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*dateStamp25001228; HSS Lightbridge 2; Presentation Theatre*

The twenty representatives, mostly military officers, of the various groups operating in the Bozeman system mill about the enormous theatre; the stadium style seating could easily hold three times that many people. A huge portal provides a direct view of the surrounding space in orbit around the gas giant, Bozeman 2. In the distance, viewers can see the expanding cloud of debris that once was the *Bozeman Reclamation and Support Services Station*; home to approximately twenty-five thousand people, many of whom are dead or missing.

On the opposite wall, a giant display provides viewers various analyses of communications and ship traffic within the Bozeman system, the current size of the exclusion zone around the ever expanding debris cloud, and various news channels with the sound muted. Tables at each end of the room provide basic finger foods, water, sodas, and juices. Hawdon Naval Militia marines, in full combat gear, keep a silent vigil at every entrance into the room; their helmet visors closed, completely hiding their faces from those in the room.

A large circular conference table dominates the center of the room; in the center is the light blue circle, with black stylized 'H', logo of the Hawdon Business Group. Around the top half of the logo it says, "Hawdon Communications, *HSS Lightbridge 2*" and around the bottom half, it says, "Carrying Humanity's Voice". Comfortable leather executive chairs and data displays denote the seating positions around the table. The air has that unique chemical smell that comes from new carpet or paint.

A door underneath the video display opens and the guards on either side of it snap to attention. A young, tall, blonde haired woman wears a HBG jumpsuit and two older men wearing Hawdon Naval Militia dress uniforms, one with Captain's rank, the other an Admiral's. They make their way to the conference table and the two men take seats. The woman activates controls on her screen and a pleasant, three tone sequence sounds in the theatre as the room lights begin to dim everywhere but over the conference table. People take their seats around the table.

"Thank you for coming," the woman, still standing, says, "My name is Dr. Angela Gosprey, Deputy Vice-President of Remote Communications for Hawdon Communications. To my left is Admiral Henry Lopez, Hawdon Naval Militia liaison and Group commander. To my right, is our most gracious host, Captain Mark Dungold, Commanding Officer of the *HSS Lightbridge 2*; thank you Captain for providing this lovely facility to us today. Although you may have introduced yourselves to each other, I have not yet had the opportunity to meet each of you. Please introduce yourselves and describe your group's contribution to this endeavor."

Dr. Gosprey takes her seat and listens attentively to each and every description. One by one, the people seated around the table give their names and describe their group's role in the rescue effort. The United Planetary Compact, the Free Peoples Confederacy, the Red Heart Society, and several nearby Non-Affiliated planetary governments are represented.

Once they were all done, Dr. Gosprey finishes making some notes on her datapad then says, "Once again, I thank you all for coming. Over the past week, each of your respective groups has been working tirelessly, trying to help as many people as possible. Unfortunately, the rivalries that exist between many of you are hampering efforts. Also, the lack of common communications and protocols works against our common goal helping the victims of this tragedy. Forty-eight hours ago, a group of representatives approached Vincent Hawdon about heading up the coordination of rescue efforts within the Bozeman system to facilitate operations. To that end, I was given the task by Mr. Hawdon personally to come up with a plan for coordinating search, rescue, recovery, security, and investigation activities within this star system."

The UPC StarCorp Admiral raises his hand and the doctor says, "Yes Admiral Bolling, you have a question?"

"Aside from the obvious command and control issues, what benefit does allowing Hawdon business interests dictate our activities provide?" he says flatly. Several of the military officers around the table nod and murmur in agreement.

Dr. Gosprey does not wait for the noise to die down before continuing, "I brought that issue up myself while discussing this assignment with Mr. Hawdon. As of today, Hawdon Communications will no longer charge any fees to those in this system associated with the efforts undertaken here; that includes using our local system infrastructure or the GalactiComm interstellar communications gateway. As a matter of fact, Hawdon

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Communications will be refunding all fees collected from the moment the *HSS Lightbridge 2* went online here. Nor will Hawdon Communications ask for payment from those represented here to cover the ongoing operations of the intrasystem and GalactiComm communication networks, HBG's contributions to these efforts, or those Hawdon Naval Militia ships supporting HBG activities."

After several moments of stunned silence ... "That's potentially millions of credits," blurts out FPC People's Commandant Francios Luis, the senior representative of the FPC present at the meeting, "You mean to tell us that Vincent is simply giving up that kind of money just for a rescue operation?"

"Tens of millions to be more precise," she replies, "Mr. Hawdon fervently believes that a consolidated effort would better serve the victims of this tragedy than infighting ever could. It would also dampen potential conspiracy theories as to who done this. As you all can vividly recall; a smaller incident than this one served to be the catalyst of the last big war between the UPC and FPC. Vincent Hawdon wants to avoid something like that at all costs."

"You said intrasystem communications," asks Shirley Jukato, representative of the Red Heart Society, "isn't that a violation of your agreements with the various governments not to compete in the local system communications market?"

"In every system where Hawdon Communications has a presence, except our home system, we agreed not to engage in local system communications business activities, Dr. Gosprey replies, "But here in the Bozeman system, there is a total lack of governmental authority. Aside from that, our plan to coordinate activities here depends on a centralized communications platform. In the future, if the station is rebuilt and a local government founded, they can setup their own arrangements for local system communications and Hawdon Communications will step aside."

Dr. Gosprey looks around the room and when no one else speaks, she continues, "Our plan is to divide up the system into control areas and assign one to each group present. You will have full operational control within your assigned area. To facilitate communications with the other groups, all activities will be routed through our disaster management center. Since each of you routinely uses our communications protocols, it makes sense to pass those comms through us instead of attempting to sort it out amongst yourselves. Once we have an agreed on framework for search, rescue, recovery, and security each group can leave a representative here to oversee activities. This avoids stepping on each other's toes."

"What about the investigation?" asks Francois Luis, "You mentioned that earlier?"

"Admiral Lopez will form investigative groups from those people you provide," she replies, "Each headed by a Hawdon employee. This open type of environment provides the type of environment that conspiracies find difficult to form in. But that is outside the scope of this meeting, I will leave it to the Admiral to go over the details at his first investigation meeting."

"What exactly is the *HSS Lightbridge 2*?" asks Admiral Bolling, "I do not recall ever hearing about it."

Dr. Gosprey smiles as she answers, "The *HSS Lightbridge 2* is the newest in the Lightbridge class remote communications platforms being developed by the Hawdon Business Group. Its original purpose was to provide a ready made intra/interstellar communications base for new colonies. It has long jump capability, short jump ship docking facilities, a complete intrasystem communications array, a fully integrated GalactiComm communications node, and the ship is self-sufficient for ten years. I ask that you hold your questions about the ship for Captain Dungold, he will be taking small groups of you on tours of the ship over the coming days."

She waits for other comments before continuing, "Well then, let's get down to the brass tacks of what we're here for, shall we?" And the giant screen clears as organizational charts begin organizing themselves.