

**Galaxy: Hope**

by Maeve Brett-Vasko

Laira banged her head against the wall. "It's useless. We designed these ourselves. There's no way out," she told Commander Beryl. Beryl shrugged.

"I designed the wiring. The control panel's around here," Beryl offered as she turned back to the wall. "If only I could find it . . ." she murmured.

Laira glanced at Jaeson. He was a senior officer, but they stuck him in here about three months ago. He'd come to the same realization they had, only sooner. He'd always been faster when it came to morals. When they were younger, Laira had cursed him every day for it, until she'd realized how ironic that was.

"It's true, though, isn't it?" she asked him.

Jaeson agreed, adding, "Doing that's useless. She should just give up," staring at her with fury in his eyes.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "What did I say?"

"That entire thing," Jaeson said, quietly. "What is the rule that our spacecraft and the rest of the entire Galaxy Legions live by?"

"Hope is all we have. Without it, we are nothing," Laira remembered.

"Exactly. However, you're telling Beryl to give up hope, which is against pretty much the entire idea of our Legions."

"What do you have that I could use to break open the panel?" Beryl asked. She had a habit of walking around very quietly, which had been incredibly spooky until Laira had gotten used to it. Jaeson handed Beryl a shard of glass.

"Go back to work," he said.

"Okay," Beryl responded.

Jaeson turned back to Laira. "You'd better regret that," he told her. Then he looked away, murmuring, "The great Commander Styx . . . never thought I'd see the day she gave up hope."

"Got it!" Beryl yelled. She rearranged the wiring, and the door clicked open. They leapt up, only to be greeted by a squadron of their own soldiers. Corporal Sloane, a young man whom Laira

had never liked, was grinning. He leveled his shooter at Laira's neck.

"We carried out your orders," he murmured. Some of the soldiers shifted uneasily. "Not the new ones. The old ones."

"How many innocent are dead?" Beryl asked, looking disgusted.

"Not a single survivor," Sloane replied, gleefully.

Laira felt a cry escape her lips, not from sadness, but from anger. She knocked Sloane back, pinning him against the wall with her glare.

"You imbecile," she hissed. "You sicken me. You killed people who didn't even fight, most of them children, simply because they were on the wrong side? And you're happy about it!?"

"Yes," Sloane replied. She punched him. Someone let a dart loose, and it pierced her collarbone. Laira crumpled.

Instantly, it was chaos. Six of the seven soldiers still loyal to Laira and Beryl turned on the shooter, pummeling her. Sloane sagged against the wall, a dart in his own throat. His two remaining supporters were smart enough to turn and run. Laira registered none of this. She slumped backwards, away from Sloane's body, desperately trying to remove the dart. Jaeson knelt beside her, gently moving her hands. He yanked out the dart himself. Laira screamed once, then fumbled with her jacket, pressing it against the waterfall of blood. Jaeson carefully pulled her up.

"Don't worry," he told her. "We'll get you to the infirmary." Beryl rushed up, studying Laira. "Can you walk?" she asked.

"I-I think so," Laira responded. She took a tiny step forward. It was fine, except for the exploding pain in her shoulder. She wobbled, and Jaeson caught her.

"I'll help you out," Jaeson offered. As they walked forward, a young man came running up.

"Commander Styx? Any orders?" he asked, breathlessly, raking a hand through his curly mop.

Laira managed a tiny smile, responding, "Leo. Make sure those who share Sloane's views are overpowered with as little force as necessary. Don't give up the ship. Once the wounded are tended to, make sure that this ship—the fleet—secedes from the Galaxy

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Legions. The practice of killing the innocent is highly immoral. I promote Beryl to Commander and, as Jaeson's decided to work with the wounded--"

"I've what?" Jaeson interrupted.

"You have. Now shut up. Leo, who's the second Senior Officer?"

"That would be me," Leo replied.

"You're co-commander, then. And no hitting on Beryl."

"Okay, thanks," Leo offered, dashing off and shouting, "Beryl! You're commander! I'm co-commander! Laira says to take control of the ship!"

Beryl's face went pale.

"Laira," Jaeson asked quietly, "How'd you stand up to Sloane? I thought you'd given up hope."

Laira grinned. "I found it again."