

Chapter 21

Arto Umbly was delighted to help out the tekkan Hive while Loni Arrak visited her family and received an award for finding the lost human tribe from Earth 47. Arto had rarely meet non-Zu humans, no less a completely alien culture. He had been briefed about tekkans by Chief Engineer Lina Aderal of Hive 1008 who joined him on this mission. He was a bit shocked when he met a tekkan face to face though.

Arto and Lina jumped directly into the office of Chief Engineer Nit Valasan, at the base of The Hive. Nit greeted them warmly and offered them some food and drink. One by one, the engineers who worked behind the scenes of The Hive came in and were introduced to the two who would take Loni's place for a few days. After shaking more than a hundred insect-like hands and learning their names and faces, he began to view them more as coworkers than tall translucent spiders. The control panels were refreshingly similar to those on human Hives so his confidence in his ability to handle this assignment rose.

After the meet and greet session and a leisurely lunch, the three Chief Engineers took a tour of the power systems of The Hive. The huge towers of computer banks and HVAC equipment were modeled after human Hives. The control panels were similar to others he had seen, but were modified to allow the tekkans to use more than two arms and hands. As with all engineers working in Hives, Arto had been taught about the building of the Tak-Makla Hive many generations ago. The friendship between the cultures continued to the current day. The tekkan Hive was a crucial tool to help mankind stretch back into this galaxy. It formed an anchor point for Universal Power in the galaxy so other Hives could pinpoint jumping locations. While planets were being settled, the Hive was an important reference marker between this galaxy and the home galaxy. The value of The Hive had declined in recent

years since other human Hives were now online, but the bonds of friendship and trade remained as strong as ever.

After the tour, Nit took the human engineers to the Earth 47 Ambassador's residence on the surface. That site had become a comfortable and convenient gathering spot for non-tekkans who visited the planet. One wing of the mansion was set aside for Ambassador Brewster and her close associates. The rest of the residence was open for others. Before he left for his home, Nit told them he would return at 0700 tomorrow to put them to work in The Hive. Kally Karsen welcomed them to the embassy and showed them their rooms. He invited them to share dinner with the other guests in the residence in one hour.

An hour later, Kally led Arto and Lina into the library of the residence. Already in the room were three humans and one tekkan having cocktails and conversing happily. Kally introduced the two engineers to Charlie and Aria Watson, Mencius the Kalidean and High Consul Zee Gongaleg.

"My dear friends," Zee said, "it is wonderful that you have come to take Loni Arrak's place for a few days. I must warn you that you have big shoes to fill. She has been the rock of our Hive for many years. Lina, I heard you were running the Hive on Hive 1008 when the Donnaki attacked it with their new weapon system. That must have been a frightful experience."

"Yes, Consul, it was shocking they could have developed such a weapon system," she replied. "The technology we found seemed far beyond their level of development."

"Lina, do you have any idea how they developed it?" Aria asked. "Does the Society of Humanity have similar weapons?"

"No, but we will soon," Lina said. "If we want to continue growth in this galaxy, we need to be able to face those weapons as some point. At least they don't seem to have Hive technology since they were unable to stop my agents from jumping their crews off the ships. I shudder to think what an enemy would do if

they could jump a ball of plasma like that onto a planet full of people.”

“We have worked on similar devices in the past,” Mencius remarked. “We were never able to create a stable plasma ball and ultimately had to cancel the project. Fortunately our alliance was able to stop the Predaxians with normal weaponry.”

“Mencius, I was not aware of any Opa systems in this galaxy,” Arto said.

Mencius laughed, “Well, I wasn’t aware that I was an Opa. I am from the Kalidean Federation which covers ten thousand planets in this galaxy. What exactly is an Opa?”

Arto blushed, and continued, “I didn’t mean to offend you sir. The Opa are one of the fifty species of humans in the Society of Humanity. You look exactly like them.”

“Please don’t be concerned, and do call me Mencius. My friend, Dave Brewster has told me that humanity came to this galaxy long ago and established planets,” Mencius continued. “If Kalidus was originally populated by Opa from your galaxy, we will need to correct a lot of our history records. How many Opa worlds are there in the Society?”

“Around five hundred, Mencius,” Lina replied. “They are one of the smallest groups in our galaxy. If your culture has ten thousand, the Opa have gone from bottom to top in the few minutes I’ve known you.”

Kally interrupted the group and asked them to follow him to the dining room as dinner was to be served momentarily. The group rose and headed out of the room. After the last person left, Kally returned to close the door. For a moment, he thought he saw some movement, but when he looked again, the room was empty. He closed the door and walked away with his guests.

Three maklans appeared on the ceiling of the room. They were quite different from the other species known, with slightly green glass-like skin and bright blue eyes. They had two sets of legs

that had developed into arms with hands and opposable thumbs. One set of legs was heavy and long to allow them to stand on two feet. Their bodies were elongated and three feet in length. They had large dragon-fly double wings which shimmered in the light in a range of hues. They moved together until they were touching each other in a tight circle.

“Okay team, give me your reports,” Awl Porto thought.

“Captain, we have managed to relocate our devices into The Hive,” Ensign Eel Valak reported. “We will be ready at the appointed hour.”

“Captain, I have heard that our fleet is approaching the valakar system. They should launch their attack on schedule,” Lieutenant Oul Zeel said. “Our ship is fully shielded and will be ready to jump us out five seconds before detonation.”

“Eel, how many troops do we have in The Hive at this time?” Awl thought.

“Nearly two thousand sir. It will take another three hours before we are ready to act,” Eel replied. “Most of our troops will evacuate one hour before detonation.”

“That’s great news! It looks like we will be right on time.” Awl looked around the room quickly. “I keep getting the feeling we are being watched. How about you two?”

“Don’t worry, Captain, it’s just a case of nerves,” Eel said. “We’ll be off this world soon and headed back to Maklakar space. We’ll all be sleeping in our own beds in a few days. We should all get medals for this mission! By deactivating this Hive, we can keep these maklans from surpassing our technology.”

“I know. I was raised to remember Paxran too. When those traitors destroyed our society, we learned our military and technology were the only things that could keep us safe from others in our species. We all saw the video of that planet this Hive destroyed. Even our plasma bombs can’t compete with weaponry like that!” Awl thought.

“Captain, I’m getting that funny feeling about being watched too,” Oul said. “We’d better get out of here just in case!” The three maklans glowed brightly and disappeared.

The ribbons of light from Bill and Cybil Brewster spun around each other in the room. A third from Serena Vanatee pulsed nearby. “You saw all that right?” Serena said.

“So, the Maklakar were behind the bombing on Tak-Makla?” Bill asked. “I thought they were wiped out long ago.”

“Apparently some survived and built new worlds. It looks like their military technology is far beyond ours,” Serena replied. “I think we need to see the whole event though. Follow me and we’ll go a few hours forward.” Their lights twisted about each other and fell into a black tunnel. After a few minutes of blackness, they reappeared deep inside The Hive.

The clock on Nit Valasan’s desk read 0330. The door flew open and Nit, Lina and Arto entered the room. “I’m sorry for interrupting your sleep, but I have been getting odd readings from the core since around midnight,” Nit began. “The power levels are jumping around all over the place. I’ve called in some agents to help check things out. I’ve never seen readings like these before.”

“Wow!” Lina agreed. “The Hive is in sleep mode, isn’t it?”

“Of course, Lina. At this hour only the maintenance crew is here. Let me contact their supervisor to get a report,” Nit replied. He pushed a button on his control panel to summon the shift leader. After a minute with no response, he pressed the contact again.

“This looks like a power imbalance to me,” Arto said. “They are very rare and usually occur when other systems are accidentally tied into The Hive’s grid. I’ll go check it out.” Arto ran out the door into the darkened maze of machines.

“We may be forced to take The Hive offline, Nit,” Lina said.

“That should be a last resort, Lina. The Hive is our only defense system for Tak-Makla. Until we can be certain we are not being breached in some way, The Hive must stay on,” he replied.

“Perhaps some agents should enter The Hive and check nearby space for intruders? If you think there might be a threat, it’s the logical thing to do,” Lina said.

“I’ve already summoned fifty thousand agents to do that. They should be here in the next few minutes. I’m stationing them at the top of The Hive in case there is more trouble down here,” Nit replied.

“That’s wise, Nit.” Lina noticed motion on one of the monitors. “I thought I saw something moving in the dark on this monitor,” she said.

“Probably just Arto or one of the mechanics,” Nit noted as he continued to watch the system monitors.

Arto used his lantern to light the area in front of him. The Hive was very quiet when the systems were in sleep mode, and that made the power fluctuations seem even stranger. He thought he sensed motion just out of the range of his light, but as he moved forward, he found only the machines. He was nearing the central core now and raced toward it. He quickly turned a corner and tripped, falling to the ground. He sat for a moment to catch his breath and rub his shoulder and hip that had taken the brunt of the fall. He turned to look where he had tripped and saw a maklan leg sticking out from beneath a computer rack. He crawled to it and pulled the dead body out into the corridor. He recognized the body as one of the engineers he had met earlier that day.

“We’ve got a big problem out here,” Arto said as he clicked on his com-link.

“What is it, Arto?” Lina asked.

“I just tripped over the body of one of Nit’s engineers. It looks like he was suffocated. Send some agents over here to investigate,” Arto replied.

“Just wait there, Arto, help will be there soon,” Nit said.

“I can’t wait. I just heard more noises just ahead. It sounded like a door closing. I’ll go investigate,” Arto said as he climbed to his feet. He held his lantern in front of him and ran toward the sound. After he turned another corner, a large metal door blocked his path. He knew this type of door should mark the edge of The Hive. Typically, these doors are heavily secured, but this one stood slightly ajar.

He tried to look through the open slit, but could see only darkness. He pulled the door open slowly and stepped through. He was in a small hallway about twenty feet long. A second door with several magnetic locks was at the other end of the hallway. He moved forward quickly. He raised his lantern to examine the locks. All of them were badly burned. He pulled slightly on the door which cracked open slightly. There was no alarm although this was the most sensitive part of The Hive. He heard movement on the other side of the door and closed it softly. He whispered into his com-link, “Lina, there’s been a breach on the exterior wall of The Hive. I can hear activity on the other side, but no voices. Whoever did this has already killed at least one maklan. I have to imagine that the Hive may be hit very soon. Please have Nit evacuate.”

“Understood, Arto. Nit insists that some agents review nearby space first in case there is an invasion fleet. This Hive is their only defense. Get back here quickly, Arto,” she pleaded.

“There’s too much at stake for that, Lina. I’ve got to check out what’s happening out there. The Hive could be full of explosives set to go any second,” Arto said. “I’d rather die out here trying to stop it rather than sitting helplessly there. Send as many guards as possible to my coordinates!”

Arto turned off his lantern and sat quietly until his eyes were more accustomed to the darkness. He set his com-link to send sounds from his side but not accept inbound sounds. He pulled the door open very slowly, trying to avoid making any noise

whatsoever. Pale greenish light partially illuminated the exterior of The Hive. He stood with his back flat against the wall of The Hive and moved slowly in the direction of the light. After twenty feet or so, the wall was blocked by massive bundles that seemed to rise a hundred feet over his head.

He stood with his back against the bundles and moved forward. After another thirty feet, he could see a group of several hundred Beings standing in formation. When he saw them, his first instinct was to see spiders, but these creatures were bipedal and wearing military uniforms. The group of soldiers closest to him glowed brightly and disappeared. Suddenly, he could see his badge start to glow bright red. He turned his back to the soldiers to shield the badge. The red light was a signal that explosive material was nearby. He had to warn the others and started to move back to the door. He reached the door to open it when it flew open and Arto was face to face with one of the spiders. Before he could think, the spider pulled a blaster from his belt and shot Arto in the chest. He fell back onto the hard floor. Several other troops saw the shot and rushed to the scene.

“How did this human get this far?” Captain Awl Porto said as he returned his blaster to his belt.

“I have no idea, Captain,” Lieutenant Oul Zeel replied. “Someone was supposed to guard those doors.”

“It doesn’t matter, Oul,” Awl said. “Almost everyone has jumped back to the ship and nothing can stop the countdown now. Let’s go.”

“Captain, I have an idea,” Oul said. “The human is only stunned. Why don’t we take it with us?”

“We don’t need any humans, Oul. Don’t be ridiculous,” Awl laughed.

“Captain, since our agents have been on Tak-Makla, we’ve learned that humans helped them build the device,” Oul reasoned. “Perhaps this human can be convinced to teach us the secrets of

this machine. This is one technology where humanity is far ahead of us.”

“Well, you might be right, Oul. If we leave the human here, it will die in the explosion. If we take it and can convince it to help us, we could surpass all races in the galaxy. And if it doesn’t help us, we can kill it anyway,” Awl said.

“Exactly, sir,” Oul smiled. “I’ll have a couple of my men jump it to our brig.”

“On the double, Oul. The whole thing will blow in two minutes,” Awl said as he walked away. Two soldiers rushed forward and carried Arto with them to their formation. Immediately the last group of maklans disappeared, leaving the exterior of the Hive lifeless.

“Okay, Serena, you were right,” Bill thought as Serena’s light twisted about his. “We will support Lord Balak’s evidence that Maklakar attacked The Hive.”

“Thank you both,” Serena thought. “The idea that my grandfather would do such a horrible thing is ridiculous. Now, we should leave before the explosion since that will have a serious impact on Universal Power.” The three lights sped out of space-time and back to The Hive on Atar Pa.

A few seconds later, the wall of explosives detonated, vaporizing the outer layers of The Hive. The core was breached and a rocket of molten radioactive material shot through the control rooms and into the lower levels of The Hive, killing anyone in the area instantly.

When the blast reached the center of The Hive, it moved straight up toward the sky, destroying most of the chambers in the first two rings and damaging more. By the time the blast reached the surface, most of the energy had already been spent. The dome covering the opening was shattered and the pieces plunged downward into the toxic smoke and fires that now filled The Hive.

The areas within a hundred miles of The Hive felt violent earthquakes. Hundreds of buildings shook and groaned under the impact. The footings of several failed and entire blocks of businesses and residences crumbled and fell toward the center of the planet. Tsunamis surged across several oceans and rock and snow avalanches filled the mountains. Ten minutes after the initial explosion, an eerie calm descended on Tak-Makla, followed immediately by the sirens of first responders.