

Here would lie all of those who would do their duty!

STAR TREK - LOTUS FLEET

CAPTIVE STARBASE

The First Adventure of Starbase 10



STAR TREK - LOTUS FLEET

STARBASE 10 : CAPTIVE STARBASE

Season 1 Episode 1

Forum roleplaying session

from May 27th 2009 to July 18th 2009

with excerpts from episodes:

USS Lotus: Changing of the Guard

USS McKenzie: Demons in the Shadows

USS Alsea: Enter Death

USS Spectre: Lament of the Missing

USS Sapentia: The Hunt

Novelization by Kheren

Story concept by Raefis

Cover by Kheren

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(by order of appearance)

Raeffis as Captain Alistair Cobb

Teancum as Ensign Zeezrom Teancum

Greg Patton as Commander Gregory Patton

Quinn Calhoun as Lieutenant Commander Quinn Calhoun

Kiernan O'Clare as Doctor Kiernan O'Clare

MacQueen as Chief Petty Officer Michael MacQueen

Talon as Ensign Sydonna V'Krull

Kheren as Master Chief Petty Officer Kheren

Caltern as Lieutenant Commander Speaker-Of-Names

Joester as Lieutenant Daniel Summers

Drakxii as Ensign Michael O'Conner

John Garrison as Captain John Garrison

Elliago as Doctor Elliago Nasaro-Myth

Kalten as Ensign Kalten Siduri

Caltern as Fleet Captain Kotari

Matija Vuckovic as Lieutenant Matija Vuckovic

Jellico as Captain David E Jellicoe

KRRauw as Fleet Captain K'Rrau

"Here lie three hundred who did their duty."

Motto of Starbase 10's dedication plaque
from the Epitaph of the Battle of Thermophylae
Greece, Sol III

CHAPTER ONE: BARBARIANS AT THE GATES

He'd thought he'd seen it all. The carnage of a high speed impact from a crashed starship, a ship aged along with its crew in a pocket of subspace...

Images, thoughts and feelings that were and were not his own, cascading into his mind at warp speed.

That was over now. He'd been returning with the Defiant class USS McKenzie to Starbase 10, for recuperation, relaxation and repairs. With the Captain in a telepathically induced coma and several other crew in a similar state, it had been a sombre journey.

Not even when they'd transferred whatever was left of the crew of the rescued USS Theory off onto the USS Jeanne Mance, a Ptolemy II class cargo transporter converted into a Federation Medical ship, did the mood change. Not even when he said his goodbyes and took a borrowed class VIII shuttlecraft from the medical ship and set off to Starbase 10 to take on his new post. As Captain and station Commander of the newly commissioned headquarters of Lotus Fleet, the most elite division of Starfleet, under the authority of Fleet captain K'Rrauw, the Commandant of the Hromi sector, he would be overseeing all activities in the tri-border region of Federation Space near both Organian Peace Treaty Zone and the Neutral Zone, respectively the borders shared with the Klingon Empire and the Romulan Star Empire.

It was the moment Starbase 10 came into visual range that his mood finally changed. The sight of one of the gigantic Starbase doors, ripped apart by focused weapon's fire, a cloud of atomised metals surrounding the door, a body floating away... It immediately erased his improving mood and replaced it with momentary fear and then a sense of urgency.

"Starbase 10, this is Shuttlecraft Clausius; please respond" He stated.

Silence.

Not even a hiss of static.

He checked his communications panel. The station had received his message but not responded.

He swivelled to the sensor controls and began a careful, silent scan of the starbase. Low power readings, significant damage to the hull area around the destroyed spacedoor, some signs of fire fights on the nearest internal levels of the station.

Then, his eyes widened as the sensors briefly detected Romulan lifesigns amongst the myriad of Human and other expected Federation ones.

Then as quickly as it appeared, the sensor display disappeared under a frantic hissing of interference.

He paused, looking at the station and reviewing the sensor logs. It looked like the Federation personnel were scattered around the station but the Operations area was devoid of any lifesigns.

Regardless of the risk, he thought, that's my first point of call.

He knew instantly that, if the starbase was to be secured he'd need the functions and systems controlled from Operations.

He tapped the helm controls and took the shuttle in, closer towards the myriad of sensors and communications relays at the top of the starbase, where Operations was located. The shuttle came to a stop about fifty meters from Ops and he set the shuttle systems to low power, retrieved a phaser, a medical Kit, a tricorder and a wrist beacon from the shuttle's main locker and activated on delayed automatic transport the shuttle's two-man transporter.

He felt the tingle of the transporter play over his body and prepared himself for the worst.

And he stepped into a nightmare.

Ops was in almost complete darkness, with a haze of ozone from weapon's fire. He quickly played his phaser and wrist beacon around, but there was no one there.

Not even bodies.

He did not feel that it was a good sign either.

A moment, he saw a movement at the corner of his eye and sharply swiveled towards the large transparencies lining one curved wall. He immediately recognized the one point seventy-five meters tall, sixty-four kilos brown haired, brown-eyed man with faint Trill spots on each side of his head and neck.

It was but his own reflection.

Lowering the phaser, the Half-Human, Half-Trill officer slowly walked around Ops. His leg brushed against something. He turned, and had to hold in a yelp as the arm of Chief Shiran flopped lifelessly to the floor. He was dead, and close by lay the bodies of Captain La Salle and Commander Moth, all of them he recognized from their Starfleet records he had read while en route to assume his new position here on the station. They'd been hit from behind by an energy weapon. It looked like they were trying to get the comm system on line. The huge crescent-shaped console had hidden them from his view until he stumbled right upon them.

He moved to the access points and used the manual actuator to shut the doors, so he wouldn't get shot in the back.

Not a good way to start a new command, he mused.

He moved to the communications system, gently moving the bodies to one side.

We'll mourn them later, he thought sadly.

The comm system was down; the system itself was working but it had no power. The internal sensors were also down so he could not even tell why.

A thought struck him. He contacted his inactive shuttle, and switched the starbase's internal communications grid on relay mode to use the shuttle's communication system. It meant the shuttle's other systems would need to go offline to conserve power, but he did not have much choice; he could not retake the starbase alone or from a single class VIII shuttlecraft.

A few minutes later, the computer onboard the shuttle stated that the re-routing was complete.

He took a deep breath and tapped his combadge.

"To all Starbase 10 crew, this is Captain Alistair Cobb. As per order from Lotus Fleet Command, I am assuming command of Starbase 10. All senior officers report in immediately. I want to know what the hell's going on," He announced.

Bleeping from the console indicated his message had been sent and received by combadges and comm panels all over the station.

Now, he thought. I wait... but not for too long I hope. These Romulans on board the station will also have intercepted my transmission for sure...

* * *

Zeez had just been settling into his new quarters on Starbase 10, stowing the last of his gear. He had then sat down to write in his personal log.

I should only be here a short time before being assigned to a ship.

The tall, heavysset, balding, hazel-eyed middle-aged man had quickly saved his entry, then had looked at the lettering imprinted under his name on the graduation picture with his family. His reason to be here.

"Out to the stars in ships."

I should look at a diagram layout of this place so I have some ideas where things are. This base is a one of a kind. Well, I'll do that in a few minutes.

But then, after a few minutes, the lights suddenly had gone out.

Oh, man, now thought Zeez, frozen in the dark and the silence, now what is going on? Do big stations like this have power outages?

A low level emergency light came on after a little bit.

I wish I had looked at that diagram!

Then, there was the sudden announcement of a captain Alistair Cobb.

And he had not been issued any combadge yet.

Well, he thought, at least this is not a common occurrence. Hmmmm. What could cause it? Well, we are close to the Romulan-Klingon border. The Captain didn't say anything about fighting. Should I carry one of these Romulan disruptor pistols a friend helped me get? I'd probably get in trouble for having a weapon, especially one like this... and look foolish, too. Ah, I'll carry it in my briefcase. Now, out to the turbolift, which probably isn't working if we are under attack and sabotaged, if that power outage is any clue. Better take a shoulder carry strap for this thing.

Finally reaching the lift, he almost bumped nose first into the closed door.

Dead of course. If I can get this door open, I can climb to the promenade deck, and see what might be happening.

And so he did, forcing the door open manually and then using the emergency ladder running all the length of the turbolift shaft. After what seemed like an eternity of climbing, Zeez pushed open the lift doors on the Promenade deck.

"Halt! Who are you?"

Zeez, startled, looked at the grim looking Starfleet crewmen pointing phasers at him.

"Ensign Zeezrom Teancum, newly reported board, awaiting assignment to a starship as a tactical officer. What's going on? I was in my quarters, lights went out."

"Large Romulan boarding party. We're mounting a defense here. Report to Ensign O'Conner... over that way, Sir."

"Okay, thanks, on my way. You didn't have to throw such a wild party on my account."

They all laughed mirthlessly as Zeez went looking for this Ensign O'Conner.

Zeez discarded the case and strapped on the disruptor pistol and holster to his hip then went to look for this Ensign O'Conner.

Numerous decks below within the kilometers-wide space station, a tall, gangly young, blond-haired, blue-eyed Human blinked and looked up from the noisy and flashy energy experiment he was conducting within a portable fusion reactor assembly. He had been focused so deeply on the display of instruments and the workings of the small power source that he hadn't noticed anything going on around him. Startled by the sudden announcement over the comm and having been all but alone in the unused complementary lab for just as long, he touched his combadge to answer the call.

"Patton to Cobb. Welcome to the station. I'm Commander Gregory Patton, Chief Science Officer of the starbase. What has happened with Captain La Salle? I wasn't informed about his departure or any change of command..."

He rambled on for a couple of minutes, then his methodical finally realised that something dreadful must have been happening. Either it had happened quickly or he had been so focused he hadn't heard the internal alarm going off. Or both...

"My apologies, Sir, but can you explain? I haven't heard anything about an alarm situation."

Cobb was already going restless after a few seconds, expecting Romulan shock troops to burst through the security doors, when he heard the voice of Patton. He was understandably relieved when the Chief Science Officer responded.

Hopefully the first of many, he mused.

It seemed that Commander Patton hadn't been aware of the situation. Alistair thought for a moment and summarized that, with the power dampening fields effects on the entire central hub of the ringed starbase, there had probably not been any time for an alert when the invaders boarded, most probably from a cloaked ship.

A quick check of Commander Patton's location revealed that his signal was coming from a science lab, lower and on the other side of the station, in the outer ring itself.

He's outside the dampening field, Alistair realized.

"I'm afraid Commander that you've missed a lot," Alistair finally replied.

He went on to explain that, at some point in the last few hours, he guessed Romulans had boarded Starbase 10 and planted dampening devices that had cut power to the entire central area of the station. Also, he explained a ship had blasted its way out of drydock, leaving a gaping, charred hole where one of the Spacedoors should have been.

He paused before his next revelation.

"I'm sorry to report that Captain La Salle, Commander Moth and Chief Shiran were killed by an energy weapon in the Operations center."

He paused again to let that information sink in. Then he resumed his report:

"As such, we're on our own, facing an unknown number of intruders. I need you to locate these dampening devices and either neutralize them or find a way to counter them," He ordered. "The turbolifts seem to be down as are all systems inside the central section of the starbase, but there is still reserve power in the outer docking ring so it would seem to be a simple case of sabotage of the main reactor."

He was asking a lot and he knew it. But still he finished by adding:

"I'd advise finding a couple of Starbase 10 crewmen and getting some phasers; you're likely to run into trouble at some point. The Romulans are still on the station and their objectives are still undetermined at this point... but most certainly anything but friendly and diplomatic. Keep in contact, Commander... and good luck."

He switched the channel on standby to maintain contact and at the same time free his speakers from any other call.

Well it was a small start, but a welcome one.

Elsewhere on the immense starbase, moving around the servicing sections nearest his location while this was going on, Gregory Patton turned around and looked through the labs. He saw a couple of crewmen who were assisting in various noisy and absorbing delicate experiments, as oblivious to the situation as he had been.

"Ensign Venture! I need you to gather at least ten crewmen armed with phasers. You can find them in the locker next to my office. Then please report back to me." Patton ordered to the small, wiry, sandy-haired man leading the research operation there.

By the tone Greg had in his voice, the ensign understood that the situation was serious. After a few minutes, he reported back, followed by thirteen science and engineering crewmen.

"These are all I could find, Sir." Venture reported.

Greg nodded. It should be enough for now. He briefly explained the situation to them.

"I want you all to secure a perimeter around astrolab 12. I need the equipment there to find a way to find and block these dampening fields the Roms placed around the station. All be very carefull out there; Romulans are aboard and we can expect heavy fire out there. On our way to the lab, check every room, office, cabinet or whatever we pass. We want to find survivors as well as make sure we do not have any Romulan sneaking up on us."

The men and women all nodded. They understood the situation and were prepared to do what it took to make sure the base was secure again.

At the very heart of the colossal construct, one black haired, green-eyed man looked up and almost banged his already hurting head on the roof of the jefferies tube he was in. He stared at the piping and conduits of the exposed overhead above him as if he could see through all the bulkheads at the lone officer in the control center that was calling over station channels. He barely heard it from where he lied.

Who, what...

His aching body and pounding head felt indicative of a good night of shore leave, but the man knew that wasn't, couldn't have been the case. In fact, he had come down to the lower decks for a run and to get acquainted with his new post. He had decided to cut through this section and head back early because he'd forgotten his combadge, a rookie mistake, and must have banged his head into something... an even bigger rookie mistake.

After several failed attempts to stand up after sliding out his tall, solidly built, black clad and grey shouldered frame of the maintenance conduit, he started making his way to the main corridor of the power section of the base.

Well, at least the bleeding has stopped, the black-haired thought as he felt the dried blood on his forehead and the bridge of his nose. *Probably should have a doctor look at it though.*

Not recalling how to get to medical on this huge starbase, the still slightly dazed man found the nearest wall panel and tried to bring up a schematic of the station. But it appeared access was restricted and he finally noticed that only the emergency lighting was operating in this section.

Reflexively, he went to tap his missing combadge.

"Lieutenant Commander Quinn Calhoun to ... Great..."

Unexpectedly, heard a muffled response which sounded like it was coming from down the corridor. As Quinn hurried towards the source, the repeated transmission became more clear.

"To all ... 10 Crew, this is ... Cobb. I am assuming command ..., All sen...cers, report in immediately, I want to know what the hell's going on."

Turing a corner, Quinn found the source of the transmission and was horrified. It was coming from the combadge attached to the corpse of a petty officer with a large hole in her abdomen.

Suddenly it came back to him.

He was heading back to his quarters when he had heard a noise and had turned his head to see what it was. Not seeing anything out of order, he had turned his head back, looking forward, and had seen the butt end of a rifle connect with his face.

As hard as he tried, he still however couldn't remember who, or what, had been holding it.

Quinn reached down and reverently removed the combadge from the petty officer's uniform and activated it.

"This is Lieutenant Commander Quinn Calhoun, Chief of Engineering; what are your orders, Sir?"

"Commander, good to hear you," Alistair replied immediately and with obvious relief in his strained voice. "We're in a hell of a state; no power at all is reaching the central section of the starbase. Only the outer docking ring seems to have power. There appears to be some kind of dampening field in action. I've spoken to Commander Patton, the Chief Science Officer, and he's going to locate the dampening field source. Liase with him and get this starbase back online. Concentrate on the internal sensors, communications and security systems first."

"Aye Captain, I'll rally with Commander Patton ASAP." Quinn replied.

Calhoun knew time was of the essence but he was fairly exposed in his current state. So, before contacting Commander Patton, Quinn made his way to a storage locker he remembered passing during his run. Not recalling the locker's exact location, it took him several minutes of searching to find it again; and Quinn's efforts appeared to be in vain. Apparently, the invaders had also found the storage locker, and not being able to open it, had fired several shots through the hatch but without managing to destroy its reinforced covering. After rearranging the isoliner chips in the door panel and some hard work, Quinn managed to open the hatch just enough to squeeze through.

While most of the equipment in the locker was damaged by residual energy that had seeped through the cracks of the half-blasted hatch, Calhoun was able to gather some useful items: a flashlight, a tricorder, two type-II phasers, an emergency medical kit, and several basic engineering tools. Quinn strapped the flashlight to his arm and was stowing all but a phaser and the tricorder in a pack when his combadge chirped to life again.

"Patton to Calhoun. I'm on my way to the astrometrics lab. We're two decks below at section 12. Please inform me where you can meet us. Be advised, you could run into hostility on your way to us," Greg Patton reported seriously.

Not sooner had the chief science officer of Starbase 10 spoken these last few words, two Romulans appeared instantly and started shooting with disruptors.

"Roger Patton, I'll..." But Quinn was cut off as the sound of several discharging disruptors were relayed over the comm channel.

Not wanting to distract Patton from what was sure to be an intense situation, he tapped his combadge off, knowing the science chief would contact him when he could.

With Astometrics being seventeen decks above him, the chief engineer of Starbase 10 headed to the nearest turbolift, not wanting to waste the time to stealthily climb up. However, Quinn started to get an uneasy feeling when the turbolift doors didn't open as he approached and this was confirmed when they stubbornly remained shut after he tapped the door panel.

Emergency power should have kept them running. No doubt the Romulans sabotaged them to prevent starbase personnel from freely moving about.. or they have broken our security protocols and encoded their use for their sole benefit...

Visually sweeping the corridor to ensure he was alone, Chief Calhoun set to open the door manually. To his chagrin, all that was there when he succeeded was an empty tube extending up and down as far as he could see.

Just my luck, he thought. At least I'll get my exercise today.

Chuckling to himself with the last, he swung into the turbolift shaft and started his long climb up on the emergency ladder.

By that time, the science team had forced the pair of intruders that had stumbled upon them in the corridor to hastily retreat. Soon the invaders would be aware of armed resistance mounting against them... and things would get much hotter. Greg tapped his combadge one more time.

"Patton to Cobb. I've gathered fifteen men and women, including myself. We are making our way to the astrometrics lab where we can find a way to or block the fields or find the emitters locations. I could use the help of an engineer somewhere. Have you had contact with the new chief engineer, Commander... Commander Quinn Calhoun?"

Alistair smiled to himself. Even in a crisis, Starfleet Officers could always be relied on.

"Commander, I've been in contact with Commander Calhoun and instructed him to work with you on the dampening field problem. I suggest you contact him and appraise him of your plan," he replied then. "You may have issue getting the Astrometrics lab online though, as its in one of the unpowered areas, but I'm sure you'll think of something. Cobb out."

He switched to another channel and asked a young nurse to begin forming a team to work their way to sickbay.

What he needed now was a Doctor.

* * *

Doctor Kiernan O'Clare's eyes opened slowly, allowing dim light to softly filter into focus.

She found herself staring upward at the infirmary's ceiling. In her groggy state, it took a few seconds for her to realize she was laying on the floor and for the throbbing headache to sit in. As she closed her eyes and moved her arm up to run her hand across her blood soaked forehead, her actions were interrupted by a hard kick to her ribcage.

"This one is awake!" shouted a rough voice near her.

"On your feet," another loud, unknown voice demanded.

Without opening her eyes, O'Clare rolled over into a prone position and raised herself onto her knees. The sensation of a rifle barrel being pressed into the back of her head caused her to speed up this process.

As O'Clare turned to face her captor, she immediately recognized the grey quilted, shoulder-padded uniforms and especially the green-tinged, sharp angular features with upswept brows and pointed ears.

Romulans.

The one nearest of her grabbed her by the collar of her uniform and pulled her forward.

"Who are you?," he demanded.

"Who are *you*?" she questioned back sarcastically.

With her bearings starting to stabilize, O'Clare grabbed the Romulan's wrist that was clinching her jacket and charged forward. The sudden aggressiveness of the maneuver surprised him, causing him to stumble and bend backwards over a biobed. With her free hand, she started to struggle against him for control of the disruptor pistol he was holding.

A discharge of a second disruptor brought the action to a dead halt.

"Enough!"

Both O'Clare and the Romulan she had pinned turned to face the other occupants of the room. The sight only had a moment to register as she was caught off guard by a sucker punch.

The grey-clad soldier pushed her back and stood upright, subsequently dragging her towards the rest of the captured medical crew. The other Starfleet members scurried to make a spot, as she was thrown against the wall the rest were lined up against.

The crew sat motionless with their hands on their head. The captor she had struggled with now stood guard over them, while the other continued to rummage through the medical supplies.

* * *

My first day on my very first posting and I get placed in the brig. Crewman MacQueen thought bitterly.

He wasn't alone. Ensign Michael MacQueen was grouped in with three other crewmen and women of Starbase 10.

They were all lighter of hair, darker of eye, younger and smaller than he was at one point eight meters and ninety kilos with tousled black hair and fierce raptor-like blue eyes.

And these intense eyes watched the backs of three Romulan guards.

What do they want with the starbase? he wondered silently. We're ten light years away from the Neutral Zone and there is not even a fleet attached to us yet, barely a pair of small ships! And Starbase 24 is halfway closer to their border than we are! it makes no strategic or tactical sense. Hell, it makes NO sense at all!

Upon beam up from the supply ship that had brought him here with several cadets and newly graduated officers like him, Michael was instantly taken prisoner by an ambushing squad of Romulan troopers popping out of nowhere, immediately stunned by disruptor bolts and crudely thrown into the station's brig. He had had immediate thoughts of fighting back, but the Romulans were heavily armed and MacQueen hadn't been issued with a phaser yet. And they were now depossessed of everything but their uniforms and now were encased between thick reinforced bulkheads and a forcefield.

Michael paced the floor in a small circle as the other crewpeople sat on retracting benches. He was hoping for a chance to get out of the cell and sending a message to the Romulans.

"No one is coming." A woman then said, her blonde head lowered between her hands, cascading over her cadet uniform. "The Romulans are going to kill us all."

"We're pretty much doomed." A man agreed, his own cadet uniform soiled by the blood that had poured earlier from his split lower lip. "Romulans don't take prisoners, do they?"

The young blue-eyed ensign spread his hands around to cover them all with a sarcastic smirk. Then his expression turned as serious and determined as his voice:

"Someone will come." Michael assured them. "We won't be in here forever."

"So... we just... wait and see?" The fourth prisoner asked, spreading his arms, one sleeve of his petty officer uniform torn off. "We've got to do something!"

Michael spun around to face him.

"Like what? Charge the containment field? At the moment, we're better off right here, so just stay put."

The man shook his head.

"I don't like it. Let's take action."

"Be quiet." MacQueen hissed. "No one does anything to provoke the Romulans, understand? You're right, he then shot back at the other man, they don't take prisoners; so, why are we here, still alive? There is more here than a simple attack and if they keep us alive, it's because they have some damn good reason to do so. As long as we are still alive and conscious, let's concentrate on finding out what it could be, shall we?"

No one said anything after that and Michael continued to wait. At least his proposal would keep them all thinking about a problem instead of wallowing in despair like they had been starting to. despair was a worse enemy than any Romulan could ever be, even now. Especially now.

When there is life, there is hope, he beleived.

* * *

Meanwhile on one of the lower decks of the station, things were not as quiet but just as dire.

"Move your butt Murphy! We don't have all day!"

Engineering Ensign Sydona V'Krull barked out in the harsh, very Klingon-like tone of her father as she braced her tall, powerful one point eight meter tall, eighty-four kilos lean-muscled frame behind some structural beam fragments that littered the corridor. Beams of green energy hammered the barricade, putting smaller Science officer Murphy further on edge.

"We need to get some back up down here! There's only the three of us." Murphy said as he popped up returning fire with his hand phaser.

Security Lieutenant Reyes on the other side of the half-Klingon woman laid down some return fire of his own, taking down two of the grey clad intruders.

"One can make a difference, Ensign, let alone three. Now get it together! We need to join up with the other Starfleet teams."

Going over the PADD that she always brought with her, Sydona located their current position.

"Sir... according to the last few communications we received... most of the security teams are above us. And the ones that are on our level are nowhere near us."

"Nice way to state the obvious, Klingon." Murphy retorted.

With phaser in hand, the Amazonian Klingon hybrid managed to clip one of the Romulan in the shoulder, following it up with a shot to his chest.

"Just keep running your mouth, Mousy Murphy... and the Romulans will be the least of your problems."

"That's enough you two!! We need to get to that corridor to the left. We can head up the Jefferies tubes to get to the deck above us!" Reyes said, adjusting the setting of his phaser.

The three Starfleet officers prepped themselves to make their move to the left corridor when a three-man Romulan group came up behind them and opened fire, taking them by surprise.

Fortunately, the smoke, the fire and the debris spoiled their aim; just long enough for the trio to hurriedly shift position to try and get cover from this new, unexpected angle.

"Damnit! Crossfire! V'Krull, Murphy...MOVE OUT!! I'll cover you!" Reyes said in an authoritative tone.

Murphy was the first to make his way to the empty corridor, shooting in the general direction of the newly appeared Romulans, but hitting nothing.

Sydona hung back, exchanging fire and hitting one intruder in the leg.

"C'mon Sir!! I got this!" Sydona yelled out.

"Get moving V'Krull! That's an order, Ensign! Get to the security teams! You can make it!" Reyes yelled back.

The response, the posture... Sydona had seen it before. It was the one when Klingons truly believed that this was a good day to die.

Green energy beams flew furiously through the corridors, scorching the walls around them. The enemy fire being too much for the two ensigns. They started to fall back.

Sydona called out to the Security Officer, stopping midway in the escape hallway, only to relive the nightmare she had been through barely a month ago. Time seemed to slow down around her as the first disruptor blast struck Reyes in his left leg. The Klingon hybrid started to charge to aid the fallen Lieutenant, only to take a grazing hit herself to her arm.

Seeing the ensign fall, Reyes yelled at her to leave, pushing himself to his feet. Standing with rifle in hand, he defiantly fought his attackers, dropping one of his assailants before taking a shot to the chest.

Screaming out in frustration, Sydona made it back to her feet and then fell back to Murphy's position while green bolts sizzled the air around them. It took a while before pursuit was engaged after them, so both of them made it to the farthest storage room with a jefferies tube access located inside of it.

Using a door opti-lock keypad, the Klingon Hybrid bypassed the lock. Once in the room, Sydona locked the door.

"Reyes... he... he knew. He knew we wouldn't make it out unless one of us hung back." Murphy said in a hushed tone, running his trembling hand through his sandy blonde hair.

"He will have not died in vain today. As long as a V'Krull draws breath, we will take this station back." Sydona swore, speaking in a determined tone.

She pulled her long, thick dark hair back and put it in a ponytail before going over her PADD again.

"No wonder... they took the entire power grid down."

The Science Officer looked at the Engineer in a perplexed fashion.

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"The security defense grid. About two-third of the carnage wouldn't have even happened if the security systems had been online. And there is much more than one generator to back up the central reactor core on a starship, let alone on a starbase, especially one this big. They needed someone already inside to disable our power systems so that only emergency reserve would still function... leaving only life support... artificial gravity... emergency lighting..."

"So? What do you have in mind?" Murphy asked.

"They obviously must have installed, or intend to install, their own independent substitute power grid through our own for securing the station for themselves... obviously powered by one or several external sources, starships most likely... So, we find the control of that power grid, shut it down, bring at least the backup generators online and bye-bye Romulan *targs*." Sydona said as she checked the storage lockers, loading up on Engineering tools and another phaser.

"Great... sounds easy enough." Murphy sighed as he grabbed his rifle and readied his tricorder. "We might be able to get some of the station's other defense systems online as well."

Sydona grinned her pointy-toothed smile at Murphy, putting him more at ease.

"Now you're talking. Let's get moving before the pointy-eared *PetaQs* make their way in here."

They could already hear that the firing had stopped and boots were pounding closer to their location, doors being forced open as they searched the storerooms. closing on their location rapidly.

She had doubted the communications channel would be operational; that was the first action of any invading force. But then had come the voice of this Captain Alistair Cobb over the comm so it was clear somebody was still alive and kicking somewhere on this huge space construct and had at least reestablished communications. Confidently, she tapped her combadge.

"Ensign Sydonna V'Krull to the Captain, to security... anyone wearing a Starfleet badge; Ensign Murphy and I are currently in storeroom 9 on lower engineering deck with a hand of hostile Romulan intruders on our heels. We intend to head for backup generator B. Respond if anyone is out there."

As she spoke, she and Ensign Murphy made their way to the jefferies tube and began their self-given mission, not waiting for orders or even answers.

Sydonna could not chase the image of Lieutenant Reyes falling in a halo of green fire... nor the rage that welled up inside her beating heart, making it pound so loud that she did not even hear the pursuers forcing the door of the room they had left behind.

* * *

He regained consciousness amidst darkness, feeling nothing, hearing nothing but his own breathing.

Then, a voice, insistent:

"To all Starbase 10 Crew, this is Captain Alistair Cobb. I am assuming command of Starbase 10, All senior officers report in immediately, I want to know what the hell's going on"

Memory returned: twirling into space, torn off from the lower gantry under the defective, locked open space door he had been sent to investigate and repair with an engineer... the broken body of the engineer, burning from weapon blasts... a huge mass hurtling out of the base through the wide opening above them...

Now he had his bearings: he was free floating a good distance of the disc-shaped form of starbase 10, looking up at the damaged spacedoor of the empty dock... and still moving away on his own inertia after the blasting out of the unidentified ship.

His gauge told him he still had almost a full day of air; but his chronometer was broken... so was his emitter. He could receive but not respond. And he was floating further away still. And his life support power was so low, a Human being would be in a coma... and a Vulcan would have already been frozen to death.

But fortunately, this drifting junior officer of Starbase 10 was Andorian.

And, in his dire predicament, he knew what to do... even desperate a maneuver as it was.

From his tool belt, he took out a powered screwdriver. Without hesitation, he used his considerable strength to puncture his air tank and jam the tool in the hole to improvise something that could act like a crude steering lever.

The forceful escape of the high pressured content acted instantly as a primitive reactor to rush him back to the starbase, hurtling him into the gaping damaged spacedock until he managed to almost miraculously slam directly on one of the outside hatches.

Out of air, he punched in his access code and dropped face first into the airlock, gasping, and dizzy. He barely managed to open the faceplate of his helmet to expose his dark blue face and his startling silver eyes as he crawled to the wall intercom:

" Se... security off...icer Kheren... Kheren... re... repor... ting... S-Sir. "

And then, he passed out.

Inside the station, noises could be heard in the distance. Security Teams were fighting all over the starbase, desperate to hold back the unknown numbers of assailants.

The din of it came back to captain Cobb through several combadges as officers and crewmen started reporting to him. After Commander Patton's voice had come through, steadily others came through afterwards. But he'd heard nothing from Medical, which was a worry as he needed to ensure the wounded civilians and crew were being cared for.

And then came another one, this one very faint, from some internal comm channel, sounding forced out by sheer force of will.

"Mister Kheren, good to hear from you. What is your status?" Alistair asked.

Silence.

"Mister Kheren?" He asked again more urgently, whilst bringing up a locator signal with his remote link to the Clausius.

It had come from an airlock com panel, inside the drydock closest to the damaged door. There was still no answer. He had no way to reach the evidently injured crewman... and no one from medical reporting yet.

Before he could begin to think of a way to help Kheren, another voice, low, powerful and growling like a barely contained roar, barked through his combadge, filled with urgency and the stress that could only come from combat.

"This is Lieutenant Speaker-of-Names, Chief of Security."

It was rudely interrupted by the sound of a weapon impact on a bulkhead and the telltale sound of a shower of sparks.

Then the voice continued:

"We're pinned down near transporter room 5. Romulans." The voice trailed off into a fit of coughing, no doubt brought on by the smoke from the constant weapon fire.

"Captain-Cobb, we need to move. I will keep the line open." The roaring voice said again, recovering from the coughing.

Then, the starbase commander could only gnash his teeth in frustration as he could do nothing yet from where he was while he heard every detail of the life and death struggle that was happening, powerless witness as he heard everything.

"Mister-Rivers, give me cover fire! Mister-Yylna, get..."

The colossal, two and a half meters, two-hundred kilos walking tiger holding a phaser against his blackened black and grey Starfleet uniform snarled in surprise as a bolt of disruptor fire nearly caught his furry, high-perched pointy headed head. The sparks flying onto his black-stripped auburn fur made sure to warn him against showing even a bit of his head from behind their makeshift barricade. Hurriedly slapping the cinders off, he continued with the same roaring low voice Alistair Cobb now heard over the channel.

"...Get Schumacher down the corridor. See if you can find a med-kit!"

Nodding to his orders, the red-haired woman called Ensign Rivers popped her head out over the barricade briefly, leveling her phaser rifle into position before squeezing off a couple of shots across the hallway while Yylna's fluted androgyn shoulders pumped quickly as it crawled on all fours to the limp form of another security officer. Its spoon-shaped fingertips clasped his collar and soon had him behind the barricade, moving quickly down the hall while the huge felinoid Security Chief let out a growling roar of defiance and snapped off three shots from his hand phaser.

Sending off another shot at their adversaries, the Kzinti named Speaker-of-Names was motioning for the redheaded Ensign with the phaser rifle to continue to keep the pressure up. Then, he had to cough again under another Romulan volley near their position as Ensign Yylna rushed forward to aid Rivers. He glanced up and saw the irritating smoke wasn't going to go away.

He just hoped the gas escaping that conduit wasn't the combustible kind.

He tapped Rivers on the shoulder, then nodded away from the barricade. While scooping up the limp form of Ensign Schumacher, he waited for the two other ensigns to retreat with him. As they were moving off, he heard again the voice of the man over the restored comm channels:

"Lieutenant Speaker-of-Names again; good to hear you, Sir. I'll keep this brief."

At the other end, Alistair smiled despite the direness of the situation.

Trust a Chief of Security to be in the thick of it.

"Lieutenant, we need to create a defensive perimeter around the key areas and the civilian shelters. Also Mister Kheren, one of your security officers, appears to be injured in Airlock 37... and we have no one from medical reporting in yet. We need to get someone to him."

He shifted to another link, knowing that the Security Chief would reply when he was good and able, do what he could... and what he must.

Don't we all, he then thought grimly.

At the same moment, Lieutenant Daniel Summers finally heard his discarded combadge near the control arch as he was exercising in the holodeck.

And at first, he ignored it.

The young, tall and athletic blond-haired, deep black-eyed gold-collared officer completely unaware of the situation going on around the starbase, even with his unusually high telepathic abilities, at least unusual for a Half-Human, Half-Betazoid like him who were usually only empathic. But he was rather quite engaged in what he was doing.

And he was, after all, off-duty.

When the call came, two drones came at him from the front and rear as he overpowered the one in front of him and ripped vital parts out of its chest, then quickly turned around and just caught the second one before it was going to inject nanites in his neck and they wrestled to the ground. He was able to pull the robotic parts of the drone's hand away from him and slammed it to the ground as he looked up and saw his father's face.

Forgetting everything even the urgent call, he quickly got up off the drone and jumped back in shock... just as a drone that was behind him was about to inject nanites into him... And then he heard again.

"Computer; freeze program." He stated sharply.

Summers tapped open his communicator.

"This is Lieutenant Daniel Summers, Chief Tactical Officer; what's going on, Captain Cobb? Did I miss the change of command?" He stated with a hint of slight confusion in his voice, now trying to use his telepathic abilities to get a read off of Captain Cobb as to what was going on around the starbase.

Reports coming in from various points on the station showed a sudden resolve to hold out, and starbase commander Alistair Cobb noted with grim determination that many were fighting on even whilst injured. It was nevertheless a testimony to the cunning and stealth of the Romulan infiltration operatives that trained Starfleet officers had been caught off guard like this.

His communication console blared once again, this time with the voice of the tactical chief of the station.

"Lieutenant Summers, Starbase 10 has been infiltrated by a substantial Romulan force who have killed Captain La Salle and some kind of dampening field has shut off power to the central section," He replied. "We have teams under Security Chief Speaker-of-Names fighting to link up and create a perimeter to keep them out of the key areas. I need you to liaise with him to hold the Romulans and then drive them back," He finished.

Lieutenant Summers smirked.

"A...aye, Sir, I hate when that happens,"

Realizing that he had been cut off before he had a chance to answer the new Captain with acknowledgement he just sighed.

"Computer End Program" he stated as he grabbed his phaser off his belt and ran out the door and tapped again his combadge: "Lieutenant Speaker-Of-Names, this is Lieutenant Summers, Chief Tactical Officer; what is your current position? Captain Cobb has ordered me to rendezvous...excuse me, but I have company..."

Summers was cut short by his telepathic abilities sensing devious and malicious intent so he took cover, tapped off his combadge and awaited for the intruders to come into view.

Just then two Romulans running down the hallway came into his view as they turned around the bend and he popped up and fired two shots, catching them both off guard and stunning them both, out cold for an hour.

Summers tapped open his combadge once more.

"Lieutenant Speaker-Of-Names; my apologies. What is your current position so I may try to rendezvous with you?"

Daniel spoke with a sense of urgency he could barely control. He grimly thought:

We better get the starbase secure as quickly as possible to avoid having Romulan reinforcements arrive and overtake the starbase. It's crucial to Lotus Fleet's functionality as the first line of defense against not only those Romulans, but from the Klingons as well... and anything that could come out of the Delta Quadrant.

The Borg simulation he had just exited was not just for fun and games. If the Collective or any other hostile force encountered by the USS Voyager years before ever fancied coming into Federation Space with hostile intentions, this is where they would come first.

And only Starbase 10 stood between them and the rest of the Federation.

We loose the base... we loose everything.

The same thought came at the same moment into the mind of Engineering Ensign Michael David O'Conner as he chuckled to himself while diving his tall, slim body behind a bar on the Promenade. Disruptor blasts flew around his red-haired head, making his green eyes blink from the sparks. He looked over to one of the other ensigns around him and said:

"Oi! And I though being on a Starbase would be boring."

Michael chuckled to himself but the ensigns just rolled eyes and darted for more cover as others provided covering fire.

Michael tapped his combadge and hailed the captain who had sent his roll call order, so long ago it seemed.

"Oi, Captain, this is Ensign Michael O'Conner. I ain't no senior officer but I do got almost a dozen crewmen and ensigns down here... somewhere on the Promenade. What are you orders, Captain?"

Michael leaned out the side of the bar and shot his disruptor, rejoining the fire fight as he awaited a reply.

Up in the Ops center, Captain Cobb was taken aback for a moment at the abruptness of the voice and the disruptor blasts shouting out of the comm system, but decided in a crunch he'd deal with it later. This was no time for fidgeting with protocol.

"Ensign," he replied, "as Chief Drydock Officer, you are very much a senior officer. I need you to get to drydock control and see if you can communicate with the civilian ships that are marooned in there. They may require assistance. there are also a few people injured down there, some trapped in airlocks."

He paused then added:

"Take a small team with you and instruct everyone else to secure the Promenade against the Romulans."

Michael O'Conner smiled to himself upon hearing his new position for the first time.

"Aye, Captain."

Quickly, Michael looked around for a jefferies tube hatch as he yelled:

"Oi! I need two volunteers!" After a couple burst of disruptor fire flew by him, he quickly ducked his head out and fired his, recently acquired, disruptor. Then, he quickly darted over to a table in front of the bar and he flipped over the the table to hide behind from enemy view. He shifted it against the wall so he could begin to remove the jefferies' tube hatch while he waited for any volunteer to show up and come to him.

"Ensign Teancum, new graduate, newly reported aboard, awaiting assignment to a Starship as a tactical officer. I was in my quarters, lights went out. Do we have enough people to cover all the entrances to this place?"

O'Conner looked over to the newcomer.

"Welcome to the party Ensign; you have just volunteered."

"Okay, wherever I can help."

Zeez moved to the Jefferies tube, remarking:

"Probably somebody should lead who knows where we are going."

Michael O'Conner smirked to the new ensign and motioned to the Jefferies tube he had just opened.

"Get into the tube. I have orders to get to Drydock Control."

Not waiting for a reply from Teancum, Michael looked over to one of the other Ensigns.

"Oi, Ensign Chow; try to secure the Promenade against those trespassers, but don't get too spread out! Crewman Davis, you are a volunteer. You're with us."

Michael smirked to himself.

"Beging your pardon, Sir, then asked the crewman, but I tought the dockmaster would already be over there and securing station access..."

"Aye that would have been best," admitted O.Conner. "But apparently he is not and no one here knew how to get there and only I have a map."

He chuckled a bit a as pulled out his PADD.

"I will say which way to go; you two just keep an eye out for Romulans."

He studied the map quickly.

"Good... Dock control should only be about four decks up and three sections over from here."

Michael O'Conner motioned the crewman over as Ensign Chow signaled his team to move out of the bar and to create a better defense perimeter on the Promenade as the three men disappeared in the maintenance conduit.

Zeez entered the Jefferies tube behind him.

"Okay. Are we going up first and then over? That's my recommendation."

"Sounds fine," Michael said as he led Zeez and the crewman into the Jerffries tube. "Lets just hope we don't run into too much trouble."

Michael moved forward and he looked over his map again.

"Having a fire fight in a Jerffries tube aint my idea of fun."

Michael shook his head at the idea, while Crewman Davis entered the tube last and closed the hatch. Then, they began to climb the maze of Jefferies tubes crisscrossing the entie starbase.

After Ensign O'Conner answered, Zeez started moving, constantly looking around him and listening intently, ready to draw his weapon in an instant.

Makes me think about playing war games in hay bale tunnels back home in Indiana. Okay, enough of that, pay attention, Zeez. The enemy might be everywhere by now.

Meanwhile, Captain Cobb switched channels. There was little more he could do here without power but try to verbally command his crew's efforts.

And it was only a matter of time before the Romulans realized he was there... and sent people to deal with him.

* * *

He had been so fast asleep that he never heard Captain Alistair Cobb's summon. But then, Captain John Garrison heard noise outside his quarters and woke himself up.

The noise sounded like weapons fire!

Tousling his brown hair and blinking his hazel eyes to wake himself fully, he threw his tall lanky frame off his bunk and slipped quickly to the door. Surprised that he had not heard an alarm, he turned then to one of his lockers, opened it and realized that he had left his personal phaser aboard the Lotus when he had relinquished command to his former first officer, Felez Connora'tu, to report to Starfleet Command for a new assignment with the Joint Chiefs of Staff back on Earth.

One more reason to regret his old command.

Weapons fire on the starbase meant major trouble; a starship like the refitted and upgraded Intrepid class USS Lotus would have helped greatly. But she had been gone for several days now. And the other ship assigned to this new command post, the defiant class USS McKenzie, was also out on its mandatory border patrol, parsecs away.

Never easy... he sighed inwardly, his teeth clenched too tight to even swear as he felt to.

He considered trying to get a message out to someone, but figured he might risk giving away his position. So he decided instead to reconnoiter the immediate area and try to reach Ops inconspicuously.

As he walked up to the door and manually opened it, two disruptor bolts rang out in response.

John ducked and narrowly avoided taking a blast to his head.

So much for being inconspicuous.

He knew that if he tried to leave he would get shot; and if he stayed trapped in his room, he would surely be shot... or captured; no, these were Romulans: they did not take prisoners... They would throw in a plasma grenade.

No mercy, no surrender; the Romulan way.

And so, he considered another method.

"Hey Romulan Scum! You're as weak and as cowardly as is your Praetor and all who serve with you! I defy you openly!"

Garrison heard the Romulan yell back:

"I shall enjoy killing you, Human *Varrul!* Jolan Tru!"

Captain Garrison stood to the side of the door. The Romulan kicked the door down, shot a few bolts inside and walked in, his fuming disruptor rifle leading the way.

An unwise move, dictated by provoked emotion. The Romulan had no chance.

Garrison quickly delivered a brutal forearm strike to the intruder's collarbone, shattering it and breaking the side of his neck at the same time with his genetically enhanced strength as his other hand grabbed his disruptor with superior coordination.

The illegal eugenic experiments he had been submitted to as a child to save his very life from birth defects had almost prevented him from entering Starfleet; today they might just prove right those officers who then looked past old prejudices and believed in his spirit more than in his heritage. Genetic experiments had brought about the horrors of the Eugenics wars, centuries ago; but for every Khan Noonien Singh could sometimes, sometimes, also come a Julian Bashir...

Or a John Garrison.

He walked out to find two dead Romulans and the corpse of the security officer who had fought them with his last breath while he himself had been dealing with his assailant.

Garrison quickly exchanged his disruptor for the dead security officer's phaser, kept a few seconds of silence in respect to his fallen comrade who had helped him while listening with acute senses to his surroundings. And then, swiftly but discreetly, he made his way to a wall terminal.

He quickly found that the station's power was being drained and computer access was limited almost to basic life support and maintenance functions only.

The former captain of the flagship of Lotus Fleet decided then to make his way to the starbase command center and hopefully find some help along the way.

John crawled out of a jefferies tube after several long minutes around his station's level and looked down a corridor, only to quickly realize that the whole senior officers habitation deck was held by Romulans.

He knew he couldn't fight them all off. This was not a simple infiltration team; it was obviously a full invasion force... possibly the vanguard of a full scale invasion plan against the Federation. Starbase 10 was, along with Starbase 24, the only sentinel between the Empire and the rest of Federation Space after the outposts of the Neutral Zone. Their sudden appearance here proved that they had greatly improved their cloaking technology to reach this far inside Federation territory, as the station had been erected more than five parsecs from the forbidden border, where simple presence within from either side was considered an act of war.

And if they had... if they could establish that they had succeeded in taking over this starbase... then they would report to their Senate that Starfleet could not stop them; then they would come back but this time with everything they got.

Not on my watch, he vowed silently.

John moved back away from the closest Romulan guard just a few meters down the corridor. Still safely hidden inside the maintenance conduit, he pulled a panel off the wall and began working on cutting emergency power feed to this level, the reserve energy maintaining basic vital systems like artificial gravity, lighting and life support.

It won't stop them, but it will certainly slow them down, he estimated.

But he would have to move up fast to the next level to avoid being himself caught in his own trap.

Garrison backed away from the panel, all the way to the other end of the jefferies tube to the hatch at the other end from the corridor and fired a low level burst of the disruptor he had confiscated that overloaded the EPS conduit.

There was a loud hiss of melted components and power shorting out.

And... nothing else happened... except sudden shouts and a loud commotion from the invaders.

Crap! They connected systems to an independent power source! the former ship captain realized.

John then quickly closed the hatch and fled as fast as he possibly could crawling on all four into the next jefferies tubes to avoid some angry Romulans that were already opening the access port at the other end to inspect the damage.

The war is on, Garrison thought grimly.

* * *

The Romulan Commander sat in silence in the almost empty bridge. It was silent apart from the clicking and quiet bleeping of a few consoles and stations. All of which were unmanned.

The only other person was a tall, broad shouldered figure standing behind the Commander, waiting patiently to be spoken to.

"Report" The commander said in a cool, calm voice.

K'Tal responded "Things are progressing well, however we for the last hour we have been encountering increased resistance, there have been several casualties"

"Unacceptable" The cool voice, stated.

"Commander, am I cleared to give them something else to worry about?" K'Tal asked.

The Commander barely even nodded. The silence was halted by the stark metallic clanging of K'Tal's boots on the deck plating.

As the door hissed shut and the room was plunged into silence, the Commander almost smiled.

In a jefferies tube inside the central core of the Starbase, a small item materialised with the sickly, green of a Romulan Transporter.

It may have been small, it may also have set off the weapon detector sensors placed around the station. But they were offline and unpowered.

Its display counted down in the strange, Romulan script. Lower, and lower until it could go no further.

It exploded in a cascade of noise, flame and destruction atomising the area around it in a second. Had it been placed under a plasma conduit it could have started a chain reaction that would have seriously damaged the station.

But this wasn't a bomb placed by a terrorist, it was one planted by an artist of explosions. It was placed by a skilled Tal Shiar Operative, designed to strike fear and terror into the enemy.

It was placed below a Fire Suppression tank and above one of the Civilian shelters. A normal explosive would have made an irregular shape and would likely not have damaged either.

This was a specialist device, custom built by its user. It exploded in a cylindrical blast that created a sort of artificial conduit between the Tanks cargo of fire suppressant foam and the ceiling of the shelter.

As it was the blast didnt rip through the ceiling, and nor had the artist planned this. It damaged enough, just a small crack to let the foam slowly seep through. A crack that would gradually get wider and wider and fill the shelter with foam.

The foam itself wasnt toxic to most species, but it would eventually fill the room and there'd be no air to breathe. And as fortune would have it, a family of an alien species that were allergic to it were in just that shelter...

CHAPTER TWO: UNDER SIEGE

The door hissed open and two pair of boots clanked on the metallic deck. One boot flipped over the body lying face down on the hard floor.

"Is he dead?" Someone asked in Romulan.

The other voice answered also in Romulan.

"The air tank is punctured, the face blue from coldness and lack of oxygen... He's dead all right."

"Let's make sure." The first voice said.

Two pair of boots now flanked the inert body. The shadow of two disruptor muzzles crossed over the closed eyes on the face exposed through the lifted visor of the helmet.

"Look how blue his face is, " noted one to the other, pointing at the very dark blue face showing through the opened faceplate. "Death by asphyxiation and cold."

"Vaccum death, " agreed the other. "Let's throw the body out this..."

He stopped talking abruptly, peering with obvious curiosity and bewilderment. He was looking at the opened helmet of the inert spacesuited body.

The tips of two antennae snaked under the upper rim.

Suddenly, two brawny arms grabbed a booted ankle on each side and pulled. Fortunately, these were not Vulcans but Romulans, no more stronger than Humans; and the average Andorian was twice as strong as any Human, almost as strong as a Vulcan.

And Kheren was himself twice as strong as any Andorian; strong enough to wrestle a Gorn.

So when both hands pulled, both Romulans went down hard, shouting in surprise.

The pull allowed the prone Kheren to roll onto his back and up on his feet; not an easy feat in a cumbersome heavy spacesuit; but the futile effort of the two invaders to stay upright just gave the necessary reaction to pull it off. Nevertheless, his sudden backward roll sent him stumbling back and down on his spine again as his heels met the airlock's door lower rim.

He reflexively rolled sideways to the right, avoiding the disruptor blast that came from one of the prone Romulans; his left boot shot out and clanged the airlock door inside it's frame. The autolocking mechanism sealed it shut.

The Andorian lost no time in getting up to his knees and slam with his palm the airlock activating sequence. On the other side of the door, the angry buzz of disruptors was almost immediately replaced with that of the airvents sucking air, pressure and heat out of the confined space.

With visible effort, the Starfleet security officer got to his feet, panting. He hadn't recovered yet from his last spaceflight, and the lack of endurance typical of his race now showed plainly. But he managed to raise himself to the porthole and saw both Romulans gasping for air on their knees, then slowly passing out from the coldness and lack of oxygen.

Giving himself time to recuperate, Kheren said outloud while still gasping:

"Tough luck... gentlemen. I graduated from the Academy... with Honors... in tactical and security... best in... close quarter combat."

Crewman Kheren allowed some air back into the airlock, and minimal heat; just enough to keep them alive but weakened and unconscious. Still panting, he removed his helmet to free completely his antennae, then went in to retrieve both disruptors before locking them inside again. Until he got back a phaser, these would do fine since he didn't brought his own sidearm for a simple outside repair on a starbase.

He got his wind completely back by the time he had removed his encumbering spacesuit, keeping only the shoulders, arms and leg pads and the chest plate as improvised armor over his jumpsuit of the same shiny white color. Now ready to go, he could use his combadge freely to call ops:

"Security officer Kheren reporting: a Romulan infiltration might be in progress... minus two, caged and sleeping in airlock 37. Requesting instructions."

Kheren never was one to sit back and wait for things to happen. He had learned discipline from a young age, decades before joining Starfleet. All of his people did, as a matter of survival in their society. He taught it for years as a duelling master. He even perfected it with Vulcan disciplines. But he had also always beleived in the importance of free and active thinking and acting. It saved his life in more than one duel; it could possibly save it again here, along with many people on this huge starbase.

There has been no answer to his call. Either his combadge was defective, or his superiors were unable to respond.

He went to the comm panel on the wall, wich was usually rigged to communicate with the inside of airlock 37. It took him a minute to realigned the isolinear chips to connect it to the main general channel of Starbase 10.

"Security crewman Kheren reporting. "

Still no response.

Therefore, possibility one was not valid; a simple level 4 diagnostic on the comm panel confirmed it was working fine... but it lacked power.

That left possibility number two: And looking at two Romulans knocked out and detained in the airlock, it did not bode well. Not at all.

He decided then that he would apply that old Earth philosophy he read about once: if the mountain does not come, go to the mountain... Lives might depend on what he did or failed to do.

May I be damned for what I do but never for what I did not.

The Andorian strapped his pair of confiscated disruptors to his armpads magnetic clamps usually used for tools. He checked that they were both set on heavy stun then walked to the turbolift door.

It didn't open. there was power, but it was locked down.

Security protocols in case of station boarding. Security level Gamma 1 to access... but I am not an Ensign, just a Master Chief Petty Officer with Delta 1 clearance only...

Annoying... but Kheren was not one to blame the system for his problems... especially when it must have helped ensure that the starbase was not already into enemy hands.

So... let's do like Romulans did...

He located the nearest access to the Jefferies tubes and slipped inside.

* * *

One of the crewmen fell on the floor injured. Greg Patton returned fire and shot one of the Romulans.

The other one was speaking into a communications device. They now were aware of this group and probably would send more troops on their way.

Venture, who was standing besides him, aimed at the other invader and shot him in the arm where he was holding his disruptor. The weapon fell on the floor as the Romulan screamed out of pain and fell.

Once the disruptor fire had ceased, Greg slowly walked towards the pair of Romulans. One of them had been killed. Although Greg was a scientific man, this didn't mean he didn't make his hours at the shooting range. he was after all a Starfleet Officer and took regulations seriously.

The other one looked at him while he was approaching. Unable to grab his disruptor, he stood cautiously unmoving since twelve phasers were aimed at him.

Greg bent his knees and squated in front of the man, making sure he was out of reach of the man's grasp. He knew he had to interrogate him, but he also was aware that he didn't have much training in doing so.

He sighed and addressed the Romulan.

"I am Commander Patton, and by your being aboard this starbase, you broke the thin line of peace we had. You'd better explain yourself."

The man remained silent.
Ensign Venture stepped up besides him.

"Sir, we have stabilised crewman Dykstra's condition. She will survive, although she will need medical treatment shortly."

Greg nodded and thanked the ensign.

"Tie this man up. We'll have to bring him with us. Make sure he doesn't have any concealed weapon after you tied him."

"Aye, Sir". Venture replied.

Greg picked up the two disruptors and handed one over to one of the crewmen. They might just become in handy. He tapped his combadge.

"Patton to Cobb. We have had a small incident with two intruders. One of them is now our captive. Also we have a wounded crewman so we could use some medical assistance once we arrive in the lab, as well as some security personel to take over this man."

There was a commotion behind him and he saw the prisoner dashing away to escape.

Reflexively hald a dozen phasers hist him on heavy stun.

"Wait! Hold your fire!"

Patton's order came too late. The man crumbled into a heap against a bulkhead.

The science officer didn't have to wait for one of his people to confirm what he already knew; so many heavy stun blasts together at point blank range were lethal enough.

He should have known; since the Earth Romulan war of three centuries ago, Romulans never gave quarters... or asked for it. It was their solemn duty and their sense of Honor that prompted them to seek death to avoid capture.

"Ah, Ops, he said through his communicator, forget about the prisoner. He's dead."

He waved at the crewmen and the ensign to leave the body there and move on. They had two decks to go and the turbos would probably be disabled by other Romulans roaming the base.

He signalled the rest of the team to follow him again, trying to walk in a column where the last one kept an eye out for intruders in the rear end of the group, he himself leading, looking out for possible new threats ahead.

Ensign Venture assisted by one crewman, took care of their wounded crewmate. Although her condition was bad, they all knew they had to continue their journey and hope there would be more medical supplies near or in the astrometrics lab. At least the mandatory medkit for emergencies regulation demanded stored in every working room of a starship or starbase.

When they did come to one of the turbolifts, it was indeed inoperative.

Greg sighed. They had to go through the jefferies tubes now, which would slow them down, especaly with the wounded crewmate.

Before he opened the tube's hatch, he took out his scanner.

There were no lifesigns behind the door so they entered, one by one, making their way to the deck above them; slowly, since they only could enter one by one in single file to have any room to maneuver in case of problems and one of them had to be carried.

Up in Operations, Captain Cobb had begun to collate the reports into a PADD to see if he could begin to formulate theories on the situation.

The Romulans had to have a ship in or cloaked around the station, he had thought. But what size of class of ship was it?

He had no idea.

How was the dampening field working?

He'd checked an EPS Conduit near Ops and had discovered it was inactive. A visual inspection showed that its magnetic containment fields designed to contain the plasma weren't working.

Now his combadge suddenly began speaking again and caused him to bang his head as he closed the inspection hatch.

Alistair silently cursed to himself as he heard the science chief's report, ending with the prisoner lost. There was still no coordinated medical relief effort he had heard of anywhere on the station... and he was not at all surprised to hear about the suicidal escape attempt of a Romulan soldier.

Cobb was getting concerned. A few off-duty medical personnel that were responding to minor injuries were all he'd got. There was no sign of the majority of those who were assigned to primarily work in main sickbay. There had been no communication with the Chief Medical Officer for the last hour by anyone; in fact, several stated she'd been in the Infirmary before the power shut down but nothing heard or seen from her since.

He had tried to reach Sickbay on the comm several times but with no response. Not even from an emotionless EMH. Even that should be working as it wasn't tied into primary power supplies.

What was going on in there?

* * *

Kiernan sat motionless against the wall with the rest of the captors. Time seemed to hold no relevance as she teetered on the edge of consciousness. When her eyes were able to focus, she briefly sized up the gunman standing watch over them. She waited patiently for him to drop his guard...

No such luck.

The young lady beside her seemed to glare at him with wide eyes. Obviously, the thought was mutual. Now, it appeared as if the Romulans had scavenged all of the medical supplies they could, as the other intruder quickly packed it for transport.

"Which one should we take?" the gunman questioned without turning an eye from the crew. Clearly he was the less superior agent.

"Pick one," the other snarled while continuing to cram medkits into a bag.

The gunman approached the distal end of the line from O'Clare, stooping in front of the crewman. O'Clare quickly realized he was looking at the rank on the collar. She leaned slightly towards the lady beside her.

"Be ready," she whispered. "He's going to take me. The minute he drops his guard, move on him. I'm right there with you."

As the Romulan drew near, the horrified look on the young woman's face did little to calm O'Clare's own concerns. He quickly passed by her counterpart and stood directly in front of Kiernan.

"Ah, a Lieutenant. And what luck, a feisty one at that."

The Romulan leaned in closer.

"It appears you and I will have a little more time to converse. I assure you, I look forward to it."

The smug inflection in his voice stirred up the small amount of adrenaline O'Clare had left. Yet she refrained from further provocation.

Again he grabbed her by the collar and pulled her to her feet.

"Take her to the drop point," issued the superior Romulan.

"I thought I'd keep her around to enjoy the show."

The blatant statement left little for O'Clare's imagination. She knew the rest of the captors would be assassinated if they did not act immediately.

"Get her to the point, we have no time for your antics."

As the Gunman began to lead O'Clare toward the exit, the sound of the other assailant heaving the bag onto his shoulder and the gasp of the hostages seeing his rifle rising to sweep them with a killing blast signaled the time for action.

O'Clare was medium height and plump for a Human woman, her brown hair and eyes making her even more unassuming and seemingly weak and defenseless. The violence of her action was therefore all the more surprising to the burly Romulan leering at her.

Kiernan shifted her weight and charged against the gunman, forcing him to stumble towards the infirmary wall. Once pinned she pressed her weight into him, digging her raised forearm into his throat. Unaware of the actions around her, she remained focused on the single intruder and used her free hand to fight for control of the weapon. At this point she was more concerned with keeping it pointed away from her, then gaining control.

He struggled against her, but the oxygen depletion he was experiencing weakened his attempts. O'Clare leaned in and pressed hard in a slight rocking motion. Wither his thyphoid crumbled or he suffocated, all she sought was the end result. As the struggle continued, his grip on the rifle weakened and she was able to snatch it away.

With one last exaggerated push she flung her self backward and discharged the weapon in the general direction of his torso.

Quickly regaining her stance, she spun to face the crew.

Luckily the young lady had summoned her own courage, as well as two other crewmen in the prisoner line. They continued to struggle to detain the other Romulan. With the female crewman attempting to wrestle away his firearm.

Kiernan ran to their assistance. She lifted the rifle and placed it flush against his forehead. With a quick discharge of the weapon, the Romulan went limp and fell to the floor.

The survivors stood in a huddle, taking a moment to process the events. Within seconds O'Clare broke the silence.

"OK What happened here before I came in?"

She strolled slowly towards the nearest biobed and took a seat, placing the weapon beside her. She immediately closed her eyes to try to soften the feeling of a plasma charge detonating in her skull.

"They transported in right behind you," a soft feminine voice answered.

Her eyes shot open with the sensation of a hand on her forehead near her hairline. The crewman that previously sat beside her was attempting to assess her wound. Kiernan grabbed her hand and softly moved it away. Staring blankly, she waited for the explanation to continue.

"Immediately afterwards the power was cut. One caught you with the end of his disruptor. They overtook us instantly. We're under attack, Doctor. A Captain Cobb tried to hail you on the Coms, but we've had no interaction with the rest of the station."

O'Clare ran her hand over her uniform.

"Where's my combadge?"

She began to look around for it.

"They took all of them well before that captain tried to contact you. All of ours have been destroyed."

Kiernan raised herself off the biobed and began to look around the room. Within a few steps she came to a lifeless body. Rolling him over, she took the combadge left there affixed to his uniform.

"Who was he?"

"Doctor Alexander. Your... predecessor. He... had put in for transfer back to Earth."

O'Clare glanced up at the medical crew.

"See if you can find a portable stasis unit. We'll see to his remains at a later time."

O'Clare hesitated to press open her newfound communicator.

"Where was the Captain when he hailed?"

"He did not specify ma'am."

Kiernan nodded slowly while she weighed her options.

"Well, since you are the one with the initiative, you're in charge here. If the injured on the station are mobile, they may try to find their way here. This here of course will be medical's base of operations. Can you handle it?"

"Can I handle it?" the young lady questioned back. "I'm a nurse, I'm not qualified to run an infirmary. And where are you going?"

"I didn't ask if you were qualified ma'am, I asked if you could handle it" quipped O'Clare. "Someone from here has to be mobile. We have to see what's out there."

She reached out and took the other weapon, tossing it at one of the other blueshirts.

"You're on security."

Without giving the medical crew a chance to second guess her plan of action, Kiernan departed the infirmary. Her goal was to rendez-vous with the rest of the senior staff, and to serve as a field medic in the interim.

A minute after she left, Medical Chief Petty Officer Doctor Elliago Nasaro-Myth was waken up by a hypospray from the now head nurse with a sudden, deep breath. He had been unconscious for awhile, lying among the captives in the infirmary, after receiving a stunning disruptor shot in the back he never was even aware of. But now the pain lanced through his head and he unconsciously released soothing pheromones to dull the effect.

Elliago was medium height, well built with harmonious body proportions and a strikingly handsome, friendly face with luminous, mesmerizing purple eyes. His clean-shaven head did little to deter the natural charm and sensuality of his looks.

He was Deltan. And like all of his species, he had a remarkable beauty and charisma further enhanced by powerful pheromones that made his people so deeply attractive that they were the only known to be required to take an Oath of Celibacy to avoid causing problems with all the other "sexually immature" species. Only the very rare, drastically different ones like four-gender Andorians or silicon-based Tholians were immune to their charm.

He had been assigned on Starbase 10 for his internship as a Federation Medical crewman. Like all Starfleet physicians, he was already a full fledged Doctor of Medecine; he was just finishing the complementary exobiological curriculum and deep space apprenticeship to make him officially fully competent for Starfleet service. In fact, besides his official graduation, the ceremony that goes with it, Doctor Nasaro-Myth was effectively ready to serve in Starfleet, as he had been born and raised on starships all his life. His practicum was officially over, yet, he had to wait for his official leave to get back to sector 001 for his graduation.

And so, he had been taking care of a common spacesickness case from some late civilian arrivals to the starbase when everything had turned to black.

And now that he woke up, he had barely time to see his newly desiganted senior medical officer, Doctor O'Clare, leaving hurriedly the medical center. He stumbled, trying to follow her but still felt too weak from the stun blast. So, only several minutes after she had disappeared from view, he finally got up.

"What happened?" he asked around, still groggy.

The nurse left in charge by O'Clare came to him, seeing her salvation in this already well known competent Deltan doctor. She explained everything to the bald physician.

"Very well... " he said then.

Seeing he lacked his combadge, he went to a console to open an internal communication channel.

"Doctor Nasaro-Myth to Doctor O'Clare; I am awake and reporting for duty in main sickbay. Awaiting for your orders. If I may, I will take control of the infirmary... Please acknowledge..." he stated.

Before he even received the official approval, he immediately lost no time and ordered some treatments to start on the most injured among them.

Let's just hope we get some news soon enough!!! he thought.

That is when he noticed the Romulan bodies lined against one wall the valid crewmembers were finishing tying up.

What is happening here? he wondered silently, his eyes wide.

The incoming com startled Kiernan, and she quickly sought cover behind debris. In a whispered response she acknowledged the doctor.

"O'Clare here. Do what needs to be done; the infirmary is all yours. If I can, I'll funnel the more serious injuries your way... and, Doctor, please maintain security protocol. You're a sitting duck in there."

"Aye ma'am!" answered the Deltan, lowering his own voice.

He looked at the nurse who seemed relieved to hear she was not the 'head of infirmary' anymore.

"Alright, ladies and gentlemen, we have a lot of work to do here." said Elliago, a smile taking the edge of his voice. "First, we need to do some triage."

Nasaro-Myth looked around carefully. He had five able nurses and one orderly now acting as a security officer. He first assigned the man to guard their access. Doors would be under constant surveillance. One of the nurses would assist him while all the others would proceed with triage and medical procedures.

All the while in a corridor several hundred meters away, O'Clare's heart continued to race as she continued on her scouting and prayed no Romulans were monitoring comm traffic. Clutching her Romulan rifle and medkit tightly, she started to stand to move out of concealment when a faint noise caught her attention.

In a crouched stance, she crept along the wall, and peered around the corner. Glancing from left to right, a small twitter of movement caught her eye.

The tip of a boot was visible from a protruding bulkhead.

From the little she could see, it appeared to be Starfleet issue, but she still had her reservations about advancing. Obviously, whoever was hiding held the same concern she did. Kiernan took a last glance behind her to ensure she wasn't falling into an ambush. Steadying her alien firearm, she lifted and took aim.

"Come out slowly," she demanded in a calm authoritative voice.

A split second passed with no movement.

"You! On your feet and move to the middle of the corridor, or I'm going to blow your foot off and finish the job!"

Unnoticeably, her breathing slowed as her fingers gently caressed the trigger.

"Don't shoot!" replied a trembling voice. "I'm unarmed!"

A small set of bare hands appeared from behind the bulkhead.

"I... I can't stand!"

"Keep your hands where I can see them," O'Clare stood up slowly and moved towards the individual.

Within a step or two she had him in sight. It was a young man in a cadet uniform.

Kiernan lowered the weapon slowly, and crouched beside the cadet.

"What happened?"

"I don't know," he replied. "I was in the guest quarters when I heard weapons fire."

O'Clare had continued to observe the environment until his response prompted an awkward stare in his direction.

"No, what happened to you? Why can't you stand up?"

When she finally allowed herself to observe the cadet, his agony was clear. His face was pale and beads of sweat dotted his forehead.

"Good grief son, what's wrong?"

"Its my leg ma'am."

Kiernan glanced down and only then noted him guarding his left leg with his hand.

"I was running and I fell down... I was looking behind me and I just tripped over something. Every time I try to stand up, I fall. I've had to crawl on my arms the rest of the way."

Kiernan hesitated again, but handed him her confiscated disruptor.

"Keep a look over my shoulder."

She pulled open the medkit and started pulling out its contents. In her thoughts, she was simply thankful she had brought her personal kit over from the Lotus when she transferred to the Starbase for her temporary assignment to replace the Starbase CMO until a new one was appointed. Her kit was augmented from standard by her field experience and it offered her far more tools to work with, especially for unusual situations like this one.

Removing a laser scalpel, she cut into the cadet's pants at his mid thigh and tore the single pant leg off to inspect the limb.

"Yeah, you aren't getting far on this."

She ran her hand over his knee to palpate a large mass to the lateral side. The midline indentation clearly being the anatomical location of where his patella should be. With a quick flick of a hypospray, she administered a dose of anti-inflammatory and analgesics. Taking his free hand in hers, she leaned in close and demanded his attention.

"You're going to have to trust me kid. This is going to hurt, but it will help in the end."

She pulled his hand and placed it over his own mouth.

"I know I'm asking the impossible, but you scream and you'll have Romulans to deal with. Just remember; they would hurt you much more than I ever would."

He nodded in response.

"Ok, on three."

Kiernan gripped the side of his leg in each hand. Without vocalizing, she mouthed one, two and on three pressed swiftly and harshly against the man's knee. The resulting noise sounded like scraping two medkits against each other. However, the sensation of the "pop" back into place reassured her. And to the young man's credit, he didn't utter even the meereest sound despite the sharp jolt of pain that shook his entire lanky frame.

Quickly shifting her weight, the doctor moved her knee against the medial side of his. Using it to resume the act of bracing as she removed her hand. Grabbing an osteoregenerator, she adjusted the setting and reinforced the inserting point of his ligaments. she completed the task and swiftly tossed her supplies back in the medkit.

"Ok, let's try it out. It's still going to hurt, but you should be stable now. If you can make it to the infirmary, you will find that they have better medicine."

She extended her hand and pulled him slowly to his feet. Holding him under his arm, she took the first few steps with him.

"Thank you. You're right, it hurts but not as badly."

Kiernan smiled softly as she observed the color start to return to his face.

"What now?" he questioned.

O'Clare was at a loss; she had yet to come up with a plan.

"You any good with that disruptor?"

"I can use one," he replied. "I've had a semester of combat training and some basic practice sessions with common alien hand weapons, but it's really not my strength, Ma'am."

Kiernan glanced around as if the answer would be written on a wall somewhere. She thought it over briefly.

"You really think you can make it back to the infirmary?"

The cadet stood speechless for a moment with a questioning look on his face.

"Without you?"

"Yes, without me" she replied calmly. "Take the rifle. I've got medical staff that need tactical reinforcement. Turn right and head straight....you're not far."

As she turned to walk away the cadet followed her.

"But what about you? You need tactical support!"

O'Clare stopped to face him.

"They need it more, and you need supervision. I made it here with no enemy encounters. You'll be fine. Keep your head up and your eyes open. There's a doctor and a few medical staff there. You'll be safe."

"But... Ma'am!"

Kiernan cut him off mid-sentence.

"That's an order, cadet."

The two stood face to face, the cadet clearly wishing to continue to support his argument. After a brief period of consideration, basic discipline prevailed and he conceded.

"Aye, Ma'am."

O'Clare stood tight against the bulkhead and watched him walk off. She continued to observe him until he was out of sight.

With com silence broken, she then decided she'd make an effort to raise the captain. She tapped her combadge and spoke in a hushed voice.

"O'Clare to Captain Cobb. Sir, the medical staff is receiving casualties in the specified location. I have set out to render aide to the walking wounded, Sir."

There was no acknowledgement of her quick report; but she did not have time to reflect on this. People were suffering, maybe even dying all over this floating space city... and she had but a handful of people to try and help them.

She feared that it would not be enough.

After a few minutes, Petty Officer First Class Denis Thompson, the security crewman guarding the door of the infirmary, raised his weapon.

"Halt, who's there?" ordered the crewman.

The doctor stopped what he was doing and reached for the disruptor pistol taken from one of their unconscious captives. he checked that the setting was on stun; he had vowed to do no harm after all.

"Cadet Harolds... " answered a voice in the corridor.

"Show yourself!" ordered Thompson.

The limping silhouette came out of the corridor, hands up, a Romulan disruptor slung to one shoulder. When he saw the other Human face and the Starfleet cadet uniform, crewman Thompson lowered his own confiscated enemy rifle.

"I was asked to help with your security," said the young man as he entered the infirmary.

"Nice of you to come and help us, Mister Harolds; but first, we're gonna help you." said the doctor, immediately noticing the limp of the young man.

As he was taking a closer look to Harolds' injury, the Deltan perceived all the tension within the infirmary.

They need to calm down, he thought, not an easy task...

The hairless doctor decided he was going to help a bit. He started to emit some pheromones to soothe everyone, dosing to let them keep a sense of urgency, but enough to let them feel more relax in this tense situation.

With the proper treatment, Harolds' leg was now way better. The pain was gone and he was able to move around much like Thompson. The nurse armed with the second disruptor pistol was relieved to leave her guarding post to him and rejoin the medical work and the injured were all more optimistic all of a sudden. The global mood in the infirmary seemed better now that a first survivor of the attack had come in.

Let's hope this heralds the turn of the tide, wished the Deltan Doctor.

* * *

Chief Engineer Quinn Calhoun had been climbing for a while and was starting to get dizzy.

Whether it was from the blow he suffered being worse than he thought, or exerting himself during the climb had aggravated the injury, or from the massively open turboshaft extending above and below him, he couldn't tell. Quinn's only option was to steel himself and continue climbing the couple of decks left to make it to Main Astrometrics.

Once there, he'd rendez-vous with Commander Patton and his team. Then they would use the equipment in Astrometrics to locate all the dampening field devices. After shutting them all down, they would be able to drive the invaders off the station.

Sounded simple enough... but something kept nagging at the back of Quinn's mind and being preoccupied with not slipping kept him from realizing what exactly.

Get to Astrometrics, find the devices, shut them down, remove the invaders. Quinn thought.

Get to Astrometrics, find the devices, shut them down, remove the invaders. Quinn repeated, focusing on something other than the dizziness creeping up on him.

Get to Astrometrics, find the devices... without power?

That's what had been bothering him!

Without power, the equipment in Astrometrics was as useless as the turbolifts.

Quinn stopped climbing and tapped his combadge.

"Calhoun to Patton. Commander, unless you have a plan to get around this dampening field, we're going to need some power to run the equipment in Astrometrics. Now, there are some portable energy cells in one of the cargo bays on Deck 32, which could make our job a lot easier. I'm heading there now to search for them. Once I find them, I'll meet with you in Astrometrics." Quinn reported with the beginnings of fatigue starting to show in his voice.

"Take care my friend," Greg Patton responded. "Maybe it's wise to have some of the crewmen I have here to help you out. It's along way from deck 32 to Astrometrics. What is your current location?"

"That's a good idea, sure will make finding the power cells easier. I'm currently in the turboshaft that runs through Deck 30, Section 5. Have your crewmen meet me on Deck 32, Section 5, I'll be waiting in one of the first rooms on the right. Thanks Greg, Calhoun out."

Quinn tapped again the communicator on his chest, closing the channel, and started climbing down.

Patton signalled two crewmen to make their way once Quinn told him his location. Of all things, he was climbing his way up in a turbolift shaft... Using those and jefferies tubes' ladders, they would all have lots of exercise while retrieving the equipment and trying to secure this starbase for sure...

A short while later, Chief Calhoun reached the hatch leading to Deck 32. Before opening the hatch, Quinn drew his tricorder and conducted a quick scan of the area. Its range and functions were limited due to the dampening field, but it still showed the area to be clear for a forty meter radius. He easily opened the hatch and made his way onto the deck, then headed for the first room on the right.

He entered a room of medium size with a variety of crates and containers scattered about. A few moments of searching to make sure the area was empty of any presence and then he went straight to a PADD he well knew was supposed to be stored in a recess on the right side immediately next to the door. As the base's chief engineer expected, the PADD was there and contained a complete inventory of the room.

Unfortunately, it did not appear that power cells were in this storage room.

Suddenly, a muffled noise in the hall caused him to draw his phaser and duck behind the closest crate.

"...I don't know; the Commander didn't see fit to tell me that..." A voice stated rather tersely.

"But, what if we shoot him by accident...or worse he shoots us! Oh we should have had a plan..." A nervous voice responded.

"What like a knock, or a password? Ha!" The terse voice replied.

"Yes, exactly; a knock would have been perfect..." The nervous voice continued.

While this discourse was ongoing, Calhoun produced his tricorder and made a quick scan of the two newcomers while they were still on the other side of the door. The scan revealed one to be a bald, blue-skinned, portly humanoid that was obviously a Bolian and the other, short, stout, heavily haired and bearded with a pig-like face could only be a Tellarite.

Most likely not the invaders... and a smile crept across the engineer's face as he thought of the fun he could have with these two, but decided that would be "illogical" and frankly dangerous in the current situation.

"All right you two, at ease, I'm coming out now. And keep it down; we are trying to avoid capture." Quinn commanded and stood up slowly, his hand palm out and perpendicular to the floor in a sign of non-aggression.

The two crewmembers snapped around and Calhoun found himself staring down two phasers.

"Sorry, Lieutenant Commander Sir; I'm Master Chief Glasch and this is Crewman Harot. What are your orders, Sir?" The terse voice of the Tellarite inquired as he lowered his phaser.

"There are approximately forty of these storage bays on this deck alone and one of them contains a consignment of energy cells. Since, we cannot access the main computer, we're going to have to search each one the old fashion way. If we're lucky, they will all have an inventory like this one which will make things go much quicker," Quinn stated, holding up the PADD he had found. "Time is of the essence, so we must hurry."

After replacing the PADD in its socket, the three starbase crewmembers left the room and began searching the rest of the deck. The apparent lack of Romulans on this level of the starbase, or anyone else for that matter, allowed them to make very quick progress. In close to thirty minutes, the three had gone through twenty-one rooms, none of which had the power cells they were searching for.

"This is pointless; by the time we find the cells, the station will be firmly in Romulan hands." Harot lamented after they had entered and secured storage bay 23.

"Knock it off," Glasch snarled. "I've had enough of your whining. Besides I'd rather be dead than under Romulan rule. Worse than Vulcans they are!"

"Alright you two, take it easy; we've still got a ways to go." Quinn ordered, reading the room's inventory report.

He was himself almost to the end and ready to give up on this room when the words *Sarium Krellide Power Cells, Emergency, Federation Standard: Quantity 5, Container: FSD-934Q* appeared on the PADD's display.

"They're here," Quinn announced happily. "Start looking for container number FSD-934Q."

"I've found it! It's over here beneath these kits!" Harot shouted a short while later.

Between the three of them, they quickly uncovered the container and extracted the power cells. Because of their size, they would only be able to carry three of them together.

With the power cells in hand, the three Starfleet officers were ready to exit the storage room and head for the nearest turolift. As they approached the door, Quinn's tricorder began to beep urgently. Quinn brought up the device to eye level and examined the results.

A patrol of Romulans were in the corridor and approaching their location.

* * *

"Aren't their any combat ships docked here?"

O'Conner whispered back to Zeez as they climbed their third fourth maintenance conduit:

"Not sure; I just got this posting. I just came from the USS Thunderchild... but she has left the station two days ago. Even if a distress call was sent, she would not get back here before the Romulans took over the place."

the other ensign continued to mumble to himself.

"Sneaking Romulans. Is this a newer ship with suppressors on tachyon emissions and better balanced engines? This station should be up to date on all the sensor sweeps for detecting cloaked ships. This close to the Neutral Zone, it seems we should have ships on patrol, also..."

"Oi, the McKenzie is, " recalled Michael O'Conner. " Our flagship the Lotus is out there too... even heard the USS Sapentia, the flagship of Gemini Fleet, is in the sector. But space is a pretty big place..."

After what seemed like an interminable climb, Zeez entered a horizontal tube on the fourth deck above the promenade. He was careful not to make any noise.

"We don't want them to know we are here."

"Okay. take the second right. The..."

Michael was interrupted by a loud explosion that echoed down the jefferies tube.

"Oi, what was that?"

"I think it came from that way, Sir!" crewman Davis answered:

He pointed in a different way than the one that they were going.

O'Conner looked to Zeez directly behind him.

"Hmm... Teancum, why don't you check that out? I still have my orders but I am sure that this will be more interesting than guarding my behind."

"Perhaps," he answered the tall red-haired man. "I doubt that I will be much help in drydock anyway. I suggest we put our combadges on vibrate. I just hope I don't get lost in this rabbit warren."

Zeez then left the two men and crawled off towards the direction of the explosion site.

Hm, he thought, What is the most likely cause of an explosion? Romulans. I wonder what they are up to. Since they undoubtedly transported aboard, they can easily be detected when they are doing so. IF we can use the internal sensors again. Then we would be able to deal with them. When we have power on again...

As he went as softly but as fast as possible on all four, he continued thinking:

With no idea what was near the explosion, I have no idea what they are trying to do.

When Zeez arrived at the outskirts of the damage, he found fire retardant oozing down the tube towards him. He went back to the nearest tube going down. He checked each horizontal tube, and when he saw the retardant, continued down.

At least there is no fire, he breathed inwardly.

The ensign finally found a level without the ooze. He exited the jefferies tube. Looking around, he chose to go in the direction the ooze would come from. Zeez smiled, thinking of an old grade B sci-fi flick of the early twentieth century he had once seen, "Blood Rust", about a blob from outer space.

That made him narrow his eyes with a sudden dark thought,

We'll make blobs out of these Romulans soon enough.

Teancum noticed he had inadvertently found a civilian shelter. Wondering whether the blast had caused any injuries, or even if someone was actually still in there, he forced the door open.

What appeared to be a family of blue-skinned, hairless Bolians was cowering in the corner farthest from the ooze coming in the crack in the ceiling. They were startled by his sudden appearance but immediately recognized the Starfleet uniform and an obviously Human face.

Zeez beckoned to the frightened individuals.

"We must move to another more secure shelter," the ensign said quietly and calmly.

Looking a bit skittish, the parent-looking beings began to shepherd their children outside.

Smiling slightly, and nodding, Zeez beckoned to them again. Smiling and spreading his hands a little, palm up, the ensign then shrugged apologetically.

Do you know where the next shelter is?" he asked. "I just arrived on the station. I don't now where anything is."

One of them, obviously the father, was holding a PADD. He offered it to Zeez saying:

"You need this more than we do; we have been here long enough to know our way around."

Teancum tried to decline but they insisted.

"Please, what is happening?" the male Bolian asked again.

"We have been boarded by a Romulan raiding party. We do not yet know their exact number or intentions."

Gulping down their renewed fears, they thanked the Starfleet officer, then hurried toward the next shelter as he had instructed them to. Zeez began searching the station schematic diagrams available on the civilian PADD.

"Well, this is better than nothing. What should I do next?"

Out of curiosity, he punched up the diagram of the section where he had found the strange ooze and frowned. There was virtually nothing of importance there, not even power distribution conduits.

"Weird place to blow up... Why?"

They might not know the Romulans' intentions; but the Romulans never did anything without giving it serious thought first.

And *that* was worrying him *seriously* now.

"Ensign Zeezrom Teancum, new tactical officer, reporting to Captain Cobb, " he sent through his communicator on his chest. "The Romulans have caused an explosion above a civilian shelter; fire retardant is seeping in through the ceiling with some unidentified substance seeping in from the damaged area. I have sent the civilians who were here to the next shelter. This may be harassment to distract us."

He made a short pause before adding:

"I have only a disruptor pistol and a civilian PADD with some starbase layout diagrams on it. Orders, Sir?"

Only silence answered his call.

And the next.

* * *

Kheren must have been crawling into the maintenance conduits for centuries, as far as he felt.

He was slowly making his way to the more central areas of the starbase, and here power was down to minimal. The cold and the darkness felt almost as deep as that of outer space itself in the tubes he was travelling in. Even his Andorian physiology was sorely tested by the freezing air, and although his antennae vision ranged both into the ultraviolet and infrared ranges, he had difficulty orienting himself. the residual power barely registered on his senses.

The eerie silence around him was only heightening his sentiment of isolation... but isolation was a feeling he was all too familiar with...

And then, his ultrasonic hearing caught what he was looking for.

The sound of electronics... in a powerless zone.

He had been on starbase 10 for barely four days. Until today, he just had found time to barely familiarize himself with the general layout, certainly not with all the access conduits crisscrossing it's titanic, city-sprawling superstructure, a web of tunnels and shafts only engineers and technicians usually bothered with. That lack of knowledge had forced him to crawl in a somewhat vague path to what he perceived was the central hub of the installation.

But now. he had a beacon to follow.

It took him only a short moment to reach a vent grid overlooking a vast chamber littered with heavy machinery. There was pulsing lights in there and a low hum that could only come from the huge main power core of the base. Through the grid on one of the walls near the ceiling, he saw indeed the massive column of light pulsating like a titanic heart, but with almost all power indicator lights and stations around it darkened.

He also saw the green and grey blinking contraption connected to one of it's few functioning outlet, definitely not Federation issue...

And the squadron of Romulans operating and guarding it.

There were at least half a dozen of them in all, at least those he could see. Then, a group of four more appeared in the huge engine room, disruptor in hand, to walk in at a brisk pace to relieve the previous guards as they were beamed out.

Kheren crawled back to a safe distance, then activated his combadge.

"This is security Crewman Kheren," he whispered softly. "I have reached the main power room through the maintenance tubes all the way from airlock 37. The core is set at minimal power, and is feeding a Romulan device. There is a minimum of six guards and two technicians in the power room. Some have beamed in and out; there is obviously at least one Romulan ship orbiting the station as well. Estimating all their weapons on heavy stun only because of the danger of blowing up the reactor core in there. I'm at the main reactor chamber, requesting assistance and instructions."

The Andorian waited patiently for some time after he sent his message. But the only voices he heard were those of the Romulans in the room below confirming status of their ongoing attack. Just listening to the reports they sent between themselves, he had learned some bits of what was happening in different parts of the starbase.

He knew the Chief of security was pinned down under heavy fire; no surprise then that he couldn't respond.

Some individuals and groups were fighting their way to protect or reactivate key systems; one at least was bound to come to the main power room beneath him. Well, logically... hopefully...

The Captain that took command of the base was certainly trying to piece together everything that was going on to bring order out all this chaos; Kheren new he shouldn't expect any answer before this Captain Cobb could define priorities.

All in all, the initial advantage of surprise of the attack was lost to the Romulans. The resiliency and resourcefulness of the Starfleet personel still on board starbase 10 was now surprising *them*... and compromising their plan with each minute passing by, whatever that plan could be.

And what could he, a lone Petty Officer, even do about it?

Know thy enemy as you know thyself; to his mind then came the old human warrior wisdom.

He could waste time... or he could use the time.

Crawling to see the most out of the elevated vent grid behind wich he was hiding, the dark Andorian studied intently the position and movement of every Romulan in the room, timing their actions; he studied what looked like a power-dampening control apparatus they had hooked on the main reactor, and how it was connected to it and to the power distribution grid; he noted the accesses to the vast room and all possible hiding places and covers.

When it would be time to retake the place, he would have precious data to provide; it will be like playing chess knowing half the moves in advance.

When... and *if* someone would come.

Taking on by himself more than half a dozen armed Romulans was not a smart idea. He just hoped that he would not be left with just that suicidal an option.

This Kobayashi Maru would not be a simulation...

To Kheren, a century passed since his last attempt to contact any superior officer. It felt like he was the last one alive on the whole starbase... except for Romulans.

All this time, he had studied their move, posture and activity so thoroughly, and got a layout of the place so precise in his head that he knew now he could somewhat hope to disable them all... with a lot of luck, a lot of resolve and a most of all a lot of planning.

The planning was done. The resolve was building up with time passing alone... If luck wouldn't have him contacted in a few minutes by his superiors, it would have to be spent on a covert assault of six armed Romulans, two enemy techs and a diverting power system... with the possibility of reinforcements from the unseen ship.

Well Kheren, you graduated with the highest honors in tactical and close quarter combat from the Academy... You won tournaments... But you didn't try the Kobayashi Maru test.

Here it is now.

Maybe the time has come to really put yourself to the test.

On the same level, elsewhere within the kilometers-wide starbase, Lieutenant Daniel Summers stopped running to find a place to take cover so he could answer the communication from crewman Kheren safely and without being overheard. He hid in the first room to his right.

As he walked in the door a shout almost surprised him.

"Death to you, Federation scum... Jolan Tru!"

A Romulan pointed his disruptor at Daniel.

"I'm sorry, were you busy? I could come back at another time if you'd like?" Daniel said with extreme sarcasm after he jumped out of the way of disruptor fire and took cover back in the corridor he was coming from.

Thankfully there is only one of them in here, Summers thought as he looked around the room for a way to get around the Romulan and get a clear shot without getting his own head blown off.

"Ah, that will do just fine," he whispered to himself as he picked up a PADD and threw it up in the air towards the Romulan.

The Romulan reflexively looked up at the PADD and, before he could realize what it was, Daniel quickly spun up and around from cover and fired his phaser on maximum stun, knocking the Romulan out cold.

He then opened a channel to Ops.

"Captain Cobb, Lieutenant Summers here. I have a stunned Romulan prisoner with me. He won't do much talking for a while, but I think he will do just fine for questioning. I was also about to contact Crewman Kheren and see what I can do to get the situation he is witnessing resolved. However, now that I have this prisoner, I can't do that and I'm afraid that the holding cells might not have any power since a lot of the computer systems are down as well. What are your orders, Sir?" the Lieutenant said in what seemed to be one breath.

Up in the deserted command center of Starbase 10, Cobb had been sitting mostly in silence, mulling over reports.

Without power there was little he could do and he'd done most of it.

He'd heard Kheren's reports on the reactor core, but he'd held off from ordering more onto his stretched security teams. They'd handle it once they'd got the Romulans contained. No sense securing the reactor core if they just retook it.

He thought over the chief of tactical's following communique for a few seconds. Handle one prisoner or possibly assist a crewman in securing the power core.

One fact made him reach a decision quickly.

These were Romulans.

"Mister Summers; one prisoner isn't going to help us right now... and I doubt you'd be able to get to the Promenade area with him," Cobb replied. "And I doubt even more strongly that you will be able to make him talk, let alone even keep him alive, once he regains consciousness. You secure him then get to Mister Kheren's position before he does something rash. I don't want anyone trying to be a hero," He finished.

Question is; how much longer is it going to be before the casualties started. But this gloomy thought he kept to himself.

"Aye Sir, on my way," Daniel Summers acknowledged.

He tied up the unconscious Romulan and gagged him, using the prisoner's own ripped uniform so as he could not get the attention of any other Romulans that may pass by and would not rejoin the assault anytime soon. The Romulan would stay unconscious for a full hour anyway; by that time, the Starfleet personnel would have retaken the starbase... or it would fly the Romulan flag.

In a low voice so as to not give the crewman's position, away, Daniel said through his combadge:

"Crewman Kheren; this is Lieutenant Summers, Chief Tactical Officer. I have received orders to meet up with you from captain Cobb leading the siege against the Roms. What is your current situation and do you have anything in mind?"

He tried to locate towards the crewman's relative position as Kheren answered. To his surprise, he found that he could not. The mind of the crewman was seemingly too far away... or more probably shielded against telepathic contact.

They train them quite well these days, the Half-Betazoid was forced to admit.

As was standard procedure during any covert operation, Kheren had configured his combadge to vibrate silently in case of any transmission sent to him; no need alerting the invaders of his presence with a loud communication chirp.

When it buzzed against his chest, he silently lowered back the vent grate by which he had been about to drop down into the power room.

Saved by the bell, he recalled from some obscure Human expression he had heard back at the Academy... was it merely weeks ago?

Nevertheless, the call had just stopped him merely seconds short of trying a reckless one-man assault against the occupying force in the power room.

He was a patient individual, not prone to rash actions in the least; but he knew Romulans never took prisoners. Whatever they were doing in the reactor core, it could only be with the goal of destroying the entire starbase.

Would it now? he suddenly wondered as he retreated deeper into the maintenance conduit. *If they aimed at destroying the starbase to deprive us of this strategic location, there would be ships out there pounding us with torpedoes and disruptors.*

It suddenly hit him.

They want something.

But as keen his tactical mind was, he could not figure out what.

Slowly and discreetly, he crawled a good distance back into the jefferies tube before opening a channel to listen to the recorded message:

"Awaiting orders, Sir. " he answered first in a soft voice. "Glad to hear you, Lieutenant. I was wondering if I was the last one left in here. My position is access tube L41S7, in a radial air vent of the main power room, facing galactic center."

Sitting on his haunches inside the maintenance tunnel, he detailed then:

" I report a dampening control unit directly hooked to the main reactor. All stations are down and the control unit is connected to our main power distribution grid. "

His antennae were both slightly moving towards the other end as he further explained:

" There are two technicians at the unit, two guards on the alert with them and two patrolling the entire room in a clockwise eight minutes circuit. They are relieved by pairs, beamed from an orbiting ship, at an estimated interval of once every hour; last change of the guard was fifteen minutes ago, removing a pair of guards for possible reinforcement elsewhere. Both remaining pairs of guards lose sight of each other for four minutes as the patrollers walk behind the main reactor. All their weapons are on heavy stun for fear of damaging surrounding equipment."

He took a deep breath before finishing:

" I estimate it is possible for two of us to overpower them with proper tactics, Sir."

Kheren stopped talking. His ultrasensitive hearing in his cranial appendages was registering movement in an adjoining tube. He crossed his arms, ready to draw both disruptors from the magnetic clamps of his spacesuit lower sleeves he had kept.

Then, his quadriscopic vision recognized the shape of a Human body and the colors of a Starfleet uniform coming towards him.

Daniel Summers, slowly coming up to the Andorian crewman Kheren, went from a basic crawl to a commando crawl so as to make less noise.

"Report, Crewman Kheren; any updates to report? Any change down below?"

"Negative, Sir. They feel pretty secure in their position. They jammed the access doors so that phaser fire to force them open will give them plenty of time to take cover and call for reinforcements... or sabotage and flee. Their dampening controller also includes a transporter inhibitor, which shuts down only for the few seconds it takes them to transport their own soldiers in or out."

Lieutenant Summers spoke while a few ideas of dropping down on top of the Romulans and catching them off guard like he had seen in the data archives an old twentieth century movie called *The Boondock Saints*... He did not want to go in guns blazing with the possibility of damaging some vital systems. But it might be the only way to get power back to the entire station and finally rid themselves of these Romulan invaders.

"As soon as the other group loses sight of the others, we drop down and we each take out the nearest pair. It's gotta have to be quick because the other two are gonna come running back to see what is going on the moment we start shooting... As they come around, I really shouldn't have to say what we have to do, do I?"

The Andorian used his hand to give a crude representation of the power room layout, using his other hand to point out what he was explaining:

"May I suggest, Sir: from the nearest grid, here, I can slide down unnoticed behind the secondary power converter. From there, I can hit them low while you can hit them high from the vent... then I can circle along while covered by the monitoring stations to flank the last two when they will come under your sights. Hitting them from two different angles will maximize confusion and therefore our chances of success. And if one manages to find cover, you will pin him down from your higher vantage point while I close on him. And we must be quick, before they have a chance to call their ship for reinforcement."

Kheren then showed the two disruptors clamped to his reinforced forearms:

"I would also suggest, Sir, to set your weapon on heavy stun. It will take them out without endangering the equipment. "

He took a moment to assess this Lieutenant with four ocular receptors and all the sensing array of his antennae; he listened to his heartbeat and smelled his breathing; he looked at his sweating and facial expressions; he felt his biofield. Some races thought Andorians were empathics; but it was just the result of their extraordinarily heightened senses and deep education in body language built from millenias of duelling tradition.

For three human decades, Kheren had been a master duellist and a teacher before joining Starfleet four years ago. He knew how to assess friend or foe at a glance. And so, he knew immediately that he could rely completely on this young officer.

"Unless we receive further instructions from the Chief of Security, he added then, you are in command, Sir. "

"Very good, Crewman; you're a fine tactical security officer, that's a certainty. I like the plan. Let's go with that if you are completely confident you can get down there unnoticed. I am way ahead of you with the stun setting; already had a run in with three of these guys on my way here, " Daniel whispered as he was positioning himself to be at a good angle to get some good shots off at the Romulans in the room below.

Then he whispered into his personal badge-shaped communicator:

"Lieutenant Summers to Lieutenant Speaker. Crewman Kheren and I have a plan formulated to eliminate the Romulans occupying main power core and are preparing for attack. Wanted to keep you informed; Lieutenant Summers out!"

Daniel tapped again his combadge to end the transmission as Crewman Kheren and himself prepared for their imminent battle ahead. He had already heard through the comm channel that elsewhere, where the security chief was, the battle had already been joined.

Everywhere around the huge starbase, Starfleet personnel, sometimes even Federation citizens, were fighting to push back the intruders.

Phasers and disruptors screamed, echoing down the jefferies tubes, trailing brilliant flashes of alternating green and crimson light. It had been less than an hour since the Captain had taken control of the Ops center of the station, and yet it felt like weeks to the young, redheaded security woman named Rachele Rivers.

And to think the day started out with the Chief and two of her squadmates wanting to explore the station...

Bryce Schumacher, her always joking blond-haired Academy pal, had happily called it, "a chance to familiarize ourselves with the new digs," spreading his arms apart in a half shrug as if he couldn't help it that orders were orders. She had quirked an eyebrow at the Ensign, a habit given to her by the Vulcan man who had raised her, but he did have a point. And so, the four of them, herself and the man Schumacher, the androgyn Veldriari Yylna and their towering felinoid chief, the Kzinti Speaker-Of-Names, they had gone on their private tour of the station. Delayed by Yylna's horrified interest in the goings on in the fitness facilities and Bryce's chumming around with what seemed like every other person on the station, they'd only been a quarter of their way through their little tour of the vast space city when Lieutenant Speaker's batwing-shaped ears had flicked and he had growled for everyone to take cover.

And now, they were dragging Schumacher's limp form with them as the group simply attempted to survive.

She was using Bryce's hand phaser right now, the jefferies tube's confines too tight for her to comfortably use her rifle. Rachele took a moment to glance towards Lieutenant Speaker and Yylna before quickly lancing several phaser beams down the tunnel.

Yylna had been working with Speaker-of-Names ever since they'd established this new safe point, working on making the Captain's orders a reality while Ensign Rivers kept the door closed. The Veldriari worried for her. It couldn't understand how the Chief could assign a brain-damaged, fragile woman first to the elite Team-Rhetti, then as their only defense in this firefight. Humans didn't have the Chief's girth or Yylna's own exoskeleton...it continued fretting until the big cat's growl brought it back to attention. Yylna blinked once, then nodded and turned back to the PADD and combadge assembly they were huddling about.

Speaker-of-Names nodded back to Ensign Rivers as she glanced back, his clawed hand flicking in silent order for her to lay down several phaser beams towards the pursuing Romulan party. It was their misfortune to place one of their main beam-in locations where the Kzinti and three of his best were touring.

Still, this confining maintenance conduit was bad placement for the big cat and his allies, and Schumacher had been downed during the first few moments of the fight.

A rock and a hard place, he mused, not without feeling puzzled about the Human saying.

"Now." he growled to Yylna, while looking at the juririgged appliance the Veldriari had contrived.

This representative of that new Federation species was proving over and over again its usefulness. First in keeping Schumacher alive in the midst of a heated firefight, now in this unholy marriage of a communicator badge and a PADD.

Utilizing the comm network Captain-Alistair-Cobb had somehow thoughtfully brought with him, Yylna's makeshift device allowed Speaker to communicate with the other security officers on the station on its own independent power source and frequency. Then it automatically recorded their X, Y, Z coordinates on the station map built into it for their tour. His four-man team leaders came first, as it allowed him to begin shaping the defensive perimeters, and calling Team-Cargo-Bay to flank their attackers. Beyond that, it also allowed him to figure out how many team members were together, and how many were separated, like Mister Kheren.

The Andorian was the first of the "loose" members to be contacted once the Chief had a working visual diagram of his main forces.

"Speaker-of-Names to Kheren. Advise status if you are able." And as he did so, he prepped Team-Rhetti's other members to go to the Andorian's assistance, his claw-tips clacking against the PADD's surface as he selected and dragged them to Yylna's bit of code, an icon marked, "Signal Origin."

The Antennae of the Andorian stood almost straight up. He had not yet met the new Chief of Security, but he had already heard of the impressive reputation of the colossal and unique Kzinti officer of Starfleet from logs and reports of the flagship USS Lotus where the starbase's new chief of security had served last.

A smile crossed his dark blue features:

"Reporting, Sir. Position:access tube L41S7, in a radial air vent of the main power room, facing galactic center. Tactical officer Lieutenant Summers is with me."

Still sitting on his haunches inside the maintenance tunnel to make some room for the other officer, he then said after getting a go-ahead nod of the senior officer near him:

"A dampening master control unit is directly hooked to the starbase's main reactor. All stations are down and the control unit is connected to our power distribution grid. "

His antennae were now again slightly moving towards the other end closed by the grid as he further reported:

"Two technicians at the unit, two guards with them; two patrolling the entire room in a clockwise eight minutes circuit. beamed in relief once every hour.; last change of the guard was thirty-eight milutes ago. Both pairs of guards loose sight of each other for four minutes as one move behind the main reactor. All their weapons on heavy stun in the power room."

He marked a pause before suggesting:

" Sir as Lieutenant Summers told you, we estimate it is possible for the two of us to overpower them with proper tactics... but more help would make it much easier. I am wearing makeshift armor and armed with two of their own disruptors, taken from two prisoners I left unconscious in airlock 37.

Do you acknowledge our planned action, Sir?"

There was some discussion on Speaker's end while he conferred with Yylna, gesturing for it to begin some quick graphical reconstruction on the map. Kheren's descriptions were good.

"Lieutenant-Daniel-Summers, Crewman-Kheren, three members of Security-Team-Rhetti are en route to assist from the main access. We are making them aware of your plan now."

He nodded to Rachele, who was now resting against the bulkhead: with Security Team Cargo Bay hitting the Romulans from behind, the beleaguered officers had been given a bit of breathing room.

He watched as she tapped her combadge after mopping her forehead with her sleeve. With all due alacrity, she relayed the information to the women making all of Team Rhetti. When she finished, she smiled and nodded at him. His ears flicking once and he called back to the two officers waiting for his confirmation.

"Security-Team-Rhetti is in position at the front entry. Signal them when you need them. Don't let your prey escape. Speaker out."

Chief petty officer Aireiko Hattori, leader of Team Rhetti, listened as her squad's leader breathlessly recounted the information this Crewman Kheren had provided. She nodded, making certain to stay silent as she absorbed the situation. Then when Ensign Rivers finished, she smiled.

What it must be like to see the colossal Lieutenant finally pushed to his limit, to see real rage and fear in his slitted eyes, frustration rippling across his auburn fur. Frustration at not being at such a critical battle...

She double-tapped her communicator to silently acknowledge the situation, then glanced to her teammates, one at a time.

Evelyn Ryans: talented Sweeper. Her gray eyes were sharp enough to cut diamond, and she had the wit to match. The telling smirk on her face, the energy coiled within her young frame...Hattori almost felt a pang of sympathy for the Romulans caught in their web.

Alani Bankole. Quiet and dutiful, her dark eyes gazing down at the tricorder she carried. She was unknowable to the Chief Petty Officer. The woman could have had a fine career in Science... she was brilliant. How she ended up in Security was something Hattori wanted to know someday.

She was nothing like her; small, lithe long black hair tied into a ponytail behind her safron, feline features brightened by dark slivers of obsidian catching every detail, every movement her slim hands could follow intently and perfectly. She was like a cat, born for instinctive, sudden action. She would not have liked it in Science... or anywhere else but security.

Hefting her phaser rifle, she nodded to the two other security Crewmen. Bankole holstered her tricorder, adjusted the medkit slung over her shoulder, then finally drew her hand phaser with a look of serene concentration passing over her face. Ryans lounged a bit against the wall, deceptively calm and easy, her fingers resting lightly on her own hand phaser.

Now they just needed the signal.

* * *

Cobb slowly opened his eyes. His head felt like someone had shoved a hammer up his nose and rattled it around.

The last thing he recalled was the sound of a transporter and four Romulans suddenly appearing in Ops, weapons drawn.

He'd got two of them with his phaser before one of the remaining ones hit him with a disruptor just as he dived for cover. He'd evidently hammered his head against the deck plating as he had landed, suddenly paralyzed by the green-hued discharge.

Now, as he slowly turned his head to look discreetly, he saw that his hands had been tied behind him and that the two still conscious Romulans were standing over him, weapons trained.

He could hear groaning, signifying that at least one of the Romulans he'd stunned earlier was slowly waking from stun like he had done.

I'm not going anywhere, he thought bitterly.

But there was a more disturbing thought creeping now into his confused mind.

Romulans... why am I still alive?

CHAPTER THREE: NEVER SURRENDER

It had taken them longer than he had expected to reach the astrometrics lab. The two crewmen kept carrying their disabled colleague while Ensign Venture monitored her condition, which was, due to their lack of medical equipment and difficult situation, worsening with every step they took. Having a wounded comrade in their team also had definitely slowed them down.

But they could not abandon her and let her die.

They were not Romulans.

Nevertheless, they finally reached their goal. The lab was dark, running on minimal power. One of the benefits of this lab was that, like sickbay and life support, it always kept receiving energy since some of the processes running here could be vital to the station's survival, notably constant monitoring and recording of stellar phenomenon. And so, it had its own independent reserve power source in case main power and even back ups failed or had to be rerouted for some dire need.

As he approached the main control console he was looking for, one of the other crewmen, dark of hair and eye, a smallish Third Class Bennings, approached him.

"Commander, what are your orders?" he asked.

Greg nodded. He knew they were expecting something of him, and although he wasn't trained that much in security, his experience over the years as a Starfleet officer had given him enough ideas and actual training so as how to keep them secure in a crisis situation such as this.

"I want you and the remaining crewmen to establish a safe perimeter around this lab. I will only need one extra pair of hands to do my work so the eight of you should be able to do so easily while Ensign Venture works with me. Be careful when you go to secure the area; the Romulans are, as you have seen, armed and dangerous with definite deadly intent upon this starbase."

Whatever their intentions might be, he started wondering. I would have expected them to simply blow up the station with ships if they wanted war or simply objected to this starbase... So... why are they here?

he kept his doubts to himself. No one here could readily answer this question.

Bennings nodded then gathered seven of the remaining men and women with him to establish a safe zone around the astrometrics lab.

Greg nodded as Venture approached him. He would be assisting him until Commander Calhoun would restore main power to the base... or bring back the promised power cells to implement their counter effect against the Romulan dampening field.

Hopefully...

He began his own work by rerouting reserve power available to one of the sensor arrays as his assistant was checking the array's status. While they were waiting for Commander Calhoun to arrive with the energy-cells, Greg continued rerouting power to the sensory array. It was difficult work since the closed circuit had been effectively built to prevent such a thing, but he finally succeeded. It would still be not enough to block the dampening signals, not without the power cells, but he would now be able to at least detect how many emitters there were, and where they had been placed on the station.

While he scanned the station for the emitters, the chief of science immediately detected the first three of them, including the master one to which the rest of the field grid was relying on. This one was located near the main matter-antimatter reactor, down in Engineering; two other backups control systems were situated at two other reactors, auxiliary fusion power cores.

The Romulans had been able to cover the entire station with their emitters except for the outer ring of the kilometers-wide starbase. Once they had been made fully operative, they had made it impossible for anybody to communicate within the central hub of the station itself or to use any station system. It would take portable power units to power any specific system.

He knew he had to do something about this, but he was aware of the fact that he needed the power cells that Commander Calhoun was collecting to do so.

Where is he? Is he alright?

He dared not call him over an unsecured comm channel. If the Romulans even had but a hint of what he was doing and where he was, all their hopes would disintegrate as swiftly as if under direct disruptor fire.

And there was enough of that already.

But then, they had finished their work and had been waiting for a while and still no word.

Greg finally felt that he had little choice left and tapped his combadge.

"Patton to Captain Cobb..."

Only silence came back.

He wondered what was wrong. The channel was active but there was no response. His instinct immediately told him the Captain was in a bad situation.

He taped his badge again.

"Patton to security. Is there somebody out there?"

He wanted to have the Romulan problem taken of his hands. Now, he needed the abilities of all the crewmen he had available to him, so that he could start working on a solution for the dampening field. He also wondered if it would be possible to send out a distress signal to one of the ships of the Fleet. But if they had disabled most of the internal systems, they also would have disabled the external systems, and communications would of course have been taken out first. So, contact with the fleet was also impossible in their current predicament.

He began to wonder if there could be another way of getting in touch with the ships. He knew the Sovereign class battleship USS Sarpentia was patrolling near; she should report to the Starbase anyhow, so she probably was en route to their location. Lotus Fleet flagship, the USS Lotus, and its headquarters starbase patrol ship, the USS McKenzie, of course were in the sector as well. He wanted to alert them of their situation, but even more to give them a warning ahead, so they wouldn't fall into a trap upon any chance return; a trap that definitively would have been set up by the Romulans for such a possibility.

But all of this was impossible to prepare without the power cells that Commander Calhoun was fetching and without all the hands of his team he had been forced to send out to secure their surroundings were needed, so a security team would be very welcome.

Since he didn't get a response, he tried again.

And again, met only worrying silence.

* * *

After Zeez had left them, O'Conner and Davis had quickly made there way to drydock control.

Slowly, O'Conner opened the jefferies tube's hatch leading to the room, weapon drawn. He was relieved to see that no Romulans were in the control room.

As he stood up, walked in and looked over the controls, he could see why.

"Of course.... no power."

Michael sighed as he tapped the lifeless control panel.

"But..."

He looked around as Davis crawled his way out of the maintenance conduit himself to stand guard over him.

Then, O'Conner smiled at the weapons locker near the door.

"One perk of being stationed at a tactical post and being trained as an engineer..."

He moved over to the locker, pulled out couple of his engineering tools from his thigh tool belt and began working on the locker's dead key pad.

"Guard the door, Davis."

"Aye, Sir." the brown haired and eyed stout security crewman replied as he moved over to cover with his weapon's muzzle the only direct access to the room they were occupying.

After about a minute of working, the locker's door popped open.

"There we go."

Michael smiled at the five rifles, five hand phasers and five wrist lamps neatly hung inside.

O'Conner tossed a set of each of the three standard security assault items to Davis and took one for himself before bringing the rest of the weapons with him as he moved to bend and lie under the console.

"I should be able to get this thing working in a few minutes. Keep an eye on that door, Davis."

He nodded to O'Conner as he readied his new rifle.

"That should do it." the tall red-haired ensign said with a muffled voice from under the console.

After a few minutes, O'Conner finished wiring the unused phasers' power packs into the energy grid of the console. He stood up and looked over the now working console with a grin.

"Wont last long, but should be good enough for now... Hmm... looks like we have five ships docked. Lets try hailing."

O'Conner pressed a few buttons.

"Ensign O'Conner to... Trader Mon Tak in drydock 2."

A typically high-pitched and rough Ferengi voice could be heard over the com.

"About time! Why have I been trapped here? Do you know who I am!? I am..."

O'Conner interrupted him.

"I am sorry, Sir, but there has being a power lost on the station we are trying to fix..."

The Ferengi interrupted in turn.

"Power lost? I have a cousin..."

O'Conner cut him off again.

"Repairs are underway, no supplies needed at this time. Do you need any assistance?"

"Uhh... no... but..."

Michael closed the channel.

"Oi... I never did like them Ferengis anyway."

O'Conner chuckled to himself as he radioed the next ship.

"Ensign O'Conner to transport White Wind in drydock 3."

O'Conner waited a few moments then repeated.

"Ensign O'Conner to transport White Wind in drydock 3."

After a few more moments, he sighed.

"No one there I guess... Ensign O'Conner to freighter Miami, drydock 4."

"Uhh hello? What's going on, Ensign? We have been trapped in this dock for the last two hours!" A female voice replied.

"There has been a power outage on the station. Do you require any assistance?", O'Conner replied.

"Uhh no.. but how long will we be stuck here?"

"We are fixing the problem as quickly as we can; please stand by," the young Starfleet officer replied before closing the coms. "Three down, two to go... Ensign O'Conner to transporter Navi in drydock 6."

No reply.

He tried one more time.

"Ensign O'Conner to Transporter Navi in dry dock 6."

Again, there was no reply.

"Hmm... well, one more. Ensign O'Conner to... hmm this is odd... Console says there is someone docked at drydock 7 but there is no name. Ensign O'Conner to dry dock 7."

He waited a few moments but then, the makeshift power pack of the comm station died before he could try again.

O'Conner frowned a bit.

"I was hoping it would last longer than that. Something must be draining our power grid still... Oh well..."

He now used his personal communicator.

"Ensign O'Conner to Captain Cobb. I have hailed the ships in drydock; two of them are fine but I couldn't get a reply from the other 2 and the console says there is something in drydock 7 but it doesn't have any registry number or name and I didn't get a reply when I hailed them. By the way, the spacedoor of drydock 7 has been severely damaged. Seemingly by weapons fire, Sir"

And again, only silence answered him.

Michael sighed again and looked at his comrade with an exaggerated expression of sadness.

O'Conner paused.

"Hmm... still no reply. Something must be wrong."

He and Davis had been waiting for a reply from the captain for nearly ten minutes now when he looked over the map of the station on his PADD.

"An armory and Ops itself are nearby."

He smirked to Davis.

"Maybe we should report to the Captain in person."

The anxious crewman simply nodded his head in agreement, still too tense to trust his voice not to squeak and break under stress.

"Okay help me with the door."

Together, they forced the door open. Davis took the lead and they began to advance down the corridor with rifles at the ready. O'Conner was glad to progress without any resistance; glad and also worried. He wondered about it until he saw why at the end of the badly lighted corridor they had been following.

The armory had been ransacked; most of the phasers, rifles and other equipment had simply been destroyed, reduced to slugs of metal and plastic by disruptor fire once their power units had been obviously removed and taken.

"Should have guessed that, he told his comrade, but maybe they left something..."

He sighed as he began to rummage through what was left of the armory.

* * *

Security Lieutenant Junior Grade Karos Ovan, leader of Security Team Residence 1, maneuvered his people into position in a "two-in, two-out" formation that brought to mind his days in the Maquis, and further back, to the years of the Resistance on Bajor. His heavy weapons man and one of his sweepers moved into defensive positions quickly, while he and the other of his sweepers began manually levering open shelter doors, pulling people out of the fire retardant goop as each door was unsealed.

Then he began pressing each rescuee into service until the civilians could safely take over the rescue efforts themselves without splitting his team.

All the while, Petty Officer Ghaham Bartholemew gritted his teeth in frustration. The Lieutenant still hadn't found the other two members of his Security Team Medical. It was only him and his Tech-Med officer... and they really didn't understand how this four-man technique of Lieutenant Commander Name-Speaker-whatever was any better than the previous Security Chief's efforts. Two sweepers, a heavy weapons officer, and the tech-med. It was unnecessary. The standard Starfleet partner system worked just fine. With a frown, he mentally noted Gloria would still be with him instead, under the old Chief's rules...and now, he had to give up looking for her. Maybe she was ok, holding out against the attackers and their "Jolan Tru's" just as they had been before this whole mess began.

"...Maybe she'll be back in sickbay, hopefully unharmed," he muttered.

And then, bolts of green energy flashed past him.

"Move out people!" ordered Lieutenant Karos. "Fall back to the Promenade! Team Residence1, cover fire!"

Bartholemew complied and, seeing the large group of intruders harrassing them, suddenly realized the four-man tactic managed to pin them down as they fled... something a mere pair of security officers could never have suffered of.

But there was no more time for tactical studies. They all retreated hastily, not even aware that others were moving about nearby, even through the very bulkheads of the station.

Captain John Garrison moved quickly through the jefferies tubes, hearing firing and shouting behind him. He climbed down a long access shaft and opened the door to the engineering deck. He then arrived at an access junction and saw two doors and an air vent panel. He manually opened the air vent and crawled inside hoping to foil his assailants if they were still following him. After shimmying through the vent for a few minutes, He heard two voices in front of him and approached quietly to hear if they were friend or foe...

John then saw two Romulans and realized they had their backs turned to him.

He adjusted his phaser for heavy stun and fired, instantly knocking one Romulan out of commission and nailed his companion in his shoulder as he turned. His eyes went wide as his arched eyebrows almost touched his pointed ears and it fell to the floor accross the still body of his comrade.

Not far from there, security Crewman First Class Gloria Tuzon ran. The corridors were a blur to her, one fading into the next. She'd long since given up on trying to figure out where she was in the station. The sounds of multiple boots hitting the deck quickly behind her had hounded her since her own security team had been scattered, and learning even simple things like what part of the station she was in became something she needed to know and couldn't at all.

As she approached a T-shaped intersection, she heard two voices...Romulan-sounding. Briefly, she considered ducking into the air vent that overlooked the corridors, but like every other time she'd considered it, she simply didn't have enough time. She let out a pouting sigh of defeat. Two in that intersection she needed to cross, and at least two chasing her from behind.

She skid to a stop as a moment of life-threatening indecision and panic hit her. What to do...what to do... until she heard the distinctive sound of firing.

A phaser firing.

Garrison then just made his way down the corridor to see barely seconds later the lone Starfleet security officer running towards him and almost shooting him on sight as they met. But, despite her obvious unnerved state, she still had enough training to restrain herself and shout:

"Run! I'm being chased by a Romulan squad!"

Garrison grabbed a disruptor of one of the fallen Romulans. He quickly motioned for her to get into position behind the wall on either side of the intersection. He overrid the safeties on his phaser and began an overload of its power pack.

As four grey-uniformed intruders appeared at the other end of the corridor, several dozen meters away, he tossed the sharply whinnying overloading phaser into the corridor.

A blast of energy blew through the corridor singing his nightwear even at this distance and behind the far away wall, so intense was the heat of the energy blast. The entire station seemed to shake as the immense power reserve suddenly exploded. He waited a moment and looked out into the corridor which was totally destroyed. Fortunately, his phaser's power pack had been almost drained; a fully charged phaser would have destroyed the entire deck.

The woman got up and looked at the blasted corridor in silence. After a moment, she began to laugh with mixed nervousness and relief.

"Station security Crewman First Class Gloria Tuzon... Nice clothes..."

John turned around somewhat embarrassed.

"I wasn't alerted about the Romulans and I was asleep while the attack came, if you must know..."

"That much is obvious," she smirked, looking him up and down.

"Now crewman, I am Captain Garrison, formerly of the Lotus..."

Her attitude instantly went from casual to formal as she now took the time to peer closely at his face and a light of recognition came to her features.

"Captain Garrison Sir! Sorry, Sir, I did not immediately identify you in those... without your... in the..."

"Smoke and bad lighting," finished John for her without a smile but allowing her to recover her dignity as well. "Ensign, I could use your help in getting contact back with the rest of the starbase crew."

The woman nodded.

John smiled a bit, now remembering that his own former chief of security and tactical aboard the Lotus had been reassigned to Starbase 10 at the same time he had been himself offered to join the Joint Chiefs back on Earth.

Hope you're alright my friend because now we most certainly need someone like you...

John and Gloria made their way down the other end of the devastated corridor and opened the door to find four crewmen in a guard position around a jefferies tube. He greeted them, made the introductions and ordered one of them to begin a tricorder scan of the area for Romulans.

The former captain of the flagship then ordered them to hold position until back up arrived.

"I need to speak with Lieutenant Commander Speaker-of-Names." he then said to the security officer he had met first, Gloria Tuzon.

In the short time that it took for various events to occur throughout the station, Speaker's team had exited the jefferies tube to join up with Team Cargo Bay, and were just now setting up a proper command post in one of the station's many conference rooms. Rachele let out a sigh of relief as she heard Hattori's report, and was relaying the message to Speaker when Tuzon's call came in.

"Crewman Tuzon to Lieutenant Speaker-of-Names. I have found Captain John Garrison and he wishes to speak with you."

With surprise, Speaker tapped his badge and called back.

"Speaker-of-Names to Captain-John-Garrison. Good to hear from you, Sir. Good as well to know you and Tuzon are together."

His bare tail flicked behind him idly as he continued speaking.

"Sir, if you are able, you both should head for the cargo-transporter room on that level."

He was once again gazing at Yylna's device, in particular the four starfleet badges just two corridors down from where Tuzon's signal was coming from.

"It's the safest location I can find in your proximity."

Rachele continued to listen in for a few moments, then decided it'd be better to give the Chief the rest of the details later. She glanced at Bryce Schumacher, currently being cared for by Team Cargo Bay's tech-med. He was awake now, but she could tell by the grimace on his face how good he felt.

They needed to focus on getting a clear line to main sickbay next.

Rudolph Tungstad, one of Bryce's team members on Team Cargo Bay and an admirer of hers poked his head into the conference room.

"One of my men just found a civilian. They're bringing him in now, but it sounds like he found a friend of his from Team Ops 3 dead in Turbolift 1."

She closed her eyes and sighed. So that's why they couldn't contact Ops 3 earlier. It probably explained Ops 1 and 2 as well...which meant Speaker's Deputy Chief was likely dead.

Speaker had just finished coordinating with Captain Garrison when he overheard the news Tungstad had brought in. Growling low in his throat, he stepped away from the table to gaze at one of the paintings in the room.

It was difficult to see, with the power still down in this section, but he always did appreciate art, and the heavy shadows, by way of an interesting twist of words, illuminated the artist's brush strokes more strikingly than had the room's lights been operative.

Inspiring, especially in this gloomy hour.

"Alright, we have three objectives we have yet to meet," he stated to the wall, but clearly enough so that everyone in the room could hear him. "Ops. Engineering. Medical. Those are the locations so far where we've had no luck contacting complete security teams. With Tungstad's news, we have to assume all Ops teams are dead, incapacitated or scattered. We have half of Team-Medical en route to Primary Sickbay, and another member of Team-Medical with Captain-John-Garrison near Main Engineering. Team-Patrol 12 has been ordered to rendez-vous with them, but the majority of that deck is in Romulan hands still."

He paused, and reached up to stroke his forked beard.

"Ensign-Rachele-Rivers. For the duration of this situation only, or until we find him, you are my new Deputy-Chief.

He continued for several minutes, reorganizing the structure of the security teams, and Rachele dutifully noted them down on her PADD:

"Here will be the teams roster and assignment changes for Operation... Sparta, " detailed the colossal Kzinti officer. "Security Command Prime, Formerly Patrol 3, will consist of myself with you three crewmen, " he said, pointing to the nearest security people. " Our Assignment: Reestablish command post at the main Security Office and in the Armory."

Looking at the red-haired woman recording his words with her PADD, he then ordered:

"Security Command 2, Formerly Armory 2, will consist of Ensign Rachele Rivers and you three," he then said, pointing at the ones guarding their location. "Assignment: Rendez-vous with Team Medical remnants and establish control of main Medical Office and Sickbay."

Pausing a moment, he looked upward then back at Rachele.

"Tech-Med One, formerly loose elements from several teams, will be Ensign Yylna and our last three crewmen here. Assignment: Accompany Security Command 2 and set up a command post for Security Command 2."

Then, their comm channel chirped.

"Patton to Security. Is there anybody out there?"

Just beginning to set into her new role and recording the new orders, Rachele paused, looking to the Chief. One call after another after another. He couldn't handle the latest incoming at the moment.

No time like the present... she thought before she tapped her communication badge.

"This is Acting Deputy Chief, Ensign Rivers," She began, her tone dutiful. "We hear you, and I'm glad to hear you're still ok, Commander."

Greg sighed. He finally had contact.

"Good to hear you too, Ensign. Last time I had contact with Captain Cobb was almost an hour ago; I fear something has happened to him. I am unable to reach him and no other Starfleet personnel has showed up yet. And I need all my staff to complete our task here if we want to detect and neutralize the power dampening field and get rid of the Romulans."

He coughed.

"My apologies if I come out harsh, but the situation is too serious already. When can you have a team down here in the astrometrics lab?"

The redhead quickly checked her modified PADD and sighed.

"Sir, we're spread thin. All the teams that reported in have been reassigned by the Chief to retake Medical, Engineering, and Ops, or have been deployed to critical defensive posi..."

She stopped as she waved Yylna's team forward, gazing at the surviving Starfleet personnel they had already picked up along the way. All were injured, and none wore Security gold, but she bet they could hold a phaser like any Starfleet officer out of the Academy.

"...Actually, I may have a team for you."

She grinned to herself and explained:

"We're about to hit Medical with several teams. Our orders were to get here, clear out the Romulans, set up a second command post, and defend. We have light-wounded personnel with us I think I can press into service as guards. That'll free up a team for me to send you."

She looked over at the injured men and women as she spoke and they all nodded despite the weariness in their eyes... or perhaps because of the need for retribution burning there too.

"I'll get that team to you in a few minutes, Rivers out."

The teams, the assigned and the improvised one, checked their gear while Rachele filled the Chief in on what was happening.

The Kzinti chief of security nodded appreciatively to his new second in command's handling of the situation in Astrometrics. Whatever the scientists would be able to do would certainly help. He then activated his own communicator before continuing his assignment orders:

"Team Cargo Bay, you are now Team Guard 1. Ensign-Rudolph-Tungstad, Crewman-T'Alon and the two crewmen still with you, your assignment now will be to rendez-vous with Patrol 2 which will be Captain-John-Garrison and Crewman-Gloria-Tuzon and anyone they may find along the way. Once linked, your objective will be to retake and control Ops. Captain-John-Garrison, I you of course will be in command... at least until Captain-Alistair-Cobb's condition can be established. We have lost all contact with him."

"Good plan, Lieutenant Commander, agreed the former captain of the Lotus, having followed the whole thing over their open comm channel. "We start moving now to join Team Guard 1."

"Team Guard 1, acknowledge." then came another voice.

Nodding to himself, the giant felinoid resumed his list of assignments.

"Mobility One will be Ensign-Dwight-Schumacher with the people currently guarding the Promenade. Assignment: link with Ensign-Michael-O'Conner and Crewman-Davis to secure runabouts or shuttles with transporter for site-to-site operations and supply efforts."

Speaker then made the first of three vital communications.

"Speaker-of-Names to Ensign-Michael-O'Conner. A security team is en route to assist you. You will be in overall command once link is established. For now, I need numbers and locations for docked shuttlecrafts and runabouts with transporter capability."

A slightly hesitant voice then replied over the channel.

"O'Conner to Speaker-of-Names. To be honest, Sir... I don't know. Power is down here, no console or computer working... and I only got on this station a few days ago."

Meanwhile, Speaker was growing concerned. Captain Cobb had not given any sign of life during the entire time he'd had the line open with the drydock Chief. And the man was now hesitating.

"Mister-O'Conner; find out what you can and coordinate with Team-Mobility-One-Leader-Bryce-Schumacher. I haven't been able to contact Captain-Cobb, which makes it imperative we secure another Starfleet ship not just for possible transport capability, but also for communications."

The Kzinti growled low and shook his head, clearly not liking the situation at all.

"Security's efforts will fail if you cannot complete this task, Dock-Master-Michael-O'Conner. Speaker-of-Names Out."

"Aye, Sir." O'Conner answered as he collected a mostly ruined but still serviceable backpack and filled with the a few explosives and rifle power cells that had be missed by the Romulans. he then got up and looked over to Crewman Davis who had been guarding the door.

"We need to get to the hangar; but first, lets go get those rifles we left in drydock control."

Davis nodded in agreement and began to move out.

O'Conner followed as he looked over the map on PADD.

"Which hangar to try..."

He smiled when he noticed one only a few sections away from the main armory.

"Ensign O'Conner to Ensign Chow. Report."

"All clear down here only minor injuries," reported the lead officer of the group he had left earlier on the Promenade. "Ensign Rodriguez took care of them. No Romulans contact in quite a while now." Chow replied.

"Good, I need you to lead your group to hangar 16."

O'Conner relayed instructions on how to get there safely as Davis and him continued down the hallway to the dry dock control.

"That should get you to the hallway near hangar 16; when you leave the jefferies tube, take a left turn. Then, the next left should lead you to the hangar doors. Watch out for Romulan guards who should logically be there to secure any incoming and escape route. Understood?"

"Aye, Sir!" Ensign Chow answered before organizing his rag tag team of officers and crewmen to move out.

As this was happening, Starbase 10's chief of security Speaker-Of-Names paused again, as he came now to the final part of his whole plan.

"Tactical One, formerly Team Rhetti, will be made up of Lieutenant-Daniel-Summers with Crewman-Kheren linking up with the rest of Team Rhetti. Assignment: retake main engineering and secure the location until engineering officers can reach you and reestablish main power to the starbase."

This was a crucial part of the entire operation. But Speaker was feeling confident it could be pulled off by those people. They had a full-fledged Tactical Lieutenant to lead them; Hattori, Ryans and Bankhole were his best assault team, their efficiency equal even to the best even Starfleet Marines could offer.

And now, he recalled having met crewman-Kheren once before, four years ago, during an incident with Klingons on Deep Space Station K7 when the Kzinti had started out himself as a security Ensign fresh out of Starfleet Academy.

This Crewman Kheren was Andorian, unusually dark-skinned and muscular for his kind... hard to forget; especially since, back then, he had bested an armed Klingon warrior in single combat without even ever retaliating to half an hour of savage bath'leth attacks... bare-handed.

Andorians were born and bred warriors who could stand toe to toe with any other warrior race you could name; but this one had proven himself to be a genuine master at personal combat.

And that was *before* he had joined Starfleet as a security officer.*

Speaker-Of-Names now sighed contentedly. He was confident that, of all the people he had with him at the moment, those five individuals were the best ones to succeed in this most vital part of his strategy in taking back Starbase 10.

* See the short story *Fire and Ice in the Holonovel Emporium* first writing contest on the forum at www.lotusfleet.com

"Speaker to Lieutenant-Daniel-Summers, Crewman-Kheren and Crewman-Aireiko-Hattori."

He paused for a breath.

"You are now Team-Tactical 1. Lieutenant-Daniel-Summers leads. Crewman-Kheren is his acting deputy, the rest performing the role of Sweeps. Team-Rhetti is in position at the front entry. Signal them when you need them. You are all ordered to take back main engineering and secure the area for restoring station power. Don't let your prey escape. Speaker out.""

"Aye, Sir" Daniel Summers said without hesitation.

He then tapped his combadge.

"Lieutenant Summers to Team-Rhetti; please stand by... and when you open the door, be careful, Summers Out."

Team Rhetti's leader Aireiko Hattori acknowledged Summer's contact with a brisk, "Yessir," while Evelyn looked on in amusement.

Aireiko was their heavy weapons while Rachele was away, and more than that, she was the team's leader for this. Crewman Ryans could see the anticipation her superior officer felt in a most palpable fashion, a sign of some of that aggression the woman so poorly hid.

There was little for the Chief Petty to anticipate though, in Evelyn's mind. She just needed to plow down the center while they covered her: Evelyn sweeping right, Bankole sweeping left. If anything on either side required more than a hand phaser set at heavy stun... well, that's why they kept one hand free. Hattori didn't need to think, not when she and Bankole could direct with a touch.

While they were waiting for the final "go" from Summers, Ryans ran her fingers through her short New Seattle-silver hair and glanced at Bankole idly to see what her companion was up to. She smiled when she saw it. Of course she was quiet, calmly gazing down the corridor behind them. Where Aireiko strained to look further ahead, Alani tended to look back. It was true of most things they did.

Speaker knew them well; he could all visualize their positions and actions in his mind as clearly as if he had been there. No one would be better to do the job as he had laid it out to them all.

He just hoped it would prove enough.

He stayed on the line with them for a few moments more before he dismissed everyone to their newly assigned teams and then made his last call.

"Lieutenant-Speaker-of-Names to Captain-Cobb," he began, unaware of the Captain's current predicament. "I have forces deployed throughout the station. Are there any crisis situations in particular that need reinforcements?"

* * *

Crewman Thompson went down the corridor of the left access to the infirmary. He arrived at the first T section, took a great care to be sure no one was around and, with his phaser, created a hole to place a tricorder, at waist height, in the wall. The young black haired crewman checked the corridor one last time before going back to the infirmary.

Cadet Harolds was still working on a medical station apart from the others and far from the entrances to the infirmary. At Doctor Nasaro-Myth's suggestion, Harolds had managed to put several pieces of equipment together in order to power a medical station on which a few tricorders, placed in surrounding corridors, were relayed in order to act as a very short range radar.

"It's all in place, Harolds!" said Thompson.

"Aye!" the Starfleet cadet answered.

With a few commands, the medical station's complement of tricorders, set for lifesigns scans and proximity alert, was reconfigured in an emergency scanning grid.

"Now we will have a good idea of what's happening out there."

Doctor Nasaro-Myth overheard his fellow crewmen and smiled.

"Hey guys, maybe we could barricade both entrances..." the Deltan yelled with his melodic and singing voice.

"We're gonna have to take some beds..." answered Thompson.

"Take the ones stored in the infirmary reserve locker..." said the hairless and handsome doctor.

Crewman Thompson was barely going there while Cadet Harolds was being replaced at the improvised scanner grid by one of the nurses, Nurse Ricard, when six forms appeared in the middle of the infirmary.

The Romulans were all heavily armed. Doctor Nasaro-Myth barely had time to tap his combadge and say:

"Infirmary to Captain! We are under attack! Six Romulans! Request immediate back ups!" he said before a disruptor flash missed him by a centimeter. The Deltan rolled back and ended up behind a console. He grabbed his confiscated disruptor promptly.

What a first week! Elliago thought... I hope they won't make a habit of this...

Crewman Thompson was the fastest of all and fired his own weapon at the nearest Romulan. The heavily armed soldier fell on the floor, stunned.

Two of his comrades turned to face their attacker. At that same moment, Harolds leveled his disruptor rifle given to him by Doctor O'Clare and shot down a second one, but then was hit by the disruptor beam of a third before he could do anything. The intruder responsible for Harolds falling pointed his weapon on the injured and nurses with a fourth comrade while another aimed at the nurse behind the central medical station. The last Romulan had fired on the doctor but the Deltan had quickly ducked behind his covering console and the invader swiftly walked towards his hiding place for a better angle to get to him.

Hidden behind the medical computer console, the doctor tapped his combadge once more.

"Sickbay to Security! we are under attack! We need assistance right away!"

Then, coming out of his hiding place, he rolled away, got on his knees and fired with his own weapon at the coming Romulan. His heavy stun shot hit straight and the grey-clad soldier fell to the floor.

Crewman Thompson managed to avoid the first disruptor blasts now turned at him and hid behind an unoccupied biobed before any other invader had any time to shoot him. From the other side of the bed, Thompson fired at one of his attacker and felled him.

Hearing the sound of a body hitting the floor, the Romulan covering the injured turned his head. Before he had time to try and shoot the exposed Doctor Nasaro-Myth right besides him, a huge Caitan female among the injured grabbed his torso with both arms and bearhugged him savagely.

As he saw his comrade being grappled, the Romulan covering the nurse behind the med station turned to aim at the felinoid woman but was then hit by a stun bolt from the Doctor.

The Deltan rolled once more on the floor and shot the last Romulan trying to get Thompson.

With them out of the way, Nasaro-Myth rushed toward Harolds. When he reached him, he immediately saw that he was comatose even if the disruptors appeared to be set to heavy stun. His pulse was barely perceptible under his sensitive fingers and his breathing very slow.

"Nurse, get a biobed ready yesterday!" he screamed. "Thompson, come here, I need you to get him on the bed" he ordered.

Promptly, the young crewman joined the Deltan and they moved Harolds.

"Nurse, I need two ccs of Kelotane. Fetch me the dermal regenerator while I inspect that wound." said the doctor with his strong but still oddly melodic voice.

Using his medical tricorder, he analysed the injury. Nurse Ricard used the hypospray to inject the Kelotane to the patient. After a moment, the Deltan doctor looked at Thompson and said:

"Secure the place, crewman; set a tricorder for incoming organic material in subatomic matter stream. We don't want to be caught off guard again by transporting Romulans."

Thompson nodded.

I guess I need to thank my father for that serenity in such emergency, the Deltan thought...

After all, how many times he had overheard his father talking like that while hiding in his ready room on the USS Kepler where he was born and raised. Starfleet talk and attitude was like his native language and own culture to him, even more than was his Deltan heritage. Delta IV had been but one of many places he had visited, and only stood out in his heart and mind as his parents' birthplace. His own life has always been in Starfleet.

And preserving such life had become his own life goal. Damn he should be if he let anyone's life slip away while he was there.

Ensign Rivers tapped her own version of Yylna's PADD improvisation, only the second one it was able to complete before Speaker's new orders came through. It opened up another line, but probably added to the major burden the comm system Captain Cobb's shuttlecraft provided. She'd try to keep it short.

"This is Acting Deputy Chief Ensign Rivers to Infirmary. Security forces are already en route."

And it was true. With Speaker's PADD and Rachele's PADD linked, any information she had was available to him and vice versa. Teams Security Command 2 and Tech Med 1 had continued on their way to rendez-vous with Team Medical's remnants.

"Please hold out as best you can, Rivers out."

The eight security personnel, led by Rachele and Yylna, were moving at a hustle. At each intersection, four hand phasers swept out quickly and cautiously, two to the group's left and two to the right. The fighting on this deck however had long since passed. They encountered Starfleet survivors and dead alike along the way. Yylna's group would pause at these rare occasions while Rachele's group pressed on, clearing intersections and open spaces so that Yylna's group, laden down with survivors, didn't have to. Overall, the two teams managed to stick together, take on three more Starfleet personnel, and recovered four more hand phasers, an engineering kit, and two medkits.

As they neared, Rachele tapped the PADD badge again.

"Rivers to Infirmary; ETA less than a minute. Hang in there!"

Meanwhile, Team Medical's remnants headed towards the designated rendez-vous point as well. It was slower going for them, as the duo needed to be far more careful at the numerous intersections. Despite the tense situation however, Graham was relieved. His buddy Bryce had contacted him the moment Gloria had reported in, somehow, insanely, from all the way over in Engineering. He was about to tap his badge and contact her when his teammate motioned for everyone to be quiet, gesturing down towards a side corridor.

The two Security teams reached their rendez-vous position, one corridor away from Medical's offices, triggering the makeshift tricorder sensor array Medical had set up earlier.

In the Infirmary, the computer warned everyone that someone was within the scanning radius of their alert grid.

"Mister Thompson, the incomings are wearing Starfleet combadges" one of the civilians who was sitting in front of the medical station announced with a grin, relieving everyone of the sudden tension that had gripped them again.

But just then, before anyone could do anything, the Romulan held by the Caitan woman managed to free himself, falling on the floor. He tapped his communicator and his entire form dissolved in a green sparkle of light.

"Coast is clear... but they will be back!" screamed Thompson towards the corridor to call the security team in place. "Quickly, come in!" he added.

Meanwhile, the Deltan doctor had managed to stabilise Cadet Harolds. His life was now saved and his injuries treated. Elliago turned towards the Caitan woman and thanked her for saving his life as well as helping stop the intruder squad.

She flashed a smile full of fangs and, despite her injuries, insisted on guarding the other entrance with the Deltan's disruptor.

We have to find a way to move everyone out of here... he thought.

"Nasaro-Myth to Chief of Security; Sir, all wounded are stabilized and your teams have reached us. But sickbay will be attacked sooner or later again... We have to either find away to shield ourselves against incoming transport or move sickbay out of sickbay..."

* * *

With a nod to his senior tactical officer, security crewman Kheren quickly took the lead towards the grate ending the airshaft. For a moment, he just stood there, his antennae twitching slightly forward, even, amazingly, stretching forward longer.

Then, suddenly, he just pushed himself forward and dropped down through the opening.

The grate swung out and back; but instead of clanging back in place, it thudded softly on the thick, chitinous skin of one blue hand still gripping the sill.

Lieutenant Summers felt the inner confidence of the tall Andorian as he was attempting his covert infiltration of the power room... and also his intense rush of adrenaline. This was no game or exercise, and lives were at stake, starting with their own. As the Half-Betazoid took his partner's place, he could see inside the huge room... and that two Romulan technicians were monitoring the power grid while the two guards with them were looking over their shoulders. The other two were out of sight on the other side of the huge, pulsing power pillar as they went on their patrolling circuit around the vast chamber.

Something seemed to be happening... some kind of minor power fluctuation... and it diverted their attention, just long enough for Kheren to slip inside the place, his drop partly hidden by an angling roof support.

Summers could see him dangling below him with just one hand preventing his fall. Then, with that one arm, he lifted up his whole body and swung himself to a farther supporting strut, then to a lower one. He moved about just like a Terran monkey among tree branches, until he could lower himself behind a coolant tank.

Daniel moved himself to where he was able to take out two Romulans with his phaser. As he watched Kheren, he couldn't help but be amazed with the ease the Andorian was able to get himself over and behind the cooling tanks without being seen or heard. His species had a centuries-old reputation for both fighting and covert operations prowess; he could see first hand that this reputation was well deserved.

The Human-Betazoid Hybrid's own heart was now racing and the adrenaline was coursing through his veins with the same rhythm and intensity as that of the Gheloid's much higher metabolism and he had to calm himself down before the mental link would damage his own physiology. He had enough stress of his own to deal with already... as he anxiously awaited for Kheren to make the first move.

All the while, the blue-skinned Starfleet crewman was getting into position. So was Summers, crawling around like a Starfleet Marine to get around in the conduit silently to where he could see the pair of Romulans guarding the door while making sure the other two on patrol around the room would not see what was happening to the other four Romulans at the power grid controls... and before they could hear, realize what would hit them and run back.

The Romulan guards that had been looking over the technicians' shoulders now turned their attention around them. Once more they were on the alert, as the two technicians resumed their monitoring duty of what now definitely looked like a dampening field controlling system.

None noticed the dark blue-skinned, grey and black-clad silhouette sliding between two converters, drawing slowly his pair of disruptors and carefully aiming at one guard and one tech, his head slightly lowered as if in prayer, his antennae rigidly forward.

He was ready.

Summers knew that without even using his telepathic probing. With his superior four-eyed depth perception and natural ambidexterity added to his Starfleet security training, the Andorian could not miss two stationary targets so close.

From his high vantage point, the Lieutenant had the best view of the other two.

He too was ready.

Daniel Summers whispered "go" with a soft, low-voiced call.

The Andorian's antennae twitched in acknowledgement.

Then, all the Romulans in the room jumped and raised their weapons.

Damn! Romulan pointed ears are sharp too!

Daniel decided to open fire while he still had a clear shot. As a green blast flew past the right side of his face, He rolled to the left while firing.

"Geez that was close."

The Romulans had reacted to Lieutenant Summers voice. Too many times people forgot that Romulans were an offshoot of the Vulcan race; those pointed ears were not just for show. But unfortunately for them, the Andorian had had a lot of time to take aim. Both disruptors in his hands fired their green beams, striking a guard and a technician down instantly.

Kheren again reacted on instinct... or some subtle signal of his multi-sensory antennae, he could never tell the difference; but he rolled on his back under a grazing green bolt, then sideways before a second one struck where the floor was still warmed by his body heat.

But the shot ricocheted on his left disruptor, knocking it out of his hand. Checking the other one, he found out that it was completely discharged.

Crime doesn't pay he thought wryly about those sidearms he had stolen from his prisoners at airlock 37.

There was only silence for a moment; the whine of weapons was replaced by the clanking of running boots as he rolled back to his feet. Then, his cranial appendages twitched sharply from a sudden increase of electromagnetic emissions and sudden air displacement.

Quickly, the Andorian tapped his combadge:

"Lieutenant Summers: from your position, you can blast away the control panel of the doors for Rhetti team. I will distract the Romulans."

"Got it," Summers said anxiously.

He just wanted this battle to be over and the base to be secured again. He didn't like confrontations with the Romulans...

But it is better than the Borg, he thought as he took aim and tapped his own combadge.

"Team Rhetti! Get ready! I'm firing on the door controls to open them for you; eight Romulans and an Andorian inside... don't mix them up! Summers out."

Then, right in front of the said Andorian, between two power coupling pylons, another pair of Romulans appeared from a transporter beam.

They had their back turned from him and their attention diverted as they were already seeing the Lieutenant on his elevated position. Kheren threw his useless weapon at the back of the skull of one with such force that the newcomer was knocked down as if by a stun beam.

The other just had time to see his partner falls in front of him before two callused hands grabbed his shoulders to push him; instinctively, the Romulan pushed back to stay upright; that gave enough momentum for the Andorian to pull him effortlessly but most brutally back to bang his skull loudly against a pylon. Kheren pivoted in front of him and slammed the back of a chitinous elbow right between his eyes... savagely banging again the intruder's head against the metallic support.

Behind him, the invader slid slowly against the pylon with blood pouring out of his splintered nose, knocked out cold.

Two meters in front of the Andorian slowly rose the other Romulan, still groggy, leveling his disruptor at the dark blue face. His thumb clicked the weapon's setting to full disintegration.

beyond that telltale sound, the Andorian's acute hearing was picking up many boots running towards him.

Nice distraction, Kheren, he chuckled to himself mirthlessly.

Fire! Daniel thought as disruptor fire came buzzing past his head.

Outside of the main engineering room, Aireiko Hattori drew her phaser at the sounds of combat coming from beyond the doors. Alani had already gotten past the hasty rework the invaders did locking this door, and it was powered thankfully. The signal would come any second now...

Summers fired directly at the control panel for the manual controls of the room's blast doors. It fizzled and died out. Alani activated the manual override

As the compartment doors opened, he quickly turned his attention to the two Romulans still shooting at him. He caught one in the chest and the other in the leg as the disruptor fire from the second Romulan rocked him out of from the rafters at the very same instant.

He hit the floor with an astounding thud and lay unconscious with his phaser still in hand.

And, as soon as the doors opened, the three members of former Team Rhetti swept into the room.

Crewman Evelyn Ryans immediately swept her phaser to the left side, then said quickly: "None," while Crewman Alani Bankole swept the right side, her long, dark brown hair flowing behind her as she stated: "Two."

The Nigerian woman began firing at the two still-standing Romulans that were looking at the fallen form of a Starfleet officer. Between them, Chief Petty Officer Aiereiko Hattori emerged, advancing with her phaser rifle in a sweep that took in the forward section. When she caught sight of the third Romulan getting up and adjusting his own weapon towards a powerful looking but unarmed Andorian in a Starfleet uniform, she grinned and fired, catching him in the obliques.

"One and done," she merrily cried as she then whirled towards the left.

"Cover!" called the Japanese security officer as more disruptor fire came back.

Evelyn hit the deck in a forward roll, coming up with her back to some sheltering containers. Bankole faded back a few steps, tilting her body just enough to avoid the lethal green-hued beams. Hattori had apparently decided for the dramatic as she leapt atop the same containers Ryans had hid behind, then sprang from them. At the apex of her arch, black hair streaming behind her like a silk banner, she fired a stream of crimson bolts at the two Romulans, forcing them to hit the deck or be cut down by that wild maneuver.

"Showoff," accused Ryans under her breath as she popped up, acquired her target, and fired.

Her shot was true, catching one of the ducking Romulans in the middle of his fall to the deck. Dropping behind the containers again, she rolled her eyes as her cover was partially disintegrated in the return fire from the last Romulan still conscious.

"Seven of eight confirmed down," counted Bankole, her normally soft voice raised above the din of battle.

While the other two were busy, she had found a niche in the wall and tucked herself into it, swapping out her phaser in favor of her tricorder.

"Friendlies both accounted for," she noted as her gaze took in Crewman Kheren, then Lieutenant Summers. "The lieutenant is unconscious, some bone and ligament damage but stable."

Caught out in the open, the last Romulan tried to get up so that he too could run out of the room through the wide open doors. Hattori had never stopped advancing however, and flipped her rifle around to swing like a baseball bat into his skull.

"Eight. Of. Eight." She stated with exuberant satisfaction.

With the immediate threat over, Crewman Bankole rushed over to the fallen Lieutenant and popped open her medkit while the short, silver-haired Evelyn went to the door to make sure no reinforcements were coming in from back the way they came.

Hattori meanwhile came over to the panting Andorian and the bodies already downed before their own entrance and smiled.

"Nice bit of carnage."

Then she tapped her combadge and reported in.

"Hattori to Ensign Rivers: We're done here. We walked over what was left, but it looks like Lieutenant Summers and Crewman Kheren took care of most of it before we got in. Rest easy, girl. Your team's doing just fine in my care."

A comment to which Evelyn smirked.

"There, that should do it," Alani said as she applied a hypospray to Summer's neck. "Lieutenant, can you hear me?"

But the man remained out cold. There was no stimulant left in her medkit to revive him.

Then, a growling voice came over the communication channel;

"Tactical 1, report!"

Kheren had barely time to thank the others that just saved him when he heard the call. Picking up the dispatched Romulan's disruptor of his would be murderer and setting it back to heavy stun, he tapped his combadge:

"Chief Speaker-of-Names, Kheren here. Main engineering secured, thanks to team Rhetti. "

Looking around a moment with all four sight receptors, he continued:

"I suggest posting some guards in this section and wait for a coordinated signal from you, Chief, as to when to disconnect the Romulan device down here. Last change of guard occurred a little more than a minute ago. Eight prisoners, all secured. We have less than sixty minutes before they beam another pair... unless we alert them by shutting down their contraption sooner. This could be used as a trap, Sir."

While talking he came over and looked with all his senses at Lieutenant Summers now been taken care of by one of the security team members:

"Lieutenant Summers has taken a bad fall and is unconscious but not seriously hurt: no visible fracture, heartbeat steady, breathing slow but even. He's been taken care of, thanks again to your team. "

Looking around he added:

"Sir, I theorize there is at least one ship close out there from where they base their intrusions. Finding it should be feasible with a tricorder at the exact start of a beam in or out. My antennae can pick up and pinpoint air displacement and electromagnetic surges when transport occurs nearby. This could be used to find that ship... and solve the problem at the source, Chief. "

"Good work, Tactical 1," came back the reply from the starbase's chief of security. " I will try to find an engineer to come and restore station power. Stand by."

As he waited, the Andorian could see that the rest of the Starfleet personnel had already efficiently made a security perimeter with their heaviest weapons guarding all accesses... including the air vent from which Summers and himself had come in.

While waiting for two of them to improvise a stretcher for the Lieutenant with engineering parts from a locker and for the Chief of security's confirmation of orders, he took out a tricorder from a drawer in the chief engineer's office adjoining the immense power room. He modulated the settings to that of detecting and testing the flow of particles from a transporter emitter, narrowing the sensor beam to give it the longest range possible.

If the ship was orbiting the starbase, this would allow to find it... unless it was too far out within the forty thousand kilometers range of transporters.

Even extended with a confined beam , the hand sensor device could not reach that far out, especially through the station's bulkheads... and the alteration would make it purely unidirectional... but his antennae could do the directional work from the point of arrival... if they met any beaming-in of invaders while carrying their wounded Lieutenant to the nearest sickbay or sheltered area.

Looking one last time at the others, he marveled at the ease they positioned themselves for escort and sweep maneuvers in confined space.

Praise be Starfleet's standards and training he thought...and those Humans ' deep sense of survival and caring for each other.

"Chief, crewman Kheren here: we now have fifty-five minutes to bring him to sickbay before other Romulans come in here and find the room empty... or with some guards to welcome them. Ready to move out, Sir. " he finally sent through his combadge.

"Team-Tactical-One; I am dispatching two security teams to your location to relieve you. Move out and rendez-vous with Captain-John-Garrison at the engineering deck transporter room. You will find nine other Starfleet personnel with him: Team-Deuterium-Three, Team-Patrol-Twelve, and Crewman Tuzon from Team-Medical."

Security Chief Speaker-of-Names paused as his own team began climbing down a jefferies tube with him, then resumed communication once they reached the next level.

"Coordinate with those forces, but be wary. That deck is still under Romulan control and you have one injured to bring with you. Sickbay is out of the question at the moment: it's under attack. You'll have to make due with medkits. Good hunting. Speaker Out."

Once more he closed the line, and opened up a new one, this time back to Captain Garrison.

"Sir, this is Speaker. Team-Tactical 1 and Team-Patrol 12 will be meeting at your location. Tactical 1 is bringing the injured station's Chief-Tactical-Officer with them. When both teams reach you, I recommend you carefully begin retaking the rest of the Engineering deck, but you are best in position to assess your next tactical situation and objectives, Sir. I'll have two teams in Main Engineering by the time you're ready to move out, but the deck itself..."

He paused, looked up to the air thoughtfully, then said:

"... I believe the Human term is "it crawls" with Romulans, Sir."

John nodded to himself as he listened to his former chief of security, remembering when they had served together on the flagship; he was reassured by his familiar professionalism.

"Acknowledged, Lieutenant Commander." he simply said, closing the channel and started deploying his people for the difficult task laid out before them.

"Acknowledged, Sir. " answered in turn the muscular Andorian.

Lieutenant Summers was still unconscious. Crewmen Bankole and Ryans had cleverly used contragrav units for cargo transport to implement a makeshift stretcher that could be maneuvered with one man's hand, while the Lieutenant was secured on it with a harness used for extravehicular repairs. That left Ryans with one free hand to use a phaser, while both CPO Hattori and Bankole were free to heft their heavier armament.

Kheren now turned around. He almost smiled, suddenly realizing that, as master Chief Petty Officer and due for a promotion since a week ago, he was the highest ranking among them, officially given command of the team by the Chief himself while the Lieutenant was out.

My first command. Well... like those Humans say... a hell of a time...

Kheren had one fully charged disruptor magnetised to each armguard, another to to each leg covering and one in each hand, with the power packs of the last pair of discarded disruptors of their prisoners inside his chestplate with an active tricorder fixed in front of it with magpins. He glanced at the bodies of their former assailants, gagged and tied securely to a pylon with their own clothes.

No shortage of ammo this time; thanks guys!

Then he looked at his fellow Starfleet crewmen, at their dedicated, professional expression despite visible tenseness and weariness. His antennae pointing, he listened to their heartbeat, fast but strong. He knew then that he was in good company.

"People, we all heard the orders. Chief Hattori; please lead the group, with Ryans at the Lieutenant's side manning the stretcher and Bankole covering the rear. I will scout ahead. Now... let's move out. "

Barely a few dozen meters outside of main engineering, the sound of marching boots from beyond the intersection was so clear to his multisensory antennae that he could count them without seeing them... knowing that, unlike Starfleet, the Romulan Star Empire's Fleet didn't recruit multilimbed races like Edoans.

Kheren quickly backed up to the others beyond the opposite corner as they were coming up with the still disabled Lieutenant.

" Six of them. Position yourself to sweep the corridor when they will turn to follow me. "

As Hattori, Ryans and Bankole left the floating stretcher behind and started to position themselves for a sudden fire burst from around the corner, the Andorian turned back at a trot into the corridor, setting his weapons to concussion mode, until he reached the side corridor leading to the transporter room they were trying to reach...

And apparently, so were the Romulans.

They saw him just as they turned the other corner in front of him: six of them as expected, holding disruptor rifles at the ready. They didn't even had time to point their weapons as Kheren ran out of sight into the side passage on his left.

Immediately, they charged after him.

But, at the exact moment they turned to follow him in the other corridor, the first two ones barely coming into it were caught by the precise shots from the Andorian's pair of stolen disruptors, the Starfleet crewman kneeling in the middle of the passage waiting for them; one fell, while the other lost his weapon, rendered useless from the impact of a green bolt.

At the same instant, all the others were caught sideways by the covering fire of the rest of the Starfleet team suddenly jumping out from the opposite corner from where the one they had come from.

Totally taken by surprise, the whole group of Romulans fell... except the one Kheren had just disarmed.

Cursing and throwing his broken rifle into the Andorian's face, he turned to run back the way he came. Seeing the rest of his team down, he hesitated for a split second.

Kheren's whole body slammed into him.

Twice as strong as any human, an Andorian could make impressive jumps; and Kheren's herculean strength, even to the scale of his powerful species, gave him almost the pouncing power of a Caitan. Kheren's body slam threw them both back in the line of fire of the rest of the Federation Team. But as they rolled away on the floor, none of them could get a clear shot at the last Romulan. And, as they slammed both in the end wall of the far corner from which the Romulan squad came, the Andorian heaved his opponent clear off him and threw him out beyond the corridor's corner, of sight of the others, as Hattori and Ryans started to run after them.

The Romulan fell, rolled back on his feet and stumbled into a half-run, using his comlink to call for an emergency beam out.

Perfect.

Kheren smiled in an uncharacteristic human fashion despite the rigidity of his few facial muscles, both antennae stretching forward as his right hand shot sideways to stop the rest of the team rushing close.

His cranial appendages twitched. He took out the tricorder from his breastplate just as the pulsing lights of a transporter beam envelopped the fleeing Romulan. When he vanished, a strong signal was recorded on the particle flow scanner and numbers poured in the small viewer as his hand holding the enhanced tricorder followed the curvature of his antennae.

Standing up, he tapped his combadge :

" Kheren to Chief Speaker-of-Names: Team Tactical 1 is approaching rendez-vous point with Captain Garrison's team, ETA one minute."

With a far away look beyond the walls of the starbase's corridor, he finished saying:

"And, Sir... I have a lock on the Romulan ship. "

* * *

Meanwhile, the eight men and women of Teams Guard 1 and Patrol 2 began their ascent to Ops, led by Ensign Tungstad. It was slow, methodical work as they crawled through the jefferies tubes, scanning for boobytraps and sweeping intersections for Romulans. But they'd get there, and that's what worried Tungstad. Three Ops security teams were presumed dead. Could two more win the day?

He really, really hoped so. Not just because he liked living, but because two was the best the remnants of the station's Security could muster with all those key areas to take back.

As Lieutenant Speaker's own team neared the main Security Offices and Armory, signs of heavy fighting could be seen all over. Phaser and disruptor scoring, debris from explosions, burning carpet... and bodies, both Romulan and Federation. Two security officers, one with a bloodsoaked sleeve covering what looked to be a now-useless arm, greeted the group at the door, and gave their status reports.

Speaker stalked into the Security offices, fists clenched as he surveyed what he saw.

There were four teams worth of Security personnel already here, and dozens of civilians covered in flame retardant foam. All were injured in one way or another.

"Security-Chief-Speaker to Ensign-Sydona-V'Krull." He began while he went to his locker and pulled out a heavy box, setting it down on the ground with a thunk even as he watched Team Residence 1, under Karos Ovan's command, set out once more to dig out more trapped civilians. "Are you and Murphy the only ones down there? That deck is still firmly under Romulan control. Be extremely wary."

"Roger that, Sir. I'll keep you updated of our progress. V'Krull out." Sydona responded as she continued to crawl her way to the end of the jefferies tube, reaching the door.

Brendan Murphy paused about halfway from the imposing Half-Klingon woman, checking the readings of his tricorder.

"Hey V'Krull...you might want to wait a second. I'm getting two readings of lifesigns..."

Sydona sighs wearily.

"Lovely. We'll try to slip in quiet like and hopefully take them by surprise."

"I thought Klingons were all charge-in-first-ask-no-questions?" Brendan said sarcastically.

Glaring at Murphy, Sydona opened the hatch of the jefferies tube and dropped down into the room. The sound of her feet hitting the floor alerted the two Romulan guards who's only duty was to keep the room secure. The hybrid Klingon open fire as soon as she could target one of her attackers... and missing, due to the injury she sustained to her arm.

Rolling behind one of the consoles, she barely avoided the Romulan's deadly disruptor beam.

Ensign Murphy fired his own phaser, making his orange beam connect with the second, retreating Romulan guard.

"Oh yeah!!! That was for Reyes!" Brendan yelled, getting lost in his moment of glory.

The remaining Romulan closed on Sydona, aiming over the console, preparing to fire. Taking time to gloat, the Romulan looked over at Brendan with a smug, victorious expression.

"Come down Starfleet, or this halfbreed mongrel dies. Drop your weapon." The guard said.

Brendan dropped his weapon and jumped down. With the swiftness of Klingon training, Sydona quickly moved toward the distracted Romulan, grabbing his arm and executing a take down maneuver. The guard was slammed to the ground hard, knocking the wind out of him.

Rage filled the Klingon ensign as she proceeded to break his arm. Brendan winced hearing the cracks and pops echo through the room as the Romulan's arm gave in. Not finished with him, Sydona pinned the would-be attacker down and delivered punch after punch to his face, each blow harder than the last.

After the fifth blow to the head, the Romulan was motionless... and void of life.

"V'Krull!! Get a grip on yourself, woman!!" Brendan said as he pulled Sydona off of the slain Romulan.

Using all of his strength, he managed to back the Klingon amazon up and away, inadvertently slamming her into an adjacent wall. Brendan's soft blue eyes stared back into Sydona's emerald green pupils filled with anger and pain.

"Syd! We have a mission to do! Come back to me! I need the engineer, not the warrior!" the man said softly but with obvious urgency in his voice.

Sydona let out a sigh, then slipped past Brendan and headed to the nearby console.

"If you had been there when they did their surprise attack on the USS Thane... then you'd understand my anger."

Brendan tried searching for something to say... but the words failed him. Seeking to make himself useful, he looked around the room and spotted some power cells.

"Finally... lady luck is on our side. I'm shocked they left this here and didn't move them out. I'm going to go ahead and get these wired up." Murphy said.

"Alright. Considering that this generator is supposed to be offline and the green bloods know that... I'm going to make sure the power fluctuation stay low for the time being." Sydona replied as her blood-stained fingers danced across the console interface. "Are they connected?"

"You got it V. Fire it up." Brendan said enthusiastically.

Sydona looked up from her console, raising a brow. "V? We're on nicknames now, Murphy?"

Brendan shrugged and headed to the second station, starting the relay controls.

"Ready here... *Ensign M'am.*"

Sydona nodded with a smirk and a wink then tapped her combadge,

"Ensign V'Krull to Security Chief; Engineering Science Team Omega has secured backup generator B and is ready to activate it. We'll have a set time to decipher and initiate the lockout before the Rommies swarm our position. We'll try our best to secure this spot...and hopefully give the station some power back."

The Kzinti starbase chief of security immediately called back:

"Ensign-V'Kull, I will be able to give you fire-support from my location, but it will be limited. Be quick and be wary. Speaker Out."

"Affirmative Speaker. V'Krull out." Sydona said as she tapped her combadge off, continuing to work.

"Engineering Science Team Omega... cute." Brendan said, chuckling.

"Hey... what can I say? All the Security teams get all the smooth-sounding names." Sydona replied as she finished making the relay connection to her console.

While she was working, the communicator on the wrist of the bloody-faced, dead Romulan began to sound off. A male voice emanated from the device barking for a status report. Sydona and Brendan looked at each other knowingly.

The sense of urgency loomed over the two Starfleet officers like a cloud as they picked up the pace of the task still before them.

"Damnit!! They are going to send some more after these two." Brendan Murphy said.

Sydona blew a strand of stray hair from her face as she removed a panel from an interface display behind the Science officer. Biting her lower lip gently, the Klingon used her hyperspanner in several key locations across the conduit.

Breathing out slowly, she finally responded:

"I guess we'll have to be quicker than they are. Either that or we should just stop now and wait for death."

"Oooh no; I'm not ready to die yet. I still have things to do with my life thank you very much." Brendan said with definite firmness in his voice.

"Good to know. Murphy... remember: We only get one shot at this. The lockout access alone will tip them off. Once that happens... we literally have minutes before they beat the door down or beam into the room." Sydona warned.

Brendan nodded and began to check the levels for the power cells.

"Seems like the power to the Cells are at peak levels, V. It's now or never."

The Klingon ran back to her station, charting in the energy displacement. She eyed her console, fingers gliding across the surface. She closed her eyes for a brief moment and mumbled a Klingon expression, smiling to herself. Centering herself, she turned to her scientist comrade and nodded.

The Science officer immediately went to work, tapping away furiously, entering his authorization code while Sydona bypassed the system lockouts. Because the entire Starbase had been put offline, the auxiliary engineering computer core had to reset itself, awaiting the first Starfleet authorization code to be entered for reactivation of basic systems. Like those of even an assigned low ranking science officer, confirmed by those of an equally low ranking assigned engineering officer.

With a slight smirk on her face, Sydona steadily bypassed the main lockouts.

"If they didn't know we are here...they do now."

As the two isolated junior officers waited for the storm to fall on them, Speaker-of-Names who had just spoken to them a few moments before opened the box he had taken out of the locker and began stacking its contents on the ground in front of him.

He then looked at one of the engineering crewmen his teams had rescued, and gestured to the table behind him, then to the power cells he'd just unpacked.

"Get it working."

As the crewman set to work, he began parceling more power packs in front of the brig, two per cell. With only one cartridge left, clasped firmly in his paw-like hand, he went to the main armory. It had been designed with power failures in mind, completely locking down and activating self-powered transporter dispersers.

The access door meanwhile would be as solid and unmoving as any other section of wall while unpowered. He slid the power cell into the appropriate housing, and reactivated the door's system.

"Computer, open this door. Authorization Four-Alpha-Six-Seven-Omega."

With an acknowledging chirp and several metallic groans and thunks, the door jolted once, then slid upwards smoothly, revealing Security's main weapons stockpile.

Speaker walked into the armory, eyeing the three TR-116's on the far wall, but stopped and turned to the wall of exographic targeting sensors and phase compression rifles instead.

"Team-Armory-One, come here" He called, then began outfitting himself with one of the eyepieces.

As they came, he instructed each of them to don the sensors, grab a compression rifle, then head out to relieve the next closest team. That team was given the same instructions. Slowly but surely, he would make sure each of his surviving teams could see their enemy clearly through walls and quickly clear out rooms with powerful weapons. As the process became an automated procedure, he grabbed the closest of the TR-116's for his own use.

The TR-116 rifle had been specifically developed to offer effective hand weaponry against the Borg, whose portable shields made energy weapons quickly useless as they adapted to the beam's frequency. This new hand weapon was almost a throwback to centuries past, as it chemically propelled an explosive tritanium slug into the target, bypassing shields with a short transporter burst from a micro emitter; Starfleet had quickly abandoned mass production plans of this rifle when regenerative phasers were introduced, but since it was still good in dampening fields and radiation-filled environments that could hamper energy beam weaponry, even with its transporter capability nullified in such conditions, a few of them could still be found on many Starbases and ships closest to the border with the Delta Quadrant... like Starbase 10.

He hefted his TR-116 and checked to make sure the microtransporter muzzle was active. Reassured, he then glanced back at the Armory doors and thought briefly of employing the other two. Briefly. They were incredible weapons, but they were also...seductive. Seductive weapons tended to be used too often. And that led to your enemy, in this case the Romulans, developing a similar technology as well as a means to defend against it.

The huge Kzinti officer slung it across his back while he headed back to the table the engineer had just finished getting operational. Above it, a transparent, holographic representation of Starbase 10 hovered. It didn't have the station's internal sensors available to it, but it was a start.

"Computer, download the information from this PADD to the Situation Table. Synchronize comm frequency. Update in fifteen second intervals."

* * *

Chief Engineer Quinn Calhoun's tricorder showed that four Romulans were steadily approaching his position.

The only way out of this particular cargo bay was through the hatch directly in front of Quinn, which was not an option at present. They could fight their way out, and stood more than a good chance of doing so if they could keep the element of surprise... but the chief engineer of Starbase 10 did not want to risk damaging one of the power cells. If even just one of them was to be damaged, it would detonate like a spatial charge and would cause massive damage to the surrounding decks.

That left hiding as the best option to them, which would only be effective if the Romulans weren't thorough in their patrol.

As if we'd suddenly start to get lucky and have the only delinquent Romulan in the entire Imperial Fleet leading the patrol. Quinn thought with a scoff as he quickly weighted their other options.

"All right, we're going to try and wait them out. Put everything back where it was and meet me behind the containers in the far back corner," he commanded to the two crewmen standing by him.

Glasch and Hator ran back into the center of the room where they began replacing the few of container that they had needed to move to access the power cells. Quinn replaced the inventory PADD in its customary recess next to the door after he scanned the area with it, to make sure they had not left any obvious signs of their presence. Before the Romulans had approached within five meters of the room, the three of them had set everything back and squeezed between a set of crates and the cool metal bulkhead. After turning off their wristlights, all that they could do now was wait in the immensely dark and quiet room for the enemy to come.

All too soon, the door swished open and the room was suddenly filled with the sound of Romulan boots pacing on the deck and brightened by the beams from the their flashlights, playing across the chamber as the intruders began their search.

"I'm detecting energy readings in that direction." A stern voice announced, shattering the silence.

"Just as we did last time, and the time before that! It's those pathetic Federation energy cells. Are you reading anything else?" A clearly annoyed voice countered.

"Yes, Sublieutenant; there appears to be three life forms in that direction. However I'm having difficulty focusing the readings... there is some interference." The first voice reported albeit more timidly this time.

"You... were did our second team go?" The Sublieutenant inquired of another patrol member.

"Larsus, Oxon and Ladrina headed over there in the other corridor to make more efficient use of our time, Sir," A confident female voice replied, her light pointing straight where hid the three Starfleet officers.

“But Sir, the device...” The timid sounding Romulan began, but was quickly interrupted.

“You Uhlans are all alike; at the first opportunity, I will personally see that you are drummed out and sent back to the farming colony you spawned from! Move out! There is nothing here, and there are many more rooms to examine,” The Sublieutenant said to his team, disgust filling his voice.

And, as abruptly as they had appeared, the Romulans left the compartment to continue their patrol.

Behind them, the door closed with a sigh almost as loud as those of the three hidden Starfleet men.

“That was close!” Harot said with a sigh.

“Yes... and now, there are seven Romulans on this deck, while we have what amount to spatial charges strapped to our backs. Wonder we’ve made it this far.” Glasch retorted snidely.

The chief engineer didn’t respond to either comment as he was focused on the tricorder, having drawn and reactivated it once the Romulans were gone. The device showed they were outside its forty-meter short-setting range.

Quinn then issued a quick series of orders.

“Glasch, you're on point. There is a turbolift shaft thirty-three meters straight out this door, on the left. Once there, we need to climb up seven decks to main astrometrics. I’ll bring up the rear, understood?”

Calhoun received a series of nods in response.

“Good; lets go.”

The trio left their hiding spot and made their way to the door, where Quinn confirmed the coast was clear. Glasch lead them out into the corridor, his companions close behind him. The three-man Starfleet team moved down the corridor as quickly and as stealthily as they had been trained to. And, as they made it to the turbolift ,Glasch and Harot flanked the access, keeping a watch down each length of the corridor, allowing Quinn to manually open the door.

Focused on some peculiar results he had been getting from the tricorder, Calhoun came before the lift access and was surprised when the door swished open.

More surprised however, was the Romulan standing leisurely against the back wall of the lift cabin.

Both were shocked into immobility by the seemingly random encounter.

Then, the Romulan reacted first and began swinging his disruptor rifle from its at-rest position to the center of the Starfleet engineer’s chest.

Quinn launched a quick right jab at the Romulan which connected with it’s throat, stunning him for the second Quinn need to build enough momentum and drive the Romulan back against the rear of the turbolift, wedging the disruptor between them.

The Romulan's advanced combat training and sturdy Vulcanoid constitution began to show as he quickly recovered and began fighting back. Calhoun knew instantly that he was outmatched but struggled on regardless, painfully aware of the fact that the sharp edges pressing into his stomach belonged to the Romulan's disruptor.

Suddenly, Quinn felt the Romulan's left leg wrap around his right and received a hard upwards blow under his chin that set him off-balance, stunned. The turbolift tilted weirdly as Quinn sprawled backwards, knowing vaguely that it was over and waiting for the impact from the sickly green bolt. The chief engineer instinctively held his breath until a crimson line streaked through the air above him.

After regaining his bearings, Quinn looked up to see Harot lowering his phaser as the Romulan crumbled on the deck inside the lift cabin.

"You alright, Sir?" Glasch asked as he entered and helped the engineer to his feet.

"For the most part, thank you." he replied, looking at Harot while rubbing his jaw.

"Now why were they in here... and... what is that?" Glasch asked, pointing to a green metallic device wired into an open access hatch below the control panel.

Quinn got down on one knee, grabbed his tricorder off the floor and began to inspect the device. It was heavily shielded, preventing a detailed analysis, but it appeared to be generating an asymmetric field around the turbolift and was connected to its command and drive assembly subsystems.

"I think, the station's chief engineer started to explain as he stood, that it's a mobile linked powering device to make the turbolift operational."

Quinn typed in a series of commands into the wall panel and was greeted with an affirmative beep from the system and the turbolift lurched upwards towards Astrometrics.

"Ah! That, why *they* don't have to crawl in tubes or force every door open," commented the Tellarite gruffly.

A few seconds later, the lift doors opened, revealing the way to Main Astrometrics.

Glasch stuck his head out to make sure the corridor was clear, then the trio made their way into the large room where Commander Patton, the chief science officer of Starbase 10 and several junior officers were scattered about.

"Apologies Commander; a Romulan patrol held us up in the cargo bay. They appear to be sweeping all the unoccupied decks, searching for resistance. Luckily, we were able to retrieve three power cells." Quinn Calhoun reported once they all recognized each others uniforms and noting the lack of green-tinged skin and pointed ears from each other.

A sigh of relief came from Greg's mouth. Not only had they been successful in reaching their objective, they also managed to get no less than three cells, as well as some weapons and, more importantly, a Romulan device that would enable them to move around the base much more efficiently while they lacked main power on the base.

"Good to have you here Commander. I hope you three are all ok."

"Yes, we're fine. But we had to bring an uninvited guest; he was guarding the device activating the lift." Quinn replied as Harot and Glasch brought in the various pieces of equipment they had gathered, finishing with the semi-conscious and tightly bound Romulan from the turbolift.

"Glasch, place him over there." Quinn instructed pointing to a wall cleared of any equipment.

"Aye, Commander."

Not wasting time, Greg took a look at the power cells. They would definitively be a great help.

The chief of science then looked into his friend's eyes. They had served together on occasions, the last time was when they had been assigned to the Defiant class USS Grimsby for the ill-fated rescue operation of that tragical mission where they had lost the Captain of the Nova class science ship USS Ivan.

"Commander Calhoun, Its good to see you again. First let me brief you about our situation here."

He explained the work he already had done and the success he had had in finding the locations of the three emitters. He continued in how their trip from the auxillairy science labs to the astrometrics lab had been and about the captive Romulan that they had lost.

"So, now you're up to date and what remains is how we are going to disable the Romulan emitters. I was thinking that we should send out a power surge through the power grid, hoping it will disable their devices. The backside is that it will fry out most of the powergrid of the station. Luckily, you have found several cells, so that we will have the ability to use the transporter in the adjacent room to beam in and out security personel once the Romulans have been immobilised to the same extend we have been ourselves by their... impromptu visit. That and, of course, our ability to still use the internal sensors to detect their lifesigns. Do you have any suggestions or remarks?"

Calhoun waited patiently as Patton brought him up to speed. Things appeared worse than he had expected; and what worried him most of all was Captain Cobb's silence.

"Well, I think sending a surge through the system isn't our best option. Like you said, it would cause a lot of collateral damage to desperately needed systems. Not to mention the Romulan designers probably anticipated that approach and built in safe-guards...for what it's worth, that's what I'd do."

Quinn was thinking about alternate approaches as he looked at the station display overlaid with Greg's results. He was hitting a road block until Greg's words about transporting in and out sunk home.

"What if... we modified the astrometric sensors to emit a focused asymmetric field at the same amplitude and frequency as the dampening field... but directly out of phase? It should cancel out the effects of the dampening field, similarly to how that Romulan device works to dampen our systems." Quinn suggested as he gestured to the device lying on a nearby workstation. "If it works, we could then beam the device out and dematerialize it in space, or beam in and disable the device if it's shielded. Either way it'd be one less thing to worry about. And if we start here," he pointed to the closest device, "we can recapture roughly all of the upper third of the station to begin with, including Ops."

Greg nodded.

"I agree. Once we have the Romulans forced out of the station, we will need power indeed. Especialy if they have some hidden ships surrounding the starbase. Let's do this."

Before Greg could start working, the voice of Ensign Rivers came through his combadge again.

"...We're in position. I'll get that team to you in a few minutes, Rivers out."

Now he could finally sigh with relief. Once the Romulan threat was taken out of their hands, they would be able to completely focus on restoring systems online and activate all sensors. With a plan in place, the two commanders set to making it work and as Greg began modifying the array, Quinn began integrating the recovered power cells into the systems power structure.

Greg nodded at Quinn while they began reconfiguring the circuits and installing the power cells. He quickly scanned one of the emitters to get its frequency and amplitude. It gave him some trouble, but now that power was rising due to the cells that were being attached one by one, he could get more clear readings.

"Ensign Venture, I could use your help for a moment. Crewman Bourne, please tend to our patient in the mean time."

Without waiting for a response, Greg turned back to the console and began to make the necessary adjustments to the sensors while the chief engineer took care of the powering problem. He quickly looked up when Ensign Venture took place at the console beside his.

"Set the amplitude to 0.7 micrometer and a frequency of 32000 megahertz."

A quick nod was the response.

Taking a glance around the compartment, Quinn Calhoun located a large access panel on the port wall and removed it, revealing a large number of isoliner chips, circuitry, and a small access tunnel leading to the main power bus. The chief engineer pulled some engineering tools out of the rucksack he had been carrying around and began examining the power systems.

Quinn let out a disappointing sigh. The designed current draw of the main power bus was much more than the power cells were capable of. This meant connecting the two directly would immediately burn out the power cells, making them useless to anyone. It was not an unsolvable problem, but the engineer would have to build a capacitor circuit to act as a buffer between the main power bus and the power cells.

Luckily, there were enough components in various devices scattered about the lab to construct one. With the capacitor built in short order, Quinn attached it and the first power cell to the main power bus. He glanced up from his work and could tell from Greg Patton's posture that the attachment of the power had improved things greatly. Grabbing the second power cell, Quinn began integrating it into the power system with the first.

The chief science officer of Starbase 10 turned around to see how far Commander Calhoun and his two aides were with the installation of the power cells. They had already installed one and were beginning to install the second.

"We're ready when you are, Commander" he said when the chief engineer briefly looked up from his work to check on his own progress.

"Just one more sec..." Calhoun replied distractedly, as he used the hyperspanner to finish connecting the second power cell in parallel with the first.

After a short moment, the connections were finished and he slid out of the access tunnel.

"Alright, Commander; the first two cells are installed. If you have enough power, I'd like to hold the third in reserve, in case we need to boost the array's power or to use it for the transporter."

"It will have to do" Greg replied.

* * *

The Romulan Commander sat still in silence on the bridge of his borrowed ship.

His trusted second had carried out his orders knowing that he was dooming civilians to a slow painful death.

Trusted is too strong a word, he mused.

He wasn't able to trust anyone to do anything except what he ordered. Everything else, he was always wary.

Such was the way of the Tal Shiar.

He had already dealt with the resurgent Federation crew in a swift series of deployments that sent his last remaining reserves into battle. Even now, he was aware that the team guarding the main reactor where the main dampening field system was installed had been defeated. He had planned for the eventuality of one or more being liberated and had planted more than one dampening field emitter.

Still, he reflected worriedly, them taking back the main reactor came far sooner than even I had anticipated. Starfleet personnel are anything if not highly resourceful... But these Lotus Fleet officers are something else.

"Time to finish this, " he ordered to no one in particular.

CHAPTER FOUR : COUNTERSTRIKE

"I can hear people moving about!"

Michael learned that this other captive's name was Robbins from striking up a brief conversation with the people MacQueen shared the cell with.

Michael cast a glance at the three Romulan soldiers who, since a few minutes, were now battle-poised at the front doors of the brig. Indeed, something was happening and by the worried looks on the Romulan faces and the communications they were exchanging in low voices with someone else at the other end of their own comm channel, the tide might be turning.

Suddenly, without warning, the front doors of the brig blew apart with the telltale sound of spatial charges and all three Romulans fell to the floor, obviously stunned by phaser fire. Then immediately afterwards, a group of Starfleet officers entered, weapons hot and raised.

Everyone in the cell yelled at the top of their lungs to be let out.

Once they were all free, they were issued the Romulans' own disruptors as the leader of the group came up to them.

"I'll make this short." He began. "One of you needs to stay behind and keep a few of the Romulans in the brig; the rest of you come with us as we could use the numbers."

"I'll stay." Michael offered.

"Good. the rest of you all come with us now."

As everyone headed out of the brig, a few helped Michael take the stunned Romulans into a holding cell and reactivated it. Afterwards he pressed the new combadge he had been given by the departing security officers that had freed them all.

"This is Crewman MacQueen. The brig is secure. Repeat: the brig is secure. Start sending prisoners over."

It did not take long for several makeshift security teams and more formal ones to come and drag a few invaders under heavy stun. Once everyone recovered enough to realize who they were fighting against, the general Starfleet protocol regarding Romulans came back to everyone's mind: the use of phasers on maximum stun to prevent the suicidally-minded Romulans to evade capture by going all out on them. then keeping them in restraint to prevent any suicide attempt once they would revive.

As more Romulans, all stunned, were brought to the brigs, Michael decided he'd be hospitable towards them even if the Romulans would be less than polite themselves.

"See to it that the ones who will come around and awake are fed." Michael said to a crewman by the name of Chambers. "But keep them in restraint so that they will not try to kill themselves."

"Spoon-feeding them, yeah looking so forward to it... What are we going to do when the brigs are filled up?" Chambers asked.

MacQueen pondered the question.

"I suppose we could use a shuttle bay?" he wondered. "If not, there are cargo holds we could possibly use also. I'll have to find out."

Michael pressed his combadge on.

"Crewman MacQueen here; the brigs are almost filled. Do I have permission to use either a shuttle bay or cargo hold to temporarily contain our unwanted Romulan guests?"

There was no answer from Ops.

Michael did not have time to get impatient however, as a small team of Starfleet personnel, their leader no higher in rank than he was, came in with a heavily stunned prisoner on a makeshift antigrav stretcher. They secured this newest captive with the others and the newcomers quickly reported about the rescue operation of Ensign Zeezrom Teancum in the living quarters and the public areas of the starbase before heading back there, complimenting MacQueen for the efficient way he was running his improvised POW camp.

Since crewman MacQueen received no word from anyone aboard the starbase because they were busy fighting Romulans and saving people, he decided he'd hold his position with the other fledgling crewmen and women with him.

At least with all that had been confiscated from their prisoners, they had a significant arsenal to help them hold the fort.

* * *

Kiernan seemed to have wandered through the starbase for what seemed like an eternity.

In reality, only mere minutes had passed. The isolation and solitude apparently making the situation seem much worse to her.

Where in the stars are they? she thought.

Even her own thoughts came to her in a hushed whisper. In her travel, she had yet to find any wounded, any deceased, or any personnel.

Luckily, she had not encountered any Romulans either.

She had made her way to the civilian housing section and methodically searched the area, room by room; each search tearing apart a bit of her confidence in the situation and proving her actions to be futile. The uniformity of the quarters did little to mask the fact that, only hours before, they had been populated. Personal effects reminded her of this, and gave her mind room to wonder who exactly was here and where they could be now. She caught herself secretly praying they all had made it to safety.

Kiernan continued onward until, standing outside yet another door, she paused.

Something had caught her eye.

Glancing down, she noted a thick green foam protruding through the crack of the door. Leaning down she scanned the material with her tricorder.

"Sulphites? What the ..."

Kiernan stared at the readings in shock. The substance was a manipulated compound of ureshol synthetic resin and crystallized sulphites. Whoever composed the substance had taken great care to make sure that the sulphite particles were light enough to become airborne.

"Why would they do this?" she questioned herself, knowing well that all Starfleet personnel are given immunotherapy against known allergens. "And why these? Most species naturally developed antigens for these..."

Kiernan snapped back to her senses as she realized she was talking to herself. With her curiosity getting the best of her, she stood and forced the doors open.

The sight caused her to gasp. Wading through the knee-deep foam, she made her way to the Triannon couple and child huddled together on the table. The three of them wheezing in an attempt to breathe.

"I tried... to.... open... Too... weak..." the male tried to explain between gasps.

Kiernan flung open the med kit and quickly injected the three with epinephrine.

"We've got to get you out of here."

She grabbed the child from its mother and rushed it out of the room, softly placing it on the floor in the hallway. Returning to the room, she threw the half-conscious mother over her shoulder and carried her out as well. The process was repeated for the father, although with more of a physical struggle on Kiernan's part.

Once assembled in the hallway, she took a quick scan of the family. Their condition had improved already, but she knew she had little time before a rebound reaction would occur. Their wheezes had decreased in severity, but making the walk back to sickbay would be taxing at the least. The family simply couldn't oxygenate their bodies adequately for physical activity.

Kiernan left them briefly to run into a different housing unit. She stripped the sheets from a bed and returned quickly. Spreading it out on the floor, she had the couple lay on their sides back to back while the mother held onto the child.

Kiernan tapped her combadge.

"O'Clare to Doctor Nasaro-Myth. I'm headed your way with three casualties. Have the medical staff on standby. ETA eight minutes,"

O'Clare bunched the end of the sheet up in her hands and began to drag the family back to sickbay. Moving so slowly, unarmed and with her attention focused elsewhere while her hands were full, running into Romulans at this point would be extremely detrimental.

"Negative, Ma'am," answered the Deltan's voice then over the comm. "We have been attacked and Romulans are probably on the verge of coming back! Sickbay is really unsafe for the moment. Maybe we can send you some support, if you tell me what you need, Ma'am".

Suddenly as he spoke, Elliago Nasaro-Myth was struck with an idea.

He went straight to a control panel on the wall. There was power in sickbay; not much, but power nonetheless, since this vital section of the starbase had its own independent emergency power source for situations just like this. Enough power for a containment field in case of epidemic contamination... or a pattern scrambler..

The doctor looked around. He was not able to implement his idea, but someone ought to be.

"I need anyone from the engineering department" asked the Deltan. "We need to reconfigure sickbay's containment field to cover all sickbay and remodulate it so it prevents incoming transportation." he said.

Lying in among the injured was a Vulcan. He was wearing a starfleet uniform, with cadet First class rank on the collar and golden lines on his uniform. He turned towards the medical crewman.

"If I may, Sir, I don't think this will fully work, though I am pretty sure it will reduce the number of intruders able to beam in here. We may have to worry about one or two Romulans at a time as they will detect the field and narrow their transporter beam to single emission."

"Considering our current position, its better to reduce the number than to wait for a full contingent to drop by." answered the doctor. "Can you make it happen, cadet?"

"I will definitely try..." answered the young Vulcan. With the help of the Caitan woman, he was moved towards the control panel where Doctor Nasaro-Myth was standing.

If this can work, we'll be able to prevent part of the arrivals... and we'll be able to welcome Doctor O'Clare and her casualties... thought the Deltan medical crewman. He opened a channel back to her.

"Nasaro-Myth to Doctor O'Clare; we are working on a way to prevent the Romulans from transporting in sickbay. We are not that much safer than we were, but we're working on it."

Kiernan continued to drag the family onward and she mulled over her options. Eventually she decided to answer the doctor.

"Negative is not an option. I'm coming that way regardless. If you and the crew have to clear out, make it happen."

O'Clare realized the need for her medical equipment outweighed the risk. There was a slim chance she could slip in and out before the next wave of assailants. Though the odds weren't in her favor, she would have to play the hand she was dealt.

Her legs felt tight and ached under the strain of moving her patients. Quickly, frustration and down right aggravation settled in. She had just about enough of these Romulans, and thoughts of abandoning her self-reserve began to dance around in her mind.

If only I could find a phaser, she thought. Anesthetizing from a level 3 stun setting is as humane a procedure as any chemical one...

Still a godd distance ahead of her, Ensign Rivers' team filed in with Ensign Yylna's and, quickly, while the doctor was assembling his plan to reduce the transporter attacks, the eight security officers brought in the wounded they'd found along the way. Ordered as they were to set up her post at the medical offices, her team's Tech-Med began to assemble their command post, which mostly consisted of making sure Yylna's modified PADD was on a long, available table in an out of the way from Sickbay proper but still relatively secure: the CMO's office.

Meanwhile, Team Security Command 2's sweepers stationed themselves in the room in locations with relative cover and range of fire to both the doors and the center of the medical facilities. Team Tech-Med went off on Rachele's orders to fulfill her earlier promise to the science chief back in Astrometrics. Things were relatively secure here after all.

Through perseverance, O'Clare finally arrived back at sickbay. Via the coms, Kiernan O'Clare informed the medical staff of her arrival and was allowed entrance by the security staff. Their presence relieved a bit of Kiernan's frustration, and proved helpful as they assisted with transport of her patients.

With the family transferred to biobeds, she instructed the medical crew to hook up blood gas infusers for all three. A round of corticosteroids and bronchodilators were administered in attempts to block a rebound occurrence.

Although focused, Kiernan took a step back from the action and let the medical staff administer care. She knew this would be the first of many. Perhaps the most puzzling was the direct attack against this specific family. Something was off about this situation and O'Clare clearly realized this.

She had no idea why, but these patients were obviously of value to her assailants.

Why them? she kept wondering silently.

* * *

"I'm already through three security locks, working on lock four." Sydona V'Krull announced.

"That's my girl. Just acquired control access for sub-junction two. Entering authorization for control access three." Brendan replied.

The sound of confirmation bleeps and chirps filled the room as the two officers pressed on. Brendan occasionally looked towards Sydona as she remained immersed in her work, passing one internal wall after another.

"Alright, I'm on the last encryption wall. This take a few minutes." Sydona said.

Brendan frowned as he reads the display on his console.

"Hey V.. we got a problem. Seems the Romulans brought their own Engineer.. and he's attempting to override our access."

"That's what he thinks. I'm here, and I'm on this station. Thus, this place is currently my home. These Romulan scums have defiled my house. As a Klingon, this can not and will not stand." Sydona said as she focuses her attention of the last encryption wall.

A resounding confirmation chirp ringed throughout the room. A familiar computerized voice then finally was heard again.

"Procedure complete. Encryption security protocols deactivated. Manual access to Main Power Generator via Console B and B1 has been initiated. Backup Generators B and C are online."

"Halfway there, baby. Don't let Mama down now. Computer: Initiate Main Power Generator shutdown and reroute all power distribution to the station through Backup Generators B and C, and bring stations internal and external sensors online." Sydona said as the other displays indicators and room lights sparkled back to life.

Brendan picked up his tricorder, checking the readings.

"Seems like we really pissed some people off. I'm showing eight Romulans... and they are headed this way."

"Fine. I think I got a way to fix that. Computer: Initiate level 5 forcefields for areas B-25 and C-12." Sydona said, smiling with the thought of the coming romulan contingent walking into a trap.

"Confirmed. Forcefields have been engaged in areas B-25 and C-12."

"The power flow conversion rate has is stable and the generators are holding. Bypass lockouts are in place. Seems like we did it V'Krull! Now comes the fun part..." Brendan said, constantly watching his console.

Sydona nodded with a feral grin.

"Making sure the power levels stay up enough to distribute power to the station and it's systems."

"That's what I'm here for," Brendan said, chuckling.

Sydona smiled too, then tapped open her commnicator.

"Engineering Science Team Omega to Speaker: Main generator is now offline but backup generators B and C are operational. Forcefields are up covering the rooms for both generators. Murphy and I are currently working on getting power to the rest of the station."

"It will have to do, " acknowledged the security chief's growling voice.

"It will have to do" Chief of Science Greg Patton repeated unknowingly at the same moment, more forcefully, this time for the people around him in the vast astrometrics lab.

He took a look at Chief Engineer Calhoun and then at Ensign Venture.

"Ok Ensign, lets do this."

Both men simultaneously entered the necessary commands in their console. Greg could hear a buzzing sound coming from the power cells. It looked as if all was going smoothly, but Greg was afraid the sensors might not hold much longer under the makeshift power source.

Finally, the readings were coming in... and the first thing he noticed from them was that the dampening field of the central emitter in main engineering was off.

Somebody's been busy, he grinned inwardly.

Obviously, others were as hard at work as they were against the intruders.

"Ok, now try to beam that back up emitter out of the station" Patton said to Crewman Belder, who manned the transporter console remotely from one of the astrometrics consoles the engineers had helped reconfigure and reroute to the main transporter room.

"I've got a lock, Sir. Beaming out... now"

Suddenly a few flashes of surges blew out through the lab. The console that was manned by Crewman H'drow exploded, blowing the bald Bolian crewman manning it through the lab.

Then it was over.

After the sparks and smoke began to fade, Quinn approached the nearest console and did a quick systems check. Everything was a little worse for wear but still operational.

Greg rose back to his feet and looked around the vast chamber to see if more were injured and sighed in relief. No one else had been hurt and H'drow was just dazed and singed. Luckily, her semi-aquatic species' smooth, leather-like blue skin had no body hair to catch fire; a thin oily film even covered it and had effectively protected her from serious burns.

"Crewman Broody, tend to her wounds," he ordered to a blond haired man already near her.

He tapped his combadge.

"Patton to Rivers. Main dampening emitter is offline according to internal sensors and we managed to beam one of the three relay emitters out into space. Power should be restoring now in sections Alpha, Gamma and Epsilon. I could use some medical assistance here as well. Surges caused by the disconnecting of the emitter caused some explosions here, wounding a crewman. This means we now have two injured crewmen, as well as a Romulan prisoner."

Greg began reconfiguring his own console to prepare for the second beam out. He then looked at commander Calhoun.

"I suppose beaming the other emitters out will blow out some more of the instruments here. How are the power cells holding?"

"Yes, but it appears the major sensor and transporter relays are fine for now. I'll have to get in the access tube to check the cells; give me one second," the engineering Commander replied.

Quinn took the third power cell and crawled down the access tube. Reaching the other two power cells, he produced his tricorder and scanned them receiving disappointing results. Power cell 1 was at six percent and power cell 2 was at forty-one percent. He integrated the third power cell to the main power bus through the capacitor circuit and slid out from the tube.

"Beaming the dampening device off the station took the balance of the two power cells. I've attached the third cell but it might not be enough for another transport. I'll try modifying the transporter sequence to consume less power... it will take a few moments. Excuse me Crewman, I'll take it from here," Quinn ordered to the one manning the station they had routed transporter control through.

The starbase's chief engineer used the console to deactivate the adjacent transporter's biofilter and Heisenberg compensator. With the Heisenberg compensator offline, Calhoun reduced the resolution of the imaging scanner from a quantum level to a molecular level, like any cargo transporter would normally operate on. After all, they were beaming devices off the station, not people... and even then, they were actually attempting to disable them, not particularly bothered in preserving their structural integrity.

With the modifications complete, they were ready for an attempt on the second dampening device.

"Alright Commander, we're ready on this end. How about you?" Calhoun inquired of his scientist friend.

Patton nodded.

"We are ready, Commander."

He quickly looked at Ensign Venture who nodded also.

"Ok, on my mark...3. 2. 1. Mark!"

Again, the two scientists pressed buttons simultaneously. Greg monitored the dampening field, which indeed was dropping as expected while Venture oversaw the actual transport results.

"Dampening field strength now at fifty percent... thirty... twenty-five... fifteen... seven percent... it has depleted completely."

Greg nodded at Commander Calhoun, acknowledging that he could do the last transport.

"Commander, your turn."

"Aye, establishing a lock... now." Quinn replied as he focused on establishing a pattern lock on the third Romulan dampening device.

With the lock complete, the chief engineer of Starbase 10 completed the dematerialization sequence and was about to begin the materialization protocols in deep space, at a safe distance from the station, when a quick look at the tricorder rigged to display the power cells energy levels showed he didn't have the power to do so. Thinking on his feet, Quinn deactivated the annular confinement beam and began rematerializing the device. Without the ACB engaged, the device's composite molecules coalesced in a pile of destroyed parts on the deck it had originally rested on, rendering it useless.

He was about to report the destruction of the last device and the current state of the power cells when several previously unavailable functions on his console came back to life, telling it for him. But his sense of responsibility made him voice the result anyway as protocol required:

"The third device is destroyed and it looks like other engineering teams were able to get the backup fusion reactors online. We've got sensors, computer access, comms, and security systems throughout seventy percent of the station already. We will be able to get rid of that last main dampening device easily now."

Greg smiled.

"Good" he said, while he was pressing his console to see what he could do or not do.

Most functionalities were indeed back online, but they needed to remove that central emitter in main engineering if they wanted all of them back. This included the station's external defenses.

"Ok, I'm reconfiguring for the last beam out."

Suddenly, a small explosion ocured in the tube where Commander Calhoun had installed the three power cells. All looked up from what they had been doing.

"I suppose that was the first one that blew up there. Station power on back ups is still not high enough to compensate. We have to do the last beam out before the second or even the third power cell goes. I'm ready when you are Commander."

Calhoun had been realigning the imaging scanners to reduce the time required to beam the last dampening device off of the station, when the concussion from one of the power cells detonating caught his attention. Looking up, he saw thick smoke pouring out of the access tunnel and Quinn had to fight his impulse and training to rush over and try to put it out. But the chief engineer held his ground and finished his task.

Greg sighed as he looked around and saw smoke comming from the very tube where the power cells had been installed.

"Crewman Mearyweather, see if you can stop the fire down there. Maybe we just will be able to perform that last beam out in time"

"Alright Commander, lets go for broke!" Quinn Calhoun said, getting ready to remove the last device.

* * *

No reason to sit here doing nothing, when I might help there, he thought.

Zeez moved slowly and carefully, listening between paces. Still thinking.

If I knew where to find some transporter dampeners, that would keep the Romulans out of some areas.

When he arrived at the Promenade deck, he was back with the original team he had left with O'Conner and Davis. Seeing their worried stare, he explained to them what had happened to him and the other two since he had left.

"Any activity from Romulans, here?" zeez asked in turn.

After a negative response, he continued:

"Where is the nearest store room where useful equipment, like transporter dampeners, might be found? Any idea where Captain Cobb is located? I called him over a while ago but still no response. We guys just might happen to be in the eye of the storm..."

Zeez looked grimly at the forlorn civilians wearing fire retardant. He looked at the crewmen standing around awkwardly, wanting to help, not knowing what to do.

"Let's send out teams to search the shelters and quarters for other people in similar condition," Teancum suggested. "The Romulans seem to be doing this sort of thing, just making people miserable and diverting our attention. We aren't doing anything else anyway, so it will not divert us from anything."

After learning the name of the security chief from those on the Promenade, Zeezrom Teancum took advantage of the prolonged peace and quiet in their sector of the starbase to call him up.

"New tactical crewman Ensign Zeezrom Teancum to Security Chief Speaker-of-Names; all quiet here on the Promenade. We have enough extra people to make up two or three teams of mixed specialties if you need us, including a few frightened civilians wearing fire retardant; no significant injuries to report here, Sir."

"Ensign-Zeezrom-Teancum; sweep your deck for any civilians or wounded then bring everyone down to main Sickbay area. I will assign new orders to you when you arrive."

All the crewmen were enthusiastic about the idea. It finally gave them something useful to do. Three teams were quickly established and a search pattern devised. Then, they all set out down various corridors, being in wary of sneaking Romulans.

Zeez's group went in a diamond formation. At each door, the lead point man went past, while one checked for inhabitants. The rear point man watched behind, and the other watched both ways. After each door and, at regular intervals, they all rotated positions to keep themselves alert. Roaming for any length of time through deserted and silenced, half-lit corridors to peer into empty room could quickly dull senses and mind; Starfleet training had long ago see to solve that problem so now they were ready to face whatever would happen.

They found no inhabitants in the nearest quarters, but when they opened the shelter, they freed a group of families out of the fire retardant goop that seemed to sip everywhere, even when there was no fire at all. Some were in distress from the chemical's effects on them. The team returned them to the Promenade deck, where some clean up assistance helped mitigate the effects. The teams went to check the next shelter on their list. A fourth team was sent to search cargo bay for anti-grav units to improvise stretchers for the more severely wounded and transporter dampeners for defense against any sudden intrusion.

It took some time but, eventually, all the first section of shelters was cleared. There were enough people needing treatment already, and so the teams decided to escort a group to sickbay. The scavenger team had returned with enough anti-grav units for the more serious casualties they had, and two transporter dampeners that would secure their improvised HQ on the still quiet Promenade.

Then, lights started to come back around them. Starbase power was obviously coming back on.

And with the growing light, so grew their hopes and their resolve.

The escort group led by Teancum started out towards sickbay. An armed and ready pair led, and another brought up the rear. Two armed pairs assisted the casualties, dragging the stretchers and corralling the refugees able to walk but ready to reinforce either end of the column.

"Ensign Zeezrom Teancum to Sickbay. We have nine refugees and eleven casualties from the Romulan chemical attacks. They seem to be flooding the inhabited area with some foul mixture within the fire retardant chemical system. We are bringing them on anti-grav pallets. We also have two transporter dampeners installed in our hold out area on the main square of the Promenade to secure the area. If you get contact from people needing help, you may direct them over there. We are leaving from Promenade deck now, and be at your location in about fifteen to twenty minutes, barring trouble."

And sure enough, while he was speaking, a group of Romulans suddenly transported into their path.

As soon as they were in, all four of the point team started firing phasers and confiscated disruptors. The Back up teams quickly moved forward, also firing.

All six Romulans were down before they could respond to the surprise fire.

"Good job!" Zeez exulted. "It's about time we started surprising them too. Leave one team to watch them; we will deliver our casualties first and then return to drag them to the brig. Contact this officer macQueen who said that they are set to receive prisoners."

The odd old-looking ensign moved the group along quickly and, after a good while but without any further incident, the balding Ensign resumed his earlier message.

"Teancum to sickbay; we are almost at your location. We intercepted one group of Romulans beaming in. They are all sleeping quietly now. We are also bringing with us a transporter dampener, if you want it. We will return afterwards to the Promenade to seek out more trapped civilians after a quick delivery to the brig."

A short while later, they reached the central infirmary of the starbase with their charges. Doctor O'Clare barely had time to thank Crewman Teancum for such a job well done before the gentleman was off with his team to continue his tasks.

Once on their way back, Zeez then suggested sending the prisoners on the anti-grav pallets with two men, while the rest of the team would return with him to seek civilians in distress. The rest of the trek thus went quickly; so did the trip to the detention area where a young security officer, One security crewman Michael MacQueen, took charge of them with sober efficiency.

Soon, Zeez and his team were heading back to the other group left on the Promenade deck. As he returned to their makeshift operation center with his team, he picked up his briefcase and a phaser, placing the Romulan weapon charge he had confiscated separated in the briefcase. When the other two sent there with their prisoners arrived back from the brig, they all spread out into the next sector of the base, which would take Zeez near his quarters. He would leave his briefcase in there when they passed by.

Power was being almost fully restored, making the search much easier. The teams quickly found the shelters and sent people to the Promenade, taking those in distress on their anti-grav pallets. Nine more people were considered in need of medical attention in sickbay. As they took them in "convoy," they told the others they should wait until command gave an all clear directive. Then, they resumed their second trip to the station's medical center.

And all this time, they met with no intruders at all.

Ensign Teancum wondered then if he should feel relieved... or worried.

Back in sickbay, Doctor O'Clare directed the walking wounded to the medical support staff for triage. After brief consideration, she decided to step back and let the junior medical officer, this Doctor Nasaro-Myth, continue to get his "feet wet."

In an odd way, she looked forward to finally being able to see this new doctor in action. He had been sent right out of Starfleet Academy for his internship in Starfleet medical duties and the chief medical officer had not even had time to acknowledge his arrival when the attack began.

The situation was providing an unusual, but exceptional opportunity for him to prove his mettle and gain quickly a lot of field experience.

While the crew worked to triage the new arrivals, O'Clare gathered some scrap fabric off of her lab coat and began to clear away a bit of the fire retardant off of the patients. Due to its abrasive nature, she took great care in only dabbing away the upper layer. While such a small reduction of the irritant wouldn't prove of great use, it was a start.

If only she could get a sterile field erected... then she could use its biofilters to completely remove the particles. But emergency power in sickbay would not alone sustain such a field long enough and strong enough to do the job.

In the interim, she would have to find another solution.

Triage is always of utmost importance when receiving casualties, but Kiernan always seemed to rely on her instincts regardless. Glancing around at the new arrivals pouring in, she felt confident that these were simple cases that the meager contents of a medkit could handle.

In fact, triage was going pretty well. With the CMO's eyes on him, Doctor Nasaro-Myth felt like he had finally a way to prove that he was not good only for routine medical exams. Though his specialty was comparative xenobiology, field work protocols and emergency room procedures had no secrets for him. And the silence of Doctor O'Clare seemed to acknowledge it all.

So he kept on working, giving his best.

The Vulcan cadet was still trying to reconfigure the containment field for decontamination into a makeshift transporter dampener within sickbay to prevent further intrusions by the Romulans. After a moment, while Elliago was taking care of the new family Doctor O'Clare had, literally, dragged back from a patrol in the Starbase, the Vulcan raised an eyebrow in a typical fashion.

"Doctor, he started, addressing both medical officers leading all the activity in sickbay at the same time, I believe I have properly reconfigured the containment field. Unfortunately, we are lacking too much power to implement the system to try to prevent any focused beaming in."

"Well, at least now we have an option if the power comes back," said Elliago Nasaro-Myth.

After a few minutes, the Deltan doctor stopped and looked around. As he saw O'Clare taking care of the fire retardant on one of the victims, he got an idea.

He went close to his CMO.

"Ma'am, I believed that with a slight modification, we could reconfigure a laser scalpel to produce a wide and weak laser beam. This beam would enable us to eliminate all the particles of fire retardant on our patients without burning the skin. We would have to be careful, but I think it would do a neat job." he said.

After his work with the containment field, he was pretty confident that the Vulcan, despite being still but an engineering cadet, would be able to do such a modification.

Hesitant, and in an attempt to choose her words wisely, Kiernan took a moment to evaluate the proposed action. She scraped the majority of the substance off of the fabric, leaving only a thin layer. After tossing it on a biobed, she offered her best solution.

"Test it on that first. I have to admit I have my reservations on such an action, Doctor. But I would love to be proved wrong."

"Aye Ma'am!" said the Deltan.

As he was walking towards the Vulcan cadet, every system in the sickbay then suddenly reactivated as the power was finally fully restored, obviously by Starfleet engineers elsewhere on the station.

Elliago stopped and turned, smiling widely at Doctor O'Clare.

"Well, Ma'am, looks like we won't have to find out if you were right or not. We now have the power we need to complete standard removal procedure."

In his excitement, the Deltan medical crewman emitted more pheromones than usual. Slowly, every one in sickbay turned toward him; the women with widening smiles, the men with lowering brows. With his empathic abilities, he realised the effect he suddenly had on all of them. Promptly, he reduced his emission to the usual minimum when surrounded with non-Deltans.

He turned back towards the Vulcan and headed his way, to help him sit on a biobed for further osteogenic stimulation in his withered leg. When he got closer to him, the Vulcan raised an eyebrow.

"I believe you have emitted too much pheromones," said the emotionless Starfleet cadet.

The Deltan nodded, with a slight smile on his handsome face.

At that same moment, as they neared sickbay once more, the white-haired, balding ensign and his rescue team from the Promenade opened again a channel directly to the medical center of the station.

"Ensign Teancum to sickbay; we are almost there with nine more patients who need assistance due to the Romulan chemical attacks."

When they arrived, Zeez told the medics:

"There are quite a few more who will need help getting this goop off, but they are not having serious reactions to it like the ones we are bringing to you. We told them to wait on the Promenade in our secured camp until there was an all clear from command.

Making a pause as he thought about his own last words, he then asked:

"Have you received any information about how the overall situation is going?"

"Your gess is as good as mine, Ensign," answered the Deltan doctor that rushed past him to get to a group of security officers bringing in a comrade who's face was badly mangled and burned by a disruptor shot, while both his comrades showing scrapes and burns themselves through their torn, charred uniforms.

Seeing how busy sickbay was, Zeez led his team back to search out more people in the living quarters areas who might need also to be brought to sickbay. Hopefully, transporters would soon be online, to assist with this effort. But in the meantime, it was manpower alone that would do the job.

When they arrived back once more at the Promenade, more people were finding their way to that location. Teancum asked them whether they knew of anyone else needing assistance to sickbay, while telling those not in distress to wait behind their makeshift shelter if they could, since sickbay was nearly overwhelmed already.

With information gained from those refugees, Zeezrom and his people were able to go quickly to find those in the greatest need still trapped in still powerless rooms and damaged corridors. He was pleased that the team was. Like him, feeling that they were contributing in an important way, and those they were helping were indeed grateful.

They enthusiastically went on rounding up people who could not get themselves to sickbay, and transporting them with anti-grav pallets back and forth under their protection.

Helping and saving people; that was why Ensign Zeezrom Teancum had joined Starfleet in the first place. And so, despite the dire circumstances, he felt better as he was, with his fellow Starfleet comrades, slowly but surely winning the war against chaos, death and destruction.

Indeed, a good feeling it was.

* * *

"We are here, Sir." Davis reported as they got to the open door to the drydock control.

Michael O'Conner moved forward and grabbed a rifle.

"Good."

Then he opened the hatch and ordered:

"Grab two rifles and then get in the jefferies tube," as he entered himself the maintenance conduit.

Davis quickly followed suite and they began their trek to the hangar control room.

"Ensign O'Conner to ummm... Team Mobility... 1; Leader Bryce Schumacher?"

Michael wasn't sure that he called the right name but he continued anyways.

"My team and I are on are way to Hangar 16. The hangar is closest to the main armory. If you can please try to load up there, hopefully it isn't under Romulan control. My team is only lightly armed with Romulan disruptors and our training in using them is rather basic."

With a pained draw of breath, Schumacher squinted a bit as he drawled:

"This is Schumacher. Yeah, while you went lookin', the Chief popped open the Security Armory and got us some goods. My team's decked out with the best, and we've got our originals still."

Carefully, he got up off the crate he was resting on, leaning on his phaser-compression rifle. Then he nodded to his men and drew himself up to his full, formidable height. He was no beanpole either...something Speaker's original team had had a hard time dealing with while he was out and they had had to carry his large frame with them.

"My team's heading out to meet up with you. Mobility 1 Out."

O'Conner was glad to see, as he removed the hatch of the jefferies tube, that their section of the station now had power. After climbing out of the maintenance conduit, he whispered to Davis:

"This should be the right spot. Now we wait."

After about ten minutes, O'Conner's team of ragtag off duty personnel showed up.

"Good," the tall red-haired man said as he looked over the team with a smile.

Then he added through his communicator:

"O'Conner to Mobility 1. Are you in position?"

"Yes, Sir. Just waiting on you." Schumacher replied.

"Head right down the hall. The Hangar will be on your left at the first intersection; watch yourselves as there are two guards outside the door. We will provide crossfire when you open up."

"Aye, Sir; on our way."

Michael signaled Chow and Davis to follow as they moved up to the intersection and aimed their rifles down the hallway at the Romulans guarding the door.

After a few moments, the hallway rang out with phaser fire as Mobility 1 opened up the access door on the other end, quickly downing one of the guards.

The other guard dove for cover... only to be quickly shot by Chow.

"Well done. Now follow me," O'Conner ordered as he motioned his group behind him and met up with Schumacher's own team outside the hangar deck.

"Schumacher, when we go inside, I need your team to sweep the right side of the hangar; we will get the left side."

Schumacher, nodded as Michael ordered to the rest of his group:

"Chow, Davis and T'ral, your with me. The rest of you hold this area till the hangar is clear."

The three Starfleet crewmen fell in behind O'Conner as he moved against the wall while the rest moved into defensive formation to guard their rear and the access corridor to their target zone.

Once everyone was in position, Michael signaled Schumacher to get ready. He then tapped a few buttons on the door pad before he stormed in, rifle at the ready, with his team following behind and Mobility 1 rushing in on the other side...

Only to see two Romulans soldiers being beamed out of the hangar.

"Well..." O'Conner lowered his rifle a bit as he looked around the large, now deserted hangar, dumbfounded. "Uhh... Scan the room for any more Romulans or traps."

"Aye," Schumacher responded and signaled his team to move out as they began to search the room for anything out of place.

"T'ral, get up to the Hangar controls and see if they are working."

"Yes, Sir." The Vulcan officer responded as he moved up to the upward rear cabin where were located all the main hangar controls.

Michael moved to the hangar doors.

"Clear inside. Chow set up some defenses at the door."

"Yes Sir. Davis, Jackson, Kim, Hayes, you're with me." Chow responded as he ordered the security crewmen to help him set up a defense perimeter.

They quickly began to move the supply crates in to a defense wall in front of the door to turn the access corridor into a choke point. This was their home base after all; they knew the terrain perfectly and they knew exactly what to do.

"Smith, Archer get in a runabout and get it up and running."

The two engineering crewmen nodded to O'Conner and ran off to the nearest of the two large auxiliary crafts, virtually the smallest starships of Starfleet, resting in the hangar they now had commandeered.

"Skvur and Mavor, I need you to get the sensor array of the flight control deck up and running when they are done."

"Aye, Sir," Mavor acknowledged for the both of them as they went to their own duties.

Michael O'Conner smiled in awe as he fully looked over the hangar and all that was in there before tapping his combadge.

"O'Conner to Lieutenant Commander Speaker-of-Names. Hangar 16 is under our control. Romulans were beaming out when took it before we could even open fire... not sure what that means though. We have here a pair of runabouts and four shuttles of every current class... a sizeable number of shuttlepods and workbees as well. Transportations should be available in a few minutes."

Looking again at the docking bay's content with a smirk, he finished saying:

"I also have a good number of attack fighters ready for use."

"Good work, Ensign-Michael-O'Conner. Secure this area and ready every ship able to fly then standby."

Now back in control of main Security, Speaker was juggling several things at once. Keeping one eye on the situation table's holographic display, and the other gazing through the decks via his new eyepiece, the Security Chief of Starbase 10 also had comm reports coming in from all over the station.

"This is Team Guard 1, in position."

"Team Residence 2 to Chief; coming back to basecamp with injured, Sir. Over."

"Ovan to Chief Speaker; evacuation of the fire-retardant area is 85% complete. Sending you more civilians, Sir."

Thankfully, the comm load would lessen soon, as Ensign Rivers' team had taken control of the Sickbay area; and the chief engineer and chief of science had control of the Astrometrics lab and main science deck with their support security team now coming in position. Soon, the other groups working on merging at various key points of the starbase would also be in position.

Until then, the barrage of reports left his ears twitching.

The Kzinti listened for a while longer, then began cycling through the comm channels.

"Ensign-V'Kull, I will be able to give you fire-support from my location, but it will be limited. Be quick and stay wary. Speaker Out."

Again, his claw-finger tapped the console.

"Team-Guard 1. Wait for my signal. There are elements that could be beneficial to your effort coming into play soon."

he opened two channels in quick succession:

"Team-Residence 2, Team-Residence 1; acknowledged."

He spared a meaningful glance to the team leader of one of the security section's defense teams as he added:

"We will have medical kits and anyone available with medical knowledge ready to receive you."

And then came the report from Tactical team 1 about locating the invaders' ship. The towering Kzinti almost roared in glee.

"This is Speaker. Good, Crewman-Kheren. You are earning your name today."

He paused, then added:

"And you are in a position to give that information to the people who can use it: Captain-John-Garrison and his team. You will be under his command once you join with them."

His feral face showed gleaming fangs as he finished with a growl:

"Good hunting."

Romulans seem to think that too... then thought security crewman Kheren, barely conscious.

The spacesuit breastplate he had kept from his jaunt through airlock 37 was nothing but fuming scrap now, lying in small pieces around him; but it had stopped most of the concussion blast of the disruptor that shot him. His partly chitinous skin further saved him from death and injury, but he had been thrown across the corridor to slam his white-haired skull on the wall.

Stunned, his antennae had reflexively retracted in their most unusual fashion for an Andorian who's cranial appendages were supposed to be rigid; and he was at the moment looking only through his facial eyes, seeing only black and white, soundless images.

But, despite their astonishing retracting ability, his antennae were still fairly rigid nevertheless; and so, like the rest of his brethren, his extraordinary perceptions were almost nonexistent from the rear. The two Romulans had caught the self-appointed scouting officer completely by surprise from behind, jumping out from a side room before the rest of his team could arrive in time to help him.

But now, both ambushers were in turn out of commission.

"Are you alright? "

Two dark-skinned Human crewmen were bending to help him get back on his feet as the rest of team tactical one came from around the corner at a trot, weapons raised. Seeing them proved to him that he was not seeing double, as both men looked exactly the same... No, not exactly; his antennae came out and colors came back to his vision: one's collar was in science blue, the other, the one who spoke, engineering gold. And this last one was shaved bald.

"Yes... Thanks guys. You saved my life." Kheren answered a bit groggy.

And Fortune does Favor the Foolish. he thought.

"Always the right tool for the right job," smiled the bald gold-collared crewman showing a good-sized piece of tubing for EPS conduits. " I am Engineering Petty Officer Second Class Robert Baoule and this is my brother Jamal, Science Petty Officer Second Class. We were trapped in one of the storerooms when power went out and just managed to force the door mechanism open when we spotted them aiming at you."

The other kept silent but looked intently at the tricorder Kheren picked up from the floor. Looking at the readout, he just nodded.

Now back on his feet and clear-headed again, the Andorian curtly completed the introduction with the rest of the team as they rushed in a mere moment later. Then, he gave a disruptor to each one of the brothers to reinforce the escort of the still unconscious and wounded Lieutenant Summers and motioned everyone to resume their trek towards the rendez-vous point with Captain Garrison.

Finally, they reached the large corridor to the main cargo area of the starbase where Captain John Garrison and his people welcomed them.

Kheren activated his communicator: " Chief, this is Kheren; we have reached rendez-vous point with Captain Garrison. "

Then, he lost no time coming up to the higher ranked officer:

"Security Master Chief Petty Officer Kheren and Team Tactical 1 reporting, Sir."

Before the other could utter a word, he immediately followed with a showing of the tricorder he held in his heavily callused hand.

"Captain, if I may; this tricorder is tracking the ship from where the Romulans are boarding the station."

Showing the modified detecting tool in his hand, he then added:

"I suggest we use the transporter pad in the main cargo area... and return the favor, Sir."

Everyone was looking at him with wide eyes.

"But... this is a cargo transporter we're talking about... too imprecise... too dangerous for living organism transport," said one female voice from the captain's team; security officer Tuzon the Andorian recalled from the introduction.

"I can fix that. " immediately said engineering crewman Robert Baoule as he stood besides Kheren. "Recording each boarder's signal multiple times to imprint the pattern buffers and rigging them in a loop with a diagnostic program, it could do the job."

"I can implement the program and perform the transport operation while monitoring the signal and making adjustments from a comparative recording on a tricorder. " then proposed his twin Jamal Baoule, speaking for the first time as he stood on the other side of the Andorian.

The Andorian acknowledged their suggestions with the details of his bold plan:

"Sir, since they are cloaked and thus, without shields, we can use this pad for all of us but those two crewmen to get in one beam-in aboard their ship. We start trouble, then beam back after, say, thirty seconds, then beam again at another location and start trouble again. We keep jumping in an out like this to confuse them and keep them on their toes while the rest of the personel reclaim the station... this time, without Romulan reinforcements to bother them. If we time this right and with a little luck on our side for a change, they might even think many security teams are boarding *them*."

And as everyone was still looking at him and each other, assessing his audacious proposal, he looked at the captain straight in the eye and concluded in a firm tone:

"With all due respect, I think it is time to retake the initiative, Captain Sir."

John nodded.

"Alright, were going in!"

In a moment, all the Starfleet officers present readied their weapons upon hearing the Captain's voice, their expression resolute as Garrison ordered:

"Petty Officer Kheren, I will take team patrol and secure the transport zone."

"Aye, Sir. " answered the Andorian. The captain then added:

"Once my team has secured the area, I will contact your team and your team will come in and beam aboard the enemy ship for your planned counterstrike."

Without further words, Captain Garrison signalled his team to fan out and close in on the cargo area. The group covered the distance quickly and was immediately greeted with several disruptor bolts coming from multiple directions.

Although feeling slightly disoriented, the captain quickly pulled out his own confiscated disruptor and let loose on his assailants, followed by the rest of his makeshift assault squadron. Searching for a covered spot inside the target area as he dodged several bolts, he yelled out to Gloria Tuzon:

"Cover me!"

John began strafing past several Romulans to a nearby terminal. Using the terminal as cover, he returned fire on the Romulans and ordered his team to find cover. Under the covering shots of Tuzon, crewman Nielson and Ensign Hudson made their way to the console and picked off two Romulans as they went, but Petty Officer Nadine was not as lucky. As she attempted to get to cover, an intruder on the upper level of the room fired a disintegrating blast at her; in a second, she was gone.

As the one who shot Nadine cheered with a resounding "Jolan Tru!" Garrison thumbed fully upward the setting of the pistol in his hand, jumped from his cover and released a barrage at the upper level. The disintegrating blast hit the supports and the upper level began to collapse, taking the Romulan down with it and on top of his comrades.

"Everyone; move!"

With the collapse of the upper level of the engineering section, the battle was over.

"Garrison to Kheren; Area secured. Get your team up here!"

Team Tactical 1 immediately rushed in behind them and, under their cover, jumped onto the transporter pads, checking their weaponry and discussing coordinated angles of fire and movement while the twin black-skinned crewmen headed for the cargo transporter console.

Captain Garrison turned towards the two brothers that came in with their latest reinforcement:

"Ensign Baoule, ready the transporter!"

"Aye Captain." answered the twins at the same time.

Robert, the Engineer, immediately ducked under the transporter console to make the necessary technical adjustments, taking tools out of his coverall's wide pockets like a magician pulling out rabbits from a hat. At the same time, Jamal, the scientist, transferred the data from Kheren's tricorder to the transporter console then recalibrated it to record each team member's bio-signature. He kept the tricorder as a referential while punching in the readouts numerous times within the pattern buffers his brother was enhancing.

As Captain Garrison and his team disappeared to secure the area from outside, leaving only crewman Tuzon to take care of Lieutenant Summers, the Andorian turned to his own team:

"Set all weapons on heavy stun."

"Begging your pardon, Sir, but the Romulans are not bothering with that." commented crewman Bankole with a somber look and a low voice. Her eyes looked blankly and unblinking at the spot where Petty officer Nadine had vanished.

"Are we going to be merciless Romulans, now? Bloodthirsty Klingons perhaps? Why not remorseless Jem'Hadar or mindless Borg drones then? Let's kill, maim and destroy and forget why we are out here in the first place... *what* we are fighting *for*, what we all *stand for*... what some of us *died for*."

A deep silence fell over them all... only finally broken by weapons reset for maximum stun.

"Transporter is ready." announced Engineer Baoule.

"Lock confirmed on target; first stop, the engine room." added his brother behind the controls. "Be warned that this is still a cargo transporter. There might be some inconvenient minor side effects from each cumulative transport, especially to you, Mister Kheren. Your Andorian physiology is much more complex than the rest of the Human team. The transporter might have problems adjusting... and me too; I'm a physicist, not a physician."

"Noted, Mister Baoule. Crewman Bankole, since you are itching to destroy something, you will set your own weapon to fire a tachyon emission and aim at a specific target I will designate. target one: plasma coils."

Robert Baoule nodded with a big smile.

"That will force them to stay cloaked... thus without shields! No easy counter to our forays! "

"Now *matees*, get ye ready for the Capt'n's Ho!" smiled Kheren hefting two disruptors to complete his near perfect impersonation of an antique sea-going human pirate.

And when Garrison's order came, all four disappeared in a shower of pearly blue lights.

The voice of Captain Garrison was still ringing in their ears when the cargo bay dissolved in front of their eyes to become a vast engine room full of tool-wielding crewmen and armed officers of the Romulan Star Empire.

As soon as they materialized, all members of Team Tactical 1 but Bankole opened fire at the armed officers in sight. Both disruptors in Kheren's hands spat green bolts that added to the total confusion the Romulans were experiencing at been suddenly boarded and fired upon.

Both of the Andorian's shot went completely wild, missing their targets.

Great... first beam in and I am already dizzy...

It took a good moment for him to recover his senses; his antennae were flailing wildly in and out of his skull. Any other Andorian would have only felt slightly disoriented with the flailing, but Kheren was a genetic mutant; his unique retractable appendages were now causing him severe problems because of their peculiar aptitude to slide in and out of his skull. To a Human, it would have felt like blinking rapidly while rolling his eyes upward and violently moving his head up and down... And sounds kept coming in and out in confusion since Andorian ears were also located there.

So he just fired wildly to confuse the enemy, hoping Bankole could locate the plasma coils alone.

The sudden flash of a tachyon burst rewarded his confidence in his teammate.

"Kheren to Baoule: energize!"

He couldn't hear his own voice; but Baoule did, as he saw the engine room disappear. They all suddenly found themselves in a vast semi-circular chamber filled with control stations... and armed Romulan officers.

Sensor control room guessed the Andorian falling on one knee from the severe dizziness he now felt with his antennae flattened on his skull. Fortunately, the three human females with him seemed to hold themselves well as they immediately exploited their surprise advantage to knock out the Romulans with precise shots. It was over before they could return a single shot.

"Sensor grid..." Kheren managed to blurt out without vomiting.

Bankole located the sensor nexus of control and shot another tachyon burst at point blank range, making it totally inoperable.

"Sir! I hear guards running this way!" warned Hattori replacing the power cell of her heavy phaser rifle.

Lucky you thought the Andorian as Ryans was helping him up while his antennae were retracting again, leaving him color blind and deaf at the same time. But he took a second to straighten himself and tap his combadge again.

"Energize!"

Four Imperial guards bursted into the room... only to find deeply uncounscious comrades and a totally disabled sensor system.

Team Tactical 1 materialized at a cross-shaped intersection; one corridor went deep into the bowels of the ship; the other three opened a short distance to the three main transporter rooms.

They were all filling up with Romulan soldiers beaming aboard.

The women of the boarding party were in perfect position to open fire; they reacted so fast that, in both left and right transporter rooms, a Romulan fell totally taken by surprise... while in the third one in front of them, The entire pad fizzled and shorted out under Blankole's tachyon burst.

The five Romulans about to materialized were disassembled by the interrupted transport, dying in a horrible mix of screams and body parts filling the whole chamber. the transporter chief fell from burning sparks and green blood showering on him.

In each side chamber, another romulan fell, now blasted into deep and sudden uncounsciousness by a green bolt. While the women were all kneeling on one knee to open fire around him, Kheren was standing in the center of the team's formation, an arm stretched on each side pointing a Romulan disruptor.

Well, that's better! he thought as he looked at a silent, black and white world. He now strained to keep his antennae fully retracted within his skull, loosing colors, hearing and accuracy but also almost all symptoms of the debilitating illness each fast transport was pulling on him.

So... that's how a Human's headache must feel like...

The soldiers were still trying to recover from the surprise appearance of the Starfleet officers at the strategic juncture point of their transporting deck. Five more fell, stunned, dazed and burned as a second tachyon burst deactivated the second transporter room before a new beam up could bring more Romulans back to their ship.

"Scatter!"

On cue, the three women ducked around a corner as the Romulans left now returned fire. the Andorian just dropped on his back still firing, hitting one and forcing another to seek cover.

"Tachyon!" the Andorian ordered.

Giving covering fire while still lying on his back, Bankole stepped over him and fired several shots at the last of the ship's active transporter pad, then ran for cover in the other corridor.

From his position, Kheren saw the transporter room deactivate... and silhouettes running from the long corridor.

Now the rest will have to walk back home... but if they were beaming back their soldiers, it's because they are about to leave. Well, next stop is nav control... "

"Energize!" he ordered into his combadge.

Disruptor bolts went harmlessly by as they vanished.

The navigation systems and their operators fell as quickly as the sensor crew did under the sudden appearance of the fast jumping Starfleet boarding party. And they were gone before any reinforcement could be alerted.

The mice were too fast for the cats.

Meanwhile, with power back online, Starbase 10's Chief of Security Speaker-of-Names wasted no time either.

"Patrols 3, 6, and 8, move to secure the Promenade. Establish secure supply lines between Sickbay and the main civilian protection areas. Ensign Zeezrom Teancum is in command."

He then called over to the security team he had sent to support Schumacher's group and Ensign Michael O'Conner securing hangar bay 16.

"Mobility 2, lock onto the following combadges and prepare for site to site transport to Ops."

He slung over his TR-116 over his shoulder and hefted his compression rifle.

"Team-Guard 1, initiate your attack on Operations. Reinforcements from Teams-Command-Prime, Team-Armory 3, and Team-Residence-2 will be joining you."

And, as the Security Chief's squad positioned itself to dematerialize at his command, he called over to Rachele Rivers.

"Ensign Rivers. We're taking Ops." He growled. "Until you hear from me, you're in charge of Security. Over."

Lying down on the hard deckplates of the control room of Starbase 10, Captain Alistair Cobb had never been so uncomfortable; he'd had a pretty hefty Romulan guard sitting with his knee on his back for some time now.

He couldn't be sure of the time because all he could see was the deckplates in his face.

He'd been curious for the last few minutes, however. The Romulans had dragged in a prisoner, one that he'd initially thought was a Starfleet Officer. A Vulcan...

That notion had been proved wrong when he heard one of the Romulans whisper into his communicator that "They had located the traitor."

A Romulan? he then wondered. A spy? or... what... a defector?

Then, there had been a frantic series of communications indicating that something had gone wrong on the Romulan ship for a good minute now. And then, mere seconds ago, he heard and saw the light from a Romulan Transporter taking two of the guards and the prisoner with them.

He was left with a pair of guards, one on his back and one sitting propped against a console near a doorway, apparently injured. If only the guard would relax a little and maybe a little distraction and he might be able to get himself free...

It had been a while, but then, his opening came. Not in the way he'd liked... but it came.

Suddenly, he heard a startled gasp from one of the Romulans, then he heard a device being activated. He expected to be shot... and instead there was a flash of light and wind and then silence. The pressure on his back had suddenly, just vanished.

He turned round slowly to an empty Ops. All the intruders had transported out.

Cobb got to his feet, puzzled at what had happened and picked up his phaser left on a console by his former guards. His hand moved to his combadge while he frowned.

Could the Romulans have left the Starbase? are they about to leave and destroy it?

The sudden surge of light from the main power coming back online answered his question.

They were chasing them off!

He quickly moved to the main control panel and began to bring control systems back online.

At this precisely timed moment, two security teams burst up from under jefferies tube access hatches. One, led by Ensign Rudolph Tungstad, moved to port. The other team moved starboard. At the same moment, three more security teams materialized at several planned angles, forming a triangle covering entirely the vast command center of the starbase, all aiming in the same converging direction. Then from the main door came in the head team lead by the unmistakable colossal feline Chief of Security of Starbase 10.

"Spread out." Speaker ordered, tapping the sensor over his eye, deactivating the device while he gestured for the teams to set up a perimeter best suited for the situation. Meanwhile, the Kzinti pounced on the station's main tactical console and tried to bring it back online.

Seeing the lone Human Starfleet officer with four pips on his collar, the huge feline security officer came to him at attention.

"Captain-Alistair-Cobb, I presume, Sir. Station-Security-Chief Speaker-Of-Names. Reporting station takeover by Romulan forces being routed out by several active Starfleet officers, Sir.. but the enemy is still at large and possibly trying to regroup."

Nodding with obvious appreciation and respect to the gigantic furred officer, Alistair pointed to him the tactical and security station as he opened a channel station wide.

"This is Captain Cobb speaking. I apologize for my silence but I was otherwise... occupied. I see you've done a sterling job in my absence. I read seventy percent power back online and no armed Romulans on the Starbase," he said using the station's now functioning communication system and internal sensor grid.

Punching on the external sensor pallets, Speaker-Of-Names then reported:

"I'm reading a Romulan freighter cloaked outside the station because of several transport signatures coming and going from its location in space to here and back. Speaker to transporter teams! Lock onto any combadges outside the station not on Federation vessels and stand ready to beam them back! I'm attempting to raise shields and reactivate starbase defenses!"

* * *

On the Romulan ship, despite the sounds of firefights in the distance, the Romulan Commander was still sitting in silence, K'Tal was with him, appearing more battered and nursing a small phaser burn to his shoulder, but still confident.

"You have him"? The Commander stated calmly and coolly.

"Yes, Sir. Scan confirms it, but we need to repel these boarders if we are to take the Starbase." K'Tal replied in a far less calm state, a hint of urgency creeping into his voice.

"Know your place," The Commander stated, edge creeping into his voice slowly rising in anger at the insubordination. "My Objective is complete. It does not matter if this ship is defended or not. It does not matter if the Starbase is captured or not. What matters is that the Tal Shiar has what it came for."

K'Tal's face dropped into something that was half dismay and half anger.

"But... Sir, we lost all these brave soldiers and precious equipment for *one person*?" K'Tal replied, incredulous.

"Correct. Now, instruct the units on the Starbase to fall back to the ship, place the prisoner in my personal shuttle and make sure he is sedated and restrained," The Commander ordered, his voice returning to its cool calm manner.

K'Tal might have been angered but he was still a soldier of the Empire, and he quickly began barking orders into his communicator.

A moment later, he lifted high-arched eyebrows and his voice to his superior officer.

"Commander! Our assault troops have already answered the boarding action of Starfleet but... there seem to be several of them hitting different key locations of the ship in random fashion. They are damaging equipment and disabling personnel then beam out before reinforcements arrive! Sir, if we decloak to raise shields, we will become a target to the starbase' phasers arrays and torpedo banks! Our dampening field is down, our control teams not responding and the station's main power is almost fully restored!"

I suspect I might have to dispose of that one, the Commander mused to himself silently, as the noise of battle drifted ever closer to his quiet sanctuary.

Starfleet had already recovered from their surprise attack and mounting a surprisingly bold, efficient counterstrike that left the Commander reluctantly admiring of their resourcefulness and resolve. He had of course expected such retaliation; he was not a boastful, arrogant Klingon to even think for a moment that Federation officers were weak and fearful, easily defeated like those barbaric heavy-browed fools always wanted tried to convince themselves blindly of; but he had not expected such a reaction to come so soon, and especially not that effective. They were already on the offensive, having somehow disabled his elaborate power dampening grid, countered the biochemical attack on their civilians, restored power and order on their base, captured many of his soldiers... even found his cloaked ship and boarding it.

This Lotus Fleet division of Starfleet was not called an elite one for nothing, he had to forcibly admit to himself.

The Ship was lost... as were the Romulan troops engaged in this assault; he knew it. and they all knew it.

But, amidst the mayhem of this sudden turn of the tide, the Romulan Commander still sat calmly in his command chair.

K'Tal, then turned once more to him from the ship's tactical station and the two weapon-singed reporting officers that had rushed to him.

"Commander, the ship is lost! We are being boarded and we have no transporters, sensors or propulsion!" He shouted, clearly way past any attempt at discipline.

The commander shifted slightly in his chair before responding.

"Order all soldiers to complete their duty with Honor," He stated icily.

A moment of frigid silence stretched on the entire bridge before K'Tal finally blurted out:

"But... Sir, they've fought and many already died for this Starbase... and we are now retreating!" K'Tal thundered, as he stormed to the front of the Commander's chair.

The Commander stirred, and a disruptor pistol appeared in his hand.

"If you are not able to give that order, then simply state so," he replied, still not looking up at his subordinate.

"I will not give that order, Sir" K'Tal replied.

A single shot rang out, and K'Tal dropped to the floor.

"Just as well... the order was already given, the second your failure was complete," The Commander replied to the dead officer, rising from the chair.

He reached down and activated the device attached to K'Tal's wrist and stepped back as a wave of energy burned his clothes, flesh and bones until his body was reduced to nothing but a few drops of sizzling plasma.

Then, at the same instant and all across the Starbase and indeed everywhere on his vessel as well, other Romulans, loyal to the end, were all moving to activate their implants.

It had taken me decades to build this strike force, the Commander mused angrily. I've taken the cream of the Romulan Military's rejects and trained them, some of them to their death, for missions like these. Such a price to pay... but so is the reward.

He still had a handful left however, the best, because he'd anticipated that the mission could go this way. But the objective was his, safely held in stasis in his heavily modified shuttle.

He moved to a console and punched in a few commands to initiate a purge of the computer core's memory banks. Not just any purge, but one that actually destroyed the entire core itself so there wasn't anything left to store or retrieve ANY data but merely system functions ones.

Then he brought up one of his own modifications, a secondary self destruct system. He paused before choosing a fifteen minutes countdown.

Then, strode calmly to get down to the shuttle bay, to his shuttle... and his future; the future of the whole Romulan Star Empire.

CHAPTER FIVE : FINISHING BLOW

The transition from warp to sublight was unusually more than a little jerky. Kalten Siduri had been having difficulty with this Yewllowstone-Class runabout he had been tasked to pilot all the way from Starbase 1 back on Earth, ferrying with him the other best graduates of Starfleet Academy to join the most elite division of Starfleet all the way to the one hundred light years away Hromi sector; the infamous tri-border region where Federation Space met the borders of the Klingon Empire and the Romulan Star Empire while facing towards the ominous Delta Quadrant. This smaller of Starfleet ships was far from being fresh and elite material like the young men and women of various species travelling aboard her. It was in fact meant to be used as a replacement for the ships of Starbase 10 in this ferrying job, most notably the nebula class USS Aurora, their own Academy vessel; but it seemed to Kalten that the thing was in need of replacing itself.

After all, the class XI shuttles had been made to do just that for quite a while now... and they were way more slicker and powerful. But Starfleet was not in the habit of scraping still serviceable crafts; space was a very big place, with many starbases, space stations and ships needing such useful vehicles; not to mention planets and colonies.

The slim and athletic man obviously in his late twenties rubbed his regulation-cut ash-blond hair with his hand, blinking his color-changing eyes from grey to blue to green as he looked at his flying board's readouts going from green to red than yellow. He was not sure what had happened, but it seemed like something had hit the navigational deflector while slipping out of warp. Looking up instinctively through the front transparency of the cockpit, he saw the reason and exchanged a worried glance with the small and silent Benzite woman in the co-pilot seat wearing the same grey and black-shouldered cadet uniform he was garbed in.

And it was a sight that was not the most welcoming he would ever see.

Ahead, could be seen the immense circular mushroom-cap shaped starbase that was their destination. Most lights were out. The other thing that stood out was the sight of parts of Starbase 10 in pieces, floating around it. It must very well have been some part of these that had got far enough away to effect his warp transition. One of the four colossal docking bay doors was blasted open, pieces now indeed floating far enough from it to have created a small debris field in which they had just inadvertently emerged.

The runabout sensors caught the signals emanating from a Federation class VIII shuttlecraft at station keeping right above the command post on top of the titanic structure, apparently acting like a makeshift comm relay; and, slightly starboard of the gouged dock drifted a transport vessel or freighter...of Romulan design, if his guess was right.

And she looked in trouble. The power readouts coming from it were alarmingly high and rising still, and the ship was adrift.

Checking his sensors he quickly realised that there was an imminent warp core breach on the Romulan vessel... and it looked like the shields on the Starbase were non-operational.

A breach this close meant very bad news for anyone on the station.

Not good. Thought Kalten. Not good at all!

Quickly he brought up his communications array.

"Petty Officer First Class Kalten Siduri on the Runabout St-Laurent to Starbase 10; Starbase 10 please respond."

Upon hearing the hail, Sydona V'Krull smiled.

"Well... at least subspace channels are back up," she said to her scientist comrade who had been working on restoring those systems once they had minimal power back online. And on his first test, there came the sudden outside call.

"Runabout St-Laurent, this is Starbase 10. Ensign Sydonna V'Krull here. Seems you're a little late for the party... but c'mon down. The Romulans have seemed to left cake and punch for everyone. Seriously... the station is in the process of being secured. However, there is certainly at least one Romulan ship somewhere close to the station."

"I'm seeing it right now, just above and port to the base, " confirmed the voice of Siduri over the comm channel. "My sensors are screaming warp core breach imminent."

Brendan and Sydona paused as they heard the news about the Romulan ship orbiting the station about to have a warp core breach. They both have been listening to communications all over the base as they had been working to fully restore all of the stations functions from Generator room B1, but this last bit of news had yet to be acknowledged. And they had no doubt listening to the runabout pilot's voice.

"Talk to me Murphy."

"Full power has been restored to all the levels with the exception of level 2. We have partial power only to that level. Severe power Conduit damage," Brendan Murphy said as he tried his best to reroute power to that section.

With a heavy sigh, Sydona nodded.

"What about the residential areas and sickbay?"

"Sickbay is back up and running. Internal and external sensors are up. Residential as well," the science crewman responded as he looked at another station display. "Still... I can't seem to get weapons systems and shields online from here."

"That means it needs to be done from the control room."

Sydona grabbed her confiscated Romulan disruptor rifle and her Starfleet-issued phaser 1, then carefully packed her Engineering tool kit.

"I'm going to head to the main control room to see if I can get the shields online." then said the tall engineering woman to both him and her companion, grabbing things around her with haste.

Packed with weaponry and tools, the Hybrid Klingon then made her way to the door as she spoke. Murphy dropped the protective forcefield he had erected around their location and the automatic doors swished open.

Checking her rifle and phaser, Sydonna continued on.

"Siduri, I expect some of our people are or will soon attempt to be on that freighter trying to stop the breach, but they might need emergency beam out just in case. Most of the transporters here are online... but scan that vessel for Starfleet combadge signals and be on standby just in case... and keep your comline open."

"Siduri to V'krull. I have detected numerous transport signatures to and from the freighter and the station. Are all our people off that thing? Listen, I can place the St-Laurent between you and the freighter. If that thing blows, at least my shields might protect you from some of the blast! Please advise."

It was more than a bold statement; it was pure wishful thinking. A ship's power core detonation at this range would easily disintegrate even the several kilometers-wide starbase, let alone his minuscule twenty-three meters long courier vessel; its shields and entire structure would be whiffed out like a candle flame in a tornado by the blast... but it would still deflect a small portion of the blast, maybe giving a few escape pods enough time and cover to evade destruction...

Dying before even before his first deep space mission seemed like a waste to Kalten, but if that was his destiny, then so be it... Kalten Siduri had not taken his Starfleet Oath to lay down his life to protect Federation citizens lightly. He would do the duty he had chosen as his destiny... to the end.

Of course, that's only if the feared core breach activation could not be stopped.

What he wouldn't have given to have been here when the Romulans showed up! The chance to kick some Romulan butt before this critical moment would have been a great start to his career, at least in Kalten's opinion; if not, well, a fitting end then.

A glance at the rest of the crew with him showed his own fear but also his own resolve in their eyes. With a nod from the pale blue, bald, oily, tendril-faced Benzite woman, he turned to the controls and accelerated to full impulse to get into position between the starbase and the threatening enemy ship.

Within the base at the other end of his open comm channel, Sydonna's lungs took in air deeply as she ran, jumped and hurdled down the corridor. Working from memory, she made it to a turbolift. Checking her tricorder, she tapped her combadge and responded to the pilot's message.

"V'Krull to Siduri; our people might still be there. They are probably working it to the wire to commandeer this ship to try and get that core jettisoned. Although placing your ship in the path will not do much I'm afraid... but... how about this..."

Sydona ran her fingers over the panel on the wall near the turbolift door. The panel didn't respond.

"One sec, Siduri. Murphy...I need power to this Turbolift."

"Roger that V. The lift is powered. Still having trouble routing power to the Ops." Brendan said.

Slightly bouncing impatiently on the tip of her toes, the half-Klingon engineer surveyed the area around her wearily before responding.

"Try routing it through the secondary conduits. I'm sure the Romulans damaged the main lines. Siduri... she then called over the open channel, I have another idea."

Rifle at the ready, the Ensign took aim, making sure there weren't going to be any surprises when the doors opened.

"Ops, she ordered the computer before speaking outloud again through her communicator; Siduri, here's my idea: If your ship has the power to do it... tractor beam that freighter out of range."

Another voice then was heard over the comm channel:

"Ensign Schumacher to St-Laurent," came the communications call. "I'm on the runabout Brazos, just clearing the dock. We'll help you tow that ship out."

They all could hear his fingers tapping a few controls and in their mind's eye, see him peering at the results during the pause that followed, then hear him ordering other officers on his ship.

"My tech-med tells me to send you our shield specs. He thinks if we reinforce your shields with ours, we will not shelter the station but we may survive the blast if we can't disengage in time at maximum effective towing range. We're willing to give it a go if you are... Over."

While the chatter went on over the comm, the Turbolift doors opened to the main floor, and Sydona was moving swiftly through the corridors as she spoke again:

"We have power back and most of the transporters are online. We even have an engineer with a science officer that has a lock on them... so ,long range transport shouldn't be an issue. Just in case though... have your systems up so if we lose a lock for any reason or when you will have towed it beyond forty thousand kilometers, we have you as back up. That way you can save the boarding crew as well as yourself."

"The energy readings are building. Get your Klingon butt in gear, V!" Brendan now shouted over the channel.

"I'm moving! Just keep working on getting power to the Main control room, Half-Pint!" the burly hybrid woman said as she raced to her destination. "I hope the security teams can pull this off. If not... then this will have all been for nothing."

"Siduri to V'Krull and Schumacher; I read you both. I've moved my ship into position and have recieved your shield specs. Give me a few seconds to lock everything in place from this end."

Kalten adjusted his position and started to work at the tactical console. His main skills were mainly in this area and he had little difficulty in matching his shield harmonics to those of the Brazos as it came out from the damaged doorway of the station, now illuminated by returning power.

As the other runabout came into range, he punched the activation control and watched with a wry smile as his shields and those of the Brazos linked and overlapped.

This should work a treat, though I'm still not sure about the distance involved here. Kalten thought as he aligned his flight path with that of the incoming Brazos.

"Kalten to Schumacher. Please come about to heading 315, mark 24. That should take you out to the left of the freighter and I'll be sitting just below you and aft. This way we can use the tractors on both our ships on reverse polarity to push that freighter ahead of us and she won't shift or slide out and present herself fully to the starbase; plus, we'll both be in the flood lights if and when she blows. V'Krull, tell me you have us all locked. I'd hate to not get to meet you all in person... I've only just got here!"

Kalten's mood was oddly calm. It seemed that his simulation training and all those hours in flight school had actually done their job of preparing him for this! It struck him as odd that he should be thinking about the Academy and how he had got on there, just as there was a distinct possibility that he might be dead in the next few minutes.

You are a strange man, Kalt, he thought as he adjusted his flight path to come about and below the dying Romulan ship.

But then, he had always thought so; and so did most people meeting him during his life. Even his own parents, his homeworld was a mystery; even to him. The only thing that had ever been known of him was his name, on the container that had delivered him to the orphanage where he grew up on Earth... a name he now had hoped to make for himself by joining Starfleet.

Making it with a bang! Although I did not expect to bang it out so soon...

Another six seconds and then Kalten set his tractor to target the left nacelle of the freighter, rocking it slightly as the beam took hold of the Romulan ship and began to hold it in place. Another few seconds and the beam from the Brazos hit on the right nacelle, leveling the ship and reinforcing the hold both small runabouts had on the much larger transport vessel.

Then, gradually, the ship began to move away from the starbase, repulsed by the graviton beam of the two runabouts; surely but slowly. Aboard the two Starfleet auxiliary crafts, one thought was shared by all: at this pace, would they move it far enough and in time?

"Schumacher, it's working," Siduri confirmed, stating the obvious out of sheer nervousness. "Adjust to bearing 320, keep her level and let's keep pushing. It's risky, but I think we can get to one quarter impulse on this move. You with me?"

"A hell of a time to ask!" was the falsely casual retort from the other runabout.

"Sydona, what's the situation down there?" then asked Kalten over the open channel. "Do you have access to external sensors? Mine tell me we don't have long at all left. Not rushing you or anything, but now might be a good time to get those would be Starfleet Marines or whoever is out there off that thing!"

* * *

When they materialized in the weapons control room, all the members of Team Tactical 1 saw the most unexpected and horrifying scene they could ever have imagined.

Instead of leveling weapons at them, all the Romulans pressed something on their wrist... and all were instantly disintegrated as if under intense disruptor fire, their bodies contorting in brief agony as they became luminous clouds of dispersed atoms under plasma fire.

Even in silent, black and white images that Kheren was seeing through a pounding headache, the whole scene was as astonishing as it was horrible to behold.

They were all coldly and unhesitantly killing themselves.

Kheren pointed weapons control to Bankhole and activated his combadge:

" Kheren to Baoule: renew lock on three Humans and one Andorian and beam us back, now! "

Then he dropped his combadge on the floor.

The woman besides him had barely time to fire her last tachyon burst to deactivate all the ship's weapons that the bluish lights of the transporter dissolved them to reassemble the whole team on the transporter platform within Starbase 10.

The Andorian fell on one knee as he dared to stretch out his antennae to recover fully his senses. But it took all his will not to vomit after this last transport. The rest of the team was putting a hand to a temple or a brow, now barely feeling a slight dizziness despite all those flash beam-in and out they went through. All three women had done a wonderful job of disabling the entire Romulan ship and a good part of her crew... but now...

Kheren forced himself up to properly greet Captain Garrison coming back to the cargo bay. Slowly, perspiring with a fruity scent filling the air, he managed to say:

" Romulan ship disabled, Sir.. but the crew is undergoing what appears to be a planned mass suicide. This will certainly be followed by the imminent self-destruction of their ship. "

" I have a clear lock on it now, Sir, bearing 045 mark 080, at standard orbital distance of the starbase " then said Jamal Baoule from behind the transporter console.

" My combadge signal, Sir. " explained the Andorian, showing his chest now bare of the small piece of equipment.

And then rose the alarmed voice of the Engineer crewman Robert Baoule:

" Captain Sir! I read a massive power build up on these coordinates! Sir! It looks to me like... a power core surge! Sir? If they detonate their power core *this* close to the starbase... without shields... "

Captain Garrison finished for him:

"If they destroy the containment system of their warp core they could create a warp core breach! With the microsingularity they use as an energy source in their vessels, this means an implosion of gravimetric forces that would tear this entire space station to pieces!"

Hefting his own weapon, John moved Tactical Team 1 off the platform but pointed the Andorian back on with his free hand.

"Kheren, you're with me. Ensign Baoule, beam us onto their engineering deck away from any Romulan signatures.

"Sir?" said the Baoule twins together as the rest of the Starfleet complement exchanged astonished glances.

"Do it! We don't want them to hasten our own destruction with that of their ship!" John jumped on to the transporter pad beside Kheren.

It is usually hard to read an Andorian's facial expression since they have much less facial muscles than Humans. But at this moment, it was plain to everyone that Kheren was not so pleased with the idea of going through the rough cargo transporter effect again.

Nevertheless, Andorians are creatures of deep-ingrained discipline. Retracting his antennae within his cranium like only he could do, he followed Captain Garrison on the large pad.

A disruptor in each hand, he half-kneeled on one knee to be as small a target as possible while hoping to reduce the dizzying effects of the transport beam on his already overtaxed senses.

With his sensory appendages retracted, he couldn't hear the senior officer's order to energize... but he did feel it happening, from his pulsing forehead down to the pit of his stomach.

General Order 15; No officer of flag rank shall travel into a potentially hazardous area without suitable armed escort...

Suitable... pretty big word in *his* case, as far as *he* felt... But...may he be damned if he would fail in his duty now.

John and Kheren beamed on board without immediate detection by the Romulans by appearing behind several supply crates.

"Okay, our main objective is to take their singularity power core offline." John whispered almost inaudibly; he knew Andorian antennae could pick up sounds way beyond any Human's hearing range and used it to give orders unheard by their enemy. "I've dealt with Romulan computer systems before, but I will need time to shut down the core."

Kheren, mostly guessed the words from his lips, barely hearing him as his trembling cranial appendages sprouted out of his thick white mane flattened by sweat. He simply nodded, slowly, then closed his eyes. This last beam in had almost sent him sprawling unconscious to the deckplates of the Romulan engine room.

But the captain was still speaking to him and that kept him awake.

"We will go in quietly and take down any Romulans quickly to prevent any destructive actions on their part."

Kheren managed to clench his teeth and resist fainting from the effects of the cargo transporter despite throwing his antennae out earlier than he should; either he was getting used to the effect of the inadequate cargo transporter, or the scientist crewman Baoule was better adjusting it's emission flow readout, now that there was only the two of them.

" Leave them to me, Sir. I will introduce them to Andorian fighting. "

" Let's move. " answered the commanding officer.

It took no time for Captain Garrison to see that, even in his weakened, dizzied state, the Andorian was in his best element despite his newness as a Starfleet Officer. Not only had Kheren graduated with the Highest Honors from the Academy as a specialist in close quarter tactics and combat, top of his class with a perfect score in the majority of his courses over the four years of study and training... but he had been a champion duellist and martial arts master on Andoria for decades before joining the fleet.

And the Romulans too were about to find out.

His first sneak attack took out two Romulans at the same time; *hleshvalath* was a most brutal form of wrestling; with the formidable strength and natural ambidexterity of an Andorian, it was utterly as lethal as it was silent. Especially in his weakened condition, the speed and strength he displayed was astonishing, even for his already powerful warrior kind; almost as impressive as that of a Saurian or even a Gorn.

And so, in one swift motion, each of Kheren's arms snaked from behind under their armpits to hook his hands behind their necks. In one merciless motion, he lifted both off the ground by rising his arms, then swiftly brought down his hands to his own hips, snapping their small cervical vertebrae like twigs.

He hid back behind a power distributor to lower the bodies he still carried almost effortlessly behind, moving discreetly and swiftly but without making a sound.

Then, he moved in a half crouch towards the third of the half dozen elite Imperial soldiers still unaware of the silent predator among them. This time, he put a hand behind the Romluan's neck, who reflexively raised his head from his console... exposing his throat to a savage strike of the callused, inner edge of a blue-skinned hand. His throat and any alarm shout were crushed instantly like a rotten fruit under a heel. The striking Andorian style of *Kharakom* was evidently no less brutal than the grappling one.

Kheren was already stalking the last three. Because of the urgency of the crisis, and still feeling sick because of the last beam-in he had to endure, he worked quickly and ruthlessly.

He did not feel well; and he was not in a good mood.

With his vision wavering with each pounding of his multi-chambered heart against his temples, he wondered how long he could keep on before fainting completely for good. His high metabolism made him quite less endurant than his Human companion, especially after all the beamings and fighting he had gone through and it was starting to show in the heaviness of his movements, the shallowness of his breath and the trembling of his body extremities.

The clock was ticking.

John Garrison worked at a furious pace. He barely heard noise of battle in the background but he phased it out, concentrating only on the task at hand.

He realized quickly that he couldn't shut the core down since it was powered by nothing less than a microscopic black hole artificially generated; but he could begin Romulan containment protocols by reactivating the coolant tanks. John quickly accessed a low security maintenance subroutine which powered up the coolant system. He then implemented manual override on the computer's attempts to follow its self-destruct orders to deactivate the cooling system by punching in another, higher security command:

John clearly understood the warning that came next in bold Romulan ideograms:

**Core Ejection system activated.
Core Ejection system activated.
Core Ejection system activated.**

Kheren all the while slid over the inert body of the fourth Romulan he had dispatched with a savage neck twist from behind. But his own head was feeling like *he* had been the recipient of the gruesome attack.

And his heart was feeling even heavier... and much more in pain.

This is not combat... this is murder... I... How can I be so cold and heartless about it? It is wrong... it has no Honor... but... so many lives on the Starbase depend on me taking those lives... There should be another way... there must be another way...

But Kheren couldn't find it. In his worsening state of fatigue, confusion and pain, he was succumbing to his primal instincts, his veneer of discipline melting away to reveal the savage passion of his ancestors throbbing from his heart to his soul, obscuring his mind.

"Core Ejection System activated. Ejection in ten... nine... eight... "

Suddenly alerted by the voice of the computer, the last two Romulan guards came around the huge engine core at a fast trot and spotted Captain Garrison at the engineering station. Swiftly, they drew up their disruptors...

A tall black and grey-clad, dark blue-skinned form smashed into them like a living missile.

Their shots went wild as the three bodies bowled over in a mass of limbs and heads amidst curses and shouts. Highly trained, the two Romulans rolled on their feet...

Making themselves perfect targets for Captain Garrison's quick phaser shots.

On the floor, The Andorian was lying very still.

* * *

"Captain Cobb, this is Kalten Siduri, Petty Officer First Class reporting for duty, Sir. I'm on the runabout St-Laurent, Sir. I have the Brazos with me and we have the freighter in tractor beam lock. I can confirm the instability of the freighter's power core and its ejection from the hull, Sir, but we are touch and go as to whether we can get this bird away to have the starbase out of the blast zone in time. Just to let you know, we have interlinked our shields in an overlapping harmonic. We're not a hundred percent sure it will improve their strength, but it's the best we could think of at the time, Sir."

Kalten paused. That was a lot to say in one breath while maneuvering a large freighter using a tractor beam at one-quarter impulse.

He was about to disconnect from the hull to grab the free-floating warp core behind it and try to tow its much smaller mass away at full impulse; but not knowing when the explosion would exactly occur...

Then another idea popped up in his mind.

"Sir, if we repulse the freighter towards the core, it might absorb some of the blast while pushing it farther away and, with our shields added and the angle of refraction from increasing distance, possibly avert at least major damage to the starbase."

His self-satisfied smile at his own cleverness suddenly froze as he recalled out loud:

"Only problem is... we still, as best as I know, have men on that thing. Requesting directions, Sir."

Tearing down the corridor as she listened to the exchange between Siduri and Ops, Sydona V'Krull barely gave the doors of the starbase command center time to open before she was through them.

"Yes, our people are still there. Tactical Team 1 hasn't reported back in yet over any channel. I guess that they are fighting over there, since the ship never attacked while we were powerless... and now, it is self-destructing instead of simply warping out."

Upon seeing the security teams leveling weapons at her sudden appearance in Ops, she slowed to a medium pace as they obviously recognized her uniform and most non-Romulan features, tossing her rifle to the nearest officer before heading to the Engineering station.

Ignoring some of the looks she received from the officers around her, the hybrid Klingon woman tapped her combadge and went to work.

"Siduri, the core is out... but from what Murphy can tell from the stations sensors, that thing can go off at any moment. Sydona as her frustration was mounting. "Murphy... talk to me! Our security chief wants the shields up!"

"And people in hell want icy water. Tell me something I don't know, Klingon," came back the gruff retort of science officer Brendan Murphy. "The station is not at full power. Even with the removal of all the dampening field emitters by the guys in the Astrometrics lab ... Some of the systems are still affected. No one yet reconnected power from main engineering. At this rate, if we get shields at thirty percent, we're doing good."

Sydona fingers gracefully danced and skipped about the console and displays before her. Scanning all of the screens and displays of the stations current status, she finally broke the silence both Alistair Cobb and Speaker-Of-Names kept around the operations center to let her work.

There was nothing they could do until she was done anyway.

"Fine. We'll do this old school. Murphy, most if not all of the civilians and injured personnel are located in one area, right?"

"Yes, actually, they are all in the main sickbay area. Talk to me V'Krull... what's on the table?" Brendan said inquisitively.

"Shut down all power and life support to the sections of the station that aren't being used or occupied and route the power to the shields. According to the quick diagnostic I did, we have a few main conduits that have not been damaged that will be able to handle the load of power hitting it. We can boost shield strength beyond your initial projections," Sydona responded as she set up the relays.

"Right. Initiating shutdown of non-occupied areas and rerouting power. All transporter systems are still online." Brendan replied.

Sydona finalized the power setup and brought the shields operational with a modulating frequency setting. Watching the power grid readings, she addressed both Cobb and Speaker.

"The shields are online. We'll try our best to keep them up with as much power as we can."

* * *

On board the doomed Romulan vessel, John Garrison moved quickly to assist his fallen comrade.

"Garrison to Starbase 10! Mister Baoule, lock on to my combadge signal; two to beam back directly to Sickbay, NOW!"

"Sir! There is a dampening field around that location!"

"Petty Officer Jamal Baoule to sickbay, then followed instantly the other brother through the station inner comm channel; incoming casualties, emergency beam in; drop your dampening field *now!*"

"Baoule? Is it you?" came back a melodic voice over the speakers. A voice no one could forget once heard, even if had been some time ago back in basic science classes at the Academy.

"Elliago! Drop the field! Officer down!"

Captain Garrison found himself caught up in the shimmer of a transporter beam along with the junior officer who had taken a blast for him.

In the medical bay, the captain saw several medics and wounded piled everywhere all around him but a pair of nurses were already coming to help as if they had been waiting for him. He assisted them in getting the unconscious Kheren on to a biobed.

A medical crewman yelled out:

"Medical Emergency!"

John waited anxiously for the doctor. A bald, handsome man, obviously Deltan, was already joining him near the inert form of the Andorian.

The Deltan went straight to the bed, already fully alerted to this late casualty coming. Realizing the patient was Andorian, Doctor Nasaro-Myth ordered special needs. A needle hypospray with an increased dose of Kelotane to be injected by intramuscular injections. Andorians having a circulatory system working mostly by osmosis under a chitinous layer of skin, injections ought to be intramuscular as hypospray would not penetrate this vestigial exoskeleton of that unique half-mammalian, half insectoid species. His specialization in Comparative Xenobiology brought up some studies on the peculiar Andorian physiology.

And already at first glance, this Andorian was most peculiar even to his strange kind. His skin was much darker than any he had ever seen and the biobed readouts had to recalibrate for an abnormally high muscle and bone density he would have expected from a heavyworlder; but a heavyworlder this patient was not, as his frame, despite being remarkably much more muscular than any Andorian he ever saw, was still slim and tall, nowhere as thick and squat as life under a much higher gravity would have produced along with that surprising body mass. And at first, he thought the poor devil had lost both antennae... until he found them, unbelievably retracted within his skull; something no Andorian had ever been recorded doing.

Then, the preliminary genetic scan explained everything; and Elliago paused with astonishment.

He's a... fusion? He has... both Andorian male genders! Thaan and Chan! My heart! Nature could not have accidentally produced such a being without any flaw like this... But the level of genetic work needed just to conceive such a mutation...

"Doctor!"

The urgency in the voice of the Starfleet captain beside him, looking with concern at his fallen comrade, brought the Deltan out of his fascinated musings with a startling jolt.

The young doctor took a close look at the wound. It was a major wound, a third degree disruptor burn, especially severe for a coldworlder species like those native of the icy moon of Andoria were. But, fortunately, nothing he couldn't handle. Slowly and steadily, the Deltan crewman treated the severe burn of this most peculiar Andorian.

After a few minutes, Doctor Nasaro-Myth raised his head. He barely realised only then that Doctor O'Clare was the CMO in place. In a rather smooth motion, the Deltan managed to hide his uneasiness in a surgeon call for assistance from his nurses.

It's not the time to think about this! There is a life at stake, Elliago. If Doctor O'Clare has something to say, she's gonna tell me... Come on! Save that poor blue fellow, he firmly thought as he brought back his full attention to his patient.

After nearly an hour and a half, Doctor Nasaro-Myth finally closed the completely healed wound on his Andorian comrade. It had taken unusually long treatment as this fellow seemed to be very susceptible to heat and burning damage, even more so than any of his ice-worlder kind. The burn had gone deep within his dense flesh, but his partially osmotic circulatory system made him all the more responsive to regenerative medication and treatment. There would not even be a scar left after a while.

And the Deltan had also taken some time to record everything that he could from this unique individual, keeping a bit more samples than treatment required.

He was after all, an exobiologist.

But the patient was saved and on his way to a complete recovery. He took a look at his team.

"Good job everyone! You all did well, thank you very much. Nurse, let him rest and call me as soon as he wakes." ordered the doctor.

Then, he went straight at Doctor O'Clare.

"Sorry Ma'am, I came here to apologize for taking the Andorian case so quickly. I knew we had little time to intervene, so I decided to treat him. Ma'am." said the Deltan.

The woman, herself busy with a young Bolian child victim of the foul chemical compound the Romulans had used to attack civilians as a mere diversion and terror tactic, glanced at him with a genuine smile.

"This is not a bureaucracy, Doctor; this is a sickbay. We take care of patients, not careers. We save lives, not egos. *You* saved a life; that is *all* that matters. Carry on."

The Deltan nodded and gave her a most bright smile and such a whiff of soothing pheromones that even the injured young child smiled back at them both.

Ensign Zeezrom Teancum and his rescue team brought in the last few injured from the civilian section of the starbase who needed assistance. They had passed through the Promenade to gather everyone, then moving quickly on towards sickbay and sheltered areas, reestablishing order, calm and safety throughout the entire main living deck.

"We are bringing in the last nine casualties from the civilian sections, as far as we can tell, that need assistance getting to you. There are more who will arrive under their own abilities."

As they helped the last people into sickbay, he came to the woman he identified as the Chief medical officer of Starbase 10 to ask:

"Are the transporters available for any others?"

His team was ready to go back to the Promenade and look again for any straggler, friend or foe... but they were weary and tired after taking care of so many defenseless and afflicted people. They needed to rest a bit.

Doctor O'Clare was quite aware of it, as much as if she had herself the Deltan doctor's own empathic abilities.

"You and your people will be of no help to anyone if you fall on your face from exhaustion, Ensign. You have done more than enough already and I don't need you as added patients. Go rest by keeping company to our security teams outside. Hearing about all the people you saved today will cheer them up, show them that they too did their job well and, with you, won the day."

The balding Ensign nodded in acknowledgement and strutted out with weariness but also with pride shared with his teammates.

Elliago Nasaro-Myth smiled to O'Clare.

"Healing the soul heals the body," he said to her with a warm tone. "So it is believed on Delta IV."

"So it is known on Starbase 10," she shot back with a smile of her own.

* * *

"Siduri, we're ready here. If you're going to do anything...now is the time."

Oh great, all me huh....fantastic....I get to blow this thing up... and maybe the station... Great first day on the job!

Kalten was obviously suffering from the enormity of the situation here, as the two runabouts were pushing away the larger Romulan ship against the glowing power core on the other side of its greenish hull at almost twenty thousand kilometers per second; so slow and ponderous when you had a potential explosion building up within minutes, if not seconds, that would devastate millions of kilometers all around it.

He wasn't sure of anything now... But the woman had said go for it, hadn't she?

And so he did. Then one last detail he had almost forgotten popped back up in his mind as he watched the larger freighter through the cockpit view of his tiny ship.

"Siduri to V'Krull; what about those teams? If you need extra transports I can get... "

A repeated beep brought his eyes back down to his sensor readout.

"Wait..."

A red light flashed across his board.

"Wait..."

The computer listed the sensor results as they appeared.

"Oh no..."

Kalten's eyes rose again towards the ominous mass he was holding before him as he flew away from the base.

"Do you read this Starbase 10? That core is breaching *now*..."

"You are out of transporter range," came back the report from Ops.

"Initiating emergency beam out from that freighter!" he then announced. " Brazos, are you tracking this? Initiate emergency beam out on your side; I have starboard!"

There was no time to await a reply. Kalten's voice command had already started the computer of and he felt the power surge through his console as his ship initiated the transport on his mark.

The transporter pad remained empty.

Then, there was an almighty flash of white light that blinded the viewscreen. Of course nothing was heard of the sound, but the shockwave that hit micro seconds later was enough to vibrate the runabout's hull like a huge bell and throw Kalten and his crew out of their seats halfway across the main room of their wildly tumbling ship; tumbling nearly into the path of the other disabled runabout.

Siduri barely saw the looming shape of the Brazos suddenly filling up the twirling cockpit window as he fell, knocking his head hard against the wall. Alarms started to flair and the computer's voice kicked in, announcing damaged systems...

The last thing Kalten heard before blacking out was that his shields were failing,

Cobb and the others in the control center of the Starbase had braced themselves against the Ops console when he'd seen that the readings of the ejected warp core indicate a breach. It would take an immense power to even shake the station, and such power would destroy it anyway...

But not this time.

Barely a minute had elapsed between the ejection of the power core and its detonation. But the courageous maneuver of the pair of runabouts had pushed it away slightly over a million kilometers; just far enough to reduce the explosion to a rumbling of the station's superstructure without damaging it, leaving only a rain of small debris pelting its weakened but sufficient energy shields.

Cobb switched the filtering of the sensors, praying that no Starfleet crew had been aboard the freighter when the shockwave hit, hoping the two runabouts would have escaped destruction in time. With the inertial dampeners stressed with their reduced power state, he knew the shockwave would have thrown anyone into bulkheads, off catwalks and into consoles and killing them instantly even at this distance if it had been for the covering shield of the Romulan freighter and the two small vessels, extended shields between them and the gravimetric implosion.

He let out the breath he didn't know he'd been holding when a quick check told him that a cargo transporter pad had been activated before the freighter had been pushed beyond forty thousand kilometers. Both sickbay as well as the two junior officers at an active cargo transporter console confirmed that the last two boarders had been safely beamed back.

He activated the Starbase's Comm system once more.

"This is Captain Alistair Cobb speaking. The threat to Starbase 10 is over."

He could almost feel through the deckplates the cheers that went up all across the immense station, same as the one that erupted between all officers present with him in the command center.

Once things calmed down a little, he resumed his communique:

"I expect to have full main power in an hour. To all civilians in shelters, please remain there until medical and security teams ensure it is safe to do so. All personnel are to go to repair duty or medical work at once, all docked ships are requested to report in and state their condition before I'll allow their departure. Cobb Out."

Several hours later, Captain John Garrison had rejoined the command staff in Ops after the successful operation that had saved the life of the crewman that had been, with him, last to face the enemy. As he finished his report to the new Starbase commander, the security man currently taking the seat of the Communications Officer, Ensign Harkness, noticed then a bleeping on the board of the restored station system in front of him: a priority one message coming directly from Starfleet Headquarters and addressed to both Starbase Commander Captain Cobb and to the Chief Security Officer, Lieutenant-Commander Speaker-Of-Names.

"Open subspace channel, Ensign, " ordered Cobb, facing the main viewing screen.

With a hand, he waved to Captain Garrison to stay with them just as he started to leave from the situation desk they had all been seated at, as they were preparing themselves to study the incoming data about the recent attack.

They awaited the call from Starfleet Command. The tension in the room was tangible as it took a moment for all the station's systems to reinitialize properly after having been put offline so abruptly.

As the screen lighted up after a few bypassing circuits kicked in, the face of a Boslic man, grey peppering his short haircut and his neatly trimmed beard, emerged from the static and they all relaxed a little. This was the well known countenance of Fleet Captain Kotari, Commandant of the Hromi sector where Starbase 10 was located.

Besides him stood the imposing figure of a humanoid lion also wearing the pips of a Fleet captain on his black and grey, red collared standard uniform. Even more than Kotari, Fleet Captain K'Rrau was certainly among the most well known, recognizable figure in Lotus Fleet; he had been the first commander of Starbase 10 upon its commissioning, barely a year ago.

"Gentlemen," Kotari began; "The situation just reported in your sector is severe. The Romulan situation seems now to be out of control. This last unprovoked attack on Starbase 10 has made Starfleet Command discuss the situation for hours. As my heart will always be there with Lotus Fleet, I managed to convince them that we need to invest further resources in the Hromi sector instead of cutting our losses. The report of your successful resistance and victory over these forces has given me the best argument needed to have this proposal accepted."

Cobb looked at Speaker-of-Names, then at John Garrison and then back to the Fleet Captain.

"Sir, what do you have in mind?" He asked.

"Well, Captain, it wasn't easy, but I've managed to get the Sapentia of Gemini Fleet to divert to your location. She's the starship closest to your location. I'm assigning you, Captain Cobb, to her center seat and your mission will be to investigate what is going on with these recent provocations from the Romulans, starting with this one at Starbase 10."

Captain Cobb was obviously taken aback by the unexpected starship commission. Especially that the USS Sapientia was one of the only twelve Sovereign class battleships in all of Starfleet, five of them all assigned to First Fleet alone under the leadership of the Federation flagship, USS Enterprise. Commanding such a starship would be the crowning achievement of his career.

"I am honored, Sir. But... what about Starbase 10? I was assign to her command barely weeks ago... And truth is... I just got here!"

Kotari made a vague gesture. But his eyes were unwavering and his voice firm.

"Due to all the recent changes in the command structure on the station, we think it is necessary to have someone stationed there already to take over Command, someone who is still of enough command experience, proven valor and familiarity with the station to face all the challenges that are obviously heading its way."

His gaze shifted away from Cobb as he went on saying in a very formal voice:

"Due to the exemplary work you did in defending the station, we are promoting you to Captain rank and assign you as the new Commander of Starbase 10."

Fleet captain Kotari was looking straight at Speaker-Of-Names.

"Starfleet Command feels that you have the qualities necessary for this new position, especially when the situation in your sector requires someone well experienced in security. There will also be many of the officers currently aboard your starbase that will receive promotions, awards and reassignments as well. Captain K'Rrauw will arrive shortly aboard the Sapentia to deliver them personally and oversee the change of personnel before assuming himself border patrol duties and command of the USS Alsea upon her return."

"If I may ask, Sir; has the situation on Remus changed? last we where told the situation was dire." Captain John Garrison then asked, speaking for the first time.

K'Rrauw scratched his hairy chin with a clawed paw as he replied.

"No, no change, as farr as we know at any rrate. No, the prroblem is mmorre one of perrsonal interest. The Rrommulans have agrreed to allow Federration aid to Rremmus but they insist that Lotus Fleet and yourr former ship in parrticularr, not be allowed into therre homme systemm."

Garrison looked bewildered.

"What? What reason did they give?"

"They refused to explain their reason for this, but we could not debate it for too long, so we agreed."

Garrison sighed and looked around at his fellow officers.

"I understand, Fleet Captain K'Rrauw; but it's just so.. insulting."

The large cat smiled slightly, showing some of his teeth.

"Of course."

He then continued.

"Also it has been decided to begin a fleet reorganisation, a shake up the troops kind of operation. I will be sending the new crew rosters within the next twenty hours, after that time you are expected to begin switching staff over the next three days before reporting yourself to the Joint Chiefs at Starfleet Command back on Sol III."

He spoke with a curious tone of mixed pride and sadness in his voice. But it was hidden well, almost not detectable.

Garrison was surprised but these new orders and said as much:

"Fleet Captain, this is very sudden. It would take a week or more to do this properly, I don't see..."

K'Rrauw interrupted.

"I'm sure you will make do, Captain Garrison, as we all must."

Garrison had the look of a frustrated man, but held his bearing.

"Understood; I'll start preparations immediately."

K'Rrauw nodded.

"Excellent."

"One other matter Captain, then said Garrison; I respectfully request that Commander Felez Connor'atu, chief science officer of the Lotus, be promoted to captain rank and given command of the flagship."

The officers in the room glanced at each other with surprise. He had never mentioned anything about this, not even once. It was assumed from orders received directly from Starfleet Command that an already seasoned commanding officer, one Captain Hargrove from Fourth Fleet, would take over command from Garrison. Her presence aboard the Nova Class science ship USS Savoy inbound for Starbase 10 was already confirmed.

K'Rrauw seemed to weigh his words before replying, his head tilting slightly to one side.

"Very well Captain Garrison, if that is what you wish. I will arrange for his posting at least as Acting captain until Command review your proposal and makes a final decision. I assure you, your command style is not under scrutiny because of the Romulans; but your request to bypass an earned command in favor of a junior officer, especially on the flagship of any fleet division, might not be well received. But I will do what I can."

"Thank you, Sir, that's good to know; but I have personal reasons not related to this situation to make such a request," Garrison replied.

K'Rrauw thought for a moment and nodded. As former commander of Lotus Fleet's headquarters, he was well aware of the USS Lotus' mission logs and the exceptional record of her chief of science since the very maiden voyage of the flagship. But Starfleet has to follow its own orders and chain of command to be of any worth is pretended to as the institution dedicated to keeping the peace in Federation space. Individual preferences were irrelevant.

"I see. Verry well then. I'll be in touch."

"Congratulations, Captain Speaker-Of-Names, then aded Kotari; and good luck... to the both of you."

Fleet Captain Kotari terminated the communication, leaving the three command officers rather surprised in the ready-room, looking at one another with both frowns and smiles while the rest of the Ops personnel lined to congratulates them.

* * *

The Commander smiled to himself as his shuttle slipped quietly out of Starbase 10. He'd located, acquired and secured the objective and it was safely stored in the shuttle behind him, carefully in stasis.

His cloak was activated and, just as the power core of the freighter had detonated, he used it as cover and instantly went to Warp.

His destination was one of the most secret locations in the entire Romulan Star Empire. Its designation was thought to be a myth to both Starfleet Intelligence and the Obsidian Order.

It was also a myth to the Romulan people; but they were meant to believe that.

As he had used the cover of the power core's explosion to warp away undetected, he had thought about the possibilty of the Starfleetcrew disarming the self destruct. The officers of this Lotus Fleet division had proven unpredictably resourceful, unfailingly courageous and faithfully devoted to their duty and one another.. and many of them, he knew, were barely rookies and junior officers. They had proven more than a match to the very elite of the Empire.

In the end, they did not prevent the explosion... but his last sensor scan before warping out had shown that the starbase, through some incredible luck or miracle, had not been destroyed.

Those Federation officers were no match for someone of superior blood and intellect like him. And yet, they had prevailed, this time, even against the perfection of his plans, almost bringing them to a halt.

Almost.

Still, this Lotus Fleet just proved that it would be a decisive adversary in the struggle to come. But now, he would have what was needed to resolve that... inconvenience.

Silently, the incredibly expensive shuttle soared towards the Neutral Zone... for home.*

** The follow-up of this event can be found in the USS Sapentia episode "The Hunt" found in the RP archives on the forum section at www-lotusfleet.com*

EPILOGUE

A short signal made Greg Patton aware of the approach of the Sapentia. He had had a long talk with Captain Cobb, the newly appointed commander of the Sovereign class flagship of Gemini Fleet, after which he had agreed to take back the head of the science department of the Sapentia he had already served in before his short assignment to Starbase 10. The loss of her former captain, his friend Captain Satory, made it important that it was led by someone experienced enough. It seemed that Alistair Cobb was that person.

And so was newly reappointed and promoted Commander Gregory Patton.

Patton himself was glad to be returning to the Sapentia where he had served before being affected to build up the science department of Starbase 10, Lotus Fleet's new headquarters. Although a short posting, he had been the Sapentia's chief science officer already before he had been assigned to the Starbase for an equally short, and let's say as lively, assignment... And so, despite the death of his friend and former commanding officer, he felt like he was coming home.

A small party had been given by his friends and colleagues to celebrate his new assignment.

He wouldn't be the only new crewmember. The CMO of the Sapentia had resigned his commission to devote herself full time to the unfortunate captain.

Captain Satory had had an accident on their way to answer Starbase 10's distress call during the Romulan attack and was paralyzed from the neck down. Although the medical knowledge of Starfleet was advanced, it wasn't advanced enough to reconstruct from the subatomic level the entire nervous system of someone surviving a normally deadly dose of baryon radiation. At the moment, it was incurable. He would not even be able to control any artificial prosthesis or support from what was left of his brain impulses, like the historical figure of Captain Christopher Pike once did a few centuries ago.

Space is not a friendly place, reflected the science commander with sadness.

Greg Patton walked over to the viewport of his quarters and saw the Sapentia preparing to dock inside the immense Starbase. Seeing the almost eight hundred meters long battleship again, as each time he saw her, made his heart race. He admired its elongated curves and sleek. Profiled shape.

"We'll see how she handles our upcoming problems," he thought smiling.

Although equipped for all Starfleet missions parameters, including a full sensor pallet and a complete complement of research labs, the Sovereign class was essentially a battleship designed to face the Borg threat first and foremost. It would require serious work from her chief science officer to make her as efficient as possible for any scientific mission.

But they knew each other well already, the Sapentia and him; they would do well.

He tapped his combadge.

"Patton to Doctor Nasaro-Myth. The Sapentia is arriving. We'll meet at docking-bay 12. Patton out"

Then he heard a transmission.

"Sapentia to Captain Cobb. Captain, we will be fully docked at the station within ten minutes. I'm looking forward meet you, Sir. And to see you again, Commander Patton. Congratulations for your promotion... and welcome back. Lieutenant Vuckovic out."

Greg smiled. He had met Matija Vockovic before on a Hazard team mission, where they had fought a skirmish with an intruding Borg sphere. They may have served together for a short time, but it never took long in a crisis for deep bonds to be created between officers. He too was looking forward to meet again the athletic security and tactical chief of Gemini Fleet's flagship.

"Patton to Vuckovic. Acknowledged. The doctor and I will be waiting at dock 12. Patton out"

He gathered his final belongings, then stepped to the door which, as usual, slid open silently. He took a last look of his now former quarters before standing reflexively at attention as if in a last salute to the base itself, then walked out.

He had almost reached the turbolift, when Captain Cobb approached him.

"Commander, I need to speak with you before we leave. Please follow me to my office."

Greg raised an eyebrow, since he hadn't expected this to happen so soon before his departure.

"Yes Sir" he said, following the former commanding officer of the Starbase and now his new captain on board his old ship.

"Please sit, Commander," Cobb said with a smile on his face.

Greg nodded, put down his luggage, then took a seat.

"Commander Patton; as you are aware, we have had some problems here with... Romulan visitors. And although the situation fortunately ended soon enough, in good part thanks to your own efforts, the damage done was extensive. In the end, all of the Romulan intruders have committed ritual suicide... except for a small number who managed to escape in what appears to be a shuttle of advanced design."

He made a pause. He knew Greg was already aware of the shuttle escape; his science team was the one which had detected the residual warp trail of the fleeing craft after the freighter's destruction. But Cobb wanted his chief of science to have all the proper data in proper order before continuing:

"Starfleet wants the Sapentia to investigate and if possible, apprehend the Romulan officer or officers we suspect to have taken one prisoner aboard their shuttle."

That one was new to the scientist.

"A prisoner? All this to kidnap *one* person? Who?"

We don't know yet. We are currently going through the entire starbase complement but over twenty-thousand people to check after so much chaos and with still only half our systems operational takes some time. We only have a transporter trace to tell us that it happened. And that he was Romulan."

"A Romulan? What do you mean? A spy? A defector?"

"That we don't know either. Of course you are aware of the difficult situation we have to deal with. Our relations with the Romulan government is still fragile, so, if dealing with Romulan officials, we will have to be very careful not to cross certain boundaries. Are these orders clear?"

Greg nodded.

"Good. Here is a PADD with further details about the situation. As the highest ranking officer under my command, and because of the current shortage of any other competent officer as much as for your expertise and credentials coupled with your recent experience with these Romulans, I will ask you also to double up as my First Officer."

The promotion and all the added responsibilities coming with it startled the science commander a moment. But his mind was quick if not anything else and he weighted in mere seconds all that it implied. he had the training, the expertise and the experience; and a Starfleet officer never shied from any responsibility... or any challenge.

"Thank you, Sir" Greg replied evenly. "Let us wish ourselves some good hunting."

Both men shook hands, after which Greg took his luggage and left towards the docking-bay and the surely waiting new CMO of the ship while Captain Cobb stayed in his ready room of the starbase to finish up the transfer of command from the base to the now docking ship of the line.

Greg Patton's step was light and full of renewed energy. The promotion, the assignment and even the new commanding responsibilities would have been enough to energize him so. But there was much more to it.

There was a mystery to ponder, a search to conduct, questions to answer.

And *that* was why *he* was in Starfleet.

* * *

To Nasaro-Myth, Elliago, Doctor
Petty Officer 2nd Class
Medical Division
Lotus Fleet

Your application for placement has been processed.

You had been temporarily assigned as Medical Crewman on Starbase 10 awaiting the completion of your medical internship in space duties before being considered for your next assignment to any deep space duty. Your request to be assigned to the Starbase as a Medical Officer has been noted and considered; however, following your exemplary conduct and personal acts of bravery and service under fire during the recent incident at Starbase 10, it is deemed essential by Fleet command to assign you to current pressing duties commensurate with your showed potential and to answer equally pressing needs of the fleet.

You are hereby promoted in the field to the rank of Ensign and transferred to service in Gemini Fleet and assigned as Chief Medical Officer aboard Gemini Fleet's flagship, the U.S.S. Sapentia.

I am aware that you certainly know that no CMO of a starship had ever been assigned with such a low rank and as little actual deep space experience as you. Especially aboard the flagship of a fleet. But that is the official record only. Truth is, we are aware that you have been born and raised aboard starships and, beyond your academic successes, you are one of the only two fully trained medical officers we have being already experienced with the biochemical weapon used by the Romulans during the attack on Starbase 10.

The Sapentia is tasked with the responsibility of tracking down a Romulan shuttle whose warp trace has been detected from the Starbase shortly after the end of the assault. Your medical expertise and experience will be required when confronting that fleeing enemy again, especially if such biochemical weapon is to be used again.

Your nomination and transfer to Gemini Fleet therefore is temporary. Your confirmed status within Lotus Fleet shall be confirmed upon return from this next mission.

Please report for duty immediately on board the USS Sapentia and report directly to your Commanding Officer, Captain Alistair Cobb.

Fleet Captain Kotari
Hromi sector Commander
Lotus Fleet

As the huge USS Sapentia was drawing near the damaged Starbase, Elliago Nasaro-Myth was getting everything ready.

Finally, he thought, my first assignment on a ship... and a big one at that... a Sovereign.

He had now finished packing and was simply walking around his soon to be former quarters.

Mom and Dad would be soooo proud of their son... he thought.

Having grown up on a Galaxy Class under the command of Captain Camélia Nasaro-Myth, his mother, with his father as CMO, he was now living one of his dearest dream... to be CMO on a starship.

He took a deep breath.

And nothing less than a Sovereign, largest vessel ever commissioned by Starfleet ... and the flagship of a whole division fleet no less!

"The Sapentia has entered visual range," then stated the feminine computer voice, cutting off his reverie.

"On screen," answered the Deltan.

On the small viewscreen of his quarters appeared a huge and beautiful ship of the most classic profile of Starfleet's ships of the line since the days of the legendary Constitution class of such great historical figures as James T. Kirk, but smoothed too low-profiled, streamlined lines much reminiscent of the sleek Intrepid class design made famous by the unbelievable trek of the USS Voyager of Kathryn Janeway in the Delta Quadrant.

But this was not a mere short range explorer; this was the most powerful battleship design of the Federation, with regenerative shields, ablative armor, quantum torpedoes and the most powerful phasers that could be carried by a starship; one that could still exceed Warp 9.9 despite her size of three-quarters of a kilometer and her mass exceeding four million metric tons.

She is sooooo beautiful, he thought.

Yes she was a battleship; but she was a Starfleet vessel nevertheless. Elliago knew that such a ship would face dangers boldly and casualties might pill up high on such a vessel dedicated to face all enemies and perils threatening the Federation; lots of work for a doctor to be sure. But he knew also that such a ship would not be an aggressor but a defender, a protector, a savior when things were at their worst, be they war, invasion or untold cosmic catastrophies. Lots of noble work for someone dedicated to save lives.

I guess I better get going...

He stood still a moment more before his viewer, appreciating the majestic starship nearing the station's inner central hub. Then, he went straight to his bag, took it, looked around a last time to be sure nothing was left behind, and went through the door for the last time.

A whole new life was opening before him.

"Ah Doctor. I see you are ready. Good"

"Of course I am, Sir!" said the Deltan with a large smile, recognizing the science officer from the final debriefing session and the following promotion ceremony in the huge auditorium of the starbase after the successful repelling of the Romulans. "I can't wait to serve on such a beautiful ship," he added.

Both men stood still and looked at the *Sapentia* while it was docking at docking pylon 12. The Sovereign Class vessel finally stopped and the docking procedures ended a moment later.

"Well, Commander, after you..." said the Deltan with his wide smile.

Greg Patton nodded and smiled back as he tapped his combadge.

"Patton to Vuckovic. The Doctor and I request permission to come aboard."

And in the next moment, they dematerialized from the starbase to set foot in the main transporter room of the USS Sapentia, their new home.

Anyone with a small amount of empathy would have felt the excitement coming from the doctor. In fact, he was having a hard time controlling his pheromones to avoid any unpleasant situation with people in his vicinity. He knew how sexually immature species like Humans were when it came to sexual stimuli and he didn't want to cause any problem. But he had a lifetime of training in this, having lived aboard mostly-human crewed vessels almost all his life; he would not cause discomfort. fact was, his job was to alleviate discomfort!

And he *would* do his job.

He knew also, because he had gone through his medical staff, that there were at least four other Deltans on board his new ship, thanks to Starfleet policy about recognizing the congenial and... biological... needs of his own species. Deltans were a most gregarious people and because of their oath of Celibacy in Starfleet, solely regarding all non-Deltans, they were usually assigned in group to ships and starbases to avoid any... complications.

So, beyond being assigned to this fine ship, Doctor Elliago Nasaro-Myth was eager to meet his new fellow Deltans.

And to fly towards the final frontier... at last.

* * *

To Teancum, Zeezrom
Ensign
Command Division
Lotus Fleet

Your application for placement has been processed.

You were until now temporarily assigned as Science Crewman aboard Starbase 10 awaiting your next assignment to the U.S.S. Tempest as the Chief Flight Control Officer.

This, your current assignment, has been recinded.

You are hereby promoted in the field to the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade and transferred to service in Gemini Fleet, to be assigned as Flight Control officer aboard Gemini Fleet's flagship, the U.S.S. Sapentia.

I am aware that you certainly know that it is unusual for anyone to be assigned with such a low rank and as little actual deep space experience as you to a starship's department head; Especially aboard the flagship of a division fleet. But these are unusual circumstances; and you are an unusual officer. You have more years of experience than the average officer of your rank and you have showed remarkable poise and resourcefulness during the Romulan assault of Starbase 10. We are also aware of your unusually long experience as a pilot, going back even to interplanetary shuttle ferrying long before your enrolment in Starfleet.

Being the first ship to reach Starbase 10 after the incident, the Sapentia is tasked with tracking down a Romulan shuttle who's warp trace has been detected from the Starbase shortly after the end of the assault. We need an experienced pilot for the pursuit and, because of their severe depletion of personnel after the destruction of their own headquarters a few weeks ago, Gemini Fleet is in dire need of such experienced personnel, especially for her flagship and on the eve of a dangerous hunt, one that could most possibly even through the Neutral Zone and into Romulan territory.

Do not bother with the political implications of this, Lieutenant; bother yourself to fly your ship straight and true and to bring her back home.

Please report to duty immediately on board the USS Sapentia and report directly to your Commanding Officer, Captain Alistair Cobb.

Fleet Captain Kotari
Hromi sector Commander
Lotus Fleet

Zeez read his orders three times.

The Sapentia. Oh, WOW. I'd best get over there right now. Good thing I didn't get a chance to unpack.

As soon as he heard over starbase speakers that the Gemini Fleet flagship was on final approach to the station, he dashed to the turbolift and almost shouted to get to the transporter. Breathing consciously to try to steady himself, he asked the transporter chief whether he could still get aboard.

The transporter chief smiled.

"Just barely. Quick, get on the pad."

Zeez was already headed that way. Still a little dazed at the assignment, he soon found himself on the Sapentia transporter pad.

Taking a deep breath, the newly appointed flight control officer declined his name, rank and posting and then asked the transporter chief what exactly was happening, explaining he had just received his orders, but he was not where he expected to be.

The transporter chief gave a wicked grin,

"You are late to the meeting in the Captain's ready room. Better get cracking, Sir. I'll send your bags to your quarters."

"Man," Zeez barely whispered. "Thanks."

He dropped his bags, got directions to the nearest turbolift, and rushed out.

Zeez stepped onto the huge bridge of the Sovereign class warship and with quick stride went to the other door and slid into the room just before the captain began to speak.

He was extremely relieved to not be late after all. He slowly let his breath out, trying to not make it whistle.

He was there.

He was ready.

Yes he was ready; ready to face the next mission, the next challenge, the Romulans and the rest of the universe.

A Starfleet officer.

* * *

It had only been a few days since the attack on Starbase 10 before Sydona was reassigned to the USS McKenzie. Seeing that a position needed to be filled, the Klingon Hybrid was given a promotion for her actions during the crisis and orders to head out to the McKenzie's chief engineer position to fulfill her assignment.

Sydona had never set foot in a starship strictly built for combat... fact was, the Defiant class was but one of the three such Starfleet designs in service; and this design could serve no other purpose. It was barely under two hundred meters long and a few hundred thousand metric tons, with a smallish crew of sixty and spartan facilities only a Klingon ship would surpass in strict bareness. Yet, this design came with quantum torpedoes, phaser arrays and pulse phase canons under a compact, armored hull and regenerative shielding encasing a warp core powerful enough to shake it apart at high warp. Even the bridge could be detached and used as an antimatter warhead. And this USS McKenzie even sported the experimental regenerative hull plating only found so far on the USS Voyager and the USS Lotus. Even the original USS Defiant of Captain Sisko with its borrowed Romulan cloaking device had not been as deadly as this Lotus Fleet destroyer.

Sydona was taken by surprise with the fast promotion and posting. But she did a major crash course study on the ship's layout, systems and weapons loadout and was impressed. Not wasting any time, she used the return time of the McKenzie to familiarize herself with the engineering layout. Within a matter of hours of receiving her new pip and orders, the McKenzie was docking to Starbase 10 and she was beamed aboard.

The newly minted Lieutenant tried her best not to feel like a fish out of the water, but it couldn't be helped. Sydona noted the truly spartan conditions of the ship in relation to the normal amenities found on other Federation ships; but she told herself that it was her Human side, "Dona," that was not comfortable. It was time for her Klingon side, "Syd," to take over.

After being beamed to the diminutive transporter room of the McKenzie and placing her things in her cramped quarters she was sharing with the engineering bridge officer that would take over her post after her shift, she took her own tour of the ship. She made sure she hit all the key locations before getting to engineering and, on ship this size, with barely five decks and only four inhabitable, it was quick and easy enough.

Upon entering the room where she would be spending most of her time, Sydona looked around and took in all the sights around her. The engineering staff, the few that were required there, continued to work at their post. Sydona walked in and took a crossed leg seat near the warp core and closed her eyes. A few officers saw this action and were perplexed.

"Umm... excuse me, Lieutenant? It's best that you don't sit near the warp core."

Sydona placed a finger on her lips, silencing the senior officer.

"Quiet, Mister... "

"Davis, M'am. Ensign David Davis. I was transferred here from the base a few hours ago"

"Shsh... Trying to listen to Kenzie here. She's telling me something."

"Telling you something?" Davis asked.

"Yes. You can find out a lot about how the ship is just by listening to her as she runs. Seems like she's not up to peak efficiency."

A look of frustration crossed Davis face.

"Oh really? Well... with all due respect, why don't you show me, Lieutenant? I'd love to see this," the man said with a restrained but still loud enough tone to get everyone's attention in the unusually small engineering room.

Sydona hopped to her feet, towering over the man. With all the eyes of the room focused on her, the Klingon Hybrid walks over a nearby console. She took a quick glance at the station in front of her before turning towards Davis and entering the needed adjustments. At that moment a familiar female computerized voice filled the room briefly.

"Power Coil coupling recalibration complete. Efficiency rating: one hundred and ten percent."

The man was speechless; a was for the rest of the Engineering team.

Sydona smiled as she walked the bewildered officer, patting him on the shoulder as she passed him by.

"Not every problem will present itself visually or even on standard diagnostic modes. It's the little things that lead to bigger problems. In short, when Kenzie speaks...you should listen. But you already knew that... right? Oh and by the way, I'm the new chief. We'll work this out later together."

With a confident stance in her stride, she left engineering and barely started heading to the Mess Hall when she received a communications from the Captain.

"Captain Jellicoe to Chief Engineer V'Krull; please report to the bridge."

"Roger that." Sydona said as she passed by the mess hall to head to the turbolift.

"Bridge." Sydona said.

The turbolift took merely seconds to get her to the nerve center on top and in front of the ship. She stood at attention before the Captain Jellico.

"Lieutenant V'Krull reporting for duty, Sir."

* * *

The hum filling the air stopped abruptly as Calhoun deactivated his sonic shower with a tap and exited the small chamber. Calhoun walked across his quarters and pulled a uniform out of a set of drawers built into the wall. The shower had felt good after exercising, but Calhoun still stretched out his sore muscles as he put on his uniform.

Shortly after coming on board, Calhoun had started running a circuit through the starbase every morning. It was part of the daily routine Calhoun had started on his first shipboard assignment, and he had stuck to it wherever he was stationed. Running laps on the lower decks, and crawling and climbing through the jefferies tubes was very good exercise and had provided a thorough knowledge of the ship or, as of now, starbase's layout. Both of which had come in handy the day those Romulans had tried to take over Starbase 10.

Calhoun finished getting dressed for his wake up exercise in a one piece silvery grey tracksuit and examined his appearance in the mirror. He brushed off a stray piece of lint and turned to leave, ordering the computer to deactivate the lights. It wasn't until he exited the room that Calhoun realized he had not looked at the message beeping from his desk terminal.

Getting back inside, he sat before it and flickered it open. The logo of Starfleet Command was followed by the one for Lotus Fleet division when, entering his personal ID code, a message appeared:

To Calhoun, Quinn
Lieutenant Commander
Chief Engineer Starbase 10
Engineering Division
Lotus Fleet

Your application for placement has been processed.

You were temporarily assigned as Chief Engineer on Starbase 10 awaiting your next assignment. Your request to be assigned to the U.S.S. Alsea as a Chief Science Officer has been noted.

It must be said here that your request for transfer from Starbase Engineering to a starship Science assignment on a starship had Lotus Fleet Command puzzled. However, your exceptional bravery under fire and resourcefulness in the line of duty during the recent incident at Starbase 10 involving a Romulan assault has been also duly noted.

Therefore, you are hereby promoted in the field to the rank of Commander and assigned as Chief Science Officer aboard the U.S.S. Alsea.

You are aware that the Alsea is the newest, latest starship in the fleet, one of the very rare Prometheus class design out there. She is a combat vessel to be sure, but she is also a Starfleet vessel; we need her to have a competent science chief to round up her capabilities to the fullest, especially considering that Lotus Fleet is the most elite but also the smallest fleet division we have at the moment. In the critical sector we are entrusted with, all our resources must be maximized as best we can.

That is why we need you aboard the Alsea. We need the best science officer we have for her; and I am sure a scientist of your caliber will find good use of the multivector assault mode of this exceptional starship for exploration and scientific surveys and studies. You will in fact have effectively not one but three small, well-armed ships with state of the art sensors for you to use, even in the most hazardous areas we can imagine you may have to explore. I am sure that you will appreciate this soon enough.

The Alsea will dock at Starbase 10 in seven days to assume her posting there as the guarding ship while the USS McKenzie will be reassigned to border patrol. Please report to duty as soon as possible and report to your Commanding Officer, Captain K'Rrauw .

Congratulations, Commander Calhoun.

Fleet Captain Kotari
Hromi sector Commander
Lotus Fleet

Sitting back to recover his breath, Calhoun finally smiled. Then he looked at the docking schedule of the base and then at the chronometer.

"Well... I know where to run to this morning, " he said to himself.

* * *

After he recovered from his near fatal head wound during the warp core explosion of the Romulan freighter, Kaltén Siduri still felt dizzy not only because of the sudden promotion to Ensign his action had earned him, but also with the new posting.

He was now finding himself assigned as the Chief Flight Control Officer at the helm of his most desired ship in Lotus Fleet: the USS Alsea.

A dream come true! he could only tell himself.

There was something about the Prometheus class that made Kaltén shiver with excitement. Perhaps it was the fact that they were one of the newest class ship of the fleet, or perhaps it was the Multi Vector Assault mode that got him. The very idea of a combat ship dividing into three assault vehicles at will opened an untold number of tactical and operational possibilities that made him dream already of even becoming her captain one day.

Back at the Academy, Kaltén had spent many hours training in the simulators, but especially for this class of ship and the method of controlling such a ship. The MVAM mode of attack was so new, even after four decades, that there were first year cadets that could handle them better than seasoned officers and Kaltén had been one of those.

Through his four years at the academy, only about fifty people had been able to master the control systems of this complex design, so it was no wonder that, with the Alsea's main helmsman position open, Kalten got assigned to take his place.

Starfleet was also good at making sure all its staff were trained in at least the basics of all fields of study of starship control, and Kalten had spent a summer working on engineering to boost his grades, as well as having a good understanding of ships anyway. As luck would have it, he had specialized in three specific types of ship during that summer: The Galaxy class, a former ship of the line class that Kalten had always loved, being celebrated Captain Picard's original Federation flagship and so was practically revered at the Academy; The Intrepid class that Kathryn Janeway's historic flight from the Delta quadrant had sparked major interest in... as well as being the basis for the third of his vessels of choice, Kalten's favorite, the Prometheus class.

And there lay the luck. Kalten was now assigned for his first deep space assignment and ship position to serve on a Prometheus class!

He felt like a first year cadet all over again!

His thoughts then shifted from the ship herself to her master.

Captain K'Rrauw. Not human. Not someone to be messed with! It was rumored, amongst the new crew members that the Captain liked to use 'fresh' crew to sharpen his teeth!

Of course, that was just something to scare the new guys; but looking upon that lionid visage, even on Starfleet file, certainly gave you cause to pause; especially considering Kalten Siduri himself.

On Kalten's official records from his time at the academy, it was stated quite clearly that, while normally he was an exemplary follower of the required hierarchy of ship command, he had a tendency under extreme conditions to overrule the commanding officer if he felt that the commanding officer was not right. Though a reprimand would result, the possibility was softened by the fact that, as of yet, Kalten had not been recorded as ever being wrong in any of these simulated situations.

Records went on to say that it might be wise to let Kalten take control and lead the ship out of danger with guidance and suggestions as needed and gloss over his 'heightened' sense of command until the crisis is over. Initiative was also a quality desirable in any officer and only some guidance would be best rather than firm rule-reigning in. It also noted that, once the emergency situation was over, Siduri was again the exemplary officer and indeed often apologized for any overreaction he may seem to have had.

The understanding of the academy professors was that Kalten had a near perfect feel for the right action and could thus pilot a ship with a near uncanny skill in times of crisis. Having someone telling him how to do his job at these times could prove counterproductive.

It was in fact for this reason that Kalten was admitted to the flight school for the Prometheus class in the first place and why he had graduated at the top of his class for flight control... and why he was now assigned to the USS Alsea under the command of Captain K'Rrauw .

He needed a commanding officer who relied a lot on the initiative of his bridge officers; the unique configuration of the Prometheus class, nothing less than a three-in-one warship, demanded nothing else. But at the same time, such a squadron-ship demanded a central command; a captain that could inspire instant respect and impose immediate and firm authority upon officers like him when necessary.

As much as the Alsea was for him, so was Captain K'Rrauw.

Flight officer Kalten Siduri was looking towards a bright future.

And one day, you will be mine, he promised to himself and to the Alsea.

* * *

To Summers, Daniel
Lieutenant
Starbase 10 chief of Tactical
Tactical Division
Lotus Fleet

Your application for placement has been processed.

You were until now assigned as Chief of Tactical on Starbase 10, an unusually high level of responsibility for someone of your rank. But such posting was not due only to the newness of the Lotus Fleet division and of its starbase but a tribute to your excellence in your duties.

Your direct, personal and key involvement in the retaking of Starbase 10 from the recent Romulan takeover attempt, and this at great personal risk, has not only proved this excellence but enhanced it further in the eyes of Lotus Fleet Command.

As a result, you are hereby promoted in the field to the rank of Lieutenant Commander and assigned as Executive Officer of the USS Spectre.

The Spectre is to be the next starship assigned to Lotus Fleet. She is an Akira class light cruiser, a mutlipurpose short range vessel that will provide Lotus Fleet with not only a good fighting ship but one with more capabilities for short range exploration, basic colonisation support and efficient rescue efforts than the current vessels made available at Starbase 10, freeing them for more specific and constant needs of peacekeeping duties more suited to their specialised designs. This ship will be able not only to support the Alsea in guarding the starbase and help the McKenzie's in border patrol responsibilities, but also second the Lotus in supporting further exploration and colonisation efforts in this region.

The Spectre will come with some innovative technology you will be tasked to test in the field. This technology is classified at this time; therefore your posting will not be discussed with fellow officers outside of the Corps of Engineers, the officers already assigned to the Spectre and Starbase 10 Command.

Please report to duty immediately to Engineer Inspector Lieutenant Commander Ty'Renick of the Starfleet Corps of Engineers for final checks and afterwards at the commissioning ceremony to Captain Nimue Aline who will be your commanding officer.

Congratulations, Lieutenant Commander.

Fleet Captain Kotari
Hromi sector Commander
Lotus Fleet

Daniel Summers sat for the last time in his quarters on the space station with minutes to spare before the commissioning ceremony of his new ship, thinking about how only a few days ago he was the Chief Of Security for Starbase 10... and now, first officer of a starship; and not just any starship: the newest one of Lotus Fleet and one quite unique at that.

The USS Spectre, as an Akira class, was already a new approach to starship design, even if it had been developed several decades ago already. The one-hulled saucer with a pair of low nacelles vessel was made to be of a modular design inspired by the older, quite successful Nebula class; a large pod linking the nacelles to the hull with downward strut could be interchanged for combat with either fifteen torpedo launchers and magazines or a flight deck for nearly a hundred fighter shuttles or a vast sensor pod and lab facilities for research or a sizeable inhabitable section for rescue or colonisation... Currently, such reconfiguration required a short stay at the starbase, but already Starfleet was field-testing a sister starship class, the Oslo, designed to do so in deep space. Since her first launch in the later part of the twenty-fourth century, the Akira had been nothing less than a first look at the twenty-fifth century.

But even more intriguing was this experimental DYCEP system of the Spectre, the Dynamic Camouflage Electro-Plating, which had probably inspired her name; shifting armor plating that could convert into mirror-like and sensor-reflecting material to hide the ship in hazardous areas. This was maybe the closest Starfleet could come with a camouflage that would, arguably, not fall into the cloaking device ban of the Treaty of Algeron. It was all but useless at any speed over maximum thrusters but still... a new and interesting concept; and he was part of the crew that would first test it in actual service.

Looking out the window of his quarters at the docking bays of Starbase 10 where the new starship floated peacefully under the sparkling interior lights of the station, he realized that he should go and meet some of his new crew in the main mess hall and enjoy the festivities; try to get into better spirits as, for some unfathomable reason, he was down in the dumps.

He shook himself and exited his quarters with a last look at the now empty room.

Parting is such a sweet sorrow... he quoted to himself.

And then, he walked off towards the docking area, towards his new assignment, a new ship that would now carry him towards the next journey of his destiny.

* * *

To O'Conner, Michael David
Ensign
Engineering Division
Lotus Fleet

Your application for placement has been processed.

We are aware that you are a more experienced officer than your current starbase posting reflects; your term of duty on the USS Thunderchild, prior to this assignment, has been noted and reviewed, along with your latest remarkable performance in the line of duty during the Romulan assault of Starbase 10. You have showed not only competence but leadership worthy of greater responsibilities.

As a result, you are hereby promoted in the field to the rank of Lieutenant. You are to be assigned to special dockyard work under the authority of Starfleet's Corps of Engineers for the final work on the next ship to be assigned to Lotus Fleet division: the Akira class USS Spectre, NCC-80175.

Furthermore, upon completion of your work on the Spectre, you will be assigned as her Chief Engineer for her maiden voyage and subsequent tour of duty as a mutlipurpose short range vessel. She is to provide Lotus Fleet with not only a good fighting ship but one with more capabilities for short range exploration, basic colonisation support and efficient rescue efforts than the current vessels made available at Starbase 10, at the same time freeing them for more constant needs of peacekeeping duties in this hot region of the Alpha Quadrant.

For these, the Spectre will come with some innovative technology you will be tasked of making operational and tested in the field. This technology is classified, therefore your posting will not be discussed with fellow officers outside of the Corps of Engineers, the officers already assigned to the Spectre and Starbase 10 Command.

Please report to duty immediately to Engineer Inspector Lieutenant Commander Ty'Renick of the Starfleet Corps of Engineers and to Captain Nimue Aline.

Congratulations, Lieutenant. We are counting on you.

Fleet Captain Kotari
Hromi sector Commander
Lotus Fleet

Michael O'Conner paused outside of the mess hall door of the USS Spectre to adjust his uniform, which had clearly been put on in a hurry, then fingercombed his unkempt hair. Mumbling to himself about hating formal parties, he shook his head before putting that thought away and brought a smile on his face and entering the reception area.

O'Conner smiled a bit as he looked over the large room with its high and narrow windows open to the internal vista of the starbase, its long bar where drinks and dishes were aligned, the plush chairs and low tables circling the meeting floor where people mingled in their Starfleet formals. A few of his memories from his first assignment, another Akira class starship, the USS Thunderchild came to mind. But he shook his head away from the memories of his career beginnings and turned his attention to the party.

Quickly, he made his way through the crowd, nodding to the few crewmen and officers he had met earlier in the days during the Spectre's final works, before getting to the bar and requesting to the serving personnel a cup of Earth English tea.

Then, with his tea in hand, he moved over to a group of his engineering officers and began to chat with them. He saw in their eyes the same longing that now gripped his heart as they stood on the deckplates of their new starship.

All I want is a tall ship... and a star to steer it by, he quoted to himself.

* * *

Doctor Kiernan O'Clare's time spent at Starbase 10 had been anything but relaxing, especially with a Romulan assault following right behind her.

The attack was over, but she nevertheless still felt a sense of unease during her time spent at the base's main infirmary in the days that followed. Perhaps due to her making it clear that her only need was their facility.

It wasn't that she felt the staff was incapable of continuing the level of care she would provide. In fact, it was quite the opposite. There was a feeling of relief from everyone, including herself, that someone like this young Deltan Doctor, Elliago Nasaro-Myth, would be even more efficient now in a more stable or safe environment. O'Clare's continued involvement with station medical despite her recall to the flagship as CMO was not prompted by arrogance or pride, but a simple personality trait that is instilled into most but not all health care providers. There was an old Earth saying many of them attached to such a frame of mind. Something to the effect of "Passing the buck." Kiernan couldn't remember the exact saying or its reference, but she knew that she was the type of person to avoid it at all cost.

Simply put, she would not offload her responsibility onto someone else. Until further notice, Starbase medical was her assignment and that, until her ship would depart or another CMO was formally named and, therefore, still her responsibility. It was her mission to provide continuity of care until no longer possible where she was assigned to... or as a matter of fact, *anywhere* care would be needed.

Security flooded the infirmary as the rest of the station in anticipation of a possible Romulan retaliation to Starfleet's successful retaking of Starbase 10. After clearly defying a security crewman to take another step forward into the infirmary, holding her ground against armed personnel, and a few rather loud and unpleasant conversations via the comm system, Kiernan had finally been able to convince the new security chief to call off his troops. Only three guards remained to oversee the medical staff's safety in these "dangerous times."

She was in the middle of a short-term memory recall exercise with a crewman who had suffered a severe concussion when an alert came over the speakers.

"The USS Lotus will be departing in two hours; every crewmember must immediately report to station on board. All senior officers must report immediately to the briefing room. Doctor Kiernan O'Clare, please report directly to the captain."

O'Clare finished her therapy and transferred care over to the starbase staff. She gathered her personal medkit and called for her head orderly on board the flagship, Vulcan Ensign Slavik, to meet her in the transporter room before she would make her way to the briefing room.

As O'Clare stepped forward to exit sickbay, she turned to take another glance over her shoulder. She continued walking forward as she noted the young, smiling Deltan Doctor waving at her. He too had been transferred to ship duty, so it would be sometime before they might see each other again. Although their time together had been brief and under difficult circumstances, she had quickly shared professional and mutual respect with him.

She smiled and waved back as she went out.

As she made her way through the Promenade, she tapped her combadge and contacted her ship's EMH.

"O'Clare to EMH, have you completed your assignment?"

The reply was instant.

"Yes ma'am. Did it go well? Yes, I was able to replicate the graft and it was attached skillfully and successfully."

"And the quality of the graft?" she questioned.

"I meticulously assembled one that matched the same color, density, and length of the Kzinit's fur. It would be impossible to visually or physically note a difference."

"Excellent! O'Clare out."

On arrival, she had instructed the EMH of the most advanced starship in the fleet to construct a hair graft for Speaker-Of-Names, the former Chief of Security of her ship, then of the starbase, now starbase 10's commanding officer. His fur had been singed repeatedly during the firefights to retake Starbase 10, and disruptor fire tended to kill hair and fur down to the root. Thanks to her procedure, he would not look like a mangy, flea-bitten cat anymore.

Kzintis were exceedingly proud warriors after all. It would be a small parting gift, the only peace offering she could think of as she left him and his base without a senior medical officer.

But duty calls... he of all people would understand.

* * *

When he opened his eyes, Kheren saw that he was in a recuperating room of starbase 10's main sickbay. He was lying on a bed with about half a dozen other starfleet officers, either sleeping peacefully or chatting quietly with some visitors.

The whole black and white silent scene made him wonder a moment if he was dreaming.

Why would I be in an officers ward? I'm just a crewman on the starbase...

He suddenly jerked his torso upright. The movement lifted his silver-haired head from the pillow, freeing his peculiar antennae to sprout from the upper side of his cranium. Colors and sounds rushed in suddenly as he exclaimed:

"The base! The ship! Captain Garrison! We..."

"Good mmorning, Ensign."

He hadn't even noticed that he had a visitor, sitting right next to his bed.

Barely out of the Academy and already slipping, he chastised himself.

But when he recognized his visitor, he suddenly jerked himself out of bed and up at attention.

"Fleet Captain K'Rrauw, Sir!"

"At ease, Ensign. You are under medical care, remember?" gently purred the towering leonid figure of the Caitan fleet captain, his long, thick furred body filling almost to the bursting point his back, grey-shouldered uniform, the golden pip in a square of his red collar glinting almost as much as his impressive fangs. "Captain John Garrison is fine, he added in his growling deep voice, relieved by your recovery and grateful for you saving his life. I am myself on my way to my next posting as captain of the USS Alsea but, as he is a friend of mine and, after he told me of your shared adventure, I wanted to meet you before leaving. Indeed, I heard good things about you, Ensign."

Even sitting on a chair, the Caitan officer was very imposing, beyond his high-ranking uniform. The Andorian relaxed a fraction but some tenseness remained in his voice and his silvery eyes:

"Thank you, Sir, but I feel fine now. Except maybe for my hearing."

Captain K'Rrauw understood perfectly what was going on in the junior officer's mind.

"Your hearing is fine. You have been promoted in the field during your recovery, after your involvement in the Romulan incident on the starrbase. Congratulations, *Ensign* Kherren."

He stood up to his full formidable height and offered Kheren a small casket in which shined a full golden pip. The Andorian took it, inclining his head in true gratefulness, not just to hear and see better... to hide his confusion as well.

"I assume the situation has been resolved then, Sir?"

"An astute observation, Ensign," half-mocked the superior officer. "Since you have all of your wits about you and obviously are well enough to stand on your own feet, I will confirm your release from sickbay... and your orders, straight out from sector Commandant Fleet Captain Kotarri's office, so you know."

The Andorian stood straighter:

"Orders, Sir?"

"Report immediately to Acting Captain Felez aboard the USS Lotus as Chief of Security, Ensign Kherren."

Andorians had much less facial muscles than humans to express emotions. But these were more than enough to convey his bewilderment.

"Chief of security?...the... the *flagship*, Sir?"

"Are you still suffering from your disruptor shot, Ensign? Is your hearing truly impaired? Or your mind, perhaps?"

Kheren managed to straighten even more, his dark blue face turning into living ice:

"No Sir! Reporting immediately for duty, Sir!"

"Good. Then snap to it, Mmisterr."

Kheren saluted and stepped sideways to let the massive Caitan slid past the biobed and walk out of the room. But the deep voice of K'Rrauw addressed him from the doorway.

"Oh, and good worrk, Ensign. You show mmuch prrommise. I know grreat things lie ahead of you. And soonerr than you might think."

Is that a compliment or an order? wondered the Andorian. Ensign in my graduation year... security chief on the flagship a month after graduation... what's next? The Federation presidency next year?

It took a moment for his mind to realign himself with reality. But his antennae waved this way and that a good while longer in obvious confusion.

Better slow down before I warp out of my own life!

But finally, after the Caitan captain had left him with a respectful nod, he accepted reality as it was; as incredible as it was to him.

The Lotus... wow...

The run to his starbase quarters to get his few belongings packed and slung accross his shoulder in his duffel bag went by as in a daze; even the final check up and official release by the Deltan doctor that he was told had saved his life felt like a half-remembered dream as he rushed to the nearest shuttlebay to request a shuttlepod to his ship.

USS Lotus... NCC-74810...Intrepid Class Refit... Lotus Fleet Elite Starfleet Division flagship...

Up till now, Tactical and Security Ensign Kheren still had a hard time beleiving that he was headed for the very flagship of the fleet. There were so many outstanding officers within the ranks, many of them already here at Starbase 10... He was barely out of the Academy; no more than a few weeks ago, only one security crewman among many... reshuffling of personel was one thing; getting promoted in the field was another... but, to be assigned so soon to the the very ship bearing the most elite division of the fleet's name...

And now, the viewport of the shuttlepod was showing him the long, sleek lines of the most famous Intrepid class starship since the USS Voyager, bathed in the spacedock's lights and showing prominently it's proud name.

This was no dream; he was about to set foot on her deckplates and assume his first assignment as a commissioned Starfleet officer.

The Andorian could not deny his sharp senses from the reality of it. But his mind was still dumbfounded with the assignment orders he had heard directly from none other than Fleet Captain K'Rrauw himself, and now imprinted on his PADD.

Chief of security? Me?

He couldn't resist glancing at his PADD again to see those orders one more time. But he still couldn't bring himself to quite beleive them yet.

I've been an Ensign for barely two days... almost all of the time not even conscious! Don't tell me they couldn't find even a Lieutenant for the post... and that of Speaker-of-Names, no less! Just being assigned to security on that ship would already be honor and high praise enough... I must have misunderstood... No doubt the Captain will straighten things out. "

The thump of the locking port broke off his train of thought.

"There you are, Sir." announced the crewman piloting the shuttlepod. "Good luck with your new assignment. She's as fine a ship as anyone could ever hope for."

Kheren silently thanked the pilot with an approximation of a human-styled smile, he was working hard on that, and emerged from the pod to step in the airlock of the starship. But he didn't voice his own thought.

A ship is only as good as her crew... And this is the flagship! I can't imagine for a moment that anyone there will be as wet behind the ears as I am...

Stepping inside the USS Lotus, the Andorian could feel through his sensitive antennae the power coursing through it's frame even as dormant as she was, moored to the dock.

Not by far the biggest ship in Starfleet's registry... but among the fastest and most versatile... and surprisingly powerful for it's deceptive size.

And even more, with a good crew...

The airlock door hissed close behind him.

"Ensign Kheren; permission to come aboard?"

"Granted. Welcome aboard, Chief," said the security officer waiting for him.

Chief... whew...Next thing you know, they will be calling me Captain next year...

He shook his head to acknowledge the welcome as much as to focus back on the present. In front of him, his first ship, his first crew, his first deep space assignment opened his whole destiny before him.

This, is the USS Lotus! And I will take care of her as well as she takes care of me, and all of us.

* * *

As actual higher ranking security personnel were returning to the security sections, Michael MacQueen felt both relieved and saddened by the transition.

On one hand, it felt good to 'hold down the fort' while people were fighting against the Romulans; but on the other hand, Michael felt a temporary sense of loss as to what to do now that the crisis was over.

He still had awful images haunting his head, especially of the horrible death of all those Romulan prisoners suddenly consumed in plasma fire from some implant no one had suspected or even had had time to detect. And they all died almost instantly, almost... with horrible screams of pain and yet with smiles on their faces...

Romulans... creatures of duty... to the death.

It would take a long time for him to erase those visions from his nightmares... if ever.

He wondered now if the engineering staff needed any help with repairs. Luckily, Captain Cobb's call over the starbase had suggested just that, ordered it actually; MacQueen joined a group to repair computer panels and also phaser arrays of the station's outer ring.

As he worked, he got to know a few other low level crewmen that had shared this siege with him. He heard about their fears and their dreams, their deeds and their aspirations... and he shared his own. It all helped making the workload go along a bit quicker.

And to make his pride in being in Starfleet all the more alive.

All in all, it wasn't really a bad start to a new career, even if, despite recent events, being stationed on a starbase wasn't as promising as being on a starship. It had potential, but, at the same time, Michael made a mental note to keep looking for starship openings and hopefully to find a quick route to becoming captain of his own ship someday.

Fact is, rumor had it that the USS Sapentia was said to be heading their way. A Sovereign class starship, seven hundred meters of armored hull plating, regenerative shieldings and the most powerful weapons that a vessel could carry... now that was something to behold... and to aspire to.

And there was the Lotus Fleet own assigned ships to consider: the Defiant class USS McKenzie, a smallish but pure combat vessel, with firepower to match almost the huge Sovereign in a frame a sixth of size and but a handful of a crew; and of course the flagship of Lotus Fleet, the twenty-fifth century redesigned Intrepid class USS Lotus, said to have not only experimental transphasic torpedoes, enhanced sensors and the fastest warp engine ever built, but even regenerative armor plating.

And there were now even rumors about new ships to be soon commissioned to this starbase. Wild talks about a cloaked modular vessel... about a prototype with something called the multivector assault mode... and about some resurrected ship of legend...

Indeed, there were a lot to aspire to in Starfleet... and especially in Lotus Fleet.

Even on a starbase.

But first things first. He had no idea what his assignment here would be; but it sure wasn't going to be as a hired handyman. Hopefully, once everything was truly back in order, he would find out.

But now, there was a spacedoor to repair.

Then, a call came over his combadge.

"Ops to Ensign-Michael-MacQueen."

The low, growling voice that was addressing him was immediately recognizable and known to everyone, even to those not serving in security on Starbase 10 or not even serving in Starfleet; especially after the late incident with the Romulans.

"MacQueen here," he immediately answered. "My apologies, Captain Speaker-Of-Names Sir, but it is Petty officer Second Class Michael MacQueen actually."

"Are you disputing my judgment or that of Lotus Fleet Command, Ensign-Michael-MacQueen?"

The tone and roughness of the rumbling voice had not changed; yet it sounded ominous to the ears of the young security officer who stood straighter out of pure reflex.

Ensign? Field promotion? Me?

The sudden confusion in his mind came out blurting through his voice.

"No Sir... of course not Sir... I just thought..."

"Your thoughts, interrupted the new Starbase commander, are needed here in Ops. You have earned your field promotion and your name already; now come up here and earn your meat. Lieutenant-Rachele-Rivers can not do her Chief of Security job properly if her chief deputy is not here during staff meetings."

Ensign? Field promotion? Security deputy chief? Me?

The thoughts tumbled in his mind still and out through his wide eyes and his gaping expression.

"Now, Ensign-Michael-MacQueen."

"Yes Sir! Right away, Sir! On my way!"

* * *

Space.

The vastness of it stretched before his golden eyes as far as he could see. Like the prey on his homeworld, he gazed in rapt attention, imagining those bottomless depths being the yawning maw of some great and unknowable predator.

Perhaps we are already in the belly of the beast, he mused, idly scratching carefully at the grafted fur recently granted him by Doctor O'Clare's Emergency Medical Hologram on his former ship.

He finally looked down, peering through his EVA helmet's transparent visor and patted the hull right below him.

Starbase 10.

"An outpost floating in the belly." He mused aloud, whisking sounds filling his helmet momentarily as his Kzinti ears flicked in the race's approximation of a small chuckle, scraping the helmet's interior gently.

A futile abstraction.

Shaking his head, he peered out towards space once more...towards that lone border that he indulged himself in only between missions.

Kzinhome. Home of Heroes.

The name held a slightly bitter taste in his mouth, even as small glimpses of memories fluttered through his mind. A rush of leaves there, the scent of his prey's fear cloyingly sweet and equally elusive. The stern, disapproving eyes of his younger brother who clung so closely to their traditions. A brief spike of pride bursting in his chest at a mirror of the emotion in his father's knowing gaze... and emotion that turned sour as a shuttlecraft floated into view then quickly passed by, bringing to mind the disappointment of the last mission.

"How am I to be a Hero when I fall at the first sign of combat?" He asked the distant star, balling his fist and pounding it soundlessly against the Starbase once more.

A disgusted grumble escaped his lips. It didn't matter that the console, his tool, had failed him. Blades had failed him before, and they were less complicated implements than those he had under hand during this last mission on board the Lotus and the boarding attack that had left him wounded with his tigerish fur singed as deep as his prideful soul.

All his planning...all his training. Useless.

Another shake of his head, and a growl.

"Useless too, to mope."

He scratched idly again at the new patch of fur under his spacesuit, then flicked his ears again in amusement. It had been a good gesture, a noble intent... no wonder women were the downfall of his race during the Man-Kzin wars. They did the most silly and useless, but profoundly... he grasped for the word, then found it after a moment. Touching. Yes...they did the most profoundly touching and unexpected things sometimes.

"Captain Speaker," came the combadge call, interrupting his thoughts.

It was Chief Petty Officer Hattori's voice.

MASTER SENIOR Chief Petty officer he corrected himself, recalling her field promotion. There had been so many in these past few days, even he could barely keep up. So many had earned their names here.

A clan of Heroes, he thought and no small pride for being among them.

"Captain Felez is recalling all crew to the Lotus, Sir. They will depart soon."

He took a deep breath, stood, then nodded, tapping his suit's combadge.

"Understood, Mister-Hattori. Speaker out."

He tapped the badge once more then went into a crouch and sprang upwards, gazing upwards at the upside down Intrepid class vessel, the USS Lotus, flagship of the elite division of Starfleet... his former deep space assignment. Flipping over easily, he landed back on the starbase's hull gracefully, his current assignment, then entered the adjoining airlock.

A short time later, clad in his standard duty uniform, the massive Kzinti starbase commander was all business once more, nodding politely to his fellow crewmates as he entered the Operations room.

"Prepare for the USS Lotus departure when it will be requested within a few hours from now," he said with a low rumble, and carefully sat perched forward on his chair to avoid crushing his tail. No mere PADD this time; he placed his elbows on the command console before him and laced his thick fingers together.

And so it will be my lot now; waiting on the decisions of others, making the biggest decisions for all, then waiting for them to do the work. I wonder if I can face such a challenge...

The retractable claws of his hands clicked out then returned under his fur.

But I will face it. We all will. And comes what may.

THE END

