

Chapter 13

Well, this sucks, thought Mitchell. His 307 was spinning, unpowered. Fortunately, it wasn't a fast spin, because his inertial dampers were off. Even with his eyes closed he could tell that the ship was moving, the spin wasn't fast enough to be disorienting.

However, he was in trouble. No com link, no power at all. In a few hours he'd run out of air, which wouldn't kill him, because he'd freeze to death first.

So what happened? (Might as well take his mind off his impending fate.) He remembered the what he'd called the "Theory of Ancient Devices" class he'd taken as part of his training to fly the F-302. Carter had been giving the lecture.

"Asgard and Goa'uld engines couple to the zero-point fluctuations of the vacuum. When I say vacuum, I don't just mean the absence of air, I mean the background to all of space. The zero-point fluctuations aren't uniform, and the engines use the fluctuations that move you in the direction you want to go.

"The F-302, and its Death Glider predecessor, is relatively small for a ship using this technology, so it is equipped with wings. The wings enhance the effect of the zero-point fluctuations, giving you a response which is ordinarily obtained only in a ship of much larger size.

"The disadvantage of this is that you can only fly in the direction favored by the wings. In the F-302 model this means that your direction of motion will always be in the direction the nose of your ship is pointing in. If you have a reaction motor attached, then of course you can fly in another direction, but this will not be a standard feature of the model.

"Another thing – turns. The F-302 is moving through the field of the zero-point fluctuations of the vacuum. For your purposes, this is something like moving a submarine through the water, or a supersonic airplane – you will not be able to stop on a dime, or even turn on a quarter. You'll have to anticipate your moves. Flying the F-302 in space is almost like flying an F-15 through the atmosphere. It is *not* like piloting the space shuttle in orbit. If you turn the nose of the F-302, it *will* start to head in the direction of the turn. And it will take a finite amount of time to make the turn, just like you were flying through the atmosphere."

And that's the difference between me and him, thought Mitchell. I wanted to shoot and turn. He couldn't turn without firing his rocket engine, but he could change the attitude of his ship. So as he passed, he could track me

without changing his direction of motion. Which meant that I was a sitting duck for his missiles.

We need this technology, he thought. Couple one of those high-powered rockets with Asgard engines and we can out-fly anything in this galaxy. Or in the Pegasus Galaxy, if the reports I've read from Atlantis are any indication.

Of course, from his point of view this was all going to be academic very soon. His ship was tumbling, he had no power, no heat, and very soon he wasn't going to have any air.

Wilson Bridges knew the capabilities of his ship, and knew its limitations. What he didn't understand was the capability of the fighters he faced. There just hadn't been time in the briefing to make everyone aware of this, and Bridges had been a test-pilot, not an astronaut.

So one Asgard-powered ship should have been an easy match for four rocket fighters. He could have outrun them, but he couldn't resist trying to reduce the odds a bit for the folks back home. He turned his ship back towards his pursuers, and fired at the lead ship. Missed. He sped on past, and didn't worry about it any longer. In his mind, that ship would have to do a loop to turn around and attack him. He fired at the next ship in the little armada, and hit it in the wing.

The ship he originally missed *pivoted* and, still speeding away from him, locked on. Fired a missile.

Bridges' X-F307 exploded in a soundless fireball.

The survivors of the *Galactica's* mission returned to the battlestar. Adama met them on the flight deck. Though he knew most of the answers already, he turned to Apollo and snapped "Report!"

Lee Adama turned to his father. "We lost Whisker. Stingblade took a hit, but we sent a Raptor after him, he wasn't injured. We hit two attackers. One was a confirmed kill. No sign of any others, but didn't show up well in radar – probably good stealth tech – so there may be others out there. The ships movement was funny – almost like they were flying in air. And I didn't see any kind of flame, like you would with one of our engines. They've got something new."

"So the Cylons are coming up with new tech?"

"If these are Cylons. I'm not sure. If these ships were Cylon, then they reacted like no Cylon I – or you – have ever fought."

"You said you had one confirmed kill. What about the other one?"

“I don’t know. I hit him for sure, but there wasn’t a secondary explosion. He may have been able to escape.”

“Or he may be still in the area,” said Adama. “Chief,” he turned to the head of the flight deck. “Ready the Raptors. I want a complete search of the volume of space where this ship Apollo hit might be. Assume he was unpowered after the hit. If he’s got power, then we’ll never catch him. But if he’s alive out there, I want to question him.”

“Yes. Sir.”

Raptors went out, in a search pattern around Mitchell’s last position, corrected for his observed velocity. A difficult search, given the stealth nature of the ship, and the fact that it must be without power and so would not be radiating much heat.

In his unpowered 307, Mitchell was composing his Last Will and Testament. Pity that he didn’t have anything to write with, and that his recorder, along with everything else electrical, was out. However, it served to pass the time and keep him from noticing how cold he was getting. Let’s see. “To Jack O’Neill (I can call you Jack now, can’t I? I mean, once I’m dead I’m no longer under you in the chain of command.) I leave all my fishing and hunting gear. I also give you my passion for women not named Samantha Carter. To Daniel Jackson, I leave you my Beatles collection, in the hope that some day you’ll loosen up enough to sing ‘I Want to Hold Your Hand’ in public – oh, wait, I forgot you lost the haircut a long time ago. Never mind. To Teal’c, I leave my sense of humor, such as it is, in the hope that you’ll use it to help understand all those Yankees that still surround you. To Samantha Carter – well, Sam, since you’re not interested in me, I hope that you find happiness with someone, someday, and if he’s Jack, well, that would be OK by me.”

I don’t suppose Oma Desala is going to show up and offer me the chance to Ascend, he thought. That only seemed to happen to Daniel. Even O’Neill hadn’t ever – oh, wait, he turned it down when he was captured by Ba’al and Jackson tried to help him.

You’re losing it, he thought. Keep focused. But another part of his mind was saying “why the fuck should I?” This wasn’t going to be pretty. His demise, that is. Warring factions of his brain. Did this mean he was going schizo? Might as well, who’s going to know?

So cold. Tired. No, got to keep my eyes open.

But he couldn’t of course, and his mind drifted into oblivion.

The Raptor search continued. No need not to, for the *Galactica* was hours from the planet ahead, and no further opposition was in evidence. The projected volume where Mitchell's ship might be located was an expanding sphere. With each passing minute it grew larger, and the chance of success grew smaller, but Adama judged that the reward – a possible prisoner, a trade for Thrace – was worth it.

In the end, though, the initial sighting was not by any of the Raptors. The *Galactica* had multiple telescopes, and all searched the sky for objects that might be in the path of the ship. One found that a star had disappeared, and then reappeared.

In most of the galaxy, the telescope's computer would have told the ship's computer that there was something out there. This being the *Galactica*, however, alarms sounded. It was several minutes before the crew responded, and another few minutes to look over the logs and report to the CIC. When Gaeta saw the output, he immediately informed the Raptors on search. Within a few minutes they were able to locate Mitchell's wounded ship, latch on, and bring it back to the *Galactica* landing bay.

Mitchell awoke to the sound of several large, burly MPs pounding on his cockpit window. When he looked up, he saw that behind them was a ring of more large, burly MPs, all armed, and all with guns pointing in his general direction.

Well, at least they all look human, he said to himself. *Of course, it could be that they're Goa'uld, or Jaffa, or replicators, or even these 'Cylons,' whatever they are.* Well, they sure wanted him out of his bird. OK, might as well play along. He motioned the MPs to back off, took off his helmet, and opened the hatch, being very careful to keep his hands within the sight of the guards.

Despite that, they kept the guns pointed at him. He carefully climbed out of the cockpit, slid off the wing and onto the deck. The lead guard motioned him to hold his hands up. Mitchell complied.

Another guard approached, patted him down, and removed his gun, com unit, ID card, his Swiss Army Knife, and even his memory key. That done, the lead guard motioned Mitchell to put down his hands.

Another figure came out from behind the guards. He approached Mitchell and spoke. "You and your partner fired on ships of the Colonial Fleet. Therefore you may consider yourself a prisoner of the Battlestar *Galactica*, under the command of Commander William Adama." From his tone, this

seemed to be a standard formula used for dealing with prisoners. The accent was much like Starbuck's, and, like her language, slightly archaic.

Mitchell knew the protocol for that.

"Mitchell. Cameron. Lieutenant Colonel, United States Air Force. Serial number 56214993."

Formalities observed, the guards led him off to the brig.

Meanwhile, six Vipers continued their course towards the moon and the Stargate. Lacking stealth technology, their approach was observed, and the F-302s guarding the gate moved into an intercept position.

Behind them, another ship flickered into existence.

"We've arrived, Madam President. The *Galactica* isn't here, but six of its Vipers are nearby, heading toward the gas giant."

"Thank you, Billy. Good jump, Captain, exactly where we wanted to be. Can you put me in touch with the fighters?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the Captain. "Viper Squadron, this is *Colonial One*. Stand by for a communication from the President."

"Pilots, I need your help. I would like you to escort the *Colonial One* to the inhabited planet."

"Ma'am," came the response, "with all due respect, we've got orders to scout the moon ahead."

"That won't be necessary, Lieutenant," replied Roslin.

"I have my orders, Ma'am."

"And I'm countermanding them. So, unless you'd like to explain to Commander Adama why you let the President of the Twelve Colonies take an unarmed ship into possible enemy territory, without an escort –"

The Viper's channel went mute. Then, all Vipers cut engines, pivoted around, and started accelerating towards the *Colonial One*.