

Dire News

Chapter IV: Old Friends

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

Saurian resiliency was almost unmatched among all known sentient species; they could survive extremes of temperature, of irradiation and poisoning that would kill most of them, endure shearing forces of the elements or shifts in gravity and brightness unbearable to many, face injuries and trauma that could be lethal to any other.

But at this very moment, Commander Shaell, first officer of the starship *Nuntio*, truly wished it was not so. Around him, everyone was shaken, faces torn in surprise, fear and pain, until the blessed peace of unconsciousness freed them from the hellish suffering of the inferno they now were swallowed in. All but him.

A long hiss of pain and impotent rage came out of his wide mouth as he was using all of his monstrous strength to grip the railing behind him, to fight off both the dizzying pain and from being tossed about like a broken puppet across the bridge. The railing almost tore out of the floor under both the strain of Shaell's grip and the violent shaking of the entire Nova class vessel. Through his blurred vision, he could still see on the main viewer the swirling vortex of liquid fire and crackling lightning bolts closing around the ship like the devouring mouth of a titanic dragon, closing on them huge dark teeth of compressed matter also caught in the raging maelstrom. And then, suddenly, brutally, all went dark, still and silent. Emergency lights switched on. Stumbling and panting, Shaell went to the tactical console and checked the status of the ship.

Main power down... structural integrity ninety-five point three percent... adrift but life support stable...

"All hands, this is the bridge: All sections report! Priority to damage and casualty assessments!" As he spoke through his combadge, the towering Saurian went to the command chair. Looking over at Captain Rousseau's condition for a few seconds, he then took a look around the rest of the unconscious bridge crew and hissed out loud: "Computer: activate EMH ship wide."

"Unable to comply. Insufficient power allocation."

A long sigh of displeasure sifted through the clenched jaws of the Saurian. *Hope CMO and ChEng are still with us...* "Computer: try to activate bridge EMH only."

Right in the middle of the bridge, a form shimmered into that of a male human in a blue-marked Starfleet uniform. "Please state the nature of... oh... never mind."

After one look around, the photonic medical officer went beside Shaell and, following a quick tricorder scan, used a hypospray to revive the ship commander as a few other officers started slowly to stir back to consciousness.

Rousseau groaned while the hypospray brought her back to the land of the living. Her head was throbbing from the gash she received when she was thrown against the console and her skin was red hot and felt like it was on fire. She attempted to stretch her arms in order to lift herself off of the deck and gave a short scream. Her left arm was broken and trying to stretch it caused intense pain. The EMH knelt beside her, and examined a few places on her arm before pulling a bandage out of the bag that was replicated alongside him when he appeared. He wrapped her forearm tight against her stomach for a temporary sling and then helped her up.

She approached the Captain's chair and sat down. She pressed the internal comms before saying, "Engineer to the table. Medical... need medical core alert." As she looked up at the First Officer and EMH, and their concerned and confused expressions, she said, "What are your contents?" The words she spoke made perfect sense to her and she didn't understand why they just stood there and looked at her like that.

"Well you most certainly have a concussion, Captain." He approached her and shined a penlight into both of her eyes as he asked, "What is the current year?"

"24... 24... 2424." she answered confidently, with a frown. "I'm time." She was beginning to get frustrated at being asked such silly questions in their current crisis.

"Mhmm... follow the light with your eyes, please." he said in response and moved the penlight up and down and side to side. Rousseau consented, begrudgingly. The EMH then brought out another hypospray containing an agent to mend the blood vessels in the portion of her brain that became bruised. After several minutes, he again repeated his previous question, along with, "Where are you now?"

"It's 2410 and I'm on the Nuntio. I told you I'm fine. There are other people that need your assistance, Doctor."

"Yes ma'am," he said simply and moved along to help the rest of the crew.

As soon as most of the crew on the bridge regained consciousness, she used the internal comms again. "Attention crew. Maintain yellow alert. Engineering I need a level ten forcefield put up around the warp core as soon as possible. I think that is what the other ship was trying to say, but they determined that it was necessary too late. And please take any other steps necessary to protect the ship from... whatever this is."

"Medical teams to all decks for triage support. Doctor Johansen, please report to the bridge as soon as emergencies are taken care of."

"Tactical: check on our 'guests'", she said, referring to the journalists. "Make sure they're not impeding emergency ship operations."

"Science team, I need scans on that other ship including life signs. Engineering: Make sure you look over those scans to determine whether you believe it is safe to begin rescue operations." Out of breath and her head throbbing again, she sat back and closed her eyes, trusting her officers to carry out her commands efficiently and professionally and report back to her when they found out more.

"We are the Borg, lower your shields and surrender your ships. We will your technological and biological distinctiveness to our own...Resistance is futile."

The fight for the *Tranquility* played out in Mikaela's subconscious as she lay on the *Nuntio's* bridge. When the ship hit the anomaly no amount of grip on the ship's science station could

keep her upright. She was thrown violently backward and her head smacked hard against the deck. Now, she was forced to relive the worst memory of her life again as if it was happening right in front of her. She felt the pain in her neck, and then heard the voice. *"Welcome Two of Eight..."*

Mikaela's eyes popped open as the hypospray from the *Nuntio's* EMH brought her back to reality. She gasped as she tried to sit up, her eyes wide, but the photonic doctor held her down.

"Please do not move Lieutenant." He swept the tricorder over her, and noted the unusual activity in her brain. "Lieutenant, what is your name and where are you?"

"L-Lieutenant Mikaela Sirus, I'm on the U.S.S. Tran---" Mikaela stopped herself as she fully returned to the present time "I'm on the U.S.S. Nuntio, thank you Doctor."

The doctor nodded apparently satisfied with the response, even though it was nearly incorrect, and he moved on to the next officer allowing Mikaela to get up. She glanced around the bridge and could see a couple of destroyed consoles and much of the bridge crew still down except Captain Rousseau and First Officer Shaell.

"Science team, I need scans on that other ship including life signs," she heard from the Captain.

"Aye Ma'am," Mikaela replied as confidently as she could before turning to her science console.

The Nuntio's sensors were only partially online, but she ordered the computer to reach out with what was available. Her fingers darted over the console trying to get a handle on where they were and what had happened, not to mention why they hadn't detected the anomaly in the first place. She analyzed what was coming back, they seemed to be stuck wherever they were, and there was planetary debris everywhere around them. She focused on the other ship; the computer was telling her there was almost nothing left of it.

"Captain, the other vessel... there's almost nothing left Ma'am. No life signs, though I've only got partial sensors ma'am. We're definitely stuck ma'am, there's debris from planetary bodies everywhere out there... still not sure why the sensors didn't pick this up in the first place I will try... I- I..."

Suddenly Mikaela's head was swimming, her vision blurred, and she tried to grab hold of the science console, but missed it completely and collapsed to the deck. At the sight of her fall, Rousseau ignored her own pain and jumped up to her officer's aid. She knelt beside Sirus to feel her pulse. It was slow but steady, so she tapped her comm-badge and said, "Emergency medical transport, Lieutenant Junior Grade Mikaela Sirus!"

Once the officer was transported down to a biobed in sickbay, she stood and said, "We need to be absolutely sure there's no life on that ship before we abandon rescue efforts."

Engineering

As sparks rained down from the ceiling scattered around engineering the Engineers began to pick themselves up off the deck and check on each other. As two crewman helped up a wounded Vulcan they exchanged glances at the sound of scratching. Without a word both knew the other had heard it and it was coming from the panel draped over the console a few meters behind them. "Help him up Roger I'll check that out".

Running over to the fallen ceiling panel the crewman grabbed the panel and began to rock it backwards. As the gap between the panel and console increased the puffed head of a

Denobulan poked out screaming. The shock of the puffed face combined with the shriek caused the crewman to jerk back and drop the panel pinning the Denobulan face of Ensign Devin against the bulkhead. "Oh god Sir... someone help me."

Several crewmen ran over and together they lifted the panel off the now bleeding and slightly crushed head of their Chief Engineer. "One word gentleman... ow."

As the wounded Denobulan was helped to his feet he grabbed a rag off the rail next to him, placed it over his head, and ran to the nearest comm panel. "Bridge this is Engineering. We are deaf, dumb, and blind down here what is going on and what do you want me to fix?"

Rousseau looked around the bridge with surprise. She had thought the Denobulan was on the bridge, but he had apparently snuck down to Engineering when she wasn't paying attention. *Like a sneaky mouse*, she thought. *Fortunate, though*. It was fortunate because she was sure that in their current situation he would be needed down there more.

Rousseau sighed and placed her fingers on either side of the bridge of her nose, unsuccessfully trying to squeeze out the pain. She repeated her previous statement about putting a level 10 forcefield around the Warp Core -- after shutting it down of course. She did not like having to repeat herself, but under the circumstances she accepted that he may have been unable to hear her at the time.

"And I shouldn't have to tell you that our shields are slowly being drained away and even with whatever shield power we have left, the hull is taking on massive heat fluctuations and Theta radiation. Figure out how to protect us, Lieutenant," she ended, sternly.

Arinak lifted herself up off of the deck, she felt the slight warmth of blood running down the side of her head from a cut on her forehead, but she ignored it.

"Damage reports coming in, ma'am," she said. "Multiple stations are reporting casualties. Most seem to be ranging from some cuts and bruises to a few concussions." She tapped her commbadge. "Arinak to Holfaak." She paused. "Holfaak, come in." She tapped it again. "Arinak to shuttle bay."

"Ma'am, this is Johnson," said the unusually soft voice of Alpha squad's leader. "We need a medical team ASAP." Arinak's fingers slid across her slightly dimmed console, sending a call out.

"On it's way," she said. "What happened?"

"A cargo container was knocked loose during the attack," Johnson said. Her voice cracked for the first time in Arinak's entire memory of knowing the Alpha squad leader. "Clarg..." her voice trailed off.

"I'm sending back up, keep me informed," Arinak out. She didn't like hearing Johnson's voice, but kept her uneasiness as buried as she could. She tapped her commbadge again.

"Arinak to Takek: status?"

"We are unhurt, ma'am," she said.

"Get to the shuttlebay, Lieutenant Johnson needs support," Arinak said. Then she tapped it again. "Arinak to Relys. Status update."

"We're all here, ma'm," he said.

"Take you team to the reporter level and make sure they're both intact and not going anywhere, understood?" she asked.

"Very much so," Relys said. "Relys out."

"I DEMAND to see your supervisor THIS instant!" yelled a sharp, loud and angry voice.

"Sir, please calm down, you're frightening the other passengers," said a young crewman.

"Don't you tell me to calm down!" the man yelled. "We were nearly annihilated by... something! Do you know who I am? What I can do!?"

"What seems to be the problem here?" Relys asked as he entered the area that had been designated the reporter's pool. Lieutenant Korapok, a tall, imposing Klingon and Ensign Cobb flanked him on either side.

The man turned to him, his eyes wide and angry. He was about 35 years older than Relys was and a vein seemed to be throbbing in his temple. "About time we get some answers! Do you know who I am?" the man asked.

"No, I'm afraid I don't have the pleasure," Relys said.

"I am Kevin Kleiner! I represent everyone in this room and several people within the most prestigious publications in the Federation! I can destroy entire planets with my words!" he said.

"Well, sir, if we have need of your planet destroying talents then we will be sure to call on you," Relys said. He kept his face straight and sincere. "But for the time being, I ask that you and your fellow passengers please take your seats and remain calm while we determine what happened."

"How dare you! I will be sure to talk to your supervisor about this!" Kleiner said. "I will speak to your Captain at once!"

"I'm sorry sir, the Captain is busy now, but I will be sure to inform her of your desire to see her at the earliest opportunity," Relys said. Then he looked at the other reporters. "Until then, please be sure to remain here until we return and allow for everyone to leave. Right now we have to see to both your safety and that of the ship." Then his eyes returned to Kleiner. They almost had an evil twinkle in them while his expression remained serious.

"For now, I will leave you with Lieutenant Korapok," Relys said. "He will ensure that your needs are met." He turned and nodded at the imposing Klingon before motioning for Cobb to follow him out of the door. Korapok took a step forward and stared down at the angry man.

"W-w-well, I've...uhm..." Kleiner said.

"Please... take your seat, sir," Korapok said. He smiled; which rather than make him appear friendlier, made him look far more threatening. Kleiner mumbled something about lack of respect before he stepped back and sat in the chair in the center of the room.

The doors to the shuttle bay opened, allowing Takek and Latorres to enter. They took in what had happened almost immediately. It seemed like most of the damage had been here. The impact, or whatever it was, had torn loose the aft locks on the shuttlecraft, causing it to slide against the wall. The force of the shuttle hitting the wall knocked one of the secure cargo containers loose from its magnetic clamps and it fell to the floor; right on top of Lieutenant Clarg Holfaak.

Johnson and Kasilaris were trying desperately in the flickering lights to lift the container off of the assistant security officer. Takek and Latorres ran over and grabbed the other end. Takek's added Vulcan strength gave them just enough leverage to spin the container just enough and move it away. Holfaak grunted as his body was freed of the crushing force.

"You certainly... waited long enough... to move that..." he said. Johnson knelt down beside him while Takek pulled out her tricorder and scanned him. He had two fractures in his spinal

cord and multiple fractures in his legs. That, coupled with the internal bleeding should have rendered the Tellarite comatose.

Holfaak craned his head down to look at the damage. "Eh... I've had... worse..." he said. He looked over to his left. Takek followed his gaze to where a paralyzed Reynolds stood staring at the scene. "That'll teach you... to stare at falling objects... you idiot."

Johnson turned towards Reynolds. Takek had worked with her long enough to know that her friend was about to tear into the Ensign, presumably for having to be rescued by Lieutenant Holfaak. She took a step forward and placed a hand on Johnson's shoulder.

The doors to the shuttle bay slid open to admit the medical team. "Latorres, Reynolds and Kasilaris with me, we will be needed elsewhere," Takek said. Reynolds took another moment and shook it off before the four of them left the room, leaving Johnson to assist the medical personnel.

Ensign Kathryn Cellis was in the Nuntio's main science lab with two other members of the science department when the ship hit the disturbance. As the Nuntio shook to her foundation Kathryn grabbed for one of the lab consoles to steady herself. Despite that she was tossed to the deck by the violent disturbance anyway, and then the lights went out.

"Verys, Renner, you okay?" she called out in the darkness

"Here ma'am," came Chief Renner's reply from the left side of the room.

"Verys?" Cellis asked. "Verys are you there?"

At that moment the ship's emergency power returned light to the darkened lab. Kathryn frantically looked around until she spotted Ensign Verys lying on the deck. It appeared the young Bajoran woman had hit her head on a bulkhead. Kathryn ran to her, knelt down by her side, and checked her vital signs. The young Bajoran woman was breathing, and her pulse was present but slower than normal. Cellis tapped her communicator: "Ensign Cellis to Sickbay, medical emergency main science lab."

Without waiting for a response Kathryn closed the channel and opened another "Cellis to Sirius." When no response was forthcoming she tried again "Ensign Cellis to Lieutenant Sirius, ma'am are you there?" Again there was no response and Kathryn was beginning to get worried "Computer, locate Lieutenant Sirius."

"Lieutenant Sirius is in Sickbay."

"Sickbay," Kathryn said aloud and then turned to Renner "Chief, stay with Verys, I'm going to the bridge."

"Aye, ma'am."

Cellis left the lab behind knowing that a medical team would respond eventually, but she supposed that they were relatively busy down in Sickbay at the moment. Her mind whirled on the way to the bridge. Here she was in her first posting on what everyone had told her was a cupcake command that never did anything, and now they had hit... something... and the ship was apparently dead in the water.

Her anticipation hit a crescendo as the turbolift doors opened and revealed the chaos that was the Nuntio's bridge. There were sparks coming from several consoles, the ship's EMH was moving from crewman to crewman checking on the command crew, and through it all Kathryn saw Captain Rousseau standing tall by her command chair just like you would picture Kirk, or Picard, or any of the other legendary Starfleet captains would be like in a crisis. The sight of

Rousseau calmed Kathryn a bit and her eyes landed on the vacant science station. Kathryn crossed through the disheveled bridge and took the science station. She began glancing over the controls: partial sensors, nothing long range... it looked like Lt. Sirius had been looking for something before she was sent to Sickbay. Kathryn decided it was time to speak up

"Captain, Ensign Cellis, assistant science officer, what can I do to help Ma'am?"

Rousseau was still on the comm with Lieutenant Devin waiting for his response, but all she heard was static. "Do you hear me Lieutenant? Lieutenant Devin!" She hoped nothing serious had happened down at Engineering and it was just an issue with the comms.

Rousseau moved over to the nervous young Ensign and placed her hand on her shoulder in a reassuring manner. "Determine what this spatial anomaly is and what kind of effects we're up against and provide the information to Lieutenant Devin so he can protect us against whatever you find out there. And make sure he heard my order to shut down the warp core and erect a level ten forcefield."

"Thank you Ensign," she added before she moved back in front of her chair.

The presence of the confident Captain Rousseau next to her, and the woman's hand on her shoulder helped to calm Kathryn's nerves. As the captain walked back to her chair Cellis looked down at the science console, and noted that she still only had short range sensors. She instructed the computer to determine the composition of the space around them.

As the sensor data came back she began sorting it out. The general area consisted of not only planetary debris, but there appeared to be the remains of several ships out there as well. The composition of the space was curious, and unlike anything Kathryn had seen in her studies at the academy. The anomaly was almost completely composed of chronitons, and nucleons and not much else, but it was behaving very much like the plasma storms of the Badlands. The other problem was that it had no detectable mass... which was strange.

"Captain, the space around us is composed mainly of chronitons and nucleons. The sensors are not picking up any gravitons or electrons, and no mass. Yet at the same time I am also detecting debris from several planetary bodies and well as the remains of starships, but non identifiable. The anomaly behaves like the plasma storms of the Badlands Ma'am, but it's... different. I'm afraid I can't theorize why, and our long range sensors are still out."

After making her report to the captain, Kathryn turned back to the console and typed in a few commands ordering the computer to send the data from the sensors to main engineering, as well as to the engineering console on the bridge in case the Nuntio's chief engineer made an appearance. Then she tapped her communicator: "Ensign Cellis to Lieutenant Devin, are you there Sir?"

Sickbay

Mikaela Sirius was lost, lost in her own mind. In her subconscious she fought the murderous Borg over and over again only to end up in her assimilated state each time. It was a nightmare to end all nightmares and more terrifying than any normal person could understand. In her vision she sobbed uncontrollably, as the incident played over and over because she already knew how it would end. Mikaela's damaged mind cried out for help, but if it was there it wasn't answering...

Andy ignored the pain in his shoulder and ribs from being slammed against one of the biobeds when the ship bucked in the storm and then abruptly stopped. He had work to do.

"Computer, activate the EMH net ship wide."

The computer cheerfully replied, "Unable to comply, insufficient power allocation."

Andy muttered, "Oh, great." He tapped his combadge. "Engineering, this is the CMO. We need power to the EMH net back. We're getting casualty reports in from all over."

All he heard was static. "Cady," he ordered his MCPO. "Go check out Engineering stat."

"Aye, Doctor." He grabbed a triage bag and trotted out the door.

"Johansen to Captain--"

"Emergency medical transport, Lieutenant Junior Grade Mikaela Sirius!" came the captain's voice.

The unconscious Orion woman materialized on the biobed.

"Mikaela, can you hear me?" the CMO asked as he scanned her with the medical tricorder. He frowned at the results. "Computer: full neural scan, including synaptic potentials." He examined the bruising on her wrist and used the tissue regenerator on the bad sprain.

Two more crew members beamed onto biobeds. A woman moaned, agony etching deep furrows in her forehead. She gripped the sides of the biobed, knuckles turning white. The other crewman lay unconscious on the other biobed, face a blue-white. zh'Aranthi reported, "Doctor, casualties reported on all decks. Medical teams are ordered to the transporter room and the shuttlebay. The EMH was somehow activated on the bridge to treat everyone there, including the Captain."

"Initiate Level 1 triage procedures. Senvor, Byrne--get trauma scans on these two that just beamed in. zh'Aranthi, get someone to run dispatch for all these calls. If we can get enough power, convert the mess hall into a secondary sick bay. Ferrara, you'll lead there; work with whatever we can replicate right now. T'Leian--get over to the shuttlebay. Rosek, you're in charge of the transporter med team. zh'Aranthi, make a note for me to check the Captain in particular when things are calmed down to a dull roar."

"Aye, Doctor," said the Andorian.

Andy read over the scan data, noting the odd depolarizations in Mikaela's basal ganglia. "40 cc inaprovaline and 10 cc 3% hydrocortilene," he ordered. "We need to stabilize these neurons."

The tall nurse pressed the hyposprays against Mikaela's neck. Within a few moments, the science officer began to stir, moaning about Borg. Her eyes popped open, searching frantically in aimless, erratic movements.

Andy leaned over so she could see him more clearly, inhaling sharply a moment as the pain in his rib cage shot through him. "Mikaela, it's Doctor Johansen. You're on the Nuntio, Mikaela. You're safe."

Mikaela trembled on the bed, pale, sweat forming a sheen across her face.

Andy took one of her hands in his. It was cold as an Andorian winter. "Look at me, Mikaela. There are no Borg here. You're in sickbay on the Nuntio. No Borg, Mikaela."

The medicine finally took full effect, and her eyes focused on him, recognition suddenly lighting them up. She relaxed, exhaling the fear in a long breath. She squeezed his hand once to let him know she understood him before releasing it. The doctor looked at the neural scans, noting the synaptic potentials in her brain were now at near-normal levels. "Are you hurting anywhere else?"

"No," she said, shaking away the horrid memories.

"I had to repolarize some of the neurons in your basal ganglia. You'll be OK in a few more minutes. I'm going to look at this more when we're not in the middle of a mass casualty situation, though. Something's not quite right."

Andy's combadge chirped. "T'Leian to Doctor Johansen. Emergency transport: Tellarite with crush injuries--multiple spinal and leg fractures, mid-level paralysis, suspect internal injuries."

"Acknowledged," he replied.

zh'Aranthi rushed to set up the surgery unit as the doctor quickly examined the other patients in sick bay. "Senvor, use the osteoregenerator on that CPO's femur and pelvis fractures. Run the plasma infuser 100 cc per hour. 2 mg morphenalog every 4 hours for pain. Give her tri-ox 20 cc IV if her O2 sats drop below 95%. Byrne, give the crewman here 2 units erythrocyte replacement in the plasma infuser, and another 2 if the CBC is still low in an hour. Run it wide open. Tri-ox every 4 hours. 25 cc metoropan for pain every 4 hours as needed." His brow furrowed as he took in all the biobed scans. "Might need a spleen replacement--let's see if we can fix it first, though."

She put the delta wave inducer on the young man to keep him unconscious while the doctor repaired his internal injuries. "I'll get the schematic loaded for replication right away," the red-haired medic said, and she walked quickly across the room to the lab.

The Tellarite beamed directly onto the surgery bed as Andy stabilized the crewman's fractured ribs, and then repaired the ruptures in his spleen and kidneys. zh'Aranthi set up a full trauma scan on the Tellarite, deftly inserted the plasma infuser and turned it on to run it on full, and prepared the delta-wave inducer to anesthetize him.

"I'm not hurt enough, and you gotta go poking me some more," Holfaak growled.

"I made sure not to be gentle just for you," she retorted.

"Damn nurses," he said, coughed, and spasmed in pain. "This CMO better do a good job or I'll... I'll sit on him."

The head nurse snorted as she gave him some tri-ox to improve his oxygen levels. "He might just leave you paralyzed with talk like that. He wouldn't do that normally, but for you I think he might make an exception. Breathing better?"

He nodded yes to her.

She called over to the CMO. "Scan's up, Doctor."

"zh'Aranthi, come finish up here with the tissue regenerator. Byrne, we won't need the spleen replacement. Move him over to the overflow when zh'Aranthi's done and his O2 sats are up above 95%."

"Will do, Doctor," she said. "Oh, Lt. Korapok relayed a message from the journalists asking about a report on casualties and how some of their injured were doing. I get the sense that he didn't want to bother you, but Kleiner apparently is pretty insistent."

"Tell Korapok that he can tell Kleiner that I'm too busy to have a little chat right now, and if Kleiner doesn't like it, he can shove his PADD up his--wait--tell Korapok that I'm drafting every able-bodied journalist with any kind of medical or first aid training. Make up the regulation if we don't have one on the books. Tell them to report to the mess hall and help out Ferrara. That'll at least keep some of them busy and out of our hair."

Byrne grinned, the smile light up her emerald eyes. "Oh, I'd LOVE to see the look on their faces when Lt. Korapok says that."

Andy wiggled his eyebrows once in amusement as he walked over to the surgery bed to treat the Tellarite. The doctor checked the scans--spinal fractures in 2 places with spinal cord damage leading to paralysis from the chest down. Multiple fractures in both legs. Internal bleeding in the liver, intestines, and kidneys. "I'm surprised you're still awake with all the damage you took, Holfaak" the CMO said as he moved the surgery unit in place. He winced as pain knifed through his ribs again.

Holfaak's eyes narrowed as the grunt caught his attention and he peered at Andy. "You look like crap, Doc. You sure you up to doing this?"

"You're going to be my test case on doing surgery with broken ribs, Holfaak."

"You want me to trust you to treat me when you won't even treat yourself? Sheesh."

"It's kinda hard to reach around my own back. I can't do anything til the EMH is back online. You'll be up and walking by tonight and torturing my staff, I'm sure."

"You better not pass out during surgery, Doc. And when you're done with me I'll personally get up and get engineering's lazy lard-butts working on that EMH."

Andy put the delta wave inducer on Holfaak's forehead and injected neurozine into the infuser. "Holfaak? Shut up and go to sleep so I can get my work done."

The Tellarite grinned at the doctor as his eyes closed.

Bridge

As Captain Rousseau had to see to the whole situation, First officer Shaell's job was to ensure that the ship herself would get back to optimal responsiveness as quickly and as best as possible. His towering frame bent in half over his XO chair to access his armchair PADD, the Saurian gathered all ship reports as they came in and dispatched orders to bring the Nuntio back on line: "Sickbay: assess which crewmembers are able to resume duty and send them to report to Operations. Engineering: priority allocation to medical needs and damage control. Get the EMH grid back on line and initiate repairs on all key systems, priority to life support, ship integrity then propulsion. Security, ensure the safety of the passengers and that they are not hampering anyone's work. Operations: assist all departments as they request and prioritize personnel for medical, engineering then security. All departments: status report to the bridge every ten minutes."

The red-skinned reptilian giant's voice was even more slow and neutral than usual... which made it even less alive than the voice of the computer itself. But over his years of service in Starfleet, he had learned how emotional species reacted under pressure. The last thing he wanted was to add to this strain as he gave out orders. They had to revive the ship soon... before whatever was out there finished them off. There was no fear in the emotionless four hearts of the Saurian. But in his primary mind, there was a *lot* of apprehension.

Rousseau turned to the Saurian and said, "X, I want to send an away team over to that other ship; just to make sure that there really are no survivors. Their warp core is stable for now but it won't remain like that for long. Please assemble a team with the bare minimum amount of people required, but take all precautions necessary to see that your team is safe."

Sickbay

The CMO heard the captain calling over the comm, "Medical team: report. How is triage progressing?"

Andy's sigh escaped before he could stop it. The pain from his rib fractures was making it difficult to focus on the delicate process of regenerating the nerves in Holfaak's spinal cord. The comm traffic made it almost impossible.

zh'Aranthi glanced at him, eyes and antennae both evaluating him with practiced professionalism. She noted the increasing pallor creeping across his face, the shallow, rapid breathing, and the faint sheen of sweat indicating shock was setting in. She made a mental note to contact the captain as soon as he finished with Holfaak so that Rousseau could order him to the bridge for treatment from the only functioning EMH.

She said, "Captain, this is Ensign zh'Aranthi. We're not looking at too many serious injuries, but those who we are aware of so far have been beamed in and we're beginning on those. We have medical teams beginning triage throughout all decks. We will keep you informed of any changes."

"Very well Ensign, thank you, and keep up the good work," Rousseau responded.

"'We're not looking at too many serious injuries'?" he asked her.

"All in a day's work for someone who's trained with the other surgeons at Starbase 10," she answered calmly.

The corner of his mouth twitched up in a half-smile. "Myelin regenerator," he ordered. She snapped the instrument into his hand. "Run the osteo-regenerator over those leg fractures, zh'Aranthi. How bad are the major vessels looking?"

"The right femoral will need replicating," the Andorian noted after peering down into the wound with both antennae. "Byrne, we need a Tellarite femoral artery replicated for transplant."

"Aye, Ensign; right away." She rushed off to the lab, and a few minutes later re-appeared with a steri-tray holding the artery. By then, Andy had reattached the nerves in the spinal cord and had finished sealing the spinal blood vessels with the vascular regenerator, and was using the osteo-regenerator to knit the bones of the spinal column back to their normal shape. "Back wounds are ready to close," he said.

zh'Aranthi nodded, handing him the microsutures needed to replace the destroyed artery with the new one. She picked up the dermal regenerator and closed up the wounds, noting that the CMO had made them as small and thin as he possibly could. Her antennae bobbed in appreciation. Not many surgeons could do that well.

The comm chirped again. "Sickbay, Commander Shaell here; Doctor Johansen, send to the main transporter room your medical officer most qualified for field operations in hazardous areas. Provide for stabilizing an average ship complement suffering for similar injuries as we have sustained."

"Aye, Commander," he answered. He thought a moment about which medic to send. All of them were excellent. The Irish medic was the only one who, for the moment, was dealing with only 1 emergency, rather than 5 or 10. "Byrne, grab an away medkit and meet Commander Shaell in the transporter room. Beam any critical patients directly to our sickbay."

"Will do, Doctor. My patient is waking up. Vitals are stable and reaching normal range," she reported as she headed out.

"Good. zh'Aranthi, these leg wounds are ready to close. I'll run the tissue regenerator over the organ injuries and he'll be ready for the recovery sequence."

"Yes, but will we be ready?"

"You mean for his quips or his foul mood?"

zh'Aranthi's antennae tapped together in thought. "Both."

"Then, no."

"That's what I thought."

A couple minutes after the nurse removed the delta-wave inducer, the Tellarite security officer woke up.

"Holfaak: move your toes for me."

The Tellarite moved not only his toes, but his feet and legs, too. "I can move again!"

Andy leaned heavily against the side of the bed in relief, pain, and fatigue. "Good. Another hour or so and you'll be back to light duty, like terrorizing the journalists."

Holfaak sat up. "Hey!"

"What's wrong?" the doctor asked.

"You fixed the arthritis in my back! What am I going to complain about to the young pukes on my watch now?"

"I have great faith in your ability to find the smallest detail and turn it into a major issue just for them."

Holfaak laughed, and slid down off the bed. "I'm going to get those lard-butts in Engineering going on your EMH. You're looking like you really need it, doc."

zh'Aranthi tried to stop Holfaak from going any farther before making sure the spinal cord was communicating properly with the rest of his body. Before she could say anything, one of his legs buckled under him. He waved his arms in the air, trying to catch his balance, and knocked hard into Andy. Holfaak fell back into zh'Aranthi, who was able to break the fall enough that the Tellarite didn't hurt himself when he ended up on the ground, sitting on his bottom.

Andy collapsed in a heap on top of him, crying out in agony as one of the fractured ribs snapped completely in two. He went silent suddenly as the broken rib punctured a lung, collapsing it. He gulped for air, terror filling his eyes when he couldn't manage to take even a tiny breath.

"Don't move a muscle, Holfaak. That's a medical order," zh'Aranthi said, voice stern to tell him she was serious. She injected Andy with tri-ox to ease his breathing. "Computer, emergency transport. Lock on Holfaak and Johansen. Beam both directly to the bridge. zh'Aranthi to Captain. Doctor Johansen needs emergency treatment, and the bridge has the only working EMH. I'm sending him now."

Andy, cradled in the arms of his patient, saw sickbay disappear and wondered if it was the transporter or his consciousness.

"Acknowledged," Rousseau said to the nurse.

As they beamed in, she turned to one of the junior officers working to help the EMH and said, "Give me a hand with him," and she helped to move the injured Doctor to an open space in front of the nav and ops consoles. "If we're going to be making this a temporary triage area, I need you to get some biobeds in here now, Ensign."

The young officer nodded vigorously and hurried toward the turbolift to make his way to sick bay. Several minutes later, five biobeds were beamed in to the bridge and they assembled them side by side perpendicular to the viewscreen.

"Warp core overload detected," the Computer alerted.

"Great. Lieutenant Devin, where is my forcefield!" Rousseau shouted.

A voice came over the comms. "Ensign Johns here, ma'am. Lieutenant Devin has just collapsed. We're sending him to the bridge for the EMH to take a look. Shortly prior to that he put up a level five forcefield -- we don't have enough energy for a level ten and it took all this time just to shunt enough for what we did manage -- but it may be too little too late."

Great, all my senior officers are falling around me, she thought with a sigh. "Alright, thank you Ensign," she responded as the Denobulan was beamed to the bridge and moved onto one of the spare biobeds.

"Warp core stabilized," the Computer assured, followed by a collective sigh of relief on the bridge.

"Science, once you're done getting those readings for Commander Shaell, please look into finding us a way out of here... wherever 'here' is."

Sickbay

Now that she knew where she was Mikaela felt a great wave of relief rush over her. Then when Doctor Johansen went down Mikaela tried to sit up. That turned out to be a mistake, as soon as she sat up she was instantly dizzy again, and one of the corpsman saw trying to move and stopped her.

"Ma'am, please don't move; one of the doctor's will get back to you soon."

"I need to be on the bridge," Mikaela said emphatically

"Not right now you don't," the corpsman said "Please don't make me restrain you."

Mikaela sighed; her Orion stubbornness wasn't going to get her out of Sickbay, at least not right now.

Bridge

Confusion and distress swept the entire Nova class starship. Only the Chief Medical Officer directly acknowledged the First officer's request. Shaell did not formalize himself with the lack of responsiveness from the senior officers; other species were not as resilient and deadpan as Saurians when caught in a crisis. Over the years, the reptilian Commander had learned this and learned to quickly improvise in such situations. Repeating orders or requests was as inefficient as it would prove futile at the moment... and waiting for answers even worse.

So he immediately assumed his overseeing role to the fullest: "Ensign Noth: meet me in transporter room 1 with pattern enhancers and respirators; bring a full portable damage control kit."

As he came out of the turbolift, he tapped again his combadge. "Ensign Kasilariss to transporter room 1. Bring four phasers mark II; a pair set to stun and a pair set for cutting. Have a tricorder ready."

When he entered the small transporter room, he saw that Senior Chief Petty Officer Alayna Byrne from sickbay was already there, a full medkit and medical tricorder at the ready.

"Any lifesigns over there?"

"With the level of interference from chronitons and radiations over there, difficult to ascertain, Sir," the red-haired, green-eyed woman answered, looking at the readout from the transporter console. At least one... on the main bridge, extremely faint; body temperature is dreadfully low despite an abnormally high heartbeat."

She showed a hypospray, ready to inoculate each team member once assembled.

"This should preserve us from radiation effects, but for less than an hour for everyone except you, Commander. But even for you, I recommend as short an exposure as possible. Effects of chronitons on living tissues are still not all that well understood."

As the Bolian engineer damage control specialist Noth entered, folded pattern enhancers strapped to his back, tools circling his waist and a tricorder slung over a shoulder, he gave everyone a breather mask and then went beside the transporter chief and checked coordinates and readouts of the beaming target.

"It's a mess over there, Commander," he said, his blue-skinned bald head bobbing with tension. "Whatever she was, this was a mighty big ship; at least over five hundred meters, nearly four million tons... but it's almost all so much scrap now... battery power, gravity, life support, all failing and barely present on the upper decks of the primary hull only."

"Federation?"

"Yes, Sir; hull alloy composition is standard issue... so is armor plating, at least what's left of it. No warp signature thought; their core is totally cold."

As the last away team member rushed in, they all looked at the Caitan female bounding to them with phasers for each, keeping the stun-set ones for her and the medic.

"Recommend staying grouped and beaming as close to survivors location as possible, Commander," she growled but surprisingly without any of the purring accent so often heard from officers of her felinoid kind. "I expect noxious gases, debris, fire and unstable structures making any exploration unsafe. We should not linger there, Sir."

"Noted," acknowledged Shaell who then flicked open intraship comm: "Shaell to Captain Rousseau: ready to beam out over there."

Kathryn Cellis played her fingers over the controls for the Nuntio's very limited sensors. She tried to ignore the chaos on the bridge as she attempted to get the information the captain had requested. The lack of power resources had slowed down the computer's processing power considerably, but the information was starting to come in slowly.

"Captain, I have sensor data on the vessel. Federation starship; Ambassador Class. Life support is active, but under extremely low power. No other active systems, at least not according to the sensors. No signs of any escape pods jettisoned, but no... Wait ma'am, I'm picking up a life sign, on the ship's bridge but it's very faint!"

"Acknowledged Ensign, thank you for the information," Rousseau said to the Science officer.

"Shaell to Captain Rousseau: ready to beam out over there," came the voice of the Saurian.

"Commander, you have life support on the other ship and it looks like there's at least one soul remaining. If you can save him or her we've done our job. Be careful over there, though," she added, with the unspoken understanding that she was not willing to casually trade the lives of her four officers for the chance to save one, despite the fact that she knew if she asked them to, they would.

As those four officers stepped onto the transporter pad, the First Officer nodded to the transporter chief without uttering the customary "Engage". As the material that made up the four people in front of him began to disappear into shimmering sparkles of energy, Chief Petty Officer K'Ralt frowned. He adjusted a few more controls and then slammed his fist down in frustration before trying a few more adjustments. "Engineering, I need more power to Transporter Room One NOW! Emergency procedures override," he added so there would be no

questions. There was no time for second guessing as the patterns stored in the buffer began to slowly degrade

On the bridge, Captain Rousseau had expected the First Officer to report in by now. "Rousseau to Commander Shaell, report," she said as she tapped her commbadge. No answer. She felt a chill down her spine as she did so again and said, "Chief K'Ralt, are they still transporting?"

"Chief!" she shouted after there was no answer.

"Sorry Captain, but I don't have time to explain quite yet," came the response.

"Excuse me!?" Rousseau asked incredulously.

"Just... give me... one... more... moment," he said in a long drawn out response while concentrating intensely on his adjustments. "There! I've got them!" he said, as the energy patterns shot through the void towards the other ship. "Ma'am, normally the pattern buffer adjusts perfectly fine for the Doppler shift that occurs when the matter stream is transmitted into the subspace domain, but in this case whatever was out there was causing the shift to be amplified. I had to shunt more energy to the pattern buffer to compensate so it took some time."

Eternity stretched inside a second as if they were transported one molecule at a time from the Nuntio to the derelict starship. For a moment, it was like feeling oneself dying...

Then, they were all stumbling and blinking amidst the smoke, darkness and fires of the mythical Human Hell. The corridor around them was short and littered with debris, panels burned, bulkhead twisted, connectors dangling from the caved-in ceiling. There were two doors each side of them, one jammed halfway open over an empty turbolift shaft flashing with sparks, the other jammed shut under the name "conference room." Behind the plumes of smoke from burning plasma conduits and spouting extinguishers, they could see at the other end two other accesses, one on the right, one in front.

As the chief explained the situation, Rousseau tried to wrap her head around the science behind Doppler shifts, but the long years since her Academy days was failing her at that particular moment. There was just one thing she really needed to know. "Rousseau to Commander Shaell, report in, please."

The voice of the captain sounded like a screeching banshee from a mile distant through a blizzard. Shaell answered slowly and loudly, his voice muffled however by the respirator. "Shaell here; transport complete, Captain. Proceeding to bridge."

His team was safe and sound, and so, he signaled to the security woman and she sounded the way ahead with senses and tricorder, pawing her way prudently to the other end, then signaling them to come join her. The ship was groaning and hissing around them like a dying beast.

"That one is... was, the captain's room," said engineer Noth pointing to the right hand door fallen into a burning, blasted room. "This one leads to the bridge alright... but there was a decompressive explosion before the emergency forcefield isolated it. And it won't stay up for long. Power failing."

"One life sign in there, Commander; but even here I can only tell you that it's not human... and falling fast."

They stood back as Kasilariss and Shaell used their phasers to cut out the jammed door ending the short hallway. Then, the Caitan woman waved them all back, made effortlessly a two meters jump to slam both feet on the panel and bounce back to them as it crashed beyond. A blast of frigid air struck them, almost putting out the small flames around them. Beyond the open access, they could see the bridge; or rather, what was left of it.

The dark, circular command center, barely lighted by their own portable lights and a few consoles flashing in dying spurts, was dreadfully cold. A flickering golden sheen alone was still isolating it from outer space, clearly seen through one huge tear in the ceiling.

"Sir... I don't recognize this configuration," commented Ensign Noth as they entered and looked around. "This bridge looks vintage -- early 24th century -- but the consoles are all state of the art, and this command chair left of the captain's... I never saw one like it before."

But they were all looking at the bodies, lying at their posts, their flesh burnt and frozen under a curious cross-strapping portable apparatus belting them all: a tall bearded Human sprawled over a lone console just before the offline viewscreen; a Human woman at helm behind him with slender, blue-skinned, white haired female-looking alien at tactical beside her; a Human lying before the engineering station at the back and a Trill male folded over the science one near it; and in the center of it all, sprawled on three chairs, a bald Deltan, a golden haired and mustached older man and what looked like a solidly built, dark-hued Andorian but with no antennae on his white-haired head.

"Here, Sir," medic Byrne shouted as she went to that last one lying in the exec seat. They gathered around the sole survivor; all but Ensign Noth who made his way to the other side. The turbolift door did not respond to his approach, but he ignored it, bending to pick up from the littered deckplates a large bronze plaque badly soiled and burned.

"It... it *can't* be..."

"What is it, Ensign?" asked Shaell, looking at his suddenly pale face.

"He turned the metal plate towards him. It was the ship's dedication plaque, defaced by damage, where could barely be deciphered:

USS **T**I*
Ambassador cl*** - Regis*** NCC *****1
Launch** Stard*** 17605.* - Nesrund Fleetyards
Andor sector - United Fed***** ** *****

"I memorize dedications of Starfleet ships, Sir... a hobby of mine. And I know this one! This... this one... she's..."

Unable to speak over his own feelings, he finished cleaning up the last engraved line for them all to see:

The Sun Never saw her Like Outside Olympus

"Sir... Noth finally blurted out, this ship... This is the... the *Artemis*!"