

The Lost Stars: Shattered Spear

By Jack Campbell

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Before Iceni and Drakon can put their house in order, they must deal with an even greater threat. An enigma warship has appeared and vanished near a Syndic colony. If the aliens are capable of jumping into other human-occupied star systems, then billions of people could be vulnerable to a hostile invasion fleet anywhere they choose to strike.

But an even greater vulnerability lies with Iceni and Drakon, as a once-trusted adviser-turned-saboteur plans revenge...

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Editorial Review

Review
Praise for The Lost Stars series

“A fast-paced thrill ride that leaps nimbly from harrowing to heartbreaking to heroic.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Campbell expertly cranks up the military, political, and sexual tension.”—*Kirkus Reviews* (Starred Review)

“There is one thing Jack Campbell really does very well indeed [and] it is writing space battles. They are fabulous, and there are enough here to give you a real taste of what it would be like to be up there and shot at.”—SFcrowsnest

About the Author
“Jack Campbell” is the pen name of John G. Hemry, a retired naval officer who graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis before serving with the surface fleet and in a variety of other assignments. He is the author of The Lost Fleet series as well as the Stark’s War series and the Paul Sinclair series. His short fiction appears frequently in *Analog* magazine. He lives with his indomitable wife and three children in Maryland.

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Chapter one

Freedom or death.

Dignity or slavery.

Give life to something new or die in the collapse of the old.

When empires fall, the outposts of empire do not immediately disappear. Men and women continue to hold the walls they have defended. The cause they once served may no longer exist, but they stay on, holding a line that no longer has meaning.

Some of them find new reasons to fight. At such times, each man and woman must decide whether to hold on to the past, or to fight for the future.

In Midway Star System, President Iceni and General Drakon were building a future different from the oppressive and brutal rule of the Syndicate Worlds. Nearby star systems were choosing whether to align with Midway, risking devastation at the hands of vengeful Syndicate forces, or to cling to loyalty to the Syndicate, which had never worried about repaying loyalty in kind but had maintained stability for generations.

Taroa, Ulindi, Kane, and Kahiki had either joined with Midway or were seeking ties.

Iwa Star System, facing a threat much greater than anyone yet realized, would soon have to deal with the same decision.

ÒWho is in command of your ships?Ó the woman demanded, her image visible to Kapitan Kontos on the

bridge of the battle cruiser Pele. She wore the suit of a Syndicate CEO, but some of the details of her clothing reflected sub-CEO status. Kontos wondered what had happened to the last CEO. Iwa hadnÕt revolted against the Syndicate, but there were unmistakable signs that the Syndicate presence at lonely Iwa was as frayed as the cuff of the CEOÕs suit.

"We have not received appropriate entry reports following your arrival," the woman said in tones not quite arrogant enough for an experienced CEO. "You are to explain your presence at Iwa and subordinate yourself to lawful Syndicate authority without delay. Forthepeople, Vasquez, out," she finished, running together the words of "for the people" in the usual Syndicate manner that reduced a supposed tribute to an empty string of sounds.

Kontos didn't have much experience with the diplomatic side of being a senior officer. Truth to tell, he didn't have much experience at all. Rebellion produced some amazing promotion opportunities. It also produced a lot of opportunities to be killed.

Still, despite his lack of experience, it wasn't hard for Kontos to understand why the authorities at Iwa Star System would be worried when a battle cruiser and a troop transport showed up from Midway. Midway was both a fairly well-off star system and the center of rebellion against the Syndicate in this region of space.

In contrast, Iwa was the sort of star system that was often summarized as "too much of nothing." A lot of asteroids and small barely-planets, a single gas giant that had nothing special about it, and beyond that several larger worlds that were simply giant balls of rock and ice. Only a single planet about nine light minutes from the star was marginally habitable, but too cold for human comfort, and its atmosphere contained too little oxygen while containing too many toxic compounds that would ravage human lungs. The Syndicate had nonetheless planted a colony there, the buildings and streets and factories mostly buried under the surface to allow easier heating. Iwa had once been a fallback position if Midway had fallen to the alien enigmas, with extensive fortifications and bases begun, then abandoned in various stages of completion as the Syndicate first diverted resources for the far-off war with the Alliance, and was later forced to refocus internally on its crumbling empire.

Kontos considered his reply for a few more moments. According to the rules by which the Syndicate worked, those in a position of strength were expected to lord it over individuals with weaker power bases, and those who were weaker were expected to bluff against their peers but to offer submission to the powerful. Every action was judged in terms of how it displayed strength or weakness, respect or insubordination.

The transmission from the Syndicate CEO had been sent just over three hours ago from the main inhabited world at Iwa. Kontos's reply would take another three hours to make its way back, because light only traveled at about eighteen million kilometers per minute, and there was still three light hours' distance between Pele and the planet where the Syndicate CEO resided. But by the rigid rules of Syndicate protocol, that CEO would be timing the reply to see how long Kontos took to transmit his answer. A subordinate was expected to reply within seconds. An equal could take a few minutes. A reply that was received in anything longer than six hours and a few minutes would be considered either a deliberate show of strength or a deliberate insult.

So Kapitan Kontos waited, purposely taking his time, while the specialists on the bridge of Pele pretended not to watch the clock and hid smiles at the way their Kapitan was disrespecting the Syndicate CEO. Kontos himself had little use for Syndicate CEOs. But the specialists, once all known as "workers" under the Syndicate system, tended to hate the CEOs who had been the highest level of official enforcing their subjugation to the Syndicate. Though "hate" was probably far too mild a word for the workers' feelings.

About ten minutes having elapsed since the receipt of the message, Kontos composed himself, trying to look every bit an officer of his rank and one who cared little for the expectations of a Syndicate CEO, then activated his reply. "This is Kapitan Kontos of the Free and Independent Midway Star System battle cruiser Pele. My ship is escorting troop transport HTTU 458, which is carrying ground forces and mobile forces personnel of the Syndicate Worlds who were captured by the forces of Midway at Ulindi Star System. In keeping with our agreement when they surrendered, our prisoners will be released to your custody. Do not bother claiming that you cannot take these people. We know that with the now-empty barracks that once held construction workers, the existing living facilities at Iwa are more than adequate to handle the additional Syndicate soldiers and crew members who are in the troop transport. Those personnel will require further transport to other locations in Syndicate space," he added, knowing how it would enrage the Syndicate CEO to be given a job to do by someone like Kontos.

"Once we have dropped off the Syndicate personnel," Kontos continued, "we will return to Midway. We have no hostile intent toward Iwa and will not launch any attacks while here. Unless we are first attacked, in which case we will reply with all the force of which this battle cruiser is capable. For the people, Kontos, out," he concluded, saying the last phrase with slow emphasis.

CEO Vasquez would not be happy with that reply, but unless she was a complete idiot she would limit her objections to bluster and legalisms. "Have we spotted any signs of possible hidden defenses?" Kontos asked.

"None, Kapitan," Pele's senior operations specialist replied. "The Syndicate records of the work being done here match what we can see, but most of that work is incomplete or clearly abandoned, showing no weaponry, no signs of human presence, and not even traces of power sources."

"Some defensive weaponry had been installed," Kontos said. "I saw those completed work orders in captured files."

"Yes, Kapitan. But those installations are now vacant. From what our sensors are showing, it looks like the Syndicate has been recently again cannibalizing Iwa for weapons, sensors, and anything else that is easily removed."

"It does," Kontos agreed. "Is this right? Communications we are intercepting within the star system indicate that only a single company of Syndicate ground forces remain?"

"Several messages that we intercepted reference that, Kapitan," the comm specialist replied, her voice confident. "There is only an Executive Third Class commanding them."

"An Executive Third Class?" Kontos questioned. "That is the senior Syndicate ground forces commander in Iwa at this time?"

"Yes, Kapitan."

It seemed impossible that even the Syndicate, overextended everywhere, would leave such a junior executive in command of the forces at Iwa. But, then, Iwa had little worth defending. "The Syndicate probably would have abandoned Iwa completely by now if Midway had not revolted," Kontos commented. "As it is, they are doing the minimum necessary to keep it as a potential staging ground for further attacks on us. Try to spot any indications that the Syndicate has shifted resources from here to Moorea. And try to pick up any comm chatter about the situation at Moorea and Palau. Anything about Syndicate activity, or other threats. President Iceni wants to know anything we can discover about the warlord or pirate who rumors say is

operating in the region near Moorea Star System."

After that, it was only a matter of waiting as the battle cruiser and the troop transport crawled at point one five light speed toward the inhabited world. Forty-five thousand kilometers per second sounded fast on a planet, and was in fact impossibly fast in such a limited environment. But in space, where planets orbited millions and billions of kilometers apart, even such velocities took a while to cover distances too huge for human instincts to fully grasp. At point one five light speed, the three light hours that separated them from the inhabited world would take twenty hours to cover, but since the planet was itself moving through its orbit at about thirty-five kilometers per second, Pele and the troop transport had to aim to intercept the planet as it moved, their paths forming a huge arc through space.

"Kapitan," the comm specialist reported, "we have intercepted a system-wide message from CEO Vasquez ordering a safety stand-down by all Syndicate forces."

"That is certainly the safest course of action for them," Kontos agreed with a smile. Technically, CEO Vasquez was not surrendering to Kontos's demands. She could argue to her Syndicate superiors at Prime Star System that the safety stand-down had left her unable to fight. The senior CEOs at Prime probably wouldn't be impressed by that claim, but Vasquez was making the best of a situation with no good alternatives for her.

Pele and the transport were still a light hour away from the inhabited planet when an alert sounded. The tension level on the bridge immediately jumped as the warning of a warship was accompanied by a bright new warning marker on Pele's combat displays.

Kontos stared at his display, baffled, as the warning symbol appeared where no symbol should appear on the outskirts of this star system. The location was nearly five light hours distant, on the other side of Iwa Star System, so the unknown warship had appeared there five hours ago.

And then vanished as quickly as it had appeared.

"What was that?" Kontos demanded. "What kind of ship was that?"

Pele's sensors had automatically recorded everything that could be seen of the other ship in every frequency of the visual and electromagnetic spectrum, then compared that to the information in its databases. The answer to Kontos's question popped up on his display before he had finished asking the question. "An enigma ship?"

"Yes, Kapitan," the operations specialist replied, sounding worried. "One of their light combatants, about equal in size to our light cruisers."

"How could an enigma ship be at Iwa? The only jump point in a human-occupied star system that they can access in this region of space is at Midway. Iwa is too far from any enigma-controlled star system to be reached by them using jump drives. He must have been hiding from our sensors," Kontos concluded.

"Kapitan," the systems security specialist said, "we are scanning our sensor systems and all other ship systems now. No enigma-originated worms that could have hidden the presence of a ship have been found."

Kontos shook his head, glaring at his display. "You are saying that the ship was not there, then it was, then it wasn't? That could only mean it jumped into this star system, then jumped out again almost immediately."

"Yes, Kapitan," the systems security specialist agreed with clear reluctance.

"How is that possible?" Kontos demanded, turning to look at all of the specialists at their watch stations on the bridge. "There is no jump point at that spot in space."

"That location is nowhere near the jump points that Iwa has, Kapitan," the senior specialist said. "There are only two possibilities. Either the detection was a false one, something produced by a glitch in the sensor systems, or there is a jump point at that location that our own systems cannot identify."

Kontos frowned. "Is that possible? A jump point we cannot detect?"

The operations specialist hesitated. Not long ago, when still a worker under the Syndicate system, he would have done his best to avoid providing any useful answer, instead saying whatever he thought his superior wanted to hear. Workers learned the hard way that Syndicate superiors did not want to hear bad news or unexplained events.

But under Kommodor Marphissa, and now Kapitan Kontos, they had been encouraged to think and to give their best information. The specialist spoke slowly, choosing each word with care. "Kapitan, if the enigma warship did appear there, then we would have to conclude that it is possible for a jump point to be at that location, a jump point that we cannot detect with our sensors. But it is also possible that the warship was not really there, that the detection is a ghost generated by a flaw in the sensor systems which was quickly cleared."

Kontos nodded. "Run checks. Full diagnostics on everything. I don't see how this could be anything but the result of a glitch, but let's check it carefully."

"Incoming call from HTTU 458," the comm specialist reported.

The image of HTTU 458's commanding officer appeared before Kontos. "What was that?" she asked. "That ship that appeared on the edge of the star system?"

Kontos paused before answering. "Your ship saw it, too? Was it over the link with Pele?"

"No. My ship's sensors reported a detection independent of that from Pele. They identified what they called an enigma warship in the same location that Pele reported seeing one, then reported that the warship had vanished as if it had entered jump space." The transport's commanding officer shook her head. "But Iwa doesn't have a jump point there."

"No, it doesn't," Kontos said. "Or, rather, it's not supposed to have a jump point there. And we cannot see a jump point in that location."

"I know very little about the aliens, the enigmas. Can they do that?"

It was Kontos's turn to shake his head. "I don't know. Black Jack's people didn't tell us the enigmas could jump to places where we cannot see jump points, but they admitted they were able to learn little about the enigmas."

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