

GIBRALTAR STARS

(A Novel)

By

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SCI FI - ARIZONA

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The Rock of Gibraltar



Prologue

"No battle plan ever survives contact with the enemy."

—Field Marshall Helmuth Carl Bernard von Moltke, Prussian General Staff

That, ladies and gentlemen, is the ancient wisdom of our profession. Despite this axiom, few military officers are truly prepared when they come face to face with the enemy in battle. We make our plans, array our forces, build vast logistics trains, and worry about the smallest details of the most unlikely scenarios. Yet, when the moment of truth arrives, we find it nothing like we imagined. A prime example of this is our recent campaign against the implacable alien foe.

As others have pointed out, we were incredibly lucky during our first encounter with the Broa. Had things gone just a little differently that day, this planet would now be enslaved, or barren. Having been present at the initiation of the current conflict, I can tell you that we felt many things that day, but "lucky" was not one of them.

I was in my cabin when we felt that first gravity wave pass through Magellan. A few minutes later, sensors reported a battle in progress between two alien ships that had appeared out of nowhere. What we didn't realize was that we would soon become combatants ourselves.

It all happened so quickly that there was no time to plan, no plotting of move and countermove. That first battle was fought with instinct and wild improvisation. It is only by the Grace of God that we survived to bring home the news that humanity was no longer alone in the universe.

Later, when the First Expedition confirmed that there was indeed a race of hostile alien overlords in the next galactic arm, the human race found itself in a quandary. We knew about them, but they were, as yet, ignorant of our existence.

You all remember the Great Debate. Many well-meaning people thought discretion the better part of valor. They counseled a policy of retreat from the stars and a reduction in our electromagnetic emissions at home, all the better to hide from our new enemies. Many were attracted to this point of view. It was only after events proved such 'safety' to be an illusion that we decided to face the danger squarely and begin preparations for war.

For six long years, we spied out the enemy's weaknesses. We invented new weapons and technologies, built vast flotillas and manned them with the best of our young warriors. We established secret bases in the heart of the enemy domain, moved vast mountains of supplies, and did all we could to get ready for the inevitable day when we would finally confront the Broa.

Yet, when that day came, our preparations were incomplete. Some of our plans had not worked out as expected. Many of our most important fleet units were still under construction. Like every other fleet/army in history, we went into battle when circumstances forced the battle, not when we were prepared for it.

Yet, to date we have been successful. This is not primarily due to our planning and staff work, although these are essential precursors to victory. No, we carry the fight to the enemy because of the diligence, competence, and sheer guts of those who ride our ships into battle.

These, ladies and gentlemen, are your predecessors. I know that when the time comes for you to take your place beside them, you will carry on in their tradition and that of the Terrestrial Space Navy!

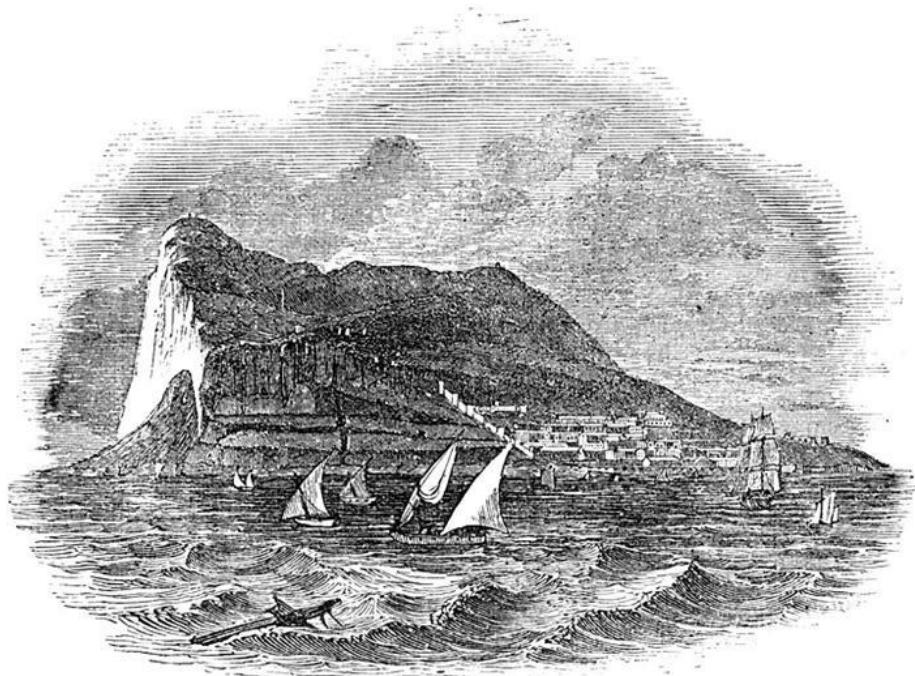
—From a Commencement Address to the Naval Academy Graduating Class of 2358, by Admiral Daniel Landon.

The Duodecimal System

The duodecimal system is widely used by species that possess six digits on one grasping member and which are laterally bisymmetric. Chief among these are our adversaries, the Broa.

Decimal	Duodecimal
1 = One	1 = One
2 = Two	2 = Two
3 = Three	3 = Three
4 = Four	4 = Four
5 = Five	5 = Five
6 = Six	6 = Six
7 = Seven	7 = Seven
8 = Eight	8 = Eight
9 = Nine	9 = Nine
10 = Ten	A = Ten
11 = Eleven	B = Eleven
12 = Twelve = Dozen	10 = Twelve = Dozen
10x10 = 100 = Hundred	10x10 = 100 = Gross (144 decimal)
10x10x10 = 1000 = Thousand	10x10x10 = 1000 = Great-Gross (1728 decimal)

PART ONE:
PREPARATIONS FOR WAR



Chapter One

One piece of space looks like any other, Lisa Rykand, thought morosely as she gazed at the shrunken star more than a billion kilometers below.

Lisa was a petite blonde with green eyes and a nose that turned up at the end. She wore her hair cropped close in a microgravity style. Her mouth was a bit too wide for her face, and her cheeks had a tendency to dimple when she smiled. She wasn't smiling at the moment.

For more than a year each successive mission had taken them farther out along the Perseus Arm of the Milky Way and deeper into enemy space. Sol was too small and dim to be seen from her current vantage point. Had it been visible, the photons detected would be brother to those that once illuminated a small village destined one day to become Babylon. The constellations were another reminder of how far they had voyaged. None were remotely the same as those named by the ancient Arab astronomers.

This mission had seen them scout six enemy star systems. Save for the color of the starlight streaming through the viewports, each had presented the same ebon panorama sprinkled with diamond-like sparks of light.

The first star had been a red giant, whose rays tinged everything ruby. The second was a small blowtorch of a sun. In that system, camera filters had been dialed to maximum and the viewports tightly sealed to protect delicate retinas. The third...

"What are you doing, Hon?"

Startled, Lisa squirmed against her acceleration straps to look over her shoulder. Floating in the open hatchway, with one steady hand wrapped around a nearby stanchion, was her husband, Lt. Commander Mark Rykand.

"About to tear my hair out from boredom," she replied. "Thank you for coming to save me just in time!"

Lowering himself to her level, he leaned down and planted an upside down kiss on her lips. Lisa welcomed the distraction and concentrated on making it the best kiss he had received all day.

When their lips finally separated, her husband twisted his body around to align with hers and wedged himself between her flank and the arm of the couch. He stabilized himself in the microgravity by anchoring his hand to a spot that wasn't exactly Space Navy regulation, but one that caused a small electric shock to race up Lisa's spine.

Mark was of average height with a shock of sandy hair that was tinged with gray, something that hadn't been there when she first met him. His blue eyes were his most striking feature. He was currently grinning in that crooked smile way he had.

"Seriously, what are you doing?"

"The same thing we've been doing since we entered this godforsaken system. I'm listening to the locals jabber at each other in their native tongue, while attempting to record everything we can of their visual communications. At the rate we have been capturing speech and images,

the linguistic computers should be able to crack the code in another week or so. Of course, we will reach the stargate and jump in three more days."

"I could ask the captain to hang around to give you more time to collect linguistic source data."

"Sure, drive right up to the gate and then hover for another 120 hours or so, looking inconspicuous. I'm sure the local overlords wouldn't suspect a thing," Lisa replied, laughing.

"And if they did," Mark replied, "we would just tell them that we are doing the local once-a-twelve-year space monkey census."

"The only space monkeys around here are us. The locals look more like ambulatory fish."

"When do you get off duty?"

"I have another hour to go," Lisa replied, snuggling close to feel her husband's muscled ribs press into her right breast. "Why, sir, do you have something *interesting* planned for this evening?"

"Not a bad idea," he said. "We've both been working too hard this trip."

"You're telling me. It's been so long, I forget which of us gets tied up!" She emphasized her point by letting her own hand do some exploring. His torso still had its same hard tone, she noted, despite so many months in microgravity.

"Stop that!" he said, applying his own pressure in return. There ensued a quick tussle that ended with both of them laughing and not a few articles of clothing in disarray. Acknowledging that it might not be good for two officers of the service to be found in such a position, Mark released his wife, pushed back, and halted his flight just out of reach.

"Besides," he said, gesturing toward the Gordian knot of light paths in the nearby holoscreen, "It's your own damned fault."

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For Mark Rykand, it had begun at Sandia Spaceport, New Mexico, when he'd seen his sister off to join the Survey Starship *Magellan*. *Maggie* had been assigned the plum of exploring the newly discovered New Eden system, containing the most earthlike extra-solar planet yet discovered. Jani had been quite excited at the prospect.

Laughing, her red locks whipping in the breeze, she waved at him from the shuttle airlock before disappearing into the streamlined dart. Minutes later, the dart had lifted from the runway and disappeared into the azure sky. That was the last time Mark had seen his sister. Three months later, he received word that she had been killed in space.

That worst day of his life triggered a series of events culminating in his discovery that humanity was no longer alone in the galaxy. While exploring New Eden, *Magellan* detected two nearby alien ships as they suddenly materialized from out of vacuum. The pair was impossible to miss. Their arrival triggered a massive gravity wave that rattled storage compartments all over the ship.

At the moment of breakout, the two alien ships had been slugging it out in a space battle. Or

rather, one of the ships was attacking the other. The second ship tried to flee its tormentor.

Finding itself near *Magellan*, the alien under attack made directly for the human starship. In the process, its orbit took it close to Jani Rykand's scout boat. The scout was unarmed and defenseless, offering no threat to anyone. Despite this, the alien attacker lashed out with an energy beam. Jani, her ship, and seven other human souls were instantly transformed into an incandescent cloud silhouetted against the black of space.

The attack on the scout boat alerted *Magellan*'s captain to the coming threat as the two aliens made a beeline for his ship. He used the only weapon available. In desperation, he aimed one of the ship's faster-than-light message probes at the attacking alien.

Launching a probe so deep in a planetary gravity well would normally have been a prescription for disaster. Not that day. The probe's overloaded drive generator exploded in the first millisecond after jumping to hypervelocity. With its superlight generators gone, the remains of the probe returned to normal space with an intrinsic velocity of 60% light speed. The expanding cone of debris sliced through the alien attacker, vaporizing it as thoroughly as it had vaporized Scout Three.

With one alien ship gone and the other drifting helplessly in space, there had been nothing for *Magellan*'s crew but to hunt for survivors.

That was how the human race first met Sar-Say.

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NOVELS

1. Life Probe - ^{US\$}\$7.50****

The Makers searched for the secret to faster-than-light travel for 100,000 years. Their chosen instruments were the Life Probes, which they launched in every direction to seek out advanced civilizations among the stars. One such machine searching for intelligent life encounters 21st century Earth. It isn't sure that it has found any...

2. Procyon's Promise - ^{US\$}\$7.50****

Three hundred years after humanity made its deal with the Life Probe to search out the secret of faster-than-light travel, the descendants of the original expedition return to Earth in a starship. They find a world that has forgotten the ancient contract. No matter. The colonists have overcome far greater obstacles in their single-minded drive to redeem a promise made before any of them were born...

3. Antares Dawn - US\$6.00

When the super giant star Antares exploded in 2512, the human colony on Alta found their pathway to the stars gone, isolating them from the rest of human space for more than a century. Then one day, a powerful warship materialized in the system without warning. Alarmed by the sudden appearance of such a behemoth, the commanders of the Altan Space Navy dispatched one of their most powerful ships to investigate. What ASNS Discovery finds when they finally catch the intruder is a battered hulk manned by a dead crew.

That is disturbing news for the Altans. For the dead battleship could easily have defeated the whole of the Altan navy. If it could find Alta, then so could whomever it was that beat it. Something must be done...

4. Antares Passage - US\$7.50

After more than a century of isolation, the paths between stars are again open and the people of Alta in contact with their sister colony on Sandar. The opening of the foldlines has not been the unmixed blessing the Altans had supposed, however.

For the reestablishment of interstellar travel has brought with it news of the Ryall, an alien race whose goal is the extermination of humanity. If they are to avoid defeat at the hands of the aliens, Alta must seek out the military might of Earth. However, to reach Earth requires them to dive into the heart of a supernova.

5. Antares Victory – First Time in Print – US\$7.50

After a century of warfare, humanity finally discovered the Achilles heel of the Ryall, their xenophobic reptilian foe. Spica – Alpha Virginis – is the key star system in enemy space. It is the hub through which all Ryall starships must pass, and if humanity can only capture and hold it, they will strangle the Ryall war machine and end their threat to humankind forever.

It all seemed so simple in the computer simulations: Advance by stealth, attack without warning, strike swiftly with overwhelming power. Unfortunately, conquering the Ryall proves the easy part. With the key to victory in hand, Richard and Bethany Drake discover that they must also conquer human nature if they are to bring down the alien foe ...

6. Thunderstrike! - US\$7.50

The new comet found near Jupiter was an incredible treasure trove of water ice and rock. Immediately, the water-starved Luna Republic and the Sierra Corporation, a leader in asteroid mining, were squabbling over rights to the new resource. However, all thoughts of profit and fame were abandoned when a scientific expedition discovered that the comet's trajectory placed it on a collision course with Earth!

As scientists struggled to find a way to alter the comet's course, world leaders tried desperately to restrain mass panic, and two lovers quarreled over the direction the comet was to take, all Earth waited to see if humanity had any future at all...

7. The Clouds of Saturn - US\$7.50

When the sun flared out of control and boiled Earth's oceans, humanity took refuge in a place that few would have predicted. In the greatest migration in history, the entire human race took up residence among the towering clouds and deep clear-air canyons of Saturn's upper atmosphere. Having survived the traitor star, they returned to the all-too-human tradition of internecine strife. The new city-states of Saturn began to resemble those of ancient Greece, with one group of cities taking on the role of militaristic Sparta...

8. The Sails of Tau Ceti – US\$7.50

Starhopper was humanity's first interstellar probe. It was designed to search for intelligent life beyond the solar system. Before it could be launched, however, intelligent life found Earth. The discovery of an alien light sail inbound at the edge of the solar system generated considerable excitement in scientific circles. With the interstellar probe nearing completion, it gave scientists the opportunity to launch an expedition to meet the aliens while they were still in space. The second surprise came when *Starhopper*'s crew boarded the alien craft. They found beings that, despite their alien physiques, were surprisingly compatible with humans. That two species so similar could have evolved a mere twelve light years from one another seemed too coincidental to be true.

One human being soon discovered that coincidence had nothing to do with it...

9. Gibraltar Earth – First Time in Print — \$7.50

It is the 24th Century and humanity is just gaining a toehold out among the stars. Stellar Survey Starship *Magellan* is exploring the New Eden system when they encounter two alien spacecraft. When the encounter is over, the score is one human scout ship and one alien aggressor destroyed. In exploring the wreck of the second alien ship, spacers discover a survivor with a fantastic story.

The alien comes from a million-star Galactic Empire ruled over by a mysterious race known as the Broa. These overlords are the masters of this region of the galaxy and they allow no competitors. This news presents Earth's rulers with a problem. As yet, the Broa are ignorant of humanity's existence. Does the human race retreat to its one small world, quaking in fear that the Broa will eventually discover Earth? Or do they take a more aggressive approach?

Whatever they do, they must do it quickly! Time is running out for the human race...

10. Gibraltar Sun – First Time in Print — \$7.50

The expedition to the Crab Nebula has returned to Earth and the news is not good. Out among the stars, a million systems have fallen under Broan domination, the fate awaiting Earth should the Broa ever learn of its existence. The problem would seem to allow but three responses: submit meekly to slavery, fight and risk extermination, or hide and pray the Broa remain ignorant of humankind for at least a few more generations. Are the hairless apes of Sol III finally faced with a problem for which there is no acceptable solution?

While politicians argue, Mark Rykand and Lisa Arden risk everything to spy on the all-powerful enemy that is beginning to wonder at the appearance of mysterious bipeds in their midst...

11. Gibraltar Stars – First Time in Print — US\$7.50

The great debate is over. The human race has rejected the idea of pulling back from the stars and hiding on Earth in the hope the Broa will overlook us for a few more generations. Instead, the World Parliament, by a vote of 60-40, has decided to throw the dice and go for a win. Parliament Hall resounds with brave words as members declare victory inevitable.

With the balance of forces a million to one against *Homo sapiens Terra*, those who must turn patriotic speeches into hard-won reality have their work cut out for them. They must expand humanity's foothold in Broan space while contending with a supply line that is 7000 light-years long.

If the sheer magnitude of the task isn't enough, Mark and Lisa Rykand discover they are in a race against two very different antagonists. The Broa are beginning to wonder at the strange two-legged interlopers in their domain; while back on Earth, those who lost the great debate are eager to try again.

Whoever wins the race will determine the future of the human species... or, indeed, whether it has one.

12. Gridlock and Other Stories - US\$6.00

Where would you visit if you invented a time machine, but could not steer it? What if you went out for a six-pack of beer and never came back? If you think nuclear power is dangerous, you should try black holes as an energy source — or even scarier, solar energy! Visit the many worlds of Michael McCollum. I guarantee that you will be surprised!

Non-Fiction Books

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The Astrogator's Handbook has been very popular on Sci Fi – Arizona. The handbook has star maps that show science fiction writers where the stars are located in space rather than where they are located in Earth's sky. Because of the popularity, we are expanding the handbook to show nine times as much space and more than ten times as many stars. The expanded handbook includes the positions of 3500 stars as viewed from Polaris on 63 maps. This handbook is a useful resource for every science fiction writer and will appeal to anyone with an interest in astronomy.