

Dire News

Chapter II: Launch

Featuring...

Evshell.....Captain Caroline Rousseau, Commanding Officer
Kheren.....Commander Shaell, Executive Officer
Sorripto.....Lieutenant Devin, Chief Engineer
Jureth.....Lieutenant J.G. Mikaela Sirus, Chief Science Officer
NEligahn.....Lt. Commander Marissa Arinak, Chief Tactical and Security Officer
Jae Onasi.....Lieutenant J.G. Andrew Johansen, Chief Medical Officer

“All hands, this is First Officer Shaell: all departments, report readiness for departure to your senior officer. Heads of departments, confirm readiness to the bridge. We are on launch procedure... now.”

Towering beside the command seat, the red-skinned reptilian executive officer of the Nuntio closed the intraship channel. Then he flipped the channel to the one linking the vessel to the Starbase.

“Starbase 10, this is the USS Nuntio: request permission to depart.”

“USS Nuntio, this is Starbase 10 Flight Control. You are clear to launch. Fair winds, Nuntio.”

“Thank you Flight control.” he said closing the channel. Then he turned his oval, bald head towards the navigation station.

“Helm, disengage docking clamps and clear all moorings. Stand by for the Captain's order of departure.”

“Aye, Sir. Docking clamps retracted; all moorings cleared. We are free and clear to navigate.” answered the pilot.

“Captain Rousseau, bridge here. Starbase 10 confirmed launch status; awaiting bridge crew and your order for departure, ma'am.”

Shaell stood unmoving besides the central chair. He looked at the main viewer, watching the gigantic space-doors slowly part in preparation to their launch.

Now there was left only to wait for all the bridge officers to report their readiness and for the captain to order them out.

Within the immense interior of the bowl-shaped, ringed starbase, the sleek shape of the Nova class starship looked quite small compared to other ships usually berthed here, like the impressive four-nacelled Prometheus class Alsea, the formidable low-nacelled Akira class USS Spectre, or the majestic, classical ship of the line silhouette of the Ambassador class USS Artemis. In fact, she was even smaller than the celebrated, elongated Intrepid class USS Lotus and barely bigger than the compact, diminutive Defiant class USS McKenzie. Yet, her form was definitely that of the most well known Starfleet vessels of all eras, with an upswept pair of nacelles from a elongated cylindrical hull, topped in front by a saucer section; but the shape was as compact as that of a Sovereign battleship and the saucer of a definite ultramodern triangular shape.

The USS Nuntio was not a powerful ship; but with her overlarge deflector emitter, numerous enhanced sensor pallets, and advanced computers, she was best suited for her purpose: being the eyes, ears, and voice of the United Federation of Planets.

And she was about to reach for the stars.

Mikaela rubbed her throbbing head as the turbolift sped toward the bridge of the Nuntio. Today was not the day for one of these damn headaches. The lift stopped and Mikaela strode onto the bridge with as much confidence as she could muster, and approached the science station. She knew that even though this was technically a noncombatant command she would still be in the spotlight as the chief science officer, as the Nebula Class was definitely a science oriented vessel.

She immediately pulled up a diagnostic of the Nuntio's sensor arrays and deflector. The board came back green telling Mikaela that all the ship's systems were good to go. She turned and faced First Officer Shaell.

"Commander, all science systems are go for launch. Sensor arrays and deflector systems are online and fully operational."

Mikaela stood ready for any orders she may receive, and internally resolved to go to Sickbay as soon as she was able. The doctors had told her she might have headaches, but the frequency of them was getting ridiculous. If she didn't get them addressed, her reinstatement could result in the shortest career in Starfleet history.

"Thank you, Lieutenant." answered the giant Saurian without turning. "Your station is the most critical aboard this ship. This is a news ship. Correction: this is THE news ship of the Federation. Make sure we have also a full complement of probes, even if we have to leave a few torpedoes on the dock."

Shaell knew his comment would not please much Lieutenant Commander Arinak at tactical; but if she joined the Nuntio to see combat, she definitely choose the wrong ship.

"Aye, Sir." Mikaela turned back to the console and pulled up the ship's current probe inventory. The computer informed her that the Nuntio had her assigned complement of probes, and Mikaela relayed as much to Shaell.

"Commander, the computer shows we have our full probe complement, do you wish to add to it?"

"You are chief of science; that is your call, Lieutenant. But so you know, we have twenty-five torpedo casings available to make more if need be." simply answered the First Officer, now turning his bald blood red head and enormous golden eyes to get the readiness confirmation of all the other bridge officers.

"Aye Sir," Mikaela said by way of response. She rubbed her temples for a moment and turned back to the console.

She subtly made a change in the probe complement requisitioning a half dozen more probes from Starbase Ten and prayed that the ship's tactical officer wasn't too upset with her as she knew that her probes would take the place of six of the ship's photon torpedoes. Mikaela didn't think it would matter though; the Nuntio wasn't headed into combat anymore than the Constitution Class USS Enterprise that was docked at Starfleet's museum back on Earth.

Hopefully after launch she would be able to get down to Sickbay and get something for her head. After that, perhaps she could get a few hours of sleep in.

The new CMO of the Nuntio entered sickbay and looked around. The staff was busy putting away supplies in preparation for travel. The sickbay had the standard arrangement for a Nova class – 3 biobeds against one wall and one surgical bed against the opposite wall

in an area that could be contained in isolation if needed. His office was just off sickbay, and a door next to the surgery unit led to the medical lab.

One of the petty officers, a short, dark-haired human with deep brown eyes, looked up at the sound of the swooshing of the door. "The Doctor is here." He walked over to Andy and offered his hand and then a smile as Andy shook it firmly. "I am SCPO Anton Rosek," he said, voice heavy with a Russian accent. "I am one of the medics on the Nuntio."

A tall, bright blue Andorian with long, white hair stepped around a biobed. She was thin by Andorian standards, but her large presence filled the sickbay anyway. "Ensign Zihrather zh'Aranthi," she said, knobby antennae curving forward towards Andy as she also offered her hand as well. "I am pleased to meet you, Doctor Johansen."

"I understand you're the head nurse on the Nuntio?" Andy asked, looking up to meet her silvery eyes. He'd already read the personnel files on all 7 members of his staff, but words and images in a file could never replace actually meeting them.

"Aye, Doctor. I've been assigned to the ship for about a year now. I'd like to introduce SCPO T'Leian to you. She is our alpha shift medic." The slender Vulcan nodded her welcome to Andy, and he nodded back. Zihrather gestured to a statuesque brunette who had joined them. "And this is Ensign Cristina Ferrara. She's our beta shift nurse. Anton works beta as well."

"*Bongiorno*, Doctor," the nurse said. She offered a gentle, slim hand to him. Her eyes reminded him of warm cocoa. Hints of sienna lit her long, curly chestnut hair. He wondered briefly if she played Dabo. She continued, "Ensign Senvor is our gamma shift nurse. He is currently asleep, as is SCPO Alayna Byrne, but we can call them if you need."

Andy waved off that suggestion. "Sleep is at a premium on a ship. I'd rather have well-rested staff taking care of our patients. I'll meet with them later."

Ensign Zihrather tipped her head slightly in approval at his comment. A lanky, auburn-haired young man walked into sickbay, carrying a stack of supplies. "Here's the last of the boxes, Ensign," he said to the Andorian. "Oh! Hello Doctor!" He set the items down on one of the biobeds and went over to the CMO to shake hands, quickly pumping Andy's hand up and down. "I'm MCPO Kendrick Cady. I'm your lab guy."

The Andorian said, "All right. We're fully stocked with supplies, Doctor. I took the liberty of checking your surgical profile to make sure we've stocked all the instruments you use regularly and to have the schematics to replicate all of the instruments you use for specialty cases. We have no patients, and all scheduled physicals were completed by Starbase 10 staff while we were docked for repairs. There are some medical files for you to review, but nothing urgent."

"Good. Sounds like we're set," Andy replied. He tapped his combadge. "Commander Shaell, Medical is ready for launch."

"Thank you, Doctor Johansen. Stand by for launch," came back the hissing, low voice of the First Officer over the comm channel.

Shaell then looked over to the tactical and the engineering stations, the last two departments left to report in.

As the glowing eyes stared across the room, the Denobulan Engineer looked up from the PADD he was typing on. Having zoned out of the conversation completely being entrenched in his work, Devin stared blankly at the face across from him.

"Engineering do you have anything to report."

As his eyes flashed through two shades of yellow Devin shook slightly and with a slight jitter spoke up.

"No sir. All systems are fine. Everything is fine. How are you? Wait. Sorry sir I got distracted. I have found no faults in the systems and that little tweak I put to boost power to the Heisenberg Compensator seems to be holding strong."

Touching a few buttons on his PADD, Devin looked up as his eyes faded to a deep blue and then back to the bluish yellow they were when the meeting started.

"Is there anything you request from Engineering today sir?"

"Thank you, Engineer. Tactical, report readiness please." now asked Commander Shaell.

"Sir, all systems at peak condition and ready for your order," Arinak said as she stood at the tactical station. As long as she was the tactical officer, they wouldn't be anything but that. If they wanted to take resources away from her department, then fine. She'd make do with what she still had.

As long as they got out of her way when it was time for her to do her job, then there wouldn't be any problems.

"Very good, Lieutenant. Make sure also that our news people are secured... and us from them." acknowledged Commander Shaell.

As First Officer, his primary job was to see that the ship ran smoothly. Having so many civilians as the key personnel on board a starship was not a common occurrence... and not at all to his liking. But he had studied Lieutenant Commander Arinak's record thoroughly; if anyone could ensure the safety of everyone on board and help him maintain order, it was her.

The tall Saurian tapped his combadge:

"All hands, attention: all departments report ready for departure. We have received clearance from Starbase 10. Captain Rousseau to the bridge, please."

Captain Rousseau had been going over the duty roster when she was called to the bridge. They were short on staff, even for such a small ship as the Nova-class. Luckily they didn't have much to do except get these people back to San Francisco.

She stood and exited her ready room which led directly to the bridge. "Thanks, X," she said with a grin and received the usual stone stare and brief nod from the Saurian.

She sat in the Captain's chair to the left of the XO, and in an enthusiastic tone she added, "Are we ready to go home *Mesdames et Messieurs*?" She was trying to keep spirits up. Having been stuck at Starbase 10 and working all that time on repairing the ship, she was sure they were tired, and morale was an issue to consider.

Home... Mikaela hadn't been back to Earth in years despite the constant pestering from her mother who still lived in San Francisco. Her medical treatment had been conducted on Starbase 110, and on Betazed. She had been very young when the Breen attacked Earth during the Dominion War and killed her father. He worked as a diplomatic attaché to a Federation ambassador, and was away more than he was home. It had just been pure chance that he had been at Starfleet Headquarters during the attack. It was his stories that had led her to join Starfleet, and see the stars and planets he had talked to her about over subspace and on the rare occasions he was home.

Mikaela rubbed her temples again; this headache was turning out to be one of her more intense ones. She was just glad she wasn't hearing voices with this one. Too many times she had heard the Borg collective consciousness even though she was only attached to them for

a short period of time. She decided it was time to go to Sickbay, she needed to be at her best as Chief of Science even if it wasn't exactly an active research vessel the Nuntio was still outfitted like one. "Captain, request permission to report to Sickbay,"

Captain Rousseau had seen the Science Officer put her hands to her head and frowned at the thought of one of her bridge officers not feeling well right when they were getting ready to launch. Regardless, she said, "Permission granted, Lieutenant. Nothing major I hope? Not that it's any of my business; just concerned." Rousseau knew from her files of Lieutenant Junior Grade Sirius' period of being connected to the Borg consciousness, so she had a feeling that this had something to do with it.

Mikaela offered a smile at the captain "No ma'am, just a headache they come and go... this one just decided to stay awhile."

She left the science station and entered the main turbolift. "Deck Four," She commanded the computer.

The lift moved swiftly and smoothly before depositing her on deck four. She smiled and nodded at the other crew members as she passed them until she came to the Nuntio's sickbay. As she entered she could see the sickbay staff milling around trying to get ready for the ship's return to space.

One of the enlisted crew noticed her and stopped. "Can I help you Ma'am?"

Mikaela offered her best smile, but with the way her head felt she was sure it was probably a weak one. "Yes Senior Chief, my head feels like its going to explode, and I was hoping to get a pain killer."

Back on the bridge, Rousseau turned to Lieutenant Commander Arinak who was on the tactical station behind her and to the left. "Commander Arinak. Good to see you where you belong again, watching our backs." She did not intend the pun related to where the officer was situated, but it made her smile nonetheless. "Got those rooks whipped into shape, I hope?" she asked with a sly grin.

Captain Rousseau waited for a response from the Tactical and Security Chief, but after moments of awkward silence where the officer stood with her back to the Captain working hard on the tactical console, Rousseau shrugged and turned to face forward.

Part Cardassian, part Betazed, she mused. It was an unfortunate fact that people still had a certain negative gut reaction when encountering a Cardassian. She had the same; she couldn't help it, but of course she stayed professional and courteous. This one, however, could read her mind, or at least her emotions during the time they had spent on the ship together, and she was beginning to fear that the officer despised her for it. Either that or she simply didn't hear the Captain.

She didn't have much time to think about it. Kevin Kleiner, the liaison to the various journalists on the ship came onto the bridge. Two security personnel moved to intercept him, but Captain Rousseau stood and motioned for them to stand down.

"The bridge is off limits to civilians, Sir," she said to him. "You know this."

"We've been stranded on Starbase 10 all this time," he replied, courteous, but with a frustrated undertone. "If you could do us the courtesy of allowing one of us to observe the launch, I would be very grateful."

"Very well," Rousseau responded in a sweeter voice than before. "You may stand over there," she motioned to a corner of the bridge with no consoles, "as long as you promise not to touch anything, *mon ami*." She smiled, and he nodded and returned the smile before

moving into the position she indicated. She did not have much patience with these journalists she was tasked to ferry around, but she found that if she was overly pleasant with them, they usually did what she asked.

She sat back down and said, "Ensign George, prepare to launch."

"Aye, Captain," George replied and released the mooring clamps and engaged inertial dampeners.

"Get us clear of the Starbase, quarter impulse."

"Aye, quarter impulse," Ensign George repeated, and carried out the command.

As the ship made its way out of the space dock, it passed over the Ambassador-class that had recently returned from its harrowing experience inside the Azimuth Horizon anomaly. The damage could be seen visually. The Nuntio was tiny by comparison and it took several moments to clear the massive saucer section that seemed like a vast creamy ocean beneath them.

Once the ship had passed well beyond the aft section of the Artemis, George said, "We are clear of the Starbase."

"Plot a course to Starbase Twenty-three," she said. "Warp Five."

George again repeated and carried out the orders. Starbase 10 instantly diminished into a speck behind them as the ship went to warp in the direction of the starbase on the edge of the Romulan Neutral Zone. They had to go around the Hromi Cluster which was too densely populated with star systems to navigate at high warp. Once they reached Starbase 23, they would be able to take a more direct route to Sol.

They had not yet detected the plasma storm that had previously been starboard of their path, but was now directly in front of them and spreading toward a system to their left. They would soon need to take a detour that none of them could ever imagine.