

# **BEYOND THE GALAXY**

ADVENTURE #1:  
CAPTIVITY

by  
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# PROLOGUE

“Hey, Great Grandpa. Whatcha doin’?” asked the little boy as he raced through the living room door.

The old man turned around and smiled. His thick gray eyebrows rose and his wrinkled cheeks puffed up. In his hand he held a video photograph.

“Just looking at an old photo,” he answered. “Want to see it?”

“Who is it?” the child asked staring at the picture of the young man with bright eyes and an old-fashioned hair cut.

“His name is Joshua Stoner. He was my Great Grandfather.”

“But that’s *my* name,” said the boy, clearly puzzled.

“Yes, you are named after him. When your father was just about your age I used to tell him stories all about this Joshua Stoner. He loved hearing about Josh’s exciting adventures. Josh was his hero, so it was no surprise that he named you Joshua when you were born.”

“Was he a superhero like Spectrum Warrior?” asked Little Josh, his eyes opened wide.

“Not quite that kind of hero, but he was a hero. He was a pioneer in the American space program. When he began his

career the space program was virtually in its infancy. There were only six spaceships and the technology at that time was fairly antique compared to what we use now.”

“What’s a spaceship, Great Grandpa?”

“It’s what we now call nebula turbo shuttle jets. The spaceships back then were much smaller and traveled a lot slower. Communication throughout the galaxies was more difficult, too.”

“Didn’t they have cell chips in their hands?” asked Little Josh, pointing to the area in his right wrist where his embedded phone chip was slightly visible under his pale skin.

“No, Little Josh,” smiled Great Grandpa. “This was before the chips were invented. They did have a type of cell phone that could be used on the ship and within certain ranges. Like I said, their technology was still pretty elementary.”

“But they must have had computers,” commented Little Josh.

“Of course, they had computers. However, would you believe they had to push a key to make each letter go into the computer? They use to call it keyboarding or typing. When Josh started his career they were still employing a combination of the old keyboarding and the newer tablets, and the even newer speech recognition. Now of course we just use brain recognition.”

“Great Grandpa, can you tell me one of the stories you told Daddy about Joshua Stoner?”

“Sure.” Great Grandpa James Glenn Stoner sat down and patted the overstuffed cushion on his left. “Come, sit next to me.” Little Josh climbed up on the couch. He leaned his head on his Great Grandpa’s shoulder. “Let’s see, where should I begin...?”

# CHAPTER ONE

MAY 1



Spaceship Captain Joshua Stoner flipped off his private intercom and ran his hands through his hair. His wavy blonde hair and sparkling blue eyes made him appear much younger than his thirty-two years. At thirty-two he was one of the youngest Space Captains in the entire United Galaxy Command. This was only his second year in command of the U.S.S. *Gladiator*, but he had already proved himself a worthy and highly respected captain. He was in complete rapport with his crew. Aside from occasional squabbles, Captain Josh Stoner ran a taut ship equipped with a relaxed but highly reliable crew.

In just ten minutes Captain Stoner would be joining the landing party in the Conveyor Port. He leaned back in his chair and locked his hands behind his head. Glancing around the room, he noticed his reflection in the mirror above his desk.

*What would I be doing right now, he thought, if I had taken that ten million-dollar bonus to sign with the Cleveland Browns? Would I be happier with my life than I am at this time?*

There was probably no other career in the world that was as exciting as being a Galaxy Command Officer. And he wasn't just any old Command Officer. He was a Spaceship Captain. There were only five other people in the world who held that distinction. The prestige of his position was unmatched. He would never forget the ceremony when he was promoted to Captain. It was an answer to his great grandfather's childhood dreams. Josh remembered watching *Star Trek* reruns on television with his great grandfather, Kyle Stoner. *Star Trek* was a popular TV show when his great grandfather was a little boy. The show was a science fiction series about a time in the future when spaceships explored distant planets. His great grandfather had dreamed of being just like Captain Kirk and having his own Starship Enterprise to command. And here it was one hundred years later and his great grandson was actually doing what seemed at one time like the impossible dream.

But, with all the glamour and prestige, and excitement, there was still a void in the life of the young Spaceship Captain. Josh had spent the last ten years of this life in space. He had only seen his parents briefly during those years. Marriage and having a family of his own was almost totally out of the question. Maybe one day he'd retire and settle down on a planet colony somewhere in the Andromeda Galaxy.

The intercom buzzed sharply and startled Josh. He unlocked his hands and flipped on the intercom.

"Stoner here."

"Sir, the landing party is assembled and ready to go."



The U.S.S. Gladiator was a massive spacecraft with ten full decks and living quarters for a crew of one hundred. The ship was oblong and resembled a submarine with wings. The bow of the ship boasted a 180° windshield that offered spectacular views of the galaxies it glided through. There were also four portal windows on each side of the craft. The steel blue ship proudly displayed the name U.S.S. Gladiator in large Navy blue letters painted under the portals. The stern contained a giant satellite dish that afforded the crew computer and communications access. Affixed to the top of the ship was a tall antenna like structure that housed the ship's sensors. Underneath the rear end of the ship was the hangar.

Just like the legendary mission of the U.S.S. Enterprise to explore strange new worlds and seek out new life, the purpose of the U.S.S. Gladiator was to gain knowledge about distant planets and galaxies. It was one of the six spaceships dispatched into outer space by United Galaxy Command. Great advancements in aerospace and aeronautical engineering during the past century had made interstellar travel possible. It was the discovery of solar heated hydro-rocks that provided the jet propulsion needed to make space travel faster and safer. Every ship in the UGC was equipped with the latest electronic technology and information systems available for intergalactic communication and research including automatic universal spoken language translation programs and ship to planet satellite phones. Zip guns capable of emitting a non-lethal dose of laser beam radiation that could render a person momentarily helpless but could also be set to deliver a fatal dose that could kill a victim immediately, were stocked

in the ship's arsenal along with the old-fashioned combat type weapons and an array of lasers, torpedoes, and blasters thereby ensuring that these ships were suitably able to defend themselves if necessary.

Inside the spaceship was a busy community of crew members going about the daily business of maintaining this fabulous craft. All were dressed in regulation uniforms. The UGC uniforms were constructed of the latest form of breathable nylon. The smooth material provided warmth in cold temperatures but was cool on the skin even in intense heat. The thin material was actually very strong and durable as well as flame resistant. The uniforms which were designed for comfort consisted of long sleeved polo shirts and full length slacks. The crew wore identical uniforms in different colors depending on the occasion. Aboard the Gladiator they always wore green. On expeditions they usually donned either blue uniforms or a camouflage version. When on leave or visiting a space station the red uniforms were required. For formal occasions the crew all dressed in white. On the upper left chest each uniform had the red, white, and blue UGC logo that resembled the Milky Way in a spinning diamond. On the other side crew members' names were embroidered into the material with black thread. Gold stars and black stripes across the cuffs indicated the rank of the wearer. All personnel wore Navy issued black leather boots.

The landing party was just stepping onto the Conveyor platform as Josh entered the room. The U.S.S. Gladiator had one of the best crews, if not the best, of all of the six Galaxy Command Ships. He glanced at his landing party. Doctor Paul Loring, Chief Medical Officer was standing on the platform waiting patiently. Paul was Josh's closest friend in the world. He and Paul went to Ohio State University together where they

were roommates and later on they both joined the Spaceship Academy. Paul was a fun loving guy born thirty-four years ago in Duluth, Minnesota. He was the crew's practical joker. Next to him was Commander David Andrews, who was probably the smartest man in the entire United Galaxy Command. He served as the Gladiator's Science Officer and was second in command. Dave came from a very proud Virginia military family dating back to the American Revolutionary War.

The next two members of the landing crew were Lieutenant Keith Hampton and Lieutenant Wayne Shasta. Both were young officers with promising futures. Keith was the ship's chief navigator and Wayne was the number one laser technician. As chief navigator Keith Hampton was responsible not only for plotting courses and keeping track of the ship's destination, but he was also the helmsman. In years past the navigator and the helmsman were two separate positions but with the advent of the Intergalactic Positioning System or IGPS as it was commonly referred to, the role of the navigator was all but eliminated. So these days the navigator was also the helmsman. Navigator was the preferred title since it was gender neutral. Keith was practically born to be a navigator as he had a natural sense of cardinal directions. When his classmates at the Naval Academy learned of his ability to tell directions, they rejoiced in blindfolding him, spinning him around, and then testing him. He never failed.

Laser Technician Wayne Shasta's principle responsibility was to scan outer space with laser beams in order to record scientific data. In the event of a situation where the Gladiator should have to defend itself, Lieutenant Shasta was also charged with firing laser torpedoes and similar weapons.

The final member of this group was Ensign Beverly Glen-na, the newest member aboard the Gladiator. She had joined



the crew only three days earlier at Space Station 15. Josh had requested a wildlife and fisheries expert to replace the Gladiator's recently retired environmental specialist. Ensign Glenna was UGC's answer. She was very young and very pretty.

Josh took his place on the Conveyor platform. He nodded to Lieutenant Commander Pearson at the Conveyor controls. The large steel doors at the back of the Conveyor platform slid open revealing a glistening white space pod. The name James T. Kirk was stenciled in blue across the base with Old Glory alongside it. The six seat pod was the most up to date that United Galaxy Command had to offer. The Gladiator had picked it up only five months ago at Space Station 2. Josh had been given the unique privilege of choosing a name for the spanking new vessel. He had not spent much time deliberating over what title to bestow on the craft. He had immediately thought of his childhood idol, the man who more than anyone else had influenced his desire to become involved in the space program, the illustrious Captain James T. Kirk. He wasn't sure if UGC would sanction his choice of a fictional hero, so he was surprised when Admiral Wilcox called to inform him of the Governing Council's unanimous support. Swinging the bottle of Dom Perignon at the hull of the space pod and watching the shards of glass flying about at the christening ceremony was a significant occasion that would long remain implanted in Josh's memory. Since then the Gladiator crew had taken to referring to the craft as the James K.

The pod doors of the James K automatically unlocked and the landing crew climbed in. Dennis Pearson manipulated the controls, and the doors slammed shut. Another large steel door clanged open. The pod slowly rose in the air and then hurtled into open space.



In less than fifteen minutes from taking off the six crew members departed from the James K and were standing on the planet's surface hundreds of miles below where the U.S.S. Gladiator was orbiting.

"You all know why we are here," Captain Josh Stoner said to his landing party. "This planet is reported to be uninhabited. It is our job to determine whether or not this environment is suitable for human life. Commander Andrews was able to determine before we landed that the air on this planet is safe for us to breathe. I don't think I need to remind you that this mission is top secret. If you should find yourself in the hands of aliens, although that is highly unlikely, you are by no means, I repeat by no means, to surrender any information on the purpose of this mission."

Lieutenant Hampton put his arm around Ensign Beverly Glenna's waist. "You're new here, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, removing his arm from her body. Keith simply replaced his arm once again about her waist.

"Hampton, behave yourself," Josh said sternly. "OK, now you all know your jobs. Hampton, I want complete accurate reports on the vegetation of this planet. Ensign Glenna, you are in charge of animal life. Dr. Loring, psychological factors for adjusting to life here. Lieutenant Shasta, check out water and air quality. Dave, I want from you a report on energy and mineral contents. We'll meet back here at 1500 hours."

They had appeared to have landed in the mists of a forest. Using a hand-held telescopic viewing device to scan the planet's surface, Andrews concluded that the whole planet was just one huge forest. As the landing party dispersed to go about

their various assignments, Lieutenant Hampton came up beside Ensign Glenna. He smiled and said, "Let's work together."

She hesitated, "Well, I don't—"

"I promise to behave," Hampton interrupted.

Stoner chuckled at Dr. Loring as he watched his two young officers walk off together. "He's a fast worker," Stoner sighed.

Loring walked over to a nearby lake and began taking notes. Stoner joined Commander and Chief Scientist, Dave Andrews, busy getting readings of soil samples. Dave's thick dark brown hair flapped slightly in the breeze as he bent over to scoop up some soil.

"The soil is identical to that found in Mid-Western United States. If the trees are cleared away it should not be difficult to turn this soil into fertile land. The land is capable of—" Andrews stopped short as a piercing woman's scream filled the air. He glanced at Captain Stoner. "That sounded like Ensign Glenna."

Stoner did not hesitate. He was off and running in the direction of the scream. Dr. Loring, Commander Andrews and Lieutenant Shasta skirted after him. Stoner stopped short. Lying on the ground in a pool of blood was Ensign Glenna. Next to her was lying Lieutenant Hampton, his plant knife clenched in his fist.

"They're both dead, Josh," said Dr. Loring. "As far as I can see, Hampton stabbed Ensign Glenna and then killed himself."

"But why?" asked Wayne Shasta.

"Well, Hampton was trying to make it with Ensign Glenna. But she was resisting him. He probably tried to kiss her. She pushed him away, and in his anger he stabbed her with the knife in his hand. He hadn't meant to hurt her, and when he realized what he had done he killed himself. It happens all the time, Josh. Husbands and wives argue. They throw things at

each other. If they happen to be in the kitchen at the time, the nearest thing in their reach may be a knife.”

“This was her first landing,” said Stoner. “What a tragedy. But Hampton was never violent. It’s so hard to imagine that he was capable of - of murder.”

“Josh, you know as well as I, how it is in space. A pretty girl comes aboard ship and every guy is excited. He hasn’t seen a new girl in months. Ensign Glenna was new on ship. All the guys were after her. Hampton just pushed too fast.”

“Well, despite this tragedy, we must get on with our work. Our time is very limited if we are to meet UGC’s deadline. Let’s get Hampton and Glenna loaded into the James K, and I’ll have Pearson convey them up.”



# CHAPTER TWO

MAY 17 – 22



“From everyone’s reports it seems apparent that this planet, Brisula, is suitable for human life,” Captain Stoner concluded. He was standing at the large table in the Conference Room aboard the U.S.S. Gladiator, addressing Dr. Loring, Commander Andrews, and Lieutenant Shasta. “I will give a report to United Galaxy Command that Brisula is an ideal planet for human colonization, and that they should be able to begin their plans as soon as possible. Any comments?”

“Josh, did you carefully read my report?” asked Dr. Loring. “I had written that in my opinion it would psychologically be a very hard adjustment for humans to survive on Brisula. The planet is uninhabited. There are no modern conveniences. No structures. No shelters. Life there would be difficult.”

“Paul, all of that is to be expected. Throughout the centuries humans have taken uninhabited and sometimes even barren territories, and turned them into viable settlements,” answered the Captain. “Any other questions?”

There were none. Stoner concluded the meeting with an order. “Lieutenant Shasta, have the navigator lay a course for Lexter, our next destination.”

Josh remained behind as his officers exited the room. He had several jobs to do. He notified UGC of the results of their exploration of Brisula. He made the calls to those back home informing them of the tragic deaths of his two officers. He made arrangements for the bodies to be returned to Earth. Then he got on the ship’s PA system and announced the unfortunate events that had occurred on the planet’s surface.



It was refreshing to have a couple of peaceful days aboard the usually tumultuous Gladiator. It was a five day journey to Lexter, through almost empty tranquil space. The crew was enjoying every moment of it. The Messdeck rang with the sounds of high school lunch room laughter. Despite the sadness of the recent deaths, it seemed like the whole ship was on one big vacation.

It was on the fourth day of the vacation that an A-15 Priority message came from UGC. Stoner and Andrews received the video phone call in the office adjacent to the Captain’s quarters.

“Captain Stoner, United Galaxy Command has just been informed by the Tradians that they are aware of our plans for Planet Brisula. Those plans were top secret. How did the Tradians learn of those plans? They appear to have precise accurate information that could come only from one source. Someone in your landing party is guilty of treason! I want an entire investigation of all those in the Brisula landing party.

Immediately!!”

Stoner recovered from his initial shock to murmur a “Yes, sir.” before the Admiral’s picture faded. “Dave, who do you suppose leaked the information?”

“I do not know, but I suggest we start an investigation without delay,” Andrews answered.

Stoner switched on the intercom. “Dr. Loring and Lieutenant Shasta, please report to the Conference Room immediately.”



Within five minutes both the doctor and the laser technician hurried into the Conference Room. They took seats around the large table and turned to the Captain. They were eager to find out why they had been summoned.

“I have just received word from United Galaxy Command that somehow the Brisula Project Plans have leaked out into Tradian hands. Admiral Wilcox feels that one of us is responsible,” Stoner noticed the look of shock on Loring and Shasta’s faces as he continued. “I am ordered to carry out a full investigation of this matter. We are all suspects.”

“Josh, you really don’t believe that any of us would betray UGC,” cried Loring.

“Paul, I didn’t say I suspected anyone. I said that we are all suspects, me included, in UGC’s view.” Turning to Commander Andrews, he asked, “Could there have been something in the air that might have somehow, unconsciously perhaps, affected our minds?”

“Josh, that is outrageous. The air there was identical to Earth’s,” Loring blurted out.



“Despite the doctor’s observation that the air on Brisula was similar to Earth’s, your suggestion, Captain, is possible. If you will recall, Lieutenant Hampton acted strangely down on the planet’s surface,” Andrews said.

“Captain!” exclaimed Wayne Shasta jumping from his seat. “Maybe Keith gave the information away and then killed himself and Beverly.”

“It’s a thought,” said Stoner. “Except there was no one on the planet for him to talk to.”

“Even if he did tell someone,” suggested Andrews. “It seems illogical that he would kill himself. Unless.... Doctor, did you perform autopsies on Lieutenant Hampton and Ensign Glenna?”

“Why, no. The cause of death was obvious.”

“Well, I suggest that autopsies be done as soon as possible.”

“OK, but I don’t see why it’s necessary.”



The investigation was adjourned to await Dr. Loring’s completion of the autopsies. Stoner and Andrews waited in Sick Bay while Loring went into his laboratory directly adjacent to Sick Bay. The lab was lined with shelves that contained rows and rows of bottles, test tubes, and various shaped glass flasks, all neatly labeled and organized. Paul Loring was a neat man, neat and orderly, and his laboratory reflected this. His college advisor had once commented that Loring’s mind was as orderly and neat as his work. It was this extreme organization that had allowed Loring to advance so rapidly through the ranks of the United Galaxy Command. Not even the slightest

detail was out of place on his Medical Academy records, his Ripad VI internship records, his Mars Station 23 residency records or his records for the past three years as Chief Medical Officer aboard the U.S.S. Gladiator.

But no one knew the real reasons behind his driving obsession with neatness and organization. And perhaps Paul himself was not aware of the real reasons. He only knew that with an organized mind on a strict schedule, there was no time left or even allotted for memories, day dreams or thoughts of the future.

Two steel doors at the north end of the lab slid open with a crash and two corpses draped in white were wheeled into the center of the large room. The nurse dismissed the three seamen who had assisted her in transporting the bodies from the Morgue on Deck Two to Dr. Loring's lab on Deck Six.

Without a word passing between them, Nurse Amanda Rugan and Dr. Paul Loring began the gruesome procedure of cutting into the chest of a person whom they had known and admired. A person with whom they had shared many harrowing experiences. A person whom they had laughed with, cried with, lived with for three years. Lieutenant Keith Hampton had been a friend of theirs.



He paced impatiently back and forth across the receptionist area. What is taking so long?

"Captain, you are going to wear out the flooring," said Dave Andrews looking up from the scientific manual he was viewing on one of the medical library computers. "And you are making me dizzy."

“What?” asked Josh stopping for a moment to look absentmindedly at Andrews. “Did you say something?”

“Just that I am getting a headache watching you parading around,” said Dave shaking his head. “You need to relax.”

“The autopsy seems to be taking so long.”

“Josh, it really has not been that long. Maybe—” Dave ceased talking as all at once the sounds of heavy footsteps could be heard out in the corridor.

“Josh, you’ll never believe this,” shouted Loring as he burst through the door into Sick Bay. “The bodies are synthetic. The workmanship is magnificent. So detailed, so—”

“If those bodies are fakes, then Hampton and Ensign Glenna are still alive somewhere on Brisula,” Stoner said.

“And,” Andrews added, “they aren’t alone.”

Stoner switched on the intercom. “Ensign Saad, turn this ship around. We are going back to Brisula.”



Captain Stoner sat alone in his quarters. He hung up the video phone. He had called Admiral Wilcox back. He had wanted to know precisely what information had been revealed to the Tradians.

It was still three more days before they would reach Brisula. It was going to be three very long days. By the time the Gladiator got back it would be eight days since Hampton and Glenna disappeared. Would they be in time? Or would it be too late to save them? What if they were already dead? Or what if they had been taken to another planet? The questions continued to buzz through his brain. Was one of them a traitor? He had trusted Keith Hampton. Could Hampton have betrayed

him? Stoner got up and moved over to the bed. Was this my fault? Was I careless? Did I miss something that should have alerted me to what might happen? Damn it, I am going to drive myself crazy over the next few days if I don't stop second guessing myself. Right now I need to decide what to tell the crew.

After pondering that for several hours, Josh Stoner got onto the shipwide PA system. He told the crew that they were returning to Brisula in order to continue their exploration of the planet. There were some additional factors that they needed to investigate. He did not tell them that Hampton and Glenna's bodies were fakes, or that someone had leaked top secret information to an enemy. Josh switched off the microphone. He turned on his computer and typed a message to United Galaxy Command.

*May 22, 0900 hours*

To: Admiral Wilcox

The U.S.S. Gladiator is headed back to Brisula. If Lieutenant Hampton or Ensign Glenna disclosed the Brisula Project Plans to the Tradians then we need to check to see if the Tradians are hiding on the planet. Also I need to find out if the Tradians are responsible for my two officers' deaths.

--Captain Joshua Kyle Stoner.

He hated having to lie to his crew and to UGC. However, there were occasions when a captain had no choice. This was certainly one of those times.