

Dire News

Chapter III: Lost in Space-Time

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

As the Nuntio made its way through the void ahead on its way to Starbase 23, there was the comforting view of the stars creating white streaks as they passed by faster than the very light being emitted. Back in the familiar frontier, Rousseau jumped up from her chair with renewed vigor. "X, you have the bridge. Let me know when we reach Starbase Twenty-three," she said.

"Acknowledged." answered the towering Saurian.

Walking across the bridge allowed her to recall a fleeting memory that had been lurking at the back of her mind since they left. She turned toward the Engineering station. "Oh, Lieutenant Devin. Please report to my ready room whenever Engineering can spare you."

As she entered the ready room she shook her head and sat down with an audible sigh. She was happy to be back on a mission, but was already overwhelmed by the crew. A humorless XO, an Engineer that missed their first briefing, a Tactical officer that seemed to just ignore her, a Science officer with headaches resulting from her brief tenure as a Borg, and a brand new, greenhorn CMO. Certainly dealing with her senior staff would be the most difficult part of the simple mission to return home.

She was a fighter at heart. She wasn't good at dealing with people. She was more comfortable shaking a phaser at someone than shaking their hand. Her parents were too distant for a majority of her childhood, not through fault of their own, but simply as a result of their jobs. This solitude tended to make socializing all the more difficult. As seen on the bridge, often times she tried to strike up a conversation. But her motives were often transparent. To others – especially one who was empathic – her attempts were seen to be artificial in nature and it was a turn off.

She sat back in her chair and briefly rested her eyes before picking up a PADD to memorize all details she could about her crew and the journalist guests.

As usual, Shaell stood from his own adapted XO seat and went before the command seat. He stood there instead of sitting down in the too small human-sized chair; it allowed him a better all around view of the bridge anyway... and of departing Captain Rousseau.

The Saurian was not empathic in the least; but he had served long enough with her to read the emotional signs from her eyes, her face and her posture.

She felt... bad... lonely?

Shaell, like all of his kind, was baffled by this feeling each time he sensed it from another being. But he knew it could interfere with the crew's performance if her mood would spread across the bridge. And so, he did what he could to stem the emotional flow before it could spread: keep them all busy.

"Helm, tactical; conduct simulated escape scenarios according to our current flight path. Reports about Klingon and Romulan stirrings at the border should keep us alert."

"Aye, Sir." answered the pilot.

"Aye, Sir," Arinak repeated. "I've input several into the computer, including possible attacks from other forces along other vectors." She tapped her commbadge. "Lieutenant Holfaak, if our new personnel are finished with the grand tour, please begin weapons systems drills. I want everyone to their stations in less than two minutes. Run it from multiple locations through the ship. When that's done, start armory drills. Ensure every member of security is able to be armed and ready within four minutes."

"That long?" Holfaak said. "That's unusually generous of you."

"I'm feeling nice today," Arinak said under her breath.

Shaell continued. "Science, engineering; work on sensors for maximum resolution and maintain scans along our trajectory. We also had recent report of some anomaly in the sector. Let us be vigilant."

Finally he tapped his combadge, sending his whispering yet clearly audible voice through the intraship channel:

"Sickbay, this is the bridge. How is our science chief?"

Andy didn't need a tricorder to tell him that Lt. Sirius' head was hurting. He could see it in her hunched shoulders, the tense wrinkles grasping her forehead, and the shadows creeping under her eyes. She rubbed circles on her temple with one hand.

"That bad, eh?" he asked, motioning for her to sit on one of the biobeds.

She nodded, lips pressed tight.

The CMO had looked over her file in particular, given her unusual medical and psychological history. Not everyone rescued from Borg assimilation survived the procedures to remove the implants or the mental trauma of separation from the Collective. Andy scanned the science officer with a medical tricorder, and then looked over the results. Everything was structurally normal, but her pain levels were severe.

"Well, let's give you some hydrocortilene to knock the pain down," he said, loading the 3% solution into the hypospray. He scanned her head again after the injection, almost as an afterthought.

A tiny irregularity in the synaptic potential appeared momentarily, and then returned to normal. Andy's brow knit together as he studied it with professional interest. He scanned around her head another time.

"What's wrong?" Mikaela asked, eyes studying his expression.

"I saw a brief change in the synaptic potential in the basal ganglia. I'm not seeing anything abnormal now. Did they notice this on Starbase 10?" he scrolled back through her medical records, searching for any signs of changes. Other than during the operation to remove the implants and the immediate recovery period following, the scans were normal.

"The neurologists never mentioned it."

"Starbase 10's chief neurologist is one of the best in the field. I can't imagine him missing something unusual. Perhaps it was just a misfire due to the changing pain levels," Andy said. He flashed a brief smile at the lieutenant to reassure her. "Feel better?"

"A lot," she nodded.

The voice of the Saurian XO came over the com. "Sickbay, this is the bridge. How is our science chief?"

Andy toggled the com. "Her condition is returning to normal, Sir. I'm releasing her back to duty as we speak." He nodded towards the sickbay door. "I think he wants you up there yesterday. I'll do some more research on these headaches. Come in if they return," he tapped on the PADD, and then turned it to show Mikaela her painkiller blood levels. "Don't self-medicate anymore, either." He gave her a half-smile to indicate he wasn't trying to lecture her. "It's always easier to figure out a problem if we don't have medications masking it."

The Lieutenant got up from the biobed. "Aye, Doctor," she said, heading back to the bridge.

Andy sat down at his desk, and frowned at the data. Something tickled the back of his mind. He accessed the medical database and pored over the data, searching for the bit of information that he knew was eluding him.

Down in Engineering Devin sat Indian style in front of a relay swapping out isolar chips bouncing and slightly humming to himself. Almost in tune with his humming Devin would swap out a chip and scan the lower components on the panel in front of him.

With every scan the results were the same. Devin would swap a chip out, scan the processor, and the beeping of a negative scan would momentarily pause his humming only to flip another chip out twirl it in his hands and begin the cycle again.

Meanwhile on the bridge young Kathryn Cellis sat and watched the sensors as the readings spiked and went all over the place. The senior officers on the bridge chuckled to themselves as the dark skinned woman looked around trying to figure out what was going on while trying to hide the confusion. Just as she leaned in and stared at the readings a hand clasped her shoulder gasping in fear she turned around.

"Oh it's you, you startled me."

Laughing to himself Devin puffed his face out slightly. "Maybe you startled me?"

"I just realigned the sensors the outputs should be greater than before."

"Realigned the sensors? How? I thought we didn't have the parts we needed?"

"We didn't young... I'm sorry I did not catch your name."

"Kathryn Cellis. My name is Kathryn Cellis."

Nodding to the dark skinned woman in front of him Devin continued.

"Well Kathryn Cellis as I was saying we did not have what we needed, but I built one so it should work."

"Ok so what am I looking at?"

"You are looking at now."

"Now?"

"Yes Kathryn Cellis you are looking at now. Everything that you see now is happening now."

With an almost blank stare young Kathryn Cellis blinked a few times and stammered out a response.

"Well if this is now then what then?"

As his eyes faded to a brighter blue Devin smiled.

"Then was then, and now is now. It is really quite simple Miss Kathryn Cellis. You over complicate things and they just get confusing."

Nodding to the now meddling Denobulan, Ensign Cellis turned back around and began attempting to sort through the massive amounts of new sensor data that was in front of her.

Standing behind Ensign Cellis Devin simply smiled and as she struggled to sort through the large amounts of new data showing he had improved the sensors beyond the capability of a young officer, his smile grew only wider.

With the pain in her head virtually gone, Mikaela hastened her pace back toward the turbolift so she could return to her duty. She scolded herself mentally for not realizing the doctor would detect the pain medication she'd taken, and resolved that he was right and she probably shouldn't do that anymore. Some science officer she was, she thought, she couldn't even stay at her station long enough to see the ship out of Starbase Ten. Her communicator interrupted her self-pity: "Ensign Cellis to Lieutenant Sirius."

She tapped the device and responded "What is it Ensign?"

"Ma'am, you better get back to the bridge, our Chief Engineer has recalibrated the sensor array, and now the readings are spiking all over the place. I'm trying to get the computer to tell me what I'm looking at, but I'm not having much luck."

"Stand by Ensign I'm on my way, Sirius out."

Mikaela practically jogged the remaining distance to the turbolift. "Bridge," she commanded the computer and it started immediately. She tried to go over in her head what could possibly cause the sensor's to suddenly go crazy, she suspected the engineer's adjustments could be at the root of the problem. *Engineers*, she thought. *Why can't they leave things alone?*

The lift deposited her on the bridge moments later and she immediately moved to her station where the Nuntio's Denobulan engineer and her assistant science officer were standing. "Report Ensign."

Cellis looked up at her and Mikaela could read the frustration on her face. "I don't know what happened Ma'am, *He*" she shot a glare toward the engineer, "did something to the sensor array, and I can't make heads or tails of the readings."

"I have it Ensign."

Cellis stepped back and Mikaela took the science console. The sensor readings were coming back with all sorts of data, and the computer seemed to be having trouble processing it. She ran her fingers over the console refining the resolution on the sensor array, and narrowing the band of the scan in the area of space where the readings were coming from.

"By the Gods..." Mikaela said as she examined the readings. Without even thinking of speaking with the Nuntio's executive officer Mikaela tapped her combadge.

"CSO to Captain Rousseau, Ma'am we have a problem."

Captain Rousseau had been in her ready room, studying their route and the Nuntio's crew when the call came through. She had been waiting for Lieutenant Devin to arrive as she had requested, but it was apparent her Denobulan Engineer might have been quite absentminded. She decided to let the matter slide, this one time, she thought, as the tone in the Science officer's voice indicated a more pressing matter.

She got up and tugged on her uniform to straighten it before marching out of the ready room and turned right to head toward the science station where the young Orion was waiting for her.

"What seems to be the problem, Lieutenant?" she asked Sirius, her light French accent contrasting against the air of gravity in the bridge.

"This Ma'am," Mikaela said indicating the readouts on the science console. "At first I thought it was because our Chief Engineer had put the sensors out of whack when he recalibrated the array, but when I narrowed the bandwidth and resolution I realized that I wasn't seeing things."

Mikaela stopped for a moment and addressed the Nuntio's computer "Computer, please put the long range sensor readout on the main viewer, maximum magnification."

The computer complied displaying what Mikaela was seeing on the console so that it was more visible. What appeared was a display of crackling, and rippling pure energy.

"That, Captain, is one of the largest plasma storms I've ever seen, and it is right in our path."

"Helm: project parabolic course to avoid entering this area." First Officer Shaell ordered. "Recommend Yellow Alert and staying clear of this phenomenon, Captain."

Arinak watched the discussion on the bridge and caught the drill reports in her peripheral vision. Holfaak was working his usual brilliance and she had no doubt that the new Ensigns were loathing every minute of it. That thought actually brought a smile to her face.

"I agree with the Commander Captain, this storm will fry pretty much every system we have if we get too close. Recommend we avoid and dispatch several probes to get more detailed readings."

"Agreed on all points, Commander, Lieutenant," she said, acknowledging each in turn.

"All hands, Condition Yellow!" announced the snakelike tone of the Saurian First Officer once the captain gave her orders. "Civilians will follow all security personnel directives."

As he spoke, standard starship procedures were implemented with practiced precision by the crew; medical and engineering teams stood by for possible shift to red alert following either sudden casualties or damage; science and operations team did the same to ensure uninterrupted flow of resources and information, including one shuttlecraft being prepped up; and security personnel readied everything for the worse, with shields going up, phasers pre-heating for quick response and one torpedo readied in a tube. They were trained and ready for all known possibilities; and hopefully to face the unknown as well.

Rousseau briskly stepped down from the platform where the Tactical and Science stations were situated and moved toward the Captain's chair. The still standing Saurian moved aside as she approached to give her room to sit down. As she did so, she said, "Helm, take us out of warp."

A few moments later, she said, "Lieutenant Sirius, please feel free to launch your probes now."

"Yes Ma'am," Mikaela replied and she turned toward Commander Arinak at tactical. "Commander, if you wouldn't mind? Two class four probes?"

Rousseau looked at the viewscreen where the graphical representation of their current course was plotted along with the parts of the plasma storm collected by the sensors so far. The edges, at least where it was closer to their current position, were more clearly defined.

"Helm, please adjust your course starboard, zero-two-zero mark five," she said. "We'll go back to warp five once the probes are launched and we can determine exactly where the edges of this thing are."

"Commander Arinak. This will take us even closer to the Neutral Zone than previously anticipated," she warned. "And please commence the probe launch when ready."

"Probes armed," Arinak said, "and firing." She pressed the keys on her console, signaling for the ship's forward torpedo bays to fire the probes. "They're away."

"Thank you, Commander," Rousseau responded.

The crew on the bridge watched the view-screen as the two probes sped out into the vacuum like sharks patrolling the waters ahead of them. They wavered a bit as the guidance sensors performed the work of calculating the correct path. Finally they both decided on a trajectory and headed straight in different directions toward the plasma storm ahead. One of the probes was sent up and to the right toward their planned path, and the other further toward the bottom left.

Not going at warp, but still gaining speed approaching that of light, the probes would be able to reach the destination in mere minutes.

She turned to the Orion Science Officer. "Lieutenant. Once you have enough information, please verify that our planned trajectory will keep us clear of the plasma storms."

"Yellow alert, Doctor," said head nurse Ensign zh'Aranthi.

Andy looked at the information on the yellow alert. "OK, we're going around a plasma storm. Wow, that thing is *huge!* Let's do a practice run on what we'd do if we got hit by a plasma storm. Computer, run disaster drill... Plasma 3A."

"Aye, Doctor." The Andorian said.

Andy tapped his combadge to contact the mess hall. "Chief Tonn, this is Dr. Johansen. We're running a disaster drill. Prepare for incoming."

The Ferengi chief responded, "Oh, lovely. I can raise the price of peanut butter sandwiches to at least 500 credits now."

"What? Are you crazy?"

Tonn grumbled. "OK, maybe only 485."

Andy grinned. "You should ask at least 800."

The CMO heard Tonn whistle. "You think like a Ferengi, Doctor. I'm in awe."

"Keep my team well fed, will you? If we have a real emergency, they won't have time to eat."

"Aye, Doctor. Tonn out."

zh'Aranthi cleared her throat. "Doctor, the scenario reports 12 injured with plasma burns reported on deck 3, 5 on deck 4."

"OK, team, let's run through the disaster treatment protocols." Andy said.

As the Yellow Alert was sounded Mikaela turned to Ensign Cellis who was still standing by looking at the sensor data over Mikaela's shoulder.

"Cellis, I don't think we have any experiments running, but why don't you go down to the lab and make sure that if there is anything that it gets secured."

"Aye ma'am." she replied and then she turned and exited the bridge via the turbolift.

Mikaela turned back to the science console and began to shift through the data from the two probes. They were both confirming what she already knew, the storm was incredibly large, and seemed to be moving through the sector ahead of them. Its composition was consistent with other plasma storms particularly those in the Badlands. Mikaela correlated the sensor data with the probe data and then compared them to the Nuntio's projected course. It looked like the ship's course would take it around the trailing edge of the storm. They might see some sensor interference, but that should be it. She turned to face the captain.

"Captain, data from the two probes is coming in. The plasma storm is incredibly large... larger than most other recorded storms except those in the Badlands. Composition is consistent with other plasma storms. The computer confirms that our plotted course will take us around the trailing edge of the storm. We might still see some sensor interference but that should be it."

The giant Saurian First officer turned his large bulbous eyes towards the woman in the command chair and addressed her with his hissing voice: "Captain; tactical could use the probes in escort formation with the Nuntio as a warning system if our sensors fail to detect any trouble while we circumvent the storm."

"Agreed. Make it happen," she said as she nodded to the Tactical officer. "Let's continue on, but at Warp one", she said to Ensign George. "I want to be sure that we can make corrections in the course if necessary."

"Aye, Captain."

As they moved past the storm and into formation with the probes, the hull heat sensors rose and radiation levels in the ship slowly increased. So far it was well within acceptable parameters. They remained in Yellow Alert, so all personnel were dutifully ready and able to protect the ship and its crew at a moment's notice.

It only took several minutes to get to where the storm seemed to be subsiding. Before they approached the end, however, the Nuntio picked up an S.O.S. signal and based on protocols, the computer automatically notified them.

"Standard Federation S.O.S. signal received over radio frequency," the computer lead with, before playing the message. A man could be heard shouting in a distressed voice and some of the message was cut out by static. "...eration vesels in the vicini... caught in something... can't move in impulse or thrust... core is overload... breach imminent... forcefield... too late... please help!"

"Ensign, drop us out of warp!" Rousseau shouted. After she did, Rousseau said, "Triangulate the source of that transmission and set a course. Half impulse."

"Red Alert! All hands, ship in distress! Rescue operation protocols are in effect! Medical, damage control and security teams to shuttlebay and transporter rooms!" Shaell's voice hissed all accross the vessel, overseeing that all departments complied with the captain's orders and their readiness for the next ones to come.

He then looked down at his commanding officer, himself ready to lead any command away team that might be needed to go to the distressed vessel.

"What do you suppose he meant by 'forcefield'?" Rousseau asked the bridge in general.

Mikaela was struggling with the Nuntio's sensor array. Even though it was a fairly powerful sensor pallet she was having trouble picking out a ship, if there was one, anywhere on their projected course. She turned and said as much to the Captain.

"Ma'am if there is a ship out there our sensors are having trouble picking it out. Could be interference from the storm. I would advise caution."

Rousseau frowned and said to the science officer, "Any suggestions for attempting to find its location or at least the general direction? Can it be determined based on the radio signal being transmitted? We can't exactly ignore a distress call. It is our duty to do our best to find this ship."

"My best guess would be that it's trapped somewhere on the outer edge of the storm," Arinak said. She keyed in a channel to the security office.

"What do you want?" Holfaak said.

"Not now," Arinak said. "Tell the newbies that the cruise is over. Take Alpha and go to the shuttlebay on standby. Send half of Bravo to transporter room one with Carendo and the other half to transporter room two with Takek."

"On it, unless you demand something else in the next five minutes," Holfaak said.

"Just be ready, Arinak out."

C'mon Mikaeala think, Sirius scolded herself. *You're the chief science officer... you should be able to handle this*. Out loud she said, "Stand by Captain, I'm going to narrow the scan parameters, see if I can pick out the ship's transmitting frequency."

Mikaela turned back to the science console and focused the sensor array on the trailing edge of the plasma storm. She altered the scan parameters to focus on current Starfleet and Federation distress frequencies instead of looking for the materials of a ship. What she really needed was a little more power. She turned and focused on the Denobulan engineer. "Mister Devin, can you give me a power boost to the sensor array without taking away from anything important?"

"Wait a minute, I think I can get a very general direction from this signal, ma'am," voiced the communications officer. Ensign Pablo Domingo Gonzalez put in a few commands to determine signal strength at very positions along their course. It allowed him to determine how much the signal had degraded at those different locations and estimate an approximate course.

Dom Gonzalez spoke up again. "I have an estimate of seven two three mark five. It's not perfect, but it's the best I can get you right now."

"Very good, thank you Ensign," Rousseau said with a smile at the communications officer. "Sorry Lieutenant Sirius, but we're short on time here. But I thank you for your effort. Helm, make it happen. Quarter impulse."

As the ship slowly made its way toward the plasma storm the turbulent jet streams became more and more distinct. The fires that burned off when the plasma became superheated and the intense currents in all different directions made it impossible that any ship could've survived in it for long.

"There's no ship. Where could that thing be!" wandered Rousseau aloud.

Just then a small black orb appeared in the middle of the plasma. It was barely the size of a shuttlecraft and appeared like a small pupil in the raging red eye that was the rest of the storm. It then began to grow, slowly and slowly until eventually it was the size of the Nuntio.

"What is that?" Rousseau ordered, looking for answers from her crew, but it was clear that everyone aboard feared the same thing: A black hole.

They didn't even have time to answer or even postulate. The moment the "hole" became bigger than the Nuntio, its gravimetric forces won over and the ship was yanked as if by a

string into the abyss. Eventually the inertial dampeners failed as the ship neared the apex of the "hole" and everyone was thrown across the bridge with the force of several Earth gravities. Rousseau's head came in contact with the navigation station in front of her and before she faded into unconsciousness, all she saw through the viewscreen was darkness.