

# CONFRONTATION

## Aliens and Humans - Allies and Enemies

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Book Two in the Space Fleet Sagas

### PART ONE

## CONFIRMATION

### CHAPTER 1

Their situation was bad, quickly growing worse, when the ship's avatar announced, "Kennedy is unable to maintain tactical updates. The Zenge virus penetrated the primary firewall. The AI is fully engaged preventing access to the ship's operating systems."

"Navigation, where are they," Paré called. When the hack-attack sidelined Kennedy, the pilot's holo-display winked out. It flickered once, then disappeared.

"First Primary at one-fifty degrees port by plus forty-three degrees. Distance is twenty-six thousand K. Closing at 40,000mph." Lt.JG Adams called target coordinates, range, and speed from the navigation console. When his holo-display fizzled, he immediately booted the console's back-up display monitor. "Second Primary following number one at one-sixty-three port, plus forty-three. Distance forty-one thousand K, and 40,000mph."

Adams swiped his hand across the screen. The data pitch, relayed to the pilot's console, arrived as icons. Paré's screen displayed two Zenge Primary ships, left and above the PT-109's icon.

"Brace for impact," Col. Kebede announced. "Pulse impact from battlecruiser in three."

The pulse, fired at close range, caught the 109 under the stern keel, pushing the ship tail up, and nose down. The sonic force field held against the assault, preventing structural damage. Paré compensated, returning the craft to posture.

“Where the hell is the battlecruiser?” she asked.

“Three-hundred, minus sixty. Ten thousand kilometers out, and closing at 100,000mph.” The navigator passed the image to the pilot. “On us in seconds.”

“Battlecruiser firing a second pulse,” Kebede said. The Ethiopian’s dark skin glistened as a fine sweat rose. Her voice remained calm.

Paré dropped the ship twenty degrees, firing thrusters located above the center line at one-hundred percent. The pulse blast crossed over the 109’s superstructure. “Fuck this,” she grumbled under her breath.

The vessel rotated nose-up, bringing guns to bear on the passing Zenge battlecruiser.

“Nice,” Kebede said. “Rod away.” The rail-gun deployed beneath the 109’s forward hull launched a solid projectile. “Nymph away.” She fired a non-nuclear electromagnetic pulse shell (NNEMP), or nymph. The faster nymph round outstripped the rod, both streaking toward the Zenge warship.

“EMP hit. Shields dampened. Rod impact. Penetration is affirmative. Cruiser is damaged.” The Op-Tac commander adjusted her aim, as the pilot repositioned to follow the course of the damaged enemy ship.

“Rod Away. Nymph Away.”

Before Kebede could report results, Storm called aloud from the Communications console. “MSD taking fire from the first Primary. Force field holding, but energy cells at eighty-percent, and dropping. MSD is requesting assistance.”

Paré rolled the big ship, fired the sub-lights to max, taking them to an intercept position between the Mars Shipyard and Docks, and the two Zenge Primary ships.

“While we engaged the battlecruiser, they changed course for the platform,” Adams said. “First Primary at zero, forty-three, and eighteen-thousand K away. Number two directly behind. Five-thousand K behind number one.”

“Where’s that damn battleship?” Paré demanded. “It isn’t on my screen.”

“Second rod impacted their hangar doors,” Kebede answered. “They bugged out at over 200,000mph. Out of the fight.”

“AI is completely off line,” Genna informed the bridge. “All systems are now independent.”

“I have everything on my screen,” ENS Diego Castillo said. “Systems controls are operational. Whatever hit Kennedy did not infect the other computers. We are good to go across the board.”

“Primary One firing nuclear torpedoes. Six fish.” Kebede’s voice pitched higher; strain constricting her throat. “Their laser cannons have recycled, and they are

preparing to fire. If those torpedoes hit, and take down the force field, the lasers will follow, ripping MSD to shreds. Firing intercept torpedoes. One through four gone. Reloading. One through four gone, again.”

The pilot drove the ship higher. She gained a position out of the line of fire, and optimal for the rail-gun to target any torpedoes missed by the 109’s interceptors.

“Four impacts. Two misses.” Kebede called the shots. The sweat from her chest beginning to stain her uniform top. “Firing rods.”

The bridge crew held a collective breath.

“One down.” Then a pause, no longer than the space between heartbeats, which seemed eternal.

Storm broke the silence. “MSD reports an impact. Exterior dock hit by nuclear torpedo. Their shield is down along the perimeter. Structural damage, and casualties. Power down to sixty-eight percent.”

“Damn, damn, damn!” The expletives firing from Kebede as quickly as she fired the ship’s two laser cannons. “Primary Two fired torpedoes at the same time as number one. They positioned themselves at an angle to use One for cover. Scans did not pick up the launch.”

With Op-Tac busy with target acquisition, as well as operating the top-mounted, and bottom-mounted laser cannons, Castillo took over the play-by-play from his console.

“Nine torpedoes fired by Primary Two. Four nuclear, and five explosive. 109 laser fire crossing their path. One hit. Two.”

Before Castillo called another number, Adams reported more bad news. “The battlecruiser is reengaging. Cruiser at forty-five degrees, minus twenty. Thirty-one thousand K away, and coming in hot.”

“Ops?” Paré asked.

“Please hold,” Kebede replied. “Five down. I need another few seconds to stop the other four.”

“Laser fire incoming from the cruiser,” Castillo called. “Primary One and Two have us bracketed. Pulse rounds heading our way.”

Kebede had no time to call for a brace. The remaining crew received no warning when two pulse bursts pounded the hull, followed by fourteen laser blasts.

“We are officially dead,” Captain Daniel Cooper said. He sat in the command chair, watching, listening, and evaluating. “Kennedy?”

“Two torpedoes with high-explosive warheads entered via the hole in MSD’s perimeter force field, impacted the hub, resulting in massive damage,” the ship’s artificial intelligence reported. “The three Zenge ships will complete the destruction of the station. They will then set troops on the surface, take over the habitats, as well as

control of the Martian hangar. Following the capture of Mars, they will travel to Earth, and complete the annihilation of intelligent life in this solar system.”

“When you lost the AI, you started acting as individuals,” Coop said. “Everyone looked to someone else for answers. Communications slowed, and became useless.”

He rose, walked the short distance to the navigation-pilot console, to stand behind, and between pilot, and navigator.

“Casey, in a fight, the pilot needs the images first, not the numbers. In fact, the pilot doesn’t give a damn about navigational coordinates. Without the AI to speed the process, you have to act quicker.”

He turned to his pilot. “Rachelle, you are among the best fighter pilots on Earth. But you need more time on the controls of a space ship this size, with its limitations. When you held steady to allow Sindy more shots at the torpedoes headed for MSD, you killed everyone.”

Paré, a Space Ranger survivor, like Captain Cooper, held her anger. Never one to show any emotion in public, especially not toward her commanding officer, and not when she was really angry at herself.

“By holding our position, and not maintaining the sub-light engines at a higher rpm, the ship’s sonic force field diminished to the point lasers ripped through the hull,” Paré conceded the tactical mistake. “Trying to protect MSD, cost everybody in both locations.”

“Rachelle, what is the primary tactical weapon the 109 possesses?” He used her first name, attempting to take the sting out of the harsh assessments.

“Speed,” she answered. “I gave away our advantage.”

“You also piloted for line of sight. The guns are on swivels. Fly the ship. Let Ops worry about angles.”

He turned to Senait Kebede, the third Space Ranger currently on the bridge.

“Sindy, as Operations and Tactical Command Officer, with the Captain absent or incapacitated, you have command. You cannot get caught up in a fight to the point you lose focus on the bigger picture. Tunnel vision resulted in your order to stay on station, to defend MSD.”

“I should have placed the weapons with the Marines as soon as the AI went off-line,” she said. Coop waited. “I should have been calling targets, letting Rachelle put the 109 into position, while maintaining movement and speed. Systems could warn of incoming, and report damage assessments. Storm could relay firing instructions to the Marines, and torpedo rooms.”

“MSD?”

“Our mission is to protect the people of Earth,” she replied. “I should have protected the 109 first. Without her, Earth has limited defenses against an attack.”

“Bridge?”

“This is the bridge,” Storm answered the interior channel hail.

“This is Loba in the hangar. Is anyone going to give us the okay to launch?”

“Fuck,” Sindy and Rachelle said in unison.

“Sorry, Loba,” Cooper responded. “When the shooting started, I’m afraid we forgot we have a fighter on board. By the way, you’re currently dead.”

“No problem. I’d rather be dead, than forced to listen to the after-action report explaining what got me that way. Loba, out.”

“Drill is over, people. Kennedy will provide everyone a summary, with my notes attached. Take this for what it represents. We drill to find our weaknesses, and our strengths. We practice to improve our strengths, and minimize our failures. We will always fail. We train, and we improve to make sure failures are never lethal. Take a few minutes to clean up your systems, and ready everything for the next shift.”

Cooper departed the bridge, exiting to the Captain’s private office.

Castillo, a recent crew member, muttered, “Three against one odds, and no AI. We never had a chance.”

“Diego,” Kebede said the first name quietly, but everyone heard the steel return to her voice. “Daniel Cooper faced, and defeated three Zenge warships while in an Angel series fighter. He and Captain Casalobos took on, and took out another three, including two Mischene battlecruisers. He’s attempting to prepare us, so we damn well do stand a chance when we go into battle.”

“Yes, Ma’am. I realize the importance, Colonel. It just didn’t seem fair.”

Storm interjected, “I was on Angel 7 when we faced the Zenge. Do you know what I learned about Daniel Cooper of Earth that day?”

Everyone paid attention, as ENS Castillo asked, “What?”

“He does not fight fair. He would rather win.”