

## ***Prologue***

The fleet bay was a flurry of activity. What had started as an orderly evacuation had turned into near total chaos. Maliza held tightly onto her son's hand. They were caught in the middle of the mob as the colonists pushed towards the ships. Their colony was under attack, and they were leaving.

The call to evacuate had come before the attack began. They knew they did not have the defenses capable to withstand the coming assault, but the warning was insufficient. The raid had started before the evacuation was complete and the resulting chaos ensued. Miliza's husband had stayed behind with the militia. They were severely outmanned, but all they needed to do was buy time for the colonists.

The press of the mob was constricting and she held her son's hand even tighter. They were nearly to their assigned ship when there was explosion outside the fleet bay. People screamed. The crown shifted. She lost her grip on her son's hand. He was knocked down by the crown. She stretched out her hand but the mob was quickly coming between the two of them.

“Lorn, get up!” She screamed. “Please, get up!”

The press of the mob was too much for the young child. “Help me mommy, help me!” he screamed back.

She tried forcing her way towards her son, but it was like trying to swim up river, in the rapids, during a heavy rainstorm. She felt herself being pushed away from her son. “MOOOOMMMMMYYYYY” he was yelling the top of his lungs now, but she could not reach him.

“Lorn, get up! Get up, Lorn!” she was screaming.

Lorn heard her yelling but the crown kept knocking him down. All he could do was watch her get pushed farther and farther away. “MOOOOMMMY!!!! MOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMYYYYY!!!” He yelled again and again.

“Lorn, get up!” he heard, over and over. “Lorn, get up!”

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LT Jake Dierson, bridge officer first class was trying hard to wake his buddy and having little success. “Lorn, get up!” he cried.

Suddenly, Lorn shot up in his rack. His sheets were soaked and body all sweaty. He drew in a sharp breath and looked around. “Jake?”

“Yea, man...are you ok? You’re going to be late for your watch. Commander’s going to go ballistic on you.”

Lorn ran a hand through his dark, sweaty hair and took a deep breath. “I’m fine, just a bad dream is all.” He swung his legs over the side of his rack and hopped down to the floor. Once down he rubbed his eyes and face and shook away the rest of the dream.

“I’m ok, really.”

“Well you better get up to the bridge or Jastin’ll have your hide.”

Lorn nodded and splashed some cold water on his face. He grabbed a towel and went over to his locker. He pulled out his coveralls and took a moment to look at his new insignia. He and Jake had just been promoted. Bridge officer first class brought with it the rank of full Lieutenant or LT, as they called it.

That meant he was now in charge of the watch shift on the bridge. It also meant he and Jake would no longer be on the same watch shift, which, according to rumor, was why the captain had put both of them up for promotion. He put on his coveralls and looked himself over.

“You look fine, pretty-boy. Now get up to the bridge before the old man finds a way to blame me for making you late.”

Lorn looked over at his friend. “It *is* your fault, you didn’t wake me up soon enough, nor did you my have my uniform ready. The coveralls aren’t pressed, the boots are not even close to being shined, and don’t even get me started on the--” He ducked through the hatch to avoid one of Jake’s boots, which had come hurling across the room from Jake’s hand.

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Lorn barely made it to the bridge on time, and was relieved to see that Commander Jastin was not there. The Commander was not a screamer, but he did expect everything to happen by the book, and barely making it to the shift on time did not qualify as “by the book,” especially when Lorn was in charge of the shift.

LT Lance Gmat was currently on watch. He was new to his position as well, promoted one day before Lorn. “Hey, nice to see you could join us,” he said. Lorn smiled weakly, “Sorry, Lance. What’s on the scope?”

The “scope” was the typical watch turnover briefing. Each bridge officer had to brief his replacement on everything that was going on: ship status, department status, contact status, basically the full scope of the ship’s activities that occurred over the previous six hours and what was expected to happen during the next six.

Lorn received his briefing from Lance and then came to attention. "I hereby relieve of you the bridge," he said with a salute.

"I stand relieved," Lance replied, returning the salute. Then he added, "have a good watch."

Lorn nodded to his shipmate and then announced to the bridge, "This is LT Lorn. I have the bridge."

A series of "aye, sir"s acknowledged that Lorn was now in control of the ship.

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Most of the watch was uneventful. Most first watches were. "First watch" was the first watch of the standard day. The standard day was broken up into four watches, and there were three watch shifts. The shifts were six hours on and twelve hours off. That ensured each shift held a different watch every day, and helped cut down on complacency. Still, it was hard not to be complacent during first watch. Coffee helped, but only partially.

While a ship as big as EXCELSIOR always had stuff going on, there was a reduced operating status during the first shift of the day, and shipwide the lighting was reduced to simulate night. It was supposed to help with the natural cycles and keep them fit and healthy.

"Excuse me, sir, I'm detecting some ships on long range scans, unknown size and type."

Lorn walked over to the tech. "Where are they? What're they doing?"

"They are on the edge of the system and appear to be skirting the sector. No wait, they're changing course. They're moving to intercept, sir."

"Run a full system scan, I'll call the Commander."

"Aye, Aye, sir."

Lorn walked over to one of the free comm. consoles and pushed the code for Commander Jastin's quarters. The voice was groggy at first, but only briefly. "Jastin," it said.

"Good Morning, Sir, this is LT Lorn on the bridge. We have detected an unknown fleet insystem. Five ships, of unknown design have moved to an intercept course. We are currently running a full system scan."

"I am on my way, have a full report ready for me when I arrive."

“Aye, sir.”

Commander Jastin was on the bridge just a few minutes later. Lorn gave him a full report and the two went over to the comm station. The tech was trying to match it to known ships in their database.

“I’m sorry sir, but I’m coming up empty,” he reported.

“Hail them, see what their intentions are,” the Commander ordered.

“I’ve been trying, sir, there’s no response.”

“Keep trying, run the same message in all known languages.”

“Aye, Aye, sir,” the tech replied.

Commander Jastin went over to his command chair, but didn’t get to sit. Without warning, the mysterious fleet fired on them. The first salvo rocked the ship, but did little actual damage.

“Return, fire! Red Alert!” The Commander was on his feet.

The enemy launched a second salvo. Fingers of energy danced around the hull. Torpedoes exploded near the engines.

“Main Drives are out! Returning fire! Hull breach in section 32!”

EXCELSIOR was taking a beating but she was holding up. Two of the enemy ships were destroyed in her return fire, but that just made the remaining ships fire that much more vicious a salvo.

“Sir! We have incoming!”

Before the tech could get the warning out, the torpedo struck its mark, right near the bridge, taking out half the watch crew, including the Commander.

“Commander?! *COMMANDER?!?!?*” LT Lorn rushed to his side, but all he could do was cover the charred body that had been his commander. He turned to one of the surviving techs. “Gimme a report, Mac,” he ordered.

“Not good, sir...drive systems have completely failed, weapons are out, life support is failing.”

Lorn closed his eyes, and pressed his palms into his forehead. When his hands fell away and his eyes opened he was resolute and determined. “Are internal comms still up?” He asked, as the ship was rocked by another volley.

“Just barely, sir.”

“Get them up, now.” Lorn got a nod from the tech than announced, “Attention all hands. This is LT Lorn from the bridge. All hands abandon ship. Repeat. All hands abandon ship!” He cut the comms and turned to the techs. “Let’s get out of here, there is nothing else we can do.”

The surviving watch crew followed him to the shuttle bay. The EMMANUEL was nearly full and the remaining survivors were boarding SPIRIT. LT Gmat ran up to Lorn. “All hands are in the shuttle bay. There are no other life signs on board EXCELSIOR. There is room for us on EMMANUEL, the remaining crew is boarding SPIRIT,” he reported.

Lorn took a deep breath. “Good, let’s get everyone boarded and we’ll leave together. I want LT Deirsen to pilot SPIRIT, I will pilot EMMANUEL myself, at least until we get clear of the enemy fleet.”

“Aye, sir, I’ll let him know.”

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Lorn sat in the Pilot’s seat of EMMANUEL. EXCELSIOR was starting to break up under the onslaught. “Mac, take second seat, it’ll take both of us to get out of here in one piece.” He orderd, then got on the comms. “Jake, you ready?” He asked LT Deirsen.

“You betcha! Let’s get these babies lit and burned,” came the reply.

“Good, we’re coming out hot, and are gonna go full burn to the jump point. We’ll meet up and coordinate before jumping outsystem.” Lorn ordered, then added, “And Jake, be careful. Do what you need to get to safety, but no hotshotting. You can impress me later.”

“I read ya, buddy, now get outta here so we can leave,” Jake replied and then laughed. Lorn shook his head. The two went way back and sometimes he wondered if Jake had a serious bone in his body. Still, he was a good officer and better pilot.

Lorn got on the intraship, “All hands, we’re leaving hot, brace yourselves we’re in for a ride. Lorn out.” He turned to Mr. Duron, who nodded. They worked the controls, and the ship shot forward.

They quickly moved a safe distance from the ship, but SPIRIT had not come out.

“SPIRIT, EMMANUEL, what’s the hold up?”

In reply SPIRIT shot out of EXCELSIOR at top speed. Just as SPIRIT left the bay, the final salvo rocked EXCELSIOR and the ship was rocked with explosions before going up in a big ball of fire and molten metal.

Lorn watched from a distance...grieving for his commander, crew and ship, but relieved for the members who made it. Relief turned to horror, however, when the fireball that had been EXCELSIOR overtook SPIRIT.

Lorn jumped from his chair. “JAAAAAKKEE!!!!!!” he shouted, as if somehow that would bring SPIRIT through it.

Instead, SPIRIT was encapsulated and vaporized, all hands gone with her.

Lorn fell into his seat. Watching SPIRIT and Jake go like that was a severe blow. He and Jake went through school and came up the ranks together. Lorn decided then and there that he would lead this ship to safety. They would carry on the mission they came out to do. They would settle, they would prosper, and someday, somehow whoever that mysterious enemy was would pay.

With a cold determination he rose from the pilot’s seat. LT Gmat and a tech named Lino were on the bridge with him, he looked them both dead in the eyes. “Gentlemen we have some work to do.” Lino sat in the pilot’s seat and Lorn took a seat in the command chair, taking command of the ship and the mission.

He turned to LT Gmat, “Lance, find out who made it on board, what rates and skills we have, and take a complete inventory. When that’s done you and I will establish a watch routine for the survivors. Let’s put people to work and get them focused. We will carry on, we will complete the mission we set out for and we will make who ever did this pay, and pay dearly.”

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## Chapter 1: The Find

Lorn sat in his command chair, wondering if they would ever find a suitable planet to make home. It had been nearly six months since their ship came under attack by mysterious group of aliens. He and a small group just barely escaped in a shuttle, most of the command crew went down with the ship. Being the most senior officer among the survivors, he assumed control of the mission.

Well, what was left of the mission.

They were a ragtag group for sure, but each one of them was able to rise to the occasion when the situation demanded it. Now, after six months of searching, the tight quarters were wearing thin and supplies were running low. Sometimes, Lorn felt inadequate for the job.

He was young, only in his late 20's, but he had really stepped up to the plate and taken care of his people. He was responsible for their very survival. However, he felt responsible for those who did not survive. He carried the burden of their deaths on his shoulders, and it was causing his hair to gray around the edges prematurely.

He resisted the urge to ask for an update. No need to grate anyone's nerves more than necessary. He got up and headed towards the replicator. They were on rations now, but he could not do without his coffee – that was typically all he had for breakfast anyway – plus, it helped pass the time.

“Sir, I’ve got something!” The tech was very excited. The mere prospect of getting off the ship was enough to excite anyone.

Resisting another urge, Lorn calmly walked over to the tech's station. “Report” he ordered, though not quite as neutral as he would have liked.

“Sixth planet, Sir. Gravity reads 1.3, but oxygen is 20%, 3% CO2, no hostile gases. No tech, and life signs are minimal, appears to be native fauna only. Recommend sending in a surface team.”

“Move us into orbit Mr. Lino. I want two full surface scans. One equatorial and one polar. Once those are complete we’ll decide on landing a team. And Lino,” he added, “Keep your fingers crossed.”

“Aye, sir.”

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The scans were completed two and a half hours later. They showed no signs of life other than animals native to the planet. Lorn called the three most senior survivors onto the bridge and briefed them on what was going on.

“Gents, we have our first ‘possible’ and the initial scans are positive. We are going to send out surface teams to do some scouting. I want each of you to be a team lead. Take ten men each. LT Gmat, you will lead Gamma team. Tadam, you will lead Alpha team, and Stone, you will lead Beta team.”

Lorn took a print out of the surface scans and laid it out for them. It was broken up into grids, and Lorn assigned a sector to each team lead. “Search your grids in an orderly way and make sure you cover all the ground you can. We need to be very thorough if we are going to establish a base camp. Choose your men and be ready to head out in one hour.”

A series of “Aye, Sirs” and the three went off to carry out their orders.

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Each of the scout teams covered a good amount of distance in a short time. Initial reports were positive, but then Gamma team came across something unexpected. At first it looked like strange natural formations, but upon closer inspection they saw it was a colony!

LT Gmat radioed back to the ship, “Control, Gamma team, we have located what appears to be a colony, we are moving to investigate, over.”

“Gamma team, Control, negative. Stand by.”

Lance sighed in frustration. Here were people who could provide assistance, and Lorn tied his hands. Was he afraid part of the crew would choose to stay behind? They might actually prefer a home to being crammed into a tiny shuttle like animals?

“Control, Gamma team, request permission to investigate settlement.”

“Gamma team, Control, negative, stand by.”

Lance sighed again.

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Lorn was discussing their options with the bridge crew when he suddenly got a cold feeling deep in his gut. It was one of those feelings that had no rational explanation, but one you would wind up kicking yourself for later if you did not listen. He made his decision.

“All teams, Control, return to inception point. Repeat, return to inception point.”

“Alpha team, aye.”

“Beta team, aye.”

“Control, Gamma team, we should at least scout out the settlement before making that decision.”

“Negative, Gamma team, report back to inception point.

“But, sir, we could use the help, these people could provide. We need to at least take a look.” LT Gmat was becoming insistent.

“Gamma team, Control-1, that is a negative. Get your team back to the inception point *immediately*. We are lifting and leaving.”

“But, sir, we need help. We cannot just go floating around the galaxy crammed in that shuttle. I think you should use a little judgment—“

Lorn flipped the switch cutting him off. “Mr. Lino go secure.”

Lino hit a few buttons encrypting their communications. That set up a secure channel between the ship and the scouting teams. Anyone eavesdropping on their comms would hear nothing but garbled blips and beeps. The other teams could hear everything though. “Channel is secure, sir.”

“Thank you, Lino.” Lorn flipped the switch back. “Lance, this is Lorn, enough. Get your hind back to the ship now. That is an *order*. We are lifting off with or without your team. Lorn out.” He closed the channel before Lance could respond. The rest of the bridge crew stared at him, wondering if he would make good on his threat. He hoped he was right about this or things would not be pretty.

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Circumstances did prove him right, but things were still not pretty. No sooner was the last team onboard when they detected a ship coming from the general direction that Gamma team scouted. They lifted off and made for the upper atmosphere, but the ship was closing.

“Sir, they are powering weapons!” Mr. Lino reported.

“What? Open a channel.” Lorn ordered.

“Channel open...no response.”

Just a moment later they got all the response they needed. Blue streaks of energy barely missed their hull.

“Mac, get us out of here, yesterday,” Lorn ordered. Mac was the best pilot on board. It was his skills that helped save them six months ago. Hopefully, his skills would save them now. He worked the controls and the ship seems to dance in the atmosphere. They even managed to pull away from the bigger ship chasing them.

The pushed through the clouds and kept climbing. The enemy ship right on their tail. They had not been fired on anymore but were being given a good chase. The shuttle climbed through the upper atmosphere and hit open space. Their pursuer fired off a few more shots that went wide, then turned and head back towards the surface.

Mac took the shuttle to the edge of the system and did an emergency jump outsystem. Normally jumps take a few minutes to calculate. For all its vastness, there are always pieces of debris or space junk floating about. Add to that uncharted heavenly bodies and jumping could be dangerous if not done correctly. The ship could go through a star or run right into a planet wreaking havoc on the crew as well as the planetary inhabitants.

However, each ship had a few sets of pre-programmed jump calculations in their computer. These calcs allowed the ship to jump out immediately in the event of an emergency, such as being chased and shot at by an unknown enemy. They could bypass the required calculations without running the risk of a hyperspace collision. The programmed calcs had to be updated regularly, but rare was the accident with an emergency jump.

When they were safe in another system, things still were not pretty. Lorn called LT Gmat up to the bridge and laid into him. “Just what were you *thinking*?!?!? When I give you an order to return, you return. You put not only your team but our entire crew at risk, and not just ‘oh this could be a little dangerous,’ you nearly got us all KILLED!!!

“You have the audacity to question my judgment, over an open line no less, when *you* are the one who needs a little judgment. I know things are not as strict as they were on EXCELSIOR, LT, but that does not mean you have the right question orders. Especially when it was my judgment that saved our lives.”

“Are you finish, *sir*?”

“Oh, I’m just getting warmed, Lance. What you did goes far beyond inexcusable.”

“Excuse me, sir,” one of the techs interrupted timidly. Lorn was not one to get angry easily, much less berate someone in public. He must have been angry, and that had the tech a little nervous.

“What is it Mr. Lino?” Lorn replied in a tense but not angry voice, somewhat to the techs relief.

“I am sorry to interrupt, but we did sustain a little bit of damage and I think you might want to see this.” Mr. Lino braced expecting Lorn to switch his anger to him, but it did not happen.

“LT Gmat, you are hereby confined to quarters until further notice, you are dismissed.” Lorn then turned to Mr. Lino and his demeanor changed. “I am sorry you all witnessed that,” he announced to the bridge, and then turned to Lino, “what have you got?”

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LT Lance Gmat returned to his quarters and he was incensed. To be berated like that, and in front of the entire bridge crew! CDR Jastin would have done such thing, never. Word of his dressing down reached his quarters before he did—it was a small ship—and his bunkies were somewhat sympathetic.

“You know, Lance, technically you outrank, Lorn,” one of them, a tech named Eichman was saying.

LT Gmat shook his head. “No. When we left, I had one day on him, but he rose to the occasion, and did not need the challenge. There was too much to do, and we had to worry more about surviving than who played boss.”

“But how ‘bout now? We’ve been trapped in this cramped place for six months. That was our chance to settle.”

“Listen, while I may question Lorn’s style, he was right in this case. It pains me to admit it, and he was wrong to call me out in front of everyone. However, he was right about the planet, and he did save all our lives...again. What you’re proposing is mutiny and I won’t be a part of it.”

“Lorn hasn’t got the right to be in charge, Lance.”

“Lorn will very likely self-distruct. His self proclaimed title of “Commander” won’t stick. You can bet I will be keeping an eye on him, but I won’t be party to what you are thinking. His leadership style may be all wrong, but he’s in charge, and he has saved us all, twice now. I’m sure he’ll screw up eventually, but until then I’ll do what I’m told and so will you. Do you understand?”

“Yea, I got it.” Eichman didn’t get it though. He did not think Lorn had any right to be in charge and did not think he was running things the way they ought to be run. He would have to come up with another way to make things “right.”

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It was a full month before they found another ‘possible.’ The universe was an infinite place, with an infinite number of planets, but there were very specific parameters a planet needed to meet in order support life. Its size had to be in a certain range to ensure gravity would not be too harsh or too light. Temperature, gas content, even distance from its star all had to be within certain parameters and all of the factors had to match. If even one of them was off, the planet was unsuitable.

If a planet was the correct size and distance and initial scans indicated the correct atmosphere it was classified as a ‘possible’ and warranted further investigation. After a month of being cooped inside the shuttle, the tech on watch found a planet that was able to be classified just that.

Lorn was in his quarters at the time, but the watch officer, Sub LT Tadum, called him with the initial report. “Run a surface scan, I am on my way,” Lorn ordered on his way out of his cabin.

He was on the bridge not more than a minute later. “What’ve we got?”

“Fifth planet in, Sir, 17% oxygen in the atmosphere, no hostile gases, planet looks uninhabited”

17%, that was a little low for their liking, but they would survive, and they would be off the ship. “Move us into orbit, Mr. Lino. You know the drill.”

“Aye, Aye, sir!!!”

The bridge was a flurry of activity now. It was a small ship, but word spread fast even for its size. They had been ready a month ago, now, even more so. Lorn had to restrict the bridge to watch crew only, as the shuttle moved into orbit. “Give me a full surface scan,” He ordered.

The minutes ticked by slowly. This was only the second ‘possible’ they had. The first had a hostile colony already in place. This one seemed like it might work. He tried not to get excited, he didn’t want to get his hopes up, but after seven months in this tiny shuttle, he was ready for a little stretching room. Two hours later they had their results.

“Surface scan complete, temperature range –11 degrees to 48 degrees, native life only. No technology detected. No structures detected. Energy scans, negative as well, Sir”

“Set landing coordinates....here,” Lorn pointed to what looked like a suitable spot. Time to make the official announcement:

*“Attention all hands, this is the commander. We have found a second ‘possible’. Scanning report is positive. Land exploration is a go. Form up in your teams, and stay alert. This is not a drill. Stay professional and forward all reports to the bridge. Out.”*

He considered leading one of the teams himself, but his place was on the bridge. He needed to analyze the information as it came in. If the place was suitable he would explore it himself before making the decision to set up camp.

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Reports started coming in after only a few hours. Some positive, some negative, but overall things were looking good. The air was a little thin, but they would adjust. Temperatures were moderate, as was the humidity, so their equipment would work well here. Most importantly, this planet was completely uninhabited. Lorn decided it was time to find a spot to set up a temporary camp.

“All teams report back to the shuttle. Make preparations for establishing a base camp.”

There was an immediate chorus of whooping on the radio and Lorn let them vent their steam. After their performance since the escape they certainly deserved it. After a few minutes they were all business.

“Alpha team checking in. We are currently eight clicks east of the shuttle.”

“Beta team checking in. We are currently twelve clicks south by southwest from the shuttle.”

“Gamma team checking in. We are currently five clicks to the north. Sir, I believe we have found a suitable location to set up camp, over”

“Very well, all teams move to Gamma’s position. Gamma team set up a perimeter; we are en route with the shuttle, ETA 3 minutes.”

He waited for all teams to acknowledge, and then command the bridge crew to bring the shuttle in. The excitement was thick all around. The camp would be temporary, but even that was better than the shuttle.

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The shuttle set down in a large clearing at the teams last reported coordinates, but none of the team members were in sight.

“Gamma team, Check in.”

Silence

“Gamma team, this is Commander Lorn. Check in.”

“This is Gamma team, sorry sir, we, uhh, found something. Sir you should probably see this for yourself.”

“Acknowledged,” it sounded bad, but there was quite a bit of excitement in his voice. Well, he was looking for a reason to get off the bridge and out of the ship. Here was his chance.

“Mr. Duron, you have the bridge. Have Alpha team set up the defenses around the perimeter established by Gamma team. When Beta team arrives have them start setting up camp. Mr. Lino, you’re with me.”

Lorn and the tech got their equipment and made their way down the ramp. The air was cool and fresh. Lorn took a deep breath, then another. There was a rich, sweet aroma to the planet. After over a year in space, most of which was confined on the little shuttlecraft, he could barely contain his joy at being on firm ground and in the open air. Still, he had business to attend to.

“Gamma team leader, forward me your coordinates. We are en route on foot.”

“Commander, Gamma team leader. We are located at Charlie grid Omega-four, over”

“Roger, en route, standby. Out.”

Lorn and Mr. Lino made their way to over to Gamma team's position, but they took their time. They both were excited, curious, and euphoric. Looking all around their environment they both felt at home. Upon meeting up with part of Gamma team they saw what had gotten them so excited.

LT Gmat, Gamma team lead rushed up to Commander Lorn with a crisp salute. The LT was not sure of Lorn's leadership abilities, but was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, for now. His eyes were a pale blue, a striking contrast to his dark hair. While his skin was pale from months in space, his face retained a rugged look that suggested he was more at home hunting in a forest than standing watch on a bridge.

“Commander, we’ve scanned as deep into the cave as we could, there are five different metals in there, including gold, silver and iron. We don’t have exact amounts, but sir there is more than enough to establish an actual colony. We do not need to start with a base camp. We can settle right here, sir!”

“Easy, Lieutenant. We are all excited but we need to progress slowly. At the very least we will be able to restock our supplies. That is what the base camp is for. If this planet is suitable and *safe*, then we will establish our colony.” He kept his voice

easy, for establishing a colony was exactly what Lorn wanted to do. He could not fault the team lead for wanting the same thing. Still survival was their top priority, and they would settle down only if they could survive. “Adjust your perimeter to cover the cave. Make sure the cave has no hostiles in it, and then meet me back at the shuttle.”

“Aye, aye, sir”

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The camp was mostly set up by nightfall. They got a defense perimeter set up, but they only were able to salvage four nodes, so their defenses were somewhat limited. They had enough weapons for the camp though, and each team was sufficient to handle round the clock watches. They would set up a daily team rotation at first and modify the schedule later on if need be.

Beta team managed to bag some local game, so, after determining it was safe, they had an “old fashioned cookout.” The entire crew was in high spirits. The air was fresh, it looked like food was plentiful, materials certainly were, and climate comfortable. Tomorrow they would set up the mining operation, but tonight they needed, and deserved a celebration. It looked like they just might do it. They would survive and even prosper.

He wasn’t sure if it was the circumstances, the liquor or a little of both, but Lorn was feeling optimistic and confident that they had finally found a place to call home.

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