

Blue Star

The Beginning

By

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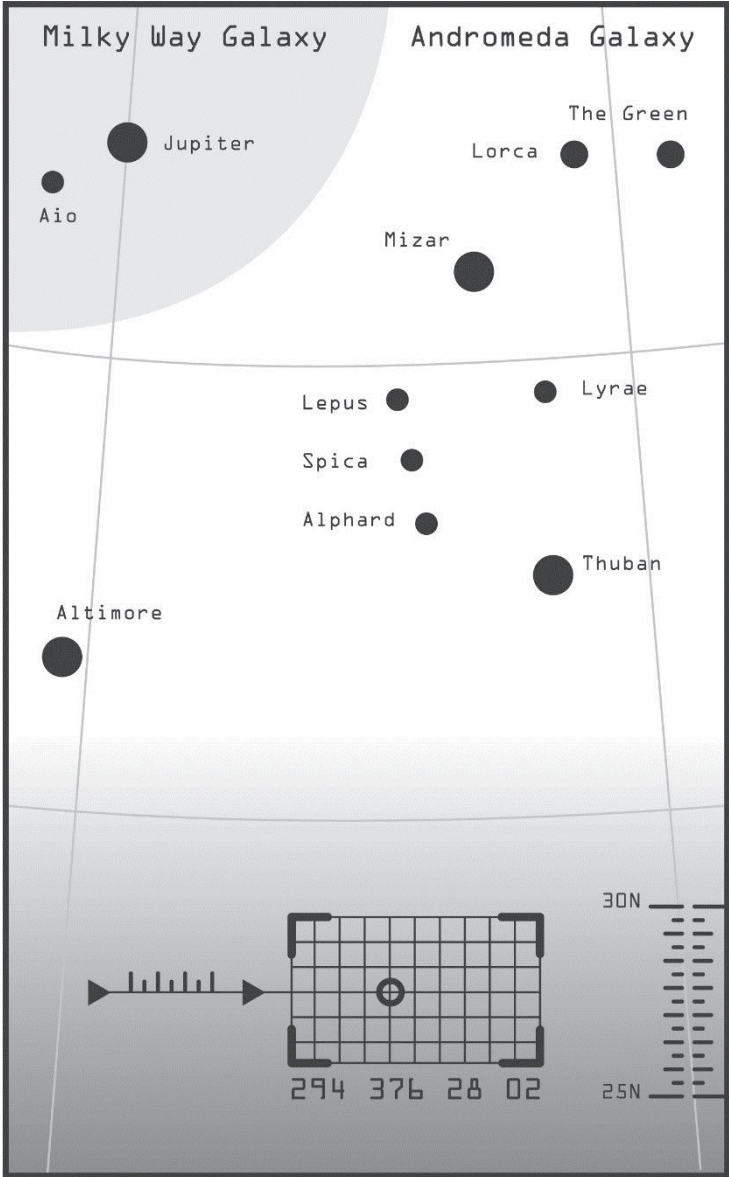
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*For my brothers and sisters,
George
Donna
Jesse
and
Deborah*



*Listen as I speak
Let the story tell itself.
It's a tale of love; a tale of
Power and possession;
A tale of weakness and strength
Of error.
In other words, it is a tale of all humans.*

Prologue

A storm is raging, a great unsettling in the heavens; an ominous gray pall hovers, and a mysterious dust can be seen ascending and descending around the planets and stars. Something terrible is about to happen. The gods are in a towering rage.

Don't they have enough to do without someone causing a disruption? The last time this happened in the Andromeda Galaxy was fifty years ago; then a war that lasted thirty years began between the peoples of the planets Atrean and Betria. Even with the help and support of the gods, the devastation for human beings during that war was incalculable. For twenty years now a blessed peace has reigned in the universe. But the gods know this new stirring can mean only one thing—that Man's wanton insolence has reached its bounds and crossed over—and it can only end in madness—the abyss—chaos.

But who started this current unrest? Where is it coming from? There is now a greater interpenetration between the galaxies, planets, sub-planets and stars. Boundaries have been crossed. The preponderance of greed and avarice has finally toppled the balance. Generals and politicians, statesmen and religious leaders are integrating and overlapping. Through powerful economic negotiations they have extended themselves farther and farther into the galaxies, probing for new energy sources and control. Even the smallest planets are acquiring the technology they need for themselves.

On the small planet Altimore, which rests on the southwestern edge of Andromeda Galaxy just over the

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border of the Milky Way and nine hundred and eighty light years away from the planet Jupiter, another kind of catastrophe is taking place in the home of Nanta and Lull Star. The eldest of their five children has gone missing. No one knows why, how or when Blue Star has gone. She was last seen at bedtime five days ago. The entire family is in an uproar. They have searched everywhere, but to no avail. Trouble is brewing.

Blue Star's journey has begun, and she and all those around her will be caught up in the chaos that will shortly begin. All the heavens will be filled with the threats of fire and danger. Blue Star will long for home, but will she be able to make it back? The universe trembles.

Everything living is warning of impending doom.

Chapter One

In the quiet village of Parth, on the planet Altimore, the Star family stood apart. They were thought of by some of the villagers to be artistic or eccentric. Others just thought them odd. Even though they were spoken of kindly by the villagers and the children were well-liked in school, the family was often the subject of discussion in the market, around the dinner table or just when there was nothing better to discuss. In the rather boring little village they stood out because no one in Parth could really come up with a satisfying explanation for the Star family.

Blue Star, the eldest of Nanta and Lull's five children often thought of her mother sarcastically as quirky, but of course, she would never say it out loud. After all, she loved her mother; it was just that she never fit in anywhere. Nanta didn't look like the mothers of her friends. She had long, ginger-colored, curly hair, which always looked uncombed and wild. On a planet where most of the population was dark-skinned, Nanta's fair complexion, dotted with freckles, and her hazel eyes were just one more way in which she stood out. She wore colorful skirts and blouses and men's plaid shirts, all of which she made herself, and she was barefoot as often as she could be. A kind person, she always had a smile on her face, and when she walked it was as if she danced across the floor. While many of Blue's friends' mothers worked outside the home, Nanta stayed at home writing verses and singing, especially when she was baking. She cleaned house only once in a while and loved to hang out wash in the sunshine even in the dead of winter, not caring if the sheets froze. Nanta

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played the piano by ear and insisted all her children sing, but her favorite things in the whole world, she would say many times, were being a mother and being married to Lull Star.

Blue's father, Lull, was tall and lanky with dark, curly hair and deep, dark eyes. Some folks in the village called him lazy; the more charitable just said he had a more romantic habit of mind than most of the men in the neighborhood. He carved wooden figures for a living. They were beautiful pieces of work, for he was a fine craftsman. They were figures of people. Adults, the elderly and children all doing some kind of activity, storekeepers, workmen, businessmen, children at play. But working at his own pace, which was slow, he sold very few carvings, barely enough to keep a family, and could be heard in his studio at the rear of the house, singing at all hours in his soft, tenor voice. In the middle of the day he could be seen taking long, long walks through the village into the countryside, his head down, thinking deep thoughts. Lull tried and tried to do better at providing for his family. On several occasions, he attempted to work for others in the village, but he couldn't hold down a job long because he either wasn't fast enough or reliable enough for the other men of Parth.

But Nanta never minded. *She treats Lull as if he was the greatest gift in the world*, Blue sometimes thought bitterly.

Nanta called her children her "cluster of Stars" and named them all after the colors she saw in her dreams and visions. Her first daughter she called Blue because she reminded her of –the constancy and spirit of the ocean, sky and clouds. "One beautiful sunny day I was lying on my back on the ground looking up at the moving clouds. As they moved across the sky I saw a laughing baby encircled in a lovely blue haze and right then I knew what my first baby's name would be," she told Blue.

Blue looked more like her father than her mother, for which she was often grateful since it meant she blended in just a little better with the other children in her school. She was a tall, dark-haired and dark-eyed, slender seventeen-year-old, the age, on Altimore, that a person was no longer a child, but a responsible adult. As a youngster, Blue was never still and wouldn't stay in the same place from minute to minute. She was beautiful, intelligent and had always gotten very good grades in school. She and her next older brother, Perse (yes, another of Nanta's visions), particularly excelled in the sciences, subjects her parents never valued.

Blue also had a fertile imagination and a keen sense of adventure, and she was popular with all her friends, who thought her very brave, always taking some kind of risk. When she believed she was right, she stood her ground, which didn't always sit well with her teachers. Her friends' parents called her a born leader, but wondered how on earth she would ever succeed with parents like Nanta and Lull.

During her last year of school, Blue had begun to think about her life and what would happen to her after graduation. There was no money for her further education. As soon as they were old enough, she and Perse had gotten after-school jobs to contribute to the family income.

After Blue graduated from school she started working full time at the local library. She knew that her position at the library didn't offer her any real future, but what else could she do? At least at the library she was allowed to read and research space explorers and their ships, stories that had fascinated her for as long as she could remember. Her dream was to someday leave Altimore and see more of the universe, but with only a basic education and a dead-end job it would remain just a dream. She tried to talk to Nanta and Lull about her desire to explore and see other worlds beyond Altimore, but they only shook their heads.

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“We have lived on other planets,” her father said. “Altmore is by far the best we found. Why ever would you want to leave?” Lull said.

“Why can’t you be happy where you are?” added Nanta. But Blue could never be convinced.

Blue had been unhappy for so long she could no longer remember the sparkling, joyful, little girl everyone thought of when they called her name. And she was sure her friends no longer thought about her, either. One by one they had dropped away; some had gone off to bigger cities or planets to study and prepare for exciting careers. And the ones who stayed were tired of hearing Blue sigh and question where her life was going rather than just enjoying what she had right now.

Blue wondered why her siblings didn’t seem to mind the life they were living and became more and more depressed; her life was a dead end. Blue felt so different from her family that she began to wonder if she had been adopted.

A foundling dropped off by the roadside perhaps, taken in by Nanta and Lull, she thought. It was just the kind of thing they would do.

Blue chafed at being different, but no matter how hard she tried to fit into the village, or her family, she just didn’t.

Even though Lull was good at working with wood, he never seemed to have time to fix the house, which remained in disrepair despite the extra income Blue and Perse brought in. There never seemed to be enough money, and there never would be extra money to further her education. There was no money and no future for her in sight.

One evening as she sat in the living room with her family after dinner, she began to survey the room and those in it. Her brother Perse was reading a scientific journal. As usual, Blue thought, *hiding out in his science books. A lot of good that will do him.* Her sister Ivory was playing an old relic of a harpsichord, at which she was very good. *The*

only time she seems happy and relaxed is when she is playing that harpsichord. What will happen to her? She has such talent; how will she ever make anything of it? Goldy and Silv, the twins, were whispering together. *Probably hatching some mischief,* thought Blue.

Does no one care about our lives except me? she wondered. Why doesn't anyone care about what is going to happen to us?

Lull sat in an old stuffed chair, a worn sweater around his shoulders. He was feeling miserable with a bad cold and Nanta was hovering around him, gently and lovingly touching his face. Blue had witnessed this scene many times before. She wondered why Nanta could not see Lull for what he was: a loser, never able to hold down a job like other fathers who worked a steady job. Instead he did his own thing, keeping them all in the poorhouse. *What will happen to me, to the others? What future do we have? It's all a dead end! I cannot belong to this family! Am I to be stuck like this forever? Well, I won't!*

As Blue became more and more dissatisfied with life at home, she began to wonder more and more about her mother and father's families. Nanta and Lull kept secrets from their children about their past and would never answer the questions Blue asked. Always curious, she was forever trying to discover something about her family's history and her ancestry, but to no avail. Neither one would say who their parents were nor where they had come from before they mysteriously arrived on Altimore. When pressed, all they would answer was, "that was a long time ago," and then they would say no more.

Why won't my parents talk about themselves? Who are they? Maybe their parents were rich! How do I know I am not an heiress? I wonder if I really was adopted? I wonder if my grandparents know who my real parents are?

She thought about the little she had learned from her

parents. Both Nanta and Lull were born on the same planet, not Altimore, and in different villages. For some reason, they had both been sent to another planet away from their parents when they were very young, and it was there that they met, fell in love, married and decided to travel to another place. They ended up on Altimore and started a family. They told their children they didn't remember the name of the place where they were born nor where the planet they had been sent to was located, but Blue did not believe this. She thought it was just an excuse they gave when they became tired of answering their children's questions. They would only say that the planet they had come from was very far away. Nanta did love to tell how she and Lull met through a friend and that "it was love at first sight." They never mentioned their own parents. When asked they would say, "I don't want to talk about that, it was too long ago."

Well, Blue said to herself defiantly, I am going to find out!

She began to search through her parents' bedroom whenever she could without being found out. She had never done such a thing before, and she felt a twinge of guilt but continued her mission anyway. She looked carefully in drawers, putting things back as neatly as she found them. She opened a large closet and found, deeply hidden in the back of the closet, a black bag. She opened it and inside was a small, leather case. Inside the case was a gray velvet pouch which contained two identical silver necklaces each with a small, round pendant. On each pendant was an engraved symbol. Blue couldn't at first make it out because the markings were faint, as if they had been rubbed away. But after taking the necklaces into the bright sunlight, rubbing them clean and peering very closely, she finally made out a carved circle with lines around the edges like the rays of the sun. Two wavy lines that reminded Blue of an icon for water or a river ran from top to bottom of the

circle and were carved more deeply in the center. Along with the necklaces was a gray stone that was just the size to fit into Blue's cupped hand. It, too, had the same symbol cut into it. Blue replaced the leather case in the black bag and returned it to the back of the closet, then she took the velvet pouch with the necklaces and stone and hid them in her room. She knew the symbol had to be a clue to her parents' past, and she would have to discover what it meant. Was it a symbol of the planet where they were born or the planet where they met? What did it mean? She was determined to find the answers. Now she had to figure out a way to do it.

Chapter Two

Now that she finally had a tangible clue, the necklaces and stone, Blue needed a plan if she was ever going to find out more about her background and ancestry. *At least I work in a library*, she told herself. She would make good use of the reference materials available, and maybe she could trace records of the ships that had arrived on Altimore in the year before she was born. One of the few things her parents had told her was that they had only lived in Parth for a few months before her birth.

She decided to talk to Mrs. Hyler, the head of the research department at the library, for help but she didn't want her to know that the information she was looking up was for herself. *There is enough gossip about my family without me creating more.*

"A patron asked me to help with a research project. He wants to locate when someone arrived on Altimore. Where should I start?" Blue asked Mrs. Hyler.

"Did they arrive recently?"

"No, it was about eighteen or nineteen years ago," Blue said, hoping that she wouldn't notice that this date was very close to Blue's own age.

But she seemed not to notice.

"Well, if you have their names, finding out which ship they had arrived on should be fairly easy, although time-consuming," she replied. "If I were you I'd start by looking at the passenger ships that arrived in that time period. Good luck, though, it's going to be quite a list!"

Blue was excited, and as soon as her lunch hour arrived she began her search. She knew if she could just find out

which ship her parents had arrived on, she would learn where they had been just before coming to Altimore. It might not be their home planet, but at least it would be a start.

For the next few weeks Blue spent every lunch hour and every break from her work poring over old records from the spaceport at Parth Silver Tower. In school, she had always enjoyed learning about early space explorers such as Leland Markham who had first opened the passage to Biham over two hundred years before. She had thrilled at the tales of Sengar Beid who had saved the people of the planet Muscida in the Atrean War. Now she was learning about things that would have seemed much too mundane to her just a few months before.

She read lists of people who had disembarked from passenger ships for the two years prior to her birth. Nothing.

Finally, she went back to Mrs. Hyler. "It's not working. I've found nothing!"

"Well, maybe they didn't arrive on a passenger ship. They could have come as part of the crew on a cargo ship, and then decided to stay. It happens all the time," Mrs. Hyler assured her.

Blue thought this over. It seemed very likely. Her parents had been young, and probably penniless. Maybe they had worked their way here on a cargo ship.

Blue went back to her records, this time looking at the manifests for all the cargo ships that had docked in that same period.

She learned a lot about the import and export business of Altimore. She also found lists of crew members for each of the ships, but again, her parents' names were not listed.

Things were getting even more mysterious. Could her parents have been stowaways? Did they come to Altimore illegally? That could explain their reluctance to ever go far beyond the boundaries of the small village of Parth.

But Blue knew she certainly could not go home and ask them that question. First, they would be horrified to learn she had been looking into their past history. And then, they would find some excuse not to answer her questions. No, talking to her parents was out of the question. Blue knew she would have to solve the mystery of her parents' home planet by herself. And these false starts only made her more determined to find the answers.

She still had some clues to work with: the necklaces and stone, and the two facts her mother had once let drop about the planet they had left. The first was that it was extremely small, tiny really, and was located very near a larger planet. The second thing her mother had mentioned was that it had taken three weeks' space time for Nanta and Lull to arrive at Altimore from the port where they began.

This was all she had to go on, but at least she still had some clues left. She didn't want to go back to Mrs. Hyler. She was getting quite curious about all the research Blue was doing. She wanted to know which patron was taking up so much of Blue's free time.

"You shouldn't let yourself be exploited this way," she kept warning Blue.

But Blue persisted. She just tried to avoid Mrs. Hyler whenever she was working on her "private research project," as she had begun to call it.

Now she began to look for information on the symbol on the necklaces and stone, which she had decided must represent a sun and water.

Is it the symbol of a planetary government? Or some other type of organization? What could it mean? she asked herself repeatedly. She spent several more weeks on her search. After exhausting the resources on the library's computer system, she contacted other libraries and researchers, and finally combed through the old, musty, paper documents that were saved and kept in the library's basement. But no matter where she looked or who she

asked, she found nothing that matched.

Next, she turned her attention to locating the planet her parents had come from. Using what her mother had told her—a small planet located near a larger one, and both about three weeks' space time from Altimore—she started her search again. This time, however, instead of too little information, she found too much. There were over a hundred pairs of planets that fit this description. She became very discouraged. *Without more information, how can I ever pinpoint the right ones?*

It was the first time she had felt discouraged during her entire search. She thought about it for a few days, though, and slowly began to eliminate pairs of planets from the search. Some were too far away. Others did not seem to be developed enough.

Finally, she narrowed her selection to three pairs of planets that she thought were the most likely. Each had a record of towns and industry, and most important, regular space travel to and from Altimore. All could be reached within the three-week period her mother had mentioned.

But now what?

I've spent two months on this search, and I'm no closer than I was when I started, she thought disgustedly.

But Blue was nothing if not determined—*Nanta called it stubborn,* she thought with a small smile. She was not going to give up now.

She continued to use her lunch hours and breaks, and stayed late after work to use the library's resources to try to find out as much about the chosen pairs of planets as she could, but information was limited.

There had been the Atrean War. Records and information had been destroyed on many of the planets involved, and others had cut communication entirely with the outside world. The people of these planets had decided that the way to peace was isolation. They had cut their interplanetary networks and communications systems;

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some had even scrapped their space ships and razed their spaceports, vowing to learn to live with only the technology and resources that they could make for themselves.

Finally, Mrs. Hyler had had enough. “Blue, you are getting no exercise! You’ve lost weight and you look pale. I insist you start taking a walk on your lunch break. I love the library, and I understand how you can get caught up in your research, but it will do you no good to get ill.”

Blue began taking walks each day, and she soon found herself wandering down to the spaceport. Mrs. Hyler had been right. The fresh air did her good, and it allowed her time to think about what she had learned in her long weeks of research.

Yes, it had been twenty years since the Atrean War ended. It must be significant, Blue realized, that it was about that time that her parents had left home to come to Altimore. There had been other refugees, of course. People who had sided with the losing faction often felt unwelcome on their home planets and had migrated to other planets where their background was not known. Was this why her parents had immigrated to Altimore? Or was there some other more personal reason? No matter. In the chaos of those early post-war years it would have been easy for one young couple to lose themselves.

As Blue researched the planets, and that post-war era, she had more sympathy for her parents. Something terrible must have happened to them on their home planet to make them leave and never want to discuss it again, not even with their children.

But sympathy was not information, and the more that Blue learned, the more questions she had. How was she to find out which, if any, of the three pairs she had researched was her parents’ home?

Finally, she came to a decision. It happened suddenly as she wandered the spaceport, deep in her own world, looking at the ranks of ships, large and small, old and new,

luxurious and bare-bones. *I've got to get off Altimore! If I'm ever going to learn anything, to be anything more than just a library assistant, I've got to leave here. And if I'm going to go, I might as well start by looking at the planets my parents might have come from!*

Blue decided she would start her travels by going to each one of the planets as well as their smaller adjacent satellites, and learning all she could about each one.

But how would she get there? Two of them had cut communications with the outside world a few years after the end of the war. In fact, Blue realized both had severed ties with the outside world only a year or so after her parents had arrived on Altimore. Maybe knowing that they would be cut off had spurred her parents' departure?

Even the one planet that had not totally cut off communications was difficult to get to. It no longer had regular passenger or cargo service; ships only stopped there intermittently. And Blue wasn't even sure that Altimoran space ships were allowed to land on it. *But to be realistic, before I can worry about landing on any of those worlds, I must figure out how to get off Altimore!*

This was a problem that no amount of research in the library was going to solve. She didn't have enough money to book passage on an interplanetary cruiser, and even if she had, passenger ships weren't going where she wanted to go. To obtain even the lowliest job on a space freighter, a ship that was more likely to travel to these out-of-way worlds, you needed to have education, and Blue had none. And finally, how could she get away from her family?

Her parents definitely would not approve of her going and would try to persuade her to stay. They would tell her, again, that it was better on Altimore. They might even feel that her desire to leave home meant that they had let her down. Perse would say that the family needed her income to stay afloat; that without her help, he was the only one bringing in any money. How could he save enough to ever

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get an education himself if she didn't continue to help out? And the others, while too young to really understand, would cry and tell her how much they would miss her. Yes, it would be easier to leave without telling her family. But before she even worried about that part of her problems, she first had to decide just how she was going to get off the planet.