



~ Official Document ~

*Galaxy's Edge Space Station*

*Advertisement #AD-999277*

*Subject: Phoenix Deep-Space Convoy*

Looking for action and adventure? Looking for new opportunities in uncharted space? Need safe passage beyond the galaxy's edge?

Book your passage today on the Phoenix Deep-Space Convoy out of Galaxy's Edge Station—the *best* deep-space convoy.

With years of experience and a talented crew, we'll ensure your safety while you find your adventure.

- Convoy Master Dare Phoenix has run hundreds of successful convoys in dangerous space.
- The convoy's flagship, the *Sky Nomad*, is captained by Captain Nissa Phoenix—a former GSS Patrol captain.
- Rynan Phoenix ensures the convoy's security and health with an experienced security team.
- Justyn Phoenix, a veteran trader, is also on hand to facilitate trade agreements for any out-of-galaxy goods brought back into galactic space.

So, are you ready to join the adventure? Sign up today to secure your seat aboard the best deep-space convoy in the Exodus quadrant and head into uncharted space.

## Chapter One

Some days he loved the Galaxy's Edge Space Station, with its wild atmosphere and dilapidated feel. He felt like it was saying a huge "screw you" to the rest of the galaxy.

But some days, he hated it.

Dare Phoenix watched a small, angry man stomp his way across the docking bay, heading toward him. Dare deliberately turned away, and focused on the activity behind him. The docking bay was a large, cavernous space, filled with stacked boxes and anti-grav pallets full of crates of supplies. They were all waiting to be loaded onto Dare's ship.

Behind him, the large cargo doors into the *Sky Nomad* were open, and some of his crew members were moving back and forth up the ramp, carrying boxes or directing the floating pallets.

He heard the clanking of metal on metal and his brother, Rynan, came down the ramp, wearing a large exosuit. The metal suit encased Ry's muscled form and included large, powerful arms designed for heavy lifting. Ry stopped and gave the approaching man a look, then raised a brow at Dare.

Dare gave one small shake of his head to indicate he'd take care of it. Ry might be in charge of security for the Phoenix Deep-Space Convoy, but Dare could handle scum like Rengreek Daltar any day.

"Phoenix," the man called out.

Dare turned to face the trader. "Daltar."

The man was from the planet Appax. His skin was a tough, leathery green, and he was short and round, with two small protuberances on his head.

"I see you're loading the goods I sold to you." Daltar bristled. "Where are my e-creds?"

"I paid you what we agreed on in the contract we both signed. The e-creds are in your account."

"And I've decided I want more." Daltar raised a belligerent chin.

"And I won't pay it," Dare said silkily. He felt a prick of anger, but as always, he controlled it.

He'd been a convoy master for a long time. He liked being in charge, and expected people to follow his rules and honor their agreements. Always.

Daltar shifted uneasily, then straightened. "That was before an alien starfreighter pulled into the Edge, looking for fresh food. Now I want more. I have other buyers."

It was times like this Dare wished he didn't have a lingual implant embedded in his neck that translated alien languages for him. "You didn't have other buyers when you sold the fruit and vegetables to me. That's greedy and unprofessional."

Daltar shrugged. "Yeah. So?"

Dare sighed. That was the problem with operating out here on the edge of the galaxy. People picked and discarded rules as it suited them. Or they just flat-out stabbed you in the back. He spotted movement, and watched as a small group of people entered the docking bay.

Damn, his passengers were early. He had six ships lined up to join the convoy. They'd be following the *Sky Nomad* beyond the galaxy's known edge and into uncharted space. Most were going for adventure, or looking to begin new lives on uncharted planets. Many found life in the central systems of the galaxy not to their liking. Convoys like his were a way to find new opportunities. In addition to the group of starships, he also took a few passengers aboard the *Nomad*, and it looked like his latest group was ready to board.

Dare gave Daltar one last look. "I paid you our agreed price. And it was more than fair."

The trader spluttered. "Phoenix, I won't—"

Dare's simmering anger turned ultra-cold, but he kept it on a tight leash. He'd learned young—trapped in the dark—that any show of emotion did you no good.

"The *fresh* supplies you sent me are near rotten. Your quality isn't even worth what I paid. So, if you want to make an issue out of it, let's do it."

A muscle worked in Daltar's jaw, but he remained silent.

Dare straightened and turned to look at his passengers. "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the *Sky Nomad*." He put Daltar out of his mind, and looked at the group that would be sharing his ship.

He was good at gauging people with one glance. He'd had plenty of experience, and had seen all types on the convoy. There was a middle-aged couple in simple clothes. They had worn faces and callused hands. From a labor world, Dare guessed, no doubt looking for a new, easier life on

an uncharted planet. Next was a Galletean monk. The man bowed his bald head in greeting, his long, distinctive purple robes moving around his slim frame. This one would be out to convert the savages of uncharted space. He had a gentle, patient face that Dare didn't understand. Dare might control his emotions, but patience wasn't always his best quality.

The next passengers were two young women in their twenties. One smiled widely, her gaze drifting down his body. She was blonde, tall, slim...and obvious. Sometimes Dare had a taste for obvious, depending on his mood. The other woman was shorter and curvier, with a pretty rosette pattern on the skin of her neck. She watched him, a faint smile on her face. They both wore stylish clothes that showed off their excellent figures. Searching for husbands beyond the edge, he guessed. He had no interest in being anyone's husband, but he might have to get to know them better on the trip and see if they suited his particular tastes.

The last passenger was female, too, but far different from the other two. She wore large, baggy clothes, and a dull-brown, ankle-length coat that swamped her frame, making it impossible to guess her true size. Her hair was loose and uncovered—a thick mass of dishwater-brown. There was one word for it—ugly. She kept her face down, almost submissive, but not in a good way. Dare frowned. Her story was one he couldn't quite guess at first glance.

He stepped back and waved them up the ramp. “Come aboard. I'll have my crew show you to your cabins.”

“Phoenix!”

Daltar's yell echoed in the docking bay. Dare gritted his teeth and turned.

The trader was brandishing a laser pistol, and aiming it in Dare's direction. “I want my credits!”

There were gasps from the group of passengers. Dare waved at them. “Move back.”

He turned his head slightly, and saw the young women were wide-eyed while the older couple were clinging to each other. The monk still looked patient, but now the last woman was watching him, her gaze direct.

Stunning, brilliant-blue eyes.

She quickly looked away.

Daltar yelled again. Dare turned his wrist and checked his timepiece. If they took much longer, they'd get off schedule. And that was unacceptable.

Dare quickly pulled his own laser pistol from his holster and spun.

The laser whined loudly. Daltar gave a shocked cry and slammed into some crates, clutching his shoulder. His pistol clattered on the ground.

Dare stood, arm extended, holding his just-fired weapon.

“Our business is concluded, Daltar.” Dare holstered his pistol. “Now—” he turned back to his passengers “—let’s get aboard. And welcome to the Phoenix Convoy.”

There was a sprinkling of nervous laughter, but the group moved up the ramp.

Dare watched them, and again got a quick glimpse of bright-blue eyes before they were hidden from him.

\*\*\*

She’d made a big mistake.

Dakota Jones tugged her oversized coat around her and kept her head down, as she entered the *Sky Nomad*.

The mistake wasn’t stealing a map to a priceless Terran treasure. Nor was it taking it from a ruthless terrorist group. She fingered the small, blue orb hanging from a chain around her neck. She knew Golden Nova had sent assassins after her. She’d caught a glimpse of them on Nishii Prime, had a close shave with a knife on Rendar, and narrowly escaped a group of them on Grion II.

Stealing the map was maybe not the smartest move...but Dakota loved to take a few risks. If you never took a risk, you stayed stuck. Without some risks, life wasn’t worth living.

Without some risks, you ended up with nothing.

She didn’t plan on having nothing.

No, Dakota’s biggest mistake was picking the Phoenix Deep-Space Convoy to hide out on.

Yes, they’d take her out into uncharted space, far from Golden Nova’s spies, assassins, and crazy followers. And she’d be a lot closer to the treasure she was determined to find.

But one look at convoy master Dare Phoenix, and her error had become apparent. One look in his silver eyes, and she knew he missed little. And that he liked to be the master of his own domain.

Dare Phoenix was going to be a problem. From the top of his handsome head, to the bottom of his long, lean, hard body. A *big* problem.

Her fingers curled into a fist. Too bad. Because Dakota Jones liked being in charge as well. No one was master of her or her life.

She suppressed a grimace. She had to stay in disguise and in character. Right now, she was Dena Johns. A plain woman with few prospects, looking for a new life.

Ahead, the passengers were all talking excitedly amongst themselves. They'd moved into a spacious corridor. At least she hadn't made a mistake about the ship itself. The *Sky Nomad* was large and, while not fancy, it looked comfortable. This wasn't a pleasure cruise, but she knew the cabins were well appointed, and the ship had a top-of-the-line galley, hydroponics system, gym, large cargo areas, and a small but experienced crew. Hell, it even had an arboretum.

Oh, and it had excellent weapons capabilities. In uncharted space, deep-space convoys could face anything: space pirates, hostile aliens, and some things never seen before in civilized space.

The group turned a corner, and Dakota quickened her pace to keep up. Ahead, she saw another tall man waiting for them.

"Hi," the man said with a smile. "I'm Justyn Phoenix. Welcome."

He was a shade shorter than his brother, with a more open and friendly face. He had shaggy hair, and a wide, sexy smile. This one was the charmer of the brothers, she guessed.

"I'll show you to your cabins," Justyn said. "You can freshen up before we take off."

Dakota cleared her throat. "How long until we're underway? Will it be long?"

He glanced her way. "Less than an hour. You'll have plenty of time to clean up and join us on the bridge." His gaze moved over her, but there was no spark of interest or curiosity, and she released a breath. She'd purposely picked a disguise that blended, and, thankfully, so far, nobody had really noticed her.

Well, almost nobody. She shoved the thought of Dare Phoenix away.

This Phoenix brother here saw exactly what she wanted him to see. Maybe she was worried about Dare for no reason. Maybe that one shocking look they'd shared had been nothing. She glanced at her timepiece. If any of the Golden Nova assassins had followed her to Galaxy's Edge—who was she kidding, of course they'd followed her—she wanted to be away sooner rather than later.

“Thank you, I’m just eager to be underway.” She managed a bland smile.

“In a hurry?”

The deep, authoritative voice from behind her sent a shiver down her spine. Dakota stayed calm and turned her head a little, catching sight of Dare’s tall form. She kept her eyes downcast.

“Simply eager for our journey to begin.”

“You mean adventure,” one of the young women called out. “We can’t wait, either!”

“Miss Johns, this is your cabin.” Justyn waved a hand at a nearby door.

Keen to get away from them all, Dakota nodded and moved forward, her gaze still on the metal-plate floor. Unfortunately, Dare moved at the same moment she did, and they bumped into each other.

Dakota pulled back so fast she almost stumbled. She’d gotten a hint of hard muscle and warm male.

Strong fingers wrapped around her upper arm.

“Steady there,” Dare said.

With another nod, she pulled away from him and hurried into her cabin. She didn’t look at anyone as she closed the door. It slid shut with a whisper of sound.

*Fuck.* She locked the door and then leaned against it, letting her head drop back against the metal.

Yep, Dare Phoenix was going to be a problem. She’d just have to lay very low and stay out of his way. Taking in a deep breath, she studied the cabin.

There was a double bed with a green cover, a built-in desk and cupboard on the far wall, and an adjoining doorway to a simple bathroom with a single shower stall. She wrinkled her nose. Starships used water-saving devices, which meant the shower would be little more than mist. She hated them.

There was one small, round window that right now gave her a close-up view of a battered section of the space station. She wandered closer. Not only battered, but replete with some laser burns, if she wasn’t mistaken.

Dakota tossed her coat off, glad to be rid of its bulky weight. Next, she reached up and ripped her wig off, letting her own dark hair spill around her shoulders. Stars, that felt good. The damned wig was itchy as hell.

She started to pace. Right now, Golden Nova's brainwashed lunatics would be searching the space station for her. She rubbed the back of her neck. The itchy feeling there had nothing to do with the wig and everything to do with being hunted.

She stopped and sucked in a few deep breaths. Soon they'd be underway, and the edgy feeling dogging her would fade. She nodded to herself. Everything was going according to plan, and would be fine.

And she could handle Dare Phoenix.

Dakota was good at slipping in under the radar and doing what had to be done to get a job finished. And this was the biggest job of her life.

She picked up the orb nestled between her breasts, and cradled the small sphere in her hand. It wasn't just a pretty jewel; it was actually an advanced holo-orb that held the map to the treasure.

As her fingers moved over it, the orb glowed a brilliant blue. The next second, a holographic star map projected into the air above the sphere.

Her gaze went straight to the golden planet glowing on it. The location of the Atocha Treasure.

An ancient Terran motherlode of gold and silver coins, artifacts, and fabulous jewels. Once, it had been lost under Terran seas on a shipwreck. It had been recovered, displayed, and then taken off Earth on a starship during the Great Terran War, never to be seen again.

Instead of being lost under the waves of Earth's oceans, it was now lost in the depths of uncharted space.

And Dakota Jones was going to find it.

She stared at the planet. It was a shame the star map was currently undecipherable. It matched no known star maps. She touched the orb again, and the projection faded away. But she'd done her research and she had some hunches. And Dakota was pretty good with hunches.

Finding the Atocha Treasure would be everything to her. Her heartbeat sped up. She'd started life with nothing and since then, she'd gone from job to gig to scam throughout her entire thirty years. People had tried to swindle her and hurt her, and repeatedly stolen from her. Her jaw tightened. All she wanted was to live in luxury for the rest of her life. No hunger, no worrying about where she'd sleep, worrying who was going to take advantage of her next.

The Atocha Treasure was the key to that dream. And nothing—and no one—was going to stop her from finding it.