

STARSHIP:  
PIRATE



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**STARSHIP: MUTINY**  
**BOOK ONE**

**NEW DREAMS FOR OLD**

**MIKE RESNICK**

**STARSHIP:  
PIRATE**

**BOOK TWO**



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*To Carol, as always,*

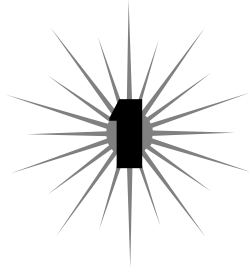
And to the rest of the Catalunya gang:

Jack McDevitt

Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Robert J. Sawyer





The broad, burly, three-legged alien spun slowly down the battered, shopworn corridor, muttering to himself. He growled at a junior officer who didn't get out of his way fast enough, glared at another who quickly stepped into a room to let him pass in the narrow corridor, and finally reached the small, cramped mess hall of the *Theodore Roosevelt*. He spotted his captain sitting at an oft-repaired table, nursing a beer, spun across the room in his surprisingly graceful gait until he reached the table, and then seated himself.

"I hate these chairs!" he muttered in his deep guttural voice.

"I'm glad to see you too, Four Eyes," said the captain pleasantly.

"We have to get more furniture designed for Molarians if I'm going to continue to serve on this ship."

"Maybe we'll just jettison you into space," replied Wilson Cole. "It's probably cheaper than buying new chairs, and it would certainly be easier on everyone's nerves."

"You'd be lost without me."

"Who needs *you*? I think we've been lost for the past three days." Cole took a sip of his beer. "At the very least, we're in uncharted territory."

"Damn it, Wilson!" snapped the alien. "What the hell are we doing here?"

"I don't know about you," said Cole. "As for me, I'm drinking beer and listening to you show off all the new Terran words you've learned." He paused and stared at the alien. "Are you going to keep it up, or would you like to tell me what's really bothering you?"

“I don’t know,” said the alien. “When we decided to become a pirate ship, I thought life was going to be romantic and filled with adventure.”

“You want adventure?” replied Cole with a smile. “Go back into the Republic. They’ll give you all the adventure you can handle, or have you forgotten why we’re out here in the middle of nowhere?”

“I know, I know. The last time I checked there was a ten-million-credit bounty on your ugly head.”

“I hope you’re not feeling ignored,” said Cole. “As of last week they’re offering three million for Commander Forrice as well.”

“I can’t tell you how flattered I am,” muttered Forrice.

Cole laughed aloud. “I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again. What I love about Molarians is that they’re the only other race besides Men who share our speech patterns and our sense of humor.”

“Only one of us is trying to be funny,” said Forrice. “We’ve been clear of the Republic and traveling the Inner Frontier for almost three weeks. Isn’t it about time we went about the business of pirating?”

“Soon.”

“What are you waiting for?”

“I’m waiting to feel safe.”

“You’ve been safe for three weeks,” said Forrice. “No one’s come after us.”

“I don’t know that, and neither do you,” replied Cole. “Look, I was the Navy’s first mutineer in more than six centuries. It doesn’t matter that they know I saved five million lives by taking over the ship. Once the press got the story and ran with it, there was no way I was going to beat the charges—and then the *Teddy R* made the Navy look like fools when the crew broke me out of jail. If you were the Republic, would *you* give up this soon?”

“They’re fighting a war, Wilson,” the Molarian pointed out. “They’ve got better uses for their assets.”



“I agree—but if they were that reasonable, I wouldn’t have had to take over the ship in the first place. The fact that we haven’t spotted any pursuit for the last few weeks doesn’t necessarily mean they’ve called it off. That’s why we’re in the emptiest sector of the Frontier we could find; it’ll be easier to make sure no one’s tracking us. And once I know they’re not pursuing us, I’ll buy you a cutlass and let you maim and pillage to your heart’s content—always assuming that Molarians have hearts.”

“You really think they might still be looking for us?” asked Forrice.

“If I’d killed Fleet Admiral Garcia or blown up a friendly planet by mistake, they might have given up by now.” Cole smiled ruefully. “But they’ll never forgive me for escaping while the press was gathered on Timos for my court-martial.”

“All this running away is getting on my nerves.”

“I didn’t know you had any.”

The Molarian stared at him. “I’m getting so bored that I even tried some of that stuff you’re drinking.”

“You mean beer?” asked Cole. “I wouldn’t think it would do much for the Molarian digestive system.”

Forrice made a face, which would have seemed hideous to anyone who was unacquainted with his race. “What it did was totally clean out the Molarian digestive system,” he admitted. “I was sick for a whole day.”

“We don’t have days out here,” noted Cole. “Just three eight-hour shifts of night.” He paused. “What else is bothering you, Four Eyes?”

“We’re running short of food.”

“We’ll synthesize some.”

“And fuel.”

“We don’t need fuel except for accelerating and braking,” answered Cole placidly.

“And there are no Molarian females left on this damned ship!” exploded Forrice.

“Ah,” said Cole with a smile. “Now we come to it.”

“You’d feel the same way if you didn’t have half the human females fighting for the right to cohabit with the great galactic hero!”

“Do I detect a note of jealousy?”

“Jealousy, envy, frustration—it’s all the same when you’re stuck on a ship without the opposite sex.”

“And I’m told Molarian females are about as opposite as they come,” said Cole.

“Enough,” said Forrice. “If anyone’s going to make crude remarks about Molarian females, it’s my prerogative.”

“By the way, I thought Molarian females were seasonal.”

“*They* are!” thundered Forrice. “*I’m* not!”

“There are two other Molarians aboard,” said Cole. “Go swap dirty jokes with them. But when you’re through, we’ve got some important things to discuss.”

“We have?” asked Forrice quickly. “You mean you and me?”

Cole shook his head. “The whole ship. But we’ll start with what passes for the senior staff, which means you, me, and Sharon Blacksmith.”

“So it’s a Security matter?”

“No.”

“Then why include the Chief of Security?”

“I value her opinion.”

“And you share her bedroom,” said Forrice bitterly.

“Actually, she shares mine,” replied Cole with no show of embarrassment. “It’s bigger. Why don’t you meet me there at 2200 hours, ship’s time?”

Forrice nodded his massive head. “I’ll be there.”

He lumbered off, and Cole finished his beer, stood up, stretched,

and wandered out into the corridor. *We really need to do something to modernize this ship*, he thought; *I'll bet it hasn't been touched in fifty years. Most of it looks like a cheap spaceband's dive on a trading world, and the rest looks even worse.*

He wanted to go to his cabin and relax, perhaps finish the book he'd been reading, but he decided it was more important to maintain the illusion that the captain was involved in the mundane day-to-day business of running the ship, so he took an airlift up to the bridge instead.

Lieutenant Christine Mboya, a tall, slender, grimly efficient woman in her late twenties, sat at a computer complex, studying screens, whispering commands and questions that neither Cole nor anyone else could hear.

Malcolm Briggs, an athletic-looking young man, also wearing a lieutenant's uniform, sat at the weapons station, watching a holographic entertainment that was being transmitted to his gunnery console from the ship's library.

Overhead, floating in a transparent pod attached high on the wall, was Wxakgini, the only pilot the ship had had for the past seven years. He was a member of the Bdxeni race, a bullet-shaped being with insectoid features, curled into a fetal position, multifaceted eyes wide open and unblinking, with six shining cables connecting his head to a navigational computer hidden inside the bulkhead. The Bdxeni never slept, which made them ideal pilots, and they formed such a symbiosis with their ships' navigational computers that it was difficult to tell where one started and the other left off.

"Captain on the bridge!" announced Christine, jumping to attention and snapping off a salute the moment she saw him. Briggs followed suit a few seconds later.

"Cut it out," said Cole. "How many times do I have to explain that we're not in the Navy anymore?"

“Maybe so, but you’re still the captain,” said Christine stubbornly.

“I am an outlaw,” he said patiently. “You are an outlaw. Outlaws don’t salute each other.”

“*This* outlaw does, sir,” she replied.

“So does this one, sir,” added Briggs, saluting again.

“I think when we finally update this ship, the very first piece of new equipment I’m going to install is a mainmast, so I can tie subordinate officers to it and flog the hell out of them,” said Cole wryly. He looked up toward the ceiling. “Thanks, Pilot.”

“For what?” asked Wxakgini, staring endlessly at some fixed point in time and space that only he and the navigational computer could see or comprehend.

“For not paying any special attention to me whenever I come onto the bridge.”

“Oh,” said Wxakgini tonelessly, all thoughts of Cole and the rest of the bridge’s personnel seemingly vanished from his mind.

“Now that we’re all through greeting each other and ignoring our Captain’s wishes,” he said to Christine, “is there anything to report?”

“Still no signs of pursuit, sir,” she replied. “We’ve passed eleven habitable planets during the last Standard day. None of them have been colonized or show enough neutrino activity to suggest any sign of industrial civilization.”

“All right,” said Cole. “Four Eyes is feeling ill-used. It’ll be a shame to spoil his snit, but I think it’s safe to say that the Republic has decided we’re more trouble than we’re worth, at least for the moment. They need every ship they’ve got for the war against the Teroni Federation.”

“What now, sir?” asked Briggs.

“I guess we wear eye patches and practice saying ‘A vast there’ and ‘Shiver me timbers.’”

Christine couldn't repress a giggle, but Briggs persisted: "Seriously, sir, what do we do now?"

"Seriously, I'm not sure yet," answered Cole. "I have a feeling there's more to the pirating game than meets the eye."

"I always thought it was simple and straightforward," said Briggs.

"Okay," said Cole. "Pick a target."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"When's the last time you or Christine spotted a luxury ship?" asked Cole. "Or even a cargo ship?"

"Eleven days, sir," said Christine promptly.

"And the last planet worth plundering?"

"There were diamonds on two of the worlds we passed yesterday, and fissionable materials on three more."

"But no industrial civilizations," noted Cole.

"No, sir," said Briggs.

"I thought you wanted to be a pirate," he said. "But of course, if you'd rather be a miner, we can drop you off and come back in a couple of years to see what you've uncovered."

"I think I'll stick to piracy, sir," said Briggs.

"If you insist, Mr. Briggs . . ." said Cole, unable to keep the amused tone from his voice. "As for ships," he continued, "a lot of them will be better armed than we are, and some will have Republic escorts."

"You're the most decorated officer in the Republic," said Briggs. "You'll figure out the best way to go beat them, sir."

"I am no longer an officer in the Republic, and none of my medals was for excelling at piracy," said Cole. "This is as new to me as I hope it is to the rest of you."

"But you've been thinking about it since we escaped," said Briggs with absolute certainty. "I'm sure you've got it all doped out by now."

“Your confidence is appreciated,” said Cole. *And don’t buy any bargain real estate*, he added mentally. He turned to Christine. “I suppose you might as well start mapping out the most populated worlds on the Inner Frontier, and see if you can dig up any information about the major trade routes. There’s no rush on this; we’re probably days away from any of them, and to tell the truth I don’t know if I’ll use anything you manage to find. But on the assumption that I might need it, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to begin gathering the information now.”

“Is there anything I can do, sir?” asked Briggs.

“See if you can find out the schedules and routes of the largest spaceliners that travel to the Inner Frontier. They probably don’t hit more than a dozen worlds—Binder X, Roosevelt III, a few others—but see what you can learn. And be subtle.”

“Subtle, sir?”

“We are outlaws with prices on our heads,” he explained patiently, wondering how long it would be before the crew started getting used to the idea. “Don’t let anyone trace your queries back to the source.”

“Yes, sir,” said Briggs, offering a snappy salute.

Cole stared at him, considered explaining yet again that saluting wasn’t necessary, decided it would be an exercise in futility, and left the bridge.

“You’re going to break that poor young hero-worshiper’s spirit,” said a familiar female voice.

“You were monitoring that?” Cole asked of the empty air as he traversed the corridor on his way to the airlift.

“I like to snoop,” said Sharon Blacksmith’s disembodied voice. “It’s my job.”

“If you were snooping earlier, you know I want you in my cabin at 2200 hours,” said Cole.

“You *always* want me in your cabin at 2200 hours,” replied the voice.

“With your clothes on.”

“What fun is that?” asked Sharon.

“Fun time’s over,” said Cole. “It’s time we got down to the serious business of plundering the galaxy.”