Star Sailors 1 - Earthlings

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## Prologue

It had been a long time coming, however Opus Samuel had finally convinced the rest of his crew to turn the ships around. After years of travelling, his crew had finally realised that Earth longed for them to return and that they longed to return to Earth as well.

Opus had not become Captain of the Fleet for no reason. Tall, strong and intelligent, he had led the Scavengers throughout dozens of star systems, helping the poor and needy. He was the only person on the crew that had been born on Earth – most of the rest had stepped foot on it but had been born off-world, and some of the scavengers had never even heard of Earth before they ran into Opus. This group of the scavengers were from 55 Cancri e.b. (the first moon of the fourth planet), but in their native tongue it was called Huw Alissa.

But it didn’t matter where they had been born, because they were all going home. They had been searching for Earth almost since they had left, but it took a lot of convincing to make them forsake their lives of comfort to go looking for a planet that they barely remembered. But in the end, Opus had won them over, telling them not only stories of Columbus and Neil Armstrong, but also that they needed to make sure that their home planet was safe. He said that they needed to leave it in a better state than it was when it had been given to them, and this was what finally moved them. Using the 2SRD probes (2nd Series Robotic Discovery Probes), they had created a catalogue of 300 planets, each with similar compositions, temperatures, and stellar neighbours to Earth. Over the course of 6 months, they narrowed it down until only one remained. Earth – Earthari Novalis. The planet of jewels.

Opus pulled the ship out of hyperspace and the rest of the fleet soon followed. What he saw took his breath away – the pale blue dot. The blue marble. But only for a moment. Then it was all whisked away in a flash of gold, disappearing into a star that had not been there 10 seconds ago. Eventually, Opus’s ship followed.

## Chapter 1

*‘If they had been trying to kill Opus, they would have taken us all,* ’ thought Gilbert McInstay. *‘Otherwise why did they only take his ship? Our crew were valuable as well.’*

Enter Gilbert – courageous and witty but not too strong. He’d been just a boy when the ships had left Low Earth Orbit, and he’d had to work hard to convince what was then the Scavenger Alliance to take him on board as a cleaner. Low on food supplies, a number of them had attempted to kill Gilbert, as they believed he was wasting their valuable supplies. Opus, who was then only 17 years old himself, rescued Gilbert and that sparked the beginning of a long friendship.

At first, though, it had looked as though it was going to be anything but. Opus was progressing through his schooling and Gilbert was seen as a burden. Not an expendable burden, but one that Opus didn’t need. Occasionally, however, Opus began to smile at the lad, whether Gilbert was showing him a new puzzle game he had created or sharing some food rations together.

They’d been together for over 30 years, in which they’d seen fire in dozens of battles, but their friendship had remained. Even after there was a mutiny in the Scavenger Alliance and almost all of the ships had been destroyed, Gilbert made sure he was with Opus, and Opus made sure that Gilbert was protected. It didn’t matter that 10 years separated them, they were as close as brothers and as young as the day they first met – at least in spirit.

But now Opus was gone. While he pondered this thought and what had caused this, the ship he was in entered hyperspace and he had to grasp the hand railing to prevent himself from falling over. He heard the door to his room open and he quickly untangled himself from the rail. While he did so, the first mate walked in, flanked by his body guards.

“McInstay, my crew and I are very sorry for your loss of your friend. I come here to offer my condolences and to inform you of a transmission we have received from an alien source.”

Alek Vicheva. The first mate of the fleet, he’d earned that position by birthright. His father, Vladimir Vicheva, had been the benefactor behind the fleet, and Opus had decided to honour that by promoting his son to the first mate position. However, Alek was no pushover. One of the bravest of the crew, he had the utmost respect from his crew and was one of the most popular of the crew. Never making his men do something that he wouldn’t do, he led his armies whenever possible and didn’t shy away from his duty.

Alek walked along the platform towards Gilbert. His gold piercing in his right ear pulsing, he bent his head down to where Gilbert was sitting. “We have received a transmission from – well, it’s something we’ve never seen before. It seems like it’s been transmitted from near the centre of our galaxy, but it’s been edited and re-transmitted from where Earth was. Maybe it might be able to help us find where Opus is.”

Gilbert turned, tear streaks clearly visible on his pale face. “And why are you telling me this? Why am I so important that you would tell me this before seeing the transmission?”

Alek knelt down and offered his hand to Gilbert. “Opus gave me orders if he died or was missing in action. One of those was to give you this.” He was holding out a jacket emblazoned with the fleet’s logo, with a silver number **1** next to it. “You’re first mate while he’s missing. You’ve earnt it, and it’s partly your choice whether we look at this transmission. I swore to follow his orders, and I know you did too – we all did. Are you ready?”

Gilbert took Alek’s hand. He stood up and wiped his tears away, and said the words that will define this story: “Yes. Let’s look at this transmission.”

Planet garden

Gilbert was in the control room for the first time. With him was Alek, the fleet colonels and two technicians: Arlen Wildner (M) & Nyra Drumen (F).

The 4 colonels that were there were Tima Ramel (F), Ackbar Eerpfen (M), Alexandra Enen (F), and Cyrstal Winslett (F). Each colonel was in charge of a different area of the fleet – for example food sources, defence, etc.

Arlen spoke up first. “With all due respect sir, we aren’t able to open this message. The file size is too massive – we’d have to disable half our fleet to have the energy required to read this. It must be the largest message ever received by mankind, or it could be that they don’t transmit files in gigabytes. We can’t justify with the public a reason to disable the fleet, and we would have to land the ship on a habitable planet.”

Alek, who had been pacing while listening to Arlen, spun around to face him. “Enough with the computer mumbo-jumbo. I’m the fleet captain, this is my first mate. Just land on Mars!” Gesturing to the array of computer screens around him, he continued, “we can land on Mars and set up camp there -”

“I’m sorry, sir, but Mars isn’t here. Not anymore…it’s uh, it’s been taken by the ship. And it isn’t just Mars…it’s every planet in our solar system. The alien ship – the alien *thing* has taken everything. We can’t land anywhere!” At this moment, one of the computers next to Arlen started blaring with an alarm.

“What’s going on?”

“We’re detecting a massive object coming out of hyperspace!” Racing over to the computer, he sat down in a chair and disabled the alarm and looked up from the screen. “It’s got a tractor beam engaged and has disabled our engines.”

Gilbert, who had mostly remained quiet up until now, stood up. “Wh-w-what does that mean?”

Startled, Arlen fell off his chair. Looking around to see who had asked the question, he said, “It means, Gilbert, that we’re under attack. And we can’t escape.”

Gilbert paced around the control room, pausing at times to peer at the computer screens dotted around the room. One of these had a red flashing light, highlighting where Earth had been before its ‘abduction.’ Kneeling down to look at it, he saw that there had been another transmission. Not sure about what to do, he sat down at the terminal and started typing a command to see the file size. Expecting something astronomical, he instead was surprised with a file size of 2mb – possibly an image? He tried seeing who on the fleet had sent it, but the location was blocked. While he was entering these commands, the door opened.

“What’s all this?” Arlen walked through the door, pausing when he saw the mess around Gilbert. Closing the door, he walked over to Gilbert. Quick as a flash, Gilbert closed down the transmission file on the holobook. He didn’t want anyone else to see what he had been doing, especially considering Arlen had stopped him from looking at the previous transmission.

“Gilbert, I know that you’re worried about Opus. But looking at the transmission won’t get him back. We probably won’t get him back, but what is important is that we don’t fall into the trap he fell into.” Arlen pulled up a chair next to Gilbert and sat down in it. “The transmission was sent from the ship – sorry, the thing – that took Opus. That means –“

“How do you know it was a ship?” said Gilbert. “We saw a bright pulse of light and then darkness. Our scanners didn’t pick up a ship.” Attempting to prove his point, Gilbert accessed the navigation on his holobook console and bought up the footage. “Watch this – there’s no ship –“

“I misspoke. I was – uh – getting confused with Opus. Anyway, that isn’t important. We’re under attack by a large warship that has taken almost all of the fleet hostage. Alek has gone to fight, so currently you’re in command. What are you going to do?”

Seeing that Arlen had gone over to his console, Gilbert stepped up from his chair and said, “I’m going to stay in here as long as possible. I believe I can hack into their transmissions and see where they’re from and what they’re plans are. We may be able to escape, so I plan also to attempt to remotely disable the tractor beam. But you need to tell Alek to get the other ships out of there when I do.” Of course, Gilbert was going to do nothing of the sort. He would look at the small transmission file that he’d received. He’d already told Nyra to do that, but he needed to get Arlen off his back, and the only way to do that was to give a false command.

Gilbert waited, seeing if Arlen would fall for it. To his great relief, he did. “I’ll make sure that Alek knows what to do.”

Gilbert let out a sigh of relief when Arlen turned away and marched through the door. Standing up himself to close the door, he saw that another message had appeared on his console. Thanking his luck it hadn’t come in 10 seconds earlier, he sat back down in his seat and read what the message said.

The message was bright yellow text on a black background. “Prepare for boarding, Gilbert McInstay. You have not acknowledged our transmission and you have 3 more minutes to do so before we come in. Your compatriots are safe but currently you are not. Please acknowledge.” A high-pitched bird song started playing from the computer speakers, however no-one came through the door. Gilbert pressed a button on the screen and spoke into the wired microphone: “Transmission acknowledged. Where do I need to go?” And for the next three minutes, he read what appeared on the screen. He then walked off, leaving the computer screen on. From what he knew, there wouldn’t be anyone in this room for a long time.