

# SPACE QUEST

## *BLAST-OFF!*

### Chapter 3

by James Gelsey

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The cadets released their harnesses and sprang out of their seats. Zale grabbed his backpack and was the first one down the aisle and into a lift to the bunk deck. Sivah, however, found it hard to take her eyes off the stars. Her mind raced off into the distance, exploring, searching. A light tap on her shoulder abruptly brought her back.

“Sivah? Are you okay?” Melly asked.

“This is better than anything my dream projector can create, that’s for sure,” Sivah said.

“What bunk are you in?”

“I’m not sure,” Melly replied. “How do you read this thing again?”

Sivah showed her the side of the badge with the stars on it. “Melly, these silver stars are constellations, remember? That’s second year stuff.”

Melly shrugged and gave Sivah a weak smile.

“Let me see,” Sivah said, taking Melly’s cadet badge. “You’ve got the Xetti Constellation.”

“Thanks, Sivah, I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

They walked down the narrow aisle to wait for the lift. The silver door slid open, and the girls stepped inside.

“Bunk deck,” Sivah instructed. The lift started moving.

“Did your parents really fly on this space ship?” Melly blurted out.

“Yeah, a long time ago,” Sivah answered.

“Way before I was born.”

“Is it, you know, weird for you to be here now?” Melly asked carefully.

“I don’t know what it is,” Sivah responded.

“But it’s certainly not weird. I mean, back there, in the main cabin, I felt...”

“Space sick?”

“I was going to say that I felt very safe, very comfortable,” Sivah smiled.

As the girls stepped out of the lift, a chorus of shouts and laughter greeted them. It seemed like all of the cadets were in the narrow hallway instead of in their rooms.

“Hey, everybody, check it out!” Reg yelled.

“Never fear, Solar Boy is here!” Zale exclaimed in his loudest, deepest voice. He jumped into the middle of the crowd and everyone laughed. He had used his belt to strap a bunched up shirt to the side of his head. “With my special night bulge, I can see in the dark!”

The lift doors opened again, and Bey stepped out. Everyone fell silent.

“Hey, what’s going on?” asked Zale. He whipped around, saw Bey, and froze.

Bey walked past Zale, Reg and the others, looking for his door. He slid his cadet badge into the lock. The door slid open and Bey stepped inside without a sound. A shout from the end of the hall shattered the silence.

“Check your badges!” Tonnor yelled as he ran down the hall. “Team assignments are out!”

The cadets studied their badges to check their assignments. Words had magically appeared inside the orange circle on the back.

“I’m on Team Hexalt,” Tonnor announced.

“Me, too!” Reg exclaimed.

Zale looked at his cadet badge and frowned.

“Narlin!” he exclaimed. “I’m on Team Quest.”

“Don’t worry, Zale,” Reg said. “We’ll still patch with you and stuff.”

A few feet away, Sivah and Melly stood next to each other in silence.

“It’s not that bad, Melly,” Sivah said.

“How am I going to last six weeks without your help?” Melly cried.

“You’ll be fine, Melly,” Sivah said reassuringly. “You’re a lot smarter than you think you are. Besides, we’ll still see each other at meals and stuff. And we’ll stay in touch through my new Gigapatch. It’s got an incredible range.”

Melly looked at Sivah through red, watery eyes.

“Promise?” Melly asked.

“I promise,” Sivah said. “It’s going to be lights-out soon. Go get some rest and I’ll see you in the morning.”

Sivah and Melly joined the stream of cadets comparing badges as they returned to their rooms. The hallway was soon empty, except for Zale. He

started down the hallway to his room but hesitated in front of Bey’s door for just a second. The door suddenly slid open.

“Oh, uh, h-hi,” Zale stammered.

Bey stared at him.

“Listen, about all that...” Zale began. But he didn’t know what else to say. Bey just continued to stare at him through unblinking eyes.

Zale started feeling uncomfortable, and he reached up to scratch his head. He felt the belt strap and quickly snatched it off. The balled up shirt fell to the floor.

“We were just fooling around,” Zale admitted.

“We didn’t mean anything by it.”

Bey's face remained expressionless.

Exasperated, Zale threw up his arms.

“Fine, have it your way,” he declared. “You don't want to talk to me, you don't have to. Just stop staring at me. It's creeping me out.”

Zale stormed away and found his room. As he stepped inside, Dr. W's voice came through his telepatch.

*Good night, cadets.*

A moment later, the lights in the room flickered out.

By the time Zale changed into his pajamas, he had forgotten all about Bey. He climbed into his bunk and thought about how great it would be if Dr. W

woke him in the middle of the night because she needed his help flying the Vahok.

Down the hall, Sivah took out her dream projector with the intention of visiting one of her favorite dreams. But by the time it synched with her telepatch, she was already fast asleep.

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