

S P A C E Q U E S T

B L A S T - O F F !

Chapter 1

by James Gelsey

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Chapter 1

“Cadets, please settle down now! We need to get started! Cadets, your attention, please!”

No one seemed to hear or even notice as Major Mifflin, Dean of the Endio Academy, hovered over the crowd on his levitator. Each year, the fourth year cadets and their families packed into the spaceport just before the annual expedition. And each year, Major Mifflin fought a losing battle to get everyone’s attention.

Too nervous to listen and too excited to care, the cadets continued to chatter and joke

around with each other. Off to one side, Zale Gyre and two of his friends huddled together.

“Take a look at this,” Zale whispered, carefully making sure no one was watching. He reached into his purple backpack with the silver “Z” on it and took out a small black box. He opened the box and an orange glow shined in his eyes.

“Wow!” gasped Tonnor.

“A magnel!” Reg exclaimed. “My father said I couldn’t have mine until I got back.”

“Mine, too,” Zale said slyly.

“You mean you...?” Reg began.

A proud smile grew across Zale’s face.

“I’m just starting to get the hang of it, too.

Watch.”

The tiny marble-like object was a rich orange color splashed with streaks of silver. As Zale reached for it, a shrill sound pierced the air. Zale fumbled with the box and shut the lid before the magnel fell out. He shoved the box back into his bag.

Major Mifflin removed a thin whistle from his mouth and smiled at the surprised—and silenced—crowd.

“Now that’s more like it,” he said, guiding his levitator to the front of the room.

“Welcome, fourth year cadets, to the annual

Endio Academy Galactic Expedition!”

Cheers erupted from the cadets. It took several minutes for Major Mifflin to get everyone quite again.

“I know you’re all anxious to leave, so I’ll be brief,” he said. “This expedition marks the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the Endio Academy. We hope this journey will make you not just better citizens of Endio, but better citizens of our galaxy in these uncertain times. Though it was long before the Great Galactic War began, I still remember the excitement of my first expedition as if it were yesterday.”

As Major Mifflin’s “brief” comments went on and on and on, Sivah Benjamin began to feel a little unsettled. It was many years ago that she said good-bye to her parents at same docking station. But they never made it home. Now Sivah wondered what fate would befall her.

She looked over at her best friend, Melly. Judging by her expression, Melly seemed to be listening to Major Mifflin’s words with great seriousness. Then Sivah noticed the tiny music wafer on top of the telepatch behind Melly’s ear. Melly wasn’t listening to Major Mifflin. She was listening to music through

her telepatch!

“You are so bad,” Sivah whispered.

Melly turned and made a goofy face at Sivah. She noticed the small black disc behind Sivah’s left ear. Melly’s eyes opened wide.

“The new Gigapatch!” she said aloud.

A grown up “shhhhhhed” them.

“A going-away present from my grandparents,” Sivah whispered. “I can even synch it with my dream projector.”

“...and so, it is up to each and every one of you to make the most of this expedition,” Major Mifflin concluded. He glanced at his watch and grimaced.

“Oh, dear,” he gasped. Major Mifflin took a deep breath and spat out the rest of his speech.

“While exploring the galaxies around you, you’ll discover so much more about the person within you. Now please welcome the director of the fourth year program, Dr. W!”

The cadets and parents applauded as a tall woman dressed in a dark green Endio Academy travel suit stepped in front of the crowd. She raised her hand and everyone became silent.

“Thank you, Major Mifflin,” Dr. W said in

a strong voice. “Cadets, Endio’s second sun is about to set, and as you know, space crafts can only leave between the setting of the two suns. So let me just say that I am honored to be leading your expedition this year. You are our finest fourth year class ever at the Academy, and I have great expectations of you.” She placed her right hand over her heart. The cadets followed suit and joined in the Endio Academy credo.

“With our heads, our hearts, and our hands, we pledge ourselves to Endio and the hope for a new tomorrow.”

“Cadets, you have exactly one minute to

say your good-byes and line up in front of the boarding portal,” Dr. W announced. “Parents, you may follow Major Mifflin to the observation deck to watch us depart. See you in six weeks!”

The crowd erupted into a last-minute crush of hugs and kisses. No one noticed the very tall, strange looking man standing in the docking station doorway. A boy, not as tall as the man but noticeably taller than the rest of the cadets, stood next to him.

“Are you sure this is the right place, Bey?” the man asked.

“This is it, Uncle Rim,” Bey replied. “The

transmission I received on my tele-head-thing told me to come here.”

“It’s called a telepatch,” Uncle Rim corrected. “And if you want to fit in, you can’t keep forgetting things like that. It’s hard enough being from the Solar Moon as it is.”

“Tell me about it,” Bey complained. “It took the telepatch technicians five tries to work around my night bulge and get it to stick to my head.”

“I know we’ve only been on Endio for a month, Bey, but try to forget that you’re different,” Uncle Rim suggested.

“You mean forget that I’m the only here

with a bump the size of a nutrin plant on the side of my head?” Bey asked sarcastically.

“Easy does it, Bey,” said Uncle Rim. “All I meant is that you’re going to have to make an effort to fit in. Six weeks in space is one thing, but you’re going to be with these kids for the rest of the school year, if not longer.”

“I know,” sighed Bey. “You’re right.” He noticed that just about all of the other cadets were lined up along the far side of the docking station. “I’d better go.”

“Right,” Uncle Rim agreed. “Have a safe trip.”

“Thanks,” Bey replied. He grabbed his

backpack and walked towards the other cadets. He stood at the end of the line behind two boys who kept bumping into each other.

“Prepare yourselves, cadets,” Dr. W announced. “You are about to embark on the adventure of a lifetime!”

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