

Dire News

Chapter V: Brave New 'Verse

Featuring...

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

Captain Rousseau had spent the previous several minutes intently listening in and waiting on any updates from the XO. She repeatedly rubbed her sweaty palms on her uniform as she waited. In addition to the fact that their hull was heating up and it was currently about 33 degrees -- which felt like 45 in the dank ship due to environmental controls ceasing to be operational -- she was nervous for the officers on the other ship, which caused her to sweat even more profusely. At any moment the warp core could overload or a plasma conduit could rupture triggering a chain explosion. She kept going over it in her head. Was it the right thing to do to risk their lives for the sake of one? It was one of the choices she had never had to struggle with before on the little news ship; not even Captain Johnson himself had to when she was the Executive Officer.

She looked at her chronometer. She was forcing herself to wait exactly five minutes. Checking in too often could be disruptive to work being performed and show a lack of confidence in her XO's abilities. At the five minute mark, she tapped her com-badge and said, "Nuntio to Commander Shaell. What have you found so far?"

The voice from his communicator was slightly distorted, but Shaell heard his commanding officer well enough; yet, it took him a moment to respond. "Captain... according to all gathered evidence, this ship... is the USS Artemis. Stand by for confirmation; we may have a survivor."

The Caitan security officer, looking around for any sign of damage that could betray incoming danger, voiced what Captain Rousseau must have thought at the very same moment: "It *cannot* be the Artemis!" she growled. "We saw her in dock when we launched!"

"No other ship in Starfleet has 25th century consoles on an early 24th century bridge like this!" countered engineer Noth. "That's why I didn't recognize it! I've never been aboard Captain Kheren's ship..."

"That is *not* Captain Kheren," then hissed the Saurian First Officer, looking down at the body sprawled in the command chair. Under the frosty whiteness of lifeless space that had killed him when the hull ruptured above, the man looked middle-aged, blond-haired and with a curving mustache. And again, the Bolian engineer put a name out for them: "That... that is Captain Froud! Kevin Froud, the commanding officer of the Artemis before... before sabotage killed him during the re-launch of the Artemis! He *cannot* be here!"

Moving around the bridge and looking at the other bodies, he added: "This is Lieutenant Anthony Jackson here at the engineering station... but he never made it from Earth before the Artemis was hurriedly launched to rescue the USS Jeanne Mance! And here at the

science console is Lieutenant DeVem... but he too didn't make it in time from the Trill homeworld! But there, that is... was... Lieutenant Kelsey Alther at tactical; you can't mistake the only Kalthurian in Starfleet! And here at ops, that's Lieutenant Commander Michael O'Conner alright..”

“And *here* is Kheren... *Lieutenant Commander Kheren*,” pointedly finished medic Byrne as she kneeled with her medical tricorder over the athletic indigo-skinned, white-haired form in the Exec's chair, who's red collar only showed three pips, one hollowed, to the surprised stare of everyone.

“Alive?” asked Shaell coming closer.

“Barely,” answered the medic woman, hurriedly opening her medical kit.

They all gathered around the lying body as she pulled out a needle to fix on her hypospray. She noticed their surprised look.

“Andorian skin is chitinous; a hypospray does not penetrate it. Normally I would never dare cordrazine inside one's osmotic system... but he'll die anyway if I don't.”

“He's Andorian? With no antennae? And how can even an Andorian be alive after direct exposition to space?” wondered Kasilariss still watching around but glancing with her slitted eyes wide at the survivor.

The answer came when, suddenly, the dying Andorian's silver eyes flicked open and, to the surprise of all, his antennae emerged from under his thick white mane, wiggling weakly.

“He's a mutant,” Byrne said, showing her tricorder scan results. “Retracting antennae, darker skin, double male-gendered... and denser muscle mass with higher tolerance to lower temperatures than even any of his cold-world species. He probably activated the forcefield himself manually... too late for the others, unfortunately.”

“Ensign Noth; deploy the transporter enhancers,” ordered Shaell as he kneeled also near the dying Andorian. Then to him he said, “Lieutenant Commander Kheren; can you hear me? What happened?”

His voice was barely above a whisper: “Anomaly... out of nowhere. Got sucked inside... shields, engines, all useless. Captain Froud, the captain... he did not... did not listen to me. Did not... use tractor beams to... to make a protective shell... with the debris. We, we got hit... neutronium debris... plasma fire, conduits... rupturing. Warp engines... imbalance, so near sub... subspace... fracture. Chroniton surge reported. Fire... impact... hull... hull ruptured. Hull breach... cold... so... so cold...”

Suddenly, his callused hands grasped the arm of Commander Shaell, with such immense strength that even the surprised giant Saurian winced under the pain.

“The *door!* The door... to the *stars!* The stars... at the heart... of... the... *storm!*”

The sudden powerful outburst ended up in one last, final breath. Then, he slowly dropped back down, eyes closing, antennae dropping and retracting one last time.

In the coldness and the silence, only the hum of the medical tricorder was heard until medic Byrne softly said, “He's gone.”

“And so are we, if we don't get off this ship!” suddenly shouted Ensign Noth in alarm. “Warp core is going critical!”

Arinak listened to all of the transmissions to and from the “Artemis”. She couldn't believe it in the slightest. Then the last transmission was heard.

"Ma'am, we need to get clear of that ship and we need to do it now," she said. "I can't get any transmission to Engineering and the shields are still blown to hell."

"Red alert!" she said, signaling the ship wide alarm.

"Rousseau to Chief K'Ralt: Get them out of there now!"

"Yes ma'am," came the response, and the officers sent to the Artemis were beamed back to the transporter pad. "Got 'em."

The Captain then turned to Lieutenant Commander Arinak. "Yes, but luckily we still *have* some shields, Commander, despite how 'blown to hell' they are. If we didn't, we would have no options, because I have no concept of how to get us out of here without functioning engines or thrusters... do you?" she asked rhetorically.

"Reroute any remaining power we've got to those shields, Commander."

She then opened communications to the entire ship and said, "Attention all hands. This is the Captain. HOLD ON," was all she said, but forcefully and commandingly enough to get her point across.

The first thing they saw through the viewscreen was the Artemis exploding in a brilliant white light. The next thing they observed was the sound of the explosion that was so loud it perforated some of their ear drums and caused a high pitched ringing that persisted as they began to be pushed by the force of the explosion. The oddly smooth ride lasted several seconds as they accelerated further and further away. The lack of gravitons, and therefore the lack of inertia, caused their ship to be pushed easily away by the very minor forces on the edge of the explosion. As the explosion spread and the forces became greater, the ship simply accelerated faster and faster away to safety.

In the direction the *Nuntio* was heading was a small opening that showed stars. If anybody had been actually looking, they would've seen stars in just one small circular area of space. The energy from the shields remaining on the ship was actually forcing open a hole in the wall of whatever anomaly they were stuck in. As the shields collided with that wall the ship slowed abruptly and the real impact was felt at this point.

It was like being catapulted. The initial force accelerating the ship was easy. The impact at the end was not. As the crew of the *Nuntio* was again tossed about like ragdolls, the ship slipped through the hole it had created in the anomaly and came to rest in some sort of energy field that had caught the *Nuntio* on the other side like a spider's web.

The various hull pieces and other parts of the Artemis from the explosion had created similar tears in the anomaly or had exited from existing openings. One such hole was the one the *Nuntio* had arrived through. As such, a large collection of debris and a significant amount of Theta radiation exited the anomaly in a similar but opposite path to the one the *Nuntio* had arrived in... back toward Starbase 10.

Andy woke up as the energy of the explosion thundered through the ship. He tried to sit up, and found himself restrained on a biobed. His side ached badly, but he no longer felt the piercing agony.

"Ah, Dr. Johansen. I see the noise woke you up," the EMH noted.

Andy took a tentative breath. He was thrilled to do something so simple again. He looked around. It wasn't sickbay, it was the bridge, and there were several other biobeds there, each with patients occupying them; some of them moaning, a couple ominously silent. The red alert siren blared and the light flashed around.

"Let me up so I can help treat these patients," Andy said.

"I will once it is safe to do so, Doctor," the EMH said. "We are currently being pushed away from the ship that just exploded near us. At some point we will stop abruptly. In the meantime, lie still while I complete the repair on your rib fractures. You were quite fortunate that the rib did not puncture your heart along with your lung."

The ship started rocking violently as it was tossed around inside the anomaly. All Andy could do was lie on the bed, frustrated at doing nothing while the EMH attended first him and then the other casualties, moving smoothly and efficiently despite the bucking of the ship. He heard the command staff speaking tersely, mentioning that engineering still was offline.

The CMO remembered his MCPO was supposed to be in that department. He tapped his com-badge. "Johansen to Cady: Report. What's going on down there?"

Rousseau groaned as she lifted herself off the floor in front of the Captain's chair. Having advance warning this time prevented her from hitting her head again. Luckily the previously injured were strapped into the biobeds, so it appeared, at least from the bridge, that no more injuries were incurred.

"Almost 350 years of space travel and they have yet to give us seatbelts," she joked as she got back in her chair. Having no seatbelts was not just an oversight and all Starfleet officers knew why. Usually the inertial dampeners were fully working -- not operating at under 70% capacity like they were currently -- and the kind of sudden stop and start they had just experienced wouldn't be a problem. Had the inertial dampeners not been working at all, they'd all be dead, and no amount of seatbelts would've saved them anyway.

Kathryn Cellis was trying to find a way to navigate out of their current predicament as the Captain had ordered. Then the explosion happened... Kathryn grabbed the science console as the *Nuntio* shook to its foundations. As the ship began to slow, she immediately checked the console and she did not like what she saw... which was nothing.

"Captain, we've lost sensors. I'm getting no data whatsoever long range or short range."

Kathryn was sweating. *Is it getting hotter in here or am I really that nervous?* she mused. She really hoped Lieutenant Sirius made it back from Sickbay sooner rather than later.

"Ensign Cellis, you might try to reroute power back to sensors," Rousseau reminded the Science Officer. They were out of the anomaly, and she could see stars through the viewscreen. Therefore, she knew if their sensors were actually working, the officer should have been able to see... something.

"Helm: one-quarter impulse in our existing direction," Captain Rousseau said to Ensign George.

"Aye, Captain." She tried to move, but the energy web they were caught in resisted all attempts. "I'm sorry Captain, I don't know why we can't... impulse engines read at full operating capacity."

"Half-impulse."

Again, she tried to make the *Nuntio* move, but all attempts failed. She turned and shook her head.

"What is out there Cellis?" Rousseau asked, calmly hiding her frustration.

"I'm trying Captain..." Kathryn said somewhat absentmindedly. She was focused on the commands she was entering into the *Nuntio*'s science console. In running the sensor diagnostics she'd found that one of the primary power relays for the sensor pallet was heavily damaged, and she was working on trying to bypass. Unfortunately she hadn't paid

that much attention in her basic engineering class at the academy and she was having trouble remembering the command sequence.

"Bypass here... and here..." she muttered under breath "now reconnect here and..." She said a small prayer as she entered the last command. "Got it!" she said jubilantly. She took a second to be proud of herself before remembering the ship was in a crisis situation.

Kathryn turned the sensors loose on the area around them, and began collecting data.

"Captain... I don't know where we are, but we are definitely not on our original course. All the surrounding star systems are completely different from where we encountered the anomaly. We also seem to be caught in some sort of energy... web for lack of a better word. I'm not sure how we can break free at the moment, but I don't think that attempting to muscle our way out with the impulse engines is a good idea."

"Very well," Rousseau responded. "We don't appear to be in any immediate danger, so let's just take it easy here while we assess our situation."

"Commander Shaell," she said into her com-badge. "Once you are ready and our senior officers are all medically cleared for duty, I want you to assemble in the briefing room so we can discuss our current state. Oh and... glad to have you back on board," she added, grinning and relieved that despite how terrible the day had progressed; all her officers were still alive and counted for. It could've been much worse, as evidenced by the *Artemis*.

The Artemis, she thought. She reminded herself that that ship had really been the *Artemis*, and couldn't get the foul taste out of her mouth thinking that the *Artemis* was gone. *How was it possible?* She hoped her Chief Science Officer could answer that question in the briefing later.

"Lieutenant Commander Arinak, you have the bridge", she said. Then, she made her way down to Engineering to speak to the Assistant Chief Engineer about getting her ship back in working condition.

Mikaela had had enough of lying around. She needed to be back up on the bridge, and at her station yesterday. She sat up and for the first time she actually wasn't dizzy. Mikaela hopped off the biobed and began walking toward the door. A medical crewman she didn't know tried to stop her.

"Ma'am you really should lie back down, your neural readings were very odd."

"Not this time," Mikaela replied defiantly. "Something is very wrong out there, and this ship needs her Chief Science Officer."

"Ma'am, the doctor told you not to get up."

"He can court martial me later," Mikaela said over her shoulder as she walked out of Sickbay.

When lights came back on, the towering First officer of the *Nuntio* was seen helping both engineer Noth and medic Byrne back to their feet, each with one effortless sweep of his long, powerful arms. His scaled body had protected him from the violent tossing of the ship as they barely had rematerialized in the main transporter room, and so he was the second one to rise back up, unfazed; the Caitan security officer, Kasilariss had been first, deftly rolling with the impact back to her feet, right on a wall and then somersaulting back up on the floor once everything righted itself.

"Aye, Captain," he hissed back through his com-badge. "Away team, submit your report to your department chief; dismissed."

Taking long steps out of the transporter room, Shaell again tapped his chest communicator to open a shipwide channel. "All departmental chiefs: respond and confirm your personal status to me. Then, meet the Captain and myself in the main briefing room in fifteen minutes with a status report. Assistant chief will report in your stead if you are unable to. First Officer out."

As he spoke and reached the turbolift to have himself whisked up to their meeting room, his cold mind was already pondering what had just happened, what they had seen and felt; about an unexpected anomaly that should not exist and yet did... about the inexplicable presence of a ship that was not exactly the ship they knew... a ship that was not even supposed to be there...

Despite his emotionless conscious nature, he did not like the disturbing thoughts all of it fired up in his confused mind.

He did not like it at all.

As Mikaela entered the turbolift the request from Commander Shaell came over her com-badge, and while she wasn't technically cleared for duty she was at least up and about and figured she ought to report in. At worst she would accept whatever admonishment she received for disobeying the Doctor's orders later. She was determined to show Starfleet that reinstating her to active duty wasn't a mistake. Mikaela tapped her combadge. "Lieutenant Sirius to Commander Shaell: I'm up and about, Sir, and on my way to the bridge."

The turbolift stopped seconds later and Mikaela arrived on very different looking bridge. There were several biobeds setup to one side and the ship's EMH moved between them treating crew members. The space still smelled slightly of smoke from a shorted console, Captain Rousseau appeared to have left the Nuntio's tactical officer in charge. Mikaela's eyes finally settled on the science console where her Assistant CSO Kathryn Cellis appeared to be deep in thought. Mikaela walked slowly over to the young woman.

"Hello Ensign, did I miss the party?"

"Lieutenant! Am I glad to see you!"

Mikaela thought for a moment that Cellis was going to hug her, but then Cellis' expression turned to one of concern. "Are you okay ma'am?"

"Fine for now, bring me up to speed. What's happening?"

The two women stood close together and began conferring in earnest about the *Nuntio's* present situation.

Walking into Engineering, Senior Chief Montana watched as Alpha shift was hard at work repairing the damages from the ships recent encounters.

Montana had taken on some extra responsibilities with Lieutenant Devin sitting in sickbay recovering from injuries. His stress was made worse by the constant updates requested from his Denobulan boss who clearly felt healthier then the doctor was telling him he was.

Acknowledging the message, Montana waved over his staff. "Wey I have to go to a briefing and update the XO. You are in charge until I get back, or until LT gets out of sickbay."

Walking back into the Chief Engineer's office, sat down behind the desk, and opened a com with the bridge. "Sir this is Senior Chief Montana in Engineering. All repairs are

currently on schedule and power has been restored to all effected systems. We should have full output within two hours. As for the sensor boost that Lieutenant Devin managed to produce, I cannot quite tune the system the way he did so until, then sensors are only producing at one hundred and thirteen percent effectiveness. I will compile all status reports and bring them to you Sir."

As if it wasn't enough to have to report in to the Commander, the Senior Chief was immediately greeted to the sight of the Captain herself walking into the Chief Engineer's office. He quickly dropped the PADD he was looking at and stood up straight at attention.

"I just gave my report to Commander Shaell, ma'am," he said nervously.

To which Captain Rousseau smiled and responded, "Yes Engineer, I heard. At ease," and she motioned for him to sit. She took the chair across from him and said, "Senior Chief.. Montana, right?" He nodded.

She continued. "Everyone on the bridge was doing their thing and I felt a little ancillary, so I decided to try to figure out this energy web situation. Are you aware of what I speak?"

He shook his head, "No ma'am, we've been quite busy dealing with hull fractures, fixing the EMH, and repairing the warp core."

"Well, we're stuck in some sort of web of energy, is all we really know right now," she explained. "And so that is why I came down here because we are simply stuck and sitting tight. We have some time to figure out what is happening because there doesn't appear to be any immediate danger. Now tell me: is there something we can mock up to somehow just remove the energy from around our ship?"

Senior Chief Montana thought for a moment and said, "Well, ma'am. As you know, replicators take energy from the ship's power source and turn it into useable matter. Perhaps if we are able to collect it somehow, we can turn into anything... such as a harmless mix of nitrogen and oxygen for the ship's environmental systems."

"Great!" Rousseau said, standing up. "That's the kind of creativity I like to see. Start working on it as soon as you finish up with the most critical systems."

"B-but ma'am," he protested. "I'm not sure what that energy will do to our systems or if it is even compatible. We need to research it more first."

"Very well, do what you need to do. Speak to Lieutenant Devin if he is declared fit for duty and get the science team involved," she said as she was leaving. "Good work, Chief."

As she returned to the Bridge, she explained the overall idea to Commander Shaell and said, "X, once you figure out who's in charge of what departments, get the Engineering and Science teams working together on this."

"Do we have everyone ready for our briefing?" she then asked.

"Negative, Captain," Shaell answered with his strangely strong, whispering voice. "So far I only received confirmation and reports from Engineering and the Science department. Nothing from Operations, Tactical or Medical yet, although in their case, they are quite overwhelmed after our little tussle with cosmic forces... and I expect security must have encountered problems with the media crew."

Despite being unable to feel the emotional tension of the situation, the Saurian however had enough experience to extrapolate it from the situation and the people on board. "This situation has most of our officers and crewmembers on edge; I can only imagine how it must be for untrained civilians."

Then recalling Rousseau's orders, he finished, "I will contact the other departments again. With your permission, whoever answers will be assigned to report to the briefing."

Andy released the straps holding him to the biobed once the ship came to a halt. He sat up, pressing one hand against his ribcage and wincing at the soreness in his chest. At least the knifing pain was gone, and the dermal regenerator hadn't even left a scar where the EMH had obviously done surgery. He slid off the bed and looked over the other 4 patients recovering. The bridge EMH had them well taken care of.

He slid open the drawer where patient belongings were, grabbed a shirt and re-attached his com-badge before tapping it. "Dr. Johansen to sickbay: What's the status down there?"

zh'Aranthi answered, "All available hands, including some media people, are helping in triage. The sickbay is full, but everyone is currently stable. Engineering got the sickbay EMH online here, so we're making good progress. Lt. Devin is still unconscious, but the EMH thinks he should regain consciousness at any time. How are you feeling, Doctor?"

"I feel like I've had the tar beat out of me, but it's better than dead." The bridge EMH was scanning him again with a medical tricorder and frowning. Andy suppressed the urge to bat away the hologram's hand. "The damn EMH up here won't leave me alone."

"Good," zh'Aranthi answered firmly. "I recommend you follow the EMH's orders."

The EMH applied a hypospray to Andy's neck before he could stop it. Most of the pain vanished.

"And I order rest, Dr. Johansen," the EMH said.

"I'm fine," Andy protested.

The EMH cocked one eyebrow. "Don't make me confine you to quarters, Doctor."

"I'll go rest in the conference room for the staff meeting," Andy sighed.

"That will suffice for now," the EMH said. "Doctors make the worst patients."

"I know," Andy said, lips flitting up in a quick half-smile. He walked across the bridge to the conference room.

Back on the Bridge, Lieutenant Commander Arinak approached Commander Shaell. "My report, sir," she said. "I have one member in critical condition, currently being brought to sickbay. A few others have minor wounds that will wait until things are stable. The reporters are calmed down and if they aren't, then my person currently stationed there will ensure they will be soon. Lieutenant Johnson is on her way to take over tactical during the meeting."

Senior Chief Montana had stopped by sickbay to check in on Lieutenant Devin. He was stable, but still definitely not ready for duty.

He followed Dr. Johansen, Lieutenant Commander Arinak, and Mikaela Sirius into the briefing room.

"I guess that's everyone," Captain Rousseau remarked to the XO, so she said, "Ensign George, you have the bridge."

"Aye" came the response from their helmsman, who continued to monitor their situation, since she couldn't really do anything at the helm.

Mikaela walked gingerly into the briefing room and took a seat at the table. Ensign Cellis had briefed her completely on the Nuntio's situation and she at least had a theory to present to the captain. She might even have a way to get the ship out of the energy web, but she needed to consult with engineering.

One thing she was certain of: Dr. Johansen was bound to be upset with her for walking out of Sickbay, but she didn't care. Starfleet had placed faith in her by reinstating her to active duty, and she wasn't about to let them regret it for one solitary second. At the same time, Mikaela hoped the Captain didn't expect too many answers because she was still figuring them out!

The main conference room of the *Nuntio* was surprisingly large for so small a vessel. It was in fact as spacious as the one found on the largest ships like the *Sovereign* or the *Galaxy*, with a long twelve-seated banana-shaped table of polished wood and as many chairs along the wall facing the large transparencies looking out at the unknown stars they had found themselves amidst of, crisscrossed by waves of weird purplish energies.

Captain Rousseau was standing before them, silent and pensive, as the rest of the senior officers, minus the wounded Chief Engineer still in sickbay, gathered around the conference table. She did not acknowledge anyone, and no one spoke as they came in and sat. They were all still struggling to recover from their unexpected flight through the strange cosmic storm.

First officer Shaell was also standing, at the right hand of the high-backed chair at the end of the table, between everyone and the wide viewing screen available for all communications and data retrieval. As soon as everyone was seated, he lost no time in bringing everyone to the heart of the matter.

"The ship has suffered some damage and was wounded while crossing a cosmic anomaly displacing us into some unknown region of space, where we seem to be trapped within some unidentified force. Before we decide what to do next, we have several questions to answer here. Engineering, medical, security: what is our exact status and potential risk we are facing? Science: what really happened? Where are we and what is this force we are encountering that is holding us here? And from all of us: how do we return safely to where we are supposed to be?"

Towering near the captain's seat, the red-skinned Saurian blinked once with his huge eyes and waited for the summary report and answers from the bridge officers present. Still silent, the commanding officer of the *Nuntio* walked slowly to her chair and sat to look at each and every officer in turn, taking in the worry and the resolve fighting one another on their tired faces.

Mikaela listened to the Commander and was the first to speak. "We're still trying to figure out exactly what happened and why. I can tell you, Sirs, that the anomaly acted almost like a wormhole in that we went in one way and came out another, but at the same time we can't go back the way we came. It's... odd. On the other hand I may have some ideas about getting free of this 'web' we're stuck in. I need to confer with Engineering first, though."

Dr. Johansen had eased himself into a chair in the spacious conference room. He leaned back to ease the residual soreness in his ribcage. Most of the pain was gone from the hypo the EMH had given him, thankfully. He looked around the table at all the officers. He saw the green-skinned chief of science and rubbed his chin. Last he remembered, she was still supposed to be in sickbay. She appeared to be fine, until he saw her reach a hand to rub her forehead. She saw him watching her, and she quickly made a show of brushing some strands of hair off her forehead. The CMO could have sent her off to quarters right then. Of course, according to regulations, he'd promptly have to send himself off to quarters, too.

The *Nuntio* needed all its Chief Officers right now.

The doctor looked from Captain Rousseu to the large, Saurian XO, and back to the captain again. "Is the energy web emitting any significant levels of radiation? If so we'll need to be prepared for it, with inoculations and preventive shielding."

The Captain sat back leisurely back in her chair; right hand on the table in front of her, the other hanging loosely to the side. She listened to the reports while attempting to project an attitude of confidence with the situation to help keep the officers at ease.

"I haven't received any reports to that effect, Doctor, but the Lieutenant here," Rousseau gestured to Sirius, "would be the best person to ask."

"As for the method of getting out, CPO Montana here had an idea, and I'd like you to work with him, Lieutenant Sirius. Can you please give us an overview of our plan, Chief?"

The Chief stood nervously as if he was in a military tribunal. He was not used to addressing so many senior staff at once. "Sirs, our best option may be to essentially use our replicators to gather the energy and then replicate it into harmless gasses. We're still working out the details on how -- and, I could really use Lieutenant Devin's expertise on this -- but it would probably involve reconfiguration of both our deflectors and environmental systems."

He sat down and waited for the Captain to respond.

As the Engineer spoke, Rousseau leaned forward, pulling both hands up and crossing her fingers on the table in front of her. She seemed to be looking right through the Engineer as if attempting to look right out at the energy that trapped them, trying to understand its very nature.

After a brief silence, Rousseau nodded thanks to the Engineer and then looked at the Commander who was the only one left to report.

"What's our security status like, Commander?" she asked. "Am I right in assuming that we do at least have time to figure this out? If we need to leave in a hurry, what kind of weapons or devices do you think we could use as a backup plan to free ourselves?"

Arinak steepled her fingers for a moment and leaned back in her chair.

"Right now I'm a man down," she said, thinking of Clarg. She hoped the Tellarite was grumbling angrily at being strapped to a medical bed. If he wasn't... she shook her head. "Frankly, we have a group of near-panicked civilians, never mind that they're journalists and are asking questions I don't have answers for. And it may not be long before the crew starts wondering about this too."

She stopped speaking for a moment to think, going over every inch of the ship's systems in her head. At least, the systems that actually showed up on her tactical display. She rubbed her temple for a moment, she felt an odd throbbing headache coming on and it was the last possible time she needed one to appear.

"We're down to a few of our short range scanners, but for the time being we seem clear," she said. "As for weapons, we weren't planning to enter combat so I'll have my guys look into what they can do for supplies. As for the tactical part, I can only do my job with situational awareness. Without that, all I can do is guess and shoot as best I can, ma'am."

"Alright," Rousseau responded, flatly. She was hoping for some sort of ingenious military solution -- her area of expertise had been more security when she was a bridge officer -- but she understood that the tactical officer was just as lost as the rest of them. Without something tangible to shoot at, Rousseau couldn't fairly expect more.

Still, she could always hope.

"I should probably make a shipwide announcement," she noted, responding to the comment about the fears of the journalists and even the crew.

"OK... anybody else have a Plan B idea just in case our replication plan doesn't work?" she asked the group.

"Captain," said Commander Shaell, "lashing out our tongue in the dark is not likely to catch any fly."

Seeing the blank stares of the others, the First officer explained in more common terms. "It is not only difficult to make any plan without proper information; it is unwise. So far, we are just immobilized and seemingly our ship's systems are not adversely affected since our bumpy ride through the storm. Unless there is clear and immediate danger, we should endeavor to secure the current status of the ship first and study the problem at hand for a valid solution."

Looking outside at the strange purple haze covering the unknown stars they had found themselves amidst of, the towering saurian finished. "Basically, all forms of energy have either a countering force or a nullifying effect. Gravitons and antigravitons in case of gravity, for example. Once we will have identified the type of energy we are encountering, we will be more able to assess its real potential threat and any means to combat it, if necessary."

"You're probably right, X," Rousseau responded, slightly embarrassed that he had to think logically for her.

But that's what an Executive Officer is for, right? she reassured herself. *Relax, you're doing the best you can in a really bad situation,* she told herself.

"If there's anything else to find, other than what our sensors have already told us, let's find it. But we can't just sit around studying it forever," she said. "We still need to do something, because there's still the matter of getting back through whatever that... anomaly was. Clearly we're in an uncharted part of space..." she reflected on how they had seen many chronitons upon their initial entry... "possibly another time, so we need to get working on finding out how to get back through... that," and motioned to the aft of the ship.

She stood. "And we can't do that until we get out of our current situation, so let's get working on our main plan," she motioned to the Science and Engineer officers, "and see what else we can figure out in the meantime."

"Dismissed," she said finally, and the officers filtered out to their respective duty locations, with Rousseau heading to the nearest com panel.

"Attention all hands and various guests," she said to everyone in the ship. "This is the Captain speaking. It appears we were pulled through an unknown anomaly and are currently being held by an energy web of some sort on the other side of said anomaly. I want everyone to be aware that we are NOT, I repeat NOT in any immediate danger and we have everyone working very hard to figure a way out and back to our previous route. I'm not going to lie, we are in an uncharted area of space and so that makes our return difficult. But we have a plan in mind and I want to assure everyone that we will expend every last bit of energy and every last breath to get everyone home safe and sound. Carry on."

With a weary sigh and grin, she then looked at Lieutenant Commander Arinak and said, "You're probably going to have a lot of angry journalists to deal with after that one."

Mikaela turned to Chief Montana as the captain dismissed them.

"Chief, if Lieutenant Devin is able to speak then maybe we can consult with him in Sickbay."

I just hope they don't try to keep me there, Mikaela thought, remembering her exit from Sickbay. She was honestly surprised that Doc Johansen hadn't tried to have her confined or something. The pain in her head was still there, but it was muted and she hoped it stayed that way.

Andy slowly got up from his chair. "I'll go see if the EMH has made any progress. We can get him fixed up to do that much, and hopefully more." He looked the Orion up and down, sizing up her condition. If she had pain, she was hiding it well. He turned to Rousseau. His eyes flicked back a moment to Sirius to make sure he had her attention. "Captain, at your convenience, please send Lieutenant Sirius down to Sickbay so I can finish those medical tests I started. It's a bit difficult to effectively treat someone without all the needed information, but sometimes crises call."

Mikaela cringed inwardly; she knew that the doctor would try to get her back to Sickbay. She knew that what was happening was not a side effect of her assimilation, but she was very concerned about being a burden to her new ship and new captain. The Chief Science Officer was supposed to be an asset to a ship, not a liability. Mikaela looked back at the doctor, "I can take a hint Doctor, I promise as soon as the Chief, Lieutenant Devin, and I get this problem figured out, I will submit myself to your tricorder."

Rousseau smiled and said, "Looks like you'll have your patient, Doctor," as they headed out onto the bridge.

She then turned and was surprised to see the EMH, who had finally finished with all the patients on the bridge, towering over her by at least a foot with his arms crossed, a PADD in one hand and a medical tricorder in the other.

"And what about you, Captain?" he said in a stern, overbearing tone. "I don't suppose you've submitted yourself for an examination yet?"

Oh damn it, not now, Rousseau whined inwardly, while she outwardly rolled her eyes.

The EMH turned to Andy and said, "Sir, the Captain suffered a concussion during the initial incident and she needs to be checked out."

"I'm fine," the Captain stubbornly objected.

Andy pulled a medical tricorder from his pack and scanned Rousseau's head. "I haven't met a captain yet who hasn't said that." He looked at the results. "Definitely had a concussion, but everything seems to be healing nicely. It'll take you all month to die, at least. Come down to sickbay when you get a free moment, Captain. I know it's a bit too busy right now. If you get dizzy or develop a severe headache, though, I want to see you immediately."

She nodded in acknowledgment.

"Lieutenant, please lay back down you have not been cleared for your return to duty yet."

The frustration could be heard growing in the emergency medical hologram's voice. "Lieutenant Devin I must insist you lie back in bed."

Opening another drawer, Devin continued to ignore the commands from the EMH tossing items aside looking for his uniform.

"There are other officers down here do not make me request they get involved. Lieutenant again I must insist you..."

"Computer: deactivate the Emergency Medical Hologram."

The dull tone beep signaling a denied command could be heard in sickbay.

"This course of action was anticipated and therefore your ability to deactivate my program has been blocked."

As the large Denobulan smile on his face grew Devin closed the top drawer of the supply cabinet, stood and walked over to the control panel by the Doctor's desk. "Funny how everyone loves to use Engineering protocols to write codes against Engineers is it not my good friend?"

The EMH walked over to Lieutenant Devin as he busied himself pressing the buttons. The other crewmembers in Sickbay looked on in what could only be described as an equal mix of shock and amusement.

"Sir, it appears you are suffering from post concussion syndrome, strange I did not think that to be a condition the Denobulan brain could suffer from."

"Well you learn something new every day Doctor. The world is quite fascinating when you think about it. I mean look at me: I took half the starboard hull to the head and here I am walking around and standing here reprogramming things so I can turn you off."

The EMH walked over and slapped Devin's hands off the console.

"Sir you cannot just..."

"Actually I can; just like I programmed that charge cutter in the corner there to overload."

Looking in horror the EMH ran over to the charge cutter and picking it up quickly, deactivated the feedback pulse.

Smiling a large Denobulan smile, Devin winked at the EMH.

"Besides Doctor, I am still mad at you. You treated my head, but did nothing about my tongue."

"Your tongue? And keep it down we have some patients still under sedation."

"Yes my tongue. I bit my tongue. I have a very large and sensitive tongue and you did nothing for the pain."

"Well excuse me I was too busy putting your skull back together for you to..."

As the EMH was speaking he faded away and disappeared.

"Eh boring conversation anyway." Devin thought to himself.

Looking around the now quiet side of sickbay, Devin's eyes faded to a light blue color and smiling he continued to work on the console rerouting power to the ship's internal transporter. Devin stepped back from the console and stood upright dematerializing out of sickbay with a faint wave that could be made out through the transporter beam.

The hum of a transporter beam could be heard in Engineering as Devin rematerialized on the main deck, still in his medical patient jumpsuit.

"Someone please tell me what is going on, what we need to do, and why we have not started it yet."

On the Bridge, Andy's com-badge beeped, and he tapped it. "Johansen here."

The voice of the Andorian zhen nurse said, "Doctor, Lieutenant Devin just disabled the EMH and left sickbay against medical orders. I can't reactivate the EMH."

The Captain waved a dismissal for him to return immediately to Sickbay.

Andy repacked his supplies as he walked to the elevator. "Is everyone stable?"

"Aye, Doctor," zh'Aranthi replied.

"Good. I'll be there in a couple minutes."

The CMO took a quick detour to Engineering. He found the Denobulan buried in his work, and scanned him before the Engineer could notice. Andy pressed a hypospray of a mild pain reliever against the engineer's neck. *That* finally got his attention. The doctor leaned against a console, crossing his arms across his chest. "Well, Devin, now that I've gotten rid of that pain in your tongue, you have no excuse not to tell me how to turn the sickbay EMH back on."

With a wide Denobulan smile Lieutenant Devin looked back at the doctor and rubbed the spot on his neck where he just been given a hypospray.

"Did I leave the program locked? Oh my apologies." Rubbing his chin Devin continued. "Now how to turn him back on... you could always try asking nicely."

Since Mikaela hadn't been to Engineering yet she let Chief Montana lead the way. They entered the main engineering space and found Lieutenant Devin in the middle of what Mikaela was sure was an unwelcome visit from the *Nuntio's* Chief Medical Officer.

As the Doctor glared at her Denobulan patient, Chief Montana and Mikaela approached quickly yet cautiously.

"Sorry to interrupt," Mikaela said as they approached him. "I know you've got work going on Lieutenant, but the Chief here and I have a couple of ideas on how to get us out of this mess we're in and we wanted to consult with you."

"Well now that power fluctuation in the relays has been stabilized I have a few minutes. Suggestions, Chief, I would love to hear them."

Dr. Johansen ran his tricorder around the Denobulan's head again. "Hmm, yes. I suspected a severe head injury. Inappropriate answers to the CMO's request to turn the EMH back on clearly indicate continued confusion and the obvious need to return to sickbay." Andy's green eyes flashed as he caught the eyes of the Chief engineer. "Of course, if you can turn the EMH back on, it'll prove to me that you're just joking around, and that you don't need to undergo the 'tender ministrations' of my Andorian head nurse."

Mikaela couldn't help but stifle a laugh at the exchange between the Doctor and the Chief Engineer. To some, perhaps it would be odd to be laughing when the ship was in such a dire situation, but it actually made Mikaela feel a bit better. She decided it was probably best to let the Doctor finish up before they continued with the engineering discussion.

"Perhaps you should finish up with the good Doctor, Sir," she said to Devin "before we keep going. I'd hate to see him confine you to Sickbay."

Smiling at the Doctor's apparent frustration, the Denobulan just widened his smile.

"Doctor when I said 'say please' I was not confused." Pointing at the ceiling Devin continued. "The doctor was less than polite, so I simply recoded his activation program. If you want the EMH reactivated in sickbay just say please."

In the interim, Captain Rousseau had begun to feel a sharp painful headache appear, so heeding the Doctor's orders, she reported immediately to the sickbay. Finding that he was not there, she said, "Computer: where is Doctor Andy Johansen?"

"Doctor Johansen is in Main Engineering."

Why in the Milky Way is he there? she thought and proceeded there and just happened to catch the end of the conversation.

"What is going on here!?" she shouted authoritatively. "Lieutenant I ORDER you to turn the EMH back on! Montana, you will fill in our Chief Engineer on the plan you've come up

with, NOW... and Doctor, ugh..." she held her head in pain which had worsened from the shouting, "join me in sickbay."

She turned left without another word and heard Chief Montana very hastily explaining the plan to the Engineer as she rounded the corner of the hallway toward the turbolift doors to sickbay.

Commander Shaell went back to the bridge as the Captain headed down to sickbay, as was expected of the exec of any starship. For a while, he received reports of ship and crew status and dispatched people to their duties, making sure the ship would be back in the best operating condition in the shortest time possible.

As he did so, standing before his smallish XO chair as was his habit, he kept his enormous bulging eyes to the main viewer, looking at the strange pattern of purplish energies that was playing across the unknown star field.

The longer he stared at the strange sight, the more the Saurian felt... trapped somehow, without knowing exactly why. A feeling of almost physical discomfort was slowly but steadily pressing on him. It felt like the day he was born; trapped in the sands of the desert where his egg had been buried, emerging from the too small shell only to be engulfed in choking, burning sand, every struggle of his limbs burying him more and more as he tried to reach the surface, his whole body entombed in sand, in fatigue, in fear...

Shaell straightened suddenly and shook his bald head vigorously, blinking and for a moment gasping before taking a deep, calming breath.

His second brain, the one where his primal instincts and savage emotions were normally confined, was asserting itself over his primal one, the only place where reason prevailed.

This is very bad, he said silently to himself, feeling a sudden wave of apprehension his conscious mind again fought back. *My primitive mind awakes itself when I am still fully conscious! If I am affected like this*, he then logically reasoned, *it means only one thing.*

He turned towards the science station and the officer there."Scan the immediate area for neurogenic emissions."

"Sir?"

"There is something... out there... with us. I can almost... feel it."

Arinak made her way back onto the bridge, her mind going over everything that had been discussed in the meeting. She made her way to the tactical station. Most of her systems were still being repaired and her people were still moving through the ship, assisting the med teams and making sure the civilians didn't start a riot.

Then she felt an odd tingling sensation at the back of her mind.

In Engineering, Chief Montana had just finished explaining the plan to Lieutenant Devin.

"Alright, what kind of energy are we looking at here, Lieutenant Sirius?" he asked

"It's hard to tell," Mikaela remarked. "On the outside it looks like a basic fluctuating energy pattern, but as we pushed the sensors in further we noticed a complexity I've never seen before."

Lieutenant Devin nodded. "Well, perhaps we can rig the deflector to work in reverse and pull in the energy and then route it into an isolated system. Montana, please make the necessary adjustments to the deflector array for only one module and I'll work on isolating the module and the EPS conduits to one of the auxiliary batteries."

He motioned to another Engineering crewman and said, "We'll also need to isolate off one of the replicators and set it to replicate the energy into oxygen and nitrogen." He saw the look of interest from Mikaela and said, "With this defined pathway, we'll have a completely isolated system to test it out on without endangering the rest of the ship," he explained.

After making the necessary modifications, he tapped his com-badge and said, "Captain, Commander. We are ready for the initial test."

In the sickbay, Captain Rousseau was just receiving an injection from Doctor Johansen. "That ought to keep the pain down at least until I can take a closer look," he said.

Hearing the communiqué from Devin, the Captain said, "Acknowledged, Lieutenant. Proceed."

The test began pulling a minute amount of energy from the web into the deflectors and, as Devin kept an eye out on readings, the energy was sent to the replicator and materialized into the harmless gasses and pushed into the environmental system.

On the Bridge, Arinak felt the prior tingling grow much stronger. Her mother had taught her how to control her latent telepathic abilities, but she usually pushed them aside. She didn't want them to interfere with her duty.

Now, though, no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't cut herself off from the sensation. As she focused on it, the feeling intensified until it seemed to form into a voice, then a cry; a cry combining rage, fear and confusion. It pressed onto her very consciousness.

Then she collapsed.

With a speed quite astonishing for a being his size, the Saurian first officer rushed forward and caught the falling tactical chief before she hit the deck. Holding her whole body with one hand as if she was but a doll, he tapped his com-badge and hissed, "Bridge to sickbay! Chief Arinak just collapsed!"

Ignoring her pain, Rousseau bolted out of sickbay and made her way to the Bridge.

Then Shaell ordered out loud: "Computer; activate bridge EMH!"

In an instant, the now all too familiar form of the medical hologram materialized near him and immediately went through his programmed motions:

"Please state the nature of the medical emergency."

"Unexplained loss of consciousness," retorted Shaell dryly.

The holographic doctor did not miss the sarcasm in the rough voice of the giant officer.

"You might consider making me a permanent bridge officer with all this fainting about you are all doing here. At least, I will witness firsthand the cause of your problems and refrain from annoying the both of us overusing my opening sentence."

"I will certainly bring it up with the Captain," answered Shaell in a very serious tone. But then again, his tone was always serious. But it usually was not that tense.

"What happened, Commander?" Rousseau asked her XO when she arrived.

"Captain... she just came onto the bridge and fell unconscious before she even sat in her chair." reported Shaell.

There was a pause before he added:

"Captain... there is something about this part of space, this energy field surrounding us. It is affecting us... our minds. I have no explanation... but even I can feel... something."

The Captain moved over to check on the Tactical officer and attempted to rouse her. "Lieutenant Commander, can you hear me? Arinak. We need to know what you felt. Marissa?"

"Captain, if I may," said the EMH. He injected the officer with a hypospray and Arinak came to.

"Lieutenant Commander, what happened to you?" the Captain asked, unaware that she was being pushy and should have been giving the officer time to recover. "What did this to you?"

"Voices... there's so many... at once," she stuttered. "Intense... pain. Many voices crying out at once. Right after... the test... Captain!" she shouted, alert once more. "You must stop the test! It's hurting them."

"Who...?"

"Captain, PLEASE!" she yelled, wincing, again in pain.

Captain Rousseau tapped her com-badge and said, "Lieutenant Devin, cease the test immediately!"

"Aye, ma'am," came the response.

Just then the ship rumbled and shook and Rousseau, kneeling beside the downed Arinak, stumbled and fell backwards.

"What now?" she asked, rhetorically.

"They're angry," said Arinak. "They're... attacking."