

A samaritan snare that could plunge the Federation into galactic war!

STAR TREK - LOTUS FLEET

ENCOUNTER IN THE ZONE

The Third voyage of the Starship Lotus



STAR TREK - LOTUS FLEET

USS LOTUS : ENCOUNTER IN THE ZONE

SEASON 1 EPISODE 3

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(by order of appearance)

John Garrison as Captain John Garrison

Talor as Lieutenant Talor

Peters as Lieutenant Christopher Peters

Hyperdrive as Lieutenant Ty Hyperdrive

Redding as Lieutenant Commander Felez Connora'tu

Sean Kirkpatrick as Doctor Sean Kirkpatrick

Special appearance by

Nova as Fleet Admiral Nova

Forum roleplaying session

November 2008

Novelization by Niomo Lire & Kheren

Cover by Kheren

A WORD FROM THE NOVELIZER

This story was written originally in script format, which is very cumbersome, dry and dull to read, not at all easy, lively and engaging as a novel should.

Furthermore, the story was apparently cut short with the battle yet unresolved except with one vague line and the stunted, abrupt end being but a list of names of characters coming and going.

Therefore, it became necessary to add substantially descriptive paragraphs to the original text just to convert from one format to the other, beyond what is usually done when converting a text format roleplay session into a novel-like story like correcting typos, spelling and grammar, consistently applying verb tenses and reshuffling sections of texts that were written out of synch with the described flow of events.

There were also discrepancies to be corrected, like the time it takes from Starbase 10 to the Neutral Zone for an Intrepid class starship at high warp, the exact terms of the Treaty of the Neutral Zone, the use of the Condition Blue alert, of a Doctor's rank instead of his title and such. The text also assumed a lot was already known by readers, when it was evident even the participants did not. And there was no explanation given to the whole incident, making the given mission contrived at best, absurd at worse.

Hopefully, both readers and writers of this story will forgive the liberties taken here in view of the overall enjoyment of the love and effort the participants of this adventure put into the following tale. It was all done to perpetuate it all in the best form possible and most of all, to give it its rightful place in the narrative of the Lotus Fleet Star Trek universe.

K-

The voice of the Starbase 10 comm officer filled the speakers in the captain's ready room:

"Admiral Nova wants you to meet with him on the main briefing room, Captain Garrison."

"Inform Admiral Nova I'm on my way."

Leaving on his desk the PADD where he was entering all the reports and colloquially called "paperwork" that was his worst challenge as the new commanding officer of a starship, and the USS Lotus, the flagship of Lotus Fleet, the elite division of Starfleet no less, freshly minted captain John Garrison sighed as he rose and left his office. Not out of annoyance but, on the contrary, feeling relieved.

He had joined Starfleet and accepted this command to see the stars, not the lights of a PADD.

It took almost no time from him to get from the bridge deck of his Intrepid class 25th century refit starship to the transporter room deck from where he was beamed out and into the higher levels of Starbase 10, the immense kilometers-wide space station that was the headquarters of Lotus Fleet and where his ship was docked after their last rescue mission in the Argolis cluster.

And so, a moment later, he walked up to the main briefing room aboard Starbase 10 where, alone, waited for him the commander of the entire elite division, Fleet Admiral Nova.

With a handshake and no waste of time at all, he immediately said:

"Sit down, I have a brief on your new mission. Just a few minutes ago, we received a distress call from a Romulan freighter just within the Neutral Zone. The freighter and her two escorts reported they were under heavy fire and required assistance. Our long range sensors detected Klingon weapon signatures. As per terms of the Treaty, I am authorizing you to cross the Neutral Zone and assist the Romulan freighter and stop the Klingon ships. You are by no means authorized to destroy the Klingon vessels; they will be taken by the Klingon government to be tried for their crimes."

"Were there any readings on the attackers?" asked Garrison.

"Judging from the sensor data, there are two ships... but we don't have enough information to ascertain what class of Klingon ships they are because of their own cloaking devices."

John nodded, visibly already set for the task at hand.

"That is all, then concluded the Fleet Admiral. "Ready the Lotus and leave as soon as you can. Good luck, Captain."

Garrison left the briefing room without a word and headed back towards the transporter room.

"One to beam directly to the Lotus' bridge." he ordered the transporter chief,

"Energizing."

In a shower of sparkling blue lights, Captain John Garrison was dematerialized and rematerialized instantly to the command center of his ship.

"Captain on Deck!"

Ignoring the surprised yeoman announcing his arrival in formal manner to the alpha shift already alerted to the vessel's planned departure and checking their stations, Garrison sat down in the center chair to open the shipwide communication channel from his command panel.

"All hands, this is the captain: rig the ship for departure and get to your duty stations!"

Turning first to look over his right shoulder and going in a counterclockwise circle with eyes and words, he then addressed his senior bridge officers, starting with the tactical station, then the engineering one just below and before it and then the navigation post a few scant meters in front of him between the command well and the main viewer, finishing over his left shoulder at the science and behind it the ops stations.

"Mister Falor, secure from condition blue. Mister Peters, I want maximum warp as soon we clear space dock so, I want you to give her all she's got!" "Helm, I'm relaying the coordinates to your console. Take us out of dock, thrusters only."

"Clearing all moorings and preparing to leave space dock, Sir." said Lieutenant Ty Hyperdrive.

"Mister Falor! I said secure us from condition blue!" ordered again the Captain.

"Sorry Sir. Condition Green."

The lights on the bridge lifted from a pale blue hue to normal ambient lighting as the new chief of security and tactical of the flagship keyed in her commands.

From the ops station where he also assumed his scientific duties, orange-skinned, white-haired and eyes Efrozian science officer Felez Connora'tu finished running a complete system's check of the sensors and supporting systems.

"Science station operating at optimal readiness, Captain."

"All engines online. Warp drive available at your command, Captain." said chief engineer Peters, also like Talor new to his duties on board the flagship.

"Are we clear of the station yet, Mister Hyperdrive?" asked Captain Garrison

"We're clear, Captain."

"Maximum Warp, Mister Hyperdrive! All chief positions, meet me in the briefing room for our mission brief."

Barely finishing, Garrison stood and turned his back to the image of stars streaking past them at high warp to walk towards the turbolift and down to the next lower deck where could be found the briefing room down the main corridor. Once inside, he simply sat down at the front of the long, straight table and waited for the department chiefs to join him.

The doors swooshed open and Doctor Sean Kirkpatrick, Chief Medical Officer of the Lotus and, like John himself part of her crew since her maiden voyage, walked in.

"Captain", he said with a nod as he made his way towards a chair to the Captain's left and sat down. He turned around in his chair to see more of the senior staff coming in.

Lieutenant Commander Felez next walked in, barely looking around the room, his nose buried in one of the three data PADDs he was carrying with him. He looked at the chairs quickly and sat in the one with the best view of the captain and the room's main display screen.

The briefing room doors slide open behind him and Lieutenant Peters entered, stopping momentarily to straighten his uniform tunic.

"Good morning, Lieutenant Commander Felez... Doctor..."

Nodding at them as he moved to the briefing table, Chris did so silently to the captain and took his place at the opposite side of the table from the two blue-collared science officers.

"Good morning, Captain."

Captain Garrison looked to see both Lieutenant Falor and Ensign Hyperdrive walk in and sit down following their polite greeting, both on the same side as his chief engineer.

Garrison ordered the computer to activate the briefing room viewscreen and showed them all a layout of the Neutral Zone.

"A Romulan freighter and her two escorts have come under Klingon attack in the Neutral Zone. Following Treaty regulations, we are being sent there to assist the Romulans and to capture the rogue klingons."

Despite the Hobus nova catastrophe that had destroyed the Romulan homeworld and plunged the whole Star Empire into chaos and on the brink of civil war, the Treaty of the Neutral Zone negotiated three centuries ago after the devastating Earth-Romulan War had established a five hundred parsec long, one parsec wide border between Romulan and Federation territories where no vehicle, installation, personnel or equipment of any kind from any of the two factions was permitted; any violation of the zone was deemed as an immediate declaration of war between the two galactic states.

However, the Treaty allowed one exception; when a distress call came from the forbidden area of space, both parties were then authorized to enter the zone to resolve the emergency... of course, under very precisely defined terms of operations and most of all under intense scrutiny of the other to prevent the situation to be either provoked or exploited as a pretext for any kind of foul play.

Any such action in the Neutral Zone was bound to be tricky, difficult and tense. One wrong action could start a war the Federation never wanted and the Romulan Star Empire could not afford... and yet, both could not ignore any potential encroachment that could be but the prelude to such a conflict.

They all knew this, and so, the commanding officer of the Lotus skipped these details to concentrate to the heart of the matter.

"According to our sensors, there are two Klingon vessels, a Negh' Var class battleship and a K'vort class battle cruiser attacking the freighter. We should be reaching their last known coordinates in six days."

"Will that freighter survive *that* long against two warships?" Asked Doctor Kirkpatrick with wide eyes and a clear tone of disbelief.

"The Klingons will not destroy them," then answered Tactical Chief Talor with a glance towards his commanding officer to see if he had permission to speak. getting a nod, he elaborated: "Two of their most powerful warships blasting out of the stars a mere freighter is not a glorious battle in any way you might look at it; obviously, they disabled it just critically enough to put them in serious distress and stays hidden but known in the vicinity to coax the Romulans into sending real warships to their rescue."

"And why would, or should, we get involved in this?" bluntly asked helmsman Hyperdrive. The tactical chief looked straight at him.

"Beyond any humanitarian consideration, and beyond the fact that we are probably the closest and best able to rescue those civilians, we must remember that Klingons are not the mindless savages some would like to believe. They are savage, yes, but not mindless; this is certainly part of a larger battle plan they have launched against their most hated enemy; luring ships from a sector to answer the distress call could open a breach they intend to exploit against a more significant target, or provoke an incident that could change the war they have engaged in with one another."

"Don't Romulans always die without hesitation, even as a matter of course, for the sake of duty?" Objected Kirkpatrick then. "Why would the Klingons expect them to come rescue that freighter, especially if it would compromise their frontlines?"

"Because it might not be the Romulans they want to lure in."

They all looked at Talor who glanced at them with a little uneasiness at being suddenly such a center of attention... especially from his silent captain. Clearing his throat, he elaborated:

"The relations between the Klingon Empire and the Federation broke down when we refused to join them in their plans of conquest of the broken Romulan Empire. But, if we go into the zone to answer a distress call, something they know we would *never* ignore, they might hope that the Romulans would see this as a pretext for us to join with the Klingon Empire against them... and so, be forced themselves to send armed vessels into the zone..."

"Escalating tensions until a mere wrong word or move could drag us into their war, just like the Klingons always wanted " finished Hyperdrive, eyes wide with sudden understanding.

"The Treaty allows us to go in for a rescue, protested the doctor; the Romulans know that as well as we do!"

"But we're going in with one of the most advanced starships in Starfleet, armed with state of the art defensive and offensive capabilities, from a new Federation starbase in striking distance of their territory..."

"And the Klingons are trying to take advantage of this and rally us against their adversaries... or at least make it appear so to the Romulans."

"Possibly, Doctor," admitted Talor with a sigh as he looked at the captain. "These are just speculations, Sir; but it still tells us that this might not be a simple rescue operation. I advise the most extreme caution."

Captain Garrison nodded with a small smile. For a moment, he had started to harbor some small doubt when he had noticed the absent-mindedness and the hesitancy of the Lotus' new tactical officer that had assumed his former responsibilities when he had been given this captaincy. But no longer. In this exchange, he had shown the strategic savvy expected from a senior officer of Lotus Fleet's flagship.

As silence stretched in the room, he spoke again.

"Doctor Kirkpatrick, prepare the biobeds; we are going to help the Romulan wounded. Mister Falor, Once we enter the Neutral Zone, I want the ship to go to Red Alert and activate the ship's armor. Mister Peters, have your repair teams ready by then; this will be rough. Any questions? If there are none, proceed to your duty stations."

Garrison waited and got no response or question from any of his senior officers. Without a word, he stood up, dismissing them by walking out and heading for the bridge.

The doctor was last to exit the briefing room and, pensive, headed back down to sickbay. Upon entering through the sickbay doors, he summoned over Ensign Myla, his head nurse.

"We'll be coming upon wounded Romulans in less than a week. Start with the necessary preparations."

"Yes, Doctor."

"Computer, activate EMH."

The Emergency Medical Hologram materialized in the center of sickbay at the Chief medical officer's summon. despite its looks , it was not a Mark I like the reknowned one that had gained sentience on the famous starship Voyager, but a Mark V, with more elaborated behavior subroutines... and better safeguards against any possible accidental emergence of sentience that were causing such a stir within the federation since the last decades.

"Please state the nature of the medical emergency."

Then, the EMH looked around the fully staffed and active sickbay under standard operating condition, slightly confused.

"Romulans, instantly explained Kirkpatrick to the holographic program. we'll need the extra hands. Help Myla with preparations on all kinds of treatments for Vulcanoid physiology. We have six days to get ready."

"Great, now I'm a teacher, " simply grunted the artificial medical officer with a smirk.

* * *

"Dropping out of warp. We've reached the designated coordinates."

Garrison absently nodded to his helmsman's back and, eyes on the viewing screen before him, said:

"Mister Falor; hail the Romulan freighter and inform them we will transport their wounded over here for treatment as soon as possible. Once you are done, contact the lead klingon ship. I have a few words for the "honorable" klingon leading this attack!"

"Aye, Aye Captain. The Romulans have been informed." said Falor."Opening a channel to the lead Klingon ship."

On the screen appeared the expected furrowed, somber contenance of a long haired, bearded Klingon commander baring filed teeth at them.

"Federation *pe'taq*! You dare interfere in the battle of true warriors?!"

Garrison glared back at the burly looking klingon commander.

"So, you call me a *pe'taq* but you are the one who leads a surprise attack on a Romulan *freighter*! You will stand down your assault on the romulan ship or we will forcefully drag you back to Klingon space!"

"I will take joy in destroying your ship, *Habi'dah*!"

The ship shuddered as both Klingon ships turned their weapons on the Lotus.

"Target weapons and shields and fire, Miss Falor!"

"Targeting weapons and shields, firing phasers and quantum torpedoes."

"Mister Hyperdrive, defensive pattern delta 5!"

The Lotus rocked as it was hit again.

Down in sickbay, Doctor Kirkpatrick was already prepping his teams for the emergencies they would be facing, now that they had been told they were in transporter range of the distressed vessel.

"We don't have much time until..."

The ship was fired upon and rocked from the impact and the captain's voice rang over the comm.

"Prepare for incoming wounded, Doctor, We'll be beaming over the Romulan crew momentarily, stand-by."

His warning done, Garrison turned back his attention towards the main viewer and the two much bigger Klingon warships trying to box them in and away from the Romulan transport ship.

"Initiating defensive pattern delta 5!" announced helmsman Hyperdrive, hunched over his navigation console.

Garrison smiled as a plan formulated itself in his head.

"Increase power to the armor system!" he ordered. "Mister Peters, reroute power to the impulse engines. Mister Hyperdrive, I want you to cause the armor to skid across the K' Vort's shields... and if I'm right, that should force them to remodulate their shields. Then, Mister Talor, distract them with a series of photon torpedoes at their engines... Mister Felez, watch for their shield fluctuations and as soon as it happens, beam a spatial charge onto the K'vort's impulse generator!"

The helmsman acknowledged the command.

"Initiating maneuver, Captain."

Garrison yelled over the comm:

"All hands, brace for impact!"

Down in sickbay, Nurse Myla clutched a nearby biobed and the doctor ducked into his office but tripped and fell as the ship was brutally jolted. He scurried over to the wall monitor in his office and scanned the Romulan freighter for lifesigns, worrying about their fate.

All of the Romulan crew's lifesigns were there, but a few were extremely weak.

"Sickbay to the bridge..."

"Quickly, Doctor," answered the captain in a clipped tone

"A few of the Romulan crew's lifesigns are weak and we haven't received them yet. It is urgent that they be transported to sickbay immediately! We are standing-by!"

"Noted, Doctor!" simply shot back Garrison, cutting off the channel as the battle raged still.

"Firing photon torpedoes!" shouted Talor a moment later.

The Lotus shook and groaned as the regenerative armor energy-to-matter emissions collided with the K'vort class ship's graviton emissions of its shield.

"They are remodulating their shields!"

"Now. Mister Felez! Helm, give us some distance!"

On the viewscreen the top of the K'Vort warship burst into flame and it hurtled harmlessly out of the way.

"Excellent, one down!"

"Mister Falor what's the status of the armor?"

"Down to forty-seven percent efficiency, Sir!" reported the tactical officer between two jolts of the entire hull around them. "And that N'eghvar is pounding us hard!"

Mr. Felez; activate all transporters, emergency and cargo ones as well, boost their gain and prepare to get all the freighter's crew in one pass! Ty, on my mark, micro warp jump on the other side of that freighter."

"Ready, Sir!" tensely acknowledged together the helmsman and the science chief.

"The Picard maneuver won't fool the faster-than-light sensors of the Klingons, Sir!" warned Talor.

"I hope not!" answered Garrison between clenched teeth, grasping hard his chair's arms as they were buffeted by disruptors and photon torpedoes from the remaining warship. "On Felez mark that transport is complete, get ready to fire all we've got at the freighter's warp core!"

"Ah... Aye, Sir!" suddenly understood the tactical officer.

"Helm: on firing mark of Mister Talor, warp 1 out of the zone!"

There was a tense moment of silence between two volleys of Klingon weapons; and immediately after the ship settled from the last blast with its armor barely at eighteen percent, Garrison shouted:

"Mark!"

The Lotus shot instantly several million of kilometers away, past the enormous battleship and barely a scant thousands of kilometers before the disabled Romulan transport. At full impulse, it went over and beyond the larger freighter at a quarter of the speed of light, placing its fuming, glowing mass between them and the Klingon vessel in close pursuit, weapons blazing.

"Transport complete!" announced Felez loudly.

"Torpedoes away!" immediately shouted Talor right after him.

With regenerative armor engaged, they were the only weapons available to the Lotus; but they were more than enough to obliterate a damaged civilian ship and detonate its power core.

"Warp 1!" then said Hyperdrive.

before them, the stars jumped right at them and streaked past as they almost instantly went from sublight to lightspeed.

Behind them, a ball of blinfin light and intense fire blossomed, too slow to overtake them... but near enough the pursuing Klingon battleship to fry its sensors, overpower their shields, boil away their armor and melt away their hull. A few thousand kilometers closer and they would have simply been obliterated.

Fortunately for them, their sturdy, massive battleship managed to survive the blast and, severely damaged, half blind and defenseless, could only but tow its disabled comrade and with it, limp back towards Klingon space before any Romulan mere patrol ship could come and easily finish them off.

* * *

A few short hours later the situation had been defused.

Whatever their intent had been in attacking that Romulan civilian ship and dragging it helpless into the Neutral Zone, the Klingons had been driven away, thanks to the efforts of the USS Lotus. They had rescued the crew of the Romulan vessel and had determined that the Klingons had opened fire unprovoked in their own territory, then tractored them inside the forbidden area seemingly just to watch them slowly bleed to death, countering any effort of them to repair and flee with regular chirurgical strikes at their engines and life support capabilities.

Their overall purpose was still unclear, Klingons did not usually waste anythime in disposing of their enemies; but they were not in the habit of attacking defenseless civilian transports either. If there was some bigger battle plan involved with this curious incident, neither the Klingons nor the Romulans would tell.

Now that all the Romulans were rescued and treated for their injuries, the Lotus stayed in the Neutral Zone, at the edge of Romulan space and sent a distress call to the closest Romulan Vessel for pickup.

It did not take long for the Merket, a Valdore class warbird, to arrive, already alerted by Romulan outposts bording their side of the forbidden sector and witness to all the events that had occured. In fact, they had already alerted the Merket, closest available Imperial ship, but it had been farther and slower than the Starfleet ship and would not have arrived in time. The raptor-shaped warship closed with all shiedls and weapons at the ready on the powered down Starfleet ship and took the surviving members of the transport to bring them back to Romulan territory.

There had been a tense moment of confrontation as the Romulans were highly suspicious of the apparent violation of the zone by a top of the line Federation vessel; but the risky, yet courageous posture of the Lotus, as Garrison had ordered them to power down, helped convince them that what their refugees told them was true: Starfleet had come to their aid only, as the Treaty allowed, neither trying to exploit the Klingon trap against the Empire or war openly against the Klingons since they fled once the rescue was done and did not finish off their aggressors.

The Romulans were impressed... and glad the Federation, finally, followed its own lofty pretenses and did not try to meddle into their affairs.

Nevertheless, they were quite clear in their words that the Lotus was to leave and return in a straight flight path at maximum warp back into Federation space. *Now.*

This concluded the mission of the USS Lotus and they quickly returned home to Starbase 10. Once they arrived, two weeks now after their departure, Captain Garrison learned of his crew update:

Lieutenants Peters, Hyperdrive and Falor all requested leaves of absence for various reasons and, to the surprise of all, Doctor Sean Kirkpatrick was promoted to Captain and assigned to the command of the USS McKenzie, a diminutive Defiant class destroyer sporting the same enhancements as the flagship, down to its regenerative ablative armor system.

The good doctor had apparently been a graduate of Starfleet command School for years but had always kept to his medical practices until the recent dire need of ship commanders demanded that all able officers be assigned to the new ships needed to face the growing threats facing galactic peace.

A doctor in command of a warship would certainly actualize the iron fist in a velvet glove approach that Starfleet now adopted as a policy in those trying times.

Replacing these losses were assigned Doctor Kiernan O'Clare as the new Chief Medical Officer. lieutenant Mark Robertson at flight control and an almost three meters tall, three hundred kilos feline named Lieutenant Speaker-of-names as Chief tactical Tactical Officer, the first and only Kzinti ever in Starfleet.

John Garrison looked at the crew manifest and smiled.

Whatever this new century would offer, the starship Lotus would be ready.

The End