

## Chapter 16

The tour completed, Adama led O'Neill's group to the *Galactica* briefing room. Carter was almost giddy. She came up to the General and whispered "Sir, this is fascinating! They've managed to build an interstellar spaceship with no networked computers. And their FTL system! They make hyperspatial jumps directly from one place to another. It's almost like having a set of portable Stargates. Why if we had that, we could go anywhere, anytime. Of course, their range is limited"

O'Neill cut her off. "Carter, first we have to see if they're telling the truth about the drive. They *say* the range is limited, but what if it's not? They could jump a whole fleet to Earth and there's nothing we could do to stop them! So *do not*, under any circumstances, tell them where Earth is. Got that?"

Carter quickly sobered. "Sorry Sir, I just got excited. This technology is unlike anything we've seen from the Goa'uld, the Ancients, even the Tollan. If you think of it as something we would have built in the 1970s, if we'd had their hyperspace drive and naquadah generators, you'd get a close idea of their capabilities. I think they were more advanced, once, though. There are indications ... "

"Carter, you're getting wound up again."

"Yes, Sir. Sorry, Sir."

"We're here. Remember, what we want to do first is get Mitchell back. *Then* we'll see what we can trade."

The group split up when they reached *Galactica's* briefing room. Teal'c, Wilkes, and the squadron went off with the *Galactica's* escort. Tigh thought about joining them, but decided he needed to watch his Commander, about whom he was beginning to have suspicions, and Baltar, about whom he'd always had suspicions. Someone had to take care of Colonial interests in there, he thought. Adama will give away everything just to get Starbuck back.

The summit consisted of Adama, Tigh, and Baltar on the *Galactica* side, and O'Neill, Burkemeier, Carter, and Jackson representing Earth's interest.

Adama began, "you have something I want."

*I, not we*, thought O'Neill. *something personal in there?* Aloud, he said, "you have *someone* we want, Commander. If you are willing to negotiate with toasters."

"Ah, I see you have been talking to Lieutenant Thrace," replied Adama.

“While she had good and sufficient reasons to suspect you were Cylons, I have additional information which indicates that you are as human as you look.”

“That has something to do with the number twelve, doesn’t it, Commander?” asked Jackson. He turned to O’Neill. “Jack, in some societies twelve is an extremely important number. Take the twelve disciples, for example, ...”

“Daniel,” Jack stopped him, “you’re starting to talk real fast again.” Jackson subsided. O’Neill turned to Adama, “While I’m happy that you think I’m human, it’s fairly obvious that your XO thinks I’ve pulled the wool over your eyes.” Indeed, Tigh was getting very red in the face. O’Neill continued, “Care to elaborate on your reasoning?”

“Your technology doesn’t match anything we know about the Cylons, we’ve seen no evidence of Cylon Warriors among you, and you come from a part of space that was never known to have been explored, much less colonized, by anyone. I have other reasons, which I’ll reserve for now. But you aren’t Cylon. Tigh, if you don’t stop that snorting, I’m going to ask you to leave the room.”

O’Neill ignored the aside. “In that case, Commander, I’d like to know how Bridges died, then I’d like to work out an exchange for Mitchell. Then I’d like you to get your ship out of our system.” The others looked at him in surprise. Jackson was about to say something, but Carter and Burkemeier both stilled him. *Thank you, ladies*, thought O’Neill. *We know what we want from him, let’s see if he wants something from us.*

Adama considered. These people were potential allies, and their technology could give the Fleet enough of an edge to get away from the Cylons. On the other hand, it wouldn’t do to tip his hand by revealing too much. He decided to ignore O’Neill’s last demand for now.

He turned toward the monitor, which began playing scenes of a space battle. “This is the *Galactica’s* log tape of the encounter we had with your Colonel Mitchell and Captain Bridges. As you can see, one of our pilots, fearing that Bridges was going to attack, fired first. I’ve no apology for that. You appeared near our ship without warning. In the melee, Bridges and one of our pilots were killed. We have tapes from the surviving Vipers that you can examine, and you can interview the pilots. I presume that Mitchell’s ship also recorded the action, but we haven’t been able to access that information. You’re welcome to go to the ship and get it out, if it’s available.”

O’Neill winced as first one, then another, ship blew up on the tape. Damn.

However, aside from starting a general war there was nothing he could do about it, and he didn't have enough firepower in this system to fight more than a small skirmish. His mind processed the Adama's last statement. "You mean that we're not getting Mitchell's ship back?"

"Not unless I get Starbuck's ship back, General."

"That won't be possible," said O'Neill. That ship was never going to fly again, because there was no way they were going to get it back together. He thought about claiming that the Colonial fighter had been destroyed on landing, rather than on the cutting room floor, but Starbuck would contradict that. Might as well just brazen it out. He was pretty sure that the *Galactica's* techs had figured out as much about the X-307 as Carter and her team had discovered about Starbuck's fighter. "Oh, well," he said aloud, "I suppose that U.S. taxpayers will foot the bill, as always."

"Taxpayers?"

"Never mind." Back to the task at hand. "Carter, have them take you to Mitchell's fighter. Dump all the data you can. If you find any of the fight, try to record it for Commander Adama." Left unsaid was *and make sure he doesn't get anything else*. Then he paused, as if making a decision. He turned to Adama. "Commander, I think we can take it on faith that you'll return Mitchell to us, so I'm going to go first and have Lieutenant Thrace returned to you. If you'll come with me to the Tel'tak I can make arrangements for her return."

"Why back at the what did you call it, Tel'tak?" fumed Tigh. "Can't you contact your base with that fancy radio of yours?"

"Oh, I will, said O'Neill, but I there's something I need a the Tel'tak." It was time for a little display of Tau'ri technology.