

# BEYOND THE STARPORT ADVENTURE

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PREVIEW – POSSIBLE SPOILERS AHEAD!

***2195AD – UNSS Drake***

The UNSS *Drake* entered the Joan Gallsin wormhole aperture. Proximity alarms wailed as the ship smashed into a chunk of debris. Automatic safety measures activated, reversing the cruiser away from the mass of swirling metal.

“Wreckage in the wormhole,” Greyson reported. “We’re holding steady just inside the nearside aperture.”

“Damage assessment?” Kelso barked.

“Marginal damage to the forward armor,” Niedermeyer reported. “Engineering reporting no damage to ship systems.”

“Take us through,” Kelso ordered. “Nice and slow.”

“Commercial transport SS *Glasgow* is present in the wormhole, sir.” Greyson reported. “Five kilometers ahead of us. Looks like they’re making their way towards the farside aperture.”

“That complicates things,” Kelso mused. “Helm, keep an eye on them and get us out of here if their status changes.”

“Aye sir. We’re locked onto *Glasgow*’s transponder. If it fluctuates we’ll be out of here with time to spare.”

The UNSS *Drake* shuddered. A loud moaning sound filled the control room accompanied by a structural alarm. Kelso shot a glance

towards the engineer; Niedermeyer's eyes always had a frightened look about them, and now they were positively *huge*. "Something hit us, Mr. Niedermeyer," Kelso said. "What was it?"

"That wasn't an impact, sir," Niedermeyer said. "Structural alarm is a result of distortion in the wormhole. Joan Gallsin stability is fluctuating."

"Alright." Kelso muttered. "How safe are we?"

"Unknown, sir," Niedermeyer said. "I've never seen anything like this before."

"*Glasgow's* leaving the wormhole," Greyson reported. "They'll be in sector 34 Delta in eight seconds."

"Follow them out," Kelso ordered. "*Carefully*, Mr. Herring."

"Aye sir." Herring said. "Thrusters on one quarter power."

"Watch the wreckage," Greyson said. "Dense pieces of debris at three o'clock."

"I see them," Herring said. "We have room to spare."

The hull complained noisily. Niedermeyer silenced the structural alarm, nodding to indicate that all was okay. Kelso watched *Glasgow* fade into the void, disappearing out the wormhole. Now, only a mass of debris remained.

"They're out," Kelso observed. "Lieutenant, how soon until we can exit?"

"Thirty seconds," Herring reported. "We're already on our way there, sir."

Kelso nodded. *Drake* was vibrating heavily. He didn't like the number of warning lights on Niedermeyer's station. Stress on the hull was increasing. *Should we reverse course? Is the ship going to come apart?* With a final shudder, *Drake* was out of the wormhole and back in normal space. Kelso breathed a sigh of relief.

An unfamiliar planetary body appeared on the screen; a blue billiard ball surrounded by unfamiliar stars. *Drake* was not where it was supposed to be.

"This isn't 34 Delta," Kelso hissed. "Where the Hell are we?"

“One moment,” Greyson touched her console, reading the sensors with a shake of her head. “It’s incredible, sir.”

“Tell me where we are, Lieutenant.”

“We’re in Sector 90 Golf; a unexplored region of space in the southeast quadrant of the Jailbar Cluster. Gallsin’s far side aperture has shifted to an unnamed planetary system.”

“Unnamed?”

“That’s right, sir. Large yellow dwarf star, not on our maps. At least three planets orbiting. We’re about seven hundred thousand kilometers from the nearest planet.”

“Full magnification,” Kelso ordered. “Let me see it.”

“Aye sir.”

The alien world filled the view screen; a pearlescent orb with blue oceans, white clouds, and continents of green, yellow, and brown land – just like Earth. The northernmost point of the planet appeared shrouded in cloud, but Kelso could see a mass of white; either a continental land mass or, like Earth’s north pole, a floating mass of sea ice.

“Clouds. Water,” Science officer Hong observed. “Looks like home, sir. Where there’s liquid water, there will be life.”

“Where’s *Glasgow*?”

“Can’t see them on sensors, sir,” Greyson said. “We picked up some ionization on the way out. Engineering is working on recalibrations.”

“Hail *Glasgow* on Superamp,” Kelso ordered. “I need to know where they are.”

“Already hailing them, sir,” Greyson said. “No response on standard and emergency channels.”

“Keep trying.”

“There’s something else you should know, sir,” Greyson’s tone was incredulous. “Captain, I... I can’t believe what I’m hearing.”

“What is it?” Kelso went to the communications officer and

eagerly looked over her shoulder.

“That’s amazing,” Greyson gasped, “Oh my God!”

“Damn it!”

Kelso pressed a button on the communications officer’s console. Garbled chatter erupted from the control panel, a mass of mixed up voices and strange music.

“Those are radio transmissions?” Kelso said. “Coming from that planet?”

“Yes, sir. Multiple signals, varying amplitudes and modulation. Emanating from all over the planet surface.”

“Wait,” Kelso interrupted. “That sounds like English. Its jumbled nonsense, mostly, but... *there, did you hear that?*”

Greyson shook her head noncommittally. “Sir, it bears *some* resemblance to English, but we’re hearing multiple overlapping signals. I’m trying to clean it up, but the computer’s having trouble separating the different transmissions.”

“I can’t believe we’ve stumbled across an advanced society.” Hong’s voice was filled with excitement. “Multiple radio transmissions - in English.”

“It’s not English,” Greyson said. “That’s not possible.”

“It sounds like English,” Kelso argued. “Are we making a mistake? Are these signals coming from some of *Spirit of the Future’s* wreckage? Something the sensors can’t see?”

“The signals are definitely coming from the planet, sir,” Greyson said.

“Sir,” Niedermeyer said, “I’m having enormous trouble with the sensor realignment. If you’ll excuse me, I need to leave the bridge.”

“Of course,” Kelso nodded. Niedermeyer was already unfastening the hatch beneath the large main view screen. He had a lot of practice and the four locking corners were open in twenty seconds. He slid the door aside and looked back at the captain. Niedermeyer jumped feet first into the hatch. It closed shut behind him.

Kelso kept listening to the sounds from Greyson's console. There were garbled words, even something that sounded like music. "Can you clean this up?"

"Trying, sir."

"That last voice definitely sounded like it was speaking English," Kelso mused. "It's not possible, is it? Hong?"

"No, sir." Hong agreed, his tone hesitant. "It isn't possible."

The sensor array came to life, flooding the view screen with information. Niedermeyer had succeeded.

"We have partial sensors." Greyson reported. "Nearest planet is fifteen million kilometers from our position; oxygen nitrogen atmosphere comparable to Earth's. Local star is a GV type, slightly larger than Sol. Sensors indicate six planetary bodies; two capable of sustaining life. Third planet is twenty-four million kilometers away, but sensors aren't getting any readings from it. Three uninhabitable planets are"—

An alarm sounded, interrupting Greyson.

"Captain!" Weapons officer Brzezinski shouted. "An unknown spacecraft is approaching; bearing two seven mark nine."

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### ***2195AD – EWS Justice Six***

Paj Lannzin, Jaxx's new second officer, looked up from the tactical station. "A second spacecraft has emerged from the anomaly. Weapons signatures detected!"

"It has begun," Jaxx grinned evilly. "Whatever this new enemy is, it has found a way to manipulate the wormholes. They will not find us unprepared. Prepare to engage."

"Yes, Admiral," Lannzin said. "Weapons are charged and ready."

*Justice Six* turned from the first spacecraft – the curiously unarmed transport vessel – and powered towards the new aggressor.

"We are entering weapons range," Lannzin reported.

Jaxx regarded Tyzzall, *Justice Six's* gunner. "Fire when ready,

Tyzzall. Destroy them.”

Tyzzall jerked his head back in obedience. “Yes, Admiral!”

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### ***2195AD – UNSS Drake***

Multiple alarms wailed in *Drake's* bridge. The main view screen lit up brightly, a flare of energy striking the ship. *Drake* shuddered violently. The tactical console gave a familiar – albeit incredible – directed energy weapon warning.

“We’re under attack,” Brzezinski said. “Some kind of focused energy weapon”—

“Evasive maneuvers,” Kelso snapped. “Launch full countermeasures. Helm, make your course seven two mark four. Turn us around, Herring – flank speed.”

“Evasive, aye,” The navigator said. “Engines at emergency power; lateral thrusters responding.”

“Firing ECM countermeasures,” Brzezinski said. “Enemy target continuing to close distance.”

Brzezinski triggered every one of *Drake's* many defense systems at the same time: electronic “noisemaker” pods spewed out from launchers located around the ship; powerful multi-band jamming systems shrieked out blaring data streams on the frequencies used by all guided missile systems known to *Drake's* tactical database; flares of white-hot plasma energy – designed to confuse heat seeking weapons – blasted out from the dorsal flare pods.

“Countermeasures firing,” Brzezinski confirmed. “Weapons systems ready in five seconds, sir.”

Kelso’s mind raced. The alien ship had appeared from nowhere, opened fire without warning. They’d attacked first, and nobody on Earth would question *Drake's* response. But this was first contact with an alien race. He had to make an effort at diplomacy, even if he had the feeling that the horse had already distinctly run out the open barn door.

“Preparing weapons,” Brzezinski stated. “Computer is selecting

optimal targets.”

“Stand by,” Kelso said. “That might have been a warning shot.”

“I don’t think so,” Herring said. “Hank, I think”—

“Stow it, Shaun,” Kelso snapped. “We have to try diplomacy. This isn’t some extremist holdout. This is an alien race. We’re trespassing on their territory. Hail them on all known frequencies. Friendship messages. We might still be able to fix this before it’s too late.”

Herring didn’t shake his head. He might as well have. His expression said it all. Kelso turned away from his old friend, looking back to the Sensor and Communications officer, Greyson.

“Greyson? Report?”

“Transmitting, sir,” Greyson said. “Countermeasures seem to be... confusing them, Captain. They’re scanning the noisemakers. ECM system is analyzing and reflecting their sensor scans.”

“Primary weapon is ready and locked on target,” Brzezinski said. “Firing at your command, sir.”

Herring caught Kelso’s eye. “They’re matching our maneuvers. Looks like they’re lining that big gun up again.”

“Enemy ship now five thousand kilometers ahead, sir,” Greyson said. “Relaying sensor data to the tactical station.”

“Receiving tactical data.” Brzezinski confirmed. “Tactical station assuming sensor control.”

Kelso watched the approaching craft. Its dimensions were comparable to *Drake*, but the alien ship was decidedly angry looking. The bow was tapered like the edge of a knife, and the heavy armor showed artefacts of battle damage.

“It’s heavily armored,” Brzezinski said. “Hull’s exact composition unknown – sensors not penetrating it, sir. Primary weapon looks like a large energy or particle cannon mounted along the keel. That’s what they hit us with. Smaller weapons on the port and starboard; possibly a missile system or projectile weapons system. Captain, their main gun power output is increasing, getting ready to fire.”

Kelso inspected the tactical display, noting the alien ship’s energy



signature increasing.

“Back us off,” Kelso ordered. “Keep our bow towards them.”

“Aye, sir.”

“Greyson, any response to our hails?”

“Still broadcasting friendship messages,” Greyson said, “but I’m not getting anything back that looks like a comms signal.”

“Keep trying,” Kelso turned to Herring. “Shaun, what’s happening?”

“We’re backing away, but they’re pushing forward. They want to fight, Hank.”

Kelso cursed under his breath. “Dammit, I know that. Brzezinski, stand by weapons systems.”

“Locked onto their primary weapon,” Brzezinski said. “Ready to fire on your command.”

“Stand by,” Kelso said.

There was a proximity alarm. Herring was shaking his head.

“Distance eight hundred kilometers, sir,” Herring said. “They’re matching our maneuvers.”

“They’re firing!” Brzezinski shouted. “Enemy weapon has obliterated one of the noisemakers. Their sensors are trying to penetrate countermeasures, sir. Their next hit might get through.”

Enough was enough. “Brzezinski, you have permission to fire. Try to take out their primary weapon.”

“Aye, sir.”

*Drake’s* most powerful weapon was an Ion cannon mounted beneath the forward sensor array. The weapon ran along the entire length of the ship and was flanked by dual electromagnetic railguns capable of firing armor piercing sabots at incredible speed. Brzezinski locked *Drake’s* tactical scanner onto the alien ship’s primary weapon and fired the Ion cannon.

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### ***2195AD – EWS Justice Six***

There was a flash. One of the unmanned consoles – the auxilliary tactical station – had shorted. Jaxx fell forward in his chair. He would have fallen to the floor, but Lannzin caught him just in time. Jaxx allowed himself to be settled back into his center seat. Lannzin leapt back to the main tactical station, pushing in alongside the ship's gunner, Taz Tyzzall.

“Enemy target has returned fire,” Tyzzall said. “Pulse cannon damaged, but still operational. Starboard bullet gun inoperative; possibly destroyed” —

“Fire at will,” Jaxx hissed. “Destroy them!”

“It will be done, Admiral!” Lannzin said. “Energy pulse cannon recharging.”

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### ***2195AD – UNSS Drake***

“Direct hit!” Brzezinski announced. “Enemy target has sustained damage to their starboard weapons system.”

“Their main weapon is powering up again,” Hong interjected. “They're preparing to fire, Captain.”

Kelso nodded to the science officer. “Continue evasive maneuvers.”

“Aye, sir.”

The alien spacecraft opened fire. Explosive bullets hammered *Drake's* Ion cannon, shattering the barrel. Coolant detonated and *Drake* rocked violently, the heavy explosion drowning out the structural alarm. The shockwave dissipated, multiple alarms blaring from the engineering and tactical stations.

“Our Ion cannon has been destroyed,” Brzezinski said. “Railgun system has sustained heavy damage.”

“Ventral hull breeches,” Greyson said. “Casualties on deck one and two, sections Alpha through Delta.”

“Shaun, set course zero mark one!” Kelso barked. “Get those

railguns working!”

“Railgun load failure, sir,” Brzezinski said. “Tube one has an electronic fault, tube two ammunition load system failure.”

“God damn it!”

*Drake* shuddered again.

“Another hit,” Greyson said. “Navigational sensor array damaged. Hull breach in forward section four”—

“Railguns coming on line!” Brzezinski interrupted. “Locked on and... firing.”

*Drake’s* railguns fired hard spears of heavy metal at the alien ship. The projectiles arrived at their target almost instantaneously and smashed into the attacker’s bullet gun, destroying it. The railgun sabots continued through the aggressor, blasting into a fuel store which erupted with a flash of magnesium white.

The explosive spectacle elicited a cheer from *Drake’s* bridge crew. Kelso couldn’t stop himself from grinning broadly, his left hand becoming a tight fist. “Good work, Brzezinski.”

“Target hit and damaged, sir!” Brzezinski said proudly. “Debris and power fluctuations from enemy target. Their main engines show reduced power output.”

“Excellent,” Kelso nodded. “Reload the railguns. If they still want to fight, blow them to Hell.”

“Sir,” Greyson said. “Their energy weapon is still charging. We have to take that out before it fires again.”

“Brzezinski?”

“Our noisemakers are directly between us and the enemy target. I can’t lock on, sir.”

Kelso watched the tactical display change, noting the energy build up from the alien ship. He caught Hong’s eye again. She was frowning, gently shaking her head.

“Hong, what is it?”

“Enemy sensors are penetrating our ECM interference,” Hong

said. “They’re finding a way”—

The alien ship’s energy beams blasted through two of *Drake’s* noisemakers, obliterating them. But the energy didn’t stop there. *Drake’s* bridge section received the rest of the energy beam. The electromagnetic shielding round the bridge deflected some of the particle beam energy, but there was too much energy to absorb or re-route. The EM shield failed and the bridge was immediately flooded with the full power of the alien energy beam system. Every electronic system in the bridge came alive with blue lightning, Kelso and his bridge officers catching fire and burning, screaming in mutual agony. The horror was mercifully quick. Within two seconds, the energy cannon had incinerated them all.

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### ***2195AD – EWS Justice Six***

“Enemy target has been neutralized,” Tyzzall reported. “Their command center has been destroyed, Admiral. The ship is breaking apart.”

“Excellent,” Jaxx said. “Survivors?”

“Scanners indicate life signs,” Lannzin said. “Your orders, Admiral?”

“I won’t have them aboard this ship,” Jaxx snarled. “Take us to a safe distance. Tyzzall, you can use the rest of their dammt ship for target practice.”