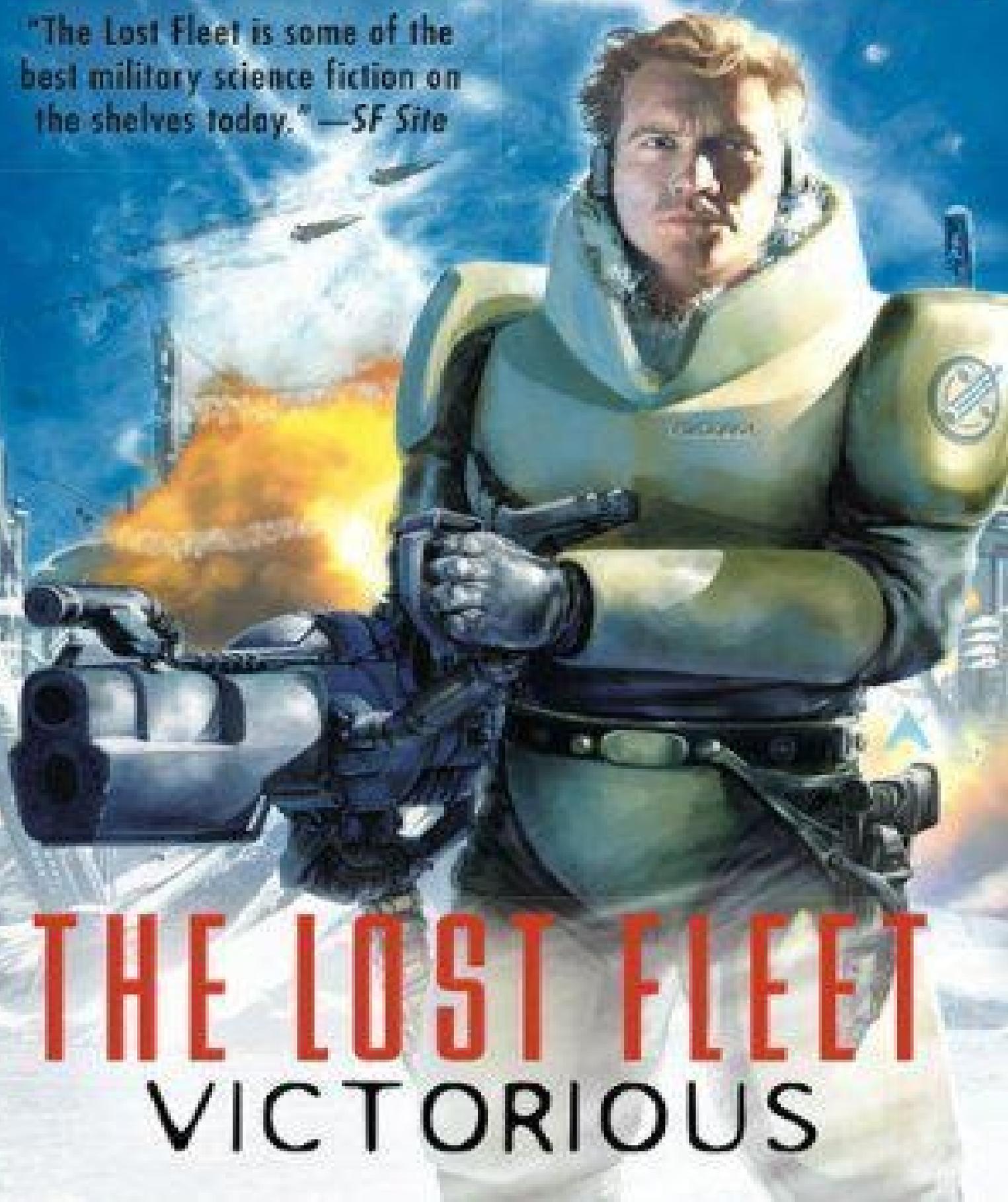


New York Times Bestselling Author

JACK CAMPBELL

"The Lost Fleet is some of the best military science fiction on the shelves today." —*SF Site*



THE LOST FLEET

VICTORIOUS

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VICTORIOUS

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“Black Jack, as a man out of time, is an excellent character, and this series is the best military SF I’ve read in some time.”

—*GeekDad*

Praise for

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“This exhilarating, action-packed outer-space military thriller will remind the audience of the battles in *Star Wars*.”

— *Midwest Book Review*

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“Fast paced and enjoyable . . . Readers who enjoyed David Weber’s Honor Harrington books, Ian Douglas’s Space Marines

[novels], or Walter Hunt’s Dark Wing series should also enjoy this series.”

—*SFRevu*

“The series is military SF, rigorously extrapolated in the classic tradition of hard SF. The laws of physics and the effects of relativity govern the battles and shape the action, while military virtues and ideals like honor and courage shape the conduct and personalities of the more admirable characters . . . Jack Campbell does a good job of fulfilling the requirements of both military SF and hard SF in *The Lost Fleet: Valiant*, and the novel will please fans of both forms.”

—*Sci Fi Weekly*

“Will grip the audience . . . Black Jack is a fascinating hero . . .

Fans will appreciate the fourth Lost Fleet tale.”

— *Alternative Worlds*

“Refreshingly well written with no pretensions to be anything more than it is—lively adventure.”

—*Critical Mass*

“This wonderfully well-plotted story is strongly reminiscent of the old Hornblower novels, featuring exciting and believable battles with the fascinating addition of military tactics. The story brings back the true meaning of romance and captures the spirit of strong men and women facing unimaginable odds with courage and honor. It carries you along on the adventure, and you’re eager to go where it takes you.”

—*Romantic Times*

continued . . .

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“Definitely recommend[ed] to people . . . [who] thoroughly enjoy military science fiction and probably some people who would just enjoy a good military story.”

—*BSCreview*

“It’s almost nonstop action and conflict . . . Jack Campbell does an excellent job with the space battles . . . It’s a hallmark of his talent in this arena that he can coordinate such large battles and make them both exciting and coherent, so that even someone without a military background of [his] own can follow and enjoy the action . . .

The *Lost Fleet* is some of the best military science fiction on the shelves today, and *Courageous* doesn’t disappoint in the least. I’ll eagerly be awaiting the next installment in the series.”

—*SF Site*

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“Straightforward, solidly written military space opera . . . It’s all good fun, and Campbell has actually given some thought to the problems of combat in space.”

—*Critical Mass*

“Another satisfying [Campbell] cocktail to slake the thirst of fans who like their space operas with a refreshing moral and intellectual chaser . . . *The Lost Fleet* deserves to find a home on your bookshelf.”

—*SF Reviews.net*

“A great and gripping read. It’s a fast-paced roller coaster of action and intrigue, with realistic characters and situations.”

—*TCM Reviews*

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“A rousing adventure.”

—William C. Dietz,

author of *At Empire’s Edge*

“Jack Campbell’s dazzling new series is military science fiction at its best. Not only does he tell a yarn of great adventure and action, but he also develops the characters with satisfying depth.

I thoroughly enjoyed this rip-roaring read, and I can hardly wait for the next book.”

—Catherine Asaro,

Nebula Award–winning author of *Diamond Star*

“Black Jack Geary is very real, very human, and so compelling he’ll leave you wanting more. Jack Campbell knows fleet actions, and it shows . . . [*The Lost Fleet: Dauntless* is] the best novel of its type that I’ve read.”

—David Sherman,

coauthor of the Starfist series

“A slam-bang good read that kept me up at night . . . a solid, thoughtful, and exciting novel loaded with edge-of-your-seat combat.”

—Elizabeth Moon,

Nebula Award–winning author of *Oath of Fealty*

“[*Dauntless*] should please many fans of old-fashioned hard SF.”

— *Sci Fi Weekly*

“Readers will admire and like [Geary], who believes in honor, teamwork, and civilized behavior . . . This is a hard military-science novel with space battles out of *Star Wars*. The battle scenes are so intricately described that readers will be able to visualize them . . .

A fast-paced but intricate story line and fully developed characters turn this novel into a fun reading experience. Fans of David Weber, Elizabeth Moon, and Peter F. Hamilton will find *The Lost Fleet: Dauntless* thoroughly enjoyable.”

—*SFRevu*

“This is an amazing piece of military science fiction writing, with a protagonist who is remarkable and memorable . . . Campbell writes well. Period. The book flows well,

with an excellent mix of action and philosophical debate . . . Overall, this is just a plain good read, with memorable characters and scenes, and a writing style that is aimed at people who like to think and ponder while enjoying the action. Bravo.”

—Rambles.net

“*The Lost Fleet: Dauntless* is well written, with a hero who’s all too human and battle weary. There’s much here that will remind readers of *Battlestar Galactica* . . . The battles are well-done, but it’s the characters who drive the story.”

—*Fresh Fiction*

“[Campbell’s] space operas [seek] to add new layers to the conventions of military SF.”

—SF Reviews.net

“Lots of fun, and I devoured it in a day. I can’t wait for the sequel.”

—*The Weekly Press* (Philadelphia)

“Campbell’s book takes a sharp look at military discipline (and the lack thereof) in wartime . . . engaging and interesting.”

—*Romantic Times*

Ace Books by Jack Campbell

The Lost Fleet: Dauntless

The Lost Fleet: Fearless

The Lost Fleet: Courageous

The Lost Fleet: Valiant

The Lost Fleet: Relentless

The Lost Fleet: Victorious

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VICTORIOUS

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THE LOST FLEET: VICTORIOUS

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To Paul Parsons,

a man of great enthusiasms,

a great mind, and a great heart,

all of which he shared in abundance

with the many who will miss him.

For S., as always.

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THE ALLIANCE FLEET

" % . * 3 " - 0 ' 5) & ' - & & 5 + 0) / (& " 3 : Commanding

As reorganized at Varandal Star System prior to offensive actions against the Syndic home star system.

Ship names in bold are those lost in action since Geary assumed command, with the name of the star system of their loss given afterward.

SECOND BATTLESHIP

THIRD BATTLESHIP

DIVISION

DIVISION

Gallant

Paladin (lost at Lakota)

Indomitable

Orion

Glorious

Majestic (lost at Lakota II)

Magnificent

Conqueror

Dreadnaught

Dependable

FOURTH BATTLESHIP

FIFTH BATTLESHIP

DIVISION

DIVISION

Warrior (lost at Lakota II)

Fearless

Triumph (lost at Vidha)

Resolution

YJJ

5) & " - - * " / \$ & ' - & & 5

Vengeance

Redoubtable

Revenge

Warspite

SEVENTH BATTLESHIP

EIGHTH BATTLESHIP

DIVISION

DIVISION

(RECONSTITUTED)

Relentless

Indefatigable (lost at Lakota) *Reprisal*

Audacious (lost at Lakota)

Superb

Defiant (lost at Lakota)

Splendid

Sustain

Encroach

Resound

TENTH BATTLESHIP

FIRST SCOUT BATTLESHIP

DIVISION

DIVISION

Colossus

(DISESTABLISHED)

Amazon

Arrogant (lost at Kaliban)

Spartan

Exemplar (lost at Heradao)

Guardian

Braveheart (lost at Cavalos)

FIRST BATTLE CRUISER

SECOND BATTLE CRUISER

DIVISION

DIVISION

(RECONSTITUTED)

Leviathan

Courageous (lost at Heradao)

Dragon

Intrepid (lost at Heradao)

Steadfast

Renown (lost at Lakota)

Valiant

Formidable

Brilliant

Inspire

Implacable

FOURTH BATTLE CRUISER

FIFTH BATTLE CRUISER

DIVISION

DIVISION

Dauntless (flagship)

(RECONSTITUTED)

Daring

Invincible (lost at Ilion)

Terrible (lost at Ilion)

Repulse (lost in Syndic home system)

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YJJJ

Victorious

Furious (lost at Varandal)

Intemperate

Adroit

Auspice

Assert

Agile

Ascendant

SIXTH BATTLE CRUISER

SEVENTH BATTLE CRUISER

DIVISION

DIVISION

Polaris (lost at Vidha)

(DISESTABLISHED)

Vanguard (lost at Vidha)

Opportune (lost at Cavalos)

Illustrious

Incredible

Invincible (new construction)

THIRD FAST FLEET AUXILIARIES DIVISION

Titan

Tanuki

Witch

Jinn

Alchemist

Goblin (lost at Heradao)

THIRTY HEAVY CRUISERS

IN SIX DIVISIONS

(Thirty-seven when Geary first assumed command, minus sixteen lost in battle, plus nine

reinforcements at Varandal)

First Heavy Cruiser Division

Third Heavy Cruiser Division

Fourth Heavy Cruiser Division

Fifth Heavy Cruiser Division

Eighth Heavy Cruiser Division

Tenth Heavy Cruiser Division

losses

YJW

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Invidious (lost at Kaliban)

Cuirass (lost at Sutrah)

Crest, War-Coat, Ram, and Citadel (lost at Vidha)

Basinet and **Sallet** (lost at Lakota)

Utap, Vambrace, and Fascine (lost at Lakota II)

Armet and **Gusoku** (lost at Cavalos)

Tortoise, Breech, Kurtani, Tarian, and Nodowa

(lost at Heradao)

Lorica (lost at Padronis)

Kaidate and **Quillion** (lost at Varandal) **FIFTY-TWO LIGHT CRUISERS**

IN TEN SQUADRONS

(Sixty-two when Geary first assumed command, minus twenty-two lost in battle, plus twelve reinforcements at Varandal)

First Light Cruiser Squadron

Second Light Cruiser Squadron

Third Light Cruiser Squadron

Fifth Light Cruiser Squadron

Sixth Light Cruiser Squadron

Eighth Light Cruiser Squadron

Ninth Light Cruiser Squadron

Tenth Light Cruiser Squadron

Eleventh Light Cruiser Squadron

Fourteenth Light Cruiser Squadron

losses

Swift (lost at Kaliban)

Pommel, Sling, Bolo, and **Staff** (lost at Vidha)

Spur, Damascene, and **Swept-Guard** (lost at Lakota)

Brigandine, Carte, and **Ote** (lost at Lakota II)

Kote and **Cercle** (lost at Cavalos)

Kissaki, Crest, Trunnion, Inquarto, Intagliata, and **Septime**

(lost at Heradao)

Estocade, Disarm, and **Cavalier** (lost at Varandal)

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ONE HUNDRED FIFTY DESTROYERS

IN EIGHTEEN SQUADRONS

(One hundred eighty-three when Geary first assumed command, minus forty-seven lost in battle, plus fourteen reinforcements at Varandal) *First Destroyer Squadron*

Second Destroyer Squadron

Third Destroyer Squadron

Fourth Destroyer Squadron

Sixth Destroyer Squadron

Seventh Destroyer Squadron

Ninth Destroyer Squadron

Tenth Destroyer Squadron

Twelfth Destroyer Squadron

Fourteenth Destroyer Squadron

Sixteenth Destroyer Squadron

Seventeenth Destroyer Squadron

Twentieth Destroyer Squadron

Twenty-first Destroyer Squadron

Twenty-third Destroyer Squadron

Twenty-seventh Destroyer Squadron

Twenty-eighth Destroyer Squadron

Thirty-second Destroyer Squadron

losses

Dagger and ***Venom*** (lost at Kaliban)

Anelace, ***Baselard***, and ***Mace*** (lost at Sutrah)

Celt, Akhu, Sickle, Leaf, Bolt, Sabot, Flint, Needle, Dart,

Sting, Limpet, and *Cudgel* (lost at Vidha)

Falcata (lost at Ilion)

War-Hammer, Prasa, Talwar, and *Xiphos* (lost at Lakota)

Armlet, Flanconade, Kukri, Hastarii, Petard, and *Spiculum* (lost at Lakota II)

Flail, Ndziga, Tabar, Cestus, and *Balta* (lost at Cavalos)

Barb, Yatagan, Lunge, Arabas, Kururi, Shail, Chamber,

Bayonet, and *Tomahawk* (lost at Heradao) YWJ

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Serpentine, Basilisk, Bowie, Guidon, and *Sten*

(lost at Varandal)

SECOND FLEET MARINE FORCE

Major General Carabali commanding (acting)

1,420 Marines divided into detachments on battle cruisers and battleships.

ONE

)&had faced death many times and would cheerfully do so again rather than attend this briefing.

“You’re not going to face a firing squad,” Captain Tanya Desjani reminded him. “You’re going to brief the Alliance grand council.”

Captain John Geary turned his head slightly to look directly at Captain Desjani, commanding officer of Geary’s flagship, the battle cruiser *Dauntless*. “Remind me again of the difference.”

“The politicians aren’t supposed to be carrying weapons, and they’re more afraid of you than you are of them.

Relax. If they see you this tense, they’ll believe you really are planning a coup.” Desjani made a face. “You should know that they’re accompanied by Admiral Otopa.”

“Admiral Otopa?” Geary had literally been out of the loop for a century, so his knowledge of current officers was limited to those in the ships of the fleet itself.

Desjani nodded, somehow investing the simple gesture with disdain that obviously wasn't aimed at Geary.

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“Military aide to the grand council. Don't worry about the grand council trying to hand command of the fleet to him.

No one would accept Otopa the Anvil as fleet commander in place of you.”

Geary looked back at his reflection, feeling nervous and uncomfortable in his dress uniform. He had never enjoyed briefings, and a hundred years ago he would never have imagined that he would be called upon personally to brief the grand council. “The Anvil? That sounds like a strong nickname.”

“He's called the Anvil because he's been beaten so often,” Desjani explained. “With his political talents far exceeding his military skills, Otopa finally figured out that the position of military aide to the grand council was risk-free.”

Geary almost choked as he tried to swallow a laugh. “I guess there are worse nicknames than Black Jack.”

“Many worse ones.” Out of the corner of his eye, Geary saw Desjani cock her head to one side questioningly.

“You've never told me how you picked up the Black Jack name or why you don't like it. Like every schoolkid in the Alliance, I learned the official story in your biographies, but that story doesn't explain your feelings about the nickname.”

He glanced her way. “What's the official story?” Since being awakened from survival sleep in a lost and damaged escape pod, he'd made an effort to avoid reading the authorized accounts of his supposed heroic nature.

“That you never got a red deficiency or failure mark in evaluations of yourself or any units under your command,”

Desjani explained. “Your marks were always ‘meets or exceeds expectations’ black, hence Black Jack.”

“Ancestors preserve us.” Geary tried to keep from breaking into laughter. “Anyone who really looked at my records would know that wasn't true.”

“So what is the truth?”

“I should have at least one secret from you.”

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“As long as it’s a personal secret. The captain of your flagship needs to know all of your professional secrets.”

She paused before speaking again. “This meeting with the grand council. Have you told me everything? Are you going to do as you told me?”

“Yes, and yes.” He turned to face her fully, letting his worries show. As commander of the fleet, Geary had been forced to project confidence publicly no matter how bad things got. Desjani was one of the few people to whom he could reveal his qualms. “It’ll be a tightrope act. I need to convince them of what we have to do, convince them to order me to do it, and not make them think I’m taking over the government.”

Desjani nodded, seeming not the least bit concerned herself. “You’ll do fine, sir. I’ll go make sure everything is ready at the shuttle dock for your flight to Ambaru station while you straighten up your uniform.” She saluted with careful precision, then pivoted and left.

Geary kept his eyes on the hatch to his stateroom after it had shut behind Desjani. He’d have the perfect professional relationship with Tanya Desjani except for the fact that he’d done the incredibly unprofessional thing of falling in love with her. Not that he’d ever openly said that, or ever would. Not while she was his subordinate. It didn’t help that she apparently felt the same way about him, even though neither of them could openly speak of it or act on it in any way. That should have felt like a small problem in a universe a century removed from his own, where the Alliance believed him to be a mythical hero returned from the dead, where an unwinnable war had been raging for that entire century between the Alliance and the Syndicate Worlds, and where the worn-out citizens of the Alliance were so disgusted with their own political leaders that they would have welcomed him declaring himself dictator.

Sometimes, though, that “small” personal problem felt like the hardest thing to endure.

He focused back on his reflection, not able to spot any

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imperfections in his uniform but knowing that Desjani wouldn’t have dropped that broad hint about straightening up if she hadn’t seen something. Scowling, Geary moved a few things a fraction of a millimeter, his eyes going to the multipointed Alliance Star hanging just beneath his collar. He didn’t like wearing the medal awarded him after his supposed death in a last-stand battle a century ago, not feeling that he had really earned such an honor, but regulations demanded that an officer in dress uniform wear

“all insignia, decorations, awards, ribbons, and medals to which that officer is entitled.” He couldn’t afford to pick and choose which regulations to follow because he knew that he had the power to do just that, and if he started, he had no idea where it might end.

As he began to leave, his comm alert sounded. Geary slapped the acknowledgment and saw the image of Captain Badaya appear, smiling confidently and apparently standing before Geary even though Badaya was physically still located aboard his own ship. “Good morning, Captain.”

Badaya beamed.

“Thanks. I was just about to leave to meet with the grand council.” He had to handle Badaya carefully. Although Badaya technically was simply commanding officer of the battle cruiser *Illustrious*, he also led the faction of the fleet that would, without a second thought, back Geary as military dictator. Since that faction made up almost the entire fleet now, Geary had to ensure they didn’t launch such a coup. Since assuming command of the fleet, he had gone from worrying about mutiny against himself to worrying about mutiny against the Alliance itself in his name.

Badaya nodded, his smile getting harder. “Some of the captains wanted to move some battleships over near Ambaru station just to remind the grand council who’s really in charge, but I told them that wasn’t how you were playing it.”

“Exactly,” Geary agreed, trying not to sound too relieved.

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“We have to maintain the image that the grand council is still in charge.” That was the cover story he was using with Badaya anyway. If the grand council ordered Geary to do something the fleet knew Geary wouldn’t have chosen to do, Geary would feel obligated to follow those orders or resign, and all hell would probably break loose.

“Rione will help you handle them,” Badaya noted with a dismissive gesture. “You’ve got her in your pocket, and she’ll keep the other politicians in line. Since you say time is tight, I’d better let you go, sir.” With a final parting grin and a salute, Badaya’s image vanished.

Geary shook his head, wondering what Madam Co-President of the Callas Republic and Senator of the Alliance Victoria Rione would do if she heard Badaya saying Rione was in Geary’s pocket. Nothing good, that was certain.

He walked through the passageways of *Dauntless* toward the shuttle dock, returning enthusiastic salutes from the crew members he passed. *Dauntless* had been his flagship since he’d assumed command of the fleet in the Syndic home star system, the Alliance fleet trapped deep inside enemy territory and apparently doomed. Against all odds, he’d brought most of those ships home, and their crews believed he could do anything. Even win a war their parents and grandparents had also fought. He did his best to look outwardly calm and confident despite his own internal turmoil.

But Geary couldn’t help frowning slightly as he finally reached the shuttle dock. Desjani and Rione were both there, standing close together and apparently speaking

softly to each other, their expressions impassive. Since the two women usually exchanged words only under the direst necessity and often had seemed ready to go at it with knives, pistols, hell lances, and any other available weapon, Geary couldn't help wondering why they were getting along all of a sudden.

Desjani stepped toward him as he approached, while

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Rione went through the hatch into the dock. "The shuttle and your escort are ready," Desjani reported. She frowned slightly as she examined him, reaching to make tiny adjustments to some of his ribbons. "The fleet will be standing by."

"Tanya, I'm counting on you, Duellos, and Tulev to keep things from going nova. Badaya should be working with you to keep anyone in the fleet from overreacting and causing a disaster, but you three also need to make sure Badaya doesn't overreact."

She nodded calmly. "Of course, sir. But you do realize that none of us will be able to hold things back if the grand council overreacts." Stepping closer, Desjani lowered her voice and rested one hand on his forearm, a rare gesture, which emphasized her words. "Listen to her. This is her battlefield, her weapons."

"Rione?" He had never expected to hear Desjani urging him to pay attention to Rione's advice.

"Yes." Stepping back again, Desjani saluted, only her eyes betraying her worries. "Good luck, sir."

He returned the salute and walked into the dock.

Nearby, the bulk of a fleet shuttle loomed, an entire platoon of Marines forming an honor guard on either side of its loading ramp.

An entire platoon of Marines in full battle armor, with complete weapons loadout.

Before he could say anything, a Marine major stepped forward and saluted. "I'm assigned to command your honor guard, Captain Geary. We'll accompany you to the meeting with the grand council."

"Why are your troops in battle armor?" Geary asked.

The major didn't hesitate at all. "Varandal Star System remains in Attack Imminent alert status, sir. Regulations require my troops to be at maximum combat readiness when participating in official movements under such an alert status."

How convenient. Geary glanced toward Rione, who

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didn't seem the least bit surprised at the combat footing of the Marines. Desjani had obviously been in on this, too.

But then Colonel Carabali, the fleet's Marine commander, must have approved of the decision as well. Despite his own misgivings at arriving to speak to his political superiors with a combat-ready force at his back, Geary decided that trying to override the collective judgment of Desjani, Rione, and Carabali wasn't likely to be wise. "Very well.

Thank you, Major."

The Marines raised their weapons to present arms as Geary walked up the ramp, Rione beside him, bringing his arm up in a salute acknowledging the honors being rendered him. At times like this, when he seemed to have been saluting constantly for an hour, even he wondered at the wisdom of having reintroduced that gesture of respect into the fleet.

He and Rione went through to the small VIP cabin just aft of the pilots' cockpit, the Marines filing in behind them to take seats in the shuttle's main compartment. Geary strapped in, gazing at the display panel before him, where a remote image showed stars glittering against the endless night of space. It might have been a window, if anyone had been crazy enough to put a physical window in the hull of a ship or a shuttle.

"Nervous?" Rione asked.

"Can't you tell?"

"Not really. You're doing a good job."

"Thanks. What were you and Desjani plotting about when I got to the shuttle dock?"

"Just some girl talk," Rione said airily, waving a negligent hand. "War, the fate of humanity, the nature of the universe. That sort of thing."

"Did you reach any conclusions I should know about?"

She gave him a cool look, then smiled with apparently genuine reassurance. "We think you'll do fine as long as you are yourself. Both of us have your back. Feel better?"

"Much better, thank you." Status lights revealed the

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shuttle's ramp rising and sealing, the inner dock doors closing, the outer doors opening, then the shuttle rose, pivoted in place with jaunty smoothness, and tore out into space. Geary felt himself grinning. Autopilots could drive a shuttle technically as well as any human, and better in many cases, but only humans could put a real sense