

# MOON TREK NEO – EPISODE THREE : PRIME DIRECTIVE



STORY AND CONCEPT BY ERIN WINKING

Characters based on the characters of Ranma ½, Sailor Moon, and multiple original characters. Starfleet, the Federation, and various other parts based on Gene Roddenberry's Star Trek.

READER ADVISORY: This story contains adult language, situations, and violence. Recommended for readers 16 years and older.

©1999-2021 Erin Michael Winking

Written for fun, not to infringe on trademarks and copyrights.  
MOONTREK.DOUGLASAVENUE.COM

## Table of Contents

PRELUDE.....	3
CHAPTER ONE – MISINFORMATION .....	8
CHAPTER TWO – DISASTER .....	26
CHAPTER THREE – INJURED .....	50
CHAPTER FOUR – FIRST CONTACT .....	70
CHAPTER FIVE – DECISIONS .....	86
CHAPTER SIX – PLEADING .....	103
CHAPTER SEVEN – REVENGE & DECEPTION.....	118
CHAPTER EIGHT – DECISIVENESS .....	133
CHAPTER NINE – REVOLUTIONS.....	149
CHAPTER TEN – SPLIT.....	161
CHAPTER ELEVEN – SAYANORA .....	190
RESOLUTION .....	221

# PRELUDE

A couple of hundred light years from Earth, a large yellow star shone. One not that dissimilar to Sol. This star blanketed the six-planet system with light and warmth.

NZ-12G was its official name in the Federation Star Registry. It rested in one of the few areas of the Alpha Quadrant, near the edge of the Gamma Quadrant, that had yet to be touched by Federation, Romulan or Klingon vessels.

Four planets from the star sat a beautiful blue, brown and white marble, slowly rotating as it floated in a slight elliptical orbit around her sun.

If you did not look closely, you could swear that this was Earth.

But if you did look closely, you could see the difference. On the planet there were not many continents. There were only two large brown and green landmasses, separated by two mighty blue oceans, almost as big as the land.

A few small satellites orbited the planet, but nothing like could be seen on any of the more advanced planets like Vulcan or Earth.

But being less advanced had its charms. Having no technology anyone would want, this planet had not been caught up in the interstellar warfare that had ravaged the Alpha Quadrant for the past thousand years.

She did not have the Ferengi showing up to exploit her citizens, nor did she have to deal with the Orions coming to enslave their women. Even the Borg seemed disinterested with this planet, as there did not seem to be anything 'unique' about it.

Far from it though. On the surface of the planet, it was almost as beautiful as it appeared from afar.

There were very few clouds in the sky, and little pollution from industrialization. NZ-12G IV did not have any available fossil fuels, as the planet was relatively young, and the humanoid population evolved differently than most planets.

The population was forced to develop other forms of energy, and they had.

Most vehicles on the planet ran from hydrogen fuel cells. Most electricity was generated with solar collectors that dotted the roofs of the modern houses. The larger metropolises had nuclear power plants puffing out harmless steam.

Space travel had been achieved, but only to the effect of what they needed.

Orbiting the planet were two moons. One of which acted as a repository for the waste expended by the power plants. Once every six months a ship was launched to the moon from each of the continents.

While it was not the perfect solution, they felt it was better than burying the toxic by-products underneath the people's feet.

There were quite a few people. Several billion, planet wide.

The people seemed happy. In a park on the western continent children played with their domesticated animals. Men and women had picnics and old couples smiled as they fed the ducks.

Seems perfect.

One problem though.

The people looked a lot like humans. A few differences, such as hair color – some people were natural greenheads – but besides from that most could pass themselves off on Earth as humans without getting a second look.

However, to the people on the planet, there were two distinctly different peoples.

The people on the western hemisphere had spots on them, like a Trill. But unlike a Trill, these spots did not just run down the back of their necks and down their backs.

These spots dotted their entire bodies, sometimes in beautiful patterns, and usually in colors that matched their hair and eyes.

The Westerns were grateful for this. They felt that God had blessed them with such beautiful markings.

The people in the Eastern hemisphere did not agree. These people had no spots, and they were proud of that. They felt that God had blessed them by not giving them the 'mark of the beast.'

Wars had broken out between the two 'races.' Wars that had lasted for years. Wars that had killed hundreds of millions.

And the wars just did not stop.

The Easterns had developed a little more quickly than the Westerns. The east side of the planet had many mountains that contained vast amounts of uranium. The west side though was flat, mostly plains, prairies forest and desert. Uranium was far sparser and needed to be conserved to power the few mega-cities that lay near rivers, major roadways, and oceans.

In addition, the Westerns style of government was more socialist, giving almost all the tax revenue back to the people in the form of free education, free health care and intricate mass transit.

The Easterns had more a capitalist, free market system with heavy consumption taxes which gave the government almost unlimited funds to spend on military research and development.

However, despite their advantage, the Easterns were never able to conquer the Westerns. The Westerns had a four to one population advantage. An occupation never succeeded either due to being outnumbered militarily, or the massive insurgency the population managed.

In the southern Western city of Vida, the people milled about their daily routine. Men and women working at their places of business. Children, who had no school thanks to a holiday, played in the streets, hung out at the malls, and just did the things that children do when they get a reprieve from school.

In the middle of the city, between the remains of three bombed out skyscrapers and next to a pair under construction, laid the largest park in Vida.

The image of this beautiful, lush park on this beautiful, cloudless day, in the shadow of the results of war was poetically ironic to say the least.

It became even more so as a squadron of attack fighters roared overhead, heading east.

An elderly couple looked up as the four silver warplanes streaked by, leaving ironically beautiful contrails of water vapor behind.

“Where do you think they are going?” The old man asked his wife of fifty years.

The old lady shrugged and inhaled deeply. She had grown too old to care about things like that anymore.

The sound of children’s laughter was once again interrupted, this time by a loud, shrill wailing noise.

A man playing with his six-year-old son looked around as two military police vans screeched to a halt at the front of the park, red and blue lights flashing like mad.

“Don’t those bastards ever stop?” he pondered as the wailing of the air-raid sirens continued to blare.

A man’s voice bellowed out of one of the police vans.

“WE’RE HERE TO TAKE YOU TO THE LEVEL FIVE SHELTER!”

The old man looked to his wife.

“Level five?”

The old lady shrugged and inhaled deeply as a whistling noise began to fill the air.

“EVERYONE HURRY!” the army man screamed.

The people in the park began to realize that this was not the usual bombing that their city had endured almost every day for the last five hundred years.

People began to panic as the whistling became louder.

The look of pure fear on the hardened military people did not help keep the people calm. Many began to scream as they rushed to the vans, knocking each other down, trampling each other as the sound of the whistling became so loud it overpowered the air-raid sirens.

“I love you,” the old man said to his wife.

The old lady took her husband’s hand, kissed him on the cheek, and inhaled deeply.

A brilliant flash of light overtook everyone, followed by an explosion that could be seen from cities over a thousand kilometers away, and from a couple of military satellites in orbit.

When all was said and done, all that remained of the fourth largest Western city was a mushroom cloud that extended seven kilometers into the air.

The look on the evening news anchor was perplexing. Lt. General Una Garone could not figure out whether it was sadness, fear, or anger.

He would have understood all three.

The journalist had been covering wars since he was a pup. He had thought he had seen it all, but today had proven that he had not.

“While government officials haven’t released any official numbers, all indications are that no more than a handful of Vida’s six million people managed to survive.”

The man on TV’s face contorted.

“Yeah, that’s defiantly anger,” Garone acknowledged out loud.

“Our condolences go out to all of those affected by the Vida massacre.”

The Western Prime Minister took a step back. It was very odd to hear someone who has won hundreds of awards for his unbiased reporting use a, while accurate, bias word like ‘massacre.’

“General,” the Prime Minister said.

Garone jumped up. He hadn’t heard his commander in chief walk in.

“Sir.”

“At ease, Una,” the Prime Minister replied.

Garone nodded. He motioned for Prime Minister Pho Mao to have a seat on his couch.

“I like what you’ve done to your office,” Mao stated as he sat down on the couch.

“Thank you,” Garone acknowledged as he pulled up one of his chairs and sat across from Mao. Garone grabbed his remote and muted the volume on the television.

“What’s the word from the Eastern press?” Mao asked.

Garone hopped up and grabbed some papers. He quickly sat back down and handed them to his boss.

“They are celebrating it as a triumphant attack against the enemies of God.”

“Are they acknowledging that only about ten thousand of the six million killed were military?”

Garone inhaled deeply. “I don’t think that matters anymore. By using such a high yield weapon, they HAD to have known that it would have resulted in millions of civilian casualties.”

“So, it’s not about conquest anymore, is it?” Mao asked, thumbing through the reproductions of the Eastern newspapers.

“No.” Garone looked to the television, which was showing aerial pictures of the smoldering Vida. “It’s about extermination.”

“So, what are we going to do?” Mao asked, setting the papers down. “It’s going to be months before our first missile silos are active, and probably a year before the missile defense shield is operational.”

Garone’s eyes narrowed.

“We kill all of them before they kill all of us.”

Mao took this thought in for a moment.

“How?”

Garone shook his head.

“I don’t know, sir. But we cannot sit here and allow ourselves to be slaughtered.”

Mao nodded as alarms began to sound.

Three of Mao’s bodyguards ran into the office. “Sir, we need to get you to the shelter. We have incoming and WADN believes that they are targeting the Ministry of Defense.”

Garone stood. “Another missile?”

“No,” one guard shook his head. “Carrier based bombers.”

Garone grumbled as he helped the prime minister to his feet. Mao paused and looked to the leader of his armed forces.

“God will provide for us.”

Garone nodded as Mao and his bodyguards hurried out of the room.

“Maybe. But maybe we need to try and give God a little help,” Garone said to himself before he headed down to the war room.

# CHAPTER ONE – MISINFORMATION

Ranma looked at the two cards sitting in front of him. He groaned.

“Hit me.”

Akane complied, smacking Ranma in the back of his head.

“Idiot! You have seventeen! She’s got sixteen! Don’t hit!”

“Too late,” the dealer smugly informed Ranma as she dealt him a jack of clubs and scooped up the chips set out in front of him.

Ranma buried his head in his hands. Akane just threw her arms up in exasperation.

“Hopeless!” She whimpered as she walked across the casino floor.

Ranma quickly gathered up the few chips he had left and ran after Akane. He nearly slammed into her when she suddenly stopped, her jaw hanging wide open.

“Wh-what are you doing?!” Ranma hollered.

Akane spun around and put her hand over his mouth. “Be quiet.”

Ranma shook his head as he pried Akane's hand off his face. “I can barely hear myself think in here. No one else is going to hear us.”

Akane grumbled and pointed to a slot machine in the back corner of the casino. Sitting there, with her hair in a ponytail, was Ranma.

But it wasn’t Ranma.

“Is that the Captain?” Ranma pondered.

“How many other people look exactly like you?” Akane asked rhetorically.

“I don’t know. A few,” Ranma stated. His eyes moved down, towards his chest. “And she doesn’t look EXACTLY like me...”

Akane slowly turned to him.

“You’re cut off.”

Akane began to walk towards the red head that was quietly pulling the handle on the slot machine in one of the Ferengi casinos in Las Vegas.

“I haven’t drank that much,” Ranma reaffirmed to himself before tripping slightly and following Akane again.

Once again, he nearly slammed into her when she made a sudden stop.

“What are you DOING?” Ranma grumbled.

“Look at her,” Akane said softly.

Ranma took a long, hard look at the short redhead. Ranma noticed that she had grown out her hair and that it was now about ten centimeters longer. He acknowledged that she looked like she was very dressed up, wearing a formal dress, one that almost looked like a wedding dress. She seemed far to dressed up to come and play slots.

Then he noticed what Akane had noticed.

She was crying.

He would not have noticed if he weren't looking. Hell, only Akane could have noticed if they were not looking. But she was sitting on the stool, mechanically pulling the slot handle, softly crying, the tears slowly running down her face.

“Sh-Should we go talk to her?” Ranma questioned.

“I'll go,” Akane stated bluntly, knowing Ranma's tendency for insensitivity. “You go get us some water.”

Akane walked towards Karyn as Ranma sulked. He could not wait till they got back to the Sisko where he could give orders to Akane. She would not follow them, but simply giving the orders instead of receiving them would make him feel better.

Ranma paused for a second.

At least he assumed it would.

Ranma shook his head quickly and marched off to get the water as Akane slowly approached Karyn.

“Captain?” Akane whispered.

Karyn jumped slightly upon hearing Akane's voice. She quickly dried her eyes with part of her dress and turned around.

Her eyes were as red as her hair, and some of her make-up had run. She forced a smile on her face.

“Commander,” she sniffled. “What a surprise seeing you here.”

“I was thinking the same thing,” Akane said half a smile on her face. “Are you okay?”

“Hmm?” Karyn asked. She wiped her eyes again, acknowledging to herself that Akane knew that she had been crying.

“Yeah, I'm fine, thank you,” she lied. “So much smoke in here...”

Akane tilted her head. “What's wrong? You can talk to me. I'd like to consider you a friend if you're willing to consider me one as well.”

Karyn fought hard to keep the smile on her face.

“Everything is okay. I just thought I’d kill some time down here.”

Karyn looked past Akane at a couple walking across the floor. The woman was wearing a wedding dress, the man a tuxedo.

Karyn lost the smile.

Then she just lost it and began to cry. Hard.

Akane dropped to her knees to put herself at the same level as Karyn. She embraced her captain as Ranma walked back up. Akane flailed an arm at him, silently telling him to get lost.

Ranma grumbled, turned around and walked away. A moment later a crash is heard, and a female began to scream.

“WHAT DID YOU DO THAT FOR?”

Akane ignored her husband turned wife and squeezed Karyn tighter.

“What happened?”

Karyn bawled for a minute or so more before gently pulling away from Akane. Akane reached into her purse and pulled out a tissue and handed it to Karyn.

“Th-Th-Thank you,” she whimpered as she dried her eyes. Karyn paused for a moment, and then turned to Akane.

“My fiancée brought me here.”

Akane raised an eyebrow.

“We met about a year ago, before I came aboard the Sisko,” Karyn explained. “We came here about a week ago.”

Karyn resisted the urge to begin to cry again and continued.

“While we were engaged, we weren’t planning on getting married for a while. But a couple of nights ago he asked if we could get married here.”

Akane had to hold in her normal excitement when someone she knew was getting married. Obviously, this story did not have a happy ending, and she was trying to STOP Karyn’s crying.

“We were going to get married tonight. But last night we had an argument about me returning to space tomorrow. He wanted me to resign.

“I told him I couldn’t – that I had worked so hard to become what I’ve become. He said he was going for a walk to think about things.”

Karyn inhaled deeply. “He didn’t come back this morning. I had hoped he was just still thinking, so I got dressed and came down to the chapel.”

Karyn sniffled some more.

“He never showed up. I went back to the room, but the security code had been changed on the door. So, I called security and had them let me in.”

Tears began to stream down Karyn face again.

“When I went inside, he was with another woman.”

Akane gasped.

“He said that he needed to be with a woman who had her priorities straight.”

Karyn began to cry loudly again. Akane moved and put her arm around her.

“I noticed that they were both wearing wedding rings...” Karyn trailed off.

“Ca-Captain,” Akane stammered, her desire to murder the next person she saw that had testicles growing.

To Akane’s surprise, Karyn began to laugh.

“You know what the real bitch is? Every goddamned hotel in this god-forsaken city is booked. So, I’m stuck down here till the transport back to the ship comes tomorrow.

“I’ve been on ships for the past ten years, so I don’t have a home here. And my parents live on Risa.”

Karyn was both laughing and crying. Akane had never been so angry and sad before in her life.

“Captain-” Akane began.

“Karyn, please.”

Akane smiled.

“Karyn, we have room. Please stay with us.”

Karyn shook her head. “I can’t impose.”

Akane scoffed. “Nonsense. I insist. And if I must, I will get an Admiral over here to order you.”

Karyn chuckled, and dried her eyes some more.

“I would really like to get out of this stupid dress.”

Akane stood and helped Karyn up. She turned to the slot to cash it out for Karyn but noticed there were no credits on it. Karyn paused and began to speak, staring off across the casino floor.

“He brought all the money. I – I was just sitting here pulling the handle.”

Akane shook her head and took Karyn’s hand as they headed towards the turbolift.

On the way they stopped at a still wet and still female Ranma playing a slot machine. He pushed the button, it beeped, then lights started flashing and bells started ringing.

“WOOOOOOOOOO!” Ranma yelled, jumping into the air.

After the bells finished, Ranma turned to Akane.

“And you said I suck. I just won seventeen-hundred credits.”

Akane rolled her eyes. “That’s a sliver machine. You’ve won seventeen slips.”

Akane walked off with Karyn, leaving Ranma to glare at the machine. All that noise, all that commotion for less money than he put into the machine to begin with.

Ranma turned red.

“KATCHU-“

Akane and Karyn looked up to see security toss Ranma into their room.

“She’s not allowed in the casino for the rest of the night,” the guard informed Akane.

-----

Lieutenant J.C. Devall and Lt. Commander Usagi Tsukino looked up at the warp core towering over them. J.C. tilted his head, while Usagi developed a confused look on her face.

“It looks exactly the same,” she commented.

J.C. nodded.

“All the changes are on the inside,” Commodore T’Kuk stated.

“What exactly did you change?” J.C. asked.

The chubby Vulcan laughed.

“Well, the details are classified.”

Both Usagi and J.C. slowly turned to look at T’Kuk.

“You’re kidding,” Usagi asked in utter amazement.

“Not at all!” T’Kuk grinned.

J.C. began to shake his head furiously.

“How the hell am I-” he looked to Usagi who had already scolded him about not including her in such matters, “-we supposed to fix the damn thing if we don’t know what’s in there?”

T’Kuk raised an eyebrow. “Why do you think you will need to fix it?”

“Oh, I don’t know!” J.C. exclaimed. “Maybe because this ship has been shot at more in the last eight months than every other ship in the fleet combined?”

J.C. began to walk around engineering, muttering to himself, but making sure T’Kuk heard it.

“Oh no Mister Cardassian, please don’t shoot our engines ‘cause they won’t tell us how to fix them!”

J.C. stormed into his assistant chief engineer’s office and demanded the sliding door slam. It did not, which seemed to infuriate him more.

Usagi, who had been watching J.C.’s tantrum, slowly turned to T’Kuk.

“You’re not serious, are you?”

“Why does everyone think I would be joking?” he asked, turning towards the warp core, which still sat dark.

“If, by chance, there is a failure, we will immediately send out a repair ship and tow you back here and remove the upgrades.”

The Vulcan stroked the thin goatee he adorned. His voice deepened and he began to talk much more methodically.

“The technology inside of this machine is far too valuable to risk it falling into enemy hands.”

Usagi sighed in resignation and nodded.

“You have nothing to worry about, my dear,” T’Kuk said, returning to normal and placing a hand on the petite blonde’s shoulder; an act that for some reason sent a chill down her spine.

“We’ve been testing phase two of the new engines for months and we haven’t had a single failure. I think the risk is worth being able to hold warp 9.9 for almost 72 hours.”

Usagi slinked away from T’Kuk and nodded.

“Can we start the restart sequence yet?” she asked, putting some distance between the two.

“My team needs just a couple of more hours to finish up checking connections, conduits, that kind of stuff,” T’Kuk laughed. “I’d almost think you were in a hurry to get out of here. Your crew won’t all be back for almost another twenty-four hours.”

Usagi nodded. “Yeah, I know, but when the Captain wants to leave, I want us to be able to leave.”

T’Kuk walked over to Usagi and put his arm around her.

“Oh, don’t worry, you will.”

T’Kuk smiled a big, toothy grin at Usagi and walked away and to the turbolift.

J.C. came storming out of his office, throwing PADDs in every which direction, and stormed towards a different turbolift.

“...and no, not one nebula has ever fried a warp core out in the middle of nowhere. We should drag their sorry asses out with us...” he trailed off as he stepped into the turbolift.

“What’s his problem?”

Usagi turned around to see Makoto standing there, smiling at her. She was still wearing her civilian clothes and carrying a suitcase.

“Hi!” Usagi grinned as she ran over and hugged her friend. “How was Risa?”

“Perfect, as usual,” she grinned. Usagi lost her grin as she looked around.

“Where’s Gosnell?”

Makoto frowned. “They wouldn’t allow him into the nebula. So, he’s stuck camping out on a Runabout just outside the defense perimeter.”

“What? Why not?”

“He’s a civilian, and they’re just being cautious. I left him plenty of food and water.”

Both women laughed.

“Hey, I need a favor.” Makoto asked.

“Sure.”

“I – Lieutenant Jansen and I REALLY need more room in the tactical station. Every time we turn to hit a button, we slam into each other. Is there any way you can have someone push forward the forward panel?”

The turbolift opened and J.C. came storming back into engineering.

“...god forbid an asteroid gets through the deflector array and nails the nacelle...”

“HEY!” Usagi called out.

J.C. stopped and turned to his boss. “Yeah?”

“Is there a way to move the forward control panel in the tactical station forward?”

Makoto looked to J.C. and batted her big, dark green eyes at him.

“That doesn’t work when a married woman does it, Commander,” J.C. stated. Makoto groaned.

J.C. pondered the situation to himself for a moment. “I think I can do it pretty easily. I’ll get on it right away.”

“No hurry,” Makoto smiled.

“It beats sitting down here next to that death trap,” J.C. grumbled as he grabbed a tool kit and headed towards the turbolift.

“Death trap?” Makoto asked.

Usagi shrugged.

-----

Salek looked around as he approached the Vulcan Administration Building. The planet seemed exceptionally red today. If he hadn't repressed the emotion that appreciated both beauty and irony, he would have found it both beautiful and ironic.

Beautiful because of the way the colors were hitting the clouds; ironic because red was the color of blood.

Human blood.

Salek continued inside and showed his identification to the guards at the door who allowed him into the secured area. He then proceeded down the corridor, nodding a greeting to the Vulcans who walked past him.

Eventually he found himself at turbolift 16A. He pushed his palm up to a palm reader next to the turbolift doors.

"Confirm identity please," the computer requested.

"Salek, Vulcan High Command, Ministry of Intelligence."

"Identity confirmed," the computer replied dryly. The turbolift doors opened and Salek stepped in.

"High Command chambers," he ordered.

The turbolift complied and quickly took him up the seven levels to the floor that contained the High Command chambers, the office of the Chairman of the High Command, and the Vulcan Federation Council members' offices.

Salek walked down the corridor, occasionally pausing to look out the window and out into the Vulcan capital. Soon he stopped outside of the High Command chambers door.

Salek paused, put on his best game face – which of course looked exactly like his everyday face – and stepped in. The fifteen other members of the high command turned when they heard the door open and looked to Salek.

"I apologize for my tardiness. I wanted to make sure I had everything in order, and everything confirmed."

The High Council chairman nodded in understanding.

"We appreciate your attention to detail, Salek."

Salek nodded thanks and took his seat.

Salek sat through about an hour of the meeting in silence as the High Command discussed every day, mundane Vulcan issues. Salek found these meetings to be incredibly boring, but of course being bored was an emotion, so they did not bore him.

Salek was a walking contradiction.

He could be both what Vulcans strived to be, and what Vulcans hated about themselves. He had emotions, and he would occasionally show them – just never in public. He was sarcastic, even for a Vulcan.

And he hated the Federation.

He did not hate humans though. In fact, he often admired them. To him it was a big achievement to advance like they did, even with their handicap.

But he and a growing number of Vulcans were beginning to resent how the Federation was beginning to overshadow the Vulcans and Vulcan achievements.

To them, the Federation had used the Vulcans, abused them, and now had them as their pets.

Four months ago, a Federation ship fired a torpedo at the planet and destroyed a Vulcan village. While Salek's attempt to hang the man responsible for that had failed, it did stir public discussion.

Salek, and his group, used that to their advantage, showing how the Federation disregarded the safety of Vulcan but not only allowing the act to happen, but allowing it to go unpunished.

More and more, the public grew wary of the Federation and its intentions. Salek knew now was the time to strike.

"Salek, you have a presentation from the Ministry of Intelligence?"

Salek nodded and stood.

"Thank you, High Commander Vora," Salek bowed to the group.

"I have a rather disturbing report from Earth. I assume that you are all aware of the Federation organization known as 'Section 31', yes?"

Everyone nodded.

"We have reliable intelligence that Section 31 is planning covert operations on Vulcan, including the bombing of both Vulcan government installations and civilian targets."

"What?" some of the members called out. One, an older man stood.

"Why would the Federation do this?"

Salek inhaled deeply. "Captain Ranma Saotome, the man who murdered six Vulcan citizens, has a former Section 31 operative as his chief of security.

"It is our belief that she was angry over our request for justice and asked Section 31 to punish us."

"What proof do you have of this?" the old man asked.

"We have no proof of the motive, but we do have proof of the planning of the attacks.

"The Ministry of Intelligence has had a Vulcan inside Section 31 for several years now. This agent has sent us these operational planning documents."

Salek began to hand out PADDs to the other members.

“Section 31 isn’t one to normally keep records and write down their plans, but for an operation this coordinated and this massive, they had too.”

One of the Vulcan officials reads the PADD halfway, and then sets it down.

“Have you contacted the Federation Council about this information?”

Salek nods.

“Yes. However, the Council refuses to acknowledge Section 31’s existence, and by default, refuses to do anything about it.”

The man shakes his head again. “And you know for a fact this ‘Section 31’ exists?”

Salek has never really liked this guy and was beginning to remember why.

“Asides from the fact that we have an operative in deep cover with them, their ships have been detected flying in and out of the Chii Nebula, where Starfleet has an experimental shipyard.

“We know they operate out of a front business in the Earth city of Chicago, and we know, from intercepted communications, that the Sisko’s security chief was an operative.”

The members all mumbled to themselves for a moment before Vora stood.

“What do you recommend?”

“A covert strike of our own on both the shipyards in the Chii Nebula and their headquarters on Earth. We should also increase planet side security.”

Vora groaned.

“I don’t think I am ready to authorize an assault on Federation installations,” he walked to the window. “I agree with the additional security precautions here, but nothing more.

“I will personally travel to Earth and speak with the Federation president about Section 31 and your intelligence reports.”

Salek nodded and sat back down. It was not what he was hoping for, but the gasoline had been poured. All that was left was for his partner to strike the match.

-----

Councilman Zack Young smiled at the pretty, young Petty Officer who filled up his coffee mug as he sat in the Federation Council Chambers in Paris.

The young, enlisted officer smiled back and walked to the next councilman as the Trill representative droned on about trade routes and some other nonsense that interested Young about as much as grass growing would have.

Being a politician had its drawbacks, and this was certainly one of them.

Young’s mind wandered as his spotted counterpart began to talk about warp field damage to an asteroid belt.

Young was nowhere near as complicated as Salek. Like Salek, Young did not hate Vulcans. He did not really like them, but he didn't dislike them.

However, he hated the peacenik nature of the Vulcans.

That is how he ended up working with one in his current scheme.

Young, and several other high-ranking officials within the Federation, and a whole lot of Starfleet commanders were tired of being attacked by every single faction in the quadrant. They were tired of constantly being on the defensive.

They wanted to go back to being what humans do best.

Conquer.

Peace and love had not worked. In the three-hundred-year history of the Federation they had gone maybe fifteen years without a major conflict.

The people who thought like Young were realizing that they were going to have to send a message.

The Federation was NOT to be messed with.

What better way to do that than by invading and destroying a major superpower?

The Breen were at the top of list right now. Their alliance with the Dominion was not forgotten, nor forgiven. The Cardassians had been a thorn in the Federation's side for years. The Klingons were friendly – for now. But the minute Martok was gone, who would know.

And obviously the Romulans were never to be trusted.

But the Vulcans didn't want to be drug into another war, especially an offensive war of conquest. They had enough problems of their own, with the rising number of Vulcans who were beginning to embrace emotions becoming a threat to the High Command, and other, less obvious domestic issues that tend to plague any civilization.

Plus, there was a split beginning to form in the High Command. With the Federation's military capacity diminished from the Dominion War, several Vulcan politicians wanted to make building a large military of their own a priority. Others, including the Vulcan military did not, and preferred to work with Starfleet.

"Councilman Young?" one of the suits called out.

Young sat up and nodded. "Yes, sorry."

"You had something you wished to discuss?"

Young nodded and stood.

"Starfleet Intelligence has learned that groups of separatist Vulcans are planning a covert, terrorist attack on Starfleet and Federation installations here on Earth."

Everyone in the room seemed to gasp in unison. The two Vulcans on the council looked to each other, and then turned to Young.

“What proof do you have of this?” one asked.

Young began to pass out PADDs.

“We have been working very closely with the Vulcan Ministry of Intelligence. Based on our evidence we believe that the insurgents are planning on attacking an unnamed shipyard and a Federation facility based in Chicago.”

The Vulcans looked over the PADDs.

“Has the High Command been informed of this?”

Young shook his head. “The Ministry believes that the separatists have infiltrated the High Command.”

“What sect?” the other Vulcan asked.

“A large group, including many in the military, who follow the teachings of Sybok,” Young explained.

The Vulcans both cringed at hearing a forbidden word spoken. They read over the PADDs as one of the other council members speak up.

“What do we do about this?”

“We know that they have control of some Vulcan ships. I would suggest that we place our defenses around our shipyards on high alert for Vulcan ships and increase the LDF presence in Chicago.”

Another councilman piped up.

“I wasn’t aware that we had any major installations in Chicago.”

Young grinned.

“We have a couple.”

One of the Vulcans stood.

“Are you suggesting that we allow Starfleet to fire on Vulcan ships?”

Young shrugged. “If they get within weapons range of any of our shipyards, yes.”

“That’s absurd,” he stated before sitting back down.

“Now, now,” Young smiled. “there’s no need to get *emotional* about it.” The Vulcan turned to Young and gave him a stare. “I’m not talking about simply destroying these ships. If one comes by, we scan them, ask their business, and search them. If they fail to comply, then we do what must be done.”

“These are FEDERATION citizens,” the Vulcan growled.

“These are terrorists, sir. They seek to destroy what Vulcan has worked very hard for by trying to separate Vulcan from the Federation and causing more Vulcans to embrace their emotions.”

The Vulcan sighed.

"I call for a voice vote on the authorization of Mr. Young's plans," one member called out.

"Second," another said.

"All in favor?" the Council President asked.

"Aye," many the twenty members of the council called out.

"Opposed?"

"Nay," the two Vulcans replied.

"Motion passes."

"This should be taken up with the general assembly," one of the Vulcans protested.

"Defensive military operations are the responsibility of the council, not the general assembly," Young replied.

The President nodded in concurrence and turned to a different Councilmember.

"What's next on the agenda?"

The second human began to drone on as Young leaned back in his chair and grinned.

*\*It's beginning,\** he thought happily.

-----

Ranma slowly opened her eyes. The sunlight streaming in through the window immediately forced them closed again.

"Why do I drink so much?" she mumbled.

She sighed upon hearing her voice. She didn't remember everything, but apparently, she got wet last night and never bothered to change back.

She sighed and rolled over, and promptly slammed into the floor.

"What the hell?"

Ranma looked up and saw that she rolled off the couch placed in the corner of her and Akane's hotel suite. She slowly sat up and looked around.

"Did we fight?" she pondered as she pulled herself to her feet.

"Computer, time."

"10:14," the computer replied.

"HOLY SHIT!" Ranma exclaimed, running towards the bedroom. "AKANE!"

She slammed to a halt when she saw Akane sleeping in the bed, the comforter on the floor. She screamed when she saw herself sleeping in the bed, snuggled up with Akane wearing nothing but a lacy blue bra and a matching pair of panties.

Akane stirred. "Ranma?"

She looked at the tousled red hair that was in her face.

"Why are you a girl still?" She asked.

"I don't know," Ranma replied.

Akane shot up when the voice replying to her came not from the red head next to her, but from behind her.

"Ranma?"

She turned to see Ranma. She turned back to the red head in the bed.

"Oh."

Ranma tilted her head. "Is that the captain?"

"Who else would it be?" Akane asked.

Ranma grumbled.

"Stop looking at her!" Akane exclaimed, realizing that Karyn was half naked.

Akane pulled the comforter over Karyn and slid out of the bed. Ranma quickly turned away as to not incur any wrath that would make his hangover even more painful.

"Akane, it's a quarter after ten."

"WHAT?" Akane screamed. She quickly began to gather some clothes, stopping next to the captain.

"Captain - Karyn, wake up," Akane shook her gently.

"Mmmm?" Karyn mumbled.

"We have forty-five minutes to catch our transport!"

"Okay..." she mumbled.

Akane and Ranma just stared at her for a moment. Finally, Akane's words sunk in.

"WHAT?" Karyn screamed.

She hopped up and began to look around.

"Where are my clothes?" She turned to Ranma. Ranma quickly turned away again.

*\*No wrath... No wrath...\** she prayed.

Akane inhaled. "Um..."

Karyn remembered. "Oh yeah."

"I am sure I have something you can wear," Akane grinned.

Karyn smiled. "Thank you."

Ranma continued to stand, looking at the wall.

"We need to get dressed! Ranma, finish packing!" Akane ordered.

"Yes, boss," Ranma sighed as she began to walk around, picking up their belongings.

"You're going to Titan?" the conductor asked Karyn, Akane, and the still female Ranma.

"YES!" Akane said for about the sixth time.

"There is no transport to Titan today," he stated.

"The tickets say 60917 at 11:00," Akane protested.

"Well, that's today," the conductor acknowledged, looking at the PADD Akane nearly smacked him in the face with. The conductor did some things on his terminal for a little bit, before looking up at the group sadly.

"Sorry, I don't know what to tell you."

Akane nearly jumped the counter when she felt a large hand on her shoulder.

"Glad you could make it," a man stated.

The three girls turned around to see Admiral Larson standing, dressed in a floral print shirt and khaki cargo shorts, looking almost like he'd just gotten back from a time-share conference in Maui.

"Admiral," the three acknowledged.

"Your transport is this way," he smiled, motioning for the group to follow him.

The trio nodded and followed Larson across the Spaceport lobby. He came to an area and stopped. Ryouga and Minako were standing there, kissing.

"Ahem," Larson coughed.

Ryouga swatted in Larson's general direction.

"LIEUTENANT!" Karyn screamed.

Ryouga knew that voice, as did Minako. Both let go of each other and spun in the direction of Larson and their three shipmates.

"Admiral?" they both asked, confused.

"Sorry to surprise you all like this, but unfortunately there isn't time for a leisurely ride back to the ship," Larson hit his communicator.

"Larson to Hacienda, six to transport."

Within a moment the six and their baggage vanished.

Larson waited for everyone to get seated in the Sovereign class ships conference room before he began.

“We have a situation with the Cardassians,” Larson stated.

Ranma, who had finally transformed back to a male, groaned. Loudly. He was so happy to no longer have to patrol the border, and now they were going back. Larson smirked at Ranma’s audible frustration before continuing.

“Six days ago, a fleet of Hideki class cruisers attacked a Federation colony. DS9 sent their ships, which managed to destroy the Cardassian task force, but were not able to stay. Yesterday, long range sensors detected another small fleet on route to another colony.

“As usual, you are the only available ship that can get there before the attack force does.”

Karyn raised her hand.

“Yes?”

“That’s almost a two-day trip.”

“Your engine upgrades can hold warp 9.9 for 72 hours. If you go at 9.9 the whole way there, you can get there in a little over a day and intercept the task force before they arrive. They have an ETA of 33 hours.”

Karyn whistled. 9.9 was fast and took a lot to keep that speed. If they could hold it for 72 hours before starting to lose their warp field they could be almost anywhere in no time.

“I hope you don’t mind, Captain, but I’ve had your crew begin pre-flight. We’ll be in the Chii Nebula within an hour, and you should be ready to go immediately.” Larson explained.

“Not at all, thank you.”

Larson nodded.

“I know this isn’t you guys want to do,” he again smirked in Ranma’s direction, “and I know that this isn’t what I want your ship out doing, but unfortunately we have a developing situation here that is tying up a lot of ships.”

“What situation?” Ranma asked.

Larson sighed. “It’s really nothing for you to worry about. Just intelligence reports that will probably end up being unfounded.”

Ranma nodded, knowing that Larson was keeping something from him.

Karyn noticed it too and hoped that everything was going to be okay.

The turbolift doors to the bridge slid open and Ranma, Ryouga, Minako, and Karyn stepped out.

“CAPTAIN ON THE BRIDGE!” Makoto called out.

Karyn nodded a weak acknowledgment.

Everyone took his or her place, except Karyn. She stood and looked around the bridge. Ryouga was sliding into his seat at flight ops. Ranma was taking his seat to the right of the captain’s chair. Shampoo was seated in the new seat to the left of the captain’s chair.

The CONN had been reconfigured from two seats to three, saving Shampoo from having to sit on the retractable bench on the far-left side.

Makoto and Lieutenant Amanda Jansen were standing in the tactical station. Karyn was not quite sure what, but something seemed different about it.

In the operations station, Minako was getting reacquainted with her computer, while Lieutenant Kaii began to silently question her about her vacation.

Karyn sighed.

She thought being back on the bridge would make her happy, but something was different. Standing there, staring at the back of her seat was not making her feel any better.

In fact, being here was making her feel worse.

Karyn shook off those thoughts. She had plenty of time to deal with this later. Right now, she had people who needed her help. She inhaled deeply as she walked down to her chair.

“Departure status?” she asked.

“All stations report ready,” Ranma replied.

Karyn nodded.

“Clear all moorings,” she ordered.

Outside, the magnetic tethers that held the massive Trinity class warship suspended in space released their hold, and snapped away, retracting into the giant claw that surrounded the Sisko.

Karyn looked to Shampoo. “Take us out, Commander.”

Shampoo smiled and nodded. She stood and walked behind Ryouga.

“Ahead, full thrusters.”

Ryouga complied and the ship began to drift forward. Ryouga smiled when the ship cleared the space dock without hitting anything. Shampoo even gave Ryouga a little pat on the head.

Ryouga did not even realize he was being patronized. Even if he did, he probably wouldn't care.

“As soon as we clear nebula, set course and engage,” Shampoo instructed.

“Um, Captain,” Makoto called out.

“Yes Commander?”

“We have a Runabout sitting outside of the nebula.”

Karyn looked to Ranma, then stood and turned around.

“Why? Who’s in it?”

Makoto blushed.

“My husband, ma’am. They wouldn’t let him into the nebula.”

Ranma snorted to hold in his laughter. Karyn sighed and sat back down.

“Tell him to hurry up and dock. We’ve got to get going.”

Makoto nodded.

Soon the massive ship had cleared the nebula and Gosnell quickly piloted the Runabout into her aft shuttle bay. Once the bay door closed, her engines glowed bright blue, and with a massive white flash, she was gone.

A small Vulcan ship sat about six light years from the nebula, watching it.

The captain of the ship looked to one of his subordinates.

“Did you get the transponder information?”

“Yes sir. NX-95077, USS Benjamin Sisko.”

“Interesting,” the captain stated. He turned to another subordinate. “Contact the Ministry of Intelligence. Let them know and let them know they picked up a Runabout prior to leaving.”

“Aye.”

The Vulcan captain took a seat in his chair.

“Why would THAT ship be in a Section 31 shipyard?” The captain thought to himself. He wanted to find out.

“Helm, take us to the perimeter of the nebula.”

The Vulcan ship got about halfway there before three ships uncloaked in front of him.

Three Federation ships.

“What?” The captain asked.

Several volleys of torpedoes told him exactly what before the ships re-cloaked, vanishing into the darkness of space, leaving nothing but a green nebula and the sparking debris of the former Vulcan ship.

## CHAPTER TWO – DISASTER

Karyn looked out the window of her ready room at the stars whipping by. The ride was amazingly smooth, considering that they had been tooling along at warp 9.912 for the past twenty-four hours.

That really was not what was on the young lady's mind though. She wasn't thinking about the Cardassian ships that she was soon going to have to confront. In fact, what she was thinking of was a long way away and getting farther away by the moment.

Karyn did not hear her door chime as it rang once, then again, a second time. In fact, it took a knocking at the fiberglass doors to bring her back to reality.

"Come in," she called, wiping some of the moisture out of her eyes.

The doors slid open and Akane walked into the room. Akane smiled gently at her new friend.

"How are you doing?" she asked.

Karyn grinned and motioned for Akane to have a seat.

"I'm okay. Just thinking."

Akane nodded and sat down on Karyn's couch.

"Is it anything that you would like to talk about?"

Karyn pondered this for a moment.

"No. But at the same time I realize that I cannot keep bottling things up. If I remain as distracted as I am right now, people could die."

Akane nodded as Karyn moved over to the couch and sat down next to Akane.

"I don't think I belong here."

Akane tilted her head. "On the Sisko?"

Karyn shook her head. "No. In space. In Starfleet." She paused for a moment. "You know, I never really cared about things like this before – boyfriends, husbands and the like – I just worried about my career and developing myself.

"But after what happened this week, I wonder if I would be able to find someone for me as long as I continue to prioritize this over finding someone to share my life with me."

Akane shook her head. "Why wouldn't you? Ranma and I have a good marriage and we're both focused on our careers. You don't have to choose one or the other."

"You guys are different," Karyn countered. "You met before you came on board. I can't do that. I can't meet someone on board while I am in command."

Akane sighed. She really did not think the captain dating and eventually marrying someone under his or her command was such a big deal, but Karyn had the military aspect of Starfleet deeply engrained in her. It was that aspect of her that Akane both hated and respected.

“So, what do you want to do?” Akane asked. “While I can understand your desire and need for a relationship, it would be a shame to give up everything that you have worked so hard for. After all, you are not defined by others, but by your own self.”

Karyn nodded.

“I mean, look at you. You have got to be one of the youngest captains in Starfleet. That’s not an easy task,” Akane told her.

Karyn nodded again. “I’ve never hurt so badly before in my life,” The redhead turned and looked to some of the plaques and things on her wall.

“It would be rough, yeah. But I don’t see how leaving this could possibly feel worse. I used to have a wall up, you know, to keep my work and my emotions separate. Sure, sometimes it made me come off as a bitch,” Karyn chuckled a bit, “but it worked.”

She turned to Akane and continued. “It’s not just about Derek leaving me. How I treated Shampoo when she came back to duty, how I reveled in getting this command despite the circumstances, all of it. It broke the wall, and I don’t think there is any fixing it at this point.”

Karyn shook her head and sighed. Akane placed her hand on Karyn’s shoulder and gripped it softly. Karyn turned and smiled at her.

“I really wish I had made a point to get to know you guys sooner,” Karyn lamented. “All of you.”

“Even if you do leave, that doesn’t make it goodbye. Nothing is goodbye, it’s just ‘ja ni’,” Akane grinned.

“Ja ni?”

“See ya later.”

Karyn nodded and walked over to her window as Akane walked out the door and onto the bridge.

Karyn sighed, watched the stars for a little bit, and then went to begin removing the memorabilia hanging on the wall of her office.

J.C. stood, watching the blue lights quickly pulse up and down the warp core. Occasionally his eyes would drift over to a display panel, which showed many different sets of numbers; none changing more than a couple of points and all staying nice and green.

He groaned.

Usagi walked up behind him and began to watch the warp core pulsate as well. After seeing J.C. eye the lights, check the numbers, eye the lights again, and again check the numbers, she spoke.

“What’s wrong?”

“NOTHING!” J.C. exclaimed, sending Usagi backwards about two feet in fright.

“The damned thing is running perfectly.”

Usagi slowly crept back to J.C. “That’s bad?”

“Engines NEVER run perfectly,” J.C. flailed. “Even brand-new ones, right out of the box! Warp physics isn’t an exact science. That’s why we have so many, powerful computers! To make millions of adjustments per second to keep the field stable!”

J.C. glared at the numbers again.

“They aren’t spiking, they aren’t dropping – hell, the largest change I’ve seen was to the secondary cooling system. It shut off because the primary system was keeping the core cool enough on its own!”

“Isn’t that what it’s supposed to do?” Usagi asked cautiously, ready to leap out of J.C.’s way if the need arose.

“Yes, but I have been on six ships and that has NEVER happened! The secondary system has always had to help! Do you realize how much electricity is running through this thing?”

Usagi shrugged. “Lots?”

“Damn right lots! The current heats the circuitry to almost 800 degrees! But somehow they have gotten the primary cooling system configured to keep the system below 200 degrees!”

Usagi looked to the panel. “That’s still pretty hot.”

J.C. grumbled once again. He really could not figure out what was more frustrating. Not knowing what was inside these engines, making them so damned perfect, or not knowing what was inside his chief engineer’s head. He was fairly sure it wasn’t a brain.

Usagi could not comprehend the look that J.C. was giving her, so she decided now would be a good time to take her lunch break.

“Uh, we’ve only got a couple of hours before we arrive, so I am going to go get some food,” Usagi told J.C.

“Okay,” J.C. said, not really caring. Usagi walked towards the turbolift, tapping her communicator as J.C. walked to the hatch that would lead him into the main engines Jefferies tube.

He stopped suddenly as another engineer walked over to him.

“It’s the same on the port side as well,” the second engineer stated before walking away.

J.C. glared at the large, silver sticker with bold, red lettering on it.

‘WARRANTY VOID IF REMOVED’

“For the last time, I am not going to tell you that and if you ask again, I am going to have you stuffed into a torpedo and shot into the nearest star,” Minako grumbled quietly at Kaii.

The young Bajoran operations officer grinned.

“I just need to know if I need to get you a wedding present!”

Minako spun around and walked towards Kaii. Considering they were in the operations station, it was a very short walk. Kaii soon found himself grinning nervously, pinned against the rear bulkhead with Minako nose to nose, her blue eyes glaring into his.

If looks could kill, Kaii would have found himself being covered by a white sheet right now.

“We are NOT getting married, and I would very much like it if you would mind your own damn business, Lieutenant.”

Kaii bumped his head as he tried to back up further. Minako pulled away from him and turned back to her station.

“Ever?” Kaii asked after her.

“I didn’t say that,” Minako blushed.

“That’s good. Your kids would be so cute.”

Minako turned around again and began to move towards the soon to be clobbered Bajoran.

<Nifty Communicator Chirping Sound>

Minako paused her advance and tapped her communicator.

“Aino.”

“Minako!” Usagi’s voice called. “Come eat lunch with me.”

Minako looked towards Ranma.

“Commander, do you mind if I go to lunch?”

Ranma, half asleep shook his head. Minako smiled, poked Kaii in the chest, and walked towards the turbolift.

“I’ll be there in a minute,” she told Usagi.

Shampoo turned to Ranma. “Can I go to?”

Ranma nodded.

Shampoo grinned and stood. She walked up to tactical. Amanda smiled and turned to Makoto.

“Go, go,” Makoto smiled. “Have fun.”

Amanda and Shampoo both gave Makoto wide-eyed gasps.

Makoto began to stutter.

"I- I didn't mean like that! I meant, enjoy your lunch break. That's all."

Amanda stepped out and into the turbolift, with Shampoo trailing behind her.

"Smooooooooooth," Ryouga called out.

Makoto groaned. She heard snickering and turned towards Ops where she saw Kaii giggling as he took over the station.

Makoto pulled up her instant messaging terminal.

mkino-gosnell (tac1): What the hell are you laughing at? Wait till you see the size of that bruise on your chest.

jkaii (ops2): They're trying to keep their relationship quiet!

mkino-gosnell (tac1): And Minako and Ryouga are trying to keep theirs personal.

jkaii (ops2): Then they should make a point of not – expressing themselves – in cargo bay four.

Makoto gasped. "CARGO BAY FOUR?" she yelled out loud.

Ryouga and Ranma both turned around as Makoto slapped her hand over her mouth. Ryouga was as red as could be. In fact, his shade of red would be worthy of Webster's.

Kaii quickly turned around and moved to the back of ops to conceal his laughing.

"What's going on in cargo bay four?" Ranma asked.

"NOTHING!" Both Ryouga and Makoto called out.

Makoto quickly began to run diagnostics on the weapons systems and Ryouga went back to keeping an eye on his station. Ranma looked to both before sighing and slumping back down in his seat.

He really needed to get more sleep at night.

"He's just been so frisky lately," Akane explained.

Gosnell raised an eyebrow. "Really?" he asked, stroking his goatee. He had never pictured Ranma as the kind who would be 'frisky.' In fact, he was having a difficult time deciding if the phrase 'Ranma is frisky' intrigued him or disturbed him.

"It happened ever since we came back from Las Vegas. I mean the trip from Earth to the nebula was only about eight hours, but he was still all over me."

"Interesting," Gosnell stated. Gosnell was beginning to lean towards intrigued as he liked the direction of this conversation.

"He was telling me how bossy you've been lately," Gosnell mentioned.

“WHAT?” Akane bellowed.

“Wait, wait,” Gosnell pleaded as Akane’s battle aura began to glow. “I think he likes it.”

Akane raised one eyebrow, and then the other as her aura disappeared. She thought back to the past two months that they had been off the ship. She did have to acknowledge that she had been being a bit more aggressive in getting what she wanted.

She was not ready to say that she’s been ‘bossy’, though.

“That’s kind of weird. He’s got such a dominant personality. I find it hard to believe that he would like to be ordered around,” Akane pondered.

“Yeah, but maybe, since he gives so many orders, he’s developed a desire to be ordered himself. I’ve heard that Captain Walker doesn’t spend much time on the bridge during mundane missions, so he’s really been in charge, even though he’s just the XO.”

Gosnell pondered this for a moment. The doors to the lounge slid open.

“And here’s the perfect guy to ask,” he grinned.

The man who walked in stopped and looked to Gosnell.

“Yes Jeff, I’m thinking of you coming over here,” Gosnell grinned.

Lieutenant Jeff Fuchs, the ships councilor, walked up to the bar. He looked to Gosnell.

“Did I miss something, or were you asking me to come over after work?”

“WHAT?!” Gosnell screamed. “NO!”

Jeff tsked. “Too bad.”

Akane stifled a laugh as Gosnell turned beet red.

“We have a question for you,” Gosnell finally said, upon regaining his composure.

“Okay,” Jeff waited.

“Is it normal for someone with a very – dominant – personality to enjoy being dominated?”

Jeff looked to Akane.

“You’re looking to be dominated?”

Akane slammed Jeff into the floor.

“NOT ME! RANMA!”

Jeff hopped up, shaking off Akane’s fury.

“Ah. Well, sometimes. I can see how someone with the responsibility that Commander Saotome has would enjoy having that taken away from him for a while. Having someone else make his decisions for him.”

“Do you think someone ordering him around would turn him on?” Gosnell asked, causing Akane to blush.

“He’s sexually attracted to Captain Walker?”

Once again Jeff and the floor were introduced thanks to Akane’s magical mallet.

“NO! BY ME!”

Jeff stood back up, albeit a bit more slowly this time, and turned to Akane.

“Well, like I said, it’s not abnormal.”

Jeff thought about the situation for a moment before going into psychiatrist mode.

“He’s been under a lot of pressure lately, with all the events that have been happening. I could see him taking pleasure and enjoyment in having some of that pressure lifted, be it by simply being an XO – which has been made easier with Shampoo coming back to duty – or be it being ordered around by his wife.”

Gosnell pulled out his camera, ready for Akane to slam Jeff into the floor again. She didn’t though, and looked to her hands. Disappointment slowly slid across Gosnell’s face.

“So, if he was required to take command again, he might not like it?”

Both Jeff and Gosnell looked to Akane slightly befuddled.

Akane noticed this and smiled.

“Never mind,” she stood and patted Jeff on the shoulder. “Thanks doc. Take care. See you, Gosnell.”

Jeff nodded and Gosnell waved as Akane walked across the lounge and out the door. Simultaneously, Minako, Usagi, Shampoo and Amanda walked in and headed to their usual table.

“What do you think that was all about?” Gosnell asked Jeff.

Jeff just shrugged.

Gosnell sighed as he walked over to the table where the four girls had seated themselves.

“Good afternoon!” he beamed. “What can I get for you all?”

Usagi simply glanced at her menu. “I’ll take the lunch special.”

Minako, Amanda, and Shampoo all nodded in agreement.

“Me too.” they stated in unison.

“See this is why I love you all,” Gosnell grinned. Nothing made a waiter happier than having customers who knew exactly what they wanted.

Gosnell trotted off to prepare the four officers orders as they began to chat about their vacations.

Usagi, a bit grumpy that hers wasn’t as long as everyone else’s, began to describe J.C.’s tantrum.

“He’s upset that the engines are working fine?” Amanda asked.

Usagi nodded.

“I can’t really blame him though,” Usagi said, softly. “There was just something about the new head of the shipyard that really bothered me.”

The others looked to her.

“You ever meet someone, and it just slaps you in the face that this guy is up to no good?”

They nodded in understanding.

“Can’t you get inside engine to see how it works?” Shampoo asked.

Usagi shook her head. “They’ve sealed all the access points.”

“That’s strange,” Minako acknowledged.

The other two agreed.

“I guess though,” Usagi resigned. “That as long as they are working, we shouldn’t concern ourselves with it too much.”

The others nodded in cautious agreement as Gosnell brought over their food.

“Four chicken fried chickens,” he stated.

“Thank you!” The four called out before digging in. Gosnell grinned.

Gosnell noticed the stars outside slowly stop streaking. Soon they were floating in space, motionless. A small, green planet sat off in the distance slowly rotating.

Everyone else in the lounge turned to look. They paused and looked towards the alert lights that were situated above the doors and along the ceiling.

They didn’t light up.

No alarms sounded.

Everyone grinned and resumed eating.

Karyn walked out onto the bridge.

“We’ve arrived?”

Ranma nodded.

“ETA on the Cardassian fleet?”

Ranma looked to his panel.

“Seven hours.”

Karyn sighed. "Maybe we should have stopped somewhere first?"

Ranma chuckled and nodded.

Karyn looked to the clock. 11:09. "Senior staff is dismissed. Report back to duty at 16:30."

Karyn smiled to a junior officer who was manning the engineering station. "You have the bridge."

The junior officer grinned as he hopped up and took the Captain's seat as the senior officers left the bridge, being replaced by the second shift officers.

First Sergeant Anthony Schaefer looked at Chief Warrant Officer Kio Yuki as she sat, her head in her arms, snoozing away in the NSO briefing room.

She was the most adorable thing that he had ever seen, especially when she was sleeping.

Kio snored loudly. Anthony stepped back.

Well, she was usually adorable.

Sergeant Major Mike Simpson looked to Anthony, who was studying Kio intently.

"What are you doing?" Mike whispered, a mix of confusion and concern in his question.

"Just watching," Anthony whispered back.

"That's stalking, man."

Anthony rolled his eyes. "I'm not stalking her. I feel bad for her. She's been working non-stop to finish her OCS courses. She didn't even leave the ship on leave. She stayed here to try and get ahead on things."

Anthony walked over to where Mike was standing. "She was up most of the night studying for her Military Tradition final."

Mike watched his unit leader for a moment; she stirred slightly which sent both Mike and Anthony to another area of the briefing room. They both exhaled in relief when they saw she hadn't woken up.

"And then, for whatever reason they have us on hot stand-by today," Anthony continued. "We've been sitting in the same spot for three hours, no heightened alert level, nothing."

Anthony groaned. While he loved what he did, he hated when they had him geared up for a long day of doing nothing.

"There is a Cardassian assault force on route. We have to be ready to assist in repelling a boarding party," Mike explained.

Anthony rolled his eyes. "What are the three of us going to do that the 150 marines couldn't do?"

Mike shrugged. "I didn't say it was a perfect idea, but that is it."

“Your job is not to repel a boarding party, but to use your skills to regain control of the ship,” Yuki replied, her head still in her arms.

Both Mike and Anthony looked to her.

“We didn’t mean to wake you up, Chief,” Mike stated.

Kio raised her head up. She had the outline of her PADD imprinted on her forehead. Anthony laughed. Kio glared at him.

“It’s okay, Mike,” Kio yawned. “There is just so much crap to memorize.”

Mike nodded. “That’s why I am perfectly content remaining enlisted. If I was smart enough to become an officer, I would have been smart enough to become a doctor like my folks wanted me to.”

Anthony patted his friend on the shoulder.

“You wanted to be a doctor?” Kio asked.

“No,” Mike stated bluntly. “But my parents wanted me to become one. I have to admit though; most doctors don’t almost get killed as often.”

Kio grinned. “That’s part of the thrill.”

Anthony snorted. “Speak for yourself.”

Kio laughed as did Mike.

“You were just complaining about having nothing to do,” Mike pointed out.

“Yeah, well it’s better than doing nothing,” Anthony replied.

“I think you’re bi-polar,” Kio laughed.

Anthony groaned and sat down across from Kio, snagging her PADD.

“Let’s see how ready you are for this final,” Anthony grinned.

Kio sat up and nodded. Mike took a seat next to Kio and watched. While he’d always seen the attraction between the pair, it was becoming more and more overt the more time they spent together on the Sisko. He knew that they had known each other for a long time. They had been in the same unit, the LDF’s Third Ranger Infantry Unit, for at least six years.

He also knew that Kio used to be married until her husband was killed in an ambush in their last mission with the 3RIU.

Mike also knew that Anthony used to be married as well, but his ended in divorce. From the way Anthony talks about it, it was a mutually agreed upon and mutually welcome divorce.

Mike continued to watch the pair laugh and quiz each other about ancient military units and the history of warfare. They were acting more like two high school kids studying for an exam than they were like the two highly trained infantry officers that they were.

An alarm sounded and the trio looked to the front of the room at the alert lights. The light was flashing red.

"Looks like they are here," Kio acknowledged as she placed the PADD into a bag.

Mike looked at his weapon that lay on the deck next to him. He picked it up, activated the charger and set the level to kill.

Karyn stepped onto the bridge, a little embarrassed that she didn't follow her own order and get back to the Sisko's command center by 16:30.

The clock above the bridge read 17:17 as she began to move towards the CONN, still zipping up her jacket.

Makoto noticed her and inhaled. Karyn held up her arm, keeping her chief tactical officer quiet, then continued down the ramp and into her seat.

"Status?" Karyn asked.

Ranma turned to Karyn.

"We have nine Hideki class ships and one Keldon class inbound. They were heading towards the planet, but upon seeing us they switched to an intercept course." Ranma checked his terminal. "In weapons range in ten minutes."

Karyn nodded. This was not going to be easy. She looked to Ranma and then to Shampoo.

"What do you think?" she asked.

Shampoo pondered this for a moment.

"We should get rid of Hideki class first. Keldon class has stronger weapons, but Hideki faster and can fire more often."

Ranma nodded. "I agree."

Karyn also agreed. "Commander Kino, prepare to engage the Hideki class ships. Everything you've got."

"Aye," Makoto grinned. Amanda frowned at some interesting readings on her console.

"The aft launchers are not getting much power. I'm going to go down there and see if it's something I can fix," she told Makoto.

Makoto nodded and Jansen ran off.

"Problem?" Karyn asked.

"For some reason it appears that the aft launchers are not getting a proper power flow from the warp core," Makoto explained.

"Will we still be able to fire?" Ranma asked.

“Yeah, just not as often.”

Ranma nodded. Usagi, who was seated at the engineering station was concerned by this newly discovered information and relayed it down to J.C. who was in engineering.

A few minutes passed and the ten Cardassian warships slowed to a crawl in front of the Sisko.

Karyn stood. “Hail them,” she ordered.

Minako complied. “No response.”

Karyn grumbled. “Open a channel.”

Minako did as she was told.

“This is Captain Karyn Walker of the U.S.S. Benjamin Sisko. You are in Federation space and you are ordered to return to-” Karyn is cut off by the Hideki fighters breaking formation and opening fire.

Karyn sat down. “Fire.” She dryly and angrily stated.

Ranma watched his terminal for a moment. “Ryouga, defensive pattern Omega.”

Ryouga complied and the ship executed her preprogrammed maneuver perfectly. Makoto fired phaser and torpedoes; slowly and methodically taking out the Hideki class ships one at a time, until there were only three left.

Minako spoke up. “Aft shields at 44 percent.”

“Defensive pattern Gamma,” Ranma ordered.

Ryouga initiated the maneuver.

Once there was only one Hideki ship left, it and the Keldon class ship made an about face and headed back towards Cardassian space at maximum warp.

“Pursuit?” Ryouga asked.

“No,” Karyn replied. She looked to Minako. “Any others?”

Minako shook her head. “Asides from some freighters I don’t see another ship for five light years.”

Karyn sighed. “Stand down from red alert.”

Ranma looked to Usagi. “Damage report?”

Usagi looked confused. “None?”

“Doesn’t seem like they were really trying,” Shampoo mused.

Ranma and Karyn looked to each other. It didn’t at all seem like they were really trying, and that was very strange. Karyn stood.

“Commander, come with me,” Ranma nodded as Karyn turned to Minako. “Please send the visual recording of the battle to the conference room.”

Minako nodded as Ranma and Karyn walked into the room on the port side of the bridge.

Karyn and Ranma stood in the observation lounge watching the replay of the Cardassian assault very carefully for the third time.

“Do you notice how they are only shooting towards our nacelles?” Ranma asked.

Karyn nodded. She did notice it, but that made things even more confusing.

The ships nacelles were one of the most shielded areas of the ship, with only the bridge having more shielding. The raiders and their low-level phase cannons didn't even dent the shields, and the pilots would have known that would have been the result.

What would have made sense would have been for them to attack the shield generators first. They wouldn't have succeeded, but it would have made more sense from a tactical standpoint.

“Something else I am noticing; they are staying behind us. Like they knew we were having issues with our aft launchers.” Ranma stated.

“They couldn't tell that by scanning us?” Karyn asked.

“No. They would only see that we had power to the section, not that it wasn't enough.”

Karyn did not like this. Nothing at all seemed right about this.

“And of course, the strangest thing, the Keldon didn't fire a single shot.”

Karyn was about to scold Ranma for making things even more confusing when a loud shudder suddenly shook through the ship, knocking both Ranma and Karyn to the deck. The ship began to shake violently. Karyn went to stand and hit her comm badge when Shampoo's voice echoed over the intercom.

“CAPTAIN, XO TO THE BRIDGE!” she screamed.

Ranma and Karyn were on their feet and ran out of the conference room onto the bridge. They turned to see Shampoo standing over Usagi at the engineering station.

“REPORT!” Karyn ordered.

“I no understand,” Shampoo whimpered. “Plasma injectors fused open!”

Ranma ran over and looked.

“Shut down the engines,” he ordered.

“I can't!” Usagi bawled.

“OH CRAP!” Ryouga yelled.

All eyes turned to him.

“WE'RE GOING TO WARP!”

Ranma turned back to Shampoo and Usagi. “Get those engines offline!”

Usagi and Shampoo went to work as Ryouga began to bug out.

“WARP FIVE!”

Ranma and Karyn could do nothing but watch the star field warp by.

“WARP SIX!”

Minako’s panel began to chirp.

“The warp field is fluctuating.” she stated, a tone that was somewhere between confusion, fascination and terror entering her voice. “I’ve never seen anything like this.”

“WARP SEVEN!”

“Problem with the new engines?” Karyn asked.

“WARP EIGHT!”

Minako shook her head as the ship began to shake harder and harder.

“No. The engines show they are functioning perfectly, but the warp field...” she paused. “It’s not right.”

“WARP NINE!”

“STATUS!” Ranma yelled at Shampoo and Usagi.

“NINE POINT FIVE!”

“We’ve tried cutting the plasma flow! We’ve tried killing power! We’ve tried stopping the anti-matter flow! Nothing is working!” Usagi exclaimed.

“NINE POINT NINE FIVE!”

“Oh my God,” Minako gasped.

Everyone looked to her. Ryouga grabbed his hair and started to completely lose it now.

“MY DISPLAY! IT SAYS, ‘SPEED EXCEEDS MEASUREMENT!’”

Karyn looked to Ryouga in disbelief, but only for a moment as the star field grabbed her attention.

“Ra-Ranma,” she mumbled as she pointed to the star field. The ship slowly stopped shaking.

Ranma turned and looked. The sight on the screen caused his jaw to drop. Instead of stars streaking and passing by, there were only single streaks of a few stars. And they weren’t moving.

“I THINK WE’RE IN TRANS-WARP!” Minako yelled, finally figuring out where she had seen this warp field before.

“Jettison the core!” Ranma ordered.

“We could be torn apart!” Karyn countered.

“Captain, if we’re in trans-warp we could be in a different galaxy within minutes.”

Karyn didn’t like the thought of that any more than she liked the thought of being ripped to pieces at around a billion kilometers per second.

“Do it,” she confirmed to Usagi.

Usagi whimpered, performed the necessary computer operations, and closed her eyes. Another thunk was heard.

She opened one. “Core jettisoned.” She stated.

“FIELD COLLAPSING!” Minako yelled.

“ALL HANDS BRACE!” Karyn yelled just before the ship slammed out of warp, the inertial dampeners doing everything they could to keep the occupants from being hurled into the front of the ship at Warp 10.

It mostly worked. Ranma and Karyn were flung to the thinly carpeted deck. Makoto and Minako were both thrown over their consoles and to the deck. Ryouga was slammed into his console, the wind knocked out of him. Shampoo was tossed into the nearest bulkhead where she slammed into it, headfirst, and hit the ground, unconscious.

Ranma slowly rose to his knees. He looked to Karyn who was also slowly staggering to her feet. Ranma quickly moved to help her up. The pair stood and turned to the operations station where Minako was crawling back to the correct side of her terminal. Ranma moved over to check on Shampoo.

“Medical emergency on the bridge...” he mumbled into his communicator.

“Status,” Karyn asked quietly.

Minako was still shaking off the smack to her head she took when she was planted face first into the deck plating.

“Uh-” she mumbled.

Ryouga coughed a couple of times as he started to regain his composure. He looked up at the view screen.

“CAPTAIN!” he yelled.

Ranma spun around from tending to Shampoo, Karyn a little more slowly. On the view screen was nothing but blue, white, and brown.

The surface of a planet.

“FULL REVERSE!” Ranma screamed, running over to the helm, as Karyn’s eyes went wide.

Ryouga started to hit some buttons, ignoring the blinding pain in his midsection. The flight control station just buzzed at him, refusing to acknowledge his commands. He slammed his fists on the terminal, which made it buzz at him even louder.

"IMPULSE ENGINES ARE NOT RESPONDING!" he screamed in horror as the ship began to accelerate into the upper atmosphere of the planet.

"SHIELDS!" Karyn finally managed to yell.

Makoto, who had made her way back to her station even more slowly than Minako, attempted to activate the shields. Her panel also buzzed at her.

"We have massive EPS damage," Minako finally managed to say. "Impulse engines, shields, weapons, inertial dampener, all offline." The master situation display was going nuts flashing red, confirming Minako's report.

"THRUSTERS!" Ranma yelled at Ryouga.

Ryouga began to fire the thrusters on the bow of the ship. The CO2 blew out of the thruster ports but did nothing to slow the ship.

"We're too far into the planets gravity well," Minako stated, beginning to roll on all her cylinders again.

Ryouga frantically and futilely kept trying to pull the ship out of its dive, his panel mainly squawking at him in noncompliance.

Ranma and Karyn both watched the viewer as the ship began to roll slightly.

"Oh shit," Ranma mumbled.

"Lieutenant! Keep us ventral down!" Karyn ordered.

"I'm trying!" Ryouga whimpered as the ship continued to roll until it was inverted.

"We're dead if we crash like this," Makoto bluntly stated as the ship began to rumble again.

Ranma looked to the floor. They were inside the planet's gravitational field, so the only thing keeping them from falling to the ceiling was the ships grav plating.

He hoped to God that it would not fail; otherwise, they'd have no chance.

Ryouga, pissed off at the flat screen controls in front of him, slides down to the left end of the flight control station. He hits a button, and a joystick rises out of the console.

"Once we get out of the upper atmosphere, I should be able to roll the ship manually." he stated.

Ranma looked to Karyn.

"Nothing to do now but hang on," he stated.

Karyn agreed and the pair sat down in their chairs.

On the floor next to the engineering station, Shampoo finally begins to come to. She slowly stands, wipes some blood off her face with her sleeve, and staggers over to her seat to the left of Karyn. She whimpered when she saw the red glow on the main viewer.

"What..." she mumbled.

“We’re making an unexpected landing,” Karyn said, never taking her eyes off Ryouga and the viewer.

Shampoo sat down quickly, and her hands gripped the armrests on her chair. She looked over to Ranma who was intently eyeing the viewer, waiting for the ship to come out of the upper atmosphere.

The outside of the ship burned red as the ship ripped through the atmosphere of the planet. Paint peeled off and burnt up. The nacelles shook; the drag trying its best to rip them from their moorings.

After what seemed like an eternity, the red glow dissipated, and the crew got their first close view of the planet. From where they were it looked completely blue.

“Oh no, we’re going to crash into an ocean,” Karyn stated quietly.

Ranma switched his gaze from Ryouga to the viewer and back. Ryouga was slowly, but effectively, rolling the ship counterclockwise putting her right side up.

“Two minutes to impact,” Minako stated. They had no sensors, but the surface of the planet was close enough to be picked up by the lower technology proximity sensors.

“Pitch us up, Ryouga,” Ranma stated.

Ryouga complied and slowly began to bring the nose of the ship up.

“There’s a land mass,” Karyn stated pointing towards some brown and green off in the distance.

Ranma nodded. He did not know if they would make it that far, but the Sisko was moving VERY fast.

“Ranma! Angle?” Ryouga asked.

Ranma tried to do the calculations in his head. It has been years since his single class in emergency landing operations.

“Fifteen degree,” Shampoo stated.

Ryouga nodded. He pitched the bow of the ship up about fifteen degrees. He watched the viewer intently. The land wasn’t that far, but he didn’t think they would make it.

“ALL HANDS, EMERGENCY LANDING PROCEDURES!” Ranma called out over the intercom. Minako, Usagi and Makoto all tucked themselves under their panels, up against the forward wall, and placed their heads between their legs.

Shampoo gripped the arm rests even harder. Both Ranma and Karyn did the same. All three of them knew that on impact they would all be thrown.

“Why the hell haven’t they installed seat belts yet?” Ranma growled.

Karyn, despite the fact she was scared out of her mind, chuckled at Ranma’s joke. She then sighed. “You two, get behind the conn.”

Ranma blinked.

“What about you?”

“Just go,” Karyn replied.

“Captain.”

“DO WHAT I SAY, COMMANDER!” Karyn screamed.

Ranma nodded and both he and Shampoo scurried behind the command console and braced themselves against the back of it.

Ryoga closed his eyes.

“We’re going to hit the water.”

Ranma closed his eyes.

Karyn inhaled.

The Sisko hit the water and hit it hard. However, the pitch of the ship remained stable, the ship bounced like a rock skipping over a lake and became airborne again.

On board things did not go so well. Ryoga was once again slammed into his console. The force knocked him out. Ranma and Shampoo, despite bracing themselves as much as possible were slammed into the back of the conn, knocking them out.

Karyn, sitting in the center of the newly configured command center was thrown directly into Ryoga’s console, only the fact that Ryoga was on the far end of the console keeping her from flying into him. Karyn screamed until she hit the top of the console, her momentum throwing her over it, into the front of the bridge to where the now inactive viewscreen was, and onto the floor.

The Sisko once again began her decent from her temporarily resumed flight. She passed over a beach, no more than 50 meters above the ground, moving at well over 500 kilometers per hour. After a moment she slammed into the ground, once again throwing the unconscious bridge crew forward.

The Sisko did not bounce this time but slid past the beach and into a dense forest. The giant ship snapped enormous, hundreds of years old redwood trees like matchsticks as her momentum pushed her forward.

Metallic screeching of the hull was all that could be heard over the intense rumbling.

The second impact knocked all power out on the ship. The bridge was completely dark. The emergency lights did not activate. All that could be seen was a dim, glow-in-the-dark path that would lead the crew to the emergency access.

The shaking of the ship was worse than anything any of the Sisko's crew had ever been through. Every direction at once, the ship moved, all while hurtling, uncontrolled, forward.

Underneath her console, Usagi quietly cried. It was dark and she had no idea what was going on. On the first impact all she heard was a blood curdling woman’s scream, rumbling and now this terrible metallic ripping.

Makoto kept her eyes closed tightly and gripped her legs tightly with her arms. She wanted to know what was going on, but after the inhuman scream after the first impact, she did not dare stand up till the ship came to a rest.

Minako shook even more than the ship did. She can never remember really being scared before. But this scared the hell out of her.

The resistance that the Sisko faced from the forest and continued to get denser gradually slowed the once mighty warship. Her forward force was finally no match for the giant trees, and she slammed to a stop.

Once again Karyn was tossed against the forward bulkhead, though not as violently this time. Ranma and Shampoo's unconscious bodies were also thrown forward, as the shaking of the ship rolled them into the open area of the bridge.

Once she was sure that the ship wasn't going to go anywhere, Makoto slowly felt her way out of her hiding place. She pulled herself to her feet and looked around.

She could not see anything. The dim path lighting giving off almost no ambient light.

"Is everyone okay?" She asked.

"Yeah," Usagi sniffled.

"I – I think so," Minako called as she also tried to feel her way out of her crash position.

"Captain?" Makoto asked.

There was no answer.

"Commander Saotome? Commander Shampoo?"

Again, silence.

"Ryouga?" Minako whimpered.

Nothing.

"Where are the lights?" Makoto asked as she felt around her station, trying to locate her emergency kit.

"Even with no power the emergency lights should have activated," Minako said.

"Ah fuck!" Makoto exclaimed, followed by a thunk.

"Oh God, Makoto, are you okay?" Minako asked.

"Yeah. I can't find my emergency kit. Can you find yours?"

"I couldn't even find my hands right now," she complained.

"Well, we can't just sit here in the dark. They probably need medical attention."

Minako slapped her communicator.

“Aino to sickbay.”

Nothing.

“Aino to Security.”

Nothing.

“Aino to anyone!”

Nothing.

Makoto grumbled.

\*BANG! BANG! BANG!\*

“What was that?” Usagi whimpered.

“Sounds like some banging.”

“ANYONE ALIVE IN THERE?” a voice called out.

“YES!” Minako yelled.

There was some more banging on the aft turbolift door till eventually a hand squeezed between the two doors. A marine managed to pull the one door open and both he and two other marines came out of the turbolift. The turbolift car seemed to be locked into place and the emergency exit on the top of the car was opened.

Flashlights begin to shine into the bridge as the three came out.

“Is everyone okay here?” one of the marines asked.

“No. The command staff are all seriously injured, as well as the helmsman,” Minako replied.

The group of three marines walked over to the tactical station. They shined their flashlights on Makoto.

“Good to see you guys,” she stated.

The marine holding the flashlight smiled.

“Hold your flashlight over here. I have flares we can use to light up the bridge.”

The marine complied and allowed Makoto to dig out her emergency kit.

“Do you know what’s going on with the rest of the ship?” Makoto asked.

“No, Commander. We were on deck two and determined it should be our priority to check on you guys,” the marine explained.

Makoto nodded and opened the emergency kit. Inside she pulled out four clear spheres. She hit a button on the top of two of them and tossed them; one towards the front of the bridge and to the left, the other to the right.

After a couple of seconds, a bright light blazed out of both, lighting the bridge up well.

Minako came down the bridge with Makoto and the marines. They first saw Shampoo and walked to her.

Makoto pulled a tricorder out of her kit.

"Massive concussion, broken arm and dislocated shoulder," she stated. She motioned for one of the marines to join her.

"You know how to use this?" she asked, pointing towards a sub dermal regenerator.

"Yes ma'am," he stated. The marine took it and began to attempt a repair on Shampoo's arm.

Makoto and the first marine walked over to where Karyn was. There was a huge gash on her forehead and a large pool of blood on the deck. Makoto ran her tricorder over her Captain.

She bowed her head.

"She's dead," Makoto stated softly.

Minako, who had gone to check on Usagi, looked up.

"Who?"

Makoto looked to her.

"The captain."

Makoto and Usagi bowed their heads in respect for the woman who at first, they hated, but eventually grew to admire and respect.

The first marine ordered the one free marine over to help him move the Captain's body out of the pool of blood and to a better area. Makoto moved over a bit more too where Ryouga had landed. The final hit had knocked him over the console and onto the floor.

She scanned him.

"Five broken ribs, possible internal bleeding," she looked to the marines as they walked back to her. "We need to get him to sickbay."

"We can't take him down a turbolift shaft." one marine stated. "I'll go see if I can find another way."

That marine scurried towards the deck two emergency access while Makoto and the other marine moved over to where Ranma was. Minako, now sure that Usagi was okay, ran to Ryouga.

"Don't move him," Makoto ordered.

"I-I won't," she stammered as she took the eternal lost boy's hand.

Ranma was lying face down in a heap. Makoto grimaced as she rolled him onto his back. He also had a huge gash on his head, but he did not seem to have lost as much blood as Karyn did.

Makoto scanned him.

“Concussion, tons of micro fractures of his bones, but otherwise okay,” she sighed in relief.

The marine who went off to find a way to sickbay returned.

“We can use the emergency access to get to deck two, but from there we will have to come down the shafts or Jefferies tubes to get to sickbay.”

Makoto groaned.

“Well, we can’t let them die up here. Let’s go,” she ordered.

The marines moved into position to begin to move the three injured crewmembers to sickbay.

A bright blue glow stopped them.

Makoto turned around and drew her phaser. The marines also readied their weapons.

When the six figures materialized Makoto and the others found themselves looking at the business ends of six hybrid phase/projectile weapons.

“Oh my God. Am I glad to see you guys,” Makoto exclaimed, lowering her phaser.

Rei grinned at the dark-haired security chief and lowered her weapon as well. The five NSO members, CWO Kio, Sgt. Simpson, Sgt. Schaffer, Lt. Commander Shelton, and Lt. Parker followed suit.

“What’s your status?” Rei asked.

“The captain is dead,” Makoto stated bluntly. “Commander Saotome, Commander Shampoo and Lieutenant Hibiki have serious injuries.”

Rei nodded and walked to the injured officers. She placed a transport enhancer on each of them. Rei then walked over to Captain Walker’s lifeless body and put one on her. She hit her communicator.

“Hino to Ensign Xiao. Four to beam directly to trauma. Advise them one is deceased.”

“Aye,” the ensign’s voice replied. Within a moment Ranma, Shampoo and Ryouga disappeared.

“We have our triage unit set up in the NSO control center,” Rei explained.

“You have power?” Minako asked.

“Yes. We generate our own power, life support, and etcetera,” Shelton explained.

“Have you been to any of the other decks?” Makoto asked.

“No,” Rei replied. “Most of us were knocked out or otherwise discombobulated when we crashed, so it took us a bit to mobilize. We’re going to go deck by deck, find survivors and survey damage.”

Makoto nodded. “Sergeants, Corporal, go with them. As you find marines begin moving everyone to deck four. We will try and get power restored to sickbay, since there will probably be more injuries than the NSO trauma center can handle.

“We should also work on getting power restored to deck five. If you find any more security officers or marines, have them begin to set up a make-shift S & R center in the lounge.”

The marines nodded. Rei handed Makoto three transport enhancers and three more communicators.

“The hull plating on this ship makes transport hard the way we’re doing it, so you will need these. Also, since the ship’s main power is out, we had to use our communication system, which is different than yours.”

Makoto nods.

Rei gives the three marines enhancers as well. “Hino to Corporal Stevens. Nine to transport to deck two.”

The nine people quickly vanish.

Makoto looked to Minako and Usagi.

“Well?” She asked.

Minako looked to Makoto.

“Well, what?”

“You’re in command. What do we do to get power back to the bridge, deck four and five?”

Minako scratched her head, noticing some dried blood on the back. She ignored it and looked to Usagi.

“Well, we first need to find out what the problem is, and for that we need to go to engineering.”

“Okay,” Makoto stated. “Usagi and I will go.”

“No offense Makoto,” Minako countered, “but you don’t know anything about engineering.”

Makoto nodded.

“You’re right, but I do know that right now you are the captain and the captain’s place is on the bridge.”

Minako sighed and agreed.

“Besides, there will be engineers down there to help. And once we get power back, we’ll need you to start doing all your nifty operations stuff to get the ship working again,” Makoto smiled at her friend.

“Be careful,” Minako ordered, smiling back.

Makoto tapped her new communicator.

“Kino to NSO, two to transport to engineering.”

The pair slowly dissolved into a blue light, then into nothing, leaving Minako alone on the bridge. She shook off the slight dizzy feeling she was having and sat down in the operations station.

Unknown to anyone inside the ship, two attack helicopters hovered above the damaged starship, watching, and waiting, for anyone to come out.

# CHAPTER THREE – INJURED

“Say what?” the chubby Vulcan asked.

“I said they were destroyed,” another replied. “They were feeding us some information about the Sisko leaving Section 31’s shipyard. They then said they were being engaged and that was the last we heard from them.”

The chubby Vulcan stood from his seat in the Intelligence Ministry’s headquarters.

“Call Salek.”

“No need,” Salek called out, as he walked into the room.

The other two Vulcans turned to see the older Vulcan walk in. Salek picked up a PADD and began to read it.

“This says that the ships decloaked before firing on the scout ship,” Salek read.

“Yes sir,” the slimmer Vulcan walked to the screen and popped up a visual record showing three Federation ships, one Defiant class, one Intrepid class, and one that Salek wasn’t familiar with, decloak and fire on the scout ship, ending the recording.

“It seems that the Federation hasn’t been paying much attention to the Treaty of Algeron,” Salek replied.

“So, what do we do?” the chubby Vulcan asked.

Salek groaned. “The High Command isn’t ready to authorize any kind of military action,” he grinned. “That’s why we have to do it quietly.”

The chubby Vulcan nodded. “I’ll get right to work on it.”

Salek nodded and walked into his office. He sat down and leaned back in his chair and looked out the window for a moment.

His observation was halted as his communications terminal chirped. Salek turned around and hit a button and Young popped up on his screen.

“Is this connection secure?” Young asked.

“Who do you think you’re talking to?” Salek asked.

Young rolled his eyes. “Right. You wanted to speak to me?”

“Yes. The head of the High Command, Vora, is on his way there to talk to the President.”

“What about?” Young asked.

“Section 31.”

Young laughed. "Section 31 was 'disbanded' after they outed themselves on Deep Space Nine."

"As long as the president believes that," Salek leaned back. "The ships that destroyed the scout ship?"

"Not Section 31, but who else would be flying around with illegal cloaking devices? And they certainly were not drone ships using false sensor readings and holographic projectors," Young replied smugly. "How's your guy on the inside?"

"He's on his way back to give his 'confession' and turn himself in to the Ministry of Intelligence."

"Good. Everything is running smoothly here as well."

Salek nodded. "I'll speak with you later."

Young nodded and went to hit his comm. System when Salek stopped him.

"Oh, Zack."

Young paused.

"I'd stay out of Chicago for a few days if I were you."

Young grinned and ended the communication.

-----

"Greetings, High Commander," Nanietta Bacco, the president of the Federation grinned as the elder Vulcan walked into her office.

Vora bowed slightly and had a seat across the desk from the President.

Bacco nodded towards the corner.

"You of course know Councilman Zack Young, Chairman of the Council's Defense Committee, right?"

Zack walked over and shook hands with Vora.

"I have met him, yes," Vora replied.

"Well, enough with the pleasantries, High Commander," Bacco smiled. "I understand that there is something you wish to speak to me about?"

"Yes, madam President. Our intelligence operatives have determined that operatives of the Federation's 'secret service', Section 31, are currently planning to attack Vulcan interests.

"My people wanted to launch a military attack against these people, but I wished to discuss it with you before we did anything rash."

Bacco kept her smile.

"High Commander, Section 31 was disbanded after the Dominion War."

Vora shook his head.

“You will forgive me if I don’t take your statement at face value. I have heard about Section 31. They managed to stay hidden for over three hundred years. I doubt very much they will simply ‘go away’ because you tell them too.”

Bacco continued to smile, like a good politician.

“What proof do you have that Section 31 still exists, and that they are planning an assault on Vulcan?”

Vora paused for a moment.

“The Ministry of Intelligence has someone inside of Section 31.”

Bacco lost her smile.

“I’m sorry, are you telling me that the Vulcan government is spying on the Federation?”

Vora groaned. “President, this is a serious matter. If this Section 31 is genuinely interested in protecting the Federation, they will NOT proceed with this attack.”

Vora stood and turned to Young. “Good to see you again.”

Young nodded back as Vora walked out of the room.

“Don’t you just want to slap them?” Young mused.

Bacco, not humored by Young’s joke grumbled.

“Who’s in charge of Section 31?”

Young, surprised that the president did indeed know that Section 31 was still in existence, simply shrugged.

“Don’t they have any oversight?”

Young shrugged again. “They wouldn’t be very secret if they had an Admiral in charge.”

Bacco hit her communications terminal. “Get the head of Starfleet Intelligence in my office NOW.” She almost yelled at her assistant.

“There is another issue, Madam President,” Young stated.

Bacco turned to him.

“A Vulcan ship came within the defense perimeter of one of Starfleet’s shipyards. Based on intelligence, Starfleet believed that it was hostile in nature and destroyed it.”

Bacco buried her head in her hands. “So, what you’re telling me is that we have Vulcans spying on Federation agencies and Starfleet attacking Vulcan ships?”

“On face value, yeah it looks like that. But we had solid information that the Vulcans were going to launch a strike on this shipyard, and apparently they were.”

Bacco shook her head. “Why?”

“Maybe they thought it was a Section 31 shipyard?”

“Why would they think that?”

Young looked at his PADD. “It’s a classified yard in the Chii Nebula, made to build new prototype ships – mainly for use in the Dominion War. Now it is used for other covert operations, like the NSO operations.”

A blue light appeared and within a few seconds a husky four-pip Admiral in a black Starfleet Uniform appeared.

“Ah, Admiral Torres,” Bacco motioned for him to have a seat.

“Yes ma’am?” The admiral stated as he sat down.

“How can I contact Section 31?”

Torres almost fell over backwards in his seat.

“Contact them? I don’t think it’s possible.”

“Aren’t they under your control?”

Torres shook his head. “No ma’am.”

“Who runs them?”

“The directors of Section 31 do, but I have never met them.”

Bacco was growing frustrated. “But you do work for them?”

“We, uh...” He looked to Young.

“I have level ten security clearance, Admiral.”

Torres nodded. “We perform mostly logistical and transportation missions for them. But that is rare. They have their own ships. They are not a Starfleet agency.”

“So how do I contact them?” Bacco asked.

“You don’t. They contact you,” Torres stated quietly.

-----

The sun was almost completely past the western horizon. A chilly windy breeze down the industrial streets of South Chicago. Most everyone had gone home for the evening, so West 83rd was vacant.

A large warehouse sat on the corner of 83rd and Wentworth Avenue. Pretty non-descript. A few windows, a couple of doors, but not much else.

A green light glowed from behind the warehouse.

Within a moment an explosion that engulfed the building in flames, demolishing it and part of a couple of warehouses nearby.

-----

Ranma stirred slightly. The medic who was tending to the wounded as they began to slowly be transported into the makeshift triage unit in the NSO command center turned to him.

“Commander?” he asked.

Ranma groaned loudly and slowly opened his eyes.

The medic turned. “COMMANDER! He’s coming too!”

Ranma nearly screamed in pain as he was roughly glommed onto.

“Thank God!” Akane whispered.

Ranma managed a smile. “You know I’m tougher than that,” he whispered back.

Akane pulled away from him, tears running down her bandaged face.

“What happened to you?” Ranma asked weakly.

Akane chuckled. “I got nailed by some flying debris. One of these days I will learn to do what I’m trained to do when I hear ‘brace for impact’.”

Ranma grinned. He began to sit up, grimacing in pain.

“Ranma, no.”

Ranma shook his head. He looked around. There was a grey and yellow grid covering the walls and the deck, indicating that this was an offline holodeck. As Ranma looked around, he noticed that most of the wounded were being treated on mats placed on the floor. The most seriously injured were on a few bio beds, scattered around the room. In the far end of the room, he saw several people lying on the floor with white sheets stained in red covering their whole bodies.

“Where-Where is this?”

“There is no power in the main part of the ship,” Akane explained. “This is one of the NSO holodecks. They managed to keep power.”

“How many...” he trailed off.

“Eighteen so far,” Akane frowned. “Ranma, you should know...”

Ranma looked at the pain in Akane’s eyes.

“The Captain is dead,” she whispered.

Ranma felt sadness overwhelm him. He paused for a moment and said a quick prayer for her. He then started to turn as to slide off the bio bed.

“Wait, wait, wait!” Akane snapped. “Where the hell do you think you’re going?”

“I need to get back to work.”

“Not!” Akane pushed Ranma back onto the bed. “You have a SERIOUS concussion. We’re not going anywhere and there are other people who can get things running for now.”

Ranma grumbled. “How long do I have to stay here?”

“Ask me again in the morning,” Akane smiled, kissing Ranma.

Ranma nodded in resignation and lay back down.

Akane patted Ranma on the arm and walked over to a second bed where three doctors were busy at work.

“How is she?” Akane asked.

“Not good.” one replied. “We lost her for a little bit, but now I think we have a stable rhythm.”

Akane looked down at her former nemesis.

Shampoo lay there with an oxygen mask covering her face, her breathing soft and labored.

“What happened? She didn’t seem that bad when they brought her in?”

The doctor finished up what he was doing, then left Shampoo in the hands of the other two. He and Akane then began to walk towards the corner.

“She had MAJOR cranial hemorrhaging that wasn’t detected by the standard tricorders the security teams use. We’re having an extremely hard time stopping the bleeding and we might have to operate.”

Akane grimaced. Even in the twenty-fourth century, brain surgery was extremely dangerous.

“What are her chances right now?”

The doctor sighed as he pondered it for a moment.

“Twenty percent, but we can’t operate up here. If we can’t get her to sickbay soon...” the doctor trailed off.

Akane took this in for a moment, and then nodded.

“Please keep me updated.”

The doctor nodded, and then poked at Akane’s bandage.

“Let me regenerate that real quick, otherwise it might scar.”

Akane swatted at his hand.

“Save Shampoo, then worry about me.”

“It will literally take 10 seconds,” the doctor countered. Akane sighed and allowed the doctor to take the bandage off, run the dermal regenerator over her head, healing the small wound. He then smiled to Akane before he returned to work on the critically injured Amazon.

Akane then ambled over to where Ryouga lay. He was still knocked out, but the doctors had determined that his injuries were minor enough that he would have to sleep on the floor until he came to.

He did suffer some internal bleeding, but that was quickly patched up and he was brushed aside for someone who was in worse shape. Akane hated mass casualty incidents simply for that reason. It seemed cruel to tag someone as 'not hurt enough' and have them thrown on the floor.

Or worse, tagged as 'good as dead' and allowed to die.

Akane shook off that feeling and looked at Ryouga. She figured that he must have been dreaming about Minako. He had a small, but happy grin on his face.

Akane grinned. She was glad that he had finally seemed to find happiness, even if that were the only thing he could ever find.

"Commander, we have eight more coming in," a medic called to her.

Akane sighed and ran over the materializing forms of the Sisko injured.

Minako scratched the back of her head again and checked her fingernails. There was some fresh blood on them. She realized that she must have smacked her head against her console when she was braced, and probably should stop scratching it so the wound could heal.

\*KLUNK\*

Minako looked up. She then looked around the bridge, and it was still empty.

She didn't know if being up here was making her paranoid or what, but she could swear that was the third time she had heard something.

"Is anyone up here?" she asked.

Silenced answered her.

It really was an eerie situation. There was always noise on the ship. Panels chirped, the warp engines hummed, the grav plating hummed a little too, and if all else failed you could listen to the life support systems blow oxygen into the room.

But there was nothing now. No beeps, no hums, no whirs. The only thing she could hear was her own breathing and heartbeat, which were both getting a little more rapid.

\*KLUNK\*

Minako's eyes darted around.

She knew that it was coming from above her. But there was nothing above her.

\*KLUNK KLUNK\*

“Dammit!” She hissed. She slowly stood up from her seat in operations and grabbed her flashlight. She moved over to the doorway to the observation lounge.

Minako popped open a panel and pulled down a handle. The hydraulics hissed as the air in them escaped. She then squeezed her small hands between the two doors and pulled them apart enough for her to get in.

Minako looked out the window. At least wherever it was that they landed had nice weather. The sky was blue with only a small stream of clouds.

The young woman walked to the window and looked outside more closely. She looked across the dorsal, right-hand side of the saucer shaped ship. The paint looked like it was ripped to shreds and severely burnt, but she couldn't see any hull damage.

Suddenly, one of the large redwood trees that the Sisko had used to stop her forward momentum snapped, crashing down on the ship, right in front of the window.

\*KLUNK\*

Minako screamed as it slammed into the hull, then began to slide down the ship before crashing into a pile of other trees the Sisko had destroyed.

Minako laughed for a moment before silently scolding herself for being so paranoid as she scratched her small head wound. She continued to laugh as she looked up, and out the part of the window that wrapped up and over the observation room's ceiling.

The operations officer stopped laughing at what she saw.

“Oh no,” she gasped.

Two black military helicopters floated overhead, slowly orbiting. Minako quickly ducked away from the windows and ran back into the bridge, tripping over a dislodged piece of metal and falling to the deck.

Minako didn't even bother to get up as she hit her new communicator.

“Aino to Kino,” she called.

“Yeah?” Makoto replied.

“We've crashed on an inhabited planet.”

There was silence.

“How do you know?”

Minako slowly staggered to her feet and began to move back to operations.

“I looked out the window. There were two, what I think are helicopters, circling above us.”

“Crap,” Makoto replied. “Engineering is working on the power. Stay there, I'll send a couple of security officers to stay with you.”

“Okay,” Minako nodded, sitting back in her chair. “The windows are pretty thick, right?”

“If they only have helicopters, I wouldn’t worry,” Makoto replied. “However there have to be tons of hull breaches on the lower decks.”

“Goodie,” Minako sighed as two security officers materialized on the bridge.

J.C. silently swore to himself as he once again tripped over something that was laying across the floor in engineering.

“Is this what you go through every day?” He asked Usagi.

Usagi, fairly sure that he was making fun of her, didn’t respond. She simply shone her flashlight on the grey door placard.

#### AUXILARY POWER CONTROL

She looked to J.C. who nodded and went to his knees. He pulled a panel off the wall next to the door and pulled the handle that released the door hydraulics. The door hissed as the air and fluids escaped.

J.C. stood and touched the door. He screeched and pulled his hand back.

“HOT!” he called out.

Usagi, unsure why, touched the door to confirm. She also yelped like a beaten puppy as the door singed her hand.

J.C. looked to his Chief for a moment before turning to Makoto and the security officers who were with her.

“Over by station seven there is a hatch. Open it up and you will find some fire suppression gear,” J.C. instructed.

Three of the security officers nodded and went to get the gear. J.C. turned to Usagi.

“If the fire has caused enough damage, we’re screwed.”

“There’s no other way to generate power?” Makoto asked.

J.C. turned to her. “Primary power is generated by the warp core. Obviously, that isn’t an option, so you must use the secondary power generators, which are a deck down. But considering it’s failed, there is no telling how much damage has been done to it. It will be nearly impossible to fix, especially without auxiliary power.”

Makoto groaned. She did not have many flares left, and she knew that unless they could get power to sickbay, lots of people could die.

The three guards returned with the firefighting gear.

“Put those pants and coats on over your uniforms. They are fire retardant.” J.C. instructed.

The guards turned firemen complied. J.C. turned to one of the other guards.

“Help me open this door,” he asked.

The guard nodded and came over. J.C. placed two magnets with handles on the door.

“Everyone else stand back,” J.C. ordered. “When we pull the door open, the fire will come out at us.”

He turned to the firemen. “Spray towards the base of the fire, and sweep.”

They nodded. J.C. looked to the guard on the door, who nodded as well.

J.C. and the guard began to pull the doors open. As J.C. predicted, the fire shot out into engineering, knocking both J.C. and his assistant to the ground. They both scurried out of the way as the firefighter security guards began to spray the fire.

Within just a few moments the three had managed to get the blaze down to just a few hotspots. The fireguards ran in and extinguished them as J.C. and Usagi came in to survey the damage.

“Odd,” J.C. stated, looking around.

“What?” Makoto asked.

“There’s hardly any fire damage.” Usagi pointed out.

She was right. The front of the room was scorched, but the rear two thirds of the room was fine.

J.C. walked forward and was suddenly stopped.

ZAP!

“Holy crap, the force field still works!” J.C. grins.

“How is that possible?” Makoto asked.

“It’s got its own power supply. And one purpose, to protect the aux power generating batteries.”

“So why is there no power?” Makoto asked.

“The fire destroyed the EPS conduits,” Usagi pointed out, looking into a junction point.

“Damn,” Makoto groaned.

J.C. chuckled. “Actually, that’s wonderful news. Restoring the EPS conduits will probably only take about twenty-four hours. But we will need the guys upstairs to begin to replicate parts.”

Makoto nodded. “Get me a list and I will see to it.”

Gosnell sighed as he sat on the couch in the front of the Sisko’s lounge. The medic who was tending to his injuries was not being very gentle and it was starting to bother him.

“Don’t you know how to not hurt someone? What about your Hippopotamus Oath?”

The medic looked to him for a bit.

“I’m not euthanizing you. Therefore, I can do what I please to you.”

Gosnell groaned.

“And stop stealing jokes from The Simpsons,” the medic scolded.

There was now a couple dozen security officers going over PADDs with the ship’s blueprints on it, assigning search routes. Gosnell decided to save his limited supply of flares for when the natural light streaming in through the windows went away.

One of the things that concerned the people in the room the most were the two helicopters that were orbiting above the ship. Despite the three trees lying across the windows (as the lounge was on deck five, one deck above where the saucer flattened out and began to slant downward), they could still see them.

It was assumed that if the pilots of the ships were looking, they could see the people inside as well.

They all hoped that if all they had were helicopters, they wouldn’t be able to bust through the transparent aluminum windows and board the ship.

The medic patted Gosnell on the head and smiled.

“You’re all fixed.”

Gosnell checked his once broken arm and smiled.

“Thank you.”

The medic nodded as he got up to assist four others with minor injuries who were being helped into the room.

The seriously injured were transported to the NSO triage, while the walking wounded were forced to huff it down to the lounge.

It seemed cruel, but the temporary sickbay/morgue was quickly becoming full. And they now learned that they would not have any power for at least another twenty-four hours.

To top everything else off, the air on the ship was starting to become hot and stale. While there was fresh air coming in through the multiple hull breeches, the air was not being circulated. There was no cooling system either, and once the sun went down; there would be no heating system.

The next twenty-four hours were going to be very trying.

-----

“A spaceship?” the Westerns Minister of Defense, Ina Klasn asked, just as befuddled as the rest of Mao’s cabinet.

“Yes sir,” Garone replied. “We think it crashed. It came in over the ocean at an incredible speed and crashed into the Reed Forest, destroying a path about fifteen kilometers long before stopping.”

“Did anyone survive?” Mao asked.

“We don’t know,” Garone stated. “Nobody has come out of it yet. We’ve got two Dal gunships overhead, and they have been radioing it, but we have to assume that they are not monitoring our channels.”

Garone shrugged. “I doubt they’d even understand us if they could hear us.”

The Interior Minister looked to Garone.

“What about the media?”

Garone looked to his assistant who handed him some papers.

“It appears that people have been calling in reports of a UFO and a red streak across the sky, but nothing concrete. We’ve sealed off the airspace around it, and the Navy is protecting the waterways near it.

“We should be happy that it happened where it did, since the forest will conceal it from the next closest town.”

The older man nodded and looked to Mao.

“Sir, we should keep this away from the public. After the Easterns attack they are jumpy. We don’t need to add aliens to their list of things to fear.”

Mao nodded. “Agreed.”

The Prime Minister stood.

“What’s our next course of action?”

Garone inhaled.

“We need to find out if they are friendly or not. If they are, and they survived, maybe we can enlist their help?”

“Help?” Mao asked.

Garone looked to his old friend.

“You said God would help us. What if God sent us these people to put an end to the Eastern threat forever?”

Mao pondered this.

“That ship is enormous. The amount of power that would be necessary to run it would be astronomical! Not to mention the technology that would be required.

“We could eliminate ALL of those murderers in days, not years.”

Mao looked to Garone.

“I won’t force them.”

Garone shook his head. "Of course not. But once we determine their intentions, we will come and get you and all you have to do is explain what is happening. They have to help if they have any morals."

Mao nodded.

"But it will be a while," Garone replied. "I think it would be best if we wait a couple of days for them to attempt to make contact first. Plus, I want to send in a team to check it out for radiation."

Mao nodded once more. He hoped that this truly was God's hand helping him – helping them – God's chosen people, in their struggle against the evil that sat on the other side of the ocean.

"Did the Easterns see it?" Klasn asked.

"They would have had to," Garone sighed. "The ship left an enormous radar signature. We detected it from orbit as well, so we have to assume they did."

Mao glanced to the two military officials.

"Protect that ship. That's our priority right now."

Garone nodded as he and his assistants darted out of the room.

Mao sighed softly and returned to his seat. He noticed his friend of many years, Klasn, looking at him.

"What?"

Klasn looked out the window for a moment, and then turned back to Mao.

"What if they aren't friendly? What if they came here on a mission of conquest?"

Mao shrugged and turned towards the window as well.

"Then we do what we always do. We defend ourselves and punish those who would dare do us harm."

-----

All forty-one of the Sisko's engineers had been found and accounted for. Of them, only four were too injured to return to work. The remainder were down in engineering, assisting J.C. and Usagi in repairing the auxiliary power EPS grid.

It was a relatively simple task in and of itself. Unfortunately, some of the damage was so extensive from the fire, the engineers had to drill holes and build new passages from the aux power room to the power distribution center.

Neither of which were close to each other.

Gosnell had been making a point of every few hours bringing the engineers some field rations, as the replicators were not working. He would chat with his half-asleep wife for a few moments, and then return to the lounge to be of whatever assistance he could be.

"Ah crap," an engineer cursed.

“What?” J.C. asked, looking up from his welding.

The engineer stuck his head around a corner.

“I’ve got another sealed junction box.”

J.C. grumbled. “I knew we should have brought that fat ass Vulcan bastard with us,” he growled about the head of the shipyard.

J.C. walked to the junction in question. He quickly pulled off the seal and jammed a makeshift crowbar between the bulkhead and the panel’s covering. He pulled back on the low-tech prying instrument, but it immediately snapped, sending J.C. to the deck.

“What the hell?” he asked.

Makoto walked over to where J.C. was as the young engineer pulled himself back to his feet.

“What’s wrong?” Makoto asked.

J.C. looked perplexed as his gaze switched between Makoto and the junction box.

“This one seems to be sealed up better than the rest,” He complained. “Can you guys blow it off?”

Makoto nodded and motioned for a marine to come and join her. The pair placed some explosives around the hatch. The marine placed a detonator on the explosives, and then motioned for all to duck and cover.

Five seconds later the hatch is blown clear. Once the smoke dissipated, J.C. looked inside.

“What the hell is that?” he asked.

Usagi, who was woken from her standing sleep by the explosion, walked over and investigated the hole. Inside was a green and black device that was flashing and beeping quietly.

“Isn’t that the main warp field generator current line?” Usagi asked.

J.C., not sure whether to be more amazed at the device or the fact that Usagi knew what the device was attached to, nodded.

“Yeah.”

J.C. went to pull the device off, but Makoto stopped him.

“Don’t touch it,” she ordered.

J.C. stopped moving forward and turned to another engineer.

“Can you work around it?” he asked her.

The other engineer nodded. J.C. turned to Makoto. “I want that thing off my-”

“Ahem,” Usagi groaned.

“-Our engines,” J.C. demanded.

Makoto nodded in understanding. "I'll get a bomb team down here in a couple of minutes."

After about twenty minutes, three specially trained security officers had arrived and successfully removed the device after determining that it was not a bomb.

They then secured it and left it for J.C. to analyze later. J.C. was terribly curious of what it was and why it seemed to have power. He also sure as hell wanted to know why it was attached to one of the most important conduits outside of the nacelles.

He did not have time to deal with that now, though. Word had filtered down that the triage unit was losing people and would continue to do so unless sickbay regained power.

So, J.C. and the rest of the engineers worked at double speed to get the connections made the power restored.

Minako was awoken by sounds.

Not the clunking of the trees falling onto the hull like before, but of real, honest to goodness sounds of the ship.

She looked to her panel, which had been acting as a pillow. It was beginning to boot up.

Minako shot up, and looked around happily as the emergency lighting system, albeit dim, began to kick on.

She grinned as she heard the life support system begin to kick air out of the vents.

She giggled happily as all the terminals on the bridge began to chirp, their loading sequence beginning.

The two security officers, both of whom had fallen asleep as well, also woke, happy to see the lights coming back on.

Minako tapped her communicator.

"Aino to Kino."

"Yeah," Makoto groaned.

"We're getting power back to the bridge."

"Good," Makoto replied dryly.

"You okay?" Minako asked her friend.

"I'm really fucking tired," she replied.

Minako chuckled. "Go get some sleep."

"We still have two decks to search. I'll sleep when we're done."

“Alright.” Minako replied as her terminal completed the restart and was ready for action. “Can you send Lt. Jansen up here to help me run diagnostics?”

The short silence concerned Minako.

“We haven’t found her yet.”

“Oh.”

“She went to weapons control to check on something. I am sure she is fine, and she just hasn’t been able to get up here yet. Don’t worry,” Makoto replied, trying to ease the worry in her friend’s voice.

It did not do much to ease her own worrying though.

Ranma awoke to the sounds of people being transported. He slowly sat up and looked around as both doctors and patients were beamed from the triage unit.

The pig-tailed boy groaned as Akane shoved him back onto the bed.

“Let me run one more scan on you, and then you can go back to being belligerent,” she told him.

Ranma nodded and allowed Akane to run the sensor of her tricorder over his head.

“How is everything?” Ranma softly asked.

Akane never took her eyes off the tricorder.

“They’ve restored emergency power to the entire ship, sans a few places. Everyone who is serious is being transported to sickbay.”

Akane grinned and closed her tricorder.

“So, what’s the prognosis?” Ranma asked.

“You’ll live. Try not to smack your head again for a few days though,” Akane smiled at him.

Ranma chuckled and attempted to sit up again. This time he was not met with any resistance, and slid around, dangling his feet off the bed. He looked around the temporary emergency room.

It seemed that all the people that remained were the least seriously injured of the group. He noticed Ryouga sleeping on a floor mat.

“Is he going to be okay?”

Akane looked to the snoozing pig-boy and nodded.

“Yeah, he’s just still out from the crash. Soon as he bothers to wake up, he’ll be ready to go.”

Ranma didn’t know if that mattered too much. It did not really seem to him like they would need a helmsman any time soon.

“Where’s Shampoo?” Ranma asked.

Akane lowered her gaze.

“She’s in sickbay. She’s critical right now.”

Ranma nodded. “Will she be okay?”

Akane shook her head. “I don’t know.”

Ranma sighed and slid off the bed.

“I guess all I can do now is go back to work.”

Akane took Ranma’s hand. Ranma squeezed it back and leaned in, kissing Akane softly.

Akane returned the kiss, not wanting to let Ranma go. He finally broke the embrace and walked away from her, and to the turbolift.

The door slid open and Ranma stepped in.

“Bridge.”

Amanda groaned.

She had been lying here, underneath a pile of crossbeams and wires for over twenty-four hours.

She was hungry, thirsty, tired and in pain. Not to mention that it was incredibly dark in the weapons control room and the air was getting very stale.

She had no idea what had happened. She had gone down to the small computer room on deck sixteen to try and fix the power flow to the aft torpedo launchers.

Then before she knew it, the ship was shaking and eventually she heard Ranma scream ‘emergency landing procedures.’

It seemed far more like a crash than a landing in her opinion.

Part of the ceiling had collapsed on her on the first, initial impact, trapping her. More fell on her upon the second impact, knocking her unconscious.

She had awoken about three hours ago. She had been calling for help, but either no one was around to hear her, or no one was alive to hear her.

The room was empty, sans the two security officers guarding it when she arrived. She had no clue what happened to them. Deck sixteen consisted of mostly conduits, computer rooms and storage areas, so it was highly unlikely that anyone would simply stroll along and find her.

They would have to be looking.

“CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?” she called out, a little weaker than she had in her previous pleas.

Silence answered her.

Amanda whimpered, closed her eyes, and laid her head down on the cold deck.

She slowly opened one of her eyes when she began to hear humming. The sight was one for sore eyes that was for sure. The dim, blue emergency lights began to come on. She could then hear the life support system begin to start up as well.

Amanda tried to move her arm to her communicator, but she was too pinned down.

"Damn!" she grumbled. "Computer!"

The computer did not reply.

"HELP!" she called out again.

The young blonde sighed in exasperation. What the hell good were the lights when there was no one around to see her.

Once again, she cried out. "COMPUTER!"

"Please stand by; loading sequence in process." the computer finally replied.

Amanda began to laugh. She would soon be out of this mess. As soon as the computer booted up, which took longer than she thought a 6.7 Petahertz computer system should take, but it did have a lot of programs and systems to run and boot.

After a couple of minutes, she thought she would try it again.

"Computer."

The computer chirped its friendly, ready for your command chirp.

Amanda smiled. "Comm system access. Security."

It chirped.

"Security, Ensign Halton."

"Nicky, it's Amanda."

The man on the other end gasped.

"Amanda, where are you? We've been looking everywhere for you!"

"Apparently not!" Amanda scoffed. "I'm in weapons control, deck sixteen. I'm trapped under some stuff."

"Okay, we'll be there shortly."

"Can't you just beam me out?" Amanda groaned.

"No, the EPS junctions are shot throughout most of the ship. We have to use the NSO transporters, and you need enhancers to do internal transports."

Amanda sighed. "Well hurry up, please."

"Be there in a flash."

The communication ended. In about thirty seconds eight security officers, including Makoto beamed in.

“AMANDA!” Makoto called out. “Where are you?”

“Over here!” Amanda’s voice called from beneath some rubble.

The security officers all scurried in that direction and saw Amanda’s head, pinned to the floor.

“Are you badly injured?” one of the combat medics asked as the others began to pull the debris off her.

“I don’t think so,” she replied. “I can still move my toes and fingers.”

“Well, that’s a positive sign,” the medic grinned.

A few more security officers beamed in. Makoto looked to them.

“Finish searching this deck. We still have nine crew members unaccounted for.”

The guards nodded and headed off.

“Did we lose many people?” Amanda asked, doing her best to look at Makoto.

Makoto squatted down and the remaining pieces of debris were removed, and the medic began to run scans.

“Yeah, we did,” Makoto replied.

“How’s...” Amanda trailed off.

“She’s alive,” Makoto replied quietly. “She’s really hurt, though.”

Amanda felt a tear run down her face.

The medic placed a transport enhancer on Amanda.

“You have a couple of broken bones, and I think one of your vertebrae is damaged.” He replied, hitting his communicator.

“Dawson to NSO, two to transport directly to sickbay.”

“Acknowledged,” the person on the other end replied. Soon after both Amanda and the medic vanished.

Makoto stood up as the guards she sent to search returned.

“We found two.”

Makoto looked at the guards with sadness on her face.

“Are they...”

One guard shook his head. “They’re gone.”

Makoto shook her head softly for a moment.

“Alright, let’s go. We’ve got one more deck to search.”

# CHAPTER FOUR – FIRST CONTACT

“Would you mind repeating that?” Bacco asked her chief of staff.

The older man inhaled and repeated the report from his PADD.

“A Federation installation in Chicago was bombed about thirty hours ago. There were three people inside, all were killed.”

Bacco turned to her window, overlooking the Paris skyline.

“Do we know who is responsible?” she asked.

“No.”

The president groaned as her communications terminal chirped.

“Yes?”

“Madam President, several officers from Starfleet Intelligence are here to see you. They say it’s important.”

“Send them in,” Bacco replied.

After a moment seven men, wearing the black and gray uniforms of Starfleet Intelligence walked in.

“I’ll leave you alone,” The chief of staff said as he began to walk to the door.

His egress was quickly halted by the very direct point of one of the officers.

“We need you to stay for right now, sir,” the lone admiral replied.

The chief of staff nodded and complied. He knew this could not be good.

“Ma’am,” the admiral began, turning towards the president. “The Federation does not officially have any facilities in Chicago. The buildings that were bombed were used by Section 31 for training, storage, and logistics.

“We have reason to believe that the Vulcans are responsible.”

“What evidence?” the chief of staff asked.

One of the officers turned to the Admiral, who nodded.

“We have security footage,” the officer stated. “We were able to get a match by facial recognition. The man is a member of the Ministry of Intelligence.”

Bacco sighed at the information.

“Madam President, we need to respond,” the admiral stated.

Bacco's chief of staff started to choke on his own disbelief as Bacco simply shook her head.

"We cannot launch a military attack against another Federation planet," the chief of staff finally blurted out.

"If we don't, Section 31 will," the admiral replied. "And they will not do it cleanly. They've been punched in the proverbial face, and they *\*will\** take it personally."

"So, what do you suggest?" Bacco asked.

Another officer stood.

"We can take out the people responsible--"

"Take out?" Bacco interrupted. "You mean kill them?"

"They killed three Federation citizens, three officers of the Federation," the admiral replied. "Besides, if Section 31 doesn't think our response is good enough, they will kill more than the people directly responsible."

Bacco sighed and resumed listening.

The officer continued with his idea. "We take out the M-I agents responsible. We have the confirmed identity of one of them, and we know that three more were on the planet at the time of the attack.

"Quick, quiet, and clean."

Bacco shook her head again, still unsure.

"Ma'am, we can go to the council for this, but we will have to then make up some elaborate ruse to conceal the existence of Section 31. Plus, then you will have the Vulcans on the council informing the M-I and putting the agents responsible in hiding," the admiral countered.

Bacco sighed. The middle aged, dark haired woman knew that she was being asked to open one of the biggest can of worms she had ever opened in her life.

But the Starfleet people sitting on the edge of their seats awaiting her orders were right. Section 31 would be quick and quiet, but they would not be tidy. They would punish people all the way up the chain of command.

Possibly even Federation officials for allowing such a deed to happen.

"Fine," Bacco stated softly. "Keep it quiet."

The Starfleet Intelligence officers nodded and handed Bacco a PADD. The President inhaled deep in compilation and after a short delay, placed her thumbprint on the order.

"You've made the right decision, ma'am," one of the officers stated as he followed his peers out of the room. Once the room had cleared, the chief of staff looked to his president.

"Are you sure about this?" he asked.

Bacco shook her head. "No. In fact I think it's a terrible idea. No matter how neat and tidy Starfleet keeps this, I just know somehow this will come around to bite us in the ass."

The chief looked to his superior with a look of utter confusion on his face.

"Then why did you sign the order?"

Bacco turned from her gaze out the window and took a seat behind her desk.

"Because they were right. I've seen some of the reports of activities believed to be done by Section 31. An attack directly on them will incur amazing wrath."

She sighed and leaned back in her chair. "And we don't need a group as deadly as them having a vendetta."

Young browsed over the classified PADD that had been delivered to him moments before hand. It took him all the strength he could muster to keep from breaking out in stereotypical cartoon supervillain style laughter.

His communications system chirped.

Young grinned and looked down at an exhausted Salek.

"Hey buddy," Young grinned.

"I don't care for running, so this better be as urgent as you said it was," Salek panted.

Young cocked his head. "I think I would enjoy seeing you run."

"Zack..."

Young snickered. "They're launching a counterattack."

Both of Salek's eyebrows shot up. "Already?"

Young nodded. "A precision strike directed at the M-I officers who launched the attack."

Salek was fighting hard to keep from bursting out in glee himself. He made a quick mental note that he would have to meditate for an extra few hours tonight.

"Excellent," he finally replied, a partial grin managing to sneak onto his face. "I will have my people set up to make the arrest."

Young nodded. "What about your boy from Chii?"

Salek shrugged. "He can't very well give his confession before they find the debris."

Young nodded in understanding. "I can't imagine that they held together for too long."

"According to T'Kuk, the Sisko should have exceeded structural tolerances within seconds of entering trans warp. A couple hundred of light-years is as far as they could have gotten.

“They surely disappeared from DS9’s sensors suddenly when the break-up occurred. As soon as DS9 gets some ships out there to investigate, they will find the wreckage. Then he’ll turn himself in.”

“Well, I look forward to seeing the president’s face when a Vulcan confesses that the High Command authorized a revenge murder,” Young smirked. “You know, I really hate that woman.”

Salek nodded. “Well, I doubt very much that the president in charge when the Federation fell apart will win reelection.”

“Stranger things have happened,” Young replied.

“How far down the succession chain are you?”

Young simply growled.

“I will speak with you later. I have to get things moving,” Salek grinned. He did the usual Vulcan finger greeting to Young and ended the communication.

Young quickly looked around his office.

No one around.

After verifying the door was closed, he took one last look, and grinned to himself.

“Oh, what the hell,” he said out loud.

The laughter began slow and quiet, but within a moment he was laughing in a manner that would have made even the best mad scientists green with envy.

-----

*\* Executive Officer’s Log, Star Date 60922.9.*

*Today I have a gaggle of unhappy tasks to perform. First, I must assume command of the ship. Something that, surprisingly, I am not looking forward to – and not just because of the circumstances.*

*Second, I am tasked with contacting the inhabitants of this planet. This will be my first, first contact mission. But what makes it even more sensitive is the fact that all indications are showing that this is a pre-warp civilization.*

*However, it seems a little late to simply pretend we don’t see them.*

*Third, we must attempt to contact Starfleet. We still haven’t figured out how exactly to do this, since emergency power is all that we have available to us. \**

Ranma sighed as he sat in Karyn’s chair – his chair, in the captain’s ready room.

It disturbed him sitting in there and looking at the empty walls. He had originally thought that everything had just fallen off, until he discovered a crate with all of Karyn’s possessions in them.

He had no idea that she was planning on resigning. He, like just about everyone else on the ship, had gotten used to her, and the way she did things. While he did not know if he would consider them ‘friends’, they had quickly developed an excellent captain, first officer rapport.

It pained him to think that she had to spend her last days so unhappy.

“Would you like to continue recording?” the computer asked him.

“No. End log,” Ranma replied. The computer chirped and Ranma stood.

A bit too quickly.

Ranma suddenly felt a dizzy spell overwhelm him. He had to grab the back of his chair to keep from falling to the deck.

While he was almost 100 percent, the remnants of the concussion were messing with his balance.

“Good thing I don’t have to worry about Ryouga rocking the ship!” Ranma joked to himself.

*\*That wasn’t very funny.\** His mind replied.

Ranma nodded. Dark humor wasn’t really his thing. However sometimes you need to do what you can to keep your mind from breaking down on you.

Ranma was facing the largest number of fatalities that he had ever had while serving in a command position on a ship. So far, forty-one confirmed with three still missing. A couple dozen officers were still in sickbay with life threatening injuries.

Ranma would never consider himself religious, but he had been praying. Praying for those who were already gone and praying for those who were still very hurt.

Ranma sighed, pulled himself together and stepped out onto the bridge.

There was a little more activity. Several of the engineers had returned to the bridge to assist in fixing control panels so that they could get communications, sensors, and various other necessary systems up and running again.

Ranma took note of Minako, half asleep, staring at her panel.

“What’s wrong, Commander?” Ranma asked her.

Minako slowly turned to Ranma.

“So many people...” she mumbled.

Ranma nodded and walked up to her. Minako was surprised when Ranma embraced her, but she did not fight it. She leaned into him and began to cry.

“We’re going to be okay,” Ranma softly said, gently rubbing her back.

Minako continued to cry for a moment before pulling away.

“I – I’m sorry,” she sniffled.

Ranma shook his head. “Don’t be. I may have to ask you to return the favor soon.”

Minako nodded.

“Is ship wide up?”

Minako nodded and pressed a couple of buttons. A low whistle came out of the ship's intercom.

"This is the X-O, can I have everyone's attention please," Ranma called out.

Ranma paused a couple of seconds, giving his crew a moment to turn their attention to the speakers hidden within the walls.

"In case anyone is not aware of our situation, we have crashed on the surface of a planet. We have not yet been able to determine our location, nor send a distress call, but that is our first priority."

Ranma inhaled deeply.

"I regret to inform you that I am assuming command of the ship. The captain-" Ranma trailed off for a moment, the hollowness of his words echoing in his mind.

"...our captain was killed as the result of her injuries sustained during our crash."

Ranma again paused a moment, his own injuries again causing him to have to steady himself with the back of the captain's chair. After a couple of seconds, Ranma inhaled deeply and continued.

"All department heads, please report to the bridge in two hours for a status meeting, and to determine what resources will need to be spared to bring the ship to levels dictated in Starfleet emergency planetary operations S-O-P.

"That is all," Ranma stated, ending the communication.

"Computer," he called out.

The computer chirped at him. "Transfer all command codes to Saotome, Ranma. Commander. Authorization 7-1-2-3-Alpha-Zula-Beta."

"Reason for transfer?" the computer asked.

"The C-O is deceased." Ranma quietly replied.

The computer chirped. "Reason verified," It replied in its uncaring, monotone voice. "Command transferred."

Ranma turned to Minako.

"Have the ships overhead attempted to contact us?"

Minako nodded. "I have been receiving transmissions on low UHF, and VHF frequencies. Also, on a 3 gigahertz digital band."

"Can we reply?"

Minako nodded. "I can divert some power to the communications system. Short range, but they're close enough to receive it."

"And the universal translator?"

"It's listened to their request enough to develop a translation matrix," Minako replied after checking some details out on her terminal.

Ranma nodded, bit his bottom lip, and inhaled deeply. "Open a channel."

The communication system chirped and Minako nodded.

"This is Commander Ranma Saotome, captain of the United Federation of Planets starship, the U.S.S. Benjamin Sisko to the aircraft hovering overhead. Please respond."

A moment passed by, and the radio crackled.

"This is Lieutenant Jul Polius of the Western Defense Forces. Please state your intentions."

"We come in peace," Ranma replied, amazed at how hokey it sounded. "We – We did not mean to contact you. We had an engine malfunction and crashed here."

"Commander Saotome is it?" the lieutenant asked.

"Yes."

"On behalf of the Western government, we welcome you to Valari."

Ranma smiled.

"Thank you. Is there someone with your government that we can speak with?"

"My superiors are informing me that our prime minister would like to meet with you. I will inform them and get back to you on this channel," the pilot replied.

"Very well," Ranma answered. "We'll be right here."

The lieutenant chuckled and closed the communication.

"Is the air safe?" Ranma asked Minako.

"Yeah," she replied, "Slightly higher concentration of hydrogen, but otherwise similar to Earth."

The rear turbolift door opened and Makoto walked onto the bridge, with Rei right behind her.

"Captain," Makoto called to Ranma.

Ranma almost corrected her, but then remembered the long-standing naval tradition. The captain of a ship is referred to as Captain, regardless of rank.

It would make things less confusing, considering there could be up to seven officers who could be referred to as 'commander' on the bridge at one time.

"Yes?" Ranma replied.

"All crew members have been accounted for."

Ranma lowered his eyes. "The final three?"

Makoto smiled. "Hurt, but alive."

It was the happiest news he had received all day.

“We’ve made contact with the inhabitants of this planet,” Ranma told them. “We’re working on face-to-face contact now.”

“I would suggest we do it off ship, sir,” Rei offered.

Makoto nodded in agreement.

“If they aren’t warp capable, we don’t want them seeing the inside of the ship or using the transporters.”

Ranma had to agree.

“I guess we could meet them somewhere in front of the ship.”

Rei nodded. “I’ll get a security team set up for you.”

Rei began to turn and walk away.

“Commander, I’d much rather take just a couple of regular security officers. Just trying to impart that whole ‘not hostile’ image on them.”

Rei stopped and nodded. Makoto turned to Ranma.

“Who are you taking?”

“Myself,” Ranma stated. “Obviously. Commander Shampoo if she is able, and Lt. Fuchs. Commander Aino will come if Shampoo is still in sickbay.”

Makoto nodded. “And me.”

Ranma grinned. “And you.”

Makoto returned the grin as the rear turbolift slid open.

Out of the turbolift walked Usagi and J.C., both looked like characters out of ‘Night of the Living Dead.’

“Captain,” J.C. called out.

“What’s the status down there?” Ranma asked.

The two engineers walked up to Ranma as Makoto and Rei went off to resume their duties.

“I think we can get main power restored within a week,” J.C. replied.

“That long?” Ranma asked.

J.C. looked to Usagi.

“Captain, there are several things wrong down there,” Usagi stated.

The look of confusion did not go undetected on Ranma’s face.

"We've found several 'foreign' devices on various relays, most of which control plasma and anti-matter flow. But there was another on a system that adjusts the coils in the nacelles and generates the warp field," J.C. explained.

"What do you mean by foreign?" Ranma asked.

"They're Borg," Usagi replied bluntly.

"WHAT?" Ranma yelled. "How the hell did they get there?"

J.C.'s eyes narrowed as he remembered the fat Vulcan at the shipyard.

"They were installed back at Chii."

Ranma shook his head. "Are you sure?"

J.C. shook his head. "No, but I will be."

Ranma nodded. "Do what you can to get power restored so that we can send out a distress call. That's our first priority."

J.C. pondered this. "Why don't you just send a Runabout up?"

Ranma shook his head. He hadn't even thought about that. It was a good idea, yet at the same time a bad one.

"I don't want the population seeing them."

J.C. nodded in understanding. "Well, how about we take the subspace system out of one and put it into Nighthawk?"

Nighthawk, the scout shuttle with a cloaking device installed was still sitting in shuttle bay two. At least Ranma hoped it was.

"Hopefully, it hasn't been damaged," Ranma stated.

J.C. shrugged. "It shouldn't be. The magnetic locks that hold them in place are EXTRAORDINARILY strong. I'll get to work on that right away."

"I can handle it, J.C." Usagi interrupted.

J.C. eyed her. "You sure?"

Usagi nodded.

"Okay," J.C. replied. "Back to work then."

"Go take a nap," Ranma ordered. "You look like hell."

J.C. grinned and nodded. "Yes sir."

Usagi groaned as she tripped and fell to the deck.

"You too, Commander," Ranma ordered her as well.

Usagi only chuckled Ranma thumbs up as she stumbled her way into the turbolift.

Minako felt herself starting to dose off when her speakers barked out at her.

“This is Lt. Polius to Commander Saotome aboard the U.S.S. Sisko. Do you read me?”

Minako opened the channel as Ranma scurried to the operations station.

“Yes, Lieutenant.”

“Sir, the Prime Minister would like to meet with you in twelve hours. There is a river about two kilometers from here to your northwest, and a very lovely picnic area. Would that be an acceptable place?”

“Yes. That would be fine,” Ranma replied.

“Excellent. I will tell them.”

“Lieutenant, may I ask, are your ships going to remain overhead?” Ranma asked.

“Yes sir,” the pilot replied. “The government has declared a military restricted no-fly zone around your ship, and we need to enforce it. The government feels it best to conceal your existence from the population for now, and the only way to do that is to make sure no one can get close enough to see you.”

Ranma nodded in understanding. He was partially grateful, part annoyed. While it would help minimize the contamination by keeping the public away, it would make it harder for them to launch Runabouts and repair damage.

“Very well. Twelve hours,” Ranma replied.

“Sir, this is Lt. Commander Minako Aino, Chief of Operations,” Minako called to Polius. “By chance do you have an atomic clock frequency that I may sync our ships clocks to?”

Ranma raised an eyebrow but said nothing.

“4-9-9 point 1-5-5-5 megahertz,” Polius replied.

“Thank you,” Minako replied, closing the channel. “We don’t want to be late, and their hours and our hours may not be equal.”

Ranma nodded. “Good thinking.” He began to walk to the turbolift but paused. “Is Lt. Kaii okay?”

Minako nodded. “I have him helping engineering.”

“Bring him up here. You need to get some sleep before our meeting.”

Minako slowly nodded. “What about Shampoo?”

Ranma sighed. “I don’t think she’ll be up to it.”

-----

“Deep Space Nine to the U.S.S. Sisko. Please respond,” the exhausted communications officer in Ops called out once again. Once again, she heard nothing but static. Colonel Kira walked out of her office and down the ramp to where the communications officer sat.

“Any luck?” she asked.

“No ma’am,” the federation officer replied. “I’ve tried all channels, and nothing.”

Kira sighed. “Has the Defiant reported back yet?”

Right on cue the communications panel began to chirp.

“The Defiant.”

Kira nodded and turned to the viewer. “On screen.”

“Colonel,” the young man sitting in the Defiant’s captain’s chair nodded.

“What’s the report, Commander?”

“We’ve searched for the past sixteen hours, and we can’t find any sign of them anywhere.” He replied.

“And are you sure that is where they will be?”

The young man nodded. “We followed their warp trail to this area, where it stopped. But it does not make sense because if they had been destroyed there would be debris and remains around here somewhere.

“But we’ve gone over this entire sector with a fine-tooth comb and we can’t even find a paint fragment,” The man explained.

Kira groaned in defeat.

“Very well. Return to the station.”

The man on the Defiant paused for a moment, and then nodded.

“Aye.”

The communication ended as Kira turned to the communications officer.

“Who’s the Admiral responsible for the Sisko?”

The communications officer looked it up.

“Admiral Scott Larson.”

“Get him on subspace for me and send it to my office.”

The officer nodded as Kira went back into the office on the aft side of Operations.

Genma finished a yawn as he materialized in Admiral Larson's San Francisco office. He looked to Larson who was reading some text on his computer.

The older man appeared to have a lot on his mind right now. He was so preoccupied by what was on his screen that he hadn't noticed Genma beaming in yet.

"Ahem," Genma called out. "You wanted to see me, Admiral?"

"Genma," Larson noted as he turned away from his computer. Genma's senior stood and motioned for Genma to have a seat across from him.

Genma nodded in thanks and sat down.

"Genma, I am not one for beating around the bush, so I am going to be quite blunt here," Larson stated.

Genma grimaced. What did Haposai tell Larson?!?

"The Sisko is missing."

Genma sighed in relief, till realizing that his son's ship missing was much worse.

"Wh---what?" Genma stuttered. "What happened?"

"We don't know," Larson replied. "About twenty-eight hours ago the Sisko engaged a Cardassian fleet. The fleet was quickly destroyed. Then, according to sensor logs from Deep Space Nine, the Sisko went into warp. Their heading didn't correspond with any known locations, so DS9 thought they might have been chasing a ship that didn't appear on sensors.

"Sensors showed them accelerating to Warp 9.95, and thirteen seconds later they vanished off sensors."

Genma looked to the floor. "Has their debris been located?"

"No," Larson replied. "That's why I am not calling this a recovery operation, but a search and rescue."

Genma allowed a small smile to creep across his face. He knew that Ranma wouldn't be taken out that easily.

"What have the Cardassians said about this?" Genma asked.

"They deny any responsibility in the matter. They also emphatically deny having any part in the assaults that drew the Sisko out there."

"Do you believe them?" Genma asked.

Larson nodded. "Yes, not only because their economy is in tatters right now and starting a war with the Federation would be suicide, but the debris of the ships the Sisko destroyed before she vanished don't match what Cardassian ship debris should be."

Genma sighed and thought back for a moment. After a lifetime of memories of him and Ranma has drifted through his mind, he sat back up.

“What do we do now?”

“I have two ships with highly refined sensors on board that can do a better job sweeping the area than the Defiant could. All we can do now is wait to see what they find.”

Genma nodded and grumbled. He hated to wait.

-----

“It’s not a bad day for a walk in the forest,” Ranma said, breaking the silence of the hike that he, Minako, Makoto, Jeff, and three security officers were taking.

No, it was not a bad day at all. Like every day on NZ-12G, known only to the crew as Valari, the weather was perfect. A few clouds of water vapor from the jet fighters patrolling over head was the only obstruction between the ground and the crystal blue sky overhead.

The temperature was a toasty 25 degrees, a little warm for the dress uniforms that everyone, including the security guards were wearing, but the utter lack of humidity made it very pleasant.

Minako looked around. “This planet is pristine. I’ve never seen such a clear sky.”

Makoto nodded in agreement. “The air even seems cleaner than the ships air.”

Ranma also nodded in agreement, even though he did not understand how that would be possible. But he could tell a difference.

The crew continued to walk for another fifteen minutes before coming upon a clearing. There waiting for them was Garone and several military officers.

The two sets of people sized themselves up for a moment, before Ranma stepped forward, stretching his arm outwards.

“My name is Commander Ranma Saotome of the United Federation of Planets.”

Garone slowly also stretched out his hand as he stepped forward. Ranma clasped it and shook it in a friendly greeting.

Garone grinned, stepped backwards slightly, and bowed deeply. Ranma returned the bow.

“I am General Una Garone, commander of the Western Self Defense Forces,” Garone replied. “Welcome to Valari.”

Ranma smiled a ‘thank you’ as the sounds of helicopters began to echo overhead. Within a couple of moments, a large helicopter, decorated in many colors, including the blue and red flag of the Western people, began to land nearby.

Two attack helicopters shadowed the transports every move. Once the transport landed, the helicopters began to orbit overhead, their weapons scanning both the sky and the ground.

Out of the transport three army men hopped out. Seeing the aliens, none of them with markings on their skin, two of them ran forward and drew their weapons towards the group of strangers.

The Sisko security officers began to raise their weapons as well.

“STAND DOWN,” Ranma yelled back to them.

The security officers complied and kept their phaser rifles aimed at the ground.

Garone noticed how uneasy the army officer’s weapons were making the alien security detail.

“Corporals, lower your weapons,” He ordered them.

“YES SIR,” they both yelled as they complied, pointing the muzzle of their weapons to the ground.

At the transport, the security detail finally opened the main door and Mao stepped out, wearing a very formal suit. The older man was flanked on both sides by security officers in civilian clothes, as well as the Minister of Defense.

The group walked up to Ranma and his group.

Ranma, slowly bowed in respect and greeting to the leader of their temporary home. Minako elbowed Makoto, who in turned silently ordered the rest of the group to do the same.

“Mr. Prime Minister, it is an honor to meet you,” Ranma said, still bowed.

Mao smiled, and returned the bow. Everyone raised back up at the same time.

“I am Commander Ranma Saotome, captain of the United Federation of Planets starship, the USS Benjamin Sisko.” Ranma turned to his group. “This is my Chief of Operations, Lt. Commander Minako Aino, my Chief of Security, Commander Makoto Kino,” Ranma paused. “Our Chief Diplomacy Officer, Lt. Jeff Fuchs...”

Jeff raised an eyebrow at the unexpected promotion.

“And Lt. Merrywether, Ensign Vo, and Ensign Lee, members of my ships security detail,” Ranma grinned.

Mao returned the grin. “I am Pho Mao, Prime Minister of the Valari Western Republic. I see you have already met General Garone, and this is our Minister of Defense, Ina Klasn.”

Ranma nodded a greeting to Klasn.

“I apologize for any inconvenience our unexpected arrival has caused your government,” Ranma said. “It is against our policy to make contact with any civilization that has not achieved faster than light travel, but unfortunately it seems like the choice was taken out of our hands.”

“Accidents happen, I suppose,” Mao grinned.

Ranma nods.

“I can assure you though that my ship and crew will be as little of imposition as possible during our stay here. We generate our own food, water and power, and as soon as we can get our communications system repaired, we will call for help and get out of your hair,” Ranma explained.

“Well, I don’t want you to feel like you are unwelcome,” Mao replied. “In fact, I would like it very much if you would join me for dinner tonight at my house.”

Ranma nodded. "I would be honored sir."

Mao smiled. "Very good then," he looked to his watch. "Would you like me to have you picked up here, or at your ship?"

Ranma turned to Makoto.

"I am sure we can set up a landing zone in the path we made when we crashed," Makoto replied, unsure if she really wanted them that close to the ship.

Ranma looked to Mao.

"Very well. I will have someone pick you up in seven hours."

Ranma nodded and bowed again. "Thank you for your hospitality."

Mao returned the bow and he and his group returned to the helicopter. Ranma and the others turned around and began their walk back to the ship.

Once he was sure they were out of earshot, Ranma turned to Jeff.

"Well?"

Jeff pondered as he walked.

"He's hiding something. He's got some sort of hidden agenda, but I don't know what."

"Do you think they may be considering attacking us?" Makoto asked.

Jeff shook his head. "I couldn't see anything that resembled a suicidal thought in his head."

Makoto chuckled. Even crippled, it would be suicide for them to attack the ship. Superior training, weapons and technology could equal the fact that they were greatly outnumbered.

"I don't think it's an evil agenda," Jeff continued. "He seemed..." Jeff had to think about it for a little bit. "Scared."

"Well, it is a little scary to have a massive alien battleship land in your forest," Minako contemplated.

Jeff shook his head. "Not of us. In fact, I think he was almost ecstatic to see us."

"I think while we are stuck here, we should attempt to learn as much as possible about these people." Ranma motioned.

Minako mulled over how she could do that for a moment.

"Well, assuming they are at about twenty-first century Earth technologically, which is a safe assumption going by the jet aircraft and helicopters we've seen, they likely have a decentralized computer network we can access.

"Once communication systems are up again, that is."

Ranma nodded. "Okay. I'll see what I can learn tonight, as well."

"You're not going alone, are you?" Makoto asked.

"Yes," Ranma replied. "The less aggressive and paranoid we appear, the more likely they will be to leave us alone."

"Are you sure you're not mistaking them for bears?" Makoto mused.

Ranma chuckled.

"If he tries to eat you, make yourself look big," Jeff joined in, causing Ranma and Makoto to laugh.

Minako also giggled a bit, but suddenly felt a wave of nausea overwhelm her.

The blonde quickly turned away from the group and ducked into the bushes where she vomited.

"Commander?" Ranma called out.

"Minako!" Makoto also cried.

"I'm fine," she called back, wiping her mouth. She ignored the concern she felt from seeing blood in what she just expelled from her stomach.

"MRE's just don't agree with me, I guess," she said as she returned to the trail.

Ranma nodded and the group resumed their walk.

Makoto did not believe her though and eyed her old friend with concern.

15,000 kilometers away, on the Eastern continent, several military men went over the large satellite pictures of the path of destruction leading up to the silver 'flying saucer' sitting in the middle of a Western forest.

"Have you been able to determine its origin?" one military officer asked another.

"No, but I can guarantee that THEY did not build it."

"I guess we have to work under the assumption that it is an alien space craft."

The second officer nodded. "That's the problem though. With the technology on board, the Garah will have no problem countering our nuclear weapons, and potentially launching a massive counter offensive."

The first sighed as he nodded.

"Then there is only one thing for us to do. We either get the aliens on our side, or we kill them and take their technology."

# CHAPTER FIVE – DECISIONS

Ranma nodded a thank you to a security officer as they helped the pig-tailed captain from the helicopter to the landing pad at the Western Executive Mansion, about 1,600 kilometers from the Sisko's crash site.

Ranma looked around in awe as he is escorted into the main hallway. The palace was very lushly decorated with ancient Valari art that covered the walls from top to bottom.

There were also multiple pictures that looked to represent a man in a long flowing robe, like Earth pictures of God from the same era.

Ranma continued to look around at all the decorations. The huge, crystal chandeliers that adorned the ceilings, the plush, wool carpet that was so soft he could swear that even through his dress boots, he could feel how soft it was.

After walking down what had to be a Sisko's length of hallways, Ranma and his escorts came upon two large doors. Two military officers in full formal dress snapped to attention and very methodically put on a huge production in simply opening the doors.

Ranma smiled. It was an interesting feeling being treated like someone who was more important than they were. Ranma had acknowledged that in the grand scheme of things, he was nothing more than just another cog in the machinery. So, when someone treated him like he was more than that, well, it felt good.

It felt good even if he did feel that the person treating him so well did have an ulterior motive for doing so. As well, despite how he was being treated he could feel some uncomfortableness, and even hostility, from some of those around him. Ranma just brushed it off. He would not judge them as he did not know how he would react in their place, seeing an alien for the first time. At this point, Ranma was not aware that the disdain and hostility was not about who or what he was, but rather, how he looked.

Mao looked up from his recliner as the doors opened. He smiled when he saw Ranma walk in, still flanked by the two security guards. Mao shot them a quick nod and they left the room.

The Prime Minister walked over to Ranma and bowed. Ranma returned the greeting and was escorted by the blue and silver speckled man to the dinner table.

"I hope you enjoy seafood," Mao smiled.

Ranma chuckled. "I do. I am not that picky anyway. As long as I can catch it, I'll eat it."

Mao chuckled back. "Hopefully, we won't have to chase this."

The pair sat across from each other in silence for a few moments while the minister's staff brought out the first course, which consisted of a rather large salad made with some of the greenest lettuce Ranma had ever seen, other vegetables and fish. The waiter also filled up a glass with some bright purple wine.

Ranma took a bite of his salad. He then had to put forth every ounce of will power he had to not inhale the rest of it.

“Wow,” Ranma stated.

“I take it you like it?” Mao asked.

Ranma nodded as he took another bite. “I’ve never tasted anything quite like this before.”

“You don’t have this kind of food on your planet?” Mao asked curiously.

Ranma shook his head.

“We do, but it tastes...” Ranma looked for what he was trying to say. “Different.”

Ranma took another bite and continued. “Plus, the food we have on our ship isn’t ‘fresh’ so maybe I am just used to that.” Ranma grinned.

Mao smiled. “Your ship is pretty big. How many people are on her?”

Ranma swallowed and paused for a minute. He quickly tried to sum up the nature of Mao’s request.

“448.” Ranma inhaled. “Actually 404, after the crash.”

Mao dropped his smile. “I’m sorry, Captain.”

Ranma nodded. “Please, call me Ranma.”

“Ranma,” Mao replied. “If there is anything my government can do to help, let us know.”

Ranma smiled. “I appreciate the offer. We are grateful for what you are doing to keep the cultural contamination as low as possible.”

“That’s probably in both our best interests right now,” Mao half grinned. “Mass hysteria is the last thing I need.”

Ranma nodded but did not say anything.

The pair continued to eat for a while. Once the second course had arrived – something that was like a lobster and shrimp pasta dish – Ranma began to reengage the Prime Minister in small talk.

“So, tell me about your planet,” Ranma requested.

Mao took a bite and began to talk.

“Our planet is called ‘Valari’. It means ‘Paradise.’ God placed us on this planet over a half million years ago.

“Our planet is pretty young. Scientists think that God created it not more than one billion years ago.”

Ranma nodded. “Our planet is believed to be about four and a half billion years old.”

“Makes sense why you would be far more advanced than us,” Mao commented.

“Eh,” Ranma replied between bites. “Your civilization is not that far behind us. Most of our advances have happened in the past 500 years. And based on everything I have seen, you’re just a few hundred years behind us, and very close to developing faster than light travel.”

Mao shook his head. “We’ve never really been interested in space exploration. God has given us everything we need right here on Valari.”

Ranma smiled. “Based on just the beautiful forest, that I again apologize for damaging, I can understand why.”

Mao chuckled. “The forest will grow back.”

Ranma continued to eat for a while.

“Does your world have a single government?” Ranma asked after a few moments.

Mao grew a scornful look on his face. Ranma hoped that it was not directed at him.

“No,” Mao stated, the contempt in his voice obvious. “There is a second race of Valarians who live on the eastern continent.”

Ranma’s eyes darted around the room as all the security guards seemed to have the same look of scorn – no – hate on their faces.

“I take it there is some bad blood between your peoples?” Ranma quietly asked, although the question was quite unnecessary.

“Yes. The ‘Guraff’ are nothing more than thugs and murderers.”

Mao stood and walked to a television. He punched some buttons, and a news report came on. Ranma turned to it attentively.

“Final projections of damage from the Western Office of Information reports that five million, two hundred ninety-seven thousand, four hundred and two people are missing and presumed dead.”

The reporter paused.

“According to unnamed military officials, most of the bodies were vaporized, burning what one officer described as ‘a ghostly shadow’ into the wall behind where the person was standing.”

Ranma gasped.

“What happened?”

Mao muted the television.

“The Guraff consider us the enemies of God because of colors on our skin,” Mao explained, pointing to the marks on his face. “The entire history of our ‘conflict’ would take a long time to explain. But last week they stepped up the war by launching and detonating a nuclear missile in the center of the city of Vida; a city that was populated with over six million men, women and children.”

Mao sighed.

“There were a few thousand military officers there, but Vida was not a military city. They deliberately attacked a civilian city and SLAUGHTERED innocent people.”

The anger on Mao’s face and in his voice was very noticeable. Ranma shifted uncomfortably.

“Do you believe in God, Captain?” Mao asked.

*\*Oh no.\** Ranma shifted again. “I don’t disbelieve in God,” he dodged.

“Our scriptures say that God will take care of his chosen people. I believe that God caused you to crash here to help us eliminate the threat that the Guraff pose to us.”

Ranma shook his head. “We can’t interfere-”

“It’s not interference if it’s God’s will,” Mao countered.

Ranma sighed and quickly finished off his dinner.

“I will have to discuss this with my command staff,” Ranma replied.

Mao nodded. “I understand. But please understand Captain... Ranma... These people know you are here. They might forcefully try and take your technology.”

Mao looked to the television as it showed smoldering buildings.

“Or they might do THAT to you to keep you from helping us, regardless of whether or not you choose to do so.”

Ranma nodded and stood. Mao stood as well.

“Thank you for dinner, Mr. Prime Minister,” Ranma smiled as he bowed.

Mao bowed as well. “We’ll be in touch.”

Ranma nodded and walked out with the security officers.

From around the corner, Garone and Klasn walked in.

“Well?” Klasn asked as soon as Ranma was out of the room.

Mao nodded. “He’ll help. I’m sure of it.”

“What if he doesn’t?” Klasn asked.

Mao shrugged. “He will.”

-----

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh...” a small, quiet moan came from the port side of the room.

Three doctors who were checking some readings on another patient turned to bio-bed four where Shampoo was trying to open her eyes.

“COMMANDER SAOTOME!” one yelled.

In her office, Akane jerked up from her head in her arms, asleep at her desk position.

Akane wiped the drool from her face and walked into Sickbay.

"What is it?" she asked, angrily.

"Commander Shampoo is regaining consciousness."

Akane quickly dropped the anger and ran to the bio bed. She smiled as she checked Shampoo's vital statistics.

"The surgery worked!"

Shampoo slowly opened her eyes and looked up to Akane and the other four doctors.

"Where Shampoo?" She asked.

"You're in sickbay," Akane replied. "You were seriously injured in the crash."

Shampoo slowly moved her hands up and wiped the sleep out of her eyes. She then went to scratch the front of her head but was stopped by the doctors.

"We need to let the stitches heal for another day before we can do dermal regeneration," One doctor explained. "So, you mustn't scratch it."

Shampoo slowly nodded and began to sit up.

Akane helped her former rival into a sitting position.

"What happened," Shampoo whispered.

"We crashed into a planet. You apparently suffered some serious head trauma and required surgery to remove a clot. But it was successful, and you will be fine in a couple of days," Akane explained.

Shampoo inhaled deeply. "Ranma?"

Akane glowered.

"My husband is fine."

Akane frowned for a moment. "The captain is dead, though."

Shampoo exhaled and said a silent, amazon prayer for Karyn.

"When can Shampoo return to work?"

Akane looked to one of the doctors who checked Shampoo's readings.

"I think she will be okay to return to duty in 48 hours."

Akane smiled at Shampoo but was quickly knocked out of the way by what appeared to only be a gold streak.

“SHAMPOO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” Amanda cried as she glommed onto the Amazon. If one had not been paying attention you would have almost thought that it was Mousse. Or maybe someone who had been taking lessons from Shampoo herself.

Shampoo groaned from the impact, but quickly got over it as Amanda squeezed her. Shampoo brought her arms around Amanda and returned the embrace, albeit weakly.

Akane pulled herself off the floor. “Well, I know how to take a hint. I’ll be in the lounge if anyone needs me.”

The doctors nodded and everyone went their separate ways as Amanda, almost like a puppy, cried and smothered Shampoo with loving kisses.

Ranma materialized in transporter room three. Rei, Makoto, and Minako stood there, awaiting his report.

“Well?” Minako asked.

Ranma motioned for the three to follow him.

The quartet quickly walked out of the transporter room and headed towards a turbolift.

“We’ve landed in the middle of a nuclear holy war,” Ranma groaned.

Minako nodded as the three arrived at the turbolift.

“I’ve managed to hack into their decentralized computer network,” she explained as the doors opened and the four of them step in.

“Bridge,” Ranma interrupted.

The turbolift began its trip upward as Minako continued.

“This war has been going on for millennia. The people from the east have always had the technological advantage, but the people on the west outnumber the east nine to one.”

Minako check her PADD.

“It appears the east stepped up their campaign just recently by launching a nuclear weapon.”

Ranma nodded. He slowly turned to Minako.

“Can you see what the word ‘Guraff’ means?”

Minako paused and looked it up.

“‘Bastard animals’,” she replied.

Ranma sighed as the lift came to a stop and the four young officers stepped onto the bridge.

“Commander,” Ranma turned to Makoto. “I want you to start security patrols around the outside of the ship. There needs to be at least a one-kilometer perimeter buffer between us and them.”

Makoto nodded and began to move off.

“Oh, and Commander,” Ranma called out. Makoto stopped and turned to him. “There is a chance that they people from the east may attempt to attack us.”

“I’ll take care of it,” Makoto replied as she scurried off.

Rei looked to Ranma. “What do you want us to do?”

Ranma shook his head. “Nothing, yet.”

“Yet?” Rei pondered.

Ranma motioned for the two to follow him into his ready room. Once inside, Ranma ordered himself some coffee from his replicator and sat down on the side of his desk.

“The Westerns asked for our help in fighting off the Easterns,” Ranma informed them.

“You’re not going to help them, are you?” Rei almost gasped.

Ranma paused.

“Captain-” Rei started.

“No,” Ranma stated dryly. “I’m not going to violate the prime directive and interfere.

“That said, I want to keep all my options open.”

Rei looked to Minako.

“Understood,” Minako replied.

Rei, unsure of what to make of such a vague statement, adjusted her uniform and began to move towards the door.

“I need to brief my people on the new information.”

Ranma nodded.

As the door opened, Kaii turned from his position in Ops towards the ready room.

“Captain!” he called.

Ranma stood and he and Minako walked out the door with Rei.

“Yes?” Ranma asked.

“I have an audio message from someone claiming to be the president of the Eastern Valari Republic.”

“Can you verify where it’s coming from?” Ranma asked.

“No, our long-range sensors are still offline.”

Ranma nodded. “On speaker then.”

The speaker buzzed.

“Good day to you. I hope that you can translate this into your language. My name is Erie Lahore, I am president of the Eastern Valari Republic, a democratic republic that covers the eastern continent of this planet.

“On behalf of my government and people, I welcome you.

“I would very much like to meet with your leader face to face, but current – circumstances – prohibit that. However, if you would like to speak in a more, conversational way, you can contact me on digital frequency 8-2-1 point 5 gigahertz.

“Again, good day.”

The communication ended.

Ranma groaned. He had hoped to get in a nap before doing anything else diplomatic that evening.

-----

13 LIGHT YEARS FROM VULCAN

The operations officer on the oversized cargo freighter looked up from the Girls Bravo manga he was reading at a flashing light on his display.

He pondered it for a moment, before turning to the freighter’s captain.

“Leroy,” the ops officer called out.

Captain Leroy stirred slightly.

“Whutchuwan?”

The ops officer smirked.

“I’ve got three ships on an intercept course.”

Leroy shifted a bit more before sitting upright in his seat.

“Can you identify them yet?” Leroy asked as he wiped some of the sleep drool from his neatly trimmed goatee.

Ops shook his head. “Not yet. They’re still a light year out. But they’re big.”

“Alright then,” Leroy stated. “Yellow alert. Notify the rest of the convoy.”

Ops nodded and activated the ships minimal defensive platforms. He then got on the radio and informed the other five ships that there was possible danger ahead.

The six ships belonged to the Federation. Most were taking raw materials and food across Federation space. Being in Federation space, they weren’t issued an escort. After all, who would attack them? They had the defensive measures to handle raiders and over ambitious Ferengi, but no one else would dare march into Federation space.

Leroy walked up and around the small bridge to his operations officer.

“Sam, notify Starfleet. See if they have any ships nearby.”

The operations officer, known as Sam, complied. After a few moments of quiet chatting, he looked to his Captain.

“The U.S.S. Navajo is not too far. They are sending them.”

“ETA?”

Sam checked his readings.

“Twenty-one minutes.”

“And the ships?”

Sam sighed. “Nine minutes.”

“Great,” Leroy groaned. “How soon till you can identify them?”

“Another minute or so,” Sam replied.

Leroy returned to his seat and watched the viewer intently. After a few moments Sam piped up.

“They’re Vulcan,” Sam replied.

Leroy sighed in relief.

“Go ahead and stand down from yellow alert,” he ordered.

Sam nodded and deactivated the defense systems. “I wonder why they are running without their transponders on,” The bearded Scotsman pondered.

“Eh,” Leroy replied. “There is no telling why those Vulcan’s do anything.”

Sam, Leroy, and the helmsman all shared a laugh.

Their laugh ended and quiet consumed the bridge for another four minutes until another one of Sam’s lights began to blink, and his panel began to beep like crazy.

“THEY’VE LOCKED WEAPONS!” Sam screamed.

“WHAT?” Leroy screamed back, standing.

Before anything else could be said, the three Vulcan battle cruisers had brought the small cargo ships out of warp. Within another few seconds nothing was left but left-over grain, some sparking metal fragments, and the lifeless bodies of her crew.

The three Vulcan ships, without saying a word, turned and shot off into the darkness.

Aboard the Navajo, her captain, Mary Wilkens, screamed at the helm officer.

“CATCH UP WITH THEM!” she yelled.

The helmsman whimpered.

“We’re moving as fast as we can.”

Mary turned to operations.

“Can you plot a pursuit course?”

The ops officer shook his head.

“Sorry, they’re masking their warp trail.”

“I’ve lost them,” the weapons officer stated.

Mary sighed and resigned herself to the captain’s chair.

“Are you SURE those readings were accurate?” she asked operations, not bothering to look that direction.

“Yes ma’am,” Ops replied. “They were Vulcan battle cruisers.”

“Notify Starfleet,” Mary ordered as the Navajo dropped out of warp and began to scan the debris field for survivors.

-----

VULCAN; CITY OF NAGAYA – POPULATION 43,112,992

Several hundred Vulcans proceeded to mill around Nagaya’s central shopping district. There was little idle chatter, since chit-chatting seemed to be a waste of time, and therefore was not logical.

So, when there was chatter, it got everyone’s attention.

Of course, gawking was not logical either, so paying too much attention was frowned upon.

But when you see a couple of drunk, smelly, noisy Starfleet officers stumbling through the crowd you cannot help but watch.

“DAMN POINTY EARED BASTARDS!” the first slurred as he tripped over himself and fell to the ground.

Both officers were clad in the green uniform of the Land Defense Forces. A patch on their shoulders them as part of the Starfleet contingent assigned to Vulcan.

“ALWAYS SO LOGICAL!” the second officer laughed. “It’s NOT logical to be SO DAMN LOGICAL!”

The first officer laughed as well as he pulled himself up.

“Excuse me,” a voice called to them.

The two officers turned to find two Nagaya police officers standing in front of them.

“What do you want, pig?” The first officer laughed.

The old school insult was lost on the Vulcan policemen.

“You two are being very loud. Would you mind coming with us, please?”

The Starfleet officers laughed.

“You have no jurisdiction over us!” The first explained.

“Yeah,” the second continued. “We’re Starfleet.” The drunkard poked himself hard in the chest, attempting to bring attention to his communicator. “We can do whatever we want to you and there is NOTHING you can do about it!” The second belched, also pointing to the first officer's communicator.

“Yeah!” The first laughed. “Like that village we blew up!”

The pair laughed as the Vulcan police called for assistance. However, if the goal of the two drunks was to cause a scene, they had succeeded. A majority of the city center’s patrons were crowding around to see what was going on.

“Gentlemen, I insist you come with us, or we will have to arrest you,” The police officer explained again, still monotone, yet stern.

“What?” The second Starfleet man screeched. “YOU ARREST US?!”

A couple more police officers came, as well as a pair of Starfleet officers in gold security uniforms.

The two drunks noticed this, as well as the large crowd. They nodded to each other and began to laugh.

“See you in hell, you green blooded assholes,” the first stated before both men tapped their communicators.

In a blinding flash an enormous boom is heard. People and buildings alike are blown in every which direction. Screams are muffled and short lived.

After the smoke cleared, everyone within a kilometer of the two Starfleet officers turned suicide bombers were dead. Others were seriously injured, crying out for help. Their cries were hard to hear over the sounds of sirens and alarms as more Vulcan police, military and medics began to arrive.

-----

Shampoo scratched at the spot on her forehead where the incision used to be.

“Didn’t they tell you not to scratch there?” Ranma asked her from the captain’s seat.

Shampoo grinned. “They said no scratch before it heal.”

Ranma returned the grin. It was a quick grin though as he looked around the bridge and groaned. Ranma's eyes moved from one station to the next, surveying his crew before they moved to the rear of the bridge. There his eyes sat, watching the alert status indicator on the master situation display blink yellow.

---

11 HOURS EARLIER

"I understand that you don't wish to help us," President Lahore stated. "The problem is that you are helping the Garah."

Ranma checked his PADD that Minako gave him. Garah translated to 'Marked beasts.'

*\*Gee, these people just have all sorts of nice names for each other.\** Ranma thought to himself.

"We're not helping them, President Lahore. We're just borrowing some land until our people can come and rescue us."

"Then I don't suppose you'd mind if I came and toured your ship?"

"That isn't possible," Ranma replied. He noticed Jeff waving his arms. Ranma nodded. "They have not been on board either."

"I'm not blind, Commander," Lahore growled. "I see the military presence near your ship."

"They're protecting us from exposure."

"LIAR!" Lahore growled. "Be careful who you bed with, Commander. God doesn't care for those who would lie with the dogs."

Ranma sighed.

"If I find that you are assisting them in anyway, I will come and take your technology and punish both of you with it."

The communication ended before Ranma could reply.

"That went well," Ranma groaned.

Jeff smirked and nodded.

"You should have done diplomacy as a career, sir."

Ranma scowled at Jeff.

"I have to go now," Jeff grinned before running out of Ranma's ready room.

-----

BACK TO NOW

"Devall to Bridge."

"Go ahead," Minako replied.

"We're almost done down here."

Ranma grinned. "You have the bridge, Shampoo. I want to go check this out."

Shampoo smiled as Ranma, Minako and Lt. Kaii left the bridge.

J.C. looked down as Usagi fused the final junctions together between the Nighthawk's EPS grid and the harvested communications system. It was already a tight squeeze in the small ship's cockpit, and the bulky terminal made it even tighter. What was once a three-seat shuttlecraft was now a two-seater, assuming one of those people were tiny.

Once she was complete, Usagi looked to J.C.

"I think it's done," she stated.

J.C. turned slowly and pressed a sequence of keys on the terminal, which he hoped would power it up.

The panel chirped and the lights began to light up and blink. J.C. grinned.

"Sweet."

Usagi smiled and climbed out of the ship. J.C. quickly made sure the console was locked down, and then climbed out as well. The pair high-fived each other.

Ranma, Minako and Kaii were standing outside of the ship when J.C. and Usagi emerged. Kaii had already begun walking around the ship as part of his preflight.

"Well?" Minako asked.

J.C. nodded. "It should work."

"Should?" Minako asked.

Kaii walked back to the group.

"If we are too far away, continuum drag will pull the signal out of subspace. If that happens before the signal hits a subspace amplifier, it could be years before the signal gets to Federation space."

Ranma nodded. He understood what could happen.

"Beats sitting here and hoping they just happen to pass by," Ranma acknowledged.

The group nodded in agreement with their captain.

"Once I get up there," Kaii continued, "I will run a stellar cartography scan and we can determine our location. Then we can aim our signal towards the nearest relay, fire it with full power and hope for the best."

"Alright, good luck, Lieutenant," Ranma stated. Kaii nodded and boarded the small scout ship. Ranma, Minako, Usagi and J.C. turned and walked out of the shuttle bay.

"Nighthawk to control, request departure permission."

"Granted," the voice replied.

The shuttle bay door began to open. Kaii lifted the craft off the deck to about 3 meters above the deck.

"Engaging cloak." Kaii stated.

"Copy," control replied.

Kaii activated the cloaking device. The external view of the shuttle shuddered a little, and then vanished. Kaii slowly pushed the ship out of the shuttle bay, and then pitched upwards.

"Nighthawk to Operations, Minako can you give me a clear heading?"

Back on the bridge, Minako had her computer plot out the patrol patterns of the fixed wing aircraft overhead. Within a few seconds, her computer chirped and showed a blinking green line, with a short countdown timer.

"Heading 2-1-0 mark 0-1-6, engage full speed on my mark," she replied.

Kaii programmed in the course. The shuttle craft adjusted its nose to be ready to shoot off in its programmed direction at a moment's notice.

Kaii readied himself to hit the engage button.

Minako eyed her terminal.

"Ten seconds."

"Five."

"Four, Three, Two, One, MARK!"

Kaii engaged the engines and the small invisible ship shot off into the early evening sky, blowing through the net of fighters overhead. The Nighthawk quickly breached the atmosphere and within a few minutes was comfortably orbiting several thousand kilometers above the surface of the planet.

"Nighthawk to Sisko, I'm in position. Beginning phase one."

"Roger," Shampoo replied.

Kaii squeezed himself into the co-pilots seat and set up his first set of scans. After a moment, the results began to appear on his terminal.

"It appears that they do have some 'near terra' detection telescopes and radar which might detect me," Kaii informed the Sisko.

"Do what you can to minimize that risk, Lieutenant," Ranma ordered. "But if you have to decloak to transmit with enough power, then do so."

"Aye," Kaii replied. "Beginning astrometric scans now."

Kaii began the first set of scans.

"Unable to locate universal positioning beacon," the computer replied.

"Well," Kaii mumbled. "We're out of Federation, Klingon, Romulan, Cardassian- well, were out of any know civilizations space."

Ranma simply groaned in reply.

“Beginning scan number two.”

Kaii worked on a second computer for a moment, then began the scan. A few seconds later the computer chirped at him again.

“Unable to triangulate location based on stellar landmarks.”

“Why not?” Kaii angrily asked.

“No landmarks conform to Federation star charts,” The computer replied, ignoring Kaii's attitude towards it.

“Bah,” Kaii grumbled. He began to punch in more commands.

“Beginning stellar recording,” he informed the Sisko. “The computer on the ship should be able to run more complex comparisons.”

“Recording complete,” the computer informed Kaii.

Kaii grinned. “I’ll just hang out up here while you guys figure it out.”

Minako went to work in her station. Well, she just programmed the parameters into the computer system, and it did all the work.

However, it took longer that they hoped it did.

After an hour Minako’s computer chirped.

“GOT IT!” she called out.

“On screen,” Ranma ordered as both he and Shampoo stood to look at the star chart.

“We’re on NZ-12G...” Minako paused, then began to continue. The elation in her voice from having found where they were being replaced with the disappointment in knowing exactly where they were. “...The nearest Federation outpost is 14,926 light-years away.”

Shampoo gasped. “It will take a rescue ship from Earth months to get here.”

Ranma groaned. He wanted nothing more than to go nuts on the main viewer for delivering him such grim news, but he knew that would accomplish nothing. Plus, he had the morale of the crew to think of. He simply turned to Minako. “Well, let’s get them started.”

Minako nodded and began to do some work on her computer. It chirped at her a couple of times before she looked up.

“I’ve found a relay station about 3,000 light-years from here,” she explained. “We should be able to hit it before the signal falls out of sub-space.”

“That should also mean that there is a chance there is a Federation ship out here somewhere.” Makoto pondered out loud.

Ranma nodded and stood. He turned to Minako.

“You guys ready?”

Minako nodded.

“Begin recording.”

-----

“SIR!” an ensign screamed as he ran into Larson’s office, barely waiting for the sliding doors to open completely. Larson and Genma looked up at the over excited ensign.

“Yes?” Larson asked.

The ensign nearly tripped over himself as he ran to Larson’s view screen and began to punch in commands. “DS9 received this about fifteen minutes ago.”

Both Larson and Genma stood as the image of Ranma appeared on the screen.

“This is Commander Ranma Saotome of the U.S.S. Benjamin Sisko to Admiral Larson.

“I hope you get this message sir. It’s being sent on Stardate 60722.4 at 17:28.”

Ranma paused for a moment to look over a PADD.

“About four days ago we suffered an unexplained engine malfunction which threw us into transwarp. We forcefully terminated the warp field by ejecting the core approximately 24 seconds later. We found ourselves exiting transwarp within the gravity well of a planet.

“All attempts to pull ourselves from the dive that we were in failed. We were forced to execute emergency landing procedures on the planet NZ-12G IV.”

The pain in Ranma’s eyes became more and more apparent as he continued to talk.

“We lost forty-four members of our crew, including our captain.”

Genma bowed his head. Larson could only shake his in disbelief. Even though the admiral had dealt with death throughout his career, it was still hard for him to hear such reports.

“There are further complications,” Ranma continued. “Our assistant chief engineer has found – foreign – devices on our engines, including one of obvious Borg design.”

“What?” Larson asked the recording.

“In addition, NZ-12G IV, Valarie, is an inhabited-” Ranma inhaled, “-pre-warp civilization, about at early twenty-first century Earth technology.”

“Ah crap,” Genma replied.

“Obviously, we had no choice but to initiate contact with them,” Ranma added, before pausing once again.

“While the government of the region that we landed in is friendly and is assisting in limiting the cultural contamination caused by our arrival, they are in the midst of a war with another government who has threatened to attack us to obtain our technology.”

Ranma leaned back in the captain’s seat and sighed.

“This government has also requested our help. They feel that we were sent here by God in order to eliminate the other government.”

Ranma paused, looked around, and leaned towards the camera.

“To be blunt, sir, it's a goddamned mess. The sooner you can get a rescue ship here, the better,” He said quietly.

Ranma leaned back and resumed speaking in his normal voice again. “We are in the process of restoring all our vital systems to ensure our survival till then. The ship suffered massive EPS and electrical damage in the crash, and damage control teams are checking hull integrity to see if she will be flight worthy once a ship arrives to tow us back into space.”

Ranma paused for a moment, checking a PADD.

“Assuming this is being picked up by DS9, there is about a 4-and-a-half-hour delay, so face to face conversations won't be possible. I will be awaiting your reply. Sisko out.”

The communication ended.

Genma, who was already pulling up a star chart, began to sob.

“NZ-12G is a fifteen-week trip from here.”

Larson, not really paying attention to Genma – who was looking a little more like Soun now – tapped his communicator.

“Yu here,” the person on the other end replied.

“Petty officer, contact Starfleet Engineering. Inform them that they will need to prep a repair ship, a tow ship, a recovery ship, and a warp core for NX-95077. They will be making a six-month round trip.”

“Aye,” the young, enlisted man on the other end replied.

“I'm going with them,” Genma bawled.

Larson sighed, stood, and walked to Genma. “I need you here. This crisis is escalating.”

Genma sniffled and nodded.

“You can send the message to them, letting them know that we're sending a rescue team.”

Genma smiled and nodded.

“Thank you.”

Larson nodded and began to resume his paperwork. Before Genma could make it to the door though, Larson piped up again.

“Don't worry, old friend,” Larson smiled. “We'll get them home. It's just going to be a while.”

Genma sighed.

“I just hope they'll have a home to come back to.”

# CHAPTER SIX – PLEADING

A pair of Vulcans finished their vegetarian dinner at the upscale Vulcan restaurant just outside of Sacramento. Most of the San Francisco based Vulcans enjoyed this shop as the small, northern California town had become home to more Vulcans than humans.

It had become as close to Vulcan as the Earth stationed Vulcans could get.

The younger one, Sarrak and his elder, female companion T'Lol, leaned back in their chairs and sighed contently.

Quality Vulcan cuisine can make you not want to bother repressing the emotion of contentment.

Besides, if no humans were around, then as far as they were concerned, it did not actually happen.

But there were humans around.

The pair sat back up and pulled out a couple of PADDs.

“The Ministry wants us off the planet. They think that we might be at risk,” Sarrak whispered.

T'Lol nodded. “You wouldn't think they would be illogical enough to retaliate against the destruction of a building that doesn't even exist.”

Sarrak smirked. “If the humans didn't do things that weren't logical, they wouldn't do anything at all.”

T'Lol allowed herself a small smile.

The two employees of the eatery, who were busy bussing tables, walked into the backroom.

Sarrak and T'Lol stood, readying themselves to walk out and to their shuttle.

However, they were greeted by two humans, dressed in black, standing in the doorway.

“Can we help you?” Sarrak asked.

One human shook his head.

“You already have. We thought we'd have to make two trips,” he quipped. Both humans pulled phasers from their jacket pockets and fired, sending the two Vulcans flying backwards and crashing into a table.

Before the lifeless bodies of the two could settle on the ground, their assassins had dematerialized.

-----

“I am sure you understand that the actions of the two Starfleet officers in Nagaya does not reflect the views of Starfleet,” Starfleet's chief of Staff Admiral Kevin James explained to the group of Vulcans who had gathered in the High Command's chambers.

"You cannot deny that this mass-murder has come during a high time of anti-Vulcan sentiment within Starfleet," Salek replied to the image of Starfleet's highest-ranking officer.

"I can, and I do deny that," James replied. "There is no 'anti-Vulcan' anything within Starfleet."

The balding admiral cleared his throat. "If anything, it's the Vulcans that are stirring up anti-Starfleet sentiment."

A collective gasp went through the room.

"Excuse me?" Vora finally asked, not even attempting to repress his disgust in the statement from the elder Starfleet official.

"We know the bombing in Chicago was orchestrated by Ministry of Intelligence officials," James responded. "We have a ship that saw three Vulcan battle cruisers destroy a Federation convoy."

Vora looked to Salek, who shrugged.

"Why didn't you inform us about this?" Vora asked.

"No offense, High Commander, but it seemed 'illogical' to inform the high command of fact that they already know," James smugly replied.

"I take exception to that," Vora growled. "This council had nothing to do with the death of any Federation citizen."

"Maybe *\*you\** didn't, High Commander," James replied lowly. "But to deny that no one on the high command did is idiotic and illogical."

"Are you saying that we have traitors within the high command?" Salek asked, doing his best to sound shocked at such an allegation.

"Unless you are telling me that three heavily armed Ministry of Defense battle cruisers were stolen from right under your nose," James replied.

The Vulcan leadership murmured under their breath for a moment before resuming the conversation.

"What about the Starfleet officers in Nagaya?" Vora asked.

"Nothing has been delivered to me to actually prove that they were either human or Starfleet officers," James responded. "Every single member of the LDF and Starfleet assigned to Vulcan has been accounted for, so I don't even know who these bombers were."

"Even if they were Starfleet, what you ask me to do? The murderers are dead, and LDF military police officers haven't found any explosives on the Nagaya base, or any nearby."

"Then you won't mind if we have Ministry of Intelligence officers take a look as well?" Salek asked.

"Absolutely I would mind," James growled. "You can feel free to find some Vulcan Starfleet officers within the LDF and ask them to look around, but we don't allow foreign intelligence officers on our bases."

“Foreign?” Salek smugly asked, egging on James. “I thought we were all on the same team here.”

James would not bite though.

“Maybe you should remind yourself of that.”

Vora, sensing what would best be described as a subspace battle royal brewing, cleared his throat.

“Admiral, thank you for your time.”

James nodded and ended the communication as a young Vulcan female came into the room and walked to Salek.

Vora turned to Saanik, the head of the Ministry of Defense.

“Do you know anything about the three battle cruisers?”

Saanik shook his head. “We don’t have any reported missing. I will get an investigation started immediately.”

Vora nodded and turned to Salek, who was going through a PADD with a concerned look on his face.

“Salek?”

“I’ve received harsh news from Earth,” Salek stated.

“What is it?” Vora sighed.

“Three MI officers were killed. Two at a Vulcan diner in Sacramento, one in his home in San Francisco. Forensic evidence at the scene links their killers to Starfleet.”

Vora was visually upset by this.

“What kind of evidence?”

Salek looked to the young lady, who began to speak.

“Sir, we discovered transporter signatures that match older, but still used transporter systems that now are only found in Excelsior class starships. Also, the energy signature of the phasers used were Starfleet issue.”

Vora paused for a moment in thought, and then turned to the room.

“Everyone, will you excuse us, please?”

The room stood. Vora motioned for Salek and Saanik to remain seated. Once the room was cleared, Vora sighed and sat down.

“Was this their retaliation for Chicago?”

Salek looked shocked.

“Chicago?”

Vora groaned. "You can save your plausible deniability crap for the humans, Salek. I know very well that you went behind my back and authorized that attack against Section 31. And now it's come to bite you, hasn't it?"

Salek didn't respond.

"You launched a covert strike against a Federation facility!?" Saanik exclaimed. "Did you also destroy that convoy?"

"You have the battle cruisers, not me," Salek growled at Saanik.

"How dare you accuse me of attacking an unarmed food convoy!" Saanik stood and stated, surprising himself at the emotions he was allowing to come forth.

"Gentlemen, please," Vora interrupted. "Finger pointing is a human pastime, and we will not be doing it here."

Saanik slowly sat down.

"Besides, fault is irrelevant right now. What is happening needs to stop. We are on a path of self-destructiveness. You both need to rein in your troops, or I will find someone who can."

Vora stood and walked out of the room. Saanik soon followed, simply giving Salek a look.

Salek grumbled to himself for a bit, then marched down to his office. He quickly closed his door and brought up his secure, subspace terminal.

"Councilman Young's office," Young's assistant perkily answered.

"Minister Salek for the councilman please."

"Yes Minister, one moment."

Elevator music played as Salek waited. He found himself, subconsciously, tapping his fingers to the music while he waited.

*\*Who'd have thought I'd like Earth music?\** He pondered to himself. Salek made a mental note to download more of this music later.

The music stopped suddenly and Young appeared.

"I apologize. I had to get rid of some people," Young explained. "What's up?"

"What's up' is that in the operational briefing you sent me it said that I had twenty-four hours to get my agents in place to arrest the SI agents that were going to attack the agents who bombed Chicago."

Young looked uncomfortable.

"Yeah, about that..." He stammered. "That's who was just in here. It seems that someone got to them first."

"SOMEONE?" Salek yelled.

“Well, it wasn’t Starfleet Intelligence. You know Starfleet, they are even more anal and tedious than your people are. There is no way that they would have launched their assault before the scheduled time.”

Salek fumed. Not over being called anal and tedious (on Vulcan that was a compliment), but because his plan was going awry.

“I have more bad news,” Young continued.

Salek raised an eyebrow but said nothing.

“The Sisko wasn’t destroyed.”

Salek sat in silence for a minute before speaking. “How is that even possible?”

“From what I am hearing is that they somehow managed to hold it together into transwarp, and then somehow managed to survive after ejecting their warp core.”

Salek cursed the good luck that Saotome seemed to have.

“If it makes you feel any better, they’re far, far away.”

“How far?”

“Six months. But they don’t have a warp core, and it appears that they have been marooned on a planet.”

“Is Larson sending a rescue party?”

“Yes, but by the time they get there, the plan will have already driven the Federation and the Vulcans to war.”

“Idiot!” Salek snapped. “They will STILL be able to report the presence of the Borg equipment on their ship. Then they will be able to follow the paper trail back to both of us.”

“You said there was no paper trail.”

“There is ALWAYS a paper trail!” Salek groaned. “You know how anal and tedious we are!”

“So what do we do?” Young asked, growing a little concerned that he might be implicated in quite a few murders.

“Can you stop the rescue ships from leaving?”

Young shook his head.

“Then I will.”

-----

“Due to the modifications that were made to the Sisko,” the captain of the lead repair ship, Andre Fuuka explained. “It will probably take us a couple of weeks to get the new warp core installed. Once we get her into orbit that is.”

Larson nodded from the large leather chair that sat behind his desk, despite the semi-audible Soun style whimpers of Ranma's father.

"That's fine. The main priority is getting the ship off that planet."

Captain Fuuka nodded. "Considering the Sisko's crew will have three months to make her space worthy, it shouldn't be an issue at all.

"Doing the task unnoticed won't be easy, but assuming we take care of it at night it should limit the contamination to a few conspiracy theorists."

Larson grinned for a moment, and then sighed.

"I can't get you escorts until you get to DS9. From there Colonel Kira has agreed to allow a couple of Bajoran cruisers to escort you."

Fuuka shrugged.

"We shouldn't have any issues from here to there. I have heard what happened to that convoy. However, I think it's something completely different to attack a group of Starfleet ships."

Fuuka smiled.

"And even though we're not fighting ships, we're better armed than the convoy was."

Larson nodded.

"Good luck captain. See you in six months."

"Aye," Fuuka replied, ending the conversation.

"Are you sure I can't go with them?" Genma sniveled.

"I'm sorry, Genma. But you know with the world falling apart back here I can't afford to lose you right now," Larson apologetically explained.

Genma nodded, resigned to know that he was just going to have to wait another six months to see his son again.

Aboard the Starfleet repair ship, the U.S.S. Cougar, Captain Fuuka sat at the conn, reading over a status report.

"Are all ships assembled?" he asked after a couple of moments.

"Aye," one of his bridge crew responded.

"Set a course for Deep Space Nine, warp eight," Fuuka ordered.

"Aye," Helm replied.

Fuuka looked at the subspace reports showing his route. Very few ships between here and there, he noticed.

“Engage,” Fuuka grinned.

The four ships lined up their warp, and then in four brilliant flashes of light, disappeared.

The small fleet included the Cougar, a Starfleet combat repair ship. One designed to go into war zones and repair ships so that they would be able to escape the field of battle and make it to a Starbase.

Two Ship Recovery Vessels (SRVs), the U.S.S. Jerome and the U.S.S. Chatham, were designed recently, during the Dominion War. At one point in time if a starship was forced to ‘ditch’ on a planet, the ship was declared a lost cause and either disassembled or destroyed.

However, with the massive losses the Federation endured, it was no longer viable to leave any ship behind, if there was even a slight chance of recovering it.

The SRV’s were specially fitted with immensely powerful tractor beams that allowed them to basically tow a ship from the surface of a planet and then outside the gravity well of that planet, allowing it to be repaired enough to fly under her own power.

The Sisko’s weight, and the fact that no one knew exactly how strong the gravity was on NZ-12G, required two ships, to ensure that a successful recovery was made.

The final ship was the U.S.S. Baton Rouge, a transport ship. It carried a replacement engineering team, as well as crew members who could be a part of any of the other ships in the fleet, as none of them were trained for any deep space assignments it would be a good idea to rotate crews every so often.

It would also give the Sisko’s crew a comfortable place to relax on the trip back, as their stress levels would be extremely high.

The Baton Rouge also contained a level one morgue, to transport those who did not survive the crash back to Federation space for a hero’s burial.

-----

“Captain, we have an incoming transmission from Earth,” a smiling Lt. Kaii called out to Ranma.

A collective sigh of relief could be heard throughout the bridge. Starfleet had received their distress call.

Ranma grinned and turned from the conversation he was having with Usagi.

“On screen.”

Kaii continued to smile and put the transmission on the main viewer.

A weeping Genma appeared, startling Ranma.

“OH SON! THANK GOODNESS YOU’RE OKAY!” Genma cried.

Ranma smiled and even allowed himself a slight laugh. “Oh pop,” he stated softly.

“We’ve got your message.” Genma continued. “We’re dispatching a repair and recovery crew to you. They will be leaving in a couple of hours-” Genma paused, “-well, by the time you get this, they will already be on the way.”

The entire bridge cheered.

“At any rate, you’re going to have to make that planet your home for the next three months. Make sure you keep the contamination low and remember the prime directive.”

Ranma sighed softly.

“Things are not good here, boy,” Genma stated, a little more quietly. “There is a crisis escalating between Earth and Vulcan. We’re not sure, but we think that your situation might be related.”

Usagi thought back to the fat head of the shipyard for a moment.

“The head of the Lincoln Park shipyards, Commodore T’Kuk, has gone missing. Vulcan Ministry of Intelligence attacked a Federation facility in Chicago.”

Makoto, upon hearing this, popped her head up from the control panel she was working on.

“A food convoy on route to a Klingon colony was attacked and destroyed by Vulcan battle cruisers. And a suicide bombing happened on Vulcan by what we think were Vulcans, disguised as humans, trying to stir up anti-human sentiment.”

Genma sighed.

“I don’t know what’s going on son, but unless the diplomats can diffuse this situation, we might be looking at an all-out civil war within the Federation.”

Genma paused for a moment as a young Petty Officer brings in a PADD for him.

“Anyway, please send us a daily status report. Do your best, as you always do.”

Genma looked as if he was going to end the transmission but paused.

“Son... Ranma, know that I am very proud of you.”

Ranma blushed slightly as the transmission ended.

“Captain,” both Usagi and Makoto called out.

Ranma turned to Makoto first.

“Sir, the only ‘Federation’ facilities in Chicago aren’t actually ‘Federation’ facilities. They belong to Section 31.”

“Section 31?” Ranma groaned. “Why would the Vulcan Ministry of Intelligence attack Section 31?”

Makoto shrugged. “Beats me. In fact, in my opinion, that’s about the stupidest thing anyone can do.”

Ranma nodded and turned to Usagi.

“I knew that guy was up to no good,” Usagi groaned.

“Has Lieutenant Devall managed to get all the seals off yet?”

“No, not yet,” she sighed. “It’s easier to simply reroute everything to restore secondary power.”

Ranma looked to the blue emergency lights which lit up the inside of the Sisko.

"It's not easy, just easier," Usagi explained.

Ranma nodded. "Alright, I'll be in my ready room. Keep me advised."

Usagi nodded and went back to work as Ranma walked into his office. Inside he found Akane lying on his couch, sound asleep.

"How long have you been in here?" He pondered.

Ranma walked over to her and found a blanket. He gently covered her up and softly kissed her on the cheek.

The pig-tailed boy sighed softly and sauntered over to his replicator where he ordered a cup of tea. He then went to his desk and sat down. Minako had managed to locate all the terrestrial video entertainment channels for them. Ranma had been watching their news to understand more about their hosts. If there was one thing that he had quickly learned from watching the channels was that everyone from the east hated everyone from the west. And everyone from the west hated everyone from the east.

Ranma could not understand how there could be so much hate over something so trivial.

Even in Earth's history when people were treated differently because of the color of their skin, or their religion or even when aliens first came to Earth they were discriminated against, there were some people who felt that you judge someone by their character only.

Not on this planet.

In fact in the east, it was a felony, punishable by death, to even speak to someone from the west.

Ranma surfed through the channels for a bit before finding the nightly news program. Ranma shook his head at what he thought was the replay of the Vida bombing.

"Breaking news to report," an obviously choked up anchor stated. "Another Eastern nuclear missile has struck, this time hitting the industrial city of Takana. So far, no government reports on casualties, but if this is anything like Vida, we're looking at a 90% loss of all eleven million citizens."

"Oh my God..." Ranma murmured.

"What?" Akane sleepily asked as she began to sit up.

"Another bomb..." Ranma stammered. "Almost ten million people killed."

"What?" Akane asked, a bit more alertly. The young chief medical officer quickly strode over to Ranma's desk and looked at the images being displayed on the screen.

Akane gasped in shock at the carnage.

"How?" Ranma asked. "How do you just sit back and order the deaths of so many people?"

Akane could only shake her head as Ranma's communicator chirped.

"Saotome here," he replied slowly.

“Sir,” Kaii answered. “I have an incoming communication from the Western Prime Minister’s office.”

“Damn it,” Ranma replied. “Send in Commander Hino and Commander Kino and then put it through.”

After a few moments, Rei and Makoto arrived. Ranma then instructed Kaii to put through the transmission.

“I’m sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Prime Minister,” Ranma stated as Rei and Makoto stared in shock at the pictures on Ranma’s terminal.

“It’s okay,” Mao replied, obvious tension and sadness in his voice. “I hope that you have had time to consider helping us.”

Rei looked up at Ranma.

Ranma inhaled deeply.

“I’m sorry, we-”

“Captain, your operations officer tells me that you can receive our television channels, so I am sure that you have seen the images from the newest attack in Takana. Those images are taken by the media from the air. If you’d like I can send you images from the ground, taken by the military teams that responded.”

“No-” Ranma tried to reply.

“I’m looking at one right now,” Mao paused for a moment. “It’s of a couple of children who weren’t fortunate enough to be vaporized by the blast.”

Makoto cringed at the thought. Rei simply shook her head at Ranma.

“I was born in Takana, probably why they chose it as a target. Fortunately, for me personally, I guess, my wife and daughter live with me here in the capital, and my parents have already been killed by the Guraff...”

Ranma cut him off.

“Sir, I sympathize with you and your people, but our most primary law is that we cannot interfere with the natural development of a planet,” Ranma explained.

“You say that like your arrival was not part of God’s divine plan for us, and therefore part of our natural development,” Mao responded.

Ranma inhaled, not knowing what to say. He looked to Rei, Makoto and Akane for support. Both Rei and Makoto didn’t have anything to say, but Akane leaned into Ranma’s ear.

“Don’t hold back,” she whispered.

Ranma nodded. “Mr. Prime Minister... I honestly feel disgust and hatred for these people who would slaughter innocent people. And personally, I’d be content vaporizing them all myself.”

Rei and Makoto both raised an eyebrow at Ranma's statement.

"However, I can't do anything."

Ranma stood and walked over to the Sisko's dedication plaque. Ranma looked at it. He noted the quote on the plaque, taken from Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War.'

*'There is no instance of a nation benefiting from prolonged warfare.'*

Ranma found it bitterly ironic, considering how long these two nations had been fighting.

Ranma inhaled and continued speaking with the Prime Minister.

"Sir, we've had this policy – this law – for over three hundred years. Why? Because every time my people interfered with a society not as advanced it turned bad. Hell, it has been downright ugly at times."

Ranma sighed. "There is nothing I would rather do than help your people. But I cannot. I don't expect you to like that, or even understand it. But you will have to accept it."

Ranma, Makoto, Akane and Rei all waited for a reply as Mao mulled his response.

"Okay," he finally replied. "I accept your answer, and believe it or not, I do understand. I hold no malice towards your people, and I will continue our relations as they are. Good day."

The communication ended.

"Oy," Makoto exhaled.

"You've made the right choice, Captain," Rei stated.

"I've made the correct choice," Ranma corrected her as he walked back to his desk and slid into his chair. "There's nothing right about this at all."

Meanwhile, Mao sat glumly in his office.

"They refused."

Garone and Klasn who sat across from Mao nodded.

"For now." The two military men added.

-----

"Skies are clear, so far," the tactical officer on the Cougar informed Fuuka. "We've got a Vulcan listening station seven light years to our port, and a couple of Ferengi freighters 16 light years ahead of us, but I don't see anything else."

Fuuka nodded. "Adjust our course. Keep us at least ten light years away from that Vulcan station."

The helmsman looked to his captain for a moment, and then complied. The lead ships adjustment adjusted the course of the other three ships as well.

“Four hours out from DS9. They’ve dispatched the Defiant out to meet us halfway and escort us the rest of the way,” operations stated.

“Heh,” Fuuka chuckled. “Larson is such a worry-wart.”

“Better safe than sorry?” the first officer asked.

“Maybe,” Fuuka replied. “Just seems like a bit of overkill. Hell, we flew into Dominion battles unescorted, but we need one to cruise through Federation space?”

The first officer shrugged.

“I’m picking up another Federation ship,” ops called out. “The U.S.S. Destiny. Small frigate. She seems to be holding position about six light years away. I also see the Defiant on an intercept course, ETA, two hours.”

“Spiffy,” Fuuka smiled.

The small fleet continued on their course for another uneventful hour. Fuuka was in the midst of reading one of his favorite books when both the operations console and the tactical console began to chirp wildly.

“We have three ships inbound on an intercept course!” tactical called out.

Fuuka put down the PADD.

“Why are you just now seeing them?”

Ops growled at his terminal. “They are not running with transponders, and they seem to be emitting very low energy signatures.”

“Can you identify them?” The first officer asked.

“Not yet.”

“Red alert,” the captain ordered. “Ask the Defiant to step it up.”

Both operations and tactical complied.

“The Defiant is still forty minutes out.”

“Time to intercept?” Fuuka asked.

“Five minutes,” operations replied.

Fuuka turned to helm. “Best possible speed to DS9.”

The helmsmen nodded. “Aye. But we’re maxed out at 9.22 since that’s the fastest the SRV’s can do.”

“The ships have increased to 9.83,” operations called out. “They’ll overtake us in two minutes.”

Fuuka gripped his arm rests.

“I’ve got an ID on them,” tactical called out. “Vulcan battle cruisers.”

"Why are Vulcan ships trying to intercept us?" the first officer asked.

Fuuka didn't let go of the arm rests.

"Send that information to Admiral Larson."

"Aye," ops replied.

"THEY'VE LOCKED US!" tactical shouted.

"Inform the other ships to try and separate and flee."

The Cougar rocked hard as the first volley of torpedoes slammed into her engines.

"Return fire," Fuuka ordered.

However, it was an order of futility as all four ships in the Sisko's repair fleet were quickly destroyed by the far more powerful battle cruisers.

On board the Defiant, her captain stared in amazement at the scene that just played out in front of her on the ship's tactical display.

"FOLLOW THOSE SHIPS!" she ordered.

"I'm losing them," tactical stated. "But they look like they were on course for that listening post."

"Set a course then. Maximum warp," the captain ordered.

The communication terminal on board the Destiny began to chirp. The communications officer, who was a Vulcan spoke up.

"Sir, we have an incoming transmission from the Vulcan Ministry of Intelligence."

The captain raised an eyebrow.

The Vulcan captain looked around to his Vulcan bridge crew. In fact, 95% of his small, Intrepid class ship was Vulcan.

"On screen," He ordered, the confusion in his voice apparent.

On the view screen Salek appeared.

"Greetings," Salek nodded. "I am Minister Salek, head of the Ministry of Intelligence. I am contacting you because I've received word that the Defiant is on route to a Vulcan Science Directorate listening post near you with secret orders to destroy it."

"Destroy it?" the captain asked.

"Yes," Salek replied. "They are apparently taking orders from a faction within Starfleet who wish to destroy the Vulcan-Human alliance. We don't have any Vulcan military ships in the area, and I don't know who I can trust within Starfleet to contact them."

The Vulcan captain nodded.

"We'll take care of things."

"Thank you," Salek stated. The lying Vulcan did the Vulcan hand gesture. "Live long and prosper."

"Live long and prosper," the captain replied.

After the communication terminated, the captain turned to his helmsman.

"Set a course to intercept the Defiant."

"Aye. Time to intercept, eleven minutes."

#### ON BOARD THE DEFIANT

"Looks like we have the Destiny coming to assist us." The tactical officer states.

"Good," the Defiant's captain replied. "How long till we get to the listening post?"

"Thirty minutes."

"And the Destiny?"

"Nine minutes," ops responded.

#### EIGHT MINUTES LATER, ON BOARD THE DESTINY

"Red alert. Hail the Defiant," the Vulcan captain ordered.

The operations officer complied and the captain of the Defiant appeared on the main viewer.

"Greetings, Captain," she stated.

The Vulcan nodded. "We are aware that you are planning on attacking the listening station. Please drop out of warp, lower your shields and prepare to be boarded."

"Say what?" the Defiant's captain asked.

"We know you are on route to the outpost to destroy it."

"No, we're following three ships that just destroyed four Federation vessels," the captain replied. "They are going towards the listening post."

The Vulcan looked at his tactical display.

"There are no ships out here except us. Stop your ship and lower your shields or we will attack you."

"Captain, I don't think you know what you are talking about," the clearly agitated human captain growled.

"Very well," the commanding officer of the Destiny replied. He terminated the communication. He turned to his tactical officer.

"Lock weapons and target their engines. Fire when ready."

## BACK ON THE DEFIANT

"They've locked weapons!"

The Defiant rocked slightly as the Destiny fired a volley of torpedoes at her engines.

"WHAT THE FUCK?" the captain yelled. "Drop out of warp, defensive pattern Omega-2. Return fire."

The small ship dropped out of warp. The larger, yet not more powerful Intrepid class ship followed.

The Defiant began her pre-programmed defensive maneuvers. She was a nimble ship, but the Destiny was also quick and agile.

"Shields at 88%!" ops called out.

"Offensive pattern Gamma-6!" the captain ordered. "Take out her weapons!"

The Defiant class and Intrepid class ships danced in a virtual three-dimensional ballet around each other. Each ship giving almost as much as it was getting.

While the Defiant's agility was not an advantage in this fight, her power was.

"Shields at 33%!" ops notified the captain.

Tactical spoke up. "The Destiny is losing shields."

"DEMAND HER SURRENDER!" the Captain ordered.

A phaser blast that sent crew members flying told the Defiant that the Destiny would indeed not surrender.

"Keep firing." the small ship's captain grumbled as she crawled back into her chair.

A couple of shots later, the Destiny exploded in a bright flash of red and white fire. Soon there was nothing left but small, sparking grey pieces of metal.

"Resume course?" helm asked.

The captain grumbled as she looked out into the debris field.

"No. We're in no shape to take on three ships right now. Head back to the last known location of the repair fleet to check for survivors. Then back to DS9 for repairs."

"Aye." Helm replied as he swung the ship around and away from the Destiny's debris field.

# CHAPTER SEVEN – REVENGE & DECEPTION

Ranma blinked.

He was a sound sleeper, but something wasn't right. There was far too much light striking his face.

"Computer, time," he groggily asked.

"01:19." The computer replied.

Ranma sat up. Even though Federation Standard time and the local time were different, it should still be dark outside.

Akane stirred slightly from Ranma's movements as he looked out the window.

"Stars," he smiled.

To Ranma it was an odd, but not totally unwelcome change of pace to see the stars from this angle. In fact, he'd probably consider this a nice vacation if they were stranded in the middle of a nuclear holy war; with the ship having no power-

"No power?" Ranma gasped as he seemed to have finally awoken one hundred percent.

Ranma looked around his quarters to see not the blue emergency lights that had decorated the Sisko for the past weeks, but honest to God, regular, bright, white lights.

Ranma burst into laughter.

Akane, slowly turned to him.

"What?" she asked.

"The power's back!" Ranma gleefully stated.

Akane slowly rose and became fully awake as well.

"Sure is," she acknowledged, less excited. "Lights off!" she called out.

The lights in the room shut off. Akane laid back down and pulled her blanket over her head. Ranma simply sat there in the dark, depressed at Akane's disruption of his merriment.

"Go back to sleep," she called out from under the comforter.

Ranma whimpered and laid back down on his back. He stared at the ceiling for a bit. *\*Why does she always have to be ants at my picnic?\** Ranma thought to himself. He really did not mind it though. A year ago, he could not imagine that the two of them would even be on speaking terms, much less having a wonderful marriage.

Right now, though, he had no clue what in the world he would do without her.

The young martial artist sighed.

All the death that was constantly happening around him, forty-four this time, a dozen before the refit, more and more since he took command of the Sisko. How long was he going to be able to keep this curse from affecting her? How long before his luck ran out?

Ranma sighed and turned onto his side. Akane laid there on her side facing him, her eyes slightly open.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

Ranma pulled her close to him, holding the one true love of his life tightly in his arms.

“Nothing,” he softly replied as he pulled her as close to him as he could. “Nothing at all.”

-----

“Come find me if you can!” Minako’s voice taunted.

“You know this isn’t a good idea,” Ryouga whimpered as he looked around the densely shrubbed path.

It had been two weeks since the Sisko had crashed on Valeria. To make sure that people did not go to mad on board, Lt. Fuchs had suggested that the crew, during their off time, be allowed to go outside the ship; get some fresh air and the like.

Ranma agreed and tasked Makoto with the duty of securing a two-kilometer ring around the ship where Sisko personal could go without fear of running into any of the planet’s inhabitants.

Working with the Western security forces, they had succeeded. All day and all night Sisko marines patrolled the inner perimeter, while Western forces patrolled the outer.

It was a welcome reprieve from the dark, gray interior of the Sisko. The recycled air, while clean, was no match for the pristine oxygen/nitrogen mix that made Valeria’s atmosphere.

While going outside at night was not recommended, Minako’s rank gave her the ability to bypass most security protocols. She and Ryouga (who was going a little goofy with nothing to do) decided to head outside.

“Come on Minako. If I get lost who knows what will happen,” Ryouga whimpered, already concerned that the trees were obscuring a good portion of the ship.

Minako pounced on Ryouga from behind.

“Boo!” she playfully called out.

Ryouga smiled. He took Minako’s hand, and the pair walked into a clearing where they sat down.

“It’s kind of amazing,” Ryouga commented, looking up at the night sky.

“Hmm?”

"I mean, we see the stars every single day, yet there is just something so different, so profound about looking at them from the surface," Ryouga smiled, pointing at the different stars.

Minako looked up. There were countless stars in the sky. They were at least a hundred kilometers from any light pollution, so the view was amazingly unobstructed.

The only thing other than the stars was the occasional aircraft patrolling overhead.

"Which one do you think is Earth?" Ryouga asked.

"That one," Minako stated, pointing at one of the smaller stars.

"You think so?"

"I know so," Minako replied. "I looked it up. It's just to the left of the Golsum Cluster."

Ryouga laughed.

"What?" Minako asked. "What is funny?"

"You're such a nerd," Ryouga smiled.

Minako frowned and turned away from the bandanaed boy. "Well, that's certainly not cool."

Ryouga continued to smile while pulling himself closer to Minako. He cupped the blonde's chin in his hand and turned her head back towards him. "Yes, it is. It's one of the coolest things ever."

Minako leaned into Ryouga and the two shared an extremely passionate kiss that seemed to last forever. Only the forthcoming footsteps of a pair of Sisko marines broke it up.

The Marines nodded to the pair and continued their patrol. Minako followed them with her eyes before returning her attention to Ryouga.

"So, what's so cool about it?"

Ryouga blinked. "We're you just checking those Marines out?"

Minako smiled. "Don't worry about that. Tell me what was cool."

Ryouga, not really interested in losing another girlfriend, decides to let it go. "It's just pretty awesome that you teach me stuff that I otherwise would never know, and quite frankly would never want to know."

"Aww," Minako grinned. "That's so schweet."

"Yeah. And then we get to have sex."

Minako laughed loudly at Ryouga's joke. Even louder than Ryouga thought she should have. Ryouga quickly puts his hand over Minako's mouth before more marines show up.

Minako grabs Ryouga's hand and stands. "Come on, P-Shan. Let's go into the bushes."

"P-wha?" Ryouga asked as he is drug off.

The pair walk off into some brush. Minako finds an area where the grass is not too high, and the ground is relatively soft. Before she can stop and turn to Ryouga though, she trips and falls on her face, laughing all the way.

"I'm Usagi!" Minako giggled as she rolled over and tried to make faux 'meatballs' with her hair.

"Are you drunk?" Ryouga asked.

"Naw. Are you?"

"I'm always drunk, now," Ryouga replied. "What else would I do?"

Minako began to unbutton her jacket. "Me!"

Ryouga smiled. "Okay!"

Ryouga pounced on Minako and began to help her unzip her jacket. He began to kiss her neck and slowly worked his way up to her face. Ryouga looked at Minako in her hazy, dilated eyes and smiled. She was the most beautiful-

Wait, hazy and dilated?

Ryouga stopped for a moment and looked at Minako. "Minako?"

"Yeah?" she slurred.

"Are you okay?"

Minako looked in Ryouga's general direction, but Ryouga noticed that she was not looking at him at all.

"Yeah, baby. I am great, and I will be ezen better once I bet your bacon stick in ne! Here, here... Do me from behind!"

Minako, rolled over and it was then that Ryouga could see that she was bleeding from the back of her head.

"Crap, you're injured."

"Oh, that's been there for a while. It's fine." Minako contested, while trying to get out of her pants.

"Minako, stop it," Ryouga argued, trying to flip her right side up and refastening her belt. "Now stay here, I'm going to go get those marines."

"Alright!" Minako cheered. "Way to be adventurous!"

Ryouga face palmed. *\*I can't leave anyway. If I wander off, I'll get lost,\** Ryouga thought to himself.

His attempts to come up with a plan were thwarted though when he heard the horrid sounds of Minako vomiting. "Aw man," she complained. "Now I hab to vy dinner again."

Ryouga looked and saw what appeared to be blood in her vomit. "This is bad, Minako," Ryouga said as he pulled out his communicator.

"Kay. You deal with it. I'm gunna nap," Minako said, laying down in some sticks.

"No, wake up," Ryouga shook her as he tapped his communicator. "Hibiki to sickbay. Medical emergency, two to beam directly to sickbay."

The transporter beam begins to grab Ryouga and Minako right as a helicopter flies over head.

"Oh, fuck!" Ryouga squawked before he completely dematerialized.

-----

Ranma walked into sickbay and over to where Akane was conferencing with the other doctors. In the corner of sickbay sat Ryouga. He had dual concerned looks on his face. One for Minako, and one for the fact that the Westerns saw he and Minako dematerialize.

Both things were weighing heavy on Ranma as well. With the fact that they had that ability out of the bag now, they are going to be more open to attack by the Westerns to gain that technology.

At the same time though, maybe now that they knew that the Sisko crew members could come and go at will, they would be less likely to start trouble, since they might believe they could be killed and sabotaged by bombs that appear from nowhere.

However, first things first.

"Hey," Ranma greeted Akane and the doctors.

"Captain," the main, real, doctor smiled. "Commander Aino had an acute subdural hematoma, that was accompanied by a tear in her eustachian tube, between her ear and mouth which was causing blood to drip down into her mouth that she was swallowing.

"Didn't heal because she's a hemophiliac."

Akane sighed. "The cut on the back of her head was small enough not to cause an issue, but she's lost a lot of blood due to the ear tear. As well, if Ryouga hadn't gotten her in here when he did, she would have died from the hematoma."

"Will she be okay?" Ranma asked.

"Yeah," Akane nodded. "We've stopped the bleeding and released the pressure on her brain."

Ranma sighed in relief. "How many people have you not run check-ups on since the crash?"

"About seventy," one of the doctors answered.

"I want everyone checked. No one else is going to die or almost die from something preventable."

"Yes sir," the doctor replied.

Ranma patted Akane on the shoulder and walked over to Ryouga. He lowered himself to his former rival's eye level and grinned.

"You saved her life, man."

"I should have looked for that helicopter first."

Ranma shrugged. "Yeah well, shit happens, Ryouga. Don't beat yourself up over it."

Ryouga shook his head and looked at Ranma. "I've gotten too lax without anything to do around here."

Ranma patted Ryouga on the shoulder. "If you promise not to get lost, and it's okay with Makoto, I can have you temporarily reassigned to security."

Ryouga looked up to Ranma and smiled. "That would be nice. Thanks, Ran- Captain."

Ranma chuckled.

"Ryouga?" Minako called from the bio bed.

Ranma smiled and nodded. Ryouga quickly stood, bowed to Ranma, then ran to Minako's side.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

Minako weakly nodded. "They said you saved me."

Ryouga smiled. "Of course I did. I..."

Minako's smile got a little bigger. "You can say it this time. I won't run away now."

Ryouga leaned in and kissed Minako softly. Ranma and Akane stood about fifteen meters away watching. Akane leaned up against Ranma and sighed contently.

"It's like a young us," she cooed.

"She's going to hit him?" Ranma asked.

Akane just groaned as the sickbay doors opened and Makoto walked in.

"Captain," she said.

Ranma turned to his chief of security. The look of concern on her face was quite visible. Ranma didn't need to ask, but he did anyway.

"They know?"

"Yes," Makoto replied. "Their encryption technology is pretty solid, but nothing we couldn't eventually break.

"The gunship sent back video of Ensign Hibiki and Minako beaming back to the ship. It's short, only about a second and a half, but it clearly shows two people vanishing into thin air."

Ranma sighed. He turned and looked to Ryouga and Minako. He could not be mad at Ryouga. He would have done the exact same thing if Akane had fallen ill. In fact, he had done much worse just to spare Akane's feelings. This was just something he was going to have to deal with.

"Keep me updated on her status," Ranma said to Akane as he headed to the door with Makoto.

"Sure," Akane nodded.

“Hopefully...” Ranma groaned as the sickbay doors closed behind he and Makoto. “...this won't give them any crazy ideas.”

-----

“They can do what?” Mao asked, not even trying to hide the shock.

Garone played the video showing an incredibly surprised Ryouga looking up at the helicopter camera as he dematerializes, followed by the camera looking around, and some comm chatter from a very disturbed helicopter pilot.

“They can apparently appear and disappear at will,” Garone stated.

“That technology could turn the war in our favor overnight. We wouldn't even need better weapons,” Klasn fantasized. “We could just 'beam' conventional bombs right into their barracks.”

“Indeed. Or insert special operations soldiers behind lines. Landing tanks and soldiers without warnings.”

Mao began to shake his head. “They already said they will not help us.”

“They said they will not interfere,” Garone smiled.

Mao raised an eyebrow. “What are you planning?”

“If I tell you, you can't deny knowledge.”

Mao smiled. “I knew there was a reason I put you two in charge of the military.”

Garone and Klasn nodded and leaned back in their chairs.

-----

“ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME?” Larson screamed at his assistant.

“No,” his assistant whimpered back, cowering.

Larson sighed. “I'm sorry, Mathew.”

“Should I contact Starfleet Engineering again?”

Larson thought about this for a second. “Yes.”

Larson's assistant nods and walked out of the room, only to be run over by Genma who was running full steam into Larson's office.

“IS IT TRUE?!” Genma bawled.

Larson nodded wistfully. “I am afraid so. It seems that whoever sent your boy out there wants him to stay out there.”

Genma begins to cry again as Larson's communication panel chirps.

“Don't worry, Genma, old friend. I'm ordering another engineering fleet on route,” Larson hits the button on his comm system. “Larson.”

“Sir,” Larson's assistant's voice spoke up. “Starfleet engineering says that they don't have any more warp cores that will fit that ship, and they don't have any more transport ships or SRV's that they can spare for that length of time.”

“I see,” Larson sighed. “Well, that's quite inconvenient.”

“MY BOY!!!!!!” Genma wailed.

Larson eyed Genma with some concern for a moment before going to work on his computer.

“Interesting.”

“What?!” Genma called out.

“There is a ship within six weeks of them.”

“Let's send it!” Genma smiled. “I'll contact Starfleet dispatch.”

“No,” Larson replied.

“No?”

“I think it would be better if we did this through unofficial channels.”

“Oh?” Genma pondered.

“Mathew, please contact the Romulan Embassy and ask for Ambassador Val'UI to contact me on a secure frequency,” Larson requested.

“Yes sir.”

“Romulans?”

“Genma, my boy,” Larson leaned back in his chair and lit up a cigarette. “You’re going to learn many lessons today. The main one being that you never burn any bridges because you never know when you might need to go back over them.”

-----

The rear turbolift to the bridge opened and Minako walked out. Most of the bridge crew smiled and waved to her. Shampoo walked up to her station and gave her a hug.

“Head injury nothing to be messed with. Shampoo know.”

Minako nodded. “I guess I am pretty lucky.”

“What is status report?” Shampoo asked.

Minako smiled and looked to her display and then looked to the master situation display on the back wall.

“Still stranded.”

The entire bridge laughed. It was good that they could laugh about their situation. Their last message from Starfleet was dismal. Their rescue fleet was destroyed. No one else was able to come and

get them right now, but for some reason the Captain said to not be concerned with that and to continue to work on making the ship space ready.

They hoped he knew more than he was letting on.

At any rate, spirits were still high, as the crew was pretty tight. However, being in a war zone, especially one that was a volatile and as dangerous as the one they were currently in, that could change at any moment.

“Dammit!” echoed through the bridge as Usagi banged her head underneath the main engineering panel.

“You okay over there?” Minako called to her friend.

“Yeah,” she replied. “I’m just trying to fix this terminal so I can work up here while J.C. works down in engineering.”

“Trouble in paradise?” Jansen taunted.

“Shut up,” Usagi groaned.

The bridge once again laughed.

Some time passed and after about an hour of idle chit chat and panels beeping here and there, Usagi managed to get her station working. However, when she sat in it, the chair collapsed, causing her to cry. Loudly.

Out of his ready room, Ranma came, his phaser drawn. “WHAT HAPPENED?!”

Kaii, Shampoo, and Jansen all point to where Minako had rushed over to tend to Usagi. Ranma sighed and holstered his phaser. Though he still debated on whether to use its stun setting to silence his still bawling chief engineer.

The Captain walked over to the engineering station and looked at it. He noticed that the main display matched the master situation display.

“Commander. Usagi. Did you actually get this panel working all by yourself?”

Usagi, still crying with a river of tears running down her face, nodded affirmatively.

“That’s pretty awesome.”

Usagi stopped crying momentarily and looked up at Ranma. “It is?”

“Sure. I mean, you get lots of stuff working, but usually you have help. But I have noticed that lately you have been able to do a lot of stuff on your own. That’s rather good for someone whose actual Starfleet specialty is cooking.”

“But I couldn’t fix the chair!”

“Meh. That’s because you’d have to dumb yourself down too much. Fixing a chair is work for an ensign or an enlisted person. Not a Lieutenant-Commander.”

Usagi sniffled and smiled while Kaii, Jansen, and Shampoo engaged in simultaneous eye-rolls. "Yeah!"

Ranma and Minako helped Usagi to her feet. Usagi slapped her communicator began to bark orders into it, demanding things like a new chair and lowly ensigns. Ranma chuckled and walked to his chair and sat down.

"You good at that," Shampoo complemented.

Ranma just smiled. He seemed to be getting a lot of practice lately at trying to boost other people's feelings. He just wished there were someone who was going to boost his own.

The damage on the ship was still massive. Larson, who had switched to using coded and encrypted transmissions for some reason, had assured him that despite the recovery fleet being destroyed, the Sisko would be rescued.

And even though they seemingly had all the time in the world to do it, Ranma did not know if they could make the ship space-worthy by the time they got there.

The Sisko's damage control teams had managed to fix most of the lower deck hull breeches from the inside, as they obviously could not get to them from the outside. Once they got all the EPS conduits and the power grid back to 100%, the emergency force fields would handle the remaining breeches - if their rescuers could tow the six-hundred-ton ship back into orbit. After that there was still the problem that the ship had no warp core. While it was possible, installing a warp core outside of a space dock was not something that engineers liked to do.

The Sisko was too big to be towed any faster than warp two, which meant they would arrive at the nearest space dock sometime in the next century.

Usagi groaned as she watched a section of ship, which they had just gotten to turn green, revert to flashing red.

"Nuts!" Usagi barked as she hit her communicator and started screaming at some unnamed lackey on the other end.

"I think I might have given her too much confidence," Ranma chuckled as he eyed Usagi.

Shampoo nodded in agreement as a chirping noise began to come from the tactical station, startling Lt. Jansen who had also become immersed in Usagi's animated display of leadership.

"What the hell?" she pondered as she checked the display.

"Lieutenant?" Ranma asked, turning his attention in that direction.

"I have about ten large aircraft heading in this direction."

"On screen." Ranma turned to the screen. He saw ten blue and gray jet powered bombers.

"Who do they belong too?" Ranma asked.

Jansen shrugged. "They don't have their transponders activated."

“Put up tactical display.” Shampoo ordered.

Jansen complied and the tactical display appeared on the main viewer, putting the view of the ships up in the corner.

“There are no targets this direction,” Shampoo commented, pointing out that the nearest cities and military bases were miles away. “Besides, Sisko was declared no fly zone by both governments.”

“You’re sure that they are coming this way, and are not going to change course?” Ranma asked.

Jansen’s terminal chirped.

“I am now. They have a radar lock on us.”

“JAM IT!” Shampoo yelled.

“We can’t.”

“Get everyone inside now!” Ranma ordered. “Status on hull plating?”

Kaii began to order people inside while Minako ran some checks.

“We can polarize it, but depending on what they drop on us, I don’t know how effective it will be.”

“Everyone is inside,” Kaii reported.

“Polarize the hull,” Ranma ordered.

“Scan them,” Shampoo demanded. “Find out what they carrying.”

Both Minako and Jansen ran scans. Minako was the first to respond.

“Nothing nuclear or plasma based.”

Jansen nodded. “1,400-kilogram Tritonal explosive. The plating should have no problem absorbing most of the damage.”

Ranma sighed a sigh of relief.

“They’ve released their payload,” Minako stated.

Ranma turned to Shampoo.

Shampoo nodded and turned to Jansen. “Shoot the bombs.”

Jansen grinned as Rei and Makoto came onto the bridge.

“What’s happening?” Rei asked.

“We’re being attacked,” Ranma replied as he watched the tactical display on the main viewer.

Outside, the top of the downed ship opened, and the dorsal phase cannons protruded out. They quickly spun around and set their sights on the ten bombs headed in the Sisko’s direction.

Minako's panel begins to chirp.

"The planes are breaking off, but there are ten more in formation behind them heading this way!" she stated.

"What the fuck?" Ranma groaned.

Outside the phases cannon began to fire. Quickly there were nine explosions in the sky. And one on the hull of the Sisko.

Right on the forward section of the bridge.

Most of the people on the bridge were knocked to the deck thanks to the earthquake level explosion that occurred just a few meters from them.

Ranma was the first to his feet.

"Why did that bomb get through?"

Jansen pulled herself to her feet and began to look at her console. Makoto also walked into the tactical station.

"These weapons are too small to get a good sensor lock on, and they have practically no energy signature," Makoto explained, looking at the scan results.

"The cannons basically have to wait for them to get within the prox sensor range to get any kind of solid lock," Jansen finished.

"Our weapons weren't designed to protect us from such rudimentary ordinance," Makoto groaned. "I mean, what are the chances that we'd face someone using radar?"

"Can we target the incoming aircraft?" Ranma asked.

"Yes," Makoto nodded. "They have stronger energy and heat signatures."

Ranma looked to Shampoo.

"If bridge take brunt of damage, we're dead," She stated.

Ranma nodded in agreement.

"Shoot those sons-of-bitches down," Ranma ordered.

Jansen grinned as did Makoto.

The phase cannons turned in the direction of the aircraft, which still weren't in eyesight yet.

The cannons, which while short range, did have a 500-kilometer range. What is considered short range in space is not so short on the surface.

The cannons swiveled quickly, firing ten bursts. One by one the aircraft on the tactical display disappeared.

While most of the aircraft went down in shards into the ocean to the east of the Sisko's location, one of the aircraft stayed mainly intact and crashed on the beach only ten kilometers from the Sisko.

Ranma turned to Rei and Makoto.

"Get some teams together and go look for survivors and wreckage. I want to know who those jets belonged to."

"Aye," they both replied and shot off into the turbolift.

"Anymore?" Shampoo asked.

"No," Minako replied.

"Commander, get DC to check out the damage," Ranma said to Usagi.

"I'll see to it myself," Usagi grinned as she ran off, tripping once and falling to the floor.

-----

"So," Genma said, softly. "This is a Romulan ship."

"How many times is he going to say that?" The captain of the Romulan freighter asked Larson.

"Sorry, don't mind him. He's just not used to the new order of the world, where your old enemies are your friends, and your old friends are your enemies," Larson explained.

Genma chuckled nervously.

"Well, get used to it, tubby," the Romulan replied. "The Vulcans are untrustworthy scum and it's only a matter of time before they tear apart the alliance between your two worlds."

Another Romulan walks up to Larson. "Your secure channel is ready, Admiral."

"And it cannot be decrypted by the Vulcans?"

The Romulan laughed. "They haven't decrypted one of my messages yet!"

"You guys know a lot about encryption for freighter pilots," Genma commented. "Are you Romulan Intelligence?"

"You sure do ask a lot of questions," the first Romulan grumbled. "Maybe you should ride the rest of the way in the decompressed engine room?"

"I'll shut up now," Genma said, turning his attention to a shiny red ball.

Larson hit a few buttons on the communication panel and began his recording.

#### APPROXIMATELY SIX WEEKS TRAVEL FROM VALARI

As is normal for one of the U.S.S. Crossroad's many exploratory voyages, the captain's seat was manned by the first officer, Commander Mark Adcock.

Mark was sitting, reading one of his favorite books about the political upheaval of the late 22nd century. He always found it hard to believe that people argued and then fought wars over such silly things as the right to wear hats indoors.

He was just getting to one of the better parts of the book when the operations station began to chirp.

Mark slowly turned his head.

"Well?"

"Sorry sir. It's an encoded message. It's for us, but it's got several layers of encryption on it," the operations officer replied.

Mark turned back towards the main viewer. He hit a button on his chair.

"Yes?" Captain Ami Mizuno's voice called out.

"Captain, we have an incoming message that someone went through a lot of trouble to make sure no one but us saw."

There was a pause, with a grumbling Australian man in the background mumbling. "Okay, I'll be there in a minute."

"Take your time, Captain," ops called out. "The computer says it needs about an hour to decode this."

"Understood."

The communication ended as Mark turned his head back towards ops. "Take your time?"

"Well, I didn't want them to finish quickly on our account. Especially if they were just going to come up here and wait."

Mark turned his head back towards his book. "Someday I hope you will understand what you've done today."

#### ONE HOUR LATER

The turbolift doors open and Ami walks out onto the bridge. She walks to operations and gives the young Asian man there a glare.

"Captain?" he grins nervously.

"Is the message decrypted?" she asks, continuing to glare.

Ops nods slowly, worried there might be violence in his immediate future.

"On screen then," Ami said, turning away. Ops complies, sighing a quiet sigh of relief.

A shot of Admiral Larson appears on the screen.

"Captain Mizuno. I am Admiral Scott Larson. I apologize for contacting you in this way, but certain circumstances prohibit me from contacting you through proper channels.

"You can verify my identity in Starfleet databanks. My ID# is 6627D-77GG2 and my command authorization code is 77ABB-002JZK."

"Run those," Ami ordered.

Ops complied as the recording continued.

"I have a situation. There is a planet, about six weeks from your present position where a ship under my charge, the U.S.S. Sisko, has crashed."

Ami gasped. "Usagi... Minako... Makoto... Rei..."

Larson went on for about fifteen minutes explaining the situation, explaining the deal with the destroyed engineering ships, and making one final request to the Crossroads.

"I need the Crossroads to head to NZ-12G 4, maximum sustained warp. I will have recovery ships on the way, but I do not know when they will be there.

"Do not contact me back, and do not send a message to the Sisko. Not yet, until we can establish more secure communication. Thank you. Larson out."

There is silence on the bridge for a moment.

"Well, civil war between Vulcan and Earth. Ain't that a kick in the nuts." Trevor, who had wandered onto the bridge at some point, finally says.

Ami turns and glares at him for a moment before turning to operations. "Did the Admiral's security checks turn out okay?"

Ops nodded. "Yes ma'am. He's the real deal or an awesome imposter."

Ark turned to engineering. "Time to NZ-12G?"

"Six weeks, four days at warp eight point eight. Highest we can hold without stopping."

Ami turned to the helm. "Set a course."

Helm nods. "Course laid in."

"Engage."

# CHAPTER EIGHT – DECISIVENESS

Kio slowly pushed through the bushes with her free hand. For a forest, there sure did seem to be a lot of jungle trees around here.

“About another kilometer,” Lt. Kaii’s voice relayed to the NEO team as they moved towards the wreckage of the assumed Eastern bomber that the Sisko shot down.

“Copy, Nighthawk,” Kio replied. Having an invisible scout flying a few thousand meters above you, watching for people was so helpful, Kio had to acknowledge.

Though apart from stepping on the occasional snake or otherwise poisonous looking forest/jungle looking creature, the hike itself had been uneventful.

Too uneventful in Kio's opinion.

They were well outside of the Sisko's crew’s perimeter, yet they hadn't seen a single gunship, soldier or aircraft. Granted it was overcast, but their technology was to the point where they should be able to fly by instruments alone.

“I don't like this,” Kio made her suspicions known.

“Yeah, I don't either, Chief,” Rei commented back from her position to the east. “That's why we need to be extra vigilant out here, get what we came to get, and scram.”

“Yes ma'am.” Kio replied.

Meanwhile, on the Sisko, about seventy-five marines and thirty security officers milled around Cargo Bay one waiting to find out if they were going to be transported out.

Ryouga was among them.

“Ryouga,” Minako called out.

Ryouga turned and looked towards Minako who was running in his direction.

“Uh, hi.”

Minako ran up to Ryouga and smiled. “Wow. You look so cute in your assault uniform.”

The standard assault uniform, which in this case was for land, was green and black digital camouflaged with a protective vest and helmet.

“Thanks,” Ryouga said, nervous.

“What's the matter?” Minako asked.

“Oh, just first mission jitters, I guess.”

Minako nodded uncertainly. "Well, if you guys go, be safe!" Minako leaned up and kissed Ryouga on the cheek and walked off.

"Hey way to go there, Hibiki! WOO!" the security officer next to Ryouga taunted.

"SHUT UP!" Ryouga barked.

"You know, I'm your supervisor."

"Shut up, sir?"

As the first NEO group reached the end of the tree line they paused. Kio looked around, her tricorder showing no bio signs except that of her group and those of the other NEO group in the distance.

"Nighthawk, can you confirm, no one around?"

"That's affirmative," Kaii responded from the cloaked scout ship.

Kio sighed. "Commander, we're at the tree line and we can see the wreckage. We can secure the perimeter for you--"

"Negative," Rei cut Kio off. "If you have eyes on the wreckage and it's clear, your team is go to take possession. We'll secure the perimeter."

"Aye," Kio replied, somewhat surprised. She turned to the rest of her group. "Okay gang, let's move."

Kio, Anthony, Michael, Ensign Yayo, and Corporal Xiang, the entire complement of NEO's Beta Team, bolted from the wooded area and set up defensive positions around the crashed wreckage of the bomber aircraft.

Kio and Xiang climbed onto what appeared to be the cockpit of the aircraft. Kio investigated the window.

"The pilots are still in here."

Yayo, the medic began to climb up onto the aircraft as well. Xiang, after some searching, managed to locate where the cockpit canopy and the fuselage meet and applied some plastic explosives to that area.

"Fire in the hole." He dryly stated before setting off a small explosion that popped the canopy open enough for Yayo to check the three pilots inside the aircraft.

"They're all dead."

"Do they have marks on them?" Rei asked.

"No," Kio replied. "Their skin is a single color. Plus, the writing inside this aircraft doesn't match the writing sample Commander Aino gave us."

"Copy."

“Sisko to NEO, is it overcast enough that their satellites cannot photograph us?” Ranma's voice asked.

“Quite,” Kaii replied. “I had to drop to about 1,500 meters to scout.”

“Beam that aircraft back here then.” Ranma demanded.

Tony looked to Mike before pulling out one of the transport enhancers from his pack. “You heard the man.”

“Hopefully, we can beam back too. My dogs are barking!” Mike laughed.

-----

Larson and Genma walked into a dark office that was peppered with pro-Romulan and anti-Federation propaganda. The man sitting behind the desk motioned for the two to have a seat while he finished reading a memo.

Genma turned to Larson but Larson silently ordered Genma to be quiet and trust his elder, as Genma had so often told his son to do. It was rare that Genma was on the receiving end of that look, especially without the panty raids of Haposai being involved.

The old Romulan behind the desk was menacing in appearance. He appeared about seventy Earth years old, but of course since Romulans and Vulcans live such long lives you can assume he is much older than that. His hair was dark black with a few streaks of gray in it. His eyes were green, probably stained with the blood of Vulcans he has had killed over the years. He had a thin goatee which had turned all gray, with the odd exception of one spot, which remained black.

The old Romulan finally put down his PADD and turned to Larson and smiled.

“Scott, old friend,” he said in a voice that certainly did not match his look or his earlier demeanor. “How are you?”

“I'm well, thank you,” Larson replied, also smiling. “Van'dy, this is my associate, Admiral Genma Saotome.”

Van'dy leaned across his desk and shook Genma's hand. “You're Ranma Saotome's father, aren't you?”

Genma nodded. “Yes.”

“What a shame, the way they railroaded your boy. Just to make the Vulcans happy,” Van'dy shook his head in both sadness and disgust. “He should be hailed as a national hero on Vulcan for killing that traitor, Vor'Gal.”

“Mmm,” Genma replied.

“Anyway...” Van'dy continued, feeling Genma's obvious discomfort with him. “What's the urgent situation?”

“I have a ship stranded. Interestingly enough, Ranma Saotome's ship. And I am fairly sure that someone inside of the Vulcan defense or intelligence ministries are wanting to keep it that way.”

"I've lost four ships so far trying to rescue them, and now Starfleet won't send anymore since they don't have any escorts."

"Not to be harsh, but this is a lot of effort to go through for a ship. Why not just send someone to recover the crew?"

"The crew found tampering with her engines which I think will prove and bring down the conspiracy that is trying to break apart the Federation.

"Without that evidence, everything is just hearsay."

Van'dy nodded and picked up another PADD. "I am lacking SRV's."

"We have two," Larson stated.

"We do?" Genma asked.

Larson smiled.

"Well then!" Van'Dy "You guys have a nice long voyage to prepare for!"

Genma and Larson stood and began to walk to the office door. Genma stopped and looked at a propaganda poster that showed a Romulan drinking what appeared to be Romulan Ale out of the head of a human.

"HA HA!" Van'Dy laughed, patting Genma on the back. "Stupid propaganda. Do you know how terrible Romulan Ale would taste if you mixed it with blood and brain matter?"

Larson laughed as did a couple of other Romulans within earshot. Genma let out an uneasy chuckle as he and Larson were led out of the office.

-----

The pinkish-orange Geneva sunset crept in the window of the Federation Council building. Slow footsteps were the only sounds that could be heard as Zack Young came walking down the hallway towards his office; a PADD in his hand and a smile on his face.

The PADD, partially obscured by his palm, displayed the headline from the local newspaper.

'STARFLEET ATTACKED BY VULCANS!' it read.

Young smirked. In a little under a day, he had managed to set in motion what he had hoped would end up being the start of the end of the Vulcan-Earth alliance, and end the end, would allow Earth to regain, what he believed was its rightful place as explorers and conquerors.

The tall, blonde man looked at the PADD once more before deactivating the lock on his office and walking in. As he began to take off his suit jacket, his office chair began to turn around towards him.

"I have been waiting for you," Salek said calmly.

"GOD DAMN IT!" Young screamed, jumping against the wall and instinctively going for the security panel. He managed to realize who was in his office though and stopped himself before alerting the guards.

"You see jumpy," Salek mused.

Young resumed removing his jacket and walked to his replicator in a huff.

"You'd be jumpy to if someone had broken into your office and was pretending to be some sort of Bond villain. Coffee, black."

The replicator complied as Salek tried to comprehend Young's slight towards him.

"What's a 'Bond villain'?"

Young picked up his coffee and shook his head.

"Never mind," he sighed as he walked to his desk and sat down across from Salek.

"So, what do I owe the honor of your trespassing?"

Salek grinned. Whenever Salek grinned, Young knew treachery was afoot. This was always good news for the pair's plans.

"Tragic news. First a Starfleet scout ship attacked a Vulcan science ship, killing all on board. Incredibly sad."

Young nodded. "Indeed."

"Then another Starfleet ship came within the Vulcan defense perimeter. They apparently didn't identify themselves quick enough and were quickly dispatched by the planetary defenses."

Salek quickly turned away in what appeared to be an attempt to stifle a laugh. Once he had regained his composure, he turned back to Young and attempted to look even more stern.

"Sneeze, sorry."

Young nodded in faux understanding.

"Anyway, I didn't even have anything to do with that. Seems like the real military is getting pretty paranoid of Starfleet ships now."

Young leaned back in his chair and began to chew on his fingernail. "That's all well and good, but misunderstandings aren't going to get the job done."

Salek smiled. "Well, what's going to happen tomorrow will be no misunderstanding."

"Oh?"

"A rouge Vulcan Army division is going to retaliate for Nagaya."

"Oh?" Young chuckled. "Against the LDF?"

Salek nodded. "It will be ugly."

"Saanik will have a hard time explaining his way out of that."

"Saanik will be arrested shortly after the attack begins and accused of ordering it. All the evidence is ready."

"Nice work," Young grinned.

Salek nodded. "Speaking of nice work, what about things on your end? I stopped the rescue fleet. Has Larson tried to launch more?"

"Tried, but I made sure they don't have any warp cores for that ship, any SRVs or any transport ships."

Salek nods. "Let's taunt him."

Young laughed. "How Vulcan."

Salek shrugged.

Young turned his computer around, so it faced him and began to hit a couple of buttons. After a moment, a pretty young woman appeared wearing a Starfleet uniform.

"Starfleet Headquarters, how may I direct your call."

"Admiral Scott Larson's office, please," Young replied.

"I'm sorry, but the Admiral is out of town on business, would you like his voice mail?"

"Can you transfer me to where he is?" Young asked.

"I'm sorry, I cannot."

Young scratched his head. "Okay, well, can you tell me where he went?"

"I'm sorry, his destination is classified."

Young, despite his appreciation for young Petty Officers, was growing frustrated with this one.

"This is Councilman Zack Young. I have level Alpha One security clearance."

The young girl looks at her screen for a moment, then back to the camera. "I'm sorry, but this is classified Black Five."

"Black Five?!"

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Councilman?"

Young sighed. "No. Thanks."

"Have a great day!" the girl cheerfully smiled before ending the transmission. Salek looked to Young, who was getting more and more agitated by the moment.

"What does 'Black Five' classified mean?"

Young, whose head looked ready to explode, turned to Salek.

"Section 31."

-----

"Section 31?" Genma asked. A few of the Romulans who were in the lounge with Larson and Genma turned their direction, but most ignored them, as they had no clue, or no interest in what the two humans were talking about.

"Yes. For about twenty years," Larson continued. "But as the threats became more obvious, and more dangerous, I decided to become a Starfleet officer and put my talents to use here."

Genma nodded while taking a drink of his tea. "It's good that you didn't burn any bridges. Having these... friends... is quite useful."

Larson looked and nodded to a couple of Romulans who were giving the pair the dirty eye.

"Eh, don't worry. I don't think most of them like us anymore than you like them." Larson took a drink of his Romulan Ale and leaned back. "I guess I don't mind being around them because I spent a lot of time on Romulus.

"Van'dy and I were 'enemies' you could say. But at the same time, we were friends. We would pass each other information, and at the same time, use each other to keep the peace. It worked that way back in the twentieth century too. Back channels."

Genma nodded. Espionage was something he didn't really care to get into, nor really care to understand the finer details of.

"Man, we could have used an agent like you, Genma!" Larson laughed. "I can't imagine how many places I could have gotten into if I could have turned into a panda!"

Genma laughed for a moment before looking out the window and seeing the ship drop out of warp.

"Bridge to Admiral Larson," an unnamed Romulan called.

"Go ahead."

"We've reached the rendezvous."

"Thank you!" Larson replied. "You ready, Genma?"

Genma looked out the window at the two ship recovery vessels and the transport ship idling in orbit around an exceptionally large gas giant.

"Starfleet lied to us."

"No, they didn't lie," Larson corrected Genma as the pair walked to the turbolift. "Someone altered the ship inventory to make it look like there was no ships available."

The pair stepped into the turbolift and instructed it to head to the transporter room. Once there Genma resumed his questioning.

"Why would someone do that?"

Larson shrugged. "Energize."

One the pair rematerialized on the transport ship, the U.S.S. Muskogee, Larson continued.

“Why, I don't know. As to who... Well, I have my suspicions, but I don't know yet.”

Genma nodded. “So do we also have a warp core?”

Larson nodded as the pair hopped into a turbolift and rode it to the bridge. “Basically, everything we had the first time, we have now.”

“No escort,” Genma sighed.

The pair rode in silence for a moment, before Genma turned back to Larson.

“So, why are we dealing with the Romulans then?”

Larson didn't turn away from the front of the turbolift.

“If we stay in Romulan space, we'll be safer. The Vulcans, especially those acting out of the authority of Starfleet, will be less likely to cross the Neutral Zone to attack us. Plus, like that...”

Larson smirked as he continued. “...freighter crewman said, the Vulcans have issues with breaking their encryption.”

Genma nodded slowly as the turbolift to the bridge slid to a stop and the doors opened. The pair walked out as Larson continued.

“The Bajorans have been given permission to come into Romulan space as well and will catch up with us in about 15 hours. They're sending a pretty heavy escort.”

Genma smiled. “Well, that's nice of them.”

“They're pretty attached to that ship.”

The pair walk down to the ship's captain. “Hello!” The captain, an older, black man with a thick goatee and an even thicker voice greets them.

“Good morning, Captain. I'm Admiral Scott Larson, this is Admiral Genma Saotome.”

“Nice to meet you, Admirals. I'm Commander Edwin LeBeaux and I understand we've got a long trip ahead of us?”

“Yes, about two months,” Genma sighed.

“I guess we better get going then,” LeBeaux stated.

“One second, Captain,” Larson interrupted. “Open a channel to the Romulan ship please.”

The communication officer complied and Van'dy appeared.

“Scotty! Best get going!”

Larson smiled. “I just wanted to say thanks.”

Van'dy nodded. “We're even now, okay?”

Larson nodded. “You got it, old friend.”

The channel closed and Van'dy's ship cloaked. Larson turned to LeBeaux. "NZ-12G. Best possible speed, please."

LeBeaux turned to the helmsman. "You heard the admiral. Link with the SRV's, make sure they are with us. Engage."

After a few seconds of the ships aligning, all three took off in a blinding flash of light.

#### SEVEN HOURS LATER

Salek rolls over in his bed and angrily looks at his terminal, which is flashing and making some God-awful Vulcan version of the standard 'Star Trek' chirp. He manages to hit a button which sets it to audio only.

"This is Salek," he grumbles.

"Minister, sorry to wake you, but I think we've found the ships you're looking for."

Salek sat nearly straight up in bed. "You *\*think\**?"

"Well..." the voice on the other end explained nervously, with what can only be described as the Vulcan version of fear in his voice. "There is a large fleet of Bajoran ships headed towards empty space, just across the Romulan border. You said last time that they were going to get a Bajoran escort--"

"-Bajoran escort," Salek interrupted.

"They're running with their transponders off. Unless Bajor is invading Romulus, there is nothing for months in the direction the Bajoran ships are headed."

"Send the squad," Salek ordered. "I'll be in there shortly."

"Yes sir."

-----

Ranma was the final one to walk into the main conference room as the sunrise began to shine through the windows. The large transparent aluminum slightly tinted automatically to contain some of the glare, however many of the occupants of the room had to squint, depending on where they were seated.

Ranma took his seat at the head of the table as Akane and two doctors walked up to the main monitor to begin their presentation.

Akane began to speak as she activated the monitor, showing a picture of the deceased pilot.

"After performing an autopsy, DNA analysis, and full genetic markup, and comparing it with all the information we could find on the Valarie computer network, we are reasonably comfortable with assuming that these people are indeed from the Eastern continent."

"Reasonably comfortable with assuming?" Ranma asked in a tone that made clear that the doctor's statement was not what he was hoping for.

“Yes, captain,” one of the doctors responded. “Basically, the Easterns and Westerns DNA is more or less identical, which would make sense, given that with the exception of the markings the Westerns have, they all appear to be the same race.”

“Wouldn't the marks themselves be caused by something genetic?” Minako asked.

“Yes,” the other doctor replied, changing the display to the pilot's genetic profile. “But the issue is that unless you can bring us known Western DNA to compare this to, we won't be able to tell what the difference is.”

Akane sighed. “The seemingly one thing that both sides have been able to agree on is that 'God made the marks'. So, neither side has bothered to try and figure out a scientific cause for them, or why only those from the west have them.”

“But it is genetic,” the second doctor added on. “We saw a few cases where children were born without the marks.”

“What happened to them?” Minako asked.

Rei scoffed. “I really don't think we want to know.”

The second doctor shook his head. “They were deemed to not be in favor of God.”

Ranma sat up before this became a theological discussion. “So, how certain are you that these men are from the east?”

“From a biological standpoint, I'd say 90%. There's no sign of surgery that would suggest that their marks were removed.”

Ranma turned to Makoto. “And you verified the language in the aircraft, and the aircraft itself matched Eastern language and equipment?”

“Yes sir,” Makoto replied.

“Alright then. Doctors, Akane. You're dismissed.”

The doctors left the room. Akane stayed for a moment, nodded to Ranma in support, and then followed her coworkers out.

“Last night, Prime Minister Mao called me again. A third city was hit by an Eastern ICBM.”

Ranma hit a button and the devastated ruins of a Western city appeared on the monitor. Minako rubbed her face as Makoto just shook her head. Rei bit her lip for a minute.

“It's been a long time since I have heard another man cry,” Ranma said softly. “Sadly enough though, not long enough since I had cried myself. Especially when I told him 'no' again.”

Ranma punched up a map of the Eastern continent. On it, several lights began to flash.

“General Garone sent this to us. It's a map of the Eastern Republic's ICBM bunkers. They apparently have thirty-seven left. If one of them were to hit us, we would be killed.”

“We could shoot them down easily before they got here,” Makoto replied.

Ranma nodded. "Or we could destroy them in their bunkers."

"Ohhhhh..." Makoto grinned.

Ranma looked to Rei. "I know you object to us interfering..."

Rei nodded. "Yeah, Captain, I do. And I think this is an interesting way of getting around it." Rei paused and looked at the window and the less than two meters of invisible metal that was between here and the air outside.

She turned back to Ranma. "But at the same time, I have no interest in one of those missiles landing on us."

Ranma smiled. "Can you put together a plan in five hours?"

"Can you get me schematics to one of those silos?"

Ranma smiled and bowed as Mao stepped off his helicopter. Mao walked up to Ranma, bowed, and smiled in return.

"Captain. Nice to see you."

"You as well, Mr. Prime Minister."

"General Garone said you had to talk in person."

Ranma nodded as the two walked away from the noise of the helicopter.

"I want to make a deal with you," Ranma said.

"Oh?" Mao asked.

"I will end the Eastern nuclear attacks by destroying all of their nuclear silos. However, in exchange, you must promise me that you will not use that awful weapon on them."

Mao blinked. "They deserve-"

"I know what they deserve," Ranma interrupted. "But two wrongs don't make a right. They will get their comeuppance in the afterlife."

Mao sighed and bit his lip.

"Do we have a deal?" Ranma asked.

"How are you going to do it?"

"General Garone is going to provide me us with intelligence on locations and we will insert teams in to destroy the ICBMs while they are still inside their silos."

"Are you going to use your magical disappearing beam?" Mao asked.

Ranma chuckled. "A famous writer from my planet once said, 'any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.'"

Mao nodded and smiled. "You have a deal."

-----

Larson and Genma sprinted up the corridor of the Muskogee as the red alert lights flashed and the alert klaxons blared. The two men reached the turbolift after a short sprint, both out of breath.

"Bridge," Larson ordered as Genma panted.

"I thought my running days were over," the bald man whimpered as Larson smiled worriedly.

The turbolift did not take too long to get the pair to the Ambassador class ship's bridge. Once there, Genma walked over to the tactical station and Larson to LeBeaux.

"Status, captain?" Larson asked.

"Three unidentifiable ships on an intercept course," LeBeaux replied, looking at the tactical display on the main viewer. "Based on the information you gave me from the last engineering fleet, their size and speed leads me to believe that they are the same Vulcan cruisers."

Larson groaned. "Dammit. I thought we'd be far enough away from Federation space to avoid being detected."

Genma looked to the operations station. "How long before the Bajoran fleet gets here?"

The operations officer shakes his head. "Way too late."

Larson ran his hands through his black and gray hair and bit his lip. "Send out a general distress call. Maybe the Romulans will get it."

Ops nodded as Tactical began to tighten his stance. "They're locking their weapons."

"HOLY SHIT!" Ops screamed, pointing to the main viewer.

Larson, Genma and LeBeaux all looked up to see a single Romulan Bird of Prey and four Romulan Valdore type heavy cruisers decloak and break formation.

"They're hailing us," Ops called out.

"On screen," LeBeaux ordered.

The screen came to life with the grinning appearance of a young Romulan captain. He had an arrogant appearance to him, with his fingers tented and his legs crossed. He nodded to the officers on the Muskogee.

"Good day. I'm Commander Torah, of the Romulan Warbird Jarok. Please allow me to dispatch these vagabonds who seem to be wanting to impede your travels and then we'll deal with pleasantries."

"Sounds good, Commander," LeBeaux replied.

Torah nodded again and the channel closed. The bridge crew of the Muskogee watched as the five ships intercepted the three Vulcan cruisers. However, the battle was not as one sided as one would think.

The Vulcan cruisers were obviously rigged for battle with larger, more powerful ships, and were manned by crews that had skill sets beyond what one would consider a normal ship's crew. Before the first battlecruiser was destroyed, one of the Romulan cruisers was immobilized and was on fire.

Without the third battlecruiser though, the other two battlecruisers seemed to go down quickly. The Romulans showed no mercy as they made no attempts to demand either ship surrender.

"Set a course for that damaged ship," LeBeaux ordered. "The least we can do is see if we can get it moving again."

"Aye," Helm responded as Ops piped up.

"They're hailing us again."

"On screen."

Torah reappeared on the screen. He appeared to have taken a slight beating in the battle, but in general was no worse for the wear.

"Commander, thank you for your assistance," LeBeaux stated.

Torah nodded. "I'm noticing you're changing course."

"We're a repair team, we thought we could help with your disabled ship."

Torah shook his head. "I appreciate the thought, but we cannot allow non-Romulan military on board our Valdore class ships. She is being evacuated and will be destroyed."

"Mmm," LeBeaux acknowledged. He turned to the helm and began to issue more orders as Larson stepped forwards.

"Commander, I am Admiral Scott Larson."

"Admiral."

"I'm just curious, why were you following us?"

Torah smiled. "We were escorting you. By order of the Tal Shiar."

Both Genma and LeBeaux looked up at Larson who was grinning from ear to ear. "That old dog." Larson mumbled to himself. "Well Commander, we thank you for your diligence."

"Please, Admiral, the pleasure was ours," Torah smiled, leaning back. "If it means I get to blow up Vulcan swine, quite frankly I'll do it for free."

"How much longer will you be escorting us?" Genma asked.

"Until you are safely under the guard of the Bajorans," Torah replied.

"Well, thank you very much," Larson smiled. "We appreciate your help, and it will be remembered in the future."

Torah nodded and grinned. "You know, Admiral. Growing up, I dreamed of joining the military so that I could kill Starfleet officers."

Larson continued to smile, as Genma looked on worriedly. LeBeaux also slowly turned from the operations station.

"However, after fighting with your people during the Dominion War," Torah paused for a second. "Well, while we're not yet allies, I am glad that I am escorting you, rather than killing you."

"You and me both," Genma mumbled.

"Commander Torah, for you to be flying one of the Romulan Guard's finest new ships, you must be an excellent commander. When I return, I will be sure to alert your supervisors to your competence."

Torah, who looked like he'd be complemented by the Praetor himself, nodded and closed the channel. The four healthy Romulan ships then opened fire and destroyed their disabled vessel and quickly cloaked.

"Captain, if you'd like to resume course," Larson said as he started to walk back towards the turbolift with Genma following slowly behind.

"Aye," LeBeaux nodded.

As the turbolift doors closed, Genma turned to Larson. "The Tal Shiar?"

Larson nodded, watching the front of the turbolift.

"You don't think that Section 31 would talk to just any old Romulan, do you? Deck six."

Genma leaned back and sighed as the turbolift began to work its way downward. "No. No, I guess not."

Larson turned to Genma. "What's wrong?"

"Well, at first I thought Section 31 was bad for what they did to Commander Kino. Then I have my world turned upside down because I thought the Tal Shiar was bad."

Larson chuckled. "They are. Oh, they've killed more people than I can count."

"Then how can you be friends with that man?"

Larson turns to Genma. "Pause."

The lift comes to a stop as Larson rubs his face. "How can he be friends with me? Do you have any idea how many of his colleagues I've killed?"

Genma shook his head.

"Neither do I. Do you know how many people you've killed?"

Genma started to talk but couldn't find the words.

"Would you believe me if I told you that because he and I have the relationship that we do, we've saved far more than we've killed? That we've stopped the Federation and the Romulans from going to war dozens of times.

"Think about that. Killed... A few hundred. Saved. A few hundred billion. Resume."

Larson turned back towards the front of the turbolift as did Genma.

“Espionage work is dirty. But it's necessary and sometimes it's the only thing that keeps the peace.”

The turbolift comes to a stop and the doors open. Larson begins to step out, but Genma stays. Larson notices this and turns around.

“I'm sorry, Scott.”

Larson shakes his head and walks back to Genma and pats him on the back.

“Don't worry about it. You have a lot on your mind right now.”

Genma nods and walks out of the turbolift with Larson, unsure if he feels any better or not.

#### FORT VOKAU – VULCAN – 0218 LOCAL TIME

Rain continued to pour down, reducing the already limited visibility of the soldiers driving the Vulcan Defense Force transports. Most were driving by sensors, but they were still occasionally hitting trees, which was infuriating their commanders who were hoping for a stealthy approach to the Starfleet base.

They realized that they would only be able to get to within a kilometer of the base and would have to fire from there.

The drive for the approximately sixty troops took another fifteen minutes, before the order to disembark was received. The soldiers, with almost android like order, moved out of the transports and lined up in formation. Quickly, the soldiers began to move mobile plasma artillery into position. Between the Vulcan's expert mathematical skills, the computerization of the artillery, and the fact that the Vulcans knew exactly where the base was and exactly what they wanted to hit, meant that the opening salvo would be devastating.

It would have to be. After the first hit, the bases shields would be raised. However, damage would have already been done.

The clock was ticking.

Nothing could be seen. The rain had increased to monsoonish levels. Night vision was useless. Not that it really mattered. No one would be watching the perimeter for ground forces. They were on friendly soil. They were there to protect the Vulcans.

Not to be attacked by them.

It would go into Webster's 24th Century Dictionary under 'back-stab'.

“Now,” The order was given.

Every piece of artillery opened fire.

It took the plasma charges under fifteen seconds to make it the kilometer to the base. Barracks exploded. Fuel silos exploded. Everything that could possibly explode, exploded.

The base went dark.

“Again.”

Again, the artillery fired. The troops expected the plasma charges to hit the shields and dissipate, but they did not. The base’s shields did not activate. The plasma charges hit again, this time, their secondary targets, hitting shuttle hangers, transports, storage facilities.

“Continue firing.”

The artillery took about 45 seconds to recharge, every time it did, it hit a different part of the base, demolishing everything. After a few volleys, a second, smaller group of scouts reached the perimeter of the base.

“There are no life signatures coming from within the base,” one scout reported.

“Starfleet has dispatched interceptors and troops from Fort Vash. ETA, seven minutes,” another informed the soldiers.

“Transports, pick up the troops, and let's leave.”

The transports quickly zipped down and picked up the soldiers at the base entrance as the artillery and the main group were transported to an unknown location. Within five minutes, all the Vulcans had come and gone, and the Starfleet base was destroyed; inside lay nearly 100,000 dead Starfleet LDF personal.

# CHAPTER NINE – REVOLUTIONS

“Saanik? No way,” Salek gasped.

Salek was getting quite good at his 'fake shock' routine. One would almost think he had been practicing.

Vora nodded. “His name was on the deployment order. Plus, it's quite hard to believe that many soldiers could go rogue.”

“That would not be logical,” Salek agreed.

Vora walked over to the window, looking out over the Vulcan capital. “At any rate, we've arrested him.”

“Good.”

“Starfleet has requested we extradite him to face charges in their courts.”

“Ludicrous,” Salek groused.

“Actually...” Vora groaned. “I think it's the right thing to do.”

Salek's head slowly turned towards Vora. “You must be kidding,” Salek said, his shock not so fake this time.

“He should be executed, post haste.”

“Weren't you the one who got all upset when a certain Captain couldn't be tried in Vulcan courts for a 'crime' committed against Vulcans?”

“That's different,” Salek stammered. “They weren't going to properly punish him for his murders.”

“I'll note your objection with the magistrate in the extradition hearings. They aren't for a few weeks though, so you have plenty of time come up with legal precedent. You know how much those magistrates love that.”

Salek allowed himself some time to fume quietly before continuing with his morning questioning.

“So is Starfleet doing anything different at the rest of their bases?”

Vora nodded. “Yes.”

“Abandoning them?” Salek smiled.

“No. They're stationing an additional 250,000 at Vash and 300,000 at Uzhau.”

Salek slammed his hands on the table, startling Vora. “Who gave them that authority?”

Vora eyed Salek for a moment. "Vulcan is a Federation planet. The Federation has the authorization to place soldiers on any planet they want, so long as they don't interfere with the civilian government."

Salek didn't say a word as he grabbed his belongings and walked, leaving Vora rather surprised. Salek stomped out the door and huffed his way towards his office. Once there he secured the lock and called Young.

"What's up?" Young asked, distressed.

"You know?"

"Of course I know," Young snapped. "The Federation Council had to approve it."

"I hope you voted against it."

"I did. Sole dissension. So much for reelection."

"Would you stop thinking about your political career for a minute?"

"I'm a politician, you idiot," Young glared.

Salek sighed. "So, what do we do now?"

"There is only one thing left to do," Young said, sitting up. "You have to convince the Vulcan High Command that the increased Starfleet presence is an invasion. You have to get Vulcan to secede."

"Secede?"

"The Federation will never allow a core planet to secede, and they will use force to stop it." Young explained.

Salek gritted his teeth while rubbing his forehead. "Vora has veto authority. He will never go for secession."

Young shook his head and leaned back in his chair. "No, I don't suppose Vora would allow that. So long as Vora is in charge, that kind of thing wouldn't be allowed."

Salek felt his subspace bond with Young connecting. "But if something were to happen to him..."

"If I recall correctly, the Vice-Chairman is someone who supports greater Vulcan independence?"

Salek half shrugged. "He would like to see more Vulcan seats on the Federation Council. But he is more concerned with domestic issues than he is with Federate issues."

"Would he support a secession?"

Salek nodded. "At the least, I don't think he would veto it."

Young looked down at some PADDs. "LDF forces will begin mobilizing in about 72 hours. The entire contingent is expected to be in place on your planet within two weeks. So, unless you want to have to dislodge a million soldiers, I suggest you move before then."

Salek nodded, did the Vulcan hand gesture, and closed the channel as someone began to knock on his door.

“Who is it?”

“It's T'kal,” a woman called from the other side.

Salek got up and walked to his door, unsecuring it. The door slid open, and his formally dressed assistant walked in.

“I have a message for you.”

The assistant handed Salek a green PADD and turned to walk out.

“T'kal,” Salek called.

“Yes sir?” she replied, turning back.

“Thank you,” Salek grinned.

T'kal nodded in his direction for heading back to her office area. Salek stood and walked to his replicator and ordered himself some tea before walking back to his desk. The middle-aged Vulcan then sat down in his oversized faux leather chair and leaned back, taking a couple of sips of his tea before beginning to read the report on the PADD.

It took only a few seconds before his melancholy mood changed to pure, blood boiling rage.

Salek flung the PADD as hard as he could against the farthest wall; the fiberglass and silicon device shattering into dozens of pieces – sparking as the parts fell to the floor.

Salek then shifted his rage to his teacup, slamming it to his desk, boiling tea scalding his hand.

This of course only angered him more, causing him to flip his chair over, then to take his anger out on his computer, his scalded fist smashing through the screen like it was paper mâché.

Salek's tantrum went on for about five minutes before two Ministry of Intelligence security officers, who were summoned by T'kal, arrived to see what the commotion was about. They arrived to find Salek smashing one of the paintings he had pulled off his wall; his left hand covered in blood.

“Minister,” one said.

Salek snapped out of his rage induced tunnel vision and noticed the security officers. He slowly put down the painting and looked around.

“Are you okay?” the other officer asked.

Salek nodded. “Yes. Thank you. I guess I have just been terribly busy working and not been meditating. And I have just received some very unfortunate news regarding three of our ships being destroyed by some Romulan ships, and I guess I lost control of my emotions.”

Salek up righted his chair and sat down, shaking his head. “I'm sorry for the commotion I caused.”

The first security guard nodded. "Understandable. However, I think it would be best if we had someone look at your hand."

Salek looked at his hand, which was still bleeding quite badly. Green blood was dripping onto his pants and the floor.

"Of course."

Within a couple of moments, a medic was working on Salek's hand, pulling glass out it and attempting to fix the cuts. However, Salek's mind was elsewhere, thinking about how there was nothing he could do to stop the Sisko from being recovered.

-----

Stardate 60960.4: Operation Safe Haven.

Rei looked at the bombs they were going to be attaching to the Eastern ICBMs. She wasn't that impressed with their size. Each one was about the size of a tricorder, but she had been assured by Makoto that they would be powerful enough to destroy the bunker, trapping the missile, but not actually detonating the nuclear reaction.

That, of course, was what they were going for, as they were not interested in nuking the population of the Eastern cities, even if they did seem to not care about the civilian population of the Westerns.

"Pretty small," Kio noted, seemingly reading Rei's mind, as she walked up.

Rei turned to her protege. "Yeah. But I guess considering they come from a device that was made to destroy starships, not buildings, they should work."

Makoto, who was also in the room, groaned at the pair questioning her handy work.

"If you place them properly, they will detonate, igniting tons of rocket fuel as well, causing a pretty awesome explosion in a pretty confined area."

Rei and Kio nodded. "And you're sure the nukes won't detonate?"

"Yeah," J.C. replied, as he walked into the room. "It takes a specific chain of events to get the nuclear reaction to go off. There might be some radiation issues from the uranium, but I don't think it will affect the cities too much because there will be a lot of rubble on top of what's left of the silos."

Rei's communicator chirped as she smiled at J.C. "Hino here."

"Rei, the relay ship is in position," Minako informed her.

Rei looked to Kio. "You guys ready?"

Kio nodded. "You know it."

"Okay. Remember, only shoot if you must. We don't want them to reinforce the other silos, or worse yet, launch," Rei ordered.

"Yes ma'am," the NEO troops replied.

Rei grabbed one of the bombs, then she, Commander Shelton and Lt. Parker got onto the transport pad. "NEO to Nighthawk, transport to Alpha One."

"Roger," Kaii said from the cloaked shuttle overhead.

A couple of seconds later, Rei and her team were gone.

Kio gingerly grabbed a bomb, attached it to her belt and she, Anthony and Michael all got onto the transport pad.

"NEO two to Nighthawk. Transport to Bravo One."

"Roger."

The trio soon vanished.

The Eastern ICBM silo was dimly lit, most of the lighting coming from track lighting against the walls. Rei's team materialized near the actual missile, causing a bright blue glow, that may have given away their position, had anyone been looking.

Quickly, Shelton and Parker took up defensive stances. Rei pulled out her tricorder, nervously checking to make sure she had not actually grabbed the bomb by accident, and then scanned for bio signs.

"There are four in the control room," She whispered. "I am having trouble scanning outside of the walls. NEO One to Nighthawk, do you still have a lock on us?"

"Negative," Kaii replied. "You're going to have to use transport enhancers to get out."

"They'll be destroyed in the blast," Parker stated.

Rei sighed. "Yeah. Still though..."

The group slowly made their way down to the fuel port on the missile. Rei scanned the missile and shook her head. "It's fueled."

Shelton bit his lip. "I guess they want to be able to murder millions on a moment's notice."

Rei nodded but did not say anything. She quickly went to work affixing the bomb to the side of the missile, then activated it. After about twenty seconds, the display showed green, indicating that it had established a link to the Sisko.

"Rei to Sisko. Alpha One tagged."

Kio's team, for what seemed like the first time in a long time, had some luck. They did not beam down in the middle of a group of hostiles. In fact, the entire place seemed empty.

Kio only scanned two people in the control room, and what may have been a couple of more outside of the silo, but the scan was inconclusive.

While she didn't want to admit that she was a blood thirsty killing machine, she couldn't help but think to herself that she was a little disappointed that there was no one for her to shoot.

It wasn't because she just wanted someone to shoot, but because she really thought she was doing something right in stopping these people from slaughtering the Western people.

Kio was thoroughly confused by this 'race war.' She found it difficult to comprehend how circumstances of birth was enough of a reason to kill people over. It was especially hard to understand having come from the Federation, where you cannot turn around without seeing someone who looks different than you do.

In her own team, there were people different from her. She was of Asian descent. Anthony was African descent, and Michael was European descent. The only thing the three of them had in common, race wise, was the fact that they were all from Earth.

And that was not even a full truth. Anthony was born on Titan.

Regardless, Kio still was appalled by this, and would happily shoot any Eastern military officer she saw and was looking forward to blowing these instruments of mass-murder, as she described them, to hell.

"Looks like we'll need to use enhancers to get out, Chief," Anthony said, as they received a transmission from Nighthawk.

"You brought some, right?" Mike asked.

"Me? That was your job," Anthony whimpered.

Kio turned and glared at Mike as he pulled out the transport enhancers.

"Kidding!"

"I really hate you, dude," Anthony growled as Kio shook her head and turned her attention back to attaching the bomb.

#### ONE HOUR, EIGHTEEN MINUTES LATER

Rei and company materialized inside of their final silo. However instead of finding the normal, darkened silo, they found this one brightly lit, with quite a bit of activity going on inside of it.

"Shit, take cover," Rei ordered.

The group ducked into a small storage area. Rei pulled out her tricorder and ran a scan. "Fifty-eight people in this silo. Nine in the control room."

"What do you think they are doing?" Shelton whispered.

Rei shook her head. "We're never going to make it down to the fuel port undetected though."

Parker raised his phaser rifle. "Maybe we need to just do it the normal way then? How many of them are actual military and how many are technicians?"

As Parker finished speaking, two soldiers walked by with two men in lab coats behind them. They stopped at a computer terminal.

"I think the yield has doubled now," the first lab coat said.

"Good. We should let the war council know. They will probably want to get it airborne in the next hour as a test," the second replied.

The four began to walk away.

"Alpha to Bravo, are you guys done?" Rei radioed.

"Just got back to the Sisko," Kio replied.

"We're going to need your help. Bring guns."

"Yes ma'am," Kio responded, her smile obvious over the COMM.

"Go," Rei ordered.

The group popped out of their hiding spot and shot the two guards and two scientists in the back. They quickly dragged them into their hiding place as Kio's team materialized next to them.

"About 53 left. We need to get down to the fuel valve. You guys go left, we'll go right," Rei ordered.

Kio nodded as she, Mike and Anthony moved out and slowly began to meander their way down the catwalk that surrounded the fifteen-story tall missile.

Rei grabbed one of the incapacitated guard's radios before she and her group slowly began to walk in the opposite direction, doing their best to avoid being seen from the people in the oversized windows overhead.

"Seventy-four, respond," the stolen radio demanded.

After there was no response, Rei realized that there was not going to be much time left for them, as the soldiers here would soon start looking for their missing comrades.

"Double time, folks," Rei quietly ordered.

The group quietly, but quickly maneuvered down a ladder, their boots making a slight noise when they hit the catwalk below. They moved around, through some water vapor that was coming from what appeared to be a cooling fan, to where the fuel valve would be.

It was at that point they found themselves face to face with about ten people in lab coats and about fifteen soldiers.

The group stared at each other for a moment before the soldiers, caught completely off-guard by the intruders, began to attempt, and raise their weapons.

Rei and company quickly started to take cover positions while firing their phase rifles at them.

"Under fire!" Both Rei and the Eastern soldiers called out.

Rei's groups fire was very methodical, firing very specifically, even though they were in extremely poor positions. The Eastern military's group was wild and random but seemed to get more directed as the guards seemed to get their wits about themselves.

The scientists were running in every which direction, trying to avoid being shot by either the enemy or by friendlies.

Kio's group had disregarded any concept of stealth to get down to Rei and assist her. Because of that, they had run into a group coming to reinforce the Eastern soldiers.

"Three more intruders!" the Eastern radio squawked, shortly before Kio's group had disabled the small squad of five guards.

Shortly thereafter, though, Kio's group had arrived and began shooting everyone, regardless of whether they were wearing a lab coat or camouflage. The Eastern group that had engaged Alpha team was not protecting its flank well and was an easy target for Kio's group.

Once everyone was down, Rei began installing the bomb as the radios began announcing that more reinforcements were on the way. As well, alarm klaxons began to blare, and the roof of the silo began to open.

"I think they might be getting ready to launch this thing," Parker said, looking up.

"Get the enhancers set up," Rei ordered as she continued to arm the bomb. "We have to get the fuck out of here."

Shelton complied and once the modified tricorder alerted the group that it had established a link with the ship, the group got inside of them.

"NEO One to Nighthawk, six to transport," Rei ordered.

In a couple of seconds, the group was gone.

Aboard the Sisko, Ranma looked to the main viewer which showed him thirty-seven blinking, green lights on the Eastern continent. He looked to Shampoo who then turned to Minako.

"Status?" she asked.

Minako nodded. "I have a solid connection to all bombs."

"NEO teams back?" Ranma asked.

"Yes," Minako replied.

The rear turbolift opened and Rei nearly sprinted onto the bridge, still in her full gear.

"We were confronted in the last silo, and they are preparing to launch it. They also talked about 'increased yield.'"

Shampoo shuddered a little bit as Ranma nodded. "Good work." He turned to Makoto. "Begin detonation sequence."

Makoto nodded. "Beginning."

As each tricorder was signaled from the Sisko, a countdown began, as the tricorder began to overload its circuitry.

Inside the tricorder was a directional charge with explosives in it built from one of the Sisko's quantum torpedoes. Once the tricorder overheated, the charge ignited, firing the charge. First the small explosion on the warhead ruptured the ICBM's fuel tank, then the ICBM's fuel ignited, engulfing the silo.

"Nighthawk to Sisko. Confirming... Holy crap..." Kaii mumbled.

"What?" everyone on the bridge asked at once.

"I can see these explosions out the window."

Everyone started to applaud, except for Ranma. "Can you confirm that all thirty-seven are destroyed?"

"Scanning and running aerial photography."

"Ranma worry to much," Shampoo grinned, playfully bumping into Ranma.

"Uh..." Kaii's voice came across.

The bridge fell deathly silent.

"Number three seven... It is down... But the missile exploded outside of its silo."

Rei put her head in her hands. "Transport enhancers."

Ranma bit his lip.

"Captain, I have an incoming transmission from both governments," Minako called out.

"Yeah, I bet," Ranma sighed. "Get Lt. Fuchs up here."

"Yes sir."

"Kaii, how many people are at that silo?" Rei asked.

"Looks like about three hundred now."

"Dammit," Rei hissed.

"It will take them years just to build the technology to begin to reverse engineer those things, Rei," Minako said.

Rei nodded, despite Minako's assurances not really helping her at all.

"You saved millions of people," Shampoo smiled, patting Rei on the back.

Rei nodded again as the rear turbolift opened and Lt. Fuchs, Akane, and one of her doctors came onto the bridge.

“Ranma, do you have a minute?” Akane asked, her facial expression far more serious than Ranma has seen it in a long time.

“Oh my, can anyone else need me right now?” Ranma joked.

No one laughed.

Ranma chuckled nervously, then turned to Akane. “Akane, if you guys want to go to the conference room, I will be with you as soon as I can. Lieutenant, Rei, Makoto, my ready room, please. Minako, please transfer the Eastern call into there.”

Everyone complied. As Ranma approached the door to his ready room, he turned to Jeff.

“Just to let you know, I am going to be doing a lot of lying. Please don't confuse my lying for his.”

#### ONE HOUR LATER

Ranma and his entourage walked into the conference room as nightfall began to settle in on their continent.

“How'd it go?” Akane asked.

“He's pretty pissed,” Ranma smirked.

“He swears up and down that he's not the one who bombed us,” Makoto stated.

“He might be right,” the unnamed doctor said.

Jeff blinked. “I couldn't tell if he was lying. He was just so mad, that was overriding everything.”

“Well, we don't need your services to prove this. No offense,” the doctor continued.

Jeff smiled with one of those 'it's all good' smiles that only a gay Betazoid can give you.

“With the help of some of the operations people, we've actually managed to push deeper into the Western computer network.

“What we've discovered is a covert operation known as Ban Kajsa, or Operation Holy Deception.”

Akane stood up and pointed to a DNA string on the main viewer. “Apparently the Westerns are really good at genetics and genetic engineering. It appears that they may have been able to alter the DNA of some of their people so that they could go undercover inside of the Eastern government and military.”

The unnamed doctor continued. “The spots are a genetic mutation. So, the only way to get rid of them, would be to alter the DNA.”

“So can you confirm where the pilots come from?” Ranma asked.

“Well because we can test DNA better than they can, we can see whether or not these pilots had their spots removed by genetic altering, since their doctors wouldn't have been able to do a complete job at it.”

“The issue is...” Akane sighed. “Is that we need both Eastern and Western DNA for a sample.”

Rei pulled the radio she stole from the Eastern soldier from her pocket. "Any DNA on this?"

The doctor gingerly took it and looked. On it he found a blonde hair. "You don't have a blonde boyfriend, do you?"

Rei blushed. "NO!"

The room laughed at Rei's embarrassment. "Perfect then." the doctor smiled.

"Now we just need a Western sample."

"We'll get you one," Rei smiled.

On the outer perimeter, two Western soldiers were walking along their assigned patrol paths.

"Hey!" a female voice called.

The two began to draw their weapons, but before they could, two black clad men, jumped them from behind and shot them full of a tranquilizer.

The two men dragged them into the bushes.

"Do men usually pull their guns when you hit on them?" Mike asked Kio who was pulling out her hypospray.

Mike found himself smacked by Anthony before Kio could do it.

"Thank you, Sargent."

Kio quickly took DNA samples from both men, checked for helicopters, then called for transport back to the ship.

#### SEVENTEEN HOURS LATER

"RED ALERT," Shampoo called out as Ranma came stomping out of his ready room.

The klaxons sounded as Amanda began to read off the situation report.

"Aerial surveillance is reporting two submarines moving close to the coast, near our crash zone."

"Tactical analysis?"

"Still scanning," Minako replied as Makoto came onto the bridge and took her position.

"Everyone back inside?" Shampoo asked.

"Yes," Amanda replied.

"The ships are still too deep to get a detailed scan, but their dimensions match both the Eastern and Western versions of nuclear-powered submarines capable of launching intermediate range missiles," Minako reported.

"This is getting old," Ranma sighed.

"Polarize the hull," Shampoo ordered.

"Visual?" Ranma asked.

The screen chirped and showed the coastline, near where the Sisko crashed.

"Can't see them," Shampoo groaned, stating the obvious.

"Still too deep," Minako sighed.

"Still? Are they surfacing?" Ranma asked.

"If they're planning on firing, they'd have to," Makoto replied. "Or at least move pretty close to the surface."

"They are definitely surfacing," Minako replied.

The screen zoomed in, showing a much clearer shot of two black submarines.

"Can the Nighthawk hit them?" Ranma asked.

"If I can get a lock, I don't see why not," Kaii replied.

"Load your bays, Lieutenant."

"Looks like they are getting ready to fire. Their silo doors are opening," Makoto reported.

"Kaii?" Ranma asked.

"Got a lock."

A few seconds passed before a torpedo came blasting into the shot, into the water and down the few dozen meters, smashing into the first sub. A few seconds later, a second torpedo made quick work of the second submarine.

"Anymore?" Shampoo asked.

"Not that I can see," Kaii replied. "But the water is an effective sensor block. I can only scan to about 300 meters below the surface."

Ranma sighed. "Okay. Stand down red alert."

The lights shifted back to normal.

Ranma turned to Shampoo. "Keep people confined to the ship for now."

"Okay," She replied.

Ranma turned to go back to his ready room when Akane walked onto the bridge. Ranma turned to her.

"It's all a lie," she said.

# CHAPTER TEN – SPLIT

“Those would have had to have been Western submarines,” Makoto explained. “They have a huge net of ships around this area, some of them are specifically designed to detect submarines. To think not just one, but two of them would be able to slink past without anyone knowing... Well, that's just ludicrous.”

“I agree,” Ranma nodded.

“So, what we do? Pretend and be friends?” Shampoo asked.

“I think we need to be upfront with them and let them know that we know they lied to us,” Rei suggested. “After we showed them that we can also strike from orbit, they may be content on just leaving us alone, since we've already damaged the Eastern's ability to nuke them.”

“On that same note, we can't really be chummy with people who tried to kill us,” Minako added.

“They likely didn't think the bombs and those missiles could kill us,” Ranma countered.

“They're vastly overestimating our hull strength,” Makoto groaned.

Ranma leaned back in the conference room chair and tented his fingers. “On the bright side, it's only five more months before our rescue.”

The room laughed somewhat half-heartedly.

“Bridge to Captain Saotome,” operations called.

“Go ahead.”

“I have a message for you from Admiral Larson.”

“About damn time,” Ranma snarled. “Put it in here.”

The screen chirped to life; however, everyone was a bit surprised when the logo that appeared was that of the Romulan Star Empire.

“Ranma,” Larson smiled. “Sorry for the delay since my last message. There have been some extremely complicated issues that arose, and I will explain all of those later.

“For now, please be advised that I have dispatched the U.S.S. Crossroads to your location. It was nearby – and when I say nearby, I mean, closer than me. As of now, she should be about three weeks from you.”

Minako and Makoto high-fived each other.

“As for now, I grant you leeway to do what you need to do to survive. Being a captain is about making difficult choices that affect not just you, but the people around you.”

Some crying is heard off in the distance.

“Oh, and your father says 'hello',” Larson said, rolling his eyes. “It is imperative that you do not contact me back until I say that you can, as we have been forced to travel rather... Stealthily. Again, I'll explain later. Larson out.”

The group took a moment to take the message in.

“Wow, we're gone for a couple of months and the universe falls apart,” Rei joked.

Ranma laughed. “Indeed.”

Ranma then paused and turned to Shampoo. “If it becomes necessary, I want a plan put together to evacuate the Sisko to the Crossroads when she arrives.”

Ranma turned and looked out the window. “If it becomes necessary, we'll destroy her.”

Shampoo nodded. “Yes sir.”

The rest of the room looked to Ranma. They all knew that abandoning the ship was something they would have to consider, but they didn't think that it would be so close to a reality that they would start planning for it.

Ranma, sensing the sadness in the room, sat up.

“I guess it's time for some more... diplomacy,” he sighed.

Ranma stood, with everyone standing after him. Ranma tapped his communicator. “Operations, contact the Western government. Tell them I would like to speak to the Prime Minister.”

“Yes sir,” operations replied.

Ranma paced back and forth on the bridge. He wondered if this is how the Westerns felt when he kept them waiting. He of course understood that Mao was likely a busy man, especially during a time of war, and was probably not in his office.

Unlike Ranma, he had a lot of places to go.

It occurred to Ranma that he was beginning to get a bit of cabin fever. He wasn't sure why. He had been on spaceships all his adult life. There were not very many places you could go that didn't look the same as the place you just were.

Some of the ships looked different. Some were brightly lit; others, like the Sisko, were dark and intimidating. However, they were all the same. It was like flying around in a tin can.

Maybe it was because just outside of the ship was the pristine air, the beautiful forest – well most of it – and not too far away, a white sand beach and beautiful, blue ocean.

Of course, all of that could be replicated inside of the ship. The Sisko had four holodecks. Still though, it was not the same. Regardless of how real the holodecks felt, you knew it was not.

“Captain, he's on,” Minako called out.

Ranma nodded and the channel came to life.

"Captain Saotome, I am sorry to keep you waiting," Mao apologized.

"Not at all," Ranma replied.

"What can I do for you."

"Mr. Prime Minister, do you mind if I speak rather bluntly?" Ranma asked, the sternness obvious in his voice. A tone that many on the bridge had not heard him take since the lashing he had given them regarding Captain Walker before their mission.

Mao paused for a moment. "Not at all."

Ranma looked to Rei who was nodding in encouragement. He bit his lip as Akane placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Sir, we've discovered evidence that your military was behind the attack on our ship two weeks ago."

"That's absurd," Mao countered.

"We also have reasonably concluded that the submarines that attempted to launch missiles at our ship yesterday were also under your command."

"WHAT EVIDENCE?!" Mao yelled.

"Genetic evidence. We recovered the bodies of the pilots of those aircraft-"

"They all crashed into the sea," Mao snapped.

"No, they all didn't," Ranma replied. "We recovered bodies of some of the pilots and discovered that they were part of your Ban Kajsja covert operation."

Mao stayed silent for a moment. Ranma looked to Jeff who nodded at him. Ranma quickly continued.

"Based on their DNA, DNA we got from an Eastern military soldier, and DNA we got from one of your soldiers-"

"You're the ones who attacked our soldiers patrolling the area near your ship?" Mao barked.

"You bombed us, and then tried to fire missiles at us," Ranma replied, some anger creeping into his voice. "All things considered; the fact we left your soldiers unharmed was pretty nice of us."

Mao did not reply.

"Regardless, despite all that you've done to try and drag us into your war, we will not retaliate against you."

Mao could be heard speaking to someone, but it was inaudible. Ranma ignored this and continued.

“As of now, consider any cooperation between us split. Any aircraft, boat, or land vehicle that comes within fifty kilometers of my ship will be destroyed. Any surveillance satellite that passes overhead will be destroyed.”

Ranma inhaled. “There will be no more use of non-lethal means against your military. Any soldier found within the perimeter will be killed. I’ll give you five hours to move any assets within that perimeter out.”

Ranma shook his head, the distaste of issuing that ultimatum pushing his breakfast around in his stomach.

Ranma shook it off and concluded. “I will defend my ship and my crew by any means necessary.”

There were a few moments of silence. Ranma looked to Jeff, who just shrugged. It wasn't the reaction from the councilor that Ranma was hoping for.

However, before Ranma could attack Jeff, Mao began to speak again.

“Very well, Captain,” Mao said, slowly and deliberately. “Then this will be our last communication. It was nice meeting you.”

A chirp is heard.

“They closed the channel,” Minako reported.

Everyone stood around silently for a moment before Shampoo finally decided to break the uneasy silence. “At least now we know who hate us. Everyone.”

Ranma snorted before laughing loudly.

“I guess that does make things easier.” Ranma nodded.

Akane patted Ranma on the shoulder and then looked at him. Ranma looked like he had aged ten years in the last three weeks. She was getting worried about the toll this current situation they were in was taking on her husband.

She knew there wasn't a whole lot she could do for him. Ranma deeply cared about every single person on this ship, and until they were out of harm's way, Ranma was going to keep worrying about them.

“Hey,” She whispered.

“Mmm?” He asked.

“I think you need some sleep.”

Ranma looked at the clock. The days were a bit longer on this planet, so it had been messing with his sleep schedule a bit.

“I have a lot of stuff to do.”

Akane looked around at all the people on the bridge going about their business. She sighed, before moving her hand down Ranma's back.

“Doctor's orders.”

Ranma snickered and turned to Shampoo. “You have the bridge.”

Shampoo nodded and watched the pair walk off and into a turbolift. Amanda watched as well before slowly meandering her way down to the command console and planting herself into the Captain's chair.

“So,” she whispered to Shampoo, who was trying to stifle a grin.

“Yes, Lieutenant?” she asked.

“How come they never let us sneak off for sex?”

Shampoo turned bright red, her head darting around, looking to see if anyone heard Amanda.

“Oh, come on. No one heard me.”

Jeff plopped down in the third seat on the command console.

“I did.”

This time Amanda turned bright red.

“Though as a Betazoid, even if you didn't say it, I would have known you were thinking it,” Jeff smiled.

“Isn't there some kind of rule, or professional ethic that keeps you people from reading other people's minds without their consent?” Amanda glared.

“Probably,” Jeff replied.

Shampoo snarled at Jeff.

“Hey, hey now. It's cool,” Jeff chuckled. “I'll tell you a secret if you want.”

Shampoo and Amanda nodded.

“I'm thinking about asking Lt. Kaii out.”

“He's...?”

“Yup.”

“How do you know?” Amanda asked.

Jeff pointed to his head. “Duh.”

“Maybe that's why he spends all his time with Lt. Devall?” Amanda pondered.

“Naaa,” Jeff replied. “Devall is married. They're just friends.”

“With benefit,” Shampoo chuckled.

Both Jeff and Amanda laughed, getting the attention of Minako.

"What's funny?" She asked.

"Just gossiping," Jeff grinned.

Minako frowned. "Do it over here so I can hear."

"Can't gossip about Ryouga in front of you!" Shampoo called out.

"Ryouga?" Minako asked.

Jeff stood. "I have a client soon. See you guys later!"

Amanda also stood. "I should go check on the phase cannon calibration."

Both officers walked to the rear turbolift, smiling in Minako's direction the whole way.

"What about Ryouga?"

Shampoo just returned her attention to her terminal, trying her best to hide her snickering.

-----

Ryouga lay quietly in the grass that completely obscured him. He was dressed head to toe in green and black Starfleet digital camouflage, like what the Land Defense Corps wore.

His phase rifle was also painted in black and green, as was his face.

Through the scope on his rifle, he could see some movement, but at this distance, he could not tell if it was friend or foe though. However, none of them were wearing Starfleet transponders.

Were they damaged? Or were these enemy soldiers?

As they started to get closer, Ryouga got his answer. Six of them, and one of them was carrying a projectile rifle.

Quickly, Ryouga lined up his shot and fired. Again. Fire. Again. Fire.

The three remaining soldiers began to fire randomly in the direction they thought the phaser blobs were coming from, but it was an exercise in futility as Ryouga was too well concealed.

His phaser blasts penetrated the soldier's ballistic vests like they weren't even wearing them, knocking them back several meters.

Four more came running in, startled by the commotion. Ryouga again, in rapid succession, fire... fire... fire... fire...

One shot, one kill.

Ryouga thanked God that this was the holodeck because he realized that he couldn't see the ship from where he was and that he would be lost forever otherwise. So, for now he would just continue to shoot holographic soldiers until his training officer came and got him. He refused to be known as 'that guy who was lost on the holodeck.'

'That guy who got his you-know-what stuck' was enough.

“Computer, end program,” a voice called out.

“Oh, thank you,” Ryouga muttered.

Ryouga quickly stood at attention as the Starfleet Marine Corp training officer, Major Hiro Tanizaki, walked up.

“At ease, Lieutenant,” Tanizaki nodded. Ryouga slipped into a relaxed position. Tanizaki looked at his PADD and smiled.

“You’re showing great improvement here. Have you ever thought about transferring from helm to the Marines?”

Ryouga smiled. “Security and combat have always intrigued me. The Sisko was my first assignment, and I wasn’t trained for the helm. I was actually put there as sort of a sick joke by a very disturbed Admiral.”

“Well, you have a knack for it son. If you ever want off the ship and need a letter of recommendation, just ask.”

*\*Off the ship...\** Ryouga pondered. “Thank you.” He said a little more softly.

“At any rate, I am going to recommend to Commander Kino-Gosnell that you get a provisional promotion to full Lieutenant, and that you be placed in Assault Group One.”

Ryouga blinked. “Th-Thank you.”

The older man patted Ryouga on the back.

“Don’t thank me, son. It’s your skill and desire that are allowing this to happen.”

Ryouga nodded, stood at full attention, and saluted Tanizaki.

Tanizaki returned the salute, turned, and walked out of the holodeck, leaving Ryouga alone to think about his future.

-----

The Prime Minister's limousine and security entourage pulled up outside of the main cathedral of the Western's capital city. Once the military had shooed away the lookie-loos, Mao's civilian security staff opened the rear doors and escorted Mao inside.

Mao looked around the gigantic sanctuary. It was incredibly ironic that it was his first time here since he had taken office. Here he was, leader of a deeply religious nation, yet he had not been to church in almost two years.

But now he was in desperate need of some spiritual guidance.

His advisers had always been there for him. Handpicked, some of his closest friends and people he had worked with all his life.

But right now, he need advice from someone who he believed hand picked him for this job. And the only way to find out what his advice was, was to talk to one of his employees.

Mao walked up to one of the priests who immediately bowed. Mao returned the bow and smiled.

“Good day. Is the Ni-Hiala busy?”

“No,” the priest replied. “I will go let him know you are here, sir.”

The priest scurried off as Mao picked up what was essentially the Western Valerian Bible. He thumbed through it while he waited for the churches chief to arrive.

After a short wait, a man in a very extravagant and formal outfit came out, flanked by two of the church’s priests. Mao set down the bible and turned to him. He and the security officers with him bowed deeply.

The Ni-Hiala also began to bow, but Mao grabbed his shoulder and stopped him.

“I am but the representative of man. You are the speaker for God. You do not bow before me.”

The Ni-Hiala smiled and clasped Mao's hand. “It is nice to see you again. It has been a while.”

Mao nodded shamefully. “I have failed in my obligations.”

“Not coming here each week doesn't mean you have failed,” the Ni-Hiala smiled. “You have continued to work for God, and that is what is important.”

Mao nodded slowly.

“Now, you said you wanted to speak with me?”

Mao again nodded. “May we speak privately?”

“Of course,” the holy man replied as he motioned for Mao to follow him.

The pair walked in silence, both flanked by their entourage, back to the Ni-Hiala's office. Once there, Mao turned to the two priests.

“Would you excuse us?”

The Ni-Hiala nodded that it was okay for them to leave. Mao also silently instructed his security detail to leave the office as well. Mao then quickly shut the office door as the Ni-Hiala removed his exceptionally large hat.

“This thing weighs a ton!” he laughed.

Mao smiled as he sat down across from him.

“I need to know that everything we talk about will be in the strictest of confidence.”

The Ni-Hiala nodded. “Of course, my son.”

“I'm in kind of a spiritual bind here.”

Mao went on to explain the situation with the aliens. He went on to explain how they tried to trick them into thinking they were bombed by the East. Then he explained how he tried to trick them into thinking the subs that were about to attack them came from the East. He explained how they are refusing

to help in the war, how he cannot believe that they have no morals, no souls. Then he explained how they got caught and the bind they are in now.

“Well,” the Ni-Hiala said after pondering the situation for a moment. “Space is excessively big. I'm no mathematician, but the odds of them crashing on our planet...”

Mao nodded.

The Ni-Hiala continued. “It had to be divine intervention.”

“So, God did put them here.”

The Ni-Hiala took a sip of his tea and nodded. “Takoia 4:23, 'As the evil apexes, God will protect his children with a mighty wall'.”

Mao nodded quickly. “Yes. Yes.”

“But, my son, you must also remember Yash 8:2; 'While the Father only protects the chosen, the chosen must prove their worth'.”

Mao continued to nod. “God wants to make getting that ship hard to make sure we truly are his chosen race.”

“And to assure you are our chosen leader,” The Ni-Hiala concluded.

Mao quickly stood and bowed. “Thank you, eminence.”

The Ni-Hiala also stood and smiled at Mao. “I hope I don't have to wait two more years to see you.”

Mao shook his head. “I will make sure to be here again soon.”

-----

“...And that's our current situation, Captain,” Ranma finished.

After the annoying eleven second delay, Ami nodded. “Well, if we step up our speed, we can be there a few hours earlier. We're moving as fast as we can without having to power down.”

Ranma shook his head. “I think we'll be okay. They have seen we can hit them from orbit, that right there should be enough to dissuade them from trying anything too aggressive. Plus, we've destroyed the other side's ability to launch ICBMs at us... Though ironically, those would have been easier for us to knock down in flight than their bombers are.”

“Can you withstand a nuclear strike?” Ami asked.

“Yes,” Ranma replied. He looked to one of his PADDs. “From their low yield, tactical weapons, we could likely take five or six hits before the ablative armor gives and the hull becomes compromised.”

“So, you've sealed all your hull breaches?”

“Yes,” Ranma nodded.

Ami smiles and looks at her terminal for a moment. "Well, we're just over eighteen days away. Once there we'll start working on a plan to use equipment from our ship to better shield the Sisko until the recovery ships arrive."

Ranma nods. "Sounds good, Captain. I look forward to your arrival."

"Good luck. Crossroads out."

The communication closes and Ranma turns his chair towards the window. He takes in the beautiful setting sun and leans back. Eighteen days does not seem like that long, and so far, both governments seem to be abiding by the demands Ranma had issued.

"Maybe things are going our way for once?" Ranma asked.

Akane, who was napping on Ranma's couch, gave Ranma a thumbs up.

This did not last for long though as the red alert klaxons began to sound.

Akane sits up as Shampoo's voice bellows out over the intercom.

"Captain to the bridge."

"I had to open my big mouth," Ranma half joked as he quickly kissed Akane and sprinted onto the bridge.

"Status?" he demanded as he moved towards Shampoo.

"Aerial surveillance reports soldiers breaching the outer perimeter," Shampoo replied.

"Soldiers? Western?"

"Yes," Makoto answered. "And they're making no attempt to hide that fact this time. They're fully uniformed, with mobile artillery behind them."

The view screen popped to life showing a blob of Western troops and several dozen, self-propelled artillery vehicles, moving up a small road in the forest.

"Numbers?" Ranma asked.

Makoto began to check the scans. "Couple of battalions. Uh, 1,692 to be exact. Thirty-four artillery units."

"Range on the artillery?" Shampoo asked.

"I don't know," Makoto bluntly responded.

Shampoo looked at her.

"I'm sorry, this stuff is so low tech, we really won't know till they stop and start aiming. There are no sensors on it. Right now, it's barely emitting any heat."

"How they hit us then?" Shampoo angrily asked.

"We're huge!" Makoto replied. "And they likely have a laser range finder to help, but really it's just a matter of firing when they get into range."

Ranma decided to intervene before the pair started to argue. "Once they stop, can we hit them from orbit?"

"Kaii?" Makoto asked.

"If I could hit those subs, I can surely hit those things," Kaii replied.

"Get ready to fire on my command. Try and take out as many as you can with as few torpedoes as possible."

"Yes sir," Kaii replied.

Ranma turned to Makoto. "Get your teams ready. I want them to know we can fight on the ground too."

"Yes sir," Makoto nodded as she began to issue orders into her terminal.

The bridge crew continued to watch the Western forces advance, albeit slowly, towards the Sisko.

"Shampoo wonder why they no send planes?"

Ranma partially shrugged. "Likely because they know we can shoot them down easily."

Shampoo had to agree with that logic. She had to think that maybe the Westerns did not believe that the Sisko could see the group advancing in what was now darkness.

They would be right if it were not for the excellent night vision image that the overhead shuttle was providing them.

"I think I have a satellite moving over you guys," Kaii reported.

"Take it down." Ranma ordered.

"Okie dokie," Kaii replied, decloaking the shuttle and firing a phaser shot at the small satellite. The phaser missed, much to Kaii's disappointment.

"Nuts to this," Kaii growled, as he powered up the engines. Pretty soon he was moving full speed towards the Western spy satellite. Moments later, the two objects collided, the shuttle totally unscathed. The satellite on the other hand found itself falling into the planet's atmosphere in about 500 different pieces.

"Satellite neutralized," Kaii smiled.

The group waited a moment till Kaii had the ships sensors refocused on the advancing army. They were apparently unphased or unaware of their eye in the sky's destruction, as they continued to march forward.

After another twenty minutes or so, the road that the Western military was on began to get narrower as it moved up a hill. The foot soldiers continued to their destination, however the artillery started to move into the trees.

"Looks like fifteen kilometers is their range. They're breaking off," Makoto reported.

"Are the assault teams in position?" Ranma asked.

"Yes sir," Makoto replied.

"Looks like they're positioning the tubes to shoot between the trees." Ranma noted.

Shampoo nodded. "Tactic good against foe who cannot see."

Ranma smirked. "Kaii?"

"They're still knocking down trees to get into position. I can probably take the whole lot out with a couple of torps. Might be one or two left, but the concussion of the blast should mess up the operators pretty bad."

Ranma ran his hand through his hair and flipped his pigtail off his shoulder. "Fire when ready."

"Fire one," Kaii reported.

A few seconds went by before a massive fireball filled the screen.

"Fire two," Kaii stated.

After a few more seconds, a second fireball appeared on the other side of the road. Once the dust had settled, numerous trees lay burning in the rubble of all thirty-four artillery pieces.

"How 'bout that." Kaii cheerfully said. "Got 'em all."

"What about the foot soldiers?" Ranma asked.

The shot moved down to where the soldiers were. They were not, as everyone had hoped, turning back. They had sped up and were moving towards the ship at an accelerated rate. Some were scattering into the trees to avoid what they assumed was an aerial bombardment, but once the explosions stopped, most moved back into formation.

Ranma just shook his head.

"Tenacious little bastards, aren't they?"

Shampoo looked to Ranma.

"Minako..." Ranma ordered. "Record and send this message to the Western government."

"Recording," Minako replied.

"This is Captain Saotome. Unless you want your soldiers to meet certain death, order them to turn back before they reach the five-kilometer mark. They will be unharmed if they comply."

Ranma turned and nodded to Minako. Minako acknowledged that she had sent the message, as Ranma turned to Makoto.

"The minute they hit 4,999 meters, shoot them all."

"Aye," Makoto acknowledged.

-----

Ryouga was feeling a little less confident in himself right about now. Sure, he was in the same position he was just a day ago in the holodeck, but now this was real.

If he got shot out here, he would die.

Or worse, if he wandered away from his unit, he'd never see the ship again.

Plus, the odds against them were insane. Sixteen hundred against the Sisko's hundred fifty security officers and marines. Almost ten to one odds.

Then again, Ryouga did manage to kill a dozen in the holodeck by himself.

Of course, there was a huge difference between taking a real life and taking one that was just a computerized creation of lights and other technobabble that Ryouga didn't understand.

But this was justified. This was in defense of his ship. In defense of his crewmates. In defense of his friends. In defense of her.

Minako.

Ryouga blinked. This was the first time he could think of that he finished that thought with a woman that was not Akane. Could it be that he had finally gotten over her? The woman that he had loved for so long – did he just replace her?

Minako.

Ryouga acknowledged that it was probably easier having a crush on a woman who kinda-sorta liked him back. One that knew his P-Chan secret, and did not seem to care. One that liked him for who he was.

Then again it would help if he could figure out exactly who he was himself. He had devoted so much of his life trying to get revenge on Ranma, for reasons that even he did not understand anymore, that he had lost track of his own life.

Then there was the issue with the marine Major who thought he should leave the ship and become one of them. Of course, if Ryouga did join, he thought, there was no real reason that he would have to leave. The ship would need more Marines. He could stay with her.

Ryouga tried to shake of the thoughts for now. There was a time for soul searching and when you are about to be assaulted by almost two-thousand enemy soldiers, that's not it.

"Enemy approaching five point five kilometers," Makoto's voice reported.

The three security officers lying next to Ryouga twitched a little.

"I wish they'd hurry up," one mused.

Ryouga smirked.

"I can see them," another said, looking through his binoculars.

"Can't shoot till they reach five clicks," the third groaned.

"Can they hit us from that far?" Ryouga asked.

"Beats me," the first replied.

Ryouga rubbed his protective ballistic vest. "I guess we'll find out."

-----

"Provide us with the schematics for your energy weapons, like the ones you used to shoot down our aircraft with, and to bombard us from orbit, as well as the details on how to use plasma as a power source and we will call off the attack," Garone demanded over Minako's panel.

Ranma looked at Shampoo. "Plasma?"

"Don't play stupid with me, Saotome. The Guraff found what you left behind at one of their silos. When they broke open the power source on one of them, they suffered serious plasma burns."

Ranma silently ordered Minako to mute the channel. "What is he talking about?"

Rei slammed her fist against one of the consoles. "The transport enhancers. Because the missile blew up in flight it didn't destroy the complex."

"Ah, right," Ranma sighed. "Well, whatever."

He motioned for Minako to reopen the channel. "You know I cannot do that, General."

"They have the technology. We want it."

"They cannot do anything with those," Ranma said, almost flailing his arms in exasperation. "Just developing the technology to reverse engineer those devices, which were supposed to have been destroyed - while helping you, I might add - will take decades."

"Your ship is not invincible," Garone growled. "Will you give us the technology or not?"

"No," Ranma bluntly replied.

The channel chirped, indicating a closed transmission. Ranma sighed.

"I am beginning to think they don't like hearing 'no'," Minako observed.

Ranma nodded. He turned to Makoto. "Range?"

"Five kilometers."

Ranma shook his head as he threw himself into his seat. "Engage the enemy."

-----

Ryouga was a little upset by the 'hold your fire' order that had come down, but he assumed there was a good reason for it. Hopefully, the group of soldiers were about to be convinced to turn around and go home, but their steady march onward more than certainly told him that scenario wasn't the case.

“What do these yahoos think they are going to do? Just kick in the front door?” one of the security officers with Ryouga joked.

“I guess since they know we've been out and about, there has to be a way in somehow,” Ryouga replied.

“I thought you showed them how we got in and out,” another officer smirked.

Ryouga glared at him. “That was an emergency.”

“Chillax bro, I didn't mean anything by it,” the officer replied.

Ryouga squinted, trying his hardest to see the officers rank insignia in the dimly lit night. He prayed for it to be lower than lieutenant.

Once he could finally see that the officer was also a lieutenant, he groaned. Nothing made him happier than being able to yell at someone for disrespecting the chain of command. Especially when it was the result of him being the butt of a joke.

“Congrats on the promotion, by the way,” the officer added, as he returned his attention to the advancing forces.

Ryouga beamed. “Thank you.”

“All units, you are weapons free,” Makoto's voice announced.

“About time,” The first officer smiled, as he lined up a soldier in his phaser rifle's scope.

Ryouga and the others did the same. The group seemed to fire in unison with several other who were on the front.

The line of ten Western soldiers in the front of the tightly formed column dropped. From that point, it was a race to try and shoot as many as possible before they managed to take positions behind trees.

Ryouga growled at his rifle for taking, what seemed to him, forever to recharge after each shot. In reality, it was probably less than a second, but it wasn't taking very long for the Western forces to scatter.

Most of the forces that ended up being picked off were forces that were so surprised by the ambush, that they did not go anywhere.

“I think the lack of return fire would tell us that we're out of their range,” the first officer noted.

“Or they have good discipline, and they don't fire blindly,” Ryouga countered.

“Squads One through Six, begin moving forward,” the field commander ordered.

Ryouga's group, being Squad Three, started to stand, but quickly dove back to the ground as machine gun fire whizzed past them.

“Yeah, we're in range,” Ryouga pointed out.

Ryouga pushed aside some shrubbery and looked through his scope. Besides from the trees and brush, the land was flat. Ryouga noticed several soldiers moving through the tree line.

"Eleven O'clock," he whispered.

The squad all looked and began to fire. As gunshots rang out, phaser blasts also fired towards the Western forces. Ryouga's group quickly took down the Western soldiers in view, then stood partially up and began to move forward, trying to stay as concealed as possible.

However, every few dozen meters, they would start to come under more accurate gunfire. The Western's military, while not as technologically advanced as Starfleet's, was not inept. Their night vision and thermal vision ability was allowing them to see their enemy; especially as they got closer.

As well, the closer the Starfleet forces got, the more accurate the Western shots got.

"Man down!" one person yelled over the COMM link. A blue glow could be seen in the trees as he was transported back to the Sisko.

Ryouga's squad got into another firefight, this time with about thirty Western forces. The groups were getting remarkably close to each other, only about a kilometer separating them.

During the fight, Ryouga felt a sudden pain in his chest and is knocked backwards, his rifle thrown from his hand.

"Lieutenant!" one officer called.

Ryouga waved off any assistance and crawled back to his knees, grabbing his rifle along the way.

"Shit!" Ryouga swore.

He looked through his scope as the two remaining of the thirty attempted to move towards another group. Ryouga growled as he shot one, and then the other dead center in the back.

Once he was sure they were both on the ground, he set his rifle down and looked at his chest. Embedded in the dead center of his ballistic vest was what was left of a silver slug that had come from one of the Western rifles.

"He's a good shot, I'll give him that." Ryouga smirked.

"Was," another countered.

Ryouga nodded, pulled the slug out of his vest, and tossed it aside. He then picked up his rifle and motioned for his group to get going to find some more Westerns.

-----

Ranma paced as he watched the battle summary on the main viewer. Even though it showed one KIA on the causality report, he was so far pleased with the result. Only four Sisko personal had been injured, including the one killed, with a best guess of five hundred of the Western military killed.

He was really wishing they would retreat. Ranma was a pacifist at heart, but he was willing to kill if necessary, to defend those in his charge.

Right now, he was concerned. The Westerns seemed to be moving east, almost like they were trying to flank the Sisko forces. However, they weren't necessarily moving inwards.

"What the hell are they doing?" Ranma finally asked out loud.

Minako gasped causing everyone to turn to her.

"There is less vegetation the closer you get to the ocean. That's why we skidded so far inland."

Makoto snarled. "Of course. With less brush to hide in, their superior numbers will give them more of an advantage."

"What can we do?" Ranma asked.

"Well, they think we're chasing them. Let's put some of our forces in front of them," Makoto suggested. "Catch them off guard and then pin them in."

Ranma nodded. "Make it so."

-----

"Squads One to Ten, prepare for transportation to new location."

Ryoga looked to his partners and shrugged as the transporter beam grabbed them.

Once they rematerialized, they found themselves in a far more vulnerable position. However, their commander quickly informed them of the plan, which they were quite fond of.

"Beats running," one of Ryoga's partners said as he crouched behind a tree.

It wasn't long before the Western military began to arrive. As expected, they were mostly marching with soldiers walking backwards, watching their rear.

It was a deadly mistake for a lot of them as the Starfleet officers began to lay waste to the ill prepared soldiers.

With the lack of shrubbery in the area, most of the once that were able to get away from the initial ambush were simply forced to take cover behind trees, randomly firing by sticking their guns around the tree and squeezing the trigger.

It soon got worse for the Western forces as the second group of Starfleet arrived. The Western forces were quite preoccupied with the forces in front of them and had made a poor assumption that all the Starfleet forces were in front of them.

Their flank was decimated by a group a fifth their size.

It was finally to the point where the Western forces had decided enough was enough and began to pull back.

-----

On the bridge, Ranma smiled.

"They retreating," Shampoo smiled as well.

Ranma looked at the casualty count. It still stood at four. The estimated remaining Western army forces stood at 419.

"Wow," Ranma could only say.

"They're passing the five-kilometer mark," Makoto reported.

Ranma quietly walked up to Minako.

"Can we lock on to the deceased Western soldiers?"

Minako thought about this for a second. "Yeah, probably. Though the ones around the artillery..."

Ranma nodded, not needing Minako to finish. "Locate a position outside of the fifty-kilometer perimeter. Then have the deceased transported there. Inform me when it's complete."

Minako nodded once. "Aye sir."

Ranma turned to Makoto before walking into his ready room. "Good job, Commander."

"Thank you," she replied.

-----

"WHAT?" Garone screamed, not really caring that he was scaring the wits out of a poor private who was just sent to relay a message.

"All of them?" Minister Klasn asked, slightly more calmly.

The young private nodded at the Defense Minister while trying to ignore Garone's rampage against several vases and paintings that happened to be in his office.

"As well sir, the alien ship sent a message saying that they have moved the bodies of our fallen soldiers to these coordinates, and that we can pick them up for burial at any time," the private continued.

Mao, who was standing in the doorway, smirked.

"Saotome is an honorable man."

Garone halted his rampage against the decorations long enough to be concerned with Mao's remarks.

"Sir, he killed almost all of both of those battalions!" Garone protested.

Mao nodded. "I know. But to be fair, we did attack him."

Garone raised an eyebrow.

"Don't give me that look, General," Mao said, surveying the damage to Garone's office. "God put that ship on our continent for us. But of course, he wants to make sure we deserve it, that's why he makes it difficult for us to obtain."

Garone bowed his head. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean--"

Mao laughed, as he picked up a picture of himself that got tossed during Garone's tantrum.

“Una, if I didn't think you were a loyal friend, I would have tossed you on the street years ago. Loyal friends are not afraid to question other friend's motives and directions.”

Garone looked at the painting as Mao attempted to hang it back on the wall.

“I really wasn't paying attention to what I was throwing.”

Klasn laughed.

Mao grinned as he tried to make his likeness hang straight. “So, what do we do now?”

“We need to soften them up,” Klasn replied.

“They've shot down every single plane we've bombed them with,” Garone sighed. “They took out half our damn submarine fleet from orbit and we don't have any artillery that can get within range of that thing.”

Klasn continued to smirk, inadvertently, as he was unable to tell whether Mao was paying more attention to his top General or to the painting he was still trying to right on the wall.

“We can't even rely on those monsters...” Garone growled, chucking his thumb towards a news report of an anti-Western rally in the Eastern capital. “...to nail them with an ICBM since we got the aliens to blow up all of theirs.”

Klasn watched Mao finish up, then turned to a computer monitor. “Una, I was reviewing our attack on them a few weeks ago and I noticed that one of our bombs was able to get through.”

Mao raised an eyebrow. “You said they were undamaged.”

Garone nodded. “Both statements are true.” Garone changed the computer monitor to show an aerial photograph of the Sisko. He pointed out a spot just forward of the bridge.

“Right here is where the bomb impacted.”

“That's a before shot?” Mao asked.

“No, that's right afterwards,” Garone responded.

“It's not even scratched.”

Klasn shook his head. “No, it isn't...”

Mao interrupted. “That was a Kau-2 right?”

Both Garone and Klasn nodded.

“I've seen those take down reinforced buildings.”

Again, both Garone and Klasn nodded.

“Sir,” Garone started. “This ship was built to fight other spaceships with weapons built to blow up other spaceships with armor like this one has. A two-ton conventional explosion is probably like what they bump into flying through an asteroid belt.”

Mao sighed. If God was putting him and his people through a test, this one was one hell of a doosey.

“You were saying, Minister?” Garone asked.

“Yes...” Klasn continued. “Why do you think one of the bombs got through?”

Garone pulled up another image showing one of the dorsal phase cannons deployed.

“This is what was shooting down the bombs. They have two of them, one starboard, one port.” Garon shrugged. “I guess they just missed.”

Klasn bit his lip.

“Do you think there were just too many of them?”

Garone pondered this for a minute.

“Maybe. I guess if we swarm them, we might be able to get several bombs past their defenses. If we are able to take out those cannons, we can then claim air superiority and bomb at will.”

Klasn nodded. He turned to the Prime Minister.

Mao scratched his head. “What can we use to hurt them though?”

Garone shrugged. “We're going to have to use tactical nukes.”

Klasn nodded. “I agree. We don't have the range to hit the Eastern forces anyway, so we might as well use them to our advantage somehow.”

“Civilian casualties will be light. We've moved almost everyone outside of a 200-kilometer zone of that ship,” Garone added.

Mao nodded and turned to his attaché. “Bring me the nuclear authorization keys.”

-----

#### 21 HOURS LATER – 701 KM NORTH OF U.S.S. BENJAMIN SISKO

At Kiaspals Air Defense Base, two by two, Western Air Force bombers began to take off. They were lined up on the taxiways like hordes of overweight fan fiction writers waiting to get into an all you can eat buffet.

Fifty bombers in all, representing two-thirds of the Western's bomber force. Each pilot, co-pilot and bombardier were told that they would likely not return from this mission. However, they understood and did not mind, for they knew if they succeeded, they were doing not only the will of God, but protecting their people and their homeland from the evil that lay just across the ocean.

But across the ocean, that 'evil' did not like to be left out of the loop, nor did they have much interest in allowing whatever was inside of the alien ship to fall into the hands of the marked beasts.

There was a reason why God gave them the marks of shame, the marks of Satan.

They also knew that the people in the ship must also be evil, otherwise they would not have helped the Western's in the way they did.

Sure, they were not friends now, but that wasn't surprising. How could you remain friends with people so despicable? But the evil aliens did destroy their entire offensive nuclear arsenal in under 15 seconds, and the attempts to reverse engineer their technology had managed to kill two and maim one.

Whatever was in that ship could not fall into enemy hands.

That's why, undetected, an Eastern carrier group sat a few hundred kilometers off the coast between the Western naval blockade and the airbase where the... unescorted... bombers were circling; waiting for the order to move.

-----

Aboard the Sisko, things were quiet. It was just past 22:00 and the third shift duty crew was settling in for a long night of, hopefully, peace and quiet.

Minako, Rei, Usagi, and Makoto were in Gosnell's lounge, gossiping about this and that, while Gosnell chatted with Ryouga about his new job as Gosnell cleaned up.

Shampoo and Amanda were doing... Well, they were doing the usual things that Shampoo and Amanda do around 22:00... which is pretty much the same thing they are doing anytime they are not forced to be in public.

Ranma had decided that he would take a few kilometer run in before his nightly swim. Akane, who seemed to be able to run again now that she was almost four weeks without a cigarette, decided to join him for once.

All in all, it was a peaceful night.

"One more lap!" Ranma smiled as Akane struggled a bit to keep up with him.

"Try and stop me!" Akane called back, smiling as well.

Ranma nodded to a security officer as he ran past, his and Akane's footsteps almost hitting the deck plating in unison. Ranma slowed his pace just a little bit so that Akane would be beside him. He turned to her as they ran.

"So, what do you want to do when we're off the planet?"

"Hrm?" Akane asked.

Ranma nimbly dodged another security guard, then turned back to Akane. "When we get back to Earth. I think we have earned some leave. What do you want to do?"

Akane hadn't really thought that far ahead yet. She was still questioning whether they were actually going to get off the planet. She grinned and pinched Ranma.

"It's nice to see that in just a few months you've returned to your optimistic self."

Ranma shrugged as the pair slowed to a stop in front of a pair of large gray doors that were labeled 'POOL.'

The couple walked in and found the place deserted. Ranma smiled as this is the way he preferred it. Especially considering he had some changing to do.

The two of them walked into changing stalls. Ranma turned the shower on cold, shrieked a little bit, and after a bit, walked out wetter, shorter, bustier, and female.

"With everything I've been through..." she smiled, "...if I wasn't an optimist, I'd throw myself out an airlock."

"Wouldn't matter here," Akane reminded her.

Ranma laughed, turned, and ran, diving into the pool. Once she surfaced, she looked to Akane.

"Race ya!" she called out.

Akane slowly got into a shallow area of the pool and leaned against the wall.

"You know I can't swim."

Ranma scoffed. "Still?"

Akane stuck her tongue out at Ranma, before watching the red head begin to swim laps.

Akane watched for a while, almost hypnotized in Ranma's form and motions before becoming lost in thought. What could they do when they got back to Earth? It is not like it was something they had to decide right away, as even if they were rescued, there would be a very long ride back.

Akane shook the wrong word out of her head.

'*Not if.*' She corrected herself. '*When.*'

Akane didn't know why she was so concerned. They knew there was a ship coming that at least could get them off the planet. That one was only about a week and a half away.

And they knew that another one was coming to get the Sisko. That one was a month away.

But she kept thinking about the attack on the ship, and whether they would try again.

Akane opened her eyes and looked for Ranma. She couldn't see her.

Suddenly the water right in front of her splashed and Ranma emerged, standing nose to nose with her, causing Akane to gasp.

"Whatcha thinking about?" Ranma asked.

Akane could never lie when Ranma peered into her with his or her deep, but bright, blue eyes.

"I'm scared."

"Of?" Ranma asked.

"Of what might happen before we can leave."

Ranma continued to stand no more than an inch from Akane, their bodies actually touching. Ranma lost eye contact, and sighed.

"I thought I've made this clear, but I guess I haven't..." Ranma said softly.

"Ran..." Akane started.

Ranma turned back to Akane. "I will kill God himself before I let anyone harm you."

"Ranma."

Ranma pushed in and kissed Akane softly. Akane lost herself in the moment for a minute, but then pulled away.

"Ranma, someone might see..."

Ranma rolled her eyes and turned to the door.

"Computer, security override, authorization Saotome, Gamma Sierra 7-9-2, seal pool doors."

"Doors sealed," the computer replied.

Ranma smiled, then resumed kissing her wife.

This lasted about a minute before the red alert klaxons went off.

"Red alert. Captain to the bridge, expedite," The third shift supervisor called out, the panic in his voice obvious.

"No fuckin' way," Ranma growled as she pulled herself out of the pool. She quickly helped Akane out, changed into the running shorts and Starfleet t-shirt she was planning on wearing back to her quarters, unsealed the door and began to run towards the turbolift with Akane in tow.

"Akane, go to our quarters. Stay away from the windows," Ranma ordered.

"But I..." Akane protested.

"Please," Ranma asked.

Akane nodded, and reluctantly headed off in the direction of a different turbolift.

After a couple of minutes of turbolift travel, Ranma came out onto the bridge. She looked around and saw that she was the first senior officer to arrive. She turned to the third shift supervisor.

"Status?"

"Uh hi, Captain." he replied, obviously noticing her attire.

"You said 'expedite'."

"Yeah, sorry. We have multiple inbound aircraft," he replied as the rear turbolift slid open and Makoto, Minako, Rei and Usagi walked onto the bridge.

“Multiple inbound aircraft,” Ranma repeated for Makoto.

Minako began to run scans.

“Yup, they're headed for us.”

“Can you scan their payload?” Ranma asked.

“Yup. It's nuclear,” Minako replied.

“Commander?” Ranma asked.

Makoto slammed her terminal. “Goddamned hydrogen powered jets. They're not putting out any heat.”

“How's the phaser array?” Ranma asked.

Usagi looked to Ranma. “Uh... Maybe.”

“Based on the last once we dealt with, they will be able to release their payload in six minutes,” Minako reported.

The rear turbolift opened and Amanda and Shampoo walked onto the bridge. The third shift supervisor looked relieved as now he could wander off and no longer risk staring at Ranma's chest or thighs.

“Clarify 'maybe', Usagi,” Makoto demanded.

“All the rerouting we had to do,” Usagi whimpered. “We could blow a lot of jury-rigged EPS manifolds, knocking everything offline.”

“How long before you can start-” Ranma began to ask before Minako cut her off.

“I HAVE MULTIPLE CONTACTS COMING FROM THE OCEAN!” she yelled.

“At us?” Shampoo asked.

Minako shook her head. “No, they're intercepting the bombers.”

At the Western Continental Air Defense Center (WCADC), Major Yah Nadas began screaming frantically.

“SIR!!! MULTIPLE CONTACTS, BEARING 0-7-6!!! HEADING RIGHT TOWARDS OUR STRIKE FORCE!!!!”

The commander, Vice General Hak Nam grabbed his red phone and began barking orders.

“Scramble the 20th through the 33rd. Turn the strike force inland. We cannot lose those planes!”

Ranma paced as J.C. and Usagi scoured over engineering diagrams, occasionally running back and forth from the engineering station to the master situation display.

Minako's terminal began to chirp, causing Shampoo, Ranma, and Makoto to look her direction.

"The bombers are turning west, trying to get away from the contacts coming inland."

"Those have to be Eastern aircraft," Makoto guessed.

"Why they help us?" Shampoo asked.

"They're not," Amanda replied. "They just don't want them to get us first."

Ranma nodded. He turned to Minako. "Can you scan them yet?"

Minako shook her head. "But neither side, as far as my research has been able to determine, has aircraft that can fly intercontinentally, insofar as to bomb the other – that's why the Easterns rely on ICBMs, and why the Westerns never retaliated."

"So, if my 20th century history is correct..." Ranma pondered. "There must be an aircraft carrier out there."

"With that many contacts, I'd say at least three," Amanda added.

Everyone watched the tactical display for a while before Minako's panel began to chirp again.

"I have contacts in the west heading east now at a high rate of speed. As well, the Eastern contacts are beginning to cross the coastline. Looks like they've lost a few too."

"Air defenses," Amanda pointed out.

"I think, the Eastern aircraft will be able to engage the bombers before the Western aircraft reach them," Minako reported.

"Captain..." J.C. called out.

Ranma turned to J.C.

"We've isolated defensive systems, life support, and the transporters. Hopefully, we won't destroy anything else, but... Well..."

"Good enough," Ranma replied. She turned to Makoto. "What do you think? Can you knock down a bunch of them?"

Makoto grit her teeth. "Yeah?"

Ranma smiled. "When you think you have a shot, take it."

Makoto looked at her panel intently. Amanda looked over her shoulder for a moment, then patted her on the back reassuringly.

"Boss," she whispered. "They're all lined up for you."

Makoto looked at the formation the bombers were flying in then grinned.

"Firing."

A red arc flashed across the bow of the grounded warship from each side of her, meeting in the middle of the phaser array. Once the two energy pulses met, they lashed out, into the dark, cloudy sky.

The pilots didn't even see their doom coming as the blast of energy ripped through their aluminum aircraft, then the one next to it, then the next then the next.

Makoto, slid the phaser beam to the right, taking out as many ships as she could before the lights on the bridge began to flicker, her console began to buzz, and the phaser beam died out.

The bridge switched to emergency lighting for a moment before quickly going back to normal lighting. Ranma quickly spun to J.C.

"Status?"

"Everything seems to be okay," J.C. reported. "We just don't have enough power to do that again."

Shampoo spun towards Minako. "And?"

Minako smiled. "Fifteen contacts gone."

Ranma turned to Makoto. "Nice shooting."

Makoto smiled. "Thanks."

Back at WCADC, the same Major started screaming again.

"THE ALIEN SHIP JUST SPLASHED FIFTEEN OF OUR BOMBERS!"

The Vice-General picked up his phone. "ETA on our fighters?" He paused while he was told the information he requested.

"Good. Have them intercept and kill the Eastern fighters. Have the bombers resume their course."

The Vice-General then hung up that phone and picked up another.

"Flight one, once in range, immediately deploy payload. Flight two, target any weapons on the alien ship that attempt to destroy Flight one's payload. Flight three, I don't fucking care what you bomb. Just try and kill 'em."

Minako sighed.

"They're turning."

"Back at us?" Shampoo asked.

Minako nodded.

Ranma walked up to Minako's terminal and looked at her display, before turning to J.C. and Usagi.

"Is there any way we can get dorsal shields up?"

Both J.C. and Usagi shook their heads. "Until we can convert some more torpedoes, we barely have enough power to run the turbolifts."

Ranma quickly walked over to Makoto and Amanda's station.

"I guess it's up to you guys."

"Three minutes," Minako called out. "On the bright side, though..." she continued, "there are still Eastern aircraft pursuing and they are moving faster than the bombers."

"Yeah, but those Western aircraft are moving faster than the Eastern aircraft," Amanda said, pointing to the scrambled Western fighters.

"I may have to ask you to see Lt. Fuchs regarding your outlook on life, Lieutenant," Ranma joked.

Shampoo snickered.

"Ninety seconds."

The group waited.

And waited.

"Sixty."

And waited.

"Thirty."

\*BEEP\* \*BEEP\*

Everyone turned to Makoto.

"HOLY SHIT I CAN GET A LOCK!" Makoto exclaimed.

Before Ranma could even order her to, Makoto had both dorsal cannons out, and firing at the incoming aircraft.

"How?!" Shampoo asked as the first nine planes disappeared from the tactical overview.

"When they opened their bay doors. I guess the sensors were able to lock the bombs?"

"SIR! FLIGHT ONE HAS BEEN COMPLETELY DESTROYED! BEFORE THEY GOT INTO RANGE EVEN!"

The Vice-General growled. "I can see that." He quickly picked up his phone.

"Flight two, change of plans. Bomb the ship, but do not open doors till you are ready to deploy. Flight three, target those guns."

"Thirteen to go." Shampoo smiled.

"They're in range," Minako reported.

"They must realize why we hit them so accurately," Amanda theorized.

"Well, they have to open the doors to bomb us," Ranma said. "Don't they?"

Amanda nodded, understanding Ranma's concern of a suicide 'kamikaze' run. "The bombs won't go off just from impact, in case the plane accidentally crashes, you don't want a nuclear explosion."

"Three down!" Minako reported.

"Easterns?" Ranma asked.

"Likely."

"The Westerns have engaged them though, and the bombers are moving away from the Eastern fleet," Minako sighed.

Ranma snapped her fingers. "So much for getting them to do our dirty work for us."

\*BEEP\* \*BEEP\*

Makoto began shooting.

\*BEEP\* \*BEEP\*

"CRAP!" Amanda called out.

"WHAT?" Ranma and Shampoo yelled in unison.

"Numerous ordinance incoming, both dorsal cannons have been targeted."

"Makoto?"

"Switching to the bombs." Makoto said, her hands beginning to sweat.

"Twenty seconds to impact." Amanda stated.

"Makoto?" Ranma asked.

"Too many."

"Ten seconds."

"STOW!" Ranma ordered."

"Five."

"ALL HANDS BRACE!"

Everyone on the bridge dove to the floor as six of the Western's nuclear bombs detonated on the hull of the Sisko, sending bright flashes through the windows, and enormous fireballs into the skies.

The ship shook in a way it had not since it had crashed nearly two months earlier. Anything and everything that was not attached to the wall or the deck was thrown there, including any people who could not heed the Captain's 'brace' warning in time.

Outside, six mushroom clouds rose from the hull of the Sisko, the prevailing winds causing the clouds to arc towards the ocean. For about a kilometer around the Sisko, what trees remained after her crash were vaporized. A few others around the edges caught fire.

Where fallout rained onto the Sisko and the nearby forest, nearby, fire rained from the sky, where hydrogen powered aircraft were exploding left and right as the Eastern forces and Western forces continued to battle over ownership of the crippled alien spacecraft.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN – SAYANORA

*Captain's log, Stardate 60988.1. I would be lying if I said that I am not getting damned annoyed by the constant attacks by the Western forces. I am grateful though that for whatever reason they have decided not to take another whack at us with their nuclear arsenal.*

Ranma paused, thinking back to that night where the Sisko was unshielded and slammed by six Western nuclear bombs.

Fortunately, being a ship designed for war came in handy. The ablative armor, albeit badly compromised, held and thanks to that there was not a single hull breach.

Sadly though, one of the dorsal cannons could not stow fast enough and was destroyed, leaving them with a single weapon to defend themselves.

It was hardly enough. The Western government had stepped up their bombing campaign, using a policy of swarm, knowing that the Sisko would be unable to shoot down all the planes. They also realized the effectiveness of releasing their payload at the last minute, giving the Sisko extraordinarily little time to target and destroy the incoming ordinance before stowing the remaining cannon.

The Sisko was taking multiple hits per sortie. The armor was not able to absorb all of it. The polarized hull was beginning to buckle as well.

Damage control teams were working double time to try and repair the small, but potentially fatal hull breaches that were being made in the enormous warship's superstructure.

*I worry about what the Eastern Military is up to as well. They have stationed several dozen carriers a few hundred kilometers off the Western coast. I think about sinking them, but at the same time, they end up shooting down at least a couple of the bombers attacking us.*

*My crew is not doing well either. Everyone is ancy, nervous. I keep reminding them that the Crossroads is now only five days away, but of course to them, understandably, that just sounds like 'great, five more days of attacks.'*

Ranma sighed and leaned back in his chair. He looked at his window, which had been permanently locked in dark tint mode by the nuclear blast.

*There is a certain irony to all of this. I could end this all with a shuttle craft that's floating in orbit or the two Runabouts in our shuttle bays. Yet I and my crew may very well be killed, and our technology taken, because of a rule set up to protect our killers.*

“End recording,” Ranma grouched. Ranma had jokingly mentioned to Larson in his last message about carpet bombing the entire continent back a couple thousand years and had gotten a truly angry reply from the older Admiral. So obviously he understood that despite the Western's desire to kill the Sisko's crew, the prime directive was still in effect.

But, Ranma pondered to himself, Larson had given him some latitude when it came to protecting the ship. Larson had no issue with attacking the encroaching forces, he frowned upon, but accepted Ranma's explanation for destroying the Eastern ICBM silos, even if Ranma did fudge the reason for doing it just a bit.

Ranma stood up quickly and stormed out onto the bridge.

"Do we know where those bombers are coming from?" Ranma asked to anyone who could answer.

He looked around the bridge. Minako finally replied. "Northeast of here."

Ranma rolled his eyes. "I know that. Where are they based?"

Kaii, who spent his shift in Nighthawk, began to speak. "There are several airfields in that direction..." he trailed off.

"Lieutenant?" Ranma asked.

"I think I have found one about 800 kilometers northeast of you that has heavy surface to air defense around it."

Amanda, whose knowledge of early warfare was becoming more and more valuable every day, piped up. "It's unlikely that a civilian airport would be that heavily guarded."

Ranma turned to Makoto. "What's our torpedo inventory look like?"

Makoto shook her head. "We have about fifty-six left that the shuttle can use. Engineering had to start using Mark Fives for power as using the phaser array really drained us."

Ranma nodded. "Once the Crossroads arrives, they will be able to help us with our power issues." He turned to the display of the airport that Kaii had transferred to the Sisko. "Lt. Jansen, what do you think is the best way to render this airport inoperative?"

"Easy," she replied. "Destroy the runways."

"Can't they just move the planes to different airports?" Minako asked.

"You can't just drive a bomber down a city street," Amanda replied. "They will have to patch the runways first."

Ranma nodded. "Plot targets and then transfer them to Nighthawk. Try and do it with a few shots as possible."

"There's one issue though," Makoto finally said.

Ranma turned to her.

"That airport is less than two kilometers from a fairly large city. They will see the torpedoes and the explosions."

Ranma sighed. "Oh well. Hopefully, the civilians will just assume it's an Eastern attack."

Makoto nodded slowly as Amanda sent information up to Kaii. Once the two had coordinated their attack, Kaii reported to Ranma.

“Ready sir.”

Ranma noticing on the feed of the airport bombers starting to leave their hangers, narrowed his gaze.

“Fire.”

Kaii decloaked his ship and began to fire in rapid succession. The small scout ship fired one, two, three, four, five, then six torpedoes before relocking.

On the screen, Ranma smiled as he saw six flashes of light. The entire bridge crew became agitated that the smoke from the explosions was not clearing fast enough for them to see their handy work.

It eventually did though and what remained was two runways, each with massive craters in them in three different spots, and emergency vehicles attempting to put out fire that used to be the bomber that was closest to one of the now useless runway 9R.

-----

“So, you're saying we've just lost the use of half of our bombers?” Garone asked?

The air force general on the other end of the phone call, who was grumbling something to one of his underlings while talking to Garone, scowled back.

“Based on how many we've lost between the aliens and the Eastern forces in the ocean, I'd say it's closer to 80 percent.”

Garone set the phone down and took a deep breath.

Klasn looked at Garone. “Well?”

Garone turned to Klasn. “If this wasn't your office, there'd be very little left in one piece right now.”

“That bad?”

“They demolished the runways at Kiaspals. We can't get the bombers airborne.”

Klasn blinked. “How bad?”

“One of the craters was estimated to be half a kilometer deep.”

Klasn shook his head. “What does that leave us with?”

“Cruise missiles.”

“Do it.”

Garone picked the phone up again.

-----

NINE HOURS LATER – 00:16

The third shift officer assigned to sit in orbit in Nighthawk was keeping an eye on everything. It was quiet since they didn't have much action now that the bombers were grounded.

However, there was some movement that was a little bit out of the ordinary.

“Nighthawk to Sisko.”

“Go ahead,” the third shift supervisor replied.

“The Western blockade seems to be moving closer to shore, and south.”

The supervisor looked to his tactical officer who shrugged.

“Maybe they're trying to move away from the Eastern battle group?” he theorized.

“Keep tracking them. If they seem to be doing anything else strange, like launching landing craft, let us know.”

“Aye.”

Two thousand kilometers away though, off the Western coast, two dozen Western navy missile cruisers parked and launched their cruise missiles. Each one launching six missiles each.

The missiles, flying about fifty meters above the ground, hugged the terrain, whipping through trees, dancing through and over valleys and hills, powered by the Western's favorite fuel source, hydrogen.

Leaving no trail, but a small puff of water vapor which was indistinguishable from the other water vapor caused by the millions of other hydrogen powered devices on this planet.

02:30

As the Sisko's third shift supervisor began to look over the hourly status report on the ship, both the operations and tactical station began to chirp wildly.

Operations was the first to start screaming madly though.

“MULTIPLE CONTACTS!” he yelled.

Tactical joined in, although a little more calmly.

“Dozens of contacts, bearing 2-9-1, range fifty kilometers.”

“RED ALERT! SENIOR OFFICERS TO THE BRIDGE!” the supervisor called out. “Why are you just now seeing them?” he asked.

“They're small and fast,” Tactical replied as the klaxons started to blare.

“Polarize the hull. How's the armor?”

“Twenty percent.”

“Two minutes!” Ops squeaked.

"Are they planes?!" the supervisor asked.

"They can't be," Tactical responded. "They're about fifty meters off the ground. I don't even think I can hit them without firing into the hull."

"Ninety."

"Shit, stow the cannon then," the supervisor ordered.

He began to pace, trying to think of what to do. He really hated the fact that these people loved to attack at night.

"Thirty!"

Makoto was the first to walk out onto the bridge, still zipping up her uniform jacket. "SIT-REP!" she demanded when she saw that she was the most senior person on the bridge.

"We're about to get hit hard," the tactical officer whimpered.

"Fifteen!"

"ALL HANDS BRACE!" the third shift supervisor yelled as he sat down in the captain's chair and held on for dear life.

Outside the cruise missiles began to slam into the Sisko in different locations. Some into her saucer section, some into the NEO pod atop her struts, a couple into the bridge, a few into the port nacelle.

It took about three minutes for the explosions to stop, and another minute for the lights to stop flickering. Once that was done, everyone turned and looked at each other.

"Everyone okay?" the supervisor asked.

The group all nodded. Operations looked at his terminal. "I'm getting a few casualty reports, nothing serious. No fatalities."

Makoto looked at the master situation display. The port strut connecting the bulk of the ship to the port nacelle was flashing red.

"I don't like the look of that."

The turbolift open and a very disheveled Ranma and Shampoo walked out. Ranma looked around as Shampoo stumbled down to her seat and sat down.

"Okay... What the hell just happened?" he asked.

"We were attacked by missiles that seem to fly very low," the third shift tactical officer replied.

Minako, who also looked like she was in an unfriendly place when the ship shook, tumbled out of the turbolift, and made her way to her station.

"Where they come from?" Shampoo asked.

"Don't know," the tactical officer replied.

Ranma began reading the third shift notes as Makoto surveyed more of the ships damage.

“Captain, the ablative armor took a huge beating,” she reported. “We can't continue to take these kinds of attacks for much longer.”

“Then what do you suggest we do, Commander?” Ranma asked. “Do you have a suggestion that will both protect us, AND assure that we won't leave them defenseless against an Eastern invasion once we're gone?”

Makoto remained silent. She hadn't thought that far ahead.

“We are leaving. If we can't hold out till the retrieval ships get here...” Ranma paused for a minute. “We'll evacuate to the Crossroads and destroy the Sisko.”

Makoto nodded, before pointing to the flashing strut. “The attack seems to have caused a structural defect in this strut. Obviously in microgravity that wouldn't be an issue, but here...”

Ranma nodded. “Where's Commander Tsukino?”

Makoto sighed. “She's a heavy sleeper.”

Ranma shook his head. “Where's Lt. Devall?”

“Yo, sir!” J.C. called from the engineering station.

Ranma smiled. “Can you fix this from the inside?”

“Possibly. I have a damage control team analyzing it now.”

Ranma nodded. “Thank you.”

J.C. nodded and went back to work at his station.

“I think I know what we were hit with,” Minako reported.

Ranma walked up to Minako's station and looked at her display.

“I've finally managed to push into their military's database and have gotten some details on their weapons. Those may have been Tay-9 Class Cruise Missiles. Base range of 2,500 kilometers, but they can be retrofitted to convert hydrogen from the atmosphere to continually fuel them.”

“You say they have theoretically unlimited range?” Shampoo asked.

“Theoretically. But it's likely they would burn fuel faster than they could process it,” Minako replied. “Unless they moved really, really slow, but that would make them easy to shoot down.”

“500kg warhead,” Ranma pondered. “Doesn't seem like that much.”

“No, but when you take into account that our armor is compromised, and the fact we were hit 144 times...” Minako trailed off.

Ranma nodded.

“It doesn't say anything about a nuclear variant.”

Minako nodded. "Fortunately. I don't think they have the ability to make a nuclear bomb small enough to fit on a cruise missile yet. The bombs that hit us were low yield and heavy, which is why they had to be carried by those large jet aircraft."

Operations and tactical began to chirp again.

"CONTACTS!" Minako called out. "Bearing 0-2-1, range, 47 kilometers."

Ranma moved back towards his seat. "More cruise missiles?"

Minako looked to Makoto who half-heartedly nodded. "Best guess is yes. They're moving at about the same speed, and they're very low. However, these are coming from an angle where I might be able to try and shoot them."

"Do your best," Ranma ordered.

Makoto began to work on firing at the incoming cruise missiles, but for the most part ended up just blasting trees instead.

"Goddammit," she swore. "They're too damned small."

"One minute," Minako reported.

As the seconds ticked by, Makoto's frustration level increased. Every time she missed, she slammed her hand against her terminal, not only frightening the third shift tactical assistant, but also causing the terminal to buzz non-compliantly at her.

"Thirty!" Minako called out.

"Commander, if you can't get them, stow the cannon."

"One more try," Makoto called out.

Makoto fired again, this time hitting one of the cruise missiles.

"Fifteen!"

"Stow the cannon!" Ranma ordered.

"ALL HANDS! BRACE!" Shampoo called out.

Makoto ordered the cannon to stow.

\*BUZZ!\* The console alerted her.

"It's jammed!" She yelled.

Ranma blinked as the ship began to rock.

Makoto, holding herself upright with one hand, continued to argue with her console with the other, attempting in vain to get the one remaining dorsal cannon to stow. Every time, it continued to buzz, till finally, it complied.

"STOWED!"

143 explosions were not much better than 144, especially to the bridge crew, seeing as how at least six of the cruise missiles hit the bridge, or close to the bridge.

When all was said and done, the master situation display was a mess of red and yellow. The overall ship's health was degraded, and Ranma was not a very happy camper.

"Status?" he said, picking himself up off the floor, then helping Shampoo up.

J.C. began to check the engineering terminal as Minako began to check reports coming in from around the ship.

"These hits were more focused on the saucer," J.C. reported.

"Ablative armor is totally compromised." Makoto reported.

"Causality reports from all decks." Minako reported. "Some serious, but so far no fatalities."

J.C. bit his lip and turned towards Makoto. "Oooo, Commander Kino..."

"Yes?"

"Umm, yeah I know why the phase cannon suddenly complied and stowed for you."

Makoto blinked. "Why?"

"It's gone,"

Ranma and Shampoo looked to J.C.. "What?" They both asked in unison.

"There's nothing there but the support strut." J.C. replied.

Ranma sighed and fell back into his seat. Makoto just buried her head in her hands. "Dammit."

"Why it jam?" Shampoo asked.

"Damage control has found, quote, waterfowl remnants, unquote, in the storage area," J.C. replied.

Ranma turned to J.C. and snarled. "Are you telling me a freaking duck jammed the phase cannon?"

J.C. nodded.

Ranma continued to fume. "Freaking duck needs glasses."

Shampoo glared at Ranma.

"Oh... Right." Ranma said meekly. "Too soon, I guess. Sorry."

Shampoo nodded forgiveness and returned to her seat. Ranma rubbed his head and looked to the tactical overview on the view screen.

"So, what do we do now?" he asked.

"We're going to start taking hull breeches from their attacks," Minako replied.

“And without the phase cannons,” Makoto continued. “we have no chance of stopping anything.”

“Ranma,” Shampoo whispered. “Maybe we have to sink boats.”

Ranma gripped his armrests.

“We can't,” He said quietly. “If we did that, they'd have no way of stopping the Eastern forces from landing millions of soldiers and slaughtering them.”

Shampoo nodded, not really agreeing with Ranma. Ranma sensed her disapproval and turned to her.

“You think I'm wrong?”

Shampoo turned back.

“No,” She said. “Shampoo think you right. Shampoo just don't know if priorities in order.”

Ranma turned back towards the view screen for a minute, then stood. He reached down, and slightly tugged on Shampoo's sleeve, silently gesturing for her to head to his ready room.

Ranma walked behind her, turning to Minako. “You have the bridge,” he told her as he and his XO walked into the Captain's office.

Minako nodded as the door closed behind them.

“Permission to speak freely?” Shampoo asked immediately.

“You never have to ask,” Ranma told her.

“Shampoo think you making big mistake putting these people's lives ahead of the lives of crew. Ahead of my life. Ahead of Akane's life.”

Shampoo pointed to the permanently tinted window. “They going to all kill each other anyway.”

Ranma smirked. “If aliens would have landed on Earth a few hundred years ago, they probably would have said the exact same thing.”

Shampoo sighed. “We should be priority.”

Ranma motioned for Shampoo to sit on his couch. She complied and Ranma sat down next to her.

“Do you trust me?” He asked.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because you good man who do things with honor,” Shampoo looked to Ranma's wedding ring. “Usually.”

Ranma smiled.

“We cannot be the ones who decide the fate of these people. Sure, we could use our power to put their military in a position where they would not be able to touch us, but then we'd have to do the same to the Eastern military.”

Ranma inhaled a bit.

“Of course, they can't let it be known that aliens did it, so they'd blame it on the other side, which would just foster more and more hatred.

“I don't know if these people are approaching an age where they might start to come together, or an age where they will end up killing each other. What I do know is that we cannot allow ourselves to be anymore apart of it than we have already been.”

Shampoo slowly began to nod.

“We're only 400 people,” Ranma continued. “They are billions. I certainly don't care for protecting a bunch of jerks who are trying to kill us, but that's, interestingly enough, what we're sworn to do.”

Ranma started to squirm awkwardly when Shampoo started to cry and glommed on to him. Mainly as he expected Akane to walk in at any moment and pound him.

“I sorry Ranma,” she cried.

Ranma, after becoming certain that Akane wouldn't walk in, hugged Shampoo back. After letting her cry for a moment, Ranma let Shampoo go and the pair pulled apart.

Ranma leaned in and kissed the pretty young Chinese girl on the forehead.

“You're my XO. Questioning me is part of your job,” Ranma smiled.

Shampoo smiled.

“Bridge to Captain Saotome,” Minako called out.

Ranma tapped his communicator. “Go ahead.”

“I have an incoming transmission from the Eastern government.”

“Oh really?” Ranma asked as he looked at Shampoo. “I'll be right there. Summon Lt. Fuchs.”

Lt. Fuchs slowly staggered his way onto the bridge and down to the command console where he stood next to Shampoo. The Sisko's XO looked him up and down, as did Ranma.

“Thank goodness this isn't visual communication,” Ranma said.

“Eh, sorry sir,” Jeff replied. “Not a morning person.”

Ranma nodded. “Put it through.” He ordered.

Ranma began to conduct the normal 'hostile pleasantries' with the Eastern president as Shampoo leaned into Jeff.

"Date night?"

Jeff just pushed Shampoo away.

"Captain," the president said, in a more friendly tone than their last conversation had been in. "I can't help but see that your ship has been under attack by the Garah on multiple occasions."

"Indeed," Ranma replied.

"I also see that you have something in orbit that is able to help defend yourself."

"Mmmhmm," Ranma again replied.

"But what's disturbing is that we now see that your ship has been rendered defenseless by the Garah's most primitive weapons."

"Defenseless is a rather broad term," Ranma countered.

"Fair enough," Lahore replied. "But you no longer have the guns on the top of your ship to shoot down planes with."

"Where are you getting this information from?" Ranma asked.

Lahore chuckled. "The Garah are not the only ones who can genetically modify their people to use as spies."

"I see," Ranma replied. "So, did you contact me to simply give me a status report on my ship, or do you need something?"

Lahore laughed. "Straight and to the point. I like you Saotome. It's a shame you didn't crash over here, as we'd have made you feel far more welcome."

"Mmm," Ranma mumbled.

"I'm willing to provide you with surface to air batteries that are able to shoot down Garah aircraft and their terra hugging cruise missiles."

"In exchange for..." Ranma pushed.

"Nothing," Lahore replied.

Ranma looked to Minako and ordered the channel muted. Once that was complete, he turned to Jeff.

"He's got an ulterior motive, that's for certain," Jeff stated.

"His motive is likely to keep the Western forces away from us till he can get here," Makoto growled.

Ranma nodded. "So do we agree or not?"

"How do we get the stuff?" Minako asked.

"They have a desert they can leave it in." Makoto replied, looking at a map of the Eastern continent. "We could transport it from there."

Ranma order the channel unmuted.

"Mr. President, we need to discuss your offer. May I contact you back in a few hours?"

"Of course."

"Just out of curiosity, how did you plan on delivering this equipment to us?"

"We know about your little transportation trick. We assume if it works on people and..." he paused, "bombs, it will work on military equipment."

"Mmmhmm," Ranma again mumbled.

"Oh, and Captain," Lahore said. "You should know, there is a group of missile cruisers to your southeast, moving up the coast. Once they get within 2000 kilometers of you, they will likely fire their missiles again."

"Thanks," Ranma sighed.

"I look forward to hearing from you," Lahore concluded before closing the channel.

Ranma turned to Minako. "Can we find those boats?"

Minako and the Nighthawk's pilot began their search. Soon, the armada of naval ships appeared on the view screen.

"Damn," Shampoo said in awe.

"There has to be eighty ships there." Makoto groaned.

"Most are probably escorts though," Ranma hypothesized. "Range?"

"2,192 kilometers, moving at about 27 k-p-h," Minako answered. "So, we have about seven hours before their in range."

"Will they fire in the daylight?" Makoto asked.

"Don't see why not. Friendly waters, nearly untouchable missiles flying over friendly terrain." Ranma replied.

The bridge was quiet for a few moments before Ranma yawned. He then looked at the clock which was ticking away.

03:27:43.

"Okay, we have time. Back to sleep. Everyone back here, ready to offer suggestions about the Easterns offer and what to do about those boats at 08:00." Ranma ordered.

The awoken bridge crew complied and began to wander towards the rear turbolifts as the third shift bridge crew returned to their stations.

-----

In a dark smokey room buried deep underground in the Eastern capital of Ballan, Lahore smiled at his top military commanders.

"I just don't see how Saotome could refuse our offer," he said.

"I agree," the air force commander agreed. "I understand that it's a spaceship, but still, anything can be destroyed, even with lackluster technology, if you hit it enough."

"But what good would destroying it do?" the army commander asked.

"They don't have to destroy it," the navy commander replied. "Just break it open, then nuke it again. Let the radiation kill the people inside and then guard it till it's safe for them to go in and take what they can."

Air force nodded. "They have to know that's their main risk."

"How far out are our Marines?" Lahore asked.

"Two days," Navy replied.

"The army is right behind them," Army continued.

Navy snickered. "And whatever the aliens have in orbit has destroyed all their spy satellites, so they have no clue we're coming."

"They know about the battle group though," Air force countered.

"Yeah, one of them," Navy argued. "But not the other six with the landing groups."

Lahore leaned back and lit a cigar. "Now all we need is for the aliens to grant us air superiority over their ship. Gentlemen, we might be looking at the easiest invasion known to man, God willing."

The room all laughed as they plotted the demise of both the Sisko crew and their perceived enemies of God.

-----

Ranma leaned up against the turbolift and yawned. He hadn't gotten a lot of sleep, half because of all the thoughts that had been going through his head, and half because Akane wasn't around.

He had gotten so used to sleeping with her in the bed with him, it had become difficult for him to sleep without her. He found that strange, especially considering the odd positions he used to sleep in. However, he just chalked it up to what married life will do to a man.

Akane was in sickbay helping there. For what it's worth, Akane had finally managed to get her paramedic certification. It was not quite the PhD normally required for the ship's Chief Medical Officer, but this was the Sisko, and it was a crew that – at least originally – haphazardly thrown together by a bitter old Admiral.

As the lift came to a stop, Ranma stood up. The doors opened and Ranma walked out onto the bridge. Ranma looked around and – to his own disappointment – found that he was the last one to arrive.

"Morning," Shampoo said.

Ranma nodded in her direction. "Yo."

The view screen continued to follow the Eastern armada as they steamed down the coast.

"Range?" Ranma asked.

"2,059," Minako replied. "Bit over two hours."

Ranma rapped his fingernails on Makoto's terminal for a few seconds before turning back to Minako.

"How much of an issue for those boats would we cause if we detonated a torpedo just under the surface, about a kilometer in front of them?"

Minako bit her lip. "It would certainly cause some waves. It could capsize some of the smaller boats, but I don't know."

"Let's try it at five kilometers first, see if we can force them to turn away."

"Aye," Minako replied.

"Firing," Kaii reported.

The view screen shot widened out. Suddenly, the torpedo fired from the scout craft hit the water, causing one splash, then detonated, causing a massive burst of water. The ocean around the detonation then rose, causing a tsunami like wave of water to move in every direction, eventually hitting the Western armada.

The boats seemed to take the wall of water in stride, riding the wave up, then down.

"They are continuing on course." Minako reported.

"Two point five kilometers." Ranma ordered.

"Firing," Kaii replied.

Again, one splash and then another post detonation. Again, the tsunami like wall of water came barreling at the blob of ships. The ships again, rode the wave up, but this time came down much harder. The bow of one of the smaller escort destroyers was pushed underwater.

It managed to come back up, but it was obviously disabled, as it started to fall behind the rest of the group.

"Continuing on course." Minako reported.

"One point five." Ranma ordered, becoming slightly more frustrated at the persistence of the Western navy.

"Firing," Kaii replied.

This time, the wave made a difference. Several of the ships were knocked off course. Others looked as if they were starting to list to one side or the other. Some had been knocked into each other, a side effect of their tight formation.

The surviving ships realized that the Sisko had no intention of letting them hit their 2,000-kilometer firing range and began to change direction.

"They're turning out to sea," Minako smiled.

Makoto pumped her fist as Ranma grinned. "Lieutenant, see if you can find the other ones. Try and push them out of range."

"Aye," Kaii reported.

Ranma was getting ready to turn to Minako when J.C. and Usagi walked out of a turbolift.

"Captain," Usagi said, the expression on her face not filling Ranma with the expectation of good news.

"Commander," Ranma acknowledged.

J.C. motioned for Ranma to follow them to the master situation display, where he started to point out certain red areas on the ship.

"We've discovered sixty-eight hull breeches caused by the recent attacks," J.C. stated. "Nine of them are serious."

"Emergency force fields?" Ranma asked.

"In place, but here's the issue with that," J.C. continued. "Because of all the rerouting we've had to do, there's no guarantee that when a new hull breach is formed, a force field will engage."

"There are always bulkheads," Usagi continued. "But they seal off entire sections, potentially trapping dozens of people."

J.C. inhaled and continued. "Also, we're not able to 'fix' the port strut from inside the ship. We've reinforced it to the best of our ability, but if it gets hit again, it could break."

Ranma rubbed his face. "Then the ship tip that way..." he noted, his Shampooish accent not going unnoticed.

J.C. nodded. "We wouldn't notice that besides from the actual falling, since the artificial gravity is still working. But it would expose the ventral side of the ship which is still heavily damaged and was only 'patched' to make us space worthy."

Shampoo walked up to the group. Ranma turned to her. "Has everything for plan 'Exodus' been set up?"

Shampoo nodded.

Ranma put a hand on Shampoo's shoulder and rubbed it for a moment. "Well then for now, I guess we'll have no choice." He turned to Minako. "Contact the Eastern -"

"Captain," Kaii called out.

"What is it, Lieutenant."

"I checked up and down the coastline and I found two other armadas, both appeared to be ported, either getting more missiles or fuel or something, I don't know."

"Okay," Ranma said.

"Yeah, so I decided to see if I could tell where the ones, we just shot at were going so I started scanning the ocean for ships and this is what I found."

On the view screen Kaii put up a shot of a carrier battle group.

"They been sitting out there for a while," Shampoo stated.

"Those are moving," Ranma said, pointing at the wake the boats were making in the water.

"Yes sir," Kaii replied. "Let me zoom out."

Kaii zoomed out, showing five more battle groups.

"Wow," Makoto gasped.

"Now let me pan over a bit."

Kaii moved the camera over showing more boats that anyone could count. They filled the Sisko's view screen. As Kaii pulled the camera out, more and more boats showed up. The occasional fighter jet flew overhead securing the airspace.

"Fuck me," Ranma said, a tinge of anger creeping into his voice.

"Is invasion force," Shampoo stated.

Amanda shook her head. "If we transport those surface to air batteries over here, the Western forces will have no way to stop them."

"Easterns. Get them. Now," Ranma snapped.

Minako quickly complied. After a couple of minutes, she nodded.

"Captain Saotome! Glad you could get back to me!" Lahore gleamed.

"Mr. President."

"Have you had time to think over our generous offer?"

"Indeed I have, and I am afraid I am going to have to decline," Ranma said.

"Decline?" the president asked, not even attempting to hide the shock.

"We see your invasion fleet. We are not going to inform the Western military as we have no interest in being involved in your war, but we will not allow you to use us to place your military hardware on their soil."

There was a pause and then some quiet talking in the background. Finally, the president spoke again.

“Very well. If you wish to be killed by monkeys throwing rocks, so be it. Hopefully when you see God and he asks you why you did not accept the help of his chosen race to protect yourself, you will have a better excuse than 'I am an ignoramus' for him. Farewell.”

The channel closed.

Shampoo looked to Ranma. “Monkeys throwing rocks?”

Ranma shook his head and sighed. “How long before the invasion force gets here?”

“The battle group will be here in two and a half days, the second group of ships in three,” Minako replied.

“And the Crossroads?” Ranma asked.

“Three.”

“Oy vey,” Ranma whined.

-----

Klasn knew that once this ordeal was done and over with, he was going to have to get his top general some anger management classes.

Garone was once again tearing up office furniture in the Western Military Command Center (WESTCOM). Garone was running around screaming as well, using terms such as 'inept', 'moronic' and 'useless', despite knowing that none of those words were true. After all, if they had the ability to shoot massive blobs of energy from space, they would be winning the war too. That was something the scientists were going to have to work on. Perhaps space travel was something that should not be ignored, just because home was so nice.

But Klasn had to think about the situation they were in now.

“UNA!” He barked.

Garone stopped just short of smashing a coffee pot.

“Yes?”

“I am sure there will be plenty of things on that ship for you to break. Right now, I need you to help me plan our next assault against them.”

Garone set down the coffee pot and walked over, looking at the latest report on the downed alien ship.

“What next assault? We can't bomb them. We can't use artillery. They've scared away the navy. I'm out of ideas.”

“What about a full-scale invasion?” Mao asked, walking into the room.

Klasn and Garone stood to acknowledge their leader. Mao smiled at them and the trio all sat back down around their large conference table.

“How full scale are you thinking, Pho?” Klasn asked.

“Everybody,” Mao replied.

Garone checked his notes. “I think we could probably have a couple million soldiers mobilized in a couple of weeks-”

“No,” Mao replied. “That will give them time to repair the damage we've done. We need to move in the next couple of days.”

Klasn and Garone looked at each other. “That will be hard,” Garone finally said.

“But not impossible?” Mao asked.

“No.”

“Good,” Mao smiled, leaning back.

“The population will see the soldiers moving though,” Klasn stated.

“No worries,” Mao grinned. “I will go on the news tonight and announce that our glorious military is doing a massive readiness test, to prepare for a surprise invasion.

“It will show them that we can mobilize quickly and that they are safe. It will help boost morale.”

“Even more than our ‘special operations team’ that destroyed the enemy nuclear silos?” Klasn smiled.

Mao grinned.

Garone got off his telephone. “The orders have been issued. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> armored divisions, the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> armies, two provincial national guard corps, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> artillery corps, and the navy is sending me a half dozen marine divisions.”

Mao blinked. “What the hell did you just say?”

Klasn chuckled as Garone grinned and simplified it for his Commander in Chief. “A whole bunch of tanks and artillery and about 600,000 soldiers and marines. If we do not take that ship, we’re never getting it.”

Mao nodded. “If God didn’t want us to have it, it wouldn’t be here.”

Klasn and Garone nodded in agreement.

-----

40 HOURS LATER; CROSSROADS 33 HOURS OUT STARDATE 60995.4

Ranma nodded as he got the status update from Ami.

"We've increased our speed to 9.94, as we can maintain it for the duration of our flight without having to power down."

Ranma smirked. "I appreciate that, as it's looking more and more like this is going to be an 'abandon ship' situation."

"That bad, huh?" Ami asked.

"You have no idea, Captain," Ranma glowered. "With the exception of the past 48 hours, we've pretty much been under constant attack by 'our hosts'."

"To top things off, they're about to be invaded, and the invasion is, of course, going to happen near us, since the purpose of the invasion is to gain control of the Sisko."

Ami nodded. "Well from what you've been telling me, you've done a fine job, given the circumstances, of upholding the prime directive. And while those in the government might be aware of your existence, it's the population, the little guy that we tend to forget about, who need to be protected from our existence the most."

Ranma nodded in agreement. "Sometimes I fail to appreciate my dumb luck. All the places we could have crashed on this planet and we landed in the middle of a forest over 180 kilometers from the nearest city."

Ami chuckled.

"I'm having Commander Kino-Gosnell send you some tactical coordinates."

"Oh?"

"We've found that an appropriately placed torpedo can 'encourage' military forces to turn back. If this invasion force lands before we can evacuate, we might need your help 'stalling' them."

Ami nodded. "Understood."

"Bridge to Captain Saotome," Minako called.

"Go ahead."

"Captain, there is something you need to see."

Ranma, on the verge of pulling out all his hair, shook his head. "On my way." Ranma tapped communicator and turned back to his terminal. "I'm needed."

Ami giggled. "Understood. I look forward to meeting you, Captain."

Ranma nodded. "I as well. Saotome out."

Ranma ended the communication and quickly stood. He walked out onto the bridge and up to Minako's terminal.

"What's up?" he asked.

Minako pointed to the main viewer as she punched some buttons. On the viewer, the video of a news cast appeared. A reporter was talking some of her reporter gibberish with some Western soldiers marching behind her. There was generic b-roll of the soldiers getting their gear loaded up into their armored personal vehicles and other shots that would go into a story about soldiers.

“As usual, we're monitoring their newscasts,” Minako started. “Most of it is the usual 'people from the east suck' stuff topped off with 'God thinks we're awesome, hizzah!' But then there was this story with an interview with the Prime Minister.”

Ranma nodded. “Okay.”

“He said some things that I think we should be concerned about,” Minako replied.

Minako fast forwarded the story a bit and then played it.

“Right now,” Mao grinned, “our military forces are doing a readiness evaluation drill.”

Ranma continued to watch as Minako moved the recording to a different part.

“What we're doing is making sure that we can move large numbers of forces, unexpectedly, in a short amount of time, long distances. This is to help keep our people – God's people – safe from the Guraf.”

Minako went forward some more.

“So, when people see the troops moving south...” the reporter asked.

“That's right,” Mao replied. “They're on a drill. There's no actual invasion or anything to be concerned about down there.”

“South?” Ranma asked.

Minako continued to go forward.

“There have been explosions down there though, Mr. Prime Minister,” the reporter stated.

Mao nodded. “Indeed. The Guraf have been bombing some of our airfields near the coast from their carriers, which is why we're running this drill in the south. However, our navy hasn't seen any other ships and certainly none with troops on board.”

Minako looked to Ranma. “It's just more 'Eastern's suck' from then on.”

“You think they're not running a drill at all, but coming after us?”

Makoto and Amanda nodded. “We'd bet our lunches on it,” Makoto replied.

Minako looked to her notes. “Oh, I guess there is one more thing.”

She quickly went to the end of the story.

“The defense ministry said that between all three branches, nearly one million troops are taking part in the readiness drill,” the reporter stated.

Ranma threw his hands up in exasperation. "What did we do? I mean really. All we did was get lost and crash."

"We should have a couple of days before they can get here," Makoto said, optimistic.

"That's assuming that story was taped today," Amanda countered.

"Okay, you," Ranma snarled at Amanda. "Soon as we're off this planet. You're taking glass-half-full classes."

Shampoo snorted.

"Yes sir," Amanda replied.

The rear turbolift door opened and J.C. and Usagi walked in. Ranma looked at the pair.

J.C. halted at Ranma's stare. "Usagi has the bad news, I only bring good news, Captain."

"Huh?" Usagi whimpered.

Ranma turned to Usagi.

"Oh, never mind," J.C. said as Ranma turned back to him. "The bad news is that while we've managed to get you guys enough power to use the phaser array one, maybe two more times, we will then only have enough power to last another week. Ten days if we conserve."

Ranma shook his head. "That will not be an issue."

"Oh," J.C. said. "Well, then, I guess that was good news too."

Ranma partially nods. "What's the actual good news?"

"Well, the port phase cannon was blown to smithereens," J.C. stated.

"That's not good news," Makoto snapped.

"I'm not done," J.C. countered. "So, there wasn't anything we could do about that. However, the starboard cannon was kind of just blown off its mount cleanly. It didn't appear to be directly hit, except by that duck."

Ranma nodded.

"So, we went down and took one of the undamaged and unusable ventral phase cannons and attached it."

"So, we have a working phase cannon again?!" Makoto beamed.

"Yup," Usagi smiled.

If Makoto would have had room to dance in her and Amanda's cubbyhole, she would have.

"Good work guys," Ranma smiled.

J.C. and Usagi nodded and began to walk to the engineering station. Ranma grabbed J.C.'s sleeve and tugged on him, motioning for him to follow him to a quiet corner of the bridge.

“Have you removed all the Borg material from Engineering?” Ranma asked quietly.

“The majority of it,” J.C. replied. “Some of it couldn't be removed without losing power or damaging it.”

Ranma bit his lip. “If we...” Ranma paused. “When we evacuate, is there a way for you to set up some kind of transport enhancers or something so that we can take those parts with us?”

J.C. nodded.

“Do it. That's your top priority right now.”

“Yes sir.”

J.C. walked off and towards a turbolift. Usagi eyed him, then turned back to her terminal, forced to try and figure out the gobbilty-gook on the screen for herself.

#### STARDATE 60997 – CROSSROADS ETA 1 HOUR

The red alert lights on the bridge of the U.S.S. Sisko slowly pulsated. Ranma had been in this position so many times before, but never had he known for a fact that at the end of the battle, he was going to lose his ship.

The theorizing about the Western 'drill' had proved correct. A massive force, led by an uncountable number of tanks, was bearing down on the disabled warship.

The Sisko had already been forced to show that it had indeed regained its ability to shoot down aircraft when a high-altitude spy plane flew overhead.

Makoto, working with the overhead shuttle had managed to track it and destroy it. The cold night air working against the Western's. Their aircraft didn't put out much heat, but the -1-degree temperature at the surface was much colder at the 14 kilometers the spy plane was flying at.

Either by coincidence or by design, the Eastern forces were due to land at about the same time the Western forces would be in range. The Eastern carrier groups had been sitting off the coast for the past eleven hours, waiting for their fellow countrymen to catch up.

Either the Western forces didn't see them, or they were more interested in the Sisko.

Whichever was the case, the Sisko was in the middle of what was about to be one ugly, and bloody battle royal.

“Sir,” Makoto called out. “Security reports that all decks have been cleared.”

“Good.” Ranma nodded. He had no intention of leaving anyone one behind. Dead or alive. “Stasis chambers?”

“Moved to cargo bay four.”

“Very well,” Ranma replied. He looked to Akane who had asked to be on the bridge with him. “I really wish you'd be down there, so I know you'd be off the ship.”

Akane smiled. “You'll know better if I'm here because you'll see me disappear with you.”

Ranma leaned over and kissed her quickly. For what seemed like the first time ever, he did not feel Shampoo's dreadful glare burning into the back of his head, nor did he hear Ryouga's insults. Could things finally be turning in his direction?

"Eastern ships appear to be launching jets," Minako reported.

*\*Guess not.\** He thought. "At us?"

Minako shook her head. "Too early to tell. They don't appear to be headed anywhere in particular."

Ranma sighed.

"The boats are all definitely moving again."

Kaii spoke up. "Explosions on the water."

"They might be anti-submarine planes," Amanda guessed.

"Looks like the Eastern forces just got discovered," Ranma stated.

The group watched as the Eastern forces attempted to fight off the Western submarines that were attempting to sink their carriers.

"Wow," Amanda smirked.

Makoto turned to her.

"If they weren't all coming to kill us, this would be cool."

"People are dying," Makoto reminded her.

Amanda nodded. "Yeah, but it's war. Granted for a silly cause, but still. It's kind of like time travel, only without causality issues."

Makoto returned her attention to her terminal.

"I guess cool is the wrong word," Amanda continued. "But seeing the past come to life is every history buff's dream."

Makoto nodded, pretty much just to end the conversation. Minako checked her sensors and began to squeak.

"Incoming contacts. Small aircraft, about two hundred."

"Western?" Shampoo asked.

"Yes."

"They're not playing around this time." Ranma noted. "They headed our way, or towards the carriers?"

"At us," Minako replied.

"Range?" Shampoo asked.

"175 kilometers, moving supersonic. In range in three minutes," Minako replied.

"Makoto?" Ranma asked.

"Adjusting for speed," she replied. "Firing."

The phase cannon deployed and began to fire. The jets started to break formation after the first couple were hit.

"Crap, they're breaking formation. The cannon is having trouble moving fast enough to track them," Makoto groaned.

"Two minutes."

"Shit, their all over the place, altitude wise as well."

Ranma nodded. "Just do your best. But once they release their payload, stow the cannon. We can't afford to let it get damaged."

"Yes sir," she said, still shooting away.

"One minute."

Slowly, but surely, less and less aircraft were being displayed on the Sisko's tactical overview. However, it was the slowly part that concerned Ranma as the countdown timer ticked ever closer to zero.

"Ten seconds."

"Stow it," Ranma ordered.

The phase cannon quickly righted itself and disappeared back into the ships protective hull.

"Range," Minako called out.

Amanda looked at her display.

"They've deployed ordinance."

"Scan?" Shampoo asked.

"Checking." Minako replied. "650-kilogram, conventional explosives."

"Time to impact?" Ranma asked.

"Thirty seconds."

"Damage estimate?" Ranma asked.

J.C. sat up. "Depending on where they impact and whether or not they all hit at the same spot, negligible to catastrophic."

"Fifteen seconds!"

"ALL HANDS! BRACE!" Shampoo called out.

Ranma looked to J.C. "You're going to class with Jansen."

J.C. grinned before ducking for cover.

The ship rocked slightly as some of the bombs hit the Sisko's hull. However, most of them exploded harmlessly in the forest away from the ship.

Ranma stood and looked to J.C. "Report?"

"Meh," J.C. replied.

Amanda grinned. "Without any guidance, those bombs essentially rely on the pilot to 'chuck' them to their target."

"'Chuck' them?" Ranma asked.

"Yeah. Throw them. Let inertia and gravity carry them to the target," Amanda clarified. "Once we knocked them out of formation, the pilots had to guess where the best release point would be."

Shampoo giggled. "Lots of them guess wrong."

"Yeah, except..." Kaii started. "Now if the military doesn't get you, the forest fire the bombs caused will."

Ranma growled. "You're in the class to, Kaii."

Akane laughed. "Who's teaching this class?"

Ranma pondered this for a second. "Gosnell."

Makoto looked up. "Oh my God. We're all doomed."

The entire bridge laughed. It was a nice moment. It unfortunately only lasted for a moment though before Minako's panel started to beep again.

"Western ground forces have breached 50 kilometers."

"Damn, they're moving fast," Ranma complained.

"Their line stretches for about another 20 kilometers. They aren't able to spread out far due to the forest," Kaii noted. "As well, the Eastern forces have engaged the Western naval blockade."

"The Western navy doesn't have a chance, does it?" Ranma asked.

"It's about 30 ships against about a thousand. So, maybe, if an asteroid hit," Kaii replied.

Ranma blinked.

"I'm practicing for class."

Ranma stifled a laugh. "Well done, Lieutenant."

The bridge crew watched the view screen for a while, able to do nothing but grimace as the Eastern naval forces decimated the Western blockade ships.

Once the Eastern navy was on the move again, Ranma turned to Minako.

“Was a single Eastern ship destroyed?”

Minako shook her head. “Doesn't appear so.”

Ranma shook his head. “Range?”

“On who?”

“Everyone!” Ranma barked.

“The Western forces are at 35 kilometers. The Eastern forces are 30 from the shoreline.”

“The Crossroads?”

“Twenty.”

“Okay,” Ranma said, unsure of what to do.

“Sir,” Minako whimpered. “The Eastern ships appear to be launching landing craft.”

“How many?” Ranma asked.

“Dozens...” Minako answered. “No, hundreds...” Minako continued to look at the information she was getting from Nighthawk.

“There has to be over a thousand.”

“ETA?” Shampoo asked.

“Fifteen to the shore.”

“Fighters,” Makoto reported.

“Target?” Ranma asked.

“They're headed this way.” She replied. “But they could be headed to the invasion fleet.”

Ranma did not want to stop the fighters if they were going to attack the Eastern forces, but at the same time he did not want to let them get within range of shooting his ship.

“DAMMIT!” he snapped out loud before putting his head in his hands and rubbing his face.

“Fighters are being launched from the carriers,” Minako added.

Ranma slumped down in his chair.

“Wonderful. A nonsensical holy war right above us where we're the prize.”

Ranma rapped his fingers on his arm rest for a few moments.

“Captain, I am fairly certain these fighters are not going to attack us,” Amanda called out.

“Oh?” Ranma asked.

"Yes sir," She replied. "They don't appear to have any bombs on them. Just missiles."

Minako looked at her scans. "She's right."

Ranma nodded. "Well good then."

"Uh, I don't know if I can sort them out if they do send ones with bombs though," Makoto interjected.

"Well, I'm not going to send you to the brig for shooting down the wrong one," Ranma responded.

Makoto took some solace in that.

A little time passed as the two blobs of fighter jets got closer to each other. During the same time, the blob of Western armor and soldiers and Eastern landing craft came closer and closer to the Sisko.

The operations terminal began to chirp. Minako looked at it and concluded that things were about to get very, very ugly.

"Captain, the Eastern amphibious force will be landing in 10 minutes. The Western armored forces will be here in fifteen minutes and their air forces will be engaging each other in--"

The sound of an explosion and the remnants of either a Western or Eastern fighter jet slamming into the hull of the Sisko paused Minako.

"-now," she finished.

"ETA on the Crossroads?" Ranma asked.

"They will be in transporter range in five minutes," Shampoo replied. "But to get everyone on board will take fifteen minute."

Ranma acknowledged that he needed a way to slow both advancing forces down. There was far too much air traffic to send up the two Runabouts the Sisko still had in her shuttle bays, they would be shot down easily.

He also did not necessarily want to torpedo the soldiers either, despite the fact that expected them to all kill each other soon anyway, assuming any of them survived the destruction of the Sisko.

"The trees. Can we knock down more of the trees to slow the tanks?"

"I think so," Makoto replied. She turned to Amanda who began to enter in targeting parameters.

"The Crossroads will be in transporter range in two minutes," Kaii called out. "The NSO Teams say they are ready to go."

"Ready!" Amanda said.

"Fire," Ranma ordered.

"Transport when ready!" Shampoo ordered.

The ship rocked at the same time her forward phaser banks lit up. The phasers hit the trees, knocking them over, stopping the Western tanks forward progress.

"It worked," Minako yelled. "The Western armored column has stopped."

"What hit us?" Ranma asked.

"Artillery." Makoto replied. "The battleships off the coast are shelling us."

"Why?!" Shampoo cried.

"Why not," Makoto snarled.

"Is it a threat?" Ranma asked?

"Yeah, but..." Makoto trailed off. Ranma nodded.

"Crossroads is in range, beginning transport," Kaii stated from his position aboard the scout ship.

"Bombers inbound," Makoto reported. "Conventional weapons."

"Shoot them down," Ranma ordered.

Makoto and Amanda complied and downed the bombers with the Sisko's phase cannon. Amanda sighed.

"More coming in from sea,"

"Fuck!" Shampoo swore.

"Transport 10 percent complete," Kaii reported.

"Keep shooting," Ranma ordered as he watched the tactical situation on the main viewer. He cautiously eyed the Western armor as it had regained mobility over the tree barricade. The Eastern amphibious assault was just a couple of kilometers from the shore and would then only be a few minutes from them.

He would not have much choice soon, he realized as another artillery bombardment slammed into the hull. He would have to ask the Crossroads to hit both sides with torpedoes and kill several thousand soldiers at once.

Not something he wanted to do at all, but he could not let the Sisko fall into their hands. Neither side could obtain this technology.

"Transport at 35 percent."

"Western forces reaching yellow line," Minako grimaced, seeing the Western military pass the fifteen-kilometer mark.

Ranma sighed. "A warning shot. Open a channel to the Crossroads."

Minako nodded. The communications system chirped, and Ami replied. "Yes captain."

"We need some cover fire. One torpedo, position yellow-bravo."

"You got it," Ami replied.

From the mighty Sovereign class ship, a single red orb shot from her forward torpedo bay and descended to the planet, slamming into the forest about ten kilometers north of the Sisko, and about five kilometers south of the advancing army, exploding in an enormous fireball, leaving a massive crater behind.

"I think it worked, Captain," Minako smirked. "The Western armored column has halted their advance."

"Have they turned back?" Shampoo asked.

"No," Minako replied.

"Didn't work well enough." Ranma sighed.

"The Eastern advance is still coming as well," Minako said as another bombardment from an Eastern battleship hit the Sisko.

"WAIT!" Minako yelled. "The Western troops! They're turning back!"

Ranma smiled. However, his elation wasn't to be long lived.

"The Eastern forces though have landed. And I am picking up numerous aircraft inbound from the northwest. They appear to be armed with nuclear payload," Minako groaned.

"Captain, we've got too many hull breeches, and the ablative..." J.C. trailed off.

"Transport at 75 percent."

Ranma looked to Shampoo, then to tactical. "Can you shoot them down?"

"Most of them." Amanda replied. "They are stealth aircraft, so I have to wait for them to get pretty close to get a lock."

"ETA," Shampoo asked.

"5 minutes."

"Kaii?"

"5 Minutes," Kaii replied.

"How much fun is this?" Ranma joked. "Start shooting. Do what you can."

\*WHAM\* \*ALARM BELLS\*

"SHIT!" both Makoto and Amanda screamed.

"WHAT?!" both Shampoo and Ranma screamed back.

"That artillery barrage nailed the phase cannon."

"So, you're saying the Eastern military just helped the Westerns?" Ranma asked.

"Yeah."

Ranma sighed. "Kaii?"

"Two more cycles, then you guys," Kaii replied.

Minako bit her lip. "The Eastern infantry has just reached red line."

"They're all going to be fried by those nukes, aren't they?"

Minako sighed. "Yes."

"You're next!" Kaii stated.

"None too soon," Amanda sighed. "Bombs away."

Ranma looked up at the viewer as the planes broke formation and 15 small blips headed towards the center image of the Sisko. Ranma turned to Akane and smiled as the blue glow surrounded them both and Ranma felt the familiar sensation of his body being taken apart and then being reassembled. Within an instant he found himself and the rest of the bridge crew in transporter room three of the U.S.S. Crossroads.

Ranma quickly looked to make sure Akane was on the pad as well. Once he saw her, he scurried out of the transporter room, Shampoo hot on his trail. The pair shot into a turbolift and up to the bridge. There was one last thing Ranma had to do. He did not want to do it, and it was going to break his heart, but he knew it had to be done.

Ranma stepped out onto the bridge of the Crossroads and nodded to the crew. Ami turned around and greeted him and his first officer.

"Commander Saotome."

"Captain Mizuno. Thanks for the rescue."

"Any time."

"Captain, there is one last thing we need to do."

"Indeed. I figured you should do it, since she was your ship, for so long."

Ranma nodded.

"First, establish a link with the Sisko's computer."

"Established," the operations officer said.

"Computer, run program 'Exodus Zero'," Ranma stated.

"Acknowledged."

Aboard the Sisko, 192 tricorder turned bombs suddenly activated with a ten second countdown. Once they reached zero, every critical piece of equipment, including the ship's computer core was blown into billions of pieces.

"Captain?" Ami asked.

"Insurance," Ranma replied.

Ami nodded.

"Tactical, load all torpedo bays, full spread of quantum torpedoes," Ranma ordered.

"Aye," Tactical replied.

"Lock on to the Sisko."

"Locked on."

Ranma looked to Shampoo and took her hand. He then looked at the image of the stricken and smoldering image of the Sisko, which had obviously just been hit by dozens of nuclear bombs, on the viewer.

He blinked. "Fire."

The front end of the Crossroads lit up silver as every torpedo fired, in all, twenty quantum torpedoes were jettisoned from the front of the Sovereign class ship and propelled towards the surface of the planet till they contacted the hull of the U.S.S. Sisko. Simultaneously, all detonated causing a blast that made the earlier nuclear explosions look like New Year's firecrackers. Ranma and Shampoo watched as the smoke began to clear. Shampoo squeezed Ranma's hand tightly.

"Better safe than sorry."

Ranma nodded. "Again."

Tactical nodded and repeated the attack, ensuring that not a scrap of the warship could have survived the onslaught.

# RESOLUTION

Stardate 60992 - 3 days before the Sisko's crew is rescued.

Vora, like every Vulcan, was a creature of routine. If it was for anything he did more than once, he had to have some kind of system for it.

Getting ready for and going to work was certainly no exception.

His morning routine usually began with the usual things a man of his age would have to deal with, followed by bathing, then, like clockwork, a high protein, low sodium breakfast cooked by his wife of 112 years.

Despite being Vulcan, the pair were still quite affectionate towards each other – one would think you would have to be married for over a century – and after goodbye kisses and hand gestures, Vora quickly made his way to the transit station that would take him to the High Command's headquarters.

Despite being, essentially, the leader of Vulcan, Vora chose to maintain a low profile. He walked when he could, as he felt it was better for his health. He took the public transportation as he felt it would encourage the public to do the same.

He only took with him a single security officer who shadowed him.

Vulcan's Interior Ministry had asked him to change his mind on all acts, but Vora felt that despite the violence, he was not in danger.

As Vora boarded the transport, once the security officer screened it for explosives, he nodded to the small group of Vulcans on board. Most returned the nod. Many were unaware of who he was.

This was the way Vora liked it.

The ride was uneventful for several minutes, when suddenly Vora's security officer yelled at him and grabbed his robe.

“SIR GET DOWN!”

The officer pulled Vora to the floor of the transport, but it was completely useless.

A second transport swooped in from an opposing angle and collided with Vora's transport. Both exploded into fireballs, killing all aboard.

-----

Stardate 61001 – Two days after rescue.

Ranma spent a lot of his time looking out the window anymore. Considering he was a passenger on a three-month voyage, and he had absolutely nothing to do, why not. The streaking stars was something he had missed during their stranding, and it was nice to see them again. Although he will admit, the fresh air was a nice change.

At least it was nice while he had the opportunity to take advantage of it.

Ranma was having a hard time trying to figure out how he had become so attached to what was in essence an inanimate object. He had been on several ships in his life. Though, the Sisko was 'his' ship. Even if, at least at the beginning of this mission, she was not his.

The young pig-tailed boy sighed.

"Ranma," Akane called out softly.

Ranma turned and looked at his wife who was wearing a very formal, black dress.

"Ak-Ak-Ak."

Akane smiled. "Mmm. I like it when I get that kind of reaction." She slowly walked over to Ranma and sat down on his lap. The smile on her face grew slightly.

"I like that kind of reaction as well."

Ranma blushed. "You look very pretty."

"Thank you," she smiled. "So why aren't you dressed?"

Ranma, who was wearing his workout clothes, blinked. "For?"

"Don't tell me you forgot," Akane asked, sadly.

"Oh no, is it our anniversary?"

Akane stood up. "No."

Ranma shook his head.

"Gosnell's opening up that new nightclub in the holodeck."

Ranma nodded. "Oh, right. Yeah, I did forget. I'm sorry. My mind has just been elsewhere."

Ranma quickly got undressed and hopped into his sonic shower. Akane looked to the PADD Ranma was looking at. It was his letter granting him command of the U.S.S. Benjamin L Sisko.

"Are you alright, Ranma?" She asked.

Ranma ran out in his underpants and quickly started to rummage through the closet, before remembering that all his clothing was blown up.

"Mmmhmm. Why?" he asked before heading to the couple's replicator.

"Well, you've just been forgetting a lot of things lately," Akane noted as she walked near him.

Ranma ordered a tuxedo from the replicator, then moved back to the closet and started to get dressed.

"You've also spent a lot of time in here..." she paused. "By yourself."

Ranma slowly buttoned up his shirt, before finally stopping on the last, top button. He looked at himself in the mirror for a few seconds. The look of self-loathing he had on his face began to change, morphing into a glare of pure anger.

Ranma swiftly, and violently sent his right fist into the mirror, shattering it.

Akane screamed when she heard the glass shattering and ran into the closet with Ranma. She looked at him as he pulled his hand out of the hole in the wall he had created.

Ranma looked at his fist which had several shards of glass sticking out of it, blood covering it.

“What-” Akane started to ask as Ranma began pulling the glass pieces out.

“Twice now,” Ranma said quietly.

Akane just watched Ranma in silence as he casually tossed aside the blood-stained glass that he pulled from between his knuckles.

“I've lost the Sisko twice,” he continued. “Except this time there's no chance of getting her back.”

Akane quickly went and grabbed her medical kit. She came back in and began to work on Ranma's wounded hand. Unlike the many other times she had tried to treat him, Ranma didn't fight with her.

“It's not your fault,” she reminded him.

Ranma shrugged. “Maybe. But maybe if I had played things differently – maybe if I had just agreed to help the Western forces, we could have been able to recover her.”

Akane, having patched up Ranma's hand, began to slowly wipe the blood off it.

“Yes, but then you would have left the Eastern people defenseless against the Westerns. Isn't that why we didn't destroy their armies in the first place?”

Ranma nodded.

“But maybe Shampoo was right. They were just going to end up killing each other anyway, what does it matter?”

Akane shook her head.

“Isn't that what had to happen to us? It took us nearly killing our planet off for people to say, 'wait a minute' and stop fighting over things like skin color and religion.”

Ranma sighed and nodded.

Akane finished wiping off the blood and tossed the cloth she was using in the trash receptacle. She then began to rub her hand along Ranma's face.

“Ranma, I can't say magic words to make you feel better. However, understand this. You did everything in your power to protect this crew, and the people of that planet. Everyone on board stood behind you and believed you did the right thing, and most importantly, I believe you did the right thing.”

Ranma looked down at his wife and smiled. He pulled her close and ran his hand through her hair.

“And you said you didn't have any magic words,” he grinned.

Akane chuckled as she leaned against his chest.

“Now,” she said, “put some pants on, we're late.”

Fancy music played as the Sisko crew, all dressed in formal, civilian clothing, milled around chatting with each other. Many of the Crossroads' crew was there as well, however they were dressed in their formal, Starfleet uniforms.

Admiral Larson had dictated that the first thirty days of the trip home would be considered 'shore leave' for the Sisko's crew. Considering everything they had just been through; it was well earned.

And unknown to the Sisko's crew, what lay ahead may make this shore leave even more well-earned.

Everyone was paired up in their usual groupings.

Shampoo and Amanda.

Minako and Ryouga.

Makoto and Gosnell.

Lt. Fuchs and Lt. Kaii were also hanging out together, however they were making it a little less obvious that they were 'together'.

J.C. was hanging out with some other engineers. Usagi was chatting with Ami and Trevor but looked a little sad. Ami could not help but catch on to this and began to question her friend about her distressed look.

“What's wrong, Usagi?”

Usagi sighed. “Seems like everyone has someone but me.”

Ami looked around. It did indeed seem like everyone was in pairs. Well, almost everyone.

“No, see.” Ami noted, motioning towards the bar. “See, Rei's alone,” Ami paused. “Oh, right.”

Usagi just shook her head. “Too soon.”

The main doors opened and Ranma and Akane walked in. Usagi turned to them, sighed again, this time twice as loud, and then turned back to Ami.

“I don't know what you're worrying about,” Trevor said.

“Hmm?” Usagi asked.

“Yeah, that bloke has been eying you all night.”

Trevor motioned across the room to a handsome young lieutenant who was standing in the corner with a couple of other lieutenants.

“Really?” Usagi asked.

“Yeah really?” Ami asked.

Usagi glared at her as Trevor continued.

“Yeah. He's probably just too shy to ask, or worried because you're a department head.”

“Well, that doesn't do me any good,” Usagi complained.

“Don't be such a silly Sheila,” Trevor laughed. “This is the twenty-fourth century! Go over and talk to him yourself!”

Usagi looked at Trevor who nodded reassuringly. Usagi decided why the hell not, downed her drink for confidence, not really caring that her drink was non-alcoholic, and marched over to the group.

Ami turned to Trevor. “Was he really eying her?”

Trevor laughed. “YES!! Goodness, am I that untrustworthy?”

Ami just looked at him.

“May I have your attention please?” Gosnell called out from the karaoke stage.

The talk subsided and everyone turned their attention to Gosnell who waved and smiled at the group.

“I'd like to welcome you all to my nightclub, which, I guess ironically will be open during the day too.”

Gosnell paused, waiting for laughter that never came. He quickly adjusted his collar and continued.

“I'd like to thank Captain Muzino for allowing us exclusive use of this holodeck for this purpose. Let's all give her a hand!”

The group applauded as Ami waved.

“Um, before the celebrations, I'd like to take a second and ask for a moment of silence to remember our comrades... our ship mates... our friends, who couldn't be with us today,” Gosnell stated a little more softly as he and the rest of the group bowed their head in a silent prayer for the fallen Sisko crew.

“Now...” Gosnell continued as people started to look at him again. “I present to you... Benny's!”

Gosnell flipped a switch and, on a neon style sign, the outline of the Sisko appeared with the word 'Benny's' on top of it. The group applauded, happy with the name of the club.

“And don't worry, we brought real food in, so it won't disappear out of your stomach once you leave the holodeck!”

The group laughed at Gosnell's joke this time. Deciding to quit while he was ahead, Gosnell put down the mic and wandered off the stage to leave people to eat, drink and be merry.

-----

Stardate 61010.5 – Five days out from NZ-12G, 11 Weeks, 3 Days from Earth.

Ranma, Shampoo, Rei, Makoto, Minako, Usagi, and J.C. all sat in the Crossroads' main conference room. Ami smiled at them as she began to walk towards the door.

“Admiral Larson was very specific on who he wanted in this briefing, so I will be in my ready room if any of you need me.”

Ranma smiled. “Thank you, Captain.”

Ami nodded and left the room.

“We close enough for face to face?”

Minako nodded. “The delay is about thirty seconds, but it's better than nothing.”

Ranma nodded. “Put it up.”

The group nearly jumped when they saw the Romulan Imperial Guard logo appear before Larson did. Larson smiled at the group.

“Greetings my friends, I hope you are doing well.”

The group all responded with yeses.

“I am going to get right to the point. You all will not be headed to Earth. I have already instructed the Crossroads to change course. You will be meeting up with me. We have an extremely sensitive mission that we will be going on that even using my current level of encryption, I do not feel comfortable talking about over subspace.”

“Encryption?” Ranma asked. “That explains the Romulan logo?”

Larson nodded. “Indeed. I've called in some favors. Commander Kino may already be aware of this, but I was once involved in Section 31, so I have many contacts.”

Ranma looked to Makoto.

“You knew?”

Makoto looked to Ranma. “I know a lot of things, sir,” she smiled.

“I probably don't want to know most of them, do I?”

Makoto shook her head.

“Didn't think so,” Ranma responded, turning back to the screen.

“Ranma,” Larson continued. “I am using my authority to promote you to the rank of Captain. Based on the reports I have gotten from you and your subordinates; I believe you handled things to the best of your ability back there in what had to have been an incredibly difficult situation. Congratulations.”

Ranma smiled. “Thank you...”

Larson nodded. "Lt. Devall."

J.C. sat up. "Yes sir."

"The Borg parts. What have you learned about them?"

J.C. shook his head. "Very little. The Crossroads doesn't have the equipment to properly dissect them."

Larson nodded. "Very well then. Once you get here, we will see what we can do with them. I think they are the key to figuring out this conspiracy."

"If you don't mind me asking, sir," Ranma interjected. "What conspiracy?"

Larson cleared his throat then leaned back. "Vulcan has seceded from the Federation."

-----

Stardate 60997.3 – The date of the Sisko's crew's rescue. Geneva, Earth. Federation Council Headquarters. General Assembly.

"Motion passes," the Federation secretary general states.

Inside the general assembly room, hundreds of alien representatives from all sorts of planets from within the Federation are gathered to discuss usually mundane issues.

However, the Vulcan group had something far more important and controversial to discuss this brisk, October morning.

"The chair recognizes the Vulcan delegation."

The Vulcan ambassador stands. "Thank you. This is to notify the Federation that the Vulcan High Command has voted six to three to exercise our right under the Federation charter to voluntarily end our association with the Federation effective immediately."

The entire room began to speak at the same time. The secretary general began to bang his gavel. "Order!" he yelled.

Once the room became quiet, he spoke again. "Are you saying Vulcan is seceding from the Federation?"

"Yes," the Vulcan replied.

"You cannot do that," the Earth ambassador replied.

"There is legal precedent for it," the Vulcan replied.

"Nuts to legal precedent," the Earth ambassador countered. "Secession has been only due to majority decision by the population..."

"We have a majority on the High Command."

"They're not elected."

“They represent the Vulcan people.”

“There are too many Federation assets on Vulcan.”

“Yes, we expect those to be moved, post haste.”

“Vulcan is too close to Earth.”

“Breen is not that much farther away.”

The Earth ambassador was very frustrated. He quickly began to type up something in his PADD, then began to speak.

“Mr. Secretary, I motion for this bill, 77280-Gamma, to be placed for a vote.”

“You are making a mistake,” the Vulcan said as he read the bill that appeared on his console.

The Federation Assembly clerk began to read.

“No planet, defined as a core planet, which includes, but is not limited to Earth, Vulcan, Andoria, and Teller Prime is permitted to secede from the United Federation of Planets. This law is retroactive.”

“Second!” someone called out.

“Voting begins.” the secretary general stated.

The board lit up. The yes votes overwhelmingly outnumbered the no votes.

“Motion passes,” the secretary general acknowledged.

The Vulcans picked up their items. One turned to the group. “Vulcan will continue with their plans. This law means nothing, as we are no longer a part of the Federation.”

The Earth ambassador watched the group huff out before turning back to the secretary general.

“Mr. Secretary, I suggest we pass a motion on to the Federation Council to request enforcement of resolution 77280-G, by any means necessary.”

An Andorian ambassador stood up, almost too quickly.

“SECOND!”

The secretary general sighed. Any means necessary.

“Agreed.”

He banged his gavel.