

Galaxycats
Episode 4 "Love Thy Neighbour"

We see scenes from Episode 3.

VANILLA (V.O.)

Through the combined efforts of Galaxycats and the secret agency known as Strike Force, the F'lar were ousted from their stronghold in Markarre, severely upsetting the balance of power on Panthera. With no major outposts remaining, the F'lar have been forced to withdraw from Panthera due to constant harassment from Galaxycat forces.

Scene switches to Rienne control room, with Sheba, Vanilla, Malteazer, Sandy, Aquilegia and Ferrero all carrying out normal everyday procedures.

Over the last few monai, we have managed to virtually eradicate the F'lar from our planet, but the fact that they have yet to launch a major counterattack is less likely to be a sign that they have given up than it is an omen of worse things to come...

Title and credits appear.

1. Sheba's Office, Rienne

Sheba is sitting at her desk. Vanilla and Malteazer sit at the other side.

VANILLA

So, Captain, what was this whole urgent issue you had to speak to us about?

SHEBA

As we're all aware, the F'lar occupation of Panthera is basically over- but that doesn't mean we can call an end to the war. The admiralty has been loath to push on, but with no sign of F'lar retaliation, they want to force the line further back into their territory.

VANILLA

Fair enough, but I leave that sort of strategic planning to the brass- I don't see why we need to discuss it here.

SHEBA

Probably because the brass have done all the planning they can- now they want to start taking action. Their next target is the F'lar-controlled mines on our neighbouring planet of Prila.

MALTEAZER

I assume that this is leading up to some kind of mission proposal?

SHEBA

Yes. Galaxycats was quite impressed by your actions in freeing Markarre and Rienne- they want the two of you to become part of a reconnaissance team. Your goal will be to infiltrate the mines and gather as much information as possible in preparation for a strike.

VANILLA

Why not just launch the strike and be done with it?

SHEBA

No one knows how extensive the mines are. There could be anything hiding down there.

MALTEAZER

From what I picked up whilst in the F'lar, the mining colony is mostly made up of Haynars. Not all Haynars are happy with their enforced subordinate role in the F'lar hierarchy- they may be willing to help us.

SHEBA

Don't take any unnecessary risks- your job is to get intel and get out, not act as heroes.

VANILLA

Wait a grad- I haven't even agreed to go yet. Why us? And who else is coming along for this fun little visit to the system's favourite vacation spot?

SHEBA

Like I said, your actions have caught the attention of Galaxycats command; they're quite impressed with the service records of the pilot who freed Markarre and the ex-double agent whose knowledge of the F'lar has helped us many times already. As for the third member of the team; her name is Lieutenant Novek. She's a former security officer turned communications engineer.

VANILLA

I don't know about this Novek, but if there's anything I can do to give the F'lar a kick up the backside, I'll do it.

SHEBA

Like you really had a choice. How about you, Malteazer?

MALTEAZER

Count me in.

SHEBA

Very well- a Startiger will be along to pick you up in two days. That's all, Vanilla. Malteazer, could you stay a few more grads?

Vanilla leaves. Malteazer stays behind.

MALTEAZER

What is it, Captain?

SHEBA

Malteazer, Galaxycats have been thoroughly considering your situation over the last monai, and they're ready to make an official decision. Based on my recommendation, they want to make you a resident tactical advisor on the F'lar. You'd have the equivalent rank of commander, and be assigned to whatever section needed you the most. What do you think?

MALTEAZER

I expect there's all kinds of difficulties ahead if I refuse.

SHEBA

I don't want to push you into this, but it would be a great help if you took on this role- and it might help the brass to forget about the few irregularities in your record that even I can't smooth over.

MALTEAZER

I appreciate what you're doing for me, Captain, and I can see I don't really have any choice but to accept the role. Don't get me wrong, I want to put an end to this as much as you do, but once this is all over, I'm getting out of this life. I only ever wanted to be a scientist, not a spy, a tactical advisor or whatever they're calling it now.

SHEBA

I can't blame you for that.

2. Malteazer's Quarters, Rienne

Malteazer is packing away some stuff into a rucksack. Vanilla enters.

MALTEAZER

Aren't you supposed to sound the doorchime *before* you come in?

VANILLA

First officer's privilege.

MALTEAZER

Didn't you hear? I've just been given the honorary rank of commander and independent authority on tactical matters. I'm sure I can find something in the rule book that overrides your position.

VANILLA

I'm not sure that I understood a word of that, but never mind. I guess you're with Galaxycats for a while now, then?

MALTEAZER

Yes. I only want to get out this life, but I don't think that can happen until the war's over.

VANILLA

We'll both do whatever's necessary to make that happen. Sheba tells me that Galaxycats will probably have more missions like this lined up for us, now that they think we're actually good at this kind of thing.

MALTEAZER

Then we'll continue to be good at it. A life of fighting isn't what I want, but then neither is a life under the F'lar. They made me what I am, and by the gods they'll pay for that.

VANILLA

I don't know what the F'lar did to you, or what secrets you hold inside, but I have my own reasons for fighting. I swear I'll always be there right beside you, to protect the freedoms the F'lar have threatened for so long.

Malteazer nods.

3. Fringes

A Startiger skims along. Camera follows it, then cuts to;

4. Departures Area, Carria Spaceport

In one corner there are four rows of chairs, some occupied. There are small shops down one wall, and doors leading in and out. There is also a line of information desks along another wall. Pantherans, Lan-Kanians and Velassians enter and exit. Some look at the shops, others queue at information desks. There are large signs suspended from the ceiling.

Vanilla and Malteazer enter and walk over to an information desk, where a young female Lan-Kanian assistant waits. Camera zooms in. Malteazer hands the assistant hers and Vanilla's ID cards. The assistant places them in a computer slot.

ASSISTANT

Destination?

MALTEAZER

We're here on behalf of Galaxycats to pick up a private shuttle.

ASSISTANT

Galaxycats, Galaxycats, Galaxycats. You guys really think you own the planet, don't you?

VANILLA

No, but we did save it- and your sorry hide. How much action have you seen?

ASSISTANT

Your shuttle is waiting at docking bay seven.

VANILLA

Thanks for nothing.

The assistant hands back the ID cards. Malteazer puts them away. Camera follows Vanilla and Malteazer as they walk down the corridor and then cuts to;

5. Space- Mek-Lon Satellite

We can see the geostationary satellite and part of the planet. Cut to;

6. Int. Mek-Lon Satellite

A large, single room with one door (leading to a corridor) contains a bed, bedside drawers, frosted glass door of sonic shower cubicle, kitchen area, recreation area (possibly with treadmill, card table, rowing machine) and a separated raised chair

surrounded by computer consoles on a panel and on the wall in front of it (like a compressed control room).

A woman sits at this chair, in Galaxycats uniform. She is a Lan-Kanian, with dark brown hair tied back in a severe ponytail- Lieutenant Commander Novek.

A console bleeps. Novek punches a button and a male Pantheran, Corian, appears on the viewscreen in front of her.

CORIAN

Hey 'Vek, off on a new mission?

NOVEK

The name's Novek- get that through your thick brain.

CORIAN

Cool it, 'Vek. I'm just giving you a heads-up on an incoming shuttle- your replacement and companions for this mission you're heading off on.

NOVEK

Oh, great. One inexperienced s't'rac and two planetside c'rens.

CORIAN

Watch your language, 'Vek.

NOVEK

I was. Well, until next time, Corian.

CORIAN

Hope you come back in one piece. Corian out.

The screen goes blank.

COMPUTER

Shuttle Panthera-zero-three-four-one is requesting permission to dock.

NOVEK

Granted. Begin docking procedures.

She leaves.

7. Entrance Room, Mek-Lon Satellite

Large grey room just inside of the airlock. Novek waits by the airlock door. The door flashes;

"Equalised"

Vanilla, Malteazer and Lieutenant Vaughan enter.

NOVEK

Welcome to Mek-Lon. Don't bother introducing yourselves, I've seen your names on enough reports to know who you are.

VAUGHAN

Oh, er, well, I've been assigned as your replacement.

NOVEK

Have you been on space duty before?

VAUGHAN

If you're asking if I know where everything is, then the answer's yes.

NOVEK

Right. Well then, I'm ready to leave.

VANILLA

Don't you need to pack anything?

NOVEK

I can get anything I need from the shuttle's vendor.

Malteazer raises an eyebrow.

MALTEAZER

Okay then. See you, Vaughan.

VAUGHAN

Good luck.

VANILLA

We're going to need it.

Novek, Vanilla and Malteazer re-enter the airlock.

8. Space- Mek-Lon Satellite

The shuttle detaches from the satellite, which free-falls away from it. In a burst of energy, the shuttle heads offscreen.

9. Prila

We see the purple and dark-green planet with grey clouds swirling over the surface.

10. General Imanov's Office, Prilan Mines

The desk is large and made from mahogany. The floor is carpeted with rich purple, thick pile carpet. The walls are creamy white. The two doors are also mahogany, and open inwards rather than sliding back.

General Imanov, an ageing Fessan with dark skin and grey/black streaked hair, sits at the desk, contemplating a single datapad. A Haynar woman (Klissza) enters.

IMANOV

Report, Klissza- how goes the deep mining?

KLISSZA

Sir, the quotas you've imposed on us are endangering my people. Mining is risky enough under the best of circumstances, but keeping to your schedule means that we have to cut corners.

Imanov leaps up.

IMANOV

So what? This planet is rich in the resources we need.

KLISSZA

And what about the lives of the Haynars who have to work down there?

IMANOV

What of them? There'll always be more Haynars- when will you people learn that you are entirely expendable? In fact, maybe I ought to execute you right now as an example to those lazy ingrates you call workers!

Imanov's eyes slit, and his hand drops down to the gun at his side. As he goes to draw it, Klissza jumps for him, and wrestles the weapon out of his grip. She ends up shooting him.

11. Prilan Landscape

Scouring dark-green and purple sand sweeps across a landscape carved from dark-green and purple marble-like stone. The shuttle lands, and comes to rest on a flat purple plateau.

12. Int. Shuttle

Vanilla is in the pilot's seat, Malteazer sits next to her. Novek sits in a back seat.

NOVEK

Nice landing, Commander.

Vanilla does not answer.

MALTEAZER

According to the mission details, one of the pre-war outposts should still be here. Hopefully we'll be able to pick up some equipment and find a way into the F'lar controlled mines.

VANILLA

So where exactly is it? I don't see anything.

MALTEAZER

Of course you wouldn't- it's located underground. I'm scanning for the entrance now.

She presses a few controls.

NOVEK

Hurry up about it- I don't fancy getting stuck in a sandstorm.

VANILLA

Maybe if you shut your mouth, we'd be able to concentrate on our work a little better.

NOVEK

Oh, pardon me for butting in your little partnership. There's no need to feel shy around me, you know- if you two want to get intimate-

VANILLA

What in hell are you talking about, Novek? Did too much time in space fry your brains or something?

NOVEK

I suppose it must have done, I mean, no one would want to spend time with that F'lar through choice, not even an idiot like you!

VANILLA

She's not a F'lar!

Vanilla is clearly angry.

MALTEAZER

Leave it, Vanilla.

Pause.

I've found the storeroom. A kenometr'in away, bearing 345, ten metr'ins below the surface. We'll have to leave the shuttle here and walk the rest of the way; it's not safe to go in any closer.

Vanilla and Malteazer get up, and dress in their environmental suits. Novek does the same, silent and sullen.

13. Prilan Landscape

Vanilla, Malteazer and Novek walk through the minor sandstorm.

NOVEK

Are you sure this is the right way? I'm sure we should have walked past it already.

VANILLA

Being cooped up in that satellite's altered your sense of perception, Novek. We're not even halfway there yet.

14. Underground Cavern, Prila

Malteazer, Vanilla and Novek have climbed down a ladder into a bare rocky, cavern. They clear away debris from a rockslide to reveal a door sealed by an electronic combination lock. Malteazer uses a hand device to decode the combination and release the lock. The doors slide back, revealing a small armoury situated above a skimmer bay.

NOVEK

Guess you do have your uses after all. Mind you, this equipment would be of more use to a museum than it will be to us.

MALTEAZER

You're welcome to proceed on foot, if you wish.

VANILLA

Forget that, I want to give these skimmers a spin- I've only ever flown a Puma in simulations before.

MALTEAZER

Fortunately there are propulsion runners built into the tunnel walls- they should make it a lot easier to fly these things without crashing.

The trio board skimmers and launch.

15. Tunnel, Prilan mines

The three skimmers fly through the tunnel, which curves slowly downwards. When they reach an area where the propulsion runners are replaced by beam generators, they trigger a mesh of beams that immobilises all three skimmers. A group of

Haynars carrying ion guns, led by Klissza, arrive. Klissza is holding a control device; she inputs a command and the red energy beams fade.

16. Int. Vanilla's Skimmer

Vanilla tries to restart her skimmer, but all systems are down.

KLISSZA

Your energy systems are drained; please leave your skimmers.

17. Tunnel, Prilan mines

Vanilla opens the hatch and gets out of her skimmer, ion gun in hand. Despite being outnumbered, she seems ready to fight.

KLISSZA

Drop your weapon, Galaxycat!

Vanilla has no choice but to obey.

KLISSZA

Now tell your friends to leave their skimmers.

Vanilla motions to Malteazer and Novek. As their skimmer hatches open, Vanilla tries to distract the Haynars with a feint to one side. She buys Malteazer enough time to fire off a couple of shots, but all three Galaxycats are swiftly overcome.

18. Storeroom, Prilan mines

A small utility room filled with broken machinery. Vanilla, Malteazer and Novek are locked inside.

VANILLA

Well, that went well. Mind you, it was a long shot at best, especially with Novek on our side.

NOVEK

And how in hell was I supposed to figure out that you were going to attempt some half-witted kamikaze excuse for an...

She trails off, and thumps on the door in anger.

Let us out! Damn you!

MALTEAZER

Do you really think banging on the door will accomplish anything?

NOVEK

It's better than anything you've come up with so far.

She stands back from the door, which swings open to reveal Klissza, flanked by a pair of Haynar guards.

KLISSZA

Before we start exchanging pleasantries, I would like to discourage you from any futile escape attempts. Any one of my people is skilled enough to take you all down.

VANILLA

Then why do you need those guards?

Klissza ignores the question.

KLISSZA

Come with me.

As Klissza turns away, the other Haynars shepherd Vanilla, Malteazer and Novek along after her.

19. Klissza's (prev. Imanov's) Office

Klissza sits in Imanov's place. Vanilla, Malteazer and Novek are seated opposite, under the watchful eyes of the guards.

VANILLA

Look, obviously we've failed miserably in our mission, so why don't you just get straight to the point and tell us what you're planning to do with us?

KLISSZA

Galaxycats, I am sorry we have had to treat you so roughly this far, but consider it a by-product of the times we live in. What we want from you is your help.

VANILLA

What could you F'lar possibly need from us?

MALTEAZER

Let's hear them out, Vanilla. It's uncommon for a Haynar to wield such authority, and that tells me that the situation around here is not as clear cut as it may seem.

KLISSZA

You are correct, Galaxycat- we have a recently had, shall we say, a change of management. And those of us who are now in charge have no love for the F'lar- so much so, in fact, that we wish to break all ties with them and join the Sector Alliance.

NOVEK

Yeah right, like we're going to swallow such a ridiculous story.

MALTEAZER

She's telling the truth.

NOVEK

And how would you know?

VANILLA

Oh, come on, Novek, think about it for a moment. Why would she bother telling us this if it wasn't true? They could have just killed us straightaway.

NOVEK

Well, it's not like they couldn't have sent a transmission to the Alliance if they really were serious about this.

KLISSZA

We are in something of a precarious position. Our former commander was only removed recently, and even the F'lar do not yet know of our proposed defection. There are also other, internal problems that have made it impossible for us to act.

VANILLA

What sort of internal problems?

KLISSZA

Many of the Haynars here have little love for the F'lar, but there are differing factions even among our own kind. My group is nominally in charge here, but those who remain loyal to the F'lar have fled to the lower mines and orbital defence platform. My people may be skilled warriors, but the loyalists have equal training and superior resources. Our only hope is to recruit some fresh blood.

NOVEK

So what you're saying is that you want us to risk our lives for you.

MALTEAZER

From a tactical standpoint, it may well be worth taking this opportunity to strike at the F'lar and gain Prila as an ally- especially as I suspect our Haynars friends here have no intention of letting us go unless we agree to comply with their wishes.

Klissza looks abashed.

KLISSZA

I am sorry.

VANILLA

I'm prepared to work with anyone who'll hold a gun to the F'lar. Tell us what the plan is, and I'll pitch in.

KLISSZA

We must strike both the deep mines and orbital platform simultaneously if we are to flush them out completely. If possible, we'd like to get the loyalists to surrender, but if eliminating them is the only option, don't hesitate.

VANILLA

We'll need the Pumas to penetrate the deep mines; I'd like to head up that operation. Do you have many qualified pilots?

KLISSZA

We're miners- we can operate machinery in the tunnels, but we don't have any combat experience.

VANILLA

You'd just get in the way, then. Leave it to us.

NOVEK

I'd feel more comfortable being a part of the orbital station team. I function better in space.

KLISSZA

Very well- one of my people will accompany the Lan-Kanian, and I shall go with the deep mine team. Given the circumstances, I don't think it would be advantageous to send anyone else out- they'll be more useful maintaining the defences here.

VANILLA

Yeah, so why don't you help them with that? I don't need you flying into my sights down there.

KLISSZA

I assume you know your way around these mines as well as I do, then?
Vanilla isn't happy, but says nothing.

Come, you should rest a little before we set off. Let me show you the other side of Haynar hospitality.

Klissza gets up and leaves; the others follow.

20.Café, Prila

Haynars dressed in off-duty clothes relax at table. At one end of the room there is a sliding door, at the other there is a raised white platform. Scantily clad Haynar men and women dance an exotic dance to alien rock/jazz type music. They whip each other with electro-whips.

Vanilla, Malteazer, Novek and Klissza sit around one table.

VANILLA

Why are the dancers whipping each other?

KLISSZA

Our people derive pleasure from controlled amounts of pain.

NOVEK

It's hard to believe your people and mine were once the same race.

KLISSZA

The Haynars and Lan-Kanians have been separated for a millennium. Changes were bound to occur.

VANILLA

Who cares about that? Let's just eat and get on with this.

KLISSZA

I hope you like Fessan cuisine. The vendor here is limited.

MALTEAZER

I'm familiar with Fessan food- Vanilla, Novek, I'll order for you.
Malteazer and Klissza get up and head over to the vendor.

MALTEAZER

I must admit I'm curious as to what Haynars eat- I don't believe I've ever seen your people sit down to a meal.

KLISSZA

That's because we don't consume food in the way you do.

MALTEAZER

I thought that was just a rumour.

KLISSZA

Necessity has compelled us to turn to various chemical mixtures. Our scientists have even theorised that by adulthood we are no longer capable of ingesting solid food.

Malteazer orders food.

MALTEAZER

I can't believe I didn't know that. I suppose I never paid much attention to Haynars when I was in the F'lar.

KLISSZA

You were in the F'lar? I thought you were a Galaxycat.

MALTEAZER

It's a long story; suffice to say my allegiance is firmly with the Alliance.
Three plates of food and glasses of water, as well as appropriate cutlery appear in the vendor and slide out on a ledge. Malteazer picks them up, and places them on a tray from a trolley nearby. After Malteazer steps away, Klissza orders a chemical cocktail for herself. They return to the table, pass out the food, and commence eating.

VANILLA

I have no idea what I'm eating, but it tastes pretty good.

MALTEAZER

You realise that this will be our last meal before we enter the mines?

VANILLA

Then let's enjoy it; I doubt there's much to eat down there.

They ad-lib a conversation, which fades into the background as the camera swings to another table. A Haynar sits alone, surreptitiously watching Klissza and the others.

21. Haynar's Quarters, Prilan mines

Dark, sparsely furnished. The Haynar from the café is talking to someone via a personal communicator.

HAYNAR

Unit 4 to Tieran. We have a problem.

TIERAN (V.O.)

Expand on that, Unit 4.

HAYNAR

It seems that Klissza is now working with Galaxycats- three of their officers are here now.

TIERAN (V.O.)

Just the three? Is that really so worrisome?

HAYNAR

I believe two of them may be worthy of note- their names are Malteazer and Vanilla.

TIERAN (V.O.)

Vanilla...it can't be her...and yet, I thought I sensed it...

HAYNAR

Sir?

TIERAN (V.O.)

Nothing. These Galaxycats may prove mildly problematic, but we should be able to deal with them. Proceed as planned.

HAYNAR
Acknowledged.

22. Elevator, Prilan mines

A giant lift cage- the three skimmers are loaded on there and about to descend to the lower levels. Novek watches from the entrance.

NOVEK
Good luck.

A Haynar male, Merq, approaches from behind Novek and puts a hand on her shoulder. Novek jumps.

MERQ
Let's get going.

23. Prilan Landscape

Dressed in environmental suits with teleport belts, Novek and Merq walk through a mini-sandstorm to the Galaxycats space shuttle.

24. Int. Shuttle

Merq and Novek sit together in the front. Novek is in the pilot's seat. Both wear teleportation devices.

MERQ
I'm afraid I can't read Alliance Standard very well.

NOVEK
It's only my second language. Hang on.
She presses a button and the characters shift.

MERQ
Haynar!
NOVEK
Actually, it's Lan-Kanian.
MERQ
I guess that'll have to do.

NOVEK
Why do you Haynars always have to act so superior to Lan-Kanians? Your ancestors were the same as mine.

MERQ
Force of habit, I suppose. I apologise, though, I certainly didn't mean to cause offence.

Novek seems a little surprised at the apology.

25. Prilan Landscape

The shuttle takes off.

26. Tunnel, Deep mines

The mines are hewn from a red rock layer found below the marble surface. Dark obsidian and other crystalline substances stick out from the rock at jagged angles. Glowstrips and propulsion runners are set into the wall. Vanilla skims past, followed by Malteazer and Klissza.

The corridor widens out into a large room. It contains a convoy of 4 light patrol droids and 3 medium transport droids. They fire on the skimmers.

27. Int. Vanilla's skimmer

KLISSZA (V.O.)
Looks like they knew we were coming.

VANILLA
One of your people isn't as faithful as they say.

MALTEAZER (V.O.)
We can't worry about that now- we have to finish what we've started.
28. Tunnel, Deep mines

Klissza, Malteazer and Vanilla engage the droids and destroy them with little difficulty. As they fly deeper into the mines, the three split up. We follow Vanilla's skimmer, which runs into another droid squadron in an open cave. This time, she does not fare so well, and is forced to eject as her skimmer explodes.

29.Int. Shuttle

Merq leans over to a tense Novek.

MERQ

Relax. It's a full twenty grads until we dock with the orbital station.

NOVEK

I see no reason to relax.

MERQ

I thought the Lan-Kanians were renowned for being the most relaxed race in galaxy.

NOVEK

I should have known a Haynar would pick up on a stereotype like that. I know you think of us as the soft, weak cousins you'd rather forget, but not all of us as hedonistic as you make out.

MERQ

I've always thought it can be equally dangerous to go to the other extreme.

NOVEK

What's that supposed to mean?

MERQ

It means you don't have to live your life with a rod up your butt to prove you're not a typical Lan-Kanian.

NOVEK

How dare you say such things when you don't even know me?

MERQ

Your attitude tells me everything I need to know.

NOVEK

That's enough!

30.Int. Malteazer's Skimmer

MALTEAZER

Klissza, are you getting any response from Vanilla? She hasn't checked in for a while now.

KLISSZA (V.O.)

We don't have time to fly around here looking for her. The forces here are more numerous than I had anticipated. We must return to the upper levels to refuel our skimmers.

MALTEAZER

I disagree.

KLISSZA (V.O.)

If we don't go back up now, we will end up stranded out here.

Malteazer sighs.

MALTEAZER

Very well.

31.Cavern, Deep mines

Vanilla lies behind a tall rock, barely conscious. She pulls herself into a seated position.

32.Orbital Station, Docking port

The dark grey airlock door slides back, revealing Novek and Merq. Unfortunately, a party of four Haynars is waiting to 'greet' them.

NOVEK

How in hell...

HAYNAR #1

Welcome to your final resting place.

MERQ

I'll hold them off, Novek! 'Port into the interior!

Novek activates her teleport and dematerialises. Merq begins firing his ion gun- he takes down one Haynar before being shot by the lead Haynar, Ressayar.

RESSZAR

Find the woman!

Haynar #2 exits.

You! Jettison all the shuttles!

HAYNAR #3

All of them?

RESSZAR

You heard me. It's been a while since we've had a good hunt, and I don't want it to end prematurely.

33. Cavern, Deep Mines

Vanilla gets up, only to find herself surrounded by armed Haynars.

HAYNAR

Turn around slowly, Galaxycat.

VANILLA

Oh great

HAYNAR

Silence!

The Haynar delivers an electric shock to Vanilla. As she cries out in pain, the squadron begins escorting her away.

34. Klissza's Office, Prilan mines

Malteazer and Klissza sit around a table.

MALTEAZER

Klissza, our skimmers are refuelled and ready to go. We need to get back down there and find Vanilla.

KLISSZA

Vanilla is lost to us now.

MALTEAZER

I'm not ready to give up on my best friend!

KLISSZA

Our only job is to retake the mines- we must not allow concern for a single warrior to cloud our goal. If you will not help me, then you are worse than useless.

MALTEAZER

How dare you lecture me- Haynar dog!

KLISSZA

And I thought that the Pantherans were an honourable people. You are no better than a Fessan! I should kill you where you stand.

They glare at each other. A young male Haynar, Messzal, enters.

MESSZAL

Klissza, the loyalists have initiated a counterattack! They've destroyed our mid-level security checkpoints.

MALTEAZER

I see now that it was a mistake to even start this battle- we've stirred up a conflict we can't possibly hope to win. We should evacuate as many people as we can and return with reinforcements.

KLISSZA

I won't take such a dishonourable course! This is our home, and we will fight for it until our dying breaths.

MALTEAZER

That's what I hate about you Haynars. You think all that "death before dishonour" stuff makes you strong, but you know what- it just makes you stupid.

In one fluid motion, Klissza rises and draws her knife, but even as she does, Malteazer does the same.

I think you'll find I'm a lot faster than the average Pantheran.

KLISSZA

That may be so, but I doubt you could do more than equal my speed. If you attack, you'd be killing yourself as well as me.

Malteazer sighs, and sheathes her knife.

MALTEAZER

Very well, then, we'll do things your way- if only because I don't think either of us are ready to throw our lives away just yet.

35. Orbital Station, Interrogation Area

Merq sits, under restraint, in a chair in the middle of a stark grey room. Resszar, is pacing up and down, a datapad in his hand.

RESSZAR

I don't know quite what you hoped to achieve here, but once we apprehend your companion, your short-lived mission will be well and truly over.

MERQ

I've always despised people who feel the need for pointless exposition. If there's nothing you want from me, just kill me and get it over with.

RESSZAR

Looking for a quick death, are you? I'm sorry to disappoint you, but my men could use a little practice- and you'll make a perfect punching bag.

MERQ

Look, we're all on the same side- do you really have to beat me to a pulp just because we're from different factions?

RESSZAR

How dare someone who associates with those filthy Lan-Kanians even think to suggest that they are on the same side as those who remain loyal to the

F'lar!?

MERQ

How can you be loyal to them when all the Fessan do is treat us like second-class citizens?

RESSZAR

And do you really think that our people can ever be free, whichever side we choose? At least with the F'lar we know where we stand, at least we are needed! I won't give that up for an uncertain future under the Alliance.

36. Office, Deep Mines, Prila

The Haynars escort Vanilla into a large office/workroom. A Pantheran is seated there, dressed in the uniform of a F'lar warlord.

TIERAN

Vanilla...so it was you after all.

VANILLA

Who the hell are you? And how do you know my name?

TIERAN

Yes, I suppose you wouldn't expect to see me here. It's me- your uncle Tieran.

Pause.

VANILLA

Tieran- but how? You died fifteen years ago...how can you be sitting here wearing a F'lar uniform?

TIERAN

Because I am a F'lar, Vanilla. I didn't die on the attack on our village- I was the one who carried it out.

37. Klissza's Office, Prila

Klissza sits at her desk, Malteazer is opposite.

MALTEAZER

I know I agreed to do things your way, but going into the mines on foot? This is madness!

KLISSZA

You said yourself that our skimmer attacks were worse than useless. If you reconfigure your teleport belt to handle a three person load, you should be able to make a series of jumps that will take you past the drone guards and into the deep mine control centres. If you are all that you claim, it should be easy enough for you to reset the drones' programming and have them turn on the loyalists.

MALTEAZER

Admittedly it is our best chance for success in this venture, but I can't guarantee the safety of my team.

KLISSZA

Someone like you should have no problem with that- we are only Haynars, after all.

MALTEAZER

Klissza, I'm sorry for what I said before...some habits die hard.

KLISSZA

It is all right, Malteazer, I know you are not like the F'lar. And don't worry about my people- we can take care of ourselves.

38. Orbital Station, Interrogation Area

As before. Two Haynars drag Novek in and tie her up in a chair next to Merq. One of them hands her teleport belt to Resszar.

HAYNAR #2

We found this on the woman.

RESSZAR

Very good.

The nameless Haynars exit. Resszar moves to face Novek.

Considering you are a Galaxycat, you didn't provide much sport for my men. Perhaps your innate Lan-Kanian pleasure skills would be of more use to us,

hmm?

NOVEK

I'd sooner die.

RESSZAR

That can be arranged. But come now, I don't even know your name.

NOVEK

How sad for you.

RESSZAR

You don't know how much I'd enjoy breaking you slowly- stripping away that veneer of yours piece by piece, and then flaying the raw ego within. Unfortunately for us all, Warlord Tieran has ordered that your interrogation be both swift and effective. To that end, you will both be spending some

quality time in one of our less well sealed airlocks. Even if you care little for your own lives, perhaps you will be motivated by a need to save each other.

39.Orbital Station, Airlock

Novek and Merq are thrown roughly into the airlock. The door slides shut behind them. There is the faint hiss of slowly escaping air.

MERQ

I'm not even sure what information Ressayar and his superiors want from us, but it's a Haynar code that we don't set a precedent by giving in to torture.

I hope you understand.

NOVEK

Of course I do- as long as you understand I won't be in a hurry to save your life either.

MERQ

Then I guess this probably isn't the time to mention that I think I might be attracted to you.

NOVEK

Don't be stupid- we've only just met. Besides, I don't think we should be using up the last of our oxygen on such cheesy romantic come-ons.

MERQ

Well, it's not like we're going to have much time later. I just thought I'd get it off my chest before the air's too thin to talk.

NOVEK

And I'd rather you stopped joking around so I can concentrate on finding a way out of here. I just know Vanilla and Malteazer wouldn't give up, and by the gods I won't let them outdo me.

MERQ

Saving our lives would be a nice bonus too, I have to say.

40.Tieran's Office, Deep Mines, Prila

As before.

VANILLA

Tieran, what are you saying? It can't have been you...I can't believe that you cared about us so little that you would have destroyed our home. Are you saying killed them all, Tieran- that you killed Paul, and my parents?

TIERAN

That's right.

VANILLA

Then you know what was worst of all- that you couldn't even finish the job properly! Do you even know how many times I wished I'd died with all the others, instead of being the only one left alive?

TIERAN

Vanilla, I...I'm so sorry...

VANILLA

Just tell me...tell me why you did it. Tell me why you even joined the F'lar in the first place!

TIERAN

Vanilla, I hated my life back then. I was never able to tell you this before, but I'm a telepath –a strong one- and by all the rules of Pantheran society, I should have either been ostracised or locked away. For all those years, I had to hide who I was, keeping my distance from everyone so that they wouldn't suspect, learning to shield myself from the overflowing thoughts all around me.

Then I took that job at the Pantheran embassy on K'trakan. None of the others liked it there, but for me, being among Fessan was such a relief-

their alien minds are that much harder to read. As for the F'lar, back then it was just a political group- idealists who shared my beliefs. And by the time they became a military faction, it was too late for me to back out. I was in too deep, Vanilla, I had no choice but to finish what I'd started. Even my return to Panthera seventeen years ago- that wasn't because the F'lar had driven all the Pantherans off K'trakan. It was because we were already planning to attack Panthera.

VANILLA

I don't believe you. Even if you had no choice then, what about now? You're sitting in front of me dressed as a warlord and yet you say you don't have the power to walk away!?

TIERAN

Vanilla, I don't expect you to forgive me for what I've done, and maybe I shouldn't even expect you to understand. With or without me, the F'lar will keep on going- and by fighting back, you're only prolonging a war you can't possibly win. How many more people have died because of that?

VANILLA

I fight to ensure the freedom of my people. I won't give up until that goal is accomplished.

TIERAN

You're just like the Vanilla I remember- no idea of higher level strategy. I suppose I never really expected you to understand- just don't interfere.

41. Deep Mines, Prila

Malteazer and two Haynars (Tarq and Messzal) teleport into a tunnel where a pair of Haynar guards are waiting. Malteazer is about to teleport them out again, but Tarq and Messzal fly forward and attack them. The guards are soon disabled.

MALTEAZER

What did you do that for? We could have 'ported straight back out before they noticed us.

MESSZAL

I'm sick of all this running away! I saw two enemies and disabled them, like any Haynar should.

MALTEAZER

And for all you know you've just triggered an early warning system.

MESSZAL

Let them come- I'll take them all down.

MALTEAZER

The point of this mission was that we wouldn't have to do that...oh look, right on schedule.

Three more guards run towards them. The Haynars try to attack, but the Haynars stop them with shock prods.

HAYNAR

Cease resistance immediately and your lives will be spared.

MESSZAL

Malteazer, get out of here! Finish your mission!

42. Orbital Station, Airlock

Novek is working on the airlock's control panel.

MERQ

Feels like the air's getting pretty thin in here. Guess we aren't going to miraculously escape from this after all.

NOVEK

I refuse to believe that I'm going to die in a place like this. I know I can hack this panel, just give it a little more time.

MERQ

What good is opening the hatch into space going to do, other than letting us die a little faster?

NOVEK

You Haynars clearly have no imagination, but in this case, that's a good thing. Listen, when Resszar comes back, just follow my lead, and make sure you're holding onto something secure.

43. Deep Mines, Prila

As before.

MALTEAZER

Well, in that case...Tarq, Messzal, I'm sorry.

Malteazer teleports away.

44. Control Room, Deep Mines

Malteazer teleports in. Alarm lights begin flashing, but she makes her way to a control panel and starts hacking.

45. Tieran's Office, Deep Mines, Prila

Tieran is trying to counter Malteazer's hacking.

VANILLA

What's going on in the mines? Is Malteazer okay?

TIERAN

The one you call Malteazer is currently hacking into my control systems.

This could be problematic.

Vanilla goes to knock Tieran away from the computer console, but he anticipates her movements and stops her.

A word of advice...don't try to jump a telepath.

Alarms start flashing as main power to the office is cut.

VANILLA

All I needed to do...was buy some time.

Tieran shakes his head.

TIERAN

This base is unimportant. Come on.

Tieran drags Vanilla away.

46. Orbital Station, Airlock

Resszar and two of his underlings appear at the window. Novek is still by the panel; both she and Merq are holding onto the airlock's side railing.

RESSZAR

Feeling a bit light headed, are we? Perhaps you'd like to come out before you start hallucinating.

NOVEK

Please...I'll tell you anything- just let me out.

Resszar smiles and opens the airlock.

RESSZAR

I knew a Lan-Kanian would be easily broken.

NOVEK

Oh, did you?

Novek hits a button on the outer panel. Atmosphere starts venting, and the two underlings are blown out into space. Resszar manages to save himself by grabbing onto Novek, but Merq grabs him. The two scuffle, and are dislodged. Novek manages to grab Merq, but Resszar is less fortunate, and ends up in space. Novek hurriedly closes the outer hatch and the two drag themselves out of the airlock.

47. Orbital Station, Interior

Merq and Novek are slumped against the corridor, panting.

MERQ

Guess we make a pretty good team, huh?

NOVEK

There's no time for sitting around. We still have a mission to complete.

MERQ

What's the point? All the shuttles are gone, and so is your teleport. We can't possibly get back to the surface.

NOVEK

Of course we can- we'll just land this station.

MERQ

Are you crazy? This thing was constructed in orbit; I doubt it could even stand re-entry.

NOVEK

We'll be fine. Now, come on- we'd better find some weapons.

MERQ

The armoury shouldn't be far from here. Let's ho.

Merq gets up and helps Novek to her feet.

48. Control Room, Deep Mines

Malteazer is still at the main console.

MALTEAZER

If I've done this right, the mines should be locked down- no one's going to be going anywhere in a hurry. Now to find Vanilla...

Malteazer switches to internal scanners.

What's this...there's some kind of shuttle heading to the surface from the deep mines? And there's two Pantheran life signs aboard- it must be Vanilla...and someone else...

Malteazer leaves the control room to head back to the upper mines.

49. Control Room, Orbital Station

Two of Ressler's Haynars are in command. Novek and Merq burst in and shoot them down before they can react.

MERQ

That was satisfying. I suppose this isn't a good time to ask you if you'd like to have dinner with me?

Novek moves over the control console.

NOVEK

Just sit down and be quiet. This isn't going to be a smooth ride.

MERQ

Why am I not surprised?

50. Upper Atmosphere, Prila

The orbital station begins re-entering the atmosphere. It's not a smooth ride.

51. Control Room, Orbital Station

As before. Novek and Merq are clearly not enjoying the re-entry.

MERQ

We are going to survive this, right?

Novek shrugs.

NOVEK

If we do, I may just accept that invitation to dinner.

52. Prilan Landscape

The orbital station crashes into the ground.

53. Control Room, Orbital Station

As before.

MERQ

Not the best of landings, I have to say...but you'd better make good on your promise.

Novek half smiles.

54. Klissza's Office, Prila

Klissza is at her desk. Malteazer enters.

KLISSZA

Malteazer- You're alive!

MALTEAZER

Did Tarq and Messzal make it back?

KLISSZA

They managed to subdue their captors, but since you locked down the mines, they're stuck.

MALTEAZER

I'm sorry, but it was the only way to restrain the F'lar loyalists.

KLISSZA

Don't worry about it- we'll be dealing with those loyalists. And maybe once they see sense, they'll want to join us.

MALTEAZER

Well, good luck with that, but the way I see it, this is just the start of something bigger. Just before I came back to the surface, a shuttle was heading for the surface; according to the computer, it was registered under the name of Warlord Tieran- and I think he has Vanilla with him.

KLISSZA

The Pantheran warlord? What would he have been doing here?

MALTEAZER

I don't know- but if his reputation is anything to go by, then we may have stirred up something serious.

KLISSZA

What will you do?

Malteazer does not answer straightaway. As she is thinking, Novek and Merq enter.

Novek! Merq! How did the mission go?

MERQ

Well, the orbital station is secure, Klissza. The only thing is, it isn't exactly in orbit anymore.

KLISSZA

That sounds like a story and a half, but it will have to wait until later. Malteazer, Novek, you've done more for us than we could have hoped. I am only sorry that you lost your friend in the process.

NOVEK

Wait a grad...are you saying that smart-mouthed Commander Vanilla got herself killed?

MALTEAZER

No, she's still alive- but in the custody of a F'lar warlord.

MERQ

And you think we've got a story to tell.

MALTEAZER

I'm sorry, Klissza, but we really can't afford to spend any more time here. I have to find out where Vanilla's been taken- and get her back.

KLISSZA

You must be crazy if you think you have a hope of going up against Warlord Tieran. They say that he's the most powerful of the warlords.

MALTEAZER

I will do what I must to save my friend. Novek, are you ready to go?

NOVEK

I'm not coming with you.

MALTEAZER

You mean you want to stay here?

NOVEK

Malteazer, we may have helped these people, but it doesn't end here. I may not get called a hero or have my name go down in history, but I have to stay here and help finish what we've started. I won't let Galaxycats and the Alliance forget about Prila.

MALTEAZER

Understood- I'm sure I can get Sheba to pull a few strings back home and fix you up with an official posting here.

NOVEK

Thank you, Malteazer. And good luck in your mission, too. Vanilla may have got on my nerves, but no one deserves to end up in the hands of the F'lar.

There is a general round of farewells, and then Malteazer leaves.

55. Prilan Landscape

Malteazer heads back to the shuttle, and climbs inside. Shortly after, it takes off.

56. Int. Shuttle

Malteazer is piloting the shuttle back to Panthera and talking to Sheba over the communications system.

SHEBA

You mean a F'lar warlord was there the whole time? Do you have any idea where he and Vanilla went?

MALTEAZER

I wasn't able to track his course.

SHEBA

Then there's no choice. Return to Panthera and we'll decide our next move from there.

There is a crackle of static.

MALTEAZER

Wait a grad, I'm receiving another communication from an unknown source.

VANILLA (V.O.)

To anyone who can hear me, this is Commander Vanilla of Galaxycats. I'm trapped on a secret F'lar base on the moon of Kralor. The F'lar are planning to attack...

There is the sound of a struggle and then the message abruptly terminates.

TO BE CONTINUED...