**Airship Duchess II**

1882

Almirante Javier Santos-Rodriguez stared out the window of his bridge, and down at the mottled Earth far below. Soon, they would be at their destination, the Galapagos Islands. He led a skilled crew with his capable, if firm, hand.

The Royal Airship *Duchess II* was a large and, for the most part, comfortable vessel that handled easily. Her 3 brass-and-iron steam engines pumped out an incredible 400 horsepower each, allowing the ship to sail the skies for a week without landing to refuel. In that time, the *Duchess II* could easily make the trip from Colombia to the islands.

Spain had made amends with its former colony of Colombia, and now the two countries worked in peace against the English and the Dutch to secure the Americas for the glory of all Hispanic peoples. Colombia’s independence had come without a great deal of bloodletting, anyway. What there had been was easily overlooked in the peace treaty.

“All systems check out, Almirante. We should arrive at the Galapagos station in little more than 2 hours, sir,” Lt. Garcia said, snapping a tight and official salute.

“Thank you, Lt. Has the Galapagos station been notified of our impending arrival?”

“Unknown, sir.”

Turning his attention to his communications officer, Almirante Santos-Rodriguez raised his voice slightly. “Capitán Bardem, radio the Galapagos station to alert them to our presence and seek clearance to land.”

Capitán de Fragata Bardem picked up the brass receiver, flipped one switch, and turned the crank located to the right of his station. “Galapagos station, come in please. This is *Duchess II*. Are you receiving? Over.”

…no response…

A little frustrated, Capitán de Fragata Bardem repeated, “Galapagos station, come in please. This is *Duchess II*. Are you receiving? Over.”

Finally, a voice crackled through. It was an Englishman. “*Duchess II*, we’re receiving you. Sorry, I was in the lav. I’m all alone at the station today.”

“*Duchess II* to commence initial approach. We should be on the ground in 2 hours, requesting permission to land.”

“*Duchess II*, I don’t have you on the schedule for today. Wait…that’s the wrong day. Hold on a tic…yes, there it is. Sorry, I was looking at the wrong day. Yes, you are scheduled. We have no traffic in your flight line, you may land when ready.”

“Thank you, Galapagos, we’ll see you soon.” After the call disconnected, he muttered under his breath, “Damned Limey pendejo.”

Just has Capitán de Fragata Bardem was about to relay news of his call to the Almirante, the brass funnel sparked to life, with its tinny sound. “Almirante Rodriguez, sir? This is Capitán de Fragata Skye. I need to speak with you, sir.”

Almirante Rodriguez crossed the hardwood-floored bridge and took the receiver directly out of Capitán Bardem’s hand without a word.

“Yes, what is it Capitán de Fragata? I see. Yes, but you better not be wasting my time. Yes, I’ll see you there in a few minutes. Adios.”

“Capitán de Fragata Bardem, I have a pressing matter I have to attend to. You have the con.”

“Si, Almirante.”

The men on the bridge all rose and saluted as the Almirante bade them his goodbyes and headed off, back to his quarters.

After a few minutes of walking along the steam pipes and gears of the main corridor, Almirante Rodriguez finally came back to his quarters. Standing just outside the door was Teniente de Navío Lilliana Guittierez, who had been waiting for him, and who was on the other end of the line during his mysterious call on the bridge. She snapped a tight salute when she saw her commanding officer.

“At ease, Teniente.” Almirante Rodriguez unlocked his door and pushed it open. “Please come in.”

“Gracias, Almirante.”

“I assume from your phone call that you had something important to talk about?”

“Si, Almirante.” Lilliana pushed the door closed behind her until she heard it latch.