

One ship in jeopardy... or is it the entire Federation?

STAR TREK - LOTUS FLEET

ARGOLIS RESURRECTION

The Second Voyage of the Starship Lotus



STAR TREK - LOTUS FLEET

USS LOTUS : ARGOLIS RESURRECTION

SEASON 1 EPISODE 2

Forum roleplaying session

October 2008

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(by order of appearance)

Nova as Fleet Admiral Nova

Garrison as Commander John Garrison

Niomo Lire as Lieutenant Commander Niomo Lire II

Sean Kirkpatrick as Doctor Sean Kirkpatrick

Hyperdrive as Ensign Ty Hyperdrive

Redding as Lieutenant Felez Connora'tu

Novelization by John Garrison & Kheren

Cover by Kheren

A word from the Novelizer

This story had been played out in the very first year of existence of Lotus Fleet and later novelized on the forum but never in a finalized way that would have allowed to transfer it as a good story in PDF format.

The second novelizer started to complete the job four years later... only to have the end of the story cut short by the sudden permanent disconnection of the server.

The ending of the story was therefore lost forever.

In an attempt to save the work of those who had contributed to this story, several still serving in the fleet today and even one returning as an active RPer, it was deemed necessary to write a proper ending to this story by narrating the last events and gearing them towards the third episode that followed afterwards.

Hopefully, the reader will accept this effort for the intent it has to preserve in a complete form the work of our early members.

K-

Chapter 1 : Calm before the Storm

Fleet Admiral log : Supplemental.

The science vessel USS Umpqua was sent to the Argolis Sector to conduct research into the gravimetric distortions that the USS Lotus will have to traverse when goes to investigate the Argolis Array for Romulan tampering. That was 3 days ago and she has not responded to sub-space hails. Starbase sensors confirm that there is a Starfleet signature in the area, however, all we can tell is that the ship is still intact.

"Admiral on Deck!", yelled an ensign.

"Thank you, please sit down"

As Admiral Nova looked out across the large briefing room, he could see all of his Command Staff as well as the senior officers of the USS Lotus, flagship of the elite division of Starfleet he was in charge of to guard the sensitive Hromi sector near both the borders of the Klingon and Romulan Empires... and nearest to the edge of the Delta Quadrant, the point of origin of the dreaded Borg Collective.

Such a sector could only be rife with serious situations to address...

"I'll make this short because I'm afraid time is of the essence," said Nova. "The Lotus will be heading to the Argolis Sector; Its primary mission is to find the Argolis Sensor Array as well as any Romulan threat that may be attempting to reactivate it. Our secondary mission is going to be to find and recover the USS Umpqua. At this time, its condition is unknown; what we do know is that she is intact. It's not likely that the Romulans attacked the Umpqua in fear that their position would be discovered within Federation Space. The Umpqua's orders were to stay clear of the Argolis Array and simply collect sensor information that would allow the USS Lotus to safely travel through the Argolis Cluster without being damaged by the gravimetric shears that exist in that area of space."

With a look to each officer before him he ordered:

"The USS Lotus will be departing within the hour."

And an hour later, the Admiral entered the Bridge of the USS Lotus. He sat down in his chair, tapping the comm button.

"All departments and senior officers, report in; we are preparing to depart."

Lieutenant Commander John Garrison replied first.

"Armor, Weapons, and shields are functioning at a hundred percent capacity, Admiral."

In engineering, several decks below and aft, Chief Engineer Lieutenant Niomo Lire had been examining the final system checks monitors since after the briefing when Admiral Nova contacted him.

Tapping his combadge, Niomo replied:

"Warp Core is running at maximum efficiency. Sensors are functioning properly as well. Deflector is online and thrusters are good to go. I am going to try and see if I can use what little information we have on the distortions in order to prevent any interference with our systems... and maybe rig up an old style sonar detection for any stealth greeting parties we meet. rest will be on my report. Niomo out."

Picking up a PADD, Niomo continued his report to the Admiral, recording on the handheld device further details for his benefit:

"We have completed total repairs to the computer systems; we should no longer have voice command issues. We have also restocked the supplies we used up in repairing the core and the computer. I have also taken the liberty to double the amount Engineering crewmen, as I believe these gravimetric distortions have a chance to make our core go fritzzy. The main addition is Ensign Thompson, a new grad from the Academy. I've decided to make him my gopher; second in command of engineering. Although he is only a newly graduated ensign, he finished his engineering core classes at the top of his class. I am very glad I was able to snag him for Lotus Fleet. I have him currently working on increasing deflector output in order to protect us from any gravimetric distortions we may hit in the Nebula. Hopefully, Science will be able to alter our sensors to allow us to avoid these distortions so that the deflectors will not have to deflect anything but space rock. End of Report."

Niomo called out:

"Thompson! Bring this to the Admiral, ASAP."

Thompson took the PADD from Niomo and left engineering.

Meanwhile in sickbay, the doctor squared away the remainder of the fresh medical supplies from the starbase as he heard the admiral over the com.

"Finish this up for me would you?" Doctor Sean Kirkpatrick asked of his head nurse.

"Sure, Doctor," nurse Myla replied.

Kirkpatrick tapped his combadge to report to Admiral Nova.

"Sickbay reporting in we have received our supplies and are operational and on standing-by, Admiral."

On the Bridge, Nova replied to all:

"Very well. All hands we are preparing to leave spacedock."

He switched to external channels before saying:

":Starbase control, this is the USS Lotus requesting permission to leave spacedock."

"Spacedock control to USS Lotus; you are cleared to depart. Good luck, Lotus. Starbase Control out."

Nova then began issuing orders.

"Helm, take us out, Thruster only. Once we have cleared spacedock, set course for the Argolis Sector, Warp 8."

Turning his head around, he added louder:

"Once we are underway, I would like to see all of my department heads in my ready room."

A mere instant before the Intrepid class light cruiser initiated its undocking procedures, in the transporter room, the reception pad hummed and a figure appeared on the circular terminal. From there, a white haired, orange-skinned humanoid in a blue-collared, black and grey Starfleet uniform looked around the room.

"Welcome aboard, Lieutenant Connora'tu, you made it just in time."

"Its Lieutenant Felez; we Efrozians have our last name first, like Bajorans," replied the medium built humanoid with a strange, absent look in his almost all-white eyes. "But hank you, it was something of a rough trip..."

At that point, the chief saw the brace on his right arm.

"So I see, Sir, The captain, that being Admiral Nova, called for all department heads to meet in his ready room."

Felez smiled.

"Well, I guess Id better get there then."

Department head was it? sounds good, thought Felez. He hoped he was up for it.

On the Bridge where the Efrozian was now headed, as the Lotus cleared Starbase 10, Ensign Ty Hyperdrive, the helm officer, began entering the coordinates for and speed into the navigation console, as he completed the task the computer responded with a beep indicating that all calculations where completed.

"Course plotted and engineering indicates we are ready to go to warp, Sir."

"Very good helm, Engage."

"Aye, Sir; warp 8."

As the stars suddenly flashes and then streaked towards and beyond them on the screen, the helmsman stated:

"Sir, at our current course, we will arrive at the outskirts of the Argolis sector in approximately six hours."

"Very good; keep me informed."

Standing up, the Admiral walked out of the bridge and into the briefing room. Turning to the right, he picked up a PADD and began reviewing crew reports. Lieutenant Lire and his engineering teams had managed to repair all the damage to the ship in record time. As the Admiral continued paging through the crew reports, he came across the Science Officer's report from a few days prior. As he read on, he was astonished at how aggressive the Klingons had become within the last few years. Granted it was only one major house and a few minor houses, but that alone was enough to strain the relationships between the Romulans, Klingons, as well as the Federation.

Walking over to the replicator, the Admiral ordered a cup of coffee. Just then, the door chime rang.

"Come in," the Admiral responded.

As the senior staff began entering one by one, they each took seats around the ready room. Last to enter was a the ship's new Science Officer, Lieutenant Felez Connora'tu.

As the Admiral went into more detail about what the Lotus' mission would be, he highlighted that despite their primary mission of stopping the Romulans from activating the Argolis Array, the safe recovery of the Umpqua and her crew was going to be at the top of their list. Captain Imperator was a friend of the Admiral and the Umpqua's crew were not going to be forgotten about. To that end, the Admiral looked at Lieutenant Lire.

"Niomo, Please begin preparing your engineering crews to transport with supplies and equipment to asses the damages on the Umpqua when we arrive. Additionally, prepare the ship to enter the Argolis Cluster."

"No problems in Engineering, Admiral. All systems are green. I have placed a team on call to research the effects of the cluster on the ships systems. I also have all repair teams off duty in preparation for long term duty shifts once we reach the Sector."

Then he turned towards the orange-skinned science officer.

"Mister Felez, glad you made it safe and sound. Please begin working with the sensor information from the Defiant and devise a plan that will allow the Lotus the ability to traverse the Gravimetric distortions that we will be experiencing. I believe that all of the ship's sensor data can be found in the computer under the directory under the name Argolis. Once you have completed your task, please begin working with Lieutenant Lire on how to complete the necessary adjustments to the ship."

He switched his attention to his tactical and security chief.

"Mister Garrison, we can expect that the Romulans will be cloaked; I'll be counting on you and your sensors to cut through the gravimetric interference to give us an early warning. Unless Mister Felez can compensate for the interference, you can expect that sensors and weapons will be frustratingly difficult to use. The good news is that the Romulans will likely have a similar problem."

"I will increase power to the sensor array and program the deflector to emit tachyon pulses augmented with the latest specifications to detect cloaked ships," Garrison replied. "I believe at best that should give us warning distance of fifty kilometers, Admiral"

"I shall optimize helm control to work in unison to Mister Garrison's modifications and allow for some breathing room," Ensign Hyperdrive added.

Nova's eyes then went to the chief medical officer.

"Doctor Kirkpatrick, be prepared to accompany the engineering crews when they go over to the Umpqua; she's going to have wounded, so take as many supplies and medical personel that you can muster."

"That will be all. We only have six hours everyone... and, unfortunately, we will be going in deaf, dumb and blind; so, do your best."

* * *

On the bridge, Felez tapped his finger on the control panel as he listened to Lieutenant Lire.

"And we have two hours to make this work? ookaaay..."

He held a hand to his head as if he might have a headache. Then, he started tapping on the controls, bringing up the ship schematics.

"Well, if this where most ships, I'd say it couldn't be done in the allotted time, but as it happens our ship comes equiped with anti-grav thrusters needed for a soft landing."

He set up the viewer so Lire come follow his train of thought.

"All we really need to do is run a graviton inverter circuit from the main hull's gravity generator and patch the thrusters into the navigational deflector for maximum effect, which should maintain its integrity for at least... a hundred and eighty minutes.. under optimal operation; maybe even twice that."

Then he shrugged.

"The GIC bypass should take forty-five minutes to an hour to complete, but we won't be landing anytime soon I should hope. In theory, that should work. The only unknown is how long we'll be wandering around the cluster looking for the Umpqua and the Array. Should we have to spend longer than three hours looking around, what are the possible side effects? I'm assuming, since we're going to be routing power through the main hull, should we expect any breaches? I don't want my baby to be limping back to Starbase 10."

Niomo's voice came back from the intraship comm channel.

"There won't be any problems with the Hull, but if your looking to find a way to get around the navigation problem in the sector.. well.. I'm afraid our options are more limited."

"I can't just whip up in a few hours what ships designed to do just that still can't do in this area,"
shot back the Efrozian scientist.

Then he looked thoughtful as he said:

"But we do have a few options, depending on the severity of the gravity fields in the area. The tried and true method is the beacon chain, a series of gravimetric probes dropped at regular intervals which we can use to reestablish our heading from time to time. The faster but more risky method would be to stabilize the ship using a shuttle for course corrections, as it would be less affected by the distortions due to its significantly lower mass."

He mulled it over in his head for a bit then shrugged.

"That's all I have off the top of my head. Unfortunately, should either a beacon or the shuttle hit any gravimetric shear, they will not be returning to the Lotus whole. The Lotus herself would have some problems should we hit one. Whatever we figure out needs to be done from inside the ship... also allowing for quick activation of weapons and shields... I can't think of anything we can do. Stupid protostar."

Thinking for a few minutes, Niomo quickly looked up as if he could see Felez several decks up and forward of his current station in engineering.

"Wait. Is it possible for us to somehow route sensors into the deflector dish and use it as a looking glass? There was this game back in the twentieth century that had this kid running around this world. At one part he went to this well, I think. There was all this fog and he couldn't see. But then he got this magic looking glass thing that allowed him to see through the fog for a bit to help him not die. Is it possible that we could do the same? In theory, it would allow us to see through the navigation problems that the shears cause, detect where they are and avoid them all while flying through the cluster. It would also give us an easier chance of finding the Umpqua and the Array. Who knows, we play our cards right and it might detect cloaked ships too."

Niomo began running simulations on his console to test his theory.

"Anyway, so what you are saying is that our problem is with grav shearing after all and not just fluxuations in the field. If that is the case, I would really have to stay with my original suggestion of projecting an anti-gravity zone ahead of the ship, using the main deflector. For the shields, they can already be optimized for gravimetric shearing; any more would likely be a waste of power allocation. As for the cloaking idea.. well, that's been tried, but as I think you would say, worth a knot? we can try it."

Garrison interrupted them from the other side of the bridge.

"Sorry to interject, but if we are going to use the main deflector to emit an anti-gravity field, then it will probably interfere with the tachyon pulses that I set the deflector to emit to detect cloaked ships."

Ensign Hyperdrive then chimed in.

"Captain, we've reached the bowels of the Argolis system."

"Have we overcome the problems with navigation?" Nova asked from the command chair.

Lieutenant Felez cut in at that moment.

"I think we're overshooting here. Unless there is a problem I am unaware of, the gravimetric fluxuations in this region will render cloaking infective in any event. I have suggested transferring power from the anti-grav thrusters because they are the simplest and most efficient systems to work from for our needs. We could, I'm sure, design a much better system with the proper time, but that time is not now. As chief Science officer, that is my recommendation, Captain, But of course, it's up to you."

The admiral nodded.

"There is an old earth saying: you can't put all your birds in one basket... because one would surely get away, I think that means."

Nova tapped open the internal ship channel and stated :

"All hands we have reached the Argolis sector."

As Admiral Nova stood to take a closer look at what he saw on the viewscreen, the admiral turned to his bridge crew.

"Well from what I have been overhearing, we seem to have a lot of moving parts; so lets try to sort this out."

He first turned to his right at the tactical station behind the command well.

"Mister Garrison, we can expect that the sensor platform will have some type of dampening field surrounding it and extending out more than millions of kilometers; so, once the Lotus has entered the field, Felez and Lire will transfer deflector controls to you so you can start emitting your tachyon bursts. In the meantime, reroute power to the secondary deflector array on the saucer section to help cut down on some of the interference so we can see where we go."

Nova turned his head all the other way around towards the science station.

"Felez and Lire, good work on adapting the ship's systems. I think we have a solid plan. Mister Felez, please bring the deflector modifications online."

As the Admiral sat down in his seat, he brought his eyes back to the main viewer and ordered:

"Mister Garrison, activate ship's armor and raise shields. Mister Felez, please continue working on the anti-graviton emitter. Mister Hyperdrive, set course for the Umpqua's last known position and proceed at best possible speed."

After a moment, he tapped again the ship's intercom.

"All hands we are going in. Bridge to sickbay; please prepare for wounded and ready your teams. Once we have found the Umpqua, we are going to need to move fast."

Nova turned his head halfway towards the tactical station while his eyes stayed on the image of swirling lights and sparkling dust before them.

"Garrison; brings the ship to yellow alert and deploy the armor."

"Armor and shields activated, Admiral," Garrison stated.

"That may not be necessary," felez then told his commanding officer. "My original calculation was for a system-wide search for our missing ship... my error, I now realize we're going directly to the sensor platform. Taking this into account, it should be possible to concentrate the field so that the power consumption will be minimal and for a much longer time frame. Some graying may still be necessary, but I would not recommend rerouting it from the tractor beam as we do not know the condition of the Umpqua... and we may have immediate need of it."

He started to turn away but hesitated. When the Nova noticed this, he asked:

"Was there anything more, Felez?"

"Well.. in a way... After I get the emitter online, could I see you in private for a few minutes, Sir? Concerning the away mission."

As the USS Lotus came to a complete stop on the outskirts of the Argolis Sector, the ship's computer started to beep warning of the dangerous environments that lay ahead. The question now was where should they start.

"Mister Felez; begin your scans. Mister Hyperdrive, set course for the first waypoint on Mister Felez's mark. Mister Garrison, bring all defensive systems online."

Addressing the shipwide channel, he announced more loudly:

"Bridge to all hands; we will be experiencing gravimetric shears shortly."

Then he spoke for the benefit of his bridge crew.

"Alright everyone, lets go find the Umpqua and bring her crew home."

Felez checked his instrument readings for the third time, making sure he hadn't missed anything in setting up the graviton inverter circuit from the anti-grav thrusters as John Garrison checked that all their defenses were still up.

"All systems ready, Sir," Niomo announced as he came to his station on the bridge and activated it. He looked at his readings and made sure that all engineering teams were ready for any emergency damage. He believed that everything was ready to go and gave an all clear nod to the Admiral.

"Sir, anti-graviton Emitter is online and should keep most of the turbulence to a minimum. I have my repair teams ready to get to the Umpqua when we find her. The Deflector is also reading condition green for tachyon pulses. Though I'm not really sure if we'll get a clear reading through the anti-graviton field we're creating. Either way, we're about to find out."

Felez stated:

"Sensors running on high intensity deep scan, Admiral."

The Efrozian took a look at the sensor imagery and shook his head.

"Admiral, sensors are only functioning at three-fourth of projected capability. I can't guarantee we will be able to maneuver quick enough should we run into a larger gravimetric distortion."

Niomo, repending to Felez' report, quickly turned to his station, examining power outputs.

"Sir, I am diverting all unused power to the sensors. Hopefully that will provide Ty enough time to get us around any problems. I can't guarantee that we'll be able to push power into the sensors for more than an hour without damaging the systems."

Tapping his console, he threw over his left shoulder:

"Ok, Lieutenant, try a sensor sweep now. How does it look?"

Felez looked at the sensor imagery again.

"The sensors are now functioning at eighty-five percent of projected capacity: hopefully this will be enough for Ty to maneuver, Chief."

Niomo sighed.

"Damn. Sorry boss, that's all the power I can give to the sensors and still be able to support the anti-graviton systems, along with everything else. I really don't want to risk damaging any primary systems if we don't have to..."

Ensign Hyperdrive replied then:

"Eighty-five percent is all I need to get us to the nav point. Setting course. Going to maximum impulse. The faster we get there, the better."

Lire checked the impulse power grid for any possible effects on the grav stabilizer then said:

"I would suggest eighty percent impulse thrust at this time. If we hit a big sheer, it would be nice to have a little maneuvering room, Sir."

"Agreed, Chief," Nova acknowledged. then he ordered: "Mister Hyperdrive; reduce speed to three- quarter impulse power, just to be safe. Mister Garrison, take over sensor duty and maintain an active scan; as soon as you get something that looks like the Umpqua, let us know. We should be arriving at their last known coordinates soon. "

As the Admiral stood, he turned to his science officer.

"Felez, please join me in my ready room."

As the two men entered the admiral's ready room, the admiral moved to sit down behind the desk.

"Have a seat. So, you wanted to talk privately about the away mission to the Umpqua?"

"Well its.. rather awkward Sir, but I feel I should inform you that i've never lead an away mission before. In fact, I've never been ON an away mission for that matter. My last posting aboard the USS Response was as communications officer; I was rarely called away from the ship, and even then, it was to secured areas. I'm not suggesting I can not perform this duty; but I felt you should be aware of this fact,Sir."

Chapter 2 : A needle in a haystack

"Scanning the area, Admiral." Garrison stated.

Niomo rises from his chair and moved to the center of the bridge.

"John, the Admiral and Felez are in the Ready Room. Are sensors picking up anything out of the ordinary? We are still a few minutes away from getting within sensor range of the Umpqua..."

Niomo's words were cut short when the ship began shaking as if they were in an earthquake. As he struggled to stay on his feet, Garrison, the highest ranking officer on the bridge grunted:

"Urgh. Ty! Full impulse until we're out of this distortion and then cut to one-third. Computer, status of anti-graviton generators."

"All systems functioning properly," the computer replied.

"The generators must be protecting us from the brunt of the distortion's effects." Niomo explained while quickly sitting down in the XO's chair to avoid falling down and brought up the Engineering controls.

"I'm diverting all available power to the anti-grav generators. Emergency power as well...Ok...Done."

The Lotus stopped bucking after a few moments.

Niomo sighed and clapped his hands.

"Ok. John, any clue as to how big this distortion is? I don't like taking power from weapons in here..."

At that moment, both Nova and Felez came out of the ready room to assume their respective places. Garrison quickly made a situation report to the Admiral as he sat in center seat again. Niomo looked over at his returning commanding officer and gave a quick nod, then quickly moved back to his station and started checking for any structural damage in the Hull or effect on the integrity field.

"Admiral, Garrison finished reporting, shields are holding at ninety percent capacity,"

His eyes then went to the Efrozian at the science station.

"Felez, this appears to be the main distortion measuring about a million kilometers; can't get a precise reading due to multiple fluctuations. I wouldn't be surprised if this became a rip in subspace. I believe your analysis of the situation should be helpful."

Nova stated:

"Very well. Relay the fastest exit coordinates to Ty. Felez, what do you think? Rips are bad, right?"

Felez replied:

"I'll begin scanning for isolytic or polaric ion particles right away, Sir. If it's either, we should know soon enough."

Niomo stated;

"I don't think it's isolytic; we'd probably be dead by now. Also, isolytic-based weaponry are banned through the Second Khitomer Accords...I don't think the Rommies would be bold enough to start another war, at least not yet..."

"Agreed, Felez replied; I was simply being thorough. Nevertheless, if such a weapon was in use, this area would be an excellent place to mask its development, given the unstable gravimetric environment."

"Hm...that's true. Garrison, picking up any cloaked vessels or platforms?"

"Ty, relaying the coordinates to your station now," said the tactical chief before replying: "No cloaked vessels detected, but I am detecting power fluctuations consistent with that of a small scout vessel two thousand kilometers starboard."

mere seconds later, he confirmed:

"Admiral Nova; scout class ship detected on the edge of sensor range."

hunching over his station, Niomo began pushing at his controls.

"Ok. It's my professional suggestion that we get out of whatever is making me drain power from most systems before we get into something that requires us to use said systems. I am going to restore power to the tractor and transporters...This could get bumpy for a bit."

The Lotus began to lightly shake, like going over a gravel road, as Niomo restored power to transporters and the tractor beam.

"Ok...that should do it. Hope no one gets motion sick..."

"We've left the distortion, Ensign Hyperdrive reported. "It was bigger than our calculations first read."

The Lotus soon stopped shaking. Breathing a sigh of relief, Niomo said:

"Thank you Ensign. Restoring all power settings...Good. Running systems check... OK..." Niomo looked towards the viewscreen and remembered there was still the vessel off their Starboard Stern and addressed the tactical chief behind him.

"Lieutenant Commander, I'm boosting power to sensors and I'm going to attempt to refine the scan now that we have a target... Can you ID that vessel off our Starboard Stern?"

"Boosted sensor scans confirm the ship is the Umpqua!" Garrison exclaimed. "There's a problem; Sir, it appears the Umpqua is floundering; they are being pulled into a nearby distortion! Their impulse engine and thrusters are functioning at minimal capacity."

Niomo gnawed his teeth.

"Crap... Sir, we've found the Umpqua. She's trapped in a distortion. Here are some quick options: We can try to tractor her out, and start repairs here in the cluster. We can try to drag her out of the cluster completely and repair out there. Or we can try to beam our teams over and pray the Umpqua doesn't fall apart before we get anti-grav generators online, if that's needed, she may just need repairs... Of course, these are just quick ideas; anyone, feel free to add to the list. What's her status? Can you tell if she's being affected by the distortion?"

"I suggest we first attempt to hail her and see if they might enlighten us to their needs," then proposed Felez.

Even as he said this, he was working communications too compensate for the gravimetric distortions and, as standard procedure required, sent a recognition signal to the Umpqua, checking to see if it was acknowledged.

"Sir, I don't believe tractors are an option, he then said; the gravimetric distortion would scatter the beam."

Niomo sighed,

"Yeah, you're right...It would also throw out trying to beam anyone aboard... How about shuttles? Felez, do you think we could rig up another anti-graviton emitter through a shuttle's deflector?"

Niomo looked up at their viewscreen.

"Either way, we need to assess the internal and external damage of the ship, along with comparing our ability to help repair any damage without making ourselves vulnerable to any extraordinary damage. There's a reason the Umpqua got stuck in here, and I for one don't want my baby falling into the same problem. Felez, you should keep pinging her... but try to keep it quiet. I don't want to have any problems while we figure out what to do."

Felez replied:

"Aye... We could also try extending our modified deflector shields around the Umpqua. That should stabilize her, but it would be a serious strain on our emitters, especially if another sheer hits us."

Admiral Nova continued to listen to the situation, sitting pensively in his chair.

"Felez, Lire, let's assume that they are adrift and are unable to maneuver away from the distortion. What are our options? Can you use the main deflector, or even a torpedo that will give a low yield blast to break them free?"

"Sir, the Nova class is a sturdy design but after being exposed so long to the gravimetric distortions here, she must be sporting innumerable microfractures that even a low detonation could rupture," estimated the efrozan science officer.

"Hm... I believe that we should avoid anything that would cause undue damage to the Umpqua until we know how much damage she has already taken..." added the chief engineer. "I'd hate to blow off one of their nacelles because we were hasty." Analyzing the current readouts of the Lotus' Deflector Array, Niomo continued; "As for using the deflector to...nudge her out of the distortion, It might work, however, we would have to go into the distortion ourselves, and would require a lot of power to make sure we did not take much damage. No power, no rescue." "However, If we can extend our deflector's anti-grav field around the Umpqua, we should be able to just tractor her out. I am diverting all available power from any operational non-essential systems and putting it into the Deflector's intergerty field and power supply."

Nova nodded to their comments and suddenly turned towards the viewing screen and the image of the smaller scout vessel stranded in the unforgiving forces between the stars.

"Helm, bring us in as close as you can. Gentlemen, let's try to extend our shield around her. Once we have her, try to engage the tractor beam to relieve some of the stress on her hull and allow us to tractor her to a relative safe location."

"Our shields should indeed nullify some of the gravimetric forces with their own," voiced felez as Niomo nodded approvingly while inputting the orders on his engineering board.

"Mister Garrison; hail the Umpqua. Lieutenant Felez, Lieutenant Commander Lire, once we have the situation under control, I want the two of you to supervise the repairs to the Umpqua. Oh and, Niomo, Give Mister Felez some pointers in away team protocols" .

Felez, monitored the deflector's emitter stress signature, doing his best to offset any unbalance that came up without overloading them.

Niomo stated then:

"Ok, that should do it... And I think we're close enough. Ty, slow us down...Felez, start the extension process when ready."

"Aye, Sir," replied the helmsman

"Hailing the Umpqua, Admiral, then reported John Garrison. all I'm getting is static; even if they are trying to answer us, the distortion is scrambling our hail."

At that moment, Felez announced:

"Extending deflector shield... NOW!"

He carefully increased the emitter output as quickly as was safe to do. The strain on the ship's systems was apparent as some of the control panels flickered momentarily, automatically adjusting from one station to another. A general queasy feeling could be felt as gravity wavered a bit.

"Field extended, Mister Garrison. Are you able to get a lock?"

"I have a transporter lock on some survivors, but the I can't obtain a lock near engineering: radiation leaking from the warp core is making it difficult to get a lock on them."

Niomo gritted his teeth as he saw the figures slide onto his screen. The field was holding, but it would not hold for long...

"We have five minutes before our deflector overheats and fries its circuits. We need to get the Umpqua out of here now! Boosting the strength of the tractor beam... Ok... Engaging Main Stern Tractor... We've got her! Beam strength...strong. It seems that the anti-graviton shield is keeping the cluster from affecting our tractor. Great... I think it's time to get out of here, Sir." "Ty, did you record where all the graviton disruptions are? it would make our escape a bit easier." Nova then said from the command chair.

"As a matter of fact I have recorded and plotted a safe course out. I'll be able to get us out at a second's notice, Sir"

"Fine, Ensign. Get us out ASAP, best attainable speed."

The security chief then addressed Niomo in front of him at his own station down and forward of his:

"I suggest we get an away team assembled with pattern enhancers to beam the rest out."

"My teams are ready, but it's not something we need to worry about right now..." Lire shot back. "We need to get out of the cluster to safely conduct repairs."

Tapping his Combadge he then said:

"Niomo to Sickbay. Doc, we're going to have some wounded coming in from the Umpqua. From our initial scans, it looks like there's some radiation leaking from their warp core. We are going to have repair teams going into that section so, are there any inoculations you can whip up? I don't want to grow a third eye. We're going to be moving out in about five to ten minutes... Also, if you start feeling some shaking, brace your team for injured."

"Yes well much as I'd like to advise against walking into a radioactive room, I suppose there's no other option." Kirkpatrick cleared his throat and then continued: "I'll have the inoculations ready by the time you get here, Lieutenant Commander."

"Thanks, Doc. We'll try our best to keep any Lotus crewmen out of your office. Bridge out."

Doctor Kirkpatrick then muttered to himself:

"Nobody cares about what the doctor has to say until they can't sleep or have a growth on their..."

"Doctor, Nurse Myla then cut in on his grumblings without knowing it, the medical teams are on their way."

"Yes, well, let's get those inoculations prepared."

back on the bridge, the chief engineer tapped his combadge again.

"Lire to Thompson. Get our repair teams to the transporter pads. It looks like they have a rad leak from their core. We are going to focus there. Have teams head to Sickbay for rad inoculations and then report to the transporter rooms. Teams 1 and 2 will start immediately on repairing the warp core. All other teams will wait for my arrival."

"Roger."

"Lire out."

Turning to Admiral Nova,, he then reported:

"Sir, we are ready to begin repairs to the Umpqua once we are out of the cluster. I am heading down to Sickbay to get my radiation inoculation."

Turning to Felez he then said:

"Felez, I'll be back in a few minutes so you can get your shot. Until we are out of the cluster I do not think it is a good idea for both of us to be off the Bridge. Don't want her to split in two."

"Agreed, I will attempt to keep you updated as the need arises."

Niomo turned and entered the Turbolift.

"Deck 5, Sickbay."

The computer beeped in confirmation and the cabin began moving down. The doors swooshed open seconds later and he walked into sickbay. The doctor and the rest of the now present medical teams were bustling around, preparing for the incoming wounded.

Doctor Kirkpatrick turned around and greeted Niomo while putting a vial into the bottom of a hypospray.

"You're the first, Lieutenant Commander."

Niomo took the hypospray like a man, closing his eyes and wincing. Unconsciously rubbing his neck.

"Yeah, thanks, Doc. By the way, I think it is Lieutenant Felez's first Away mission. Try not to scare him, ok? I saw the size his eyes grew when I mentioned not wanting to grow a third eye." Niomo said laughing. "Thanks you to you and your staff, Doc. Heres to a safe mission."

Niomo soon left sickbay and returned to the Bridge.

"OK, Felez, you're up. I'll meet you in transporter Room 3 once you're done."

As the Efrozian got there a short moment later, more of the away team members were coming into sickbay. Nurse Myla and medical Lieutenant Junior Grade Bryant assisted in the inoculations.

Bryant, after inoculating the last away team member, said cheerfully to Felez:

"All set, good luck on the Umpqua."

Nurse Myla, talking to herself as she was putting away a hypospray mumbled:

"The only sure thing about luck is that it will change."

"What was that..?" Bryant asked.

"Just something I heard once."

"I think that's accurate enough." Doctor Kirkpatrick said then.

Chapter 3: All good things must come to an end

And, for once, luck did change for the better.

It took long minutes, almost an hour, for the USS Lotus to tug the distressed Nova class starship out of the destructive forces of the Argolis cluster. but thanks to the efforts and resourcefulness of Admiral Nova's bridge crew, the Umpqua was brought out of danger and to the edge of the danger zone.

As soon as both ships were safe, the efficient damage control teams of Lieutenant Commander Niomo Lire went on to make the science vessel spaceworthy enough to get back on its own power. because of the damage to the warp core, they could barely achieve warp 5, but it was enough to bring her home.

All the while, the dedicated emergency teams of Doctor Sean Kirkpatrick managed to save fifteen of the eighteen crewmembers of the skeleton crew that had commandeered the Umpqua, including a comatose but still alive Admiral Crowl. Fleet Admiral Nova's senior officer had assumed command of the science vessel when the Lotus had faced Klingon threats on her maiden voyage, in order to offer assistance; but the Umpqua had never succeeded in making the rendez-vous. The Lotus had managed to shake off the opposition and complete its mission to rapatriate both Ambassadors Picard and Spock from rator II, new homeworld of the shattered Romulan Empire... but by then, the Umpqua had failed to cut through the Argolis cluster to shortcut her flight to the flagship, becoming stranded as they had been now found by Admiral Nova and his crew.

The entire rescue operation had required careful monitoring and supervision from security, especially in view of the possible presence of Romulan ships that could be lurking nearby, according to mission reports that had sent them here. And so, instead of assuming the direction of operations, Nova left the job to his chief of security and tactical, Lieutenant commander John Garrison.

The fleet admiral was not doing this without purpose. As head of the entire elite division of Starfleet, he knew his days in the center seat of even the flagship were numbered; his responsibilities called for him to serve elsewhere and on a larger scale than just the bridge of one starship. But before he gave command of his flagship to anyone, he wanted to be sure that he had the right man for the job: his most experienced and highest ranking officer, John Garrison.

Immediately, the man assumed his new field-commissioned status as executive officer of the Lotus Fleet flagship with poise and efficiency. He coordinated not only both the rescue operation, the security perimeter around the ships with hidden probes, but also ordered a wing of class X shuttles, those especially equipped with electronic measures against easy detection, to enter the Argolis cluster and investigate discreetly the status of the Argolis sensor array known to be hidden there.

When they came back, reporting that the array was inoperative as per the last reports of the Dominion war, with no trace of any Romulan activity or presence, they all sighed in relief. The mere presence of Imperial ships in Federation Territory would have meant an immediate state of war between the two galactic powers; something the Federation was always loathed to do, regardless of being barely out of a last major conflict, and something the Romulan Star Empire, shattered by the destruction of its homeworlds by the Hobus catastrophe, was certainly not ready to engage in either.

The threat had only been rumors... but rumor was also a Romulan weapon of choice, and simply getting proof of the actual situation would neutralize that weapon.

Nova also let Garrison assume command of the return trip home, keenly observing each and every word and decision of the man in day to day operations of a starship, just as he had studied him during the last crisis involving both a scientific challenge, a rescue operation and a tactical situation.

When they finally docked at Starbase 10, a few days later, Fleet Admiral Nova knew without a doubt that he could confidently leave with Admiral Crowl and with him freely assume his duties at Starfleet's Joint Chiefs of Staff back on Starbase 1. He had found a great crew and especially the perfect man to take command of the USS Lotus, flagship of Lotus Fleet.

The End