

MIDSHIPMAN HENRY GALLANT IN SPACE

H. Peter Alesso

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**MIDSHIPMAN HENRY GALLANT
IN SPACE**

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Not everyone who fights is a warrior.

A warrior knows what's worth fighting for.

United Planets—Jupiter Fleet

Captain Caine

6 Battlecruisers – *Repulse, Renown, Remarkable, Retribution, Dauntless, Devastator*

72 Eagle Fighters

72 Bombers

5 Destroyers

12 Auxiliary Support Ships

Marines on Ganymede

Colonel Ridgewood

7th Marine Regiment

Mars Fleet

Admiral Collingsworth

18 Battlecruisers *Superb*

48 Cruisers

96 Destroyers

72 Auxiliary Support Ships

Titan—Jupiter Fleet

6 Battlecruisers

24 Cruisers

144 Destroyers

144 Auxiliary Support Ships

Titan—Main Fleet

12 Battlecruisers

70 Cruisers

288 Destroyers

288 Auxiliary Support Ships

24 Orbiting Battle Stations

120 Ground Missile Bases

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Joining the Fleet

1

A massive solar flare roared across the sun, crackling every display console in the tiny spacecraft.

“No need to worry, young man. We’re almost there,” said the aged pilot.

“I’m not concerned about the storm,” said newly commissioned Midshipman Henry Gallant. Eagerly, he shifted in his seat to get a better view of the massive battlecruiser *Repulse* that would be his home for the next two years. She was a magnificent fighting machine, a powerful beast in orbit around Jupiter.

The pilot maneuvered to minimize the effects of the x-ray and gamma radiation until the craft slid into the cold black shadow of the *Repulse*. Gallant could hardly contain his delight as the tiny ship quivered in the grip of the warship’s tractors.

By the time the docking hatch finally slid open, Gallant was waiting impatiently for his first glimpse inside the warship.

He hurried to the bridge. The officer of the watch stood next to the empty captain’s chair, surrounded by a dizzying array of displays and virtual readouts. The officer rested his hand on the panel that concealed the Artificial Intelligence (AI) tactical analyzer.

“Midshipman Henry Gallant, reporting aboard, sir.” Drawing his gangly seventeen-year-old figure to its full height, he gave a snappy salute. He tugged at his uniform jacket to pull the buttons into proper alignment.

“Welcome aboard, Mr. Gallant. I’m Lieutenant Mather.” Mather was of average height, barrel-chested with angular facial features and a stoic look. Beyond a glance, he showed little interest in the new arrival. “Give me your comm pin.”

Gallant handed over his pin, Mather made several quick selections on a touch screen, then swiped it past the chip reader.

While his ID loaded into the ship’s computer, Gallant took the opportunity to look around. The semicircular compartment, though spacious, bristled with displays, control panels, and analysis stations.

From his academy training, he could guess most of the functions. There were communications, radar, weapons, and astrogation, plus a few he couldn’t identify. Several of the positions were vacant operating automatically. Gallant’s fingers twitched, eager to be a part of the bridge’s efficient operation. A huge view screen dominating the compartment displayed Jupiter. An orbiting space station was visible against the vastness of the gas giant. He marveled at the spectacle.

“Junior officer authorization verified. The ID pin has been updated with *Repulse*’s access codes,” a computer’s voice announced from a nearby speaker. Its neutral, disinterested tone reminded Gallant of a rather cold and distant teacher he had had in basic math years ago.

“Did you bring your gear aboard?” asked Mather.

“My duffle bag is at the docking port, sir.”

The aged pilot had helped Gallant carry his gear from the shuttlecraft onto *Repulse*. Then, after a cheery smile and a friendly, “Good luck,” he climbed back in his shuttle and left. Having no family of his own, Gallant had found some faint comfort in the good wishes.

“I’ll have your gear sent to your quarters. But, for now, you had better see the captain,” said Mather, raising an eyebrow at Gallant.

“Aye aye, sir,” said Gallant.

Mather turned to one of the bridge's junior officers, a young woman. She wore a single thin gold stripe on her blouse sleeve, indicating her rank as Midshipman First Class, one-year senior to Gallant. He ordered, "Midshipman Mitchel, take Mr. Gallant to the captain's cabin."

As they left the bridge, Mitchel said, "Henry Gallant . . . I remember you from the academy. I'm surprised you're still in uniform."

Gallant gritted his teeth, as he had done many times before when confronted with what he perceived as overt disapproval. He didn't recognize her, but he couldn't help but observe that she was an attractive brunette with a trim figure.

"Will you be training as a fighter pilot or missile weapons officer?" she asked.

"I had basic fighter training on Mars and will be taking advanced pilot training with *Repulse*'s Squadron 111."

"I'm a qualified second-seat astrogator in 111. Most likely, we'll wind up flying together at some point."

Because her demeanor revealed nothing about whether that idea repelled or appealed to her, Gallant nodded.

When they reached the captain's cabin, she said, "I'm Kelsey, by the way." Then, as she turned to leave, she added as an afterthought, "Good luck."

Gallant watched her walk away. He wondered if her remark was sincere.

Gallant stood like a statue inside the open hatch.

Captain Kenneth Caine was seated with his back to him, reviewing Gallant's military record, which was displayed on a computer screen. Clean-shaven with close-cropped graying hair, Caine was solidly built with square shoulders and a craggy face. His well-tailored uniform hugged his robust frame, accentuating his military bearing.

From his brief time onboard, Gallant had already realized that *Repulse* was an orderly ship, and that Kenneth Caine was an orderly captain. Precision and discipline were expected. He was suddenly conscious that his tangled brown hair was longer than regulations allowed.

The cabin was sparsely furnished in a traditional, starkly military fashion. A desk in one well-lit corner held the single personal item in the room: a photo of an attractive, mature woman with a pleasant smile. The sadness in her eyes hinted at the difficult bargain she had made as the lonely wife of a dedicated space officer.

While the captain flipped through the personnel folder, Gallant's gaze wandered to the compartment's viewscreen. The solar flare had subsided, leaving gigantic colorful Jupiter filling most of the view.

"At ease, Mr. Gallant," said Caine, finally turning to face the newcomer. "Welcome aboard the *Repulse*."

Gallant relaxed his stance and said in a strong, clear voice, "Thank you, sir."

Caine looked him up and down and scrunched his face before asking, "What do you know of this ship's mission, Mr. Gallant?"

"As the flagship of the Jupiter Fleet, *Repulse* must prevent alien encroachment along the frontier, sir," ventured Gallant.

"Quite right, as far as that goes. But you'll find, Mr. Gallant, that this task is more nuanced and layered than may be apparent. As a United Planets officer, you must find shades of meaning that can affect your performance. What would you surmise is behind this frontier watch?" The captain's brisk voice demanded a resolute answer.

Gallant spoke guardedly at first, but as his confidence grew, his voice gained assurance. "Well, sir, UP knows little about the aliens' origins or intentions. They appear to have bases on the satellites of the outer planets. Clashes with their scout ships have proven troublesome, and Fleet

Command wants to gather more intelligence. With so little known about alien technology, it isn't easy to assess the best way to repel it. Still, this fleet must forestall an invasion of Earth by preventing the aliens from gaining a foothold in this sector."

"And what would you say will be essential in achieving victory in battle?"

Leaning forward with his hands behind him to balance out his jutting jaw, Gallant said with fierce intensity, "Surprise, sir! I assume that is why you've dispersed most of the fleet. So you can search the widest possible region of space for the first signs of significant alien activity."

Caine examined the young man again as if seeing him for the first time. "Good. *We* will not be the ones surprised. *We* will be prepared. You can appreciate how important it is that *Repulse* performs well." Then, he added, "And I will allow nothing, and *no one*, to interfere with our mission."

"Yes, sir," said Gallant, feeling the sting from the pointed comment.

"Tell me, Mr. Gallant," said the captain, shifting in his chair to find a more comfortable position, "why did you apply to the academy?"

Gallant's voice swelled with passion. "For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to pilot spaceships and explore the unknown, sir."

"You are undoubtedly aware that many people wanted your hide raised up the flagpole." Caine's eyebrow twitched. "Although your progress for two academic years at the academy was respectable, many doubt that a Natural can compete in the fleet. Today, your real qualification for advancement is your double helix."

Caine continued, "Frankly, I'm astonished you have gotten this far without the advantages of genetic engineering. You're a bit of a mystery that has yet to unfold."

Gallant didn't like being referred to as a mystery, but he had his own uncertainty about how his future might evolve.

Caine said, "Now that you are commissioned, you must serve a two-year deployment on *Repulse*. Then, if you complete all your qualifications and receive strong ranking marks, you may be recommended for promotion to ensign."

He gave a weak smile and added. "Learn your duties, obey orders, and you will have nothing to fear."

Caine searched Gallant's face. "Well, nothing to say for yourself?"

Gallant thrust his chin out and said, "I am prepared to do my duty to the best of my ability, sir!"

"It is exactly 'the best of your ability' that is in question, young man," responded Caine.

