

Devilfish

Chapter 1

The Attack

The blare of alarms sounded across the bridge as the Planetary League Starship *Stargazer* transitioned to normal space. It took mere seconds for Captain Manfred Cox to process the information on his monitor and slam his hand down on the arm of his command chair sending the cry of '*BATTLE STATIONS*' throughout the ship.

In the same instant, the *Stargazer* shuddered from an explosive impact. Alarms from the damage control consoles echoed around the bridge as Cox again scanned his monitor. It showed heavy damage in the engineering sections with multiple compartments open to space. The automated systems would seal those compartments.

"Weapons," the captain shouted, "do we have a fix on where that missile came from?"

"I've targeted the ship!" The weapons operator responded.

"Return fire!"

As the weapons officer depressed the firing stud, fire control warned, "Point defense has targeted multiple inbound missiles!"

A second missile impacted the ship and slammed the crew against their restraints. A third explosion followed and the bridge went pitch black. A startled cry filled the air.

Cox counted the seconds until the backup systems came online. Red emergency lights fought to push away the darkness, followed by the flicker of the few operable screens. The readouts told their story, hull breaches, weapons inoperative, and engineering not responding.

The *Stargazer* was dying.

He hesitated a second before he opened the ship-wide com, "This is Captain Cox. The Stargazer is done for, Abandon Ship!"

The bridge crew made their way to the escape pods as Captain Cox made one last entry in the ship's log.

"This is Captain Manfred Cox of the PLS Stargazer, the final entry. We are under attack by unknown forces and have suffered catastrophic damage. I've ordered the crew to abandon ship." He launched the beacon that contained a full record of the ship's actions then proceeded to the last escape pod. Three crew members waited anxiously inside and without a look back Cox initiated the launch sequence. When the pod cleared the ship, he activated the passive sensors. He hoped they would remain undetected among the debris field. The screen indicated four ships floated in the vicinity. One showed an identifiable transponder, the remains of the Stargazer. The others were unknown. The slow rotation of the escape pod made Cox wait for his ship to come into view. She was a mess. Her back was broken in two places, the sections held together by twisted metal and wires. The atmosphere escaped from the few spaces still intact like streams of fog against the dark background of space. The wreckage of a second ship floated a short distance from the Stargazer while the two remaining ships floated nearby. They had no markings but matched the description of raiders the Stargazer often chased along the border with the Pendragon Alliance.

"At least we're alive," he reassured his companions.