Don't Ever Say What You Don't Mean

by Rivendale

Summary

This is a retelling of Voltron Legendary Defender Starting with the first Season. It's what I believe how Adam should have been along in the Voltron story and never should have died. This way, Shiro could have had his happy ending.
Adam sat on one of the bar stools in the officer's lounge and stirred his coffee. He sat the spoon down and hooked the cup's handle with his fingers. As he brought it up to his lips, realization shot through him. It was here where he and Shiro had their fight, and he was sitting in the same seat when he'd demanded that Takashi not go on the Kerberos mission.

He sat the cup back down on the saucer. He turned and glanced over at where Takashi had sat on the couch. Moisture gathered in his eyes. How could I have been so selfish? He thought. The words he'd spoken in anger still haunted him.

He stood up from his seat. He wished again that Takashi would appear out of the blue so he could tell him he was sorry. He released a sigh as he wiped at his eyes.

Lights out would be soon, and all cadets should be in their barracks. He stepped out of the officer's lounge and caught the sight of a bit of yellow that crawled past the window. He knew it had to be Lance and Hunk again. Those two were going to drive him to drink. He thought as he frowned. He decided to follow to see where they were going.

Adam watched as the pair followed the little guy, Pidge Gunderson, onto the roof. He couldn't say he was surprised to see Pidge surrounded by tech given the boy's technically oriented mind. He slowly moved closer, sticking to the shadows to hear what they were saying.

He silently chuckled when Pidge slapped Hunk's hand. "Stop it! With this thing, I can scan to the edge of the solar system."

Lance crossed an arm over his chest as he gripped his chin with his other hand. "That right? To Kerberos?"

Pidge deflated as he looked away.

Lance continued unfazed. "You go ballistic every time the instructors bring it up. What's your deal?"

Pidge caught Hunk messing with his equipment. "Second warning, Hunk!"

Hunk groaned.

Lance stared down at his younger teammate. "Look, Pidge, if we're going to bond as a team, we can't have any secrets."

Pidge glared up at Lance. "Fine." He picked up a notepad where he'd scribbled some drawings on it, but in bold letters, one word was written across the page. "The world, as you know, it is about to change. The Kerberos Mission wasn't lost because of some malfunction or crew mistake. So, I've been scanning the system and picking up alien radio chatter. They keep repeating one word, 'Voltron,' and tonight it's going crazier than I have ever heard it."
Adam took a step forward with full intention to send the cadets back to their dorms in the barracks when an alarm sounded followed by Iverson's voice. "Attention, students. This is not a drill. We are on lockdown! Security situation Zulu Niner."

Hunk turned his attention caught by a bright light in the night sky. "What is that? A meteor? A very, very big meteor?"

Pidge pulled out a pair of binoculars from his backpack and looked up at the falling object through the binoculars. "It's a ship!"

Lance yanked them from Pidge as he gazed through them. "Holy crow! I can't believe what I'm seeing."

He pulled them away from his face, intent on passing them to Hunk when another hand reached out, grabbing them and glancing up at the sky. Adam's deeper male voice cut in. "That's not one of ours!"

Pidge replied voice almost solemn as if he'd stumbled across the Rosetta Stone. "No, it's one of theirs."

Hunk's eyes grew large. "So, wait. There are aliens out there?"

Before anyone could answer, the alien ship crash-landed at a distance from the Garrison. Vehicles pulled out, leaving the Garrison as Pidge quickly packed away his equipment and slung his backpack on his back. He turned to the others grinning. "We've got to see that ship!" He turned away and took off running.

Lance hurried behind Pidge and called out, "Hunk, come on!"

Hunk reluctantly followed.

Adam groaned, but he had to follow along. Even though he was a distant cousin of Lance's mother, he knew the woman would kill him if he allowed anything to happen to her youngest son. He hurried after the others.

The three cadets and Adam found an outcropping that overlooked the crash site. Lance with Pidge's binoculars in hand glanced over the scene below. Lance focused on the ship that now lay strapped onto a trailer. "Whoa! What the heck is that thing?" he asked as he scanned over the area focusing on a woman. "And who the heck is she?"

Pidge yelled, "Lance!" as the younger boy smacked Lance upside the head.

"Ow!" Lance replied as he refocused his attention back to the alien ship. "Right, alien ship." He lowered the binoculars. "Man, we'll never get past all those guards to get a look."

Hunk groaned. "Aww, man. Yeah, I guess there's nothing to do but head back to the barracks, right?"

Lance turned to look back at Adam. "But you could."

Adam shook his head. "Only if there was a reason for me to be here, but there isn't."
Hunk rose intent on heading back when Pidge spoke up. "Wait. They set up a camera in there, and I grabbed its feed. Look!"

Adam leaned over and gazed at the screen, what he saw made his blood run cold as his face paled. It was Shiro, but he was different from the last time he saw him. He looked more muscular, with a shock of white hair for his bangs. Not to mention the prosthetic that replaced his right arm. The Galaxy Garrison had him strapped down to an exam table like he was the alien.

Lance pointed at the screen. "That's Shiro! The pilot of the Kerberos Mission! That guy's my hero!"

Hunk added, "Guess he's not dead in space after all."

Pidge frowned. "Where's the rest of the crew?"

As they watched, Shiro became increasingly agitated as he said, "We have to find Voltron."

"Voltron!" Both Adam and Pidge spoke at the same time.

Shiro's stress level rose as one of the med techs injected something into his arm.

Pidge's expression was of someone stricken as he quietly said, "They didn't ask about the rest of the crew."

Lance couldn't believe what he was seeing. "What are they doing? He's a legend. They're not going to listen to him?"

Pidge craned his head to stare at Lance. "We have to get him out."

Hunk sighed, "I hate to be the voice of reason, always, but weren't we watching on TV because there was no way to get past the guards?"

Lance gazed up at Hunk. "That was before we were properly motivated. We've just got to think."

Pidge replied, "Maybe we could get some hazmat suits and sneak in like med techs."

Adam snapped his fingers. "I can do that." He stared pointedly at the youngest of the trio of cadets. "I hate to say this, but they'd never believe you were a med tech." He turned and started to walk away from the others.

As he moved toward the hastily constructed quarantine building, several explosions went off in the distance. Adam caught sight of the red hoverbike that raced in. He whispered as the driver got off the bike and ran into the building, "Keith."

Adam picked up his pace and ran in behind him and couldn't keep the smirk off his face seeing Keith's handiwork. He heard the question uttered from the younger man, "Shiro?"

"I can't believe he's back myself," Adam replied as Keith cut through the straps holding the man who was like a brother to him on the exam table.

Keith turned and glared at Adam. "What are you doing here?"

"Same thing as you."

"Funny, as I remember, you two broke up before he left for Kerberos," Keith replied as he turned back to Shiro.
"I was afraid, and I know I said some things that I shouldn't have. I want to make amends."

"Tell that to Shiro when he wakes up. Right now, I have to get him out of here before they get back."

Adam made a step to help Keith with Shiro when Lance burst in. "Nope. No, no, no. No, you don't. I'm saving Shiro."

Adam groaned as he pushed his glasses up and gripped the bridge of his nose. "Lance, it's not a competition." He turned to Keith once more. "Where are you taking him?"

"The house in the desert."

Adam nodded. "I'll meet you there."

Keith nodded as he and Lance carried Shiro out.

Shiro stood on the small hill overlooking the terrain. A bird called in the distance. Adam wanted to talk to him but couldn't seem to bring himself to do that right now. He'd wait and allow him to get acclimated to being back on Earth again.

Keith turned to Adam. "Aren't you going to talk to him?"

Adam shook his head. "Not yet, he needs to get adjusted to being back on Earth first."

"I'll go talk to him," Keith replied.

Adam watched as the pair talked. He envied the way Keith acted with Shiro and the way Shiro reacted to Keith.

Keith led the way back into the house and stepped over to the wall that was covered by a white tarp. He yanked it away, and a large corkboard covered most of the wall with maps, pictures, drawings, and even a star chart all pinned to the board.

Shiro stared at it and asked, "What have you been working on?"

Keith replied, "I can't explain it. After getting booted from the Garrison, I was lost and found myself drawn out to this place. It's like something... some energy was telling me to search."

Shiro gazed at Keith. "For what?"

"Well, I didn't know at the time... until I stumbled across this area." Keith placed his fingers on a spot on the map. "It's an outcropping of giant boulders with caves covered in these ancient drawings. Each tells a slightly different story about a blue lion, but they all share clues leading to some event, some arrival happening last night. Then, you showed up."

Shiro turned and faced the others. As his eyes fell on Adam, there was so much he wanted to say but found it hard to say anything at all. He cleared his throat. "I should thank you all for getting me out," he said. He quietly whispered, "Adam," and swallowed hard.

Adam opened his mouth but closed it again. He closed his eyelids. He wanted to scream out Takashi's name and beg him for forgiveness. He wanted to take the man he loved in his arms and
tell him everything would be alright, but with everything that has happened, it was just a little much for his mind to process.

Shiro turned to the other three cadets. "Lance, right?" he asked as he held out his prosthetic hand.

Lance froze for a minute as he stared at the hand before he finally took it in his, and the pair shook hands.

Shiro turned to Pidge as the servos in his mechanical arm gave a mechanical whine.

Pidge spoke up, "The nervous guy's Hunk. I'm Pidge." He quickly took Shiro's hand and released it. "So, did anyone else from your crew make out?"

Shiro's eyebrows knit together. "I'm not sure. I remember the mission and being captured. After that, it's all bits and pieces."

Hunk spoke up, interjecting himself into the conversation. "Sorry to interrupt, but back to the aliens. Where are they now? Are they coming? Are they coming for us? Where are they at this very moment?"

Shiro frowned as all eyes turned to him. "I can't put it together. I remember the word 'Voltron.' It's some weapon they're looking for, but I don't know why. Whatever it is, I think we need to find it before they do."

Hunk began rummaging through Pidge's backpack and came with a picture of who he thought was Pidge and his girlfriend.

As he flashed it up, showing everyone, Pidge yelled, "Hey, give me that! What were you doing in my stuff?" Pidge yanked his backpack out of Hunk's hands.

Hunk let out a nervous chuckle. "I was looking for a candy bar. But then, I started reading his diary." He pulled the book from behind his back.

Pidge yelled, "What?" and yanked it out of Hunk's hand.

The larger teen was unfazed. "I noticed the repeating series of numbers the aliens are searching for looks a lot like a Fraunhofer line."

Keith asked, "Frown, who?"

Hunk turned to Keith. "It's a number describing the emission spectrum of an element. Only this element doesn't exist on Earth. I think it might be this Voltron, and I believe I can build a machine to look for it, like a Voltron Geiger counter."

Keith led them out into the area where he was drawn, too, and Hunk's Geiger counter began picking up on the energy. He led them to a cave whose walls were covered in carvings.

Lance wandered over to the wall nearest him and wiped away a layer of dust and dirt off the carving. The carvings suddenly came to life with a blue light. A circle lit up under their feet, and the floor caved in, sending them all screaming down on a wild ride down an underground waterway. They landed with a thud and splashed in a pool of water.
Lance rose to his knees, staring up at the giant blue lion that seemed to be staring down at him with brightly shining yellow eyes.

Adam groaned as he rose, "Lance, what did you do?"

Lance pointed to what he was staring at as he whispered, "They are everywhere."

The others got to their feet as Pidge asked, "Is this it? Is this the Voltron?"

Shiro replied, "It must be."

Keith glanced around at the others as he started walking forward. "This is what's been causing all of this crazy energy out here. It looks like there's a force field around it."

As the others followed Keith, Lance zigged and zagged. "Does anyone else get the feeling this is staring at them?"

Shiro frowned, "No."

Lance said as he continued to zig and zag. "Yeah, the eyes are following me."

Keith stepped up to the force field and placed his hands on it. "I wonder how we get through this."

Lance joined him. "Maybe you just have to knock," he said as he raised his balled-up fist and knocked twice.

A bright light flashed in the cave as the eyes of the lion flashed, and the force field disappeared. They all mentally saw five lions joining together to form a large mechanical warrior. Lance and the others seemed frozen in their tracks. "Uh, did everyone just see that?" Lance asked.

Lance's words seemed to break the spell they were under. Hunk yelled, "Voltron's a robot. Voltron is a huge, awesome robot!"

Pidge, with his eyes still on the lion, added, "And this thing is only part of it! I wonder where the rest of them are?"

Shiro gazed at it in wonder. "This is what they're looking for."

The Lion stood and lowered its body into a crouch with its chin, nearly resting on the ground. It's lower jaw dropped, and a ramp lowered to the ground.

Adam frowned as he heard the low chuckle escape from Lance as he ran up the ramp. A groan escaped from Adam's lips.

Shiro glanced over at Adam as he pointed toward where Lance had been as he put two and two together.

Adam nodded. "My cousin's kid." He replied as he and the others followed in Lance's wake into the blue lion.

Lance chuckled again as the cockpit lit up, and the viewscreen cleared, showing them the view from the inside of the cave. "All right! Very nice!" Lance said.

The others arranged themselves around the seat where Lance sat. Hunk said, "Okay, guys, I feel the need to point out, just so that we're all aware. We are in some futuristic alien cat head."
Lance's eyes grew as he heard a purring from inside his head. He looked over toward Hunk. "Whoa. Did you guys hear that?"

"Hear what?" Keith asked.

Lance gazed down at the controls in front of him. "I think it's talking to me." Lance leaned forward, examining the keyboard. He pressed two keys, and two handlebar controls appeared by his seat as the lion stood and roared.

He pushed the bars forward, and the lion burst out of the side of the rock, doing a mid-air flip. Adam yelled, "Lance, I taught you better than this!"

Keith yelled as Pidge and Hunk screamed around him, "You are the worst pilot ever!"

Lance grinned, looking over at Hunk as the Lion ran across the ground. "Isn't this awesome?"

Hunk begged for Lance to make it stop.

Lance replied, "I'm not making it do anything. It's on autopilot." The lion launched off the Earth. "It says there's an alien ship approaching Earth. I think we're supposed to stop it."

Pidge narrowed his eyes at Lance. "What did it say, exactly?"

Lance shook his head. "It's not like it's saying words. It's more like feeding ideas into my brain."

Hunk looked around nervously. "If this is the weapon they're coming for, why don't we just give it to them." He glanced up at the ceiling of the cockpit. "No offense, lion."

Shiro's expression grew both fierce and severe. "You don't understand. These monsters spread like a plague throughout the galaxy, destroying everything in their path. There's no bargaining with them. They won't stop until everything is dead."

Hunk gulped. "Oh, never mind then."

The Blue Lion made it into space when a large purple gray ship appeared in front of the lion. Everyone in the cockpit gasped.

Hunk gazed at Shiro. "Holy crow! Is that an alien ship?"

Shiro whispered, "They found me."

Adam, who stood next to Shiro couldn't take his eyes from the other man's face. It was as if Shiro was expecting to be a prisoner again. Adam balled up his free hand into a fist. He wouldn't allow that to happen even if he had to fight these aliens himself.

The alien ship began firing purple beams of energy at the lion.

Pidge yelled, "We've got to get it out of here!"

Lance replied, "Hang on!" as he thrust the bars forward. The lion managed to avoid the beams of energy. Lance spoke again. "I think I know what to do!"

Pidge yelled, "Be a careful man! This isn't a simulator!"

Lance smirked. "Well, that's good. I always wreck the simulator."
Adam groaned again as his mouth moved, saying a silent prayer.

Lance shoved one of the bars forward, and a bright white beam of energy shot out of the lion's mouth as it moved it's head cutting down the side of the ship. "Let's try this," Lance said as the Blue Lion shot forward and pounced on the side of the ship, raking its metallic claws down the side. Explosions flared up from the side of the ship as the lion leaped off and took off again.

Shiro grinned, "Good job, Lance."

The Blue Lion sped off into space as Lance spoke. "I think it's time to get these guys away from our planet."

"Good idea," Adam agreed.

Hunk fidgeted. "Oh, no!"

Pidge cried out, "They're gaining on us."

Lance frowned. "It's weird. They're not trying to shoot us. They're just chasing."

Keith asked out loud. "Where are we?"

Shiro gazed out the side of the Blue Lion's cockpit. "We're at the edge of the solar system. There's Kerberos."

Pidge adjusted his glasses on his face as he stared. "It takes months for our ships to get out this far. We got out here in five seconds."

Before anyone could comment on Pidge's statement, a giant circle of glowing blue energy formed in front of them.

Hunk pointed at it. "What's that?"

Lance glanced around him. "This may sound crazy, but I think the lion wants us to go through there."

Pidge asked quietly, "Where does it go?"

"I don't know," Lance replied. "Shiro, Adam, you're the senior officers here what should we do?"

Adam shrugged. "I don't have experience in space travel."

"Whatever is happening, the lion knows more than we do. I say we trust it, but we're a team now. We should decide together."

No one disagreed with Shiro. Even Adam kept quiet. He couldn't help focusing his gaze on the scar on Shiro's face that ran across the nose and ending under each eye.

Lance let out a sigh. "All right. I guess we're all ditching class tomorrow."

The Blue Lion shot into the hole of energy, but it wasn't a smooth ride as everyone was shaken like being in a giant blender that scrambled their insides. The Lion popped out the other side of the hole, and they saw a planet that reminded them of Earth.

Lance grinned as he gripped the handles. "Whoa that was—"
He was cut off as Hunk leaned over, facing away from everyone and retched as whatever was in his stomach came up. After the first explosion, he managed to say, "So sorry," before he threw up again.

Pidge adjusted his glasses as he deadpanned, "I'm just surprised it took this long."

Shiro gazed at the stars. "I don't recognize any of these constellations. We must be a long way from Earth."

Lance scratched at the back of his head. "The lion seems to want to go to this planet. I think it's going home."

The lion entered the atmosphere. But with Lance no being an experienced pilot, the ride was rough was an understatement. As they got closer to their destination Lance, Hunk and Keith argued amongst themselves. Shiro did what he could to calm things down as he raised his voice. "All right, knock it off! No one's happy to be in this situation, but we're here now. If we want to get through this, we've got to do it together. First, we find out where we're headed, Lance?"

Lance frowned, "I don't know. I'm sorry. The lion's not talking to me anymore." He gazed at the viewscreen. "But, there's a castle up there."

The lion landed in front of a large door. "Keep your guard up," Shiro said as he stared at the door.

Pidge turned to gaze up at him. "Something wrong?"

Shiro replied as they began to exit the lion. "My crew was captured by aliens once. I'm not going to let it happen again." His prosthetic hand drew up into a fist.

The lion retracted the ramp and rose while Hunk screamed about how he knew the lion was going to eat them. Instead, it roared at the door, which caused the door to open.

They cautiously entered the castle with the light from the open door providing just enough illumination for them to see by.

As they reached a large open area, Pidge gazed around. "From the size of the lion, I expected these steps to be bigger."

A series of lights lip up around them as a computerized female voice spoke from all around them. "Hold for identity scan." As they stood in place, a circular wave of light rose around each of them.

Shiro called out to the voice, "Why are we here? What do you want with us?"

Instead of a reply, lights began to flicker to life around them. More lights flickered to illuminate a hallway. "Should we go further in?" Adam asked.

Shiro nodded. "If we want answers, yeah." He started following Pidge as the younger cadet led the way.

They entered a large room with eight circles on the floor. Lance asked no one in particular, "Where are we?"

Pidge neared what looked to be some control panel. The panel flickered to life as two tubes rose up out of the floor.

Hunk looked at the tubes. "Are these guys… dead?" He gulped as he swallowed hard.
The front part of one of the tubes disappeared, and a young woman gasped as she called out, "Father!" She reached out as she fell forward.

Lance was nearest to her and caught her before she hit the floor. As he stood still holding her, his cheeks flushed red as he grinned at her.

She gazed up at his face. "Who are you? Where am I?"

Lance trying to sound suave, replied, "I'm Lance. And you're right here in my arms."

She gazed at him again. "Your ears."

"Yeah?"

"They're hideous. What's wrong with them?"

Lance let his emotions get carried away from him. He released her as his temper lashed out. "Nothing's wrong with them! They heard exactly what you said about them!" He screamed as the girl grabbed him by his ear and dropped him to the floor as she twisted his arm behind his back.

Adam couldn't stop the chuckle that burst from his lips. "Looks like he finally found someone who can put him in his place."

"Who are you? Where is King Alfor? What are you doing in my castle?"

Lance gasped in pain as tears came to his eyes. "A giant blue lion brought us here. That's all we know."

She released Lance. "How do you have the Blue Lion? What happened to its paladin? What are you all doing here? Unless… How long has it been?"

Shiro stood his ground as Hunk hid behind him. "We don't know what you're talking about. Why don't you tell us who you are? Maybe we can help."

She gazed at them as she sucked in a breath. "I am Princess Allura of Planet Altea. I've got to find out where we are and how long we've been asleep." She placed her hands on the control panel, and a holographic screen appeared in front of her.

The second tube opened, releasing an older man with orange-red hair and mustache. He opened his eyes and, believing the princess in danger, yelled, "Enemy combatants!" He jumped out of the tube, trying to attack Lance but missed and impacted with another tube. "Quiznack! You're lucky I have a case of the old sleep chamber knees."

Lance and the older Altean traded threats of what they were going to do to each other.

Adam slapped his face with his hand as Hunk stared at them, and he said, "Man, these guys are good."

Adam shook his head at Hunk's comment. "No, it just means I need to work with Lance on his hand-to-hand combat skills."

Shiro chuckled beside him.

Allura spoke up sadness, tinging her voice. "It can't be!"

The other Altean asked from behind her, "What is it?"
Her eyes grew large. "We've been asleep for ten thousand years." Her expression turned hard, angry even. "Planet Altea and all of the planets in our solar system have been destroyed." She gazed down at the floor before raising sad eyes to the man. "Coran, Father is gone. Our civilization..." She paused and pulled the fingers of her hand into a fist as she growled out the name, "Zarkon."

Shiro gasped, "Zarkon?"

Allura gazed at Shiro. "He was the King of the Galra. A vile creature and enemy to all free people."

Shiro stared at her. "I remember now. I was his prisoner."

Allura whispered, "He's still alive? Impossible!"

Shiro gazed at her. "I can't explain it, but it's true. He's searching for a superweapon called Voltron."

Allura stared back at him. "He's searching for it because he knows it's the only thing that can defeat him, and that's exactly why we must find it before he does. But first, I told you who I was."

Shiro rubbed at the back of his head as he flashed her a slight smile. "Sorry, I forgot," he chuckled slightly.

Adam jabbed Shiro with an elbow. "Dork."

"I'm Shiro," and then he pointed toward the others. "That's Lance, Keith, Pidge, Hunk, and Adam. We come from the planet Earth. I can't believe your civilization created such advanced technology ten thousand years ago. It must have been an incredible place."

Coran's face fell as sadness touched his eyes. "Yes, it was," he replied. "But it's gone, and we're the last Alteans alive."

As he said, this Allura finally allowed herself a chance to grieve as she fell into the older man's arms and sobbed quietly on his shoulder. She heard a noise that brought her head up as she gasped. She walked over to the sleep chamber and gazed down to the bottom of it. "Looks like we're not the last after all," a soft smile pulled at her lips as she gazed down at the four mice.

An alarm blared. Coran rushed over to the control panel. He stared at the image he brought up on the screen. "A Galra battleship has set its tracker to us."

Allura asked, "How did they find us?"

Lance glared over at Keith. "I'm not sure, but I'm sure it's Keith's fault."

Keith glared back. "Say whatever you've got to say to make yourself feel better. After getting us stuck on the other side of a wormhole!"

Lance's voice rose as he turned and shoved his face into Keith's. "I'll stick you into a wormhole!"

Shiro moved over and pushed both teens apart. "Stow it, cadets! This isn't the time to place blame."

"No, it isn't," Adam said as he pushed Lance a little farther away from Keith. "But," he turned to Shiro, "What are we going to do? We only have two experienced pilots and four children."

"Hey!" Lance yelled.
Adam turned back to Lance. "Zip it, cadet." He lowered his voice as he stuck his index finger in Lance's face. "If you don't drop this cocky attitude of yours, I swear I will tell your mother about all of this when we get back home."

Lance gulped as his eyes narrowed, staring back at Adam. "You wouldn't dare."

"Try me."

Shiro turned to the Alteans. "How long before they arrive?"

Coran glanced at them. "At their speed?" He mumbled to himself as he counted on his fingers. "I'd say probably a couple of days."

Allura nodded as her expression turned hard and determined. "Good. Let them come! By the time they get here, you will have reformed Voltron, and together we will destroy Zarkon's empire!"

Adam stepped away from Lance. "Princess, there are six of us and only five lions. How do we determine who gets a lion?"

Allura and Coran led the others to the bridge. She stepped up onto a dais where a blue crystal in the ceiling glowed as she closed her eyes.

Coran stood off to the side with the humans. "King Alfor connected the lions to Allura's life force. She is the key to finding the lions."

Allura opened her eyes, and a giant holographic star chart filled the room.

Pidge stared around the room. "These are coordinates. The Black Lion looks like it's in the same location as the Blue Lion."

Allura smiled. "Very observant. That's because the Black Lion is in the castle."

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

Allura gazed at the humans. "As you have found, the lions choose their pilots. It's a mystical bond and cannot be forced. The quintessence of the pilot is mirrored in his lion. Together they form something greater than science can explain. 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, Shiro, you will pilot the Black Lion."

Adam folded his arms over his chest, but he couldn't stop the pride from beaming off his face. But he frowned because, at the back of his mind, he couldn't help but worry. Especially about the disease that Shiro was diagnosed with. Was it truly gone or in remission? Inwardly he also was concerned about what the man had gone through at the hands of the Galra. He pulled himself out of his thoughts to focus on the Princess.

"The Green Lion has an inquisitive personality and needs a pilot of intellect and daring. Pidge, you will pilot the Green Lion. The Blue Lion—"

Lance interrupted. "Hold up, let me guess. Takes the most handsome slash best pilot of the bunch." He smiled, flashing his best flirtatious smile at her.

Adam reached out and smacked Lance in the back of the head.
Lance turned around and glared at Adam.

Allura frowned and skipped the explanation of the Blue Lion. "The Yellow Lion is caring and kind. Its pilot is one who puts the needs of others above his own. His heart must be mighty. As the leg of Voltron, you will lift the team up and hold them together."

Hunk looked around at the others. Finally, he pointed to himself, "Me?"

Allura continued. "The Red Lion is temperamental and the most difficult to master. 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. Keith, you will fly the Red Lion."

Lance frowned at Keith. "What? This guy?"

Adam leaned forward. "Cut it out," he hissed in the younger teen's ear. "You're supposed to be learning how to be a team."

"Unfortunately, I cannot locate the Red Lion's coordinates yet. There must be something wrong with the castle. After ten thousand years, it might need some work."

"I might be able to help with that, I think," Adam replied.

Allura nodded.

The image of the Red Lion roared, and the others joined it in flight. Allura smiled at the images. "Once all the lions are united, you will form Voltron, the most powerful warrior ever known, the Defender of the Universe."

Hunk held out his hands in front of his body. "Wait. Okay, we're going to be in there and flying lions. Got that part. How do lions turn into legs?"

Allura sighed and rolled her eyes.

Shiro decided now it was time to get the Yellow and Green Lions. "We don't have much time. Pidge, and I will go after the Green Lion. Lance, you take Hunk and get the Yellow one. Keith, you stay here. If you locate the Red Lion, go get it."

Allura gazed at the others. "In the meantime. I'll get this castle's defenses ready. They will be sorely needed."

Coran gazed at Shiro. "I'll ready a pod and load the coordinates so that you can reach the Green Lion."

As the Blue Lion and the Altean Pod headed out toward the wormholes, Coran spoke again. "We can only keep the wormholes open for two of your Earth hours, so you'll have to be quick about your work. According to my readings, both planets are peaceful, so if you do get stuck, they'd be relaxing places to live out the rest of your lives."

"What?" Adam gasped at Coran as both the pod and Blue Lion vanished through the wormholes. He rubbed at his temples. What if they didn't make it back, he thought. What would he do then?

Keith stepped up next to Adam. "Don't worry. I'm sure they'll be fine."

"I hope so," Adam replied. "We've both lost Shiro once, and I don't want to lose him or Lance this time."
Then, you should talk to Shiro when there's time and tell him how you feel.

Adam shot Keith a smirk. "How'd you get so wise?"

Keith shrugged as he stepped away from him.

The doors to the bridge opened as Shiro and Pidge stepped through. Adam let out a sigh of relief, but still worried about Lance. Adam nodded toward Shiro, "I'm glad you made it back."

The doors slid open a second time as Hunk and Lance entered the bridge as they both groaned.

Allura smiled. "You made it."

Lance rolled his shoulder while rubbing it with his other hand as it popped. "Yeah, just barely. That was a nightmare. I almost puked out there. I felt like Hunk!"

Hunk held the side of his head. "Think about how I felt. I am Hunk."

Pidge gazed up at Shiro. "Yeah. We had a tough time, too." Her face lit up in a grin.

Shiro turned his gaze to Allura and Coran. "Did you find the Red Lion yet?"

Coran walked forward. "Allura just located it. There's a bit of good news and bad news." Coran tugged at his mustache and released it. "The good news is, the Red Lion's nearby." He crossed his arms over his chest. "The bad news is, it's onboard that Galra ship now orbiting Arus." Coran brightened, "But wait, good news again. We're Arus!"

Shiro leaned forward. "They're here already?"

Coran flinched a bit. "Yes. Guess my calculations were a bit off."

Adam rubbed at his forehead. But he lifted his head as the main screen flashed to life as a Purple alien stared back at them. "Is that?" Adam gasped out as he gaped at it.

"Princess Allura, this is Commander Sendak of the Galra Empire. I come on behalf of Emperor Zarkon, Lord of the Known Universe. I am here to confiscate the lions. Turn them over to me, or I will destroy your planet." The communication ended.

Shiro could sense the panic rising from around the room. "All right, let's not panic."

Hunk stared at him. "Not panic? The scary purple alien thing is driving his battleship toward us. We only have four lions."

Pidge crossed his arms over his chest. "Technically, only three working lions."

Hunk pat Pidge's shoulder. "That's right. Thank you, Pidge. Three working lions and a ten-thousand-year-old castle. Now is the perfect time to panic."

Allura gazed at Hunk. "Wait! This castle has a particle barrier we can activate."

Lance raised an eyebrow as he gazed at her. "Girl, you've already activated my par—"

Shiro raised an eyebrow as his eyes narrowed and slid over to glare at the teen. "Lance!"
Adam, who stood on the other side of Lance, reached out and smacked the teen on the back of the head. "Knock it off with the flirting! This is serious!"

Lance reached up and rubbed at the back of his head as he glared at Adam.

Coran scanned Sendak's ship. "The particle barrier won't hold Sendak's ion cannon forever. The Galra technology must have advanced since we last fought them."

Hunk asked, "Panic now?"

Shiro turned his gaze toward Hunk. "No. We've just got to figure out our plan of action, and figure it out quickly."

Lance took the opportunity to speak up. "I say wee pop through a wormhole and live to fight another day."

Hunk jumped on the bandwagon. "I second that. Yes. We tried to find the lions. We gave it the old college try. Couldn't do it. We only have three lions. We can't form Voltron I guess we could form a snake or worm to go through that hole Lance, that you were talking about."

Lance strode over to Allura. "Then it's settled. Allura, you ride with me. One of you take the old guy."

Pidge glared at Lance. "We can't just abandon Arus. The Galra will keep on destroying planets and capturing prisoners until we stop them."

Hunk held out his hands. "Okay. If we run, then maybe Sendak will follow us and leave his planet alone like when we left Earth. We form the snake-worm thingamajig, and we," he made a hissing noise, "out of here."

Keith crossed his arms over his chest as he frowned. "Sendak could destroy the planet then come after us anyway. Staying is our only option."

Lance leaned in toward Keith. "Here's an option, shut your quiznack."

Keith rose to his full height. "I don't think you're using that word correctly."

Lance stuck his face in toward Keith's. "What do you know, Mullet!"

Keith glared back as he stuck his face in closer to Lance's. "We're staying!"

"Leaving!" Lance yelled back.

Pidge yelled, "Staying!"

Hunk yelled, "Snake!"

Shiro and Adam both had it with the teens arguing, but Shiro was first to say anything. "Guys, stop!" His raised voice brought an end to the argument. He turned to face Allura. "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?"

Allura's face fell as all eyes turned to her. "I-I don't know."

Coran gazed over at her. His voice was soft as he spoke gently to her. "Perhaps your father can help."
"My father?" she asked as Coran led her away and off the bridge.

Adam gazed around him as Lance and Keith both shot glares at each other. Hunk still looked like he wanted to panic while Pidge just glared at Lance. He moved over to Shiro and gazed into his dark gray eyes. "We should talk."

Shiro nodded in full agreement. "But right now isn't the time. What we have to say should be in private."

Adam opened his mouth, but whatever he was going to say was cut off when Allura returned to the bridge dressed in a flight suit, and her white hair pulled up into a bun. "You five paladins and Adam were brought here for a reason. 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."

Shiro nodded. "We're with you, Princess."

Allura led them to another room. As the light flickered on, she announced, "Your suits of armor."

Coran spoke up beside her as the new paladins stood looking at their armor. "Princess, are you sure about this? They aren't exactly the best and brightest the universe has to offer."

Adam sniffed and crossed his arms over his chest.

Allura shook her head. "No, but they're all we've got." She turned to Adam. "What can you offer?"

"I'm a pilot back on earth. I'm also trained in first-aid, hand-to-hand combat, and some basic mechanics."

Coran leaned toward him. "I assume what your wearing is some type of uniform."

Adam nodded. "You're correct. This is the officer's uniform of the Galaxy Garrison."

Allura crossed her arms over her chest. "I have an idea for how you can be of help and support the Paladins on missions."

Shiro called out to the others. "Boys, it's time to suit up."

As they put their armor on, Allura stepped over to a panel and pressed her hand to it. It opened to reveal some odd-looking devices. "The bayard is the traditional weapon of the Paladins of Voltron. It takes a distinct shape for each paladin."

Hunks turned into a giant cannon. Keith's turned into a sword. Lance's turned into an energy rifle. He laughed and then shouted, "Whoa!" Pidge's turned into an angular Katar.

Lance leaned over. "Aww, you got a cute little bayard."

Pidge swung the bayard out and smacked Lance with it as he sent an electrical charge through the older teen's body.

Lance screamed out in pain and fell onto the floor.
Pidge smirked as he looked down on Lance. "Yeah, it is pretty cute."

Adam shot Pidge a thumbs up.


Allura stepped up to Shiro. "I'm afraid your bayard was lost with its paladin."

Shiro smiled back. "I guess I'll just have to make do."

"There's just one other thing we need to do." Allura walked over to a wall panel and pressed her hand to it. As the door opened, it revealed several other suits of armor. "These were used by Altea's soldiers."

Adam stepped forward. Inside he found three sets like the paladin's armor only in the colors of orange, brown, and gray. He shuddered at the orange. It reminded him of the cadet uniforms of the garrison. No way was he wearing that again. The brown was too drab in his book, but the gray was similar to the uniform he wore. He chose that one.

Allura pressed her palm to another panel. Inside was an array of weapons from knives to energy rifles and pistols. Adam chose an energy pistol, belt knife, and an energy rifle that could be slung over his shoulder.

Once he was suited, the entire group walked back to the bridge. Allura stood on the dais as they all gazed at the diagram of Sendak's ship. "You'll need to retrieve the Red Lion from Sendak's ship."

Keith gazed at it. "That's a pretty big ship. How are we gonna know where the Red Lion is?"

Pidge gazed at him. "It's not a matter of we. It's a matter of you."

Hunk grinned. "Pidge is right. Once we get you in, you'll be able to feel it's presence and track it down."

Lance grinned. "Yeah, you know how you felt that crazy energy while we were in the desert?"

"Yeah. You made fun of me for that."

Lance crossed his arms over his chest and aimed a smug grin at Keith. "And I'm proud of that. But it turns out it's exactly like that mumbo-jumbo."

Allura turned to face him. "Keith, remember, the Red Lion is extremely temperamental. You'll have to earn its respect."

Shiro placed his hand on Keith's shoulder. "All right. Here's our plan of attack. The Galra Empire knows about the Blue and Yellow Lion, but they don't know we have the Green Lion, too. Hunk, Lance, you'll act as a decoy by pretending to give yourselves up. While Sendak is distracted, Keith, Pidge, Adam, and I will sneak onto the ship in the Green Lion. Keith and I will find the Red Lion while Pidge and Adam guard our exit. Hunk, Lance, find some way to take down that ion cannon."

Keith entered Sendak's ship first, followed by Shiro, Adam, and Pidge. Adam pulled the energy rifle off his shoulder as Shiro glanced around. He froze as images flashed through his mind. He groaned and panted for maybe a minute as he fought through the memories.
Adam took a step forward as Keith turned to look back at his friend.

Shiro looked up. "I've been here before. After I was taken by the Galra cruiser off Kerberos, they brought us here."

Pidge gazed at Shiro. "So, that means your other crewmembers. They might be held captive here. We-We've got to rescue them."

Shiro lowered his head and closed his eyelids. "Pidge, we don't have time. We have to get the Red Lion and get back to Arus." He opened his eyes and turned to face Pidge.

Pidge stared at him. "But we can't leave prisoners here."

"Look, no one understands that more than me, but, in war, we have to make hard choices. Now let's get moving." Shiro turned and started to walk away.

"No!" Pidge shouted as he stood his ground. "Commander Holt is my father. He and my brother were the ones on the Kerberos mission with you."

Shiro stared at Pidge. "Commander Holt is your father?"

"Yes. I've been searching everywhere for him and my brother. I'm not going to give up looking when I'm this close to finding them. I won't!"

Shiro made his decision quickly. "Then Adam and I are coming with you."

Keith gazed at Shiro, "What?"

"I remember where the prisoners are held. Keith, you find the Red Lion."

"By myself?"

Shiro knew he couldn't let Pidge go wandering around Sendak's ship alone, but Keith had skills. He knew the teen could do it. "Minor change of plans. You'll be fine. Just remember, patience yields focus."

Doors opened, and a patrol of sentries came though as the paladins and Adam scattered to get out of the hall before being spotted by the enemy.

Pidge, Shiro, and Adam hurried down a hall when a floating drone spotted them. He hit it with his Katar and knocked the triangular-shaped drone out of the air.

Shiro glanced at it. "That thing saw us. We should get out of here."

Pidge flipped open a panel on the drone, and his fingers started rewiring it. "Wait. I think this might come in handy." He reset the controls and closed the panel. It rose up into the air again. "And it's working for us. I'm gonna call you Rover. Follow me."

The drone beeped as it followed Pidge.
As they ran down a hall, they came to a door. Pidge looked over at Rover, "Open up."

Rover hovered over to the door and shot a beam at the mechanism opening the door. Shiro half laughed and shook his head at the younger paladin. "Excellent, Pidge."

Pidge ran into the holding cell first, which was crowded with aliens of several different races that huddled together in fear. "Dad," Pidge called out.

Shiro stepped in behind the Green Paladin as Adam stood outside watching for patrols. Shiro spoke to the aliens, "Don't be afraid. We're here to help you escape."

One of the aliens spoke up. "It's you… It's you, the Champion. If anyone can get us out of here, he can."

Adam from outside, whispered, "Champion?"

Shiro stared at the alien who'd spoken. "Wh-What did you call me?"

Pidge gazed at Adam and Rover before looking back to Shiro. "We don't have much time. Let's get them to the escape pods."

Shiro waved his hand at them, motioning for them to move out. "Let's go. Come on!"

They led the prisoners to an escape pod when a voice said, "Halt!"

Five sentries ran forward to try to stop the prisoners who were boarding the pod. Shiro held his right arm up when the hand shot pain into his body, and he dropped to the ground as it began to glow purple.

Adam raised the energy rifle and squeezed off a shot. One sentry fell, it's head turned into molten slag.

Shiro jumped up and charged the remaining sentries cutting a path through them, leaving them as sparking scrap.

The escape pod launched. Pidge grinned up at the Black Paladin. "Shiro, that was amazing! Where did you learn to fight like that?"

Shiro raised his prosthetic arm and folded the hand into a fist. "No idea."

Adam stared at him. "Your hand is a weapon?"

Shiro shrugged but turned as he heard Keith's voice come through his helmet's communicator. "I got the Red Lion."

Pidge grinned again. "Let's get out of here."
All four lions sat in front of the locked hangar door for the Black Lion. Shiro stood facing it as Adam, and the other paladins waited to see what would happen.

The hangar door opened. The Black Lion's eyes lit up. It roared. The other four lions stood and roared back.

Allura's voice came over their helmet communicators. "Sendak is entering the Arusian atmosphere. We need Voltron now!"

Shiro turned to Adam. "This is our fight now. You need to get inside the castle."

"On my way. Lance, you'd better come back in one piece!"

Lance grinned. "Easy peasy."

Adam rolled his eyes, but he turned and raced into the castle. As he stepped onto the bridge, a bright orange-red glow surrounded the castle. He had to raise his hand to block the flash from blinding him. The castle shook from the blast of the ion cannon from the Galra ship. He had to grab at the nearest wall to keep his feet under him.

Coran turned from his station. "The barrier gets weaker with every blast. Once the shield goes down, the castle will be defenseless."

Allura stared at her screen as she spoke. "I can give you cover with the castle defenses for a while, but you have to form Voltron now, or we'll all be destroyed."

A second blast struck the castle. The lions were caught in a tractor beam as the castle was hit by a third blast that destroyed the particle barrier.

Adam sucked in a breath as all the color drained out of his face. This was it. This was the end, and he knew it as he whispered, "I love you, Takashi." He saw the ion cannon preparing to fire again. A gasp came from him as the beam of energy completely missed the castle.

Coran activated the viewscreen to see Sendak's ship. What Adam saw brought another gasp from him. As the smoke cleared, Voltron stood on Sendak's ship.

Adam smiled as Voltron ripped the ion cannon off the ship, throwing it down to the ground. He heard a cheer come out of his mouth as the giant warrior demolished Sendak's ship.

Coran Allura and Adam raced outside as the Paladins gathered around in front of their lions. Allura held her hands clasped together in front of her chest. "Good work, Paladins."

Lance smiled at her. "Thanks, pretty lady."

Keith began taking off his helmet when he stumbled.

Adam frowned. He noticed the scrape in the red of the helmet. He reached into the belt pouch that hung from the armor's belt and pulled out his penlight. "How hard did you get hit in the head?"

"I'm fine."

"I'll be the judge of that," Adam replied. He raised the penlight and flashed it in Keith's eyes, checking his pupil response and frowned.

"What is it?" Shiro asked.
"I'd say he has a slight concussiion. I think I have some aspirin in my bag I brought from the garrison. Keep him awake for a while. I'll check up on him every two to four hours to make sure he's okay."

"I swear Adam. I'm okay."

"Keith," Shiro said as he placed his hand on the Red Paladin's shoulder. "Adam is the closest thing to a doctor we have. You need to listen to him."

Keith groaned.

Allura turned to follow Keith and Adam with her eyes. "It appears the Red Paladin is as temperamental as his lion."

Coran not noticing still went on about how the Paladins would have to form Voltron again, and again. "It's not going to be easy being the Defenders of the Universe."

Shiro turned and smiled up at the Black Lion. "Defenders of the Universe, huh. That has a nice ring to it."
Becoming A Team

Chapter Summary

It's difficult trying to learn how to become a team. But Adam has to teach the Altean's that you can't force the humans to become a team. They have to want to become a team.

Alarms blared throughout the Castle. Adam, whose military routine was deeply ingrained in his psyche, was up doing his morning calisthenics in his new armor. If there was something he needed to become familiar with was the feel of it. He glanced up at the sound and grabbed his helmet, and slung his energy rifle over his shoulder. Running out of his room, he raced down the hallway needing to find out if they were under attack again.

Allura's voice rang through the castle. "Everybody up! Zarkon's attacking! The Castle is about to be destroyed! Go, go, go! We need Voltron now!"

Adam's steps faltered as he stepped onto the bridge, followed by most of the Paladins as Coran's voice turned overly dramatic. Coran turned to see the others standing there as the older man startled. "Oh! Time!"

Shiro gazed at the pair of Alteans. "I guess this isn't an actual attack."

Allura stared back at them. "And it's a good thing it wasn't because it took you, Coran?"

Coran stared at a device he held in his hand. "Seventy-five degrees. Oh, sorry. No, this is a meat thermometer."

Allura sighed, but her body grew rigid as her expression turned hard. "However long it was, it was too long. You must always be ready to do battle with Zarkon. Look at you! Only Adam and Shiro are in uniform. Keith, Pidge, Hunk, where are your bayards? And where is Lance?"

As if the mention of his name summoned him, the teen in question made his appearance. "Good morning, everybody. What's going on?"

Adam groaned as he stared at his second cousin.

Allura tried to reign in her temper, but she still lashed out. "Coran and I have been up for hours getting the Castle back in order. We had to run a test on the alarms, and we decided to test you as well." She placed her arms behind her back as she gripped her hands together. "Guess which one failed."

Hunk replied while fighting through yawns. "Hey. You got to sleep for ten thousand years, man. Monday night, I was on Earth. Now, I've flown through space, fought some evil alien named Zarkon, eaten goo in some mysterious castle. That's a lot to process in uh… I don't know. What day is today?"

Coran leaned forward. It's the third quintant of the Spicolian movement. Hump Day!"

Adam sighed, "I suppose Hump Day is universal." He glanced around as if he were looking for
something.

Keith stared at him. "What are you looking for?"

"A talking camel."

Keith rolled his eyes. "That only happens on TV."

They both turned their focus back to Allura's voice. "You must understand the stakes of our mission." She reached up, activating a holographic control panel and pressed some of the buttons on the screen. "Over the last ten thousand years, the Castle picked up distress beacons from the following locations." The room was filled with a star chart showing star systems and galaxies over half-turned red.

"We have to assume that Zarkon has conquered almost the entire known universe." She spun the map. "Earth is here." It was still colored blue. "An attack on our planet is inevitable. 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 we can begin fighting Zarkon."

Shiro nodded. "The Princess is right. Let's get to our lions and start training."

Pidge gazed up at the Black Paladin. "Wait. I want to talk to the prisoners we rescued from the Galra ship."

Coran gazed at the Green Paladin. "Negative Number five, I have you paladins ranked by height. The prisoners need to remain in the cryo-replenishers until tomorrow."

Allura was quick to agree. "That's right. Now, get to your lions." She turned to Adam. "Why don't you go with Coran and he can show you how some of the systems work."

Adam shrugged and turned to follow Coran to wherever he was heading.

The more Adam followed Coran. The more Adam realized how inadequate his mechanical skills were. Coran pointed out different systems as they moved around the engine room. Adam stared at everything but had the feeling his head would explode if he removed his helmet because of all the information and stories Coran was babbling on about.

Adam held out a hand. "So, exactly how old is this Castle?"

Coran turned and rocked back on his heels. "It's ten thousand six hundred years old and was built by my Pop-pop Wimbelton."

Adam sighed and turned around again. Time to get this over with no sense in beating around the bush. "I'm sorry, Coran, but my mechanical skills are too rudimentary for this."

"Ah, well, don't feel too bad. Not everyone is meant to be a mechanic." Coran pulled at his mustache then released it as he brightened. "Perhaps you could help Allura on the bridge."
Adam stepped onto the bridge and stopped as he heard Allura speaking to the Paladins. He saw their faces on a screen as she addressed them. "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."

The Paladins agreed.

"Perfect," Allura replied, a little too happy to Adam's ears. "Because I need to run a diagnostic test on all of the Castle defenses. This should help." She raised the particle barrier as the Castle defenses began firing whitish-blue energy blasts at the lions.

Keith's image appeared on the screen. "Allura, what are you doing?"

"Running a diagnostic test on the Castle defenses and inspiring you! I believe in you, Paladins! Let fear be your guide! Form Voltron!" She backed away from the screen and spun around to walk off the bridge and nearly came face to face with Adam. She jerked as she stared at him. "Adam, you startled me."

Adam crossed his arms over his chest as he raised an eyebrow. "Answer me one question. Why are you trying to blow the lions to smithereens along with their paladins?"

Allura flinched. "I'm trying to get them to form Voltron even if it's through fear."

Adam released a sigh. "Take it from me. Fear isn't going to get them to work together as a team. Shiro is a good leader, and Keith will follow him into the depths of hell itself if Shiro led him there. But the other three are the wild cards. Lance, though he's cocky, has a good heart. But he's got too much of this idea that he has to compete for Shiro's attention."

Allura raised an eyebrow at him. "What do you suggest?"

"Something a little less violent."

She nodded. "I'll keep that under advisement. Now, why aren't you helping Coran?"

Adam shook his head. "A mechanic, I'm not. Coran's the one who suggested I come up here and see if you needed help."

"I suppose I should show you where the infirmary is and show you how the scanners and cryo-pods work," she replied.

"That would be much appreciated, Princess," Adam replied.

Adam, after taking a crash course on the workings of the infirmary, found the lounge. He entered the room finding Hunk, Lance, Keith, and Pidge on the couches.

The door on the other side opened, allowing Princess Allura and Coran in the room. She was so focused on what she was saying she didn't notice the others. "Are we at full power on condenser number five yet?"

"No, still at eighty-four percent."

Allura looked up, her eyes falling on the four paladins. "You did it! You formed Voltron!"
Keith spoke up. "No. The shooting stopped, and the particle barrier shut down, so we flew in."

Adam smacked a hand to his face.

Allura's eyes narrowed. "What?"

Coran's eyes grew as his shoulders rose, trying to reach the bottom of his ears. "Oh, right. Sorry, Princess. I had to turn off the Castle defenses to test the fire suppressors."

Adam folded his arms over chest, shooting Allura with an 'I told you so,' glare.

The door opened, and Shiro strode in the room, stopping to stand next to Adam. "What are you guys doing here? We're not taking a break."

Allura nodded. "Shiro's right. You should be training."

Hunk raised his head. "We've been training. When are we going back to Earth?"

Pidge sat up, staring at Hunk. "I'm not going back until I find my family."

Shiro's eyes hardened. "Guys, there won't be an Earth if we don't figure out how to fight Zarkon."

Lance stood up, glaring at Shiro. "How are we going to fight? We can't even figure out to form Voltron."

Adam glared at his second cousin. "Dial it down. You don't talk back to your leader."

Coran spoke up. "I'm not surprised. The original paladins fought hundreds of battles together, side-by-side. They were like a pack of yalmors linked at the ears."


Coran became serious. "During the last attack, your survival instincts forced you to work as a team, 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."

Hunk looked up at Coran. "There's a training deck?"

Adam stood next to Coran as the Paladins stood on the training deck. He couldn't stop himself from grinning. The room below the control room was at least as large as a football field. Maybe a football field and a half.

Coran had what looked like a Bluetooth device plugged in his ear. He cleared his throat and then spoke into the microphone. "Two, two, one, two. Okay, listen up, guys. The Paladin Code demands you put your team member's safety above your own. A swarm of drones is about to attack. It's up to each of you to do everything you can to protect the other members of your team."

As the drones began to fire, Hunk ducked, and Pidge was struck falling through the floor. Hunk was second.

Coran tried to get it through the remaining Paladins heads. "Protect your teammates, or no one will be there to protect you!"
Adam knew Shiro and Keith would protect each other's backs, but Lance was a bit of a surprise. Then Coran increased the intensity, and all went to hell again when Lance got cocky again.

Both Adam and Coran groaned at the same time. "What now?" Adam asked.

Coran turned off the microphone. "We'll go with the invisible maze."

Adam frowned.

Lance stood on the training deck as Coran spoke from the control booth. "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 cannot. So, listen carefully. If you touch the walls, you'll get a slight shock."

Lance put his helmet on his head. "Wait. Who's guiding me through?"

"Take two steps forward."

"Oh, no. Not Keith. Why does he get to be the man on the mic?"

Coran replied. "Now, sit tight. You'll get your turn."

Adam gazed at the image of the maze that Keith stared at.

"As I said, take two steps forward, turn right, and take three steps that direction."

Lance started walking forward but stepped into the maze wall. He screamed and turned around, staring up at the control booth. "You did that on purpose!"

"You're not listening."

"You said, 'Turn right.'"

But before that, I said, 'Take two steps forward.'"

Lance growled. "Two steps—" He screamed as he walked into the wall again. "We're switching right now."

Adam stepped up, placing a hand on Keith's shoulder. "Lance, suck it up and stop acting like a petulant child and turn around facing south."

Lance growled but did as Adam told him too.

"Now Keith will guide you through, and you're going to listen because if you don't, I will personally put you through my training."

Lance visibly shuddered. "Anything, but that."

"Then straighten up, cadet."

It worked the next time, but Coran frowned. "We need to try something else."
Adam and Coran stood in the control booth as they watched the live feed as the lions flew in formation. Coran spoke into his mic. "You'll never be able to form Voltron unless each of you has a strong bond with your lion."

Lance spoke up. "No problem. Me and Blue are best buds for life, for real."

"Perfect! Then you won't have any issues with this exercise. Everyone put your lions into a nosedive! This is an expert level drill you 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!"

Lance screamed. "Coran, what's happening? I can't see!"

Coran replied, "You must learn to see through your lions' eyes. The goal is to pull up right before you crash into the ground. Feel what the lion feels!"

Hunk was the first to bail. Followed by both Lance and Keith crashing into a dune.

"Lance, Keith, are you two all right?" Adam asked.

"I'm fine," Keith replied.

"Ditto," Lance replied.

Adam sighed, "Lance, you do realize you've just crashed your lion."

"Yeah, so what. Blue's fine."

Adam couldn't stop himself as he swore in Spanish. He switched back to English, trying to control himself. "If Commander Iverson were here, I can imagine what he'd say. But guess what you'll be doing tomorrow morning, and it won't be sleeping in."

"Come on, Adam, lighten up."

"Not until you start taking this seriously. You do realize how stupid that stunt was because Keith is still recovering from a concussion."

"Whatever, Mullet said he was fine."

"Tomorrow, at four a.m. PT on the training deck."

Lance groaned.

Keith spoke up for the first time. "I was involved in the stunt too. So, I'll report in too."

"Suck up," Lance replied.

"Keith, I need to check you when you return to the Castle anyway. I need to make sure your okay."

Adam replied.

"Fine," Keith groused.

Adam turned back to the screen when he heard Shiro's voice. "I think I'm getting this."

Coran replied, "Excellent, Shiro."
Adam met Keith at the Red Lion's hangar. Adam held his penlight in hand.

Keith removed his helmet and tucked it under one arm. He sighed but allowed Adam to flash the light in his eyes.

Adam smiled at the Red Paladin. "Your good to go."

The Paladins sat in a circle facing each other with a weird-looking device on their heads.

Coran's voice came from the control booth. "The most important part of paladin training is to be able to meld your minds and focus on one thing, Voltron. Everything else has to fade away. This technique will be essential every time you form Voltron. So relax and open your minds. No walls, no secrets between paladins. Come on, everyone, clear everything. Now, focus on forming your lion. Bring your lions together and form Voltron."

As the images of the lions moved forward and got closer together, Coran's excitement grew. "Keep your minds open. Work together. Good! Keep focusing! Only one to go!"

Keith opened his eyes. "Pidge, stop thinking of your girlfriend!"

Pidge shot back. "I wasn't! Hunk was grubbing around in my head!"

Hunk replied as he gazed at the green paladin. "I thought we were open. You can look in my head hole."

"Everyone has to be able to look in everyone's head holes!" Coran replied. "Clear your minds!"

They almost managed to form Voltron when Pidge lost focus again.

Lance yelled, "Pidge!"

The Green Paladin jumped up, ripping the Altean mind-melding device from his head and down onto the floor. "I'm done with this! Look, I don't like everyone running around in my head!"

Shiro gazed up at the smallest paladin. "Oh, come on, Pidge, we're starting to get the hang of this."

"I'm just-I'm just tired, okay?"

Shiro nodded. "Okay. Let's take a break."

Coran turned to Adam. "Is this a good idea?"

"You can't keep forcing them, or they eventually do what Pidge just did, they'll rebel. Remember, Shiro, and I are the adults. The rest are teenagers, and one thing teenagers will do is rebel against authority."

"We can't have that," Coran replied.
Allura appeared with the mice on her shoulders. She placed her hands on her hips. "What are you doing lying around? You're supposed to be training!"

Coran considered Adams's words before speaking. "Just resting a bit. You know, you can't push too hard."

Allura gazed at Coran then back to the paladins as her face flushed, and her gaze grew hard. "What do you mean, 'can't push too hard'? Get up, you lazy lumps! It's time you faced the Gladiator!"

Adam glared at her. He resisted the urge to smack her down, but if anything happened, he knew he was near his breaking point. He rejoined Coran up in the control booth. This time though, they were joined by the Princess.

Coran spoke, "To defeat the Gladiator, five paladins must fight as one."

The Gladiator dropped from the ceiling. Hunk began firing his cannon as it charged. It struck the Yellow Paladin knocking him off his feet and hit him with its staff sending an electrical charge through Hunk's body.

Pidge charged it, trying to get a hit on it. But it connected the staff to the Green Paladin's helmet who fell and landed on Hunk.

Lance kept up a steady stream of energy blasts from his rifle, but the Gladiator evaded them all and struck Lance like he was a baseball. Keith charged, and he and Lance had it caught between them until it knocked Lance's bayard out of his hands and sent the Blue Paladin crashing into Keith.

Shiro activated his arm, but as the Gladiator charged, he froze. Keith managed to jump in the way blocking the staff with his sword. Keith gripped the blade of his sword with his other hand. "Shiro, are you okay?"

The Gladiator knocked Keith off his feet and struck Shiro with the staff.

Allura stormed out of the control booth, but Adam was hot on her heels. She stepped onto the training deck. "That combat simulator was set on a level fit for an Altean child! You're not even close to working as a team, let alone ready to face Zarkon!"

"That's enough!" Adam roared. "You don't seem to get it! You can't force them to work as a team. They have to be willing! So, knock it off!"

He knelt next to Shiro and eased the helmet off the Black Paladin's head. "You okay, Takashi?"

"I'm fine. The Gladiator reminded me of Galra sentries, and I froze."

Adam pats his arm. He rose and went around to check on the other before returning to Shiro, who was now sitting up. He gazed over where Coran and Allura spoke quietly.

Shiro gazed up at Adam. "You know you didn't have to go off on the Princess as you did."

Adam frowned. "No, I did. Pidge is close to his breaking point, and Hunk needs better control over his bayard. If Keith hadn't brought up his shield when he did, he could have been hurt seriously."

Shiro frowned at Adam's assessment. "What about Lance?"
"Don't worry about him. He's my problem. But, after I get finished with him, I hope he learns the value of teamwork."

Coran turned to the others. "Take a break. We'll reconvene shortly in the dining room."

Coran gazed at the now seated humans. "Ahoy, young Paladins. 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!"

Shiro gazed up at the older Altean. "Smells great, Coran. Thanks."

They picked up their spoons to eat when Coran pulled out a remote and pointed it at them. They all found their wrists cuffed together.

Adam began to rise from his seat across the table from Shiro when Coran waved for him to take his place.

Lance yelled. "Hold the phone."

Coran replied, "I saw a lot of solid individual performances today, but you're still struggling to work as a team. So, welcome to the final bonding exercise of the day."

Hunk and Lance tried to free their arms when the Yellow Paladin stared at the older Altean. "Coran, I want you to think about what you're doing."

Coran stared back. "This one's a classic. You get to feed each other, like a pack of yalmors!"

Adam glanced at Coran. "And what is a pack of yalmors."

Coran waved him off again but turned to wink at the human.

Hunk pulled his arm to get a spoon of the green goo up to his mouth when it missed because of movement from Lance.

Lance glanced at Hunk, "Sorry." He pulled on his arm, pulling Hunk's arm over.

Hunk pulled his arm, which pulled on Keith, whose hand landed in Lance's plate of goo.

Lance turned his head and glared at Keith. "Oh, nice. You defiled my food, goo!"

Keith yelled back, "It's your fault! This is ridiculous."

Allura, who'd joined them growled. "Do Earthlings ever stop complaining?"

Adam sighed as he placed his elbow on the table and propped his chin on his hand.

Shiro glared back at Allura as one of his eyebrows rose. "Can't you give us a break. Everyone's been working hard today."

Keith rose from his seat. "Yeah! We're not some prisoners for you to toy with, like—"

Lance jumped in. "Like a bunch of toy prisoners!"
"Yes!" Keith growled out. "Thank you, Lance!"

Coran's gaze hardened as he yelled back. "You do not yell at the Princess!"

Pidge spoke as he glared at Coran. "Oh, the princess of what? We're the only ones out here, and she's no princess of ours!" A serving spoon of goo splattered upside Pidge's head. With some falling off his face and into his lap.

Coran stared at the princess, his eyes wide.

Adam smirked as he whispered to no one in particular. "Even she has a breaking point."

Keith reached down to his plate and yelled, "Go loose, Pidge!" He picked it up and threw it at Allura, but Coran jumped in the way using a small towel to knock the plate out of the way.

He retaliated by throwing a ladle full of goo slapping all the paladins with the green goo.

As they sat there stunned for a couple of minutes, Adam chuckled at the sight wishing he had a camera to capture this moment for posterity.

Hunk shook his head as he glared at the Princess and royal advisor. "Oh, it's on now." He dropped his head down into his plate and came up with a mouthful of goo. He slapped his hands to either side of his face shooting a blast of goo out of his mouth, hitting both Allura and Coran.

The fight was on now with the Alteans against the Paladins. Laughter reigned before the goo was all over everyone in the room. Several chairs were knocked over by the time the fight ended.

Allura backed up and sat down in a chair.

The paladins gazed at each other and broke out in laughter.

Allura yelled, "Enough! Do you see what you're doing?" She raised her head with a silly but giddy smile on her face. "You're finally working together as one!"

Keith grinned, gazing at Lance. "Hey, she's right!"

Lance replied, "I don't hate you right now."

Hunk grinned at them. "You guys thinking what I'm thinking?"

Shiro grinned, "Let's form Voltron!"

The other paladins replied with, "Yeah!"

Hunk replied, "Actually, I was thinking dessert. But, yeah! Let's do it!" He raised both arms, pulling himself and the others off balance and down into the floor.

Adam couldn't stop himself as he doubled over in laughter. It felt good to be able to laugh after such a stressful day finally.

The Paladins formed Voltron, and the giant mech warrior landed in front of the two Alteans.

Allura grinned. "I told you I could get them to do it. They just needed a common enemy."
Adam crossed his arms over his chest as did Coran. "It's true," the older man said. "As the old proverb says, 'A man can be driven to do anything, if a beautiful woman is really, really mean to him.'"

Adam snorted, and then he chuckled. "Who would have thought that a food fight would be a team bonding exercise," he muttered to himself.
Chapter Summary

This Chapter has nothing to do about the Gladiator Robeast but more about Adam and Shiro's relationship and if they can talk things out or not.

Adam gazed at Lance and Keith as they jogged around the training deck. Both teens were in good form. However, Lance was beginning to flag.

"All right," Adam said. "Hit the showers and get ready for Paladin training."

Lance gazed over at Adam. "Why do you have to be such a hardass?"

Adam sighed. "Because this isn't a game. And physical training will help keep your brain functioning and your reflexes sharp."

Lance sighed but followed Keith toward the showers.

Shiro called out to the others as they entered the dining room. "Great job training today, guys. We're really getting the hang of Voltron."

Lance grinned. "Seriously, how far do you think my lion kicked that broken alien ship? Must have been like a mile!"

Keith frowned. "Yeah, that'll come in handy when the Galra challenges Voltron to a soccer match."

"Hey, I did something cool, and you can't stand it. I get it."

"Your kick ruined our balance. We fell."

Adam entered the room. Upon hearing Keith's comment, he nodded. "I agree with Keith."

Lance growled toward Adam. "That falling part was Hunk's fault."

Hunk took offense. "Hey!"

Before he could say anything else, Shiro knew he had to say something to reign them in before all hell broke loose. "All right, save your energy for fighting Zarkon."

Coran stepped into the room from the kitchen, carrying a plate covered with a dome. "Hello, guys! How was the Voltron workout?"

Shiro replied, "We're getting there. Are you and Allura almost done fixing the Castle so we can leave the planet? I feel like we're sitting ducks here."

Coran replied, "Just about." He set the plate down 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!" He removed the lid.

What sat on the plate looked like something from the old 1950's science fiction movie The Blob with Brussel sprouts exploding from the surface. Everyone groaned.

Adam turned his head as the smell hit him. Ugh, whatever it was made out of, it definitely stunk, causing his stomach to turn.

Hunk gazed at Coran. "You just got me hooked on that goo, and now you're switching it up?"

"This is packed with nutrients."

Hunk rose from his seat, lowered his head and sniffed at it. "Oh, it smells disgusting."

Coran bounced on his heels. "I know! That's how you know it's healthy!"

Hunk held up a handful of plants. "Coran, we're on a planet with fresh herbs, spices, and whatever this thing is. A tuber? Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to head back to the kitchen and spice things up."

Shiro glanced around, noticing that the youngest paladin was missing. "Where's Pidge?"

"I passed him in the hall," Adam replied.

Coran with a piece of his paladin lunch stuffed in his cheek, giving him the appearance of a chipmunk with seeds stuffed in its cheeks. "He's probably checking on those prisoners you rescued."

"Which reminds me of the reason I came down here," Adam said. "I need to get a scan on everyone to have our normal vitals on record for the cryo-pods."

Lance turned to look at his cousin, "Why?"

"It's a just in case if something happens so these cryo-pods can heal anyone who's injured. Considering they don't have access to human physiology."

"That's actually a good idea," Lance replied.

Shiro rose from his seat. "I'm going to join Pidge in the infirmary."

"I'll go with you," Adam replied.

Lance snickered as he turned his head away. "His first victims."

Keith stared at the Blue Paladin. "Shut up, Lance."

Shiro and Adam entered the infirmary. Shiro stopped as he gazed down on the Green Paladin. "You're as nervous as me."

Pidge gazed up at the Black Paladin. "These aliens we saved may know something about my family. They have to!"
Shiro nodded. "I hope so."

"They recognized you, didn't they? They called you 'Champion.' What does that even mean?"

Shiro frowned as he rubbed a hand to his head. "I don't remember 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."

Pidge jumped up as the cryopods began to hiss as they opened.

Adam stepped over to a cabinet and opened it. "Here's some blankets you can wrap around them. According to Coran, they'll be cold. I even have some soup here that Coran made earlier. We should give them some to get them closer to their natural temperatures." He began ladling out the soup into cups. "Whatever that is," he muttered to himself.

Pidge passed a cup to the spokesman of the prisoners. "So, how long were you held captive by Zarkon?"

"Some for years. Decades maybe. It's hard to tell. Time becomes a blur."

Pidge blinked at him but didn't pause in questioning. "Then you must have been there when my dad and brother arrived, Sam and Matt Holt?"

"I never knew their names, but I certainly remember the other two Earthlings that arrived with Champion."

Adam's head rose at the mention of that name again.

Shiro's haunted eyes gazed at the alien. "Champion. Why do you keep calling me that?"

The alien gazed up at him from where he sat on the steps below the cryopod. "You really don't remember? Unbelievable! 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.'"

"I was there, as was the young Earthling. We were all prisoners, forced to fight for the entertainment of Zarkon. That day, we were set to fight Myzax, a vile beast many thought could never be defeated. Slaughter awaited us all. This 'Matt' was the first of us sent to fight. But fate had other plans. You were so thirsty for blood. You injured your fellow Earthling."

Pidge turned, eyes narrowed, glaring at Shiro. "You attacked my brother? Why?"

Shiro flinched as his dark gray eyes though haunted, also turned sad. "No, it can't be true."

The alien gazed at Shiro. "I was there. We all were."

Pidge turned back to the alien needing some kind of answer. "After my brother was injured, where was he taken?"

"I know not."

Shiro shook his head. "I don't believe it. There's got to be more to the story. I-I couldn't have hurt my friend." He frowned as he began to pace. Why would he have hurt Matt? Why? There had to be a good reason. But maybe he could find an answer on the wreckage of the Galra ship. But he wasn't a tech person. He was a pilot.

He stopped his pacing. "Wait," he said as he turned back to face Pidge. "That ship we were held captive on crash-landed on this planet. They'll have logs of prisoners, some information," he said
as he began to walk away.

Pidge ran after him. "I'm coming with you."

Adam gazed after the pair as they left the infirmary. He sighed as he rubbed ran to his forehead. Shiro wasn't like the way the alien described him, there was no way he'd be the bloodthirsty demon to strike out at Matt. There was more to the story that was hidden somewhere in Takashi's mind.

The alien stared at Adam for a moment before taking a sip of the soup in his cup. "You care for Champion, don't you."

Adam nodded. "Very much."

"You should tell him before something happens, and you never get the chance."

Adam let out a half-laugh. "Right now, just finding the time is non-existent." Adam gazed down at the floor. "How do I tell him I was so stupid before he left Earth."

"Matters of the heart will always work their way out," the alien replied.

Adam didn't know what to say, but this alien was right. He definitely needed to either find or make the time. Even if it meant making Takashi sit still for a while and listen to everything he had to say.

Adam checked the aliens one last time before making Keith, Lance and Hunk sit still for their medical scans. "Has anyone seen Pidge or Shiro?"

"I saw Pidge sitting on the bridge leading to the Castle," Coran replied as he twisted his mustache.

"Thanks," Adam replied. He figured that Shiro might be there too.

Adam stepped out of the Castle, and there he saw Pidge and Shiro talking. He couldn't help but grin as Pidge suddenly reached out and grabbed the older man hugging him. It must have been something good. He began walking as he heard Shiro call the Green Paladin by her real name.

Finally, that was over. Of course, he knew she was Katie Holt. The only one who hadn't seemed to get the idea that she was Matt Holt's sister was Commander Iverson. It pulled a chuckle out of his chest. That would be kind of nice to rub it in Iverson's face.

"Hey," he called out to the pair. "Is everything okay?"

Pidge gazed up at Adam and smiled as she grinned. "Yeah, Shiro just told me why he hurt Matt. It was to save him, not to intentionally hurt him so he'd be taken away with dad."

"That is good news," Adam replied. He shifted his weight as he gazed down at the stone bridge. "Uhm, do you mind if I join you."

Pidge grinned, "It's a free planet."
Shiro smiled at the younger paladin and then reached out ruffling her hair. "I don't think that's what he means," the Black Paladin replied.

Pidge gazed at Shiro and then Adam and back again. "Oh," she said as she rose from her seat. "Sure. I should go check in with the others and see what's going on." She ran for the castle with the mice hurrying behind her.

Adam sat down next to Shiro and gazed up at the sun as it was beginning to go down below the curve of the planet painting the sky with brilliant reds, oranges, and gold. The cloudsslowly crawling across the sky by the light breeze that blew around. He clasped his hands in his lap. "I said some stupid things back on Earth when you said you were going on the Kerberos Mission."

Shiro snorted as he crossed his arms over his chest and nodded. "Yeah, you did. But I do understand why you said them, but I can also say they did hurt."

"I never meant to hurt you," Adam's chest rose as he sucked in a breath and released it in a sigh. "I was worried that it might be the last time I'd ever see you again. Then you and the Holts left. Then the official report was that the mission was lost. They said pilot error. I knew that was wrong because your too good a pilot to just crash because you made a mistake. But there is also the disease. That kept creeping into my mind. Maybe, that was the reason." Adam shrugged.

Shiro understood where he was coming from, but it still didn't help the fact that Adam had broken up with him. "Deep down I know. But too much has happened since then." He held out his prosthetic arm and stared down at the hand. He released a sigh as he closed his eyelids and placed his hand down on the bridge. "I'm not sure how I should feel right now. I know I still love you, but I'm also worried about how this war will play out."

"I know you are Takashi," Adam replied. "I still love you, too. I'm so sorry for the things I said. I wish I could take them back and go back to where we were before Kerberos."

Shiro nodded. "I wish we could too." He gazed off into the distance.

"I can make a promise to you right now," Adam replied. "I'll never say anything that I don't mean."

"Sounds good," Shiro replied as he turned his head to gaze at Adam. "I can promise the same."

"Then, we're still friends?" Adam asked.

Shiro nodded as a smile pulled at his mouth. "We're still friends," he replied as he bumped a shoulder to Adam's.

"That's good," Adam replied. "Now, I need to get Pidge, and your medical scans are done to add them to the other Paladins and my own."

"I thought you were kidding about that," Shiro replied.

Adam gazed back as he smirked. "Nope, I've got the others done. You and Pidge are the final ones."

Shiro sighed as Adam stood beside him, reaching out a hand to the Black Paladin. "Let's get this out of the way. From what I understand, Princess Allura wants to invite the Arrusians to the Castle."

He reached up and allowed Adam to pull him up to his feet. "Sounds like a party."
Adam groaned. "Then I'll have to keep an eye on Lance. I swear that boy is going to drive me to drink."

Shiro chuckled as he slung an arm over Adam's shoulder. "I think you'll survive."
The Arusian King stood at the top of the stairs by Princess Allura. "The monster fell from the sky! It was an epic battle, but Voltron was victorious!"

Several Arusians stood on the steps facing each other — five representing Voltron and two others who represented the Robeast.

The top Arusian that was supposed to be the Robeast threw what looked like a ball at the Voltron Arusians who fell in a heap on the stairs. The King not happy said, "No, I said, 'Voltron was victorious!'"

The five Arusians jumped up facing the crowd while the pair as the Robeast fell. The Arusians who made up most of the audience cheered.

Allura smiled at the king. "Thank you, Your Majesty, for that wonderful production. It saddens me that we must leave tomorrow, but we must continue our battle with Zarkon and spread peace throughout the universe." She turned to the King. "Your Highness," she said as she held an item in her hands and opened them to reveal a piece of Altean tech. "Please accept this gift. This will allow you to contact us anytime you need help."

The King took the communicator and smiled up at the princess.

Allura returned the smile with one of her own. "Arus will be the first planet in the Voltron Alliance."

The King held up the communicator and yelled, "Hoorah!"

The Arusians cheered.

Adam stood near Lance just close enough to hear what the Blue Paladin and Red Paladins were saying as Hunk joined them. Keith crossed his arms over his chest as he smirked and raised an eyebrow as Hunk said, "We ought to get something like that."

Lance raised an eyebrow as he gazed at the Yellow Paladin. "Like what?"

"You know, like a cheer. Like a team cheer that we can do."


The Red Paladin clearly didn't understand what Lance wanted as he replied, Uh, Voltron?"

Adam chuckled. If Lance knew about Keith's background, he'd understand how awkward this was for Keith.
Lance waved his hand in front of his face. "No! No, no, no. The cheer includes the instructions. I say Vol, and you say…"

Keith gazed back at Lance as he shrugged his shoulders, "Voltron?"

Lance let out a sigh. "We'll work on it." He turned away and took a sip of what was in the cup, and his eyes grew large when the liquid hit his tongue. Somehow, he managed to swallow it, but he turned to the Altean royal advisor. "Coran, what is this?"

"Oh, this is Nunvill, the nectar of the gods."

Lance glared at the older Altean as if he'd lost his mind. "It tastes like hot dog water and feet."

As a floating tray passed by, Adam set his cup down on it. He cringed at what Lance said it tasted like. He'd stick with regular water.

Coran stuck his gloved fingers into the cup. "Yeah, it makes a wonderful hair tonic as well." He flicked the liquid onto his mustache.

Lance turned a shade of green as he froze but then gagged before turning back to Hunk. Adam pat the Blue Paladin on the shoulder. "You'll be okay, Lance."

Lance shuddered. "I thought it was some juice," he replied as he gagged a second time. Adam grinned again, but Lance sighed as he pointed to Hunk's cup. "I guess we should get used to this stuff. Who knows when we'll get back home again?"

Hunk swirled the liquid as he frowned, and his eyes gazed downward sadly. "Yeah, if ever."

"What do you mean?" Lance asked.

"I mean this Zarkon guy has been ruling for ten thousand years. How long do you think it will take for us to fix it? You know if we live," Hunk replied.

Lance's face fell. "Right. That."

"Hey, what do you think the chance is of us landing on a nacho planet?" Hunk asked, trying to lift the mood.

Lance smiled. "Well, there's only one planet with Varadero Beach, pizza shack looking over the water and the garlic knots and my mom's hugs—" he sniffed as his head lowered. "I'm sorry. I gotta go," he said as he walked away from Hunk.

Adam started to follow as Lance passed the older Altean. Coran gazed at the Blue Paladin, but he held up a hand, stopping Adam. "I'll talk to him," Coran said, who turned and followed Lance up the stairs.

Adam joined Allura and the other Paladins in the main hall, as Shiro whispered. "Pidge, no."

"The download from the Galra ship was enough to get me in the right direction at least to start my search for my family. I have a pod all ready to go."

Keith's face grew angry as he rounded on Pidge. "You can't leave."
Pidge glared back, "You can't tell me what to do."

Keith yelled back. "If you leave, we can't form Voltron, and that means we can't defend the universe against Zarkon. You're not the only one with a family. All these Arusians have families. Everyone in the universe has families."

Hunk chose that moment to speak up. "Yeah, I have a family. They live on Earth. I want to be with them. Is that like a thing that can happen?"

Allura took a step up toward him. "You want to leave, too?"

"Of course, I do! Look, Voltron is super-cool, and don't get me wrong, but I never signed up for a lifetime in space, fighting aliens."

Keith growled as his blue-gray eyes flashed with anger, and he leaned in closer to Pidge. "You're putting the lives of two people over the lives of everyone else in the entire galaxy!"

Shiro reached out with his human hand grabbing the Red Paladin by the arm. "Keith, that's not how a team works. People have to want to be a part of it. They can't be forced." He stepped in between Keith and Pidge. He closed his eyelids for a moment before he gazed down on the Green Paladin. "If you want to leave, we won't try to stop you. But, please, think about what you're doing."

Pidge gazed down at the floor. She knew if she looked at Shiro's face, she'd stay. "I'm sorry. You're going to have to find someone else to pilot the Green Lion." She turned and walked away.

Allura grasped her hands together as she clutched them tightly to her chest. "I can't believe it. This team is falling apart. How will we ever form Voltron?"

An explosion rang out through the Castle and rocked it, sending the Arusians screaming and running from the structure. While the Paladins, Allura, and Adam ran to the source of the explosion.

As they raced onto the bridge, they found it filled with smoke, and Coran began to stir as he coughed. Shiro asked, "What happened?"

Coran groaned as Hunk helped him to his feet. "I'm not sure."

As the smoke thinned out and cleared more, they saw the crystal was destroyed. Allura let out a gasp. "The crystal!" Allura moved toward the shattered crystal with Shiro on her heels when they saw the prone figure of the Blue Paladin lying still on the floor. "Lance!" Allura called out.

Adam looked up from a cursory check of Coran and rushed over to Shiro's side, who now held the teen in his arms. "Lance? Lance!"

Pidge looked at the others. "We have to get Lance to the infirmary."

Allura shook her head. "Without the crystal, the Castle has no power."

Shiro gazed at Lance. "He doesn't look good."

The King of the Arusians ran onto the bridge. "Lion warriors, our village is under attack! We need
Keith gazed at Shiro. "Let's get to our lions!"

Allura sighed as she frowned. "You can't. They're sealed in their hangars. There's no way to get them out. We're defenseless."

The King asked, "Will you not help us?"

Keith stared at the King, who didn't seem to understand the situation at hand. "We'll help you. We just——"

Lance moaned but didn't wake.

Hunk gazed at the others. "This is bad."

Adam knelt next to Shiro as he muttered, "Understatement of the decade."

Coran frowned. "We have to get a new crystal to get the Castle working again. But to get a new crystal, we need a ship."

Pidge looked over at Coran. "The pod I was loading, we can use that! I left the bay door open."

Coran nodded as he gazed intently at the Green Paladin. "Good. I can use the scanner in the pod to see if there's a Balmera nearby." He turned to Hunk, and what he said next left no way open for any arguments. "Hunk, you come with me. I'll need someone big to help me carry the crystal."

"A Balmera?" Hunk asked.

Coran nodded at the Yellow Paladin. "It's where the crystals come from. I'll explain on the way. Let's go."

Keith gazed at Shiro and Adam. "I'll go see what's happening at the Arusian village."

Allura spoke as she turned to Keith. "I'll go with you, Keith. I brought this on the Arusians."

Adam gazed at Shiro. "I'll tend to Lance. That's my job now."

Shiro nodded, "I'll stand watch over the Castle."

Adam pressed his fingers around Lance's skull and face. He found a bump about the size of a goose egg above Lance's right eye. Without a scanner, he couldn't see what was going on inside the teen's head. Especially the brain. He worried about swelling to the brain or even bleeding on the brain.

Adam froze where he was as he heard voices approaching the bridge. He heard metallic noises that could be that of Galra sentries. His eyes scanned the area. He needed a place to hide so he could find a way to fight back against the intruders.

His eyes fell upon a vent grate. It looked like it would be large enough for him to crawl into. He moved over to it as his fingers fumbled at the edges trying to find a way to get it open. He nervously licked as his upper lip as he finally got the grate open. He gazed back at Lance, but the noises increased in volume, and he knew he didn't have time to grab his cousin. "I'm sorry," he
whispered as he ducked into the vent.

He replaced the grate but backed away enough, hoping the intruders didn't see him. As they strode onto the bridge, he saw Sendak and another living Galra along with five sentries. Four carried a purple crystal while the fifth dropped an unconscious Shiro down on the floor next to Lance.

Adam balled up his fist as he growled out in a whisper, "Sendak." He glared at the Galra commander, who plugged the crystal into the Castle, which powered up. The usual clean bluish-white lights changed to a sick purple glow.

Adam found the vent itself was broader than what he thought, and he turned around and crawled. He needed to get to the armory and get his armor and weapons. There was no way he could fight five sentries and two living breathing Galra with just a knife.

Adam opened another vent grate and dropped down into the armory. Thankfully his armor and weapons were in the same spot where he'd left them. He quickly changed from his Garrison uniform into the armor. As he placed his helmet on his head, he heard a voice coming from the communicator. "Keith, can you hear me?"

Keith's voice came through loud and clear. "Pidge, is that you? Where are you?"

"I'm inside the Castle. Sendak has taken over. He's preparing for launch. He's got, Lance and Shiro."

Allura was the next voice that Adam recognized. "Pidge, listen. If they've started the launch sequence, then we don't have much time before liftoff to stop it."

Pidge replied, "What do I have to do?"

"You have to get down to the main engine control panel and disconnect the primary turbine from the central energy chamber. 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."

"I'm here, too," Adam spoke up.

"What about Lance?" Allura asked, but Adam could almost hear the tone of how he could abandon the Blue Paladin to Sendak.

"I had to leave him, Allura. You said it yourself. We need to find a way to stop Sendak. We don't need him delivering the lions to Zarkon. Along with three paladins and one Garrison pilot."

"Your right. Though it's a risky decision, you were right to leave."

Adam replied, "I'm going to try to help Pidge. I can try to distract Sendak while Pidge does his thing." Mentally, he had to remember that as far as he knew, everyone else thought Pidge was still a boy.

Pidge's voice came through Adam's helmet again. "Okay, Allura, I'm near the turbine. I think it's started."

"Then you'll have to hurry. Cross the catwalk to the main column in the center," Allura replied.
"Okay."

"Now, open the hatch. Find the central control hub and enter the following sequence—"

"Wait, wait, wait! Which one is it? All the labels are in Altean! I can't tell which one it is! Allura? Allura?"

Adam tapped the side of his helmet. What happened? He couldn't hear Pidge anymore. He brought up his arm, bringing up the built-in computer screen to his wrist gauntlet. He found a map of the castle and pinpointed Pidge's position. He'd have to hurry if he wanted to help the girl.

He walked quickly out of the armory and followed Pidge's moving dot on his screen as Allura finally got back into contact with the Green Paladin. "Pidge, have you made it to the generator room?"

"I'm in. This technology is so advanced. I don't know if I can figure it out."

"Yes, you can. The lives of your fellow paladins are at stake. You can't give up."

Adam muttered under his breath, "Jeez, no pressure."

"Okay, talk me through it, Allura," Pidge replied.

"Shutting down the barrier from this room can be dangerous. Remember, the barrier is also a weapon. So, stay away from energy arcs."

Adam was getting closer to Pidge's location when he heard the metallic thumping of sentries ahead of him. "No," he whispered as he hurried his own pace.

Pidge replied, "Don't touch the giant lightning bolts. Got it."

Allura continued. "Now, what I'm going to need you to do is—"

Adam yelled out, cutting Allura off, "Pidge, you have incoming!" As he closed in on Pidge's location, he heard the blasts of energy weapons firing. He pulled his energy rifle from his shoulder and sped up his pace down the hall.

Pidge groaned.

"Pidge, Pidge, are you alright?" Adam yelled.

"My only way out is two floors up? Seriously?"

"Listen, Pidge. I'm almost to your position, but if you got a chance to get out of there, then go. Don't wait on me," Adam replied.

"Okay, but they have me pinned down. But I have an idea on how to get out of here."

Adam hovered outside the generator room as he saw Pidge run out of her hiding spot only to be struck by a blast from one of the sentries' weapons. "Pidge!" he yelled but sighed in relief as his brain registered that it was a hologram.

He watched as Pidge made her escape, and he released a nervous chuckle. "That was clever."

"Thanks," Pidge replied.
"Adam, what's going on?" Keith asked. "Why is this taking so long?"

"Sendak knows about Pidge and sent four sentries after him." He caught himself before he said to her. "He got away from them, but one sentry is still in the generator room. I have to track him down again. I don't like him taking on these sentries by himself."

He stopped talking as he heard boots striking the floor. "I've to get out of here. Someone's coming."

Adam ran down the hall and found an alcove to hide in. He fought to control his breathing as his mind raced. He was a pilot, not a foot soldier, but things had to change and quickly for him to adjust to his new role.

He stuck his head out, seeing the other Galra that came from the bridge. Adam closed his eyelids as he ducked back into the alcove.

He opened his eyelids and then crept down the hall, past the generator room to the turbine room. Adam crept back down the hallway and peeked into the generator room. His eyes caught movement along the wall. It was Pidge. What she was doing, he didn't know, but he grinned when the Galra soldier let out a scream of pain and dropped to the ground.

Adam walked forward as the Galra soldier stared at Pidge. "You're the one causing all this trouble? A child?"

"I'm not a child. I'm a Paladin of Voltron."

The Galra laughed as he rose to his full height and drew his sword. "Let me tell you something, child. I'm a soldier of the Galra Empire. Nothing stops me but triumph or death." He charged at Pidge and slashed his sword at her.

Pidge managed to jump backward and dived out of the way. Adam aimed at the Galra and squeezed off a shot but missed.

Pidge fired the Katar, but the Galra grabbed the cord and yanked, throwing the Green Paladin off balance. He turned, leaving his back exposed to Adam.

The Galra soldier was focused solely on Pidge. "Nowhere left to run. Nowhere left to hide." He raised his sword.

Adam pressed the trigger, and the energy blast from his rifle went through the Galra's back and out his chest.

Pidge used the Katar again and tangled his feet in the cord and yanked, sending the enemy down into the turbine chamber.

Adam ran forward, "Pidge, are you okay?"

Pidge nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine."

They both turned as they heard Sendak's voice. "Haxus, report in."

Pidge stepped over to the control panel. "Haxus is gone, and you're next!"
"You've slowed me down, but this ship mine! You will turn yourself over to me immediately!"

She yelled back, "Never!"

Adam's face paled as Sendak's voice grew smooth. He knew from experience that this wouldn't be good. "Well, then, maybe your leader can convince you!"

Both Pidge and Adam flinched as they heard Shiro's voice. "What do you want?"

"Your friend wanted to hear from you."

Pidge replied, "Shiro?"

"Pidge? Pidge, don't listen to—"

Both Adam and Pidge heard the electrical buildup of a charge followed by Shiro's pained screams.

Pidge yelled, "No!"

Sendak spoke again in that smooth tone like he was holding all the cards. "You can make it stop. Turn yourself in. His suffering is in your hands."

Adam clamped his jaws together as he ground his teeth. "Turn that thing off." He turned away as a tear ran down his cheek.

Pidge turned it off. "What are we going to do?"

Adam removed his helmet as he brushed the tear away. "We're going to get our people," he said as he replaced the helmet.

Pidge nodded in agreement.

Pidge and Adam snuck up to the entrance to the bridge. Pidge peeked around the corner. "It's just Sendak. But Shiro isn't looking too good."

"Can you do that hologram trick again?"

Pidge grinned up at the older man. "With my eyes closed."

Adam grinned back as she created a hologram causing Sendak to chase after the fake Green Paladin.

Pidge and Adam ran onto the bridge. Adam dropped down next to Lance as Pidge knelt in front of the Black Paladin. "Shiro, wake up. It's Pidge."

Shiro's eyes opened as he muttered, "Pidge?"

The Green Paladin yelled as Sendak grabbed her with his giant weaponized hand, which was connected to his shoulder by a beam of purple energy. Sendak held her up in the air as his grip tightened. "You thought your little hologram trick would work with me?"

Keith and Allura appeared as Adam turned to face Sendak.
"Stand back!" Sendak ordered.

Adam felt something stir next to him and gasped when Lance straightened up enough to point his bayard now formed as his rifle at Sendak. He fired an energy blast at the Galra commander.

Sendak dropped Pidge.

Lance groaned and dropped his bayard from his grip.

Shiro got to his feet and charged Sendak, earning a punch from Sendak's weaponized fist.

Keith ran in and kicked at the Galra, knocking him down. He raised his sword, but Sendak blocked it with his weaponized hand.

Shifting position as he rose to his feet, Sendak grabbed Keith and threw him. Pidge ran up and severed the connection to the Galra's weaponized arm with her Katar.

Sendak yelled, "NO," as he rushed toward Pidge.

Allura ran to the control panel and pushed buttons on the holographic screen.

Adam gazed over at Shiro, "Hi, and low?"

Shiro nodded as he rose to his feet again. He rushed in low and struck Sendak's legs while Adam ran and shoved his shoulder into the Galra's chest.

Sendak stumbled off balance. Pidge struck again with her Katar sending an electrical charge through his body.

Keith struck at the Galra with his sword, which Sendak caught.

Allura yelled, "Keith, now!"

Keith kicked, knocking Sendak behind a particle barrier that grew up around him and his crystal.

Pidge cut through the cuffs on Shiro's wrists while Keith knelt next to Lance. "Lance, are you okay?" the Red Paladin asked.

Lance smiled at Keith, but his eyes were pained as he replied. "We did it. We are a good team."

Keith smiled back. "Yes, we are."

Adam gazed at the others. "We need to get Lance, Shiro, and Pidge to the infirmary."

Pidge glared at Adam. "I'm fine. I've only got a few bruises."

"Humor me, Pidge. I want to be satisfied with that."

Keith stood and helped Lance to his feet. He grabbed the Blue Paladin's arm and slung it over his shoulder. Pidge stepped over to the other side to offer moral support.

Shiro stood and stared at Adam and shook his head. "I'm fine," he replied and then swayed.
"Bullshit," Adam replied as he stepped over to Shiro and grabbed Shiro's human arm draping it over his shoulder. "You're nearly dead on you're feet. You think I don't know you were tortured." Adam poked him in the chest with his forefinger. "You need to be treated for your wounds, and you need to rest."

"You're bossy," Shiro replied as he smirked at him.

"Someone has to," Adam replied as they began to make their way off the bridge of the Castle.

As they entered the infirmary, Allura stopped as she heard a voice through her earrings. "Hailing the Castle of Lions."

"Coran!" she called out. "Did you get a crystal?"

"Yes, we have one, but why is the Castle readout glowing with purple energy?"

"I'll explain that later. Right now, I need you and Hunk to escort Sendak to the brig and then replace his Galra crystal with the Balmeran crystal. I don't want to risk putting anyone in a cryopod with the energy from that Galra crystal doing who knows what to the Castle."

"What about Lance," Hunk asked. "How is he?"

A small smile graced Allura's lips. "He's awake, but in a lot of pain though he doesn't want to acknowledge it. How long before you get here, Coran?"

"Well, be there in about a Varga."

"Good, we'll be waiting," Allura replied.

Adam led Shiro over to a wall. He pressed a place on the wall, and a bed came sliding out of the wall. "Sit," Adam said as helped Shiro up on the bed. He turned away from Shiro and walked over to another wall and repeated the process, and turned to Keith. "Help Lance on this bed. I'm going to get the scanner."

He stepped over to a cabinet off to the side of the room and opened it, pulling out the small handheld device. "I'd better scan Pidge first," he said.

The Green Paladin gazed up at him. "Why?"

"Hunk and Coran might need your help with the Balmera Crystal."

"Point taken," Pidge replied.

Adam ran the scanner over Pidge and checked the readings. "Your assessment of your injuries is correct," Adam replied as he sighed. "Nothing but a few bruises."

He moved over to Lance next and ran the scanner over the Blue Paladin. He frowned at the readings. "You're going to need to go into a pod."

Adam walked over to Shiro and ran the scanner over the Black Paladin. "You need some rest. So you can lay down right there and get some."

Shiro shook his head, "I can't. There's a lot we still have to do. Sendak needs to be locked up."

Adam shook his head. "You won't get medical clearance from me until you do."
Allura stepped up next to Adam. "I'm sorry, Shiro, I agree with Adam. You can barely stand."

"So you're ganging up on me too?" His dark gray eyes gazed at the princess.

"Yes, I am."

Shiro let out a sigh. "Fine," he said as he lay back on the bed.

As Allura walked away, Adam lowered his voice. "I know you're more injured than what you're telling. I'll take care of you after Lance is in a pod."

Shiro closed his eyelids as he let out another sigh. "Thank you for that."

Sendak was taken to the Brig, and Pidge took a piece of the Galra crystal to the Green Lion's hangar where she had her lab set up. She wanted to study it and try to find a way to check for Galra energy signals and to try to find a weakness that she could exploit for the good of the universe.

She helped Hunk and Coran get the new crystal installed, and once the Castle was powered up, it was time to take care of Lance.

Coran led Adam over to another draw in the cabinet. "I'm sorry I didn't get a chance to show you these before. But they're cryosuits. They'll monitor all of Lance's vitals." He pulled one out, passing it over to Adam. "Just like the flight suits that go on under the armor, they'll adjust to the size of the person wearing it."

"Thanks, Coran," Adam replied. He walked over to Lance and got him out of the armor and flight suit and then got him into the suit. "Let's get you into this pod," Adam said. He helped his cousin into the cryopod and got it set according to Coran's instructions.

Allura and the other paladins entered the room to find Lance in the pod. "He should be fully healed in a day," she said as she examined the settings.

Shiro joined them. "Pidge, we can't thank you enough for all you did. I can't help but feel that you were meant to be a part of our team, but I understand if you want to leave."

Pidge made her decision. "Dad used to tell me how close he was with his crew members. They were like family. Now I understand what he was talking about. I'm staying with you guys. Let's stop Zarkon for all of our families."

Keith smiled back at the Green Paladin. "Good to have you back on the team."

Adam couldn't help the smile. "Pidge is pretty smart. But I still have one more patient to attend to." He waved his hands to the others. "Everyone, but Shiro needs to leave."

Allura turned as she stared at Adam, her eyes growing huge. "Is there anything seriously wrong?"

Adam shook his head as he chuckled. "No, just that he likes his privacy."

"Then we should leave," Allura smiled as she led the others out of the infirmary.

"Now that we're alone, you can strip down to the waist," Adam said as he stared pointedly at the Black Paladin.
Shiro slowly complied as he frowned. Adam was going to see more than bruises. He'd see the other scars that marked his body. He pulled off the outer armor, followed by the flight suit.

Adam gasped as he gazed at the scars of gashes, and several that could only have been under a scalpel. He stared at the metal port where the Galra arm was attached to his shoulder. "I'm sorry, Takashi. I wish you hadn't gone through all this."

Shiro let out a snort. "I wish I hadn't either." He shrugged as he gazed down at the floor. "I'll live." He looked up into Adam's eyes. "Now, you know how broken I am."

Adam shook his head as he picked up a bottle and began to apply the contents to the bruises and burns on Shiro's upper body. "You're not broken. You are a survivor." Adam swallowed hard. "I-I was curious about your disease. So, while you were asleep earlier, I showed the results to Coran. He thinks that the Galra cured you of the disease."

"That's interesting. I have to wonder why they even wasted their time to save my life," Shiro replied.

Adam shrugged. He sat the bottle down after he finished applying the liquid. He reached down and grasped Shiro's human hand in his. "Takashi," he took the next step and reached up, grabbing the back of Shiro's head and pressed his lips to Shiro's.

The Black Paladin stared back in shock, but then his eyes closed as he reciprocated the kiss. As they parted, Shiro gazed into Adam's brown eyes. "I missed you."

A crooked smile pulled at Adam's lips. "I missed you, too. Now you need to get dressed and go to your room and get some real sleep. Doctor's orders."

Shiro laughed. "You're still bossing me around."

"Just go and do what I said," Adam replied as he smiled back at Shiro.
Leaving Arus

Chapter Summary

The Voltron team leaves Arus only to learn a hard lesson that you can't trust everyone who comes along.

The Paladins, along with Allura and Adam, stared at Lance through the cryopod door. Hunk stared at his friend. "I can't tell if he looks healthy or not."

Pidge said to no one in particular. "I think he's breathing weird."

Keith growled as he grew tired of waiting. He raised his arm with his index finger, poised to end the cryopods healing sequence. "Oh, come on." He growled out a second time as he tried to press the button.

Allura grabbed his wrist. "Not yet!" she said as she pulled his arm away. "A few more ticks."

Keith glared at her as he crossed his arms over his chest. "How much better do you think he's gonna get in a few more ticks?"

Pidge glanced up at Allura before Adam could say anything to Keith about his behavior. "And what is a tick?" the Green Paladin asked.

Allura replied, "You know, a time slice?"

Shiro scratched at his scalp as he asked, "Like a second?"

Allura turned to face Shiro. "What is a second?"

Pidge pulled out his cellphone and turned it into a stopwatch and held it up so Allura could see the seconds on it as they counted. "Like this."

Allura frowned. "I'm not sure. I think ticks are bigger." She turned her gaze over to her royal advisor. "Coran, do you have a ticker?"

Coran turned to face her and the Paladins, "Right here, Princess." He held it as Pidge, Allura, and Hunk walked over to him.

Hunk stared at it. "I think ticks are a little slower."

Pidge replied, "I can't tell. We have to start at the same time."

Adam placed his head in his hand as he leaned forward and chuckled softly as he muttered to himself, "I'm surrounded by dorks."

Coran gazed at Pidge, "Okay. Ready, go!"

Hunk replied as he watched the ticks and seconds flashed on the cell phone and the ticker, "Yes, I think we're winning."
Keith gazed at the others as he shook his head. "Winning what? The intergalactic time-measuring competition?" But even he found himself drawn in by the little contest between which was faster ticks or seconds.

Lance appeared behind everyone. "You guys having a clock party?"

Hunk frowned, "Ah Lance, you ruined it." He realized what he said as his eyes grew, and he turned so fast Lance didn't have the chance to jump backward. Hunk grabbed the Blue Paladin into a bear hug and squeezed tightly. "Hey, Lance!" the Yellow Paladin yelled out.

As he released Lance, the other teen threw an arm over Hunk's shoulder as he leaned on his friend for support. "What happened?" he asked.

Allura moved over to Lance's other side and placed her hand lightly on his back. "We can tell you all about it while you get something to eat. Are you able to walk?"

Lance craned his head around to gaze up at her. "Talking? Eating? Are you asking me out on a date?"

Adam couldn't hold back his mirth as he laughed loudly. "He's back to normal."

Allura sighed as she crossed her arms over her body.

Adam walked over to stand next to Lance. "I think you want to change clothes."

Lance gazed down at himself as he let out a little squeak. His cheeks flushed darkly. "You're right. I look like I'm wearing some crazy space long johns." He scratched at his arm. "Feels like it, too."

Lance sat at the head of the dining room table, fully dressed while he ate some of the food goo. Everyone else explained what happened while he was out of commission. He turned the spoon toward the largest of the mice, Platt, who happily ate out of his spoon.

Allura spoke. "He'd be Sendak's prisoner right now if not for Pidge."

Pidge gazed at the Blue Paladin. "Well, you wouldn't have survived the explosion if Hunk and Coran hadn't gotten a new crystal."

Lance gazed around at the others. "Wow. Thanks, everyone." He turned his gaze to Keith. "Sounds like the mice did more than you thought."

Keith glared back at Lance. "I punched Sendak!"

Lance gazed back at the Red Paladin. "Yeah, apparently after I emerged from a coma and shot Sendak's arm off."

Adam gazed over at Shiro, who leaned up against the chair that the Blue Paladin sat in. "Aren't you going to tell him that it was Pidge who severed the connection?"

Shiro shook his head but whispered back. "That's up to Pidge."

Keith's eyes grew for a second as he shot back at Lance. "We had a bonding moment. I cradled you in my arms!"
"Nope. Don't remember, didn't happen." Although a thought occurred to Lance as he turned his attention back to Allura. "So, what happened to Sendak?"

Allura somehow knew this question was coming. "We had him in the brig, but he's too dangerous to keep him there. So, he's now frozen in a cryopod here in the Castle."

Lance asked, "Are you sure that's a good idea?"

Allura shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know if it is. But we might be able to get some information about Zarkon from him."

Lance frowned but let the subject drop. "So, what's the plan now?"

Hunk gazed down at Lance. "We have to get back to the Balmera and save Shay and her people."

Lance gazed up at Hunk as a slight smirk pulled at the corner of his mouth. "Wow! You are hung up on this lady!"

Hunk shook his head. "No, it's not like that. 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 know what freedom is. It's up to us to set this right. This is what being a paladin is all about. It's time to man up."

Shiro straightened up as he focused his gaze on everyone around him. He couldn't think of a better way of growing the Voltron alliance except by freeing the Balmerans from the Galra. "Then let's get moving. It's time to defend the universe," he said as he turned and started to walk out of the room.

Pidge stood up from the chair he was sitting in and turned to face the others. "Wait, I have something to say first. I need to come clean. And I'm afraid this may change the way you all think about me. Just so there are no secrets between us anymore, I can't man up. I'm a girl." She paused as she closed her eyelids for a quick minute and licked her lips before continuing. She opened her eyelids again and hoped for the best. "I mean, I don't have to be a man to man up. I have to be tough. But what I'm saying—"

Lance's eyes grew large as he rose from his hair and planted his hands on the table to keep himself from falling over from surprise. "What? Are you a girl? How?"

Allura ignored Lance's outburst as she smiled gently at Pidge. "I've known for some time, but I'm glad you've shared it with everyone."

Hunk grinned. "Yeah, I figured."

Keith gazed at her. A knowing smirk pulled at the side of his mouth. "Oh, yeah, me too."

Coran gazed at her as he leaned forward. "Wait, we were supposed to think you were a boy?"

Adam smiled at her. "I knew when you first came to the Garrison. I just never figured out how Iverson didn't catch on."

Shiro smiled. "Pidge, owning who you are is going to make you a better paladin."

Pidge sighed. "It's good to get off my chest. Now, let's launch this Castle-ship."

"Wait. What?" Lance asked as he shook his head. "Pidge is a girl, and the Castle is a ship? How
long have I been out?"

Adam leaned over to his cousin and draped an arm over his shoulder. "You'll be alright. But you know there are times where I wonder how in the heck you got to be so clueless."

Lance pushed Adam off him. "Oh, shut up."

The Paladins, Allura, and Adam stepped onto the bridge. Allura in her flight suit and the Paladins and Adam in their armor. Allura stood in her place under the Baleran crystal, which began to glow a bright blue onto the Princess. Holographic screens popped up around her as sections of the floor opened, and seats rose from the floor. Each one was color-coded as to whose seat was whose. Another rose off to one side, color-coded for Adam.

Two pillars rose on either side of Allura, stopping about waist high. She placed her hands on top of the pillars. "Activate interlocks."

Coran replied from his position at the helm at the front of the bridge. He stared at his holographic screen. "Dynotherms connected."

Allura nodded as the power began to grow throughout the Castle's engines. "Mega-thrusters go."

Coran scanned his screens and panel as he announced from his position. "We are ready to depart Planet Arus on your mark, Princess."

Adam whispered to himself as he licked his lips and grabbed at the sides of his chair. "I hope this is an easier ride than the one we had getting here."

Allura said for everyone to hear, "Firing main engines for launch."

The Castle's engines grew in power as it rose from the plateau where it had sat for ten thousand years. The ground beneath it crumbled, and rocks fell into the sea as the Castle of Lions took to the sky and left Arus behind.

As the Castle flew through space, the Paladins and Adam stood off to one side as Hunk paced. "So, when we get there, what do you think? Do we roll up and start blasting? Or do we land and have some public address system, like, 'Attention, Galras, this is Voltron. Turn yourselves in?'" He looked around at everyone else's faces, but his shoulders sagged as he deflated. "No. Blasting, right?"

Keith leaned up against a side wall and held out his hands to try to calm the Yellow Paladin down a little. "Hunk calm down. And, yes, blasting." He crossed his arms over his chest.

Shiro smirked over at Keith. "It's our first big rescue mission. He's excited."

Pidge gazed at Hunk as a wicked gleam twinkled in her eye. "Excited to see his new girlfriend," she said as she stressed girlfriend.

Hunk gasped and glared back at the Green Paladin. "She's not my girlfriend!" he raised his voice.
"She's just a rock that I met, and I admire very much."

Alarms began blaring.

Shiro voiced what everyone else wondered before the younger paladins could panic. "What is it? Are we being attacked?"

Coran shook his head. "No, it seems to be a distress beacon."

Allura gazed at her holographic screen. "It's coming from a nearby moon. A ship has lost power."

Pidge held her chin in her hand. "I wonder who it is."

Hunk was adamant as he placed his hands on his hips. "Whoever it is will have to wait. Shay has the priority. We can check back on them when we're done."

Allura turned her gaze toward Hunk and Pidge. "The Paladin Code states that we must help everyone in need."

Lance joined Pidge and Hunk and couldn't contain his excitement. "Wow! This is so cool. It's like we're space cops on space patrol."

Adam rolled his eyes. Shiro leaned over, "Any ideas on how to stop that?"

Adam shrugged his shoulders as he shook his head. "He's the youngest of my cousin's kids. So he's spoiled rotten."

Shiro frowned.

Lance if he'd heard what the pair had said it didn't show. "Coran, do we have a siren we can turn on?"

Coran craned his head around to gaze at Lance from where he stood at the helm. "Uh, no, but we could record you making a siren noise and broadcast that to them." As he turned his attention back to his controls and monitors, he muttered to himself, "Whatever a siren is."

"Perfect!" Lance replied as he cleared his throat and began to imitate a siren.

Shiro stepped up and placed his hand over Lance's mouth. "No, not doing that."

Adam reached with his hand out and slapped, connecting with the back of Lance's head.

Lance winced and shoved Shiro's hand away from his mouth. "Hey!" he turned, facing Adam as he rubbed the back of his head. "What are you trying to do? Give me brain damage?"

Keith snorted. "Hard to do that."

"Shut up, Mullet!" Lance growled as he continued to rub the back of his head.

The Castle began to sit down on the moon as Allura spoke to inform the crew of the stranded ship on the surface of the small moon of their intentions. "Attention, damaged craft, this is Princess Allura. We are coming to assist you."
As the Castle touched down on the moon, Allura gazed at Coran. "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."

"Yes, Princess."

Allura, Adam, and the Paladins rode down to the moon's surface in the Castle's transport pod. As it touched down, the doors opened, and a purple-skinned alien with white hair turned to face them. "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."

Keith asked as he and the others from the Castle of Lions approached the alien, "So, you guys are fighting the Galra?"

The alien smirked at the Red Paladin. "Well, I don't think Zarkon is exactly quaking in his boots at the three of us, but we do what we can. I'm Rolo, this is Nyma," he indicated with his thumb toward the tannish skinned alien. "And our cyber-unit, Beezer."

Nyma gazed at everyone with her purple eyes, "Hi."

Lance gazed at her as Adam frowned. He looked to Adam like Loverboy Lance was going to strike again.

Pidge was instantly all over Beezer inspecting the cyber-unit. "Cool robot."

Lance stood next to Nyma. "Hi! Name's Lance."

Shiro ignored the Blue and Green Paladins as he focused on Rolo. "Was your ship damaged in a fight?"

Rolo nodded. "Yeah, we've been through it with the Galra. Parts are hard to come by. Luckily, we were able to limp to this moon about a week ago. If you didn't pick up our distress signal, I—"

Allura jumped into the conversation. "We're happy to help. 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."

Adam crossed his arms over his chest. He stood next to Hunk, but he couldn't say where this uneasy feeling was coming from. Something didn't seem right. He spoke just loud enough for both Shiro and Hunk to hear. "I don't like it. My spidey sense is tingling."

Hunk turned his head to gaze at Adam. He nodded in agreement. "Mine too."

Rolo frowned as he turned his head to gaze at Lance flirting with Nyma and Pidge playing with Beezer. "Okay." He deadpanned. He frowned.

Shiro spoke to no one in particular. "I don't think they've heard of us."

Keith frowned. "It has been ten thousand years."

Lance gazed over at Rolo. "Voltron? Five robot lions that combine into this big robot… guy?"

Rolo gazed back at Lance, but Adam frowned. Adam expected to see the confusion on Rolo's face, but instead, he saw a smile. That wasn't the expression Adam had expected. A tingle ran up his
spine again. Something was off.

Hunk and Adam shared a gaze at each other. Hunk's eyes narrowed as he gazed at Rolo. "Why don't we get to work on your ship? I'm sure we all have places to be."

Rolo smiled back. "Sure." He led Hunk over to the ship and opened the engine compartment. "Pretty much our whole flaxum assembly is shot. I don't know what kind of extra parts you carry in this rig of yours. I've never seen anything like it."

Allura smiled in return, exercising her diplomatic experience as she spoke. "I'm sure we can get you back up and running. Give Hunk a list of what you need. Coran can show you where to find it."

As Allura spoke, Lance was showing off his muscles and pointing finger guns at Nyma. Shiro reached out and shoved Lance, who turned around and glared at the Black Paladin.

Adam made his way over to Lance and shoved his elbow into the Blue Paladin's side. "If he hadn't done it, I would have. Now get your head out of your ass and back into the game."

"What in the hell is your problem?" Lance turned and glared at his cousin.

"What's my problem? You're making an ass out of yourself. You need to stop it and learn how to behave."

Lance turned away from Adam for a quick second before he turned back, and his eyes blazed. "I'm fine. Maybe you should learn to ease up. Maybe," Lance turned away before continuing with his thought as he turned back to face his cousin, "You should figure out how you feel about your ex before you continue trying to plant your moral foot on my neck."

Adam flinched as if he'd been struck. His eyes flashed, but he did what he could to calm his temper but still glared back at Lance. "Any more outbursts out of you, and we'll have another session on the training deck."

Lance groaned. "Fine. I'll calm down, but I happen to like Nyma. She's pretty."

Adam held up a finger. "I wish for once you'd think before you shoot off your mouth." He frowned before he reached up and rubbed the side of his head. "She might be pretty, but remember wars have been fought over pretty women before," Adam replied.

Lance groaned. "Fine," he groused as he threw his hands up in the air.

"One more thing, Lance," Adam leaned in close to his cousin. "What happened or happens between Takashi and me is our business. Nobody else's. Got it?"

"Yeah, yeah. I got it. Sheesh."

Rolo smiled at Hunk. "We'll go with you. Don't want you to have to carry all that by yourself. Come on, guys."

Hunk stood in his way as Rolo started walking toward the Castle. He held out his hand, stopping the purple alien. "Uh, I don't think so. You can wait out here."

Allura stared at the Yellow Paladin. "Hunk, don't be rude."

Lance frowned at his friend. "Yeah, mind your manners. There are ladies present."
Shiro sighed.

Adam rolled his eyes as he said, "Kettle… black."

Hunk stood his ground as an immovable wall. "Oh. I'm sorry, but does anyone remember the last time we let our defenses down? Someone kind of set off a bomb. Remember, Lance? You were almost killed."

Lance gazed down at his feet. "Oh yeah."

Shiro took a step forward, putting himself between Lance and Nyma. "Hunk's right. Sorry, but we have to be cautious."

Rolo nodded. "Hey, I don't take it personally. That's how it is out here."

Beezer began to bounce up and down as it printed out a list of parts.

Rolo tore the list off when the printing stopped and passed it over to Hunk. "You've got to look out for your own. You're doing a good job, big man."

Hunk took the list. "Yeah, thanks." Hunk turned and headed for the Castle.

Rolo lit a fire and sat on a crate. Shiro, Allura, Keith, and Adam leaned up against some boxes on the opposite side of the fire as they listened to Rolo tell a bit of his story. "The Galra destroyed my planet, and I was taken captive. I managed to escape, but not before I lost something." He raised his pant leg and knocked on the leg with his fist producing a metal sound.

Shiro bent his prosthetic arm. "I know exactly how that feels," he replied as he balled up the hand into a fist.

Hunk appeared pulling a large crate full of parts. "Well, I hope there are some parts in here that'll fit." He stopped and stared over at the others. When no one moved, he said, "You know to get your ship moving?"

Rolo turned and waved at Hunk, but he didn't make a move to inspect the contents. "Great! Thanks."

Allura chose that moment to speak. "So what can you tell us about Zarkon's forces? Where are they concentrated?"

Rolo frowned. "Well, his command ship sits right in the center of the Empire. He 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."

Keith replied, "Oh, we've met." Not adding that Sendak was being held in the Castle.

Shiro asked. "How far are we from the center?"

Rolo replied. "We're way out on the fringes."

Hunk called out, "Sorry to interrupt, but I think you guys are keeping Rolo from working. It's just that we're in a hurry. A hero named Shay saved my life, and I swore I would return to do the same
for her and her people. You understand."

Rolo stood and frowned slightly before he turned to Hunk. "Sure. Sorry."

Shiro waved Hunk over as Rolo moved over to the crate. "Hunk," Shiro spoke quietly. "We're going to get going soon, but I think Rolo might have some information that could be helpful to us."

"Shiro, I can't explain it, but I don't trust this guy a far as I can throw him. I think we ought to leave him with the parts and say, 'Adios.'"

Rolo turned toward Hunk and Shiro. "Hey, bud! Sorry, but do you think you could hunt down a longer length of thermal pipe?"

Hunk groaned. "On the way."

Shiro nodded to himself as he took steps to get closer to Rolo. He needed to try to get more information out of the purple alien. "So, are there more freedom fighters? Any organized resistance against the Galra."

"Only folks who haven't been colonized yet, or the lucky few like us, who managed to escape somehow."

Keith's muscles tightened as he gazed directly into Rolo's eyes. "We're going to change all that."

Rolo glanced away from Keith. "That's good to hear, but I've got to warn you, it's pretty bad out there. You know what you're up against."

Nyma sat on top of a crate as Lance leaned against it. Adam stood close enough to overhear what the pair talked about. "I mean, there are only five of us in the entire universe, so I guess you could say its kind of a big deal."

Nyma gazed back at the Blue Paladin. She rubbed her chin as she tilted her head to the side and pursed her lips. She drew in a breath. "I don't understand. Are the lions' ships? Are they like flying statues that you ride on?"

Lance shook his head as he did his best to explain. "No, no, no. They're magic, but also super scientific and advanced. They fly crazy fast and have all these incredible weapons. The entire Castle is insane. I wish you could see it."

Nyma's shoulders fell slightly as she smiled a weak yet pensive smile. "Yes, it's too bad we're not allowed inside. I would love a tour from one of the knights. But I guess the big one is in charge, huh? You have to obey his orders?"

"Who Hunk?" Lance scoffed and then chuckled. "I don't have to listen to him!" he said as he grabbed Nyma's hand, and the pair ran toward the Castle.

Adam shook his head, and his mouth turned down as he gripped the bridge of his nose. He whispered to himself. "Time for you to learn that you can't trust a pretty face."
Hunk's attention was caught by the Blue Lion flying off. "Aw, Lance."

Rolo clapped a hand on Hunk's shoulder. "Let them have their fun. Thanks to you, this thing is just about ready to fly. So we'll be on our way soon."

Rolo came out from under his ship suddenly. "I think this thing is just about ready for a test flight. Beezer, come co-pilot for me. Be back in a tick."

As the ship blushed off, Adam frowned as he stood next to Shiro. "I swear I don't like this one bit. And Lance isn't back yet."

Shiro gazed up at Adam. "You've made that abundantly clear about not liking this situation. You and Hunk both. And I must admit I'm getting worried about Lance."

Adam sat down next to Shiro. He crossed his arms over his chest as he sighed. "I am too."

Pidge looked around at the others. "How many ticks have they been gone?"

Allura sighed but couldn't hide the worry from her voice. "I don't know. I hope they didn't break down again."

Hunk frowned and rubbed at the back of his neck. "Something ain't right."

Shiro gasped as he gazed down at the helmet that sat next to him as Lance's voice came through the helmet's communicator. "Hello? Little help?"

Shiro replied as he picked up the helmet and pulled it onto his head. The others quickly followed to hear what was going on. "Lance? Lance! Are you all alright? What's going on?"

"Well, I'm kind of chained to a..." his voice deflated as he continued to speak, "tree."

Hunk crossed his arms over his chest. "I knew it!"

Lance continued, "And I think Nyma and Rolo just stole the Blue Lion."

Hunk glared at the others as he shouted again. "I knew it!"

Shiro ignored Hunk, focusing on the problem of how to get the Blue Lion back. "Where are they?"

"Uh, space?" Lance's voice rose to a higher pitch.

Hunk glared again. "I never trusted those guys right from the beginning."

Adam crossed his arms over his chest. "Right there with you, Hunk. They kept giving off a vibe that I didn't like. And I warned you about Nyma Lance, but you didn't listen to me at all."

"I'm sorry, okay?" Lance grumbled. "I should have listened. Happy now?"

"No, I'm not," Adam replied as he closed his eyes for a quick second. "Are you okay?"
"Yeah, but someone needs to get Blue. My girl isn't happy."

"We're gonna get her back, Lance," Shiro replied.

Adam stood on the ground and watched as the lions flew out of the Castle. He had to admit that it was a sight he would have never seen on Earth. He whispered to himself, "Get the Blue Lion back."

Allura stepped up to him. "Adam, you said you were a pilot back on Earth. Do you think you might be able to fly one of the Altean pods?"

"I just need to take a look at the controls."

Allura gave a quick nod. "Good, if you can then you can pick up Lance." She frowned at the Blue Paladin's name.

"I'm not happy about this situation either, Princess."

Adam took a quick look at the controls of the pod. "Oh, this will be easier than flying the fighters at the Garrison." He hopped into the pod and flew it out of the hangar. He couldn't wipe the smile that plastered itself on his face.

He turned on the locator beacon and tracked down Lance quickly. He set the pod down by the Blue Paladin and hopped out of the cockpit. He shook his head at the sight of his cousin lying on the ground, handcuffed to the tree.

Lance groaned as he looked up to get a view of who was sent to free him. "Are you here to gloat?"

Adam shook his head. "No, I'm not. I won't even tell you I told you so, but I should."

Lance sighed. "I think you just did."

Adam knelt, examining the cuffs. He pulled out his belt knife and sliced through the cuffs disrupting the energy, freeing Lance.

Lance stood but bent over, picking up his helmet.

Adam motioned with his head over to the pod. "Let's go. Allura wants to rendezvous with the Paladins. I wouldn't be surprised if she doesn't give you a piece of her mind over this incident. You'll be lucky if she doesn't take a strip of your hide too."

Lance frowned. "I'll apologize."

Adam threw his arm over Lance's shoulder. "Yeah, that I will agree with. You should have listened." He shook the teen gently. "But now you know not to be so trusting. I think Allura just learned a lesson too."
Lance gazed up at Adam and couldn't stop the chuckle. "Yeah, we were all taken in by them."

Adam smacked the Blue Paladin on the shoulder. "That's where you're wrong. Hunk and I weren't taken in by them. You can't be so trusting. Not everyone is nice, like Coran and Allura."

Allura, the Paladins, and Adam arranged themselves around the bounty hunters.

Keith gazed at the two aliens and their cyber-unit. "Since your ship doesn't work now, you'll have to wait here for a rescue."

Rolo gazed at the others. "Thanks for sparing our lives."

Hunk turned to face the others. "Now that these guys are dealt with, let's get to the Balmera and save Shay and her family."

Rolo stared down at the ground as his shoulders sagged. "You may not believe this, but I hope you do stop Zarkon. It's a lifetime of fighting the Galra that led me where I am today."

"I hope you've learned a lesson," Allura glared at the three bounty hunters.

The Altean princess and the others from turned and walked away, leaving the three so-called freedom fighters where they sat. They boarded the Castle of Lions which took off for the Balmera.
Freeing The Balmera

Chapter Summary

The Paladins finally arrive at the Balmera only to find more problems than just the Galra to deal with. They also have to fight a Robeast out of a nightmare.

As the Castle of Lions approached the Balmera, Allura decided now was the time to give the Paladins a rundown of the task at hand. "We'll be arriving at Balmera soon. Liberating the Balmerans from Zarkon's grasp will not be easy."

Lance gazed at her. "So, what's the plan? We go in there and —" he turned his fingers into laser guns and then threw his arms around as if he was shooting, "Pow, pow, pow! And free the prisoners?"

Keith walked up and slid his eyes over at Lance as if questioning the Blue Paladins sanity. "What was that noise?"

Lance placed a hand on his hip as he smirked at Keith. "Laser guns."

Hunk stepped up. "No, Lance, I think you mean," the Yellow Paladin imitated a laser cannon firing as his pows were louder. Which he followed by a more emphatic, "Pow!"

Pidge held her hands together like a smaller gun. "Technically, they're more like pa-choo, pa-choo, pa-choo!"

Shiro gazed over at the other Paladins. "Okay, enough with the bad sound effects. Besides, it's more like—" Shiro dropped to one knee as he gave his imitation. "Blam, blam, blam."

Adam flashed a grin at Shiro as he dropped to one knee next to the Black Paladin. "Not even close. It's bang, bang, bang."

Keith stared at Shiro and Adam as if they'd lost their minds. "What?"

Pidge gazed at the pair. "You're crazy."

Lance chuckled, then stared at both of the older men. "No way."

Hunk rolled his eyes, sighed, and said, "Wrong."

Allura gripped her hands into fists at her sides. "Paladins, focus."

Hunk shrugged quickly. "I'm focused, I've been focused, even if some of us are acting like their shoe size instead of their age." He smirked over at Shiro and Adam. He then turned serious. "We can't just shoot at the Galra. This Balmera, its, like alive. From what we've seen, it doesn't look very good."

Coran gazed at the screen showing Balmera. His voice was both solemn and sad at the same time. "Yes, it's an atrocity what the Galra have been doing to the magnificent beast. Stealing its crystals, its very life force, without even performing the energy rejuvenation ceremonies to heal it."
Hunk's kind eyes turned hard. "After seeing Shay's people enslaved. It made me realize how bad Zarkon is. And we're the only ones who can stop him."

Shiro gazed at the image of the Balmera. "Okay, so we can't go into the tunnels guns blazing. Plan B. We figure out how to draw the Galra up to the surface and battle them out there."

Hunk held his fists in front of him like a boxer. "Hey, I know. 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."

Keith folded his arms over his chest as he saw a bit of a flaw in the plan. "But, how do we know how many are left in the tunnels."

Allura replied. "We can track the Galra and the Balmerans by using Biothermal Life Indicator Point Technology."

Pidge gazed at the holographic representation of one of the sensors. "Oh, BLIP tech!" When the bridge became deathly quiet, Pidge gazed up at Allura. "It's an acronym."

Allura replied, "One of you will need to fly around the Balmera and drop the BLIP sensors into the shafts on each side. Then we'll be able to see where the Galra and the Balmerans are. There are sensors built into your suits."

Pidge smiled. "I can do it. I just modified the Green Lion with the invisible maze's cloaking ability. I should be able to fly around unnoticed."

Coran brought up an image of a large structure. "That's their main power generator. If you take that down, it will severely weaken their defenses."

Allura nodded. "We'll stay in the clouds and give tactical support. With the Castle's defenses weakened from Sendak's crystal, we won't be of much help to you."

Shiro gazed back at the main viewing screen. "I'll take out the power generator. Keith, Lance, Hunk, you take out these mining rigs around the area."

Hunk roared excitedly as he threw his hands up in the air. "Yeah! Okay, let's do this! Let's go kick some alien butt!"

As the Paladins started to leave to change, Adam clapped a hand to Shiro's shoulder. "Be careful out there, Takashi."

Shiro placed his hand over Adam's as he gazed in the other man's brown eyes. "I will."

As Shiro left the bridge to get changed into his armor, Allura gazed over at Adam. "You and Shiro seem to have a history? Is that the right word?"

Adam nodded and smiled at the Princess. "Yes, we do have a history." He gazed down at the floor, wondering how much he should tell her, but he took a page from Pidge since she's the one who said the team shouldn't have any secrets. And if anything did happen, well, it would be good that more people knew.

"Back on Earth, Takeshi, that's Shiro's first name, and I was engaged to be married. We both worked and lived at the Garrison, not only teaching cadets Like Lance and the others, but we were also pilots. Shiro was chosen by Pidge's father to pilot the Kerberos mission. But Commander Iverson tried to tell him no because, at the time, Shiro had an illness that was going to kill him
eventually. But I loved him then, and I love him now.

"To make a long story shorter, Takashi came into the lounge and told me that the Admiral was threatening to take him off the mission. I agreed because to tell you the truth, Takashi is the best pilot the Garrison ever had. But when he said he was going on the mission, I got angry. I said some things that I regret, and I broke off our engagement. But I never stopped loving him even after the mission was deemed as lost, and the Garrison claimed pilot error on Takashi's part. I knew that was a lie. But Commander Iverson was hiding the truth.

"Then came the day over a year later when the escape pod crash-landed on Earth, and I found out he was alive." Adam stopped and sighed. "Now, I'm trying to rekindle our relationship. If he will truly take me back, and I'll do everything I can to make sure that happens. But I will take the small victories."

Allura smiled back at Adam as she placed her hand on his arm. "I understand now. Thank you for telling me."

"Don't worry. It won't affect the performance of our jobs, though."

Allura nodded as she removed her hand from his arm and turned her attention back to her screen to monitor the Paladin's progress.

Allura listened to the Paladins conversations. "We've located a hangar full of Galra fighters. They're just below the surface. Someone has to take those out before they can launch."

Adam could practically hear the frown in Shiro's voice. "They're luring us down, but we have no choice. Keith, Lance, you guys hit the hangar. Hunk, head down to the prison to rescue Shay and the other Balmerans. Pidge and I will track down the Galra soldiers."

Adam gazed at the screen. His eyes took in the colored dots showing where each of the Paladins was in real-time. "I like this. It's a shame we don't have something similar at the Garrison. We could have seen when the Kerberos mission ran into trouble with the Galra."

"What do you mean?" Allura asked, but she had an idea about what the Earthling had in mind.

Adam chuckled, "I'm just thinking out loud. But being able to see where everyone is located, based on the color of their lions, is what I mean. But I have another question that's bothering me. How can you communicate with the Paladins at times without opening a hailing frequency?"

Allura's eyes grew as she exclaimed, "Oh!" She giggled slightly at his question. "My earrings are also communication devices."

She turned her gaze up to the map again as Hunk spoke. "Allura, Coran, what's my location? All these tunnels look the same. I can't remember where the prison is."

Coran replied as he tugged on his mustache. "You're on the right path. Turn right at the next tunnel. Once you get there, you'll have to disable the energy doors. Be careful. It looks like it's
heavily guarded."

Allura crossed her arms over her chest. "I don't like this," she frowned. "Paladins, are you there? The Galra troops are moving down the tunnels. It looks like they're going down toward the center."

Adam frowned at Hunk's reply. "They must be headed to the core. That's where they're holding Shay."

Shiro replied. "They're drawing us into an ambush, but we don't have a choice if we want to save Shay. We have to follow. Lance, Keith, get to the core. I think we're going to need everyone together to get through this firefight."

Allura's eyes roved over the screen, taking in everyone's positions. She heard the Green Paladin gasp. Allura offered her take from seeing the difference in terrain in the tunnel where the smallest of the Paladins was at. "Pidge, you're in an area where the tunnels are too narrow for your speeder."

"Yeah. Proceeding on foot."

After a few minutes, Pidge's voice came over the bridge's speakers. The Green Paladin whispered, "There's someone down here."

Allura pressed a few buttons on her screen. "Looking into it." As she gazed at the scan and also where Pidge was located at the same time, she got her answer at the same moment the Green Paladin charge to confront what she must have thought were the enemy. "Pidge, no!" Allura cried out as her voice raised in volume. "Those are Balmerans!"

Adam let out the breath he was holding and turned his gaze toward the young Altean woman. "That was too close." He snapped around, and he took a half a step forward as the alarms began blaring and red emergency lights began to flash on the bridge.

"Raise the particle barrier!" Allura shouted to Coran. She turned to speak to Adam. "You'd better get to your station. Galra fighters are coming in. From where I don't know."

Adam hurried over to his seat. As he sat down, a screen popped up, showing the Castle's particle barrier and the swarm of Galra fighters that were circling the castle.

Lance's voice came over the speakers. "Allura, can you please come to get us?"

The rest of his transmission was garbled static as the Galra fighters began to fire on the Castle.

Allura glared out at the fighters. "We're quite occupied at the moment." She grunted as the Castle was hit by a hard hit. "We're surrounded by Galra ships and taking heavy fire!"

Coran craned his head around, "Princess, our particle barrier won't last much longer!"

Allura growled as the Castle was rocked again by more blasts from the fighters. "Paladins, you need to get out of there as soon as you can."

Lance began to freak out. "This is it. We're going to die in here."

Adam let out a sigh. "Lance, stop it. You're not going to die!"

Shiro spoke to the Paladins. "Get it together, guys. Allura, we'll get there when we can."

Half the fighters attacking the Castle broke off from the leading group. Coran's body froze mid-movement as he stared at the screen. He took a deep breath, trying to regain control of himself.
"They're heading down into the tunnels. They're going after the lions!"

Allura pressed a button on her screen. "Paladins, the lion's are in danger! You must get them back to them immediately!"

Coran stared back at the screen. "Princess, something's locked onto us."

That something suddenly dropped out of hyperspace bearing down on the Castle. "Paladins, do you copy? There is a battle cruiser locked onto us. If it fires on us with its ion cannon, I don't know if we can survive."

Shiro's reply was of calm control. "Allura, stand by. We're on our way up."

Allura glared at the screens as what she saw chilled her to the bone. "No," she whispered. "Paladins, hurry. They're taking off with the lions!"

Coran's face reddened as the inevitable came to pass. "It's charging it's ion cannon."

Allura's eyes hardened. She knew what her father would have done in a situation like this, and she was determined to live up to her destiny whatever fate had in store for her. "Divert all shields to the bow."

The bright light flooded the bridge. Adam raised his hand to block the intensity of the light from blinding him. He wondered if Altean eyes were different as both Allura and Coran stared straight into the light.

Allura called out. "Paladins, I need you immediately! Five more ticks and we're finished!"

Adam's eyes grew as the light vanished only to see Voltron holding the Galra cruiser in place and up so that it's energy beam now shot harmlessly into space.

Coran turned, "Princess, this is our chance."

Allura nodded as her lips pulled back in a feral grin. "Full power on the blasters!" she said as she pressed the buttons, locking the Castles blasters on the enemy ship. "Locked onto the target. Fire!"

A bright white beam of energy shot from the Castle as Voltron moved out of the way. It pierced the Galra cruiser like a sword. The ship blew up in a fiery ball of light, taking with it several remaining Galra fighters.

Voltron landed on the Balmera's surface as Keith said, "Mission accomplished."

Allura replied, "And just in the tick of time. The Castle's defenses are battered and will need to recharge fully."

The alarms began yelling, and the red emergency lights flashed on the bridge. Coran hollered to be heard over the noise. "There's an unknown object incoming! It's about to crash into the Balmera!"

Everyone stared as the dust began to clear. Adam recognized the giant coffin for what it was. "Zarkon, again," he muttered.

The Robeast that appeared from the coffin was something out of a horror movie. A row of teeth
poked through the skin of it's lower jaw. It reminded Adam of a mutated lizard that he'd once seen in a sideshow at a carnival in Platte City. His mouth fell open, and his upper lip curled back as it fired a beam of green energy out of its chest, striking Voltron's upraised shield. He grimaced, trying to look away from the monstrosity but unable to do so.

Voltron disbanded, but now the Robeast was firing beams of energy from the insides of its arms.

Adam found it hard to speak. He snapped out of his trance or daze when a beam of energy from the Castle struck the beast. He clenched his hands into fists.

The Castle was struck hard by a return blast from the beast on the surface of the Balmera. Adam heard Allura ask as if she were thinking out loud, "Where does Zarkon get these beasts from? And how do they keep finding us?"

Coran stared at the information from his screen. Princess, the particle barrier won't hold much longer." He craned his head around enough to gaze at the young woman from his peripheral vision. "It's still not at full strength after the blast from the Galra ship."

They listened as the Paladins tried to fight and devise a way to defeat the Robeast.

Keith suggested aiming for the laser eyes as they took to calling the circles where the energy beams were coming out of the monster.

Adam nodded. It was a sound tactic, but he couldn't see how the Paladins could get in close enough to take out even one of the laser eyes.

Allura spoke up. "We'll cover you from up here!" She suited words to action as beams of energy struck the beast from the Castle.

Coran tried to sound professional as he started relaying information about the Castle's status to Allura. "We've lost the spectrum generator! Going to reserve!" He continued his list of damages before turning as his eyes grew wide to the point where the whites were showing around the irises. His veins stood out on the exposed portion of his neck while his face flushed red. "Princess, the ship is being torn apart."

Allura called out to the Paladins below. "We're taking heavy fire up here! We're in trouble."

Shiro's voice came over the speakers. "Princess pull back! Get out of its range, now!"

"We will not abandon you!"

"You're not abandoning us. We're about to pull back anyway."

Hunk asked, "We are?"

Shiro replied to both Hunk, the other Paladins, and the Princess. "We can't hold out. We have to. Lions, to the mine shafts! It's the only place the monster can't get to us."

Pidge replied, "Roger, that!"

Shiro added, "Adam, stay safe."

"I will, and you do the same."

Allura nodded to Coran to set the course. "Heading into orbit!" The Castle rose into orbit around the Balmera.
Adam rose from his seat. He wanted to help, but at the moment, there was nothing he could do. He couldn't read Altean, and he wasn't an engineer like Coran and Hunk. Shiro's voice broke into his thoughts. "Coran, Allura, are you there?"

Allura replied, "Shiro, we're here."

"The Balmera—"

Coran knew it was rude to do so, but he cut Shiro off. "We already know. Our sensors are showing the life energy draining from the poor beast."

Pidge asked, "How is that possible?"

Coran replied, though his voice took on the tone of one of the instructors from the Garrison. "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."

Adam frowned. What he'd learned so far is this planet, could he call it a planet, was a living creature. What would happen to the people living on the beast?

Hunk asked, "So, what's gonna happen?"

He continued his explanation. "It's core will collapse, destabilizing the entire skeletal structure. Anything or anyone on the Balmera will be crushed into dust."

Shiro, whose face appeared on the screen, his eyes flashed in alarm. "How long before its core collapses?"

"Probably only a matter of a few of your hours. That mighty organism willingly gives itself to all, but not all return its kindness."

Allura replied, "Then our time is short. We'll evacuate the Balmerans. We need to get all the Balmerans to the Castle of Lions before the Balmera implodes."

Hunk leaned over Shiro's shoulder. "Okay, that sounds like a good plan. But how on earth do you plan on landing the Castle with that monster-thingy on the surface?"

Pidge's face popped up on the screen, joining Shiro and Hunk into a three-way conversation. "You'll need a distraction."

Shiro nodded in response to Pidge. "We'll engage the beast in our lions. With it distracted, Allura and Coran will land the Castle and load all of the Balmeras citizens."

Lance piped up, sticking his head into the feed close to Pidges. "Or 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?"

Coran frowned as he guesstimated. "Days? Weeks?"

Keith's face appeared as he replied to Lance, "We only have hours."

Adam gazed at Lance's image on the screen. "Lance," he groaned as he slapped his gloved hand up against the helmet of his armor he wore.

Lance gazed back at his cousin. "What?"
"Forget it," Adam replied.

Shiro nodded as he made the decision. "Look, we don't need to beat this thing. We need to bait it away from the ship. Provoke and evade."

Hunk nodded but then frowned. "Okay, here's the thing. I'm worried that we're going to be good at the provoking part, and then really bad at the evading part. But if this is what it takes to save Shay and everyone on the Balmera, then I'm in."

Keith turned to face Shay and her family. "Can you contact the other Balmerans?"

Shay nodded. "I can, but I know not what they'll say. Leave our home?"

Allura replied at that. "It's the only option. I'm coming down."

Coran turned. "Princess, no! It's too dangerous."

"Someone has to be there to lead these people out."

Pidge spoke up. "You're coming down? That thing will spot your pod and blow it to pieces."

Allura let out a small sigh. "Let me worry about that. You must focus on keeping the creature distracted."

Adam stepped up to the Altean. "If you're going down there. I'm coming, too."

"I can't allow you to risk yourself on my behalf."

Adam shook his head. "No, nothing you say is going to stop me. If you can't see for yourself, Coran is worried about you." He turned his attention to the older man. "I'll go with her and do my best to protect her." He turned back to her. "And that's final."

Shiro spoke over his helmet's communicator. "Princess, Adam, we've lured the monster away. It's time."

Allura replied, "We'll contact you all when we're on the ground."

Coran replied softly. "Be careful out there."

Allura and Adam launched themselves out of the Castle on board two personal transports. They flew down toward the mine shaft where Shay and her family were located. They flew into growing darkness and pulled up, landing the tiny craft on the floor of the shaft. Allura and Adam stood up as she said, "We're on the ground."

"Hurry," Shiro said. "I don't know how long we can hold this thing off."

Allura and Adam ran over to Shay and her family. Allura spoke as both she and Adam slowed their pace. "Shay, I'm going to need your help."

Shay stared back at the Altean and the human. "Princess?"

Allura placed her hand on the wall. "Have you contacted the rest of your people?" At their sad
expressions, she asked, "What is it? What's going on?"

"All Balmerans give thanks for the kindness you and the paladins bestowed upon us, but, alas, we cannot take leave of our home."

Allura gasped, "What?"

Shay gazed at the Princess. "If our great Balmera's life cycle is over because of us, then we desire to stay with it until the end."

"But you'll never survive."

Rax stepped forward toward the pair. "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."

Shay nodded, "It is our wish. The wish of all Balmerans."

Allura steeled herself. "No. I won't give up on you. I won't give up on any of you, no matter the circumstances."

Shay pleaded, "But we do not ask this of you. Please!"

Allura gazed back at Shay and her family. "I have heard your words. Now, let me speak mine. I want to talk to your people. Can you get a message to them from me?"

An older female spoke, "There is no need to speak for you. You have a unique power within. The Balmera will carry your words."

Adam and Allura both gasped at the teal blue handprint she left on the side of the wall when she pulled her hand away.

The older female took Allura's hand and pressed it up to the side of the wall. "Speak your heart, child. All can hear you."

Allura closed her eyelids as she spoke out loud for everyone to hear her. "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 been destroyed by the Galra. But I refused 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."

The older Balmeran touched the wall with her hand. "Your words have touched our hearts."

Allura smiled, "Thank you."

"No, thank you. You've given us reason to hope again."

Allura spoke again to the Balmerans. "Everyone, head to the caves just under the surface."

Coran onboard the Castle gazed at the map of the tunnels. "Princess, your speech must have worked. The Balmerans are moving toward the surface!"
Allura and Adam ran down the tunnel leading Shay's family to the opening. "Coran, we're just below the surface. Triangulate my position. This is your landing zone."

Coran replied, "Yes, Allura. I am readying ship. Castle of Lions, coming in! Paladins, how are you holding up?"

Adam listened to the conversation between Coran and the Paladins. He sent positive thoughts to the Paladins as he held his chin high, and his shoulders were held back.

Keith replied, "I think we've got him pretty distracted. Are the Balmerans in position."

Allura replied, "They're making their way to the top."

Shay and her family gasped as the Castle of Lions touched down on the surface. The transportation pod landed on the Balmera. As the doors opened, Coran cried out from the doorway, "Bring them out! Hurry now!"

Allura began to step off the ladder as the ground started to rumble. Shay reached out, grabbing her hand and steadied her as she stepped onto solid ground.

Adam was still on the ladder as it shook and began to collapse. He jumped away, activating the jet pack on the back of his armor. He reached out and released a grunt as his hands gripped the edge of the wall.

Allura yelled, "No!" She and Shay both ran up the edge and reached down. "Adam, give us your hands, we'll pull you up!"

Adam reached out to Allura first as sweat broke out on his brow as the edge under him began to crumble. His heart raced like a horse on a racetrack as pressure gripped his hand. He gazed up into Allura's bright blue eyes. He reached out with his other hand, and his eyes grew as the two females pulled him up to the surface.

He bent over as his feet touched solid ground, and he sucked air into his lungs and released it in great gusts like a blacksmith bellows. He straightened up and grinned at the pair. "Thanks."

Coran ran forward. "It's on the verge of collapsing! We have to go!"

Allura turned, "But the Balmerans!"

Rax turned to Coran. "They're trapped! What can be done? Time is short!"

Hunk called out. "Every hit weakens the Balmera. Have you evacuated yet? What's happening?"

Coran replied, "The Balmerans are trapped. Just keep distracting that beast!"

Adam frowned at Hunk's reply. "Uh, do you want us to distract it by dying. Because that's what's going to happen!"

Shay dropped to the ground and clapped her hands to her head. "We're lost! All are trapped with no chance for escape!"

Allura knelt next to Shay. "We can't give up."

"But what can be done?"

Adam knelt beside her. "I know things look bleak right now, but I've seen some incredible things.
Allura and Coran will figure something out."

Shay turned her head to reply to Adam but gasped. "The Balmera! The ground beneath your mighty ship appears healed. Its essence thrives. But how?"

Allura gazed at it and replied. "The Castle."

The older female spoke, "Not just the Castle, but you, as well."

Coran gazed at Allura. "It's true. Your Altean energy combined with the ship's crystal has revitalized this part of the Balmera."

"That's it!" Allura replied as she rose to her feet. "Maybe we can perform the ceremony you spoke about. We can save the Balmera."

Rax turned to Coran as did Shay and her family. "What ceremony?" he asked.

"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 to re-infuse the Balmera with quintessence. In this way, we had a symbiotic relationship."

Allura took the few steps that brought her next to Coran. She placed a hand on his shoulder. "The Galra have only been taking. It's time we give back." She walked forward toward the Castle, followed by Coran, Adam, Shay, and her family.

Adam glanced over to Coran before he turned his eyes back to Allura. "This quintessence," he started. "If I understand it correctly is the life force of all living beings."

Coran replied softly, "Yes."

Adam realized what Allura suggested. He stumbled, bringing his attention back to Allura. He trotted forward as she reached the glowing area under the Castle. "You can't do this," he said as he grasped her by her arms.

Allura gazed into his brown eyes. "I have to try. Can't you see it's the only way to save the Balmera and the Balmerans."

Coran joined them, and he placed a hand on Adam's shoulder. "I don't like this any more than you do, but she's right."

Adam released his grip on her arms, "I still don't like it. I don't like her risking her life this way."

Coran nodded in agreement. "You must understand, she's just as headstrong as her father."

Allura stood under the Castle and focused a beam of energy from the ship into her body. Adam tried to wrap his head around what she was doing, but he found it like a generator powering up.

Coran gasped as motes of energy floated up around everyone.

The battle between the Robeast and the Voltron Lions neared the Castle.

Adam stepped away from the ceremony as Shiro's voice came through his helmet's comm unit. "What's happening over there?"

"Allura and the Balmerans are trying to heal the planet." He paused and then lowered his voice. "Takashi, she's risking her life to save these people. You've got to keep it away from us."
Lance spoke up, not caring if he was butting in or not. "She's what?" he asked as his voice rose a couple of octaves.

Shiro groaned over his comm unit. "Lance, this is between Adam and me."

Lance replied, "But Allura is part of the team!"

"I know she is Lance. But right now we have to keep the Robeast away from the Castle. You heard what Adam said."

Lance grumbled, "I heard. But it doesn't mean I like it."

"None of us like it," Shiro replied. "Adam, we'll do what we can."

Allura dropped to her knees and placed her hands onto the Balmera.

The fight between the Robeast and Voltron continued until Voltron punched it and sent it flying over the main mine shaft that led into the Balmera. At the same time, Allura let out a sigh and slight groan as she fell over.

Shay was the first to reach her and picked her up in her arms. "Princess, are you all right?"

Coran knelt next to Shay.

Allura groaned as she struggled to open her eyelids. They finally opened. "Did it work?"

Rax placed his hand to the ground. "Yes. The Balmera lives. It thanks you."

The Lions landed, and the Paladins raced over to check on the Princess. However, fate had decided to throw a monkey wrench into the works. The Robeast rose from the ground.

Allura gazed up as the Robeast loomed over them all. Her voice came out as an almost weak whisper, "No!"

The monster took a step forward and began charging its remaining weapon. Crystals from the Balmera sprang up around its feet, and they rose quickly, entombing the Robeast in a giant crystal.

Hunk whispered, "No, way!"

Coran gazed over at the Princess and Shay. "The Balmera just saved us."

Allura gazed at the ground. "Look at the crystals!"

Everywhere they looked, crystals sprouted all over the Balmera.

Hunk dropped to the ground, the others to see what he was doing. "Oh, who's a good Balmera? You are. Who ate the big monster? You did." He rubbed his hands over the ground. "Yes, you did. Yes, you did," he practically cooed at it.

Keith stared down at the Yellow Paladin. "Dude, what are you doing?"

Hunk shifted his gaze up to Shiro, Adam, Keith, and Lance. "What? It's alive, and it wuvs my scwatches."

Keith dropped his head as he pressed his fist to his helmet. The others were bewildered at his behavior.
Shiro turned his gaze to Adam, who shrugged his shoulders. Adam said one word as if it would solve the mystery of the Yellow Paladins' behavior. "Teenagers."
Adam stepped out of his quarters, intent on heading for the kitchen for some breakfast. It felt good to be in his Garrison uniform and out of the armor. As he neared the Princess's room further down the hall, his eyes focused on Coran stepping out of the young woman's quarters.

Coran raised his head as his hands briefly clenched. Adam almost missed the minute shake of the older man's head.

Coran seemed to notice the human who approached. "Ah, Adam," the older man said. "Have you, by chance, seen the Princess? I came to check on her, but she's not in her quarters."

Adam shook his head. "No, I haven't."

"If Alfor were alive, he'd skin me for not noticing her gone from her room. She should be resting. The Balmera rejuvenation ceremony took a lot out of her."

"I can help you look," Adam replied.

"Thank you. I'll accept it."

"I was heading to the kitchen anyway. She might be there," Adam replied.

"If you find her call out. The Castle is programmed to pick up your voices if you need anything," Coran replied.

Adam nodded as he continued on his way.

Adam stepped into the kitchen but found Hunk by the food goo machine. "Hey, Hunk. What's for breakfast?"

"I would say eggs," Hunk replied as he frowned. "Instead, we have goo until we find another planet with herbs and spices. There's not much I can do."

"Well, I for one hope we do." Adam released a sigh.

"Something else wrong?" Hunk asked.

Adam nodded. "Have you seen the Princess this morning?"

Hunk shook his head as he passed Adam a bowl of the green goo. "No, last time I saw her was
when Coran sent her off to bed. Is something wrong?"

"You could say that. He went to check on her, but she's not in her room."

Hunk's eyes grew. "That's not good. Do you have an idea of where she might be?"

Adam shook his head after scooping a spoon of the goo into his mouth. He grimaced as he swallowed. "I don't." He stared down at it. "I know this is supposed to be nutritionally complete for us, but I still can't get used to the taste or consistency."

"Yeah," Hunk frowned. "But, this is what we have until we find a way to get some actual supplies of real food here."

Adam took a few more bites and then set his bowl into the dishwasher type machine. "I'm going to check the training deck. Shiro and Keith should be there."

"If it helps, I'll go check the bridge," Hunk added.

"Thanks, Hunk," Adam smiled as he pushed his glasses up his nose.

Adam walked into the control room of the training room. It was empty. He walked over to the window and looked down, expecting to see Shiro and Keith sparring below. But the training room was empty.

He scratched at the back of his head. "Where is everybody?" he asked himself as an idea struck him.

Adam gazed into the Blue Lions hangar. He frowned. No sign of Lance. He'd figured his cousin might have known where to find the Princess, especially with the way he liked to flirt with her.

Adam gazed into the Green Lion's hangar and found Pidge typing furiously on her keyboard as she worked on something.

He strode over to her. "Hey Pidge, you haven't seen Allura around, have you?"

Pidge didn't take her eyes from the screen. "Nope, I haven't." She frowned, "Is she lost or something?"

"No, Coran's worried about her. He went to check on her, and she wasn't in her quarters."

Pidge spared a glance from her peripheral vision but kept typing away. "Wherever she is, I'm sure she can take care of herself. She's a big girl. Coran needs to loosen up some and quit treating her like some fragile flower. She healed a whole planet."
Adam opened his mouth to say something when Coran's voice came over the Castle's Intercom System. "Pidge, please come down to the containment room. And if you see Adam bring him along with you."

Pidge groaned as she moved away from her laptop. "You heard him. Let's go."

Coran began placing some sensors on the cryopod that held Sendak. He looked up as Pidge and Adam joined the other Paladins. "Oh, Adam, I found Allura. She was in Alfor's AI chamber."

Adam nodded as he flashed the Altean a quick grin. "It's good that you found her."

Coran nodded as he placed the third sensor on the cryopod. He turned and walked to another device beside the pod. "Okay, guys, Sendak's almost all hooked up. But, I have to warn you, this technology was used to keep Altean memories alive, not to interrogate prisoners."

Shiro gazed at the royal advisor. "Coran, we understand this isn't what the technology was meant for, but if we can extract Sendak's memories, we may gain valuable intelligence on Zarkon's troop locations."

Lance smirked. "Yeah, and then we can be like, knock-knock," he said as he bonked the side of the Yellow Paladin's head with his fist and replied to himself, "Who's there?" He raised his arms up in the air, "The avenging fury of Voltron, son!" He dropped his arms down to cross them over his body.

Adam rolled his eyes and shook his head.

Pidge placed her face up against the smaller tube as Coran pushed some keys on a holographic control panel. "Fascinating. So, how exactly does this work?"

"As the memories are extracted, they're written bit by bit on individual molecules of the micro-storage strands."

Lance gazed at the system as his chin dipped slightly and held his arms crossed over his body and rubbed his forearms with his thumbs. "When I go, I want all the stuff in my brain stored in a giant ship."

Keith gazed at the Blue Paladin from his peripheral vision. "The amount of information in your brain could be stored in a paper airplane."

Lance turned on Keith. "Oh yeah? Well the amount of information you have, Keith, could be—"

"Yeah?"

"Uh… it's less than what I have!"

Hunk called out from behind the Blue Paladin, "Good one, Lance!"

Adam dropped his head in his hands as Shiro sighed, and his head fell forward slightly while he frowned.

Pidge ignored the others as she asked, "This is how you incorporated King Alfor's memories into the Castle of Lions?"
"Precisely, but it's never been attempted before on an unwilling participant."

A light flashed on in the chamber, and it glowed as something flowed into it like a swirling gas.

Hunk asked, "Uh, is this what's supposed to be happening?"

Shiro crossed his arms over his chest. "Let's give it some time."

Keith frowned, "Well, I can't wait around any more. I'm going to hit the training deck," he said to the others and then walked away.

Pidge gazed at the others as boredom overcame her interest in Sendak's memories. "Okay, if anyone needs me, I'll be in the lab. Maybe I can pull some information from Sendak's Galra crystal." She stood up and walked away.

Hunk's stomach rumbled. He stood up from where he sat on the floor. "Time to feed the beast," he said as he walked away.

Coran stretched. "Well, I'm afraid I can't wait here either. I have a million duties to attend to. Between that Galra crystal infecting our systems, 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."

Shiro continued staring at the cryopod holding the enemy commander. "I'll stay. Somewhere in Sendak's mind is the information about Zarkon that we need."

Lance stood up and placed his hands on his lower back and bent backward, popping his back in several places. "Okay, well, while you guys do that. I think I'm gonna get my chill on. Maybe kick back with a lemonade or space juice. Something."

Coran frowned as Lance began to walk away. "Hold on there space juice. You're going to come and help me." He placed his hands on his hips.

Lance stopped and turned, "What? Why? Why me?"

Coran strode toward Lance. "Because you're the last one here and because your activity isn't essential."

Lance's eyes bugged as he mentally scrambled for a good excuse. "Wait, did I say, 'chill out with a good lemonade?' I meant I gotta do homework."

Coran replied, "No, too late."

"Fine," Lance replied as she scowled. He glanced over his shoulder at the Black Paladin. "Let us know if anything happens."

When the older man didn't reply, Lance stopped and called out, "Shiro?"

Shiro replied hesitantly as if he'd just now registered what Lance said. "You got it."
Lance shrugged and strode away, following Coran.

Adam placed his hand on Shiro's upper arm. "I know your focused Takashi, but I'll go help Coran and try to keep Lance out of trouble."

Shiro's gaze never left Sendak as he replied, "Okay."

Coran, Adam, and Lance were cleaning the cryopods when the teen grumbled, "Since when did 'you sleep in it, you clean it' become a Voltron rule? Also, how is it these pods can heal a human from near death but can't clean themselves?"

Coran laughed. "Self-cleaning pods. Now, that's a good one! This 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 pods day and night. I got so good at it. I earned my first set of stripes!" Coran sighed. "Those were the days. Anyway, you keep up the good work, and maybe someday you'll earn some cleaning stripes too." He turned around. "Lance? Lance!" He sighed again as he shook his head. "Ah, paladins…"

Adam glanced over toward space where the pod had stood, but his eyes focused on Lance's jacket on the floor. "Something's wrong. Lance would never leave that jacket behind. It was a present from Lances' sister Veronica."

Coran gazed at Adam, "I'll take your word for it." He walked over to the pod where Lance had been working on it. It rose from the floor, and the royal advisor jumped. Coran pressed an area on the front of the pod.

The door opened, releasing a whimpering Lance who stepped out stiff and shivering. "This pod just shut on me and locked me in, while you were rambling on about boot camp!"

Coran gazed at the Blue Paladin. "You sure you didn't just trip and fall in? No judgment. It happens."

Adam picked up Lance's jacket from off the floor and held it out to his cousin.

Lance took it. "Thanks," and he quickly shoved his arms into the sleeves. He sat down on the steps in front of the pod.

Coran frowned as he tried to find a rational explanation. "Besides, why would the pod automatically lock and start the cryogenic freezing process?"

Lance screamed up at Coran, "To kill me!"

Coran leaned over Lance as he gazed down at the teenager. "Don't get your boots in a bunch. My guess is they're malfunctioning."

Lance's gaze shifted left and right as if he expected something to come jumping out at him. He turned his gaze up to the older Altean. "Okay, I'm gonna float this out there. I think this castle is haunted."

Adam chuckled as he sat down by his cousin and threw his arm over the teen's shoulders. "Don't tell me you believe in ghosts?"
Lance turned his head and glared back at his cousin.

Coran pulled at his mustache. "The ship might seem like a fantastical, magical creature to you, but it's just a big embodiment of advanced supernatural technology that cannot be explained by science alone." Coran rubbed at his chin. "Well, that does make seem a bit haunted. But it's not. Trust me, nothing out of the ordinary is happening here." Coran started to walk out but stopped.

He turned around. "Adam, there might be something you can help me with. I need to recalibrate some systems."

Adam pat Lance on the shoulder. "You'll be fine." He rose and followed Coran out of the infirmary.

The door to the Green Lion's hanger opened, and Lance stormed in, followed by Coran, Adam, and Keith. They saw both Pidge and Hunk lying on the floor of the hangar, and of course, Lance let his temper get the best of him. "How can you guys be taking a nap while this castle is trying to kills us?"

Hunk got his feet under him and stood up while rubbing his head. "Taking a nap? We've been floating around in zero-G! You know how scary that is?"

Lance's muscles tensed up as he folded his hands into fists. "That's not scary! That's fun! I was almost ejected out into space!"

Hunk clasped his hands, touching his fingers together in front of his chest. "I got attacked by killer food, and that's the most horrifying thing you can imagine! The stuff of nightmares! It'll haunt me to my grave!"

Keith yelled out at them, "Well, I had a robot trying to kill me!"

Lance turned facing the royal advisor. "I don't care what you say, Coran. This castle has gone apples and bananas!"

Coran groaned. "Perhaps the infection from Sendak's Galra crystal is worse than we thought."

Hunk stared at the purple crystal on the other side of the room. "Well, let's get rid of it."

Coran replied, "It's too late. When Sendak plugged it into the ship, it corrupted the entire system."

Adam's eyes grew as Keith said, "Sendak? Wait. Has anyone seen Shiro?"

They ran into the containment room as Pidge called out to the Black Paladin. "Shiro, are you okay?"

Adam was instantly at Shiro's side. The man was leaning against the tube where they'd transferred Sendak's memories. His eyes were wild-looking as he gripped the side of his head with his Galra arm. Adam wrapped his arm around Shiro's shoulders. "Lean on me, Takashi," he said softly. Adam felt the Black Paladin tremble as he leaned into Adam's side.
Keith glanced over at the space where the pod had been where they had stashed the Galra Commander. "Where's Sendak?"

"I-I had to get him out of here. I heard his voice. He-He can't be trusted on this ship."

Lance fired back. "It's is the ship! I got stuck in a cryopod, then in an airlock. Keith got attacked by a robot, and Hunk and Pidge got attacked by food. It's been a weird morning."

A Klaxon blared. They all turned to gaze at the flashing panel on the wall.

"What?" Coran asked out loud. "How is that possible?"

Keith turned to the royal advisor. "What is it?"

"The ship is starting a wormhole jump!"

Adam gazed at Shiro as the man he held started to settle down. "Takashi, are you okay?"

Shiro took a deep breath as he stood a little straighter. "Yeah, I'm better." His face flushed as he glanced away before turning his gaze back to his friend. "Thank you again." But he frowned as he gazed at the rest of his team. "I didn't want anyone seeing me that way."

"Takashi, it's okay. They won't see you any differently."

Shiro nodded and pushed his shoulders back. "Okay, team. Let's get to the bridge and find out what's going on."

The door to the bridge opened. Shiro saw the Princess standing at the controls. "Allura, what's going on?"

Allura turned her head, but her voice was off, almost as if she were still asleep. "We're going to Altea. We're going home. My father is taking us."

Shiro gasped and rushed forward with the others following him.

A particle barrier appeared around Allura, and King Alfor's face appeared on the screens around the bridge. "Stay away from my daughter!"

Shiro shouted, "Allura, wake up!"

Coran said, "The crystal must have corrupted King Alfor's artificial intelligence. It's taking over!"

Alfor's image appeared beside Allura as the castle emerged from the wormhole.

Pidge gasped. "We're headed straight for a star, and it's about to explode!"

They all heard Allura as she spoke to the AI image. "Father, I can see Altea."

Coran ran to the particle barrier. "Allura! Allura, wake up! What your seeing isn't real."

Adam joined Coran in his efforts to try to wake the Princess. "Allura! Wake up!" he said as he pounded on the particle barrier.
Allura didn't hear either of them. "The juniberries, the most exquisite flower of all."

Coran tried again to get through to her. "Allura, please! You've got to listen to me!"

She looked around as she asked, "Is this real?"

Alfor's image replied, "Of course it is. That flower your touching is real."

Coran yelled again, "But where is the fragrance of the sweet juniberries?"

Allura bent her head down as if smelling the invisible flower she held. Her head rose as she finally woke up and stared at the blazing stare on the screen. "That's not Altea."

Pidge replied, "When that star goes supernova, it will destroy the entire system. Allura, you must reset the course and get us out of here!"

Allura rushed over to the pillars and placed her hands on them but screamed as an electrical current ran through her hands, and it knocked her out of the area and through the particle barrier. Shiro caught her in his arms. Once she was steady on her feet again, which only took a moment, she moved forward and put her hands on the barrier. "Father, please, I beg you to turn this ship around. If we don't do it soon, we will all perish!"

Alfor's AI replied. "I know. That's my intention."

Allura's eyes grew. "What? Why?"

Alfor's AI turned to face her. Don't you see, dear daughter? Zarkon can never be defeated. He's been ruling for ten thousand years."

Her eyebrows rose. "But we must continue to fight!"

The AI spoke again. "Fight for what? It is all over for Altea. You don't have to live a lifetime of war. You can be with the rest of your people and me."

Allura shook her head. "Father, please! The paladins and I can still stop Zarkon! Somewhere in there, you must want that to happen."

Adam's shoulders drooped. This couldn't be the end of their journey now.

Alfor's AI changed to the man the princess remembered. "Allura, my AI has been corrupted. You must disconnect my power source." It switched back to the corrupted version. "We can stroll across the Blossom Canyon every morning, just like we used to. Remember how much you loved that?"

Allura let her head drop. "I remember. I'll see you soon, Father." She turned and faced the paladins. "I've got to get into the AI chamber to disconnect my father's power source manually."

Coran's mouth downturned as his face went slack. "But that means losing King Alfor forever!"

Allura pushed her shoulders back. "Paladins get to your lions. I need you to slow the Castle's descent into the star."

As she ran off the bridge, the Paladins followed. Coran said, "I can try to override the system to open the hangars."
The AI image disappeared along with the particle barrier. The warning klaxons began blaring as Coran whispered. "She did it."

"Can we get out of here?" Adam asked as he sat down at his station.

"Yes, we can," Allura replied as she stepped onto the bridge. She brought up the screen to address the others. "Paladins get to your hangars. We're getting out of here."

Allura sat on the side of her command area, flanked by Shiro, Coran, and Adam.

Shiro placed his human hand on her shoulder. "I'm so sorry about your father, Princess."

Hunk gazed down at the Altean. "We all are."

Allura allowed a small smile to tug at her lips. "Thank you. But that was not my father." She stood to her full height. "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."

Allura faltered, and Coran was at her side immediately. "You still need to rest, Princess."

"I will, but first, we need to find an out of the way planet, one that Zarkon hasn't taken over where the Castle's systems can be purged of this infection."

"I'll do that. But I need to make sure you get to your room."

Adam stood. "I can do that for you, Coran."

Coran nodded.

Allura shook her head. "No, it should be Shiro this time." She offered a smile to Adam and Coran. "I thank you both, but there is something I must discuss with the head of Voltron."

Adam watched as Shiro stood and held out his arm for the princess to take. Adam had an idea of what they were going to talk about, and if it helped to get it through Takashi's head that yes, he still loved the Black Paladin, then he would accept her help.

Shiro led Allura down the hall toward her quarters. "What did you want to talk to me about?" he asked.

The Princess stopped as she gazed into his dark-gray eyes. "How do you feel about Adam?" she asked.

Shiro glanced away as he swallowed hard. This wasn't exactly the subject he'd thought she'd bring up. "I-I don't know what to think right now. Back on Earth, before I left for the Kerberos mission, we were lovers and engaged to be married. But we fought, and he broke it off. Of course, I still loved him then, and I still love him now, but—" his voice broke as he tried to continue. He
released a sigh. "But now, I'm broken, and I don't think he'd want to be with someone who has nightmares and freezes up at times."

Allura exhaled with a sigh. She'd have to step in and be the matchmaker here. "Shiro, back when we freed the Balmera before the Robeast showed up, I talked to Adam. He explained everything, and I do not doubt that his words were true. He does still love you, and he wants you back. He doesn't care about what's going on in your head. He wants you for you, nothing else. So don't wait to rekindle a relationship with him. You and I both know this war isn't going to be pretty, and I know that you know that someone may die. I don't want you or him having regrets."

Shiro gaped back at her. Could what Adam said and did in the infirmary be true after Sendak took over the Castle? Shiro thought.

Allura pats his arm. "I can see your thinking something over. I don't know what the two of you have said or done, but if he has said or did anything to try to show you how he feels, then you should grasp on and hold tight to that. Forget what happened in the past and make new memories, happy memories."

Shiro chuckled as he and the Princess began walking again. "Imagine me getting advice from a woman whose over ten thousand years old."

Allura let out a giggle. "I think I'm better than getting advice from Coran. Though he's delightful and means well, there are times when his advice is questionable." She broke into laughter, which bounced off the walls of the hall.

The Castle touched down on a bright green verdant planet teeming with jungle plants but no telling what kind of life existed.

Hunk gazed around at everyone. "We should go out and forage and explore. Find some foodstuffs that are palatable and fit for human consumption."

"The goo provides everyone with enough nutrition," Coran replied as he harrumphed.

"No offense, Coran, but food goo is too mushy, and it's green. Reminds me of the green peas and beans that my nephew and niece ate as babies. And smells like it too," Hunk's tongue came out of his mouth as he made a face.

Lance chuckled as he slapped Hunk on the shoulder. "He's right, Coran. We're humans, and we need food that's just like," he paused, trying to come up with a word or words to describe what he was thinking of. He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, like food."

Shiro stepped onto the bridge. "Where are we, Coran?"

"I'm not sure," the Altean replied. "The Castle doesn't have any records of anyone ever visiting this planet."

Shiro nodded. "Okay, I'll go out and make a sweep and see if it's inhabited."

Lance spoke up. "Uh… Hunk and I want to go exploring and foraging for some real food."

"Okay, but teams of two," Shiro replied. "And don't take off your armor. Lance and Keith, you'll be
a team and Hunk and Adam. Pidge can stay here and help Coran with purging the infection.

Pidge gazed at everyone. "Just one question. How are we going to know that any food here is fit for us to eat?"

"I've worked on that," Hunk replied. "Of course, with Rover's help."

Rover hovered behind Pidge and beeped at Hunk.

"Thanks for loaning him out to me," Hunk replied.

"No problem. I'm glad you all don't blame him," Pidge replied.

Hunk pulled out a couple of small devices and passed one to Keith and the other to Shiro. "These are pretty rudimentary. But you scan any food, and if it comes up green, then it's suitable for eating if it comes up red throw it away. It's poison."

"Great idea, Hunk," Lance replied as he smacked his friend on the shoulder.

"Okay, guys, I'm taking the Black Lion. If I find any Galra instillations be ready to get to your Lions at a moment's notice. Other than that, I don't see any reason to delay the foraging portion of this mission," Shiro said as he gazed at all of them. His eyes looked into Adam's as the other man nodded. "If you run into Galra patrols, get back to the Castle. Don't take any chances."

Keith gazed at his friend. "Yes, sir."

Lance rolled his eyes at the dark-haired teen. "Suck up," he muttered.

The Black Lion flew over the tall blue-tinged trees. Shiro couldn't see much clearing as the Galra had a habit of doing by building giant power stations. He wasn't picking up any signals from technology, which caused a grin to pull at his lips. Finally, they were free of fighting the Galra, which would give everyone a chance to relax.

His eyes caught sight of an area where the trees disappeared. Flying over, he saw a large clearing with some huts with giant tree leaves for roofs. He checked his scanner locating the nearest team to the village. "Keith, Lance, there's a village near your position. It shows no signs of technology. But keep your guard up, we don't know if they're hostile or not. And if you run across any villagers, be nice."

Keith's voice came over Shiro's helmet communicator. "Roger that, Shiro."

Shiro's eyes were drawn to a dark smudge on the horizon. He noticed that some flashes came from it. "There's a storm brewing on the horizon. I'm going to take a closer look at it to see which direction it's heading and the speed."

"Okay," Keith replied. "I guess that means we may need to cut this short and return to the Castle?"

"Yeah. I don't want to take any chances. It looks like it could be a nasty storm."

"Affirmative. We should be returning soon. We've found a lot of fruits and vegetables that Hunk should be able to make something out of it. There's also some animals in the trees. Similar to monkeys on earth," Keith replied.
"Sounds good. I'll get back to you shortly," Shiro replied as he turned the Black Lion toward the storm.

Keith had his bayard out using it as a machete to cut through the thick foliage allowing him and Lance to traverse through the jungle. The decomposing leaves that rested on the ground, added to the heat.

Lance stopped walking the bag he held, weighing him down. "Let's stop for a minute Keith," he said as he removed his helmet and wiped at the sweat on his brow. "This place is sweltering."

"I know, but we shouldn't stop yet. Shiro said there was a village near here. We should check it out to make sure that the people are peaceful."

Lance's eyes scanned the blue-tinged foliage around them. "This place is weird. It's kind of like a backward earth, you know. Green sky, blue plants." He sighed as he glanced around again and put his helmet back on. His eyes caught movement off to the side. "Something just moved over there."

Keith stood up straight as his eyes stared in the direction where Lance pointed at. He raised his bayard in a defensive posture. The leaves parted, and a mottled blue-skinned alien with dark hair appeared as if she'd sprouted from the ground. She wore something that looked like a dress made of some animal skin and leaves.

She pointed at them and then pointed in the direction they came from. "You come from giant light from the sky?"

Keith turned to Lance, who stared back at him. The two paladins turned their gaze back to the female. "Yes, if you mean the castle."

The female was humanoid and stood a little shorter than Keith, but her eyes were an amethyst with a dark blue in the center.

Lance grinned at her. "I'm Lance," he said as he introduced himself. "What's a pretty lady like you doing out here by yourself?"

She gazed at him and cocked her head as if not understanding what he was saying. "What does p-pretty mean?"

Lance rubbed at the back of his neck, trying to come up with a definition for pretty. "Oh," he said as he raised his arm and entered a few commands on his wrist gauntlet that brought up a picture of a Balmeran crystal that gleamed in the sun back on the Balmera. "Pretty, like this," he pointed at it.

"Ah, pretty," she replied. "I'm this pretty?" she asked.

Lance nodded, "Yes, you are."

Keith groaned as he brought his hand up and smacked the front of the helmet. "Lance, concentrate on the mission and stop flirting with her," he growled out.

Keith's actions brought the attention of the female onto him. "Why smack face?"

He gazed back at her. "Because he's acting like a fool."
Lance yelled at Keith, "I'm not a fool! She's pretty, and I thought she should know it."

"One of these days, Lance, your flirting is going to get us in some big trouble," Keith replied.

She gazed at them and then pointed to the bag Lance carried. "What you looking for?"

"Oh," Lance gazed back and opened the bag to show her. "We're looking for food to take back to the light from the sky."

Her face brightened as she waved her hand for them to follow her. "Come, food. My people have much." She led them over to a path through the jungle that neither of the paladins had noticed before. "This leads to my village."

Hunk and Adam made their way through the jungle. "I was hoping to find some meat," the Yellow Paladin said as they pushed their way through dense plants. "Not just fruits and vegetables so far."

The noises from the trees of the chattering monkey-like beasts were loud. And they were deafening at times.

"They're cute but too scrawny to provide meat. We'd need like several cows or even pigs," Hunk sighed. Then he swallowed hard the squeamish side of him catching up. "I don't want to kill it. I know I'll throw up if I do."

Adam chuckled as he slapped Hunk's shoulder. "Don't worry. You won't have to do that if we come across anything like that. I can do it."

The pair moved deeper in the dense jungle when they heard a snuffling off to the side. "That doesn't sound like a person," Hunk whispered.

"B-But what if it comes my way? What do I do?" Hunk asked as his eyes grew so large the whites of his eyes shown around the iris and pupil.

"I'd say back away slowly and call me on the radio. Just don't run and don't make any sudden noises."

Hunk nodded.

Adam crept off into the jungle and found a clearing where the beast stood. He had to admit it was ugly. As ugly as a warthog from the earth, but meaner looking. With a total of four eyes and three sets of tusks erupting from its jaws. Only one thing truly worried him. It's the size. It stood as tall as a buffalo from the American plains.

It jerked it's head up as the wind direction changed, and Adam cursed his luck. He was no longer downwind from the beast. It snorted as it pawed the ground. The creature stared around and locked onto Adam. It released an angry noise from its throat and charged.

Adam pulled his energy rifle from off his shoulder. He took a steady aim and fired. The beam hit the beast in the head, and it dropped to the ground, sliding across the jungle floor and stopped at
Adam's feet.

The older man called out to Hunk on his helmet comm. "It's clear, Hunk. We've now got some meat."

Hunk crashed through the brush and gazed down at the corpse Adam stood over. The Yellow Paladin turned green as he turned and lost whatever was in his stomach.

"You might not want to watch this," Adam replied as he pulled out his knife and began to skin the beast. "But if you want the meat, then I'm going to have to butcher it here."

"Scan it first. Make sure it's fit for us to eat," Hunk replied as he turned away.

Adam used the small palm-sized scanner over the corpse, and it flashed green. "It's good."

Keith and Lance followed the alien woman into the alien village. A stern-looking man glared at the two strangers. "Where you go?"

"I went to see the light that came from the sky but found these two instead. They came from the light," the woman said. She pointed at Lance. "He says I'm pretty." She looked to Lance, "Show chief how pretty I am."

Lance grinned at her again and brought up the image again on his holographic screen.

The chief growled as he glared at the two newcomers. "Go," he shoved the woman away. Then he turned to Lance. "Leave!"

Lance took a step forward. "You can't do that to her."

The chief's gaze took on a murderous gaze as he glared at Lance. He pointed to himself, "My woman!"

Lance's mouth went dry as his skin paled. "I didn't know."

Keith grabbed Lance by the arm and pulled. "Let's get back to the Castle. Now!"

The pair of Paladins took off back down the path toward the Castle of Lions when Shiro's voice came over their comms. "Lance, Keith, you need to hurry back to the Castle. That storm is heading your way, and it's a bad one. I guess it's close to 500 lightning strikes an hour."

"We're on our way back," Keith replied.

"Good, but you might want to speed up the pace."

"Roger, Shiro," Keith replied as both he and Lance broke out into a jog down the aliens' path heading toward the path they had made in the jungle before encountering the female.

Keith turned and stopped looking back the way they'd come. His spine tingled, and his hair on the back of his neck began to rise. He felt like they were being watched. He turned back around and followed Lance when he felt a sting on the back of his neck. He ignored it, attributing it to the teeming insect life that abounded around the jungle.
Infected Castle Part 2

Chapter Summary

Keith is suffering, and Lance goes through some self-doubt. Adam and Shiro try to find out what's wrong with Keith while also trying to help Lance.

Keith shook his head as dizziness hit him. Instead of running a straight line, he moved off in a diagonal line until he hit the jungle. He stopped and grabbed hold of the nearest tree trunk.

"Lance," he called out.

The Blue Paladin stopped and turned around. "You okay?" he asked as he walked back toward where Keith stood.

"No. I'm dizzy. I can't clear my head."

"Is it the heat?" Lance asked as he frowned.

"I don't think so. I think I got bit by one of these weird insects flying around here."

Thunder clapped from somewhere in the direction of the village. "We've got to get moving," Lance replied as he sat the bag down he was carrying and grabbed Keith's arm and slung it over his shoulder. "Lean on me." He reached down and grabbed the bag with his free hand.

They started moving, but their pace was slowed down considerably than before. Keith shook his head. "I'm slowing you down."

Lance shook his head. "We're a team, and I'm not leaving you behind, so do me a favor and shut up."

The thunder got closer as the pair walked through the path, but Keith nearly fell several times. Lance gazed at Keith, who was struggling, and he appeared paler than usual. "Shiro," Lance called out. "If your still around, we're going to need a pickup. Keith isn't doing so good."

Shiro's voice came over Lance and Keith's helmet comm's. "I see a small clearing about fifty feet from your position. It should be big enough for Black to sit down in. If not, then keep your distance because I'll be taking out some trees."

"You got it, Shiro," Lance replied.

As Shiro hovered over the clearing in the Black Lion, he frowned. The storm seemed to be intensifying. "Adam, Hunk," he called out to the other pair. "I'm going to come your way and pick you two up after picking up Keith and Lance."

"Okay, Takashi," Adam replied.
The Black Lion settled down in the clearing. It lowered itself down and the ramp lowered. Lance walked Keith up the ramp and settled him down in the cockpit by the wall.

Shiro glanced over at them as Lance pulled Keith's helmet off. "Are you still dizzy?"

"Yeah," Keith reached up and let his head fall into his hand. He turned his eyes over to Shiro. "I'm sorry."

A gentle smile pulled at Shiro's lips. "Don't worry about it. Things do happen. Now hang on, I'm going to pick up Adam and Hunk, and then we'll head back to the Castle." He banked the Black Lion away from the storm and headed for Hunk and Adam's location.

Adam loaded the last of the usable meat in the skin from the beast. He wiped the knife's blade off on a large leaf. He'd had to close up his helmet a while back to keep the miasma of swarming bugs out of his face. But the gore on his gloves and arms of his armor made him wish for some water to wash it off.

Now they just needed something to carry this meat back toward the nearest clearing. Adam turned around and nodded to himself. "Hey, Hunk, give me a hand here."

"What do you need?"

"Pull some of those large leaves from off that bush over there," Adam pointed in the direction he was looking at. "They're long enough and skinny enough to use as vines. I'm going to use them to make a travois."

Hunk cocked his head at Adam, avoiding the gore on his armor. "What's a travois?"

"It was a way for the Native Americans who lived in the plains of North America to carry their possessions either by horse or dog. I think this is the only way we're going to get all that meat out of here."

"Okay, on it," Hunk replied as he hurried to the bush and began to strip off the leaves. "I think I know what you're up too," Hunk said. "But How do we keep it from falling off?"

Adam smiled as he found two long yet sturdy and thick branches for the poles. "Don't worry about it, Hunk," he said as he started hacking away at one of the branches. "What I wouldn't give right now for Keith's bayard or Takashi's hand." He finally cut through the first one and started working on the second one.

"The good thing is that these branches are pretty strong, so they'll hold all that meat in that fur," Adam said as he hacked away at the second one.

"How many of these leaves do you want?" Hunk asked.

"Go ahead and strip it bare, then start weaving them together wide enough to hold all this meat on," Adam replied.
"Okay."

Adam finally got the branch to break. He cut off the smaller branches with the larger leaves that reminded him of Catalpa tree leaves. He turned to see Hunk finishing with the weaving. Adam moved over to another bush and stripped more leaves off of it and weaved them together to make some lengths of rope.

Hunk glanced up at Adam. "How did you learn to do all this stuff?"

Adam grinned. "You don't think that the Galaxy Garrison just teaches how to become explorers, do you?"

"Uh, I guess not."

"Well, before you get your rank of Lieutenant, you go through a survival course that the Garrison puts you through. And it's not easy. I was dropped down in Borneo and told to survive for a week. All I had with me was a knife. I learned how to survive. So this here is pretty easy. It was also a bonus that my dad taught me how to hunt when I was a kid."

He caught the frown on Hunk's face about the hunting comment.

"Hunk," Adam began, "Not all of us were born into conveniences. My parents were so dirt poor; we had to hunt and farm to survive. But I got into the Garrison because I studied hard and I swore I'd make something of myself. And I did, but I never forgot my parents. They work at the Garrison too. My mom's a cook, and my dad's in maintenance."

Hunk grinned, "That's cool, having your family at the same place." Hunk's brown eyes glinted with unshed tears. "I miss my family. Especially my niece and nephew." He sniffed and wiped at his nose.

Hunk's eyes looked at the weaved mat that he finished. "So, what do we do with this now?"

Adam held out a couple of lengths of improvised rope. "Tie these to the mat, and to that pole, I'll do the same to the other. Then we'll put the meat on the mat and these others we'll tie the bundle to the mat to keep it from falling off and drag it along behind us. It's too heavy for us to carry."

Hunk let out a gust of air. "That's a relief. I don't think we'd be able to make it in time for Shiro to pick us up." Hunk jumped when a clap of thunder came from around them. He glanced around quickly as the monkey-like creatures in the trees quieted, and even the insects seemed to disappear. "What was that?"

"Thunder," Adam replied as he finished tying the last of the improvised rope to his pole, securing the mat in place. "Help me with this bundle of meat."

Hunk was able to lift his end, but Adam struggled, but they managed to manhandle the large package of meat to the improvised travois. Adam and Hunk lashed the package to the mat.

Adam leaned over with his hands resting on his thighs as he sucked in air. "That was heavy."

"You've done a lot of work. I'll do the pulling, keep an eye out for any more of those animals. Whatever they are. Because I don't want to come face to face with one," Hunk said as he grabbed both poles and began to move the travois forward toward the planned pick-up site.

"Don't worry," Adam replied as he shuddered. "I don't want to meet another one myself."
Lance gazed up at Shiro as he placed a hand to Keith's forehead. "How long before we pick up Adam and Hunk?" He pulled the hand away. "Keith's running a fever."

"Am not," Keith grumbled as he smacked at Lance's hand and missed.

"We should be there in five minutes," Shiro replied as he pushed the controls of the Black Lion forward.

Hunk and Adam stepped out of the edge of the jungle into the clearing when they were greeted by a great gust of wind from above. Adam gazed up to see the underside of the Black Lion pass over him. The bushes around the Paladin and Garrison Pilot were all pushed over as the Black Lion came down for a landing.

The giant mechanical cat leaned down and lowered the ramp. Hunk went first, dragging the travois of meat up into the lion. Adam followed and removed his helmet, put his energy rifle down, and removed the gore covered armor. He didn't want to scare anyone.

Adam followed Hunk to the cockpit as the Black Lion rose into the air. The garrison pilot grinned. "You still haven't lost your touch Takashi. A smooth as silk take off."

Shiro nodded, but then he gazed over his shoulder to Adam. "You need to take a look at Keith. He said something bit him and well I'm worried. He's dizzy and now running a fever, but he won't admit it."

Adam moved over to Keith's side. "Where were you bit?"

Keith gazed at the older man. "Back of my neck."

Adam felt along the back of Keith's neck and stopped on something that stuck out of it. "Hold still. I don't know if it will hurt, but I've got to get it out." His fingers clasped on it and pulled it out. He gazed down at it. "It's a dart like from a blowgun."

"What?" Lance's voice rose.

"I told you not to flirt with that alien woman, but you wouldn't stop." Keith groaned as he tried to focus on Lance.

Adam turned his gaze on his second cousin. "Lance, what did you do?"

"We met a woman in the jungle, and she was pretty. But didn't understand what the word meant, so I showed her what it meant. When she found out we were looking for food she took us to the village. How was I supposed to know she was the chief's wife?"

Adam frowned. "So, let me guess he got mad about it and decided to get revenge."

"Probably," Keith replied. "Only, I'm the one who's paying the price."

"As soon as we land in the Castle, Lance and I will get you to the infirmary. I'll need to run a scan
to see what's going on inside you." Adam turned his attention to Lance. "As for you, Takashi and I will discuss what your punishment will be for being reckless."

Shiro shook his head. "There's no need for a discussion. Lance, your punishment is to take care of Keith."

Lance's eyes grew as he shouted, "What? Why is taking care of Keith my responsibility."

Shiro took a calming breath. "Because of your behavior. Time for you to take responsibility for your actions."

Adam nodded. "Good idea." He focused his gaze back on Lance.

Lance sagged as he let out a sigh. "Fine," he mumbled.

The smooth ride in the Black Lion ended as klaxons blared, and Shiro fought the controls. Hunk grabbed at anything he could use as a handhold. "What's going on?"

"A microburst has hit us," Shiro said. He groaned as he continued to fight to try to keep the lion steady. "Hang on!"

Adam sat down on the opposite side of Keith doing his best as acting as a cushion to keep the younger man from being bounced around the cockpit.

The klaxons stopped as the ride smoothed out. And they heard the metallic clang of the Black Lion setting down inside the castle. Adam rose and helped Keith up to his feet. "Lance, let's get him to the infirmary."

Lance nodded but didn't say anything. Instead, he shot a petulant glare at his cousin.

Hunk glanced around. "Uh, Shiro, if you could get the bags of vegetables and fruit, and I'll haul the meat to the kitchen so I can get it all into storage."

Shiro's eyes lit up at the mention of meat. "You two got some meat?"

Hunk nodded. "Yeah, and I think I need to make some stew. I think Keith could use some broth."

"That sounds like a good idea, Hunk," Shiro replied as he followed Hunk down to the Black Lions cargo hold. He took in the travois and whistled through his teeth. "What kind of animal?" he asked.

"I didn't see it, but it was huge." Hunk gazed down at his feet. "I couldn't help Adam butcher it. Seeing it lying there dead, well, I threw up."

Shiro put his hand on the Yellow Paladin's shoulder. "That doesn't make you less of a paladin, Hunk."

Hunk nodded. "I guess not."

"Now, let's get this stuff out of here. I can't wait for a home-cooked meal," Shiro replied as he hefted both of the bags.

Lance and Adam helped Keith into the infirmary. Adam led the pair of Paladins over to the wall
and pressed the panel, causing a bed to slide out from the wall. "Help me get him up on the bed," Adam said to his cousin.

Lance did as he was told but hadn't said a word since they left the Black Lion.

Adam didn't care if he was getting the silent treatment. It wasn't the first time he'd got it, and it wouldn't be the last time. His concern right now at this moment was Keith.

Once they got the Red Paladin up on the bed, Adam pulled the dart out of his belt. "Take this to Pidge and have her check and see if there's anything on it besides Keith's blood. I need to know if those villagers use any toxins, and if they do, I need to see if she can make an antidote if it was some form of poison."

Lance gulped as he gingerly took the dart in between his fingers. His eyes met Adam's as his voice squeaked out, "Really?"

"Yes," Adam replied. "Now go and track down Pidge. Move it!"

As Lance hurried out of the room, Adam retrieved a medical scanner and ran it over Keith's body. He frowned at the result. "Whatever was on that dart is playing hell with your body. How do you feel, and I want an honest answer."

Keith gazed back at Adam. "Like hell. Besides being dizzy, all my joints are starting to ache, and then there's the fever you and Lance say I have."

"Anything else?" Adam asked as he folded his arms over his chest and one of his eyebrows raised.

"Fine," Keith replied as he turned his head away. "I also feel like I want to throw up." He turned his head back to face the older garrison pilot again.

Adam sat the scanner down. "If I hadn't found that dart, I'd say you had the symptoms of the flu."

Keith shook his head. "You know me. I rarely get sick."

Adam nodded. "I know, but when you do, it's a doozie." He glanced away before turning his gaze back on the younger man. "I need to get your armor off of you and then get you comfortable so you can rest and get better."

Keith gave a half nod as the door to the infirmary opened and Shiro strode in. "How's he doing?"

Shiro asked as he nodded toward the Red Paladin.

"Truthfully," Adam replied, "I'm not sure. Keith's experiencing flu-like symptoms. I sent Lance with the dart to find Pidge and get her to analyze it. Certain tribes of indigenous people on Earth still use blowguns today with poison darts. So, I want to know if there was any poison on it."

Shiro nodded as he frowned, not liking that information. He watched as Adam was removing Keith's armor. "Here, let me help you with that," Shiro said as he helped to remove the last of the Red Paladin's armor.

Shiro put his hand on Keith's shoulder. "Do everything that Adam tells you to do, okay. He'll take good care of you."

Keith swallowed hard as he nodded carefully. "I will."

"Don't worry, Takashi. I'll take good care of him," Adam replied. "But, could you stay with him for
a bit. I need to track down Lance and send him back down here besides taking a shower."

"Yeah, I'll stay."

"First, I want to give him a light sedative so he can get some sleep. Don't worry, and it won't put him under too deep," Adam replied as he prepared the shot.

Shiro expected to see a needle and cringed. What he didn't expect was the tube-like device that Adam pressed to Keith's arm that hissed, and in a matter of moments, the Red Paladin lay still breathing slow and steady. "What was that?"

"It's an Altean device for delivering a shot. No needles, just a hiss of air. It makes it a lot easier for those with a fear of needles."

Shiro grinned. "Nice."

"I will return, Takashi," Adam replied as he walked out of the infirmary.

Adam tugged the bottom hem of his uniform jacket down. He picked up his glasses and put them on his face. Now that the stink of the creature that he'd killed was off of him, it was time to track down Lance and Pidge. He remembered what Coran had said about the Castle. "Pidge, where are you, and is Lance with you?"

He heard Pidge not scream exactly, but her reply was a bit heated. "I'm in my lab, and if you want an accurate examination done on this dart, you better get Lance out of here. He's annoying me."

Adam frowned. "Don't worry, and I've got a job for him to do."

Adam strode into the Green Lion's hangar that Pidge had also set up as her lab. Lance hovered behind the girl who tried to focus on her computer screen, but the Blue Paladin was hovering behind her.

Adam sighed and stepped up to the teenager. He grabbed Lance by his shoulder. "You need to go get changed, and then you should go to the infirmary and stay with Keith so Shiro can decide what we should do next."

Lance turned to face him. "But what about the dart?" Lance's voice rose.

"I'll stay here and get Pidge's report, but I know better than to hover or crowd her. You can't speed this up."

As Lance left the hangar, Adam sat down on a stool near where Pidge sat pouring over her computer keys. He turned his gaze onto the Green Lion. He couldn't stop the grin that pulled at the corner of his mouth. The smallest paladin being connected to the smallest Voltron Lion.

He wondered what it would be like to fly one, but he wasn't one of the chosen ones. In a way, he was happy where he was at because he was able to help in his way. He crossed his arms over his chest as he closed his eyes and listened to Pidge as she muttered and mumbled to herself.

He didn't realize that time had passed when he heard Pidge yell, "I got it!"

Adam nearly jumped out of his skin as he rose from the stool. "You do? What is it?"
"It's a type of virulent type poison that on humans would make a person sick like having a nasty case of the flu," Pidge replied as she gazed up at him. "And just like the flu, you can only treat the symptoms and let it run its course."

"Thanks for the update Pidge," Adam replied as he rolled his shoulders, working out some of the tension that had built up in his muscles. He turned and strode out of the hangar.

Adam stepped through the door leading into the infirmary. He saw Lance standing next to the bed that held Keith. The Blue Paladin wiped a wet rag over Keith's face and neck. He stuck it back in the bowl of cold water and squeezed out most of the liquid, laying it on the Red Paladin's forehead.

Lance turned his gaze over to his second cousin. "What did Pidge say?"

"The substance on the dart was a poison. Though on the human body, it makes a person extremely sick, like having the flu."

Lance's shoulders sagged. "So, I'm guessing she can't make an antidote?"

Adam shook his head. "No, he's just going to have to ride it out."

Lance's eyes fell to the floor. "He was right. It was all my fault flirting with that woman. How was I to know that she was the chief's wife?"

Adam placed his hand on Lance's shoulder and squeezed. "No one knew."

The pair turned as the door to the infirmary opened, and Shiro stepped into the room. He strode over to the cousins. "Did you find out what's going on with Keith?"

Adam nodded as he explained the situation. As the pair talked, Lanced moved over to the steps and sat down and held his head in his hands.

Shiro caught the movement out of the corner of his eye. "What's up with him?" He asked Adam.

"He gets like this. He puts up this confident front, but deep down, he's just as scared as anyone else. I think what he needs is a pep talk from his hero."

"Who's his hero?" Shiro asked.

"You are," Adam replied.

"Me?"

Adam nodded, "I've talked to him, but I don't think anything has sunk in. He's blaming himself for what happened to Keith."

Shiro nodded as he turned toward where Lance sat. He took the steps that drew him over to the dejected-looking teenager. He sat down next to the Blue Paladin, who didn't look up at him.

"Hey, kiddo," Shiro said. "You know no one could have expected that this chief of that village would seek revenge just for flirting with his wife."

Lance sighed as he dropped his hands to his upper thighs. "I thought she was pretty, but I didn't
know that she was his wife. I mean, she's so much younger than he is." He shook his head. "It's all my fault this happened to Keith," he sighed as he deflated even more. "It should be me in that bed, not him."

"No, Lance. No one should be in that bed. I'd say the chief overreacted and has a jealous streak a mile wide," Shiro replied.

The pair heard a moan from behind them. They both stood and moved quickly to Adam's side.

"The sedative I gave him earlier is wearing off," Adam frowned as he gazed at the scanner. "Lance, I need you to continue what you were doing earlier with the cloth. His fever is spiking. It's climbing to dangerous levels."

"Is there anything else we can do?" Shiro asked.

"Yeah, Coran showed me where some cold and hot packs are stored," Adam said as he moved over to the other side of the room. "He explained how to activate them and believe it or not they're as simple as a glow stick back on Earth," Adam replied as he pulled out the cold pack from a drawer in the supply cabinet. He bent the pack, which snapped and then shook it. Moving back over to Keith's side, he lifted the younger man's head and slid the pack under the back of his neck.

Keith's eyes opened, but his eyes were glazed over as he tried to focus. The voice that came out of his mouth tore at Shiro's heart. "Daddy," Keith said as his voice sounded like that of a small child. "Daddy?" he asked again.

Adam nudged Shiro with his elbow. His voice lowered, "You're the closest he has to family."

Lance's eyes grew as he gazed down at Keith then over to Shiro.

Adam crooked his finger for Lance to follow him. As the pair moved across the room, the older cousin spoke, "Don't say anything to anyone, but Keith's father died when he was young. No one knows what happened to his mother. The child welfare people suspect she walked out when he was a baby leaving Keith's father to raise his son on his own. He was about twelve or thirteen when Takashi met him."

They reached the storage cabinet, and Adam pulled out three more of the cold packs and showed Lance how to activate the two he handed to the teenager. "Put those at his armpits. We've got to get his temperature down."

Lance nodded as he quietly digested what Adam said. "How did you find out all of this?"

Adam rolled his eyes. "You know, sometimes you can be very thickheaded. You know that I was engaged to Takashi before he left on the Kerberos mission. There were times when I had to take care of Keith when he was sick while Takashi was gone on a mission."

Lance stared back at Adam as his mouth made an 'O' back at the older man.

Adam pointed toward the bed. "Now go take care of your fellow paladin. I need to find something that will help him retain fluid, or he'll get dehydrated, and that's another problem I don't want to have to deal with."

Lance nodded as he moved back over to the bed as he tucked the cold packs in the other teen's armpits. He dipped the cloth in the water and rung it out and wiped off Keith's face, neck, chest, and arms. As he did so, he listened to what Shiro and the slightly older teen said.
"I'm here, Keith," Shiro said.

A weak smile tugged at the corners of Keith's lips. "They said you died. They were wrong."

Shiro gave a weak laugh, "Yeah, but do me a favor and get well. You have to get better."

"Okay, daddy, I promise," Keith replied. His eyes closed, but he held onto Shiro's hand tightly.

Keith's eyes opened, and he focused his gaze at the ceiling above him. He reached up to the weight on his forehead, though light it was slightly damp and itchy. He found it to be a piece of cloth as he held it between his fingers.

He noticed a sting in his arm that held the cloth. His eyes moved to see the thin tube that had a needle in his arm with some fluid running into his vein. It was at that moment he realized he was no longer hot; instead, he was warm.

Soft breaths reached his ears as he glanced around. His eyes saw Adam, Shiro, and Lance lying about asleep.

The door to the infirmary opened, and he tried to crane his head to see who might have entered the room, but he couldn't see. However, an aroma of something reached his nose that set his mouth to watering. It must be Hunk, he thought.

Keith's question was answered as the Yellow Paladin came into view with one of the floating trays following behind him.

Hunk smiled and waved, seeing the Red Paladin was awake. "Hey," Hunk said quietly. "How are you feeling? I brought you some broth that I made from the stew I'm cooking from some of the meat. I added some of the herbs I saved from Arrus to it. But I hope you like it."

Keith smiled up at Hunk. "Thanks for asking. I'm feeling better than I was, but my brain feels foggy." He inhaled the aroma of the broth in the bowl a second time. "I'm sure it will be good, Hunk. You made it." Keith frowned for a minute. "Can you help me sit up?"

"Sure man, no problem." Hunk reached out and grabbed Keith hooking his arm under Keith's free arm. "Just grip my shoulder and let me do all the work, okay?"

The Red Paladin nodded and managed to stifle a groan as Hunk raised, pulling Keith up with him to a sitting position. Hunk helped him drape the blanket over his lap, considering Keith was nude from the waist up. Hunk grabbed the tray and set it down next to the Red Paladin on his bed. "Do you need help with the broth?" Hunk asked.

"No," Keith replied as he dipped the spoon into the bowl and slurped up a spoonful of the broth. As it hit his tongue and its warmth slid down his throat, he grinned. "This is good." His stomach grumbled as the liquid reached it. The Red Paladin flashed Hunk with a shy grin.

"I wish we had some crackers or something to give it more substance," Hunk sighed.

"It's fine, Hunk. Besides, I think Adam would frown on that."

Adam yawned and sat up, rubbing at his eyes. He stood up. "What would I frown on?" he asked.
"Sorry, I didn't realize we were loud. But Keith thought you'd frown on him having crackers for his broth," Hunk replied.

"I would frown on the crackers. Keith needs the liquid, though." He stepped over to the bed and pulled the scanner out of his pocket, and ran it over Keith. "Your fever has dropped considerably, but it's not broken yet. Once you finish the broth, you need to go back to sleep, but for the most part, I believe you're on the road to recovery. But what woke me up was the smell of the broth."

Hunk grinned. "The stew is ready. I'll send some down to you and another bowl of broth for Keith." His grin grew wider as the Red Paladin lifted the bowl and drank down the dregs of the broth.

"Thanks, Hunk. Another bowl would be nice. I didn't realize I was that hungry."

Not long after Adam, both Shiro and Lance rose from the floor where they'd all crashed earlier.

Lance sucked in a deep breath and strode over to the Red Paladin. "I'm sorry, Keith. I'm sorry that you're the one who got hurt when it should've been me."

Keith held up his hand. "You can stop right there. If I hadn't stopped when I did, you would've been hit by the dart. But I remember you were here when it counted. So, in a way, I think we're even."

Shiro stepped up to Adam. "So when can Keith return to duty?"

"I'd say in about two or three days. I want to make sure he's completely healthy first, and I'm sure Hunk's cooking will get him back in no time," Adam replied.

"Good," Shiro replied. He turned his gaze over to Lance. "But just because Keith is recovering doesn't mean the rest of the team gets out of training."

Lance groaned.

"Tomorrow, I expect to see you, Hunk, and Pidge on the training deck."

"He'll be there," Adam replied as he stared at Lance. "Won't you."

Lance sighed. "Yes." He stuck his hands into his pockets and slumped.

Training continued, and Keith regained his strength in two days, not three. Everything was back to normal as the Castle of Lions took to the sky, leaving the jungle planet behind.
Pidge's fingers flew over the keyboard as her eyes focused on the holographic screen at her station on the bridge. Hieroglyphic looking symbols flashed across the screen.

The others ranged themselves around the girl who ignored them as she worked.

Allura spoke from behind her. "Somewhere inside Sendak's memories, we should be able to find the key to take down Zarkon."

Coran's eyes shifted to gaze at the princess. "I don't think your father would approve of searching through an enemy's memories."

Allura sighed. "I know, but we have to do everything we can to defeat Zarkon."

Lance gazed at the princess. "Once we learn all his weaknesses, we can drive up to his front door and challenge him to a fight. Winner gets the universe."

Adam shook his head as he jabbed Lance in the ribs with his elbow. "Bring yourself back down to the deck."

Lance glared at the older man. "Stop raining on my parade!"

Adam rolled his eyes. "There won't be a parade for anyone if you don't get your head out of the clouds."

Shiro ignored the exchange as he asked, "Anything good yet, Pidge?"

The girl continued to stare at the screen. "We were only able to salvage bits and pieces."

Keith sighed. "We need something to work with. Right now, we don't even have a decent map of the empire."

Lance crossed his arms over his chest. "Who needs a map. After ten thousand years of conquering, I could fire my bayard at any random point in space and hit a Galra ship."

Shiro gazed down at Pidge's screen. "If we could find some troop locations or supply routes, small targets we could hit-and-run, then we could start to free planets one by one." He raised his eyes, gazing off into the distance but focusing on nothing.

Lance leaned over to Shiro. "Boring. I want the big kaboom."

Shiro crossed his arms over his chest as he frowned. "Zarkon's been building his empire for ten thousand years. We're not going to tear it down overnight with five inexperienced pilots and one support ship. Hitting him where he lives would be a huge mistake."
Adam nodded. "It would be tantamount to suicide."

Lance snorted. "Of course you'd agree with Shiro."

Adam leaned in toward the teenager, "And what's that supposed to mean?"

Lance rolled his eyes at his cousin. "If I have to tell you, then your even more hopeless than I thought." Lance blew out a breath. "And you called me thickheaded."

Before anything else could be said, Pidge spoke, "Okay, I've cross-referenced Sendak's memories with the info I got from the downed ship back on Arus. Most of it was a garbled mess, but one thing kept repeating, something called a 'Universal Station.'"

Hunk leaned over and stuck his head in Pidge's way. "Universal Station? Like the kind of station that controls the entire universe?"

Pidge reached out and shoved Hunk's head out of the way. "Well we are translating it from Galra, so it could be 'Galactic Hub.'"

Lance added his two cents into the conversation. "Or 'Space Base!'"

Everyone turned their heads to stare at the Blue Paladin.

"What?"

Coran spoke as he moved to his station. "I'm pulling up the location of your Universal Hub Station Base on our screens now."

The main screen flashed to life, showing an image of two planets and what might be a moon close to each other.

Adam raised an eyebrow, not seeing anything else on the screen.

Lance was the first to give voice to what everyone was thinking. "So, where is it?"

Coran replied as his voice took on a tone of confusion. "I don't know. Our long-range sensors are unable to find anything at those coordinates."

Keith frowned. "Maybe he remembered it wrong?"

Pidge leaned her chin against her hands. "Or maybe we stumbled across a top-secret base in Sendak's memories."

Adam knew that out here in space, anything was possible.

Allura's face hardened. "Only one way to find out. Let's go take a look."

Coran set the course, engaged the engines, and the Castle of Lions shot through space.

Adam couldn't help wondering how Hunk could sleep in such a tense situation as he listened to the Yellow Paladin snore. And upside down at that in his seat.
As the Castle neared the trio of celestial bodies, Allura spoke, "We should be close enough to get a good scan, but far enough away to avoid being noticed."

Coran ran a scan bringing up the station on the viewscreen.

Shiro said, "There it is."

Coran gazed at it. "It appears the gravitation between the two planets warps the electron emission spectrum enough to keep the station off deep space scans."

Pidge held her chin between her index finger and thumb. "So, you can only see it if you know where to look."

Adam stepped up next to Pidge. "It's ingenious where it's placed. But why is it hidden like this?"

Shiro nodded, wanting to know why too. But he didn't give voice to his thought. "This place must handle shipments from all over the Galra Empire."

Pidge frowned. "If this is some big airport where shipments come and go, why is it hidden?"

Shiro replied, "There must be more to this than we're seeing."

Allura added. "Then we'd better go down to take a look. We'll need to enter here, she brought up a closer image of the station, "the central control building."

Keith turned his head and gazed at her. "I'm sorry Princess, did you say 'we'?'"

Allura tucked her arms close to her body and clasped her hands together in front of her body. "I'm going with you. I've traveled through the Galra transportation hubs many times before the war began. I know more about them than any of you."

Coran turned to face her as Shiro stood from his station. Coran took several steps forward. "Princess, I'd rather you stay here."

"I'm a part of this fight against Zarkon as much as anyone. I'm going." She gazed around at everyone else, her face turning fierce, daring them to say anything to try and stop her. "Does anyone have a problem with that?"

Coran turned to Shiro, hoping he would stop Allura from going.

Shiro shrugged his shoulders at the older Altean before turning to the princess. "Fine. Suit up."

Everyone was shocked at how fast Shiro gave in.

Shiro went over the plan. "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 Pidge's modifications to the Green Lion, we'll have thirty seconds of cloaking."

Coran nodded as he twisted one end of his mustache between his fingers before releasing it. "I can flood their short-range sensors with a radiation burst. 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."
"That should give us enough time," Shiro replied. "Let's move."

The Green Lion set down in the blind spot of the control building. The Paladins, Adam, and Allura dropped down using their jet packs to slow their descent. Shiro and Adam both held onto the Princess as they dropped.

A Galra officer stood overseeing the work of his underlings. He yawned as the machinery around beeped and buzzed in a steady, almost musical rhythm.

Shiro crept up behind him and quietly said, "Psst. Hey."

The officer turned around to find Shiro standing behind him. Before the officer could think, Shiro punched, sending the hapless Galra flying toward two sentries. The machines turned around to find a wall of Voltron Paladins facing them.

Lance fired two shots from his bayard quickly, taking out the sentries. He pulled the downed robots out of the way.

Shiro knelt next to Pidge, who had her laptop open and waiting to go on the floor. Shiro turned his head to Keith, who was acting as a lookout. He asked, "How's it look out there?"

"All clear."

Hunk plugged in Pidge's laptop interface into the Galra computer system. "This shouldn't take too long," he said as he rose and joined Lance on the other side of the room.

Adam stood near Keith, clutching his energy rifle in his hands.

Pidge turned on her laptop, and her fingers pressed on the keys. "We'll have all the information we need in a few minutes. Hunk and I have made some improvements since the last time I tried to download Galra info. We should get a nice, clear translation immediately. Hunk had a great idea about how to do it."

Hunk sat down on the nearest sentry to the others. "Do you guys remember when we studied algorithms at the Garrison, and Mr. York told us that joke about the ghost learning symbolic logic and innumerably different set?"

Lance turned his head toward Hunk. "Boring."

Hunk replied, "Right, yeah. Totally. It was boring. Anyway, the joke goes –"

Lance let out an agonized groan, not wanting to hear the joke again.

Keith spoke, "Hey, guys, sorry to interrupt, but I think we have company."

Everyone dropped down as a Galra cruiser flew over the control building.

Keith and Adam joined the others. Keith asked, "Think we should get out of here?"

Pidge shook her head. "We just need a few more seconds."

"Stay low. We need this intel," Shiro said.
The computer beeped, and the screen flashed open to reveal a Galra stepping to an identical screen on the Galra ship.

Keith whispered, "Get down!"

Lance whispered, "He's still looking. I think he's waiting for a signal or something."

Hunk started to crawl across the floor. "I got it," he said as he drug one of the downed sentries behind him. He propped it up, and it took him three attempts with the arm before getting it to flash a thumbs up at the screen.

The Galra was satisfied when the screen blanked out.

Hunk stood, releasing a quick sigh of relief.

Lance approached Hunk as he smiled. "Nice job, Hunk."

Hunk held up the sentry's arm as he replied, "Thanks." Lance smacked his hand against the destroyed robot's hand.

Adam shook his head at the pair.

Pidge gazed at her laptop. "Okay, download complete."

"What does it say?" Keith asked.

Pidge stared at her screen. "Nothing. This place doesn't have any useful information. Just a schedule of the ships coming in and out."

Lance frowned. "Well, I guess this mission is a bust."

Shiro agreed with Lance. "Let's go back to the Castle."

Allura stared at the ship outside. "Hold on." She turned her gaze back to the Green Paladin. "Pidge, do you know where that ship is headed?"

Pidge stared at her computer screen. "Um, it's scheduled to be here for about a half an hour, then head off to Central Command."

Allura stood. "That's where they have the information we need, and I'm going to sneak aboard that ship and get it for us."

The others jumped up to their feet. Lance was the first to speak. "What? No way!"

Keith asked, "How are you going to get in?"

Allura removed her helmet and closed her eyelids. She opened them again as a soft smile played across her lips. "I'm going to walk right through the front." She closed her eyelids again as her brown skin changed to purple, and her body grew to the height of a Galra soldier.

Everyone gasped as they stared up at her.

Hunk asked, "How the heck did you do that?"

Allura, who was now towering over the Paladins and Adam replied, "Alteans are a chameleon-like people who can blend in with the local populations. It's the ability that's made us great explorers.
and diplomats throughout our history."

Lance stared up at her. "So, can you turn into, like, a balloon?"

Adam groaned as he shook his head.

Pidge asked, "How many different colors can you be at once."

Hunk asked, "Aren't you afraid you'll rip your pants?"

Adam slapped his hand to his face.

Allura answered their questions all at the same time. "No, just one at a time, and I will need a change of costume. I can use his uniform as a disguise," she said as she gazed at the felled Galra officer.

Shiro shook his head. "I can't let you go in there alone."

Allura frowned. "Excuse me? I don't need your permission."

Shiro's expression turned fierce. "It's too dangerous. I'm going in with you." He glared back at her.

Pidge stepped forward as she stood next to the Black Paladin, trying to talk some sense into the Altean Princess. She grabbed the older man's robotic arm and raised it in the air. "Shiro's hand is made from Galra tech. It's the only thing we have that will allow us to interface with their systems and gather intel. I can monitor the download remotely from here."

Allura sighed. "Fine, you can come."

Hunk looked out the window. "Uh, you guys better hurry if you want to get on and off before the ship leaves for Zarkon Central."

Keith asked, "How are you going to get Shiro on board?"

Allura smiled softly toward Keith. "Don't worry. I have an idea." She turned to Shiro. "I think now would be a good time for you to make one of those happy memories."

Shiro rubbed at the back of his neck as his cheeks flushed pink. "You might be right." He lowered his hand and then coughed into it as he forced himself to reign in his emotions. He turned to face the others. "Adam, could you come here?"

Adam gazed over at Shiro. "Sure," he said as he took the few steps over to the Black Paladin.

Shiro's dark gray eyes gazed into Adam's brown eyes. "Take charge while we're gone," he said as he reached out and grasped one of Adam's hands in his human one. Then he shook his head. This wasn't right. He pulled Adam in closer and leaned in, touching his lips to Adam's. Although the kiss was brief, his heart knew it was right. "I'll be back."

Adam nodded. "You'd better, or I'm going to rip through the entire Galra Empire looking for you."

Shiro squeezed Adam's hand and released it as Allura said behind him. "I'm ready."

Adam turned around to find Keith giving him a nod of approval. Pidge grinned, Hunk wiped at moisture in his eye, and Lance waved a hand in front of his face.
Adam, Lance, Keith, and Hunk stared out the window watching as Allura carried a huge crate with Shiro inside. Adam's heart nearly stopped as the Princess stopped while two other Galra walked down the ramp pushing two giant containers in front of them. Adam let out the breath he was holding as Allura walked up the ramp and into the ship.

Lance spoke up, "They're in."

Keith asked the others, "What do you think they have in those giant containers?"

Hunk replied, "Well, I suspect it's sporks."

Keith, Lance, and Adam all craned their heads around to stare at the Yellow Paladin.

"This is an advanced race we're talking about here. Surely, they've learned that it's foolish to have forks and spoons when one tool will efficiently do the job," Hunk replied as he defended his thought.

Adam had to physically resist the urge to slap himself in the face a second time.

Pidge sat on the floor and held her laptop in her lap. She'd been ignoring the others and said, "Maybe this guy will tell us." She raised her voice as she spoke to the sentry. "What is coming in and out of this station?"

The sentry replied to her question. "Interrogation detected. Initializing lockdown." Its head dropped forward as it powered itself down.

Pidge narrowed her eyes as she glared at the robot. "Not talking, eh?" She bent over her laptop, and her fingers tapped furiously at the keys on the keyboard.

Keith gazed down at a robed and hooded figure who stood before the two Galra with the giant containers. "Whoa. Check out this guy. Whatever's happening here that requires the base to be kept secret must have something to do with that scary dude. I'm gonna go check it out." He stood and began to walk toward the exit.

Lance turned, "How about we just lay low, and you don't blow our cover."

Adam stood and followed the Red Paladin. "Keith, Takashi, left me in charge."

Keith turned and faced Adam. "Look, Shiro and Allura didn't know about that guy or those containers, and we need to know what's going on here."

"I agree, but I don't like you leaving the group," Adam replied.

"If I'm not back in half an hour, you'll probably need to come and get me."

Adam released a sigh. "I know your right, and you're an adult. But don't get yourself hurt and don't get killed, or Takashi will kill me for letting you go."

"You got it," Keith said as he turned and continued for the exit.

"What?" Lance exclaimed as he rose from his spot on the floor. "You're letting him go?" He took a step forward and glared at Keith's back. "Keith, think about what you're doing. Don't walk through that door!" But the other paladin continued walking and exited the door. Lance put his hands on his hips as he smiled over at Pidge. "I think I told him."
Pidge rolled her eyes as she deadpanned, "You're a paragon of leadership, Lance."

The Blue Paladin jutted his chin out as he smirked at Adam. "Have anything to say? I think Shiro should have left me in charge instead of you."

Adam shook his head. "Lance, one of these days, that ego of yours will be your undoing."

Hunk moved over and sat down by Pidge. He picked up a wire that connected the sentry to Pidge's laptop. He unplugged it and then plugged back together, causing the robot to raise an arm and smack itself in the head. He laughed as he gazed at the sentry. "Why are you hitting yourself?" he asked as he continued to cause the sentry to smack itself.

Pidge sighed. "Stop torturing it, Hunk."

Hunk gazed over at her. "I'm sorry. I-I need something to keep me busy, you know, so I don't worry about Keith getting caught, or Shiro and Allura getting blasted by robot things, or someone finding us here like right now."

Pidge grabbed the wire out of the Yellow Paladin's hands. "Stop it, Hunk! I think we can teach it to help us. Would you like to help us, Mr. Robot?"

The sentry shook its head.

"Whoops," Hunk replied.

Lance leaned back lazily against the wall and gazed up at the ceiling. "Quick question. Does Allura talk about me when I'm not in the room?"

Adam opened his mouth, but Hunk winked at him. "Oh, yeah, all the time."

Lance sat up quickly as he flashed Hunk a hopeful smile. "Oh, yeah, all the time."

Lance brightened as he sat up straighter. "I knew it."

Pidge's finger hovered over a key, and she jabbed it down on the key, causing the robot to swing its arm out and hit Lance.

Adam snorted but spared his cousin from embarrassment. He sat up straighter as he heard Takashi's voice come over the helmet comms. "Okay, Pidge, start the download." Adam turned his head to watch the girl as she began to type a series of commands into her laptop.

"Generating access code," she said as she continued her work. "We're in."

Shiro's voice came over the comms again, but this time he sounded stressed as though something was going wrong. "Pidge, I think there's a problem."

Pidge replied calmly. "Sit tight. I'm trying to work around this."
Adam moved next to her. "What's wrong?"

At the same time, Shiro asked, "Pidge?"

The Green Paladin replied with slight panic in her voice. "I'm on it. I'm on it."

Shiro whispered, "Hurry up, Pidge."

The girl replied, "Almost there."

Keith sent an image to Coran, which Pidge intercepted. As she stared at it, she asked, "What is that?"

The robot replied from behind her. "The material is quintessence, the substance with the highest known energy per unit volume in the universe."

Lance gazed at the younger girl. "Hey, nice job, Pidge! You got him to work for us."

Coran replied from the bridge of the Castle of Lions, "What? Impossible!"

The robot spoke again. "Raw quintessence is transported here from throughout the galaxy and refined into standard Galra fuel requirements."

Pidge glanced around. "Did you guys hear that?"

Coran exclaimed, "I can't believe it. They've found a new way to acquire quintessence!"

Keith's voice came over the comms. "Guys, I'm going to steal some of this quint-whatever."

Several minutes passed as Adam fidgeted. He needed to hear something from someone. This waiting was wearing on his nerves. The silence was broken by Keith's voice again. "Pidge, I need an extraction, now! Hurry!"

Almost at the same time, Shiro's voice came over the comms. "Pidge fire up the Green Lion! We're coming in hot!"

Pidge finished downloading the intel. She slapped down the top of her laptop and grabbed it up quickly as she jumped up from the floor. "Let's move!"

Adam, Lance, and Hunk ran behind the smaller paladin to the Green Lion. She secured her computer and jumped into her seat, bringing the lion to life. "Okay, girl," she said to the mechanical cat. "Let's go get our friends and head home."

Pidge flew the Green Lion over to the building, where Keith's representative dot blinked on the screen. She fired the lion's tail laser at the wall, weakening it. Then she pushed the control sticks forward, ramming the head of the Green Lion into the building. Pidge activated the external microphone. "Get in! We've got to get Shiro and Allura!"

Keith ran up the ramp of the Green Lion.

Pidge flew the Green Lion over and landed on the top of the control building as the Galra cruiser rose and lifted off the transport hub. "I hope we can catch the ship before they go into hyperspace," she said as she chased after the cruiser.

Adam pointed at something that was ejected from the cruiser. "What's that?"
"Escape pod," the girl replied as she maneuvered the Green Lion into the trajectory needed and scooped up the smaller ship.

The doors to the cockpit opened, and Shiro trudged through. He walked up to the back of Pidge's seat. Keith asked, "Where's Allura?"

Shiro sagged and lowered his head forward. Adam moved over to Takashi's side, wrapping an arm around the Black Paladin's waist. Adam's eyes did a quick survey, not finding any visible injuries.

Keith leaned forward. "Shiro?"

Shiro's eyelids closed, knowing some of the torture he'd gone through. He hoped that Allura wouldn't have to go through any of the same treatment he'd been through. His knees threatened to buckle under him as he said the words that he didn't want to say. "She sacrificed herself to save me."

Pidge craned her head up to try to get a look at her face. "So, she's still on that ship?"

Hunk stared at Shiro. "The ship that's headed to Zarkon's central command?"

Keith stared at Shiro. "The place that's way too dangerous for us to attack?"

Shiro straightened up and opened his eyelids. He gazed at Keith. "It doesn't matter how dangerous it is. We can't let Zarkon get Allura."

Hunk frowned. "But you said going there would be a huge mistake. You said for us to attack that place head-on would be equal to suicide."

"I know," Shiro said as he dropped his head for a second. He raised it, staring forward, and his eyes narrowed as his face grew hard. "But now we don't have a choice."
The plan to rescue Allura doesn't go as planned.

Coran turned around as the Paladins and Adam stepped onto the bridge.

Shiro was the first to speak. "Pidge, search the download from that ship." He pulled his helmet from his head. "Find out where Zarkon's central command is."

Pidge nodded as she walked over to her station and sat down in the chair, bringing up the holographic screen. "On it," she said as she began pouring over the intel.

Coran asked as his eyes searched the others for his princess, "What happened? Where's Allura?"

Shiro couldn't bring himself to make eye contact with the Altean man. He knew this would hurt since the older man and the princess were the last living Alteans in the universe. "They captured her. She sacrificed herself to save me and the information. I didn't have a choice." His mind replayed the last few minutes, where she'd lifted him by the collar of his armor and threw him into the escape pod. His last glimpse of her was the Galra grabbing her.

Coran gripped his hands into fists. "How is that possible?"

Shiro raised his gaze to the older man's face. "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. Pidge, anything?"

Pidge stared at her screen. "Guys, look at this." She directed the images to the main screen.

Coran gasped at the images that came up on the screen. "Look at the size of it."

"I think we should in right away. Every minute we wait gives Zarkon time to prepare for us," Pidge added.

Lance turned to Shiro. "I agree. We form Voltron, fly-in, fly-out, dust off our hands, and walk away."

Adam frowned, "Lance, it's not going to be that easy."

Hunk frowned at Lance, "I agree with Adam. Do you guys not remember the Balmera? We could barely take out one fleet. But this," he paused a minute as he pointed at the screen. "A base this size could hold a thousand fleets!"

Keith shook his head. "Maybe we shouldn't go on this mission at all. Think about it. We'll be delivering the universe's only hope to the universe's biggest enemy."

Hunk blinked as if he was processing what Keith had said. "Keith, that's cold, even for you. What if it was one of us? What if it was me? You wouldn't leave me, would you?"

Keith let out a sigh but defended his statement. "I'm not saying I like the idea. I'm thinking like a
Lance glared at Keith as his face darkened, and he jabbed a finger at the other teenager. "No, you're thinking of yourself because you're too scared to do what's right."

Adam glared at Lance but kept his thoughts to himself.

Pidge raised her voice as she held out her hands. "Okay! We're all upset because we lost Allura."

Coran turned on the Black Paladin. "No, Shiro lost Allura!"

Adam reached out, placing his hand on the older man's chest. "Dial it down a notch, Coran. That was a cheap shot, and you know it! Takashi never meant for that to happen, and you didn't see him in the cockpit of the Green Lion. We all did. It's hurting him as much as you so back off. Give yourself some time and help us think of a way to get in there and get her back."

Coran shoved Adam's hand away and stomped off toward the main screen.

Hunk stamped his foot on the ground as his voice rose louder than anyone had heard it before. "Okay! This isn't helping! We can't sit here and bicker like this."

Shiro turned his gaze on the others. "Let's focus. How are we going to get Allura?"

The others moved off to their stations to go over the visual of Zarkon's Central Command to try to figure out a way in. Shiro moved between them, all getting each paladin's input of a way to get in without being seen.

He stopped at Lance's station and put his arm on the back of the seat as he leaned over as the Blue Paladin studied it again. Shiro asked, "Anything?"

The Cuban teenager shook his head as he frowned. "I've looked at this thing from every angle. There's just no way in. They'll have us tracked from every direction."

Shiro frowned as he shook his head. "I can't accept that. There's got to be something. Keep looking." Shiro gazed at the front of the ship, where Coran stood staring at the main screen. He stood straight. He knew it was time to get this over with.

Shiro walked up to join Coran at the main screen. "I know you're worried about her. We all are. I'm sorry I let her slip away."

Coran sighed. "I know it's not your fault. It's just," he paused a moment before speaking again. "I've lost so much. I can't lose Allura, too, like I lost my people and her father."

Shiro allowed a moment to pass for Coran to get his bearings. "We'll find a way to get her back. If there was a way to get in close to Zarkon's ship unseen," Shiro said as he thought out loud.

Coran's eyes widened as he stared at the screen again. "Wait for a tick. I think I've got a way," he snapped his fingers and rushed over to his station and studied the readings. "Yes, yes, this will work."

Adam gazed at the Paladin and Altean. He knew by how Shiro held himself that both he and Coran were coming up with a plan. A slight smile pulled at the corner of his lips.

Shiro and Coran turned around to face the others. "Everyone, eyes front," the Black Paladin called out in his commanding voice, immediately gaining everyone's attention. "We've got a plan to get
Allura. We're going to jump to the heart of the enemy, unseen and undetected."

Pidge asked, "I thought we needed Allura to open a wormhole."

Coran nodded. "It is true that Allura powers the Castle's ability to travel through wormholes. However, I think we have enough of her residual energy stored in the system to make one jump. We'll hide the Castle here," he pointed to one of the two planets on the outskirts that were linked to the rings surrounded Zarkon's command ship, "inside one of these giant gas planets in Zarkon's command system. The gas is so dense we'll be hidden."

Shiro took over the briefing. "From there, we'll use the Castle to scan for Allura on Zarkon's ship and attack before he knows what hit him."

Coran frowned. "There's only one hiccup. We have enough energy to wormhole in but, without Allura, we won't have enough energy to wormhole out."

"Let's go get Allura," Keith said as he stared pointedly at Lance.

Coran nodded as he moved over to his station and inputted the coordinates for the wormhole jump. He held his finger over the button as he closed his eyelids and took a deep breath. This was it. He released the breath and stabbed his finger on the button.

A wormhole opened up inside the gas giant and the Castle of Lions few out of the wormhole and into the thick red gas. Shiro gazed out the viewscreen. "We're here."

Coran's fingers ran over his controls. "I'm detecting Allura's energy signature. From this distance, the signal is pretty weak, but she's somewhere in Zarkon's main ship."

Keith replied, "It gives us a starting point."

Coran continued to input commands into his control panel. "Once we get closer, we'll be able to narrow down the location where Allura is being held."

Shiro turned to the others. "Okay, guys, this is it. Voltron is going to come in fast and without warning. We'll smash our way into that ship and grab the princess. We'll have Allura and be on our way. Adam," he paused, hoping for the best but also fearing the worst that could have happened to the Altean woman. "I need you to ride with Hunk. Let's get to our lions."

Coran turned to watch the humans move to their spots to get to their lions. "God speed paladins," he whispered. "Bring her home."

Voltron flew out of the gas planet and flew toward Zarkon's command ship. Hunk and Adam stared at a barrier that closed around the area. Hunk asked, "What is that?"

Pidge replied, "I don't know, but I hope when we get the Princess, we can find a way out of here." She stared at the mass of Galra cruisers that sat between them and the command ship. She shouted, "They're going to fire!"

The cruisers fired purple beams of energy at the giant robot.

Shiro growled in response as Voltron flew up to the nearest ship. The Red Lion that made Voltron's right arm drew back and flew forward, punching the cruiser. The Green Lion that made the left arm followed through with a second punch to the ship. Shiro shouted, "Form sword!"

Voltron now held the sword and stabbed the blade into the cruiser then cut down the side of the
cruiser. The ship exploded as Voltron charged at another and hit it with such force it slammed into another cruiser. The resulting explosion took out a third cruiser.

Voltron cleared the ships. Lance yelled out, "More trouble straight ahead!"

Another line of cruisers faced Voltron firing their weapons. Shiro yelled out another command. "Form shoulder cannon!"

Adam watched as Hunk jammed his bayard into a slot beside him. He watched fascinated as the targeting screen came up, marking the entire line of enemy ships. Beams of energy shot out of the shoulder cannon, and the whole line of warships exploded.

Shiro growled, "There's Zarkon's ship." As they got closer, Voltron was stopped as if the giant mechanical warrior had smacked into a wall.

Keith shouted, "We lost the sword! Something's malfunctioning!"

"What's happening?" Coran asked.

"Somebody do something! Voltron's frozen up!" Lance yelled out to the others.

Shiro groaned. "I can't hold it!" He grunted.

A bright flash of white light surrounded Voltron as the paladins screamed. They all groaned as the mechanical warrior broke apart and their lions floating in space.

Adam glanced over at Hunk as the Yellow Paladin asked, "What happened? Something tore us apart!"

Lance replied, "I don't know, but we've got bigger problems right now. Look!"

Fighters flew out from the rings.

Keith growled. "Why do I get the feeling these guys knew we were coming?"

More Galra cruisers appeared joining in the fight as the lions peeled out to the Galra ships. However, the Black Lion was caught in a tractor beam and a tug of war of wills between Shiro and Zarkon.

The Yellow Lion crashed though two fighters that the Blue Lion had frozen. The Yellow Lion spun around. Hunk gazed through his viewscreen. "There's no end to these guys."

An intense beam of a white ion beam fired from above, taking out the nearest cruiser. The older Altean yelled, "Coran attack! I've waited ten thousand years for this!"

"Coran!" the paladins yelled.

Shiro groaned over the comms.

Adam turned his head, seeing out the side of the Yellow Lion's cockpit that the Black Lion was closer to Zarkon's Command ship. "Takashi!"

"Shiro, are you okay?" Keith asked.

Shiro groaned again. "Something is overriding the controls! My lion isn't responding!"
Adam couldn't take his eyes away as Shiro screamed in pain and was suddenly ejected out of the mouth of the Black Lion. "We have to help him!"

Hunk shook his head. "I'm sorry, Adam, we can't. Our priority is to get Allura."

Adam's shoulders sagged. "I know your right, but I can't stand not being able to help in some way."

Keith's voice was almost music to Adam's ears. "Shiro's in trouble! I'm going in!"

Hunk asked, "What do we do now, guys? Our plan isn't working out as well… planned!"

Shiro's voice came back over the comms. "I'm going for the Black Lion. You guys concentrate on getting the Princess, now!"

"I've identified Allura's exact location. Uploading the coordinates to you now," Coran said. "In the meantime, I'll provide covering fire from up here… all alone, against an entire fleet. So, yeah, do you mind hurrying?"

Shiro released a sigh. "My jetpack's damaged. I'll need to go through the ship."

Keith took out several Galra fighters. "You guys get the Princess without me."

"What?" Lance replied. "We've got to stick together! What are you doing?"

"Whatever I can."

Adam snuck peaks out the side of the Yellow Lion's cockpit. His eyes grew large as he saw Keith's intention and watched as the Red Lion rammed into the Black Lion sending the mechanical cat flying to impact with Zarkon's ship.

Someone dropped out of the bottom of the command ship and flew over to where the Black Lion had landed.

Keith said, "Whoa! Who is that?"

Coran gasped. "It's Zarkon! Keith, get out of there now! He's too powerful!"

"No! This is my chance to put an end to the Galra Empire! I have to take it."

Coran yelled over the comms. "Keith, don't!"

As Keith and Zarkon battled, a blip came up on Hunk's screen. "The Princess in this part of the ship!"

Lance asked, "How do we get in?"

"Maybe I can try hacking one of their cargo bays," Pidge said.

A wicked gleam flashed in the Yellow Paladins' eyes. "Actually, yes, I do. Adam, you better hang on. We're gonna crash the party!" Hunk said as he chuckled at his pun. He slammed his control sticks forward and smashed the Yellow Lion headfirst into the ship. As the mouth opened, both Hunk and Adam ran out, blasting the sentries who stood guard.

Fighters started to converge on the Yellow Lion as Lance said, "Looks like we've got to cover Hunk's butt!"
Hunk chuckled at Lance's comment as he used his bayard to burn a hole in the wall to Allura's cell. As he stepped through the hole, Allura gasped. "Hunk!"

"We're going to get you out of here."

Allura's eyes widened as she fired off rapid questions. "What are you doing here? Tell me you didn't bring Voltron here! Where's the Black Lion?" She stopped as if she heard something. She jumped up and ran for the hole in the wall. "We have to save Shiro!"

"Hunk, did you get the Princess?" Lance asked.

"I got her, but there's a change of plans."

"Change of plan? What are you talking about?"

"Shiro's in trouble," Adam replied.

Allura, Adam, and Hunk ran into the hangar to see Shiro surrounded by several copies of a cackling robbed woman.

Hunk gripped his bayard, "Which one is the real one?"

Allura glanced around quickly when movement caught her attention. She pointed, "Hunk, there! Fire!"

Hunk fired his bayard at the witch. With her spell broken, Shiro rose swinging his weaponized hand at her. He missed and fell as she vanished in a puff of smoke.

Allura and Adam helped Shiro to his feet as she yelled. "We've got to get out of here!"

Hunk glanced around. "Where's the scary lady?"

"Hunk!" she yelled at him.

The Yellow Paladin jumped and ran after them.

They climbed into the Yellow Lion, and Hunk backed his lion out, removing the lion's head from Zarkon's ship.

Shiro hung onto the Hunk's seat but winced as pain shot through his side.

"Your hurt," Adam said as he gazed at the wound.

"I'll live," Shiro replied. "Zarkon's witch has done worse to me in the past," he said as he flexed his right arm.

Hunk craned his head around. "Shiro, I'm dropping you off so you can get the Black Lion. Keith's been keeping Zarkon occupied, so he didn't get his slimy Galra hands on it."

The Yellow Lion touched down by the Black Lion, and Shiro ran down the ramp. When he got near the lion, it sat up and lowered, dropping its ramp for him to climb up into the lion. He sat down in his seat. "Let's go home," he told the Black Lion.
Movement below caught his attention. Zarkon held the black bayard in his hand, and it transformed into a giant sword, and Zarkon began charging at the Red Lion that lay on its side, not moving.

Shiro changed course. A feral growl came from his throat. He aimed the Black Lion straight at Zarkon firing the mouth laser. He didn't wait to see if Zarkon survived or not. He used the Black Lion to scoop up the Red Lion and headed for the Castle. "I got you, buddy!"

The lions landed in the Castle as Allura and Adam raced out of the Yellow Lion for the bridge.

Allura took her position under the crystal that bathed her in its nearly white light as she placed her hands on top of the pillars. "All right, Paladins, time get out of here."

Hunk's face appeared on the main screen. "Hello? What's going on? I don't see a wormhole."

Coran gazed back at the teenager. "The Galra barrier is jamming our ability to create one! They have us surrounded!"

Before Hunk could panic more than what he was, the barrier fell.

Pidge's face now appeared on the screen. "What just happened?"

Hunk's face appeared again. "Who cares? Wormhole!"

Allura focused and created a wormhole. The Castle started to enter it as a blast of dark energy came from Zarkon's ship hitting the wormhole. The once clean blue light of the wormhole was perverted into an ugly sick purple. The Castle shook as bolts of energy like lightning flashed around and through the ship.

"Coran, what's happening?" Shiro asked.

"The integrity of the wormhole has been compromised. It's breaking down!"

"What does that mean?" Lance asked

"We have no control over where we're headed!"

The Castle was shaken as the lions suddenly became weightless and swirled around as if they were in a hurricane. The Paladins screamed as the lions were sucked out of the ship and thrown out.

Allura's eyes grew wide as she said, "The Paladins are gone!"
Chapter Summary

The Castle of Lions is stuck in a time loop.

Adam stood next to Coran as he watched the lions swirling about in the wormhole, and they vanished. "Where'd they go?" he asked as his knees started to buckle, but the older man beside him caught him.

Coran reached out and grasped the younger man by the arm. He knew what Shiro meant to Adam, and Lance was family. He couldn't help but turn his gaze to Allura as he helped the younger man to his seat. The Princess was as close to a daughter to him as one could get. He'd been there for her birth and watched her grow into the young woman she was now.

Allura stared at the viewscreen. "They've vanished through the temporal rift! The lions are gone!"

Coran rushed back to his station. "Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us."

Allura checked her holographic displays. "Coran, look! There appears to be something on the other end. We're heading toward it!"

"Scanners show that there's no exit. It's just nothingness. Find an exit before we run smack into the void!" Coran craned his head around to stare at her.

Allura's fingers raced over the holographic controls. "I can't. I've lost control of the Castle!"

The Castle crashed into the void but reappeared back at their starting point.

Adam slumped in his seat. Takashi, Lance, even Keith were gone. What more could go wrong? What more could anyone or anything take away from him?

Coran's voice interrupted his thoughts. "Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us."

Allura blinked as she looked up. "Coran, we're okay!"

The older man turned to face her. "What are you talking about? We've lost all the lions!"

Allura stared at the older man. "We've just smashed into a black void. Don't you remember?"

Pressure heavier than usual appeared on her shoulder. She looked over at the mouse, sitting on her shoulder. "Hmmm?" she said in response as it squeaked at her. She gasped.

The mouse on her shoulder was about five or six times larger than its average size. And its ears were longer and pointier than usual. "What happened to the mice? They've transformed."

Allura finally got a good look at Coran. She gasped again. "Coran?"

Coran stared back at her. "Why are you looking at me like that?"
"You look younger."

Coran shrugged and turned back to his controls. "Scanners show that there's no exit. It's just nothingness!"

Allura groaned. "You said that already!"

Coran glanced over his shoulder. "Find an exit before we run smack into the void."

"I'm entering coordinates to get us out of here. The Castle won't accept an endpoint."

"Enter any coordinates!"

"I'm trying, but the system is locked. I can't get a signal in or out." Allura gasped as the black void grew larger.

Coran yelled, "Allura!"

The Castle entered the void.

As the Castle started it's run again, Adam sat up straight. Strangeness was the word of the day. He pushed his feelings to the side. He rose from his seat and took the steps to Allura's side.

Coran said, "Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us."

Allura frowned and gazed at the ceiling. "Oh no! You're even younger now!"

Coran flashed heroic, and what he considered manly poses at her. he said, "What's the matter, Princess? You look confused. Don't worry. I'll get us out of here."

One of the mice bellowed. Allura let out a surprised scream. "We appear to be caught in some time loop that's affecting everybody but Adam and myself."

"Yeah," Adam nodded. "There's been theories about temporal time loops since humans first shot a rocket into space. However, now I get to see one up close and personal."

Coran bent over his control area. "Scanners show that there's no exit. It's just—"

"Nothingness, I know. And we can't find another exit point." The mice surrounded Allura. They were the size of Great Danes but with bigger heads and much thicker bodies.

Coran flexed his muscles. "Don't sit there. We've got to find a way out of this." He flexed his bicep. "I'll never give into nothingness."

The Castle flew into the void.

Coran's hair was much longer. He propped his head up on his hand. "Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us." He sighed. "This is so boring."

"Coran, please! I don't need any of your attitude right now."

Coran turned around full of teenage angst. "You don't understand me at all! You have no idea what I'm going through. I'll be in my control area! Hmmph!" He folded his arms over his chest as he spun back around.
Allura frowned. "I can't manually enter coordinates. But the Castle will automatically lock on to the lions' whereabouts. If we can locate them," she said as she brightened.

"Good idea, Princess," Adam replied.

She brought up the star map, but her frustration grew. "It's not working! I'm unable to home in on their location."

Loud music filled the bridge. "Coran turn that music down! Our lives are at stake!"

Coran shouted back at the princess, "I can only express myself through music!"

"Coran if you don't turn that down, I swear I'll turn this Castle around and—"

"And what? We're just gonna run into this void that's coming up here. I hate everybody!"

The Castle entered the void.

The Castle started its journey again. Adam stared at the little boy who now stood in Coran's spot. The boy was about ten earth years old.

"Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this wormhole is taking us. Whatever that means."

"We've tried everything, and nothing's worked. A few more trips down this wormhole, and you're to disappear. We must find a way out."

Coran turned around. "Blast your way out. Duh!" He ran over to the mice who were now one creature with four heads. Coran jumped on it's back, riding it around like a pony.

Allura shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose it's worth a try. The Castle defenses might have enough firepower to destroy the tunnel."

Coran yelled, "Yeah! And it'll go ker-ploooey!"

Each shot fired just bounced back. "It's not working! It's like we're shooting at ourselves."

Coran asked, "Where's Voltron?"

The Castle flew into the void.

The Castle started its run again, and Adam blinked. Coran was now a toddler.

Toddler Coran stood on top of his control panel. "Let's check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where this worm goes." His stomach rumbled. "I hungry." He screamed and stomped on the control panel then flew into a temper tantrum, jumping up and down on it.

Allura pushed her way past the mice who were now giant floating orbs. "Coran, no! That is not a toy. You're going to break the Castle, and everything will stop! Wait a tick," she said as she held the squirming, screaming child. "Perhaps we can simply stop the Castle from moving." She placed Coran down.

Toddler Coran reached up, grabbing the back of Allura's head and yanked her hair. "No! Mine!" He opened his mouth and clamped his teeth down on her shoulder.

Adam ran over to her and grabbed Coran. He knelt in front of the child and pointed his index finger
at him. "No, good babies, don't bite."

Coran stared at the finger and opened his mouth, biting on it.

Adam growled. "Oh, you little biter!" he yelled as he reached out. Coran screamed again and ran around the bridge with Adam giving chase. Coran ran over to Allura and slammed into her thigh, gripping it with both hands.

"He's just a baby, Adam."

Adam rolled his eyes. "Yeah, a baby Barracuda." At her blank look, he waved a hand in front of his face. "It's nothing. How's your shoulder?"

"I'll live."

She pressed a button on the control panel. The Castle began powering down.

"I've shut down all the power. Why are we still moving toward the void?"

Coran cried, "My control panel!"

The Castle flew into the void.

As the Castle started it's run again, Allura blinked. She found herself back at her spot on the bridge, holding infant Coran.

The infant in her arms cried. "I know, I know. Who wants to check the Rift Exit Positioning Monitor to see where the wormhole is taking us? You do, that's who."

Adam shot her a grin. You'll make an excellent mother one day."

A slight smile pulled at the corner of her mouth. She turned her gaze back to the upcoming void. She sighed. "We have to get out of this loop before the only thing left of you is your mustache." She hugged him closer to her. "If we hit the end of this tunnel again, you'll cease to exist." She gasped as they drew closer to the end. "I'm sorry. You were like a second father to me."

One of her screens began beeping. "Coran, look! The Castle has locked onto a coordinate. Come on. Come on!"

The Castle jumped out of the wormhole, flying toward a giant trash heap. "We made it!"

A groan and a snore reached her ears. She gazed down to find herself holding a grown-up Coran.

He opened his eyes and gazed up at her. "Mom?" he asked.

Allura dropped him and crossed her arms over her body.

Adam let out a chuckle but turned it into a cough as she turned her gaze toward him.

Allura parked the Castle next to the heap of trash where the Green Lion stood. The young woman gazed out the main viewscreen at the image of the Green Paladin. "You saved us, Pidge. We were stuck in a time loop."

Coran gazed at the smallest Paladin. "You got us out with this giant trash pile."

"It's a make-shift communications link that sends out the Green Lion energy. It's similar to the
energy that guided the Blue Lion home."

Coran raised a hand in the air. "Pidge, you're a genius!"

Pidge smiled back. "I know. Besides, it wasn't just me. They helped." She turned, and a bunch of small floating creatures floated in the air behind her.

Allura smiled. "Let's go get the rest of the Paladins."

"I've locked onto the coordinates of the Red and Black Lions. They're on a planet two systems over."

Adam gazed at Pidge as she got up to go to her lion. "I'm going with you."

"Why?" she stopped and turned around to gaze at the older man.

"Take was hurt before we got separated. I have to go down and make sure he's okay."

"Shiro's hurt? How did that happen?" Pidge asked.

"In a fight with some robed thing on Zarkon's ship. She reminded me of the old storybooks about Halloween filled with comments about witches."

"Let's go then," Pidge said as she turned to get to her lion.

The Green Lion burst out of the wormhole and flew down toward the planet. "I see them both, Allura."

"Are they okay?" Allura asked.

Before either Adam or Pidge could say anything, Keith's voice came over the comms. "Pidge, let Adam know that Shiro needs a pod."

"I'm here," Adam replied.

Pidge landed the Green Lion by the others. It lowered itself to the ground and dropped the ramp. Adam ran down the ramp in a flash.

Adam raced over to the pair of Paladins. He had to make sure Shiro was okay.

Shiro grimaced as pain shoot through his side. He gazed up at the other man. "Check out Keith first. He fought Zarkon."

Adam shook his head. "I'll check him out after we've got you in a pod on the Castle. You look worse than I last saw you."

"He was being hunted by some giant lizards. But I managed to save him from them," Keith said.

Adam, with Keith's help, got Shiro to his feet.

"Can you pilot the Black Lion?" Keith asked as his eyebrows drew together.

Shiro groaned as he was hit with another spasm of pain. "I should be able to as long as I don't have
to fight."

Both the Black and Red Lions lowered toward the ground with their ramps dropping. Adam helped Shiro up the ramp and into the cockpit. Shiro sat down in his seat as the systems powered up. His cockpit glowed briefly. He reached out, flipping a switch. "Black says he'll do the work for me."

Keith snorted. "Good. At least Black is looking out for you."

Adam chuckled from behind Shiro's chair. "I never imagined these mechanical cats could be so protective."

"Yeah," Shiro frowned. That's something that I need to take up with Allura."

"Yeah," Keith agreed.

"What are you two talking about?" Pidge asked as all three lions lifted off the ground, and they left the desolate planet behind.

Adam frowned, "I don't have a clue, but I'm sure they'll let us know after we've found Lance and Hunk."

"You haven't found them yet?" Shiro asked.

"Not yet," Adam replied. "If it weren't for our little resident genius, we'd still be stuck in a time loop. And that wasn't pleasant." He placed his hand on Shiro's shoulder. "I'm glad we have you back."

"Hey," Keith began as the lions headed for the wormhole. "What about me?"

Adam chuckled. "You too, hothead."

Keith growled, "I'm not a hothead."

Pidge giggled. "I missed you guys."

The Lions went into the wormhole.

The trip to the Castle didn't take long. As the Lions landed in their bays, Shiro flipped the communication switch. "Adam, I need to tell you something." He panted as his pain grew. He struggled to stay awake from the pain. "I want Keith to lead Voltron if anything happens to me."

Adam's face paled as he stared at the other man. "Your serious, aren't you."

Shiro nodded, "Yes, I am." He groaned as another spasm shot through him.

As Adam helped Shiro down the ramp from the Black Lion, his glassy pain-filled eyes stared around at familiar surroundings. He grit his teeth together as another spasm shot through his side. Shiro's legs gave out as Keith shouted, "Shiro!"

Keith raced in as Coran appeared with a hover stretcher in tow. Adam and Keith got the Black Paladin on the stretcher, and Pidge ran in. "Is he gonna be okay?" she asked.
"I'm sure he will be," Adam replied as he placed a hand on the teenager's shoulder.

Pidge stayed with Adam, Keith, and Coran as the older man guided the stretcher to the infirmary. Adam raced over to where he stashed the medical scanner. He ran it over Shiro's body. He gazed at the readout on the device. "Let's get his armor off and get him in that pod."

Both Keith and Pidge stepped in to help as they quickly got him out of the armor. "Pidge, Keith, if you stay while I put on the medical suit, you're going to see somethings that Takashi never wanted you to see."

"Like what?" Pidge asked.

Adam took a deep breath. "His scars."

"I can take it," Keith replied.

Pidge nodded, "So can I."

Adam grasped the black flight suit. His fingers stopped as he brought his gaze up to check on Pidge and Keith. He sucked in a deep breath. Now or never, he thought. Then he continued to remove the suit from Shiro's body.

Pidge gasped at the scars on Shiro's body and turned into Keith, hugging onto the older teen.

Keith froze for a minute but then accepted the hug from the smallest Paladin. He awkwardly hugged her back. "It's okay."

Adam finished putting the suit on Shiro. "Okay, let's get him in the pod, and then we can take a look at you, Keith."

Keith grit his teeth. "I'm fine. I'm not hurt."

"Let me be the judge of that," Adam replied as he and Keith got Shiro in the pod.

The cover slid down, and the freezing process started. How it worked, Adam didn't know.

He picked up the scanner and ran it over Keith. "Your good. But you should get some rest." He turned his gaze to Pidge, "You too."

"Nope, I'm not leaving here until the both of you do."

Adam sighed. "Okay, I see the two of you are going to be stubborn." He moved over to the wall and lowered three beds. "Now, we can all get some rest." A thought occurred to him. "Allura, any sign of Hunk or Lance yet."

"Yes, we're locked onto their position. They're just one system away."

"Good, I've got Pidge and Keith here in the infirmary with me. They don't plan on leaving."

"Alright. I'll tell them not to wake the both of you up when they're back on the Castle," Allura replied.

"Sounds good," Adam replied.
Adam and Shiro get closer and they find an ally to help aid them in their war against Zarkon.

Adam tried to sleep but found his mind drifting back to what Shiro had said earlier before getting him out of the cockpit of the Black Lion. "If something happens to me, I want Keith to lead Voltron." Adam's eyelids opened again. He stared across the room at the pod that held Takashi.

He heard voices in the hall. They sounded like Lance and Hunk. Coran or Allura must have told them about Shiro. He rose from the bed and walked over to another wall and pressed his hand against it opening two more beds.

He turned around to face the pair of Paladins. He held his finger to his lips and pointed at the other beds containing Keith and Pidge.

Hunk gazed over at the pod, holding Shiro and then over at Adam and Lance. He kept his voice to a whisper as he spoke. "I'm glad to see he'll be okay, but I think I'm going to head down to the kitchen and fix something for us to eat."

Lance slapped Hunk's shoulder. "Good idea. I'll join you in a bit."

"Don't you want to get some sleep?" Adam asked.

Lance shook his head. "No, I got enough on that water planet where we were stuck at. But you cuz, you need some. I could play hide and seek in the bags under your eyes."

"Shut up," Adam replied.

Lance was going to repeat something when he yelped and looked down to find a certain small Paladin next to him. "Shut up, Lance. I'm just glad to see your back," Pidge said.

Lance gave the smaller girl a quick hug. "It's good to be back. But Adam, I mean it, you are not looking too hot. You haven't been taking care of yourself."

Pidge poked Lance in the side. "How would you feel if the man who kissed you was now in a healing pod? Hmm?"

"Point taken," Lance replied. He leaned over and whispered something into Pidge's ear.

She nodded. "I'm on it," she replied as she grabbed Adam by the hand and tugged.

"What are you two up to?" Adam asked as Pidge tugged on the older man again.

Lance grabbed Adam's other hand and yanked. "It's time you slept. I'm not going to go through Shiro getting upset because you're turning into a zombie from worry."

"Lance, Pidge," Adam gazed at the both of them. "I'll be fine when I know that Takashi is okay."
Lance shook his head. "Something is bothering you in a big way, and I know it. I remember how you were when you thought Shiro was dead. You didn't sleep much then either. Now you can either tell us what's going on so we can help you or you can sleep."

Adam shook his head as he allowed the two teenagers to pull him over to the bed that he had chosen for himself earlier. He sat down on the edge and muttered to himself. "Imagine an adult being bullied by teenagers."

Lance put his hand up to his ear and leaned in toward Adam. "What was that? I didn't quite hear you."

Pidge sighed and punched her fist into Lance's shoulder then turned back to Adam. "Ignore him. I think his brain is waterlogged from the water planet."

Lance's eyes narrowed as he stared back at her. "Haha. That was so not funny."

Keith rolled over. "I thought it was. Now would you shut up so I can go back to sleep?"

"Whatever, Mullet," Lance grumbled.

"Okay, settle down," Adam replied as he stretched out on the bed. But he was surprised when Pidge followed and lay down next to him. "Uh, Pidge, what are you doing?"

"I-I," she hesitated. "I thought I could handle seeing Shiro's scars, but I was wrong. Now I can't stop thinking about my dad and my brother. And-And I feel safe with you and Shiro around. And I believe him when he says that we're going to find them."

"We will find them, Pidge. Don't ever doubt that."

Adam woke to find the other Paladins awake and surrounding Shiro's Pod. When had he gone to sleep? He couldn't remember. As he sat up, Lance gazed over at him. "Good, you're awake. Keith wanted to wake you up, but I wouldn't let him."

Keith glared at Lance then turned his gaze to the older man. "I think somethings wrong with the pod. Shiro looks like he's in pain."

Adam got to his feet and raced over to the pod. He placed his hands on it as he silently agreed with the Red Paladin. He raised his head and spoke loud enough for all the Paladins to hear. "Allura, Coran, we may have a problem."

Allura's voice came over the speaker in the infirmary. "We're on our way."

As they waited, Pidge drifted over to the other side of the room, and Lance sat down on the steps behind where Hunk stood. The Yellow Paladin scratched at the back of his head. "I'd love to take one of these apart to figure out how it works."

"That's not advisable number 2," Coran said as he walked into the room, followed by Allura. The pair of Alteans stepped over to the main control panel for the pods.

Hunk turned back to the pod but turned back toward the Alteans as they studied the readout on the control panel. "Is he going to be okay."
Allura turned her gaze toward the Yellow Paladin. "Sometimes, the healing process can cause involuntary brain wave reactions."

Hunk turned back to the pod. "He looks like he's having a bad dream."

Keith folded his arms over his chest as he was finally assured that Shiro was out of imminent danger. He gazed at the pod. "He got blasted by a space witch and mauled by giant lizards. What dream could be worse than that?"

Pidge gazed at the Red Paladin from the other side of the room as she shuddered from a sudden shiver that ran over her body. She rubbed her hands over her arms. "I can think of a few things."

"I can, too," Adam agreed.

Allura lifted her gaze from the control panel. "The pod will be opening in a few ticks."

Adam picked up a blanket, holding it ready. He turned a fraction to gaze at the Green Paladin. "Pidge pour a cup of the heated Nunvill. Takashi will need something warm in his system."

Pidge jumped up from her spot and carried out the required task. She held the cup in her hand as she stood next to Adam, practically bouncing up and down. The pod hissed, and the lid dematerialized.

Shiro opened his eyes to see his team waiting for him.

Adam placed the blanket on the Black Paladin's shoulder.

"Thanks," Shiro replied as he sank to the step. Pidge handed the cup to him, and Shiro eyed the contents with a raised eyebrow but then took a small sip. The warmed Nunvill hit his tongue and didn't taste as bad as the cool stuff did.

Lance gaped at him. "How can you drink that stuff?"

Shiro chuckled, but he sobered. "Guys, I remembered something while I was in the pod. I didn't exactly escape from Sendak's ship by myself. I had help from a Galra who was working with a resistance movement called the Blade of Marmora. He said he put the coordinates in my hand. He also said that the Blade of Marmora was with us."

"Are you certain?" Allura asked.

Shiro nodded. "Yes, Ulaz was very specific. It was the explosion from the bomb that Ulaz set to cover my escape that caused my memory to turn into Swiss Cheese."

Pidge gazed into Shiro's dark gray eyes. "I can hook your hand up to my equipment and run a scan."

"Sure."

Hunk gazed up at the ceiling. "Mmm. Swiss Cheese, I miss that. It would go good on that meat we have. It would be almost like Ham and cheese sandwiches. That is if I can find anything out there that could be worked into a flour to make bread with."

Lance gazed over at Hunk. "You're making me homesick for my mom's garlic knots."

Hunk grimaced. "Oops, sorry, Lance."
Adam rolled his eyes at the pair of friends. "But first, Takashi, you need to eat something, and I'm sure you'd like to shower and change to feel human again."

Shiro nodded, "Your right about that."

Shiro sat on an improvised stool with his Galra arm resting on Pidge's workbench. Wires ran from a machine to the spot where the human wrist would be on the metal arm.

Pidge glanced over at the older man. "I'm not finding any coordinates here. Are you sure this wasn't just a dream."

Shiro didn't flinch or look away as he stared back at Pidge. "I'm positive. Someone helped me escape."

Allura interjected herself into the conversation. "And he was Galra?"

"Yes."

"You know you cannot trust them."

Maybe he decided to be a little cruel or just wanted the truth that both he and Keith had discovered finally out in the open. Or perhaps he just wanted the young Altean woman to stop keeping secrets finally. "Your father must have trusted them once. Zarkon was the original Black Paladin, wasn't he?"

Lance's eyes grew. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

Adam placed his hand on Shiro's shoulder.

Allura looked away from Shiro. "That was a long time ago."

Lance turned his gaze on her. "Wait, what?"

Keith gazed past Allura at Lance. "Didn't you see how Zarkon stole the Black Lion from under Shiro? Or that he could do all that cool stuff with his bayard? Shiro's bayard? You know, the black one?" He let his comment strike at the Princess. "The one that was lost with its Paladin."

Shiro leaned toward the Princess. "Why didn't you tell us the truth about Zarkon?"

Allura frowned as she looked down, not able to make eye contact with the Black Paladin. "I wanted to protect you from the dark history of the paladins," she lifted her head to gaze into the older man's eyes, "so you would have a chance to bond with your lion on your own. You are the Black Paladin now, not Zarkon."

Shiro turned his gaze from her as he dropped his head slightly. "Yeah, well, the Black Lion may have a different take on the matter."

Pidge looked up from her computer and then back down to the screen again as her fingers worked on the keys of her keyboard. "Wait a second. I think I see it now. Some repeating numbers in all this Galra code. Let me extract it." She examined the numbers closer. "They are coordinates." She directed them to a much larger screen in the Green Lion's hangar. "They lead here. The Thadycon System."
Shiro stood and faced the screen. "Then, that's where we're headed."

Keith asked, "Shiro, are you sure you can trust this? I mean, after everything the Galra have done to you – They took your arm."

"It's worth the risk. Someone helped me escape. If we can locate some allies in our fight against Zarkon, especially ones from his own side, we might find a way to take him down."

Allura joined the conversation. "We can check the location, but I do not like this. The Galra are not to be trusted." She spun on her heel and stormed out of the hangar.

Coran shrugged and followed the Princess.

The other paladins followed Coran out of the hangar heading for the bridge. Adam reached out and grabbed Shiro's human hand, pulling him back. "You scared me when we found you and Keith back on that planet. And then what you said once we got you back," he couldn't finish what he was going to say. He placed both hands on Shiro's cheeks and pressed his lips to Shiro's, and when he felt the response, he deepened the kiss.

As the pair separated, he placed his forehead against Shiro's. "Takashi, don't leave me. I know I'm selfish, but I love you with all my heart."

Shiro closed his eyelids as he leaned his forehead into Adams. "Adam, you have no idea how much I've wished for this moment." He opened his eyelids, pulling his head away as he gazed into Adam's eyes. "I wish we could sneak away, but we're at war." A sad smile pulled at the corner of his mouth.

"Once Zarkon is defeated, and the universe and Earth are safe, I will be happy to be with you. And leave all this fighting behind us." He reached out and brushed his fingers against Adam's cheek.

Adam sighed, but he pressed his hand against Shiro's as he leaned into the other man's caress. "Takashi, it could take years, but I'll wait for that day."

Shiro reluctantly pulled his hand away as he nodded. "Good. Let's find out what we're facing."

The Castle of Lions entered the Thaldycon system. Coran gazed at the viewscreen. "Well, this is it. No sign of any activity at all, living or otherwise."

Shiro, who sat at his station, gazed out at the crystal formations. "Can we get in there to take a closer look?"

Coran shook his head. "I don't want to bring the Castle any closer. Those xanthorium chunks contain highly unstable nitrate salts. Even bumping one of them can blow us straight to Wozblay."

Pidge tapped a finger against her cheek. "Nitrate salts. I knew I recognized this. It's a component used in the manufacture of gunpowder. Gunpowder was used on earth years ago to make bullets for guns."

"Wow, Pidge," Hunk gazed over at her. "I'm surprised you remember that."

She shrugged. "I did a project in middle school for the science fair on the feasibility of bringing the
uses of gunpowder back as more than for fireworks."

Shiro started at the screen. "Are you sure this is right?"

"These are the coordinates Number Five gave me."

"Hey! My decryption is solid," Pidge replied slightly offended that either man would question her decryption of any code.

Shiro shook his head. "There must be something we're missing."

Allura gazed at the back of Shiro's head. "We should get out of here. We've checked it out, but now it's time to move on."

"No," Shiro shook his head again. "There must be something more to this. I can feel it. Let's wait."

Shiro ran scans over the area when a red bar with Altean writing flashed across his screen.

Coran craned his head around toward the Princess. "There's an intruder in the Castle!"

Lance gasped. "How could someone just sneak aboard the ship?"

Allura stomped her foot down on the deck. "I knew coming here was a mistake!" She brought up the many security cameras on her monitoring screen. She gazed at the different displays. Scanning them with her eyes, she brought her head up. "There he is, level five."

Shiro stood. "Everyone, suit up."

Lance ran down a hallway and stopped glancing down the connecting hall. "I got him."

Shiro's voice came over the comms. "Keep eyes on him, Lance. We're all headed toward you."

The person in the weird-looking armor turned around.

Lance aimed his bayard at him. "Hold it right there!"

The masked person charged at Lance. The Blue Paladin squeezed off several shots, but his adversary was too quick and evaded every shot rushing past the teenager. "Sorry, guys, he got past me."

The intruder rolled out the hallway and charged straight for Pidge. She ducked and rolled while he jumped and rolled past her and jumped up, still running down the hall, not breaking stride. The Green Paladin fired her bayard at him and he turned effortlessly grabbing it before it could strike him.

Pidge yelled, "I got him!"

The intruder yanked, still holding onto the pointed end of the bayard and ran down the hall.

Pidge yelled, "I don't got him!"

Lance rounded the corner and chased after the intruder who was now dragging the smallest paladin
behind him.

Pidge yanked on the handle of her bayard, trying to stop him. "Come back here!"

Hunk turned to see the intruder. "Huh?" He started firing his bayard.

Pidge was drug through the shower of energy from the Yellow Paladin's energy blasts. "Hunk!"

"Huh? Sorry!"

Hunk chased after Lance, who was chasing after the intruder who was still dragging Pidge behind him.

Shiro's voice came over Keith's helmet comms. "He's heading your way."

"Copy that. I'm ready."

Keith ran toward the charging intruder and had to duck under the cable from Pidge's bayard. He jumped up and ran after the intruder who still drug the smallest paladin.

The Red Paladin caught up to the running intruder and swung his bayard twice and missed both times. As he turned the corner, he glanced down at Pidge. He gave her a quick nod, and she nodded in understanding, digging her heels in pulling back on her bayard.

Keith leaped and somersaulted in the air and landed beside the intruder who pulled his sword. Metal clanged as bayard and sword met. Keith was distracted by the design on the intruder's sword, and his adversary took that distraction and sent his bayard flying out of his hand.

Keith grit his teeth as he advanced with his hands doubled up into fists for hand-to-hand combat, but the intruder pulled on the cable yanking Pidge and threw her into the Red Paladin, sending them both down to the ground. The pair of Paladins lay there for a moment.

Adam raced forward and swung his fist, but the intruder grabbed his wrist and effortlessly threw the Garrison officer over his shoulder, slamming him down hard on the deck. A gust of air came out of his lungs, and the pop in his shoulder reached his ears.

Keith got up and charged the intruder. But his adversary hooked his arm in his and swung the Red Paladin around throwing the teenager into Lance and Hunk.

The intruder turned and came face to face with Shiro, who held his weaponized arm back, which now glowed purple. Shiro shifted his weight and thrust upward toward the intruder holding it just inches away from the intruder's throat.

The intruder took a step back and pulled down his hood. His mask disappeared, revealing the face of a Galra.

Shiro lowered his arm and stood up to his full height as he gazed up at the face of the Galra. "Ulaz?"

Princess Allura came charging in and slammed the intruder into the wall. "Who are you?"

Shiro held out a hand to her as he tried to put himself in between her and Ulaz. "Stop! It's him! The Galra who set me free."

Ulaz gazed down at Shiro. "You've come."
Allura turned to the other Paladins. "Take him to the lounge. Make sure he's in cuffs. I don't want anymore Galra running amok on my ship!"

Coran, who had followed Allura from the bridge, stopped beside Adam and knelt. "You took a hard tumble. Need a hand up?" He stuck out his hand and made a note of how awkward Adam grasped his hand with his opposite hand, seeming to favor his shoulder.

The Garrison pilot groaned as Coran pulled him to his feet.

Shiro craned his head around Allura. "You okay?"

Adam nodded, not quite making eye contact. "I just got the wind knocked out of me."

Coran winked at Adam. "Don't worry, Number One. I'll make sure he's okay."

Shiro nodded. "Catch up when you can, Adam."

Coran steered Adam toward the infirmary when the Altean turned his head to scan the human with his eyes. He noted the way Adam held his right arm. "Why didn't you want Number One to know that your hurt worse than you let on?"

Adam sighed. "I don't need Takashi or the others to worry about me. I know what the problem is." He went silent for a moment, but pain clearly shown in his eyes as he turned his gaze to Coran. "It's not the first time I've had a broken collar bone. Besides, Takashi would be so mad at me."

"Oh, I highly doubt that he'd be mad."

"I've had a weak collar bone since I was ten and fell out of a tree, and it the first time. The second time was during hand-to-hand combat training at the Garrison." Adam chuckled. "The look on Takashi's face when the doctor said it was broken was priceless. He was beside himself and so sorry about it, but like the doctor told him it was one of those freak accidents. Like what happened with Ulaz."

"Well, don't worry, the healing pod will fix that up for you in about one or two of your Earth hours."

They strode into the infirmary, and Coran helped Adam out of his armor and flight suit. He helped the younger man into the medical suit.

As Adam stood in the pod before Coran activated it, the younger man gazed at, the older man.

"Take care of them for me."

The older Altean placed his hand on his chest. "Don't worry about a thing." He set the controls which started the healing process.

The cover to the healing pod dematerialized, and Adam blinked as his eyes opened. Besides being chilled, he rolled his shoulders and no pain, no grinding of bones, he was healed. His eyes focused on Coran, who stood there, holding what looked like his clothes.

"Shiro is going to need you," the older man said, his eyes tinged with sadness.

"What's going on? What's happened?" Adam asked. "It's not Lance or one of the other Paladins, is
"No, nothing like that." Coran drew in a breath and released it. "Somehow, the Galra found out about us being here and sent a Robeast. Voltron fought it, but Ulaz sacrificed himself to save us."

"And Takashi isn't taking it well?"

"He hasn't said anything to anyone," Coran frowned. "I think you might be the only one here to help him."

Adam nodded as he took the clothes. "I'll go talk to him. Where is he?"

"He's on the observation deck. I think Keith was going to talk to him."

"Thanks, Coran."

Adam slipped onto the observation deck behind Allura. He saw Shiro standing there, staring out the window while Keith stood behind him. "Sorry, we doubted Ulaz, Shiro. He saved all our lives."

Shiro continued staring out the window. "I still have so many questions."

Keith frowned. "Do you think Zarkon is tracking us?"

Allura's voice entered the conversation. "We cannot know for sure. Only Ulaz knew our whereabouts."

Shiro gripped his hands into fists. "You don't think Ulaz gave us up? After he sacrificed himself?"

Keith's eyes narrowed. "Yeah! Maybe Zarkon found out about this place on his own. He's probably been searching for the Blade of Marmora."

Allura stared at the pair of Paladins. "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."

Keith stared back at her. "We should meet up with the rest of Ulaz's group, finish what we started."

Shiro shook his head. "No. We're not going to the headquarters until we figure out how Zarkon found us. We can't risk losing possible allies in this war."

Shiro turned back to gaze out at the stars.

Adam spoke softly to Allura and Keith. "I'll talk to him."

The Princess and the Paladin left, leaving Adam alone with Shiro. "Takashi," Adam started as he gazed at the Black Paladin. "How are you holding up?"

Shiro turned to gaze at Adam. "I'll be okay. It hurts that Ulaz gave his life to save ours. Truthfully, Adam, I don't know if we would have beaten that Robeast without Ulaz." He sighed. "It could have been the end for us."

Adam stepped forward and placed his hand on Shiro's upper arm. "If he hadn't, I would have been very cross at him for losing you again. This time for real."

"What about Lance?"
Adam froze and stared into Shiro's eyes. "That would be the death of me. I'd never be able to return to Earth for his mother would kill me."

Shiro nodded. "Yeah, I'd hate for to happen either." He sighed as he turned back to the stars again. Pressure squeezed his arm. He turned to see Adam turning to walk away.

Shiro grabbed his hand. "Stay with me for a while, please?"

Adam turned back and wrapped his arm around Takashi's waist. "I'll stay here as long as you want."

Shiro leaned into Adam. "Thanks."
Adam and the Paladins were outside the Castle of Lions on a spacewalk. Shiro gazed at the others. "Let's hurry up with these repairs, Zarkon could be here at any moment."

Adam nodded. "I, for one, don't want to be outside when he does show up."

Hunk opened a panel. "Okay, the panel's off. Now, what?"

Coran's voice came over their helmet comms. "Very simple. Just loosen the blaxmus on the somoflange."

Hunk frowned. "Could you be more specific?"

Allura's voice came over the comms. "Sorry, Hunk, he means the poklomes on the agroclams."

Hunk's frown deepened as he stared at the panel. "No, that doesn't help."

Lance put his gloved hand on Hunk's shoulder, giving him a nudge of a push moving the Yellow Paladin out of his way. "Easy, Hunk, I got this." He pressed a button on the panel and then flipped a switch. The color of the board turned red, and a Klaxon rang out. "Uh, oh! That can't be good."

Allura's voice came over the comms. "No, not the smalters, the poklones!"

Coran's voice was next. "No, no! It's the blaxmums!"

Hunk shook his head. "What are you talking about?"

Pidge moved over and gazed at the panel. She pressed a button, counter-rotated two dials, and pressed down on the main switch. The board changed from red to blue. "There. Fixed."

Allura's voice came over the comms again. "Well done, Pidge!"

A sparkle came to the Green Paladin's eyes. "The tech on this ship never ceases to amaze me. It's so mathematically elegant. It's fit is a hundred times more frictionless than any exoskeleton we have on Earth. It's beautiful."

Lance rolled his eyes. "It's not a sunset, Pidge."

Pidge gazed over at him. "You're right. A billion sunsets happen every day. Some genius engineer built this."

As the curly panel sank back down into its spot on the outer hull of the ship, Hunk grinned. "Kinda looks like a big delicious curly fry." Something glowing and squishy impacted with Hunk's helmet. "What the…?"

Shiro brought up his shield. "All right, we've prepared for this. Remember your rogue projectile
cluster training from the Garrison. First, we need a temporary shelter." He was cut off when something him in the back.

Lance shot a sheepish grin toward the Black Paladin. "Oh, sorry, Shiro. I was trying to hit Keith."

One of the squishy objects slapped into Lance's helmet. Keith chuckled. "Like that?"

Hunk jumped up, holding a glowing orb in each hand. "Yes! Squishy asteroid fight!"

Pidge sighed as the males around her broke into what was equal to a snowball fight on Earth. Pidge shook her head at the others. She reached out and grasped one of the squishy objects in her gloved hand. "I don't think these are asteroids. Coran, I'm going to need a containment unit."

"Just a tick."

Allura's voice came over the comms. "They appear to be some hyper-resilient spore."

Pidge stared at the object. "This bioluminescent pulsing doesn't seem natural. It appears programmed. I think it's a code."

Hunk glanced over at her. "A code? From who?" He grunted as another object hit him.

Pidge shrugged. "I don't know. I mean, it makes no sense. You can't program a spore."

Shiro dropped his guard as he gazed at her. "If anyone can figure it out, it's you, Pidge." He didn't see the glowing orb that smacked him in the head.

Lance crowed with laughter as turned to Adam. "That was a sweet shot. He never saw it coming."

Adam smacked gloved hands with the Blue Paladin. "I might not be the sharpshooter of the family, but I have my moments."

Allura's voice came over the comms. "Everyone needs to come in for decontamination."

Adam stepped out of his quarters to witness the tail end of a weird conversation between Lance, Keith, and Coran. As he approached, Pidge's voice came over the Castle's internal comms. "Guys! Check this out!"

Everyone gathered in the Green Lion's hanger. Hunk leaned over a device that held the glowing spore. "Oh, oh! I've seen this experiment. But, question… Why, do we need to get electricity from a potato?"

Pidge turned her head toward him as her eyebrows drew together. "What?" She shook her head as she realized what he meant. "No, no, I was able to crack the spore code. I ran the bioluminescent pattern through a variety of code-breaking sequences, including this homemade virtual Turing machine.

"Of course, I had to make a few tweaks to the original design, because there have been several advancements since he designed it. Although you have to admit, Turing was a shining light in the world of science in an age when too many were still –"

Keith sighed, losing his patience. "Pidge! What does it say?"
"Oh, yeah. Under attack. Galra. Help. And there are coordinates."

Shiro gazed at the screen. "It's a distress signal. Good work, Pidge!" He turned to face Coran. "Get those coordinates into the castle's navigation system."

Coran piloted the Castle toward an odd-looking planet. "The signal came from Olkarion, home to the Olkari, a proud race of engineers, builders of vast cities that could change shape at the whim of their creators." He brought up an image of an Olkari city on the main screen.

Allura gazed at the city. "They had a seemingly magical ability to manipulate solid metal. With a wave of their hands, they could build a computer inside a block of steel."

Pidge smiled at the image. "Whoa!"

Coran turned to face humans. "An Olkari once gave me this!"

Lance cocked his head as he stared at the small cube that Coran held. "What is it?"

Coran placed a hand to his hip. "Uh, hello? It's a floating cube!" Coran let out a laugh as he removed his hand, and the cube floated in the air. "Oh, this guy. And watch! My name is Coran, and I'm a gorgeous man."

The cube repeated what Coran said verbatim.

As Pidge got all excited about the cube, Adam leaned over to Shiro and whispered. "He's not one bit conceited is he."

Shiro smirked, and Allura let out a soft giggle.

Keith gazed at the cube. "Why would a society full of literal tech wizards use spores to send a distress signal?"

Pidge turned to Keith. "Who cares? When do we get to see that city?"

Allura gazed at the Green Paladin. "Pidge, the distress signal isn't coming from the city. It's coming from... the forest."

The smallest paladin groaned.

Shiro turned to Adam. "Suit up. We need our medic along with us."

Adam grinned as he gazed into Shiro's dark gray eyes. "Are you sure that's the only reason?"

Shiro grinned at the Garrison pilot and gave him a push. "Yeah, I'm sure. Get your gear together."

He rolled his eyes as Adam walked toward where he stashed his armor for emergencies.

Adam gripped the back of Shiro's seat as the lions flew over the forest. Pidge's voice came over the helmet comms. "Why doesn't anyone ever send a distress signal from a cool place? I hate the outdoors. Nothing but sunburn and poison oak."

Keith's voice came over the comms. "I like it out here. It's quiet." He let out a gasp.
Hunk called out, "What was that?"

Keith replied. "Uh, are we under attack?"

Adam gazed out the window, the Black Lion. He gripped the back of the seat harder. "Was that arrows?"

Shiro frowned as he focused on his controls. "I don't know, but something's dragging my lion down to the surface."

The lions landed in a clearing. They faced a group of people.

Hunk asked, "Are those wooden mech suits."

Lance's voice came over the comms. "Are you kidding me? We got taken down by a bunch of tree people!"

Shiro called out over the Black Lion's external speakers. "We come in peace!"

Adam chuckled from behind the Black Paladin. "I'm surprised you didn't say take me to your leader."

Shiro groaned and rolled his eyes.

Pidge climbed out of the roof hatch of the Green Lion holding a container with the spore in it above her head. "We found your distress signal!"

The people below cheered.

Adam grinned, "It looks like their friendly."

Shiro grinned in return. "Yeah, leave it to Pidge to make the first contact."

As the Paladins and Adam left the lions, one of the Olkari stepped forward. "Are you the Paladins of Voltron?"

Shiro took a step forward as he removed his helmet. "Yes, we are, and this is Adam, our medic." He introduced the Paladins to the Olkari leader.

The leader smiled at them. "Welcome, I'm Ryner. Come with me." She lead the others to an observation deck in the woods on the outskirts of their tree city. "When the Galra attacked, only a few of us escaped the cities. We were forced to flee into the forest."

Shiro gazed at the Olkari. "How long have you lived like this?"

Ryner gazed up at him. "Many decafeeb. But as you can see, our people are resilient. We never stopped evolving. Instead, we adapted our skills to the environment."

Pidge ran ahead of the others as Ryner led the others into the city. She stopped and watched as one of the Olkari engineers created something that resembled an Earth dragonfly that flew out of its creator's hand. It stopped to look into the youngest Paladin's face. "Coran was right," she turned to Ryner. "You are the most incredible engineers in the universe. To be able to switch from working
with precision machinery to a bunch of sticks!"

Ryner followed Pidge's gaze as the youngest paladin continued to watch the dragonfly as it flew. "Nature's designs are superior to any that we could devise."

Pidge smirked. "No offense, but I'll take my computer over a tree any day."

Shiro shook his head. "You two can talk science later. Let's assemble Voltron and get rid of these Galra invaders."

Ryner frowned. "It's not that simple, I'm afraid. The Galra have our leader, Lubos. If you attack, who knows what they'll do to him."

Shiro gazed into Ryner's eyes. "Then we'll have to rescue him."

Ryner gazed back and nodded. "Then, I should show you something else." She led them to another area. It was a considerable glade filled with flowers and trees.

Keith gazed around. "Uhm… Ryner, where are we?"

"This is the armory."

They watched as an Olkari stuck his hand into a flower, and it wrapped around his hand and transformed into a useful energy weapon.

Ryner placed her hand against a tree, glowing energy raced up the tree, down a branch to what looked like a giant nut. A wooden mech suit fell to the ground.

Pidge grinned. "Cool!"

Keith gazed at Ryner. "Uh… Can I get one?"

Ryner held her hand over a flower that opened with circlets that sort of resembled crowns inside. "You can each have one. The key to operating it is understanding that the nanocellulose responds to electrical impulses from the neural pathways connected through this."

Lance stared at his. "Do what now?"

Hunk tasted his. "Mm! Makes my tongue itchy."

Adam shook his head but placed his on his head.

Pidge put the circlet on her head. "This is your interface?"

Ryner nodded. "Of course, all commands need to come as binary coded messages."

Pidge stepped over to a tree, placed her hand on the tree. "So, like this." She closed her eyes and concentrated, focusing her mind on the tree. Energy ran from her hand and up the tree, down the limb to the seed. It glowed and dropped down onto the ground like a wooden mech suit.

Ryner smiled. "Yes! Excellent!"

Lance frowned. "I think mine is just a tree."

Ryner gazed at the Green Paladin. "You must have a deep connection with nature."
Pidge climbed into the mech, taking the driver's seat. "Not really. My allergies and pale skin don't mix with outdoor living."

Shiro smirked. "Pidge is our resident tech expert."

Ryner nodded. "That explains it. Like the Olkari, you understand that everything that surrounds us, even you and me... we're all made of the same cosmic dust, all arranged by the laws of mathematics."

Adam gazed at Shiro and mouthed, 'Cosmic Dust?'

Shiro shrugged.

Pidge frowned. "Does this mean I should start gardening?"

Ryner chuckled. "It means you're going to need to give your friends a ride."

Hunk and Lance climbed into the mech suit with Pidge. While Adam, Shiro, and Keith joined Ryner in hers. She glanced at them. "This might be a bumpy ride, so you might need to hang onto something." Ryner closed the hatch and turned the suit. "This way! To the edge of the forest! To save our king!"

Ryner stopped at the edge of the forest and brought up a map of the city but focused on a central tower. "Their headquarters are impenetrable from the ground, but there is one-way in. A small opening in the roof. It goes all the way down to an open courtyard."

Keith stared at the screen. "That's quite a drop."

Ryner didn't waver. "But there you will have total access to the building. The hard part will be getting onto the roof."

Shiro smiled. "That won't be a problem."

Hunk, from Pidge's mech, pointed out something on the ground by the building. "Hey, hey, what's that? Is it part of the building."

Ryner's eyes grew. "My Lubos! It can't be!"

Pidge held up the floating cube to the screen. "Hey! That looks like the cube Coran gave me!"

Ryner stared at the cube. "I haven't seen one of those in many decafeebss. We used to play with them as children. But this," she turned her gaze to the giant cube. "Only King Lubos could have designed one that size."

Keith frowned. "Why would he do that?"

Ryner shook her head and frowned. "They must have forced him to reveal his designs and reconstruct it as a weapon. From the looks of it, I'd say it's almost finished."

Shiro nodded. "Okay, we need to act fast. Everyone, back to base. I have a plan."
Shiro gazed at the hologram of the city that Ryner downloaded from her mech. "Our first problem is getting to Lubos in the tower. Pidge will fly us to the top of the tower using the Green Lion’s cloaking.

"Adam will be going with us in case anything goes wrong. Pidge will also be our pickup if anything should go sideways. She can also scan for any Olkari life signs within the tower."

Pidge nodded as she smirked.

Lance grinned. "This is going to be easy peasy."

Adam rolled his eyes. "Let's hope so."

Lance puffed out his chest. "I know it."

Shiro cleared his throat and stared pointedly at Lance. "The reason for making this plan is, so everyone knows what to do."

Lance nodded, "Yeah, but let's get to it then. The faster we get done here, the sooner we can get back to the Castle. I'm sure the Princess is missing me."

Pidge slapped Lance's arm. "Keep telling yourself that."

"It's true! She misses me every time we leave for a mission."

Hunk placed his hand on the Blue Paladin's shoulder. "Let's go, Loverboy Lance."

The cloaked Green Lion flew over the top of the tower. Shiro and the others dropped down using their jetpacks to slow their descent into the tower. As they landed, Shiro set out the sensor and activated it. His helmets viewscreen zeroed in on the Olkari life signs.

Shiro and the others made their way quickly, evading Galra patrols. They heard sounds of sobbing coming from behind a door. They entered, not knowing what they'd find on the other side.

What they found was incomprehensible. It appeared to be the Olkari King watching some weird alien version of a soap opera.

Shiro stepped forward. "King Lubos?"

The Olkari turned to gaze at the human. "Yes? Who are you? The jesters I requested?"

Lance gazed at the king. "Uhm, we're here too, like, rescue you?"

Lubos glared back at them and pushed a button on the arm of his chair. A klaxon blared, and the wall opened, revealing sentries and a Galra Commander.

Hunk frowned. "You could have just said no, thanks."

The commander stepped forward. "Looks like someone came to rescue you, Lubos."
Shiro glared at the king. "You turned your back on your people to save your skin?"

Lubos stared at the Paladins. "I'm doing this for my people! They wanted to fight the Galra but are too powerful! The Galra could destroy us!"

Lance raised his rifle. "So, you helped enslave your people to build some superweapon?"

Lubos glared at Lance. "Don't make me the bad guy! He forced me to do it!"

Lance's ire rose as he compared the difference between Lubos and the other Olkari in the room. "Did he force-feed you, too?"

Lubos tried to come up with a response but failed miserably.

Keith had enough of the king and his lies. "You're no king." Keith ran toward Lubos as the king tried to run to the Galra. The other Olkari shoved the king toward the Red Paladin. Keith grabbed hold of the king. "Okay, we're walking out of here! Anyone tries to stop us, and Lubos gets it!"

Shiro frowned as he stared at the young man. "Whoa, Keith!"

Lance shook his head, not believing his ears. "That came out of nowhere."

Adam stared at the Red Paladin. "That's like a bad line from a bad gangster movie." He frowned but pulled his pistol and brought up his shield.

Lubos frowned. "La-sai, what are you doing?"

"You betrayed our people. I can't live this lie anymore."

Keith glared at the Galra commander. "You don't want me to hurt your genius engineer, right?"

The commander nearly grinned. "Oh, be my guest. His work is done. The cube is complete."

Lubos nearly sagged. "What? But-But I thought we had a deal!"

The commander barked out a sharp laugh. "Guards, put them all out of their misery."

As the sentries prepared to fire, a bright white beam shot through the wall.

The youngest paladin's voice came from the external speaker of the Green Lion. "Your ride is here!"

As everyone ran up the ramp and into the Green Lion.

The Galra commander yelled. "Engage the cube! Takedown the lion!"

Shiro frowned. "The cube is operational! We've got to get back to the other lions and form Voltron!"

Pidge replied, "On it!"

Shiro and Keith shoved the king, tossing him down to the ground in front of Ryner and the Olkari Rebels.
Ryner gazed at them. "What's going on?"

Shiro gazed at Ryner. "While your countrymen starved, King Lubos was well taken care of by the Galra. He willingly helped them build that cube, willingly helped to enslave his people."

Ryner glared at the king. "Lubos, how could you?"

The king raised his gaze to Ryner. "I-I was only trying to—"

Ryner cut him off. "Enough! We must free our people!"

The Olkari rebels cheered.

Shiro turned to Adam. "Stay here and help them with any casualties."

Adam nodded. "Come back in one piece."

Adam's gaze was drawn to the Green Lion as the smallest paladin screamed. "Pidge!" he yelled. Ryner turned to him and another Olkari. "The Green Lion is in trouble!"

They ran toward the Green Lion's crash site.

Adam ran up to the lion and slammed his hands against the side of the Green Lion's head. "Pidge, are you okay?"

He sighed in relief as he heard the Green Paladin's voice. "Yeah."

Adam stepped back as the Green Lion glowed. It stood up and roared. He watched as the lion launched into the air and shot each cube with a green beam that caused vines to sprout out of the cubes.

Adam stood next to Shiro, and the other paladins as Ryner smiled at them. "I want to thank you all. You helped us get our home back. And for that, we will never be able to repay you."

Shiro smiled. "Just promise me that when it's time to take the fight to Zarkon, we can count on the Olkari for help."

Shiro held out his hand, and Ryner took it. "Now and forever."

Ryner turned to the Green Paladin. "And you, Pidge. The spirit of the Olkari resides in you. The bond between you and your lion is now stronger than ever."

"Without you, I would never have been able to unlock my lion's hidden power."

Pidge sat on the platform where Allura usually stood.

Shiro grinned at the smallest paladin. "Nice job, Pidge."
Pidge gazed at the others. "You know it's weird. I've always been a tech junkie. That's how I connected with the world. But for the first time, I feel connected to everything. I guess it's like Ryner said. We're all made of the same cosmic dust."

Keith's blue-gray eyes grew. "So that means we're all related. This ship, those stars, the Olkari. Even the Galra."

Hunk smirked as he jabbed Lance in the ribs with his elbow. "Uh-oh. I think Keith just blew his own mind."

As everyone laughed, Hunk looked around at the others. "What?"

Coran gazed at them. "Well, that was a productive trip. Look at all the cubes they gave me!"

At least ten of the cubes floated in the air over Coran's head with them repeating everything that the older Altean said. Including a fart noise provided by Hunk. However, their good humor died when the klaxons began to blare, and red flashed all over the bridge. An image appeared on the main screen, Zarkon's command ship.
Evading Zarkon

Chapter Summary

The team is in a tight spot and they need to get away from Zarkon fast when problems arise.

Allura nearly growled as her face twisted in anger. "Zarkon! How did he find us?"

Keith gazed at her. "That commander must have radioed him from Olkarion."

Shiro turned to face his team. "We need to wormhole now! Everyone to your stations. We've got to put some distance between Zarkon and us. This could be the fight of our lives."

The Castle shook from Galra fighter fire.

Hunk stated the obvious. "That's a lot of fighters."

Shiro stared straight ahead. "Allura, can you evade these fighters? We can't have them following us through the wormhole."

Allura nodded in understanding. "I can try."

As Coran activated the particle barrier, Shiro quickly examined their options. Voltron wasn't an option given his and Zarkon's fight over the Black Lion. "Keith, Lance, Adam, let's lay down some covering fire."

Four defense disks appeared at the rear of the ship that each person operated. Three matched the paladins' colors, while the fourth matched Adam's armor. Shiro and Adam's disks weaved around each other in a ballet of laser fire taking down Galra fighters.

Pidge craned her head as she acted as a spotter. "Lance, incoming twelve o'clock high."

Lance grit his teeth together. "Got it."

Before the Blue Paladin could fire, the red disk slid into the blue zone knocking Lance's disk out of the way. "Hey!"

"Sorry! Gotta be quick!"

Lance slammed his disk into Keith's. "How's that for quick?"

Keith growled. "You..."

The pair slammed their disks into each other.

Shiro released a quick sigh. "Knock it off, you two! Stay in your zones!"

Lance glared at the Red Paladin. "Yeah, Keith!" He glanced at his display. "Hey, you and Adam aren't in your zones."
Adam sighed. His cousin was a test in patience. "That's because Takashi and I are working as a team. Unlike the two of you who seem to make it a personal fight."

Shiro shook his head. "Keep calling out those fighters, Pidge. Hunk, how are the defenses holding?"

Hunk rubbed his eyes. He leaned down to gaze at the screen. "I don't know. Ten percent? Fifteen maybe? Everything's a blur. I have tired eyes!"

Shiro sympathized with the others. He hated that these children were in this situation, but right now, what they needed were hope and courage. "I know we came off an intense battle, but we've got to stay focused until we jump."

Keith asked, "And when is that?"

Coran turned to gaze at them. "They're still too close. We need to gain more speed!"

Allura spoke up. "I've got an idea! Hold on!"

Pidge gasped as she gripped onto her seat as the Castle dove for a nearby moon. "Allura, what are you doing?"

Allura focused on her task. "I'm going to use this moon's gravity to gain speed and put some distance between Zarkon and us."

Coran held tight to his panel as the Castle's speed increased. He turned his head to shout over his shoulder toward the Princess. "We're clear to wormhole!"

Allura closed her eyes and focused. The wormhole appeared in front of the Castle, and the ship flew in.

Lance frowned. "We got away from Zarkon, how come we're still on alert?"

Shiro needed an answer. "Coran, what's going on?"

Coran's response was something no one expected. "Oh, no! Teludav lens malfunction! We're about to exit this wormhole a lot sooner than we planned!"

The wormhole opened, and they appeared in what looked like an ice asteroid field. Lance stared out at it. "Whoa. Where are we? Looks like some iceberg graveyard."

Allura's breath rushed in and out of her body as if she'd run a marathon. "Coran, what's the status?"

Adam turned in his seat. He didn't like how the young woman sounded.

Coran stared down at his panel. "Checking that now. We didn't make it to our exit point, but we're several galaxies from Zarkon's fleet."

Adam kept his attention on Allura as she raised a hand to her head. He rose from his seat and was at her side when she collapsed. He knelt beside her and wrapped an arm around her waist to steady her.

He pulled his scanner out of his pocket and began to scan the princess, but Allura pushed it away. "I'm fine."

Coran stared at her. "Oh, no, you look exhausted." The former royal advisor knelt on her other side.
"You must rest. You've been exerting way too much energy." Coran stood. "I'll go check on the main turbine and figure out what's going on." He screamed as he slid across the floor and slammed into the wall face first.

Keith blinked several times as his brain tried to comprehend what happened.

Lance flinched. "Are you all right?"

Coran pushed himself off the wall. "I'm fine. Look, I tell you what, I've probably hit a slippery spot on the ground there." He pointed down at the watery trail. "Someone wipe that up there!"

Allura turned around on her platform but still sat on the metal. "You're sweating. You might have a case of the slipperies."

Coran shook his head as he held up his hands. "What?" he laughed. "No! No, that's an old person virus, and I'm not old. I'm young. Well, young-ish."

Lance frowned. He figured he'd get a straight answer from Coran, so he turned his attention to Allura. "What are the slipperies."

Allura leaned forward, gazing at Coran. "It's a common Altean virus that occurs later, in life. It's not harmful and usually only lasts a couple of days, but it causes one's body to secrete extremely slick fluid."

The Paladins cringed.

Adam shook his head at their reactions. He sighed. "Guys, look, it's not that unusual. Or have you forgotten about how women go through menopause on earth?"

Lance shuddered. "You would have to bring that up. I still haven't forgotten how your mother wanted to kill me."

Adam barked out a sharp laugh. "She wouldn't have if you didn't steal the candy that my dad bought her."

Lance placed his hands on his hips. "I was hungry."

Adam glared back at him. "You have a death wish."

Coran frowned at Adam and Lance. "That sounds like a strange thing for the females of your planet to go through. But it's a good thing I don't have the slipperies."

Allura smiled at the royal advisor. "Coran, it's nothing to be embarrassed about."

Coran glared back at her. "I'm not embarrassed because I don't have it!" He turned to walk away but didn't move because of the pool of sweat under his feet. "And now, I'm going to leave because I've got to fix the main turbine!" He increased his speed until he fell on his behind and slid forward. "Quiznack!" he shouted as he went sliding down the hall.

Shiro now had to decide what to do next. He knew his team was tired, but they still had things to focus on. "All right. Since Zarkon has no idea where we are, this is the perfect time to focus on our next step. Maybe we can find that secret group, the Blade of Marmora. Pidge, where are those coordinates?"

Pidge groaned as she stared at her screen. "Wait, hang on." She blinked her eyes, trying to clear the
grit out of them. "I'm so tired. My brain's not working."

Lance groaned. "Yeah, neither is mine."

Adam rose from the platform and moved over to Shiro's side. "Takashi, you can't push so hard. They need to rest."

"Maybe, but we still need to find more allies, and this is as good a time as any."

Adam shook his head. "Takashi, they're still young. They don't have the stamina that we do. Keith is close, but even he is tired. He's not going to say anything because he wants to be just like you."

Before anything else could be said, Coran's image popped up on the main screen. "Hello, all. I've checked the engines."

Pidge muttered. "That was fast."

"Well, I slipped right down," Coran groaned as he fell but managed to pull himself up again. "I mean, hurried down. Anyway, the good news is the Galra fighters did minimal damage. I flushed the turbine, and it's fine. The bad news, the teludav, or wormholer, as you Earthlings call it, is in bad shape. Several scaultrite lens-stones of the magnifying beam generator uses a crystal to convert Altean energy into usable fuel. That supplies the power needed to wormhole. Well, anyway, I need to remove the cracked lenses and readjust their trajectory temporarily until we can replace them. I'll also need to divert power to make up for the lost energy anyway. It's going to take at least a quintant."

Shiro nodded, now his hands were tied. "All right. We'll hide the ship and get some rest while Coran comes up with a work-around. Tomorrow, we'll be sharper and refocused."

Adam was drawn to a noise coming from the kitchen. He peeked in to see Pidge sitting on the counter while Hunk carried a tray he'd pulled from the oven.

Pidge stared down at the large mixing bowl on the counter. "I thought you were exhausted. Why are you making cookies?"

Hunk rolled his eyes. "Because baking clears my head, Pidge. Okay?" As he sat the tray down on the counter, he leaned forward. "I thought you were gonna help Coran with the wormholer."

She picked up a package off the counter and stared at it. "One mention of the slipperies and he got all sensitive about it and kicked me out. I hate not being able to read Altean. What is this stuff?"

She turned her head to stare at Hunk. "Are you sure you're making food?"

Hunk lifted one of the sky-blue cookies and gazed through it at Pidge. "You're gonna try and tell me that these aren't cookies?" He stuck it into his mouth and bit down. The pain that shot through his mouth caused by the so-called cookie nearly caused him to cry. He gazed up the younger paladin. "Okay, I might have overcooked them."

Pidge hopped off the counter and began to walk away without saying a word to her fellow paladin. Hunk called out to her. "Wait, where are you going? You don't want to wait for the next batch?"
Adam passed Pidge as she left the kitchen. He gazed at Hunk. "How about a quick and easy snack to lift everyone's spirits?"

Hunk cocked his head. "Like what?"

Adam smiled at the teenager. "Maybe some ham croquettes?"

Hunk grinned. "Oh, yeah. Lance's mom taught me how to make those. I can make those."

The door to the bridge opened, and Adam walked through. He shook his head as he saw Shiro at his station. "I figured you'd still be here."

"Someone needs to keep an eye out for Zarkon."

"I know Takashi, but why does it always have to be you?"

Before Shiro could answer, the door to the bridge opened again, and Princess Allura stepped through. Shiro craned his head as he gazed at her. "What are you doing here?" he asked as he rose to his feet. "You should be resting."

Allura stepped onto her platform. "I cannot sleep. Zarkon is out there searching for us." She started to bring up her holographic screen bringing it up with her hand.

Shiro grabbed her hand, stopping her. "I know how you feel, but you have to step away for a while. It's what's best for everyone."

Adam leaned forward and whispered low enough for Shiro's ears. "Pot calling the kettle black." He wanted to say more, but the klaxons began to blare, and the Castle shook from Galra fighters attacking.

Allura's eyes grew. "We are several galaxies away. How could they find us so soon?" She brought up the particle barrier and brought up the image of the engine room. "Coran, are you there?"

"I'm here!"

"Zarkon is back! What's our status?"

"Wormholing will be a problem. The lenses haven't been readjusted! I don't know if the Teludav will generate enough power."

Allura gazed at the older man on the screen. "Do everything you can!"

Lance and Keith ran onto the bridge. Lance plopped down into his chair. "They found us again. How is that possible? That doesn't seem possible!"

Pidge jumped into her seat and was closely followed by Hunk.

Allura wasn't brushing off Lance's questions, but now wasn't the right time for a discussion. "Right now, we must figure out a way to get out of here."

Keith threw out his suggestion. "Or we can stay and fight. Now's our chance to form Voltron. Enough running!"
Allura shook her head. "It's too dangerous."

Shiro decided he needed to step in before Keith lost his temper. "Allura's right. We can't take on Zarkon and his entire fleet. Remember what happened at Zarkon's command center. We wouldn't have escaped if the Blade of Marmora hadn't shut down the shield."

Coran stopped in front of the camera, projecting his image onto the main screen on the bridge. "The turbine's up. I'm still working on the wormholer." He screamed as he fell again. "I think I'm realizing now that I do have a case of the slipperies. I'm sorry I yelled at you, Pidge. I may need your help after all."

Pidge nodded. "I'm coming down."

Shiro turned to the others. "Let's clear a path."

Keith, Lance, Adam, and Shiro all used the disks to fight off the pursuing Galra fighters. The Red Paladin studied his screen quickly. "Lance, there's a fighter advancing on your six!"

"Thanks for the heads up! And you've got one going for the lower barrier."

Keith growled at the fighter's image. "Not on my watch, you don't." As he blasted the offender, he threw a compliment toward the Blue Paladin. "Good eye!"

Adam smiled. He was pleasantly surprised that both the Red and Blue Paladins were working together instead of fighting with each other.

Lance smirked at his screen. "Okay, buddy, your mine." Before he could fire, his controls for his defense disk disappeared. "What's going on. I lost control of my defense drone."

Keith was still using his. "I got you covered." But his controls also disappeared too. "Uh, I don't got you. There must be a system failure."

Shiro and Adam's controls also disappeared.

Pidge's face appeared on the screen. "Nope, that was us. We're diverting power from non-essential systems to get the wormhole generator working."

Lance stood up and shouted at the screen. "Shooting bad guys is pretty essential."

Hunk added to the compounding problems. "We lost secondary controls! Thermal regulator's offline! Oh, no, there goes the particle barrier!"

Coran's image came up on the main screen. "Okay, try it! We should be able to make one small jump… I hope."

Allura closed her eyes and focused. A wormhole appeared in space in front of the Castle.

Shiro called out from his seat. "The wormhole is open!"

The Castle entered the wormhole, but the jump was as Coran predicted shorter. Adam rubbed at his temple. He felt a migraine coming on.
Lance, Keith, and Hunk all sagged from exhaustion and boredom. Even Allura was just as tired, but she didn't try to let it show. She rubbed a hand over her forehead.

Shiro frowned as he voiced his thoughts out loud. "Zarkon keeps finding us. It's like he knows how to track us down. Maybe he planted some kind of tracking device."

Allura, following his train of thought, ran a scan of the Castle. "Well, from what I can see, there's nothing on the ship. The Castle would have detected any tracking devices and alerted us."

Shiro gazed at his screen. "Until we figure out how he's doing it, we should assume that he could show up at any minute. So stay alert."

Snoring reached their ears when Hunk shot up out of his chair. "Oh, man! Oh, what's going on? What are you guys doing?" He looked around, realizing everyone was staring at him. "What are you looking at?"

Keith smirked as he stared at the Yellow Paladin. "You woke yourself up snoring."

Hunk ducked his head down. "My bad."

Adam shook his head, trying to clear it. He rubbed his forehead; his brain and thoughts seemed muddled. "I must be tired," he muttered.

Shiro brought up an image of the engine room. "Coran, what's our status? Any good news?"

The older Altean skated around. "There is a bit of good news. I'm finally getting used to these slipperies."

Shiro forced himself to control his temper, which even he found was wearing thin. "Any good news about the Teludav?"

Coran stopped skating and shook his head. "I'm afraid not. The last jump overloaded the lens-stones. Now, even more of them are broken. I'm going to try some readjustments to change the beam trajectory. Until then, wormholing away will be impossible."

Pidge pulled up some information from the bridge, checking the Castle's immediate surroundings. "Hey, there's a giant metallic storm ahead of us. I think we can hide in the eye of the storm. It should give off enough interference, so we can't be traced."

Shiro nodded. "It's worth a shot."

Allura flew the Castle into the eye of the raging maelstrom. Things were looking up. "Brilliant, Pidge. We're essentially invisible to any radar, radio waves, universal scans, or any other known technology."

Klaxons blared.

Allura gasped. "No."

Pidge appeared on the main screen. "I don't know how he found us, but it wasn't with normal instruments."

Allura gazed at her instruments for a moment. "It's me. It's been me all along. That's how they found us on planet Arus." She groaned as the Castle was shaken by heavy fighter fire.

Adam gazed at Shiro. "Zarkon's trying to flush us out into the open."
Shiro nodded and stood to face Allura and the other paladins still on the bridge. "It doesn't matter, Princess. We're in this together. We're going to get out of this together."

Hunk gazed at Shiro. "Uh, how? We're trapped."

Shiro smacked his thigh with his human hand and drew his mechanical hand into a fist. "We need to form Voltron and go through the storm."

Lance gasped as he jumped up from his chair, his eyes wide. "The storm? What are you, nuts?"

Hunk jumped to his feet. "Yeah! What do you mean? Yeah, why would we do that?"

Shiro fought to keep a cool head. "It's risky. I know, but it's our only chance. We have to go through the storm, then lure Zarkon's ship away, giving Allura some time to get it into open space."

Adam nodded. Even though his brain seemed to be a muddled mess, he could see where Shiro was going with this and decided to spell it out for the rest of the team. "The fighters will follow Voltron into the storm. Only living Galra pilots might have the experience to get out of the storm while the sentry pilots ships will be ripped to shreds cutting down or even eliminating all fighter presence."

Allura gazed at Adam, considering his words before shifting her gaze back to Shiro. "Then, what?"

"Then, we wormhole away." Shiro turned back to the main screen. "Coran, remember how you said getting this Castle to wormhole is impossible? Well, I need you to do the impossible!"

The Paladins left the bridge and suited up quickly. They flew the lions out of the Castle and formed Voltron. As the giant mechanical warrior went into the storm, the fighters gave chase.

Adam looked up from his screen. "The fighters are being ripped apart."

Allura pressed buttons on her holographic screens. "How's it coming, Coran?"

"For this to work, each remaining lens-stone will need to take the equivalent of five beams! There's no way it can hold that kind of power! The whole thing will explode!"

Allura gazed up through one of the overhead windows and watched as Zarkon's command ship moved away from the eye. She didn't hesitate to fly the Castle out of the storm.

Voltron tried to fly away but was caught in the grip of a tractor beam. Zarkon was again fighting Shiro for control of the Black Lion.

Adam jumped up from his seat. "We've got to do something to help!"

Allura nodded. "My thoughts exactly." She flew the Castle around the command ship, firing the primary weapon into it. Explosions blossomed throughout the lower sections of Zarkon's ship. "Paladins, now's your chance. Get out of there!"

She didn't have to tell the Paladins twice. They disbanded and flew back to the Castle.

The Paladins sat in the cockpits of their lions. Keith frowned. "Why haven't we wormholed yet?"
Coran's voice came over their comms. "Because we can't! We're missing several scaultrite lensstones!"

Pidge replied. "Wait, did you say scaultrite? I've seen that somewhere before. I think Hunk was making some terrible cookies from that stuff!"

Hunk growled.

The Paladins gathered the cookies and took them to Coran, who examined them. "Unbelievable! These cookies do have trace elements of scaultrite."

Shiro leaned in close to Coran. "Will they work?"

"They might be able to hold for one jump, but we'd still need several people physically holding them. And, if the trajectories were calculated just so… we might make it out of here."

Coran arranged the Paladins in the Teludav as Allura flew the Castle, trying to evade Zarkon's command ship. Coran contacted the bridge. "They're in position."

Allura concentrated, but nothing happened. "Coran, what's happening? Zarkon's right on top of us!"

"The stones aren't reflecting properly! I need something to shine them up with!" Coran rubbed the back of his gloved hand across his forehead. He gazed at how it shined. "Wait a second. I think I've got it. Hit the wormhole in ten ticks!"

Allura began to count down from ten. Adam leaned forward in his chair. He crossed his fingers and silently hoped this worked.

Allura got down to one, and she closed her eyes and concentrated. A wormhole appeared, and the Castle dived into it.
Chapter Summary

Something is terribly wrong with Adam. It's up to the others to nurse him back to health.

I'm glad I finally finished this in time for Valentine's Day. Also, you'll find several words in this that I had some help with. I'm not sure myself about them but the first is Idiota in Spanish for Dork, Koishiteru in Japanese for love or my love, and Amor in Spanish for love.

Adam sat in his chair on the bridge as he studied the scans of the planet where Princess Allura had landed the Castle of Lions. This one was thankfully, uninhabited. It was probably because of the desert terrain outside.

He rubbed at his temple. The pain blocker was wearing off. He pulled a second one out of his pocket and popped it in his mouth and chewed. He grimaced at the taste. It was like black licorice mixed with rotten eggs. "So gross," he said to himself, but he couldn't deny it helped to soothe his head.

Adam chuckled to himself at the image of the Paladins as they stepped out of the Teludav. Each one smelled of singed hair though Takashi looked a little worse for wear.

It had taken him several minutes to convince them to get some rest. But now, he questioned himself. Should he leave his post and get some rest himself?

Before he could decide, the doors to the bridge opened. Adam craned his head, expecting to see Takashi there but was surprised to see who it was. "You should be resting."

"Don't start fretting over me, Adam." Allura waved a hand in front of her. "Coran does enough of that."

"I've already run more than enough scans. The only life out there is some animal life and some plant life."

She brought up her screen and studied his scans. "Your very thorough, thank you."

Adam stood as he studied the young Altean woman. She was more than tired. She seemed paler than usual.

Allura turned to walk away as the doors opened, revealing Lance. He stepped onto the bridge when the young woman stumbled, landing in Lance's arms. "Allura, are you okay?"

The princess drew herself up to her full height and pushed herself out of the Blue Paladin's arms. "I'm fine."

Lance gazed at her. "You don't look fine to me. Are you sure your not sick or something?" Genuine concern radiated in his voice.
Allura blinked at Lance. "I do feel a bit out of sorts. But I think it's just a case of exhaustion."

Lance crooked his arm, giving her his arm to hold onto. He craned his head to gaze at his cousin. "I'm coming back to take your place. You should get some sleep too."

Adam smiled back at the Blue Paladin. "Thanks."

Adam trudged down the hall leading to his quarters. He stopped in front of Shiro's door. He let out a sigh as he continued down the hall toward his room.

Adam stopped and reached out, grabbing the wall. The floor seemed to shift under his feet as if it was undulating. His head seemed to spin, but he held onto the wall until the floor stopped moving and his head stopped spinning. He looked up, seeing Coran walking his way, but his attention was fully absorbed into the datapad he held.

Adam straightened up as the older Altean walked closer to him. "Coran, I thought you should know. I believe Allura's sick."

Coran's head shot up. "Sick? Oh no, I must go check on her!" He raced past Adam as fast as his legs could carry him.

Adam made it to his room as the door whooshed open, allowing him entry. He removed his uniform jacket and hung it on the hook by the door. He sat down on the edge of the bed and removed his boots, followed by his slacks. He reached out and picked up his thin sleep pants provided by the Alteans.

He stuck a foot in each leg and stood to pull them up to his hips and let go of the waistband, which hugged his waist like the flight suit hugged his body. He sat back down and then stretched out as he lay his head carefully on the pillow. He closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Shiro stepped onto the bridge, surprised to find Lance there. "Hey, Lance. I thought Adam was here?"

Lance grinned back at Shiro as he puffed his chest out. "He was, but I sent him off to his room. He looked like he was in the running for a part in a movie about Zombie's as a Zombie."

Shiro chuckled. He opened his mouth to speak when Coran's voice came through the speakers on the bridge. "I need Pidge in Princess Allura's room quickly."

Shiro frowned. "What's wrong, Coran?"

"Allura's sick, and I need help with a diagnosis. I tried Adam, but he's not responding."

Shiro's frown deepened. "Okay, I'll round her up for you."

Lance began to rise from the seat, but Shiro shook his head. "Stay here. If Adam does show up, send him down to Allura's room."
The Blue Paladin nodded as the Black Paladin turned to leave. "Adam would never abandon his duty."

Shiro nodded at the teen's comment. "Your right. I'll check up on him after Pidge and Coran find out what's wrong with Allura."

Adam tossed and turned in his bed. He groaned as another image of Takashi appeared in his mind. Again he found himself at the Garrison walking into Commander Iverson's office. He saluted his commanding officer.

Iverson cleared his throat. "I wanted you to hear it from me first. The Kerberos mission failed."

Even though he'd broke off his relationship with Takashi, he still loved the man. Adam's knees turned to rubber as he sank into a chair. He stared at Iverson. He opened his mouth to speak, but the words that came out cracked with the pain he felt in his heart. "Failed, sir?" He swallowed hard.

Iverson nodded. "All hands were lost."

Adam rolled over in his bed as he mumbled, "Takashi," in his sleep, and a tear slid down his cheek.

Shiro stood behind Pidge as Coran ran the medical scanner over Allura. The smallest paladin glanced at the readings and inputted them into her laptop. She studied the results and spoke quietly to Coran.

The older Altean nodded curtly as he silently agreed with Pidge's prognosis. "It appears you're sick with the Altean Flu."

Allura gazed up at them with glazed eyes, but even though she was sick, she still had her wits about herself. "Shiro and Pidge should leave." She groaned as pain shot through her body, and her eyes lowered to half-mast.

Coran pulled a pain blocker from his pocket and used his other hand to help the princess sit up slightly. "This will help with the discomfort," he said as he placed the pill in her mouth.

Allura chewed but grimaced as she swallowed the medication.

Coran eased her back down and pulled the covers up around her chin. He straightened up and turned to face Pidge and Shiro. "Allura is right. The two of you should leave. We have no idea how this will affect humans. It has been known to be very uncomfortable for some races. Even life-threatening."

The older Altean held up his index finger. "But once she's well, we can create a vaccine from Allura's blood that should make you all immune to the disease."

Shiro stared at Coran. "How did she contract it?"

The former royal advisor frowned. "She's been overworking herself, and in that state, her body couldn't fight it off. See, on Altea, our people are born with the disease in a dormant state. But
when someone overworks themselves and doesn't take care of themselves, then it can become active. But now she's forced to get that rest I told her she needed."

Shiro nodded though a shudder ran through him. "We'll leave. But I need to check on Adam."

Pidge smirked up at Shiro as the pair began to leave the Princess's room. "Don't forget to give him a kiss when you see him."

Shiro rolled his eyes at her, "Pidge."

Pidge let out a laugh as she took off running down the hall.

Shiro stood outside of Adam's door, which whooshed open. He stepped through seeing the man's uniform jacket hanging on the hook, boots in front of the bed, and slacks on the floor. This wasn't like Adam at all to leave any part of his uniform lying about.

He moved up closer to the bed. "Adam?"

Adam groaned and opened his eyes. He stared up, and Shiro as his face drained of color. "No," he shook his head, trying to clear it. "You're not here. You died on Kerberos."

Shiro frowned. This wasn't Adam's usual demeanor. "Adam, I swear it's me. You helped rescue me from the Garrison after I crashed back to earth from escaping the Galra." He stepped forward, trying to reach out and touch the other man.

Adam shook his head. "No, your dead, and now you've come back to haunt me." Adam's eyes darted around the room. This wasn't the Garrison, where was he? He couldn't tell. He jumped up and placed his hands on Shiro's chest and shoved with all his might, running out of his room.

The touch on his chest was enough for Shiro to tell that Adam was sick and possibly delusional, given the heat that radiated from his hands. He tilted his head up toward the ceiling of the room and raised his voice. "Coran, we have a problem. Adam's sick, he's in the Castle somewhere. We need to find him."

Keith stepped out of his room and saw Adam charging toward him. Adam's eyes grew as he stared at the dark-haired teenager. What he saw a purple-skinned alien glaring back at him with hand outstretched as though to grab him.

Adam ducked and rolled under the arm and ran. His mind racing. What happened to Earth? Was it conquered? Where were his parents? Where was he? Adam shook his head again. He needed his weapon. He'd fight these invaders by himself if need be.

He found his way to the armory and gripped his energy pistol. His joints and body ached. And his head was so painful and throbbing he was finding it hard to concentrate on anything. He shook his head again and found his way onto the bridge.

He glanced out of the main viewscreen seeing the desert as a dust storm kicked up around the
Castle. He heard movement from him behind him. One minute he saw his cousin Lance standing there the next he saw another purple alien thing. He pulled up the pistol and aimed it at Lance.

"Who are you?"

The voice that came out of the thing's mouth sounded like Lance. "It's me, Lance, Adam. What's wrong?"

Adam shook his head again and saw Lance again. "Lance? Is it you?"

Lance nodded. "Yeah, it's me. Put that gun down."

Adam frowned. "I can't. Where are we?"

"We're on the Castle of Lions. I'm a Paladin of Voltron, and you're the team medic."

Adam shook his head again. Voltron did sound familiar, but he couldn't grasp onto the concept as the pain in his head grew. He looked up again at Lance, and the purple alien was standing there again. Adam's eyes darted around again, looking for a way out, but the only way out was the way he'd come. He fired a warning shot at Lance. "I'm leaving, don't try and stop me!" he growled at his cousin.

Lance nodded as his eyes grew wide. He held his hands up. "Uh, don't worry about it. While you're holding that pistol, I'm not coming near you."

Adam turned and darted off the bridge.

Lance sagged and then stood up. "Shiro, Adam was just here, and he shot at me. I don't know what's up with him, but he's not himself."

Shiro's voice came over the speaker. "I know Lance. I believe he's caught Allura's illness. We have to stop him before he does hurt someone."

Adam slipped through the door and onto the training deck. He looked for a place to hide so he could plan his next move, but he didn't see one. He found it harder to breathe. The rational part of his brain told him he was probably developing pneumonia. The irrational side wondered if this was some bioweapon that he'd been exposed to.

He dropped to his knees and toppled over onto the floor. Pain flared through him again as he fought for a good breath of air, and the sound coming from his chest wheezed and tried to take a deep breath but failed. He closed his eyes.

Keith found Adam first. "Shiro, I've found Adam. He's in the training room."

"Keep an eye on him, but don't approach. He's already taken a shot at Lance."

Keith gulped as he stared at Adam. "Yes, sir." He knelt by the door, ready to roll one way or another. He didn't like the sound of Adam's breathing. It sounded congested like the man's lungs were filling with fluid.
True to his word Shiro and the other paladins arrived on the training deck with Coran in tow. He turned to the Altean. "I need you in the observation deck. I want to try to talk to Adam, but if he tries to shoot any of us turn on the invisible maze."

Coran nodded and rushed away.

Adam managed to push himself up to sitting as the sound of shoes or booted feet on the deck plates reached his ears. He shook his head, but his vision was blurry as he tried to focus on the direction of the sounds.

Shiro held out his hands in front of his body. "Adam, it's going to be okay." He took a step forward as his pulse raced, and stomach twisted. Cautiously he took another step forward.

Hunk whispered to the others as Adam rose to his feet. "Guys, I think we should scatter."

Adam raised the energy pistol, but it shook in his hand as he tried to focus on a target. His finger twitched as he started to press on the trigger.

Shiro didn't hesitate. "Coran, now!"

The older man flipped a switch, and the walls of the invisible maze came up. Adam tried to run forward but staggered into a wall. Electricity shot through his body, and he crumpled to the floor.

Coran shut off the maze. "That was intense," he muttered.

Shiro rushed forward and knelt beside Adam. He placed his human hand on Adam's forehead. The man under Shiro's touch was so hot. It was unbelievable that he'd still managed to get to his feet. He was reminded of Keith when the dart poisoned him. Shiro removed his hand and craned his head toward the others. "We have to get his temperature down."

Coran appeared with a hover stretcher in tow. He scooped Adam up in his arms and lay him down on the stretcher. "This will be quicker getting him to the medical bay instead of trying to carry him."

Shiro nodded. "Good idea."

Coran and the Paladins hurried into the medical unit. The Altean moved a wall and pressed a panel lowering a bed. Again he scooped Adam up from the stretcher and placed him on the bed. "Lance, I know you helped with Keith. Do you remember where the cold packs are kept?"

Lance's head bobbed up and down. Yeah, I do."

"Go get some," Coran ordered. He knew he needed to keep the Blue Paladin busy.

Lance ran over to the other side of the room. He rummaged through the drawer and pulled out several cold packs and ran back to Coran and Shiro, who had removed what little clothing his cousin wore, leaving him in his briefs.

Shiro turned to Pidge and Hunk. "Adam's going to need some water. We have to keep him hydrated."

Hunk and Pidge ran out of the room to get the pouches of water.

As Coran activated the cold packs and placed them at the hotter points of Adam's body, Lance
turned to Shiro. "Uh, Adam also used an IV on Keith."

"Do you remember where it's kept?" Shiro asked as his eyebrow rose.

"Yeah, I'll go get it."

Coran pulled the blanket up to cover Adam's body. He turned to Shiro as he pulled out a small bottle of pills and placed them in the Black Paladin's hand. "He'll need these for the discomfort when he wakes. Only give him one every six to eight hours. No more than that, they could be hazardous to the human system." He frowned as he gazed into Shiro's dark gray eyes. "It might have been my fault that his symptoms got so bad."

Keith's eyebrows drew together as he stared at the older man. "Why do you say that?"

Coran rubbed at the back of his neck. "When he came to see me, Adam asked for something to deal with the discomfort of a headache, and when I went to use my medical scanner on him, he assured me that wasn't nothing more than a painful headache. I gave him four pills but failed to mention a limit on hours." Coran's eyes fell to the floor.

Shiro shook his head and placed a hand on Coran's shoulder. "This isn't your fault. We all should have seen something was going on, but we were busy trying to get away from Zarkon and keep the Black Lion out of his hands. We all missed it."

Lance nodded as he returned, carrying several IV bags of the same solution he'd seen his cousin use on Keith along with the other essentials of setting it up. "Shiro's right. We all should have figured out what was going on, me, especially since I was the last to see him before he went bonkers. And I just thought he was tired, nothing more."

Coran nodded as he pressed a corner of the bed, and the IV stand emerged. He set up the first bag of fluid, showing Shiro and Keith how to do it. Then he set the connection to the side of Adam's wrist, and it located the vein and inserted the needle from itself into the vein. He then strapped it around Adam's wrist. "When the first bag runs out, replace it with another. The fluids in these are similar to something Adam called glucose and saline."

Shiro nodded. "That's good." He frowned as Adam's breathing became more labored. "Is there any way to help him with his breathing."

"Most certainly." Coran pressed another button on the bed, and head of it raised. He pressed another button on the wall, which seemed to spit out an oxygen mask and tube. "This will also help his breathing." Coran pressed another button and then slipped the mask over Adam's mouth and nose. "There's also a medication that's being mixed with the oxygen that should help to clear his lungs."

A slight smile pulled at Shiro's mouth. "Thanks, Coran."

Coran gazed at the three paladins still in the room. "I'm sorry, but I should go back and take care of Allura. If you need anything, don't hesitate to call me."

Shiro nodded. "Don't worry. We will."

"You should try to keep your chances of getting the flu to a minimum."

Shiro shook his head. "I'm not leaving Adam here alone."

Both Lance and Keith nodded in unison. "I can't speak for Keith, but I'm not leaving either. Adam
is a part of my family back on Earth."

"I know Adam isn't my real family, but he's almost as close to me as Shiro is," Keith added.

Coran gazed at all three of them. "Very well, but if any of you start feeling bad, alert me." The Altean turned and exited the medical bay.

Shiro gazed at Keith and Lance. "So, who is going to take the first shift?"

Keith gazed at the pair. "It should be me. I've had more sleep than either of you."

Shiro gazed at the right arm of Voltron. "I suppose your right." He turned his gaze over at Adam. "But I feel like I'm abandoning him."

Keith shook his head. "No, you're not abandoning him. Your taking care of yourself."

Lance opened his mouth, but Shiro cut him off as he smirked at Keith. "Okay, Lance, we've got our orders. Why don't you open two of the beds for both of us."

Lance nodded and reluctantly moved over to the next wall and pushed a couple of buttons to open two beds. He sat down on the edge of one but did have to admit to himself that he was tired. He gazed once more over at Adam's bed before he lay down himself.

Keith looked around for something to put some water into and found a small bowl. It sat next to something that resembled a water faucet. He pressed the button above it, and water ran out into the bowl. He pushed the button a second time to stop the flow. He saw a cloth sitting on top of a cabinet where the bowl had sat next to it. He picked it up and dropped it into the water.

He walked back over to the bed where Adam lay and sat down on the edge of the bed. He wrung out of the cloth and used it to wipe down the exposed skin of Adam's face and neck.

Adam groaned and opened his eyelids, gazing at Keith. "Hot," he managed to whisper.

Keith had to lean forward to hear Adam through the mask. "I know, but we're working on getting your fever down." Keith dropped the cloth back into the water and picked up the medicine bottle, opened the cap, and shook out one of the purple pills into his empty hand. He recapped the container and set it back down and turned back to Adam. He lifted the oxygen mask and held the medicine out for Adam to see.

Adam screwed his face up. "They're gross."

Keith smirked at the sick man. "You're probably right. But Coran assured us that it will relieve the discomfort."

Adam frowned but gave in because anything would be better than the pure agony he was experiencing. All his joints seemed to ache worse than being through hand to hand combat. He opened his mouth and allowed Keith to put it on his tongue. Adam pushed it over to his back molars and chewed as he grimaced in disgust and swallowed the medicine.

Keith replaced the mask as Adam's eyelids slid closed. "You need to rest."

Adam gave a slight nod, but his eyelids opened again. He began to remember some of the things
he'd done, like taking a shot at Lance. "Is everyone okay?"

"Yeah," Keith nodded. "Everyone's fine. Lance and Shiro wouldn't leave, so they're asleep over there. But now what you need most is to sleep. Don't worry about anything. It's our turn to take care of you."

Adam's eyelids closed again as he finally let go and slept.

Hunk and Pidge walked into the infirmary carrying a huge box loaded with as many water pouches as they could stuff inside. They sat it down near the bed as Keith held his index finger to his lips and motioned them to follow him to the other side of the room. "Adam's finally sleeping," he kept his voice low. "And Shiro and Lance are asleep. We're going to take shifts."

Pidge nodded. "How can we help?"

Keith crossed his arms over his chest. "Well, when Adam gets better, he's going to need to eat something."

Hunk grinned, "I know, I'll see about using some of that meat to make something like chicken soup."

Pidge scowled at the Yellow Paladin. "How do you get chicken from pork that tastes something like a cross between pork and beef?"

"I can do this, don't worry, Pidge. I have this covered."

Pidge frowned and rubbed her chin. "What about me?"

Keith crossed his arms over his body. "Well, we don't have anyone keeping an eye out for the Galra, and we don't need Zarkon finding us."

Pidge nodded. "Yeah, that we don't need. I'm your girl," she grinned at him and ran out of the infirmary.

Keith frowned as he scratched at the back of his head. "I think she's been hanging out with Lance too much."

Hunk chuckled as he slapped Keith's shoulder. "I prefer her this way to moping about."

"I guess you're right about that."

Keith jerked up as he blinked and rubbed at his eyes. He glanced down at Adam, who was still asleep. Keith hadn't realized he'd dozed off. He heard again the sound that had woken him. It was a groan, but it sounded like someone in pain.

His eyes followed the sound. It was coming from Shiro. Movement caught Keith's attention as Lance sat up.

Keith carefully hopped off the bed, making sure not to wake Adam and walked across the room to Shiro's bunk.

Lance joined Keith. "Do you think he's got it now?"
"I don't know, Lance." He raised his head and gazed into the blue eyes that stared back at him. "Adam's asleep, but I think his IV needs to be changed."

Lance hurried away to check on his cousin.

Keith caught a twitch from Shiro as he groaned again. He put a hand on the older man's shoulder. "Shiro, wake up." He gently shook the older man.

Shiro's eyelids opened, and he blinked as recognition flashed in his eyes, and he sat up. "Is everything okay? Adam's—"

"Adam's fine. However, you were making noises."

Shiro rubbed his human over his face. "Sorry, I was dreaming."

"I'm guessing it wasn't a good dream?"

Shiro nodded as he leaned his back against the infirmary wall. "I was reliving my time as Zarkon's prisoner." He glanced away, drew his gaze back on Keith. "You look tired. You should get some rest."

Keith shook his head. "I'm fine."

Shiro pat the bed. "Then why don't you sit down here. We haven't had a chance to talk for a while."

Keith took the offer to sit down next to his friend, his brother. Keith sighed. "You know you're the closest person I have to family." He swallowed hard as he stole a glance at Lance who'd finished changing the IV bag and now sat on the bed, wiping off Adam's face and neck. He shifted his gaze back to Shiro. "You didn't have to help me like you did at the Garrison or with Iverson."

A smile curved up at the corner of Shiro's mouth. "I remember the first time I saw you in that classroom looking out the window. You didn't look at me while I gave my recruiting speech. But when I saw how well you did with the flight simulator. I knew you needed to be at the Garrison. You showed the potential of being a great pilot."

Shiro chuckled at something, and he turned to head to gaze at Keith's face. "Care to tell me why you stole my car that day? You've never told me why."

Keith sighed. "Of all the questions you could ask, you choose that one?"

Keith sighed a second time and swallowed. "I-I was so frustrated with the kids and the principal. For one thing, they kept on calling me the Emo kid. They all came from homes with parents while I didn't have any. And James Griffin, he made it a daily game to take a jab at me about my parents."

"So yeah, when the principal called me a discipline problem right there to your face, well, I figured if they labeled me that, then I should live up to it." He crossed his arms over his chest.

Shiro placed his human hand on Keith's shoulder and squeezed slightly. "I'm sorry you had to go through that. It's a shame we hadn't met earlier. Maybe I could have spared you from that pain."

Keith lowered his hands into his lap. "I'm over that now, but I was also booted out of the Garrison as a discipline case. But that's after Iverson came and told me that you and Pidge's family were declared dead. I got furious, and I told him to take it back, but he told me that people higher than he
had passed the word down. So I punched him in the face as hard as I could. Adam tried to get Iverson to change his decision, but Iverson didn't.

Shiro gazed at the teenager. "So, you were on your own since they declared us dead?"

Keith nodded, "For the most part. Adam came by a few times to check up on me. It was nice of him to do, but I didn't like the way he broke up with you before you left for Kerberos. I made that clear to him and did what I could to push him away. Eventually, he stopped coming around."

Shiro wrapped his arm around Keith's shoulders and pulled him closer.

Keith ducked his head under Shiro's chin. "I'm sorry about that."

"No, you have nothing to be sorry for." Shiro closed his eyelids. "I'm the one who's sorry. I should have been there for you, but I was fighting for my life in Zarkon's arena." He opened his eyelids as his voice turned softer. "I will always be here for you, Keith."

Keith pushed himself out of Shiro's embrace. "Don't make promises you can't keep. I realize now that there's no guarantee that any of us will make it out of this alive. But if I can keep everyone safe, including you, I will."

Shiro stood and stretched. "I should go and check on Adam."

Keith yawned as he nodded. "Tell Lance that Adam had a pill about six hours ago. He'll probably need another one soon."

Shiro nodded. "You can lay down here."

Keith nodded but reached out and grabbed Shiro's hand. "One more thing." His eyes slid away before sliding back to Shiro's. "I'm sorry for pushing Adam away back on Earth. I owe him for taking care of me when I was poisoned."

Shiro pat the teen's hand. "I'm sure he knows."

Keith yawned, then lay down on the bed.

Shiro brushed Keith's bangs out of his eyes. "Get some sleep."

Keith's mind flashed back a memory of Shiro doing the same thing while he was poisoned. A smirk pulled at his mouth as he gazed up at the older man. "Okay, Dad."

Shiro chuckled. "I guess you remember that."

Keith nodded but let his eyelids close. "Yeah, thanks for being there."

Shiro pat Keith on the shoulder but left the younger man's side and strode over to the other side where Lance was taking care of Adam. "Keith said Adam had one of those pills that Coran left with us about six hours ago. He wanted you to know." Shiro turned his gaze down to Adam. He reached out a hesitant hand. But continued the movement and ran his human hand through Adam's hair.

"He's still hot, Shiro. What should we do?"

Shiro reached down and touched the cold pack under the backside of Adam's neck. "This cold pack is getting warm. We need some more."
Lance stood up. "Okay, I'll get them." He ran over to where they were kept.

Shiro glanced down at Adam's face to find his eyelids open and gazing up at him. "Are you real?"

Shiro smiled softly down at Adam. "Yeah, I'm real. You're sick with Allura's Altean flu bug. Only this one is kind of like the poisoning Keith went through. Only you've also developed pneumonia too. But how are you feeling?"

"A little better."

"Do you want some water?"

Lance appeared at Shiro's side with the cold packs in hand. He gazed down at Adam. "Hey, you're awake. Can I get you something?" He glanced down at his hands and saw what he was carrying. "Oh, yeah, right." He chuckled slightly as his cheeks flushed pinker than usual. "I went to get you these cold packs." He went through the motions of activating them and replacing the warm ones.

Adam gazed at Lance as his cousin finished replacing the cold packs. "Thank you, but your still an idiot."

Lance grinned back at his cousin. "I know your feeling better since you can tease me."

Shiro opened his mouth again to try to find out if Adam was thirsty or not, but the door to the infirmary opened, and Hunk stepped through with a couple of hovering trays, each carrying steaming bowls of soup. "I finally perfected my soup." A big toothy grin spread across his face as he practically preened like a peacock.

Shiro tried again when Lance butted in. "Great, I'm sure Adam would like some since he's awake."

Shiro groaned and smacked his face with his human hand. He let it slide down.

Adam groaned, but he smirked at Shiro. Then whispered through the oxygen mask, "I'm thirsty."

Shiro nodded and saw the box loaded with water pouches and picked one out of the box. He inserted the straw and removed Adam's mask, holding it so Adam could drink it. "Not too fast."

"I know," but he smiled to take the sting out of the words.

"It seems as if the medicine that's in the oxygen is helping with pneumonia."

"Yeah, it's not as difficult for me to breath anymore."

Lance returned with a bowl of soup. He sat down the edge of the bed. "Hunk says this tastes like chicken soup. He made it with that meat that you two brought back."

Adam pushed Shiro's hand away and focused on Lance. "What are you going to do? Feed me like an infant?"

"If I have to."

Adam shook his head. "Put the straw in the bowl, and I can drink it that way. I'm not helpless, you know."

Lance sighed. "Yeah, I know. But you were sick, and now you're weak."

"I won't deny that. I should eat some of the soup."
Lance grinned. "Now, you're talking."

Hunk stepped over to them. "I want to know if I should change the recipe to make it taste more like chicken soup, or if I need to add anything else to it."

Shiro took a step back from Adam's bed. "While these two," he indicated Lance and Hunk, "take care of you I'm going to check in with Coran and see how Allura's doing. But I will return, koishiteru."

Both Lance and Hunk's mouth's dropped open as they both gaped at Shiro. Lance gazed down at Adam who's face was both a pink and eyes were gazing at Shiro. "What's that supposed to mean?"

As Shiro walked away, he heard Adam's reply, and he grinned. "That's something I haven't heard in a long time. And I'm happy to hear it again."

Shiro entered Allura's room to find the young woman up and wearing her dress. She sighed as she brushed her hair.

Coran held out his hands to her back. "Princess, you need to get back into bed. You're still sick."

Allura turned from where she sat and smiled. "I assure you, Coran, I'm fine. It was a mild case of the flu." She noticed Shiro behind the royal advisor. "Oh, Shiro, is everything okay?"

"Adam's recovering. He's not delirious anymore, but his fever is still high, but not as dangerously high as it was."

Allura gasped as she stood and dropped her brush to the floor. "Adam's sick?"

Shiro nodded. "Yes, he caught it, too."

Allura reached out to him but stopped herself. "Oh, Shiro, I'm sorry he caught this from me." She turned her gaze back to Coran. "Why wasn't I informed of this?"

The older man scratched at the back of his head. "You were ill. But now we can make a vaccine from your blood to give the Paladins the protection they need, and it should also shorten Adam's recovery."

Allura nodded. "Then let's get it done. We can't allow the Paladins to get sick from this, and they need Adam well."

Coran led the way to the Green Lion's hangar. They found Pidge finishing some work on a program. The older man pulled at his mustache and then released it. "Is everything ready?"

Pidge grinned as she stood and practically bounced. "It's ready."

Coran turned to Allura. "Sit down right over here," he indicated a chair for her to sit down in. He picked up a tube-like device and pushed up the sleeve of her dress, pressing it to her arm. Pidge and Shiro both stared fascinated as the blood flowed into the tube.

Pidge studied the process intently. "I'm sure there's a way we could speed up the process."

Shiro sighed. "If it's not broke, don't fix it."
The youngest Paladin crossed her arms over her chest. "Hmph."

Coran turned to what looked like a centrifuge and poured the blood into six smaller cylinders. He raised his head, gazing at Pidge. "Care to do the honors?"

"Definitely," she replied as she turned it on. It ran until Coran motioned for her to turn it off.

Coran removed the smaller cylinders and drained off the clear liquid of each into smaller vials. He held up one of the vials. "This is what I'll use to make the vaccine doses. I need to scan the blood serum for impurities."

It was Allura's turn to Hmph as she crossed her arms over her chest and raised her chin. "My blood is pure."

"Yes, yes, it is." Coran cleared his throat. "What I meant was anything that might be harmful to the Paladins and Adam. Their physiology is very similar to ours." He scanned each vial and seemed satisfied.

He ran the vials through a processor, which each one was now in an even tinier vial. He placed the first vial into one of the air injectors and pressed it against Pidge's arm. It hissed, and the vial was empty. He followed the same procedure with Shiro. "I'll go and give the others their injections."

A devilish grin crossed Pidge's face. "It's called a flu shot on Earth."

Shiro rolled his eyes. "I'm going back to the infirmary."

Pidge's grin grew wider. "Say Hi to your boyfriend for me."

Shiro rolled his eyes but nodded. He turned to leave but couldn't wipe off the grin that spread over his face as Pidge chuckled, and Allura giggled.

Shiro entered the infirmary and found the room practically deserted. Keith was still sleeping, and Adam was asleep, but Lance, Hunk, and Coran were absent. He walked over to Adam's bed and lightly pressed his hand to Adam's forehead.

The man's eyelids opened as he focused on Shiro's face. "Hey."

"Hey, yourself. How do you feel?"

"Better than earlier. Coran says I'll have to stay until my lungs are cleared." He smiled at Shiro. "I hope I wasn't dreaming. I thought you called me koishiteru earlier."

Shiro nodded and smiled in return. "Yeah, I did."

"What happened to bring this about? I'm not complaining, I'm curious."

Shiro motioned with his head in Keith's direction. "We were talking earlier, and he came to the realization that we might not survive this war, and it made me think about what and who is important to me right now." He took a breath and decided to jump in feet first and eyes open. "I've decided that I want us to be together again, koishiteru."

Adam smiled, and Shiro leaned forward to touch his forehead to Adam's. "Takashi, Amor." He
reached up and ran his fingers through Shiro's white bangs. "I wish there was a way we could have prevented the pain you went through."

Keith opened an eye from the other side of the room. "I'm glad you two are a couple again, but I'm trying to sleep here."

Adam reached under the blanket and pulled out the dog tags he wore around his neck. He pulled the chain up over his head and pulled the mask off his face before replacing the mask. "I kept something. When Iverson told me you'd died, I started wearing your ring on my dog tags, keeping it next to my heart." He placed the dog tags in Shiro's hand.

Shiro flipped them over to find both his and Adam's rings there. The ones they'd given each other when they'd become engaged. He closed his fingers over the dog tags. "Are you—" he couldn't finish as his voice cracked.

Adam nodded. "Will you marry me?"

Shiro put the tags back in Adam's hand. "I will, but not right now. Once this war is over with, and peace returns to the Universe."

Adam nodded. "Until that day comes. I'll hang onto these."

Keith sat up on the other side of the room and stood. "Congratulations to both of you. I'm happy for you two, but I'm going to my room where I can get some sleep."

Adam smirked, and Shiro chuckled as the Red Paladin left.

Two days later and Adam was officially cleared by Coran to return to his duties. But that didn't stop the congratulatory comments from the others to the pair of Garrison officers who formally had moved in together. Nor the teasing they received from both Pidge and Lance.
Who or What is Zarkon Tracking

Chapter Summary

They finally find out how Zarkon is tracking them.

Adam woke and reached out, finding Shiro's side of the bed empty. Not only empty but cold, so Takashi had been gone for a while.

He appreciated the rest, but Takashi needed to understand that he was regaining his strength. But he still admitted to himself that he was still weak. The flu combined with pneumonia had taken a lot out of him.

Adam rose and dressed. He needed to seek out the others to find out what was going on. He strode through the ship, looking for any sign of the others. But the thought struck him that they might be on the bridge. He followed his hunch and stepped through the doors but wasn't prepared for what met his eyes.

Allura sat on the edge of her station and shook her head. "There's no point in debating this further. Zarkon is tracking us through me."

The others refused to believe her, and each one voiced their objections.

Allura frowned. "Why would that be so hard to believe? Zarkon's forces showed up on Arus only after I woke."

Lance crossed his arms over his chest as he gazed over at Shiro. "She's got a point." He bent over toward her as flirted outrageously. "I would travel across the galaxy to find you."

Keith cleared his throat, gaining everyone's attention to him. "It's not you, Princess Allura. It's me."

Hunk blinked and stared at Keith as if he'd lost his marbles. "Because?"

Keith shifted his eyes away from the others. I think Zarkon must've imprinted on me during our fight or something."

Pidge sighed and rubbed at her forehead. It was time to stop all this and focus on the bigger picture. "Look, the fact is, we don't know how Zarkon is tracking us. It could be through the Black Lion. Every time Zarkon gets near it, Shiro has to fight him for control."

Coran, who'd been beside Allura, stood up. "That's only when Zarkon is nearby. No Paladin has ever been able to connect with a lion over a vast distance."

Hunk glanced around. "So what are we going to do? Allura and Adam both are still recovering, and we can't wormhole until we fix the wormholer."

Shiro turned to Hunk. "I know. Right now, it doesn't matter how he's tracking us because we're gonna take the fight to the Galra soon enough. They've been chasing us from galaxy to galaxy. The last thing they will expect is for us to come after them."
Lance smirked. "The hunter becomes the hunted, hmmm? Awesome. That's the tagline from like six of my favorite movies." He jabbed Keith in the side with his elbow. "Get it?"

Keith rolled his eyes.

Pidge took her seat at her station. "As it happens, I took our list of recent Galra attacks and analyzed it for both commonalities and anomalies among the attack sites. I was hoping to create an algorithm that would, in a statistically acceptable margin of error, provide a list of target-rich Galra environments, color-coded, of course, because what are we animals?"

She pressed a button on her holographic screen, and the star map appeared surrounding everyone on the bridge.

Lance turned around stat the stars that surrounded him. "Cool. What is it again?"

Hunk turned to face the youngest Paladin. "It's a Galra finder?"

Pidge shook her head as she pushed her glasses up her nose. "Well, finder suggests that it locates the Galra, whereas it would be more accurate to say that my model predicts their likeliest –" She blinked as she looked up at the others catching their blank stares back at her. She sighed. "Fine! It's a Galra finder."

Lance asked the burning question. "So, where are the Galra?"

Pidge brought up a planet. "The nearest ones are right here. A planet called Taujeer."

Shiro turned to face the others. "Then that's where we're headed. Everyone should get some sleep. Tomorrow we'll find that Galra fleet and take it out."

Everyone else left the bridge, which left Adam, Shiro, and Keith still there. Adam approached Shiro but stopped when the man strode over to Keith. "Is everything okay?"

Keith ducked his head down. "Yeah, why?"

"You seem a bit anxious."

Adam gazed at Keith. He seemed more than anxious to him. He appeared to be sadder than anything.

Keith frowned. "I'm fine. Just tired. As you said, I should get some sleep." He walked away without a backward glance.

Shiro watched him walk away. He could tell something was bothering him, but he wanted Keith to come to him instead of trying to pry it out of the teen.

Adam walked up to Shiro and slid his arm around the Black Paladin's waist. "Something's bothering him."

Shiro nodded. "I know." He turned to face Adam. "You should still be asleep."

Adam sighed. "Amor, I don't want to fight. I was sick, not injured."

"I know, but I worry about you."

Adam smiled at Shiro. "I worry about you too, but I can't stop you from piloting the Black Lion."
Shiro made a poor attempt at stifling the yawn that came. "It's been a long day. I need some sleep."

"Well, what I walked in on was intense. Allura still believes that Zarkon is tracking us through her?"

Shiro nodded as the pair headed for the doors. "Yeah, she does."

"Well, my vote is the Black Lion."

Shiro's hand reached up and rubbed at his chin as the pair walked through the doorway. "I agree, and until the Teludav is fixed, I don't want to get into another cat and mouse chase with Zarkon. The Teludav is important."

"I know."

Adam and the others stepped onto the bridge. At the sound of the doors opening Coran turned from his station. "We should be entering Taujeer's orbit soon."

Shiro stood beside his station. "Raise the particle barrier. Scan for Galra." He glanced around. "Where are Keith and Allura?"

Coran ran a quick scan of the Castle. "It appears that one of the pods launched in the middle of the night."

Lance sat up straight in his chair as his muscles tensed. "Wait a minute, Keith and Allura? In the middle of the night?" he leaned forward as he grit his teeth together for a quick minute. "You don't think they're sitting in a tree?"

Adam shook his head and rolled his eyes. "Dork," he mumbled under his breath.

Shiro ignored Lance's moment of jealousy. "Contact the pod."

Lance stuck his hand up with his index finger extended. "Yes! Contact that pod!"

Coran opened up a channel to the pod. "Princess, Keith, where are you?"

Allura's voice came over the speaker. "Exactly where we should be, far away from the Castle."

Shiro ran his human hand through his hair as he tilted his head to the side. "What? Why?"

Allura's voice floated out of the speaker. "We must know if we are the ones Zarkon is tracking."

Pidge leaned forward. "They're isolating the variable. Well, isolating two variables."

Lance gaped at the youngest Paladin. "In English, please?"

Pidge frowned as she tried to explain in simpler terms. "To test a hypothesis—"

"I said English!"

Pidge cringed and crossed her arms over her chest. "Never mind!"

Adam glanced over at Pidge. "Don't worry about it, Pidge. Lance wasn't that great with math or the
scientific method."

Lance jumped up out of his chair as he glared at Adam. "Hey! That's private."

Adam twisted his body in the other direction to gaze at Lance. "It's not when you keep letting your personal feelings get the better of you."

Allura's voice brought an end to their bickering. "Pidge is right. If Zarkon finds you despite my absence, we will know that we are not the ones he is tracking."

Shiro frowned. "Splitting up the group makes us far more vulnerable. Come back to the Castle immediately."

"I'm sorry, Shiro, I cannot do that," Allura replied.

Keith joined the conversation. "If Zarkon does find us, I can pilot us to safety. We're in wide-open space with plenty of room to maneuver. Plus, we'd be able to outrun him. Pidge added that booster rocket."

Adam could swear that Coran sounded stunned. "That things still on there?"

Shiro wasn't happy with the way they were ignoring him. "We need you both back here now!"

The Castle hit something which caused them all to jump. The klaxons went off as red warnings flashed over the bridge. Shiro gazed at the older Altean. "What's going on?"

Hunk checked his scanner. "We're in some debris field."

Coran's eyes ran over his console as he searched for an answer. "I believe it's coming from Taujeer." He brought up the holographic display on the main screen. "Correction. I think it is Taujeer!"

Allura's voice came over the speaker. "Coran, what's going on—"

Static cut into their conversation. The Altean studied his console's readings. He turned to face Shiro. "Some radiation from Taujeer is interfering with communications!"

Shiro frowned. He needed to know that Keith and Allura were safe even if what they did was ill-advised. "Move the Castle away from the planet and reestablish communications. Everyone else, get to your lions." He stood and took several steps that led him to Adam's station. "No matter what happens, I don't want you overworking yourself."

Adam sighed, but he smirked at the other man. "You know, you'll make a great dad someday with the way you worry. Unless you give yourself a heart attack first."

Lance, who was moving a little slower than usual, snorted at the comment. Wisely, for once, he kept his thoughts to himself.

Shiro's cheeks flushed pink. He bent down, giving Adam a quick kiss before he raced away to get his armor on.

Adam wished he was going with them, but he knew this time he'd be a hindrance instead of a help.

The lions shot out of their hangars and raced away for the planet's surface.
Coran moved the Castle away from the planet. "Adam, I think I've reestablished the link."

"Thanks. Princess, Keith, do you copy?"

Allura's voice came from the speaker again. "Adam, what's going on? Where's Shiro?"

Adam rubbed at his forehead. What was he going to tell her? The truth and one of those truths were they were out of radio contact until someone like Pidge or Hunk could boost their radio signals over the planet's radiation. Or even figure a way to filter it out of their communications to the Castle.

"From the readings I'm getting from my scans, Taujeer is shedding its outer layer, but the radiation coming from the planet is causing interference in our communications. Shiro and the others went down to Taujeer to see what they can do." Adam sighed. "I'm not the Black Paladin, so I can't give you two a direct order, but I'm going to repeat it. You two need to return."

Adam could practically hear the frown in Allura's voice. "I'm sorry, but we have to know."

Adam sighed. "You know, Allura, right now, you're stubborn just like Keith."

Keith growled. "I am not stubborn!"

Adam rolled his eyes. "Says the guy who decided to live in the desert like a hermit and conspiracy theorist." He sat up, straighter in his seat. "Coran, I'm picking up something coming toward Taujeer fast."

Keith's voice came over the speakers. "Adam, what's going on?"

"I can't talk right now."

Shiro's voice came over the speakers of the Castle. "Coran, we need you here now. Attack the Galra cruiser!"

Coran brought the Castle in closer to Taujeer. "I'm on my way!" He quickly switched back to the pod. "Keith, Allura, are you still there?"

Allura's voice came over the speaker. "We're here, Coran. What is it?"

"Zarkon's not tracking us through either of you."

Keith's voice sounded almost shocked. "He's not?"

Adam thought that the Red Paladin sounded stricken by that news.

Allura asked, "How do you know?"

"Because you're out there, and a Galra fleet has shown up here! We need you now!"

Allura replied, "We'll be there in two dobaches."

Adam stared at the battle raging below the Castle of Lions. "They're trying to project that ship on the surface from the Galra." He ran a scan of the greenish liquid that bubbled below what little bit of ground that surrounded the ship. "That's acid, and Hunk and the Yellow Lion are trying to keep that ship from falling in it, but they're close to falling in themselves."
Coran brought up the particle barrier. "We are not going to allow that to happen. We're in range of the Galra ship now." He activated all defense weapons firing into the top side of the Galra cruiser. Explosions blossomed across the top of the ship from stem to stern.

Shiro's voice came over the speaker. "Way to go! Keep it up!"

The Galra cruiser turned part of its weapons fire on the Castle.

Coran let out a small growl. "Oh, if only there were another who could pilot the Red Lion." He turned to Adam. "Take my place here."

Adam's jaw fell open as he gaped at Coran. "Me?"

"Yes, I know your learning Altean. I believe by now, you're quite proficient."

Adam swallowed hard, trying to get the lump that appeared out of it. His voice cracked. "What are you going to do?"

"We need someone to pilot the Red Lion. So I shall see if it will accept me."

Adam stood and strode over to Coran's console. "This is more complicated than my station."

Coran pointed out the weapons and particle barrier to the younger man. "Keep your eyes on these controls. If the levels begin to drop, reroute the power." The Altean ran off the bridge.

Adam shook his head. "Reroute the power he says. From where?" he asked the empty bridge.

Coran's voice came from the Red Lion's hangar. "Uh, guys. The Red Lion ran away."

Adam shook his head as he tried to wrap his brain around what the Altean had said. "Ran away? What are you talking about?"

"The Red Lion stood up, roared, and launched itself out of the hangar."

Adam pursed his lips. "That's probably because it knew Keith was in trouble."

The doors to the bridge opened, and Coran returned to the bridge. "I'll take over again."

Adam's legs trembled. "Thanks, Coran."

"No, thank you for covering for me."

Adam reached his station and let himself collapse down into his seat. A fast-approaching blip on his screen caught his attention. He noticed it was red, meaning it was the Red Lion returning.

Adam sighed, grateful for Keith's return as the lion joined the others, trying to keep the ship below from falling into the acid.

Shiro's voice came over the speaker. "Coran pull the Castle back. We're going to take down that cruiser once and for all."

The Castle moved away as the lions formed Voltron. Adam gasped, as the giant mech warrior
created the largest sword he'd ever seen. It attacked the Galra cruiser and easily split the ship in
two. It exploded.

Voltron picked up the Taujeerian ship and transported the people to their new colony on a nearby
planet.

Keith and Allura stood on the bridge facing the others.

Allura held her hands together in front of her body. "I'm so sorry for leaving."

"Keith gazed at Shiro and Adam. "Me too. We thought we were doing the right thing."

Allura glanced down at the floor but brought her eyes back up and focused entirely on the Black
Paladin. "You were correct, Shiro. We are always stronger together."

Lance gazed at Allura. "At least we learned that Zarkon isn't tracking us through you two."

Hunk grinned. "I learned that my lion can grow armor and extend its claws. Which would come in
handy if we ever needed to, say, I don't know, slice up a giant steak while getting beat up. Or fight
evil and save innocent people. That too. That would work."

Shiro frowned, but he gazed at the others. "The fact that the Red Lion came to help Keith from so
far away is a vital piece of information. We now have proof that a lion and a Paladin can connect
over a greater distance than we realized. Which means we finally know how Zarkon is tracking us.
It's through the Black Lion."

Adam's shoulders sagged, but Lance caught the movement out of his peripheral vision. "Are you
okay." He took a good look at his cousin's face. "You're looking a bit worn out there."

Coran cleared his throat. "I'm afraid that's my fault. I had him take over for me because I hoped the
Red Lion would accept me to pilot it while Keith and Allura were away."

"Here lean on me," Shiro said as he wrapped an arm around Adam's waist. "I'll take you to our
room so you can get some rest."

Lance gazed at the pair as Shiro helped Adam off the bridge. His face lit up in a big grin. "I can't
wait for them to get married, then Shiro will be part of my family. It's gonna be, so fun having my
idol as part of my family."

Keith crossed his arms over his chest and snorted. "Things happen. Who knows what's going to
happen before that time comes."

Pidge gazed at the Red Paladin. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that in case you haven't noticed it, we are in a war."

Lance sighed. "Stop being such a downer Keith and look on the bright side."

Keith shook his head. "Grow up."

"Oh, is somebody jealous?" Lance teased as he leaned toward Keith.
"No, I'm not jealous. I'm happy for Shiro and Adam. After everything he's been through, Shiro finally has a chance for happiness. But we have to be realistic here."

Allura stepped in between the two teens. "I do understand how both of you feel. I am also happy for them. But we need to get the Teladuv fixed. Who knows when Zarkon will find us again."

Hunk nodded. "Yeah, and I think it's time to make something to eat. So who wants to help me in the kitchen?"

Everyone suddenly had something else to do.

Hunk grinned. " Stops a fight every time." He chuckled as he headed for the kitchen.
In Search of Lenses

Chapter Summary

This is what happens when an Altean, four teens, and a cousin go to the Space Mall.

Shiro and the others gathered on the bridge. They needed to figure out what to do next. "Okay, look. We know for certain that Zarkon is tracking us through the Black Lion. We have to find some way to stop him."

Pidge gazed at him. "How are we gonna do that?"

Allura frowned. "We've never had this situation before. Two paladins battling for the same lion."

Shiro pat his thigh with the fingers of his human hand. "Well, unless we want Zarkon taking control of Voltron every time we get close, I'll have to forge a new bond with my lion. One that's stronger than his."

Coran turned to Shiro. "Well, while you're working on that, the rest of us need to find some new Teludav lenses; otherwise, we won't be able to travel via wormhole."

Hunk rubbed at his chin. "Is that something we have to mail order?"

Adam shook his head. "I don't think that's a thing out here in space, Hunk."

"Oh."

Keith gazed at Coran. "Does anyone even make those anymore?"

Allura gazed at them. "I don't know. Only a few Alteans could use the Teludav ten thousand years ago. May not even exist anymore."

Coran twisted one side of his mustache and released it. "I think I may know where we can get some."

Adam flinched and leaned over to Shiro. "How does he do that without hurting himself?"

Shiro shrugged.

Coran walked to his station and brought up some images of a humanoid species that had four arms.

Allura stared at the viewing screen and crossed her arms over her body. "You're not suggesting going to one of those filthy swap moons! The last time you went, those space pirates took you for everything you had."

Lance stared at the screen. "Space pirates?"

Coran enlarged the pictures of the humanoids. "The Unilu were traders and pirates that roamed the galaxies and dealt in black market goods. Of course, you had to bargain. No one could bargain like the Unilu." A quick laugh escaped from the Altean. "Last time, I ended up giving away three-quarters of my shipment of lango in exchange for a used pogo oscillator."
Hunk scratched at the back of his head. "Is that anything like a motorized pogo stick?"

Adam shrugged. "No clue."

Allura grinned at the former royal advisor. "Father was not pleased about that."

Lance sighed, gaining Allura's attention. He stepped up closer to her. "Well, while Coran is picking up his lenses, I take you shopping for something sparkly."

Coran suddenly popped up between Lance and Allura. He leaned over Lance with his hands doubled up into fists. "This isn't shopping! No! I can't allow Allura anywhere near those filthy, lowballing Unilu hoodlums."

Allura smiled at Coran with one of her best smiles that would have caused King Alfor to cave in to one of her wishes. She grasped her hands together under her chin. "But I'd love something sparkly."

Coran shook his head. "Look, you're the only one who can operate the Castle. You need to be resting after all you've been through."

Allura's shoulders sagged as she deflated.

Coran continued to speak as he walked away. "We need to get in, find the scaultrite lenses, and get out."

Lance yelled, "Shotgun," as he ran after the older Altean.

Hunk reached out for Lance but missed. "What? No, you have to be in the pod bay to call shotgun."

He ran after Lance.

Lance stopped, turned, and smirked at the teen. "Since when?"

"Since forever? That's shotgun etiquette. I wrote the book."

Pidge trotted after the two teens.

Keith let out a sigh and trudged behind.

Shiro watched them, but his worry for Keith was apparent. However, he didn't say a thing. "While they're doing that, I'm going to head down to the hangar. I have to strengthen my bond with the Black Lion." He turned to Adam. "What are you going to do?"

Adam rubbed a hand against his chin as he stuck the other in his pocket. "I had thought about learning more Altean. But I'd better go with them. Lance has a way of getting into trouble when he's not looking for it."

Shiro smirked. "He does at that." He leaned forward and pressed his lips to Adams and wrapped his arms around his fiancée. Adam wrapped his arms around Shiro and rubbed his hands along Takashi's back.

As they separated, Shiro spoke softly. "I'll miss you every second your away."

Adam leaned his forehead against Shiro's. "Me too."
Coran's voice came over the speaker in the back of the pod. "Hello? Back passengers? Can you hear me?"

Lance's voice came over the speaker, and he let out a little chuckle. "Oh, it's so comfy up here. Extra legroom, heated seats! Oh, Man!"

Hunk folded his arms across his chest. "Stupid Lance. Stupid shotgun."

Adam pushed his booted foot against Hunk's, getting the teen's attention. "Don't get all bent outta shape. I'm sure you'll get another chance to ride in the cockpit of a pod again. Like your first trip to the Balmera to get a crystal."

"Yeah, but does he have to rub it in?"

Keith didn't bother opening an eye. "No, he can't help himself."

Coran, who had no idea of what was going on in the back of the pod, began to impart his wisdom. "Now these swap moons are dangerous environments. So be on your toes. No weapons or communication devices of any kind! Also, I've brought along some disguises."

Adam blinked as he glanced at the others. "Did I hear him, right? Did he say disguises?"

Pidge nodded. "Yeah, you did. What's up with that?"

Coran landed the pod and insisted they put their disguises on before entering what he remembered as a swap moon but was now a sizeable sprawling complex with several stories of shops.

They entered the building, which turned out to be a mall that looked quite similar to malls on Earth. Music played over a sound system.

Pidge was the first to speak up as the others stared around them. "Uh, Coran? This Unilu swap meet looks an awful lot like a regular mall."

The older man glanced around. "It does seem to be a little cleaner than I remember. Still, be vigilant. The Unilu are cut-throat wheeler-dealers. So keep your hands on your coin satchels."

Hunk reached into his pocket, pulling it inside out. "My satchels are empty."

"Good."

Keith let out a sigh. "Let's get this over with."

Coran nodded. "Yes, right. Everyone, let's fan out, search the area for Teludav lenses. We'll meet by the giant ticking clock in one varga. Don't be late, and try to blend in."

As Coran walked out of hearing range, Adam sighed in relief. "Ditch the disguises, guys. We'll blend in easier in our clothes."

They took off the disguises and dumped them in a trash can. Then they split up. Hunk went off in one direction, Keith another, but Adam stuck with Pidge and Lance.

Lance glanced over at Adam. "I don't need a babysitter, you know."

Adam snorted. "Yeah, right. I can think of a few things you've gotten yourself into at the Garrison."
Lance placed his hand on his chest. "Those weren't my fault. Hunk got hungry, so we snuck down to the commissary, looking for a snack."

Adam nodded. "And was that all Hunk's doing?"

Lance looked left then right before focusing on Adam again. "Uhm, well, no."

Adam nodded again, then smirked at the teenager. "And what's this business with Jenny Shepard? You've never explained that one."

Lance sighed. "Well, she had the hots for Keith, and well, he never gave anyone a second look, so I tried to pick her up on the rebound. And she mistook the situation."

Pidge perked up. "The same Jenny Shepard, who dumped her meal tray all over you?"

Lance stuck his hands in his pockets. "Yeah." He looked away from them for a minute before focusing on them again. "Can we talk about something else?"

Pidge stopped walking. "Uh, guys, I have got to go to the bathroom."

Adam pointed to something that suspiciously looked like it could be the bathroom. "I think there's one over there. It's at least in the position where a bathroom would be."

Lance gazed at her. "Couldn't you have gone before we left?"

Pidge sighed. "I didn't have to go then, you, Dorkasaurus."

"What? What did you call me?" Lance spluttered.

She spun on her heel as she hurried away. She said, "You heard me."

Adam chuckled.

Lance stopped in front of a store, noticing two alien females watching him and Adam from the opposite side of the hall in the window's reflection. He ran a hand through his hair, pointed finger guns at them, and flashed his best smile at them. They both giggled.

Adam jabbed the Blue Paladin in the side with his elbow. "We're not here for you to flirt," he hissed.

Lance turned and scowled at his cousin. "Would you stop cramping my style."

Adam leaned in closer. "Don't you realize that if someone here recognizes us, then we'll be running again. I'm tired of running from Zarkon. Now get with the program!"

An alien stepped out of the store. It was gray with big black eyes and wore a hat with the number 51 on it. "Can I interest you in the latest Earth fashions?"

Pidge ran up to Lance and Adam. "Guys, come on! We have to be back at the ticking clock in a half-hour."

Lance turned to her. "But Pidge, wait, look at this crazy Earth stuff this alien is selling!"

Pidge pushed her glasses up her nose. "We're supposed to be looking for Teludav lenses, and you're looking in the one store we know for certain won't have—" She saw something out of the corner of her eye and became all excited. "Oh, my gosh! Is that Killbot Phantasm 1?" She picked up the
game box. "The first journey to the depths of the demon sphere? Oh! Mercury Gameflux Two!"
She set the game down and picked up the game console box. "With the original power glove that
gives you infinite lives if you touch the index finger to the pinky! We have to have this!" She
hugged the box. "How much is this?"

The alien looked at her. "Twelve hundred GAC."

Pidge stared at Lance and Adam. "Is that a lot?"

Lance grabbed his chin while he gazed up at the ceiling. "Well, compared to what we have, which
is none, yes. It's a lot."

Pidge set the game console box down. She grabbed Lance by the arm. "We're gonna find some
money. Come on!" She turned to the alien. "Don't sell that!"

The alien frowned. "Don't worry. I never sell anything."

Adam frowned as he held the teen's shoes with their socks stuffed inside and Lance's jacket. "Is this
necessary?"

The pair of teens ignored him as they raided the bottom of the decorative water fountain for coins.
Pidge picked up a coin and stared at it for a moment before slipping it into her pocket. She stood
up. "Oh, this tender looks like the last one. So, how much have we got?"

Lance stood up. A math whiz in Calculus and Trigonometry, he wasn't. But money and judging
wind speeds he was good at. He mentally calculated the money. "Eleven hundred and ninety-six
GAC."

Pidge bent low, looking like a boxer ready to throw a punch. "We're so close!" A flash of metal
caught her attention. An alien child stood close to the fountain making a wish while it held the coin
in its hand. She pointed toward the child. "Lance, look!"

The Blue Paladin took off like a shot from a cannon running through the water toward the child.
"Already on it!"

The child threw the coin. Before it got near the water, Lance caught the coin between his teeth.

Pidge, giddy with excitement, climbed out of the fountain and yanked her shoes out of Adam's
hand. "Yeah! Let's go!" She took off running for the Earth store.

Lance laughed as he pulled the coin out from between his teeth after following Pidge out of the
fountain. He spun and yelled at the alien, "Thanks!" He yanked his shoes out of Adam's hand and
chased after the Green Paladin.

Adam still carried Lance's jacket as he followed them. He shook his head as he muttered to himself.
"And I thought Lance and Hunk would drive me to drink. Pidge and Lance are worse!"

Lance and Pidge were walking out of the Earth store when the gray alien shouted, "Hold on!" as he
trotted after them. He held a cord that led to a large hoverboard carrying a cow. He handed the
cable to the Blue Paladin. "With every purchase, you get a free Kaltenecker."
Hunk ran past and shouted, "Time to get moving guys!"

Adam rubbed his forehead. "Can this day get any crazier?"

Keith ran past, shouting, "Security's on our tail!"

A large Galra on a hoverbike saw Pidge, Lance, and Adam. "There's the rest of the crew!"

Lance, Pidge, and Adam all spurred into action, running after the other paladins while the Blue Paladin pulled the hoverboard with Kaltenecker on it behind him. They panted as they ran.

Lance jumped up on the cow's back. He reached down and grabbed Pidge by the hand and pulled her up behind him. "Everybody up on Kaltenecker."

Adam jumped up behind Pidge and helped Keith up behind him. Keith, in turn, helped Hunk up behind him.

The Yellow Paladin seemed a bit stupefied at first but found his voice. "Did you buy a cow?"

Pidge shook her head. "It was free with purchase!"

They rode the cow over the balcony as the security guard rode his hoverbike down the escalator.

As the hoverboard flew down a hall, Pidge saw Coran step out of a shop. "There he is!"

Keith shouted at him. "We've got to go, Coran!"

Coran ran beside the cow and reached out. Keith caught his hand. "I got the scaultrite lenses!"

The security guard chased them until they reached the exit hallway when the guard stopped.

Lance found out the hard way that you shouldn't stand up on a moving Kaltenecker when his head hit a low beam even if it was to make fun of a Galra.

Adam sighed. "I can't take you anywhere."

The hoverboard stopped moving, and Adam climbed off the cow. He reached down and grabbed his cousin off the floor. "I'll take care of your head in the ship."

They returned to the Castle of Lions and stepped onto the bridge. Coran ran and announced. "We got the lenses!"

Allura stood with the mice scolding her for upsetting them while they were supposed to be fixing her hair. "Excellent! Now we can get the Teludav up and running again."

Keith looked around. "Where's Shiro?"

The door to the bridge opened behind them, and the Black Paladin stepped through the doorway.

Allura stared at him. "What did you do? Take a nap?"

Shiro stepped up to them as a smirk pulled at his mouth, and amusement flashed in his eyes as he gazed at the Princess's hair. "Not exactly." He crossed his arms over his body. He noticed a new
smell and craned his head over to look at Lance and the animal beside him. "Is that a cow?"

"Mm-hmm, his name is Kaltenecker."

Kaltenecker mooed at Shiro.

Hunk leaned over to Adam. "Hasn't he figured out that it's a female?"

Adam's eyebrows rose as he turned to Hunk. "I guess I'll have to explain that to him later."

Keith gazed at Shiro. "So, did you find a way to bond with your lion?"

Shiro nodded. "Yes, and we need to get moving. We're headed for the Blade of Marmora's headquarters."

Coran turned and ran toward his console. "I'll plot a course."

Pidge could barely hold in her excitement. "While you're doing that, I'm gonna hook up the video game Lance, and I bought."

Lance joined her as she opened the box. "Yeah! Let's this baby set up."

Pidge looked around, looking for a place to hook the incompatible Earth game to Altean Tech. "Where can we—" she paused as she stared at the cord in her hand. "How do—" realization struck her as she screamed.

Shiro wrapped an arm around Adam's waist. "How was your trip to the swap moon."

Adam shook his head. "Never again am I going to a place like that again with those two," he motioned to Pidge and Lance. "To get the money to buy that, do you know they raided a fountain. And they bought it from a store that sells probably stolen merchandise from Earth by, would you believe, a gray."

Shiro jerked his head back. "A gray?"

Adam chuckled slightly. "Yeah, a gray, and he was wearing a 51 hat. You know, like in Area 51."

Shiro chuckled. "Sounds like it was interesting."

Adam sighed. "I think I need some Nunvill. Care to join me?"

Shiro shook his head. "Nope, you can have all you want of that."

Hunk rubbed his hands together. "I'm going to go see what I rig up to make some real dairy products out of the milk we're going to get from Kaltenecker. Imagine it real cheese, butter, and hey, maybe even some milkshakes." He grabbed the cord to Kaltenecker's hoverboard. "Come on, Kaltenecker. I'll go get you settled down somewhere."

Kaltenecker mooed again.
The team heads to the Blade of Marmora base. Only, will things go as planned?

Shiro stood next to the Altean. "Coran, how soon will we get to the Blade of Marmora's base?"

"Based on the coordinates Ulaz gave us, we should be there in a few dobashes."

Pidge smiled as she balled her hands up in front of her body, trying to contain her excitement. "I can't wait to see it!" She looked up at Hunk. "I mean, they were able to fold space-time, and that was just an outpost!"

Hunk's stomach rumbled, and he put his hand on it. "Mm, the space taco. It left us too soon."

Pidge slid her eyes over to gaze him almost suspiciously. "Well, sure, but my point is, imagine how amazing their home base will be?" She spread her arms wide as her voice level rose as she grinned at him.

Hunk leaned over, gazing down at her. "Exactly. It could take on any shape. Like a space jelly donut. Or long, like a space éclair. Or a space cheese blintz with a cherry sauce on top. Maybe a little dusting of powdered sugar on. That's the stars."

Lance gazed at the pair. "Aw! Now, I'm hungry for breakfast."

Adam shook his head. "Lance for someone as thin as you are, you do pack the food away."

Lance smirked at Adam. "Well, yeah. I'm still growing, you know."

Pidge smirked. "A growing Dorkasaurus, you mean."

Keith leaned forward in his chair. "Guys, this a serious mission. We need to focus on."

Lance screwed his face up, trying to impersonate the Red Paladin. Sarcasm tinged his voice. "We need to focus."

Adam reached out and smacked his cousin in the back of the head.

"Ouch!" the teen yelled as he rubbed the back of his head. "Hey! What was that for?"

Adam leaned toward his cousin. "Like it or not, he's right. We do need to focus, and you need to stop acting like an ass."

Coran's voice brought all eyes to the front of the bridge. "The base is in range."

Shiro rolled his shoulders. "Take us in slowly."

The Altean gazed at the screen. That might prove the tiniest bit of a challenge.

Hunk stared at the screen. "Is that a Black Hole?"
Coran shook his head. "No. It's two black holes and a giant blue star."

Hunk frowned. "That's not better!"

Pidge pushed her glasses up her nose. "No, kidding. Just inside a black hole, the temperature is one-millionth of a degree above absolute zero. But just outside of that, it's hundreds of millions of degrees Celsius."

Hunk grinned as his eyes brightened. "Okay, it's like when you try to nuke a frozen burrito in the microwave, and it comes out all scorching hot on the outside, but it's still frozen in the middle, right?"

Lance gazed at the Green and Yellow Paladins. "Now, I'm hungry for lunch."

Keith jumped up from his seat and let his irritation at the other three teens get to him. "Guys, quiet!" His tone changed to something calmer when he addressed the Altean. "Coran, where's the base located?"

The man in question magnified the location of the base several times. "In between those three deadly celestial objects."

Pidge stared at the screen. "The perfect defensive position."

Allura added her own opinion for the first time. "Or the perfect trap."

Adam frowned. He silently considered Allura's experience with the Galra. She could be right, but and he hated to think this way, she could be judging an entire race based on the actions of others. His frown deepened.

Lance saw the expression on his cousin's face. "What has you frowning?"

Adam shook his head, "It's nothing." He crossed his arms over his body.

Hunk frowned as his eyes grew. "Yeah, I'm with Allura. Maybe we shouldn't, like, go in there at all?"

Keith suddenly blew up. "What are you talking about? We have to go in! This is the whole reason we came out here! There is no other option!"

Lance gaped at the Red Paladin and held his hands out in front of him. Okay. Jeez. Calm down!"

Keith turned away from Lance. His gray-blue eyes stared ahead, and he frowned.

A message in another language flashed up on the main screen. A female computerized voice came through the speaker. "Identify yourself."

Shiro turned to Coran. "Open a hailing frequency." As the Altean's panel beeped, the Black Paladin spoke. "We are the Paladins of Voltron sent here by Ulaz."

Time passed as no response came through. The tension was so thick on the bridge that Adam thought he could slice it and serve it up on a platter.

The computer beeped, and the voice replied, "Two may enter. Come unarmed."

Allura frowned, and her eyes hardened. "Why would they insist we come unarmed. Shiro, this doesn't feel right."
Shiro didn't turn around. "We've come too far to back out now."

Coran stared down at his console. "They just sent us a route to the base, but we'll have to move quickly. Because of the solar flares, it's only open for one varga. Then it will be closed for two quintants."

Hunk's eyes grew. "They're gonna close it for two years?"

Pidge crossed her arms over her chest as her eyelids lowered to half-mast. "Two days."

"Oh."

Lance raised an eyebrow as he gazed at Shiro, who now approached where he stood next to Keith. "So, any thoughts on who's gonna join you on this little mission?" He grasped his chin. "I think things might get a little hot, so you're gonna want someone who can stay cool." He lowered his arm as he puffed out his chest.

Shiro didn't hesitate. "You're right. Keith, you coming with me."

Lance gaped at Shiro before he got his mind in working order. "Keith's a hothead. He's probably going to shoot first and ask questions later!" He leaned forward, sticking his face into the Black Paladin's face. "And they're not gonna be able to answer his questions because they'll be dead!"

Shiro put his hands on the Blue Paladin's shoulders and pushed him out of his face. "We haven't severed Zarkon's link with the Black Lion, so it has to stay here. And the Red Lion can withstand the heat from that sun. So, yes, it'll be Keith."

Coran's voice came from the front of the bridge. "The course to the base will be quite treacherous. You're walking the razor's edge between the gravitational pull of the black holes and the sun. One false move, and you'll either be crushed into infinity or burnt to a crisp."

Shiro nodded. "Let's go, Keith."

Adam stepped up. "Takashi, Keith, both of you come back in one piece."

Shiro placed his hand on Adam's cheek. "I will, koishiteru."

Keith nodded. "Don't worry. He'll be safe with the Red Lion and me."

Adam reached up and put his hand on Shiro's. "Stay safe," he whispered as he let his hand drop, and Shiro and Keith walked off the bridge.

Allura stared at the screen. "How long has it been?"

Coran glanced at the chronometer on his console. "Roughly ten vargas."

Allura frowned. "We cannot wait here."

Lance sat on the edge of the raised platform in front of Shiro's station. "The is closed for, like, I don't know, thirty more vargas or something?"

Coran ran the calculations through his console. "That's correct."
Hunk did a double-take at the Blue Paladin as his eyes bugged out. "Really?"

Lance laced his fingers together and popped his knuckles. "Yeah, I wasn't born yester-quintant."

Hunk rolled his eyes at his friend.

Adam stepped up behind the Yellow Paladin and tapped him on the shoulder.

Hunk turned.

Adam knew he'd heard right when he'd listened to the teen's stomach grumble about a varga ago. "How about we go make something to eat."

"Sounds good," Hunk glanced over at Lance. "You want to come too?"

"I'll stay here."

Adam and Hunk entered the kitchen. The Yellow Paladin turned to Adam. "Did you have anything in mind?"

"I was thinking maybe some Fajitas."

Hunk brightened. "Yeah, now that we have the cow, I can try out the butter I made from the milk."

"How did you figure out how to make butter?"

A quick laugh bubbled out from the teen. "Never underestimate a teen who's desperate for some Earth food."

Hunk reached into the refrigerator and pulled out some odd-shaped vegetables. "Here, you can chop these up." He pulled out a bowl and a pitcher of milk from the refrigerator. Then he moved to a cabinet and pulled out some spices, and what he found made an excellent form of flour.

Adam took the vegetables over to the sink. He turned on the water as he ran the vegetables under the water. "Why didn't you ask Pidge if she wanted to help?"

Hunk let out a nervous chuckle. "Because of those cookies I made when Zarkon was chasing us. It still stings that she called them terrible. So, for now, I've banned her from the kitchen."

He mixed the dough, keeping it pourable and then poured it some into a large skillet, frying them up. As he turned, the first of the tortilla's over his eyes shifted to Adam's. "So, are you and Shiro going to tie the knot?"

"Yeah, but later. Hopefully, once we get back to Earth."

Hunk nodded as he pulled the tortillas out of the skillet and began the process again. Both he and Adam worked in comfortable silence. It wasn't awkward.

Adam shifted his eyes up to Hunks. "Something else is on your mind."

Hunk gripped his bottom lip between his index finger and thumb before releasing it. "What do you think you and Shiro will do once we're back on Earth? I mean, you know, after you two get
married. Lance has some crazy idea that the two of you will leave the Garrison and go back into space to live out your lives on the Castle of Lions."

Adam chuckled. "You should know by now not to listen to him." He shook his head at the absurdity of the idea. "We don't have any set plans yet, because the future is too far away even to consider."

Hunk grinned. "Yeah, I figured he was talking nonsense, but he's on cloud nine since the two of you will be getting married. Mainly because Shiro is his hero, after all." He pulled out the last of the tortilla's out of the skillet and set it off to the side away from the heat.

He picked up the pitcher milk and put the remainder into the refrigerator. He pulled out a small haunch of meat and cut it into thin strips, placed the skillet back onto the heat, and put the strips of the giant boar meat in the skillet. The flesh began to sizzle. He sprinkled spices over the meat and added some extra butter to the skillet for flavor. "This won't take long."

Hunk turned the meat over. "I need those vegetables added to this so I can get them tender."

Adam scooped up the veggies and dropped them into the skillet. He scooped up the rest and cut them and smiled as the aroma of the cooking meat and vegetables filled the room. "Your quite the genius at turning the stuff we have into foods we all remember."

Hunk nodded, but then he frowned. "Well, I still want to try to make some cookies, but I haven't found a suitable substitution for sugar yet, and I know Pidge likes Peanut Butter Cookies, and it seems like trying to find peanuts out here, well, that's a problem."

Once the filling was finished, Hunk and Adam began assembling the Fajita's and placed them on another plate. Once they were finished, Hunk grabbed one of the floating serving trays and lifted the plate and put it on the floating tray.

As they stepped onto the bridge, Hunk made sure to grab two of his Fajita's before the serving tray floated away. Adam managed to grab one.

The smell from the tray caught Lance's attention, and he stood and gazed at what Hunk and Adam held in their hands. "Hunk, did you figure out how to make Fajita's?"

Hunk managed to swallow the bite he'd taken to answer his friend. "Yeah, but I didn't do it alone. Adam helped."

Adam nodded. "And make sure you get enough to eat, 'Growing Dorkasaurus.'"

Pidge snickered from her station.

"Hey! Why'd you call me that?"

Adam stepped up to Lance. "That was for trying to figure out what's going to happen in mine and Takashi's future. You need to butt out and stop trying to dictate what we will do. Maybe we'll want to stay at the Garrison. Just like you, I miss my parents, and I wonder if my parents know I'm out here and safe."

Lance rolled his eyes as he stuffed a mouthful of Fajita in his mouth. He stopped, and a grin came
to his face, and he chewed and swallowed. "Hunk, my main man. You are a culinary genius!"

"You tell me this all the time. Why not tell me something else?"

Allura finished hers. "I must agree with Lance. That was good."

Coran snorted from his station.

Adam raised an eyebrow at the Altean but didn't say anything.

Allura crossed her arms over her body then uncrossed them. "I-I have to know what's going on down there." She brought up her holographic command screen.

Pidge craned her head to gaze at the princess. "There's no way to get a read on their base. Too much interference from the solar flares and black holes."

Hunk crossed his arms over his chest. "If we account for the gravitational lensing, maybe we can reduce the noise and interference and connect with the Red Lion's sensors, right?" He gazed at Lance, craned his head toward Coran, and back to Lance. "Th-That's right, right?"

Lance looked toward Coran and then back to Hunk. He pointed a thumb at himself. "Are you looking at me?"

Coran held his chin as he gave Hunk's idea some serious thought. He released his chin. "We can give it a try."

Allura nodded. "Get on it."

Allura gasped. "The Red Lion is moving!"

Lance straightened up. "We've gotta get down there!"

Hunk shook his head. "It won't be ready for five more minutes."

Coran turned from his station. "The Red Lion has started attacking!"

Hunk ran to his station with Lance racing to his own. "Wait, what does that mean? Why would the lion attack? Unless—" he didn't finish his statement as he swallowed hard and gazed up at Adam.

Time had passed quickly for them as they all wondered and worried about what could be happening at the Blade of Marmora base to cause the Red Lion to go berserk.

Lance gazed up at the princess. "Allura?"

The Princess's facial expression hardened. "Everyone stay focused. Coran, how much longer until can get in?"

Coran twisted his body along with his upper body to gaze back at her. "Just a few more ticks, Princess."

Allura tensed, her muscles coiled for action. "Get ready!"
Coran began counting down the ticks. "Five, four, three, two, one!" He moved his hand to activate the thrusters to move the Castle of Lions forward.

The Red Lion appeared on the screen. Shiro's voice came over the speaker. "Princess, we're coming back, and we're bringing someone you should meet."

Coran twisted around a second time and gazed at Allura, who sighed.

Pidge grinned. "Yes, they did it!"

Everyone assembled in the Red Lion's hangar as the lion flew in and landed. It dropped down and lowered the ramp allowing the two Paladins to exit, followed by two Galra. Both of the Galra wore the same uniforms that Ulaz wore; however, one also wore a wrap around his body. He was even taller than the Galra beside him. His facemask disappeared, revealing an aged face that bore a scar and a white braid that fell when he kneeled before the young Altean woman. "Princess, Allura, it's good to see the rumors are true. You're still alive after all these years. I am Kolivan, the leader of the Blade of Marmora."

Allura gazed down at him. "So is Zarkon. Can we consider you our ally in the fight against him?"

The Galra stood. "Yes, but we have received word from our spy inside the Galran hierarchy. They have become aware of our presence, so the timetable for our plan of attack has been moved up."

Shiro gazed up at Kolivan. "How soon do we need to begin?"

"Now."

They turned to walk out of the Red Lion's hangar when Keith cleared his throat. "Uh, guys, I need to tell you all something." He pulled out his knife so everyone could see it. He activated the knife for everyone to see it turn into one of the Blade of Marmora's small swords. "I found out the only way I could do this is well," he rubbed at the back of his neck. "I'm part, Galra."

Shiro nodded and smiled as his eyes glowed with pride.

Allura, Coran, and the other paladins gasped. Adam stared at Keith and raised an eyebrow. He didn't like how the teen was holding himself, and his eyes were full of pain.

Pidge pushed her glasses up her nose. "How did this happen?"

Keith shrugged and tried to hide that his shoulder hurt. "I don't know. I never knew my mother."

Adam moved over to stand next to Keith. "I want to check him out."

Shiro nodded. "Your right, he does need to be examined. In the meantime, the rest of us need to go figure out the plan to take down Zarkon."

Allura didn't say anything, but her eyes narrowed as she glared at Keith.

Keith sighed as everyone else left the hangar. "Now, everyone is going to hate me."

Adam put an arm around the teen's waist. "Lean on me. I'm taking you to the infirmary. And just for the record, no one hates you."
Keith stared in the direction the others had walked away in. "Allura hates me."

Adam shook his head. "She's got to get used to this new situation."

The pair entered the medical bay. Adam eased Keith down on the steps and pulled out the scanner from his pocket and ran it over the teen. "You've got some pretty bad bruises, and I don't like the way this shoulder looks." He ran a closer scan on the shoulder. "You've got a hairline fracture in the collarbone."

Keith frowned. "Does this mean I have to spend time in the pod?"

Adam nodded. "Yeah, it does, but don't worry. I'd say about an hour will do you some good." He rubbed a hand against his chin. "How did you get those bruises? You can explain while you get out of the armor and change into a cryosuit."

Keith sighed. "I wanted to know where the knife came from, and Kolivan told me that I would have to go through the Trials of Marmora. Nobody told me it was some gauntlet type thing. But I fought, and I had a couple of," he shrugged, "visions, I guess. One was of Shiro trying to convince me to give up the knife, and the second was my dad telling me that my mom would return and explain everything. I was going to give up the knife, but I finally realized exactly who I was, and that's when the knife turned into the sword, and I was told that I have Galra blood in my veins."

Adam set the cryopod for the required time. "Sounds brutal, but it also sounds like you passed this trial. But it's time to get you in here, healed, and ready to go so you can help take down Zarkon."

Keith nodded as he stood. "Yeah."

The lid to the cryopod slid open, and the Red Paladin stumbled out. Adam caught him and placed a blanket around his shoulders. "I'm sorry, but you're needed on the bridge. Shiro has a mission for you and Hunk to go on."

Keith nodded. He flexed his shoulder and was relieved the pain was gone. "Thanks."

Adam grinned. "I'm glad I could patch you up. Not get up to the bridge."

Keith saluted. "Yes, sir!"
Finding the Source of Scaultrite

Chapter Summary

The Paladins leave the Castle on missions to get the items needed to take down down Zarkon. Adam goes off on Allura and even Pidge goes off on her. The fight the Robeast that was on the Balmera, and Keith and Lance get into an argument that almost comes to blows.

Lance stood by Hunk, who snored away. The Yellow Paladin jerked and jumped, waking himself up. "Wha-What did I miss?" He glanced around before setting his gaze on the Blue Paladin.

A smug grin tugged at Lance's lips. "Oh, nothing important. We've just figured out a way to defeat Zarkon."

"Really? I dozed off for ten minutes, and you guys figured out how to defeat the forces of evil?"

Pidge, who stood on Hunk's other side, slid her eyes at him. "You've been asleep for three hours."

Hunk grinned at her as a small bead of sweat slid down the side of his face. He turned his head to gaze at the giant hologram of Zarkon's command ship and the others who stood around it.

Shiro stood between Kolivan and Allura. "I think we've got something here. It's dangerous, and there are a lot of moving parts, but if we can coordinate everything just right, then—"

Kolivan chose that moment to speak. "Zarkon's reign will be at an end, and the savagery that's poisoned our universe can finally be cleansed. You've done it, Shiro."

Pink dusted Shiro's cheeks. He shook his head and held his hand out to the Galra resistance leader. "We did it together."

Adam gazed at the Black Paladin and grinned. It was fun seeing Shiro a little embarrassed.

Kolivan and Shiro grasped their upper arms, which was a universal sign of respect out in space.

Allura turned to face them. "As long as we all stick to the plan, it should work."

Shiro sighed, not liking the tone of her voice.

Kolivan didn't flinch at her words. "It will work. Perhaps, then, you'll learn that not all Galra are as bad as Zarkon."

She craned her head around to glare at Keith. "I hope not."

Adam frowned. He knew what he had to do.

Antok kept his face covered. His voice sounded distorted as he spoke. "Ulaz was right to trust you all."

Shiro gazed at the Galra. "He sacrificed everything to bring us together. Let's honor him by taking down Zarkon."
Hunk rose from his chair and strode over toward the others with Pidge by his side. "So, what's the plan?"

Lance fought to control his excitement, but it burst forth from him. "The plan is amazing!" His actions were manic as he spoke while his arms went flying around. "First, we infect Zarkon's ship with a virus. Then, we make an extra-large wormhole and lure Zarkon inside of it, zapping him a bajillion light-years away. Then when he pops out on the other side, all like, 'Oh, why doesn't my ship work?' Voltron kicks his butt!"

Adam sighed from behind Shiro. "I've got to do something about him."

The Black Paladin reached out and grabbed Adam's hand as he turned. "Let him have a little fun. It'll probably be the last we have until after Zarkon's gone for good."

Hunk gazed at everything. "Wow. So this is it."

Pidge gazed toward Shiro. "I guess the only question is, when do we strike?"

Coran brought up a holographic screen. "As soon as we build a Teludav big enough to wormhole Zarkon's ship."

Hunk blew out a sigh. "Oh, man. The Teludav again? Does that mean we need scaultrite?"

Allura focused her gaze on the teen. "That's just one of the many things we'll need."

Hunk's eyes lit up. "Am I, uh-Am, I sensing a trip back to the space mall here?"

Coran shook his head. "I'm afraid not. This is gonna take a lot more scaultrite than we can find in any Unilu shop. For this plan to succeed, we're gonna need to split up. We all have a task to do. Keith, Hunk, you'll be in charge of getting the scaultrite. If anyone of us fails, the entire plan fails."

Adam gazed at Coran, wondering if the Altean realized how easily he started using Earth slang. Maybe for the two survivors, it was a good thing to be exposed to humans.

Keith and Shiro hugged in the main hangar as Hunk cried as he shook Pidge's hand. Adam smiled at the scene.

His eyes caught Allura as she turned her head away from Keith as he and Shiro released each other. She failed to notice, but Adam caught the pain in the Red Paladin's eyes as he gazed down at the metal deck.

Pidge knelt, giving the three mice on the ground a little extra attention while the largest, Platt, sat on Allura's shoulder.

Lance gazed at the Princess. "So, how about a kiss for good luck?" He leaned forward with his lips puckered and closed his eyes.

Adam placed his hand over his face hiding his eyes. "I can't believe I'm related to him."

Shiro wrapped his arms around Adam. "Sometimes, I can't either."

Adam pulled his hand away from his face and wrapped his arms around Shiro. "I'm glad someone
agrees with me, Amor."

Shiro leaned forward and pressed his lips to Adam's lightly.

Adam responded in kind.

As the pair separated, they turned in time. Coran picked the mouse up off Allura's shoulder and held it up to Lance's face. The mouse kissed the Blue Paladin.

Lance's eyes opened as he stared at the mouse and silently screamed.

Adam doubled over as laughter rippled out of his body as Lance wiped his mouth with the back of his gloved hand.

Pidge giggled as she saw what happened. "Serves you right!"

Lance glared at her as he wiped his mouth a second time.

Adam watched as the three Paladins climbed up the ramp into the Blue Lion. He waved as the lion lifted off the deck and flew out of the hangar. He turned and watched the pair of Alteans head off toward the Pod Bay. He'd give them some privacy, but he needed to talk to Allura.

He felt something against his pant let and glanced down to see the smallest of the mice by his foot. "Well, hello," he knelt and held out his hand. "How are you doing, Chulatt?"

The small pale blue-furred mouse climbed onto Adam's fingers. It let out a flurry of squeaks as it gazed up at the human.

Adam chuckled. The little mouse seemed to know that he had something on his mind. "Well, if you're asking me to talk over what's on my mind," he shook his head, "I can't. This has to be a conversation between Allura and myself. But you're more than welcome to tag along."

Time seemed to slow for Adam the closer he got to the bridge. His stomach churned, and his chest tightened, but it was time he had this conversation with Allura about one person, Keith.

The doors slid open, and he stepped onto the bridge. Allura turned from her position on the deck. "Good, I was getting ready to ask you to join me. I've set our course for the Balmera."

Adam nodded as he gazed at her. His thoughts raced through his head over how he was going to say what needed to be said. He cleared his throat. "You probably won't like what I have to say, but there are some things you need to know about Keith before you damn him. That young man considers you a friend, but you keep on stomping on his feelings and the cold you've shown him since he told us he was part Galra needs to stop."

Allura opened her mouth, but Adam held up his hand to stop her as he shook his head. "Don't say anything yet. Let me finish what I need to tell you." He turned away from her for a minute before turning back. Keith was going to kill him for telling her this, but she did need to know. "First, you should know I have talked to Keith, something you haven't bothered to do. He never knew who his mother was, and his father raised him until his father was killed."

"That boy spent the next few years being shipped off to different families because he didn't have
anyone to look after him. He was an orphan." Adam paused as he heard the sharp intake of air from Allura as she gasped. He nodded. "Yes, Keith is an orphan. He was finally sent to a group home, not the best place for a child."

Chulatt, who now sat on his shoulder, squeaked at Adam. He made a shushing noise to the mouse and brought up his hand to stroke it's head. Adam drew in another breath. "He stayed in the group home until Takashi came along. Takashi told me that he saw something in Keith and wanted him to reach his full potential. So Takashi risked his reputation at the Garrison for Keith, and the two have become something as close to brothers could be. Now he's found another family, but here you are throwing it all away over something he had no control over."

Allura sucked in a breath. "I didn't realize it."

Adam crossed his arms over his chest. "It's something, Keith doesn't like to talk about. Most of the story I learned from Takashi, but I've kept my eyes on Keith since he found out he's part Galra. And we talked for a little bit when he returned from the Blade of Marmora's base. What I can't understand is after he's shown his loyalty so many times over to bringing an end to Zarkon, even risking his own life by taking Zarkon on single-handedly, you would even think that he could be like that tyrant."

Allura sighed. "You have given me much to think about. But I can't change how I feel about the Galra. They destroyed my world, killed my people, my family."

"And this is why you won't heal. If you keep blaming an entire race because of the actions of some and not seeing the good in others, you will become bitter." Adam shook his head.

"What do you mean by I won't heal?"

"Your drowning in your grief for your father and your people. I can see it. Right now, your whole focus is on Zarkon. But what after Zarkon is gone? What will you do then?" One of Adam's eyebrows rose as he focused his gaze on her. "Will you continue to grieve for your losses, or will you stand up and be the leader your father wanted you to be? It's all up to you and you alone."

Adam shook his head, hoping he'd given her enough to think about. He walked to his station and sat down as silence enveloped the bridge.

The silence on the bridge was broken by the smallest of the mice sitting on Adam's shoulder. It squeaked at him as it nudged him with its paw. Adam reached up and stroked its head. "I'm sorry, I don't understand."

Allura chuckled from behind him at her station. "His name is Chulatt, and he's asking if you're all right."

"I'm fine."

Chulatt squeaked again. Adam chuckled again as he stood from his seat. "If I didn't know better, I'd say he's scolding me."

Allura chuckled again. "He is. He's very perceptive about others' feelings. But he and the other mice are such dreadful gossips. She placed a hand on her hip. "How do you think I learned about you asking Shiro to marry you?" She pointed at Platt, who stood on her shoulder.
Platt let out a flurry of squeaks at her.

Her eyes narrowed as she gazed at the mouse. "Don't take that tone with me." She rolled her eyes and turned her gaze to Adam. "Platt just scolded me too. And I have to say he is right," she clasped her hands together in front of her body. "Please forgive me, Adam. What you said to me earlier, it stung, and I wanted to try to hate you, but I can't. You've been so kind and patient. I'm surprised you didn't say anything earlier."

"What I had to say needed to be said between us. No one else needed to know."

Allura lowered her eyes to the deck before raising them again to gaze into his eyes. "I'm grateful for that. But I still haven't decided, Keith."

Adam nodded and took his seat back at his station. Chulatt, still on his shoulder, rubbed his head against the human's cheek.

Allura sat on the raised platform of her station and gazed down at the mice. "All right, then, what's the next one?" Adam sat near her and the mice as they played a game of charades.

The mice squeaked at her. "Okay, two words." The mice squeaked again. "Second word." Platt waved his arm like flowing water. "Waves?"

Platt shook his head.

"So I'm close. Ocean? Splash? Drink? Water?"

Platt nodded.

"Water!"

Adam grinned, her excitement at playing charades was fun to watch. Like watching a child discover a new toy.

Allura leaned forward with her hands clasped together under her chin. "First word."

The other three mice jumped up onto Platt's head in order of size and made a motion of swimming, but they also growled.

Allura's eyes brightened. "That's a Bytor! Bytor water!"

The mice jumped in the air squeaking their cheers.

Adam shook his head and laughed, gaining Allura's attention. He grinned at her. "That isn't exactly how charades are played back on Earth, but you do get into your games."

She giggled. "Hunk was right, though. These Earth road trip games do help pass the time."

Her screens appeared, and Coran's face appeared on the central display. "How are you, Princess? Are you almost at the Balmera?"

Allura gazed at the Altean as she stood. "I'm scheduled to arrive in just a few dobashes. I hope I'm able to find a crystal big enough for the Teludav."
"Have you heard from the other paladins?"

"I had contact with Lance, Shiro, and Pidge a little bit ago. They've located Slav."

Coran nodded. "What about Hunk and-and Keith?"

"No word from them yet."

The older Altean pulled at one side of his mustache and twisted it as he spoke. "I have no doubt my scientifically accurate instructional video was of great help."

"I'm sure it was. If they collect enough scaultrite for the lenses, will your Teludav structure be complete?"

"It's nearly done. The Olkari and I have been working on it day and night. It will be ready in time."

Allura sighed. "Oh, I hope so."

Coran gazed at her as his voice grew softer. "What's going on, Princess? You sound worried."

"I was thinking of my father. He gave his life to try to keep Voltron out of Zarkon's hands, and now we have a chance to defeat him. I-I don't want to fail."

"You know, Princess. Your father would be proud of you. It wasn't that long ago we found out Altea had been destroyed."

Allura dropped to her knees. "I've never felt so alone."

"Nor have I, And we could have easily given up. But we didn't. You didn't. And now look at us. We reformed Voltron. We freed the Olkari and the Balmerans, and now they're working alongside us."

Allura gazed up at Coran's image and smiled. "You're right, Coran. We have allies, and that's what's going to defeat Zarkon."

Coran saluted. "Crack a squiggle on the Balmera, Princess."

Allura smiled. "Thank you, Coran." She rose to her feet and ended the communication with the older man.

Adam stepped over to her and placed his hand on her shoulder. "Keep reminding yourself that you're not alone. And I have to agree with Coran. Your father would be proud of what you've done. Also, remember that it's okay to grieve, and it's okay to cry. But holding it inside isn't healthy. I'm here if you need an ear to talk to or a shoulder to cry on, okay?" He released his grip on her shoulder and let his arm drop to his side.

Allura smiled back at him. "Thank you, Adam. You are such a kind person. Shiro is lucky to have a man like you at his side."

Allura set the Castle of Lions down on the surface of the Balmera. Adam and Allura rode the landing pod down to the surface.
She blinked at him. "The armor I can understand, but full weapons too? Don't you think that's a little overkill?"

Adam shook his head. "It's better to be safe than sorry."

She shrugged, still not understanding some of the sayings that Earthlings used.

The door slid open, and Allura and Adam stepped out of the pod. They strode toward Shay and her family.

Shay's grandmother smiled. "The Balmera welcomes your return, Princess Allura."

Shay clasped her hands together and held them to her chest. "Princess, did Hunk accompany you?"

"I'm sorry, Shay. I've come here with Adam. The others are on missions of their own collecting important elements that we need to defeat Zarkon."

Shay's grandmother gasped, but the older woman gained her voice. "Defeat Zarkon? How can we help? The Balmera and its people can never thank you enough for all that you've done."

Allura clasped her hands together. "If the Balmera will give it, I need a crystal."

Shay gazed at the Altean. "Battleship class?"

"Bigger."

Adam gazed around the area. His eyes were taking in details. They stopped on the giant crystal in the distance. The site where the Balmera encased the Robeast in crystal several months ago. His eyes narrowed as a chill ran through his body.

The Balmerans led Allura and Adam down into a chamber. Before them sat the largest crystal, Allura had ever seen. "Incredible."

Shay stood beside the Altean. "When the Galra were here, these caverns were closed off. As if the Balmera was protecting itself. Now that the Balmera is free and healed, the crystal caverns are opened once more."

Allura stepped forward and placed her hands on the crystal. She closed her eyes and focused. The crystal hummed in response as the entire chamber began to glow. The Balmerans dropped to their knees behind her and placed their hands on the floor. They focused on the energy and helped Allura replenish the energy needed for the Balmera to grow more crystals.

Rumbling erupted around them. Shay whispered to her grandmother. "Of what was that rumble? Perhaps because a crystal this big has never been asked for."

"No, this is something different."

"Shay gazed at her grandmother. "Shall we stop the ceremony?"

Shay's grandmother gazed at Allura. "Let her finish."

Adam gaped at the crystal as it rose out of the ground, fired by the Balmera. He heard Allura speak
to the Balmera. "Thank you."

The Balmerans stood before the Castle of Lions. Shay smiled. "The crystal has been loaded onto your Castle, Princess."

Allura hugged both Shay and her grandmother.

The Balmeran elder spoke. "We wish you could stay longer. I made you stickercup stew for the sky road."

Allura kept the smile on her face as her eyes grew to the size of saucers at the two giant worms that erupted over the side of the bowl. "Oh, thank you. I'm sure we shall enjoy this immensely."

Adam whispered beside her. "Speak for yourself."

She took the bowl from the elder Balmeran. "To all of you, Balmerans, thank you once again."

The ground rumbled beneath their feet. Adam's eyes locked onto the crystal in the distance.

Allura gasped. "What was that?"

The crystal that encased the Robeast began to crack and shatter with giant chunks crashing to the ground.

Allura's eyes grew as she stared at it. "Oh, no!"

Adam shouted to any Balmerans who hadn't run away in a panic yet. "Go, get to cover!"

Allura dropped the bowl to the ground, which shattered as she turned to Shay and her family. "Take cover in the Balmera! I'll hold it off with the Castle's defenses."

Allura and Adam ran onto the bridge. She stopped at her station while Adam took a leap and landed in his seat. He slid the energy rifle off his shoulder and sat it on the floor beside him. She raised the particle barrier and activated the Castle's defense system bringing all weapons sending white energy beams at the beast.

It carried two giant shield-shaped crystals that were infected by the same energy that powered Sendak's Galra crystal. It blocked every shot from the Castle's defense system.

Adam craned his head around toward her. "Can we launch my defense drone while sitting here on the Balmera? Maybe I can use it to sneak past one of those crystals to get a hit on it."

Before she could get a word out, the Robeast fired a beam of energy from its chest. The beam was magnified by the crystal that stuck out of its chest.

The beam rocked the Castle. "I need to lure it away from the Balmera!" Allura followed her words with actions as she fired up the engines, and the great Altean ship rose into the sky, heading for space. The Robeast launched into the sky, giving chase.
Adam called out to her from his position as he activated his defense drone. "You need to contact the Paladins. I'll try to keep its attention off the ship."

Allura nodded as she opened up communications. "Hunk, Keith, are you there? Can you hear me?"


"You must return to the Castle! I need you!"

"We're on our way."

She opened a channel to the Blue Lion. "Paladins, are you there?"

Lance responded to her call. "Princess, what's happening?"

"That monster that attacked us on the Balmera has returned!"

A chorus of 'What's' came from the Blue Lion.

"I need you back here immediately!"

Lance gazed back at her. "You got it, Princess. Sharpshooter is on the way."

Allura nodded, ignoring the sharpshooter comment. "Adam is trying to fight it with a defense drone."

Shiro took over communications as Pidge and Lance argued in the background. "Ready when you are, Allura."

Allura closed her eyes, and two wormholes appeared with the Blue and Yellow Lions flying through.

The Blue Lion flew to the Castle as Hunk did what he could to distract the Robeast, Adam was able to sneak in a few shots from his defense drone. Adam frowned. "This is like trying to hurt an elephant with a water gun. That monster isn't feeling any of my hits."

The Robeast fired its laser, attempting to hit the Yellow Lion. But the beam raked over the Castle's particle barrier destroying it and Adam's defense drone.

Feedback from the strike flowed up through Adam's station and sent an electrical jolt through his body. He jumped out of his seat. He turned to Allura as he shook his arms. "Good thing I have this armor on. That could have hurt more than feeling like ants were crawling all over me."

The door opened to the bridge. Shiro and Pidge ran onto it as Slav followed his eyes, taking in everything.

Allura gave a quick report. "The barrier is severely damaged."

As Shiro ran to his access point for the Black Lion, he spoke. "Lance, get back out there to give Hunk cover. Pidge and I are right behind you."

"You got it, Shiro."

Slav stared at the Black Paladin. "Don't worry about me. I'll hang out here."
Shiro stopped and turned toward the eccentric engineer. "Can you help the Princess restore the particle barrier?"

"Yes."

Shiro rolled his eyes and stared at the alien. "Now?"

"Oh, you mean in this reality. Got it."

Adam did his best to ignore the alien as it worked to restore the particle barrier. He was focused on the Paladins and the Robeast. Pidge was finally able to get a shot with the vine weapon allowing the paladins to form Voltron.

The giant mechanical warrior flew forward with sword in hand, aiming for the chest of the beast. The sword slipped past the shielding crystals and stabbed into the beast. It exploded.

Slav lay across Coran's station, studying the schematics for the Castle as he also worked on other systems with three of his eight hands. "Why is there a grand entrance on the fortieth floor? And what's with all the ziplines? You have hover technology."

Allura stood behind him. "Well, you know what? Ziplines were quite fashionable ten thousand years ago."

The paladins stepped up behind her. Keith spoke up. "Allura, have you heard from Coran?"

She didn't bother to turn around. "Yes."

Lance spoke up. "So, we ready to pop through the wormhole and get back to Olkarion?"

"Yes," Allura replied as she turned around, smiling. "I've checked in with Coran, and the Teludav is nearly complete." She turned her gaze to the Yellow Paladin. "Hunk, thank you for getting the scaultrite."

Hunk smiled back at her. "No problem." His smile faded as he motioned toward the Red Paladin. "You know, Keith was there too."

Her face hardened as she glared at the Red Paladin.

Keith kept his face blank as he gazed back at her.

Shiro stared at her. "Don't you think you've been hard enough on Keith since we found out he was part Galra? He can't help who gave birth to him."

"Adam already gave me a talking to after you left. But as I told him, it's hard to turn off my feelings."

Pidge balled up her hands into fists as she glared at the Princess. "Apparently, it wasn't enough!"
Allura gazed at her. "What do you mean?"

"I'm the smallest Paladin here. You know how that felt in school, being the smallest of your classmates. Probably not. I was teased and bullied, especially because of my brain and how I wanted to follow my brother and father out into space. I thought you of all people would be different!" She spun on her heel and ran off the bridge.

Keith glanced at the others. "I'll go talk to her." He chased after her.

Adam looked around at the others. "I'd better go too. And make sure both of them are okay." He pointedly glared at Allura.

Allura turned and walked away to her station where she activated the wormhole and flew the Castle through it.

Keith found Pidge sitting in her room. "Hey, Pidge. You-you want to talk?"

Adam followed Keith into the room and pushed some of her tech junk out of the way. Rover beeped above her head as Adam took a seat next to her.

Pidge held her helmet in her hands but put it on the bed while she wiped at her eyes. "I'm not sorry I blew up back there." She raised her head and gazed at Keith. "Allura's so unfair to you!"

Keith blinked at the Green Paladin. "I-I thought you'd hate me because I'm part Galra, and they did take your father and brother."

Pidge shook her head. "I can't hate you. You're not like them who took my dad and Matt. You apart of the team and," she laughed slightly. "You always apologize for being a little late to the Robeast Party. Who does that?"

Keith shrugged. "I don't know."

Adam threw an arm around Pidge. "Are you going to be okay?"

Pidge nodded. "Yeah, I will. But I warn both of you now that if Allura doesn't stop treating Keith this way, I'm going to punch her. I won't let her bully you anymore."

Keith leaned against the wall. "I'm not worried about it."

"Stop being a dork. I know it hurts you, and you say your not worried about it is total bullshit!"

Adam's jaw dropped as he gazed at Pidge. "Wow, I never knew you felt so strongly about this."

Pidge nodded. "Why do you think I get along with computers better than people. Computers don't bully you." She rose from the bed and took the steps to cross the room over to Keith. She wrapped her arms around his waist but didn't let go when she felt him stiffen underneath her touch. "Your part of my family now. Don't forget that."

Keith wrapped an arm around her. "I won't."

Adam smiled at them.
The Castle of Lions landed on the Olkari spaceport near the Teludav structure. Coran met Allura, the Paladins, Adam, and Slav. "We've made significant progress while you were gone. And now that we have the scaultrite, we should be finished in less than a quintant.

Lance gazed down at it. "Wow. That is one giant Teludav."

Keith gazed at it. "Nice work, Coran."

Hunk added his own praise. "Good job, Coran." He held his hand, balled up in a fist to the Altean. "Fist bump."

Coran bumped fists with the Yellow Paladin, who pulled his hand back and spread his fingers out. "Now, blow it up."

The older Altean rounded on Hunk. "Oh, don't you dare! It took forever to build this Teludav. And let's not forget it's a pivotal piece that we need for our plan to defeat Zarkon."

Adam tapped Coran on the shoulder, gaining the Altean's attention. "Hunk meant nothing by the blow it up comment. That's just something the teens of Earth do after a fist bump."

A holographic screen popped up, and Slav appeared on it. "I've made some improvements to your design." He banged a rock against the Teludav. "This will increase our chances of survival in this reality by two hundred and five percent."

Coran craned his head as he pointed at the screen. "Is this guy a little—?"

Shiro nodded. "Yes."

Pidge closed her eyes and frowned. "No doubt."

Lance shifted his body and grimaced as he gazed skyward. "Not a fan."

Coran yelled at Slav. "Stop hitting the Teludav!"

Shiro, Hunk, Lance, Adam, and Keith stood on the platform holding the Teludav while Pidge sat on the edge. They all gazed as the sun slowly sank toward the horizon. Pidge was the first to speak. "What's everybody thinking about?"

Shiro said what was on his mind. "Zarkon."

Hunk replied, "Calzones." Which drew everyone's gaze to him. Hunk jerked back slightly from the sudden attention. "I mean, uh, heck, yeah, I'm thinking about Calzones, okay? I mean, does it always have to be about Zarkon? He's a bad guy. We're trying to defeat him. I get it. I'm hungry." To punctuate that fact, his stomach rumbled.

Keith kept his gaze on the sunset. "We've come a long way."

Lance grinned. "Yeah, remember when Hunk used to throw up from riding in the elevator?"
Hunk growled, then a smile came to his face. "You guys remember that Arusian Klaizap, I think his name was? Cool name."

Lance chuckled. "Yeah, Keith tried to beat him up even though he's the size of a peanut."

Keith turned as he glared at the Blue Paladin. "He was their bravest warrior!"

Pidge laughed. "How about the time the food goo machine attacked us in the kitchen?"

Hunk grinned. "That was the scariest thing that's happened to me the entire time I've been here."

Lance slid over and bumped into Hunk. "Oh, come on."

"What? It's the truth!"

Lance shook his head. "We faced sentries, a haunted castle, giant Robeasts, a mall security guard."

Pidge jumped up. "And don't forget that cool cube thing."

Lance waved her off. "Yeah, that awful cube thing."

Keith frowned. "Adam being sick was pretty bad."

Lance nodded. "Don't remind me. But the good thing is that when we defeat Zarkon, Adam and Shiro will get married. Then my hero will be part of my family."

Keith's eyes narrowed. "Who says?"

"I do!"

Keith leaned toward Lance. "Shiro is my family!"

"Oh yeah?" Lance blinked. Where did this guy get off calling his hero family? "Shiro's no relation to you!"

Keith growled at Lance. "He's like my brother!"

Lance smirked. "Well, he's sleeping with my cousin!"

"Duh, I know that! I'm not stupid, stupid!"

Lance balled his hands up into fists. "Who are you calling stupid?"

Keith leaned forward, shoving his face a little closer to the Blue Paladin's as he balled his hands into fists. "Who do you think?" He pulled his fist back.

Shiro grabbed Keith by the jacket collar and pulled back while Adam put his hands-on Lance and pushed him back a couple of steps. "Knock it off, Lance!"

Lance glared at Adam then pointed at Keith. "He started it!"

"For the record, you started it with your bragging." Adam's voice lowered as he moved his face closer to Lance's ear. "Now shut up before I knock your block off."

Lance hissed at Adam. "You wouldn't dare!"
"Don't think I won't!"

Shiro gazed at them all as he raised his voice to get everyone's attention with his commanding tone. "You realize once we defeat Zarkon, the universe won't need Voltron anymore."

Pidge pushed her glasses up her nose as she gazed down at her feet. "I can look for my family."

Keith nodded. "I guess I could look for mine."

Shiro gazed at all of them. "This is it. As long as everything goes according to plan, we can't fail."
Time to Launch

Chapter Summary

It's time to take the fight to Zarkon. It's not a smooth ride for anyone.

The lions locked their jaws onto the Teludav. Shiro's face appeared on the main screen. "Princess, we are go for launch."

Allura's screens appeared around her as the waist-high pillars sprang from the floor. "Charging the main turbine." The Castle launched into the Olkari sky with the Lions of Voltron following carrying the Teludav.

Shiro stood on the central platform where Allura usually stood. "All right, guys, listen up. I'll use the Black Lion to lure Zarkon's fleet to our current location and make sure he's within the Teludav's area of effect. Keeping the Teludav hidden behind the space-fold until the last possible second is essential. We can count on you, right, Slav?"

"I'll be fine. I'm not sure about the gravity generator, though."

Hunk blinked at Slav. "What? What was that last thing?"

Slav rubbed what would pass as a chin on other humanoid species. "Hiding a ship is one thing, but I've never had to build a gravity generator for something this large before. I know it'll work, but I'm not sure for how long."

Shiro nodded to Slav. "Well, that's a risk we're going to have to take. Once Zarkon's ship is in position, Kolivan and Antok will coordinate with Thace. Together they'll take down Zarkon's security system and upload the virus."

Pidge crossed her arms over her body as she smirked. "And then, he'll be a sitting du-flax." Her smug expression faded as everyone stared at her. "What? A du-flax is an Altean creature with a beak and webbed feet."

Coran shoved past Shiro. "We'll wormhole Zarkon five hundred million light-years away, and he'll be in the Yggiz Galaxy before he knows what's hit him!"

Shiro turned to Kolivan. "What about Thace?"

He should be getting into position now. We received his last communication three quintants ago. We should hear from him soon."

Shiro grew focused. "Let's do it."

Adam held Shiro's helmet. Though he tried, he couldn't hide the worry he felt. "Takashi, come back to me."
Shiro smiled as he took the helmet from Adam and slid it over his head. "I will."

Shiro's face appeared on the main screen of the Castle from the cockpit of the Black Lion. "Zarkon took the bait. He's got my position. Is everybody ready?"

Kolivan gazed at the screen. "We've not yet heard from Thace. He was supposed to contact us two vargas ago."

Antok, who was usually silent, spoke. "He could've been captured."

Kolivan's head bobbed quickly in agreement before he added. "Or killed. We need to abort the mission immediately."

Allura glared at Kolivan. "Abort? No! We cannot back away now."

Antok's face was unreadable behind his mask as he turned toward her. "The Blade of Marmora does not take chances. It's how we've survived for so long."

Allura turned her icy gaze on the second in command of the Blades. "It's held you back. Your caution is the reason Zarkon's still in power."

Kolivan turned to face Allura. "We would rather wait than jeopardize everything. Besides, it's too late to get someone else inside Zarkon's ship."

Keith rose from his seat. "I'll do it."

Allura blinked as she gazed at him. "What?"

Adam smiled. Maybe she was finally seeing what everyone else saw in the Red Paladin.

Keith turned his gaze to Kolivan. "I'll sneak onto Zarkon's ship. I'm Galra, so I'll be able to interact with their technology." He turned his gaze to the Green Paladin. "Pidge, you can rig up one of those pods with a cloaking device, right?"

"Well, yeah."

Kolivan stared at the Red Paladin. "Going onto Zarkon's ship is a suicide mission. I would never command someone so inexperienced to go on a mission so dangerous."

Listening to Kolivan speak, Adam's stomach twisted painfully as his chest grew tighter. He rubbed at the back of his neck, trying to relieve the building stress. He felt useless right now sitting here.

Keith's tone was firm as he gazed at both Kolivan and Allura. "No one's commanding me. I'm doing it."

Shiro listened to what Keith had to say. He took a breath and blew it out slowly. "Pidge get that pod ready. Keith," he paused as he closed his eyelids. He opened them again. "Let me know when you're on your way. I'll give you cover."

Adam leaned forward in his chair. He couldn't stop his mind focusing on the words 'suicide mission.' He found it hard to breathe as his mind played over everything that could go wrong. He couldn't stop himself as he turned around and gazed at Lance. His nerves screamed as his hand
He rose to his feet and noticed that Allura was missing from the bridge. He needed to talk to Keith, but what would he say. He'd figure that out once he got to the pod bay.

Adam strode down to the pod bay when he heard Allura's voice addressing the Green Paladin inside. "Pidge, may I have a moment with Keith, please?"

He slipped into the large room unseen. He hated spying, but he had to know what was going on with Allura. If she were going to go after Keith again for being part Galra, he would put a stop to that, and he was also afraid that Pidge would punch the young Altean woman.

"Sure thing. Have all the moments you like."

Adam crouched behind a pod as Pidge walked out, and the door slid shut behind her.

Keith gazed at Allura. "Is there something I can help you with?"

As Allura started to speak, she was hesitant at first. "I-I just wanted to say-the Galra, they've done terrible things, destroyed entire civilizations. They took my family. But in time, I've grown to consider you, Adam, and the paladins my family. So, when I learned you were Galra, I-I didn't know what to think. I wanted to hate you."

Keith gazed down at the deck. "Allura-it's—"

Whatever else he was going to say was lost when Allura cut him off. "But it's not you. It's me. My anger has blinded me for too long." She rushed forward and threw herself against his body. "I'm so sorry I misjudged you. You've proven, it's not what's in your blood. It's who you are that counts. Please come back to us."

"I will."

Part of the tightness eased in Adam's chest. But it didn't reduce the fear that something was going to go wrong.

Adam returned to the bridge and took his seat. Everyone else continued to focus on the plan.

Allura stood between the pillars while her holographic screens circled her spoke. "The plan is working. Keith is on board Zarkon's ship, and he and his fleet are on the way."

Lance spoke up for the first time. "The Castles defenses are up and ready to go."

Slav's voice came from engineering. "Starting gravity generator now. Commencing cloak."

Kolivian tracked Keith's progress. "Okay, you've made it to the lower communications deck. Head left down that corridor."

Antok took over. "Based on the schematics from Thace. There should be a large door up ahead."
This is the central hub for the Galra fleet."

Shiro continued to fight the Galra fleet by himself while leading them closer to the cloaked Teludav. "I'm two minutes out. Is everything ready?"

Kolivan's expression remained unreadable. "No, Keith hasn't made it to the hub yet. We need more time."

Shiro grunted as he fought to hold the Black Lion steady amid an explosion. "How much more?"

At the same time, Slav's voice came from the engine room as panic colored the alien's voice. "I hope not much because my gravity generator is not going to run forever!"

Shiro replied as he grunted again. "I don't know how much longer I can hold Zarkon's fleet in this position by myself!"

Adam didn't realize that the other paladins had left the bridge when Pidge's voice came over the speaker. "You won't have to!"

Adam imagined the relief that was probably on Shiro's face as he spoke. "Good timing. Okay, we've got Zarkon's ship right where it needs to be."

Keith's voice came over the speaker. "Kolivan, I'm in. Now what?"

"Now you need to reset the system using the codes that Thace obtained. It'll be down for a dobash. That's when we'll upload the virus."

A frown creased Adam's face as rapid beeping came over the speaker, followed by Keith. "It's doesn't seem to be working."

Adam gazed at Kolivan. How could the guy appear so unphased by what was going on? Had Zarkon's minions figured out what Thace was up to and changed the codes he'd stolen?

Kolivan replied to Keith. "Try it again."

Only silence came over the speaker from Keith's helmet comm.

Slav's voice came from engineering. "Uh, everyone, the gravity generator won't maintain power much longer. If it goes down, we're going to be uncloaked in open space."

Shiro replied from the Black Lion. "Do all you can. We need to hold out a little longer."

Adam stared at the screen intently. But when Slav's voice came from the speaker again, it caused him to jump. "The gravity generator lost power! Now there's no reality where we get out alive!"

Coran stood near Allura. "Princess, the Teludav is completely exposed!"

Allura turned her gaze to the former royal advisor before turning it back toward the screen. "We
cannot wait any longer. I'm powering the Teludav now."

Kolivan spoke up from Coran's station. "The system is down, uploading the virus now."

When the virus upload was finished, Coran took his place at the front of the bridge as the giant wormhole opened. He set the course for the Castle to fly through the wormhole. "Hurry, Paladins! We must make it in before the wormhole closes!"

Shiro's image came up on the screen. "Coran, how's Allura?"

"She's weak, but okay."

"You take care of her. We've got it from here."

Keith's face replaced Shiro's. "Once we're out of the wormhole, I'm sending Thace over in Red's speeder. He's going to need medical attention."

Adam stood from his seat on the bridge. "How bad?"

"He's pretty bad. I can't explain what happened on Zarkon's ship right now. I'm not even sure I understand everything that happened, but we had some help."

Kolivan and Antok gazed at each other.

Adam nodded. "I'll be waiting." He turned and raced off the bridge.

Knowing how tall the Galra could be, Adam brought a hover stretcher with him. The Red Lion's speeder entered the pod bay and landed. Its passenger was slumped over in the seat as the canopy slid back.

Adam raced over to the side as Thace stirred from within. "I need to get you down to the infirmary. I'm Adam, by the way."

Thace focused his glowing yellow eyes on Adam. "Keith told me you were the team's medic. So I guess that means I'm in good hands."

"Yeah, now let us get you out of here."

Thace stood but groaned from the pain and stepped out of the speeder. Adam was at his side in an instant as he put an arm around the Galra's waist. "Here, lean on me if you have to."

Thace shook his head as he gazed down at the human. "I appreciate the offer, but I think I can make it under my power."

Adam shook his head. "Then we'll compromise. Lay down on the stretcher. I can get you to the infirmary quicker that way."

Adam stepped into the infirmary and led the stretcher over to the wall. He pressed the button,
opening one of the beds inside. "Okay, Thace. Do you think you can sit on the bed for me? I need to get a scan of your injuries besides the obvious."

Thace nodded and pulled himself up. The pain in the upper right quadrant of his chest tore a groan from between his lips as he brought his hand up to the wound.

Adam gazed at the wound. "I've seen another wound just like that. The witch inflicted it on Takashi or the Black Paladin before you dropped the shield so we could escape Zarkon."

Thace nodded. "It's from a druid's dark magic. They are usually dangerous. I will need to speak with Kolivan and Princess Allura when there's time." He stood and managed to make it over to the bed.

Adam ran the medical scanner over Thace. He frowned at the readings. "I have to wait until this battle is finished to put you in a healing pod, but I can give you something for the pain, though."

"I understand."

Adam moved over to the cabinet and pulled out the Altean air injector and placed a small vial of a pain reliever at the end of it. He walked back to Thace's side and pressed the vial against the Galra's arm.

Thace nodded, and his eyelids closed as his hand dropped away from the wound.

Adam squeezed the Galra's free hand. "Rest, you deserve it after what you've been through."

He looked at the scanner again to make sure he'd read the readings correctly. He walked over to the sink and gripped the edges to hold himself up as his stomach twisted again. Adam fought to keep from throwing up. Thace's organs showed evidence of torture.

He needed to go back up to the bridge, but he also didn't want to leave Thace alone either. Finally, he could use Pidge's backup plan for a case like this. He raised his head. "Rover, I need you in the infirmary to monitor a patient." He silently thanked Pidge again, who'd programmed the drone to respond to him in a case like this.

As Adam stepped onto the bridge, he saw Coran kneeling still holding onto Allura while she recovered from the exertion of opening such a large wormhole. He started moving forward, his eyes glued to the main screen. Voltron was heading for the command ships bridge. He made it to his station when a dark black circle appeared underneath the giant mechanical warrior.

Adam froze, where he stood as he heard Kolivan say, "Oh, no." His mind whirled. What was Oh, no? He couldn't tear his eyes away from the screen as a beam of sick purplish-black energy leaped up from the circle under Voltron and hit the mech. The screams from the paladins clawed at his brain.

Adam's chest hurt as he forced his voice to work and push past the painful lump in his throat. "Takashi! Lance!" he managed to scream out. His knees gave out from under him and smacked painfully into the deck.

Adam couldn't bring himself to turn around, but he heard the fear in Coran's voice. "Paladins! Can you hear me?" Static was the only thing they received as Voltron floated lifeless in space. As the
Altean spoke again, this time, Adam heard a hint of an accusation along with a bit of anger. "I thought the virus shut down all of Zarkon's power!"

Adam was able to tear his eyes away from the screen as Allura spoke. She sounded so tired and exhausted. "That blast was not from the ship's weapons. It was magic."

Kolivan was ever the stoic leader, but Adam detected a slight, very slight tremor to his voice. "It must have been the Komar. Zarkon has been trying to develop a device to extract the quintessence from planets. It appears he succeeded."

Adam shook his head. "No!" he whispered as his mind screamed. It couldn't end here, not now.

Coran asked, "If it destroys planets, what did it do to the paladins?"

Allura rose to her feet. "Paladins! Shiro, can you hear me?" Static was the only reply for a couple of dobashes."

"Yes, Princess. We're alive." Adam gasped as he heard the voice he so desperately wanted to hear. Coran sighed in relief. "Oh, thank the ancients!"

Allura asked, "Is Voltron operational?"

Hunk replied, "It's not working."

Keith grunted. "I can't move my lion."

Coran explained what happened to them. "You've been hit with some kind of witchcraft that draws the quintessence out of you. You need to get out of there! Another blast like that, and you may not survive!"

A hatch opened on the command ship as Adam got his feet under him and rose to his full height. A giant mech emerged from the command ship.

Allura stared at it. "You must get moving. Remember your training. Remember all the battles you've been through."


Allura gazed at Coran. "We must buy them more time. Get us in closer. Divert all power to our weapons system."

Coran turned to face her. "What? Princess, we'll be defenseless!"

"It's the only way."

As Zarkon's mech launched, Coran put the Castle into motion. Adam focused on the Princess. Allura's voice was fiercer than he'd ever heard before. "Listen to me. You are true paladins now. Connect with your lions, reach out to each other! Fight! This cannot end now!"

The primary weapon began charging as the Castle got within range. Allura yelled, "Fire!" A bright beam of pure white energy flowed from the ship, striking Zarkon's mech and pushing it back, causing it to crash into the command ship. However, Zarkon moved the protecting wings into place, reflecting the beam striking the Castle of Lions.
Adam groaned as he woke to find himself floating on the bridge. He craned his head around as Coran flew past him to Allura's aid. "Are you all right, Princess?"

Allura's eyelids opened. "I'm fine. How badly is the Castle damaged?"

The Altean kicked off the wall reaching his station. "Our power levels are decimated. Communications aren't working. We can't reach the paladins. I'm afraid we can't fight anymore."

Allura gripped the pylons. "We cannot give up."

The doors to the bridge opened behind them as Slav forced them open. "D-Did, we win yet?"

Allura turned to Coran. "You and Slav do what you can to get the Castle functioning again. Kolivan, can you get me to the Komar?"

Kolivan nodded. "It will be dangerous, but I know a way."

"I'm coming with you!"

Allura turned her gaze to Adam. "Don't you need to tend to Thace?"

"Rover's keeping an eye on Thace for me. Takashi and the other paladins are out there, risking their lives for us. And if you're planning on taking the fight to Zarkon's witch, I have to be there too. I owe her a beat down for everything she's done," he growled as his eyes flashed in bridled rage.

"I forgot how fierce you humans could be. Okay." Allura turned to Kolivan, "Change of plans, Adam is coming with us."

Allura, Adam, and two Galra launched the personal transports to leave the Castle. They threaded their way through floating wreckage toward the command ship's bridge.

Kolivan jumped off his transport and flipped a switch on it, sending it flying smack into one of the floating platforms the druids used. He used his momentum to leap up and land on another floating platform. The distraction was enough that it stopped their next Komar attack.

Allura dropped down behind the druid that Kolivan faced. She used a staff to attack the druid from behind and knocked him from the platform.

Antok and Adam joined Allura and Kolivan as the witch in purple robes yelled, "Attack!" Adam slid his energy rifle from his shoulder.

Two druids on floating platforms flew at them. Adam dropped to one knee and fired the rifle. The energy beams from his weapon impacted one of the masks on the druids face dropping it where it stood with a smoldering hole in the head.

Antok split off from the group taking on one of the druids by himself, but every time he tried to get in a hit that should kill the enemy, the druid disappeared in a puff of smoke and reappeared in another spot on the platform.

Adam cradled his rifle in his hands as he watched Allura and Kolivan team up on one of the druids.
They could be killed. He knew that. But it was becoming evident that to kill them. Distraction was the key. Takashi's words came back to him as he took a breath. 'Patience yields focus.'

Allura distracted, and with a well-placed sword throw, Kolivan struck the druid in the chest. It dropped, but the body was gone leaving behind Kolivan's sword and a pile of robes.

Antok was struck by a beam of energy from Haggar, allowing the druid he was fighting to get behind him. A ball of dark energy flew from the druid's fingertips, striking the Blade of Marmora member in the back, and the electricity shot out of his chest.

Adam screamed, "No!"

Kolivan yelled, "Antok."

The Galra dropped to the ground taking one last pained breath.

Antok's killer charged Adam as a second druid appeared out of nowhere. Adam rolled and fired his rifle, blasting the newer druid dropping him. Kolivan pushed the Garrison officer out of the way as Antok's killer threw a blast of dark energy at the human.

Kolivan nodded toward Allura. "Go, help the Princess. This one is mine."

Adam nodded. He activated his jetpack and flew up to join Allura on the central platform where Haggar stood.

His upper lip curled back as his eyes glowed with hatred. This was his chance to end the witch who'd hurt Takashi. He fired his rifle at Haggar as Allura charged the witch.

Haggar avoided the attacks as two balls of energy sprouted from her hands. She threw them at Adam and Allura.

Allura swung her staff like a bat and knocked the energy away, but Adam was a little slow in moving out of the way. It struck him with a glancing blow, but he had to admit it still hurt like hell as he winced and sucked in a breath.

Allura struck with Haggar, with the staff knocking the woman off her feet and sent her sliding across the platform's surface. The witch's hood slid back from her head as she turned her face to the Princess. Allura gasped. "You're Altean?"

Haggar growled as she rose quickly, thrusting out her hand as purplish-black energy shot toward Allura.

Adam ran forward to block the energy, but something happened that stopped him in his tracks. Allura brought her arms up in front of her, and she absorbed the energy.

Haggar glared. "Impossible!" She blasted more of the dark energy at Allura, who blocked the energy and stepped forward, pushing it back toward Haggar. The energy backlash brought the witch to her knees.

Allura glowed a pinkish-purple as she took steps to bring her to face Haggar. "You will never destroy another innocent world!" Allura crouched and placed her hands on the platform as energy surged from her hands. Beams of energy flared out all around her, turning into lashing tentacles that struck around destroying the mechanism that absorbed energy from planets. One beam of energy struck the druid Kolivan was fighting. It disappeared in a flash of energy. The power around Allura grew until it exploded, and Haggar disappeared.
Debris rained down around them. Allura and Adam gazed at each other, neither being able to explain what happened.

Kolivan appeared on one of the floating platforms. "Come on!"

Allura and Adam jumped over to it.

Adam was now able to focus on the battle raging outside the command ship when he heard Shiro cry out in pain. "Takashi!"

The Castle of Lions appeared picking the Galra, Altean, and human up. Then it picked up the lions as power returned to Zarkon's ship.

Allura created a wormhole, and the Castle moved away to safety.

Keith led the way to the main hangar with Adam, the other paladins, and Alteans behind him. They entered the Black Lion, which lay sprawled on the floor of its hangar. The door to the cockpit opened. Keith's voice cracked as he spoke. "He's gone."

"No!" Adam whispered. "This can't happen again." He took a step toward the seat, but his knees gave out from underneath him as he dropped to the plating of the cockpit.

Lance knelt next to Adam and wrapped an arm around his shoulders. "Lo Siento, Adam," he whispered to his cousin.

Keith knelt on the other side of Adam. "I promise right now that I'll find him, Adam. Shiro's out there somewhere, and I'm going to find him."

Pidge wiped at her nose while Hunk rubbed at his eyes. Allura and Coran were both silent.

Adam tore his gaze away from the empty seat as he turned it to Coran. "Thace needs to go into a healing pod. His medical scan revealed evidence of torture."

Allura gasped. "His people tortured him?"

Coran placed a hand on her shoulder as he frowned but didn't say a word.

Adam sighed. "Guys, I'd like to be left alone for a while."

Lance gazed over at Keith before he turned it back to Adam. "Are you sure?"

Adam nodded. "Please."

Keith nodded. "Okay, but if you need anything, don't hesitate to ask." He fought to hold his emotions in check. The lump in his throat seemed to be growing as his eyes watered.

The Paladins and two Alteans left the cockpit. Adam rose to his feet and walked over to the seat before allowing himself to sit down in it. What should I be feeling? How should I think?

He pulled his helmet off and set it down in his lap. "Takashi," he whispered. "You were supposed to come back to me."
The temperature in the cockpit seemed to change. He reached up to touch his cheek as his eyes widened. It was just like Takashi's. He looked over in the direction of the touch. Nothing was there. A breath tickled his ear. "Adam, I'm sorry."
Chapter Summary

Changes are coming to the team with Shiro's disappearance. Adam isn't taking it well, and Keith is pretty obsessed.

Adam sat on the side of the bed that he and Takashi shared. He held his dog tags in his hand as he brushed his thumb across Takashi's ring. Did he want to get up and face the others? No, his mind answered his unspoken question.

He didn't want to face the others. The looks of pity in their eyes, or well-meaning platitudes. He glanced over at the trays of uneaten food Hunk had left.

He lay down and rolled over facing the wall. He pulled Takashi's pillow over to him. It still held his smell. "Takashi," he whispered.

The door to his shared room slid open. Lance walked in, followed by Hunk. The Blue Paladin gazed at his cousin and sighed. He tried putting a smile on his face, but seeing the man lying there, it hurt. "Adam, are you going to get up today?"

Lance wasn't surprised when he didn't get a response. "Hunk was able to make a Cubano sandwich, and it tastes just like your mom's."

Hunk retrieved the other trays of uneaten food. His eyes watered as he tugged on Lance's sleeve. As they walked out of the room, someone else entered. Unseen to the two teens Chulatt snuck into the room. The little blue-furred mouse was worried about his human friend.

Using the corner of the blanket that hung down to the floor, he climbed up and ran up Adam's body to gaze down into the man's face. He squeaked at Adam but was ignored as he continued to stare at the blank wall.

Chulatt didn't like what he saw. Dark circles around Adam's eyes and three days growth of whiskers on his face. Chulatt squeaked again as he ran back down to the end of the bed and squeezed his way into the vent duct. His little mind deciding that someone more able than he needed to know what he knew.

Chulatt ran into Allura's quarters, squeaking loudly as he ran.

"Chulatt? What has you in such a frenzy?" Allura knelt and held out her hand as the mouse ran into her hand.

He released a series of panicked squeaks as he ran circles in the young woman's palm.

Allura gasped. "Adam's what?"
Allura nodded, "You're right, something must be done, and I think I know the person who can help."

Allura stepped into the Red Lion's hangar as Keith returned from another search of the debris field from the battle with Zarkon. She sighed. He wasn't giving up on his quest for Shiro. "Keith, I need your help."

Keith pulled off his helmet and tucked it under his arm. "What do you need help with."

"It's Adam. Chulatt says he's not eating and not sleeping. He's either going to make himself sick or —" she couldn't bring herself to finish that statement. "You're close to him. He might listen to you if you tried talking to him."

Keith ran a hand gloved hand through his raven black hair. "Why do you think he'd listen to me, why don't you get Lance to talk to him?"

"Lance and Hunk have both tried."

"Why me?"

"Well," Allura began and glanced away from Keith for a minute before turning her gaze back to him. "Adam explained to me that you and Shiro are like brothers. And Lance explained that when Adam and Shiro marry, that will make you Adam's brother-in-law." She shook her head. "I still don't quite understand that, but you would be part of Adam's family."

"And you think that he'll listen to me because of that." Keith ran his hand through his hair again.

Allura nodded. "It's either you try, or I tell Coran and well he did mention it to me yesterday, and his idea of dealing with this would be to sedate Adam, strap him down to a bed in the infirmary and hook him to an IV and a feeding tube. I'd rather not do that to him."

"I see your point. It would be akin to torture."

Allura nodded. "Exactly."

Keith stepped out of his room. He strode down the hall to the room that Adam and Shiro shared. He sighed and stepped in front of the door. It slid open, allowing him entry.

He stepped inside, seeing Adam on the bed. "Adam?"

Adam rolled over and gazed at the teen. His hand still clutching his dog tags.

Keith gazed at the man and didn't like what he saw. Adam's skin appeared dry. His eyes were dull, almost lifeless with circles so dark they looked like someone had punched him. Three days' growth of stubble was on his face where he hadn't shaved.
Adam sat up. A hint of hope came to his eyes. "Did you find him?"

Keith shook his head. His voice softened as he spoke again. "No. I've searched the entire debris field. Shiro's not there, but I'm here about you. Everyone is worried about you. You're not eating, not sleeping. You have to take care of yourself."

Adam shook his head. "Without Takashi, I have nothing."

Keith glared at Adam as his temper rose. "That's bullshit, and you know it. You have the rest of the team here. They all care about you. Shutting them out isn't the answer. You have to live."

Adam rose as his temper flared. "For what? Huh? Takashi is gone again." He strode over to Keith as he doubled up a hand into a fist. But instead of striking out at the teen, he smacked himself in the chest with the fist. He dropped to his knees as he dropped his arms to his sides. "My heart hurts. I've lost him."

Keith grabbed Adam's shoulders as he knelt. "You're not alone. As I said, the rest of the team needs you. And I will find him, believe that. Coran is even threatening to sedate you and strap you to a table in the infirmary and hook you up to an IV and feeding tube."

Adam cringed as he started showing some real emotion. "He wouldn't dare."

"He'd dare alright. So please, eat something. Hunk made this sandwich just for you."

For the first time, Adam finally saw Keith and how haggard and tired he looked. "You haven't been taking care of yourself either."

Keith chuckled. "Well, that's calling the kettle black, don't you think."

"Fine, but I'll compromise. If you eat half, then I'll eat it too."

Keith jerked as his eyelids opened. He rubbed at his eyes as he tried to remember where he was. He focused on the sound that he'd heard a moment ago. He scanned the room with his eyes until realization hit him. This wasn't his room. He gazed down and saw Adam. That was who he'd heard. Yes, he'd promised himself he'd stay and watch over the man as he slept.

He focused on Adam's face as it was twisted in what looked to Keith like pain. A groan escaped the man's lips, followed by a mumbled word. "Takashi."

Keith pushed himself up off the corner of the bed, where he sat down earlier. He never realized that he'd fallen asleep either. He reached out and grabbed Adam's shoulder, shaking him slightly. "Adam, you're having a bad dream."

Adam woke with a start as his eyelids opened. "Wha—"

"You're having a bad dream."

Adam nodded. He sat up as Keith took a step back from him. "Yeah, I was. Sorry." He held his head in his hand.

"You should get up. Everyone else will be glad to see you."
"I'm not sure if I'm ready." He reached up with his other hand and rubbed at his chest. "It feels like someone is crushing my heart."

"Try it. Besides, I think Thace should be ready soon to come out of his pod. And you should be there."

"I'll try."

Adam rose from the bed and stepped into the joining bathroom. He at least showered, but he didn't feel like shaving. He dressed into the Garrison uniform and combed out his damp hair. He placed the chain of the dog tags over his head and slipped them down under his tank top, making sure Takashi's ring was where it was supposed to be. He tried to smile as he stared at his face in the mirror, but the smile wouldn't come. "I guess this is my new normal."

Adam tugged on the hem of his uniform jacket. He walked to the door and took a deep breath. As it slid open, he hesitated. He released the breath and was grateful no one was waiting for him. What would Takashi do, but he knew the answer. He'd continue to move on. Adam nodded to himself. "Time to go to work."

He walked down the hall and rode the elevator down to the level where the infirmary was located. He walked into the room only half, expecting it to be empty, but he wasn't surprised to find Coran there.

The Altean turned to gaze at the human. "Ah, Adam, it's good to see you up and about."

Adam nodded. "I'll take over here."

"Alright. I'll leave Thace's care in your capable hands." Coran stopped as he gripped Adam's shoulder. "My boy, I know what you're going through. I lost everything. If you ever need to talk, I'm here."

Moisture collected in Adam's eyes. He'd been wallowing in his torment that he'd forgotten that both Allura and Coran had lost everything and everyone they'd loved. "Thanks, Coran."

The Altean released his grip. "Oh, before I forget, Kolivan left one of the Blades of Marmora's suits. His Galra uniform was damaged, and Kolivan felt that Allura wouldn't like that reminder around."

Adam nodded. "Yeah, I can see his point."

"I'd better get to the bridge. Hunk and Lance are on a mission with the Blades. They're responding to a planet that requested aid in freeing themselves from the Galra."

"Thanks again, Coran."

The pod hissed, and Thace blinked. "Where am I?" He gazed around until he spotted Adam. "Ah, now, I remember. You're the human who met me when Keith sent me here in his lion's speeder."
"Yes," Adam replied.

Thace stepped out of the pod under his power.

"Are you feeling better?"

"Much, thank you. Altean technology is much better at healing than the Galra has."

Adam held out a small cup of the heated Nunvill. "Here, drink this. It'll help take the chill off."

Thace accepted the cup and drank it down.

Adam turned and walked over to the bed that was still down. He picked up the suit and walked back to the Blade of Marmora member. "Kolivan left this for you, but he's away on a mission right now. He'll return when the Blades and Hunk and Lance are finished freeing a planet from the Galra."

Thace accepted the clothing and smiled. "That's good news. I hope you were successful at ending Zarkon."

Adam shrugged. "I haven't heard. I've—" he began but stopped. "Never mind. We'll find out together, I guess."

Coran stood by the door to the lounge as Allura, the Paladins, Adam, and Thace sat around on the couches in the center of the room. Thace sat near Keith while Adam sat near Lance.

Hunk grinned as he spoke. "They haven't figured out their flatbread situation, but what they do with those centipedes is just out of this world."

Lance rolled his eyes. "And they're ready to join the fight against the Galra."

Pidge grinned. "Nice!"

Thace nodded, but his mind was elsewhere. His gaze was torn between Adam and Keith. Something was happening with them that he wasn't sure he liked. He remembered Ulaz saying something about a human named Shiro that was called the Champion by Zarkon's forces, but he didn't see him.

Hunk grinned, "We brought back a few of their leaders to join the coalition."

Allura's eyes brightened as she clasped her hands together. "That's splendid. Excellent work!"

Lance held his Garrison phone. "You know, I gotta say, this is what it's all about." He held his phone out, showing his picture of his selfie being surrounded by several of the female Puigians. He leaned back while he crossed one leg over the other as he rested an arm on the back of the couch. "Freein' the people, lovin' the ladies, then bombin' down the road again looking for adventure, Voltron style."

Adam frowned as he crossed his arms over his body and shot Lance a dark stare. He reached out and smacked Lance in the back of the head.

Lance hissed as he rubbed the back of his head.
Pidge let out a little chuckle.

Hunk ignored what was going on as his gaze fell, but he refocused on Allura. "Which brings up a little issue. They all want to see Voltron. Only we don't have Voltron anymore."

Allura frowned as she gazed down toward her hands as her eyes watered.

Keith frowned as he closed his eyelids. "We don't have Shiro anymore either. Everyone seems to have forgotten that."

Allura sighed but felt it was time to suggest something that might be taken the wrong way. "It may be hard for all of us to accept, but I feel it is time to think about finding a new pilot for the Black Lion."

Keith shot up off the couch. "No, I'm gonna find him. Shiro is the one person who never gave up on me. I won't give up on him!" He turned and stalked out of the room.

The door where Coran stood slid open, and Kolivan stepped inside. All eyes turned to him. "Princess Allura, the leaders are restless. But I have a suggestion. I would like to leave Thace here once I have to leave to conduct missions elsewhere. Sort of as my liaison."

Allura stood and faced him. "After what Thace has gone through, I think it's a good idea to keep our lines of communication open that way."

"Thank you, princess. I shall go back to the leaders."

Allura sat at the head of the formal dining room table. She had Adam sit in the chair where Shiro usually sat with the Paladins next to him. Kolivan was facing her at the opposite end of the table. Thace stood behind him while the other leaders sat opposite the Paladins. Coran took his usual spot behind his princess.

Though young by species standards, Allura took control of this diplomatic meeting. "It is our honor to have you all here together."

The Puigian leader smiled. "I had the biggest bunker back on Puig, but it wasn't nearly this nice."

The leader next to him reminded Adam of a catfish in a way. When he spoke, not only was his voice deep, but it also gurgled. "Well, I spent the last decade sleeping in a spiny thistle thicket. You look wonderful, though, Princess. I'm glad I put on my best tarp."

Hunk stepped out of the door behind them from the kitchen carrying a tray of food. He smiled as he sat the tray down on the table. "Welcome, everyone. Welcome. I've prepared a few Earth canapes for our distinguished guests to enjoy while we talk galactic diplomacy."

Kolivan stood. "The Blade of Marmora has gathered this intelligence." A large star map appeared over the table, colored purple. "As you can see, the Galra Empire is still the most massive ruling force the universe has ever seen. The sheer size of it is almost incomprehensible. It seems like it could rule another ten thousand years."

Adam squirmed in his seat. He didn't like taking Takashi's place. It seemed like blasphemy. He caught movement out of the corner of his eye and saw Lance whispering to Pidge.
Kolivan continued speaking. "However, we are beginning to see signs of increased rebel activity from within the Empire." Planets began changing colors.

The leaders gasped as they began to see a change in the star map.

Allura stood. "We have a strategy to bring these forces together, free more planets, grow our numbers, and accumulate an army that can defeat the Galra in major battles."

The leader of a sentient machine species spoke. "The forces will all fight behind Voltron, right?"

The Puigian leader turned to Allura. "Yes, where is Voltron?"

Allura kept a polite smile on her face while inwardly, she frowned. "The people you see before you are the Paladins of Voltron. Together, they pilot the mighty lions that form the great warrior." She motioned to Adam. "While Adam here is their medic, and he helps them on missions."

Adam's discomfort grew as several of the alien leader's gazes fell on him. He didn't want to be here to face their scrutiny.

The Puigian leader nodded. "Excellent! Can they form Voltron now?"

Allura fumbled. "Uh, well—"

Keith growled. "We can't form Voltron, okay? We can fly the lions, but Voltron is not happening."

The leaders gasped.

Allura tried to explain. "What he means is that right now they can't do it, but—"

Keith shot Allura a glare. "But nothing. Shiro is gone. He was the Black Lion. And until we find him, there is no Voltron."

Various expressions of shock appeared on the leader's faces.

Kolivan took over, trying some damage control. The lions are still a substantial fighting force, and this Castle is also a considerable weapon. The Blade of Marmora can lead you."

The leader of the machine species turned her gaze on Kolivan. "My people have been enslaved for centuries by soldiers who look exactly like you."

The Puigian leader gazed at Kolivan. "Yes! Our people have heard how Voltron defeated Zarkon. That is what gave them hope. What are we supposed to tell them now?"

Keith stood up and slammed his hands down on the table, rattling dishes. "Tell them to stand up and fight for themselves!" he leaned toward the leaders. "Voltron is gone!" He pushed off the table and stomped off.

Everyone stared at Keith as he walked away.

Adam cleared his throat, gaining everyone's attention. "Earth has survived many conflicts. Each conflict had groups of men and women who were not experienced fighters who rose and did what they could for their families' safety and freedom." He stood. "I'm sorry, Princess. But I can't sit
through this any longer." He bowed politely and strode away.

Keith stood in the Black Lion's hangar, gazing at the lion who just lay there as if it were lifeless.

Adam, Allura, Coran, and the other Paladins stood behind him. Silently they all agreed that Lance should speak to Keith.

The Blue Paladin frowned and slouched as he walked up to Keith. He stopped bringing himself even with the Red Paladin. "Hey, man. Listen, we all miss Shiro. I remember what a thrill it was to meet him for the first time when the two of us carried him out of that makeshift Garrison hospital."

Pidge and Hunk joined them. Pidge spoke next. "I grew up with my dad and Matt telling me stories about him. He was a legend at our house."

Hunk spoke next. "The guy taught me everything I know about being a pilot. Which isn't much, but that's more on me."

Adam walked up, putting himself between Lance and Keith. He clapped a hand on each of their shoulders. "I was at the Garrison about a month before this skinny teen showed up. He had all the looks and could have had anyone he wanted, but he chose me."

Lance turned to Keith. "You're not the only one hurting man. We're all here with you. But you know that he'd be the first one to tell us that we have to move on."

Keith turned and glared at Lance.

Allura stepped up. "Keith, I know exactly how you feel. But our mission is bigger than any one individual." She gazed down at the metal plating. "Even those who are completely irreplaceable."

Keith gazed down at the deck. "I know you're right. It's time to figure out how to reform Voltron."

Adam squeezed his shoulder.
Lion Swap

Chapter Summary

Time to find a new Paladin and a new threat emerges.

Allura sat on the center couch in the semi-circle of couches in the lounge. Lance sat on another hugging the knee of the leg he propped on the couch while his other leg hung over the edge. He sighed. "I wish Shiro were here to tell us how to go on without him."

Adam, who sat near Lance mumbled to himself. "I just wish he were here."

Coran's ear twitched as he stood at the open end of the semi-circle. He frowned, but he understood what the human was going through.

Pidge, who sat on a couch opposite Lance with Hunk beside her, leaned forward. "Allura, when we came here, you told me I would fly the Green Lion, and I thought there was no way. But then I found it, and I flew it. And then, Hunk flew the Yellow Lion, and he's not even a pilot. You told everyone who would pilot which lion."

Hunk became animated as he leaned forward. "Yeah, how did you do that? Did we ever find out how you did that?" He turned puppy dog eyes on Allura as he clasped his hands together. "Can you do that now?"

"Sadly, no!" Allura decided it was time to explain how that worked. "When you arrived at the Castle, I instantly recognized the special qualities in each of you. But I don't know how to search the entire universe for a new paladin."

Coran looked up at Keith, who stood leaning against the wall. "Keith, you piloted the Black Lion when you had to save Shiro. Perhaps you're the one."

Lance let go of his knee as he gazed up at the other teen. "Keith would be the worst leader of Voltron."

Adam jabbed the Blue Paladin in the back with his elbow. "And you think you could do better?"

"Of course, I'd be an awesome leader!"

Adam shook his head, "In your mind."

Pidge perked up as she gazed at Coran. "Yeah, we all have our thing. Keith's the loner. I'm the brain. Hunk's the nice one. Allura's the decision-maker. Adam's the medic. Coran's the wise old guy. And Lance is the goofball."

Lance grinned. "Mm-hmm. Yeah, exactly. Right – Wait a minute." Lance's eyes opened wide, and he turned a blue-eyed glare on Pidge. "I'm not a goofball!" He crossed his arms over his chest and stuck his nose up in the air. "I'm like the cool ninja sharpshooter."

Adam leaned toward Lance. "Sharpshooter, yes, ninja no."
Keith scoffed at Lance while amusement flashed in his eyes. "Are you joking?"

Lance jumped off the couch. "I'm completely serious when I say; I do not want you to lead me anywhere."

Keith's eyes grew as his anger flared. "I don't want to be a leader! That's just what Shiro wanted!" He realized what he said and gazed down at the floor.

Hunk turned around, and an expression of shock flashed on his face. "What are you talking about?"

Keith shook his head. "Nothing."

Pidge gazed at the Red Paladin as she spoke softly. "Shiro wanted you to be his successor, didn't he?"

Lance held up his hand. "Well, I never heard Shiro say that, and how convenient that you're bringing it up now when Shiro is gone."

Hunk stood up. "Now, now, hang on. I've called the head from the beginning."

Pidge jumped up. "What about me? I picked up on the radio waves that led us to Voltron in the first place."

Adam rose to his feet. "Stop arguing!" He gazed down at the floor for a moment before turning his gaze on the others. "After Takashi came out of the healing pod after fighting the witch on Zarkon's ship, he told me that he wanted—" He took a deep breath, trying to steady his nerves. "He wanted Keith to lead Voltron if anything happened to him." He sank back down on the couch and placed his head on his hands.

Coran nodded and placed a hand on Adam's shoulder before turning back to the others. "Even though Shiro wanted Keith to lead, it's not our decision to make. We must allow the lion to decide."

Allura nodded. "Coran is right. We must all present ourselves to the Black Lion to see who will bear this glorious burden."

Coran blinked. "What? You, Princess?"

"My father created Voltron. How can I allow others to risk their lives in battle and not be prepared to do the same myself? I must try it. And Adam and Thace should try also."

Adam raised his head and turned his haunted eyes to hers. "No, I-I can't do that!"

Keith gazed at his brother's fiancée. "You should. Out of everyone here, other than Coran and Thace, you have actual military experience."

Adam sighed as his shoulders slumped.

Everyone gathered in the Black Lion's hangar. Hunk glanced around. "So, who goes first?"

Pidge shrugged. "Should we draw straws?"

Coran blurted out his response. "I have it! I'm thinking of a number between one and fifty! Allura,
you go first. Pidge is second and then the others."

Thace nodded. "That's fair."

Lance gasped. "Wait, don't we get to guess the number?"

Coran put his hand on his chest. "But, I already know the number."

Lance sighed. "Allura, just go!"

Adam grabbed Lance by the arm and yanked him close to him. "Stop it! You're acting like an ass!"

Lance yanked his arm out of his cousin's grip. "No, I'm not. I know the Black Lion will choose me."

Adam shook his head. "For our sakes, I hope not. Because you have a lot of growing up to do to be a leader."

Lance shrugged. "Whatever."

Allura exited the Black Lion and frowned. "It's not me."

Pidge entered next. But she exited after a couple of dobashes. "I reserve the right to try again. I just need to check something out."

Hunk entered after her. But he came out of the lion in record time.

Coran gazed at him. "What are you doing? You didn't even try."

"Yes, I did. I sat down."

Coran glared at the Yellow Paladin.

Hunk's eyes grew. "I don't want to leave the Yellow Lion, okay? I mean it's big, it's got this super armor, and it's safe."

Coran shook his head. "But, you called the head."

"Yeah, I know. I wanted to form the head with the Yellow Lion." He sighed as his shoulders slumped. "Fine." Hunk turned and re-entered the Black Lion. He tried, but the lion didn't choose him either.

Pidge re-entered the Black Lion. After a bit, she exited and sighed. "Why did Shiro have to be so tall?"

Thace tried next, but he wasn't chosen either.

Adam trudged up the ramp and into the lion. The cockpit was different than the last time he was here. It seemed warmer and inviting to him. It was comfortable. He imagined seeing Takashi in his armor in the pilot's seat. Adam shook his head. "I want him back so badly I'm seeing things," he muttered. He sat down in the seat and sighed. Inside his head, his mind screamed out his pain. Finally, he stood and exited the lion.

Lance took his turn.

The others stood outside the lion when Pidge asked out loud, "So, how long are we gonna let Lance
Hunk nodded. "Yeah, it's been like half a varga."

Lance stormed out of the lion and stormed down the ramp. He ripped his helmet off and tossed it down to the metal plating with a bang. He sat down on it as he crossed his arm over his chest. "It's useless. The Black Lion hates all of us."

Allura gazed at the Red Paladin. "Keith, the Black Lion, hasn't responded to any of us. You have to try."

Keith frowned as he sighed. He turned and placed his helmet over his head and walked up the ramp disappearing inside the Black Lion. Several minutes later, the lion's eyes glowed as it rose to its feet, stood, and roared. It crouched down and lowered the ramp. Keith walked down the ramp and pulled off his helmet, facing the others.

Allura smiled at him. "I'm proud of you, Keith. I wish you were getting the job under better circumstances, but congratulations."

Pidge grinned. "Congratulations, Keith."

Hunk waved. "Yeah, man, ditto."

Keith shook his head. "No, I don't accept this."

Everyone gasped.

Allura took a step forward. "You must. The Black Lion has chosen you."

Keith shook his head. "I can't replace Shiro! You guys were right. I'm the loner. I'm not the leader Shiro thought I was." He turned his gaze away from them.

Adam poked Lance in the ribs.

Lance nodded his understanding and walked up to the former Red Paladin and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Keith, no one can replace Shiro. But the Black Lion wouldn't choose anybody it didn't feel was worthy of leading Voltron. I respect its choice. And you should too."

Keith turned and gazed at the Black Lion. "But who's gonna fly the Red Lion?"

Adam groaned. "No way. I'm not trying again."

Lance chuckled. "Chicken."

Adam shook his head. "No, I don't have the temperament."

Allura joined everyone in the lounge. Her eyes were a little red-rimmed as if she'd cried. She frowned as she gazed down at the ground.

Coran was the first to speak. "I'm sorry, Princess. I know how much you wanted to pilot the Red Lion."
She flashed a quick smile in his direction. "I'm fine. Let's move on. We must find a new paladin again."

Pidge shook her head as Allura and Coran sat down on the couch. "A new paladin? I mean, where would we start looking?"

Lance smirked. "Well, I vote for getting some alien diversity on the team, and I know some cool mermaids who could be good at it."

Hunk bumped his elbow against Lance's arm. "You just want to see them again."

Lance grinned. "You got that right."

Hunk gazed up toward the ceiling before a thought came to mind. He focused on Allura. "How about Thace?"

Pidge perked up. "Or the Olkari."

Their ideas were interrupted when the viewscreen in the lounge came to life, revealing the Puigian leader. "Voltron, we need your help. The Galrans have returned. Once you left, we were defenseless. My people are trying to hold out, but the Galra are too powerful."

Allura stood up. "The Lions are on their way. Hold your ground and protect your people until we arrive. Volton stands with you."

Thace turned to Allura. I'll contact Kolivan and see if we have any agents in the area who can help."

Allura nodded and smiled. "Thank you, Thace."

Adam followed Allura and Coran to the bridge. He took his seat at his station.

Keith went to his usual spot to pilot the Red Lion. As the door opened, Allura called out to him. "Keith. The Black Lion has chosen you. You can do this."

He closed his eyes and nodded but walked to Shiro's usual spot. He turned around and glanced at Adam.

"Good luck," Adam said. He stood up and saluted.

Keith returned the salute then turned back around, and the floor beneath him began to lower, and the former Red Paladin disappeared.

Keith's voice echoed through the Castle. "Lance, where are you?"

Adam groaned. What game was his cousin playing at now?

In answer, Lance replied, "My lions not responding to me."
Keith replied. "Well, figure it out and catch up with us as soon as you can."

Adam gazed at the reading. He was picking up a signature on a ship he'd never seen before. "Keith, something is coming out of hyperspace in front of you!"

Thace gasped. "It can't be!"

Adam gazed at the Blade of Marmora member. "What's going on?"


Adam's eyes grew. "Zarkon's son?"

"Yes, though not as evil as Zarkon," Thace replied. "He's not to be trusted."

Allura stared at the screen as fighters swarmed the three lions. "Coran, we have to get there immediately. Lance, we need you. The lions are being attacked!"

Lance's reply came back excited but almost panicked. "I'm trying!"

Allura glanced over her shoulder at Coran. "I'm going to see what's keeping him."

Adam rose from his station. "I'll go with you. If he's playing around, he's going to get it!"

The pair joined Lance in the Blue Lion's hangar. Allura asked him. "What's wrong?"

Lance rubbed the back of his head. "I don't know. Blue is shutting me out." He gazed down at the deck as he dropped his arm to his side. "Maybe Pidge was right. Maybe I am just a goofball. Not only am I not meant to be the leader, but I also guess-I guess now I'm not even meant to be a paladin."

Adam smacked Lance, not hard but just enough to get his attention. He placed his hands on the Blue Paladin's shoulders. "Will you listen to me for once in your life. Yeah, you can be a goofball at times. But you are also a paladin, so get this idea that you're not meant to be one out of your head. You can figure this out. I know you can." Pain flashed in his eyes as he drew in a breath and released it. "You know that if Takashi were here, he'd tell you the same."

Lance sniffed and then grabbed his cousin and pulled him into a hug. "I know, you're right."

A roar echoed through the hangar. Lance jumped and looked up at the Blue Lion before turning toward Allura. "What was that?"

Allura listened for a tick and turned toward him. "It's the Red Lion. You must go to it."

Lance shook his head. "No Way! Keith probably trained it to bite my head off." He stopped then turned his gaze on her. "Maybe it's roaring for you."

Allura shook her head as she dropped her gaze. "I would love nothing more than for that to be true, but I know the Red Lion is not meant for me." She raised her eyes to gaze into Lance's blue eyes. "It is choosing you."

"I don't understand."
"My father-built Voltron, but he knew Zarkon was a better leader in battle, so he became Voltron's right hand." Allura placed her hand on the Blue Paladin's shoulder. "Lance, when you accepted Keith as the new leader of Voltron, it proved that you value a strong team over your own need for glory. Just like my father."

Lance swallowed as a lump formed in his throat. He nodded. "I won't let him down." He picked up his helmet and ran for the Red Lion's hangar.

Adam nodded at Allura as he stuck his hands into his pockets. "That was a nice pep talk you gave Lance."

Allura gazed at him as she matched his gait stride for stride. "I was honest with him."

The particle barrier around the Blue Lion dropped, and it growled, stopping both the human and Altean in their tracks. Adam turned back to the lion. Then he turned his gaze on Allura. "She wants you."

Allura smiled sadly back at him. "In a way, I hoped you would be accepted by one of them."

Adam shook his head. "No, I can't do what the paladins do, and emotionally I'm too much of a mess. But you should go. The others need you. Don't worry about the Castle."

Allura nodded as she headed off for the lion.

The Castle of Lions flew into the scene of the battle, and Coran fired the primary weapon managing to get a hit on Lotor's ship. But it was shook like a snow globe from return fire from the Prince's vessel. However, Lotor's forces retreated once the Blue Lion appeared.

Adam walked toward the lion's hangars, but something told him that he wouldn't find Lance in Red's hangar. He turned and entered the Blue Lion's hangar seeing his cousin standing in front of the lion. Adam shook his head. Somethings didn't change.

Lance gazed up at the Blue Lion. "Well, Old Blue, we sure had some fun adventures, didn't we? I wanted to stay with you, but sometimes, what we want isn't necessarily what we get. I'm gonna miss you, buddy."

A door opened and closed. Allura stood nearby wearing armor that was white and pink.

Lanced turned to her, not noticing Adam nearby. "Pink, huh? Now what I was expecting, but I like it."

Allura approached him, but her eyes were downcast as she spoke. "Yes, on Altea, we wear this color to honor our fallen warriors." She stopped facing him and raised her eyes to meet Lance's. "I wear it to honor the paladins of old. And Shiro."

Lance materialized his bayard and handed it over to her. "This belongs to you now. If I had to lose Blue to someone, I'm glad it was you."
The knot in Adam's throat was growing. He cleared his throat, trying to force the lump away. "Thace has been in contact with Kolivan, and he's ready to brief us on everything they know about Lotor and his Generals."

Thace stood by the viewscreen as the last ones to arrive into the lounge entered. He nodded toward the Princess. Then activated the screen bringing up an image of a purple-skinned man with yellow eyes and long white flowing hair. "This is Prince Lotor. He has been in exile for several thousand years. But he has returned taking over the throne. There are rumblings from within the empire. Certain factions are seeking the throne looking to take it away from Lotor."

He brought up another image of four female Galra. "These are Lotor's Generals. They are loyal to him. Acxa, Narti, Zethrid, and Ezor. They are each dangerous in their way, so be careful."

Keith nodded to Thace. "Good to know." He turned to the others. "I managed to place a tracker on Lotor's ship earlier. Let's go and take him down once and for all."

Thace frowned but called out to the others before they left. "Good hunting."
A Comet by the Tail

Chapter Summary

Keith is beginning to grow up and is showing signs of the leader he can be, but he still lets his one tracked mindedness get in the way.

Adam sat at his station on the bridge as he stared out the viewscreen in the direction the lions had flown off. His stomach knotted and tightened as he frowned. He tapped his fingers on his leg. Something tugged on his pants leg.

It's only nerves he told himself. However, the pulling at the cloth didn't stop. It moved, and he leaned over to find Chulatt climbing up his leg. He blinked at first but lowered his hand. "How about a hand?" he asked as the mouse hopped off his leg onto his hand.

Chulatt ran up his arm to his shoulder and squeaked in Adam's ear. He tried to pat the human's cheek and then let out a tirade of squeaks.

"I don't understand you, but I guess your fussing at me about the beard. Well, I just don't feel like shaving it anymore." His eyes turned away from the mouse, and he released a sigh. "I don't feel like doing much of anything anymore truthfully."

He forgot he had an audience on the bridge as he talked to the mouse. "And why is that?"

Adam turned his gaze to Thace. "It's a little complicated, but with Shiro gone, I don't feel like continuing anymore. My chest hurts all the time."

Coran appeared at Adam's shoulder. "I understand, my boy. Losing a loved one does hurt. I still remember the day when I lost my wife and son." His eyes seemed to glaze over as he spoke as he remembered his family. "Even though Altea was technologically advanced, still some things could not provide us with a cure. Like the Altean Flu. My wife was a good woman but had a difficult pregnancy with our son. She died after she caught the flu, and my son, who wasn't born yet, died with her." The man sniffed as he wiped at his eyes.

"I threw myself into my work as King Alfor's royal advisor and friend. Then Princess Allura was born, and she helped to ease the pain in my heart. But I still think of my wife and wonder what my son might look like had she survived."

Adam bowed his head. "I'm sorry, Coran. I didn't mean to cause you pain."

Coran waved a hand in his direction. "Don't worry about it. Instead, I've gained a new family, with all of you humans." He chuckled. "Though I'm still trying to understand some of your ways. But it's a definite learning curve."

Adam nodded. "I suppose we are difficult to understand at times. But I've found learning Altean to be a bit difficult in itself."

Thace chuckled. "Altean is a pretty simple language to learn. Galra, on the other hand, is difficult. Friends had told me before the war started."
Adam nodded. "I suppose it is." He ducked his head as images of Takashi trying to teach him Japanese at the Garrison came to mind. He couldn't stop the tear that traced down his cheek. The dam finally broke, and more tears followed.

Thace alarmed by this behavior opened his mouth, but Coran shook his head. He stepped over to the Blade of Marmora member. "Allow him this release. He needs it."

Chulatt rubbed his face against the side of Adam's neck. He squeaked softly into the man's ear.

"I-I'm sorry for breaking down like that." He brought a hand up and wiped at his eyes.

Coran shook his head. "Nonsense. You needed that."

Allura stood at her station as the Castle of Lions flew through space. She stated at the screen as an alarm went off, but it was an emergency alarm. It was something else entirely different.

Keith sat in Shiro's spot as the new Black Paladin. "What's going on?"

Pidge nodded in agreement. "Yeah, these have never gone off before."

Lance turned his gaze toward the princess. "Allura, what is it?"

Hunk scratched at his scalp as he gazed at the pair of Alteans. "Looks like you guys just saw a ghost."

Coran finally moved in answer to Hunk's statement. "That's just the thing. It's an old Altean distress code. One used by King Alfor's ships."

Coran's words seemed to bring Allura back to life as she clasped her hands together. "Could it be? Are we not the last Alteans alive?"

Keith leaned forward in his seat. "Wait. What if someone is cloning the signal to try and lure us in?"

Adam gazed over at Allura. "I agree with Keith on this. No telling what lengths Lotor would go to try to lure us into a trap."

Thace dipped his head in a sign of respect to the princess. "I agree with Adam and Keith."

"I've taken your words under advisement. The signal is from an Altean ship, and we're going to find it." Allura activated the Teludav, and the Castle flew through the wormhole and out the other side into a different area of space.

They all saw what looked the tail end of a ship stuck in a glowing hole in space. Allura stared at it. "That looks like a Tel-Galax exploration shuttle. One of my father's deep space vessels."

Coran ran the ship's ID through the Castle's database. "According to the ship's identification code, it's Commodore Trayling's ship. But I don't see any records of its destination or mission."

Lance asked, "What happened to it?"

Hunk gazed at the screen. Is it stuck in a wormhole?"
Coran shook his head. "That's unlike any wormhole I've ever seen."

Pidge studied her holographic screen. "There's a massive amount of energy emanating from it, centered right where the ship is stuck."

Allura stared at the screen. "We have to see if anyone is aboard. They may need our help."

Pidge threw out a suggestion that came to mind. "We could send a probe over to it, see if we can get some kind of idea what this thing is?"

Keith glanced over at Adam. He wanted his opinion before committing to anything since he still worried that it might be a trap of some kind.

Adam gave him a subtle nod. It was a sound idea.

Keith turned his gaze back to Pidge. "Do it."

The Green Paladin launched the probe and studied the readings that came back. "The energy shows no signs of radioactive decay, and it's not thermal."

Hunk stared at his screen. "It's not gravitational, our probe is steady on course, and the light is radiating out, not in, like it would in a black hole."

Pidge frowned. "But out from where?"

Coran gazed at the readings he received from the before he tilted his up at the screen. "That energy signature, I know it." His eyes brightened and grew as he finally figured it out. "It's radiating quintessence."

No one asked Coran what he meant. Instead, they kept their eyes on the probe as it hit the glowing energy. It didn't explode. It just seemed to disappear as all transmissions from it stopped.

Hunk said what was on all their minds. "Ooh! That's weird."

Lance gaped, and his eyes grew as he stared at the screen. "Okay, well, let's not go anywhere near there."

Allura wasn't in the mood to take no for an answer. "We must!"

Hunk shook his head. "Hold on. Didn't you see what happened?"

Allura kept her eyes on the screen. "Voltron's compositional strength far exceeds anything else in the universe. We received an Altean distress call, which must mean that someone is alive on the ship. We are Paladins of Voltron, and we must help."

Keith turned in his seat. "Princess, I still think there's a case that this whole thing is a trap."

Coran turned around. "Even if it's not a trap, it's far too dangerous to go in there."

Allura frowned as she stepped away from her spot. "I'll do it myself if I have to."

Keith stood as she walked away. "We'd better go with her."

Adam stood up quickly. "Keith, Lance," he began but couldn't say anything else as his voice faltered.
Pidge seemed to understand what he was trying to say. She jumped up from her seat and ran over to him, wrapping her arms around his middle. "We'll come back. Don't worry."

Adam gazed down into her honey brown eyes. "I hope your right." He sucked in a breath as he turned his gaze to the other paladins. "I don't know what I would do if I lost all of you, too."

Hunk threw his arms around Adam, followed by Lance and Keith.

They broke up the group hug.

Adam gazed at Keith. "Keep your comms open, so we know what's going on, okay."

"Sure."

The lions flew away from the Castle and formed Voltron. As they flew closer to the Altean ship, Keith's voice came over the bridge's speaker. "All right, let's take it slow. Pidge, any chance you can explain what I see right now?"

"The Euclidian space around the ship is some kind of anomaly. But the energy source doesn't originate from anything that registers with my understanding of how reality works."

Adam snorted. If she didn't understand it, then they were all in trouble. He rubbed at his chest, trying to loosen the non-existent band that seemed to be tightening itself.

Hunk's voice was next. "I'll scan the ship for biorhythms." A couple of ticks of silence followed. "That's strange. I'm not picking up any signs of life on the ship."

Allura replied for the first time since she stalked off the bridge in a huff. "Maybe not on this half, but there is more to this ship than we are seeing. We need to go through there."

Adam rose from his seat as his chest tightened more, and his eyes grew. "No," he managed to whisper.

Lance replied, "The glowy, explodey area?"

Keith replied, "Pidge, keep an eye on Voltron's vitals. Everyone, be prepared to abort if things get hairy."

Hunk replied, "Roger that. Ready to abort immediately."

Voltron started to enter the energy field. Pidge's voice came over the speaker. "Guys, my sensors are going crazy. Technically we should be torn apart. But somehow, Voltron is completely unaffected by the stress of the spatial distortion."

Voltron disappeared through the spatial distortion. Visual vanished from the screen. Coran gasped then shouted out, "No!"

Adam swayed on his feet as though he were going to fall. He held his head in his hands. The room seemed to spin.

Thace turned his head and gazed at the human. "Adam," he called out as he raced over to the human. He put his hands on the man's arms and noticed he was trying to say something, but no
sounds came out of his mouth.

Coran turned around and gazed at the pair. "Get him to sit down." He pulled out his medical scanner and ran it over the human. He frowned at the readings. "The stress is putting a strain on his body. Stay with him. His blood pressure is too high." The Altean ran off the bridge.

After several dobashes, Coran returned and pressed a device against Adam's neck. It hissed as the medication entered his bloodstream. "There that should do it."

Thace, who knelt beside Adam, turned his gaze up to Coran. "What did you give him?"

"A light sedative. It should help to relax him." He scratched at the back of his head. "Though I was in such a rush, I didn't check to see if it might have an adverse reaction to his system."

"This is going to be fun." Thace shook his head.

Coran ignored the comment and went back to his station at the helm of the Castle. All four mice sat there as he ran his fingers over the screen, trying to figure out what happened to Voltron. Platt held Chulatt as the other two mice squeaked to each other and then up at the Altean. "I've tried every scan and test I can think of. There's no sign of Voltron anywhere."

The other two mice squeaked up at him.

Coran leaned over them. "How could I have stopped her? You know how she is."

The mice squeaked again.

"I can't understand anything that you're saying, but I'll assume by your tone that what you said was an insult." He straightened up to see the ship disappear through the hole and vanish. "Not good."

Adam's voice caused him to turn around and gaze at the earthling. "C-Coran, what d-did you give me?"

"A mild sedative. You need to relax."

Adam leaned back in his seat. "If I could stand, I'd punch you."

"What?"

Adam tried to focus on the Altean, but he saw two Coran's standing at the helm. "I'd rather get drunk the old-fashioned way instead of feeling like I've been melted and poured in this seat."

"Hmm… well, I didn't consider the side effects. But you are relaxed now."

Thace chuckled as Adam managed to stick his tongue out at the Altean.

Voltron appeared in their reality with a giant rock. Coran cheered. "You're back! Oh, thank the ancients!" He began to hail the huge mech. "Paladins, can you hear me? Are you okay?"

Before he could say anything else, an explosion rocked the Castle of Lions. Coran stared at the screen as Lotor's ship appeared, and a couple of smaller vessels hooked cables to the rock and pulled it into hyperspace as Lotor's ship also jumped.
Allura sounded weak as she answered his hails. "Coran, we're here."

Thace helped Adam down toward the human's quarters as Lance and Hunk approached. Adam's tongue wasn't correctly working properly. "I-I tell you Thace, it's criminal."

The Galra chuckled. "If you say so."

Adam nodded as his knees gave out on him again. "It is. I'd rather have drunk several shots of vodka or whiskey to feel like this."

Lance stopped and stared at the pair. Adam's unfocused eyes and sagging demeanor told him something was wrong. He pointed at his cousin. "What happened?"

Thace stopped, and Adam groaned when he heard his cousin's voice. Thace turned his attention to the teen. "When he saw Voltron disappear, his blood pressure went up. Coran gave him a sedative, and since then, he's been like this."

Adam shook his head. "It's criminal. I didn't get a drop to drink. I never got a chance to get drunk."

Lance tried to keep from laughing. But it burst out of his chest with force. He leaned on Hunk to hold himself up.

"Uh, Lance. I don't think it's so funny. You remember what he said on the bridge before we left."

Lance nodded as he wiped at a tear that came to his eye. "Yeah, I do." He sobered quickly and took a breath. "Sorry for laughing, Adam."

Adam squinted as he tried to focus his eyes. "Laugh it up, but you all gave me a scare. I thought I'd lost you all."

Lance straightened up. "Come on, Hunk, let's get him to his room before he turns into a crying drunk."

Booth teens got a hold of Adam and helped him to the shared room. They eased him down on the bed. Lance grabbed his boots and slipped them off his feet while Hunk helped him lay down.

Adam gazed up at them. "I'm glad nothing bad happened to any of you."

Lance nodded. "Yeah, we are too. Get some sleep. You need it."

Adam felt the dip in the bed beside him, but he couldn't open his eyes, afraid that he was dreaming when he heard words come being spoken between Takashi and Keith. It had to be a dream, he told himself.

"I don't know. The last thing I remember was Zarkon trying to take over the Black Lion. It told me to use my bayard. Then nothing. I woke up, and I was back on a Galra ship."

"Well, you'd unlocked the Black Lion's ability to teleport. Could it have teleported you? Maybe it
was trying to save you."

"By teleporting me back into Galra hands?"

Keith sighed. "Maybe Zarkon forced it to. I mean, he was trying to control the Black Lion up until
the very last moment, right?"

"Yeah, maybe."

"Well, if you're feeling up to it, the rest of the team would be thrilled to see you up and around
again. They need you. You know."

"Yeah, I'll try."

Adam sighed next to Shiro. "Kashi."

Shiro jerked slightly in the bed and gazed at Adam. "What's up with him?"

"He's had a hard time of it since you disappeared. For days he didn't eat, didn't sleep. And well,
Coran said he gave him a sedative, and well, he didn't check it out first to see if it was compatible
with human physiology, and it made him drunk."

Shiro chuckled. "That I would have given anything to see. Adam could drink me under the table."

Keith chuckled. "Okay, we'll be on the bridge whenever you decide to get up."

"Hey, Keith?"

"Yeah?"

"How many times are you gonna have to save me before this is over?"

A small smile pulled at Adam's mouth at Keith's reply. "As many times as it takes."

The door to the bridge opened as Shiro and Adam stepped over the threshold. Shiro gazed at
everyone on the bridge. "Great job out there, everyone. You've turned the tide in this war. I'm glad
you never lost sight of the mission while I was gone."

Lance smiled. "You're looking better. How are you feeling?"

Shiro reached up and raised his hand to the side of his head. "Good. Trying to get rid of this weird
headache."

Pidge perked up, cutting off anything else he was going to say. "Guys, I think have something here!
So, I downloaded intel from the Galra base we just defeated. I untied the quantum-folded
encryption, and I found something on Lotor."

Shiro turned to Adam. "Who's Lotor?"

"Zarkon's son."

Keith folded his arms across his chest. "Do you know where he is?"
"Well, not exactly, no, but the last three sightings of his command ship have been in the Va'Kar quadrant."

Shiro gazed at the teenager. "Nice work, Pidge. Although, those quadrants are massive." He turned his gaze to Allura and Keith. "How will we pinpoint his location?"

Hunk, who knelt next to Pidge, looked up at her. "Hey, that comet is made from the same material as Voltron. Maybe I can scan the emission spectrum for Fraunhofer lines, like when I found the Blue Lion!"

Pidge leaned forward slightly. "But you know those emissions are subject to free induction decay. Those are exponential drop-offs."

Hunk frowned. "Yeah, but if you could find a way to amplify the sensors— No, there'd be way too much interference. What if, instead, we increase the SA magnitude?"

"The spires of the Castle!"

Hunk's eyes brightened. "Genius!"

The two teens jumped up and took off to get to work.

Lance gazed at Keith. "I have no idea what either of them just said."

Shiro gazed at the others. "Let's set a course for the Va'Kar quadrant while they get started on that detector. We need to work fast. Who knows what Lotor has planned for that comet."

Allura smiled at Shiro. "Agreed, and it's good to have you back."

Adam nodded but frowned when he caught Lance's sad expression. He thought his cousin would be overjoyed to have his idle back. He'd have to talk to him later.

Keith broke away from the others and strode over to Shiro and draped an arm over his brother's shoulder. "It is good to have you back. You walking and talking granola bar."

Shiro's eyes grew. "K-Keith, what are you talking about?"

"I haven't forgotten Adam calling you Kashi while sleeping off the sedative. And since there's a brand of a granola bar—"

Lance burst out laughing as he pointed at Adam. "Y-You didn't!"

Adam sighed. "I was asleep and thought I was dreaming!" He turned his gaze toward Shiro. "I'm sorry about that. But in my defense, it was Coran's fault for giving me the sedative in the first place."

Coran opened his mouth, but Shiro held up his hand as he chuckled. "It's okay, everyone."

Hunk sat at his station. "Okay, we're gaining on it."

Shiro stood next to his old spot on the bridge. "Make sure we stay back far enough to be undetected."
Pidge studied her holographic screen. "Looks like the signal stopped in the Ulippa System. Activating long-range scanners."

Thace nodded. "There's a Galra base there on an ice planet."

Pidge brought up images of the base bringing a ship into focus on the main screen. The ship they saw was a Galra cruiser.

Keith leaned forward and then stood up. "That's not Lotor's ship."

Hunk gazed at his holographic screen. "But, the comet is in there."

Shiro and Keith turned to face the others, and both began speaking at once. Keith stopped and gazed at his brother. "Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead, Shiro."

"We need to get that comet. They must be transporting it into that base. It'll be vulnerable during the transfer. That's the best time to strike."

Several jaws dropped when the cruiser opened fire on the base.

Lance cocked his head slightly. "Who the heck are these guys?"

Shiro frowned as he sat down in his old seat. "I don't think they're moving the comet to that base. We need more information."

Keith nodded as he placed his hand on Shiro's shoulder. "You're right. You take the Black Lion. I'll stay with Coran, Thace, and Adam in the Castle and provide support."

"Keith, are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

Adam didn't smile, but the former Red Paladin had grown while Shiro was gone. Keith was growing up.

Shiro's voice came over the speaker on the bridge. "Keith, I'm gonna need you to lead this mission."

"What? What is it? What's wrong?"

"The Black Lion isn't responding to me. It looks like you're its true paladin now."

Keith's shoulders hunched as he lowered his head. "I'm coming down."

Shiro stood on the bridge next to Coran. He still wore the Black Paladin armor. Though Adam liked to see him in that armor, but also behind the controls of the Black Lion, this seemed awkward.
Everyone on the bridge gazed at the dots that were the Paladins speeders as they raced through a canyon that gave them cover from the ship. Shiro spoke to them. "The most important thing is for you to get eyes on that comet. Second is figuring out who we're dealing with."

Keith's voice came over the speakers. "Shiro, we've just boarded the ship. There's no crew in sight. Moving forward with the search."

The roof opened on the Galra base. Shiro stared at the screen. "Coran, give me a closeup look at that." The image on the screen cleared up. "Is that—"

Coran's eyes grew. "The Teludav! What in the name of King Grogbery the Infirm is going on?"

Shiro frowned. "Get in touch with the Paladins." He was rewarded with Pidge's face on the screen. "Guys. There a piece of the Teludav inside the Galra base."

Lance shoved his face in Pidge's way. "The one we used to wormhole Zarkon's ship?"

Allura's voice came over the speaker. "But they would never be able to operate it without an Altean—" she gasped. "Zarkon's witch! She had Altean markings."

Hunk asked, "Is anyone else freaking out?"

Adam didn't say it, but internally he was freaking out as he remembered the face of the witch.

Lance replied to Hunk, "Yep, Mark me down for one freak out."

Keith's voice was next. "Lotor must be nearby. We need to find him and take him out for good."

Shiro placed his hands on his hips. "Team, you cannot let Lotor get that ship. You need to get back to your lions. You need Voltron."

Keith's face appeared on the screen. "Why take out one ship when we can stop all of this by taking out Lotor himself. We can't let him keep outsmarting us."

Adam shook his head. And I thought he was growing up. He still has that one-track mind.

Shiro dropped his hands off his hips. "That's exactly why we can't risk letting Lotor have that ship. This is too important."

Allura sounded like she was trying to be the voice of reason. "Keith, I want to stop Lotor as badly as you, but Shiro has a point."

"Okay, you guys go back to the lions. I'm gonna search the ship for Lotor."

Shiro shook his head. "Keith, you need to stick together."

Lance spoke up. "Yeah, I'm with Shiro on this one."

The others agreed.

Keith didn't sound happy being overruled. "Fine. Let's move."
Shiro stared at the screen as the enemy ship locked onto the lone piece of the Teludav with a tractor beam. "We have to stop that ship."

Coran nodded as his fingers flew over his controls. "On it." Before he could get the Castle closer, a smaller ship flew out of the cruiser. "That must be the ship made from the comet."

Shiro stared at the screen. "Then let's be careful. Raise particle barrier. Fire the Castle defenses."

The ship dodged the beams from the Castle. Coran gazed at it. "A quick little bugger, isn't it?"

Shiro replied, "I've never seen anything like that size move that fast."

It evaded every blast from the Castle. It spun around and fired several beams testing out the Altean ship's defenses. A second blast came from the comet ship and struck the particle barrier. The Castle rocked as part of the barrier was destroyed.

Shiro threw his arms out to keep his balance.

Coran stared at the screen. "That blast tore right through the particle barrier."

Adam rolled his eyes, but he wondered where Voltron was.

Shiro stood up straight. "Team, where are you?"

Coran grunted as the particle barrier took another direct hit. "We can't take another hit like that!"

The comet ship powered up its primary weapon again, but a blast from elsewhere in space cause it to fly away. Voltron appeared where the comet ship had been before.

It raced toward the Castle of Lions. Voltron gave chase.

Keith growled. "It's too quick."

Shiro replied. "Guys, the cruiser is escaping with the Teludav!"

Keith grunted. "I thought taking down the comet ship was the most important thing."

"We still can't let Lotor get away with the Teludav."

Allura jumped in. "Shiro's right. We need to destroy it."

Keith let his frustration get the best of him. "But the comet is right here! We need to take it down!"

Shiro called out, trying to get the former Red Paladin's attention. "Keith, the cruiser is getting away!"

Voltron was pinned down by the comet ship. Shiro spoke again. "You're going to have to lower your shield, shoot the cruiser, and deal with the consequences."

Keith again argued. "We can beat this ship first and then get the cruiser."

Shiro shook his head. "There's not enough time! You need to make a decision!"
Keith growled. "Hunk, get your bayard ready. On my cue, we're gonna lower the shield and shoot the cruiser. Ready?"

All the paladins answered him. "Ready!"

"Go!"

As the comet ship fired, Voltron moved back and let the blast from the comet ship strike the Teludav destroying it. The comet ship fired again, striking Voltron.

The paladins wanted to go after the comet ship, but Shiro overruled them. "No, get back to the Castle. Something strange is going on, and we need to figure it out."

Shiro headed for the door to walk off the bridge when Adam joined him. The pair entered the elevator. "You were pretty hard on Keith."

Shiro nodded, "I know, but he needs to learn that being the leader of Voltron isn't easy."

Adam cocked his head, and his eyes narrowed. "Are you sure that's it or that the Black Lion didn't respond to you?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the fact that you aren't the Black Paladin anymore, and Keith is."

Shiro sighed. "That has nothing to do with it at all, Adam. He needs to learn that there's more to being the leader than just flying the lion. He's got the welfare of all the other paladins under him, and he needs to learn that."

"Takashi, you can't push so hard with Keith. You don't know what he went through while you were gone, how he searched for you every day, and nearly worked himself to death trying to find you. It's time for you to talk to him and explain it to him because I'm sure he's completely confused."

Shiro nodded. "Your right again. But let me get out of this armor, okay."

"Sure, and I'm going with you to make sure you do a good job with it."

Shiro walked up to Keith, who stood gazing out the window of the Observation deck. He placed his prosthetic hand on the new Black Paladin's shoulder. "I'm sorry I had to step in back there."

Keith left his arms crossed over his chest as he gazed down at nothing in particular. "I thought I had it under control."

"You need to learn to pick your battles. Sometimes you have to make hard choices."

Keith didn't look at Shiro. "I'm not good at this."

"Yes, you are," Keith raised his head to gaze at Shiro as he continued to speak. "It was your quick thinking that prevented Lotor from getting away with the Teludav. You're gonna get there." Shiro smiled. "The Black Lion has chosen you. I'm proud of you, Keith."

Adam smiled at the pair as they embraced. It was a good sign that things were going to get better.
The Beginning of Voltron

Chapter Summary

Coran tells the Paladins the history of Voltron so they can figure out Lotor's Plans, and Keith comes to a decision.

Pidge brought up the star map that circled everyone on the bridge of the Castle of Lions. She pressed different locations on the map. "He fought us here, his generals were here, and he stole the comet here."

Lance shook his head. "So, Lotor could be anywhere."

Shiro crossed his arms over his chest. "We'll never be able to find him unless we can figure out his plan. We're missing the big picture."

Pidge gazed at the location where they fought Lotor and his generals. "How about this question? Why was Voltron made out of the same material as that comet? What's so special about it?"

Allura lowered her head. "My father discovered another comet before I was born."

Coran gazed at her. Adam could see he was struggling to tell her the truth. He stepped up beside the Altean. "Maybe it's time to tell everyone the truth."

The former royal Advisor sighed. "Yes, it is." He turned to her. "Your father and Zarkon."

Hunk frowned. "This is back when Zarkon was the Black Lion's paladin?"

Coran turned his gaze to the Yellow Paladin. "Before that. Before Alfor built the lions."

Shiro gazed at the Altean. "I know this is painful, but if we're going to stop Lotor, it's time we heard the rest of the story."

Coran swallowed hard, and Adam put his hand on his shoulder and squeezed it. The Altean was a rock when he needed the support, so it was his turn to pay him back for his kindness and understanding.

Coran began the story. He started talking about the five leaders who banded together as a team to rid their system of enemies. He smiled as he gazed at Keith. "Alfor was reckless. Like a certain paladin, I know."

Lance jabbed Keith in the side with his elbow.

Keith glared at the Blue Paladin. "Why don't you listen for once instead of trying to play one up on me."

Coran smiled at the pair. "But I digress. The original Paladins were Zarkon from Planet Daibazaal, King Alfor of Altea, Gyrgan from Rygnlrath, Trigel of the Dalterion Belt, and Blytz from Nalquod. That night a comet crashed on Daibazaal. They could have never known that the fate of the universe would be changed forever."
"Zarkon evacuated his people from the crater. Alfor studied the comet, but he found that the comet could travel through other realities. He also brought with him Altea's top Alchemist, Honerva.

"King Alfor had the comet transported to Altea where he experimented on the ore in his lab, as Honerva continued her research of the rift on Daibazaal. But Alfor often visited as the years passed. Zarkon even married Honerva. However, as time passed, Honerva began experiments which called forth a creature from the rift. It called forth others of its kind.

"King Alfor and Honerva erected a particle barrier around the crater containing the creatures. But it wouldn't hold forever.

"Alfor took Zarkon and the others down to his lab where he introduced to them the lions he'd created. But one thing he made clear was they didn't choose the lion. The lion chose its pilot.

"The creatures broke through the particle barrier on Daibazaal. But the newly formed paladins learned that the lions could form Voltron, and they defeated the creatures.

"Zarkon and Honerva fought against the voice of reason and decided to continue working with the energy from the rift. Honerva continued her experiments.

"Despite their differences, Zarkon and Alfor, along with the other paladins, established a new era of peace and prosperity. It was an age of exploration, and Voltron became known as the Defender of the Universe, establishing the legend that would live on to this day.

"When Alfor went to visit Zarkon and Honerva, a frightening realization was revealed. He found they had discovered that quintessence could extend life. However, Honerva was changing. No longer the vibrant beauty Alfor had once known. She was turning into something almost grotesque. The exposure to that much quintessence had poisoned both Honerva and Zarkon's minds. When Zarkon began talking about living forever and ruling the universe, Alfor left. He was sickened by what came from Zarkon's mouth.

"Zarkon came to Altea. Honerva had fallen extremely ill, and Daibazaal was on the verge of destruction. He pleaded for help from Alfor and the other Paladins. He proposed they use Voltron to close the rift.

"Alfor's compassion for his old comrade blinded him to Zarkon's real plans. They made the rift big enough for Voltron to enter. Zarkon left the safety of Voltron and carried Honerva into the quintessence. The creatures of the rift returned surrounding Zarkon and Honerva. The Paladins rescued their friends and left the rift.

"Zarkon's attempt to save Honerva was in vain. They both succumbed to overexposure of quintessence. Zarkon deceived the paladins. They had unwittingly enlarged the rift, which further destabilized Daibazaal.

"King Alfor was forced to evacuate the planet. He closed the rift the only way he knew how, by destroying the Galran homeworld.

"King Alfor held a state funeral for Zarkon and Honerva in his royal hall. But what happened next, he never guessed. Zarkon rose from his deathbed.

"Zarkon had become pure evil, obsessed only with quintessence. To open a new rift between the realities, he needed Voltron. And so the war began. The Galra immediately responded to their leader and attacked. The peaceful planets of our system were not prepared. Soon they had all fallen, except for Altea. In a final attempt to keep Voltron from Zarkon's hands, the lions were sent to the
far corners of the universe. Zarkon flew into a rage. He killed King Alfor then avenged the loss of Daibazaal with the destruction of Altea."

Pidge gazed at Coran, "So that's Lotor's plan. To cross into other universes and get the purest quintessence possible."

Keith nodded, "No matter what, we have to stop him."

Thace nodded, but he turned to Allura. "However, that isn't the entire story. When Zarkon called for the Galra to attack, some of us had families on those peaceful planets. Zarkon called half-breed Galra a disease and ordered those who had married outside of our races to be destroyed. Some who were captured were put into the arena for Zarkon's amusement.

"Other Galra were appalled by this barbarity. Kolivan was one of those. He began to gain like minds, especially from the half-breeds, and we formed The Blade of Marmora.

"My sister was a Blade, but she was captured by Zarkon and tortured by his witch to find out where this new resistance movement was. But my sister was strong, and she took the information to her grave no matter what that witch did to her. I was young when Kolivan appeared and handed me her blade. I swore that I wouldn't let the blades down be just as strong as she was."

He gazed at Allura. "I see that same fire that she had in you, Princess. You would have done anything to have saved your people."

Allura nodded. "I did. I tried to convince my father that we should fight, but instead, he put me to sleep inside a cryopod."

Thace knelt in front of her. "Princess Allura, I pledge myself to your cause. You have stopped Zarkon. I will remain by your side during this fight against Lotor. Let me do this for my sister."

Allura gaped at him, unable to think of anything to say because he took her off guard.

She glanced around as if silently asking for help.

Adam nodded and flashed her a thumbs up. Then he mouthed at her, 'You got this.'

She drew in a breath. "Thank you, Thace. I do this to honor your sister's sacrifice, and you have proved yourself to be a Galra who appreciates others and not just quintessence. Rise General Thace."

Lance gazed at Thace. "Good job."

Keith's gaze dropped to the deck as he frowned. "But what about Shiro?"

Allura sucked in a breath as if she'd known this question would come. "Shiro is still an invaluable member of this team. He proved that with the Teludav. So, don't worry about that. Remember, we are also getting together allies to fight the Galra, and we will need a General to lead them. I believe Thace is a good choice. While each group will have their commanders, they still need an overall leader, and Thace is my choice for that."

Hunk nodded, and Pidge smiled. "I can see that," the Green Paladin replied.

Shiro nodded. "I don't mind stepping away from the battlefield and coordinating the rebels transports. It may not mean leading Voltron anymore, but it is useful."
Coran piped up. "It certainly is, and you will be a big help. Because while Voltron is away on missions, I can keep the Castle running in tip-top shape."

Keith glanced up at the others but didn't say anything as he stomped off the bridge.

Lance gazed after him. "What's up with him?"

Adam shook his head. "I don't know, but I guess he'll eventually tell us when he's ready."

Adam sat in the lounge as Thace walked in. "Why are you here by yourself?"

"I needed some time to think about some things." Adam leaned forward and placed his elbows on his knees as he steepled his hands together in front of him. "I wonder where I fit in here. I know, at times, Lance feels like a fifth wheel or even seventh wheel, but he's more important to this effort than I am. Seeing how things have gone, I wonder if I'm needed here."

Thace took a seat next to him. "I can't speak for everyone here. You are needed. Your medical knowledge is needed."

The laugh that came from Adam held no humor behind it. "No, I have only rudimentary knowledge. The medical scanner does the diagnosis for me."

"But that's good. You at least have the mental capacity to follow it."

"I suppose your right."

Thace nodded. "I am right. And there's another reason we need you. It seems only you can keep Lance in line at times."

Adam chuckled. "He's family. He's my cousin's youngest son."

Conversation stopped as the door slid open. Keith stood there, but he seemed to debate whether he was going to step in or not, but he took the steps inside. He gazed at the human and the Galra. "What's going on?"

Thace glanced at Adam, who gave him a minimal shake of the head. So the human didn't want Keith knowing what was going on in his head. He'd keep the man's secret, for the moment. "You look troubled."

Keith let out a sigh and moved to sit down on one of the other couches on the other side of the small semi-circle. "Yeah, you could say that." He pulled his knife out from its sheath that hung on the backside of his belt. "You said I was a fellow Blade when we first met. How do I get into the Blade of Marmora?"

Adam's eyes grew as he gasped. "Keith, but what about Voltron. You are the Black Paladin."

Keith frowned. "I know, but Shiro should be the head of Voltron, not me. And if I leave something will come up and he'll have to become the Black Paladin again. Also, the team will be in better hands than mine."

Adam ran a hand through his hair. "Keith, you're still learning to be a leader."
"I think I can learn better if I also learn from the Blade of Marmora. Can you understand where I'm coming from?"

Adam nodded. "I can, but what am I supposed to tell the others?"

Keith shook his head. "Nothing, this is my decision."

Thace gazed between Keith and Adam. He frowned. "You became the Black Paladin recently. You do have the bravery and skill but not the wisdom of a leader or, for that matter, a member of the Blade."

Keith growled. "I wish people would stop telling me that! It wasn't my decision to be chosen by the Black Lion. It happened, and it still makes me unhappy. I need to find out who I am, and I would kind of like to find out who my mother was or if she's still alive, then who she is."

"Okay. I will contact Kolivan and see what he says. He may agree, but he also might not. Until we find out what Kolivan says this is our secret. Agreed?"

Adam sighed. "Agreed."

Keith nodded.
Questionable Actions

Chapter Summary

Adam is stressed over Shiro, not precisely acting as he had in the past and stressing over how Shiro and Keith are bumping hands.

Shiro crossed his arms over his chest as Keith stepped on the bridge. He studied a holographic display of ships with the lions matched up with a ship. He barely spared a glance at the new Black Paladin. "Keith, good, you're back. The team's on a mission. You need to get to your lion and join them immediately."

Keith gazed at Shiro. "I will, but I think we discovered a new form of quintessence. The readings are off the charts. Kolivan says it could be linked to Lotor."

"Okay, we'll discuss it when you return. The team's escorting refugees out of the Fimm System."

Keith wasn't about to back down. How could Shiro not see how important this was? "This is Lotor I'm talking about? He hasn't been seen in months. This might be our chance to track him down."

Shiro's eyes narrowed slightly. His voice was firm. "I said, we'll discuss it later. Right now, I need you to focus on the mission at hand."

"But—"

Shiro turned to face the teen. "This isn't a request, Keith. Get to the Fimm System. That's an order."

Keith stormed off the bridge.

Adam was a silent witness to what happened. He turned in his seat as he removed the earpiece with a connected microphone from his ear. "Takashi, you were hard on him."

Shiro sighed. "I know, but when he's here, he's the leader of Voltron." He shook his head. "I just don't understand why he decided to also join the Blade of Marmora."

Adam sighed. He couldn't tell Shiro what was going on in Keith's head. He put the mic back into place and turned back in his seat as he monitored the Paladins transmissions. He frowned when Keith joined him because Pidge and Lance had vented their frustrations on Keith. He mentally decided he had two more victims for extra training.

Keith stood next to Shiro in front of the Black Lion on Olkarion. "Were you able to speak with Kolivan about the intel?"

"I did, and we need to find out all we can about that quintessence." Shiro turned to face Keith. "But more importantly. Voltron needs a strong leader."
Adam, who stood close to them, rolled his eyes. How many times was Takashi going to sing that tune?

Keith sighed as he turned to face Shiro. "I know they do, and it should be you."

Shiro frowned. "Keith, we've discussed this before."

Adam released his sigh. Shiro turned and raised an eyebrow in his direction. Adam shook his head and stuck his hands in his pockets.

Shiro shrugged and turned back to Keith. "We both know the Black Lion chose you."

"You only tried once. You had a connection with the Black Lion, and I know it's still there. If you just give it another shot."

Shiro shook his head. "Keith, we all have a part to play. This is mine now. I've come to terms with that. Now, you need to. I support your decision to continue with your Marmora training, but not at the expense of the team. They need you, Keith. They need you to be their leader."

Adam's shoulders tensed. He was tired of all of it. "You're full of shit, Takashi, and you know it!"

Shiro jerked back as if slapped. "What?"

"The Takashi Shirogane I know would never turn his back on a chance to fly."

Shiro shook his head. "People change, Adam."

Adam shook his head and jabbed his index finger in the air toward Shiro. "You don't get it, do you? When you figure it out, let me know." The Cuban dropped his hand, turned, and stormed away.

Keith blinked a few times as Adam disappeared from view. "Wow, I didn't know he felt so strongly about that."

Shiro glanced back at Keith. "Me neither."

Coran faced the assembled team. "Okay, everybody. Today, we'll be heading to Reiphod. A planet recently liberated from Galra forces."

Keith gazed at the Altean. "This is embarrassing. We're basically the grand marshal of a parade."

Coran shook his head and raised his fist in the air while flexing his muscles. "Not a parade. A show of arms!"

Pidge gazed at Shiro, who stepped up. "Whatever it is, this is the second one of these we've done this week."

Allura gazed at the others. "I know it's not exactly battling the Galra, but believe it or not, this helps us boost morale and strengthen alliances."

Lance waved her off. "Right, right, strongholds, blah-dy, blah-dy, blah."
Adam grit his teeth. Between Shiro and now Lance showing how much of a smartass he could be, he was getting sick of it. He raised his hand and swung, but the Red Paladin ducked.

Lance turned and smirked at Adam. "Haha. Your too slow."

When Lance started to turn his attention back to the others, Adam's hand snaked out and caught him on the back of the head. He shot his younger cousin a smirk. "You were saying."

Lance bowed to Adam. "Well, played."

Both Pidge and Hunk chuckled at the pair.

Lance placed his hands on his hips and glared at Pidge and Hunk. He leaned forward. "Now I say we go over our lion choreography one more time. I don't want a repeat of what happened last time," he turned his head toward the Yellow Paladin, "Hunk."

Hunk frowned, "I thought my lion had more room."

Before anyone could say anything else, a new voice entered the conversation. "Shiro, my apologies for interrupting, but this is an urgent matter." Everyone looked at the main screen to see Kolivan's face. But it was replaced by data being transmitted to the Castle. "A Galra supply ship has been spotted passing through Quadrant Omega-Raylar-Six."

Shiro frowned. "What's it doing so far from the normal supply route?"

"We can't be certain but taken together with the fact that Lotor hasn't been seen in some time and the emergence of this new form of quintessence, we feel compelled to investigate. Normally, we would wait for better intel, but I believe we should act on this now." Kolivan's face reappeared on the screen.

"I'll send Voltron to intercept."

"An infiltration mission makes more sense. We can plant a tracker and see just how far the supply route extends. With all the Galra activity as of late, my agents are spread thin."

Keith spoke up. "Not anymore. Count me in."

Lance turned on the Black Paladin. "Hey, what about our performance? We can't razzle-dazzle the crowd with four lions."

Keith turned on the Red Paladin. "This mission is more important than a show of arms. Shiro?"

Shiro turned back to the screen. "How long will it take?"

"Not long, but we must act fast, or we risk the ship jumping to hyperspace."

Shiro turned back to Keith. "Go. But when you're done, meet us on Riphod."

Adam gave Shiro his nod of approval.

Shiro pointed at Lance to stop him from mouthing off. He turned to Adam. "Monitor their comms during the performance."

Adam stared at Lance. "Don't worry. I will. I have some new drills in mind."

Lance swallowed, hard.
Coran's voice came over the PA System. "Citizens of Reiphod, on this day, we honor you for your perseverance. Your refusal to bow down in the face of such adversity is a testament to the fighting spirit of your people. You've put aside your differences and united in dispelling the oppressive Galra regime, bringing freedom to all!

"We thank you for joining the coalition and continuing the fight against the Galra that began with the reemergence of the five Lions of Voltron." Coran raised his arm in the air.

The four lions flew over the crowd, trailing colored smoke behind them. They started an acrobatic display.

Adam stood backstage and frowned as the Red Paladin complained. "I thought Keith said he was gonna be here. He's going to ruin our show!"

Adam opened his mouth, but Allura spoke up. "Lance, this isn't about putting on a good show. It's about uniting people and bringing them to the coalition to help the fight against the Galra."

Lance sighed. "Fine. I don't know why I try."

Adam decided to let the Red Paladin slide.

As Coran continued his spiel, Adam frowned as his earpiece beeped, signaling another communication coming in. He placed his hand up to the earpiece listening, and his eyes grew. His body slid down the wall until he was sitting on the floor. "Are you certain, Thace? What went wrong with the mission?"

"According to Kolivan and Keith, it was a trap. They'll meet us back on Olkarion."

Adam sighed. "At least they're okay."

"Barely. Regris was killed in the blast. Keith's communicator broke, and he had a tear in his suit. He came close to dying himself."

Adam placed his hand over his eyes as he wiped at the moisture that formed. He took a breath to steady his breathing. "Okay, I'll relay the news to the others." He ended communications with Thace, but the more he thought about what could have happened, the more his hands shook as he placed his arms across his knees.

When would things settle down like before? He ran a hand through his hair as his breathing increasing. No, he couldn't lose another of his family. Spots danced before Adam's eyes and his chest hurt. He didn't hear the boot heels striking the floor until he blinked to see both Coran and Shiro kneeling in front of him.

Shiro placed his hands-on Adam's face. His human hand caressed Adam's cheek. "What's wrong?"

Coran pulled out his scanner and ran it over the younger man. "Something's wrong. He needs something to calm him down."
"Is it Keith? Did something happen on the mission?"

Adam couldn't get his mouth to work.

Shiro pulled the mic out of Adam's ear and turned it on. "Lance get the Red Lion down here, NOW!"

"Wha—"

"Don't ask questions. I need you to get Coran and Adam to the Castle immediately."

Lance replied, "I'll be there in a tick."

Coran pressed a button on the wall lowering a bed. He turned to Lance. "Get your cousin to sit there. I'll just be a minute. I'm giving him a dose of the sedative, but I'll reduce the dosage so it will relax him."

Coran raced to the other side of the and prepared the shot. He moved back over to Adam and pressed the injection against the side of Adam's neck. As it hissed into his vein, Adam reached up and grabbed Coran's arm. His breathing started to slow. "This isn't going to make me drunk, like last time?"

"No, it won't. Well, I hope it won't."

Adam rolled his eyes as he leaned forward. "I have something to tell the others, and then we need to get back to Olkarion."

Shiro and the other paladins joined Lance, Adam, and Coran in the infirmary.

Adam stood up from the bed. "While you all were doing your show, but towards the end, I received a message from Thace on Olkarion. That Galra ship they went to investigate was a trap, and Regris sprung it when he went to check the ship's logs. Kolivan and Keith barely got out in time before the ship blew up."

Everyone gasped as they heard the news.

"But that isn't all. Keith nearly died too. He had to make his way through debris from the explosion with a tear in his suit." He raised his eyes to meet Lance's gaze. "That's why he didn't meet us on Reiphod."

Lance turned his gaze to the floor as he fidgeted. "I didn't know."

Adam shook his head. "That's the problem. You never do know."
Shiro, along with Allura and Adam, strode through the spaceport on Olkarion to the Blades staging area. They found Thace observing the training of some recruits. Shiro stepped up to the Galra. "They're looking pretty good."

Thace crossed his arms over his chest as he chuckled. "I know they're still rough around the edges. But they are getting better than the first day they arrived here." Thace glanced over at the two humans and Altean. "I know you're not here to check out the recruits. I'm guessing you're looking for Keith."

Shiro nodded. "Yeah, we are."

Thace pointed with a clawed finger toward a building nearby. "He's in the infirmary."

Allura gasped. "Infirmary? Is he injured?"

Thace nodded as he rubbed his hand against the side of his nose. "I should let him tell you what happened. And I should mention this too. He's hurting and doesn't want anyone to know it. Regris wasn't just another Blade to Keith. He was also a friend. So, please don't lecture him." He turned his gaze on Allura.

Allura's cheeks flushed. "Am I that predictable?"

Thace nodded. "When it comes to the Paladins, yes."

Shiro chuckled. "Yes, she does at that."

Allura groaned. "Not you too. I know you do the same."

"Only when warranted."

Thace chuckled again. "I will return to the Castle of Lions soon. I think I've finally found the person I need to take my place here."

Adam nodded. "I guess we should go see Keith."

The trio crossed over to the infirmary and stepped inside, seeing Keith sitting on a bed with his Blade of Marmora suit pulled down to his waist. A Blade medic held up a strip of what looked like tape, but he snapped it, and it seemed to glow. He placed it on Keith's side over the ribs. "This will heal in a few dobashes. Your lucky you only got away with a couple of cracked ribs and some bruises."

Keith nodded, "Thanks." Movement out of his peripheral vision caught his attention. He turned his head to gaze at the three people who meant a lot to him. He schooled his face, not to show any emotions. "Hey, guys."

Shiro gazed at him and then turned his attention to the Galra medic. "Is he okay?"

The medic nodded. "Yeah, he is."

Adam gazed at the teen. "I know how important that mission was to you, but I swear if you give me another scare like that again, I might kill you myself."

Keith glanced over at Shiro. "What's his problem?"

"Coran gave him another sedative."
"Did it make him drunk again?"

Shiro shook his head. "Not this time."

Adam frowned as he crossed his arms over his chest. "You two do know that I'm right here."

Allura frowned at the paladin and former paladin. She turned her attention back to Keith. "What happened out there?"

Keith sighed. "We entered the ship, thinking it might have been a ship full of sentries, but it wasn't manned by anyone. Regris went to check the ship's computer logs to see where it had been, but that started the timer. I tried to get to Regris to get him out, but Kolivan grabbed me, and he ran, and the ship blew. That's all I can say about it. I remember waking up maybe a minute or two after the explosion, but I couldn't raise anyone because my communicator was broken. I started making my way through the debris and saw the ship we arrived in and had to cross through the debris field to get to the ship. That's when I realized my suit was torn and had to race through the wreckage to get there before all the oxygen from the suit escaped." Keith sighed. "Kolivan even violated one of his own rules and stuck around waiting to see if I'd return. I have no idea why."

Allura stomped her foot on the floor. "It's a good thing he did." She opened up her mouth as though she were going to say more, but she closed it again. "I think I should have some words with Kolivan."

Keith's eyes grew wide. "You're not going to stop me from continuing with the Blades, are you?"

Allura shook her head. "No, that's up to Shiro." She spun on her heel and stormed away.

Adam glanced at Shiro and Keith. "I think I'd better go with her. Make sure she doesn't piss off Kolivan, much."

Allura and Adam walked around until they heard Kolivan's voice coming from another building. He stood in front of a holographic screen where some of the Blades attended but also some of the more experienced groups of the rebel forces.

Allura glanced around. "Well, this is an actual step in the right direction."

Adam glanced at her from the corner of his eyes. "But we can't stop how the Blades conduct their own business."

"No, but I can make sure something like that doesn't happen again."

Kolivan sent his teams off on a mission. His eyes rose, catching sight of Allura and Adam. "Princess, it's good to see you again. In-person this time."

Allura didn't beat around the bush. "Kolivan, I know there are reasons for you and your Blades to conduct your missions the way you do. But I've found it's better to work as a group, not in two- or three-person teams."

Kolivan gazed at her. "I suppose in some ways, Keith has been showing me that some of my tactics were flawed."
Adam gazed at Kolivan though he tried his best not to look directly into those unnerving yellow eyes. "Yeah, he can show you some new ways of doing things."

Kolivan held up his clawed index finger. "However, Keith will be a better leader of Voltron only when he learns some discipline."

Allura nodded toward him. "That I agree with you on. He's a bit headstrong at times."

An alert rang out over the ship. Adam stood next to Shiro, and the paladins as Allura raced over to them. Coran leaned over his console. Allura stopped near the older Altean. "What's going on?"

"We're receiving a distress signal. Galra cruisers have ambushed one of our convoys."

Shiro frowned. "Our medical supply ships. We can't allow the Galra to get them."

Allura gazed at Shiro. "We must leave immediately. Voltron can keep those cruisers occupied long enough for the supply ships to make their escape."

Pidge turned and gazed up at Allura. "Voltron can't. Keith isn't here."

Shiro gazed down as if trying to remember something Keith may have said to him yesterday. "They're probably on a mission. I knew this would happen sooner or later. You'll have to go without Keith. The convoy needs you immediately. I'll send him to help as soon as I find him."

Adam ran to his station to monitor the paladin's transmissions as they ran for their places to get to their lions.

Adam raised his eyes to gaze at the main screen. He transferred what he was seeing and hearing to it as Hunk spoke up. "Someone must've called for backup!"

Lance called out. "They're everywhere!"

Pidge's voice sounded slightly panicked. "There are more fighters than we've ever seen!"

Lance called out. "Allura, I need your help. I got two on my tail!"

Allura replied, "I'm sorry, I can't get to you. They're all over me!"

Shiro turned and walked away.

Coran turned to gaze after him. "What are you doing?"

"Whatever I can."

Adam stood up as the loudest roar he'd ever heard came from inside the Castle. He gazed at the screen as a new black dot appeared on the screen. He flopped down into his seat. "Takashi did it. He did it."
Coran reached out to open communications with the other paladins.

"Don't," Adam called out. "Let's let this be a pleasant surprise for them. They deserve it."

Coran frowned as he turned back to Adam. "This just seems a bit mean."

Adam shrugged. "Maybe, but you know I think they'd be happy to know that Shiro is back as their leader."

Hunk's voice came over the speakers on the bridge. "There's no way we can beat all these fighters with four lions!"

Shiro's voice came over the comms. "You don't have to!"

A chorus of "Shiro's" came over the speaker, followed by Hunk's happy sounding, "No way!"

Shiro's voice came over the Castle's speaker. "Converge on me. It's time to form Voltron!"

Those words were literal music to Adam's ears. Voltron made quick work of the Galra ships and escorted the convoy to Olkarion.

Keith entered the bridge of the Castle. "Guys, I—" he gazed at the faces of the others. Most were not happy. Most seemed to be angry. He looked away. "I heard what happened. I'm sorry I wasn't there to help."

Allura was the first to reply. "You keep saying you're sorry, but your actions say otherwise. Do you realize that your absence put the team in jeopardy?"

Lance joined in. "And not just the team, the refugees as well."

Pidge crossed her arms over her body. "Matter of fact, the entire quadrant was in danger."

Keith frowned as his eyes focused on Pidge's general direction. "This isn't the way I wanted this to happen, but if there's a bright side to any of this, it's that my absence allowed Shiro to reestablish his bond with the Black Lion. He can finally be the leader I was unable to be. I'm not meant to pilot the Black Lion."

Allura's eyes widened. "Is that why you've been pulling away from us."

Keith gazed down at the ground. "Yeah. That's part of it."

Hunk crossed his arms over his chest. "What's the other part?"

"The Blade has made headway tracking this new source of quintessence. They've pieced together a large network of hidden supply lines that have been secretly transporting it for who knows how long. And there's good reason to believe it could lead us to Lotor. A mission is being planned to infiltrate the supply line. It could take weeks maybe months to pull off, but if there's a chance I have to take it. I need to be on that mission."

He paused long enough to take a breath. "Shiro, you are the rightful leader of this team. And you proved it today by reconnecting with the Black Lion. It was always meant to be yours."
Shiro walked forward and placed his hand on the younger man's shoulder. "Keith, if this what you feel is right, then we won't try to stop you. But know that we're here for you whenever you need us."

Keith smiled at Shiro. "I know you are. And I can't tell you how much that means to me." Shiro pulled Keith into a hug.

Coran wiped at his eye while Hunk had tears flowing freely down his cheeks. "I can't be left out of this."

Everyone, including Adam, joined in on the giant group hug.

Pidge sniffed as she gazed up at Keith. "We're gonna miss you."

Lance grinned. "Yeah, and who am I gonna make fun of?"

Allura smiled at Keith. "I know you'll make us proud."

Adam smirked at the younger man. "Try to stay out of the way of explosions, okay?"

Keith grinned back. "I'll try."

The group hug ended, and Keith walked toward the exit. He turned back and took one last look at his friends before he left the bridge.
Pidge brings Matt back with her to Olkarion. A discovery is made, and Lance gets himself in a situation with Adam.

Adam glared at the screen. "Pidge, you could have told me what you were up to. I would have gone with you."

Shiro stepped up next to him. "Pidge, I don't like the idea of you going alone. You sure you don't need backup?"

Pidge nodded. "I'm sure. The intel that the shopkeeper gave me leads me to believe that they could pull out of their location at any time. I need to act fast. This may be my only chance. Plus, you guys still have plenty to do on Olkarion."

Shiro sighed but nodded. "You're right. Good luck."

Hunk took a moment to speak up. "Hey, while you're out, will you look for some more fluuto beans?"

Lance shook his head almost violently. "No, no, no! No more beans for Hunk!"

Hunk gasped. "Hey! I happen to like those beans, Lance."

Lance turned to the Yellow Paladin. "Well, yeah, we all know how much you like them. But we also know how much they don't like you."

Hunk frowned and crossed his arms over his chest.

Pidge smirked at the two teens. "Gotta go."

The Castle of Lions landed at the Olkarion spaceport. The transport pod lowered from the Castle to the surface, and the doors opened. Several huge aliens stood inside. Coran squeezed his way through and popped out of the pod like a cork from a champagne bottle. Only instead of flying, he fell to the tarmac. The aliens rushed out, and the Altean became a red carpet as they ran over him.

Coran stood, "Go right in there. They'll get you sorted out."

Allura gazed at Coran. "Is that the last of them?"

"That's it. A few hundred more souls looking for a new home."

Shiro smiled. "A few hundred more soldiers in the fight against the Galra."

Adam strode over to Coran and pulled his scanner out of his pocket.
The older Altean waved him off. "I'm perfectly fine. Don't worry yourself over old Coran."

Adam shrugged his shoulders as he slipped the scanner back into his pocket. "If you say so."

A roar of a lion came from overhead as the Green Lion flew over. Hunk grinned as he pointed. "Hey, everybody. Pidge is back!" Hunk and Lance took off, running toward the lion as it landed.

Adam shoved his hands in his pockets as he gazed at the smallest of the lions. "I hope she found Matt." He paused as his eyes lost focus. "Do you remember back at the Garrison how Matt and Keith fought like cats and dogs at times?"

Shiro chuckled. "How can I forget. Those two had a lot of hero worship going on."

Adam shook his head. "Not on Keith's part. He had this idea that he was losing you to Matt."

"What are you talking about?"

Adam shook his head. "You know, for a brilliant leader of Voltron, sometimes you can be as dense as a doorknob." He pointed toward the lion. "We should go to meet her."

The Green Lion hunched down and lowered its ramp. Pidge stepped down and knelt to pet the mice who joined in on meeting her. She laughed as she stood up. Another person began to step down the ramp behind her. "Hey, everybody. This is my brother Matt."

Matt, a taller version of Pidge, waved. "Hey, everybody."

Pidge quickly made introductions. "Matt, this is Hunk, Lace, and Coran." She got to Allura. "And this is Princess Allura of Altea."

Allura smiled at him. "It's so wonderful to meet you, Matt."

Matt bowed to her. "It is my honor to meet you, Princess."

Everyone moved out of the way, and his eyes locked on two people he never thought he'd see again. "Shiro? Adam?" He walked forward. "It's so good to see you, um, sir." He held out his hand but gasped when Shiro pulled him into a hug.

Adam chuckled at the pair. It felt good seeing another familiar face even though that face had a scar on his cheek.

As Shiro released Matt, he smiled. "Pidge never gave up on finding you."

Matt nodded as he gazed back over his shoulder at her. "Yeah, she can be pretty stubborn at times."

Adam nodded. "I'll agree with you there. She wouldn't tell us what she was up to until after she'd left."

Shiro smiled at Matt. "I want you to know that all of us will help you find your father."

"Thanks."

"Matt," Pidge said as she pointed up. "This is the Castle of Lions."

Matt turned around and followed her finger with his eyes. "Woah. Nice ship."

Pidge grabbed him by the hand. "Let me take you on a tour."
Adam sat in the lounge as Pidge and Matt came in. She flopped down on a couch in the semi-circle. "And this is the lounge. You know where we hang out."

Adam smirked. "Although, this is where I find Lance most of the time when he's trying to avoid Paladin training."

Matt chuckled as he sat down.

Hunk entered the lounge with a tray in hand. "Hey, hey! I made celebratory milkshakes for you two! Just a little welcome gift to Matt from Kaltenecker and me. No big deal." He turned his head toward Adam. "Here's yours." He passed out the milkshakes as he sat down next to Matt. "Fun fact about Alteans, they don't get brain freeze. Coran and Allura hoovered up their shakes in one slurp." He chuckled. "I've never seen anything like that before. So, like, what have you been doing since you got busted out of Galra prison?"

Matt gazed back at Hunk. "I've been stationed at a listening outpost, monitoring Galra radio chatter."

Hunk grinned. "Are you serious? Then you should check out the Galra finder Pidge built. We used it to track down a Galra fleet and save a planet."

Pidge smiled. "Hunk made the locator that led us to the first Voltron Lion, and we built an upgraded version of it to track Lotor."

Matt smiled. "Wow, Pidge. Dad would be so proud if he could see what you've done here."

Adam stood from the couch and passed his cup back over to Hunk. "That was good, but I'd better go track Lance down before he gets into trouble."

Matt turned his gaze to Adam. "Uh, if you don't mind me asking Adam, but you seem to be kind of protective about him."

Adam shook his head. "It has nothing to do about being protective of him. He's my cousin's son, and he has this bad habit of getting himself into trouble."

Matt chuckled. "Kind of like me and Keith."

Adam nodded. "Yeah, you were Mr. Hero-worshiper over Takashi. While Keith thought you were trying to take his brother away from him."

Matt gaped at Adam. "Brother? I didn't know Keith and Shiro were brothers."

"It's a long story, and one Takashi or Keith should tell you. But Keith's not here to ask."

Pidge piped up. "Yeah, he's working with the Blade of Marmora."

Matt gasped. "Blade of Marmora?"

Hunk nodded. "Yeah, they're a group of Galra fighting against Lotor."

Matt gazed at Hunk. "Wow. I guess I've missed out on a lot."
Adam strode out of the lounge, leaving the Holts and Hunk to talk. He needed to find Lance. Sometimes that boy could do nothing and still get himself into trouble.

Adam saw Allura and Coran hovering outside of Lance's door, both seemingly afraid to open it. "What's going on? Is he pouting again?"

Coran turned around. "Ah, Adam, no, not exactly. We have a problem that I believe only Lance can help us with."

Allura nodded. "Yes, we would like another milkshake, but it appears Kaltenecker won't make one for us, but there are all these noises coming from inside Lance's room. It sounds like a pitched battle."

A slight grin curved up the sides of Adam's mouth. "No, he's not trashing his room. He's playing a video game."

Allura gazed at the human. "Is it some type of Paladin training."

Adam shook his head in reply. "No, nothing of the sort. It's supposed to be for relaxation, but well with Lance, if he can't win, he takes it personally. But since he hasn't been able to get past that level, don't worry about it." Adam moved over to the wall. "I'll just wait over here."

The door to Lance's room slid open. Coran spoke up. "Lance, could you assist us for a moment."

Adam shook his head as Lance screamed, "Not now!"

"Okay."

When the game's music stopped, Allura spoke up. "We were wondering if you could assist us in getting a milkshake."

Coran took up their tale. "We tried to negotiate some on our own, but we've run into a bit of difficulty with Kaltenecker."

Lance groaned as he walked out of his room. "All right. Let's go."

Adam followed the trio to the holographic room where Kaltenecker grazed. Lance sat down on a stool. "Well, first off, Kaltenecker is a girl."

Allura gazed down at Lance. "Oh! I see."

Coran held his hands behind his back. "Apologies, madam."

Lance gazed up at them. "Right, and she's a cow, so she can't understand you."

Adam shook his head. "Lance, if you're going to explain things, do it right." He sighed as he gazed at the Alteans. "Yes, Kaltenecker is a cow, but cows are raised to provide an array of protein as food for humans and sometimes predators. They're usually raised in herds of both males and females. Some of the males are separated and sent to slaughter for their meat. While females like Kaltenecker here are raised for their milk, which is used to make some of the products you've
eaten. Like butter and cheese."

Lance jumped up off his stool and grabbed Kaltenecker's ears. "You can't just say slaughter around her. She's sensitive."

Adam rolled his eyes. "Get on with it."

Lance stuck his tongue out at Adam, but he turned his gaze to Allura and Coran as he sat back down on the stool. "Well, since Mr. Grumpy cat said it all ready, she doesn't make milkshakes. She has to be milked." Lance picked up a bucket and placed it under Kaltenecker. "Let me show you." He raised his hands. "Watch and learn." He reached under Kaltenecker and began to milk her.

Both Coran and Allura turned white.

Adam would have called them shellshocked because of the expressions on their faces.

Lance, once finished, dipped two cups into the milk and held them out for Allura and Coran. "It's so thick. It's almost like a milkshake right now!"

Allura and Coran didn't say a word as they rushed out of the room.

Lance shrugged as he leaned against the cow. "It's not your fault, Kaltenecker. You're a beautiful girl, and this is very natural." He raised the cup and drank it down. He gazed over at Adam. "Do you want to explain why you've been such a grouch lately?"

"I don't know. I feel out of synch with everything. Especially Takashi."

"Why do you say that? Both of you seem to be on the same page."

Adam shook his head. He sat down on the ground and wrapped his arms around his knees. "That's just it. We're not. Before Keith left, he kept harping about how Voltron needed a strong leader. He didn't even try to connect with the Black Lion after that first try until the other day. Which isn't like him at all."

Lance cocked his head. "What do you mean?"

"Back at the Garrison, no one could keep Takashi away from anything with wings. You know he broke every record the Garrison had for pilots. So when he didn't try again, that just didn't make any sense at all to me."

Lance nodded. "Yeah, I see, but did you think that maybe he might have just been tired?"

Adam shook his head. "No, there are other things." He sighed. "I don't know. Maybe waking up on a Galra ship again messed with his head."

"You could be right. But right now, you have to stop thinking that way because your only making yourself grumpy and when your grumpy well, you kind of bring the team down." Unseen by Adam, Lance dipped his fingers into the cup of milk and pulled them out with milk dripping off the tips. He flicked his fingers at his cousin several times.

Adam flinched and wiped at his face. "Did you flick milk on me?"

A big smile pulled at Lance's lips. He dropped the cup of milk to the ground. "Nana nana boo boo you can't catch me," he giggled as he ran.

"You are so going to regret that." The pair raced
out of the room, and when Adam got close to his cousin, he leapt off the floor and tackled Lance.

The pair rolled around on the deck plates until Adam got his arms around Lance's neck and managed to get his feet underneath him. He stood with his cousin in a headlock beside him. "Say it."

Lance grinned, but he shook his head. "Never."

"Say it, or I'm not letting you go."

"Do your worst. I refuse to say it."

Adam grinned as he chuckled. "Fine, you asked for it." He backed both himself and Lance into the wall. Releasing his hold, he spun around and used his fingers to tickle Lance's ribs.

Lance howled in laughter as he fought to catch his breath. "Fine, uncle."

Adam released him, but he continued to chuckle.

The teen gazed at his cousin. "Your laughing, finally."

Adam wiped at his eye. "I guess I needed that."

Lance threw his arm around Adam's shoulder. "Yeah, you did. I'd better get that milk to the kitchen and clean up that mess I made."

"Yeah, and now I need to find out what trouble Matt, Pidge and Hunk are getting into."

"I'm not exactly sure I like Pidge's brother."

Adam gazed at Lance. "Why not?"

Lance scratched at the back of his head. "I don't know. I guess it was the way he came onto Allura."

Adam shook his head as he squeezed his cousin's shoulder. "Look, the only thing that gets Matt's total attention is robotics. Remember, he's a computer nerd just like his sister."

Lance shrugged. "If you say so."

"I don't say so, I know so. Matt and Pidge are both cut from the same cloth. Having two Holts on board, the Castle is going to be interesting." He gave his cousin a gentle shake. "Now, go take care of the milk and Kaltenecker."

Adam found Matt, Pidge, and Hunk working in the Green Lion's hangar. Whatever they were doing, it was keeping the trio out of mischief. "What's up?"

Hunk didn't look up from his screen as his fingers moved entering something into the computers. "We're plugging in intel that Matt has into Pidge's Galra finder."

Matt looked up at the larger screen on the wall. "I think we've just about got it."
The trio cheered as the screen came to life covered with dots representing Galra positions. Hunk pointed at the screen. "This is unbelievable. We're tracking Galra fleet movements almost live."

Pidge turned her head to gaze up at the Yellow Paladin. "I think I know a few tweaks we can make to extend the range."

Another screen caught Matt's attention as what looked like hieroglyphics gibberish scrolled up. "Hold on, Pidge."

"What's up?"

"It's a scrambled message. I've collected hundreds of them. I never crack them."

Pidge leaned forward in her chair. "Let me see."

Matt pressed a button sending the possible message over to her laptop.

Adam took a couple of steps forward to stare at the gibberish, scrolling up her laptop screen.

Pidge leaned back in her chair. "I'm guessing this isn't just a simple number-for-letter swap."

Matt stared at her screen as he leaned in close. "I've run these through every kind of decryption technology I can think of, and I've spent days with just the numbers and a Galra language log. Nothing."

Hunk scratched his chin. "Maybe they're not words. Maybe they're just numbers."

Pidge place her head in her hand. "Maybe they're a frequency."

Matt frowned. "A quantum signal that broadcasts for other frequencies to go to. It's too high. These are more than three thousand gigahertz."

Pidge's fingers began running over the keyboard. "Invert it."

"What?"

Pidge didn't take her eyes the screen as she spoke to her brother. "For every wave we receive, there's only one partial transmittance, right?"

Hunk caught on fast. "Oh, right, yeah. So we figure out the transmission coefficient—"

Matt caught on too. "And tune for the frequency of the reflected waves."

Pidge pressed a button on the keyboard, and they were hearing a Galra transmission for the first time. "Members of the Seventh, Eleventh, Twelfth, and Fourteenth Fleet, assemble to rally point trox-lyte immediately. Engage targets at coordinates in the next transmission by order of Emperor Zarkon."

Hunk's eyes grew. "Zarkon is alive?"

Pidge gazed up at the screen. "Guys, look at this."

Matt gazed up at what his sister was looking at. "I've never seen troop mobilization on this scale before."

Hunk asked, "What are they attacking?"
Pidge frowned. "That's just it as far as I can tell, nothing. There are no planets, no rebel ships, no Blade of Marmora bases, nothing."

Adam frowned. "We need to get this to Shiro and Allura. They'll decide what to do next."

Allura's eyes hardened. "Whoever they're attacking, we have to help."

Shiro frowned. "I don't like it. We should be gathering intelligence, not diving into a fight without knowing why, especially now that we know Zarkon is alive."

Pidge spoke up. "We could go check it out."

Lance sighed as he turned his ocean blue gaze down on her. "I think they'd probably notice us."

The green Paladin snapped her fingers together and smirked. "Not if we're cloaked."

Matt's eyes grew. "You have cloaking? Who are you?"

Shiro turned his gaze back to Pidge. "I'm not sure it's safe for just the Green Lion."

Pidge grinned. "I'm pretty sure I can upgrade Voltron with cloaking. We could all go."

Lance rammed his elbow into the smaller teen's shoulder. "Were you waiting for your big brother to show up before you rolled that one out?"

Pidge scratched at the back of her head. "It's something I've been working on for a while, but I can't pilot the Green Lion and operate the cloaking at the same time." Her eyes slid over to Matt. "But if I had a co-pilot."

Matt grinned. "Absolutely."

Shiro turned his gaze over to Adam. "Suit up. If this cloaking of Pidge's works, we'll need someone else to operate it when Matt's not here. Ride with Pidge and Matt."

Adam glanced over at the smallest teen who raised her hand with the thumb up. He turned back to Shiro. "Okay."

Shiro gazed at everyone. "Let's get to the Lions."

Shiro's voice over their comms. "We're getting close. Everyone get ready."

Pidge craned her head. "Go ahead. Run the cloaking subroutine."

Matt nodded. "Got it." As he started running it, he explained to Adam what he was doing. "Initializing cloak. I'm not sure how long we can keep this up."

Adam tried to absorb everything Matt said. "Uhm, you might need to write down some instructions for me to study."
Lance chuckled. "What's this? My cousin needs a technical guide?"

"You want extra drills?"

Lance's voice cracked as he replied to Adam's question. "No."

Allura's voice came over the comms. "All right, let's take a look at who the Galra are attacking."

Lance shouted, "What the cheese? It's Galra-on-Galra violence, again."

Hunk's voice came over the comms. "These people just do not like each other."

Two ships appeared out of the firefight. Pidge asked. "Whose ships are those."

Allura came close to growling like Keith. "It's Lotor."

Shiro's voice came over the comms. "Lotor and Zarkon must be fighting for control of the empire."

Hunk called out, "Guys, those ships are getting close."

The ships flew past Voltron. Matt frowned as he called out from behind Pidge. "Uh-oh. The trails from Lotor's ship drives messed with our cloaking spectrum."

Pidge craned her head slightly. "Can you find a workaround?"

Shiro's voice came over the comms. "It's too late. Out cover's been blown. We may have to engage." Shiro, Hunk, and Allura flew Voltron through the Galra weapons fire, trying to evade. As Voltron was hit, Shiro called out. "Hunk, use your bayard."

"You got it."

Beams shot out from the giant shoulder cannon striking all the Galra ships. Damaging the cruisers and destroying the smaller fighters.

Shiro let out a sigh. "All right, that'll hold them. Let's get out of here."
The Attack Begins

Chapter Summary

It's time for the Coalition to make its move and take back a fourth of the Galra Empire and give freedom back to enslaved people.

The Paladins, Adam, Thace, and Coran stood on the bridge of the Castle facing the main screen. Staring back at them from the screen were Kolivan and Keith. Kolivan gave his report. "Entire Galra fleets have been mobilized. Zarkon seems to be actively looking for Lotor."

Shiro nodded. "It's only a matter of time before he gets the empire back in order. We need to take advantage of this moment."

Allura turned toward the Black Paladin. "What are you getting at, Shiro?"

Adam frowned. Lately, Takashi was doing a whole lot of work on this intelligence gathering. It was like he was possessed. Ever since they found out that Zarkon was still alive, although he could understand it, Adam was afraid that Takashi might be close to burning out.

Lance tapped Adam on the shoulder. "You're doing some heavy-duty thinking there."

Adam shook his head. "Now is not the time to discuss it."

Shiro frowned as he glared at both Adam and Lance but turned his attention back to the screen. "Now is the time to assemble the coalition that Voltron has been building. With the intelligence gathered by the Blades and coalition observers, combined with Pidge's Galra tracking software, we now have a detailed map of the Galra Empire."

Shiro brought up a star map. He highlighted a line of planets on the map. "I've identified an intermittent line of coalition planets that runs through the territory. If you look closely, there's only one planet left on that line under Galra control."

Allura crossed her arms over her body. "Naxzela."

Shiro nodded. "Exactly. If we capture Naxzela and solidify that line, we can cut off all the Galra troops behind it from central command and use our position to defeat them."

Pidge grinned. "Wow! We could take back a third of the Galra Empire in one fell swoop."

Hunk gazed at Shiro. "Do we have a plan?"

"We attack several locations across the region at once. First, we'll have to cut off communications between the region and Galra Central Command by striking the satellite relay station orbiting Vantax Five."

Hunk nodded. "Pidge and I can handle that."

Shiro continued outlining his plan. "The Blades have informed us of two Galra defense systems coming online called Zaiforge cannons. Now, these cannons can strike any target within two
combat theaters. The first cannon, in high orbit around the planet Teq, will be attacked by coalition air forces led by Matt and Captain Olia. Kolivan will lead a Marmora strike team against the second cannon, located on the surface of Senfama, which is vulnerable to a covert ground attack. We intend to take control of these cannons and use Zarkon's firepower against him. Once the coalition and Blades neutralize these targets, Galra defenses will be weakening, allowing us to take down the remaining Galra occupied planets in this area. While our forces are taking control of the planets, Naxzela will already be under attack."

Allura gazed at Shiro. "By whom?"

"Voltron."

Adam shook his head as Lance tried to look wicked but failed. "Aw, yeah!" The Red Paladin spoke up. "Team Voltron's gonna drop in Naxzela, and be all like, Pow! Pow! Pow! Easy-peasy."

Shiro shook his head. "Unfortunately, not that easy. Naxzela will be tough. It's heavily fortified with Galra. Our attack must be swift enough to neutralize the Galra forces before they have time to call for help. Because if they call for reinforcements, we'll be caught in a fight on two fronts."

Kolivan spoke up. "If this works, the Voltron Coalition will possess a third of the Galra Empire's territory. It will be a massive victory."

Allura nodded. "And inspire a whole new wave of rebellions."

Shiro stared at the screen. "There's no time to waste. All right, Paladins, it's time to gather the coalition. Friends and allies from across the universe must come together to take on the Galra. With their help, we'll have a chance to turn the tides of this war. We all knew this moment would come, and we are more prepared now than we've ever been. Let's do this."

Adam leaned against one of the coalition ships as he observed a reunion of dubious proportions in his mind. Rolo, Nyma, and Beezer faced Hunk and Pidge. He guessed they wanted to make amends for tricking Lance and stealing the Blue Lion. Rolo was the first one to speak. "We heard about the Voltron Coalition against Zarkon."

Hunk nodded. "Yeah, we heard about you, too. Matt told us you've been helping with the coalition forces." He stuck out his arm, and Rolo and Hunk grasped forearms. Rolo spoke again. "You guys inspired all of us."

Adam frowned. He wondered how much was real and how much was just for show. Those three would bear keeping eyes on until he was sure they were for real.

The Voltron team and several leaders of the Coalition forces assembled on the bridge of the Castle of Lions. Coran gazed at Allura. "All right, Princess, it's time to begin the broadcast."

Allura asked, "Have we secured communications?"
Matt waved at Allura as Pidge sat on Beezer. The Green Paladin grinned. "Matt and I used the rebel's transponder encryption."

Coran slid over to the pair. "Always helps to have a pair of tech-genius sibling around."

Allura activated the crystal, which enabled the Castle's communications system tying it into communications systems across the universe. "Fellow members of the Voltron Coalition, if you are hearing me now, it is because you have pledged to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us in our fight against Zarkon's enslavement of the free peoples of the universe. But that enslavement is about to be dealt a crushing blow. The time for a full-scale attack on the Galra Empire is now. For in the future, when they speak of this day, they will speak of our sacrifice, but they will also remember this as the day that freedom began to overtake tyranny. You all have your missions. You know what to do. Good luck. We'll see you on the other side."

Adam grabbed Lance and held him in a quick embrace. "Be careful out there."

Lance grinned as the cousins parted. "Don't worry about Voltron. We'll be back in no time."

Adam turned toward Shiro. But Shiro was already disappearing from view. What is going on with you, Takashi? Adam sighed as his face fell.

Coran saw but didn't say anything. He stroked his chin as he frowned. Perhaps he should say something to Shiro once the Paladins returned.

As the teams left the Castle of Lions to begin their mission, Adam picked up his earbud microphone. "I'll monitor Voltron."

Coran nodded. "I thought you would say that. Thace and I will monitor the other groups."

Thace turned and shot the human and Altean a quick Galra smile. "I have to wonder how well my troops will fare out there."

The Altean chuckled. "I believe they will be fine. It's these others I have concerns about. The ones who haven't exactly trained with anyone. Oh, I know they might be fierce, but some have no fighting experience at all."

"True, but let's get to our task at hand too." Thace nodded toward Adam, who was already seated with his earpiece in his ear.

Coran humped but quietly agreed.

A couple of hours later, Coran called out as a Zaiforge cannon changed colors on the holographic map of the battle zones. "The Senfama Zaiforge cannon is ours."

Adam glanced up as he pressed his hand to his ear. "The attack on Naxzela is underway."

He focused his attention on what he was hearing. Shiro's voice sounded like him but seemed more forceful than usual. "All right, Paladins, we've got one chance to take out Naxzela, so let's make it
count."

Lance called out, "Incoming cruiser, three o'clock."

Allura grunted. "What was that?"

Lance replied, "I didn't see—"

Adam grit his teeth together as it sounded like Voltron was hit by something.

Several more hits along with more grunts from the paladins as they seemed to be fighting an invisible enemy. Shiro grunted. "What's hitting us?"

Pidge replied quickly. "We're in a minefield. Somehow the bombs were cloaked."

Hunk hollered. "Shield. Shield!"

Pidge continued to speak. "My systems can detect the mines, but there's too many to maneuver through them safely. And with their cruisers covering all possible exits from the minefield, we have no way out!"

Adam's fingers tapped on his thigh. He reached up to turn off the mike as he muttered under his breath, "Come on, guys, you can figure it out."

Allura spoke up. "Wait a tick. Perhaps I can freeze the mines."

Adam, who slumped in his seat, sat up as he came to the same assessment at the same time as Lance voiced it. "Then, we can fly out of here before they explode."

Shiro replied, "All right, that sounds like a plan. Freeze 'em Allura."

They must have separated because Adam heard Shiro say, "Form Voltron." Which was quickly followed by, "Great work team. Let's secure Naxzela."

Coran turned as he heard beeping from behind him and saw the second Zaiforge cannon change colors. He called out, "Zaiforge cannon base is ours!"

Thace smirked as Keith's reported in from Senfama. "Ready to provide the Taujeerians with cover."

Captain Olia reported in next. "Cannon acquired. Ready to provide backup."

Coran replied, "Copy that. Coalition forces you are clear to begin."

Coran gazed at the holographic map as more and more worlds turned from purple to green. "We've almost taken the entire area!" Rapid beeping caught his attention. "Quiznack! The communication satellite is back online. Galra distress calls are going through!"

Shiro replied. "It doesn't matter, Coran. They're too late. We've just about secured Naxzela."

Coran continued his report. "It appears that all of the planets we've engaged have been pacified, if not liberated." Alarms blared on the bridge. "Wait, there's another Galra battle cruiser approaching Naxzela."

Matt Holt's voice came over the speakers. "Sector Zar Niomofar is clear. Let me see if I can get a line on that battle cruiser." His voice came over the speaker, sounding rushed almost panicked.
"Zaiforge cannon Senfama, are you still operational?"

Keith sighed. "Negative."

Coran pulled at his mustache. A sure tell that he was a bit aggravated. "That incoming battle cruiser must have shut them down remotely."

Keith sighed again. "Sorry, Shiro. That's it for artillery support. What should we do about the cruiser?"

Shiro replied. "That cruiser's gonna be too late. Naxzela's almost secure. We just need to take out the last of the heavy artillery. On our left! Shield up!"

Lance shouted. "Whoa! Did we cause that earthquake?"

Pidge replied, "I don't think so!"

Adam wished he could see what was going on as Hunk spoke next. "Guys, look over there!"

Lance's voice was shaky, sounding to Adam. "Uh, guys, what are those?"

Adam activated his sending function on the microphone. "Lance. Lance! What's going on?" He frowned. He could hear them, but they couldn't hear him."

Pidge replied, "We've never seen anything like this from the Galra before."

Hunk asked, "Are they weapons?"

Pidge replied, "They look like some sort of generators."

Shiro replied, "Stay alert."

Adam listened to Lance as he spoke. His cousin was turning out to be a pretty good Red Paladin. "I say we get outta here. Pidge, plot a course for our escape."

Adam nodded. "Good job, Lance."

The next decision caused Adam to frown. What in the hell was Takashi thinking? "Hold on. We should find out what these things are."

Adam slammed his hand into his thigh. His communications were wholly cut off. Nothing was coming through now.

Keith's voice came over the Castle's speakers. "Coran, are there any targets that need support."

Coran studied the holographic map. "I haven't heard of anyone needing help. And that Galra fleet heading toward Naxzela stopped."

"Stopped?"

"Yes. Quite a distance away too."

Kolivan spoke up. "Perhaps the Galra decided it's too well-fortified to attack."

Keith replied, "Victory or death is the Galra way. They never stop attacking."

Both he and Adam came to the same conclusion as they both spoke at the same time. "Voltron."
Keith called out, "Shiro, can you hear me? Shiro? Something's wrong."

Adam spoke into his microphone, hoping this time his signal would go through. "I lost all communications with them about a minute or so ago."

Coran's head shot up. He turned and ran to his station. "Paladins? Allura? What's happened?" He turned around and gazed at the image of Naxzela on the holographic map. There were waves of some kind of distortion coming from the planet. The Altean knew precisely what that was. "It must be the magnetic distortion from Naxzela."

Keith replied, "I'm gonna check it out."

Adam paced across the bridge. "Keith, don't do anything stupid."

Keith didn't respond to Adam. "Matt, something's wrong. I can't reach Voltron."

"We can fly to Naxzela to check on 'em."

"No, I need your help. I can't explain why, but I know we need to attack that fleet."

Matt replied, "I thought the fleet had stopped."

"It has, but we're afraid it has something to do with Voltron."

"We're with you."

"Copy that. Good to have you along," Keith replied.

Coran spoke up. "I'm coming too. It might take me awhile. I'm on the other side of the galaxy, and I don't have enough of Allura's energy left to work the Teludav."

Keith replied, "No, stay in position. We might need you back there."

Shiro's voice returned. "Keith, can you hear me?"

"Shiro? Where are you? Is everything okay?"

"Not for long if we don't stop Zarkon's witch. She must be aboard that battle cruiser."

Keith replied. "I'm way ahead of you. And I brought some backup."

Captain Olia's voice came over the speaker. "Rebel squad is en route."

Matt spoke up. "Good to have Voltron back in the fight."

Shiro's face appeared on the main screen of the Castle. "Coran, you need to get as far away from Naxzela as you can immediately. Pick up any member of the coalition who is nearby but go."

"Wh-What's happening?"

Allura's face replaced Shiro's. "Naxzela is a bomb, and it's about to go off."

Coran's eyes grew. "But what about you?"

"We'll stop it if we can, but we need you to do this."

Adam heard Thace behind him getting in touch with his commanders giving out orders to evacuate
as quickly as possible.

Adam craned his head to gaze at Coran's stricken face. "Yes, Princess."

He paced again but stopped as he heard reports that the rebels with Keith couldn't get through the shield with their weapons. His knees almost gave out when Keith's reply was low, "Maybe not with our weapons."

Adam's eyes grew as Matt shouted. "Wait, Keith, what are you doing? Keith, no!"

"No," Adam whispered as he realized that Keith was going to sacrifice himself to take down a shield that might not even be damaged by a kamikaze strike. "Keith, if you're doing what I think you're doing, and none of us makes it out of here alive, so help me, I will make your afterlife miserable."

Coran, who was oblivious to what was said between Adam and Keith called out. "Naxzela is returning to normal! You did it!"

Shiro called out, "Good work, Keith."

"It wasn't me. It was Lotor. The cannon on his ship was the only thing powerful enough to take down that shield."

A new voice came over their communications channel. "Attention Paladins of Voltron and rebel fighters. I know we've had our differences in the past, but I think it is time we had a discussion."

Adam wanted to rip his microphone out of his ear and toss it across the bridge. What in the hell was going on? Shiro's acting weird toward him, Keith is trying to commit suicide, and now they're saved by Lotor? He shook his head. It was like the universe was suddenly turned upside down and inside out.

He dropped down into his seat. "I need a drink."

He didn't realize his microphone was still open when Lance replied. "If you want a drink so bad, we could always head back to that Earth store at the Space Mall and see if they have anything."

Adam clicked Lance's icon on his holographic screen. "I've secured our communications, so it's just you and me right now." He rubbed his hands on his thighs as he tried to gain control of his emotions. "I don't know if you know this or not, but Keith was going to sacrifice himself to try to save everyone."

Adam winced as Lance screamed, "What? You can't be serious."

"Stop yelling. That hurt you know."

"Sorry, but you said he was going to kill himself?"

Adam nodded, "Yeah, I did."

Lance let loose a stream of colorful expletives in Spanish.

Adam chuckled. "Yeah, my thoughts exactly. But you do know if your mother was here, you'd be tasting soap."

"Yeah, I know. But dammit what the hell was Keith thinking?"
Adam shrugged. "I don't know, but we're going to find out. Someone has to escort Lotor's ship here. So I guess that job will fall upon Keith and the rebels while you all go and mop up Naxzela."

"Okay, and yeah, we will find out," Lance replied. "Gotta go. Voltron's work is never done."

Keith escorted Lotor's ship onto the Castle of Lions. The Paladins were waiting in the pod bay as both the Galra fighters and Lotor's ships landed. Keith stepped out the Galra fighter, and Lotor did the same as Coran stepped forward and slapped cuffs on their prisoner. Lotor sighed. "Do you think this is necessary?"

Adam glared at the Galra. "Given your history, yes, I do."

Lotor sighed. "Very well, let's get this over with."

Lance and Adam hung back as the others escorted Lotor away to a holding cell where they could interrogate him.

Keith gazed at the Red Paladin as the teen practically vibrated in anger and had to duck as a helmet came flying at him. His eyes narrowed as he balled his hands up into fists. "What the hell was that for?"

Adam stepped forward and shoved Keith back a step. "What in the hell were you thinking out there? Did you think that little Galra fighter was going to hurt that shield any?"

Keith gazed back at the cousins. "I-I guess I thought that if I sacrificed myself, I could make a difference."

Lance's eyes grew as he slapped a hand to his face and let it slide down. He turned slightly away from Keith. "And everybody calls me the goofball." He turned back to the teen as temper flared in his blue eyes. "Keith, what the hell is wrong with you? You might not think it, but you are an important part of this team, and if I ever hear of you making another boneheaded move like that again, I'll make sure the rest of the team knows it. I mean it!"

Keith sighed. "Lance, I did what I felt was right."

"You idiot," Lance shot back, "there wasn't a guarantee that it would work. Even you said the cannon on Lotor's ship was the only thing powerful enough to take that shield down."

"I realize that now," Keith grumbled.

Adam sighed. "I'm glad that Lotor was there to save you." Adam's voice cracked with emotion. "You are important to all of us." He reached out and pulled the teen into a hug. Lance joined in.

Matt appeared in the room, having been a silent witness to most of what was said. He also joined with the others on the hug.

As they separated, Adam gazed at the other three. "Let's keep this to ourselves for now."

Lance nodded, "Agreed."

Keith picked up Lance's helmet and passed it over to the Red Paladin. "Okay."
Matt grinned at the others. "You got it."
Chapter Summary

It's time to get Sam Holt from Zarkon, but Adam's having some problems.

Adam stepped on the bridge of the Castle of Lions. "So, the paladins are off on another mission?"

Coran turned to face him. "Yes, they are. If you don't mind continuing to monitor their communications, it helps to have someone on board who understands their foibles. Sometimes I just don't understand a thing that comes out of Lance's mouth."

Adam chuckled as he sat down in his seat and inserted the earbud microphone into his ear. He reached out to activate the communications channel but stopped. "I have a slight problem with these missions. They're making Lance lazy." He pressed the switch and sat back to listen.

Shiro's voice was the first one he heard. "That's our target, the moon of Tragoch."

Allura's voice was next. "According to our latest intelligence, that's where the Galra is building their upgraded sentries."

Shiro spoke again. "Taking out this base will the Galra won't be able to resupply their bases and ships for months."

Lance replied, "How do we know this isn't a trap."

Adam could swear he heard Shiro frown when he spoke again. "All the intel's checked out so far. Everything's exactly how we were told it'd be." An alarm started blaring. "Including preparing for those!"

Allura called out, "Pidge?"

The Green Paladin replied. "Allura, I'm sending you the signals to interfere with the drones."

"Signal acquired. Broadcasting."

Shiro spoke again. "Let's take them out before they recalibrate and report our approach. Form up on me. We're going in. We only have five minutes before the base realizes their drones aren't responding. Be careful to stay in formation and don't touch the sides." He let out a grunt.

Adam could imagine Shiro at the controls trying to keep the Black Lion from touching the sides of the vent that the Lions of Voltron was in. He frowned as Hunk said, "Don't touch the side. Don't touch the side." Followed by "Uh-oh!"

Pidge yelled, "Hunk!"

Adam slapped his hand to his face. He sighed. "Hunk."

"I think I may have nicked the side a little bit."

Allura said. "Let me through. We'd better hurry. That patch won't last for long."
Hunk yelled, "The lava's gaining on us! We can't outrun it!"

Adam's stomach knotted up as he leaned forward in his chair, and his chest grew tight.

Allura replied, "We should be directly under the base."

Shiro called out. "There's an opening up ahead. Follow me!"

Lance shouted, "Oh, no! We're trapped!"

Shiro replied, "No, we're not! There's another way out! Form Voltron! Takedown the factory machines!"

Adam sat near Lance as Shiro stood in the middle of the lounge.

Hunk, who sat on the other couch closest to Shiro, gazed around the room at everyone. "Oh, man! Going on missions is a lot easier when somebody gives you all the information you need before you get there."

Lance chuckled. "And yet, you still managed to run your lion into a wall."

Hunk looked over at Lance. "Yeah, information is one thing. Ability is something completely different."

Shiro nodded. "There's no doubt about it. We haven't encountered a single problem."

Allura gazed at Lance and Hunk. "I must admit, we took down a vital target today."

Pidge spoke up. "And we made it look pretty easy, except for the getting buried in lava part."

Adam shook his head as he crossed his arms over his chest. "Tell that to my frazzled nerves. Listening to what is going on is terrifying."

Shiro ignored Adam's comment. "It may be time to consider taking the next step."

Allura leaned forward as her eyes narrowed. "I'm still not comfortable with this. It doesn't feel right."

The door to the lounge slid open, and Thace walked in. "Pardon the intrusion Shiro, but I was looking for Adam."

Shiro gazed at the Blade. "No problem, we were mainly finished anyway."

Thace nodded and strode over to Adam. "I forgot that Kolivan had given me this." He held out a bottle filled with an amber-colored liquid. "Be careful when imbibing this. I have no idea what effects it will have on the human body."

Adam reached for the bottle. "Bless you, Thace," he said as his fingers wrapped around the neck of the bottle.

Shiro's eyebrow rose. "What is that?"
Adam gazed at him. "Something to ease my nerves and maybe help me forget some things."

Shiro gazed at the tawny-haired man. "You don't need that."

"And how the hell would you know what I need anyway? You're never around when I need you!" Adam's eyes flashed as unspoken anger rose inside him. "It's always Voltron with you anymore, or your off interrogating Lotor and getting intel for new missions." He smacked a hand to his chest. "Don't I matter to you anymore?"

"Of course, you do, but stopping Zarkon and freeing the universe takes precedence over anything else."

Adam shook his head. "Bullshit!" He stood and stormed out of the room.

Hunk glanced around at everyone. "What was that all about?"

Lance gazed down at the floor. "I think I know, but it's not my place to stop him." He turned his eyes up to Shiro's, hoping that his hero and leader would go after Adam. He sighed as he gazed back down at the floor. "I'll go look for him."

Lance walked into the dining room and found Adam sitting at the table, pouring some of the liquid into a cup. Adam set the bottle on the table as he raised the cup to his lips. He took a sip of the liquid and gasped and coughed as his eyes watered. He slammed his hand down on the table, "Now that's good, but what a kick it has to it."

Lance slid his hands into his pockets. "Are you sure you need that?"

Adam gazed up at him. "Damn straight, I do. I'm tired of being the one always left behind."

The Red Paladin shook his head. "That's not you talking, that's the alcohol."

Adam shook his head. "No, it's all me, and right now, I plan on getting drunk on my ass."

Lance sat in the chair, ass the table from his cousin. "Come on, Adam, you don't need that."

Adam stared Lance in the eyes. "You have no idea what I need, either." He took another sip and followed it by swallowing the rest of the liquid. His body warmed as the alcohol was absorbed into his bloodstream. He grabbed the bottle and poured a second drink and chugged it down.

Adam's voice began to slur as he hefted the bottle. "You want shome?"

Lance shook his head. "No, I can't. Mom would kill me if she found out I was drinking before I was twenty-one."

"I won't tell if you don't."

Lance sighed. "Your drunk and not thinking clearly."

"Your loss, you don't know what you're missing." Adam shrugged as he poured another drink. He chugged it down. The cup slid out of his hand, and he laid his head down on the table and passed out.
Adam heard a voice by his ear. "Koishiteru," he opened his eyes, and there stood Shiro gazing down on him in full paladin armor.

"What? What did you say."

Shiro smiled at him as he rubbed his hand on Adam's cheek. "Koishiteru, I only have a few minutes. Don't trust him."

Adam blinked at him. "Don't trust who? Lotor?"

"No, Koishiteru. Don't trust the thing that looks like me." Shiro gazed at Adam as both love and sadness shown in his dark-gray eyes. "I'm sorry, my time is up."

Adam reached out as Shiro disappeared.

Lance gazed at his cousin as he began to stir but whispered, "Kashi, Wait." The teen chuckled as he remembered what Keith had said about Shiro being a walking, talking granola bar.

"I guess I should get you to bed so you can sleep it off properly. I hope you won't have a hangover in the morning."

Hunk entered the room. He gaped at Adam with his head down on the table. "How much did he drink?"

Lance shrugged. "I'd guess maybe about three shots."

"Woah, that stuff is potent."

"You said it, buddy. Will you help me get him to his room?"

Hunk nodded. "Yeah, you get one side, and I'll get the other."

Adam's eyelids opened, and he blinked, glancing up at the ceiling. Though his head was a bit fuzzy, he didn't feel worse for wear. He sat up and glanced around the room. "Huh," he asked. How did I get here? Last he remembered he was in the dining hall. "Must have been Lance who got me here."

His eyes slid over to the other side of the bed, and as usual, there was no sign that Takashi had ever come to bed. He sighed. "So, I guess this is the new normal." He grabbed his dog tags from under his shirt. He brushed his thumb against Takashi's ring. He rose from the bed and hopped in the shower, trimmed his beard, and redressed. He tugged the hem of his uniform jacket down and finally stepped out of the room.

Adam stepped onto the bridge of the Castle. Everyone stood around Allura, who was looking for
something on her holographic screen. It was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Pidge sat in her
chair with her arms wrapped around her knees, and her cheek pressed against the top of her knees.
Matt stood next to her with his hand rubbing on her back.

Adam froze. Matt was here? What have I missed?

Lance seemed to understand his cousin's confusion and quickly strode over to him and quietly
filled him in on what he'd missed.

Adam nodded. "Thanks, Lance."

Adam strode over to Pidge's chair. He knelt in front of the Green Paladin. "Do you remember when
Takashi was in the healing pod, and you were worried about your family?"

She nodded.

"We'll get your dad back. I promise you that."

Electronic beeping of a signal coming through caught their attention. Adam stood as Pidge raised
her head.

The main screen came to life, and they were faced with a monstrous image of Zarkon. It looked
like Voltron had done significant damage to him so that now the only way he could survive was in
the armor. "Paladins of Voltron."

Shiro whispered, "Zarkon."

"I am making a one time offer. I have someone of value to you." He moved out of the way, and
they all saw a timid looking Commander Holt in the grips of three of Lotor's Generals. He looked
up."

Pidge stood up. "Dad!"

"We'll hand him over, and in exchange, you give me my son Lotor."

Adam stared at Takashi. "I'm going on this one." As Takashi opened his mouth to refute what
Adam said, he raised his hand. "Commander Holt looks like he might need medical attention, and
I'm the medic on this team, remember?"

"Fine, get suited up, and meet us in the pod bay."

Adam spun on his heel, but before he strode off the bridge, he fired a parting salvo. "It's about time
you got your head out of your ass."

The Castle of Lions hovered over the planet where the exchange was to take place. Pidge rode
shotgun next to Shiro while Adam and Matt rode in the back watching Lotor.

Once the pod touched the ground, Matt exited the pod while Adam stayed in the back with Lotor.
Adam gazed at Lotor.

Lotor though in cuffs, gazed at Adam. "I haven't seen much of you."
Adam leaned back as he rested his hand on the butt end of his energy pistol. "I've been busy doing other things, not that it's any of your business."

Lotor sighed. "Fair point. But you should know that Zarkon will try to pull a double-cross on your people. Right now, he wants me so he can end me."

Adam shrugged. "I'm not bothered by that. I just want to get Commander Holt back, so his children won't have to worry about him anymore. Since it was your people who took him, his son, and Shiro."

"Your father's witch has messed with him."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You don't? What about the scar across his nose. He never had that before he left Earth for Kerberos. And let's not forget about the arm they took and replaced with a prosthetic."

Lotor shook his head. "That was all Haggar and her druids doing. I've been living in exile for the most part."

Adam's eyes narrowed as he stared at Lotor. "Let's get one thing straight. I don't trust you, and I'll never trust you." He stopped as he listened to the conversation between Pidge, Shiro, and Matt. "Looks like your father has arrived."

Matt banged on the side of the pod. Adam's helmeted head rose. "That's our cue. It sounds like Zarkon wants to see you."

Both he and Lotor walked out of the back of the pod.

Zarkon replied, "Now, where is Lotor?"

Shiro yelled. "Send us Commander Holt!"

Zarkon replied, "Release him."

Commander Holt began walking down the ramp of the Galra transport.

Shiro nodded toward Adam. Adam nudged Lotor forward. "It's your lucky day."

Lotor started walking toward Zarkon and his generals.

Shiro's voice was low. "Stay alert. If Zarkon's going to try something, now would be the time."

As Commander Holt neared them, Pidge took off running. Shiro yelled, "Pidge!" He reached out toward her, trying to stop her.

Pidge yelled, "Dad!" as she neared her father. She reached out to embrace him but went right through him. She growled as she glared at Zarkon. "No! No, we had a deal! Give me my father!"

Zarkon's expression was unreadable from under the mask. "If you want this Earthling returned alive, you will forfeit Voltron to me immediately!"

Matt held onto Pidge the best that he could as she struggled against him. "No. No! We have to get Dad!"

Matt gazed toward Adam and Shiro. "Shiro?"

Shiro replied. "Hold your positions until the time is right."
Adam placed his hand on his energy pistol. "When is the time going to be right?"

Zarkon yelled, "Bring the lions now!"

Lotor broke free from the cuffs and attacked Zarkon.

Shiro turned to the others. "We need to get Sam!" They used their jetpacks to cross the ground to the Galra transport as it began to liftoff.

Pidge, Matt, Adam, and Shiro grabbed the side of the transport. Pidge slammed her bayard into the side of the ship, using it to cut into the hull. "We can't let the shuttle dock with the cruiser!"

Shiro slammed his prosthetic hand into the side of the ship. "We need backup. Lance! We could use a little help down here."

Lance replied, "We're already on the way!"

A piece of the ship's hull fell inside the ship and clattered to the deck. Shiro, Matt, Pidge, and Adam stood facing the Galra generals. Pidge yelled at them, "Hey! Let my Dad go!" She charged forward. Being the smallest, she was able to slip past Zethrid, who stood facing Matt.

Ezor jumped out of her seat to attack Shiro, who charged at her with his glowing hand.

Matt produced his staff and swung at Zethrid. She kicked out at him with her foot connecting with his chest and pushing him backward.

Pidge charged Acxa, who was flying the transport. Acxa pulled back on the controls sending loose cargo sliding backward.

Shiro moved out of the way as the loose crates knocked Ezor out of his way.

Pidge fired her bayard into the back of Acxa's seat, and she used it to propel herself into the chair knocking Acxa out of it, but the sudden shoving motion caused the controls to be shoved forward putting the ship into a nosedive.

Zero-G set in as Pidge launched herself to her dad's seat. "Hold on, Dad." She cut through his bonds.

As Sam started to float, he gazed into her eyes. "Thanks, Katie." He turned to see that the ship was heading for the surface. "The ship's gonna crash!"

Pidge launched herself toward the controls but was intercepted by Acxa.

Adam launched himself forward as Zetherid reached out to grab his ankle. He drew his free leg up and kicked down on her hand, getting her to release her hold. He used his jetpack to push himself toward the controls. He pulled the ship's nose up. He turned to Sam. "Here, take over, Matt needs help."

Sam took over, but he cocked an eyebrow at the other man. "Did the entire Garrison come looking for me?"

Adam chuckled as he launched himself at Zethrid. "Seems that way, doesn't it?" If Sam replied, Adam didn't hear it as he tackled the larger Galra.

Lance's voice came over Adam's helmet comm. "Shiro, Pidge, the sky has been cleared of all Galra. What's your status?"
Pidge yelled, "Shuttle is not clear yet!"

Matt swung his staff and got a good blow to Zethrid's face.

As soon as Adam's booted feet touched the deck when gravity returned, he pulled his energy pistol and fired it off into the air. The sound of the blast striking the ceiling caught everyone's attention. "Move," he glared at the generals as he motioned for them to get over by the exit. "Don't try me. I'm better with this than I am with my rifle." He kept the pistol trained on them. "What do you say that we take out the trash Commander."

A wicked chuckle met his ears. Sam called out to the other humans on board. "Hold on." He pulled back hard on the controls as Pidge appeared next to him. She glanced over her shoulder to make sure her friends and brother were holding on. She slammed her gloved hand down on a button. The hatch opened, and the generals went tumbling out along with some of the cargo. She closed the hatch again.

Adam took over the controls of the ship and flew it up into the atmosphere. Pidge jumped into Commander Holt's arms. "Dad! I missed you so much!"

Adam couldn't help eavesdropping, as Sam replied, "I missed you too, Katie." Matt came up and joined his sister in hugging his father.

Shiro's voice came over Adam's helmet comm. "The shuttle is clear."

The Lions appeared to escort the shuttle. Lance said, "Nice job, team."

Shiro asked, "Where are Zarkon and Lotor?"

Lance's voice replied. "I see them, but it's not looking good for Lotor."

Shiro frowned. "Distract Zarkon."

Adam gazed at Shiro. "Are you serious? You want to help Lotor?"

"Would you rather Zarkon was still around?"

They all watched as Zarkon turned and aimed something up at them, and Lotor picked up something like a long piece of metal from one of the Galra fighters that the lions took out earlier and used it to pierce it through Zarkon's body.

They gasped.

Shiro gazed at Adam. "Land, and let's pick up Lotor."

Adam blinked as he gazed at Shiro. "What? You want to pick up someone who just committed patricide?"

"Yes, Lotor may still be helpful in this war. Considering he just took out his father. Now he should be able to take over the Empire."

Adam muttered under his breath a string of Spanish expletives. He landed the shuttle, and they picked up Lotor and returned to the Castle of Lions.

He frowned as he thought about his dream. Something is going on, and he was going to find out one way or another what was happening.
Chapter Summary

Something is going on with Shiro. Adam lets Lance and Thace in on what he thinks is going on.

The door to the bridge slid open, revealing the Paladins, Adam, Thace, and Coran, who faced Lotor and Allura.

Lance leaned over toward Pidge. "Look, it's Prince Lotor, hanging out on the bridge."

Pidge stared at the pair. "I guess this is a thing that's happening."

Adam folded his arms across his chest as he glared at Lotor. "I hate this idea."

Coran shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose we'll have to get used to it like I had to get used to my Zarbloomian intestinal eel."

Shiro walked past Coran and Hunk. "What's going on, Lotor?"

The Galra gazed back at them. "The death of my father has created a power vacuum within the Galra Empire. The most formidable Galra leaders will gather for what is called the Kral Zera sometime in the next two days to decide who will take the throne. We must be there."

Adam glared at him. "We? What do you mean by we? You created this problem when you killed Zarkon!"

Lance nodded as he crossed his arms over his chest. "Yeah, and now you want us to fly you into the middle of a meeting with all of the most powerful Galra leaders?"

Allura turned to Zarkon's son. "Lotor, we appreciate all you've sacrificed, but this sounds far too dangerous."

Adam shook his head. "No, not dangerous, Allura. It sounds suicidal."

Shiro focused solely on Lotor. "We've been in more dangerous situations with much less to gain. Putting Lotor on the Galra throne is what we've been discussing."

Pidge gazed at the Black Paladin. "Yeah, but no one told us that would mean flying into a war zone."

Allura turned her gaze on Shiro. "We can't plan an operation this important so quickly."

Shiro replied. "We don't have a choice."

Lance turned toward Shiro. "I'm with Allura. We need time to think this over."

Shiro craned his head over toward the Red Paladin. "Lance, this isn't your call. He turned his head back to the Princess. "Allura, the Coalition wouldn't be where it is right now without Lotor. We need to listen to him."
Pidge added in her own two cents. "Well, I'm with Allura, too. This is too dangerous to pull off at the last minute."

Coran nodded. "Agreed. So, it looks like it's four-to-two in the Princess's favor."

Shiro shook his head. "Look, this isn't a vote. I'm the leader of Voltron. I'm making this decision."

Adam's eyes grew at that. Why was Shiro so adamant about this. He frowned again as he thought back to his alcohol-induced dream. Was his subconscious trying to tell him something? He glanced over at Thace. Maybe Thace would know more about the effects of that Galra alcohol on the human body.

His attention was drawn back to the conversation as Allura took a half-step forward. "Like when you armed Lotor with your bayard without consulting the rest of us?"

"That's right. Making that decision resulted in the removal of Zarkon."

Allura's voice rose. "You put the entire operation in jeopardy."

Shiro's voice rose to match hers. "I put an end to Zarkon's reign. Now is the time to finish the job!"

Lance stepped forward. "Shiro, we're all on the same side here."

Shiro glared at the Red Paladin. "I told you to stay out of this!"

Adam stepped in front of Lance and stabbed his forefinger at Shiro. "You don't talk to my cousin that way!"

Lotor drew everyone's attention back to himself. "While you all waste time squabbling, sinister forces are conspiring to fill the Galra power void. If I do not return to claim the throne, there is no telling who will. And it could be someone equal or worse than Zarkon."

Shiro nodded. "Good. It's settled."

Pidge replied. "How's that settled?"

Shiro gazed at her. "Our hands are tied. The Kral Zera is happening. If we want to stop the Galra, we need to put Lotor on the throne immediately."

Adam shook his head. "In your mind, it's settled. But my vote on this is a big resounding no. He turned and strode off the bridge. Lance followed."

"Hey, Adam, wait up."

Adam stopped and turned to face his cousin. "What do you want, Lance?"

"I was just wondering where you're going in such a hurry."

Adam shook his head. "Someplace you probably wouldn't go."

Lance cocked his head.

Adam sighed. "The training deck. I feel the need to blow something up."

"I guess I should go with you to make sure you don't kill yourself."
Adam shrugged. "It's a free Castle, do whatever you want to do." He spun around and continued on his way.

Lance stared after him.

Adam dressed in his armor with his energy rifle on his shoulder, energy pistol, and knife on his belt, stood in the center of the training deck. He opened his mouth to start a training sequence when the door opened, and Lance strode in dressed in his Paladin armor.

"So, you decided to join me?"

Lance nodded and grinned. "I can't let you have all the fun."

"Did you have anything in mind?"

The Red Paladin grin grew. "Yeah, drone practice."

Adam gazed back at his cousin as he rubbed at his bearded chin. "That sounds like a good idea. The gladiators are pretty easy."

Lance gaped at Adam. "Easy?"

Adam sighed. "Well, I know they weren't easy the first time you all fought one, but that was because you had never seen one before, and you weren't sure how they worked. Right?"

"Okay, yeah, your right."

"Ready to begin drone practice?"

Lance grinned. "Let's do it."

Adam spoke to the Castle's training deck computer. "Begin drone practice."

The training room beeped as a door in the wall opened, and about thirty small metallic colored balls came flying out. Adam slid the shoulder strap off and hefted his energy rifle as Lance pulled out his bayard. Both began firing at the drones as they flew in circles around the pair.

Adam missed one twice but then hit it on the third shot, while Lance's shots struck home. When about fifteen drones were left, they began speeding up. Adam dropped his rifle and pulled out his pistol as he formed his shield. Like he'd warned Lotor's generals on the shuttle when they'd rescued Sam Holt, he was a more accurate shot with the pistol.

Lance got stung by a blast from a drone as he formed his shield. His sniper rifle wasn't cutting it when he closed his eyes and then swung out and sliced the drone in two. He stopped and gazed at the sword he held, and then proceeded to finish mopping up the drones.

Adam turned to see the sword in Lance's hand. "How did you do that?"

Lance scratched at the back of his helmet with one hand. "I'm not exactly sure."

Allura spoke from behind the cousins. "I haven't seen that for ten thousand years."
Lance stammered, "A-A-Allura?"

Allura approached and stopped alongside the Red Paladin. "It's an Altean broadsword. My father used one just like it."

Lance stared at the sword. "I have no idea how I did this."

"I think your bayard has shown you what we've all been noticing. You have greatness within."

Lance's face fell. "I don't think Shiro has noticed."

"Shiro has been quite difficult lately. I'm not sure what to do. We seem to be at odds constantly."

Lance lowered the sword. "You guys are under a lot of pressure. Having Lotor around doesn't help."

"Sometimes, it's like it was easier to fight the Galra rather than to try to work with them."

Lance gazed at her. "You both have the Coalition's best interests at heart. Don't forget that. Shiro isn't your enemy."

Allura's eyes raised to look up at the Red Paladin. "You're right. I need to stay focused on the big picture. Thank you, Lance. Speaking with you has actually made me feel better."

One of Lance's eyebrows rose as he gazed at her. "What do you mean, actually?"

They both started laughing.

Allura placed her hand on his shoulder. "Oh, and, Lance, if you're going to try to control a sword this powerful," she reached over and placed her free hand on his arm. She leaned forward and kicked at his feet, knocking him off his feet while she held his bayard. "You're going to have to work on your stance."

Adam chuckled. "Yeah, Loverboy Lance." He reached down, offering his hand to his cousin.

"Ha, ha," he glared up at Adam but reached his hand up and grabbed Adam's hand and allowed the older man to pull him back up to his feet.

Allura passed Lance his bayard.

An alarm began going off in the Castle. "Paladins," Coran's rang through the ship, "Shiro needs your help. He's fighting something in the forest that struck near the Olkari Capital."

Lance and Allura sprinted away from Adam and out the door of the training room. Adam ran off too, heading for the bridge of the Castle.

Adam met Matt and Sam as they raced onto the bridge. Thace and Coran were both working hard to try to figure out what was going on.
Matt asked, "What's going on out there?"

Coran kept his focus on the screen. "The forest appears to have come alive, and it's attacking the city."

Adam set his rifle down on the floor beside his seat as he listened to the Paladins communications through his helmet's communicator.

Pidge contacted the Olkari capital. "Ryner, what are we looking at?"

"I don't understand. That monster resembles one of our tree-mechs. It's as if the forest is being corrupted."

Shiro replied, "It must have something to do with whatever is emanating from the impact site!"

Pidge replied, "It looks like some sort of invasive plasma. Coran, have my dad and brother analyze the data I'm sending!"

"On it."

Shiro called out to the others. "Hurry up team. Let's form Voltron!" After a few ticks, Shiro said, "Let's finish it."

Hunk replied, "I can't move my leg. I mean, my Voltron leg!"

Allura grunted. "Neither can I! These vines are restricting our movements!"

Shiro called out, "Pidge, can you get free?"

"Negative. They're everywhere!"

Lance called out, "Red's stuck too!"

Allura replied, "Separate into Lions!"

Adam fought to keep his composure, but this was like something from out of a nightmare. His stomach churned as if a vine had somehow got inside him.

Shiro spoke up. "We can't! We're seized up! Trapped."

Hunk called out, "Wait. What's that sound?"

Shiro replied, "It sounds like the monster is heading the other way. And I think I know why. Ryner, is that ion cannon of yours operational?"

"No, it's still not functional. At best, it could perhaps manage one shot."

Shiro replied. "Make it count, 'cause that thing is heading right for you."

Pidge's voice came out of the Castle's speaker. "Matt! Dad! These vines."

Matt replied, "They're like a computer virus. From the data you sent, it appears the plasma substance is self-replicating organic wetware. This creates a single expanding system, giving it the ability to interface with nature the same way the Olkari do."

Pidge replied. "It's like a computer, and a virus rolled into one."
Coran slammed his fist against his control panel. "Quiznack! Now Voltron is offline."

Adam growled. "Lance. Lance, answer me!" He shook his head, "My communications are shut down too." He wanted to rip off his helmet and throw it, but he knew that would be a futile effort.

Sam threw out a suggestion. "If the plasma mass has the properties of a computer, there must be some way to hack into it and shut it down."

Matt gazed at his dad. "Conceivably. If we could figure out how to interface with it." He thought for a moment. Then his eyes lit up. "The Olkari interface."

Sam's eyes lit up. "Yes, that should work."

The pair of Holts ran off the bridge.

Adam's holographic screen flashed a warning at him. "A Galra cruiser has entered Olkarias atmosphere."

Coran stared at the main screen as it hovered over the forest and drew up Voltron covered in a cocoon of vines in a tractor beam. "This is all their doing."

Adam's pulse raced through his body. He could hear the blood rushing past his ears. He jumped up when Voltron broke free of the vines, and the Olkari ion cannon fired and struck the Galra cruiser. He dropped back down in his chair as he placed his hand on his heart. "I'm getting too old for this," he muttered to himself.

Shiro's voice came through Adam's helmet comms. "Let's finish this fight!"

Voltron managed to push the monster out of the Olkari city. But vines from the creature latched onto the metal warrior.

Shiro grunted. "Pidge, what's it doing?"

"The virus! It's trying to absorb Voltron!"

Hunk said, "I can't see anything."

Shiro asked, "Are any of the lions free?"

Pidge replied, "It's got me!"

Allura replied, "Me too! Lance!"

In response, Lance yelled a battle cry and a big explosion where the monster was at went off destroying it.

Voltron stood by the city as the paladins stood or sat on Voltron's shoulder. Adam sat next to Lance. Both watched the cleanup effort of the Olkari getting rid of the bio-hacked vines. "Hey, Shiro. What were you trying to tell me in that void thing earlier?"

"What do you mean?"
"You were shouting at me, but I couldn't hear you."

Shiro frowned. "I don't know. Things went dark there for a second. But good work today. I'm sorry I yelled at you earlier."

Lance smiled for a minute, but as soon as Shiro's eyes were back on the scene playing out before them, the Red Paladin frowned.

Adam leaned over to Lance. "Meet me later. I'm going to get Thace. We need to talk."

Lance craned his head toward Adam. "What's going on?"

Adam shook his head. "Not now. Later."

Lance blinked. "Okay."

Lotor gazed at the Voltron team as they all assembled on the bridge, continuing to discuss the Kral Zera. "I'm telling you, Branko's wanton attack was only the beginning. Without an Emperor, more and more high-ranking officials will start lashing out and consolidating their power at the Kral Zera."

Hunk held up his hand. "Uh, just gonna jump in here. What exactly is the Kral Zera? Is there food there? It sounds awful, fancy."

Adam groaned from behind Lance. Leave it to Hunk to think with his stomach again.

Lotor gazed at the Yellow Paladin. "It's the coronation ceremony for a new emperor or empress. It is held on one of the first planets we, the Galra, conquered. Planet Feyiv, a sacred land."

Shiro gazed at Lotor. "Okay, so who will be at this Kral Zera?"

Lotor started to turn toward Coran's control panel, "Allow me to show you." He stopped and gazed at Allura. "May I, Princess?"

She sighed. "Go ahead."

Lotor brought up images of several Galra officials. "Warlord Ranvieg is one of the fiercest Galra in the empire. That's why he was sent to the fringes of the universe. He will already have several factions pledging their allegiance."

Lance gazed at the screen. "Warlord, huh? I'm guessing you don't get that title by being nice."

Lotor ignored his comment. "Commander Gnov was one of Zarkon's most trusted advisors. She will be unifying his inner circle of commanders. They know what they'll be getting with her. She's not as reckless as Ranvieg but just as cruel."

"Quartermaster Janka. He is responsible for overseeing supply routes throughout the empire. Don't let his stature fool you. His power is bureaucracy, and he should not be underestimated."

Pidge spoke up. "He keeps popping up in my database. His supply chain management is incredible. He color codes."
Hunk gazed at Pidge. "So organized evil. Okay."

"And finally, Zarkon's witch Haggar."

Shiro glared at the image. "We've met."

"She the most dangerous of them all. Because she's not Galra, and therefore not eligible to rule, she probably has a puppet already. Someone she can control and manipulate. If the Galra were smart, they'd be working together against her. If Haggar's puppet takes over, then stopping Zarkon's reign will all have been for naught."

Adam's eyes narrowed as he focused onto those two words that Lotor said, 'Haggar's puppet.' Now more than ever, he needed to talk to Thace and Lance.

Shiro replied. "Then, we can't risk any of them assuming control." He turned to face the other paladins. "We should help Lotor take command of the Galra Empire."

Allura gazed at the Black Paladin. "Shiro, we've already discussed this. It's far too risky."

Lance moved to stand next to Allura. "Yeah, why don't we let them fight amongst themselves a while before we do anything?"

Shiro gazed at the pair. "You know what we went through on Olkarion, that was one rogue commander vying for the throne. When the Galra lash out, everyone in the universe suffers."

Pidge asked, "How would we get Lotor there without stirring up a huge fight?"

Lotor turned around. "I'll be bringing Voltron."

They all gasped.

Hunk's eyes narrowed. "Yeah, because Voltron never gets in fights."

Allura gazed at the Black Paladin. "Shiro, we can't allow that to happen."

Shiro frowned. "I'm sorry to hear that." He stormed off the bridge.

Hunk asked, "Uh, what's up with Shiro?"

Adam leaned toward Lance. "Now would be a good time to go talk." He turned to Thace. "Would you join Lance and me?"

"What's up?"

"There's something we should discuss, and I want to do this privately."

Lance lowered his voice. "Meet me in the Red Lion's hangar. We can talk inside the lion, and nobody will know."

Hunk turned to gaze at the trio. "What's going on?"

Lance turned and waved at the Yellow Paladin. "This is super-secret ninja stuff."

Hunk rolled his eyes. "Fine."

Lance, Thace, and Adam walked off the bridge.
Pidge glanced up a Hunk, "What's up with them?"

Hunk shrugged. "I don't know."

Lance sat in his pilot's chair as Adam and Thace leaned against the side of the cockpit. "So, what did you want to talk about?"

"Well," Adam scratched the back of his head. He turned to Thace. "That alcohol you gave me the other day. Is it known to cause hallucinations in other species? Or hallucinogenic dreams?"

Thace frowned. "I have no idea. I mean, it's possible."

Lance gazed at Adam, "What are you getting at?"

Adam took a seat on the floor of the cockpit as he gazed at Lance. "Do you remember back when I was sick with the flu, and Takashi called me Koishiteru?"

"Yeah, you never did explain what it meant."

"As you can guess, it's a Japanese term, and it's a special way of telling a person you want to spend the rest of your life with that you love them. Have you once heard him use that word since he's been back?"

Lance frowned as he rubbed his chin. "No, I only thought he might have said it in private with you."

Adam sighed. "Not once has he said it to me. But then I got drunk, and I had a dream where I saw Shiro in, and in the dream, he called me Koishiteru, and also told me not to trust the thing that looks like him."

Lance jerked up in his seat. "Wait, wait! Just wait a minute. Are you saying Shiro isn't Shiro?"

Thace gazed at the pair. "It's possible. Although, I hadn't been on the command ship for very long before Voltron attacked to save the Princess. But I'd heard some stories about the druids doing some things that had other Galra afraid."

Adam gazed at his cousin. "I mean think about the way he's been so gung-ho about putting Lotor on the Galra throne. I don't like the idea any more than anyone else. It seems to me that it would be something the witch might do to drive a wedge into the team and make it easier to take Voltron down."

Lance frowned. "I hate that you could be right about this."

Adam nodded. "I am too. I also hated the way he hounded Keith all the time when he was here."

Lance's expression turned sad. "Yeah. I miss the mullet-head."

Adam raised an eyebrow as he gazed at his cousin as a slight smirk pulled at his lips.

Thace turned to Adam. "So, what do you suggest we do about it."

"Keep an eye on him. If he does anything that might put anyone in danger, take him down."
Lance sighed. "Okay."

Adam, Thace, and Lance returned to the bridge as Pidge's face popped up on the main screen. "Hey, Princess, do you know where Shiro is?"

"Let me check." Allura checked her holographic screen. "He isn't on the ship. His lion's gone, too. Where's Lotor?"

Thace checked his holographic screen. Lotor's not here either."

Adam gazed at Allura. Right now, he'd follow her cues. He drew his hand up into a fist. "This is all Lotor's doing," he muttered under his breath.

Allura sighed. "Let's get to the Lions."

After the lions left the Castle, Adam leaned back in his seat. Thace appeared by his shoulder. "What do we do now?"

Adam gazed up at the Galran. "We continue to keep an eye on him."

Thace placed a hand on Adam's shoulder. "I understand now what your relationship was with the Black Paladin. If I can help with finding your Shiro, I will do it."

Adam nodded. "Thank you, Thace."
Secrets Revealed

Chapter Summary

Some secrets held by some of Team Voltron comes to light. Adam thinks he's getting closer to the truth about Shiro and wonders if Lotor is the puppet master.

Team Voltron stood around the pod facing Sam Holt. Shiro spoke, "We're going to miss you, sir."

Sam smiled. "Ah, you guys seem to be just fine without me. Your mission is here. Mine is on Earth. As soon as I get back, I'll inform the Galaxy Garrison what's going on and start working on upgrading the planetary defenses."

"Tell Iverson the next time I see him. I'm going to kick his butt for strapping me to that table."

Pidge grinned.

Sam chuckled. "I'll be sure to tell him that."

Adam stepped up to Sam. "It was nice to see you again, Commander Holt."

Sam grinned at the other man. "No need to be so formal, Adam. But it sure was nice to see you too."

The two men shook hands.

Hunk approached Sam. "Hey, I had everyone record some messages for our families. Uh, a little heads up, I got teary in mine, so that's mom's eyes only."

Sam took the device from Hunk. "Of course."

Hunk slid toward Lance. "You don't wanna see Lance's either since it's probably a love message to Jenny Shaybon or the other Jenny. What was her name again?"

Lance's eyes narrowed as he glared at the Yellow Paladin. "Shut up, Hunk!" He turned away and crossed his arms over his chest.

Hunk's eyes grew. "Hey, are you okay, dude?"

Lance replied as his voice thickened with unshed tears. "I'm fine. It's just once I started thinking about going back to Earth, I started missing my mom, my brothers Marco and Luis, and my sister Veronica, and my grandma, and—" his voice trailed as he sniffed.

Hunk tentatively reached out, but he stopped. "Um, are you crying?"

Lance's voice cracked as he rubbed his arm over his eyes. "No!" He sniffed again. "No, I just-I just got space dust in my eyes." The harder he tried to hold the tears back, the more he lost whatever composure he had. "It's very dusty in here."

Adam stepped over to Lance and threw an arm over his shoulder. "I know you miss them all. I do too, but you remember we're going to get back to Earth one day, and when we do, they'll probably
have a parade."

Lance nodded.

Sam turned to Pidge and Matt. "I guess this is it."

Matt said, "I wish I could go with you. I'd love to help build Earth's first galactic defense system."

"I'm just worried we won't have enough time or resources to make a dent before we need it."

Pidge gazed at her dad. "A wise man once told me, if you get too worried about what could go wrong, you might miss your chance to do something great."

Sam smiled. "Sounds like a wise man indeed." He turned to his firstborn. "Matt, you be careful on the front lines. And, Pidge, keep an eye on your brother for me."

"You've got it, Dad."

Sam gazed at his children and whimpered. He suddenly reached out and embraced both of them.

Pidge returned the hug. "We love you too, Dad."

Hunk wiped at his eyes. "There is a lot of space dust in here."

Coran began bawling. "It's filthy!"

Lance gazed out the window of the bridge of the Castle as the ship approached the Galra command ship. "I can't believe we're flying into the belly of the beast."

Hunk nodded. "It's strange to think that last time we were here, we were fighting the Galra. Now we're working with them."

Allura replied, "We have to do everything we can to support Lotor. This is our chance to promote a new era of peace."

Adam shook his head as he frowned. He still didn't like the idea of working with Lotor. His eyes slid over to gaze at Shiro. Before Sam left for Earth, he almost sounded like himself. But now? Could this Shiro be Lotor's puppet?

He focused back on the Castle as it docked with the Command ship. He sighed, but his hand rested on the butt of his pistol. It made him feel better, and he'd use it if need be.

The door slid open, revealing Lotor's throne room with sentries lining both sides of the room, all standing at attention. Lotor stood at the bottom of the steps leading to the Galra throne. Two sentries flanked Lotor, one on each side. His voice rang out. "Thank you for coming, friends. I have prepared a new imperial banner to herald over the alliance. This is the same symbol that flew over our fathers when they worked together as the original Paladins of Voltron. I hope that we can return the universe to that golden age. Since I ascended to the throne, the Galra Empire has been
torn apart. A sizeable portion has sworn its allegiance to me. However, large factions remain in revolt."

Allura led the way with the others following as Lotor spoke. They stopped a short distance away.

Hunk glared at the new emperor. "Uh, okay, the Galra aren't exactly known to turn the other cheek."

Lance's eyes blazed as he glared at Lotor. "They're more likely to swing the other fist."

Thace stepped up beside Allura. "I don't know what you're getting at here, but Voltron isn't your mechanism of revenge against those factions in revolt."

Lotor waved a hand in front of his face. "That was never my intention, Commander Thace."

Thace's eyes narrowed at the use of his old rank.

"I did my homework. You were instrumental in freeing Voltron when they came to rescue the Princess from Zarkon."

"That was my duty. I had to be certain that both Allura and Voltron stayed out of Zarkon's hands."

Lance nodded, "Thace is the man."

Shiro gazed at Lotor as if nothing had been said between Thace and the new emperor. "How do you get an empire that's only known violence for thousands of years to put down their weapons?"

Lotor stepped forward. "By providing them with the very thing they're fighting for. Quintessence, unlimited amounts of it." He stopped in front of the princess. "And, Allura, you are the key to getting it." He gazed at the others. "I'm sure you'll be interested in inspecting every aspect of Galra headquarters."

Shiro replied, "I'd like to cross-reference our star charts with current Galra troop locations."

Lotor nodded. "Consider it done."

Coran gasped, as one of his eyebrows rose. "You want to sync our intelligence to the Galra headquarters? I never thought I'd see the quizznaking quintant."

Lotor turned, "Sentry, take them to the record room. You will find everything you need there." As Shiro and Coran followed their sentry guide, he turned to the other Paladins and Adam. "I'm leaving you with a personal escort that will take you where ever you'd like to go." Lotor turned to Allura. "Come, Princess. There is much work to be done."

As the pair walked away, Lance tried to follow but was stopped by the sentry.

Hunk asked, "So we're free to roam around Galra HQ and have some fun?"

The sentry replied, "What is fun?"

Lance gazed at the sentry. "You're about to find out."

Pidge gazed at the Red Paladin. "Lance, it's a robot. It can't have fun." Pidge gripped her chin with her hand. "Unless," she released her chin as her hand shot up in the air, "I reprogram it."

Hunk raised his arms over his head. "Take us to the sentry repair center!"
Adam groaned. This didn't sound like a good idea.

Thace glanced at the others. "I need to contact Kolivan. I should fill him in on what is going on."

Adam gulped. "You're going to leave me alone with these three?"

"They are still children. What trouble can they get into?"

Adam resisted the urge to facepalm. "You have no idea."

Pidge spoke, "Reconfigured processor inserted."

Hunk nodded. "Check."

"All rewired for an optimal fun performance."

Hunk vigorously nodded. "Checkity-check."

Pidge stared at the sentry. "Now, gotta upload the new program, and—" she entered the program. "All right, I'm finished."

Hunk and Pidge slapped their hands together. "Yeah! Team Punk does it again."

Adam snorted at their nickname.

Lance asked as he played around with a piece of a sentry, "How do we know if it worked?"

Pidge looked down on the sentry as Hunk and Lance did. The sentry sat up so fast that the Green Paladin lost her balance and fell backward. The sentry gazed at Lance then turned it's head to Hunk. "You dum-dums got any non-lethal semi-combustible diversionary devices?"

Lance blinked. "What?"

Pidge pulled herself up from the floor. "I think he's looking for firecrackers!"

Hunk grinned. "Oh. It worked."

The sentry led them to the mess hall, where they figured out how to make low explosive bombs out of Galra food goo packs. They hid behind a counter as the bomb ticked away and then exploded, sending food goo splattering around the kitchen area of the mess hall and into their hair and on the metallic head of the sentry.

As the sentry and three paladins cheered, Adam slapped his hand to his face.

However, the three paladins and sentry took off running when two Galra appeared. Adam found himself separated from the trio. He gazed at the pair of Galra officers. "I'm not involved with their shenanigans, but if you do catch them, contact me. I'm heading back to the Castle of Lions."

The pair of Galra gazed at each other then took after the three paladins, and the former sentry turned fun robot.

Adam gazed around, trying to remember which way they'd come to get where he stood in the
kitchen area of the mess hall. He sighed. "If all else fails, get a map," he muttered as he brought up his holographic screen from his wrist gauntlet.

Adam entered the Castle of Lions and rode the elevator up to the bridge. As the door opened, he saw Thace gripping the sides of Coran's console.

"Thace, are you okay?"

The Galra released his grip on the console and turned around to face the human. "I've received some disturbing and distressing news from Kolivan. And I find I need someone to talk to."

"Well, I'm available."

"What about the children?"

Adam shook his head. "We got separated after they were caught blowing up packets of food goo in the mess hall. They ran off, but I did tell the two Galra who were chasing them that if they caught them to let me know."

Thace chuckled. "Are all human children so mischievous?"

Adam shook his head. "No, but some are."

Thace sighed. "Well, at least they do have someone looking out for them."

"I can tell something's bothering you."

Thace nodded. "I guess I should start from the beginning. When I contacted Kolivan, he told me he sent Keith off to get an operative we had in Warlord Ranvieg's base. That operative is my younger sister Krolia though we had different fathers but the same mother."

"Kolivan said that he had received a message from Krolia that she and Keith had gotten out, but they were going to continue following the trail of this new quintessence. And that's the last anyone has heard from either of them."

Adam let out a gasp and began pacing. "But that could mean anything. It doesn't mean that anything has happened to either of them."

"I know, but it's still worrying. You see, this isn't the first time that Krolia has disappeared. The first time was when she was sent on a mission to find and prevent the Blue Lion from falling into Zarkon's hands."

Adam spun around as his eyes grew. "She was on Earth?"

Thace nodded. "When Krolia returned to the Blade, it was around eighteen of your Earth years ago. She returned without her Marmora blade. She also said that she'd crash-landed after killing a pilot in another fighter to keep him from reporting the location of the Blue Lion. She fell in love with a human male, and together they had a child. She wanted to name that child Yorak, but the human decided on another name, Keith."

Adam stumbled but focused his gaze on Thace. "So you're saying this Krolia is Keith's mother? And that would make you his uncle?"
Thace nodded. "Yes."

Adam sucked in a breath. "Okay. I'll keep your secret safe."

"Thank you, Adam."

They both turned as the door to the bridge opened, and the three paladins returned. All were laughing over something.

Adam's eyes fell on Lance. They looked onto the black eye and the bandage on his forehead. He placed his hands on his hips. "What in the hell happened?"

Hunk chuckled. "Oh, it was great! You missed it."

"Don't tell me what I missed. Tell me why Lance looks like he's been through a fight!"

Lance waved a hand in the air. "Oh, calm down, Adam. It's nothing major."

Pidge giggled. "It was a bad decision. But Lance became a real Lance in a joust with the sentry."

Hunk nodded. "Yeah, you should have seen it. We tackled those two Galra who were chasing Lance, and we got the idea we should have a joust."

Pidge giggled again. "Yeah, so we tied them to those mechanized dollies, and Lance got on one, while the sentry got on another and—" she couldn't continue as she doubled over in laughter.

Hunk smacked his hands together as he took up the story. "And wham they crashed together. And this is the result."

"And where is your friend now?"

Lance took up the story. "Well, that's the best part. He wanted to see space. So we tied him to one of those Robeast coffins, and he insisted we launch him into space. So, we did."

Hunk nodded. "As he left he yelled, 'See ya later Paladudes!'"

Adam turned as he heard a snort come from Thace, which was followed by a chuckle then by roaring laughter. He wiped at his eye and tried to calm himself down from laughing, but the roaring laughter continued.

Adam chuckled, but soon the Galra laughter was joined by four humans. Pidge even pulled out her garrison phone showing off pictures of them in the throne room sitting on the throne.

Adam shook his head as he got control of himself.

They were soon joined by Shiro, Coran, Allura, and Lotor. Allura held out the compass stone for all to see.

Pidge's eyebrows rose as she stared at it. "So, this magic rock is gonna guide us to a mysterious planet?"

Lotor replied, "A land known as Oriande."

Coran chuckled. "I'm afraid someone's been rugging your wimble, Prince Lotor. Oriande is just an Altean folktale. It doesn't exist."
Allura turned her gaze to the older Altean. "That's what I thought, Coran, but now I have a feeling it is quite real."

Lotor turned his gaze to the others. "It is the birthplace of all Altean alchemy. The place where King Alfor learned the secrets that helped him create Voltron and where Allura will master those same secrets so that my ships may enter the quintessence field."

Lance crossed his arms over his chest. "And what makes you the authority on crazy Altean nonsense? Coran knows more magic made up gobbledygook than anyone I've ever met."

Adam cradled his forehead in his hand. "Why me?" he mumbled.

"Thank you, Lance. And I can assure you King Alfor never mentioned anything to me about traveling to Oriande."

"In all likelihood, he kept it a secret from everyone. I have been researching Oriande for centuries, hoping to learn more about my Altean ancestry. Over time, I've managed to gather evidence from all over the universe that hinted at its existence. Now, thanks to Princess Allura, I will finally gaze upon its magnificence with my own eyes."

Hunk raised his hand. "Oh, aren't you a little busy running your empire to take a magical vacation."

Adam raised his eyes skyward as he sighed and shook his head. But what he didn't like was Shiro's proximity to Lotor.

Lotor replied, "To transition the Galra Empire to a peaceful existence, I need to open a pathway to the quintessence field. Once my people have access to unlimited energy, the old ways of the empire will be behind them."

Allura gazed down at the compass stone. "If this voyage is successful, the universe will be on the path to peace."

Shiro gazed at Allura. "Well, let's find out where we're going."

Allura activated the Castle's holographic star map. She closed her eyes and focused on the stone in her hands. It began to glow as it projected an image of Oriande up into the map. She pointed up at it. "There, between those three celestial bodies. That's where we're headed."

Coran gazed at it but gasped as recognition flashed in his eyes. "Wait a tick, that's the Patrulian Zone."

Lance turned his head so fast to gaze at Coran that Adam rubbed the back of his neck. Lance ignored his cousin. "The what now?"

"The Patrulian Zone is a mysterious part of space where ships enter and are never heard from again. Princess, that area has been deemed unsafe to navigate for ages."

Lotor gazed at Allura. "The perfect place to hide a magical world."

Pidge crossed her arms over her chest. "Or to crash and die."

Allura gazed at Pidge before turning her gaze to the former royal advisor. "We will approach with caution. Prepare our course, Coran."

He sighed, "Yes, Princess."
Adam took his seat. He took a glance around the bridge. Everyone wore a troubled expression of some fashion. That is except for Lotor. He frowned. It seemed to him Lotor was expecting something. But he also didn't like how close he stood by Princess Allura.

Adam turned his gaze to Thace. His eyebrow rose as he noticed the expression on the Galran's face. Was that jealousy he was seeing? "Curious," Adam muttered.

Coran focused on the main screen. "We're approaching the Patrulian Zone."

Shiro asked from his seat behind the Altean, "What is that up ahead? An asteroid belt?"

Coran shook his head. "No. It's a graveyard."

Hunk asked, "What caused them all to lose power?"

Coran's voice held a reverence for the deceased. "No one knows."

Pidge studied the readings on her holographic screen. "I think we just found out."

Coran gasped.

Lance stood up from his seat. "Is that some kind of supermassive star."

Pidge gazed at her screen. "No. Unbelievable! It's a white hole!"

Hunk grinned. "Whoa! Take that, theoretical physics!"

Lance turned to face Pidge. "Wait, what's a white hole?"

Pidge replied, "Well, unlike a black hole, which has massive gravity that sucks everything in, a white hole is an opposite body that shoots massive amounts of energy out from an unknown source."

Hunk studied his screen. "It's blasting the whole area with crazy huge radiation."

Shiro frowned. "The energy must've fried those ships systems."

Lotor placed his hand to his face as his eyes lost focus. "The wise stand back from the fire, fools are burned on the pyre. The mystic becomes one with the flame, the embers, and he are the same."

Lance asked, "Is that, like, a song you're working on. 'Cause it sucks."

Adam groaned. "Lance, you're not helping any right now."

Lotor replied, "It's a poem by an ancient Altean alchemist. I discovered it carved next to a cave painting of a fiery sphere. I never realized until now that it described the route to Oriande. We must go into the white hole."

Hunk stood as he raised his hand. "Are you guys serious? We're going to navigate by cave poetry now?"

Pidge gazed up at Lotor. "How are we supposed to go through the white hole? If we get close,
we're gonna end up like those dead ships out there."

All eyes turned to Allura. "We wormhole inside."

Coran gasped. "Princess, no!"

Allura stared back at Coran. "Voltron can withstand forces other ships cannot."

Shiro jumped up and faced her. "Are you sure?"

"If this is the home of Altean alchemy, then Voltron will make it through."

Lance gazed at her as his eyebrows knit together. "And what if it's just another nuclear explosion in space? Then we're toast."

Coran stepped forward as he held his hands out in front of him. "Princess, I think you've taken this quest far enough. Lotor is sending you to your doom."

Lotor turned to face Coran. "Quite the opposite. It is a mission of life discovery."

Lance leaned over toward the new Galran Emperor. "You need to zip it!"

Thace strode up behind Lance and placed his clawed hand on the Red Paladin's shoulder. "Trust her. I'm sure she'll make the right decision."

Lance nodded, but he swallowed hard.

Allura took a deep breath. "Believe me. I would never ask any of you to do this if I didn't know if I didn't feel in my heart that it is true. I belong here."

As the paladins turned to leave, Thace reached out to Allura but stopped. He turned and returned to his place on the bridge.

Adam rubbed at his bearded chin as he gazed at Lotor but turned his eyes to Thace. If there was anyone on the Castle that he'd like to see with the Altean Princess, it was Thace, not Lotor. He still had his suspicions about Lotor and the witch Haggar. He took his seat on the bridge. He'd taken to wearing his energy pistol more frequently now. "Just in case," he told himself.

The Lions flew out of the Castle and formed Voltron. Shiro's voice came over the bridge's speaker. "Alright, Coran, open up a wormhole."

Lance's sigh came over the speaker. "Well, let's fly into the cosmic death storm!"

Adam gripped the arms of his chair as Voltron flew into the wormhole. He still loved Takashi even if he was somehow Lotor's pawn in all this. He hoped he wouldn't have to use his energy pistol on the man, but if push came to shove, he would.

Shiro grunted. "We're being blasted backward! Full power to thrusters!"

Lance's voice came over the speaker. "Is that a lion?"

Adam sat up as Allura asked, "Why is it attacking us?"
Shiro called out, "Fire lasers!"

Lance yelled, "There's nothing to hit!"

The paladins screamed.

Coran turned to Lotor. "What have you done?" He jumped back as he threw an arm in front of himself. "Wait, what's happening to your face?"

"What?"

"You have Altean marks. And they're glowing?"

Adam jumped up from his seat. "Do what?"

Lotor lifted his hand to his face. "The Mark of the Chosen."

Coran asked, "What?"

Lotor turned quickly toward the screen. "You need to get out of there. That thing is a guardian! It will only allow worthy Alteans through."

Lance yelled, "Oh, thanks for the tip!"

Shiro yelled, "Pull back!"

A beam of bright white energy shot out of the white hole striking the Castle of Lions. Coran called out. "All systems shutting down! Our stabilizers aren't working. We're listing into the graveyard!"

The Paladins returned to the Castle. As they walked onto the bridge, Coran stood up. "I managed to restore auxiliary power, but it won't last long. If we don't get the Castle running within the next quintant, we'll be out of air."

Lance replied, "Maybe we can decrease our breathers by one."

Adam nudged Lance with his shoulder, getting the teen's attention. "You're using your head."

Lance's cheeks flushed slightly. "It seems only natural."

Hunk stared at Lotor. "Uh, what's up with your face?"

Pidge nodded. "Yeah, and if this is the home of Altean alchemy, why can't Voltron get in?"

Lotor gazed back at them. "I am sorry to put us in this position, but I think I know the answer. Look at Allura."

The princess removed her helmet. She stepped forward and gazed at Lotor. "You have them too."

"It's called the Mark of the Chosen. They are mentioned in some of the Oriande legends. They indicate those worthy of entering the realm."

Shiro turned to gaze at Coran. "Wait, why aren't Coran's marks glowing?"
Lotor replied, "There are different types of Alteans. Allura possesses a deep connection to ancient Altean energy. It enables her to operate the Teludav and change her shape and size. Her father had greater alchemic understanding than any before him. Others are less magical, no offense."

Hunk asked, "So, what do we do now?"

"Allura and I need to enter the white hole alone."

Lance yelled, "What?"

Coran leaned in toward Lotor as his face flushed, and his eyes narrowed, "Absolutely not! What about the monster?"

Lotor replied, "The monster is a guard keeping the unworthy out. It won't hurt us."

Lance glared at Lotor. "Yeah, and before, you thought it wasn't going to hurt us!"

Pidge's eyebrows rose. "How are we going to get there? We're stuck."

Allura replied, "We can use the personal transport crafts."

Coran raced over to her, putting his hands on her shoulders. "Allura, please! It's too dangerous."

Allura placed her hands on his forearms. "Coran, I must gain some kind of alchemic knowledge in Oriande, both to save our lives and bring peace to the universe."

Lance exploded, "Coran, don't tell you're going to cave in on this!"

As Allura removed Coran's hands from her shoulders, Shiro focused on the Red Paladin. "Lance, she's right. The ship is stuck unless the princess can get it restarted."

Allura gazed at the human teen. "Don't worry. This will work. I can feel it."

As Lotor and Allura walked toward the door to the bridge. Thace stepped forward. "Princess, could I speak with you for a moment. She stepped forward. "Princess, could I speak with you for a moment." He shot a pointed stare at Lotor. "Alone."

Allura gazed up at Thace, "Of course."

Thace led her off to the side near the Red Paladin's chair and lowered his voice. "I want you to know that since the day I swore myself to your cause that I do have feelings for you."

Allura's cheeks flushed as she gazed back up at him. "I-I don't know what to say."

"I just wanted you to know."

"I must go."

Thace nodded. "Return safely."

Allura hurried off to lead Lotor to the personal transports.

Everyone gathered in the engine room, and Adam approached Thace, who stood over at the side. He stood next to the Galran and lowered his voice. "You're in love with her."
Thace sighed. "Is it that obvious?"

Adam nodded as he smiled. "Yeah."

Thace gazed at Lance. "I think someone else is too."

Adam followed his gaze and shook his head. "I believe that it's infatuation. I think he's actually in love with somebody else, and he doesn't exactly realize it yet."

Pidge's voice rose from under the machine she was working on. "Shiro, can you take Lance, please."

Adam followed Shiro, who followed Lance out of the engine room. Lance sighed. "It's okay, Shiro. I'll be quiet," he smacked his head into the bulkhead. "You don't have to babysit me."

Shiro's voice came from behind the Red Paladin. "Lance, let me ask you something. Do you remember, on Olkarion, how you asked me about talking to you inside Voltron?"

Adam's eyebrow rose.

Lance turned around to face the Black Paladin. "Yeah."

Shiro asked, "What happened there? I can't remember any of it."

Lance replied, "We were all in some kind of mystical Voltron mindscape, and you were yelling something, but I couldn't hear you. Are you okay?"

Shiro sighed. "I-I don't know. My head-I'm just-I'm feeling so confused. It's like—"

"What?"

Shiro gazed at Lance. "Like I'm not myself."

Adam gazed over Shiro's shoulder at Lance. He hoped that his cousin would do the right thing and not mention their suspicions about Lotor, and this seemed like confirmation that somehow the Galra Emperor had some kind of control over the Black Paladin.

Lance replied, "It's probably a lack of oxygen. You should probably sit down. We'll get through this."

Everyone lay around on the bridge as a computerized voice said, "Oxygen levels at five percent."

Pidge struggled to breathe and tried to focus. "There must be some way for us to harness the power of the white hole and use it to get the ship working." She groaned as it became harder for her to breathe.

Hunk replied as he lay on the floor. "We've tried everything. I don't think I can keep moving."

Lance pointed at the screen as it began beeping but failed to find the words.

Allura and Lotor returned to the Castle in time for Allura to restart the Castle. Coran gazed at his princess. "You did it!"
Lance finally got to his feet. "We-We shouldn't have doubted you."

Thace bumped Lance. "Speak for yourself. I didn't have any doubts."

Allura replied. "I couldn't have done it without Lotor."

A quiet growl came from Thace's throat, only heard by those closest to him.

Lotor bowed his head toward Allura and then raised it. "You are a true Altean alchemist. Oriande was for you, not for me."

No one but Adam noticed the look on Shiro's face. It seemed almost angry.

Pidge spoke up. "So, what's the next step?"

Lance frowned at the smallest paladin. "Slow down, Pidge. We just started breathing again."
As the Castle of Lions approached the Galra HQ, Lotor stood by Allura. "To return so triumphantly is a dream I thought I would never achieve. We are one step closer to bringing peace and prosperity to the entire universe." He turned to face Allura. "This all because of you, Princess."

Adam rolled his eyes. This song and dance of Lotor's made him want to gag. It was getting old, extremely fast.

Allura gazed at Lotor. "We did it together. I would have never even known of Oriande without you, and therefore could have never unlocked its secrets."

As the doors slid open, allowing them access to the throne room, Shiro spoke, "We'll see what intel is in your briefing and decide what to do. Maybe we can—"

He was interrupted by a woman who faced them. "Lotor."

Lotor frowned. "Oh, no."

Lance slid in front of Lotor. "Uh, who the heck are you?"

The woman stepped up to Lance. "How dare you speak to me without authorization from Blood Emperor Lotor." She bent what looked a lot like a riding crop back and released it smacking the Red Paladin in the forehead.

Lance yelled as he jerked back.

Lotor explained, "She was my governess. No one had used the term Blood Emperor since before we were a star-faring race." He turned toward the Voltron team. "And these are my colleagues. They have more than my permission to speak. Everyone, this is Dayak."

Everyone but Lance said hi in one fashion or another while the Red Paladin groaned.

Lotor didn't look or sound thrilled to see her. Especially to Adam. "So to what do we owe the honor?"

Dayak smiled. "Word of your victory at the Kral Zera has spread throughout the empire. I always knew you had it in you to crush your enemies. Dayak's raised you from a child to a man, and now I'll witness your ascension to the throne."

Lance broke into laughter. "Wait, she raised you from a child? Aww, is this your nanny?"

"Governess."
Lance gripped his hands together under his chin. "You have a nanny!"

Adam sighed as he shook his head. His cousin had a bad habit of running with something when he should just drop it. And this seemed to be another one of those times.

Lance ignored his cousin's sigh as he continued. "Is she going to read you bedtime stories? Is she gonna rock you to sleep? Is she gonna—" Ow!" he yelled as he was struck again.

Dayak brandished her crop. "I instructed Lotor in the ways of the Galra. The history of our conquests, our customs, battle philosophy, and the art of war."

Hunk gazed at her. "Hmm, Galra customs, huh. Is that like when you guys say vrepit sa and stuff? There's so much we don't know about you."

Adam, if asked later about it, would swear he saw the wheels in Lotor's head-turning.

Lotor leaned over to Hunk. "If you're interested in our society's history, you couldn't find a better teacher than Dayak."

She held her head up proudly. "What Lotor says is true."

"Oh, wow. Would you teach me about the Galra?"

Lance blinked at Hunk. "What do you want to know about the Galra for?"

Hunk looked over at Lance. "We're gonna be working with Lotor to bring peace through the empire, right? It makes sense the more we know about their society, the better."

Dayak gazed at the Yellow Paladin. "If you are to learn the ways of the Galra, you must be prepared for the most challenging trial you could ever undertake. There will be no turning back. Her eyes narrowed. "Victory or death."

Hunk raised his hands as his eyes grew. "Uh, oh, that's okay."

Allura spoke from behind him. "Hunk, you're a Paladin of Voltron. There is no challenge too great for you."

Hunk groaned. "Will I learn what vrepit sa means?"

"Yes."

Hunk pumped his fist in the air. "Let's do it!"

Dayak walked away with the Yellow Paladin following.

Shiro gazed at Lotor. "Let's get to that briefing."

A Galra officer stood in front of a huge screen showing a map of the Empire along with different factions. "The civil war continues unimpeded. More Galra forces are leaving to join other factions." He pressed a button bringing up an image of a Galran they were all associated with. "Sendak has claimed the most deserters. They call themselves the Fire of Purification."
Lotor glared at Sendak's image. "It is time I address all Galra and make my claim as emperor absolute."

Lance gazed at Lotor. "Does that mean you'll start freeing planets?"

Lotor turned his gaze on the Red Paladin. "It's not that easy. My grip on the empire is tenuous at best. I need to offer an alternative to our current state. That is why it's so important that Allura and I gain access to the quintessence field."

Allura gazed at him. "Are we to focus all of our energies on that?"

Adam's eyes narrowed. Lotor was definitely up to something. He could feel it. He heard a low growl near him and turned his head to gaze up at Thace. The Blade of Marmora member eyes glared at Zarkon's son.

If Lotor noticed he didn't show it. "It is paramount. However, we cannot let the empire fall apart. I will address my people at the astral conflux."

An alarm blared through Galra HQ. Nearly all of the paladins, along with Coran, Adam, and Thace, joined Lotor. A Galra commander's face came on screen. "The planet has already been fired upon, and we do not have the means to protect ourselves. You must send assistance immediately."

Shiro appeared from wherever he'd been at. "What's going on?"

Lotor turned to face them. "One of our labor planets is under attack from Sendak and his fleet."

Lance sighed. "Sendak? Not that guy again."

Pidge spoke up. "We've got to help that planet immediately."

Lotor gazed away from them. "Sendak would have me respond to his attack and neglect my empire."

Allura gazed at him. "Voltron can handle this while you continue to rule."

Lotor looked at her. "But, Princess, I need you here. Without you—"

Allura shook her head. "Your plan has waited this long. It can wait for a tick longer. We must protect your innocent subjects."

Lotor appeared torn as he replied. "Of course. You're right."

We will return as soon as we can."

As the Lions flew away from the Castle of Lions, Thace and Adam moved to their stations. Adam picked up his earbud microphone. He gazed at Thace. "I can tell that Lotor is pushing your buttons."

Thace stared back at him. "What do you mean?"

"All that low growling you've been doing. It sounds like you've set your claim on the Princess."
Thace nodded. "I knew that I liked you. I don't have to explain much to you because of your preceptive mind. Yes, in a way, I have. I will go so far to challenge Lotor to a duel to the death in the arena if I have to."

"I hope it doesn't come to that. He's very handy with a sword."

A feral grin pulled at Thace's lips. "I will be the challenger, and I will have the choice of weapons. There are some that I am a true master of."

Adam took his seat as Coran, who was oblivious to their conversation, opened a wormhole for the lions to fly through.

Adam pushed the earbud into his ear as he flipped the switch, opening communications to the team. "I'm here in case you need backup. Coran can get the Castle to you in no time."

In reply, he heard Sendak's voice taunting the Paladins. "Here at your new master's bidding?"

Shiro gasped as if in pain.

Lance's voice called out, "Shiro, are you all right?"

Adam's eyes grew as he heard Shiro's voice. He sounded like he was in pain. "I'm fine. Come on, team, let's form Voltron!"

Sendak's voice came over Voltron's comm's. Adam gritted his teeth as the Galran spoke. "I know your true weakness. That you value the lives of others. And I will harness that weakness until you are crushed beneath my heel."

Pidge called out, "Oh No! Without those panels in place, the planet will be fully exposed!"

Lance asked. "Which means?"

"They'll have no protection from the radiation bands!"

Lance called out, "We can't let him get away!"

Shiro replied, "Lance, there's no time. We gotta fix that shield as soon as --" he grunted and cried out in pain.

Adam frowned. "Takashi, you are not fine."

"Can't talk now, Adam." He started talking to someone else. "We are the Paladins of Voltron, working with Emperor Lotor. We're here to help you. What is the status of your shield system?"

"Paladins, I am Commander Bogh. Our damage report indicates that a plate has been fractured. Our generator is offline and needs rebooting. Other plates have shifted out of their gravitational harnessing and must be repositioned. Only five dobashes remain until the next solar sequence."

Shiro said, "You're the engineer, Hunk. How should we handle this?"

Hunk didn't hesitate. "We need to split up. Pidge, you handle the generator system."

"Then I'm gonna need Shiro to come with me. I can use his arm to power the mainframe."

"Okay, good. Allura, Lance, I need you to refuse that fractured plate."
Allura replied, "Affirmative."
"You got it!"

Hunk sighed. "I'm gonna try to get the plates aligned."

Shiro replied, "Okay. We've got our orders. Let's move!"

Hunk asked, "Where does this plate need to be lined up?

Commander Bogh replied, "You're moving plate 7-2. It needs to be aligned with plate 8-1."

Hunk replied, "Got it, but those other plates are out of position. There's no way I'll be able to move them all myself."

"I can activate the manual thrusters on some of the plates. It will be slow-going, but I—"

He was cut off by his subordinates. "First you side with Lotor and get our system attacked by Sendak. Then you willfully work with Voltron, our sworn enemies!"

Bogh commanded, "Get to your station and begin the thrust sequence. That's an order!"

Hunk yelled, "Are you freaking kidding me? Palen-bol!"

Adam sat up in his seat. "Woah, you go, Hunk." He glanced over at Thace. "I think you'll like hearing this." He pressed a button on his screen that brought up the Paladins communications over the speaker of the Castle as a grin spread over his face.

Both Bogh and his subordinate replied, "Huh?"

"You're both a dishonor. Do you fight for yourself, or do you fight for the Galra?"

"Galra!"

Hunk's voice roared over the speaker. "Then Victory or death! Enough of this bickering!"

"We're going to die because of Commander Bogh."

Hunk replied, "You know, long ago, there was a desperate group of Galra that thought they were going to die. They executed a spear-like attack known as the Killing Thrust. Those soldiers knew what it meant to put their life on the line. They won the day. Are you ready to put aside your differences and fight with me?"

"Vrepit Sa!"

Adam and Thace both chuckled as Hunk said, "I guess all that pain did make me smarter." A few ticks later, Hunk spoke again. "Pidge, I need you to restore main shield power to get this gravitational harnessing going."

"We're on it." Pidge spoke again, "Okay, Shiro, let's jack your hand into that terminal, and we'll get this thing running in no time."

Lance's voice came over the speaker. "Okay, broken massive shield plate. I don't suppose there's a video on how to fix this, is there?"

Hunk's voice came over the Castle's speaker. "Make sure the connection's straight. If it's even one
degree off, the shield will fail."

Lance yelled, "That's not a tutorial!"

Allura replied, "If you hold them in place, then I could freeze them together. But I don't think the ice will stand the radiation for exceptionally long."

"Hey, maybe after you freeze them, I could use my heat ray to weld them together."

"Great idea, Lance!"

Lance's voice came through the speaker again. "I hope this works."

Allura replied, "We did it!"

Hunk replied, "Nice job, guys. Pidge you ready? We're almost at the radiation belt."

"Hold on. I just need a few more minutes."

Lance replied, "Uh, guys, that radiation belt is getting closer!"

Hunk replied, "The last piece is in place. Fire up that power, Pidge."

Pidge's voice came over the speaker after several moments of silence. "Shields up!"

Adam heard Pidge yell, "Shiro, no!"

Lance asked, "What's going on with the plates?" He yelled, "Allura!" Which was followed by a scream.

Adam jumped from his chair. "Lance! Lance! Answer me!"

Allura yelled, "Lance!"

Adam yelled, "What's going on? Someone tell me something. What happened to Lance?"

Allura called out, "Lance, please respond!"

Hunk replied, "The broken plate shorted out. Lance isn't responding. Allura jumped out of her lion. What else could go wrong right now? Pidge what happened to the power. We're almost at the radiation belt."

"I know I'm on it. Come on, Shiro."

Adam heard Allura as she whispered, "No, no, No!"

He fell to his knees on the bridge. "Lance?"

Hunk called out, "Let's try this again."

Commander Bogh's voice came over the speakers. "Radiation exposure in four—"

Hunk yelled, "Pidge hit it now!"

"Three—"

Pidge murmured, "Come on."
"Two— One—"

Hunk yelled, "Great job!"

Pidge yelled, "It worked!"

Adam heard a slight, "Huh," followed by a weary sounding, "You saved me."

Adam took a breath at hearing Lance's voice. But he still didn't know what had happened to his cousin.

Allura replied. "I owed you one."

Adam rubbed a hand over his face. "Whatever happened out there, I'm going to require both Lance and Takashi to meet me in the infirmary."

"What?" Lance yelled.

"Don't you what me. I need to know what happened to the both of you. As the medic of the team. I can sit you both out of the fight for a while if need be."

Lance spluttered. "Th-That's not fair!"

Adam shook his head. "Wrong, Lance, it's perfectly fair. If you need to complain to anyone, complain to Takashi. He's the one who made me the medic Remember?"

Lance sighed, "Fine!"

Adam stood in the infirmary as Shiro entered. "You wanted to see me?"

"Yeah, your head still hurting?"

Shiro ran a hand through his hair. "It's still there, but not as bad."

Adam ran the scanner over Shiro and frowned. "According to this, it says you're fine. But I'd like you to take at least a day off unless it's an emergency. See if you can relax a bit. That might help."

"Okay." Shiro turned on his heel and exited the room.

Adam sighed.

A few moments later, Lance appeared, and Allura was beside him.

They stopped, and Adam eyed the pair. "What's going on?"

Allura placed a hand on Lance's arm. "Adam, I should explain. I wouldn't be here if not for Lance. You see the broken plate we were working on when the power went out on it Lance saw a something that I didn't. Using the Red Lion, he shoved both Blue and myself out of the way. But a bolt of electricity shot out of the plate and struck the Red Lion. I left Blue and found Lance not moving. Actually," she glanced down at the floor before bringing her eyes back up to gaze into Adam's. "His heart had stopped beating, but using what I learned in Oriande, I was able to bring him back."
Adam blinked as he gazed at his cousin. He took in a deep breath, trying to stay professional but coming close to losing it at least twice. He ran the scanner over Lance and then gazed into his cousin's blue eyes. "I don't see any damage done, but I want you to take a couple of days off from Voltron. I want you to rest unless an emergency comes up."

"No, you can't do that."

Adam reached out and grabbed Lance, embracing him in a hug. "Look, I know this is important to you, but you are important to me too. Okay?"

Lance nodded as he returned the hug. "Okay."

Lance slumped on the couch in the lounge when the mice ran up to him. Lance groaned as they squeaked at him. "Oh, great! Are you here to make fun of me too?"

Adam stepped up and stood over him. "They led me to you." He stepped over the side and sat down next to Lance.

Lance turned his eyes over to Adam. "Can't a man sulk in peace?"

Adam smirked at Lance. "I wouldn't exactly call you a man yet. But I think we need to talk about something."

Lance groaned. "What in the heck do you want?"

Adam gazed at the Red Paladin, "It's about Keith."

Lance sat up, and the mice squeaked in alarm as they were unsettled. He stared at Adam.

"Yeah, I thought that would get your interest," he gazed down at the floor for a minute. He raised his eyes to gaze into Lance's face. "Keith's missing. Kolivan sent him to get an operative from Warlord Ranvieg's base. They went to continue a mission looking for that new quintessence and haven't been heard from since."

Lance's eyes grew. "But, but that's what the Blades do, don't they? They go on radio silence when they're on a mission?"

Adam shrugged. "I don't know, Lance, but I thought you should know."

Lance turned his gaze to Adam. "What if he's dead?" A tear slid out of the Red Paladins' eye and raced down his cheek to drip off his chin.

Adam grabbed his cousin and held on tight as the Red Paladin cried.

Coran, the Paladins, Adam, and Thace stood on the bridge of the Castle as they observed the preflight checks that Allura and Lotor were going through on his ship.

As they got through the end of the preflight checks, Hunk glanced around at the others. "I can't be
the only one who sees this is nuts, right? I mean, just getting in there is a long shot. Then they have to make it out again."

Coran folded his arms over his chest. "I agree with Hunk. This plan is foolhardy and full of unnecessary risks."

Pidge frowned. "I don't know. We've traveled through the quintessence field to another reality. This isn't just theoretical physics. Mathematically, we know it's possible."

Coran moved so fast no one was truly sure he'd moved or was beamed over by Pidge as he leaned over and stuck his face in the Green Paladin's face. Pidge leaned back, and her eyes grew wide. Coran spoke, "We'll it's hard to argue with math. I've tried."

Lance placed his hand on his hip as he gazed at the older man. "But even if they do reach the quintessence field, then what? The last time anyone got in there, it turned Zarkon evil."

Shiro turned his gaze to Coran and Lance. "Zarkon fell prey to his evil instincts. The quintessence field didn't create them. It revealed them."

As Lotor's ship left the Castle, Coran gazed at the screen as he returned to his control panel. He frowned as he whispered, "So, this is goodbye, for now."

Lance spoke, "Allura."

The Princess turned her gaze to the screen. "Yes, Lance?"

"Get back safe."

"I will."

Coran spoke as his shoulders hunched. "T-minus ten ticks to gate entry." He began counting down. The gate glowed, the closer he got to one. Then the ship disappeared through the gate.

The klaxons blared, as Hunk asked, "What's that?"

Coran touched his hand to his helm, and the panel beeped. "It's an incoming craft."

Shiro stared up at the screen. "Shields up. And pull it up on the screen."

As Coran brought the craft up on the screen, he gasped. "That-That can't be. It's an Altean pod! An ancient one!"

Lance gazed at the screen. "What's it doing out here?"

Shiro stared at the screen. "Let's find out. Attention, Altean pod, identify yourself."

The screen changed to show the pilot in the pod. "Shiro, it's Keith."

Shiro found it hard to find the words. "Keith! Are you okay?"

Pidge asked, "Where have you been?"

Coran leaned further over his control panel. "How did you get your hands on that pod?"

Adam gazed at Lance. "Your staring."
Lance blinked. "Does he look bigger to you guys? He's bigger, right? No?"

Keith asked, "Where's Lotor?"

Hunk replied, "He's in the quintessence field."

Keith gasped and then frowned as he spoke, "Oh, no."

The Paladins, Adam, Coran, and Thace all gathered in the pod bay as the ship was brought in for a landing. Keith hopped out of the pilot's compartment.

Shiro stared at the young man just a few months ago was eighteen, but now appeared to be at the least two years older. "Keith! It's so good to see you."

Lance stopped staring as he walked forward. "Hold on. How do we know you're the real Keith and not his bigger, cooler, grizzled older brother?"

Keith glared at the Red Paladin as he started past. "I don't have time for this, Lance!"

Lance turned and announced, "Hey, everybody, Keith's back!"

Keith stopped to face Shiro. "We need to stop Lotor. He's been lying to all of us!"

Shiro gazed at Keith. "Lying about what?"

A woman shouted from beside the rear of the pod. "Everything!"

Coran gasped as he focused on the blonde-haired woman. "You-Your Altean!"

Lance asked, "And who's the Galran?"

Hunk gulped. "Is that a wolf?"

Coran gazed at the Altean. "Where did you come from?"

Keith turned to face the others. "I promise I'll explain everything once we get to Lotor."

Pidge gazed at Keith. "We can't get to him. He entered the quintessence field with Allura."

Keith frowned. "We traveled through realities before. Can't we fly in there and attack?"

Lance walked up and stopped beside Keith. "She said Allura is with him. We can't risk hurting her."

Hunk gazed at Keith. "Why are we even attacking?"

Adam stared at Shiro. Why wasn't he taking control of the situation like in the past? He fingered the handle grip of his energy pistol.

Shiro gazed at Keith and held out his hands. "Look, Keith-Everyone, calm down. When they return, we'll get this all sorted out." He smiled at the former Red Paladin. "Lance is right. You have changed."
Keith replied, "Time is different where I've been."

The Galran stared at the Black Paladin. "Shiro, I am Krolia." She stepped forward and held out her hand. "Keith has told me all about you." They gripped forearms. "Thank you for raising him to be the man he is today."

Keith spoke from behind her. "Krolia is with the Blade of Marmora. Also," he found it a little difficult to express but managed to power through. "She's my mother."

Shiro smiled. "It's an honor to meet you."

Lance screamed, "What?" as he brought a hand to his face and held up the other hand palm facing them. He dropped his hand as he gazed at Keith. "Okay, this is nuts! You come back with your Galra mom, a wolf, and an Altean?"

Coran nodded. "Yes, I still want to hear the story of how you found this Altean."

Hunk held his hand up. "And why we're supposed to be attacking Lotor."

Thace stepped forward. "That will have to wait." He walked past Coran and held out his hands, and grabbed Krolia, pulling her into a hug. "It's good that Keith has returned and with you. I was afraid you were both lost when Kolivan called to tell me."

Krolia nodded as she smiled up at him. "It's good to see you again, too, brother."

Lance’s mouth dropped open as he gaped at the pair. "Brother? Your Keith's uncle?"

Hunk gazed at them. "Man, I feel like I just fell into the Twilight Zone."

Pidge nodded. "Yeah, me too."

Adam stepped up to Lance and pushed on his chin. "Close your mouth, or you'll start catching flies."

Lance shook his head and glared at his cousin. "Hey, how come you're not freaked out over this."

Adam shrugged. "Thace had confided in me earlier. Why do you think I found you in the lounge."

Lance glared at Adam. "That is so not fair."

Keith gazed at Coran as the Altean fidgeted. Keith looked toward them all. "This is Romelle, and I think she should tell her own story."

Romelle gazed down. "I come from a planet where there are thousands of Alteans. We have lived there since the war with Zarkon began."

Coran's eyes widened. "What? That's impossible. Altea was destroyed. Allura and I were the only survivors."

Romelle gazed at him. "Every Altean child knows the story of how Lotor saved us from destruction. When Zarkon attacked, many were off-planet on trading expeditions." She continued her story of how Lotor offered them a safe haven away from the war.

She continued her story about how Lotor was creating a second colony and how her parents and brother were recruited for this other place. Tears came to her eyes as she told how her brother escaped and crash-landed. He died in her arms but not before telling her with his last breath that the
colony was a lie.

She sniffed and said about meeting Krolia and Keith, and they figured out this so-called colony was on a nearby moon. They used the transport pod to travel to the moon, finding a Galra installation. But they discovered that Lotor was harvesting their quintessence. She put her hands to her face, wiped at her eyes.

Coran gazed at her. "That's horrifying."

Pidge whispered. "All this time—"

Keith gazed at them. "He's a monster."

An alarm beeped.

Coran gazed at the main screen on the bridge. "They're back."

Romelle stared at the screen. "What are you waiting for. "Open fire!"

Lance yelled from behind her. "No! Princess Allura is with him."

Hunk asked, "We're gonna let him back on board?"

Coran glared at the screen. "We must!" Coran leaned over, putting his hands on his control panel. "As long as the princess is with him, we cannot risk any sort of attack."

Shiro glared at the screen as he frowned. "Coran and Lance are right. We can't do anything until the princess is safe. Once Allura is secure, we will take Lotor down."

As Allura and Lotor stepped onto the bridge, she gazed at Coran and the Paladins. "What's going on?" The bridge door shut behind them. Krolia drew her energy pistol aiming it at Lotor as both Thace and Keith brandished their swords.

Lance pulled out his bayard and pointed it toward Lotor. "Allura, step away from Lotor."

Allura spread her arms out in front of the Galra Emperor. "I will do no such thing. Tell me what's happening here."

Romelle's voice came from the side and behind Allura and Lotor. As she spoke, they both turned to face her. "Lotor is a monster and has been harvesting Altean quintessence for generations!"

Allura gazed at her as shock set on her face. "An Altean!"

Romelle glared at Lotor. "You killed my brother and thousands of others!"

Pidge glared at the Galra Emperor. "Lotor has been lying to us the whole time. He's a murderer, just like his father!"

Lotor glared at Pidge. "You know nothing about what you speak."

Allura's eyes grew. She couldn't make eye contact with him. "What are they talking about?"
Lotor's face fell. "Allura, listen to me. I've dedicated my life to preserving Altean culture. Now that we have unlocked the quintessence field, all of your people, who would have been hunted down long ago, had it not been for my intervention can live in peace. Were some lives lost in the process? Yes. But they were martyrs to a noble cause. I sacrificed a few to preserve the future for millions. Allura, do not let this ruin everything we've worked for." Lotor leaned in close, "Think of everything we experienced in the quintessence field." He tried to take her hand in his.

Adam glared at Lotor. How could he say he was going to bring peace to the universe when he was harvesting the life force of innocent people who believed him to be a savior.

Allura surprised them all when she grabbed Lotor's hand and threw him quickly over her shoulder as if he was a sack of garbage.

The klaxon blared.

Coran yelled, "The hangar's been breached."

Hunk gazed at the screen. "It's Lotor's troops. They're stealing the ships."

Shiro groaned as he dropped to the deck, groaning as he grabbed his head.

Keith gazed at him. "Shiro?"

Coran asked, "What's happening to him?"

Lance took charge. "Allura and I will secure Lotor, Hunk, Adam help, Shiro. Everyone else get down to the hangar and stop those guys."

Hunk gazed down on the Black Paladin. "Shiro?"

The Black Paladin raised his head and grabbed at Hunk, tossing him across the room like a football. He slammed into Coran.

Adam pulled his energy pistol from its holster. "Takashi, don't make me use this!"

Shiro turned his head as his gaze focused on the other man.

Adam blinked as he focused on the eyes. Those weren't Shiro's eyes staring back at him. He hesitated, and that's all that was needed for the thing he faced. It dove in and knocked Adam's hand with the energy pistol out of the way as the weaponized hand started glowing. Instant pain radiated from his abdomen as he looked down to see half of the things hand in his midsection.

His legs buckled from under him and he fell to the floor. He gazed up at the ceiling and heard more noises coming from around him and then footsteps past him.

Allura was saying something, but he blinked. He couldn't hear what she was saying because of the blood rushing past his ears in time with his heartbeat. He gazed up, seeing Lance hovering over him.

Adam saw Lance's mouth moving but didn't hear anything at first. The sound of his blood was too loud. He swallowed and then focused on Lance again. "Adam, Adam, what do I do?"

He groaned. "Pressure, put pressure on the wound to slow the bleeding."

Lance shook his head. "I'll hurt you." Lance blinked, trying to keep the moisture that was building in his eyes out of the way.
"Don't worry about that, just do it."

Pressure intensified the pain, and Adam groaned.

Lance raised his head and yelled, "I need help here," his voice cracked from emotion. "Adam's hurt, bad." He sniffed but kept up the pressure.

Keith's voice came over the speaker. "How bad?"

"Shiro stabbed him with his weaponized hand, and I'm putting pressure on the wound."

A couple of minutes passed until Keith replied, "Krolia and Thace are coming. They'll take over. Can you and Hunk pilot your lions?"

Hunk replied, "Yeah, I'll manage."

Lance gazed down at Adam as Krolia and Thace stepped onto the bridge. "We've got this."

Keith's voice came over the speaker again. "Then let's go! If we're gonna fight Lotor's ships, we'll need Voltron."

Pidge's voice came over the speaker. "Shiro's gone. Who's going to pilot the Black Lion?"

Adam cried out as an intense pain shot through his abdomen. He gazed up at Thace as Lance stood up. He turned his gaze to Lance, "Go," he whispered. "Find out what happened to Takashi."

Keith's voice came over the speaker in reply to Pidge's question. "I will!"

Krolia looked up at Lance. "Hurry. We'll take care of him." She turned her head down toward Adam. "Keith also told me about you, too, Adam. He'll be upset with me if I let you die."

Sweat broke out on Adam's forehead. "I'll try not to."

"Thace."

The pressure was released as Thace sat back. Adam knew Krolia had pulled away the cloth of the Garrison uniform coat from his body, exposing the wound. She pulled up his undershirt. She leaned over into his field of vision. "I'm not going to sugar coat anything, but this is going to hurt."

He heard the lid of something being removed, which was followed by a liquid sloshing around, and then the fire struck as the wound burned. "Hold him down," he managed to hear Krolia say. "I have to disinfect this wound if it gets infected, it could cause more problems."

The pain from his abdominal wound intensified as she poured some more of the liquid into the wound. Adam screamed as he thrashed, but pressure on his shoulders and legs kept him still. He tried to focus his eyes on anything, but his vision faded to black.

Adam's eyelids opened. His vision came into focus as he recognized his surroundings. He was in his room. How did I get here? The last thing he remembered was on the bridge of the Castle.

As he moved to sit up, pain flared in his abdomen. A groan escaped from between his lips. The Castle wasn't lighting up as usual, what was going on? Had the Sincline ships returned and finished
the job? Were Keith and the Paladins okay? He had to know. Lance, where was Lance.

He swung his feet over the side of the bed and groaned as he sat up. Adam placed his hand to the wound. He stood up, but his body swayed with effort. He took a breath and grabbed the wall to keep from falling. He remembered those dark gray eyes that had stared at him. The pupils were wrong. The pupils were a bright magenta.

He shuddered. "Where are you, Takashi?"

Adam sighed as he made his way to the door. He gripped the door with his fingers and muscled his way out. Sweat sprang to life on his forehead, and his wound screamed in pain as the muscles in his abdominal wall strained. He was able to slide out past the door, and it slammed shut behind him.

He leaned back against the door as he took some breaths. Maybe he should have stayed in bed. He pressed his hand to the bandaged wound. It was too quiet. He made his way toward the bridge and found the doors were forced open. He stepped onto the bridge and found Krolia, Thace, and Romelle discussing something.

"Did I miss anything?"

Romelle was the first to reach his side. "You should still be resting."

Adam shook his head. "I can't. I have to know what happened."

Krolia turned and gazed at him as some lights came up on the bridge. She placed her hands on her hips. "You've ruined my work. Now I'll have to rebandage that wound."

Adam walked over to his seat. "Okay, but no more of whatever that was."

Thace chuckled. "It was the alcohol you imbibed that got you drunk in three shots."

Krolia glared at her brother. "You gave him that? You have no idea what it would do to a human!" She frowned. "Sometimes, your too much like your father!"

"And you are too cautious like your own."

Krolia shook her head as she grabbed at her bag of supplies. "I'll just rebandage that, but I swear if you don't stay still this time, I'll-I'll have Keith's wolf sit on you."

Adam gazed over at the wolf. His markings were unusual. "He's pretty, where did you find him?"

"In the Quantum Abyss. Now stay still."

She removed the old bandages and pulled out the new bandages. She snapped the tape, activating it's healing properties. "It's going to take longer for this to heal since it's open. This bandage works better on a closed wound instead of an open one. I didn't bring anything with me for an open wound. I didn't think I'd need it."

Adam winced as she applied the bandage to the open wound. "Tell me what's been going on? Where are the Paladins?"

Thace gazed at his sister, who nodded. Thace placed his hand on Adam's knee. "I know you'll worry if I don't tell you. Keith had Voltron disband, and only he alone went through a wormhole that Haggar had created. The rest of the Paladins are back aboard the Castle. Before Shiro left with
Lotor, he'd uploaded a kill virus, but Pidge was able to stop the virus before the Teludav exploded."

Pain registered on Adam's face as he leaned his head back. "That thing wasn't Takashi. I know it wasn't. Takashi would never do that. He's the most amazing man you've ever met. He's always going out of his way to help others."

Krolia placed her hand on Adam's arm. "I'm sure it wasn't. But where is the real man?"

Adam shook his head. "I don't know. Hopefully, Keith will be able to tell us when he returns."

Adam grabbed his dog tags that hung around his neck and brushed his thumb against Takashi's ring. His brown eyes slid up to gaze into Krolia's. "I have faith in Keith."

Krolia nodded. "I do too."

Adam dozed in his seat. The Galran medical tape caused his skin to tingle. It wasn't an unpleasant feeling like pins and needles from a limb waking up after blood circulation was restored after falling asleep from loss of circulation. But it was unnerving.

His eyelids opened as he heard footsteps behind him. Adam craned his head around to see Lance and Allura walking to their places, but Lance stopped and gazed at his cousin.

A slow smile pulled at Lance's lips. "It's good to see you again."

Adam was going to rise, but Krolia glared at him. He held his hands up to her. "I'm under orders, not to move from this seat. What's been going on while I was out?"

Allura gazed at him. "You should be resting."

Thace sighed. "Krolia and Romelle have told him this. Are all humans so stubborn?"

Allura deadpanned, "Yes."

Lance's smile grew bigger. "Adam and Shiro especially." He frowned at his mention of the Black Paladin. "Pidge is drawing power from the Teludav to the engine room. Hunk and Coran are trying to restart the Castle from there." Lance took his seat while Allura took her position under the crystal, that was one of the casualties of the virus.

Allura didn't focus on anything as she crossed her arms over her body and gazed down at the deck. She was unusually quiet.

The main screen flashed to life on the bridge. Adam blinked as Coran appeared, but he was hanging upside down. He blinked his eyes several more times, thinking he might be getting sick, but no the image stayed the same.

Coran's voice came through the screen. "Allura begin the reboot sequence. Allura, can you hear me? Is this thing on mute? There's a lot of blood rushing to my head. I keep hitting the wrong buttons."
Lance gazed over at her. "Allura?"

Allura's gaze rose as she focused on Lance. "Oh, right. What is it you need?"

Coran's voice came over the speaker. "The reboot sequence. Can you run it again?"

Krolia shot a glare at Adam. "Don't move from that spot." She turned to the wolf. "If he moves, sit on him."

The wolf gazed up at Adam and then back to Krolia.

The Galran woman spoke, "Thace and I will go down and assist with repairs." As she and Thace hurried away, Romelle chased after them.

Lance rose from his chair and walked over to the Princess. "Allura, are you okay? You seem a little distracted."

Allura closed her eyes. "I'm so angry with myself for allowing this to happen. I played right into Lotor's hands, and I fear my actions have placed us in this dire situation."

Lance shook his head. "You didn't put us in this situation. It was Shiro who went rogue and released the virus in the Castle."

Adam glared at his cousin. "Wrong, Lance. That thing wasn't Takashi. You know he'd never do anything to hurt us."

"What do you mean?"

"His eyes, they were different."

Allura shook her head. "No, this is my fault. I trusted Lotor. I helped him build and empower his ships, granting him unlimited access to the quintessence field. He fooled me, and it put the entire universe in jeopardy. How can the coalition ever be expected to trust me when I'm not sure I can trust myself."

Lance lowered his gaze. "Allura, it wasn't just you who trusted Lotor. We all did. I had more reason than anyone not to trust him, but he did everything right. He didn't just fool you. He fooled us all."

Adam grumbled under his breath.

Allura reached and grabbed Lance, as the Red Paladin continued to speak. "Let me tell you, as someone who's made a million mistakes, all you can do is get up and try to make it right. You can't doubt yourself now. We need you. The universe needs you."

Allura whispered. "Thank you, Lance."

Adam smiled at his cousin. The boy had done it again.

The screen beeped as a message was coming in.

Keith's face appeared on the screen. "Hailing the Castle of Lions. This is Keith."

Lance nearly gushed in pleasure to see the Black Paladin's face. "Keith! You're okay!"

Allura smiled. "Where have you been? Did you get Shiro?"
Keith replied, "I got him, but it's not the Shiro we know. The Shiro who took Lotor was a clone."

Lance and Allura gazed at each other. Lance asked, "Well, then where's the real one?"

Keith replied, "It's complicated. I'll explain everything later, but right now you need to focus on Lotor. I've picked up the Sincline ships on my scanner. It looks like Lotor's headed back to your position."

Allura replied, "He needs to get back into the quintessence field."

Keith replied, "I'm on my way to you now. But without a wormhole, it's gonna take me a while. You'll have to hold off Lotor without me."

Lance replied, "We'll do what we can." As the communication ended with Keith, Lance called out. "Paladins, Lotor is coming back. Get to your lions."

Adam held up his hand and gave Lance a thumb's up. "Be careful out there."

Lance gazed at his cousin. "Aren't you going to monitor our communications this time."

Adam shook his head. "You've fallen into your role as the right hand of Voltron. Now you need to believe in yourself and your team."

Lance gave him a quick nod. "Okay." He hurried forward and wrapped his arms around Adam and embraced him carefully, not wanting to squeeze too tight.

Adam patted Lance on the back. "Go, take Lotor down."

Lance released his cousin and ran off the bridge quickly.

Keith's wolf cocked its head as Adam squirmed in his seat.

Adam pressed a hand to his wound. "Don't you worry either. I'm just trying to find a more comfortable position."

Coran joined Adam and the wolf on the bridge of the Castle. He opened his communications so the pair would be able to hear what was going on with the paladins.

Allura's voice came over the speaker. "Accessing the quintessence field has been Lotor's singular drive for millennia. He wants to harness the power for himself, but we cannot let him. Thankfully, there's only one-way in. Through the inter-reality gate. So we must destroy it."

Coran replied, "I'll continue working on the Castle to get it up and running before Lotor arrives. It'll be slow going without the paladins, but we'll get it done."

Allura replied, "Good luck, Coran. We'll need all the help we can get in the fight against Lotor."

Coran hurried off the bridge again.

Adam guessed that Coran did it so he wouldn't feel left out. He gazed down at the wolf. "When it comes to engineering, I'm all thumbs."

The wolf placed one of his huge paws on Adam's leg as if to give some comfort.

Lance asked, "Are you sure about this?"
Allura replied, "We must. It's the only way."

Adam watched as the lions destroyed the gate. He rubbed his bearded chin. His thoughts drifted back to Coran's story and how King Alfor and the original Paladins destroyed the Galra homeworld and how that started the war. It seemed history was repeating itself, but this time with Allura and the new Paladins.

Pidge asked, "Lotor will be here any second. What's the plan?"

Allura replied, "We can't expect help from the Castle of Lions. The Black Lion isn't here, so we can't form Voltron. We're going to have to do what we can."

Pidge replied, "Got it. Attempt to survive."

Adam sighed. Leave it to Pidge to hit the nail on the head.

Hunk sighed. "Last time we fought Lotor, we had five ships, and Lotor had two, and he still kicked our butts. This time, he's gonna have three ships, and we only have four. Does-does anyone else see where I'm going with this?"

Lance yelled, "Zip it Hunk, no one's interested in your math equations right now. Especially ones that add up to us taking a beating."

Allura asked, "Coran, how are the repairs coming?"

"I'm working on 'em, Princess. The problem is we need for the systems that start the main turbine. But if I use that power for the main turbine, then I don't have the power to run the turbine. It's a conundrum."

Allura said, "Coran, without the Castle of Lions backing us up, we might not make it."

Coran replied, "Right, no pressure. Come on, Coran, think! I've got Krolia and Thace to help me—and Romelle, the space mice, and a cosmic wolf."

Lance's voice lowered. "We've got incoming!"

Hunks rose close to panic. "Guys, they're here!"

Lance replied. "Hold your positions. Let Lotor make the first move."

Lotor's ships stopped a distance away. His voice came over the speaker in the Castle. "We need not fight today. We are all on the same side. I know what you all must think of me now that you know my past. It doesn't have to change our future together. The truth is, I want to harness the power of the quintessence field to better the universe, just like I said. Nothing has changed."

Adam shook his head. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. Did Lotor think they had stupid written on their foreheads?

Allura replied, "You enslaved countless Alteans. Harnessed their life sources for your gain." Her voice rose in tune with her anger. "How many innocent lives did you destroy?"

Lotor replied, "Allura, I—"

"How many?"

"It's true. Many Alteans perished in my desire to unlock the mysteries of quintessence. But, I
protected thousands more, and I rescued their culture, our culture. Allura you must understand, I've
given everything I have to plumb the depths of King Alfor's knowledge to unlock the mysteries of
Oriande. Please, Allura, we've come too far together. Surely, you can see the greatness we've
already accomplished. There's still more to come. Join me. We're on the same side."

Allura yelled, "No, we're not!"

Adam had a ringside seat as Allura attacked with the Blue Lion.

Lotor yelled, "Hold your fire! Hold your fire! Allura, stop! You and I hold the ancient knowledge
of our Altean culture. We were meant to be together. My feelings for you are true. And I know you
have feelings for me as well."

Allura growled in reply, "You betrayed and used me. You're more like Zarkon than I could have
ever imagined!"

Lotor replied as his voice lowered to something that sounded predatory. "What about your father?
He may have been a master engineer, but Alfor was too weak to defend his homeworld. I'm the
one who had to step up and save our entire race. Who are you to question my tactics in bringing
peace and prosperity to the universe? Destroy the lions."

Two of the Sincline ships shot forward blasting at the lions.

The Blue Lion shot away from the others.

Lance yelled, "Allura, stay with the group!"

Hunk yelled, "Coran, we need your help here! Please tell me you got the Castle up and running!"

Coran took his place on the bridge of the Castle. "Don't worry, guys. I'm here!"

Lance asked, "What's going on with the Castle?"

Coran replied, "We've got one of the engines working, so I'm kind of learning to fly all over again."

Adam stared at the screen but pressed his hand to his abdomen as the rough ride of the Castle
shook his body. His eyes were glued to the thing that now replaced the three Sincline ships.

Pidge asked, "What is that thing?"

Lance replied. "He's created his own Voltron."

Allura replied. "That's why he was using me. I helped him build it."

Lotor's Voltron shot forward and attacked the lions.

Coran's fingers flew over the control panel. "I think I've finally got control! Ready the weapons
systems!"

Krolia's face appeared on the screen. "We don't have much power. Probably enough for one shot."

Coran growled. "Well, then let's make it count. Fire!" He slammed his hand down on the panel. A
beam of white energy struck Lotor's ship.

Allura replied, "Nice shot Coran!"
Lotor's ship fired a beam of energy that pushed the Castle's power back on itself. The great ship shook violently. Adam groaned as he was shook about in his chair.

Pidge yelled, "Impossible. Lotor's weapon has completely repelled the Castle's attack!"

Lance said, "Coran, shoot it with the cannon again."

I can't. That was our last shot."

Lance yelled, "Pidge, get out of his line of sight!"

"He's locked onto me. I'm taking heavy fire!"

Lance replied, "Get out of there! I'm coming in!"

Hunk yelled, "Lance!"

Allura said, "We can't take this much longer!"

Adam groaned again as something warm and sticky touched the palm of his hand. He was bleeding again. Adam turned his gaze back to the screen as the lion's floated in space. "Coran, is there anything we can do to help them."

Coran shook his head as he gripped the sides of his control panel. "No," he whispered.

Adam's eyes grew as his panel began beeping. "I don't believe it."

Coran turned to gaze at the human. "What?"

"It's the Black Lion, Keith is here!"

The Black Lion shot forward and stopped with its nose inches away from Lotor's cockpit. It flew away suddenly and stopped in front of the other Lions.

Lance said, "Keith, how did you get here so fast?"

Keith's reply was cryptic. "I had some help. Now hurry. We don't have much time. On me! Form Voltron!" The Black Lion's speeder came flying out of Voltron. "Coran, you have incoming."

"Affirmative." Coran turned and walked toward the doors but stopped by Adam's chair. A little bit of red oozed out from under Adam's hand. "Your bleeding again. I'll tell Krolia."

Adam frowned. "She's going to kill me."

Coran let out a half-laugh. "No such thing, my boy. Even if you'd been laying down, the shaking the Castle just received would have caused you to bleed again."

Adam nodded. "I guess you're right."

"I am right. Don't worry about her fussing at you."

As Coran left the bridge, Keith's voice came over the speaker. "Shield," followed by, "Hunk, form cannon."

"You got it!"

Lance yelled, "He's too fast!"
Keith replied, "Then we'll have to get in close. Form sword!"

Adam groaned. He could hear them, but the fight had moved out of range of the Castle.

Keith yelled, "Attack!"

Pidge yelled, "We can't touch him. He's too fast!"

Hunk replied, "We need to stop him moving around, back him into a corner or something."

Keith said, "Hunk's right. We have to eliminate his speed advantage. Limit his movements. There! Now we lure him in close. Wait for him. Let him build up speed. Now!"

Adam sat up a little straighter in his seat. Keith sounded like Takashi with his snap decisions. A slight smile pulled at the corner of Adam's mouth.

Hunk asked, "Where'd he go?"

Pidge said, "He's behind us!"

Keith replied, "Hunk hit him with the shoulder cannon."

"On it!"

"Fire!"

Lance asked, "Did we get him?"

Hunk replied, "I don't know."

Lance said, "I think we got him."

Pidge replied, "It looked like he just disappeared."

Lance said, "Yeah! We got him."

Allura replied, "I'm not so sure."

Krolia appeared on the bridge. "Coran told me what happened. I have to agree with his assessment of the situation." She knelt beside his chair and removed the old bandage.

Adam winced and groaned.

Krolia waited for his muscles to relax as she pulled out a cloth and wiped away the blood from off his skin. "The good thing is it's healing, but this will still take some time. I believe that it will be fully healed in two or three Quintants." She set the cloth down the pulled out more strips of the tape, and snapped the first one. She pressed it to Adam's abdomen. She snapped a second strip and placed it over the first.

Krolia frowned as she heard the battle that raged outside somewhere coming over the speaker of the bridge. "Listening to this can't be good for you either. I should shut it off."

Adam reached out to stop her but stopped. It was silent. "What happened? Where'd they go?"

Coran stepped onto the bridge. "They went into the Quintessence field after Lotor. I hate when they do this."
Dobashes passed until they heard Allura's voice again. "If we'd stayed in the quintessence field, we would've kept fighting until we destroyed ourselves." She sighed. "Just like Lotor."

Keith asked, "What did you do in there?"

"I transferred the excess power from Voltron. It's a technique I learned on Oriande. Thanks to Lotor."

Lance replied, "Thank you, Allura. You saved us."

Hunk said, "Not just us. The entire universe."

Coran said, "Oh, you're back!"

Keith said, "Lotor is no longer a threat."

Coran brought up an image of the surrounding area on the screen. "Right. I'm afraid we face a bigger threat now. All of Lotor's jumping in and out of the quintessence field has created multiple growing rifts in the fabric of time and space."

Lance asked, "What does that mean?"

Pidge's face appeared on the screen. "It means unless we do something fast, these tears will continue to expand until all of existence as we know it has been destroyed."

Keith replied, "There has to be something we can do."

Pidge said, "Scanning the rift for any strand refabrication possibilities."

Hunk replied, "I'm running models to see if there's any chance it can close on its own."

Pidge sighed. "Nothing."

Hunk replied, "Nope. Me neither."

Keith asked, "How long do we have?"

Coran replied, "Based on the way those rifts are expanding, about fifteen dobashes."

Lance said, "Allura, you have to have a way to close it. Voltron opened it up. Maybe we can-I don't know. There's gotta be a way!"

"I'm sorry, but I just don't possess that level of alchemic knowledge."

Pidge said, "The only thing that could pull that rift closed would be a source of gravity more powerful than a supermassive black hole."

Lance replied, "Any chance we can find one and tow it over here in fifteen dobashes?"

Coran's eyes widened as they lit up. "Wait a tick. The Teludav."

Keith asked, "What about it?"

Coran replied, "Too make wormhole jumps, the Teludav creates a brief flash of infinite mass. There might be a way I can overload the Teludav's reactor and seal the rift. If one of the flashes went off in the rift, it could do the job."
Hunk replied, "But that would mean near sacrificing the Castle of Lions!"

Pidge asked, "What choice do we have? The Castle will be wiped out with the rest of us."

Hunk replied, "But still—it's been our home."

Coran sighed, "Oh, I hate to say goodbye to my grandfather's creation, the last piece of the real Altea."

Allura replied, "Coran begin preparations. Everyone else, start unloading the Castle. We need to evacuate immediately."

The lions flew away as the Castle of Lions flew into the rift. The backwash from the explosion rocked the lions.

Adam lay on a cot next to what was left of a healing pod holding the clone's body minus the Galra arm. Adam groaned. Krolia knelt next to him, bracing him against the cot while the wolf lay across his legs.

Hunk found a diamond was left of the Castle and sucked it up into the Yellow Lion.

Lance said, "Well, we saved all realities. What do you guys want to do now?"

Keith replied, "We need to find someplace to land and see if there's some way to help Shiro."

They landed on a nearby planet. The wolf teleported himself and Adam outside-facing Keith as he lay the clone's body down. This body is barely living, but Shiro's spirit is alive. It's inside the Black Lion. I've heard him talking to me."

Lance spoke up. "He-he tried to tell me, but I didn't realize it." Lance rushed forward and dropped down hard on his hands and knees beside Adam as tears ran down his face. "I'm so sorry, Shiro I didn't, I could've—" he was stopped by pressure on his shoulder and arm. He looked up into the tear-streaked face of Adam and the smiling one of Allura.

Allura stood up and walked to the Black Lion and placed her hands to its face. Her hands glowed as energy flowed through the lion. She turned and faced the paladins. Her eyes were solid white.

She stepped forward, crossing the distance from the lion to the clone's body. She knelt and placed her hands on either side of the clone's head. The body began to glow as Shiro's consciousness flowed out from her into the clone. When she stopped glowing, his hair and eyebrows had turned white.

The eyelids opened, and his eyes had an odd glow to them, but then they turned white and finally changed to Shiro's eye color. He sat up coughing and groaned as his body fell over into Keith's.

The lions roared around them, as Coran and Hunk cheered and hugged each other. Adam slid forward enough to wrap his arms around Shiro and Keith. Shiro whispered, "You found me."
Keith gazed into Shiro's dark gray eyes. "We're glad your back, Shiro."

Allura smiled, "Rest."

Shiro sighed as he closed his eyelids.

Hunk asked, "So what are we gonna do? The Castle is destroyed."

Pidge gazed toward a spot in the distance. "There's only one place that has the plans necessary to build a replacement for the Castle of Lions. Coran gave them to my dad."

Keith looked up from where he knelt, still holding Shiro. "We're going home."
Fight!

Chapter Summary

The Paladins have several things to fight during their flight home. But they find themselves in some desperate situations.

Everyone was gathered in the cargo hold of the Black Lion. Hunk gazed at Allura. "Is he gonna be okay?"

Allura replied as she gazed down at the healing pod. "Only time will tell if this body will accept Shiro's consciousness."

Lance gazed behind him at Adam, who lay on a cot behind him and Allura. He turned to look back at the Princess. "Is there anything we can do to help?"

Pidge frowned. "I've tried contacting the Voltron Coalition, but I can't get through to anyone. It doesn't make any sense. There might be some distortions I'm not picking up on. Maybe we need to get into the upper atmosphere for a better signal."

Hunk gazed over at Pidge. "The lions aren't going anywhere without recharging their power cores."

Allura gazed at the healing pod. "The battle with Lotor severely depleted them. If we had the Castle of Lions, we could recharge them, but—" her voice trailed off as she gazed at Coran.

Pidge asked, "Is there another way to recharge them?"

Coran folded his arms across his body. "They can recharge naturally given enough time and ambient energy- but that might take phoeb."

Keith raised his gaze from the healing pod to Allura. "There's got to be something we can do."

Coran tapped his fingers on his arm. "We are on the Dalterian Belt, home to the element faunatonium. We may be able to use it as a temporary solution."

Lance turned his head to gaze at Coran. "Faunatonium? How will that charge the power cores?"

Coran placed his hands on his hips. "Well, you see, it involves gluon field fluctuations—"


Coran's eyes brightened. "Your not far off. We're going to use the element to expand the energy particles within the cores. But first, we need a yalmor."

Hunk's eyes grew. "Wait, there are yalmors on this planet?"

Coran turned to Hunk. "How you think we find the faunatonium? Yalmors have a nose for the stuff."

Keith made his decision. "Okay. You guys find a yalmor and get this faunatonium. I'll stay with Shiro."
Allura gazed at Keith. "I'll stay as well. I may have exhausted the limits of what I learned on Oriande, but I still might be able to help in some way."

Coran turned as he spoke, "All right, then, we'll get started."

Romelle held her hands together in front of her body as she tried to wrap her head around this new concept. "Wait, you just fought Lotor, defeated him, stopped an explosion that could have destroyed reality, took your friends consciousness from the Black Lion of Voltron, and put it inside his clone, and now we're simply moving on?"

Hunk replied, "Trust me. I'm always saying the same thing, but these guys like to move on."

Romelle shook her head. But she hurried after the others as they began leaving the Black Lion.

Allura gazed at the Black Paladin. "He's going to be okay, Keith."

Keith raised his head to gaze at her across the healing pod. "I hope so." He lowered his head to look back down toward Shiro. "You can't imagine all he's done for me."

Adam smiled as he gazed up at the ceiling of the cargo bay inside the Black Lion. He knew everything that Takashi had done for Keith. Those two made up his world, and he didn't want to lose either of them.

Adam didn't realize he'd dozed off until Allura's voice brought him to awareness. "His levels are getting dangerously low."

Keith leaned over the pod. "Fight. I won't give up on you."

Adam nodded with Keith's words. "You better fight, Takashi," he mumbled to himself. "I can't lose you again."

Allura frowned as she gazed down at the pod. "I'm afraid the clone body is rejecting Shiro's consciousness."

Keith turned his gaze up to Allura. "There must be some way you can help!"

Allura closed her eyes. "There's nothing I can do."

Adam groaned as he started to sit up from the cot.

Allura spun around, "Adam, you need to rest."

Adam shook his head, "That's all I've been doing." He reached his hand out to her. Help me up."

Allura sighed. "I do this under protest." She grabbed his hand and pulled him up to his feet.

Adam groaned, but he moved to stand beside the healing pod. He placed his hands on it, hoping Takashi would know he was there too.
Keith slammed his fist down on the surface. "Shiro, please. Fight!"

Adam gazed down at Shiro. "Takashi!" he yelled. "Come back to me. I need you, Takashi, please."

Keith sobbed. "You can't do this to me again. You can't do this to Adam. We need you!"

The humanoid symbol glowed yellow as the lid disappeared. Shiro coughed several times.

Keith leaned over the pod. "Shiro!"

Shiro opened his eyelids, focusing on the Black Paladin. "Keith? I was dreaming." He swallowed. "Keith-you saved me."

Keith grabbed Shiro into a hug. "We saved each other."

As Keith released Shiro, Adam grabbed him and ignored the pain from his abdomen. "Amor, I've missed you."

"I've missed you too, koishiteru." Shiro pulled back and gazed at Adam. "What happened? You have a beard."

"It's a long story."

The door slid open as both Keith and Adam helped Shiro sit up. Lance grinned. "Shiro's looking better. All right!"

Keith asked, "Where were you guys? We couldn't get ahold of you."

Lance rubbed at the back of his head. "Well, we were shrunk by a magic skunk, but we ended up using that sparkly dust to unshrink ourselves. So, ready to charge up the lions?"

Shiro sighed and chuckled. "It's good to be back."

Hunk glanced around at everyone. "If I don't see another yalmor, I'll be happy. Those things are ugly with their three beady eyes."

Pidge shrugged. "I don't know. I thought they cute in a creepy sort of way. Kinda like you, Lance."

Lance glared at her.

"Well, I can't tease Shiro. He just literally returned from the dead, and Adam is out of the question, so that leaves you." Pidge punched Lance in the arm and squeezed her way past Coran and Romelle as her laughter reached them all.

Thace snorted and then burst out in laughter, followed by the others.

Lance gazed the way Pidge had run. "Ha-ha! Very funny, Pidge!"

Adam wiped at his eyes. "Yes, it is. But I think some air would do us some good while Coran does whatever with the faunatonium on the lions."

Shiro smiled as he turned his gaze to Adam. "I think I could use a change of scenery."

Keith and Adam helped Shiro out of the pod. Adam groaned at the pressure on his abdomen but ignored the glances from the others.
Hunk grinned, "Yeah, and we can all use something to eat."

Allura, Hunk, and Lance, with the help of Thace, Romelle, and Kroli, removed some boxes from the lions. Hunk set up a fire and set to work on the food.

Shiro sat on one of the boxes with Adam beside him. Shiro's eyes collected moisture as he remembered nearly touching that sword that had sprouted from his Galra arm to Keith's face. He looked at the younger man. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to do that to you." He brushed his hand against Keith's cheek. "You should hate me."

Keith reached up and grabbed Shiro's hand. "That wasn't you at all. That was the clone."

Shiro sighed. "I'm having problems separating my memories from the clones."

He turned his head and gazed at Adam as a tear sprang to life and ran down his cheek. "You should hate me most of all." He pressed his hand to the bandage that was showing a little blood. "I hurt you so much and ignored you."

Adam reached out and using his thumbs. He wiped away Shiro's tears. "Listen to me, Takashi Shirogane. That wasn't you, that was the clone. Everyone here understands that. You should too. I love you, and when we get back to Earth, I will be happy to spend the rest of my life with you." He gripped the back of Shiro's head with his hand as he rested the other on Shiro's opposite cheek. He leaned in and pressed his lips to Shiro's.

Shiro's response to Adam was timid at first but grew as they both deepened the kiss. They pulled apart abruptly when they heard whistling and looked up to see Pidge and Lance doing the whistling.

Adam chuckled as he pressed his forehead against Shiro's. "They are a bad influence on each other."

Shiro chuckled. "He's your cousin."

Adam sighed. "I know, but I can't do anything about it right now."

Hunk appeared with a few of the floating trays from the Castle with him. "I made some soup for us all. I figured Shiro could use some kind of comfort food." He brought over the floating tray. "I've also set up this tray for your personal use to compensate for the other arm."

Shiro smiled up at Hunk. "Thanks, Hunk."

Adam nodded. "Yeah, Hunk is a gem."

Hunk blinked, "Oh, Yeah." He spun around and raced over to Coran. "I made you something." He pulled out the diamond of what was left of the Castle of Lions that was fixed to a chain. "I thought you might like to have it since this is all that's left of your grandfathers ship."

Coran took the chain and sniffed as he wiped a gloved finger to his eye. "Thank you, Hunk."

Pidge walked up to the crate where both Shiro and Adam sat. She leaned up against the corner as Shiro turned his gaze to her. "Were you able to contact Earth?"
Pidge frowned as she gazed down at the ground. "No luck. The low power levels are probably affecting our broadcast distance. I'll keep trying as we head for Earth."

Lance's eyes lost focus. "I can't believe we're finally going home."

Hunk smiled as he wrapped his arms around himself and hugged. "I'm gonna hug my parents and never let go."

Pidge smiled. "I can't wait to see how Dad integrated Altean and Earth technologies." Her voice grew in excitement. "I bet he came up with something amazing. And my mom—" realization hit her as her enthusiasm fell. "Oh, she's gonna be so mad at me for running away. I hope I'm not grounded."

Adam smiled at her. "I'm sure it won't be that bad."

Pidge shook her head. "You don't know my mom."

Keith turned his gaze toward Allura and Coran. "How long do you think it'll take us to get home?"

Coran held up his hands as he counted on his fingers. "I was just calculating that now. Without the luxury of a wormhole and with diminished power cores. It's gonna take us approximately one hundred and fifty thousand years."

Everyone gasped.

Keith stared at Coran. "A hundred and fifty thousand years?"

Pidge shook her head. "Coran, I think your finger counting is a little off. It's gonna be one and a half years."

Coran's cheeks flushed a little pink. "Oh right, I didn't carry the three."

Allura gazed down at the ground. "It's going to be a very long and difficult voyage, but it's our only chance to replace the Castle of Lions."

A slight breeze blew and ruffled through Shiro's bangs. He gazed down at the ground. "There were times when I thought I'd never see Earth again. To be able to go back, it seems like a dream."

Adam placed his arm around Shiro's shoulders. "It's okay now. We're going home together."

Shiro raised his head and gazed into Adam's eyes. He leaned forward, and the moment was broken as Lance jumped ahead. "Well, what are we waiting for, guys? Let's hit the space road."

Krolia leaned against a crate. "I suppose we need to figure out who's flying with whom."

Adam gazed around at the others. "Wherever Takashi goes, I go. He still needs time to get reacquainted with his new body."

Shiro blinked at Adam. A slow smile pulled at his lips. "I agree with that."

Coran gazed around at the others. "And what about the animals?"

Pidge asked, "What about them?"

"Well, the wolf can't go with Kaltenecker, wolves eat cows. And the cow can't be in the same area as mice because aren't cows afraid of mice?"
Lance shook his head. "No, elephants are afraid of mice."

Adam groaned as he smacked a hand to his face. "Not another Lance explanation."

Shiro gazed at Adam. "Lance explanation?"

Adam nodded. "Pidge found Matt and brought him back, and Hunk made milkshakes to celebrate. Well, Allura and Coran wanted another one and thought that Kaltenecker made the milk, and well, Lance explained the reasons why Kaltenecker wasn't able to make milkshakes. Let's say it was a huge culture shock for the Alteans."

Shiro chuckled. "I wish I'd been there to see it."

Adam shook his head. "No, you don't. That was a shallow point for me. Truthfully, after you," he couldn't bring himself to say the word died. "I was barely functioning."

Shiro's voice cracked, "I'm sorry."

Adam shook his head. "No, that wasn't your fault. I found other ways to cope. Though the clone looked and acted so much like you, it pretty much avoided me, and if it had been smart, it wouldn't have."

Shiro nodded. "It's a good thing. At least you looked out for the team."

Adam leaned his head over and placed it on Shiro's shoulder. "Someone had to."

Shiro blinked. "Huh?"

Adam waved a hand in the air. "I'll explain it later." He turned his attention back to Lance, who'd finished his explanation of elephants.

Allura frowned. "Giants with long grabbing noses? Earth seems so weird."

Adam sighed as he shook his head. "That's not right, and you know it, Lance."

"And I suppose you could do better?"

Adam ignored his cousin's comment. "An Elephant is a four-legged animal. They do use their noses called trunks to grab things with, but that's for foraging for food and using it to bring water up to their mouths. Since they are one of the largest land animals on Earth. They also live in family groups called herds."

Allura smiled at Adam. "Thank you for clearing that up."

Lance leaned over to his cousin as he lowered his voice. "You know I couldn't help but overhear your conversation with Shiro earlier, space daddy."

Adam's eyes flashed as he rose, but he placed a hand to his abdomen as he dropped back down on the crate and groaned. He moved his hand away but pulled the garrison coat over the bandage to try to hide the fact that he was bleeding more profusely.

Keith said, "The wolf is riding with me, but that means Hunk will have to take the cow."

Hunk shook his head. "Me with the cow? Not a good idea."
Lance replied, "Hunk's right. Keith, you're keeping the cow. Someone else is gonna have to take the wolf."

The Paladins began to argue when Lance replied, "Guys, you're all overthinking this. I know exactly where everyone should go."

The others packed up camp as Adam helped Shiro back into the Black Lion. He knew Shiro was tired and helped ease him down on the cot. He clamped his jaws together to keep the sound of the pain he was in from escaping. As he straightened up, the pain hit him in the back of the head. "Ow!" he yelled as he rubbed a hand to the back of his head and turned around to face Krolia.

"You didn't think I was watching you. I knew you'd overdo it."

Thace chuckled from behind her as he set up a second cot next to Shiro's. "Now, you won't have any excuses for being up and about."

She pointed down at the cot. "I need for you to lay down so I can take care of you again. I said Keith wouldn't like it if I let you die, and I'm certain Shiro wouldn't either."

Shiro cringed at her choice of words, but he gazed at Adam. "No, I wouldn't."

Thace removed Adam's Garrison coat. He gazed at the blood-soaked bandages. "You were right again, Krolia."

She nodded as sadness appeared in her eyes. "Keith's father was the same. Selfless to a fault. Keith told me he died a hero." She gazed down at Shiro. "Sorry about that."

"I understand. It's sort of hard for me to accept too."

Adam lay down on the cot.

Krolia leaned over him. "I'm hoping that this time the wound is healed better."

Coran appeared in the Cargo hold. "If I might suggest that you try this. I hadn't thought of this before until we were packing up the Castle. It's a dissolvable ball that goes inside the wound where it activates and helps to heal it from the inside." He passed it over to her.

"Thank you, Coran. I was worried about it not healing from the inside."

"That is a rather gruesome prognosis." He turned his gaze to Adam. "For it to work, since the Black Lion doesn't have enough energy in its power core to run the healing pod we brought, you'll need to stay still."

Shiro winked at Adam. "I think he'll stay still now."

Krolia rolled her eyes but smirked as she turned away. "Lovebirds."

Shiro mumbled in his sleep, Adam woke and gazed over at him. He recognized the next noise that
came from the man's mouth. Shiro jerked as his face changed into one of pain, and his breathing increased as if in a blind panic.

Adam reached out and ran his hand through Shiro's hair. "Shh," he whispered. "You're having a nightmare." He continued to run his hand through Shiro's hair. "Your safe Takashi, remember your safe."

Shiro's breathing evened out as he fell into a deeper, more restful sleep.

Shiro woke to find Adam staring at him. He rubbed his hand over his face. "What did I drool in my sleep or something?"

Adam shook his head as he smiled at Shiro. "No, I was looking at your hair."

"Please don't tell me you're going to start with the old man jokes?"

"No," Adam propped himself up on his elbow. "Not at all." He cocked his head at Shiro before a slight smile began to pull at his lips. "I think I like this new you. At least you don't look like a skunk anymore."

"Adam—"

Adam leaned in and cut off his complaint as he kissed Shiro. As they separated, Adam's eyebrow rose. "You were saying?"

"I forgot."

A couple of quintants passed until Krolia knelt by the cots and checked Adam's abdominal wound. "You're healed."

Shiro smiled at her. "I knew he was itching to get out of bed."

"I'm sure Keith will be glad to see the both of you up and around, especially you, Shiro."

Shiro frowned as he sat up, and sadness passed over his face. "I'm sorry for hurting him. I-I'm still trying to process the clone's memories, and it's hard to get past the instances where I hurt-the clone hurt the team."

Krolia placed her hands on the former Black Paladin's shoulders and gazed into his eyes. "I know this is hard for you. That's why you can take the time during this voyage to heal." Shiro nodded. "I think I need some air."

"We're still flying. But we've had to make one stop already and transfer some passengers."

Adam chuckled. "I knew Lance's plan was all wrong."

Krolia nodded. "Yeah, Coran got on our nerves singing the Altean Alphabet."
Adam changed into his armor and stepped into the cockpit of the Black Lion with Shiro beside him.

Keith craned his head around. "It's good to see you both up and around again."

Shiro nodded. "It's good to be back."

A signal started beeping on the screen of the Black Lion, gaining everyone's attention. Krolia gazed at the screen. "This is the Klii-Nyn System. There's a Blade of Marmora rally point located on a moon here. We should check in with them and get an update on their operations."

Keith opened communications with the other lions. "Team, we're going to make a quick stop. Everyone follow me."

As they neared the moon, Krolia opened the communications channel for the base. "Hailing Zilox Station. Please Respond. Repeat Zilox Station, please respond."

The lions landed, and only the Paladins, Krolia, and Thace left to investigate the base.

Adam caught Shiro's expression as he glanced around the cockpit of the Black Lion. Shiro reached up and brushed his hand across the roof, but his face fell even more.

"Takashi, what's wrong?"

Shiro gazed at Adam. "I can't hear him anymore." A tear raced it's way down his cheek.

"You can't hear who?"

"The Black Lion. I'm cut off from him. It's almost like being deaf or losing a limb." Shiro dropped down as he lowered his head and began to cry.

Adam wrapped his arms around the man he loved and rocked him back and forth. "It's okay, Takashi. It's okay." He held on tight and let Shiro cry himself out.

Coran's voice came over the Black Lion's communication system that was also linked to the Paladins helmet comms. "Enemy ship coming in!"

Shiro sucked in a shaky breath as he wiped at his eyes with his hand. He pulled away as he turned his red-rimmed dark gray eyes up to Adams. His voice cracked. "Thank you."

A gentle smile pulled at Adam's lips. "I'm here for you whenever you need me. Always."

The Paladins, along with Thace and Krolia, returned to their lions. Keith dropped down into his seat in the Black Lion's cockpit. If Krolia or Keith noticed Shiro's tear-stained face, neither said anything.

As the lions flew away from the moon, Keith gazed at his scanner. "It looks like a small fleet. Mostly Galra fighters."
Lance replied, "That's good. We should be able to take them out pretty easily."

Pidge said, "Yeah, but remember, we're not flying at full power."

Keith replied, "Pidge is right. Everyone stay sharp."

Adam leaned over to Shiro, "You taught him well."

"I guess I did."

Lance said, "Keep an eye out. Where there are fighters, there's usually a cruiser nearby."

Shiro leaned over to Adam. "Lance has grown to be a good right hand of Voltron."

Adam nodded, "Yes, but he's also still Lance."

Shiro chuckled, and he gazed into Adam's eyes. "He wouldn't be Lance if he changed completely."

Adam groaned. "Don't I know it."

As the paladins tried to evade the fighters, Keith said, "We need to get out of here."

Hunk said, "Guys, they got me. I can't move."

Keith replied, "Hang on, Hunk. I'm gonna get you out of there."

Shiro and Adam found themselves pressed against the wall of the cockpit as Keith increased the speed of the lion. They were both surprised to find Coran there as well. The last they knew, Coran was in the Green Lion with Pidge and Romelle.

Hunk replied, "Thanks, Keith."

Lance said, "We're getting our quiznacks handed to us. We need to do something. We need to form Voltron."

Keith replied. "Okay. Everyone in formation."

Lance said, "It's not working."

Allura yelled, "The Lions can't take much more of this."

Keith yelled, "Abort."

Lance said, "What the heck just happened?"

Pidge replied, "I'm guessing the lions didn't have enough power to form Voltron."

Hunk asked, "So now what?"

Keith replied, "We run."

The lions began running into something explosive, but the paladins couldn't see what it was.

Lance asked, "Is everyone okay?"

Pidge and Allura both replied to the affirmative. Hunk asked, "What did we hit?"
Coran pressed a button, and a display appeared on one of the Black Lion's control panels. "Xanthorium crystals. They've been cloaked."

Hunk said, "I've never seen the Galra use weapons like these before."

Allura replied, "And they're not using standard Galra battle formations."

Hunk asked, "How are we going to get away?"

Keith said, "They're trying to trap us by chasing us through this tunnel of crystals."

Pidge replied, "He's right. Look, there are more crystals ahead."

Hunk said, "They're corralling us like we're space cattle."

Lance replied, "They backed us in a corner."

Keith said, "We have no choice. Everyone into the cyclone. Hunk, that means you and I are gonna have to punch a hole through the storm and create a path for the team. You ready?"

"As I'll ever be."

Adam wrapped an arm around Shiro's waist while he gripped the back of Keith's chair.

Lance said, "Guys, we can't take much more of this."

Keith replied, "Everyone scan the area for anything we can use for cover. We need to go somewhere where we have the advantage."

Pidge said, "There's a volcanic ice planet nearby. It has geysers, steam vents, ice tunnels, extreme changes in temperature, and an unstable core. It's super dangerous. It's perfect."

Keith nodded. "Okay, team, let's do this. All right, everybody, stay in formation and follow me."

Hunk yelled, "Geyser, Geyser!"

Adam swallowed hard as Keith guided the Black Lion through the water coming from the geysers.

Shiro leaned forward. "Watch out for the falling ice."

Keith said, "A cave. That gives me an idea. Lance, bring up the rear. When everyone's through the tunnel, fire above the cave opening. Red should be fast enough to get in before the avalanche completely blocks the way."

Adam's eyes grew. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. He tried to swallow but found his mouth was parched.

Lance said, "Roger, that, team leader."

Keith replied, "We'll see each other on the other side."

Adam closed his eyelids. He opened them when Lance said, "Uh-oh! Some of them made it through."

Keith replied, "Split up. We need to thin our attackers."

Shiro gazed at the screen as an alarm beeped. "There's someone on the Black Lion. He's trying to
break in. I'll take care of him."

Krolia shook her head. "No, you're still recovering. I'll do it!"

Adam tightened his grip on Shiro's waist.

Shiro frowned as his eyes shifted between Adam and Krolia. He sighed. "All right."

Adam whispered. "She's right."

As Krolia turned to leave, Keith yelled, "Wait!"

He pulled out his knife. "Take this!"

Krolia took the knife and ran past Coran, who chased after her. "I'll help."

Keith grunted. "Hang on!" She spun the Black Lion, which crashed into some ice, but he powered the lion through the obstacle.

As Krolia returned, Keith asked, "Is everyone okay?"

Hunk said, "Clear."

Allura replied, "Me too, thanks to Romelle."

Lance's voice rose, "Well, Pidge and I need help."

"Yeah, we can't shake these guys, and we don't have any room to maneuver."

Keith replied, "I see your location. We're headed your way."

Pidge's voice came through a few minutes later. "I think the wolf saved us."

The Lions flew out of the cave but were slammed down against the ground by a repulsor beam.

Adam stood next to Shiro in the cell. "I know your tired Takashi. You can lean on me."

Shiro shook his head. "I'm fine."

Adam sighed. "You're not fine. I can see it in your eyes."

Keith stood in the opposite corner. He glanced up at Shiro. "Adam's right, you know."

Shiro frowned. "How can I get better if I don't force myself?"

Allura gazed up at him from her place on the floor. "You need to conserve your strength for when we do get out of here."

Lance pressed his head against the wall. "I'm working on that."

Hunk whispered from where he sat between Pidge and Allura. "What are you doing?"

"I'm feeling for a secret passage."
Keith looked up. "You've watched too many movies, Lance. There's no secret passage."

Lance frowned as he glared at the Black Paladin.

Krolia glanced back at the others. "Only one guard is patrolling out there. If we can get this door open, we can overpower him."

Hunk blinked as he looked around. "What happened to Coran?"

Krolia turned her gaze to the Yellow Paladin. "He must have managed to hide when we were captured."

Allura gazed at Krolia. "At least we have one ally out there still able to fight for us."

Pidge turned her head to gaze past Hunk at Allura. "Are you saying our fate rests in Coran's hands?" She turned her head to stare at Lance. "I will help you look for that passage."

Krolia listened and turned to the others. "Someone's coming, move away from the door."

Thace stared at his sister. "But you just said—"

"I know what I did, but it sounds like four or five are coming."

Lance moved over by Adam and Shiro as Thace positioned himself by Allura, and Krolia stood near Keith.

The door unlocked, and two guards entered the cell. The paladins' eyes grew to see who followed the guards.

Ezor smiled. "Look who's here. It's Voltron."

Zethrid punched her fist into the open palm of her hand. "We're going to have a little chat."

Lance gazed at them before he remembered who they were. "Hey, you're the guys Lotor shot into space."

Pidge glared at them. "And the ones that were trying to kill us."

Hunk nodded. "Yeah, sure, but we're all friends now, right? I, for one, am glad you survived."

Shiro frowned as he struggled with memories that weren't his own. He leaned over to Adam and whispered, "Who are they, and who's Lotor?"

"Lotor was Zarkon's son, and they were two of his generals."

Ezor smiled back at him. "I'm glad you survived, too." She leaned over him. "It's no fun torturing a corpse."

Hunk's face fell. "Oh. So maybe not?"

Zethrid glared at them with her one good eye. "Where have you been all this time? And happened to Lotor?"

Shiro gazed at the pair of half-Galran females. "What are you talking about?"

Ezor replied. "We're talking about your little disappearing act."
Zethrid glared. "Answer the question! How did you survive the explosion?"

Hunk gazed up at her. "Don't you know? You were there?"

Ezor placed her hands on her hips. "I think there's a little confusion about how we ask questions. You give us answers, scenario works."

Zethrid balled her hands into fists at her sides. "Enough of your games. Where is Lotor?"

Keith glared back at her. "Lotor's dead. We left him in the Quintessence Field."

Ezor shook her head. "Yeah, that doesn't add up. Why aren't you dead?"

Hunk shrugged. "Because of the power of teamwork?"

Zethrid glared. "I'm going to ask you one more time, and then we're going to have to take a more extreme approach."

Ezor grinned as she cocked her head. "The fun part."

Zethrid stared at them. "I'm tired of asking the same question over and over again. What happened to Lotor, and where have you been all this time?" She sighed. "Fine. Since you insist on maintaining this charade of ignorance, you leave us no choice but to apply pressure."

Ezor laughed. "Finally. Who's our first victim?"

Zethrid pointed at Pidge. "You. I'd bet half my fleet this group of heroes has a soft spot for the small one."

Ezor walked forward when Lance charged. "Don't you touch her!" Ezor kicked out, knocking the Red Paladin to the floor.

One of the guards pointed his weapon at Lance. Zethrid snorted. "Your defiance is adorable and so very misguided."

Pidge glared at them. "Leave us alone."

Ezor stepped forward one more step as Adam, Shiro, and Thace stepped forward to try to stop her from grabbing the smallest Paladin. "You were right, Zethrid. They do have a soft spot for this one. But you won't stop us." She swung her head, and the tentacle at the back of her head reached out and grabbed the Green Paladin.

Hunk yelled, "Pidge."

Ezor held the human up in the air by the top of her chest armor.

Keith yelled, "Let her go!"

Zethrid glared at him. "Tell us what we want to know!"

Ezor slammed Pidge into the wall. The back of her head impacted with the metal surface as Ezor's eyes narrowed. "Answers!"

Keith replied, "We told you, he's—"

An explosion rocked the ship as alarms blared.
Ezor dropped Pidge as she along with Zethrid, and the two guards ran out of the cell.

Adam hovered over Pidge. He did his best to check her over with his wrists cuffed together in front of him. "I think you'll be okay, but you're going to have a headache. How do you feel?"

"Like I want to kick the shit out of them."

Shiro heard her. "Pidge," he sighed.

As Pidge stood up, she gazed at him. "What? Don't tell me you haven't thought about it before."

Shiro nodded. "Yeah, I have. But I never gave voice to my desires."

Pidge put her hand on her hip. "Well, I'm not you." She stuck her tongue out at him.

Adam sighed, but he turned his head as everyone heard noises and a scream from outside the door. The door slid open, and they found the mice sitting on the incapacitated guard laid out of the deck.

They squeaked up at everyone.

Allura knelt by them. "Hello, little friends."

The mice squeaked up at her.

"What? Where?"

Hunk asked, "What? What are they saying?"

"Coran's trying to rescue us. And he's got help. Acxa."

Keith gazed down at her. "What?"

The mice squeaked again, and Platt held up the key to their cuffs. He freed Allura, who, in turn, released everyone else.

They found Coran and Allura used her power to grow in size and punch the pirate in the full suit of metal armor in the back of the head, knocking him out.

Lance and Keith helped Coran up to his feet. Keith gazed at the Altean. "Coran, where's Acxa?"

"I don't know. Where am I?"

Shiro asked, "Are you okay?"

Coran tried to focus on him but swayed on his feet. "Never better. Now let's get our belmards and hayards."

Adam gazed at Allura. "I'll check him out once we get off of this ship."
They crept through the ship as a group but found the alcove where their helmets and bayards were being kept in the ship's armory. But they also found two pirates examining their equipment.

Lance sighed. "They have weapons, and we don't. Any suggestions?"

Coran shouted, "Unhand those bayards, you scallywags!"

Keith closed his eyes and concentrated. His bayard appeared in his hand. He jumped up and charged down the hall toward the alcove and made short work of the two guards. He put his helmet on his head. "Lance, lead the way. Keep the team together."

"Wait, where are you going?"

"Acxa saved us. I'm not gonna leave her behind. I'll meet up with you guys soon." He ran off as Lance stared after him.

Adam helped Shiro get his helmet on as Coran and Romelle found and put on a couple of spacesuits. Adam slipped his helmet on and slipped his energy pistol into its holster.

Lance gazed at everyone. "Let's get to the lions and stay together."

They ran down a hall to the airlock. Hunk opened it. They all flew out in space toward the lions, but a group of pirates gave chase firing at them. Lance and Pidge turned to fight back.

Hunk flew up behind one of the pirates and grabbed his scarf and yanked it over the pirate's face. He launched him into the group of pirates and pulled out his bayard and fired it into the group of pirates, causing them to scatter.

Adam turned and fired on a pirate. He saw movement out of the corner of his eye as a pirate flew forward and tackled Shiro. "Takashi!" He aimed carefully, but Shiro struggled to fight off the pirate.

He saw a flash of metal off a blade as the pirate raised his arm above his head. "Takashi!" he screamed as the blade started making a downward plunge.

A bolt of energy zipped past and struck the pirate. Adam turned around, and Lance flashed him a thumbs up.

Adam sighed. "Thanks, Lance."

"It's nothing. Get to Red. Hurry!"

Keith's voice came over the helmets. "Guys! Zero in on my location and fire on the ship."

Allura asked, "Are you sure?"

Keith yelled, "Just do it!"

All four of the lions fired on the ship.

The Black Lion flew forward and sucked Keith and Acxa up.
Hunk stepped into the cave where Acxa was living. He carried an armload of firewood. "I just looked at the lions, and they're in worse shape than ever."

Shiro gazed at her from where he stood next to Adam. "We should probably give them some time to recharge before we head back on our way."

Lance gazed at Acxa. "Wow, a lot of things have changed in the past few weeks."

Acxa sat up straight. "Weeks? What are you talking about?"

Allura gazed at her. "The last time we saw you. You were fighting us alongside Lotor."

"That was three deca-phoebs ago. No one has seen you since your fight with Lotor."

Keith gazed at her. "That's impossible."

"It's true. After Lotor jettisoned us, we managed to make it to a small meteoroid. There we saw both Voltron and Lotor disappear. Eventually, Voltron re-emerged-alone. But then there was an explosion and after that-nothing. That was three deca-phoebs ago."

Lance gazed at her. "Whoa." Adam placed a hand on his cousin's shoulder as the implication of what the former general said struck home.

Allura gazed at her. "So as far as everyone else in the universe is concerned, Voltron has been gone for three deca-phoebs?"

Hunk dropped half his load of firewood as he gaped.

Pidge gazed into the fire. "That explains the discrepancies in the star charts in the lions. I thought they were off because of our inter-dimensional jumping. I guess they were in a way. Because when you think about it, that must have been the cause of the time-slippage between our experience and that of the rest of the universe."

Keith gazed at Acxa. "So, how did you end up here, helping us?"

"Zethrid, Ezor, and I were marooned on the meteoroid for days. Finally, a Galra ship came to investigate Lotor's last known whereabouts. We took it over. With Lotor gone, it was clear that there was a power vacuum in the Galra Empire. Zethrid and Ezor wanted to exploit that for their gain, but I knew I had to find my path. And it led me to you."

Keith replied, "Thank you for saving us."

"I hope that this makes up, in some way, for the wrongs I've done. I realize now that Lotor wasn't the man I thought he was. He preached unity, but in the end, he sought only power."

Allura replied, "I understand how you feel. I fell for Lotor's lies as well."

Thace placed his hand on the Princess's shoulder in support.

Acxa gazed at them. "I'll do everything I can out there to help the Voltron Coalition."

Adam gazed at the others. "I know how you all feel. I feel the same way, but I need someone to
keep an eye on Takashi while I set up a cot. He's been through a lot, and even though he's trying to
up this stoic front, he's exhausted."

Coran jumped up from his box. "Here, take my seat, Shiro."

Krolia went off and brought back the cot. She set it up to the rear of the cave.

Shiro gazed at Adam. "Would you stop fussing over me?"

"Not on your life."

Pidge chuckled. "Oooh!"

Adam rolled his eyes as he helped Shiro over to the cot. "Rest now," he said as he ran his fingers
through Takashi's hair.

Shiro's eyelids closed as he drifted off to sleep as the others continued to murmur amongst
themselves.
A Few Bumps in the Road

Chapter Summary

The Paladins are heading to Earth, and when they get there, they find their world has been taken over by Sendak and his Armada.

Keith's voice came through the comms of the lions. "Everybody up."

Although two people were already awake, sticking to the schedule of the Garrison. They now rode in the Green Lion with Pidge because she said they weren't as annoying as some of the others.

Shiro gazed over at the teen who still slept. "Did she have more nightmares last night?"

Adam frowned as he gazed in Takashi's dark gray eyes. "Yeah, she doesn't like for others to know about them, but one is recurring. It's about the clone's body rejecting your consciousness."

Shiro shook his head. "But that didn't happen."

Adam sighed as he sat down on the side of the bed. "It almost did. And I suspect that she knows about it because she probably overheard Keith talking about it with Allura after the fact. And I did tell her that it didn't happen. But she cried herself out last night." Adam yawned. "But that's also part of the reason why she wanted us here with her in the Green Lion. She also said that you are a link to her family."

Shiro's cheeks turned a slight pink. But he eyed Adam noting the dark circles that began to show under his eyes. "I'll keep watch over her tonight."

Adam shook his head. "No, you're still healing, and it's my job."

Shiro reached out and brushed his thumb against Adam's cheek. "You have to take care of yourself too, koishiteru. Your working too hard trying to make sure everyone is okay. So, I'll take my turn."

Pidge groaned, as one of her hands, reached out into the air. "Only a ninety-nine on the test? But I did all the extra credit."

Keith's voice through the Green Lion's comm system again. "Come on. It's time to wake up."

Pidge screamed as her eyes opened. "What a nightmare."

She gazed over at Shiro and Adam watching her. She blinked at them. "Uhm, yeah, I'm okay. I had a nightmare about being in school again."

Shiro chuckled, "We could tell you were talking in your sleep."

Pidge groaned. Rover floated above her head as it beeped. She rubbed at her eyes. "I know, I know. I'm getting up."

Lance replied from the Red Lion. "What's the point? We're floating in space. There's no day or night here."
Allura's sleepy voice came over the comm system. "I have to agree with Lance. We should sleep for fifteen more dobashes."

Keith replied, "Guys, we can't let this long journey make us soft or dull our skills. Routine will keep sharp."

Pidge grumbled under her breath as she sat up. Around her bed, like in her room on the Castle lay debris of some projects she was working on and on a crate at the head of her bed lay a couple of books she was reading.

Shiro said, "Keith is right. Routine is what got me through being Zarkon's prisoner and being in the infinite void of the Black Lion."

Lance replied, "I guess that does make you an expert on killing time."

Shiro frowned as his eyes watered.

Adam grabbed his hand as he stood up. "Lance didn't mean it. He's always spouting off without thinking about it first."

Shiro nodded as he held onto Adam's hand. "I know, it still hurts, though."

Adam tugged on Shiro's remaining arm. "Let's go so she can get dressed."

Shiro allowed Adam to lead him out of the Green Lion's cargo hold.

Keith said, "Okay, everyone, to your stations. Running battle situations now."

All the other paladins grumbled.

Hunk said, "Can't we - Can't we have breakfast first?"

Lance sighed, "Like mother like son."

Keith replied, "Focus."

Krolia said, "Here's the scenario. Your on a planet with double gravity, dense volcanic fog, and eight blovar raptors are attacking. What do you do?"

Hunk asked, "Do these raptors have eggs? I say we steal some, and we make a little breakfast." He screamed.

Adam winced.

Krolia said, "A raptor just melted your face off, Hunk! Now it's eight on four."

Keith said, "Everyone split up to thin their numbers. If there was a way we could – What?"

Krolia replied, "Keith, you're out."

Pidge leaned forward in her seat. "Okay, I think I know what to do. This place has thick volcanic fog, right? That means the blovars must use some form of thermal vision to see us."
Adam smiled. The Green Paladin was finally awake.

Lance replied, "Maybe I can lure them away with my heat rays. It's working."

Pidge grinned. "Nice."

Allura replied, "Let's get them while they're distracted."

Pidge's screen went dark. "Wait, what happened?"

Krolia replied, "You focused too much on the raptors and forgot about the volcano."

Lance replied, "That fictional planet seems harsh."

Krolia replied, "I programmed the simulator to be unbeatable. I wanted to see how long you'd survive."

Lance replied, "Well, I hope you're happy."

Thace chuckled. "Oh, she is Lance. She did this all the time while training new Blades."

Krolia replied, "Thace, you were never around. How would you know?"

Thace chuckled again. "Before Ulaz was sent to the ship where Shiro was held, he told me."

"Figures, it was Ulaz."

Hunk yelled, "Food incoming!" He sighed. "Aw, what a good wolf. Fella – guy. Gosh, we gotta come up with a name for the wolf."

Keith replied, "It's not gonna happen."

Hunk replied, "Oh, come on. I vote, Kosmo."

Allura said, "I like Kosmo."

Lance replied, "Kosmo's cool."

Pidge reached into the package tied around the wolf's neck. "Yeah, it's nice." She handed a smaller package to Adam and one to Shiro.

Shiro's floating tray hovered nearby, and he opened it so he could set the food out on the tray along with a drink that Hunk had provided in the package.

Keith said, "I figure when he's ready, he'll tell me his name."

Adam rolled his eyes. "Keith, he's an animal, a helpful animal, but still an animal, not a Voltron Lion."

Lance replied, "So, Kosmo. Got it."

As Pidge ate her breakfast, her communication screen popped up in front of her. She used her tongue to push the food over to the side inside her mouth. "I got a signal."

Allura asked, "How did you get a signal?"

Pidge tried to swallow too fast and coughed as her eyes watered. Shiro reached down and slapped
her on her back as her eyes watered, and tears rolled out of her eyes. She sucked in a breath as she waved him off. "I'm okay." She took a quick drink and coughed a couple more times.

Hunk asked, "Are you okay?"

Pidge nodded as she wiped the back of her gloved hand over her eyes. "Yeah, I'm fine. I just swallowed the wrong way." She took another drink. "Back to the signal. I've been running a passive scan, so I wouldn't give our location away looking for any signs of communications. And I just picked up something!"

Keith asked, "Well, what is it?"

"I'm patching it through now."

Coran started laughing; apparently, it was a sitcom created by the bibohbi's.

Adam shrugged as he gazed at Shiro.

Hunk asked, "Wait, what's that noise in the background."

Pidge concentrated on it. "It sounds like some interference. I'll try to tune it out."

Krolia replied, "No, wait. Pidge, can you amplify that signal?"

"On it."

Romelle said, "Thace?"

Allura asked, "Thace? What is it?"

Pidge gazed at her screen. "Judging from the intermittent sound structure, it's just deep space interference. Most likely, a radiation pulse from a nearby star."

Krolia replied, "No, that's what it's supposed to sound like. Listen to the sounds in between the pulses. There's a unique pattern."

Allura replied, "She's right."

Krolia said, "Before the Blades were unified, we would use this crude way of communicating with each other. Not many Blades know this code. It must be a senior member."

Keith asked, "Kolivan?"

Krolia replied, "Possibly."

Shiro remembered the stoic leader of the Blades. "What does it say?"

"It's a distress signal. Whoever is sending it is in trouble."

Pidge brought up a star map on the Green Lion's screen. "It looks like it's coming from this sector."

Shiro gazed at her screen. "So, do we know anything about that section of space?"

Coran replied, "Not without the Castle of Lions research library core. We would be flying in blind!"
Krolia said, "We must go!"

Thace joined in the conversation. "We have to go. Isn't that what your Paladin code is all about?"

Hunk replied, "That's a pretty severe detour from Earth."

Adam sighed. "Hunk, we all know you want to get to Earth, but the Blades are our allies. We have to go."

Keith said, "Adam's right, and if Kolivan is there, maybe there will be more Blades. We need all the help we can get to reach Earth."

Shiro nodded. "I agree. We need to find out if we can find help."

Adam gazed over at Shiro, knowing this was the right call, he hoped they didn't run into a firefight.

The Green Lion led the way. "The signal is coming from this planet. I'm detecting remnants of a civilization, but I don't see any signs of life."

Romelle asked, "Is that a good sign or a bad sign?"

Hunk replied, "In all my space experience, there have never been any good signs."

The lions landed at the edge of a city that looked as though it were the survivor of a significant battle. Walls had crumbled to the ground like pieces of stone littered the road. A soft breeze blew up a small puff of sandy dirt from the ground.

Pidge studied her holographic screen from her wrist gauntlet as she walked down the remains of a street. "I still can't tell exactly where the signal originates. I'll keep trying to triangulate its location.

Adam slid his energy rifle from his shoulder as the group seemed to naturally form a protective barrier around Shiro, their former Black Paladin. He wasn't about to let Takashi out of his sight. Not after everything they'd been through.

Krolia gazed at one of the walls. "The signs are all around us. There was a massacre here."

Allura pressed her hand to a wall. "Some of this damage looks like it's from magic."

Keith gazed around them. "Keep looking. We need to find whatever Blade is broadcasting that signal."

Kosmo sniffed at the air and stared at something and began to growl in his throat.

Keith gazed at the wolf. "What is it?"

Kosmo suddenly took off running and charged up a broken wall and leaped into the air, landing on a humanoid that had an odd insect-like face. The wolf stood on the creature as it lowered its head and bared a mouthful of teeth.
Keith and Hunk, with their bayards drawn, flanked Kosmo. Keith placed his gloved hand on the wolf's back. "Good job." He turned his attention fully to the creature. "Who are you? Who's broadcasting the signal?"

The creature gazed up at them. "It was me," it said in an unusually deep voice.

Keith's eyes narrowed. "Impossible. You're no Blade of Marmora."

"I will explain all if you would put away your weapons and call off your beast."

Krolia's eyes slid over to Keith as she gazed at her son. "Let's see what he has to say."

The creature led them to the ruins of a building where it started a fire.

Pidge continued scanning the area. "This is where the signal was coming from. Somewhere below us."

The creature sat down on a box as it gazed at the Green Paladin. "You are clever. But I wouldn't expect less from the Paladins of Voltron."

Lance lowered his bayard. "You recognized us?"

"Of course, of course. Though I am surprised to see you, all were certain you perished."

Lance lowered his guard a bit as he relaxed. "Yeah, we found that out. But we're back."

"And I am so grateful that you are. It's been so long since I've seen another being."

Shiro gazed at the creature. "Thank you for your hospitality, but who are you? What happened here?"

"Bloodshed happened here. Death happened. I am Macidus. This is my home planet. And now I am the only one left alive here."

Movement from Adam's peripheral vision caught his attention as Krolia walked to a wall covered by a cloth.

Krolia spun around and pulled her energy pistol. It clicked and hummed as she prepared to fire. "What are you doing with these?" She reached behind her and pulled back the cloth revealing a wall decorated with the small swords carried by the members of the Blade of Marmora.

"I hang them in honor of their sacrifice. They died trying to protect the universe."

Krolia glared at him. "How did it happen?"

Macidus sighed. "This all started when Voltron disappeared, when – when you disappeared. The power vacuum that ensued destabilized much of the universe. Galra turned on each other. Warlords and pirates became the rulers of the land."

Allura turned her gaze on Macidus. "What happened with Haggar, the witch? She would not have let the empire crumble."

Macidus shrugged. "No one knows. But her druids continued her work, carrying out her final orders. They set out to destroy every Blade."

Pidge's eyes widened. "After Lotor took over the throne, almost every Marmoran agent was
exposed."

"And that's when the slaughter began. All Blades were called away from their assignments and sent here. Kolivan knew they were being hunted, and he wanted to make a stand against them. He believed it was their only means of survival."

Romelle lowered her gaze to the floor. "That must be why they abandoned that base we found."

"Indeed. When they arrived, my people helped them to fortify their base. But the druids found us. They encircled the base and besieged it with magic. Casualties on both sides were enormous. My people tried to escape. They were slaughtered. I stayed behind with Kolivan. For each druid, we managed to take down nearly a hundred Blades fell."

"In the final battle, I was buried beneath a collapsed structure. When I regained consciousness, the fight was over, and I was the lone survivor. I've been sending the signal Kolivan gave me ever since in the hopes of finding any remaining Blades."

Adam frowned. Something about Macidus's words didn't ring true. Kolivan wouldn't have brought in all the Blades to one central spot. He wasn't stupid.

Keith gazed at the survivor. "There are still a few of us alive."

"Good."

Krolia gazed at the blade she held in her hands. "Kolivan? His blade is flickering."

Pidge gazed at Keith's mother. "Flickering? What does that mean?"

"A Marmoran agent's life force is connected to the blade. I just saw it glow. He must still be alive."

Macidus replied, "Just barely."

The Paladins gasped. Adam glared as he raised his rifle.

Macidus stood. "Your hand is looking much better."

Keith gazed at him and then down to his hand. "My hand?"

"You don't remember our fight?"

Keith growled. "You've been using that signal to draw Blades in!"

Macidus laughed. "Kolivan proved to be useful, after all!" He dropped something.

Krolia shouted, "No!"

Adam managed to squeeze off a shot, but Macidus disappeared.

The container impacted onto the ground, as a sickening magenta energy exploded out of it.

Adam could see, but he couldn't speak, he couldn't move. They were trapped. But Keith with Kosmo's aid had escaped. He hoped Keith could kill the druid and free them from this evil spell.

Wait, what was that? If he could have shook his head to clear it, he would have. Allura's hand was glowing. Somehow she was drawing the evil spell into her.
Adam stumbled. He was free of the spell, but Allura now glowed the same color as the spell. It was exactly like when she was able to draw the witch's magic inside her during the fight on Zarkon's Command ship. She fell to the ground. "Allura!"

Pidge gazed at the Princess. "Allura, are you okay?"

Allura grunted as she tried to contain the energy as she rose to her feet. "Pidge, lock onto Keith's location!"

"He's directly below us!"

Allura raised her arms. "Stand back!" she shouted as she aimed her hands down at the floor and redirected the energy blowing a large hole in the floor in front of her.

She and the other paladins dropped down into the hole. Shiro moved to jump down after them.

Adam dropped his energy rifle and placed his hands on Shiro's armored chest. "Not this time. You only have one arm."

"But it's Keith, and the others down there!"

"I know, Amor, I know. But this time, you have to sit it out."

Shiro glared at the shoulder where his prosthetic arm had been. "If I had both arms, I'd be able to help!"

Adam grabbed Shiro and hung onto him. "I know, but we can figure this out eventually."

Pidge knelt by Kolivan as Adam knelt beside her while she ran a medical scan. "He's in pretty bad shape, but it looks like he's gonna be okay."

Adam nodded, "I agree with Pidge's diagnosis."

Kolivan gazed at everyone. "I-I'm sorry my code lured you here."

Keith gazed down at Kolivan. "There was nothing you could do. The coordinates I gave you, the Altean colony, were you able to find it?"

"I sent a team. There was nothing there. Just an empty facility. They were gone."

Krolia gazed at Kolivan. "Judging from the Blades that Macidus collected, he may have delivered a critical blow to the Marmora, but he did not defeat us entirely."

Kolivan sighed. "I must find the others. The universe needs us now more than ever."

Krolia nodded. "I will join you. We will revive the Blade of Marmora together, father."

Keith stared at Krolia, then to Kolivan and back to Krolia. He shook his head at what he just heard. "What?" he yelled as he ran a gloved hand through his hair. He stood up, "You're my grandfather? Why didn't you tell me?"

Kolivan nodded weakly, "Yes, I knew you were my kin."
"Why didn't anyone tell me? Here I thought for the longest time I was alone, and now I find I have a mother, an uncle, and a grandfather."

Thace chuckled as he moved away from the others and wrapped an arm around Keith's shoulders. "Now, you know. How does it feel to be directly in line to the Blade's leadership?"

Keith shook his head. "Weird. But I'm also a Paladin of Voltron."

Kolivan gazed up at him. "We know, and that's why I never told you and swore Thace to secrecy. I didn't want you to leave Voltron entirely in case something happened, and it appears I was right."

Krolia placed her hand on her father's shoulder. "Rest." She rose and moved over to Keith, and the pair started murmuring together.

Thace walked up to Allura. He reached out and took her hand in his. "I'm going to join them in helping with rebuilding the Blades. Kolivan is right. The universe does need us, and we need to be able to help Voltron when you need us."

Allura nodded as she gazed up at him. "It has been nice having you and Krolia around. Come back to us soon."

He leaned down and pressed a quick kiss to her cheek. "Be safe, Princess."

Shiro leaned toward Pidge's holographic screen. He pointed at something on it. "Maybe if we run this configuration."

Pidge frowned. "Still nothing."

Adam leaned against a panel as he watched Shiro and Pidge try to figure out their current situation.

The Green Paladin focused on her flying. "Allura, try the sonic wave."

The Princess replied, "Okay, I'll try." She sighed. "It's still not working. And it probably won't work again until our power-cores are recharged."

Pidge's shoulders sagged. "Roger that. Well, our long-range scanners still haven't detected any planets nearby. No star systems, nothing."

Lance groaned. "How long have we been out here?"

Romelle sighed, "Going on four movements."

Lance sighed. "And how long is it gonna take us to get to Earth at this speed?"

Romelle replied. "I think Pidge said something like ten billion deca-phoebs."

Pidge shook her head. "I said one and a half Earth years."

Hunk said, "Whoa, whoa. Wait, there's a big discrepancy between ten billion deca-phoebs and one and a half Earth years. Which one is it?"

Pidge leaned forward in her seat. "It's one and a half Earth years! We've gone over this several
times, though there may be a margin of error of about a month, depending on any time dilation we encounter."

Adam groaned as he slapped his hand to his face. Why did Hunk have to ask again?

Lance seemed to perk up as he asked, "You didn't just facepalm again?"

Adam sighed. "What do you think?"

Lance chuckled. "I think you did."

"Shut up, Lance!"

Shiro shook his head. "Look, we knew this wasn't going to be an easy or quick voyage, but replacing the Castle of Lions is our top priority."

Keith replied, "We just have to stay sharp and maintain discipline. We knew when we started this journey. We'd be low in power. We didn't plan on going through the galactic void, but we'll get through it."

Lance said, "Don't worry, guys. We'll run into something eventually that will turn this trip around."

Hunk asked, "What makes you so sure?"

"If my experience in space has taught me anything, it's that something always comes along to try to kill us."

Lance asked, "Hey, Pidge. Why is it so dark out here?"

Pidge shrugged. "I can't be sure, but my theory is that this area is surrounded by some kind of nebula that blocks most of the light."

Lance replied. "Oh, yeah. Must be a patch of that dark matter I've heard about."

Pidge leaned forward as a smirk pulled at her lips. "Stop trying to impress Romelle, and that isn't what dark matter is."

Shiro stared out the cockpit screen of the Green Lion. "Guys, I think I might have an idea on how to get the lions back to full power."

Lance replied. "And you're just now telling us this?"

"Well, I'm sorry, Lance, but I guess having my consciousness transplanted from the infinity of Voltron's inner quintessence into the dead body of an evil clone of myself has left me a little out of sorts for the past few weeks."

Lance replied, "Oh. Uh. Yeah."

Keith asked, "What is it, Shiro?"

"It's difficult to articulate, but remember when we were fighting Zarkon, and we were hit with that beam that drained all of our quintessence?"
Adam sat up straighter. That was one of the memories he never wanted to relive.

Allura replied, "Yes, you were all incapacitated."

"That's right, but we managed to regenerate enough power to keep fighting."

Keith replied, "Yeah. We repowered Voltron ourselves."

"Exactly. And I think that's how its meant to work. Since I – I disappeared, you've been relying on the Castle's crystal to keep the lions charged. But if you were a team of fully – realized paladins, you wouldn't need that."

Allura replied, "I – I can't help but feel this must be my fault. You were able to recharge Voltron before, but since I joined –"

Shiro shook his head. "It's no one's fault. Being a Paladin of Voltron takes training. You just haven't had time to focus on working together to find your balance in this configuration."

Pidge grinned. "Well, we've got nothing but time now."

Lance replied, "That's right. We've been down before, and we always come back."

Keith replied, "I'm glad you're here, Shiro. After all, you went through, how did you find the strength to be the leader of Voltron?"

"I had help. That's why there are five of you to lift each other up."

Keith asked, "So what should we do? Maybe some flight formation exercises?"

Before anyone could answer, the lions were hit by some weird storm.

Allura said, "It looks like the nebula carried us thousands of light-years away."

Adam glanced around. "How did I wind up on the floor?"

Pidge craned her head. "We'll explain later." She turned back to her scanner. "That looks like – I recognize these constellations! This is Earth's solar system! It's the Milky Way."

Shiro gazed out of the screen of the Green Lion. "We're finally here."

Pidge gripped onto her controls as Voltron raced toward Earth. "Dad, please respond. Voltron is coming. Hold on."

Hunk asked, "Are we too late?"

A voice broke through the static. "Katie? Katie, is that you?"

Pidge grinned. "Dad, it's me. I'm here."

"Katie, I'm so glad to hear your voice. Where are you?"

"We're within the Solar System. Heading to Earth now."
"Wait! You must stop!"

Keith said, "What? Say again."

Adam and Shiro stared at each other then gazed down at the screen, which showed Commander's Holt's voice pattern coming through.

"Stop. Sendak has invaded the planet. He's taken over Earth. If he finds out Voltron is here, he'll threaten the people of Earth in exchange for the Lions."

Keith yelled, "Reverse thrusters!"

Hunk replied, "Copy that. Hold tight!" He grunted. "Uh oh, we've come out of hyperspace and run into a Galra patrol."

Sam replied, "Paladins, we blocked the patrol's transmission. You're clear."

Lance said, "Roger that. Let's take 'em out!"

Voltron took out one of the Galra fighters, followed by a second one. The third tried to run.

Pidge yelled, "Wait! Don't destroy that ship. We need it!"

Lance replied, "Really? For what?"

"I've got an idea. We can't fly our lions to Earth without being spotted, so they'll have to stay here on this moon in Saturn's rings, which should keep them hidden from Sendak's radars. We'll fly in using the Galra ship."

Everyone piled into the Galra fighter while Keith took the pilot's seat. He fired up the engine, and the fighter rose into the air before he pushed the control stick forward.

Allura gazed at Lance and Hunk. "I hope the mice and Kaltenecker aren't too frightened without us."

Lance chuckled. "The mice seem to do well on their own, and Kaltenecker will be fine on her own."

Keith frowned. "We're making our way through Sendak's cruisers. I hope none of them decide to scan us."

Shiro gazed toward the cockpit. "I don't think we'll have a problem there. Sendak has always been too arrogant for his own good."

Keith shouted from the pilot's seat. "Hang on! We're entering Earth's atmosphere."

Hunk gazed up at the ceiling of the ship. "This is weird. This is about exactly how we left Earth, crammed in the cockpit of the Blue Lion."

Pidge glanced over at the Red Paladin as she smirked. "We'll be fine as long as Lance doesn't fart."

Lance glared at her.
The fighter shuddered, and everyone gasped.

Keith called out from the front. "We're overweight. I'm losing altitude. Brace for impact."

Adam did his best to brace both himself and Shiro against the nearest wall of the fighter.

The fighter smacked into the ground and gouged a furrow across the ground before resting in a smoldering sparking mass of metal.

They exited the wreck and climbed a ridge that gave them an Eagle eye view of a bombed-out city. Hunk glanced around at the remains of the city below. "Hey, I know this place. I've been here. This is Platte City. It's about half an hour from the garrison."

Lance's eyes grew. "Whoa, I can't believe this is all that's left of it."

Keith frowned. "We need to get to the garrison. Stay together. Let's move quick and quiet."

As they walked past the rubble and the wreckage of burnt-out cars that littered the street, purple beams of energy shot down at Lance and Keith. The Red and Black Paladins dived under the remains of a vehicle. Lance yelled, "Take cover!"

The others ran into the side of a building as Hunk provided them with cover fire from his bayard as he walked backward. Adam slid his energy rifle off his shoulder and returned fire after making sure Shiro and the others were safe.

Hunk stepped out from behind a wall. He and Adam took turns at returning fire at the Galran drones.

Lance stepped out from his hiding spot and returned fire.

Keith stepped up beside him. "I'll distract it. You take the shot. Don't miss." Keith moved back behind the car and slid over the rear of the overturned vehicle. He ran down the street with the drone quickly chasing after.

Lance instantly turned his bayard from a rifle to a sniper rifle and aimed it at the drone. He fired, taking out the first drone, then spun and took out the second drone effortlessly.

Keith stared down at the wreckage of the drone. "I wonder how many of these things they have around here. Pidge any chance we could see those things before they get to us?"

Pidge stared down at her holographic screen on her wrist gauntlet. "Already on it. Looks like four more headed our way."

More purple energy blasts fired at them as everyone separated and dove for cover.

Shiro recognized the impacts just by sound. "It's not drones. Look."

Lance and Hunk used another burned-out car for cover to return fire at the Galra sentries that had appeared on the scene. The pair of paladins took out two when a drone came flying over firing down them.

Hunk ducked behind the car, but when he stood up, a sentry charged at him. An engine revved as a
A garrison vehicle came speeding and smacked into the sentry and pinning it between the car and a wall. It sparked as the light in his faceplate disappeared.

A second car appeared, and a man around the same age as Lance and Hunk jumped out and shot the last sentry.

A woman jumped out and yelled, "Stay down, we got this," as she shot the drone.

Keith turned and yelled. "I had it."

Adam recognized the man who stood before him. It was James Griffin, Keith nemesis at the Garrison before Shiro left on the Kerberos mission.

Griffin turned and stared at Keith. "Drones send distress signals when attacked. Our weapons neutralize those signals. So, unless you want to deal with a swarm of those things, let us handle it. Now, let's get out of here before a lot more show up."

The vehicles pulled to the main building at the Garrison. Pidge was the first one out as she jumped from the car as it stopped and landed on her mom.

Lance and Adam stepped out of their vehicles as two kids ran forward, yelling, "Uncle Lance!" Both Adam and Lance were smothered in a pile of family.

Adam managed to squeeze his way out of the pile and strode over to Shiro's side as he helped Allura down from the vehicle.

A voice came from behind them. "Lieutenant Shirogane. It's great to see you again." Commander Iverson cleared his throat as Shiro, and Adam turned to face him. "My apologies for throwing you in quarantine."

Coran leaned forward, stuck his face in close to Iverson. "Ah, so you're the one who strapped Shiro to a table. I heard about that."

Shiro gazed at the commander. "You were following orders. Any good soldier would. Let me introduce our Altean allies. Meet Allura, Romelle, and Coran."

Iverson smiled. "The honor is mine. Your technology has been instrumental in defending this small corner of Earth."

Coran tugged on his mustache as he kept his eyes on Iverson. Adam chuckled, it appeared that Coran was daring the commander to order that he be placed in quarantine so he could throw a punch at the man.

Iverson turned toward Keith, "And Cadet."

Keith stood and saluted. "Yes, sir."

Iverson gazed at Keith. "I owe you an apology as well. I've heard about all you've done. I-uh-I was wrong about you. It's an honor and privilege to see you again."

A slight curve came to one side of Keith's mouth. "Thank you, sir. I guess I wasn't exactly the best cadet back then. I probably owe you an apology too." He held his hand, and Iverson took it.
Adam glanced past Keith as Griffin leaned against the tire of one of the Garrison vehicles. He watched as the younger man pulled his helmet off his head and stormed away.

Iverson gazed at the paladins and Alteans. "I'm sure you all could use a shower and fresh clothes besides some food."

Hunk mumbled something as he gazed down at the ground. Adam gripped his shoulder. "We will find them."

Hunk nodded.

The main briefing room was filled with military personnel.

The joint chiefs sat on one side of the table with the MFE pilots behind them. Admiral Sanda sat at the head of the table while Shiro, Adam, Paladins, and Alteans sat on the opposite side of the table.

Sam Holt and Veronica McClain stood in front of a giant wall screen. Sam pointed at the display. "Sendak's forces remain at bay, but without a meaningful supply line, we're slowly being suffocated."

Shiro gazed up at Commander Holt. "No one else is putting up a fight against Sendak?"

Veronica took over the debriefing. "Small underground pockets of resistance have attempted to do so with varying degrees of success. Eventually, all were systematically wiped out. Earth's offensive capabilities simply don't stand a chance against the Galra."

Hunk leaned forward. Why don't we bring more people into this base?"

Sam replied, "We've had to put a halt on our extraction ops as they were proving to be too risky."

"But there are good people out there. They could be protected. My family's out there."

As Commander Holt replied to Hunk's statement, Adam gazed toward the MFE pilots."

Griffin burst out. "Hey, don't Paladins understand the chain of command?"

Adam jumped up out of his chair that fell backward from his sudden movement. "You're out of line cadet! Don't say another word, or you will be on report!" Griffin had bullied Keith before, and he wasn't about to let him start in on Hunk.

Allura stood. "Well, then let's find out what we do. You said you'd integrated Altean tech with Earth weaponry?"

Sam nodded. "Yes, we should go to the hangar."

They rode down an elevator to an underground hangar. Sam pointed out at the four fights on the ground below. "The Mecha-Flex-Echo fighters, or MFE's, are extremely agile with advanced weaponry but are only capable of short-range attacks. Sustaining power with Altean infused
technology is an issue we're trying to overcome."

Adam leaned over to Shiro. "I see that look on your face. You want to fly one. But this time around, leave it to the kids."

Shiro chuckled. "You know me too well."

"You bet your sweet ass I do." Adam grinned as Lance snorted from behind him.

Coran gazed at Sam. "Maybe I can help you out with that. I do have some leftover faunatonium. It's an Altean fuel additive, but it also has some unexpected effects, so don't get any on you."

Sam led them to the massive ship at the end of the underground hangar. "And this is our battleship. It's large enough to house all of the lions and an entire command unit."

Admiral Sanda gazed at the Paladins. "It's built, but it can't fly. Everyone there's a subject we can't avoid any longer. Sendak attacked Earth because he wanted the Lions, and now they're here. It seems that we need to discuss our options."

Shiro gazed back at her as he frowned. "Are you suggesting that we willingly hand over the Lions to the Galra?"

"Our supplies are gone. We spent all our resources on a ship that doesn't fly. The weapons we do have are not enough to mount an attack. All we can do is protect a small pocket of Earth. But for how much longer?"

Sam glared at her. "The universe needs the Lions."

"So does Earth. They're our only bargaining chip."

Sanda's second in command, Commander Sablan, stared back at Sam. "I agree with the Admiral. Earth has been nearly destroyed. Countless citizens have been lost. But it could all be over if we give up the Lions."

Adam glared at them. "Excuse me for being blunt, but you're full of shit. Sendak isn't interested in the Lions. That was all Zarkon's deal. Sendak is pissed that the Paladins have bested him at different times. He hates us and would like nothing more than to see Earth destroyed and all humans gone from the universe. Why? Because we do something, the Galra have never understood. That is our will to survive."

Allura placed her hand on Adam's shoulder and gazed into his eyes. She turned her gaze on the Admiral and the joint chiefs. "I'll settle this argument right now. We're not giving up the Lions under any circumstances. There is no negotiating with Sendak."

Admiral Sanda glared at Allura. "Maybe you should leave the matters of Earth to the people who live here."

Shiro stepped forward, tired of listening to Sanda's mistreatment of one of their allies. "Please, Admiral. I respect that you'll do anything you can to protect Earth. But trust us, we've been through more than you can ever imagine." His voice rose as he stressed a couple of facts to the Admiral. "We have fought the Galra on the fringes of the universe and in their very home. I know there's a
Admiral Sanda asked, "How? We barely know what we're up against. We need intelligence, and we just don't have it."

Allura crossed her arms over her body as she gazed back at Sanda. "Maybe we do." She turned to Sam. "That information you downloaded from the Castle of Lions contains Sendak's memories."

Sam asked, "How does that help?"

Pidge caught on fast. "It might give us some insight into Sendak's plan." She turned her gaze up to the Princess. "Allura, you're a genius."

Sam gazed at the Admiral. "We just need some time."

Sanda growled in reply. "Fine." She turned to her second in command. "Take them to the computer room." She spun on her heel as she stormed away from the others.

Adam crossed his arms over his chest. "I think someone yank that stick out of her ass and beat her with it."

Sam chuckled. "Right now, I agree with you."

Iverson led the Paladins over toward the MFE's.

Sam turned to Adam, Shiro, and Coran. "Let me take you on a tour of the IGF Atlas." He led them onto the bridge. Coran gazed around. "I'm quite impressed despite the crude nature of Earth's technological capabilities."

Sam gazed at Coran. "It has a lot of potential, but I'm unable to recreate the power of a Balmeran crystal. Maybe your faunatonium will work for this ship as well?"

Coran gazed down at the floor, doing a mental calculation before gazing up at Sam. "I'm afraid not. A ship like this size might need two or three battleship class crystals."

Shiro kind of knew it was a stupid question, but he asked it anyway. "I don't suppose there any Balmera nearby?"

Coran laughed. "In this young galaxy?" He laughed again and then sobered. "That's no. No Balmera around here."

Adam saw someone crossing the hangar toward the MFE's after Iverson, and the Paladins walked away. "Excuse me, but I have to go talk to someone about his behavior."

Sam gazed at the person who Adam saw and nodded.

Adam crossed the distance between the Atlas and the MFE's. "Griffin."

James turned and saluted.

Adam saluted in return. "We need to talk."

James cocked his head at Adam, "About what, sir?"
"Your behavior since we've returned. You have gone out of your way to try to push your rule loving behavior down the Paladins' throat."

"Well, the way I see it, sir, they lack any military discipline."

Adam shook his head. "No, you don't understand. The Paladins have their way of doing things. They talk things through when they plan out a mission, so there are no misunderstandings, and it works for them. And what works for them probably won't work for you since I know you're the team leader of the MFE's. But now that we're back, I will not put up with your bullying tactics."

Griffin's eyes narrowed. "Bullying?"

Adam nodded. "Yes, bullying." A beeping noise caught Adam's attention, and he looked up and saw Rover flying around. "Rover, come here."

The drone beeped and dropped down to Adam's height. "This is Rover. Pidge repurposed it, and it has been a great help aboard the Castle of Lions until we had to destroy it to save the universe."

Griffin's posture tensed up as he reached for his weapon. "That thing looks like it's Galran."

Adam nodded. "It is, but it works for us now. Pidge reprogrammed it to work for us." He looked up at it. "Rover, do you have any footage of the Paladins in action recorded?"

Rover hummed and then beeped.

"Come with me. It's time for you and your pilots to get an education in what the Paladins have done." He turned to Rover, "Follow me, Rover."

Adam stood at the front of his old classroom. The MFE pilots were sitting in chairs, gazing up at him. "I'm not exactly sure which battles Rover recorded, but I'm hoping he also has the last battle with Lotor."

Rizavi gazed at Adam. "Lotor?"

"Zarkon's son. He was manipulative. He hid his agenda from everyone, even his generals."

Griffin gazed at Adam. "We didn't hear anything about Lotor."

Adam turned to his desk and pressed a couple of buttons. A screen came sliding down. "Rover, can you interface with this?"

Rover beeped as he sat down on the desk, and it whirred as it clicked into the controls.

"Playback battle footage."

Adam recognized the first scene from the fight with the Robeast on the Balmera. Well, both fights. Griffin sat up straighter as he heard Shiro's voice. But he did pay attention as did the other pilots.

The next footage was both fights on Olkarion. The final footage was the battle with Lotor up until they entered the Quintessence Field and finally the destruction of the Castle of Lions.
Griffin gazed up at Adam, "So, Keith is the leader of Voltron now? I thought that was some kind of sick joke."

Adam shook his head. "It's not a joke. You have no idea what he went through, and until you figure it out, you have no right to even glare at him based on your past. Maybe if you'd kept your mouth shut, he might not have been booted out of the garrison. But you made it your mission to torment him every chance you got, and that's exactly how a bully works. They see someone who they think is weak and chip away at that weakness until they fight back, and when they fight back, you go running off to Iverson or whoever to keep him from killing you. But Lieutenant Shirogane saw what Keith was capable of, and now it sort of gnaws at you that he is a good leader. And one other thing you better realize is that he has a family now. The other Paladins, the Alteans, are his family, and I'm a part of that family."

Griffin gulped. "Seems like I may have misjudged him."

Adam snorted. "That's putting it mildly. From this day forward, you should give the Paladins the respect they deserve. They're young like you, but they've already fought more battles against the Galra than you."

Griffin cleared his throat. "What about Lieutenant Shirogane? He looks so much different than when he left on the Kerberos mission."

Rizavi raised her hand. "And how did he get the scar on his face?"

Adam sighed. "I was afraid you'd ask that." He reached up and pulled his glasses from his face as he wiped his hand across his eyes. He replaced the glasses to find Shiro standing in the doorway.

Shiro cleared his throat and walked into the room. "In answer to your question Cadet Griffin. I was a prisoner of the Galra. I was forced to fight in Zarkon's arena for his amusement. Only these fights were almost always to the death." Shiro sighed. "There's one thing you should know. Not all Galra are bad. There's a group that has been working for an exceptionally long time to try to stop the ones like Sendak. They are the Blade of Marmora. One of their operatives helped me to escape. He gave his life to save Voltron in one of our fights. His name was Ulaz."

Adam placed his hand on Shiro's shoulder, "You don't have to talk about it."

Rizavi jumped up from her seat. "I knew it! You two are a couple!"

Kincade jumped up and grabbed the woman. "Not now. I want to learn more about these Galra."

Rizavi smacked at his hands. "That's boring. This is great!"

Griffin groaned. "Sorry about that, sirs. She tends to go overboard at times."

Adam chuckled. "I'm used to outbursts like this." He thought of how Lance had reacted to the news that he'd asked Shiro to marry him.

Shiro cleared his throat. "There's something else you should know about the Galra when we fought them. They had a group of magic-users called druids who liked to experiment on prisoners. That's how I lost my arm. The scar on my face, I don't remember. When I escaped from the Galra, there was an explosion, and I hit my head while getting into an escape pod. My memories were scrambled."

Rizavi grinned. "And what happened to your hair? Why is it all white?"
Shiro shook his head. "No more questions."

Rizavi gazed back at him. "But why not?"

Adam gazed at her. "Sometimes, Cadet, it's not a good idea to push for answers." He turned to the desk. "Rover, go find Pidge and stay with her."

Rover beeped as it rose from the desk and flew off to find Pidge.

Griffin asked, "If that thing belongs to Pidge, why does it also respond to you?"

"Pidge programmed him to respond to me too, in case I needed help with a patient in the infirmary. And I'm sorry, but I have to agree with Lieutenant Shirogane. Question and answer time is over now."

Adam and Shiro entered a workshop. Shiro gazed at Allura, who stood at a worktable. As they approached her, Shiro spoke, "You wanted to see me? I thought you were with pidge and Sam."

Allura raised her head, but her back was still facing them. "Sendak's memories were hard to hear." She turned to face the pair. "But it did remind me of something my father once said. He told me there are those with the power to destroy and those with the power to create." She stepped out of the way and there lay a hand with a forearm attached to the workbench.

Shiro blinked, totally speechless.

Adam gazed up at Allura, "Did you make this for Takashi?"

Allura nodded as she smiled at Shiro. "I did. You deserve a replacement for the Galra arm after everything you've been through for the Universe. This was the best thing I could think of to give you something back for everything that you've sacrificed."

Adam tried sitting, but he couldn't. He stood up and paced the floor.

Keith gazed up at him. "Adam, it's going to be okay."

Adam shook his head. "Anything could happen."

Griffin stuck his head in the doorway, but Adam's pacing caught his eye. He walked into the room and stepped over to Keith. "What's up with him?"

Keith turned his gaze up at Griffin. "You hadn't heard?"

Griffin shook up at Griffin. "You hadn't heard?"

"Sam is doing surgery on Shiro. He's replacing the Galra interface where the Galran arm was and replacing it with an Altean interface and arm for Shiro. And Adam is worried sick."

Adam's head shot up to glare at Keith. "I'm not worried."
Griffin nodded. "Yeah, right, you're not. I'd say your petrified."

Pidge's cell phone rang. She pulled it out of her pocket and turned it on. "Hello?" she listened to whatever the other person was saying on the other end. "That was my dad. He says Shiro should be waking up anytime now."

Keith stood. "Let's go."

Griffin stared after them. "I hope everything works out."

The Paladins and Adam stood outside the glass, gazing into the room as Shiro opened his eyelids.

Adam gazed at the arm as it floated in the air. But when Shiro screamed, his heart skipped a beat. Adam knew what the reading on the heart monitor was. Takashi's vitals were crashing and fast. "Takashi!"

Allura ripped the tiara off her forehead and took off running. She ran into the room and tackled the arm down onto the ground. Sam hurried over and removed the power source from the arm while Allura replaced it with the triangular-shaped Balmeran crystal from her tiara.

The arm rose and floated back to where it was placed initially before it went berserk. Adam and the other Paladins ran into the room. The heart monitor was back to beeping normally again.

Shiro's eyelids opened. "What—what happened?" He flexed the fingers of the new hand. "I feel strange." He balled the fist up and gazed down at the new hand. "I feel great."

Adam stepped up to Shiro's side and wrapped his arms around the other man's neck. "Don't you dare scare me like again!" Adam's voice cracked.

Shiro turned his gaze up to the other man. "I'll try not to."

Adam strode through a hall heading for the Conference room as Griffin reached him. Griffin matched strides with the older man. "How'd it go?"

Adam turned his head to gaze at Griffin. "Oh, it went fine."

Griffin's eyebrow rose. "What do you mean, fine? You were petrified."

Adam shook his head. "No, I wasn't. A little concerned maybe, but certainly not petrified."

Pidge and Allura stood facing everyone seated at the table. Pidge gazed toward Commander Iverson. "We've learned so much from Sendak's memories. We discovered his methods for taking over planets like Earth."
Allura took over. "Sendak constructs armaments at key strategic points around planets. This gives him the ability to control enormous swaths of territory. He uses these armaments as deterrents to prevent uprisings and to control the conquered populations."

Veronica pressed a button on a datapad that sat on the table in front of her. She brought up an image of the continents. Each one shows a spot where these Galra installations were built. "Based on data from Commander Holt's micro-satellites, cross-referenced with resistance intel, we've ascertained that Sendak built six massive structures on Earth. We never knew what they were being used for until now."

Hunk gazed up at the screen. "They're the weapons? So, what's stopping us from blowing them up?"

Admiral Sanda started spouting her same old tune again. "We simply don't have enough firepower to do the job. And even if we did, there's a good chance those facilities contain civilians. We can't just go in blind."

Shiro gazed at his datapad. "Admiral Sanda's right. That's why we should infiltrate a base and gather intelligence first."

Veronica studied her information before transferring it to the screen on the wall so everyone else could see. "The nearest base is fifty-two klicks south of our position."

Shiro gazed at the screen. "What's the terrain like?"

Veronica replied, "The region around what we'll call Base One is a complex urban environment. Our route will take us through highly patrolled areas. It'll be hard to keep proper surveillance of our surroundings due to all the structural damage."

Shiro began pressing buttons on his datapad with his left hand. "Then I suggest we form two teams. A ground unit that will infiltrate Base One and get eyes on whatever is inside, and a sniper team that will observe from a higher position, covering the ground unit and providing some visibility."

Veronica replied, "Use communications sparingly. Stay on the move. Keep an eye on the timing patterns of the portal drones. "Pidge, Keith, Allura, and Griffin, you're the ground unit. Hunk, Kincade, Lance, and I will be sniper support."

Adam craned his head to stare at his cousin. "What about me? I'm the team's medic."

Veronica shook her head. "Not this time, and you're a lousy shot with a rifle. And we need people who can shoot."

Adam shook his head and opened his mouth.

Shiro leaned over to him. "Let it drop, this time."

"Fine, this time only. Next time I'll bitch about it."

Pidge stood in front of the screen as she briefed everyone in the conference room. "Sendak has built Zaiforge cannons. Our intel indicates the cannons were just completed. They could launch at any time."
Commander Iverson asked, "What exactly is a Zaiforge cannon?"

Keith leaned forward in his seat. "Planet killers. If these cannons launch and are fully charged, Sendak will be able to destroy Earth in seconds."

Rizavi gazed at Keith. "What do we do?"

Keith shifted his gaze to her. "Ideally, we attack all six bases at once, allowing them no time to stage a counterattack."

Admiral Sanda replied. "That's not possible."

Adam shook his head. They knew it wasn't possible right now, but did she always have to be a Debbie Downer?

Keith turned his gaze on the Admiral. "If we had our Lions, it could be. We'll have to find another way to retrieve them since the ship we rode in on crashed."

Sanda glared at Keith as her voice rose. "Your Lions are orbiting another planet. There's no way to get you to them. Plus, there are only five Lions."

Adam gritted his teeth as his jaw clenched. What the hell is her freaking problem? Yesterday she wanted to hand the Lions over to Sendak, and today she's putting the Paladins down as if they were nothing.

Shiro turned his gaze on the admiral. "The MFE's would need to attack the sixth cannon."

Griffin gazed at Shiro. "We'd love to, but they don't have that kind of range."

Coran spoke up, "There should be enough faunatonium to boost them to the sixth base and back."

Pidge gazed down at the table. "That's great, and all, but Admiral Sanda has a point. We can't get to our Lions."

Shiro gazed down at the table as he thought about the problem at hand. "You don't need to go to the Lions. They'll come to you." He rose to his feet. "As Paladins of Voltron, you can connect with Lions. They will come."

Hunk asked, "From Saturn?"

"From anywhere. You've been training for this since the very beginning. Each of you has forged a bond with your Lions. Tap into it."

Lance raised his eyes to gaze at Shiro. "Our Lions did come to us when we were lost in space."

Keith gazed up at Shiro. "And Red saved my life numerous times."

Allura replied, "Yes, it's possible. So we'll call the Lions to meet us here."

Pidge said, "We'll need the element of surprise. The Lions will have to rendezvous with us at the bases."

Hunk nodded. "Yeah, that will catch the Galra off guard. I mean, assuming the Lions respond to our calls. What if they don't come?"

Shiro replied, "They'll come. And when they do, you'll strike and destroy all six cannons.
simultaneously before they can be launched. And when the job's done, you can form Voltron and finish off Sendak and the rest of his forces."

Griffin gazed at the Paladins. "My pilots can transport four of you to the Galra bases before heading out to the sixth canon."

Adam couldn't believe it. Maybe he'd done the right thing. Griffin's whole attitude toward the Paladins seemed to have changed.

Veronica gazed up at Shiro. "I'll bring Lance to Base One. It's the closest, so I can do it by ground."

Shiro gazed at the admiral. "It's settled then. While Veronica drops Lance at Base One, the MFE's will each fly a Paladin out to a base. The Paladins should reach the drop zones at the same time the Lions arrive. Then the MFE's will head to the sixth base. We'll launch a coordinated attack on all the locations at once."

Adam watched Allura walk away from the Garrison vehicle. Lance stood on the side. Adam started walking until he stood behind and gazed up at Lance. "Hey, kid."

Lance turned around and gasped as he saw what sat on Adam's shoulders. "When did that happen?"

Adam shook his head. "It's not important."

Lance's eyes bugged. "Not important? You're a commander now!"

Adam shrugged. "It's nothing."

Veronica appeared and saluted.

Adam saluted back but sighed. "Will you cut that out? I'm still the same person I've always been."

Veronica snorted. "The same person, my ass says the guy with the beard."

"Yeah, you went through hell out there. Not as much as Shiro, but you still went through hell."

Lance's eyes teared up a little as he gazed at the other man. "His clone tried to kill you."

Adam nodded. "I remember. But I didn't come here to talk about that. I came up here to tell you to be careful and come back to us."

Lance nodded as he hopped down and gripped Adam in a hug. "I will."

Adam gripped Lance in return. "You better, you dork."

Veronica giggled from the Garrison vehicle. But she calmed quickly. "Let's go, Lance. We've got a schedule to keep."

Adam stepped into the command center as Shiro gave one last pep talk to the Voltron team.
"Paladins, our window of opportunity is razor-thin. With the element of surprise, we'll have the advantage. Good Luck!"

Commander Iverson said, "Four of the five Paladins have reached their drop zones. We're just waiting on Lance."

Shiro frowned. He knew Lance was a goofball at times, but he'd never play around on a mission, especially with Earth at stake. "Lance, where are you? Can you hear me?"

Adam heard Lance's scream. He gripped the edge of a desk. This reminded him of Shiro's death. He found it hard to breathe. Why did he have to think of that again? Why? He took another breath as his knees trembled, and he dropped into an empty chair.

He rubbed at his forehead as he tried to clear those thoughts that were swirling around in his head. But it shot up when he heard Lance finally report. "Red Lion checking in!"

Iverson replied. "We have all Lions. It worked!"

Cheers broke out in the command center.

Shiro's eyes grew as the attack went sideways, and the Paladins and the MFE's were calling for help. "They were ready for us."

The cannons were launched, and Keith ordered the MFE's to return to base. Then the Paladins formed Voltron's intent on attacking Sendak's ship. But several blasts came from somewhere and converged on Voltron, causing the great warrior to split into the individual Lions. A tractor beam sucked the helpless lions and pilots into Sendak's command ship.

Commander Holt asked. "Where did those shots come from?"

Coran was quick to answer. His fear and worry for his Princess were evident in his voice. "The Zaiforge Cannons. Sendak was ready for the entire attack the whole time. How?"

Adam gazed around the room, spotting the joint chiefs and second in command of the Garrison, but one person was missing. His eyes narrowed. "It appears we have a traitor in our midst."

Commander Holt's eyes narrowed as he let his own eyes roam around the room. "Where is Admiral Sanda?"

A voice from off to the side spoke, Adam recognized as one of the people who was involved in some of the mission briefings. He'd gone out with him a time or two after Takashi's disappearance on the Kerberos mission, but nothing had clicked between them. The man's name was Curtis. "She's been gone from the base since the mission briefing."

The gray-haired man wearing glassed with the sash and medals on his chest stepped up. "I don't like what your all are insinuating."

Adam glared at him. "Really? Then where is she? Face facts she's either tried blocking us at every turn or lobbying to turn the Lions over to Sendak. Get this fact through you're head. Sendak doesn't intend for Earth to survive this attack. He hates us because what do we do when we're threatened or forced to fight for our lives we don't roll over and die we fight back. And we fight back hard.
That's what he hates about us. He hates our human spirit."

Sam nodded from beside him. "And that's what we tried to get into her stubborn head. And now she's nowhere to be found, and Sendak knew our plan, so put two and two together."

Shiro gazed at the screen as he swallowed hard. "Paladins, are you there? Paladins, do you copy. Keith? Anyone?" He turned to Sam. "Commander Holt, what weapons do we have available?"

Sam replied, "Fusion cannons, but that fleet is out of range."

Adam slapped his hand against his thigh. "Is there anything we can do?" He raked a hand through his hair.

Shiro frowned. "What about the MFE's?"

Sam replied, "The mission depleted their power. They're charging now."

Coran gazed at the former Black Paladin. "Shiro, even with the MFE's, Sendak has an entire fleet."

Shiro silently cursed but gazed at the Altean and Sam Holt. "What about the Atlas?"

Sam shook his head. "We've had zero success launching it."

Shiro sighed but then gazed past Sam to someone he was kind of surprised to see. "Veronica monitor the fleet. Let us know if anything changes."

"Yes, sir."

Shiro turned his gaze back to Sam and Coran. "Come on, let's get that ship off the ground."

Coran's fingertips ran over the keyboard as Shiro hovered from behind. "Anything?"

Coran frowned as he shook his head. "Not yet. We can shut down all non-essential systems and use an external source to fire one engine."

Sam replied, "We tried that. It wasn't enough power."

Coran rubbed a hand along his chin. "What about the crystals from MFE's?"

Sam was ready to grasp for any kind of straw. "You think that would work?"

Coran frowned. "Actually, no, scratch that. Far too small. You don't happen to have any Nunville, do you?"

Sam gazed at Coran as his eyebrow rose.

Veronica's voice cam over the Atlas from the Garrison's mission command room. "I'm detecting movement from the Zaiforge cannons. Their course will have them converging over our location."

Shiro frowned. "Even with all the power we've collected to it, the particle barrier will never hold against a Zaiforge cannon."

Coran's eyes brightened. "Wait, that's it! We can divert power from the shield generator to the
Sam nodded following Coran's train of thought. But he also frowned. "The base would be unprotected, but it's possible. And it just might work."

Shiro gazed ahead. "Veronica, how much time do we have before the Zaiforge cannons arrive?"

"By our calculations, less than two hours."

Shiro replied, "We have to hurry."

Sam nodded. "Veronica, transfer all data from mission control to the Atlas."

"Yes, sir."

Adam gazed at Shiro and nodded. "Commander Iverson, get all personnel aboard this ship immediately."

"Yes, sir."

Adam shot a grin at Shiro as he lowered his voice. "Never did I ever think Iverson would listen to an order given by me."

Shiro chuckled. "I know."

Adam waited by the ramp. Lance's family was already aboard the Atlas, but where were his parents. He caught a glimpse of a woman with dark hair and a taller man with salt and pepper hair approaching. He let out the breath he'd been holding as they neared him.

The man waved, seeing Adam first.

Adam smiled at the pair. "Momma, Poppa, I've got you accommodations with Lance's family."

His mother gazed at him as he brushed a hand along the side of the cheek. "You're tired. When's the last time you've slept?"

Adam shook his head as he grabbed his mother's hand. "I'm okay, really, but there's no time for this." He happened to look up and caught sight of Sam's wife. He waved at her. "Mrs. Holt over here."

Colleen saw him as she moved up alongside the younger man's parents. "What's going on?"

Adam shook his head. "I'm sorry, but I can't explain right now. I need to get you all aboard."

Adam appeared on the bridge in time for the energy transfer to begin from the barrier defense generator. He stepped up next to Shiro. "My parents, along with Mrs. Holt, are with Lance's family."
Shiro nodded. "Good."

As the Atlas charged up, the ship shook in the underground hangar by Ion cannon fire from a Galra cruiser, now attacking the exposed base.

Sam's voice came from engineering. "We've got it. It's charged!"

Shiro asked, "Is everyone aboard?"

Iverson replied, "The Garrison is cleared."

Shiro replied. "Prepare for launch." The engines fired up as the hangar doors above opened, and the ship began to gain a vertical lift. However, the power drain was too much, and the Atlas settled down hard in its cradle.

Adam grabbed onto the rail in the command area to stay on his feet.

Commander Holt's voice came up from engineering. "I've built a useless ship. It would take the power of several supermassive black holes to get this hunk of metal off the ground."

Coran's eyes bugged out. "That's it! Why didn't I think of it before? Of course! Black Holes!"

Adam gazed at Coran as the Altean held up the crystal. "You mean that? The crystal left over from the destruction of the Castle of Lions?"

"Exactly!"

Commander Holt raced up on the bridge. He opened a container that rose from the floor. "This serves as the brains of the Atlas." He gazed at the crystal. I hope this works."

Coran released the crystal that hovered in the air and then flew into the container, and a flash came from the container as power immediately flowed through the great ship.

Veronica turned in her chair. "Subsystems fully powered."

Curtis spoke from his seat. "Mega thrusters are go."

Shiro turned around and faced the bridge crew. "Veronica, monitor the radars, let us know what you see. Commander Iverson, I need you on weapons, Coran get the helm."

Coran enthusiastically gave Shiro an Altean salute. "Yes, Captain."

The entire bridge grew quiet as everyone turned to face the former Black Paladin.

Commander Holt spoke from behind him. "The bridge is yours, Shiro."

Shiro turned back around to the commander. "I could use an engineer." He turned to Adam. "I could also use a second in command."

Commander Holt and Adam both saluted at the same time. "Yes, sir."

Veronica studied the radar. "Captain, the Galra fleet is directly above the launch pad!"

Adam frowned at the screen. "MFE squadron, we need you to clear a path."

Shiro nodded at Adam. His command was sound. "The Atlas is powered and ready for launch."
Griffin's voice came over the ship's speaker. "Copy that, Atlas."

Shiro gripped the rail as Adam spoke. "Crew, prepare for launch."

Shiro gazed ahead. "Launch." He stared at some readings coming over his holographic screen. "Nice work, pilots."

A slight grin tugged at one corner of Adam's mouth. "You've temporarily knocked out their systems, giving us some breathing room."

Shiro called out, "Iverson, how are the weapons systems coming?"

Iverson replied, "Still working on them."

Veronica craned her head around to gaze out the corner of her eye toward Shiro. "Sir, Sendak appears to be positioning to attack from above."

Shiro nodded. "Shields at the ready."

"Yes, sir."

Iverson craned his head. "An ionic discharger came online."

"Very good," Shiro replied. "Lock onto that cruiser. Fire when ready!"

Iverson crowed, "Direct hit!"

Veronica called out. "Galra cruisers are taking up positions around us!"

The Atlas was rocked from fire by the cruisers.

Sam's voice came up from engineering. "We have a problem with the main engine. The dynotherm connections are weakening."

Adam gazed at Iverson. "Commander –"

"I know. I'm hitting them with everything we've got, but there are too many of them!"

Adam let Iverson's reply go. He knew the man was under pressure, hell they were all under pressure to save Earth from Sendak.

The Atlas rocked again from heavy fire. Shiro held tight to the rail. "Sam, what other weapons does the ship have?"

"I'm not sure. Once the crystal was added, this ship gained abilities I never imagined."

Veronica spoke from her seat, "We've got incoming." She studied her screen a little longer. "Wait, they're friendly!"

A huge grin formed on Coran's face. "The Lions, they've escaped!"

Shiro grinned. "Paladins, welcome to the fight. Let's go take out Sendak's cruiser."

Pidge replied, "Wait! We're still on that ship! Well, our bodies are."

Shiro's grin grew. "Amazing." He directed his next comment to the Atlas crew. "We've got ourselves some breathing room. Let's make it count."
Adam gazed at Veronica. "Roni, keep those reports coming."

Amusement colored her voice as she replied, "Yes, sir."

The battle continued to rage while the Paladins escaped from Sendak's ship and formed Voltron.

Shiro said, "Welcome back to the fight, Paladins."

Hunk replied, "It's good to be back. You know, in our bodies."

Adam shook his head. Hunk was still Hunk.

Shiro said, "MFE pilots, what's your status?"

"Power's dropping."

Adam nodded. "Return to the Atlas and recharge."

"Copy that."

Weapons fire from the Galra fleet began hammering the Atlas again as Voltron took out several other cruisers.

Shiro gazed at the Altean. "Coran, adjust our heading to narrow our surface area for incoming attacks." He turned to focus his attention back to the cannons. "Sam, what's the status of the Zaiforge cannons?"

According to the projected trajectories, they've started moving together, but the convergent point is —"

"Sam? What is it?"

"I know what Sendak's doing. He's going to merge the beams to make one massive amplified emission of particle radiation that will vaporize Earth!"

Hunk said, "We can't let that happen? What do we do?"

Allura asked, "Should we go after the Zaiforge cannons? The Lions might not be able to defeat them all in time."

Sam replied, "If even two of those beams connect, they have the power to destroy Earth."

Keith said, "We know Sendak is controlling them. Let's take him out."

Adam gazed at some of the readouts flying across a screen by him. He turned to Shiro. "The Zaiforge cannon bases are attacking Voltron, but Voltron moved near the cruisers, and Sendak is destroying his ships."

The Atlas rocked again. Alarm klaxons were going off on the bridge.

Coran called out, "We can't get to Sendak!"

Veronica turned her head. "Voltron is pinned down."

Shiro glanced at one of the displays on his holographic screen. "Griffin, what's your team's status?"

"The MFE's are nearly charged."
"We need you back in the fight! Head to the coordinates I'm sending you and your team. Take out those surface-to-air cannons!"

"Yes, sir."

The Atlas continued to rock from the battle. Veronica shouted, "We've sustained structural damage on our starboard bow!"

Iverson called out. "Aft cannons are charging. Holding at forty-five percent!"

Sam's voice came from the speakers. "Shiro, the Zaiforge cannons are almost in position. By my calculations, we're not going to get to Sendak in time."

Shiro knew he had to decide, and it had to be made now. "Paladins, you have to stop your attack."

Keith said, "What?"

"Abort your attack, or Earth will be destroyed."

Lance replied, "What's going on?"

"The Atlas will continue to attack Sendak while the MFE's continue to take out the ground cannons. But you need to stop the Zaiforge cannons directly."

Griffin reported in, "Atlas, cannon one is neutralized. Moving on to the next target."

Adam stepped up behind Veronica. "Roni, what's the status of the shielding system?"

Veronica growled. "I'm trying."

Adam gripped her shoulder and gave it a quick squeeze. "Keep working."

Shiro studied the positions of the remaining Galra cruisers. "Coran, adjust our heading to five-point three eight." As the Atlas came around, Shiro continued to study his screen. "Full ordinance! Starboard side!"

Iverson said, "Munitions to starboard!"

Shiro called out, "Coran, bearings seven point two. Fire!"

Iverson roared out, "Galra cruiser destroyed."

Veronica gazed over her shoulder to Adam. "Commander, the shielding system is coming online."

Adam gazed up at Shiro. "Particle barrier is now working."

Shiro gazed at his screen. "Sam, how much time before the Zaiforge cannons fire?"

"Any second now! The Paladins have the plates in position, but those plates were designed to reflect short bursts of energy. They won't hold for long."

Shiro's eyebrows narrowed as his face hardened. "We have to take Sendak out now!"

Coran replied, "But we can't get through the cruiser blockade he's created."

Shiro growled. "We need a new plan! Sam, what if someone were to infiltrate Sendak's ship and gain access to the crystal? Could the cannons be disrupted?"
Adam gazed up at Shiro as he took a step forward. "By someone you mean you."

Sam asked, "Infiltrate Sendak's ship?"

"Would it work?"

Adam balled his hands into fists. A stream of Spanish came from his mouth as he glared at Shiro.

Veronica's lips pursed together as she ducked her head, and a blush came to her cheeks. "Wow, Adam is pissed," she whispered.

Sam's voice came from the speaker. "It could work, but you'd need a communication device to link the Atlas so we can hack their systems."

Shiro nodded. "Then that's what we'll do. I'm going in." He locked eyes with Adam's knowing that the man he loved was pissed at him for risking his life again. "It's to save Earth." He sighed. "Adam, you have the conn." He turned and raced out the doors.

Adam grits his teeth together as his jaw clenched tight. He took Shiro's spot. When Takashi returned after this was over, they were going to have a long talk about risking his life. Adam closed his eyes and took a calming breath. He opened them again. "Coran, we need to get the Atlas to the impact site. We need to be prepared for every outcome."

Coran nodded as he set in the course.

Keith groaned as he asked. "Atlas, what's happening?"

Adam replied, "Hold on a little longer! We have a plan!"

"Whatever it is, we're running out of time!"

Shiro reported in. "Atlas, I've arrived at Sendak's command ship."

The Atlas rocked under the onslaught of the combined beams of the Zaiforge cannons. Veronica said, "We've interrupted the beams, but we need more power!"

Adam nodded. "I'm aware of that. Paladins! Paladins, are you there? Takashi, I can't reach the Paladins, and the Atlas can't hold out this beam much longer!"

Coran spoke up, "Shiro, whatever your gonna do, can you do it now?"

Shiro replied, "Sam, I've made it to the crystal. Activating communication transponder."

"Okay, Shiro, I have to warn you, this might be a little strange. I'm about to use your brain as a computer node."

Shiro replied, "Well, it wouldn't be the first time."

Adam muttered under his breath.

Sam hacked into the crystal. After a few moments, he said. "I've lost the connection. Shiro? Shiro! Are you there?"

Iverson spoke from the weapons console. "One of the cannons is down!"

Veronica replied, "That bought us time, but we can't withstand the blast from the other cannons"
much longer. The shield is failing. Twenty-five percent and dropping!"

Sam replied, "I'm diverting power from the infinite mass crystal."

Adam frowned. "Paladins, hurry!"

Veronica yelled. "Lance!" Maybe that was what spurred the paladins, but she sighed as she sat back in her chair as the Atlas stopped shuddering from the impact of the beams. "The Lions have defeated all the cannons."

Adam gripped the rail that surrounded the command area. Where in the hell was Takashi?

"Atlas, this is Griffin. MFE's have successfully neutralized the final target."

Adam nodded. "Good job! Return to the Atlas."

"Copy that."

Veronica said, "The only remaining hostile is Sendak's ship. It's free-falling toward Earth's surface. It's hit terminal velocity."

Adam spoke, "Keith, Takashi's on that ship."

Keith growled. "What the – never mind. I know why he'd do something like that. I'll look for him." The Lions guided the ship past the city.

White noise seemed to roar through Adam's eardrums as he listened for anything to tell him that Takashi was alive.

Keith spoke again, "I've got him, Atlas and Sendak is no longer a problem. Hunk is bringing Shiro to you."

Klaxon's rang out over the bridge. Adam gazed at Veronica. "What's going on?"

Coran craned his head. "It's a Robeast. I have no idea where it may have come from or who sent it."

Hunk called out, "Shiro's onboard the Atlas."

Adam listened to Keith. He sounded exhausted. "Paladins. I know we're all in bad shape, but we have strength in together. This is Earth. This is our home. We're going to defend it!"

Adam's chest swelled with pride. He opened his mouth, but Coran beat him to the punch. "And we'll be by your side."

Allura replied, "Good to have you back, Atlas."

Adam called out, "Raise particle barrier."

A hit from the Robeast struck the Atlas as a new alarm joined the noises from the bridge.

Veronica said, "We've taken a direct hit. It's aligning for a second attack."

Keith said, "Atlas, we need you to hold the beast back temporarily, so we have time to form Voltron. It's the only way we're gonna beat this thing."
Adam replied, "Affirmative. Fire all weapons. Pin that thing down! Veronica, prepare to raise shields!"

The Robeast flew up in the air and began firing down on the Atlas.

Adam frowned. "Cease firing. Raise shields."

Veronica replied. "Shields up."

Shiro appeared on the bridge. "Coran, hold this course."

Iverson turned in his seat and gazed at Shiro. "Captain, are you okay?"

"I'll be fine."

Adam leaned over, "Bullshit."

Shiro stood. "Shields report."

Veronica replied, "They're holding at seventy percent."

Shiro braced himself against the rail. "Iverson, the port side cannons."

"They're fully charged."

"Shield's down. Fire!"

The Robeast reflected the attack at the Atlas.

Sam said, "We lost an energy inverter on two cannons. Diverting power."

The Robeast charged forward to attack the Atlas, but fire from above caused it to retreat. Keith's voice came over the bridge speaker as Voltron stood in front of the ship. "Thanks for covering for us, Atlas."

Shiro gazed forward. "Coran take us up to cover fire position. Iverson, once those cannons come back online, we'll need to give Voltron some support."

Adam's heart seemed to jump up from his chest into his throat. He knew Shiro saw the same thing he did. The Robeast had its dual weapons shoved into Voltron's shoulders.

Shiro said, "Launch fighters!"

"Griffin announced to both the Atlas and Voltron, "We're coming in." The MFE's strafed the Robeast.

But it was enough of a distraction for Voltron to break free.

Shiro asked. "Paladins, what happened? Are you okay?"

Hunk replied, "Those blades, they sapped our energy."

Pidge said, "It felt like the Komar."

The MFE's continued to harass the Robeast.

Keith said, "Pilots, fall back. Those blasts can vaporize you."
Shiro replied, "Keith's right. You've successfully drawn its fire. Rendezvous with the Atlas ASAP."

"Roger that."

Veronica said, "The enemy has turned its attention back to Voltron, sir."

Shiro asked, "Sam, how are those cannons?"

"Coming back online now."

"Fire!" Shiro saw a glint of purple in the dust clouds that flew up around the Robeast. "Shields!"

A blast of energy struck the Atlas and took out the shields of the ship. Klaxons blared as everyone shouted, and emergency lighting came up, bathing everyone in an eerie orange glow.

The Robeast fired striking the Earth warship.

Sam said, "It's destabilizing the molecular reflection arrays!"

Shiro shouted. "Pull out of range!"

Voltron rose and attacked the Robeast. Their fight rose into the sky.

Iverson roared, "We can't get a clear shot!"

Veronica said, "Rebooting shields."

Adam's eyes locked onto the fierceness of Shiro's face. It was scary. Is this how he looked when they fought Zarkon?

Voltron and the Robeast crashed to the ground with the beasts blades again tuck into Voltron's shoulders, pinning the great warrior to the ground as it drained the mech's energy.

Shiro asked, "What's our status?"

Coran replied, "Stabilizing thrusters are gone. I'm attempting to override."

Iverson said, "The cannons are offline again, all of them."

Sam reported in from engineering. "Initiating backup generators!"

Shiro's eyes grew, "No!"

Voltron lay on the ground lifeless.

The Robeast turned and fired, striking the Atlas.

Coran said, "Shiro, the shields are gone, and we don't have countermeasures..."

Adam gazed up at Shiro as his face went blank. He ran and entered the command area and placed his hand on his shoulder. "Takashi?"

Shiro whispered, "It's talking to me."

"What?"

Shiro blinked and gazed ahead. "Bring us up. Set coordinates for the upper atmosphere."
Coran turned in his seat and glared. "But, Voltron."

Adam shifted his gaze to the Altean. "Do it, Coran."

Shiro said, "Commander Holt, I need all the power we've got."

"Copy that."

Shiro closed his eyelids and then opened them. "Atlas crew, hold tight!"

Adam stared at one of the command screens as it switched to a new display that popped up. The Atlas, according to the display, now looked like a giant mech warrior even bigger than Voltron. He turned his gaze back to Shiro. "What did you do?"

Shiro shrugged. "I don't know, but it started talking to me like the Black Lion used too." He said, "Paladins are you there? What's your status?"

Keith replied, "We're here. How did you –"

"I'm not exactly sure. We've got you covered."

Veronica said, "Hostile returning for another pass."

"Get me eyes on the target."

The Robeast attacked the Atlas and used its weapons to drain the energy from this new mechanical warrior.

Voltron attacked the Robeast at the last minute.

White noise roared in Adam's ears. He shook his head as he picked himself up off the floor, and the noise cleared. Shiro stood up next to him. They both watched as Voltron carried the body of the Robeast into the atmosphere. An explosion occurred, and the lions were thrown violently down to earth.

Shiro yelled. "Paladins! Keith, Keith, anyone answer me!"

Adam gazed at a display. "We're offline."

Shiro nodded, but he sagged as his injuries began catching up to him.

Adam sighed. "I knew you were hurt worse than you let on. Commander Iverson. I need your help getting our Captain down to sickbay until we can get back to the garrison."

Adam dozed in the chair next to the bed where Shiro lay. His eyelids opened as he heard movement from the bed. His eyes blinked as they slid over toward the noise.

Shiro gazed over at Adam. "Where are we?"

"We're at the Garrison hospital." Adam sighed. "I know you're going to ask. The Paladins are here, but none of them have woke up yet. Their bodies need time to heal, just like yours did."
Shiro nodded. "Your still mad at me."

Adam's eyes narrowed. "Damn straight, I am. Why do you always have to be the one risking your life?"

Shiro sighed. "I did it to save Earth. You know that."

Adam sighed as moisture gathered in his eyes. "I know you did, but what about the others you would have left behind if you'd died. Like me?" He raised a hand and wiped at his eyes. "I lost you once. I don't want to do that again."

Shiro reached out and grabbed Adam's hand. "I promise I won't do that again."

A throat clearing noise came from the doorway. The newly-promoted Admiral Sablan stepped into the room. "Captain Shirogane, I've talked to your doctors, and they say you will be released in a day, possibly two. We're planning a memorial service for those we've lost in three days. We need you to give a speech."

Shiro gazed up at the man. "Why me?"

"You and the Paladins saved Earth, but you're the first one to wake up."

Adam frowned as he muttered under his breath only loud enough for Shiro to hear the nickname that Coran had coined for him, "Shiro the Hero."

Thace had prowled this corridor for the last two days since both Allura and Keith were brought in. Both were still unconscious. But Keith's was a little more troubling since he sustained a head injury sometime during the fight.

He stopped as he heard voices coming from one of the rooms and then the exit of the new Admiral Sablan. He'd run into him a couple of times, and though the man wasn't pleasant, he seemed to be competent at his job.

He stuck his head through the doorway, finding Shiro sitting up and Adam sitting on the side of the bed beside him.

Thace grinned as he stepped into the room. "It's good to see your awake, finally. I heard you took out Sendak and his ship and managed to survive."

Shiro groaned.

Adam jabbed his elbow into Shiro's side. "Your legend is growing."

Thace nodded. "Not only his but also of Voltron and Earth. The people of the Voltron Coalition, rebel fighters, and The Blade of Marmora are here now besides others who are offering assistance in helping your people rebuild." Thace paused and then pointed with his clawed index finger toward the doorway. "What was he doing here?"

Adam chuckled. "He drafted Shiro to give a speech that he and the joint chief's wrote for a memorial service to be held in three days."

Thace cocked his head. "What's a memorial service?"
Shiro frowned as he held the speech. "It's to honor the people we lost. But we shouldn't only honor them. We should also honor others like Ulaz and Antoch, too, with this speech."

Thace nodded. "Then rewrite it. Keep whatever sounds good, but toss out what it doesn't say."

Shiro grinned, "Thanks Thace."

Thace grinned in return. "I'm glad to help. Now I must get back to Keith's room before Krolia or Kolivan come looking for me."

Shiro's grin faded. "How is Keith?"

"He's still unconscious, but he has a head injury. The doctors here are optimistic about his recovery."

Shiro sighed. "I hope so."

"Don't worry, Shiro. He'll be okay. Not only is he part human, but he's also part Galra and has his mother's stubbornness. He'll pull through."

Shiro nodded. "Thanks for that, Thace."

The day dawned bright as the Galaxy Garrison's flag flew at half-mast. The Lions sat on the tarmac on the part of one of the remaining runways that were chosen for the memorial service.

Shiro gazed up at the Black Lion, but he turned to face the podium. Adam stood next to him, both dressed in full military dress uniforms. Shiro pulled off the cap and laid it on the podium next to his speech. He gazed out over the faces of those who stood facing pictures of some of the people that the Galaxy Garrison had lost.

Shiro blinked and turned his eyes down toward the paper and then gazed up again. "Today is a solemn day." He took a second breath before continuing. "Today, we look at the lives we've lost, and the sacrifices that were made both here on Earth and across the universe. There isn't a person among us here today who hasn't lost a friend or a family member." He stopped to suck in a calming breath. "It truly feels like a light has gone out, and we can't reignite it."

Shiro paused for a moment as images of people he'd never see again flashed through in his mind. He blinked again, fighting back the tears that glinted in his dark gray eyes. "But that light, that fire, has not gone out completely. It is fueled within each of us by the memories and the love of those we've lost. And now, we must move forward in their names and shine that light onto a new path for future generations. Today is a solemn day, but it is also a day of hope. Earth is now stronger than ever, and it stands a beacon of light to guide everyone fighting against tyranny and oppression. From here, we will spread peace, and together we will hold strong as the Defenders of the Universe."

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!