

ATTACK

Chapter I

At that moment, the ZX/2 lifted from the floor of the dock and dashed down a long corridor. Lights flashed in front of them. A loud voice came over the speakers, "Stop that craft or be destroyed!"

"Get over here! We can hide you here," a voice came from inside the entrance to the cave on the outskirts of the colony. "We have room for you, but you need to hurry," the voice called out.

Joseph ran to the cave running back and forth avoiding the tracer fire that was flying around him.

The Reidforcians were attacking the Lambdata Colony and they intended to destroy everything.

From the entrance of the cave, the group hiding inside watched the place they called home go up in flames.

The attack was so sudden, the defenses were trapped on the ground and were destroyed before they could engage the enemy.

When the attack was over, the only things left were burning buildings and debris scattered all about.

The attack didn't last long, but the affects were devastating. The group inside of the cave left cautiously to see what might be left of the colony.

As they looked over the ridge above the small city, smoke rose into the sky. It

became apparent that they had survived the attack only because they had left the protection of the city.

It was an emotional time as they realized that each one of them had lost friends and family in the attack.

One of the group members suggested that they return to the cave. He had some food from his picnic and he was willing to share. Others shared what they had.

Joseph knew these people. He had been on the colony for almost a year now. He was scared, but felt safer now that he was with friends. They waited in the cave not knowing if the Reidforcians would attack again.

Mr. Wantis had a communicator with him and he was trying to reach anyone who might be monitoring his signal.

“This Jesse Wantis of the Lambdata colony, is there anyone there?” he kept repeating.

Suddenly there was a voice, “This is the CIG ship *Burmi*, what can we do for you?”

“We have come under attack. Our colony has been destroyed. Can you help us?” Mr. Wantis pleaded.

“Hold on, I’ll be right back,” the voice answered.

After a few minutes of silence another voice rang out, “This is Admiral Verondi, what is your situation?”

“Our colony has been attacked. We are hiding in a cave on the outskirts of the city. Can you help us?” Jesse Wantis explained the situation to the admiral.

“We will send help. Give us your coordinates and our fighters will get you. How many of you are there?” Admiral Verondi asked.

“There are seven of us here. I am not sure if there are any other survivors,” Jesse gave the count and assessment of their situation.

Soon the fighters appeared in the air space over the now destroyed colony. CIG soldiers spread out around the town assessing the damage and looking for other survivors. Not much was left. They did find a few things found that had been stored in deep underground caverns, including a project that Joseph Xelco’s father had been working on.

They found notes left by Dr. Matthew Xelco, the lead project manager, that detailed his capture, and the execution of his entire staff.

There were about one hundred survivors, most needing medical attention, that were transported to the *Burmi* for relocation to the Sigmata colony, a Confederation of Interplanetary Governments (CIG) outpost in the Vultar sector.

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As the planet of Manita came into view, from the observation deck atop the rescue ship *Burmi*, Denise noticed the look of turmoil on Joseph's face. During the Reidforcian attack on the Lambdata scientific colony, his mother was killed and his father was taken captive. Joseph felt guilty that he had survived, and not them, after all, he had wandered off on his own forgetting about his parents. Now he was on the *Burmi* heading for the Sigmata colony, and they weren't.

Denise told her mother that she thought it would be a good idea if Joseph received some comforting words from an adult. Mrs. Wantis agreed with her so she walked over to the boy to give him some words of support.

"I understand how you must feel Joseph. Besides, I knew your mother very well, and I know that she would want you to continue without them. You have your whole life ahead of you.

"It's just not fair, I survived the attack, and they didn't. I should have stayed with them," Joseph said with tears welling up in his eyes.

"It's not your fault." Mrs. Wantis responded in a reassuring tone. "You didn't tell the Reidforcians to attack the colony."

"I hate the Reidforcians and I am going to free my father no matter what it takes," Joseph exploded in a rage as he ran off to be alone.

Mrs. Wantis looked back at her daughter and shrugged her shoulders. "Maybe we should just give him some time to be alone.

Denise agreed with her mother. They sat looking out of the windows at the expanse of space.

Mr. Wantis had been looking for his family. When he found them on the observation deck he embraced them. They sat and talked for a while, happy they had been fortunate enough not to be on the main campus when the attack took place. They were on a short excursion for a family hike when the attack happened. Denise was very close to her parents, and was happy they were safe and together.

After an hour or so Mrs. Wantis sent Denise to find Joseph. They had plans to go on a tour of the ship. She hoped that by doing something interesting, Joseph would get his mind on something other than the loss of his parents.

Denise found Joseph sitting alone in the food court. He had a cup of hot chocolate and he was eating a cookie. He looked lonely.

Joseph and Denise knew each other from the outpost, but they hadn't spent much time together, because they were both shy. There weren't a lot kids their age around. They had gone to some of the school activities and liked each other. There just wasn't a lot of free time on an outpost.

"Hey Joseph, is it OK if I sit with you for a while?" Denise asked.

"It's a free ship," Joseph said sarcastically.

"Thanks," Denise replied as she sat down to join him.

"Do you want some?" Joseph offered a piece of his cookie to Denise.

"No thank you, I just came by to tell you that we've been invited to go on a tour of the *Burmi*. Do you want to come?" Denise smiled as she asked Joseph.

"I geth so. I hab notting bedder to do wit my time wight now." Joseph replied through his food. As he got up he stuffed the remainder of his cookie into his mouth and drank the rest of his milk, spilling most of it on the front of his shirt.

Denise laughed at him, "Smooth move!"

He brushed the front of his shirt to wipe the milk off, shrugged his shoulders and grinned, showing the cookie crumbs on his teeth. Then they walked out of the commissary.

"I was told we are going to meet with Admiral Verondi in the control center. I think he's expecting us," Denise directed Joseph as they approached the eleporter.

She pushed the button and as soon as the door opened they both stepped in, Denise

first.

“Control room please,” Denise gave the instructions since Joseph was still trying to swallow what remained of his cookie.

The door closed and with a swoosh, and then the elevator began to move. Shortly after that, the doors opened exposing the control center of the *Burmi*.

The tour began in the control room where they saw how the ship operated and learned about the job assignments of each of the crewmembers. It was here that they met Admiral Vernondi. He was the only surviving officer of the Confederation of Interplanetary Governments’ command center located on Lambdata. He had been on an assignment away from the facility when the attack occurred. He returned in time to see the devastation caused by the invasion, and he took over control of rescuing the survivors.

“Welcome to the control center. If you have any questions or need any assistance don’t hesitate to ask,” Admiral Vernondi greeted Joseph and Denise with a smile. He had been a good friend of Joseph’s parents, and he knew Joseph as well. “I am sorry for your loss Joseph; your parents were good friends of mine.”

“Thank you sir, I appreciate that,” Joseph responded less than enthusiastically.

They moved on to the medical treatment bay where Denise showed her knowledge of medical methods and equipment. Denise’s mother was a Military Reserve Medical Specialist (MRMS). She was teaching nursing skills on Lambdata, and she was teaching Denise many of the new medical techniques used on the most sophisticated ships in the CIG force. Denise was impressed with the equipment in the medical center and the lab that was adjacent to it.

“This is better than most hospitals,” Denise commented.

Their next stop was the shuttle dock. This is where all of the smaller attack ships are stored and maintained. They learned how the Tolmit Airlock System (T.A.S.) worked, the system that releases ships from the *Burmi*.

Joseph enjoyed this better than the medical lab. He admired the many attack ships in the holding area. One of them had rescued him from the outpost.

Someday he wanted to become a fighter pilot and rid the world of the Reidforcians.

He was a cadet pilot in his school, and because of his father's assignment to the command center, had access to the simulators. He was very comfortable flying in the simulator. His scores were very good.

"What is that over there?" Joseph asked as he moved toward a sleek silver ship he had never seen before. "Is that the experimental craft my father was working on?" Joseph walked over to the craft and circled around it.

"Yes, this is the ZX/2 experimental craft," The escort answered.

"Wow! This is really cool." Joseph said as he admired the ship.

In front of them was a sleek silver craft with blue markings. Emblazoned on the tail was "ZX/2 ~ CIG-2541". The wings sloped back gracefully from the fuselage. There were small windows made of one way glass around the main cabin. Under the ship were three landing struts that retracted into the body of the ship. Also mounted on the underside were five missiles, and two trazer canons. There were communication antennas located above the cabin area Two streamlined thrusters on either side of the tail gave it a regal appearance. Neither of them had ever seen anything like this before. They just stared up at it.

"This is the CIG's new ZX/2 Experimental unit," the guide explained.

"Can we go inside and look around?" Joseph asked.

The officer nodded yes and Joseph and Denise went inside. Joseph immediately sat in the pilot's seat. "This is so cool! How fast can this thing go?" Joseph asked as he turned towards the guide.

Corporal Rant began to describe the ZX/2. "It's the best piece of engineering of our time. In fact, it's the only craft to be equipped with the McMarian Hyper-Warp drive technology. It also has two Krolon Power canons, capable of forty mega-throns of force and five Ralston torpedoes."

He then went on to explain the operation of the craft. "To engage the thrusters the throttle pod must be activated by raising the blue cover and pushing the switch forward. Then by pushing the double levers forward the sub-light engines engage. As the craft moves forward through the release tunnel the button on the right labeled T.A.S. is pushed.

Then the doors open. After that, the craft is under the control of the CPU. Even a shuttle pilot can operate it. The ZX/2 has the most advanced systems known to the Confederation of Interplanetary Governments, however some of the newer components are still under initial testing,” Corporal Rant continued.

“The reason we’ve got such an advanced piece of equipment here on the *Burmi* is that it was on the Lambdata colony where we rescued you. Fortunately the ship was underground hiding in a special hanger. Admiral Verondi knew where it was, so we were able to retrieve it and bring it here. Fortunately the Reidforcians didn’t know it was there or we would be in big trouble. They would have taken it and discovered the secrets behind the McMarian Hyper-Warp drive technology. They know about the McMarian Hyper-Warp system and they desperately want it. We are lucky they didn’t get their hands on this!”

When the tour guide advised the two that it was time to leave, Joseph pushed Corporal Rant out of the small spacecraft, raised the door to the hatch, locked the door, and then jumped into the pilot’s seat. He put on the headphones, buckled his seat belt and then lifted the blue cover pushing the switch forward. He then engaged the main power throttle.

“Joseph Xelco! What do you think you’re you doing?” Denise shouted in a rage as she rushed to the seat next to Joseph and followed his lead by putting on her helmet and seat belt.

“WE are going to Reidforcia to free my father. And, if possible, rid the galaxy of the Reidforcians while we’re at it,” was Joseph’s reply. “By the way, HOLD ON!” he added.

At that moment, the ZX/2 lifted from the floor of the dock and dashed down a long corridor. Lights flashed in front of them. A loud voice came over the speakers, “Stop that craft or be destroyed!”

Denise Screamed, “We’re gonna be killed!”

Joseph gripped the controls and glared down the long shaft as if in a trance. He noticed the button on the dash panel marked T.A.S. He pushed the button and the two large doors in front of him opened releasing them into the darkness of space.

A glaring voice over the headset radio said, “Return to the ship or be destroyed!”

“Go back before they blow us up!” Denise urged Joseph with panic in her voice.

Joseph ignored her pleas and engaged the power system. Joseph’s time in the simulator gave him all the confidence he needed. His father thought that it was important for him to have knowledge of flying so when he was older he could apply to the academy and become a CIG officer. He was familiar with most of the functions on the control panel and knew how to operate it.

Just then the monotone sound of a synthesized voice startled him. “What is your destination?”

He wasn’t aware that there would be a voice recognition CPU on the *ZX/2*. “This is going to be fun,” Joseph said to himself.

Joseph replied to the CPU, “Computer, set the auto-navigation system for the Blithonian solar system in the Colderus sector of the third quadrant,” In other words, Reidforcia.

Suddenly the ship lurched forward leaving the security of the rescue ship behind and hurtled into the emptiness that lay before them.

Once the craft was a safe distance from the *Burmi*, Joseph went down into the lower section, under the console, and began working on something.

After a seemingly endless silence, Denise began to ask questions. “Do you really think that you are going to get away with this? In case you haven’t noticed, we are in a stolen craft heading for a planet that belongs to the cruelest people in the known universe.”

He popped his head up from below and acknowledged Denise. “What’s the problem? You heard the guy; this is the best piece of technology in the universe. We are absolutely safe,” Joseph said in one of those get a life voice tones.

“Is that so,” Denise remarked. “Well Mr. Bigshot, we’ve managed to get off of the *Burmi*, but it seems as if you’ve forgotten that we have yet to get down onto the planet without being detected.”

“Will you quit being such a worrywart,” responded Joseph. “Perhaps if you had been paying more attention you would have noticed while you’ve been up there worrying yourself to death, I have been down below converting our shields into a detection jamming

system.”

He then crawled out of the hole and resumed his position at the controls.

Joseph set the *ZX/2* auto control, and set the speed to maximum, using the Greco Light Drive system. He decided not to use the McMarian Hyper-Warp system, mostly because he was not yet familiar with it. At that speed it would take a couple of days to get to their destination.

The bickering ended with that (partially because they both fell asleep).