

GRID Traveler Trinity

J Carrell Jones

Chapters 1 - 7 preview

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In a person's life-time decisions are made, some good, some bad, some of no immediate consequences. A person frets over some little unimportant detail when the big picture stares back. A choice is not always made under the best of circumstances. The only thing a person hopes for is an outcome that is remotely close to what is hoped for. Thus, a decision begets a consequence.

Chapter 1

Sean Blakemore stared blurrily at the picture in front of him. The picture frame weighted in his alcohol weakened arms. Why he kept the damn picture all these years was beyond him. Why he held it in his hand more so. He was an idiot for yet again torturing himself like this. Idiot, idiot, and idiot. He squinted once and sighed heavily. "Damn you!" he hissed. "God damn you to hell!" He screamed and flung the picture frame across the room. The frame broke and the glass cover shattered into small pieces. He slammed his glass at the shattered remains. Liquid spotted a torn photograph of a beautiful woman. He stood up and walked over to the bathroom sink. The remains of his last eaten meal still clogged the drain. He stared into the mirror. "You bastard! You ought to walk out in space right now." Sean, at this moment hated himself and a decision he made years ago. The man in the mirror stared back with eyes that spoke of disappointment, pain, suffering and shame. Sean thought that if he were The Buddha his eyes would show him his duhkha. Instead, they reflected a man in deep pain.

"Excuse me Commander," a disembodied voice said.

Sean looked over his shoulder. "What is it now?"

"Commander." The computer said.

"I know my rank!"

". . . You have a call coming in from headquarters."

Sean stared at himself again and rubbed the day old growth on his chin. Not too long ago Sean enjoyed receiving calls. It was always that hint of the unknown that gave him a reason to serve GRID Command. Now . . . he didn't feel one way or

another. A call was just that: A call.

“I’ll take it in my Ready Room.”

“Yes Commander.” The computer said.

Sean walked the walk of a man trying not to show his inebriated state. He entered his Ready Room and sat heavily into his chair. He faced the computer terminal and pressed a ‘ready’ button on the keyboard. The screen sparkled a moment, then a shaped solidified. Sean blinked. He cleared his throat and said, “Yes, sir. What may I do for you?”

The man on the screen stared intently at Sean for a moment, as if he could literally read what was on the younger officer’s mind. Then he smiled. “Sean, you look like shit!”

“I feel like shit.” Sean smiled and raised an eyebrow, “A mission?”

“Yeah Sean, you got a mission and what a mission it is.”

Sean chuckled softly to himself, “Good, patrolling asteroids is not my idea of fun.”

The Admiral laughed. He knew all the details over the incident. When it happened he shook his head in astonishment. The man sacrificed a promotion for a fellow officer. Sean had been on the fast track to Commodore. Everyone he met believed it. Sean believed it. There was no stopping the progress. Except something did stop it. It was emotions, or if one was a direct witness to the events then it was lust. Maybe love, but lust, and loyalty, trust and belief. Sean put all that into a person. In letting his emotions steer him away from the main path he got side-swiped and it resulted in a very nasty ugly collision with an alternate destiny. Sean disobeyed a direct order from a commanding officer, a commanding officer with ties to the military measured in centuries. After the dust had settled and cleared, and the body count recorded, only one person stood. Unfortunately, it was not Sean. The fellow officer had won a commendation, a commission, and a promotion. GRID Command, in all its self-imposed wisdom, is an institution where discipline, duty, loyalty, and honor are held in high praise – when applied to the right side. Sean’s side lost and he was a casualty of a bruised ego. In one felled swoop ten dozen bodies littered the streets of revenge and embarrassment. He figured that as the walking wounded he’d be rescued. He

wasn't. His wound was deep.

Sean Blakemore walked onto Top Deck. He stepped just outside the elevator doorway as the doors hissed closed behind him. He stood for a moment listening to the beeps and low tones around the room. 'Top Deck Chatter,' Sean thought. The beeps, the hushed conversations, background noise and voices coming from the intercoms, the clicking sound from keyboards, all this was Deck chatter. It was a sound that all hands grew to believe, no felt, synonymous with the autonomous functions of the brain. Quiet the Deck chatter and the ship is dead. Rumor had it that if you silenced Deck chatter for a minute all hands would suffocate.

"This is the one thing she can't take from me."

"Commander?" A young ensign asked. "Are you alright?"

"Nothing Ensign," he smiled, "I'm okay."

"Okay, sir." The ensign said, turned and walked off to other assignments.

Sean walked over to the command chair and sat down. He swiveled over to look at a CRT on his right. He punched in his pass code and read the scrolling information on the screen. His eyes widened first with excitement, then narrowed with anger. His assignment was going to put his ship under HER command. "Damn it!"

The personnel on Top Deck turned to see their Commander in a foul mood. He ignored them for the moment; his only concern was the data scrolling across the screen. "Incredible! The Johnson is not some damned escort vessel!" Sean looked up suddenly and saw many startled faces. Deck chatter was an octave lower.

Sean sat for a full minute before he moved. 'Damn,' he thought, 'God hates me.'

"Mr. Foster," Sean said, "get us to the nearest GRID point, we're going to Flashpoint."

"Aye, aye sir." The Lieutenant said. He fingers played over the control panel. "Course laid in, sir."

Sean sat back and pressed the 'Comm. button'. "All hands, all hands, travel stations, repeat, travel stations." He pressed the button again. His second-in-command sat next to him in the XO chair. Sean swiveled to the left. "Well, number one.

Ready?"

Dawn pressed several keys on her terminal, read the scrolling data on her CRT. "Yes, Commander."

Sean Blakemore cleared his throat. "Mr. Foster, proceed!"

The GRID Ship Battlecruiser Reginald L. Johnson's engines flared into action. Her destination: A GRID Point. An artificial point that created a measured amount of gravity within dark matter. GRavity InDuced points, in space, allowed a mobile object the ability to travel to another GRID point millions of miles to light years away. The Johnson jumped . . .

Sometime in the three-quarter 20th century scientist speculated about the fate of the Universe. Some said what was seen in the heavens was all there was. Others argued that the visible Universe was about 4% of what was really out there. Early in the 21st century "dark energy" was discovered. It was in complete contradiction to Einstein's gut feeling that "there was no such thing as ether." But, like all things scientific, some gut feelings must give way to observable facts. Succinctly put, the visible Universe was but a pinch in a hand full of existence. We lived in a place of great mystery as others called folly.

Sean sat back, watching the main viewer. The signal beacons bleeped on and off marking the boundaries of the GRID-point.

Mr. Foster said over his shoulder. "Ready to enter, sir."

Sean stared. His mind was on the encounter he was about to face. Robin. It's been a long time he thought. Do I greet you with civility, or spit in your face? Sean almost always had that thought whenever there was a chance encounter with his past friend, lover, and now superior officer.

Mr. Foster waited.

"Proceed, Mr. Foster."

The huge ship labored forward into the GRID point. It accelerated, then vanished between two beacons that flashed on and off in a relentless job of signaling a GRID slot. The ship was gone, toward another grid-point to another point, to another point, to another point, until it reached its destination. This trip would be short and not require the crew to Trank. This trip also took the long ago and adjusted GRID points. The modulation

on each point kept the crew sane and relatively comfortable.

Mr. Foster checked and rechecked the pattern flow across his CRT. He knew the drill: Pick a point, lock in on it, pick another, and lock in on that one also. Keep doing it until you were where you wanted to be. He knew the drill, but to make sure he checked and rechecked. “ETA in ten minutes, sir.”

Sean looked up from his CRT, “Noted Mr. Foster.” He swiveled his chair to the communications section. “Mr. Kirkland.”

Mr. Kirkland pulled the Comm. plug from his ear, “Yes, sir.”

“When we get to Flashpoint, contact the Webster. Let Webster know that we’re ready for rendezvous.”

“Aye, sir.” Kirkland placed the Comm. plug back in his ear. He listened intently on the comm. traffic over the GRIDnet. He picked up bits of messages from the Outlands. He dialed in a tighter signal. His panel beeped that his designated target was in communication range. He typed in a brief message and sent it to the Comm. Officer of the Webster, a friend.

Sean sat and stared those last ten minutes away. He snapped out of his dream state, “Mr. Kirkland . . .”

Kirkland looked up from reading a text message that flashed across his screen. His friend had just sent a message explaining that the crew was on edge. Webster’s Captain was going to command Johnson and she wasn’t too happy. “Yes, sir?”

“Are we in contact with the Webster?”

“Yes, sir. Just reading a message from the Comm. officer now . . .”

“Good, please ask their Captain to contact me at her earliest convenience.”

Sean got up and started walking. “I’ll be in the conference room. Dawn, please accompany me, I have things to tell you.”

Dawn followed Sean through the sliding door. To the Top Deck crew the door hissed closed rather tightly.

Kirkland began typing out the message to the Webster.

Beginning of Message

Commander of Johnson wishes Captain of Webster to contact him at earliest convenience.

End of Message

***** Commander is in a bad mood - think maybe blood is still bad between them? *****

The reply came back,

Response

Commander of Webster acknowledges message. Information on rendezvous follows immediately.

***** Yep, blood is still bad. The Captain cursed up a fit when she received the orders. *****

Sean sat down behind his desk. He turned the chair around so that the expanse of stars swept by the view wall. This was his place of ease, his escape. During most of the war, Sean and the crew spent travel time in a sleep that allowed them to retain sanity. Short trips and surface jumps, though travel time increased drastically, gave the crew rest and the ability to function normally. Dawn sat just in front of the desk and turned her chair likewise. She watched the stars streak by. She waited a few moments – Sean seemingly lost in awe with the view, cleared her throat.

“Sir, is there something wrong?”

Sean broke his gaze from the window and turned his chair to Dawn. “Yeah, very much wrong.” He paused.

Dawn waited.

“Captain Spaarin will be taking command of the Johnson for the duration of this mission.”

Three seconds ticked by.

“The fucking bitch!”

Sean fought the urge to laugh. Dawn knew all the details. She was absolutely loyal to him, he was certain of that. During that time Sean gave her an order to not fire and she followed it. She believed in that order; she still believed in the order and she felt Sean had been given a raw deal. It was absolutely

political. Dawn had heard rumors that someone high up had taken a liking to Captain Spaarin. This someone had shielded her from all the meltdown that occurred from her disobeying an order and everyone else was collateral damage. The only good thing that came out of the whole mess was that Sean was given the command of the Johnson, but not the rank. It was the oldest ship in the fleet, but it was the fastest and he made the best of it. The Johnson had the best record in the entire GRID Fleet and that rubbed many folks the wrong way. When the SI war ended with humanity victorious many questioned what it really meant to be human. Many lost their lives – many commanding officers died. Ranks had to be filled. Sean had been skipped over three times. Dawn thought what better form of humiliation and punishment could be exacted on a person?

Dawn reiterated, “The fucking bitch!”

Sean nodded, “Wish it could be someone else.”

“Damn! What is GRID Command thinking?” Then Dawn frowned. “What is our mission?”

“Don’t know yet. I only know that Robin . . . Captain Spaarin will be commanding Johnson.”

“Bitch!”

“This is why we are talking right now.”

Dawn looked Sean straight in the eyes. Sean stared back and said, “I’ll effectively be her number one and . . .”

“That is total bull shit!”

Sean nodded. Dawn would have had to be temporarily reassigned. This mission sucked for everyone. He continued, “. . . and I’m keeping you as XO.”

Dawn clamped her jaws tight. “Yes, sir. I knew I wasn’t going to like this one bit.”

Sean nodded and understood. During the ‘fallout’ Dawn was up for court-martial. Sean took absolute responsibility over the incident. He tossed himself on top of the grenade and saved about a hundred personnel.

Dawn sighed, “Anything else, sir?”

Sean smiled, “Nope, I dropped that second shoe.”

Dawn smiled back, “By your leave then sir.”

He nodded and Dawn got up and walked out.

Sean sat there for a moment staring out the window. He

remembered the first time he had been in space. It was an inescapable feeling of being free. A sense of awe, and wonderment mixed with fear, and anticipation. Even now, amidst this mission Sean still took in the expanse before him. Space, Sean told himself, was something to always be in awe.

“Commander . . .” Kirkland’s disembodied voice said.

“Yes?”

“Captain Spaarin is on comm. line three.”

“Thanks,” Sean replied, swung his chair around and hit a comm. button marked ‘three’ on the terminal on his desk, “Commander Blakemore here.” Sean listened. He stilled himself for the voice he knew would come.”

“Yes, Commander Blakemore . . .”

Sean’s heart skipped a beat.

“Put it on visual, Commander.”

Sean hesitated. He really didn’t want to see her face. Hearing her voice was painful enough. He hit the visual button. A beautiful face sparkled solid. A face he hadn’t seen in a couple of years, a face that reminded him of bad times – and good. He set his jaw, tensed, then relaxed. “Yes, Captain, do you see me now?”

The face was small and round, light hair, with pale eyes. The lips were full and every time Sean chanced the stare, emotions of lust would wash over him. He shook himself and remembered that this woman was the one who placed him where he is now, maybe not purposely, but nevertheless a result of the fallout from her actions. Sean never forgot, and for that he hated her.

Spaarin sat back and smiled thinly. She remembered Sean better looking the last time they encountered each other. She stared into his eyes, and wished he had been stronger about the whole ugly affair. It wasn’t her fault that he became too emotionally attached. She warned him, but by that time she was ready to make a career move. She used Sean as a stepping-stone and felt certain he hated her. She sighed and said, “Yes, I see you Commander. Nice to see you after all these years.” It was a lie, but she had a courtesy to lie, rank, position, and respect and all that in the service.

Sean nodded; he wasn’t going to make this easy.

“Sean, we have a problem . . .”

“Yes.”

Spaarin hesitated a moment, then, “I will be taking command of the Johnson . . .”

“The Johnson,” Sean snapped, “is my ship. Just tell me what to do . . .”

“No Commander, I will be coming aboard. We will then proceed with the mission.” She saw that Sean was grinding his teeth and clenching his jaw.

Sean stared intensely at her. He knew he couldn’t fight it. His orders had been specific, ‘Follow the orders of Captain Spaarin.’ “Yes . . .”

She dared to push, “Yes what?”

“Yes . . . Captain Spaarin . . . I will make arrangements.” He wanted to scream ‘you bitch I’ll arrange my boot up your ass! You messed up my career, and I took the fall for you.’ But he stilled his tongue and swallowed his pride. He hit the off button, turned his chair to the view wall and lost himself in space. She, at least, can’t take his last moments as commander of his own ship, the last moments that would allow him to be alone.

Captain Robin Spaarin looked at the now blank screen. She bit her lower lip and swore, “Damn!” She was not going to like this assignment, not one bit.

She was taking his ship away from him and he couldn’t do a damn legal thing.

Captain Spaarin sat in her chair. She stared at the contents on the desk in front of her. The assorted mish-mash of stuff lay upon it. She reached out and picked up a picture frame. She held it close to her heart and sighed heavily. “I’m so sorry Sean, it had to be done.” She looked at the photo and pursed her lips together. She laid the photo down face up.

It is the small things that command the most attention. Ego, pride, and shame are sprung from the same fountain of emotion but to differing degrees of appreciation. The sin that causes the most pain is not necessarily the sin most presented.

Chapter 2

Sean stood in the hangar bay watching Captain Spaarin's shuttle dock. His stomach twisted up in knots in anticipation. The docking rings locked into place and the green "all-clear" light, flashed. The hangar door hissed open and Captain Spaarin stepped out. She was met by a small contingent: Sean, Dawn, and other officers.

Robin saluted, "Captain Robin Spaarin here to take command of GRID Ship Johnson." She held her salute and stood stiff. It was only a moment but it felt like forever minus one hour.

Sean waited. He slowly stiffened and saluted back, "GRID Ship Reginald L. Johnson is temporarily in your command."

Robin nodded and dropped her salute, Sean did likewise.

"You'll be moving into my quarters. I'll move into the VIP."

Robin searched his face for distress she found none. "That won't be necessary Commander. The VIP room will do nicely. The Johnson is your ship and my stay on board will be brief.

Sean held himself in rigid control; he would not give her any reason to feel superior. Sean nodded once. "Follow me, Captain." He turned and walked out before she could reply.

The walk was more for his sanity than for her benefit. He wanted her to follow him for once. He knew the Johnson, she didn't, and she would have to admit that.

She picked a spot at the back of his neck and stared. She could feel his tension, his stress, he was giving up his ship and that in itself had to be stressful. It didn't matter she knew he hated her. She resolved not to let it impair her decisions. She was in command now, at this moment that was the only thing that mattered. Robin cleared her throat. "Commander, take me to the Johnson's bridge please."

Sean stopped short, "Yes, ma'am." And entered the nearest lift.

"Top Deck." He spoke when everyone was in the lift.

The computer replied, "Yes, Commander."

The door opened and a flood of deck chatter washed in. Robin held her breath as she stepped out into the 'Top Deck.' Immediately the chatter stopped. Robin froze as she realized that she was a complete stranger to this particular crew. Eyes stared at her from all corners.

Sean stepped from behind, said, "As you were people. Superior officer on the deck." The Top Deck sighed; Robin released the breath she held. Sean walked down the ramp to the command center and sat in the XO chair. Robin walked from station to station observing. The situation was indeed awkward. She pushed the thought of uneasiness aside. The Johnson was hers, for now, but only on a word. Sean was in command, she was just sitting in his chair. That was the important thing to remember. Robin walked to the commander's chair and sat heavily. She reached for the CRT and typed in several keys. The computer blinked with access denied. She caught a quick glance from Sean. He was trying not to watch, but was failing in concealing his curiosity. She typed in another combination of keys. 'Access denied' again. She looked up and over to Sean.

"Commander, may we talk in private please."

Sean nodded, got up and headed for the conference room. Robin got up and followed.

Just before the conference door hissed closed Robin snapped, "What the hell do you think you're doing?" Top Deck heard, "What the hell . . ." and the rumors would fly.

Her cheeks bright red from the anger she no longer held back.

Sean stared and kept his mouth shut.

He cleared his throat and said, "Captain, what am I doing?"

Robin placed herself in check. What had he done? That was his chair out there, not hers. He sat there and conducted ship's business very well. In fact, he was getting a commendation. Then what had he done? He shut her out, his ship, his chair, and his people. He shut her out and was not going to give her

easy access to any of them. She realized she was going to have to earn her place. Robin looked at Sean. His forehead was wrinkled in a frown. Yes, she was going to have to earn it from now on. “Commander, please give me access to all command systems.”

Sean smiled, “I was . . .”

“But?”

“Never had a chance to finish the process. You sat in my chair and started typing away.”

Robin nodded.

“May I do it now, or do you have anything else you want to talk at me about?”

Robin stood in silence musing over the many ways she could handle his request. She sighed slowly, said, “Yes,” and grinned.

Sean frowned, “Ah, yes to which question?”

“Which one do you want first?”

Sean looked into her eyes. Too much pain, too much sorrow, he thought. “I’m sorry, Captain. I’ll give you access now, may I go?”

Robin nodded.

Sean sat in the command chair, stared at the CRT and began typing. He gave her access to all his files, all the ships files, and everything else she may think she needed, he didn’t care.

“Mr. Foster,” Sean said, “please call Commander Dawn to Top Deck.”

Robin stared out the view window. She thought of Sean and the life they would have had. She thought about her career, and how satisfied she was for making the choice she made. Life had been good to her. She turned and stared at the beige bland wall. ‘Oh, Sean, I am sorry for what happened, but life goes on.’

A paradigm is a worldview unique to each person. Change the rules you change the outcome. Change the outcome changes the paradigm. The universe does not take kindly to changing the rules.

Chapter 3

Robin sat in the command chair, getting a feel for how Sean seated himself. She noted that he sat with his back flush against the rest. “Mr. Kirkland.”

“Yes, ma’am?”

“Send a message to the Gallant. Tell them that all is well and we’ll be proceeding to rendezvous point immediately.”

Kirkland adjusted the Comm. plug. His fingers danced over the keypad. He placed in his routing codes and sent the message.

Beginning of Message

Comm. Officer of the Johnson sending a message to Commander of the Gallant. Message follows: Proceeding to rendezvous point immediately. No ETA given by commander. Please reply upon receipt of message. Signed Comm. Kirkland.

End of Message

Kirkland waited. He didn’t know the Comm. Officer of the Gallant but a friend from the Trailblazer spoke highly of Gallant’s Comm.

“Message sent, ma’am.”

Robin nodded. “Mr. Foster, set a course for . . . “she keyed in a set of numbers and sent it to his console, “I want us there in two hours . . .”

Two hours, ma’am?”

“Was I making a suggestion or giving an order?”

“An order, ma’am. Shall I alert the crew and medical?”

Robin frowned. How dare he she thought. "Explain yourself mister."

Foster swallowed hard. "Ma'am, the Johnson travels on Long waves."

Robin's anger tempered down as she realized what Foster said. Long waves. The Johnson still had the old engines. Probably his punishment. She sighed. "Thank you, Mr. Foster. I forgot. Proceed as fast as the Johnson can go without Tranking up."

Mr. Foster nodded and started his task. He called up the Nav. Map and took notes. Thirty-five grid jumps! By the book it would take a little over five hours. He cut it down to twenty-seven jumps. It wasted fuel and would be bumpy. He keyed in the codes, looked over his shoulder.

"Ready, ma'am. Three hour twenty-seven minutes. Best I can do and keep our lunch down."

Robin smiled. Sean kept a good ship. She knew the Webster could make it in a little less than five hours. "Proceed, Mr. Foster."

With a nod, Foster started the sequence of grid jumps that would take the Johnson to whom knew where. He watched his panel, and did what he did best: Navigate.

Robin punched the intercom button, "Commander Blakemore, please report to Top Deck conference room, please report to the Top Deck conference room."

Sean drifted in a sea of smooth colors, soft fluids, and faded lights. He dreamt of nothing but patterns. His dream-state body floated in complete relaxation, no worries, no hassles no fuss. A cloud of mixed colors covered him. It was soft and pleasant. Sean rolled in its cool and changing patterns. Another cloud drifted by, its collision marked by the increase in flowing colors splashing around him. Several more clouds drifted into the already chaotic patterns that were produced by the previous encounters. Sean's dream state sensed something wrong. He tried to relax and will the colors and patterns to smooth out, but more clouds gathered, their colors and patterns dark. Sean gasped as he tried desperately to stop his dream from its inevitable conclusion. "No!" He silently hollered, "No! I want to dream!" A cloud crashed into him. The force knocked

his dream state in a spiraling fall into nowhere. Another cloud slammed into him, and another, and another and another.

Sean woke up sweating. The sheets were moist from the perspiration that gleamed on his body. He looked around. No clouds.

“Commander.” The computer spoke.

“Yes, what is it?” Sean said, burying his face into his hands.

“Captain Spaarin requests that you see her in Top Deck Conference Room.”

Sean got out of bed and dragged himself over to the sink. He stared in the mirror, studying a face that didn’t sit right with him.

“Commander, did you get the message?”

Sean snapped, “I got it.” Then, “Send the Captain an acknowledgment message to the Command CRT.”

The computer remained silent.

Sean grabbed his clothes got dressed and headed out the door.

Robin sat waiting. Now was the time she would tell him. The door hissed open and Sean walked through.

He looked at her, said nothing and sat down across from her. Robin sat back and stared.

Sean stared back. He would meet her on her terms.

“Sean, did the Admiral tell you why he gave me command of Johnson?”

Sean shook his head, “Nothing important.”

“Have you heard of Necronomicon?”

Sean frowned and shook his head.

“Have you heard of Magick?”

“Magic?” Sean blurted.

Robin began, nodding her head slowly, “Understand that this is serious.”

Sean sniffed, “Serious?”

“Suppose Earth was visited in the past by Aliens . . .”

“Excuse me, Captain, but is this speculation?”

“Pardon?”

“We’ve been out here,” he waved toward the window, “for more than two centuries. The only aliens we’ve encountered

were the ones we scattered ourselves.”

Robin blinked and frowned.

Sean continued, “I would like to believe in ‘em, but we’ve only found proof of dead worlds”

Robin cleared her throat. “Have you heard of Magick?”

“Yeah, and?”

“I mean, really know of it? Not just something you grew up with, but have you seen it?”

“Just in Vids and Streams. Why?”

Robin sat back and smiled. She pursed her lips in thought, took a deep breath. “Earth was visited long ago.”

Sean huffed. “You turning my ship into some damned ghost hunter?”

Robin ignored the question. “Dr. Loggar will be joining us from the Gallant. She will conduct the investigation . . .”

Sean raised an eyebrow. He heard of Dr. Loggar. Pretty high up in GRID Command. “Really?”

Robin thought a moment. “An investigation, the proof is beyond scary.”

“How so?”

“Dr. Loggar was working out in the region we will be heading into. She and her group found artifacts and equipment, computer equipment Sean! Equipment that is still working.”

“Working! Alien computer equipment? Impossible!” Sean said.

Robin shook her head. “No, it’s not. The equipment is working. Hardcopy manuscripts detailing how to operate it. The manuscripts were preserved for over 1,000 years.” Robin’s eyes welled up with tears. She softly shuddered at the thought of this information. My Goddess, she thought, it still makes me shake when I think about it. She cleared her throat. “Sean,” she began softly, “think of it, a connection between another intelligent race and ours. Suppose we are their people.”

Sean sat uneasily in the chair. The information Robin was giving him was shocking, if not difficult to assimilate. Aliens, maybe real proof. “Is the evidence real? Any chance of fraud?” Sean knew the answer. GRID Command would never send a trillion-credit ship on a whim. The evidence had to be exact and overwhelming.

Robin shrugged, "Anything's possible. After Dr. Loggar made the discovery, GRID Command placed armed ships in the area. She took some stuff to Earth for further analysis. She thinks the stuff is real. The Gallant is going to meet with us. We'll take her aboard and proceed to the system." Robin hesitated. "She asked specifically for you."

"Me! I don't believe in magic, or in aliens!"

"How can you say that, and really mean it? Earth has had a lot of unexplained occurrences throughout our existences."

Sean huffed. "Fraud, practical jokes, massive EM surges."

Robin thought a moment. She never really considered that Sean would totally deny evidence. Yet again he hadn't seen the evidence. She had and it scared her. A handful of scientist who think they've found something so profound and utterly old that it has to be from 'someone' else? Maybe humans were the only ones still alive in the galaxy. Robin slowly shook her head. "This place is much too big for just humans to exist." Robin said. "We can't be the only ones here."

"All right," Sean started, "suppose we're not the only ones in the galaxy, or the universe. The all important question is why have we not been contacted."

Robin opened her mouth to answer, but Sean cut her off.

"Because, maybe there is no one else." Sean said casually as if it was the hundredth time he said it.

"Maybe," mused Robin, "they've had some form of a Main directive regarding life forms. We have one."

"You see, you sound like all the other UFO . . ." Sean paused to consider his words, then continued with, ". . . believers. We've been in space four hundred years now. We've traveled to hundreds of planets. We've settled tens of them. And in our centuries of populating the galaxy we've made war with ourselves. Yeah, we've found some evidence of intelligent life, but we've never encountered it. I'd like to believe in 'em, but the truth is we are it. We've mapped 125 cubic billion light years and nothing. No encounters, no proof of existence now. Nothing, nada, zero, zilch."

"Sean," Robin retorted, "that is less than one percent of the total volume of the Milky Way."

"Robin, we've had this discussion before."

Robin stared.

“Look, scooping up an 8 oz. glass of ocean water is by far less than a millionth of a percentage of the total volume of water, but you’d find it full of life.” Sean waited a second. He was giving Robin a chance to counter. “We should have found something by now.”

“Wait and see what Dr. Loggar has.”

Sean smiled, “I will. I’d also like to know why she asked for me.”

Robin shrugged.

The room was silent for several seconds.

Sean cleared his voice. “If you’ll excuse me, Captain.”

Robin picked up on the formal tone, “I’m through. You have other duties to perform.”

Sean nodded sharply once, got up and walked out.

Robin turned her chair around to the window. A star streaked its elongated self slowly by. We can’t be alone Robin wished, and hoped. This universe is much too large for it to be wasted on us.

Sean walked back into his room and sat down at his desk. He thought about what Robin told him and immediately got scared. He cursed himself for the sudden emotional turn. Why am I scared he thought? We are alone, aren’t we? I grew up all my life believing that humankind was it. And if there was life ‘out there’ then it happened a long time ago, right? Sean got up and walked over to the bar and pulled a bottle out. He stared at the clear contents for a few seconds, pursed his lips and put the bottle back. I am scared. I’m also excited. What if, life, other than humans is out there? That would be something. “Computer?”

“Yes, Commander?”

“What do you know about Dr. Loggar?”

“Dr. Kathy Loggar, is currently GRID Command Exobiological/Anthropological coordinator.”

“Is she married?”

“At the last known query, no. Dr. Loggar is single.”

“Do you have any documentation on her life?”

“I have documentation of all individuals of prominence and

importance to GRID Command.”

“How about answering with a yes or no?”

A pause, then, “Yes.”

“Thank you.” Sean walked over to his couch and sat down.

“Tell me about her please. Dim the lights also.”

The lights dimmed and Sean relaxed as the computer began.

Encounters are the very basis for being human. Our society and our culture is based on our interaction between one another. We think and wonder on the dynamics of the outcome, but in the end the results are from actually meeting. Speculation is usually a preparation for a physical encounter.

Chapter 4

Robin sat and waited. The shuttle glided to a smooth soft landing in the docking bay. Robin approached the shuttle as its side door opened. A tall slender woman of about forty stepped out. She walked with an air of arrogance, but with an obvious naiveté of presence – Loggar seemed to be thinking about something other than the present day now.

Robin held out her hand. “Dr. Loggar.”

Dr. Loggar nodded and shook Robin’s hand briefly. “Are we ready to proceed Captain?”

“Yes,” Robin answered, “As soon as the shuttlecraft is clear, we’ll proceed to the coordinates you gave us.”

“Thank you, Captain.” Dr. Loggar hesitated a moment and cleared her throat. “Is Commander Blakemore, here?”

Robin smiled. She looked knowingly at Loggar and spoke slowly. “Yes, he’s on the Top Deck.”

Loggar breathed a small sigh. “Good.” She uttered softly. “Good.”

Robin turned, “Please follow me, Doctor. I’ll show you to your quarters. The trip is going to take a few days.”

“Yes, I know.” Loggar said with a heavier and more audible sigh. “I know. So far away, but faster than the transports GRID Command give us.”

“Yes, Cargonaughts.”

Loggar nodded, “You understand then?”

“Yes, perfectly. I started my career on a Cargonaught, the Cargonaught Surprise. Slow as hell.”

Robin giggled a secret inside joke to herself. “Shall we?”

Loggar nodded and followed Robin.

Robin remembered that the Surprise had a colorful history

attached to it. She remembered one day while on deck watch when the ship came within visual range of a space station, the Comm. Officer from the station yelled over the audio band channel "Surprise! You made it!"

Dr. Loggar drifted in and out, her thoughts dancing back and forth to things serious and things whimsical. She shivered under a feeling of embarrassment.

Robin stared straight ahead. She knew that Dr. Loggar's asking for Sean was something more than professional. The other woman exuded nervousness and anticipation. Would Sean pick up on this? She shook her head. 'Probably not' was her thought, but then again, at times he was good at reading people. He would have possibly been in line for fleet captain if not for an incident a while ago.

"Something wrong, Captain?"

Robin looked at Loggar. "Sorry, Doctor. I was drifting."

"Oh," was the simple reply. "How long will it actually take us?"

"Considering we have no GRID points out to where we're going, we have to do long jumps . . ."

"Long jumps? I'm afraid I'm not too up on the terminology."

"Quite all right." Robin paused and considered her next words. "Think of it this way. Since we don't have any heavy field generators strategically placed, we have to create our own."

Loggar frowned and slowly nodded.

Robin said, "We have heavy gravity induction probes. We drop one off behind us, and then we literally ride a gravity wave generated by the probe."

Loggar frowned again. "One would image I'd find time to study GRID technology. I never found it interesting until now. I mean, GRID ships. Point that away and eventually we get there, but relatively fast."

Robin said, "If you like, I'll have Commander Blakemore give you more detailed information. It'll pass the days away."

Loggar followed Robin to an elevator. As it traveled the length of the ship her mind drifted. She'd only seen Vids and bio pics of the Commander. His personnel file was thick and his Captain entries read like wonderful adventure stories. Loggar

realized she had been utterly lost in thought when Robin stopped at a door. It slid opened and Robin walked in. Loggar followed. The room was spacious. The light was set at low luminosity to give it the effect of appearing much bigger than it actually was. "Lights on." Robin said. She turned to face Dr. Loggar.

"I'll have Commander Blakemore look in on you later, say in about three hours?"

"Thank you, Captain."

"If you have any questions, direct them to the computer," Robin pointed at a CRT, "and it'll answer your questions. If it can't then it will contact me or Commander Blakemore."

"Thank you again, Captain."

Robin took a step back, then stopped and looked at her timepiece. "It's Afternoon's watch, now. How about dinner at Dog's watch six bells?"

Loggar blinked.

"7:00 pm, about six hours from now."

Loggar nodded.

"Relax and enjoy." Robin did a quick nod, turned and walked off. The door slid closed.

Loggar turned to a window. She watched a star glide by and marveled at its beautiful passage. "Computer?"

"Yes, Dr. Loggar?"

"May I have a glass of water?"

A panel in the wall slid out and produced a glass. "An outlet is over in the kitchenette, Dr. Loggar. A tap will provide you with whatever your taste desires."

Loggar walked over and retrieved the glass. "Thank you, Computer." She held the glass in her hand. A Battle cruiser was definitely much better than a Cargonaught. She mused about her first encounter with Commander Blakemore. 'A bath, I need a bath.' She spoke out loud.

"Water is being drawn in the tub, Dr. Loggar. Please specify temperature."

"Ah, 37 degrees, please."

The computer beeped.

Loggar looked around and spotted her luggage. How efficient this crew was. She hummed to herself as she opened

her suitcase and held up a plain, solid red dress. “You’re going to have to get a more colorful selection of attire.” She smiled and walked into the bathroom.

Betrayal is a very powerful and destructive weapon. Its use can do considerable damage to all those involved. But it's most powerful when used in secrecy. The damage is everlasting.

Chapter 5

Sean sat still. His face was held in rigid contemplation. He wondered about Dr. Loggar and her findings. He wondered about Robin Spaarin. And he wondered about himself. Had he been wrong in finger pointing at Robin? After the trial he waited for her. He was a bit confused over the whole proceedings. It was amazing. Robin had disobeyed a direct order to fire on an unarmed jump ship. He and Robin had been junior officers on the Dreadnaught Hornet, a massive ship the size of a small asteroid. The Hornet had just moved into a suspected enemy position. Her Commander, Admiral Quail, ordered the entire area sprayed with missiles and artillery. Several hours later the Hornet moved deeper in. Robin had been on deck watch. It was three bells first Dogwatch. Sean was early – just making the rounds. He was next up. Sensors picked up the ship first. Communications picked up the mayday. The message said that an Ambassador and his staff had escaped enemy fire, but the ship was crippled badly. Life-support was failing. Robin called general alert and informed the Admiral. The Admiral said it was a trick and ordered her to destroy the ship. His orders were not subject to debate. Robin clicked off. She informed Sean that she was going to disobey the order. The Hornet had no reason to fire upon an unarmed crippled ship with important delegates onboard. Sean agreed, but since his watch was coming up the responsibility would fall on his shoulders. Change of duty was a funny thing within GRID Command. Robin received the order first, but since she openly disobeyed it, the responsibility to carry it out would fall on Sean's shoulders. Instead, he also failed to obey those orders and further executed a plan of rescue, on his watch.

During the trial Admiral Quail had been relieved of space duty. He retired a month later. The Admiral had endangered

the lives of civilians. He disregarded proper protocol and was irresponsible in the execution of his duties. Robin was seen as a hero. She received a slap on the wrist, a commendation and a promotion. Sean also received a commendation, but since the Admiral's family had been deeply entrenched within GRID Command he was reassigned, suspended for a month. He did not inform the Admiral of the conspiracy, thus exacting a harsher punishment, later given command of the Johnson but denied promotion pending further investigation. Everyone was stunned. After the rescue, Sean had discovered evidence that the Admiral knew the Ambassador was in the area. Sean also discovered that the Ambassador had been pressuring the Admiral to retire years earlier for a debacle that jeopardized an entire system. The Admiral refused and threatened the Ambassador. All the evidence Sean uncovered had been tossed out and made classified. Robin's defense team distanced themselves from his. There were rumors of secret meetings in the judge's chamber.

After the trial and fallout, Robin informed Sean that she would be moving on. She thanked him for a great time but that was all it was. She had her eye on something bigger, something better. Her phallic symbol was advancement. For a long time Sean had been confused. He figured she would eventually come around to his way of thinking. He was firm in his convictions. He knew he was right. Robin would realize the mistake she had made when she dumped him. Sean waited. Counting off the days, counting off the weeks, then, in frustratingly painful realization, he counted off the months. The pain and frustration didn't subside as a year went by, then another, and another. The memory just got easier to deal with. Only in his moments of lapse did the pain come back.

The Top Deck door opened, and Robin walked in.

Sean looked over and grudgingly got up. "All is well, Captain." He reported.

Robin looked around. Several stares quickly shifted back to control stations. Maybe I'll be accepted, someday. Robin thought. "Very well, number one." She immediately regretted saying it. Sean had been Commander of the Johnson for years. The insult would sting for a while. Someday seemed like

forever now.

Sean cringed, but he locked his gaze on Robin. ‘You bitch!’ was his only thought.

Robin ignored his discomfort and sat in the command chair. Sean was about to sit when Robin broke the silence. “Commander, Dr. Loggar requested that someone give her some guidance in understanding GRID traveling.” Robin paused, waiting to see if Sean would pick up on the hint. He didn’t, or wouldn’t show that he did. “Please assist her in whatever she needs.”

Sean gritted his teeth. He spoke in a slow and measured tone. “Am I relieved from standing duties?”

Robin reflected. “Yes, Commander Dawn may temporarily perform number one duties. I want you to personally see to her needs, she --”

“Begging the Captain’s pardon,” Sean started with that same slow measured tone, “but shouldn’t a protocol officer be assigned to her?”

“Any other guest, yes. For Dr. Loggar, no. You will assist her. I told her that you will be calling on her in about three hours. Beside, this is a good excuse to find out why she asked for you specifically.”

Sean sat in the number one chair and thought about it. “Very well, Captain.”

Robin called over her shoulder, “Is the shuttle cleared?”

“Yes, ma’am” came a voice from behind.

“Mr. Kirkland, please give the Gallant’s captain my compliments.”

Kirkland typed on his keyboard and listened to his ear comm.

“Message sent, ma’am.”

“Thank you,” then, “Mr. Foster.”

“Ready, ma’am.”

“Good, you have the Doctor’s coordinates?”

Mr. Foster nodded.

“Your staff has been instructed on how we are to proceed?”

“Yes, ma’am.” The reply was curt and formal.

Robin punched the intercom button. “Now hear this, now hear this, prepare for long jumps. Prepare for long jumps. Trank

will not be needed.” She pushed another button. “Dr. Loggar?”

After a few seconds pause, “Yes? Is that you Captain?”

“Yes, it is. Please make yourself very comfortable. Each jump is extremely bumpy and rough the first hour.”

“Thank you, Captain. I shall.”

“Since you’ve never experienced long jumps, I’ll leave a transmit only comm. to your room. If you get tired of listening, just ask the computer to disconnect.”

“Thanks again, Captain, I do appreciate it.”

Robin tapped out a few commands on the Command CRT. She turned her attention back to command. “Mr. Foster, please proceed.”

Foster punched in several sequences of keys. “Aye, aye, ma’am. Coordinates locked in, computer has ‘a confirm’ panel is green, condition is green.”

Sean typed out a command on his CRT. “Confirmed, ship status is green, condition is green. Ship is ready Captain.”

Robin said, “Mr. Foster, bring Johnson along path. Start when ready.”

“Aye, Aye, ma’am. Johnson is along path. Probe launch, three seconds. Stand-by.”

The Johnson’s main engines pulsed. The GRID ship banked away and headed off into the void. A small round object emerged from the hindquarter of the ship. It glowed with intense brightness not seen by mortal eyes. The hulking vessel pointing away from it would respond to the radiate energy it produced, energy creating a gravity wave strong enough for the vessel to surf its way into the under-folds of space and time. The Johnson’s engines pulsed brightly. The ship disappeared into the under-folds of the space-time continuum and transcended distances too incredible to comprehend, too far to measure with mortal life spans.

A gift is something that holds a surprise inside. Usually it is given between friends, family or intimates. It is a symbol that transcends mere simple feelings but speaks of an underlying strong bond. It's very much a surprise when one's enemy gives the gift.

Chapter 6

Dr. Loggar looked at the strange mix of colors outside her window. Weird shimmering patterns danced about. Her door chimed. She turned, "Enter." The door opened and the figure in the door way caught her breath. Loggar had forgotten that Sean Blakemore would call on her. He stood in the doorway, in the flesh, finally. She had waited a long time to meet him and here he was. She regained her composure. "Commander Blakemore. I'm so glad you can assist me."

Sean leaned in. He looked timidly to the sides, and then stepped inside fully. The door closed. "Then, I'm not disturbing you?"

Loggar walked over and extended her hand, her offering of friendship.

Sean accepted . . . and quickly held his surprise. Did Loggar finger his palm?

"No, not at all, Commander. I do have to admit my awkward feelings in having to be instructed on the workings of GRID travel and by a Commander at that."

Sean smiled. That was a mouthful. "How so?"

She motioned them to the table. "One would think that being with GRID Command I would have picked up on how GRID travel is done." Sean shrugged, "Maybe, maybe not. I don't know anything about exobiology and anthropology myself."

Loggar laughed cutely and smiled wide. She looked into Sean's eyes for a moment. Trying to see what the window into his mind revealed. As a trained anthropologist she picked up on what Sean didn't say, didn't do.

Sean became uneasy. Loggar's stare was piercing. She locked gazes with him. "Ah, how should we start?" Sean

mildly choked out, breaking the horrid fear that was creeping over him. If he didn't know better, he would swear that Dr. Loggar wanted to get to know him. Really get to know him. He glanced quickly at the dress she was wearing, bright Red. Odd for a scientist he supposed, but he approved. She looked nice for a scientist. He noticed her skin. It was smooth and flawless, no wrinkles or scars. And her eyes, those piercing eyes that had -- what in the hell was he thinking? She was a scientist, a very important scientist, maybe a bit nutty in thinking aliens lived out there, but nonetheless important. He did wonder at why she asked about him. What he had been thinking was out of the question. Robin would have a field day if she found out that a VIP from GRID Command had literally palmed him. He wiped the thought of her piercing eyes, the curvature of her form, and her nice legs --.

“How about the history.” Loggar said, interrupting his thoughts.

Sean, you dog, he told himself, back to business. “The history, sure, good start.”

Jealousy is an animal that roams freely and with many disguises. Its true form can be a complete contradiction of its perceived form. Jealousy, fear, anger, wonderment, amusement, all part of the same family tree. Different roots from the tree but part of the same family.

Chapter 7

Robin looked at the display readout for the third time. It said the same thing it did when she looked at it the two previous times. She sighed and looked at her timepiece. Sean and Dr. Loggar had missed dinner. Robin thought about calling them - to see if they had forgotten, but thought better of it. Suppose they were indisposed? She stared at the display a fourth time. Same thing, nothing.

“Computer?” She called out.

“Yes, Captain Spaarin?”

“Is it possible to check on Commander Blakemore and Dr. Loggar without them being notified?”

“Is this a priority override request, Captain?”

Robin paused and reflected for a bit. “No, I suppose not. Maybe they’re still talking?”

“Unable to speculate without further inquiring.”

“No, I suppose not. Forget I asked about checking on them Computer.”

The computer beeped an acknowledgment.

Robin sat and wondered. This is what she had hoped for, wasn’t it? The Doctor did specifically ask for him. Robin subconsciously bit the side of her middle finger. Years of such biting created a thick layer of skin. ‘Am I jealous?’ was the thought that rang through her mind. ‘I liked Sean, but I made my decision. But then again, do I feel guilty?’ Robin sighed, pursed her lips, got up and straightened out her uniform. She purposefully walked out the room.

Sean lay on the couch with a glass of colored liquid on his chest. Dr. Loggar was hunched over a CRT gazing intensely at

some readout.

“Sean,” She called out, “is this to mean that the power output is proportionate to the mass?”

“Yeap.” He got up and walked over to Loggar. Her glass was empty. “Shall I?”

She looked up and caught Sean smiling at her. A forgotten feeling almost welled up. “Oh, my beer. Please.”

Sean took their glasses over to the tap. “Computer, Beer, please.” When her glass was full, he drained his and filled it up. “Beer.” He said handing the glass to her.

Loggar took a sip. “Is that why the ship transverses roughly the first hour?”

Sean looked at the readout and smiled, and whistled softly. “I never had a student like you before. No wonder GRID Command listens to you when you speak.”

She shrugged, “Sometimes, sometimes not. I’m a little fortunate, though. Picking a field that is just starting to make some waves.” She stared Sean in the eyes for a long time. The thing that amazed her was that he was staring back. His eyes were warm and delightful, if not a bit out of focus from the adult beverage.

Sean couldn’t believe he was falling for a scientist, especially a scientist as renowned as Dr. Loggar. He stirred a little and reluctantly moved his gaze over to the read out. He nodded, “Doc, you’re right, that’s why it’s bumpy the first time . . . the first hour.”

Robin stood outside the door to Dr. Loggar’s room. She listened, nothing. She pressed the chime button and waited.

The chime rang.

“Who could that be?” Loggar mused.

“Oops, I bet it’s the Captain. We didn’t exactly excuse ourselves from dinner. It’s my fault.”

“Dr. Loggar, Cmdr. Blakemore?” Robin’s disembodied voice called out.

“Enter.” Sean spoke and straightened himself for the stare. “I’m sorry Captain. I should have . . .”

Loggar interrupted, “Sean, I should be the one to apologize.”

Robin silently worded, ‘Sean.’

“It is my fault Captain, you see, when I get interested in

something, I become obsessed . . .”

Robin leaned forward.

Loggar’s statement struck Robin as both amusing and disturbing. Loggar was obsessed with Sean. She wondered when she would tell him. She wondered if she would if either of them ever asked. “. . . I was just very interested. I hope I didn’t get the Commander in trouble?”

“No, not at all Doctor. I did relieve Commander Blakemore from his temporary duties to help you. I should have reminded you about dinner.”

“Is it too late? Dinner I mean.” Loggar asked.

Sean replied, “No, we could have it in here or in the galley, The Johnson has 24-hour service.”

Dr. Loggar ran her hand across her stomach. “I am a bit hungry and I suppose I should put something in my stomach besides adult beverage.” She turned to Sean, “Commander, I don’t suppose you could show me to the galley. I’m sure the food is much much better than from a Cargonaught.”

Sean nodded, “Beggin’ your Captain’s permission,” and enjoyed Robin’s slight discomfort. He had a feeling that this particular exchange of words and set of happenstances was not boding well with her.

Robin nodded once, and watched as Loggar followed Sean down the corridor. The Doctor had used the word obsessed. Robin thought, ‘Sean heard, I heard it, and the Doctor realized we both understood. Loggar is someone you should watch out for.’

They faded off in the distance giggling. Robin had never known Sean to giggle! The door hissed closed.

Robin turned to the CRT Dr. Loggar had been looking at. It displayed advanced formulas of GRID jumping and power conduction equations. She noticed two equations that didn’t belong to GRID calculating. Several symbols were foreign, but don’t scientists often invent new ways of saying the same thing?

Robin said, “Computer?”

“Yes, Captain Spaarin?”

“Copy Dr. Loggar’s ‘text’ from this CRT to primary TEMP region.”

“Done Captain, anything else?”

“No . . . yes! Priority override. Mask my request to copy Loggar’s text to primary TEMP region.”

The computer beeped an acknowledgment.

Robin looked around and noted the near full glass of beer and no-doubt Sean’s glass of toxins he liked to drink. She walked out and the door hissed closed shutting out a scene that made Robin feel guilty, upset, angry, and scared.