

Thursday

"Captain Thesan, we have the power crystal back." The leader of the Beta squad approached Thesan's desk with confidence, smug smile and his face and just as much shine in his uniform as in his eyes. "And we have a prisoner."

Thesan looked up from his computer without changing his expression. "You have the wrong crystal."

The squad leader's jaw dropped. "But... but it registered correctly on our scanners... we checked half the land mass on the planet for this thing. There is no mistake about it, Captain, this is either the crystal you sent us for or something completely identical to it."

"The crystal is bigger than that, and clear. You have the wrong crystal. But if it registers correctly, maybe it will still work after all. Bring it to the R&D room, have them take a look at it and report back to me. Pray it works. You are dismissed."

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Laura and Fairchild woke up in each others' arms early that morning, the searing heat of the lava still all around them. "Good morning, sexy." Laura gave Fairchild a coy smile. "It's good to have you back." She kissed her.

"Well I don't know about you, but I'm feeling much better. Last night was incredible, you're a quick learner."

"Well gee! Twist my arm why don't you! Not only could it save your life some day but taking you out of a coma seems like it could be a lot of fun! Not that I'm hoping it ever happens again, you understand."

"Come on, let's get dressed. I'm sure Chris is getting lonely up there all by himself." The lovers kissed each other again and started up the tunnel to the house.

When they got upstairs they were greeted with a shocking sight. The counter on which they had left the gem was smashed and the gem was missing, and so was Chris! All they could find was a cryptic note that neither of them understood. At least it was written in English.

Altutians and Vendorians

We have two of your soldiers now and we have recovered the crystal. Each further action you take against us will result in a new torture for you comrades. We'll send you postcards.

"What's that all about?" Laura asked.

"Well, the Vendorians were a race of mostly engineers, they invented the strongest steel and some of the best weapons in the galaxy, but despite all that they were still wiped out by the Arions years ago. I've never heard of the Altutians though. And as for the crystal... oh shit! Laura! They must mean the gem that Seth gave me! I don't see it anywhere!" Fairchild scanned the house with her tachyon vision over and over again, but couldn't find that present that was so special to her. "Oh no! We've got to get it back!"

"I don't see Chris either. If the Arions took the gem, they probably took him too! But what's this about two soldiers?"

"I don't know either, Laura. Raymond's armor is still here, but I'll be damned if I know how they overlooked it. Probably because the gem was in the kitchen and they didn't need to go further into the house. And... yes the [dimensional gun](#) thing we got from the Arions is still here too."

Laura scanned the house with tachyon vision this time. "You were still an Arion captive when we got this, but Raymond gave Chris this incredibly powerful energy rifle when we went to rescue you. It's still here too. This doesn't make any sense. The only two things missing are Chris and Seth's gem. Unless... unless the Arions didn't know that this was our house! That would be why they left a note for the Vendorians."

"Except there are no more Vendorians. They held off the Arion invasion for quite a while. That pissed them off pretty bad. They wiped out the entire population of Vendor when they won."

"Well then the only way we're going to find any answers is by going to the Arions and getting this mess straightened out." Laura interjected. "We'll just have to be careful not to let on that this is where we live when we do it."

"Well there's only one Terran I know of who was able to find hiding Arions," Fairchild glanced at Raymond's armor. "and he's probably not going to be helping us anymore. Any idea how to get in touch with his friends?"

"I'm not so sure his friends will be very eager to help us, especially if they blame us for his death. But I met a detective who was working on Raymond's case, if anyone knows them, he does."

"Well lead me to him. The faster we find any Arions, the faster we'll figure out what's going on."

Without another word, they both donned the costumes of true Velorian Protectors and rocketed off into the sky, determined to find some clue to help them out. Within minutes they were over L.A., scanning the ground in case they found something interesting on their way. They did. There were a few large men working on the front of a building that looked like it had been driven into by a bulldozer. What caught their attention was that these men were lifting slabs of concrete and panes of glass far too heavy for normal human beings to even consider lifting! Aurora shot Laura a quick glance, to which she just nodded. The pair descended to the rooftop, unnoticed by the workers.

"I don't think I'd be making any absurd generalizations if I said this was an Arion base." Aurora commented.

"No, no you wouldn't." Laura agreed. Without the slightest effort on the part of either one of them, they flew straight down, crashing through the roof of the building and landing in an office that Aurora had found with her tachyon vision.

The Prime's jaw hit his desk at the sudden intrusion of the two beautiful, and scantily clad, women into his office. Aurora knew she had only a few seconds before guards arrived, so she set her plan into motion.

Before the Arion could even scream, she had pulled him out of his chair and, with Laura holding him down, reached under his ribcage and pressed her hand deeper and deeper into his chest cavity.

Guards arrived just as Aurora had gotten a firm grip on her captive's heart. "Hold it right there, twitch and I kill him. I've got a good grip here so don't try anything. Laura, take their weapons."

Laura strutted confidently across the room and relieved the guards of their energy rifles. She bunched them all up in her grip and cracked them in half over her knee with a bright yellow spark.

"We're only here for one thing: Information. What have you done with the Vendorians you captured?" Aurora was trying to bluff her way through this, trying to make it sound like she knew more about what she was saying than she really did.

"This is really... starting... to hurt..." came a gasping plea from the Arion Aurora had in her grip. She ignored him.

"Well? Where are they?"

There was a muttered conversation among the guards. "We got a second Vendorian?" "I only know of the two we got." "Two Vendorians?" "Not, one Vendorian, one Altutian." "We're not sure that one's a Vendorian, though." "Who, the Altutian?" "No, we know the Altutian isn't a Vendorian." "Oh the other one." "Unless we have three now." "Don't look at me, no one ever tells me anything."

"Shut up already! Just tell me where the captives are or this Prime has a heart attack he'll never forget!" Aurora tightened her grip on the Prime's heart, and ignored his grunt of pain.

"Well, like I said, no one ever tells me anything, but I'm sure they're on the ship somewhere." "You idiot! We're supposed to lie to her and get ready for her to come back." "I thought I did lie to her?" "Hold on, did you or didn't you?" "Pfft, I dunno. I don't even know where the damn ship is. I've been on Earth for the past few months." "Hold it, does anyone know where they *really* are?"

"Shut up! Just tell me what I want to know and I'm outta here." Aurora tightened her grip on the Prime's heart again, this time though he wasn't able to groan, he just started clawing weakly at Aurora's arm."

"Um... Aurora?"

"Just a minute, Laura."

"No, Aurora... I think..."

"Just a *minute*."

"Aurora!" Laura pointed at the Prime in her grip. He was turning purple and gesturing toward his mouth.

"Oh, sorry! You want to say something?" Aurora loosened her grip.

"YES!!!" The Prime gasped in relief. "The captives are on a ship we have in orbit. But you'll probably never find it. We've learned from our previous mistakes, we don't put anything in geosync anymore."

"There now, that wasn't so hard now was it? By they way, you'll probably want to abandon this base now that we know where it is. See ya later, boys." Aurora winked at the guards and released the Prime in her grip, who crashed loudly to the floor. He had a huge bruise just below his ribcage, and was clutching his chest in agony. Before anyone even thought to think, Aurora and Laura had flown through the roof again, off to try to find the Arion ship.

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"Warrel, Ardy, get in here!" Captain Thesan's voice boomed over the loudspeaker, beckoning the two Primes into his office. "The science labs found out how to modify our machinery to accept the power from the gem the Betas brought back. Take as many of our science personnel as you need and get back to the surface. We want the earthquake device up and running as soon as possible. We want an update the instant you figure out when it will be finished. Now go, and don't waste any time!"

Warrel and Ardy hurried out of the office and headed to the research and development labs. "Do you hate him as much as I do, Warrel?"

"At least."

"Do you know what I have in mind then?"

"I think so. He said take as many as we need... and he does want the device running as soon as possible..." The two grinned at each other.

Moments later, Warrel and Ardy were headed toward Earth in a new shuttle, followed by a dozen more shuttles holding about three quarters of Thesan's crew.

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"Malohr, the Arions just launched a massive wave of shuttles toward Earth! They'll be on the surface in a few minutes."

"What's the status on the gestalt!?"

"I'll check with the tech lab... it's done! Turns out that crystal we got from the Arions worked better than we could have hoped. Now that's what I call a stroke of good luck."

"We could use a lot more of that right about now. Take us back into realspace and transport the gestalt and six men with B.U.L.S.H.I.T. to the surface. We need to intercept them before they do whatever it is they're trying to do."

"Right captain. I'm sure Dolo will want to lead the group, he's kind of pissed off about losing Mallek in the last battle."

"Offer him first choice then. And be ready for the Arions to retaliate. We'll probably just have enough time to transport and get back into the half-dimension before they find us."

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"Captain Thesan, that... thing has reappeared on our scanners. We're ready for it this time though. Tractor beam... has a positive lock!"

"Aha, so it *is* a ship. What are they up to, and where did they come from?"

"I don't know sir. But there's been another energy transfer, this time *to* the planet's surface. Should I open fire?"

"Wait... we have them in our tractor beam, they can't be any threat. This ship has the best shields we could steal from the Vendorians. Whoever's in that ship couldn't possibly..."

The ship was rocked by a blast of energy from the ship in their tractor beam. "What happened!?"

"With all due respect sir, I can't believe you haven't made the connection yet between the Vendorians and Altutians on the surface and this ship we found. The Vendorians obviously know the weaknesses of their own shields!"

Captain Thesan was taken aback, both by the gall of this Beta to speak to him like that and by the fact that he was right, and he hadn't made the connection until he mentioned it. Before he had organized his thoughts though, the ship was rocked again by another blast.

"Sir, they're fucking firing at us! Give us some fucking orders!!!" It was no secret that Captain Thesan was unfit to command the ship, but never before had it mattered so much.

"Return..." Before Thesan could finish his order he was knocked off his feet by a third blast.

"That explosion meant that we just lost the tractor beam, *sir*. The Beta added sarcastically. "The ship is pulling away and initiating some kind of FTL drive. Shall we pursue?"

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Laura and Aurora had just exited Earth's atmosphere when they caught sight of several Arion shuttles headed for the general L.A. area. *Well that's lucky* Aurora thought to herself. *We just have to follow their trail back to the ship!* Laura pointed at the shuttles, and Aurora shook her head. They understood what each other meant. They should leave the shuttles for now and go after the big ship.

Warrel and Ardy, meanwhile, breathed a huge sigh of relief.

After a bit of flying, the two caught sight of the Arion ship and another, much smaller, ship in its tractor beam. But before they could get too close, the second ship had shot the Arion ship three times. The first shot seemed to create a huge hole in the shields of the ship, the second two destroyed the tractor beam emitter. *Geez, they know what they're doing! It's like they knew exactly how those shields work.*

The pair were getting closer to the ships when the smaller one had turned, and a second later seemed to be everywhere in a straight line at once! The sight faded quickly, and Aurora realized it was the bizarre effect of a ship entering faster than light speed. The Arion ship followed soon after, with a similar effect. As Laura and Aurora both lacked the ability to travel faster than light, they had no hope of ever catching the ships. Discouraged, they turned back toward L.A., determined to catch the massive wave of shuttles before they made it back to the surface.

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"Dolo to Malohr, transport complete. Malohr? Come in?"

"Dolo, I'm not getting a reading from orbit, either here or in the half-dimension. The ship must've taken off. The Arion ship isn't there either."

"Damnit. We're stranded here then until they get back. Can our ship outrun an Arion battlecruiser?"

"Last time we checked it could, but that was a looong time ago. I'm sure the Arions have improved the systems since then."

Dolo clenched his teeth. "Then we just have to hope Malohr knows what he's doing. What's the status on the shuttles?"

"They're going to land in that clearing over there. If we stay in the forest we can get a good first shot at them."

"All right, here's the plan. We stay here until they land. Then send in the four crotch rockets. Tetsev and I will bring up the rear with the jeep. We'll only use the gestalt if we absolutely have to. Unfortunately, I think that'll be the case. There are a lot of those shuttles, but they're mostly Betas and we've got the elephant of surprise."

"Sir? The 'elephant' of surprise?"

"You'll see." Dolo grinned. "Just be ready on my mark."

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"I can't *believe* how lucky we were back there, Warrel! Can you imagine what would have happened if those two Protectors had engaged us in orbit? We'd have been sitting ducks! They'd outmaneuver the shuttles without even thinking about it!"

"We're not out of the fire yet, Ardy. They just turned around and are coming back for us. But I've got a plan. I think the energy transfer to the planet's surface was a signal of some sort. They Altutians and Vendorians are probably waiting for us down there. Try to pick them up using passive scanning, we don't want them to know we're looking for them."

"Yow! No problem. They've got the crystal they stole from us with them. It's putting out enough power to light up a city. What do you suppose the chances are of two incredibly powerful energy-storing crystals of alien origin showing up on Earth in the same week?"

"I don't know, and quite frankly, I don't care. The fact is it happened. If we can get our hands on both crystals, we'll probably never have to worry about powering our systems on Earth again."

"Entering the upper atmosphere. Heat shielding up."

"So, let's see. We've got two Velorians on our tail and a bunch of Altutians and Vendorians waiting for us on the surface. On a superficial level this sounds like it's a very bad situation for us."

"You know, I really like it when you talk all negative like that. It really brings up my spirits."

"Fortunately, I have a plan."

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"Dolo, all but one of the shuttles has cloaked. The uncloaked shuttle is landing."

"Hmmm... must have a bad cloaker. Probably hoping we didn't notice. Well we did notice. Let's go."

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Back in the atmosphere, Laura and Aurora could talk to each other again. Traveling faster than sound though, Laura had to cup her hands over Aurora's ear to talk to her. "Shit! The shuttles cloaked!"

Aurora used the same trick. "No, wait Laura, there's still one shuttle not cloaked. I can barely see it, they're pretty far ahead of us."

"Great! Must've had a back cloaker. Those Arions can't get anything right. Let's go!"

Seconds later, they were back on the ground, landing inches from the shuttle. "FUCK! It's empty! It was a diversion!"

"But why... hey what's that?" Laura looked behind her, and saw an elephant. "An elephant?"

Aurora turned around too. "Well that's something you don't see every day. Oh wait... it doesn't have a tachyon shadow. It's a hologram!"

The instant the two had made that discovery, they were pelted by energy beams from behind! "It's an ambush!!" Laura screamed.

The two turned around just in time to see four street racing motorcycles zip past them, their drivers slashing cruelly at them with energy swords. Only the Arions used energy swords! Well, the Kintzi anyway.

The shrugged off the pain and leapt into action. Aurora picked up the shuttle and tossed it all but effortlessly at the motorcycles. The group scattered, easily dodging the clunky weapon. "Don't get too close, these two are too strong for the energy swords! Pull out your sidearms!"

Again, Aurora and Laura were attacked from behind. They turned to see a tan, topless, military-style jeep with a top-mounted laser cannon dive out of the forest and begin firing!

"Laura, forget the jeep, concentrate on the bikes!"

Unfortunately, that plan sounded better than it turned out. The jeep's cannon kept them off-balance, and they were finding it hard to hit the quick little motorcycles. "That's it, I'm getting pissed and this is really starting to hurt!" Laura grunted. Clenching her eyes shut, she built up a small reserve of power, then unleashed her heat vision at the jeep with all her fury!

But when all was said and done, her fury ended inches away from the vehicle, as if it had hit an invisible wall. "Don't you learn? You already tried that!" Dolo screamed at Laura. Laura ignored his comment.

"Dolo, we're not doing enough damage here. I think we're going to have to form the gestalt before reinforcements arrive!"

"Agreed, bring in the crotch rockets. Switch to hand-to-hand. Activate the B.U.L.S.H.I.T.!"

"The WHAT!?" Aurora burst out. "Battle Unit Lambda activated. Self-applied Hypodermically Implanted Technology at full power. Dolo, you have the gestalt!"

The four motorcycles roared past Aurora and Laura, skidding to a stop at the four corners of the jeep. As the drivers leapt from their seats, the motorcycles seemed to fold over into themselves in a dozen places, as did the jeep!

The four motorcycle riders and the driver of the jeep landed in a perfect formation between Aurora and Laura and the transforming machines. "Fire!" Came the order, and ten wrist-mounted micro-missile launchers answered, their payload streaking toward the pair of Protectors with unexpected speed and accuracy.

Aurora and Laura covered themselves with their arms as the missiles found their targets. The explosion was sufficient to bring a skyscraper to its knees, but the Protectors felt little more than a solid impact all over their bodies that threw them backwards a good distance. When the smoke cleared, the five men were standing in front of a grotesque creation made of twisted motorcycles attached to a malformed jeep: The vehicles had transformed and combined into a twenty foot humanoid robot!

It was six feet at the knee joint, with fully articulated hands two feet across the palm. The motorcycles were still barely recognizable as the arms and legs of the monstrosity, held together by a ten foot long deformed body that was once the jeep. The jeep's laser cannon was now in the robot's left hand, like some giant's pistol. It was a horrid and intimidating sight.

"What the hell is that thing?" Laura shouted.

"It's the gestalt! And it's going to kick your alien ass off this planet once and for all! We know you're not supposed to fuckin' be here!"

"But we're..." Aurora started to protest, but was knocked backwards before she could finish by the robot's laser cannon.

"You bastard!" Laura screamed in rage. She leapt into the air with all her formidable strength but Dolo (who was piloting the giant robot from safely inside the cavity that used to be the jeep's driver's seat) was ready for her. The gestalt's right hand flashed up faster than Laura thought possible for such a huge device, and caught her!

Aurora, meanwhile, was trying to shake off her dizzy feeling when she saw the five remaining attackers heading right for her! What she hadn't noticed while they were on their motorcycles was that they each had some kind of weird cybernetic technology on their arms and heads. That was odd. The Arions didn't widely use cybernetics, not that she'd seen since the fight in Australia anyway. How much had she missed while she was out?

Meanwhile the robot had "holstered" its laser "pistol" on a clamp on its left leg. With both hands free, Dolo brought both hands together to try to crush Laura!

"That's it, you fucker. No more Ms. Nicey-Nice!" Laura unleashed her full power of heat vision on the giant robot again, but with the same effect as before. The beams simply stopped inches from the surface of the metal. She could feel the giant hands compressing her rib cage, making it impossible for her to breathe. Not that it mattered. She kept her heat vision on the robot for almost a full minute before giving up.

"No, you can't overload a fifth dimensional heat sync." The robot boomed over its loudspeaker. "I thought you were smarter than that." Laura wanted to protest, but without any air in her lungs she couldn't speak!

Aurora meanwhile had decided to ignore the foot soldiers. They had already shown they were too weak to really hurt her. Seeing that Laura was in trouble, she hurled herself at the twenty-foot monster. As she approached, Dolo took a swing at her with both of the robot's two-foot wide fists, still holding Laura. Aurora managed to fly out of the way of his attack, though, by diving suddenly, flying fists-first into the robot's right leg.

Aurora suddenly understood what it was like for a terran to punch a brick wall. She knocked the robot off balance, but it hurt! The robot was forced to take a few steps backwards to catch its balance again. Then, over the loudspeaker, Dolo's voice commanded "Hold it! Stop the fight! These aren't Arions!" One of the foot soldiers brought his hand up to touch a device mounted over his right eye. "He's right, switch to tachyon and take a look at the size of those flight organs! They're probably even functional!"

Dolo let go of Laura, who floated effortlessly out of the robot's giant hands much like an insect does when you release it. "Of course they're functional you idiot! We're Velorians!"

"Velorians!?" Dolo screamed over the loudspeaker. "There are *Velorians* on Earth too? For the love of the Elder Ones, doesn't *anyone* follow directions anymore? We know you're not supposed to be here, this planet is off-limits to supremis!"

"How the hell do you know that?" Laura snapped.

"When the Elder Ones dropped our ancestors off on Altus a few centuries ago, our people were very dedicated to them. In exchange for our worship, the Altutian race knows a lot of things most of the other humanoids around the galaxy don't know. Like the fact that the Ancient and Elder ones have been scattering us around the galaxy in the first place. And we know who and what you and the Arions are, and that the Ancient Ones declared this planet off-limits. What are you all doing here anyway?"

"We're here to stop the damn Arions from taking over! They've been lying low for decades on Earth trying to get the terrans to kill themselves. We're here to stop them, but it's not easy with them hiding around all the time."

"Wait a minute... Aurora, they said they were Altutians. Isn't that the name on the note the Arions left us?"

"Yeah, in fact, I think it is. Do you guys know anything about the Vendorians? Are they here too?" Aurora questioned.

"Yeah, *I'm* Vendorian!" Tetsev answered.

"Okay, this is *starting* to make a little more sense. I think we need to get a few things straightened out here. First of all, I thought Vendor was destroyed by the Arions. Secondly, what are you two races doing on Earth anyway? And what do the Arions have against you so badly?"

Aurora stopped there, thinking three questions at a time was enough.

Dolo answered. "All right, here's the story. Vendor and Altus were both destroyed by the Arions. We both had things they thought were a threat to them. The Vendorians had technology far more advanced than anything else in the galaxy. They wanted their weapons and ships. It took them a while but they got them. Altus was a threat because we knew so much about the supremis and the Ancient and Elder Ones, and we used Elder magic. Only a ship full of survivors escaped from each planet. That's us.

"We met in deep space by coincidence alone. We landed on a nearby planet and spend the next few months combining our ships into a bigger, better ship we could both use. That was the start of the AVA, the Altutian Vendorian Alliance. We've had our differences, but for the most part we get along.

"So anyway, we asked, where are we going to go now that we're together? We're in no hurry to die, so we figured we'd high-tail it to Earth because we knew the Arions weren't allowed there."

"Then you got here and found out they've been bending the rules."

"Exactly. So we started working on this S.H.I.T. The Self-applied Hypodermically integrated Technology. It's a system of modular bionics that can be detached and shared and optimized for any situation. We knew we'd be getting into a fight so we're using the Battle Unit Lambda, or B.U.L.S.H.I.T. configuration.

"So we've been following the Arions around for a while with our ship hiding in orbit around Earth in this sort of "half-dimension" we can access between the 3rd and 4th dimensions. It's the ultimate cloaking device.

"Then we found out they've been paying a lot of attention to a certain briefcase lately. So we stole it from them. Turns out they had some kind of power crystal in it they were going to use for a weapon."

"My gem! That must be the gem they stole from me!" Aurora cried out. "Where is it now? It belongs to me, someone very special gave it to me and it means a lot."

"Well, we're, um... kind of using it right now..."

"What!?"

"It's powering this giant robot right now. After we took it from the Arions, we figured we may as well use it. So we... kind of... integrated it into jeep section."

"I can't see through your robot's armor. My little gem is powering that whole thing?"

"Yeah, it's got a lot of power for such a little crystal. And you can't see through the robot because it's made of Vendorian steel."

"Yeah, I kind of figured the Vendorians would still be using it. That must be why it hurt so much when I rammed the leg section. So, this is kind of awkward, but do you think you could, you know, find an alternate power source for your robot? I mean, we've been looking for that gem all day."

"I promise, as soon as we find an alternate power source, we'll give it back to you. But for now, please understand that we need it. We're on the same mission here. We know the Arions aren't allowed on Earth, so we're trying to get rid of them too. The Elder Ones would want it that way."

"Well... I guess. As long as I know where it is now. Oh, by the way, we've got this note the Arions left at our place when they stol the gem, and kidnapped another friend of mine. They mentioned they Altutians and Vendorians, and we were curious about that for a while but you cleared that up. They also said they've got one of your troops, and they were going to torture him if you kept interfering with them."

"That the Elder Ones, Mallek's alive! He's probably on the Arion ship now. if only we knew where it was. We haven't been able to contact our ship."

"Oh, that's because it took off a little while ago followed by the Arion ship. They seemed to be in a awful hurry to get someplace. From what I understand, FTL travel generally isn't used inside a solar system. According to the Pactrel anyway, it tends to do some weird things with time travel."

"Well, the way the Pactrel do it, yeah. But what do you expect when you use a phased dimensional emitter to cancel the effects of relativity? We're just worried about hitting something. There's a lot of garbage in a solar system."

Aurora finally felt like she was in the loop again. "Okay, so that's three mysteries cleared up. Now we just have to wait for the Arions to get back, whatever they're doing now, and get Chris and your teammate back. Then stop them from making this weapon or whatever it is you said they're making."

Dolo replied "Agreed. We'll try to let you know as soon as we get into contact with our ship again. Our ship is a lot faster than the Arion's, we don't have anything to worry about. It turns out they don't seem to be able to modify Vendorian technology, they just steal it. So as the Vendorians have been advancing, the Arions have only been getting what they could steal."

Laura finally spoke up. "So I don't suppose you guys have anything related to that Elder magic you mentioned that helps you find Arions. Thanks to this little distraction they obviously set up for us, they could be anywhere by now."

"Unfortunately, the Elder Knights, the ones who used The Power, were the first ones targeted by the Arions when they invaded. There's no one left who's formally trained in The Power. My nephew had the potential to be an Elder Knight, but with no one to train him, he'll never get beyond the basics. Feeling disturbances, communing with deceased Knights who have bonded with The Power, things like that. I don't understand it all. But if our little Q and A session is over, we've got some Arions to kill."

"We have some fr... well they're not friends, in fact they tried to kill us last week, but we know some people who might be able to help us find them. If you'd like to join us?"

"Thanks, but we've got our own methods. Tetsev, give them one of our communicators. We'll keep in touch."

Tetsev handed Aurora a small metal object that seemed to be nothing more than a little ultra-contemporary style piece of jewelry. "Just tap the case of it, and we'll be able to talk. The carrier beam is affected by gravity, so we can stay in touch as long as we're anywhere on the same planet or in orbit. We just came up with it a few months ago. It gets a little boring wandering aimlessly through space."

"Have you guys thought about selling this technology to the terrans? It would revolutionize communications! You could make enough money to retire and live like kings just off this thing."

"Well... we could... except that if everyone had one it wouldn't work anymore. The carrier beam only works over one frequency, anything else and it wouldn't orbit the planet correctly. So it's not something that more than one person could use at a time."

"Oh. Well we're off to find some people who would rather see us dead and ask for help from them. How are you going to find the Arions?"

"We tore up a base of theirs in Los Angeles. We were going to see if we can find any clues there."

"Good luck, I think we were just there a little while ago. They were fixing the place up. It might be difficult to find anything in the mess you made."

The giant robot laid down on its back, and its limbs twisted and folded themselves back into shapes recognizable as motorcycles and a jeep. The AVA members hopped back on their vehicles. "May the best team find them first then. We'll be in touch." At that, the AVA drove off toward L.A.