaku hide!" Kallen's urgent whisper broke him from his thoughts as he was shoved to the left away from the center hall while Kallen leaped to the right. Not a moment too soon either as a pair of Galra droids emerged from the center hallway before walking past them, remaining unaware of the two paladins. Suzaku and Kallen made eye contact afterward, both nodding before they continued down the hall they had hidden in. As Lelouch said, it may be riskier, but splitting up gave them a more significant chance of finding the Lions.

○○

Back outside, Shirley gritted her teeth as she set her lion into a nosedive straight for the ion cannon. If she could get a good hit on it at least once, then it would still take a while for it to get fixed so it would be able to buy Allura and Coran some time. Shirley was sure with the amount of armor on
the lion, it could probably even smash it to pieces. Just as she was about to hit it though, she felt herself and her lion bounce off of something. It almost like they had run into a flexible steel wall. Flipping backward to regain balance, Shirley flew around to see why she was bounced off, and then she saw it.

"What the quiznack?" she gasped, seeing a translucent purple barrier surrounding the ion cannon, "What is that? A forcefield?"

This was going to take longer than she thought.

o~o

"Particle barrier up!"

At Allura's command, a transparent orb of blue energy surrounded the castle. It remained solid for about two seconds before it suddenly vanished.

"Is… that what's supposed to happen?" asked C.C. curiously with a raised eyebrow.

Allura shook her head. Something was wrong as the barrier should have remained on. Coran and the princess quickly rushed to a small control panel where the energy to power the dome should be. Opening the hatch, they looked inside, and Coran promptly spotted the problem.

"Oh, the barrier crystals are out of alignment!" he gasped.

"You use crystals to power your technology?" asked C.C.

"Yes," Coran said, "Don't you Earthlings?"

C.C. was about to answer 'no' when she remembered that the sakuradite mineral was what helped provide the main power for Knightmare Frames. She shrugged, "I suppose, to an extent."

"We have to fix it immediately," Allura said, "without the particle barrier, we'll be defenseless!"
"We're all too big," Coran said, referring to C.C. as well, "what could we do?"

C.C. was about to say they must have some sort of tools that could fix this, obviously, but found that it was not needed as the four space mice squeaked and scampered into the hatch.

"The mice!" Allura smiled.

"How do they know how to do this?" Coran asked.

"I can hear them talking to me," Allura explained, as the mice worked together to get the crystal back in alignment, "I think our minds are connected! It must be from sharing the sleep pod for ten thousand years!"

C.C. raised an eyebrow minutely at this. While she couldn't call anything impossible anymore, this was a first in her book. Then again, though, she hadn't expected to be transported with Lelouch and his fellow classmates to a far off planet either.

After the crystal was realigned, the controls lit up, and the barrier finally manifested around the Castle, in full power this time. The critters squeaked with joy, waving their paws happily.

"Thank you, friends," Allura said with a smile.

Coran then placed his fingers on his temples, his eyes comically wide as he stared intently at the mice, straining so much he began sweating.

"Coran, what are you doing?" Allura deadpanned to her assistant, while C.C. could only look on in amusement.

"I'm trying to get them to make me a sandwich."

o~o
Kallen and Suzaku each ran down a hallway after hallway, neither of them having luck finding their lion. Shouldn't they have at least felt their presence, or whatever the others said by now?

Suzaku made a sharp turn around the corner only to run headlong into someone, knocking them over. Suzaku quickly scrambled to his feet, Bayard in hand just to put it away right after when he saw that he had run right into Kallen. Kallen had mirrored his actions as she realized who crashed into her.

"Come on, Kururugi! Watch where you're going!" Kallen snapped.

"Sorry," Suzaku swiftly apologized, until he registered just where correctly they had run right back into each other… which happened to be the same intersection they had split up from, Suzaku coming in from the right and Kallen from the left this time. They had been going in circles!

"Oh, come on! You've got to be quiznacking kidding me right now!" Kallen cursed in Altean as she caught onto what Suzaku noticed.

Suzaku regained his composure though and took a deep breath before closing his eyes in concentration, "Okay, let's just calm down. We're the only ones who can really find them. We just need to focus. I'm sure we can find them."

Huffing in irritation, Kallen relented before doing the same. Both the paladins waited and listened, then they both heard the sound of a growling purr coming from two areas of the ship.

"There you are!" Kallen smirked as she sprinted down the hall they originally came from.

"Got ya!" Suzaku said shortly after, taking down the hall he had just exited from, smirking.

o~o

Lelouch, Rai, and Milly made a turn to the right down a corridor, the lights changing from purple to green as they traveled. They stopped abruptly when a hovering prism-shaped drone flew before them. The markings covering it glowed a cool red as did the small light at the corner of it, moving up and down as if to scan them. But before it could alert anyone, Rai shot it down with his wrist laser that had been built into their armor. The robot short-circuited and fell to the floor with a clank.
"That thing saw us," Lelouch said, as Rai approached the little droid, "we should get out of here."

"Wait," Rai said, removing the robot's hood and messing with the wires, "I think this could come in handy." Lelouch and Milly watched in awe at how easily Rai seemed to understand this technology already. Even Lloyd Asplund would be jealous of his skill.

He flipped the covering closed after finishing the last wire, "Now I'll just reset the controls..." the robot leaped back to life, but instead of red and purple lights, bright blue lights lit it up, "...and it's working for us!"

"Rai! You little genius, you!" Milly grinned. She would have given him a nuggie had he not been wearing his helmet. Lelouch nodded with a smile before turning serious again and glancing down the hall to make sure no one was behind them.

Rai smiled at their new companion as they turned down another hall, "I'm gonna call you Rover. Follow me!"

The three made their way to a large pair of metal doors that were sealed shut. Rai recognized it pretty well. This was a prison cell that very likely held many innocent aliens inside.

"Open up," he ordered Rover, in which the little drone happily complied, a beam shooting out from its lens, it scanned its ID before the door opened.

"Nice job, Rai," Lelouch nodded. The doors to the cell opened with a groan, one side rising up, and the other going down.

As light entered the cell, it nearly brought Milly to tears as the distressed cries, whimpers, and moans of the alien prisoners inside.

"Mom? Sophronia?" Rai asked as the three entered. The prisoners only cowered in fear, all different types of alien species; some were green, red, blue, and yellow. Some had claws instead of hands, and others had multiple arms. One alien, a slender gray one with a fish-like face, was hugging what appeared to be an adolescent yellow alien with a single eye and yellow skin.

As Rai slumped in disappointment, seeing that his mother and sister weren't present among them, Milly and Lelouch came up behind them.
"Don't be afraid," Milly said with a kind smile, "we're here to help you escape."

The gray alien scanned over Lelouch and Milly before his eyes fell on Rai again. His eyes widened in shock and... awe?

"It's you!" he gasped, as Rai brought his head back up, his eyes widening in confusion, "It's you, the Champion. If anyone can get us out of here, he can."

"Wh-wait, what did you call me?" asked Rai. He didn't remember any of these aliens at all. And the champion of what?

"We don't have time to wait," Lelouch said as he exited the cell, "Let's get them to the escape pods and meet up with Kallen and Suzaku. Quickly!"

"Right," Milly nodded as she and Rai started waving prisoners out, "let's get going."

O~O

Rivalz, made a sharp turn around the ship, laughing and whooping as he went, avoiding a shot from two more vessels. Even though he was technically in a life or death situation right, he couldn't help but feel how exhilarating flying the Blue Lion felt.

"Yeah!" he grinned, "This is way more fun without anyone puking on me!"

On the other hand, Shirley wasn't having much success breaking the particle barrier surrounding the cannon. She attempted to break through by slamming against it with the Orange Lion, only to be bounced off and drift away again. She had hit it so hard she had nearly hit her head on the controls, and she already felt a massive headache forming.

'This is going to hurt in the morning,' she thought miserably.

O~O

Kallen followed the energy of the Red Lion until she reached her destination. Taking out her
clawed cestus, she cut through the doors that led to the other side like butter. Rushing inside, she was soon confronted by a warm red glow from the end of the room. There it was, the Red Lion, hovering a little above the floor inside its particle barrier, its eyes faded and dark, indicating it was still asleep.

"Bingo," she grinned as she ran up to it and placed her hand on the particle barrier, "Let's get out of here. Open up!"

Unlike the other Lions, though, who lowered their barriers the moment their respective Paladin made contact, this lion was stubborn and refused to connect to Kallen. The Red Paladin knew getting the Red Lion's trust would be more complicated than the others, but she honestly hoped that it wouldn't be this way.

"It's me, Kallen, your pilot," she insisted, trying to use a tone she would use if she speaking to a friend of hers, or even her brother Naoto. Kallen scowled in frustration. Come on! What would it take for this thing to like her?!

"It's me! Kallen! Your- I am your Paladin!" she exclaimed rather bluntly, but the lion still didn't move.

Kallen grit her teeth as she banged on the barrier. She must be doing this wrong; there was something she was missing. She didn't have any more time to think, however, as several Galra droids started to fire at her. She activated her wrist shield to protect herself from the blasts as she continued to try and wake up the Lion.

"I'm bonding with you! Come on! We're connected! Or whatever you want to call it!"

Still no response. Snarling in a fury, Kallen reactivated her Bayard, the three cestus claws shining menacingly from the lights in the hanger, and charged the droids. She wasn't necessarily angry with the Lion; she knew she was going to have to make it trust her… somehow, but she was far more than annoyed with these droids firing at her.

"You're not getting this lion!" she shouted as she blocked one of the droids strikes before slicing its legs off. She sliced another droid to pieces right through the middle. She ducked to avoid another attack from above and reached up, grabbing the droids head, intending to crush it.

She then heard a 'click' in her gauntlet hand and what followed she could only describe as a
significant robot malfunction. The palm of her gauntlet glowed a bright red, and the droid expanded and melted at the same time before going up in a little inferno, blasting Kallen back against the control panel. The blasts kept coming, but Kallen stared, astounded at her gauntlet. The center with the silver circular opening still smoking before closing shut over a red light.

"Woah-" Kallen couldn't finish her sentence before one shot nearly knicked her ear. She looked around frantically before eyeing a sizeable glowing button at the bottom of the control panel. Following her instinct, she lowered her shade to cover her entire mouth so she could breathe before slamming her fist onto the button. The hatch beneath them opened, sucking all of the Galra droids into the soul-sucking darkness of space.

Kallen held onto the control panel with all her might, looking up desperately at the Lion, almost pleading with it to do something. Debris and other parts of the ship zoomed past her face, one of them hitting her hand. She yelped as she lost her grip on her left side. She attempted to reach back and get another hold, but another piece of debris hit her square in the face. She knew that if she hadn't been wearing the space helmet, that surprisingly remained intact from the blow, she probably would have been knocked out cold. She lost her grip, screaming in terror as she was sucked into space.

She floated in zero gravity, her eyes flickering frantically, unsure what to do now.

To her surprise, though, it turned out she didn't need to do anything. The Red Lion came swooping out with a mighty roar, nipping her up and settling her in the safety of its mouth.

Despite the initial shock of the experience, she smirked as she sat down in the pilot seat and was brought to the head of the Lion, where the controls rested.

"Good kitty," she said, placing her hands on the control handles, "let's roll!"

o~o

(Happening at the same time as Kallen's)

Suzaku sliced through another droid as he continued to charge toward a hanger door that he felt the Purple Lion was in. Unlike Kallen, who didn't run into any droids until reaching the hanger, droids were hanging around every corner!
"Seriously! Don't you guys have something better to do?!” Suzaku complained as he pushed through another pair of droids. Panting, Suzaku looked around seeing nothing but droid scraps surrounding him, some still short-circuiting from recent wounds. Looking at the door, he saw that there was a hand-scanner of some sort.

"I wonder…” Suzaku said aloud as he squatted next to one of the droids before taking its hand, which was only dangling by a few wires and held it against the scanner. The scanner glowed a faint violet before the door in front of him opened. Looking inside, he almost didn't see the Lion, as the purple lights nearly matched the views of the ship itself, but it was there as he could just barely make out its outline.

"There you are," he smiled as he began running toward the Lion. Before he was even halfway there, a blast flashed by his head, nearly hitting the side of his neck. His military training was the only thing that probably saved him from certain death. He whipped around; his Bayard activated he saw that it wasn't a droid that had shot at him, but an actual Galra officer. And he was HUGE!

He grinned, lowering his rifle that almost claimed Suzaku's life. His hair and fur were brushed neatly, and hard, cold amber eyes stared into his very soul.

"So," he said with a deep voice that sent shivers down Suzaku's spine, "you're one of the new Paladins. You must be the new Purple Paladin. Obviously, of course, why else would you be seeking our lions."

"They're not your lions!" Suzaku snapped, his Bayard still at the ready, "They belong to Princess Allura of Altea. You have no right to any of them!"

The Galra could only laugh a hearty, belly laugh as if mocking the boy. More droids fell into the room, surrounding him, "On the contrary, we did find it first after ten thousand years. As the saying goes 'finders, keepers.'"

"Finding it doesn't make it yours! And besides, I don't see that lion coming over to defend you right now. It only serves the one it chooses!"

The Galra stopped laughing before sneering at the Purple Paladin, "So, you're a know-it-all type, are you? I hate know-it-alls." The guard swung his rifle outwards, causing what looked like a hidden compartment to open, turning the gun into a wicked-looking scythe-like weapon.
Suzaku's eyes widened as the Galra charged at him. Suzaku barely had time to bring his Bayard up to block him, even then, though, the strike from the Galra was strong enough to throw him back at least a yard. He slid backward, nearly losing balance before bringing his sword up to block again, the Galra soldier bearing down on him. The metal underneath them creaked at the strength of the Galra above him, sweat already dripping down his face.

"Well, well," the Galra grinned, his yellow teeth bared, "you've got some spirit I see. I might just let you live if you give up."

"Never," Suzaku gritted out as his grip on the Bayard beginning to shake. Seriously, was this alien made out of boulders?!

"You do realize if you don't quit now, you'll die. Not much help to the Princess dead now are you?"

"That doesn't matter," Suzaku grunted, "there were Paladins before us. If I die, they can find another. All that matters is getting the Purple Lion back to the others."

"Tch, how pathetic," the Galra mocked, "throwing your life away for something so worthless. Fine then, if you're so eager to die, I'll grant you that wish!"

The Galra pressed his weight down on Suzaku even harder, Suzaku nearly losing his grip on his Bayard. Suzaku could swear he heard his bones creaking as he yelled in pain and righteous fury.

Death, however, was not Suzaku's destiny that day, as a mighty roar suddenly filled the room. The particle barrier around the Purple Lion dissipated and began charging straight for Suzaku and the Galra soldier. The soldier and Suzaku both looked up in shock, though the soldier more in fear as well. The Galra in sheer terror tore himself away from Suzaku and made a run for the door. Suzaku was too stunned to move as the Lion leaped above him, standing proudly above with him protectively between the Lion's front paws.

"SHOOT HIM! SHOOT HIM!" the Galra ordered frantically to the droids. Before the droids could even raise their guns though, the Lion roared, and its tail shot out beams of energy, hitting each droid dead on. It wasn't long before they were nothing more than scrap metal.

The Galra, now terrified, attempted to run for the exit but didn't get far as he felt sheer agony tear through him, from his back to his torso. Looking down, he was stared in horror at the purple and
white blade protruding from his gut.

"You're no soldier," Suzaku muttered, pulling his sword out from the Galra, "you're nothing but a coward. Why you decided to become a soldier, I'll never know!" The Galra gurgled before slumping forward, his scythe-rifle falling limp from his hands.

Suzaku panted as he stared at the dead Galra, already feeling bile rising in his throat, painful, unwanted memories rising to the surface of his mind. His right hand was trembling to the point he nearly dropped his Bayard.

A soothing purr soon filled his mind, pushing the memories away. Suzaku turned to face the Purple Lion in apprehension. Did she see that? Did she now know what he did? Another purr filled his mind as the Lion lowered its head to let him in.

Suzaku smiled in absolute relief, he knew he would have to reveal his secret to the others eventually, but right now, he just wasn't ready yet. "Let head back," he said as he gripped the controls in the pilot seat.

o~o

Lelouch, Milly, and Rai led the prisoners through the ship to the escape pods as fast as possible. The aliens were moments away from freedom. They had been locked up for so long they nearly forgot what it felt like to be free.

"Halt!" a droid called out, followed by four more. Milly kept herding the prisoners into the pod as Lelouch and Rai prepared to face the droids. Rai activated his Bayard while Lelouch raised his fists. His body may not be the fittest, but he would do everything in his power to get the prisoners out safely.

Lelouch and Rai both suddenly felt a jolt of pain in their right eyes, and it wasn't long before they saw red, clutching their Geass eyes in pain, collapsing to their knees.

o~o

C.C. blinked as she suddenly felt a pulse of energy run through her body. The red mark of the
Geass Code flashed across her forehead before fading. It did leave stinging pain in her head, though.

'What was that?'

o~o

"Lelouch? Rai? What's wrong?" Milly's voice was nothing but a muffle in the background.

'What's going on?' Fear was suddenly gripping Lelouch. He didn't remember calling upon his Geass; he wasn't even planning to use it as he wasn't sure it would work on droids. He remembered C.C. mention this before. She called it a 'Runaway Geass' and had warned him that if he used his Geass too recklessly, then his Geass would activate permanently. Was it happening already? He hadn't been using his Geass for that long, right?

'And when did Rai get a Geass as well? Did C.C. give him one as well? And if so, when? Wait-' Lelouch suddenly realized that Rai was in pain similar to this back at the Castle, right before he got some of his memories back. 'What was going on-

Before Lelouch could think anymore, his mind suddenly went blank, the blazing red seal of his Geass shining brightly in his left eye. Had he looked at Rai, he would have seen the same thing happening to him. They both looked up, looks of pure murder on their faces.

Rai shot forward while Lelouch squared his shoulders, a red-tinged aura surrounding his wrists and arms, crackling red electricity seeming to surge from them.

Rai quickly blocked the laser shots with his Bayard and armor before slicing and dicing it to pieces. Two droids broke through Rai's guard, but they didn't get far as Lelouch reigned his arms backward before shooting them forwards again, red energy erupting and blasting through the droids before rushing forward to meet more. Rai flipped over one of the droids that were shot backward and sliced the heads of three more droids off, and Lelouch slid under him and, with his bare hand, stabbed straight through the chest of the last droid, hand still crackling.

Milly could only watch slack-jawed at the now useless pile of droids that surrounded the two boys. 'Since when could Lulu do that? He's been holding out on us!'
Lelouch and Rai blinked and shook their heads, the Geass in their eyes disappearing. They both looked around in confusion at the now fallen droids. What the heck just happened?

The sound of the escape pod doors closing shattered the illusion as the trio looked at the prisoners in the pod as it drew away from the ship.

"Thank you, Zephyr," the gray alien smiled at Rai as the pod reeled away, the aliens being escorted to safety. Rai reached out to them, confusion on his face.

"Wait- who's Zephyr?" Rai asked before realizing that now wasn't the time for questions; they could wait until they got back to the castle.

"Rai, who were they talking about?" Lelouch asked suspiciously, in which Rai could only shake his head helplessly, just as confused.

"Lelouch. Lamperouge." Milly harrumphed, "Explain yourself, young man! What on Earth have you been doing to compensate for missing gym class?"

"What?" Lelouch asked, now the confused one.

"Just a minute ago, you two were completely wiping the floor with those things. And last I checked Lulu you can't even run two without looking like you ran a 5K afterward!"

Rai still looked completely confused while Lelouch slowly covered his left eye, and looking down at his right hand after.

"I-I don't know…"

o~o

Finally, having enough, Shirley yanked down on one of the handles as hard as her hands could muster. A bright blue beam of energy shot out of the Orange Lion's mouth and directly at the particle barrier, purple cracks beginning to form.
"Come on! Just break you stupid thing!" she exclaimed. Finally, after putting everything she had into the blast, the barrier shattered, leaving the ion cannon wide open for attack.

"Score one for Shirley!" Not wasting another second, Shirley zoomed down and slammed the Orange Lion into the side of the ion cannon, leaving a significant dent in it. Not exactly the most excellent example of vandalism, but it should at least buy them some time before it was fixed. Looking up, she saw four more lions swiftly pass overhead, Milly's, Rai's, with Kallen's Red Lion, and Suzaku's Purple Lion.

"You guys made it!" Shirley cried in happy relief.

"Kitty Rose has left the stage!" Milly replied with a grin.

"Let's get the heck out of here!" Rivalz said as he directed the Blue Lion to fly back to Arus.

"I hope I stopped that cannon," Shirley said, "I could barely make a dent in it!"

o~o

"They stole both the lions!" one of the Galra officers said to Sendak back on the ship's bridge.

"After them!" Sendak snarled, "Either we get those lions, or we blow this whole planet to cosmic dust! Fire the ion cannon!"

"Sir! The ion cannon has been damaged!" the officer, Haxus, said.

"Then send the drones to fix it!" Sendak order in exasperation as the Galra ship began approaching the Arusian atmosphere.

Chapter End Notes

In case anyone is confused, Sophronia is the name of Rai’s younger sister. She, Rai, and their mother were abducted by the Galra a little while before the official Code
Geass series began. Won't say anything else as more of Rai's past will be revealed as we go.

The next chapter will finish off the 'pilot' episode of Voltron.

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this chapter. If you don't agree with the bayard choices and think a different weapon would suit them better, then just let me know. And why did Lelouch, Rai, and C.C.'s Geass/ Codes react like that? Are the Galra connected to the Geass power somehow?

So, if there are any further questions, leave a comment so I can answer it for you!

R&R!
Rise of Voltron Part 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The six lions stood assembled before the large hangar doors. The anticipation in the air was thick enough; someone could easily swim through it. Finally, after ten thousand years, the seven Lions of Voltron would be united once again.

Lelouch breathed as he stood on the steps leading to the door. He'd never admit it aloud, but he was nervous. Though Allura did say he would be the Black Paladin, what if that wasn't the case? What if the Black Lion didn't respond to him?

'No,' Lelouch thought, 'you can do this. If it doesn't accept you, the universe is doomed.'

One by one, the eyes of the Lions behind him lit up as the doors opened.

Back on the bridge, a screen in front of Allura and Coran showed images of the six active lions on diamonds of their color. Three were on the right, three were on the left, and a large indigo diamond was placed at the top. She clapped her hands together in anticipation, praying that the Black Lion would awaken. She didn't mention this to Lelouch or the others, but the Black Lion could be picky with its pilot as well, primarily since it was the head of Voltron and would ultimately lead the team. If it didn't see it's paladin as competent enough, she could reject them.

Lelouch's heart pounded as the doors to the hanger glowed blue, and the doors rose to reveal the black beauty herself.

Lelouch's eyes widened, along with the other paladins that stood behind him by their lions, gazing in astonishment. The Black Lion was undoubtedly the largest of the seven. Sleek black body, a gold chest, and 'crown' on its head and large red wings hanging on her back. Her eyes dark, indicating she was still asleep. Her eyes suddenly lit up before she lurched forward, producing a tremendous roar that seemed to echo throughout the entire castle. The six other lions mimicked their leader, returning with bellows of great respect.

Allura sighed in relief as the indigo diamond lit up, and Coran leaped up with a cheer of victory. It was not to last, though, as alarms blazed throughout the Castle.

"Oh, quiznack!" Coran exclaimed as a video feed appeared on the castle's screen. The Galra
battleship, along with hundreds of fighters, had entered Arus's atmosphere and was coming in fast.

Allura placed her hands on the control panels, multiple screens showing the castle's defenses lit up. "Sendak is entering the Arusian atmosphere. We need Voltron now!" her voice emerging from the intercoms to alert the Paladins.

One by one, the Paladins entered their lions. Lelouch slid into his seat in the Black Lion's head and was brought up to the controls, gripping to the two control sticks firmly in his hands, the walls and screens lighting up in white light. The Black Lion's eyes flashed before roaring again and shooting up into the air and flying towards the opening at the very top of the castle, the six others following close behind. They landed firmly on the ground, their silver bodies gleaming in the sunlight, witnessing the Galra shooting at the castle's barriers. Each hit causing a small explosion, weakening the shield bit by bit.

o~o

"The ion cannon is back online," the Galra soldier informed Commander Sendak from the control deck.

"FIRE!"

o~o

The ion cannon, shot its powerful beam, hitting the castle head-on. The barrier was engulfed in a fiery inferno, powerful enough to shake the hill that the Castle was perched on. Coran, C.C., and Allura held onto the controls from inside. At the same time, the Paladins could only endure the impact from their lions, their bodies practically vibrating with the hill.

"Man, those Galra guys repair things fast!" Rivalz exclaimed, astonished to see the cannon that Shirley had managed to partly destroy back to full operation.

"The barrier gets weaker with every blast," Coran said as he scanned the particle barrier, "Once that shield goes down, the Castle will be defenseless!"

Allura kept her composure as she contacted Lelouch and the other Paladins. "I can give you cover in the Castle defenses for a while, but you have to form Voltron now, or we'll all be destroyed!"
"Jeez, no pressure!" Shirley mumbled with frightened sarcasm.

Another blast from the Galra's cannon hit the barrier. Once again, it was engulfed in an inferno, causing earthquake levels of shaking once more. Lelouch grit his teeth as he and the others endured until the shaking ceased, the particle barrier already short-circuiting from the damage. His hands were white beneath his black gloves from gripping the controls so hard.

"Team Voltron, listen up! The only way we'll stop Sendak is to fight with everything that we've got! We can't let the Castle fall; otherwise, we're just handing victory over to Sendak and Zarkon! Are you with me?!"

Each of the Paladins nodded in response, even the mechanical lions nodding with them. They had come this far, each protecting the other, it was far too late to turn back now.

"Very well!" Lelouch said, pulling on his controls and pushing his lion forward out of the barrier, the other lions following behind, "Let's go!"

"Yeah!" they shouted in unison.

"Okay, quick question, though. How?" Suzaku said, suddenly remembering a big problem.

"Good question," Kallen said while avoiding incoming blasts, "how do we form Voltron?"

"I don't see a 'combine into a giant robot' button anywhere on my dashboard!" Shirley said as the lions leaped across the rocky landscape of the hill. Beams of the Galra ship forced them to remain moving. Otherwise, they would get shot.

Rai in the Green Lion barely dodged a flurry of lasers, "This is insane! Can't they just cease firing for one minute so we can figure this out? Is that too much to ask?!" Rai shouted right before turning around a leaping towards two gliders that closer to the ground. Jumping up, the Green Lion caught one of them in his mouth by the wing before throwing it into the other.

"I doubt these guys are the considerate type, Rai," Milly said as she nearly lost her balance from another laser landing right in front of her.
Kallen also turned around and used the Red Lion's laser tail to shoot down two more flyers. "We got to do something!"

"Combine!" Rivalz yelled as he suddenly rammed his lion into Kallen's, which was flung backward and rolled across the ground before regaining balance.

"Hey!" Kallen exclaimed in annoyance.

"Okay, that didn't work," Rivalz said, slightly ashamed.

"Good try," Shirley said, trying to comfort the Blue Paladin, right before having to dodge shots again.

Lelouch grit his teeth in frustration. He hated having to be in a battle like this. Unlike on Earth back with the Black Knights, at least he had had information on the enemy. Not to mention he already knew what actions his siblings and the other Britannian soldiers would make, so he was quickly able to thwart them. Not to say his Geass helped much in that department as well, but this time he was on a completely blank slate. He only had his king and couple pawns remaining. Barely any moves available to make on the board. He had to figure out how to form Voltron with the others, FAST!

It didn't help when Allura's face appeared on the screen of the lion, "Quickly paladins! Our energy levels are getting low!"

"Maybe if we fly in formation, we'll just combine," Lelouch suggested. It seemed to be the most logical solution right now. Seeing as the Lions needed to be a specific part of Voltron if they flew a particular way, they were bound to just come together, "Everyone, take off on my cue!" The seven lions dashed towards the edge of the cliff as Lelouch began counting down, "One, two, three, Voltron!"

As one, the lions leaped off the cliff and soared into the sky in perfect 'V' formation. The paladins grunted and strained themselves, trying desperately to try and merge, but nothing was happening.

"Nothing's happening!" Lelouch exclaimed in frustration.
"Hey, wait, wait, wait!" Rivalz said, "I think I feel something!"

"I do too!" Milly confirmed, "it's like we're being pulled in the same direction!"

"Uh, guys!" Kallen suddenly shouted, "I think I know why!"

"Yeah! Look up!" Suzaku said.

"What the cheese?!" Shirley exclaimed as they all saw that they had been caught in Sendak's tractor beam and were slowly being pulled in.

"Sendak's ship is sucking us in like a black hole!" Rai shouted in panic, pulling at controls, desperate to escape.

Sendak smirked evilly. "Send a report to Emperor Zarkon. The day is ours!"

The ship unleashed one final blast from the ions cannon. This time, it destroyed the particle barrier leaving the castle vulnerable, C.C., Coran, and Allura losing balance as it happened.

"No!" Lelouch gasped as an image of the defenseless castle appeared on his screen.

Shirley's screen appeared right next to it, she looked like she was having a panic attack, "Lulu! I don't care what you say, I'm panicking now!" followed by a shrill scream.

Everyone else and their lions tried desperately to move, but no matter what they did, they were completely frozen, at the mercy of Sendak's crew.

"It can't end here!" Rai shouted.

"This is it!" Rivalz cried.
"It's been an honor flying with you," Suzaku said.

"It was good while it lasted everyone," Kallen agreed.

"At least we'll go down together," Milly said, trying to comfort everyone one last time.

From the Castle, Allura could only watch with tears in her eyes as the universe's last hope was pulled towards the enemy.

Lelouch was gripping the controls of the Black Lion so hard, his hands were turning white. Gritting his teeth, he looked up defiantly at the ship, sucking them in. No. He was Zero! He was the Man Who Works Miracles. He's already pulled off more impressive feats with the Black Knights than any other terrorist group could only dream of. He confronted his father, the freaking Emperor of Britannia. He demanded an explanation of his mother's murder, and what did he get in return?! Banishment to Japan with Nunnally blinded and crippled to add icing to the cake! Nunnally was the entire reason he was fighting. He promised Nunnally he would make the world a gentle place for her. If he gave up now, it would be like spitting upon that promise and the memory of his mother, Lady Marianne vi Britannia. He wouldn't give up.

He REFUSED!

"NO!" Lelouch proclaimed, "We can do this! But we can't do that unless we believe in ourselves!" the other paladins blinked at their leader's words, "If we give up now, we may as well be digging Earth's grave. Several other planets will follow close behind!"

Milly thought of her grandfather, all alone at Ashford Academy.

Rivalz saw his mother, sisters, and baby brother, praying and kneeling for him to found and safely returned.

Shirley saw her father and mother, worried sick and devastated over her disappearance.

Rai heard his sister and mother calling out to him, begging to see him again and rescue them.
Princess Euphemia, the sub-viceroy whom he had grown to respect and trust in the short time he knew her, flashed through Suzaku's mind. Sweet innocent Euphie… he could never let her be subjected to this.

A tear trailed down Kallen's face as the face of her now-deceased brother and her mother's soft smile. Watching her take the abuse of her stepmother and continuing to remain by her side. She never realized, but besides the Black Knights, her mother had always been there, even when she didn't want her. How could she have been so blind up to this point?

"The situation seems impossible, that's true! But if we work and listen to one another, we can pull off our own miracle! Failure to do so is not an option!"

The paladin's expressions hardened. Lelouch was right. They couldn't afford to lose now, not with so many lives at stake!

"If we work together… WE'LL WIN TOGETHER!"

"YEAH!" the others cheered next to him, the eyes of their lions glowing a bright gold as they lifted their heads to roar in unison!

Then as one, at the very moment, the seven paladins felt something deep within them all snap into place, the lions following not even a split second later. The joining of seven hearts, seven minds, seven souls.

They were one.

The Lions leaped into the sky, their colors sailing behind them in a stream as pieces took shape, merging as one. Each lion dismantling itself, portions either retracting or extending to form and link together.

A bright flash of light followed as the resulting shock wave of a lion's roar jostled the ion cannon. When the final shot fired, it missed the Castle of Lions by mere centimeters. Instead, it hit and destroyed the mountain behind it in a fiery inferno.

After regaining balance from the aftershock of the explosion, Allura, Coran, and even C.C. looked up and gasped in astonishment.
Bringing in a closer image, they saw the outline of a towering figure made entirely from metal. The face of the warrior could be seen within a dark helmet, shaped like the head of a lion, sizeable red metal wings outstretched from the body. The upper torso looked black with outlines of blue energy. The left arm a green color, the right red. Its right leg blue and left leg orange with the faces of the lions as the feet and two more lion heads making up the knees in yellow and purple, respectively. Same with the arms as the lion heads made up the hands. A neon blue 'V' symbol was presented proudly on its chest.

Sendak could only gasp in terror and took a step back, not believing what he was seeing, "Voltron!"

"We did it!" Suzaku exclaimed.

"I can't believe it!" Kallen agreed.

"We formed Voltron!" Rai cheered.

"And we look AMAZING!" Milly commented.

"I'm a leg!" Rivalz whooped.

"How are we doing this?!!" Shirley could only ask in astonishment.

Lelouch was honestly just as astonished and amazed at what they accomplished. Not to mention, it felt incredible! Since the Lions were now one being, it was as if he could sense what everyone else was thinking as well. They were a team.

"I don't know, but let's get that cannon!" Lelouch ordered, thrusting the controls forward the winged giant gripped the cannon and snapped it off the ship like it was a mere twig. Voltron tossed it away and watched as it landed in a nearby field. With a swing of its right arm, the Red Lion's head punched through the ship's surface. A powerful beam of energy blasting through the battleship, the front of it exploding in an inferno, breaking the ship in two.

Sendak stumbled before catching himself, seeing the shadow of the Defender of the Universe soar to the other side of the ship, before stomping through the interior on the other side, a beam emitting from the Green Lion on Voltron's left arm. As Sendak watched from the control deck, his ship going up in flames, he and his second in command, Haxus, turned in terror and ran to the
escape pods.

They had made it just in time as Voltron soared into the air and sped forward, ramming right into the ship, the seven paladins within the giant screaming in righteous fury. They slammed so hard into the ship, they smashed through one end and right out the other. The vessel caught fire before blowing up in a blaze as they landed on the ground, the glow of the destroyed ship lighting up the Arusian sky.

o~o

The sun was setting in the distance as the paladins, now in their disbanded lions returned to the Castle of Lions, triumphant. They landed near the entrance where Allura, C.C., and Coran awaited them. All of them were sweaty and worn out, but otherwise happy they made it out of the battle alive.

"Good work, Paladins!" Allura praised, a look of joy in her smile.

"Thanks, pretty lady," Rivalz replied with a smile as he removed his helmet along with Lelouch, Suzaku, and Rai. Shirley had fallen on her behind; she was so tired, and Milly had her hands on her knees, panting. Kallen was only slightly hunched over. Both their helmets were still on. Milly was actually amazed Lelouch of all people was one of the ones still standing after that.

"Well, mission accomplished," Lelouch said, a tired smile on his face.

"Yeah," Suzaku agreed, looking at his childhood friend with a small grin, "we did it!"

"How did we do it?" asked Kallen, removing her helmet and looking at Lelouch questioningly.

"I was kind of just screaming the whole time," Shirley said with a shrug, taking off her helmet and untying her bun, her hair flowing behind her, "maybe that did it?"

Everyone chuckled at Shirley's attempt at a joke before Rai looked down with a grimace of regret. Milly and Lelouch, seeing this knew precisely why. The Yellow Paladin put a comforting hand on Rai's shoulder.
"Don't worry Rai, we're not going to stop searching until we find your mother and sister, that's a promise!"

"Just keep thinking about them," Lelouch said, adding his two cents, "no matter where they are right now, I'm sure they're proud of you." Rai gave the two a smile of appreciation. He hadn't realized how much he truly needed to hear that. He felt like for the time being that a weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

"We won the battle," Allura addressed them after a moment, Coran standing next to her in classic military fashion, "but the war has only just begun... I'm afraid Zarkon will not stop until he gets these lions."

"Good thing you paladins know what you're doing," Coran said, "because you're going to have to form Voltron again and again."

"Totally... Wait, what?!" Shirley exclaimed, pretty voicing everyone's thoughts.

"We barely survived forming Voltron this one time!" Rivalz added.

"Oh, and you only had to battle one ship," Coran said, "wait until you have to fight a whole fleet of them! Yeah, it's not going to be easy being the Defenders of the Universe."

At this statement, all the paladins gained intrigued looks, replaying the words Coran just said. They turned and looked up at the lions behind them as if they were heavenly beings, which in a way they kind of were.

Suzaku suddenly smirked, before addressing the Black Paladin, "I don't know Lelouch, what you think?"

Lelouch simply smirked his famous smirk. The one Rivalz often saw when Lelouch was playing a 'challenging' opponent when off gambling. A grin that stated that he knew exactly what he was doing and how he was going to win the game!

'And here I call check Charles zi Britannia,'

"'Defenders of the Universe,' huh? If you ask me Suzaku, I say it has a nice ring to it."
'This is going to be interesting." C.C. thought as the sun's rays seemed to make the lions glow from atop the hill.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if the characters from CG seem OOC, I'm to find a healthy mix of their personalities. Also, just to let you all know, especially in regards to C.C., I don't really plan for any prominent roles for her until maybe after Season 2 of Voltron (with a certain Prince perhaps...?). But if you do spot anything that you think should REALLY be changed for them personality wise, don't hesitate to tell me because I like staying true to their characters.

Also, in regards to Voltron season 3... HOLY CRAP, I KNEW IT! ***** and **** are alive! You'll know what I'm talking about if you've seen the leaked screenshot. MY PRAYERS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED!

Anyway for further questions, R&R, please! Thank you!
All was quiet and peaceful in the Castle of Lions as the sun began to rise over the Arusian horizon slowly. No sign of the Galra anywhere and one of the few precious times to relax and process all that happened the day (days...? How exactly did time work in space?) before.

After dinner, the Paladins went to some halls aligned with several bedrooms on the side. It wasn't too far from two large bathrooms, which looked similar to the P.E. showers and locker rooms. One was for the girls and the other for the boys. The bedrooms mostly consisted of a single bed, a simple set of drawers, and a couple of other hidden compartments. From the sheer number of them, the Castle must have had a tremendous amount of servants and workers or hosted a large number of visitors reasonably often. They all decided to pick their rooms in the same hallway. Best to stick together after all. Lelouch's was the closest to the intersection leading off in other directions, with Rivalz, Shirley, Kallen, Rai, Milly, and finally Suzaku taking up the rooms past him in that order.

Shirley sighed as the warm water from the Altean shower streamed down her form. Despite the similarity of the locker rooms, the showers were just as fancy as the rest of the Castle. It took about fifteen minutes for her to make her way through the many buttons lining the shower wall. They varied from dumping flower petals to what smelled like some sort of lemon-lime juice that almost got in her eyes. *That* would have stung! Despite the confusion though, the Orange Paladin had to admit that the Princess had excellent taste in regards to hair products, taking her sweet time lathering her locks with the sweet vanilla smelling shampoo-

*BEEP*BEEP*BEEP*

-Which promptly ended as a resounding shriek echoed through the bathroom, which was joined as one of her own tore through her throat, nearly causing to slip and fall on her face! She only managed to catch herself by bracing her legs on the sides of the stall.

o~o

Rivalz jumped in shock as he tumbled out of bed and tangled himself in his blanket. He struggled to get up for the door, only for the same blanket culprit to trip him by the feet and face plant on the hallway floor.
"Everybody up! Zarkon's attacking."

Suzaku looked up from mid-push-up, Paladin armor already adjourned, leaping to his feet and racing out the door.

"The castle's about to be destroyed!"

Kallen yelped as she all but threw on her turtleneck, snatched up her Bayard, and scrambled out into the hall.

"Go, go, go! We need Voltron now!"

Rai jumped, and almost hit his head against the cryo-pod he was dozing against, the laptop sliding off his legs. The Green Paladin hadn't even bothered to go to his room, wanting to question the prisoners they'd picked up the second he could.
But considering the urgency in Allura's voice, it would probably be a bad idea to stall any longer. Pushing himself up, he rushed out the door, Rover trailing behind him.


"Hurry! We can't survive much longer!"

"You've got to sell it a little bit more," Coran said, taking the device out of Allura's hands.

Clearing his throat, Coran wailed, "Oh no! Allura is dead! Oh, it's horrible! Her head fell off!" he collapsed to his knees, still very much in remorseful character, "A-! Wait! He-Her severed head is trying to speak to me! What is it Allura's head? What are your final words!?" Tears gathered in the advisor's eyes.

"Coran…"

"Oh yes, Princess, I'm listening!"

"It's over." she deadpanned.

Not even realizing what she meant, Coran continued and nearly dramatically collapsed onto the floor again, "Oh yes, I know! Augh! If only Voltron had been fooooorrrrrmmmed."

Coran finally looked up, to see the very annoyed faces of the Paladins waiting for him to finish his soap opera. "Oh! TIME!" he shot up, accidentally tossing the com behind him in the process.

"Can I assume from the theatrics, that this isn't an actual attack?" Lelouch remarked, arms crossed, lips pulled back in an annoyed frown. The other present Paladins looked just as irked. Besides Suzaku, Lelouch was the only one in full uniform and guessing from the state of Kallen's shirt; she had just been getting dressed when the alarms went off. But she had been wise enough to bring her Bayard in her rush.
On the other hand, Rai and Rivalz still looked half-asleep, the former in his casual dark blue shirt, grey jacket, and black jeans, the latter only in his pajamas. Shirley was shivering and blushing cherry red in embarrassment. The only garment of clothing she wore was her orange bathrobe with a towel wrapping up her soaking wet, shampoo-filled hair.

Allura didn't seem to notice the annoyance as she stared sternly at them. "And it's a good thing it wasn't because it took you—Coran?"

"Seventy-five degrees," he answered. Allura blinked. That wasn't a time slice. Coran seemed to notice too, as he registered the device he was holding in his hand, "Oh! Sorry! No, this is a meat thermometer."

Allura sighed in annoyance, "However long it was; it was too long! You must always be ready to battle against Zarkon. Look at you! Only Lelouch and Suzaku are in uniform, and at least Kallen brought her Bayard! Rai, Rivalz, Shirley, where are your Bayards? And where's Milly?"

As if on cue, the Yellow Paladin came strolling through the door, sporting cute lion-headed slippers, pajamas, and bathrobe, holding a cup of tea in her hand. Her hair was already styled in her signature curls, and her face smooth and pimple free. "Good 'meow'ning everybody!" she greeted with a small yawn, "What's going on?"

"Coran and I have been up for hours getting the Castle back in order," Allura explained tartly, "We had to run a test on the alarms, and we decided to test you as well." The princess glared daggers at Milly while folding her arms behind her back, "Guess which one failed?"

"Well, you could've given at least a day to process all that's happened!" Shirley blurted out, still flabbergasted from having her shower interrupted.

"Yeah, what Shirley said!" Rivalz agreed, "You-" he yawned, "you got to sleep for ten thousand years! Monday, we were ordinary school kids on Earth, and since then, a magic lion has flown us through space, we've fought some evil alien named Zarkon, and eaten goo in some weird sci-fi castle. that's a lot to process in, um, I don't know what day is it today?"

"It the third quintant of the spicolian movement. Hump day!" Coran cheerfully replied.

'Wednesday,' everyone thought in astonishment. They'd been missing from Earth for two days already!?
"What Rivalz means to say is that this is simply a lot of process for only a couple of days," Lelouch stated in slight annoyance. Though the prince himself had many experiences with only days to process, this was a bit much as well.

Allura sighed again, not in annoyance this time, but more out of concern and fatigue.

"You must understand the stakes of our mission," a holopad appear by her head and pushed a few buttons on the screen. "Over the last ten thousand years, the Castle has picked up distress beacons from the following locations," the screen disappeared to reveal the star map from their first day. Instead of blue planets, stars, and comets, however, ominous red glows covered almost all of them with a few still blue ones in the outer edges of the holograms. "So we have to assume that Zarkon has conquered almost the entire known universe," she swiped her hand to the right towards the more blue area. She stopped on a small bright solar system only about a foot or two from the red border. "Earth is here, an attack on your planet is inevitable."

"Oh, no!" Shirley gasped in horror, similar expressions plastered on the other paladins' faces.

"Exactly," the princess nodded as the holomap pixelated out, "our mission is to free all those planets. Coran and I are getting the Castle ready to leave Arus. During that time, you have to learn to form Voltron, so that we can begin fighting Zarkon."

"The princess is right," Suzaku said, turning to Lelouch, who nodded, "let's get to the Lions and start training."

"Wait!" Rai protested, "But I want to talk to the prisoners we rescued from the Galra ship."

"Ah, negative Number One-I have you all ranked by height, okay?" he missed the slight wince Kallen and Lelouch gave at the proclamation. "The prisoners need to remain the cryo-replenishers until tomorrow."

"That's right. Now, get to your lions." Allura ordered.

"Uh, hold on!" Rivalz piped up, "What exactly are we going to be doing in them? We're not gonna be shooting at each other, are we?"
"Yeah," Shirley said, trying to tighten her robe to preserve her modesty, "Unlike most of you, we've never even stepped foot in a Knightmare, so how's this supposed to work?"

"GUTS!" Milly suddenly shouted, making Coran and even Allura jump.

"The 'Guts' spell again, Prez?" Kallen asked in annoyance.

"Yep! We may not be in Student Council anymore, but Allura does mean well, we'll never figure out how to work the Lions if we don't practice!"

"Spell?" Coran asked inquisitively, "I did not know that humans were capable so such feats."

"It's just something Prez has done to try to motivate us; it's not real magic per se," Suzaku tried to explain.

"Actually!" Rai grinned, "It's got me going already, Milly!"

"Subtle and willing, that's what I like to see!"

"Very well, now that you're all motivated, get moving!" Allura ordered, pleased to see that some of them were willing to take charge.

"That's not exactly what I was going for Princess," Milly suddenly smirked. The hair on the back of Shirley and Kallen's neck stood on end.

'Why do I have a bad feeling about this?' the Red Paladin asked.

"You're a ten," Allura blinked in confusion. What on Alaaran did that have to do with anything? Then she followed where Milly's eyes were looking. "At least at first glance. For someone who's over ten thousand years old, you're filling out in all the right places, aren't you, Princess?"

Shirley and Kallen turned beet red while Rai and Rivalz struggled to hold back laughter. Lelouch could only pinch the bridge of his nose while Suzaku shared an equally mortified look with Allura.
"Why you-!"

"I am being left out of something?"

Allura's confounded response was interrupted when C.C. trudged into the room — adorned in her straight jacket that she had been wearing the previous day. Lelouch made a mental note to ask Allura for some extra clothes for her. The mysterious woman had been quiet the last day, not even going through the trouble to bother Lelouch before bed. Come to think of it, Lelouch wasn't even sure where C.C. had decided to sleep.

'I guess even immortal witches need time to process chains of events.' Lelouch concluded.

"Besides questioning prisoners," Suzaku said, turning his attention back to Lelouch again, "you still need to explain to us who she is and what she's doing here."

"You do realize I'm still in the room, right?" C.C. asked, now leaning against the wall.

"Yes, I know Suzaku," Lelouch exhaled, "but that'll have to wait. All of you, to your lions now... After, of course, you've changed Shirley," giving a sympathetic look at the Orange Paladin, who only blushed harder in embarrassment.

"No need for that!" Coran said, "once you step through the elevators leading to your lion's hangers, if not dressed in it already, you'll be dressed in your uniform automatically!"

"Okay, uh, handy!" Shirley squeaked. The thought of being dressed automatically like that made her skin crawl for some reason, but a magic alien castle. Who knew?

"Enough," Lelouch said in finality, "to the Lions, now!"

The Paladins each marched into the elevators positioned conveniently next to their color-coded seats. Except for Lelouch. His lift was in the center of the bridge. Lowering the Paladins (all now fully clothed just as Coran said, much to Shirley's relief) down, it took about 10 seconds until an opening appeared, revealing a zip line. They zoomed through a brightly colored tunnel for each respected lion and paladin. The zip line by far was a new experience for all the Earthlings. They'd
heard of a couple of famous and fantastic zip lines back on Earth. Some that came to mind were in the continent that used to be known as South America before Britannia took it over and split it into different areas to govern. Ones that zipped through leafy treetops and colorful birds and other wild beasts roamed freely. Some of them lasted for several long minutes with only the wind in your hair, and the green scenery flitting past.

Once the zip line ended, they dropped down through a hatch and into what appeared to be a single-personed motorbike, which drove them up to another elevator specifically large enough for it. The Paladins were lifted up until the bikes themselves disappeared into the chests and lower compartments of each lion. It soon wasn't long until the Lions let out a mighty roar and darted out into the courtyard of the castle.

"Alright Paladins," Lelouch's commanding voice echoed in the comms, "we'll fly in tight formation until we're completely in sync."

Allura's smiling face appeared on the screen within each Lion. "Feel the bond with your lions and your fellow pilots until seven become one unit, and you form Voltron!"

"YEAH!" everyone shouted as their lions leaped into the sky, the same formation as they when they first formed Voltron.

Nothing.

"Yeah!" they shouted again as they swooped back around, trying to connect with the Lions… somehow.

Nothing.

Thirty minutes later.

"...Yay…," less than enthusiastic replies followed. The Lions slowed until they came at last to a distal stop.

"Woooo… Am I the only one who's still pretending to be excited?" Rivalz asked. None answered as mirrored expressions of frustrations and scowls of annoyance presented themselves on each of the Paladins.
"This isn't working," Lelouch admitted, "Let's set down for a little bit."

"Maybe we should be building Voltron from the ground up." Suzaku suddenly suggested.

"What do you mean?" asked Rai, not quite following Suzaku's train of thought. Wasn't that what they were trying to do?

"I mean, let's try literally building Voltron, like, stacking on top of each other."

"What? Like one of those cliche cheerleader pyramids?" Kallen scoffed. That was a ridiculous idea! What even made the Purple Paladin come up with that?

"Well, if you've got a better idea, Kallen, I'm all ears," Suzaku shot back.

Lelouch sighed. He thought the idea was ridiculous too, but he honestly couldn't think of another thing that they could try. They'd been flying around the Arusian plain for almost an hour, or varga as the Alteans called it. The answer couldn't possibly be that simple.

"Fine! We can give it a try," he consented.

The Paladins quickly moved into a position to try and 'build' Voltron. And it seemed to work. Except...

"Rivalz, what are you doing?" Lelouch asked incredulously.

"What do you mean?" the Blue Paladin replied.

"Rivalz Cardemonde, you're supposed to be the lower leg! Down here!" Milly scolded from almost the bottom of the pile. Currently, Suzaku and Shirley were standing side by side. Then Kallen and Milly were on top of them, Rai and the Green Lion perched on top of the Yellow Lion, and the Black Lion semi on top of the Red and Green Lions. And Rivalz... had the Blue Lion parked on top of the Black Lion's wings.
"What?" Rivalz asked, surprised and confused, "No. No, no, no. I'm pretty sure when we did it last time I was the head. Right?"

"You yelled, 'I'm a leg!'" Shirley reminded him.

"Yeah, last I checked we all were yelling a lot of things!"

"Lelouch is the head," Kallen stated a little aggressively. 'Stinkin' Britannians!'

"All the time?" Rivalz almost whined.

Lelouch let out another sigh, "Let's just try it my way for now!"

Rivalz pouted in defeat, "Okay, but next time I call head!"

The Lions quickly shifted into the correct positions as Lelouch slowly lowered the Black Lion down. Rivalz and Shirley were at the bottom, with Milly and Suzaku on top of them, Kallen and Rai over them, and Black on top.

"Okay. Arms and legs, and I'll form the head." Lelouch instructed himself. He set the Black Lion gently on top of the pyramid. Lelouch blew out, "All right, feel the bonds with your lions. Now, channel your energy into forming Voltron. Focus. Focus."

Two minutes later.

"Is everyone bonding and focusing?" Lelouch asked as the Lions had not moved once from their spot in the plane.

Kallen growled in frustration, "Why did this seem so much easier before?!"

"For some reason, I figured this would be more like piloting the Knightmares," Suzaku commented, "but… guess not."
Lelouch breathed out a sigh. "Let's take a break," He needed some time to think about this. Kallen did have a point; it was a lot easier to form Voltron yesterday. Could it have been part of the adrenaline rush and the imminent danger?

His train of thought was cut short though when Allura's face appeared on their dashes again. "Sorry to interrupt, but I may be able to help. Yesterday, you weren't able to form Voltron until you were in the heat of battle."

Lelouch blinked as that was what he had been thinking. The other Paladins all replied in agreement with the concept. The attack had indeed forced them to have to work together and to believe as one being. Practically an extreme example of the fight or flight method. But… something in his gut suddenly plummeted as well. It was a similar feeling he got when Milly was about to spring some completely outlandish scheme onto them.

"Perfect," the Princess smiled as she pushed a few more keys and buttons on the castle's screen, "Because I need to run a diagnostic test on all the Castle's defenses. This should help!"

Lelouch's suspicions were confirmed as the shield sprang to life on the Castle, and then started shooting blue lasers at them!

"RUN!" Lelouch shouted just as the first lasers hit the field. Clouds of fire and smoke enveloped them as the Lions took off in all directions, frantically dodging the blasts.

"Princess! What are you doing?!" Suzaku shouted.

"Running a diagnostic test on the Castle's defenses," Allura casually answered as if endangering the only hope to the universe was normal for her, "and inspiring you! I believe in you Paladins! Let fear be your guide! Form Voltron!"

"Nevermind! I'll take Milly's schemes any time!" Shirley screamed.

"Forget this!" Rivalz exclaimed, "I'm heading back to the Castle!"

"Rivalz, wait!" Kallen called as the Blue Lion bounded up the hill to escape. Upon leaping to the
barrier, Rivalz was met with surprise as his lion bounced off it and tumbled back down.

"Princess!" Milly screamed, "Shouldn't you be using a more practical method of inspiration?"

"You think Zarkon's going to be 'practical' with you?" Allura chastised the Yellow Paladin harshly, "He's probably on his way here right now to destroy us all!"

With that final word, the Princess pressed a button on the screen. All seven of the colored dots gained four dark blue arrows pointing at them.

"Auto-lock-on engaged," Allura then left the bridge as the screaming Paladins struggled to survive the new onslaught of 'friendly fire.'

o~o

"You've returned early," a booming voice observed from the main throne room, "Did you complete your mission?"

A trembling Galran soldier knelt before the throne. "Sir, the moon's crust became unstable." he explained with a bowed head, "Staying any longer would have cost half my crew."

Zarkon's scowl didn't leave his face, and only seemed to grow darker, "Hmm, perhaps, but the half that survived would have been stronger."

The commander looked up slightly in shock, "Weakness is an infection, better to cut it off, then let it spread."

The commander blinked. What was the emperor referring to? Two metal arms suddenly seized him and started dragging him from the room, terror filling his eyes.

Not even blinking as the commander was dragged off, Zarkon turned his attention to the woman next to him. "What have you and your druids come up with to capture Voltron?"

"I have been working on perfecting something. Something that will strike fear into the hearts of any that stand against it. Voltron may have surprised Sendak, but he will not be able to overcome my creation."
"Are we at full power on condenser number five yet?" Allura questioned Coran as the two of them entered the small lounge, both carrying small devices to monitor the Castle maintenance.

"No," Coran sighed, "still just at eighty-four percent."

Allura looked up and was pleasantly surprised to see that most of the Paladins were laid out upon the benches. If they were inside that had to mean—!

"You did it! You formed Voltron!"

"No," Kallen sighed, "The shooting stopped, and the particle barrier shut down, so we just flew in."

The smile on Allura's face vanished, a scowl now in its place, "What?!"

Coran smiled awkwardly, "Oh right, uh, sorry, Princess, I had to turn off the Castle defenses to test the fire suppressors."

"Considering we were fighting for our lives outside," Lelouch commented, walking in with Suzaku, "we issued a small mental break to recover."

"We know you want us to be training Princess," Suzaku added, "but we're not Alteans. We don't understand the Lions as you appear to."

"Yeah, and when are we going back to Earth?" Rivalz asked, almost desperately.

"I'm not going back until I find my family!" Rai declared cold blue eyes narrowed.

"Did it occur to you that there won't be an Earth to return to until Zarkon is defeated?!" Allura demanded.
"We do understand that!" Shirley protested, looking close to tears with frustration and pressure, "But how do you expect us to do this if we can't even form Voltron?!"

"Well, I'm not surprised," Coran said, a thoughtful expression on his face, "You know, the original Paladins fought hundreds of battles together, side-by-side. They were like a pack of yalmors linked at the ears," he pretended to pull at his mustache to demonstrate.

"Normally, that would be us…” Milly admitted as she flopped down on her back, "But considering the events as of late, all of us are off our game lately."

"During the last attack, your survival instincts forced you to work as a team," the advisor continued, "but that will only get you so far. You'll have to become a real team to have any chance of forming Voltron and then beating Zarkon next time. You should try working out on the training deck."

This peaked Suzaku's attention, "There's a training deck?"

o~o

Haggar moved gracefully and with purpose down the hall. She was confident that with the inexperience of the new paladins that her creation would crush them into nothingness. But for this project to come to fruition, she needed some… assistance.

A dark cell door at the end of the hall hissed open as four of her faithful Druids stood guard. Her glowing yellow eyes gazed at the large, boisterous creature in the cell.

"I think I have the opportunity you've been waiting for. How would you like to get your revenge against the Champion?"

Yellow eyes almost identical to her own narrowed in delight before stepping forward. An array of razor teeth shone behind a sinister smile.

o~o
"Two, two, one, two," Coran mumbled after clearing his throat. He was standing in what appeared to be an observation tower, shielded with a thick panel of glass. A Bluetooth-like device with a microphone was attached to his left ear. "Okay, listen up, everyone! The Paladin Code demands that you put your team members' safety above your own."

Coran's voice echoed through the training deck. The seven Paladins were facing outward, away from the others. The training deck's color was similar to the rest of the Castle, consisting of bright blue lights with white and black metal paneling.

"A swarm of drones is about to attack," Coran informed them as a hiss issued from above them. Looking toward it, they saw that a bunch of circular white robots was gliding towards them. It reminded Rivalz vaguely of the drone that Luke Skywalker trained his lightsaber with, in the fourth Star Wars movie. They began to circle them, surrounded.

Kallen, Suzaku, Rai, Milly, and Lelouch all shifted into defensive stances, their blue shields springing to life. Shirley and Rivalz were a little slower but soon followed.

"Get ready," Lelouch ordered, right before the first drone fired right at Shirley's head.

With a gasp of panic, she ducked, covering her head. The blast flew over her, but ended up hitting Rivalz square in the back!

Before the Blue Paladin could even discern what had happened, the floor opened up underneath him, before he fell into it with a shout of alarm.

"Protect your teammate!" Coran ordered again, "Or no one will be there to protect you!" As he said this, another shot hit Shirley in the shoulder, and with a shriek, she fell through the floor as well.

Gritting their teeth, the five remaining Paladins found themselves back to back, shields practically in front of their faces. So far, it seemed to be working though, no blasts hit anyone, the shields efficiently absorbing them.

"Time to increase intensity," Coran commanded as the drones began to spin so fast it became a blur. More shots were firing at rapid speed as everyone struggled to block them.

"You keeping up over there, everyone?" Rai asked with a slightly cocky smirk.
"Just focus on keeping us safe!" Kallen barked back.

"Quit talking and focus," Milly yelled, gritting her teeth, pulling the shield closer still.

The drones then lowered and began shooting at their legs. Most of the Paladins were able to kneel in time, but one shot a very low blast which would've hit Rai's leg, had the Green Paladin not lifted his leg to dodge in his quick moment of panic… which ended up hitting Milly in the back, where she disappeared with a shriek through the floor. Still caught in his shocked stupor, Rai didn't have time to block as another shot hit him in the stomach.

"Rai!" Suzaku yelled, looking behind as the boy fell through. This moment of weakness cost him as another drone shot him right in the forehead, where he crashed into Kallen! After the Red Paladin fell square eagle on her stomach, they both fell through the floor.

Lelouch's eyes widened as he saw that he was now alone. It didn't last long as a shot hit his hand that was holding the shield with enough force to skid backward. And just like with the others, the former prince was joined with the floor.

Coran groaned as he rubbed his forehead. Some of these humans claimed that they were military, but that was anything but military from what he could see. Whatever 'military' experience they claimed to have must be something much different from Altea-

"You know-

"Yaaeerrrggg!" Coran shot two feet in the air against the window as a shriek escaped his lips, clutching his chest and gasping for air as C.C. ('How does she sneak around so QUIETLY?!') made her presence known on the control deck. The green-haired human(?) had a playful smirk on her face and looked like she was trying very hard not to laugh.

"Madam!" he seethed as he mustache bristled in fury and embarrassment, "Quit doing that!"

"Doing what?" C.C. asked innocently, cocking her head slightly like a curious toddler.

The Altean huffed as the Paladins were all slowly brought back up to the surface.
"As I was saying," C.C. continued, walking up to stand next to him, "if this were real combat, a couple of them would still be standing. Foot, hand, and shoulder shots aren't necessarily fatal unless hit in a specific location, like an artery or vein. The head, back, and stomach I'd understand. But if this were real life, I believe at least Shirley and Lelouch would still be fighting. Also, considering Suzaku's 'corpse,'" she made quotation signs with her hands to prove her point, "fell on top of Kallen, resulting in her falling with him, we'd still have three Paladins standing. Injured, but standing."

Coran stroked his mustache as he saw the logic of C.C.'s reasoning. Hitting a few buttons on the deck, he began instructing them again.

"Alright, Paladins! Let's try again! This time the floor is programmed to open if the blast hits a vital area. If your arm or leg is hit, you can still technically defend yourself and your team. For example…"

One of the drones blasted an unaware Rai in the shin. The Green Paladin yelped as the shocking pain swelled up his leg. He was able to hop on the other for a couple of seconds before tipping backward, bracing himself for the floor to open up and swallow him… but nothing happened.

"Huh?" a confused gasp before registering he was still on the surface, "Nothing happ-" he attempted to rise up but lost balance again when his leg refused to budge. "What the?! My leg!"

"Afraid you lost your limb Number One!" Coran informed, as Suzaku ran over and slung his arm over his shoulder, "you'd have to make do without it if this was a real fight."

Rai grumbled as the numbness soon dissipated, shaking his now working leg of the pins and needles.

"Alright, everyone, shields at the ready!"

o~o

Now for the record, the last sequence went a little better than the first one. Almost immediately, the team clustered together, shields up, and determined to protect their section of the circle. But as shots continued to fly and small mistakes were made, the formation crumble. This time it was Lelouch that fell first, suffering a blow to the head, jerking forward and tumbling headfirst through the floor. After that, though, it wasn't long before the others joined him.
From what Coran could tell, the team seemed to be relying heavily on the Black Paladin as their foundation. While he admired the trust they appeared to have for Lelouch, in other circumstances, this might not be the best case. They would have to learn to rely on not just their leader, but each other as well. There would be situations where Lelouch would be either out of commission due to injury or otherwise.

Hence the reasoning for the next exercise.

Kallen was standing in the middle of the training deck, surrounded by a vast transparent maze, which soon flickered out of existence. Or so she believed.

"To form Voltron, you must trust in each other. This ancient Paladin maze will teach you that trust. Your teammate can see the walls, but you can not. So, listen carefully, if you touch the walls, you'll get a slight shock."

Kallen took a deep breath as she placed her helmet on her head. For some reason, she wasn't looking forward to this exercise. Maybe it was all the practice she'd had of feigning her identity, but she didn't trust most people at all.

"Okay," she sighed, "who is guiding me through?"

"Take two steps forward," Suzaku's voice rang over the comm.

She growled a little, why was she always partnered with Suzaku?!

Coran seemed to have noticed the hostile expression and spoke up, "Now, just sit tight. You'll get your turn."

"As I said, Kallen, take two steps forward, turn right, and take three steps in that direction," Suzaku repeated.

With a huff of annoyance, Kallen took a step forward-

"GAH!" she cried as the wall she hit electrocuted her, "What the quiznack Kururugi?!"
"Kallen, you're not listening to me!" Suzaku said in an exasperated tone.

"You said 'turn right'!" she shot back,

"But before that," Suzaku corrected in a tone he hoped sounded calm, "I said 'Take two steps forward.'"

The Red Paladin growled in frustration, why did this seem more natural when Zero was giving orders back home? "Two steps-" she screamed again as she hit the wall again.

"WE'RE SWITCHING PLACES! NOW!"

o~o

Despite the small hiccup with Kallen and Suzaku, most of the other Paladins made it through the maze with little trouble, much to Coran's relief.

Now the Paladins were back in their lions and soaring through the atmosphere of Arus in tight formation. The Black Lion in the front, the Red, Yellow, and Blue Lions to the right of it, and the Green, Purple, and Orange Lions to the left.

"You'll never be able to form Voltron unless each of you has a strong bond with your Lion," Coran instructed from down in the castle.

Rivalz grins proudly, "No problem! Me and Blue and are best buds for life, for real!"

"Perfect!" Coran said, "Then you should have no issues with this exercise. Everyone, put your Lions into a nosedive!"

With almost excited growls, the seven Lions dove towards the ground at the speed of a bullet.

"This is an expert-level drill that you really shouldn't attempt until you've been flying for years, but uh, we're in a bit of a rush, so here we go. Activating training helmets," Coran says as another screen pops up with a button that he promptly pushes.
Simultaneously, the Paladins' helmets all went dark. They couldn't even see their hands in front of their faces. Yelps and gasps from all the Paladins resulted.

"Coran, what's happening?!" Shirley screamed.

"I can't see!" Rai yelled.

"You must learn to see through your Lion's eyes. The goal is to pull up right before you crash into the ground. Feel what the Lion feels!" Despite the instruction, most of the Paladins had the same thought rolling through their heads: 'ARE. YOU. CRAZY?!'

Shirley was the first to pull out. Heart pounding so hard she could barely breathe, tears starting to form in her eyes. "Mine feels scared!" she whimpered as she pulled back on the handlebars and slammed on the pedals. The Orange Lion pulled out of formation.

The Blue and Yellow Lions were neck and neck as they continued to charge for the ground.

"You still going, Milly?" Rivalz asked a confidant, but a slightly flirty smirk on his face.

"You know it!" she replied, eyes focused, trying to connect to the Lion, "You?"

"Going? I'm speeding up!" Rivalz challenged as he hurled the handle forward.

Milly raised her eyebrows in amusement, mimicking him, "Oh yeah?"

The two lions rapidly picked up speed as the ground began to get dangerously closer. Due to the Blue Lion being slightly slimmer than the Yellow Lion, Rivalz held the lead by nearly an inch.

"Must be getting close," Rivalz remarked friskily.

"Must be!" Milly replied, smirking almost evilly, "What's wrong? Scared?"
Rivalz mouth dropped, "I'm not scared-!"

The Blue Paladin didn't have more time to protest further as he was almost knocked out of his seat as both he Milly crashed into the dune below, burying them waist-deep, head first!

They both groaned from the impact as the Blue Lion ungracefully tumbled out back down the hill.

"I… win…" Rivalz muttered, his head still spinning. Maybe that wasn't the best idea, after all.

"What was that noise?" Rai asked, alarmed, "Did they crash?!"

Pulse fluctuating, Rai pulled back on the controls, promptly ending the nosedive. The good news was that he didn't entirely crash but unfortunately didn't pull up quite fast enough, and nicked the side of the rocky canyon, taking a good chunk out of it.

Lelouch, Kallen, and Suzaku were the only ones left still participating in the exercise. The three pilots were perfectly calm, eyes closed, and focused. Recalling the sensation they felt when they connected with their lions the other day, they concentrated on reviving the same feeling.

Their eyes then opened, Lelouch's Geass flashing in his left retina. There it was, the simultaneous chill and warmth coursing through them as they felt their consciousness dip into a terrain they never knew existed. The loud purrs of their Lions pulsed through their veins, as they felt their presence overshadow them like a blanket or cape, their souls uniting and lining up with their own.

In a flash of gold, the world appeared before their eyes, racing past them as they continued to dive towards the surface. None of them seemed too concerned about it, though. Flawlessly, as if they had been flying for years, they activated their thrusters, just seconds before they collided with the soil. The thrusters propelled them forward across the plain, dodging over rocks and arches, and riding over dips and hills. They were flying them while their eyes were still closed!

"I think I'm getting this," Lelouch said.

"This is… amazing!" Kallen muttered.
"That wasn't too difficult," Suzaku smirked.

"Lelouch, Kallen, Suzaku, excellent!" Coran praised as they glided back towards the sky.

oo

After everyone returned to the Castle and recovered from the flight exercise, the Paladins found themselves in the training room once again. This time, the Paladins were sitting in a circle, legs crossed, hands in their lap, and eyes closed. On their heads was a piece of fancy headgear, with blue lights probing their temples and in the middle of their foreheads.

"Now, the most important part of Paladin training is being able to meld your minds and focus on one thing: Voltron." Coran calmly instructed in a soothing tone, sounding almost like a yoga instructor.

As the Paladins focused, small screens appeared in front of each of their faces, portraying different things.

Rivalz's showed an image of downtown Area 11 near where he worked.

"Everything else has to fade away."

Milly's showed Ashford Academy's Clubhouse.

"This technique will be essential every time you form Voltron."

Shirley's was the Academy pool.

"So, relax and open your mind."

Suzaku's was an image of a pretty girl with light purple eyes and long pink hair that past her waist, partially in two buns and circles. She was wearing a white and green blouse with an orange skirt and red flats.
"No walls."

Rai had a picture of his favorite park in Area 11.

"No secrets between Paladins."

Kallen's had a picture of her in a yellow tank top and brown shorts, holding some sodas in her hands. She was smiling next to a boy with short auburn hair wearing a red headband, a black shirt, red jacket, and grey jeans. Next to him was another man with curly greyish-brown hair, wearing a light pink shirt and khaki pants, with a light blue towel draped over his shoulders. The picture, though, was hard to make out as it kept glitching.

"Come on, everyone, clear everything."

Finally, Lelouch's showed a young, beautiful girl with long, wavy, light brown hair, eyes closed, wearing a simple green and white dress. She had a lovely, innocent smile on her face and was sitting in a comfortable looking, power-operated wheelchair. A small, barely noticeable tear trailed down the ex-prince's face.

"Now, focus on forming your lion."

The images glitched out until they formed small three-dimensional pictures of the robots in front of them.

"Bring your lions together and- and form Voltron." All the Lions slowly started making their way towards the center of the circle.

"Keep your minds open; work together."

They were almost there, pieces beginning to mold together…

"Good! Keep focusing!"
Well… all except for one.

"Kallen!" Suzaku barked, peeved, "stopping thinking about your boyfriend!"

"I wasn't!" Kallen growled eyebrows arched down in anger, all the images flashing out of existence, "Shirley was rooting around in my head!"

'And for the record,' she added mentally, secretly deeply offended, 'that was not my boyfriend!'

"I-I thought we were open," Shirley hesitantly argued, "you can look in my head hole."

"Everyone has to able to look in everyone's head holes!" Coran reminded sternly from the observation deck above, "Clear your minds!"

Sighing in resignation, Kallen closed her eyes, and this time, the Red Lion's image materialized before her along with the other Lions with the other Paladins.

"Good! Almost there." Coran said as the Lions all began joining together. "Now, form Voltron," Leg joints were attached, a body made up, and arms were slowly locking into place. "Yes!"

Just as the Green Lion was locked into place, though, the Black Lion's images glitched violently.

Lelouch's head jerked up with a violent gasp as if he'd been shocked, eyes snapping open, his left eye glowing red as his Geass flickered. Rai cried out as well as he buckled, his eyes scrunching shut in pain. The other Paladins soon followed as a sharp pain seemed to pierce through their skulls. Their headsets glowing a brighter blue, Voltron falling to pieces as the Lelouch's image overtook it.

When the screen finally cleared an image of a stairway, as if looking down it from the top. Blood was splattered everywhere as three, no, four figures lay in pools of it. Two of them were men dressed in expensive-looking suits. At the same time, the other two, at the very bottom of the steps, was of a woman in an orange dress and long flowing dark hair, covered in bullet holes and blood. Her eyes, presumably a soft, gentle purple, were now faded and dull. In her arms was the trembling form of a little girl, eyes staring forward, traumatized and frightened, hands twitching
 uncontrollably. Stained glass and the remains of a chandelier were littered all around the sides.

There was screaming, and the Paladins couldn't tell if it was coming from them or this memory. They didn't have time to draw conclusions, though, as they all were suddenly flung backward, the image shattered.

Lelouch blinked, the pain in his head gone. It registered that someone was speaking next to him. Coran's mustached face slowly swam into focus.

"-ladins! Lelouch, are you alright?"

"Coran?" Lelouch breathed, shaking his head to clear it, "What happened?"

"Ah... I wish I could tell you myself. An unexpected glitch with the mind-meld device it seems," the advisor said, doing his best to answer. In all honesty, in his many years of watching King Alfor and the other Paladins train and bond, he never saw anything like this. Though he didn't voice it aloud, he suspected the mind-meld somehow triggered a traumatic memory for Lelouch. And because all the other Paladins were linked to it, they got caught up in it as well, causing some sort of psychic whiplash.

The prince himself quickly realized that the others were talking as well. Anxious and worried expressions plastered on their faces.

"You okay, buddy?"

"Lelouch, what was that?"

"What happened?!"

"Was that Nunnally? What happened?"

"Enough!" Lelouch leaped to his feet, though unsteadily, "I don't want to talk about it, so just leave it OKAY?!"
Every flinched back a little at the outburst but eventually complied.

As everyone watched Lelouch breathe to calm down, Milly and Suzaku were the only ones that looked the least shocked, but no less disturbed. Both of them knew what memory that was. It was one that cost Milly's family their nobility status, as well as what led Lelouch and his sister, Nunnally, being sent to Japan in the first place. Both of them knew the story, but seeing it with their own eyes just now only seemed to amplify the reality of it even further.

The day that Empress Marianne vi Britannia was found shot to death at Aries Villa in the Britannian Palace.

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Coran decided to take the silence as a way to call a break time, handing out small packages of water that looked very similar in design to Capri Suns on Earth. Despite the appreciated rest, Lelouch didn't miss the suspicious and anxious looks that all but Milly and Suzaku were giving him. He even noticed Coran shoot him one before he could hide.

"Fantastic…” he muttered low enough that no one heard, sucking forcibly on his straw.

"You all have been working hard. A small break may help," Coran said, overlooking them.

Their break was short-lived, however, when Allura came tromping through the door, hands on her hips and the four mice perched on her shoulders. "What are you doing lying around?! You're supposed to be training!"

"Just resting a bit," Coran calmly explained, not in the mood to tell as to why they were, "You know, you can't push too hard."

That didn't seem to appease the Princess at all as she shot back, "What do you mean, 'can't push too hard'?" She seemed to miss the exasperated looks that most of the Paladins were giving her, except Suzaku. He was actually quite used to being ordered around harshly like this. Kallen especially looked bitter, almost purposefully slurping her drink loudly.

"Get up, you lazy lumps! It's time you face the gladiator!"
After her rather harsh order, the Paladins soon found themselves in similar positions for when they were fighting the drones. Their backs were facing each other, but much farther apart now.

"In order to defeat the gladiator, seven Paladins must fight as one," Coran instructed back up in the deck.

A port from the ceiling soon opened up with a hiss, and a giant, slender humanoid bot gracefully fell to the floor, a battle staff clutched in its hands. With a flash of blue light, it charged at the first Paladin it saw, which happened to be Shirley.

With a gasp of panic, Shirley readied her bow and fired a series of shots that she tried to aim at it, only for Kallen to have to throw up her shield to keep them from hitting her. With a fast spin, the gladiator knocked the Orange Paladin off her feet, causing her to fall hard on her back. With the wind already knocked out of her, the gladiator's staff struck her stomach with an electrical spark, knocking her unconscious.

Milly quickly charged it with her kusarigama, only for the attack to be blocked with the staff. It barraged the Yellow Paladin with a series of violent strikes, which she managed to block with the chain part of her weapon. But eventually, with a sharp jab at her ribs, she was also flung backward, hitting Shirley in the process.

Rivalz used this opportunity to fire some shots with his rifle, but the gladiator danced around the shots like a pro, causing Rivalz to have to block and back away defensively. Eventually, it knocked the gun from his hands, and the bot hit him hard on the head before swinging around, almost clocking off Lelouch's if he hadn't ducked.

'How does the Princess expect me to fight?! I don't even have a weapon!' Lelouch ranted mentally as he tried to summon that strange power that he got last time he had fought the weird red lightning. But either that was a one-time fluke or could only be done in specific environments.

The gladiator then hit Rivalz again before also sweeping him in the stomach, twirling him around until he crashed into Lelouch, knocking them both to the ground.

Rai flashed his katar out and knelt in ready position for the gladiator to approach. As it charged, the room suddenly grew dark, bright blue being replaced with vile magenta. No longer a gladiator
charging, but a whole legion of sentries. Galra sentries.

With a terrified whimper, Rai froze, eyes blown wide like a deer caught in headlights.

Suzaku managed to jump in front of Rai and block the strike for the Green Paladin with his own Bayard. Kallen was by his side a moment later.

"Rai, what wrong?" she asked, "Are you okay?"

Suzaku grit his teeth as the robot moved, aiming to disarm and trip him, but Suzaku saw the movement and jumped to avoid the strike. Kallen pushed Rai out of the way as the bot leaped over Suzaku for her. Her cestus managed to catch the staff between its claws, and with a quick twist, the staff went flying in the other direction. Suzaku took the opportunity and sliced through the bot's abdomen. With a shutter, it collapsed before dissolving into the floor.

Despite the ultimate victory, though, Allura was not impressed.

"That combat simulator was set at a level fit for an Altean child! You're not even close to working as a team, let alone ready to face Zarkon!"

"Oh, really!" Kallen finally exploded, she'd had about enough with this lady, alien princess or not, "Thanks for a load of confidence! Well, newsflash Princess: We're. Not. Alteans! While we've been in this room working our asses off all day, I haven't exactly seen you participating in any this bull!"

"Kallen!" Suzaku gasped in slight horror, though he had to agree with her partially, his patience simmering as well. But who on Earth was this girl? What happened to the sick, feeble Kallen Stadtfeld they were all used to? From the looks on most of the others, except Lelouch, they were all thinking very similarly.

"Yeah, I said it! Besides, you didn't even give Lelouch a weapon! I get that we don't have his Bayard thingy right now, but you could've at least given him a knife, or a gun, or something!"

Allura, absolutely appalled by the lack of respect, was about to retaliate when another voice beat her to it.
"You know," C.C. casually walked down from the deck she'd occupied with Coran, "if you really wish to know how they'll take this training to the battlefield, I'd recommend a more… strategic approach."

"What are you talking about?" Allura snapped. She'd had just about enough of this nonsense and insubordination.

"Well, think about it," the green-haired woman continued. "Sure, strength and brawn are essential in battle, but they can easily become worthless and overbearing if they know not where to place it. It takes strategy and a sound mind to truly win. All I'm trying to say is that if you wish to know how well they'll survive, you need to test them… mentally as well."

Coran, intrigued with C.C.'s logic, asked for further clarification.

"I'm not exactly sure how your people had risen through the ranks on Altea, but on Earth, it's one's mind and cunning that will get them places. Lelouch, for example, is possibly one of the greatest minds I've ever seen."

"Oh yeah!" Rivalz said in agreement, "All those times I've seen Lelouch play chess, I've NEVER seen anyone beat him."

"Chess?" Coran asked the name sounded familiar, "does this happen to be a game as well?"

"It can be, but there's a lot of people on our planet that play it competitively too," Milly added.

"Hmmm… does it involve black and white pieces that only move in certain directions, depending on the role they play?"

"Wait," Shirley said, voicing most of the paladins' shared shock. "You know what chess is?!"

"Why it's only one of the most ancient games in Altean history!" Coran exclaimed excitedly, "Why I remember when I was a lad, my grandfather, and I would go at it for varga on end! I do recall that your father attempted to get you into the game yourself, Princess."
Princess Allura actually smiled, recalling her childhood. Chess had been one of her father's favorite games. She had never caught onto the game, but she remembered her father would use the game for strategies with the old paladins, calling out individual pieces to represent each of them and other forces they were working with.

"You seem quite versed in the game," Lelouch smirked as he sat up next to Rai.

Coran just grinned, "Ho-oh! Is that a challenge that I'm hearing?"

"Perhaps. Though what Rivalz speaks is true, I can count the number of people who have actually beaten me on the one hand."

"Righty-oh then!" Coran whooped, practically skipping out the door, "Let's see if I can't hunt down that board, and we'll play a round!"

"I'll look forward it," Lelouch chuckled almost deviously.

"What just happened?" Kallen asked, blinking.

"No idea," Suzaku admitted with a nervous laugh.

Shortly after, Coran did indeed find the chessboard, covered in about a foot of dust, but still in one piece and all pieces intact. After setting it up, the Altean was practically shaking in excitement. Lelouch had smirked in amusement, Coran was undoubtedly one of the most enthusiastic opponents he'd ever played as everyone else gathered around to spectate the match.

The match itself had been quite eventful, Coran's attitude was competitive but cheerful throughout the entire game. Lelouch had to admit, despite his silly and overly eccentric demeanor, Coran proved to be quite the adversary on the board.

Ultimately though, Lelouch ended up destroying the Altean, losing only three pawns and a bishop overall. From the start of his signature move with the king, all the Paladins could tell that Lelouch had everything under control. Though secretly, the prince believed the Altean may have been going a little easy on him.
Despite the defeat, though, after the initial shock, Coran openly congratulated the Paladin on an outstanding match and gave his wishes to play him again on a later date, which Lelouch cordially accepted.

"I do have a slight question, though."

"Oh? And what is that?"

"You started the game with the king piece. I assume you understand the risk that takes place by doing so."

"Heh, heh, true," Lelouch had admitted, "however, if a king doesn't lead, how do you expect his soldiers to follow?"

Coran's eyebrows raised in surprise, before twirling his mustache inquisitively. "I see. An interesting mindset you have, Lelouch."

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"Ahoy, young paladins!" Coran said about an hour later. The Paladins gathered around the dining table. In front of them were plates loaded with food goo and even more in bowls along the table as well as small pink packages or what they assumed was... well... more food goo. "I've whipped up a big batch of focusing food. After this meal, you'll be forming Voltron six times a movement and twice on the astral conflux."

"Smells great, Coran," Rai said on behalf of all of them, "Thanks!"

Before the Paladins could even dip their sporks in for a first bite, Coran threw up his arm, which was hiding a remote control. With a swift click of a button, the Paladins' arms were chained to one another from cuffs that appeared from the floor.

"Hold the phone!" Rivalz protested in shock. Similar expressions marred the faces of the other members.

"I saw a lot of solid individual performances today," Coran commentated, expression and tone suddenly serious, "but you're still struggling to work as a team. So, welcome to the final bonding
"Coran," Milly said in a warning tone after she and a couple of others pulled on the cuffs to see if they'd budge. They didn't, "I highly advise thinking about what you're doing!"

Coran simply grinned, "Oh, this one's a classic. You get to feed each other, like a pack of yalmors!"

Despite the supposedly optimistic attitude, only glares and groans of frustration emanated from the paladins. This was going to be a long meal.

°°°

A hulking device, illuminated by purple light, stood firm and tall. Wires interconnected it and a small floor port. It was not on as the vital source had not transferred yet.

The tyrannical emperor watched from the floor above. He trusted completely in the witch's creation. The Paladins were still young and inexperienced, and this would bring them to their knees.

The witch herself lifted her bony hand, and a capsule containing the muscular prisoner rose to the surface. It was grinning in malicious excitement. Finally, after all this time, it would have its revenge.

She thrust her hands out with a single grunt, her robes and hair billowing in an invisible wind.

The creature roared in agony before all was consumed in the light. The floor and wiring lighting up with life that transferred into the giant mech behind him. Lights sprang on as it opened it's 'eyes,' one yellow, one a slit white.

°°°

"Ah-augh!" Shirley gasped as her food goo went flying from her spork, her fist colliding with her face.
"Sorry!" Rivalz said sincerely. She groaned as she reached down for another scoop, only her to accidentally bite the Blue Paladin's hand rather than the spork.

"Ew!" he flinched back involuntarily, causing the goo to fly in the other direction. This time he tried to move a little more with the Orange Paladin, only to pull Suzaku with him, the Purple Paladin's hand landing flat in his the green goop. "Oh nice Suzaku, you defiled my food goo!"

"It's your fault!" Suzaku protested, "You moved too suddenly!"

"Urgh!" Kallen growled, "This is ridiculous!"

"Do Earthlings ever stop complaining," Allura asked haughtily. She and C.C. had joined the Paladins at the dining table. Only the Princess's royal etiquette training had kept her from bursting into a long stream of suggestive exclamations as she attempted to eat her platter.

"On good days, not very often," C.C. said, poking and rolling her goo about her plate. She wasn't sure where these Alteans learned to cook, but would it have killed them to at least provide something that looked a little similar to pizza? She was ordering herself a lifetime supply once they got back to Earth. She didn't care if she ran Lelouch's wallet and bank account entirely into the ground.

"C.C., the sarcasm is not appreciated," Lelouch said, glaring at the immortal.

"Can't you just give us a break?" Milly queried, her tone highly annoyed, "Everyone's been working really hard today!"

"Yeah!" Rai jumped up, fed up with her attitude, "We're not some prisoners for you to toy with, like… like…" he was drawing a blank with his insult.

"Like a bunch of toy prisoners!"

"Yes! Thank you, Rivalz!"

"Guys!" Suzaku protested, appalled at the others' behavior, "Look, I get that everyone's upset, but
that gives you no right to disrespect the Princess."

"Ha! At least one of you has some manners; he's correct!" Coran reprimanded.

"Oh, the princess of what?" Kallen spat, her face almost going as red as her hair with rage, "We're the only ones out here, and she's no princess of ours!"

Kallen probably would've continued her rant had a giant blob of food goo not hit her smack in the face. The culprit being Princess Allura herself, her spork in front of her and her free hand moving away as if she'd just used it to flick something… which she totally did.

The room went completely silent, and still, Kallen was frozen in place, trying to process what the heck just happened, even C.C. paused in between her bites.

'She really should not have done that!' Lelouch noted, silently panicking. He'd seen Kallen when she was angry, and the Princess was walking on some thin ice right now!

It didn't seem possible for Kallen's face to get any redder, but she grit her teeth and practically snarled at the Altean, her eyes drilling holes into her head.

"Oh, it's on!" She screamed as she grabbed the closest thing she could catch, it being Rai's entire plate of goo. Together with the platinum blonde, they both flung it in her direction.

Allura gasped in shock. Just before it could hit her, Coran batted it away with his serving towel, and with a giant, graceful swoop of a ladle, sent a large glob right back at them. It collided head-on with each Paladin at the table.

C.C. wisely lowered herself to the ground and hid in the safety of the underground table.

'Okay, that's IT!' Lelouch roared in his head, before abruptly rising from his seat himself. Now he was mad; his patience had been strained far enough, "PALADINS! I COMMAND YOU TO ATTACK!"

"YES SIR!" they exclaimed in unison, as they grabbed their weapons (plates and utensils) and
started hurling them at the Alteans. Even Suzaku, who usually attempted to be as cordial as possible with royalty had reached his limit, as his food fling hit their adversaries square in the face. Allura and Coran quickly returning fire of their own.

Armageddon quickly pursued. Bowls and plates overturned, green goo hit the walls and chairs, proving to be very futile shelters from the sharp aims from both sides. However, the Paladins still found themselves much more exposed as they were still tied together.

By the time calm fell back on the group, nobody had escaped the wrath of the food goo. Plates scattered over the table, and almost all the chairs overturned. The goo clung to their hair and armor, some of it still dripping and sliding down their faces. They would all definitely need showers after this.

The Paladins all blinked, their minds coming out of a haze of adrenaline. They all looked at each other, confused about what the heck just happened… before bursting into good-natured laughter. Sure, they were all still covered in food, but at this very moment, they didn't care. It was actually even fun!

"Enough!" Allura suddenly shouted, bringing the laughter to a halt. And here came the lecture. Not only had they started a food fight and made a massive mess of the dining hall, but their two hosts had been the targets of their uncontrolled ire. "Do you see what you're doing?!!"

Here it comes…

Allura lifted her head, a wide grin on her face, "You're finally working together as one!"

They blinked. What happened to the- wait!

"Hey! She's right!" Rivalz realized with a grin of his own.

"I… actually don't hate you guys right now," Kallen admitted, smiling genuinely.

"Yeah! Totally!" Shirley nodded.
"Best bonding exercise ever!" Milly cheered, yanking her's and Lelouch's arm in the air.

"You all thinking what I'm thinking?" Suzaku asked triumphantly.

"Let's go form Voltron!" Lelouch proclaimed.

"YEAH!" Everyone was jumping in the air…. Before losing balance and falling on top of each other.

After taking some time to untangle themselves and wipe off the goo, the team confidently marched to their Lions.

One elevator, zip line, pod tunnel, and a second elevator later, all the Paladins were situated in their Lions.

"Is everyone ready?" Lelouch asked, gripping the Black Lion's controls, eyes lighting up.

"Roger that!" Rai answered.

"It's on!" Rivalz cheered.

"Yes, sir!" Kallen replied.

"I was born ready!" Shirley grinned.

"Up and at'em!" Milly quipped.

"Ready to proceed!" Suzaku said boldly.

"Then let's go!" Lelouch ordered. With a mighty roar that shook the room, the Black Lion flew up and out of the hanger.
"YEAH!"

Just like with their battle with Sendak, the same feeling of ‘oneness’ washed over the seven Paladins, as their lions converged with eager bellows, appendages retracting and sliding into place. Arms, legs, knees, and at last, the head. Voltron's strong face shown once again as it flew across the sky and landed gently in the field, Allura, C.C., and Coran watching a safe distance away.

"I told you I could get them to do it." Allura said, "They just needed a common enemy."

"It's true. Like the old proverb says, 'A man can be driven to do anything, if a beautiful woman is just really, really mean to him."

C.C. burst into a series of giggles as a peeved Allura scowled at her advisor.

'O, if only they knew how true that is!'

o~o

"Man, that was cool!" Rivalz exclaimed in the lounge later, "I'm so charged up, I don't know if I'm gonna be able to sleep tonight!"

"Not me," Kallen smirked, "When my head hits the pillow, I'm gonna be lights out."

"I just want you to know," Shirley said emotionally, sliding between Rivalz and Kallen, "that I realized when we were in Voltron, we're family!" She slung her arms tightly around the Blue and Red Paladins, pulling them close, "You know? Like, we're totally connected. No secrets, no barriers, no nothing. A family all the way. I love you guys!"

"Indeed, we are!" Milly proclaimed, "In this together. The romance of the three kingdoms: 'It matters not that we were born apart, but upon this day we die as one!'"

"Is that your idea of a love quote?" Rivalz asked.
"If one of us goes down, then we all do," Milly smirked mischievously.

"...That's a little dark there, Milly," Rai said, "don't you think Suzaku?"

The Green Paladin gasped as he saw Suzaku's eyes slowly tear up. "I'm glad," he sniffled and wiped the tears that were falling, "that we can all be together, you know like this?"

Lelouch smiled at his friend, very similar feelings rising in him as well.

Rivalz then sprung up and practically tackled Suzaku to the floor, legs and arms wrapping around him, "Oh come on! We're supposed to be unwinding right now!" Everyone laughed at the engagement.

"But that's what's so refreshing about Suzaku, though," Shirley said.

"Yeah, though once in a while, you just want him to get a clue, you know?" Milly answered hands on her hips.

"Oh, sorry about that," the Purple Paladin answered, Rivalz squishing his cheeks playfully.

"Oh, but you love it, don't you puddy tat!" Another round of laughter enveloped them; even Kallen was laughing at the silliness.

"G-forces messing with your heads a little bit?" Lelouch inquired with a grin.

"Maybe a little bit," Rivalz admitted as he and Suzaku untangled.

"Well, I'm gonna head to bed," Kallen said, standing up and heading for the stairs, "see you all tomorrow."

"Yeah, I like the sound of that," Rai murmured, eyes suddenly starting to droop. Most of the team began heading for the exit when Shirley noticed Lelouch still sitting down.
"Aren't you going to bed, Lulu?"

"In a minute," the Black Paladin replied with a small smile.

"Don't stay up too late, Lulu," Milly scolded light-heartedly, "you don't have the excuse of late-night gambling here!"

Lelouch just laughed as everyone exited the room. As he found himself alone again, though, he let out a tired sigh. Lelouch reached into his burgundy pocket and pulled out a small photograph that had been lounging in it since they'd left Earth. He'd only shown this picture to a few select people.

He was about eight or nine years of age in the photo, dressed in a majestic white suit and white cravat decorating his neck. He was standing next to a beautiful woman in a dark navy gown and a large white and blue headpiece sitting on a small bench overlooking a beautiful garden. The woman was holding a little girl's hand, about six or seven years of age in a pale pink dress with puce trimming, her light brown hair tied in two high ponytails.

Two of the space mice that had been in the room with them came closer, squeaking in concern, the smallest, Chulatt, perching on his shoulder and the larger green one, Platt, on his thigh.

"If you plan to keep this charade going, Lelouch," C.C. said, emerging from the shadows, still dressed in her straight-jacket she'd been wearing all day, "you'll have to tell them eventually."

He let out a long, tired sigh, "I know…"

o~o

A ship prepared for launch at Zarkon's main base. Not just any ship. This one carried a weapon that would bring Voltron to its knees.

"This beast will allow us to destroy the Paladins," the emperor himself sneered next to Haggar, "And then, Voltron will be ours."

With a whoosh of fire, the ship took off into the cosmos. The destination: Arus. Target: Voltron.
AN: I'M BACK! I'M BACK AND READY TO RUUUUMMMMMBBBBLLLLEEEE!
Haha! Thank you so much to everyone that has patiently waited these last nineteen
months, but I'm back and SO pumped to write this fic! NO, seriously! You have no
idea how excited I am! With all the new Voltron material now, I'm going to be having
a lot of fun with this!

I especially want to thank Iron117Prime for helping me with some inspiration for this
chapter! If you haven't read his story 'Code Prime - R1: Rebellion' I highly recommend
it! It's an amazingly written story so far and definitely worth your time!

A quick note about the Alteans knowing about chess, if you've read the first set of
Voltron comics, the Sphinx in issue 4 (?) challenges Pidge to a chess match. So
apparently this is an ancient game that's been around for eons... cool!

And as for the casual clothes the Paladins wear when not in uniform:

Lelouch and Suzaku are in their canon casual clothing. For Lelouch a burgundy jacket
with a black shirt underneath and dark grey pants with black shoes. For Suzaku a long
blue trench coat with a green shirt underneath, blue jeans, and sneakers.

Milly and Shirley are wearing similar outfits that they wore in the Lake Kawaguchi
episode. Milly's wearing a blue dress with a three-quarter length white jacket and light
blue flats. Shirley is wearing a green tank top with white frilled straps and yellow
shorts with brown sandals.

Rivalz is wearing some beige pants with a white shirt and a green jacket, with
sneakers.

Rai is in a casual blue shirt with a grey jacket, black pants, and sneakers.

Kallen is wearing brown shorts with a red turtle-neck, a brown jean jacket, and knee-
high combat boots. And her hair is up in her headband, fanned-out.

If any of you have any questions or concerns, feel free to PM me, I'm pretty good at
replying within twenty-four hours! Again, thanks so much for putting up with such a
long wait and I hope with chapter pays off! Love you guys!
 Return of the Gladiator

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dark purple energy surrounded the occupants of the chamber — four at each corner with one in the middle. The quintessence seeped slowly into his ancient form as Haggar approached.

"Sire, the beast is almost to Arus." the witch announced as the Galran Leader stood slowly to his feet.

"This quintessence gives me so much power; I could fight the Paladins myself," Zarkon sneered, clenching his fists.

"There is no need," Haggar smirked darkly, "My creature will destroy them and capture the Voltron Lions for you. Then, the most powerful weapon in the universe will be ours."

o~o

"Great job training today, everyone! We're getting the hang of Voltron," Lelouch said as he and all the others except Rai entered the main dining hall.

"Seriously, how far do you think Rivalz and I kicked the broken alien ship?" Milly asked cheerfully, "Must have been like a mile!"

"Yeah, that'll come in handy when the Galra challenges Voltron to a soccer match!" Kallen said, rolling her eyes. The training that morning had gone on reasonably smoothly. That is until Milly convinced Rivalz to help her kick some of the wreckage from Sendak's ship. The maneuver had overbalanced Voltron, and the giant Knightmare had landed flat on its back.

"Oh, come on, Kallen!" Rivalz said, exasperated, "You're just jealous that we did something cool, and you can't handle it. We get it!" The Blue Paladin and the other student council members were still trying to get used to the new, war-hardened, moody Kallen Stadtfeld. Not to say she wasn't moody before, but to compare her outbursts to each other, the old Kallen's was like a small firecracker, while this Kallen was a stick or two of dynamite!
"Your kick did kind of ruin our balance, you two," Suzaku commented, taking his helmet off and setting it at the table, "we fell."

"I think that was partially my fault Suzaku," Shirley admitted from her seat at the table, embarrassed, "I reacted too slow."

"Everyone enough!" Lelouch said, pulling up a chair himself, "Save your energy for fighting Zarkon!"

"Hello, Paladins!" Coran chirped as he strolled into the room, a large silver platter held proudly in his hands, "How was the Voltron workout?"

"We're getting there," Suzaku said, leaning back in his chair. Suzaku then placed an arm over the top, "Are you and Allura almost done fixing the Castle so we can leave this planet?"

"Yeah, I feel like we're sitting ducks here on Arus," Kallen added.

"Just about," Coran confirmed, putting the platter on the table. "In the meantime, to get your minds off those duck seats you're worried about, I made you guys an authentic, ancient Paladin Lunch!"

At first, the Paladins were excited about an authentic meal, that is until Coran lifted the lid. What was underneath looked more like a green, gooey, bug-like creature rather than a meal? And that didn't even account for the smell.

"Coran," Shirley whined, "I just got used to that goo stuff, and now you're switching it up?!"

"This is packed with nutrients," Coran replied, still smiling proudly.

Rivalz leaned forward, taking a whiff, then gagging, "It smells disgusting!"

"I know!" Coran chirped, "That's how you know it's healthy!"

"Coran," Milly crooned, holding up some plants she managed to snitch on the way in, "We're on a
planet now with fresh herbs, spices, and whatever this thing is. A tuber? Now if you'll excuse me," she grabbed Rivalz's wrist, dragging him away. "Rivalz and I are going to head back to the kitchen and spice things up."

Suzaku and Lelouch chuckled slightly, good old Madam President.

"Hey, where's Rai?" Suzaku asked, finally noticing the blonde was missing.

"He's probably checking on those prisoners we rescued from Zarkon. They'll all be waking soon in the infirmary." Coran said between bites of the… bug?

"Very well, then we will join him," Lelouch said, standing up, Suzaku quick to follow after.

They didn't get far though as a fork was thrust into Lelouch's face, "Open the hatch. Food Lion is coming in!" Coran made airplane noises as the spork hovered in front of them.

Suzaku gulped down nausea as Lelouch scowled, "No, just… no!" Before Coran could make a second attempt, the two of them slipped out of the room.

"You don't know what you're missing!"

o~o

Rai breathed deeply, profoundly trying to slow his hammering heart. He twiddled his thumbs and swallowed to calm his churning stomach. These aliens were the only connection he had to find his mother and sister. The way those prisoners looked at him, though, and what they called him: Champion. He wasn't sure if that was supposed to be a good thing or a bad thing. He sincerely hoped the former. He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he barely registered that the doors had opened.

"We're probably as anxious as you are," Suzaku said.

"These aliens that we saved know something about my family," Rai said, looking back at the fish-like one, "They have to!"
"We hope so too," Suzaku nodded sympathetically.

"They certainly seemed to recognize you," Lelouch said, "They called you 'Champion.' Any idea what that means?"

Rai bit his lip, his knees bouncing anxiously, "I don't know. I can't remember very much from that time. But the way those guys looked at me when we freed them... I don't know if I want to find out."

Further discussion of the topic was interrupted as one of the pods hissed, steam escaped from the device, freeing the fish-like alien from his frozen slumber. He let out a breath of icy air as he opened his eyes.

o~o

Bowls and plates full of colorful, delicious foods came sliding down the table, Rivalz quickly adding the finishing garnish to the front one. Shirley and Kallen's eyes widened, and their mouths watered.

"Well?" Milly asked expectantly.

No further encouragement was needed as the Red, and Orange Paladins swiftly dug into the food. Mouths were bulging with the delicacies. C.C. had joined the group about a minute ago and tried some herself.

"Hmm… not pizza, but not bad either."

"They like the Paladin Lunch," Allura observed as she entered the room. Coran, however, stood pouting at her side, arms crossed. He was a little peeved at the Paladins' rejection of his food.

"I don't want to talk about it." he sniffed in disdain.
"I just got the final nebulon booster working," Allura said, "We should be able to leave Planet Arus tomorrow and take the fight to Zarkon."

Before anyone could reply, however, the room was illuminated in red light as the alarm sounded in the room. The Paladins leaped to their feet, suddenly alert. C.C. got up slower, slurping up the alien spaghetti hanging from her mouth.

Allura swiped her hand in the air, the computer beeping to life. A camera from outside the Castle appeared above them. On it was the front entrance, and leaping, apparently trying to be stealthy, from the small rocks in the way was a little figure with ram-like horns and small, child-like face. The camera zoomed in closer.

"What is that?" Kallen asked.

"I don't know what it is. Maybe it's a local Arusian," Allura deduced. "He's approaching the Castle."

The Arusian native upon closer inspection had brown horns and appeared to be wearing small green pants. He was bare-chested with a brown strap over his shoulder, possibly for the small spear-knife it was carrying as he screamed like a drunk rabbit. He was running from rock to rock, peeking over them suspiciously.

"Oh!" Shirley gushed with a squeal, "He is so adorable!"

"He doesn't look too dangerous," Rivalz smirked confidently, hands on his hips.

"You never know," Kallen's eyes narrowed, her Bayard flashing to life in her hand.

"No," Allura chastised, turning towards the door, "Alteans believe in peace first. Let's go welcome them."

"Maybe we can knit him a little sweater!" Milly said as Shirley continued to gush happily.

C.C. smirked in amusement as she followed closely behind.
Kallen's brow furrowed, "I'm not taking any chances," she muttered, Bayard still tight in her grip as she ran after them.

o--o

The Castle doors opened slowly, dust and sand picking from the tension. The Arusian yelped and dived behind another rock. It wasn't too hard to find the creature as his heavy breathing gave away his position.

"Greetings," Allura said pleasantly, "We know you're there. No harm will come to you." The alien responded with a flip outward, and weapon held out at the ready.

"Aw!" Shirley cooed, absolutely smitten at how cute the alien was. If all alien species were like this, she didn't mind one bit!

"Wait!" Kallen exclaimed, stepping in front of them protectively, holding her bayard up, though not activated, "He could be dangerous. Drop your weapon!"

"No one takes Klaizap's weapon!" the alien shot back, glaring at the Red Paladin.

"Kallen, put that away!" Allura scolded, before turning back to the Arusian, "Please, kind sir, accept my most humble apologies."

The alien blinked in surprise before he lowered his weapon, standing tall and proud. "I am Klaizap, bravest of our warriors. Our village is over Gazrel Hill," he gestured to his right, "I come seeking answers as to why the Lion Goddess is angered with her followers."

"Followers?" Coran asked, confused.

"Lion Goddess?" Rivalz asked, just as perplexed.

Klaizap pointed to a small carving next to him. It was an image of a divine being in long flowing
robes, holding two staffs. A large lion's head was in place on top, encircled with a sun. "The one the ancients spoke of."

Upon seeing the image, Allura smiled, "What makes you think she's angered?" Allura asked, kindly.

"Destruction is everywhere!" Klaizap exclaimed, "In the past few suns, fire has rained from the heavens, and a giant has danced in the sky."

Rivalz leaned over to Milly and whispered loudly, "I think he's talking about Voltron."

C.C. smirked, "Well, you know any other giant robots around here?"

"I think we got that, Rivalz," Milly replied a little dryly.

"You have not angered the Lion Goddess," Allura reassured the alien.

"How can you be certain?" Klaizap asked, still uneasy.

"Because I am Allura, this is my castle," the princess said, gesturing to her castle.

Klaizap looked between the Castle, all of the humans, and Alteans. He gasped.

"Lion Goddess!" he exclaimed, bowing before the princess in great reverence.

"Oh, well, look at that!" Milly said, smirking slightly.

"Please, bravest warrior, take us to your village so that my friends and I may meet our neighbors," Allura instructed gently.

"Wait!" Kallen protested, "What about our mission to get off the planet and fight Zarkon?!"
"Part of the Paladins' mission is to spread peace and diplomacy," Allura explained shortly, "Arus has been our host for 10,000 years. These people deserve our thanks."

o~o

"So, how long were you held captive by Zarkon?" Suzaku asked the fish alien as he carefully handed him a cup of tea. All of the aliens were out of the pods now. They each were wrapped in a blanket that they found in the infirmary right next door. Even before they started talking to them, though, it was evident from the looks on their faces that they had been through unspeakable terror.

"Some for years," the alien answered, "Decades, maybe. It's hard to tell. Time becomes a blur."

"Were there any other humans imprisoned with you?" Lelouch asked, "Ones that were close to Rai when he was also a captive?"

"Yes, my mother and sister," Rai said anxiously, "their names were Erina and Sophronia."

"I never knew their names, but I certainly remember the other two Earthlings that arrived with you, Champion."

The knot in Rai's stomach tightened. There was that title again, and the same haunted look in the alien's eyes as he looked at him. "'Champion.' Why do you keep calling me that?"

"Yeah, you called himself something else too," Suzaku said, "Zephyr or something?"

"You really don't remember? Unbelievable!" the alien gasped, "You were a legendary gladiator, undefeated in the ring. You defeated an infamous Galra gladiator known as Myzax. That was the day you earned the name 'Champion.' But 'Zephyr' was what you were called before that time by the other Earthlings."

Lelouch blinked, then looked at Rai, "So 'Rai' isn't your real name either… interesting."
"Anyway, what happened? When he defeated this Myzax guy?" asked Suzaku.

"I was there when it happened, as was the younger Earthling."

"Sophie?" Rai gasped. She was in the rings too?!

"We were all prisoners, forced to fight for the entertainment of Zarkon. That day, we were sent to fight Myzax, a vile beast many thought could never be defeated. Slaughter awaited us all. This 'Sophie' was the first of us sent to fight. But fate had other plans," The alien paused, the haunted look returned to his face. The three boys waited for him to gather his thoughts. "You were so thirsty for blood, you injured your fellow Earthling in a rage."

Lelouch's eyes widened as he heard Suzaku gasp. Lelouch's expression became murderous as he rounded on Rai.

"You attacked your sister?! WHY?!"

Rai's eyes widened in horror. "N-No!" he gasped, trembling, "Please! That can't be true! I-I would never hurt her!"

"I was there," the alien said, "We all were."

"After Sophronia was injured, where did they take her?" asked Suzaku calmly, assuming his military demeanor. The calmer you were, the more likely a straight answer would come.

"I know not," the alien looked down solemnly.

"No!" Rai exclaimed, shaking his head and beginning to hyperventilate, "Nononono! Th-there's got to be more to the story! I-I couldn't have hurt my sister!"

Lelouch's brow furrowed in thought, "Well, that ship you were held on crashed-landed on this planet. They should have prisoner longs in the database. Information."
"Okay," Rai nodded, calming down, "Let's go then!"

o~o

The Red, Blue, Yellow, and Orange Lions sat perched over the village in the distance. The Arusian community was… small, just like its people. The construction design looked similar to old huts on Earth. Quite the primitive species it would seem.

Allura, Coran, Rivalz, Kallen, Milly, and Shirley were all gathered in the town square with the rest of the village. Rivalz and Milly were passing out some cookies they made (or whatever the equivalent to cookies was for Alteans) while Shirley and Coran had scooped two of them into their arms and were hugging them tightly. Kallen and C.C. both stood awkwardly in the middle of everything.

"Rustic," the immortal commented, looking around.

"Oh, Lion Goddess," the Arusian King proclaimed, "I, King of the Arusians, formally beg your forgiveness. Please have mercy on us and accept our traditional Dance of Apology as atonement for our wrongdoings."

The king clapped his hands twice, and a small pink Arusian scurried to the middle of the square, hands up in a pose.

"Commence Dance of Apology! Hoorah!" the king commanded. The other Arusians cheered around them as a group began to play a set of drums off to the side. The dancer started moving in a strange form. It certainly didn't look like any dance they'd ever seen. She was mostly waving her hands in odd directions.

"Please," Allura said politely, "there's no need for this."

"Moontow halt!" the king ordered as the Arusian paused in a pose again, this time on one leg, "The Goddess has refused the apology. Start the sacrificial fire," an Arusian lit a pile of logs upon an altar, and the other Arusians began screaming as the king turned to face it, "We must throw ourselves in."

Kallen was about to rush over and put the fire out herself when Allura quickly stopped them. "No!"
No sacrifices!

The king turned back around in relief, whether it was to continue the ritual or not be burned to a crisp, "So, we may proceed with the dance?"

"That's a better alternative," Allura nodded. The king clapped his hands, and the music started again. The Arusian, Moontow, proceeded to finish the dance. Shirley then noticed that C.C. was giggling a little bit.

"What's so funny? Are you laughing that they were about to kill themselves?!"

The witch smirked, amused, "When you've lived as long as I have, you'd also have a morbid sense of humor as well, Shirley Fenette."

Shirley looked at her like she'd just grown a second head. 'Lelouch, WHERE in the WORLD did you find THIS chick?!

It wasn't long until Moontow stopped and bowed to them, or Allura, the rest of the village following shortly.

"Oh my," Allura murmured, feeling a little overwhelmed, "Please, please, rise. Thank you for that, but I am not a great being worthy of your worship. I accidentally put you all in danger," the Arusians gasped in horror, "It is I who should be apologizing to you. I am Princess Allura, and these are the Voltron Paladins. Although we originally came from different worlds... and have very, very, very different traditions, we wish to live alongside you as friends."

"But the mighty, robotic angel," the King protested, "has it not come to destroy us because of our immoral ways?"

Rivalz looked like he was about to say something but was silenced by Milly, who elbowed him in the ribs.

"Voltron?" Allura asked a little shocked, "No. In fact, that mighty robot is here to protect you. Let it be known that Voltron will protect every innocent being throughout the universe!"
The Arusians cheered and jumped for joy. Rivalz and Milly soon had Arusians climbing all over them. Coran was throwing and catching an Arusian in the air. C.C. and Shirley had sat down while a couple of the Arusian children began playing with their hair. Kallen tried to walk away from the crowd with an Arusian leaped up and hugged her around the middle.

"I-I don't usually hug strangers, but…” Kallen blushed a little embarrassed as she awkwardly hugged back, "Man, you are cuddly."

"Thank you," the Arusian answered in a deep, baritone voice. Kallen blinked. She wasn't expecting that to come from such a small creature.

o~o

The Galra ship in question had landed in a small lake, half of it already submerged. Suzaku lead Lelouch and Rai deep into the ruined structure through an opening in the top, bayard in sword form. They had no idea if anything survived the crash, so couldn't be too careful. The three leaped in, using their jet packs to slow their fall. Most of it had been destroyed.

Suzaku then noticed a computer looking device, "This looks like the master control board, but there's no power."

"All we need is power?" asked Lelouch.

"Yes, from the looks of it," Rai nodded, "but something compatible with Galra tech…”

Lelouch hummed in thought, remembering the fight on this Galra ship as the prisoners were escaping… maybe.

Lelouch activated his Geass and tried to picture the same feeling from the battle as he placed his hand on the console. His hand suddenly lit up with red energy, the console blinking to life.

"What the-" Suzaku gasped, "Lelouch, what are you doing?"

"I honestly don't know. I'd tell you if I did."
"Either way, I can't believe you got this thing to work!" Rai said in awe. He then tapped the armor on his forearm, a screen appearing in front of him, "My mom and Sophie's whereabouts must be logged in here somewhere. Once I download this information, I'll find some way to decode it back at the Castle." He pressed a few more buttons, and a downloading bar appeared in red as well as a coding sequence on the larger Galran screen.

Suzaku and Lelouch jumped as the sound of a sonic boom split the air. Looking up, the two gasped in horror as a giant fireball started plummeting towards the planet.

"What the-"

"Oh, no!"

"What? What is it?" Rai asked eyes, barely moving from the screen.

"Something just entered the atmosphere," Suzaku said, "Not sure what it is but it's big, it's Galra, and it's coming right for us!"

"We need to go!" Lelouch said, about to remove his hand, only for Rai to grab it and slam it back down.

"Lelouch, don't move! I'm only fifteen percent done. I'm not going anywhere!" he said stubbornly.

Lelouch hissed out through his teeth in frustration, Suzaku looking apprehensively between the UFO and them. It was coming closer and faster from the looks of it. The download bar was barely fifty percent full.

"Rai, I'm sorry!" Suzaku shouted, grabbing the Green Paladin and rocketing upward. Lelouch quickly followed after them.

"No!" Rai shouted in protest as he struggled against the Purple Paladin, but to no avail. For such a lanky guy, Suzaku was pretty strong!

"Team Voltron, come in!" Lelouch shouted over the comlink, "We need back up!"
"Hello! Is anyone there?!" Suzaku also shouted.

o~o

The rest of the team was still with the Arusians when they heard them.

"Lelouch? Suzaku?" Allura asked, alarmed.

"Where is everyone?!" the Black Paladin asked. He sounded scared, which was an emotion he rarely showed around anyone.

"What's going on?" Kallen asked. The question was answered for them as a rumbling sound erupted in the distance. Turning around, the two women saw the fireball heading straight towards them.

"Oh, no! We got to get to our Lions!" she shouted.

The Arusians started running for an underground shelter on the other side of the village, Allura, C.C., and Coran guiding and encouraging them.

"Everyone, get inside, and stay down!" Allura said, waving them onward.

"I'm on it!" Shirley said, running past her. Allura blinked in surprise as the Orange Paladin pasted her. Only for Milly to drag her back and away from safety.

"Not you, Shirley!" she scolded as her fellow Paladin began silently crying at her botched escape attempt.

o~o

Back at the crash site, Rai continued to struggle in Suzaku's grip, protesting loudly. "No, Suzaku,
Let me go! My mother!” He ceased, though, as he finally spotted the ship getting dangerously close.

"Run!" Lelouch cried as the trio dashed for safety, away from the wreckage. They barely got within a few yards when the ship crashed and destroyed the rest of the debris. Everything else around it was being blown away in a fiery shock wave that was heading towards them at a terrifying speed. They probably wouldn't have made it, had the Black, Green, and Purple Lions not jumped in between the trio and the blast.

The dust and debris were swept away with the wind as the landscape calmed for the moment. The three Lions stayed protectively hunched over their Paladins. Once it was deemed safe, they stood up to full size, rumbling in concern and relief.

"The Lions just saved us!” Suzaku exclaimed, astonished.

"I didn't know they could do that!” Rai said in equal awe.

A fascinated smile graced Lelouch's lips before catching a shape out of the corner of his eye, "I think the praise will have to wait guys. Look!” he pointed at the wreckage.

As the dust cleared, a large, coffin-like black ship stood towering over them; it was even taller than the Black Lion. With a hiss, the structure's outer walls fell apart to reveal the passenger. A giant, monstrous robot blinked to life in front of them. Its eyes glowed ominously, one yellow, the other purple, and slit. It zeroed in on the three Paladins.

"Get to your Lions!” Lelouch ordered as they rushed to obey. As they ran, the monster's right arm raised in the air and began to spin like a drill, producing a giant ball of purple energy. They had barely settled in their seats ready for the incoming attack when the monster swung the ball directly at it. The three instantly jumped out of the way as the ball collided with the ground, leaving a crater.

But the robot wasn't done. With another swoop of its hand, it directed the ball towards the Green Lion's position. Rai barely got out of the way in time before it slammed into the rock formation. The ball then swung back around to its master, who then flung it at the Purple Lion hovering above. Suzaku fired his Lion's laser beam to destroy the ball, but there was little to no effect as the energy just was absorbed by the orb. Suzaku didn't have time to react as the ball hit him and Purple square in the chest. He cried out as they rolled to the ground, skidding across the landscape.

He groaned as he lifted his head, his eyes widening as the monster was charging towards him. It didn't get far though as the Alpha of the Pride, the Black Lion, lunged at the robot, locking its jaws
onto its shoulder. Despite the attempt to hang on, though, the robot grabbed the Black Lion and threw it off of him.

Before the robot could attack again, a barrage of lasers bombarded it, forcing it to shield itself.

"Lay down some covering fire so they can get out of there!" Kallen shouted from the Red Lion.

"I'm on it!" Rivalz called out, providing help.

"Got it!" Milly confirmed.

The Blue and Yellow Lion began firing beams from their tails as they aided the Red Lion in covering fire for the Black, Purple, and Green Lions. Soon, the Orange Lion was seen charging in as it ran across the earth torts the Beast.

"Take this!" Shirley shouted as she charged in from behind on the ground. "Battle Lion Head-Butt!" She rammed into it, causing the robot to lose its balance and fall on its knees. This tactic was enough of a distraction for the Paladins to regroup quickly.

"Guys, are you okay down there?" Kallen asked as she looked to her teammates from above, the Lions slowly backing away from the beast.

"Still alive for now," Suzaku said as they ascended into the sky with the others.

It didn't take long for the robot to get back on its feet, glaring up at the complete pride now.

"Are the Galra behind this?" Shirley asked, grimacing nervously.

"Since when do the Galra have a giant robot too?" Rivalz exclaimed.

"They must be. Who else would it be?" Lelouch confirmed.
"I've never seen them make a weapon like this before," Rai stated, answering Lelouch's unvoiced question.

"So, uh, what's the plan? Shoot at it with everything we got? Take out its weapons? Call it names?" Rivalz asked, sounding just as scared as Shirley.

"If we want to take this monster down there is it one way to can do it," Lelouch said, the other Paladins braced themselves, as they prepared to call forth their mighty friend.

The Lions then roared out as their eyes glowed, their bodies giving off the energy of their colors. They then flew in formation to the sky as they began to form up.

"Form Voltron!" Lelouch invoked as the colors clashed in the sky.

The Lions all roared in enthusiasm as their limbs and legs contracted and extended to form each part of the giant robot. The black head and body, the red and green arms, the purple and yellow shins, and blue and orange feet. Finally, Voltron's stern and battle-ready face appeared at the top, and the juggernaut was prepared for battle.

Voltron landed on the ground as it glared at the Ro-Beast, that glared right back at it.

"Remember, we are one unit, fighting with one goal!" Lelouch shouted as they prepared themselves for the fight.

The Ro-Beast's arm spun again, generating another energy orb, readying for another round against them. Voltron himself stepped forth with the orange lion digging in the ground as Voltron leaped forward.

The Robeast swung its arm, sending the energy orb out towards Voltron in the air, but he expertly dodged it with a quick corkscrew.

Kallen screamed a battle cry and thrust forward the controls as the Red Lion plunged ahead, locked into the robot's arm. They stood there in a stalemate before Rai cried out and flung the Green Lion towards the robot's head, knocking him back against the mountains. Team Voltron didn't give it too much time to recover as the warrior leaped into the air, intent on smashing the robot's head further into the earth of Arus. The ro-beast was barely able to raise it's arm in time to block as they made contact, metal grinding against metal. In retaliation, the ro-beast called the energy ball back to him. Voltron noticed it too late and didn't have time to dodge before it impacted them from behind.
The ro-beast brought its arm down again, ready to hit them a second time, but the team recovered quickly and activated their thrusters, zipping out from underneath it just in time.

"I thought Voltron was the most powerful weapon in the universe!" Kallen screamed as they dodged another attack.

"Yeah, so how's this monster kicking our butts?!" Shirley shrieked in tandem. Keeping an eye the orb for another attack, they didn't notice that the ro-beast had run up behind them until they were punched upwards almost over the mountain. They landed only a couple of Voltron footsteps from the Arusian village.

"Oh, no, the village!" Suzaku gasped.

"We have to protect those people!" Lelouch said breathlessly.

From within the village itself, Allura, Coran, C.C., and the other Arusians had taken shelter in a cave. Even from their hiding place, they could feel the tremors in the ground from the two robots fighting furiously.

The ro-beast send another orb of energy at Voltron, hitting the Defender of the Universe in the face as it tried to block. They would've crushed the village had Milly, Suzaku, Shirley, and Rivalz not wrenched on their controls. The thrusters activated, allowing them to hover mere inches from the town below, before recovering and flying back towards the beast.

"That was way too close!" Milly said. This time they flew past and behind the Ro-beast, so if they did get hit again, they would be propelled away instead of towards the village.

"We got it away from the Arusians, but we can't take him down!" Suzaku said.

Rivalz suddenly had an idea, "I got it! I'm going to power kick that orb thing!"

"No way!" Kallen shouted, "the last time we did a kick, we fell!"
"Oh, come on! Stop living in the past, Kallen!" Rivalz fired back.

As Voltron turned back around and flew off. The Robeast matched them and sent the orb at Voltron as he leaped into the air, Rivalz crying out he made Voltron aim a kick at the orb...barely missing by a few inches.

"Oh, no!" the Blue Paladin cried as the orb, smacked Voltron clean in the chest, causing him to flip and land with a loud thud on the ground.

The ro-beast charged at them at full speed as the Defender of the Universe struggled to his feet.

Lelouch grit his teeth from the inside of Black, "Rai, fire lasers now!"

"Got it! Fire!" the Green Paladin exclaimed, the arm raised to attack… only for the two wings on Voltron's back to spring forward, and magnetize themselves to the Green Lion's maw.

"Oh, whoops!" he gasped, frantically hitting some buttons on his control panel to take the shield down.

"No, Rai! I said lasers! Lasers!" Lelouch ordered just as desperately as the ro-beast made contact with the shield. They were sent flying backward again, and with another hit from the energy ball followed, knocking them back further.

"Every time we focus on the orb, we're blindsided by the monster!" Suzaku said.

"Yeah, but every time we focus on the monster, the orb hits us!" Shirley added.

"Then what do we do?!" Rivalz asked, starting to sound a little panicked.

"ORB!" Milly screamed as the orb hit the robot again, slamming them into the side of the mountains.

"Lelouch, we've got to move!" Kallen shouted through the comms.
Lelouch wasn't paying attention to Kallen, though. Instead, his eyes were closed and focusing on the ro-beast. Or rather, what he heard coming from the ro-beast. He noticed that the mace that the beast was holding was making a strange sound like it was charging up. Now that he thought back to all the continuous attacks from the monster, the orb attacks came in counts of three before the orb regrouped with the wielder.

As Lelouch was making these observations, a light flashed before Rai's eyes. He was no longer in the Green Lion, facing a monster robot, but back in Galra captivity. In an arena. Fighting for his very life... against a monster that had a weapon almost identical to this one, making the same sound.

"That sound," he muttered, before his eyes widened in realization, "I recognize this monster, from my time in Zarkon's prison! I know how to beat him!"

"Watch the pattern of the orb's attacks correct?" Lelouch asked.

"Yes! That's right!" he nodded as Voltron quickly leaped back from the mountains just as Myzax's attack hit where they had been laying only a second before.

"Everyone, listen!" Lelouch shouted, "there's a loud sound when the orb returns to the base of the weapon. Can you hear it?"

The other Paladins quickly quieted down, straining their ears to hear. Lelouch was right; there was loud drilling like sounds coming from the mace right now, as the top of the weapon was spinning around the orb.

"And every third time," Rai continued, "that orb needs to charge up. That's this monster's weakest point. We need to attack within that time frame!"

"Okay, so what do we do in the meantime?" Shirley asked, worry still prominent in her tone.

"Defense!" Suzaku answered for Lelouch, catching on to his and Rai's strategy, "Rai, bring up that shield!"
"Way ahead of ya!" he shouted as the Green Lion brought the shield and landed it directly in front of them. And not a moment too soon as the orb crashed into it a second later. The sphere crashed into it, the Paladins grunting at the impact, and ricocheted off into the air.

"One. Two more to go!" Lelouch called out.

Myzax swung his arm around, sending the orb arcing right back at Voltron, impacting the shield. It bounced off of them as they cried out. Even with the protection, the ball was doing a massive amount of damage.

"We can't take much more of this!" Milly shouted through gritted teeth.

Myzax swung his weapon again and sent the orb down at Voltron once again as Voltron stood ready.

"Last one! Everyone brace for impact!" Lelouch ordered. The orb struck the shield, this time shattering it and knocking them off their feet once more. But just as Lelouch and Rai predicted, the globe returned to the base of the weapon, the drilling sound emanating as it charged back up.

Seeing their chance, Lelouch didn't waste another second. "NOW!"

Kallen swung her hand back on the controls and thrust it forward as hard as she could. The Red Lion's head shot up, a blue laser beam erupting from its mouth. The attack hit Myzax square in the chest, sending him tumbling backward in an explosion of fire and smoke. As it cleared though, Myzax quickly got to his feet, preparing his next attack, weapon now fully charged.

"It didn't work!" Milly cried, shocked that the attack didn't seem even to dent it.

"So now what?!" Rivalz said as Voltron took another hit to the chest, shield still torn in two on either side.

As Voltron tumbled backward, Rai's mind flashed back to his arena fight again; he plunged back from an impact form the orb. He rose up slowly, panting from exhaustion, holding the sword tightly in his hands.

Wait… a sword!
"When I attacked him before, I had a sword with me!" Rai exclaimed.

"ORB! ORB!" Shirley shrieked as the orb crashed into them again, this time Voltron blocking it with the Red and Green Lion's arms.

"We can't take another shot like that!" Kallen yelled. Voltron had taken too much damage. If another attack hit them, they probably wouldn't survive, much less win!

Suzaku groaned as he struggled to sit up straight again. Suddenly, a wave of what seemed like electricity raced through his being. He gasped as the Purple Lion's purr practically vibrated the cockpit, and a small panel to the right rose up from the control board.

"Wait a second, guys! I think my lion's telling me what to do!" he informed them as the information was practically downloaded into his brain from the lion.

"Whatever it is, hurry up and do!" Rivalz said, "He's about to fire his third shot!"

The Paladins all gasped as Myzax swung his arm around again, firing the orb at them once again. Having escaped from the ditch they were trapped in, Voltron lifted his arms in defense just as the sphere impacted them. They flew backward and rolled, tumbling several feet before stopping.

Suzaku grunted, regaining a sense of his surroundings as he looked at the foreign port again as Myzax charged at top speed and jumped into the air. He intended to crush them into the ground with the orb still attached to the weapon.

With a battle cry, Suzaku ripped his Bayard out of its magic pocket and jammed it into the port, cranking it to the right.

Suddenly, Voltron slammed his hands together, a bright flash of blue light illuminating their surroundings, then pulling apart with a thick strand of blue energy. And he swung right into Myzax. It was so fast that Myzak didn't have any time to react. The sword positioned sturdily in the Red Lion's jaws, slashed like butter through the ro-beast, Voltron landing on his other side with one leg crouched down, sword outward.
Myzax, in a spark of static energy, collapsed to his knees, before exploding in a fiery inferno. Voltron swung his sword twice more before proudly holding it at his side in victory. The Paladins all cheered in relief. They did it! The monster was defeated.

"How did you do that, Suzaku?" Milly asked enthusiastically.

Suzaku, being the only one that wasn't cheering, sat stunned still in his seat. Finally, after two seconds of processing what he did, he pulled his bayard free from the port.

"Whoa, heheh, thanks Purple," he smiled graciously.

Meanwhile, in the distance by the original crash site, the camera attached to the shuttle caught sight of the column of smoke over the mountains.

o~o

"NO!" Haggar shrieked as she saw what happened through her link with the camera. She then a calm, deathly tone said, "I'll make another, more powerful."

"That won't be necessary. Sendak is still alive on Arus," Zarkon began as he looked away a bit, "I've given him instructions for how to proceed."

"Can he be trusted?" Haggar asked as she knew that Sendak was loyal, but you never knew if it was a ruse for something else.

"I trained him, and he has his mission. He fights in the name of Galra. Only success or death will stop him."

o~o

"Zarkon has challenged us to rise from the mud and prove our worth," Sendak informed the one surviving Galran with him, Haxus, "We will not let him down."
"Sir, how are we going to take the Castle with just the two of us and five damaged sentries?" Haxus asked.

"By exploiting our enemy's weaknesses."

"What weaknesses?" Haxus asked, still unsure of the situation.

"The worst weakness of all: they value the lives of others," Sendak said, looking down at the Arusian village, as the populace happily went about their day. None was the wiser on what was beyond the horizon.

o~o

The Paladins, minus Lelouch, Suzaku, and Rai were gathered in the hanger as the former prisoners of Zarkon were loading up in one of the Altean pods.

"Good luck out there," Rivalz said with a small wave.

"Thank you all for everything. We never dreamed we see our families again," the fish-like alien said, bowing slightly in respect, "But you gave us hope. You gave the universe hope."

A few minutes later, the pod was flying into the sky, away from the Castle and planet Arus, escorting its precious cargo home.

o~o

Meanwhile, outside the Castle, Rai was sitting on the bridge overlooking the ocean. Two of the mice were seated on his lap, Platt and Plachu. Rai smiled and scratched Platt's head as the larger mouse squeaked at him.

"Hey Rai, there you are!" Suzaku said, running over to join him. He sat next to the Green Paladin, placing a hand on his shoulder, trying his best to show support and cheer him up, "Are you okay?" he asked.
"Yeah," Rai nodded, "just thinking about stuff."

"Like what?"

"About the fight… I remember why I attacked Sophie."

"Your sister?"

"Yeah, the memory of what happened came back when we were fighting the monster. Mum was being sent off with the weaker prisoners to a work camp. Meanwhile, Sophie and I were forced to fight in the Gladiator Arena. She was going to fight first, but she was scared. We all were."

(Flashback)

Sophronia trembled as sentry lowered the shield, extending the sword towards her delicate hands. Sobbing, she ran into her brother's arms.

"I don't want to go out there!" she sobbed into Rai's abdomen, "Please, big brother, don't let them take me!"

"It's going to be okay, Sophie," Rai said in an equally terrified tone. He knew that whoever went out there was going to die. If Sophronia did, she would die in minutes. He glanced between her and the sword the sentry held. He made a decision and acted before he could change his mind.

With a wild roar, he threw his sister behind him, and charged the sentry, ripping the sword from its arms. With an animalistic snarl, he turned back to her and the other aliens.

"THIS IS MY FIGHT!" he snarled, swinging the sword down on Sophie's leg, leaving a large gash as she fell to the floor with a shriek of pain. She held her leg as tears streamed down her face. He growled as he landed on top of her. "I WANT BLOOD!"

His resolve almost wavered as he looked into his sister's eyes. Terror, and betrayal plain as day on
her face. His face quickly softened as he whispered, "Take care of Mum," before they dragged him away. The last thing he saw was one of the aliens kneeling to examine Sophie's wound before the gate closed.

o~o

"...that was the last time I saw her," he whispered, a tear sliding down his cheek.

"You saved her," Suzaku said, eyes wide. "You attacked her, so they'd choose you instead."

"Yeah..." Rai said, but tears continued to roll down his face, "...but the look she gave me when they dragged me out... I don't know if that's her last memory of me or not..."

Suzaku suddenly pulled Rai into a hug, "We're going to find her. And your mom. I promise."

Rai stilled for a moment before returning it, sniffling, "Thank you..."

In the distance, Lelouch observed the two, having heard the entire conversation. Now that he knew the reasons, Lelouch understood why Rai acted the way he did, as Lelouch probably would've done the same thing if that had been him and Nunnally.

Speaking of Nunnally... Lelouch looked at the ground, guilt rising in his chest. Though it wasn't entirely his fault, he'd still left Nunnally alone on Earth. No note or message for Sayoko, no clue to where he was. It had already been about a week since their blast off from Earth. He did not doubt that by now, missing person reports were being made for the other student council members. Once their faces hit the media, he had little to no doubt that their cover would be blown sky-high. And if his face were one of them, someone in the military or royal family would see it, recognize him, and make the connection.

Not to mention the Black Knights. Without him as Zero, and even Kallen, there to assist them, how long would it be before the group did something stupid and got themselves caught? Whether by either Cornelia or the police?

He clenched his fists, gritting his teeth. This was slowly turning into a nightmare.
"So," C.C. said, walking up next to him, the small blue mouse and pink mouse mounted on her shoulders, "What's the great Prince Lelouch vi Britannia going to do now?"

"Don't call me that C.C.," he almost snarled. "You know I no longer answer to that name!"

C.C. shrugged, "Still, you should answer my question."

"...Britannia still needs to be stopped," Lelouch said. "If the Galra Empire is as close to Earth as Allura says, that goal is paramount now."

"But Lelouch, if you defeat Britannia and leave it in shambles, how do you expect for them to defend themselves against an alien invasion?"

"Once the Emperor is gone, and someone with better ideals takes the throne, we can make preparations for that. But that won't happen as long as the Earth remains divided."

"So you plan to return? Alone?"

"If I have to," Lelouch nodded. "There have to be others. Perhaps even the Princess can fill my place as Paladin."

"When do we leave?" C.C. smirked.

"...Tomorrow night."

o~o

"Hey, Ohgi, still no word from Zero or Kallen?" Tamaki asked from the upper floor of the Black Knight's hideout.

"No, nothing," he shook his head in frustration. The Black Knights had not had contact with Zero for over a week. It wasn't unusual as none of them knew where their masked leader disappeared to on days they weren't doing operations. What really worried him was that Kallen had vanished into
thin air as well.

"Oh, come on! We usually hear from him by now, don't we?" Tamaki complained with an exaggerated groan.

Sugiyama was flipping through the channels on the television, seeing if any news stories would warrant their attention. He was about to press the up button again when the screen glitched out. The face of the Britannian news station suddenly appeared on the screen. The reporter was standing in front of the Ashford Academy.

"We interrupt this program to bring urgent breaking news," the news anchor said. "Seven students, all registered at Ashford Academy, have been reported missing today."

As soon as 'Ashford Academy' hit Ohgi's ears, he sprang to his feet, he and the rest of the Black Knights quickly gathering around the screen. That was the school Kallen was attending.

"Don't tell me…" Minami muttered in fear.

Seven student photos appeared on the screen a moment later, each with their names written at the bottom in alphabetical order: Milly Ashford, Rivalz Cardemonde, Shirley Fenette, Suzaku Kururugi, Lelouch Lamperouge, Rai... and Kallen Stadtfeld.

"No…" Ohgi muttered in horror as Kallen's face appeared at the bottom of the list.

o~o

"The group of students was last seen around the Lake Kawaguchi area."

"Sayoko?" Nunnally asked, fear in her voice. The Japanese maid only stared at the news report in horror.

o~o
"Records show the students boarded a train to the area, and witnesses have stated they spotted the students by the lake about a week prior."

"It can't be..." Viceroy Cornelia li Britannia muttered as she and sub-Viceroy Euphemia li Britannia locked eyes with the fifth name on the screen.

o~o

"Authorities and law-enforcement urge all citizens and numbers that if they have any additional information to contact them immediately."

"Prince Lelouch!" Jeremiah Gottwald exclaimed, springing from his seat at the bar, Villela Nu staring in disbelief at his side.

o~o

"Charles," a female voice called out from behind him.

"Yes, Marianne, I know."

"It seems there are more unusual circumstances than we thought. I still have been unable to contact C.C."

"She remains with our son, that much is certain. We find Lelouch, and we find C.C. This is of the utmost importance. Summon the soldiers. They will find them and drag C.C. back here where she belongs."

"Right away."

Chapter End Notes

AN: FINALLY! FINALLY DONE! I'm so sorry this took so long, but the school semester is coming to a close and professors think that's the perfect time to drop a ton
of homework on your lap, projects and exams included.

So Voltron has just faced their first monster on Arus, and have officially been declared missing back on Earth... Uh oh...

So just a couple things to address. The Purple Lion bringing out the sword. I don't know if you noticed, but Voltron seems to form the weapon based on the Paladins' bayards. So when Keith changed to the Black Lion, his bayard still formed a sword like it did when he was in the Red Lion. Just pointing that out in case there was any confusion there.

Two other small announcements:

1. THIS STORY HAS A TVTROPE! Our wonderful nphillips0115 on Fanfiction.net has started one up and it looks pretty good so far! Please do go look at and update it when you can!

2. I posted a small poll on my account page on Fanfiction.net, so if you'd be so kind as to go answer it, that would be fantastic too!

So once again, if you have any questions, feel free to PM me and/or leave a review. But make sure it's related to the fic itself! Thank you!
"The monster fell from the sky! It was an epic battle, but Voltron was victorious!" The Arusian King exclaimed from the stairs. Three Arusians were on top of each other, seven others were standing on each other with a sword and shield. They were reenacting the battle that Voltron had fought just the previous day. Allura had announced that they would be leaving the planet tomorrow, but as thanks, had invited the Arusian village to the Castle for a farewell feast and party.

The three Arusians threw a ball at the seven, and they ended up collapsing underneath. "...No! I said Voltron was victorious!" The seven Arusians quickly leaped back to their feet as the three collapsed in defeat. The rest of the Arusians cheered and raised their drinking goblets as the Princess watched in amusement.

"Thank you, Your Majesty, for that…" she raised an eyebrow and grimaced slightly, "...wonderful production," she then changed to the most innocent smile she could. "It saddens me that we must leave tomorrow, but we must continue our battle with Zarkon and spread peace throughout the universe." She then turned to the King himself, her hands clasped, "Your Highness… Please accept this gift," she opened her hands to reveal an Altean communicator. The king took the device apprehensively, "This will allow you to contact us anytime you need help." The king smiled in gratitude, "Arus will be the first planet in the Voltron Alliance."

"Hoorah!" the King exclaimed, holding the communicator in the air as his subjects cheered again.

Milly, Rivalz, and Shirley were in a little group in the crowd, holding small cups of their own.

"You know, we should get something like that," Shirley said.

"Like what?" Rivalz asked, confused.

"You know, like a cheer. Like, a team cheer that we do," the Orange Paladin clarified.

"Oh! I like where you're going with that, Shirley!" Milly giggled, "Hmmm… how about: I say 'Vol' and you say 'Tron.' Vol-"
"-Tron!" the two exclaimed.

"Vol-"

"-Tron!"

"YES! It's perfect! Now we just need the others in on it!" Milly winked before sipping her drink—before immediately spitting it back into her cup, a full-body shiver followed. She zipped over to Coran, a peeved look on her face, "Coran, what is this?!"

"Oh, this is Nunvill, the Nectar of the Gods," the advisor smiled after sipping his glass.

Milly stuck out her tongue, disgusted, "It tastes more like hotdog water and feet!"

Missing the disgust in her tone, Coran smiled, "Yeah, makes a wonderful hair tonic as well." He stuck his hand in the glass before sprinkling some onto his mustache, causing it to fluff up, before sliding gracefully away. Despite trying to maintain manners, this only caused the Ashford President to gag again.

Kallen was leaning against the wall, afar off from the crowd, scowling. She never was much of a party person to begin with, but her mind was on other things as well. It had now been officially four to five days since they all went missing. It had now been officially four to five days since they all went missing. She'd be shocked if the news hadn't caught wind of their disappearances by now. She knew her step-mom knew she snuck out of the house now and then, but the longest she'd ever stayed away was about thirty-six hours. She was probably one of the first to contact authorities. Not because she loved Kallen, but to save her name and reputation.

Not to mention the Black Knights and Zero. She was their most potent Knightmare pilot. With her gone, they would have to find a way to compensate for their loss. And it wouldn't be good on their end. Plus, she shivered, Ohgi was probably worried sick about her as well. Just like—

Kallen sighed and stared up at the ceiling. She hated to admit it, but she missed her mom. Her real mom. Who worked and endured ridicule in the Stadtfeld home just to stay by her. Why couldn't that woman just move on and get a life already?

"I'm sorry guys…" she whispered, continuing to brood in the corner.
Meanwhile, Shirley and Rivalz were attempting to assist Milly, who was still having problems with the Nunvill drink. Rivalz poked her, where she fell, rather comedically on her side.

Rai and Suzaku were also standing apart from the crowd. But for entirely different reasons than Kallen. They were tense as if waiting for a whole army of Galra to come barging in through the wide-open gates.

"Not feeling well?" Coran asked them as he approached the two, "Try some Nunvill. Settles the stomach and brightens your smile."

"Coran, I don't think it's a good idea to be letting everyone wander in and out of the Castle like this. It doesn't seem safe." Suzaku admitted.

"Oh, these Arusian won't hurt anything-"

Coran was interrupted as two Arusians came floating by, hanging from a hovering plate of drinks.

"-Much." he cringed as the platter collided with another one. "Besides, it's only fair to let them see the inside of a castle that's been sitting on their planet for so long."

"Okay, but who knows when Zarkon will attack again?" Rai asked pointedly.

Suzaku pushed himself away from the wall, "I'm gonna do a perimeter check. Just in case. Coming Rai?"

"Sure!" the Green Paladin said, following close behind.

o~o

Meanwhile, far across the way from the Castle, two adversaries laid in wait for the perfect opportunity to strike.
"Commander Sendak, the sentries are in position around the Arusian village," Haxus said.

Sendak grinned. He was eager to gain revenge on the Paladins and kill the Princess personally. Emperor Zarkon would reward him generously for doing so. He zoomed in to get a better look at the castle with his unique Galra eye.

"Luck is on our side. Look, the Castle defenses are down. The door is wide open. With all these Arusians coming in and out, it should be nothing for you to infiltrate."

Haxus looked through his binoculars and spotted Rai walking around with Rover, the drone that he had reprogrammed. "I may not have to. Look. The green one has a Galra drone they've repurposed. If I can just get close enough to clone its signature code, I can send our bomb drone in undetected."

Sendak grinned sinisterly, "I knew you would not disappoint me, Haxus."

Haxus got up from his crouch next to him and left to find a spot closer to the entrance, to fulfill the plan.

o~o

As everyone was having fun and socializing, Lelouch finally emerged and was out carrying around a small backpack, discreetly stocking it with some of the food from the party.

Up above, Allura gazed down at the paladins with a smile, with the light blue mouse, Plachu, perched on her shoulder, "Look at them, the new Paladins of Voltron. The fate of the universe is on their shoulders."

She watched as Shirley took a drink of Nunvill. Her eyes widened impossibly before she spewed it out in Rivalz's face, his head ducked down as if to cover his eyes.

"Ow! My eyes!" Rivalz exclaimed with a cackle as he had put two of the stick snacks into his sockets. The two, along with Milly and the Arusians surrounding them, threw back their heads laughing.
Allura cocked an eyebrow at the display. Not exactly the most proper Paladin behavior, but she saw that they weren't necessarily causing trouble, and allowed it to slide. "... I must portray strength so no one can tell how concerned I am about the fate of our mission."

Plachu chittered close to her ear as he perched on her shoulder. Allura's eyes widened before she blushed and smiled sheepishly, "Let's... keep that a secret."

He chittered again quietly. Allura's face became intrigued. "Who else has secrets?"

Plachu leaped down and joined his siblings on the ramp. He then took Platt's cheeks and squished them upwards like he was trying to eat something he probably should've ate in smaller bites.

"Rivalz tried to eat what?!" Allura laughed, "That is rather amusing. What other secrets?"

The tiny mouse, Chulatt, hopped onto Plachu's head and styled his hair to look curly like Milly's. He then grabbed his tail and, with a devious smirk, spun it around like a lasso.

Allura frowned slightly, "That sounds like something Milly would attempt."

Chulatt then dropped down back to the ramp, and standing in front of Chuchule, the pink mouse, offered his paw out to her. Chuchule placed it there, and Chulatt lightly kissed it, as Chuchule batted her eyes and gave a flattering squeak.

"Lelouch is a what?!!" Allura reeled back in shock. She quickly zeroed in on the Black Paladin, who was in the process of casually dumping another plate of snacks into his backpack. He suddenly frowned and looked around. He spotted a stray wooden pick in one of the snacks that an Arusian was carrying. He even proceeded to dig it between two of his canines before pulling it out. He frowned before tossing it behind him, apparently satisfied.

Allura scowled skeptically, as she doubted even by Earth standards that that was how royalty acted. "Hmmm...Are you sure?" she asked. The mice squeaked in confirmation, "I'm getting to the bottom of this."

Meanwhile, back down below, Rivalz stared skeptically at the Nunvill still in his cup. "I guess we should get used to this space juice. Who knows when we'll get back home again?"
"Yeah…" Milly frowned, swirling her cup. "If ever…"

"It's our new life," Kallen suddenly snapped next to them, "get used to it!"

"What do you mean, Kallen?" Shirley asked.

"Well think about it, if this Zarkon character has been ruling for 10,000 years, how long do you think it will take for us to fix it? You know, if we live through it?"

"You're right…" Shirley frowned, picking up a bowl of food as a tray floated past.

Kallen rolled her eyes and sighed again. 'Seriously?! Can they not understand that?!' she ranted as she slinked back into the crowd.

"You know… ever since we got here, Kallen's been acting like a completely different person." Shirley said.

"Yeah," Rivalz nodded, "what happened to the sick, frail Kallen Stadtfeld we know? It's like she's never been sick! Not to say that's bad! If anything, I think it's a big improvement. She's a lot more attractive now."

"True, definitely love the spikes she's added to her locks," Milly commented.

"Kallen has a point, though…" Shirley murmured. "It could take forever for us to fight Zarkon. And who knows what will happen. Some of us might not come back!"

"Yeah. Right." Rivalz nodded solemnly.

"But hey! What do you think the chances are of us landing on another glitter planet?" Milly asked, trying to change the subject to cheer them up. "Oh! Or a planet made up completely out of nachos? That would be one for the journals!"
"Well, there's only one planet with beautiful beaches, pizza shack looking over the water, and the garlic knots and... my mom's hugs..." Rivalz eyes started flooding with tears before ducking his head, "I'm sorry. I think this Nunvill is getting to me. I gotta go."

Milly and Shirley looked after him in concern. Coran also watched him go up the stairs with a concerned frown, the conversation he was having with two Arusians briefly forgotten.

As Rivalz was hurrying up the stairs, Allura passed him coming down, making a beeline for Lelouch, his backpack still flung over his shoulder.

"So, Lelouch," Allura started, trying to sound casual, "we haven't had a chance to really... talk. Tell me about yourself."

Lelouch blinked in confusion for a moment, wondering why the sudden interest, but he sighed and relented, thinking a couple of facts should satisfy her. "Hmmm... well, my favorite color is indigo, I prefer turkey over ham sandwiches, and my favorite tea is jasmine, with a small dollop of honey in it. I also like peanut butter and peanut butter cookies. But I refuse to eat peanuts on their own. They're far too dry and salty."

Lelouch tried to escape from the princess after that, figuring that was enough. Allura blocked his path, "I-I suppose I was thinking of something a little more... personal?" She asked with a knowing wink. That sounded suspicious to him. "We do have a lot in common."

Lelouch's eyes widened in alarm. Then they narrowed as his Geass activated, "What do you mean?" he demanded as the sigil flew into Allura's eyes.

The princess's eyes glowed with a red ring around the iris as her face went slack. "I mean that fact that we are both prince and princess of royalty," she replied monotonously.

Lelouch gasped before he grit his teeth in anger, "How'd you find out about that?!"

"The mice told me. They overheard a conversation with you and C.C. about it."

Lelouch sighed. That was his fault then. The fact that the mice shared a mental link with the princess completely slipped his memory. Satisfied that he had the information, he broke the command off.
Allura blinked before she refocused on Lelouch, and then noticed his strangely aggravated face. She quickly backtracked, "I'm sorry! I overstepped my bounds. I just want you to know that you can confide in me. If there's anything you ever want to talk about..." She leaned in uncomfortably close to Lelouch's face, "Anything..."

Though a little irritated, he might as well say it now, since she was technically asking. "Fine, I do have something to tell you."

"I had a feeling~" Allura sang with a giddy smile, "What is it?"

"I'm leaving Voltron, and going back to Earth."

Allura took a breath like she was about to speak something else entirely different. Her mouth turned into a confused frown, "Wait, what?!"

"You heard correctly; I'm going back to Earth. With C.C. Tonight," he informed with a tone of finality.

"Lelouch, you can't. You're one of seven Paladins," her hands landed on Lelouch's shoulders, "You have a sacred trust to defend the universe."

"Well, I regret to tell you, Princess, but I have previous engagements and priorities back home!" Lelouch exclaimed, back away defensively, "Tell me, did you have any other family besides your parents? A brother or sister, perhaps?"

"Well- no but-!" Allura protested.

"Well, I do!" Lelouch exclaimed, "My mother is dead, and my father abandoned my sister and I. She's blind and crippled. She can't move unless she uses a wheelchair! She needs help with almost everything! Don't you get it?! If I'm not there for her, who will be?! And I'll die first before I let my father get his filthy hands on her again!"

Allura stood in frozen shock. She had never seen Lelouch this emotional about something. Where was the calm, stoic, Black Paladin she was familiar with?
He drew in a sharp breath, eyes glossy with tears, "I'm sorry. But I should inform the others about this."

Outside, Rai and Suzaku stood guard at the entrance, squinting out into the darkness. Rover was hovering closer to them, assisting in patrol.

"Rai, Suzaku?" Lelouch asked as he came up behind them.

"What's up, Lelouch?" Suzaku asked.

"I need to talk to you about something."

Off to the side, however, no one noticed the galra Haxus hiding in the rocky outcroppings. He leaned out and pointed a device at the drone and trio. It quickly scanned them as the three started walking back to the Castle. It got full encryption of the drones codes, which he promptly prepared a copy of it.

"Signature code cloned," he muttered. He quickly pulled back behind the rocks when Rai looked over in his directions with narrowed eyes. The two then followed Lelouch back into the castle. He pulled out a drone of his own and scanned the code into it. Its glow went from red to bright blue, copying Rover's code perfectly. "Bomb activated."

The fake Rover started hovering towards the entrance, following the trio from a short distance as Haxus leaped over the rocks and retreated to Sendak's position. Now all they needed to do was wait.

Rivalz sat sulking in the castle's bridge. His head was rested on one of his fists as thoughts rolled through his head. He missed his mom, sisters, uncle, and baby cousin. What Kallen said struck closer to home than he anticipated, because she was right! This was war! People died, and who was to say that he wouldn't be one of them?
"Mind if I join you?" Coran asked gently as he hopped down from the platform Rivalz was sitting against.

"How far away from Earth do you think we are, Coran?" Rivalz asked. Maybe if he saw the distance, and that it wasn't far at all, it could reassure him.

"Let's take a look," Coran went up to the central control and brought up the holographic map, the planets, and stars surrounding them.

"Earth is over here," Coran said, pointing to the space that they marked for the paladins, "And we're aaaaaall... the waaaaay... oveeeeer..." The kept swiping his hand over the map. It seemed to take forever. And it didn't help Rivalz's sudden homesickness at all.

"You ever notice how far the planets are from each other, Coran?" he asked forlornly.

"Yes," Coran replied, still swiping, "haven't you been paying attention?"

"Yeah," Rivalz walked up next to him, "but I mean, like, they're really, really far away. Like, say, Earth? It's so far; I can't even see it. The... The blue oceans, the white clouds, green grass... I c—I— I... I can't see any of it!" he confessed, looking down with a depressed gaze.

Coran gazed at the Blue Paladin with sympathy, "You miss Earth. I understand. I miss Altea."

"I know we're supposed to be brave Paladins and Defenders of the Universe or whatever, but, honestly? I just want to go home." Rivalz complained as he looked down, depressed stare still prominent.

"If I could go home, I would," Coran confessed, looking down and sad as well now.

"I miss the rain," Rivalz said randomly, "and splashing in puddles."

"Rain?" Coran asked, intrigued.
"Yeah. It's water that falls from the sky?" Rivalz provided, looking up at their Milky Way Galaxy.

"Oh, we had that on Altea. Only, it wasn't water, more like rocks. Razor-sharp and boiling-hot. Oh, they could knock a hole right in your head."

"Sounds fun," Rivalz said unenthusiastically.

"Yeah."

o~o

The Galra drone that was rigged continued to fly down the hall completely undetected. It scanned each place as it went, looking for a convenient place to go off. Its destination was the bridge, where the primary power source of the Castle was. Once that was taken out, the Castle would be completely defenseless.

o~o

"Lelouch, no!" Suzaku exclaimed. He, Rai, Allura, and the other paladins, except Rivalz, were gathered in one of the halls. Lelouch had just broken to them the news of his departure.

"Nunnally needs me Suzaku," Lelouch said, "and I have other things I need to do on Earth. And besides, with the way things are right now, should the Galra attack, no one would stand a chance, not even Britannia."

"Lelouch, you can't just leave!" Milly argued, putting her hands on her hips.

"We're not in school, Milly, so you can't tell me what to do. Besides, C.C. and I have a pod ready to go already. She's probably waiting for me."

"Okay, seriously, Lelouch, what's with you and that C.C. chick?!" Kallen suddenly exclaimed angrily, "She sneaks onto the Blue Lion, following you, and now you're leaving with her?!!"
"And if you leave, Lelouch, we can't form Voltron!" Rai said, angry as well, "And that means we can't defend the universe against Zarkon. You're not the only one with a family; we all have one. *All these Arusians have families. Everyone* in the universe has families. My mom and sister are still out there as well, you know!"

"Yeah, I have a family. They live on Earth. I want to be with them. Is that—Is that, like, a thing that can happen?" Shirley spoke up timidly.

"You want to leave, too?" Allura asked, aghast.

"Of course I do. Look, Voltron is super-cool, don't get me wrong, but I never signed up for a lifetime in space fighting aliens." Shirley said, trying to make Allura understand.

"Lelouch," Milly said, "I care about Nunnally as well. We all do. But think about the bigger picture. You're putting the life of one person over the lives of *everyone else* in the entire galaxy —!"

"—Guys, wait!" Suzaku finally spoke, "This isn't how a team should operate. People have to *want* to be a part of it. They can't be forced," Suzaku looked at Lelouch, with a small desperate gleam in his eye, "Lelouch, If you want to leave, we won't try to stop you. But, *please*, just think about what you're doing."

Lelouch inhaled deeply, "I'm sorry, but you need to find someone else to pilot the Black Lion."

As Lelouch started walking away, Kallen suddenly caught up to him, grabbing his arm, "Fine! Then I'm going with you too!"

"Wha- Kallen!" Allura protested.

"Look," Kallen interrupted, "I hate the idea of leaving this too. But he has a point. Our world right now is completely unprepared for an attack. We need to at least warn them! So that's what we'll do," she then walked up to the princess and whispered, "and maybe I can convince him to come back."
Allura gasped slightly as Lelouch, and now Kallen both started walking away.

"I can't believe it. This team is falling apart. How will we ever form Voltron?"

Rivalz and Coran were finally leaving the bridge when the fake Rover came hovering in. They had a good talk about their homeworlds, and Rivalz had to admit he was feeling a bit better.

"Hey, Rover!" he greeted as it passed him. It continued in its path until it stopped right next to the crystal.

Rivalz suddenly stopped, noticing something crucial. "Wait… Where's Rai?" he asked as he turned around slowly.

As he looked back at the drone, it suddenly started beeping and flashing red.

Rivalz gasped, realizing what was happening.

"Coran, look out!" He shouted, tackling the Altean as the drone exploded in an inferno.

The explosion was felt throughout the Castle. The Arusians panicked and started running in all directions and out of the Castle. Suzaku, Rai, Milly, Shirley, and Allura all gasped in horror as small pieces of debris fell around them. Lelouch, Kallen, and C.C., who had been waiting in the shuttle for them, also paused, staring in terror.

Soon the lights on the Castle of Lions flickered out. No power was flowing from any part of the ship. They were now truly stuck.
Coran groaned as he slowly got up. The bridge was dark; smoke was gently cascading around him. He blinked several times until he figured out what he was seeing. He heard footsteps as Allura, C.C., and the other Paladins ran into the rooming, some coughing from the smoke.

"What happened?!!" Lelouch exclaimed as Suzaku and Kallen helped Coran up.

"Ugh… I'm not sure," Coran said as he stood up. The smoke slowly cleared to confirm Allura's worst fear, though.

"The Crystal!") It was in shards everywhere. Their power was gone, and therefore, nothing was going to work until they got a new one. What was even more horrifying, however, was the still figure almost directly underneath it.

"Rivalz!" the Princess gasped.

Rai ran forward and gently picked up the Blue Paladin, cradling his neck, "Rivalz?" The Blue Paladin groaned in pain, "Rivalz!"

"We have to get Rivalz to the infirmary!" Shirley exclaimed.

"Without the Crystal, the Castle has no power," Allura said frantically.

"Meaning that those healing pods won't work either," Lelouch said before cursing.

"He doesn't look good…” Milly said, kneeling next to Rai, tears gathering in her eyes.

"Lion warriors, our village is under attack!" the Arusian King cried, running into the room, "We need help!"

"Let's get to the Lions!" Suzaku said.
"You can't. They're sealed in their hangars. There's no way to get them out. We're defenseless," Allura explained frantically.

"Will you not help us?" the king asked, eyes shifting between the Paladins in a panic.

"We will. We just-

Rivalz groaned in pain again, interrupting Kallen. She looked back at her friend, biting her lip.

"Well… this is quite the predicament," C.C. said as if she was talking about the weather.

Ignoring the immortal's tone, Coran straightened himself, taking his arm away from Shirley, who had had it draped over her shoulder.

"We have to get a new Crystal to get the Castle working again. But, to get a new Crystal, we need a ship."

"Use the pod we were loading," Lelouch said, pointing down the hall they came from, "the bay door should still be open!"

"I can use the scanner on the pod to see if there's a Balmera nearby. Shirley, C.C., you both come with me. I'll need some help with carrying the Crystal."

"You're making women do all the heavy lifting? How very ungentleman-like of you," C.C. quipped sarcastically, casually crossing her arms.

"A Balmera?" Shirley asked, sounding out the strange word.

"It's where the Crystals come from. I'll tell you two about it on the way!" the advisor said as he, Shirley, C.C., Kallen, and Lelouch exited the room for the hanger.

"I'll go see what's happening at the Arusian village," Suzaku said to Milly and Rai.
"I'll go with you, Suzaku. I brought this on the poor Arusians." Allura said, a layer of guilt in her tone.

"Okay, we'll look after Rivalz and guard the Castle." the Green Paladin said.

o~o

Coran, Shirley, and C.C. had gotten settled in the pod as the advisor turned the scanner on. Lelouch and Kallen were standing outside it.

"It's our first bit of luck," the Altean said, looking at the star map, "There's a source not too far. We won't need a wormhole to get there, thankfully."

Shirley quickly adjusted her helmet as the screen lit up with the path to take.

"Hold on; Rai's been doing some tinkering around here. He told me he added some modifications to some of the shuttles. I'll try and explain them the best I can," Lelouch said, leaning in and pointing at one of the screens. "The first change is a cloaking device that he reverse-engineered from the invisible walls on the training deck. The second is a tank of booster fuel that he mounted on the fuel line."

Coran, however, didn't look very impressed with the second option, "Using that during flight would turn the whole pod into a bomb!"

Shirley paled considerably, and even C.C. looked a little nervous. Not to say she'd never been blown up before, but the experience was never pleasant. And especially not out in space.

"Oh-kay, maybe refrain from using that modification then," Lelouch said, looking a little apologetic. "Mental note, have Rai take it off the shuttles ASAP when this is done."

"Ya think?" Kallen asked sarcastically.
"Are we ready, then?" Shirley asked Coran.

"Yes, let's go!" Coran lowered the pod window as it prepared for take-off. The engines ignited, and it hovered as it approached the bay doors.

"Good luck!" Lelouch said, giving Shirley a smile and thumbs up. Kallen waved after them.

From inside the pod, Shirley blushed and sent a thumbs-up back before it shot out the doors and into the Arusian night sky.

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Meanwhile, Rai and Milly were slowly transporting Rivalz to the medical wing. Milly was holding his legs while Rai had hoisted him up by the shoulders. They planned to use some of the other supplies inside and their limited knowledge of medical treatment to try and help heal some of the wounds.

"Hang on buddy, help's on the way," Rai said. He stumbled when Milly came to an abrupt stop. She was staring at the entrance to the Castle, petrified. Rai followed her gaze, and his blood ran cold. There was a small Galra troop coming towards them. They were dragging a large purple crystal behind them, and the one leading the assault was-

"Sendak!" Rai snarled, gritting his teeth.

"He's still alive," Milly whispered. The two Paladins quickly guided Rivalz body to lie down by the wall.

"Stay here!" Rai said as he raced for the entrance. He met the Galra outside and was the only thing standing between him and the Castle. Both parties stopped.

"Stand aside," Sendak said as the two continued the standoff.

"No!" Rai shouted, whipping out his bayard in a flash of light, readying himself for battle, "You're not getting in!"
"Yes, I am." Sendak thrust his robot arm out towards the Green Paladin. Rai raised his arms to block, but the arm actually grabbed him and dragged him further outside towards the Galra forces. Rai was dragged along the ground with a yell before landing right in front of Sendak. He barely had time to dodge backward as the large arm came crashing down on the ground.

Rai grunted as he pulled out his bayard again, this time igniting it to full charge. He ran forward with a battle cry, arm ready to swing his bayard inward. Sendak raised his arm to block, and the katar scraped across its surface, not even scratching it! He quickly leaped up and swung again, causing Sendak to have to step back to dodge. Rai ducked and rolled out of the way of another strike, flipping backward to get out of range.

He roared again as he sent a frontal attack forward, the bayard crackling with electricity. Sendak's fist also returned with an onslaught of his own, punching his metal hand in Rai's direction. The attacks clashed, the two stuck in a stalemate, though Rai was starting to pant a little.

Sendak's eye narrowed before widening, his robot one whirling. He then smirked, "I see you spent some time with the Druids. They do love to experiment. Too bad you're letting such an ability go to waste."

"Huh?" Rai blinked. What was he talking about? He didn't get the chance to ask this though as the Sendak's arm fluctuated and launched the Green Paladin backward into the Castle. Rai skidded and tumbled back to where Milly and Rivalz were hiding.

"Rai!" Milly gasped as he finally stopped next to them. She couldn't inspect his injuries, as they both had to jump away from Sendak's arm again. It slammed so hard into the ground it left a small crater, and the force sent the two Paladins tumbling back. Sendak was already using the momentum of his attack to propel himself at them again. This time though, Rai managed to grab Sendak by the shoulder and throw him away from them. The Galra roared in fury as Rai ran at him again, bayard activated. The two were soon locked in another stalemate, Rai's bayard by Sendak's neck and Sendak's claws under Rai's chin. If either one of them made a move, they were as good as dead.

"No!" Milly cried out from behind him. Turning around, Rai saw that some sentries had grabbed Rivalz and had thrown him to the ground. Milly was standing behind Rai, surrounded, her bayard out in its kusarigama form. She looked like she was going to attack, but Haxus was also holding a gun to the Blue Paladin's head, looking her in the eye, daring her to try.

Milly looked back at Rai, terror plain to see on her face. This moment of distraction was enough for Sendak to launch Rai forward, catching the Yellow Paladin off balance and knocking them both
unconscious. The two collapsed right by their fallen comrade, prisoners of war to the Galra.

"Voltron is ours," Sendak proclaimed with a sinister grin.

o~o

"Damn!" Lelouch whispered as he and Kallen hid behind the balcony.

"What do we do?!!" Kallen asked urgently.

"Let's get out of here. It won't help anyone if we're caught as well," the Black Paladin said as the two scrambled down the hallway. Lelouch's brain worked furiously to come up with a plan to get the Galra out of the Castle and save the others in time.

o~o

The Arusian village was in flames. Blasts from guns desecrating the structures and leaving the homes of the people in ruins. The King and his people could only watch in terror as everything was slowly engulfed. Suzaku and Allura quickly joined them at the top.

"What's happening?" Allura asked.

"Look! Attackers!" the King pointed towards the town square. There were multiple Galra sentries with blasters in their hands, and explosions went off in many directions.

"I'll go in for a closer look. Stay here with them," Suzaku ordered as he slid down the wall, gritting his teeth.

"Suzaku!" Allura called out in alarm.

The Purple Paladin leaped into the blaze, using his jet pack to slow his descent. He sneaked through the burning village, hiding behind buildings in case he was attacked… and he wasn't. Warning bells went off in his head as he got closer to the square. He looked through the window of
one of the huts, well hidden from the sentries. As the watertower crashed to the ground, one of the droids also fell to its side, limp.

Suzaku blinked, "What?!" Now that he had a closer look, he saw that all of the sentries were damaged and not operating. Some of them were even mounted on stilts and had their arms wrapped around their guns with cloth.

His eyes suddenly widened in realization, "Oh no! They tricked us!"

Allura's face paled as Suzaku's voice rang into her ears through her earrings, "It was just a diversion to separate us and thin the Castle's defenses!" Allura whipped her head around, her eyes widening in terror as she gazed at the defenseless castle.

o~o

Inside the Castle, the working sentries plugged the Galra crystal into the Castle's central power system.

"Power up the Castle," Sendak order, the symbol of the Galra Empire flashed to life on the screens. The once soothing blue lights of the Castle of Lions was soon flooded with a sinister violet. Even the lights outside had switched to match its new master's.

o~o

As the system reactivated, the screens on all the Lion hangers flashed to life, showing all seven felines sitting dormant in their chambers. The Galran commander smirked cruelly in victory. "The Lions are all in their bays. Raising particle barrier. Begin launch sequence."

Suzaku and Allura ran as fast as their legs could carry them as the now violet particle barrier descended over the Castle. The wall slammed to the ground just as the two collided with it. Suzaku slammed his fist against it, but it didn't budge.

"We're too late… No!" Suzaku shouted in anger.
"They have control of the Castle. They're taking Voltron!" Allura gasped in fear.

o~o

After checking over the crystal one last time, and glancing at his three unconscious prisoners, Sendak turned to Haxus, "Make contact with Emperor Zarkon."

His fellow Galra nodded and pressed a few buttons on the holopads. The screen in the middle blinked to life as a link was made. Soon the Emperor's sinister face flashed onto the screen.

"Sendak," he acknowledged.

"My mission is complete," Sendak debriefed, grinning in triumph, "I've captured the Altean castle, along with all of the Voltron Lions. I am currently preparing for launch and will be delivering them all to you shortly."

"This news is most pleasing," Zarkon said, showing little expression, "You've done your duty. Vrepit Sa!"

"Vrepit Sa!" saluted as the communication ended, "Haxus, ready the Castle for take off."

"Yes, Commander."

o~o

Suzaku morphed his bayard to its katana form, looking at Allura desperately, "Can we break through the barrier?"

"No. And whoever has taken the Castle has a Crystal, which means they'll be able to fly the ship. We have to stop them," she answered.

"How are we going to do that?" he asked.
"Suzaku, can you hear me?"

The Purple Paladin gasped at the voice, "Lelouch?! Is that you?!"

"Yes, Kallen's with me as well."

"Where are you two?"

"We're inside the Castle. We managed to evade capture... for now," the Britannian Prince answered.

"Sendak has taken over, and he's preparing for launch. He's got Rai, Milly, and Rivalz." Kallen added in the same hushed tone. Rover, who they ran into as they escaped down the hallway, was hovering next to them.

"Lelouch, Kallen, listen. If they've started the launch sequence, then we don't have much time before liftoff to stop it." Allura informed them urgently.

"Tell us what to do," Lelouch ordered.

"You have to get down to the main engine control panel and disconnect the primary turbine from the Central Energy Chamber," Allura instructed.

o~o

Inside, Lelouch tapped his armor gauntlet, pulling up a screen. It contained a map of the Castle's interior. He pushed a couple more commands, and soon a red path lead him to the chamber the princess was talking about.

"If you can do that, Sendak will have to reset the whole system. That might give us enough time to find a way to stop them."
Lelouch glanced at Kallen. They both nodded before shooting up from their hiding place and running down the hall. At that very moment, the fate of the very universe rested on their shoulders.

o~o

Shirley never knew how alone she felt until the pod was finally out of range of the Castle. She felt the bond she shared with Orange (they had to come up with some better names for their lions) fade and then disappear as they traveled through the stars. Now being alone in her own mind felt... weird. Like a crucial part of her spirit, her very being had been removed. She shivered as the sensation seemed to deepen the more they traveled.

"Are we almost there?" C.C. asked from the back seat. She sounded bored.

"Almost, don't get your hair in a knot. It's not safe to pilot this pod any faster," Coran said.

Finally, a planet that had several large rock pikes and edged mountain ranges came into view.

"Is that the Balmera planet with the crystals?" Shirley asked.

"It's not a planet. Balmera are ancient animals. Petrified, but still alive," Coran informed her. Shirley looked out in shock at the 'animal' they were propelling closer towards. She had no idea that creatures this big existed. Even C.C. looked intrigued at this revelation.

"Their bodies naturally create the crystals that help power many Altean ships. I often accompanied my grandfather to visit these majestic creatures when he was building the Castle of Lions," Coran reminisced. The pod screen pulled up a picture of a Balmera from 10,000 years ago, the ground sparkled with blue crystals. "I'll never forget the first time I saw the sparkling surface of a Balmera. You're both in for quite a treat."

As they finally broke through the cloud surface; however, it wasn't sparkling landscapes that greeted them, but a wasteland with large, dark-colored machinery drilled into the Balmera's surface.

"Oh, no!" Coran gasped, as they flew over several gaping holes in the surface, some more reinforced than others, "This is horrifying! The Galra have turned this into a mining colony! Oh, they're completely destroying it! They have no regard for the poor creature!"
"Incoming, we've been spotted," C.C. informed the Altean as a large shadow drew over them.

"Hailing unidentified craft. State your ship ID, entry code, and landing destination," the ship's robotic voice demanded as it hovered over them.

"Um… what do we do?" Shirley asked, starting to panic.

Before Coran could reply, C.C. leaned forward, "Hailing Galra aircraft," she spoke monotonously, "this is ship number XG21G2D4. Requesting permission to land at once."

"There's no ship of that number expected to come through here," the voice said, the ship descending to almost being on top of them, "land immediately and prepare to be boarded."

"With pleasure," C.C. smirked before turning to Coran, who was looking at her with an expression of shock. A similar expression was on Shirley's face as well, "See you down below."

Coran blinked before it understanding C.C.'s silent message as he yanked back on the control handle. The pod rocketed backward from underneath the ship. Shirley held on for dear life as she screamed in terror, while C.C. braced herself against the wall.

The shuttle swerved left and right to avoid the blasts from the pursuing Galra ship.

Then Coran had an idea, "Not done yet. Hang on!"

The pod pitched downward into one of the gaping holes in the Balmera. It was large enough that the ship would've fit comfortably in the middle, longwise. Shirley continued to scream as they descended at breakneck speed into the abyss.

It was about thirty seconds of straight diving before the Orange Paladin eventually got control of herself enough to ask, "How deep is this thing?!"

"Look out!" C.C. cried as one of the beams appeared right in front of them. Coran managed to
swerve the pod out of the way just in time. It barely missed knicking the post.

The swerve did cause Coran to lose control of the pod, though. The trio tumbled the rest of the way down before landing ungracefully at the bottom with a lurch.

Shirley sat there in shock for about a solid minute before having the courage and strength to move again. The window of the pod flickered out as the passengers groaned from the impact. C.C. could already feel the bruises forming on her immortal body.

Shirley wrenched off her helmet, her hair flowing down her back (as she didn't have time to pull it into a bun or ponytail) and looked around the bottom of the crater. She could barely see the light of the surface above them. She gazed to her right, which had a small tunnel leading away from the crash site.

She froze and grabbed her bayard as two sets of glowing yellow eyes stared back at her.

"Uh, Coran. What lives at the bottom of these mines?"

o~o

Back at the Castle of Lions, Kallen used her clawed bayard to wrench the elevator shaft doors open. She shoved against them with her feet and back. She panted as Lelouch looked over her leg and down toward the shaft below. Rover hovered over them, before positioning himself above the center of the shaft.

"Okay, here goes nothing," Lelouch leaped forward, using his jetpack to propel him and jumped across the chasm to the lower ledge underneath. Kallen grunted, letting the doors slam closed before following after him. The faithful robot drone quickly tailed behind them in case they needed help.

o~o

"Run main cluster activation sequence," Sendak ordered.
"Activation sequence initiated," Haxus confirmed. "Powering up for launch."

o~o

After wrenching another pair of doors open, the two paladins, though exhausted, finally made it to the Central Energy Chamber. The ball of pure energy was alight with a blue glow.

"Okay, Princess, we're near the turbine," Lelouch said.

"It looks like its started!" Kallen added.

o~o

"Then you'll have to hurry," Allura said, "Cross the catwalk to the main column in the center."

o~o

The two paladins panted as they sprinted to the center column. They couldn't afford to waste any more time!

"Okay, we're there," Kallen said.

"Now open the hatch," Allura instructed. Lelouch bent down and removed the covering and looked inside, "Find the central computer control hub and enter the following sequence..."

"Princess, wait! Which is it? All these labels are in Altean!" Lelouch snapped, cursing at himself for not learning at least some basic Altean while he was here.

o~o

"Commander Sendak, we are ready for launch," Haxus said, looking at the commander.
The orb in the center of the chamber suddenly pulsed, large bolts of energy hitting it at once. The turbine was powering up, which only meant one thing! It was about to launch.

"Argh! I can't tell which one it is!" Lelouch shouted.

"Allura! Allura?! Dammit!" Kallen cursed as the link lost the connection.

Lelouch was still kneeling in front of the control panel, trying to make heads and tails of the connections. For all, he knew if he adjusted the wrong one-

He was thrown backward as Kallen got in the way. Her bayard claws were extended.

"What are you-!"

"The hell with this!" Kallen screamed as she buried her claw into the circuits. She was shocked backward, almost hitting Lelouch. She groaned and held her arm, as it felt like it was on fire, her bayard bouncing away.

"Kallen! Are you alright?!" Lelouch asked, kneeling next to her.

"Peachy!" she hissed sarcastically, glaring at him. Kallen's impulsive maneuver seemed to work though, as the turbine's sound subsided, energy levels dropped, and the energy ball in the center
decreased to about an eighth of its original size.

"Well, I guess that's one way to do it," Lelouch shrugged with a sheepish grin, helping Kallen sit up. She grinned viciously at him, though she was also relieved it worked.

O~O

"The main engine just shorted out!" Haxus exclaimed in alarm and frustration. Sendak scowled and approached the screen. The camera came online and zoomed in on the two figures with the modified drone. The two of them had wrenched the doors open to let it through before bolting through themselves.

"We have some saboteurs. Find them and take them out."

O~O

Fanart:
AN: FINALLY! Finals are done! And to celebrate I finished this chapter for you all! You're welcome!

So a lot of you have noticed the new picture I have on my profile and for the story. Well, our lovely Iron117Prime commissioned a friend of his to make a drawing for this fanfic! And I got to tell you! It's AMAZING! Once again, thank you so much Iron117Prime, you're the best!

Also, those 'fun facts' about Lelouch. Those are completely made up. No idea if any of them are true!

Oh boy! This chapter was intense and I can't wait to begin the next one! Love you all and thank you for reading!
Rai’s eyes barely opened as he turned his head to look around. He could feel that his arms were bound behind his back, and the room seemed darker than usual, coated in purple light instead of blue.

"Rai," he heard a whimper to his right. Turning his head, he saw Milly also bound, her hands tied behind her, but she was leaning over Rivalz, trying to hide tears.

"It's going to be okay, Milly," he tried to say comfortingly.

"Haxus! I want whoever's in this ship found and terminated!" Sendak's voice rang out. Rai lifted his head to the center of the room, which he realized was the bridge. It was now alight with a purple glow compared to the neon blue they were all used to. He suspected it was thanks to the dark violet crystal sitting on the platform by Sendak. From the sound of Sendak's tone, though, he was angry. Did something happen?

"Commander Sendak, I've received a transmission generating from somewhere inside," Haxus informed him as he punched in a few more buttons.

"*There's not much time before they get the ship running again. You must shut off the particle barrier so we can get in,*" Allura's slightly pixeled out voice rang out.

"*Got it; what do we do?*" Kallen's voice asked.

"*The particle barrier generator is beneath the main hull.*"

"*Understood, *" Rai's eyes widened as he recognized Lelouch's voice.

"She's telling the intruders how to take down our defenses," Haxus said, a slight layer of concern in his tone.
"Yes, but she's also giving away their location. Find that room. Kill the Paladins!" Sendak ordered.

"Rai…" Milly whispered fearfully as the sentries left. If they caught Lelouch and Kallen, it was over.

"It's going to be okay, Milly, believe in them," he whispered back with a small smile.

"You stop talking!" Sendak snapped at them, causing Rai to glare back, and Milly to flinch away. "Repair the engine," he told Haxus, "Emperor Zarkon has commanded us to bring him Voltron. This ship will rise before day's end."

o~o

Meanwhile, back on the Balmera, Coran, C.C., and Shirley all took cover by the pod as two figures approached them from the tunnels.

Shirley pulled her bayard out and unsteadily pointed the bow at them. "Okay, don't come any closer! I don't know how to use this very well."

As the creatures came into the light, however, she saw that they weren't Galra, but two large built, thick, stone-skinned bipedal creatures, with gold eyes that matched those of the Galra. Their faces didn't seem to have a nose, and instead of hair, their heads had a thick layer of cartilage that made it look like helmets. The shorter one even had hoops on the sides of it. Their clothing looked ragged and worn out, and their two-toed feet were bare.

"Wait a minute. You're not Galra!" Shirley gasped, lowering her bow.

"Nor are you!" the shorter one gasped, a feminine voice exiting. Her tone was wary but also coated with relief and hope.

There was suddenly a humming sound from above, and the creatures looked upwards, the shorter one gasping. Looking up, Shirley saw a Galra ship, maybe the same one that was chasing them, descending the shaft. Red lights shined out, scanning for signs of intruders.
"A patrol!" the taller one exclaimed, before turning to his companion, "Shay, we must take leave from these ones, now."

"Wait, please! We need your help. If the Galra find us, they'll kill us." Coran pleaded.

"Or torture us!" Shirley added.

"Or capture us and stuff us in testing tubes to be living experiments for them," C.C. said. Coran and Shirley looked at the immortal horrified. "What? It could happen," she shrugged nonchalantly.

"Not our problem, stranger. Galra see us near you, and they kill both you and us. Shay, exeunt!" the taller alien said, about to leave.

"No!" Shay protested, "These many years only Galra have been seen here. I will not turn my back on the skylings."

The trio let out a breath of relief as the female alien agreed to help. Shay looked at her brother, pleading him to help.

He finally sighed, "...Vex!" He ran out towards the pod and began pushing it towards the tunnel. Now that Shirley had a better look at them, she saw that these aliens also had tails.

"Grab a side!" he said, ordering Shay, "In here, hurry!" Together they pushed the pod deep into the tunnel. They finished hiding it just as the Galra ship passed by their level before leaving for the top again.

When the Galra ship left, everyone breathed out in relief. That was way too close.

"Thanks for saving us. I'm Shirley," the Orange Paladin said, smiling at the aliens.

"Shay," the alien smiled, "And this one, my brother Rax. How did you fall to us?"

"We're looking for something," C.C. said, "And we believe your people might be able to help us
“Lelouch, have you and Kallen made it to the generator room?” Allura asked through their helmets.

“Yes, but I'm hesitant to continue forward,” the Prince said, hesitating at the entrance doors. The room looked similar to the other hallways of the Castle. The only difference was that on the sides, there were large bolts of violet electricity crackling around them.


“I think we may be walking into an ambush,” Lelouch told her.

“How do you know?” Kallen asked.

“Think about it, Sendak at the moment has complete control of the Castle. Meaning he may have access to any frequencies entering and exiting it. For all, we know he's been listening in to our entire conversation.”

“Are you sure?” Kallen asked as the two along with Rover walked down the generator's hall, "If this was an ambush he set up, wouldn't we have been attacked by now?”

"Just be careful you two, the lives of your fellow Paladins are at stake," Allura said.

"Talk us through it, fast!" Lelouch said.

"Shutting down the barrier from this room can be dangerous. Remember, the barrier is also a weapon. So, stay away from the energy arcs."

"Don't touch the giant lightning bolts. Got it," Lelouch summed up.
As Allura continued to talk them through the process, Kallen bit her lip. What the princess said was true. Milly, Rai, and Rivalz would die if they didn't do this. She thought back to the oath that she made when the Black Knights made their debut just over two weeks (movements?) ago. They swore that they would protect anyone too weak to defend themselves. Nationalities and social status didn't matter.

"Those of you with power, fear us! Those of you without it, rally behind us as you see fit!"

Zero's words ran through her head as she continued to think back. Milly had inducted her into the student council so that it would be easier on her 'health.' All of them had been welcoming, even Nina, who was considered the shiest of the bunch. She was never super close to any of them. Heck, now that she thought about it, this was the most intimate interaction that she'd had with them since the beginning!

She also thought about what her brother, Naoto, would think of all this. The Black Knights, Voltron, the Ga-

Rover suddenly beeped in alarm, and that was the only warning they got as a laser blast barely missed the pair.

"Lelouch? Hello? Are you there?!!"

"Sorry, Princess, but I have cut communications. We can't risk Sendak finding us again!" Lelouch shouted before cutting the connection. He and Kallen ran for their lives as the sentries stormed into the room.

o~o

"Lelouch, what's going on?!" she demanded. All that answered her was static. She bit her lip, panicking for a second. Then an idea struck.

"Wait... the mice! Maybe they can help," she said to herself as she then closed her eyes in concentration.
"Friends..."

The Space Mice were currently lounging in Allura's bedroom, a couple of them rifling through her jewelry box.

"...I need your help," Allura's plea echoed in their heads. Platt, who had been lying outside the box, seeing how he was too big, quickly butted it open, and his three siblings jumped out, scattering a few gems and rings on the dresser. They quickly scampered off to the closest air shaft.

Back in the Generator room, Lelouch and Kallen managed to find shelter behind one of the structures, shielding them from the sentries' blasts.

"Kallen, find an escape route, fast!" Lelouch ordered, and the Red Paladin pulled up her gauntlet screen. It quickly analyzed the room before pointing to their exit.

"You're kidding me; our only exit is two floors up!" She shouted, risking a glance behind to spot the air shaft.

Lelouch held out his hand, concentrating, trying to summon some of that lightning from before. Nothing came out, though. "What the hell?!" he whispered. Now was certainly not the opportune time for his abilities to be stuck.

Wait... lightning!

"Kallen, I've got an idea, try and distract a few of them!"

Kallen nodded before springing out from behind her hiding place, quickly charging two of the sentries. Then Lelouch ran out and attempted to leap to the upper floor. Kallen had managed to take out two of them, but a third hit Lelouch in the chest before his form flickered, and the blast hit one of the lightning bolts instead. It zapped the sentry backward, effectively destroying it, and nearly
"Kallen, come on!" Taking this moment of surprise to their advantage, the two bolted for the exit. They managed to dodge the blasts from the final sentry before Lelouch leaped up and grabbed onto Rover, who propelled him upward. He felt Kallen grab onto his middle, and Rover deposited them to the upper air duct. Lelouch let go as soon as his feet hit the narrow ledge.

"I can't believe that worked!" Lelouch gasped with a short laugh as he crawled towards the ducts.

"GO!" Kallen shouted as she pushed Lelouch through, barely dodging another blast. The sentry kept firing until the two Paladins and bot disappeared inside.

"You stay here and guard the generator," the sentry told his remaining comrade as he ran off in pursuit.

At one point, Kallen managed to climb over Lelouch in the duct and sliced through to the other side. She crawled out and was shocked to see that the airway had led them to the Training Deck. The two climbed to their feet and made a move for the exit. But the observation deck window burst above them, and the sentry that came after them jumped between them and the door.

"You again?! Man, you're persistent!" Kallen yelled as she raised her shield to block the attacks. With a battle cry, Kallen rushed forward, giving the sentry no time to dodge as she sliced it in two.

"That ought to teach 'em!" she grinned.

"I wouldn't go that far!" Lelouch exclaimed. Kallen froze as a noise they were both familiar with was heard above them. The gladiator landed with a crash in the middle of the deck, staff in hand.

"Seriously?!!" Kallen yelled. The gladiator ran at Lelouch first, seeing as he didn't have any immediate weapons with him. He pulled his shield up to block, but the gladiator was ruthless and kept pounding on it, driving the Black Paladin to his knees.

"Hey! Dipstick!" Kallen shouted as she charged, drawing its attention. It swung its staff around to hit Kallen, which she managed to block with her claws. While Kallen was holding the gladiator back, Lelouch hit a control on the back of his shield, showing the layout of the invisible maze.
"See if you can handle this!" He grinned deviously as he pushed the button to activate it. Kallen quickly leaped backward as the Gladiator tried to strike again only to run into the maze's wall, which knocked it back.

"Come on!" he shouted, pulling open another air shaft on the floor. Kallen ran over as Lelouch dropped himself down, she quickly followed along with Rover. They crawl through the duct again before coming to some crossroads... but were almost hit by another laser blast! The gladiator had escaped the maze, grabbed the fallen sentry's gun, and had pursued them down the shaft!

The two quickly dodged to the right and began crawling for their lives, the gladiator sliding after them, shooting them as they went. Halfway across another shaft was another shaft that led downwards. Lelouch jumped the gap, but as Kallen was about to, the gladiator landed a hit on her jetpack. She screamed as she stumbled, beginning to fall.

"Kallen!" Lelouch shouted as he reached after her, grabbing her hand. Unfortunately, the momentum, along with being anchored down by her weight and his weak arm strength, resulted in them both tumbling down the shaft. It would've been a painful demise if Kallen didn't jam her bayard claws into the side to prevent them from falling further. They stopped right above another ledge, which Lelouch cautiously landed on.

The gladiator wasn't done yet, though. It braced itself between the sides of the shaft and continued to fire at them. It, however, didn't count on a certain reprogrammed drone to suddenly hit it hard in the back, causing it to lose its grip, tumbling down into the shaft. The sudden tumble caught Kallen by surprise, accidentally switching her bayard off! She screamed as she began to fall after it, but a well-timed leap from Lelouch's ledge allowed the Black Paladin to catch her and brace both of them on the other end. They both watched as they lost sight of the robot before it burst into flames upon hitting the bottom.

They both breathed a sigh of relief after that, now that they were officially safe… only to blush two seconds later when they realized how close to each other's chest they were.

Next to them, Rover beeped out a series of noises, as if it were laughing!

"Not funny, Rover!" Kallen exclaimed, cheeks flushed with embarrassment.

o~o
Back on the Balmera, Shirley, Coran, and C.C. were sitting around a fire with Shay, Rax, and the rest of their family. Despite being strangers, the Balmerans were very kind to them, offering them food and temporary shelter.

"Thanks for the delicious soup," Shirley said graciously, not realizing how hungry she'd been before, "Are these potatoes in here?"

"Grandma's special dish for special visitors," Shay smiled, "Cave-root for the skin. Cave bugs for the soul."

Shirley was in the middle of drinking the rest of the broth when she heard Shay. She tried her hardest not to spew everything back up, forcing herself to swallow, holding her fist to her mouth to keep from vomiting. Plus, it looked like this was all the food these people had, so she at least tried to be polite.

Coran also grimaced, but still strained a smile, "Thank you for the bugs," Shay's grandmother smiled and poured more into Coran's bowl. "Okay, I think that's too many."

C.C. seemed the least affected of the three. She was just glad they had something to eat. She remembered when she was once a child that she had to survive off of less and even worse than a few cave insects. She just shrugged and placed her bowl next to her.

Soup aside, however, Shirley turned her attention to the aliens themselves, "So, how many of you are down here exactly?"

"There are thousands here on Balmera," Shay's father replied. "We work and live in these mines."

"We harvest crystals for Zarkon," Shay added.

"Zarkon," Shirley grit her teeth, angry. She couldn't believe he was letting so many people suffer. "That's so... sad that he's enslaved an entire planet."

"Zarkon may rule, but we still have family. That's where true happiness comes from," the father said, smiling a little. Shirley, moved by this sent a small smile back. She then struggled to hold
back tears as she thought of her mom and dad back on Earth, and how much she missed them.

Rax suddenly leaped to his feet, "The Galra would tear our family asunder if they found these ones! Everyone comes to Balmera and takes but gives nothing in return."

"In the past, those who took the Balmera's crystals would replenish her with energy," Shay explained in a depressed tone, "It was an equal exchange. But the Galra only take. It is no wonder we can feel her suffering."

Shay placed her hand lightly on the ground, and it began to glow a faint blue. Soft echoes filled the tunnel as the Balmera cried out. Shirley, Coran, and even C.C. looked on with remorse. These people and this animal were suffering so much from the Galra's greed. There had to be a way to help them.

"I'm sorry that we put everyone in this situation," Shirley said sincerely, "but the faster we get the Crystal and get out, the faster everyone is out of danger."

"We're looking for a battleship-class crystal," Coran informed them.

"Battleship-class crystal? Those are most rare," the father informed them regrettably. "Galra soldiers guard them ceaselessly until their harvest. Your quest is in vain."

"There is one, found only weeks ago. It is almost excavated." Shay said, but Rax cut her off before she could say anything else.

"Quiet! Even if they could steal the crystal from the Galra, battle patrols wait to take down their ship. These ones have no chance of getting out of here alive, with Crystal or without."

Shirley gulped a little as she recognized the tone Rax was using. It was the same tone that Lelouch used when he heard someone talking bad about his sister. It was a tone used when trying to protect what was most precious to you, and both cases, it was family.

"So it would seem this crystal we need is the hardest thing in the universe to get," C.C. said, folding her arms around her legs and leaning back slightly.

"Well, I don't know about the hardest," Coran argued, "There is the scaultrite mineral found only"
in the stomachs of giant weblums. Collecting that stuff's no picnic. Uh, but, yes, th-this seems very difficult."

"You've had some wacky adventures, haven't you?" Shirley asked with a quirked eyebrow. Coran grinned back sheepishly.

"You may stay here until Balmera gives another crystal. One that is hidden from Galra eyes." Shay offered, but Shirley shook her head.

"We don't have time. One of my friends is injured, and he needs to get into a magic healing machine, stat."

"C.C., Shirley, stay by the pod and make sure it's not too damaged. I'm going to do some reconnaissance and see if I can come up with another plan," Coran said as he got to his feet. He left the girls with the Balmeran family as he headed down the tunnel.

o~o

Kallen sliced through another air duct, and after looking around, crawled out. Lelouch and Rover followed close behind. After the save in the last shaft, they managed to find a more stable air duct that took them to one of the Castle's hallways.

Lelouch looked around quickly and found that they were alone. He leaned back against the wall with a sigh and removed his helmet, "I think we're safe for the moment…"

"What do we do?" Kallen said, "We haven't exactly made much progress in stopping Sendak."

"That's not true," Lelouch immediately disagreed. "Yes, Sendak still has complete control of the Castle, meaning he can track our movements with the cameras and any communications with Allura and Suzaku. We probably can't access the Lions either; he's likely locked their hanger doors."

"How does that help us?!" Kallen exclaimed in frustration.
Lelouch straightened and put a firm hand on her shoulder, "Kallen, you need to calm down. The last thing either of us wants to do is panic right now,"

The Red Paladin blinked. She'd heard that tone before. It was one that Zero gave when directing them in battle. This surprisingly calmed her down significantly.

"Now it's true, we're in a tight spot, but think about Sendak's situation as well. Did you notice how many sentries there were when they first came in?"

Kallen blinked before she remembered. When they had been watching from the balcony, there had been only about five or six of them.

"That's right," Lelouch nodded, as if reading her mind, "There were only about five or six of them, along with only one other Galra. And if my math is correct, we managed to take out at least four of them. That means there's only one or two of them left. And I guess that they're the ones still guarding the Power Generator."

"Well, let's go and take those out!" Kallen said, "We can handle one or two robots!"

"Negative," Lelouch shook his head, "that's likely what Sendak is expecting us to do. If we go back to attack the robot, that gives the other Galra more time to repair the engines. It's a diversion. Plus, he still has Rivalz, Rai, and Milly as hostages, so it'd be foolish to go after the 'King piece' right now. Our best course of action would be taking out the other Galra with him. Eliminating him will cut off Sendak's chances of repair the engines unless he goes to do it himself."

"And if he does that... that would give us time to free the others and take down the particle barrier. It's a loss for him either way!" Kallen exclaimed in realization.

"Exactly," Lelouch smirked victoriously, "he doesn't realize it yet, but he's just left himself open for checkmate."

"Let's go then!" Kallen said, already about to take off for the Turbine room again. Lelouch nodded, and they both ran off, Rover trailing behind them.

' He and Zero act so much alike…’ Kallen thought as they ran, ' But they're not the same person, that was confirmed when Zero called me in the bathroom... Still..'
As they ran, Lelouch was also thinking, his mind racing with memories of the past. He remembered when he and Suzaku first met. They didn't get along at first, not surprising because of how different they had been, and still were. But they eventually warmed up to each other and became the best of friends.

Milly's family had offered them sanctuary after Britannia's invasion of Japan and had kept his and Nunnally's identities secret for the time being. He had met Rivalz not too long after. The two of them hit it off right away, feeling like they understood each other due to their difficult family situations since his parents were estranged. Though, to Rivalz's knowledge, Lelouch and Nunnally's parents died in the invasion.

The rest of the current student council slowly trickled into his life over the years. Almost all of them made efforts to befriend him and his sister. Despite their efforts, though, Lelouch always seemed to keep his distance. Ever since the confrontation with his father, those eight years ago, he learned not to place too much trust in people. He feared that if they found out the truth about his true identity as a Prince of Britannia, that they would leave him and turn their backs on him and his sister. They'd end up as political tools, a casualty of royal ambition.

But… ever since landing in the Blue Lion at this castle, that resolve was slowly cracking away what Shirley said after they formed Voltron for the second time after.

"No secrets, no barriers, no nothing. A family all the way. I love you guys!"

And it was true; he had felt closer to them. He was starting to see them as siblings he never had… and also…

"In here?" Lelouch said, turning to C.C.

"This is where Coran said he was located," the green-haired witch said. Lelouch crept into the room. It was lit with a small glowing orb at the center of the room. He reached out for it, and suddenly burst with color. Lelouch was soon surrounded by a magnificent field of flowers, mountains rising in the distance, and a clear blue sky above him.

"How-"

Before Lelouch could finish his thought, a glitching sound started from behind him. Turning around, the form of late King Alfor appeared before him.
"So you're King Alfor, former patriarch of planet Altea," Lelouch addressed formerly, "as well as Princess Allura's father."

"Well, this is quite the surprise," Alfor said, "I haven't had anyone else come to visit me. What may I do for you, Lelouch?"

"You know my name?" he frowned.

"Allura has told all about you and the new Paladins," the king informed him kindly, "and how fast you are progressing at your Paladin training."

"Yes, well..." Lelouch hesitated for a moment before continuing, "...about that. I wanted to inquire about something, specifically the Lions."

"Go on?" Alfor asked in a concerned tone. Lelouch didn't understand, but despite just meeting Alfor, he felt... calm. Safe around him. It was the exact opposite feeling he had when in the imposing presence of his father.

"When the Lions picked their Paladins for the first time," Lelouch said, "did any of them have second thoughts. Did any feel like this wasn't their calling? Like they had other things they had to attend to?"

Alfor smiled ruefully. "Well, I'll be honest after Allura was born, it was hard for my wife and myself to split our attention between Voltron and her upbringing. And there were times that I considered stepping down as Paladin and letting someone else take the reins."

"Wait- you were a Voltron Paladin?" Lelouch asked, shocked, "You and your wife."

"I was," Alfor nodded, "I created Lions of Voltron and was after that chosen by the Red Lion as its first pilot. My wife, Melenor, was also claimed by the Purple Lion."

"And yet at the same time, you still had an obligation to your subjects," Lelouch said.
"Indeed," Alfor nodded, "but it was when my conflicting thoughts came into play that I realized something else as well. The other Paladins that fought alongside us; they weren't just teammates to us. They were also treasured members of our family. If I left them to pursue my duties as king permanently, I'd also be putting them in danger by not being there. By fighting alongside my brothers and sisters, I grew to understand that I was protecting all the members of my family. And I wouldn't have it any other way."

'Now I get it,' Lelouch thought with a sad smile, 'they were your family. They're… my family,'

"Lelouch?" Kallen called out from down the hall. He raised his head in surprise. With all his thinking, he hadn't realized that he stopped. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, sorry!" he called as he ran to catch up.

"What's wrong?" she asked as they ran next to each other.

"I guess… I just realized how poorly I've been treating my friends is all," Lelouch answered before his eyes narrowed. "But that's about to change!"

Now that he thought about it, he'd be lying if he said he didn't care about the other members of the team. It was one of the driving forces that allowed him to save them during the hotel-jacking, not just because Colonel Kusakabe was in the wrong for endangering civilians. He cared about the safety of the Black Knights as well. It was always difficult to see when his plans involved sacrificing some of them to win. If there had been another way, all the Black Knights would come out of battle, maybe a little beaten up at times, but at least alive.

His earlier declaration about preparing Earth for an invasion wasn't wrong either. With the way, Britannia was moving now and the disarray of the other nations, should the Galra attack, they'd all be wiped out. Even Britannia wouldn't last long.

Now it seemed that defeating Britannia was out of the picture as well. If they wanted a chance against the Galra, they needed Britannia's technology. They didn't need it to conquer, though. They needed to use it to defend. But Britannia would only cooperate if they knew it was a force they couldn't easily defeat.

If they took Voltron to Earth, and the Empire saw that even they stood no chance against the juggernaut, it could at least subdue Britannia and its forces for the time being and force them to
cooperate. Only if Earth stood on a united front would the Galra be driven back.

'To do that, though...' Lelouch would need to reveal his identity to the others and explain to them his actions. Including his identity as Zero. If they were to be a fully supportive team, there couldn't be any secrets between them. And if they were his te-his family, they wouldn't turn their back on him.

He nodded at this silent declaration as he and Kallen continued to the turbine chamber.

o~o

Somewhere else in the Castle, the Space Mice were also doing their own infiltration. Allura had ordered them to get to the generator room and turn off the particle barrier so that they could get inside. Due to their small size, Sendak wasn't able to pick up their presence. And even if he did, he would have brushed them off as merely pests he'd deal with later. Plus, he didn't know about Princess Allura's connection to them, allowing communication to be made between them easily.

It was perfect!

o~o

Back outside the Castle, Allura was pacing with anxiety. Lelouch and Kallen hadn't contacted her or Suzaku again for several hours. She understood his caution for turning off the communicators, but by doing that, she couldn't tell them how to stop Sendak effectively. The mice were currently doing a well enough job sneaking to the generator room. Hopefully, the particle barrier would be down soon so that they could help.

"You okay, Princess?" Suzaku asked, "You look worried."

"It's because I am," she admitted, "We haven't heard from Kallen or Lelouch for varga now. We don't know if they are alright or not!"

"Calm down, Princess," Suzaku said, putting a hand on her shoulder. "Trust me when I tell you that they're fine. Lelouch is one of the smartest people I know. If anyone can figure out a way to stop Sendak, it's him. Plus, he has Kallen with him. She can handle herself."
'Which is weird…' Suzaku said silently, 'It's obvious now that she's never been sick. So then… why would she pretend to be? To skip school? Get out of P.E. as Lelouch tries to? The way she moved during training, it's like she's been fighting all her life…'

"From the way you speak of him, it sounds like you've known him for a long while," Allura observed with a smile, despite the situation.

"Yeah," Suzaku nodded, "we were childhood friends, but we lost contact with each other until about a few months ago," he chuckled a little, "but he hasn't changed a bit."

"If I might ask…" Allura inquired, "Lelouch mentioned he had a sister. What exactly happened to her?"

"Oh!" Suzaku said, looking apprehensive, "Um… there was an… an incident in their early childhood that caused her to lose her legs and sight."

"What kind of incident?" Allura questioned further, "It wouldn't have anything to do with him being a prince, would it?"

Suzaku physically jumped back, his eyes wide in shock. "How do you know about that?!"

"The mice told me. They overheard him and C.C. talking about something, and the subject was brought up," she explained.

"Oh… that makes sense, I guess…" Suzaku muttered in relief.

"Although…" Allura frowned, "When I tried to talk to him about it, he spoke of it with such contempt… I do not understand why, though."

Suzaku bit his lip, "I think it's best if he told you about it himself," he then laughed ruefully, "if he found out I blabbed about it, he'd put me through the wringer."

Allura smiled awkwardly before frowning again, her eyebrows knit together in thought.
"And I'll die first before I let my father get his filthy hands on her again!"

'If Lelouch is a prince, that would make his father a ruler of some sort,' the Altean royal thought in confusion, 'so why in Alaaran did he speak so... viciously about him? And he can't possibly mean that his father truly abandoned them, does he?'

o~o

Thanks to C.C.'s quick save from earlier, the pod didn't sustain any structural damage, even when they crashed into the tunnel wall. At least that's what C.C. herself informed Shirley as she inspected the craft. The Orange Paladin was honestly shocked by how much C.C. knew about engineering and fixing equipment. She may as well be a professional mechanic.

The two weren't alone, though. Shay was leaning against a rock, watching them as they worked.

"Tell me, what is the sky like?" she suddenly asked curiously.

"The sky?" Shirley asked, shocked. Of all the questions to be asked, she certainly wasn't expecting this one, "You seriously have never even seen the sky?"

Shay looked down, a sad look on her face, "No..." but then the Balmera grinned and leaped gracefully to the top of the pod, "...but, at night, I sneak up as high as I dare, trying to imagine what it is like. Oh, lucky are you to fly in this machine to worlds far from here."

"Well, it doesn't have to be like this. You can be free, too."

"Free?" Shay asked, the word sounding so foreign in her tone.

"Yeah, free," Shirley tried to explain as Shay hopped back down to the ground, "It means you can go where you want, be what you want, do what you want. No Galra masters to tell you what to do."

"It makes no sense. Zarkon controls everything," Shay said sadly.
"Well-yeah, right now, he seems to…” Shirley paused in her rambling as her mind suddenly wandered to Area 11. It was once a country all its own, with its own people, beliefs, religions, utterly different from Britannia. She thought she lived a pretty good life there… but now that she thought about it, and saw up close the way Shay's people lived, she realized that the Elevens were mirror-images of them. Unless they enrolled as Honorary Britannians like Suzaku, they couldn't live in the same area, join the military, go to the same schools, or even eat in the same restaurants! She felt ashamed that it never clicked in her head before, how less free everyone else was compared to her and other Britannians.

She quickly shook her head to clear it, returning to Shay's focus, "But-but things are changing! Have you heard of Voltron before?"

"...A child's tale?" Shay asked dubiously, quirking an eyebrow.

"No, he's real!" Shirley exclaimed, "I'm actually one of the Paladins, and Voltron is going to defeat Zarkon."

"You are?" Shay asked, hope filling her voice.

"Stop filling this one's head with your shadow show!" Rax shouted, coming from the tunnel, glaring at Shirley, "The cavern is our home. This will never change. Come."

Shay reluctantly stood from the rock and followed her brother back inside.

Shirley stood there, shocked. How could Rax be so unsupportive of all this?

"These people haven't known what 'freedom' is for many years, it's a new concept for them," C.C. said as if reading her mind, "And more often than not, people fear change. They fear the unknown."

This only made Shirley sadder. Sad at how willing the Balmerans were to accept their fate as slaves. Did the Ele-the Japanese who weren't fighting in rebellions have similar thoughts to Britannia?

She nearly burst into tears.
"Powering sub-panels," Haxus reported as he stood in front of the Central Energy Chamber's computer.

"Sub-panel energy transducer is go," Sendak's voice intoned from the other side.

"Aye, sir. Opening pathway to link with Bridge. Initializing main cluster reboot."

Lelouch, Kallen, and Rover were crouched behind the doors, watching and listening to Haxus and Sendak's conversation.

"Okay, we found the other Galra, now what? Just walk right up to him and ask him to stop?" she questioned sarcastically.

To her shock, Lelouch smirked and took off his helmet, "That's precisely what we're going to do."

Kallen watched in shock as Lelouch casually strolled up to the catwalk, wholly unarmed and making no move to draw a weapon. Gritting her teeth, she trailed slowly behind him.

Haxus, hearing the footsteps turned around to see the two of them approaching. Lelouch stopped about ten feet in front of him.

"You're the ones causing all this trouble?! Children?!"

"Hey! We're not kids! We're Paladins of Voltron!" Kallen declared, whipping out her bayard. She was shocked, though when Lelouch held out his arm, preventing her from stepping further.

Haxus laughed mockingly, pulling out a blade, "Let me tell you something, children. I'm a soldier of the Galra Empire! Nothing stops me but triumph or death!"
Lelouch laughed and smirked evilly, his hand raising to his face, covering his left eye, "Well then, how about a third option? Where you put away your weapon and tell us everything we want to know," his hand fell from his face, the Geass symbol flashing ominously. The sigil flew into Haxus's eye. A red ring now within them, showing he was entrapped within Lelouch's command.

To Kallen's shock, Haxus put away his weapon, "As you wish, say on."

"How much of the engine have you repaired already?" Lelouch asked first.

"I've repowered the sub-panels and was just beginning to initialize the reboot by connecting it to the bridge," the Galra answered monotonously.

"Can the engine and particle barrier be shut down from here?"

"The engine can, but the particle barrier's functions are elsewhere."

"Very well, deactivate the engine then."

Kallen's jaw seemed to descend further as Lelouch continued to question the Galra, and he was answering without resistance! And now he was willingly turning off the main turbine!

o~o

Meanwhile, on the bridge, Sendak's eyes widened as he saw the main engine powering down suddenly.

"Haxus! Haxus, what are you doing?!" he shouted angrily into the computer. He slammed his robot fit into the ground when no response came.

From behind him, he heard the Green Paladin laugh, "It sounds like you're having some trouble up there! I think I can see you sweating!"

The commander growled at the hostage, which briefly silenced him.
"Where's Sendak?" Lelouch questioned next after Haxus finished.

"He's located on the Castle's main bridge. He's holding three of the Paladins prisoner."

"Is there anything else we should know about?"

"No," he intoned.

"Very well," Lelouch smirked, "then I command you: Die!"

Haxus drew his blade again, holding it to his own throat, "Vrepir Sa!" The blade cut cleanly through his jugular as he then tumbled backward over the edge of the walkway.

Kallen still stood in shock, trying to process what in the world she just watched happen while Lelouch stepped towards the edge and looked over it. He barely caught a glimpse of Haxus's corpse as it disappeared into the abyss.

"H-How did-"

"I'll explain everything later, Kallen, I promise," Lelouch interrupted, "Right now, we need to focus on rescuing the others."

Kallen nodded with a swallow. After witnessing what just happened, she saw Lelouch's head warp into a large helmet with a shaded mask in the front. His Paladin armor was replaced with a large black cape that swept around him like a bat ready to take flight. Even his posture was almost identical to Zero.

"Haxus, report in, now!" Sendak's voice rang out of the computer.
Kallen stepped in front of it, slamming her hands flat on the console, "Haxus is dead, and you're next!"

"You've slowed me down," the commander snarled, "but this ship is mine! You will turn yourselves over to me immediately!"

"Or else what?!" she spat. Lelouch's face soon fell into a scowl. Kallen shouldn't have said that!

"Your fellow Paladins can explain," Sendak sneered.

"What do you want?!" Milly's frightened voice came through.

"Your friends wanted to hear from you."

"No, don't-" Rai's voice was cut off when Milly screamed, and electrical sounds echoed through the computer.

"Leave her a-" Rai's scream soon followed.

"You bastard!" Lelouch seethed, though he wasn't surprised that Sendak played this move. That didn't do anything to dampen his rage, though.

"You can make it stop. Turn yourselves in. Their suffering is in your hands."

Lelouch scowled before speaking, "Will their safety be guaranteed if we do so?"

"Yes. Turn yourself over at the bridge, I'll be waiting," Sendak said before the line was cut off.

An angry sneer was on Lelouch's face he gracefully swept out of the room, Kallen following behind.
"You realize he's probably lying, right?" Kallen said.

Lelouch laughed humorlessly, "Of course he is. I'm not stupid enough to fall for such an obvious ploy."

"So then… are you gonna do the same thing you did to Haxus?"

"That's the plan. The problem is that I must make direct eye contact for it to work. One of them is cybernetic as well, so I don't know if it will pose a problem or not, so I'll need you for back up."

Kallen nodded as they continued their determined walk to the bridge.

o~o

"Is your ship prepared that you may depart our presence?" Rax asked rudely as he, Shay, and the Voltron trio stood around the fire.

"My, my, you seem desperate to have us leave this place," C.C. said, crossing her arms.

"I am," Rax frowned.

"Well, the ship works, but we can't leave without that crystal," Shirley said. She then looked at Coran, "Do you have any ideas on how to get it?"

"Actually, yes," the Altean grinned.

Shortly after, Shirley nearly lost her balance as the trio held themselves underneath a cloak, with a sentry head on top. The plan was for this sentry disguise to sneak them past the guards and take the crystal.

"This is the worst plan in the history of plans," C.C. muttered. 'And that's saying a lot coming from me!'
"Shh! Legs don't talk!" Coran said as they approached the guards. Behind it was a large blue crystal nestled into the rock. C.C. and Shirley were both sharing the job of being the robot's legs while Coran was crouched on top of their shoulders, a sentry's head sticking up on top.

"Oh, hello, gentlemen, shift's over. Boss needs you back at the guard shack." Coran said as he came up to the guards.

'You could least try and sound like one of those robots!' Shirley panicked.

"Verify identification code," the sentry ordered.

"Right. I didn't want to have to do this." Coran pulled one of the sentry's arms out from under the cloak, "But I'm going to have to pull rank. You guys are in big trouble, right? So, hand over those blasters and ID badges."

That didn't do anything to stop the sentries as they raised their guns and charged them up, "Verify identification code or be destroyed."

"Okay, okay. I've got it right... here!" Coran exclaimed as the trio lost their disguise, revealing Coran, Shirley, and C.C. The girls had been perched underneath, holding Coran up. Shirley quickly fired two quick shots from her bow, hitting the sentries' heads, effectively destroying them.

Coran hopped down to the ground and approached the crystal almost reverently. He then placed both his hands on top of it. The Crystal and Coran's hands began to glow a bright blue.

"What are you doing?" Shirley asked urgently, "We need to hurry!"

Coran peaked his eyes open at the women, "I'm not just going to pry this out of here like some Galra monster," he exclaimed, "The Balmera is a sacred being. You have to communicate with it. Let your life forces connect. This is the way it was done in our time."

"Whoa!" Shirley gasped.
"You really know your Balmeras," C.C. smirked, folding her arms again.

The Balmera soon started to shake, and Coran stepped back as the crystal stopped glowing. The ground around it shifted away, exposing the crystal completely. Coran jumped forward and caught it before it could tip over, but he was struggling to lift it back up. Suddenly there was a large crack heard in his back. Eyes wide, the advisor turned his head mechanically in the girls' direction.

"...I think I'm broken..." he muttered in pain.

C.C. sighed, and Shirley massaged her forehead before they all froze, the sound of blasters charging behind them. Turning around, they saw at least a half dozen sentries behind them, guns aims and ready to fire.

"Augh... Okay, guys!" Coran said, turning around, trying to sound threatening despite the pain, "All right, I hate to do this. Blasters and badges. Come on. Give them up!"

The reference stared in disbelief as Coran suddenly tipped over, in too much pain to continue.

C.C. sighed again as she and Shirley both raised their hands in surrender, her face a look of annoyance while Shirley smiled and giggled nervously.

o~o

Sendak stood by the bridge doors, waiting for the Black and Red Paladins to finally surrender themselves. After that, he'd kill them and the others he currently had, fix the engines *himself*, and have the Castle, and the Lions delivered to Zarkon by day's end.

Rivalz still lay flat on the floor, unconscious while Rai and Milly were hunched forward on their knees, struggling just to keep their eyes open.

"I'm impressed that you managed to escape, Paladin," Sendak said, addressing Rai. "Perhaps it would be worth the trip to your planet to see if the rest of your kind have your spirit."

Unbeknownst to Sendak, Lelouch and Kallen were right behind the door, hiding on the sides with Rover close by. Lelouch sneered as Sendak made that comment. Over his dead body!
"Of course, they will all end up broken, just like you. Now that we have Voltron, every planet, every race, all share the same fate."

"I'm going in," Lelouch whispered, "if my Geass, my ability, doesn't work, then you come in. Got it?"

Kallen nodded as Lelouch stepped out of the shadows. His helmet was off, and his hands were in the air. But a large smirk was plastered on his face.

o~o

Shirley, C.C., and Coran had all been moved to a holding cell deeper underground. The two women were sitting on the small benches as Coran paced anxiously.

"Quiznack! I can't believe they saw through our disguise!" he ranted.

"I do," C.C. quipped.

Shirley, meanwhile, was staring at the floor of the cell, breathing heavily, struggling to hold back tears. Coran noticed this and kneeled by her.

"It's alright number five, we'll get out of this!" he tried his best to sound cheerful, even though he was inwardly panicking as well.

"I know, but…" she bit her lip, "I-I just can't believe how so many people are suffering like this! It isn't right! How could someone do anything like this?"

Coran felt sympathy for the Earthling. He thought similarly when Zarkon turned on Altea. He was once a great warrior and friend. Then overnight, he completely changed, conquering their solar system and any other planets that stood in his way. Coran honestly was shocked to see how far his conquest had gone 10,000 years later.
"I know it's difficult to see, and you're very courageous to be fighting like this. But that's what Voltron is for. To bring hope to the universe. To prove to them that this doesn't have to be the end."

"Yeah," Shirley bitterly said, "but I don't see us doing much locked up down here."

Shirley suddenly felt a hand on her shoulder. Looking up, C.C. was looking at her intensely, "If you had the power to change things, would you use it then?"

The Orange Paladin blinked in confusion, "What do you mean?"

C.C. took her hand.

Shirley gasped as she was suddenly in a completely different place. A black void with tendrils of energy shooting off in various directions, coming off of her!

"Like I said," C.C.'s voice echoed in her mind, "If you had the power to change things, would you?"

Shirley's face suddenly seemed to warp in and out of reality, her surroundings turning into a large tunnel of color.

"A reason to live on..."

Suddenly, C.C.'s body flashed in her vision as well, distorted just like her own.

"I propose a deal, Shirley Fenette. In exchange for this power, you must be able to fulfill a wish of my own choosing..."

Shirley saw what appeared to be two planets, orbiting very closely together, a bright light appearing between them.

"Accept this contract, and you accept its conditions. While living within this reality, you will live,
unlike any other being. A different providence, a different time, a different life."

Her surroundings were clustered with white feathers, and several more images flashed before her. She saw a ruin, then several people in olden-time clothing with strange red marks on their foreheads, the night sky with mars glimmering in the distance.

"The Power of the King will condemn you to a life of solitude. Are you prepared for this?"

Shirley felt a new connection being made, one alongside the one she had with her lion. All she needed to do to complete was reach out and take it — a new power blooming within her chest.

"Yes," she replied, "I accept the terms of this contract!"

C.C. had just let go of Shirley's hand, and she felt a pulse within her left eye. Coran sat there dumbfounded, wondering what in the world just happened. He wasn't able to express his concern, though, as they heard footsteps approach. Looking up, Shirley, with her right eye that wasn't covered, the trio say none other than Shay approaching them, carrying a sentry's arm.

"Shay?!" Shirley said in astonishment. The Balmera didn't say anything as she held the hand up to the scanner. Upon accepting the sentry's handprint, the cell door opened.

"Make haste to your pod. The Crystal is prepared for departure," she informed them.

"How did you get the crystal?" Coran asked, shocked.

"I was assigned to take it to the upper levels, but instead, I took it down. Soon, they will discover my ruse. Time is short."

Before they could leave, Shirley stopped her by grabbing Shay's arm, "Why are you helping us? You could get in trouble!"

"Because your words touched my heart," Shay said, "I wish for freedom for all Balmera. Perhaps your Voltron can make it so."
Shirley looked at the Balmeran, shocked. She didn't think her words had had *that* much of an effect. But she could see how brave Shay was being by doing this. With a determined gaze, she nodded. Unknowingly to her, her left eye flashed red, with a familiar symbol in the center.

Shay led them through the tunnels back to the pod, but just as they turned the corner where the pod was, a surprise awaited them. And not a good one. A dozen Galra sentries and Rax were standing in front of them, blocking the way.

"No! Rax, why?!" Shay cried out in betrayal.

"These three bring only trouble to our family. It was the only way to protect you," he replied.

Some of the sentries leveled their weapons at the group. Instinctively, Shirley jumped in front of them, her back pressed to them.

"NO!" Suddenly, it felt like energy had jumped from her eye, creating a sizeable transparent dome around the four of them. The Orange Paladin braced for the shots… that didn't come.

"What?!!"

"Where'd they go?!!"

"They're gone!" several sentries exclaimed, looking around confused. Even Rax, who had shifted behind them, blinked in dumb confusion.

Even the group themselves were confused. What did they mean they couldn't see them?

"What-what's going on?" Shirley asked, scared and confused, looking wildly at the other three.

Coran gasped, "Number five, what's going on with your left eye?"

"Huh?" she gasped, hand hovering over her left eye. She didn't have a mirror, so she couldn't understand what Coran was talking about.
"Interesting…" C.C. observed. The other three looked at the immortal, "It seems your new power makes yourself, and those in your vicinity, invisible to your enemies."

"We're invisible?" Shirley asked, looking down at herself. She seemed pretty visible to herself.

"Is this some sort trick?" one of the sentries suddenly shouted, turning and pointing his gun at Rax. The male Balmeran stepped back in fear, holding his hands out defensively.

"You're working with them, aren't you?"

"No, I-"

"Rax!" Shay shouted, kneeling on the ground and planting her hand on the surface. It glowed bright blue. A moan filled the air as the walls began to shift, and the ceiling collapsed. Boulders landed on top of the sentries, crushing several of them and saving Rax. Taking this moment of chaotic confusion to their advantage, the four quickly ran towards the pod.

Now that her Geass had worn off and they’d stepped outside the dome, the sentries that survived spotted them and started to shoot at them. One nearly hit Shay, and Shirley jumped in front of her, shield active to block some more of them.

One of the sentries, though, had a different weapon. It wasn't a blaster, but some sort of grappling hook. It aimed at Shay and fired, causing the purple rope to wrap around her, tripping and trapping her.

"Shay!" Shirley screamed as she watched her new friend being dragged back to the sentries.

"Go! Make haste!" Shay yelled.

"Let her go!" Shirley demanded, pulling out her bow.

"No, Shirley! We have to go!" Coran yelled before the Paladin could fire. With tears in her eyes,
Shirley looked between her fallen friend and the pod. At the cave opening, they saw that more sentries were marching in. Soon they would be surrounded and captured again. A Galra fighter also had positioned itself outside.

Finally, she turned and jumped into the pod as well. "We'll come back for you, Shay! We promise!" The pod windows closed tight, and Coran propelled them as fast as he could out of a side entrance of the cave, crystal secured in the back with C.C.

"If we can't shake these patrols, we might be back here sooner than we want!" Coran exclaimed as they skidded beneath the Galra fighter and up through the shaft. The ship hadn't come alone, though. There were three more waiting for them as they continued upwards.

o~o

Meanwhile, back at the Castle, the final remaining sentry was patrolling the hall, in case the Black and Red Paladin decided to come back.

However, he wasn't expecting an entirely different kind of intruder to get the better of him.

The four Space Mice looked down on the ledge of an air duct they just crawled out of. Platt squeaked at his siblings before he jumped down from above, Chuchule not far behind. He landed flat on the sentry's head, surprising him enough that he punched himself in the face to try and get him off. Chuchule landed on his arm, the one that was holding the gun, before biting down on his finger. This one happened to be holding the gun trigger. The sentry ended up shooting itself in the foot before it lost balance and tumbled over the edge. It met its end with a loud boom.

Plachu and Chulatt quickly joined their brother and sister on the floor, and the quartet scrambled up to the control board. Platt then lifted his paw and pressed down on the large round button in the center.

o~o

Outside, Allura and Suzaku were overjoyed to see the particle barrier finally lower.

"It worked!" Suzaku exclaimed.
“They did it!” Allura agreed.

Not wasting another second, the pair rushed into the Castle to reclaim it as rightfully theirs.

Lelouch was still standing in the middle of the doorway, his hands casually raised above his head, a smirk plastered on his face.

"Where’s the Red Paladin?” Sendak growled.

"She’s on her way, I ran ahead of her," Lelouch said with a shrug.

"Hmph, smiling at your demise, are you, boy?"

"No," the Black Paladin chuckled, "I’m smiling at yours actually. Let me ask you something, Sendak. Are there any Galra out there that detest their own empire? If so, how exactly would they live their lives?"

Sendak sneered but answered him anyway. He might as well humor him, "They would spend what little remains of their lives in fear of the moment where I would inevitably find them. And when that happens, they’ll be begging for death when I’m done with them!"

Sendak would’ve charged Lelouch right there, but something stopped him. He scowled. There was something strange about this Paladin. It was how he held himself, the pure confidence and pride in the aura around him. It reminded him of the way many elite Galra commanders and generals held themselves. Why it was the way he carried himself when on his command ship… no, it was more than that. He’d probably go as far to say it was more similar to Emperor Zarkon himself.

Lelouch smirked deviously at the Galra’s hesitance, "What’s wrong? Why not kill me? Your opponent is just a child. At least that’s what Haxus thought before he died."

Kallen wasn’t the only one shocked and nervous about the tone Lelouch was using. Milly and Rai, who were moments ago terrified for their friend and fellow Paladin, were now looking at him in
surprise. What the quiznack was Lelouch doing?

"Or perhaps you realize that the only ones who should kill are those who are prepared to be killed."

Sendak smirked evilly, "I couldn't agree more. Victory or death is the way of the Galra!"

"Very well then," Lelouch said, lowering his hands, one landing above his left I, "I command you... Die!"

Lelouch's hand flew from his face as his Geass glowed. The bird-like symbol flew into the commander's eyes. For a moment, his one real eye glowed red, but he then fell to the floor, clutching his head. Lelouch blinked and took a step back as well. He certainly wasn't expecting this outcome.

Sendak's cybernetic eye suddenly glowed purple, the red light vanishing from his real eye. Rai and Milly watched on in shock at this turn of events. The commander then unsteadily got back to his feet and smirked at Lelouch.

"So you paid a visit to the Druids as well," he smirked. Lelouch stepped back again, though not entirely out of surprise. He had a feeling his Geass wouldn't wholly work this time. But who were these 'Druid' people Sendak was talking about?

Sendak charged up his arm to attack, taking advantage of Lelouch's surprise, "Pity a waste of great potential!" His arm crashed down and would've hit Lelouch had he not leaped backward in time.

"Kallen now!" he shouted. The Red Paladin in question dashed out of the shadows and took a flying leap at the Galra, bayard claws splayed out. Caught by surprise, Sendak didn't manage to knock Kallen away before the gauntlet enclosed around the side of his face. The 'eye' in the middle of the glove opened, and massive heat waves emanating from it.

Sendak howled in pain before he finally managed to bat Kallen off of him. Despite this, the bayard already did a number on the Galra, half of his face burned, and his cybernetic eye having been melted off.

He charged at them in a rage again just as Suzaku and Allura entered the room.
Instinctively as Sendak came at him, Lelouch raised his hands, and the same red lightning from the first time shot out of his palm, hitting Sendak directly in the chest.

'I see,' said Lelouch as he stood by the hostages, 'I get it now. I can only do that when my Geass is active!'

Kallen took advantage of Sendak's fallen state to charge him again, but he recovered fast enough to bat her away. Suzaku charged head-on, swinging his katana expertly. As he slid under one of Sendak's gauntlet attacks, a bolt of blue, fired from the right and hit the purple energy connecting it to his shoulder socket.

"No!" Sendak snarled. He turned his furious gaze to the hostages, which was where the shot came from. Rivalz was propped up against one of the bridges ledges, having barely regained consciousness and had used his rifle bayard to shoot out the connection. He grinned in victory just as he collapsed from exhaustion again.

As Sendak charged them, Milly and Rai together got to their feet and body-slammed into him. Despite losing his arm, the commander was still strong and threw them both aside one at a time.

Allura took Sendak's distraction to her advantage and rushed to the main computer, punching in a few codes. The three able-bodied Paladins, Milly and Rai, knocked unconscious again, helped to keep the Galra back and distracted.

At one point, Lelouch managed to sidestep behind Sendak and punch him in the back. His Geass was still on, so he ended up electrocuting the Galra from behind. Sendak howled in rage and pain. Suzaku then attempted to swing his sword towards him, but Sendak managed to ignore the pain enough to grab the blade before it hit. The Galra and Paladin were locked in a battle of strength as they struggled against the weapon.

"Everyone now!" Allura called out suddenly. Lelouch quickly jumped out of the way, and Suzaku quickly released his bayard, which Sendak tossed to the side. But he was too late to block the giant, swinging kick, that Suzaku delivered spectacularly to his skull. It tumbled the Galra backward, landing against the purple crystal. One second later, the barrier surrounding the central deck shot up, effectively locking Sendak inside. The Galra got up and attempted to punch the wall down, but it was no use. He was trapped.

"Checkmate," Lelouch breathed heavily.
With Sendak successfully detained, the group quickly got to work freeing the others. Kallen slashed through Rai’s restraints with her claw, and the moment he was free, Rai grabbed his own bayard to free Milly.

Rivalz was also regaining consciousness as Suzaku knelt next to him.

"You okay, Rivalz?" he asked as he helped him sit up.

"We did it," the Blue Paladin huffed out an exhausted laugh, and smiled graciously at Suzaku "We make a good team."

"Yeah," Suzaku agreed with a nod, "we do."

o~o

Coran, C.C., and Shirley were still struggling to escape from the Balmera's mine shaft. Lasers were being fired at them from everywhere.

"We can't shake them!" Coran said in a panic, "We're not going to make it!"

Shirley looked at how much farther their escape path was. They would need a significant boost to get them out of the way of the ships. She looked desperately down at the console, her hand hovering over the extra booster button. It was their only chance.

"Uh, it may turn us into a giant fireball," Coran warned her.

"Maybe, but it's the best chance we've got! And we're going to die either way!"

Coran and Shirley looked ahead. More Galra cruisers were descending the shaft, trying to close in on them. Shirley was right; it was their only option.

"Fine. Fire in the hole!" Coran shouted as pressed down on the button.
Whatever Rai had attached to it was indeed only a prototype, as the force from it was strong enough to press Shirley back against the seat. C.C. in the back would've slammed against the side wall had she not had the foresight to brace herself. She made a mental note to have the Green Paladin add a few seat belts back here for future reference.

However, the booster did its job and shot the pod directly out the shaft and into the Balmera's atmosphere. A giant fireball trailed behind them from the Galra ships that crashed into each other, trying to pursue them.

Coran cheered in triumph as they zoomed off back into the stars.

"We did it!" Shirley breathed, slumping against the seat.

"Number five, you were quiznacking brilliant back there!" Coran suddenly cheered excitedly, "Why didn't you mention you could turn invisible before?! Oh, the possibilities! I must inform the Princess immediately of this!"

Shirley laughed a little as Coran continued to rant excitedly about Shirley's new power. She looked at the slight reflection of the metal the pod offered, looking at the new symbol decorating her iris and pupil. It looked like a crane ready to take flight. She'd been given the power she needed to help these people, and she swore she would make good on her promise to Shay. She and the team would return and rescue her. She and her family!

Something then clicked in Shirley's memory. A few days ago, C.C. had called Lulu and 'contractor' as well… is this how he knew her? How long ago did he meet her?

o~o

The trio arrived back at the Castle without further incident, and the Alteans wasted no time installing the new Crystal as they were filled in on what happened on both ends. The Castle's blue lights soon returned, and Sendak was detained in a holding cell in the Castle. They decided the Galra Crystal would be moved to the Green Lion's bay as Rai said he wanted to examine it. The moment the healing pods were back up and running, they wasted no time helping Rivalz into a cryo-suit and setting him inside. Soon he fell into a peaceful, healing sleep.

"After a day in here, he should be fully healed," Allura reassured them all.
"That's a relief," Milly sighed. She and Rai had been offered to go in the cryo pods as well when they mentioned their fight and torture from Sendak. Still, they reassured them that it wasn't anything serious, they just felt a little sore.

"Lelouch, Kallen," Rai said, "thank you for everything you did. You saved us."

"Yeah," Suzaku nodded, "I feel like you should stay. Be a part of the team... but I understand if you want to leave. Especially you, Lelouch," He really did. He knew how much Lelouch loved Nunnally and probably missed her too.

Lelouch smiled, however, "King Alfor told me about how close he was with the past Paladins." This statement took a surprised gasp from Allura, "He said they were like his family. I think I now know what he was talking about."

"You spoke to my father?" Allura asked.

"Yes. I wanted to get his opinion on the situation. And now I understand," he smirked, "So if you're willing to forgive me, I think I'll stick around. You, Kallen?"

The red-head in question smirked, "No duh! These guys would be helpless without us!" This caused the rest of the group to laugh good-heartedly.

"Let's stop Zarkon, for all our families," Lelouch said in finality.

"It's good to have back," Suzaku smiled before pulling them all into a group hug.

Lelouch knew this wasn't over, though. He remembered the vow he made during the battle. If he was to trust his team, and they trust him, they needed to know the truth about him. Once Rivalz woke up, he would tell them everything: about Geass, his heritage… and even about Zero…

o~o

She replayed the video for the sixth time. The seven faces flashing on the screen.
"There's no question... it's him." the knight said, biting her thumbnail. Her gaze was fixed on the platinum blonde's face.

"Prince Zephyr..."

She tightened her green ponytail and gripped her sword on her belt.

"If you're truly alive, I'll find you," she said, marching to the Emperor's throne room. If she could convince him to send her to Area 11, she could use all the resources there to find him. And his sister.

Nonette Ennegram swore it upon her title as Knight of Nine...

Chapter End Notes

AN: So a new chapter so soon?! Well, let's just say I had some free time on my hands so... yeah.

So Shirley now holds a Geass power of her own. It's name is Absolute Concealment! Thought it was pretty cool!

Also, I just wanted to make something clear so there's no confusion, Shay and Shirley are FRIENDS! Not a couple like with Hunk and Shay. Just wanted to make that clear to everyone for the future! Thanks!

Next chapter... stay tuned ;)}
The twenty-four hours (vargas?) that Rivalz needed in the pod came and went. The whole team, now in regular clothing, was gathered around, anxiously waiting for him to come out.

"I can't tell if looks healthy… or not," Shirley said.

"I think he's breathing weird," Rai observed.

"Oh, come on!" Kallen exclaimed about to open the pod herself.

"Not yet!" Allura batted Kallen's hand away, "A few more ticks."

"How much better do you think he's gonna get in a few more ticks?" Kallen argued.

"What exactly is a tick anyway?" Milly asked.

"You know, a time-slice," Allura said as if expecting it to be noticeable.

"What, like a second?" Lelouch asked.

"What, like a second?" Lelouch asked.

"What is a… 'second'?" Allura asked, intrigued.

Rai pulled a device out of his pocket, looking like an advanced stopwatch, "Like this." The watch started counting up in Earth's time.

"I'm not sure," Allura said after listening to a few of them, "I think ticks are bigger. Coran," she asked the advisor, who was at the central control monitoring Rivalz's condition, "do you have a ticker?"
"Right here, Princess," he said, holding up his device. It ticked slowly around a circular direction.

"I think ticks are a little slower," Suzaku said, squinting at the ticker.

Rai furrowed his eyebrows, looking between the two, "I can't tell. We have to start them at the same time."

"Okay," agreed the advisor, restarting his, "Ready, go!" The two held the timers out in front of them. At first, it seemed they were evenly matched, but each click from the Earth timer soon made it jump ahead of the Altean timer.

Everyone gathered around, so engrossed in this competition that no one noticed that Rivalz's pod opened, and the Blue Paladin in question had stumbled out.

"Yes! I think we're winning!" Milly cheered.

"Winning what?" C.C. raised an eyebrow, "The intergalactic time-measuring competition?"

"Um, yes!" Milly said as if it was apparent.

Rivalz soon was able to stumble over on his own towards the group, eyes still droopy, "You guys having a clock party?"

"Aw, Rivalz, you just ruined it. Uh-Hey, Rivalz!" Milly shrieked, before pulling him into a bear hug, lifting him off the ground.

Under normal circumstances, Rivalz would have blushed, considering where his face was pressed against. However, he still felt half asleep after coming out of the pod. He blinked his eyes to stay awake as he was lowered back down. "What happened?"

Allura placed a hand on his back, "We can tell you all about it while you get something to eat. Are you able to walk?"
"Talking? Eating? Are you asking out on a date or something?" Rivalz asked, only hearing half of what was said with his foggy brain.

While Allura looked a little annoyed, the rest of the group shared some snickers. They were all happy that their friend was alive and healthy again, though.

○○

Rivalz honestly thought the food goo in front of him was the most delicious thing he'd ever eaten at the moment. He had finished almost the entire plate when Platt scampered in front of him, loopy-looping around before sitting impatiently in front of the bowl, begging for a bite. Smiling, the Blue Paladin scooped a clump up and held it out to the mouse, who nibbled at it almost greedily.

"You'd be Sendak's prisoner right now, if not for Kallen and Lelouch," Allura said.

"Well, you wouldn't have survived the explosion if Shirley, C.C., and Coran hadn't gotten a new Crystal," Kallen added.

"Wow. Thanks, everybody. It sounds like the mice did more than you, though," Rivalz said, and the mice straightened in pride at the praise, smirks on their little faces.

"Hey! I punched Sendak!" Suzaku protested.

"Yeah!" Rivalz laughed, "Apparently, after I emerged from a coma and shot his arm off."

"We had a bonding moment! I cradled you in my arms!" the Honorary Britannian exclaimed, throwing his arms up.

"Nope!" Rivalz shook his head, "Don't remember! It didn't happen! So, anyway, what happened to Sendak?"
"He's frozen in a cryo-pod. We're keeping him here in the Castle," Allura answered.

"...Is that really a good idea?" Rivalz asked.

"He's too dangerous to be set free. Besides, we might be able to get some information about Zarkon from him."

"That's the plan anyway... if he'll even talk," Lelouch said with a frown.

"So... what's the plan now?" the Blue Paladin inquired.

"We have to get back to the Balmera and save Shay and her people," Shirley declared with a determined frown.

"Made a new friend have we?" Milly asked, wiggling her eyebrows.

"Prez, you know it's not like that!" Shirley scowled with a small blush, "Look, guys, when you see how Zarkon has treated these people and destroyed their home—They've been under his thumb for so long, they don't even know what it is to be free. It's up to us to set this right. This is what being a Paladin of Voltron is all about."

'Not much different from how we treat other countries, though...’ Shirley regrettably added silently.

"Let's get going then!" Rai cried, "Time to go defend the universe!"

"Wait," Lelouch said, standing up, "before we do anything else, I have something to say first. A confession. A few of them actually, and I might not get another chance like this. Some of them might change the way that you all think of me as well."

Lelouch now had the full, rapt attention of everyone in the room. The ex-prince took a deep breath. Now or never.
"First, what I'm about to say must not exit this Castle unless I say so. Is that clear?"

Milly quickly caught on to what he was implying and began to protest before Lelouch silenced her with a stern glare.

"No, Milly, if we're going to be doing this, they have a right to know."

Milly looked like she still wanted to protest but ultimately stepped back with a sigh before crossing her arms.

"Before that, though, I owe all of you an explanation. About why I wanted to go back to Earth."

"You said it was because of Nunnally, right?" Shirley asked, confused.

"Yes, but that's only part of the reason. You see, I'm apart of something back on Earth. A special group of people that I have responsibility for… The Black Knights."

There was shocked silence within the room. Suzaku's eyes widened into saucers along with Rivalz and Shirley's. Kallen's arms dropped to her sides in shock, jaw slack.

"Y-You're apart of the Black Knights, Lelouch?!" Suzaku exclaimed, "Why?!"

Suddenly, Rivalz and Milly started laughing!

"Oh! Good one, Lelouch! You? In the Black Knights?" the Blue Paladin giggled hysterically, "That's a real knee slapper right there! Haha!"

"Man, and here I didn't think you even had a sense of humor!" Milly guffawed, "You had me worried there for a second!"

It took the two of them five seconds to register that Lelouch wasn't laughing with them, or the offended and enraged look on Kallen's face.
"Wha-What wait, you're serious?!!" Rivalz asked, shocked as his hands also fell to his sides.

"Oh… my…" Milly muttered, realizing just how real this was.

"I'm not just apart of them," Lelouch said, sighing before taking a deep breath, "...I'm their leader. I'm Zero."

There was silence for a solid twenty seconds in the room. The only ones who didn't look in shock were the two Alteans, who only looked mildly confused at the situation. Even C.C.'s eyes widened at Lelouch's revelation, quite baffled that Lelouch told them.

"Y-yo-Lelouch, please tell me that's a lie! It can't be true!" Suzaku begged desperately.

"You've known me since childhood Suzaku," Lelouch frowns, "why on Earth would I lie about something like-"

The Black Paladin was cut short when he was nearly bowled over by Shirley, who had thrown herself forward and engulfed him in a hug.

"It was you then," she whispered, "you were the one that saved Milly, Nina, and I at the hotel!"

"Um…” Lelouch blushed, embarrassed while awkwardly patting her back. "Yes, that was me."

"...Now that I think about it, so much makes sense now!" Suzaku suddenly exclaimed, causing Shirley to let go and back away, "I can't believe I didn't suspect you even once Lelouch. But…"

"I swear Suzaku, so help me. I will one day, obliterate Britannia!"

"...To think that you went through with it?! Don't you realize how many people you're endangering just to achieve this selfish goal of yours?! Your methods aren't going to change anything!"
"Endangering people?! Suzaku, did you not hear the goal of the Black Knights? Our mission is to defend the weak; those who can't do it for themselves!"

"The police force can do that just fine too! There are plenty of ways to work within the system for it! If you, Zero, continue this way, how many others will die in the process?! A goal is worth nothing if the means of achieving it are wrong! Rebellion isn't the way to do it!"

Lelouch froze, before throwing his head back and laughed almost hysterically.

"What's so funny?!" Suzaku spat in disgust. The rest of the room, the Alteans especially, were watching this play out like a tennis match, heads shooting from one side to the other.

"What's so funny?!" Lelouch gasped, before glaring venomously at Suzaku, "What's funny is that you're spouting out nonsense and degrading rebellions when you're practically participating in one right this very moment!"

Now it was Suzaku's turn to freeze, his eyes widening in shock.

"Don't give me that look, Suzaku, you know it's true! Voltron is rebelling against the Galra. We're the only known force at this moment that has any hope of defeating them! We're 'Defenders of the Universe,' ones that are destined to defeat Zarkon and the Galra. Tell me, how are mine and the Black Knight's vision and goal for Japan and the rest of the world any different?!!"

Suzaku clenched his fists and looked like he was about to make a comeback statement when Shirley interrupted, "He has a point Suzaku…"

"Wha-Shirley, what are you saying?!

"Well-it's just-Lulu is right! We're doing the same thing as the Black Knights right now. We're a rebellion. If you think it's so wrong… are you saying we just hand Voltron over to Zarkon and surrender?"

"We-well no but-!"
"If we do that Suzaku, people will just keep suffering!" Shirley interrupted, "When I was on the Balmera and talking to Shay, she didn't even know what the word 'free' meant! The Galra have been there for so long; they don't see any other future for them! Just as slaves living in those mines. She hasn't even seen what the sky looks like! They're all kept in those mines. If they don't obey, they're taken from their family, and who knows what happens to them?!"

'Sounds familiar,' thought Kallen. Upon the revelation of Zero's identity, a plethora of feelings and thoughts raced through the Red Paladin's head. There was confusion as to why a Britannian of all people was fighting for Japan. Anger and rage for his deception. But also… acceptance, and even a little peace. The fact that Lelouch trusted them enough to reveal himself to them. Not to mention the way he acted when Sendak still had the Castle. He was utterly focused on saving others. So, Lelouch wasn't being selfish on those terms, and because of that, she was at least willing to hear Lelouch out on his reasons.

"Suzaku… I want you to be honest with me, please," Shirley said, turning to the Purple Paladin, "...the Ele-the Japanese, the ones still living in the ghetto. Is it the same for them?"

"YES!" Kallen exclaimed before Suzaku could even open his mouth, "That's **exactly** what it's like for them! In Shinjuku, the military slaughtered everyone, even those not involved with the terrorism happening. Men, women, and children! All of them!"

"Wait, hold on a moment! What is this all about?!" Allura suddenly exclaimed. All of the Paladins turned to the Alteans, who they realized probably had no idea what they were even talking about.

"Apologies, Princess," Lelouch said, "Can I assume that you two don't understand the situation?"

"No, I'm afraid not," Coran admitted, "but, are you saying that this is happening on your home planet?"

"Yes, it is. It's why I was so eager to return there. We're currently in the middle of what you may call… a planetary conflict."

"I'm afraid I still don't follow…" Allura confessed, feeling embarrassed for sounding naive.

C.C. suddenly stepped in, and everyone saw that she had one of the mind meld machines on. A screen appeared in front of her, showing Earth's world map. "Currently, our planet Earth is separated into three major superpowers, each with different laws and ideals for its people. They are
the Chinese Federation, the European Union, or the EU, and the Holy Britannian Empire, which is
where a majority of us are from." China and it's allying nations lit up in red, the EU appeared in
green, and the rest of the map lit up in blue for Brittania. "Each group is fighting and negotiating
for territory and resources," the colors started shifting back and forth across the differing lands.
However, the blue area seemed to continue to expand. "From what we've heard of your planet,
Altea, it seems that your planet has reached a unity under one centralized government. Our planet
has yet to make it that far."

Allura just nodded, though inwardly, she was quite surprised how primitive Earth was compared to
other planets.

"As you can see, the Britannian Empire currently holds the majority of Earth's territory, and they're
still pushing forward, taking more and more countries into the fold. Whether it's willingly or not,"
Lelouch concluded.

"I suppose I am still struggling to understand why you've turned against your nation," Allura tried
to explain. Never in a million years would she think to betray her people.

"Because," Lelouch seethed, "Britannia is no different from the Galra!"

Coran and Allura both looked taken aback. Could this be true?

"As I mentioned before, Britannia, even as we speak, is continually conquering more and more
territory. They crush any and all they see as 'weak.' Are either of you aware of the term 'Social
Darwinism'?

"I don't believe so, no," Coran said, holding his chin in intrigue.

"To put it simply, Social Darwinism is the belief that all living things are subject to the natural
selection of nature. Basically, 'strong survive and the weak die.' Kind of like the food chain,"
Kallen explained.

"That's very similar to what the Galra believe," Allura observed with a look of disgust on her face.

"Precisely!" Lelouch said, "What Britannia does is no different. They invade other countries, take
what they want, and because the country 'lost,'" he made quotation marks with his hands, "to them,
they strip the nation of their freedom, rights, and even name. All countries that come into the Empire are replaced with just a number. All the previous citizens of that country suffer the same fate."

"Now, hold on!" Suzaku protested, "That's not completely true! If they become Honorary Britannians, they can live in the settlement as well!"

"Oh, so now you're saying they need to earn their rights back?" Kallen shot back, angrily, "Rights that never should've been taken from them in the first place?!"

"It's better than resorting to violence!"

"So are you saying that our home, Altea, should have simply surrendered the Galra? Even if we did that, they would've destroyed Altea anyway!" Allura said.

"No! Princess, you have a right to be angry. I get it! But Britannia didn't destroy Japan-"

"They sure as hell did!" Kallen practically screamed, "The people, the Elevens," she emphasized furiously, "they have nothing now! Last I checked the Britannians don't even see them as human beings!"

Suzaku stuttered, wracking his brain to come up with a defense when Lelouch spoke again.

"What floors me the most Suzaku is that you're even considering defending that nation when they, themselves, tried to murder you in cold blood!"

"Wh-what are you talking about?" a drop of sweat slowly descended Suzaku's brow.

"You know exactly what I'm talking about! They falsely blamed you for Prince Clovis's murder, even though you had an obvious alibi! They didn't bother to launch a real investigation; they just threw all the blame on you because you happened to be the same area!"

"These people would do that?!" an astounded Allura demanded. She was starting to understand why Lelouch hated these people. She was appalled. If her father had heard that an Altean had done
this, he would've charged them with treason and conspiracy immediately.

"Yes, there was zero evidence against him. A sect within the military, known as the Purebloods, decided to use the Viceroy's, similar to a Regent's status," he quickly informed the Alteans, "death to accuse Suzaku of it. And if he was found guilty, what do you think would have happened? An Honorary Britannian, the son of the late Prime Minister even, is found guilty of the murder of Viceroy Clovis. Please, humor me."

There was silence for about twenty seconds before Rai's head shot up in horror, "No…"

"That's correct. The Pureblood's ultimate goal is to abolish the Honorary Britannian system. And they would've used that incident to begin that process. If Suzaku were found guilty, I wouldn't've been surprised if the entire system was toppled overnight. That means that all numbers, not just Japanese, would've had their rights stripped from them all over again. They would have been forced to return to the ghetto, like lambs to the slaughter."

"But that didn't end up happening obviously," Milly said, "Suzaku was found innocent."

"Yeah, it was after Zero showed up and…" Rivalz trailed off before looking at Lelouch again.

"Wait," Suzaku said, realizing the same thing, "then that means- you killed Prince Clovis!"

"Yes, you're right, Suzaku, I did kill Clovis la Britannia," Lelouch sneered, "after he gave the order to slaughter hundreds of innocents in Shinjuku ghetto! They were your own people Suzaku; most had nothing to do with the terrorism!"

"Wait, Prince Clovis ordered that?!" Shirley asked, horror in her tone, "But the news said it was poison gas that the terrorists had stolen!"

"That was a lie," C.C. said, calmly, "it wasn't poison gas that the terrorists stole. It was me."

"C.C.-"

"We might as well tell them, Lelouch. I'm stuck here just as much as the rest of you are," the
immortal rationalized. "So, to answer all of you as to why I was inside that capsule, your precious Clovis la Britannia was running illegal human experiments on me." Most of the room's occupants made noises of shock and disbelief. "So, when the terrorists unknowingly took me, he feared if anyone outside his inner circle found out what he was doing and it went public, he would be disowned by the royal family. So to cover his tracks, he ordered the massacre. That's also where I first met Lelouch."

"I had fallen into one of the vehicles that the terrorists were using to transport C.C. I also ran into Suzaku, who was already a soldier. We both saw the canister open with C.C. inside."

Despite all of the firm, furious emotions within him, Suzaku couldn't deny this as he nodded in confirmation. No one noticed that Kallen had made a slightly disturbed and guilty face at the mention of the vehicle.

"With a little of his help," Lelouch decided to leave out the part that the captain shot Suzaku as he had already dragged Britannia's reputation through the dirt enough, "C.C. and I made a run for it. But, we were eventually cornered by some of the royal guards. They were going shoot me; they thought I was a fellow terrorist despite it being obvious I was a Britannian student." Coran's eyes widened at that before grimacing in disgust. They even would kill one of their own?! "C.C. then leaped in front of me, and took a headshot in my place."

"A headshot?!" Rai exclaimed, most of the others having similar reactions.

"That's impossible!/You should be dead then!/Are you sure it was a headshot?!!"

"Not many alien species can survive a wound to the head like that, but as far as I tell Miss, you seem very human…" Coran observed, "...unless-

"I'm/-you're immortal," the two of them said together.

Everyone was shocked into silence again. None of them made a move to question whether or not C.C. was making it up or not. Plus, after everything that's happened so far, nothing really surprised them anymore.

"Wait, if you're really immortal, then how old are you?" Milly asked, leaning forward.
C.C. shrugged, "You tell me; I stopped counting about a century ago."

"When I thought C.C. was dead, she suddenly grabbed onto my arm and… well, I'm not one hundred percent sure what exactly happened. I saw a bunch of images," Shirley gasped a little, "and when it was all over, I felt different. I realized that C.C. had given me something. A power known as Geass. The ability to compel anyone to do what I want."

"Wait! So that's what happened with Haxus. You just looked at him, and whatever you asked him, he answered you," Kallen said.

Lelouch nodded as C.C. continued, "Lelouch and I formed a contract. I would give him the power of Geass, the Power of the King, and in exchange, he must grant me a single wish of my choosing."

"What kind of a wish?" Rivalz curiously.

C.C. shrugged, "Don't know, haven't thought of one yet."

"Wait! That's what you said to me on the Balmera. We formed a contract too!" Shirley said.

"You made a contract with Shirley?" Lelouch asked, quite surprised.

"Don't act too shocked; I can decide who I form contracts with or not," C.C. said.

"So… you can control people now too?" Rivalz asked.

"No," C.C. said as Shirley shook her head, "Geass manifests differently from person to person. It usually depends and is based on strong personal desires. It can be anything from mind control to mind reading to even rewriting the memories of another person."

"So then… what can you do, Shirley?"
"Perhaps seeing these abilities up close could give some insight," Coran suggested. "That way, we all see how they work and how to use them in battle."

"Ladies first," Lelouch said to Shirley.

"Um… okay," Shirley activated her Geass and a blink later, she was gone.

"WOAH! Where'd you go?" Rivalz exclaimed.

"Nowhere, guys! I'm right here!" the Orange Paladin said.

"You're invisible! That's so cool!" Milly squealed.

"Hmmm… I think invisible is the wrong term," Lelouch said, "Shirley, turn it off for a second, Rai, go to the opposite end of the room. I want to try something."

The Green Paladin shrugged and obeyed, stopping at the far wall.

"Okay, try it again, Shirley."

Shirley turned it on again. Once again, the Lelouch and the others close by; they couldn't see her. But Rai…

"Did you do it? I can still see you!"

"You can?" Shirley asked, shocked.

"As I suspected. You're not becoming invisible with your Geass. Rather, it seems you're projecting an energy field that affects people and creatures a certain distance away from you. It likely distorts our vision so that you simply look invisible to us. But because Rai's out of range, it didn't affect him. I bet if he came closer, you'd eventually disappear to him as well," Lelouch deduced.
"It seems we'll have some extra training to do," Allura said, "to find its limits and capabilities."

"I think I can make others invisible too," Shirley said, "on the Balmera Coran, Shay, C.C., and I were all invisible to the sentries."

"I believe all three of us were in some form of physical contact with you when that happened," C.C. said. "So it's assumed that that's how it can be done. The Geass recognizes anyone touching you as an extension of your own body, and therefore will act to hide that as well."

"Cool!" Kallen said, mildly impressed with the ability. She could already see the advantages that this gave.

"And you, Lelouch?" Suzaku asked, narrowing his eyes. He didn't know why, but something about this 'Geass' power rubbed him the wrong way.

"...Alright," Lelouch turned to Coran, activating his Geass with a small grin, "Tell us the most embarrassing thing that's happened to you."

Coran's eyes lit up with a familiar red ring around them. "When I was just beginning my training as the royal family's advisor, I do recall tripping down the staircase, losing my pants and shirt in the process and lying square eagle on at the bottom... with the entire royal court there to witness it."

There was silence for a solid ten seconds before most of the Paladins out laughing. Even Lelouch had thrown his head back in guffaw and deactivated his Geass in the process. Allura was attempting to hide a couple of giggles as well. C.C. was also shaking her head in amusement.

"Huh? Wha-what happened? Why are you all laughing at me?" the advisor asked.

"Oh," Allura coughed to cover her next snicker, "nothing that you must concern yourself with Coran."

"My Geass originally was the ability to compel anyone to obey when I make eye contact with them. The drawbacks that I've noticed so far are that I can only do it once per person. So now that I just used it on Coran, it won't affect him again. Also..."
Lelouch activated his Geass again and held his fist to the side, which was charging up with lightning. A blast then shot out, completely obliterating the cup Rivalz was using at the table.

"I can do that."

"Woah! That was like that one superhero movie! You know, the one where the chick was kidnapped by aliens?" Rivalz asked.

Lelouch smiled and shook his head slightly. He knew what Rivalz meant, but it was hilarious that that was the first thing that his friend thought of to compare it to.

"Strange, no one I've made contracts with was able to do that…" C.C. muttered, inwardly quite shocked.

"I wasn't able to do that until we infiltrated Sendak's ship. Something just… snapped inside me. I don't know how else to describe it."

"Hey yeah! Both you and Rai totally destroyed the sentries that came after us," Milly remembered.

"Come to think of it," Rai said softly, rejoining the group, "whenever I fight, I get this weird feeling. Like my senses are heightened or something. When I was fighting Sendak the other day, he mentioned a group of people. The Druids? He said I must have paid a visit to them or something. So if I do have this Geass thing too, it seems to activate when I'm physically in battle."

"I see. We'll see what can be done about it. Sendak did say something similar to me as well," Lelouch said, "Princess, Coran, does that name ring a bell at all? The Druids?"

"Not that I recall no," Allura shook her head.

"It could be the division's name," Coran suggested, "a group of Galra that specialize in science and the like."

"Perhaps…"
"Okay… but why you, Lulu?" Shirley suddenly asked. "You get this weird power and decide to use it to fight Britannia? Why go so far? Why does it have to be you that does this?"

That was the big burning question, wasn't it? Well, time to finally answer it.

"Do you remember the story of how my parents died?"

Shirley and Rivalz winced. The official story that was spun about Lelouch and Nunnally's past was that their father was a scientist and their mother a businesswoman. Both were also very well versed in Britannia's politics. They had moved to Japan to help settle the disputes about the Sakuradite mineral. But shortly after, the Pacific War broke out, and both of them lost their lives.

"Yeah, you said that they were killed during the first days of the Pacific War, right?" Rivalz said.

Lelouch nodded and grimaced.

"That's the story that I came up with, with some help from the Ashfords. But in reality, my mother was murdered while we were still living in the homeland."

"Wait, what? But, I don't get it..." Shirley stuttered. All of these revelations today was starting to make her head feel dizzy.

"Yeah, what Shirley said. I know that Milly's grandfather owed you guys a favor, but..."

"My mother and the Ashfords were close friends up until she died. That incident stripped them of their status as nobles. If it weren't for the Ashfords, my mother would never have become the Knight of Six. Or Two for that matter."

As he expected, their eyes widened to the size of softballs. Even Kallen and Rai looked surprised.

"Whoa, hold on, back up! Your mother was a Knight of the Round?!"
"Let me put it to you this way, Rivalz. Lamperouge is mine and Nunnally's mother's maiden name. When she was married, she was renamed Marianne vi Britannia."

It was nothing but silence. Milly and Suzaku were the only two not showing signs of shock, having known about this beforehand.

Rivalz's jaw was on the floor, Shirley was a stuttering mess, Kallen was stock still, and just stood there dumbfounded. Coran was also quite shocked, and Allura seemed to relax slightly, her suspicions of him being a prince being confirmed. Still, Lelouch felt somewhat relieved to finally have that off of his chest. Now they knew his identity. Now they had to understand his reasons.

"W-w-what... S-so then, you and Nunnally are..." Kallen stammered.

"Correct. Officially, Lelouch vi Britannia and Nunnally vi Britannia both died near the end of the Pacific War. After we were exiled, we were sent under the care of the Kururugi family. That's how Suzaku and I knew each other before."

The word 'exiled' caught Allura's attention, but Coran beat her to the question, "Wait, why would you and your sister have been exiled?"

No one expected to hear Lelouch's tone go cold and icy. The air in the room seemed to turn several degrees colder.

"Because my father, Charles zi Britannia, doesn't give a damn about anyone but himself, not even his own children. After our mother was killed, I barged into the throne room, and demanded that justice be carried out on the murderer."

Lelouch took the mind-meld device from C.C. and placed it on his own head. He figured showing them would help them understand better than merely telling them.

The screen in front of him fizzled out before clearing. It showed a set of elegant grand doors in front, and after a few moments, they opened up.

"Announcing Prince Lelouch vi Britannia, Seventeenth Heir to the Royal Britannian Imperial Throne!" someone announced to the side. At the other end of the room was a large throne with the Emperor himself seated on it. To both sides were nobles and other people dressed in fancy gowns.
and elegant jewelry. The women all had their hair styled beautifully.

The screen slowly began to approach the ruler of Britannia, walking at a steady pace and with purpose, ignoring the whispers circling. However, some of the comments shocked the majority of the audience.

"I heard Empress Marianne was killed inside of the Britannian Palace."

"There's no way terrorists could've gotten in there."

"Which means that the real assassins must have been..."

"Shhh. Beware, my friend. You'll regret it if anyone hears that kind of talk around the Palace."

"And yet the boy remains... even though his mother is dead."

"It's over. And the Ashford family who stood behind them is finished as well."

"And his sister, the Princess?"

"We understand she was shot in the legs."

"And that she lost her sight."

"Blindness caused by trauma, though, isn't it?"

"No difference. Now she can't even be married off for political gain."

The screen came to a stop at the foot of the throne, "Hail, your Majesty! My mother, the Empress, is dead!" A young voice was heard, which they realized must be Lelouch's when he was younger.
"Old news. What of it?" the Emperor replied in a bored tone.

"What of it?!" younger Lelouch exclaimed in disbelief.

"You sought an audience with the Emperor of Britannia simply to inform me of that? Send the next one in. I have no time for these childish games."

"Father!" the screen approached the throne closer. Two guards standing by the throne rushed to intercept but were stopped when the Emperor raised his hand.

The guards straightened and secured their weapons. "Yes! Your Majesty!"

"Why didn't you keep mother out of harm's way? You're the Emperor, the greatest man in this nation, if not the world. You should have protected her, and now you don't even visit Nunnally?!"

"I've no use for that weakling."

This reply drew a large variety of reactions from the group watching. Shirley had gasped and covered her mouth her hands. Rivalz and Rai were both standing with duplicate looks of horror. Even Coran looked taken aback and a little ill. Milly grimaced and looked away, while Suzaku scowled. He had heard stories about the Emperor, but witnessing this firsthand… it paled to anything else he was aware of. Kallen and Allura, on the other hand, weren't horrified. They were both livid. Kallen gnashed her teeth, and Allura was clenching her fists so hard they almost turned white.

"That weakling?" Lelouch gasped.

"That is what it means to be royalty." Allura honestly never thought she'd meet someone she'd hold in as much contempt as she did Zarkon, but it seems she had. Lelouch's father was certainly one of the most despicable beings she'd ever laid eyes on as she stared at his face in disgust.

The screen shifted downward for a moment, before rising again, "Then I don't want to be your heir. I give up my claim to the throne!"
There were shouts and noises of bewilderment and shock that followed. The vassals that were there to watch were all astounded at the proclamation.

"I'm sick of the fighting and scheming over who will succeed you, Father. I've had enough!"

"You are dead." They heard the young Lelouch gasp.

"You have always been dead to me, dead from the moment you were born. Who gave you the fine clothes you wear, a comfortable home, the food you eat, and your very life? All of those I have given to you. In short, you are nothing to me because you have never existed. Yet you dare to speak such foolishness to me?!" the Emperor rose threateningly from his throne, and the young Lelouch stumbled back as the screen shook with his cry.

"Lelouch! You are dead. Therefore, you are not entitled to any rights. I am sending you and Nunnally to Japan. As Prince and Princess, you will serve well as bargaining tools."

The screen shorted out, and the Black Paladin pulled the device from his head, his hands shaking slightly.

"The image you saw when I messed up the mind-meld was of the assassination. Not a day goes by that it doesn't haunt me… After that, we went to Japan and were taken in by Suzaku and his family. The Pacific War started not long after that. We were staying at the Kururugi Shrine during that time, and it was one of the first places to get bombed by Britannian forces. Nunnally and I wouldn't have survived had Suzaku not helped us escape. During this time, Britannia had developed a new weapon. They're Knightmare Frames. War machines that work in a very similar fashion to the Lions though not nearly as advanced to be used within the military ranks. The country fell less than a month later, and not once did anyone come even to try and rescue us. In other words, it didn't matter to them if their prince and princess were still there. They attacked anyway, knowing that there was a huge possibility that we would die, and officially that's exactly what happened. Lelouch vi Britannia and Nunnally vi Britannia's deaths were marked among the casualties of that war. It's only thanks to Milly and her family that Nunnally and I have a place to stay at all."

"...That's horrifying!" Coran said.

"All this time…" Rivalz said, clenching his fists and scowling in disgust.
"Lelouch I..." Shirley started before stopping as tears trailed her face.

Rai also was scowling. Though he still didn't remember much, everyone knew about the war. And to hear how it happened in another point of view was terrifying, and immediately regretted ever calling Lelouch a coward, or selfish.

"Lelouch, I knew that you were a prince, but... I didn't expect your father to be such a cruel individual."


"Apparently, the mice don't know when to keep certain pieces of information to themselves," C.C. said, eyeing the mice. Platt had the decency to look a little guilty, but the other three just shrugged aloofly.

"The Emperor... my father... he's a monster. Now, do you understand? This is why I have Geass, why I became Zero. Though I'll admit there is personal motivation behind this, it's not about revenge, not to me. The Britannian Empire is nothing more than a plague upon the Earth. I swore I would do what it takes to create a world where Nunnally, and all those less fortunate like her, can find happiness. But to do that... I have to... I will obliterate Britannia!"

"And you will!" Allura agreed, looking right at the prince, "Because you'll have Voltron with you!"

"Princess, not that I disagree in the slightest, but are you sure this is a good idea?" Coran inquired.

"Absolutely!" she proclaimed, "They may not be the Galra, but I can not just sit by and let other people suffer like this. Lelouch, you have my support in this endeavor."

"I thank you, Princess, but I only fly the Black Lion, and though she may be powerful, I doubt we can do it alone."

"You won't be!" Kallen said, stepping forward, "The Red Lion is right next to you! Can't leave a fellow Black Knight behind now, can I?"
"Wait, Kallen?" Rivalz exclaimed, "You're in the Black Knights too?"

"That's right! Even if I weren't half Japanese, I wouldn't be standing by and letting innocent people die!"

"You're half Japanese?" Suzaku asked, shocked.

"Yes. My real name is Kallen Kouzuki, and I'm half Japanese, half Britannian."

"Why did you choose to do this then?" Shirley asked, "I mean, it's pretty obvious by now that you're not the sickly Kallen Stadtfeld we know."

"Yeah! By the way, please keep that look. It suits you way better than before," Rivalz said with a grin.

She shot Rivalz a slightly annoyed look, "...Because Lelouch isn't the only person who's lost someone to Britannia." At everyone's concerned inquiring faces, Kallen grimaced, tears pricking her eyes, "Britannia killed my brother, Naoto. He never hurt anyone! When Japan was overtaken, my brother and some of his friends made a small group. They weren't terrorists, though. I guess the best way to describe them is like Robin Hood and his gang, you know? Anyway, they never let me go with them, said it was too dangerous." She growled a little before continuing, "Anyway, all they technically did was find and get food and medicine, whether from an overly rich house, hospital, or whatever. Then they would hand it out to people in the ghetto. Sure, they may have stolen the stuff, but that's all they did. They were never violent, though! Naoto even insisted they not carry guns! Anyway..." Kallen had to take a breath to gain control of her emotions, tears nearly spilling from her eyes. "Anyway, one time they went out on one of their raids. Nothing special, just another nobleman house that had more food than he knew what to do with, and as they were leaving, they got caught by some soldiers in Knightmare Frames. Naoto distracted them while the others got away... They publicly executed three days later."

Lelouch and the other Paladins looked in shock; even he didn't know about this. It was no wonder Kallen showed her distaste for Britannia so strongly.

"They killed my brother when all he was trying to do was help others! No, not because he was helping 'others,' but because he was helping 'Elevens'! What kind of logic is that?! Even they charged him for theft that shouldn't warrant the death penalty!" she screamed, tears falling. Coran stepped forward a placed a hand on Kallen's shoulder. The Red Paladin instantly wrapped her arms
around his neck and broke down in sobs, and they both were lowered to the floor. Allura also comforted her, running her hand up and down her back.

"I'm sorry that happened," Lelouch tried to sound comforting. He knew that Kallen's brother was dead, but he never knew anything about the circumstances. Her attitude towards Britannians explained a lot now.

Kallen sniffled, before wiping away the rest of her tears, "Either way, I'm with you too, Lelouch, Zero, or whatever you want to call yourself."

Lelouch smiled graciously, "I thank you… Q1," he finished with a smirk. Kallen snorted and shook her head as she slowly stood back up.

"I'm in too!" Shirley said, shocking Lelouch again. He honestly was expecting to get scorned and even kicked off the team for revealing all this to them, but everyone was suddenly proving him wrong. "Besides, I already told Shay we'd be saving everyone, that includes our own planet! The Orange Lion will stand with you too!"

"So is the Green Lion," Rai said, stepping forward, "Lelouch, I'm sorry I called you a coward before. You're anything but that!"

"Me too! If that's really what the Emperor is like, I don't want anything to do with that monster! I mean, what kind of a parent does that to their own kids?! What the hell?!" Rivalz ranted.

"Don't count me out," Milly smiled, "who else is supposed to keep an eye on you, Lulu?" Everyone laughed a little at that.

Suzaku just stood there, still in semi-shock. What amazed him most was how fast everyone in the room was suddenly against their own country. How could they not see the consequences that could occur from this?

"Suzaku," the Purple Paladin jumped, startled his thoughts, "I know we don't agree on many things, but I think we can agree on one. The Galra is the bigger threat, and if they reach Earth, the entire planet is in jeopardy, including Britannia. I believe it's in both of our best interests to work together in this."
Suzaku grimaced, no matter how much he wanted to deny it, Lelouch did have a point there. But still…

"Lelouch, you realize if Earth wants a chance to stand against the Galra, then we'll need Britannia with us. Despite what you might think, Britannia has the strongest military power at the moment, and we'll need that to defend the planet! W-Why don't we just tell him?" Suzaku suggested.

"Tell him?" Lelouch asked as if Suzaku just spoke to him in an ancient Roman dialect.

"Yeah! If-if the leader of a country knows there's a threat coming, and is provided with legitimate proof, wh-why wouldn't he help?!"

Lelouch let out a sigh; he then approached the Purple Paladin before he almost nose to nose with him. Suzaku leaned back, looking very uncomfortable.

"Let me make something very clear, Suzaku," Lelouch almost whispered in his ear, "you do not know that man the way I do. And I can guarantee that when I say he won't help. He. Won't. Help."

Suzaku had to take a couple of steps back. He had never heard Lelouch use that tone of voice before. It terrified him.

"However, you are correct about one thing," he said a little louder, walking back to the center of the room. "Britannia's military might trumps any on Earth at this very moment. Therefore, if the Galra were to attack at this very moment, this the outcome I see. Due to their superior firepower, Britannia would likely try to shoot them out of the sky immediately. They wouldn't even take the time to ask who they are or what they want. This course of action would only provoke the Galra further. They would retaliate with their own weapons. Ones that Britannia would never even dream of inventing. They would wipe out their troops and the rest of the Empire overnight. When that happens, other countries will move in to claim the power void that has appeared. I have no doubt this will ultimately lead to conflict between these other countries. The Galra will immediately take advantage of the wars and chaos that follow. The rest of Earth's forces will be destroyed within days. Any other resistance would be hunted down and annihilated along with the rest of the planet."

"Are you sure that's what will happen?" Rivalz asked in a shaky tone.
"Well, in theory, considering it hasn't yet, but that's the most likely outcome. This also means that to defeat the Galra, we will need Britannia's forces on our side."

"Wha-but you just said-

"Kallen, I know what you're thinking, but hear me out, please," Lelouch said calmly. "I know I spoke of my desire to obliterate Britannia, but you misunderstand what I mean by that. What I want to obliterate isn't Britannia itself, but their ideology. Their belief in Social Darwinism. I will honestly say that I believe that most people within the Britannian military are good people. They're simply following orders given by racist officers and are just too scared to disobey."

"...Lelouch, say you're wrong," Suzaku suddenly said. "Say we do manage to convince your dad-sorry," he quickly apologized at Lelouch's glare. "The Emperor, say we do convince him, and he agrees to help. That should merit something, right?"

Lelouch shook his head, "This is what I see happening if by the tiniest percent that happens. If the Emperor, along with every other world leader not under his thumb yet, agrees to work together, I do see us defeating the Galra. But once that threat is eliminated, the very second it's confirmed that we beat them, Britannia will just go right back to what it does best. And that is oppressing other countries for its own personal gain. I wouldn't be surprised if they try to use what remains of the Galra tech to advance their own, making them even more difficult to defeat in the future. You know that Lloyd Asplund certainly wouldn't pass up the opportunity to do so, Suzaku."

"Sure, I know some people might be interested in it, but the Emperor-

"THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT CHARLES ZI BRITANNIA WOULD DO!"

Suzaku jumped back. For a brief moment, Allura, still standing to the side watching this showdown, saw something different. It wasn't Suzaku and Lelouch arguing anymore. It was Alfor, her father... and somebody else.

"If we want to save Earth, if we want to stop the Galra from taking it, if we want our world to have a peaceful future, it has to be united. Not under Britannia rule, but where all nations, all people stand as equals regardless of their race, status, gender, or ideology. But to do that, we can't have Britannia's beliefs on Social Darwinism be active anywhere, and that means removing Charles zi Britannia from his throne. Otherwise, Earth will just go right back to fighting itself, and nothing will have changed. I can think of maybe two or three people from the Royal Family who might listen to us and cooperate willingly." Euphemia, Odysseus, Marrybell, even Cornelia and Schneizel flashed through Lelouch's head. However, he didn't utter their names, "But not Charles."
"Suzaku, we are looking at a man that exiled his own kids just because Lelouch wanted to know why his mom died," Rai pointed out.

Suzaku still looked unsure, and Lelouch inwardly sighed. Suzaku usually meant well, but he was also one of the most stubborn people that Lelouch had ever met.

"I'm not going to force you Suzaku, that's one of the few things I'll never do. But right now, I need you. Nunnally needs you. The Earth needs you. Voltron needs you. So please, fight with us now," Lelouch held out his hand to his comrade in arms.

Suzaku was silent for a few moments. He admitted Lelouch's responses were almost all logical, even his explanation on Britannia's 'obliteration.' Not to mention that Lelouch came out and told them that he and Zero were the same being. That probably took a lot of courage on his friend's part, considering how hard it came to him to trust others, even when they were still kids. And both he and Lelouch at least agreed that Britannia needed to stop what they were doing for peace to come about. So, because of that…

Suzaku clutched Lelouch's hand back, "I'll help you, Lelouch. But there are lines I will not cross, you can guarantee that."

Lelouch grinned, "Of course, I think we can all agree to that."

"Alright! Team group hug!" Milly proclaimed as everyone crowded around the two Paladins in a tight embrace. Even C.C. had been dragged into it.

Lelouch was so relieved that it had turned out this way. His first fear had been that once they knew who he was, both Zero and a Britannian Prince, that they would turn away and abandon him too. That, fortunately, wasn't the case. Now that everything was off his chest, he felt lighter and happier.

"Thanks, everyone, for everything…"

"No problem./Anytime!/Of course, you idiot!" came the responses.
"Right," Lelouch said after everyone backed away, "then I think it's time we launch this Castleship. Princess, we ready?"

"Absolutely!" Allura nodded.

"Then let's go, we have a Balmera to save."

"Yes, yes, let's go!" Shirley eagerly responded, leading the way to the bridge.

After changing into their Paladin uniforms, everyone arrived at the bridge, Allura stood underneath the crystal once again. As it glowed, seven large colored seats that circled the edge of the room rose from the floor. Each matched the color of their respective Paladin. Lelouch at the front, Kallen, and Rai behind him to the right and left, followed by Suzaku and Milly, and Rivalz and Shirley taking up the back. Each seat was conveniently located next to each of the elevators that could take them down to their Lions. As everyone took their seats, transparent screens appeared in front of them, each showing a different function of the Castle.

Coran and C.C. were close to the front of the bridge as well, just behind Lelouch's chair. The green-haired witch was adorning a new outfit of her own as well. It looked identical to Allura's but was gold where pink should be, and the blue was much darker.

Two pillars rose to Allura's side, where she placed her hands gently on top of them. "Activate interlock," Allura said.

"Dynotherms connected," Coran confirmed from below.

From outside, the Castleship's windows glowed a brilliant blue as the ship prepared for launch after 10,000 years of inactivity.

"Mega-thrusters are go," Allura said.

"We are ready to depart Planet Arus," Coran said.

"Whenever you're ready," C.C. added.
The dark windows that initially surrounded the bridge opened up to reveal the clear Arusian sky. "Firing main engines for launch," the Castle soon began to shake.

The six spires surrounding the center moved outward as the engines roared to life. At last, the Castle of Lions detached itself from its rocky outpost and rose into the sky. From the Arusian village, the king and his subjects watched as the Lion Goddess and her warriors vanished into the atmosphere.

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**Omake:**

Shirley Fennette never had used a bow in her entire life. If her friends from Ashford Academy and the Swimming Club asked why she was using a bow right now, it would be because of a hobby. Not because she was trying to fight an alien tyrant that reminded her of the Emperor of Britannia. And now she was practicing again at the training deck alone from prying eyes.

At first, she was skeptical using a bow as her primary weapon, but in time it felt natural, like swimming, as she quickly hit the targets.

'I guess Allura was right, the bayard morphs to fit the Paladin,' she thought as she shot another arrow. It hit the target straight in the center.

It definitely helped when Suzaku gave her pointers on Japanese archery known as Kyūdō that Suzaku learned from his former teacher Todoh. It was taught as a form of meditation in action.

"To shoot correctly will result inevitably in hitting the desired target. Seisha hitchū. That means 'true shooting, certain hitting.'"

Shirley didn't know what it meant, but in time she understood.

If her swimming club members saw her and how good she was at using the bow, they wouldn't believe it.
She decided to practice when no one was looking at the training deck to concentrate. She hit another target in the center from about 50 yards away.

"I'm getting really good at this. I might reconsider joining the Archery Club when this is over," she said as she continued onto another set of targets.

Unbeknownst to her, Rivalz was walking by and saw her practicing, and just so happened to catch her as she shot a target just a little bigger than a quarter.

She continued her practice. The targets started hitting targets that bounced like tennis balls and quickly shot them down easily. She then shot the targets while running, sliding, and jumping while avoiding obstacles.

Finally, she shot a holographic apple (or the Altean equivalent) that was balanced on top of another target. It shot right through and fizzed out.

As she took a breath, preparing to hit the showers when a clapping sound caught her attention. She turned and the other Paladins, along with Allura, Coran, and C.C. applauding her.

She blushed. She didn't realize people were watching her.

How many of those trick shots did they see?

Chapter End Notes

So as you can see this is a bit of an interlude chapter. Lelouch's secrets are finally out, and everyone still accepts him for who he is and is willing to help (even Suzaku! Who knew?)

The scene I used with Lelouch throwing his energy bolts around is similar to when Captain Marvel demonstrates it for Nick Fury in the movie.

The next chapter will be the rest of Taking Flight. And if you want a visual of what C.C.'s outfit looks like, it's in the artwork displayed in the last chapter.

Thanks so much for reading! Please leave a comment or two, I love hearing your feedback!
"Sire, if capturing Voltron is the Empire's number-one priority, then I suggest we begin moving the main fleet toward its last known location posthaste." The Galran commander said as he knelt boldly before his leader. It was Prorok, a proud Galra that was currently stationed at the Galra's main fleet. Ambitious and loyal to the bone, he did everything in the name of Zarkon for his best interests, even if it meant taking matters into his own hands.

To Prorok's disgust, though, the witch turned to the Emperor and presented her own course of action. "Lord, after many years, the Komar Experiment is finally ready. Soon, we could have more quintessence at our fingertips than ever imagined. We must test it before moving the fleet."

Prorok rose in defiance, "We don't have time for any more of your magic. We must move our ships now." The Emperor must see that this was the perfect opportunity to take Voltron.

"Voltron is the most powerful weapon ever created," Haggar argued, "His puny ships will never be up to the task. We must be well prepared for our next encounter."

Zarkon slammed his hands against the arms of his throne, and Prorok took a step back in surprise before immediately kneeling again.

"I know better than anyone the power of Voltron. Haggar has my trust. We will perform her test," he decided.

Seeing that there was no more point in arguing, Prorok rose to his feet and stormed out of the room. He met up with one of the Galra officers he was over, Thace, a quiet but loyal Galra, in the hall away from the throne room.

"The witch has his ear. Keep sending our offer out to any scum between Planet Arus and Balmera X-95-Vox. I'll capture Voltron on my own."

o~o
"Okay. So, when we get there, what do you think? Do we just roll up and like, start blasting? Or do we land and have some kind of... public address system, like, 'Attention, Galras. This is Voltron. Turn yourselves in!' No, nevermind. Blasting, right?" Shirley asked as she paced anxiously with the rest of the Paladins sitting on the steps below her. She had no idea how a rescue mission was supposed to go. Not to mention this would be Voltron's first official mission, several things could go wrong. She was almost having an anxiety attack when Kallen gently interrupted her.

"Shirley, calm down. And yes, blasting."

"Shirley, it's okay for you to be nervous," Rai reassured her, "it's our first big mission, a rescue mission even. Everything's going to be alright."

"Nervous? I think she's more excited," Rivalz grinned.

"Excited to see her new BFF!" Milly sang as she tipped her head to wink at the Orange Paladin.

Shirley looked like she wanted to protest when unusual alarms started going off in the ship. They didn't sound like the emergency ones, though.

"What's happening? Are we under attack?" Lelouch asked urgently.

"No, it seems to be a distress beacon," Coran informed them as a small red triangle appeared on his and Allura's screens.

"It's coming from a nearby moon," Allura confirmed, "Apparently, a ship has lost power."

"I wonder who it is?" Suzaku wondered.

"Okay, well, whoever it is will have to wait," Shirley insisted, "The Balmerans have first priority. We can check back on them when we're done."

"The Paladin Code states that we must help all those in need," Allura chastised.
"Wow! This is so cool," Rivalz exclaimed, "It's like we're space cops on space patrol. Coran, do we have a siren we can turn on?"

"Uh, no, we don't," Coran admitted.

"Well, we could record you making a siren noise and broadcast that to them if you'd like," C.C. suggested with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"Perfect!" The Blue Paladin started to make some pretty lousy siren noises before Lelouch pinched Rivalz lips shut.

"Nope, not doing that!"

o~o

It didn't take long for the Castleship to approach the moon in question. Seated around a small bond-fire were two aliens, a little robot, supplies, and a decent-sized ship that looked like it had been worn out through many battles.

"Attention, damaged craft, this is Princess Allura. We are coming to assist you." The six towers folded in on themselves, and the castle turned upright with more fluidity than any Knightmare or aircraft on Earth could ever achieve. It slowly and gracefully lowered to the ground next to the crew.

One of the aliens, a humanoid alien, with four fingers instead of five. He was tall with muscular arms, mauve skin, and purple spots. He had lank white hair and some pre-pubescent facial scruff. He also had downturned eyes and a cartoonishly straight nose.

"Whoa. Nice ship."

o~o

"Stay aboard and try to get as many of our systems clear of that Galra crystal energy as you can. We'll see who hailed us," Allura informed Coran and C.C. as she and the Paladins all prepared to
meet the lost aliens.

"Yes, Princess," Coran nodded while C.C. shrugged. She might as well learn how a few of the things worked on the castle. Two pairs of hands were better than one after all.

o~o

They didn't take any of the Lions down to greet the strangers. Instead, the team descended to the ground in a small elevator shuttle. The doors opened to reveal the Princess and the entirety of Team Voltron as a whole. As they exited and approached the stranded party, the purple skin leader grinned, holding a wrench-like device in his hands.

"You don't know how glad we are to see some friendly faces. Most folks don't want to get tangled up with anyone who's on the run from the Galra."

"So, you're fighting the Galra as well?" Milly asked. However, almost immediately upon exiting the pod, her student council president senses perked up. Something felt wrong to the Yellow Paladin. She couldn't put her finger on it, but something was off.

"Well, I don't think Zarkon is exactly quaking in his boots at the three of us," he gestured to the robot and his female comrade, "but we do what we can. I'm Rolo. This is Nyma, and our cyber-unit, Beezer."

"Hi," Nyma smiled. She was a tall alien with pointy ears, cream and yellow skin, and blonde hair with two brown stripes at her forehead. Her eyes were light purple with darker purple pupils and sclera. Her lower arms were slightly larger than her upper arms, and she had three fingers on each hand.

Rai's eyes nearly bugged out of his head at the sight of the robot. That was probably one of the coolest pieces of machinery he'd ever seen! "Cool robot!"

Rivalz was wholly enraptured with Nyma as he immediately shook her hand and introduced himself, "Hi! Name's Rivalz!"

"Was your ship damaged in a fight?" Suzaku asked Rolo.
"Yeah, we've really been through it with the Galra. Parts are hard to come by," the purple alien explained as he looked back at the ship, "Luckily, we were able to limp to this moon about a week ago. If you didn't pick up our distress signal, I didn—"

"We're happy to help," Allura interrupted him, "I am Princess Allura of Altea, and from now on, you won't be alone fighting the Galra. You'll have the Paladins of Voltron by your side."

Rolo rubbed his chin and looked back and forth between the two groups. Lelouch, Suzaku, Milly, and Kallen were standing next to Allura at the ready. A hint of light even shined off Lelouch's helmet. On the other hand, behind Rolo, Rai was still examining Beezer with Shirley crouched next to the robot with a small smile. Meanwhile, Rivalz was again flirting with Nyma, who giggled at a remark the Blue Paladin made.

"...Okay," Rolo replied dryly, not really sounding impressed.

"I don't believe they've heard of us," Lelouch said.

"Well, it has been 10,000 years," Kallen muttered the remark.

"Voltron? Seven robot Lions that combine into this big robot... person?" Shirley tried to explain.

"Sounds impressive," Rolo said, "I'd love to see it. Or—Or him. Them?"

"Alright, enough chit-chat!" Milly proclaimed, clapping her hands twice, "Let's get to work on your ship. We all have places to go and people to see."

"You know how to fix spaceships, Milly?" Suzaku asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, my family does own the Ganymede, and therefore I know it's maintenance and function. This should at least be a little similar, at least the basics anyway." Milly didn't mention that she'd also binged, with the help of a translator, a couple of manuals she'd found on the ship while they were waiting for Rivalz to wake up from cryo-sleep.
"I can help too," Kallen said, "I've had to repair Knightmares from scratch before. Two sets of eyes are better than one too." Milly nodded in agreement.

"Yeah, sure," Rolo agreed as he leads the two of them to the ship.

"Pretty much our whole flaxum assembly is shot," he explained as he opened one of the hatches, "I don't know what kind of extra parts you carry in this rig of yours. I've never seen anything quite like it."

"I'm sure we can get you back up and running," Allura smiled. In the background, Rivalz was attempting to flex his muscles for Nyma, who giggled at his efforts. Milly was watching the pair very suspiciously.

"Give Kallen and Milly a list of what you need. Coran can show you where to find it." Allura told Rolo then gestured to the two women.

"Okay," Kallen shrugged.

"We'll go with you," Rolo said, "Don't want you ladies carrying all that yourselves. Come on, guys."

Rolo started walking towards the Castle when Milly planted herself right in front of him with her hands on her hips.

"Uh, yeah, I don't think so. You can just wait out here."

"Milly, don't be rude!" Allura said sternly.

"Yeah, mind your manners," Rivalz said, "you're giving a bad impression!" He grinned apologetically at Nyma.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Oh, but does anyone remember the last time we let our defenses down?" Milly asked, with a frown and narrowed eyes, "Someone kind of set off a bomb. Remember, Rivalz? You were almost killed."
"Oh… yeah," Rivalz wilted a little at the memory.

"Milly's right," Lelouch nodded, "apologies, but we must exercise caution. This is our first meeting, after all."

"Hey, I don't take it personal," Rolo said with a smile. Beezer rolled forward and printed off a list of materials, which Rolo handed to Milly and Kallen, "That's how it is out here. You've got to look out for your own. You're doing a good job."

"Yeah, thanks," Milly frowned as she looked between the list and the alien.

o~o

"My planet was destroyed by the Galra, and I was taken captive," Rolo explained as he, Lelouch, Suzaku, Shirley, and Allura, as they all sat around the fire. "I managed to escape, but not before I lost something," he pulled up his pant leg to reveal a metal prosthetic leg.

'I'm so sorry.' Shirley murmured. She glanced back behind Rolo to see that Rai was still playing with and examining Beezer. She wondered, even though most of his memories were gone, whether the Green Paladin felt the same way.

"Well," Kallen called out as she and Milly lugged a large storage box out, "I hope there are some parts in here that will fit."

Rolo glanced back but made no move to join them.

Milly scowled, "...You know, to get your ship moving?"

Rolo smiled and waved back, "Great! Thanks!"

"So, what can you tell us about Zarkon's forces?" Allura asked, drawing Rolo's attention again, "Where are they concentrated?"
"Well, his Command Ship sits right in the center of the Empire. He mostly calls the shots from there and has his minions do the work, depending on who's closest. This is the territory of a real nasty bugger named Sendak."

"Oh, trust us, we've met," Suzaku frowned.

"How far are we from the center?" Lelouch asked, leaning forward.

"We're way out on the fringes," Rolo said. Before he could say anything else, Milly roughly cleared her throat and walked to the group, with her arms crossed.

"Hey, sorry to interrupt, but I think you guys are kind of keeping Rolo from working. Didn't you remember we're supposed to be in a hurry? Shirley kind of has a promise she needs to keep."

"Yeah," the Orange Paladin nodded, standing up, "someone named Shay saved my life, and I told her I'd come back to help her and her people. You understand, don't you?"

"Sure. Sorry," Rolo said, as he passed Milly by. The Yellow Paladin pursed her lips and glared after him. Yup, these people were up to something all right.

As Rolo started looking through the parts, Lelouch walked up to Milly, "You've noticed too, huh?" he said lowly.

"Yeah. Sorry for the attitude Lulu, but I don't trust these people at all," Milly whispered back.

"Neither do I, but we can still use this opportunity to gain valuable intelligence on the enemy. Just keep your guard up."

"Got it," she nodded before glancing at Rolo again. She turned back to the prince. "Honestly Lulu, I think we should just leave the parts here and let him take care of-"

"Hey ma'am," Rolo called over to Milly, "Sorry, but do you think you could hunt down a length of
thermal pipe, about yay long?" he held out his hands to show the measurement.

"I can do it," Kallen said as she ran back to the castle for the part, "be right back!"

As Kallen went to get the part, Lelouch walked up to Rolo again, "So are there more freedom fighters? Any kind of organized resistance to the Galra?"

"Only folks who haven't been colonized yet, or the lucky few, like us, who managed to escape somehow," the alien said.

"Well, we're going to change all that, very soon," Suzaku informed him as he walked up to them with Allura, Shirley, and Milly.

"That's good to hear," Rolo smiled, "but I've got to warn you, it's pretty bad out there. You don't know what you're up against."

o~o

"I mean, there are only seven of us in the entire universe, so…" Rivalz said as he kept talking the Nyma, "I guess you could say it's kind of a big deal."

"I don't understand," Nyma confessed, "The Lions are ships? Are they, like, flying statues that you ride on?"

"Oh, no, no, no. They're magic, but also super scientific and advanced," Rivalz explained, "And they fly crazy fast and have all these incredible weapons. Really, the entire castle is just insane! I wish you could see it."

"Yes, it's too bad we're not allowed inside. I would love a tour from one of the knights," Nyma said with a small smile, "But I guess the yellow one is in charge, huh? You have to obey her orders?"

"Who, Milly? Pfft, maybe at school I do, but not out here!" he grabbed Nyma's arm and enthusiastically led her inside the castle.
The two arrived at the command deck with no problem. "This place is incredible!" Nyma gasped.

"Yeah, I guess," Rivalz shrugged casually, "You get used to it."

"But it's so gigantic. It must take you forever to get to your Lion," Nyma said.

Rivalz just smirked, "Oh, you'd be surprised."

Soon the two of them were laughing gleefully as they slid down the zip line. Rivalz blushed the entire time as Nyma gripped his chest tightly. It didn't take long for the two to be in the Blue Lion's cockpit. Nyma looked around as the interior lit to life.

"Pretty slick, right?" Rivalz grinned.

"Unbelievable!" Nyma exclaimed, before turning to the Paladin, "Take me on a ride around the moon?"

Though Rivalz was flattered with the offer, he knew that Lelouch probably wouldn't approve of it, "Uh—We should probably get back to the others."

"Yeah, you're right," Nyma sighed, "Maybe Rai will give me a ride."

Upon hearing this, Rivalz completely changed his mind, "No! Whoa, whoa, hold on a second!" Rivalz stretched out and pressed a few buttons, activating the engines, "I mean what's the point of having the Lion if you can't enjoy it, right? Giddy-up, girl!" he exclaimed as the Lion zoomed out of its bay and rocketed into the sky.

Back down below, Kallen, Milly, and Rolo looked up just in time to see the Lion vanish.

"Ugh! Rivalz!" Kallen exclaimed in frustration.
"Ah, let them have their fun," Rolo said with a small smile, "Thanks to you two, this thing is just about ready, so we're going to be on our way soon. Too many light-years on that guy, I guess."

As Rolo returned to examining the ship, Milly couldn't help but narrow her eyes suspiciously at the part they just replaced. For some reason, it didn't look like it needed to be replaced entirely. Several other parts of the ship looked the same too, but Rolo had insistent on replacing them.

"Yeah... sure."

o~o

The Galra central command was hovering above a giant planet that looked to be flooded with beautiful trees and plants. But the Galra weren't here for that. No, what they sought was much more sinister.

From aboard the ship, the witch, Haggar, and her druids were floating on large platforms above. Haggar was positioned in the middle, with the other four druids surrounding her. Their platforms each had a Galran crystal underneath that began glowing a dark purple. Below them was a device merged in the center, right underneath Haggar.

"Begin the ritual," Haggar commanded, as a magic circle began to glow underneath her feet. Identical circles appeared under the others as well, "Druids of the Four Directions, join us!"

Pillars of purple energy hit Haggar's crystal, and the witch slowly guided it down past her in a vile form of dark magic. Upon being absorbed in her crystal, the energy hit the point where the merged device met, coloring it a wicked shade of black. The dark energy traveled up the pillars of the device until it hit the sides of the wall that supported it. They lit up in bright purple colors, creeping down towards the bottom where it sharpened to a point. Finally, the very bottom of Galra HQ erupted with a sphere of dark, black energy, almost the size of the base itself.

Down below on the planet, many animals minded their own business, nibbling at the plants and flowers for food. Suddenly, the flowers began to wither and die, streams of blue energy being sucked from them into the sky. The animals looked up in confusion but saw no cause for this phenomenon.

It didn't take long for the Komar to suck the planet completely dry of all of its bounteous quintessence, storing it within a large storage unit. The planet below them, once bright and vibrant,
darkened until there was no sign of life left.

It was dead.

Haggar's platform rose above the others to meet the Emperor that had been watching from the deck above. The witch smiled triumphantly.

"The Komar Experiment was a success. We have gained an entire planet's quintessence, a feat that would have normally taken us years."

"Most impressive," Zarkon commented as he turned to face the storage unit holding the energy. "This will revolutionize the way we advance throughout the galaxy. Mining and colonizing planets is a thing of the past. With this much power available at our whim, we can now spend all of our time hunting down and capturing Voltron."

O~O

"Look! A kinetic spring!" Nyma pointed as the Blue Lion descended back to the water, "Let's land over there. The minerals reflect off the water, making a rainbow," the Blue Lion's back paws trailed within it, kicking up a mist that sparkled into a rainbow above.

"Wow. Is there anything you don't know?" Rivalz asked as he gazed at the beautiful sight.

However, while Rivalz wasn't looking, Nyma looking down at a band that she had around her wrist and clicked the button on it. It began to flash red rapidly.

O~O

Back with the rest of the Paladins, Rolo's band also began to glow red. The alien smirked rolled out from underneath the engine.

"I think this thing is just about ready for a test flight," he said as he closed the hatch, "Beezer, come co-pilot for me. Be back in a tick." the two of them rapidly disappeared inside, leaving most of the Paladins confused.
The ship's thrusters activated and easily lifted off the ground. It soared off towards its destination. The Blue Lion.

o~o

"So, ah, you want to see how fast I can climb this tree?" Rivalz asked with a smirk, leaning against the said tree.

Nyma giggled again, "Aw, you are cute. Let me show you something. Give me your hand."

Blushing, Rivalz held his hand out to the alien, only to suddenly be jerked forward and have something clasped over his wrists. He grunted as he was then slammed against the tree, as the cuffs around his hands emitted an energy beam that wrapped around the tree, effectively trapping the Blue Paladins.

As Nyma took a step back with a smile, Rivalz tried to move his hands, but they wouldn't budge a bit.

"Um… this is… kind of…" Rivalz said, an uneasy feeling suddenly rising in his gut. The rest of what he was going to say was interrupted as Nyma, and Rolo's ship appeared from above. Rivalz watched in horror as it sucked the Blue Lion inside. Rivalz could already hear her roaring and lecturing him for falling for such an obvious ploy as she disappeared inside.

"Nyma, what're doing?!!" he asked desperately.

"Sorry, Rivalz. Maybe we'll meet again," she said as she was hoisted into the ship with a wire that extended down.

Rivalz only watched in terror as the ship turned and fired off into the sky and out of sight.

The Blue Paladin frantically looked around for something to either call for help or to get him out of his bonds, but all he found was his helmet that was sitting a couple of feet away.

"Oh, quiznack..."
Back with the rest of the group, they were still waiting for Rolo to return from his 'test flight,' perched on the supply and part crates they'd brought down. The longer it was, though, the more Lelouch got suspicious of something else happening.

"How many ticks have they been gone?" Rai asked.

"I don't know. I hope they didn't break down again," Allura said.

"Something's not right," Milly declared, her arms tightly folded.

Rivalz managed to slide his body almost entirely to the ground, and he strained with his foot to kick his helmet over to him. He wouldn't be able to put it on, but he knew that the others would still be able to hear him. He had to warn them, and the sooner they knew, the sooner they could go after the thieves.

It took him a couple of tries, but he finally managed to hook his toes under the glass visor and swing it over to his head.

Panting he called out into it the best he could, praying they could hear him, "Guys! Hello? Little help?"

Upon hearing the distressed call, all the Paladins put their helmets back on to listen to him properly.

"Rivalz? Rivalz! Are you all right? What's going on?" Lelouch asked urgently.
“Well, I'm kind of chained to a... a tree.” they heard him say.

"I knew it!" Milly yelled, an angry scowl on her face.

"And I think Nyma and Rolo just stole the Blue Lion."

"I knew it!" Milly shrieked, throwing her arms down.

"Where are they?" Lelouch demanded, gritting his teeth in anger and frustration. He knew they shouldn't have trusted them! Now they had another problem on their platters.

"Uh... space?" Rivalz said helpfully.

"Oh! I never trusted those guys, right from the beginning!" Milly ranted. And she continued to do so all the way through the castle and to her Lion's bay.

"I mean, y'know, at first, it was just like a feeling in my gut, you know? But when Kallen and I were replacing that thermal pipe, the pipe was cracked, but none of the hardware around it was damaged."

"Okay! We get it!" Shirley shouted through the comms.

"I mean, if the thermal pipe is cracked, then, obviously, hello, the entire assembly should be totally roasted," Milly was on a roll in rants and showed no sign of stopping. At the same time, the other Paladins just meekly listened to her explanation. At the same time, though, they were all mildly impressed that she knew so much about machinery interiors.

"Okay, we get it!" Suzaku exclaimed through the comms.

"We should've had to replace the entire undercarriage of that reactor. So, right then, I was, like, positive. Foul play."

"Okay, we get it!" everyone, even Lelouch, shouted at her.
The six remaining Lions soon launched from the castle and took off in hot pursuit of their stolen sister.

"Commander Prorok, my name is Rolo," he said to the Galran on the screen, "I understand you're offering a reward to anyone helping capture the Voltron Lions."

"That's correct," the commander said, "do you know where they are?"

"I know where the blue one is. It's in my ship."

"Excellent," Prorok intoned, "Bring it to me, and you'll have your reward immediately."

"Just a tick. You see, my friends and I have a bit of a checkered past," the bounty hunter added. "Some stolen merchandise from the Galra Empire may have fallen into our possession without us knowing about it."

"Well, I'm sure that a full pardon can be arranged for the brave souls who bring Emperor Zarkon a Voltron Lion. Is that all?" he asked, somewhat impatiently.

"We'll take the reward too," Nyma confirmed.

"Of course," the commander nodded.

"All right, we're on our way," Rolo confirmed as the commander's face disappeared as the screen closed up.

Rolo stretched and cracked his knuckles as he leaned back in his chair, "I almost feel sorry for those Voltron folks. Seemed like a nice bunch."
"If you're feeling guilty, you can turn yourself in," Nyma frowned. "Stealing from Zarkon carries a life sentence."

"They don't seem… that nice," Rolo amends.

o~o

Onboard the command ship, Prorok turned to Thace again, having just finished his conversation with Rolo, "Send the nearest fighter squadron to the area of the transmission. I'm not trusting some bounty hunter with our prize."

o~o

Alarms started blaring in Rolo's ship as it continued to it's meet up point. Pulling up the feed, Rolo was shocked to see the other six Lions in hot pursuit of them. The Blue Paladin must've warned them somehow. It suddenly wasn't looking suitable for any of them.

"No way!" he gasped. He pulled up the stirring system and pressed a few more buttons. They had to shake them and fast!

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?" Nyma asked, "There's no way we can outrun those Lions."

"Not in the open. Good thing the Zorlar Asteroid Belt is right up here. I know that like the back of my hand," Rolo smirked as he zoomed towards the asteroid belt. They could quickly lose them in here… right?

o~o

The Lions screeched to a halt at the entrance of the belt. They could barely make out Rolo's ship as it moved farther away from them.

"We'll never get through his asteroid belt!" Rai exclaimed, flabbergasted.
"Maybe I can just bust through!" Shirley suggested.

"No, Shirley! Wait!" Suzaku called out in warning, but it fell on deaf ears. She and the Orange Lion raced forward, head lowered to charge through.

She *did* hit the asteroid. However, all it did was lazily bounce off another one behind it, causing it to bounce off another, and another, and another.

"Nope. That was wrong. That was a bad idea," she quickly deduced.

"Kallen, you're the only one who could possibly fly through this," Lelouch said, "We need you. Get in there and flush him out."

"Understood. See you on the other side!" the Red Paladin exclaimed.

As the other five Lions pulled out to go around, Kallen and the Red Lion zipped into the field, hunting for its prize. She smoothly spun around asteroids and debris as if she did it daily. They hopped from rock to rock fluently like a jungle cat, growing ever closer to the cargo ship.

The other Paladins could only watch in awe at Kallen's skill.

"I still can't believe that that's Kallen out there!" Shirley said.

"I know! It's like she's been flying all her life!" Rai agreed.

Lelouch from inside the Black Lion smirked, "Well, in the Black Knights, she's our number one ace pilot. In combat, she can easily use a Glasgow to take down several Sutherlands at once. She's a formidable foe and valuable member."

"Maybe a little *too* valuable?" Milly giggled with raised eyebrows.
Lelouch scowled and blushed, 'Damn you, she-devil!'

"You guys realize I can hear you, right?" Kallen asked through the comms, though she was blushing for an entirely different reason as she heard the praise that Zero gave her as she and the Red Lion ran along a rather long, narrow asteroid. A shadow fell overhead of them, and Kallen gritted her teeth as she drove her lion to move faster to avoid the other asteroid about to collide with them. "Come on, Aka! We've got this!" With one final thrust of her controls, Aka shot out in between the rocks just as they crashed.

She smirked as she saw that she was now practically right on top of Rolo and his crew. They seriously didn't think they'd get away, did they?

o~o

"No way!" Rolo exclaimed as the camera showed the Red Lion, "Get on the blasters! Take her down!"

"Copy," Nyma said as she pulled up the controls with Beezer.

o~o

From on top of the ship, two blaster cannons elevated above. They started rapidly shooting in Kallen and Aka's direction.

Kallen saw them and gritted her teeth as she pulled up behind another asteroid. In retaliation, she had Aka shoot out some energy blasts of her own, each of them barely missing the cruiser.

From inside his ship, Rolo, despite the situation, couldn't help but smirk, "This chick can flat-out fly!"

Despite the multiple blasts, though, Kallen quickly began to close in on them.

"She's gaining on you!" Nyma shouted.
Rolo instinctively yanked the controls to the left. As the ship swerved out of the way, Kallen barely had time to stop herself as she narrowly avoided hitting another asteroid.

She gritted her teeth and pulled back on the lever, allowing Aka to activate her leg thrusters just in time. They leaped out from the rock, and with a smash of a button, Kallen activated Aka's jaw blade. With a swift swing of her head, the knife flew at the ship, burying itself in and destroying the two blaster cannons on Rolo's ship.

"Blasters are offline!" Nyma reported as the three crew members braced themselves with the turbulence.

"We gotta get out of here!" Rolo said as he fired the thrusters one last time, hoping for a last-ditch escape.

"Oh no, you don't!" Kallen yelled as Aka fired an on-point shot at one of the engines. It exploded, and the ship was soon spinning out of control. Red lights and alarms blazed as the crew inside held on for dear life. It began descending towards the planet just outside the asteroid belt. But before they could crash, Aka's claws gripped onto the ship. With a pull of the thrusters, the Lion and Paladin brought the crew to a stop in the middle of space.

Kallen grinned triumphantly as the five other Lions surrounded the ship.

"Yeah!" Kallen laughed, "Hey, Rivalz, I got your lion back!"

"Thank you, Kallen," Rivalz said through the helmet, "Now, can you come and unchain me?"

"What's that? I, uh... Y-You're cutting out. I can't—I can't hear you," Kallen teased, even going as far as to make some static noises.
"Oh, come on!" The Blue Paladin exclaimed, "I thought we all bonded!"

o~o

With Kallen and Suzaku dragging the crew and their ship back to the moon, and Milly making a trip to rescue Rivalz, the Paladins and Allura now faced the thieves.

"Since your ship really doesn't work now, you'll have to wait here for a rescue," Suzaku said, disappointment in his tone.

"Thanks… for sparing our lives," Rolo said sincerely.

"You're welcome," Lelouch said, narrowing his eyes, "But… should we catch you doing something like this again, you won't be so lucky…" Lelouch understood why they did what they did, but that didn't mean he was happy about it.

Rolo gulped and nodded.

"Now that these guys are dealt with, can we go now?" Milly asked impatiently.

"Yeah, Shay and her family are still waiting for us," Shirley agreed.

"You may not believe this, but I hope you do stop Zarkon," Rolo confessed. "It's a lifetime of fighting the Galra that led me to where I am today."

At this statement, Lelouch's eyes lightened a little. He could only think of how many other rebels or criminals were thinking the same thing. What they needed more than ever was hope… and he knew just how to give it to them.

As the ship left the moon and the wayward thieves behind, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

"Hey, Kallen, was that that you called the Red Lion?" Rai asked.
"Oh!" Kallen blushed a little, "'Aka,' it means 'Red' in Japanese."

"You named your Lion?" Suzaku asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Well… not really! I mean, it's just the color in a different language, I mean…" she stopped when she saw all the amused faces of the other Paladins, "Okay! Yes! I named her! Is that a problem?!

"No, no!" Shirley shook her head with a giggle, "I think it's cute! Honest!"

"Hey! Maybe we all do that? Have the other Paladins done that Allura?" asked Milly.

"Well, no," Allura said but smiled, "but there's no rule saying that you can't."

"I think it's a good idea," C.C. spoke up, catching everyone's attention. "You keep talking about them building bonds with their Lions. By having names for them, it proves that they are being treated as equals, not just machines."

"I agree as well," Lelouch nodded, "having a name gives identity. You're not much without it."

"Great! Lion naming party!" Rivalz shouted.

"After we save the Balmera," Lelouch emphasized.

"Right, right!" Rivalz quickly agreed, leaving everyone laughing all over again.

O~O

Haggar held the container of quintessence in her palm as she and her druids surrounded the test subject. After the last one failed, she was more determined to make good on her promise to her Emperor and make a weapon that not even Voltron could stand up against, and she believed that she found the perfect subject.
"All this Quintessence will turn you into the strongest, most horrifying fighter ever created. One that even Voltron will not be able to defeat."

o~o

Omake:

Lelouch and Kallen were tasked to clean and fix the damage that was caused during Sendak's invasion. It was a dirty job but, someone had to do it.

Rover was there to help with schematics and which parts needed repairs.

"Why we got to do this?" Kallen grumbled, patching a hole, "A highly advanced castle without any droids or robots to fix the problems. I can't imagine how we're going to fly this thing during battle."

"That I don't know, Kallen," Lelouch answered with a sigh, "This is something Coran probably knows since he knows this castle up and down."

Both of them continued in silence. It was awkward, leaving the two of them together. Ever since Kallen found out Lelouch was the leader of the Black Knights, Zero, she felt a tingling of betrayal inside her. Finding out the man you admired and respected turned out to be an exiled Britannian prince.

However, after hearing his explanation and seeing his memories, she understood why he rebelled. Like her, both of them lost someone important because of Britannia's cruelty and corruption.

She understood why he needed to hide his face. If Ohgi, the others, and the rebel forces knew, they might have tried to ransom Lelouch to free Japan. But that would have been impossible. If the Emperor was willing to abandon his children to the lion's den, she doubted he was ready to negotiate.

Sure, during Sendak's invasion, they bonded, but knowing the truth was different, and it felt awkward for both of them. Even Lelouch could feel it.
So she decided to break the silence. "You know, Lelouch, I never actually thought in my life that we would be the first humans to meet alien life and journey into space on a giant, advanced robot lion."

"Yeah, it's mind-boggling that there are other lifeforms farther than our Solar System. And piloting a giant, robot lion that makes Knightmares look like small chew toys," Lelouch chuckled. Though, he would love to see the Lancelot try and go up against Voltron. They could merely crush it if he wanted to.

"I want to apologize for accusing you of lying to me earlier." Of course, she didn't speak it out loud, but she needed to get it off her chest somehow, and this was the right time and away from prying eyes, especially Milly.

"About me being Zero and an exiled prince?" It was no surprise that she distrusted him for lying to her, but like him, she wanted to get it off of her chest, like how he confessed to everyone that he was Zero.

"Yes, it's just that I never thought something that terrible happened to you and your sister. Being forced into exile to an unknown land."

"No need to apologize, I was glad she was blind. Thank the small mercies she couldn't see what I've seen," Kallen didn't need to guess what that meant.

"Still, if you have problems, don't hesitate to call for help. We all are here with you as a team, you don't have to act like Zero all the time."

"Thank you, I'm glad to have met you, Kallen, first."

The redhead blushed that Lelouch thanked her. Sure, it wasn't some kind of confession, but still, it made her heart skip a bit. Then she saw Rover who saw everything.

"Rover, you didn't record anything, did you?" the droid turned around, not looking at her and making some kind of noise that sounded like a whistle.
"Coran, how are Lelouch and Kallen doing with the repairs?" Allura was drinking some tea in the kitchen.

"They should be finished right about-"

"Get back here you droid! When I get my hands on you, I'll make you a scrap!" Kallen shouting along with Lelouch following from behind.

"I think that's a 'No.'"

Chapter End Notes

AN: So here's the next chapter!

So I have officially decided to give the Lions unique names of their own. So far we've heard what Red's was, Aka, you'll just have to wait to see what the others will be!

Also, for all you Skyrim fans out there, my co-writer on Fanfiction.net, TheCrookedQueen, for Burning Bridges, Crossed Minds has uploaded a story of her own. If you're a fan of the video game, I recommend you check it out. It just started, so it's a little short right now, but please do so!

Catch you all in the next chapter! R&R!
After several more hours of traveling, the Balmera was at last in sight. Other than Shirley, the other Paladins took a moment to take in the view of the planet. A planet they were told wasn't a planet at all, but a giant petrified animal, that made itself a home for other creatures as well.

"We'll be arriving at the Balmera soon," Allura announced, "Liberating these Balmerans from Zarkon's grasp will not be easy."

"So, what's the plan? We go in there and just—Pow, pow, pow!" Rivalz said as he imitated shooting noises with his hands in gun form, "—And free the prisoners?"

"What was that noise?" Kallen asked with a quirked eyebrow.

"Laser guns!" Rivals smirked back.

"No, Rivalz, I think you mean—" Milly made sounds that sounded like a giant cannon, even making hand motions to demonstrate it locking into place, "—Pow!"

"No offense, Milly, but sounded like fireworks to me," Rivalz argued.

"Technically, they're more like—ba-choo, ba-choo, ba-choo!" Rai said, making his own handgun and 'shooting' with it.

"Okay, enough with the bad sound effects!" Lelouch chastised with a frown.

"Yeah… besides it's more like— blam, blam, blam!" Suzaku said, crouching down as if he were holding a sniper rifle and targeting his foe.

"Suzaku…" Lelouch groaned as the other Paladins protested in agreement that that was not what a gun sounded like.

"Paladins, focus," Allura said with a sigh.

"Besides," C.C. spoke up. "You might want to rethink that strategy. It'd be foolish to start shooting at the Galra once we enter."

"C.C.’s right," Shirley agreed, as a picture of the Balmera's heat signature appeared before them, "This Balmera thing, it's, like, alive. And from what we've seen, it doesn't look very good."

"Yes," Coran agreed as the screen showed the brighter colors slowly giving way to darker, colder ones, "it's an atrocity what the Galra have been doing to this grand beast. Stealing its Crystals," another screen of the Balmera's current surface appeared next to it, "its very life force, without ever performing the energy rejuvenation ceremonies to heal it." Another image showed two figures, Alteans they assumed, with hands outstretched and surrounded by a circle, and arrows being directed towards a large Crystal in between them.

"After seeing Shay's people enslaved, it made me realize how bad Zarkon really is," Shirley said, "And we're the only ones who can stop him."

"C.C. and Shirley are right, going in guns blazing is the last thing we want to do," The Black
Paladin said, "Not only will it alert the enemy of our arrival sooner, but it would simply hurt the Balmera as well. What we need to do is try and draw as many troops as we can up to the surface where we can fight them in the open air,"

"Wait, I know!" Rivalz exclaimed, "If we attack all of this big mining stuff on the surface, the Galra troops will have to come out to defend it. Then we beat them up, head down to the tunnels, and Voltron saves the day!"

"Okay, but will we know how many are left in the tunnels?" Kallen asked.

"We can track the Galra and the Balmerans using Biothermal Life Indicator Point Technology," Allura said, pulling up a hologram of a small device that looked like a miniature version of the Castleship.

"Oh, B.L.I.P. Tech!" Rai said, leaning in closer. At Allura's confused stare Rai awkwardly looked at the Princess and clarified, "...It's an acronym."

"One of you will need to fly around the Balmera and drop sensors into the shafts on each side," Allura continued as the device flew further in front of her. The screen then spread out to show a map of intricate tunnels and vein systems that it picked up, "Then we'll be able to see where the Galra and the Balmerans are. There are already sensors built into your suits."

"I can do it," Rai volunteered immediately, "I just modified Zerith with the invisible maze's cloaking ability. I should be able to fly around unnoticed. Plus I'll have Rover with me as well to help out," he smirked at the robot helper that beeped excitedly.

"Zerith?" Shirley asked, confused.

"My Lion," Rai said with a smile.

"Oh! That's pretty!" Shirley commented.

"Thanks!"

"Okay, first you know how to reprogram Galra tech, now you can make your Lion invisible? Are you sure you're not an alien, Rai?" Milly asked with a teasing grin.

Rai shrugged, "I don't know. It's like I said, these things are easy for me… maybe it's something to do with my Geass?"

Lelouch glanced at C.C., who simply shrugged. She wasn't the one who gave Rai his Geass, so she didn't know.

"That's their main power generator," Coran said, pulling up the surface again, this time with a large structure in the center, "If you take that down, it will severely weaken their defenses."

"The three of us will stay in cloud cover and give tactical support," Allura said, pulling up a model of the Castle, some areas being pointed out next to it with Altean writing, "With the Castle's defenses weakened from Sendak's Crystal, we won't be of much help to you."

"Very well, I'll take out the power generator," Lelouch said, "Rai, get those sensors to the shafts. The rest of you will take out these big mining rigs around the area. Any objections?"

The rest of the Paladins shook their heads and agreed to the strategy.
"Yeah!" Milly jumped in the air, "Okay, let's do this! Let's go kick some alien butt!"

The gravity of the Balmera pulled the Castleship into its atmosphere as the Paladins made their way to their respective Lions.

"You think the Balmerans will have a parade for us after we've freed everybody?" Rivalz asked as he settled in Blue. He had yet to come up with a name for her but promised he would soon. He had already thrown a few names her way, but all had been shot down. Rivalz didn't mind too much; it was her name after all.

Kallen's face showed up on his dashboard, Aka's cockpit in the background, "It's not about the glory, Rivalz. It's about freeing prisoners from Zarkon."

"No, I know. I know. But still. When they—" Rivalz didn't finish his sentence as he and the Blue Lion launched off into the atmosphere with the rest of the Lions. As they descended, the pillars surrounding the power generator started firing rapidly at the Lions. One even launched an attack that looked like a flying windmill blade that they had to maneuver around to avoid.

"This is it. Get your heads in the game," Lelouch ordered, "Remember, the Balmera is a living creature. Make sure you pinpoint only the Galra installations and not its surface."

Rai, Rover, and Zerith promptly broke off from the rest of the group and started flying low, closer to the ground, "Initiating cloak," the Green Paladin said, as Zerith disappeared from view. The other Lions could still pinpoint where they were, but Galra certainly wouldn't be able to. At each mining shaft he flew over, a B.L.I.P. device was dropped in and activated at the bottom.

As the installations continued to fire at them, Suzaku expertly maneuvered the Purple Lion up and around every strike like a pro. He shot back with blasts of his own from his Lion's tail. He noticed Rivalz, and Milly quickly followed his example as they took up his flanks.

As he flew, Suzaku noticed how much easier it felt to fly his Lion, compared to even the Lancelot. It was like he and the Lion were one being instead of just pilot and machine. It was so much more than that. He could feel it.

'I need to remember to find a name for you too,' Suzaku added mentally as they shot down another tower.

Shirley, on the other hand, had gone in more close to the ground and was simply smashing each of the towers with her Lion.

Lelouch gritted his teeth as he examined the base. He knew shooting at full power was out of the question, but his Lion was not quite bulky enough to just smash through either, "How do I take this thing down?"

He blinked as he felt the Black Lion brush against his mind as a screen showed up in front of him, "What's that?" he asked as the Lion elaborated. It was a picture of the Lion's head, and a pair of blades that seemed to extend from its jaw, "Jaw blade?" he questioned before smirking almost evilly, pushing the thrusters down, "Okay! Let's do this!"

The Black Lion growled as the blade formed around her jaw. With the weapon in place, she and Lelouch easily sliced through the generator's foundation like a hot knife through butter. It wasn't long until nearly the entire generator was destroyed.

"All sensors delivered," Rai confirmed just as he dropped the last one.
From inside the Castle of Lions, a screen appeared, showing all of the underground tunnels of the Balmera. They'd now easily be able to track any movements and guide the Paladins through without a hitch.

The biggest cannon was still giving them trouble. They wouldn't be able to start the rescue until then. After a couple more blasts, Kallen and Aka managed to get in close, as the Red Lion opened its maw, and outshot a pillar of pure fire that melted right through the cannon's support beam.

"Whoa! Did you guys just see that?!!" Kallen exclaimed, a giant grin on her face, "I got fire powers!"

"Hey! I want that!" Rivalz whined.

"That is so awesome, Kallen!" Milly cried, a matching grin on her face.

The praises were short-lived though as the cannon suddenly shuddered and wobbled. It began to tip down towards the surface. The very thing that they didn't want to happen!

"Oh, no!" Rivalz shouted.

Before it could connect though, Shirley managed to get under it in the Orange Lion and try to push it back up, "We can't let this thing hurt the Balmera!"

"I'm coming!" Suzaku shouted as he flew overhead. His Lion opened its mouth too, but instead of anything firing out of it, it started sucking wind and debris into it. Almost like-

"A black hole!" Suzaku said as the suction began to slow the descent gradually.

"Cool Suzaku!" Milly exclaimed.

It wasn't enough though; the structure was still falling too fast.

"We need to try something else!" Suzaku yelled, strain in his voice.

"I think my Lion knows what to do!" Rivalz said as he and the Blue Lion flew in closer. It opened its jaws too, and while everyone expected the tower to go up in flames, a blast of crisp white ice hit it instead, freezing it entirely in place and halting the crash.

"Ha-Aw, snap! These rays are super cool, just like me!" Rivalz cheered.

"Well done, everyone!" Lelouch said, as the Lions all perched on top of the frozen cannon. However, as they looked across the Balmera's surface, they were perplexed to see that no ships were coming up to attack them.

"Something's wrong," Suzaku said, "Where are all the troops? They're not coming to the surface."

"He's right," Shirley said, as her face popped up on everyone's dashboards, "Last time I was here, I remember seeing a whole army of Galra down in the mines."

"We've located a hangar full of Galra fighters just below the surface," Allura informed them from the Castle, "Someone has to take those out before they can launch."

Lelouch grit his teeth. They were being lured down. It was obviously a trap. But..."We don't have a choice," he muttered, "Alright we'll split into three teams. Suzaku, Kallen, and Rivalz will hit the hangar. Shirley, you, Rai, and Rover head to the prison to rescue Shay and the other Balmerans. Milly and I will track down the Galra soldiers. Any objections?"
"Nope!"
"Ten-four!"
"Nada!"
"You got it!"
"Leave it to us!"

"Let's do this!" Came the shouts as the Lions bounded off the tower and towards the tunnels.

o~o

Back at the Galran headquarters, Commander Prorok was waiting. It had been several varga since he'd contacted those bounty hunters that claimed to have the Blue Lion. They never arrived at their meeting point. This could only mean one of two things. They had either been caught by the other Paladins, or they had decided to keep the Blue Lion for themselves.

Whatever the case, it wasn't a completely lost cause. Thanks to their hailing, Prorok now knew where the Paladins were going. It was now merely a matter of when to strike them.

"Commander Prorok," Thace said, as he approached his superior, "we have word from the troops on Balmera X-95 Vox. The informants were right. Voltron is there."

"Excellent," Prorok smiled smugly, "Everything is going according to plan."

"How do you wish to proceed?" his subordinate asked, "Should we inform Emperor Zarkon?"

"Contact Subcommander Ylvik," Prorok ordered, turning to meet Thace's eye, "His fleet is awaiting my command. Tell him it's time to attack. I will update the Emperor."

o~o

The Black Lion landed with a bang at the bottom of the shaft. Fortunately, there had been no Galra fighters occupying it, so Lelouch had managed to land without too much trouble. Unfortunately, the cave tunnels were too small for the Lion to navigate due to its enormous size. But there was no need to worry about this hiccup.

Lelouch's pilot chair slowly pulled back with him, still seated. It hit the back wall of the cockpit and then lowered into the Lion's chest. Inside was a speeder; all the Lions had one. As Lelouch's seat clicked into it, the Black Lion's chest opened and set him free. As the speeder departed, the Lion's particle barrier rose up, effectively securing it until Lelouch could return.

o~o

Inside another tunnel, Rivalz, Suzaku, and Kallen slowly crept up in their speeders to a ledge that quickly showed the hanger full of Galra fighters that Allura had mentioned earlier. They were quite surprised to see how only a few sentries were guarding them.

"The entire hangar's only being guarded by a few Sentries?" Rivalz said, voicing everyone's question.

"We can take them! Let's go!" Kallen said, as she pulled out her bayard and was about to storm in before Suzaku grabbed her arm and pulled her back.
"Whoa, whoa! Kallen!" Suzaku hissed, "Do you not remember all that stuff about this Balmera thing being a sensitive animal?"

Kallen stopped struggling against Suzaku's grip, "Oh. Right," she said, feeling embarrassed.

"Yeah, I think going and blowing things up like psychos is the last thing we want to do right now," Rivalz agreed.

"Well, do either of you have a better idea?" Kallen snapped impatiently.

"I do actually," Rivalz said as he pointed to the other end of the gorge, "We sneak into the control room to shut down the bay doors. That'll trap the ships in."

"That—!" Kallen stopped herself as she processed Rivalz's words, as Suzaku smiled in agreement, "...Actually...is a better idea."

"Come on!" Suzaku said as he started sneaking across one of the catwalks, connecting the two sides together. Kallen and Rivalz were right behind him. They were reasonably narrow, so they had to move slowly and pray that none of the sentries spotted them doing so.

o~o

In another tunnel, Shirley and Rai, with Rover hovering in Rai's speeder with him, were struggling to locate Shay and her family. Despite the Orange Paladin's previous visit, it didn't mean she was suddenly a tunnel expert.

"Allura, Coran, w-what's our location?" Shirley asked, "All these tunnels look the same. I can't remember where the prison is."

"You're on the right path," Coran assured them as he looked at their map in the Castle, "Turn right at the next tunnel. Once you get there, you'll have to disable the energy doors."

"Be careful, though," C.C. added, "it's heavily guarded."

o~o

"No, no, over here more!" Kallen whispered as Suzaku was about to cut through the control room's ceiling.

"Calm down Kallen, I know what I'm doing," the Purple Paladin said in an exasperated tone, as he plunged his katana through and cut a circular hole through. Below them, a single sentry was operating the controls. He didn't have time to react when he looked up to see what the noise was as the ceiling hole came crashing down with Suzaku on top of it, crushing it below. Kallen and Rivalz joined him a moment later.

"Alright, you two keep an eye out for guards," Rivalz said as he approached the control panel, "I'll see if I can find a way to shut the hangar doors."

Kallen and Suzaku both moved to the side to look out the bay windows. So far it seemed their presence had gone unnoticed. The few sentries that were down there made no move or gesture to signify that they knew they were there.

Rivalz eyes lingered over different parts of the panel. Screens were showing the status of multiple base functions, a box with a Galran symbol on it, and a few other things. There were some buttons near the bottom of the screen that Rivalz pushed in a couple of patterns, but nothing happened or
"Ah!" he finally groaned in defeat, "I don't know what I'm doing here. It's all Galra gibberish."

"Let me see," Suzaku said as he and Kallen came closer to try and help.

Just like with the Blue Paladin they didn't understand what most of it meant, the box near the upper center caught Suzaku's eye though.

"Hmmm...," he muttered. He turned to the sentry that was now destroyed. He took out his bayard again and sliced off the downed sentries arm.

"What are you doing?" Kallen asked, confused.

"Let me try something," he said, as he placed the sentry hand over the symbol and box. It glowed red when he did it, and a buzzing sound filled the room as the hanger doors above slowly creaked shut.

"Nice thinking, Suzaku!" Rivalz cheered as Kallen nodded in agreement.

One task down, two to go.

o~o

Following Coran's directions, Shirley and Rai turned right at the next tunnel intersection. They were able to spot the prison doors about halfway down. As they approached, sentries started shooting at the two speeders, forcing them to stop. The Paladins and drone exited their rides and ducked behind them for cover.

Shirley whipped out her bow and fired two consecutive shots at the robots, ultimately destroying both of them.

Despite the small victory, an uneasy feeling bubbled up in the Orange Paladin's chest.

"Shirley, that was way too easy," Rai said, voicing her exact thoughts, "I don't have a good feeling about this."

"Neither do I Rai, but Shay's still in there!" Shirley argued.

Rai sighed as the three of them approached the energy doors.

"Do your thing Rover," Rai said, as the drone beeped happily and scanned the control board. The energy barrier went down immediately. No bombs went off; no army was waiting for them on the other side. Rai was right; this was too easy.

They took the chance though and sprinted down the tunnel. Off to the side, they thought they heard a troop of sentries approaching, but the steps quickly faded. After turning another corner, Shirley finally spotted it. It was a cell door with some familiar faces on the other side. Rai had Rover scan the console here as well, and the doors opened to reveal Shay's mother, father, grandmother, and her brother Rax... but Shay wasn't there.

The Balmerans present looked up as the door opened, surprised delight on their faces.

"Shirley, you have returned," Shay's father exclaimed as he, his wife and mother, stood up to greet her.
"I promised I would be," Shirley smiled as she grasped his hand. She turned around, hand outstretched, "This is Rai. He's one of my friends I told you about."

"Nice to meet you," he greeted with a smile. Rover clicked a greeting as well, "Oh and this is Rover. He's with us too."

Shirley looked around the cell but then realized something.

"Where's Shay?" she asked urgently.

"Our life may not have been perfect, but our family was whole," Rax retorted and glared at the two Paladins, "Your arrival has left us imprisoned and torn apart. As soon as your attack started, they took her away to the core of the Balmera. For all we know, she could be gone for good."

Shirley gasped at this information as Rai grimaced, "This isn't good," he muttered.

"Paladins, are you there?" Allura asked urgently, as she Coran and C.C, saw the Galra forces converging at a point, "The Galra troops are moving down the tunnels. It looks like they're going down toward the center."

"They must be headed to the core of the Balmera," Shirley said, "That's where they're holding Shay."

Lelouch grit his teeth in frustration as he rode on his speeder, "They're drawing us into an ambush," he said objectively, "but we don't have a choice if we want to save Shay. We have to follow. Everyone, start heading to the core. We'll need to be together to get through this firefight."

"Copy that," Kallen's voice sounded as she and her team left the control room now that the launch doors were sealed, "we're on our way!"

Behind her, Suzaku quickly slashed through the control board to prevent anyone from trying to open the doors again. As the trio ran out, and the doors closed, Rivalz fired his bayard at the control pad, effectively locking it behind them.

Milly gasped, and her speeder screeched to a halt as it almost crashed into what she thought was a dead end of the tunnel. After she stopped and popped out of it, she saw that there wasn't a dead end, but that the tunnel was simply narrow enough that she couldn't bring her speeder through.

"Looks like you're in an area where the tunnels are too narrow for your speeder," Allura informed her.

"Yeah, I see that," Milly said, stepping through the small gap, "proceeding on foot,"

Milly had been walking for a couple of minutes when she spotted lights that were moving ahead of her. She jumped to the side, hiding from view, "There's someone here," she whispered urgently.

"Looking into it," Allura replied.

As the shadows crept closer and closer, Milly bit her lip before she jumped out and ran, raising her kusarigama bayard to attack.
"Milly, no! Those are Balmerans!" Allura cried out just in time. Milly stopped short and lowered her weapon. Three young Balmeran children were standing in front of her. One of them was carrying a small lamp.

Milly sighed in relief that they weren't sentries. She looked up with a smile and waved to the children.

Suddenly, the ground underneath her began to quake, and a loud, high-pitched groan echoed through the tunnel. Small rocks, dust, and debris began to fall around them.

The three children gasped and turned to run in the other direction, but one of them tripped and fell. Above them, a large slab of stone shook loose and began to fall. Acting fast, Milly sprinted to the trio, using her jetpack for more momentum, and snatched the fallen child just as the slab crashed to the ground behind them. She set the Balmeran down next to her friends, who promptly hugged her close to them, and turned to view the damage behind her. She was completely blocked off from her speeder.

"Don't worry," she assured the children, "everything's going to be okay."

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"Everyone," Milly's voice buzzed through the comms, "be careful. The Balmera is very unstable."

Kallen, Suzaku, and Rivalz almost didn't have time to start worrying about that, when they turned a corner and were ambushed by a small platoon of sentries that were guarding a door. Rivalz and Kallen tumbled to the left, and Suzaku took shelter to the right of a battlecruiser output of the wall. As the laser shots zoomed past them, the ground vibrated again, and the pained echoes of the Balmera could be heard from all over the tunnels.

"Their shooting is destroying the Balmera. We gotta do something!" Kallen shouted over the noise.

"Well, we can't shoot back!" Rivalz said, "That'll just make it worse!"

They had to think of a plan, fast. The ground started shaking again as stone and rock tumbled down around them from the Balmera's pained screams.

Suzaku looked around, by the sentries and his teammates. Then he spotted a ladder behind Kallen. If the two of them climbed up to the upper level, they would have the advantage of higher ground. With Rivalz distracting them below, it would be easy!

"Kallen!" He whispered urgently pointing behind her.

The Red Paladin shot him a confused stare before glancing behind and spotting the ladder. Making an 'o' with her mouth, she then smiled and shot a thumbs up, realizing what the Purple Paladin had in mind.

As Suzaku scrambled to the other side with her, Rivalz leaped out and waved his hands in the air right in front of the platoon, "Na-na na-na boo-boo!"

As the sentries started firing at him again, he crouched down to the ground with his shield activated, hoping to block most of the shot from hitting the Balmera wall behind him. Some still made it to the other side, though. He gritted his teeth and endured it as Kallen and Suzaku ran across the upper level. Once they were on top of them, they leaped down and quickly finished them off with their weapons, Kallen blowing the last one up with her gauntlet.
"I love this thing!" she whispered with a smirk. She and Suzaku glanced back to check on Rivalz, who flashed them a smile and a thumbs up.

o~o

Rai and Shirley ran until they came across a closed door. According to Allura's directions, the core was on the other side. They would find Shay there.

"Okay, this should be it," Rai muttered as he directed Rover to unlock it, "be ready, we don't know what's on the other side."

Shirley nodded and gulped, readying her bow to shoot. Despite being scared, she put on the bravest face she could as Rover beeped that he was finished.

Rai raised his hand with three fingers. Once his finger hit one, the two rushed in as the door opened, weapons drawn and prepared to fight. They came to an abrupt stop, though when no enemies came to greet them. There was only one occupant in the room, dangling in chains from the ceiling.

"Shay!" Shirley shouted in relief, "You're alive!"

The Balmera was hanging from the ceiling by her wrists and had a muzzle wrapped around her mouth. Upon spotting Shirley and Rai, she started struggling against her restraints, shaking her head furiously to try and dislodge the muzzle.

Aiming as carefully as she could, Shirley fired an arrow at the chains holding her up. As the Balmeran fell, Rai rushed to catch her from underneath. With a blast from his jetpack, Rai caught Shay bridle style, and slowly lowered them to the ground. Once there, Shirley started working trying to undue the muzzle, but it was clasped super tight. As the Orange Paladin assisted her friend, Rai looked around in disbelief. They were the only ones there. There were no guards, sentries, or even Rover's fellow droids. Nothing.

'Something's wrong,' he thought, eyes scanning around them.

"Where are the Galra?" Lelouch demanded as he ran in through another entrance, the other Paladins following from another, "If this is an ambush, they should be here waiting for us."

They got their answer as the doors they had moments ago run through, slammed shut and locked behind them.

"Not an ambush," Suzaku said, "more like a trap!"

"Whatever it is, keep your guard up!" Kallen shouted.

"The Galra, they gained knowledge that you would return to the Balmera," Shay said once Shirley removed the muzzle. The other Paladins joined her at the bottom.

"What? How?!" Rivalz asked.

"I know not," Shay answered with remorse, bowing her head, "But they set this trap just for you. I was the bait."

"Who could have possibly known that we were heading here to save Shay?" Rai asked incredulously.
Lelouch grit his teeth, already knowing who, but Milly beat him to the punch, "Rolo! Those liars must have told Zarkon!"

"It likely happened when they had the Blue Lion, to negotiate its trade," Lelouch said with a frown, "and we were foolish not to question them of such an action!" Lelouch mentally kicked himself for overlooking something so obvious.

"We need to get out here, fast!" Shirley said, looking around at the closed doors.

"Rai, can Rover hack the doors and get us out?" Suzaku asked the Green Paladin.

"If he was on the other side, he could. There are no control panels to do that here!" he answered. Rover beeped sadly, tilting downward as if ashamed.

"Wait! We have a giant Castleship hovering in the sky," Rivalz said, before contacting the said ship, "Allura, can you please come get us?"

"How do you expect her to do that, genius?" Kallen demanded.

"I don't know; maybe they got teleporters or something. Like from Star Trek." Rivalz suggested.

"We're quite occupied at the moment," Allura informed them urgently and grunted as another shot from a Galra fighter hit the ship's shields. There were over a dozen of them surrounding the Castle, "We're completely surrounded by Galra ships, and we're taking heavy fire!"

The shots were coming from every direction, giving the ship no place to maneuver. Alarms started blaring, and the screens in front of the ship's occupants turned red with warning.

"Princess, our particle barrier won't last much longer!" Coran informed her urgently.

"Do you have any other forms of attacking besides the Lions?" C.C. asked, holding onto one of the control tables as another blast rocked the ship.

"We do, but I'm not sure how long they'll last," Allura informed the immortal.

"It's better than nothing!" she countered as she made her way to another screen that popped up by the princess. A targeting system appeared in front, and C.C. grasped the two control sticks that appeared in front of her. She pressed down on the handles and started firing back at the fleet intensely. Despite managing to take a few down, more continued to pour in.

"Paladins, you need to get out of there as soon as you can!" Allura cried out.

"This is it! We're going to die in here. I can say bye-bye to that parade," Rivalz lamented as he sagged down. Everyone shot him unimpressed looks.

"Everyone focus!" Lelouch ordered, "Allura, we'll get there as soon as we can!"

"Perhaps my people can help us get out," Shay suggested. She walked towards the core of the Balmera and placed a hand lightly on top of it, "This is how we communicate. The Balmera senses our vibrations and sends a message to those in the tunnels,"

"Are you sure someone will be able to hear your... hand from all the way down here?" Kallen
asked skeptically.

"The Balmera will deliver the message," Shay reassured them as she closed her eyes in concentration. Her hand started to glow, and the Balmera groaned around them. The Paladins watched, mesmerized by this act. Shay stood still, not moving a muscle from the core.

o~o

Elsewhere on the Balmera, Shay's family was making their way back to their home inside. Their faces were sad and solemn, believing that a member of their family was gone forever despite what Shirley said.

The four suddenly stopped as the Balmera groaned. Rax bent down, placing his hand on the ground.

"It's a message from Shay!" he exclaimed, shocked.

"She's alive!" her father rejoiced as his wife and mother smiled at the news.

"The Paladins of Voltron went to the core of the Balmera to save Shay... and now they are all trapped," Rax informed them, eyes narrowing.

"Then we are all doomed," his father mourned, looking down in despair.

"This is all my fault," Rax said, standing up, guilt swelling in his chest, "I conspired against them, and because of my actions, Shay was imprisoned. The orange female was right. If we ever hope to be free, we must take action."

"But how can we rise up against our Galra overlords?" his father asked.

"What choice do we have?" Rax asked, "They have stolen all of the Crystals from our Balmera. Our lives are worthless to them now."

"But Balmerans have never fought." his father countered.

"You taught me that without family, we have nothing," Rax argued, a fire of rebellion blazing in his eyes, "The Galra have taken Shay. How can we do nothing while the Paladins sacrifice everything to save us? We must do our part!"

o~o

Prorok kneeled before Zarkon, smirking at the knowledge that his plan was working out. The Emperor would no doubt be pleased with him for his efforts. Within the next few varga, Voltron would be within the Galra's grasp at last.

"Lord Zarkon, I have news to report. News that will likely please you, my Emperor."

"Proceed," Zarkon commanded, no emotion on his ancient face.

"I have the Voltron Paladins trapped on a Balmera in the Javeeno star system," The commander informed him, with a proud grin, "I've ordered a fleet to capture the Lions and destroy the Altean Castle."

To Prorok's surprise though, the Emperor was far from pleased with his report, "You fool! You dare make plans without informing me?"
"Forgive me, Emperor..." Prorok shrank back in fear, "...but I saw an opportunity, and I took it for the glory of the Galra Empire."

"I suspect that you are seeking your own glory, Prorok," Zarkon growled, "But you do not realize Voltron's power." He knew that there were only a few that knew Voltron's full potential. Not even the Altean Princess did, much less the new Paladins...

o~o

As the Castle continued to be fired upon, about a dozen of the fighters broke off from the formation and began to descend towards the Balmera.

"They're heading down into the tunnels!" Coran gasped, "They're going to steal the Lions!"

"Paladins, the Lions are in danger! You must get back to them immediately!" Allura called out desperately.

On C.C.'s targeting scanner, a small alert popped up, directing them to the cause of it in the distance.

"Something's locked onto us!" she informed them as they spotted a large Galra cruiser with an ion cannon affixed on top.

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"Paladins, do you copy?" Allura asked, "There's a battlecruiser locked onto us. If it fires with its ion cannon, I don't know if we can survive."

"We're trying, Allura," Shirley replied anxiously.

"Yeah, Shay's pressing her hand against the wall, which apparently sends vibrations to the other rock people," Rivalz tried explaining, "who vibrate back or something? Hand talking? I guess the answer to your question is, 'Yes, we copy.'"

"Shay, are you sure the Balmera is sending your message?" Suzaku asked urgently.

As Shay began focusing harder, her family appeared behind one of the doors. They pressed their hands against the wall surface, causing it to glow blue. The wall suddenly constricted, knocking the door off its hinges.

The Paladins and Shay all jumped and turned to where the door had been initially. As the dust settled, Shay's family stood in the doorway to greet them.

"Rax!" Shay exclaimed, happily.

"We must make haste!" Rax replied urgently, "We know a shortcut through the tunnels."

"Princess, stand by," Lelouch called out to the Castle, "we're on our way up!"

o~o

Lelouch and his speeder had scrambled back to the Black Lion just in time. Two Galra ships were using tracker beams to try and drag it out.

"Paladins, hurry! They're taking off with the Lions!" Allura said.
Gritting his teeth, Lelouch thrust the speeder forward. A small opening was made in the particle barrier, and the Black Paladin disappeared back inside his Lion. With a roar, the Black Lion broke free of the tractor beams and zoomed out of the Balmera tunnel.

"Paladins report! Did everyone make it to their Lions?" Lelouch asked as he hovered above the mines.

He got his answers as the six other Lions promptly burst from the tunnels and joined him on the surface in formation.

"Come on, Lelouch. Who you think you're dealing with, a bunch of amateurs—" Rivalz didn't finish his sentence as he and the Blue Lion ran head first into what remained of one of the Galra structures, which the other six Lions easily avoided.

"You really want me to answer that, Rivalz?" Lelouch smirked in amusement despite the situation.

"No," the Blue Paladin groaned.

The Lions quickly regrouped as the Galra fleet started firing furiously at them. The Red, Green, Blue, and Yellow Lions fired out shots of their own while the Orange Lion tore through them with its armor and powerful jaws. The Purple Lion followed suit, sucking in every aircraft it could and tearing the wings off and destroying them. Finally, the mighty Black Lion sliced through several fighters with its jawblade in effect. It was like a hot knife through butter!

The fleet was getting obliterated every second they continued to fight. Balls of fire rained down from the sky.

As another wave came flying at them, Kallen and Rivalz put their Lions attacks together to wipe them out. Kallen melting half of them as Rivalz froze the rest completely.

Shirley grabbed another fighter in the Orange Lion's maw and proceeded to ram into four more before tossing the stack away as it exploded in a fiery inferno.

From above her though, she didn't have time to dodge as three more began firing at her.

"Shirley, watch out!" Rai cried as he and Zerith flew to cover her, the shots having little effect against the Green Lion's shield on its back.

"I'm coming!" Lelouch shouted as he and the Black Lion zoomed overhead and sliced through the three assailants. They blew up easily.

"Phew! Thanks!" Shirley said with a smile.

Milly and Suzaku charged another five Galra fighters from above. They seemed ready to dive bomb them.

Milly thrust the control of the Yellow Lion forward, intending to take them out with one shot. To her surprise though, when the Yellow Lion opened its mouth, it didn't shoot a blast of energy, but a tiny ball of light… which moments later expanded to illuminate the battlefield, blinding everyone but the Paladins, whose visors came down automatically to protect their vision.

"Woah!" Milly exclaimed in shocked excitement, "Did you guys just see that?!"

"Nice Milly!" Suzaku complimented as he sucked the five fighters towards them, and chomped down on them at once. They blew up as he tossed them aside.
Despite the Paladins' growing success, the Castle was still facing a threat from the Galra warship. The ion cannon began to charge up, ready to fire.

"It's charging its ion cannon!" Coran exclaimed in fear.

"Divert all shields to the bow!" Allura ordered.

"That'll leave the rest of the ship completely vulnerable!" Coran argued.

"Leave that to me!" C.C. said, still at blaster controls.

As the shields all converged in front of the ship, it met the blast of the ion cannon head on. Allura grit her teeth as the blast pressed against the shield. It began to fizzle out, losing power fast.

"Paladins, I need you immediately! Five more ticks and we're finished!"

"Very well!" Lelouch shouted, "team, let's form Voltron!"

"Yes/Yeah!" the rest of the team screamed out as the Lions roared and converged.

Within moments the giant juggernaut appeared before them and emerged from the clouds and headed straight for the Galra warship. It slammed into the bottom of the ship. As the Paladins screamed, Voltron shoved the ship upwards, diverting the cannon blast away from the Castle of Lions in the nick of time.

"Right now is our chance, Princess!" Coran proclaimed.

"Full power on the blasters!" Allura ordered as the holographic image lined up with the target, "Lock onto target. Fire!"

At Allura's command, the Castle unleashed a sizeable blue beam of energy straight at the Galra ship. Voltron flew out of the way just as the shot hit the ship, straight through the helm. Within moments the warship exploded in a fiery inferno, taking out whatever remained of its Galra fighters with it.

"Yes!"

"Woo-hoo!"

"Whoop-whoop!"

"Nice shot, Princess!"

"Yeah!"

"Yeah! The Parade's back on!"

Lelouch simply smirked victoriously from the Black Lion, watching the firework show.

The day was theirs.

o~o

"The Galra fleet and all Sentries on the Balmera have been defeated!" a communications officer reported to the throne room.
Prorok's face fell at the news. That wasn't possible. He was sure he could obtain Voltron!

"No!" the commander gasped, "How could this be? Lord Zarkon, I will do all that I can to recapture Voltron for the Galra!"

"Silence, Prorok!" Zarkon thundered, causing the commander to flinch away, "I have plans that you can not comprehend."

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Voltron touched down lightly on the Balmera's surface, the Castleship preparing to settle just behind them.

"Mission accomplished!" Kallen grinned as she leaned back in Aka's pilot chair. She hadn't felt this pumped since her first official mission with Ohgi's old group before Lelouch/Zero had come in to play.

"And just in the tick of time," Allura agreed, "The Castle's defenses are battered and will need to fully recharge."

Allura spoke too soon though as the Castle's proximity alarms blared to life. Something was approaching the Balmera's atmosphere. Fast.

"There's an unknown object incoming!" Coran said as a massive fireball could be seen from the ship's bridge, "It's about to crash into the Balmera!"

Lelouch silently cursed as the object crashed into the surface. As the dust cleared, a familiar looking black coffin-like ship could be seen in the distance.

"What the heck?!!" Rivalz exclaimed.

"What is that?!!" Milly asked.

Additional noises of confusion could be heard from the other Paladins as well.

"...Trouble." Lelouch spat, teeth grinding in his jaw. The battle wasn't over. It had only just begun.

Chapter End Notes

AN: And cut! Don't you just love those cliffhangers? Anyway, the next chapter is another awesome Ro-beast fight between Voltron and the Galra!

I hope everyone enjoyed the abilities I gave the Purple and Yellow Lions. The Purple Lion's ability is very similar to a black hole, and the Yellow Lion can shoot out small balls of energy that can expand into a light, bright enough to stun/blind foes.

Also, just wanted to add this. I know Lelouch doesn't seem as intelligent as he is in the anime, but here's something to remember. In the anime, he already knew his opponents very well and had ways of getting on the inside of Britannia easily. Out in the Galra Empire's territory, he doesn't have that advantage as much. So he can only work with the moves and tools he has as they come and go.
As for what we have for Lion names so far:

Black Lion: ?

Red Lion: Aka

Green Lion: Zerith

Blue Lion: ?

Orange Lion: ?

Yellow Lion: ?

Purple Lion: ?

So, I guess I'll see everyone next chapter! R&R!
"Oh, no!" Rai exclaimed as the dust finally cleared. The black coffin ship stood ominously in front of them, a replica of the one that attacked them on Arus.

"Please tell me there's not a giant monster in there. Please tell me it's empty!" Shirley begged desperately.

"If it's the same kind of monster that attacked us on Arus, we already know how to beat it," Suzaku said, pulling out his bayard.

"I don't think so," Lelouch disagreed, as Suzaku's bayard formed Voltron's sword and a shield appeared in front of Voltron "I don't think even the Galra are stupid enough to send the exact same monster against us and expect different results. Hold your ground."

Nothing happened for a couple of seconds, but then the ship creaked and fell open like a puzzle. Inside wasn't the same Myzak monster that they were hoping it would be. This robot was thin, with long, lanky red arms and a chameleon-like head, with long, serrated teeth. Once freed, it lifted its head up, the two eyes on its sides rotating to face forward, a sickly green color illuminating them.

Lelouch got a bad feeling in his chest when the beast's eyes landed on them. This was not going to be an easy fight.

Suddenly, the large port in its chest began to glow and fired a powerful blast of green energy, hitting Voltron's shield dead on. The shot was so strong that it pushed Voltron back several yards.

"Definitely not the same monster!" Kallen yelled as everyone braced themselves against the blast.

With a grunt, Voltron managed to extract itself away from the blast by turning to the side. "We need to draw its fire away from the Balmera's surface!" Lelouch shouted as the Defender of the Universe took off from the ground and charged head-on at the beast, sword poised to strike.

They didn't get the chance to though as the robot leaped into the air and shot at them again from above. Rai barely brought the shield up in time to block it. Everyone groaned as they struggled to hold themselves against it. When the attack wore off, Voltron managed to get airborne again and dodge the next several laser shots fired at it, but it was still too close to the surface for their liking. At one point they were able to fly in close and took a swing at it, but the beast was just as versatile as it was fast and easily dodged. One of its eyes then rotated about its head and shot another laser at Voltron, causing him to tumble backward. As Voltron took the air once more, they quickly tried to put some distance between them and the robot, but it caught up to them and fired again. The shield managed to hold out against it, but it wouldn't be forever as Voltron was pushed backward.

"We can't hold out!" Rivalz cried.

"Zerith's weakening!" Rai exclaimed, "If the shield sustains structural damage, we're done for!"

"Rai's right!" Milly agreed.

"Oh, Rai is right, I'm the one that said, 'We can't hold out!'" Rivalz argued.
"Rivalz! Watch your footing!" Suzaku called as the Blue Lion caught a rock that caused the team to lose their footing, the shield splitting and flying off to the sides in two pieces.

"Okay," Lelouch hissed between his teeth, "Team Voltron, disband!" At his command, the Lions split apart from Voltron, "Everyone, evasive maneuvers! It can't shoot us all at once!"

Lelouch, however, spoke too soon as the monster, stretched its arms wide open, the inside covered with more laser cannons, and began firing all at once at the seven assailants.

"Okay, it can do that too!" he quickly amended.

At least as separate ships, the Lions were able to avoid the lasers a little bit better, but there were still too many coming too fast to get in a clear shot.

Suddenly, through the cloud cover, a blue laser shot out and hit the beast point blank in the back, causing it to stumble. It immediately afterward turned one of its eyes on the Castleship, firing relentlessly at it as well.

Coran, C.C., and Allura grunted as they braced against the barrage of attacks, "Where does Zarkon get these beasts from? And how do they keep finding us?" the Princess demanded.

"It was likely used as a backup in case the trap they set for us didn't work," C.C. reasoned.

"Princess, the particle barrier won't sustain much longer. It's still not at full strength after the blast from the Galra ship," Coran informed her as the screens began glowing red again from the damage.

"Kallen, try to draw its fire! I'm coming in from above!" Lelouch ordered.

"Roger!" Kallen said as she and Aka dove down from below. She fired several shots of her fire cannon, but that seemed to have zero effect on the beast other than drawing its attention.

With its head turned, Lelouch and the Black Lion prepared to fire a barrage of their own but were forced to pull back at the last second when one of the beast's eyes rotated back and shot at them instead.

"We need to find its blind spot!" Kallen said in frustration.

"I don't think this thing has a blind spot!" Rai countered, "It has a thousand eyes!"

"Laser eyes! Lasers eyes!" Shirley screamed as she dove to avoid a Galra structure falling on top of her. Despite this ting fighting for the Galra, it didn't seem to have much care for its surroundings whatsoever.

"Suzaku, maybe you could try and suck it up with your Lion?" Rivalz suggested.

"I don't think that'll work!" the Purple Paladin said, "It's way too big for that!"

Milly suddenly had an idea, "Maybe I can blind it with my supernova!"

"Supernova?" Kallen asked.

"You know, the flash bomb thing I did earlier," Milly explained briefly as she spun around a laser.

"It's worth a try," Lelouch agreed, "everyone, be ready!"

"Alright! Let's go!" Milly grinned as her Lion shot out a light ball that moments later expanded
with light. Everyone heard the monster cry out in confused pain. It seemed to do the job, and the Paladins took full advantage of it.

"Hit it! With everything you've got!" Lelouch ordered. The Lions raced forward to obey, lasers flying and elements being throw all over the place. Rivalz even managed to freeze some of the laser eyes shut, but a few moments later they melted open again. Despite the fact it had been blinded, that didn't stop the creature from attacking, instead just shooting willy-nilly hoping to hit someone.

"It's not enough!" Rai exclaimed, "even when it can't see us, fighting this thing is like fighting an entire fleet at once!"

"We need to aim for those laser eyes and take them out!" Suzaku shouted, barely dodging a random shot from the monster.

"We'll cover you from up here!" Allura said as the Castle's shields started firing at the beast from above. This was a mistake, as the creature had finally got its full vision back and had turned its assault to the Castle. The shields were still heavily damaged from the ion cannon earlier, so the Castle was losing ground fast.

Coran started to panic as multiple screens started popping up, the condition of the Castle dwindling with each attack taken. "We've lost the spectral generator! Going to reserve! There's a fire in VIN bay three! Suppressors on! Suppressors out! Princess, the ship is being torn apart!"

"We're taking heavy fire up here! We're in trouble!" Allura shouted over the sound of the alarms blaring, inwardly starting to panic as well.

"Princess, pull back! Get out of its range, now!" Lelouch ordered harshly.

"We will not abandon you!" Allura countered stubbornly.

"You're not, we're about to pull out anyway,"

"We are?" Shirley asked in confusion.

"We can't hold out. We have to," Lelouch promptly, "Lions, to the mine shafts! It's the only place the monster can't get us."

"Roger that!" Rai nodded, flying towards the closest one. The other Lions were quick to follow his example.

"Heading into orbit!" Allura said as the Castle pulled back into the atmosphere.

Rivalz and Milly followed after Rai, while Lelouch, Suzaku, Kallen, and Shirley retreated into another shaft. As the quartet landed, they spotted Shay and her family at the bottom with them. They quickly exited their Lions and approached them.

"What is happening?" Rax asked anxiously.

"There's a monster up there that Zarkon sent to destroy us," Kallen informed them as the Balmerans' faces morphed into shock.

"A monster?" Shay asked, losing the little hope she had gained, "Will Zarkon's savagery never abate? Perhaps our people were never meant to be free."
"No! Shay, don't give up," Shirley furiously tried to reassure her friend, "It's true, Zarkon's power grows with every planet he conquers, but he's weakened by every being that fights back."

"Fight back? Against a monster like that? How?" Shay asked, desperately.

"I don't know, but we can beat it. Tell her, Suzaku," Shirley begged.

"Can we?" the Purple Paladin asked skeptically.

"Yes, we can! This is our first mission, and we're not going to fail," Lelouch said, determined to see this through, "We can beat it. We just need some time to come up with a plan."

"See? I told you we can! Thanks, Lulu," Shirley smiled. Suddenly, everyone gasped as the ground beneath them began to shake, loud groans echoing from the tunnels around them, rock and debris falling.

"Do you guys feel that over there?" Kallen asked through her comms to the other party.

"Yeah, we feel it alright!" Rivalz answered back, hearing the same shaking and groans from the other tunnel.

"It's that sound again. What is that?" Milly exclaimed as the shaking continued, seeming to get stronger.

Lelouch and his group actually jumped back a little as large cracks started to form close to them. Rax gently laid his hand on top of it, sorrow showing on his face, "That great noise comes from the Balmera itself. Our home crumbles beneath our feet. The Balmera is dying."

"Oh, no!" Shirley gasped, a hand flying to her mouth, tears welling in her eyes.

o~o

"Coran, Allura, C.C., are you there?" Lelouch asked through the Castle's communications.

"We're here Lelouch," C.C. responded.

"The Balmera—"

"We already know," Coran interrupted as he brought up a screen of the Balmera's heat signature, still continuing to give way to cold, dark blues and purples, "Our scanners are showing the life energy draining from the Balmera."

o~o

From there hiding place, Rai pressed a button on his gauntlet, pulling up an identical image of the Balmera, this time the color was disappearing rapidly. Milly and Rivalz watched the image with concern as well, "How does that happen?"

"Removing crystals from a Balmera is like removing a vital part of the mighty beast. The Balmera needs time to regenerate itself to stay healthy, but the Galra's greed may have cost this noble Balmera its life."

o~o

Back with Shay's family, Lelouch had also pulled up the image on his own gauntlet, face looking
grim. It was not looking suitable for the Balmera or its people.

"So, what exactly is going to happen?" Suzaku asked.

"Its core will collapse, destabilizing the entire skeletal structure. Anything or anyone remaining on the Balmera at that point will be crushed into dust," Lelouch and the others gaped at the revelation, though the Black Paladin was quick to recover.

"How long before the core collapses?" Lelouch asked urgently.

"Probably a matter of hours," Coran regretfully answered, "The mighty organism willingly gives itself to all, but not all return its kindness."

Back on the Castle's bridge, Allura steeled herself, seeing that this was slowly becoming a worst case scenario. They had to act quickly if they were still to save the remaining Balmerans. "Then our time is short. We'll evacuate the planet. We need to get all the Balmerans to the Castle of Lions before the planet implodes."

"Okay, that sounds like a good plan," Kallen agreed through the screen from Lelouch's gauntlet. Rai was looking through on a separate screen with Rover hovering next to him. There was still a significant problem for that plan to work though, "but how on Earth do you plan on landing the Castle with that monster on the surface? It'll shoot you down the tick that it spots you."

"We're going to need a distraction," Suzaku said.

Lelouch nodded, "We'll engage the beast in our Lions. With it distracted, Allura, C.C., and Coran will land the Castle and load all of its citizens."

"Or," Rivalz interjected from Rai's screen, "we could load Balmerans into our Lions a few at a time and shuttle them to the ship. You know, no engaging, ferocious laser-eye guy. How long would that take?"

"Probably weeks," C.C. bluntly stated, "Days at the very least,"

"We only have hours!" Rai added, shooting Rivalz a look that showed there was no room to argue.

"Guys look, we don't necessarily have to beat this thing," Milly said.

"We don't?" Shirley asked, mildly confused now.

"Milly's correct. This time we don't. We just need to bait it away from the ship. Provoke and evade," Lelouch elaborated.

"Uh, Lulu, here's the thing," Shirley said, a tremor in her tone, "I'm worried that we're going to be really, really good at the provoking part, and then like really bad at the evading part. But if—" she glanced at Shay and her family, before steeling herself, "—if this is what it takes to save Shay and everyone on the planet, then I'm in."

"Shay, can you contact the other Balmerans?" Suzaku asked, turning to Shay and her family.

"I can, but I know not what they'll say," Shay admitted, hesitation laced in her tone, "Leave the planet? Our home?"
"It's the only option," Allura said through the communications link, "I'm coming down,"

"Princess, no! It's too dangerous!" Coran protested strongly. He had already lost his family, his king, and everything else on Altea. He didn't want to lose her too.

"Someone has to be there to lead these people out," Allura argued back, determined to help.

"You're coming down? That thing will spot your pod and blow it to pieces!" Rai exclaimed through the transmission.

"Let me worry about that. You just focus on keeping the creature distracted," Allura reassured them.

"I'll go with her," C.C. said, and pressed further before Allura could object, "If something goes wrong, I can take the hit from that creature for you. Don't you remember that I'm immortal? Nothing that beast throws at me will kill me,"

"...Fine, suit up then," Allura relented. Though it was true that C.C. made good arguments, Allura was still mildly disturbed not only with the fact that someone would literally be acting as a living shield, but how casually C.C. took getting shot out of the sky. She could only wonder how many other painful 'deaths' this woman had gone through for that possibility.

Minutes later, all seven of the Lions shot out of their hiding places in the mine shafts. The beast spotted, Rai, Milly, and Rivalz first and attempted to fire, only to be blasted in the back by Lelouch and his party from behind. The beast was not amused as it shot back with its chest in retaliation. As the Lions flew off, the creature activated its own jetpacks on its legs and flew after them, continuing to fire lasers from its eyes and arms.

"Okay, we've provoked. Time to evade!" Shirley shouted with determined eyes as she and the Orange Lion narrowly avoided another shot to their left. The beast roared as it barrelled through a rock structure in its path.

Allura and C.C. arrived at the launch bay, where some drop sleds were waiting, this time with helmets of their own on. The drop-sleds were in a similar design to the speeders, but mostly only had the front of it, with little to no back.

"Alright, Princess, C.C., we've lured the monster away. It's time," Lelouch informed.

"I'll contact you when we're on the ground," Allura answered as she and C.C. prepped two of the sleds.

"Be careful out there," Coran warned through the intercoms.

The launch doors began to blink before turning red. They opened up, sucking the two women out into a vacuum that launched them towards the Balmera's surface.
continued to descend.

"Is that Allura and C.C.?!" Rivalz exclaimed.

The Paladins weren't the only ones to notice, as the beast turned one of its eyes on the women and was about to fire.

"We got to protect them!" Suzaku shouted as he dive-bombed the beast to shift its focus. The Purple Lion barely avoided it and felt the lasers skim by its side. Lelouch and the Black Lion latched onto its head and kicked off of it, further agitating it. To the rear, Rivalz used the Blue Lion's ice ray to freeze its head, but it was shattered moments later with its lasers.

o~o

The princess and witch both continued to fly down into one of the shafts, weaving around the mining pillars and equipment and until they came to a stop on the ground. Allura looked up in relief to see that Shay and her family were already there.

"We're on the ground," Allura informed the Paladins.

"Alright, hurry! I don't know how long we can hold this thing off," Lelouch ordered anxiously.

Allura and C.C. ran towards the Balmeran family, "Shay, I'm going to need your help,"

"Princess? C.C.?" Shay asked, surprised to see both of them.

"Have you contacted the other Balmerans?" she asked urgently. Then she noticed Shay and her family. They looked sad and dejected. Something wasn't right.

"What is it? What's going on?" Allura asked.

"All Balmerans give thanks for the kindness you and the Paladins bestowed upon us, but, alas, we cannot take leave of our home," Shay informed them sadly.

"What?" Allura gasped, and even C.C. looked taken aback. These people, knowing that death was at their doorstep, were willing to die with their Balmera. It was a way of showing how much they loved and honored the magnificent creature. C.C. had only met a handful of people back on Earth that shared this same conviction and couldn't help the warm admiration she felt at that moment.

"If our great Balmera's life cycle is over because of us," Shay looked back at her family, "then our desire is to stay with it until the end."

"But you'll never survive," Allura protested.

"And it's not your doing either," C.C. argued, though much calmer than the Princess, "it was the Galra that came here and took what was rightfully yours in the first place. If you must blame someone for this, blame the one behind all this madness, Zarkon himself."

"But it was I who conspired against you when you first came here," Rax countered, "And we submitted to their cruelty years ago. We contacted the others, and all agree, it's not right that you risk your lives for us. Please, away. We ask for no more guilt and shame upon us."

"It is our wish. The wish of all Balmerans," Shay added.

"No. I won't give up on you," Allura persisted, "I won't give up on any of you, no matter the circumstances."
"But we do not ask this of you. Please!" Shay begged.

"We're here because we want to be," C.C. said, "All living things deserved to live without fear of oppression. And you will receive it."

"I have heard your words. Now let me speak mine. I want to talk to the Balmerans. Can you get a message to them from me?"

"There is no need to speak for you," Shay's grandmother said gently, "You have a unique power within. The Balmera will carry your words," she pointed at the wall that Allura had laid her hand against. Underneath her palm, it was glowing blue. Allura gasped and pulled her hand away in shock.

"Speak your heart, child. All can hear you," the grandmother encouraged, placing Allura's hand back on the wall.

Allura closed her eyes and concentrated as she spoke, "Balmerans, this is Princess Allura. You don't know me, but I am here to help. I know what it's like to watch your home planet die. For I come from planet Altea, a planet that has long been destroyed by the Galra. But I refuse to give up. And now, you all have the same choice. You can decide now to devote your lives to making sure this never happens to another planet. I am eternally sorry for what has happened to the Balmera, but I beg you, do not let its dying be in vain. Honor the Balmera's death by refusing to give up. Join me in my fight against the Galra."

From all over the Balmera, the people were listening to Allura's words. Words that touched their hearts and filled them with the courage they needed to carry on.

Shay's grandmother placed her hand next to Allura's and looked graciously at the princess, "Your words have touched our hearts."

"Thank you," Allura said, tears filling her eyes.

"No, thank you. You've given us reason to hope again," the grandmother smiled at her

"Everyone, head to the caves just under the surface," Allura instructed through the Balmera.

From the Castle, Coran, with the B.L.I.P.s, was able to see a large number of yellow dots converging towards the shaft entrances. "Princess, your speech must have worked. The Balmerans are moving toward the surface!"

C.C. and Allura just finished leading Shay's family to the exit, with Rax carrying their grandmother on his back. They were able to make out the Castle, just barely in the clouds.

"Coran, we're just beneath the surface," Allura informed him.

"Triangulate our position. This is your landing zone," C.C. added just as the Balmera shook again, causing the group to have to hang onto the walls for balance.

"Understood. Readying ship. Castle of Lions, coming in! Paladins, how are you holding up?" Coran asked.
Kallen looped around a set of lasers and now was looking down at the beast from above. "I think we've got him pretty distracted. Are the Balmerans in position?"

"They're making their way to the top," Allura informed from down below.

From all over the Balmera, the Balmerans started climbing towards the top on ladders and even the mining columns and pillars. Men, women, and children were slowly bringing themselves to the surface. All of the Balmerans paused in wonder as the Castle of Lions landed just outside one of the main shafts.

Allura and C.C. were directing Shay and her family up to the final ladder to the top, thousands of other waiting just below them.

Coran lowered himself to the surface in a transport pod that landed underneath the Castle. Coran urgently motioned to them as the pod opened.

"Bring them out! Hurry now!"

Just as the words left his lips though, the Balmera began to shake again. Allura had just finished coming up the ladder when it tilted backward from the tremors, along with all the other lower ladders. Large boulders and rock began to crumble down, nearly killing several Balmerans.

"No!" Allura gasped as the surface began to split apart and the Balmerans cried out in fear.

"It's on the verge of collapsing!" Coran shouted as he ran over to them, "We have to go!"

"But the Balmerans!" Allura cried. Only Shay and her family had managed to make it to the surface. There were still hundreds or even thousands more still trapped below!

"They're trapped! What can be done? Time is short!" Rax exclaimed as the ground rumbled again.

Back on the battlefield, the Lions were scrambling to avoid the incoming shots from the ro-beast. Each one that missed them hit the Balmera, which only weakened it further.

"Every hit weakens the Balmera. Have you evacuated yet? What's happening?" Milly asked as she felt herself getting uncharacteristically anxious.

"The Balmerans are trapped. Just keep distracting that beast!" Coran said over the link.

"Uh, do you want us to distract it by dying? Because that's what's going to happen!" Shirley shouted, desperation in her tone.

Lelouch gritted his teeth. This was taking too long, they were slowly getting worn out. There was no telling how much longer they could keep the robot occupied before it possibly got bored and went to attack the Castle again. That meant…

"Paladins, remember when I said we didn't have to beat it?" Lelouch asked. Sounds of confirmation rang in his ears. "Well, it looks like we have to beat it now!"
"We're lost! All are trapped with no chance for escape!" Shay cried, holding her head in despair.

"We can't give up," Allura said, kneeling next to her, placing a hand on her shoulder.

"But what can be done?" Shay asked desperately. Her eyes though were suddenly drawn to a bright blue glow in the direction of the Castle. Everyone else also looked in its path. What they saw was a small section exactly underneath the Castle that was glowing a bright, healing blue.

"The Balmera... The ground beneath your mighty ship appears healed. Its essence thrives. But how?" Shay asked in wonder.

"The Castle!" Allura exclaimed in realization.

"Not just the Castle, but you as well," the grandmother said, as she smiled at Allura. Looking beneath her, the spot where she and Shay were sitting was glowing as well.

"It's true," Coran said, "Your Altean energy combined with the ship's Crystal has revitalized this part of the Balmera."

Allura picked her head, an idea forming in her head as she stood up, "That's it! Maybe we can perform the ceremony you spoke about. We can save the Balmera."

"What ceremony?" Rax asked, confused.

"In the days of old, when Alteans were given the gift of Crystals from a Balmera, we would repay its sacrifice by performing a ceremony," Coran explained, "A sacred Altean would re-infuse the Balmera with Quintessence. In this way, we had a symbiotic relationship."

"The Galra have only been taking. It's time we give back," Allura told her advisor as they all started walking to the bottom of the ship, "I can connect with the Crystal in the Bridge and use the Castle's power as an amplifier."

"When your father performed the ceremony, it was on a much smaller scale," Coran said as he walked up to her side, "I beg you. To heal an entire planet, it could take more energy than you possess. You may not... live through it."

"I know you're scared for me, Coran, but I must try," Allura said, with conviction.

"Perhaps I can help as well," C.C. said from behind them.

"How? You're not a sacred Altean, you can't perform the ceremony with me," Allura pointed out.

"Perhaps, but if you Alteans are capable of giving life force, I can assume that the opposite is possible as well. No?" C.C. tilted her head toward the Princess.

"Well, yes it is, but I would never think to do such a thing to anyone or anything," Allura said, horrified at the mere idea.

"Well, if I let you use some of mine, you wouldn't necessarily be taking it," C.C. said, "No matter how much it is, it won't kill me. You might as well use the tools you've been given."

Allura was shocked that C.C. would suggest such a thing, but realizing that there weren't many other options, nodded, "Very well, stand here in the center with me," she instructed.

C.C. complied as the Balmerans all placed their hands on the healed surface in a circle formation. All of them closed their eyes in concentration. Unbeknownst to them, the rest of the Balmerans had
Allura held her hands out, palms up to C.C., who promptly grasped them. Both the women closed their eyes and concentrated. Using Allura herself as a conductor, they both connected to the Crystal in the Castle, and a pillar of blue energy descended down and engulfed both of them. The blue circle of healing energy that surrounded the Castle slowly started spreading outward until it almost reached the edges of the Castle.

Coran gasped in awe as the ceremony appeared to be working.

As Allura and C.C. continued, C.C.’s hair began to blow in an invisible breeze as the Geass symbol on her forehead lit up, red for only an instant before flashing to a brilliant blue, the same as the energy surrounding them.

The Black and Orange Lions froze in mid-flight as their pilots suddenly gasped. Power, similar to what they felt when they first received their Geass coursed through them. The Geass symbol flashed in their eyes, a bright blue, for barely a moment, but long enough for both Lelouch and Shirley to notice.

This stop forced the other Paladins to spin around and defend them as the robot continued to fire its laser at them. They spun around gracefully as they fired back attacks of their own, but had little to no effect.

"Shirley! Lelouch! Are you okay?" Suzaku shouted, just as the two pulled out of their trance.

"Yes," Lelouch gasped out.

"I'm good!" Shirley shouted as she also charged the beast, and managed to hit the port in its chest, but there was no damage shown that it did anything.

"Guys, this isn't working," Kallen shouted, as the beast began to rotate, shooting out lasers like a sprinkler for a grass lawn, "We'll never take this beast down in our Lions."

"Well, forming Voltron didn't work, either," Rai pointed out.

"Not without some way to shoot all those laser eyes at once," Rivalz grunted as he narrowly dodged another laser.

Shirley gasped again, but this time for a completely different reason, as she felt her Lion growl. Looking to her right, a port began to rise up from her dashboard, with a keyhole inside. The mental nudge came again, like a mother lion encouraging her cub to take its first steps, "Wait-what? What are you trying to tell me?" Following her gut, she pulled her Bayard out of its little magic pocket of her armor and held it up, not entirely sure what she was doing yet. "Guys! Guys, something's happening! I-I think there is a way to take down all those laser eyes at once."

"Well, what is it?!" Milly asked urgently.

"Well, uh, do you remember how Voltron formed that sword with Suzaku's Bayard? I think my Lion's telling me I can do the same thing with my Bayard."

"Are you sure?" Suzaku asked.

"Well, we're about to find out!" Shirley said, as she raised it, and aimed for the keyhole, "Form
"thingy!" She shoved it into the port and twisted… nothing happened, "...It didn't work!"

"Because we didn't form Voltron yet," Lelouch replied.

"Oh, right, right!" Shirley said quickly, mentally kicking herself for forgetting about that, "I knew that!"

"Guys, whatever we're planning, let's hurry up and do it," Rai shouted as he flipped around another laser, and barely missing a second one.

The ro-beast below suddenly turned its head behind it, spotting the Castle, along with the growing area of blue healing energy. It raised its arms and started levitating towards it.

"We got to defend the Castle! Everyone follow me. Form Voltron!" Lelouch ordered. The Lions lined up with him and the Black Lion and began to ascend towards the sky, trails of their colors forming behind them. In a flash of light, the Lions roared and began to shift until the familiar Defender of the Universe was built once again.

The ro-beast roared as it raised its arms to fire a concentrated shot from all of the eye ports at the Castle but never got a chance to shoot though as a blue laser hit it square in the face from above. Voltron landed between the ro-beast and the Castle.

As he rose to his full height again, a thin object morphed to life in his hands. It was long and slender. He held it out in front of him in the Aka's mouth and pulled back with Zerith. A single arrow made of pure energy appeared between them.

As the ro-beast recovered from the attack, it brought its arms together again to form the same concentrated attack again, this time aiming at Voltron. Just as it fired, Voltron released the arrow it was holding. It hit the ro-beast's attack head-on, exploding on impact and disrupting the rest of the assault as the monster cried out in pain.

Stunned, but not about to give up, the ro-beast readied another concentrated attack, and Voltron moved to dodge it and draw it away.

"A single shot isn't enough! We need to try something else!" Lelouch shouted as Voltron turned and twisted to avoid the lasers that flew towards him.

Then, from inside her Lion, Shirley's screen zoomed in on the ro-beast, and multiple targets locked onto it, all aiming at the eyes.

"Are you guys seeing this?" Shirley asked.

"Roger that!" Kallen exclaimed, and she could feel all of the other Paladins agreeing.

"Let's see what this thing can do. Engage!" Lelouch shouted as he thrust his controls forward.

Voltron fired another arrow, but this time, it split mid-air into a dozen smaller ones, each one hitting one of the ro-beast's eyes with perfect accuracy. The ro-beast stumbled back from the barrage, and its arms fell to its sides, purple lightning flickering around them.

o~o

Allura and C.C. had not moved from their position underneath the Castle as the glow of quintessence continued to grow greater still, tiny sparkles of energy rising up from the ground around them.
Allura suddenly let go of C.C.‘s hands and thrust herself to the ground, hands slamming the surface. C.C. stumbled backward, body feeling weaker and more lethargic than she’d felt in a while.

Once Allura’s hands hit the Balmera’s surface, the light spread out even further, engulfing the entire landscape and exterior of the creature. It spread like a tidal wave rolling in from the sea, sweeping up sand and shells in its wake.

The Paladins all gasped in awe as they watched this occur.

"Guys it’s… beautiful!" Milly breathed, as every pillar and curved surface was spread with blue. None of the Paladins denied it. It was the most incredible thing they’d ever seen!

The light continued to spread all around it. Even from space, one could see that wave of life energy rolling across the Balmera’s surface. Within moments, the quintessence faded, absorbed into the creature that it was saving.

However, despite this victory for Allura, the ro-beast wasn’t finished yet. Even though its arms had been severely damaged, the monster lifted its head and roared at its foe, dragging itself to its feet.

Once upright, the large port in its chest glowed brightly with another as a massive laser was unleashed at the Paladins. Unlike the other times, though, Voltron wasn’t deterred. After flying high to avoid it, the juggernaut zoomed downward and charged the beast head on, even as it fired another laser to try and stop him.

Kallen with a victorious yell, Kallen wrenched her controls forward as Voltron pulled back its fist. With a swing, Voltron buried Aka’s head in the ro-beast’s chest. In a flash of light, the ro-beast was propelled backward, over the mine shaft with the Balmerans still inside, and landed with a broken thud on the other side, smoke trailing out of its open mouth in defeat as its eyes flickered off.

\[ \text{o~o} \]

The pillar that surrounded Allura slowly shrunk until it disappeared back into the Castle above. C.C. was still standing shakily to the side as Allura’s formed slumped forward and fell to the side.

Shay ran over and gathered the Princess in her arms as her father went to steady C.C., whose legs almost gave out underneath her.

"Princess, are you alright?" Shay asked as she propped Allura up in her arms. Coran raced to their side, his heart hammering in his chest.

Allura groaned as her eyes slowly flickered open, "Did it work?" she asked weakly.

"Yes. The Balmera lives," Rax said, as he put his hand on the ground, "It thanks you."

Despite feeling weak, Allura smiled. The ceremony had worked. The Balmerans were safe along with the creature they called their home. The Paladins, having disbanded Voltron and landed, ran up to them as well, relieved to see that everyone was okay and alive.

They stopped short though as the ground rumbled beneath them, but it wasn’t coming from the Balmera. To everyone’s horror, the ro-beast had risen again, like a zombie rising from its grave.

"No!" Allura gasped in terror as the beast charged its chest cannon to full power. It planned to wipe out the Castle and everyone within the vicinity!

But it never was able to complete its plan, as the ground underneath it shifted, and the Balmera
cried out, this time in anger rather than pain. From beneath the ro-beast's feet, large crystals gathered and rose around it, holding it to the ground. It gathered up around its torso and latched onto its arms. The chest cannon that had previously been charging broke out as crystals emerged from it as well. With a final roar, attempting futilely to free itself, the ro-beast was fully encased in crystal, imprisoned forever.

It took everyone about a five ticks to process what on Earth they just witnessed. It was both one of the scariest and the most amazing things they ever saw.


"The Balmera just saved us," Coran said with a smile.

"Look at the Crystals!" Allura exclaimed with joy as tiny blue gems began to grow and form from the ground. They began to cover the entire surface, sparkling like a tranquil lake along the surface. It was indeed one of the most beautiful sights the Paladins had ever seen.

'Nunnally would love this,' Lelouch thought with a smile and made a mental note to bring his sister here to see for herself someday. And she would see it! Even if the pods proved unable to cure her blindness, he was positive that somewhere out there, there was medicine, a civilization, or technology that could do so. As well as heal her legs. His sister would be whole again. He wouldn't stop looking until his dying breath.

Lelouch was torn from his thoughts when he heard Rivalz behind him. Turning around, he blinked when he saw the Blue Paladin on the ground, petting the surface.

"Oh, who's a good Balmera? You are. Who ate the big monster? You did. Yes, you did. Yes, you did," Rivalz grinned as he continued to scratch the planet's surface.

"Rivalz, what are you doing?" Kallen asked in disbelief.

"What? It's alive," Rivalz defended, "and it wuvvs my scwatches."

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The aftermath of the battle involved cleaning up the rest of the Balmera's surface, as well as uprooting as much of what remained of the Galra equipment that was still there and helping the Balmeras get resettled back in the tunnels. It almost the whole day, and no one returned to the Ship until nightfall. Allura and C.C. had been rushed back inside by Coran and ordered to rest as they worked despite Allura's protests. C.C. was more nonchalant about it but certainly didn't say no to it either.

Most of the Paladins had now returned to the Castle, Lelouch looked particularly anxious to get back on. The only one that hadn't joined them yet was Shirley, as she and Shay were perched on top of the Orange Lion and enjoying the view of the stars as well as the glowing light of the Balmera Crystals below.

"Thank you for honoring your vow to return," Shay said with a smile.

Shirley turned and smiled back at her friend, "I should be thanking you. You made me understand what's most important. Zarkon and his Galra Empire are destroying lives. I'm a part of a team that can change that. I know that, now. So thank you."

Shay smiled back before a glow in the distance distracted her, "What is that?" she asked alarmed.
Shirley turned to look as the sun rose above the horizon, painting the planet with a golden glow, "It's the dawn of a new day."

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Shirley returned to the Castle shortly after that. Watching Shay see her first sunrise was a beautiful moment. It made Shirley remember how many things they all really took for granted back on Earth.

The thought of her home made the Orange Paladin pause in her step slightly as she exited her Lion. She missed her mom and dad, but she also couldn't help but think of all of the people in Japan that were waiting for their return. Lelouch told them that they would be returning soon, but how long would that be exactly. 'Soon' could mean weeks or even months. She sincerely hoped it wouldn't be years.

"Ah, number five," Coran's voice rang through the Lion's hanger, "if you will, please report promptly to the bridge. We're having a brief meeting."

Shirley blinked, curiosity and worry rolling in her gut. Had something happened? Did they have to leave for another planet now?

When Shirley entered the bridge, she was surprised to see not only Coran and the other Paladins, but also C.C. and Allura. No… Lelouch wasn't here yet either.

"Princess, shouldn't you be resting?" she asked when she entered.

"I will Shirley," Allura answered, "but Lelouch insisted we all meet here on the bridge."

"Why?"

"If we knew we'd tell you," Suzaku shrugged, looking a little confused as well, "It needs to be quick though. Shirley's right about you needing to be in bed Princess."

Allura groaned. While she appreciated that they all cared, their insistence was starting to really annoy her. She was also annoyed that they weren't saying the same so C.C., though the immortal looked like she'd partway recovered already. Must be an immortal thing.

"Speaking of Lelouch, where is he? He's the one who wanted to have this meeting so-"

Rai was interrupted when the bridge doors opened again. Everyone turned to them, and the Paladins all gasped at the person who entered the room.

It was Lelouch, but his outfit was completely different. He still adorned his Paladin armor, but the white had been painted a pitch black, and the black outlining that would identify him as the Black Paladin was now tinted in bold gold color. Around his shoulders and down his back was a long, sleek black cape, that curved at the top. Finally, for the cherry on top, in Lelouch's hands was a very familiar looking mask, black just like the cape, with a dark tinted front, and spikes rising up from the top.

"Woah! Lelouch, when did you-"

"I started working on it with C.C. shortly after your stay in the cryopods Rivalz," Lelouch answered.

"Lelouch, I'm confused," Allura said, "why are you wearing that?"
"It's his Zero costume," Kallen answered, "or, at least very similar to it, obviously minus the Paladin armor. But that mask and cape is definitely Zero's,"

"So this is the form you take with your group back on Earth," Coran mused, "I'll admit, the cape adds a nice touch. I, myself, am quite fond of them too."

Lelouch couldn't help but chuckle at that statement. He had a feeling the Altean might like it and was glad he was correct.

"Lelouch, this is great and all, but why do you have that on?" Milly asked.

"Coran," Lelouch addressed, seeming to ignore Milly's question, "I was wondering. Is it possible for this Castle to broadcast across the entire universe? Seeing how it can pick up any all distress signals, can assume that it's a 'yes'?"

"Yes, you're correct," Coran nodded, "this Castle's signal can reach across the entire astral conflux if we wanted it to,"

"Even so the Galra can pick up?" Lelouch asked, a small smirk playing on his lips.

"Well- yes, I suppose so," Coran confirmed, though a little hesitant.

"Perfect," Lelouch grinned.

"Woah, Lelouch hold on!" Rai exclaimed, "You haven't answered Milly's question, what are you doing?"

"Isn't it obvious? I'm planning to… 'introduce' Zero to the universe, particularly the Galra," he answered casually.

"What? Why?" Suzaku asked. Several noises of confusion were heard from the other Paladins as well.

"Well, for one, we do intend to return to Earth very soon. But the Galra's territory continues to grow closer every passing varga. Even if we returned right this very tick, we simply wouldn't have enough time to prepare Earth for an invasion, considering the… complications that will arise once we get there."

"Britannia, right?" Kallen asked with a frown.

"Correct," Lelouch nodded before continuing, "Also, something that Rolo said when we were talking to him and his crew caught my attention. He mentioned that there are several others out there fighting against the Empire. None of it appears to be very organized, but it's better than nothing.

"While we were on our way here, I discovered that the Castle's footage has the entire battle with Sendak, and our Lions also have recorded every battle that we've been through until now."

"Okay, that's cool all, but I'm still not following," Rivalz admitted.

"I intended to broadcast these battles, our victories, or rather the Galra Empire's defeats across the universe. To every signal that can pick up on screen or air. By showing the people this, it can inspire them to keep fighting, and perhaps cause even more to take up arms against the Galra oppressors. It's proof that the Galra aren't invincible, that the Empire can be defeated."
"With these pockets of resistance that will no doubt rise up, it should distract Zarkon and a majority of his forces to try and suppress those first. It should give us the window of time that we'll need to get to Earth and prepare it for when the Galra do come."

"It should work," C.C. said as she noticed that Allura and Coran still looked a little hesitant to agree, "when Zero made his first debut on Earth, many resistances rose up against Britannia all over the world, not just in Japan."

"Lelouch, I'm not saying this doesn't sound like a good plan, but if all you want to do is inspire more rebellion, why not just use Voltron? He's called the 'Defender of the Universe' for a reason," Shirley said.

"That's true, Voltron is an extraordinary weapon, and he does inspire many to rise and fight. However, at the end of the day, Voltron still is just a weapon, a giant robot that only a few have access to..."

He heard the Black Lion growl a little in his mind, sounding offended. 'You know what I mean,' he thought back. He felt the Black Lion huff in annoyance still, but she seemed to calm down a little.

"...By having Zero, along with the rest of the Paladins, shown to the universe, it will show everyone that it is the people who are fighting Zarkon and his empire, not just Voltron. It's true that war is fought using weapons, but in reality, it's won by the people that use them."

The rest of the team could see Lelouch's logic. It would be a similar strategy to how he was fighting Britannia, though this time it would be on a much larger scale. If it worked with Britannia, it should work out here as well.

"Also," Lelouch added, drawing their attention again, "inspiring rebellion isn't the only reason I'm using Zero. Kallen, do you remember what I told you and Black Knights when we first started working together, about the reason why Zero exists?"

"Yeah, I remember," the Red Paladin answered, "you said that Zero is a symbol, for two things. Hope, as a shield for the weak, and also a symbol for people to fear if they use their power to suppress others."

"Exactly. I plan to do the exact same thing for the Galra. To those fighting against them, Zero will be seen as a beacon of hope; a shield to the weak and the powerless," Lelouch stretched his hand to the left, his cape flapping behind him slightly, "while at the same time, to the Galra specifically, he will be an omen of terror for they, and others like them, to fear," he smirked darkly as he used his other hand to put his mask on his head, "and I believe it's about time that the Galra experienced that fear. Wouldn't you agree?"

Several different reactions followed from this proclamation. C.C., Rai, and Kallen smirk. Zero was back and ready to hit the ground running. Even Allura looked impressed, though deep down it wasn't just from Lelouch's strategy and plan, but in a small part of her, it was craving vengeance against the Galra. Not just for the suffering of the people currently in the universe, but for her own as well. Now they would know at least a sliver of what she felt as she watched her home burning to ash around her.

Shirley was blushing a little as she looked at Lelouch in his costume. She admitted, ever since Lelouch/Zero had saved her and the others from the hotel-jackers, she held a little bit of admiration for the masked being. And now that she knew that that being was her secret crush, she saw Zero not as a terrorist, but a hero. One that inspired her to continue to fight as well.
Rivalz whistled and smirked as well, "Dang, that's dark buddy," he couldn't help but chuckle.

Milly shivered as she felt a chill run up her spine. Lelouch always had a thing for the theatrics when he wanted to didn't he?

Suzaku, despite seeing the logic of the plan, couldn't help but be a little disturbed and taken aback by Lelouch's attitude. He remembered his friend always saying that he would never end up like his father, but he couldn't help but notice that a couple of the Emperor's traits seemed to leak through to this persona. He really hoped Lelouch knew what he was doing.

The most hilarious reaction though was definitely Coran's however. The advisor looked visibly spooked as he had jumped back and was holding his arms in fronts of him like a shield, his eyes full in shock and terror.

After he recovered from the scare though, Lelouch… no, Zero turned to the advisor, "Prepare the ship for the broadcast. I want every corner of the universe to hear our declaration.

Coran stood up straight and saluted, "Right away, Zero!"

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"Your Highness, the Drazi monster has been defeated," Thace reported as he entered the Galra throne room with some other Galra soldiers. Commander Prorok was still there in front of the Emperor, and Haggar had joined him at his right side.

At the mention of the ro-beasts failure, Haggar growled, but she said nothing more.

Prorok barely hid the smirk on his face at the news. It was about time that the witch understood the insignificance of those experiments. If the first one didn't stop Voltron, it was unlikely that the others would. He didn't say it aloud though, as he didn't wish to provoke the Emperor's ire even further.

Before anyone could say anything else though, another Galra reported through the throne room's intercom, "Emperor Zarkon, we're picking up a signal along the Astral Conflux. It's being broadcast to all frequencies."

"Proceed," Zarkon ordered. Four robot drones flew to the center of the room and projected a violet screen in the middle of them. For a few moments, there was nothing but static, but slowly, an image began to take form.

When it finally cleared, a single figure could be seen on the screen. A masked figure.

"I am Zero!" the figure proclaimed.

Prorok, Thace, and the other soldiers in the room looked taken aback by the perpetrator. No one was ever bold enough to broadcast themselves like this.

'Zero? As in 'nothing'? 'Thace thought as he stared at the masked man before them.

Haggar had her full attention on the screen, not so much as blinking. The Emperor himself seemed to remain unfazed by the being though but allowed the broadcast to continue running.

At the moment, the message was being played through every radio and screen throughout the universe, to both Galra prison camps, military facilities, civilian colonies, as well as every existing rebel base and outpost that the Galra hadn't obliterated yet. Aliens and beings everywhere all
stopped their current activities as the masked man before they had their full attention.

The screen then panned out. Standing on Zero's right hand and left were the other Paladins of Voltron, the Red, Blue, and Yellow to the right, the Purple, Green, and Orange on the left. All of their helmets were darkened, so none of their faces could be seen.

"People of the Universe! Fear us or rally behind us as you see fit! We are the New Paladins of Voltron!"

Several of the Galra soldiers began murmuring out concerns to one another, even in tones of fear as they continued to watch the screen. Even Prorok couldn't help but look a little nervous.

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"We of the Paladins stand with all those who have no weapons to wield! Regardless of what planet or species they hail from! The Galra Empire cowardly attacked the inhabitants of Balmera X-95-Vox, and attempted to destroy the living creature itself! It was a wanton and meaningless act. Therefore they have been punished."

From behind Zero and the other Paladins, clips of the battle with the fleet and Drazil played out, showing the utter and humiliating defeat of both, by the hands of Voltron himself. Aliens in all sizes, colors, and shapes in a mall stopped their shopping to gaze in amazement at the footage from all over the shopping center.

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"Just as the Galra Commander Sendak was punished for endangering the populace of Planet Arus, we could not stand by and allow such cruelty to be carried out, and so we made him pay for his actions."

A rebel base couldn't help but watch in awe as footage of Sendak's defeat, first by Voltron in the air, and then his failed Castle take over were shown next. It was shown all the way up to the point where they detained Sendak and had him trapped. A younger female member with short brown hair especially looked astonished as she held her hands in front of her face as if to pray.

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"We will not repudiate battle on a fair and level field, but neither will we tolerate a one-sided massacre of the weak by the strong! The only ones who should kill are those who are prepared to be killed!"

Zarkon narrowed his eyes at that particular comment as he and Haggar continued to watch.

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"Wherever oppressors abuse their power by attacking those who are powerless, we shall appear again! No matter how mighty, how formidable our foe may be!"

Even Rolo and his crew could hear the speech from their ship, its holographic imaging was still working. The bounty hunter, despite getting off on the wrong foot with the Paladins just a couple days ago, couldn't help but smirk.

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"Those of you with power, fear us!" Zero whipped out one of his hands from under his cape, "Those
of you without it, rally behind us!" the other hand flew off in the other direction, "We, the Paladins of Voltron, shall be the ones who stand in judgment of this universe!"

A crew member in a ship hidden in deep space whistled as the broadcast shut off, just as suddenly as it switched on, "Alright, I like that guy. He's got some guts for sticking up to the Galra like that."

"I liked the cape," another member added, "gives him a bit of that 'bad boy' look. Don't you think?"

Two other members weren't quite as enthused as their two comrades. Both looked back at their leader, who sat quite casually upon a throne in the center of the room.

"Should we take action, sir?" one of them asked while the other simply stayed silent.

The purple-skinned, white-haired leader didn't respond for a couple of ticks, before he smirked, "No, let's enjoy his little show for now,"

As the crew got back to looking at the star map they had pulled up before the broadcast interrupted, the leader's grin widened, his sharp white teeth glimmering in the soft lighting of the ship.

'Well then, 'Zero,' you've caught my attention. Now... show me what you can do,'

Chapter End Notes

AN: AAAANNNDD now it officially begins! Zero had made his appearance, and the rebellion is only just beginning! You're all more than welcome to guess who some of these mystery people were, but I won't be revealing anything for spoiler's sake. But I hope you enjoyed this chapter as much as I did writing it.

Once again, special thanks to my co-writer/idea generator friend Iron117Prime for helping me with this chapter!

Also, if anyone notices spelling errors or the like, please let me know with a PM so that I can fix it. Thank you!

R&R please and I'll see you next time!
"This was supposed to be training exercise!" Shirley shrieked as Voltron ducked underneath the swing of their foe.

*The day before…*

"Not again, Suzaku, cut it out!"

Kallen blinked as she approached the Black Lion's main hangar in the Castle. She had found a note on her bed to meet there when she had come out of the shower. A wash of deja vu flowing over her at the sound of Lelouch's voice as she got closer.

"Sorry Lelouch, Milly's orders."

"Just hold still Lelouch. If you do, this will be over sooner! And it's not even half bad," Rai's voice sounded as Kallen turned the corner and entered.

"Urgh, easy for you to say! This is ridiculous!"

"Hey, come on Lelouch, you put the costume on, you got to have a complete look!"

"The only reason I'm wearing this Rivalz is that *somehow* all my clothes mysteriously disappeared after I got back from showering! All except for this!" Lelouch glared at Milly who just looked away and hummed innocently.

She blinked as she saw Lelouch being pinned down by Suzaku and Rivalz, and Rai was holding a marker over Lelouch's head, attempting to draw something on his face. She did a double take when she noticed that the four boys were wearing one-piece cat costumes each in the color of their lions, complete with hoods that had cat ears on top. She could only see Rai's face and saw that his nose had been colored in brown and had black whiskers on his face. Milly and Shirley were standing off to the side, giggling at Lelouch's predicament. They were wearing tight, long-sleeved leotards, with cat ear headbands, and knee-high socks. They were yellow and orange to match their Lions. C.C. was also there, wearing a white cat outfit like the others. She then noticed that all seven of the Lions were sitting around them in a circle. How they got there, she wasn't sure…

Milly turned to Kallen when she noticed her entering.

"Good meowning, Kallen!"

"Good morning, I guess. What's going on?" Kallen muttered, still looking confused as everyone turned to see her.

"Kallen! I command you to rescue me from this!" Lelouch shouted.

"Oh, it's our Naming Party for the Lions!" Shirley informed her, ignoring Lelouch's protests.

"'Naming Party'?” she asked.

"Yeah! Didn't Prez tell you? We know that you and Rai already did it, but we're trying to come up with names for our Lions too," Rivalz said.
"And… you're dressed up as cats because…?"

"Milly said it was to help us 'get in tune with the Lions' better," Suzaku laughed.

"We've had nothing to do the past couple of days due to Allura still recovering, so we might as well have a little fun," Milly shrugged.

"We set a costume aside for you too," Shirley said, pulling a red cat costume down from Aka's paw, with a headband to match, "here, I hope we got your size right."

"How did you get your hands on these?" Kallen asked, as she took the costume, and saw that it was identical to Milly and Shirley's, save the color.

"The Princess was more than happy to lend them some older dresses for them to work with," C.C. said.

"Wait, you made these?" Kallen asked, holding the leotard up in front of her.

"Well, Shirley helped a little," the Yellow Paladin shrugged, "and as I said, we had some extra time on our hands."

"Come on! Get changed so we can get started, Kallen!" Rivalz exclaimed as he held Lelouch's face still as Rai was carefully applying eye-liner. Seeing there was really no room to argue, Kallen complied and returned ten minutes later in her leotard.

"Alright! Now's the fun part! I do hope you've all been thinking of names lately. It's time to see what ones they like best!" Milly cheered.

Since Kallen and Rai already named their Lions, they were allowed to just sit out and watch. Though they were still allowed to give their input as well.

"Well, what name are you thinking of for the Yellow Lion Milly?" Suzaku asked.

"I'm glad you asked Suzaku. I've narrowed it down to two so far. I was thinking of either 'Maeraka' or 'Stella.' What do you think?" she asked the Paladins and her Lion.

"'Stella'? That's a bit clique, isn't it?" Rai asked from his position on Zerith's paw.

"On the contrary, 'Stella' is actually Latin for 'Star.'" Milly explained.

"And what does 'Maeraka' mean?" Rivalz asked.

"I believe it's 'battle' in Arabic, correct?" C.C. asked.

"Yep!" Milly nodded.

"I personally like Maeraka more than Stella," Suzaku said.

Milly jumped a little as she felt her Lion purr behind her, quite fond of the name herself.

"Alright, Maeraka, it is then!" she smiled back.

This pattern continued for the rest of the group as well. Rivalz shot out a bunch of different names, such as Calypso, Sheila, Nori, Cassie (short for Cassiopeia), Miranda, even Ariel. For the friendliest Lion, she sure was being picky about what name she wanted.
"Man! I'm starting to run out!" He exclaimed, starting to sound a little frustrated, "Um… I have Halley, Aurora, Polaris-"

The Blue Lion suddenly roared when he said 'Polaris' making Rivalz drop the list that he'd made.

"Oh! Do you like Polaris? Alright then, that's your name then!"

Suzaku already had his name ready. Yoru. It meant 'night' in his native language. The Purple Lion liked it a lot and accepted her new title.

Shirley was struggling with her name a little. She had wanted to name her Lion after a flower, or something else involving the earth, but none of them seemed to fit the heavily armored Lion.

"You could try Zinnia," C.C. suggested.

"Zinnia?" Shirley asked.

"Oh yeah!" Rai agreed, "It's those bright orange flowers. They bloom shortly after they're planted, and usually stay in bloom for a lot longer than most. Because of that, one of the things it symbolizes is endurance, but it also stands for lasting affection and daily remembrance."

"How do you know that?" Kallen asked incredulously.

Rai blushed and scratched the back of his head, "Well, I may or may not have camped out in the library for a couple of nights and read every informational book I could get my hands on. I figured if I don't remember who I am, I might as well learn everything I can about the world, right?"

Kallen nodded with a shrug. Everyone else seemed to accept that answer as well.

Before Shirley could even suggest the name, she felt the familiar nudge in her mind and an affectionate purr of approval. Zinnia was the Orange Lion's moniker now.

"All right, last but not least, Lulu," Milly smiled, turning to the Black Paladin, "what fantastic name have you thought of for the Black Lion here?"

"Well," Lelouch said, "considering that the Black Lion is the head of Voltron, and the head of this rebellion, I thought of this one. Zenobia."

"Zen-what now?" Rivalz cocked his head.

"Zenobia. On Earth was known as the Rebel Queen of Syria. During her reign in the third century, she waged war against East Roman forces and drove them back enough that allowed her country to annex Egypt. Though she remained subordinate to Rome, she did attempt to make her son as the current Emperor's successor. Though the coup failed, she's still known today known as a cultural and intellectual monarch and has many tales and legends in her wake. So, Zenobia, or Zen for short."

Lelouch felt the Black Lion consider it for a minute before he felt an approving growl in his mind, and he genuinely smiled at her. "Then it will be an honor to keep flying with you, Zen,"

"Yay! Party objective accomplished!" Milly cheered as the other Paladins laughed.

"Man! That was fun!" Rivalz said, falling on his back from where he was sitting, "You know, giving the Lions their own names makes them more alive in a way you?"

"Understandable," C.C. said, "when one has a name, it gives them an identity. In a way, it gives
them another reason to be alive."

"Speaking of names, no offense C.C., but what kind of name is C.C. anyway?" Rai asked.

"Well, why are you 'Rai,' Rai?" C.C. asked.

"Huh?" the Green Paladin asked.

"What do you mean?" Shirley asked.

"Is this really a time for a philosophy lesson C.C.?" Lelouch asked though he was curious why she called herself that as well.

"What I mean, for example, you Lelouch. You changed your family surname to 'Lamperouge,' but you kept 'Lelouch,' the name that was given to you at birth. How sentimental, you just can't let go of the past."

"Yeah, well, doesn't 'C.C.' swing to the other extreme? It's not even a human name," Lelouch countered.

"Well… let me ask you all this then. Do you know why snow is white?" C.C. asked

Everyone in the room paused, not understanding what C.C. meant. The snow was always white, that's just the way it was.

Seeing they didn't know the answer, she replied, "Snow is white because it's forgotten what color it's supposed to be."

"Huh? Wait are you saying that-"

"You all look like you've been having fun."

The Paladins jumped at the sudden amused voice from the hall that interrupted Kallen. Coran stood in the corridor, amusement sparkling in his jeweled eyes.

"Just finished naming the Lions," Shirley smiled nervously.

"I see that," he laughed, "and as much as I hate to break up this little party, I'm afraid I have to. I suggest you all get dressed in your uniforms, we're going on a trip.

"A trip? Where are we going?" Rivalz asked.

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"Is there anything we can get you before we leave Princess?" Coran asked. He along with the rest of Team Voltron were crowded around Allura's bed as the Princess was laying down for a rest. C.C. was there as well, having fully recovered from the rejuvenation ceremony three days ago.

"Coran, I am fine. I needn't be doted upon like a-" as the Princess attempted to rise from her bed, a ripple of pain spasmed in her back, causing her to have to lay down again, "...All right perhaps I am a bit off color."

"Returning life to an entire Balmera is nothing to sneeze at," Coran said anxiously.

"You should take your time and rest up," Suzaku agreed, "we'll only be gone for about a day or two anyway."
"And where are you going again?" Allura asked.

It had been three days since Balmera X-95-Vox had been liberated. Three days since Lelouch introduced his alter ego, Zero, to the known universe. The strategy of causing uprisings and rebellions seemed to slowly be working. Just yesterday they had received news that several resistance groups that had almost lost hope and gave up were rising up again and joining Voltron in their fight against the Galra.

The news pleased Lelouch immensely. With so many groups beginning to fight, it certainly made Voltron's job a little easier and gave them the time they needed to focus on other things. Like training.

"Coran says he's going to take us to some sort of training grounds," Rivalz said, hands on his hips. "Yeah, it sounds fascinating," Kallen agreed.

"Yeah, relax Princess, you won't be missing anything. Nothing at all," Milly purred mischievously with a wink.

Allura groaned at Milly's antics, "Now I am ill,"

"I still don't understand why I'm not coming with you," C.C. said with a small frown.

"You're still recovering yourself C.C.," Lelouch said, "and someone needs to stay behind to help Allura. We don't know if the Galra will attack again,"

C.C. scoffed, "So I'm a glorified babysitter now? Fine,"

"Lelouch, why aren't you wearing your Zero outfit?" Shirley asked.

"Well, seeing this is a training mission, I don't think it's necessary is all," the Black Paladin answered.

"Oh, okay," she shrugged.

"So Coran, what is this place you're taking us?" Rai asked as the seven of the Paladins departed in their Lions, Coran riding in Zen with Lelouch.

"The Karthulian System, the ancient training grounds of the original Paladins, the planets there have a variety of extreme natural environments to test your piloting skills," Coran said as they began to approach a cluster of planets. One looked white while another looked similar to Earth. Another looked more yellow, and the other looked similar to Mercury in their own Solar System.

"The volcanic world of Yendalian is continually exploding, requiring lightning-fast reflexes to survive its deadly blasts.

"The sweeping blizzards on ice planet Bluve will force you to fly blind as you try to maneuver through the blue crystal spires.

"Then there are the shifting sands of Niloofar. High winds create moving columns-living obstacle courses.

"Weaving through the rainforest of Griezian Sur at high speed is hard enough, but avoiding the constant barrages of the Muldoks is nearly impossible."
"The labyrinthine caves of Talwar Six were created by Giant Space Wombeasts before they began their mating cycle migration four million years ago. You've never seen hairpin turns 'til you've seen a wombeast tunnel!"

"Sounds great! Where should we start?" Suzaku asked enthusiastically.

"Down there!" Coran said as they came closer to a smaller planet that was a dusty brown color. Right below them was what appeared to be a massive whirlwind.

"What's down there? Some kind of mud tornado?" Kallen asked.

"Looks like a rust storm," Rai said.

"No, it's a gravy halo," Coran corrected as they flew into the storm. There was little to no turbulence as they descended. Down below the halo, there was a small collection of buildings, the biggest one situated right in the middle of them, and spaceships of all sizes surrounding them like a disorganized parking lot.

"A gravy halo?" Rivalz asked, feeling saliva building in his mouth, "I didn't think those would exist until I got to heaven!"

"If you mean a place that serves breaded turtle scallions by the dozens, then this might be heaven!" Coran said with a smile and a reminiscing look in his eyes.

Suddenly, from down below, the Paladins saw a giant alien smash another alien right through the towering stone walls.

"Or if you go in there, heaven might be your next stop," Shirley said nervously.

Lelouch frowned, smelling something fishy in the air as they all disembarked their Lions, "Coran, where are you taking us?"

"The Fripping Bulgogian!" Coran exclaimed as he ran up to the large building. Now that they were all closer they could see that there was a giant neon sign in a different language, along with a picture of an alien getting whacked on the head with a mallet above a large stone door. A large, muscular, grey alien was standing outside, almost acting like a guard for the place. Despite this though, he didn't seem overly concerned at the Paladins, presence. This place likely got a large number of shifty people coming in and out to act so aloof around them.

"What is it?" Kallen asked as they approached the door.

"Only the best nunvillary in the fourteen tangents!" Coran grinned. Milly and Shirley both shivered as they remembered that disgusting beverage.

"Uh, it looks a bit dangerous," Rivalz muttered nervously as they were all herded inside.

"This has always been a favorite Paladin hangout. It's not dangerous," Coran reassured them.

At the sound of another crash, the Paladins turned to see another alien go flying outside.

"We just saw someone get thrown out of a window!" Shirley gasped.

"Oh, that's not a window. The air inside is so greasy that you can just see through the walls," Coran said matter-of-factly as if taking them on a tour of a museum.

Inside looked like a scene taken straight out of *Star Wars*. It seemed uncannily similar to the Mos
Eisley Cantina on the fictional planet of Tatooine. A large variety of robust and unusual aliens sitting around many large tables drinking what they could assume was this place’s version of alcohol. Some were even arm wrestling.

"Follow me, I want to show you something," Coran motioned more towards the back of the building.

"The meat they serve here must be tender, a lot of these things don't have teeth," Milly observed.

As they moved more towards the area Coran was talking about, the Paladins couldn't help but notice the strange looks they got from the aliens surrounding them. They knew there were probably some planets and species that didn't have the technology yet to hear Zero's big entry speech, so they couldn't tell if they were being stared at because they were the Paladins, or because they simply stood out due to being... well, human.

"I can't tell if he's smiling or snarling," Kallen whispered as they passed by two multi-eyed, beaked aliens.

"That one does!" Shirley whispered back, openly spooked.

"That's a Tronagan. They're always smarling," Coran cheerfully informed them, "They're happiest being angry."

Finally, Coran approached a reasonably large table near the back, but three aliens were already seated there. Two were male, one was large and muscular while the other was smaller. But both looked pretty sinister. The other had a female built and was wearing what looked like a fancy scarlet dress with a pink feather boa.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but I believe you're at our table," Coran said authoritatively, approaching the trio with a frown.

The giant alien that also happened to have a row of sharp teeth growled at the advisor, slamming an empty keg down, "I'm sittin' here now, mustache. That makes it my table."

The alien growled some more, hoping to get Coran to back off, but the Altean stayed planted in place. The Paladins couldn't help but shift nervously as they didn't want to start a scene with this.

"Okay, okay, wh-why don't we just order some crab puffs and talk about it, huh?" Rivalz suggested, hoping to pacify the situation.

"Oh, I beg to differ, but if you'll just check right here," Coran placed his finger on the table, leaning reasonably close to the alien's face. The group then saw that his finger was on top of a name inscribed into it. In Altean, "See what it says here? Alfor. Names in red, green, blue, yellow, orange, purple, and black. Seven assigned seats and none of them is for you."

"Yeah?" the alien asked, he and his companions standing up threateningly. Lelouch groaned, he did not want to make a scene, "who's they for?"

Suzaku had walked up behind Coran to pull the advisor away when a low, booming voice stopped everyone in their tracks.

"The Paladins of Voltron!"

The muscular alien jumped, and panic flickered in his vision. Coran's eyes widened momentarily before he smirked victoriously.
"Wuh-oh. Time to cheese it, fellas," the giant alien said as he and his companions promptly fled the scene.

"Well, I'll be a wabble's plonk! Kythylian Mu!" Coran exclaimed as a giant, armadillo looking alien trekked towards them. He towered over Coran and had sky blue scales over his skin and a long muscular tail. On his back were smaller pink creatures that were possibly babies. Kythylian was also wearing a dark blue jacket and a utility belt. Despite his intimidating appearance, the alien jovially hugged the Altean as he came up to him.

"Ha, ha! Coran, Coran, the Gamblin' Man," Kythylian laughed as he released him.

"Is that Karvallian there?" Coran asked, gesturing to one of the pink babies on Kythylian's shoulder, "Last time I saw him, he was just a little grimble."

"Yeah, they grow up fast," Kythylian said, "How long's it been?"

"Ten thousand years,"

"Ten thousand years. My, my, where does it go?"

"This is Kythylian Mu. Entrepreneur, raconteur, nunvill aficionado, and the current Mu of this quadrant," Coran said as he introduced the sizeable blue alien.

"Pleased to meet ya," the Mu said.

"Oh, Kythylian, let me introduce you to the new Paladins of Voltron," Coran motioned to the humans watching the foreign exchange, "This is Kallen, Rai, Rivalz, Milly, Shirley, Suzaku, and Lelouch."

"Wait, this… the little one is over ten thousand years old?" Kallen asked, spotting Karvallian on Kythylian's shoulder.

"Kallen, the Mu typically live over a hundred thousand years before they convert to their gaseous phase," Coran informed, in which Kallen blinked in shock.

"Unless they eat the pepper-fried wokfrat here. Then it comes on a little quicker," Kythylian laughed.

Kythylian took a second to look over the new team, seeing how young they all seemed to look compared to the last group of Paladins

"Kind of scrawny ain't they?" he asked, noting Rivalz's height in particular.

"Hey!" the Blue Paladin exclaimed, sounding offended.

"Well, they just started," Coran said with a grin, "I haven't put them through all their training yet."

"I don't care how much training they get, nothing can prepare them for that Paladin Lunch you cook up," Kythylian grinned.

"I know, right?" Milly laughed, remembering the lunch from the first few days. Too bad they never actually ate it.

"It builds muscle and character! Anyway, we're here to run the planet course in the Lions," Coran informed the Mu.
The Mu's face suddenly shifted from jovial to threatening, "Yeah? 'Cause when I was informed you were coming back to the Bul, I assumed it was to lay our unfinished business to rest. Or am I mistook?"

Lelouch, sensing the sudden tension, decided to try and pacify it with a question of his own, "What exactly does it mean, to be the Mu of this quadrant?"

Kythylian grinned, as if happy to hear the interest in his kind when he answered, "The Mu is kind of a family organization. We make sure things in a territory are run a certain way," Lelouch made a mental note that they were basically Space Viceroy's, "Standards are kept," the Mu suddenly leaned closer to Coran, narrowing his eyes, "debts are paid in a timely fashion."

Coran blinked, until suddenly realization appeared in his eyes, "Ohhh, sorry, I was in cryo-sleep for ten thousand years. I completely forgot!"

"Forget what?" Suzaku asked.

"Coran used to be a pretty big supporter of the Melgregian Fitzers," Kythylian explained.

"Best Humple Tug Team on the sprat!" Coran boasted, "Whatever happened to Ig Crater? He would really Welt the hav'er."

"Killed by Zarkon," Kythylian informed him regrettably.

"Oh," Coran sighed.

"Pretty much the whole league got executed when the Galra Empire attacked Ultimate Conflux Twenty-Three. Anywho, Coran was pretty sure the ol' Fitzers were gonna be Humple Tug Champs. So much so that he put down five Altean Crown Bills on the match."

"Ah, well. I think I might have that here in my pocket… Here! Five Groggeries," Coran held up the bills to the Mu to take. The Mu just looked at the money with almost pity.

"Well, that's a start. There's just a few problems. One, these bills are worthless. The whole universe runs on G.A.C. these days,"

"Uh… G.A.C?" Shirley asked.

"Galra Authorized Currency," Kythylian explained briefly, "Two, you owed five bills ten thousand years ago. But that's compounded weekly, plus the juice has been running, then if you adjust for inflation… Well, let's just say if I impounded all the Lions in the parking lot and sold them to Zarkon at double what they're worth, it'd still be less than what you owe me now."

That explained everything. It was the face that Lelouch saw all too often when nobles didn't have the money needed to pay him when he cleaned them out at chess. Though there was that one time when-

"But Kythylian… can't we just let this one slide? For old time's sake?" Coran asked anxiously, backing away slightly.

"Aw, Coran, you know…" Kythylian placed a hand on his shoulder before one of the younger mus snatched Coran off his feet and lugged up onto Kythylian's shoulder, "...lettin' things slide ain't the Mu way."

The Paladins snapped into action, drawing their bayards while Lelouch readied his Geass,
attempting to catch the Mu's eye, "Put him down!"

But the Mu was undoubtedly smarter than he looked because as he towered over Lelouch, he made sure not to make eye contact, looking just below at his nose, "No." he growled.

"If you hurt him-"

"You gonna do what?" Kythylian interrupted Kallen, sounding amused, "Cut me open with your bayard? Leave me oozing out my last on these greasy boards like a tossed out glob of urk cheese? Heh, heh, I already knew that."

"He wants something." Rai said with a frown.

"As a matter of fact, I do. Something that nobody's been able to get as long as I've been around. Something worth so much I'd give you three Corans for it, if'n he weren't just one of a kind," Kythylian said with a sneer.

"What is it?" Lelouch spat.

"A Yalexian Pearl." the Mu said.

"What?!" Cora squawked, "That's impossible!"

"For the Paladins of Voltron?" Kythylian laughed, "Nothin's impossible for these thunderbolts."

"Where do we get one?" Milly asked.

"Hear one's about ready to pop on Planet Krell. Not too far from here," the Mu said.

"It's too dangerous! Save yourselves! The Yalex is a horrifying monster! It's unstoppable!" Coran exclaimed.

"Coran, that's just stinkin' thinkin'. Just 'cause somethin' never has been stopped, don't mean it can't be stopped. How are these kids gonna fight Zarkon if you're feedin' 'em that kind of negativity?"

"Don't worry Coran. We'll beat it," Suzaku reassured him.

"That's the old Paladin spirit! Now you got one week. Bring me that pearl..." he pointed over his shoulder, "...and I'll give you this one."

o~o

"Well our training mission is off to a great start," Kallen quipped sarcastically as the Paladins flew off in their Lions.

"Seriously! We lost Coran, and we didn't get a single breaded turtle scallion!" Rivalz complained, causing the others to cringe. Rivalz and his priorities sometimes.

Soon the team came up to their destination. A medium sized planet that from the looks of it consisted mostly of rolling hills and rocky terrain. There was barely any plant life in sight.

"Well, this is Krell," Lelouch confirmed from the star map in Zen.

"Not exactly a vacation wonderland," Milly observed.

"Rai, see if you can rig your scanners to find whatever kind of killer beast this Yalex is," Lelouch
"Copy," the Green Paladin replied as he adjusted some of Zerith's controls.

"I'm picking up multiple large-scale life forms on the planet," Suzaku informed everyone, "Very few humanoids, though."

"Probably because they're inside the large scale life forms," Lelouch replied dryly.

"Wait, there's a settlement up ahead," Rai announced, "maybe they can point us in the right direction."

"Let's set down over there then," Lelouch said as they drove the Lions towards the small town. The buildings looked very similar to termite nests, with towering columns and sand dunes.

"Alright, let's go talk to these people-"

Before Lelouch could finish, a giant, green insect-like monster, with large pinchers and mandibles broke out of the sand. Its jaws caught Zinnia's leg and started shaking the Lion harshly back and forth.

"It's got us!" Shirley shrieked.

"Fire!" Lelouch shouted as the Lions started open firing at the insect. None of the shots could penetrate the armor of the bug though, nor did it irritate it enough to let Shirley and Zinnia go.

"It's outer shell is too strong for the lasers!" Kallen shouted.

"It's gonna tear Zinnia's leg off!" Shirley shouted in a panic.

"Hold on!" Milly shouted, firing a supernova at the insect. It let go of Shirley and Zinnia in surprise from the light, and they quickly returned to the formation.

"This thing's armor is too strong for our weapons!" Rai exclaimed.

"Our armor isn't too strong for it!" Shirley shouted, "Another second and I would have been a leg without a leg!"

"If it can chop through Zinnia's armor, the rest of us are cooked!" Rivalz shouted.

"I think we know what we need to do!" Suzaku exclaimed.

"Form Voltron!" Lelouch ordered.

The Lions all converged, and the juggernaut landed on the stony ground prepared to fight. The monster lashed out with its pinchers, and Voltron raised its left arm to use as a shield.

"Kallen, Suzaku, split it open!" Lelouch shouted as Suzaku formed the sword with his bayard.

Kallen screamed as she swung the sword at the monster. It dodged a couple of the swings, and the ones that did connect couldn't pierce through the armor. She attempted to stab at the mouth, but the mandibles blocked that as well.

"We don't have any weapons strong enough to hurt it," Rai shouted.

"So, maybe we should just leave?" Shirley suggested.
"No, we can't!" Milly shouted.

"Milly's right, we're the only thing standing between that monster and those houses!" Lelouch agreed.

"What we need is some of those shoulder blades it used on Shirley!" Rivalz shouted.

"That's it! I know how to beat it! Put the shield away. We'll to do this just with the sword," Suzaku shouted.

"I hope you know what you're doing!" Kallen said with a scowl as Voltron leaped away from the insect. The bug wasn't about to let them go though as it jumped after them with a vengeance.

"Get ready..." Suzaku said. As the bug's frontal claws came down, the sword blocked both of them and pushed it back, "On my mark, push down and in with everything we've got. Ready? PUSH!"

With a thrust from the legs, Voltron pushed the trapped claws inward. They punctured into the chest, green goo sprayed everywhere from the blow. The monster roared in pain and reeled backward. Its legs wobbled from underneath it before they gave out and collapsed underneath itself. Green goop continued to spew out underneath it, creating a pool of green below.

"Yeah!" Milly shouted.

"Nice job, Suzaku!" Rai cheered.


"Sharp work Samurai!" Rivalz commented.

"So was that Yalex?" Shirley asked curiously.

"I don't think so, that was way too easy if it was," Kallen said.

"I don't see any pearls either," Suzaku observed.

Down below, the town people, that they saw resembled giant termite-like insects themselves started exiting the buildings and approaching the downed monster.

"Looks like the welcome wagon is here," Rivalz grinned proudly.

"What happened?" one of the bug-people asked, kneeling by the bug's corpse. They assumed he was the leader considering the expensive looking clothing he was wearing compared to the other people. He was also carrying a staff in his hand. His hand suddenly flew to his head in shock, "Oh no! The Guardian has been slain!"

"GUARDIAN?!" the Paladins all gasped in shock.

The looks of horror made more sense now. They weren't scared because of the monster. They were scared of them!

"You guys heard that, right?" Rivalz asked apprehensively.

"Yeah, he just said 'Guardian,'" Shirley agreed.

"Paladins, disperse, and land!" Lelouch ordered as Voltron separated into Lions again, "We need to find out what he means."
As the Lions landed and approached the crowd, that seemed to get more agitated by the second, the feeling they continued to receive only increased further.

"Surely he couldn't mean his guardian was that bug?" Rai reasoned.

"Yeah, let's just sit down and talk about this, huh?" Rivalz tried to suggest instead.

"Why did you destroy our Guardian?!" the leader demanded, still horrified with the events that happened.

"Okay, when you say Guardian, do you mean that giant, gross bug that attacked us?" Kallen asked, sounding pissed off.

"How dare you!" the leader shouted, his two guards raising their weapons, "Our Guardian protected us from the most terrifying beast in the galaxy. Abomination."

"Wait, hold on. There's another monster? No, nonono, not again," Milly denied, "We just got out of a fight! We're here looking for the Yalexian Pearl."

"You killed our Guardian for the Yalexian Pearl? What kind of monsters are you?!" the leader gasped.

"We're not monsters," Lelouch said as calmly as he could, "we're Paladins. The Lions that are behind us transform into Voltron. Defender of the Universe."

"Never heard of it," the leader said.

"It has been ten thousand years," Rai groaned.

"My name is Lelouch. This is Suzaku, Kallen, Rai, Shirley, Rivalz, and Milly. We're on your side."

"I am Elderbug Blate, the town's leader," the bug frowned, "I'm in charge of keeping everyone safe from squashing. Something you just made much more difficult."

"Can you please tell us where the Pearl is?" Shirley asked, hoping that she didn't sound too desperate, "Our friend's life is at stake."

"I'm not telling you anything, and I'm the only one here that knows where it is," Elderbug scoffed.

"Okay, what if we defeat your monster, this Abomination thing?" Suzaku suggested.

"How can we possibly trust you? You've doomed us all!"

Rivalz suddenly sniffed the air, "What's that smell?"

"We understand if you're scared, but we will protect you," Lelouch tried to reassure them, half tempted to use his Geass on them.

"Why should we trust you and your robot felines? Maybe we should be seeking revenge?" Blate said threateningly as more of the villagers started to gather around them.

"That smell…" Rivalz muttered again as he sniffed some more.

"Great job, Suzaku! You destroyed their Guardian!" Kallen exclaimed at the Purple Paladin.

"What?! Me?! That was your fault!" the Purple Paladin countered, looking offended.
"Holy crow!" Rivalz exclaimed as he reached near the center of the crowd. In front of him was what looked like a giant pile of mashed potatoes with green and red veggies mixed in. "Look at all this food!"

"It was for the Guardian Feast," the younger girl bug explained as she scooped up a shovel full and held it out to the Blue Paladin. Rivalz dipped his finger into it and tasted it. Though it looked like mashed potatoes, the substance he put in his mouth tasted like cheese, some tomatoes, and… and…

"This tastes like pizza!"

"We prepare it every year," the girl explained, "after the Guardian ate the bowl of food, he would only eat a few of our people."

"Okay, if you just add a little of this and some of that…" Rivalz muttered as he sprinkled a couple of leafy looking spices on top before he processed what the girl said, as she took a bite of the meal herself, "Wait, did you say 'ate a few of our people'?! What kind of a Guardian eats villagers?"

"Well, after we made the feast, he would come and eat our food… and a few villagers. But he always kept Abomination away. We would eat whatever was left in celebration of another year protected. But our Guardian probably wouldn't have eaten any villagers if he had a meal as delicious as this one!" she exclaimed, eyes sparkling.

"What is the meaning of this?" Elderbug demanded as he came up to the food bowl, "You destroy our Guardian and desecrate our sacred meal?!"

"I-I didn't know it was sacred!" Rivalz protested, "It just tasted like it could use a little more seasoning."

"It's delicious! Everyone should try it!" the girl exclaimed happily.

"Enough! You've ruined too much. I'd rather this village be smushed by Abomination than deal with one more insult from the likes of you! It's time we snuffed you out," the chief shouted, the town folks surrounding them with weapons. The Paladins all back away. Lelouch's hand flew up to his face, planning to use his Geass to get them out of this and also make them forget they were there. Though it was unlikely, he didn't want to get connected Zero quite yet.

Fortunately, he didn't need to do that as the girl saved them from having to do so, "Just try it, Dad! I know you'll like it!"

The chief tasted some of the food, and his eyes lit up in shock and happiness.

"This is incredible!" he exclaimed, as more villagers came up to taste some of the food, each exclaiming in glee over the great food.

"Perhaps we misjudged you. Maybe after you defend us from Abomination, I will tell you where the pearl is," the chief promised, "Let us commence the feast in celebration. To our Paladins!"

The crowd cheered happily and was about to sit down to eat when large quakes shook the ground.

"What's the noise?" Shirley asked, turning around.

The creature behind them looked like something taken out of a horror movie. It was a massive, purple quadrupedal beast with six red eyes, a spiked beak, two jagged horns, and a back full of tentacles that were lashing and writhing in the air.
"Oh boy," Rivalz moaned as he felt Suzaku grabbed onto his arm and drag him back to their Lions. The townsfolk began to run away, screaming in fear.

"Alright, Paladins! It's time to form Voltron!" Lelouch exclaimed as they all returned to their Lions and joined once again. Without wasting another second, they slammed into the monster and beat it into the ground.

"It's trying to get to the town!" Milly shouted as Abomination struggled underneath them. It was eventually able to wriggle itself out, standing a distance away from them.

"Shirley! Watch your foot!" Suzaku shouted.

"I got it!" she shouted back only for one of the tentacles to wrap around Voltron's legs and pulled, knocking them all off balance and landed with a thud behind the creature.

"Nice going guys!" Kallen growled as Voltron struggled back to its feet.

"Rivalz!" Shirley shouted, annoyed, knowing that that fall was not her fault.

"Oh sorry!" he said sheepishly, "I was still thinking about food. I'm too hungry to fight!"

"Actually, fasting promotes many positive health benefits," Rai said with a small smile, "you're body is modulating hormones to enhance your sense, thus making you a better hunter."

"So… My body is making me even more aware of how hungry I am? Great…" the Blue Paladin groaned.

"Suzaku, I think it's time we form sword!" Lelouch ordered as Suzaku thrust his bayard into the keyhole of his Lion. The sword burst to life in Voltron's hands. With a downward swing, Voltron practically split Abomination in two down its back. However, to their shock and horror, the skin started stitching itself back together!

"What's it doing?" Shirley asked.

"I don't know, but it doesn't look good!" Rai shouted as one of Abomination's tentacles took a swing at them. It sounded like the monster was getting mad now. That wasn't a good sign.

Lelouch grit his teeth. If close combat didn't work. Then- "Shirley, we need your bow!" Shirley shoved her bayard into the keyhole, and the bow appeared in Voltron's hands.

"Fire!"

With a single shot, the arrow fired, splitting into multiple arrows in its wake. They all hit straight through Abomination in various places, but just like with the sword, the wounds started healing on their own.

"Guys, nothing we throw at Abomination is working!" Rivalz shouted, starting to panic.

"Well, why don't I just use my Bayard upgrade?" Milly asked indignantly, "I'm sure it can do something!" She shoved her Bayard into Maeraka's keyhole. Nothing happened though, and this distraction cost them as Abomination charged them again and pushed the team to the ground.

"Milly," Lelouch groaned.

"You might not be ready to unlock that upgrade, Prez," Rai reasoned.
They saw that Abomination was trying to get to the town again, so with a giant leap, Voltron grabbed onto Abomination's tentacles and pulled it back with all its might. They slowed him down a little, but he was still stubbornly trying to get to the town, and the more Voltron pulled at the monster, the more the tentacles started crawling up their limbs and trapping them again.

"Huh, Abomination must really like the smell of that food down there," Rivalz observed. He then blinked, "Wait a minute…*Smell…* Guys! It's the food!"

"Enough with the food already Rivalz!" Kallen snapped.

"No! Not for me! I think this guy's hungry! I think he's after the village's food! I have an idea-" Rivalz wasn't able to finish his sentence as Abomination once again threw Voltron off of him and smashed him into the ground head first. Had Voltron been a person, this no doubt would've snapped his neck. The force of it though still jarred the Paladins, Lelouch especially. Thank goodness for seatbelts!

Abomination was just at the edge of the town now, and Voltron was barely able to grab onto him again, but this time they were literally being dragged into the village. The townspeople below began running in fear as one of the tentacles smashed to the ground, nearly destroying a building.

Shirley grit her teeth and dug her feet into the ground, managing to slow them down more much to everyone's relief, but it would work for long.

"Guys! I have an idea!" Rivalz shouted again, "It might sound cuckoo-crazy, but I think we can distract this thing by cooking it a meal!"

"Are you sure?" Suzaku asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah, uh, I'm with Suzaku. I don't know if I buy that," Kallen agreed.

"I think that the monster is trying to get to the food in the town. Trust me. I can be a slave to my stomach sometimes too. I say we make this guy a meal he can't refuse!"

"Are you sure, Rivalz?" Lelouch asked with a grunt as the tentacles continued to try and engulf them.

"Honestly, Lelouch, it's just a gut feeling," Rivalz replied.

Lelouch sighed. Obviously attacking this thing wasn't working, they didn't have much more to lose if this plan of Rivalz's didn't work, "All right, I trust you. How do we do this?"

"Okay, first we're going to have to disband Voltron…" Rivalz said just as the Lions all separated and flew to the sky.

"...Lelouch, Milly, and Suzaku, you three are going to have to keep it busy," Zenobia, Yoru, and Maeraka all flew in and charged at the creature, not necessarily trying to hurt it, but enough to keep it occupied.

"Rai, we're gonna need some of those shrubs for the stew. But only the ones with the orange-ish leaves," Zerith swooped down towards what looked like a small forest close to the town and scooped up a mouthful of the plants into her mouth.

"Shirley we're going to need some water for the stew," Zinnia plowed through the ground until an underground spring surged up to the surface. Shirley and Zinnia shook the dirt off as they soared back to the sky.
"And Kallen, someone's gotta heat that stew up," Aka's flame cannon was already active and fired at the spring, clouds of smoke and steam filling the air around them.

"And what are you going to do?" Shirley asked.

"...Cook!" he exclaimed with a smirk as he and Polaris flew to the downed Guardian's corpse. He cringed a little as he lifted it up and dragged it to the stew pool. Rai was just lowering the plants into it.

"Kallen, wait! You're overcooking it! Less direct heat!" Rivalz shouted as he dropped the insect into it. The water turned a bean green color as the flesh and insides of the bug were absorbed into it.

"I hope that's as delicious as it looks," Rivalz said, crossing his fingers that this worked. The steam began wafting in Abomination's direction just as it batted Zen away with a tentacle.

Abomination suddenly stopped and started sniffing the air and turned its head towards the source of it.

"Come on," Rivalz coaxed on, "I know you want it!"

Abomination started panting excitedly as it approached the pool as started lapping up the stew greedily. Within ten minutes, the stew was gone, and the monster had fallen asleep with a satisfying thud, its stomach distended from its meal.

The Paladins all cheered. Rivalz's crazy plan actually worked!

"Phew! Thanks for trusting me, Lelouch!"

"Lelouch couldn't help but laugh, "I'm just glad it worked! Remind me to never go against your gut again!"

o~o

"Thank you for saving us," Elderbug said as he and his people were sitting around the bowl of food. Everyone had a plate in front of them and were enjoying the tasty meal. The Paladins were all also there as honored guests, "With the new cooking system you created, we will be able to feed Abomination easily, and he should leave out village alone."

"Our tradition had lasted so long that no one realized it was the cause of our suffering," his daughter added.

"We're glad to hear that," Rai smiled before getting serious, "Now… about that Yalexian Pearl?"

Elderbug suddenly paled, as if he'd been caught with his hand in a cookie jar before dinner, "Oh, yes… I may have overstated my knowledge on the subject. I don't know where the Pearl is, per se… But I do know who does know where it is: Princess Malocoti. But she's been captured and is being held captive. You'd have to rescue her to find out where the Pearl is."

"Welp!" Milly said, standing up with a grin, "I guess our next course of action, is rescuing a princess!"

Chapter End Notes
AN: As you can see, this isn't Crystal Venom yet. This is part of a comic that came out with the Voltron series. It takes place between Crystal Venom and Rebirth. There will be one more chapter of this, then I will begin Crystal Venom.

I did struggle a little bit with this chapter since I'm not as familiar with it, and this is supposed to be more of a filler/fun episode so... yeah, I got this.

So the names of the Lions are:

Black: Zenobia

Red: Aka

Green: Zerith

Purple: Yoru

Yellow: Maeraka

Blue: Polaris

Orange: Zinnia

Also, on another note, I noticed that my Tvtropes page hasn't been updated in a while. So if anyone is a member of the site, would you be willing to go and update it? Thank you!
It was early the next morning when the Paladins prepared themselves to travel to where they were told Princess Malocoti was being held; it was almost on the other side of the planet in a more forested area. The bug people had allowed them to camp in their village for the night so that they could be ready to go.

As they were about to enter their Lions though, a thought occurred to Rai.

"Hey guys, you think we should contact Allura and C.C. and tell them what happened to Coran?"

"That sounds like a good idea," Suzaku agreed.

"Yeah, we might be a little late getting back," Kallen input.

Lelouch sighed, "I hate to have to worry them, but I guess you're right."

o~o

"WHOAAAAAAAAHHHHHH! YES!" Allura laughed with glee as the space mice pushed the hover chair down the slope of the Castle with Allura seated inside. With a whoop, the chair slammed into the wall, causing it to spin rapidly. Like a pinball machine, the chair finally came to a stop within the Castle's bridge where C.C. was going over some star charts. The immortal flinched, and her eye twitched in frustration at the Princess's grand entrance.

Before C.C. could voice a protest to this though, Lelouch's face popped up on the Castle's screens.

"Allura?" the Princess blinked at the address, before rotating herself to face the screen.

Lelouch got mildly concerned seeing Allura's tussled appearance though, "Princess, are you and C.C. okay?"

"We're perfectly peachy Lelouch," C.C. addressed casually.

"Yes, we're fine," Allura agreed before she spotted how much her hair was in disarray in the reflection of one of the console, "I'm just a bit winded. How's your training going?"

Allura and C.C. remained silent as the Paladins filled the girls in on what was going on. How Coran was being held captive, and the ransom price to release him was a pearl from a monster that had never been defeated before. That certainly reassured them a lot!

"That's it! We're coming to help!" Allura exclaimed once the explanation was over.

"I'd put more faith in your Paladins if I were you, Princess. After all, we already saved you, so if they do it again for another princess shouldn't be a problem for them, considering one is a prince himself," C.C. said with a shrug, though a tiny smirk was playing at her lips as well.

Upon hearing that comment, Lelouch's eyes widened, and then he flushed red with embarrassment as he slammed his head on Zen's console with a groan. Milly, Suzaku, and Rivalz started laughing out loud, realizing how ironic this all suddenly was. Kallen just facepalmed, while Shirley blushed a little. Rai, however, made an exaggerated gagging sound with an eye roll.
"What?!" Allura exclaimed, looking incredulously at C.C. "You?! Saved me?! When I get my hands on you, you are going to have to rescue my foot from-" Allura was cut off mid-rant when a fit of coughs hit her.

"Princess, you should be resting. You just saved a whole planet on the Balmera. Let us handle this," Suzaku said anxiously.

"...I'm fine. I can-"

"Now, now, young lady," C.C. interrupted, her smirk growing, "you just return to bed and dream of your heroes' return."

"Once I grab you by the Yulschtrix…" Allura growled fist clenched towards the witch.

"You know-"

"C.C., cut it out, please," Lelouch groaned.

C.C. just shrugged again, the smirk never leaving her face.

o~o

The bug people cheered as the Paladins took flight in their Lions, preparing to rescue the princess that could lead to the prize they were seeking.

It took about three Earth hours until they came across the place that held the best chances of keeping a princess — a large, lone tower, overlooking a vast lush coniferous forest. From the top of the tower, the Paladins spotted a young woman waving to them from the tower. She had long black hair and a deep purple dress.

"That must Princess Malocoti," Shirley said.

"They said she was being held captive. But by what?" Suzaku asked.

Suddenly a giant, long red dragon appeared out of nowhere and wrapped around the tower, glaring menacingly at them.

"By that!" Rai shouted.

"Paladins! Form Voltron!" Lelouch shouted.

As the Defender of the Universe landed by the tower, the Paladins were shocked to see that the dragon was about the same size and height as Voltron himself.

It was fast too because before Voltron could so much as try to land a punch, the dragon whipped around them and bashed them in the back with its tail.

With a grunt, Lelouch grimaced, "Shirley, your arrows, now!"

"Got it!" the Orange Paladin exclaimed, slamming her Bayard into Zinnia's keyhole. The bow immediately formed in Voltron's hands as he pulled back a single bright arrow at the dragon.

"Fire!" Just as the arrow left the string though, the dragon let out a breath of hot fire from its own mouth, canceling out the attack.

"This thing can match our firepower. We need to try something else. Suzaku, form sword!"
Lelouch ordered as the familiar sword appeared in Voltron's palms. Those attacks didn't do much good either though as the dragon was quickly able to weave out of the way of all the strikes. Despite this though, the creature made no attempts of striking back either.

"It's too quick! We can't touch it!" Rivalz shouted.

"Shields up!" Lelouch ordered as the dragon finally made to charge at them.

"But it's going to touch us!" Shirley exclaimed, frightened.

"I'm on it!" Rai shouted.

As Voltron flew away to avoid the attack, the dragon suddenly stopped. It started roaring at them, sounding ticked off... but it wasn't attacking them.

"Why isn't it attacking us?" Suzaku asked, confused.

"Yeah, it's like it's... just yelling at us," Kallen added, quirking an eyebrow.

"Wait a second," Milly muttered, speaking for the first time in the battle. She no longer saw the dragon, but Allura yelling at them in the same way she had been at C.C., "I recognize this yelling. This dragon isn't guarding the princess, the dragon is the princess! Put the sword away! She won't hurt us!"

As Voltron did so, shocked, the dragon certainly seemed to calm down.

"Wait, if that's the princess, then... who's that in the tower?" Kallen asked.

The dragon/princess started roaring again, pointing frantically at the tower. As Voltron turned, they saw tendrils of red energy emanating from it. The woman they initially thought was Princess Malocoti was actually an evil sorceress. With a zap, the sorceress hit Voltron smack in the chest with one of her terrifying spells, pushing the juggernaut backward in surprise.

"I'm guessing she's not a friendly innkeeper!" Rivalz yelled.

As the spell spread across Voltron's chest to the rest of the Lions, they started short-circuiting and sending bolts of electricity everywhere.

"She's tearing into us!" Suzaku shouted, gritting his teeth.

"I can't take much more!" Rai shouted.

"Everyone! Back into Lions!" Lelouch ordered as Voltron snapped back into his seven parts. They scattered, hoping to throw the sorceress off.

"I say we take that witch down!" Milly called out as Maeraka shot out a laser at the tower.

"Let her have it!" Lelouch shouted as the laser made contact and destroyed the top of the tower. That wasn't going to stop the witch so quickly though, as she leaped down from it to the ground, more red energy swirling about her hands. She fired another spell that hit Aka right in the stomach. Kallen cried out in pain, "The blast knocked out all my controls! I'm going down!"

As the Red Lion went down, another spell hit Zinnia, and another hit Polaris. Both Lions joined Kallen below.

"Rai! Go!" Lelouch shouted as he and Zenobia weaved around blasts of magic. From the corner of
his eye, he saw Zerith disappear.

"Lelouch what's-Gah!" Suzaku cried as a spell hit him from behind. Maeraka soon followed.

Lelouch grit his teeth as he swerved to avoid all of the spell blasts. It was a bit erratic as the witch was getting overconfident, having taken down five of the Lions already. Despite this, though, Lelouch couldn't help but smirk.

'She doesn't even realize that one of the Lions isn't present,' he thought, just as the witch was slammed down to the ground with a grunt.

"Get off!" She shrieked, as she struggled to free herself from Zerith's claws.

"Well done Rai," Lelouch praised as Zerith shimmered back into existence.

"Thanks! It was no big deal!" Rai grinned back as the witch continued to scream and thrash.

o~o

After the Paladins took the time to tie the witch up and throw her back into the now ruined tower, the dragon suddenly began to shrink, smaller and smaller until it was replaced with a young woman. She had long, wavy red hair and was wearing a beautiful yellow and orange dress and a gold tiara on her head. The same pattern that matched the dragon that had been in her place just seconds ago.

She suddenly wobbled and fell forward. In Lelouch's direction. The Black Paladin instinctively caught her before he fell on her face.

"The Prince saves his Princess," Milly guffawed as Lelouch sent her a murderous look. The other Paladins snickered as well.

After Lelouch helped Princess Malocoti straighten, she spoke, "I want to thank you all for saving me. While under the sorceress's spell, I could not attack her, but obviously I could not tell anyone who I really was. But somehow, even though I was just an enraged, screaming monster, you could see who I really was, deep down inside."

"Well… let's just say it's not the first time an enraged princess has screamed at us," Rivalz laughed, a little embarrassed.

"And I doubt it will be the last," Kallen added with a small smirk.

Lelouch cleared his throat, "Princess, we know you've been through a lot, but I'm afraid we need your help."

"Anything. I owe you my life!" Malocoti exclaimed.

"We're looking for the Yalexian Pearl…" Shirley started.

Malocoti gasped in fear, "NO! That is a suicide mission!"

"If we don't find it, a friend of ours is going to die," Suzaku explained urgently, "please, we need you."

Seeing that the Paladins were determined in their quest, Malocoti relented, "To find the Yalexian Pearl, you will need to depend on the bravest and most clever of you all. You Lelouch,"
"Well…" Lelouch said, a slight blush dusting his cheeks. While he knew that was indeed a fact, he wasn't used to being praised so openly. He'd always kept to himself about his intelligence, even in school, despite his good grades.

"It was you who had Rai turn invisible to sneak up on the sorceress and used yourself as a distraction."

"It's true. I wouldn't have thought to use Zerith's invisibility if you didn't call out to me," Rai agreed.

"Reaching the Yalex means passing the brain-sucking mushrooms, defeating the ghostly chest master, and answering the Riddle of the Sphinx," Malocoti explained further.

"A riddle, huh? That's right up your alley Lulu," Shirley said.

"Very well then," Lelouch said, "Where's this Sphinx you speak of?"

o~o

"Hey, is anyone else tired?"

"No!" came the response the Orange Paladin received from the other six.

"Okay, just asking. It's been a while since we've, you know, not been fighting or adventuring or anything," Shirley said as she and the others flew over vast plains of a desert. Princess Malocoti had told them that the Sphinx that they would need to talk to was located in the Krell's desert. They would be looking for a ziggurat where he would be inhabiting. Though they felt annoyed that they had to travel to another location, hopefully, this one would actually point them in the right direction.

"You think we have it bad?" Kallen asked incredulously, "At least our life force wasn't sucked out to fuel an entire planet. Princess Allura, and even C.C., still haven't fully healed."

"Speaking of Princesses," Rivalz said, "Didn't Malocoti say we'd find this zigg-a-whatever here?"

"Ziggurat," Rai corrected, "It's a step pyramid, like the ones in the European Union."

"Okay, why don't they just call them pyramids then?"

"Just keep looking Rivalz," Suzaku said, before a screen popped up in Yoru, "Wait. I'm getting a reading!"

"Down there!" Milly shouted as they came upon a vast, majestic ziggurat. It immediately reminded them all of some of the structures in the land that was once known as Egypt. One of the structures happened to have a sphinx statue as well.

"It's massive!" Shirley exclaimed as they exited their Lions, "So inside is where we'll find this Sphinx guy that'll tell us where the Pearl is?"

They didn't have to go inside though, as to their astonishment, the ziggurat began to shift. The golden pillars and steps rising into the air and changing until in its place stood a towering giant, that glared down at them with piercing red eyes.

"I am the Great Universal Sphinx! Why have you disturbed me?" he thundered.

Milly, Rivalz, and Shirley backed away, just a little intimidated by the giant who could easily
squash them underneath its feet.

"We're looking for the Yalexian Pearl," Suzaku explained, "We were told you could help us find it. We need it to rescue our friend!"

"I am a repository for great research. I have been analyzing life for over a million years. Of course, I know where the Pearl is; however, I do not know whether you are worthy of the information. Tell me, who is the most knowledgeable amongst you?"

"Him," Rivalz pointed at Lelouch.

"The Black one," Milly confirmed.

"Lulu," Shirley said.

"That's Lelouch," Suzaku acknowledged.

"Lelouch," Kallen gestured with her head.

"This guy," Rai said, pointing thumb at the Black Paladin.

Lelouch sighed before answering, "Yes, me,"

"It is decided. Your body, mind, and spirit shall be tested. Enter to prove yourself… and save your friend."

The Sphinx's deconstructed back into the ziggurat just as quickly as he had appeared. The doors at the top of steps opened to welcome them in.

"Are you sure about this?" Kallen asked, "I have a bad feeling…"

"We have to," Lelouch said, climbing up the steps, "if completing this test is what'll get him to tell us where the Pearl is, then so be it."

"What confuses me is why there's a test of the body when he asked for the smartest person," Rai said as they all entered the first room of the ziggurat.

"Well Lelouch is the smart one, he probably can figure it out," Rivalz said.

"Actually, I am wondering the same thing…" Lelouch confessed as they entered a room filled with red mushrooms growing on the sides.

"Commence Test of the Body," The Sphinx's voice echoed. Suddenly, six of the mushrooms sprang off from the walls and latched themselves onto the faces of the other Paladins.

"Wha-what are you doing?!" Lelouch exclaimed in alarm as the others fell to their knees, clenching their heads in pain. They suddenly stopped fighting and raised their heads, eyes blank and staring, the mushrooms glowing a dark purple.

"The spores control your friends," the Sphinx said, "You must defeat your allies in combat."

Lelouch backed away, only to see that he was being surrounded. Suddenly, Kallen charged him, her Bayard morphing into her claws.

"They will fight exactly as your friends fight,"
Lelouch managed to step back and away from Kallen's swing, only for Rai to grab him from behind.

"Let's see if you're smart enough to defeat them."

Despite his situation, Lelouch managed to head butt Rai, who loosened his grip enough for Lelouch to escape, only for Suzaku to swing in a deliver a spinning kick to his abdomen. With a yell, Lelouch slid across the floor, back to the center of his foes. He grunted as he struggled back to his feet.

'I can't defeat them; I'm not physically capable… I don't have a choice,' he gritted his teeth and turned on his Geass.

"I, Lelouch vi Britannia, command you to stop!" he shouted, making eye contact with all of them.

Everyone but Kallen froze in their tracks as his Geass took effect, their eyes lighting up with red. As Kallen tried to charge from the side again, he instinctively raised his hand and zapped her away with a lightning bolt. She tumbled away, front smoking, but she was okay otherwise as she shook her head in confusion.

"Sorry about that Kallen…” Lelouch muttered looking down.

"Impressive. You will rise to the next level." the Sphinx said as the spores detached themselves from them.

"Sorry, Lelouch, we couldn't control ourselves," Suzaku said.

"How did you even beat us anyway?" Rivalz asked.

"I had to use my Geass, it was the only way," Lelouch said reluctantly.

"Your Geass?" Shirley asked, "So you made us stop?"

"I wasn't physically capable of taking all of you on. It was the only way,"

"You didn't do that to me!" Kallen said as she got up, "You threw a lightning bolt at me!"

Lelouch sighed. He had hoped that she wouldn't ask so soon, "Yes, I did because it wouldn't work on you a second time Kallen."

"A second-wait! When did you use it on me the first time?!" Kallen demanded darkly.

"Do you need to know now?" Lelouch asked, exasperated.

"YES!" she shouted, face getting red with anger.

Lelouch sighed again, "All I did was ask you questions about Shinjuku when we were at school and the people you worked with. That's all,"

Kallen blinked, "That's it?" then she realized something, "So that's how you, or more specifically, Zero knew so much about us."

"Actually, I suspected you once you got back from school. I specifically asked if you piloted that Glasgow," Lelouch nodded as they started climbing up a flight of stairs, "I recognized your voice, and confirmed it."
"...I see," Kallen sighed. It was pretty clear that she still wasn't pleased about this, but the fact that Lelouch didn't force her to do anything harmful was a relief.

"Wait, Lelouch," Milly suddenly said, "you said your Geass only works on a person once. That means you can't use it on us again, right?"

"That's right," Lelouch nodded, "but I personally hoped that I wouldn't need to use it on any of you. At all. But-"

"Lelouch," Rai placed a hand on his shoulder just as they exited the stairs, "we get it. You did the best you could."

As they arrived in the next room, they came across a very familiar looking game board.

"The second challenge will be a game of Chess."

"Sounds simple enough," Lelouch said with a shrug, "who's my opponent?"

A mushroom suddenly attached itself to Lelouch's head, much to his and everyone's shock. The spore then flew off to the other end of the board.

"Lelouch!" Suzaku said, steadying his friend as he stumbled from the spore's effects, "You okay?"

"Yes," he groaned, shaking his head, "but I feel like I stayed up all night doing nothing,"

"Uh…Lelouch, look!" Rivalz asked as Lelouch's vision finally came back to normal. The ex-prince blinked.

On the other end, standing in front of the spore, was a holographic image of himself.

"The spore had absorbed your mind. It will use your skills against you. You will have thirty ticks for each move. Begin!"

After he barely heard the instructions, the game began. Lelouch had the first move, moving forward one of the pawns to test just how effective the system was. Just as he expected his holographic self countered the move with a pawn. After Lelouch moved another pawn, that piece was taken by his hologram.

"How am I supposed to win this?" Lelouch muttered, "it already knows my strategies. I'm going to lose… to me… it knows my plans. Every gambit I make…"

"You can do this Lulu!" Shirley cheered him on.

"If anyone can beat you, Lelouch, it's you," Milly agreed.

"No, I can't…” Lelouch muttered, feeling similar to how he faced Schneizel in their one on one matches. But he wasn't necessarily fighting alone here, "but, maybe all of us can! Under normal circumstances, I wouldn't think to do that. Doing it now could trip up the programming."

He went over each of the team's stats in his head.

'Rivalz's strengths: Better at striking from a distance, good team awareness… and luck.'

"Rivalz, you're in charge of the Rooks. Feed me ideas for maneuvers and warnings for any impending enemy Rook attacks."
'Shirley: Also good at range. Fearful, but that's made her good at not attacking straight on.'

"Shirley, you've got Bishops."

'Suzaku attacks from the side, like a ninja, catching his enemies unaware.'

"Suzaku, you're in charge of the Knights."

'Kallen: Versatile. Able to attack in all sides and directions.'

"Kallen, you keep an eye on the Queen, as well as the enemy's."

'Rai: Intelligence expert. He easily gathers information with his hacking abilities. Milly is also good at worming out her foe's weaknesses. Can have a habit of blackmail as well.'

"Rai, Milly, you both will keep track of the pawns. Everyone, we're going to work together to beat me."

The game continued. The hologram, on the other end, made no expression as the match continued, but Lelouch could see that his new strategy was slowly working as his friends gave him tips throughout it.

"That's all I've got," Rivalz said.

"I'm pretty limited too," Suzaku added.

"Can we risk anymore?" Milly asked Rai.

"I wouldn't, we already lost too many," Rai argued.

"Heads up, she's coming in hot," Kallen warned Lelouch after he moved one of the Rooks.

"Yeah, you know this, but both of my pieces are gone," Shirley said apologetically.

"That's fine. Because if I use the Queen… Checkmate!"

The others cheered as Lelouch couldn't help but smirk in victory. They suddenly jumped as the floor beneath them began to rise, with an opening appearing in the ceiling above.

"Now to the most difficult challenge of all…" the Sphinx exclaimed. Once they reached the top, the pyramid began to shift back into the Sphinx again, causing the group to take a sliding tumble down to the bottom again.

"Answer my riddle, and I will tell you where the Pearl is."

Lelouch tisked as he got to his feet to face the Sphinx for the final time.

"What happens when the unstoppable force meets the immovable object?"

Lelouch actually had to think about this one. He usually was reasonably good at figuring riddles out. But if two forces that can't be moved or stopped meet, wouldn't they cancel each other out? No, if the immovable object stopped the unstoppable force than the force wouldn't be considered unstoppable. But if the force managed to move the immovable object, then the object wouldn't be regarded as immovable.

There was really no correct answer. It was impossible either way… wait!
"There is no answer," Lelouch finally said.

"Wait. What?"

"Huh?"

"How come?"

"What do you mean?"

"Simple, it's impossible for one to exist if the other is present. If there's a truly unstoppable force, then there is no object that can stop it. Likewise, if there is a truly immovable object, there can be no force that can move it. Hence, neither can exist together,"

"Incredible," the Sphinx said, actually looking surprised, "You're the first being to ever answer that riddle correctly. It was designed to be unsolvable."

"Alright, we had a deal!" Kallen shouted, "Lelouch passed your stupid tests! Tell us where the Pearl is now!"

"Very well, it's in the evershadow of our moon. But it is a dangerous place, and darkness lurks below."

"Oh please! We're the Paladins of Voltron. We can take care of a little darkness!" Kallen fired back as she and the others retreated back to their Lions. Now that the Pearl's location had finally been revealed, it was time to save Coran.

o~o

Now Voltron had faced many foes over his long lifetime. He's laid waste to hostile armies, destroyed horrifying monsters, displayed near mastery over space and time itself. All these accomplishments had been spread far and wide throughout the universe.

As they passed from race to race, planet to planet, galaxy to galaxy, reports were spun into tales, and tales embroidered into legends. Legends that gave the mystical warrior his nom de guerre, the Defender of the Universe.

But defending the entire universe means nothing if Voltron can't save a single friend in need, and time is running out.

So the Paladins of Voltron rave to the Evershadow of the moon of planet Krell, searching for a treasure that could buy a man's life, under the burning stare of the Inner Eye.

o~o

Voltron landed lightly on the moon's surface. From what the Paladins could tell from the landscape, it looked similar to their own moon on Earth, but it was more of rusty color than grey.

"Stay vigilant. The Yalex could be anywhere," Lelouch ordered.

"Or anything," Suzaku added, "That Sphinx didn't exactly provide a lot of detail."

"It must be a giant oyster, right?" Milly said, "To save Coran, we need to harvest a pearl."

"Guys, we've gone through a sphinx, a dragon, and two giant whatever-they-were bugs to get here.
I think we can handle an oyster," Kallen said.

"Yeah, but if all we have to do is say 'Form Blazing Shucker,' I'm going to be a little it down," Rivalz said.

"Let's just find it and get back to Coran. This place is giving me the chills," Shirley said.

They all suddenly looked below; they spotted a small figure walking in their direction.

"You think that's the Yalex?" Rai asked as the creature calmly walked past them. It barely even spared them a glance.

"If that's the Yalex, he's a pretty cool cucumber," Rivalz said, "We just landed a giant fightin' robot on his moon, and he's all like 'meh.'"

Lelouch narrowed his eyes, something was off, "Let's find out who it is. But be ready. I have a feeling we're going to need Voltron before all this is over. Disassemble!"

The seven lions broke off and flew towards a flat plain close to a large building. Upon closer inspection, most of the ground was covered in what looked like some sort of grain.

"Let's set down over near that mound," Lelouch directed.

"Masks up," Rai warned as an alert sign appeared in Zerith, "The atmosphere here is poisonous. Looks like some kind of underground methane reserve coming out of the hole back there."

By the time they landed and exited their Lions, they were able to catch up to the figure they spotted earlier. Up close, they saw that the character was walking on four legs, like a camel, and also had a breathing mask and goggles on.

"Hello!" Suzaku greeted as they got closer.

"Have you come for the Yalex?" the creature asked, turning towards them.

"Yes, do you know where it is?" Lelouch confirmed.

"Or what it is?" Shirley asked apprehensively.

"Yes. Where, what… and when. Follow me," he said mysteriously. The camel alien led the group into what looked like an old, ancient church or temple. Inside were more of the camel creatures. They were bent over a hole in the ground and were… chewing the grain inside of it. But they weren't eating it.

"This is the temple of the Yalex," the camel explained, now up on two legs. Looking up, the Paladins saw that the walls and ceiling of the temple were covered in some sort of writing and symbols.

"There don't seem to be enough of you here to grow all this grain," Milly said.

"Oh, we did not do it alone," the camel said, "The rest of our people left the moon and returned to Krell after the growing season. Only the high priests remain. We will stay here and devote our remaining days to bringing about the Yalex."

"Why are they chewing up the grain and spitting it in those jars?" Kallen asked, raising an eyebrow at the other priests.
"Here, we dry the grain, then masticate it and preserve it in the cuspidors. When they are full, we carry them to the eye of the Evershadow and pour them in."

"Eww! Why?" Shirley asked, looking disgust.

"To feed the Spirit of the Moon. To strengthen him."

"...Okay, this guy is looney-tooney!" Rivalz declared.

"Wait!" Rai exclaimed as his eyes were drawn to the very center of the ceiling. Positioned, there was a large white sphere, being held up in a set of claws, "Is that the Pearl?"

"Yes..." the priest confirmed.

"I knew it! The whole place is a map! Score one for Rai!" the Green Paladin grinned.

"...The Pearl, the moon, the eye, time, life, all are the circle. Never ending, never broken," the priest explained.

Rai's smile fell and was replaced by a scowl, "Stupid symbolism..."

"Okay, this guy is definitely looney-tooney. Let's go look for the Yalex," Rivalz said as he turned to leave the temple.

"You do not need to look for it," the priest corrected, "Can you not see the calendar? The Yalex comes soon."

"How do you know when it's coming?" Suzaku asked.

"Who told you this?" Lelouch added.

"We follow the ways of the Haruspex," the priest said, pointing to a picture of a hooded woman, who had images of different moon phases above her, "she tells us of the end times."

The priest then approached one of the full containers as he put his goggles back on, "Come, let us feed the Moon Spirit."

"So... this Yalex, what is it?" Milly asked as they walked back outside.

"None living have seen the Yalex," the priest answered, "Seeing the Yalex means death. The Yalex is the End of Days."

"That doesn't sound good," Shirley said.

"Of course it is good," the priest corrected as the Paladins followed single file behind him, "Our lives here are lived in ignorance. When we die, all is revealed, and we continue our journey under the watchful eye of the Conqueror."

"Okay, but what about the Pearl?" Rivalz asked skeptically.

"The Yalex is the Pearl!"

"It is?" Rivalz asked, looking taken aback.

"The Pearl of Wisdom that comes at the end of time," the priest said, smiling beneath his mask, "The Yalex is Creator and Destroyer, Treasure and Terror, Redeemer and Annihilator, Savior and..."
Executioner. One is all, the Fire in the Dark, the eye that is blind is the most prized!"

"...Looney. Tooney," Rivalz declared again. This time most of the other Paladins were having similar thoughts, though they chose not to voice them.

As they finally got to their destination, the priest took the container and began pouring the chewed up grain into the hole in front of them.

"Uh, are you sure the Moon Spirit like camel spit?" Shirley asked. She was still a little grossed out at this strange ritual.

"Your Holiness," Lelouch said respectfully, "We mean no disrespect for your customs, but we have a friend who's going to die unless we can find a Yalexian Pearl, and-

"At last!" the priest exclaimed as the ground beneath them began to rumble. It was equivalent to an 8.0 earthquake as several of the party lost balance.

Then, to their horror, a giant leg punctured through the surface of the moon!

"The birth that is death has begun!"

The entire half of the moon exploded outward, throwing the Paladins off the surface and into open space. From inside of it was a creature with four red legs and three pairs of translucent, purple wings to move around in the vacuum of space. It had eight, purple glands which were shooting purple lasers in all directions.

"The Yalex is here!"

"Is everyone okay?" Lelouch asked desperately as he flew away from the Yalex and towards Zenobia. She and the other Lions had been blown away by the blast as well, "See if you can jetpack back to your Lions!"

"Rivalz and I are okay!" Milly confirmed as Polaris and Maeraka came into view.

"Oh! Speak for yourself! I'm alive but 'okay' got blown up with that moon!" the Blue Paladin exclaimed.

"We're heading towards our Lions, Lelouch!" Suzaku shouted as he pulled Rai and Kallen towards Zerith, Aka, and Yoru.

"Shirley! Are you out there?!" Lelouch shouted.

"I'm out here!" she whimpered as she floated right in the path of one of the Yalex's lasers, "And I'm not alone!"

Shirley screamed just as Lelouch swooped in and scooped her up in Zen's jaws, narrowly avoiding the laser blast.

"I have Shirley. Taking her to Zinnia," Lelouch shouted over the sounds of the firefight outside, The Yalex had just finished destroying the other half of the moon, the temple priests floating and scattering everywhere! "Everyone get into formation! We have to take this thing out before it destroys planet Krell! Form Voltron!"

The moment Shirley was dropped off in her Lion, she and the others flew into formation, and the Defender of the Universe formed once again.
"Now let's get that Yalex!" Lelouch shouted as Voltron charged head-on at the monster, "Shields up!"

Just as Voltron formed his shield, one of the Yalex's massive lasers hit it point blank, causing him to tumble backward.

"This thing is too huge to fight!" Kallen shouted as they dodged around another laser.

"Our weapons don't have any effect!" Suzaku added with the rare tone of panic in his tone.

"If we take another direct hit, our shield is going to explode!" Rai exclaimed as another laser hit them.

"It can shoot out of every eye!" Milly cried, "We're bound to get hit sooner or later!"

"Too many eyes!" Rivalz yelled.

"RUN!" Shirley screamed as they swooped around another laser, this one barely skidding past them.

They flew high above the Yalex, putting as much distance between them and it as possible. Suddenly, Lelouch noticed something.

"Wait a second..." then he realized, the eye that was in the center was white! "The eye that is blind is the most prized! The priest was right!"

"Uh, I think we just lost Lulu!" Shirley said with a nervous expression.

"No, I know where the Pearl is! It's in the center of the Yalex's head! The white eye!"

"Oh, perfect. Let's just go down there and get it," Rivalz said sarcastically.

"Yeah, I hate to say this Lelouch, but maybe it's time we gave up," Suzaku admitted.

"No!" Lelouch immediately denied as Voltron used one of the asteroids to shield against the lasers, "We can beat this thing, get that pearl, and save Coran! We just need a way to get in close. Rai, if Rivalz can for a layer of ice on our shield, could that act as a mirror to deflect the Yalex's lasers?"

"A few times maybe, but then the heat will melt the ice!" the Green Paladin answered.

"Then we'll all be cooked!" Milly added.

"Then we'll have to be fast. Rivalz split off and ice up that shield. Kallen, Rai is going to be handling defense, so you're going to have to reach in and pluck out that big white eye."

"Got it!" Kallen shouted just as Rivalz split off.

Once the shield was iced, the team sprung into action, charging head on towards the Yalex. The monster shot two powerful lasers at them, but just as Lelouch predicted, the lasers were redirected by the icy shield, firing right back at the beast.

"Nice one Rai!" Shirley cheered.

"Almost there, get ready, Kallen!" Lelouch ordered.

Just as Kallen was about to reach for the Pearl, one of the lasers bounced off their shield again and
hit the Yalex nearly in the middle of its head. One second later, the monster exploded in a fiery inferno.

"No!" Kallen screamed.

"Uh-oh!" Milly gasped, voicing everyone's thoughts.

"It's gone," Rai moaned.

"And so is the Pearl," Suzaku added.

"What do we do now?" Rivalz asked, desperately.

"What can we do?" Shirley asked nervously, "Without that pearl, we can't save Coran!"

"Don't give up just yet. We just saved Krell, and we can save these priests," Lelouch said as Zerith and Aka started scooping the aliens into their mouths, "We're Defenders of the Universe now, remember? Not just the defenders of our friends."

Despite the words of comfort, though, Lelouch was also nervous because Shirley was right. Unless they brought back that Pearl, they had nothing to trade for Coran. That certainly threw a wrench into their plan.

o~o

"Thank you for returning us to our people," the head priest said, as Voltron landed outside another smaller pyramid below, "I suppose this is the beginning of a new age. Just not in the way we imagined."

"We're happy to see you all reunited," Kallen said, offering a small smile.

"Yeah, now we have to see if we can reunite with our friend," Suzaku said.

"Before you leave, check over the hill in the distance. You may see something that interests you," the priest told them.

Though perplexed and curious, the Paladins in Voltron did just that. To their surprise and relief, it was the Pearl. It had somehow survived the explosion from the Yalex.

Now with the giant treasure in hand, Voltron rocketed back to the Frippin' Bulgolgian. They were surprised to see Coran and Kythilian casually waiting for them.

"I told you they could do it! Pay up!" the advisor held out his hand.

Kythilian dropped a small bag of money into his hands, shaking his head in disbelief, "I don't believe it. I figured they'd survive, sure, but…"

"Wait, what are you talking about?" Shirley asked, confused just as the rest of them were.

"Successful training mission Paladins!" Coran grinned, "Fried turtle scallions on me!"

"That whole thing was a training mission?!" Rai shouted, suddenly angry.

"We nearly got killed!" Milly exclaimed similarly.

"What? You didn't have any fun? Last time we did this, Alfor-"
Coran suddenly cried out in pain as Kallen marched up to him and kicked him where the sun doesn't shine. As the advisor sank to his knees in agony, he lifted up his head towards the Red Paladin.

"Fun? FUN?! DO YOU REALIZE HOW MANY TIMES WE ALMOST DIED ON THIS LITTLE MISSION OF YOURS?!" she bellowed in a grave tone, her head having grown to three times the size it originally was, her eyes white and full, teeth comically sharp and spiky, and flames shooting up from behind her. With the way, her hair curled it looked like her head was aflame as well.

Coran whimpered and leaned back. He certainly had not been expecting this kind of reaction when the Paladins returned.

"You know Coran, in retrospect, you kind of had that coming," Kythilian laughed at the Altean's predicament. The Red Paladin looked like she was about to pummel Coran further, and the Green, Yellow, Orange, and Blue Paladins looked just about to either join in or let her. Lelouch was just standing back with a strange looking smile on his face while Suzaku looked to be the only one trying to diffuse the situation.

"Hey, hey, calm down guys," Suzaku said with a nervous smile. He knew how dangerous the territory he was walking upon was, as it was never a good idea if an enraged, red-headed female involved, "I-I'm sure Coran had a good reason for all this. Right?"

"Wait, so Coran, you were ever really in danger?" Milly asked accusingly.

"No, but that was a good way to motivate you," Coran breathed as he got back to his feet, "But Krell was in danger from the Yalex, and we knew Voltron was the only thing that could possibly stop it. And now that Kythlian has the Pearl, he can sell it and use the G.A.C. to fight Zarkon.

Lelouch sighed, "While this wasn't what I would consider a 'training mission' we did show how much we've improved as a team, so I suppose it's not a complete lost cause," he then grinned evilly, "But… that still doesn't change the fact of how dangerous it truly was, so I believe I have the perfect punishment for you Coran."

The advisor gulped at the smirk Lelouch was flashing. A shadow seemed to fall over the Black Paladin's eyes, making his eyes look white and piercing as well.

Let's just say that by the time they got back to the Castle, the Princess had a few choice words to speak to her advisor as she chased him around on a hover chair for the remainder of the evening.

Chapter End Notes

AN: So, here's the second half of the comic book adventure! I hope you enjoyed it. Now bear in mind, that I'm not as familiar with the comics as with the show, so if some of the characters seem OOC then I'm sorry, I did my best to keep them true.

Also, I've been getting a lot of messages asking about my other fics. So I'll just address that now:

Spark of Fire: I'll be honest, I've sort of lost interest in this fanfiction. I started it in Sophmore year of high school when I was just starting to seriously write, and now that
I look back on it, it's a bit of a mess with how many characters I've included in it. I literally had to force myself to finish the single chapter that I've published since my eighteen-month hiatus. So, unfortunately, that fic is probably going up for adoption. If any of you are interested in adopting it, let me know.

Akame ga Titan: Now this I have NOT lost interest in. But a lot of stuff has happened in the Attack on Titan franchise since I've returned. I'm currently trying to catch up with what's going on in the manga before I continue with the fic, that way I understand the direction I want to go with it later on because the second half of it I plan to have take place in the AoT world. So, just be patient with me, please. If anyone wants to give me a detailed summary of what's happened since they found Eren's basement and learned about his Dad's past, feel free to do so. But I promise I'm going to keep working on this one as best as I can.

Burning Bridges: My co-writer and I actually have about six more chapters/povs written down on paper. The problem is that my co-writer lives out of state and is the one with the handwritten drafts right now. So sometimes it takes a while for her to find time to type them up. We're still slowly working on it, so just like with Akame ga Titan, just be patient with us, please!

Now if that helps with all your concerns, R&R and see you next episode!

(Also, again, if anyone is a part of the TVtrope website, please go and update my trope page, it's been a while, and the people that originally made it are busy with other pages and stories of their own. Thank you!)

PS: Added a couple of omakes to some later chapters. Hope you enjoy them. User jetslinger333 helped me with them.
"I loved the smell of the mountain juniberries in the early morning breeze," Allura sighed as she looked up at her father's image. She was sitting in a field of juniberries from Altea. She still hadn't fully processed that her home was gone forever.

"As did I, Allura," Alfor answered with a smile. The Space Mice were seated on a floating tray next to the Princess, stirring some tea for her to drink.

"Remember the summer berry festival?" Allura asked, "People would come from all over Altea for the harvest."

Alfor laughed a little at the memory, "I remember how the berry juice stained your favorite dress. You were so upset."

Allura laughed as well, "It took forever for Mother to calm me," the Princess then looked down, tears filling her eyes, "I miss Altea so much. I miss you, Father. I wish it didn't have to be this way."

"I know Allura," King Alfor sighed, "but, as leaders, we have to do what's right for our people, even if it means great sacrifice."

"I know, Father," Allura said, though the frown didn't leave her face, "that's what you always say."

The hologram door at the back of the room opened, and Coran walked in, "Princess, there you are, what are you doing up and about? You should be resting."

"Oh, Coran, can't I stay?" Allura begged.

"The Balmera Rejuvenation Ceremony took a lot out of you," the advisor argued as he knelt next to her to help her up, "Come along, to your room."

"Get your rest, darling. I will be here for you when you're well," Alfor assured her as the Princess reluctantly got up to leave.

"I love you, Father. I'll see you soon," Allura allowed Coran to lead her out of the room, though her expression was downcast as Altea faded into a dark metal room once again.

o~o

Rai was down in Zerith's lair typing away on his laptop. Rover was hovering over his shoulder. He had for the past several hours been studying the Galra Crystal that they had yet to get rid of. It's structure, he observed, was very similar to a Balmera Crystal, except something about the energy in it seemed off.

He squinted at another algorithm as the speakers in the bay came on.

"Rai, please come down to the detainment room," Coran said over them.

With a slightly irritated sigh, Rai stood up and walked out, Rover obediently trailing behind him. Neither of them noticed the Galra Crystal suddenly pulsing very brightly.
When Rai and Rover arrived, Coran was just finishing putting a device on top of Sendak's holding pod. There were two more across and below it as well. The other Paladins and C.C., who had now fully recovered from the Balmera incident, were there as well.

"Okay, guys, Sendak's almost all hooked up," Coran said as he pulled up a screen by a smaller container next to Sendak's, "But, look, I have to warn you, this technology was used to keep Altean memories alive, not to interrogate prisoners."

"Coran, we understand this isn't what the technology was meant for," Lelouch explained, looking confidently at their sleeping prisoner, "but if we can extract Sendak's memories, we may gain valuable intelligence on Zarkon's troop locations."

"Yeah, and then we can just be like, 'Knock-knock.' 'Who's there?' 'The avenging fury of Voltron, son!'" Rivalz laughed from behind him.

"Fascinating. So, how exactly does this work?" Rai couldn't help but ask as he hovered over Coran's shoulder, looking at the screen.

"As the memories are extracted, they're written bit by bit on individual molecules of the micro-storage strands," Coran explained.

"You know what? When I go, I want all the stuff in my brain stored in a giant ship too," Milly declared with a smirk.

"You sure a ship this size would have enough storage space for what's in your head, Milly?" Kallen asked with curious sarcasm.

"...No, you're right," Milly paused before smirking, "I'll need at least five ships to store it!"

"Oh! Good one Prez!" Shirley laughed.

Suzaku laughed a little too while Lelouch just sighed in exasperation.

"So this is how you incorporated King Alfor's memories into the Castle of Lions?" C.C. asked.

"Precisely," Coran confirmed, before frowning, "but it's never been attempted before, on an unwilling participant."

He pressed a few more buttons on the control board, and the memory machine immediately activated, a port opening at the top. Nothing seemed to happen, though.

"Uh, is this what's supposed to be happening?" Shirley asked, a little confused along with most of the others. Even Coran looked a little bemused.

"Let's just give it some time. As Coran said, he's an 'unwilling participant.' He'll likely resist for a while before we get any significant results," Lelouch reasoned.

No one knew how many hours seemed to pass as they waited for Sendak to give in. Shirley was having a hard time keeping her eyes open, Milly was tapping her foot, and Rivalz had resorted to just twiddling his thumbs. Rai, Suzaku, and Kallen looked like they were getting impatient too.

Finally, after several resorted to sitting on the floor and Coran checking the device for the
thousandth time, Suzaku spoke up, "Well, I can't wait around any more. If you need me, I'll be at the training deck."

"Me too," Kallen sighed as she and Suzaku exited the room.

o~o

More time passed, Lelouch had not left his position in front of Sendak's holding pod, while Rivalz leaned forward, looking at his face, trying to make sure that the Black Paladin hadn't turned to stone somehow with how intensely he was staring.

Rai finally sighed, "Okay, if anyone needs me, I'll be in the lab. Maybe I can pull some information from Sendak's Galra Crystal."

Rover followed after him as usual, and after looking back and forth between the exit and the others, Shirley followed him.

o~o

After another half hour, C.C. was leaning up against the wall while Rivalz was pedaling with his legs in the air.

Milly stomach suddenly growled, "Well, guess that means its time to eat… come to think of it, haven't even had breakfast yet," She exited the room as well. At the mention of breakfast, though, C.C. followed after her as well. Even though she didn't necessarily need to, she still ate whenever she could.

"Well, I'm afraid I can't wait here any longer, either," Coran said as he stretched his arms, "I have a million duties to attend to. Between that Galra Crystal infecting our system, and then fighting off those ships and performing the Balmeran Rejuvenation Ceremony, the old Castle of Lions has taken quite a beating. Every system needs to be recharged and repaired."

"I'll stay," Lelouch said, "Somewhere in Sendak's mind is the information about Zarkon that we need."

"Okay, well, while you guys do that," Rivalz said, flipping to his feet, "I think I'm gonna get my chill on. Maybe kick back with a lemonade or space juice. Something."

As Rivalz tried to leave though, Coran stopped him, "Oh, hold on there, space juice. You're going to come and help me."

Rivalz stopped short and looked at Coran, shocked, "What? Why? Why me?"

"Because you're the last one here and because your activity isn't very important," Coran reasoned as he left the room swiftly.

"Wait, did I say 'chill with a good lemonade'? I meant I gotta do homework," Rivalz tried desperately to correct himself.

"No, too late."

"Fine…" Rivalz groaned in defeat before looking back at Lelouch, "Let us know if anything happens… Lelouch?"

Lelouch blinked before finally acknowledging Rivalz just as he was leaving the room, "Y-You got
Milly punched the buttons on the food goo machine, a bowl already in her hand. "Maybe today, we try a little crème goo-lée."

The machine opened, and two hoses appeared in front of her. She grabbed the first one and pressed down on the handle to dispense the food goo. She blinked, though when nothing started coming out. She tapped the nozzle and shook it a few times, thinking something was stuck. When still nothing happened, she held the hose up to her face to see if she could see the blockage. She was so focused on the nozzle though that she didn't notice the static at the base of the machine.

After shaking it a few more times and holding up again, she shrieked as a blast of food fired right in her face, hitting her eye. She dropped her plate and held her face as she attempted to blink the goo out. She cried out again as another blast of goo hit her in the rear, forcing her to take cover behind the counter.

C.C. was just about to enter the kitchen herself when a glob of goo nearly missed hitting her. With a bewildered blink she looked into the kitchen's entrance, only to see the goo machine going haywire, shooting globs of goo all over the place, much to her shock.

"What is going on here?" she asked, quite shocked.

Milly poked her head up from behind the counter, "The goo has me pinned down!" she exclaimed with a grunt as another glob hit her in the face.

C.C.'s eyes widened and rushed over to the counter as well, expertly maneuvering around the globs of goo flying through the air. She crouched down next to Milly and ripped open one of the drawers next to her. Inside was a row of neatly stacked plates. She snatched two of them and handed one to Milly.

"We're going to have to flank the goo to shut it down," C.C. said holding the plate.

"Okay, got it!" Milly said, before bowing her head, "C.C., it's been an honor serving with you!"

C.C. playfully rolled her eyes before the two girls braced themselves to jump into action.

"And… GO!" C.C. shouted. The two women leaped out from behind the counter, plates acting as shields in front of them. Milly raised it in front of her face as two globs almost hit her face.

As Milly charged it head-on, C.C. swooped in on the side and leaped onto the berserk goo dispenser. She grit her teeth as she held the nozzle down with the plate, goo still flying out of it in the process. Milly then ran up to the machine itself, took hold of the nozzle's hose, and tied it tightly into a knot. This stopped any further goo from getting out of the nose, but Milly gasped in fright as the tube started to expand from the pressure of the food building up behind it. Both girls quickly scrambled away from it as more food goo began to drip from the top of the machine. To their relief, though, it didn't explode outward.

After they both sighed in relief, C.C. said, "Malfunction?"

"Yeah, yeah…" Milly laughed uneasily, "Guess the kitchen system needs to be rebooted, too."

The two made eye contact, both quite shocked about what just transpired.
"...I say we leave this Coran," Milly proclaimed.

Before C.C. could reply, the lights in the kitchen suddenly shut off, leaving complete darkness.

"...Yes, definitely leave for Coran," C.C. agree.

Rivalz pouted as he scrubbed the inside of the pod that he had previously been inhabiting when he was recovering about a week ago.

"Ugh... Since when did 'you sleep in it, you clean it' become a Voltron rule? Also, how is it these pods have the ability to heal a human from near death, but don't have the ability to clean themselves?"

"Oh, self-cleaning pods," Coran laughed as he glanced back at Rivalz before moving onto the next pod, "Now, that's a good one! You know, this kind of reminds me of my time as a young cadet. I had just enlisted in the Altean space squad, aeronautics sub-tech nano-weaponry unit, and I was sent off to boot camp. Our sergeant had us cleaning cryo-pods day and night. I got so good at it, I earned my first set of stripes!"

As Rivalz only half-listened to Coran and moved on to the more inner part of the pod, he didn't notice that the pod had somehow closed behind him.

He turned around after hearing the hissing noise of it closing, and yelled out in alarm before turning and banging on the front, trying to either break it down or alert Coran to what was happening.

"Oh—Coran! Hey! Hey! H-Hey!"

"—Oh, those were the days," Coran continued, utterly oblivious to Rivalz's plight as the pod flashed, freezing Rivalz inside and lowering back to the floor, "Anyway, you keep up the good work, and maybe someday you'll earn some cleaning stripes, too."

Coran turned around with a grin, only to blink in confusion and look around. "Rivalz? Rivalz! Ah, Paladins..." he sighed in defeat. The Blue Paladin must have slipped out while he was distracted. Oh well. He'd catch him and punish him for that later.

Suzaku grunted as he blocked the attack from the gladiator with perfect fluidity and ducked under another swing from above. Kallen stood off to the side, waiting for her turn. She and Suzaku had been switching out on who fought the gladiator. Suzaku was currently on his third round, and Kallen would begin hers once he ended.

Which it did moments after, as, with a sidespin, Suzaku's katana sank straight through the gladiator which dissolved in blue light and pixels.

"You're up," Suzaku said to Kallen, swiping the sweat from his face.

Kallen grunted as she traded places with the Purple Paladin. Activating her cestus, she stood in the center of the room. "Restart training level three!"

At Kallen's command, a gladiator once again descended to the floor on the opposite end. With a blink of its blue eye, it charged the Red Paladin. With a shout of challenge, she met the gladiator's sword with her claw, and the two exchanged blows several times, the gladiator gradually pushing...
Kallen back.

It seemed like Kallen had it all under control until one of the strikes hit so hard, Kallen went flying to the other end. She landed hard on her shoulder and spun to a stop close to Suzaku's position.

"Kallen!" he exclaimed, running over, "End training sequence!" That gladiator fight had been far too hard to just be level three. Something must have glitched in the system. The Red Paladin grunted as she got back to her feet. Despite the sharp fall, she didn't appear hurt. Her eyes widened though as the gladiator didn't disappear, but started charging towards the two, its eye glowing red instead of blue now.

"End training sequence! End training sequence now!" was her only warning to Suzaku as the gladiator continued to charge. The Purple Paladin managed to raise his katana in time to block the attack, but it resulted in his Bayard flying out of his hands and clambering to the other side of the room.

Too shocked to see what happened, the gladiator kicked Suzaku hard in the gut, running into Kallen in the process and the two ruled painfully across the floor, though Kallen managed to keep hold of her Bayard.

Suzaku looked to where his Bayard had landed, not too far away. Making eye contact with Kallen, the Red Paladin leaped to her feet and charged the gladiator head-on. With a battle cry, she clashed her claw against the gladiator again as Suzaku slid past them to scoop up his own weapon.

Upon seeing that Suzaku was armed once more, Kallen sidestepped around the gladiator and managed to trip it before both her and Suzaku sprinted for the exit. Once they were out in the hallway, the training room door locked, the two panted profusely, hoping that that was the end of it.

They didn't have time to determine what had caused the robot to go crazy, as the sword of the very robot suddenly pierced straight through the door. With gasps of surprise and slight panic, the two Paladins backed away, horrified to see the gladiator breaking down the door to get to them.

o~o

"I know you're in there, Sendak," Lelouch growled at the pod, containing the Galra commander, "My Geass might not have an effect on you, but I know you have all the answers. Give them to me." Lelouch had been down in the holding area for the past hour, and he was starting to lose his patience. What exactly did Sendak have to gain from being silent now? He had nowhere to go.

Lelouch felt frustration build up in him more than ever before as he banged his fist against the glass, "You're a broken soldier! You can't hold out forever!"

A hiss to his right cut Lelouch off. Looking to the source, he grinned in triumph as a tiny tendril of purple energy dripped into the port next to them. The mind machine was finally working, they were collecting Sendak's memories.

"Well, well, so you can hear me," the prince could only smirk maliciously.

o~o

Back in the cryopod room, Coran had just finished scrubbing the last pod just as the final one rose up. This one though had a surprise inside.

Coran leaped back in alarm as a frozen, terrified looking Rivalz greeted him from inside. Coran
immediately pressed a button to open the pod, and the nearly frozen Rivalz robotically walked out, his skin a light shade of blue.

"Ah, ah... This pod just shut on me and locked me in, while you were rambling on about boot camp!" Rivalz muttered as he held his arms close and rubbed them up and down, trying to reactivate body heat inside of himself. All the while, he was giving Coran a big stink eye of contempt.

"You sure you didn't just trip and fall in?" Coran asked. Upon seeing the offending look that Rivalz shot him, he held his hands up in a placated gesture, "No judgment. It happens. Besides, why would the pod automatically lock and start the cryogenic freezing process?"

"To kill me!" Rivalz exclaimed as he sat down on the steps leading to the pod and swiped his jacket from the floor that he had taken off beforehand. He shivered as he pulled it on over him.

"Don't get your boots in a bunch," Coran still defended, folding his arms, but eyeing the pods suspiciously, "My guess is they're malfunctioning."

"...Okay, I'm gonna float this out there. I think this Castle is haunted," Rivalz said, with a suspicious, stubborn frown.

"The ship might seem like a fantastical, magical creature to you," Coran said, twiddling his mustache, "but it's really just a big embodiment of advanced, supernatural technology that cannot be explained by science alone," Throughout this entire explanation, one of Rivalz's eyebrows raised up slowly in skepticism.

Coran blinked as he went over the words again in his head and blinked, "...Well, that does make it seem a bit haunted, doesn't it?" Despite the conjecture, Coran quickly regained his composure, "Ah, but it's not. Trust me, nothing out of the ordinary is happening here."

As Coran left, Rivalz glanced distrustingly at the pod that trapped him. He then jumped slightly as he heard faint rumbling noises coming from outside the room. With a whimper, he hugged his legs close to his chest, "I'm okay. I'm okay, I'm okay, I'm okay..."

He leaped to his feet with a shriek of fear as the pod behind him hissed and began slowly descending back into the floor. Not wanting to be in the room a second longer, he turned and ran.

Allura was slumbering peacefully in her room. Despite her protests earlier, she really was tired and didn't realize how much until she had climbed back into bed. She had fallen asleep almost instantly. Her four mice friends were nestled in the pillow next to her bed as well.

"Allura… Allura?" a voice echoed in the room softly.

Platt awoke first, squeaking in fright and jumping behind his siblings as King Alfor's A.I. appeared in front of them. Allura awoke next, blinking in confusion before her eyes adjusted to the darkness.

"Allura, dear daughter..." the A.I. smiled down at her.

"Father, what are you doing here?"

Rivalz was walking cautiously down the hall, still hugging himself due to the mildly traumatizing
incident with the pod. A flicker in the distance suddenly caught his eye. The hall lights were
shutting off one by one. He whimpered as the ones by him shut off and then the ones behind him,
shrouding him in complete darkness. Then, at the end of the hallway, one light was still flickering,
and the figure of a man stood at the end of the hall before vanishing.

"Coran, is that you?" he called out as the figure disappeared, "Okay, stop messing with me, guys.
This isn't funny," Rivalz was really starting to freak out now.

"Help! Help!" a voice that sounded a lot like Coran's echoed from the end of the hallway.

"Hello? Coran?" Rivalz called as he ran towards the voice. It led him down another hallway that
led to a line of airlocks.

"Help! Somebody!" Rivalz noticed that one of the airlock buttons was flashing red, and that's
where Coran's voice was coming from, "I'm trapped in the airlock."

Rivalz's eyes widened in fear and ran towards the airlock, "I'm coming!" He opened the outer
airlock door and ran inside. He stopped dead in his tracks, though, when he saw that the airlock
was empty. The door behind him then slammed closed.

Rivalz laughed nervously, "Okay, ha-ha. Good joke. You guys got me. Nice."

He abruptly stopped laughing when the alarm behind him started buzzing.

"Airlock opening in thirty ticks."

"Okay, joke's over! You got me!" Rivalz said desperately, looking around to see who could
possibly be pulling his prank on him that was being taken way too far.

"...twenty-nine, twenty-eight, twenty-seven..."

"Guys?" Rivalz asked nervously before it finally registered to him that this was not. A. Prank! He
ran up to the outer doors and started banging hard on it, "Guys! Eugh! Help!"

o~o

"What was the first rank you held in Zarkon's army?" Lelouch questioned the purple memories as
Sendak continued to sleep in the storage pod, "Where did you find the Red Lion? What is Zarkon's
greatest weakness?"

"What makes you think you can possibly defeat him?"

The sound of Sendak's voice, echoing through the room startled Lelouch with a jump. He whipped
his head back to Sendak but saw that the commander still continued to slumber.

Lelouch blinked. What was that? Was he going nuts?

He swallowed slightly before turning back to the memories, "If you were to attack Zarkon, where
would you strike?"

There were a few more seconds of silence before Sendak's voice filled the hall once again, causing
Lelouch to jump back again.

"Why strike at all when you can join him?"

Lelouch looked once more at the Galran, so still in his holding pod. No one else was in the room
with him. It was just him and Sendak.

For a moment, Lelouch thought Sendak's eye opened. But once Lelouch blinked, it was closed again.

What was going on?

o~o

"I bet if we can modulate the dynamics of this crystal, we'll be able to reverse engineer a lot of Galra tech. Don't you think, Shirley?" Rai asked Shirley in Zerith's hanger. He was typing away on his laptop as Shirley stood off to the side. The Orange Paladin didn't seem to be paying much attention, though. She was facing the hanger entrance. "Shirley, are you paying attention?"

"Huh?" she jumped at Rai's voice, "Oh, sorry, Rai."

"Are you okay?" Rai asked her.

"Yeah, I-I just-I just have a weird feeling all of a sudden," Shirley admitted, rubbing her arm.

"Is this about the lights flickering earlier?" he asked kindly as he walked over to the Galra crystal. As the two made their way to Rai's lab, the Castle lights had flickered on and off several times. The first time, the lights shut off so suddenly that she screamed and refused to let go of Rai's arm until they got to Zerith, shivering the entire way. Only then had she peeled her hands away from the Green Paladin.

"Yeah, a little," she admitted.

Rai laughed lightly but gave her a reassuring smile, adjusting some of the sensors on the crystal, "Relax. I'm sure the Castle's just glitchy. It's ten thousand years old. There's bound to be a few problems here and there."

"Yeah, it does seem like the ship is not currently trying to kill us," Shirley said with an uneasy smile.

Satisfied that Shirley was calm again and that the sensors were in place, Rai called over his shoulder, "Okay, so, all the sensors are on the crystal. Hit the switch, will you?"

"O-Okay," Shirley said as she walked to Rai's computer. He had shown her earlier which one to press and was about to when the laptop and the rest of the equipment started floating in midair. Immediately after, Shirley's feet also left the ground. She was floating in midair!

"Shirley, did you accidentally hit the anti-gravity switch?" Rai asked as he was also floating in midair, along with Galra crystal.

"Um, no! I didn't hit anything! Is there an anti-gravity switch?" she exclaimed in alarm.

Rover started beeping hurriedly as if panicking himself. The bot tried flying towards the doors, but he went too fast and slammed into the wall instead, causing him to be shorted out.

Rai gasped upon seeing his friend get knocked out. He'd fix him as soon as he got back on the ground. Rai then looked back at the Galra crystal. He spotted one of the sensors attached to it. If he could reach it, he may be able to guide himself back to the ground. He strained out to reach the tube but saw that he had floated too far away from it, much to his own frustration.
"No!" he shouted, "I'm too far away!"

"Okay!" Shirley shouted, "Hang on, Rai. I'm going to swim toward you!" Shirley started trying to perform the breaststroke in the air, but because there was no moving air around them, she barely moved and was simply stuck air-swimming. When she saw that the breaststroke wasn't working, she tried front crawl and even butterfly paddle. Finally, she went limp from exhaustion, "That's it. I'm all out of moves."

o~o

"Help! Help! Help!" Rivalz screamed as he continued to bang on the airlock door, his panic rising more and more with each strike.

"...twelve, eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven..."

While Rivalz continued to scream for help, Kallen and Suzaku came sprinting down the hall, the rogue gladiator still pursuing them relentlessly.

Suzaku grunted as the gladiator's sword clashed with his while Kallen stepped back and away. That's when she spotted Rivalz in the airlock.

"Kallen!" he shouted frantically.

"...six, five..."

"What are you doing in there?" Kallen asked, shocked.

"Kallen! Watch out!" the gladiator had kicked Suzaku away and had taken a swing at Kallen. She managed to dodge away in time, so she wasn't hurt.

"I need help!" Rivalz shouted, "Because if you don't get me out of here right now, I'm going to be sucked out into space!"

"Doors opening."

"I'm getting sucked out into space!" Rivalz screamed as the second and then third airlock doors opened. The wind rushed past Rivalz as the pressure from outside began to drag him backward. Fortunately, Rivalz was able to clutch the inside of a wall outcropping. He held on for dear life as Kallen and Suzaku continued to fend off the gladiator inside.

Finally, Suzaku was able to lock his and the gladiator's swords, neither of them could move. Kallen ran to the airlock door and made eye contact with Suzaku as her hand hovered over the button. With a nod, Suzake used what remained of his strength to shove the gladiator in the door's direction. Once the robot was pushed against the door wall, Kallen slammed her hand on the button, opening the outer airlock doors. The two immediately dove to the sides to avoid getting caught up in the vacuum as the gladiator spiraled out into the universe outside.

Suzaku then leaned over the side and extended his hand towards a still screaming Rivalz, "Suzaku! Come on!" he gasped as he latched onto his hand over the Purple Paladin's who managed to pull him to safety. Once Rivalz was back inside, Kallen slammed her hand on the button once again, shutting the airlock doors behind them.

Only after the danger was passed did they all take a moment to catch their breaths, sliding down against the wall of the hallway.
"Rivalz, what were you doing out there?" Kallen exclaimed.

"Who was that guy?" Rivalz asked almost at the same time.

"Oh, no one! He was just trying to kill us!" Suzaku answered, just as aggravated.

"Well, is he the Castle? Because that's who's trying to kill me!" Rivalz shot back.

The three blinked at one another before they realized how dangerous the situation indeed was, before the three of them bolted down the hall, yelling in fear.

o~o

Allura blew the petals off of the juniberry from the field she and her father were sitting in. The fragrance was still fresh as if the simulation around them was real.

"Altean flowers are the most beautiful," Alfor sighed as the petals flew passed his face.

"It is sad that I will only see them in my dreams," Allura said sadly, "But when I wake, my memories are like these spores, scattered in the wind."

"Altea is not merely a dream, Allura. It still exists. The Altean flower, you can see it. You can touch it," Alfor said, picking up another flower and handing it to his daughter, "I can take you there. I can take you home."

"You can?" Allura asked, quite surprised. Was it really possible that Altea was still there? That her people weren't truly gone?

"Would you like to go home?" Alfor asked, kindly.

"Yes. I want to go back to Altea, Father," she answered immediately.

"Then come with me, and I will show you the way," Alfor stood up with his daughter, and the two of them left her room, which had been where the flower scene had taken place. The mice squeaked in alarm as they watched them both go. Something weird, and wrong was happening.

o~o

"Wait. Wait, wait. I have an idea. Grab on!" Rai shouted in the lab. He and Shirley were still floating in zero gravity and hadn't been able to do anything to remedy the situation. But Rai now had an idea as he extended his hand towards Shirley.

The two of them strained and groaned before they finally made contact with each other, locking their hands together. This action caused them to twirl in the air, now Rai's back was facing the hanger door instead of Shirley.

"Yeah! We did it! Now, what?" Shirley asked, confused over what Rai was planning.

"Now, kick me as hard as you can!" Rai instructed.

"What? No! We're friends!" Shirley protested, looking at Rai like he was nuts.

"No, no. Kick me so I can fly across the room and get to the control panel," Rai explained, pointing to the door so Shirley could see.

Upon seeing it, Shirley nodded with a nervous smile. Rai spun around so that Shirley's foot was
planted on his butt. Then, with as much force as she could muster, Shirley pushed off of Rai, sending him flying to the other end of the room just like he said he would.

Rai grinned as he approached the control panel. He was almost there. However, moments later, he realized he miscalculated the kick's projectory. He wasn't flying low enough!

"Oh... oh, oh! No, no, no!" he exclaimed as he collided with the hanger door and then the floor. He was now floating away from the panel and back to where Shirley was.

Fortunately for both of them, the hanger doors opened anyway to reveal Suzaku, Kallen, Rivalz, Milly, C.C., and Coran on the other side. This allowed the gravity function to kick back in, and Rai, Shirley, and everything else in the room landed back on the ground with a thud.

"How can you guys be taking a nap while this castle is trying to kill us?" Rivalz exclaimed in disbelief as the group walked in behind them.

"Taking a nap? We've been floating around in Zero-G! You know how scary that is?" Shirley asked frantically as Rai ran over to Rover, scooping the bot into his arms.

"That's not scary! That's fun! I was almost ejected into space!" Rivalz ranted angrily.

"Yeah well, C.C. and I got attacked by killer food!" Milly countered.

"Oh yeah?" Kallen exclaimed, "Well, Kururgi and I had a robot, trying to kill us!"

"I don't care what you say, Coran," Rivalz said, turning to the advisor with an angry glare, "This castle has gone apples and bananas!"

Coran groaned. He had an idea of what was happening now. He looked mournfully at the Galra crystal now lying haphazardly on the floor, "Perhaps the infection from Sendak's Galra crystal is worse than we thought."

"Then why don't we just get rid of it?" C.C. asked as if the answer should be obvious.

"I wish it were that simple," Coran said, "but it's too late. When Sendak plugged it into the ship, it corrupted the entire system."

"Sendak..." Suzaku muttered, before his eyes widened, "Wait! Where's Lelouch?!"

₀₋₀

"We're connected, you and me. Both part of the Galra Empire," Sendak's voice rang through the room.

Lelouch glared venomously at the commander, "No, I'm nothing like you!" he spat.

"You're a survivor. A leader. Just look at what's in your eye."

Lelouch's hand instinctively went up to his left eye, covering it. He grit his teeth, "That doesn't mean anything!"

"It's the strongest part of you. Embrace it," Sendak continued to taunt, "The others don't know what you know. They haven't seen what you've seen. You'll never beat Zarkon. He's already defeated you."

"That's not true!" Lelouch shouted back, viciously.
"It's just like your father, a fellow emperor! One who sacrifices everything to obtain victory."

"What?" Lelouch gasped, stepping back, eyes widening.

"You're using everything now. Even your fellow Paladins. They're nothing but pawns to you. Face it. You claim you're nothing like him, but he's already broken and reformed you in his own image."

"...Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! SHUT UP!" Lelouch screamed, covering his ears and bending down as if in agony.

"Do you really think a monster like you could be a Voltron Paladin?"

"I said, shut up!" Lelouch shrieked, his Geass instinctively activating, lightning crackling in his hands as he swung out and punched the pod door, causing it to crack significantly. Lelouch took several deep breaths before looking up at Sendak slowly, tearing gathering in his eyes.

Lelouch suddenly yelled out as Sendak's face smiled maliciously at him. Without thinking, Lelouch slammed his hand on the ejection button, and the pod containing the Galran commander shot out into space.

Tears spilled over Lelouch's eyelids as he slid down the wall of the containment unit, still panting heavily, cold sweat dripping down his form.

"I remember how you used to dance around this very ballroom," Alfor reminisced as he led Allura into the hall of it, "I can still hear you giggling."

"Oh... Those were happy memories," Allura said sadly.

"We can create new memories, Allura," the King reassured her as he extended his hand to her.

The Princess smiled as she 'clutched' her father's hand. To everyone but her, though, the room shifted into the main bridge, her hands landing on the teludav controls. The Crystal above illuminated with light. Allura smiled as her father appeared beside her.

They were going home to Altea, at long last.

"Lelouch?" Suzaku called as he and the others made their way back to the holding cells. The Purple Paladin's eyes widened as he spotted the Black Paladin, still curled on the floor, clutching his head and shaking.

"Lulu!" Milly exclaimed as they ran over, "Are you okay?"

"What happened?" C.C. asked urgently, kneeling next to him.

"Where's Sendak?" Kallen asked as C.C. helped him to his feet. He still continued to tremble, though. Kallen's eyes widened. She'd never seen Lelouch like this, so torn apart and scared. It was a whole new world for her.

"I... I had to get him out of here," Lelouch stuttered (He stuttered!), "I was hearing his voice. He... He can't be trusted on this ship."

"It is the ship!" Rivalz said quickly, "I got stuck in a cryopod, then, in an airlock. Kallen and
Suzaku got attacked by a robot, C.C. and Milly got attacked by food, and Shirley and Rai were stuck in zero gravity for who knows how long! It's been a weird morning."

Any further discussion of this was interrupted by an alarm blaring through the room. Looking behind them, a red screen appeared on the upper wall, signaling a wormhole jump.

"What? How is that possible?" Coran exclaimed. Only Allura was capable of making wormhole jumps, and as far as he knew, she was still in bed resting.

Or… was.

"What is it?" Kallen demanded.

"The ship is starting a wormhole jump!" Coran exclaimed, quite frightened.

The group immediately ran towards the bridge. Upon entering, they were shocked to see Allura standing on the teludav, and the vacuum of space zooming past them from the jump.

"Allura, what's going on?" Lelouch exclaimed.

"We're going to Altea. We're going home," Allura said happily, looking back at them, "My father is taking us."

Seeing how dangerous the situation is, everyone ran forward, intending to stop her.

"Stay away from my daughter!" Alfor shouted angrily as his face appeared on the screen before them, and a barrier rose up around Allura.

"Uh…" Shirley gasped.

"Allura! Wake up!" Suzaku exclaimed, "None of this is real!"

"Why is she even doing this?" Milly asked Coran.

"The crystal must have corrupted King Alfor's artificial intelligence. It's taking over!" Coran deduced.

Utterly oblivious to their plight, Allura continued to pilot the ship forward, Alfor's A.I. appearing beside her.

Finally, the ship stopped, but it wasn't in front of Altea. In a flash of light, the Castle stopped in front of a massive darkened star.

"We're headed straight for a star, and it's about to explode!" Rai yelled.

"Father, I can see Altea," Allura exclaimed happily, bringing slowly closer.

"Allura! Allura, wake up! What you're seeing isn't real," Coran exclaimed as he ran up to the barrier wall. Allura remained oblivious and giggled at whatever invisible creature was in front of her.

"Hey, Lelouch," Rivalz said, turning to the Black Paladin, "use your Geass on her!"

"My Geass?" Lelouch asked, sounding shocked.
"Yeah! Just command her to stop! Or wake up! Or whatever! It should work, right?"

"...No, it won't," Lelouch shook his head, "I already used it on her once already."

"What? When was that?!" Kallen asked.

"It was back on Arus, during the party. She was talking to me and hinted that she and I had something in common. I got suspicious and used Geass on her to tell me what she meant. That's how I found out that she knew who I was, or who I used to be anyway. And besides, even if I could use Geass, I doubt the A.I. will give me a clear shot to do so!"

"The juniberries, the most exquisite flower of all," Allura murmured blissfully.

"This is bad! This is bad! This is really, really, really bad!" Shirley screamed on the verge of a panic attack. Rivalz looked like he was about to join her as well.

C.C. then walked calmly up to the barrier. "Coran, back away, now," she ordered.

"What? But-"

"Is this real?" Allura asked, looking around in wonder.

"Of course, it is real, Daughter. That flower you're touching is real," the A.I. said with a smile.

"Just trust me," she said, placing her palms face down on the wall, "dying here isn't an option. It won't be direct contact, but it's worth a try."

C.C.'s forehead started to glow bright red, her Geass symbol illuminating the area.

As Allura brought what she thought was a juniberry to her nose to smell it, she suddenly gasped. The world around her suddenly morphed into what looked like a wormhole, and she was the sole occupant of it. She was flung around violently before everything faded out into black and white. Her eyes widened as she saw two planets aligning, people that had similar markings to C.C. lined up in long rows. Finally, the wormhole seemed to end in a flash of light, and she saw...

"You!" she gasped as the hulking figure turned around to face her, it's glowing eyes narrowing. The corpse of her father slid off his sword with a sickening thud.

"No! Father! Altea! No!" she yelled, clutching her head.

"C.C., what are you doing?" Lelouch asked, alarm and curiosity swimming within him.

"I'm just feeding her some shock images," she explained, "I can't tell what she's seeing, but it should be enough to snap her out of whatever trance she's in."

"I think you did enough!" Suzaku exclaimed, running up and placing a hand on her shoulder to pull her away.

"Suzaku wait!" Lelouch placed his hand over Suzaku's to stop him.

C.C. gasped, turning back in horror, "No! Not now!" she gasped again, her mark lighting up still.

Lelouch and Suzaku's eyes were wide as images flashed through their minds as well. It was a little more familiar to Lelouch as it was the same vortex that originally had granted him Geass. He wasn't sure if Suzaku saw the same thing, but he saw something.
Just like before, the vortex eventually ended, but this time, Lelouch saw a crowd of people, throwing stones at what looked like an old church, and on the side of the building... was the symbol of Geass!

"Wha-what is this?" Lelouch gasped, "It's different."

The scene shifted into a figure in a long cloak that was kneeling. The character turned, and Lelouch realized that it was a nun, a nun with the same symbol that C.C. had on her own forehead. The scene shifted again, they were back in Japan, an old shrine.

The Kururugi shrine!

"This-" Suzaku muttered.

The scene shifted again, it was C.C. in a pool, unclothed, holding her abdomen and looking sad.

"No... stay out of my mind!" she shouted just as more images flashed before them. The final image was of another figure. Neither Lelouch nor Suzaku could make out anything too distinct from him, but they could tell whoever it was was male, had long, flowing hair that nearly reached his lower back, pointed ears, and... purple skin? The figure turned their head towards them. They couldn't see his face, but Geass was also flashing in his eyes.

"Is that..." Suzaku started.

"...an Altean?" Lelouch whispered to finish.

"Stop it!" C.C. choked out, closing her eyes as tears trailed down them, "Why now? You're... unveiling me."

Alfor and Melenor's faces flashed before her eyes once more before Allura screamed, "No! That's enough!" She screamed one final time before stumbling out of the barrier and falling on her butt.

"Allura!" Coran exclaimed, racing over to her. The other Paladins had stood there in shock over the chain of events that happened. They didn't want to end up like Lelouch and Suzaku by touching C.C., but even if they didn't see what exactly that was, it was still scary to watch.

C.C. also stumbled back with a gasp, Suzaku and Lelouch catching her instinctively. The two boys blinked and shook their heads. Numerous more questions were cluttering their minds. Unfortunately, the time for interrogating was not now.

Allura had also come to her senses as Coran helped her up. She blinked in confusion before she turned around and finally she saw the dying star.

"That's not Altea!"

"When that star goes supernova, it will destroy the entire system," Rai cried out, "Allura, you must reset the course and get us out of here!"

Allura attempted to get through the barrier, but it wouldn't budge. Alfor's A.I. then appeared, hands over the teludav pillars.

"Father, please, I beg you to turn this ship around. If we don't do it soon, we will all perish!" Allura exclaimed desperately.

"I know. That is my intention," Alfor said calmly.
"What?!" Allura asked, shocked, "Why?!

"Don't you see, dear daughter? Zarkon can never be defeated," the A.I. said, turning to face them, his image flickering in and out as if someone else was trying to patch through somehow, "He's been ruling for ten thousand years."

"But we must continue to fight!"

"Fight for what? It is all over for Altea. You don't have to live a lifetime of war. You can be with me, and the rest of your people."

"Father, please!" Allura begged, "The Paladins and I can still stop Zarkon! Somewhere in there, you must want that to happen."

Alfor's image suddenly shifted. He looked grave, and they could see fear lingering in his eyes as he addressed his daughter, "Allura, my A.I. has been corrupted. You must disconnect my power source-" his image flickered again back to the aloof Alfor as he continued to tempt Allura again, "-We can stroll across the Blossom Canyon every morning, just like we used to. Remember how much you loved that?"

"I remember," Allura said as tears flooded her eyes, knowing what her next course of action must be, "I'll see you soon, Father," she then turned to face Coran and the Paladins, "I've got to get into the A.I. chamber to disconnect my father's power source manually."

"But that means losing King Alfor forever!" Coran exclaimed. The other Paladins looked at Allura sadly. They knew how much Allura loved her father. He seemed like a good man. He didn't deserve this.

"Are you sure there's no other way?" Lelouch asked, despite the situation. Deep down, he didn't want Alfor to leave either. For some reason, the feeling he had in his gut reminded him when it finally sank in for him, as a nine-year-old boy, that his mother was gone forever. Now it felt like he was losing her all over again in the form of the Altean monarch.

"No, there is not!" Allura said, shaking her head, "Paladins, get to your Lions! I need you to slow the Castle's descent into the star."

As Allura ran for the door, Coran started running towards the main control panel, "I can try to override the system to open the hangars."

At that statement, the Paladins rushed to their elevators and raced to their Lions.

o~o

Outside, the Lions all exited their bays, but instead of engaging the enemy outside, they turned towards the Castle and latched onto it with their front claws. With all the firepower they had, they attempted to push the Castle away from the star. It slowed down, but the Castle still fought to get closer and closer.

o~o

Allura rushed into the A.I. chamber, the small ball of light, morphing into her father before her.

"Don't do this!/You must," Alfor said, glitching in and out of his pure form and the one the virus had overtaken, "All my memories, all my knowledge will be lost forever!/Do it, Allura. If you are to live, we must say goodbye."
Allura bowed her head, looking away from her father, "I'm sorry about this, Father," she pressed a button on the A.I.'s control board and a large red sign in Altean that asked if she really wanted to erase the A.I. before her. Upon pressing the 'yes' button, Alfor's form vanished, and the capsule containing his memories rose to the surface.

Allura stretched forth her hand to end it all, only to stop short with a gasp. The container emitted small balls of light from within it, and the room went dark around her.

When Allura opened her eyes again, the balls of light became images. No, not images. They were memories. King Alfor's memories. He was hugging a young Allura in the field of juniberries, her giggling in his arms. Another memory showed her a few years old, in a blue dress being twirled around by Alfor, both of them smiling and happy. Another, when she turned around, saw her another year older, placing a mauve flower behind Alfor's ear, her hair tied back in braids. Another had her on Alfor's shoulders, laughing gleefully. More memories continued to swirl around her, tempting her to stop.

"This is not real," Allura said with finality, "This is all in the past," As Allura ran back to the controls, more memories of her childhood flashed before her eyes, attempting to stop her. She stumbled but was not deterred from her course.

She stopped short with a gasped though, as the image of her as an infant, being cradled in her father's arms appeared before her. She stepped backward, tears streaming down her face and clutching her chest, her heart throbbing with sorrow.

"You don't have to fight, Allura. You don't have to make this sacrifice," Alfor said as he appeared from one of the memories. He approached his daughter but stopped just within arm's length.

Upon hearing her father's words though, Allura rushed forward and enveloped her father in a hug. The late king gasped at his daughter's action.

"Goodbye, Father," she whispered as the A.I. began to crack.

Alfor's face softened, before smiling sadly, "Goodbye, Allura."

In a flash of light, the capsule shattered, the room returning to what it once was memories and capsule pieces scattered everywhere. Allura watched sadly as the lights faded away like stars in the sky.

o~o

Back in the Castle's bridge, Coran and C.C. watched as Alfor's A.I. flickered and then vanished from existence along with the barrier to the teludav.

"She did it," Coran muttered sadly, before steeling himself and facing the star in front of them. Now that Alfor's A.I. wasn't corrupting the system, alarms began to blare all around them as the Castle sensed the impending danger as it still trickled at a snail's pace towards the star.

o~o

Outside, the Paladins and their Lions still continued to struggle to push the Castle back. Their fight soon ended though when the Princess's face appeared on the screen in front of them in their Lions.

"Paladins, get to your hangars. We're getting out of here." She ordered.

Nodding, everyone swiftly returned to the hangers just as Allura opened a wormhole to get as far
from the star as they possibly could. At full power, the Castle charged away from the star and plunged into the wormhole just in time. Moments later, the star shrunk and then exploded outward, dust and fire raining everywhere, engulfing its surroundings.

o-o

After escaping the wormhole, the crew found themselves surrounding a distraught Allura on the bridge. They all felt so sorry that Allura lost her father once again. Most of them couldn't imagine what she was going through.

"I'm so sorry about your father, Princess," Shirley said sadly.

"...We all are," Lelouch murmured, glaring at the ground.

Allura looked up at Lelouch's face, another wave of sadness filling her. She remembered that Lelouch had sought counsel from her father when he was deciding whether to leave the team or not. He likely saw Alfor as another parent, one that he deserved, as from what little she'd heard from the Brittanian Emperor, he wasn't fit to be anyone's father, especially Lelouch's.

Allura smiled kindly at Lelouch, putting a hand on his knee for comfort. She then stood up and faced the others, "Thank you. But that was not my father. The real King Alfor was a great man and a great father. He may not be here with us anymore, but his dream lives on through all of us, and his legacy is Voltron."

o-o

The door flew off its hinges as Britannian military men stormed through the clubhouse.

"Prince Lelouch! Princess Nunnally!" Jeremiah yelled as he entered through the door with Villetta Nu behind him, "Please, answer me if you are here!"

Doors were slammed open, and windows opened and closed relentlessly, as the soldiers attempted to find some clue of life in the house. Much to their shock though, most of the house seemed deserted. The beds were bare, no food lay in the fridge or pantry. It looked like no one had lived here for years.

"No sign of them, sir," one of the privates reported back.

Jeremiah grimaced. The moment he and Villetta had seen the news report, they knew that if they could locate the Prince, and the Princess as well, it could be their chance to reclaim their honor and positions that were lost to them by Zero.

Jeremiah turned to Villetta, "Are you absolutely sure this is the right place?"

"Positive! I checked the school records, their address was already included in it," she pulled out her phone to look up the student file she saw on a 'Lelouch Lamperouge' the boy that they were positive was the long lost prince.

Upon pulling up the student body roll though, Villetta froze. She refreshed the screen. And did again. And again. And again.

"They're not there!"

"What?!" Jeremiah gasped, looking over her shoulder. She was right. On the roll where the name 'Lamperouge' should be, was vacant, it just went on to the next student on the list: 'Lewis.'
"How is this possible?" Jeremiah demanded.

"Perhaps I can answer that," another female voice said from behind. Turning, the two Purebloods were greeted by none other than the Knight of Nine herself, Nonnette Enneagram. She had arrived in Area 11 just over a week ago without warning. Viceroy Cornelia didn't complain, though she was quite annoyed with the unannounced arrival, the more soldiers to deal with the Elevens the better. The Knight for the most part only took part in battle when asked, and had spent a majority of time researching the same academy that Jeremiah and Villetta had been scooping out.

"Lady Enneagram!" Jeremiah gasped, and bowed respectively, "I-I apologize, I didn't realize you were coming."

"Well, I'm here now," the Knight waved away the apology before stepping into the center of the room, "And as for the answer, I wouldn't be surprised if our little Lulu had this planned from the beginning."

"Planned? What do you mean?" Villetta asked.

"Think about it. The Ashfords have backed his mother, Marianne vi Brittania since she became a Knight of the Round, even long before that. I wouldn't be surprised if they assisted in contingency plans in case we came too close to finding him and Nunna," despite the explanation, a layer of sadness did paint her tone.

"W-Why on Earth would he want to hide from us?" Jeremiah asked, shocked, "We're loyal to the royal family! If he thinks we aren't competent enough to protect them-"

"On the contrary," Nonette interrupted, "I do believe that he knows that, which is why he is hiding from us. Need I remind you why he and his sister were sent to Area 11 in the first place?"

Villetta grimaced as Jeremiah outwardly gasped, before lowering his head in shame. It was a low blow, but still possibly a fact.

"...Prince Lelouch..." he could only mutter.

o~o

"How long are we staying here, Sayoko?" Nunnally asked.

"Just a little while," the ninja maid assured her charge, "once we find a more secure shelter, we'll head there."

"...Do you think my brother is okay?" Nunnally asked, trembling in her tone.

The maid's eyes widened before she slowly knelt by Nunnally's chair, "I'm sure he is. He loves you, milady. No matter where he is, I'm sure he's doing everything in his power to get back to you. I just know it."

"...Okay," Nunnally nodded, accepting the answer.

Sayoko nodded before standing back up and slipping outside the safe house. She looked out over the vast ocean that surrounded the island of Japan. She instinctively rubbed her apron pocket. She still wasn't sure why, but one of the specific instructions Lelouch had given her, should his identity or Nunnally's be discovered, was to bring this item. She wasn't sure why her master seemed so attached to it, but she didn't question the order.
But despite the heavy wrappings around it, she could tell it was a knife.

Chapter End Notes

AN: And done! Hope you enjoyed this chapter, I had a lot of fun writing it! And your requests have been granted, now you know what's happening on Earth again! I'll leave the speculations up to you, but you'll just have to wait a little while longer.

I'll hopefully begin the next chapter by this weekend, so stay tuned, and R&R!
Rai's fingers flew across the keyboard in a blur. His eyes were focused solely on the computer's screen. He barely even noticed that everyone else had crowded behind him to look as well. It had been three days/quintants since the massive fiasco with King Alfor's A.I. and Princess Allura had finally recovered from the Rejuvenation Ceremony on the Balmera. Now Rai was tapping into the memory data that they had managed to extract from Sendak before Lelouch had sent him off into space.

"Somewhere inside Sendak's memories we should be able to find the inside information that gives us the key to take down Zarkon," Allura said confidently.

"I don't think your father would approve of searching through an enemy's memories," Coran said with a slight frown.

"Yeah, I hate to admit it," Suzaku added, "but I'm not super comfortable with this either."

"I understand," Allura said before standing up straighter, "but we have to do everything we can to defeat Zarkon."

"Once we learn all his weaknesses, we can drive up to his front door and challenge him to a fight. Winner gets the universe," Rivalz grinned, already daydreaming of the battle to come.

"Anything good yet Rai?" Lelouch asked.

Rai only sighed in frustration, "We were only able to salvage bits and pieces."

"Okay, but we need something to work with," Shirley said, sharing similar feelings of frustration, "right now, we don't even have a decent map of the Empire."

"Do we even need a map?" Kallen asked with a frown, "After ten thousand years of conquering, I could probably fire Aka's laser at like any random point in space and hit a Galra ship somewhere."

"Well, if we could just find troop locations or supply routes, small targets we could hit-and-run, then we could start to free planets one by one," Milly suggested.

"Hey Lelouch," Rivalz said, looking at the Black Paladin, "you have experience kicking Britannia's butt as Zero. Why can't you just do the exact same thing here? Just 'Zero up' and challenge Zarkon to a fight."

"It's not that simple Rivalz," Lelouch said with a frown, folding his arms, "The only reason I've had so much success on Earth is that I already know the enemy so well. Most of my opponents are my own half-siblings, people I've grown up with and know on a personal level. Because of that, it's much easier to predict their movements and actions. On the other hand, we, including me, know little to nothing about Zarkon. He's been building this universal-sized empire for ten thousand years. That's longer than humanity has even been alive. We're not going to tear it down overnight with seven inexperienced-" Kallen cleared her throat loudly, and Suzaku crossed his arms with a slight frown as well, "-mostly inexperienced pilots and one support ship. The last thing we want to do right now is hit him where he lives, it'd be a huge mistake."
"Why not use your Geass on him and force him to stop?" Shirley suggested.

"I could try that," Lelouch agreed, "but there are some problems there too. I need to make direct eye-contact for Geass to have any effect, so doing that alone will be difficult enough. Also, there are too many unknowns about this situation. When I tried to use it on Sendak, he was able to counter it. Not to mention that something he said worries me."

"And that would be…?" Suzaku asked.

"When Kallen and I confronted Sendak, and I attempted Geass on him. After he countered it, he mentioned people called the Druids, saying I 'paid a visit' to them."

"Hey, now that I think about it," Rai said, turning his head back to them, "he said the same thing to me when I fought him."

"Do you know anything about this C.C.?" Lelouch looked up at the green-haired woman. Surprisingly, she shook her head, "This is the first time I've heard of them as well."

"So instead of getting answers, all we have are more questions," Rivalz sighed. This was starting to get frustrating for all of them.

"Okay, anyway, I've cross-referenced Sendak's memories with the info I got from the downed ship back on Arus," Rai announced, turning back to the screen, Altean and Galran symbols started to appear in front of him, "Most of it was a garbled mess, but one thing kept repeating, something called a 'Universal Station.'"

"Universal Station? Like, the kind of station that controls the entire universe?" Shirley asked, leaning over.

"Well, we are translating it from Galra, so it could also be 'Galactic Hub,'" Rai countered.

"Or 'Space Base,'" Suzaku suggested. Everyone turned to look at him questioningly, "What?" he asked, looking confused.

"I'm pulling up the location of your Universal Hub Station Base on our screens now," Coran said as he walked over towards the primary monitor. As he pulled up the coordinates, two giant planets and a small moon appeared on the screen, but as far as they could tell, there was no sign of a Galra base anywhere.

"So… where is it?" Rivalz asked, looking confused.

"I don't know," Coran said, looking bemused. He rechecked the screens in case he put the coordinates in wrong. They were correct though, "Our long-range sensors are unable to find anything at those coordinates."

"Maybe he remembered it wrong?" Kallen suggested.

"Or maybe we just stumbled across a top-secret base in Sendak's memories," Rai said as he clasped his hands together seriously.

"Well, there's only one way to find out," C.C. said.

"I agree, let's go take a look," Allura said with a determined frown.

o~o
They decided not to wormhole to the coordinates as the team had no real idea of what would be waiting for them on the other side, so they choose to manually fly there instead. It took several hours for the Castle to finally get within range of the coordinates that they picked up from Sendak's memories. Rivalz, Milly, and Shirley had ended up falling asleep halfway through.

"We should be close enough to get a good scan," Allura announced, shaking the trio from their slumber, "but far enough away to avoid being noticed."

The Castleship slowly crept around the first planet that oddly looked like a smaller version of their Solar System's Jupiter. As they did so, their target slowly came into focus. Located in the middle of the two planets and the moon, was a small base that seemed to have carved out of a meteorite, or even a smaller moon. A couple of Galra cruisers were already lodging there, and another was slowly coming into port.

"There it is," Rai said gravely. It was a lot smaller than they thought it would be, but the more secure and harder to find, the better.

"It appears the gravitation between the two planets warps the electron emission spectrum enough to keep the planet off the deep space scanners," Coran explained as wave patterns and other information appeared on the screen before them.

"So you can only see it if you really know where to look," C.C. observed. She chuckled slightly, "Clever."

"Huh, it's almost like a space version of the Bermuda Triangle," Kallen compared.

"From the looks of it, this place must handle shipments from all over the Galra Empire," Suzaku added.

"Wait, I'm confused," Shirley said, "if this place is basically just a glorified airport, why did they need to hide it?"

"There's probably more to this than we're seeing," Milly offered.

"I agree," Lelouch nodded, "there's no reason that the Galra would go through all the trouble to hide this place if it was simply another outpost or port. Something else is happening here."

"Then, we'd better go down to take a look," Allura said, as she tapped on the hologram screen. She pulled up the base closer to her. A small area around the middle of the base lit up and expanded, "We'll need to enter here: the central control building."

Suzaku blinked, before looking at Allura incredulously, "I'm sorry, Princess, did you say "we"?"

"I'm going with you," Allura said with a determined frown, "I've traveled through the Galra transportation hubs many times with my father before the war began. I know more about them than any of you."

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" Suzaku asked nervously.

"I agree with Number Two, Princess, I'd rather you stay here," Coran said.

"I'm a part of this fight against Zarkon as much as anyone. I'm going. Does anyone have a problem with that?" Allura glanced around as if daring one of them to protest. Most of the Paladins looked away, not wanting to catch Allura's eye.
"I'm going as well," C.C. said, "both Lelouch and Shirley are contracted with me, and I'd rather be there to make sure they survive than watch them die."

Shirley turned a small tinge of green. Despite it being quite generous of C.C. to accompany them, she still wasn't used to some of her antics, most of which were quite morbid.


"What?! Lelouch you can't be serious!" Suzaku exclaimed as everyone else in the looked up at the Black Paladin in shock.

"I understand the concern Suzaku," Lelouch said calmly, "but the Princess brings up a good point. With her experience at these ports, we can find what we're looking for faster. Besides, she's not going to be alone, we'll all be there as well."

Suzaku still looked uncomfortable, and Coran looked downright horrified, but the plan was in place. And now it was time to implement it.

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"We'll go in low, fast, and hopefully undetected. Coming around the dark side of the nearest planet should keep them from getting a visual on us. Thanks to Rai's modifications to Zerith, we'll have thirty seconds of cloaking," Lelouch had explained before they departed.

Zerith zoomed around the side of the planet, cloaking activating like a blanket being thrown over her. In a wide arc, she carefully landed near the rocky top of the base.

"I can flood their short-range sensors with a radiation burst," Coran offered, "That should buy you a minute or so, while they assume it's cosmic interference. But, after that, it's up to you to be out of sight."

Looking down from the rocky outcropping, the base looked much bigger up close, their destination, the central control building as Allura called, was right in the middle of it.

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"Interference clear in three, two, one," an automated male voice ran through the control center. A single Galra soldier stood guard on top of the central platform and down below were two sentries handling the other controls.

The Galra was bored. Nothing exciting ever happened at this base. Why was he the one stuck here handling cargo deliveries? He yawned as if to prove his point.

He then heard the entrance behind him open. He blinked and looked back, only to find that there was no one there.

"Huh?" was the only thing that came out of his mouth before something suddenly hit him in an uppercut. He went flying backward over the railing and landed unconscious down below. The two sentries immediately raised their guns, only to look around in confusion to find no assailants. They never got the chance to sound the alarm either as two blaster flashes later, they were lying crumpled on the floor as well.

Shirley sighed in slight exhaustion as her Geass turned off. Before the group had entered the control station, Shirley had used her Geass to make them all invisible, at least to the enemy's eyes. It was the most amount of people she'd had to use so far, and she didn't expect it to be so draining.
"Great job, Shirley!" Rai praised with a smile, "Just sit and rest for now okay?"

Shirley smiled gratefully at the Green Paladin before doing just that, practically falling on the bottom step of the stairs and leaned against the wall.

"It seems your limit of how many you can turn invisible is higher than nine so far," C.C. observed, as that was the number of people there, including Shirley herself, "you could easily smuggle an entire strike team into any situation without detection."

"And it's a skill we will likely be using in the future," Lelouch finished, giving Shirley a nod and a smile. The Orange Paladin blushed at Lelouch's praise. It felt good to be noticed by her crush.

The group wasted no time tying the Galran up and hiding him in the upper corner, as well as move the two sentries out of the way. Rai was in the process of connecting his laptop to Rover, who was in the process of scanning the Galran station's network. Kallen and Suzaku glanced out the large windows to the center to make sure that no one spotted or noticed the assault.

"How's it look out there?" Lelouch asked.

"All clear. For now anyway," Suzaku confirmed as Kallen nodded.

"This shouldn't take too long," Rivalz said, as he helped connect the last wire to the little drone.

Rai's computer blinked to life as he started to type furiously on it, "We'll have all the information we need in a few minutes," In front of him, the screen beeped as numerous algorithms and data began swarming onto the screen. Despite the chaos, though, Rai's face didn't change. He seemed to know what he was looking for as a pixelated face of himself appeared on the screen and seemed to start laughing as data was transferred, "I made some improvements since the last time I tried to download Galra info. We should get a nice, clean translation immediately. Milly actually gave me the idea on how to do it."

"Well actually, it was more or less Nina's idea," the Yellow Paladin confessed, "but do you guys remember when we studied algorithms back at Ashford, and Nina told us that joke about the ghost learning symbolic logic and innumerable infinite sets?"

"Your point?" Kallen asked before Milly could get too carried away.

"Yeah, right, anyway, she said-"

"Hey, guys, sorry to interrupt," Suzaku said before Milly could finish, "but I think we got company," a giant shadow of another Galra ship passed overhead, likely here for a delivery or pickup. It slowly lowered itself until it landed in the middle of the port.

"We should get out of here!" Kallen exclaimed as she and the other Paladins, plus Allura, Rover, and C.C. crowded around Rai and his laptop.

"Just need a few more seconds," Rai said, his typing seeming to speed up.

"Stay low. We need this intel," Lelouch ordered quietly.

The control board in front of them suddenly blinked to life as the group gasped.

"Get down!" Suzaku hissed as everyone scrambled out of the way as a screen appeared before them. Another Galra, likely the commander of that ship was staring back through the screen. He grunted in surprise and confusion when no sentries or fellow Galra greeted him.
"What do we do?" Shirley whispered urgently. The Galra hadn't turned the transmission off. If he got too suspicious that something had happened, he could sound an alarm, and that was the last thing they need right now.

"I think he's waiting for a signal or something," Rivalz guessed.

"Leave it to me," C.C. hissed as she stealthy dragged herself and one of the downed sentries towards the control panel. With barely a grunt of her own, she hefted the robot back to its feet and moved its elbow up and down as if it were pressing some buttons. Due to how close the sentry was to the screen, the commander didn't see C.C.'s hand controlling it. She then somehow got to not only wave at the Galra, but also give a thumbs up. How she did that they had no idea. The Galra on the other end still looked a little confused but waved back slightly in acknowledgment before closing the transmission. The immortal sighed in relief that that had worked. She'd had to do a lot of unorthodox things on this adventure so far. Well, unorthodox even for her anyway.

"Thanks, C.C.," Lelouch said graciously.

"Don't mention it," she shrugged. So long as everyone was still alive, she didn't really care what happened. Though, not getting captured would be a bonus as well.

"Okay, download complete," Rai announced as Rover disconnected from the control board, having gotten what they needed.

"Okay, what's it say?" Kallen asked a little impatiently.

"Nothing," Rai exclaimed in frustration and continued to type, "This place doesn't have any useful information. Just a schedule of the ships coming in and out."

"So we basically just wasted our time," Kallen deduced with a scowl, voicing everyone's current thoughts.

"Welp, can't win them all," Milly said, "a few busts were bound to happen."

"Let's return to the Castle before we're spotted," Lelouch decided as they all got up to leave, Rivalz helping Shirley to her feet as she still was recovering from her Geass usage.

To their surprise though, Allura spoke up, saying something for the first time since they had gotten in, "Hold on. Rai, do you know where that ship is headed?" the Princess gestured the one that literally just docked.

Though confused by the sudden request, the Green Paladin answered, "Um, it's scheduled to be here for about a half an hour, then head off to Central Command."

Allura stood up straight, "That's where they have the information we need, and I'm going to sneak aboard that ship and get it for us."

"What?!" Suzaku gasped as he and the others stood up, "No, absolutely not!"

"How are you going to get in?" Shirley asked curiously.

"I'm going to walk right through the front," Allura smiled confidently as she takes off her helmet.

Then right before their eyes, the Princess started to change. Her dark skin became a purple color, and she grew in height by about another foot or so. Everyone stared, mouths open at what just happened.
"H-how did you do that?" Shirley gasped, voicing everyone's question.

"The Alteans are a chameleon-like people who can blend in with the local populations," Allura explained with a proud smile, "It's the ability that's made us great explorers and diplomats throughout our history."

"So, can you turn into, like, a balloon?" Milly asked, leaning in closer.

"How many different colors can you be at once?" Rai asked next, turning his attention away from his laptop for a moment.

"Aren't you afraid you'll rip your pants?" Rivalz asked, all three leaning in, waiting for their answers.

Allura blinked a couple of times, not expecting such questions, but fortunately had answers for all of them, addressing one by one, "No, just one at a time, and I will need a change of costume. I can use his uniform as a disguise." Allura said, turning to the still unconscious Galra officer.

"You're not going in their alone," Lelouch said authoritatively.

"Excuse me? I do not need your permission," Allura fired back.

"It's too dangerous. I'm going in with you," the Black Paladin decided.

"You will stick out like a Choferiak's nose," Allura countered.

"You're going to need that nose, Princess," Rai interrupted before they could argue further, "We're still not sure how, but somehow Lelouch's Geass can interact with Galra tech," Rai then reached into his pocket and pulled out what looked like a flash drive, "He can interface with their systems and use this drive to gather intel. I can monitor the download remotely from here."

"If Lelouch is going then so am I," C.C. said, and continued before Allura could protest, "Lelouch is one of my contractors and will be in a dangerous situation. At least Shirley will be safe here with the others."

"Fine, you can come," Allura finally relented.

"Uh, you guys better hurry up if you want to get on and off before the ship leaves for Zarkon central," Shirley said, looking out the command center's window.

"Hold on!" Suzaku exclaimed, "How exactly are you going to get Lelouch and C.C. aboard?"

Allura, C.C., and Lelouch looked at each. That may be a problem. They needed to come up with something fast.

o~o

Lelouch honestly felt somewhat ridiculous and also embarrassed. Mainly because of how close C.C.'s... assets were to his face. A little too close for comfort. He had a feeling C.C. wasn't too happy about this either, but this was the most comfortable way that they could fit into the small cart that Allura, now disguised in the Galra's uniform, was currently carting towards the ship. Despite this though, it seemed this plan was working as the only stop they made was, Lelouch assumed as he couldn't look up, in front of the ship.

"Move along," the muffled voice of a sentry gave before they started moving again.
Allura blew out a breath of relief as she and her cargo walked right past the guards and into the ship. The hard part (they hoped) was done.

They're in," Suzaku announced, breathing out in relief himself as he Kallen, Milly, Rivalz, and Shirley watched the disguised trio enter. Despite that success, though, Suzaku couldn't let go of the tingling feeling on the back of his neck that this was still going to go horribly wrong.

"Hey," Kallen said, catching everyone's attention, "What do you think is in those giant containers?"

Before Allura was allowed to enter the ship, two sentries came marching down the ramp, carrying two large capsules. They couldn't tell what they were from their position, but they looked yellow and were glowing.

"Maybe… Fuel?" Shirley guessed. It seemed like the most logical answer.

"Makes sense," Milly agreed, "A base like this likely has tons of spare fuel and supplies when ships need to make an emergency landing of some sort."

"Maybe this guy will tell us," Rai said as he and Rover sat, or hovered in front of one of the sentries they disarmed and knocked out earlier, "What is coming in and out of this station?"

The sentry's front light suddenly started flashing yellow, like a warning light. "Interrogation detected. Initiating lockdown," the automated voice announced as the robot then slumped forward.

Rover bleeped, sounding like he was both frustrated but also slightly mocking his fellow robot.

"I couldn't agree more Rover," Rai smirked before turning his attention back to the sentry, and typing on his computer again, "So you're not talking, huh? We'll see about that."

"Whoa, check out that guy!" Kallen suddenly said as the others, except Rai, looked back out the window. In front of both of the canisters now was a creepy-looking robed figure.

Rivalz blinked before a thoughtful frown crossed his face, "Hey, uh, this is going to sound pretty random, but… what exactly is a druid?"

"Well, if you're looking for the Earth definition, they're supposed to be priests, magicians, or even soothsayers in some ancient religions. I don't think we really use that term on Earth anymore," Suzaku said.

"Wait… so the Galra have a religion?" Rivalz asked, quirking an eyebrow.

"Technically, any cultural way of thinking could be considered part of a religion," Milly pointed out.

"Does conquering the entire universe count?" Kallen asked sarcastically. That quickly shut that conversation right up.

Curious about the person they were making a fuss over, Rai briefly glanced out the window. When he saw the figure, he gasped. Soft, yet malicious laughter rang in his ears, and several figures all with white bird masks were leaning over him. He was strapped to a table and couldn't move-

"Rai! Rai, snap out of it!" a voice brought him back to reality. He blinked as Milly's concerned
blue eyes swirled into view.

"Are you okay dude?" Rivalz asked, hovering behind the class president.

"Yeah… that guy down there, he's definitely familiar," Rai confirmed shakily.

"So… this guy is a Druid?" Shirley asked, looking out the window again.

"I don't know, but whatever's happening here that requires the base to be kept a secret must have something to do with him," Kallen said, "I'm going to go check it out."

"I'm coming with you then," Suzaku said, walking up behind her as she turned to leave.

The Red Paladin looked back with a scowl, "Suzaku, I'm not the sickly, frail girl you know from school. I can handle myself."

"I don't doubt that," Suzaku said, but continued on, "but if this is one of those Druid people, we don't know what he's capable of. It's best to have back-up just in case."

Kallen continued to scowl before finally letting out a forceful sigh, "Fine. Just don't get in my way."

As the two walked out of the door, Shirley looked nervously at the remaining Paladins, "They can handle themselves right?"

"They'll be fine, don't worry," Milly said with a reassuring grin.

o~o

Meanwhile, onboard the Galra cruiser, Lelouch, C.C., and Allura glanced out from one of the hallways just as a pair of centuries walked past. From where they were, they could see the corridors crawling with sentries. It was going to be challenging to get past them all.

As another sentry walked past, Allura then heard a tapping sound. Looking to the source, she saw that Lelouch's hand was pressed up against one of the walls, and his finger was tapping in a slow rhythm.

"What are you doing, Lelouch?" Allura whispered.

"I'm timing the sentries," Lelouch answered back in a low voice.

"So you noticed as well?" C.C. asked with a small grin.

"Noticed what?" Allura asked, not quite following.

"The way the sentries walk," Lelouch explained, "Every time we've been on a Galra ship or base, I noticed that the sentries walk in a distinct pattern. Since then, I've been timing them. We should be able to sneak past them easily if it works."

"Will it?" Allura asked.

"Well, one way to find out," C.C. said as the trio turned around and scrambled down the hall just as another patrol came around the corner. They hid behind one of the outcroppings until they passed, then Lelouch led them around another corner, right before another patrol from the other side came up. The plan seemed to work as each time they heard a sentry patrol, Lelouch tapped the rhythm of their walk. Once they were gone, they would dash around another corner. No one, Galra or sentry
Kallen's eyes narrowed as she watched the Druid person lead the two sentries with the capsules down a small metal chasm. It looked like they were heading inside the base. Now that Kallen got a better look at it from her and Suzaku's perch, it looked similar to a warehouse.

It didn't take long for the warehouse doors to open and for the Druid to lead the sentries inside with their cargo.

Kallen and Suzaku sprinted to keep up with them, and the Purple Paladins was still shocked at how well Kallen kept up with him.

As the doors began to close, the duo leaped down after them with their jetpacks, making it in just as the doors closed behind them.

Rivalz had taken two of the wires that Rai had attached to the sentry's head and began pushing the two open ends together. This resulted in the sentry's arm wobbly being raised up and landing clumsily on its head.

He laughed as he continued to press the wires together, "Why are you hitting yourself? Stop hitting yourself! Quit hitting yourself!"

"Stop torturing it Rivalz," Rai scolded, but he couldn't help but chuckle along with Shirley.

"I'm sorry. I just…" Rivalz said before putting the wires down, "I've had a lot on my mind lately. Like, I guess I still haven't gotten over the fact that not only is Lelouch a member of the Royal Family, but he's Zero too? I mean, who would've guessed that, right?"

"He's a valiant superhero sporting, not one, but two secret identities!" Milly dramatically proclaimed. This caused everyone to laugh again.

"Okay, I think I can teach this hunk of junk to help us," Rai said as he looked up at the robot, "Would you like to help us, Mr. Robot?"

The sentry's head mechanically swiveled in Rai's direction before it started rapidly shaking its head, making a rattling sound.

"Whoops…" he muttered, turning back to the laptop. Rover let out a few beeps, sounding like laughter.

Despite the silliness happening around her, Shirley suddenly frowned sadly.

"You okay Shirley?" Milly asked.

"Yeah, I just… I keep thinking about what Lelouch told us. About what happened to his mom and Nunnally. And their dad just threw them away like they were trash! What kind of a father does that to his own kids, Emperor or not?!!"

"Yeah. I regret to admit this, but up until Lelouch told us about what he's really like, I actually kind of admired the Emperor," Rivalz admitted with a disgusted frown.

"If I ever see that son-of-a-bitch face to face, the first thing he'll get from me is a slice to the neck,"
Rai growled.

No one protested the action, all of them thinking similar things. To believe that the most powerful man in their nation was capable of such cruelty towards his own family!

Speaking of family... "...You know, we've been away from Earth for a while now," Milly said, "has anyone been keeping track of how long we've been gone?" Everyone shook their heads, they hadn't. Milly sighed, "Fair enough. I'm guessing it's at least been long enough for people to notice that we're missing. I wouldn't be surprised if our school pictures are all over the news."

"Wait, if that happens-" Rivalz started before Milly interrupted.

"Yeah, Lelouch and Nunna's cover has probably been blown sky-high by now," Milly admitted, "once someone from the Royal Family sees Lelouch's photo, I doubt it'll take long for them to connect the dots. Both Britannians and Japanese."

"Would the Japanese recognize Lelouch and Nunna?" Shirley asked.

"I'd be surprised if they didn't," Milly continued, "their 'deaths' are the whole reason that Britannia suppresses Japan so severely, they think the people there killed two members of the Royal Family. If a Japanese faction got a hold of Nunna, I wouldn't be surprised if they try to use her as a bargaining chip. Heck, Britannia itself could do it too, just like they did the first time."

There was a heavy silence for about five seconds as they all absorbed this information. Shirley, with clenched fists and a determined look on her face, then stood up, "Well then, once we're done here, I say the first thing we do is swing back to Earth and get Nunna ourselves, quiznack to the Galra tracking us! She doesn't deserve to live a life like that! She deserves to be with Lelouch, and no one else!"

A chorus of agreement echoed Shirley's statement, then Rai thought of something, "Hey, speaking of 'deserves better' we may be able to do more than just reunite them! The cryo-pods! Maybe they can heal her blindness and legs! Lelouch said her blindness was from trauma, so that means her vision should still be fixable. And even if those don't work, I'm sure there are some alien species out there that have the ability or resources to help!"

"It would be wonderful for Nunna to walk again. For her to have a normal life! Then Lelouch won't have to worry about her twenty-four-seven!" Shirley nodded immediately after.

"Yeah, no matter what, I'm sticking by Lelouch," Rivalz declared, "even if it means standing against Britannia."

Milly then pulled out her Bayard, it flashing into its kusarigama form, "For Lelouch and Nunna!" she exclaimed, holding her weapon in front of her.

The other three quickly caught on to what she was doing and stood up with their own Bayards activated. They joined Milly's as their wielder's held them up in the center of their circle.

"For Lelouch and Nunna!"

o~o

The remains of sentries filled the hallway as the two Paladins stalked cautiously into this next room. They crouched down low to prevent the Druid person from noticing them. In the room up ahead, the walls were stacked with layers of more canisters, all filled with the same liquid, yellow substance.
"What the heck?" Kallen whispered, "How many of these things do they need?"

Suzaku frowned. Something about this room sent shivers down his spine. He couldn't tell what was going on, but whatever it was, it couldn't be good.

Then one of the capsules was brought towards the center of the room, where several outcroppings met in the middle. At the center was a giant ball of energy, trapped within a glass ball. The capsule slid into place over the top of the ball, and the yellow substance slowly started leaking out the bottom and hitting the ball. But unlike spreading out like water normally would do, it was more like one of those penny donation boxes, as the substance started swirling around and around inside of the glass. Once it hit the bottom of the orb, it began to build up, slowly filling it.

Then the Druid, standing on one of the platforms started to move. He lifted his dark grey hands up in front of him, and then in the blink of an eye, volts of violet energy shot out from his palms and hit the orb, causing the liquid inside to turn a bright purple. They watched it get absorbed into the energy ball in the center of the glass as the lightning ringed about it. Finally, slowly from the bottom of the orb, heavy-looking purple liquid dripped from what almost looked like a claw. It emptied into a much smaller container waiting at the bottom and started filling up slowly.

Both Suzaku and Kallen could only watch wide-eyed at what they just witnessed.

o~o

Allura, C.C., and Lelouch finally managed to evade the sentries long enough to find what they believed to be a control panel. The only person there was a single flesh and blood Galra. And he was wearing a helmet either, as it was placed to the side of him.

Lelouch smirked and just walked right in, removing his own helmet. This was too perfect! When he was right behind the Galra, he cleared his throat.

The Galra promptly turned around to see Lelouch. Before he could shout for help though, Lelouch's Geass flared to life.

"Stand guard outside this room and don't let anyone in until we're finished here," he ordered as the Geass flew into the Galra's eyes.

As the telltale red ring encircled them, the Galra relaxed and saluted to Lelouch, "Vrepit sa," he replied before replacing his helmet, picking up his gun, and moving to the room entrance to stand guard, just as Lelouch ordered.

Allura watched slightly uncomfortable as the Galra seemed to mindlessly do as Lelouch commanded. She understood that was how Lelouch's power worked, but to see it in action was still unsettling.

"That should delay any more patrols that come by," C.C. said, "but we should still hurry."

"Right," Lelouch nodded as he approached the main control panel. He quickly inserted the flash drive the Rai had given him into the board, then he activated his Geass once more, but this time for a different purpose. The familiar flicker of electricity traveled down the Black Paladin's hand and into his fingers as the control panel flashed to life.

"Rai, I'm in," he said through his helmet, "start the download."

"Generating access code," Rai confirmed from back at the central command deck. His familiar pixelated face appeared on the scene in blue, and soon, several bars appeared before Lelouch,
"We're in."

Before Rai could get too far into the download though, a Galra insignia appeared on the scene and started buzzing.

"Rai, there's a problem!" Lelouch warned, a small bead of sweat trickling down his face.

o~o

"Sit tight. I'm trying to work around this," the Green Paladin reassured as he typed madly on his computer, Galra text spiraling through it.

"Rai!" Lelouch urged impatiently.

"I'm on it! I'm on it!" he replied back desperately, biting his lip in the process.

o~o

"What's going on here?" another Galra asked, walking up to the Geassed Galra. Before he could step in, though, the guard blocked him.

"No one is to enter this room until the business inside is resolved," he said monotonously.

"What? What's going on in there?" the soldier asked.

"I'm under orders not to let anyone in until the business inside is done," he repeated in the same tone. He then pointed his gun at the Galra, "If you continue to persist, I will be forced to take extreme action."

The Galra backed off, looking somewhat alarmed before he finally relented, "Fine!" he then stalked off.

Allura out a breath of relief when the soldier left. She was worried that she may have had to step in for a moment. It seemed Lelouch's plan was working, for now.

"Rai, hurry up," Lelouch hissed, "we nearly had our cover blown!"

"Almost done," Rai answered, through gritted teeth.

o~o

Kallen's visor morphed into a built-in video camera as she began to look around the room, or facility would be a better term for it.

"Coran, you need to see this."

o~o

Kallen's video feed connected to the main bridge of the Castle. Coran gasped.

"I've never seen anything like it," he breathed.

o~o

"What is that?" Milly asked as the video was also shown to the other four Paladins still in the command center.
Suddenly, from behind the quartet, the Galra sentry finally blinked to life and answered them.

"The material is quintessence, the substance with the highest known energy per unit volume in the universe."

"Hey, what do you know, he does work for us," Rivalz grinned at Rai. Though the Green Paladin wasn't listening to his comrade. Quintessence? Why did that sound familiar?

"What?" Coran asked from the Castle, "Impossible!"

"Raw quintessence material is transported here from throughout the galaxy and refined into standardized Galra fuel requirements." the sentry continued.

"Hey, did you all catch that?" Shirley asked through the commlink.

"I can't believe it! They've found a new way to acquire quintessence!" Coran exclaimed.

"Okay, guys, we're going to steal some of this quint-whatever," Kallen said.

"What? We are?" Suzaku asked, looking at Kallen like she was nuts.

"We need to know more about this stuff," Kallen replied back with a hiss, "and what better way than to get it right from the source?"

Suzaku looked like he wanted to protest. This was way too risky, they could get caught! But, seeing that Kallen also did have a point, he relented.

"Hey, look," the same Galra from earlier approached the Geassed Galra again, "I really need to get in there. Can you just step aside?"

"I'm under orders not to-"

"I get that you have orders, this will only take a second!"

Before the Galra could shove through, the Geassed one, pointed his gun at the officer and fired. The Galra froze in shock before his hand instinctively reached for his belt, his finger pressing down on the button just as before he collapsed.

Alarms started blaring from all over the ship. The button the Galran had pressed had set them all off!

"Security alert! Security alert!" an automated female voice rang through the halls.

Lelouch ripped his hand away from the control panel and tore the flash drive from the port. He turned, and with a small pistol he had brought with him shot the Geassed Galra in the skull. He collapsed to the ground in a heap by his comrade. Allura ran up and pressed the door lock as they heard multiple footsteps heading their way.

"I think we're in trouble," C.C. said surprisingly calmly.
"You think?!" Allura demanded as the door started to develop dents from the multiple assailants on the other side.

Another Galra officer that heard the gunshots was attempting to break in. Before he could fire a shot again, Allura burst through the door, slamming the officer against the other wall. She then swiped the Galra's weapon away from him, arming herself with it.

Lelouch and even C.C. froze in the doorway for a moment, looking at Allura in shock. They had no idea she was really that strong!

"What?" Allura asked, confused by their faces.

They didn't have time to ask more questions though as a horde of sentries started shooting at them from the other end of the hall.

"This way!" C.C. shouted, dragging the Princess and Paladin down the hall.

o~o

The quintessence had just finished filling into the small container. The platform it was on slowly started moving in Kallen and Suzaku's direction. It was the perfect opportunity to take it.

Kallen leaped from her side of the wall and snatched the container off the rack with barely a sound at all. Suzaku caught her before he body could slam against the wall.

"Okay, we got it, let's get out of here," he muttered.

Kallen nodded in agreement, though she did take a moment to examine the canister more closely. She had a suspicion that this stuff wasn't just used for fuel. Why else would it have to be so well hidden? There had to be another purpose behind this stuff.

"Come on-" Suzaku halted his words when he looked back into the room. The Druid was gone, "Uh oh!"

"What?" Kallen asked. She got her answer as the Druid appeared right behind the pair and zapped them straight across the room, Kallen lost her grip on the canister in the process. The Druid quickly transported over to it and picked up the quintessence carefully as if it were a precious artifact.

"Okay! Plan B!" she exclaimed, pulling out her cestus and charging at the Druid. Suzaku wasn't too far behind her with his katana at the ready.

The Druid calmly set the quintessence down on another platform before vanishing into the air again when Kallen swiped at him, only to appear a couple feet away. This time Suzaku attempted to strike at it, katana swiping the air as the Druid vanished again, this time behind Kallen, who tried to swipe at him back, only for him to disappear. Again.

"Quick running and fight, you coward!" She screamed as she looked around.

"Kallen, above you!" Suzaku shouted as he spotted the Druid on the platform again.

The Red Paladin just barely managed to spot the Druid before has was forced to dodge out of the way as a purple bolt of lightning hit where she had been just a moment ago.

Suzaku's brain momentarily screeched to a halt when he saw that. "That's just like… Lelouch!" he
whispered before he was forced to dodge the lightning attack as well. Other than the coloring, the attack seemed almost identical to the attacks that Lelouch used thanks to his Geass.

The two Paladins dodged around the lightning before the two bolts collided, causing an explosion. As the smoke cleared, the Druid paused, wondering if he had disposed of them.

He got his answer though as Suzaku suddenly leaped up in his jet pack from behind and attempted to kick the Druid as he spun rapidly. The Druid once again vanished to another platform, but Kallen had been waiting for him. With a battle cry, she swung her Bayard on what she thought was the Druid's arm, only for him to block it with a flash of purple energy, that seemed to grind against Kallen's weapon.

The Red Paladin gasped as the energy became too strong and she was shot backward with a scream, agony racing up her right arm. She hit a canister of yellow quintessence hard when she landed.

"Kallen!" Suzaku shouted in alarm as Kallen curled in around her injury. She looked down at her hand, blistering and charred from the attack. A trip to the cryopod was definitely in store for her after this.

Suzaku leaped backward himself as the Druid tried to fire at him again. Fresh adrenaline running through his veins as his jetpack activated and propelled him to Kallen's location.

"Rai! We need an extraction now! Hurry!" he shouted into the comm as he landed on the shelf close to Kallen.

O--o

"Rai, fire up Zerith! We're coming in hot!" Lelouch ordered as he, Allura, and C.C. continued to run down the hall. Lelouch was quite shocked that he was keeping up with the two women, but assumed his fight-or-flight instincts had kicked in and were helping him out with that, so he didn't question it too much.

The group then screeched to a halt as two more sentries appeared in front of them, guns raised.

Allura, the only one suitably armed, lifted the gun to try and fire… only for the shot to blast in the entirely opposite direction, hitting one of the sentries that were pursuing them from behind.

"Wha-" Allura asked as they turned to look. Lelouch growled and turned his Geass on once more, having tossed C.C. his pistol, and zapped one of the sentries while C.C. shot the other one. After they collapsed, Allura took the fallen sentry by C.C. and flung it at the incoming robots. It collided with them, causing them to fall, but that wouldn't stop them forever.

"I thought you said you'd traveled around the galaxy. I mean, you fly a spaceship. How could you possibly not know how to hold this correctly?" Lelouch demanded as he swiped the rifle from Allura's hands and turned it around and handed it back to the Princess.

Hearing more steps behind, Allura yanked the two of them down the hall, holding the rifle right this time.

"I'm tense. This is a tense situation!" Allura explained, but before Allura could say anything else, the intercom came to life once again.

"Secure hatches. All personnel take positions for departure."
"Not good," C.C. said as they picked up the pace further.

From inside the command deck, Rai promptly unplugged the wires and swooped up his laptop, leading the other four back towards Zerith.

Kallen and Suzaku were jumping and leaping from wall to platform as they barely dodged attack after attack from the Druid behind them. It didn't seem to care that while he was shooting at them, he was partially destroying some of the quintessence that was being stored there as well.

Suzaku at one point managed to leap in front of Kallen with his shield up to take one of the blasts. It took it, but the force of it sent him flying backward and hitting Kallen. Fortunately, they managed to land on one of the shelves of quintessence. They then slid down a conveyor belt that was transporting another quintessence canister was moving towards the center.

Believing they could possibly use it as a partial shield, Suzaku stood up in front of Kallen to protect her, as he was currently the uninjured one. The Druid soon appeared above them on the conveyor belt as well, hands shimmering with purple sparks of electricity.

As the canister stopped at the center of the room and Druid approached ever closer, Suzaku readied himself for what would probably be his final stand.

That turned out not to be the day he died though as the building suddenly shook violently, causing the Druid to lose balance and his attack fire just above Kallen and Suzaku's heads, cracking open the canister instead, and spilling the thick yellow quintessence all over them, though Kallen got the brunt of it being closer to it.

From above, the ceiling exploded, forcing the Druid to vanish in a retreat. Zerith's lithe form then landed right in the center of the facility, and she opened her mouth to let the two Paladins in.

"Get in!" Rai shouted from inside, "We've got to get Lelouch, C.C., and Allura!"

The two didn't hesitate as they sprinted into the mouth. As Suzaku made it in, Kallen took a moment to look back at where the Druid had been standing. She growled in fury when she saw that he was gone. She finally stepped inside, and as Zerith's mouth closed, Kallen felt a tingling in her right hand, the one that had been badly burned earlier. She looked down at it, only to gasp in shock, as the yellow quintessence seemed to close in on the injury and fresh new skin grew in its place.

"Quintessence… what the heck is this stuff?"

"This way!" C.C. shouted as they made a sharp turn down another hall dodging laser blasts from behind still.

"Formulating navigation. All crew assume secure hyper-speed positions."

"Hurry! We can't leave once the ship goes into hyper-speed!" Allura shouted as they felt the ship vibrate as it began to lift off the ground. She had also ripped off the Galra helmet she had been wearing.

From outside, Zerith leaped onto the top of the central command tower, and the six Paladins inside
watched in horror as the ship prepared to jump.

As alarms continued to blare, the trio raced into the room, C.C. slamming her hand on the door panel before sprinting to a pod. Sentries continued to fire at them as the door closed, and before they could get one of the escape pods to work, the sentries started jamming themselves into the door, trying to force their way in.

Allura rushed forward and attempted to force the doors closed, but even her strength wasn't enough for the outpouring of robots trying to bust in. C.C. and Lelouch attempted to help her as much as they could, pushing against the door with her.

Behind them though, a pod was preparing for launch, once it did, and no one was in, they'd be trapped for good and heading straight for Zarkon!

"It's taking off! Get in the pod!" Allura ordered the two humans trying to help her.

"No! We're not leaving you behind!" Lelouch shouted in protest.

The Black Paladin then yelped as he felt hands grab him by the collar of his uniform and fling him backward. He landed hard inside the pod, to see C.C. relaxing from throwing him.

"Lelouch, you can't die here!" she shouted, "Not before you prevail! Over the past, and over the outcome of your own actions!"

Lelouch could only watch in horror as the pod doors closed, and the entry doors were wrenched open, and sentries swarmed to two women on the other side. Allura sighed in relief as C.C. sent Lelouch a reassuring smile before the pod took off away from the ship, its single passenger trapped inside.

Just as Lelouch's pod exited the battlecruiser, it jumped into hyperspace, taking Allura and C.C. with it.

"No… NO!" he shouted, slamming his fist against the floor of the pod as it glided smoothly towards Zerith, who floated close by, waiting to retrieve him.

After Zerith collected the pod and Lelouch exited it, he solemnly walked up to the cockpit, the other six Paladins waiting patiently for him. Upon seeing that Lelouch is the only one to enter, though, they immediately can tell something is wrong.

"Lelouch where's Allura?" Suzaku asked, ice flowing through his veins.

"And C.C.?" Shirley added.

Lelouch had yet to raise his head as the others crowded around him in concern.

"Lelouch?" Rivalz asked anxiously. He had never seen Lelouch look so… shattered.

"They sacrificed themselves to save me," he finally whispered, barely holding back tears.

"Wait-So they're still on that ship?!" Rai exclaimed in alarm, similar expressions on the others faces too.

"The ship that's headed to Zarkon's Central Command?" Milly asked.

"The place you specifically said is way too dangerous for us to attack?" Suzaku asked, feeling like an ice cube had just been dropped down his back.
"It doesn't matter how dangerous it is. We can't let Zarkon get Allura," Lelouch said, a determined and angered frown on his face, "Or C.C. for that matter."

"But, Lelouch, you said going there would be a huge mistake. You said for us to attack that place head-on would be the dumbest possible thing we could ever do!" Kallen reminded him, eyes wide.

"I know what I said. But now we don't have a choice," Lelouch glared back through the window into the abyss the ship disappeared into. They were correct, this would likely be the most stupid move they could ever make. But if Zarkon got Allura and C.C., it was over.

And no matter what, that could not happen.

Chapter End Notes

Man! I don't know why, but this chapter took forever to write, but here it is! I hope you enjoy it!

Also, just want to add this regarding Lelouch's Paladin uniform. On stealth and low-risk missions, Lelouch is wearing the normal white and black uniform, but in large battles where it's guaranteed to be seen by the enemy, he's in his Zero costume. So in this episode, he's in the standard Paladin uniform.

Next up is the finale of Season 1! I'm super excited it's going to be a doozy!

R&R and please update my TvTrope page if you get the chance! Thanks!
Rai directed Zerith back to the Castle of Lions as quickly as possible. The longer they took to make their plan, the more danger Allura and C.C. would be in.

The moment they landed, they rushed out of the Lion and onto the Castle's main bridge. Coran was there, waiting for them. When he saw that only the seven Paladins returned, he knew immediately that something was amiss.

"Rai, scan the download from the ship. Find out where Zarkon's central command is," Lelouch ordered fervently.

"On it!" The Green Paladin acknowledge, practically launching himself into his control seat and bringing up the computer screen, Shirley and Milly looking over his shoulder.

"What happened?" Coran asked, running over to them, "Where's Allura?"

"She and C.C. were captured. They sacrificed themselves to save me and the information. I didn't have a choice," Lelouch regrettably told the advisor.

"What happened?" Coran asked, running over to them, "Where's Allura?"

"She and C.C. were captured. They sacrificed themselves to save me and the information. I didn't have a choice," Lelouch regretfully told the advisor.

"Wha-How is that possible?" Coran demanded, eyes wide and heart racing in panic. This was his worst nightmare coming to pass!

"Coran, I'm sorry things didn't go as planned, but we can't focus on what went wrong. We've got to figure out how to make it right. Rai, anything?" Lelouch shouted at the Green Paladin urgently.

"Guys, you need to see this," Rai said with wide eyes, pulling the image up to the main screen. Everyone's eyes widened at the massive size of the central command center. It was probably the size of a small moon at the very least!

"Look at the size of it!" Coran gasped in fear.

"Are you saying that C.C. and Allura are being taken there?!" Shirley asked, visibly shaking.

"Lelouch, I think we should go in right away," Kallen said to her team leader, "Every minute we waste gives Zarkon time to prepare for us."

"I agree," Rivalz nodded, "We form Voltron, fly in, fly out, dust off our hands, and walk away."

"Um, do you guys not remember the Balmera?" Shirley asked, looking at them all anxiously, "We could barely take out one fleet. But this... a base this size could hold a thousand fleets!"

"I hate to admit it, but Shirley does have a point..." Milly agreed with a worried frown.

"Maybe we should consider other options," Suzaku said, "going after C.C. and Allura may not be the best course of action. We'll be delivering the universe's only hope to the universe's biggest enemy," as he talked everyone's, even Lelouch's, faces morphed from confused to shocked. Was this seriously coming out of Suzaku's mouth?! During the mission, he was the one most concerned for Allura's safety besides Coran. Now that she was captured, he was saying that they shouldn't go after her at all?
Noticing their expression Suzaku was quick to reiterate his statement, "What I'm trying to say is, maybe we should look at options that don't involve charging head-on. Maybe we can use stealth. We use Zerith's cloaking to sneak into central command, and once inside, Shirley's Geass can cloak us further. We find C.C. and the Princess and then just get out! We won't even need to fight!"

"I don't know if stealth is an option Suzaku," Rai admitted, looking back at the base on the screen, "just look at this thing. The defensive capabilities seem nearly impenetrable!"

"Besides, we might not have time for stealth anyway!" Kallen added, "That takes planning and timing, which we just don't have right now! Plus, what do you think would happen if Zarkon finds out C.C. is immortally or about Geass? Who knows what he could do with it?!"

Suzaku's eyes widened, "I-I didn't think about that…"

"Of course you didn't," Kallen sneered, "just like you assumed that everything would be fine and dandy if you became an Honorary Brittanian!"

"What?!" Suzaku squawked in shock, "What on Earth does that have to do with anything?!"

"You think things would get better if you just followed orders like a good boy and maybe your people would be treated better?! I don't know what kind of fairy tale you're playing at Suzaku, but it definitely isn't reality!"

"First of all, this is a completely different situation! You have no right to judge me!" Suzaku argued back, gritting his teeth in anger.

Before Kallen could bark back, Rivalz got in between them, "Guys stop! Listen, we're all upset that we lost C.C. and Allura, but fighting isn't going to help anyone!"

"No! Lelouch is the one that lost them!" Coran exclaimed, looking pointedly at the prince.

"Hey! Last time we checked, you weren't even there! You got no room to put the blame on Lelouch like that!" Kallen glared hard at the advisor, fists shaking.

"That's enough!" Milly suddenly shouted authoritatively, "Sitting here and arguing isn't going to help anyone, especially Allura and C.C.!"

"Alright," Lelouch said after taking a deep breath, "First things first, we need to locate the base. We find that we'll find them."


The Galra ship was just coming to dock at Central Command. The crew themselves seemed quite elated. Who would have thought that a routine stop at an outpost would've led to capturing one of the biggest enemies to the Empire? The Emperor would likely reward them nicely, maybe even promote them to the main fleet.

The two prisoners in question were seated together in a single cell, as it was big enough to house both of them. They were both seated and silent, anticipating what was to follow.

As they felt the ship dock, C.C. gasped as she felt a pulse in her head, the Geass mark on her forehead flaring slightly.

Allura didn't have time to ask C.C. what was wrong when they heard the door to their cell opening. Standing there to greet them were three Druids, the middle one being the very leader of them
"Come with me," Haggar ordered, her tone showing that any other option would result in dire consequences.

As the two women were being led out of the cell, cuffed, C.C.'s headache intensified, the mark resonating even more.

Hearing her slight groans of discomfort, Haggar stole a glance at the Princess's companion. Overall, she looked similar to the other Earthlings that the Galra captured just a few years ago, however… the witch could certainly sense some abnormal energy emanating off of the girl. And it felt vaguely familiar.

"Interesting…'

o~o

"Anything?" Lelouch asked all around the bridge as everyone was working on trying and finding either a weak spot or an entry point into the base.

"There's just no way in," Rivalz said with a frown.

"He's right," Suzaku confirmed from his station, "They'll have us tracked from every direction."

"Keep looking! There's got to be something!" the Black Paladin ordered. He then looked towards the central computer, seeing Coran. The advisor hadn't said a word since they'd all begun their search. Lelouch's expression turned solemn. He had a pretty good idea what the advisor was feeling right now. It was likely similar to how he felt when he learned what had happened to his mother. But unlike the Empress, Lelouch swore that they would get Allura returned safely.

Lelouch went approached the advisor cautiously. He wasn't exactly the best at comforting people unless it was Nunnally, but he had to say something. Despite what the others said, Allura and C.C. were still captured on his watch, and he had to take responsibility for it.

"I know you're worried about her. We all are. I'm sorry I let her slip away," he apologized, looking down forlornly.

Coran looked sadly at the Black Paladin, "I know it's not your fault. It's just... I've already lost so much. I can't lose Allura, too."

Lelouch smiled painfully, "I feel the same way about Nunnally."

"Your sister, correct?"

"Yes."

"I've heard Allura talk a lot about you, and your sister with her father," Coran admitted. Lelouch looked up at him in surprise, "She's discussed whether or not we can not only improve your sister's condition but also improve the state of affairs on your planet. One of the things she wants more than ever right now is for all people to live peacefully, and that includes yourself."

Lelouch blinked and then smiled slightly. Though he wouldn't admit it aloud, he was greatly touched by what Coran said. He really hoped that such peace could become a reality someday.

He quickly turned his thoughts back to the situation though, "Don't worry, we'll find a way to get
her back. We just need a way to get close to Zarkon's ship unseen."

"Wait a tick, I think I've got a way!" Coran suddenly realized, as the image of one of the small planets orbiting the base expanded onto the screen.

o~o

The platform rose slowly, bringing its occupants to the main level of the center. The windows gave a perfect view of the universe outside as stars sparkled in the distance. But their majestic luster was lost as the two women were brought closer to a lone figure in a red cape.

As C.C. laid her eyes on the Emperor of Galra himself for the first time, a little bubbling sense of anxiety began to swell inside her. It was an emotion she hadn't appropriately felt in years, and to feel it rising up now of all times terrified her even more.

"Princess Allura," Zarkon's baritone voice acknowledge, not even turning to face his captives.

"You monster!" Allura exclaimed, charging furiously at the Emperor, "You destroyed Altea!"

Before Allura could even reach the Emperor though, Haggar's evil magic gripped the Princess in the air before she collapsed to the ground, panting from the pain of it, "Voltron is going to put an end to your empire!" she glared daggers up at the leader.

"No, it will only make me more powerful," Zarkon countered, "Your father knew that as well as I. That's why he led me to believe he destroyed it all those years ago. But now, your new Paladins will come for you, and they will deliver Voltron to me, and, with it, the key to unimaginable power."

The Emperor's eyes then tracked to their other captive. The green-haired Earthling that was supposedly traveling with his enemy, "Who is this?"

"I am uncertain," Haggar said, before she raised her hand again, her magic gathering, "but I intend to find out."

C.C. gasped in pain as Haggar's magic also lifted her in the air. And she was unable to contain her screams as what felt like hot knives and claws began ripping into her mind, ripping it open and exposing long-buried memories to the surface.

"No! Stop!" Allura cries as she tries to rush to help C.C., only for the two other Druids to restrain her with their own spells.

Haggar's eyes widened slightly as she saw the Geass symbol on the girl's forehead begin to glow, images of her memories flashing before her eyes.

"He mustn't die!" she cried as she leaped in front of a young boy as a bullet embedded itself in her skull. Moments later, the same boy is crouched over what he thinks is her lifeless body, only for the said body to grasp his hand, linking him to the mysterious power that she held inside of her.

Another human, this one in the uniform of the Orange Paladin, gasps as she grasps her hand, the same link forming between the two in the Balmeran prison.

Other bits and pieces flashed past her eyes. A large human with white hair standing in what appears to be ancient ruins, a female human with long flowing brown hair standing next to him, with a very young Earthling with long flowing blonde hair. He looked no older than an adolescent, but he emitted the same energy that this girl was giving off.
Then her captive grunted, and a mental wall suddenly burst up, shoving Haggar's mental probs off of her mind. The woman collapsed in a heap, breathing heavily and bracing herself shakily on her hands and knees as she struggled to stand.

"Interesting," Haggar muses as her gaze stayed on the girl a few moments longer before turning to her Emperor, "I wish to examine her. I dare to say this, but I believe we found something with greater potential than Voltron."

As C.C. raised her head to look defiantly up at her captors, the bubble of anxiety slowly morphing into an emotion she hadn't felt in a long time, one that spread down her spine and almost all the way to her toes.

Fear.

Lelouch winced slightly as he felt a small needle of pain pierce his skull, but it wasn't painful enough for him to cry out. He heard a gasp and a groan behind him, and as he turned, he saw that Rai and Shirley had similar expressions.

Something inside Lelouch turned cold. Whatever was happening to C.C., and probably Allura by extension, couldn't be good. They needed to move fast!

After shaking away the feeling, he turned to Team Voltron, "Eyes front. We've got a plan to get Allura and C.C. We're going to jump to the heart of the enemy, unseen and undetected."

"Wait, I thought we needed Allura to open up a wormhole," Milly asked, confused.

"It's true that Allura powers the Castle's ability to travel through wormholes. However, I think we have enough of her residual essence stored in the system to make one jump," Coran explained, as he and Lelouch turned to the bridge's main computer screen, the base and the planets surrounding it being pulled up, "We'll hide the Castle here, inside one of these giant gas planets in Zarkon's command system. The gas is so dense, we'll be hidden."

"From there, we'll use the Castle to scan for Allura and C.C. on Zarkon's ship. We'll form Voltron, find them, and get out before Zarkon knows what hit him," Lelouch finished explaining.

"There's only one hiccup," Coran confessed, turning back to the group. "We have enough energy to wormhole in, but, without Allura, we won't have enough energy to wormhole out."

"So leaving without the Princess isn't an option," Suzaku summed up.

"That's correct. Remember, we're not here to fight, though we will inevitably have to, this is a quick in-and-out mission. We are not going to drag things out here."

"Lelouch, no offense, but this is a far less complex plan compared to the ones you come up with on Earth," Kallen noted, "if we mess this up, we're basically handing Voltron over to Zarkon, gift-wrapped and with a bow on top."

Though she didn't mean to, her comment made most of the other Paladins squirm apprehensively. The reality of their situation was slowly unraveling in front of them, and it scared them all.

"I know there are risks, but either way," Lelouch said, as he turned around and walked towards this seat on the bridge. He opened a compartment on his armor's gauntlet, pressed some buttons, and then slammed his hand down on the gauntlet's inside, and his uniform's color suddenly morphed in
color. Gone was the white with black accented armor of the Black Paladin, and instead appeared the black and gold accented armor of the masked leader of the Black Knights. He picked up his helmet, which is where he always kept it by his side. He slipped the mask on his head and narrowed his eyes, "we're not leaving without them."

o~o

"Sire, allow me to send my fleet to protect the command system. I will stop Voltron before it can get close." Prorok began to petition before his Emperor as he sat upon his throne along with all the other loyal Galran commanders.

"You will do no such thing, Prorok," Zarkon ordered, "We will allow them inside our perimeter."

"Once in, they won't get out," Haggar sneered at his side.

"Ready all fleets," the Emperor commanded, "On this day, the Paladins will be destroyed, and I will have Voltron."

"Sire, if I may," Thace spoke up, "what if this Zero character appears? It's more than clear that he is working alongside the Paladins."

"He will be dealt with accordingly," Zarkon answered, clapping his hands together, "he's nothing but another nuisance to squash."

"Indeed. If Zero does show himself in this battle, your orders are to bring to me. Alive," Haggar ordered as her eyes narrowed menacingly.

o~o

"We're here," Zero announced, standing high and confident at the front of the bridge, his Zero uniform, minus the cape, making him look even more so, as the Castle of Lions exited the wormhole and they hovered in their hiding place. Just as they predicted, the gas of the planet was so thick that the enemy hadn't detected their presence as of yet.

They hung around the very edge of the planet's cover and were able to see the base with their own eyes. Just like on the images, the base was enormous and seeing it now, the uneasiness within the Paladins seemed to spike up another level. Shirley was the one that looked the most scared as she was literally shaking in her seat and almost hyperventilating. Though the other Paladins weren't showing as many outward signs, they were all nervous. Even Kallen had to swallow back some bile that unexpectedly worked its way up her throat. Suzaku felt sweat drops drip down his forehead.

"I'm detecting Allura and C.C.'s energy signatures. From this distance, the signals are pretty weak, but they're both somewhere in Zarkon's main ship," Coran tells them as he continues to type furiously on the main computer.

"That's a starting point," Suzaku mutters as he and the others look up at the main screen.

"Once we get closer, we'll be able to narrow down the location where the Princess is being held," Coran continued.

Shirley suddenly hurled off to the side, causing everyone to jump and look at the Orange Paladin in horror.

"I can't do this," she says as tears start to roll down her face as she clutched her hair into fists, "I'm
sorry, I can't Lulu. We're practically entering hell right at the devil's doorstep."

Before Lelouch could reach out to calm Shirley down, Kallen beat him to it, "Shirley, it may not look like it, but I'm scared too. We all are. But we need to push forward. Allura and C.C. need us to do that. That's what it means to be both a Paladin and a Black Knight."

"You can do this Shirley," Lelouch says, causing the Orange Paladin to look up at him, "I have faith in you. I have faith in all of you," he took a moment to look at each of his fellow Paladins, "We can do this."

Though it was short, Lelouch's speech put the entire team at a little bit of ease, and Shirley managed to pull herself together enough to draw a full breath.

"Alright, Voltron is going to come in fast and without warning. We'll smash our way into Zarkon's ship and grab C.C. and the Princess. Before they know what hit them, we'll have them back on the ship, and we'll be on our way."

o~o

The Lions roared out battle cries as they sprang out of the Castle hangars and into battle. Limbs shifted, and parts connected as the great warrior and Defender of the Universe came to life right before the enemy's eyes. The Paladins that piloted them all facing forward and determined to face the enemy head-on. The juggernaut blasted out of the gas planet and rocketed straight for the base.

o~o

"Emperor, we're detecting Voltron within our perimeter!" Prorok alerted Zarkon as they both stood on the main bridge.

"Engage the solar barrier immediately. Attack!" he ordered.

"Yes, Emperor," Prorok saluted.

Within moments, a dark barrier began to form around the entirety of Galra HQ, quickly locking any foes foolish enough to get in, or any from getting out.

"Thace, scramble the fighters!" Prorok ordered his second in command.

"Yes, commander."

From all over the base and the surrounding ships, hundreds of Galra fighters began swarming out of their launch bays, all of them enroute and targeting a single enemy.

"Haggar, it is time," Zarkon said to his chief priestess. She, in turn, bowed to her master. It was finally time to reclaim Voltron.

o~o

As Voltron drew closer to the main base, the Paladins watched in apprehension as the violet barrier closed around.

"What is that?!" Rivalz asked, voice quaking.

"I don't know," Rai said, "but I hope once we get C.C. and the Princess, we can find a way out of here."
"Heads up, they're going to fire!" Suzaku shouted as dozens of Galra battleships set their sights on them and started firing their ion cannon relentlessly at their massive foe.

Lelouch grit his teeth and propelled themselves forward further, dodging around lasers and cannon shots. He and Kallen then pulled Aka's head back, and with all the force they could muster, slammed the Red Lion's head through one of the first cruisers. With their grip now steady on top, Zerith balancing them on the other side, Lelouch cried out, "Form sword!"

With a slam into the key port, Suzaku's Bayard flared to life as the giant sword they were all too familiar with blazed into form in front of them, inside the vessel. The sword now embedded inside, Voltron gripped the blade with both hands and propelled himself forward with his thrusters, the cruiser's surface cutting like butter underneath the mighty weapon. Within seconds, the sword exited the cruiser on the other side, and it blew up in an inferno of flames.

They didn't stop there. Building up as much speed as they could, they thrust the sword into the side of another cruiser, pushing it off course to the side. It built up so much that it eventually slammed into the cruiser next to it, and Voltron propelled through both and the one after that as if they were made of cardboard. All three cruisers were destroyed in a matter of moments.

"More trouble, straight ahead!" Milly alerted as a wave of battle cruisers ahead had banded together and began firing rapidly at them.

The sword wouldn't do for this.

"Form bow and arrows!" Lelouch ordered.

Shirley, with a shout of her own, slammed her Bayard into the keyhole and the sharp sword was immediately replaced with the sleek form of a bow, an arrow of energy already notched within it. With a single pullback of his arm, the arrow fired, dispersing into thousands of tiny energy beams, each hitting the Galra cruisers in rapid succession.

Once the barrier of cruisers vanished, the bow vanished to be replaced with the sword once more, and Voltron shot once more to its destination. Very few cruisers dared to stand in their way as the main base rapidly came closer and closer.

"There's Zarkon's ship!" Lelouch announced as the thrusters propelled them forward once more. As the main base nearly came within striking distance, right underneath it, Voltron pulled back his sword ready to strike.

But before they could do so, Voltron suddenly froze. Everyone gasped in shock. The sword flickered out of existence as they all wondered what was happening!

"What's going on?!" Rai exclaimed.

"We lost the sword! Something's malfunctioning!" Suzaku shouted.

"What's happening?!" Coran asked from the bridge of the Castle. He too watched in horror as Voltron froze in place.

"Somebody do something! Voltron's frozen up!" Rivalz cried as his face appeared on the Castle's screen.

"Lelouch!" Kallen exclaimed in a panic.

"I can't hold it!" The Black Paladin shouted as he felt an unknown pressure pressing down on top
Unbeknownst to them, directly above them, Zarkon was beginning a plan of his own. The Druids on all sides of the Emperor were pumping quintessence through his veins. He smirked darkly as his eyes shut for a moment.

"You're a fool to bring Voltron here," his eyes snapped back open to reveal a black symbol within his eyes. A symbol that was nearly identical to the one that rested within the eyes of the Black, Green, and Orange Paladins.

The Paladins all yelled in pain as the pressure from Lelouch's cockpit suddenly spread to all of them. They didn't just feel their own emotions, but of their Lions too. And whatever was happening right now, they were afraid. Zenobia most of all.

In a flash of blue light, the Lions split apart from Voltron, all scattering to different areas of the battlefield.

"Wh-What just happened there?!" Shirley exclaimed, eyes wide in fright.

"Something tore us apart!" Milly said.

"I don't know, but we've got bigger problems right now. Look!" Rivalz pointed as nearly all of the Galra cruisers, and millions of fighters pouring from around the base began soaring towards them.

"Why do I have the feeling these guys knew we were coming?!" Kallen exclaimed.

Without another moment of hesitation, the Lions all sprang into action, charging head-on into the horde of Galra.

All except Lelouch and Zen.

The pressure that Lelouch felt earlier in Voltron intensified even more as malevolent violet energy seemed to engulf the Lion. The same power that was emanating from the bottom of the main base.

In the battle, Maeraka fired her beam at a Galra ship, causing it to blow up moments later as well as blind a few other fighters and a cruiser due to the light. Zerith wasn't too far behind as she and Rai fired a beam across the haul of another ship, leaving a burning trail in its wake causing an explosion. Just as the vessel combusted, Rai directed Zerith away and back into the battle. Suzaku and Yoru put the suction ability to use, pulling in small Galra fighters and tearing them to pieces once they came within range.

Nearby Polaris and Rivalz fired off their ice beam upon and froze multiple Galra ships at once. Aka flew in from the left and fired off her own beam and shattered two of them, while Zinnia shattered one by head-butting into it. But moments later, she was shot with another blast from the enemy, causing her and Shirley to swerve off course before the Orange Paladin managed to regain control.

"Ah, there's no end to these guys!" Shirley exclaimed in despair as she saw another ship charging its ion cannon. Before it could fire though, a large blue beam from above hit the cruiser first, setting it aflame.

Looking up, the Paladins were elated to see the Castle of Lions itself zooming into the battlefield.

"Coran attack! I've waited ten thousand years for this!" the advisor howled out a war cry as he charged in.
All of the Paladins burst into cheers at seeing some back-up, though Lelouch remained silent, too concentrated on trying to fight off this building pressure, that seemed to be getting stronger by the minute as he and Zen were dragged closer and closer into the base.

Lelouch grit his teeth and groaned as he tried to get Zen to move. Preferably away from the base and into the battle. His Lion though was silent, and no controls he pushed or pressed were doing anything to rouse her.

Within the midst of the fray, Kallen expertly destroyed two more Galra fighters flying in front of her. She and Aka weaved smoothly in and around explosions and other attacking ships. As her path of destruction led her close to the main base, Kallen called out to her leader.

"Lelouch! Are you okay?!"

"Something is overriding the controls!" Lelouch managed to grunt out, "Zen is not responding!" Before Lelouch could give anything more, he cried in pain as more of the intense pressure came down around him.

"Lelouch is in trouble! I'm going in!" Kallen exclaimed to the others as she dove towards the Black Lion.

From within Zen, Lelouch instinctively activated his Geass, not knowing if it would help, but knowing that something needed to be done. Surprisingly, the pressure lessened, only slightly though.

From above, Zarkon's eyes widened in minor surprise as he felt Lelouch's Geass activate. But...

"So, you wield that power as well," Lelouch's eyes widened and his head shot up as he heard the voice of the Emperor in his mind. But what really caused his blood to freeze in horror was what he said. He couldn't be implying- "No matter. Yours is nothing more than a feeble ember compared to mine."

Lelouch could only watch in horror as Zen's controls finally reactivated, but all of it was in Galra script, highlighted in blood red. The pressure in his head became overpowering as the inside of Zen's cockpit lit up, and Lelouch was shot backward.

Before Lelouch could truly comprehend what was happening, he felt himself tumbling out of Zenobia's mouth and into space. What frightened him more was that just as he was ejected, a symbol he was all too familiar with had flashed through his mind. The black Geass had overpowered his own entirely, no matter how hard he tried to press against it.

"Lulu!" Shirley exclaimed as she watched Lelouch continue to tumble through the air. She immediately tried to propel over to him, only for about twenty Galra fighters to ambush her from below. With a gasp, Shirley hoisted Zinnia up and flew off to the side to try and lose them.

Lelouch eventually managed to activate his jetpack to slow his descent, but it didn't help much as moments later, the Black Paladin's back collided with the side of the base, causing the packs to get damaged. Lelouch managed to grab onto a small piece of the side to stop himself from floating away further, but now he was stuck. He looked up in terror as he watched Zen being drawn even closer to who he assumed was Zarkon himself.

"What do we do now, guys?" Rivalz exclaimed over the commlink, "Our plan isn't really working out as... well, planned!"

Lelouch grit his teeth, "I'm getting Zen back! The rest of you focus on finding C.C. and Allura!"
"I've identified their exact location!" Coran responded from the Castle, "Luckily it seems they're the coordinates to you, now. In the meantime, I'll provide covering fire from out here, all alone, against an entire fleet. So, yeah, do you mind hurrying?"

"My jetpack's damaged. I'll need to go through the ship," Lelouch said as he scanned around for any possible openings. He noticed the small outcropping that saved his life earlier and slowly glided towards it. Geass on, he channeled his lightning into his hand, almost like an electrical spear, and shoved it into the crack. With the little physical strength that he had, he lifted the metal open. He covered his mask as a burst of air followed before he promptly descended into the entrance.

o~o

Meanwhile, Kallen continued to weave Aka in and out of the laser of Galra ships everywhere, shooting off lasers of her own in the process.

"Guys, get the Princess without me, now!" Kallen shouted through the intercom.

"What?!" Suzaku exclaimed, eyes widening, "No, Kallen it's too dangerous to go off on your own! What are you even doing?!"

"Whatever I can!" she gritted out as she and Aka shot like a rocket towards the underside of Zarkon's base, and slammed into Zen's unresponsive body. She knocked the Black Lion out of the path so hard, Zen went tumbling through space before landing on the surface of Zarkon's lower ship, the violet glow fading away.

o~o

Inside the base, Lelouch, or Zero to others, crouched at the end of one of the halls, waiting for the two sentries to come around. But instead of waiting for them to pass, Lelouch leaped out with a battle cry and impaled both of them with his lightning infused fists.

Unlike other situations, he wasn't taking chances with being seen, he could afford that right now.

As he continued to run down the dark hallway, Lelouch's mind began racing. Images of the battles he endured flashed through his mind. Confronting Sendak, him resisting his Geass, the mentioning of the Druids, and Rai admitting the familiarity of them, and now this!

Lelouch almost stopped dead in his tracks as the dots finally connected.

"No… Zarkon has Geass?!"

o~o

The Emperor in question glared down at the Lions from above before shedding the heavy armor and cape that he always adorned. The black Geass emblem glowed brightly within his pupils as he calmly let himself fall from the ritual platform above into open space below. He then activated his rocket boosters on his heels to shoot towards where Zen had landed.

As he landed in front of the Lion, Kallen was hovering close on the other side. Her eyes fell on the Galra, and she thought she felt a chill run down her spine, glaring daggers at him. She had a feeling she knew who that was, but she needed to confirm it.

"Who is that?" she asked Coran through the comlink, bringing up a video feed in the Castle.
As Coran looked at the screen, he gasped in horror, "It's Zarkon! Kallen, get out there, now! Zarkon's too powerful!"

Kallen wasn't listening, though. Once her suspicions were confirmed, only one goal made itself apparent, "This is my chance to put an end to the Galra Empire! I have to take it!"

Kallen thrust Aka's controls forward and dived down towards the Galra Leader, ready to fire a beam at Zarkon to end him.

"Kallen, don't!" Coran's cries fell on deaf ears as Aka's maw let loose a beam of light directly at the Emperor. The explosion that resulted almost convinced Kallen that she had actually gotten him, but then something catches her eye that causes ice to curl in her stomach.

Zarkon had blocked the attack with what looked like a giant purple energy shield. Moments later, it dissipated, and Kallen could see a familiar object in Zarkon's clutches.

"Is that-Is that a Bayard?!"

"You may have a Lion," Zarkon said, holding the dark Bayard up to his chest, "but its power is weak in your fledgling hands."

The Bayard then glowed as a sword that seemed to be made of energy formed from it. Then with a single swing, Zarkon flung a wave of energy towards the Red Lion.

Still in shock from seeing the Bayard, the Black Bayard, in Zarkon's hands, Kallen would've been hit, had the Purple Lion not rammed into her and pushed her out of the way. The shot barely missed Yoru as the two Lions spun in the air for a few moments before recovering.

All of the other Paladins heard the person Kallen was facing, and Suzaku rushed to help, being the closest one by. "If we stop Zarkon right here and now, then this battle is over. Earth will be safe," he declared from his Lion as the two spun to face the Emperor once more, their Lions both growling in challenge.

Zarkon didn't even blink, "You cannot stop me. The Black Lion will finally be returned to its original Paladin."

o--o

Lelouch finally made it to what looked like one of the main hangars. He was out of breath and panting from all the running, but he was sure that he was close to Zen by now.

When he was about halfway across the hangar, the door behind him slammed shut, causing him to jump and turn in confusion.

"So," a voice behind him drawled, making the hair on his neck stand up. He turned back around to see a hooded woman standing in the middle of the bay. She had long white hair and what looked like navy blue skin, "you're the infamous Zero."

"You will answer my questions!" Lelouch ordered, an eyehole opening in his helmet, and his Geass flashing as he caught the eye of the Druid (what else could it be?) in front of him.

She seemed to grunt for a moment before she quickly dispelled the power that attempted to take her over. She then looked up, curiously at him, "How do you wield this power?"

Lelouch took a step back in shock. Just like with Sendak, his Geass hadn't worked, and he had
made sure to make eye contact through his mask. It seemed his theory of the Galra and Geass being connected in some way was being confirmed even more as this woman seemed to show some familiarity with it.

The woman eyes then seemed to widen, before a contemplating smiled adorned her lips, "I see, that explains the woman. She granted you that power, didn't she?" Lelouch continued to stand frozen in front of her, "I wonder how many others she's granted it toward. No matter, I'll find out one way or another."

This seems to shake Lelouch out of his frozen stupor as he grit his teeth, Geass still flaring, and charged at the Druid, hands flashing with electricity. Just as it looked like he was about to make contact though, the Druid disappeared and reappeared behind him, laughing. Lelouch turned and blasted behind him, only for her to vanish yet again. Then multitudes of the Druid began to appear around him, all laughing with what he assumed was sick glee. He whipped his head from one end to the other, energy crackling in his palms. He was completely surrounded.

o~o

Back on in the battle, Rai and Zerith fired at an onslaught of fighters that came their way. Shirley was right. There was just no end to them at all!

The Green Paladin then gasped loudly, Zerith screeching to a halt. He felt something in the back of his mind. A presence. One that he knew, but knew he didn't at the exact same time. 'So, the Champion returns,' the voice seemed to purr in his head, and it certainly wasn't from his Lion.

Due to this latest episode, the Green Lion had left itself open for several fighters to fire. The only reason that Rai wasn't blown to pieces was due to the timely arrival of Milly, Rivalz, and Shirley, who shot all of them down before racing to Rai's side.

"Rai! Rai, dude, what's wrong!" Rivalz asked urgently.

"Are you okay?" Shirley questioned as well.

Rai quickly shook his head, but his eyes were wide with fear now, "We have to get out of here! Now!" he proclaimed, fear clearly present in his tone.

"We've finally managed to locate Allura and C.C." Milly reported, bringing up her tracking on their screens, "they're in this part of the ship." Her scanners showed a lower area of the main base. "Okay, how do we get in?" Rivalz asked.

"I-I can try and hack one of the cargo bays," Rai said, still recovering from the scare from earlier. "No, we don't have time! Shirley, you'll just have to bust through!" Milly ordered.

"What?! Seriously?!" the Orange Paladin asked in shock.

"Just do it!" Milly shouted back.

"O-Okay!" Shirley didn't question further as she thrust Zinnia forward, barrelling straight towards the coordinates that Milly passed to her.

o~o
From inside their cell, Allura and C.C. looked up in shock as they felt the area around them shake violently.

Outside, the head of the Orange Lion, crashed through the wall of the prison, the two sentries guarding their cell, raised their guns to the intruder, but Shirley was faster. As Zinnia's mouth opened, she fired one arrow at the first sentry, spun around and dodged a blast from the second one, before hitting it as well. To her pleasant surprise, those were the only two robots that were guarding the prison, at least in this area.

O~O

Up at the central command center, Thace's screen started beeping in alert. The Galra looked up to see that a part of the haul had been broken through.

"Sir, the hull's been breached. It's one of the Lions," he reported to Prorok.

"Focus fighters on that quadrant," the commander ordered. He would retrieve those Lions for his Emperor!

O~O

On the outside of the base, with the end of the Orange Lion hanging out of the ship, the Green, Blue, and Yellow Lions surrounded it, guarding Zinnia and Shirley against any attacks that would be coming from the hoard of fighters that was coming their way.

"Looks like we got to cover Shirley's butt!" Rivalz shouted as he swerved Polaris around several fighter shots, gritting his teeth.

O~O

With her arrow, Shirley shot a hole through Allura and C.C.'s cell. As the Orange Paladin entered, she was relieved to see that neither woman looked too hurt.

"Shirley!" Allura gasped.

"Come on! Let's get out of here!" Shirley shouted, motioning to her newly made exit.

"What are you doing here?" Allura demanded, "Tell me you didn't bring Voltron straight to Zarkon's central command! Where's the Black Lion?"

Suddenly, from over their comlinks, they hear Lelouch yelp in pain as if he had been hit with something.

"Lelouch is in trouble!" C.C. exclaimed as she sprung and ran out of the cell, "We have to save him."

As Allura and Shirley ran behind her, Shirley felt a pang of her own just behind her left eye. C.C. was right. Something was happening to Lelouch right at that moment.

"Shirley, did you get C.C. and the Princess?" Rai asked through their helmets.

"Yeah, but there's a change of plans," she replied.

O~O

Lelouch grunted as he attempted to blast one of the Druid clones, but it quickly disappeared into
"You're nothing but a child," she taunted from behind, "tampering with forces you can't even begin to understand."

With a shout, Lelouch spun around and punched the clone directly behind him, only to be with a powerful blast of her own, sending him flying across the room with a yell.

"You're only scratching the surface of the power that you possess," she hissed as a ball of energy appeared in her hand and fired in Lelouch's direction.

With a gasp, Lelouch managed to narrowly roll out of the way, charging at her again, seeing as the clones had vanished. He dodged two more blasts of energy that were shot at him. With a battle cry, he flung his arm forward, attempting to swipe at her again, only for her to vanish directly behind him.

With a sneer, she thrust her claw forward, her hands glowing with her magic, deeply scratched Lelouch's side. With a choked gasp, Lelouch collapsed, agony running up his body from the wound inflicted.

Her enemy incapacitated for the moment, him kneeling and clutching his glowing wound, Haggar wasted no time probing his mind for information. Lelouch grit his teeth and tried to fight back against her, but due to the fatigue of battle, her influence was too strong.

Small glimpses of his childhood back on Earth flash before his eyes, and he can only assume that the Druid is seeing them as well. His mother's assassination, Nunnally comatose in a hospital bed, bandages wrapped around her head and legs. The confrontation with his father and his resulting banishment.

Then, another image flashes by, one that even causes Lelouch to freeze. It was the face of his father, Charles Zi Britannia, and a Geass of his own flashing in his eyes.

He felt his head being physically jerked back. The Druid had grabbed onto his helmet, and he felt foreign energy seeping through the mask and into his mind. She was trying to rip in closer, get as much information as she could.

Lelouch groaned in anguish, but he grit his teeth. She'd already seen more than she needed. He'd push her back as best as he could.

o~o

"This is insane!" Kallen shouted as she sent another blast in Zarkon's direction. She and Suzaku had been engaging the Emperor for nearly ten minutes, and it didn't seem like they were leaving a single dent on him.

The Purple Paladin himself doesn't say anything, but his thoughts are very similar to Kallen's as well.

Once again, Zarkon quickly blocked the blast with his Bayard like a rubber ball against a brick building.

"To think that fate would bring me to face these two Lions in battle once again. What a disappointment of Alfor and Melenor's legacy," Zarkon said.

Suzaku then tried to take the moment of distraction to try and crush Zarkon underneath him with
Yoru, but Zarkon jumped out of the way, his Bayard morphing back into a sword once again.

Simultaneously, the two Paladins lunged their Lions forward, both of them racing upon the base surface, shooting lasers at the Emperor as he flew towards them at high speed, easily dodging out of the way of all of them.

Just as Zarkon was about to hit them, Suzaku attempted to suck the Emperor in with the black hole function. Instead of being pulled in and finished off though, the Emperor seemed to simply use it gain more momentum, and sliced his blade right at the Lion, who immediately fell to the ground.

Suzaku groaned as he felt the impact. This was getting ridiculous!

"Suzaku! Move!" Kallen shouted from above. The Purple Paladin lifted his head in time to see Zarkon produce a huge cannon from the Bayard that was aimed directly at him!

With a grunt, Suzaku managed to sweep out of the way, just as the blast nearly grazed Yoru's shoulder. The shot didn't hit them, but Kallen and Suzaku both looked in horror as the blast easily sliced through one of the base's outer layers. Zarkon didn't even seem to care!

What kind of a monster were they facing?!

"Kallen, Suzaku, get out there!" Coran's voice echoed through the link again, sounding even more desperate now.

The two Paladins didn't have time to reply as Zarkon then flew into the air, the sword once again in hand, and attempted to dive-bomb them. The managed to jump out of the way, but the impact that Zarkon made caused a massive explosion as well.

Zarkon was literally tearing his own base apart just to get to the Black Lion!

"Do you copy? You don't know what you're dealing with! He's too powerful! Listen to me, it's imperative that neither of you engage the-" Coran's voice was cut off as the two Paladins simultaneously slammed the off button to the communication link. Both of the Lions readied themselves, blades appearing in their jaws as they both shot off and charged the Galra at full speed.

Zarkon was waiting for them though, as he Bayard turned from a blade into a large metal whip that he threw towards them.

At first, the Lions were able to dodge around the weapon, until Aka's leg got caught by it and Zarkon slammed the Red Lion into the Purple Lion.

With both the Lions down once again, Zarkon's blade appeared once more, and he charged towards them, aiming to finally end the two Paladins at once.

"No…" Kallen groaned as she forced Aka to stand up with her own willpower. Suzaku behind her was still somewhat dazed from the attack and wasn't moving. As Kallen stood between Zarkon and her comrade, she took several deep breaths, her anger, and determination building with each one, before screaming out a battle cry.

At the same time, she felt something twist within her bond with Aka, and appearing on top of the Red Lion's back, was a giant cannon.

Though seeing this development, it didn't slow Zarkon's descent towards them as the cannon charged up. With a flash, Aka unleashed a cannon blast so massive and powerful that it actually forced Zarkon to stop and block the attack. It even drove him back a couple of steps.
With a grunt of his own, Zarkon finally dove out of the way of the attack, causing its remaining power to fly past him and hit the out base once again, creating a large chunk of it to go up in flames.

Kallen stared wide-eyed at not only the destruction she seemingly caused from that single attack but also the fact that Zarkon had been able to block it! "Whoa!"

"Kallen! Come on!" Suzaku shouted as the two Lions ascended into the air once again. With the ray gun still activated on Aka's back, Kallen fired another shot at the Emperor. To her pleasant surprise, Zarkon actually flew out of the way of the attack instead of blocking it. It left a fiery trail behind the Emperor as a result.

Suzaku took that opportunity to try and dive bomb Zarkon again, but somehow, the Emperor anticipated this and sliced Suzaku out of the air once more.

"You fight like a Galra soldier," they heard the Emperor commented to the Red Paladin.

"I'll take that as a compliment," Kallen spat. She knew that out of all of the Paladins, even out of all the Black Knights, she was undoubtedly the most... battle-savvy for lack of a better term, but she knew for a fact that she was human. There was no way that she was related to the Galra, neither were any of the other Paladins for that matter... right?

"But not for long!" Zarkon proclaimed as Kallen watched him leap into the air, and with the Bayard transforming what could only be a giant club, beat Aka out of the air. She slammed back into the ground, right next to Suzaku with a gasp.

o~o

Allura, C.C., and Shirley all burst into the fighter hangar, all under the protection of Shirley's invisibility. They all stopped in their tracks when they saw Haggar bent over Lelouch's fallen form, her hand and the Black Paladin's body glowing a sickly purple.

Shirley immediately pulled out her Bayard and aimed it at the witch, "GET AWAY FROM HIM!" she shouted as released the single arrow that had been notched.

Her shout was the only thing that alerted Haggar to their presence and managed to let go of Lelouch and dodge the arrow just in time. She sneered before she teleported away.

With Haggar's hold on him gone, Lelouch collapsed back to the ground with a gasp, barely bracing himself on his hands so he wouldn't fall flat on his face.

"Lulu! We have to get out of here!" Shirley exclaimed, rushing over to the Black Paladin and helping him to his feet. Her eyes widened in horror at the sight of his wound, but they would have to deal with it later.

As the four of them left the hangar, C.C. couldn't help but stall just for a moment, her eyes trailing back to the spot that Haggar disappeared from. A chill ran up her spine. In all of her long life, she'd only met a few people that she would admit she was frightened of, and Haggar was only her latest addition.

The last time she had felt this way... was when she met V.V.

o~o

Yoru and Aka lay still on the surface of the base. Neither of them was moving despite their
Paladins doing everything they could to get them to move.

Above them, Zarkon's Bayard transformed once again. This time, it took the form of a giant spear, that the Emperor had aimed directly at the two Lions. With a burst of the jets on his legs, the Emperor charged towards them.

"Come on! Come on!" Kallen shouted from the cockpit, frantically pushing down levers and pressing buttons.

Suzaku, on the other hand, stopped. The moment he had seen Zarkon's Bayard flash, he had stopped struggling. And as the Emperor drew closer to finish them off, Suzaku's eyes closed. If this was how he died, at least it was fighting for something he believed in.

However, death would not be the case, as just moments before Zarkon could strike, a roar to his right drew his attention. His eyes widened as the Black and Orange Lions shot off attacks of their own, throwing the Emperor off in surprise, and saving Kallen and Suzaku.

Not even caring if his shot actually hurt Zarkon, Lelouch, with Shirley right behind him, flew down and scooped up the Red Lion in his jaws, Shirley doing the same for the Purple Lion.

"We got you!" Lelouch shouted as the four of them flew back to the ship as fast as possible.

As the four lions returned to the bays, Zarkon watched from afar, his eyes boring into what was nearly his prize. He had been too focused on the battle with the Red and Purple Lion. He should've taken the Black Lion right then and there. However, this was only a minor annoyance. The Black Lion would be his once again, one way or another.

o~o

As Zen set Aka down within the Red Lion's bay, C.C. had to catch Lelouch was keeling forward and hitting his head on the console. The wound at his side pulsed darkly, causing him to gasp in pain.

From the Orange Lion's bay, Allura raced out of the Zinnia as Yoru was placed down next to her. She ran to the bridge and swiftly put her hands on top of the teludav pillars, the familiar blue glow washing over her.

"All right, Paladins, time to get out of here!" she announced as she attempted to open a wormhole. However, to her shock, no wormholes opened up.

"Hello? What's going on? I don't see a wormhole," Milly asked, her face appearing on the Castle's screen.

"The Galra barrier is jamming our ability to create one!" Coran exclaimed in a panic. They were trapped. Even though they had Allura back, there was still no way out. Nor was there a way for them to fight all of the Galra troops that were slowly caving in on them.

o~o

From inside the base, Prorok turned back to the lieutenant stationed behind him, "Send in everything we've got! Corner them!"

Prorok failed to notice the absence of one of his top subordinates.

o~o
The spy cautiously made his way done the hall, his Luxite blade clutched tightly in his hand. He approached the area of the energy barrier, he ran into a sentry that was guarding the door.

The robot turned to him and addressed the Galra, "This sector is off-limits-

Before the droid could say anything else, the spy jammed his blade into the sentry's neck, effectively destroying it as it collapsed to the ground.

Not wasting another moment, knowing that each one counted if Voltron was to escape, he entered the control room.

To his relief, there was only one other sentry stationed at the main control board, and he wasted no time stabbing his blade into the sentry's back. The robot collapsed onto the floor with a clunk.

He hurriedly entered his passcode into the computer, a lever uncovering itself in front of him. He grasped it and pulled down.

o~o

"They have us completely surrounded!" Coran cried as the solar barrier around them suddenly shorted out, much to the Paladins' shock.

o~o

The spy let out a small sigh of relief as he watched the barrier successfully shut down.

Now just to get rid of the rest of the evidence.

Thace bent down and snatched his Luxite blade from the body of the sentry.

The job was done. Voltron was free.

o~o

"What just happened?" Rai asked.

"Who cares?! WORMHOLE!" Shirley practically screamed.

Not wasting this window of opportunity, Allura activated the teludav once more. This time a swirling wormhole appeared before the Castle. Allura directed the Castle towards it, failing to notice the danger that was erupting behind them.

With a shriek of anger and power, Haggar slammed her hands into the magic circle on her ledge of the Galra base. With a dark flash of light, a beam of black energy shot towards the Castle of Lions and the wormhole they were attempting to escape through.

The Castle wasn't hit directly, but the wormhole was not so lucky. As the energy was absorbed into the hole, the familiar blue of the walls twisted into dark, unstable maroon, static energy flashing across the field as they descended.

"Coran, what's happening?!" Lelouch shouted as he and C.C. felt the shaking from Zen's interior.

"The integrity of the wormhole has been compromised! It's breaking down!" the advisor shouted in fear.

"What does that mean?" Rivalz asked, gripping Polaris's controls.
"It means we have no control over where we're headed!" Coran exclaimed, just as a loud bang shook the Castle.

Before either Lelouch, Kallen, or even C.C. could react, the bang shook the Castle hard enough that it dislodged both Lions from the bay, causing them to yell as they started spiraling out into the wormhole.

They weren't the only ones, the other five lions soon followed, all being flung helplessly out of their bays, their Paladins in tow.

One by one, each Lion disappeared into the wormhole's wall. Their destination?

Unknown.

Chapter End Notes

AN: There we go! Season 1 is officially done for this fic! Hope you all enjoyed it!

So, I know a lot of you are wondering when exactly the Paladins will be heading back to Earth. And I promise it will be within the next few chapters. First they need to all regroup (obviously) and then there will be one more episode after that. Once that's done, we'll finally move on to heading to Earth! I'm super pumped to get to that part! Me and my co-writer have been anticipating it for a LONG time!

R&R and please update my TVTrope page when you get the chance! Thanks!
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"Lelouch! Kallen!" Suzaku shouted as he watched in horror as they both disappeared through the wormhole's wall. Rai and Shirley followed shortly after on the other side. Before he could shout further though, he felt something strike Yoru, and his vision turned black.

"They've vanished through the temporal rift!" Allura gasped, "The Lions are gone!"

The corrupted rift opening above was the only thing that disturbed the eerie silence of the abandoned planet down below. The Black and Red Lions spun out of it and started descending rapidly in separate directions, both of the Lions unresponsive.

Within Zen's cockpit, Lelouch continued to sweat profusely as he held the wound on his side, that seemed to increase in size over the past couple of minutes. C.C., who had hit her head on the back
of the seat when they had tumbled out of the Castle, remained unconscious behind him.

In the complete other direction, Kallen struggled to keep Aka in control as the ground below drew increasingly closer, alarms blaring in her ears all the while.

"Come on, come on, come on!" she grunted just before Aka made impact with the ground, and her vision went black.

o~o

Kallen wasn't sure how long she was out when she finally opened her eyes again. Her ears were ringing, and all she could make out was that everything was rather...grey.

She groaned as she felt her head spin a little. She hoped she didn't have a concussion from that crash. After taking some deep breaths to clear her vision, she saw that most of Aka's systems were down, a couple of lights barely giving off any color.

"You okay, Aka?" she pulled on one of the shifts to try and rouse her Lion. There was no acknowledgment, though. Physical or mental. "Okay. We'll fix you up. We had a tough battle," she said softly.

Though most of the internal systems were down or damaged, Aka's upper entrance on her head was able to open fairly smoothly for Kallen to get out. She hoisted herself up until she stood tall atop Aka's head, looking around at her barren surroundings.

"Where are we? Where have we landed?" she wondered aloud. How were the others-

She gasped as she remembered seeing Zenobia falling towards this same area. That meant Lelouch and C.C. were also here, "Lelouch. Lelouch!"

o~o

Another corrupt wormhole opened up practically on the other side of the galaxy, two more Lions spirally out of it towards what could only be described as a space version of a garbage dump.

Shirley and Rai both held tight in their Lions as they crashed and smashed through several pieces of debris before finally landing semi-solidly onto one of the more sturdy structures.

The Green Paladin groaned as he lifted his head, shaking it to clear his vision before looking around the room.

"What's the matter, girl?" he asked, poking a few buttons. After seeing that his attempts weren't waking Zerith up any time soon, he looked out the window again and spotted Zinnia not too far from where he landed.

"Shirley?" he called through the comms, "Shirley, you okay?" the response he got was the disgusting sound of someone puking out their lunch.

"Huh?" came the Orange Paladin's weak reply afterward, "What was that?"

"You just threw up, didn't you?" he asked in sympathetic disgust.

"Yeah… maybe a little."

"...Anyway, are you okay? How's your Lion?" he asked.
"Uh... well, I have been better, but Zinnia isn't responding. Where are we anyway?" she asked.

"Well, wherever it is, looks like there's no gravity here." Rai observed, "It's like a trash nebula of some kind."

"So... what do we do then?" Shirley asked anxiously.

Rai stretched out his legs and sighed, "Well, the only thing we can do right now is to wait. That's the best thing to do when you're lost, right? Just stay put until someone comes to find you."

"...Huh," Shirley said.

"What's up?" Rai asked, sensing that the Orange Paladin had a question on her tongue.

"Um... I guess I'm just amazed how calm you are right now, Rai," Shirley admitted, "I mean... during the battle, you got pretty scared. You just froze up, right in the middle of all of it. So... are you really okay?"

Rai was silent for about ten ticks before he answered, "I felt a presence. How do I explain this...? I don't know what exactly was going on, but whatever it was, it felt like the Grim Reaper was breathing down my neck..."

Shirley swallowed as her mind flashed back to the witch lady that was hurting Lelouch. She knew she couldn't prove it, but Shirley had a feeling that she was the one that corrupted the wormhole. But if that happened.

"Oh, man! What do we do?! We don't know where the others are, or even if they are still alive, we don't know if we'll even be rescued or if we're going to die out here-"

"Shirley! Calm down!" Rai ordered sternly, "Take a deep breath, everything is going to be okay, our friends will find us... But I do agree; we should find out where exactly we are."

O~O

The Castle of Lions itself was still flying erratically down the corrupted wormhole. Allura struggled to maintain control as it nearly slammed into the outer walls several times.

Coran was furiously typing away at the main computer, trying to get the systems back under control.

"Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us," he exclaimed.

"Coran, look! There appears to be something on the other end," Allura shouted, sounding frightened, "We're heading right toward it!"

"Scanners show that there's no exit. It's just nothingness," the advisor turned back to the Princess frantically, "Find an exit before we run smack into the void!"

Allura pulled up the coordinate and navigation panels and attempted to enter something into them. But the red warning lights continued to flash, accepting nothing the Princess put into them, "I can't. I've lost control of the Castle!"

"Brace yourself! We're about to hit it!" Coran warned as the Castleship disappeared into the black void and faded away...
The Castle of Lions was erratically flying down the wormhole, struggling to stay on course. Coran was furiously typing away at the main computer, trying to get the systems back under control.

"Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us," he exclaimed.

Allura, having closed her eyes when they ran through the void, opened them and blinked. She looked around confused but relieved to see that they were all still alive.

"Coran, we're okay!" she exclaimed happily.

"What are you talking about? We've lost all the lions!" the advisor argued, turning back to look at the Princess.

"We've just smashed into a black void. Don't you remember? Hmm?" the Princess suddenly felt a pressure on her shoulder. She turned, and to her shock saw a small squirrel looking creature had hopped on. The squirrel was pink, just like-

The Princess gasped, "What happened to the mice? They've transformed!" she looked down from the teludav pedestals and saw that all four of the mice were now squirrels.

Allura looked towards Coran, hoping to get an answer, only to gasp again, "Coran?!" It was indeed still Coran, but his uniform was a little different, and his hair was slightly longer, tied in a low ponytail and a small lock hanging by the side of his face.

Coran turned to Allura, concerned, "Why are you looking at me like that?" he asked, twirling his mustache, "Do I have a boogie stuck in my mustache again?"

"No. You look... younger!" Allura exclaimed. Before more questions could be asked though, the Castle shook again, the same warnings appearing as the void from before approached closer.

"Scanners show that there's no exit. It's just nothingness!" Coran shouted with a grunt.

"You said that already!" Allura yelled, sounding flustered.

"Find an exit before we smack into the void!" he exclaimed, unknowingly, for the second time.

"I'm entering coordinates to get us out of here," Allura said, trying to type into the screen, only for it to beep red back at her in error, "The Castle won't accept an endpoint!"

"Just enter any coordinates!" Coran ordered desperately.

"I tried, but the system is locked," Allura explained, still furiously typing the screens, "I can't get a signal out or receive a signal in."

The Princess froze in her movement as the void came once more upon them.

"Allura!" Coran shouted, terrified, as the Castle of Lions was sucked through once more…

...And just like the time before, with the Castle of Lions was erratically flying down the wormhole, struggling to stay on course.

Coran was furiously typing away at the main computer, trying to get the systems back under control.
"Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us," he exclaimed. This time, he was even younger, with his hair cut very short and in a uniform in short sleeves, clearly showcasing his muscles. He smirked and swiped his hair back before pointing forward at nothing in particular.

"Oh, no! You're even younger now!" Allura groaned. This was starting to get ridiculous.

"What's the matter? You look confused," Coran asked, striking several strange poses to showcase his lithe form in the process, "Don't worry, Princess, I'll get us out of here."

Allura sighed in exasperation, only for a small growl to make her jump in surprise.

The mice that had previously been squirrels had been transformed once again. This time they seemed to be some mini form of Altean cow-hippo creatures.

"We appear to be in some sort of time loop that's affecting everyone but me," Allura deduced as one of the mice-hippo-cows licked her along her back. The other three were crowded closely around her.

"Scanners show that there's no exit. It's just…"

"Nothingness, I know," Allura finished for him, getting more irritated, "And we can't find another exit point."

"Don't just stand there. We've got to find a way," Coran proclaimed, pointing at the Princess before spinning. He then struck another dramatic pose, "I'll never give in to nothingness!"

Coran didn't have time to say anything else as the Castle vanished into the void once more.

o~o

Lelouch jolted awake as he felt someone dragging him under his arms. He groaned and blinked. One side of his world was tinted dark from his mask, and the other he could see was grey sky and rocky, barren walls.

"So, you're still alive after all," C.C. quipped as she came to a small stop. She helped Lelouch sit up more fully as the Black Paladin looked around. A short distance away, he spotted Zenobia, lying brokenly to the side of, what he assumed, was a large canyon. C.C. must have got him out of her while he was still unconscious.

"C.C. where are we?" he asked, warily looking around.

"I haven't the foggiest idea. If I did, I'd tell you," the immortal responded.

Lelouch groaned as he staggered to his feet. He winced and clutched his side. The glowing wound that Haggar had inflicted on him earlier hadn't ceased its throbbing. Fortunately, Lelouch was able to focus enough to remember that he saw the Red Lion had landed on this barren planet as well.

He activated his helmet to try and contact Kallen, who he prayed was alright.

"Kallen, are you there? Kallen?" he asked, hoping he didn't sound too desperate.

"I tried contacting her earlier," C.C. informed him, "but I couldn't get a signal. We'll need to get to higher ground."

Lelouch nodded mutely, and the two started struggling towards the upper walls of the canyon.
"Lelouch, can you hear me? C.C.?” Kallen called into the commlink as she continued to run towards the canyon that her helmet told her was where Zen was located, "Lelouch, are you there?"

All Kallen received in reply was static on the other end. She grit her teeth as she continued to sprint across the landscape, which she found had quite low gravity itself. She panted as she came closer and closer to the canyon.

C.C. and Lelouch managed to make some pretty steady progress along a canyon path. Lelouch continued to groan in pain from his wound but knew they wouldn't be able to do much about it until the Castle found them, so he didn't voice his discomfort. Though he was confident that C.C. was well aware of it already.

"Lelouch are you there?—" Kallen's scratchy voice broke through Lelouch's helmet at last, "Answer me!"

Lelouch gasped in surprise but quickly responded, "Kallen, I'm here. Kallen!" Lelouch then cried out as the wound to his side flared up, causing him to lose his balance. He would've fallen had C.C. not been there to lower him to the ground.

"Lelouch, it's Kallen!" the Red Paladin exclaimed through the comms.

"Kallen, we hear you," Lelouch responded once he was on the ground, "We're okay."

They heard Kallen chuckle humorlessly on the other end, "Looks like we made it."

"Oh, you know, I can finally check off ‘getting sucked into an unstable alien wormhole and crashing onto an unknown planet with a heavily wounded companion’ off my long list of ‘new ways to die.’ But how are you, Kallen?” C.C. answered back with a wry smile.

Lelouch shivered. C.C.'s dark humor scared him at times.

"Not good. Aka's busted," Kallen answered as she leaped down from a ledge and across a couple of floating rocks. She then stops short when C.C.'s words register, "Wait, wound? What wound?"

"It-It's nothing Kallen,” Lelouch told her hurriedly. His wound, however, was the least of his worries right now. His mind kept flashing back to his encounter back at the main base. He still remembered Haggar searching through his mind and memories that he had wished he could forget flashing before his eyes.

And what terrified him most was that Zarkon, the Emperor of the Galra Empire, himself, possessed a Geass of his own. Lelouch didn't know how, but it seemed that the origin of this power dated back farther than even C.C. initially believed. But he had used it to overpower him and take the Black Lion from him so easily.

Yes, he was terrified.

"Hang on. I'm coming!” Kallen exclaimed through the radio.
A moment later, however, a different noise caught the pair's attention. Looking back at where they had left Zen, they saw what looked like some sort of alien lizard, the body and physique looking similar to Earth's komodo dragons, and stalking around the Lion and growling menacingly. They sounded hungry.

"Kallen… on second thought, you need to hurry!" Lelouch whispered urgently.

Rai grunted as he leaped off of another piece of space debris. He and Shirley had been sitting in their Lions for about an hour when he started to get bored. He told the Orange Paladin that he was going to try and find something to help jumpstart their Lions. Shirley was far too scared to be left on her own, however, and decided to stick close to him.

Very close.

Rai was eventually able to grab onto what looked like an old antenna from one of the ships and propped himself on top. It wasn't by much, but he did get a slightly better view of their surroundings.

He gasped when he saw a pair of what looked like blue eyes staring at him in the dark debris.

"What's that?" he whispered.

Shirley heard him, and immediately got spooked. She leaped back with a small shriek and hid comically behind him, holding his jetpack tightly. As she did so, more eyes seemed to light up in front of them.

"Wha-is it gonna eat us?! Does it have teeth?!" She demanded in a shrill tone.

Rai calmly held his arm out protectively in front of her and reached for his bayard with his other hand, holding it in front of him.

"Who's there?!" he shouted into the darkness, though his arm trembled in slight fear as well.

Rai felt his blood run cold as about twenty more eyes opened to stare at him and Shirley.

However, their fear was misplaced, as the creatures finally emerged from the wreckage. They weren't monsters at all, but what appeared to be little, fluffy pill bugs with large googly eyes. The first to approach them was pink, but blue, yellow, green, and many other colors floated towards them in a cluster, chittering curiously.

"Oh… my… GOSH!" Shirley squealed, stepping out fully. She wore a massive smile on her face, and her eyes resembled large, beating red hearts, "These are the cutest things I've ever seen!"

"Hey little guys." Rai greeted kindly as a couple came up to him as well. He held up his palm as the 'leader' sniffed it, "You're too cute to be found in a dump like this. Are you guys the only ones living here?"

"I hope our rough landing didn't disturb your day," Shirley added while swooning over two that hovered by her face, "Don't worry, we'll only be here for a little while."

"Yeah, we're just waiting for our friends to find us. We were separated during a wormhole jump," Rai explained, though he thought a moment later if these creatures even could understand them.
However, he was proven wrong when five of the creatures suddenly lined up in front of him and Shirley in a straight line. They chittered happily.

"Yeah, that's right! Friends!" Shirley nodded in confirmation, a pleased smile on her face.

Despite the light atmosphere, Rai couldn't help but frown and turn to look towards the expanse of space, "I sure hope they find us soon."

o~o

The Castle of Lions was erratically flying down the wormhole, struggling to stay on course.

"Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us," an emo-teen version of Coran said indifferently before sighing dramatically, "This is so boring."

"Coran, please! I don't need any of your attitude right now!" Allura exclaimed with a cringe as the mice, now snails crawled up her body.

"You don't understand me at all!" teen-Coran pointed at her, accusingly, "You have no idea what I'm going through! I'll be in my control area! Hmmph!" he said grumpily and turned his back to her.

Allura still desperately tried to plug in coordinates into the Castle's systems, but just like the last several times, it wouldn't accept any endpoints.

"I can't manually enter coordinates," Allura sighed. Her eyes then suddenly brightened in realization, "But the Castle will automatically lock on to the "ions' whereabouts if we can locate them," she immediately turned off the manual coordinate panel and brought up the star chart, sensing for where the Lions may have landed. To her shock, though, error signs appeared on the map too, and she couldn't detect any of the Lions whatsoever! "It's not working! I'm unable to hone in on their location."

Allura then jumped slightly as operatic music started blaring throughout the bridge. Flabbergasted, she turned to the culprit, Coran, who continued to turn up the volume.

"Coran, turn that down! Our lives are at stake!" she shouted.

"I can only express myself through music!" he shot back defiantly.

Allura growled and gripped the edges of the teludav, a dark aura surrounding her as her anger rose dangerously high. The mice-snails seemed to sense her ire and hurriedly tried to slither as far from her as possible, "Coran, if you don't turn that down, I swear I'll turn this Castle around and-"

"And what?" he asked, a large amount of sass in his tone, "We're just gonna run into this void that's coming up here. I hate everybody!"

His shout was the last thing heard before the Castle disappeared into the void once more…

...The Castle of Lions was erratically flying down the wormhole, struggling to stay on course.

"Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us… whatever that means," the voice of an adolescent Coran said as he leaned excitedly against the controls.

"We've tried everything, and nothing's worked," Allura exclaimed, sounding scared now. And the mice had now seemed to converge into one giant, four-headed creature that looked similar to a
small Earth dinosaur, "A few more trips down this wormhole and you're going to disappear. We must find a way out."

"Just blast your way out! Duh!" kid-Coran said before he began to run around, gleefully making airplane noises, his arms stretched out to the sides.

"I suppose it's worth a try," Allura nodded, willing to try anything to get out of the time loop, "The Castle defenses might have enough firepower to destroy the tunnel."

"Yeah! And it'll go ker-plooey!" Coran exclaimed as he enthusiastically jumped onto the four-headed creature.

Allura immediately activated the ship's cannon, aiming right for the center of the tunnel. She gasped in fear and shock as the blast was absorbed by the tunnel's end, and fired right back at them.

"It's not working! It's like we're shooting at ourselves!" she shouted, maneuvering the ship around the deflected blasts.

Kid-Coran blew a raspberry, and asked, "Where's Voltron?" before the Castle was once more absorbed into the void.

o~o

Kallen grunted as she jetted herself across the landscape as fast as she could.

"Lelouch, what's happening?!" she shouted into the comm.

"There are several creatures," he said before cutting off again.

After Kallen's next jump, where her foot had been a moment ago, a large pillar of water erupted, shooting several meters into the air. Having felt the tremors, Kallen took a moment to look behind her, and her eyes widened when she saw the geyser.

o~o

Meanwhile, back in the gorge, C.C. and Lelouch attempted to put more distance between them and the creatures, backing away slowly so they wouldn't be noticed.

They failed to see that another one had snuck up from behind until it roared loudly at them, alerting its comrades in the process. The two that had been sniffing around Zen quickly ran up the path that the two had taken earlier, and the Paladin and witch soon found themselves surrounded.

Lelouch hissed in pain as he tried to stand protectively in front of C.C. as the creatures closed in on them.

o~o

Kallen gasped in shock as more geysers suddenly erupted around her.

"Uh oh!" she exclaimed before running in the only direction one hadn't exploded from, and just before one erupted where she'd previously been standing.

The momentum of her jump carried her a reasonable distance as more erupted in her wake. She started to try and run in zig-zag to try and dodge around where she thought ones might explode from. Finally, she used her jetpack to propel herself into the air and away from the geyser minefield. But the moment she landed again, more began erupting behind her.
With a shout and gasp, she barreled forward as she dove forward, narrowly missing one from behind her again, only to go tumbling over the edge of a cliff with a yell.

o~o

As the reptiles surrounded them on the cliff edge, Lelouch spotted probably their only hope of safety. A small crevice in some rocks down below.

Lelouch nudged C.C. and pointed towards the cave. The immortal turned and saw it as well. This, however, cost her, as the moment she turned her back, one of the creatures leaped forward and sliced its claws deeply into her back. C.C. screamed in surprise and agony.

Lelouch, adrenaline kicking in, grabbed C.C. around the waist and rocketed towards the cave opening with his jet pack. The creatures chased after them, but the two managed to make it inside safely before they could get caught.

Lelouch gasped in relief as the creatures attempted to slam into the opening, struggling to get to them.

"Kallen? Kallen are you okay?" Lelouch asked into the comm, having heard her scream earlier, "What happened?"

o~o

Kallen panted as she clung for dear life on the side of the cliff. Just as she began falling, she had ripped out her bayard and slammed her cestus into the side of the rock wall.

"Minor delay," she replied, "but I'm on my way!" With a grunt she managed to propel herself upwards with her jetpack, using her bayard as a crutch to do so. She rolled with a huff back onto the surface, sitting for a moment to catch her breath.

"We're alright for now," Lelouch said, "but we're trapped in a cave, and some nasty-looking creatures have us cornered. One of them got C.C. pretty good. She's okay, though."

Kallen breathed out slowly before getting back to her feet, "Stay put. I'm on my way... I just have to figure this out," she sighed as she looked across the chasm that nearly claimed her life.

o~o

"Whoo-hoo! Yay!" Shirley giggled as she slowly flipped through the air. She had about a dozen of the small aliens following after her, squeaking all the way, "This isn't too bad. Not so long as you cuties can keep us company!"

Rai stifled a laugh. He was glad that Shirley was remaining cheerful, remembering how terrified she'd been back at the base, and when they had landed. Watching her smile and laugh made him feel warm inside.

Though, now that he didn't need to worry too much about the Orange Paladin, it gave Rai a few precious moments to think. His mind kept wandering back to the battle, mainly when he felt Haggar's presence in the back of his mind. Ever since Milly and Lelouch found him wandering the streets, Rai had hoped that he could eventually regain the memories he lost, but from the few recovered, whether on his own or through the help of others, Rai wasn't sure he wanted to know anymore. Just picturing the witch, her glowing eyes and purple skin, made his skin crawl and his stomach turn.
He swallowed back bile once more when the creatures around them started squeaking urgently.

"What is it?" he asked curiously before following their gaze. Shirley had also stopped to look at what was causing such a fuss.

They were both pleasantly surprised to see that both Zerith and Zinnia's eyes were lighting up again, and their particle barriers cascading around them.

"Alright! You're working again!" Rai exclaimed, waving his arms excitedly.

"Welcome back!" Shirley called over. She attempted to jet pack over to Zinnia, only for her foot to suddenly get caught on a thick wire. She yelped in alarm as she is accidentally yanked down and slammed face-first into some debris.

"Shirley! You okay?" Rai exclaimed as he propelled himself towards her.

The Orange Paladin shook her head with a groan as pieces of junk floated away from her impact. Rai sighed in relief to see that Shirley wasn't hurt.

One of the green creatures glided over to them and squeaked curiously.

"No, sorry, it's not our friends," Shirley sighed, still laying where she landed, "just an old, rusty satellite."

Rai scowled, but then his eyes lit up, "Wait! That's it! Maybe we can find our friends before they find us!"

"Huh?" Shirley asked in confusion.

"Come on, Shirley, I'll need your help!" Rai said, before propelling towards another trash island and digging through parts. Still confused, but now determined, she followed after him.

The first things that they retrieved were long wires and chords they could use to drag some of the junk. Rai then went digging through several other junk piles to find the parts he needed. With each item he brought back, he had Shirley tie the cord around each of them. Once Rai determined they had everything they needed, he tied the end of the rope around his waist and started space jumping back towards Zerith, Shirley and the creatures right behind him. Due to the almost zero-gravity, it was easy to move the heavy equipment. After getting the first trip of equipment set up by his Lion, Rai and Shirley went to find more parts and tools.

"Wow Rai," Shirley commented at one point as he retrieved what looked like a makeshift wrench, "you're super smart! I never would've thought to use a satellite, much less know how to make one.

"I'm not sure how to explain it," Rai admitted sheepishly, "I guess it just kind of clicks with me, you know? Who knows? Maybe I was a scientist before this."

Shirley chuckled before looking at him, concerned, "Have you remembered anything else? About your past?"

Rai frowns, "Not much more. All I can recall is my mom and sister. Their faces and names anyway."

"Nothing else?"

He shakes his head with a frustrated sigh, "No, nothing. I-I don't even know how we got captured
in the first place."

"...What about your dad?" Shirley asked, recalling that the Green Paladin had never even brought his father up before.

This caused Rai to pause, "...No idea. If I do have a dad, I don't remember him," he confessed with a grimace.

Shirley bit her lip and looked at him sympathetically. She couldn't imagine not remembering her dad. Deep down, she hoped that Rai's father was still alive. Then once they found his mom and sister, and defeated Brittania and the Galra, they could be a real family, not have to worry about evil aliens or corrupt leaders.

Shirley then spotted a small tool that looked like pliers and went to retrieve it. On her way back, though, her foot got tangled in a cord. With a yelp, she tripped in the air and fell right on top of Rai.

"Oh! Sorry!" Shirley yelped and tried to roll herself off of her. But she miscalculated the zero gravity, and accidentally pulled Rai on top of her.

With their faces just barely inches apart from each other.

Before either Paladin could adequately process the position they were in, the little creatures started squeaking excitedly, and several of them formed a large heart around their flailing bodies.

The Green and Orange Paladins blushed harder than the paint on Aka's metal.

Rai, still blushing, coughed, "I should... you know... go check on the... the thing."

"Yeah, I'll... check on the other... thing," Shirley answered before the two scrambled away from each other in opposite directions.

Despite the small mishap, though it took some time, eventually Rai was able to construct a makeshift satellite. Now they would just need to power it on.

O~O

"Okay, okay, think," Kallen muttered as she paced around cautiously, not wanting to disrupt any more of the geysers, "how can I get across this... what would-what would Zero do?" she asked, forgetting for a moment that the comms were on.

She heard a faint chuckle in her helmet, causing her to freeze for a moment.

"Well at the moment, 'Zero' can't do much stuck in a cave," Lelouch joked lightly.

Kallen scoff before a small trickling crack caught her attention. She walked towards it and slammed her heal down on top of it. Moments later, an enormous geyser erupted.

"You know Lelouch... I guess I should thank you. If it weren't for you, I'd probably be six feet under in Shinjuku right now," she suddenly said, staring up at the water that showed little sign of stopping.

Lelouch chuckled on the other end, "It's interesting how a few weeks ago, we were part of the Black Knights in Japan. Now we're Defenders of the Universe of all things. What we were doing back on Earth seemed tiny compared to now, huh?"

"Say, Kallen," C.C.'s voice comes through this time, "Tell us. How'd you feel about finding out
"your 'high and mighty leader' is the prince of an empire you loathe more than anything else?"

Kallen scowled a little before answering, "...I'll admit, when Lelouch first spilled his guts, the first thing I wanted to do was punch in the jaw. Maybe knock out a few teeth. That would've felt good."

She could almost feel the grimace that Lelouch had on his face at that moment.

"But..." she paused, "...after hearing what you went through, I understand why you're not only fighting Britannia but why you had to hide your identity."

"...Yeah. I doubt any of the Black Knights would have considered joining forces with a Prince of Britannia. Even a disgraced, banished one."

Kallen couldn't help but chuckle at the dark humor there. Because it was so true. Then a thought hit her as she turned away from the geyser.

"Wait a second, while we're on the subject, what about the bathroom? I got a phone call from Zero in there, but you were the one that gave me the phone!"

"Oh, that..." Lelouch sounded quite embarrassed on the other end, "Um...I just used my Geass on Sayoko to play that recording at a certain time. That's all. Sorry I had to deceive you like that but didn't want to risk Nunnally getting dragged into it. I honestly still don't."

Kallen nodded instead of retorting though, "It's fine, I get it. Naoto was the exact same way. The only reason I joined their group was out of sheer stubbornness to help."

"...So, how exactly was the view Lulu?" C.C. suddenly asked, rather seductively. Kallen heard Lelouch squawk on the other end, and she felt her cheeks start to burn up, "I mean, it's not every day you get the gorgeous view of a woman naked."

Kallen growled as she heard Lelouch sputter incomprehensibly.

'I'm so kicking that witch once we're out of here!' she thought furiously as she withdrew her bayard in its cestus form. It wasn't the claws that she was interested in though. She stared down at the small hatch at the center of the glove. She still couldn't put a name to what exactly it did, but it would probably serve her needs right now just fine.

Lelouch then started coughing hard through the link, and Kallen's stomach dropped she had to hurry.

Without wasting another moment, the hatch flipped open, and Kallen slammed it into the ground, right near the edge of the cliff.

The result was precisely what she expected. From where the glove's force hit, water burst from the side of the cliff, propelling Kallen on a small rock ledge over halfway across the canyon. She laughed at her apparent success at first, before the ridge suddenly crumpled beneath her feet and she was once more free-falling into the canyon below.

With a scream of fear, Kallen disappeared into the mist below, before she forcibly activated her jetpack as hard as she could. The force was strong enough to propel her to the other end of the canyon, where she latched onto the edge with a grunt and groan, and held on for dear life.

"Kallen?!" Lelouch shouted suddenly, sounding terrified, "Kallen you okay?"

"I'm fine," she answered, reshooting her jetpack to propel herself to her feet, "I'm on my way."
"Well put a rush on it!" C.C. exclaimed, sounding somewhat frightened herself, as she and Lelouch tried to scramble farther into the cave. They soon found their backs literally against the wall, "Because these things just started digging!"

The two watched in horror as the lizards threw back dirt and stone effortlessly, continuing to slam into the structure to catch them.

Kallen continued to fly towards their location, and her eyes widened as she caught a familiar sight. She laughed in relief, "Okay you two, I got visual on Zenobia! I'm almost there!"

Lelouch and C.C. didn't have time to respond though, as one of the lizards finally managed to squeeze its head into the hole it had dug, and bit down hard on C.C.'s leg. As the immortal cried out in pain, the creature reared back, tossing her and Lelouch, who attempted to pull her away but got pulled with her instead, out of the cave and into the clearing where three other reptiles were waiting.

The two of them struggled to their feet but were immediately forced to dodge as one of the creatures slammed its clawed foot down where they had been laying moments ago.

After recovering, the creature turned in C.C.'s direction, but the immortal managed to swing a kick that landed in one of the creature's four eyes. It roared in agony before collapsing, temporarily stunned.

Lelouch was then slammed forcibly to the side by another creature when his attention was temporarily on C.C., watching when she had sucker kicked her opponent. The force of the impact was so strong that it sent him tumbling over the edge into an even deeper gorge. As he rolled roughly down the slope, his helmet went flying off his head, losing any form of communication with Kallen. C.C. joined him shortly after, also losing her helmet.

Lelouch's side throbbed as he struggled to get back to his feet. Though the pain was nearly blinding, his fight-or-flight instincts won over, and he forced himself to run as the creatures started to give chase once more. C.C. paused to glance over at their helmets before joining him. Though she wouldn't technically die if these lizards caught them, she wasn't looking forward to the pain that she knew would follow.

Plus, she couldn't let Lelouch die, no matter what!

"Lelouch?! C.C.?! What happened?!" Kallen exclaimed after hearing their cries of distress.

When no reply came, Kallen growled, and forced her legs and jetpack to go faster, sprint-hopping towards Zen as soon as she could.

"Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this worm goes," Coran, now a toddler exclaimed as he stood on top of the control panel. His little stomach then let out a gurgle. He
looked down and held it lightly, "I hungry," he then started screaming and throwing a tantrum, jumping up and down on the panel forcibly.

"Coran, no! That is not a toy," Allura shouted, pushing past the mice, that now had turned into floating, blob-like things, to get to the Coran. She picked him up as he continued to struggle and scream, "You're going to break the Castle, and everything will stop!" Allura then blinked, and gasped, "Wait a second. Perhaps we can simply stop the Castle from moving."

She bent over the panel and started pressing some buttons, but apparently, Coran didn't like that very much and started pulling forcefully on her hair.

"No! Mine!" he screamed and growled before chomping down on Allura's arm.

The Princess screamed in pain before being forced to kneel on the floor to try and control the toddler. With a desperate grimace, she pressed down hard on one final button. The lights of the Castle dimmed, systems shut down, and all life seemed to leave it. But that did nothing!

"I've shut down all the power. Why are we still moving towards the void?" Allura asked, curious, and scared at the same time.

She then jumped when Coran started to bawl quite hard.

"Waaah! My control panel! Waaah!"

Coran's cries were the last thing to be heard before the Castle disappeared once more into the void.

When Allura came to again, she saw that she was standing at the teludav once more, and now had Coran, as a baby cradled in her arms. She barely noticed the mice, now flying around as winged birds, pass her by.

Coran started crying, and Allura gently cooed at her advisor, "I know, I know. Who wants to check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us? You do, that's who."

Coran seemed to quiet down at Allura's gentle words, but the Princess was now anything but calm, "We have to get out of this loop before the only thing left of you is your mustache!"

Allura blinked in surprise when she saw Coran's pacifier fly out of his mouth. Looking down at him, the advisor uttered one word.

"Poopies!"

Allura groaned in disgust, her eyebrow twitching. Now of all times?!

o~o

Kallen, with a huff of relief, finally managed to land at Zen's resting place. She didn't stop to check the Lion and rushed towards the edge of the cliff. She gasped at what she saw. The four monsters were chasing Lelouch and C.C. across the gorge, and Lelouch was holding his side tightly.

She knew that if she rushed in, she'd just get trapped too. There was no way she could take all of those things by herself. Unless...

She turned towards the down Lion at last and ran towards her muzzle.

"Zen, I know I'm not Lelouch, but he's in trouble. We need to help him," she pleaded, laying her hand on Zen's nose, looking desperately into her dark eyes.
Lelouch and C.C. slammed against the face of a rock wall and immediately dodged to the side as the creature at the front came and jumped but hit the wall instead.

Lelouch had just rolled to his feet when a tail slammed hard into his side. The side where his wound was located. He screamed in agony as he turned blindly into the middle of the group.

C.C. rushed to his side, standing protectively over him. She held her fists up defensively, but without a proper weapon, the situation didn't look good for either of them.

"Mauled by giant, alien lizards. That's a new one," she muttered humorlessly as she defiantly stared the largest one, the leader, down.

Lelouch coughed violently next to her, and her eyes wandered back to him. If she wanted Lelouch to live, she had to figure out something fast. Make herself seem more appetizing or easier to catch. If she had to endure being their next meal for Lelouch to escape, she'd do it.

For a split second, she blinked as to why she was so concerned about his safety, and a little voice in the back of her head told her it couldn't just be because he was a contractor.

Lelouch groaned as the pain finally subsided enough that he could think. He pushed himself to his knees, his right arm softly crackling with electricity. The four creatures surrounded them on all sides, and the Black Paladin grit his teeth and narrowed his eyes at the one in front of him. If he was going to die, it wasn't going to be lying down.

"Watch out!" C.C. shouted, jumping in front of Lelouch, just as one of the lizards behind them leaped in for the kill.

The lizard's bite never landed though, as a giant metal claw slammed down nearly on top of the lizard, causing it to fly forward over them. The two gasped and covered their faces as the dust and dirt flew everywhere.

Kallen growled as she thrust down on the controls and swung Zen's head to the side, where another creature was trying to sneak up on the pair down below.

Down below, the Black Lion turned and roared, her paw slamming down towards the creature. Her tail slammed down with a thud by Lelouch where another creature tried to leap at him.

The duo down below struggled to sit up and gasped as Zen's tail swished over their heads.

With one final roar of warning, the last creature scrambled away. Realizing that it wouldn't be getting past the Lino, it wisely chose to retreat.

"That ought to do it," he grinned as blue energy began to spread along the surface and edges,
"Now, let's see if we can get a hold of the Castle."

At the top, the satellite began to glow and almost seemed to send the signal they needed. But seconds later, the energy disappeared, powering back down.

"No, no!" Rai shouted in frustration.

"What's wrong?" Shirley asked, concerned.

Rai wasn't listening though as he clutched his helmet angrily, "We need to get out of here! We need to find our friends! Come on!" with a final shout, Rai threw his head back, staring up angrily at the sky. What he didn't notice though was a familiar red insignia blinking to life in his left eye, causing Shirley to gasp.

Suddenly, beneath them, Zerith's eyes fliker open, and she roars mightily. This managed to provide the power that they needed for the satellite as the structure shot a thin blue beam into the atmosphere.

"Heh, thanks Zerith," Rai grinned as he and Shirley flew into the mouth of his Lion. Once they were inside the Lion, Rai started typing in some algorithms and coordinates into the consoles, "Now, let's see if this thing works. I hope the signal is strong enough to reach the Castle."

As systems started flickering to life inside, Shirley finally spoke up, "Rai, so you do have a Geass?"

"I-I do?" he asked, looking back at her, surprised.

"Yeah, I saw it activate for a second when you were shouting."

"...Huh. I don't know. If I really have it, C.C. wasn't the one that gave it to me, as far as I know anyway," he confessed, though his frustration over his own amnesia was still evident.

"I don't think she did either," Shirley replied, "I mean, C.C. would've said something back at the Castle if she had, right?" she asked.

"That's true… Rai admitted with a frown. However, one unanswered questions spiraled in both of their heads. If C.C. hadn't given him Geass, who did? And why?

o~o

"Coran, what are we going to do? If we hit the end of the tunnel again, you'll cease to exist," Allura lamented, watching in fear as the void approached closer and closer once more.

Nothing she had tried worked. Even when the Castle was off, it was still pulled in. The outcome seemed inevitable.

Tears gathered in her eyes as she held the infant Coran close, "I'm sorry. You were like a second father to me."

A sudden beep caused the Princess to open her eyes again, and they widened with a gasp when she saw what the screen was showing.

"Coran, look! The Castle has locked onto a coordinate," she exclaimed, and hurriedly started typing in instructions onto the screen, "Come on. Come on!"

Just before the Castle to slam into the void again, a wormhole, a real one, opened up right in front
of them, and the Castle disappeared into it.

On the other end, Allura was relieved to see the starry universe around them as they flew towards the blue beacon that had summoned them.

"We made it!" she cried for joy.

She then frowned when she heard the unmistakable sound of snoring. Looking down, she saw that she was still holding Coran in her arms. However, he was no longer an infant, but a grown adult Altean, the exact same age he was when they first entered the void.

He smacked his lips and opened his eyes blearily.

"...Mum?"

With a huff, the Princess dropped her advisor from her arms, causing him to hit the floor with a yelp. The mice scurried up to Coran and squeaked in amusement, also back to normal.

Down below, Rai and Shirley, who had exited Zerith upon seeing the wormhole, grinned, happy to see a familiar sight.

"Rai, Shirley, you saved us! We were stuck in a time loop!" Allura explained, relieved to see two of the Paladins alive through the Castle window. Their faces clear to see on the monitors.

"You got us out with this giant trash pile!" Coran added, though he still winced from the pain of the large bump on his head.

"It's nothing," Rai said humbly, "It's just a make-shift communications link that sends out the Green Lion energy. It's similar to the energy that guided the Blue Lion home."

"Rai you're a genius!" Coran praised.

"Heh heh, thanks," he smiled, "though we did have some help."

Rai glanced over at Shirley, who was currently cuddling two of the creatures up to her chest, hearts in her eyes.

"Can we keep them?" she asked giddily.

"Hmmm..." Coran scratched his head as Allura giggled.

"Let's go get the rest of the Paladins."

o~o

"...Thanks for saving us Kallen," Lelouch said tiredly as he and the two women sat together by a fire they managed to make. They had managed to find not necessarily wood, but items that proved to be flammable with help from their jetpacks. Now they were all resting, with the two Lions standing guard over them.

"You'd have done the same for me," Kallen replied, "How's your wound?"

"Oh, my wound's great. It's getting bigger all the time," Lelouch said sarcastically, still holding his side where it was.

If you're trying to lighten the mood Lelouch, I'm afraid you're failing miserably," C.C. told him
"Hey, didn't hurt to try," Lelouch retorted tiredly.

"Just hang in there. When Allura and Coran find us, they'll fix you right up," Kallen said, trying to sound confident.

Lelouch's eyes then suddenly locked with Kallen's. She blinked in surprise. There was almost a… desperation behind the purple eyes of the Black Paladin as he spoke.

"Kallen… if I don't make it out of here… please… look after Nunnally."

She gasped a little surprise. She didn't know why Lelouch was acting like he was on his deathbed. This wasn't the leader that she knew.

"Lelouch, don't talk like that, you're going to make it," Kallen told him, a determined frown on her face.

Lelouch sighed, exhaustion clear in his features before his eyes glazed over and his body slumped against the rock he had been propped against.

"Lelouch!" Kallen gasped as she caught him as he nearly fell on his side. She and C.C. managed to maneuver him so that his head rested on C.C.'s leg. Probably not the most comfortable pillow, but better than nothing.

C.C. held her hand against his forehead and frowned, "His fever's rising. If he doesn't get help soon, he'll be in trouble."

"Where the hell are they?!" Kallen exclaimed, frustrated. Allura said the Castle could track the Lions anywhere in the universe. So why hadn't they been picked up? Unless… was the Castle damaged? If that was the case, then they really were in trouble.

"You seemed rather concerned about him," C.C.'s voice startled Kallen out of her mental crisis. She looked up at the immortal in surprise.

She then frowned, "You really think this is the time for teasing?!"

"What makes you think I was teasing you? I was quite serious," C.C. said calmly, "If you had a way to help him right now, you would, wouldn't you. As well as the others."

Kallen stared at C.C. before she narrowed her eyes, "What are you getting at?"

C.C. turned fully to face her, but was careful not to disrupt Lelouch's slumber, "I'll get right to the point, then. Do you wish to form a contract with me?"

Kallen gasped, stunned. Any words that she had to say died in her throat. Was C.C. really offering to give that Geass power? Why?

"You don't have to if you don't wish to," C.C. continued, "all Geass have risks and limitations. Some more dangerous than others."

Kallen scoffed, "You say that as if it's more dangerous to have one than not."

"As I said, it's your choice," the immortal said with finality, turning her attention back to the grey sky.
Kallen frowned and looked down at the ground. From what she could tell, the Geass did indeed have advantages. Shirley was able to quickly get them into the base unnoticed, and Lelouch was able to easily convince a Galra guard to surrender without a fight. But there were still mysteries and questions about it, some that C.C. admitted that she didn't even know about.

Kallen turned slightly in C.C.'s direction, "If I said 'yes,' what kind of power would I get?"

"That depends," C.C. answered, "and I don't have the answer, unfortunately. Geass manifests differently from person to person. Two people could have the same ability, but can only use in certain ways. Some could use their Geass in the same way, but the ability is different. All I know is that it depends on a person's desires and personality."

Kallen went silent again. Her mind racing. If desires came into play with it, she thoughts immediately went to not just her new team in Voltron, but to the Black Knights that were still waiting for them on Earth. She really hoped that they hadn't done anything too reckless while they'd been gone. She knew that Ohgi was likely keeping a cool head, but she wasn't so sure about Tamaki and some of the others.

Her thoughts also floated to her mom, who was currently being held for twenty years in prison for using the drug Refrain. Had she gotten wind that she was missing? How long had it been anyway? A few weeks? A month? If Kallen was honest, she had completely lost track of time being out here in outer space of all things.

She knew if her mother found out, she would be devastated. She had already lost Naoto and endured terrible abuse from Ms. Stadtfeld for years just to be near her. Would this be too much for her?

But Lelouch said he had accepted Geass to protect his sister, and to fight Britannia. And Shirley had taken it to save Shay and her family, and them in consequence.

Though it seemed dangerous, they needed all of the help they could get.

Her mind set, she turned to C.C. and held out her hand, "Let's do it."

C.C. in response grasped Kallen's hand firmly, and the Red Paladin gasped. Just like how Lelouch and Shirley described, images flashed through her mind, the tunnels of light and other people and places.

She felt a slight burning in her left eye just as C.C.'s hand releases hers. She instinctively held her hand up to it, grimacing slightly. As she pulls away, the Geass sigil is seen briefly before fading away.

Before Kallen could ask any further questions, a light above the camp caught her attention. As she and C.C. looked up, they saw to their relief that a wormhole had opened in the sky. Out of flew the sleek shape of the Orange Lion.

Upon seeing the Lions and three figures on the ground, Shirley smiled in relief and flew down to greet them.

Help had finally arrived.

o~o

Though the Emperor seemed to sit calmly on his throne, inside, he was enraged. The Black Lion and Voltron had been within his grasp, and it had slipped through fingers once more. Had the
barrier not suddenly gone down, Voltron would've been in the hands of the Galra empire now.

He glared menacingly at Prorok, who he had summoned with his squad immediately after the battle, demanding an explanation.

"Explain to me how you let Voltron escape!"

The commander sputtered fearfully, "Perhaps it was a mechanical failure, sire. Haggar boosted the solar barrier's power beyond its normal limits."

Haggar in question stood loyally by her emperor's side, also glaring at Prorok as well, "This was no mechanical failure. The two sentries that were guarding the barrier control were found destroyed. This was clearly sabotage."

Upon hearing this, Prorok raised his head to look at his emperor, Thace kneeling close by as well, "Lord Zarkon, I will start an investigation immediately. I will not rest until the perpetrators are captured."

"Perhaps I can save months of investigating," Zarkon answered darkly, sending a chill down Prorok's spine, "Who has been trying to chisel Voltron away from me this entire time? Who sent his fleet out without my orders to get Voltron?"

Prorok's eyes widened in fear when he realized what Zarkon was implying, "Sire, no! I-I would never do that."

Despite his begging, however, two sentries came up behind Prorok and began to drag him away.

"Get rid of him," the emperor ordered

"No! I'm innocent!" Prorok screamed as he was dragged away into the darkness.

"Before we dispose of him, the druids will find out all that he knows," Haggar promised with a scowl, "Then, he will receive a punishment worse than death."

Satisfied with Haggar's response, Zarkon turned his attention to the other Galra in the room, "Lieutenant Thace. You are now in charge of the investigation, Commander."

Thace in question gasped softly before lowering his head in a bow, "Vreplit sa."

As Thace stood to leave, something else also occupied Haggar's mind; the memories she had managed to extraction from the two Earthlings before and during the battle. Particularly the red symbols that marked them and the ones that inhabited their eyes. A similar symbol that occupied her Emperors.

The witch's eyes narrowed. Something else was at play here. And she was determined to discover what it was.

Chapter End Notes

AN: Hey everyone! Sorry for the longer wait, but I had a couple of weeks between semesters as my 'summer break', and I was using it as a time to relax. Due to that, I temporarily lost motivation to write in general. But I'm back! And don't worry, I'm not
planning on abandoning this fic anytime soon! This thing is my baby and I'm raising it into a masterpiece!

Now, I know a lot of you are wondering why no one is back on Earth yet, and I promise that that is coming in the next few chapters, and it's something that I've been waiting to write for a while! I'm just as excited as you! So, strap in! A few more chapters and things are going to get crazy!

R&R and see you next time!
"Lelouch! Kallen!" Suzaku shouted as he watched in horror as they both disappeared through the wormhole's wall. Rai and Shirley followed shortly after on the other side. Before he could shout further though, he felt something strike Yoru, and his vision turned black.

Had Suzaku been watching from outside his Lion, the things that struck him had been the Blue and Yellow Lions, who were already spiraling out of control in the complete opposite direction of everyone else, the Paladins inside of them screaming in terror the entire time. The three lions as one collided with far wormhole wall and disappeared.

o~o

Up above in a crystal blue sky, the wormhole opened its vast purple chasm, and spat the three lions out, hurtling them towards the icy planet down below.

Though Suzaku was still unconscious, Milly and Rivalz continued to scream as gravity took over and the three lions slammed hard into the ice-covered surface. The impact was hard enough to break the ice open, and the three lions started to sink deep towards the bottom of the planet's sea.

The crash was also hard enough to wake Suzaku up, as the impact nearly sent him flying out of his seat. Miraculously, even without seatbelts of any kind, he remained in place.

When Suzaku's eyes finally adjusted to seeing clearly again, he yelled in shock, seeing only the dark, murky depths surrounding the trio. Warning lights were blaring in red all around him as he tugged a couple of Yoru's controls to try and rouse her.

"Okay, that's not working. Um," Suzaku took a deep breath and then called over the comms, "Rivalz, Milly, you two okay?"

"Well, besides the fact that I got sucked out of a wormhole at light speed, then crash-landed on an ice planet and ended up underwater, doing great," Milly answered back sarcastically.

"Yeah, I'm fine too," Rivalz answered. The Blue Paladin took the time to try and activate one of Polaris's systems, but a warning light was all that answered him upon doing so.

Milly was also trying to wake up Maeraka, but wasn't having any luck, "My main system is down. The crash must have screwed it up. Do either of yours work?"

"Negative," Suzaku answered.

"Yeah, I'm on reserve power. My lion's pretty much dead in the water," Rivalz grinned, laughing at his pun.

The Purple and Yellow Paladins groaned in frustration.

"This situation's bad enough, Rivalz. Don't make it worse with puns," Milly scolded with a frown.

"I'm just shocked we hit a planet. Didn't Rai tell us that space was 90% empty?" Rivalz asked as the three lions started sinking past large rock outcroppings.
"Apparently, we got pretty lucky," Milly agreed, "maybe the inhabitants here can help us out, though."

"We should get back in contact with the others immediately," Suzaku said, as he pressed some buttons on the commlink, "Hello, Princess? Lelouch? It's Suzaku. If you can hear me, please respond!" the only thing that came out through the radio was static. Suzaku groaned, "The signal must be out of range."

"Or it's not working at all," Milly said, anxiety in her tone, "I mean, you and Kallen fought Zarkon two-to-one, and from what we could see, it looked like a rough fight."

"Rough? More like awesome! I mean, did you see that cannon Kallen and Aka pulled out? That was cool!" Rivalz exclaimed.

"Fight?" Suzaku breathed out an exhausted laugh, "More like a beatdown. Kallen and I were hitting Zarkon with everything we had, but we barely even made a dent in him. When Kallen pulled that cannon out, I think the only thing that did was surprise him. It honestly didn't look like he had even broken a sweat."

Rivalz gulped loudly on the other end, and Milly's face paled. The two Paladins now really hoped that they wouldn't face Zarkon themselves.

The three briefly braced themselves as they felt their lions softly land on the ocean bottom.

"Anyway, let's check for damage and get the lions running," Suzaku ordered.

"Copy that," the other two replied.

Just as Rivalz was about to try some buttons again, to his pleasant surprise, Polaris's lights started to blink on again, the room illuminating in a soft blue glow.

"Oh, good. Polaris is coming back online now. Welcome back, beautiful," he grinned as her head lifted up, and her eyes flashed with light.

Rivalz was also the first to realize that they weren't the only ones down at the bottom, as a humanoid figure suddenly swam out of view of Polaris's lights.

The Blue Paladin blinked, "Uh... guys, did-did you just see something swim by?"

"What?" Suzaku asked, sounding confused.

"No, I didn't see anything," Milly added.

Swallowing the small knot of fear that was forming in his stomach, Rivalz turned Polaris's head to the left. He saw the same creature again but managed to get a good look at her figure, and he gasped.

"No way!" he exclaimed, "Guys, this is going to sound crazy, but I think I just saw a mermaid."

"Wait, what?" Suzaku asked, sounding shocked.

"Okay, Rivalz, how hard did you bang your head when we hit the planet?" Milly asked skeptically.

"No, I'm serious!" Rivalz shouted in frustration, only to yelp when he spotted the mermaid swim by again, Polaris's head following it. "Look! There it is again!" Rivalz was trying so desperately to keep his eye on the creature, that he was having Polaris swim around in literal circles, "Hey, come
here! Where you going?" Suddenly the mermaid made an angled swim upward, causing Polaris to do a backward somersault before she finally stopped, "Hey, slow down!"

"Rivalz, careful!" Suzaku shouted, "We have to stay focused and get to the others... You're outside of your lion," Suzaku frowned as he watched the Blue Paladin manually leave his lion to swim closer to the mermaid.

"I know we have to find the others. I'm just saying maybe this thing can help," Rivalz told them as he looked back at them, "Also, it's a mermaid. A mermaid! Come on, let's find it."

"Hey, wait up!" Milly exclaimed as Rivalz started swimming the direction the mermaid disappeared to. She quickly exited Maeraka to catch up with Suzaku reluctantly following behind.

Once the two caught up the Blue Paladin, Suzaku activated his gauntlet, and a blue light appeared from the end. He shined it around the rock formations that surrounded them, and eventually, the glow did fall on the mermaid in the distance. She seemed to be waiting for them to follow her.

"Come on!" Rivalz exclaimed once they spotted her, his jetpack spurting him forward. Milly and Suzaku were quick to follow, Suzaku still shining the flashlight. The mermaid weaved around the rocks as if it were a jungle jim, but she never got too far away that they lost her.

"I can't believe this," Milly exclaimed, sounding excited, "we're actually chasing a mermaid! Of all things!"

The only one that didn't look like he was in fairytale land was Suzaku, who kept a skeptical frown on his face the entire time they followed the mermaid. "Either way, we still need to be careful. She could be dangerous."

"How can a mermaid be dangerous?" Rivalz asked, raising an eyebrow.

"*Harry Potter. Spiderwick Chronicles.*" Suzaku listed off, matter-of-factly, "The mermaids in both of those series are dangerous!"

Before any more debate could sprout from their conversation though, the mermaid suddenly turned sharply to the left and disappeared.

"Hey, wait, wait, wait! We're friendly!" Rivalz called out after her, Suzaku's light still shining in her direction.

Milly then gasped as she looked in front of them. The boys followed her gaze and gasped as well.

"Whoa! And here I thought Atlantis was a fairytale!" Rivalz exclaimed. Down below, they saw what looked like an underwater village with a large, bushy garden in the center and a building they could only assume was a palace directly behind it.

"Hello," a friendly voice greeted them from behind. The Paladins leaped back and were surprised to see the mermaid that they had been tracking directly behind them, her hands folded in front of her, "Welcome to my village. Here, all are safe and warm."

Now that they had a proper look at the mermaid, the trio could say that she didn't look like any mermaid they'd ever seen. She had pale pink skin, a powerful orange fishtail, raggedy pink finlets situated on her hips and pink stripes on her tail and crotch area. Her eyes were entirely blue and reflective, with pink discoloration on her eyelids and two spots in the semblance of eyebrows. She has long pink hair with prominent side-bangs and a white patch running down the middle, with flimsy pink antennae located on her forehead. She was also wearing a yellow, short-sleeved crop
top exposing her torso. The shirt had a green ruffle collar, a reverse sweetheart neckline and pink spots on the shoulders. She also had on pink ballroom gloves with sharp-looking fins on the elbow.

As the mermaid smiled at them, the Paladins then heard the sound of rushing water behind them. Looking back they yelped as two large muscle sea creatures, wearing some kind of armor swam up behind them. One looked like alien walrus and the other a large purple, humanoid fish.

"Please, do not startle out guests!" the mermaid scolded the soldiers after the Paladins had scattered away from them. After they saw that it was safe, though, they approached the merfolk again.

"I am Florona," the mermaid finally introduced herself with a soft smile, "The almighty Queen Luxia, keeper of our land, would love to meet with you."

"Wait. How did your queen know we were here?" Suzaku asked suspiciously.

Florona just smiled mysteriously, "Queen Luxia knows all."

This answer didn't sit well with the Purple Paladin. Something in his gut told him that something was wrong, but he knew he couldn't do anything without proof, first. While he made a quick mental note to be cautious, he followed Rivalz and Milly as they were escorted to some giant seahorses that they were encouraged to mount.

As the three merfolk escorted the Paladins closer to the Castle, they couldn't help but notice how beautiful the village itself was. The homes seemed to be made mostly of rocks and coral, and small crevices glowing with glow and pink light illuminated the background. More merfolk of all shapes and sizes stared after them as they passed by.

"This place is beautiful," Milly commented with a small.

"Yeah…” Rivalz agreed with a nod.

Suzaku, though he admitted to himself that it was a pretty place, still spoke cautiously, "Guys, I know this mermaid thing is cool and all, but we really gotta go."

"We will, Suzaku, we will, but let's meet this queen first. Besides, maybe she can help us," Milly argued back.

"Yeah," Rivalz nodded before an almost devious grin spread over his face, "And, if I just happen to find the future Mrs. Cardemonde, well, then that is alright with me."

The Blue Paladin then suddenly yelped as he felt something hit him hard in the shin. Looking over, he saw that Milly's ride had drifted a little closer to his, but the Yellow Paladin continued to stare ahead as if nothing happened.

"Sorry, foot slipped," she quipped aloofly.

Rivalz scowled. Sometimes he wondered what was going on in that girl's head.

The seahorses eventually came to a stop in front of the palace's entrance and the three Paladins dismounted. Waiting for them at the front was who they could assume was the queen surrounded by two additional guards. She had teal skin, a long, dark blue fishtail that was speckled with teal spots, and large smooth finlets on her arms by her wrists. Her eyes were also blue. Her hair was light seafoam green and styled into two large hoops behind her back, and her ears were also small purple finlets that had large thin dangling earrings hanging from them.
"Space travelers, I am Queen Luxia," she greeted them warmly, "I welcome you to our village as honored guests."

"The honor's all ours," Rivalz greeted before attempting to bow, "I'm Ri-i-i-i-valz!" he then yelped as the water accidentally sent him floating over backward.

Despite this embarrassing stunt, Suzaku was quick to recover, "Hello Your Majesty, I'm Suzaku, and this is Milly," Suzaku turned and gestured to the Yellow Paladin who was assisting Rivalz in getting upright again, "We need your help. We crash-landed on your planet, but we really need to get back in touch with our friends who are in space. Would you possibly have any way of doing that?"

The queen smiled, "Suzaku, Milly, Rivalz, I can solve all of your problems. Here, we are all safe and warm."

"You use magic, don't you?" Milly guessed, "This castle's a ship, isn't it? This castle is a ship, am I right? Just don't say anything if I'm right." Milly held up her hands jokingly as she smiled from her babbling.

"Here, I've brought you these," the queen said, as another guard swam up behind her, carrying what looked like a giant conch shell, "The bubble coral will provide you with all the air you need."

The merman swam up to Suzaku and placed the coral against his helmet. To the Paladin's surprise, a giant bubble came out of it and engulfed his entire head. He gasped as he ran his hands along the bubble's surface. It felt dense like thick plastic and showed no signs of breaking in his grip. Even when his hands did penetrate the surface, no water rushed in afterward as he lifted his helmet from his head.

"We thank you," Suzaku said graciously as he lowered his helmet to his side. The merman quickly administered bubbles to Milly and Rivalz as well.

"Cool!" Rivalz exclaimed as Milly laughed. The queen started speaking again as they bost took off their helmets as well.

"And rest assured, your space vessels will be well protected," she gestured above them, and the Paladins turned and gasped as they saw their Lions, with particle barriers up, being transported on thick beds of seaweed towards the palace, "Now, please, follow me."

Before they could do so though, Rivalz noticed the large glowing plant behind them, the one they had been able to see from the edge of the village, "What is that?"

"That is the giver of life to our people, the Baku Garden," Luxia happily explained, "When the waters froze over, we were forced to live down here. The garden provides us the warmth and food we need to survive. Because of it, we are taken care of. Here, all are safe and warm."

Suzaku tensed as alarms went off in his head. There was that saying again. It was being said way much too often around here to be considered normal…

o~o

Inside, the Paladins were pleasantly greeted with a banquet that the queen had arranged once she saw them land on their planet. Shells and other things used as their instruments were being played softly in the background. Several mermaids escorted the trio to seats at the front table, large amounts of food and cuisine were already lined up along the middle. The queen herself was seated at the head of it.
Though it looked strange (then again, most alien food did) the food was delicious. As Suzaku bit into some sort of pastry, he couldn't help but grin as Rivalz smiled alluringly at a couple of mermaids that were lingering by the table. They giggled at a joke the Blue Paladin made, and Rivalz laughed proudly to himself.

Glancing over at Milly though, he noticed the stink eye that she was subtly shooting at the Blue Paladin. She was attempting to mask it by piling her plate with food and shoving the first thing in her mouth, chewing furiously.

Suzaku chuckled. When were these two going to get a clue? And they called him dense?

The Purple Paladins then turned his attention to the monarch sitting nearby, "Thank you for the food, Your Highness, it tastes great."

"I'm glad you enjoy it. It was picked fresh from the Baku Garden," Luxia smiled before she gestured to the stage in front of them, "And I hope you enjoy the entertainment."

Drums started to play as Suzaku, and his friends, drew attention towards the drawn red curtain. A stage light glowed and what appeared to be a young mermaid dancer was twirling gracefully from behind it.

"Whoa," Rivalz sighed as he looked on, his cheeks coloring slightly. This only caused Milly to scowl deeper.

However, the curtain soon lifted, and a mermaid didn't greet them, but a purple octopus with another small creature on its head. The creature twirled in the air before spreading out its tentacles widely.

Rivalz nearly choked on his food upon seeing the dancers identity, and Milly started laughing at the absolute horror-struck reaction on his face.

"Anyway," Suzaku said, drawing his eyes away for a moment to turn to the queen, "about us getting in contact with our friends, how can you help us? We just got out of a large battle, and they may need our help."

"Please, let's discuss that after the dance," Luxia said politely, still gazing at the octopus.

Suzaku frowned at having the matter brushed off, but figured that he should be polite enough to comply. It was just a dance show… right? He shrugged as he turned back to the octopus.

The creature flipped again before turning sideways and spinning slowly in a circle, the lights shining off it, making it look like over a dozen legs were waving in front of them.

'It's like one of those… optical illusion… things…' Suzaku thought before his head suddenly felt light, and his thoughts jumbled together.

"This dance… is amazing," Milly commented, her eyes slowly glazing over.

"Yeah," Rivalz nodded slowly in agreement, eyes also getting hazy, "It's the-It's the most amazing thing I've ever seen."

"I'm glad you enjoy it," Luxia said to them, her voice getting strangely more echoey, as more light seemed to penetrate from the dance, looking almost like a vortex, "Put your mind at ease. Let your consciousness drift like the tide."
"Sure, I can do that," Suzaku murmured, his head bobbing down like he was about to fall asleep. His head then suddenly shot up, his eyes wide open and pupils dilated, "Wait, we were just talking about something. Weren't we?"

"You were just telling me how much you like it here," Luxia softly whispered in Suzaku's ear, "how much you wanted to stay forever."

"Really?" he asked, starting to feel weak in the knees.

"Really," the queen confirmed with a smile.

"Yeah. Here, we are all safe and warm," Milly agreed, sounding dreamy, "Guys, I think we should stay here forever."

"Okay," Rivalz replied in a slurred tone, floating lazily above the table.

Queen Luxia smiled in victory.

o~o

After the banquet, the Paladins were escorted to a room that they could sleep in. The beds themselves consisted of some sort of giant oysters with soft pink foam for cushioning. Sleeping underwater was interesting. It made one wonder why they needed beds at all. Because they never stayed in them.

Despite laying in them for a few minutes, the Paladins were soon drifting slowly away from them around the room. They even floated into each other sometimes. This resulted in Milly, somehow, holding tightly to Rivalz with a content smile on her face, slight drool sliding down her chin.

"Hey Euphie," Suzaku mumbled in his sleep, "I hope you…" he yawned in between in sentence, "enjoy this daifuku I made for you. The filling the strawberry flavored…I know you love strawberries."

The Paladins were in such deep slumber that they didn't hear the wall behind them break open from a clawed hand. The claw them proceeded to carve a bigger hole around it, and the wall was removed to reveal three jellyfish peaking in. Well, sort of. There were three jellyfish, but they were on the heads of three other figures that stealthily swam into the room and approached the slumbering Paladins.

One of them approached Suzaku and covered him in a thick seaweed blanket from head to toe. Another approached both Milly and Rivalz, and seeing that trying to pull them apart was probably a bad idea, wrapped them up together. The three figures then proceeded to drag the three Paladins out of the hole that was made.

They successfully pulled out Suzaku, but Milly and Rivalz got stuck partway. Not to say that they by themselves would not have fit through, but due to being held together, they were just too big.

The three figures still attempted to pull them through, as quietly but gently as possible. This was their one shot to pull off their plan; they didn't want to hurt the land dwellers accidentally.

They were forced to halt their efforts though when they spotted a patrol swim by. They weren't seen, but next time they might not be so lucky.

"Leave them," the leader, wearing a giant orange jellyfish, said urgently, "We have to get out of here."
The figure trying to tug them out let go, and the three of them swam off quickly into the darkened sea.

o~o

Suzaku was still fast asleep when the figures brought him to their lair. They had set him down on a soft pile of seaweed but had bound his hands behind him. They had also placed a big starfish over his eyes.

After they left briefly to retrieve something, they returned, relieved to see that he hadn't moved. One of them cautiously swam up and poked him firmly on the shoulder. Suzaku grunted and sat up, still feeling drowsy.

He smacked his lips a few times and opened his eyes, only to met with darkness thanks to the starfish.

He blinked in confusion, "Hello?" he called out drowsily, looking around, "Um… Good morning!" when he still didn't get a reply, he questioned further, "Where am I?"

"He's awake!" one of the figures whispered urgently.

"Why am I blindfolded? Is this a game? I like games..." Suzaku smiled with a dopey grin. Then one of the merfolk approached him with a sizeable fat fish that they squeezed close to his face. It exuded a thick green gas into Suzaku's face but soon faded away.

Whatever the gas was, it also woke Suzaku up from whatever trance he was in, as he suddenly sat up more straight, "Wait, where am I? Why am I blindfolded? What's going on?" He shot to his feet and kicked furiously in the water, trying to get some sort of bearings despite not seeing anything.

One of the figures grabbed the starfish that was on Suzaku's face and pulled it off. Suzaku shook his head and blinked several times to adjust to the lighting again. In front of him were three figures floating in front of him. All of them were wearing some sort of green seaweed poncho with different colored jellyfish on their heads. The one to his left was orange, the middle was a yellow-green, and to his right was a teal colored one.

"It's okay. You were mind-swished, but now we want to-"

"Kill me?! Well, think again!" Suzaku shouted, interrupting the teal one and using his jetpack to shoot past them down the tunnel.

"Wait! Come back!" one of them shouted after him, but Suzaku wasn't listening, too busy trying to find a way out.

He gasped fearfully when he almost ran headfirst into some spears and other sharp weapons that were sticking out of the wall. He almost turned to swim the other direction, but paused and took a moment to use them to cut through his restraints.

Now with his arms free, Suzaku grabbed his bayard but didn't activate it just yet as he swam down another tunnel. He shouted in surprise again when he ran into a room that was filled with bones from dead fish of all sizes. Now starting to get a little scared, he turned and fled down the next tunnel. He was swimming by a small outcropping when a movement caught his eye.

Slowing down to investigate, he inhaled when he saw that the room was filled with multi-colored jellyfish. Seeing that the fish weren't trying to hurt him, he swam in to take a closer look. But, much to his surprise, the jellyfish suddenly increased to about ten times their original size,
blocking his way.

He swiftly turned around to leave, only to see the exit blocked by the three merpeople that brought him here.

He activated his bayard, holding the katana in front of him with a threatening frown.

"Who are you? Where are my friends?!" he demanded.

"Please, we are not here to hurt you," the one with teal jellyfish said, holding her hands up in a placating gesture, "I am Plaxum."

"Blumfump," the orange jelly said.

"Swirn," the yellow one introduced.

"Okay, but you still didn't answer my question. Where are Milly and Rivalz?"

"We tried to bring them too, but we couldn't, but we need your help. We believe you are our savior," Plaxum explained before she and her companions bowed to him.

Suzaku relaxed a little, hearing the desperation in the mermaid's voice, but still didn't lower his katana.

"Your savior? What do you want with me?" he asked, quirking an eyebrow.

"The queen is mind-swishing everyone, controlling their thoughts," Blumfump explained, his flippers on his hips, "We believe you can stop her."

Suzaku did lower his katana this time and looked at the mer in a mixture of confusion and horror. What was going on?

o~o

Back at the palace, Milly and Rivalz finally managed to wake up on their own. They looked around, confused as to why everything was upside down. They then looked at each other. Only then did they realize the predicament they were in.

They screamed in surprise as they tried to break free of whatever was holding them together.

"Help! Help! Somebody!" Milly called out as she struggled to push free of the wall they were wedged into. Rivalz own struggles weren't helping much either.

At the entrance to the room, the two were relieved to see Florona and Queen Luxia enter the room with some guards. Florona was carrying a tray of food in her hands.

"What's wrong?" she asked as she swam closer to the pair in alarm.

"I don't know, and we're stuck in the wall somehow!" Rivalz exclaimed as he tried to wiggle out.

"Yeah, and-wait!" Milly did a quick scan of the room, "Where's Suzaku? He's gone!"

"There was a break-in," the queen realized as the two guards helped the two Paladins safely out of the wall, "Those cave-dwellers must have taken him."

"Them again?" Florona asked, sounding frustrated, "What should we do?"
"Those meddling mermaids are harmless, but the air-breather could prove troublesome if he doesn't fall back under our control," Luxia said with a scowl.

"Wait. Wait, wait, what? Who needs to fall under our control?" Rivalz asked, looking around confused.

"Where's Suzaku? We gotta find him!" Milly exclaimed.

"And we will," the queen reassured them as she pushed them to sit down, "Don't worry your little minds about it. But first, we need to sit down and eat, talk, clear our heads."

Florona held the food out to the two Paladins. But they both seemed reluctant to take anything.

"No, we can't eat right now. If Suzaku's been taken…" Rivalz began while also popping a small piece of food in his mouth. The second he swallowed it though, any thoughts of Suzaku disappeared, and his eyes rested solely on the food, "Oh, boy. That... That is good, though."

"Rivalz, we can't." Rivalz shoved a piece of a pastry into Milly's mouth before she could finish, and soon Milly was joining him in devouring the food in front of them.

"See? That's all you need. Here, we are all safe and warm," the queen told them.

The two Paladins, having finished the plate of food, contently floated up from their seats lazily began drifting around the room.

"Okay," Rivalz murmured.

"Yeah, we'll let you handle it," Milly slurred with a dreamy smile.

With the two Paladins successfully distracted, the queen turned to face her soldiers, "They are going to come. We must destroy what remains of their kind and bring Suzaku under our control. But first, Florona," the queen turned to the mermaid, "you were in charge of watching the air-breathers. So, now, it is time for you to take a swim in the garden."

Florona looked up at Luxia, and for a moment, a flicker of raw fear flashed across her face. But she soon bowed her head, submissively, "Yes, my queen."

o~o

"Okay, okay, hold on, let me make sure I understand," Suzaku said after the rebel mermaids finished explaining to him what was going on, "You think that the queen is brainwashing her own subjects? Do you have any proof of this? Why would she even do that?"

"What do you remember from yesterday?" Swirn asked casually as she swam around in a circle above them.

Suzaku took a second to think, "Well, we crashed here, saw the mermaids and the village, met the queen, then we had dinner, and then... uh... we-" He started in surprise when he realized that he couldn't remember anything after that. It almost felt like

"My Geass originally was the ability to compel anyone to obey when I make eye contact with them. The drawbacks that I've noticed so far are that I can only do it once per person. So now that I just used it on Coran, it won't affect him again."

'And from what we've noticed, it also seems to affect the memory too… oh please don't tell that
"That's what the queen has too!"

"You can't remember, can you?" Swirn asked.

"No, you're right, I can't," Suzaku shook his head.

"That's because you were under her control," Swirn insisted.

"Our theory is," Blumfump said, holding up a poorly done drawing of the queen with what looked like sonic waves coming from her mouth towards an almost dead looking mermaid, "the queen controls minds by using her voice to strike certain head switches in your ear pan."

Plaxum then swam up behind Blumfump with another drawing, this time of what looked like lasers coming from the queen's eyes, "And her magnetic stare locks on to your eye-to-brain pathway plug."

Suzaku felt his insides turn cold when he saw that drawing and heard the explanation. Lelouch specifically said his Geass could only activate with eye contact. Was this something that it was capable of doing? Could he enslave an entire nation if he wanted to?

"Plus," Swirn added, yet another picture of the queen shooting out sound waves right next to her, "her mind-control sonar is always broadcasting through the waters. Bong! Bong! Bong!"

"And she trains her people to use hypnotic movements to lull you under her control," Plaxum finished, swimming up closer to the Purple Paladin.

"Wait, I do remember a dancer at the banquet," Suzaku told them.

"Good, because I haven't finished my picture for that one," Blumfump said, before throwing the drawings behind him, before swimming up and practically getting in Suzaku's face, "But you see, she was infecting your brain!"

"Wait, so are you saying-" Suzaku was unable to finish his sentence as Plaxum dragged him off towards a giant clamshell. She tapped it once, and upon opening, several different colored jellyfish started swimming out of it into the open water.

"Sit," Plaxum said as she practically threw onto the clam. Suzaku landed with an 'oomph' and then yelped as he felt something wrap around his head. Looking up, he saw that Swirn was using seaweed to measure it.

"The entire village is under the queen's mind control," Blumfump said and was about to say something else when Suzaku interrupted.

"If that's the case, how come you three aren't brainwashed?"

"I was just about to explain that," Blumfump said before continuing, "You see, the only reason we aren't is because we wear these jellyfish that hide our brains from her powers. It's like we have no brains whatsoever. You can't control what doesn't exist."

"Okay, I guess that makes sense," Suzaku nodded and shrugged.

"Our heads are completely empty," Blumfump chirped.

"Yeah, I get it, it works," Suzaku said as Swirn then held the seaweed to measure his face vertically.
"Many years ago, the queen froze over the surface by blocking the thermal vents," Swirn explained to him as Placum started to swim among the jellyfish, trying to select the correct size for him, "She forced everyone to the depths, where she began to brainwash them. They became her prisoners."

"What size?" Plaxum called out.

"Eight and seven-eighths aquameters," Swirn answered.

"Okay, but why is she doing this?" Suzaku asked. There had to be a reason. Maybe there had been a rebellion, and she was being paranoid or-

"To kill them!" Blumfump exclaimed.

"Wait, what?! Why?" he asked, shocked.

Blumfump actually swam back a little and paused, "Well, we don't know that for sure, but hundreds of mermaids have disappeared and... never come back."

o~o

Just outside the Baku garden, Queen Luxia led Florona to the entrance of it. Here she had cast many of her disobedient subjects, never to be seen again. It was for the greater good though, of keeping her people safe and warm.

"Goodbye, Florona. It is time to return to the giver of life," Luxia ordered, and Florona slowly began to approach the mysterious garden.

If she had been on land, tears would have begun welling in her eyes. She knew if she went inside, she wouldn't come out. But it was by her queen's orders. And she could not disobey.

o~o

"We've tried to take out the queen, but failed several times," Swirn told him sadness coating her tone, "And every attempt depletes our numbers. Now, there are only three of us left. Without you, there is no hope."

"Found one," Plaxum said as she started swimming over with a sizeable jellyfish in her arms.

"So, what exactly makes you think I can fix this?" Suzaku asked, honestly.

"We saw the mer-cat you came in," Blumfump explained, "We think it can stand up against the queen and her forces. But first, you'll need one of these."

Plaxum came over with the jellyfish, "Now, they sting pretty bad and don't smell great."

"If my theory is correct, the smelliest ones block the most mind-control rays," Blumfump said further as Plaxum came closer.

Hearing Blumfump's talk about all these theories briefly reminded him of working with Lloyd and Cecile in the Engineering department. Though he doubted that Blumfump was a sociopath like the Earl. He wondered how those two were doing. Who was piloting the Lancelot now?

"So, are you a scientist or something?" Suzaku couldn't help but ask.

"No," Blumfump denied.
"Also, they can sometimes make your face swell," Plaxum added just before she put it on, "and you might experience hearing loss."

"Could you just put it on please?" Suzaku asked almost impatiently. His outburst startled Plaxum a little but the mermaid then quickly complied. Suzaku braced himself as the jellyfish was shoved onto his head.

Once the jelly had settled onto his head, Suzaku cried out, bending over and clutching his air bubble. It burned. Very, very badly.

"Is it burning?" Plaxum asked, "If it's burning, that means it's working!"

It took about a minute for the stinging to finally stop. Suzaku's face had swelled up pretty badly, especially around his mouth and left eye. But he'd endure it. The faster they did this, the faster the jellyfish came off.

"Okay, so what's the plan?" he asked through his puffy lips.

The rebels brought Suzaku to their map to explain their attack plan.

"Here's what Blumfump came up with," Plaxum said, turning her attention to the larger merman. He was holding a small figure that looked like a mini person.

"This is you," he gestured to it, "You act like you're still thought-swirled and get past the guards," he made the figure jump through the structure that must have been the palace over to the three mini clams colored purple, blue, and yellow. He placed 'Suzaku' down next to the purple clam and picked it up, "Get your mer-cat and grab the queen," he used the clam to snatch the queen figurine in its 'jaws', "We'll mount a full-scale attack on the castle and free the people," he moved the three remaining figures inward around the Castle.

"Seems like a good plan," Suzaku admitted. He could see Lelouch coming up with something similar, though he would've added his own little 'Zero' flair to it too. However, there was a small problem Suzaku couldn't overlook, "I'll be honest though, I'm not the best actor. What will happen if they suspect me?"

"If your acting fails you," Blumfump started, before reaching into his poncho and pulling out a large puffed up fish. He tossed it towards the Purple Paladin, "this holds three doses of antidote to use on the guards. It should interrupt the queen's mind-control long enough for you to escape."

Suzaku took the fish, nodding, "My friends are in their too… but I promise that I'll do whatever I can to help."

O~O

Suzaku peeked out from the outcropping he was hiding behind. He was disappointed to see that several merman guards were keeping an eye on their lions. Now that the swelling had gone down, he could see a little bit better. He took a deep breath before swimming out towards them.

"Good evening soldiers," he greeted as politely and casually as he could, "quite the safe and warm day we've been having. If you could excuse me, I need to grab something from Yo-no!" Suzaku cried out in horror as the guards immediately threw a net over him and dragged him back towards the palace.

They took him straight to the throne room where the queen sat serenely on top of it. She smiled down cruelly at Suzaku, who glared defiantly back at her.
"I had a feeling you'd come for your vessel," she said.

"Why are you doing this?" he demanded, "They're your own people! They don't deserve this!"

"All I'm doing is keeping my people safe and warm. Is that really so wrong? Servants, take Suzaku to the Baku Garden."

Suzaku heard the doors to his left open, and he gasped in horror as he saw Rivalz and Milly staring stoned face at him.

'Oh no!' he thought, realizing that Luxia was controlling them. Before they could grab him though, he acted quickly and shot upwards with his jetpack over their heads. Even though they were underwater, Suzaku was still a warrior at heart. He wasn't going down without a fight!

"Everyone! Capture him!" Luxia ordered furiously, pointing at Suzaku's form.

With Suzaku now on higher ground, he had a good advantage as he waited patiently for the guards to come at him. Once they were in range, Suzaku managed to knock them both out with two quick but powerful kicks to the head.

Looking back down, he gasped as he saw Milly and Rivalz charging him as well, their expressions having not changed at all. He knew they would be mind-controlled, but he didn't expect to fight them. He didn't want to hurt them if he could. Suzaku leaped off the wall quickly began swimming to the entrance. In the process, he pulled out the fish that contained the antidote. If he could fire it at them together, it should snap them out of it.

He ducked when he saw Rivalz attempt to grab him from behind. He grabbed hold of the Blue Paladin's foot and flung him away into one of the throne room walls, temporarily stunning him.

He almost didn't see Milly swing her kusarigama at him, but he managed to turn in time. Instinctively, he grabbed the end of the chain that flew at him, barely missing the blade part of the weapon. He admitted that it was a risky move, one that he was sure Todoh-Sensei would've forced him to do a hundred push-ups for, but Milly was still pretty inexperienced with the weapon, so her aim wasn't always the greatest either.

He tugged forcibly on the chain, drawing the Yellow Paladin towards him with a yelp of her own. He made little work of tying her up with her own weapon before taking the fish and squeezing it forcefully in her face.

Milly gasped and blinked, "Huh? What—what wait, what's going on, why am I tied up?" was the first thing she asked before looking up at Suzaku, "Suzaku, why's there's a jellyfish on your head?"

Relieved to see that Milly was free from the hypnosis, he says, "I'll explain later, but I need you to grab Rivalz!"

"Wait, why-whoa! She cried as Suzaku tugged the kusarigama chain again, this time freeing her from that, but making her spin rapidly for a moment. Suzaku doesn't have time to help her though as Rivalz came up and tackled Suzaku from behind, causing the Purple Paladin to lose his grip on the antidote fish. It helplessly bounced off the wall and outside the palace.

Suzaku managed to kick Rivalz off of him before he made a beeline for the fish outside. He managed to snatch it up again and would've been tackled again had Milly not grabbed the Blue Paladin first, locking her arms around his elbows and legs around his knees.

"Sorry, Rivalz," Milly apologized as he struggled. Despite this though, she managed to hold Rivalz
long enough for Suzaku to squeeze the antidote at the Blue Paladin as well.

As the mist cleared, Rivalz's eyes went wide before he shook his head rapidly. "Whoa! Whoa! Where am I? What am I doing? Milly, you're kind of hurting me."

"Sorry," she said again before letting him go, seeing that he was back to normal, and turned to their purple compatriot, "Anyway, Suzaku, about the jellyfish?"

"Guys listen," Suzaku said, swimming up to them with a severe frown, "you've been mind-controlled by the queen, and you were trying to kill me. And she's done the same thing to all of the other merpeople here!"

He gave a brief summary to them of what the rebels told him what was happening.

At one point Rivalz tried to comment, "Wait, that sounds a lot like-"

"Lelouch's Geass, I know," Suzaku nodded, "We can worry about that later! We need to get to our lions now!"

"Got it!" Rivalz nodded.

"Right!" Milly agreed as the trio shot away from the courtyard and towards the lions that were still parked to the side of the palace.

Before the three could make it to their lions though, to their horror, they were soon surrounded by several royal guards. Suzaku pulled out his katana again while Milly held tight to her kusarigama as well.

Suzaku braced himself to defend when one of the guards charged. But it turned out he didn't need to as the guard instead got hit in the face by a familiar fat fish. Turning around, Suzaku was relieved to see Plaxum and Blumflup swimming up behind them to back them up. In the distance on a giant manta ray, Swirn could be seen firing several jellyfish at attacking soldiers as well. Plaxum threw a starfish shuriken at one of the guards that pinning his arm directly to a rock wall.

Suzaku grappled with one of the guards before leaping off of him in a backflip, disarming just before an antidote fish was fired at him as well.

"Wait, who are these weirdos?" Rivalz asked, in a little too much shock to try and help. Milly had managed to block a couple of coming attacks, but the rebels took care of most of the other soldiers already.

Suzaku swam up beside them and smiled, "Don't worry, they're with us."

"Come, we must hurry to your mer-cats," Plaxum called over. The Paladins didn't waste another second as they quickly swim inside each other there lions.

Once Suzaku was situated inside of Yoru, he pressed a button that opened his lion's jaw. Plaxum swam inside and hung onto one of the teeth, "You hanging on?"

"Yes, let's go!" Plaxum called out as the jaw closed.

"Okay, so what's the plan exactly?" Rivalz asked over the intercom.

"We need to grab the-"

"We need to grab the queen and take her to an ice prison that Blumfump built, where her mind-
control powers will be trapped because of the thick ice and the jellyfish," Plaxum finished for Suzaku.

"Um, who's that?" Milly asked.

"That's Plaxum. Just go with it!" Suzaku shouted before Yoru, and the other two lions shot off towards the palace entrance.

As they approached the entrance, the team plus Plaxum saw several figures standing at the entryway. One of them their target.

"There she is!" Rivalz shouted as they charged straight towards it.

Plaxum let out a savage growl as she loaded a slingshot she had with her and shot two more antidote fish at the palace entrance, engulfing the queen and several guards in the green mist. Thanks to the confusion it caused, Plaxum then shot out a grappling hook with an octopus at the end of it that hit the queen right in the middle. With a grunt of surprise, Luxia was reeled into the Purple Lion and detained at last.

"Got her! Let's go!" Suzaku shouted as he and the others took off towards the ice prison the rebels had prepared.

Inside of Yoru's jaw, Queen Luxia groaned and opened her eyes, looking around in confusion, "Where am I? What's going on?"

Plaxum, still holding the end of her jellyfish grapple glared vengefully at the monarch, "What's going on is you're not mind-controlling these people anymore, Your Majesty."

"What? Mind-control? Me?" to everyone's surprise, the queen sounded confused and even scared. Luxia looked down as if in thought before her eyes widened and she looked desperately at Plaxum, "No! Please, my people are in danger! You must go back!"

"Plaxum, what's going on?" Suzaku questioned from the pilot chamber.

"Nothing! It's a ruse!" the rebel insisted stubbornly.

"You sure?" Milly asked on another comm. For some reason, the queen's reaction sounded genuine. Had they gotten something wrong?

"I wasn't controlling anyone," Queen Luxia insisted stubbornly. Suddenly her eyes widened again, and she gasped in horror, "The Baku!"

"She's lying!" Plaxum exclaimed.

"I'm not. Please!" the queen pleaded as she tried to explain, "The last thing I remember is that organism in the garden falling from space. I went to inspect it. I thought it was a plant."

Unbeknownst to them, back at the palace, the Baku Garden walls started to quiver erratically.

"Wait a minute, we've been eating that plant," Rivalz realized, his mouth already salivating from the memory, "And it's delicious! It's so safe and warm."

Before Rivalz could nod off again, Suzaku cried out, realization hitting him like a bullet train, "We had it all wrong! The queen had nothing to do with this! It was the plant the whole time. She was just the first one to be mind-controlled."
"But why?" Plaxum asked, clearly confused.

"The Baku has been harvesting us all. We are its food source," the queen explained frantically.

"No way…" Rivalz gasped, eyes wide.

"Guys! I think she's telling the truth. Look out the window!" Milly shouted, looking back at the palace.

Turning their lions around, the trio watched in horror as what they thought was a peaceful, harmless-looking garden, slivered to life. Dark violet light seemed to absorb into its being. Like a massive, angry anaconda, the Baku rose from its resting place and let out a mighty and deafening roar, its mouth opening to reveal rows of sharp serrated teeth inside its mouth.

Gasping in shock, Suzaku quickly opened Yoru's mouth, "Plaxum, get the queen somewhere safe!"

The rebel quickly led the queen away from the lions and the creature it was now facing. With civilians out of the way, the lions prepared for battle.

"Okay, change of plans, that Baku thing is our real target. Let's take it out!" the Purple Paladin exclaimed before he charged towards it.

The Baku reared back and charged towards the lions, gliding swiftly through the water and quickly knocking Maeraka and Milly out of the way while Polaris and Yoru dodged it with ease. Rivalz quickly shot a beam in the Baku's direction when it attempted to hit Milly again, but it promptly slithered out of the way to avoid being hit.

"Whoa!" the Yellow Paladin cried, struggling to maintain control through the turbulence, "Guys, that thing's too quick for me. I can't hit it! Maeraka's not very good in water."

"Really?" Rivalz asked, "Polaris is moving better than ever. There's something about fighting underwater that's making me feel extra quick and powerful."

"Yeah, Yoru's feeling pretty good too," Suzaku observed, as he smoothly corkscrewed around the Baku's tail, "Which is weird, she should still be healing from our fight with Zarkon."

"Maybe it's due to the lack of light down here?" Rivalz guessed, "I mean, correct me if I'm wrong, but when we're right out in open space and in darker places, you and Kallen almost match neck to neck in speed. And Yoru's ability is some sort of black hole suction so…"

"So Yoru works better at night, got it. Must be the same for Maeraka, but in light and daytime," Suzaku concluded.

"Huh, makes sense," Milly reluctantly agreed.

"Anyway, I think I know how to stop that thing," Suzaku told them.

"How?" Rivalz asked as the Baku swirled around them once again, Milly barely dodging its hit this time.

"Simple. We gotta stop shooting where the creature is and start shooting where the creature's gonna be!"

"So… like this?" Rivalz asked as Polaris shot out a stream of ice in the Baku's path. Just as the beam should've hit the ocean floor, the Baku's head got his with the attack instead, encasing it in a
prison of ice.

"Great shot Rivalz!" Suzaku cheered with a grin.

The victory was short-lived though as the Baku used its tail to break the ice, showing that little to no damage had been done in the process.

"Okay, take this!" Milly shouts as she has Maeraka shoot out a supernova in the Baku's direction. As the flash bomb goes off though, and the Baku screamed in surprise, once it wore off the only thing it seemed to do was annoy it as the monster quickly smacked Maeraka down towards the floor.

"Milly!" Rivalz shouted as he and Polaris raced after her.

Gritting his teeth Suzaku as he spiraled out of the way of the tail again and shot towards some rocks in the distance. If he could get it away from the village, they would have more space to fight and fewer casualties.

"What do I do?!" he whispered desperately. With perfect timing though, Suzaku felt Yoru purr confidently as several images flashed through his mind, "You think that'll work?" receiving a nudge of confirmation, Suzaku inhaled, "Alright, here goes!"

Turning around sharply, Suzaku faced the Baku head-on, and just as the creature seemed about to strike, Yoru opened her maw and started sucking in the water rapidly around the Baku. The suction was almost acting like a drainage pipe, pulling the water inward like a whirlpool.

The Baku roared in shock and tried to swim away from them, but the force of the pull was too much for it to break free.

"Alright! Go, Suzaku!" Rivalz shouted gleefully. Before he could give any more comments though, he felt a nudge from his own lion and looked down at the controls. To the side, an image that looked like sonic waves lit up, "What...? Oh, okay! Here goes nothing!"

The Blue Paladin thrust his controls forward, and Polaris let out a loud roar. Appearing on her back, very similar to how Aka's appeared, a giant cannon came to life. With a burst of power a giant sonic beam shot out from the cannon, engulfing the Baku on the other side.

The monster was now stuck between a rock and a hard place as it struggled to stay away from the whirlpool Suzaku had created and the sonic waves Rivalz had let loose.

Off to the side of the battle, Milly looked in awe as the two boys practically had the monster pinned down. But Milly wasn't the type of girl to stay out of a fight that easily.

"Come on girl, let's not let them hog all the glory!" she smirked as she shot one her controls forward and Maeraka shot a bolt of energy at the rock wall above them. The beam sent rock wall crumbling down around them, beginning to bury the Baku alive.

"This place is coming down! Let's get out of here!" Suzaku shouted as he and Rivalz ceased their assault and quickly retreated away from the falling rocks. They heard the Baku let out one last cry of anger before a large boulder collided with its head, silencing it forever.

"Suzaku, that was so cool! You practically made your own whirlpool! And Rivalz, you just dropped a sonic boom on that thing!" Milly cheered happily.

"Hey, but you finished the job with that rockslide Milly," Rivalz complimented, "so thanks!"
"Oh, I try!" the Yellow Paladin giggled as the three lions turned back to the palace victorious.

o~o

After everyone had calmed down and it was confirmed the Baku was gone, everyone returned to the palace. The queen and the three rebel fighters stood at the entrance waiting for them.

"So, Blumfump, the jellyfish, the magnetic stare, the hypnotic dance. You got it all wrong. It was the food that the Baku was giving all this time," Suzaku explained to the leader.

'But… even though Geass also didn't have anything to do with this, I still want to talk to C.C. about it… if this is something Lelouch is capable of…' he didn't finish his thought, feeling too sick to his stomach to do so.

Blumfump, however, didn't look too upset about being proven wrong, and instead looked rather intrigued, "Well, I did say they were theories. Mer-science isn't always about getting the right answer."

"I want to thank you all for what you've done," Queen Luxia said graciously, "You've freed my people, and I will do all I can to protect that freedom. I vow to be the voice of my people," she then turned to the three rebels, "I beg of you to help. Will you be my advisors?"

"Of course, Your Highness," Blumfump immediately said, pulling out some scrolls from underneath his poncho, "I have some great ideas. Have you ever heard of electricity?"

Plaxum then swam up to the Paladins personally, "And I wanted to personally thank you, Suzaku," and, to everyone's surprise, the mermaid swam up and kissed Suzaku's helmet. Despite himself, the Purple Paladin couldn't help the small blush that spread around his cheeks. Rivalz stood to the side, mouth hanging open jealously.

Plaxum then sighed, "Finally, I can remove this thing," she said, as she took hold of the jellyfish, to reveal a beautiful blue mermaid that smiled back at them.

"Woah!" Rivalz gasped, eyes sparkling at the mermaid's revealed beauty. It quickly ended though with Milly giving him a sharp elbow to the ribs.

As Rivalz took time to recover, Milly quickly approached the queen, "Queen Luxia, the reason we came here in the first place was to see if you could help us find our friends."

"Of course," the queen answered. Two of Luxia's guards then brought out a giant clamshell that they placed in the center of the square.

"It has been many years since we have activated the energy beacon, but perhaps it is time to rebuild our civilization and reach out to interstellar travelers once again," as the clam opened to reveal a beautiful pearl sitting in the middle of it, the queen exclaimed, "Activate energy beacon!"

The pearl in the middle of the clam suddenly glowed a bright gold, and moments later a brilliant ray of light shot up from it, ascending towards the planets surface, easily breaking through the thick ice that surrounded them. It reached high above the atmosphere and could easily be seen from the planet's orbit.

o~o

Moments later, from space itself, a familiar wormhole opened up, and Rai and Zerith swiftly exited it.
"I see the beacon!" Rai exclaimed as he pushed Zerith closer towards it.

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"There is a mer-cat in our system that appears to be heading our way," Luxia informed them as the image of the Green Lion appeared on the surface of the beacon.

"It's Zerith! Rai's coming!" Suzaku exclaimed in relief.

"See guys? I told you they could help us," Rivalz said, crossing his arms with a smile.

"Yeah, plus we saved a whole planet by ourselves! Now we can brag to the others back at the Castle," Milly smirked.

"Duly noted," Suzaku chuckled and shook his head fondly.

"You know, I can totally get used to this whole 'Defender of the Universe' thing," Milly commented with a smile as they watched Rai approach ever closer to the planet.

Chapter End Notes

AN: Alright! Another chapter out and the team is officially back together again! Rivalz got his sonic cannon and Suzaku developed a new skill (underwater use only!) Sorry if a lot of people were expecting another chapter after they were scattered, but to be honest, I really wanted to get closer to the chapter where they get back to Earth, and that is officially happening in the next couple chapters! I can't wait to write it!

Hope you enjoyed this update! R&R and see you next time!
Rai's Escape

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Rai was able to quickly get Suzaku, Milly, and Rivalz back to the Castle. Kallen and Shirley, along with several puffball aliens, were waiting for them when they arrived.

Under normal circumstances, the team would've taken the time to go over the events of the last couple of days and figure out what to do next.

However, that wasn't to be as Rai urgently led the trio down to the infirmary where C.C., Coran, and Allura were watching over Lelouch, who had been rushed to a cryo-pod the moment he'd been retrieved and had yet to wake up.

Kallen quickly informed them that it had already been over a day since Lelouch had been inside of it. He was slowly getting better, but Coran had voiced that he worried if the pod could take care of the wound Lelouch had on his side. Fortunately, it seemed to be working around it, at a snail's pace, but still working.

On the third day of him being in the pod, Lelouch started to groan and whimper, his eyes squeezed shut, and a tear traced down his face.

"Is he okay?" Shirley asked upon seeing this.

"Sometimes, the healing process can cause involuntary brain wave reactions," the Princess informed calmly. She and Coran looked concerned, but they weren't panicking. That likely meant that nothing was wrong.

"He-he looks like he's having a bad dream," Milly observed with a worried frowned.

And indeed he was having a dream. Inside, Lelouch cringed and flinched with a groan.

He was eight-years-old lying peacefully in his bedroom at the Aries Villa. He was smiling from the fun day that he had been able to have with just his sister and mother. She had taken them horse-back riding and for a walk around the gardens. Though Lelouch himself didn't find these activities too exciting, as long as his mom was there, he was happy. Plus, seeing Nunnally laugh was just the cherry on top.

He heard the door to his bedroom creak open suddenly. Despite still being young, Lelouch had always been a light sleeper. As he sat up to see who had let themselves in, he was shocked to see his father, the Emperor standing there at the doorway.

His father started speaking, but static filled Lelouch's ears and couldn't make anything out. His vision began to get hazy as he struggled to stay awake but ultimately succumbed to sleep once more. But before everything went dark, and there was no mistaking it this time, he saw a blood-red seal of a bird in flight reflecting in his father's eyes.

Next thing he knew, the incident of witnessing his mother's corpse and Nunnally trembling in her arms played through his memory again. This time though, Lelouch felt something off, almost like this memory wasn't his own, but a scene rehearsed for his eyes and ears only.

As Lelouch continued to moan and shudder in the pod, the other Paladins' concern grew as well.
"Yeah, well he just got blasted by a space witch and mauled by giant lizards. What dream could be worse than that?" Kallen said, though her concern was still there as well for their leader.

"Wait, a witch? What witch?" Milly asked, confused.

"Yeah, we talking like a wicked witch of the west sort of thing?" Rivalz asked, "Green skin, pointy hat, and a broomstick?"

It took Kallen a second to remember that Rivalz and Milly hadn't heard of or seen the witch yet, and was about to clarify when C.C. spoke up first.

"Think more along the lines of dark purple skin and a dark cloak, and then you'll have your answer."

When Rai heard the description that C.C. just gave, his head suddenly pulsed painfully. With a wince, he held a hand up to his forehead to massage it.

"Yeah, she was probably the scariest person I'd ever seen," Shirley nodded with a gulp, remembering seeing her bent over Lelouch. She had been doing something with his head, but they hadn't exactly had time to ask.

"...Princess, Coran, are any Galra capable of doing magic?" Suzaku asked the pair.

"No, they aren't. It's just not in their biology to have that ability," Coran said, with Allura shaking her head.

Rai suddenly gasped, and his other hand sprang to his head too as the pulsing increased. He bent forward, eyes shut and teeth clenched through the pain.

"...Haggar," he gasped out.

"What?" Suzaku asked, staring wide-eyed at the Green Paladin.

"Her name," Rai swallowed, "That's her name. Haggar."

"You're sure?" Milly asked.

"Yeah… and… she-she did something to me. She gave me that… that Geass power," he said.

Sounds of exclamation and shock sound from all over the room, C.C. especially looked stunned. She had suspected Rai had it for a while, but she didn't expect that witch to have given it to him.

"Wait-so then, did Haggar make a contract with you?" Kallen asked. She also made a mental note to tell the others that she had a Geass too now. She didn't know what it was or did yet, but they would need to figure that out soon.

"I-No," Rai shook his head, furiously, "I don't think so. If she did, she certainly didn't offer one, and I don't… don't remember accepting it either," he looked up at C.C., "that's how it works right? Both sides need to accept it?"

"Yes, that's correct. Both sides must contribute something when a contract is formed," she nodded.

"Wait, so, are you saying that Rai was given it by force?" Rivalz asked, "Is that even possible?"

"I don't know," C.C. admitted, "I've never forcibly given a Geass before. And if I ever tried to, it didn't work."
Rai was about to say something else when he suddenly stiffened, and his mind threw him back into his memories.

"No, no! No!" Zephyr begged as he felt the hard surface of a metal table beneath his back. He felt his arms and legs being held down firmly to the side. Sometimes when they brought him here, they muzzled him too, but not this time. He inhaled sharply as the familiar sensation of needle penetrated his left arm. The Galra soldier holding it steady was injecting some sort of glowing blue liquid into his bloodstream.

"You took my family! What more do you want?!" he demanded at a Galra with a mask over his mouth. There were two other Galran soldiers in the room, acting as assistants. He must be a scientist that wanted to try and new 'toy' with him. What were they going to do? Give him a cybernetic arm?

"Stop!" the Galra said, batting the soldier's hand away, "I want him awake enough to feel this."

Just as the guard turned his back to the scientist, the Galra pivoted and slammed the guard behind him against the wall hard enough to crack it. He then charged the second one that had turned around in alarm and knocked him out cold with a punch to the jaw.

Zephyr's vision began to go black as the scientist removed his mask and jogged over to him. He took out a large syringe and implanted it into Zephyr's right forearm. Due to the drug still in his system, he barely felt the pain of it at all.

"Listen to me. We don't have much time," the Galra told him urgently. Zephyr almost nodded off when he felt something hard strike him on the cheek. With a grunt, his vision cleared and saw the Galra staring at him intensely, "Wake up! Zarkon has located the Blue Lion of Voltron on your planet, Earth. You must get it before he does."

Zephyr watched in shocked confusion as the Galra then proceeded to undo his restraints and help him up.

"Wh-what are you doing?" he asked dumbly.

"I've planted a bomb to cover your escape. Get to a pod, now," the Galra instructed, ignoring his question.

"Who are you?" Zephyr asked, still in shock at what was happening.

"I am Ulaz," he said shortly before leading him to the door of the room, "Now, come on!"

When it opened, the two crouched down low, Ulaz scanning the halls for incoming sentries, "Zarkon will know that I released you, so I must disappear. But, if you survive, go to the coordinates in your arm," Zephyr looked at his right wrist. Ulaz must have put something just under the skin. An info-chip maybe? "The Blade of Marmora is with you."

"Wait! Why are you helping me?" he asked desperately.

Ulaz looked at him intently, "As a fighter and a leader, you give hope," he told him before he got up to run down the hall, "Hurry! Earth needs you. We all do."

Zephyr watched him go, still bewildered at what was going on. But that Galra was giving him the chance to get out of here. And he wasn't going to waste that chance.

Zephyr knew that the cargo bay was likely his best chance, so he started making his way over
there. However, the drug that they had given him was still active inside him, so he had to fight desperately just to remain on his feet. He panted heavily as he snuck down the hallway, stopping to rest behind a wall outcropping. He was just about to keep going when he heard the sound of sentries walking by, and he quickly hid again, waiting for them to pass.

Fortunately, the next turn that Zephyr made brought him right where he needed to be. He looked back at the sentries walking away but failed to notice the supply cart passing in front of him until he ran right into it.

He gasped in fear when he knocked to canisters over. Looking back, he ran as he saw that the noise didn't go unnoticed by the robots and sprinted towards the escape pods.

He heard security alarms going off around him, but his eyes were only on the pods he needed to get out.

Zephyr's hand barely made contact with the button to open it, when one of the sentries caught him by the shoulder. Instinctively, Zephyr flipped the robot over his head but was unable to stop the second one from grabbing him from behind.

He screamed at the painful hold the robot held him in, and despair at not making it, but moments later, the hallway behind them exploded in a fiery inferno. The heatwave threw him and the sentry forward, knocking Zephyr's head against the pod wall and rendering him unconscious. The sentry also fell, but as the pod door closed it cut its lower body away, destroying the robot.

Zephyr groaned in pain as the pod rocketed out of the cargo hold and towards the planet that he once called home…

...He had no idea how long he been unconscious but was suddenly awoken by the sensation of crashing into something and throwing him to the other end of the pod.

He awoke with a gasp and blinked, looking around. Where was he? What was going on? He felt something wet by his feet and looked down. Wherever he was, this confined space was slowly filling up with water. Panicking, he started backing away, his back soon hitting the far wall, looking up, he saw that it looked like a door and he pounded on it, trying to get it to open, and tried pulling it from the sides.

Eventually, when the water was nearly up to his waist, his elbow hit the button to open it, and water came pouring inward. Swallowing as much air as he could, he clawed as fast as he could towards the surface.

Breaking out of it, and inhaling a massive gulp of air, he-wait was his name?! Who was he?! He began to breathe rapidly as he tried to remember what his name was, but nothing was coming to him. How had he even got into that...that...that whatever under the water? Looking around frantically in the grey twilight, he spotted in the distance what looked like land. He didn't know where he was either, but he was cooked if he didn't get out of the water.

Adrenaline pumping through his veins, he began to swim as hard and fast as he could towards the shore…

...The next time he woke up was to the sound of seagulls flying overhead and the feeling of rough, scratchy sand underneath his cheek. He felt something wet and cold sliding up and down his bottom legs.

Something tickled the edge of his nose. He barely opened his eyes and was greeted by a white
pinching claw.

He yelped and shot upwards. The little crab that had waddled up to inspect him got spooked by the sudden movement and quickly scurried off.

After calming down, he took a look around and saw sand spreading out several meters away in all directions. So, somehow, he had managed to swim to land in one piece. That was one good thing. But where was he?!

Who was he?

The next couple of days passed in a blur. He eventually found his way away from the beach and started wandering the streets of a large city with tons of people. Anyone who looked at him eyed him oddly or even in disgust. Not that he blamed them. Compared to the more... sophisticated and modern outfits they wore, all he had on was a tight black spandex (?) and short, purple ragged shirt. He didn't even want to know what his hair probably looked like.

Eventually, the stares got to him too much, so he stuck to traveling through the alleys and other shaded areas. He dumpster dived several times when he couldn't take his stomach pains anymore, and he wasn't risking getting arrested for something as petty as stealing a loaf of bread.

The nights were still pleasantly warm, so it didn't bother him too much when he stopped to rest for the night. A couple of people, most in more worn clothing compared to others, took pity on him and left him some food, water, and a friendly couple even left him some yen. He hadn't even been asking for money, but he was grateful nonetheless.

Despite the small acts of kindness, though, exhaustion eventually overtook him, and he found himself collapsing at the gates of what looked like a large estate.

A frightened female voice was all he remembered before his eyes glazed over, for what he believed might be the last time.

Rai was moving before he even registered it himself, pulling his bayard out and stabbing it into his arm where he remembered the chip was imbedded.

"Woah! Rai! What are you doing?!" Rivalz shouted in alarm along with everyone else even as he saw Coran rush over, Rai grit his teeth and wrenched out the chip, covered in blood that was now dripping to the floor.

"Wh-what's that?" Shirley asked nervously as Rai stared at it in his palm.

He wasn't able to answer though as the pod containing Lelouch started beeping, and the Black Paladin inside blinked awake.

o~o

Within the Galran headquarters, Haggar was hard at work on her newest creation. And due to recent events, she had the perfect candidate to have the honor of powering it.

"You know I'm innocent!" Prorok shouted from his metal prison in the center of the room, "I would never betray Zarkon! You're weakening the empire!"

"You misunderstand. I'm giving you the opportunity to serve the empire," Haggar said with a sneer, "You will have the honor of personally bringing down Voltron."
With a wave of her hand, Prorok began screaming in pain, his quintessence and life force extracted from his body and transformed to the machine behind him. Within seconds, its eyes lit up with light.

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Rover hovered diligently over the data that was flying through the screen in front of him with his master and the other Paladins looking over him. After Rai had dug the chip out of his arm and had it subsequently bandaged, he had it plugged into his computer in Zerith's bay. So far though, they hadn't found anything except jumbled Galran code.

"Apologies, Rai, but no results have come up yet," Coran told him, "especially not with any coordinates anywhere."

"They're in there! I swear they are! Someone helped me escape and gave me those coordinates!" Rai insisted.

"And he was Galra?" Allura questioned skeptically.

"Yes!"

"You know you cannot trust them," Allura told Rai with a stubborn frown.

Lelouch chuckled from behind her, causing the Princess to look at him with everyone else, "Well, that's ironic. Your father said he trusted his team, the original Voltron Paladins with his life. They were like his family. That included Zarkon, the original Black Paladin, correct?"

Allura looked like a child with their hand caught in the cookie jar before turning to the side, "That was a long time ago!"

"What? I... Hold... hold on... WHAT?!!" Milly exclaimed, looking at Allura in horror.

"Zarkon... the big bad, evil emperor of the Galra... was a PALADIN OF VOLTRON!?" Rivalz shouted in shock. His expression reflected on almost all of the other people in the room, including C.C., her golden eyes widening a fraction.

The only two that didn't look surprised were Kallen and Suzaku. The Red Paladin looked annoyed as she shot Allura a distrustful look, while Suzaku had one of disappointment and… sympathy?

"Lelouch is right," the Purple Paladin said, "You were all there. Zarkon ripped us apart when we were Voltron, and then stole Zenobia right out from under Lelouch."

"Or what about all that stuff he could do with his bayard!" Kallen said, leaning closer to Allura accusingly, "Lelouch's bayard! You know, the black one?"

"Coran..." Shirley looked cautiously at the advisor who had gone unusually quiet, "Did you know about this?"

Coran sighed sadly, "Yes. His identity was common knowledge 10,000 years ago."

Kallen shot him a glare, "Oh well thanks for not spoiling the surprise! Because we wouldn't wanna be... oh I don't know... PREPARED or anything!"

"Allura, why didn't you just tell us the truth about Zarkon?" Lelouch asked with a scowl of his own. Allura just stared at the ground.
"You really don't have any room to talk, Zero," C.C. spoke up. Lelouch turned to look at C.C., shocked, and even offended.

"She kind of has a point, Lelouch…” Suzaku reluctantly agreed, "...but I also agree. Why didn't you tell us that from the start?"

"I wanted to protect you from the dark history of the Paladins," Allura finally answered, looking slightly ashamed, "so that you would have a chance to bond with your lions on your own," she then looked Lelouch determinedly in the eye, "Lelouch, you are the Black Paladin now, not Zarkon."

Despite the proclamation though, a sheen of distrust still clouded Lelouch's eyes, but some of it didn't seem to be aimed at Allura, "Yes, well, the Black Lion may have a different take on the matter."

Though no one voiced it, all of them took note that Lelouch didn't call the Black Lion by the name he had given her. Not even her nickname.

"But… that's not the worst part," Lelouch continued, "Zarkon... also has a Geass."

If Zarkon's status as a former Paladin had shocked them, this revelation practically blew them out of the water.

"Lelouch, are you sure?" Suzaku asked, soundly unusually anxious.

"Would I lie about something like this Suzaku?" Lelouch snapped back, eyes flashing angrily for a moment, "When Zarkon took the Black Lion, I felt him in my mind. I saw it, the Geass. It felt similar to my own, but a hundred times more powerful. And... it felt wrong," he couldn't entirely suppress the shiver down his spine, "Dark and twisted. Just… wrong."

"Wait, Rai," Shirley said, turning to the Green Paladin, "earlier you were talking about that witch lady, Haggar. Didn't you say she gave you your Geass?"

"When I fought her or tried to, she said that I was only 'scratching the surface' of it…" Lelouch added.

"...So are you saying that the Galra created Geass of something?" Milly asked after a brief, heavy silence.

"Maybe… but if that's the case, how did it end up on Earth?" Suzaku asked logically, "C.C. you said you didn't know Geass's origins either right?"

"No, nor did the code bearer before me," she confirmed.

"But… if the Galra created Geass, that must mean they were on Earth at some point, right?" Rivalz asked.

"Oh, you would've known if the Galra had been there," Coran said grimly.

"Polaris was on Earth, though. Was her past Paladin a Galra too?" he asked further.

"No, Zarkon was the only one," Allura practically spat.

"...Why do I have a feeling we're getting into something dangerous here?" Shirley asked almost timidly.

Any further discussion was halted by some urgent beeping from Rover.
"What's up, boy?" Rai asked, looking back at the screen. The drone chirped animatedly as he began to highlight a group of repeating numbers within the code, "Good job. Extract it and put it on the screen."

With a confirming beep, Rover did just that. On the bigger screen above, several images appeared of a galaxy that looked very similar to their solar system.

"Well, well, I was right!" Rai exclaimed proudly, "there are coordinates. They lead here: the Thaldycon system. We need to go there now!"

"Rai, are you sure you can trust this? I mean, after all the Galra have done to you- they-they took your family! Your memories!" Kallen asked, sadly.

"It's worth the risk. Someone helped me escape," Rai said with conviction.

"I agree," Lelouch said, walking up to Rai and facing everyone else, "What we need more than anything right now is allies, and if we can locate some, especially ones from Zarkon's own side, we might just find a way to defeat him."

"We can check the location, but I do not like this," Allura said with folded arms, "The Galra are not to be trusted."

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After everyone, some more reluctantly than others agreed to go, the Castleship wormholed straight to the Thaldycon system. When they arrived though, the screens in the Castle showed little to no signs of activity, and all they could see surrounding them were large, teal and green crystals that formed an asteroid belt around the galaxy.

"Well, this is it. No sign of any activity at all, living or otherwise," Coran reported.

"Is there any way to take a closer look?" Lelouch asked authoritatively from the Black Paladin's chair.

"I don't want to bring the Castle any closer," Coran cautioned, as he pulled up an image of one of the crystals, "Those xanthorium chunks contain highly unstable nitrate salts. Even bumping one of them can blow us straight to Wozblay."

"Are we sure this is right?" Milly asked with uncertainty.

"I believe so," C.C. said, turning around from where she was standing next to Coran, "things aren't always what they seem. Considering we may possibly be dealing with a Galra resistance group, it may be possible they could be hiding with a method not even their own kind could understand or track."

"So there must be something we're missing here," Lelouch murmured intelligently.

"We should get out of here," Allura suddenly suggested, "We've checked it out, but now, it's time to move on."

"No!" Rai argues back, "There must be something more to this. I can feel it. I think we should wait. Lelouch?"

"I agree as well," the Black Paladin nodded, "we'll wait for one varga. This may be one of our only chances to find an effective ally; I'm not about to let that go to waste."
"Sire," Haggar addressed in the throne room. Her emperor stood with his back facing her, still seething from Voltron slipping through his fingers, "Prorok's transformation is complete. We only need to know where to send him."

Zarkon calmly stood from his throne and followed the witch the lower platform of the headquarters. Three of her other faithful druids were waiting for them there.

The emperor stood on the middle platform, the druids surrounding him and raising their hands towards him. Volts of violet malevolent energy reached out to him as his black Geass emerged behind his eyes.

"Now, reach out with your mind!" Haggar commanded.

Zarkon's mind reached towards the very edges of his empire, scouring it for any sign of his prize. Stars and galaxies passed him by as nothing more than streaks of light, colors interchanging and shaping the universe.

At last, his gaze landed on the wretched Castle of Lions where thieves kept his treasure locked away and secure.

Zarkon grunted as the druids magic ceased. It had been many decaphebes since he had performed this ritual as his Geass faded away.

His eyes narrowed, "I have the coordinates to launch the beast."

Lelouch pulled up an image of one of the xanthorium crystals, hoping to glean a little more information from these crystals for possible future use. He was unable to fish for it though when his screen lit up red with a warning blaring throughout the room.

"There's an intruder in the Castle!" Coran exclaimed from his post.

"What? How can someone just sneak aboard the ship?!!" Shirley exclaimed.

"I knew coming here was a mistake!" Allura proclaimed as she swiped through the screens towards the cameras. Scanning them, she finally spotted him running down one of the halls, "There he is. Level five."

"Huh, looks like some sort of alien ninja," Rivalz observed.

Ignoring Rivalz comment, Lelouch stood up tall, "Paladins, suit up!"

Everyone made quick work of getting their armor on and then split up on the fifth level to try and find the 'ninja.'

As luck would have it, Rivalz ran into him first. With a gasp, he whipped out his bayard, which turned into his signature rifle and leveled it at the intruder, "I got him."

"Keep eyes on him, Rivalz. We're all headed toward you," Lelouch ordered into the comm as the Blue Paladin approached slowly.

As he did so, the figure, sensing his presence turned around, but his face was hidden behind a mask that matched his uniform.
"Hold it right there!" Rivalz shouted, aiming his gun, prepared to fire.

The intruder though showed little concern for being discovered and rushed straight at the Blue Paladin. Gritting his teeth, Rivalz started firing at him, but just like a ninja, he dodged each of the laser blasts with fluid ease, ducking and jumping off walls to do so.

"Careful, he's faster than an angry Klanmaeir!" Coran shouted from the deck, just as the 'ninja' leaped past Rivalz and nearly knocked the gun from his hands. Despite this though, Rivalz quickly recovered and started shooting at him again as the intruder ran from him.

The intruder didn't get far as Kallen was running down the hall, her claws extended and her new Geass flashing in her eyes. With a snarl, she was nearly successful in hitting the intruder with a single swipe, but at the last minute, he ducked and slid underneath her, stopping several feet away. Turning swiftly around, she charged at him again, swinging wildly. He flipped over her but almost tripped when Kallen kicked outward with a twist and caught of glimpse of his face through the mask.

Kallen suddenly blinked, 'Wait he's-'

"But he can jump like a sprightly globinheffer!" Coran's voice interrupted her thoughts, and the intruder took her moment of shock to make another run for it.

Kallen growled and shouted, "Coran I can do without the commentary!"

"Somebody's as mad as a wet chãper," Coran commented, "Coming your way number three!"

Coran shouted his warning to Milly as she cautiously crept down the hall, her kusarigama held tightly in her grip. She almost didn't register the intruder as he jumped from the hall and raced past her.

"Oh no, you don't!" she shouted as she tucked and rolled under his leap and threw one end of her weapon as hard as she could in his direction. To her shock though, just like Suzaku had at the sea planet palace, the intruder caught the handle of the weapon as he flipped around. Despite her surprise, though, Milly pulled back on her end as hard as she could.

"I got him!" she shouted.

The intruder wasn't waiting around and discovered quickly that he was much stronger than the Yellow Paladin and simply began running again, one end of the kusarigama still in his hand. With a shriek, Milly soon found herself being dragged down the hall with him. "Waugh-I don't got him!"

Kallen and Rivalz sprinted from around the corner and started chasing after them.

"He's dragging Milly away!" Coran exclaimed as Milly continued to be dragged along by her butt.

"Urgh, come back here!" she shouted, trying to slow the intruder down.

Shirley gasped from the hallway she was patrolling and spun around with an arrow notched. Just as the intruder raced by, she attempted to fire, but missed and nearly hit Milly instead.

Milly shrieked as the arrow nearly grazed her helmet, "SHIRLEY!"

"Huh?" the Orange Paladin exclaimed, "Sorry!"

"Oh, Shirley failed the team, guys," Coran said mournfully.
"Hey!" Shirley shouted as she started running after Milly as well.

"All right, it's up to Suzaku now," Coran said as the Purple Paladin readied himself down the hall.

"Copy that," Suzaku's katana flashed to life, "I'm ready," he started running down the hallway that he had heard the commotion before.

"Oh, this is exciting! He's got a sword," Coran continued to narrate, "One young paladin, one seemingly indestructible foe."

Suzaku took a swing just as the intruder turned the corner, but was also forced to duck to avoid the kusarigama chain. Fortunately, despite the hiccup, Suzaku was able to sprint back and catch up to the intruder, running neck and neck alongside him. With a shout, he lunged, swinging his katana in a downward arc, "Swing and a miss! Oh, another swing and a miss! He can't touch him! He's too fast!"

Suzaku grit his teeth as he continued to pursue the foe. Just as they turned another corner, they spotted Lelouch down the hall. The Black Paladin readied himself, red sparks dancing over his fingers. Seeing this, Suzaku turned and made eye contact with Milly. With duo nods, Milly slammed her heels into the floor, forcing the intruder to slow down and for Suzaku to catch up. It worked, and the 'ninja's' arm jerked backward, forcing him to stop.

With a shout, Lelouch flung his hand out, hoping to shock him, but to everyone's surprise, the intruder pulled out the blade on his back and blocked the lightning attack.

Suzaku, taking the distraction's opening, swung his katana downward again, but the intruder also turned around and blocked it, locking the blades in place.

From the position they were in, Lelouch was able to get a good look at the blade the 'ninja' was carrying. He had just been about to throw more lightning at him, but stopped upon seeing it, or more specifically, the mark on the end of it.

Lelouch seemed to be about to say something when Suzaku's katana was suddenly maneuvered from his hands, clattering to the floor across the hall.

"He knocked his bayard out of his hands! It's on the ground!" Coran exclaimed. Despite the surprise, Suzaku raised his fists and flew at the intruder again. But, with a robust, swift pull of the kusarigama chain, he propelled Milly forward, colliding her body with Suzaku's, sending them flying down the hall.

After processing what just happened, Lelouch ran towards the attacker and attempted to punch him. However, he found his arm being hooked by the 'ninja's' and was flung to the other end of the hall, colliding with Kallen, Rivalz, and Shirley just as they turned the corner.

Before the intruder could do any more damage, the final Paladin, Rai, appeared behind him, bayard out and raised to strike.

Sensing the danger, the 'ninja' drew the blade out and held it up to Rai's face just as Rai held his katar up to the intruder's throat.

Neither one moved, staring the other down for a solid five seconds as the other Paladins watched in anxious anticipation.

Eventually, though, the intruder moved first, but not to attack. He lowered his blade and stood calmly in front of Rai. He then dropped his hood, and his mask melted away to reveal a familiar
"Ulaz?!" Rai gasped, finally lowering his weapon as well.

Before Rai could ask the Galra any questions though, Allura brushed past him and pinned Ulaz up against the wall.

"Who are you?!" she demanded.

"Stop! It's him!" Rai exclaimed, approaching the Princess, "This is the Galra who set me free."

"...You've come," Ulaz said, staring at Rai with calm but relieved eyes.

o~o

Ulaz sat in one of the lounges on the ship, his hands, and legs chained together. The Paladins, plus Allura and C.C., stood in front of him, eyeing him with suspicion and curiosity.

"Princess, I really don't think this is necessary. He's not an enemy!" Rai told her with an exasperated frown.

"I will not have some quiznaking Galra soldier on the bridge of my ship!" Allura spat with a frown, glaring venomously at Ulaz.

"If I wanted to kill you, you'd be dead already," Ulaz replied calmly, though not meeting Allura's eyes.

"Are your Galra threats supposed to win my trust?" Allura demanded with a frown.

"I'm not trying to win your trust," Ulaz said carefully, looking up at her and the other Paladins, "I'm trying to win a war. And, because of Zephyr," Ulaz turned to look at the Green Paladin, "we are closer than we've ever been. Our gamble on you paid off better than we could have ever imagined."

'He's called me 'Zephyr,' just like those other aliens,' Rai thought before speaking, "When you released me, you also mentioned that there were others working with you."

"Yes. We are called the Blade of Marmora."

"Others?" Shirley asked nervously, "Are they here?"

Milly shot the Orange Paladin an annoyed look, "Shirley, can you try not to act so scared around the chained-up prisoner? It makes us seem a little lame."

"I am alone on this base," Ulaz stated.

"What is this base you're talking about? The coordinates just led us to this wasteland," Allura said scathingly.

"The base is hidden. Now that I know it is Zephyr that has come, you are welcome to our outpost. It lies dead ahead."

"Behind all the xanthorium clusters?" Suzaku asked.

"No. Right in front of it, in a hidden pocket of space-time."
Allura scoffed. Did he really expect them to believe such a yarn?

Sensing the distrust from the Princess, Lelouch approached, "If simply want to know if he's lying Allura, we have a solution."

Lelouch turned to Ulaz, his Geass active. The Galra looked surprised at first, his eyes widening briefly, before relaxing and meeting Lelouch's eye.

"You'll answer our questions," Lelouch commanded, the Geass flaring.

"What do you want to know?" Ulaz asked, the red ring appearing in his eyes.

"Did you free Rai? Or Zephyr?" Lelouch asked, using Rai's other name, as that seemed to be who Ulaz knew him as.

"Yes."

"Why betray Zarkon?"

"Because a tyrant only seeks power. And if Zarkon has his way, all, including the Galra, will perish."

"Are you really alone at this base?"

"Yes."

"How do we get to it?"

"Just fly straight for the center of the xanthorium cluster. You will see."

Despite Ulaz's answer, Allura still looked unconvinced.

"...Coran, are you hearing this?" Allura called over the intercom.

"I am picking up some kind of anomaly on the screen. I suppose it could be a cloaked base," the advisor answered.

"He said all we need to do is fly towards the cluster in front of us. And we know that he's not lying, thanks to Lelouch," Rivalz reasoned.

"You think he's going to get me to destroy our ship just because he says so?" Allura asked incredulously.

C.C. walked up to her, "Need I remind you, Princess, those under Lelouch's Geass can not lie. It's simply impossible."

"Besides, we came out here to find some answers," Rai said determinedly, "Are we going to turn back now?"

"You know we trust you, Rai, but this doesn't feel right," Kallen said with a worried frown.

"Yeah… um… sorry guys, but it's a big ditto for me," Shirley said hesitantly.

"Galra could have implanted fake memories of the escape in your head," Milly added.

"That's impossible," Lelouch said immediately, "if that were the case, Ulaz would've said that
when I asked him."

"Ulaz freed me. Without him, we wouldn't be here," Rai exclaimed stubbornly.

Allura still held a stubborn frown on her face. For a moment, Lelouch wondered if she was still going to refuse. To his relief though, Allura finally said, still sounding angry, "Fine. Slow and steady, Coran. Head for the xanthorium cluster."

"...Yes, Princess. Beginning approach. Impact imminent in five, four, three, two... Well, that's something."

Considering that the crew didn't feel the Castle exploding into pieces, something else must have been happening.

"What is it?" Allura asked.

"Putting it up on the screens," the moment the advisor said it, a screen appeared in front of the Paladins in the lounge. They all gasped in awe. On the screen, space itself was swirling and folding as if it were a wormhole.

"Amazing!" Suzaku gasped.

"They're literally folding space!" Milly exclaimed.

Upon seeing this, Lelouch, at last, turned his Geass off, and Ulaz's eye returned to normal.

"Are you satisfied with your answers?" the Galra asked the Black Paladin.

Lelouch's lips quirked up slightly in a grin, "Very."

After traveling through the pocket for a couple more seconds, a large blue structure appeared before them.

"Welcome to the Blade of Marmora Communications Base Thaldycon," Ulaz said before standing up, "Now, if you'll free me, I need to send a message to the leadership. They need to know I've made contact with Voltron."

"Go with him and keep an eye on him. I'm staying here," Allura said, looking at Lelouch and Rai.

"Got it. Shirley, Suzaku, Kallen you're with us too. Milly, Rivalz stay on the ship and hold down the fort here," Lelouch ordered.

Milly looked a little disappointed, but shrugged and agreed, though wasn't complaining.

"I'm coming as well," C.C. said.

"...Alright," Lelouch sighed, knowing he couldn't stop her.

The Paladins, C.C., and Ulaz all gathered inside Aka and Kallen flew them towards the base. As they got closer, they noticed a device attached to the base, glistening with light purple energy. It seemed similar to other Galra ships, but the dark intent was gone.

Seeing their stares, Ulaz explained, "This is the gravity generator that creates the space-time fold that hides the station. It was created by a reclusive, genius engineer named Slav. His technology allows the Blade of Marmora to remain hidden while we work to take down the Galra Empire. Zarkon would do anything to get his hands on this technology."
"I can think of someone else who'd love to see this too," Suzaku muttered lowly, a particular Earl's face appearing in his head, hearts in his eyes and drool descending his jaw.

"So, there are Galra out there that aren't loyal to Zarkon?" Shirley asked.

"We thought expanding the Galra Empire would bring stability. We learned too late; a tyrant doesn't seek stability, only power."

'Just like someone else I know,' Lelouch thought with a scowl.

Inside the base, they had a perfect view of the pocket all around them. The energy generator's core burned brightly out one of the windows.

"With our members working on the inside, planning coordinated attacks with Voltron, we may finally have a chance," Ulaz said, typing a message into the screen of the base. It was currently showing a diagram of the Galran headquarters, as well as the planets that orbited around it.

"So, you have agents working within Zarkon's ranks?" Kallen asked.

"It makes sense if that's the case," C.C. said as Ulaz turned to look at them again, "How else could we have escaped from that last fight? I highly doubt that those shields at the command center simply went down on their own."

"You are correct," Ulaz said, "We've got people risking their lives in this war, just like you."

Rai to the opportunity to speak up, "If you have people on the inside, can they tell me where my family is? They were taken the same time I was."

"I knew others from Earth were captured. I never saw them," Ulaz told Rai, "but I have some records of Galra prisoners here. I can transmit them to your ship."

Ulaz turned back to the screen to begin the data transfer. Rai sighed in relief. With this information, they'd at least be able to find a lead on his sister and mother.

Lelouch's eyes wandered to the weapon on Ulaz's back. His eyes narrowed, "What's that weapon you carry?"

Ulaz looked at Lelouch and unsheathed the blade for him to see, "It's a ceremonial blade that each member of our order carries."

"Hmmm..." Lelouch hummed, "interesting."

Suddenly, the alarms started blaring throughout the base, making everyone, including Ulaz, jump.

Ulaz pulled up a screen that showed outside the pocket. To their horror, in the distance, they saw a large, and familiar ship heading straight towards them!

"Oh, no!" Ulaz exclaimed before turning to face them entirely, "You were tracked!"

"What?! How?!" Suzaku exclaimed.

While the others looked at the screen fear and confusion, Kallen grit her teeth and glared at Ulaz, "If Zarkon knows we're here, it's because you ratted us out."

Outside the pocket, the ship came to a stop and split open. Inside, the monster robot appeared, the same one that Haggar had merged Prorak's quintessence to.
"It's another one of Zarkon's robot-beast-ro-beasts!" Shirley shouted.

"Everyone back to the ship! Now!" Lelouch ordered urgently.

"Lelouch, wait," Ulaz said before handing the Black Paladin a large flash drive, "These are instructions on how to reach the Blade of Marmora headquarters. Before you go there, find out how Zarkon is tracking you. If you lead him there, our entire underground network, everything we've spent centuries building, will be lost."

Though Lelouch already knew that, he nodded anyway and took the drive. Everyone quickly piled back into Aka and zoomed back to the Castle.

"I knew he could not be trusted!" Allura shouted at the screen from Aka's cockpit.

"I don't think it was him, Princess," Lelouch told her.

"It wasn't!" Rai exclaimed stubbornly.

"How can you be sure?" Allura demanded.

"It doesn't matter now. What should we do?" Coran asked urgently as he, Milly, and Rivalz looked anxiously at the screen.

"Can't we hide just here in the space pocket and wait for it to go away?" Suzaku suggested.

Liking Suzaku's idea, Lelouch spoke, "Everyone get to your lions, but don't launch. We'll wait to see what it does. I don't want to risk fighting it if we don't have to."

As everyone made their way to their lions, Kallen instinctively activated her Geass. Despite not seeing it with her naked eye, she gasped when her vision spotted the ro-beast hovering closer to the xanthorium crystals. It seemed to be scanning them, searching for something. That something being them.

"I don't think it can see us guys!" Kallen said through the comm, "So I think we're safe as long as we're in the space pocket! It's the only thing there too!"

"You sure?" Rivalz asked.

"Positive!"

C.C. hummed from the bridge of the Castle, "Interesting. Absolute Perception."

Suddenly, the ro-beast opened its jaws and to their shock, started sucking in large chunks of the xanthorium into its mouth.

"He's drawing in the xanthorium clusters," Coran gasped.

Once several dozen of the crystals disappeared inside it, the ro-beasts eyes then flashed, and its jaw slammed open again. This time, instead of drawing things in, it shot a thick bolt of red energy throughout the xanthorium ring, causing many to explode upon impact.

"That was almost like Yoru's ability!" Suzaku realized with a gasp. Except, as far as he knew, Yoru couldn't fire any projectiles she swallowed back. Come to think of it, where did it even go anyway?

The ro-beast began to scan the area again, this time though, it spotted the space-pocket among the explosions of xanthorium. Opening its jaw, it started to suck crystals in once more.
"Lelouch, I think it knows we're here!" Kallen warned, her Geassed eyes still glued to it.

"Hold," Lelouch commanded calmly.

Once he was close enough, the ro-beast's blasters sprang to life again, and this time struck the space pocket with full force.

One of the energy blasts hit the Castle head on!

"Direct hit!" Coran shouted, "He definitely knows we're here!"

"Get the particle barrier up!" Allura commanded.

Several more shots hit the Castle before the particle barrier rose fully.

The ro-beast began pulling in more crystals to fuel another attack. It was pulling so hard that it began to draw the Castle out of the pocket as well.

"Paladins, I think it's time to launch!" Allura shouted.

"Form Voltron!" Lelouch shouted from his bay.

Not wasting another moment, Voltron burst out of the space pocket, slamming hard and head-on into the ro-beast. With a mighty punch, the ro-beast was nearly flipped backward, its blasting shot hitting above it and avoiding its real target.

From inside the pocket, the machine that was being used to hold the space pocket together collapsed. Moments later, it vanished.

"We're exposed! The space fold has been lowered!" Allura shouted.

From the base, a small space pod, that they assumed contained Ulaz blasted away from the base and battle.

"Well, there goes Ulaz," Coran said.

"I knew we should never trust a Galra!" Allura seethed.

Meanwhile, just outside the xanthorium circle, Voltron continued to pummel to ro-beast mercilessly, pushing it back with each strike.

Then Lelouch spotted a couple of outlying xanthorium chunks coming up behind the ro-beast, and he smirked darkly.

"Let's light this thing up. Fire lasers!" he commanded. With matching smirks, Kallen and Rai let loose several blasts at the monster, pushing it back and sending it tumbling into the open.

This small taste of victory was short-lived though as to their horror, the ro-beast turned around and began to draw in xanthorium crystals again.

"He's pulling in more ammo!" Milly exclaimed.

"Move, move, move!" Lelouch shouted and Voltron out of the way just in time from the ro-beasts blast. They failed to notice how close they were flying to the xanthorium chunks, some of which got hit by the lasers, causing massive explosions. The Paladins all braced themselves from the turbulence it created. They ultimately managed to escape the minefield, but they then saw to their
shock that the ro-beast was now aiming its suction ability towards them.

"Milly, Suzaku, Rivalz, Shirley, give me full reverse boosters!" Lelouch shouted.

The quartet quickly obeyed, but even with the boosters at full strength, the ro-beast's power proved to be stronger. Plus, more xanthorium chunks were also being pulled in, causing Voltron to crash into several of them, pulling them even closer in.

"Well, this really sucks," Rivalz couldn't help but joke despite the situation.

Everyone groaned in dismay. Now? Seriously Rivalz?

Eventually, Voltron was in reach of the ro-beast's mouth but managed to avoid being pulled fully in by bracing his feet on each side of the machine's face. They tried to push its arms out of the way as well, but they held fast.

"We can't get free!" Shirley shouted shrilly.

Kallen growled before gasping. To her right, a keyhole began to rise from within the cockpit.

"I've got this!" she shouted, her red bayard morphing into her hands. With a shout, she plunged the bayard into the keyhole and twisted it.

From around Aka's neck, three long claws emerged, almost making it look like a mane had formed, but that wasn't the feature the Red Lion was focusing on. Relying purely on her Lion's instinct, Kallen plunged Aka's head into the middle of the ro-beast's mouth.

"Now!" she shouted, and with a flash of red, waves of hot red energy exploded within the beast.

With a roar of distress, the ro-beast seized up, and with all the strength it had, pushed Voltron off of it just as an explosion from within its mouth erupted.

"Did it get him?" Suzaku asked.

As the smoke cleared, the ro-beast showed that it was clearly still functional, but they could see multiple cracks and even some of the metal that had melted around the beast's inner mouth.

"Not quite, but whatever that was, it's certainly wasn't unscathed," Lelouch said, as Voltron quickly rocketed away from the ro-beast, "Right now though, we've got to keep some distance between us and that ro-beast!"

Then from behind, with what sounded like a shriek of fury, the ro-beast sped after them, and despite the damage around its jaw, began rapidly firing lasers in Voltron's direction. As it did so though, some of the crack began to crackle dangerously. Each shot hit a xanthorium cluster, forcing Voltron to maneuver around several explosions evasively.

Voltron shot upward to avoid the explosions, but the ro-beast then attempted to pull them in once more.

"It's trying to pull us in again!" Rai shouted as Voltron flew wildly around the open space, trying to stay out of the range of suction. When that didn't work, Suzaku, Milly, Rivalz, and Shirley activated the leg thrusters again to try and slow them down.

"We're burning thrusters at full capacity, and it's not making any difference!" Rivalz shouted, frustrated and scared.
Before Voltron could be drawn entirely to its mouth though, a laser blast from behind hit the ro-beast, shaking its assault and causing Voltron to spin backward from shock.

Looking behind them, they saw that the laser had come from the Castle, providing covering fire.

"Are you all alright?" C.C. called to them.

"Alive, yes. All right, no," Shirley told them grimly.

Allura suddenly grunted as the particle barrier started to get bombarded with xanthorium crystals crashing into it, being sucked towards the ro-beast's direction in the process.

"It's going for the Castle!" Suzaku shouted.

"We need some way to stop its tractor beam!" Rai exclaimed.

"I've got an idea," Lelouch said over the comms, praying that it would work, "Rai, form shield!"

With a burst of energy, Voltron's winged contracted the collided in front of them into their strong red barrier, "We can use the shield to block the beam!" Lelouch ordered, and Voltron raced at full speed towards the ro-beast. Once within range, the shield was shoved between the ro-beast's jaws and punched it backward. The ro-beast tumbled through the air, but the strategy seemed to work as the Castle was now free from the pull.

"Okay, we stopped the beam. Now, what?" Kallen shouted.

"Now, we go on the offensive," Lelouch ordered.

"The xanthorium clusters! We can use them!" Rai said with a smirk.

With a nod from Lelouch, the Paladins propelled Voltron up to the ro-beast and pushed it at high speed towards the xanthorium cluster's ring. After building up enough speed, they let go, and ro-beast flew backward into one of the giant chunks, Voltron's shield returning to him moments before it exploded.

"Okay, we had to have got it that time!" Milly huffed.

Much to their shock, once the initial blast dissipated, the ro-beast belched out a blast that they were barely able to shield in time. And Unlike the other blasts, it felt much stronger, as if all of its energy had been concentrated into one single strike.

"The shield can't handle this much power!" Rai shouted as they continued to be blasted back. Then with shouts of pain, the shield was torn apart, blasting Voltron fully, sending him spiraling dangerously throughout the battlefield.

Though the cracks had certainly increased around it and taking advantage of Voltron's hit, the ro-beast attempted to suck them in once more.

Lelouch grit his teeth, thrusters at full strength trying to stop them, but it seemed to be of little help. Nothing they tried had worked!

"Guys, I hate to say this, but we might not be strong enough to beat this thing!" Shirley shouted in a near panic.

"Hang on!" a voice exclaimed through the cockpits and Lelouch gasped.

"Ulaz?!" he exclaimed.
Watching in shock, they saw the ship that the Galra had previously been flying away zoom back towards them.

"I'm going to take it down from the inside!" the Blade member said, blasting past Voltron and heading straight toward the beast.

"Ulaz, no! Let us handle this!" Rai begged from within Voltron.

"Voltron is too valuable. The universe needs you," he said with finality before disappearing into the ro-beast's mouth.

The ro-beast's mouth slammed shut and was temporarily thrown off balance from Ulaz's strike, but it straightened itself moments later and turned to face Voltron once more. With a mighty blast from its thrusters, it charged them.

With gasps of shock, the Paladin's braced themselves for impact.

"Get ready!" Lelouch shouted, Voltron throwing its fists up to defend.

Before it could reach them though, the ro-beast stopped. The cracks along its frame began to fizzle even brighter now, and they all watched in awe as the ro-beast's limbs began to be forcibly pulled into itself.

"Ulaz opened up the space pocket from inside!" Suzaku realized, "It's falling in on itself!"

The ro-beast continued to shrink smaller and smaller until at last, it vanished, imploding completely with a flash of violet light.

"H-He did it!" Shirley exclaimed after a moment of stunned silence.

"Ulaz saved us!" Kallen agreed.

Despite the victory though, a wave of sadness flowed down the Paladin bond.

"He's gone," Rai said mournfully, his eyes misting with unshed tears.

"...Paladins, return to the Castle," Lelouch eventually ordered forlornly.

o~o

Later on, evening time according to the Castle's clocks, Lelouch stood alone, gazing out one of the many long windows scattered around the ship. He was deep in thought. He believed they might have found their first true ally in this war, but right now, contacting them was out of the question.

The Black Paladin was no fool, though. In war, risks had to be taken for battles to be won. And a fight wasn't won with weapons alone, but with the soldiers that wielded them.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of footsteps behind him. Turning around, he saw C.C. approaching him.

Come to think of it, he had meant to ask the immortal a couple questions, and now was as good a time as any.

"C.C., did you ever meet my father?" he asked bluntly.

The immortal stopped in her tracks for a moment and before she could respond he pressed further,
turning his head partway to meet her eyes, filled with distrust and suspicion, "C.C. did you ever give my father a Geass?"

C.C. didn't speak for about a minute before she started approaching again and answered, "I didn't give him one. That honor belongs to another. V.V. A boy, or at least that's what he looks like, who's also immortal and can form contracts as well. He's the one who did."

Lelouch inhaled sharply, "So you did know my father."

"Yes," she nodded, seeing no point in denying it, "I met him in his youth long before you were born. But I haven't seen him in years."

"...I see."

"...So what now?" she asked with anticipation.

"...Where are the others right now?"

o~o

On the bridge, Rai shook and couldn't help but cry as the reality finally hit him that Ulaz was dead. Though he barely knew the Galra, he still considered him a friend, and he gave his life for them to live on.

The other Paladins were gathered around him in an attempt to provide comfort, Shirley sitting to his immediate right, rubbing a hand along his back.

"Sorry we doubted Ulaz, Rai," Kallen said sadly, "He saved all our lives."

"He was a good man," Suzaku agreed with a nod.

"I-I still have so many questions," Rai stuttered and wiped his tears away.

"And we'll find the answers, no matter what!" Milly said with a determined frown, her fist clenching.

"...Hey guys, about what Ulaz said earlier," Rivalz said, "Do you think Zarkon is really tracking us?"

"We cannot know for sure," Allura suddenly said sternly, "Only Ulaz knew our whereabouts."

The Princess's statement left many of the Paladin's in shock. Rai angrily rose from his seat and faced her.

"You don't really think Ulaz gave us up, do you?! After he sacrificed himself?!" he demanded.

"Yeah! Maybe Zarkon found out about this place on his own!" Kallen agreed, narrowing her eyes, "He's probably been searching for the Blade of Marmora too!"

Allura, however, didn't so much as flinch at their accusations, "It's clear the loss of Ulaz has caused you great concern, but, regardless of how Zarkon located us, we cannot stay here any longer. It isn't safe."

"Should we meet up with the rest of Ulaz's group?" Rivalz suggested.

"I don't think that's a good idea," Shirley said, "Ulaz himself said that we need to be absolutely sure
we aren't being tracked before that."

"...Ultimately, our next step isn't our choice make though," Suzaku said grimly, turning towards the bridge's entrance as it opened.

Standing there was Lelouch, fully dressed in his uniform for Zero, his cape flowing behind him and helmet held at his waist. C.C. also entered beside him.

Lelouch turned to the Princess and looked her dead in the eye.

"Plot a course for Earth."

Chapter End Notes

AN: DUN, DUN, DUUUNN! You heard Zero right! Next stop: Earth. The moment everyone has been waiting for! But what exactly is Lelouch planning, especially with the danger of being tracked by Zarkon?

Well... wait and find out! Mwahahaha!

Seriously though, I hope you all enjoyed the chapter, and if you did, R&R pretty please!

Oh, and just to inform everyone, Kallen's Geass is called 'Absolute Perception,' and it works similar to how the Byakugan works in the Naruto franchise. We'll go into a little more detail in future chapters.

Also, I keep forgetting to add this, but if you noticed at the end of chapter two in the AN, I changed Rai's voice actor. He's now being voiced by Dante Basco, the voice of Prince Zuko from ATLA!

Anyway, that's all for announcements. See you all next time!
"You've found nothing?!” Viceroy Cornelia exclaimed, slamming her hands down on her desk and staring down the officers before her. Villeta Nu, Jeremiah Gottwald, Andreas Darlton, and her personal knight, Gilbert Guilford all stood assembled before her in her office.

"Apologies Viceroy." Jeremiah bowed deeply, "but we've searched everywhere! We've investigated Ashford Academy top to bottom and closely interviewed every relative of each missing student."

"We even took the time to locate Ms. Stadtfield's biological mother, who's currently being held for twenty years in the Area's prison for Refrain use. She knew nothing," Villeta reported. She remembered when they had revealed the news to Ms. Kozuki, who, they discovered, had no idea her daughter had gone missing until they had told her. The woman had just sat there in shock for almost five minutes as they continued to question her and then just broke down in tears. She was so incoherent that they were forced to cut their time short and have Kozuki escorted back to her cell.

Cornelia li Britannia tisked in disgust. The moment that she and Euphemia had recognized Lelouch's face on the news last month, she had spent every free moment that she had to try and locate them as soon as possible. They had contacted the media outlets but had ordered them to keep quiet about the recent break in the investigation, for free that the Elevens could somehow use this to their advantage. If they located Lelouch and Nunnally first-

Cornelia squashed that thought before it could finish.

All other military and law enforcement that weren't on duty were tasked with assisting in finding the vi Britannia siblings at any cost. She even put the Purebloods to work, and they took it up faster than a dog to a bone.

Cornelia wasn't short-sighted though. She knew that seven students spontaneously going missing, one of them being Suzaku Kurugui, was also a significant issue. Therefore, she also ordered for all of the families of the students to be investigated. Though she believed it was ultimately a longshot, a couple of clues could be unraveled in this way.

"Viceroy if may..." Darlton spoke up.

"What is it?" she asked.

"This thought occurred to me a while ago, but I haven't had the chance to bring it up. But, do you believe that Zero may be responsible for these abductions?"

"What?! Zero?! To think that he would sink this deep!" Jeremiah snarled from behind.

"I appreciate the concern Darlton," Cornelia said, "but I don't believe that theory is correct."

"Why is that Viceroy?" Guilford questioned.

"Think about it," she continued, "if Zero was really behind these kidnappings, and discovered that one of them was a member of the royal family, one believed to have been dead for years even, don't you think we would've received some sort of ransom or bargain from him by now? Prince Lelouch
and, consequently, Princess Nunnally, in exchange for Area 11. If I were Zero, I'd be a fool not to use them to my advantage."

"...I see your point, Viceroy," Darlton nodded, "I apologize."

"Enough," Cornelia sighed tiredly, "Other than a report on the investigation, I do have another matter to discuss with you all. I believe we may have found where both the JLF and the Black Knights are hiding."

This immediately grabbed the attention of everyone in the room.

"Pardon my suspicions, Viceroy, but what exactly makes you think that both of these factions are hiding together?" Villeta asked, "Considering the events of the hotel-jacking incident, and I highly doubt that the JLF will be eager to utilize the Black Knights in any of their operations."

"When cowards are cornered, they hide together," Cornelia sneered, "especially with how desperate the JLF has been as of late. We've managed to track them to the Narita mountains. Once we wipe them out there, any straggling rebels will fall shortly after."

"And even if the Black Knights aren't there, the largest insurgent group in Area 11 will still be eliminated," Guliford realized.

"That is correct," Cornelia nodded, "However, should it be confirmed that the Black Knights are also there, and Zero with them, bring him to me alive. I will question him myself."

'And once Zero's taken care of, nothing will stop me from finding you and Nunnally, Lelouch. And I will. It's not like you vanished off the face of the planet.'

o~o

The first thing that the Castle spotted upon exiting the wormhole was the plain grey surface of Earth's moon. Upon applying the coordinates, Lelouch, dressed entirely in his Zero costume but currently without his mask, ordered for the Castle to not land on Earth's moon, but to hover just outside of its atmosphere (not that it had one). By hiding within the moon's shadow, not only should it conceal them from Earth below, but none of the long-range satellites should pick them up either.

On the bridge, each Paladin sat up tall behind each of their posts, screens and scans pulled up in front of them.

"Here we are," Kallen said, a slight layer of nervousness in her tone, "Alteans, welcome to Earth."

"Hmmm… quaint," Coran commented upon first glance. From above, out in space, Earth bore a very similar resemblance to Arus, though he doubted that the planet was that primitive.

"Lelouch, you know I trust you, but are you sure this is a good idea?" Rai spoke up, "I mean, Ulaz said there was a chance Zarkon was tracking us. If that's true, we basically just brought him right to our front door."

Lelouch glanced over at Rai, "I appreciate the concern Rai, and I am fully aware of how heavy of a risk this is. However, considering how close Earth is to the Galran border, and the rate that the Empire is expanding, an attack on our planet is only inevitable, just as Allura informed us our first week here. I believe it would be no more than a couple years before the Galra actually came and attacked."
"That's kind of scary when you think about it like that..." Rivalz commented with wide eyes.

"Yeah..." Shirley agreed.

"Indeed," Lelouch nodded, "Also, we've been gone for far too long. Both Voltron and Zero must prepare Earth's defenses as soon as possible."

"Makes sense," Suzaku said.

"I agree," Milly nodded, "the longer we delay this, the less time Earth has to be ready for an invasion."

"At this point, our faces have likely been leaked to the media," Lelouch noted, "Seven Ashford Academy students going missing out of the blue. I highly doubt that we haven't been on national coverage by now."

"Okay, but what's so bad about that?" Rivalz asked.

Lelouch turned to face them, a grim line on his lips, "It means that from here on out, our identities will be our most valuable possession. So we must protect them no matter what. No one on Earth must know the identities of the Paladins of Voltron... and that includes family."

This statement was, predictably met with shouts of protest.

"Wha-wait Lelouch, are saying we can't contact our families?!" Rivalz exclaimed, horrified.

"No way! My mom and dad are probably worried, sick!" Shirley added, "And I can't even talk to them?!"

"I understand if this is hard," Lelouch said before more protests could erupt, "but think about it. If Britannia finds out who you are, that could put your family in danger as well. You should know that the Empire will stoop to endangering its own citizens for their own goals."

This reasoning quieted the rest of the team down as they realized that Lelouch was right. After all, the Emperor had used two of his own children as bargaining tools and then threw them away after Japan was conquered. Plus, it was also likely that the only reason Shirley and Milly were spared in the hotel-jacking was due to Princess Euphemia's presence. The Viceroy wouldn't risk her sister's life but had it only been them, and they wouldn't have been surprised if they were killed as well, just to take down the JLF that overtook the building.

"Suzaku," Lelouch turned to face the Purple Paladin, "this must be the absolute case for you, especially."

"Huh? Why?" Suzaku questioned.

"Well, when you compare this situation to the one where you were falsely accused of Prince Clovis's murder, it could stand on equal footing in a legal sense. Or at least according to Britannia," Lelouch explained with a scowl, "If it's discovered that you are actively opposing them as a Paladin, they could still use you as a pariah and start grinding down on the Japanese population. I doubt the Purebloods will let such an opportunity like that slide from their grasp."

"I...I guess that makes sense," Suzaku admitted sadly.

"Anyone else have any objections?" Lelouch asked and received shakes from all of the Paladins.
"Alright then," he sighed in relief, "Our first step will be to locate where the Black Knights are."

"Assuming that there are anymore Black Knights!" Kallen piped up gravely.

"...I trust that Ohgi didn't do anything too stupid in our absence," Lelouch said, hoping he sounded reassuring.

"Wait, Lelouch, we're getting the Black Knights first?" Rivalz asked.

"Yeah, to honest Lulu, I'd have thought you'd want to fly down and whisk Nunnally up here immediately!" Milly added.

"I'm not completely concerned with Nunnally's safety at the moment," he replied calmly, and continued before anyone could protest, "When we enrolled at Ashford, I had a safe house set up far away from it for us to retreat to should our identities ever get exposed. Sayoko should have Nunnally secured there right now. I trust her with my life."

'And hopefully has that with her as well…'

-o-

"We're certain the Japan Liberation Front's headquarters are in his area," Darlton explained on board the Viceroy's transport, pointing at a map on the table before them, "we've already split four battalions into seven units and hidden them within the vicinity. We've only to wait for the Viceroy's signal, and then we'll surround them in one fell swoop and wipe them out."

"And we're confident the enemy isn't outside of the encirclement line?" Guilford questioned.

"That shouldn't be a problem," Darlton said, "as the operation begins we'll be blocking off the surrounding highways and mountain roads as well."

"Plus, we have reserve units," Cornelia herself added from her throne in the center of the room, "If Zero or the Black Knights are actually stupid enough to show up it'll be the end of them."

Suddenly a transmission showed on the screen of the battlefield. In full view of it was the Knight of Nine herself, Nonette Enneagram, smirking at the screen.

"You sure you won't need any help from me on my end, Nelly?" she asked playfully.

Cornelia frowned and addressed the knight strictly but still with respect, "I can handle this battle myself Nonette, though I appreciate the concern."

Nonette laughed, "Well just don't get a big head out there, okay Corny?"

The Princess's eyebrow twitched, but despite her irritation, she kept her composure in front of the other officers.

"I'll make a note," she said tartly before promptly ending the transmission.

Cornelia sighed and leaned back in her throne slightly, "Damn that woman."

Guilford glanced over at his Princess in surprise and glanced at Darlton. He simply gave him a look that said 'don't ask.'

-o-
Nonette sighed dramatically from her seat in the resting Lancelot. Goodness, little Nelly was way too uptight sometimes.

Ever since Suzaku's disappearance, Nonette volunteered herself to be the test pilot for the Lancelot until he could be found. And she had to admit, and the Lancelot was by far the best knightmare frame she had ever piloted. If all continued to go well, she might just request to have a separate model made for her own personal use.

Aboard the Camelot Division transport, Lloyd, Cecile, and Princess Euphemia were also present. After Suzaku disappeared, Euphie seemed to want to stubbornly stay close to the Camelot Unit. Her sister gave little objection to this arrangement, especially during battle as the Camelot was only called upon to attack as a last resort, and if it were to be attacked, Cornelia trusted Nonette to keep Euphemia safe.

As the Princess watched the others work, she couldn't shake the strange feeling blossoming in her gut, but she couldn't understand why she felt like this.

"Here sub-viceroy," Cecile said, offering Euphie a cup of tea, "this should help calm the nerves."

"Thank you," Euphie accepted with a smile.

"You know sub-viceroy, I'm still wondering why exactly you're here in an irregular unit. I would've thought you'd want to stay close to your sister," Cecile said.

"Well, I wanted to get to know the people that Suzaku had been working with, that's all," Euphie explained.

"Wanting to understand your boyfriend a little better, do you?" Nonette asked mischievously as she walked over.

Euphie squeaked in embarrassment, ducking her head as her cheeks began to color crimson.

The Knight of Nine then put a gentle hand on her shoulder, causing the Princess to look up, "Don't worry. We'll find Kururgi, and your brother and sister."

'As well as you, Prince Zephyr,' she added mentally.

As Nonette continued to console Euphemia, Cecile made her way over to Lloyd to speak with him about the upcoming battle. She stopped in her tracks when she saw what the Earl was viewing on his monitor.

It was a video of that mysterious Blue Lion Knightmare that disappeared over two months ago.

"Lloyd, don't you think you're developing an obsession with that thing?" Cecile scolded and sat down beside him, "It's almost like you're not worried about Suzaku at all!"

"Oh don't get the wrong idea," Lloyd answered, "While Ms. Enneagram is a useful devicer for the Lancelot, she's certainly no Suzaku. Plus, it's not every day that you get to see a Knightmare that can fly and then just vanish off the face of the Earth, completely without a trace."

Cecile sighed and shook her head, seeing that there was no point in arguing further. Lloyd leaned forward and clasped his hands thoughtfully.

'Now, where are you my little blue kitty cat?'
Rai couldn't help but laugh at how easy it was to hack into Britannia's military communications network. Compared to the Galra, it was like comparing a high tech MMORPG game to Pac-Man.

What he saw, however, extinguished any other form of humor in his system.

"Everyone, listen to this!" he exclaimed, pulling the data and recordings up on the screen.

"All units are in position!"

"Understood. Provide logistical support from the G1 as planned. Be sure to command the medical unit appropriately."

Lelouch narrowed his eyes at the all too familiar voice on the other end.

"Who was that Lelouch?" Allura asked, noticing the Black Paladin's expression.

"...That was Cornelia li Britannia," Lelouch responded, pressing some buttons on his control panel and pulling up a picture of his sister onto the main screen, "my older half-sister and the current Viceroy of Japan, or Area 11 as Britannia likes to call it. Due to her unrivaled patriotism and fierceness on the battlefield, she's earned the nickname 'the Goddess of Victory.' When it comes to strategy, however, her skills are only just above average, but she's still a hardened warrior and has never lost a single battle, hence her moniker."

Allura glared narrowly at the Viceroy's image. So this was the woman that was suppressing these people. How disgraceful.

"Hey, uh, Lelouch?" Rivalz asked, suddenly sounding awkward, "Out of curiosity, how many siblings do you actually have?"

Lelouch couldn't help but chuckle at the Blue Paladin's question, "Well, you all already know that Nunnally is my only full-blooded sibling. As for half… well, considering my father has taken over a hundred consorts ("a hun-what?!" Shirley squeaked), I honestly never really took the time to count."

Coran, in particular, looked quite shocked by this revelation, "Um, if I might ask, is it standard custom on your planet to have multiple partners in marriage?"

"No!" all of the Paladins exclaimed almost as one.

"Well…" C.C. said a couple of seconds later, "Honestly the number of wives a man can have usually depends on the region of Earth you inhabit. Some cultures do see polygamy as common practice."

"Yeah, and there are also some humans that just prefer open relationships in general. Just depends on the people in that specific relationship," Milly added.

"Hmmm… fascinating," Coran hummed, twirling his mustache.

"Anyway!" Lelouch proclaimed, drawing their attention back to the screen, "This is an area called the Narita Mountains. The Japanese Liberation Front's headquarters are rumored to be stationed either in or close by this area. From the look and sound of things, Cornelia fully intends to wipe them in one large wave today. It looks like the Britannians have surrounded the mountains, so there will be little to no escape for the JLF at this rate. We can't allow that to happen. Should the
JLF fall, one of the largest resistance groups in Japan will be destroyed."

"...So, what do we do?" Shirley asked.

"Our first objective remains the same. Locate the Black Knights. Once we do, Kallen, it will be your job to escort them to the Castle of Lions safely."

"Me?" Kallen asked.

"You shouldn't sound surprised, you're the only one for the job," Lelouch said, "The other Paladins, including myself, are Britannian, and though Suzaku is Japanese, he's made his status as an Honorary Britannian quite clear."

"Wait, why can't you just get them, Lelouch? You're technically still their leader," Rai asked.

"That may be true, but I've only known the Black Knights for a short amount of time, and I don't believe I've fully earned their trust as of yet. All I am is simply a masked figure, who mysteriously disappeared for a long period of time."

"Wait, Lulu, the Black Knights, don't know your real identity?" Shirley asked, quite shocked.

"Well think about Shirley," C.C. said with an indifferent look, "A Britannian prince leading a rebellion comprised of people who have been oppressed by the same empire. How do you think that would go?"

"Oh, good point," Shirley admitted, slightly embarrassed.

"Speaking of identities though, Lelouch, if we're going to involve the Black Knights in this, you'll have to reveal who you are to them at least," Suzaku said, "and about your Geass. If they find out about that and what it does from a different source, I can see them drawing some pretty messed up conclusions about it."

"I intend to reveal myself and Geass in due time, but seeing Voltron is going to be overwhelming enough for the time being," Lelouch said, "Anyway, since Kallen's the one that has been in the rebel's company even longer than I have, she's the only logical pick to retrieve them. Because of that, they trust her, and they'll listen to her."

Kallen nodded with a determined look on her face, "I understand."

'Hang on, Ohgi! I'm coming!'

"Also, Rai, considering Zerith's invisibility ability, I want you to drop multiple BLIP sensors around the battlefield. We'll use those to try and locate the Black Knights, should they be in Narita. While you're doing that, we shall hold back the Britannian forces in the other lions."

"I can do that," Rai agreed.

"Once Kallen retrieves the Black Knights and drops them off at the Castle, we'll form Voltron and decimate the rest of Cornelia's army," Lelouch finished.

"Decimate?" Shirley asked, eyes widening.

"Uh... yeah Lelouch, I understand wanting to make a big show out of Voltron, but is it really necessary to wipe the whole army out?" Rivalz asked.

"Yeah, that's a bit overkill, isn't it?" Milly asked.
Lelouch let a small smile creep onto his face, "Hmhm, that's the idea."

Most of the Paladins, even Allura, and Coran, looked at Lelouch in near shock. But the idea was to simply scare Britannia, not-

"If we show Voltron and demonstrate how it can not only rivals but *surpasses* Britannia, it might just be enough to get them to stand down and listen to us, which in turn will make it easier to prepare a defense against the Galra."

"And if they don't?" Rai asked.

"What do you mean 'if they don't'?" Suzaku turned to the Green Paladin.

"Er-hypothetically speaking, I mean," Rai amended.

"Hypothetically speaking," Lelouch said with a hint of sarcasm, "if that turns out to be the case, then Voltron's first course of action will simply be to liberate Japan from Britannia, the hard way."

Allura and Coran, who had barely said anything throughout the entire strategy meeting couldn't help but once again be amazed at Lelouch's genius planning. If all went according to plan, things were sure to end in Voltron's favor.

Allura made a mental note never to go head to head with Lelouch in battle if they ever, for some absurd reason, became enemies. She wouldn't stand a chance.

"Hey, hold on a second," Rivalz suddenly said, "Why are we even wasting our time here in Japan? If you want my personal opinion, I say we fly Voltron straight to Pendragon right now and knock the Emperor off his high-horse!"

"That's a terrible idea," Lelouch deadpanned immediately, "if the whole of Britannia were to fall due to such actions, all other nations, including the E.U. and the Chinese Federation, will lash out at *each other* and fight to try and fill the power void that Britannia will ultimately leave behind. The world would spiral into further chaos, making it that much easier for the Galra to overpower Earth's current defenses.

"Hmm, the divided nature of your planet that you continue to describe is quite primitive. Er-no offense of course," Coran quickly apologized, realizing that he had spoken that thought aloud.

"None taken," all of the humans, C.C. included, said in unison.

"Excuse me, Lelouch, may I make a small point," Allura spoke up.

"What is it?" Lelouch asked.

"While I understand your reasoning in your strategy, I don't believe freeing one country at a time on your planet would be very efficient," she explained, "it would simply take far too long to unite everyone in this way."

"That is true. Going around and freeing civilizations one by one would be a waste of time. However, there is a way to easily speed it up as well," Lelouch smirked.

"How so?" Allura asked, intrigued.

"I don't know if the same thing applied on Altea, but on Earth, whenever a person does something, big or small, the first thing they always expect to receive, is results, be they good or bad."
Suzaku flinched slightly at this proclamation. He remembered arguing with Zero/Lelouch on this very same point months ago after he had been rescued from his execution. Even now, he still didn't totally agree with such a mindset, but he was wise enough to see that voicing it wouldn't help at the moment. So he remained silent.

"If we manage to free even one country, even if it's a small one, others not against Britannia will begin to rally behind us. We may even be able to convince some people from Britannia itself to join our cause. Although, if you want my honest opinion," Lelouch looked down for a moment, "I don't believe my father will be too cooperative in any case. He's not exactly the most open-minded individual you'll meet."

"I see," Allura realized, "it's the same strategy you implemented at the Balmera. When you revealed our victory over the astral conflux, many other rebel factions began to fight back on their own."

"Exactly. Sometimes the most effective strategies are the most overlooked, and often the simplest of actions can bring a tsunami of trouble to the enemy."

"Who said that?" Milly asked.

"I did," Lelouch chuckled before turning serious again, "One more thing. Before we begin our assault, there's something I must confirm with all of you."

All of the other Paladins looked at Lelouch confused. What could be so important that he would bring it up now?

"I already know that you are completely on board with this Kallen, but as for the rest of you, you realize that once this begins, you'll essentially become traitors to your own country, even you Suzaku, though you're only an Honorary Britannian. I need to know now if you are fully committed to this. I don't want to sound like I doubt any of you, but as I said when this all started, I won't force you to do anything against your will."

There was a pause among everyone. Lelouch did bring up a point. Once this was over, there would likely be no turning back.

However…

"Lulu, I may be Britannian, but I'm also a Paladin of Voltron," Shirley said first, a closed fist raised, "people that protect those who can't protect themselves! What Britannia is doing is wrong, I understand that now. A-And I trust you! No matter what, I'm with you!"

Milly started laughing, good-heartedly, "Wow! Nice going, Shirley! Couldn't have said it better myself!"

"Yeah!" Rivalz nodded before remembering something, "Oh, that's right! We never told Lelouch about our promise!"

"Your promise?" Lelouch asked. Suzaku, C.C., Kallen, Allura, and Coran also looked curiously at the four Paladins curiously.

"Yeah," Rai nodded, "back at that universal station, Milly, Rivalz, Shirley, and I had some time to talk about what had happened. Not only about Voltron, but also about what you told us. And we made a vow, right there in that central control station, that we would stand by you and Nunnally, Lelouch, no matter what happens! We're Defenders of the Universe, and that means we stand against all tyranny, not just the Galra!"
Lelouch gasped. He had had no knowledge of this vow ever taking place, and the fact that the four had made it touched him. He smiled graciously at them, eyes shining with tears.

"A Warrior's Bond," Coran murmured off to the side.

"Huh? A what?" Kallen asked.

"A Warrior's Bond. That's what we call such vows on Altea. The very first Paladins carried such a bond as well… for a long time," Coran said sullenly. No one needed to ask what he meant by 'for a long time.'

Lelouch then turned to the final Paladin. He could only imagine how hard this might be for Suzaku. But he would remain true to his word. He wasn't going to force Suzaku to follow him.

Suzaku was currently lost within his own thoughts. During his time fighting alongside Lelouch and the other Paladins, it had given him a lot of time to think about things, particularly about Britannia itself. Suzaku wasn't a fool; he knew that Britannia was far from perfect, and could see undeniable parallels it shared with the Galra Empire. He understood that Britannia could quickly become like the Galra if nothing were done to change it, and still hoped that an internal change was possible. However, he had also learned some valuable lessons as a Paladin, and one of them was that despite the situation, facts simply had to be acknowledged. And one indisputable fact right now was that if Earth remained as divided as it did, they wouldn't stand a chance when the Galra arrived.

Plus, despite all of Lelouch's flaws, he proved that he was a reliable and competent leader and did show that he cared for their well-being above all else. Because of this, he had chosen to take a chance and trust him, and so far it seemed to have paid off.

So why shouldn't he trust him now?

"Lelouch, you're my friend, I'll always be here for you and Nunnally no matter what," he looked up at his friend with a smile, "I'm with you. One hundred percent."

An honest smile graced Lelouch's lips at this proclamation, "Thank you Suzaku," with a final nod, he lifted his mask to his face, "Paladins, to your Lions!"

"Hell yeah! Time to kick Britannia's a.s.s!" Rivalz shouted with a jump, causing everyone to laugh before retreating to their Lions.

Before he descended to his own, Zero turned to C.C., "C.C., remain here, and expect some visitors very soon."

"I understand," C.C. smiled as she watched Zero below to the Black Lion's chambers, "Now… let the games begin."

o~o

"Right, commence the operation!" Cornelia shouted as her Gloucester was launched out of the G1. Behind her, all of her subordinates launched and followed her up the mountain.

"You, the Japan Liberation Front, you who time has left behind, you who have forgotten basic human decency, you and your dream of a bygone golden age shall and rot to nothingness," Cornelia whispered in disgust at the JLF and their cowardly tactics.

o~o
"We're under enemy attack?" General Katase cried out as he stepped into the war room of their base within the mountains.

"Yes sir, the Britannian forces have completely encircled the Narita mountains. We counted over a hundred units," one of the rebels informed him.

"We're completely surrounded, and our underground reserve forces were captured all at once," another cried.

"General Katase, we've received a message from Cornelia's forces demanding our surrender," another exclaimed.

"Imbecile! If we fall here, then we've lost, and the whole resistance movement falls with us."

"But General, do we engage the enemy in battle? Or do we dig in?"

"What about Todoh? Where is he?" Katase asked.

"He's gone to Kyoto to get the custom Burais. The Four Holy Swords are traveling with him too, along with another to receive the Guren Mrk II."

"Then we're on schedule. He should be returning soon," Katase said with a small bit of relief, 
"Todoh will make it in time. Prepare to bring out the Burais. We'll break out of the circle on one side and evacuate. We'll show them the Japanese spirit and pride. This is our moment of truth!"

From another area of the mountain, one may even call it the rear line, several other Burai with a familiar symbol etched into them lay in wait for commands.

"Come on! Why isn't the JFL ordering us to attack already?" Tamaki whined.

" Probably because they don't trust us and we're simply the last resort," Sugiyama said, though his voice had a trace of annoyance as well.

"Ohgi, are you sure this was a good idea?" Inoue asked their second in command.

"If you want my honest answer, no, I don't," Ohgi replied honestly, "but we couldn't just do nothing when we were informed about this. I'm sure that Zero would've done the same. He wouldn't let one of Japan's biggest resistance groups fall like this."

Despite his proclamation, Ohgi honestly wasn't too sure anymore himself. For the past two months, any attempt to contact Zero had been met with radio silence. Several newer members of the Black Knights began to believe that Zero had gone and abandoned them, but something in Ohgi's gut was telling him that that wasn't the case. Which meant that Zero had either been captured or was planning something that required the other Black Knights not to know about it. Neither option sat well with him, but they were the only explanations he could think of.

There was also the fact that he had still not heard from Kallen yet either. Ever since she was officially pronounced missing, he had been using every spare moment he had trying to find some clue as to where she could have gone. It wasn't like her to simply disappear like this. Plus, along with six other students from her school. The police and investigators were going mad at having not found any clue at all. It's like they just vanished into thin air.

Plus, the fact that both Kallen and Zero disappeared around the same time disturbed Ohgi too. He
had brought this concern up to the other Black Knights, and they thought it was strange as well though Tamaki's comment of the two of them being somewhere 'sitting in a tree' wasn't necessary!

Despite this though, when the BK received an anonymous tip about the Britannians attacking the JFL headquarters, he knew they couldn't just sit back and do nothing. He knew Zero wouldn't have anyway. So when they had contacted the JLF to inform them of the attack, they had agreed to work with them, and that had resulted in the BKs taking up this rear line by the mountain.

From the sound of outside, the battle was beginning, and would only be a matter of time before the Britannians broke through.

Ohgi hoped he had made the right call.

o~o

From within the Camelot Division, Nonette was explaining the battle plan to Euphemia, hoping it would put her at ease with her sister being on the front lines.

"The enemy's main base is around here," she pointed at an electronic map, similar to the one in the G1, "but it hasn't been pinpointed yet. Until a list is obtained of their collaborators, we can't burn down everything with the aerial bombing. As of right now, the enemy should be engaging the encirclement and will try to break through. From there we will be able to ascertain where their base is located. The main forces are divided into three fronts: the units led by General Darlton here," she pointed at the east side of the mountain, "General Alex here," she pointed to the middle, "And our little Nelly here," she pointed to the west, "As for the flanking forces..."

Suddenly, the Camelot Unit was greeted with the shock of the map's image becoming garbled.

"Enemy ECM," Nonette said with a frown. That only meant one thing. The battle had begun.

o~o

"The main enemy force should be coming out anytime now. We're switching to ECCN mode on channel Alpha four," Darlton smirked as he and his unit began to ascend the mountain, "The enemy, what are we calling them again?"

"Burais sir."

"Right, they're rather like pseudo Glasgows so watch out for them."

"Yes, my Lord."

o~o

"How clever, they turned this mountain into a fortress," Cornelia commented sarcastically as Burais emerged from a hidden elevator covered by trees.

"Your Highness, please fall back."

"Guilford, please don't treat me as I'm another one of your women," Cornelia then shot forward in her Glasgow.

"It's...Cornelia!" A JLF soldier shouted.

"Don't panic! Take out the leader!" The three aimed their rifles and shot at Cornelia recklessly.
"Insolent worms!" Cornelia shouted as she evaded the bullets and swung her lance, knocking all three of them down.

She then plunged her lance into the nearest Burai, lifting it above her head and watched as it exploded. Cornelia snorted in disgust at how pathetic the pilots were performing.

Guilford fired a slash harken at a nearby turret, "Right, well then I'll cover you from the rear."

Cornelia smirked as she glanced back at her knight before looking up at the mountain. "Well, Cornelia is here! Is there no one who can challenge me?"

o~o

"The enemy seems to be concentrated over here. This may be the target. Split up now!" Darlton commanded.

Just as the Knightmares began to do so, however, several blue lasers rained down from the sky, completely demolishing Darlton's squad.

"What?!" Darlton shouted in a mix of shock and horror.

"YAHOO!" Rivalz shouted in glee, and Polaris roared almost smugly with him as the Blue Lion in all of her glory landed smack in front of Darlton and what remained of his forces.

"Th-That's!" Darlton exclaimed, recognizing the Lion Knightmare from months ago. They had never been able to relocate it after they initially spotted it. And now, here it was once again, standing between him and JLF's entrance.

Polaris let out yet another loud roaring cry, staring down at the Britannian Knightmares in front of her.

Acting instinctively, Darlton, followed by the rest of his squad immediately open fired upon the Lion, but to their amazement, the bullets didn't even seem to dent the Lion's metal.

"Yo, dudes! Chill out!" Rivalz shouted with a smirk as pushed his controls forward and Polaris's mouth opened to unleash a giant blast of icy firepower.

Darlton managed to dive his Knightmare out of the way, but several others were unable to move fast enough and were soon found frozen solid, their pilots still trapped inside.

"F-Fall back!" Darlton orders, a fearful, foreign emotion in his tone. As his squadron began to retreat, he quickly pulled up his communication link with the Viceroy, "Viceroy Cornelia! Th-That Knightmare, the Lion, from two months ago. It's here!"

o~o

"WHAT?!" Cornelia exclaimed this message shocked her enough that her Knightmare staggered.

"V-Viceroy!" a soldier from another squadron cried out, "There's another one! But this one's yellow!"

"A large red lion Knightmare just landed by our squad Viceroy!" Lord Kewell exclaimed, "It's wiping us out!"

"Wh."
"Princess! Watch out!" Guilford shouted from behind. That was her only warning before a large black lion Knightmare, landed heavily right in front of her Knightmare and the rest of her platoon.

"Viceroy! Please get back!"

From inside of Zenobia, Lelouch couldn't help but smirk, "Hello Cornelia," he didn't turn on outside communications, so his sister didn't hear his greeting. Wouldn't want to spoil the surprise after all.

o~o

Back at the G1 unit and the Camelot Division, the rest of the forces were shocked to hear all of the reports of the Lions landing all over the battlefield. From the look of things on the screen, the Knightmares were receiving little to no damage while their forces were practically getting wiped off the map.

Lloyd in particular though was practically vibrating in his chair, eyes sparkling in excitement. This was the moment he'd been waiting for!

o~o

"Don't just stand there! Attack!" Kewell shouted and charged quite recklessly at the Red Lion.

"Okay, are you guys that stupid?!" Kallen shouted as Aka's claw slammed down on the Knightmare, and it erupted into flames below.

"Lord Kewell!" Villeta shouted in horror.

"Fight to the death!" Jeremiah shouted in rage, leveling his gun at the Lion.

The other Knightmares stayed back, trying to fire with their guns.

"We're not making even a dent on it!" Villeta shouted.

Kallen sat casually in Aka, almost with a bored expression.

"I know Lelouch said to dial down on casualties, but…” her hand laid down almost lazily on the controls and slid the handle forward.

Aka's mouth clicked open, and a stream of flame shot out, surrounding the Pureblood unit in a ring of fire.

"What?!" Jeremiah shouted, frantically looking around at the flames.

"Lord Jeremiah! We have to pull back now!" Villeta shouted.

"No! I won't be mocked like this!" he shouted stubbornly.

Villeta grunted and then shoved Jeremiah's Sutherland away from the approaching fire.

"What are you-?!"

"We need to get out here!"

Before Jeremiah could protest further, Villetta, along with the few Purebloods that were still mobile, drove off from the scene.
"Serves you Purebloods right," Kallen spat though with a smug grin on her face, "Now Ohgi, where are you?"

O-o

Despite reports of the Lions landing around the battlefield, there was still one that had not been reported. His cloaking shield up, Rai and Zerith flew stealthily around the mountain and forest, dropping BLIP sensors every place that seemed reliable. He laughed when one of them hit the top of a Knightmare, and once it hit the ground and activated, the machines quickly made themselves scarce.

He dropped the last sensor near the top of the Narita Mountain. Considering the range that the sensors usually had, that one should pick up on every lifeform, whether human or not, in and around it.

"Alright! All sensors are on the ground!" Rai reported as he finally dropped his shield and zoomed to a stop right in front of a group of Sutherlands.

O-o

"Update!" another officer shouted through the Castle's hacked link, "Another one! A green lion!"

With the report that all the BLIPs had been delivered Allura pulled up a full map of the ground below.

"Alright, I have positions of all humans down below," Allura informed the Paladins.

"There is one small hiccup though," Coran added, "Despite knowing the positions, there's no way to tell which of them are these Black Knights that you're looking for."

O-o

"We'll figure it out later. Keep us updated!" Lelouch shouted as Zen swung her tail, knocking several of the Knightmares back and into trees.

"Open fire!" Cornelia ordered from down below. Some of the Glousters even fired small missiles at the Black Lion, but none had any effect on it whatsoever.

"The material the lions are made from will never cease to amaze me," Lelouch said with a grin as he reclined slightly in his pilot chair. He laughed almost sinisterly, "Not so fun being on the receiving end for once, isn't it, dear sister?"

Cornelia seemed to register that the gunfire was having no effect and changed tactics. She hefted her lance and charged straight towards the lion aiming for one of the joints.

"Princess Cornelia!" Guilford shouted in warning. Cornelia didn't see what was happening until it was too late as the Black Lion's massive paw shot upwards and slammed down on the front of her Gloucester. She was pinned down, the Black Lion's head hanging over her, like she was a mouse it was curiously inspecting.

"Princess!" Guilford gasped before stopping short to barely avoid a laser shot from the Black Lion's tail. He and the rest of the squad stopped short as the tail raised, charging to fire again.

Though the Viceroy refused to admit it aloud, she was indeed quite frightened, the bright yellow eyes of the monstrous Knightmare glaring down at her.
The Black Lions jaws suddenly snapped downwards, around her golden lance. She heard Guilford and the other soldiers shout in horror as this was happening. Her lance was ripped from her Gloucester's hands and snapped into pieces with a single flex of its jaws.

Finally, with what sounded like a disgusted snarl, the Lion released her and with a swift turnabout, flicked its tail, slamming it into Guilford and her other subordinates. With yells, they slammed hard into the trees behind them.

She pulled on the controls but realized that Lion's claw had done more damage than she thought as she couldn't lift herself up.

"You!" she snarled as, to her fury, the Lion began to strut slowly away before it shot back up into the sky.

The Goddess of Victory roared in fury! Not only was this her first actual defeat, but to receive such disrespect, such audacity! Whoever was inside that Knightmare, once she got her hands on them, they would wish they had never been born!

As she watched it disappear behind the trees, all she could do was scream furiously.

o~o

"What's happening?!" General Katase demanded.

"We're not sure, sir! Several highly advanced Knightmares appeared out of nowhere! From the looks of things, they're tearing the Britannian army to pieces!"

"They're holding them back?!" Katase asked.

"Yes! Nothing that's thrown at them is working!"

o~o

"Zero, five more human signatures are approaching the battlefield from the south," Allura suddenly informed him from the Castle.

"Five more? At what speed?" he asked.

"They appear to be moving at roughly the same speed as those other Knightmare machines."

"The JFL must have sent for back up," Lelouch muttered, "I don't think we need to worry about them. The JFL know we're not an enemy right now."

o~o

"All units, are you ready?" Todoh questioned seriously.

"Yes, sir!" the Four Holy Swords and their guest proclaimed.

"All right. Deploy the Guren and Custom Burais!"

"Deploying!"

The top of the trucks opened up and six Knightmare Frames, five resembling Burais, and the sixth one was a larger red Knightmare with its right arm significantly longer than its left, with a large silver contraption attached to it.
"Listen carefully, if these Lions are on our side, they should allow us time to help the General evacuate! But we must understand the situation first! Until we do, attack from all sides!" Colonel Tohdoh Kyoshiro ordered.

"YES, SIR!" the five soldiers shouted as they charged up the mountain.

Todoh, the Guren, and the Four Holy Swords were making short work of any other Knightmares that weren't currently engaging the Lion Knightmares.

Now that he saw one of them, a large purple one, up close, Todoh almost had to pinch himself. The Britannians weren't making any headway with the Lion whatsoever. Blue lasers flew from the Lion's tail, and its claws and teeth were quickly crushing any that got too close. Although Todoh also noted that whoever was piloting this Knightmare didn't seem to be aiming to kill the Britannians, just disable the Knightmares themselves. Either way, it was confirmed to the Colonel officially of who the Lion was fighting when its tail collided with a Sutherland that nearly struck Chiba's Burai from behind.

Convinced of the Lion's allegiance, Todoh took the time to contact the headquarters immediately, "General! I apologize for the late arrival, what's happening?!" Todoh demanded.

"We're not sure ourselves Todoh!" Katase replied, "But we're using the arrival of these Lions to evacuate the base! We need all the help we can right now!"

"I understand," the Colonel nodded, "We will assist as best as we can."

o~o

From the Camelot Division's transport, Euphemia watched the battle with fear in her eyes. She heard that the Purebloods had been forced to retreat, along with Darlton's unit. They had failed to get in contact with General Alex's platoon either, and word just arrived that backup for the JFL had arrived as well.

"Asplund, get this Knightmare ready to launch immediately!" Nonette ordered fiercely as she climbed up into the Lancelot's cockpit.

"Aha! With pleasure Miss Enneagram!" The Earl practically sang.

"Wait! Lady Enneagram! The Camelot unit hasn't been called on for assistance yet!" Cecile pointed out.

"That's not necessary! As a Knight of the Round, I'm personally ordering the launch of this unit. Upon doing so, I want all available military personnel sent my way as backup. Understood?"

"Ah! Yes, yes! Absolutely!" Lloyd was practically frothing at the mouth with exuberance, "This is the perfect chance to test my creation against these Lions!"

"Nonette-!" Euphie called out.

"Don't worry about me Euphie," Nonette said just as the cockpit closed, "I've got this!"

o~o

"Man! I'll be honest, I didn't think I'd have this much fun smashing these Knightmares up!" Milly commented with a smirk as leaped out of the way one Gloucester's spears.
"I know, right?" Rivalz commented, "At least the smart ones know to run away from us? And to think, for a while I actually sort of respected these guys, you know?"

"Trust me, I understand the feeling perfectly," Lelouch said a little darkly, shoving back memories that left a terrible taste in his mouth.

"Paladins," Allura's face lit up inside all of the cockpits, "There's a large number of people evacuating to the northwest of the mountain range. However, there's a small pocket of them that have yet to move from their position."

"That's got to be them!" Lelouch exclaimed, realizing that must be the Black Knight's location. He narrowed his eyes in suspicion, 'The JFL is likely using them as decoys to hurry the evacuation along should the enemy break through that far. Just throwing them under the bus, it seems.'

"Kallen!" Lelouch cried, his face appearing in Aka's cockpit, "I'm sending you coordinates to the Black Knights location. Once you've confirmed it's them, you know what to do. And hurry, there's several Britannian units are heading their way!"

"Understood Zero!" Kallen nodded before she and Aka zoomed off in the direction specified.

'Hang on, guys! Just hang on!'

H~o

Shirley and Zinnia seemed to be having the easiest time with the Knightmares, both due to Zinnia's heavy armor, and the fact that Shirley was reasonably hesitant to hurt any of the soldiers. Most of the soldiers seemed to understand on their own that they weren't going to be able to break through her armor, though that didn't mean that she didn't have to fight at all, shots were fired from both sides, though Zinnia's laser blasts were far more effective than the bullets the Glosters and Sutherlands fired.

Shirley gasped when something suddenly hit her hard from above and behind.

"What?!" she gasped as Zinnia was knocked forward. She was able to recover quickly, and upon turning around, she came face to face with the Lancelot.

"What the heck?!" Shirley exclaimed upon spotting it.

"Shirley! Get away!" Suzaku shouted, Yoru landing deftly in front of Zinnia.

"Suzaku!" she shouted.

"Just go! I'll handle this!"

"O-Okay," she nodded before retreating off to the side.

Suzaku and Yoru turned to face the unit that he himself used to pilot. Suzaku admitted that he was shocked to see the Lancelot out on the battlefield, and who was testing it if it wasn't him? However, he knew he was the best person to fight it for that very reason.

Suzaku tensed when he noticed the VARIS rifle aimed to fire at him. He and Yoru quickly leaped to the side to avoid it. Though he doubted that even an 'advanced' weapon like that could hurt Yoru, he didn't want to take too many chances.

The Lancelot sped right up to intercept him, readying its MVS sword to attack. Yoru raised her
paw with a snarl to swipe at it, but the Lancelot quickly flipped over it and attempted to kick at
Yoru's other leg. Just like with the other Knightmares though, not so much as a scratch was left
from the impact.

Yoru leaped backward again to try and shoot the Lancelot from long-range, only for one of the
slash-harkens to pull towards it instead.

"Big mistake!" Suzaku shouted, as Yoru caught the harken in her mouth and roughly threw the
Lancelot by its wire across the battlefield.

The Knightmare managed to flip and land on its feet again and readied the VARIS rifle to fire at it.
This time, the VARIS did make contact with the Lion and managed to knock Yoru to the ground,
Suzaku grunting from the impact. The next second, though, they were up on their feet again.

o~o

"Not even the VARIS did any damage to it?!!" Cecile exclaimed in shock as she, Lloyd, and
Euphemia watched on the computer.

Lloyd, however, didn't seem too bothered by this at all, and only seemed to get more excited at this
new development, his eyes twinkling with thousands of stars, "Just what in the world is that
Knightmare made out of??!

o~o

"Okay, got to finish this fast," Suzaku grit his teeth and he and Yoru leaped into the sky, beginning
to rain laser fire down towards the Lancelot, whose current pilot was dodging all of the attacks with
ease. Despite being on the receiving end of it this time, Suzaku couldn't help but stare in awe at the
Lancelot's performance.

'Not bad Lloyd, not bad.'

o~o

Kallen's eyes lit up red with her Geass as she scanned the area furiously for the Black Knights. She
had made sure to alert Lelouch about its ability before the battle began, which was why he only
gave here the approximate location, knowing she could likely find them on her own from there.

"Where are-There!" She shouted, her eyes widening to see that several black Burais were cornered
near one of the mountains entrances and were being overrun. The Sutherlands had just lifted their
rifles to open fire.

"Oh no, you don't!" She screamed, Aka roaring in passionate rage as they shot off towards the
cluster.

Before a single gun can be fired, Aka slammed down on top of the two Knightmares leading the
charge at the Black Knights, effortlessly crushing them underneath. Down below, through the dust
and debris, Kallen spotted the distressed and even panicked looks on many of the Black Knights,
Ohgi included.

Just as the Britannian ground troops turned the guns in her direction, Aka roared, and Kallen
sprinted out of the cockpit and leaped out her Lion's mouth with a flip, bayard flashing to life in her
hands. With a battle cry, she slashed her claws across the chest of one Britannian soldier and
swiftly delivered a kick to one behind her. Spotting that some were aiming their guns at her from
behind, she lifted her shield, quickly taking the puny bullets that clattered off of it like tin foil. She
sprinted towards the cowards that tried to shoot her and made little work of them, hitting one in the face with her shield and punching the other square in the jaw.

A single gunshot suddenly ran out, and Kallen's head jerked forward.

Only a thick silence fell as the bullet, that should've been lodged deep into her skull, slammed against Kallen's helmet, and landed with a clink on the stone floor below, crushed from its own impact.

"Impo-" the soldier never finished his sentence as a set of metal claws soon found its home right through the soldier's chest. With a cough of blood, he fell to the floor, bleeding out profusely on the ground.

One finally roar from Aka, enraged that her Paladin had nearly been shot, sent the rest of the Britannian ground troops running back the way they came.

Throughout the whole thing, the Black Knights had only watched in awe and shock as, to them, a single soldier practically took out an entire platoon single-handedly.

Kallen tisked as she walked over to the now-dead Britannian and yanked her cestus from his chest. The bayard shook back into resting position and disappeared into her suit.

With a huff, she turned and waved to the Black Knights, a cheeky grin on her face.

"Hey, Ohgi! Hey everyone! What's up?"

"Ka-Kallen?!" Ohgi stuttered as his brain was still trying to process what the hell he just saw.

"Wha-what the hell?!" Tamaki exclaimed, pointing frantically between Kallen and the Red Lion, "Kallen, what the hell's going on here?!"

"Where have you been, Kallen?" Minami asked urgently.

"What are you wearing?" Inoue questioned with a quirked eyebrow.

"What is that, Knightmare?" she heard Yoshida ask.

Tons of other questions were fired Kallen's way, but even though she wanted to answer them, time was of the essence right now.

"Everyone, I promise I'll explain later, but right now you need to come with me!" she said, pointing towards Aka, who had lowered her head and opened up to let the passengers on board.

"Wha-wait, Kallen we-"

"Ohgi, do you trust me?" Kallen asked the Black Knight directly.

"What?" he asked, taken aback.

"Do you trust me?" she asked again.

"Well- yes, you know I do Kallen," Ohgi answered.

"They trust me now, please! Help me get everyone in the Lion."

Ohgi swallowed, but nodded, ushering all the Black Knights into Aka's mouth before following
shortly after.

"Uh, you sure about this, Kallen?" Tamaki asked, just outside. "This thing looks more like it-"

"GET IN THE DAMN LION, TAMAKI!" she shouted impatiently before she literally kicked his ass, where he stumbled inside, nearly landing on his face.

Once all of them had boarded, Kallen shoved her way back up to the cockpit and sat down, "Sorry for lack of seats, you'll just have to hang on!" she warned before shoving the lever down.

With a roar, Aka leaped away from the mountain and with a thrust of her engines, shot up into the sky. Kallen winced as heard several of the Black Knights be thrown backward from the force. 'Yeah… lack of seats, sorry guys.'

Once they were hovering above the mountain and out of immediate danger, Kallen quickly contacted Lelouch, his face covered by his Zero mask appearing on her screen, "I've got them Zero! Heading to the Castle now!"

"Good work!" Zero nodded, "Once they're secure return to the battlefield immediately so we can finish this!"

"You got it!" she grinned and closed the screen. Phase one complete!

"Wait-was that Zero?" Ohgi asked, having climbed his way up to the cockpit with Tamaki.

Kallen sighed in slight irritation, "As I said, I'll explain later. Now hang on to something!"

Ohgi and Tamaki managed to brace themselves just as Kallen slammed down on Aka's rocket boosters and the Red Lion shot at full speed into Earth's atmosphere.

"Wha-wait! Hold on, where we going?! Wha-" Tamaki was cut off as he griped the back of Kallen's seat with one hand, and grasped the right wall with his other. In front of his and Ohgi's eyes, the clear blue sky of Japan disappeared to be replaced with millions of stars against a sheet of black.

Ohgi also looked at a loss of words as the Moon drew alarmingly closer each second. But the Lion wasn't aiming to land on the Moon. Instead, it shot around the side of it and was greeted by-

"What the hell?!" Tamaki shouted as the Castle of Lions came into full view in front of them.

Ignoring Tamaki's exclamation, Kallen guided Aka into her bay and spotted C.C. waiting for them at the end of the tunnel.

Upon coming to a stop, she turned to the two men, "Okay, this is where you get off!"

"What? But Kallen-"

"Ohgi, you said you trust me, right? So please, just bear with us a little longer okay?" she practically begged.

"And what about you?" Tamaki asked.

"I'll be back in a bit, with Zero. Now get going. There's a friend of ours waiting down there for you; she'll take care of everything else."

Ohgi still hesitated, before finally steeling himself and pulling Tamaki out of the cockpit to join the
rest of the Black Knights, who were already exiting the Lion.

The moment Tamaki and Ohgi stepped out of Aka, the lion reared back its head and roared before spiraling around and shooting right back out into space.

"Long time, no see Black Knights," C.C. greeted with a small smile.

"Wait, do we know you?" Sugiyama asked, all of their attention drawn from their new surroundings to the woman in front of them.

"We've never officially met," C.C. admitted with a shrug, "but I am an ally to you and Zero. Now, if you'll follow me, we are keeping the others waiting."

"Wait, others? Who?" Yoshida asked.

"What is this place?" Inoue asked.

C.C. just smiled mysteriously before swiftly walking out of the room, forcing the Black Knights to follow her. After turning down several halls and up an elevator, C.C. waved forward onto the bridge of the Castle of Lions.

Before any of the Knights could adequately take in the room, a loud, cheerful voice drew their attention, "Hello! You must be the Black Knights. Though honestly, you don't look very much like knights. Ha! You Earthlings and your fashion quirks," Coran shook his head with an amused smile.

"Okay seriously, what the hell is going on?!" Tamaki stuttered out.

"Who are you, people?" Ohgi asked a little more politely.

Allura turned to face them from her position in the center of the room, "Welcome Black Knights, to the Castle of Lions. I am Princess Allura of Planet Altea."

It took the Knights several seconds to process just what Allura had said before Ohgi finally found his voice, "Planet…? Wait, as in aliens?"

"Well, that's generally what 'another planet' means, right?" C.C. answered with a smirk.

"Wait, you're seriously aliens?" Inoue asked, "You guys look way too human."

Coran laughed, not looking offended by the statement at all, "Well I could say the same about you. If it weren't for the unusually shaped ears, I'd almost mistake you for Alteans!"

Several of the Black Knights unconsciously raised a hand towards their ears at that statement, shooting confused looks to one another. "What's wrong with our ears?" Minami asked quietly.

"All you must know right now is that I'm an ally of Zero, and Coran and myself are here to assist with your mission to free your land from Britannia," Allura told them professionally.

"And just how the hell are you gonna do that lady?" Tamaki demanded skeptically.

Allura's eye twitched just slightly. Kallen and Lelouch had warned her that some of the Black Knights, one with red hair, in particular, weren't the most cordial Earthlings they'd meet. This must be the one they spoke of.

Before the Princess could reply though, C.C. beat her to the punch, "Just watch," she gestured to the large screen at the end of the room, smirking, "You're gonna love this."
Suzaku grunted again as the Lancelot jumped roughly off of Yoru's back after it failed to pierce the armor on her back.

"Okay, whoever's piloting this is really good. Probably as good as me," he reluctantly admitted as Yoru swung her tail towards the Knightmare again, missing by centimeters.

Nonette also admitted from within the Lancelot that the pilot of this Purple Lion was also excellent. She had actually had to think about several of her attacks during this battle.

"Not bad stranger," she couldn't help but grin, "not bad."

Suzaku was about to fire at the Lancelot with the tail cannon again when Zero's face appeared in front of his screen.

"Suzaku, Kallen just got back. Rendezvous with me and the others at the top of the mountain!"

"It's time then?" he asked, more to himself than Lelouch, "I'll see you there!"

Zero's mask inclined in response before cutting the connection.

From outside, Nonette blinked in surprise as the Purple Lion in front of her suddenly dropped its tail cannon and leaped away, flying back into the sky.

"What the-What gives?" she asked, completely confused.

By the time Kallen returned to the others, the JFL was long gone, having escaped on several trucks and were just beginning to enter the highway. Despite the fair amount of distance though, all of the rebels could still see the seven lions starting to assemble at the top of the mountain. Todoh and the Four Holy Swords, along with the pilot for the recently re-acquired Guren watched intently as well.

Miraculously, Guilford's Knightmare was still functional enough for the knight to get to his Princess's Gloucester and drag it back to the G1 base. He was met by Darlton and a couple of other straggling soldiers there who assisted in prying Cornelia's Knightmare open.

The Viceroy, herself, seemed mostly unhurt, but a large gash on her head was bleeding profusely and would need medical treatment. Her Gloucester though was completely inoperable now. Underneath it though, her eyes were shaking in rage.

For the first time in her life, someone had bested her in battle. Not only that but had utterly humiliated her in front of her own men!

Suzaku was the last to join the Paladins at the top of the mountain, overlooking the thoroughly battered battlefield down below. From off in the distance, the Paladins could see Britannian reinforcements approaching from the ground and in the air with several helicopters racing towards them, likely armed to the brim with explosives they intended to aim directly at them.

"Man! I don't think I've ever had that much fun shooting bad guys before!" Rivalz commented happily.
"I agree," Milly smirked, "Compared to a Galran fortress, I barely even broke a sweat!"

"So, is this it Lulu?" Shirley asked, eyes still glued to the army approaching them rapidly.

Lelouch sighed almost dramatically, "I suppose there's no point in keeping them waiting," he chuckled and straightened in his chair, "Alright Paladins! Let's show Britannia what exactly it is they're up against. Form Voltron!"

"Yeah!" they all shouted. With roars of elation, the Lions all shot up into the air; their bodies cloaked in colored light.

The Black Lion roared out as it flew forward with its arms folding backward and then into the container units on its sides. Then the Green and Red Lion flew in as they flew upward leaving behind a trail of energy in their colors. Their legs suddenly began to fold up and were secured to the sides before they shot up towards their leader. Next up, the Yellow and Purple Lion as they flew in and began to fold up their legs to be secured, the Blue and Orange Lion doing the same just below them, connecting to each other to form two long, large legs together. The Red Lion attached itself to the right socket of the Black Lion and the Green Lion connected to the left outlet. Once this was done, the four remaining Lions connected to the bottom devices of the Black Lion, sealing up and joining tightly together. With the body now formed, a golden crown formed upon the Black Lion's head, its maw opened up to reveal the face of Voltron himself. With a clash of his hands, the Defender of the Universe reached upward to the sky, ready for battle.

o~o

Back as the Castle, the Black Knights all watched, eyes widening impossibly at Voltron's appearance. They were blown so open that the Alteans feared for a moment if their eyeballs would roll out of their skulls.

Tamaki suddenly fainted on the spot.

C.C. had to pinch herself to prevent herself from laughing out loud at their faces. It was honestly one of the funniest things that she had seen in a long time.

"Wha... What is that?" Ohgi asked, finally regaining his voice. The expression on his face would make you wonder if he had just seen the face of God in that very moment.

Allura simply smiled proudly, "This is Voltron."

o~o

Time seemed to stop for every Britannian troop on the ground. Even the JLF trucks screeched to a stop on the highway to look back at the robotic giant standing in the air.

"Wh-what the hell?!" Jeremiah exclaimed in shocked horror.

Villeta voice didn't seem to work as she kept opening and closing her mouth, eyes wide and shaking.

Similar reactions came from many other soldiers within their Knightmares, some backpedaling in shock and eyes widened into softballs. Some of them even felt a new wetness around their seats.

Even Nonette from the Lancelot stopped dead in her tracks at the monstrous sight before them.

o~o
From the G1 unit itself, both Guilford and Darlton practically froze in their attempts to assist Cornelia as they stared at the central console.

"What… in the world… is that…?" Guilford whispered, eyes shaking and sweat running down his face.

Darlton seemed at a loss for words himself along with the rest of the royal guard that survived.

The Goddess of Victory herself stared at the screen, still attempting to process what exactly she was looking at.

o~o

From the JLF convoys, all of the rebels looked on, eyes wide and mouth open. Even the ever-stoic Todoh couldn't mask his surprise, his eyes widening in shock.

o~o

"Ll-Lloyd… are you seeing this?!" Cecile asked frantically next to him.

Lloyd meanwhile could only look with a dropped jaw before it turned into a massive grin with beating hearts in his eyes. He squealed so loudly it would've put the biggest boy band fangirls to shame, "This-This is-! I can't even-! OOOooO0OOooO0H! This is amazing! I never thought I'd see such a thing in my entire life!"

Euphemia watched from behind them, her eyes also wide and lip even trembling.

o~o

Meanwhile, within Voltron itself, Kallen, Rivalz, and Milly couldn't help but laugh as the army practically came to a dead stop in front of them.

"Oh, man! You think any of them wet themselves yet?!" Rivalz guffawed.

"I will pay good hard cash, just to see what the look on their faces are right now!" Milly giggled uncontrollably.

"Ha! You like a taste of your own medicine, Britannia?" Kallen grinned fiercely. She hadn't felt this good in a battle for a long time.

o~o

"Open fire… Open fire!" Cornelia suddenly howled from within the G1.

The second everyone heard her orders, all forces, Knightmares, tanks, helicopters, and jets all began shoot relentlessly at Voltron, hoping that their combined power could take the robot out.

o~o

"Rai… form shield," Lelouch ordered plainly.

The Green Paladin blinked and replied, "Uh, Lelouch, you realize this is likely not going to do anything to us, right?"

Lelouch chuckled in reply, "Perhaps, but let's just humor them for the time being."
Rai shrugged but pulled up Voltron's shield anyway, just as the first group of missiles hit the safeguard raised in front of them.

After just sitting there and taking the onslaught for about a solid minute, Shirley spoke up, "Um… Lelouch, aren't we gonna like fight back?"

"Who says we weren't?" Lelouch responded with a smirk, holding a hand to the side of his face, "Kallen!"

The Red Paladin smirked before lifting Aka's head, and the Red Lion's jaw unleashed a massive blast of lasers towards a heavily crowded area of the helicopters. All of them exploded on impact, along with any Knightmares inside of them. She then directed Aka's head downward, and with a single, slow swing, blasted at the forest below, destroying or heavily damaging several ground troops and Knightmares beneath.

"Suzaku, form sword!" Lelouch ordered.

Suzaku hesitated for a moment before he jammed his bayard into Yoru's key slot.

As the shield slapped back onto Voltron's back, his hands clapped together and formed the trademark sword and held it before him. Then with a flash of his rocket boosters, Voltron slashed straight through the rest of the airborne troops with a single swing of the weapon. An inferno of destruction shadowed them as they flew to a stop, now shadowed by the flames.

With one final swing of his sword, Voltron's direction turned skyward and flew off into the twilight.

✿~✿

"They're on the way back! That's our cue, Princess!" Coran said with a grin.

Allura grinned back, and with a swipe of her hand, the holo screens shifted, and the Princess pressed a single button in the center.

✿~✿

Cornelia watched speechless as the whole army was almost wiped out in a single strike. How could this be?! How could the Elevens, or anyone for that matter, create a weapon such as this?! And even if they did, how did they keep it hidden for so long?!

"Princess Cornelia! We must pull back! We will be completely wiped out if we keep fighting!" Darlton begged her from the side.

Cornelia grit her teeth and growled. Even though she was angry…no not angry, she was livid at how this battle had turned about; she knew there was no other choice.

"Very well," she breathed, "Sound the retreat!"

"Right away!" another general said almost frantically as he got a hold of all remaining Knightmares on the ground. He suddenly gasped in shock.

"What is it now?!" Cornelia demanded as the screen in the front began to glitch.

"Wait-that's!" Guilford exclaimed as the image on the screen came into view.

"I am Zero!"
Everyone aboard the G1 gasped in shock. It had been months since they had seen the masked rebel's face. Some people thought that he had died as Black Knight activity also depleted during this time. Seeing the masked foe in front of them on-screen now made the blood freeze in many of the soldiers.

It wasn't just on the G1 unit either. Every electronic, computer, and television screen was showing the same broadcast as well. All people, Britannian and Japanese alike, stopped all previous activities to turn their attention to the screen.

"People of Japan, I have returned!" Zero spread his arms out wide, and many gasped to see the distinct change to the BK leader's outfit. Gone was the fancy purple suit and golden lining. Instead, what was underneath his cape was what appeared to be some kind of black armor, with golden lining it. One of the most distinctive features of it was a large golden 'V' on the chest plate of it. It didn't look like old medieval armor though. If anything, it looked like it had been pulled from a sci-fi convention. A very professional sci-fi convention.

''

"Hear me, Britannia!" Zero shouted, "All you who have power, heed my words carefully! I am burdened by sorrow, war, and discrimination! Malicious deeds carried out by the strong."

"You heard me right, keep it rolling!" Diethard demanded from the news station.

"But sir-"

"I'll do it myself if you don't!" the reporter shouted impatiently.

Alarmed, but not willing to disobey, the news anchor brought up the sound as Diethard gazed onward at the masked terrorist.

''

"The same abhorrent interplay of tragedy and comedy. The world has not changed. The people still suffer. That is why the return of Zero was necessary!"

From the safety of her home, Nina watched on as her eyes shook in fear. It was bad enough that all of her friends from the council were still missing, and now Zero was back again? She had just begun to feel safe as well with terrorist activity finally starting to die down. Now, this?

She whimpered and pulled her legs up in a hug, cringing away.

''

From far off, within the safety of Mount Fuji, several older men and a younger girl watched the broadcast closely. The maiden's eyes, in particular, sparkled with excitement and admiration to this great warrior.

"So long as the strong oppress the weak. My rebellion will continue to grow."

''

"And it begins today with the divine punishment brought by the titan known as Voltron!"

The screens suddenly changed to show the theatrical transformation of the Lions into the great robot that had decimated the Britannian forces just moments ago. Everyone across Japan gasped in
either horror or awe at the power that the juggernaut seemed to wield with a flick of its hand.

o~o

"Viceroy, we're trying to track the signal of the video, but there seems to be no place to track it!" an informant exclaimed over the G1's intercom.

"What?! How is this possible?!" Cornelia demanded.

"We don't know. We've checked every possible location this could be coming from!"

"Well, keep looking!"

"Understood!"

"Voltron, he is known as the Defender of the Universe, a shield to protect the weak, and a sword to destroy all those who abuse their power!"

o~o

From the Castle of Lions, where the video was being broadcast, all the Black Knights, except Tamaki, looked on in awe as their leader's speech continued.

"Charles zi Britannia, I now speak directly to you! You and the rest of Britannia will surrender unconditionally to Voltron, or else you and the rest of your empire will face total obliteration. The decision is yours."

o~o

With that final, ominous warning, the screens all throughout the Empire and Area 11 glitched back to its scheduled programming.

A young woman, a princess, bound to a wheelchair, had been able to listen to the entire broadcast. Listen because she no longer had her sight.

"What's going to happen now?" she asked in a quivering voice.

A figure that had been standing behind her came closer and gently placed a gloved hand on her shoulder.

"Don't worry," Schnizel el Britannia said gently to his sister, "everything's going to be okay."

Nunnally vi Britannia could only hum in agreement and trust in her older sibling. But the void in her stomach only seemed to increase more.

'Big brother...' she thought, tears gathering in her eyes, '...where are you?'

Chapter End Notes

AN: ANNND CUT! So the Paladins have made it back to Earth and have already hit Britannia hard with the appearance of Voltron!

This is so far the longest chapter that I've written so far, and sorry if the battle itself
seemed a little rushed, but I doubt that Britannia could've done much against the lions at this point in time.

What else is in store for our Paladins in the future? Well, find out for yourself!

R&R please and thank you! Love you all!
"We have the Japan Liberation Front on the run due to your attack, Viceroy. Without a stable fortress, it should be easy to snuff out any remaining survivors."

"Are you trying to mock me?!" the Viceroy spat at the officer, "That was no victory! Not only is it confirmed that Zero is alive, but now he has some sort of gigantic Knightmare on his side?! It should be absolutely impossible!"

The annoying bureaucrats kept on spewing ridiculous excuses, but Cornelia could barely listen to them. That battle hadn't gone according to plan at all! She had gone into battle, confident that victory would be hers over the Japan Liberation Front. She never would've expected something like a giant Knightmare mech to fall from the sky and nearly wipe them out in minutes. Not only that, but its interference had given a majority of the JLF's leadership time to escape, along with the Black Knights. What stung her the most, however, was that Black Lion Knightmare she had faced had not only beaten her but had completely disrespected and humiliated her. She was going to make the pilot of that machine pay dearly for his actions!

"Viceroy, if I may," Euphemia spoke up timidly.

"What is it?" Cornelia hoped she didn't sound too impatient and angry towards her sister.

"Well, it's just, I was wondering, but it's possible this isn't a Knightmare at all. At least, not an Earth-made one, according to Earl Asplund. He ran the data the Lancelot received in its fight through every metal compound and alloy he could think of. None of them was a match at all."

"Sub-viceroy, are you actually suggesting that those machines were sent by extraterrestrial life?" an officer asked very skeptically.

"I know it's strange to admit this, but I wouldn't rule out that possibility just yet," Guilford spoke up, causing many of the ministers and officers to look his way, "Think about when that Blue Lion was first seen, over two months ago. It happened right before Zero disappeared. After it was initially spotted, we weren't able to locate it since then, even with our informants or the most advanced tracking capabilities. But when you throw in the factor of alien life, it oddly makes sense. It's possible that that Knightmare, and Zero for that matter, couldn't be found because they weren't even on Earth at the time. Also, in that video message we saw the other day, he specifically called that robot, Voltron, the 'Defender of the Universe.'"

"As fantastic as it sounds," Darlton said, "it's certainly a possibility."

Cornelia scoffed, "If that is the case, why on Earth would Zero involve aliens, of all things, into our affairs? And besides, this move has been his boldest one yet. It could give the Chinese Federation or the EU the push they need to launch their own attack."

"Vice-Minister," Dalton spoke up, cutting off the bureaucrats' mutters of confusion and fear with a pointed look, "Internal affairs has appointed a special group of Elevens to sub-govern these areas, isn't that right? A group that is called the N.A.C. When we stormed Narita, we looked for evidence of the N.A.C's conspiracies. But it was buried in the wreckage," Darlton turned to face his princess, "Still, our suspicions remain high… if we suppress them now…"
Cornelia nodded, "Hmm, a group of bluebloods and plutocrats…" She muttered, looking down in thought, "Relics of their dismal past…"

"Wait, please! These are just rumors, there's no evidence of that at all," one of the aids stood up. Still, he gulped under Cornelia and Darlton's gazes, so he grabbed a handkerchief to wipe the sweat from his head. "If you suppress them, then the Elevens' economy will certainly collapse. That means no tax revenue to send to the Homeland. Also, it's a prime directive of the Empire that Numbers should take care of their own kind."

"And what have you done to find Zero or that Voltron abomination?" Cornelia shot back, annoyed.

"Well we-," the aid stuttered as footage of the Lions and battle appeared on their screens, as well as a list of all Britannians that died during the battle. And the cruel was not short, "We managed to obtain samples from some of the wreckage left behind, but that's it so far. We can't squeeze information out of corpses."

"So you can't catch Zero, and you don't want us to hit Kyoto," Cornelia mused, "Do you know the word 'incompetent' Minister? It's for people who can't get results."

"Either way, Zero directly challenged the Emperor in that last video message," Guilford said gravely, "all we can do now is wait for his Majesty's response."

Cornelia scowled but nodded. Nothing to do now but wait.

o~o

"So the Britannian Viceroy has gone this far already…" A figure noted as he and several older men sat seiza-style around a fireplace as they discussed the latest chain of events.

"With the Japan Liberation Front nearly smashed, the last embers of Japan have almost died away."

"Wait, they may be on the run, but the General and Todoh are still strong! Still fighting!"

"Even if that's so. I heard. I lost his custom Buraïs, so there's no hope."

"There is hope." A fifth voice corrected, this one much younger than the others. They turned to face the speaker, a young girl with black hair and bright emerald eyes. She was sitting behind a screen, smiling at them.

"The Black Knights?" the fourth voice muttered, sounding both skeptical and disbelieving as he stared at the speaker, "You've been infatuated with Zero since he rescued Suzaku Kururugi."

"Yes, but of those Knightmares that rained down on Narita. It would be foolish not to take full advantage of them. The Britannian army stood little to no chance!"

"Perhaps, but will they answer a summons if we send one?"

"If they truly wish for the freedom of Japan, they have no reason not to. Also, it could be just the test they need to confirm their true loyalty…"

o~o

"I'll be honest, that went a lot smoother than I thought it would," Suzaku said as he, Lelouch, and Allura met on the bridge.

"As I told you, they trust Kallen, and if Kallen trusts us, then the Black Knights have reason to as
"well," Lelouch said with a small, proud smile. He was still dressed fully in his Zero uniform, but
his mask was off and being held at his side. Currently, the Black Knights were settling into the
Castle and being given a tour by Kallen and the others, with supervision from Coran and C.C.

"I do agree with you, though. I was pleasantly surprised at how easily they took the information
in."

(Two days previous)

Voltron dispersed upon getting in view of the Castle, and the Lions landed safely in each of their
bays.

"Hey, uh, Lulu, quick question. Is it safe to have our helmets off when we meet the Black
Knights?" Shirley asked.

"Don't worry about that, Shirley," Kallen answered before he could, "I'll put a good word in."

"O-Okay if you say so."

"Well, come on! We're keeping them waiting!" Rivalz exclaimed impatiently.

With a chuckle, Lelouch exited Zenobia and made his way to the bridge with the other Paladins.
Upon entering, Tamaki was just coming out of his fainting spell. Which meant he was the first to
spot them.

"Wh-hey! What are Britannians doing here?" he shouted, shaking the other Black Knights out of
their shocked stupor.

"Hey, isn't that Kururgi?" Sugiyama asked, spotting Suzaku.

"I recognize you two," Inoue said, glancing at Milly and Shirley, "you were hostages at
Kawaguchi!"

"Wait a minute," Minami realized after he got a good look at them, "you-you're all those Ashford
students. The ones that went missing two months ago!"

"Yep, that's us!" Milly said with a small smile, though her demeanor and sweat on her forehead
showed how nervous she was. Rivalz awkwardly waved next to her.

"Kallen, what's going on?" Ohgi asked sternly. None of the Black Knights looked very happy to
see that most of the Paladins in front of them were Britannians. They hadn't even noticed that Zero
was standing calmly in the back.

"Ohgi, everyone, don't!" Kallen exclaimed, stepping to the front of the Paladins and holding her
arms wide in front of them, "These are my friends. I've been with them, and Zero, the entire time. I
trust them, so please, give them a chance."

"We're here to help you," Rai said, coming up next to Kallen, "we're not like the Emperor. We
don't want anything to do with that scumbag!"

"Yeah..." Shirley said with a sad frown, "Zero told us what life is like for all of you. And... I'm so
sorry! If that's really how you're treated, and the Emperor is encouraging it, we don't want to have
anything to do with it!"

"Yeah, what she said!" Rivalz agreed, holding a raised fist, "No way can I follow a lunatic like
"...Alright, Kallen, we'll trust you," Ohgi eventually said. Most of the Black Knights calmed down upon hearing this. Tamaki folded his arms with a pout, but he didn't protest.

"I assume you all have questions," Zero said, stepping forward once Kallen lowered her arms.

"Questions?" Ohgi asked incredulously, giving a short laugh, "Well, wha-where, do I even start?"

"You're free to ask anything you wish," Coran asked, "we'll answer to the best of our abilities."

"Okay, well..." Ohgi took a second to gather his thoughts, the rest of the Black Knights staring at him intently, "I guess... you called that robot 'Voltron', so what exactly is it?"

"Voltron, he's known as the Defender of the Universe," Zero explained, "The warrior himself is made up of seven lions. The same ones that you saw back at Narita. Princess Allura's father, King Alfor of Altea, was the one that originally built the Lions. And they certainly aren't Knightmares. Calling them such things would be insulting."

"The Lions themselves choose the pilots," Allura explained, "by mirroring the quintessence of the pilot with the Lion, a bond is formed that is far greater than any science can explain."

"Woah, woah! Wait a minute!" Minami interrupted, holding up a hand, "'Choose'? Are you saying that these Lions... are alive?"

"In a way they are," Kallen confirmed, shrugging her shoulders, "we do know that they possess some form of consciousness. They can't talk or communicate the way that we do, but when I'm flying Aka, the Red Lion, I can definitely feel when she's talking to me. It's like we can read each other's minds through some sort of psychic link."

"Hold up! We talking magic or some bull?" Tamaki asked, sounding highly doubtful.

"Maybe," Suzaku shrugged, rubbing his neck thoughtfully, "I mean, it's more advanced technology than anything Earth can come up with right now, so it would make sense to throw some magic into the mix."

"Wait, so do you guys know what this means?" Inoue asked, voice rising in excitement, "With this Voltron thing here, Britannia doesn't stand a chance. We all saw them wipe the floor with the army in that last fight!"

"Yeah! Britannian Emperor, look out!" Tamaki cheered.

Everyone else chuckled at the Black Knights enthusiasm. Even Ohgi's eyes sparkled with concealed excitement.

"Yes, it was made quite clear in that last fight that Britannia is in trouble," C.C. smirked, before her expression turned serious, "However, as of right now, the Britannian Empire is actually the least of Earth's worries."

"Least of our worries?" Sugiyama asked, "What are you talking about?"

"C.C. is correct. While Voltron is an amazing discovery, and a valuable weapon, unveiling his existence is only part of the reason we're here. During the time Kallen, I and the rest of the Paladins disappeared, not only did we learn of Voltron's existence, but we also discovered something else. Something bad."
"Okay, and what was that?" Yoshida asked, feeling confused.

"This part is going to sound hard to believe, but please hear us out, okay?" Kallen said with a severe frown before turning her attention back to Zero.

Zero nodded back to the Red Paladin before he continued, "We found out, through Allura and Coran, that there is another alien regime out there, not too different from our Earth's Britannia. And for the last 10,000 years," Zero emphasized the number, "this regime, known as the Galra Empire, has been expanding and conquering every planet and civilization within their sight."

"Wait, 10,000 years?" Ohgi asked, making sure he heard that number correctly.

"That is correct," Allura said, pulling up a screen and pressing a button. The Black Knights gasped as the star map blinked into existence all around them, "as I explained to the Paladins when they first arrived here, during this 10,000 year period, the Castle has been picking up distress signals from all the following locations," one by one, almost the entire room began to illuminate with red lights, each symbolizing a planet that called for help at one point or another, "The Galra Empire has wasted little time in conquering almost the entire known universe," she swiped her hand. The universe moved to the left until a large bright dot came into their field of vision, just within a border of unaffected blue and stars planets, "where we are right now, in your Solar System, is right here," all of the Black Knights gawked in fear and shock when they realized just how close they, and Earth, were to the flood of red.

"As you can plainly see, if the Galra continue to spread at the rate they have been, an attack on Earth isn't likely, it's inevitable," Zero told the Black Knights gravely.

After about a minute of silence, as he and the Black Knights took in all this new information, Ohgi swallowed and licked his lips, which had become incredibly dry within that short time frame, "...How dangerous are they?"

Allura and Coran both began typing on separate hologram screens, and within moments, several images started popping up around the Black Knights.

"This is what we know so far. The Galra Empire itself is what we might call a 'star-faring' race," Coran explained, "meaning they don't have any set planet to call home, which is partially the reason for the forceful expansion of territory. It's likely due to this expansion that the Galra have been able to create a large plethora of advanced technology," images of Galra battleships, guns, cannons, sentries, fighter jets and several other things flashed throughout the room, "not to mention the Galra themselves are formidable warriors in strategy and the art of combat," images of Sendak and several other unknown Galrans then flashed on the screen. There were even some videos of when Kallen, Suzaku, and a couple of other Paladins engaging Sendak and eventually defeating him.

"All of this, this entire empire, is led by one being: Zarkon," Zero said, as finally, the form of the Galran ruler himself. Upon seeing the emperor with their own eyes, the Paladins could immediately see the intimidation that flashed within all the BKs' eyes. They didn't blame them, though. Zarkon was an imposing creature to look at, and most of them have only seen him from a distance. The award for meeting him up close and personal went to Kallen, Suzaku, and C.C., and they certainly didn't recommend that to anyone!

"Hey, hold on a second!" Yoshida suddenly said, "So this guy has been ruling for over 10,000 years? How's that even possible? Do these Galra guys live that long?"

"Absolutely not!" Allura replied, "But we do have yet to discover what has been keeping Zarkon
alive all this time."

"It could have something to do with those huge vats of quintessence we found at that one station," Rai said thoughtfully, "maybe it helps amplify his own."

"Quintessence?" Ohgi asked, sounding the strange word out.

"In simplest terms, quintessence is an energy generated by living beings. Basically, it's their life force," Coran explained.

"You mean alien life force, right?" Minami asked, sounding a little disturbed.

"No, quintessence exists within all living things. If the Paladins, as humans, didn't have any, they wouldn't be alive right now, much less able to pilot even one of the Lions," Allura corrected.

"Hang on, if that's true, wouldn't we, or even Britannia, have discovered something like that by now?" Tamaki asked with a skeptical frown.

"Well, Shinichiro," Kallen said as she stepped closer to the red-haired BK, "tell me, have you ever traveled faster than the speed of light? Have you ever seen a giant, petrified animal be used as a planet to house other lifeforms? Have you ever come face to face with an alien warlord who's older than the entirety of human civilization? Well, we have. And I'll personally assure you, right now, it's all real."

Tamaki backed up a few paces, clearly intimidated by Kallen's challenging gaze, "...So he's basically like an alien version of the Britannian Emperor?" he asked uneasily.

"Worse. Much worse," Kallen corrected.

"Anyway, during Zarkon's 10,000 year reign, the Galra have conquered and destroyed countless planets and worlds," Zero explained as the star map came back into view, "one of them… was Allura and Coran's own home planet, Altea."

Immediately, all of the Black Knights looked to the Alteans with a new layer of sympathy. After all, Britannia may not have physically destroyed their country and home, but in a manner of nationality, it might as well have been.

"And it's easy to see how he was able to as well," Suzaku added, "during one of our last missions, Kallen and I actually fought Zarkon, in our Lions," Ohgi's eyes widened immensely at this revelation, "and he was only armed with one handheld weapon," Suzaku made sure not to mention the weapon itself, "I don't think he was even wearing proper battle armor. Anyway, we fought him together, and I don't think we even managed to scratch him, but he alone was able to put both of our Lions out of commission."

Some clips from both Aka and Yoru's fight flashed onto the screen next, and the Black Knights watched in shocked horror, as both Lions were practically thrown around like ragdolls.

During this, though, Rivalz leaned over to C.C. and whispered, "Um… should we tell them that Zarkon was the original Black Paladin too?"

"I think, for the time being, it's best to keep that under wraps for right now," the immortal whispered back.

"...So, how long until they get here?" Ohgi finally asked.
"That is hard to say, unfortunately," Allura admitted, with a slight frown, but her gaze was steely, "it could be tonight, tomorrow, or several decaphebes ("Years," Kallen translated) from now."

"It doesn't matter when Zarkon comes. What matters is that he will," Zero said with finality, "Which is why the Black Knights have a new goal, a new mission. This Castle will serve as our home base; from here on out, the Black Knight's purpose is to prepare Earth's defenses for the Galra's inevitable arrival. This means that we must cripple and dismantle the Britannian Empire as soon as we possibly can. Not destroy it."

"Wait, hold on, what?" Tamaki voiced the thoughts of most of the Black Knights present, as they all had matching looks of confused shock on their faces.

"We understand if you're concerned about this, and trust us; we don't blame you. Britannia has done horrible things to your country and people, but take a moment to think, please," Rai said calmly, holding his hands in a pacifying motion, "Out of all the nations on Earth right now, Britannia is by far the most advanced, technology-wise. If we're to have even a chance when the Galra get here, we're going to need that for support."

"Plus, as amazing as Voltron is, we're still beginners too!" Milly pointed out, "We've only been piloting the Lions for a couple of months, and we can still barely hold back one or two Galra fleets. If there were to be an entire invasion force, we still wouldn't fare well. Especially if Zarkon himself shows up."

"Not to mention that we can't stay on Earth forever," Rivalz piped up, "our mission is to free the entire universe from Zarkon and his goonies. That's kinda hard to do when you're homebound to one planet…"

"Let me try to rephrase my statement," Zero said, seeing the lingering hesitation in the Black Knights. He clasped his hands behind his back, "Our mission isn't simply about repelling the Galra attacks. It's to make sure that Earth has the means to stand up among other advanced alien races, without becoming too reliant on Voltron in the process. But for that to happen, Earth has to be united, not under the thumb of one empire, but a government where all nations and people are treated as equals."

Ohgi's breathing hitched, and his eyes widened, understanding spreading over his face, "That means... also possibly changing Britannia, as opposed to just straight-up destroying it."

Zero nodded gravely, "Exactly."

"So, that's why you openly challenged the Emperor in that message!" Inoue exclaimed, realizing the same thing.

"Also true. Given the circumstances, I usually wouldn't be too lenient on a man like Charles zi Britannia. But as the old saying goes: 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend.' If it means standing up to a race as hostile as the Galra, I am willing to cooperate if he agrees to assist. Only if he agrees to assist."

"You really think he will?" Sugiyama asked curiously.

"If you want my personal opinion, no," Zero shook his head almost mockingly, "however, when put under pressure, people can surprise you. But, if he does foolishly decline my offer that I'm practically handing on a silver platter, I will fight him. As will the rest of these Paladins!"

All of the Paladins matched the determined grin that was hidden under Lelouch's mask. Even
Suzaku had a slight curve of the lips. Suzaku admitted, he was quite surprised with what Lelouch said in his speech just now, about changing Britannia. However, he wasn't quite as naive anymore. He knew that if the Emperor did turn down this ultimatum, they would have to fight. Earth's survival depended on it, after all.

Most of the other Black Knights seemed to relax and nod, understanding their leader's intentions. Tamaki, however, was still scowling skeptically, and Minami had a nervous frown, likely more out of fear than distrust for Zero.

Noticing this, Allura took the time to speak up once more, "I understand if this develops greatly concerns you still, and I personally understand wanting to do nothing but destroy the same monster that took your home. But this is the only way to ensure that your planet survives, along with its people. We will need to work as quickly and efficiently as possible. For all we know, Zarkon and his armies on their way here right now."

(Present)

"I'll be brutally honest with you Lelouch, I certainly wasn't expecting the people I met that made up these 'Black Knights,'" Allura confessed, "Most, if not all, seem highly undisciplined, and I'm not completely fond of that Tamaki character either."

"True, they may not be the classic definition of soldiers, Princess, but as you said the other day, you should understand what they're going through. Their home has been forcibly taken, and they now have to conform to the cruel ways of the empire that conquered them. Otherwise, they face dire consequences. The fact that they are attempting to rebel is a huge act of courage on their part alone," Lelouch then chuckled, "Besides, Tamaki's temper reminds me quite a bit of your own, Princess."

"I-What?!" the Princess exclaimed, cheeks colored and looking appalled. Suzaku started laughing as now that he thought about it, it was quite accurate!

"Lelouch, did you-" Suzaku guffawed again before composing himself, "I've never seen you make a joke about that. It totally suits you."

Lelouch smirked good-heartedly, and once Allura grasped the joke, she actually giggled a little as well.

"Despite their… flaws, however," Allura said, after composing herself, "I do see that they have the drive to be Defenders of the Universe themselves, whether they are Paladins or not."

"That's good to hear," Lelouch nodded with a smile. He expected as such. If the Black Knights thought it would be smooth sailing for them from now on, they were in for a rude awakening.

"Now, I think it's time to find Nunnally," Lelouch said, a determined frown on his face as he started to walk towards his seat on the bridge.

Before he could get to his seat, however, a beeping sound blared throughout the bridge. Starting, but more in curiosity than in surprise, she pulled up the bridge's monitors.

"Someone from your planet just sent us a message," Allura informed them.

"Really? Who?" Suzaku asked Lelouch, looking on curiously too.

"It doesn't say, but I'll play it."
What they received though wasn't words, but what sounded like satellite interference and a strange combination of beeping sounds.

"...Perhaps the Castle accidentally scrambled it," Allura said with a frown, "we can have Rai look at it later."

"Wait! Play over again, a little slower," Suzaku said.

"What? Why?"

"Please, Princess, I want to check something."

Though she still looked perplexed, Allura did so. Hearing it slower the second time through, Lelouch realized what Suzaku was getting at.

"It wasn't scrambled, it is a message," Lelouch practically leaped into his seat and asked for the recording to be played again. As it was, Lelouch's own screen expanded in front of them as he typed in the message.

"I do not understand," Allura said, "how are this static supposed to be a message?"

"Not the static itself, it's the beeping pattern we hear in it. It's called Morse Code," Suzaku explained, "It's pretty old-fashioned, but the military will still use it from time to time to communicate information since not many people outside militia know how to read it. Plus, sometimes, the message itself can be coded in a way that only some people will know what it means."

"Well, I don't see anything cryptic about this," Lelouch said as he typed in the last number.

On the screen in front of them were three words.

_Voltron. Zero. Kyoto._

A set of numbers followed the words, which Lelouch recognized as longitude and latitude coordinates.

"Kyoto? What's Kyoto?" Allura asked after reading the message.

"Um… how do we explain this," Suzaku muttered, "their full name is the Six Houses of Kyoto, and it's made up of about six members who own large industries throughout Japan. They were once some of the main advisors to my father."

"When Britannia came though, they cooperated with the colonial rulers, so they became an 'Eleven' governing body to help govern the 'Elevens,'" Lelouch continued, "In reality though, from what I understand, they're actually a group of double agents. Though they officially still answer to Britannia, they secretly support resistance groups all over Japan. And it seems that they wish to meet with us."

"Well, this is a good thing, isn't it?" Allura asked.

"I want to think it is. They want Japan free just as much as any rebel, and they probably see Voltron as a chance to do so finally."

"So, we're going to go?" Suzaku asked.

"Hmmm… they may not be too happy to see you Suzaku," Lelouch admitted, "I'll take Kallen,
Ohgi, and another Black Knight with me. Rai can fly us down to the meeting point in Zerith."

"Are sure that's all you'll need?" Suzaku asked.

"No," Lelouch smirked slightly, "I have a plan. And Coran is a key part of it."

"Huh?" Allura blinked. What in the world did Lelouch have in mind this time?

o~o

Red and violet energy continued to crackle back on the Galran HQ. Zarkon was particularly eager that quintant to locate the Paladins. Had that rogue Galra not interfered, they would have almost been victorious.

Once again, Zarkon felt the sense of rushing wind pass him as he dove deeply through the astral plane of the cosmos, his black Geass flaring in his eyes.

Suddenly he stumbled. It was as if his astral self had slammed headfirst into a thick metal wall. The Druid's energy flashed out upon this impact, and Zarkon collapsed to his knees.

"Sire, what's wrong?" Haggar asked in apprehension.

Zarkon ignored the inquiry and stood back up, "Again!"

"But my Lord-"

"AGAIN!" Zarkon roared, silencing the druid that had spoken up.

More hesitantly this time, the Druids threw their magic at the Emperor again. Once again, though, as Zarkon cast out his astral range, he ran into the same wall, and no matter how hard he pushed, he couldn't get through.

When the Emperor stumbled again, Haggar raised a confused eyebrow. Through the tiny threads of her spell, she had also felt the impact. But what could possibly have stopped her Lord's search? The new Black Paladin's bond with the Lion was still weak; there was no way he discovered what they were doing and built up his own defense in such a short amount of time.

"Sire, if I may…?" Haggar asked cautiously, approaching the Emperor on the platform.

Zarkon grunted and narrowed his eyes, but allowed Haggar to place her hand on his head.

Closing her eyes, Haggar tracked the same path her lord took to find the Lion. When she came across the wall, she pushed against it herself. She hummed curiously, waving a spell along the wall. The energy it emitted seemed familiar.

Then she remembered. It was nearly identical to the energy she felt from that Earthling woman they had captured with the Princess, as well as the smaller waves she had sensed from Zero, and even the Champion.

However, there was a slight difference to it, but she couldn't quite put a finger on it. She scowled thoughtfully.

"My lord," she bowed after removing her hand, "I ask that you permit me to investigate this anomaly, personally. Though there aren't exact coordinates, the star system they've traveled to should suffice. I will find what is causing this disruption and eliminate it myself, allowing you to track Voltron once more."
Zarkon hummed, an annoyed scowl on his lips. He didn't like the idea of sending his closest advisor to the location alone. Not that he doubted the Druid's abilities, but it irked him that he couldn't do it himself.

"Very well. Take one of the western fleets to accompany you," he finally said.

"Pardon my objection, my lord," Haggar argued, "but I believe this mission will require stealth. I will investigate it. Alone."

"I'm impressed," C.C. scowled as she sat back, relaxing in one of the lounges, "I didn't expect your range to carry out this far… Apologies for being rude, but as the kids say nowadays, that's none of your business."

Off to the other end of the couch, the four mice had been lying lazily and enjoying the quiet of the room. Chuchule, however, perked up when she heard C.C. talking. Tilting her head in confusion, she wondered who the woman was talking to. Other than her and her brothers, they were the only ones there.

"If you're so curious to know, he's perfectly fine. Even off the planet, I don't make a habit of intentionally endangering my contractors… What does that have to do with anything?"

As C.C. continued to speak, the other mice soon were roused from their slumber to glance curiously at the woman as well. Platt scratched his head, plainly confused.

"Well who said you were in charge of that? Last I checked, I'm the one that decides that. Not you… How many times must I spell it out for you? I'm not coming back! Just give up already; this discussion is pointless."

After another pause, the mice saw C.C. smirk, "Heh, good luck with that. Just a fair warning, your little project is about to be torn to shreds, and I will do everything I can to ensure that happens."

With that final declaration, C.C. abruptly stood. She then noticed the mice watching her curiously. She shook her head with a tired sigh, "Just be glad you don't have a bitch in your little heads." She then walked briskly out of the lounge.

All the mice could do was look at one another in confusion, concerned squeaks sounding among them.

"Now then," C.C. smirked as she snuck to the launch bay, "on to more... important business."

"This is taking too long. When will we get there?" Tamaki grumbled as they sat in the back of a car.

The coordinates that Suzaku and Lelouch found had brought to the outskirts of one of the many ghettos. Rai dropped off Zero, Kallen (in her Paladin armor), Ohgi, and Tamaki in Zerith, invisible, and then took off into the atmosphere to await further instructions. The car to take them to Kyoto arrive about fifteen minutes later, and the four entered the car quickly to avoid being seen.

When the Black Knights heard that Kyoto had sent the Castle of Lions a message, they were excited. Kyoto backed up all of the main resistance groups in Japan; they were also the ones that
lent them the Knightmare frame Guren Mrk II until they had to return it after Kallen went missing. The fact that they wanted to talk to them was huge news.

"Ugh, could you chill out, you're embarrassing," Kallen sighed. Kallen was surprised when she heard Lelouch tell her to come in her Paladin armor. She understood that Lelouch wanted to introduce the Paladins to Kyoto, and this was likely the least violent way of doing it. She hoped that she made a good impression.

Suddenly the car jolted, and the party felt as if the car was moving up rather than forward.

"What the hell?" Tamaki grunted.

The car was taken up by a massive elevator that was seemingly built into the ground.

"We're going up?" Kallen wondered.

The elevator stopped, and when the door opened, the car jolted forward again towards its destination. The car soon came to a stop, and the passenger door opened, the driver escorting the quartet out.

"Sorry for the inconvenience." The man stated, allowing Zero and the Black Knights to exit the car, "The master is waiting for you."

What they saw took their breath away. Tamaki, eyes wide in shock and awe, ran over and looked out the window, seeing the Britannian Settlement far off in the distance.

"Wait, this is... the Fuji mines?" Ohgi asked, sounding shocked.

"That is not possible!" Tamaki exclaimed, hands on the window, seeing the solar panels and metal workings outside, "There's no way we could be here!"

"It has to be!" Kallen said, "It has to be Mt. Fuji. There's only one mountain like this in Japan!"

"So, that means the Sakuradite is right below us?" Tamaki asked, "The damn treasure that started this whole war! You know what they do to intruders here? Execute them!"

"Their power reaches all the way out here? The Kyoto group is amazing!" Ohgi gasped.

"It's repulsive," an elderly tone sounded from behind them as the windows went dark. Turning around, the group finally noticed two veiled seats at the other end of the room. On either side of the seats were men dressed professionally, wielding guns, "Mount Fuji. A sacred mountain once known for its clear water and quiet beauty. Now it is bent to the Empire's will. A place of hideous violation. A reflection of what Japan has become. It pains me so..."

As the group turned to fully face the two figures, he continued, "Zero, you seem to have caused quite the uproar as of late. We've never encountered such a thing as this 'Volton' you presented two days ago."

The man paused as if expecting for Zero to reply, but the masked Paladin remained silent.

"...We apologize for not showing our faces, but Zero, your face is hidden as well," he continued, "Unfortunately, we can not allow this. To trust you, we must know who you are. Therefore, you will show us your face!"

With this proclamation, the man seated on the right chair raised his cane he had been holding,
turning it outward. At the gesture, three Burais and another Knightmare, the one they recognized as the Guren Mrk II rolled in from the shadows, rifles raised and ready to fire.

"Wait! Please!" Kallen exclaimed, stepping forward and throwing her arms out in front of the Black Paladin, "Zero has given us the opportunity for victory with Voltron! That alone should-"

"Silence!" the man barked, cutting Kallen off, "Now, which of you is Ohgi?"

Said Black Knight straightened, "That's me!"

"You will remove Zero's mask."

Ohgi gasped slightly, looking at the masked rebel. He then swallowed and walked as calmly as possible towards Zero.

Kallen looked nervous, but she didn't move to stop her fellow Black Knight.

"I'm sorry Zero," Ohgi said, "but we need a reason to put our faith in you too," he reached to the sides of Zero's mask, "so help us to put our trust in you."

Zero's mask was slowly lifted to reveal the face underneath. Everyone, except for Kallen, gasped.

"Wait-you're!" Tamaki sputtered as Coran's Altean features came into view.

"What?! No! You're not Zero!" Ohgi exclaimed in shock.

"You're right, Ohgi, this isn't Zero," Kallen said calmly, before turning to the two veiled individuals, "This is one of the Alteans. His name is Coran."

"...Is this true? You're one of these extraterrestrials we've heard about?" the man asked, tone laced with surprise and disbelief.

"That's correct," Coran greeted quite cheerfully, before bowing deeply in respect, "Coran Hieronymus Wimbleton Smythe at your service. And it is a pleasure to meet you as well… Lord Taizo Kirihara and Lady Kaguya Sumeragi."

The second that Coran gave their names, the two guards tensed and reached for their weapons.

"Anyone who can identify them must die!" one of the guards exclaimed.

"Especially someone who isn't Japanese!" the other shouted.

"Hey, hey! Wait a second!" Tamaki shouted in panic as Kallen and Ohgi tensed, preparing to be shot down.

Before any triggers could be pulled though, from Knightmares or otherwise, the roof above the humans suddenly gave in with a crash. With a deafening roar, the Black Lion itself landed directly in front of the two Kyoto chairs. The guards and the Knightmares all wavered in fear. They knew from Narita's footage that no weapons they had were going to so much as dent the beast.

"You're soft, and your methods and thinking are outdated!" Zero's voice rang through the room as the Black Lion lowered her jaw to the floor, allowing the masked leader to walk out, "That is why you'll never win!"

'And my theory before was correct,' Lelouch added with a smirk. Despite the dramatic entrance, Lelouch had wanted to test something with the Lions themselves. Zerith he could understand with
her invisibility, but he wanted to see if any Britannian satellites would pick up the Black Lion’s signal. None did. Not only were they the most advanced weapons they had, but against Britannia, they were practically undetectable.

"Taizo Kirihara, founder of Kirihara Industries which has a monopoly on Sakuradite mining, formerly a key backer for the Kururugi regime," Zero said calmly as he walked up to the two leaders, "However when Japan fell you dodged tribunal by collaborating with the colonial rulers — commonly known as Kirihara, the Traitor. In reality, you, as well as Lady Kaguya, are two of the leaders of the Six Houses of Kyoto who support resistance groups throughout Japan. Double agents, how cliché."

"Show some respect, you swine!" one of the guards shouted.

"Stop, please!" the person, a child really, exclaimed from the other veiled chair.

Lelouch chuckled, "It is as you guessed, though. I am not Japanese."

The Black Knights all gasped at this, though Kallen more out of the fact that Lelouch actually admitted it in this situation.

"In fact, only two of the Paladins of Voltron are so," he continued. This resulted in another round of shocked noises from everyone but the Black Knights behind them.

"...If you, and the majority of your party, aren't Japanese," Kirihara responded slowly, "why are you fighting for Japan? What is it that you want?"

"Let's just say that Japan's liberation is essential for what is to come. If action isn't taken soon, not only Japan, but our entire world is at stake." Zero then seemed to sigh in relief as he reached for his helmet, slowly removing it, "I'm glad it is the two of you I am dealing with."

Once Zero's mask was removed, Kirihara's eyes widened, and Kaguya audibly gasped.

The Black Knights were also quite shocked to see that Zero removed his mask.

"What's going on? I can't see him!" Tamaki complained.

"Hold it!" Kallen ordered sternly, shooting Tamaki a stern look. Kallen knew that this was the make it or break it point for them. If Kyoto refused to support them, it would make liberating Japan much more difficult.

However....

"Kehehehehehehe..."

Everyone looked at Kirihara, who had begun to chuckle. It soon turned into a full-blown laugh.

"Hahahahah! I see how it is now! So, the flower from eight years ago has bloomed at last?" the old man cackled.

"Indeed it has, Lord Kirihara," Lelouch couldn't help but smirk, amused.

The guards, upon seeing Kirihara's reaction, immediately relaxed and lowered their guns, which they had raised when Lelouch removed his helmet and stood back. As soon as they did, however, Kaguya dashed out from the curtain and rammed into Lelouch, nearly knocking him down, wrapping her small arms around his waist.
Everyone's reactions were quite amusing, as well. Kallen developed a tick mark, Tamaki's jaw hit the floor, Ohgi took a step back, and Coran actually squawked in surprise.

"LELOUCH! Omigosh, to think that you were Zero! IknewitIknewitIknewit! And you've gotten taller!"

Lelouch chuckled despite himself. He had to admit; he missed the bubbly girl.

"It's been a long time, Lady Kaguya," he smiled, patting her head before turning to face the Black Knights.

Upon seeing his face, Tamaki's jaw practically hit the floor while Ohgi looked gob-smacked. Kallen looked surprised too, but more on the fact that Lelouch revealed his identity in this way. She was actually more surprised that Ohgi and Tamaki's reactions weren't more concerning.

Kirihara emerged as well, steadying himself on his cane as he walked toward them. The Black Knights immediately straighten themselves out, not wanting to show disrespect.

"Ohgi!" Kirihara exclaimed.

"Yes, sir!" Ohgi replied.

"This man before you is a true mortal enemy of Britannia! He hid his face from you for vital reasons. Should the enemy see it, they will target not only him but also those closest to him, the Black Knights included! That is why his face must be hidden! I urge you to follow Zero. If you do, we shall supply you with medical aid, financial support, weaponry, and intelligence."

Everyone's eyes widened. The plan had worked. Kyoto was in on the fight. Tamaki began grinning like an idiot, Ohgi bowed forward respectfully along with Kallen while Coran sent Lelouch an approving smile.

"We thank you!" Ohgi said.

Kirihara then turned back to Lelouch, "So, have you decided to embark on the path of blood?"

Lelouch smirked back at the old man, "If it is what's before me, then so be it. However, time is short. I also bring a message that must be passed to the other leaders of Kyoto at once."

Hearing the seriousness of his tone, Kaguya finally let go of Lelouch and gave him her full attention, Kirihara also gazing at him, waiting for him to continue.

"The Black Knights have already been informed of the coming threat, but it will mean little to nothing if we don't prepare. If we do not, not only is Japan in danger but possibly the rest of the world as well."

"Go on…" Kirihara attentively.

"It's something that we, myself and the Paladins, discovered not too long ago. Shortly after the Blue Lion was spotted leaving Earth's atmosphere. It was another alien race. A race known as well Galra."

Lelouch went on to explain a summarized version of the events that happened since they had left Earth, not too different from when the Black Knights were briefed. By the time he finished, Kirihara's expression had become grave, and Lady Kaguya looked genuinely concerned.
"And this Voltron is the only thing that can stop this race from reaching Earth?" Kirihara asked.

"As of right now, yes. However, the question isn't if the Galra will come, but when. Time is short, and although Voltron is a powerful weapon, without all of Earth's cooperation, it's unlikely the human race will be victorious."

"Very well. I will gather the rest of Kyoto to discuss this matter."

"I thank you, Lord Kirihara," Lelouch bowed before reattaching his helmet and walking back to the Black Knights.

"Hey um, Zero, I mean, Lelouch, or whatever, why didn't you tell us who you were back at the Castle? Why have Coran parade around as you?" Tamaki suddenly asked.

Despite the unfortunate timing of the question, Lelouch snorted and shrugged, "To be honest, I just wanted to mess with you."

Kallen couldn't stop the giggles that escaped her, and Ohgi had to cough to cover his own snicker.

'Guess Zero is human after all,' he thought as he shook his head fondly.

"Plus, Coran wanted to try the cape," Lelouch added, pointing to the Altean in question. In reply, Coran swept the cape in front of him and then posed dramatically, causing another round of laughter from the small group.

A hissing sound from behind them stopped the Lelouch and the Black Knights from leaving just yet, though. Turning around, Lelouch's eyes widened and felt like an ice cube was sliding down his back slowly as Sayoko emerged from the Knightmare and landed gracefully on the floor in front of them. Unlike her maid outfit, though, the ninja was now donning a magenta suit that was zipped up to her neck and light blue armored plating.

"It is good to see you once more, Master," Sayoko greeted, bowing deeply to Lelouch.

Lelouch stood frozen, his heart rate accelerating, and eyes filling with dread.

"Sayoko, where's Nunnally?"

o~o

Zerith came in fast as she and Zen returned to the Castle of Lions. Upon landing, the group disembarked and were met with the rest of the Paladins and Black Knights that stayed behind on the Castle.

Along with Rai and the other Black Knights that accompanied Lelouch, everyone was quite surprised to see Lady Kaguya practically skip down Zerith's ramp. Upon seeing her, Suzaku, in particular, was surprised. It had been years since he had last seen his cousin, and she had grown a lot. If his memory was correct, the last time he saw her, much less had contact with Kaguya, was before Japan was conquered.

"Suzaku!" Kaguya gasped upon spotting him and soon barrelled into him, knocking him off his feet. Shirley, Rivalz, and Milly looked on in surprise, "Lelouch said you'd be here! It's so good to see you!"

"It-It's good to see you too, Kaguya!" Suzaku stuttered and smiled as he got back to his feet.
"Wait, Suzaku, who's this?" Rivalz asked, glancing warily at the young girl.

"Oh! This is Kaguya Sumeragi; she's one of the heads of Kyoto. And she's also my cousin."

"It's so nice to meet all of you!" Kaguya said cheerfully, turning to the rest of the group.

"Lady Kaguya is staying in the Castle as Kyoto's representative," Ohgi quickly explained.

"Oh! Well, it's nice to meet you too, Kaguya," Milly said with a smile, bowing slightly in Japanese custom, "I'm Milly Ashford, and this is Rivalz Cardemonde and Shirley Fenette."

"Pleased to meet you!" Kaguya greeted with a smile.

Rivalz greeted with a smile, and Shirley giggled at how bubbly the girl was. She then turned back to Rai, only to see the distressed and disturbed look on his face.

"Rai, what's wrong?" she asked.

The Green Paladin swallowed and turned to face everyone, "Lelouch said to meet on the bridge. Immediately."

Everyone suddenly stood at attention, seeing the shine of fear in the Paladin's eyes. Something else had happened when they were on Earth. But what?

"Hey! And where the hell is C.C?!" Kallen suddenly asked, looking around with a frown.

She got her answer when one of the Castle's pods suddenly flew in and landed right next to Zerith. As the top of the pod opened, C.C.'s face showed itself… and next to her, and stacked up high in the back, were several dozen boxes of Pizza Hut pizza. Plain cheese from the aroma that wafted out.

Seeing the looks of disbelief, and even mortification, on the rest of the party, C.C. glanced around at them, clearly confused.

"What?"

o~o

Lelouch, Allura, Sayoko, and Coran were already on the bridge, waiting for everyone to arrive. As they turned to face everyone, Allura spotted Kaguya.

"Who's this?" Allura asked curiously, but with a layer of seriousness.

"This is Kaguya; we'll explain why she's here later. What's going on?" Suzaku asked urgently.

Lelouch scowled and clenched his fists, not answering as he turned to the bridge's main controls. He pulled up a large screen, and on it was the Britannian news broadcast from Earth.

"This is live," Lelouch murmured as he turned the volume up. On the broadcast, they saw that it was being filmed from Pendragon, Britannia's capital. And standing up front, in all his 'holy' glory, was Charles zi Britannia himself, a large scowl on his face.

"The world lies. Thou shalt not commit murder. Thou shalt not bear false witness. Thou shalt not cheat. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife. All of these are lies. Mere illusion. Nothing more."
As the crew gazed up at the image of the Emperor, Coran couldn't help but gulp, feeling slightly intimidated, Shirley sharing a similar expression on her face. Everyone else though, including Suzaku, was glaring up at the Emperor.

Lelouch in particular was clenching his fists and gnashing his teeth as he burned holes into the face of the monster that he called his father.

Allura also felt her own rage bubbling up inside her. True, she had seen the Emperor in Lelouch's memory he had shown them on Arus, but see the man currently only cemented her hatred towards him. She could see that this man didn't have a lick of good in him, and was genuinely stunned to realize that Lelouch was related to him. If anyone else, but Lelouch, had told her that, she would've laughed and brushed it off as a ridiculous joke. But no, there was nothing funny about this now. That was, indeed, Lelouch's father.

The broadcast was being shown all over Area 11. Every television and radio station was playing the words of the Emperor.

From the Viceroy's palace, Cornelia, Euphemia, and Nonette sat together in the throne room as they watched and listened to the Emperor's remarks.

"They don't want to be killed. They don't want to be robbed. Using the twin lies of justice and morality. The weak are endeavoring to protect themselves."

It was even being played in the military hospital, where Viletta and Jeremiah were recovering from Narita's defeat. Jeremiah had several bandages wrapped around his head and upper body, while Viletta had some gauze on her cheek and her left arm in a sling.

"But the first truth there is that the strong devour the weak. So let us feed upon people, upon wealth, upon riches and power. We of Britannia shall feast upon the raw flesh of the world itself. As well as upon this fiend that calls itself Voltron! No matter what stands in our way, we will crush this deception and bring forth the truth!"

Lelouch straightened and watched the screen carefully, knowing his father was now talking directly to him.

"The future of Earth will be decided by our beloved Britannia and her alone! Not by this abomination known as Voltron!"

Though he didn't say it directly, the Emperor's response was clear. He was refusing to cooperate, and would rather fight Voltron rather than work with it. Even if it meant the death of millions.

As Allura's fists clenched in rage, Suzaku felt the dwindling hope that the Emperor would see reason spiral down the drain. That was it, then. They had given the Emperor fair warning. Now it was time to fight.

"All of Britannia backs this decision. Especially those of the royal family."

The screen suddenly shifted, moving away from the Emperor. When it came to a stop, there was a collective gasp throughout the bridge.
In front of them, sitting in a wheelchair, facing the camera, wearing a fashionable dress with a pink color scheme, was Nunnally vi Britannia. Standing off to her left, with a neutral expression, was none other than the Prime Minister of Britannia, Schneizel el Britannia.

"Oh no…" Milly murmured, hands covering her mouth, though her statement voiced what everyone was thinking at that moment.

"Zero, this is Nunnally vi Britannia..."

o~o

"...I speak on behalf of the people of Britannia. Please, surrender peacefully, and I am sure that we can cooperate to bring a brighter future."

"Nunnally…" Cornelia gasped as she leaped from her throne in shock.

"She's alive!" Nonnette added.

Euphemia was at a loss for words. If Nunnally was alive, and with their brother apparently, why hadn't he alerted them immediately?!

o~o

"Princess…" Jeremiah murmured, eyes wide. He couldn't pull his gaze away from the girl whose mother he had failed to protect all those years ago.

"Also, to those of you who are holding my brother and his friends captive, please let them go. By holding them, you are only causing more suffering to others. And Lelouch…"

o~o

Lelouch barely kept himself standing upright as his sister began to address him directly.

"...if by some miracle you are hearing this as well, please come home safely," Nunnally choked as tears trailed down her face before gasping out her last words, "I love you."

The video cut back to the cruel face of the Emperor as, to Lelouch's rage, a satisfied smirk flashed across Charles's face before he spoke again.

"Zero, consider this your only and final warning. This Voltron will submit, and bow to Britannia, or else it will be your forces that will be decimated. All Hail Britannia!"

As the Emperor threw his fist in the air, the crowd watching the speech live shouted back in unison.

"All Hail Britannia! All Hail Britannia!"

The screen soon turned dark as the broadcast ended.

"Well… this isn't good," Rivalz finally said after several seconds of silence.

"Oh, ya think?!" Kallen snarked, shooting Rivalz a side glare.

Princess Allura, in all of her life, had never thought that she would meet another person that she would hate as much, if not even more so, than Zarkon. But the man that she had just watched address his nation just proved her wrong. Not only was it clear that he cared very little of what
became of his subjects, but to use his own disabled child in such a way was beyond cruel as well. She swore that if she ever had the displeasure of meeting him face to face, he would receive no mercy from her. She was sure that if Alfor was still with them, he would be sharing very similar thoughts.

"Lelouch…" Suzaku addressed cautiously, his voice drawing everyone's attention to the Black Paladin. The expression on Lelouch's face was one that Suzaku had only seen one other time before.

The day that an eight-year-old Lelouch swore his vengeance on Britannia.

There was nothing but unadulterated rage on Lelouch's face, his hands were clenched so tightly, that if it weren't for the gloves he had on, they might actually be bleeding.

However, there was also a small glimmer of another emotion on Lelouch's face. One that only a select few had seen before.

Pure terror.

Chapter End Notes

AN: SO SORRY for the long wait! I had a ton of midterms to study for, and by the time it was over, I had a hard time getting back into the habit of writing regularly (if you understand what I mean). But I think I'm finally back at it, and although I don't think this chapter is as good as the others, I really hope you enjoyed it!

So yes! Sayoko was the one piloting the Guren this time! Her outfit is basically the same one that Kallen wore in canon when she piloted it.

A lot happened as you can see! So what else is going to be in store for the Paladins now? Britannia has made their decision, so how will they deal with the Galra AND Britannia. And why can't Zarkon track them?

Also... the pizza scene... I had to do it, there was no way around it. HA!
There was complete silence on the bridge as the video message closed. The Paladins stood still, watching Lelouch closely. It was clear that Nunnally was now a captive of Britannia, one of the things that Lelouch feared the most. They all knew that when it came to his sister, Lelouch could act purely on his emotions, barely thinking things through.

However, that was when Lelouch was alone. He had support now. Friends and allies that he could rely on to help him.

A good thing too, as the next thing they knew, Lelouch had spun around and tried to make a beeline for the Black Lion's elevator.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! Lelouch, where do you think you're going?!" Kallen shouted, grabbing onto his wrist tightly.

"What does it look like?" Lelouch snarled and fiercely tried to free his arm, but the Red Paladin held firm.

"You-you're not just going to go barging in there without a plan, are you?!" Rivalz exclaimed, wide-eyed.

"Every second Nunnally's, there is a second far too long!" Lelouch shouted, still struggling vainly against the Kallen, C.C., and even Coran's holds.

Then abruptly, Suzaku stepped directly in front of Lelouch and placed his hands on his shoulders. He looked the Black Paladin dead in the eye. "Lelouch! You need to calm down! We'll rescue her! But you running in there like a psycho isn't going to make her condition better!"

"Suzaku's right Lelouch," Milly agreed with a determined frown, "First, we should find out where she is. Rai, see if you can track that signal. Maybe we can pinpoint where that broadcast was!"

"Already on it!" Rai growled as he practically flung himself into his chair, barely waiting for the screen to load correctly before getting to work.

"I know I likely don't need to point this out," C.C. said, calmly releasing Lelouch after she ensured he wouldn't run again, "but we could be walking headfirst into a trap. Nunnally is the perfect bait for it."

"What makes you think that?" Shirley asked nervously, eyes shifting back and forth between Lelouch and the witch.

C.C. hummed thoughtfully, "What I mean is that it is likely that Charles either knows or strongly suspects that Lelouch is a part of Voltron. Hell, for all we know, he may have figured out that Lelouch is Zero too. He knows Lelouch and knows that he loves Nunnally, and will do anything for her safety. Therefore, Nunnally becomes the perfect bait to try and keep Lelouch, and by extension, Voltron in check."

"Whoa, time out!" Rivalz exclaimed, his hands making the 't' sign, "If the Emperor already knows that Lelouch is Zero, why didn't he just say so in that broadcast? If you ask me, that could've been
"...the perfect time to expose his identity."

"Best guess? He likely kept the information to himself because if word got out that a member of the Royal Family was openly opposing Britannia, other nations like the EU and the Chinese Federation could be led to believe that the Emperor is losing control of his Empire. This would only encourage them to fight back against Britannia even harder," C.C. theorized.

"That makes sense," Milly nodded, "I know there was a bit of contention between Britannia and the Chinese Federation as of late. So caution is understandable."

"So then… what do we do?" Shirley asked, looking around nervously.

"We won't be able to do anything without more information," Suzaku quickly said, "it's just like with the Balmera. We can't just start shooting down the Viceroy's Palace. Until we locate Nunnally, we're stuck."

Lelouch, having been quiet for a majority of the conversation, could still feel panic bubbling in the pit of his stomach. He knew what Suzaku said was the most logical, but his instincts to protect his sister were waging war within him right now.

He suddenly felt a weight against his leg and looked down to see that Kaguya had hugged him again, "Don't worry Lelouch, Nunnally will be okay! And you'll definitely get her back, now that you have the Goddess of Victory on your side!"

The group chuckled at Kaguya's declaration, but only a tiny curve shook Lelouch's lips, his own heart still pounding in his ears.

A hand on his shoulder made him jump. Turning to the source, he saw Rai looking at him, having gotten up from his Paladin seat.

"Lelouch, I can't read minds, but I believe I know what you're thinking. And… I understand. I feel the same way about Sophie and my mom. Ever since I discovered that they're still alive, I've wanted to find them. But I know I can't just fly out blindly into the next galaxy we come across. That won't get me anywhere. Until I know for sure where they are, all I can do is keep looking. So I promise, once I find where Nunnally is, you'll be the first to know."

"Rai…" Lelouch murmured, staring back at the Green Paladin. Another hand suddenly jerked him forward a little.

"You want Nunnally back, right?" Kallen asked, a stern frown on her face. She continued before Lelouch could answer honestly, "Then you need to be Zero right now. Nunnally needs Zero right now. So use that big, chessmaster brain of yours that I know you have and figure out how to save her!"

Kallen's statement was the last bullet needed to break through Lelouch's wall of despair and panic. He straightened himself, eyes set, and determined.

"I will do everything to help as well," Sayoko said, giving a short bow, though her eyes and posture were heavy with regret, "It's my fault that Lady Nunnally was captured after all."

Lelouch hated to put Sayoko on the spot, but he had to know, "How did this happen?"

He hoped his voice didn't sound harsh, but if it did, Sayoko paid it no mind.

"I don't know how, but Lady Nunnally and I were tracked to the safe house that you had set up.
When I found out that we'd been discovered, I quickly made arrangements to leave. But it seems I wasn't fast enough. Forces led by your brother, Schneizel, surrounded us. I held back as many as possible, but at one point, when I was fleeing with your sister, I was knocked unconscious and fell into a pit. Whether it was a trap set prior or not, I don't know. By the time I woke up, I was alone, and Lady Nunnally was gone."

Then, to Lelouch's own shock, Sayoko collapsed to her knees and bowed to Lelouch deeply, "I'm sorry, my Lord, I failed you."

It took a couple seconds for Lelouch to shake himself from his shock, but he quickly knelt next to the kunoichi, "You're not to blame for this Sayoko," he gently lifted the maid up, "I was a fool. I should've suspected that Schneizel would figure it out. He always has, and likely always will be, the worst foe I've faced. Minus Zarkon, of course."

"Your worst foe?" Shirley said, "What do you mean, Lulu?"

"Let me put it this way," Lelouch said, turning to face them again, "We used to play chess together when I was still living in Aries Villa, and he was the one person I could never beat."

Various reactions erupted from everyone in the room, gasps of shock or wide eyes, and Rai actually paused from his rapid typing. Coran and Allura, in particular, looked stunned. They still remembered when Lelouch and Coran played their first chess match against each other back on Arus, and Coran had commented to Allura later that Lelouch was likely on par with King Alfor in skill, maybe even more so. So to hear that there was someone that not even Lelouch could beat was both shocking and terrifying.

"Wait... wait... hold on a second!" Rivalz sputtered after picking his jaw up off the floor, "Your brother, actually beat you. At chess. I've seen you take on pretty much every kind of noble out there, and you always total them in ten minutes or less! And you're saying that there's someone that you could never beat?"

"Yes," Lelouch replied quite bluntly.

Stunned silence followed as everyone digested this new information.

"Okay... that's a little terrifying," Shirley said, voicing everyone's thoughts at that moment.

"Anyway, that's a topic for another time," Lelouch said, waving his hand in dismissal, "Rai, make sure to scan every Britannian communications link that you can to track Nunnally. When you do, inform me immediately."

"You'll be the first to know," Rai nodded before practically diving back into his seat.

"Anything I can do, Lelouch?" Kaguya asked, smiling kindly. Lelouch smiled back at the young woman. He remembered that Kaguya had been one of the few people at the Kururugi Shrine to be kind to him and his sister. He remembered the two girls becoming close friends. Therefore, he knew precisely what Kaguya could do.

"All I can ask of you right now, Kaguya, is to be a friend for Nunnally when rescue her. Can you do that?" Lelouch asked, bending down to Kaguya's eye level.

Kaguya nodded happily, "Of course I can do that!"

Lelouch nodded before straightening again, "All of you be ready to leave at any time. The second Rai locates Nunnally, we're moving out." He then swiftly turned to leave the bridge, "C.C., come
"Where are you going?" Kallen asked as she and the others watched him leave.

Lelouch stalled for a moment, looking over his shoulder, "I'm gathering the Black Knights. It's time that they know the truth about me… and about Geass," everyone's eyes widened at this proclamation, "Best to get this out of the way."

"Schneizel, what is the meaning of this?!!" Cornelia roared as her brother calmly walked into the Viceroy's throne room. The moment that the broadcast had ended, Cornelia had requested… no… demanded that her brother come to the Viceroy's Palace immediately. Standing close by her were Nonette and Euphemia, as well as Guilford and Darlton. The two knights were positioned closer to the walls of the room while her sister and knight stood side-by-side with her. Cornelia's eyes glared angrily towards the Prime Minister as he approached with his own loyal subordinate, Earl Kanon Maldini.

"If you knew that Nunnally was alive all this time, and had her with you, why weren't we informed of this at once?!!" Cornelia shouted again.

"Your reaction is understandable dear sister," Schneizel answered calmly, "but please think rationally for a moment."

"RATIONALLY?!" Cornelia shrieked and nearly drew her sword from her waist.

"Viceroy!" Darlton gasped, stepping forward for a moment, "Please, we must hear him out before any rash actions are taken!"

Cornelia growled before forcing herself to calm down, as she knew he was correct. Despite his protest, though, Darlton and Guilford looked less than pleased with the Prime Minister too.

"Thank you, Lord Darlton," Schneizel nodded, "I do apologize for my actions as of late, but you must first understand when I found Nunnally, I was given direct orders from the Emperor himself to not reveal her presence until deemed necessary."

This statement only further confused the group rather than calm them down. Why on Earth would the Emperor want Nunnally's presence hidden? He could have at least told them about it.

"What about Prince Lelouch?" Guilford cautiously asked, "Have you been able to find him yet? Or any of the students from Ashford Academy?"

"Unfortunately, we haven't found any new information regarding Prince Lelouch, or any of the other Ashford Academy students," Kanon answered with a shake of his head. Though the Ashford students were not top of the priority list, everyone also knew that if they could track and find even one of the students, that could lead them to find Prince Lelouch.

"Can… we see Nunnally right now?" Euphemia timidly asked.

"We apologize, Princess Euphemia, but that is not possible at this time," Kanon answered with a sad expression.

"What?! Why?" Euphie gasped, tears gathering in her eyes.

Cornelia scowled angrily, not liking the answer either, "Yes, why the hell can't we see our own
"I'm truly sorry, sister," Schnitzel said, his tone pacifying as he held his hands up in emphasis, "but Nunnally is in a very fragile and emotional state. We don't want to add any more stress than she's already experiencing."

This response didn't seem to dull Cornelia's ire even slightly as she shot her brother an almost murderous glare, "Schneizel... if you do *anything* to her..."

"Cornelia, do you truly believe that I would harm our own sister?" he asked plainly.

The Viceroy scoffed, "To be honest... I really don't know what to think of you right now."

Schneizel frowned, "That hurts. Truly, it does. But I can understand that. Our family is quite broken, isn't it?"

Though she didn't voice it aloud, Euphemia immediately agreed with that statement. It had been for a long time. Perhaps longer than before she had been born. What happened to Lelouch and Nunnally did little to nothing to repair it and only spread the rift among the Royal Family broader. A tear escaped Euphie's eye.

With this statement, Schnitzel turned to leave, but Maldini stalled and turned back to the trio, "Princess Nunnally is scheduled to be transported back to the homeland before day's end. Prince Schneizel and I can pull some strings to have your unit serve as her protection, Viceroy."

"Indeed," Schneizel glanced over his shoulder again, "Don't worry, once Nunnally is home, you'll all be seeing her again very soon."

With these final words, the Prime Minister and his escort left the throne room, the door closing behind them. Cornelia's scowl never left her face.

Guilford sent his princess a wary look, "Viceroy, pardon my ignorance, but how could you distrust the Prime Minister. He's your own brother."

Cornelia rolled her eyes before addressing him with a sigh, "Guliford, if you grew up with a man like him, you would have some trust issues yourself. I promise you that."

Meanwhile, as Schneizel and Maldini continued their walk away from the throne room, Maldini turned to the prince, "Are you sure you know what you're doing, Prime Minister?"

Schneizel turned to his subordinate with a small smile, "Kanon, do you trust me?"

His answer was immediate, "Of course, my Prince," he said with a small bow.

"Then rest assured, I have everything under control."

As the two exited the palace, Schneizel remained deep in thought. There were very few things in this world that would make him lose his composure. However, he could certainly add the arrival of that Voltron machine to the list of things that *did*. After a brief discussion with Earl Asplund, Schneizel agreed with the scientist that the machine, mainly the lions that made it up, couldn't possibly be of Earth origin. Otherwise, he was sure they would have discovered the Blue Lion long before its debut two months prior.

That brought him to his second theory. According to confirmed reports, Zero, as well as the seven Ashford students, disappeared around the same time that the lion showed itself. He already had..."
strong suspicions that Zero and Lelouch were one in the same, and as it was true that Lelouch had been one of the seven missing students, not to mention that there were, conveniently, seven lions that made up the machine, it was likely that his brother hadn't been found yet because he was off with the other teenagers with Voltron.

His thoughts eventually led Schneizel to think about their father, the Emperor. Was he aware of this as well? And if so, that would undoubtedly complicate some of Schneizel's plans.

The Emperor's order to transport Nunnally to the homeland was no doubt a ploy to try and lure Zero, a.k.a. Lelouch, out, his sister being the perfect bait for it.

If his brother was to come for Nunnally, and Schneizel had little doubt that he would, he hoped to at least have a talk with him to resolve all this violence peacefully, if not for Nunnally's sake, then the world's as well.

O~O

Lelouch and C.C., along with the space mice that were perched calmly on her shoulders, carefully watched to gauge the reactions of the Black Knights as they all sat in one of the castle lounges. Lelouch had just finished telling them his history, his current mission, and finally about the Geass power that he, along with three other Paladins, now wielded, though he didn't mention which ones.

From what they could see, the group's initial reaction was one of stunned shock, though he did spot Inoue and Minami shooting him looks of pity and sympathy.

"And that's everything?" Ohgi eventually asked as he was still trying to process not only the information given to them but also the fact that they were being trusted with it as well.

"Yes, that's everything," Lelouch nodded, "Now, you all know."

"Damn…" Tamaki murmured with an expression that Lelouch couldn't quite identify.

"Heh, our mysterious, masked leader is a Prince of Britannia? Who knew?" Inoue chuckled in disbelief.

Lelouch bowed his head slightly with a pained expression, "I do apologize for hiding my identity from you, but I doubt if you knew who I initially was, you wouldn't have been as inclined to join me."

Ohgi waved the apology off, "Don't worry, we get it."

"So… this Geass thing, what exactly does it do?" Sugiyama asked cautiously from the back.

C.C. shrugged slightly, "It depends on the user. No Geass given out by people like me is the same as any other. It can be anything from reading minds to turning invisible. The particular one that Lelouch has is called 'Absolute Obedience.' If it's activated and he makes direct eye contact with you, he can order you to do anything he wants, and you'll have no choice but to obey him no matter how outrageous the order. The drawback that we've noticed so far is that it only works once per person. In other words, once he gives you an order using Geass, he can't do it a second time."

C.C. then smirked playfully, "So, anyone of you want to form a contract with me? Get some mysterious, supernatural power?"

A couple of the Black Knights couldn't tell if she was serious or not as Ohgi smiled nervously and scratched the back of his neck, "Uh… no thanks. Maybe some other time?"
C.C. didn't seem offended by the statement. Only more amused as she chuckled.

"I have a question," Tamaki said, raising his hand, "What's with the rats?"

To the surprise of the Black Knights, the mice seemed to actually take offense to that comment, as all four of them simultaneously turned and 

*glared* at the red-head. The skinny light blue one started hissing at him, its hackles raised.

"They are not rats, they're Altean mice," Lelouch emphasized, "They somehow managed to sneak into Princess Allura's cryopod and were asleep inside it with her for the last 10,000 years. Due to that, she somehow developed a telepathic link with them. Basically, she can understand them, and they can understand her."

Tamaki shrugged and nodded, apparently accepting the answer.

Despite that pleasant interruption though, Lelouch still had a serious question for the Black Knights, "Anyway, now that you know who I am, and why I'm doing this, I'll understand if you don't want to work with me anymore. After all, I'm the prince of a nation that you all hate so much, so if you want to leave, I won't stop you."

"Well, even if we *did* want to leave, you could just use that Geass thing to make us stay," Inoue pointed out matter-of-factly.

"I won't do that," Lelouch answered immediately and folded his arms, "That's one of the few things I'll never do. Otherwise, I'm no different from that man I have to call a father."

Ohgi stood up from his spot on the couch, "You saved all of our lives in Shinjuku, and showed us that we're more than just simple rebels. You proved that we *can* stand up to Britannia. You've given us hope when we thought we'd lost it. And if what you've told us about the Galra is true too, that they're *more* dangerous than Britannia, you're going to need all the help you can get. You're our leader, and the fact that you willingly revealed not only your history but your power to us means that you trust us. We trust you, and we're with you."

"Heh, yeah, you're stuck with us, kid," Tamaki smirked as the rest of the Black Knights smiled and nodded in agreement.

Lelouch couldn't help but smile in relief as he looked at all of the Black Knights. He was extremely grateful that they were willing to put their faith in him, and he was going to do everything he could to not let them down.

"I thank you all," he said with a nod.

"So..." Yoshida started, "Sorry, but what exactly do we call you now?"

"Hm? Oh!" Lelouch gasped when he realized what Yoshida meant, "Well, out on the field and on missions, you'll address me as either Zero or the Black Paladin. It'll depend on the situation. Otherwise, when we're just in the Castle like this, just calling me Lelouch is fine."

"Alright," Ohgi nodded, grateful that Yoshida had thought to ask, "Also, Lelouch, we were all wondering... Do you have any plans yet regarding your sister? And if you do, is there anything you need us to do?"

"...We're currently trying to gather information regarding Nunnally," he told them after a moment, "but as of right now, I can't think of anything where I'll need your assistance yet. I do not doubt anyone here, but as of right now, we lack the resources we need for you all in a fight."
"Coran and Allura are currently making arrangements with Lady Kaguya and the other heads of Kyoto to have some Knightmares brought up to the Castle," C.C. added, "Coran is going to try and see if he equip them properly for space use, as well as prepare the needed equipment you'll need for your own use. If he is successful, the Black Knights will be the owners of likely the most advanced Knightmare frames on the planet."

This statement sent a wave of excitement through the Black Knights. They all looked at one another with broad smiles on their faces. Even Ohgi's eyes sparkled excitedly.

"Ha! I'm really starting to dig this whole 'teaming up with aliens' gig we've got going on!" Tamaki grinned.

Before any other comments could be made, the intercom crackled to life.

"_Lelouch. We need you on the bridge immediately!_"

o~o

After a quick farewell to the Black Knights, Lelouch practically sprinted to the bridge with C.C. hot on his trail. The other Paladins, as well as Coran, Sayoko, and Kaguya, were already there waiting for him.

"Did you-?"

Before the Black Paladin could finish his sentence, Rai pulled up a radio message that he managed to intercept. On it, they could hear the voices of several officers discussing Nunnally's transportation from Area 11 to Pendragon, Britannia's capital.

"Have you managed to trace it at all?" Lelouch asked Rai urgently.

"Already have coordinates," the Green Paladin promptly answered.

"You have a plan, Lulu?" Milly asked, turning to him.

"Yes," he nodded, "if everything goes according to plan, we should be able to get in, get Nunnally, and get out fairly quickly. However, I want to make one thing clear. And that is that Voltron is not going to be used for this mission, not if we can help it. Any objections?"

All of the Paladins shook their heads. They didn't need an explanation. Not only could using Voltron make it more challenging to rescue Nunnally, but from the beginning, the goal was to keep as many Britannian casualties to a minimum. They were going to need those soldiers after all, once the Galra caught up to them.

"Good. Alright, this is our plan of attack," he typed into the computer, bringing up an image of the transport, the Avalon, that Nunnally would be escorted in, "We need to wait until the transport that has Nunnally is in the air. This will allow us not only more room to maneuver, but will also allow us to inflict as little damage to the transport as possible. We can also avoid combat with any Knightmare frames. We'll have Zen, Zerith, and Zinnia stationed underwater in the Pacific Ocean until further notice. Meanwhile, Aka, Yoru, Polaris, and Maeraka will fly in the air and keep any Britannian aircrafts at bay, as well as drop off myself, Sayoko, Rai, and Shirley at these three points of the ship," three parts of the Avalon highlighted in red, "Rai and Shirley will take port and starboard and sabotage the engines. While they're doing that, Sayoko and I will search for Nunnally. Once we have her, you'll pick us up. Worst case scenario, though, the Paladins that are on the Avalon can use the bonds we have with our Lions to call them to us. After that, we return to the Castle. Any objections?"
Most of the Paladins shook their heads, but Suzaku, surprisingly, raised his hand slightly, "Lelouch, I...I was wondering. Could I somehow come with you to get Nunnally? She's my friend too, and I want to help more."

Lelouch smiled but shook his head, "I appreciate it, Suzaku, but we can't risk Britannia learning your identity, and you already know why."

Suzaku grimaced, but nodded, "Yeah, got it."

"Alright, we leave in a half varga. Be ready!"

As everyone scrambled to prepare for departure, Lelouch managed to snag Sayoko's arm.

"Sayoko, may we speak in private?" he asked politely.

The maid nodded, and Lelouch led them down the hall, not too far from the bridge.

"Do you have it with you?" he asked urgently once he was sure they were alone.

Sayoko immediately reached into her pocket and pulled out an object wrapped in fabric. She handed it to him without protest.

Lelouch took the object and carefully unwrapped the cloth. Underneath it was a knife. But not just any knife. It was a knife with a familiar symbol engraved at the bottom of the hilt.

Lelouch bit his lip. Theories and possibilities all pooled within his mind, some making more or less sense than the last.

"Master, if I may ask, what exactly is this? How did you get it?" Sayoko asked.

Lelouch took a breath before answering... "...It belonged to my mother. I came across it completely by accident. Details aren't needed, but let's just say that the noble I was playing against that day bit off a little more than he could chew with the gamble. In exchange for keeping half of the money, he offered this knife as a replacement. He told me it was one of a kind and that it didn't need much maintenance. I was feeling generous that day, so I agreed. I will admit, though... the second I touched the knife, I felt some sort of... connection to it... does that sound strange?"

"Not at all," Sayoko shook her head.

"Anyway, a couple days later, when I was taking a closer look at it, I found a note hidden in the knife's sheath. That's when I found out it belonged to my mom, as well as the name of her father. How that nobleman got it, I don't know, but I was actually able to learn a lot about my mom's family because of this. My mom was born a civilian, and her father, my grandfather, was a fireman, and he died like one too. Lost his own life in a house fire while he was trying to save a little girl..." he smiled sadly. When he learned about the man he would've called grandfather, he was sad that he hadn't been able to meet him. He seemed like a good man to have raised a woman as wonderful as his mother.

"...Is there another reason you're so interested in this knife, my lord?" Sayoko asked.

Lelouch's face went from a whimsical smile to severe and determined again, "Before we arrived back here, we, Voltron, ran into a Galra operative that is working against the Empire. He apparently was a member of a Galra resistance group. They call themselves 'The Blade of Marmora.'" Lelouch tightly held the knife by the hilt, "All of their operatives apparently carried blades just like this. Though the one that Ulaz was carrying was much bigger than this one..."
"...What does this mean then?" Sayoko asked, her face looking troubled.

Lelouch shook his head, "That can wait for now. Nunnally needs us."

Sayoko nodded and bowed, "Of course."

Before she could leave to prepare herself, though, Lelouch grabbed her arm again, "Wait... Sayoko. I just wanted to tell you, I'm thankful for everything you've done for Nunnally and me all these years. You know who we are, and yet you've stayed by our side through everything. I don't think I can thank you enough."

Sayoko smiled and placed a hand on Lelouch's shoulder. He looked up at as Sayoko caught his eyes with her own, "Lelouch. You and Lady Nunnally are both precious to me. I think of you as my own. And I want to promise you right now, if I ever meet that monster that you call your father, the only thing he will get from me is a knife between his eyes."

Lelouch's eyes widened. He knew that Sayoko was dedicated to her work, but to hear her say that she would kill someone so willingly aloud took him by surprise.

Before he could think, he pulled Sayoko into a hug. The ninja stiffened for a moment before quickly returning it.

As they pulled away, Sayoko smirked at her young lord, "Now, let's go get your sister."

Lelouch smirked back, "Right."

o~o

"Attention all personnel. The Avalon is scheduled for departure in ten minutes," a voice announced over the radio.

Sitting alongside the massive ship that her brother was currently prepping, Cornelia sat impatiently within her newly repaired Gloucester within an escort ship. Nonette was stationed in a separate ship on the other side, with the Lancelot and Schneizel's research team as well. As Kanon and Schneizel promised, they managed to make arrangements for Cornelia to be with the group that would escort Nunnally back to the homeland. While she still wasn't allowed to see her sister, much to her great annoyance, she was at least grateful that she would know Nunnally was safe. And once she finished officially cleaning up the terrorism in Area 11 and left it to her sister, Euphemia, the first thing she planned to do was visit Pendragon to see Nunnally, to assure her that she nor Lelouch had been abandoned, that she had secretly never stopped looking, and wouldn't until she had physical evidence of their deaths.

Being unable to save them during Japan's conquest was a regret that weighed heavily on her shoulders, and she planned to do everything in her power to make up for it in the future.

Meanwhile, while the ground level, Jeremiah Gottwald and a small squadron of soldiers, including Villetta, were standing guard on the runway as the last of the supplies was loaded into the Avalon.

The soldier couldn't help but frown with frustration, "This is unacceptable... I should be on that ship, protecting Princess Nunnally personally!"

His radio wasn't on, so he received no response to his lament. Thinking of the young princess, though, his mind soon wandered to darker, more tragic thoughts. He remembered being there on the day that Lady Marianne had been cruelly shot down. And he had been on his first assignment as a guard as well. It had been his chance to prove his loyalty to Lady Marianne and the Empire!
But he failed. His loyalty didn't carry through. And now, the woman that he loved and respected was gone, and her children followed shortly after.

Then, just over two weeks ago, he received the news that nearly had him fall to his knees with joy. Prince Lelouch and Princess Nunnally were alive! And in good health from what he could tell. Once the Viceroy learned of this, she had all units, *all units*, out searching for any clues on where to find her brother and sister.

Jeremiah had leaped on the opportunity to prove himself once more. It had to be him that found them. Not only could it repair his reputation and honor that he had lost due to the 'Orange' incident (he grit his teeth just thinking about it), but also redeem himself from his failure eight years prior. And once Prince Lelouch and Princess Nunnally were safe once more with the Royal Family, he would never leave their side again. He would do everything in his power to keep them safe and happy.

Due to his prior history with Lady Marianne, he was one of the first to piece together Ashford Academy's connection with vi Britannia siblings. He felt like an absolute fool for not thinking about it before, either! The Ashford family had been one of Lady Marianne's top supporters. They had lost nearly everything when she had died. It would make sense, therefore, for said family to provide the vi Britannians with refuge.

But when they finally had been given the okay to infiltrate the school, they were once again too late.

The clubhouse that they found out the vi Britannians had been living in was deserted. There were no signs of life, and the home appeared to have been uninhabited for a week at the most. When he heard Villeta recheck the school attendance, his heart gave another pang of despair when she told him that their names, Lamperouge, had been removed from the school.

This discovery only proved to Jeremiah another horrifying revelation. The vi Britannia children weren't being held captive like some conspiracy theorists thought, but it was more likely that the children were purposefully hiding from Britannia. The more he thought about it though, the more it made sense.

The day that Prince Lelouch confronted his father was a harrowing one. Jeremiah's loyalty was only to his Lady Marianne, and being one of the ones there to witness the Emperor openly saying that his son was nothing to him had made his blood boil. To this day, he wondered why he didn't act differently. If he had defended the prince in that throne room, or at the very least insisted on going with them to Japan, things likely could've ended up differently.

Jeremiah was shaken from his thoughts, though, when the ground beneath his Knightmare rattled. Sirens and warning sounds rang wildly throughout the base. Knightmares scrambled into defensive positions, and soldiers rushed to finish the Avalon's preparations.

Then with a fantastic boom, three of the Voltron Lions, the black, green, and orange one, landed hard right in the middle of the base, tails thrashing, and teeth bared.

Jeremiah had been unable to get a good look at the lions when they had first appeared at Narita, but now that he was practically standing in front of them, he could understand the panic that they seemed to inflict on many of the soldiers that day.

However, this didn't deter Jeremiah. If the lions were here than that had to mean-

"ZERO!" Jeremiah shouted as he raced towards the lions in his Knightmare.
"Lord Jeremiah, wait!" Villeta shouted after him.

"Zero! If you're here, come out and face me!" he shouted, "Come and face Jeremiah Gottwald!"

"Well, well," a voice came from the Black Lion, "It's been a while, Jeremiah. So, you're still in the army? I'd love to stay and catch up, but I'm afraid I don't have time right this minute, Orange boy."

There it was. That name. The name that now made Jeremiah a near pariah among the rest of the soldiers. Red slowly bled into Jeremiah's vision.

"Orange?!" he howled in rage as he stared at the Black Lion, and he could swear the lion itself was smirking at him as it waved its tail haughtily, "DIE!"

Jeremiah charged forward in a fury with his Sutherland. Before he could land a single blow though, the Black Lion's mouth opened, and a single laser blast collided with his Knightmare, throwing it backward in pieces as it erupted in flames.

"Lord Jeremiah!" Villeta gasped in horror as she watched another soldier and comrade meet his end right in front of her eyes. Looking behind the lions, Villeta noticed the Avalon finally beginning to take off, along with the other escort ships. Thinking fast, she raced around the lions and leaped onto the Avalon just as the loading doors closed. Jeremiah died trying to protect Princess Nunnally. The least she could do was honor his death by doing the same thing in his stead.

As Lelouch watched the Avalon take off, he smirked, "Just as planned. Now!"

Zen, Zerith, and Zinnia all leaped into the air, pointing their heads downward, and began blasting at the ground below, blowing dust and debris up everywhere, making a makeshift smokescreen for their escape.

As the dust finally cleared around the remaining Britannian forces, they were shocked to see the lions had vanished.

o~o

"Alright, phase one complete," Lelouch reported through the comms as the Lions dove underwater, "the Avalon is now airborne. Meet at the rendezvous point."

"Understood!" a chorus of voices responded. It was music to Lelouch's ears. Even now, he was amazed at the support and assistance he was receiving from his fellow Ashford Academy peers.

As the three lions descended to the seafloor, a reasonable distance ahead of the Avalon's current location, Lelouch spotted the other four lions gliding towards them. Waiting for them within the other lions would be Sayoko and C.C., who insisted on accompanying the infiltration team onto the Avalon ship as well.

The trio gently set their lions down on the ocean floor, before their helmet shields automatically pulled up. They then quickly left the cockpits of each lion and were soon submerged into the depths of the sea. Using their jetpacks, the three effortlessly glided through the water to the four lions waiting for them. Lelouch swam into Yoru's mouth, Rai into Polaris, and Shirley into Maeraka.

As Lelouch emerged and entered Yoru's cockpit, Sayoko and Suzaku greeted him with a nod and smile. The maid was now wearing an outfit nearly identical to Allura's and C.C.'s, only hers was red and light blue.
Same with Rivalz when Rai arrived. The two shared a fist bump before bracing for action.

Shirley also made it safely to Maeraka's cockpit, with Milly and C.C. waiting for her.

"I thought you would be with Lulu, C.C.," Shirley said when she got there.

"I decided that I'm going with you at the last minute, Shirley Fennete," the immortal answered.

"Oh… okay," she said awkwardly.

"I probably don't need to remind you, Shirley, but there won't be Galran sentries up there this time. The soldiers we'll be fighting will be real-life people. Are you willing to do what it takes to complete the mission? Are you willing… to kill to do so?"

Milly looked warily between the two women. She herself had thought about this, and turned her concerned face towards her friend.

"Th-that won't happen!" Shirley stuttered, "I-I'll just use my Geass and sneak past them. I don't have to kill anyone!"

C.C. sighed, "You realize you can't solely rely on your Geass forever. Sooner or later, you'll have to fight and possibly kill, to survive."

Shirley didn't answer. How could she respond to that appropriately?

Turns out, she didn't need to, as the shadow of the Avalon finally fell over them.

"Kallen, use your Geass to check the ship for Nunnally. Is she on there?" Lelouch asked urgently.

Kallen promptly activated her Geass, and her vision zoomed in on the ship. She scanned the interior before her eyes fell on a room near the center of the Avalon. In the middle of the platform, she spotted a familiar figure.

"Yep, she's there. This definitely isn't a decoy!" Kallen confirmed.

"Good! Alright, commence phase two of the operation!"

Chapter End Notes

AN: So... sorry again for the long wait. But you ever get that feeling after you've gone through a heap of exams and afterward you feel like you just want to lay down and do nothing? Well, that's how I've felt for a while, especially as I was trying to write this chapter. But it's finally done. I debated on making it longer, but I feel like this is a good place to stop. Sorry that it's shorter than the other chapters, but keep your eyes open for the next one!

Thanks for your patience, and please R&R! Oh, and update the TVTropes page too!
The bridge of the Avalon was buzzing with anxious energy. The crew was tensely watching every monitor, searching for any sign of the lions that had ambushed the base. Their sudden arrival had forced the Avalon to rush through the rest of the preparations. Still, they managed to get airborne before the fighting became too chaotic.

Despite their escape, however, the tension didn't leave. Especially after they got a report from the base that the lions had retreated almost immediately afterward. According to their monitors, though, they weren't pursuing them either.

"Prince Schneizel, the lions don't seem to be pursuing us. Perhaps they have given up? They wouldn't dare attack now, not without risking Princess Nunnally's safety," Kanon said as he looked at the Prince.

"As appealing as that sounds Kanon, I highly doubt that that's the case," Schneizel answered, "With Knightmares as advanced as that, I don't think they would give up without a fight."

'If anything, my little brother is likely flying right into the trap that we set up,' Schneizel speculated. He knew that Lelouch wouldn't give up on his sister that easily. He would do anything to ensure Nunnally's safety. However, such behavior also made him predictable. Yes, Nunnally was the perfect bait when it came to Lelouch.

"Report! Four of the lions have been spotted pursuing the Avalon, sir! The red, blue, yellow, and purple ones are in close pursuit!" a soldier exclaimed through the radio.

Schneizel blinked. Four? There had only been three that had attacked the base when they departed. And hadn't it been the orange, green, and black ones that came?

The only way this made sense was for the first three lions to be a preliminary strike, and now these other four were beginning the main attack. Where were the other three lions, though? They disappeared once the Avalon had taken off.

"Prepare for battle, but be on guard," Schneizel ordered. "We don't know if the other three lions from earlier will show up or not."

'o~o'

"Haaa! Got ya!" Kallen shouted as Aka's jaw blade easily sliced through a Britannian plane like it was nothing but butter. Her role in the rescue was pretty simple. Since Aka was not only one of the smaller lions compared to the others, but also the fastest, her job was to keep the Britannian fleet busy. During this time, the other three lions would drop off the infiltration team onto the ship. Lelouch had specifically warned Kallen to try and go easy on the Britannians, considering they needed as many able-bodied people as possible when Zarkon eventually tracked them down, but…

…Let's just say that some Britannians couldn't get a clue when the situation was a lost cause.

With most of the helicopters and planes focused on Aka's nearly erratic flying (and yes, Kallen was doing that on purpose too), the other three lions managed to fly smoothly towards the Avalon. Polaris and Maeraka each landed on a wing, and Yoru perched at the top of the ship itself.
On the right wing, where Polaris dropped Rai off before quickly leaving, Rai raced towards the side of the ship and jammed his katar into the dense metal. Making a large enough hole for him to climb through, it wasn't long before the Green Paladin slipped into the hall.

The same happened on the other wing with Maeraka as Milly dropped Shirley and C.C. off on the left side. The two women quickly sprinted to the main body of the ship. C.C. then used an Altean knife she borrowed to wrench open the emergency hatch on the side, where they slipped into the flying fortress.

Finally, Yoru touched down on the very top of the Avalon. Suzaku watched anxiously as Lelouch and Sayoko exited Yoru and descended onto the smooth metal. A large part of him still yearned to go inside with the duo to get Nunnally, but Lelouch's logic always stopped him. If his identity was discovered, on camera or by a soldier, his people, the people of Japan, would suffer greatly. He couldn't afford to let that happen, no matter what.

Lelouch, fully donned in his Zero Paladin armor, cape and all, brandished his mother's knife and dug it into the roof of the ship. He effectively made a hole in the top that he and Sayoko jumped through. They were all on board. Now they needed to find Nunnally.

Once their feet hit the metal ground, Shirley grabbed C.C.'s wrist and turned her Geass on. They should be invisible to any soldiers and security cameras now. The more they avoided, the better.

Shirley held her breath as she and C.C. pressed themselves against a wall as a small squad of soldiers rushed past them. The Orange Paladin sighed in relief when the team turned a corner out of sight.

"You never answered my question earlier, Shirley," C.C. said sternly when it was safe.

Shirley flinched a little at the reminder. She hadn't forgotten what C.C. said on the flight over in Maeraka. However, the reality of having to fight and possibly kill people didn't hit her until now.

"You're not a schoolgirl anymore, Miss Fenette. You're a paladin, a knight, a soldier, whether you like it or not, you will have to fight and kill to stay alive," C.C. said gravely.

Shirley gulped a little before shaking her head to clear it, "We have a job to do. Let's go!"

C.C. sighed and shook her head. She would hate for Shirley to learn the hard way how valid her words are.

"System ready?" Nonette asked urgently as she leaped onto the Lancelot.

"Float system nearly complete," Cecile confirmed as two other scientists finished attaching the new flying system onto the Lancelot. When footage revealed that the lions could fly, a rush order was put out on the experimental Knightmares that could fly, as well as the custom one for the Lancelot. They had not had time yet to officially test the system, but in order to defend the Avalon as much as possible, they didn't have time to.

On another helicopter, Cornelia, Guliford, and the rest of her guard were doing the same. All of their Knightmares had been equipped with a float system to fly and fight in the air.

"You, Zero, will pay for this dearly!" Cornelia declared as her Gloucester was launched out into the air.
A startled gasp from Kallen caused Milly, Rivalz, and Suzaku to pause their assault, "Everyone, incoming!"

Once the debris from another fallen jet cleared, the three Paladins were shocked to see dozens of Knightmare frames exiting helicopters and carriers rapidly.

"What the-!" Rivalz exclaimed.

"They can fly?" Milly shouted, sounding shocked.

Suzaku grit his teeth and narrowed his eyes. He knew through Lloyd that Britannian had been in the very beginning stages of adding a flight mode to the Knightmare frames, but to see them being used now? His best guess was that the military had put a rush order on the devices to prepare them to fight the Lions, and that was only a few days ago.

"Just be careful," he advised as calmly as possible. "They still look like prototypes, so they may have trouble maneuvering! Kallen, can you see who's flying the Lancelot? The white Knightmare?"

"Um, not sure why you want to know, but…" the Red Paladin's Geass quickly scanned the battlefield. It didn't take long for her to locate the white Knightmare that had just launched from another airship. She was able to see her, but she didn't recognize the woman behind the controls. "...No clue, I don't recognize her."

"'Her'?" Suzaku asked, making sure he heard correctly.

"Yeah, just some lady. I don't recognize her, though."

"...Okay, leave the Lancelot to me," he said promptly before speeding off in its direction.

"Suzaku!" Milly called out, but heard the Purple Paladin cut communication, "What's gotten into him?"

"...Guys, did you know that Knightmare was called the 'Lancelot' before we got back to Earth?" Kallen asked. Now that she thought about it, even with the Black Knights, no one had given that white Knightmare a proper title. And yet, Suzaku called it with a name. Something was off.

"Um, no?" Rivalz said, sounding more confused, "Why would we know? It's a military Knightmare."

"...Then why would Suza-ugh, forget it! We have a mission to accomplish!" Kallen snapped in frustration before speeding off as well.

"Hey, wait up!" Milly shouted before they darted forward as well.

The Paladins weren't the only ones ready for a fight. Nonette smirked as she spotted Yoru racing towards her. "Round two, huh? Okay, bring it!"

Another Britannian soldier hit the ground, twitching as Rai's katar returned back to him. The Green Paladin was making little work of the soldiers on the ship. Their bullets barely dented his Paladin.
armor, bouncing off it like tennis balls on a backboard. The shock function on his bayard helped quite a bit with only knocking the soldiers out too.

It didn't take long for him to make it to his destination: the circuit box on the starboard engine. After making sure he was alone, and promptly destroying the camera in the corner, Rai held up his gauntlet to the box. He wore a slightly sadistic grin.

"You guys must have put a lot of work into this… Too bad!" he grinned before cackling and pressing a single button on his gauntlet's screen, "Demolition in session!"

Lelouch grunted, as another soldier cried out in pain and surprise. He landed hard on the other end of the hall, uniform smoking slightly as the last traces of electricity coursed through him.

Sayoko just finished dispatching a pair of soldiers herself before turning her attention back to the prince. She would admit, she was quite shocked to see her young master with such a power at his disposal. But, she certainly wasn't complaining about how effective it was against their enemies.

Lelouch stalked over to the soldier he just zapped and grasped him by his uniform collar. The soldier was barely conscious as Lelouch's helmet lowered to look the soldier in the eye.

"Where's Nunnally vi Britannia being held?" the Black Paladin demanded calmly.

"At-at the center of the ship," the soldier stuttered through the pain, "down the hall to the left. In the Garden."

"Thank you," Lelouch said before dropping the soldier. He stood up and glanced at Sayoko. She nodded when their eyes met before they raced down the hall once more.

Despite the military being reasonably new to the float systems, they seemed to have trained enough with them to fight well. The Paladins were quite surprised at how easily the Knightmares maneuvered in the air. It made sense, though. Being in midair gave more space. And more space gave better places to run and dodge.

It also made the Knightmares faster. But not as fast as the Lions.

"Lord Guliford, look out!" a soldier exclaimed as Polaris intercepted Cornelia's knight. What alarmed the squad, though, was the large, cannon-like instrument that literally materialized on the Lion's back.

"Oh god, what is that?!" Guilford gasped, scrambling to fly off out of range.

"See if you can take this!" Rivalz shouted, slamming down on the shift. With a roar, Polaris fired her sonic cannon straight at the knight and his platoon.

Guilford attempted to dodge the attack but was shocked to see the Knightmare's system begin to glitch and shut down in front of him.

"Wha-what is this?!" he exclaimed. When he looked at his screen, he was shocked to see the rest of the Knightmares also shorting out and falling towards the ocean. The last thing he saw before losing consciousness from the sea's impact was a blinding flash of light engulfing Darlton's group above.
"Agh! I can't see!" a pilot shouted as the light fired from the Yellow Lion engulfed their vision. Darlton grit his teeth, his eyes watering from the brightness before he felt a hard jolt from behind. When he could finally see clearly again, the only thing left to greet him was the blue water below.

'I failed you, Prince Schneizel! Forgive me…'

"That's my girl Maeraka!" Milly cooed, petting her dashboard. She giggled when she felt her Lion purr happily back to her.

"Well, it looks like your soldiers aren't having the best day right now, princess!" taunted Kallen as she faced off a flying Gloucester with a flowing cape behind it. It was apparent that the pilot was the Viceroy herself.

'I know you're Lelouch's sister and all, but I'm going to enjoy kicking your ass. Again."

With a scream of fury, the Cornelia launched at the Red Lion, which promptly ducked and flipped around her quickly. The shoulders from the Gloucester than snapped open, and a dozen missiles fired out towards Aka. Despite the close range, though, Aka was able to dodge nearly all of them. The two that were lucky enough to actually hit only jostled Kallen slightly from the cockpit.

"Where the Black Lion?!" Cornelia demanded, before charging the Lion again, "Is Zero too much of a coward to face me directly?!!"

Kallen snorted, "Nah, you're just not worth his time right now."

This response only made Cornelia more furious as her movements quickly became erratic and sloppy. Even Kallen had to admit, the way the Viceroy was fighting right now was laughable, even embarrassing.

"Stop! Moving!" Cornelia roared, aiming her gold scepter at Aka's eye.

"Yeah… nope!" Kallen quipped as Aka ducked down at the very last second, throwing Cornelia off balance and flipping forward.

Kallen took the opportunity to summon Aka's jaw blade. With a swift jerk of her head, Aka ripped the Viceroy's float system in two. The Red Paladin watched apathetically as the Princess's Knightmare collided with the ocean's surface below.

"Wow, and they say I got a temper," Kallen chuckled, shaking her head. Her seat vibrated slightly beneath her as Aka's growling guffaw joined her.

Down below, Cornelia was able to wrench open her cockpit door and gasp for air. Glancing around her, she saw several soldiers and pilots doing the same.

All the Viceroy could do was glare lividly up at the sky, at the small figures in the air that continued to demolish Britannia's great army.

"Just you wait, Zero," she growled venomously, "I will have my revenge! One way or another!"

o~o

"Oh my, my!" Lloyd exclaimed in awe, eyes twinkling once more. He and Cecile were currently viewing the battle from another escort ship. The ship was mostly staying out of range of the
"These Lions… they're incredible, but also completely terrifying to witness," Cecile murmured and flinched as she watched the Yellow Lion's jaws clamped around another Knightmare. It shook the machine like a ragdoll before letting it drop to the sea below.

"I must say, despite being the clear enemy, I give praise to whoever created these Lions," Lloyd said with a grin. "If I ever get the privilege to meet the mind behind these machines, I will personally approach them and shake their hand. Nothing wrong with two scientists being civil to each other, after all."

The Earl's eyes then lingered on the Purple Lion that was in the middle of clashing with the Lancelot. It was like the two were locked in a deadly dance of wit and strength.

Lloyd's eyebrows shot up, though, as the Lion suddenly dodged a downward kick from the Lancelot that several Knightmares failed to even notice before the attack actually struck. However, it seemed the Lion not only was aware of this move but had been anticipating it for a while. Literally, a split second before the foot would usually collide with the target, the Lion side-rolled out of the way, dodging the hit, spectacularly.

"Hmmm, peculiar…" he stated, folding his fingers in front of him. There was something vaguely familiar about the Purple Lion, or more precisely, the person piloting it. He couldn't seem to put his finger on it, though.

0~0

Lloyd wasn't incorrect. Unlike the other Knightmares that were dropping right and left, the Lancelot was holding a fairly decent fight against Suzaku. He had managed to hit the float system and make inoperable, but the slash harkens allowed the white Knightmare to remain airborne by hanging and jumping from numerous aircraft. It would sometimes even use other Knightmares as stepping stones.

The best Suzaku could do for now was to keep the Lancelot and its pilot away from the Avalon. Not only could they not damage the flying fortress without risking Nunnally's safety, but he didn't want to give the pilot the chance to board the ship either. If they were this good at piloting the Lancelot, he didn't want to think about their hand-to-hand combat. He knew Sayoko and C.C. could handle themselves, and Rai likely had combat experience as a gladiator, but Lelouch and Shirley he wasn't so sure. Though he was getting better thanks to the Paladin training regime, Lelouch was still the most physically weak of all of the Paladins. While Shirley was athletic, she wasn't one for confrontation. She tended to avoid and sneak around enemies than actually fight them. Her Geass's power made that even more perfect for her.

However, a sudden jump directly towards him caught Suzaku off guard. The white Knightmare landed right on Yoru's face before vaulting onto her back and leaping right towards the Avalon. The one place that Suzaku was trying to keep the Lancelot away from!

"No!" he shouted, pivoting around. The Lancelot's slash harkens attached itself to the side of the ship before flipping up and landing on the lower platform.

"You're trying to keep me away from the ship. Plus, you've made no move to actually attack the Avalon," Nonette said calmly. "So, I can only guess that you're goal is to capture Princess Nunnally, correct?"

Suzaku didn't answer but grimaced. He knew if he explained, he ran the risk of his voice being
recognized, and they couldn't afford to let that happen.

"I'll take your silence as a 'yes,'" Nonette deduced, before readying the VARIS, aiming it at Suzaku, "I won't let you pass."

o~o

Shirley shot down the camera that was positioned in the corner of the port engine room. The immortal was already in the process of connecting to the system on their side. It would take a few minutes for Rai to connect the engines and then be ready to shut them off. They also still needed the signal from Lelouch telling them that he had Nunnally. They didn't want to risk sinking the ship with anyone still on board, after all.

Shirley glanced back at the immortal again, but C.C. paid her no mind as she messed with some wires. As the two of them had sneaked and fought their way down the halls, Shirley had been lucky enough to not fatally hurt any people aboard. C.C., however, showed no such restrictions. She wasn't afraid to lift a gun to a head if it meant completing the task. The Orange Paladin swallowed as she remembered the immortal's warning from earlier, how she would have to eventually make that same call. Someday, her hands would have blood on them, whether it was human or Galra. Whether she liked it or not.

A bullet whizzing by her head snapped her out of her trance. With a gasp, she whipped around to the hall, readying an arrow. On the other end was a dark-skinned woman with a gun aimed at Shirley.

"Drop the weapon and surrender!" the woman shouted, running towards the engine room, continuing to fire at Shirley. Fortunately, none of the bullets penetrated the armor, so Shirley wasn't hurt.

The Orange Paladin tried firing several energy arrows at the woman, trying to aim for her arms or legs. However, the soldier was quickly able to maneuver around each shot. As she got closer, the woman put the gun away, drew out a knife. With a gasp, Shirley leaped out of the way just before the knife dragged across her gauntlet. Just like with the bullets, the armor wasn't even scratched.

This only seemed to irritate the woman as she started to swing widely and harshly, attempting to strike the black under-armor spandex instead. Shirley quickly summoned her shield to block a blow that was aimed for her neck. The force of the swing was strong enough to make her stumble. The woman took that opportunity to deliver a hard kick to Shirley's abdomen.

The Orange Paladin gasped as the air was knocked out of her. She tumbled back, landing hard on her back. Her head bounced against the floor, hard enough that her helmet went flying off to the other side of the room. She rolled several more times before coming to a stop on her side, back towards the woman.

Shirley grunted as she pushed herself to her knees. Noticing she had some distance between them again, she summoned her bow once more. Notching an arrow, she turned to face the woman soldier, eyes narrowed.

The woman gasped and took a step back. Her eyes widened.

"You-you're one of the students?!"

o~o

After checking to make sure the cameras were effectively destroyed, Lelouch slowly removed his
helmet. He and Sayoko stood in front of the doors leading to what they were told was the garden area. Two more soldiers lay unconscious on the ground beside them as Sayoko punched in the code they had received from one through Lelouch's Geass.

Despite knowing she would be waiting on the other side, Lelouch was nervous. What on Earth would he say to Nunnally? He disappeared without a trace for nearly two months, and now because of that, he had unintentionally endangered her. Would she disapprove of him being Zero and using Voltron to fight Britannia? Speaking of which, how exactly was he going to explain that to her? About the Alteans? The Galra? A universal war that had been going on for 10,000 years?! And Earth's-

Sayoko placed a hand on Lelouch's shoulder, shaking him out of his panicking thoughts.

"My lord, no matter what happens or what you've already done, she'll still love you. And I'm sure once she knows the entire situation, she'll understand your actions."

Reassured by the maid, Lelouch breathed deeply and nodded.

The door opened before them, and Lelouch could see on the other side of an extended platform was a small figure in a large wheelchair.

"...Nunnally," Lelouch barely whispered, his eyes misting with tears as he and Sayoko slowly approached.

"Who's there?" the young princess asked as she looked around in the direction of the door.

o~o

"Wha-Wait, that's-!"

"It's Prince Lelouch! Princess Nunna-"

Both of the men standing watch over the cameras were suddenly gunned down from behind.

"Their reunion is starting," the assailant, eyes ringed with red, stated blankly, "they must not be disturbed."

o~o

"Lady Nunnally," Sayoko said, "It's me, Sayoko."

"Sayoko?" Nunnally asked in surprise, "What are you doing here? How did you get here?"

"That's not important right now milady. I have someone with me that has been waiting to see you."

"Huh? Who?" Nunnally asked, confused but still curious about what was happening.

Lelouch took another deep breath to calm himself before he slowly approached his sister. He swiftly removed his armored glove and reached unsteadily out to her. With a tremble in his fingers, he rested his hand gently on top of Nunnally's.

Nunnally gasped. Slowly, the princess reached with her left hand, turning Lelouch's over in her right. She grasped his hand gently as if it would break if she held them too hard.

"This is-" Nunnally could barely get the first word out before streams of tears fell from her eyes. She gripped Lelouch's hand harder as she brought to her face, "Thank heavens! Lelouch… I knew
"I'm here, Nunnally," Lelouch said softly as tears of his own coursed down his cheeks.

Hearing her brother's voice, Nunnally leaped forward. She nearly fell had Lelouch not caught her as she sobbed louder, burying her face in his shoulder. Lelouch hugged her too, one hand rubbing her back gently, the other combing through her hair.

"I'm so sorry I made you worry, Nunnally," Lelouch said softly after he found his voice, "I didn't mean to be gone for so long."

"Where have you been?" Nunnally demanded softly as Lelouch helped her sit back in her wheelchair.

"It's complicated, Nunnally, and I promise I'll explain later."

"What about the others? Suzaku, Milly, Shirley, and Rivalz? And Rai and Kallen, are they okay?"

"Yes, they're all fine. They're all okay," Lelouch told her reassuringly.

"Oh thank goodness," she sighed in relief.

"You'll see them soon. Right now, we need to get out of here though," Lelouch went to kneel down and lift his sister up when her voice stopped him.

"But I can't big brother!" Nunnally protested.

"What?" he asked. He turned to look at Sayoko, but she looked just as surprised and confused too.

Shirley winced a little. Lelouch had told them that they couldn't risk anyone knowing their identities. Now someone had not only seen Shirley's face but identified her too.

'I don't want to kill her… maybe we can-

Her thoughts were interrupted when the woman spoke again in a more accusatory tone.

"If you're… You're a Britannian citizen! Why are you supporting someone like Zero?! Why is a Britannian supporting a terrorist?!"

Shirley gripped her bow tighter, her vision blurring from angry tears, "Zero's not a terrorist! He's a hero!"

The woman blinked and took a step back before her eyes narrowed, and her mouth formed a sneer.

"What on Earth are you talking about? Zero's done nothing but kill officials and endanger civilians. He even admitted to killing Prince Clovis! You realize you're supporting a person who has murdered royalty, correct?"

"Zero's not a murderer, Clovis was!" Shirley spat, remembering what Kallen and Lelouch had told her about Shinjuku and all the people that died there. Mothers, fathers, children. Grandmas and grandpas. Husbands and wives!

The woman's eyes widened again before they narrowed dangerously, "You dare-

"Zero didn't just tell us. He showed us what happened! What you did! What Britannia did! And it's
wrong! So, so, so wrong! How can you not see that?! Everything Britannia has taught us was about how we're the greatest nation in the world, and how we're proving that through all this prejudice and violence. That's nothing but a lie! Tell me, what's so righteous about any of that?! About slaughtering innocents? You're just hypocrites! I... I can never be apart of that!"

The woman just stood there, apparently trying to process the words that had come out of her mouth. It was likely the first time this soldier had ever heard a fellow Brittanian talking so harshly about their country. Sure, maybe a couple months ago, Shirley would have felt the same way. After all, when she had heard out about Shinjuku and Clovis's death-

Wait…

Shirley took a closer look at the woman, and her eyes widened. She recognized her! She was one of the soldiers at Clovis's funeral. She was also one of the soldiers, one of the Purebloods to be exact, that had tried to have Suzaku executed for a crime he didn't commit! What was her name? Vanessa or something?

"Were you one of them?" she asked tartly, "In Shinjuku? Were you doing nothing but killing innocents too?!"

Villetta frowned, "Terrorists had stolen poison gas. We were ordered to retr-"

"That's a lie!" Shirley screamed, "There was never poison gas! That was just an excuse you were given to kill the Japanese in that ghetto, right?!"

"You don't seriously believe were there to just kill everyone, do you?" Villela exclaimed angrily, "And besides, how is it our problem if a few Elevens die? They should just stay out of the way of military business."

"That's it! Right there! You call them 'Elevens' just now!" Shirley shouted, pointing at Villela, "You treat them like they're not even human! Do you have any idea what it's like for them?! The Japanese, they don't see greatness! They hate us! They're terrified of Britannia! They're scared that if they take one wrong step on the street that they'll be shot or worse! Britannia stole their home! Britannia murdered their friends and loved ones and condemned them to a life of pain and hopelessness! Can you imagine if somebody did the same to you?!!"

Shirley's thoughts wandered back to the Balmera and about the conditions Shay and her family were forced to live in. Though she hadn't been there to witness it herself, if Shinjuku was anything like the Balmera was, and Clovis had ordered the people there to be killed, she could never forgive, much less support, someone who would do that. And the soldiers didn't question it. Sure, one may make the excuse that they were just following orders, but that didn't mean the crime wasn't still there.

Shirley was on her feet now, visibly shaking and crying tears of sorrow and rage. Seeing that Villela hadn't responded to her rant, the Orange Paladin continued.

"I can't be a part of that. I can't be a part of something so... so... evil! I may be a Britannian, but I can't serve underneath that monster you call an Emperor! I am a Paladin of Voltron, and that means I protect the weak and helpless from bullies and monsters like Britannia! From bullies and monsters like you!"

Villetta was standing there frozen. This Britannian, a student no less, had just openly proclaimed she'd go against her own nation and called out its beliefs and philosophies. She even went as far as to not only insult the late Prince Clovis but the Emperor as well! She also called the nation she was
a citizen of evil.

The soldier sighed and shook her head. She wasn't sure what exactly Zero had said to her, or the other students for that matter, but it was clear she needed help. No one had to die. She would see to her treatment and rehabilitation personally if she had to.

"Look, I don't know what Zero did or said to you to make you think those things," Villetta said carefully, "but I am going to bring you in, even if I have to tie you down and drag you there myself." She pulled out her gun again, "Put down the weapon, and no one gets hurt."

"You first," Shirley growled, hand trembling.

The tension seemed to thicken in the room as the two women faced off, neither one of them moving to drop their weapon, but not firing either. Shirley's mind raced. Just like she though earlier, this woman had seen her face and identified her. If she let her go, her parents could be in danger. Plus, the military would likely figure out who the rest of the Paladins were too. Right now, she could only see one solution. The problem was, did she have the guts to do it? Could she... kill this woman? Even if she was a Britannian soldier, she was still a human being-

A gunshot cut off any further thoughts from Shirley's head as she jumped in surprise. She stared as Villetta's eyes widened in shocked horror before she collapsed in a heap on the floor. C.C. was standing stoically behind her, gun raised, and smoking. Shirley had been so focused on Villetta, she had wholly forgotten that C.C. was in the room too!

"Wh-why did you do that?!" Shirley exclaimed in horror, glancing frantically between Villetta and the immortal.

"She saw you. What was I supposed to do?" C.C. responded matter-of-factly.

Shirley winced and frantically tried to think of a response. However, a pained groan interrupted her again. Looking towards the source, Shirley gasped in shock and relief to see that Villetta was still alive.

Her relief soon shifted to panic again as C.C. leveled the gun at the woman again, this time aiming for her head.

"Wait!" Shirley shouted, running towards her, "Don't kill her!"

"Why not?" C.C. asked, quirking an eyebrow.

"W-we-well," Shirley stuttered, scrambling to come up with an excuse, "Well, why kill her? She's a soldier, right? I-If we take back to the Castle, she may have some information that could help us! Lelouch can Geass her and make her tell us! I mean, the more we know about what's going on in the military, the better. Right?"

C.C. stared at Shirley for about five seconds. It was long enough for Shirley to fidget uncomfortably.

Finally, she sighed and put away the gun, "Get her other arm."

Shirley sighed in relief that C.C. agreed and comply with the order, pulling Villetta's arm around her shoulders, C.C. doing the same on her other side.

"You were lucky this time, Shirley," C.C. said, "but you're going to have to make the call someday. Someone's not always going to be there to make it for you. You can't avoid it forever."
Shirley grimaced but nodded before the two departed the sabotaged engine room.

"Nunnally, Father's just using you. Whatever he's told you or offered, it's not going to change anything. He believes that might is always right! Do really approve of that, Nunnally?"

"Lelouch, you don't understand!" Nunnally gasped, "Father didn't send me to do this! I asked him to send me!"

"Y-You what?!" Lelouch gasped, stepping backward. Sayoko also gasped in shock, her fingers brushing her mouth.

"I think that with a peaceful approach, I can make the world a gentler place," Nunnally explained, "Even big brother Schneizel said he's willing to help."

Lelouch scowled. Had things been different, he may have been willing to let this go for his sister's sake. However…

"...Nunnally, such intention is noble of you. But this situation isn't just about Britannia anymore. There's something much more dire and complex at play here now."

"...I don't understand," Nunnally murmured softly.

"I know, and I promise I'll tell you everything, but not here. I have… I have so much to tell you, Nunnally, but there is one thing I'll say right now."

"What is it?" she asked as Lelouch knelt down in front of her again.

Lelouch glanced back towards Sayoko, who nodded. Taking a breath, he spoke two words. "I'm Zero."

There was silence within the garden for about a minute as Lelouch watched Nunnally's reaction. Her expression shifted one of shock to sorrow again, tears gathering in her eyes once more.

"I-I didn't want to believe it…" she choked out.

Lelouch gasped, and Sayoko's eyes widened as well. "You knew?!" Lelouch exclaimed.

"I-I always had a feeling," Nunnally confessed, "When you appeared to save Suzaku, and I heard your voice on the radio, my heart told me it was you, but didn't want to believe it. Because if it was you… everything you've been doing, you've been risking your life, and putting yourself in danger all this time!"

Lelouch gaped before grimacing. He never stopped to wonder if his actions could negatively affect Nunnally. He never realized how much it could hurt his sister.

"I'm sorry, Nunnally," Lelouch whispered, "But, I had no choice. I couldn't stand by and watch with what Britannia was doing. I had to do something."

"Lady Nunnally," Sayoko said calmly as she stepped forward, "I know you still have questions. But as your brother said earlier, he will tell you everything later. Now is not the time nor place for this."

"Yes," Lelouch nodded as he held Nunnally's hands again, "Nunnally, I promise, if you come with me now, I'll tell you everything. No more secrets. And I'll never leave you again. Okay?"
"...You promise?" Nunnally asked softly as she held out her pinky. Lelouch smiled softly as he hooked his pinky with hers, "I promise."

The peaceful moment was destroyed moments later as the garden doors burst open. Lelouch snatched his Zero mask from his waist and slipped it on as he whipped around. He leaped to his feet as Sayoko placed herself between the siblings and the soldiers, kunai drawn at the ready.

"There they are!" one soldier shouts.

"Wait! Don't shoot! You could hit the princess!" a superior officer ordered from near the back.

"Quiznack, this is bad," Lelouch hissed as he stood protectively by his sister.

o~o

"And… done!" Rai confirmed as he pressed a final button on his gauntlet. C.C. had alerted him moments earlier that she was finished on her end of the ship.

"Going down," he smirked as the engines on both sides of the Avalon shut down. The flying airship began to slowly descend from the sky to the water below.

o~o

"Prince Schneizel, engine failure on starboard!" a crew member reported from the bridge.

"Failure on port side as well!" another shouted in panic. "We're going down!"

"Have you tried restarting them?!" the head engineer demanded as he leaned down over the railing.

"We have! The computer won't accept any of our codes!"

"Sir! Look!" a female member exclaimed, pointing to the main screen at the front of the bridge. The screen began to glitch out of focus momentarily before brightened again. However…

"...What in the world?" Schneizel asked. His expression was one of complete bewilderment as he sat on his throne. A cartoon image of Voltron's head rocked back and forth on the screen, electronically laughing as load screen appeared underneath it. The second it filled up, more systems began to shut down on the bridge, computer images going black, and screens locking the crew out of the controls.

o~o

Nonette grunted as the ship beneath the Lancelot suddenly jolted. Looking down, she gasped in shock to see the turbines on the Avalon had stopped spinning.

"Oh no!" she gasped as the Avalon began to slowly descend towards the ocean.

"That's our cue!" Suzaku shouted to the three other Paladins as a green digital thumbs up appeared on his dashboard. It was Rai's signal telling them they were ready for pick up.

"Right!" Rivalz confirmed as the sonic cannon dispersed from Polaris's back. He then fired his boosters and raced towards the Avalon.

"On my way!" Milly shouted, twisting around and speeding off towards Shirley and C.C.'s entry point.
Both lions successfully landed on the Avalon's wings once more as they waited to pick up their passengers. Rai was quick to leap from the hole he had made earlier and onto the wing. Snagging Polaris's canine, the Blue Lion swallowed the Green Paladin back and jumped gracefully from the ship.

Milly was relieved to see both Shirley and C.C. exiting the porthole, but her relief soon turned to surprise as the two women were dragging an unconscious Britannian soldier with them.

"Who-?"

"Don't ask," C.C. snapped as she and Shirley loaded themselves and their prisoner into Maeraka's mouth, "just get us out of here!"

"Um, okay," Milly said as Maeraka leaped from the wing, swiftly following her blue sister.

Suzaku grit his teeth. He couldn't land on the ship yet, not with the Lancelot standing on the roof. He couldn't risk injuring Lelouch and Nunnally.

"I've got to finish this quick!" he exclaimed as he flew forwards, aiming to blast the Lancelot directly off the ship.

He didn't see where the VARIS was aiming until it was too late.

With a grunt, Yoru took a direct hit from the weapon, knocking them off course as Suzaku's hand accidentally slams down on the laser's button.

"No!" he gasps as Yoru's mouth laser collides with a part of the ship further down.

-o-o-

This a sudden explosion from below the garden, the occupants of the area stumbled and struggled to remain balanced. Wind began to wildly whip through the garden, flower petals, and plants blowing in all directions.

The explosion shook the room so violently, Nunnally was rocked out of her wheelchair. She would've have hit the floor had Lelouch not dove down and grabbed her, holding bridal style against his chest.

Looking down, Sayoko and Lelouch saw the glistening water of the ocean beneath them approaching closer and closer.

"Lelouch, what's happening?!
"Nunnally exclaimed as she clung to him in fright.

Lelouch, through his mask, looked frantically between the ocean and the soldiers. There was no way that he, Nunnally, and Sayoko could survive a fall from this height. Even though the ship was descending, they couldn't risk waiting for the water to be in close enough range either. Every second spent up here had the risk of the soldiers shooting them, and possibly Nunnally as well. From the sounds outside, the other Paladins were still engaging enemy Knightmares and planes, so they couldn't be picked up either.

Grimacing, Lelouch realized they were trapped, unless he tried one more thing.

He closed his eyes and reached out with his mind.

"Listen, I need your help. I know that you probably felt me doubting you after... Zarkon. But right
now, I need you! More than anything! Someone I love needs my help, and I can't protect her without you. Please!"

Opening his eyes turns to Sayoko. She nods before he turns back and whispers to his sister.

"Nunnally, do you trust me?"

Nunnally was silent for a few moments before she smiled and held tighter to her brother, "I do Lelouch."

Lelouch smiled as a lone tear trickled down his face. He felt Sayoko grip his arm.

"Then hang on," he whispered.

This was the only warning Nunnally received before they leaped from the platform and through the hole below them. They heard the shouts of disbelief and panic from the soldiers behind them as the wind whipped their hair.

Nunnally screamed as she held onto her brother with all her might, bracing herself for what was likely a hard impact below.

Suddenly a loud roar rips through the sky as a large splash erupted from the ocean. The Black Lion burst from the water and, with a single snap of her jaws, caught the three humans safely in her mouth.

From above, Nonette froze as she spotted the Black Lion erupting from the water. This moment of distraction cost her, though, as Yoru body-slammed into the Lancelot, forcing it off the Avalon and sending it crashing into the ocean.

"...He did it," Suzaku breathed with a smile as he and Yoru regained their aerial balance.

Zinnia and Zerith were quick to follow after their sister as they emerged triumphantly from the sea as well. The two lions joined their pride, un-manned, in the air above the falling Avalon.

Lelouch sighed in relief as he finally relaxed in Zen's seat. Sayoko was standing by his side, and Nunnally sat in his lap, still holding him tightly. She was looking around almost frantically, causing Lelouch to wince. He could only imagine how confused and frightened Nunnally felt right now. He figured the only thing keeping her from screaming was the fact that he was with her still.

"Thank you… Zen," he said quietly with a smile. He felt the Black Lion nuzzle his spirit reassuringly. He, in turn, projected his regret of having doubted her.

"Lelouch, are you okay? Did you get Nunnally?" Suzaku's voice asked as the Purple Paladin appeared on the screen in front of him.

"We're fine, Suzaku," Lelouch answered as he glanced down at his sister.

"Huh, Suzaku's here?" Nunnally asked, turning her head in confusion, trying to locate the Japanese boy.

"I'm right here, Nunnally!" Suzaku answered with a smile, spotting the princess in his friend's lap, "I'll see you really soon, okay?"

"Okay," Nunnally nods with a smile.

"So Lelouch, now what? Do we finish this off with Voltron?" Kallen asked as her face, and the
faces of the other Paladins lit up the dashboard.

"No. We came to get Nunnally, and we did. Our work here is done," he said sternly before smiling genuinely at everyone, "Let's go home."

From outside, the Britannian forces could only watch as the seven lions ascended into the sky and disappeared.

o~o

As the Avalon finally hit the water, warning lights and alarms were ringing from every part of the ship. The airship had completely lost power and was dead in the water. Nothing the crew did could get it up and running again. They weren't sure who created the virus that infected the system, but it had been thorough and had done its job well.

"Prince Schneizel," an officer exclaimed as he approached the Prime Minister, "we just received a report. Princess Cornelia and Lady Enneagram are both alive and are in the process of being rescued. Also…"

"What is it?" Schneizel asked, noticing the soldier's hesitation.

"...Princess Nunnally was captured by the enemy. I'm sorry your highness, we tried to stop them," the officer bowed deeply.

Schneizel frowned deeply. He was certainly not expecting this outcome.

'They sabotaged the Avalon and went with a more 'surgical' route as opposed to using a blunt weapon. This allowed them to not endanger Nunnally in the process, as well as keep casualties to a minimum,' the Prince smirked as he looked up absently at the sky.

'Well played Lelouch. Well played.'

o~o

Hours had passed since the battle, and most of the clean up had been finished on the ground. The base the Avalon originally left from only had a few unoccupied Knightmares lining the platform.

A lone figure gracefully walked onto the runway, glancing around curiously.

"So… this is the home planet of the new Paladins. Interesting," she mused aloud.

A small commotion to her side caused her to look to her right. She raised an eyebrow as a reasonably well-built Earthling hobbled deliriously towards her. He was leaning against a thin piece of wood and clutching his left eye in pain.

"I swear I'm not Orange!" he exclaimed almost manically, reaching out to her, "Zero!"

The man then collapsed forward, all his remaining strength gone.

Haggar stared at the fallen human for a moment, then a sinister smirk split her features.

"Perfect…"

Chapter End Notes
AN: Okay! So I FINALLY got this done! I'm so sorry for the long wait, but with final exams and then a very busy holiday season, I didn't have much time to write this chapter out until today.

So, Lelouch and Nunnally are officially reunited! I know you've all been waiting for this moment, and so have I! I teared up as I wrote their official reunion scene and I hope it was to your expectations.

Also, you all already know I suck at making fight scenes, so sorry if the fights seem a little short or undetailed. I may come back and add more later, I don't know. Speaking of which, for those who may complain about how easily the Paladins seemed to win again, remember in the original anime, the float systems didn't appear until R2. So at this point in time, the soldiers haven't had the time to officially train to maneuver with the equipment. They were given more of a crash course version of it so that they could be ready to fight in time.

I'm deeply sorry for any grammar errors that may still be lurking around, but it is currently 1:00 AM where I am and I'm heading to bed.

Before I start working on the next chapter, I'm actually going back and editing some of the earlier chapters a little bit. Nothing plot altering, but mostly grammatical errors I missed before.

Anyway, R&R, update the TVTropes page, and I thank you all once again for your patience! Good night!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!