

THE STARGUARDS
Earth Legacy

Raymond Burke

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INTERLUDE 1

The Extra-dimensional Adventures
of
Alpha Rion and Chalant

AMAGESH

"What happened?" Chalant asked as she rubbed her bruised behind.

Alpha Rion, also half-sitting on the ground, looked around. "I think the portal collapsed for some reason."

They had been dumped onto a very hard and parched land. They dusted themselves off, getting to their feet. They were obviously on a very different world from the fortress dimension and even from Earth.

Having to shade their eyes in the brightness, they looked around, finding themselves in the middle of nowhere with nothing but barren wasteland all around them. And it was hot. Very hot. They did not have to look very far for the cause, for up in the sky was an infeasibly large sun, almost white hot, hanging unimaginably close to the planet. It was quite a sight. Beyond the horizon on the other side of the planet hung two small moons.

Chalant stared at the sun and moons, her dark eyes squinting as if a memory had suddenly stirred, but then she dismissed it. Her blue and silver manoeuvre suit was still dusty, but as she went to slap more dust from her arms, she stopped suddenly and looked up.

Alpha Rion was about to curse their luck, but noticed that Chalant wasn't listening. At first, he thought that she was angry with him for pulling her unceremoniously through the portal created by the sword or was ignoring him, but he suddenly realised that she was listening, but not to him. Her tall, thin body was still, her eyes closed under arching eyebrows, her delicate nose and chin pointed up, her full lips slightly parted all attuned to the task at hand.

"Someone's here," Chalant said, still standing motionless, listening not to any physical sound, but to something else.

Alpha Rion stared into the empty distance, heat rippling the alien air. His deep blue eyes off-set the black of his hair and the red and black of his armour, from which he started to reach for his sword. He thought that he could, too, hear something, a faint whisper, spoken not on the air, but in his mind. It suddenly grew stronger and Alpha Rion tried to resist, but it penetrated even his strongest defences.

"It's a psi-probe!" Chalant grimaced, trying to protect her own mind.

The sound, now like a hurricane of voices, whooshed around their heads, leaving them reeling, the oppressive heat conspiring to add to the assault.

And then it stopped.

A little dazed and confused, the two looked around,

their minds still ringing, but all seemed well. It was eerily quiet. Too quiet.

THOOOM!!

The very air around them thundered violently, the shock wave knocking them down again as a giant plume of dust covered them. Beneath them, the ground cracked and abruptly dropped three meters, halting to a juddering stop, rocks and rubble falling about them. Then it was quiet again as the echoing thunder receded.

Up through the dirty haze, on the shallow crater's rim, they could make out the figures of half a dozen beings standing above them in a circle. The dust swirled and began to clear.

Alpha Rion instinctively reached to his sides to draw his swords from his dimensional sheaths, but nothing happened. He had no energy. He stared up through the dust waiting for the strangers to attack.

Five of the beings on the crater edge were the like of which Alpha Rion had not seen before—tall, metallic beings with huge wings arcing over them. The last, surprisingly, was an alien humanoid male. His skin or outer covering was the darkest black, neither matte nor glossy, but almost reflective.

Chalant thought that his skin might be metal, but soft organic metal, until his surrounding compatriots. His smooth muscular body betrayed no genitals, but his gender was in no doubt. And while his head was not smooth, neither did he have hair anywhere. He was not the tallest of men and he was thin, but with a strong wiry body. He had pronounced facial features: a sharp nose, protruding brow, but thin lips. But it was his eyes that held the life, the spirit of him, clear blue piercing eyes. He wore no other adornments or accessories. He held a quiet authority. This was his world.

There was a period of intimidating silence as the two groups stared at each other, wondering what was going to happen next.

But Alpha Rion noticed that there already seemed to be some sort of contact between the alien and Chalant. It was a silent, knowing bond between strangers of the mind. Then as suddenly as Alpha Rion had that feeling, it was over.

Chalant stirred, as if released from some invisible grip. She rubbed her head.

Then...

"Understand, I never... never thought that I would meet another being again," the alien said, in a hesitant voice, as if unaccustomed to being used or having just learned their language.

Chalant had also recovered her wits. "Uh, I'm Tera ZaVair. From Earth" She didn't know what to say or do,

standing in a small crater created by their visitor's forceful landing.

"Earth?" he voiced the unfamiliar word. He tailed off, his thin lips stretching into a smile. Then he looked at Alpha Rion, with his piercing blue eyes, a bit puzzled.

"Alpha Rion," he introduced himself. "I'm not from Earth, but Tera and I travel together," he added, just to let the stranger know. "And you?"

"I am Amagesh," he said, his voice sufficiently recovered revealing a deceptively soft, almost lisp-like quality. "Understand, I am from a world you would never have heard of, perhaps in another galaxy or even a universe. You are lost, like I am?"

"Yes," Chalant answered. "And you don't have to keep reading my mind for information. Just ask."

"I am sorry," Amagesh replied. "Understand, but I needed to learn your language and being so alone for a long time, speaking aloud comes hard to me. Please forgive my intrusions."

He seemed sincere enough, even to Alpha Rion. Chalant nodded and the stifling atmosphere seemed to clear somewhat.

"Um, Amagesh, may we climbed up?" Chalant asked.

A look of surprise burst from Amagesh. "Of course, my manners, are shocking. You must think of me as an alien barbarian. "Come, come," he gesticulated to them. He had a funny sort of staccato movement to him. Alpha Rion admired his already increasing grasp of English, as he and Chalant scrambled up the crater's wall.

When on solid ground, Amagesh gestured around him, "These are my friends. They call themselves the Surge." The metal beings stood silently, their dull, but coloured metal bodies absorbing the light. "We should go before it gets hot," Amagesh added, looking up at the sky.

"Gets hot!" chorused Alpha Rion and Chalant. They were already roasting.

"It is only mid-morning," Amagesh seemed to enjoy their discomfort. "Can either of you fly?" The two newcomers shook their heads. "Well then, you will enjoy this. Sgx, Sede," Amagesh indicated to two of the metal beings who came forth and from behind grasped the two under the arms, as one did with Amagesh. There was an initial jolt of power and they took off.

There seemed an eternity of dead desert below them. Nothing alive, nothing green, or wet, or remotely inviting looking. Parched expanse rolled beyond the horizon, mountains of dry twisted rock, separated by shrivelled valleys in an unforgiving landscape.

Presently, a flat plain opened up, like an old dead seabed and an area of disturbance presented itself spoiling the natural desolate scenery; habitation.

If that was the word for it. Amagesh's camp was not what Alpha Rion and Chalant were expecting. It consisted of one medium-sized building, built of the same surrounding material, rock.

"Understand, only I need shelter," Amagesh said by way of explanation. "The Surge live off energy, so they lap this stuff up," he pointed to the sun, a white orb of over-generous energy.

They landed in the middle of the clearing, more Surge in the encampment stopping momentarily to inspect their visitors, then getting back to the task at hand, which just seemed to be standing and basking in the sun rays.

"It is nourishment time for them. Let us go inside," Amagesh invited them.

It was not luxurious, but it was cooler than outside. Two storeys contained the usual rooms, but all stone-made furniture and drab surroundings seemed too much. There was no electronic equipment or curiously, any food.

Amagesh sensed their curiosity and again explained. "Understand, I, like you two, am an explorer. However, I also, like the Surge became trapped here. There is something about this universe that lets you in, but you cannot escape. I believe this universe is a prison." He let those words hang in the air then laughed softly at Chalant and Alpha Rion's uneasiness.

"Understand, I Initially thought I was here alone, until I was found by the Surge. They are telepathic and quite empathic, though trapped here, too, lost from their colony after they fell into this dimension from another. They had picked up my thoughts and helped me to assimilate. I tried to escape this universe several times, but I now concede this is my home. I am left alone and everyone is happy. Which brings me to my question: how did you get here? You appeared from nowhere. One minute, the psi-scape was free and the next, you were there."

Chalant looked at Alpha Rion, who reluctantly answered. "I can create portals, sometimes big enough to travel through. I think we landed here by accident, unless... there are others here like me!" He seemed hopeful.

Amagesh had been listening intently. Now he shook his head. "Only myself and my Surge family, which reminds me of our story: food! The Surge live in interstellar space and absorb energy, but they can also refocus and channel energy, like their psi-transfer abilities when you arrived. We just reflected and amplified your thoughts against yourselves. It is also how they feed, protect and keep me alive. I have been here for more than a thousand years." He smiled, apparently to emphasise his alien youthfulness. "Well, that is my story, my life, and

times."

"I'm impressed," Chalant replied. "I wish I could find others of our kind, ones like us, of the mind." Chalant explained her Chryrian nature to Amagesh, who nodded thoughtfully. "We were following a signal from one of his people, but we seemed to have lost it."

"Ah," mused Amagesh. "Understand, I have not met or known anyone by the name of Valtare, but I have heard from the Surge about a world where beings are of the mind."

Chalant beamed with pleasure. "Maybe you've brought me home after all, Alpha Rion." she turned to him. "Where is this world? Could we go there?"

Amagesh was quiet for some time. At first Chalant thought that he had not heard her, but then she heard a distinct buzzing in her head, an alien murmur. She could only admire Amagesh even more for his abilities. The Surge may be telepathic, but not only did they have a different language, but also a slighter different psi-frequency, she reckoned. She could only pick up garbled scraps of conversation.

Amagesh tuned back to the physical world of communication. "Understand, first of all, I do not know exactly where this world is, but I do know it is somewhere on the other side of the sun. I have not seen or felt anyone like Alpha Rion, but Siilii sensed others of the mind a while ago," Amagesh said, indicating a tall slender blue-coloured Surge. "She does not know where they are now, but they could still be out there. You see, the Surge like to avoid contact with others." He gave a human shrug by way of an apology.

Alpha Rion sighed in disappointment. Amagesh was doing his best to help them. But even if others were out there, he had no way of getting there.

"Understand, I know what you are thinking, Alpha Rion. Not literally!" Amagesh added quickly as Alpha Rion glared suspiciously at him. "But if I were you, I would wonder how I could get to this world. Well..." Amagesh paused, Chalant hearing the incomprehensible psi-chatter again. "Understand, I cannot, and will not, come with you," Amagesh began, seeing confusion in his guests' eyes. "This is my home," he gestured again in his jerky kind of movement to indicate his rock house. "But over the passing of a star's lifetime, things change, even Surge. The Surge are living metal. They absorb, reflect or negate energy. They also evolve. Some can now restructure the energy as when they feed me, but these Surge can also restructure themselves, grow things, make things. Take a piece of them and grow it. Anything you want, any shape, any form." Alpha Rion and Chalant were baffled as to where Amagesh was leading them, but the

alien then announced with a flourish. "Understand, I will grow you a Surgeship and you can search for the world you want. But understand, I do this for you and you must promise me not to return or tell others that you found me. Understand, I desire my private oasis of remoteness. Is this agreed?"

"Agreed!" Both Chalant and Alpha Rion chimed.

"It will take some time, at least the night, so you should rest." Amagesh took them to another chamber in his stone house. In it was a large and rough stone bed. "Best room in the house," he said.

Alpha Rion and Chalant looked at each other. They had no choice. Amagesh left them alone, off to coordinate the ship's construction. Lying on the bed, the two travellers did not even have time to talk about the day's events; they were both asleep within minutes, Alpha Rion dreaming of long-gone family and faraway home.

Chalant never dreamed, not in the usual sense. For some psi's there was nothing, for others there were fleeting glimpses of the future or other visions. Chalant was drifting. She could hear voices, see shadowy figures. She watched and listened to dark plans she could not understand. Then someone noticed her. The voices went quiet. There was blurry movement and Chalant's intrusion abruptly ended. She slept through the night, undisturbed.

In the cool of the evening, Chalant and Alpha Rion awoke refreshed and ready to move out. They left their room, the stony coolness giving way to rising heat as they neared the entrance. The giant sun hung low in the horizon, a sliver of reddish-brown descending across the sky. A dozen or so Surge stood facing the globe with their huge metal bat-like wings stretched out as if literally feeding off its energy.

"They are feeding'. Chalant and Alpha Rion started as Amagesh came up behind them, his thin lips in a facsimile of a grin as if pleased he had sneaked up on them unnoticed. "Understand, I hope you rested well?" He said looking somewhat pointedly at Chalant.

"Well, I did for one," Chalant answered, Alpha Rion concurring with a nod.

"Good, good. Are you hungry? They," he pointed to the Surge, "They can feed you as well."

Chalant was hesitant, though looked interested. Alpha Rion was far more sceptical of the notion. "How do you know it can work for Tera?"

"From what you told me of the Chryrian, that part of Tera is pure psionic energy, which would benefit from raw energy as provided by the Surge. The Chryrian then produces the necessary energy to repair, maintain and rejuvenate her human cells, which is why she ages slower, and is generally stronger and healthier. The Chryrians

can absorb solar energy anyway, but the Surge concentrate and boost its effects. It is good for you. Would you care to try, Tera?"

Chalant smiled politely. "Thanks, but I'll have to decline for now, Amagesh. Maybe another time."

Amagesh looked a little disappointed. "Very well. Understand, I imagine that you are eager to get away. Let us look at how the surgeship is coming along."

He led them around to the back of the house to where there was a crude staging area and a small, black, blunt-nosed spacecraft. It hardly looked big enough to hold one, let alone two passengers.

"What do you think?" asked Amagesh, looking pleased at his achievement.

Chalant was impressed: A grown spaceship—a sleek, black almost organic ship with no discernible exterior features. She looked at Alpha Rion who tried to keep a neutral face, but she could tell that he was impressed too.

"Is it big enough?" Alpha Rion asked.

Amagesh almost smirked, as much as his lips would allow him. "It is psionically controlled. It follows Tera's thoughts, conforms around her. You control it; communicate your navigation and other environmental needs. It absorbs and expels energy, so no need for fuel storage or conventional engines. You just tell it what to do, where you want to go and energy is directed out in the direction that you want to go."

"Sounds like you've done this before," Alpha Rion said.

"Understand, I have explored this whole world. You will be safe and able to travel as far and as long as you want to. You will try?" Amagesh pointed to the ship, inviting Chalant in.

Chalant obliged, stepping up to the living metal ship. There was no entry hatch. "How do I get in?" she asked.

"Simple, just tell it you want to get in," Amagesh replied.

Chalant thought about getting in and a hatch opened in front of her, like a tear in paper. The cavity inside was absolutely bare. Chalant stepped in and the hatch closed behind her. There was just enough room to stand up in, a slight luminescence emanating from the metal walls.

There's nowhere to sit! thought Chalant. *Where are the seats?*

Just as she thought that, a seat rose from the metal floor. "Oh, wow, that's how it works." She looked around, "Let me see outside," She said aloud as she thought it.

A section of the wall became seemingly invisible, but as Chalant touched it, she could see that the metal had only become transparent. She could see Alpha Rion and

Amagesh outside, Alpha Rion looking somewhat apprehensive. She smiled at the thought of having him at her mercy and she turned as she heard a noise behind her, a low platform rising at the rear of the ship—a bed. She giggled to herself and let the thought flitter from her mind as the bed melded back into the ship's floor. She looked back outside and waved to them, but though they were looking in her direction, they didn't wave back. The view was only one way assumed Chalant.

Now for the final test. All she did was think *>Hover<*.

There was a gentle jolt and as she watched out the 'window' she could see the ground receding. *>Turn around<* She thought to herself. She only had to picture it in her mind and the craft swivelled a few times. After a few minutes of demonstration, the sensation of flying became unsettling, though rather exhilarating, as she had never flown before. *>Okay, that's enough. Land<*

The craft stopped spinning and came to land outside the house. Chalant thought the hatch open, the heat pouring in.

"That was great!" she told the two. "We'll be fine in that, Alpha Rion," She tried to assure him, but he looked doubtful.

"So, are we ready to go then?" He asked, quite ready to leave nonetheless, doubts and all.

"Yeah, why not? I'm eager to explore a new dimension. You don't mind, Amagesh, us leaving so soon?"

"No," though his voice sounded sad. "Understand, I have grown accustomed to my solitude. Even if I wanted to come with you, this is my home and it was good having guests for a while. Do not worry about me, Understand I will not be alone." He pointed to Siilii, Sede and Sgx.

"I can see that," Chalant said. "Well, I suppose then, it's time to go." She shook Amagesh's hand feeling more than a slight tingle of energy from his pitch-black palm. Alpha Rion likewise shook the alien's hand. "Thank you for your hospitality and help, Amagesh," Chalant said. "I hope we all find what we need. Goodbye."

The two travellers walked over to the surgeship, Chalant demonstrating her skills to Alpha Rion. She touched the side of the ship and a hatch opened for her. As Alpha Rion stepped in behind her, Chalant produced two seats. She knew she heard Alpha Rion curse beneath his breath.

"Is this it?" he asked, scepticism tingeing his voice. "Is it safe?" He tapped the walls, trying to be more positive.

"It's alright, Alpha Rion, really. The ship and I 'talk' to each other. I control what it does. Don't you trust me?" She knew he did.

"Of course." He only had to look at her to voice their

joint concerns. They trusted each other, not Amagesh, entirely.

They sat in the surprisingly comfortable metal seats, Chalant commanding the surgeship into the air and up through the sky to the stars.

Amagesh watched from below as the surgeship disappeared into the air. They would be safe in the ship on their travels.

A flash of movement to his side caught his attention. He turned to see a figure standing in the shadow of the house, almost a mirror image of himself.

"My lord," Amagesh addressed the newcomer, his voice firmer and surer. "They arrived, as predicted. Understand, I intercepted them and gifted them with the surgeship, as instructed. They will find the others in hiding and free them, as foreseen. And they will lead us to their home, as inevitably as you commanded. They are yours, my lord." He bowed in acquiescence.

A deep voice answered. "You have done well, Amagesh. Your vigil is over."

The figure in the darkness disappeared in another flash of darkness, Amagesh following suit, leaving the Surge alone basking in the white hot sun.

As they travelled, Alpha Rion wondered about Amagesh and his origins. He was unlike any alien he had met before. But he also wondered if their encounter with a psi-capable being had made Chalant homesick. He decided to broach the subject again and ask Chalant about her past.

"So what ever happened to your civilization then, Chalant? Are there others like you out there?"

Chalant thought about it. "As I told you before, when I finally returned home, I found it destroyed with everyone dead, and my brothers missing. As far as I knew I was the only one alive, but now we know better. To protect my people and their heritage, I buried the village, sinking it deep under the desert. I used to visit it every few years to make sure it had stayed buried. It's my place of solace, of inspiration, my hideaway and comfort. It's my home and I hope to again some day," She looked sad. "After that I came across the Exmoors and worked with them until I met you and my life really began," She looked at him and smiled. "And then the day Lightstream took you, the rest of the Hunters arrived, too late, of course, but they had another mission for me. And that took me further away from you and my home." She looked a little sadder now.

"Don't worry, Chalant, I'll get you home soon, I promise," Alpha Rion assured her.

"I hope so."

They rode on in the Surgeship in silence thinking of home and new beginnings.