

The Guardian Chronicles – Book 1:

# **A NEW THREAT**

**AARON DEMOTT**

**(Sample Chapters)**

## Prologue

Tomed bolted upright out of a deep sleep to utter quiet. He swung his feet out of bed and slowly pulled his pants on as he looked around in an attempt to find what had awakened him. Sensing nothing in his room he extended his consciousness outward and felt the alarm of the bridge crew a moment before the red alert klaxon sounded. He quickly finished dressing then dashed out of his cabin and ran in the direction of the bridge.

As he entered the bridge, officers were frantically checking readouts and calling out damage reports. The ship was venting atmosphere and there was trouble with the engines. No one had yet mentioned what had caused the alert status, and the crewmembers were concentrating on their current duties.

Captain Trenton was standing behind a frazzled looking lieutenant and looking over her shoulder. He finished double-checking her readout then glanced up and caught sight of Tomed.

"Good morning Guardian," he greeted Tomed, "I'm afraid we'll have a slight delay in getting you to the conference at SeQish."

"Well, can't be helped. My presence there is more of a formality than anything else," Tomed replied. "Looks like I slept through all the fun. What's the situation?"

"Well," the captain said as he walked back to his command chair, "We had a surprise

visit from a pirate ship." The Captain waited to see the Guardian's reaction.

Tomed raised his eyebrows and frowned as he tried to remember what the latest security report for this sector said about pirate activity. He really wished he had a cup of coffee, he never had been able to think clearly in the morning, and he suddenly realized it was 6:13am. At least-- it was in the last time zone he'd been in.

"I think," he replied, "the latest report said that there wasn't any pirate activity in this sector since the new resort opened over at Antar. There shouldn't be much pirate activity in this sector."

Captain Trenton chuckled, "Funny you say that. Apparently the pirates that got us didn't get the memo about the resort opening... They thought we were a luxury cruise liner."

Tomed laughed loudly enough at that to distract several of the other bridge crew.

"Wait... they somehow mistook a Heim class cruiser for a *luxury liner*?"

"Yeah," the Captain replied, "you'd think the giant U.G.A.L. logo on the side of the ship would've been their first clue. That, and we're a little small for a cruise ship."

"So, how much damage did they cause?" Tomed asked.

"We're still assessing the situation. Lieutenant Roshen here was just going over our damage report. Here's the short version: we're venting atmosphere from the stern storage bay, and we're leaking drive plasma from the port engine manifold."

Tomed looked over at the readout. The atmosphere leak was already sealed off, but it looked like the drive plasma leak was getting worse.

"How's the chief engineer assess the damage?" he asked.

The Captain looked grim. "He says he's not sure if he can repair it."

"Mind if I take a look at the damage report?" Tomed asked.

"Be my guest," the Captain said as he gestured at the console.

Tomed sat down and scrolled through the damage assessment. The computers sensors didn't have an exact report of the extent of the damage. The plasma plume jetting out of the fracture was obscuring the sensors enough so they couldn't pinpoint the full extent of the damage. From what the sensors could see, the damage looked bad enough. A plasma beam had struck the port engine nacelle about twenty-four centimeters behind the field output emitter --an area that wasn't accessible from inside the ship. That would make repairing it extremely difficult, and worse, the main drive reactor would have to be shut down to repair the plasma conduit. And if he was reading the data correctly, the leak was getting worse.

Tomed grunted at the damage assessment, stood, and said, "Looks like the plasma leak will have to be repaired or we won't make it back to any U.G.A.L. outpost. Worse, it doesn't look like the damage can be repaired without shutting down the reactor core. Our best option would be to find a planet to land on. That would make the repairs easier, and we wouldn't have to worry about life support running out if we've vented too much drive plasma to restart the reactor."

"That's exactly how our chief engineer assessed the situation" the Captain replied. "You seem to have a rather thorough grasp of starship mechanics. I thought Guardians were mostly diplomats?"

Tomed chuckled, "There's a lot more to being a Guardian than most people associate with the job."

Captain Trenton grinned, "There's more to most jobs than people think." he said as he walked over to the navigation console.

"Ensign Materton here was looking through our star charts to see if we have any suitable planets in the vicinity to land and make repairs on. Find anything yet Ensign?"

A short brunet looked up from the console.

"Possibly sir," she reported, "I've found a planet that a remote survey probe indicated might be habitable. However we haven't sent live survey teams anywhere near it yet. It's also pretty much the only one within the range that engineering says we can make."

"Pretty much?" the Captain asked.

"Well sir, there are two more planets within our range, however..."

The Ensign turned to the con, and pressed in a sequence that brought up a readout in a separate holo-window. Tomed and the Captain both moved in closer to read the display.

"Each of these other choices," she stated, pointing to the relevant portion of the readout, "Has problems that would make them a bad choice for a repair stop. This one," she said pointing to the first planet, which caused the computer to bring up a larger hologram of the world in question, "is habitable, but barely. Probe reports indicate very unstable weather systems, and the star is dying, so it's very cold all over the planet. Hardly ideal conditions for exterior repair."

The Captain and Tomed both grunted in agreement with her assessment.

"What's the report on the other?" the Captain asked.

"Well, it's even worse," she said, "This one's not really habitable. It's got an atmosphere, and weather and temperature are good, but the air's not breathable, and pressure is slightly off. It might work, but we'd need air masks outside the ship. And, saving the best for last, it's also the furthest away of our three choices. I'd pick planet number one sir."

The Captain nodded in agreement. "Planet number one it is then. Does it have a name?"

"No, sir. It was just recently surveyed by a long-range probe. It hasn't even been assigned a designation number yet."

"Very well ensign. Keep looking at that probe data, and see if you can find a few ideas for a landing spot."

"Yes, sir," she replied.

The captain turned toward the helm console.

"Helm, lay in the course provided from navigation, and engage at whatever speed we can manage."

"Course entered and engaged sir," the crewman stationed at the helm reported.

The ship gave a slight lurch as it turned and accelerated.

"Current top speed is Hyper point zero-three-five. Our ETA is forty-seven hours, six minutes."

Captain Trenton walked back to his command chair and sat down, then leaned back and crossed his legs. Tomed turned toward the Captain.

"Captain, permission to go bother the engineering staff?"

The captain chuckled, "Permission granted Guardian."

Forty-six hours later, Tomed was back on the bridge, and the *Goddard* was approaching its destination, the fourth planet in the system.

"Sir, we're approaching the planet," the helm officer reported.

"Enter into orbit," the captain ordered.

"Orbiting the planet," the ensign responded.

"Ensign Materton, have you found any ideas for a landing sight?" the captain asked, as he

stood and walked over to stand behind her.

"Probe data indicated two possible spots that look large enough to land the ship sir," she replied "I'm scanning those areas now... the first one looks like a lava flow... scanners show an active lava flow, safe as far as volcanic activity goes, but looks like it's ruled out for landing sir."

She pressed a few more keys to scan the other possible landing site. "This one's looking better sir, a nice grassy plain about a kilometer wide and about 40 kilometers long, looks to be a forest on one side and foothills for a mountain range on the other. The west end is on a large inland lake, and the east end opens up to a large savanna."

"Looks like a winner to me," Captain Trenton answered.

He walked back to his command chair, sat down, and pressed the intercom button.

"Bridge to Engineering, Commander Pattersen, are we ready to land?"

The engineer's voice came over the intercom, "We'll be ready to land in approximately five minutes Captain. We're shutting down the main reactor core, venting the drive plasma out of the engine pods, and starting the power-up sequence on the anti-grav generators."

"Okay, let the helm know when you're ready," The Captain replied before he pushed the button to terminate the intercom.

Tomed looked at the image of the planet on the main viewer. It hung in space, a bluish green orb, spinning serenely. He thought it looked friendly. He always liked going to new planets and exploring places where no one else had ever been. And, this world hadn't even had a preliminary survey team look at it yet. It had been a long time since he'd been able to be one of the first to explore a new planet. A long time ago, that had been one of the duties of the Guardians. For a while now, they had been considered too busy with their primary duties of

keeping order on the worlds of the United Galactic Allied League. For the past few decades scout ships with specialized survey teams had been sent to explore any newly discovered habitable worlds.

Most of the star systems within easy hyperspace travel distance that deep space telescopes had identified as having planets in their orbits had automated probes sent to survey them. Of these, only fifty-three that were capable of supporting human life had been fully surveyed by a follow-up human survey team. Out of those, two so far had sentient beings inhabiting them.

There were still several thousand planets that been scanned by probes that had merely been surveyed by a quick fly-by scan. The planet they were now orbiting was one of these. It was a ways off from the standard hyperspace lanes. The odds were very low that it had sentient natives, but Tomed was hoping that this world housed a new species to be discovered.

"Sir, engineering reports ready for planet-fall," the helm officer announced.

"Very well ensign, commence landing," the captain replied.

"Aye sir, commencing landing procedures."

# Chapter 1

## Edge of the Great Forest, Alkask

Bast was walking as quickly as she could through the forest while still remaining silent. She flicked her ears around in every direction, listening for anything unusual. So far, all she heard were the normal sounds associated with the forest. It was a beautiful day today, and she was happy to be on this assignment. The scouts for all the clans had seen the giant metal ship, something that large and that unnatural of a shape could only be a ship, that was slowly coming down to the ground. If it kept going without changing its speed or direction, it would land in the large grassland in her clan's territory. She had worked hard to earn an important assignment like this, and if she did a good job, she would be officially recognized as an adult in her clan. That -- and, she must admit to herself-- she was very curious about where it came from, and what sort of creature would travel through the stars on such a craft.

She approached the edge of the forest that opened onto the plain, and looked around for a nice bit of cover. She found a line of bushes between a stand of trees that would work perfectly, and provide an escape back into the forest if it became necessary. She sat down on her haunches behind the brush, curled her tail around her feet, and licked a speck of dust out of her paw. The ship should be landing soon.

She idly wondered whether it would glide in and land like a bird, or if it had some other method. She paused and looked up, trying to spot the ship. "It could be crashing too..." she mused aloud. She thought the first option unlikely. It didn't have wings, and didn't look natural, so she didn't expect it to act naturally. The third option didn't look likely either. The scouts and scientists reported that it was on a stable course and wasn't on fire or anything. Most likely it would surprise her somehow. She liked surprises –for the most part– and this would certainly be an interesting sight to see. She heard a faint, high-pitched noise off to the west, and poked her head slightly out of the bush, and raised her whiskers out in that direction. Nothing yet. She waited a little longer, and the sound grew louder, and a slight wind started blowing across the plain.

Bast lay down as low as she could in her observation point, and crept slowly forward to where she could see through the bushes and yet remain unseen. The sound grew to a loud whine, high enough pitched that it was starting to hurt her ears, and the ship was just coming into view.

The main body of the ship looked like a long, squared-off cylinder. Bast wasn't sure if the ship was painted, or if the metal it was made from was naturally that shade of periwinkle. Two long narrow hollowed-out cylinders jutted out of the sides of the ship closer to the rear. Several supports connected these to the main body of the ship. A large intricate design was painted on the ship near the front of the ship. She wasn't sure what it meant. It didn't appear to be artistic, with swirls and straight lines of red and black all crossing each other over a roughly triangular patch of dark yellow.

To her amazement, the ship stopped completely in mid-air; about forty lengths above tree level, and slowly lowered itself straight down. Something that looked like legs descended from

several spots on the bottom of the ship, then it lowered the rest of the way down to settle on the grass.

Bast had never seen anything remotely like it. The shape didn't look very aerodynamic, and didn't really look like the shape mattered much at all to whoever built it. It just sat there for the longest time, not moving. Bast wondered if there was anyone or anything on board, or if it was automated in some way.

After the sun had moved about ten degrees westward across the sky, a hatch on the bottom of the ship swung down and a ramp lowered to the ground. Bast tensed and looked eagerly at the ramp. Were the passengers of this strange craft coming out? After another short wait, five bi-pedal creatures walked down the ramp, and looked around at the plain.

Two of the aliens wearing dark red clothing were the first ones off the ship. Bast guessed they were wearing uniforms of some sort, since they appeared to be dressed identically. Bast could tell them apart from the different color of the short fur on their heads, and the slight difference in size between them.

Each of the aliens carried a metal tube about the length of their forearm in one hand, and a small box in the other. They both waved the tubes and boxes around for a moment, then one of them turned back towards the ship and waved its arm. The next alien to come down the ramp was wearing blue clothing, and had brown fur. This one took his time looking around as he strolled down the ramp. Bast decided they were males, she didn't know for sure, but they seemed like males to her.

Next came two more of the aliens. These two were wearing clothing that was a mixture of several different drab colors. They were also carrying metal boxes, these ones slightly larger than

the ones the aliens in red carried. The alien in blue pulled a small box out of his pocket and said something into it, then put it back away. Bas wondered if it was a communications or recording device.

She yawned sleepily as she watched the strange creatures. So far, they weren't doing anything interesting --just standing around staring at their little metal boxes. From the way they were starting at them while pointing them at everything in sight she figured they were probably scanners of some sort.

The two with the weapons went out ahead of the two with the little metal boxes, and appeared to be checking for anything dangerous. She watched this behavior approvingly. They weren't foolish creatures then, but cautious, thinking ones, sending scouts out ahead of the others. The one in blue with brown fur --if you could really call it fur, she thought, as it only covered a very small bit of their heads-- seemed to be a leader of some kind, as he was moving back and forth from the rear group to the scouts. This brown-furred one then walked back to the ones with the boxes, and waved at the scouts to follow him, then they all headed in her general direction. She waited, absolutely still, for a moment, to see if she had been spotted, but they were headed slightly off to her left.

She glanced back at the ship to see another group of the creatures carrying a wide variety of interesting looking equipment come out of a hidden point at the top of the ship and started walking to the area that Bast thought to be the rear of the ship.

This group worked their way out and onto one of the protruding tube shaped things, and stopped at a long jagged scar surrounded by scorch marks. A few minutes more observation, and she determined that they were taking various pieces off from around this area, and seemed to be

in the middle of making what looked to be quite extensive repairs. Well, that answered the question of what this unknown ship was doing here, she thought to herself.

Now, what was that group on the ground up to... At this point, they were almost to the tree line, still staring at either their little boxes, or all around and up and down, looking for all the world like a group of kittens looking around after opening their eyes for the first time. That thought almost made her giggle; she covered her muzzle with her paws to keep from laughing. She looked back at the ship. The repair crew had half of the area around the damage torn off, and were still taking things apart. They weren't going anywhere for a while -- back to watching the ones out on the sightseeing trip.

The ones with the boxes were busy looking at leaves, and talking to the one with the brown fur, while the ones with the weapons were looking around idly. Just as she was debating whether to move closer, or continue observing them from her current location, another member of her clan contacted her using thought-speak.

*"Bast, the council wishes to hear your initial report."*

*"I have not yet finished observing them,"* she replied.

The speaker was Rrrark, another Scout of her clan, and from the sound of his mental voice, he was getting closer to her.

*"Yes, I tried to advise them to wait long enough to allow you to gather enough information to make a full report--"* Rrrark sounded irritated.

Despite his talent for it, he had never cared for politics, and preferred to spend most of his time alone in the far ranges of the woods.

*"--but the council is nervous about this ship, and wants to gather all the information they*

*can, as quickly and accurately as possible to determine if it is a threat to the clan. I am coming to temporarily relieve you long enough for you to make your report."*

"Very well," she replied.

Bast waited impatiently for Rrrark to arrive. She was very curious about these strangers, and wanted to know more about them. On the other paw, the council needed to be informed about the nature of the situation --especially if they thought the creatures were here to take over the clan's territory. She didn't know their intentions after fixing their ship --she admitted to herself-- but they didn't *feel* dangerous to her.

A black shape moved in the corner of her eye. Bast turned and squinted, then recognized the shadow as Rrrark. His black fur was hard to pick out from the shadows. She stood and bowed to him, then stretched and strode off in the direction of the council's meeting rock. She was trying to hurry, as Rrrark said they needed her report quickly, but the strange ones were fairly close to her location by now, so she also paid careful attention to make as little noise as possible.

Several paces later, she came to a deep ravine and leaped up into the tree bridge that her clan had used for ages to cross over. Halfway out on the third branch up, the limb snapped off in front of her. Bast reached out to grab the broken edge with her claws and clung precariously for a moment before sliding off. She twisted around in the air as she was falling, trying to right herself to land on her feet. Halfway through twisting her torso back to center, the rest of the limb broke off and fell tumbling at her. It smashed into her ribs, rebounded off, and slammed into her head just above the ear.

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Tomed was walking along the path in the forest. They had been surprised to find the path. Clearly made by someone, it was a dirt track packed down and kept clear of vegetation, even the tree limbs had been cleared to a height of about a meter up from the ground. They had been following the trail for about ten minutes now, when they heard a loud snap of breaking wood from ahead, followed by a scream and a loud thud.

Tomed broke into a run, "Come on!" he yelled to the others.

They ran toward the source of the sound and saw tree limbs sticking up from a ravine. Tomed approached the edge, looked over, and whistled softly.

"Come take a look at this."

He motioned for Commander Vinson to come closer. Vinson peeked over the edge.

"Wow," he intoned softly.

In the ravine lay a large cat that looked about three meters long. The log lying on top of it made it hard to tell its exact size.

What was remarkable about the feline was that, except its size, it looked very similar to a common house cat from Earth, especially in the calico coloring of its coat. The commander climbed down rapidly, stumbling twice over the roots and rocks in the steep incline.

"This is incredible!" he said as he examined the cat. "Looks to be female. Just a guess, but I think she's fully grown."

Tomed lifted the log off from her and tossed it aside.

Vinson looked surprised for a moment at how easily he lifted it, but he was more focused on the cat. He turned over her front paw and whistled.

"Look at this!" he said excitedly to Tomed, pointing to the paw. "She's got an extra opposable digit here roughly where a domestic cat would have a dew claw."

He checked her pulse at her neck, and listened to see if she was still breathing.

"How is she?" Tomed asked.

"Still alive, but her breathing's ragged."

"Let me look at her."

Tomed moved closer, and held his hand about four centimeters above her body, moving it slowly from head to tail. Commander Vinson looked at him quizzically.

"What are you doing, sir?" he asked.

"Checking for damage..."

Tomed sounded somewhat distracted. Vinson watched him until he put his hand down.

"Are the rumors about Guardians abilities true?"

Tomed looked up briefly. "Not all rumors are true, Commander. But some have a kernel of truth in them."

Tomed smiled, and turned back to the cat. He put his right hand gently on her head, and his left over her ribs where the log had caught her.

"She's got a mild concussion, four broken ribs, and possibly a punctured lung."

A very faint, soft yellow-white glow formed between Tomed's hands and the cat's inert body, a soft hum emanating from the light.

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Bast woke slowly, with a splitting headache that seemed to be getting better. She hurt all over. She started purring softly to help healing. Her people had known instinctively that purring helped the healing process for their entire history, but it was only in the past two hundred years that they had discovered that the frequency range of an average purr directly stimulated and sped healing. She tried to remember where she was. A tree branch slowly came to mind. She remembered something about falling, and then where she was going at the time.

Bast jerked to full consciousness. Two of the strange creatures were standing over her. One of them was the one with brown fur she had seen earlier. Now that she saw it up close, she was sure from the smell that it was a male. He was making some sort of combination of noises very softly at the other one. She thought that he was one of the ones with the metal boxes, but since he didn't have it now, she wasn't sure. She didn't move. Neither did they. She blinked slowly. The brown furred one blinked slowly back.

He pointed at his chest and said; "Tomed."

Bast thought that it was his name. She wasn't sure if she should just run off, or stay and see what they did next. She was only supposed to be observing them, after all. Well, it was too late to worry about that now. She decided to take a chance. She slowly reached up, and touched herself in the chest, just as he had done. "Bast" she said, pronouncing her name slowly. She thought she could sense his presence, that was unusual, she could usually only sense others of her kind when they talked with thought-speak.

Well, it was worth a shot, she thought.

*"Hello?"* she queried uncertainly.

He looked surprised for a moment, and then answered her, also in thought-speak.

*"Hello. My name is Tomed, I am a human from a world called Earth."*

It was her turn to look surprised, she really hadn't expected him to answer her, and she especially didn't expect to understand him.

*"I am called Bast, of the Mer-ahsh clan. I am surprised that we are able to understand each other."*

*"It's probably because we are communicating ideas telepathically, and our minds translate the concepts into words," he replied. "I too am surprised that we are able to communicate like this. Very few on my world are able, and no other species we have encountered can do it. May I try something that might let us communicate even more efficiently?" he asked.*

Bast wondered what on Alkask that could be. *"What do you mean?"*

*"Our minds are able to understand each other," he answered, "I would like to try to send your mind our language, so that we can communicate verbally. My companions are wondering what all is going on. It won't hurt at all, worst case, it'll sound like I'm talking a whole bunch of gibberish."*

*"You can really do that?"* Bast asked, incredulous.

*"I don't know," he answered, "I've never had the chance to try, but in theory it should work. Telepathy is a side affect of controlled quantum reactions, Basically, my brain stores information in a quantum state, and then induces the same quantum state in your brain, thus we can understand each other even though we don't know each others language."*

Bast was trying to follow what he was saying, thinking, quantoming, whatever. It made her head hurt.

*"I don't really understand all of that. My people have always been able to talk with*

*thought-speak. But if it won't do any damage, and will possibly help communicate with the others, it's worth trying."*

Tomed reached his hand out very slowly, and laid his palm gently on Bast's forehead. He closed his eyes and took a deep, slow breath. Bast felt a series of thoughts flow into her head, too fast to grasp, so she just let it come. It felt like a river of thought, filling her brain, coming faster, more and more every second. Just as she thought she couldn't take in any more, it stopped. She opened her eyes, took a deep breath, and exhaled quickly.

"Well, I don't think anything went wrong," Tomed said, "But can you understand me?"

Bast surprised herself more than the humans when she answered in their language, "Yes, I can understand you now."

"So, you are from the ship that landed in the valley?"

"Yes," he answered, "Our ship was damaged, and we needed to land to repair it."

Bast suddenly realized that her ribs were hardly hurting her at all by now. She was sure she cracked one or two of them when that log hit her. She had almost forgotten about them in all the excitement.

"Did you help to heal me?" She asked.

"Yes," he answered, "I helped a little."

"Thank you," she replied. "May I ask what your intentions are after you have repaired your ship?"

"We had intended to stay and survey your planet as long as we were here. We are a curious race, and we know nothing of your world."

"How did you come here?"

Bast's people also had an insatiable thirst for knowledge. She thought it odd that they had come all the way from another world just to fix their ship.

"We were on our way to another planet that we are allied with, and pirates attacked us."

Tomed replied.

"Pirates?" Bast was unfamiliar with the term.

"Pirates," Tomed explained, "is a term for individuals who take things that don't belong to them, often by force. The term has been used on my world for centuries. Over the years, it has been used to describe many different types of criminal activity.

"We first found about the existence of your world from a long-range probe. We send these probes out to survey different star systems that may have planets in orbit. Each probe is programmed to do a quick fly-by scan of a system, then move on to another. That way we can survey a large area of space using few resources, and if any of the results look interesting, we can come in person to see what's there."

Bast found all of this fascinating. Her people had only just begun to survey the stars with orbiting satellites.

"What do you look for on all the planets you travel to?" she asked, encouraging Tomed to continue.

"We look for many things: materials we can use to build new starships, places to go visit to relax, sites for colonies to place people that we don't have room for, or even to make new friends in the rare case we find other intelligent life on the planet.

"In this particular instance we hadn't planned on actually coming here for a very long time. We were on our way to the Deneb system for a trade and exploration conference with the

SeQish --allies of ours-- when the pirates attacked us."

The human sounded sincere. Bast didn't think he was lying about anything, but if they really were here for any of the other reasons he listed...

"You should come and speak with the council of the Mer-ahsh. They are the largest clan of Meskka on Alkask. They will wish to talk to you."

Tomed agreed, and Bast lead them up out of the ravine, to where the path resumed on the other side. She would have to remember to inform a builder about the broken tree bridge so it could be repaired.

Bast observed the humans while they were walking. They mostly seemed to be looking at the trees, birds, and other animals they saw in the forest. Curiosity was a good thing, in her opinion. Perhaps they were here with the intention of just looking around. She hoped so, but it wasn't unheard of for the clans of Meskka to challenge a bordering clans territory. Perhaps these humans were here to do the same. As a Scout, it was her job to make sure anyone or anything that was a stranger to the Mer-ahsh clan, or in this case, any of the Meskka clans, was not a threat.

End of the sample chapter for *A New Threat*. I hope you enjoyed it!

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