

STAR TRAVELER

DEAD IN SPACE

By Jonathan Snyder

Chapter 1

The room that Sinclair Barrett lay in was pitch black except for the dull, little, red light coming from the inactive computer monitor on his desk. The commanding officer of the Earth Alliance vessel *Icarus* lay on his bed facing the ceiling and had his government issued synth-wool blanket pulled up to his chin. For the most part, the room was silent except for the quiet hum of the FTL drive as it pushed them at superluminal speeds through space and the snatches of conversation that wafted through the door as people walked past.

It had been two months since the *Icarus* had jumped out of the DS-1023 System in the Beta Kappa Cluster and were making their way across the void towards the distance Osha Ahova cluster. Many in the crew thought the idea of crossing this vast distance by FTL travel was on the verge of ludicrous as most travels between the clusters of star systems had been done by the ancient Star Traveler Network that spanned the known part of the Milky Way galaxy. The warping engine based on the initial designs of Doctor Miguel Alcubierre, a theoretical physicist, who had proposed the theory of warping space 466 years ago in 1994. Sinclair did not comprehend the whole mathematics.

Sinclair knew it was a type of Lorentzian manifold and that it required exotic matter to create the negative energy behind the ship to warp real space efficiently. He left all that up to Keith O'Reilly, the ship's chief engineer. The civilian had spent years in the Earth Alliance fleet working on engines and had graciously agreed to help even in his retirement.

Even though it would be another five months before they would arrive into the unmapped cluster, their mission made it tough to sleep. An ancient race that was once thought dead had come back and destroyed an earth colony. The Earth Alliance ordered him to pursue and scout out to see how much a threat the Kaon indeed posed. Except for the sphere in orbit of a dead planet and a Kaon robot that almost killed him, they had seen no other signs of the dreadnaught that had devastated the colony on Victory.

Turning over again in his restless state, Sinclair forced his eyes closed and tried to let his mind roam at more innocuous thoughts. He thought about a sandy beach and the sound of rain, but as he was about to drift off to sleep, his vessel gave a massive lurch which pitched him out of his bed and onto the steel plate floor.

“All hands!” the voice of Sinclair's first officer peeled out over the speaker system. “Brace for emergency deceleration. All hands, brace for emergency deceleration.”

Without hesitating, Sinclair grabbed the leg of his desk that was bolted to the floor and groaned as the ship shuttered and twisted sending vibrations of pain through his arm and body. When it was complete, he pulled himself to his feet and slammed his fist on the comm button.

“This is Barrett. What the hell happened?”

“Captain,” Sutton’s voice came across even but concerned. “O’Reilly just picked up a massive spike in the equilibrium of our warping field. We almost lost the torus.”

The torus was the invisible shape that was wrapped around the ship and trapped real space allowing them to break Einstein’s cage.

“This is O’Reilly, Captain.” The voice of the Irishmen cut in, his accent thicker than normal. “The baffles are overloaded, and we’re losing containment on the exotic matter. I don’t know why but we’re going to explode if we don’t vent.”

Vent the exotic matter? Sinclair knew that was a death sentence for them as they would not be able to return to FTL. They would only have their fusion engines.

“Vent it,” Sinclair ordered, gritting his teeth.

The *Icarus* shuttered slightly as the containment hatches blew open and allowed the fluid to stream out away. The low hum of the FTL engine became silent, and Sinclair could feel that his ship had died.

“I’m on my way to the bridge.”

The *Icarus* was not a large ship. She only had three decks that required the climbing of ladders to get to each, but after throwing on his uniform top and making his way through the ship, Sinclair finally forced open the bridge hatch and strode in. The crew was working feverishly around him, and the dirty blond haired man in the center chair near the back of the bridge immediately stood.

“Report,” Sinclair ordered as he finished zipping up his blue jumpsuit with gold trim, the standard uniform of the Alliance fleet.

“O’Reilly is still investigating, but he believes that our long flights may have compromised the fuel transducer.” Michael Sutton said looking at the Compu-pad in his hands. The rectangle computer was scrolling information that was embedded on the crystal rod in its receptacle.

“It looks like those idiots back at dock screwed you, Captain.” The angry voice of the engineer growled from behind him. Sinclair turned to see the grease and dirt smeared man scrubbing vigorously at an object in his hands.

“What do you mean?”

The red haired man with a bushy red mustache tossed a burnt metal piece at him, and Sinclair caught it.

“Even knowing that we would be doing long jumps more than any other ship, they installed a substandard transducer.”

“They’re not supposed to explode like that,” Sutton started, but O’Reilly’s snort stopped him.

“Yeah, they’re meant to freeze in place and act as a barrier. This sucker shattered meaning it wasn’t even the right part. That’s why we had to eject the exotic matter. We would have a free flow, and the resulting energy burst would have twisted our real space into knots.”

“How bad is the damage?” Sinclair asked.

“Except for this baffle and about ten feet of conduit, the *Icarus* is fine. We just can’t go anywhere at the moment.”

“Damn,” Sinclair muttered under his breath. “Reserves?”

“Enough for maybe a day’s journey.”

Sinclair waved irritated at the bank of computers on the left side of the oval bridge. It was not what you would call a spacious place, but it did have a lot of computers stuffed in where it could. The astrogation computer would be their best bet.

“Ensign Ho,” Captain Barrett began, but the fierce looking Asian with a sharp, close-cut haircut raised her hand for a second.

“I’m already searching the nearby scanner data, Sir. I took the liberty of launching three probes to maximize our gain.”

Sinclair nodded. He did not pick his crew randomly and wanted them thinking on their feet. Being this far away from any known planet meant challenges they had no clue they were going to face.

The *Icarus* had exited from its warping field close enough to the middle of the Tau Phi system to allow the vessel to make the rest of the travel by its fusion engines.

Ensign Ho and Phasia worked quickly and quietly to take into consideration the physics of space to gain orbit around the fourth planet in the star system.

Sinclair tried his best to keep the mood calm, but the news about the engines had spread through the crew like wildfire. The vessel’s commanding officer could tell by the furtive glances from passing crewmembers or in the hushed tones between crewmembers as they went through their daily business.

The hardest part for Sinclair was sharing in their concern. As the captain of the vessel, he had to portray himself as impervious to the dangers that space afforded. It was not acceptable for him to worry about a decompression or to starve to death with no way to reach a habitable world. His crew needed something to focus on, and that was him. They could either love him or hate him, but they had to focus their energy.

"We've established orbit, Captain," Ho called from her seat in the forward section of the bridge. She was tense in the body shaped seat with speed cushioning. It kept her at a comfortable lean-back angle with her control panel wrapped around her middle. The design allowed her to remain at her post when the ship suffered any inertia or gravity failure. The young Asian woman was responsible for the entire movement of the vessel.

"We're holding at 65k above the equatorial line. Probes have been launched. We should have a map of the planet's surface in an hour."

"Go to station keeping," Sinclair ordered as he stood and tugged on his uniform, a nervous habit he had acquired in the Officer Academy. "Make sure all our capacitors and batteries are charged first and then a lot the rest of needed systems. We might be in orbit for a little while."

Janet nodded, and Phasia looked up with a mixture of concern and entertainment in their condition.

Phasia Eshevet was a Nihisian woman who had been brought on because of her experience with real-time space maneuvers. She had already proved herself useful on the long journey before the power failure. The problem with her onboard was twofold. She had a criminal record that rivaled some of the ones he had seen, and as a Nihisian, she had a sexual libido that would rival humans. Her species had a short life span and so reproduced quite often to keep their population numbers up. Being among humans and reproductively close enough to a human female made it a time bomb that could go off. The woman had agreed to stay away from his crew, but he was not sure how long that could last.

'You can't fight genetics.'

Like professionals that they were, the crew had gotten the ship in orbit of the unknown world, and the probes were finally delivering their information back. By the time they got to the small room off the bridge hallway they had used for their meetings, Ensign Ho had provided a map of the planet below. Settling into his chair, Sinclair looked about at the people who he had come to rely on.

Michael Sutton, his first officer, sat across from him at the small, square table with his head tilted down towards the table as he read from the little computer he held. He was a quiet man with short cut hair that always met the regulations. To his left, Phasia Eshevet sat with her slate gray uniform unzipped down her chest to her stomach while lounging in the chair.

To Michael's right Keith O'Reilly, the veteran Irish spacer who had a thick red mustache and frazzled hair. He wore one of the blue uniform jumpsuits with gold trim, but it bore no rank as he was a civilian. Keith's responsibility was everything in engineer and propulsion. He had a handle of the Mark IV FTL drive and the fusion engines.

To Keith's right, a young woman with dark brown hair that fell in waves down her shoulders read studiously from her compu-system, her full mouth moving silently with the rhythm of the

words. Bridgette Bailey was a woman with a naïve heart of a young bookworm that never left the shelter of her hometown. Though the uniform showed every curve, the short skirt wrapped around her waist made of the same nanofibrous material presented a semblance of modesty in her mind. Sinclair knew she was a member of the ultra-conservative Innocentia religious faction back on Earth.

“Alright, everyone. You all know why we are here.” Sinclair started.

“Yeah, cause we got boned by the shipyard,” Kieth muttered, and Phasia let out a sigh with a dreamy look on her face. Keith gave the woman a look of disgust

“We’ve made orbit, and the probes have shown enough raw materials on the planet that we can create a rudimentary form of our fuel. Uranium is nowhere near powerful as energized dark matter, but it’ll get us going. It’s going to be ugly, and it’s going to require a lot more stops and cleaning of the baffles and conduits. We just won’t be stuck in space.”

“We’re going to need a lot of space for reserves, aren’t we?” Sinclair asked.

“Yeah, I’ve already got my engineers clearing our shuttle bay and fabricating as many stasis containers we can muster.”

“I’ll leave it in your good hands, Mister O’Reilly,” Sinclair said. Keith had a lot in front of him, and he did not envy him the task.

“The first thing we are going to need to do is getting some scouting parties launched to get purity samples from the detected uranium deposits. We’ll be using one of our plasma lasers to bore into the earth and then deploy reprogrammed repo-bots to harvest the ore. Until we get those samples, we aren’t even going to begin setting up refinery station. The two teams will be Mister O’Reilly, Miss Eshevet in *Socrates* while Commander Sutton and Lieutenant Bailey will take the *Aristotle*. Questions?”

Silence reigned in the tiny conference room and with that he nodded and motioned for the door. The crew funneled out, but as Sinclair stood and grabbed his compu-pad, he saw Keith was waiting for him.

“Yes, Keith?”

“I don’t want her, Captain.”

Sinclair’s eyebrow shot up at the demand.

“You want to explain?”

“No, sir.”

“Then denied, Mister O’Reilly. Dismissed.”

For a second, Keith’s mouth opened to speak, but he closed it firmly and left the room. *‘What was that all about?’*

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*I hope you enjoyed the first chapter of the upcoming **Dead in Space**, the second book in the **Star Traveler Series**. I have had a lot of fun writing it and look forward to sharing it with you.*

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