

### Chapter 3

Location: Promise, Promise Subsector, Diaspora Sector  
1124 UST, Day 355, NE 5

When it was evident that the Blue Goose had entered normal space, Captain Nile said on the crew intercom, “All stations report conditions on hyperspace exit.”

As soon as the Blue Goose was clear of the static that might be caused by their entry into normal space, Captain Nile contacted the Aubaine. “RCS Aubaine, this is ACL 10253 inbound, do you copy?”

“Roger, 253, we have you inbound. Good to see you back T-Man,” the officer of the deck on the Aubaine replied to Captain Nile’s call, using his call sign.

“Is that you Two-Fer?” Captain Nile replied. “I thought you rotated back home months ago.”

“It’s me alright, T-Man,” he replied. “They made me an offer I couldn’t refuse, but I should be off by time you get in, so look me up and we’ll talk.”

“Roger that Two-Fer,” Captain Nile replied, “We will be within visual in about 5 hours.”

“See you when you get in,” the officer replied.

Lieutenant Inshali said, “Captain, all stations report conditions normal.”

“Very well,” he said, looking at his status multi-function display. Then the captain switched to public address and said, “This is the captain. We have just exited hyperspace and have entered the Promise system. Welcome to the edge of the AO. We are currently inbound to the main world where the RCS Aubaine is in orbit. ETA is approximately 5 hours. Passengers will be able to disembark shortly after docking. We hope you enjoyed your trip.”

Switching off the public address, he turned to his astrogator and said, “I’d like to get to the Aubaine in no more than 6 hours. Plot a course and make recommendations for the burn sequence.”

“Yes, sir,” she replied, calling up the system navigation program on the navigation multi-function display. “I’ll have it ready shortly.”

The captain left the bridge and locked it behind him as usual. In the reception area, he saw Doc. After greeting her he asked, “How did our passengers handle the exit?”

She said, “Much better. I think the new kids are getting used to it now. We only had one lose his lunch this time.”

“That is an improvement,” he said. “Does Petty Officer Daniels have lunch ready?”

“He started a few minutes ago. It should be ready shortly. It won’t be anything fancy though.”

“I wouldn’t expect it to be since we came out of hyperspace right in the middle of the regular meal hour,” he said as they walked to the port side of the ship. She paused outside of her stateroom and said, “Maybe I’m just getting old, but these marines seem like kids to me.”

“I know the feeling Doc,” he noted, “but you’re not really all that old.”

“I know, skip,” she said, looking square at him, “but sometimes I worry that we are spending too much of the Coalition’s youth investing in the future.”

“I understand how you feel, Doc,” he said and nodded. “But consider that as the Coalition expands, the pool of available young men and women expands with it. The newer ones know what it is to not be part of an interstellar community. Hell, you and I both grew up on worlds that were largely isolated. That’s why we do what we do, so that others might have a better future. We have to look to tomorrow.”

“Do you ever think you’ll give up being a starship jockey and settle down, skip?” She asked quietly.

“Maybe. Maybe one day, Doc, but I have a job to do right now, and, well, the stars are in my blood.” He smiled at her. “You could easily finish a few courses and become a physician’s assistant, but you’re still out here.”

She smile and said, “I’m too much like you, skip. The stars are in my blood.” She opened the door to her stateroom and said, “I better let you get back to your captaining.”

He laughed and continued on to his stateroom while she went into hers.

In his stateroom, he left the lights off, and went to command the viewport to clear. Remembering that they had not yet enabled the circuitry on the bridge, he called over to Lieutenant Inshali and had he enable them.

With the viewport clear, he sat and looked out at the stars. An edge of Promise was visible at the bow portion of the viewport. He noticed that Lieutenant Inshali had not cleared the bridge viewports. She was comfortable with the information the sensors were providing her.

He got up to get some water when the word came over his intercom, “Captain I am picking up some bogies.”

He set the bottle of water into a holder, keyed the intercom and said, “I’m on my way.”

Moving quickly, he returned to the bridge. Upon getting into his seat, he called up the sensor screen on one of his multi-function displays. Looking at the display, he saw what the lieutenant was talking about. There was a pair of bogies, which she had tagged as P1 and P2, moving quite quickly towards the Blue Goose's projected course.

He asked her, "Do you have a plot worked out yet?"

"No sir," she replied. "Permission to interrogate them?"

"They're probably friendlies," he said, "permission granted."

She called up the transponder screen on her operations multi-function display and pressed the INTERROGATE soft key.

The Blue Goose's transponder sent out a coded signal to all vessels in the area. The transponders of the bogies replied with a coded signal identifying them as fighters attached to the Aubaine.

Lieutenant Inshali said, "They are friendlies. Fighters from the Aubaine. They must be running with radio silence or using masers. I'm not getting anything on the passive sensors."

"Well, they are aware we are here, since we called in over an open channel. I'm pretty sure they will stay out of our way." He said relaxing a bit.

"I'll keep an eye on them," she said as she continued to work a plot. "Initial indication is that they will have a closest point of approach at .2 light seconds in about an hour, sir."

"That's reasonable comfortable," he said. "Do you need a break?"

"No, thank you, captain," she replied without looking up from her multi-function displays, "I'm good for now."

"When do we need to execute the first burn?" He asked.

"We can execute a burn anytime," She replied. "I think a half-hour burn to accelerate our inbound flight would do well, and then we can execute a slow down burn as we get closer to the Aubaine's position."

"I'm going to take a short break, and then we can get started on the burn." He said, getting out of his seat and heading for the door.

"I'll factor that in," she said and went back to work on her plot of the course.

He returned to his stateroom and finished the water he had gotten before being called to the bridge. He sat down and went back to watching the stars.

The planet of Promise was a bit larger in view now. He turned to look at its blue and green expanse thinking about how it was dominated by Virus not too very long ago. The Reformation Coalition had liberated it and was now helping its population rebuild their civilization and join the interstellar community.

His thoughts were touched with a trace of sadness. He had lost a good friend in that campaign when a Vampire ship rammed the ship he was on.

He apparently had been too deep into his reverie, because before he knew it, Lieutenant Inshali was paging him from the bridge.

“Captain,” she said, “we are coming up on a half hour.”

“I’ll be right there.” He replied and placed his empty water bottle into a holder.

He moved quickly to the bridge and got strapped into his seat. He put on his headset and punched up the public address mode. He said, “This is the captain. We are about to execute a burn to get us to the Aubaine quicker. There should be little noticeable effect since it is within the capabilities of our inertial compensators.”

Switching back to crew intercom, he turned to Lieutenant Inshali and said, “Slew the ship for the burn. Is engineering ready?”

Lieutenant Inshali said, “Aye, sir,” and pointed the nose of the ship in the direction that, when they executed the burn, would give them a vector towards the Aubaine. When it was lined up she said, “All set, sir. The engineer reported that the HePlaRs were warmed and ready for burn.”

“Very well,” he replied and started a countdown. When the countdown reached zero, he pressed the soft key to ignite the HePlaRs and begin the burn. The HePlaRs started to push the Blue Goose along the axis that the ship’s nose formed.

When the ship had continued its burn for 30 minutes, Captain Nile disengaged the HePlaRs and the Blue Goose continued to move silently through the void with the momentum imparted to it by the thrust of the engines.

Several hours later, as the ship neared the planet and the Aubaine in orbit around it, Captain Nile reversed the process, swinging the aft end of the ship opposite of the line of travel so the burn would decelerate the ship.

After a series of short burns and attitude adjustments, the Blue Goose had matched course and speed with the Aubaine and was floating in orbit off of her port side. The Aubaine

had a cargo module with a standard cargo dock fitting. Using the attitude thrusters, Captain Nile gently brought the Blue Goose in to dock with the Aubaine's cargo module.

When he was sure there was a good lock and seal, he called on the public address, "We have docked with the Aubaine. Passengers will be permitted to disembark shortly. Make sure you have your orders ready to present to the dock watch. Secure the maneuvering watch, station the normal underway watch, section 2."

Switching to the crew intercom, he called, "Engineering, reduce the power plant output to 10%. We won't be connecting to shore power while we are here."

"Aye, captain," Lieutenant Buchannon replied, "Will we be taking on fuel here?"

"I'm not sure," he replied, shutting down his console. "The Aubaine probably has fuel to spare, so I will see if I can arrange for some."

"That sounds good, captain," she replied. "It will be good to get some fuel that we don't have to refine ourselves."

From the forward cargo dock, Petty Officer Daniels called, "Request permission to open the forward cargo doors."

"Permission granted," the Captain replied. Looking out the viewport, he could see the Aubaine's cargo dock mere feet from the bridge. He continued, "See how soon they can accept the cargo in the lock. I wish to use that for access to the Aubaine."

"Aye, captain," Petty Officer Daniels replied. He double checked to make sure that there was atmosphere on the far side of the cargo door and then cycled it open. Beyond the doors were the outer doors of the docking module. He keyed the intercom that was there and said, "Aubaine, request that the outer doors of the cargo dock be opened."

The loadmaster of the Aubaine replied, "Opening now, ACL 253. Do you have any mail for us?"

"We have several bags," Petty Officer Daniels said, "But I'll take those to your yeoman once I get the load out of the cargo lock. How soon do you think you can receive it?"

The Aubaine's loadmaster asked, "How much do you have in your lock?"

Petty Officer Daniels said, looking at the pallets, "In the lock, we have the better part of 15 tons, all palletized. We have another 50 in the main cargo bay."

"We have room right now and can receive at least that much as soon as you are ready to transfer it," the loadmaster said.

“I’ll inform my captain and we can probably get started,” Petty Officer Daniels said. He stepped back to the intercom in the cargo lock. Selecting the bridge, he called, “Captain, the Aubaine’s loadmaster says he can receive the lock’s cargo now. I am going to get that moving.”

“Very well, Petty Officer Daniels, report when the lock is clear,” the captain replied.

“Aye, captain,” he reported and then stepped through into the Aubaine’s cargo dock to talk with their loadmaster.

Lieutenant Buchannon entered the bridge. She said, “The power plant is operating at 10 percent. I’m read to assume the watch.”

The captain said, “Very well. Daniels is getting the cargo lock emptied. Contact the Aubaine’s duty officer and let him know we have new personnel for them. Once both of those are accomplished, you can let the passengers disembark.”

“Anything special I need to be aware of?” Lieutenant Buchannon asked while energizing the third console on the bridge. It was designed for the engineer to operate from on the bridge, but she preferred to stay back nearer the equipment.

“No,” he replied, getting up. “I think that covers it. My first priority is to get the cargo lock emptied and the passengers disembarked. I will be going over to talk with the Aubaine’s captain about several matters. Besides the fuel, I will see if we can get a replacement part for Number 2 engine.”

“The machined part seems to be holding up well enough, sir.” She frowned a bit, thinking that the captain did not trust her work.

“It is and you are again to be commended for your work replacing it.” He smiled at his engineer and said, “However, I would like to have a ready spare on board in case something happens to it.”

“I understand, sir,” She said, still not happy with the idea. “It is always good to have ready spares on hand. All right then, I am ready to assume the watch.”

“You have the watch, Lieutenant,” he said and then headed for the door. He paused and said, “I will be heading over to the Aubaine in a few minutes.”

Lieutenant Inshali secured her console and said, “I think I am going to go shower and take a nap. I’ll come back and spell you later if you want to do the same, Kalin.”

“Thanks, but I’ll be okay for awhile,” she replied. “Enjoy your nap. I figure there will be time to relax later tonight. Do you think we’ll go planetside?”

Lieutenant Inshali shook her head, “I don’t think the captain is of a mind to go dirtside. I think he wants to drop this cargo off, load anything heading back to the coalition and get underway for home.”

“He doesn’t seem to be too thrilled about this particular run,” Kalin replied, slipping into her seat. “I wonder what has him distracted.”

“Hard to say,” Lieutenant Inshali said, “I spend a lot of time with him on the bridge during maneuvering, but he doesn’t really open up about personal stuff.”

“That seems like it would be awkward at times,” Kalin said, “Back aft, it is just me and my drives.”

“I don’t mind the company,” she said, “Whether it is silence or conversation. Anyway, I hear a shower calling my name.”

Kalin laughed, “Go ahead and take a Hollywood shower. I think you’ve earned it.”

Lieutenant Inshali smiled, “I’m not sure I could take a Hollywood shower with a good conscience. I have programmed my mind to take ship showers for too long.”

“I give you my personal permission as the chief water maker on this ship,” Kalin said. “That should ease your conscience.”

“I’ll give it a try, Kalin,” she said, “but I can’t make any promises.”

“Get out of here,” Kalin said furrowing her brows with mock anger.

They both laughed but Lieutenant Inshali headed for the door and ultimately the shower that waited for her.

On the bridge, Kalin called up the engineering display on one multi-function display so she could keep an eye on the power plant condition. On another multi-function display, she called up the sensor screen and cycled through various external cameras to inspect the hull of the Blue Goose.

Captain Nile went to his stateroom briefly to make sure he was presentable before heading over to the forward cargo lock. As he entered the lock, he saw that Petty Officer Daniels had already cleared half of the pallets. The loadmaster was moving another one into position in the Aubaine’s auxiliary cargo module when he stepped over to the other ship.

There was a security watch stationed at the far side of the cargo bay. Captain Nile approached him and requested permission to board the Aubaine.

Once granted permission, he took a lift up to the Aubaine's central spine where he took the travelator forward to the control module. There he went to the wardroom hoping to find the captain there.

The captain was not present in the wardroom, but the mess attendant there suggested that he might be on the bridge. Captain Nile went to the bridge and did find him there.

The Captain of the Aubaine extended his hand to Captain Nile and said, "Welcome aboard the Aubaine captain, we have a job for you."