

MOON TREK NEO – EPISODE TWO : AGENDA



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 graphic violence. Recommended for readers 16 years and older.

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PRELUDE

Strobe lights flashed. Lasers shot from the ceiling. Smoke was pumped out of fog machines both on the ground and built into the ceiling. Loud, bass-pumped music pounded out of the six-meter speakers that were placed every three meters.

The 120 decibel sounds did not seem to bother Katsy Alexander though. She was moving and dancing to the Anjarian techno music being played by the green Anjarian DJ.

Katsy came here as often as she could. It was a long trip from Earth to the Vegas style Anjarian colony of Yan, but thanks to her father's position on the Federation Council, she got to roll in style.

It was a Galaxy class ship that dropped her off this time. And from what she was told, it would be a Sovereign class to pick her up in a couple of days.

"Hey!" a barely audible female voice called to her.

Katsy continued to dance but turned to see one of her friends.

"Vanessa! Where did you go?" Katsy asked.

Vanessa smiled. "I wanted to be alone with Zola for a bit."

Katsy returned a devilish grin to her friend. "Is he coming back?"

Vanessa began to dance with Katsy and nodded.

"Yeah. He went to go get something to drink."

Katsy looked at her own bottle of Anjarian beer that she held in one of her hands. It was almost empty.

"Doesn't sound like a bad idea."

Vanessa scooted closer to Katsy as more people moved onto the dance floor.

"He's bringing you something too."

Katsy smiled, drank what was left of her beer and slightly changed the way she was dancing as the song changed from an up-beat dance song to a slow, deeper Anjarian rap song.

While Katsy and Vanessa had only been at this club for a little over two hours, they had been partying all night.

Nothing closed here, and it was always night. The city of Yan sat near the north pole of the small, inhospitable, barely M class planet of SA-882D.

The city, measuring almost 4,000 square kilometers, was enclosed in a dome, keeping the cold, arctic air outside. The inside sat at a toasty 27 degrees.

Yan had a population of a little over two million. Most of those people were Anjarians that worked in the resort colony's casinos, hotels, brothels, and clubs. There were usually no less than a million tourists and party goers that flocked to the colony every day.

Yan made Risa look like a church picnic park.

But surprisingly to some, Yan was one of the safest colonies in the sector. Anjaria had very few laws. But the laws they had were strict. Robbery would land you in an Anjarian prison for fifty years. Murderers were executed within a week of conviction.

A tall, handsome Anjarian man walked up to Vanessa and Katsy and began to dance with them. He leaned over and gave Vanessa a deep tongue kiss. He then smiled to Katsy as he handed her a bottle of beer.

"Thanks, Zola," Katsy smiled as she took the beer.

"I have something else if you'd like to try it," Zola grinned. His dark green eyes were captivating to Katsy. She understood why Vanessa liked him so much.

"What's that?" She asked.

Zola motioned for the two to follow him as he walked off the dance floor. Vanessa and Katsy complied and trailed him to a booth. The two girls sat down as Zola pulled a small box out of his pocket.

Zola opened the box and dropped out three pills. He handed one to Katsy and one to Vanessa.

"What's this?" Katsy asked.

"FOX," Zola replied.

The smile dimmed from Katsy's face. She looked to the pill, then back to Zola, who was ingesting his.

"Isn't this stuff illegal?" Katsy inquired.

Zola laughed.

"Baby, you're not in Federation space anymore. Anjaria doesn't have such draconian 'purity' laws."

Vanessa laughed as she popped hers. Katsy studied the pill for a moment. While Katsy was a wild child, she had grown up listening to teachers and doctors tell her that drugs were bad for you.

"Is this stuff safe?"

Zola handed her the box.

"It's made by one of the biggest companies in the quadrant. It's not street FOX, it's cool."

Katsy looked at the box, and grinned. She handed the box back to Zola and swallowed her pill.

"It takes a few minutes, but you'll know when it kicks in," Zola explained before beginning to make out with Vanessa again.

Katsy nodded her head to the music for a few minutes, between the sips of her drink. Then she started to notice something.

A tingling.

Katsy shuddered.

“Oh my God,” she smiled.

Zola turned to her. “Starting to work I see.”

“What’s this stuff doing to me?” Katsy asked, her arms trembling, her breathing becoming faster and deeper, sweat beginning to form on her forehead.

“It stimulates hormones in your brain. It simulates an orgasm.”

Katsy smiled. A big smile.

“Can I get some more?”

Zola laughed. “Baby, this shit ain’t free. You can go purchase a box at the bar.”

Katsy nodded as another wave of pleasure engulfed her body. There was no way she was going to let this feeling stop.

Katsy hopped up, and almost fell to the ground. The pleasurable pulse was rushing through her now, making it a little difficult for her to walk.

Katsy was determined though. She made it to the bar and ordered a box. After paying she started to make her way back to the booth. She was stopped by a man who looked almost human.

“Hey, I’m Zack.” He informed her.

“Hi Zack.” She blushed.

“Would you like to join me for some drinks?” Zack asked as he pointed to where he was sitting.

Katsy looked to where Zola and Vanessa were. She didn’t see them sitting at the booth. She quickly scanned the room and noticed them walking back towards the lounges.

“Yeah, I guess my friends are, busy,” Katsy chuckled, “so I’ll join you.”

Zack led Katsy to his booth and the pair sat down. Zack had the waitress drop off a couple of beers, one he handed to Katsy.

Zack then pulled out a box of FOX. He smiled at Katsy.

“This shit’s great, isn’t it?”

Katsy nodded as she popped two of the pills. Zack also took one and smiled.

Two police vehicles screamed down the near vacant street where Zack's hotel was located. The cars skidded to a stop in front of the Uhazo Hotel. Within a minute an ambulance and a rescue vehicle pulled up behind them.

Zack met the police officers in the lobby and directed them to the elevators.

"I don't know what happened! She just stopped breathing!"

One of the police officers took Zack aside to talk to him. The other policeman and the paramedics got into the elevator and rode it to the 11th floor.

The paramedics quickly ran down the hallway to room 11-029 where the door was standing open. They walked in to find a doctor who had been staying across the hallway attending to Katsy's naked, still, bluish body.

The doctor looked to the paramedics.

"I don't think you will be needed."

One of the paramedics ran his tricorder over Katsy.

"Massive internal brain hemorrhaging," the paramedic told his partner and the doctor.

The second paramedic sighed and turned to the police officer.

"Notify the coroner."

"Mr. Alexander, you have a subspace communication from the Anjarian government," Brett Alexander's assistant told him over the intercom.

Brett looked up from the book he was reading. He hated to be disturbed when he was trying to read but being the chairman of the Federation Council's Foreign Relations Committee, he had grown used to it.

"Put it through please, Andrew," Brett requested.

The faceless subordinate complied and a light blue colored Anjarian in formal clothes appeared on his view screen.

"This is Councilman Brett Alexander; how can I help you?"

"Hello sir, my name is Dona Fas'Un, I am Chief of Police for the Anjarian Colony of Yan. I hate to be the one to inform you of this, but your daughter, Katsy Alexander has died."

Brett gasped in shock. He simply stared past the viewer for a moment before regaining some of his bearings and continuing the conversation.

"What happened?" He asked, softly.

Chief Fas'Un inhaled deeply and began to explain.

"An autopsy shows that she died from an overdose of Fulnahuric Oxide."

“What the hell is Fulnahuric Oxide?” Brett demanded.

“Fulnahuric Oxide, or more commonly known as FOX is a stimulant that some people take to increase pleasure. It stimulates the release of certain hormones and increases blood flow to both the brain and the genitals.”

“It’s a drug?”

“Well, to use a more common term, yes, it is a drug,” Fas’Un acknowledged.

The sadness from his daughter’s death was beginning to move aside in Brett. Anger was starting to well within him.

“I assume that the person that gave the drug to her has been arrested?”

Fas’Un looked slightly confused. “No one gave her the drug, Councilman. She purchased it at the nightclub she was at.”

“So, the night club owners are in jail?”

Fas’Un shook his head. “There’s been no crime, sir. FOX is a legal ‘drug’. While the government encourages only moderate use of narcotics and other stimulants, no one has done anything wrong.”

Brett was becoming furious and was beginning to raise his voice at the police chief.

“NOTHING WRONG? How in the hell can you people allow something so dangerous to be passed around among kids?”

The Anjarian police chief was also beginning to get angry, yet he did his best to keep his cool. He disliked it immensely when foreigners criticized his people’s customs. However, he understood that Brett’s daughter had just died and tried to remain sensitive to that.

“Sir, first off you daughter was not a child. She was 23 Earth years old. And secondly, FOX is no more dangerous than alcohol when done in moderation. I mean no disrespect sir, but your daughter made a choice to overindulge, and this was the consequence of that choice.”

Brett clenched his fists but realized that it would do him no good to punch his computer.

“When can I retrieve my daughter’s body and bring her back to a civilized society?”

Fas’Un was on the verge of punching his own computer screen. His professionalism held though, and he quickly finished the conversation.

“Whenever you’d like. Just contact the coroner’s office when you or your designated party arrives. Again, sorry for your loss, good day.”

Fas’Un ended the transmission before Brett could start yelling again.

Brett sat at his desk for a moment, staring at the UFP logo that now decorated his computer screen. Brett soon stood and picked up a picture of his daughter that was sitting on his desk.

“Nothing wrong...” Brett murmured to himself, before setting the picture down and activating his intercom.

“Andrew, get me Admiral Jack Hanson.”

“Yes sir,” The faceless assistant responded. Within a couple of seconds, Brett’s screen shifted to a picture of an older, grey haired admiral who was sitting at his own desk.

“Brett! How are you! What a surprise!” Admiral Hanson grinned.

His grin dimmed though when he saw the expression on the councilman’s face.

“What’s wrong?”

Brett exhaled deeply.

“Can we meet somewhere?”

“You know, you’d think they wouldn’t make me take a Runabout to my court-martial. At least in a prisoner transport I wouldn’t have to be piloting too,” Ranma Saotome mused to his wife Akane.

Akane looked up from the PADD she was reading.

“You wouldn’t think they would be court-martialing you to begin with,” she grumbled. “Talk about screw-job of the month.”

Ranma looked down at the controls of the U.S.S. Satii, the Danube Class Runabout from the U.S.S. Sisko. After verifying that they were on the correct course still, Ranma got up from the pilot’s seat and walked to the back area where Akane sat.

Ranma takes the PADD away from Akane and gently cups her chin in his hand. He softly pushes her head so that she is looking at him.

“I really wish you would smile more.”

Akane faked a smile. She wasn’t very convincing.

“I’m sorry, but I just don’t think it’s right,” She explained, slightly pulling away from Ranma.

“I mean, you’ve done so much and now there is the potential it’s all going to end just because the council wants to appease the Vulcan High Command.”

Akane looked down at the deck.

“If it wasn’t for you, they’d all be dead. Not just six of them.”

Ranma sighed. He was not quite sure why Akane was more upset than he was. After all, it was Ranma’s career on the line. It was Ranma’s reputation.

“Akane, I don’t want to spend the next eighteen hours like this. It’s bad enough I have to do it to begin with. But I asked you to come along because you would cheer me up. Right now you’re just making me depressed,” Ranma stated rather bluntly.

Akane looked up at him.

"You're right, Ranma. I'm sorry."

Akane moved over to Ranma and hugged him.

"So," Ranma smiled once they were done hugging. "What are you reading?"

Akane looked down at the PADD she had set on the seat next to her. She picked it up and glanced at it again.

"It's Lieutenant Fuchs' report on how Shampoo is doing."

"And?" Ranma asked.

"She's better. He says three more weeks and she can assume command."

Akane grumbled.

"I can't believe I am looking forward to that."

Ranma laughed.

"Captain Walker isn't THAT bad, is she?"

Akane just looked to Ranma.

"What?" Ranma asked.

"You've been spending way too much time in the gym and not enough time paying attention to what's happening on your ship," she scowled. "I won't even tell you what she has got Commander Hino all fired up about!"

"She wants us to do what?" Lieutenant Commander Kirk Shelton asked Rei, with his eyes bulging.

"She wants to do something with the regular crew, but security doesn't need any help, so she wants us to assist engineering," Rei explained between sips of her coffee.

Commander Shelton took a sip of his own coffee and looked around the NEO Special Operations briefing room.

"I don't know the first thing about engineering," he countered.

"Nope. Neither do I," Rei agreed. "That's why she said we can work on a maintenance team."

Commander Shelton almost dropped his coffee cup on himself.

"She wants us to be janitors?"

Rei nods.

"So, this is why we're having coffee in here, rather than the lounge?"

Rei nods again.

"If we stay up here, we can keep her out," Rei smiled.

Shelton smiled as well. "What about the others?"

Rei shrugged. "I told Chief Yuki and her team that if Walker finds them, they will be sweeping and changing light bulbs. I haven't seen them since then."

"How'd we end up changing light bulbs again?" Sergeant Anthony Schaefer asked.

Chief Warrant Officer Kio Yuki looks down at him from atop the ladder she had set up so that she could change the light bulb on deck nine, section thirteen.

"I told you, I didn't think they'd find us there," she grumbled. "Now give me a damned bulb."

Anthony nods and hands a bulb to Kio.

"Little help please?" a voice murmured.

Anthony looks down at a junction point and sees the legs of Sergeant Michael Simpson sticking out.

"What's wrong, Mike?" Anthony asked.

"I'm stuck."

Kio begins to laugh as Anthony bends over to see how he can dislodge his teammate.

"Yeah, you're wedged in there good," Anthony noted. "Well, in a few days you'll lose enough weight to get out."

Kio laughed some more.

"Nuts to that. Fire in the hole."

"What?" Kio asked, no longer laughing.

Suddenly a very small explosion occurred and a twelve-inch section of wall next to the junction point blows off. A couple of alarm bells sound and Michael slides out the now enlarged junction point.

"What the hell?" Anthony asked.

Within just a moment security officers and marines come running up to the where the explosion occurred.

"What's happening here?" One of the security officers asked.

"Changing light bulbs," Anthony replied.

Kio began to chuckle.

The security people all just looked at each other, sighed and began to wander off in different directions.

“So, what do we do about this?” Michael asked pointing to the hole he just created.

Lieutenant JC Devall walked up with a couple of engineers. They all look down at the hole, and then back to the NSO team.

“What the hell did you people do?” he asked.

“You guys DC today?” Kio asked.

“Yeah,” JC replied.

“We have some damage here that needs to be controlled.”

JC could do nothing but stare at the three as they gathered their light bulbs and continued down the corridor.

Captain’s Log, Stardate 60669.8. It has been a little over two weeks since I assumed command of the U.S.S. Benjamin Sisko. I honestly don’t know how this ship was run before I got here, but it was not very well.

Captain Karyn Walker looked up, cursing her own bad grammar, and then continued.

**The ships former CO, soon to be XO, assuming he survives, left the ship today in route to Earth for his court-martial hearing. He took the CMO, whom I found out is NOT a doctor, with him. Our current XO, soon to be Second Officer is suspended from duty for being a drunk. Our COO, who is the acting XO, seems to be the only one in the command structure that is even partially normal.*

I also found out yesterday why everyone sobs when I have our helmsman do manual steering. I can’t believe in this day of age where computers do so much that he STILL managed to get us lost. Lucky for us a Ferengi trader gave us proper directions back – for fifteen bars of latinum.

I also don’t like the idea of a heavily armed, autonomous group of fighters on the ship, so I have been having the NSO teams work more with the ship’s crew to make sure everyone remembers that they are on the same team.

*Regardless, this is my first command, and I am going to make the best of it. They had originally planned on giving command to the XO – the drunk – but then figured out that they shouldn’t do that. So this ship is mine!**

“End log.” Captain Walker stated.

The computer chirped, informing the busty red head that the log had stopped recording and was saved on the ship’s hard drives.

Karyn smiled. She looked in the mirror that she had placed on the Captain's desk – her desk – in her ready room. Her big blue eyes sparkled. She could not have been happier to have this command.

Karyn was a short woman. Not much taller than Ranma as a girl. In fact, with her blue eyes, red hair, and large breasts, if she had a pigtail, she would be the spitting image of Ranma.

Karyn, however, chose to keep her hair short. While she liked to look pretty, she did not want to look too pretty. She didn't think anyone would take her seriously as a Captain then.

Unfortunately for her, no one was taking her too seriously now.

Most of the ship was still under the impression that once Shampoo returned to duty that she would assume command. They all thought Captain Walker was just a seat warmer.

Not so though.

Starfleet command had decided that until they were sure that Shampoo wasn't going to go running back to the bottle at the first stressful mission that they came too, she would not be placed in command.

Of course, no one had bothered to tell Shampoo of this.

Or anyone else on the ship for that matter.

Karyn stood and walked to the door. She adjusted her uniform slightly and walked out onto the bridge.

Everyone went about their business.

Not proper protocol, Karyn thought.

"Ahem."

Makoto looked up at the sound Karyn made. She noticed the Captain and rolled her eyes.

"Good lord," she mumbled quietly. "CAPTAIN ON THE BRIDGE!" Makoto more forcefully stated, causing multiple crewmembers to jump.

Everyone now turned and acknowledged the Captain.

"As you were," Karyn said in her sweetest voice.

Minako walked over to the security station from her operations station on the other side of the bridge. Once Minako was over in Makoto's cubby hole, she put her hand on Makoto's shoulder.

"So," Minako whispered. "What's your opinion on the new captain?"

Makoto, never looking up from her terminal, whispers back.

"She's been here two weeks and I am already planning a mutiny."

Minako laughed quietly. Makoto looked up at her. Minako stopped laughing.

"Oh my," Minako murmured.

“She reworked my security plans. She wanted ALL the guards on duty roaming. So, at any one time I have a high-risk area that isn’t under guard.” Makoto complained.

Minako smiled and patted her friend on the back.

“Well, at least she’s left me alone,” Minako smiled.

“Commander Aino,” Karyn said, standing and turning to Operations.

“Uh, over here Captain,” Minako said, from Tactical.

“What are you doing over there?”

Makoto eyed Minako.

“Uh, just getting Commander Kino’s input on some sensor readouts,” Minako lied.

“Very good,” Karyn smiled. “If you have a moment, I’d like to discuss the way the operations department is run.”

“Aye,” Minako whimpered.

Makoto patted Minako on the back.

“Mutiny!” Makoto whispered as Minako walks off and behind Karyn into the Captain’s ready room.

CHAPTER ONE – CONSPIRACIES

San Francisco was dark. Not just because it was night, but because only a third of the city remained after the Breen assault during the war.

There were the occasional running lights of a shuttlecraft or other aircraft, but for the most part what light there was emanated from what was once Oakland and San Jose.

Starfleet Command and the Federation Council had already rebuilt their buildings, overlooking the bay. From there you could see the reconstruction efforts on the Golden Gate Bridge; a bridge that had survived over five hundred years of earthquakes ranging from minor to the 10.1 that flattened Los Angeles in 2214, only to be destroyed by a photon torpedo.

India Basin Shoreline Park is where Brett Alexander was waiting. Nothing in this area had been rebuilt yet, so it was one place he could be sure that they would not be disturbed.

As Brett waited, he looked out over the San Francisco Bay. Memories of his daughter flooded back into him. The memories sat and boiled in his stomach, generating more and more anger.

Brett turned quickly as a blue light began to appear behind him. He saw his good friend, Admiral Jack Hanson, fully materialize.

“Jack, thanks for coming,” Brett said as he shook the Admiral’s hand.

“Anytime my friend. What’s wrong?”

Brett paused for a moment.

“Katsy’s dead.”

Admiral Hanson’s stomach dropped.

“My God, Brett. I’m so sorry.”

Jack walked over and put his arm around his friend.

“Jack, I need your help.”

Jack nodded. “Anything you need.”

“Have you ever heard of Fulnahuric Oxide?” Brett asked.

“Yeah. It’s a stimulant that is used to, well simulate an-“

“I’ve read what it simulates,” Brett interrupted. “Katsy overdosed on it.”

“Where did she get it? It’s illegal here.”

“Right. But not so in Anjarian space. She was on Yan where she bought it, got drunk and overdosed on it.”

“And since THEY say it’s okay, they won’t do anything about it. They say it’s safe,” Brett turned away from Jack so that he wouldn’t see the tears that were starting to form in his eyes.

“If it’s so god damned safe, my daughter wouldn’t be dead.”

Jack nodded.

“What do you need from me?”

Brett cleared his throat, wiped his eyes, and turned back to Jack. He pulled a PADD out of his coat pocket and handed it to his old friend.

“Because fulnahuric gas is so rare, there is only one place in the sector that FOX is made. On a planet called Chidori Three. The only thing in the system is a FOX manufacturing plant.

“Chidori is not in Federation space, but it’s not in Anjarian space either.”

Jack nodded.

“You want this plant destroyed.”

“Yeah,” Brett acknowledged. “But it’s a little more complicated than that.

“I’ve already brought this up to the Council and they won’t authorize an assault. That is why I need YOU to do it. No one can know about this. And no one can know of Federation involvement.”

Jack looked at the PADD for a minute.

“Well, that rules out an aerial bombardment because they have planetary defenses that will not only log but destroy a Federation ship. It looks like we will have to send ground forces down in shuttles.”

Brett nodded. “I’ve arranged for you to pick up three Kal class Romulan shuttles from another friend of mine. They’re equipped with cloaking devices.”

Jack shook his head.

“That will be helpful, but the only ship I am in command of with enough security people is the Saint Paul. And even though it has the numbers, they aren’t trained for a land assault.”

“Jack, please,” Brett pleaded. “I don’t know anyone in the LDF, so any request to them would have to go through official channels.”

Jack sighed. He knew this wasn’t a good idea, but he wasn’t going to ignore his friend in a time of need.

“Okay,” Jack finally agreed. “I’ll have the Saint Paul come and pick me up-“

“Us,” Brett interrupted.

“Us?” Jack asked.

“Yes. I need to come too. I need to – I need to see the people who killed my little girl.”

Jack nodded even though he knew THIS was an even worse idea.

"It's going to take them three hours to get here, I will contact you then," Jack told his friend.

Brett nodded and called for transport back to his residence.

Zack Young, head of the Federation Council's committee investigating the actions of the U.S.S. Sisko, stood at the end of a hallway in Starfleet Command.

He stood there, nodding to passing Starfleet officers, waiting.

He had been waiting for over an hour.

"I apologize for my tardiness," a voice called out to him.

Young turned to see a Vulcan in the dress clothes of the Vulcan High Command walking towards him.

"You know, Salek, it's not logical to keep me waiting." Young smirked.

"The high command wanted to discuss our treaty with the Golems, in lengthy detail," Salek replied as the pair began to walk down the hallway.

"I see."

"Have you spoken with her yet?" Salek asked.

"No," Young replied. "I wanted to wait for you. I figured that if she shouted me down, you could put some logic into her head."

Salek nodded.

The two men walked in silence until they reached an office. They looked at the label on the door.

Judge Advocate General – Central Office

Salek nodded to Young, and the pair stepped into the office.

The office was almost entirely empty. The JAG officers got to work a 09:00 to 17:00 day, unlike most Starfleet people. The only ones, who were still in their offices, were ones that were working on cases.

This included Captain Gwen Sanchez.

Young and Salek walked over to her office area. Her doors were closed, but they could see her through the large window that looked out into the lobby area of the JAG office.

<Insert nifty Star Trek doorbell here>

Captain Sanchez looked up from her reading and saw the pair standing outside of her office.

"Come in," she called.

The doors opened and the pair walked in. Young went to the chair across from Gwen and sat down, but Salek chose to stand and look at the massive pile of PADDs and legal books all over the Captain's office.

“Good evening Captain,” Young smiled.

“Good evening, Councilman. What can I do for you?” Gwen stated back, still reading a PADD.

“I understand that you have been assigned as the JAG for Commander Ranma Saotome. Is that correct?”

Gwen looked up for a moment.

“I am acting as the judge for his court-martial, yes.”

Young nodded. “Okay good. Now, Captain, you do understand the importance behind this trial, right?”

Gwen set her PADD down and eyed Young for a moment.

“I understand that if Commander Saotome is found guilty he will be sent to a military prison for five years on each count.”

Young shook his head. “That’s not what I mean.”

“What do you mean then, Councilman?”

Salek walked over and sat down next to Young.

“What he means is that my people would find it very insulting if the man who murdered six of our people were to walk free.”

“Who are you?” Gwen asked.

“My apologies,” Salek answered, giving Captain Sanchez a smile, or at least the closest thing that Vulcans consider a smile. “My name is Salek, and I am a member of the Vulcan High Command.”

“Well,” Gwen stated. “First off, he’s not charged with murder, he’s charged with negligent manslaughter.”

Gwen picked up a different PADD and began to read that.

“And secondly, if the prosecutor proves to me that he is guilty of that, then I will rule accordingly.”

“Captain,” Young continued. “I don’t think you understand at all the seriousness-“

Gwen slammed the PADD on her desk and stood. “NO COUNCILMAN!” she yelled, “I don’t think YOU understand. This is a court of law, not some kangaroo court designed to put a pretty face on the imprisonment of an innocent man.”

Gwen looked at Salek.

“With all due respect, I don’t care who the hell you are. I will rule on the evidence and that is all.”

Gwen sat back down and started to go over her PADD again.

“Now if you don’t mind, I have work to do. Please leave my office.”

Young and Salek stood.

"I hope you know, Captain," Salek explained as they walked out of her office. "There will be more and more problems if this deed goes unpunished."

Gwen simply ignored the Vulcan as her office doors slid shut behind them.

The pair walked out of the lobby and back into the hallway. Outside they ran into a familiar face.

"Well hello Admiral," Young smiled. "What are you doing here?"

Admiral Scott Larson stopped and looked at the pair.

"I work here. What are you doing here?"

Young shrugged.

"We're just making sure that everything is on track for the court-martial."

Young and Salek walked off, leaving the Admiral to ponder what was going on.

"What the hell are those two up to?"

The Centaur class U.S.S. Saint Paul dropped to impulse near Earth's moon. On her bridge, the Saint Paul's captain, Captain Phillip McNamara paced.

McNamara had been told to pick up the Admiral and a Federation Council member. He was also told not to tell anyone what he was doing, and why he was doing it.

McNamara did NOT like secrets. Keeping them or having them kept from him.

"Orbital traffic control is contacting us," the Saint Paul's communications officer stated.

"On speaker," McNamara stated.

The communications officer complied and the speakers on the bridge chirped.

"This is Earth Orbital Traffic Control. Confirm identification please," a faceless man on the other end of the transmission said.

"This is Captain Phillip McNamara of the Federation Starship, the U.S.S. Saint Paul. NCC 20331."

"Roger, you've been cleared by Starfleet Command to take orbit over San Francisco at 3,000 kilometers."

"Thank you. Saint Paul out."

Phillip looked to the helmsman who was already programming the orbit parameters into the computer.

"We're a little early. Let me know when the Admiral contacts us," Phillip ordered as he walked off into his ready room.

"Aye," the communications officer replied.

Admiral Larson was not one to let a question go unanswered. He had spent some time wandering the halls of Starfleet Command pondering the encounter with Councilman Young and Salek.

Millions of thoughts of conspiracies rattled around in his head. It was driving him nuts.

Larson took the turbolift down to the fourth level and walked into the JAG office and over to Captain Sanchez's office.

<Insert nifty Star Trek doorbell here>

Sanchez looked up and groaned. She was getting quite tired of being interrupted. She motioned for Larson to come into her office.

"Good evening, Captain," Larson stated.

Sanchez never looked up from her reading.

"I suppose that you are here to remind me of the importance of this case and to make sure I rule favorably, right?"

Larson raised an eyebrow.

"Excuse me?"

Sanchez looked up at the Admiral.

"Your friends already came in and informed me that this should simply be a trial for formalities and that Commander Saotome was guilty."

"Did they?" Larson grumbled.

Sanchez set down the PADD.

"So, you're not here to tell me how to do my job?"

"Captain, the only thing I have to tell you is that it's offensive that you think those two are my friends."

Sanchez laughed.

"I simply saw them outside your office and wanted to find out what they were up to."

Sanchez stood and walked over to her replicator.

"Would you like some coffee, Admiral?" She asked.

"Please," Larson nodded.

Sanchez ordered a couple of coffees and walked back over to her desk. She handed Larson a cup and kept a cup for herself.

The tall brunette sighed, took a drink of her coffee, and began to speak.

“They were trying to tell me to find Commander Saotome guilty, regardless of the evidence. They explained to me that the Vulcans would find it highly offensive if he were to ‘get away with the murder of six Vulcans’.”

Larson took a sip of his coffee and sighed.

“I figured as much.”

“I told them that I would rule on the evidence and asked them to leave,” Sanchez explained.

Larson nodded. “I doubt that they are finished trying to weave their little conspiracy.”

Larson quickly finished his coffee.

“Who is the prosecutor?”

Sanchez picked up a PADD and glanced at it.

“Lieutenant Commander Aioy Orayyo.”

Larson smiled and stood. “Thank you for the coffee, Captain.”

Sanchez smiled back as the elder man walked to the doors of her office.

“Admiral,” she called.

Larson halted and turned back to Sanchez.

“I *will* rule on the evidence, regardless of how it comes out.”

Larson smiled at her and began to walk out the door.

“That’s all I’d ask of you,” he stated as her doors slid shut.

As soon as Larson was out of the JAG office, he hit his communicator.

“Larson to security.”

“Security, Ensign Vorhes here,” a cute female voice replied.

“Ensign, locate Councilman Young and the Vulcan High Command Officer Salek please,” Larson stated as he began to walk briskly down the hallway.

“They are both at the JAG Prosecutors office. Would you like me to contact them for you?”

“No,” Larson replied, ending the conversation, as he began to run down the hallway.

“So, you do understand how important a guilty verdict is, right Commander?” Young asked the young man sitting across from him.

Orayyo looked up and nodded.

"It's going to be a tough case though. Nothing really shows any negligence," he replied.

"Would you like to see pictures of the dead?" Salek asked.

Orayyo shook his head. "That won't be necessary, sir."

"Good," Young smiled. "Everything and anything must be done to assure a conviction. If Commander Saotome were to walk free, well let's just say it could seriously scar the relationship between the Vulcans and the Federation."

"Last I checked the Vulcans were part of the Federation, Councilman," Larson stated from the doorway.

Young, Salek, and Orayyo all turned to see a very sweaty Admiral Larson standing there with a truly angry look on his face.

"Well, Admiral. We're just seeing you all over the place tonight," Young smiled.

"I know what you are doing, and it's not going to work," Larson growled as he walked into the room, towering over Young.

"Doing? I'm just discussing the case with the people involved," Young said grinning just a little bit less.

"Bullshit Young. You are trying to intimidate the JAG officers to rule in your favor.

"Well, I can tell you something, you won't be intimidating the defense attorney. Would you like to know why COUNCILMAN?" Larson growled.

Young completely lost the smile from his face.

"Why?"

Larson grinned.

"Because I am defending Ranma Saotome."

"You can't do that," Salek stated.

"Yes, I can," Larson replied, turning to the Vulcan. "Starfleet Uniform Code of Justice, section seven, subsection nine. 'An accused can either be assigned a JAG officer of the arbitrating parties' choice, a JAG officer of the accused's choice, or a flag officer of the accused's choice.'"

Larson pointed to the admiral's rank on his collar.

"And I can say with 100 percent certainty that Commander Saotome will NOT turn down my offer."

Salek stood, moved past the Admiral, and walked to the door.

"The court-martial is in 36 hours. I wish you luck in becoming a lawyer by then," Salek nodded to Orayyo and then turned to Young.

"Are you coming?"

Young looked up to Larson, then scurried towards the door and followed Salek out. Larson turned to Orayyo.

“Sir, I’m just doing my job,” Orayyo stated, afraid of the wrath he may be about to receive. He was pleasantly surprised when Larson just grinned and walked towards the door.

“That’s all I ask,” Larson stated as he walked outside.

“Captain, Admiral Hanson and Councilman Alexander are requesting to be beamed aboard,” a voice spoke over McNamara’s communicator.

McNamara lifted his head up and out of his arms. He looked at his computer display.

“09:14,” he stated out loud. “If they were going to wait till morning, I wish they would have told me.”

McNamara stood, wiped some of the sleep drool from the side of his mouth, and checked his hair. He hit his communicator as he adjusted his uniform and walked towards the door.

“Beam them aboard,” he ordered.

The doors to the Captain’s ready room slid open and McNamara walked out. He looked around at the day shift bridge crew. The XO, Commander Sarah Earl looked at her captain.

“Did you sleep in there?” she asked.

McNamara simply nodded as he took his seat.

“I was under the impression they were coming on board as soon as we got here.”

Sarah nodded. “If you want to go take a nap or something...”

McNamara shook his head. “I want to find out what this is about.”

The operations officer looked at his panel and then turned to the CONN.

“They are on board.”

McNamara nodded. “Have them come to the bridge please.”

“Yes sir,” Ops replied.

Sarah looked at McNamara. “What do you think they are up to?”

The older man sighed and looked at the viewscreen. The view of Earth was spectacular. He always loved coming back here.

The Saint Paul was part of the 22nd Expletory Fleet. Her primary job was the most important to the Federation. So important that it was in Starfleet’s mission statement.

‘To seek out new life and new civilizations; to boldly go where no man has gone before.’

That is what the Saint Paul did. She flew around in uncharted space looking for new civilizations to contact.

McNamara did not want to take anything away from the more military ships in Starfleet as they had a purpose, but Starfleet had always been about exploring. Not fighting. McNamara was a true explorer.

Being this close to home was nice, but he did not want to have to stay long.

"Phil?" Sarah asked.

"I'm sorry," McNamara smiled at his junior officer. "I haven't a clue, but I doubt it's anything good."

Sarah nodded as the turbolift doors on the rear of the bridge opened. Both Sarah and McNamara turned to see Admiral Hanson and Brett walk onto the bridge.

"Admiral," McNamara smiled.

"Good morning, Captain," The Admiral replied as he walked with Brett towards McNamara's ready room.

"Can we speak in here?"

McNamara nodded. He motioned for Sarah to follow him.

"Just you, Captain," Hanson stated.

"Sir, she's my executive officer," McNamara protested.

Hanson just sighed and motioned for the two to follow him into the ready room.

Once inside, Hanson took a seat behind McNamara's desk. Both the captain and his XO sat down on the couch on one side of the room as Alexander seated himself on the corner of McNamara's desk.

"The only people who are to know of the details of this mission are the four of us and certain security personal. Is that understood?" Hanson instructed.

"Yes sir," Both Sarah and McNamara stated in unison.

"We are going on a covert operation to destroy a facility that produces the drug FOX. We will approach the system and then send covert shuttles down with ground forces. Once the forces have gotten inside the facility, they will activate target enhancers which will allow this ship to execute an aerial bombardment from outside of their sensor range.

"This is a classified mission and the only people with operational knowledge will be those directly involved."

Hanson looked to Brett who began to talk.

"We will be stopping by a Ferengi trading post where we will pick up three Kel class shuttles that have the ability to cloak," Brett handed McNamara a PADD with the location of the trading post.

"Are there any questions?" Hanson asked.

"Yeah," McNamara nodded as he handed the PADD to Sarah. "Where will we be picking up the ground forces from?"

"The ground forces will be comprised of the Saint Paul's security detail," Hanson stated.

"What?" Sarah asked. Hanson turned to her but was interrupted by McNamara before he had a chance to say anything.

"Sir, we don't have a marine complement. Our security people are all defensive personal with straight ship-board training."

Hanson stood and walked over to McNamara.

"They will have to work. This ship will have to work. If you have a problem with it, I will happily take command of this ship," Hanson stated very softly.

McNamara resisted the urge to speak his mind some more.

"Aye."

Hanson stood and walked over to McNamara's desk, once again seating himself in the Captain's chair. He hit his communicator.

"Admiral Hanson to Commander Montasori."

"Go ahead, sir," The voice on the other end replied.

"Can you please come into the Captain's ready room."

"Aye, sir."

Hanson looked to McNamara.

"We leave immediately."

McNamara stood. "Yes sir," he stated as he walked out the door. Sarah quickly stood and followed the Captain out as a young Japanese man walked into the room.

"You wanted to speak with me, Admiral?"

<Nifty Star Trek computer chirping noise here>

Ranma snored softly as he pulled himself closer to Akane. Akane, who was also snoring softly twitched a little as the computer chirped once again.

<Nifty Star Trek computer chirping noise here>

Akane opened one eye.

<Nifty Star Trek computer chirping noise here>

She opened the other and began to nudge Ranma.

“Ranma, the computer is beeping.”

“Muh fa moma buh...” He mumbled.

<Nifty Star Trek computer chirping noise here>

Akane began to sit up. Her movement shook Ranma completely to consciousness.

<Nifty Star Trek computer chirping noise here>

“Ugh,” he groaned. Ranma slid out of the bed and looked out the front window.

Through the window, he could see Earth approaching slowly.

“OH SHIT!” he yelled. Ranma ran to the front of the ship as Akane looked to a chronometer on the rear wall of the sleeping quarters.

“Oh, 09:55,” she chuckled. “We sure did sleep for a long time.”

Ranma grinned. He hit the control panel and the chirping noise stopped.

“This is the U.S.S. Satii, Runabout Class, assigned to the U.S.S. Benjamin Sisko,” Ranma stated.

“Good morning, Satii. This is Orbital Traffic Control. Please state your destination.”

“San Francisco, Starfleet Headquarters,” Ranma replied.

“Roger.” The voice stated. “Please switch to visual communication mode.”

Ranma looked at Akane, and then down at himself. The pair was both naked as the day God made them.

“Um, any reason why?” Ranma asked.

“New security procedures,” The voice replied. “Please switch to visual communication mode.”

“AKANE!” Ranma screamed. Akane, who was already trying to put her own clothes on, tossed Ranma his uniform jacket.

“What about my pants?” Ranma asked.

“They can’t see that!” Akane stated as she fell over, tripping over her own pants. She eventually gives up and simply crawls into the bed and hides under the covers.

Ranma quickly puts on the jacket, zips it up, and switches mode. On the other end, the young traffic controller looks at him oddly.

“What was with the delay?”

Ranma chuckled nervously. “What delay?”

The traffic controller raised an eyebrow.

“Anyone else on board with you?”

Ranma nodded. “Just my wife, but she’s still sleeping.”

The traffic controller tilts his head to the right, trying to see around Ranma. Ranma also tilts in that direction.

“Okay, well sir,” the traffic controller states, turning his attention to his computers. “You are clear for approach and landing in San Francisco.”

“Thank you!” Ranma smiled, ending the conversation. He stood and walked back to where Akane was.

She poked her head from underneath the blanket. “You’re kinda sexy dressed like that.”

Ranma grinned. “I always knew you were a sucker for a guy in half a uniform.”

Ranma pounced on top of his wife and began to kiss her passionately.

<Nifty Star Trek computer chirping noise here>

“WHAT THE HELL?” Ranma grumbled as he stood and walked back to the communications console.

“Saotome here.”

On the viewer, Admiral Larson appeared.

“Good morning, Ranma.”

“Good morning, Admiral,” Ranma grinned. “What can I do for you?”

The Admiral looked at Ranma for a moment before speaking.

“Ahem... Well... Uh... The first thing you can do for me is put on some pants.”

Ranma looked down and realized he was standing. He quickly shut off the visual display and grabbed his boxers and uniform pants. He looked to Akane who was finishing dressing herself and giggling.

“I’m glad you find this humorous,” Ranma grumbled.

Akane just smiled as Ranma walked back over to the console and reengaged the communication.

“I’m sorry, Admiral. I just woke up,” Ranma explained.

“Well, no reason to say sorry.” The Admiral uncomfortably stated. “Anyway, I need to meet you as soon as you get here.”

“Well, we should be landing within the hour,” Ranma said.

“Good. Please come to my office as soon as you do.”

“Yes sir,” Ranma stated.

The communication ended.

"I wonder what that was all about," Akane pondered as she walked up to the front of the Runabout and sat down in the co-pilot's seat.

"I don't know," Ranma stated as he began to pilot the shuttle into the Earth's atmosphere. "But I am more than certain that showing a flag officer my manhood didn't help matters any."

Akane just laughed out loud as Ranma blushed as red as the shields as they dove towards the planet's surface.

Gosnell looked up at the clock on the wall above the entrance to the Sisko Lounge.

05:59:58

05:59:59

06:00:00

Gosnell smiled and flipped on all the lights. He then stood behind the bar and waited for the normal stream of breakfast eaters to begin wandering in.

The doors remained shut.

Gosnell scratched his head.

"Where is everyone?"

Usually, there were at least twenty or so people who came in as soon as the lounge opened. However, over the last few weeks, the numbers had been dwindling.

He wasn't quite sure why though. He was sure it wasn't anything he did. Even though the Captain had cut his staff down to three, he still managed to give everyone rather good service.

Gosnell whimpered slightly as he poured himself a drink.

06:47:11

The doors finally slid open, and Makoto walked in.

"Oh, thank heavens," Gosnell cried.

"What?" Makoto asked.

Gosnell pointed to the lounge area. "You're my first customer!"

Makoto groaned and had a seat at the bar.

"That's because the Captain has all first shift people doing mandatory exercises from 06:00 – 07:00. By the time they are done, usually everyone has to go on shift."

Gosnell scratched his goatee. "I guess I am going to have to start opening earlier."

Makoto shrugged.

Gosnell quickly filled up her glass with her morning Mountain Dew.

"So, how are you here, then?" he asked.

"There was a security alarm in the armory that I had to check on. After I was done, I came here."

Makoto rolled up her sleeve and showed Gosnell her muscle.

"I don't need any damned jumping jacks."

Gosnell smiled. "Yeah, I know how physically fit you are."

Makoto grinned and leaned over to give her husband a kiss. As she did that the doors hissed open, and Usagi came in.

"Hi lovers!" she giggled.

Makoto finished her kiss and grinned at Usagi.

"How'd you get out of exercises?" Makoto asked.

"Well, after I tripped on my hair and knocked over about seven engineers, they asked me if I'd leave and wouldn't come back. So, I didn't!" She smiled.

Gosnell grinned. "Would you like your usual?"

"Please!" Usagi bubbled back.

Gosnell nodded and went to fix Usagi's daily bowl of Lucky Charms.

"So, Gosnell," Usagi called out to him. "How come you don't wear your Starfleet uniform anymore?"

Gosnell continued to fix her breakfast. "The Captain said only Starfleet officers get the privilege of wearing that uniform. So, she took it away from me and makes me wear these civilian clothes." He stated as he placed the cereal bowl in front of the blonde engineer.

"Too bad," Usagi giggled as she started to eat. "You looked really cute in it!"

Gosnell blushed as he went back to work while other people began strolling into the lounge.

<Insert nifty Star Trek doorbell here>

Admiral Larson looked up from his paperwork and saw Ranma and Akane standing outside of his office door.

"Come in, Ranma," he called.

Ranma and Akane walked inside of the Admiral's office and sat down at Larson's desk. Larson smiled at Akane.

“Good morning Commander.”

Akane smiled back. “Good morning Admiral.”

“I trust the two of you had a pleasant flight. I apologize for making you have to take a Runabout, but I was unable to get another ship to cover the Sisko’s patrol area.”

Ranma smiled. “It’s okay. It was kind of nice to spend the time alone together. We haven’t gotten to do that much lately.”

Akane grinned.

Larson coughed, remembering the state of dress that Ranma had answered his hail in.

Noticing the Admiral’s uncomfortableness, Ranma quickly cleared his throat.

“You wanted to talk to me about something, sir?”

“Ah, yes,” Larson stated. “I would like you to allow me to be your defense counsel.”

Ranma pondered this for a moment.

“I’d be honored, sir. But won’t this be considered a conflict of interest?”

“I might have been if you were still Captain,” Larson explained. “But I have checked the regulations six or seven times and every way I look at it, I can act as your lawyer,” Larson explained. “I have also gotten the okay from the JAG.”

Larson stood and walked to his wall. He pointed to a paper hanging in a wooden frame.

“If you are worried about my credentials, I did graduate from Starfleet’s top law school.”

Ranma shook his head. “Your experience alone would be enough for me to accept your offer, but I will be honest in saying I am confused why you’re offering.”

Larson quickly walked to his wall and hit a button that tinted the windows and sealed his door.

“Councilman Young and Salek have been going around trying to intimidate the JAG officers into convicting you regardless of the evidence.

“I figure that as long as I am defending you, at least your defense attorney won’t be intimidated,” Larson stated.

“WHY?” Akane yipped. “What the hell does everyone have against Ranma?”

“The Vulcans are not pleased. Not necessarily with Commander Saotome, but at the events that unfolded,” Larson explained.

“I’d be ‘displeased’ too,” Ranma said. “Six people dead.”

Larson shook his head. “I’m not talking about that.”

The look of confusion on Ranma’s face was only matched by that on Akane’s.

“Vor’Gal was a former High Command officer. He was a Vulcan priest.” Larson stated as he handed a PADD to Ranma.

“None of this information is publicly available. I had to dig for it.”

Ranma perused the PADD for a moment.

“What does that have to do with me?”

Larson sat back down in his chair.

“The Vulcans may be on the verge of a civil war. There are three primary factions now. The faction, which includes the military, that wants to keep the status quo. A faction who wants the Vulcans to secede from the Federation which includes some members of the high command, and a group that wants the Vulcan’s to stop repressing their emotions. Vor’Gal is part of both latter factions.

“As far as I can tell, Salek and a number of other high ranking Vulcan officials are afraid that if it becomes public knowledge that a terrorist group managed to get THAT close to Vulcan the populace will agree with the military that Vulcan needs the Federation to assist in its security.

“They also feel that if they show that an emotional human launched a torpedo at a small village, they will prove emotions are bad and gain public support for a military strike on the third faction.”

Larson took a sip of some coffee and continued.

“The majority of the population of Vulcan thinks the Federation is good for Vulcan. But a rogue Federation officer firing on a defenseless village might change that.”

Akane shook her head. “It’s a conspiracy right out of some bad piece of fiction.”

Ranma and Larson both nodded in agreement.

“So, if I am found not guilty, what happens?” Ranma asked.

“Presumably, Salek and his cronies will come up with some other story,” Larson explained.

“So, the truth will never come out about Vor’Gal?” Akane asked.

“Allowing the truth out, to steal a Vulcan phrase, wouldn’t be logical. No matter what happens one of the factions opposing the high command will gain support. The best they can hope for then is to come up with some story and keep the status quo.”

Ranma rubbed his temples as the complicated story made his brain hurt. He could not imagine how he became the centerpiece in some Vulcan power struggle.

Ranma looked up at the Admiral. “Do you think we can win?”

Larson nodded.

“You don’t think I’m guilty, do you?” Ranma asked.

Larson leaned forward in his chair. “Ranma, I think you made mistakes. Profoundly serious mistakes. Mistakes that could have cost the lives of your entire crew.”

Larson leaned back and continued.

"I however don't think that firing that torpedo was one of them. You did what you had to do.

"When you put on that uniform you take on tremendous responsibility. That responsibility sometimes means you have to decide who lives and who dies."

Ranma wasn't sure if he was particularly comforted by that statement. Larson could see this.

"If I didn't think you were innocent, I wouldn't be defending you."

Ranma nodded.

"The court-martial starts tomorrow morning at 08:00. Try and enjoy your day today because tomorrow is going to be long and hard," Larson ordered.

"Yes sir," Ranma said as he and Akane stood up. Ranma shook the Admiral's hand and headed towards the door.

"Oh, and Commander?"

Both Ranma and Akane turned back to Larson.

"You need to believe you're innocent as well for this to work."

Ranma nodded and he and his wife left Larson's office.

07:24:17

Gosnell smiled. There were several people in the lounge now. More than he had expected.

He was quite puzzled though that a lot of the senior staff was in the lounge. Captain Walker was not one to allow the bridge crew to go and have a break, especially at the beginning of their shift.

Makoto eyed her husband. She could see that his little brain was moving at a mile a minute.

"What are you thinking?" she asked him.

Gosnell looked to her.

"What are you doing here? You left for work and then came back. What's the dilly-o?"

"Dilly-o?" Makoto asked.

Shampoo walked up and sat down next to Makoto. "Nihao!"

Gosnell smiled at her. "Good morning Commander. Long time no see."

Shampoo nodded. "Iced tea, please."

"Coming right up."

Gosnell walked off to prepare her drink. Makoto looked to Shampoo. While the pair worked well together Makoto felt apprehension in talking to Shampoo off duty.

She could still remember what she had done to Shampoo aboard the pirate ship.

And she was sure that Shampoo could remember it as well.

“How are you doing, Commander?” Makoto finally asked.

Shampoo turned to Makoto and smiled.

“Doing well, thank you. How is you?”

Makoto smiled back. “I’m good.”

Shampoo continued to smile as Gosnell brought her drink back.

“Thank you!” Shampoo beamed.

Shampoo began to walk away, but Makoto quickly grabbed her arm.

“Commander.”

Shampoo turned and looked to Makoto.

“Uh-“ Makoto stammered.

“Yes?” Shampoo asked.

“I – I was just wondering when you were coming back to work.”

Shampoo thought about this for a moment.

“Next week, Shampoo thinks,” she scowled for a moment. “Shampoo have to wait for Akane to get back.”

“Oh, okay,” Makoto smiled.

“Bye bye!” Shampoo chirped as she walked to a table and had a seat with Lieutenant Amanda Janson, one of the Sisko’s tactical officers.

Makoto turned around and sighed.

“What’s wrong?” Gosnell asked her.

Makoto sighed again and turned so she could see Shampoo.

“I want to apologize to her. But I just can’t. I feel as if I’m responsible for what she’s gone through.”

“You didn’t do that to her.”

Makoto turned back towards Gosnell.

“I’m sure what I did didn’t help matters any.”

Gosnell patted Makoto on the head. She chuckled.

“I’m not a puppy.”

Gosnell grinned, and then remembered what he was asking before Shampoo showed up.

“Why are you here again?”

Makoto groaned. “The Captain decided today she wants everyone on rotating shifts. So now today I must work 15:00 – 23:00, then tomorrow 23:00 – 07:00.”

“I see,” Gosnell groaned. He didn’t care for that much. He enjoyed spending as much time with Makoto as possible and her new shift was going to make that a little difficult.

“Something else I noticed,” Gosnell said as he pointed to a table.

At the table Ryouga sat there, drinking away.

“So?” Makoto asked.

Gosnell then pointed to another table.

At this table, Minako was sitting there with Usagi and Rei.

“So?” Makoto once again questioned.

“Do you not notice that they aren’t sitting together?” Gosnell asked, shifting his points between Minako and Ryouga.

“Maybe they’re just –” Makoto slapped both of Gosnell’s hands. “Quit pointing you dolt.”

Gosnell quickly retracted his arms before his hands could get slapped again.

“Maybe Minako just wanted to hang out with Rei and Usagi?”

Gosnell shook off that suggestion.

“No, because they used to sit together and invite Rei and Usagi to join them.”

Gosnell’s aura began to glow around him.

“There’s trouble brewing, and I am going to find out what it is and fix it.”

Gosnell began to laugh maniacally. Only Makoto walloping him with a menu got him to stop.

“How are you going to find out what’s wrong?” Makoto asked.

Gosnell just grinned at her.

“WHAT?” She shrieked. “Don’t bring me into this!”

“She’s your friend,” Gosnell retorted.

“Yeah, but it’s not my business.”

Gosnell began to whimper. "I see. You don't care about your friend's happiness. Oh well. Let her be miserable. Let her die alone curled up in a ball crying over what was and what could have been. Let her throw herself out an airlock-"

"OKAY! OKAY!" Makoto grumbled.

Makoto watched Minako stand and walk towards the bathroom.

"Go now!" Gosnell ordered. "Isn't that where all you women chat about men?"

Makoto just looked at him for a moment and began to follow Minako into the ladies room.

Gosnell grinned.

"Some people call me the space cowboy, yeah; some call me the gangster of love; some people call me Maurice; 'cause I speak of the pompitous of love..."

Gosnell's singing was stopped as a glass came flying in his direction.

"SHUT UP!" Makoto yelled from across the room.

CHAPTER TWO – MISTAKES

A single tear rolled down Akane's face and dropped onto the bed. Ranma had gotten up early to have breakfast with his father, so Akane was alone for the first time since they took this trip.

It was the first time she had been able to cry.

The tears began to flow more freely the more Akane's mind went over what exactly was happening.

She knew this wasn't going to be a good idea. She knew it from the very start. Even when they were still fighting, she knew that being on the same ship as him would be nothing but disaster.

She tried to talk to her father. She tried to get him to convince Genma that it would not work, and they should stop trying to make it work.

****Flashback – Stardate 59902.1 – California V; Federation Embassy****

"Dad, this is a mistake. A total mistake," Akane complained.

Soun sighed, took a sip of his tea, and leaned closer to Akane.

"You know that this is for your own good. You two need to stay together to form a healthy, loving relationship," he explained.

"Why don't you let me decide what's for my own good?" Akane protested.

"Do you not love Ranma?"

"WHAT?" Akane screamed, defensive as the first day she had met Ranma. "Of course not! He's rude, he's a jerk, and he's a womanizer. He's-"

"He's saved you more times than I can count," Soun interrupted. "He's come to your defense in many situations. Even though he won't say it, you and I can both see that he loves you."

Akane groaned. She knew it. She knew that she loved him.

"It's still a bad idea," Akane stated.

"Please, Akane. Give it a year. If things don't improve – if nothing changes – I will have you transferred here to take command of the embassy's security."

Akane sat there and looked at her father. She didn't know if she wanted to be stuck on a planet playing rent-a-cop, but anything would be better than being stuck on a starship where she was miserable.

"Six months," She countered.

Soun sighed and admitted defeat.

"Fine, six months."

Soun reached out and took his youngest daughter's hand.

"I really hope you understand that just because something is a mistake, it isn't necessarily wrong."

Akane held her father's hand back and nodded.

It had been six months. She could get off the Sisko if she wanted. She could get out of this. But she knew that this would not stop her from hurting. She knew that would not take the guilt away. The guilt she felt for this all being her fault.

**"All because of you," he stated as a tear came streaming down his face.*

"Me?" Akane asked.

*"I love you so much, Akane. All that matters to me is that you are safe. That I protect you from anything that might hurt you, physically and emotionally."**

The memory from that conversation stuck in her head. Ranma did everything he did because of her. If she hadn't been there, he wouldn't have hesitated in destroying the cargo ship. He would have stopped the threat long before it got to Vulcan. No torpedoes would have hit the ground. No innocent Vulcans would have been killed and there would be no court-martial.

Akane cried out loud as she continued to think.

Did she love him enough to leave? If she were gone, he could concentrate on his career. His job. His life.

He could do what needed to be done without her being in the way.

She always felt that she was in the way. He had told her on many occasions that he could do things better if he didn't have to keep protecting her.

But would leaving right now hurt him more? Ranma said he was happy that she came with him. He was happy to have someone who supported him. Someone who cared for him.

This would be the most important day in his life. She could not just abandon him – especially since this was all her fault.

Akane continued to cry. She did not know what to do. Leaving seemed like a mistake. Staying seemed like a mistake. No matter what, everything was a mistake.

"Just because something is a mistake, that doesn't make it wrong."

So, what was right? Neither option seemed right. How the hell do you choose between two options when they are both the wrong option?

Akane heard the door to their guest quarters slide open. She looked up at the clock and saw it read 06:39.

Akane sat up and quickly dried her face. She rushed into the bathroom before Ranma came in.

“Akane?” He called.

“I – I’m in here,” She responded, her voice still breaking a little bit.

Ranma noticed it.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes,” Akane lied. “How was breakfast with your father?”

Ranma groaned. “He stole my omelet.”

Akane forced a chuckle. “Nice to know some things don’t change.”

Ranma raised an eyebrow. He wasn’t quite sure what she meant by that, but he could tell that something wasn’t right.

However, trying to get Akane’s true feelings out was like trying to get fish sausage from a pit of hungry cats. Dangerous, and even if you succeeded, you’d probably have mental issues afterward.

Ranma sighed and began to change into his formal clothes as he heard the shower in the bathroom activate.

“Captain, we’re approaching the first coordinates you specified.” The helmsman of the U.S.S. Saint Paul stated.

“Slow to impulse,” McNamara ordered.

The Saint Paul dropped to a crawl as it approached a dreary-looking space station. Behind the station was a field of debris and ships. It looked more like a landfill than it did a trading post.

“We’re being hailed,” the communications officer informed the captain.

“On screen,” Brett stated, standing from his seat.

The communications officer looked to McNamara who simply nodded a frustrated nod.

On the screen, an old Ferengi appeared. He seemed to be more interested in something that he was reading than he was in the Saint Paul.

“State your business,” he grumbled without looking up.

“Vark. It’s Brett.”

The old Ferengi, Vark, looked up and grinned a toothy grin at Brett.

“Councilman,” Vark stated. “What a pleasure it is to see you.”

Brett nodded. “You have what I ordered, correct?”

Vark chuckled. "Of course! It is bad business not to deliver. However, it took a little more trouble than expected to obtain the cloaking devices for them. Therefore, I am afraid I am going to have to double the price."

Brett grinned.

"How about I pay the agreed-upon price and we don't blow your station to bits."

McNamara looked at Sarah. He then looked to the Admiral.

"You wouldn't blow my station up," Vark grumbled. "I'm outside of Federation space. You don't have the authority."

"You're selling unauthorized cloaking technology. I do have the authority."

Vark grumbled some more. "But you're BUYING unauthorized cloaking technology."

Brett grinned. "Fifteen hundred bars, and not a slip more."

Vark grinned back. It wasn't double, but it was more than he expected to get out of the Federation.

"Deal. Transfer the latinum and I will give you the coordinates."

Brett typed some information into a PADD. Vark looked at his own PADD and smiled. "Transmitting information now."

The communications panel chirped.

"Coordinates received," Comm stated.

"Beam the ships into shuttle bays one and two," Hanson ordered.

Comm once again looked to McNamara who once again nodded acceptance of the order in a very frustrated manner.

"Pleasure doing business with you," Brett informed the Ferengi.

"Likewise," The Ferengi nodded before ending the communication.

The communications officer looked up and to McNamara.

"Three Kel class shuttlecraft are on board, sir."

"Good," McNamara stated, standing. "Helm set course for the second set of--"

"Destroy the station," Brett ordered, interrupting McNamara.

"Excuse me?" McNamara stated.

The young Japanese man from earlier looked up from his position at tactical. He eyed the exchange between McNamara and Brett.

"We can't leave any trail behind. Destroy the station."

"I'm not going to kill an innocent man--"

“Innocent man?” Hanson interjected, standing. “Do you think we’re the only people he’s sold illegal goods to? He’s an arms dealer and therefore a threat to the Federation.”

Hanson looked to tactical.

“Commander Montasori, destroy the station.”

Hideki Montasori, the tactical officer and chief of security, looked to McNamara.

“I gave the order, Commander,” Hanson growled.

McNamara just threw his arms up in frustration and sat down in his chair.

“Captain?” Hideki asked.

“I won’t order it,” McNamara defiantly stated.

“Destroy the station,” Hanson ordered again.

Hideki sighed, targeted the unarmed station, and fired all the ship’s phaser banks. The station is obliterated.

Hanson looked to McNamara.

“Captain?”

McNamara scowled. “Resume course.”

The Saint Paul made a slight left turn and warped off through the debris of the Ferengi station.

Makoto walked into the washroom that sat on the starboard side of the Sisko’s lounge. She saw Minako washing her hands and another female officer walk out past her.

Makoto smiled and walked up to her friend.

“Hey.”

Minako smiled as she began to untie the red bow in her hair.

“Hey.”

Minako allowed her hair to flow freely and set the bow on the table next to the sink. She then grabbed a brush and began to brush it.

“So, what’s up?” Makoto asked her.

“Not much,” Minako answered. “I’ve been swimming more and the chemicals in the water is causing my hair to tangle.”

Makoto nodded, “Yeah, they’ll do that.”

Minako continued to brush her hair for a moment, but then stopped when she saw that Makoto was watching her.

“What are you doing?” Minako asked.

“Who me?” Makoto responded.

“Yeah, you. Why are you staring at me?”

“Oh, no reason,” Makoto stated, rather uncomfortably. “Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?”

Minako looked at her friend.

“Sure.”

Makoto twiddled her thumbs together for a moment and asked, “What’s with you and Ryouga?”

Minako turned back to the mirror and resumed brushing her hair.

“What do you mean?”

“Well,” Makoto murmured. “You guys don’t sit together anymore, and he doesn’t seem to follow you around like a puppy like he used to.”

Makoto cleared her throat. “Did something happen?”

Minako set the brush down and sighed. She turned to Makoto.

“He told me that he loved me.”

Makoto gasped.

“WOW!”

Minako shook her head.

“Oh?” Makoto asked.

“Yeah, I don’t think I was ready for that,” Minako sighed. “We were having a lot of fun just dating.”

“What did you say when he said that?”

Minako sighed again. “That’s sweet’.”

Makoto’s eyes bulged. “Oh my. And he didn’t react well to that?”

Minako shook her head. “I think I might have misled him up to this part. We spent so much time together and did a lot together. But really that’s how I wanted to keep it, and I guess he didn’t.”

Minako grabbed her bow and began to tie it back into her hair.

“So anyway, we haven’t spoken at all outside of work since then.”

“I see,” Makoto replied. “Do you want to get back together with him?”

Minako looked to her friend again. “Maybe. I just think that it would be awkward now. It would be a mistake to get back together at this point.”

Makoto smiled. "Just because it's a mistake doesn't make it wrong."

Minako sighed, patted Makoto on the shoulder, and walked out of the washroom.

Makoto sighed. "How do I fix this?"

A toilet flushed and out of one of the stalls comes Captain Walker.

Makoto shrieked.

"Calm down, Commander," Karyn smiled and said as she washed up.

"Sorry, Captain. I just didn't realize you were... in... here."

Karyn dried her hands off and smiled.

"I think you need to chat with this Ryouga chap and get his side of the story. He might be moving a bit too fast for Commander Aino, but I bet if you show him the long-term prospects, he will be able to slow it down, keep his confessions in check and everything will work out!"

Makoto was shocked. So shocked that it took her a couple of moments to reply.

"You don't have a problem with relationships between officers?"

Karyn eyed Makoto for a moment.

"As long as it doesn't interfere with work. There are no Starfleet regulations against officers dating. A lot of people meet their future spouses at work. I met my fiancé on a starbase."

She paused for a moment, a bit of concern crossing her face. "This Ryouga isn't one of the enlisted crewmen, is he?"

Makoto shook her head. "He's the helmsman. The one with the overbite and the bandanna."

"Ooooo!" Karyn giggled. "He's cute! Yeah, you should help get those two back together. They would have adorable children. Directionally challenged, but adorable."

Karyn smiled and walked out of the washroom.

Makoto simply stood there for a moment.

"She must have been drunk."

Makoto checked her watch.

07:59:22

"Uh oh," she stated as she ran out of the washroom.

"ALL RISE!" a courtroom security officer called out.

Around the courtroom, everyone quickly stood up in the time-honored tradition of respect to the court and what it stands for. Ranma and Larson, seated at the defense table in Starfleet UMCJ Courtroom 6, and Lt. Commander Orayyo, seated at the prosecution table.

In the audience were several high-ranking Starfleet officers. There were a couple of Vulcans, including High Commander Sannik with the Vulcan military. Ranma's father was also in the audience, seated next to Akane.

Salek and Young had positioned themselves directly behind the prosecution table. Both turned to give Larson and Ranma a look as they stood.

Also in the courtroom were security officers and court officials.

Captain Sanchez walked into the room. She was carrying some files and papers (well, PADDs as paper was a relic of the past at this point). As she walked up to her seat on the bench, she looked around the courtroom. She made a point to note who was in there. Some people she knew, others she did not. Some she knew why they had an interest in this case, some she did not.

Gwen took her seat and began to speak.

"This court-martial is called to order," she stated as everyone in the courtroom retook their seats.

Young leaned forward and whispered something into the ear of Orayyo. The young prosecutor nodded and stood.

"Your honor, would you entertain a motion?" he asked.

Gwen turned in his direction. "Yes?"

Orayyo cleared his throat. "I'd like to request, uh, at the discretion of the prosecution, that the records of these proceedings are sealed."

Gwen raised an eyebrow and gave a look to Young and Salek. She then turned to Larson.

"Does the defense have any objection to this?"

"Yes ma'am, we certainly do," Larson responded as he stood. "Either the record is to be sealed or unsealed. It would be improper for the 'prosecution' to be deciding what is to become public and what isn't."

Gwen nodded. "I agree with that." She turns to Orayyo. "What's it to be Commander? Sealed or open?"

Orayyo leaned back as Young leaned in. After a moment he turned to Gwen.

"Sealed," Orayyo stated.

Gwen sighed, frustrated that the prosecution was not making his own decisions, and turned to Larson.

"No objection," Larson stated rather reluctantly.

“Very well,” Gwen said. “The results of this proceeding are hereby sealed. No one is to discuss this with anyone out of this room.”

Gwen clapped her gavel.

Ranma leaned over to Larson. “Is that what we wanted?”

Larson shook his head. “No, but at least now while the truth won’t be told, neither will a lie.”

Ranma nodded as Gwen turned to Orayyo.

“Okay, if we have no further motions, you may begin Commander.”

Orayyo stood and nodded. He walked up to between the bench and the defense table.

“Captain, I intend to prove that Commander Ranma Saotome, then Captain and commanding officer of the U.S.S. Benjamin Sisko, did willfully and negligently, order the firing a photon torpedo within the atmosphere of the planet Vulcan. The direct result of this negligent act was the death of six innocent Vulcan citizens.”

Orayyo looked at Ranma before heading back to his seat. Larson stood and walked towards the bench.

“Captain, I aim to prove that Commander Saotome acted with good faith and with due diligence by following an enemy ship into the Vulcan atmosphere, and he followed all standard operating procedure and guidelines outlined in Starfleet rules of engagement when firing on a hostile ship, and the torpedo strike resulted from no negligence, malice, or anything other than an unfortunate circumstance.”

Larson sat down. Gwen looked to Orayyo.

“Commander, you may call your first witness.”

Orayyo smiled. “Thank you, Captain.”

A security officer bailiff activated a large view screen. It showed the UFP logo on it.

“Due to her duties my first witness is unavailable to join us in person, so I will be questioning her via subspace,” Orayyo stated. “I request that the court treat her as a hostile witness, due to her work with, and loyalty to the defendant.”

Gwen simply nodded as Orayyo walked up to the monitor.

“Where is she?” he pondered.

The screen chirped to life and Makoto appeared on it.

“I apologize for my tardiness,” Makoto panted.

Orayyo nodded. “Captain, I call as my first witness, Commander Makoto Kino-Gosnell.”

The bailiff walked up to the screen. “Raise your right hand please,” he instructed. Makoto complied. “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?”

“I do,” Makoto answered with a nod.

The bailiff returned to his post. Orayyo smiled at Makoto.

“Commander, can you tell us about the events that led up to the firing of the torpedo within the Vulcan atmosphere?”

Makoto thought back. “Well, we were pursuing the terrorist ship. It was attempting to crash into the planet, and based on the amount of explosives on board, would have caused massive devastation.

“It went into the atmosphere and we pursued. While we understood that destroying the ship within the atmosphere would have caused some problems, weighing that against what would happen if it would make impact with the planet we decided to act.”

Makoto cleared her throat and continued.

“There was a lot of interference with our sensors, so I was unable to get a target lock-“

“Yeah, about that,” Orayyo interrupted. “Did you relay that information to Commander Saotome? Did you tell him that you couldn’t get a lock?”

“Yes, of course,” Makoto replied. “But based on the pitch of the ship, I determined that within 10,000 meters if I fired that torpedo would not skew off course enough to miss the ship.”

“But it did,” Orayyo noted.

“Yes. The high-level turbulence within the atmosphere knocked the torpedo farther off course than I predicted.”

Orayyo walked over towards Ranma.

“Was there any indication of this turbulence?”

Makoto frowned. “I am sure operations had readings of this, and the ship was shaking very badly, but-“

“But Commander Saotome ordered you to fire anyway?” Orayyo asked, looking right at Ranma.

“We had no choice!” Makoto protested. “Besides, I am the one who said I could hit the ship.”

Orayyo walked over to the screen. “Who gave the order to fire?”

“I told him I could-“

“WHO GAVE THE ORDER, COMMANDER?” Orayyo stated loudly.

Makoto sighed. “Captain Saotome,” she answered meekly.

Orayyo nodded. “Thank you, I have nothing further.”

Larson stood as Orayyo sat down.

“Commander, do you think firing was the wrong decision?”

Makoto shook her head. “It’s what I would have done.”

“And even though the ship was unable to lock, would you in your professional opinion say Commander Saotome did everything he could to ensure the torpedo would hit its target?”

“Yes sir,” Makoto stated. “As I said, it was my error for not taking the winds into consideration when determining how far we would need to be for a free fire.”

Larson smiled. “Thank you, Commander,” he turned to the Captain. “I have nothing further.”

Gwen nodded. “Thank you, Commander. You are excused.”

Makoto nodded, smiled at Ranma, and closed the transmission.

“Commander Orayyo?” Gwen cued Orayyo for him to call his next witness.

“Yes, Captain. I call Commander Ranma Saotome to the stand.”

Ranma slowly stood and adjusted his dress uniform. He then began his march over to the witness stand. As he walked, Ranma looked out into the audience.

He looked right to where his father and Akane were seated.

Genma nodded but Akane looked away slightly. She looked as if she were about to cry.

A feeling of sadness burned inside of Ranma. It hurt him to see Akane hurting the way she was. It bothered him even more that he did not know why she was hurting.

He could not think about that now, though. He had to get through this. He had to make sure that he did not end up being the fall guy for this messed-up conspiracy.

As Ranma sat down he shot a look towards Salek and Young. Both returned his look with one of their own.

One that seemed to say, ‘Gotcha.’

“Commander, raise your right hand please,” the bailiff ordered.

Ranma did as he was instructed.

“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?” The bailiff asked.

“I do,” Ranma acknowledged, giving Young and Salek another look.

The bailiff motioned for Ranma to lower his hand and proceeded back to his post. Orayyo walked up to Ranma.

“Commander, why exactly did you order a torpedo to be fired while you were within the atmosphere of an inhabited planet?”

Ranma cleared his throat.

“It was our last chance to destroy the enemy ship before it would have been able to impact the planet and inflict even greater casualties.”

“But it wasn’t your first chance, was it Commander?” Orayyo smugly asked.

“No.”

“Is it or is it not true that you had the ship stopped, its shields down, and had the opportunity to destroy it prior to the incident above Vulcan?”

“That is true,” Ranma replied.

“So why didn’t you?”

Ranma sighed. “There were hostages on that ship. We launched a rescue mission.”

“And when that mission failed, why didn’t you destroy the ship?”

Ranma looked to his hands as he spoke.

“I made a mistake. I allowed my emotions to get the best of me, and I couldn’t order the destruction of the ship while I still believed that the hostages were on board.”

Orayyo moved closer to Ranma.

“Is that because they were the sisters of your wife?”

“OBJECTION!” Larson screamed as he stood. “Commander Saotome has already been punished for this. What’s the point behind this questioning?”

“Captain,” Orayyo stated as he looked up to Gwen. “I am trying to prove a pattern of reckless behavior and disregard for mission and Starfleet protocol.”

Gwen pondered this for a moment. “I will allow questioning about the incident, but I don’t think bringing up who the hostages were is relevant.”

Larson sat down, unsure if he had just been defeated or not. Orayyo nodded at Gwen.

“I withdraw my last question then.”

Gwen nodded as Orayyo resumed his assault on Ranma.

“After allowing the enemy ship to resume course towards Vulcan, did you have any kind of plan to stop the ship again?”

“We were hoping to overtake the ship again as we had the last time. However, they had modified the engines and we couldn’t catch them before they dropped out of warp,” Ranma explained.

“So,” Orayyo continued, “when you intercepted the ship at Vulcan, what happened?”

Ranma looked to Orayyo as he explained. “I ordered Commander Kino to target the ship and fire, but the sensors wouldn’t lock because of the interference generated by the ship entering the Vulcan atmosphere.”

“So, you followed the ship into the atmosphere?”

Ranma nodded. “Yes. We had to get within AHD.”

Orayyo turned and looked to the audience. “For those of us who don’t know, what is AHD?”

“AHD is Assured Hit Distance, the distance in which the probability of an unguided munition hitting its target is over 80 percent.”

“So even though the chance of an unguided torpedo missing the ship was 20 percent, which is an open space estimate, you still fired?”

“Yes,” Ranma replied.

Orayyo turned back to Ranma. “Why a torpedo? Why not try with phasers?”

Ranma leaned forward in his chair. “The phasers didn’t seem like the right option. We needed to ensure the destruction of the ship with one shot. We couldn’t do that with phasers.”

Ranma leaned back. “Besides. I had no real reason to think or assume the torpedo would miss.”

Orayyo began to walk back to the viewscreen.

“You didn’t think very much at all that day, did you, Commander?”

“I’m sorry?” Ranma asked, a small bit of hostility creeping into his voice.

“Computer, access ships log. Time index 1431.15.” Orayyo turned to Gwen. “Captain, I’d like to introduce the Sisko’s bridge log into evidence as exhibit A.”

Gwen nodded. “Proceed.”

“Computer, begin playback.”

The view screen popped to life and began to show the events on the bridge on that fateful day.

“Catch that fucking ship!” The recording of Ranma yelled at Ryouga.

*The bridge began to shake violently as Ryouga pushed the Sisko into the rough Vulcan atmosphere.**

“Pause,” Orayyo ordered the computer. The playback halted as the young attorney turned to Ranma.

“The ship is shaking pretty badly; wouldn’t you say, Commander?”

Ranma nodded.

“And the Sisko has inertial stabilizers even. Did this concern you regarding the AHD of the torpedo you were planning on firing?”

“No,” Ranma said quietly. “I didn’t make the connection at the time.”

“Right,” Orayyo nodded. “How fast was the Sisko going at the time?”

“One-half impulse.”

“And how fast does a torpedo go?”

“I’m not sure,” Ranma replied. A few people in the audience murmured. A quick look from Gwen shut them up quickly though.

Ranma sheepishly looked down at his hands again. He was not good with the technical aspects of the ship. It was something that he wanted to improve on but had not.

“Well allow me to tell you,” Orayyo grinned as he walked over to Ranma.

“A Mark V torpedo leaves the launch tube at one-eighth impulse and eventually accelerates to full impulse. So, it seems to me, someone who is NOT in command of a warship, that a torpedo traveling at a fourth the speed of the Sisko would be more affected by the turbulent nature of the atmosphere.”

“Like I said,” Ranma countered. “I didn’t know how fast the torpedoes moved.”

“Sounds pretty negligent of you not to know such a basic aspect of your ship.”

“OBJECTION!” Larson called out.

“Withdrawn,” Orayyo grinned as he moved back to the viewscreen. “Resume playback,” he ordered.

**“Forward hull temperature 2000 degrees!” Kaii, the operations officer yelled.*

“Forward shields to maximum!” Minako ordered.

A second operations officer that was in the operations cubbyhole with Kaii spoke up.

“I have one human bio-sign on board.”

Makoto called out from her position. “Five more seconds.”

“Beam her aboard.” Ranma stated.

Minako turned to Ranma. “If we lower the shields-“

Ranma spun and turned to Kaii.

*“BEAM HER ABOARD NOW!”**

“Pause,” Orayyo instructed the monitor. The shot paused and Orayyo turned to Ranma.

“What the hell were you thinking?” Orayyo asked, rather bluntly.

“Commander,” Gwen scolded.

“I’m sorry,” Orayyo replied. “What the heck were you thinking, Commander?”

“I – I couldn’t leave her behind. Again,” Ranma stammered. “She risked her life trying to save the hostages-“

“This isn’t about the hostages, Commander,” Orayyo said as he quickly walked back to Ranma. “You kept thinking about the hostages, about the officer on the enemy vessel, about yourself.

“But it seems pretty obvious that you didn’t think about the 300 other people on your ship. You did not think about the billions of Vulcans on that planet below you.

“Your ship could have been VAPORIZED by the atmosphere. With her shields up your hull temperature was at a critical level! Did that occur to you? Did it come into your mind that if YOU all died, that ship would have completed its mission and killed millions of people?”

Orayyo leaned forward more.

“DID YOU?” He yelled.

“CAPTAIN!” Larson screamed as he stood. “This is uncalled for.”

“Commander,” Gwen called out.

Orayyo stepped away from Ranma. “Resume playback.”

**The shields dropped. Alarms went nuts. The ship began to shake harder and harder. Steam ducts exploded. Panels exploded.*

“Fire.” Ranma dryly ordered.

A single torpedo sailed from the Sisko’s forward tube. The torpedo missed and continued down towards the planet.

*“AGAIN!” Ranma yelled.**

“Pause,” Orayyo once again stated. “So, you missed the first time, and without making any distance corrections, course corrections, or anything, you ordered a second torpedo fired.”

Ranma could not speak. He just nodded.

The more he watched what was going on. The more Orayyo screamed at him, the more he felt like he was guilty. He felt like he was negligent.

“You didn’t even try to figure out why the torpedo missed.”

“THERE WAS NO TIME!” Ranma yelled.

Orayyo stormed over to Ranma. “There was no time because you screwed up. You put all these people’s lives at risk because you could not do your job. Because you were negligent in your duties.”

If there was any time in his life that Ranma just wanted to go nuts and begin attacking someone, it was now. He was almost beginning to understand why Ryouga did it so often.

Blood no longer flowed through Ranma’s veins. It was pure anger.

Orayyo, sensing that he had hit a nerve, walked away from Ranma.

“There’s no point in continuing the playback. We all know what happens next. There was an explosion prior to the second torpedo being fired. The Sisko, with her shields down, was critically damaged, barely making it out of the atmosphere.

“The single torpedo that was fired impacted the planet near the Let’their Village, destroying it and killing six. Twenty injured three of those seriously.”

Orayyo sat down. “That wasn’t negligent, Commander. That was criminal.”

Gwen looked to Larson.

“Can we have a recess?” Larson asked.

Gwen nodded. “One hour.”

She banged her gavel.

CHAPTER THREE – FAILURE

The Saint Paul dropped to impulse at the edge of the Chidori system. On her bridge, McNamara stood and turned to his tactical officer.

“Any ships?”

The tactical officer looked at his read out.

“One, a freighter in low orbit.”

“Can they see us?” McNamara asked.

The tactical officer shook his head.

“I don’t think so. I’m not getting any passive or direct sensor pings.”

McNamara nodded and walked over to the operations station.

“Is the probe ready?”

The operations officer checked her display and nodded.

“Yes sir.”

“The ship is going to warp – they have headed away from us,” tactical stated.

McNamara looked at the long-range sensor read out that was on the main viewer.

“Launch the probe.”

Operations hit a couple of keys on her panel and a class two tactical probe is launched from the front of the Saint Paul.

“It will reach its destination in a little over a minute and will begin to feed information back immediately.”

“Good,” McNamara grinned as he walked back to his seat and sat down.

Behind him the turbolift doors opened and Hanson and Alexander walked onto the bridge. Brett was no longer wearing the suit that he had been dressed in.

He was wearing a black jumpsuit. The same jumpsuit that the rest of the assault was wearing.

McNamara raised an eyebrow.

“Captain,” Hanson stated.

“Yes sir?”

“Councilman Alexander will be accompanying the teams.”

McNamara lowered his eyebrow. He was afraid of this.

“With all due respect sir, is that a good idea? He’s not trained for this.”

“It’s not a request Captain,” Hanson rather bluntly stated. “Inform the assault teams that he will need to be armed.”

McNamara nodded.

“Yes sir.”

The tone of disgust in McNamara’s voice was obvious to everyone on the bridge. No one had ever seen their captain so angry before.

McNamara looked to the tactical station. “Do it.”

Tactical complied with his commanding officer. McNamara sat back down in his chair.

“Good luck, my friend,” Hanson stated.

Brett grabbed the hand of his older friend and shook it.

“I will never forget this.”

Hanson patted Brett on the back as he walked into the turbolift. McNamara listened to the exchange but continued to watch the view screen.

‘Even more proof nothing good can come of this.’ He thought to himself.

Hanson walked down the bridge and had a seat next to McNamara.

“You don’t think this is a good idea, do you?” Hanson asked.

The young captain never took his eyes off the view screen.

“No offense sir, but that has got to be the biggest understatement I have ever heard you say.”

Hanson eyed McNamara for a moment before operations spoke up.

“The probe is in position.”

The operations officer put the information being relayed back on the main viewer.

“Eight orbital defensive platforms,” Tactical stated. “It appears that they have some sort of sensor net extending between each one 360 degrees. The net covers the entire planet.”

“So, outside of that net and we won’t be detected?” Hanson asked.

“That’s correct sir,” tactical replied.

“What about tachyon fields?” McNamara asked.

Operations punched in some commands to the probe. After a few seconds, a display appeared on the viewer.

"None," she replied.

"Weapons on the platforms?"

"Disruptor cannons."

McNamara nodded.

"Helm, bring us to 100,000 kilometers of the planet. Operations run a passive scan of the planet. See if you can get any information about the number of guards at the facility, a safe landing area, and what not," McNamara ordered.

Both officers complied.

Hanson's eyes moved towards McNamara who was slouched in his seat watching the view screen. He was becoming concerned. The authoritative tone in McNamara's voice was gone. He did not seem to be ordering his crew. Just telling them.

Hanson knew that this was NOT a good thing. When a captain no longer becomes an authority figure the crew begins to second guess his orders.

After that it's just a matter of time before the whole ship falls apart.

This mission was too sensitive to allow that to happen. Hanson decided that he may need to take command himself.

Not yet though. Most of this crew had been together for four years. They were loyal to McNamara. While there were some new officers, mostly science officers, stripping his command, especially when McNamara had done nothing wrong, could lead to a mutiny.

Hanson decided to just bide his time for now.

"How are you holding up, Ranma?" Larson asked after he and Ranma had gotten into the hallway outside of courtroom six.

Ranma just shook his head as he wiped some sweat from his forehead.

"I can't do this," Ranma stammered.

Nothing had ever shaken Ranma up before. Ranma was a rock. He always had been. Apart from cats, nothing got to him.

This had gotten to him, though. His hands were shaking, and he was sweating. He could not finish.

"Ranma," Larson started.

"Admiral, I want to change my plea," Ranma stated.

"NO!" Akane yelled as she ran out into the hallway.

"Akane," Ranma stated. "I screwed up. I screwed up badly."

Akane grabbed Ranma and pulled herself close to him.

Ranma looked down at wife. "I am sure if I plead guilty I can get a reduced sentence and-"

"You don't understand, do you?" Akane sobbed.

Ranma shook his head.

"It's my fault. If I hadn't been there, you could have done what needed to be done."

Akane was barely audible between her sobs and having her face buried in Ranma's chest.

"You told me that you needed to protect me. That's why you couldn't kill them."

Ranma remembered. Ranma remembered exactly what he said.

**"All because of you." He stated as a tear came streaming down his face.*

"Me?" Akane asked.

*"I love you so much, Akane. All that matters to me is that you are safe. That I protect you from anything that might hurt you, physically and emotionally."**

"I didn't mean that it was your fault, Akane."

"I've always been in the way, haven't I?" She whimpered.

"No!" Ranma shot back. "If it wasn't for you-"

Ranma looked up. He noticed that Larson had drug Genma and any other bystanders away from Ranma and Akane.

"I can't exist without you, Akane," Ranma stated softly.

Akane looked up to Ranma.

"Don't you understand?" Akane cried. "I can't exist without you either. If you give up- If you let them take you away from me."

Ranma sighed. "But I am guilty."

Akane shook her head and pulled away from Ranma.

"How can you say that? You did everything that you thought was right. You followed your heart and made decisions based on what you thought was honorable. How can you consider that negligent?"

"I made the wrong decisions."

Akane sighed and wiped her face.

"I believe in you, Ranma. Please don't make that a wrong decision on my part." Akane stated as she walked back into the courtroom.

Ranma bit his lip and silently cursed to himself.

“Son?” Genma called.

Ranma turned to his father.

“Pop.”

“Don’t give up, Ranma,” Genma ordered, placing his hands on his only son’s shoulders. “There are two kinds of people in this world. People who do not make a difference and people who do.

“You’re one of the people who do. And when you do you have to stand up for yourself. Stand up for your principals. Stand up for what you believe in.”

“I killed six innocent people,” Ranma said.

“It was an accident. A terrible, terrible accident, but an accident none the less.”

“Ranma,” Larson interjected.

Ranma looked to the Admiral.

“We can’t continue this if you don’t believe you’re innocent.”

Ranma sighed.

Salek and Young walked out into the hallway. They both turned to Ranma.

“Things don’t seem to be going your way, do they Commander?” Young asked with the grin Ranma had grown to hate across his lips.

“If you go ahead and change your plea to guilty, my people will be willing to forgive you and ask for a lenient sentence,” Salek added.

Ranma looked at both of them. His eyes then drifted to his father and then finally into the courtroom where Akane was sitting.

“Why don’t the two of you go fuck yourselves?” Ranma stated as he walked back into the courtroom. He quickly paused and turned slightly back to Salek.

“Romulan.”

Ranma continued his walk. Larson grinned as he followed Ranma.

“I guess he’s rejecting your offer, Salek,” Larson chuckled.

The grin disappeared from Young’s face as he watched Genma follow Larson in. Genma was doing his best to keep from laughing.

“Don’t worry about it,” Salek, with a scowl on his face – having just been on the receiving end of the worst thing you can call a Vulcan will but a scowl on ANY Vulcan’s face - stated to Young. “He’s toast.”

Young turned to Salek and raised an eyebrow.

“I don’t think that’s a very Vulcan thing to say.”

Salek continued to scowl as he shrugged and walked back into the courtroom. Gwen began to call the proceedings back to order.

The Saint Paul slowly came to a stop near the external perimeter of the Chidori III defense grid. On the bridge Sarah stood and turned to the tactical officer.

“Verify that we are not being scanned.”

The tactical officer checked some of his displays. He nodded to Sarah.

“Nothing.”

Sarah nodded back to tactical and hit her communicator.

“Earl to McNamara. Sensor detection is negative.”

In the main shuttle bay McNamara was standing next to a view screen with Admiral Hanson and the assault teams. The pilots of the shuttles were doing a final pre-flight inspection of the shuttle craft. Commander Montasori was giving the final details prior to the raid.

“Acknowledged,” McNamara replied. He turned to Hideki and nodded.

Hideki nodded back and returned to his briefing. “The facility is currently in night. However, sunrise will be in three hours. We can either go now and hope to be out of there by then, or we can wait-”

“We aren’t waiting,” Hanson informed everyone.

“Okay,” Hideki stated. He turned to the operations officer who began to talk about the scans that the probe made.

“Now, this is only a passive scan so it’s not exact, but we estimate about 15 perimeter guards, and about 50 people inside of the building. Most of them are probably warehouse employees, production people, et cetera.

“The main entrance is to the east, so we don’t want to go in that way. There is a landing pad and warehouse entrance on the north. That is our best bet. We can land the shuttles in this grassy area about three kilometers northwest,” operations concluded.

“Once inside, the assault team can place the target amplifiers and get out. Once they are clear, we can fire a volley of torpedoes from outside of range and they will still track and land on target.” Hideki finished.

“What about the people inside?” McNamara asked.

“Well, uh...” Hideki stammered. “They will likely be killed in the explosions.”

“That’s not acceptable.”

“Captain-“ Hanson started.

“Sir, my orders are to destroy the facility, not to murder 65 innocent people.”

Hanson sighed. “So, do you have a plan?”

“Once inside, someone on the assault team can access their communications system and leave some sort of message saying they are terrorists and are going to destroy the facility. Giving them a time frame to abandon the building.”

McNamara looked to the view screen and sighed. “At least then the only ones who get killed will be those who chose not to leave.”

“Very well,” Hanson reluctantly agreed.

“Any questions?” Hideki asked.

“No,” Everyone replied.

All eyes turned to the captain.

“Launch the assault,” McNamara dryly stated.

The shuttle bay doors on the Saint Paul opened and three Romulan shuttles flew out.

“We need to cloak ASAP,” Hideki said to the pilot of the first shuttle.

He nodded and the first shuttle cloaked. The other two followed suit.

“It’s going to be a bumpy ride into the atmosphere, sir,” The pilot stated. “We had to draw power from the inertial stabilizers to make sure we’d hold our cloak on entry.”

“Understood,” Hideki turned to the group of security officers in his shuttle. “Everyone, hang on to your asses.”

The group laughed. That was until the ship hit the atmosphere and people were sent in every which way.

“Sorry,” The pilot stated. “It should be a bit smoother now that we’ve entered the upper exosphere.”

The tiny ship bounced around as it dropped closer and closer to the surface of the planet. Hideki stood and walked to the co-pilot’s seat.

“Do you think they detected us?” He asked the co-pilot.

“Yes.” He stated rather matter-of-factly. “However, the cloak held, so they’d have no reason not to think it wasn’t three meteorites.”

“Good,” Hideki stated, somewhat unsure of whether to believe that.

After a short flight, the three shuttles set down in an open field. The groups quickly disembarked and assembled.

Hideki hit his communicator. "Anders, be ready to fly as soon as we get back."

"Aye," The lead shuttle pilot replied.

Hideki looked to his troops.

"Let's move. Group one with me, group two with Mason."

Lt. Commander Casey Mason, the Saint Paul's assistant chief of security, nodded and took his group into the brush to the southwest while Hideki took his group into the forest area to the southeast.

Hideki's group walked for about two kilometers before one of the officers halted everyone after his tricorder began to beep at him.

"Two people, 30 meters, four o'clock," he whispered.

Hideki nodded and got into position. The rest of the group moved slightly and got into ambush positions.

"So, what did you do to him?" one of the people asked as the moved into earshot.

"I kicked his ass!" the other stated, laughing. "You don't do those kinds of things to another man's wife!"

The pair laughed until they were standing face to face with four phaser rifles.

"Hands up," Hideki whispered.

The pair, seeing that they were outnumbered and at the nasty end of severalphasers, complied. One of the officers quickly zipped up and restrained their hands. He then disarmed them and removed their radios.

"Who are you?" One of them asked.

"No talking," Hideki stated as he stunned the pair.

"We have a serious problem sir," the officer who disarmed the guards stated.

"What's that?"

"They aren't using phasers. These are projectile weapons."

The officer held up a gun resembling a 21st century M5. He released the magazine and popped out a couple of the bullets.

"Wonderful," Hideki groaned as he inspected the projectile. "Hypersonic 3mm carbon-deuterium explosive rounds."

Hideki quickly communicated this newly discovered information to the second team.

“We HAVE to shoot them, before they shoot us.” Hideki bluntly ordered.

“HEY RYOUGA!” Gosnell yelled.

Ryouga stopped. He slowly began to turn around. He was praying that it was an ensign or an enlisted person who just called him. He really needed someone to yell at, and with Ranma off the ship, he'd gotten out of practice.

He sighed when he saw it was Gosnell. While it would have been idea for Gosnell to call him Lieutenant, it was not required since Gosnell wasn't in Starfleet.

“Yes?” Ryouga grumbled.

Gosnell ran to catch up with Ryouga.

“How've ya been, buddy?”

Ryouga pondered this for a moment. He wasn't quite sure why Gosnell was calling him buddy. They had never chatted nor hung out. In fact, Ryouga usually avoided Gosnell, except to get liquor from him, since he was a friend of Ranma's.

“Been good, I guess,” Ryouga replied as he resumed his walk towards his quarters.

Gosnell began to walk with Ryouga. “That's good.”

Ryouga nodded and continued walking. Gosnell walked with him in silence for a few moments. It didn't take long before Ryouga was lost though.

“Didn't we just come this way?” Gosnell asked as they passed the turbolift that Ryouga had stepped out of.

Ryouga grumbled.

“Your quarters are this way,” Gosnell helpfully stated, pointing in the opposite direction of which they were heading.

“Thanks,” Ryouga nodded.

The pair walked a bit longer in silence.

“Why are you following me?” Ryouga asked.

“Oh, I wanted to ask you about something.” Gosnell stated.

“What's that?”

“Well, I've noticed that you and Minako don't sit together anymore, and I was just curious if that was something that I could help you with.”

Ryouga grabbed Gosnell and slammed him against the wall.

“How is that any of your business?”

Gosnell grinned even though the heat from Ryouga's battle aura could melt the bulkhead that he was pinned up against.

"I just want everyone on board to be happy. And to be perfectly blunt, you seemed happy when you were with Minako."

Ryouga dropped Gosnell and turned around. Gosnell slammed to the deck and looked up at Ryouga.

"I was apparently never with Minako," Ryouga stated.

Gosnell pulled himself up to his feet.

"She likes you, ya know."

Ryouga turned around. Gosnell flinched slightly, expecting another pounding. However, Ryouga simply tilted his head slightly in a confused puppy dog way.

"How do you know?"

"Well," Gosnell replied, ready to dodge any attack. "My wife and Minako are friends. And you know how girls like to gossip."

Gosnell chuckled nervously.

Ryouga turned back around.

"Can you help me find my quarters?"

"Yeah, sure." Gosnell replied.

After a short walk, Ryouga and Gosnell reached Ryouga's deck five quarters. Ryouga deactivated the lock and walked in. He motioned for Gosnell to follow him.

Gosnell complies and looks around.

"Man, they sure make junior officers' quarters small." Gosnell noted.

Ryouga nodded as he walked to his replicator. "Two vodkas, with ice."

The replicator made the drinks. Ryouga picked them up and brought them to a small table. He sat down on one side of the table and motioned for Gosnell to sit down on the other side.

"I got an extra eight square meters when I was promoted," Ryouga said as he took a drink.

Gosnell nodded and took a drink of his.

"So," Ryouga began, "if she likes me so much, why didn't she say she loved me too?"

"That's one of the hardest things to say," Gosnell explained. "I think she does, but she's just afraid to say it."

Gosnell took another sip and continued.

“You have to look at this from her point of view as well. Her best friend was in love with someone, and he left her. Then her other friend was in love with someone – well, the same person – and she lost him.”

Gosnell sighed. “Maybe she’s just afraid that if she says she loves you, and then loses you, it would be too devastating?”

Ryouga sighed as well.

“I never really thought of it like that.”

Gosnell nodded. “I think it would appeal to her if you went a bit slower. Give her time to realize that you aren’t going anywhere.”

Ryouga nodded, but then slammed the rest of his drink.

“I really mucked things up though. How do I get her to go out with me again?”

“Just ask,” Gosnell answered.

“Just ask? It’s really that easy?”

“You want easy, go to the holodeck,” Gosnell scoffed. “But if you don’t ask, nothing will happen. And the longer you take, the farther you will grow apart, making it that much harder to come back together again.”

Ryouga quickly moved to the replicator and ordered two more drinks. Gosnell begins to tell Ryouga that he doesn’t need another one yet, but Ryouga downs both before he can get one word out.

“So, what do I say to her? You know, when she asks about last time?” Ryouga whimpers, somewhat slurred.

“Well,” Gosnell thought. “Just tell her that being with her is important to you and that you’re willing to move at her pace.”

Ryouga grinned and nodded.

“Alright. I’ll do it.”

Gosnell grinned and stood.

“I knew you could.”

Gosnell turned and began to walk to Ryouga’s doors. His forward momentum was stopped though when Ryouga grabbed the back of his shirt.

“Uh...” Gosnell murmured.

“I need your help though,” Ryouga glowed.

Gosnell simply gulped.

Ranma retook his seat at the witness stand as Gwen shot dirty looks to all the spectators who hadn't taken their seats yet.

Once Gwen has visually stunned all lollygaggers, Larson stood and walked up to the view screen.

"Commander, can you please tell the court what this is?"

Larson activated the view screen. A long list appears.

Ranma looked at it for a moment. "It appears to be a list of service awards and citations that I have received."

"Can you please read them?" Larson asked.

Ranma eyed Larson for a moment, and then began to read the list.

"Wolf 359 Campaign medal. Borg Sol Invasion Campaign medal. Dominion War Medal of Valor. Dominion War Torros III Campaign medal. Dominion War Battle of Bajor Campaign medal. Dominion War Battle of the Tibor Nebula Campaign medal. Dominion War Battle –"

"Captain," Orayyo objected. "What are we doing here, reminiscing about the past?"

Larson glared at Orayyo. "If the Commander can bring up past acts to establish a pattern of recklessness, I should be allowed to bring up past acts to establish a pattern of honor and dignity. To bring up a pattern of being an asset to Starfleet and the Federation."

Gwen sighed. "I get your point, Admiral. You can submit to me the list, but it is unnecessary to have Commander Saotome recite it."

Larson once again nodded. He was still unsure if the good captain's rulings were going in his favor or not.

"Okay then, I submit Commander Saotome's service record as defense exhibit 'A'."

Gwen nodded and began to go over the record as Larson continued.

"Commander, are you aware of the Starfleet rules of engagement?"

Ranma nodded. "Of course."

"Can you explain what is required for the use of lethal force?"

"Yeah," Ranma stated, leaning forward. "It says that lethal force is to only be used when all non-lethal options are exhausted, or when inaction could lead to the loss of life of civilians and/or Starfleet personal."

Larson walked over to Ranma.

"Do the rules of engagement state anything about shooting at a ship that is in the atmosphere of a planet?"

Ranma thought about this for a moment.

“Not specifically,” he paused for a moment and thought some more. “But there is what is commonly referred to as the ‘Spock Clause’.”

Larson raised an eyebrow. “Spock, as in Captain Spock, a Vulcan?”

Ranma nodded.

Larson walked over to near Salek and Young.

“What’s the Spock Clause?”

Ranma cleared his throat. “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.”

“So, basically Spock, a Vulcan, said that sometimes to save many, you need to lose a few?”

Ranma shrugged. “Yeah. I mean obviously it wasn’t the ideal situation, but we felt that if we didn’t stop that ship, millions would die.”

“Millions would have died,” Larson walked back to the view screen and pulled up a graphic. “Analysis of the ships pitch prior to the explosion shows that it would have impacted in the center of Mol-Kom, a city of eight point three million people.”

Larson sighed and walked back to Ranma. “The entire city would have been leveled. Everyone would have been killed instantly. If the warp core fail-safes would have failed...”

Larson paused for a moment.

“An entire continent could have been taken out.”

Larson looked to Ranma. “It was a tough decision.”

Ranma looked at his hands. “It was a tough situation.”

“You do think that firing in the atmosphere was within the established rules of engagement?”

Ranma nodded. “Yes.”

“Nothing further,” Larson said as he sat down.

Gwen looked to Ranma. “You may return to your seat, Commander.”

Ranma gave her a quick nod and returned to his seat at the defense table. He looked towards his dad and Akane. Genma was grinning. Akane, for what seemed like the first time in days, also had a small, but genuine smile on her face.

Gwen looks towards Orayyo. Orayyo goes over his notes for a moment. He did not show it, but he was angry.

His breaking of Ranma was completely undone by five minutes of reciting service medals and Starfleet protocols.

“Commander?” Gwen asked.

Orayyo did not look up. “I have no further witnesses.”

Gwen nodded and turned to Larson.

“Admiral?”

Larson smiled and stood. “I only have one witness.” Larson looked out into the audience.

“I call High Commander Saanik to the stand.”

The Vulcan military official stood and walked towards the witness stand. On the way he paused and shot Salek a look.

If you didn’t know any better, you would think it was a look of disgust. It was at least the Vulcan, non-emotional equivalent.

Saanik moved on to the stand and sat down. The bailiff walked up to him and swore him in. Once that was completed Larson came up to Saanik and smiled.

“Good morning sir,” Larson grinned. “For the record can you please tell the court who you are.”

Saanik nodded.

“My name is Saanik. I am the High Commander of the Vulcan Defense Forces and Defense Minister.”

“The Vulcan Defense Forces are non-Starfleet personal charged with the defense of Vulcan and the surrounding airspace, are they not?” Larson queried.

“That is correct,” Saanik acknowledged.

“What was the VDF’s role in the events of Stardate 60523?”

“The VDF sent six cruisers and three battleships to assist the sixth fleet in intercepting the terrorist ship.”

Larson raised an eyebrow. “Sent?”

“Yes,” Saanik continued. “Starfleet felt that Earth was the target of the ship, based on a preliminary trajectory. So, the main bulk of our ships were sent towards Sol to assist.”

“Did you have any ships left to defend Vulcan?” Larson asked.

“A squadron of interceptors and a heavy cruiser.”

“And they were unable to intercept the enemy ship?”

Saanik shook his head. “No. The ship dropped out of warp within the planets gravity well, a good thousand kilometers from the interceptors.

“They had the speed to catch the ship, but not the shielding to follow it into the atmosphere. The heavy cruiser, which did have adequate shielding, couldn’t intercept it in time.”

“What about weapons lock?” Larson asked.

“Like the U.S.S. Sisko, the distortion caused by the atmosphere made a sensor lock impossible.”

“What happened with your ships that were with the sixth fleet?”

“The Sisko informed us that the target of the ship was indeed Vulcan. The sixth fleet and the VDF ships returned to Vulcan but didn’t arrive in time.”

Larson nodded. “Do you have land-based defense systems?”

“Yes,” Saanik nodded. “Many phase cannon batteries.”

“Why didn’t they fire on the ship?”

“It was the same problem with the airborne ships. The cannons could not lock the target ship. We didn’t fire without a lock because there was a risk we could hit the Sisko.”

Saanik looked to Ranma. “We had faith that the Starfleet ship could stop them.”

Larson nodded.

“When the torpedo was fired, what happened.”

Saanik thought back. “The torpedo was fired and shortly after that there was an explosion. Our first determination was that the torpedo impacted the ship.

“Six seconds later our sensors detected the torpedo passing through the lower atmosphere. The computers targeted it and fired the phase cannon batteries.”

“Why did they miss? Aren’t they designed to shoot down torpedoes?”

Saanik nodded. “Unfortunately, since the torpedo was fired so close to the surface it was still accelerating when the computer attempted to determine its path.

“The system has two parts. First there are orbital tracking stations which determine where the torpedo started from. Second, there are ground based tracking systems to track where it is going.

“The cannons have to fire not where the torpedo is, but where it’s going to be. Because the orbital stations could not lock on the target vessel, the computers didn’t accurately calculate the acceleration curve and improperly fired.”

Larson looked to Ranma.

“Do you think Commander Saotome should have initiated a self-destruct protocol on the torpedo?”

“Ideally, yes,” Saanik acknowledged. “However as close as they were to the explosion – I think the most logical course of action would be to concentrate in getting the ship out of harm’s way.”

Larson turned back to Saanik. “That wasn’t selfish?”

Saanik shook his head.

“A warp core detonation in the atmosphere could have been catastrophic for Vulcan. A lot more people could have been killed if the Sisko had been destroyed. And certainly, more than six when you consider the debris field the Sisko would have created.”

“What is the official Vulcan military opinion on the actions of Commander Saotome?”

“The official position is that Commander Saotome did the most logical thing, given the circumstances.”

“Even though it could have been prevented earlier?”

Saanik looked to Ranma again. “We don’t dwell on what led up to the final event, but the final event itself.”

Larson grinned. “Nothing further.”

Gwen turned to Orayyo.

“I have no questions,” Orayyo stated.

Gwen turned back to Saanik. “Thank you, Minister. You are excused.”

Saanik bowed to Gwen and returned to his seat.

“You have no more witnesses?” Gwen asked Larson.

“No ma’am. I’ve proven everything I need to,” Larson replied.

“Very well,” Gwen stated. “Commander, your closing statement?”

Orayyo stood and walked to the defense table.

“I have proved; beyond any shadow of a doubt that Commander Saotome on Stardate 60523 acted recklessly and without any regard for the safety of his crew, his ship, or the people of Vulcan.

“He operated outside of stated Starfleet policy and the requirements of his mission. Everything he did was to fit his own agenda. An agenda that led to the deaths of six Federation citizens.”

Orayyo walked back to his seat.

“If anything, the fact that he knows nothing about the weapons he fires willy-nilly 500 kilometers from the surface of a planet shows that he is unfit to wear that uniform.”

Orayyo sat down and looked to Gwen.

Gwen looked to Larson who appeared to have steam coming off the top of his head.

“Admiral?”

Larson remained seated.

“Commander Orayyo, despite his badgering of Commander Saotome, proved nothing that we didn’t already determine. He made mistakes. He acted emotionally. Not everything that he did was in the best interests of his ship and crew and because of that he lost his command.

“But one thing is obvious. He went to extreme measures to try and stop that ship. He acted within protocol and the established rules of engagement. Hell, even the highest-ranking officer of the Vulcan military said he did the right thing.”

Larson looked to Orayyo.

"If anyone has an agenda, it's not Commander Saotome."

Gwen sighed.

"We'll recess while I make my decision."

She clapped her gavel.

Inside the Chidori III facility, a security officer is sitting at a desk with several computers and television monitors. There is also a radio communications panel next to him.

He has his feet up on the desk and is almost asleep.

Almost.

<Weird chirping noise>

The noise startled the guard. He tips his chair backward. The guard frantically waved his arms to regain his balance.

He failed.

WHUMP!

Dammit!" he grumbled from the floor.

The guard slowly climbed back to his seat and began to investigate the noise.

"What the hell?" he asked himself after looking at the display. He quickly clicks his radio.

"Control to Echo 6 and Echo 7, come in."

Silence.

"Echo 6 and 7, this is control, come in."

More silence.

"Control to Echo 1."

A deep voice on the radio begins to speak.

"Go ahead control."

"Sarge sensors have detected a phaser discharge in grid 3. I've tried to contact the officers on patrol out there but Echo 6 and 7 are not answering their radios."

"Phasers?" The deep voice pondered with concern. "I'm on my way. Send Echo 3 and 9 as well. Get someone up to the tower to look around."

"Yes sir," the guard stated as he began to issue commands into his computer.

“Control, let him know that he is weapons free.”

The guard paused for a second, and then acknowledged the command.

Mason’s group slowly walked up closer to the point where the two groups were meeting.

Mason suddenly stopped his group when he noticed a blip on his tricorder getting closer.

“Two coming this way,” he whispered.

The group all ducked down and aimed their weapons. After a couple of seconds, two more guards came through the brush. They saw the group and drew their weapons.

Just about every officer in the group fired, stunning the two guards.

Up in an observation tower of the facility, a guard stationed there saw the bright red flash in the distance.

He quickly grabbed some night vision binoculars and looked. After a second, he quickly activated his radio.

“CONTROL! INTRUDER ALERT! GRID 6!” He yelled.

“Understood,” the guard in control stated. “You are weapons free. Repeat, you are weapons free. Neutralize the threat.”

“Heh,” the guard chuckled as he lifted his sniper rifle to the ledge. He looked through the scope, which was set on night vision mode. In the scope he could see the green and black of several figures.

“I see ten,” he pulled the trigger. “Make that nine.”

A loud boom is heard. Reddish-grey goo flies from one of the officer’s head. Then a second boom. The officer slumped to the ground.

“WHAT THE HELL?” Mason screamed.

One of the other officers rushed over and looked at the fallen officer.

“He’s got a head wound,” the officer turned to Mason. “He’s dead.”

The man barely finished his sentence before another boom was heard. Like the first officer, blood and brain matter blow from the back of a second officer’s skull prior to him dropping to the ground.

“SHIT! SNIPER!” Mason screamed. “HIT THE DIRT! SPREAD OUT!”

Another shot is heard, followed by a scream.

“MY LEG!” One of the Starfleet officers cried.

Mason hit his communicator. "Hideki! We're losing men over here! Someone in the tower!"

Hideki and his group were running towards the building. He stops them and turns to his sharpshooter.

"Take out that sniper!"

The sharpshooter sets up and looks through the viewfinder of his rifle. In it he can see the barely lit figure of a man in the observation tower.

He fires and the ball of charged energy flies up, nailing the sniper.

"MOVE! MOVE!" Hideki yells to his group. "Mason, get your injured back to the shuttles!"

"I've got some men moving them, there are four of us left, we'll come to assist!" Mason replied.

"Roger!"

"We've got ten heading this way!" one of Hideki's men with a tricorder reported.

"I've got twenty heading my way!" Mason stated over communications.

"Fifteen my ass." Hideki grumbled.

Three men were carrying the two deceased officers and the injured officer as fast as they could back to the location of the shuttle crafts when an unknown shuttle flew overhead. A large spotlight shined on them.

"THIS IS THE CHIDORI SECURITY SERVICES. HALT AND SURRENDER AND YOU WILL NOT BE HARMED. YOUR INJURED WILL BE ATTENDED TO." A voice bellowed over the loudspeaker.

The group ignored the shuttle and tried to continue. One of the side doors to the shuttle opened and a man leaned outside. He began to fire on the group with a fully automatic machine gun.

The shots hit one of the officers in the lower back, causing him to fall. Another officer was shot in the legs. He also fell to the ground.

The third officer quickly set down his wounded comrade and raised his arms.

"DON'T SHOOT!" he screamed.

The shuttle quickly landed, and six guards jumped out and took the group into custody.

"You'll help my friends?" The only uninjured officer asked.

His captor looked at the two deceased officers.

"They're beyond help."

"Please, don't just leave them here to rot."

Another shuttle quickly lands and sets down next to the first.

The guard sighs. "Never leave a man behind, eh?"

The officer nods.

"Take the dead ones," he orders the other guards.

"Get in," he orders as the captured Starfleet officers are shoved into one of the shuttle crafts.

A man dressed in what could be described as a supervisor's uniform storms into the facilities security control room.

"Update!"

"Uh, Lieutenant!" The guard stammered. "We have six captured, two of which are dead. There are four more in grid six moving to grid one. Then we have an unknown number in grid three also moving towards grid one."

"Did you call in another squad from the barracks?"

"Yes sir. Actually three."

"Good. They had to get here somehow. Find their ship."

"I've got three shuttles searching for a possible landing site."

The lieutenant looked at the computer screen. "Launch the interceptors."

The guard nodded and entered several commands into his computer.

About thirty kilometers from the facility the ground opened up and eight two-seater fighters flew out from an underground hanger. Their engines powered up to full and they took off towards the night sky.

Hideki's group attempted to take cover in the tall grasses, but they did little good against the security forces that were attacking them.

While the jumpsuits that the group was wearing were phase resistant, they did nothing to stop the small caliber bullets from diving into the men's vital organs.

"HIDEKI TO SAINT PAUL!" Hideki yelled as another one of his men is shot and drops to the ground, screaming in pain.

"You're ordered to maintain radio silence," Hanson stated.

"WE'RE BEING ATTACKED – PROJECTILE WEAPONS – LOST THREE MEN!"

McNamara stood. He grimaced at the background noise of phaser fire, gunshots and people screaming.

“GET OUT OF THERE!”

The communication shut off.

“HELM – GET OVER THERE AND BEAM THEM UP!” McNamara ordered.

“Belay that!” Hanson interjected.

“Sir! They’re dying!”

“This ship cannot be implicated.”

McNamara glared at the Admiral for a moment.

“I will no longer be a party to this – this murder of my men,” McNamara grumbled as he ripped off his communicator and pips. He took them and threw them to the admiral’s feet.

Hanson turned to the tactical officer.

“Escort Mr. McNamara to his quarters and secure him there.”

Tactical paused.

“NOW!” Hanson yelled.

McNamara walked up to the turbolift.

“I’m sorry sir,” tactical stated.

McNamara just shook his head as he and tactical got into the turbolift.

“I’m assuming command of this ship,” Hanson stated.

Hideki knew it was futile to go on anymore. This gunfight was doing nothing but killing his men.

“Cease fire,” he ordered the five that were still able to shoot.

The officers complied.

“WE SURRENDER. HOLD YOUR FIRE!” Hideki yelled.

The guards all stopped firing.

“PUT YOUR HANDS UP!” they yelled.

Hideki nodded to his men, who did as he ordered.

“We have injured,” Hideki stated to the men that were moving in to arrest them.

“They will be taken care of. How many more of you are there?” One of the guards asked.

"I don't know. Between ten and zero, depending on how many you've killed."

"Where are our missing guards?" He asked.

Hideki motioned with his head back the direction they came from.

"They've been stunned and restrained, but uninjured."

The guard nodded as a pair of shuttles landed and began to load the injured Starfleet prisoners on board.

Mason groaned as he felt a burning sensation in his arm. He looked to see his sleeve ripped and blood beginning to ooze out of a bullet wound.

"Commander, this isn't good," one of the officers stated.

Alexander, who had been quiet up to this point, spoke up.

"We need to continue on."

"What are you fucking mental?" Mason asked. "There is four of us left and there is-" He looks to his tricorder. "Seventeen of them."

Brett clenched his fists. "We need to continue on!"

Brett stood and began to run towards the facility. Mason sighed, drew his phaser, and shot Brett.

Brett stumbled to the ground. He coughed and looked up to see three Chidori guards standing above him with their weapons pointed directly at him.

"SHOOT THEM!" Brett screamed.

Nothing.

Brett looked back to see the three Starfleet officers with their hands in the air. Mason only had one hand in the air since his other arm was injured.

"I'd raise my other arm, but it seems to have part of it missing." He mused as the guards took the four of them into custody.

The pilots of the shuttles looked around. They had been monitoring communications and were pondering what they should do next. They had not received any instructions from the team leaders yet, but what if they had been injured.

"If we fly over, we might be able to spot them. They shouldn't be able to see us if we are cloaked." The first pilot pondered.

"Yeah, except we'd have to use thrusters which would cause a wake they could pick up." The second pilot stated.

“Does it really matter at this point?” The third asked. “They’ve already been discovered. These aren’t Federation shuttles.”

The first and second nodded in agreement.

“Should one of us stay here in case they are making their way back?” The first asked.

“Yeah, that would probably be a good idea.” The second agreed.

The third pilot was getting ready to say something when he spotted a light in the distance.

“What is that?”

Suddenly an explosion occurred about a kilometer in front of them. The first pilot ran into his ship to check the sensors.

“It’s a ship, firing disruptors at the ground!”

There was another explosion a little bit closer.

“Holy crap, they’re just randomly firing!”

Another explosion happened closer.

“GO! GO!” The third pilot screamed as they all ran for their shuttles, in an attempt to get them started.

The security forces ship continued along his line, firing a disruptor blast every hundred or so meters.

The shuttles began to power up.

BOOM!

The shuttles began to lift off.

BOOM!

The explosion was close enough to cause the cloak on the third shuttle to waver.

It was enough for a lock.

The security ship fired. The disruptor impacted the small shuttle craft, destroying it.

“FULL IMPULSE!” The first pilot instructed the second.

The two remaining shuttles shot off into the sky as the sun began to crest the mountains off along the eastern horizon.

The Chidori shuttle landed, and troops began to inspect the wreckage burning where the third shuttle once was.

“No warp core.” One man said.

Another hit his radio. “Control, inform the interceptors – there is a bigger ship out there.”

CHAPTER FOUR – REACTION

Admiral Hanson sat in the captain's chair on the bridge of the U.S.S. Saint Paul. He casually stroked his beard as he watched the planet below slowly rotate.

It had been twenty minutes since they had last heard from the teams on the surface. Either they were obeying orders to maintain radio silence, or they were all dead.

Hanson hoped for the former, but based on their last traffic, he feared the latter.

"Admiral!" The operations officer shouted.

"Yes?"

"I have ships decloaking in front of us," he replied. The tactical officer also spoke up.

"We're being hailed. It's the shuttles."

Hanson nodded as two Romulan shuttles decloaked a few thousand meters off the bow of the ship.

"Where's the other one?" Hanson asked.

"Sir," tactical spoke up. "They're requesting permission to dock."

"Yes," Hanson stated as he turned to Ops.

"Scan them."

Ops complied.

"One aboard each ship."

Hanson stood and walked to the view screen as the ships maneuvered towards the Saint Paul's aft shuttle bays.

"Where are the away teams?" He asked no one in particular.

"INCOMING!" tactical screamed.

Hanson spun and looked to tactical.

"Fifty-six small interceptors," he informed the admiral.

"Weapons?" Sarah asked from the first officer's seat.

Tactical hit some buttons and checked the readout.

"Phase cannons and quantum missiles," tactical finally replied. "They'll tear us apart." He whimpered quietly.

"Lock weapons," Hanson ordered as he returned to his seat.

“Sir,” Sarah protested. “We could maybe hit fifteen or twenty of them before they get to us, but once they get to close, our weapons will be useless.”

“I’m not asking you, Commander,” Hanson replied.

Sarah stood. “Look, you don’t want anyone to know of Federation involvement in this? Then you need to move this ship to a safe location.

“Our weapons WILL leave a trail.”

Sarah began to walk to the helm. “Not to mention the debris of this ship will have Federation written all over it. Literally.”

Sarah turned to the helmsman. “Set course to that nebula.” She ordered while pointing out a small nebula a half light-year from the Chidori system on the helm sensor readout.

Hanson did not care for the insubordination, but she was right. The Saint Paul was not a war ship. She wouldn’t be able to fend off all the interceptors.

The Saint Paul spun around and shot off at warp speed towards the nebula.

The turbolift doors at the rear of the bridge slid open and the pilots of the two remaining shuttles walked onto the Saint Paul’s control room.

“What happened?” Hanson asked as he turned to them. “Where’s the away team?”

“They’ve been either killed or captured. The third shuttle was destroyed,” the first pilot replied rather bluntly.

Sarah turned around upon hearing the news.

“Hideki,” she mumbled under her breath.

The Saint Paul dropped out of warp at the perimeter of the nebula. The helmsman turned to Sarah to receive his orders, but she was storming over to Hanson. The helmsman took it upon himself to steer the medium sized ship into the protection of the cloud of gasses.

“You could have saved them,” Sarah grumbled at Hanson.

“Commander, sit down.”

“I will not,” she replied, her voice rising. “Contact Starfleet,” she called to the tactical officer.

“Belay that, Lieutenant,” Hanson contradicted.

“Do what I say,” Sarah responded. “I am the executive officer on this ship.”

“Not anymore,” Hanson grimaced. “Lieutenant, escort Commander Earl to her quarters.”

Sarah’s eyes got narrow as she turned to Hanson.

“No, escort the Admiral to the brig.”

The poor lieutenant caught in the middle, Lt. Jose Alvarez, didn't know what to do. He was almost at the bottom of the Saint Paul security totem pole. His primary job was to guard the small arms locker.

He had never been on the bridge before, much less caught in the middle of a power struggle,
"Lieutenant!" Both Sarah and Hanson barked.

Alvarez looked back and forth between the two like he was watching a tennis match. On one hand, Commander Earl WAS the second in command of this ship. On the other, the Admiral out ranked them all.

Alvarez sighed and drew his phaser.

"Please come with me, Commander," he requested as he began to walk towards Sarah.

All eyes were on Sarah. The short blonde looked to Alvarez, then to Hanson. She then looked around the bridge. She looked into the eyes of every crew member.

"Hands up, Lieutenant," one of the pilots of the shuttle stated as he drew his phaser and pointed it to Alvarez.

The second pilot turned to his comrade for a moment before drawing his own phaser and pointing it at Hanson.

"Put the phaser down," Hanson ordered the pilots.

The first pilot shook his head. "No sir. You had a chance to save them, and you didn't. You're not fit to wear that uniform, much less be on the bridge."

The standoff seemed to last forever. Helm, Science, Operations and Engineering could do nothing but watch since none of them were armed.

The hiss of the turbolift doors on the front of the bridge finally broke the silence.

Out of the turbolift walked the six remaining members of the Saint Paul's security detail. All enlisted crewmen.

They looked around; unsure of whom they needed to point their weapons at.

"Take the XO and Lieutenants Sloan and Gore into custody," Alvarez ordered them.

Not knowing what was going on, the ensigns blindly followed their orders and drew their weapons on the two pilots.

One of the pilots, Lt. Sloan, quickly pointed his phaser at the security officers. All six of them fired, striking Sloan in the chest. He slammed against the rear wall of the bridge and slid to the ground.

Lt. Gore quickly moved to check his friend. He turned back to the security officers as they converged on the two pilots.

"You killed him."

The security officers stopped in their tracks.

"We were set on stun."

"Idiots!" Sarah yelled. "It doesn't just stun them if you shoot them with six guns!"

"Take them to the brig," Hanson ordered as he returned to his seat. "Call sickbay and have them retrieve Lt. Sloan's body."

Three of the officers moved in and detained Sarah. The other three grabbed Gore. They then began to pull them to the turbolift while Alvarez moved back to his station.

"You just don't give a damn who you kill, do you?" Sarah called to the Admiral as she is forced into the turbolift.

Hanson just watched the view screen as the turbolift doors shut. The bridge returned to silence as Lt. Sloan's lifeless body lay on the cold deck of the Saint Paul's bridge.

Gosnell looked around the Sisko's lounge. Everyone needed to be in position for his plan to work.

So far, no one was.

Makoto was nowhere to be seen. Minako was also not in the bar.

Gosnell looked to Ryouga who was seated at his usual table. Ryouga was looking around as well. He turned back to Gosnell who simply shrugged.

Gosnell hit his communicator.

"Gosnell to Makoto."

"Go ahead." Makoto's voice replied.

"Where are you?"

Makoto, from her station on the bridge sighed.

"We're running an exercise. We're going to be late."

Makoto eyed Minako who was at the operations station. Minako's sixth sense told her that she was being watched. She turned to Makoto who did a bad job of trying to pretend that she wasn't staring.

"I'll call you when we come that way." Makoto stated, ending the communication.

Minako brought up her instant messaging terminal.

maino - What?

mkinogosnell - Nothing. Just waiting for this thing to end.

maino - Okay.

Makoto returned her attention to the exercise for a moment before sending Minako another message.

mkinogossnell - Hey when we are done here let's go down to the lounge.

maino - Eh, I'm tired. I think I am just going to go to my quarters.

mkinogossnell - NO!! Please come with me, just for a little bit!

Minako turned to Makoto and eyed her for a moment.

maino - Fine. For just a little while.

Makoto grins and goes back to working on her terminal. Minako eyed Makoto for a bit longer, before resuming her work.

"Excellent," Makoto grinned to herself.

Gossnell set down another drink in front of Ryouga. He then took a seat across from Ryouga.

"They will be coming soon. The drill they are doing is taking longer than expected."

Ryouga nodded and took a swig of the highly potent ale that Gossnell had brought him. He then looked up and across the room. He casually motioned with his head for Gossnell to look in that direction as well.

"What do you think is up with them?" Ryouga asked about the pair seated in a booth directly in front of one of the large observation windows in the forward part of the lounge.

Gossnell looked at the pair. They were sitting close together. Much closer than casual friends do.

"I don't know. She helped her a lot. They probably have a close friendship." Gossnell suggested.

Ryouga shook his head. "No. It's more than that, I can tell."

"You can tell?" Gossnell questioned. "You didn't even know when the captain was disguised as a girl teasing you. How can you tell anything about something as complicated as love?"

Ryouga scowled at Gossnell. "How did you hear about that?"

"The captain has quite the loose tongue when he's been drinking."

Ryouga grimaced and turned back to the pair and watched for a moment. One of the ladies, in a gold Starfleet uniform took the hand of the other, wearing civilian clothes.

"I've never seen Shampoo smile so much," Ryouga explained.

Shampoo took the hand of her blonde companion and squeezed it softly.

"Plus, I've seen Lieutenant Jansen on deck two a lot," Ryouga continued.

"What are you doing on deck two?" Gosnell asked.

Ryouga turned to Gosnell and glared. "I still try and visit Akane as often as I can."

Gosnell whimpered. Ryouga's glares could put the fear of God into God himself.

Ryouga turned back to Shampoo and Jansen.

"Do you think they are a couple?"

Gosnell scratched his head. "Given her obsession with Ranma, I really don't think she's into girls in, ahem, that way."

Shampoo and Lt. Jansen shared a kiss.

Ryouga raised an eyebrow and turned to Gosnell. Gosnell shrugged.

"Well, I guess you can't control where you find love, eh?"

"Obviously not. Otherwise, I wouldn't have married a gossip and a voyeur," Makoto stated.

Gosnell cowered. Makoto chuckled as she kissed her husband on the cheek and sat down next to him. She then looked up to Minako, who had a look on her face. A look that seemed to say 'ah, I get it'.

"Hi," Ryouga managed to squeak out to Minako with a nervous smile on his face.

Minako smiled at him. "Hi Ryouga."

"Sit down!" Makoto instructed Minako.

Minako complied and sat down next to Ryouga.

One of Gosnell's staff came up to the table.

"Howdy boss. What can't I get for you guys?"

Gosnell nodded to his subordinate. "I'll take a Corona, two limes."

Makoto also nodded. "Same."

Minako looked to Ryouga as he ordered.

"The usual."

All eyes were on Minako.

"Just an iced tea please. No sugar."

"Okay, I'll be back with those in just a minute!" The waiter said as he bounded off to the replicator.

The group sat in an awkward silence for a little while before Makoto finally spoke up.

“So, Ryouga,” Ryouga looked up at Makoto upon hearing his name. “What’s your opinion on the new captain?”

Ryouga nervously looked around.

“Is this some sort of security test?” He asked quietly. “I mean, I answer in the wrong way and you send me down to the brig and eventually to the Starfleet prisons at Gitmo?”

“What?” Makoto asked. “No, I’m just making conversation!”

“Oh,” Ryouga blushed. “Your husband has been talking to me a lot about things like that.”

Gosnell cowered again as Makoto glared at him.

“She’s alright. Far stricter than Ranma was, but that might not be a bad thing,” Ryouga explained.

Makoto nodded as the waiter brought everyone’s drinks. He set them on the table at their respective places.

Once he walked off, Makoto slapped her forehead.

“D’oh! I forgot! I need to do a security check on the – the – LCARS manifolds behind the bar!”

Minako turned and eyed her friend suspiciously as Makoto stood.

“Come on, Gosnell,” Makoto ordered.

“I don’t work in security,” Gosnell complained. “And what the hell is an LCARS manifold?”

His complaints were short lived as Makoto grabbed him by the ear and dragged him and the couple’s Coronas back behind the bar.

Ryouga looked to Minako and chuckled nervously. Minako smiled at him. She really liked his nervous chuckle, and it was nice to hear it again.

“So, how have you been?” Ryouga stammered out.

Minako leaned back in her seat and took a drink of her tea.

“I’ve been okay. How about you?”

Ryouga also leaned back and took a drink of the concoction that he was sipping on.

“I’ve been good,” He explained. “Very busy though.”

Minako nodded. “The captain has been keeping us very busy.”

Ryouga sighed. “I’m lying.”

Minako cocked her head slightly. “You haven’t been busy?”

Ryouga shook his head. “No, I haven’t. And I haven’t been good either.”

Ryouga scooted closer to Minako and gathered every single bit of his courage. Granted that it was not a lot, but when he balled it all up into one courageous burst, it would be enough.

"I've been sad and upset. I realize every single day that I screwed something – perfect – up. And I hate it."

"Ryouga," Minako sighed.

"Minako, what happened was... Well, what my problem is that I have never been good with women. Or people in general, I guess. Anyway, I've never had a real relationship or anything even remotely serious before in my life.

"I was afraid that if what was going on between you and me didn't work out that I would never be able to find someone again. So, I was pushing too hard to cement it so that it would never end."

Ryouga sighed and took Minako's hand.

"Problem was I didn't take into account how you felt."

Ryouga squeezed Minako's hand.

"I over reacted big time. I had no right to be as selfish as I was. And even if there isn't going to be an 'us', this sucks. I want us to at least be friends."

Ryouga blushed. "But I do hope that you will give me another chance."

At the bar, both Makoto and Gosnell were ducked down, their eyes peering over the top of the bar, watching the pair. Makoto turned to Gosnell.

"What's he saying?"

Gosnell shrugged. "I don't know. I can't hear him."

Makoto stood and completely turned to her mate. "WHAT? I thought you said you had super hearing!"

Gosnell stood and shrugged again. "I assumed I did."

Makoto promptly found the wettest noodle she could and began to shellac Gosnell with it.

Two off duty security guards walked into the lounge and saw Makoto beating the ever-loving snot out of Gosnell.

"Way to work the face, boss!" One exclaimed.

Minako looked right into Ryouga's eyes. She took her free hand and touched his face.

"I—" she stammered. "I'm sorry. I should have been more understanding of your feelings."

Minako leaned in and kissed Ryouga.

“WOO HOO!” A male and female voice yelled from the bar area.

Both Minako and Ryouga blushed and broke their embrace.

“Why don’t we go back to my quarters where we can talk in private, eh?” Minako grinned.

Ryouga nodded and smiled. “Lead the way.”

The pair stood and walked out of the bar, hand in hand, all the time Gosnell – with several red marks on his face – and Makoto were doing some sort of happy dance behind the bar.

As they were walking out, Karyn walked in. Everyone stopped as they met up at the doorway.

Karyn looked to Ryouga, then to Minako, and then began to walk into the bar.

“Absolutely adorable!” She exclaimed.

18:14:22.

The clock above Courtroom Six kept ticking the seconds away. It had been over four hours since Captain Sanchez had gone into her office to decide Ranma’s fate.

“I guess this might be a good sign,” Ranma decided to break the silence and mused to the group of people that were there to support him.

Akane, Genma, and Admiral Larson all looked up at him.

“If this was just a mock trial for show, I am sure she would have returned with her decision by now. After all, you know how much those office types hate staying past 17:00!”

The group all laughed.

It was the only thing they could do. If Ranma was found guilty he would be sent to a Federation prison for thirty years. Even with good behavior and parole he would not get out for at least ten.

None of them had gone the whole time with their spirits up though. Even Ranma, after harsh cross examination broke down and wanted to give up.

He was not one to give up, but when you’re facing certain defeat, it can be hard to want or try to continue.

Akane wasn’t sure what she would do if Ranma was to be found guilty. She still felt at fault. She still had what Ranma said etched into her mind. But she could not imagine a life without him anymore. Even worse, she could not imagine a life where she was the one who lost him.

Genma, while keeping the usual stone like faced on the outside was hurting on the inside. He was an immensely proud man, and he was very proud of his son. It would take its toll on him if his son, an honorable man in his own right, were to be convicted of such a dishonorable act.

Larson’s communicator beeped.

“Admiral, please return with your client to the court room. Captain Sanchez is read to render her verdict,” the bailiff’s voice instructed.

Ranma inhaled deeply.

“I need a smoke,” Akane stated.

Ranma looked to his wife. He had gotten her to quit a month ago. He was certainly not going to be the one who started her up again.

Ranma took Akane’s hand. He nodded to Larson who led the group into the courtroom.

Larson walked up to the defense table. Ranma stopped at the spectator row that Akane and Genma were seated in. He continued to hold Akane’s hand.

“I need you to know something, Akane.”

Akane looked into Ranma’s blue eyes. They were as piercing as ever they burned right into her soul.

“No matter what happens, I love you. I always have and I always will. As a man, I need to take responsibility for my actions. All of them.”

Ranma sighed.

“I’m sorry for everything. For putting you through this. For doing everything I’ve done in the past. For it all. I’m sorry.”

Akane began to cry. “Ranma. It’s my fault. If I hadn’t been there-“

“If you hadn’t been there, I might have killed your sisters. And even if you weren’t there, it would have hurt me as much as it would have while you were there.

“Just because you weren’t around, doesn’t mean I didn’t love you.”

Ranma pulled Akane into his arms.

“You are my soul. You are my conscience. You are my life.”

Ranma felt a tear welling up in his eye. He quickly wiped it away when Larson cleared his throat.

Ranma kissed Akane once and walked up to the defense table. Genma wrapped his arm around Akane and led her to her seat.

“ALL RISE!” The bailiff yelled.

The room stood. Gwen walked into the room and looked around. She took her seat, as did the rest of the courtroom.

Gwen straightened out some of the PADDs on the bench for a moment. For Ranma it seemed like an hour.

“Commander Saotome, please rise,” she requested.

Ranma stood as did Admiral Larson.

“Commander, while I have never served on a starship, I have done this job long enough to understand how difficult it can be. How mind boggling and frustrating it can be to have to decide who lives and who dies.

“I understand how hard it can be to have to separate your personal feelings and emotions from your job. Sometimes they must go hand in hand, and how other times they have to be light years away from each other.”

Gwen looked at one of the PADDs before looking to Ranma.

“Commander, I have PADD after PADD of mistake and bad decision here. I really cannot wrap my mind around this. How someone so decorated, so competent can make so many stupid mistakes.”

Gwen looked towards Akane.

“Yet at the same time, I can.”

She turned back to Ranma.

“You’ve lost your command because of this, and if it were up to me, I would send you back to the academy for a few years and have you retake starship command courses. But of course, that’s not my decision.

“What is my decision is if you spend the next thirty years in prison. And that is why my decision took so long.”

Gwen looked to Orayyo, Young and Salek before returning her attention to Ranma.

“Mistakes, mistakes and more mistakes. That is all I have heard in this case. From before it even started. Mr. Salek and Councilman Young made the mistake of trying to convince me to find you guilty despite the evidence; something that I am certain is illegal.

“Lucky for both of them they have diplomatic immunity,” Gwen groaned.

“At any rate, while I have found more mistakes than I can count, punishing those mistakes are the responsibility of Starfleet administration, not of the judiciary. What I did not find is clear and obvious evidence of negligence.

“Commander Ranma Saotome, I find you not guilty on all six counts of negligent homicide.”

Gwen banged her gavel.

“This court-martial is dismissed.”

Ranma exhaled deeply. Larson grabbed the younger man and hugged him tightly. Genma smiled as Akane broke down into tears.

“ALL RISE!” The bailiff yelled.

Young and Salek stood and looked to Ranma. They then turned to Orayyo.

Orayyo turned around as Gwen left the room.

"I told you," he stated as he gathered his belongings and walked out of the courtroom.

"So, what now?" Young asked.

"I can have him tried in a Vulcan court," Salek stated.

"You'll have to wait till either he retires or quits." Young groaned. "Active-duty Starfleet officers cannot be tried in a Federation civilian court for actions taken in the line of duty."

Salek nodded and turned towards the door.

"Who says that Vulcan will be a Federation planet for much longer?"

Young grinned and followed Salek out the door.

Out in the hallway, Larson, Genma, Akane and Ranma stood around, chatting when a blue light began to appear.

Once the light was gone, a screeching voice bellowed out.

"RANNNNNNMA!"

Ranma turned.

"Happosai."

"That's Admiral to you!" Happosai snarled. "I see you managed to get yourself out of another mess."

"Hrmph," Ranma hrmphed. "Maybe if you hadn't had the sixth fleet out stealing panties you could have been some help."

"YOU LITTLE INGRATE!" Happosai yelled.

"Stealing panties?" Larson asked.

Happosai turned to Larson, all ready to yell at him. However, his ability to count stopped him.

Happosai's admiral pips: One, two, three.

Larson's pips: One, two, three, four.

"It was a training exercise, sir." Happosai mumbled.

Akane laughed. She had never heard Happosai humbled before. It was a nice sight.

Ranma smiled at Akane. It was the first time in months that he had heard her laugh and seen her smile. Not the forced laughs and smiles that she had been putting on, but a real one.

"It's better this way, anyway," Happosai sighed, returning his attention to Ranma.

“Oh yeah?” Ranma asked.

“Yeah. They’d eat you up in prison!” Happosai grinned as he tossed a bucket of water on Ranma.

“WHAT’D YOU DO THAT FOR?!” Ranma-Chan screamed. Her question was answered though as Happosai pounced on the now dripping wet officer and began to feel her up.

“Ah, the wonderful memories!” Genma happily cried as Larson simply stared in shock.

“PERVERTED OLD MAN!” Ranma-Chan screamed as she booted Happosai out the window and into the twilight that made up the evening San Francisco sky; Happosai laughing all the way.

Ranma-Chan looked to Larson, who was trying to comprehend what just happened.

“I – uh – I turn into a girl when splashed with cold water,” Ranma-Chan explained.

“It breaks my heart,” Genma cried.

Ranma-Chan grumbled and dumped a bucket of cold water on Genma.

“I can understand, Admiral Ling-Ling,” Ranma-Chan mused.

Larson turned to see a large panda where Genma once stood.

It’s a long story. Genma-Panda’s sign read.

“I don’t want to know,” Larson stated. “I’m going to go home and take a nap now.”

Larson walked off, leaving Genma-Panda, Ranma-Chan and Akane alone in the hallway.

Ranma-Chan looked to the clock.

18:29:33

“Let’s go get dinner.” She suggested.

Genma-Panda and Akane both nodded in agreement.

Inside the Chidori III facility, Hideki sat in a wooden chair. He was placed in what seemed to be a storage room turned interrogation room. There was some sunlight coming in through a set of small windows towards the top of the walls. There was also dim track lighting in the center of the ceiling. A single door also sat in the center of one of the walls.

Hideki, albeit dirty, was not that bad off. The people who captured him had him handcuffed, but in front of his body, rather than behind. He was not secured to the chair in anyway. The seemingly lax attitude in not restraining him more made an escape attempt a thought to ponder, but only ponder and not attempt.

Next to the door stood two uniformed Chidori Security Service officers. The number of weapons they had attached to them; a handgun, magazines, what looked to be some kind of stun gun, as well as the semiautomatic rifles they were carrying made it obvious that no attempted escape would end with him remaining alive.

The lock on the door disengages and a shadowy figure walks into the room.

“Good morning. I am Lieutenant Dolf Hassan of the Chidori Security Services.”

Hideki simply nodded.

“I don’t get the pleasure of knowing your name?”

“I don’t have a name,” Hideki stoically answered.

“That’s fair. I’ll think of a name for you later.”

“Okay,” Hideki nodded.

Hassan walked across the room and pulled up another chair. He slid it across from Hideki and sat down in it. The guards moved over and stood to each side of Hassan. Hassan looked around for table or anything to set the items he was carrying down on but found nothing. Annoyed, he simply put them down on the floor next to him.

“I apologize for not having better facilities. We’re not equipped to handle prisoners,” Hassan stated.

“I’ve been in worse.” Hideki mused.

Hassan nodded. “Did you get fed yet?”

Hideki nodded.

“Good,” Hassan smiled. “So down to business then.”

Hassan paused, hit a button on a small device and continued.

“For the record, our conversation will be recorded,” he explained as he returned his attention to Hideki. “Why were you attacking our facility?”

Hideki looked up at him. “We’re terrorists. That is what we do.”

“You are not terrorists,” Hassan shook his head and frowned. “You are Federation.”

Hideki paused for a second, and then laughed.

“You’ve been up to long. The Federation doesn’t hire terrorists.”

Hassan smiled, stood, then quickly turned and punched Hideki in the side of his face. Hideki was knocked out of the chair he was sitting in.

The two guards in the room quickly picked up Hideki and set him back in the chair. Hideki turned and spat some blood out of his mouth.

“You are right. Your assault drug me out of bed way to early,” Hassan said, shaking his fist slightly. He had forgotten how much punching someone hurt his hand. “You are the leader of this group, yes?” Hassan asked.

“I am,” Hideki replied.

“So, who are you?” Hassan asked after a moment. “Starfleet Intelligence? Starfleet Security? The rumored Section 31?”

“I am not affiliated with Starfleet.”

Hassan sat back down in his chair. He picked up Hideki’s phaser rifle, what did look to be a matte black version of the standard Starfleet rifle, and showed it to him.

“No matter what color you paint it, this gun has a Starfleet energy signature.”

“Just because I am not affiliated with Starfleet doesn’t mean I don’t steal weapons from them.”

Hassan laughed heartily. The two other guards also laughed. Hassan stopped laughing and jammed the butt of the rifle into Hideki’s stomach. His hand still hurt, so he wasn’t going to punch Hideki again. Not that he really cared for this kind of interrogation anyway. He really was just trying to get things over with.

“Why must you lie to me?” Hassan asked as Hideki groaned and fell out of his chair once again.

Hassan turned to one of the guards. “Bring him in.”

The guard complied and left the room. The other up righted Hideki and moved him back into his seat. Hassan tossed the phaser rifle back to the floor and crossed his legs.

“While we wait, would you mind telling me why you stormed the facility?” Hassan asked.

“My employer is angry that you have the monopoly on FOX in the quadrant.”

There was a pause of about a half minute as Hassan and the guard looked to Hideki with one of those ‘are you serious’ looks you give someone who has just said something incredibly stupid.

“FOX?” Hassan finally laughed. The guard that was with them also laughed. “Your ‘employer’ needs to do better research. FOX hasn’t been made at this facility in years. Your starship, that we intercepted a communication to from you by the way, needs to run better scans. All the fulnahuric gas was mined out of the atmosphere two years ago.

“This is a chemical weapons facility now. We make weapons for the Klingons, among others. Of course, you would know that if you’d have checked the Starfleet Database before coming. It’s common knowledge. The Federation has threatened to shut us down on multiple occasions. I figured this was one of them.”

“What?” Hideki groaned, looking up and making eye contact with Hassan.

Hassan pointed to the guard standing with him. He pointed to the various weapons the guard was carrying as he spoke.

“Do you really think a party drug manufacturing facility would be so heavily guarded? One outside of Federation space that makes a product that is legal pretty much everywhere outside of the Federation?” Hassan asked.

“Did you see any atmosphere miners flying around up there? How about the storage towers? Didn’t anyone notice they were gone?”

Hideki clenched his fists at what he just learned. Several of his men killed over incorrect information.

Not just incorrect, wrong. Blatantly wrong.

"I think FOX is now made on a moon orbiting Anjaria Six," Hassan laughed.

The door reopened and the guard walked in with a dirty Brett Alexander.

Hassan stood and smiled. He instructed the guard to seat Brett across from Hideki.

"You want some good advice?" Hassan asked Hideki.

Hideki just looked at Brett with utter scorn in his eyes. He could not care less about what Hassan had to say at this point.

"If you don't want people to know that you are Federation, don't bring a high ranking – and therefore very well know – Federation official with you."

Hassan turned to Brett.

"Isn't that right, Councilman Alexander? As Chairman of the Federation's Foreign Relations Committee, you should know that this isn't really the best way to relate to foreign governments."

Brett looked to Hassan and grumbled. "You killed my little girl."

"FOX ISN'T MADE HERE ANYMORE YOU JACKASS," Hideki screamed. "YOU KILLED GOD KNOWS HOW MANY OF MY MEN!"

"Five," Hassan helpfully stated.

"What are you talking about?" Brett asked turning to Hideki.

"How old was that god damned report?" Hideki demanded.

"A few years, but-"

"Jesus Christ!" Hideki screamed. He looked to Hassan. "Can we make a deal?"

"COMMANDER!" Brett yelled.

"Screw you, I don't work for you," Hideki bluntly stated.

"If you give them information, you'll be court-martialed!"

Hideki laughed. "You're assuming we won't all be court-martialed anyway?"

Hideki continued to laugh more.

"Commander Hideki Montasori;"

"COMMANDER!"

"ID number Sierra 7-2-3-2-1 dash 2-1-9 Echo Zulu;"

“COMMANDER!”

“Chief of Security for the Federation ship the U.S.S. Saint Paul.”

Brett quickly stood and made an attempted to rush Hideki. One of the guards grabbed him and threw him to the floor before he could get close.

“This was an unauthorized assault; the Federation had no knowledge of this. My government-“ Hideki looked to Brett as he lay face down on the ground with the guard on top of him. “Well, most of my government had no involvement in this.”

“Where is your ship?” Hassan asked.

“I won’t tell you that until I have a deal.”

Hassan kicked Brett aside and sat down across from Hideki.

“What do you want?”

“Release my men. Keep me; I will bear all responsibility for this attack.”

“What about him?” Hassan asked, chucking his thumb at Brett who was feebly attempting to get from underneath the much larger guard.

“I could not give a single damn what you do with him,” Hideki stated, glaring right at Brett.

“I will plead guilty at a trial for whatever charges you place on me. All I ask is for the freedom of my men, and for safe passage of my ship out of this system.”

Hideki shook his head and laughed. “She’s not a battleship. For crying out loud, we’re a science and exploration ship. I’m in charge of ship’s security, not some damned infantry unit.”

Hideki stopped laughing as a tear came to his eye. He looked to the floor.

“That’s why we got killed. Because HE could not use official channels. He had to go behind everyone’s back.”

Hideki looked back up at Hassan.

“I can’t let the loved ones of those who died sit and wonder for the rest of their lives what happened to their family members. If you keep everyone here, no one will know what happened. Even if you contact the Federation, they won’t allow this event to become public.”

Hideki sighed.

“No one will know the truth.”

Hassan leaned forward and looked at Hideki for a moment. He finally sighed, nodded, and stood.

“I will talk it over with my superiors. Maybe I can work something out since you killed none of our staff.”

Hassan walked to the door, stopping just shy of it though.

“There is no government here, Commander. We’re the only thing on this planet. It’s unaligned. There will be no trial. No charges. Just an execution.”

Hassan left the room but left the two guards to watch Brett and Hideki. The guards lifted Brett up and sat him down across from Hideki.

“You’ve betrayed your oath,” Brett stated dryly.

Hideki looked up at Brett.

“You are lecturing me on betrayal? You led five good officers into a slaughter. You illegally attacked a sovereign planet. All for what? Because your daughter didn’t know when to say when?”

“Was avenging the death of your daughter worth the lives of five officers? Well, Ahab? Does it make you feel better knowing that at least she isn’t the only one dead?”

Brett was on the verge of tears. “Shut up.”

“You know what the really bitch is, Ahab? You caught your damned whale, but it was the wrong fucking one. And guess what, not only do you not have your leg back, but you’ve lost your arms as well.”

“SHUT UP!”

“I really hope they execute you first.” Hideki chuckled.

CHAPTER FIVE – RAMIFICATIONS

It was approaching day four of the Saint Paul's exile to nebula 661-PD. A neutrino and hydrogen-based nebula that sat a half-light year from the four planet Chidori system in sector 009.

Tensions on the ship had grown high. Hanson had the remaining members of the Saint Paul's security detail round up several officers who he feared would be too loyal to Captain McNamara and had them placed in the brig.

And now the brig was becoming overcrowded.

Unfortunately, with only six security officers remaining, he could not move them into a cargo hold. With that much room and thirty people together, they could easily overpower the guards and retake control of the ship.

So now thirty people were placed in five cells designed for two people each.

It was bound to get ugly.

To top things off, the Saint Paul was going to become missing soon. She was scheduled for a diplomatic mission in two days. When she did not show up, Starfleet would begin looking for her.

Hanson hadn't slept much. He was too nervous. He did not really know who he could trust. He considered himself both lucky and curse that the Saint Paul had just gone through a crew rotation and most of the crew were young, new officers.

Lucky that they were still inbred with the strict 'chain of command means everything' that they were taught in the academy.

Cursed that a massive insurrection from the senior staff could easily overwhelm them. Cursed that they were not experienced enough to defend themselves from the four dozen interceptors that searched the system for them day and night.

"Admiral?" the operations officer called out.

"Yes lieutenant?" Hanson replied.

"I've run thirty simulations. No matter how we leave the nebula, the interceptors will be able to detect us."

Hanson sighed. Another case of luck and curse. Luck that the interceptors couldn't scan into the nebula. Luck that the interceptors could not come into the nebula without taking serious if not catastrophic damage.

Cursed because they could not leave without being coming up on the interceptor's scanners and potentially targeted.

"What if we detonated the hydrogen in the nebula as we left?" Alvarez asked.

“Sure,” the ops lieutenant agreed sarcastically. “If we want to destroy them and ourselves.”

“Well, you sure as hell haven’t come up with anything.” Alvarez snapped back.

“Maybe I expected the chief tactical officer to come up with a tactic,” Ops responded.

“Here’s a tactic. Why don’t you kiss my ass?” Alvarez stated.

“Both of you shut up,” Hanson ordered.

Both young lieutenants stopped their quarreling and turned to the admiral.

“Sorry sir,” Ops stated.

“Yes sir, sorry,” Alvarez also apologized.

“Just work together on figuring out a way for us to get out of the nebula and to warp before we get detected,” Hanson ordered.

“What about those still on the planet?” Ops asked.

Hanson continued to watch the blue and white colors of the nebula swirl around on the view screen.

“They’re probably all dead by now.” Hanson stated. “Getting this ship back to Earth is our number one priority now.”

Ops bowed his head and returned to work. Hanson sighed as he watched the nebula.

They would not be returning to Earth. There are thirty people in the brig who would tell Starfleet exactly what happened. Exactly why they were out here. Exactly why twenty security officers and one Federation Council member were dead on an unaligned planet in the middle of nowhere.

No, Hanson knew exactly what had to be done. He would have to get the ship somewhere else and destroy it.

Hanson had no intention of going down with the ship though.

Commander Sarah Earl moved to the force field that kept her and her four other cell mates confined and touched it.

The force field zapped her slightly.

“What are you doing, Sarah?” McNamara asked from the back of the cell.

“I’m just bored,” she replied.

She turned and looked to her Captain as he sat on the floor.

“I don’t suppose you have a plan, do you?” She asked.

McNamara stood. “Of course I do. We’re going to retake control of the ship.”

Sarah grinned. "And how are we going to do that?"

McNamara shrugged. "I don't have the details worked out yet. But formulating a good plan is a lot like writing a mystery novel. You start at the end and work your way backwards."

Sarah chuckled. "Your novels suck."

McNamara laughed. "You haven't read my new one."

The door to the brig slid open and two security officers walked in. They walked up to the first cell.

"Time for restroom breaks," one of the officers stated.

"Ensign Thompson," McNamara called out to the officer.

The young ensign walked over to the Captain's cell. He turned to the second officer. "Hold on."

"Ensign, you do realize that you are part of a mutiny, don't you?" McNamara stated.

"I'm just following the Admiral's orders, sir," he replied.

"Do you even know what has happened here?" McNamara asked him.

The young man shook his head.

"The Admiral has led us into an illegal, unauthorized mission. It has been four days. Don't you think Starfleet would have sent us help by now?"

The ensign thought about this for a moment.

"We're not supposed to be here, Alex," McNamara stated as he walked as close to the force field as he could.

"And as long as you continue to support the Admiral you help prolong this illegal mission and hurt not only your ship mates, but yourself as well."

McNamara looked right at Thompson.

"Is this really how you want to start your career?"

Thompson, an ensign who graduated from Starfleet Academy no more than four months ago, shook his head.

"Hey, Captain," the other officer called out. "We're following orders."

McNamara looked to the other officer.

"Ensign Stevens, are you familiar with twentieth century Earth history at all?"

Stevens walked to the cell.

"We had a class."

"In the 1930's and 1940's, millions of people were murdered by German Nazis. When the rest of the planet came together and stopped them, the soldiers who committed these acts were put on trial.

"The soldiers said that they should not be held accountable for their actions because they were 'just following orders.'

"However, the trials set a precedent that has been held in the military for five hundred years now. Subordinates CAN be held responsible for following illegal orders. It's Starfleet's standing order five. 'No officer shall follow any order that is illegal or immoral.'"

McNamara looked to his four cellmates, and then turned back to the two ensigns.

"This is both."

"You disobeyed a direct order from the Admiral," Stevens stated. "You shouldn't be in here. You should have been shoved out the airlock."

Stevens grabbed Thompson and brought him back to the first cell.

"One at a time. Anyone who attempts to escape will be shot, and we're not using stun."

McNamara sighed as the pair led one prisoner out and to the brig's restroom. Sarah walked up to him.

"You got to Thompson," she whispered. "Keep working on him."

McNamara nodded and returned to his seat on the floor of the cell.

"This is the Runabout Class U.S.S. Satii to the U.S.S. Sisko. Request permission to dock," Ranma gleefully stated over the communications system.

One the other end, Makoto's voice proudly replied, "Permission granted, sir."

Ranma smiled to Akane who was seated in the Runabout's co-pilot seat. He turned and looked out the front window. There he saw the aft side of the Sisko.

While it is not the most flattering side of a vessel, to Ranma it was a beautiful site. He had not expected to ever see the ship again, so any view of her was a beautiful one.

A large bay door with the number '1' on it began to open as Ranma lined up the Runabout.

"Sisko LC to Satii; please decrease speed to 30 KPH." Landing control ordered.

Ranma complied and slowed the ship to a crawl as it approached the docking perimeter.

At about one kilometer out a low powered tractor beam engaged and grabbed the smaller craft. Ranma smiled as his display switched off from manual control, indicating that the Sisko was now controlling the landing.

Within a minute the Satii was gently set down inside of shuttle bay one. Thirty seconds later the large door had closed and sealed. Mere seconds after that a green light lit up above the main hatch on the Runabout indicating that the shuttle bay had been pressurized.

Ranma took Akane's hand, and the pair walked to the door. Ranma hit some buttons and the seal on the door disengaged. It quickly opened, the top half opening upwards, the bottom half opening down, making a stairway for the pair to walk down.

Ranma and Akane walked down. Ranma's boots made a loud sound as he hopped from the last carpeted step to the cold metal deck of the shuttle bay.

"Home," he simply stated.

The doors to the shuttle bay slid open and Karyn, Minako, Makoto, Gosnell, Rei, and Usagi walked into the shuttle bay.

Minako was the first to walk up to Ranma. She gave him a hug.

"Congratulations, Commander," she stated.

Makoto also walked up and hugged him.

"Likewise," She grinned.

Gosnell grabbed Ranma and hugged him tightly, tears pouring down his face. "I'M SO HAPPY!!!" He bellowed as he nearly squeezed the life out of Ranma.

"GAK!" Ranma replied. Makoto quickly pried Gosnell off Ranma and took him to the corner to comfort him.

Usagi then walked up, gave Ranma a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Akane raised an eyebrow but didn't say anything despite her natural urge to whollop Ranma.

"Glad to have you back," she giggled.

Rei then walked up and gave Ranma a hug.

"Welcome back, sir," She smiled.

Ranma nodded to all of them.

"Thank you, everyone, for all your support in this," Ranma looked to Karyn for a second before continuing. "I will perform my duties as Executive Officer to the best of my abilities."

Ranma looked around for a minute.

"Where's Ryouga?"

Meanwhile on deck seventeen...

"WHERE THE HELL AM I NOW?!"

“You’re in the brig, sir,” A marine explains to Ryouga as Ryouga looks around the lobby of the brig.

“What happened to the shuttle bay?” Ryouga asked.

The marine looks to another marine.

“Sir, the shuttle bay is still on deck twelve.”

Ryouga scratched his head.

“What deck is this?”

“Uh, deck seventeen sir.”

Ryouga nods.

“I see,” He looks at the marine’s collar. “Sergeant, please escort me to the shuttle bay.”

“I’m supposed to stay in the brig, sir,” the Sergeant replied.

“There are no prisoners for you to guard!” Ryouga complained.

The second marine looked to his partner. “Go ahead. I’ll be fine.”

The sergeant nodded and motioned for Ryouga to follow him.

“Commander, may I speak with you for a moment?” Karyn asked Ranma.

Ranma nodded and turned to Akane.

“Back in a flash.”

Ranma walked over to one side of the shuttle bay with Karyn as Akane walked over to the group of well-wishers.

“Captain,” Ranma stated once they got out of earshot of everyone else.

“Commander,” Karyn stated. “I just-“

“May I speak freely, ma’am?” Ranma interrupted.

While Karyn didn’t really care to be interrupted, she did want to hear what Ranma had to say.

“Yes.”

“I know what you are concerned about. I know why you wanted to talk to me. I just wanted to say that you have nothing to worry about.

“I made mistakes and the loss of command is one of the ramifications of those mistakes. I accept responsibility for that. You do not have anything to worry about. I’m not going to try and get back command. My job here is to be your XO and I will do that with every piece of my being.

“You are the captain of this ship and I respect and accept that. My purpose is to execute your commands and that is what I will do, without question and without hesitation.”

Karyn simply stood there in silence for a moment. That was exactly what she was worried about. She finally nodded and extended her hand.

Ranma took her hand and shook it.

“I guess I should be happy to have such a well-respected officer as my XO,” she smiled.

“And I for having such an exceptional officer for my CO. Not many people can become Captain so quickly,” Ranma smiled.

Karyn blushed. “When I want something, I get it. No matter how hard I have to work.”

Ranma nodded. “We’re a lot alike, you and me.”

Ranma looked at Karyn for a moment immediately noticing the resemblance between her and his other half.

In more ways than one. He mused to himself.

Ranma motioned for Karyn to come with him back to the group.

“The others are planning a reception for me at 20:00. I’d like it if you were to come.”

Karyn grinned, but shook her head.

“You’d be the only one.”

Ranma stopped. Karyn noticed this and stopped as well.

“Why do you say that?” Ranma asked.

Karyn sighed. “Well, no offense Commander, but you were a little lax on procedure and discipline. I’m not. So, I think a lot of the crew resents me for that.”

Ranma wasn’t quite sure what to say.

“Besides,” Karyn continued. “I really like to make sure I get a good night’s sleep in.”

Ranma nodded. “I understand.”

Karyn’s communicator chirped.

“This is Walker,” She stated.

“Captain, we have Starfleet with a priority one message for you.”

Karyn turned to Ranma. “If you will excuse me.”

Ranma nodded. “See you on the bridge tomorrow.”

Karyn nodded as she informed the officer on the other end of the communication that she was headed back to the bridge.

She stopped dead in her tracks though when she saw Ryouga walking in, a marine holding onto his uniform.

“Oh lord, what did he do?” Karyn asked.

The marine snapped to attention.

“Nothing, Captain. He’s just so directionally challenged that I had to hold onto him to make sure he didn’t wander off,” the marine looked to Ryouga, “again.”

Ryouga chuckled nervously.

“Ah, well carry on,” Karyn stated as she ran off towards the bridge.

“Will you make inside okay sir?” the marine asked.

“Yes Sergeant,” Ryouga replied. “Thank you.”

The marine nodded and headed back to the brig.

Ryouga walked into the room. He smiled at Akane. Akane grinned back and Ryouga blushed. He then walked up to Ranma.

“Hello Ranma,” he stated.

Ranma turned to his old friend slash old enemy.

“Ryouga.”

The pair stood there in awkward silence for a moment before Ranma reached out his hand.

Ryouga looked at it, ignored it, and embraced Ranma.

“I still hate you,” Ryouga explained quietly as he hugged Ranma.

“And I still have Akane,” Ranma chuckled as he hugged the wandering boy back.

Hideki finished the rice bowl that his captors had given him for lunch. While he was upset with the fact that he was being held, at least the food was decent.

His treatment was going well. Apart from that first day where he got kicked around a bit, the Chidori Security Services had been very good about making sure he had plenty of food, water, and other necessities.

He wished they had a bed for him to sleep in though. The floor was killing his back.

His jail cell was improvised from an equipment storage room. The guards had told him that the remaining Saint Paul officers, thirteen of them, were being held in similar rooms as well. Two others were still in the facilities infirmary being treated for their injuries.

It had been six days. Hassan had come in to check on him several times, informing him that they still have not found the Saint Paul and that they were still waiting to hear back from his superiors on what was to become of the captured officers.

The only real torture was the fact that he was sharing a room with him. Councilman Alexander.

"Hey," Hideki called to one of the guards.

"Yeah?"

"Let me borrow your gun."

"What?" the guard laughed.

"No, I promise I won't escape, and I will give it right back. I just want to pop a couple of rounds into that piece of crap over there," Hideki pointed to Brett.

Brett looked up from his rice bowl.

"Come on. Please?"

One of the guards turned to the other.

"It would be kind of fun to watch the two of them battle to the death."

The second guard laughed.

The doors slid open, and Hassan walked in.

"Except it would be your asses if either of them dies," Hassan growled. "We're not animals."

"You might not be making FOX but you're still making something that will result in the death of millions," Brett stated from the floor on his side of the makeshift jail.

Hassan shook his head as another person walked in behind him.

"If the Klingons want to melt each other with this junk then good riddance. But like many weapons of mass destruction, simply having them can save millions of lives."

Brett shook his head. "That's backwards reasoning."

"Maybe," Hassan stated. "I am sure you can tell that I am human. So, I know a little bit about human history.

"There was a thing back in the mid twentieth century; I believe it was referred to as the 'Cold War.' Peace was enforced even though there were many enemy factions by a concept known as 'mutually assured destruction.' If one faction attacked another, it would be assured that even though the faction they attacked would be destroyed, that faction would return the attack and destroy them."

Hassan pulled up a couple of chairs and sat them in front of Hideki. The second man sat in one and Hassan in the other as he continued talking.

“Despite the Federation’s claims of the opposite, truly little has changed in the past five hundred years. Just look at yourself, Councilman. You abused your power to launch a mission of revenge. I thought humanity had evolved beyond such things.”

“This is different,” Brett stated.

“Why? Because you’re a parent who lost a child?” Hassan asked him. “Because of your actions, six other parents lost their children.”

“Six?” Hideki asked.

“I’m sorry, Commander. I forgot that one of your shuttles was destroyed trying to escape and the pilot was killed.”

Hideki sighed.

“You don’t seem to be very mad at us,” the second man finally spoke up.

Hideki looked at him. “I am. I’m furious. But at the same time, I can understand. You were simply defending yourselves from an attack. I’d have taken out as many of you as I could as well if you invaded my ship.”

The man nodded.

“Oh, where are my manners,” he stated. “I am General Stephen Johansson. I oversee security here. I would have talked to you sooner, but I was off at our corporate office.”

Hideki looked to the man. “Who are you people?”

“We’re a corporation,” Johansson stated. “United Chemical Defense. We have plants in many systems throughout both the Alpha and Delta Quadrants. We make various kinds of munitions for many races, some of which the Federation has never heard of.

“We bought this facility from the Anjaris two years ago when they ceased FOX production. Most of what we needed to produce weapons was here, minus some alterations we made ourselves.”

“So, you’re a corporate security department?” Hideki asked.

“That’s right. Our board of directors are the ones deciding what is to be done with you and your crew.”

Johansson leaned forward. “Now that I have answered some of your questions, will you answer mine? Your cooperation will help me convince the board to allow a deal.”

Hideki nodded. “But I won’t give you details about my ship.”

“That’s fine. We know where your ship is now anyway.”

Hideki looked to Hassan. “You’re not going to destroy it, are you?”

Hassan turned to Johansson. Johansson nodded.

“No,” Hassan replied, turning back to Hideki. “Your ship has taken refuge in a nebula our interceptors can’t enter.”

Hideki sighed in relief.

“However,” Johansson stated.

Hideki looked up at him.

“They are maintaining a perimeter around the nebula. They have been ordered to seize the ship if it comes out of the nebula. If the ship fires on our ships, they will have no choice but to defend themselves.”

“And to be frank, Hideki,” Hassan continued. “While your ship is bigger, the Federation’s short sightedness on not equipping ships with short range, point defense weapons will make it no match for our ships.”

Hideki nodded.

“You have someone special on board?” Hassan asked. He could tell it was something more than just a loyalty to his ship.

“The Executive Officer is my fiancée.”

“Do you think you can talk them into surrendering?” Johansson asked very matter-of-factly.

Hideki just looked to the floor.

“We’ll worry about that later, eh?” Hassan smiled, trying to lighten the mood.

“Yes,” Johansson agreed. “First, I need to inform you that this conversation will be recorded, okay?”

Hideki just nodded.

“Commander, who ordered this mission?” Johansson asked.

Hideki didn’t look up.

“Vice Admiral Jack Hanson,” Hideki stated.

“STOP TALKING!” Brett ordered.

“Gag him, please,” Hassan instructed the guards. The guards complied and applied a generous amount of duct tape to Brett’s mouth.

“Why did Admiral Hanson order the mission?”

Hideki looked to Brett who was flopping around on the floor as the guards were changing the hand restraints to behind his back.

“I guess he and that were friends,” Hideki replied, not attempting to hide the contempt for Brett in his voice.

“What was the point of the ground forces? Your ship could have easily annihilated this place from orbit.”

“The ODP – orbital defense platforms – we assumed would log sensor readouts. While we could have destroyed them, we didn’t know where they would transmit their sensor data too.

“The admiral made it very clear that Federation involvement could not be discovered.”

“Because the mission was not authorized by the Federation?”

“Yes,” Hideki replied. He looked to Brett who had finally calmed down, yet still had a guard pinning him down.

“That said that it went to the Federation Council and asked for authorization and that they denied it.”

“How do you know that?” Hassan asked.

“The admiral apparently told my captain that. My captain was leery about launching the assault, so the Admiral gave him more details than he gave others. The captain then told me.”

“So, if we contact the Federation, they will back up your story?” Johansson asked.

“I would assume so,” Hideki replied. “I would think that the Federation would be worried that the Klingons would construe this as an attack against them, so I can see them wanting to wash their hands of this.”

“Do you think the Federation would be willing to turn over this Admiral Hanson to us?” Johansson asked.

“I don’t know.”

“The shuttles you had. They were Romulan. Did you get them from the Romulans?”

“No,” Hideki replied. “We got them from a Ferengi arms dealer.”

“Where is he located?” Hassan asked.

“He’s dead,” Hideki answered. “Admiral Hanson ordered him, and his outpost, destroyed.”

Johansson sighed and leaned back.

“These chairs are not very comfortable,” He turned to one of the guards. “Have someone go find Commander Montasori an office chair.”

“I don’t suppose you have a cot or anything?” Hideki asked, half-jokingly.

“No,” Johansson replied. “But I can have someone bring you a mattress from the barracks.”

“I was joking,” Hideki replied. “If my men have to sleep on the floor, so should I.”

Hassan got on the radio. “Echo one to supply.”

“Go ahead,” the voice on the other end replied.

“See if you can find fifteen spare mattresses and bring them up to where the prisoners are being held.”

“We only need fourteen.” Hideki scowled, looking at Brett who was lying face first on the ground.

Hassan laughed. “Make that fourteen.”

“Roger.” The voice replied.

Johansson stood as did Hassan.

“I will keep you informed as to what is happening, Commander,” Johansson said. “Just so you know, if I can get Admiral Hanson, I can probably talk the board into releasing all of you into Federation custody.”

Johansson and Hassan walked to the door. Johansson stopped just short of it though.

“I know what it’s like having to follow orders,” The general stated, looking over his shoulder to Hideki. “I don’t want to have to hold you responsible for this, but if all else fails, I will have to.”

The two CSS officers walked out the door leaving Hideki, Brett and the two guards alone.

**Captain’s Log – Stardate 60697.1. We’ve been dispatched by Starfleet to a system about 16 light years from Earth. The system has no planets in it, yet it used to apparently have a Ferengi trading post.*

I say used to because a scout ship studying the rare blue giant star detected a debris field where the outpost used to sit.

*That isn’t the most worrisome part though.**

Karyn stood from the captain’s seat as the Sisko slowed to a crawl and approached the highest concentration of debris. In the middle of the debris field, an Intrepid class ship, the U.S.S. Las Vegas, floated taking scans and an inventory of what debris was left.

“We’re being hailed,” Minako called out.

“On screen,” Karyn ordered.

On the view screen the Vulcan captain of the ship, Kelis, appeared.

“Good morning, Captain,” Kelis greeted.

“Good morning. What have you found?”

“There is a heavy mix of deuterium in the debris field, leading us to believe that this wasn’t just a Ferengi junk yard, but an arms depot.”

Ranma stood. “An illegal arms depot in the middle of Federation space?”

The Vulcan looked at Ranma for a moment.

"Hello Commander."

Ranma could see that the man on board the Las Vegas wasn't too pleased to see him, even though they had never met.

Word travels fast, even if it's inaccurate. Ranma thought to himself.

Rather than cause a conflict, Ranma walked up to ops to assist Minako with her scanning.

"The fact that this is an arms depot isn't the most bothersome fact," Kelis stated.

"What is it?" Karyn asked.

Minako spoke up before Kelis could. "Ma'am, I'm detecting a Federation weapons signature in the debris."

Everyone looked to Minako.

"Yes," Kelis confirmed. "This station was destroyed by a Federation ship."

"Maybe Starfleet figured out what was going on and sent a ship here to destroy it?" Ryouga pondered.

"No," Makoto said, shaking her head. "They wouldn't have destroyed it with the weapons on board." She looked at her scans. "Or with the Ferengi on board."

Minako nodded confirmation that there was one dead body included in the debris field.

"Well, we must get back to surveying the star. We will leave this in the Sisko's capable hands." Kelis stated. "Good day."

The screen went blank, and the small ship pulled a 180 and headed back towards the giant blue star off in the distance.

Karyn walked up to ops.

"He didn't seem happy to see you. Old friends?" She asked Ranma.

Ranma shook his head. "Depending on which Vulcan you ask, I am either a hero or a murderer."

"It's not going to cause any problems, is it?" Karyn asked Ranma with concern.

"No ma'am, assuming we don't have to go to Vulcan for a while."

Karyn nodded and turned to Minako.

"This doesn't make any sense," Minako grumbled.

"What?" Both Ranma and Karyn quizzed.

"The station had no defenses," She stated, running some more scans. "Whoever it was blew up a totally defenseless target."

Ranma and Karyn looked at each other for a moment before Ranma turned to Makoto.

“Commander,” he called. “Contact Starfleet. I want a list of all ships that have been in the sector over the past week.”

“Aye,” Makoto replied.

Karyn looked to her XO.

“There’s a long-range observation post about four light years from here. Set up to monitor Maquis ships going from Earth to the DMZ. This system should be within its range.”

Ranma turned and looked at the debris field.

“If we figure out who was here, maybe that will tell us why they did this.”

Karyn looked at Ranma for a moment. Despite her initial concerns, Ranma was turning out to be a fine first officer. Even though it had only been four hours since they started the shift, his natural leadership had already shown through.

She had also noticed how different the crew was reacting to her since his return. They acted more like she wanted them too. More disciplined.

She did not know what he had done to make that happen, but she was happy he did.

LAST NIGHT; SISKO LOUNGE – 22:14:44 HOURS

“I can’t STAND her!” Rei mumbled.

“She a total bitch,” Shampoo stated.

“At least you haven’t had to work with her yet,” Makoto groaned to Shampoo.

“She keeps yelling at me,” Ryouga added.

“She said I was incorporate,” Usagi slurred.

“Incompetent, sweetie,” Minako corrected.

“That’s even worse!” Usagi wailed.

“She was pissed that she had to approve my leave,” Akane added.

“And those god damned exercises,” Lt. Jansen concluded.

Ranma could do nothing but stare at the table of officers as they continued to complain about Karyn.

Ranma took a mental note to never ask the crew what they thought of the new captain again.

“What’s so different?” Ranma asked.

“She’s just so into ‘procedure’,” Rei responded.

“Takes all the fun out of the job,” Usagi said.

Ranma looked out the window at the stars whisking by. They were now at warp, but he wasn't sure where they were headed. He did know that the ship took off an hour or so after Karyn had received a priority message from Starfleet.

However, the ship was still her normal alert level, the level she is always at when not in combat or docked. The NSO teams had not been alerted and the marines weren't put in any type of heightened alert.

Ranma turned back to the group.

"It's not supposed to be fun," he stated.

"Yeah, but with you it didn't seem as—" Makoto tried to look for the right word.

"Strict?" Ranma asked.

"Yeah," Everyone replied.

Gosnell walked over from where he was fetching drinks and set one down for everyone. He then sat down next to Makoto and put his arm around her. Shampoo and Lt. Jansen were sitting close together as were Minako and Ryouga. Akane scooted closer to Ranma when she noticed that his mind appeared to be lost in thought.

"Maybe that was the problem?" Ranma quietly asked.

"Huh?" Akane queried, looking at her husband with concern.

"Maybe that's why everything fell apart?" Ranma asked. "If we had been more into procedure maybe I wouldn't have allowed Shampoo to suffer for weeks before intervening?"

Shampoo looked to Ranma, and then lowered her head.

"Maybe if we had been more into procedure then there would have been the proper checks installed to keep the missions flowing smoothly."

Minako and Makoto looked at each other. They knew what he was talking about, blindly following the order to lower the shields in the atmosphere.

"And if I had followed procedure then we – all of us – wouldn't be on the receiving end of major Starfleet and Federation scrutiny."

"It's not just procedures, Ranma," Akane replied.

"She's constantly ragging on us about 'captain on the bridge' and micro-managing departments. It's like this ship has become a prison," Rei stated.

"Or more like a military ship," Ranma replied.

"Yeah, but—" Rei started.

"This isn't some fucking luxury cruise liner," Ranma snapped. "This is a battleship. This ship has one purpose and that is to defend the Federation and its citizens from ANY threat."

“Her captain is in charge and if she wants to run the ship the way it is supposed to be run, then she will. And each and every single one of you will do what she wants done, the way she wants it done. You won’t question her; you won’t talk about her behind her back and you WILL NOT expect her to run the ship like an amusement park; like I apparently did.”

Everyone could only stare at Ranma after his unexpected outburst.

“This is HER ship now, like it or not and I expect – no, I DEMAND that you give her the same respect and obedience that you gave me. Is that understood?”

“Yes sir,” everyone, including Gosnell replied.

Ranma sighed as everyone else sat in silence. Finally, Ryouga broke it.

“Does anyone else think she looks exactly like Ranma when he’s a girl?”

It took six marines to pull Ranma off Ryouga.

SISKO BRIDGE – 12:14:07 HOURS

Makoto looked up from her terminal.

“I have the observation stations records.”

Karyn and Ranma both stood from their seats and walked over to the security/tactical station.

“There have only been two Federation ships in the sector in the past fourteen days.”

Ranma looked to Makoto.

“I know you said seven, but there were only two ships, so I went back another week just to make certain that they were the only ones.”

“Good thinking,” Ranma acknowledged.

“One, the Las Vegas. But she’s outfitted to log star, uh stuff.”

Minako chuckled at Makoto’s scientific ineptness.

“The other was the U.S.S. Saint Paul.”

Karyn pondered the results.

“What about non-Federation ships?”

“There were thirty-eight but based on these readings none appeared to be armed well enough to destroy the station. Besides, the Federation uses weapons technology developed in house, so there isn’t anyway a non-Federation ship could be equipped with Federation weapons,” she explained.

“What about masking the weapons signature?” Ranma asked.

“It’s impossible to do it completely,” Makoto stated. “The scans Commander Aino completed were VERY thorough, so we would detect any variation.”

“Where is the Saint Paul now?” Karyn asked.

“According to Starfleet, she should be enroute to Starbase 552 for a diplomatic mission.”

Karyn turned to Ranma and nodded.

Ranma spun around. “Lt. Hibiki, set course for Starbase 552, maximum warp.”

“Aye,” Ryouga called back.

In moments, the Sisko adjusted her pitch, albeit clumsily, and shot off towards her destination.

EIGHTEEN HOURS LATER

“Approaching Starbase 552, Captain.” Ryouga stated.

“Drop to impulse,” Karyn ordered. “Yellow alert.”

Lt. Jansen, in the tactical/security station with Makoto reached over and hit the button on her console that activated yellow alert.

The status bar on the master situation display switched from blue to yellow. The torpedo launchers on the display, which were currently colored blue to show they were unloaded and offline, quickly switched to yellow, then green to show they were armed and ready.

The phaser bank indicators also switched from blue to yellow to green.

The Sisko’s defensive shields fired up. The main shields switched from offline to hot standby.

The new additions to the ship, short range phase cannons, activated, but stayed in their compartments inside the ship’s hull; two dorsal, two ventral. If needed the cannons would rise out of the hull and fire in an attempt to destroy incoming torpedoes.

The life support system switched to battle mode; where the one system that controlled atmosphere on the whole ship switched to four systems. One for the bridge, one for engineering, one for deck five – the deck with most of the lifeboats, and one for the rest of the ship. The NSO area in the former flight operations center, sitting upon the ‘pontoons’ that housed the warp nacelles, had its own separate system already.

Down on deck seventeen, marines and security officers grabbed weapons and ran to sensitive locations on the ship to make sure if they were boarded it would be exceedingly difficult for the enemy to gain control of the ship.

Ranma hit a button on his chair and the tactical display screen emerged from its retracted state between the XO and CO’s chairs. Both Ranma and Karyn looked at it, puzzled.

“She should be on long range sensors by now,” Ranma stated.

Karyn agreed. She turned to Minako. “Any contact?”

Minako shook her head. "No ma'am. The Starbase has attempted to contact them on subspace but got no reply."

Karyn and Ranma watched the display for almost an hour in silence before Minako spoke up again.

"Captain, Starfleet Command on subspace."

"On screen," Karyn ordered.

On the view screen Admiral Larson appeared. "Good afternoon, Captain," he stated.

Karyn nodded.

"The Sisko can stand down."

Ranma looked to Karyn who was as befuddled as he was.

"Sir?" She asked.

"The Saint Paul is not coming to Starbase 552," he informed the crew. The tone of his voice told everyone on the bridge that something was not right.

"Understood," Karyn stated. Ranma turned to Makoto.

"Stand down yellow alert," he ordered as Karyn continued her conversation.

"What would you like us to do?"

"Head back this way. I am hoping you won't be needed to handle this – situation. But I'd like you back here just in case."

Karyn nodded as Larson terminated the communication.

"What do you think is going on?" Ranma asked.

Karyn shrugged. "Take us home."

Ranma nodded as Karyn walked to her ready room.

"Set a course for Earth. Warp six." Ranma ordered.

"Sir," Minako called out. "I have the Starbase on the line. They have an ambassador who wants to know who is going to take him to his meeting."

Ranma shrugged as Ryouga plotted the course for Earth. "Tell them to call a taxi."

Minako looked at Ranma for a moment before informing the Starbase that transportation would need to be arranged for with Starfleet.

Ryouga tapped the large yellow button on his console and the ship swung around and shot off towards Sol.

CHAPTER SIX – END GAME

“Starfleet Command is hailing us again on subspace, Admiral,” Operations informed an exhausted Admiral Hanson.

It had been twelve days since they had taken refuge inside the nebula. Hanson could not believe that the interceptors had waited outside for as long as they had. The fact that they did proved one thing though. They knew that the St. Paul was in there.

He thought about making a break for it during what he described as their shift change, but the enemy spread it out so that there was always a full complement of ships out there.

Then he had Starfleet Command. He knew that they would be looking for them. Fortunately, no Starfleet ship would be able to scan into the nebula as well.

Hanson had deactivated the ships transponder and lowered the power consumption to bare minimums. The nebula, while disruptive to sensors, was harmless so there was no need to keep the shields up.

A little dangerous but he knew the interceptors would not fire into the nebula. Igniting the hydrogen would create an explosion that would not only destroy the St. Paul, but anything within a parsec of the nebula.

“Do not respond,” Hanson finally ordered.

The young operations officer complied and silenced the chirping of his station.

Hanson stood up and looked around. He was keeping the bridge minimally staffed. Tactical, Ops, Helm, and himself. Plus, two security guards in case anyone decided to try and take control of the ship.

He also kept a phaser by his side.

Hanson, when he did sleep, slept on the bridge in the command chair. He left the bridge only to use the bathroom. When he was gone, he took one security guard with him and gave the other one orders to kill anyone who left their station.

He had gotten that paranoid.

It was a justifiable paranoia though. Many of the crew was getting tired of sitting in the nebula with low lighting and extraordinarily little freedom to move. Some talked about taking control of the ship and surrendering. Those were arrested.

Hanson had most of the youngest crew members, the one with the least amount of experience – and there for the most loyalty to the chain of command – converted into security officers.

They spent the nights roaming the corridors and making sure the people in the brig maintained order.

It was getting difficult. Hanson now had fifty-four people locked in the brig. Overcrowding was causing restlessness. There probably would have been a riot already if Captain McNamara had not kept everyone calm and cool.

And while everything seems grim and the hopes of escape for McNamara and the others seemed impossible, McNamara kept talking to Ensign Thompson (who had been given a field commission by the admiral to Lt. Commander), trying to convince him that he was on the wrong side – the wrong team - and that he should help them.

Unfortunately, every time it seemed like he was making some progress, Ensign Stevens (now Lieutenant Stevens) came and took him away, scolding him for chatting with the prisoners.

It was becoming very frustrating for everyone involved.

“Hey Sarah,” McNamara called out.

Sarah was staring out the brig and at the chief of security’s office door. On the door was the placard that read ‘Commander Hideki Montasori.’

“Yeah?” she asked, not taking her eyes off the door.

“Come here,” he requested.

Sarah slowly turned and walked to McNamara, stepping over a couple of people who were sleeping and around one person who was simply sitting, quietly talking to himself.

McNamara patted the floor next to him. Sarah sat down where she was instructed.

“You okay?” he asked her.

Sarah shook her head. “No.”

McNamara wrapped his arm around her and pulled her close to him.

“You know what the worst part is?” she asked as a couple of tears began to run down her face.

“What?” McNamara asked softly.

“The fact that I don’t know,” Sarah sniffled. “I lost both my parents in the Dominion War and my brother at Wolf 359. I think I could deal with it better if I knew that he was dead.”

McNamara leaned his bearded face down and kissed Sarah on top of her head.

“He’s alive.”

“How do you know?” Sarah cried.

“I’ve known Hideki for fifteen years. And I kid you not, that man wouldn’t die if he shot himself.”

Sarah, much to her own chagrin, laughed.

“He loves you so very much, Sarah,” McNamara continued. “He won’t die simply because of that.”

Sarah turned slightly and placed her head on McNamara’s chest.

“Phil?”

“Yeah?”

“You really stink,” she laughed.

“Yeah, well you’re no box of roses either,” he laughed in return.

“Captain,” Thompson stated as he walked over to the brig cell.

McNamara looked up.

“Yes, ENSIGN?”

“The admiral would like to speak with you.”

Sarah pulled herself from McNamara. She leaned up against the wall as McNamara stood and walked to the perimeter of the cell. Thompson deactivated the force field and allowed McNamara out. He then quickly reactivated it.

As they were walking to the door, Stevens walked in.

“Where are you taking him?” Stevens asked Thompson.

“Admiral Hanson wishes to speak with him.”

“No one said that to me.”

Thompson pointed to the pips on his collar.

“No one needed to. As you were.”

Stevens looked at the pair for a moment before walking onwards. Thompson and McNamara continued walking to the turbolift.

“Deck four,” he ordered the lift.

McNamara sized up Thompson.

“Did you think about what I said?”

“No talking, sir,” Thompson ordered.

McNamara sighed as the lift came to a stop. Thompson led the captain out of the lift and down a dimly lit hallway. After about a hundred meters, Thompson stopped them.

“Shoot me.”

McNamara looked to Thompson who was holding out his gun for McNamara to take.

“What?”

“Shoot me. It’s the only way you can escape.”

McNamara took the phaser rifle and looked at it.

"It's on kill."

"You have to kill me, sir."

"I'm not going to kill you."

Tears were beginning to form in the young ensign's eyes.

"If you don't, someone else will when they figure out what I've done," he looked to the deck as he cried. "I'm going to be executed for treason when we get back anyway."

"No, you won't," McNamara grumbled as he tried to lower the setting on the phaser, but it wouldn't lower.

"They locked them in. The setting can't be lowered."

"I can't kill you."

McNamara handed the gun back to Thompson.

"Fine," Thompson stated. He took the gun, turned it towards himself, closed his eyes and fired.

The concussion sent the young man's lifeless body five meters down the corridor and the rifle slamming to the thinly carpeted deck with a thud. McNamara almost screamed as he watched him bounce on the deck and roll another meter.

McNamara ran over and checked Thompson's pulse.

"Damn it," he stated as he picked up Thompson's gun and ran down the corridor.

McNamara knew why Thompson picked deck four. The captain's quarters were on this deck. In the captain's quarters was an emergency subspace transmitter.

It would only have enough power to transmit for five minutes, but hopefully that would be enough.

On the bridge, the internal sensor screen that would normally show a phaser discharge stayed black, as they had been shut off because of Hanson's power saving scheme.

The door to Hideki's jail cell slid open. Hideki looked up from the mattress he was napping on to see General Johansson and Lt. Hassan walk in.

Hideki rubbed his eyes and sat up.

"Is it morning already?" He groggily asked.

Being held captive for over a week, the usual routine has become, well, routine for him. Every morning, after he was given breakfast and a chance to shower and do other bathroom essentials, Hassan and Johansson would come in, tell him how the negotiations with the Federation were going, and then question him some more.

His captors were running out of questions about his mission, so they began to ask about his life, about his family and about Sarah.

He almost felt like they were getting the reverse of Stockholm Syndrome, whatever the clinical term for that was.

This morning was different though. The two men did not have the usual comforting smiles on their faces. They almost looked angry. In fact, Hideki couldn't remember ever seeing Hassan that angry since the first day he was questioned.

"Things are not well, Commander," Hassan stated.

Hideki sat up, completely awake. Hassan had not called him Commander in over a week. The pair was on a first name basis.

"What's wrong?" Hideki asked as he took his place in the rather comfortable new interrogation chair.

The commotion woke Brett up. Hassan had brought Brett a mattress over Hideki's objections. Brett slowly and groggily sat up and look towards the windows.

There was no sunlight coming in.

"Early today?" Brett pondered.

The two CSS officers turned to Brett and nodded to the guards who moved in.

"Oh, come on, I won't talk!" Brett complained as duct tape was reapplied to his mouth. Brett, used to this daily ritual groaned and did not resist as he was gagged.

"Commander," the General stated, turning back to Hideki. "The Federation is not only refusing to hand over Admiral Hanson, but they say if we don't release the Councilman the planet will be assaulted."

Hideki thought about this for a minute.

"They're bluffing. They must be. For that to happen they'd have to make public what happened."

"And you don't think they would want to do that?" Hassan asked.

Hideki shook his head. "No way. You know what would happen if people found out that there are rogue admirals and councilmen running around using Starfleet ships to launch their own little vendettas?"

"You need to speak to them," Johansson stated.

"What do you want me to say?"

Hassan sighed. "First, they assume that since some of your officers got killed, we must be treating you badly. We'd like you to set the record straight."

Hideki nodded.

"Second, we want them to hear from you that we are willing to compromise and make a deal, but SOMEONE must be held accountable for this act of war."

“Admiral Hanson?”

Hassan nodded. “And Councilman Alexander.”

Hideki grinned. “Really, if you shoot him now, I’ll say he was trying to escape.”

Hassan and Johansson looked to Brett as he cried out some muffled and unintelligible profanities.

“I don’t think anyone would believe us if we said he was trying to escape,” Hassan mused.

Johansson turned back to Hideki.

“Third I want you to tell the Federation what happened, and what the result was. That because of this little adventure that Hanson and Alexander took you on six of your shipmates were killed.”

“You want a full confession,” Hideki read between the lines.

Johansson nodded.

“You know they will think I am being forced,” Hideki stated.

Johansson shook his head.

“You are not. You are free to not record anything. You are free to stay in here and hope that the people at the Federation come to their senses and give up two criminals to save the fourteen people here and the hundred or so on your ship.”

Hassan continued. “You will be in a room by yourself. We won’t be in there, no guards, nothing. Just you and a communications terminal.”

“How do you know I won’t call for help?” Hideki asked.

“The Federation knows where you are. They know where your ship is,” Hassan stated.

“Commander,” Johansson continued. “You are calling for help. You’re calling for your government to transfer the people who planned this assault into our custody in exchange for your freedom.”

Hideki sighed.

“It would be better if you let me talk to someone live, as opposed to a recording. A recording will look manipulated. If I can answer questions the Federation will be more than likely to believe it’s really me.”

Johansson nodded. “I agree with that. We’ll contact your government and come and get you when we’re ready.”

Hassan and Johansson got up and headed towards the door.

“What time is it?” Hideki asked.

Hassan looked to his watch. “04:19.”

“Is it too early for breakfast?”

Hassan chuckled. “I’ll send some in a short while.”

The door slid shut. Hideki looked to the floor.

“Thank you.”

The guards in the room took the tape from Brett’s mouth.

“What are you doing, Commander?”

Hideki scowled at the guards and turned towards Brett.

“I’m trying to save my men.”

“By taking sides with the enemy?”

Hideki shook his head as he walked back to his mattress.

“They’re not my enemy. And if you knew how to do ANY kind of operational planning you would have seen that they aren’t yours either.”

The Sisko slowed to impulse as it reached the outer defense perimeter of Earth. She then began to orbit at a comfy 1,000 kilometers above the planet’s surface.

Shampoo looked out the window in Lt. Fuchs office at the planet below.

“You can almost see my house from here,” she mused to Lt. Jansen as the Asian continent passed below them.

“Mine won’t be coming up for another thirty minutes,” she stated. “Southern England.”

“That where Amanda get such sexy accent?” Shampoo smirked as she leaned into Amanda.

The doors to the office opened with a hiss and Akane and Lt. Fuchs walked in. Shampoo and Amanda both shot away from each other and did their best to appear nonchalant.

Jeff raised an eyebrow at what he nearly witnessed. Akane, who had tons of material for a day like this, forcibly contained herself.

“Commander, Lieutenant,” Jeff smiled.

“Lieutenant, Commander,” Amanda and Shampoo both replied.

Akane held up a PADD that she was carrying and began to read it.

“I, Commander Akane SAOTOME; Chief Medical Officer of the USS Benjamin Sisko, Starfleet registry number NX-95077, do hereby find fit for duty Commander Shampoo. Acting as Chief Medical Officer with power granted to me by Starfleet Command and Starfleet Medical do hereby authorize Commander Shampoo to be returned to active duty effective today, Stardate 60702.”

Shampoo, who ignored the emphasis Akane placed on her last name, smiled as she was embraced by Amanda.

Akane nodded to Jeff and then to Shampoo and Amanda. She then turned around and walked outside of the office.

Once outside and she was sure the doors were closed, Akane smiled.

“Good for you, Shampoo. Good for you.”

Akane continued to smile as she walked down the corridor and back to sickbay.

Inside Jeff’s office, Shampoo and Amanda were still hugging.

“Ahem.” Jeff ahemed. Both girls turned to him. “First off, let me say ‘hurrah!’ I was getting kind of lonely on board.”

“Huh?” Both questioned.

Jeff pointed to a picture he kept on his desk. The picture was of Jeff and a handsome young man also wearing a blue medical uniform.

“That not your friend?” Shampoo asked.

Jeff grinned. “Oh, we’re friends.”

“Oh?” Both girls questioned.

Then they got it.

“OH!”

“Yeah.”

Shampoo blushed.

“Don’t be embarrassed or shy. As I have always said, you don’t choose love. Love chooses you.”

Amanda turned to Shampoo.

“Are you embarrassed of me?”

Shampoo turned to Amanda.

“Well, it is little embarrassing to date Lieutenant.”

Amanda stared bug-eyed at Shampoo. As did Jeff.

Shampoo grinned and kissed Amanda on the tip of her nose.

“Kidding!”

Amanda groaned and poked Shampoo in the breast. The pair began to paw at each other once again.

“Ahem,” Jeff once again interrupted.

“Sorry,” Both women replied halting their playfulness.

“No problem,” Jeff replied with his usual cheerful understanding.

“Secondly, Shampoo I would like it very much if you continued to see me on a regular basis. Just until we are sure that you are over this.”

Shampoo nodded.

“And if anything happens. If you ever get that urge, please call me. Day or night, I don’t care.”

Shampoo once again nodded.

“And thirdly, don’t volunteer for duty tonight. Go down to Earth and see some sights. Enjoy your last day off. You’ll be begging for one in a month, I’m sure.”

Shampoo smiled.

“Thank you for everything.” She smiled and walked over to Jeff. She gave him a hug and walked to the door.

“Where you want to go?” Shampoo asked Amanda.

“Well, I have to be on duty in four hours.”

Shampoo grinned devilishly as she ran her hand down Amanda’s back.

“I know where we go.”

“Commander! Enough with the tactical report! Are you okay?” a Federation official asked the image of Hideki that was on the conference rooms view screen.

“Yes sir. We have been treated very well,” Hideki replied. “Well within the requirements of the Eighth Geneva Convention regarding prisoners of war.”

Two of the five Federation suits sighed a sigh of relief. The other three, who also expressed less audible signs of relief, pondered Hideki’s self-declaration of himself as a POW.

In the conference room at Starfleet Headquarters besides from the five suits were two admirals in red Starfleet Command uniforms and one in a black Starfleet Intelligence uniform. He was the next to speak up.

“Who is in the room with you, Commander?”

Hideki looked around. “No one.”

Hideki picked up the camera he was speaking into and showed the people the room. As he stated, he was alone. There appeared to be no one way glass either. Just a single door that was closed.

“Why did they leave you alone?” The intelligence admiral asked.

“They trust me, and I trust them,” Hideki stated. There was a short murmur between the suits before one of them spoke up.

“What have they told you of our negotiations?” The suit asked.

“The informed me that you refuse to hand over Admiral Hanson and Councilman Alexander to them. That you seem to want to allow them to execute us, those who were just following orders, rather than let them punish the people who orchestrated this mess.”

One of the red admirals stood. “Commander, we don’t negotiate with terrorists.”

“They aren’t terrorists, sir,” Hideki countered. “They are the security services for this facility that were acting against a threat.”

“He’s got Stockholm Syndrome,” one of the suits stated.

“With all due respect sir, I do not,” Hideki complained. “Just because I understand what is going on doesn’t mean I sympathize with them. Hell, if I had enough guns, I’d shoot them all to get me and my men out of here.”

Hideki groaned. “Besides, for that to happen we’d have to be hostages.”

“If you’re not hostages, what are you?” Another suit asked.

“Prisoners of war, sir,” Hideki once again stated. “We were captured, fair and square, during combat. It’s no different than during the war.”

The suits began to mumble to each other once again.

“Sir, these people are willing to compromise. Two lives for fourteen plus the remaining complement on the St. Paul.”

“We are not going to turn over Federation citizens to be executed without a trial to prove their guilt,” one of the suits replied.

“TRIAL?” Hideki yelled. “Don’t you get it? I wouldn’t be here – my men wouldn’t be here – six people wouldn’t be DEAD if they weren’t guilty!”

“Admiral Hanson and Councilman Alexander planned and executed this assault against the wishes of Captain McNamara. They killed a Ferengi arms dealer with no trial. They went behind your back and stole a Federation ship.

“And now one of them is sitting in a damn nebula, probably about to get the Saint Paul destroyed killing another hundred people. Why? Because you cannot see what’s important here. Because you can’t see that all these people want is someone held accountable.”

Hideki groaned and stood up.

“Commander,” one of the Admirals called out.

Hideki turned around.

“The admiral and Mr. Alexander will be tried in a Federation court and if found guilty imprisoned.”

Hideki shook his head.

“Accountable to them. Not to you,” Hideki turned around again and walked across the room. “Besides, what does an Admiral and a Councilman get for six counts of murder?”

Hideki walked back to the console.

“They were right. Nothing has changed in the past five hundred years. Still corruption and short sightedness.”

Hideki hit a button and the view screen changed to the logo of the Chidori Security Services.

The suits all began to talk amongst themselves.

“We can continue to negotiate,” one said.

“I am sure we can talk them into releasing the hostages,” another said.

The Admiral in black stood up.

“Talk. That’s all you guys do. Talk.”

All the suits stopped talking and turned to the admiral in black.

“We need to do more than talk. We need to launch a full assault on the planet.”

“We don’t have a ship that’s able to do that,” One of the admirals in red stated.

“Then we send a fleet,” The admiral in black replied.

“We don’t have a spare fleet to send. We barely have enough ships to secure the borders as it is,” The other admiral in red stated. “You more than anyone should know the toll the war took on us. There is no way we can spare a fleet for a rescue mission.”

“It’s not just a rescue mission. We’d be killing two birds with one stone,” The admiral in black stated. “We rescue the hostages and eliminate a dangerous weapon from falling into the Klingon’s hands.”

“We don’t have enough ships!” The second red admiral exclaimed more emphatically.

“I have a ship,” a man in the corner, who had remained silent up to this point, stated.

The entire room looked to the darkened corner as Admiral Larson stood and stepped into the light.

“One ship?” The admiral in black asked.

“One ship,” Larson nodded. He looked to the suits. “But it has to be a last resort.”

One of the suits looked to the rest.

“Let’s contact the Klingons. Maybe they can talk them into releasing them, since they are their biggest client.”

“Don’t take too long,” one of the admirals in red stated. “They aren’t going to keep them alive if they aren’t going to be useful as collateral.”

The suits nodded, gathered their belongings, and walked out of the room. Larson and the other admirals walked to the exit when the admiral in black turned to Larson.

“What ship?”

Larson smiled.

“It’s classified.”

The admiral in black stopped in his tracks.

“That’s my line.”

“Well?” Hassan asked.

“It didn’t go well,” Hideki replied as the guards began to escort him back to his cell.

“That’s too bad,” Johansson stated.

Hideki looked up to the senior officer.

“The board contacted me just a few minutes ago. The executions are to be in four days.”

Hideki lowered his head as Hassan patted him on the back.

“Someone must be held accountable,” Hideki stated, resigning himself to his fate.

CHAPTER SEVEN – OBJECTIVE

The turbolift doors opened with a swish and Admiral Scott Larson stepped onto the bridge of the Sisko. Makoto looked up from her terminal and smiled at the Admiral. Larson returned the smile as Makoto took a deep breath.

“ADMIRAL ON THE BRIDGE!” she yelled.

Larson jumped about two meters into the air. Once he had regained his bearings he looked over to Makoto.

“Don’t do that,” he growled.

Makoto whimpered, turned to the wall of her station, and began to bang her head into it.

Larson eyed her for a moment with concern, looked over to Minako who simply shrugged, and then walked around the bridge and to the entrance of the conference room. He walked inside to find Karyn and Rei sitting at the table.

Karyn looked up and saw the Admiral. She quickly stood and saluted. She looked to Rei, who was still seated.

“ON YOUR FEET COMMANDER!” she barked.

Rei looked up at her, then to the Admiral. She sighed, slowly stood and saluted.

“Uh –“ Larson mumbled as he haphazardly returned the salute. “As you were?”

Karyn quickly sat back down. Rei eyed Karyn as she sat down a little more slowly.

“As soon as Commander Saotome gets here, we’ll begin.”

Larson hit his communicator. “Larson to Kino.”

“Yes sir?” Makoto replied.

“If you are done punishing the bulkhead, would you please join us?”

“Yes sir.”

“Commander Kino-Gosnell? I was under the impression that this meeting was classified?” Karyn asked.

Larson looked at his subordinate for a moment. “EVERYTHING that happens on this ship is classified. But this mission will involve her as well.”

Karyn, a little scared of the look Larson was giving her, simply nodded.

A moment or so later both Makoto and Ranma walked in.

"I apologize for my tardiness, Admiral," Ranma stated. "I'm having a little trouble adjusting to a staggered shift."

Ranma looked to Karyn.

"It's not a bad thing, Captain. Just a little hard to get used to."

Karyn nodded. When she did them on her last ship it took her some time to adjust.

"It's okay," Larson stated as he stood and walked to the view screen.

"The details of this meeting are need-to-know. Only NSO, the senior staff and select marine groups are to know the details."

"Yes sir," the group responds in unison.

"Good. Almost two weeks ago the security forces on the U.S.S. Saint Paul launched an unauthorized attack on a chemical weapons facility in the Chidori system.

"Admiral Hanson at the request of Councilman Brett Alexander planned and executed the attack. However, the attack was poorly planned, and poorly executed. The result was the death of six security officers and the capture of fifteen others – including the councilman.

"Two officers who were pilots of two Romulan shuttles that they were using for their operation," Larson paused for a moment. "We assume that the Saint Paul acquired them from the Ferengi arms dealer that the Saint Paul killed, managed to escape.

"The Saint Paul's chief of security, Commander Hideki Montasori was one of those who were captured. During interrogation he confirmed to the people holding them that he and the rest of the officers were Federation."

"So," Ranma asked. "The attack was supposed to be covert?"

"That's what we assume," Larson nodded. "They were using a cover story of being terrorists. But for whatever reason they took the councilman with them; even though he is one of the most widely known Federation officials in the quadrant."

Ranma nodded as Larson continued.

"Long story short, the Federation has been negotiating with the people holding our people for the past week. Unfortunately, the negotiations broke down. They plan on beginning executions in four days."

"So, you need us to go in and retrieve everyone?" Rei asked.

"Yes, but there is a complication."

"Isn't there always?" Rei mused.

"COMMANDER!" Karyn scolded.

Rei turned and glared at Karyn. It seemed to frighten her even more than the Admiral's look did. Ranma in turn glared at Rei, which caused her to return her attention to Larson.

The grey-haired admiral continued.

“It was a widely known fact within the Federation powers that be that this plant made chemical weapons for the Klingons. So, the Federation contacted the Klingon Empire to see if they could use their business connection with them to help ensure the release of the hostages.

“However, the Klingons buying the weapons were not doing so under the authority of the Klingon High Council. We now know that it was a separationist sect with aims of using the weapons to begin a coup.

“So now the Klingons are planning to destroy the facility themselves.”

Larson paused, inhaled deeply, and continued. “They have a strike force three days away.”

“So,” Rei clarified, “not only do we have to retrieve the hostages before they are executed, but before the Klingons come and blow the place up.”

“Exactly,” Larson nodded.

“Here is the plan,” he continued. “NSO teams will insert and secure the hostages. Once that happens, Commander Kino will lead a marine force in to clear the way out. The Sisko will be tasked with holding off the Klingon forces, should they arrive prior to extraction.”

“How many support ships will be with us?” Karyn asked.

“None.”

“Say what?” Karyn asked, surprising herself.

“Starfleet does not have any available ships. The only reason you guys aren’t out doing post-war cleanup work is because most of Starfleet doesn’t even know you exist.”

Karyn looked to Ranma. “I know this is a tough ship, but can it withstand a Klingon task force alone?”

Ranma nodded. “Yeah. I mean I had us within 10 kilometers of a massive explosion and we survived.”

Ranma grinned and looked to Larson who was scowling.

“Too soon?” Ranma asked.

Larson nodded.

“Sorry,” Ranma whimpered.

Larson groaned and returned to his briefing. “The diplomats are working overtime trying to get the Klingons to delay their assault, but we all know how stubborn they can be.”

Everyone nodded.

“Commander Kino, you also have a second task.”

Makoto looked up from the written version of the briefing on her PADD to the Admiral.

“The Saint Paul is hiding in a nebula about a half light year from the planet. There has been a mutiny aboard.”

Larson walked up to the view screen.

“This was picked up by Deep Space Four,” he hit some buttons and a static filled picture of Captain McNamara appeared.

“This is Captain Phillip McNamara of the Federation Starship the U.S.S. Saint Paul. My ship has been illegally commandeered by Admiral Jack Hanson. Admiral Hanson has imprisoned my first officer and most of my senior staff and other crew members who retained loyalty to me – sixty-four at last count. He has also sent my security forces on an illegal invasion of the planet Chidori III. Many if not all those officers have been killed or detained on the planet. One did make it back and is detained in the brig.

“My first officer informed me that prior to her being detained that we moved into a nebula about one half-light year from the planet Chidori III. She also informs me that there are about five dozen small interceptor class fighters searching for us.

“I don’t know how much longer I will be able to evade the officers who decided to misplace their loyalty with Hanson. I do know that I will no longer be able to transmit status reports.

“If anyone with Starfleet Command receives this, please try and rescue my people from the planet. They are good officers who thought they were following a valid order.

“I am going to try and free my captured crew members from the brig, but the Admiral has taken the officers that did remain loyal to him and trained them all to be security officers.

“Also, please note in the record that Ensign Thompson, a security officer serving under me died honorably freeing me and helping me in my attempt to regain control of the ship.”

The communication cuts off.

“Commander, I need you to send a boarding party over to take control of the Saint Paul. If the communication is accurate most of the people controlling that ship are inexperienced security officers or scientists that have been drafted into security officers.”

Makoto nodded. “No problem on that end. The tough part will be getting to them. If there are several dozen interceptors, we might have problems getting within transporter range.”

“I know,” Larson stated. “I’m sorry but I don’t have an easy answer for you, Commander.”

“I’ll figure something out.”

“Good. Commander Hino, I will brief you and your teams on the details we have gotten from the communication between the Federation and the Chidori Security Services – the ones holding our people.

“We will have one thing on our side,” Larson continued.

Larson punched up the diagram of a type 11 shuttle.

“This is VERY top secret, as it’s in direct violation of several treaties. But this shuttle is equipped with a cloaking device.”

“Neat,” Ranma stated.

Larson nodded. “It’s not good for troop transport as it only seats three. But it’s been modified as a transport relay station.”

“Neat!” Rei grinned.

“So, I take it sending four Runabouts to the surface filled with NSO and marines aren’t an option?” Ranma asked.

“No. According to Commander Montasori –“

“Wait,” Karyn interrupted. “You’ve spoken to one of the hostages?”

“Yes. They allowed him to contact us.”

“And give you that kind of information?” Karyn asked totally befuddled.

“They did not monitor him.”

Karyn found this very odd but asked no more questions.

“As I was saying, the planet has orbital defense platforms. While their defenses are no threat to the Sisko, they will notify the people on the surface of our presence, which could endanger the hostages.”

“I don’t mean to bring this up again, Admiral,” Karyn began, her failure to understand what was going on getting the best of her.

“Yes?”

“Are we sure these people are hostages?”

Ranma looked to the Captain as did Makoto and Rei.

“Sure enough,” Larson stated.

Karyn nodded and leaned back. Ranma continued to eye her for a moment before returning his attention to Larson.

“There is one more thing, Ranma,” Larson added.

“Yes sir?”

“If it is okay with Commander Hino, I’d like for you to be on one of the NSO teams.”

Ranma looked over to Rei.

“Fine by me,” she smiled. “I could also use another experienced ass kicker!”

Ranma grinned.

“Excuse me,” Karyn piped up.

“Yes, Captain?”

“Am I going to be without an XO for this then?”

“Not at all.” Larson stated. “Commander Shampoo was officially returned to duty as of 14:00 hours.”

“Oh, swell,” Karyn mumbled.

“Problem?” Larson asked.

“No sir,” Karyn whimpered.

“Very well then. Dismissed.”

Phillip McNamara sat on the edge of his bed for a few moments, watching the colors of the nebula swirl outside. Normally he would have thought such a site was pretty. But right now, he could only picture the nebula as their brightly colored grave.

“You can’t think like that!” he told himself.

Part of him did not want to listen. Part of him just wanted to spend the rest of his time sleeping in his own bed, rather than the cramped floor of the brig.

Then there was the other part. The part that reminded him that there were sixty-three other people down in the brig counting on him, not only to get them out, but to get them home.

Phillip nodded to himself and stood. He walked to one of his drawers and opened it. In there he took out two phasers, one a small type two that he placed in his boot, and the other a type one that he carried with him.

He knew that eventually Stevens and the others would realize what Thompson had done and would begin to look for him. He knew that all of them were blindly following the orders of Admiral Hanson and would be against them.

All of them but one.

Phillip made his way down to deck four via turbolift shafts and Jefferies tubes. The darkened corridors helped him avoid detection by the guards who were roaming by themselves.

Phillip could not understand why Hanson had them alone. They were inexperienced and vulnerable. He could probably have taken them all out before they would have been able to stop him.

Phillip feared that maybe Hanson’s goal was not to retain control of the ship.

Phillip’s mind, which had been working nonstop since he was moved to the brig almost two weeks ago, had thought of every possible scenario that Hanson could do. But every one of them required him to maintain control of the ship.

It was confusing and tiresome to try and understand what was going on right now, so Phillip put those thoughts on the back burner and waited for his target.

He saw her walking down the corridor towards him. She was alone which both annoyed Phillip and pleased him since it meant he would not have to shoot one of his crewmembers. He slinked backwards into a crevice and waited for her to walk in front of him.

The young female in a gold security uniform stopped and looked around. She thought that she heard something, but she did not see anything. She shrugged it off and continued on her path.

Phillip waited for a second, and then sprung forward, grabbing her. He wrapped one hand over her mouth and the other grabbed the arm she was carrying her phaser rifle in.

The young woman began to struggle but stopped when Phillip whispered into her ear.

“Meru, it’s me.”

Phillip pulled her back into the darkness with him and released his hold on her. The young Bajoran woman looked Phillip over for a moment, dropped her rifle and embraced him.

“Father!” she quietly cried as she hugged Phillip.

Phillip hugged her back. “Are you okay?” He asked her.

Meru sobbed for a moment, and then nodded. “I’m fine. How about you?”

“I’m okay. I am glad that they didn’t find out about you.”

Meru shook her head. “I never told anyone. And when I found out that you had been arrested, I played along in hopes that I could eventually get you out.”

Meru was a young woman, no more than twenty years old. She was a small woman as well, shorter than most Bajoran women and far more petite. She looked almost like a small child when she stood to her much larger father. The ridges on her nose were very well defined, making it obvious that regardless of the father designation she had given to Phillip, she was not his biological daughter.

“We need to get somewhere to figure out what we are going to do,” Phillip said. “We cannot stay in the corridor forever.”

Meru nodded while Phillip thought about a good hiding place. The Saint Paul had been his ship for over six years. He knew every nook and cranny of the ship.

His main advantage was that the new ‘security force’ on the Saint Paul didn’t know anything about the ship. Many had been there for less than six months and while she was not a big ship, she wasn’t small either.

“We need to get to deck six,” Phillip stated.

Meru nodded and picked up her rifle. Phillip shook his head.

“It is locked on kill?” He asked.

Meru nodded.

“Leave it,” he handed her his phaser.

“Father, we need to stop these people.”

Phillip sighed. “The people supporting Hanson are not our enemy. They are fellow Starfleet officers who are unfortunately caught up in something way over their heads. They don’t deserve to die because of this.”

Meru reluctantly nodded and set the phaser on the deck. She and Phillip then began to slink down the corridor to the nearest Jefferies tube access.

“Nihao!” Shampoo beamed as she walked down the corridor of deck two towards the turbolift.

The two officers that were walking the opposite direction waved at her.

“She seems happy,” one stated.

“She’s going back to work today,” the other replied.

“Good for her,” the first smiled.

Good for her indeed. Shampoo almost began to skip as she continued to the turbolift. While she would be lying if she said that she wasn’t enjoying her time off, going back to work was something that she had been looking forward to for a month.

Stepping onto the bridge would be the final acknowledgement that she had slain the personal demon inside of her. The one that was causing her to fail, to fall apart, to be a burden on her shipmates and the people who cared about her.

Shampoo hit the call button and waited for just a second. The lift door opened, and she stepped inside.

“Bridge,” Shampoo proudly stated.

The turbolift chirped a reply and the doors shut. The turbolift silently floated up one level and a little bit horizontally. The lift slowly drifted to a stop and the door to the bridge opened.

Shampoo inhaled deeply and stepped onto the bridge. She smiled as the lift door closed behind her. She looked around and didn’t see any of the senior staff, except for Minako.

Minako looked to her and smiled. Lt. Jansen, who was watching the tactical station while Makoto was in the briefing, smiled at her as well. Ryouga turned around from his station, as did the engineer monitoring the engineering station.

“Welcome back, Commander,” Minako stated.

Shampoo nodded an acknowledgement to Minako.

“Thank you.” She paused for a moment, “Where is Captain?”

Minako pointed to the door with the small red placard that read ‘Conference Room One’. Shampoo nodded and began to walk towards it when the doors slid open, and everyone started to walk out.

“Hey Shampoo,” Ranma smiled. “Glad to have you back.”

Shampoo blushed. “Thank you.”

“Good to see you back, Commander,” Makoto smiled.

“Likewise,” Rei chimed in.

“Ah, Commander!” Larson beamed. “Come on in here. You too, Captain.”

Karyn, who was just about to leave the room, did an about face and walked back to the table in silence. Shampoo also walked in. The rest of the group turned just in time to see the doors slide shut in their faces.

Ranma looked to Rei and Makoto. Both shrugged.

“I have to go brief the marines,” Makoto stated.

“I have to go get my group ready for our briefing,” Rei stated.

Ranma nodded to her. “I’ll be up there as soon as they get done in there.”

Rei nodded and she and Makoto walked off to the turbolift.

Ranma began to walk to his seat at the command console when his communicator chirped.

“Saotome here.”

“Commander,” Karyn’s voice stated. “Please set a course for the Chidori system, warp seven. Have us hold position two parsecs from the system perimeter.”

“Yes ma’am,” Ranma stated. He walked over to the fight control center where Ryouga was seated. He patted Ryouga on the shoulder.

“How are things?” Ranma asked.

Ryouga scratched his head. “Fine?” He sort of answered.

“Good!” Ranma grinned. He looked at the display. Ryouga had already pulled up a map of the Chidori system.

“Park us there.” Ranma stated, pointing to a spot right around the area Karyn had told him to go.

“Sure thing,” Ryouga stated. He punched in the coordinates, but before he engaged the ship, he turned to Ranma.

“I really am glad you’re back,” Ryouga stated much to the surprise of Ranma. “Things didn’t seem right with you gone.”

Ranma smiled.

“Engage.”

The Sisko started to pull out of her orbit over Earth and turned slightly. The nacelles began to glow bright blue and with a brilliant flash of white light the ship was gone.

"I am just going to watch," Larson stated to Karyn and Shampoo. "I'll set up the science station to show me a tactical overview of the mission, but I am not going to get involved, so you guys don't have to worry about that."

"Regardless, your advice will be appreciated if you wish to give it," Karyn stated.

Shampoo nodded in agreement.

"Good. Now for the real reason I asked you two in here," Larson said as he leaned back in his chair.

"Shampoo, you will not be getting command of this ship," Larson said very bluntly.

Shampoo's face maintained her smile, even though a wave of sadness flowed through her.

"Shampoo understand," she said.

Larson leaned forward and looked right into Shampoo's eyes.

"It's not that we don't think you are qualified. We just have to make sure--"

Shampoo interrupted him. "You want to be sure that Shampoo no start drinking again if things get stressful."

Larson nodded.

"Shampoo would do same thing," she smiled, disappointed yet understanding.

Larson turned to Karyn. "You have to realize that even though she has had some problems, she is a very qualified officer. This is why I have sent Ranma with the NSO teams. I want you to see what she can do and how she can be an effective and excellent leader."

Karyn nodded.

Shampoo turned to her silent superior.

"You no think I can do job?" she stated more than asked.

Karyn inhaled and turned to Shampoo.

"That's not true. I'm..." Karyn was having a hard time saying what she was thinking without coming off as some sort of ass.

"I'm just concerned because of what's happened."

"You don't understand what has happened." Shampoo stated, her face becoming more neutral. "It no that Shampoo want to drink. It was because Shampoo scared of reality."

Shampoo turned away quickly to wipe a single tear from her eye. She then turned back.

"Shampoo not scared of reality anymore. Shampoo no longer allow past to control her. Shampoo have future to look to, and person to enjoy future with."

Shampoo stood and walked to the window and watched the stars streak by.

"I no longer afraid and no longer alone. I will no longer abandon duty and honor to run off and hide like scared cat. Shampoo swear this to you."

Shampoo turned to find Karyn standing right behind her.

Karyn smiled and put her hand on Shampoo's shoulder.

"I'm sorry. I believe you and I trust you."

Shampoo smiled and nodded.

Karyn slowly walked back to the table and sat down. While she'd been criticized about her bluntness, her demeanor before, she always brushed it off. It was just her style of leadership and her way of maintaining control. This time, though, it bothered her. She'd never felt like a bad person, and this feeling was confusing and frustrating.

Larson stood up and adjusted his uniform.

"Well, now that that's settled, I have to go brief the NSO teams. We're about 22 hours from Chidori, so I'd like to have dinner with all of you later."

"We look forward to it," Karyn said, forcing a grin.

Both Larson and Shampoo walked to the door of the conference room. They turned back and looked to Karyn.

"You coming?" Larson asked.

"I'll be out there in a minute," Karyn replied.

Larson nodded and he and Shampoo left the room. Once the doors had slid shut Karyn put her face down in her arm and silently began to cry.

"They want to speak to you again," Hassan told Hideki.

Hideki, who had just finished his daily exercises, sighed.

"I guess they want to take another shot at convincing me that I have Stockholm Syndrome," Hideki groaned.

Hassan shrugged as he and the two guards keeping an eye on Hideki out in the courtyard behind the facility escorted the middle-aged Japanese man inside and into the room with the communications terminal.

Hideki sat down at the terminal. Hassan sat down next to him.

"I'm sorry but the board will no longer allow me to speak to them privately. They intercepted a sub-space distress call from your ship and are afraid that you might assist them in planning an assault on the facility."

Hideki nodded. "May I see the distress call?"

Hassan nodded an agreement. "After you're done. Your people are very impatient and are waiting for you."

Hideki smiled. "Okay, start 'er up."

Hassan activated the terminal. Two suits appeared on the other end.

"Good morning, Commander," one stated. He looked and saw Hassan. "Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is Lt. Dolf Hassan. I am Assistant Chief of Security Operations for this facility," Hassan stated.

"May we speak in private with our officer?" The second suit asked.

"I'm afraid not. I have been ordered to monitor communications between you and him." Hassan replied.

"Very well," The first suit stated. "Commander, I am Inek Vaio, the new chairman of the Federation's Foreign Relations committee. With me is Andrew Holeman, the chief negotiator for this kidnapping."

Hideki sighed. "I was not kidnapped."

"Whatever," Inek stated. "It's just a term."

"No, it's not," Hideki replied. "You're not going to accomplish anything through negotiations as long as you keep the frame of mind that these people did something wrong."

"WE were the ones who were wrong."

"So, what would you like us to refer to you as?" Inek asked.

"Prisoners," Hideki stated.

"Very well," Inek replied.

"We are running out of time," Holeman stated. "Starfleet is growing very impatient with us. They are tired of the negotiations and they want us to simply assault the planet. I don't want that to happen."

"You and me both," Hideki stated.

"If the CSS is genuinely concerned about your wellbeing, you need to convince them to at least release some of you. They already have Councilman Alexander. How about they release you and-"

"I will go last," Hideki demanded.

"Okay," Holeman conceded. "How about they release those who were injured and five of the lowest ranking officers."

Hideki looked to Hassan.

"I will have to discuss it with my superiors," Hassan stated.

“Please hurry. It would also help if you released the Saint Paul –“

“The Saint Paul will not be released so long as Admiral Hanson is onboard,” Hassan defiantly grumbled.

“We’re not going to be able to work with you if you refuse to work with us.” Inek stated.

“I think you are all high on the FOX you sent Commander Montasori here to destroy,” Hassan mused. “We were well within our sovereign rights to kill every single invader that landed on our soil.”

“It is no longer your soil,” Inek replied. “The Federation Council overwhelmingly voted to annex the Chidori system into the Federation.”

“You CANNOT annex a populated planet!” Hassan stated, leaning into the monitor. “What the hell is wrong with the Federation? You’ve turned into the Dominion.”

“A single facility with no government does not fit the legal definition of ‘populated’,” Inek explained.

Holeman was growing impatient with the bickering and interjected before Hassan began yelling.

“Look, Lt. Hassan. Please contact who you need to contact and get back to us as soon as possible.”

Hassan nodded and terminated the communication. He looked to Hideki.

“Your government’s arrogance probably just signed and sealed your execution papers. The Board will NOT be pleased when they hear about the annexation.”

Hassan sighed as did Hideki.

“Do you really think Starfleet would launch an attack without the Federation’s approval?”

Hideki just looked at Hassan. Hassan quickly realized how stupid his question was.

“Good point.” Hassan stated.

“Though...” Hideki pondered. “This is more of an official matter, as they have the negotiators involved. It’s one thing to go behind their back when no one knows anything. It’s a different story when the entire Federation Council knows what is going on.”

At Starfleet Command, Inek, Holeman and another suit walked into a conference room where three admirals sat.

“The annexation plan has backfired,” Inek stated.

The third suit, Jackson Howard, a tall chubby man with a British accent punched up a recorded communication between the Klingons and the Federation.

“The Chidori system is now part of the Federation. Any attack on it will be viewed as an attack on the Federation,” Inek’s voice said over the communication.

The Klingon laughed.

“Very well then. The High Council now views this as the Federation conspiring with insurgents to overthrow the legal government of the Klingon Empire.”

The admirals all murmured to themselves.

“Look, we don’t want a war with you, and you don’t want a war with us. Just give us time to get our people out of there,” Inek’s voice replied.

“You have a little less than three days.” The Klingon replied. “Every hour we wait more and more weapons are delivered to these subversives. When our strike force arrives, they will destroy everything on the planet, whether there are Starfleet people on it or not.

“If you want to construe that as an act of war, so be it.”

The communication terminates.

“Damn,” One of the admirals stated.

Howard nods. “The president has already signed the annexation bill. We need to get those people out of there before the Klingon’s arrive because if we attack their ships in an attempt to defend that planet, we will be drug into a war that we cannot win.”

The admiral on the end slapped his comm. badge. “Ensign, get me Admiral Larson. Priority One.”

“Aye,” the faceless ensign replied.

On board the Klingon Bird of Prey G'nikniW, the captain of the ship Vagh leaned back in his seat.

“ETA!” he demanded to know.

“29 hours,” Someone barked back.

“Ah, ahead of schedule,” he looked at the tactical report on the system. “For those enemies of the empire it will be a good day to die.”

Kio rapped her fingers on her desk in the NSO briefing room. She didn’t really mind briefings; it was just the waiting for everyone to get there that she hated. She was not one who enjoyed sitting still and sitting still is what she had to do while waiting.

She continued to rap her fingers, her fingernails making a semi-loud clacking sound on the industrialized rubber that covered the long desk. Anthony leaned over to her.

“Pardon me for saying, Chief, but that’s real god damned annoying.”

Kio stopped and looked to Anthony who smiled at her.

“Sorry.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. I’m just a bit ancy. It’s been a while since we’ve done a mission and with all the damned maintenance work they’ve been having us do I think we might be a bit rusty.”

Anthony nodded.

“We’ll be fine. I mean how can we fail? We have you as our leader and then me, charming and handsome, as our second in command! But then of course there is Mike,” Anthony grinned.

The pair looked to the right and saw Sgt. Michael Simpson with his head down on his desk, snoozing away.

Kio took one of the briefing PADDs and tossed it. It landed on Mike’s head. He jumped up.

“SIMPSON! SERGANT MICHAEL!” he called out.

Most of the other NSO people turned to look at him. Michael looked around as he began to blush.

“And don’t you forget it!” he stated as he melted back into his seat.

Kio and Anthony laughed as the door to the briefing room opened. Rei walked in followed by Ranma, Shelton and Admiral Larson.

“ON YOUR FEET!” Rei yelled.

The entire room stood. Ranma walked around the conference room and took a position behind one of the desks.

“At ease,” Larson ordered as he took his place behind the podium with Rei standing to his left and Shelton standing to his right.

“This briefing is to discuss the objectives and operational details of this mission. Unlike the other missions that you have done, this mission will have all of you operating at once. You will be in your teams of four plus one medic.

“Here’s how it’s going to work. Delta team is going to insert in near a power generation station about fifteen kilometers from the target. They will then wait for the other three teams to get into place before destroying it, causing what we hope will be panic and chaos.

“Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie teams will insert near the facility. They will then get past the perimeter guards as stealthfully as possible. Once inside they will signal to Delta team to take out the power plant.

“Delta team will then join up with a marine and security force that will clear out an escape path for the other three teams and the hostages.”

Rei brought up a diagram of the facility as Larson continued.

“These are old blueprints obtained from the Anjaris who used to own the facility. However, it is likely that it has been changed to accommodate its current purpose.”

Yuki raised her hand.

“Yes Chief?” Larson asked.

“What is that purpose?”

“It is a chemical weapons plant,” Rei replied. “So, make sure you watch your fire. If you rupture a tank containing whatever they have there, it will probably kill everyone.”

“Glad I asked,” Kio whimpered to herself.

Larson continued. “The target facility is guarded by people who are using projectile weapons. We also believe that using phasers will give away our location, so you will only be using the LA-16 weapons.”

Shelton held up a gun that resembled an MP-5.

“They act exactly like your hybrid weapons.” He stated. “The only problem is that when you run out of ammo, you will be out of ammo.”

Larson nodded. “We won’t be able to get too close to the planet so you will be beaming down via a cloaked shuttle that will act as a relay point for the transporter.

“It’s very likely that when we beam down, we will be detected. You need to be ready for that.”

Larson walked from behind the podium and to the desks.

“Our main and only objective is to recover our sixteen captured officers. You are to do it by any means necessary.

“Time is a factor here people. We have a Klingon strike force on its way here to destroy the facility. You need to get them out of there before they arrive. Understood?”

“YES SIR,” Everyone replied.

“Good. We will be assembling at 01:30 tomorrow morning. Dismissed.”

Everyone began to stand and file out of the room. Larson walked to Rei, Shelton and Ranma.

“There is a new complication,” Larson stated.

The three all looked at him warily.

“The Sisko will not be able to fire on the Klingon ships if they arrive early.”

“Huh?” Ranma asked what the other two were thinking.

“It’s a long story, but if the Federation fires on the Klingon strike force in an attempt to defend the facility a war will break out that the Federation will lose badly.”

The three nodded.

“We’ll get them out before that happens.” Rei stated.

Larson nodded and walked out of the briefing room.

CHAPTER EIGHT – RESCUE

McNamara dove behind the bar as a phaser shot slammed into the bulkhead above his head.

“Well, I guess my plan wasn’t so flawless after all,” he mused to Meru.

The petite Bajoran with light brown hair smiled at him.

“Who would have think that seven of them would all congregate in one place?” she asked.

“I guess I should have been thinking less like a security officer and more like a scientist forced to become a security officer.”

Meru nodded as she stuck her phaser above the bar and fired.

McNamara and Meru were trapped. They had made their way down to deck six and into the lounge of the Centaur class U.S.S. Saint Paul. It happened to be right above the brig that was on deck seven. Their plan was to break into the brig from above and rescue the crew who had been arrested.

However, before they were able to do anything, six security officers, who were apparently taking an unauthorized lunch break, walked in on them. They called for help and now there were seven.

Another two officers walked in with Admiral Hanson with them.

“Phillip, give it up. If you and whoever is with you comes out right now, I won’t have you both thrown out the airlock,” Hanson stated.

“Not a chance, Jack,” McNamara replied.

The admiral scowled at McNamara being so informal with him.

“Okay, go get them.” He ordered the security officers.

“I wouldn’t do that, Jack,” McNamara laughed.

Hanson held up his hand ordering the security officers to stop their advance.

“Why not?”

“Before we came here, we made a quick stop by engineering. I’ve placed a bomb on both the matter and anti-matter pods.”

“Impossible. I have engineering sealed,” Hanson scoffed.

“You think that I spent six years on this ship without learning every single access point into every single room?” McNamara laughed. “It’s just like you, Jack, to assume that simply closing the emergency bulkhead would keep me out.”

McNamara laughed.

“Just like this mission proved. You are so narrow minded that you only see one way in and one way out. If your guards come near us, I will detonate the bombs.”

Hanson scoffed again. “You’d kill us all.”

“I’d rather die knowing I took you with me than allow you to get away with this despicable, criminal act. Every single member of my staff, maybe excluding the ones you brainwashed, feels the same way too.”

Meru looked to McNamara. She silently mouthed the word ‘bomb?’

McNamara winked at her.

“So, what do you want?” Hanson asked. He looked to a pair of the guards. “Go find that bomb.” He whispered.

“Give up,” McNamara asked. “If you don’t want to die return control of this ship to me.”

“That isn’t going to happen,” Hanson stated. He looked to the guards that remained. “If they come out of there, shoot them. But don’t advance on them till I order.”

The guards nodded an acknowledgement as Hanson walked out of the room with one of the guards.

McNamara heard the doors slide open and shut.

“So, he left you here with us alone, huh?”

One of the guards was Ensign Stevens. He grinned.

“He sure did. It’s okay for you to come out now. I won’t shoot you for murdering Ensign Thompson.”

“Murdering?” McNamara growled. “That brave young man died protecting this ship and the Federation from treasonous bastards like you.”

Stevens scowled.

“Treasonous? YOU violated a direct order, Captain.”

“I did what was right,” McNamara stated. “Too bad you can’t say the same thing.”

Stevens just continued to scowl as he kept his phaser trained in the direction of McNamara.

McNamara looked in front of him. At ground level there was a small refrigerator. He opened it and noticed several glasses of a yellow-orange liquid. He took two of them out and handed one to Meru.

She took a sip.

“Orange juice,” she whispered.

McNamara smiled and took a sip of his glass.

“This drink always reminds me of you.” he said.

Meru nodded and drank some more of hers.

SOMEWHERE NEAR BAJOR – 16 YEARS AGO

“Sir, we’re receiving a distress call,” a younger McNamara stated from the tactical terminal on the bridge of the U.S.S. Horatio.

The Ambassador Class ship was on a routine star cataloging mission when the distress call came in. McNamara, currently a lieutenant, was manning the tactical station on the graveyard shift.

The thin Lt. Commander that was in command that night walked over to the tactical station. McNamara looked to him.

“It’s a Cardassian Hideki class. She says that they are in the midst of a warp core breach.”

“Set a course!” the Lt. Commander barked to the helmsman.

After a few minutes, the Horatio dropped out of warp. The operations officer began to scream.

“BREECH IMMINANT!”

“Beam them all aboard,” the Lt. Commander ordered.

The operations officer complied. Within seconds the small attack ship exploded.

“Got four. Two Cardassians and two Bajorans. Beamed directly to sickbay.”

The Lt. Commander spun around to McNamara. “Get down there.”

McNamara nodded, called for a security team, and rushed to sickbay. Once he got there, he found the two Cardassians lying on bio beds. Both had serious injuries. On another bio bed was an injured Bajoran woman. And a fourth held a little Bajoran girl, no more than four years old.

The security officers walked to the Cardassians to begin asking them what had happened. McNamara walked over to the Bajoran lady.

Her breathing was very shallow as she looked up at McNamara.

“Help us,” she weakly begged.

McNamara looked at the woman.

“What’s happened?”

“The Cardassians...” she gasped. “They killed my husband, were taking us to be slaves...”

McNamara looked at the little girl. She wasn’t injured but had a blank look on her face. A look that told Phillip that every bit of this little girl’s childhood; her innocence, had been taken from her.

The woman gasped. The monitor above her bed began to beep and blink wildly. The doctors rushed over and began to inject medicines into her.

"Please..." she whimpered. "Protect Meru..."

The Bajoran woman inhaled deeply once, and then exhaled. The monitors above her all flat lined. The doctors looked at the monitors, looked to her, then sighed as they pulled the blanket over her head.

McNamara bowed his head in respect and walked over to little Meru.

"Hi," he said to her. "My name is Phillip."

Meru continued to stare blankly into space.

"Are you thirsty?" he asked her.

Meru didn't respond.

McNamara walked to sickbay's replicator.

"Two orange juices, 5 degrees."

The replicator complied and made the two drinks. McNamara walked back to Meru.

"Here," he offered the drink to the little child.

Meru, for the first time turned to him. Her little hands clutched the glass, and she took a sip.

It wasn't a smile, but Phillip saw just a little bit of the pain fade from Meru's eyes.

Meru took another sip and looked to the bed where her dead mother lay.

"Mommy is gone?"

Phillip moved his hand towards Meru. She flinched slightly, scared of him.

What did they do to you? Phillip thought. He moved his hand back to his side.

"Yes, I'm afraid she is."

A tear rolled down the young child's cheek.

"Daddy is gone too," she stated. She took another sip of her orange juice.

"I'm all alone."

McNamara had to do his best to keep from breaking down and crying for this little girl. He slowly held out his hand.

"No, Meru. You are not alone."

Meru looked at him, set down her orange juice and placed her hand in Phillip's.

Over the years, McNamara raised Meru as his own daughter. He had never had a family. No wife, no kids of his own. While he was sad about the way he had finally gotten a daughter, he cherished every moment of it.

It took him years to try and get her to overcome the trauma of her early childhood. He really didn't think she ever did, but she gradually seemed to deal with it better and better. By age nine she was a happy child again, playing with the other children on the different ships that McNamara served on.

Meru excelled at school. So much so that she was routinely placed in accelerated classes. At age fifteen she graduated high school and went on to Starfleet Academy.

She had said that she had wanted to be able to help people the way that her father did.

Father. That's what she considered Phillip. Even though she knew that he was not her real father, he had treated her like she was his own flesh and blood.

She had wanted to take his surname, but he would not let her.

"You must never forget your heritage," he had told her.

And she hadn't. He constantly was teaching her about Bajor. Teaching her all he could find about the Prophets. About what her home world was like prior to the Cardassian occupation.

And now the two of them were stuck behind a bar, sharing the same drink they had shared on a different dark day sixteen years ago.

Stardate 60705.1; 01:54

The Sisko glided out of warp at the location Ranma had specified to Ryouga. Karyn, who despite her own order to the contrary, had not gotten any sleep since the briefing a little less than 22 hours ago.

Shampoo had returned to the bridge at 00:40 and was seated in the executive officer's seat. She was happy that Ranma was going down with the NSO teams because the lack of seats would have worked against her. She hated that expanding bench that slid out.

Larson had just arrived from visiting the NSO teams. He had taken his seat at the science station which had been converted to a tactical station. He quickly began to go over the information that was beginning to flow into the ship.

Makoto was quietly manning her post with Lt. Jansen. Makoto was dressed in the dark green camouflage color uniform that she would wear on the assault of the planet. Karyn had wanted her to stay, but Makoto managed to convince the Captain that Lt. Jansen would be able to handle the station without a problem.

Minako monitored her station. She was currently by herself since her assistant, Lt. Kaii, was down in the shuttle bay. He would be one of the officers that would fly the cloaked type 11 shuttle into the Chidori system, first to survey and then to act as a transport relay station.

Usagi was half asleep, but she was positioned at her station. She hoped that she would not have much to do. However, if the Sisko went into combat, she would have to begin sending damage control teams to fix things.

Ryouga sat at his terminal pushing buttons. He was bringing the ship to a complete stop. Once he acknowledged the display as reading 'SPEED 0.0 KPH' he turned to Karyn.

"We're holding position ma'am."

Karyn nodded.

"Red alert."

Lt. Jansen swung around and activated red alert.

Throughout the ship the sounds of the mighty cruiser getting ready for battle could be heard. The intercom spewed out the computer's voice informing everyone that red alert was activated, and general quarters were sounded.

The bright white lights on the bridge were replaced by dimmer blue lights. The pulsating of the red status lights gave many things a purplish hue.

Shampoo looked to Karyn. Karyn continued to watch the clock above the main view screen.

01:59:57

01:59:58

01:59:59

02:00:00

Karyn turned to her subordinate.

"Launch the shuttle."

Shampoo nodded and hit her communicator.

"Shampoo to Kaii. Launch."

Down on deck twelve Kaii looked to Lt. JC Devall who would be his co-pilot on this mission.

"Ready?" He asked.

Devall shook his head.

"No, but whatever."

Kaii grinned at his human companion and began to maneuver the craft. The large door opened and the shuttle slowly crept outwards till it was clear of the Sisko.

"Engage the cloak," Kaii ordered.

Devall complied and engaged the illegal cloaking device installed in the shuttle. He then checked one of the screens.

"Solid as a rock," he confirmed.

"And you're sure this cloak will hold, yeah?" Kaii asked.

JC once again shook his head.

"No, but whatever."

Kaii simply looked to Devall who shrugged.

"This is a prototype of a prototype. That is why it takes up half the damn ship. I have no idea if it will hold. But Admiral Larson said it will, so let's go and get this done before it changes its mind."

Kaii nodded. "Kaii to Sisko, we're heading to the nebula."

"Copy," Minako's voice replied.

Kaii spun the ship around and they did a short-range warp to the perimeter of the nebula.

"Don't go into the nebula," JC stated. "Cloaked or not, we'll cause a wake in the gasses."

Kaii nodded and began to fly around the interceptors. He shook his head as he looked at them.

"There's got to be a hundred of them."

JC who had just finished his scans shook his head.

"Fifty-seven."

"That's still a lot."

JC nodded and activated the communications system.

"Nighthawk to Sisko."

"Go ahead," Shampoo replied.

Nighthawk, the nickname that JC had given the Sisko's new covert toy, was based on one of the first 'cloaked' military ships, the FA-117. While 20th century cloaking and stealth technology could not hold a candle to 24th century, JC still loved reading about it.

"We have fifty-seven lightly armed interceptor class ships. They are of the fixed wing variety. Looks like they are warp capable. They appear to be unmanned, as I am not picking up any bio signs or integrated life support systems."

"No window either," Kaii added as he peers at one that was about 15 meters above them.

"Acknowledged," Shampoo replied. "Receiving data now. Are ships transmitting?"

"Yeah. Both to the planet and to each other," JC acknowledged. "But they don't appear to be receiving any communication from the planet. I would guess that they were programmed to intercept the Saint Paul and only receive new orders or directives when they ask for them."

"Can we jam them?" Karyn asked.

"Yeah, but not from here," JC replied. He showed some information to Kaii who nodded and continued.

“We need to go near the source. This nebula is too big, and the ships are too far apart for us to be able to jam them all. And by the time the Sisko got over here and began jamming they would be able to relay the information back.” Kaii explained.

“Very well. Head over there and survey the area,” Karyn ordered.

“Aye,” Both Devall and Kaii replied before the communication terminated.

“Careful,” JC said as Kaii began to move the shuttle in between two of the interceptors.

Kaii nodded as his fingers slid easily over the controls, firing the thrusters lightly to adjust the pitch and yaw of the shuttle.

Once they were away from the interceptors, Kaii engaged the warp engines, and the shuttle rocketed a half light-year to the planet Chidori III.

JC looked out the window at the blue, brown, and white Earth like planet.

“Pretty,” JC commented.

“Interesting,” He stated.

“What’s that?” Kaii asked.

“No interceptors in orbit. You’d think they’d have to be expecting us.”

Kaii flew the shuttle near one of the orbital defense platforms.

“Maybe they thought that these would do the job.”

JC shrugged.

“Only two disruptors,” He scratched his head. “They have a sensor net, but no tachyon field.”

“You sound disappointed,” Kaii mused.

“Well, the admiral said that this cloak manages to trick sensors into not seeing it with a tachyon pulse by sending out false positives and other senseless sensor fluxuations. I kind of wanted to see if it actually worked.”

Kaii moved the ship into a geosynchronous orbit over the facility.

“They won’t detect that they are being scanned?”

JC shook his head. “They shouldn’t if this junk works the way it’s supposed to.”

“You have a lot of faith in things working the way they are supposed to,” Kaii stated.

“I have to. Otherwise, I’d never be able to transport anywhere. And do you know what would happen if we were to drop out of warp without inertial dampeners?”

Kaii nodded.

“Splat.”

“No shit ‘splat,’” JC replied.

Kaii laughed as JC finished his scans. Once he was done, he opened a channel back to the Sisko.

“Nighthawk to Sisko.”

“Go,” Shampoo replied.

JC checked his screen and confirmed that the communication was being successfully masked and secured.

“Comm check showing secure.”

“Confirmed,” Minako’s voice replied.

“I’ve got a detailed scan of the facility heading your way,” JC stated as he began to input information into the computer. “Four ODP, with two disrupter cannons each. Minimal shielding. Counting one hundred eighteen bio signs on the ground, all human.”

“There appears to be an underground bunker where most of the bio signs are. There is also an underground hanger with seventy more interceptor class ships in it.”

Kaii checked the display and began to speak.

“They appear to have a radio antenna on the ground where the communications from the ODP and ships are going to. We can jam it and probably make it appear as if it’s being caused by solar flares. However, once the planet rotates away from the sun, they will catch on.”

JC spoke up. “Plus, we have to assume that they, like any communications, would need line of sight, so there are probably other antennas on the plant.”

“How long do you think we can jam them and keep them in the dark?” Karyn asked.

Kaii did some quick calculations.

“Forty-five minutes.”

On the bridge of the Sisko, Karyn stood.

“Let us know when you are ready to jam. Sisko out,” Karyn turned to Minako. “Send the data to the NSO teams.” Minako nodded as Karyn turned to Makoto. “Get your guys on the pads.”

Makoto nodded and began to relay orders to the transporter rooms.

“What plan?” Shampoo asked Karyn.

“We’re going to be a snowplow,” she stated.

Shampoo raised an eyebrow.

Karyn noticed the confusion on Shampoo’s face and elaborated.

“We’re going to ram our way through, drop off the marines, and ram our way back out. They are not going to follow us in; otherwise, they would have gone in after the Saint Paul. So, we don’t need to destroy all of them now.”

Karyn sat back down in her seat, as did Shampoo.

“Once the marines take control of the ship, they can hang out and wait for us to get back.”

Shampoo nodded. Her first day back on the job and she was going to ‘snowplow’ her way through an armada of fighters.

She loved this job.

“I recommend that we don’t use any torpedoes,” Makoto suggested. “If one were to miss and detonate inside the nebula, the Saint Paul would be destroyed.”

Karyn nodded. “Try to limit weapons to the phase cannons.”

Makoto nodded. “Aye.”

“Nighthawk to Sisko. Jamming is ready,” Kaii’s voice stated over the intercom.

Karyn looked to Ryouga.

“Begin jamming. Let’s roll.”

Ryouga set the coordinates into the computer and hit engage. The Sisko warped the relatively short distance to the nebula. Within seconds the Sisko slammed out of warp.

The interceptors detected the Federation ship and turned towards it.

“Full impulse into the nebula,” Karyn ordered.

Ryouga engaged the engines, and the ship began to barrel towards the nebula, the interceptors flying towards the Sisko.

“In range!” Makoto stated.

“Fire,” Shampoo ordered.

Above and below the Sisko the short-range phase cannons lifted out of their hiding places inside of the hull and took aim at their targets.

The interceptors began to break formation and swarm the larger ship. The phase cannons swiveled and pivoted, firing orange blasts at the interceptors. One or two hits were all it took for the small fighters to be turned into space debris.

The fighters fired on the Sisko, but their cannons and missiles were no match for the ships shielding. The interceptors that managed to slip beneath the shields were quickly dispatched by the phase cannons.

Most of the ships managed to evade being hit by the phase cannons, but even so their attacks did little if any damage to the warship’s extensive shielding.

Once the Sisko began to penetrate the outer perimeter of the nebula the fighters halted their assault. The forty ships remaining resumed their holding pattern and fruitlessly attempted to call for more help.

"How long as it been?" Meru asked McNamara.

The bearded man shrugged. "I left my watch in the brig."

Meru smiled. One of the amazing things about this man that she called father was that no matter what the circumstance, no matter how close he was to death, he maintained his sense of humor. It was that sense of humor that kept her from going insane during those first four years she spent with him.

And it really was the only thing that was currently keeping her from giving up hope.

"Hanson to Stevens," they heard one of the guard's communicator chirp.

"Go ahead."

"There's no bomb. Kill them."

"Yes sir," he replied.

McNamara looked to Meru.

"You ready?"

Meru nodded. The pair grabbed their phasers and got ready to try and fight their way out of this.

"HOLY CRAP!" one of the guards yelled.

McNamara and Meru slowly stood just enough to peek their heads over the bar. They found all the guards looking out the large observation windows.

They both looked up and saw the U.S.S. Sisko bearing down on them.

"Get down," McNamara whispered to Meru.

She complied and both ducked to the floor.

Within seconds a familiar sound is heard, followed by screaming.

"GET YOUR HANDS UP! DROP YOUR WEAPONS!"

The clanking of four phaser rifles hitting the deck was quickly followed by the sounds of four people being thrown to the ground.

Two marines slinked around and drew their weapons on McNamara and Meru.

"DROP YOUR WEAPONS! HANDS UP!" One yelled.

Both McNamara and Meru complied.

"I'm Captain Phillip McNamara, the legitimate captain of the vessel," McNamara stated.

The marine nodded. "Keep your hands up, sir. Step out this way."

Phillip nodded to Meru and the pair did as they were instructed. They looked to see sixteen marines in total. Fourteen of them were standing guard. Phillip looked to the ground to see the four guards on the floor, face down with their hands restrained behind their backs.

Phillip then looked to the window and saw the Sisko turning around.

"They're not leaving us, are they?"

The marine shook his head as he ran a scan of McNamara.

"They'll be back."

The marine finished his scan. "Thank you, sir. You can put your hands down now."

Phillip nodded and motioned towards Meru.

"She's with me."

The marine nodded and silently ordered the other marine to lower his weapon which was pointed at Meru.

"Do you know how many people Admiral Hanson has working for him, sir?" The marine asked.

"No, um..." Phillip trailed off.

"Sorry sir. Lt. Roger Jefferson, Starfleet Marine Corp. Assigned to the U.S.S. Benjamin Sisko."

"Lt. Jefferson. Thank you. My ships compliment is one hundred twenty-two. There were over sixty of us in the brig, and twenty on the planet. I don't know how many others he has killed though."

"So, we're looking at around forty." Jefferson noted.

The Sisko disappeared as Jefferson's communicator chirped.

"Lieutenant, we've secured engineering and taken three into custody. We engaged in a firefight and have one fatality. They have informed the bridge of our presence."

Jefferson grumbled at the news of one of his men being killed. "Are we able to take control from there?"

"No sir. They've destroyed the computers down here."

"Understood," Jefferson stated. "Leave six people with the prisoners and begin clearing the ship deck by deck. We'll meet at the brig."

"Yes sir," the voice replied.

"I'm going with you," McNamara stated.

"With all due respect sir, you should remain here," Jefferson replied.

"It wasn't a request, Lieutenant. I have friends who need my help."

Jefferson sighed. He handed McNamara a concussion rifle he had attached to his back.

"You six, secure the room," Jefferson instructed a group of marines. "The rest of you, let's move."

McNamara turned to Meru.

"I'll be right back."

"Don't you dare leave me," she demanded.

McNamara leaned forward and kissed Meru on the forehead.

"I promise I will never leave you."

The marines began to move out with McNamara right behind them.

"And there is no way you can generate a warp field while we are in the nebula?" Hanson growled.

Ops shook his head.

"No, and even if I could it will take well over twelve hours for the warp engines to restart."

Hanson cursed himself. He had shut down the warp drive to avoid both detection and accidental destruction, but he had forgotten how long it takes the engines to start up cold.

"Admiral," Alvarez stated from tactical. "I'm getting reports of guards engaging in firefights with heavily armed soldiers all over the ship."

Hanson turned to the young tactical officer.

"Where the hell did they come from?" Hanson asked.

"I don't know. Nothing has come up on sensors."

"That's because you guys turned them off," Ops complained. "There could be a dozen ships around us, and we wouldn't know because of this dumbass scheme of yours."

Ops looked directly at the Admiral.

"Mind your words, Lieutenant," Hanson growled.

"With all due respect sir, I will not. You've kept us holed up in this damn nebula for almost two weeks. I've finally realized that you have no plan to get us out of here."

"Escort the lieutenant to the brig," Hanson ordered.

Alvarez nodded to a couple of his lackeys standing guard. They began to move in on Ops. Ops pulled out a phaser from under his panel and pointed it at them.

"No, I don't think so," Ops stated.

He hit a button on his panel.

"I've disabled the life support to the bridge. If you want me to fix it, you'll back off."

Hanson growled at Ops.

Alvarez also growled, drew his phaser, and fired, striking Ops and killing him.

"We need to get everyone up here to defend the bridge." He suggested.

"What about life support?" Hanson asked.

"He's an idiot. It won't take me but a few minutes to override what he did," Alvarez stated as he began to go to work on his console.

"You heard him," Hanson stated to the guards. Call everyone up here."

The marines slowly marched down the darkened corridor of the Saint Paul, stopping at every set of doors, opening them, and clearing them of any people.

They had so far come across only two security officers. They quickly surrendered.

They had, much to McNamara's displeasure, found one deceased crew member. He has a large phaser burn to the back of his head. Not even the battle-hardened marines could understand it.

He'd been executed. Not by the enemy but by other Starfleet officers.

The two lead marines stopped suddenly. One put his hand up ordering the others to stop as well. They all crouched down and waited.

In the distance they could hear footsteps rapidly approaching their location.

"What the hell do you think is going on?" One asked.

"I don't know but we better get up there now." The other replied.

The two came around the corner and found them looking at several dark figures with phaser rifles pointed at them.

Their instincts kicked in and they drew their weapons.

The forward two marines fired, knocking both officers backwards and to the deck. The marines moved forward and check their vital signs.

"Stunned." One of the marines acknowledged. The unconscious crewmen were quickly restrained and drug into the crew quarters they had just secured.

The marines stepped back outside and sealed the door.

"Seven dash One Zero Niner," one said.

Another made a note of the location and the marines continued down the corridor.

The marines were approaching the brig. They looked down the corridor and saw another group of men in the shadows.

“Clear on that side?” Jefferson whispered into his communicator.

“Aye,” a voice replied from the other.

The lead marine nodded to his partner next to him and the pair slowly slinked to the door that led into the brig. The rest of the marines came close as well but stayed behind the other two.

“After the flash, go in and stun everyone,” Jefferson whispered.

The lead marine nodded and looked to his partner. That marine pulled out a flash grenade and activated the timer.

It began to beep.

“10 seconds.” he whispered.

The marine waited till it beeped five times. He then dove in front of the door, activating the sensor which opened it. The door slid open, and the marine tossed the grenade in, and then rolled away from the door.

The grenade beeped five more time and then exploded in a brilliant flash of light.

On cue the remaining thirty marines stormed in, finding only five guards in the brig. The guards attempted to draw their weapons but could not see. The flash grenade has caused their irises to constrict. The marines had no problem quickly shooting and stunned all five of them.

“CLEAR!” One yelled after the stunned guards had been restrained.

Phillip walked in and moved to the cell that held his executive officer. He disengaged the force field and Sarah ran out and embraced him.

“I thought they killed you,” she said.

McNamara smiled.

“I’m just like Hideki. I’m invincible.”

Sarah laughed as the marines lowered the force fields on the other cells. The Saint Paul’s crew quickly moved out of the cells, enjoying the room they now had to move their arms and legs.

“Let’s get these people to the lounge,” Jefferson ordered.

“You heard him people,” McNamara ordered. “Let’s keep it orderly and quiet.”

The now free prisoners did as their captain ordered and quietly followed the marines back towards the Jefferies tube that the marines had secured.

McNamara, Sarah, Jefferson, and a couple of marines stayed behind. The spare marines began to drag the unconscious security officers one of the filthy brig cells.

“We’ll finish clearing the next six decks and then prepare to assault the bridge,” Jefferson stated.

“That won’t be necessary,” McNamara replied. “Those two in the corridor said, ‘up there.’ That with the lack of resistance that we have faced tells me that everyone has been pulled to deck one to secure the bridge.”

“That makes sense,” Jefferson agreed. “Our best bet would probably be to come up the turboshafts-“

McNamara shook his head. “I know a better way.”

Jefferson nodded and the group went back in the direction of the ships lounge to devise their plan.

A blue glow began to appear in between several large bushes about a half kilometer from the chemical weapons facility. The glow lasted for a couple of seconds and was then replaced by Ranma, Rei, Shelton, Parker and Ensign Masters, the team’s medic.

They all ducked down and took a defensive stance. When they were sure that they had not been detected, Rei started to run some scans with her tricorder.

“I am only seeing two,” she whispered to the group. “They are outside of the facility about a half a click north of here.”

Ranma nodded. “I’ll take point.”

“We should stay here until a bit closer to go time,” Shelton suggested.

Rei looked to her watch and nodded.

“Yeah. Maybe about three minutes.”

Ranma sighed. He really wanted to get in there and get out.

Kio nearly screamed when she looked to the ground after materializing. A big, black snake slithered past her.

Anthony, one who was no fan of snakes either, also almost screamed. However, both managed to hold it in. Good thing that they did since a quick tricorder check showed two guards closing in on their position.

Kio quickly moved her team into some higher brush. The two guards stopped and looked around, thinking that they heard the group.

“Did you hear something?” one guard asked the next.

The second guard nodded and screamed. He opened fire.

“FUCKING SNAKE!” He screamed as he put about sixteen rounds into the snake.”

Three other guards came running over towards the sound of gunfire.

“What’s going on?” One yelled.

Kio peered through the bushes at the five guards standing less than five meters from them.

“Snake,” the trigger-happy guard replied.

The other three guards laughed. “Come on. It’s getting dark out here.”

The two original guards nodded and followed the other three towards the east end of the facility.

“Do you think that they don’t have roving patrols after dark?” Mike asked.

Kio shrugged. “All I know is that now there is going to be five of them blocking our entrance.”

Anthony looked to his watch.

“Two minutes.”

Kio nodded and looked to the rest of her group. It was her, Anthony, and Mike, the usual compliment. Also in her group was Corporal Xiang, their explosives expert and Ensign Yayo, the Andorian combat medic.

The group stayed in their crouched positions, waiting for the lights to go out, signaling the beginning of their assault.

Corporal Vincent Saint Croix, the team leader of Charlie team looked around the area where his group materialized. He then checked his tricorder.

“No one.”

A sergeant slinked up behind him.

“Yeah, but we are right in the view of that sniper tower.”

Saint Croix nodded. “We need to keep low. In the grass.”

The sergeant nodded and the five members of the team got down onto their bellies and began to slither through the tall, damp grass towards the west end of the facility.

Included this group was Saint Croix, Sergeant Lu Musasabi, Sergeant Matt Woodall, Ensign Victor Adams, the explosives expert, and Ensign Tuvalk, the Vulcan medic.

The five kept moving until they came to a spot about fifty meters from the entrance they were going to bust through.

Saint Croix looked to his watch.

“One minute.”

Delta team materialized behind a tree about 500 meters from the power generation plant. They quickly checked around and found two guards standing between them and their target.

The four members of the team, Lt. George Carson, Lt. Troy Beckham, Ensign Aileen Nelson, and Private Jessica Shelby slightly split up and took positions around the plant.

Nelson looked through her scope on her silenced sniper rifle she carried. She could see the two guards standing around, their weapons to their sides.

One of the guards was smoking a cigarette. The other was looking around through some binoculars.

“Target one has binos, not sure if they are infrared,” she whispered. “Target two is distracted.”

Nelson looked around as the team leader, Lt. Carson acknowledged her.

After seeing no other people, Nelson watched her targets for a moment. The guard with the binoculars looked right in her direction twice and did nothing.

Nelson smiled. The guard’s inaction told her that either he did not see her, or his infrared was too weak to pick up her body heat. Either way she was invisible to him.

“Permission to take out roadblocks?” she whispered.

“Granted,” Carson replied.

Nelson looked through her scope and got target one lined up in the cross hairs. She knew that she would have mere seconds from the time she fired on him to switch targets and take out the second guard.

She had practiced for an hour in the NSO range and had only failed once, out of thirty attempts. A rather good record that had her very confident.

Nelson inhaled and then slowly let the breath out as she pulled back on the trigger.

The 2.4mm round was hurled out of the gun at over 400 meters per second. The internal silencers of the rifle countered the sonic boom from the projectile breaking the sound barrier prior to it leaving the end of the barrel.

More internal components of the rifle counter-acted the recoil force, keeping the massive jolt that Nelson could have gotten down to a small and manageable jerk.

Time slowed down for the professional marksman as she watched the end of the second target’s cigarette get cut off, quickly followed by the first target falling backwards and hitting the ground.

The cigarette man turned to his buddy as he fell. Nelson placed his head in her crosshairs and pulled the trigger again.

Cigarette man looked at the hole in the forehead of his partner and began to reach for his radio with one hand, while he raised his gun with the other. Before he could do either, he was sent flying; dying before his body hit the ground.

Nelson watched as two black clad individuals ran to the fallen guards, grabbed them, and drug them back into the bushes.

“Good job, A,” Carson stated.

Nelson grinned and began to watch for any other guards.

Carson, Beckham, and Shelby carefully hid the bodies of the guards and moved towards the fence that surrounded the power generators.

Shelby ran a quick scan.

"The fence is untainted." She whispered, telling the others that there were no sensors on the fence that would alert security if it were cut.

"Good," Carson stated. He looked to Beckham. "Snip it."

Beckham nodded and quickly pulled out some small bolt cutters and cut a hole in the bottom of the fence, big enough for them to crawl through.

The three crawled under and located the master control panel for the generator. Beckham began to rig it with explosives while Shelby located the main transmission line and began to rig it.

"Thirty seconds." Nelson's voice informed the three.

Shelby nodded, completed her work, and scurried back under the fence. Beckham quickly followed suit. Carson double-checked everything and followed Beckham under the fence.

"Fifteen seconds,"

The three quickly and as quietly as possible ran through the bushes.

Two guards walked out to where the deceased guards should have been standing.

"Where's Nixon and Ford?" One asked the other.

"Time," Nelson stated.

"I don't know," the other stated, as he began to go for his radio.

Carson, Beckham, and Shelby dove to the ground where they were. Nelson pulled out her tricorder and hit a button.

The explosion could have probably been seen from the Sisko as the explosives went off, igniting the hydrogen fuel used to power the generator. The two guards are incinerated as the fireball extends upwards and outwards.

After the initial shockwave of heat and air pressure passed over them, the four members of Delta team looked up.

There were no lights except that coming from the burning grass.

Part of the facility had been breached. Guards were running out to the generator, acting as firefighters, attempting to put out the fire.

Carson looked to Beckham and Shelby.

"I didn't know it ran on hydrogen," Shelby shrugged.

Beckham also shrugged as Carson radioed the Sisko.

"Delta to Sisko. Lights out."

Karyn stood.

"Sisko to all teams. Lights out."

Shampoo turned to Jansen at the tactical station.

"Marine teams, go," She stated.

Jansen nodded and relayed the order to Makoto in the transporter room.

"Nighthawk to Sisko," Kaii's voice came over the communication system.

"Go," Minako replied.

"We're losing jamming. They're starting to receive signals from the interceptors."

Karyn turned around to Ops.

"Watch for more interceptors being launched."

Minako nodded.

"They may not be able to," Kaii replied.

"Explain," Shampoo demanded.

"The only power signatures we are reading from the planet are the receiving antennas. If they are receiving information, I don't think the facility is getting it."

"Understood," Karyn replied. She looked to Shampoo. "You'd think they'd have a backup generator."

Shampoo nodded and shrugged.

Hideki was jarred awake by the massive explosion outside. He looked around and could not see anything.

"Lights!" an exasperated guard screamed.

"Dude, it's useless. The power is out," another stated.

There were the sounds of some struggling, then two people falling to the ground.

"Can't get the god-damned door open either," the first guard stated.

"What happened?" Hideki asked.

“There was an explosion and now we have no power,” he replied.

“Are we under attack?” Hideki inquired.

“Seems that way.”

“Echo sixteen and seventeen from control. Are the prisoners still secure?”

The first guard activated his radio.

“Yeah. We’re all trapped in here.”

“Copy. Echo one is on his way to take them to a secure location.”

“Roger.”

“Good to see that the Federation isn’t going to stand by and let us be murdered by these terrorists,” Brett stated from wherever he was in the room.

“If I could find you, I’d kick the ever-loving shit out of you,” Hideki growled.

“GET AWAY FROM THE DOOR!” a voice yelled from the other side.

The guards, still not able to see anything, moved as far as they could and ducked.

Within a couple of seconds, the door blows off its supports. Four guards rush in with rifles and lights attached to the tops of them. Behind them, also with flashlights were Hassan and Johansson.

“Commander, it appears that you were wrong.” Hassan stated.

Hideki shook his head. “I really didn’t think they would.”

Two guards moved and grabbed Hideki.

“Please cooperate with the guards, Commander,” Hassan stated. “It’s for your own safety.”

Hideki nodded. The guards took his arms behind his back and applied handcuffs.

It had been days since he was last handcuffed. The apparent Federation assault removing all trust between him and his captors.

Brett was quickly manhandled and restrained. The pair was then both pushed out into the hallway.

“Where are we going?” Hideki asked.

“We’re going to the barracks to wait out the assault. Once we get power restored, we’ll call for help and get you and your men out of here.”

Johansson cleared his throat.

“I’d prefer there were no more talking for this evening.”

“Yes sir,” Hassan stated as they, six CSS guards and the two prisoners quickly moved down the darkened hallways.

Ranma peered through her night vision goggles at the two dark figures, looking around, swinging their guns in every direction blindly.

The cloudy skies impeded what light that would be generated by the two moons that orbited Chidori III. It also caused it to rain, which began to mask the footsteps of Rei's team as they moved towards the entrance.

"There are several people inside," Shelton whispered, looking at his tricorder. "But they seem to be running around like chickens with their heads cut off."

Parker, who was still intrigued at Ranma's sudden transformation when it began raining, looked at the map of the facility.

"Their infirmary is just inside this entrance. If the intelligence is right, we should find a couple of officers in there."

Rei nodded. "Let's move."

The five slowly slogged their way through the tall grasses which were quickly becoming wetlands. One of them stepped on a stick, causing it to snap. The two guards turned in that direction and began to fire blindly.

All five members dropped to the ground. Ranma and Shelton returned fire, taking the two guards out.

Three more guards ran out, screaming and were quickly dropped by Rei and Parker.

"Go!" Rei called out.

The five people quickly ran to the wall. Ranma looked inside and did not see anyone. Her night vision goggles were beginning to lose effectiveness since there was NO light inside the building.

She quickly switched over to infrared and looked around again.

"No heat sources in the hallway," she whispered.

Parker and Shelton slipped inside and backed up against the walls. They slid along the wall and found a door that had been forced open. The pair swiftly got inside and checked around.

"Empty," Parker said.

Rei sighed.

"They must be moving them," she stated. "Let's keep moving deeper."

Everyone nodded and slowly continued down the hallway.

Kio sighed. The explosion had caused the guards that were blocking their entrance to run over to where the explosion came from.

Granted it would now be easier for them to get inside, but she was really looking forward to shooting someone.

The group got inside and switched over to infrared mode. This made it a lot harder for them to identify friend from foe, so they would have to rely on less than lethal methods of taking out their enemy.

Four red and orange blobs halted the team's advance. The blobs were slowly walking down the hallway. Two of them had flashlights attached to the front of their guns.

They were sweeping the halls with the lights as they moved down them.

Kio and Anthony moved up and laid flat on the ground as the blobs moved forward.

The pair in the front was obviously security, as they had weapons. But they did not know about the pair in the back.

"Two forward, hostile. Two rear unknown," Kio whispered.

A pair of muffled shots came from behind Kio and Anthony once the four were almost on top of them. The two forward guards flew backwards and hit the ground. Kio and Anthony quickly jumped up and grabbed the two in the rear. They both held a knife to the unknown blob's necks.

"Identify yourselves." Anthony quietly ordered.

"Lt.-Lt. Sol Binker..." one of the men stammered. "U.S.S. Saint Paul."

"Ensign Michael Erickson," the other quietly replied.

"You're safe now," Kio stated as she and Anthony put their knives away. "We're with Starfleet. Please remain quiet and come with us."

The men complied as Kio and Anthony escorted them back outside the facility.

"Sit down please," Kio ordered. "Do you know where they were taking you?"

"To the barracks," Sol replied.

"Bravo to Alpha. We have two. They could be herding them down to the barracks," Kio said over her communicator.

"Copy," Rei replied. "Take them to Delta team."

"Aye." Kio replied. She turned to the blob she assumed was Anthony.

"Bravo to Delta. We're coming with two from grid four."

"Roger," Delta replied.

"Stay here. See if anymore come down that hallway," Kio ordered Anthony.

"Gotcha," He replied as Kio took the two men and the rest of Bravo team to meet up with Delta team.

Saint Croix looked up as the rain began to come down even harder. He could see two people now in the sniper tower. They looked around through their night vision scopes for the people who caused the power failure.

The water on the ground began to become standing water. The team was not going to be able to continue crawling on their stomachs for much longer. They were going to have to take out the pair in the tower. Unfortunately, none of them had sniper rifles, so taking them out from the ground would be inaccurate.

Not to mention that the pair would probably see the muzzle flashes of the LA-15s.

The veteran corporal had a plan though. He had Adams attach some plastic explosives to one of their grenades. Hopefully, if he were able to aim it right, the grenade would explode and take out one of the support structures of the post.

It would not be stealthy, but hopefully with the confusion that had already been caused by the power outage, no one would really notice.

“Ready?” Saint Croix asked Adams.

“Yeah.”

Adams waited till both the guards were turned away. He then stood and threw the grenade.

A shot rang out and Adams was thrown back several meters, the back of his head exploding.

“Shit!” Saint Croix exclaimed.

A third sniper, who was on the roof of the facility, began to radio the two in the tower. They turned in the direction of Charlie team and opened fire.

Saint Croix and the three remaining team members began to roll out of the way. The bullets from the tower splashed into the water that was pooling on the ground. The snipers could not see what they were shooting at, which could almost be more dangerous than if they could.

An explosion occurred, which according to plan, took out one of the support struts of the tower.

The tower began to bend in the direction of the lost strut, but then stopped. The shift was violent enough to send one of the snipers out of the tower and down about 30 meters to his death.

The other sniper managed to hang on and not fall out. Saint Croix popped up and began to fire at him while Musasabi fired in the direction of the second man on the roof of the facility.

The other two team members stood and sprinted towards the entrance to the facility. Saint Croix hit the sniper, sending him backwards. He then grabbed Musasabi and they both sprinted towards the entrance.

The sniper on the roof, who had ducked to avoid the cover fire, popped back up, took aim, and fired.

Musasabi barely got a scream out before he hit the ground, dead.

"Damn it," Saint Croix growled. The trio slipped inside.

"WEST END! WEST END! THREE!" The man on the roof screamed into his radio.

"We've got a problem," Minako stated.

Both Karyn and Shampoo stood and looked to Minako's station.

"What?" they both asked.

"I have two Klingon Birds-of-Prey and a Klingon Battle Cruiser decloaking at the perimeter of the system."

"WHAT?" Both women asked.

"They're early," Jansen stated.

"Hail them," Karyn ordered.

Minako nodded and the Klingon commander of the task force appeared on screen.

"nuqneH!" The Klingon growled.

Karyn eyed him for a moment. "I am Captain Karyn Walker of the Federation starship U.S.S. Benjamin Sisko--"

"Ah!" the Klingon grinned. "The ship named for the greatest warrior of the usually weak Federation. Why are you here?"

"Several of our people are being held prisoner on the planet. We are in the middle of a rescue operation. We want you to hold off your attack until we are finished."

The Klingon captain laughed. "You have had two weeks to rescue your people. Today the facility will be destroyed, and the enemies of the empire will die."

"You can destroy the facility. Just give us an hour," Karyn asked.

"We will not wait," he replied.

"Then we will stop you," Karyn glared.

If there was a Klingon version of ROFL, this Klingon would be doing that right now.

"You? Your ship may be named for a great warrior, but it is only one ship. You will be destroyed if you attempt to intervene in the internal affairs of the Klingon Empire."

The Klingon goes to hit the button to end the conversation but stops when Shampoo speaks up.

"What you expect from Klingon who have no honor."

Karyn turned to Shampoo, her eyes wide and her mouth hanging wide open. Larson, who had been more interested in watching the telemetry from the planet than what was happening on the bridge, also turned, his mouth similarly hanging open.

“What’s that, little girl?” the Klingon captain asked.

“You have no honor. You no understand Shampoo?” Shampoo grinned.

“How dare you insult my honor!” the Klingon roared.

“It true. Only dishonorable man kill while hiding in orbit.”

The Klingon raised an eyebrow.

“Men fighting on the ground for their comrades fight with honor.”

“And they will die with honor,” The Klingon replied. “A noble death that any Klingon would want.”

“But killing men fighting with honor on a mission of rescue not honorable, yes?” Shampoo grinned and asked.

The Klingon commander snorted, eyed Shampoo for a moment and continued.

“You have twenty minutes. Qapla!”

The communication terminated and the three ships reloaded.

Karyn looked to her XO.

“Well, that was nice of him.”

“Nice nothing,” Shampoo stated. “If we don’t get them out in twenty minute, he will be even more determined to blow them up.”

Karyn nodded and turned to Minako. “Let them know. They have twenty minutes, and not a minute more.”

Minako nodded and began to relay the information. Larson grinned as Karyn turned in his direction.

Told you. He mouthed.

“I NEED HELP!” Saint Croix’s voice screamed over the communications system.

Kio squeaked at the loud yelling in her ear. She turned to the four blobs standing with her.

“Let’s go.”

The blobs, even though they were under orders to continue into the facility, all nodded and followed Kio back outside.

“Bravo to Charlie, where are you?”

Gunfire rang out over the comm. Kio could hear it both that way and through the air, but it was echoing so much she couldn’t get a fix on it.

“WEST SIDE!” Saint Croix screamed.

Kio and the others began to run through the rain and the now ankle-deep standing water outside the facility. They rounded the south end of the building to see Saint Croix come flying out of the doorway, blood spraying from both his chest and his back.

The round had sliced clean through his alleged bullet resistant vest and out the back.

Woodall, the only remaining member of Charlie team bolted out the door and dove into the swampy grass as tracer fire shot over his head. Bravo team crouched down as several CSS officers came outside, looking for Woodall.

“GO!” Kio stated.

Anthony, Michael, Kio, and Xiang all popped up and opened fire on the guards. The team mowed the security officers down with extreme accuracy, the silencers on their guns keeping them from even seeing who was killing them.

Within ten seconds, the seven officers who had come out to try and capture the escaping member of Charlie team were lying in a mixture of rainwater, grass, blood and brain matter.

Kio and Anthony went up and secured the doorway. They then motioned for the rest of Bravo team to come forward. Ensign Yayo moved over to check on Woodall.

“Jesus,” she stammered. “His left femur is shattered, and his brachial artery has been pierced. He’s going to bleed to death.”

“Get him out of there,” Kio stated.

Yayo nodded. “Yayo to Sisko, two emergency medical transports requested.”

“Copy. Activate transponder,” Minako’s voice replied.

Yayo took out a small electronic device from her pocket and stuck it onto Woodall and the body of Saint Croix.

“Nighthawk has a lock,” Kaii’s voice stated.

“Energizing,” Minako replied.

Within a second, Woodall was gone.

“Bravo to Alpha. Charlie is down,” Kio whispered.

There was a pause.

“Roger,” Rei replied.

Kio looked to the rest of her group. “Let’s go.”

The rest of the group nodded and began to work their way inside.

Ranma peaked around the corner at the L shaped intersection that Alpha team had come across. She noticed a small, warm blob on the ground about fifteen meters from where she crouched.

"I have something," she whispered. "But it's too small to be a person."

Rei scratched her head. "A cat maybe?"

Ranma shivered. "Hang on."

Ranma dug into her pocket and pulled out a small tricorder enhancer. She set it on the ground and slid it over to the heat source. The enhancer slid right up to the source and bumped it slightly. The source didn't move.

Ranma began to read the scans. She gasped.

"GET DOWN!"

Ranma dove to the ground as the heat source exploded, sending a wave of heat and air pressure down the hallway, and around the corner.

After it has passed over them, the group slowly moved back to their knees.

"Land mine," Ranma stated.

Rei groaned.

"Well, at least we know that we're on the right track," Parker mused.

Shelton gave Parker a look, but it was pointless as it was still very dark inside the facility. There was some light coming from burning pieces of the floor and wall that was destroyed by the explosion.

Unfortunately, those fires just made the infrared the team was wearing useless.

"Ten minutes," Minako's voice stated over the comm.

"Dammit," Rei cursed. "We need to keep moving."

Ranma nodded and took off her infrared goggles. She looked down the hallway, her irises opening wide to allow as much light in as possible.

She scanned with her tricorder and noticed another explosive about 30 meters down.

"Everyone down," she stated.

The rest of the team complied. Ranma slinked forward until she could see the shimmer of the explosive device. She lined it up in the sights on her weapon and fired once.

The round hit the explosive, causing it to explode. A wave of fire and compressed air shot down the corridor, knocking Ranma over backwards. It soon dissipated and she stood up.

"Shit," She groaned, checking her hair and finding some of it burnt.

Rei slowly walked up behind her, followed by the rest of the team.

"How much farther?" Rei asked.

Shelton checked his map. "It appears that the barracks is down this corridor a few hundred meters."

Rei nodded. "Alpha to Bravo. Meet us at grid 15 Echo."

"Roger," Kio's voice replied.

"And hurry," Rei added.

A large thunk echoed through the hallways.

"What was that?" Parker pondered.

Before anyone could phantom a guess, the hallway lit up as the lights came back on.

"Ah fuck," Rei bluntly stated.

Inside the CSS control room, the two guards on duty there smiled as their computers began to boot back up.

Once they did, the guards lost their smiles.

"SIR!" One yelled into another room.

A CSS Lieutenant walked into the room and looked at the display.

"Forget about them." He stated. "Call the interceptors back. Have them find the ship that must be up there," he ordered as he pointed to the air.

"What about the reserve fighters?" The second CSS guard asked.

"Launch them. Make sure those sons-of-bitches have no place to go home to."

The two guards grin and begin to issue orders into their computers.

Outside of the nebula, the interceptors waiting for the Saint Paul to come out powered up their engines and shot off towards the planet.

On the planet, the ground began to open and soon several dozen interceptors were lifting off into the sky and heading towards the Sisko.

Kaii looked to JC.

"Uh oh," Kaii stated.

JC nodded. "Nighthawk to Sisko, you're about to have some company."

CHAPTER NINE – RESOLUTION

McNamara held on to the top rung of the access ladder that led from a storage room on deck two to deck one with one arm. With the other he began to work on a lock that kept the bulkhead above him secure.

“I don’t remember reading anything about this in the ships specs,” Jefferson stated.

McNamara grinned as he continued working on the lock.

“It was added in the refit we had a few weeks ago. We figured out that if the turbolifts were blocked, there would be no way for the bridge crew to get to deck two and access the lifeboats.

“I’m all about nobility but I have no desire to go down with my ship.”

Jefferson chuckled.

“The other one is on the front of the bridge, but I doubt we’d be able to surprise them that way.”

Jefferson nodded. “Don’t dislodge it completely.”

McNamara nodded. After a few moments he looked down.

“Done. It’s usually meant to be unlocked from deck one, so it was a bit tricky to do from this side.”

Jefferson called over to a couple of his marines and they quickly came to the bottom of the ladder.

“I have to insist that we go first, Captain,” Jefferson ordered.

McNamara agreed and came down the ladder. The two marines then went up it. The top marine pushed metal bulkhead off and stuck his head into the room above him. The hole led to a small open space just off the captain’s ready room.

The first marine quickly pulled himself up into the room. The second marine followed suit.

The pair checked the side room, then the entire ready room for bad guys before they stuck their heads down into the hole.

“It’s clear.”

Jefferson nods and the rest of the group quickly climb the ladder. Once everyone is up there, Jefferson looks around.

The ready room is decorated with Bajoran artifacts, wall scrolls, and other Bajoran memorabilia. There are some pictures on McNamara’s desk, most of them being of Meru.

“My daughter, Meru, the one from earlier is Bajoran.”

“Was your wife Bajoran, sir?” Jefferson asked as he looked at the pictures.

“I was never married. Meru isn’t my REAL daughter, just someone I raised from a very little girl.

"I wanted to make sure she never forgot her heritage, so I started learning all sorts of things about Bajor and became hooked. So as often as I can I try and acquire artifacts and such."

"I'm sorry for intruding, sir," Jefferson apologizes.

"Don't worry about it, Lieutenant," McNamara smiled. "Now, let's go get my ship back."

Jefferson looked back to the picture of Meru, then to McNamara and returned the smile. "Yes sir."

"Are you married, Lieutenant?" McNamara asked.

Jefferson blushed. "No sir, why?"

McNamara grinned. "Just curious."

Jefferson continued to blush as he moved into position near the door. The rest of the marines took up positions, ready to storm the bridge.

"Anyone who draws their weapon gets dropped." Jefferson whispered.

"Aye." The rest of the marines replied.

"Three... Two... One..." Jefferson whispered.

The marines moved to the door.

It didn't open.

"What the hell?" one asked.

Jefferson turned to McNamara.

"How attached are you to this door?"

McNamara chuckled. "I'll miss it but do what you have to do."

Jefferson grinned and nodded. One of the other marines moved up and quickly placed a Play-Doh like goo down the center of the sliding doors. He then placed some more along the edges. Once the area around the door was covered in the explosives, and some of it was connected to the goo going down the center, he placed a small receiver in it.

"Back up." He ordered.

Jefferson and the rest of the marines moved to the back of the room yet stayed in a position that would keep them ready to pounce.

"Here we go." The forward marine stated.

Hanson scowled.

Only about two thirds of the remaining guards had shown up to the bridge. Hanson did not know if they had been captured, or if they had just decided to abandon him.

He hoped for their sake it was the former because if it was the latter, he'd have them executed for treason.

The ones that remained had taken up defensive positions on the bridge. Four were at the forward, port side turbolift. Ready to shoot the first thing to come out of it.

Four more were at the aft turbolift. They had already mistakenly shot one of the guards returning to the bridge. Hanson had then disabled the turbolift to make sure no one could come out through them. Being delusional at this point, Hansen did not seem to realize that the non-functioning turbolift might be the reason why more guards hadn't come to the bridge.

Two guards stood in front of tactical, making sure that Alvarez stayed safe. Three stood at ops, one of them tasked with attempting to figure out how to run the station.

The remaining guards stood around Hanson, to ensure his safety. There were only fifteen guards in total on the bridge right now, but Hanson thought that would be enough to handle the current revolt.

Hanson had no idea what was exactly going on, but he quickly got a small demonstration.

An enormous boom shook the bridge. The doors of the captain's ready room blew outward, taking out the two guards who happened to be standing there. The doors continued their flight across the bridge, impacting several of the guards protecting Hanson.

Hanson dove to the ground as the Sisko marines burst onto the bridge.

"DROP YOUR WEAPONS!" they yelled.

Most of the guards, seeing the overwhelming force running out of the smoke complied, but others drew their weapons on the marines.

The marines began to fire.

The firefight lasted about eighteen seconds, but when it was all said and done, nine Saint Paul security guards were on the deck, stunned.

Alvarez, who had ducked behind his terminal, stood with his weapon pointed in the direction of the marines.

"STOP!" he screamed.

The entire marine compliment turned their phasers on him.

"I've activated the self-destruct. You let me off the ship, and I'll send you the code to deactivate it."

Hanson lifted himself off the floor.

"Take me with you," he ordered Alvarez.

Alvarez nodded and moved towards the Admiral. He kept his phaser pointed at the marines. The marines all kept their phasers pointed towards Alvarez, and then Hanson.

"Jose, there is no way out," McNamara said as he walked from his ready room.

“Captain, stay back,” Jefferson ordered.

McNamara ignored the marine and walked forward. He continued till he was standing inches from Alvarez, Alvarez’s phaser inches from McNamara’s face.

“You can still get out of this, son,” McNamara stated.

Alvarez was shaking. He looked to Hanson.

Hanson was moving behind Alvarez.

“If we don’t leave, you’ll end up spending the rest of your life in prison,” Hanson said as he walked backwards towards the turbolift. He pulled on Alvarez to walk backwards with him.

“He’s not going to take you with him,” McNamara said as he walked with the pair. “He’s using you as a shield. He’d sooner kill you than protect you.”

McNamara thought of the pilot that Sarah had told him was killed right here on the bridge. He thought of the dead man they found in the hallway.

He thought of the people on the planet who could be dead.

“He’s a murderer.”

Alvarez continued to shake.

“I – I was wrong,” Alvarez cried as they reached the turbolift.

“Computer, active turbolift one,” Hanson stated.

The turbolift opened and Hanson began to pull Alvarez into the lift.

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” Hanson grinned. He then shoved Alvarez into McNamara and the lift doors closed.

Jefferson lowered his weapon.

“Hanson is loose on the ship,” he stated.

Alvarez began to cry as McNamara took the weapon from him.

“You never activated the self-destruct, did you?” McNamara asked.

Alvarez shook his head.

One of the marines ran over and grabbed Alvarez and arrested him. McNamara walked to the operations station as the marines began to arrest the rest of the people on the bridge.

McNamara looked at the terminal. He quickly reactivated a couple of systems, including the internal sensors and one more device that they were going to need.

“Lifeboat seven alpha four is being launched.” McNamara stated. The older man hit some controls.

The lifeboat began to float away from the ship. The thrusters then began to push it towards the perimeter of the nebula.

It suddenly slammed to a stop as the forward tractor emitter on the Saint Paul grabbed the tiny, square escape pod.

"Idiot." McNamara chuckled.

"Wouldn't those ships have blown him away once he left the nebula?" Jefferson asked, as the tiny craft fired its thrusters in a futile attempt to gain freedom from the Saint Paul's grip.

McNamara just laughed.

"Maybe I should let him go?"

The aft turbolift doors opened and Sarah walked onto the bridge with a couple of marines.

"Phil," she smiled.

"What are you doing up here?" McNamara grinned at her. "Go home. Get some sleep."

"My place is on the bridge here with you," she stated.

McNamara scoffed and looked to Jefferson.

"Women."

Jefferson grinned as his communicator chirped.

"Jefferson here."

"Hey L.T." The voice on the other end stated. "The ship is completely under our control now. We have twenty prisoners. We've also found three deceased."

McNamara sighed.

"Very good, Corporal," Jefferson replied. "Secure the prisoners in cargo bay three. Davis and Holt have set it up as a brig. Also inform the people in the lounge that they are free to return to their quarters."

"Lieutenant," McNamara called out.

"Yes sir?"

"Order them to their quarters. Tell them that I said for them to go to sleep and report to duty at 09:00."

Jefferson grinned. "Yes sir. Did you hear that, Corporal?"

"Yes sir," the corporal's voice replied.

Jefferson turned to a few of the other marines.

"Get them down to the cargo bay." Jefferson ordered about the prisoners. "Then stay and help guard them."

“Yes sir,” they replied.

Jefferson turned to McNamara. “With all due respect, I suggest you follow your own order sir.”

McNamara grinned. “You know anything about getting the engine start sequence going?”

Jefferson gave McNamara a look that resembled what a kitten who was attempting to understand geometry would give.

“Okay then. I’ll go after I get the restart sequence going.”

Jefferson nodded.

Sarah walked over to McNamara.

“What about the others?”

McNamara looked up from the terminal and placed a hand on Sarah’s shoulder.

“The Sisko, the ship these marines are from, is in the process of rescuing them right now.”

McNamara pointed to the Sisko mission patch on Jefferson’s shoulder.

“As soon as they are done there, they’ll come, clean up those interceptors, and everything will be spiffy!”

Sarah wished she had McNamara’s outlook on life.

“Don’t worry, Commander,” Jefferson turned and smiled at Sarah. “The people doing the rescue are specially trained for just such a thing. They won’t – they don’t fail.”

Sarah nodded.

The aft turbolift slid open and Meru ran onto the bridge.

“DAD!” She yelled as she pounced on McNamara.

“Hey,” he grinned.

“I knew you’d be okay,” she smiled.

“I don’t break promises.”

Jefferson smiled at the reunion. McNamara noticed this and turned to him.

“By the way, Meru. This is Lt. Jefferson of the U.S.S. Sisko.”

Meru smiled coyly.

“Nice to meet you, Lieutenant.”

Jefferson blushed and smiled back.

“Nice to meet you, Ensign.”

McNamara simply grinned as the pair continued to stare at each other.

Gun fire echoed through the now brightly lit hallways of the Chidori United Chemical Defense Production Facility. The occasional short-lived scream attempted to interrupt the gun fire, but the echoing was far too deafening to hear yourself think, much less someone screaming their last breath.

Kio did not like the position that they were in. Once the lights had come back on, they found themselves about 50 meters down the corridor from a squadron of CSS guards. They managed to take out two of them before diving for cover; Kio and Anthony on one side of the corridor, Mike, Xiang and Yayo on the other.

The CSS guards had also managed to take cover and now there was a stalemate. The CSS would fire at Bravo team. Bravo team would fire at the CSS.

Neither side was hitting the other. Plus, Kio's team was quickly becoming outnumbered as more CSS guards were called in for back-up.

To make matters worse, it had almost been five minutes since the Sisko had informed the groups that they had five minutes before the Klingon assault could possibly begin.

No, Kio did not like the position she was in at all.

"GIVE UP!" One of the CSS guards yelled at Bravo team.

"YOU FIRST!" Kio yelled back as she stuck her gun around the corner and fired off a burst of three rounds.

Her gun clicked and the slide locked back once the rounds fired. She quickly dropped the empty magazine out of the handle and loaded a full one.

"This is my last mag." She stated.

Anthony checked out his supply.

"I've only got one left also."

"They know we're here," Mike added. "I think it's safe to begin using our phasers."

Kio nodded. Unfortunately, the only phasers that they had brought with them were the type two hand phasers.

"Bravo to Alpha," Kio called.

Rei peaked around a corner and saw two CSS guards standing near a doorway looking around.

"Go," she whispered.

"We need help. We're pinned down at grid six-alpha and we're running really fuckin' low on ammo."

"Sisko to all teams," Minako's voice interrupted. "Time's up."

Rei sighed.

“Try to make your way back out to the beam out point,” Rei ordered.

“What about the hostages?” Kio asked.

Rei looked to the rest of her team. If any of them were about to concede defeat, she could not tell.

“We’re facing light resistance. We will locate them. Get to the beam out point.”

“But Commander-“ Kio started.

“That’s an order, Chief,” Rei almost yelled.

There was a slight pause.

“Aye,”

Rei looked back to Ranma and Shelton. She signed that there were two tangos around the corner. Both Ranma and Shelton nodded and quietly slinked around the corner.

“Hi there,” Ranma called out.

The guards turned around and were instantly knocked backwards by the Federation rounds striking them.

Ranma and Shelton swiftly moved up the hallway and to where the guards were. They drug the pair back and around the corner. Once that was complete, they began to move back up the hallway.

Ranma stopped. Shelton nearly walked right into her.

“What?” he whispered.

“I hear voices,” she replied.

Shelton could only murmur in amazement at Ranma’s excellent hearing. He took a defensive position behind the former captain.

“We need to move quickly,” one of the voices said.

Ranma crouched low, ready to pounce. Whoever she heard was coming close and would be rounding the hallway at any second.

Rei, Parker, and Masters came up behind Shelton.

They waited.

Three figures came around the corner.

Ranma pounced.

She quickly took the first two out with a silent, but effective Kachu Tenshin Amaguriken. The third man she grabbed, wrapped her arm around his neck, and placed the barrel of her sidearm to his head.

The whole incident took less than five seconds.

Six trailing CSS guards drew their weapons on Ranma. They were matched by Rei and the others pointing their weapons at them.

Ranma quickly pulled her hostage backwards.

“DROP YOUR WEAPONS!” she yelled.

“General!” Hassan yelled.

Johansson squirmed, but the grip Ranma had around his neck kept him from moving too far.

Rei noticed two men in black jump suits with their hands behind their backs. One was Asian, the other Caucasian. She did not know the Asian one, but she knew the other one.

“Councilman?” She asked.

Brett nodded.

“Where are the rest of the hostages?” Rei asked.

Hassan, standing behind Hideki looked to Johansson.

“Only hostage I see here is the General.”

Ranma looked at the man she had detained.

“Where are the others?” She demanded.

“SHOOT THEM,” Johansson ordered.

“You shoot us, I shoot him,” Ranma growled.

No one moved.

“CONTROL TO ECHO ONE!!!” A man screamed over the radio.

Hassan began to move his hand towards his radio. Rei shifted the barrel of her rifle to face Hassan.

Hassan showed his hands to Rei.

“I’m not armed,” He stated.

“You call for help, you’ll all die,” Rei bluntly warned.

Hassan nodded.

“Echo one.” He replied.

“WE HAVE A MAJOR PROBLEM!” the man in the control room frantically yelled.

Kelta, the commander of the Klingon task force looked to his second in command on the bridge of the Klingon battle cruiser.

“HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN?” he yelled; his desire to kill something beginning to get the better of him.

“Twenty minutes as of right now,” the XO replied.

Kelta grinned.

“Decloak the task force.” he ordered. “Don’t fire on the Federation ship unless it fires on us.”

“They’re decloaking!” Minako called out.

“Damn,” Karyn mumbled as she looked to the countdown timer on the view screen that had just changed to 00:00. “Talk about a punctual bunch.”

“We’ve got an ass-load of interceptors incoming from both the nebula and the planet.” Jansen stated.

Shampoo began to ponder the meaning of ‘ass-load’ as Karyn sighed and turned to Larson.

The old man simply shook his head and looked back. “Do not fire on the Klingon ships.”

Karyn slouched back in her seat. “Can we beam them all out?”

“No ma’am,” Minako replied. “When the power came back up, the transport inhibitors reactivated.”

Karyn sighed.

“Get the shuttle out of here. Let’s hope the ODPs and the interceptors keep the Klingon’s busy until our people can get to the beam out point.”

“The Klingons are within weapons range,” Minako stated. Jansen looked at her terminal and then to the Captain.

“They’re not targeting us.”

Karyn nodded as Shampoo brought up the tactical display onto the main viewer.

They watched as dozens of small, red dots converged on them from two directions. The two Klingon Birds of Prey began to move into an attack formation and started towards the orbital defense platforms.

Larson eyed the display for a moment.

“The cruiser won’t move in for her planetary bombardment until the ODP’s are neutralized. That should give us a couple of minutes.”

Karyn nodded as Shampoo inhaled deeply.

The interceptors were beginning to break formation. Half were heading after the Sisko, the others were pursuing the older Klingon vessels.

"Fifteen seconds till the interceptors are within weapons range." Jansen stated.

Shampoo stood and walked up behind Ryouga.

"Defensive pattern Omega Seven," She ordered.

Ryouga slid back and forth along his terminal entering in the proper commands. The Sisko rocketed forward and began to loop around backwards.

"IN RANGE!" Jansen called.

"Fire," Karyn replied.

Jansen began to fire phasers at the smaller ships as the Sisko became inverted.

The phaser banks on the dorsal side of the ship fired at the interceptors, occasionally striking one, but for the most part missing. The shorter-range phase cannons popped out of their hiding places and began to swivel and fire at the smaller, faster, more agile ships.

"Gamma Nine!" Shampoo ordered.

The Sisko continued to fire at the interceptors, destroying one every so often, as she rolled to port and began to dive.

"Shields holding at 77 percent," Minako stated.

Karyn looked to the view screen and watched the larger Klingon battle cruiser fire torpedoes at the interceptors attacking the Birds of Prey. The two smaller ships had managed to destroy one of the ODPs and were now working on the next one.

They appeared to be taking damage, but it didn't seem to be serious enough to disable either warship.

The stalemate in corridor seven of the weapons facility had only lasted for a couple of minutes, but it was the longest couple of minutes that any of them could remember.

"One of the ODP's is down," The voice from control relayed to Hassan. "The Klingon ships will have the other two down within a few minutes."

"So, you brought the Klingon's in for back up?" Johansson asked.

Rei shook her head.

"Those ships are here to destroy the facility. We're only interested in bring back our people."

"Why would they want to destroy us?" Hassan questioned.

"Because you're selling to a sect that plans on using your weapons to overthrow the current government," Ranma grumbled.

Hassan grumbled. It was like the corporate types to not care who they were selling too, just so long as they were selling.

Footsteps are heard and everyone turned to see Bravo team rounding the corridor.

Kio's eyes went wide when she saw what was going on. She raised her weapon, as did the rest of Bravo team.

"HOLD YOUR FIRE, CHIEF!" Rei ordered.

Kio complied, but kept her weapon trained on the CSS guards.

"I told you to go to the beam out point," Rei scowled.

"We were on our way, but heard you guys," Kio replied.

Rei nodded. She was glad that they did show up. They now had a distinct advantage in numbers.

"Councilman, Commander, please move behind us," Rei requested.

Brett did as he was asked, but Hideki stayed where he was.

"Commander," Rei growled.

"I'm not going anywhere. I am not going to be 'rescued' while you allow the Klingons to slaughter these people."

Both Hassan and Johansson looked to Hideki.

"If you want me to come with you, you have to bring them with us."

"Fine," Rei stated, worried that the roof was going to cave in at any moment.

"All of them," Hideki expanded.

Rei looked to Ranma who shrugged.

"They need to leave their weapons behind. Anyone who comes towards the beam out point with a weapon will be shot by the marines and security people guarding it," Rei explained.

"Can't we just lower the shielding and beam everyone out?" Shelton asked.

Rei looked to Hideki and Hassan.

"SIR! THE OTHER TWO ODP'S ARE DOWN!" Control screamed.

"They better get us out FAST," Hassan grumbled.

Karyn and Shampoo watched the final orbital platform fire one last shot, destroying one Bird of Prey. The other fired and destroyed the platform.

Karyn sighed.

"Put us between the cruiser and the planet," Karyn ordered as the cruiser began to move into low orbit to begin her assault.

"Aye," Ryouga whimpered as he began to move the Sisko.

The entire fleet of interceptors had been decimated by the battle cruiser and the Sisko. But not without damage. The Sisko's primary regenerating shield had failed. She was down to her standard shielding, which currently sat at 54 percent.

She would be no match for the larger Klingon cruiser and the remaining Bird of Prey; especially if she couldn't fire back.

"Admiral, anyway you'll be able to reevaluate our standing 'no fire' order?" Karyn asked.

Larson looked at the tactical display.

He sighed.

"No."

Karyn chuckled nervously. "Well then. Everyone hang on to your asses."

Shampoo eyed Karyn for a moment. **Nice to see she have sense of humor.** Shampoo thought. **Even if we are about to die.**

"Alpha to Sisko!" Rei called.

"Go," Karyn replied.

"Change of plans. We're lowering the shields. We need you guys to beam EVERYONE on board."

Karyn spun to Minako.

"Last count, One hundred fifty-nine people. Will take at least three cycles using all the transporters."

"Get the marines and security forces on board first," Rei instructed. "We'll have hostiles."

"Beam to cargo bay one," Shampoo ordered.

"We'll have to lower the shields," Minako reminded everyone.

Karyn nodded.

"We're in position," Ryouga replied.

Time slowed for Karyn.

"The battle cruiser will be within range in eighteen seconds," Shampoo informed the bridge.

"Lower shields," Karyn ordered.

Jansen lowered the shields as Minako began to transport.

The ship is rocked.

"The bird of prey is firing on us!" Jansen yelled.

Parts of the Sisko on the Master Situation Display began to flash yellow.

“Outer hull breeches decks 14 and 15!” Usagi yelled.

“First group on board,” Minako stated.

“Facilities shields are down!” Jansen yelled.

“Ten seconds till the battle cruiser is in range,” Shampoo stated.

“They’re targeting our nacelles!” Jansen screamed.

“ADJUSTING POSITION!” Ryouga replied as he swung the Sisko’s engines away from the Bird of Prey’s guns.

“Second group on board,” Minako stated.

“Five seconds!”

The Sisko rocked hard. The bow of the ship began to flash red on the display.

Karyn inhaled deeply.

“MAJOR HULL BREECH DECK SIX!”

“The cruiser is in range!”

“Target the bird of prey,” Karyn ordered.

Larson looked to Karyn.

“FINAL GROUP IS ON BOARD!” Minako called out.

Karyn swung to Ryouga.

“WARP NINE! ANYWHERE! GO!”

Ryouga punched in some buttons and hit engage. The Sisko exploded in a bright white flash as a massive disruptor charge left the cruiser and headed towards the planet, passing right through the area of space that used to contain the Sisko.

Ryouga ordered the ship to a full stop. The Sisko drifted to that stop somewhere near the middle of nowhere. Where they were didn’t really matter though. The fact that they were alive was good enough for him.

Karyn could not agree more. She looked around the bridge. She had never seen a group of people covered in more sweat before in her life.

Yet as frustrated as they looked; as tired and worn out as they appeared; as scared as they were, every single one of them performed brilliantly.

Karyn looked to Shampoo.

"Go see to our guests."

Shampoo nodded and headed to the turbolift.

"Damage," Karyn asked.

Usagi looked at her display and grinned.

"We've had worse."

Karyn managed a chuckle. She turned to Minako.

"No casualties from the Klingon and interceptor assault," she frowned. "We're missing three NSO members though."

"Did they not get beamed up?" Karyn asked.

"I beamed up everything with a humanoid bio-sign," Minako replied. "They must have been killed on the mission."

Karyn bowed her head in respect.

"Nighthawk to Sisko," Kaii called.

"Go," Minako replied.

"Where'd you guys go?"

Minako shrugged and laughed. "Away. Is it clear?"

"Yeah. The Klingons destroyed everything within 1,000 kilometers of the facility and left. All the interceptors were destroyed as well."

Larson stood and patted Karyn on the shoulder. "Good work."

Karyn smiled. "Lt. Hibiki. Please set a course back to the nebula. Warp five."

"Aye," Ryouga complied.

"Lt. Kaii. Please contact Lt. Jefferson and advise him that it's safe to bring the Saint Paul out of the nebula."

"Roger. They contacted us as well and advise they will need brig space for more than thirty prisoners,"

Larson shook his head in disbelief.

"Make it so," Karyn stated to Jansen.

Jansen nodded. Karyn turned to Usagi. "Get DC working on the damage."

"Yes ma'am," Usagi nodded.

Karyn turned to Minako. "You have the bridge."

Minako nodded as Karyn began to walk to her ready room.

ONE WEEK LATER – BEIJING, CHINA

A young Chinese woman walks up to a table where a lone, chubby Vulcan wearing a gold Starfleet Engineering Uniform sat. His rank pip bore the rank of Commodore.

“You ordered Korean Kim'Chi?” She asked.

“Yes,” The Vulcan replied.

She set the dish down in front of him. “You want spoon or chopsticks?”

“Chopsticks will be fine,” he replied.

The young lady handed him some chopsticks and smiled.

“I have two friends coming, so please come back soon.”

The young waitress nodded and walked off. The Vulcan broke apart the chopsticks and began to eat.

“You started without us?” a voice asked.

“You are late,” the Vulcan replied as he slurped down a mouth full of rice. “And it would not be logical to be hungry.”

Councilman Young laughed as he sat down across from the Vulcan. Salek also had a seat.

The young waitress walked back.

“Do you need menu?”

“No,” Young replied. “I'll have what he is having.”

“It's very spicy!” The waitress warned.

“That's good,” Young smiled.

The waitress nodded and looked to Salek.

“I would just like some egg drop soup.”

The waitress nodded and walked off.

“Everything has been finalized,” Young stated.

The Vulcan stopped eating and looked up to Young.

“So, when do I assume command?”

“As soon as you get there,” Young replied. “A Starfleet Intelligence ship was kind enough to agree to drop you off there.”

The Vulcan grumbled. "I don't care for them."

"Well, we can't have just anyone take you to a top-secret facility. And people would question why a Runabout flew into a nebula and never came out."

"You are very naïve if you think that the Lincoln Park Shipyards are still a secret," the Vulcan replied, continuing his eating.

The waitress walked back and handed both Young and Salek their orders.

Young broke apart his chopsticks and took a bite. He immediately dropped the chopsticks and took a drink of his water.

"She warned you," Salek mused.

"And you are sure that there will be no suspicion on the part of the Sisko?" The Vulcan asked either oblivious to or ignoring Young's pain.

Young stole Salek's water and drank it before continuing.

"Their engines are experimental. There's nothing odd about the shipyards bringing them back to do an overhaul after a mission," Young replied. "Besides, they took some damage in their last mission, so they need some work anyway."

"That is true," the Vulcan replied.

Young pawed at his rice and chicken dish before taking another bite.

Salek watched him and almost seemed disappointed when he didn't put on the same show he had before.

"You are certain that your plan will eliminated Saotome and his crew, right?" Salek asked.

The Vulcan nodded.

"I will not fail, Salek. I know what is at stake here."

**Captain's Log – Stardate 60725.4. It only took them a week, but the Federation finally came to some sort of compromise with the people running the Chidori facility.*

Apparently both former Councilman Alexander and former Admiral Hanson will be tried in a Federation court, but the Federation will pay reparations for both the guards killed in our assault and the damages from the Klingon assault.

I guess the Ferengi are right. There isn't any problem that can't be solved with a little latinum.

The Saint Paul is headed back to be recrewed and sent back out on their next mission. I don't know if I could serve on an exploration vessel. All that flying with not much to do.

I guess some people like nebulas enough to stop and look at every single one of them.

As for us, we're back enroute to the Starfleet Experimental Design Team's shipyards for an engine overhaul. I don't understand why though. The new engines performed swimmingly with not a single problem or abnormality.

Plus, Commander Tsukino's damage control teams managed to repair all our damage perfectly while in space, so we don't NEED to go back to a shipyard for that.

*I guess it doesn't really matter though. After that last mission we could all use a break.**

Karyn looked up from her computer and looked around her ready room. She checked the time and saw that the senior staff had just now left their shifts.

She walked out onto the bridge and looked at the next shift's crew. She smiled at the officer in command and stepped into the turbolift.

"Deck five."

Karyn rode the turbolift down and over till it came to a stop in the forward section of deck five. She proceeded down the corridor to the entrance of the Sisko's lounge.

She walked in and looked around. She saw Ranma, Shampoo, Lt. Jansen, Ryouga and Minako (who were sitting close together, which made her smile), Akane, Makoto, and Rei.

She then walked over to the bar and sat down.

Gosnell walked up.

"Good evening Captain. What can I get for you?"

"Do you have any fruit punch?"

Gosnell looked to the replicator.

"I have whatever you want."

"No, I mean real fruit punch."

Gosnell scratched his head and began to investigate his cabinets.

"I have this stuff," he placed a metal can on the bar.

"Hawaiian Punch?" Karyn pondered.

Gosnell nodded.

"What the hell," she said.

Gosnell grinned and began to open the can. He then poured her a glass.

"Hey," Ranma stated.

Karyn turned to see Ranma standing next to her.

“Commander,” she smiled.

Gosnell placed the glass in front of Karyn and walked off.

“Why don’t you come and join us?”

Karyn lowered her head. “I don’t think I should.”

“Why not?” Ranma asked.

“I don’t really think I am welcome.”

“Oh please,” Ranma chuckled. “You took my job and I want you to come over.”

Karyn laughed. She turned to the group, who all motioned for her to join them.

“Come on, Captain.”

Karyn smiled and walked with Ranma back to the table.

Rei held up her glass.

“To our captain who led us through another successful mission!”

Everyone else raised their glasses.

“To the captain.”

Karyn blushed and took a drink.

Ryouga could not help himself though.

“Spitting image,” he stated.

This time it took ten marines.