

Convergence

BY

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CHAPTER
** ONE **

Since the reinvention of the PING drive, the number of ships plying between the planets of the Five Systems Confederacy had been steadily increasing. Economically, this was good. It also meant excitement and adventure for the bold person willing to risk the dangers of deep space. Unfortunately, it also meant . . . parking problems.

Roger sighed in resignation, shaking his head. “Trixie, I’m going to take a taxi in.”

“Yes, Captain, you will have to, since walking is out of the question,” his ship replied.

“At least the Company won’t have to pay docking fees.”

“A good point to mention to your grandfather when you see him?”

“Yeah, Gramps. I wonder what he wants?”

“According to my records, it will probably have to do with your recent setbacks.”

“Thanks for reminding me,” he answered, sarcastically.

“You are welcome, Captain,” she replied, happily. *Most times she sounded normal for a ship’s computer*, he thought, *but sometimes . . .*

The Taxi dropped him off at the Tradestation and he arranged for Trixie’s resupply. Then, took a Shuttle down to the surface to report to his grandfather, the Company CEO. Walking into the Bronson Space Enterprises office building, he wondered why, compared to some of the other space companies, it was so . . . small.

“Hi, Anita, he in?” He asked the very attractive, blonde receptionist.

She smiled happily and came around the desk to give him a hug. “Welcome back, Roger. I missed you!”

He returned the hug. “Yeah, it’s been a while.” They gazed at each other for a few seconds. “Well . . . what’s he want? It sounded urgent.”

She frowned slightly and went back to her seat. “He’s here sir,” she

said, into the intercom.

“Well, send him in!” His grandfather’s gruff voice came from the box.

“Uh oh, sounds mad,” Roger commented, gulping.

In the Office, he found his grandfather, David Bronson, on the phone, yelling at someone. He walked over to the desk and stood there. The old man briefly looked up and pointed to a chair. Roger obediently sat.

“I don’t care what your damn problems are! I contracted for that material to be delivered on time!” A voice said something, unintelligible. “That’s a load of crap! I’ll give you one more week!” He exclaimed, slamming down the phone and keying the intercom. “Anita! Get Simon in here!” He sat back and gazed across the desk at Roger.

“Uh, sir, if it’s about that little problem with our last delivery . . .”

The old man kept looking at him, not saying a word, until Simon rushed in.

“Yes Sir! You summoned me?” He asked, a worried look on his face.

“Say hello to your brother.”

Simon noticed Roger sitting there and a broad smile lit up his face. “Rog! Welcome back! How’s the Space end of the business going?”

“Just great, Simon. At least, I think so,” he replied, turning his attention back to his grandfather.

“Space Drives is going to deliver the new set of engines for Trixie, next week,” the old man stated.

“They’re already late. Why’d you give them more time?” Simon asked.

“Because time is important and we don’t have enough of it to contract to another company.”

“Uh, Trixie’s engines, all three of them, are just fine . . . sir,” Roger interjected, cautiously.

“I’m the President of this company and I want her to have new engines,” the old man growled.

“Of course, sir. If you say so,” Simon replied.

“Seems like a waste of money, to me,” Roger commented. “Why spend it if it isn’t necessary?”

“Oh?” The elder Bronson asked, with raised eyebrows. “Shall we go over your profit and loss sheets, then?”

“Er, no?”

“Exactly. Your ship is too slow. So, new engines,” he said, glaring. “Simon, you will see to it, personally.” He looked at his watch. “Lunch time. Roger, come with me. Simon, don’t forget the meeting this afternoon.”

At the high end Restaurant they went to, Roger felt totally out of place. He was dressed for Space, not, fine dining. His grandfather noticed his discomfort.

“Don’t let it bother you. There is no one here you need to impress,” he said as they were seated at a table overlooking Sidney Square.

“Yes, sir.”

He sighed. “When you were young, you used to call me Gramps.”

“Yeah, we had a lot of fun, back then.”

“So, relax.”

“Sure . . . Gramps.”

The old man smiled. “That’s better. You don’t show up here on Jefferson enough, but I get good reports from our offices on the other planets.”

“I’m glad I’m living up to the family name.”

Some time passed in silence, his grandfather gazing out at the statue in the center of the Square. Their orders arrived and they began eating. “Tell me, what do you know about Sidney Rogers?”

“That he was a great Hero who saved the Five Systems from a pirate who had gotten hold of a PING ship and terrible weapons and was trying to become King of us all.”

“And who was he?”

“He was the last survivor of the Jefferson Space Fleet that was wiped out in the first battle with the would-be King’s forces.”

“Ah yes, you listened well to your teachers.” He frowned. “A slight change of subject. I didn’t call you here to critique your Trading

skills, although, you could use some improvement there.” A sad look passed over his face. “The fact is, I haven’t long and it’s time to pass on my legacy.”

Roger felt a shock go through him. “Dying . . . ?”

“Yes, that’s just the way it is. I’m leaving Simon in charge of the Company.”

“I understand, sir. He’s much more suited to leading it.”

Gramps scowled. “Yes, and that is all he is suited to do.” He paused, composing his thoughts. “Do you remember when I asked you if you wanted to go into space? I think you were about twelve.”

“Yes, I do. It only seemed natural. I’ve always been drawn to the stars.”

“Well, I asked your brother the same question. His response was less . . . enthusiastic . . . than yours.”

“Oh, yeah, I got a little excited.”

“So, he gets the easy job, running the Company.”

“That’s the easy job?”

“Yes. What I’m going to pass to you is, challenging, dangerous and possibly deadly.”

Roger looked at his grandfather, trying to see if he was joking but his expression was dead serious. “I see. What is it?”

“That’s for later.” There was a long moment of silence. “One very important thing, do not tell anyone what I just told you. There could be serious repercussions.”

“Does Simon know?”

“No, and he is not to. You will be the only one in the family to know of my condition, understood?”

“I do, Gramps. Uh, how long?”

The old man shrugged. “It’s one of those ‘maybe five months, maybe five years’ things. Probably not soon, though.” They finished their meal. “We’d better get back, I have a meeting. Oh, and don’t make any plans for Rogers Day,” he instructed. Grandfather and grandson left the Restaurant, each lost in his own thoughts.

Returning to the office, they parted ways. It was then that Roger found out that he had a small problem.

“You are going to pick me up at nine and we are going to do the Tour,” Anita informed him.

“But . . .”

“It will take all day, so pack accordingly.”

“But . . .”

“Don’t forget your trunks, because we start and end at the lake,” she instructed.

“But . . .”

“You have something to say?”

“Uh, yeah . . . um . . . I have . . . other plans,” he finished, quickly.

“Oh? You have something else for us to do?”

“Not . . . us.”

She stepped back, a frown on her face. “Who then?”

He was starting to panic. “I . . . can’t say?” There was a long moment of uncomfortable silence.

“Who is she?”

“No! It’s not like that!”

“Really?” Anita asked, sitting at her desk. “I am very busy here, sir. Please show yourself out.”

“Anita!” She didn’t look up. He turned and left.

When he got home, the house was empty. His parents were off on some trip somewhere, so he made himself comfortable and thought about Anita. After she had calmed down a bit, he would try to make it up to her.

There was an old family tradition that certain men wed their cousins from a branch family. He had never gotten an answer as to why but it wasn’t binding. He liked Anita, a lot. She was fun and pretty, but he wasn’t thinking about marriage. Being the Captain of Tradeship Trixie was taking all his time and he was enjoying the adventure. Anita had always seemed like a grounder to him. He mentally shrugged, flipped on the Vid and put Gramps and Anita out of his mind.