

Voltron Rebirth – The Missing Key by RadicalX
Part IV

The throne room was dark and quiet as General Yurak marched forward on the carpet leading to the throne, his head high and chest protruding. As he reached the base of the wide stairway that led to the golden throne of King Zarkon, he dropped to one knee, his fists pressed to the ground and his head bowed. Like Zarkon, Yurak had exaggerated ears, pointed teeth, and a mildly but distinctly unnatural appearance, but to a lesser degree. He, too, had received the life extending benefits of Haggar's magic, which is something Zarkon would only allow for his closest and most trusted followers. Yurak was such, always showing loyalty and dedication to Zarkon, but being his brother didn't hurt, either. He looked up to the throne, his good eye focusing on the king, while the other, a mechanical replacement, quietly displayed to him information about his surroundings.

“Your majesty,” Yurak said, solemnly.

“Silence, fool!” barked Zarkon. “You allowed a ragged band of slaves from a crushed planet to defeat one of my elite units, and lost a command tank, no less! What excuse can you make for this, Yurak.” Zarkon was obviously displeased as he glared down at Yurak, pointing with his scepter, which was a black rod with a golden hand on the end with its fingers in a gnarled ‘V’ sign.

“We had the rebels under control, lord,” he replied. “But they were aided.”

“Aided? How? There's not an Alliance planet within three weeks of Arus!”

“By lions, my king,” he said. “Four mechanical lions.”

“Could it be?” Zarkon thought aloud.

“I'm sure of it,” said Yurak. “Four of Voltron's lions yet live.”

“Haggar!” Zarkon shouted. The witch appeared from his left side, creeping silently into view from the shadows. “You told me you destroyed those lions!”

“I had, your majesty,” she rasped. “It would appear they were not completely drained of energy as I thought.”

Zarkon swung his scepter into the witch's face, causing her to draw back a step. “You thought? I wanted Voltron DESTROYED!” he boomed. “And since they still function, that isn't very well destroyed, is it?! Tell me, witch. How now do we stop him without the crystal cannon?”

“Fear not,” she said. “They cannot form Voltron with only four lions. Besides, I have been working on something just in case this should happen. This may be our perfect opportunity to test it.”

“We shall see,” Zarkon said, calming a bit. “Present your solution in the arena tomorrow. Yurak!”

“Yes, majesty?” he responded sharply.

“You will join us tomorrow. In the meantime, devise a plan for crushing those lions without the aid of Haggar's magic.”

“I prefer to work that way, my liege.”

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Blurry colored shapes swirled above her, surrounded by bright light. She heard her name, and tried to turn to see who or what was saying it, but her head didn't move. It seemed as though she were swimming in space. Gradually things became clearer. She recognized the voice as being Hunk.

"Don't try to move, now," he said. "You're strapped down to that bed pretty tight."

"You're lucky to be alive," Keith said. "From what Coran told us, you and the princess barely made it out of there."

"The princess," groaned Pidge. "She's okay?"

"She's a little banged up," Lance replied, "but she's a lot better off than you! From what she says, though, we'll be getting you a medal!"

Coran entered the room, and checked some instruments beside the bed. He nodded, then spoke. "Yes, you're going to be fine now. The med-station here will help your injuries heal more quickly," he said, gesturing toward the large arch of plastic and metal that covered Pidge and the bed. Another device was wrapped around the top of her head. "That," Coran added, pointing to it, "is a neurocortical regenerator. It will aid in the healing of your concussion. All in all, I'd say you'll be up and about in a few days or so."

"Wow," said Lance. "That's pretty fast. Where'd you get all this fancy stuff?"

"Arus was quite advanced before Zarkon came. When we realized our planet would likely fall to Zarkon, we hid much of it here in the castle bunker. The Drules never managed to find this place. As advanced as it is, though, it has its limitations. Thankfully, the young one's injuries didn't require surgery."

"Thank you for taking care of her, Coran," said Sven, who'd been standing near the door, quietly.

"All that I do, I do at the request of the princess. This is her castle, her kingdom. It is her you should thank."

"No thanks necessary," Allura said as she came into the room. Her arm was in a sling, and she used a crutch. She no longer wore the flowing pink dress from before. Instead, she wore plain, loose pink pants and a snug white shirt, with her hair back in a ponytail. "If it weren't for her, I'd be in that bed now instead, or worse."

"Well, well," smiled Lance, examining the princess' clothing. "I guess you do know how to unwind a bit."

"Only until I'm healed up, I'm afraid," she chuckled as she moved to Pidge's bedside. "How are you feeling?"

"Not so good," Pidge replied, managing a bit of a smile. "Glad you're okay."

"You just rest now," Allura said.

"Yeah," said Hunk. "Come on, everybody. Let's clear out of here and let her rest." The group turned toward the door, leaning back to give last second well wishing, and left one by one. Hunk stayed behind a moment, holding Pidge's hand.

"Hunk," she said. "Thanks."

"For what, girlie girl?" he replied.

"For everything," she said, her eyes closing. "G'night..."

"Good night, hon," he said, kissing her forehead softly. "Happy Birthday."

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King Zarkon took his seat in the arena. As he did, Yurak and Haggar took theirs beside him, Yurak on his right. The arena itself was huge; about a quarter of a mile from Zarkon's booth to the opposite end. On the near side center, a vicious looking robotic drone stood at attention. It was silver in color, and stood around twenty feet tall; a hearty and well built machine of war.

"Haggar," said Zarkon. "I have seen the robotic drones. While they please me with their performance record so far, I fail to see how they can match up to Voltron."

"Yes," added Yurak. "The drones are invaluable to the Empire. I've seen only a handful of them crush an entire planet. But they would be no match for these lions."

"The drone isn't why we're here," Haggar said, grinning evilly. "It's simply here to prove my point. Watch closely."

The gates on the right side of the arena opened. Through the blackness of the open lumbered a hulking creature. It resembled a moordek, a beast native to Planet Doom, only it walked upright on two hooved feet, and its forelimbs had grown long fingers and talons, and its mouth filled with razor sharp teeth. The beast was still only about half the size of the drone.

"What is this, Haggar?" sneered Yurak. "Do you honestly believe this aberration you've created is a match for our battle drone?"

"I think you're about to be surprised, my dear Yurak," she replied confidently.

Two more drones entered the arena from the left and joined the one in the center. The three drones attacked in unison, firing lasers which the beast dodged nimbly as it lunged toward its attackers. The first one it came to grabbed the beast and held its arms, while the two others fired on the creature. The beast became enraged and wrested its arms from the drone's grasp, taking the drone's arms with it. It threw the parts down and dug into the torso of the drone with its claws, rending it in two. The other two drones latched on to the side of the beast, and fired blasts into it from point-blank range. The beast extended its arms, forcing the two robots back. It grabbed one by the neck and ripped the head off, and threw the head with such force at the other as to imbed it deep into the second robot's torso. Both drones collapsed into a heap as the beast roared in victory. Zarkon sat in stunned silence for a moment.

"What IS that, Haggar?" he finally asked.

"I call it a Robeast," she replied. "I took a normal moordek from the field into my laboratory, where I modified its body and its very genetic structure into that of a terrifying beast. I then used my magic to infuse it with nanomachines that are bonded directly to its cellular structure. It is part robot, part beast. It has the mobility, quickness, and ferocity of a beast, while simultaneously possessing resilience and strength of a robot."

"Very impressive," Zarkon replied. "But how is this thing supposed to fight Voltron, or the robot lions for that matter! It's barely bigger than I am!"

"The specific properties of the cellular nano-infusion allow me to feed a specific type of energy into the beast. It can convert this energy to matter at an amazing rate, allowing the creature to grow to Voltron's size. It cannot grow much larger, however, as the nano-bonds would become strained beyond that," she answered.

Zarkon smiled broadly. "Perfect," he said. "Yurak, you will take this Robeast to Arus. You will use it to destroy those lions and put Voltron to rest for good this time."

"Master, I do not need—," Yurak began.

"SILENCE!" boomed Zarkon. Yurak flinched instinctively. With anyone else, Yurak would not waver, but he feared Zarkon. "You failed me once. I will not have you fail me again."

"As you wish, My Lord."

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Hunk closed the door quietly behind him, and joined the rest of the group in the hall as they shuffled about silently. He spoke up.

“Okay, guys,” he said. “I’m going for a walk. I need to clear my head.”

“Take your time,” Sven said, turning to Allura as Hunk strolled away. “Your Highness, thank you for helping Pidge back there.”

“Yeah,” said Lance. “That was some pretty gutsy stuff you did!”

Coran glared and interrupted. “You’re lucky they didn’t both die. It’s you and your people that caused this mess to begin with!”

“Hey,” retorted Lance. “We can’t be blamed for your bombed out castle falling apart on everyone! Just calm down, okay?”

“The only reason that tomb collapsed is because your ship collided with the outside wall of the cave! Not only have you invaded our home, commandeered our property, and endangered the life of our Princess, you’ve desecrated the tomb of our King!” shouted Coran. “You’ll excuse me if I’m a bit upset!”

The team was silent. Lance’s face suddenly became sullen, as he and the others searched their thoughts in the awkward silence.

“Coran!” Allura cried. “They didn’t mean to do anything wrong. They’ve come a long way to help us, and they already have. We should be thankful—,”

“Thankful, your highness?!” protested Coran. “I’ve never been so —,”

“Coran, sir,” Keith said, interrupting. “I apologize for myself and for the rest of the crew for any problems we might have caused. These are desperate times we all face. We haven’t come to Arus to help. We’ve come FOR help.”

“Why should Arus help the Alliance when you ignored our own pleas for help?” Coran snapped.

“Commander,” Allura said, resting her upper arm on her crutch, and placing her hand on Coran’s shoulder, symbolically holding him back. “We have suffered much here. Coran, myself, and my people have lost everything. When the Drules came here, they took our homes, our friends, our families...those they left behind they left with nothing. There are those who still fight, but many fight simply because they can’t live this way anymore, and would rather die trying to end it. They just have nothing left. Not even hope.”

“Captain,” came Hunk’s voice over the comm. “You need to come up here right now.”

“Where are you,” Sven replied.

“I’m at the main gate. Bring the Princess,” he said.

The group made their way to the elevator, and ascended to the ground level. They walked through the crumbling mossy stone once more, and arrived at the main gate, where Hunk stood atop a large stone. As they looked past him, they immediately saw what he’d wanted them to see. In the pale light of the moon, framed by the night sky and its reflection across the shimmering lake, was spattering of golden lights flickering along the shore. Torches and candles, held out by hands big and small, dotted the beach and stretched on into forest behind them. There they stood, silently, expectantly.

Keith turned to Allura.

“Hope lives, Princess.”