

Chapter 12

Adama looked at the clock. Time. “Mr. Gaeta, you may jump when ready.”

“Sir.” Gaeta picked up the microphone, and looked up at the clock. “Jump in five, four, three, two, one, NOW.”

From the point of view of the surrounding Fleet, the *Galactica* vanished. From the view aboard the Battlestar, the Universe expanded, contracted, rebounded, and basically moved itself. When it was all over, the stars had changed.

Gaeta looked at his telemetry. “Jump completed, Sir. We’re approximately 100 million clicks from the gas giant which has the first military facility. My apologies, sir, we’re missed by a bit.”

Well, that happened. Plotting jumps to a point inside a system was an inexact science at best, especially when your computations could only take place on one computer.

“Thank you, Mr. Gaeta. Launch the Vipers assigned to cover the base, and plot our course for the planet where Lieutenant Thrace was lost.”

Six Vipers left the *Galactica*’s launch tubes and headed for the giant. In doing so, they passed Wilson Bridges’ X-307.

The radar alarm awakened Bridges. He took a few seconds to wake up, then scanned his instruments. Probably another asteroid, he thought. The space near the orbit of the gas giant tended to have a pick up a lot of passing junk.

Then he saw six blips heading away from him to the planet. He was about to give chase when he remembered that, if these ships were anything like the one Mitchell had come across, they had to come from something bigger.

He looked in the opposite direction.

“Shit.”

Then he opened a com link. “Stargate, this is Bridges. You’ve got company coming, looks like six fighters similar to the one Mitchell found.”

“Rodger, Bridges, we’re on it. Six fighters headed our way, from your position.”

Wilkes chimed in from the planet. “Bridges, do you have any idea where those ships came from?”

“Yes ma’am. There’s a mother– uh, a rather large ship out here, about 100,000 km from my position. Looks like it’s heading your way. I’m going to shadow it. Request reinforcements.”

Mitchell, awakened from his own nap by the general alarm, looked at his plotting position. The 307s had been flying in random directions, and by chance he was closest to Bridges. “Rodger that, Bridges. I’m heading your way.”

Vipers launched, the *Galactica* went to maximum acceleration. Keep it short and sweat, thought Adama. In and out, before they can concentrate reinforcements. He studied the plotting board.

Back on the planet she thought of as Massilia, Dee Burkemeier looked over her script. It had been decided that she, as civilian leader of the planet, should lead the talking with the aliens. Of course, it would be apparent that there was also a military presence, but having a civilian do the talking was supposed to make it easier to reach an agreement.

It said so in all the manuals.

Politics, she thought. If I was any good at politics I wouldn’t be here.

The initial message had been carefully thought out. The problem was its delivery. Starbuck’s civilization didn’t seem to have FTL communications, so she couldn’t just send out a signal from Massilia. It would have to be relayed to one of the 307s, and broadcast from there when they got in range.

Her standard Galactic wasn’t very good, she thought. Jackson said that this was a Good Thing. If she didn’t sound polished, maybe they would figure out that she wasn’t a machine. Thanks, Daniel. I think.

Now the wait for Mitchell and Bridges to get in position.

Mitchell considered the best way to approach the mother ship. His telescopes showed a large number of ports on each side, quite possibly for energy weapons (though the fighter didn’t have any), rail guns, or even conventional cannon. None of which made him want to approach the ship from the side. Probably not a good idea to go in from the front, either, if “front” was in the direction the ship was heading. One would think there would be a lot of sensors up there.

Behind seemed the logical choice. Not necessarily the best choice, but the logical one. He started moving in that direction.

In the meantime, he got on the com.

“Base, I’ve got the mother ship in sight. It’s about the size of a Ha’tak, but it’s more like a flattened rectangular box with a pod hanging off each side. There are rows of ports along the sides, top, and bottom which I’m

going to assume hold something nasty. I'm going to approach from the rear of the ship – at least I'm putting the ship between me and you. I'll be in place in about five minutes. Bridges, you cover me. If any fighters come out of that thing, try to keep them off me. But remember, don't fire first."

Yeah, that's a winner, he thought. He agreed with the order, and would have suggested it himself if O'Neill hadn't mentioned it. However, the difference between theory and fact was rather large. Almost as large as this ship, in fact. The last time Mitchell had gone against a Ha'tak he'd lost his copilot and had to spend months in rehab. This time? Well, if they got angry at him, he was a long way from help, and an even longer way from home.

But now he was in position. So was Bridges, well above the mother ship. "Ready, Dr. Burkemeier."

Back on Massilia, Dee Burkemeier cleared her throat. She nodded at her com tech, who flicked a few switches and nodded back to her.

"Unknown ship. I am Deloris Burkemeier, governor of the planet Massilia, also known as P7M-3527, and the rest of this system. We welcome you in peace. Lieutenant Thrace is well, and awaits your arrival on the planet. Please respond on this frequency."

The message played in the *Galactica* CIC. "Dualla, find the source of that transmission," Adama told his com officer.

"Yes, sir." Dualla checked her board. The message was going on about how the *Galactica* should approach the planet. Keep talking, she thought. Communications antenna all over the Battlestar turned toward the signal, which should give her a good fix. Just give me a few more seconds – there. "It's behind us, sir. About 100 clicks away, 20 degrees up."

"Understood." Adama turned to Tigh. "Contact the flight deck. Send out Apollo's team of Vipers to check out the source of that message."

"Yes. Sir," said Tigh. "Flight Deck, launch primary Viper squadron. Intercept message source."

The fighters launched.

Bridges saw them first. "Shit. Mitchell, we've got company. Four, five, make it six bogies. They launched through the port-side tube, now they're heading back to you."

"Understood, Bridges. Base, we've got company. Six fighters approaching, judging from their acceleration a lot like Starbuck's. I'm for getting out of there."

“Rodger that, Mitchell,” Wilkes came on-line. “Get the hell out of there and make back to base. All X-307s, return to the planet.”

Apollo was steadying his team. “Easy, let’s take a look around, we know it’s out here somewhere.”

“Maybe it’s stealthed.” Came back one of his pilots.

“Possibly, but that doesn’t mean you can’t see it. It’s just harder. Keep looking.”

The transmissions had ceased. It would have been nearly impossible to see Mitchell, except for the fact that he was close enough to the *Galactica* that the angular diameter of his 307 occasionally occluded a star.

As it did now. “Got him, Apollo!” shouted Whisker.

“Easy, Whisker.” The pilot was one of the new recruits from the Fleet. He’d gotten his name because one Whisker seemed to be the only beard he could grow.

“He’s getting away!” yelled Whisker, “Firing!”

“Hold!” Too late. Missile away.

“Gack.” (Or something like that.) Mitchell saw the Viper fire at him, and the Ship-to-Ship missile take aim. He maneuvered to avoid it.

“Base, enemy has fired at Mitchell,” came Bridges’ voice over the com. “I’m returning fire.”

A general melee ensued. The X-307s were armed with reloading rail guns. While not as powerful as the guns on a *Pegasus*-class ship, they still packed a powerful wallop.

Whisker’s ship exploded.

“We’re being attacked from behind!” Apollo sought help in the only place he could find it. “Try to force them into range of the *Galactica*’s guns.” He maneuvered his ship to try to outflank Mitchell’s. The remaining four fighters scattered, trying to get around the hypothetical squadron that had killed Whisker.

Mitchell had yet to fire, but the ship coming toward him didn’t seem to be leaving him much choice. He maneuvered so his guns could track the enemy. Fire.

Apollo saw the plasma arc of the rail gun. He applied lateral acceleration to dodge the bullet. Launch missile.

Mitchell saw the missile’s engines light up. “Shit.” He maneuvered out of the way. It followed. Damn, it had a lock on him. Stealth wasn’t good at

short range. He applied emergency thrust. Angled his ship to take a good shot at his tormentor. Meanwhile, get his backup out of here. “Bridges. I’m one-on-one, you’re one-on-four. Get the hell out of here and back to base. I’ll follow as soon as I shake this SOB.”

“I can come cover you, Mitchell.”

“Negative. Get the hell out of here. They’ve got us outnumbered here, they can probably overwhelm us if they try. The base need all the help it can get. Go. I’ll be OK.”

Ships in deep space battles usually do not come within sight of one another. Space is too vast, speeds are too high, and encounter times are generally short. In this case, however, the initial requirement had been that Mitchell be close enough to the *Galactica* so that any radio conversations could take place without a light-speed lag. This compressed the volume of space that contained the battle. Bridges firing from behind the Vipers had also tended to compress the battle, limiting it to the volume of space between the two X-307s.

Finally, Mitchell’s decision to approach the *Galactica* from behind meant that it was between him and home.

All of which resulted in Apollo’s Viper and Mitchell’s X-307 approaching within a few thousand feet of one another.

Close enough for machine guns. Mitchell fired, strafing Apollo’s ship. He then pulled hard on the joystick to try to maneuver past the *Galactica* and back to base. The X-307 did began turn which would have impressed Chuck Yeager proud.

The Viper *pivoted*, not changing the direction of its flight, but changing its orientation. A missile fired –

– And struck Mitchell’s wing. His engine went dead and his ship went spinning out of control.