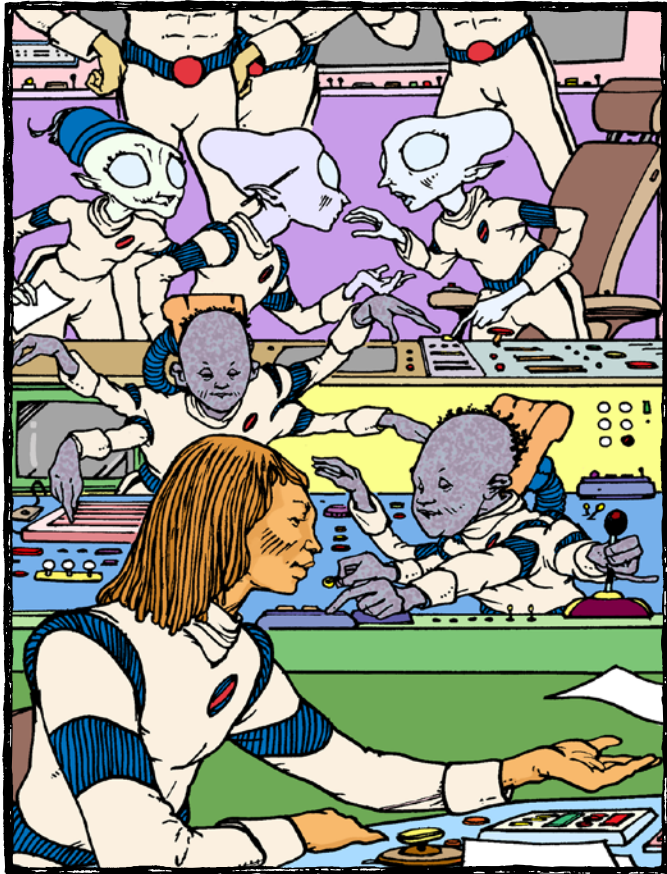


Jacey Nova: Starship Pilot

A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book
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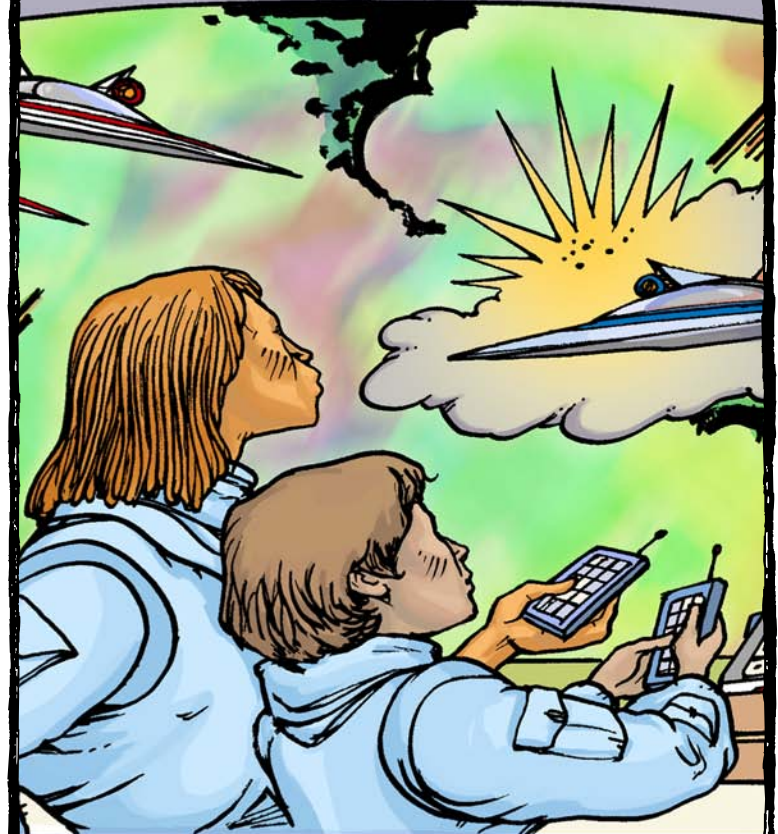


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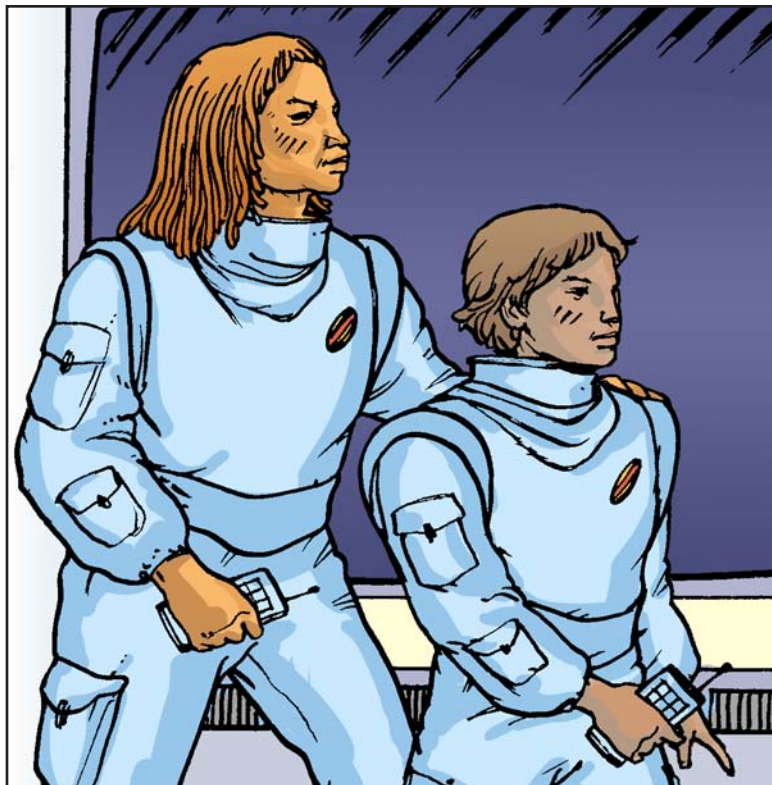
Jacey Nova: Starship Pilot



Written by Troy Wolff • Illustrated by Joel Snyder

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Correlation

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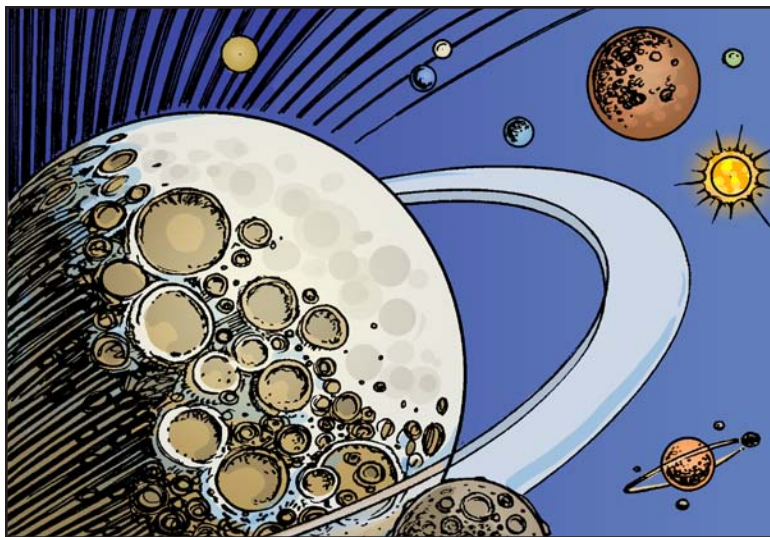


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The Letter

*Galaxy date 171: Year 2035
Calabrian Galaxy
Central Galaxon Headquarters
Starship Pilot Training Division*

Jacey Nova:

Congratulations! Central Galaxon Headquarters was impressed by your performance in pilot training on your home planet of Oberon. We invite you to participate in Starship Pilot Training. We have invited the leading pilots from each of the planets in the Calabrian Galaxy to Galaxon Headquarters on the Planet Martel.

*If you accept this invitation, you will enter the most rigorous pilot training available. After four weeks, your training will **culminate** in BattleGlobe: a simulated starship battle to determine the Alpha Pilot team in the galaxy.*

Best of luck to you, Jacey Nova. The security of the Calabrian Galaxy rests in its Galaxon fleet and in the skill of pilots such as yourself.

*Peace and Unity,
Central Galaxon Headquarters*



As this electronic message flashed across Jacey Nova's computer screen, he erupted into a howl of excitement.

"Starship Training School! I'm going to Planet Martel!" Jacey screamed.

Jacey went straight to his videophone to tell his family and friends the news—it was the opportunity he'd been training for his whole life. He talked everyone's ears off. He packed and said his good-byes, and ten days later, Jacey found himself docking at Planet Martel's Central Galaxon Headquarters. He had his pilot gear in his hands and butterflies in his stomach. He checked in and went to his dormitory.

The Roommate

"You'll take the right side," Jacey heard as he walked into his assigned room. The deep, muffled voice came from a figure seated at the desk with his back to Jacey.

"Uh, hi. I'm Jacey," Jacey offered, hopefully. He looked more closely at his new roommate: broad shoulders, a stiff jacket with a collar, and long rows of what looked like braided orange hair hanging down to his shoulders. Upon closer inspection, Jacey noticed that it wasn't actually hair but long **tendrils** of skin, growing like human hair.

"What are you looking at?" questioned the figure, without turning around.

"What? What do you mean?" Jacey stammered.

"I know you're staring at me. I know you're wearing a dark jacket. And I know your bag is in your left hand."

Jacey's mouth dropped open. "Are you a Sarpedon?"

Jacey knew Sarpedons had strands of "hair" that were actually sensitive organs that sensed light, heat, and movement and sent impulses to the brain, allowing them to "see" behind their

heads. This unique ability made them among the best pilots and navigators in the galaxy, able to sense 360 degrees of movement during battle.

“Yes, human, I am. Judging from your reaction, I’m the first Sarpedon you’ve ever seen.”

Jacey had heard about Sarpedons all his life; Oberon and Sarpedon had been great enemies when humans first immigrated to Oberon from Earth. Jacey’s grandfather had been a pilot in the long and painful war between the two planets. Since a greater threat was discovered outside the Calabrian Galaxy, Oberon and Sarpedon had become allies, but bad feelings from the war still lingered.

“Well, I guess we’re roommates now,” Jacey said, wanting to sound friendly, although he was nervous about being roommates with a Sarpedon. Jacey wondered if he’d feel like he was being watched all the time.

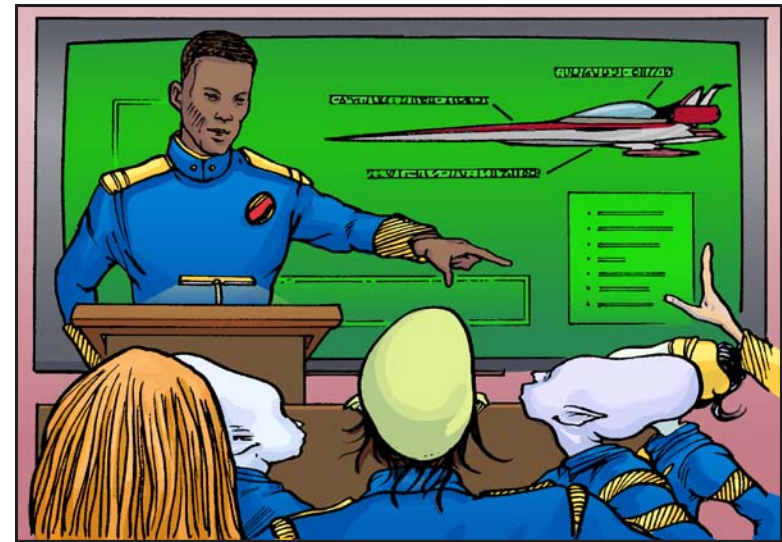
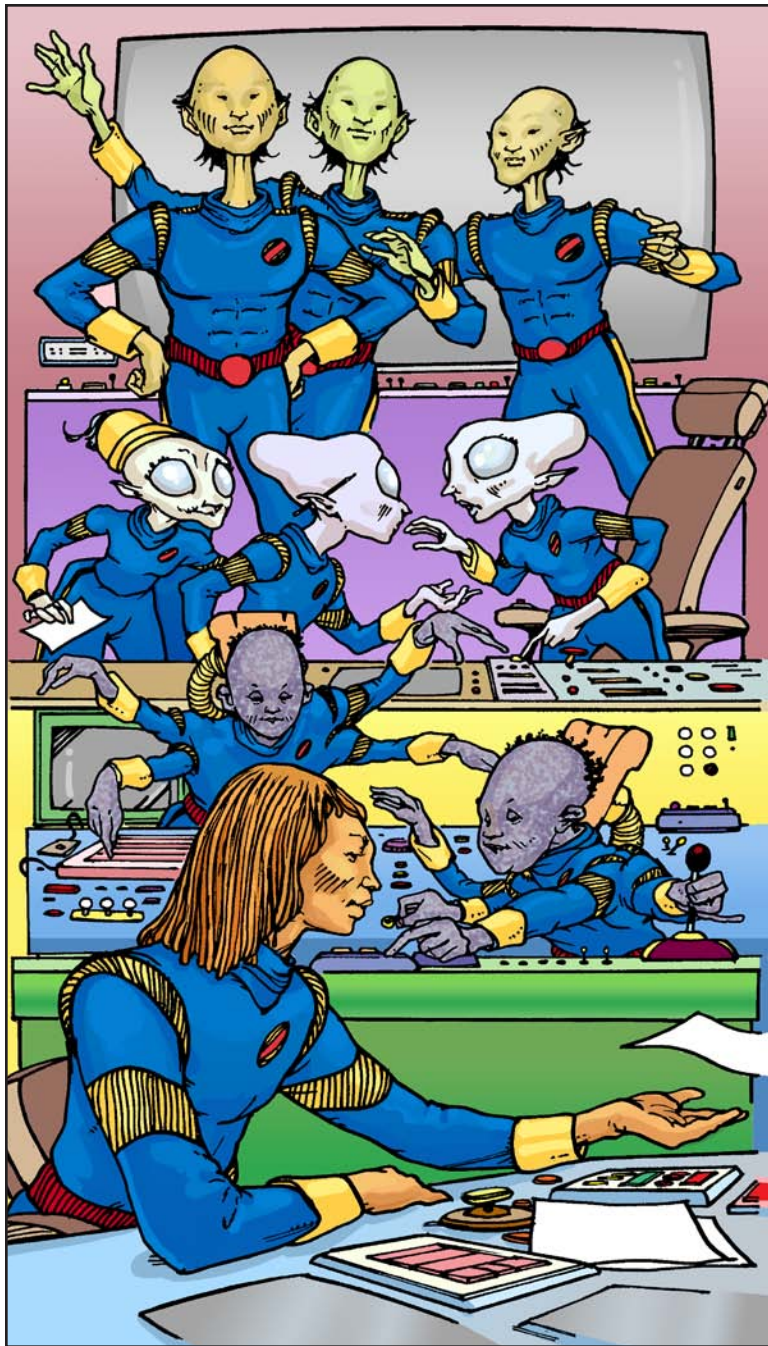
“Like I said, my name is Jacey, and I’m from the planet Oberon.”

Finally turning around, Jacey’s new roommate faced him. “Very well. I am Gamal. Like I said, you just keep to that side of the room; I’ll keep to mine, and we’ll be fine, human.”

The Copilot

The next morning, Jacey walked into the briefing room with the other pilots for the first day of training. The room was a swirl of colors and voices. All the races of **humanoids** in the galaxy were represented. The Taurians were the tallest and strongest in the room—great soldiers, but not always good pilots, since they had trouble fitting into the cockpits of Galaxon fleet spacecraft. Sybarites, with their large, pale eyes, could see in the dark, the result of living on a planet **perpetually** shrouded in cloud and fog. Quarantians had four arms and were **indispensable** in piloting larger, more complicated spacecraft. And, of course, there were the Sarpedons, sitting together and talking in low voices. Jacey sat with other humans from Oberon, though he didn’t know any of them.





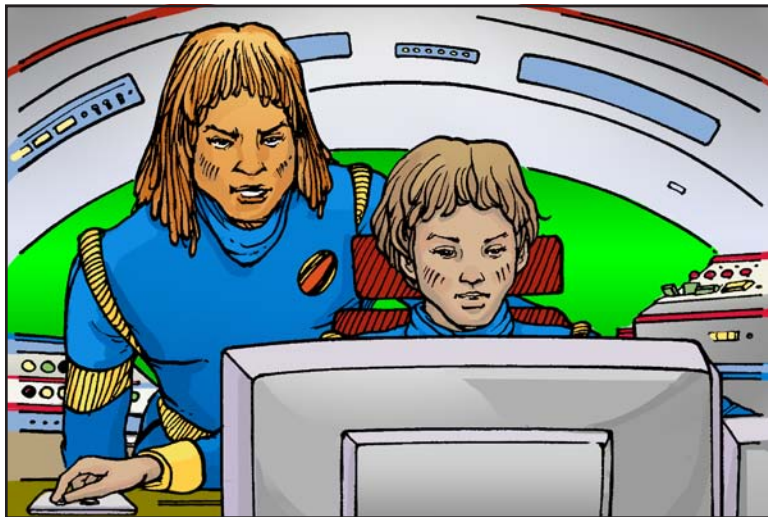
"All right, pilots," the fleet commander began. "I know you all come from different planets, and I know many of your worlds have been at war with each other in the past. However, we are now united as the Calabrian Galaxy, and you must learn to work together to protect our freedom. To ensure cooperation between races, each of you will be paired with a copilot from another planet."

Murmurs of surprise and displeasure rose from the seated pilots. Raising his voice, the commander continued: "Despite any differences you may have, you will find a way to work together, and your ability to work together will be tested in the final *BattleGlobe* competition."

Later that day, all the pilots crowded around the control board to see who their copilot would be. Jacey wasn't surprised to see Gamal's name listed next to his own.

Gamal stood staring over Jacey's shoulder, frowning.

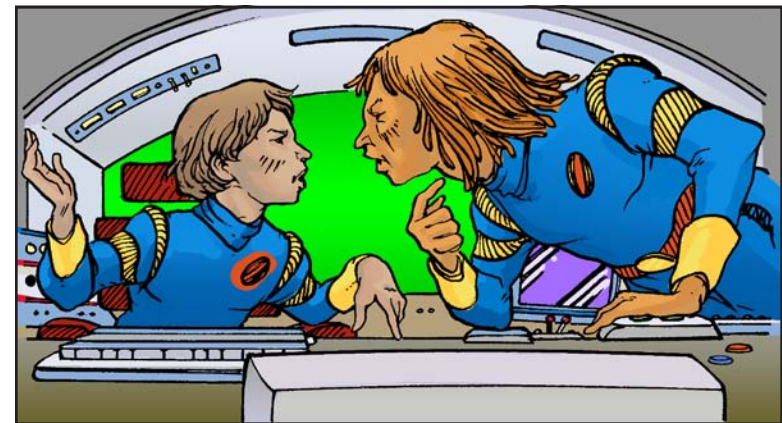
Jacey knew the commander was right, the war between Sarpedon and Oberon was in the past, and he knew the future lay in learning to work together with former enemies. Yet, looking at Gamal, Jacey struggled to imagine any similarity between them. Gamal looked so different and acted so superior to everyone else. Jacey couldn't envision being packed into a tight spacecraft together—let alone cooperating.



The Training

"No, Jacey! You're too late! We missed again!" scolded Gamal. His irritated tone revealed the frustration that had built up between the two after flying together for five days straight. Mastering the **intricate** controls of the Pulsar fighter—the most advanced spacecraft in the Galaxon fleet—was stressful enough. To make conditions in their craft even worse, the pair hadn't agreed on a single flight decision since they started flying together. Gamal relied heavily on instinct directed by his 360-degree sight; Jacey wanted to think decisions through before acting. The situation seemed hopeless.

"I told you to fire earlier!" Gamal criticized, as they were leaving their training craft. "You think too much," he added.



"You're too impulsive," Jacey retorted. "I wasn't sure of the shot. I'm still figuring out the sighting controls on this ship, but once I do, I'll never miss. I'm the best strategic fighter on my planet."

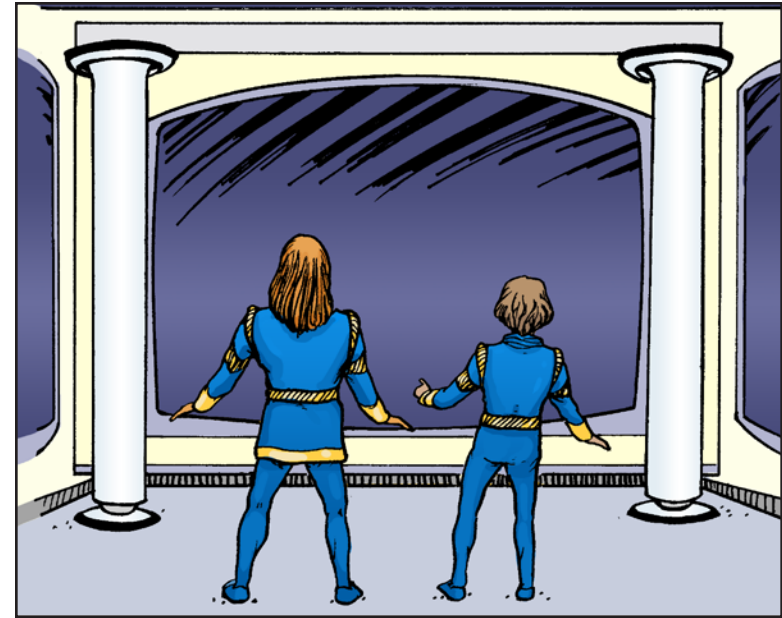
"Well, that doesn't seem to be doing us much good right now on *this* planet, does it?" Gamal grumbled.

"I don't have eyes in the back of my head. Maybe if you stopped trying to see with those bizarre things growing out of *your* head, you could give me better flight coordinates," Jacey argued, his voice rising.

"I will not take smart remarks like that from a. . ."

"STOP IT, YOU TWO!" The flight commander interrupted. "Listen to me. You are two of the most talented pilots I've ever seen, but right now you can barely fly your craft, let alone battle other ships. If you don't learn to work together soon, I'll be sending both of you home early, before you even get a chance to fly in *BattleGlobe*. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Sir," they both replied, staring down at the floor.

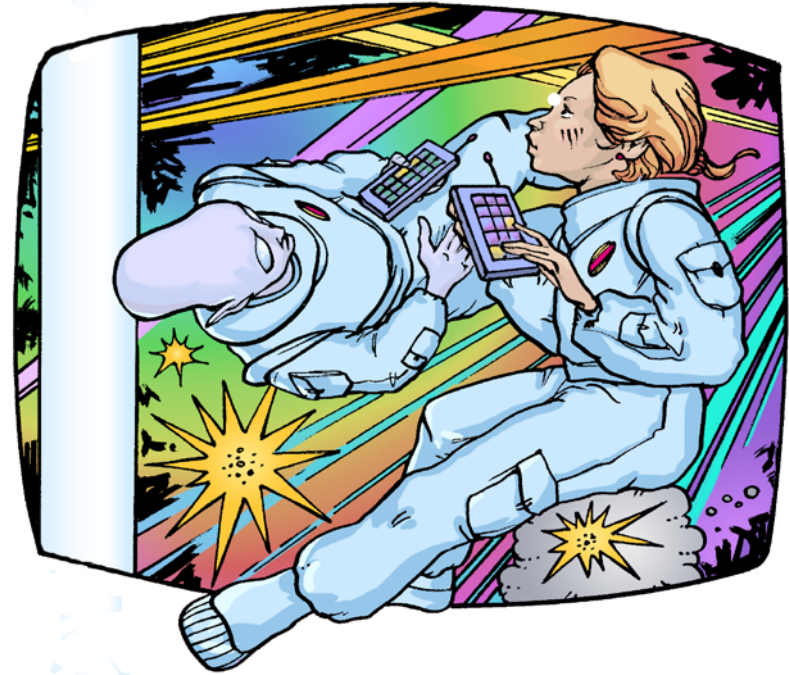
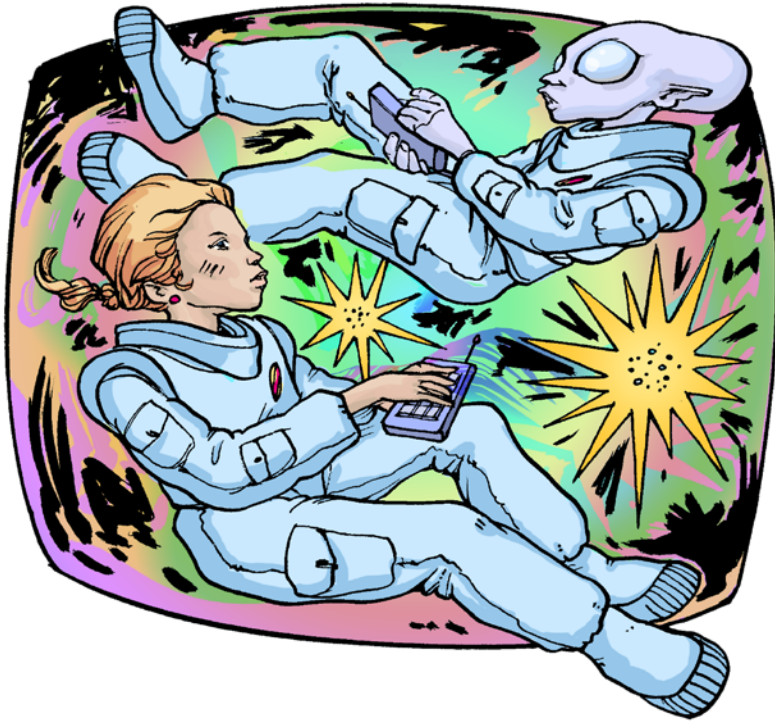


The ***BattleGlobe***

Three weeks later, after more difficult but more productive training, Jacey and Gamal stood staring at *BattleGlobe*, anticipating the afternoon competition.

The *BattleGlobe* area looked like an ordinary square section of floor with tall posts in each corner, surrounded by rows of dark, curved observation windows. Jacey wondered how such a realistic battle **simulation** could occur in such a blank area. So far, all their training had been in space, flying actual ships—training ships—but this wasn't real.

The first pilot team entered *BattleGlobe* to compete against the computer simulation run by expert pilots. The team—each pilot wearing specially designed computer flight suits that sensed their bodies' movements—walked into the center of the square and looked around, seeming unsure of themselves. The four posts exploded into color and movement, and the blank area between the posts lit up with intersecting beams of light, computer-generated battle **holograms**, and the whine of simulated spacecraft engines.



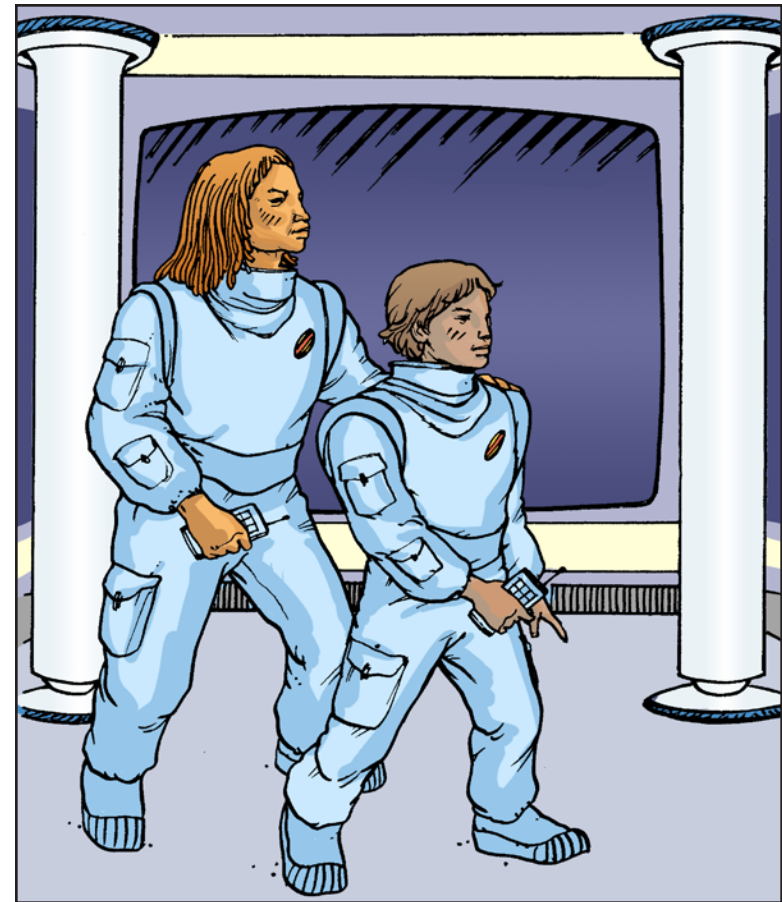
In the next instant, the pilots were lifted off the ground and suspended in the middle of the four posts by electromagnetic beams. Their bodies moved in every direction to fully simulate flying a Pulsar. Surrounding them was a dome of projected images and sounds of a full space battle. In this sphere, pilots' decisions and reflexes were tested at as close to real combat conditions as possible without endangering anyone. From behind the dark bank of windows, flight instructors monitored each team's performance and made notes for improvement.

To those who watched, the pilots appeared to be **levitating** by some mysterious power, surrounded by a round screen of flashing spacecraft. The red streaks of simulated laser fire and the sound of spacecraft mingled with the pilots' voices barking out instructions to each other.

As the team landed shots on the computer-generated enemy spacecraft, its score was projected high in the globe for the spectators to see. Opposite this, a negative score was also posted, registering the amount of damage the ship **sustained** from hits by enemy fire.



As the points mounted in each column, the spectator pilots anxiously wondered how they would do. Their training all came down to the lightning-fast action of space battle and instant decisions. They hoped to be counted among the best pilots in the Calabrian Galaxy. Two by two they got their chance. Jacey and Gamal were the last team to enter *BattleGlobe*.



The Test of Jacey and Gamal

"Jacey, ship coming 30 degrees!" snapped Gamal into Jacey's ear. The action inside *BattleGlobe* was faster than anything Jacey had imagined. Just as ships would appear, they would flash by, firing shafts of ray pulses as they went. Gamal—with his exceptional 360-degree vision—was constantly spotting enemy craft, but his steady stream of instructions overwhelmed Jacey with information and interfered with his ability to develop a strategy. Despite their difficulties, their score was high, but their Pulsar had sustained a lot of damage.

"Jacey! We don't have much protection left. Two or three more hits and we're eliminated!" Gamal yelled.

"I know. I know," Jacey yelled back.

"Watch out, two ships coming from behind!" Just as Gamal warned of two ships from behind, Jacey saw another ship approaching from his right side. He jerked the controls left, barely avoiding two streaks of laser fire. Suddenly, an idea flashed through Jacey's mind.

"Gamal, listen to me. This battle is controlled by Galaxon training command. They know our strengths and weaknesses."

"15 degrees!" interrupted Gamal.

"Got it!" Jacey answered, hitting the boost to escape another shot. "Gamal, they know about your sense of sight. I think every time you sense a ship behind us, they send another, closer ship ahead of us. They're using your ability to see behind you as a distraction."

"What are you saying, Jacey?" Gamal answered irritably.

"For the next encounter, ignore what you sense behind you. Ignore it and keep your eyes ahead with me."

"You'd better be right," warned Gamal. "If you're wrong, we'll be eliminated."

"If I'm right, we'll get the final hit we need to win," countered Jacey.

"Very well. Prepare for the next attack wave," Gamal answered.

Jacey took a deep breath, readjusted his grip on his control lever, and prepared himself for the next wave of action.

"Okay, Jacey, two ships approaching from behind!" Gamal hissed.

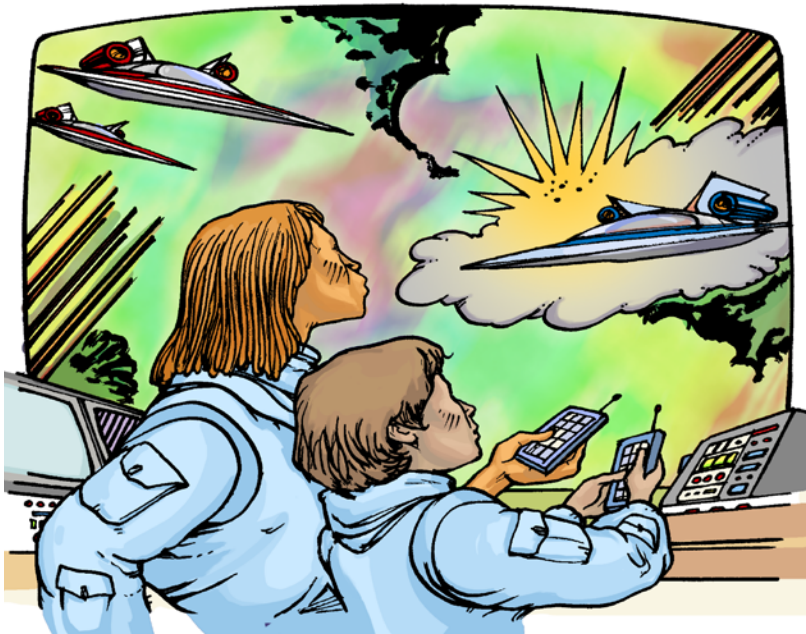
"All right, forget them, eyes forward! Let's get

a kill shot!" Jacey yelled. Sure enough, just after the two ships appeared behind them, a closer ship came screaming toward them head-on. This time, Jacey and Gamal were prepared and focused on the ship ahead of them rather than on the decoys behind them.

"Jacey, 12 degrees right and full firing power!" commanded Gamal. "Take the shot."

"All right, Jacey," Jacey said to himself as he centered the enemy ship in his sights.

"Quick, Jacey!" Gamal urged. "I won't have time to pull up."



"Almost. . ." Jacey said quietly, concentrating on the target. The approaching ship was nearly on top of them. Jacey saw the burst of light as the ship fired. A split second later, Jacey fired a double shot, and in the same motion Gamal pulled them up and to the right to avoid enemy fire.

"You got it!" Jacey heard as he saw the flare of exploding craft off to his left. "Great shot, Jacey!" Gamal howled with excitement.

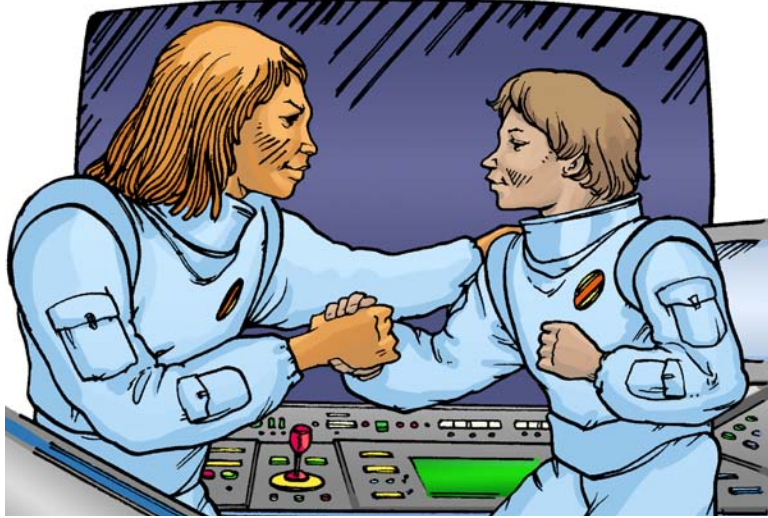
"Great piloting, Gamal!" Jacey cried.

"Nice work, Gamma Team. **Disengage** and prepare to end your session," commanded the control center.

As the lights of *BattleGlobe* died down and Jacey and Gamal were lowered to the ground, Jacey heard the room explode with cheers and clapping. With that final shot, Jacey and Gamal had scored higher than any other team. They won *BattleGlobe*!

"Congratulations," the commander said, smiling, as he walked down from the observation room. "You are the *BattleGlobe* champions. Jacey, great strategy; Gamal, great flying."

"Thank you, Sir," they answered in unison, holding in their proud smiles.



After the commander shook their hands, Gamal looked over at Jacey. “I guess that was a good plan. You taught me a valuable lesson. I was trusting in my special abilities too much, and I was forgetting the most important rule: trust your copilot. Jacey Nova, I’ll fly with you anytime.”

“Same goes for you, Gamal,” Jacey said. “With my strategy and your instincts, we’re unstoppable.”

As the dynamic duo walked off together—surrounded by the claps and cheers of their fellow pilots—Jacey took one last look at *BattleGlobe*, now a quiet room again, and wondered how he could explain all of this to his friends and family back home.

Glossary

culminate	to reach the end (p. 4)
disengage	to remove oneself from a contest or battle (p. 22)
holograms	a special type of image that looks three-dimensional (p. 15)
humanoids	creatures nearly human in appearance and behavior (p. 8)
indispensable	absolutely necessary (p. 8)
intricate	complicated; hard to understand (p. 12)
levitating	rising or floating in the air (p. 17)
perpetually	occurring constantly or continually (p. 8)
simulation	the reproduction of certain conditions, as in a battle, by using a training model (p. 14)
sustained	took (p. 17)
tendrils	long, thin spirals like a climbing plant’s vines (p. 6)