

Mission One: "Not Until Tuesday"



Author: Alenis Meru

"We are the Borg. You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile."

Lt. Alenis Meru stared up at the Borg cube on the viewscreen. It was massive, nearly filling the viewscreen and getting larger as her ship approached.

The Borg scared Alenis. And rightly so. The Federation learned the hard way at Wolf 359 that even a single Borg vessel could be a threat to an entire fleet of starships. She'd already made her peace with the prophets, not that death is even the worst fate that can befall one who fights the Borg. More than anything Alenis feared being assimilated. To have her individuality destroyed, and her consciousness trapped in the body of an unfeeling, unthinking drone. She had her sidearm ready, and was mentally prepared to use it on herself if the worst were to happen.

"All vessels, concentrate fire at 245 mark 15 and engage on my mark..." the voice of Admiral Wells, transmitted from his flagship, boomed over the loudspeakers in the USS Gol. "Let's hit them fast and hard. Godspeed." For a couple moments, one could hear a pin drop on the bridge of the Gol. "Mark."

At his command, the screen was lit up by phaser and torpedo fire. The weapons of every vessel in the fleet lit up, all focused on the cube. "Firing forward weapons," shouted Alenis as her fingers danced across the tactical console. Bursts of energy streaked from the type IX and X phasers of the Ambassador class starship towards the cube. A burst of photon torpedoes from the Gol slammed into the cube's shields. In response, the Gol's shields were rocked by a green plasma beam.

"Evasive maneuvers!" Captain Hideki barked out

"Helm, attack pattern Beta four. Keep us moving!" As the battle raged around her, Alenis went into a hyperfocused state. She was in the zone, and could anticipate the captain's orders before they were even given. She was two steps ahead of him, and three ahead of the Borg. Not even the federation ships exploding around her shook her focus from the Borg cube and what she had to do to help take it down.

"T'Rena, hard to starboard, Alenis, give them the broadside." The Gol banked to the left, crossing the

T of the Borg cube – or at least, crossing by one side; it was difficult to tell with the Borg if there was a front and a back to their ships. Without acknowledging the order, Alenis fired a burst of carefully aimed shots from the aft phaser banks to complement the Gol's forward weaponry.

"Their facing shield is down to 30%!" shouted Alenis. The battle was turning; the concentrated fire of the entire fleet was finally starting to wear down the shields. "It won't be--"

The ship came to a halt with a shudder. The sudden stop was more than the inertial dampeners could compensate for, and two crewmen were thrown from their seats, one seriously injured. A console off to the side of the bridge shorted out, and the lighting flickered for a moment. "Status!"

"Hull breaches on decks six through ten!" One could hear the fear in the voice of Ensign Dumont; not long out of the academy, it was the first taste of real combat for this green Operations officer.

"We're caught in their tractor beam!" Alenis frantically hammered on her console, desperately firing her remaining weapons at the emitter on the cube, hoping that against all odds she could free the ship. She looked up at the screen in time to see a glow emanate from one of the projectile launchers on the cube. Three balls of green energy were coming straight towards the Gol.

"Evasive maneuvers! Countermeasures!" A bead of sweat began to form on Hideki's forehead. He knew there was little that could be done to save his ship, but he was going to go down fighting.

Alenis fired a burst of phasers at the energy balls, hoping they would dissipate the incoming plasma blasts. They passed through with no effect. She could do nothing but stare at the approaching doom.

"Brace for impact!" Hideki's voice boomed across the intercom system. It would be his last command.

Alenis stared up at the incoming bursts of plasma. Closer and closer, the slow-moving projectiles came, until they filled the screen. She closed her eyes. Then... silence.

Her eyes opened wide. She was in her bed, staring at the ceiling of her quarters, breathing heavily. It was the dream again. She'd had the same dream for the past three years. Ever since that fateful day out in sector 262. Many fine men and women lost their lives that day. 486 of them on the Gol. Alenis was the highest ranking officer to make it off, and she never forgave herself. The last three years, she'd been replaying the battle in her head, wondering what she could have done differently.

She turned on her side to look at her chronometer. It was an hour and a half before she had to get up for duty. She knew she wouldn't be able to get back to bed. There was only one thing she could do to get her mind off it. She got out of bed, strolled across her immaculate quarters, and pulled out her duty uniform.

Captain's Office
USS Shikahr
Four hours later

"You wanted to see me, sir?" asked Meru. She had been summoned to her captain's office. She'd served as Baxx's right hand man and closest confidant for three years, and it was rare that he would summon her to his office like this. Usually, the chipper Bolian would make his way to her office,

more often than not carrying a mug of tea, chatting up every crewman he passed by on the way.

“Yes. Lieutenant Commander Alenis, this is very difficult for me.” Baxx was deadly serious, there was not even a hint of the jovial attitude that was so common of his people. “You’ve served with me for three years with distinction, and...” he paused. “Well, I just got a message from Starfleet Command. You...”

“Sir, what is it?” Alenis was confused; she hadn't received any messages from Starfleet Command.

“You’re being reassigned. To the USS Portland. As commanding officer.”

“Sir?” Alenis could hardly believe it; for years she strove to be a Starfleet captain and did everything she could to make it a reality.

“Yes, you’re finally getting your own ship.” Baxx stood up from his desk and handed Alenis a PADD. “Your orders. Congratulations, Meru. You will be leaving some -- what is the old earth saying -- some large clogs to fill?”

“Close enough.”

Author: Lt. Tyrlai Zade

The firelight flickered off the ancient stone walls. The light was muted and the shadows danced slowly over the table. The walls were crumbling and blackened where the torches sat slowly flickering away. It was a backwater tavern on a backwater world tucked between Cardassian, Breen and Ferengi territory and just past a lonely Tendril of Federation worlds. The stone was a holdover from a forgotten people, a civilization that had burned itself out in its equivalent of the low middle ages. . A grizzled Lethian rubbed one of his ridges looking at his cards and pondering the latest spin. An enterprising but ill equipped Ferengi had added wood tables and torches to the edifice and declared it a tavern.

And had done surprisingly well for himself.

Strategically the world was too poor and just slightly too far away from all of the local powers to be useful as a base, but that resulting lack of authority made it a travelled stopover for traders. The local authorities stayed out of anything that did not result in violence, and stamped down heavily on anything that did. It resulted in a unique variety of races co-existing peacefully with a palpable undercurrent of barely concealed contempt.

Petty officer second class Andrev Thosk glowered from where he stood, the new property of the Lethian as of three hands ago. He was dressed in an entirely ridiculous collection of hides that made him look slightly less like an out of his depth Federation crewman pretending to be a backwater trader.

The Lethian mumbled something incomprehensible to most of the room and oddly too colorful for the universal translator. He placed two strips in the exchange and the strange glowing bauble he had kept out of risk for the majority of the evening.

Tyrlai Zade’s eyes fluttered and she dropped her cards. “Confront.” She interrupted before the Lethian spun her off blue zeph which gave her a minor consortium. The two on her left dropped and cut their losses, the Childra threw up his hands in exasperation and the Lethian glared as she

collected her winnings.

“Thank you very much for your donations to the Federation orphans fund,” Tyrlai stood, to the visible irritation of more than one of the players, it was polite to leave on a losing hand but she was not about to risk another spin. She heard a desperate muffled squeak as she walked away and turned back to the Lethian. She pulled four strips from her winnings. “I’ll buy him back, trust me you don’t really want him.” The Lethian glared and stood adopting a threatening posture.

After a short round of haggling they agreed at a price of six strips and Tyrlai headed out into the refreshing chill of the autumn night. She turned at the end of the wall and set her winnings down and began splitting them into two piles, one about half the size of the other.

“You bet me in a game of tongo and lost!!” Thosk had taken that long to get past his apocalyptic rage to a place where he could speak.

Tyrlai raised the strange glowing bauble between her thumb and index finger a moment before placing it in an inside pocket of her jacket. “I needed to raise the stakes and for some reason he took a liking to you.”

“But you lost!!”

“I was lulling him into a false sense of security.”

A Ferengi quietly walked up to where they were standing collected the smaller bag of latinum, nodded to Tyrlai and returned the way he came.

“You meant to tell me you were lulling him into,... why did he take the latinum?”

“It was his cut for fixing the game.” Tyrlai replied.

“You were cheating!??”

“I don’t really know how to play tongo, not well at least.” Tyrlai admitted, looking over at Thosk sympathetically.

Thosk sputtered for several more moments. “You bet me in a game you don’t know how to play!!??”

“The Federation sent us to get a tolic shard and we got one, that’s the important part.”

“I am done. Absolutely done. I have put in for a transfer out of this madness. The Federation sends you to weird places and every ship you are posted to explodes.”

“That last one didn’t explode.” Tyrlai picked up her satchel and began the long trudge to the clearing at the center of a low rise at the edge of the village.

“It was boarded by Klingons.” Thosk stammered, looking around into the darkness and making sure to stay close to Tyrlai despite all his protests.

“Im a psychologist, Klingon boarding parties aren’t really in my realm of responsibility.”

“Then why did you fight them with a sword?”

"They were bad." She looked at him like the answer should have been obvious.

"A phaser would have been more appropriate."

"I didn't have a phaser."

"Why did you have a sword!?"

"Swords are cool."

"I am done with this. When I get my orders, this time I am free,..."

* * * * *

Tyrlai's hands flowed over the controls as she readied the runabout for departure. She tapped the comm panel and spoke in an even pleasant tone. "This is the USS Trill Sucks, requesting departure on vector one eight eight, two one four."

[Departure approved.]

"I think this is the Yukon." Thosk said trying to be helpful, looking at a wall panel as they lurched out of orbit and shifted into warp drive.

She had just about finished plotting their course back to Federation space proper when the chime rang out again. The face of a middle aged human commander appeared on the viewscreen superimposed on the blurred starfield.

[Congratulations on the successful completion of your mission, lieutenant Zade. In recognition of your fine service you are hereby promoted to full lieutenant. Report directly to the USS Portland as their second officer under the command of Alenis Maru. She will take custody of the shard.]

"Understood, and thank you Commander." Tyrlai smiled. It had been a long three years as a junior grade, ticking off every single XO she met hadn't helped any either.

[Well deserved, lieutenant. Starfleet out.]

"They promoted you." Thosk said in an even tone slowly fuming once more. "You gamble me into slavery and they promote you for it. Unbelievable."

"It's not just this, Thosk, it's been three years,..."

"A promotion! The Federation must be run by rabid madmen just randomly tapping consoles, I have had enough,..."

[Congratulations on the successful completion of your mission crewman Thosk. In recognition of your fine service you are hereby assigned as councilors aide. Report directly to Tyrlai Zade aboard the USS Portland. At the recommendation of Lieutenant Zade you are hereby promoted to Petty Officer First Class.]

Thosk gazed in shock at the prerecorded message displayed on the viewscreen, tearing slightly at the corners of his eyes. Tyrlai smiled softly and looked down at the console to try and figure out where the USS Portland was and how to get there.

[Well deserved, technician Thosk. Starfleet out.]

Tyrlai laid in the new course and kicked the engines into a slightly higher than optimally safe speed and leaned back to watch the stars streak past.

"So what is a Portland?" Thosk asked.

"I have no idea, some earth thing I expect."

Author: Jason Beauvoir
Paris, Earth

"I love you, Jason." Sarah said. Then look around at the beauty of the ancient city. "Or should that be Je t'aime? After all I'm with my handsome French Beau in the famous 'Ville Lumière'."

"The sentiment is what's important, not the language, mon amour." Jason said with a smile.

It had been a great night. A candlelight dinner at a French-Vulcan fusion restaurant, Sarah had found the tomato and Plomeek bisque surprisingly delicious and now they were walking hand in hand along the Seine.

Soon they found a bench beneath a cherry tree. They sat and hold each other just looking at the stars.

A cool wind blew up and Jason gave Sarah his jacket , making sure to take the ring box from the pocket.

He then stood up, only to go down on one knee in front of her with the ring box in hand.

"What are you doing?" Sarah asked knowing full well what he was doing.

"Sarah Imogen Patterson, will you do the honour of becoming my wife?" Jason asked.

"Umm, I don't know. " She teased "This awfully sudden."

"Yes, or no? I'm not staying down her all night." He said not unkindly.

"Yes, of course I'll marry you, now get up, so I can plant a big kiss on that handsome face of yours."

As Jason got to his feet, he heard the familiar sound of a transporter beam.

Turning he saw four figures materialise from the ether.

The leader, a Betazoid with a burn scars on his face and a dead right eye. Said. "Ah, Lieutenant Beauvoir, the eldest spawn of the she-devil, Anderson. I'm Res Valyn, and your mother did this to me." He said. pointing to his face. "And killed my first born. I'm here to exact revenge. I wish I could say it'll be painless."

"If your problem is with Captain Anderson, why don't you take it up with her?"

"I am, through you, as your good book says 'an eye for an eye..'" Then to one of his Klingon

henchmen he said. "K'Vart kill Lieutenant Beauvoir and make it hurt."

As the Klingon approached, Jason said. "Sarah, get out of here, run."

"No, I'm not leaving you."

"How very touching." Valyn mocked.

When the Klingon was close enough, he swung his bat'leth at Jason.

The Science officer dodged to the left .

The Klingon turned and lifted the high. Jason slipped in under the blade and sent a series of rapid punches to the Klingon's solar plexus, causing the man to crumple up in pain and drop his weapon.

Jason then knocked him unconscious with a elbow to the side of the head.

"So, you have some fight in you, how entertaining." Valyn said to Jason, before turning to the next of his henchmen. "Alzar, you're up."

The hulking Klingon drew two mek'leth and roared as he charged at Jason.

Jason deflected the blows with the bat'leth and pushed them aside.

The Klingon attacked again.

While Alzar and Jason were fighting, Rella Caecilian, a Romulan woman and the final member of Valyn team captured Sarah.

"Jason." Rella called.

Jason turned to see she had a knife to Sarah's neck.

He then watched in horror as the Romulan woman smiled at him and plunged the knife into Sarah's chest. This was not Valyn's original plan, but it figured it would have the desired effect.

"No!!!" Jason screamed and ran to his beloved.

"Au revoir, Jason. Pity about your girl." Valyn said as he and his cohorts disappeared.

Jason held Sarah in his arms, her life's blood drenching his clothes. He kissed her one last time and then watched as the light left her eyes. Then he howled in pain at his loss.

Jason awoke to find himself in a meditation chamber on Vulcan.

"Was it the same memory?" The Vulcan monk asked.

"Yes," Jason said as he calmed his breathing. "But it took longer for it to surface this time."

"Good. Follow me, there is a comm. call for you."

"But I thought comm. calls were forbidden to guests of the monastery?" Jason asked confused.

"Normally they are, but the caller was most insistent." The monk replied.

When they reached comm. room, the monk left Jason alone. The Science Officer activated the system and an unfamiliar face appeared on the screen.

[Good afternoon, Lieutenant Beauvoir, I'm Petty Officer Miles, Captain Anderson's Yeoman.] The young woman on the screen said.

"Good afternoon, Yeoman Miles, what does the Captain want with me?"

[She pulled some strings and had your commission reinstated. She said, and I quote 'that you've been wallowing in self pity long enough, so perk up and get your ass back to Earth, quick-smart or she'll have Security drag you back in restraints. ' unquote.]

He thought about telling her to send the Security, but that wasn't fair on the monks, that had treated him so well. So instead. "Tell her I'll be on the first shuttle in the morning."

[Very well, good bye, Lieutenant.]

"Good bye, Yeoman." He said shutting down the system.

Starfleet Academy, San Francisco, Earth Student Lounge

Six Months later

"Beauvoir, get your gear together, you've got an assignment ." The Personnel officer said as he handed him his orders.

Accepting the PADD, skimmed it.

"So, Lieutenant , where are they sending you?" Ensign Zola asked.

"The Portland."

"Never heard of it."Zola said.

"Me neither, apparently it's a Miranda Class."

"Miranda, are you sure? Those things are over a century old."

"Well, at least it will make for an interesting assignment."

"Perhaps. Good luck, Lieutenant."

"And to you, Ensign."

Bistro 302
Starbase 302
Somewhere in Federation space

From her window seat, Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru watched the work bees busily buzzing around the USS Portland. The ship was being retrofitted as part of the Miranda Service Life Extension project, a wide-ranging initiative to bring all the Miranda class vessels in the fleet up to modern standards. Privately, Alenis wondered what the point was – surely for all the effort put into extending the life of aging vessels like the Miranda and Excelsior classes, the Federation would be better suited to building state-of-the-art vessels like the new Sovereign and Anubis class starships.

Not that she was complaining. A command was a command, and she would have been thankful for the opportunity to command a garbage scow.

“Ma’am, are you ready to order?” A tall Bolian waiter was standing over her table with a PADD in hand, which was connected by data link to the back of the house.

“Yes, let me see here,” Alenis put down her PADD and took a quick glance at the menu, quickly settling on the first appetizing thing she saw. “I’ll have the chicken sandwich and your soup of the day.” Though she was a Bajoran, her taste buds had been thoroughly humanized by years of growing up as a refugee on Earth. For many years, her only tastes of home were her mother’s generally unsuccessful attempts at “improvising” traditional Bajoran dishes out of ingredients commonly available on Earth.

“Good choice, ma’am. Anything else?”

“No, that is all.” As the waiter turned to tend to another table, Alenis took a sip of her tea. The one exception to her adopted palate was her fondness for Bajoran teas. She’d rarely be found far from a mug of tea, and insisted on keeping a stock of teas from her homeland wherever she went. And it had to be real, not the poor excuse for Dekka tea that one can order from the replicator.

Turning back to her work, Alenis reviewed her orders.

[The USS Portland is to rendezvous with the USS Fox and the USS Quebec City in sector 377 on stardate 68288.4 to serve as the testbed for Project Mongoose. After testing, the Portland is to turn over an artifact to the Bajoran government. The artifact is currently in the possession of Lt. Tyrlai Zade, an officer assigned to the Portland, and will be transferred to your care]

Alenis reread the orders several times. She’d not been back to Bajor since fleeing with her mother as a child. The truth is, though she was a proud Bajoran at heart – like most of the Bajoran diaspora scattered among the stars – she wasn’t sure if she wanted to go back home. Her only memories of Bajor were the brutality of the occupation.

But this time, she didn’t have a choice in the matter. Orders were orders. Not to mention that her curiosity was piqued by the artifact. It could be anything from a piece of old jewelry to an ancient tome. For all she knew, it could even be a Tolic Shard.

Her speculation was interrupted by a beep emanating from her PADD. She’d received a message.

[Due to unforeseen delays, the retrofit project on the USS Portland has fallen behind schedule. The USS Portland will not have all systems installed until next Tuesday. Please accept my apologies. – Cmdr. Hiro Nakayama, Shipyard Maintenance and Retrofit Supervisor, Starbase 302]

Alenis sighed in frustration. By orders of Starfleet command, she had to be in sector 377 on Monday. Now, she was being told that her ship would not be ready until Tuesday. She couldn't delay the mission; to do so would hold up the Toulouse and the Bolarus. Not to mention that Starfleet was getting anxious to commence testing on Project Mongoose.

This kind of routine stupidity was par for the course in any large organization, and Starfleet was no exception.

As her food arrives, Alenis quickly fired off a reply on an encrypted channel.

[Expedite work on the USS Portland. We will be departing Starbase 302 on Monday at 0600. Ensure that all critical systems are online and the Mongoose is in the cage. Remaining retrofits will be installed at the facilities on Deep Space 9. –Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Commanding Officer, USS Portland]

Author: Timothy Rouse

[18 months earlier]

[The Chant Café, St. Rupert, Canada]

Tim walked through the door of the café of his brother. Heads immediately turned in his direction and the room went silent. When people recognized him, the lost son of the Rouse family, they continued their conversations, except for the couple of old ladies in the right corner. Within 30 minutes the whole town would know he was back.

He walked towards the bar, in search of his brother. When he came out of the kitchen Ralph looked at him for a few second, before shouting "Timmy! You're back!" and he came from behind the bar to hug his brother. "Did you just get in?"

"Yeps" Tim nodded towards his duffle bag. "I thought it was best to go by here. Where are Irma and Suzy?"

"Irma is picking up suzy from school. They should be here any minute."

"Great, I'll wait a minute then. You don't happen to have a sandwich by any change. I haven't eaten since I left the JC" He sat on one of the bar stools as Ralph was making a sandwich. When he came back Tim asked for the reason of his return. "How is Jud? Mum said she doesn't come out of the house."

Ralph's face turned serious. "No she doesn't. I think she lost the will to fight. Yesterday I took Suzy to see her and she didn't even react to her." He paused for a second. "You think you can talk some sense in her?"

"I hope so. There was a time she listened to me."

[Rouse Resident]

Tim walked through the garden to her sisters little house. He knocked on the door a few times before entering. His sister had her music so loud she couldn't hear him. He yelled her name to get her attention, luckily it worked. After the music was turned down she turned to face him with a face that

was struck by thunder. "What are you doing here? Come to take a look at your poor pathetic little sister?"

Before he could continue she turned her wheelchair and drove away, still yelling at him. "Who called you? Mum? Ralph? I know it wasn't dad." she paused for a second. "You didn't need to come all this way. Why should you? You didn't have the guts to come before, when I was still in the hospital."

So that's where this is about. "Will you just shut up for a moment." He stared at her. "You know why I didn't come to visit you? I guess you don't remember." He walked to her small kitchen, making coffee for both of them. "I'll never forget the call I got from your CO to say you had an accident. At that point that's all they knew. They hadn't found you yet. Everything I always worried about ever since you got it in your head to join the Marines, had happened. They said the chance you survived was very slim." He grabbed both cups and offered one to Judith.

After he said down, he continued. "By the time I got the message you had been found, alive, I already arranged leave and was on a transport to the Patton. I thought I was going there to identify your remains." He took a sip from his coffee, unable to continue. He walked to the window and stared out into the garden. Judith didn't say anything. "I stayed with you until you were transported to earth. Unfortunately I couldn't go with you. My ship was about to leave on a new mission, for which I was needed." With her still not speaking or even looking at him. He put his now empty cup on the table and walked to the door. "I talked to your doctor almost every day" he said before he went through the door.

[Present Time]

[Starbase 302]

Tim shot up, his hand immediately taking hold of his head. Not that it helped the pounding was any less by it. He looked at his surroundings, various items of clothing lying on the floor, sheets rumped on the bed, barely covering him. As he looked to his right he saw the woman lying next to him. He lifted his other hand to his head. He had no idea what happened last night, although the signs were pretty clear. He just couldn't remember it. Last thing he remembered was having a drink at one of the bars of the Starbase. Feeling the throbbing of his head, he definitely had more than one drink. Looking at the clock he noticed he had to hurry, he had a meeting with the CO in thirty minutes. He grabbed his jeans from the ground, put them on and did the same with the rest of his clothing. He looked over at the woman once more. She was truly gorgeous. He bent over and placed a kiss on her cheek. Checking the time again he saw he really had to go. He grabbed his leather jacket, put it on and left the room. Running towards the Portland.

After minutes of hurrying through a crowded promenade he noticed Alenis sitting at a table at one of the restaurants. He walked towards her, ignoring the fact he wasn't dressed in uniform. "Good Morning Captain," he said, right after ordering an extra strong black coffee at the bar. "Can I join you." He sat down at the table, without waiting for a reply.

Bistro 302

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse

Alenis squinted, trying to match up the incredibly presumptuous man who now sat in front of her to a personnel file. She'd reviewed her crew files en route to her assignment, but after reading a dozen or two files, all the pictures and names became jumbled in her head. "Mr. Rouse, is it?"

"The one and only" he responded with a smile after the waiter brought his coffee. "Everything ok?"

he nodded to the padd in her hand. "Don't tell me we're going to be behind schedule. The look on the engineers face I spoke to yesterday didn't look good."

"Fine, I won't tell you," replied Alenis, jokingly. As she placed her PADD on the table, her voice turned serious. "We're to be in sector 377 on Monday, but now they've told me that the retrofits won't be ready until Tuesday. I've told them in no uncertain terms to expedite them. But so long as we've got all the critical systems online and Mongoose is installed, we can finish the remainder of the work at Deep Space Nine after our tests."

Turning serious he asked. "And how long do you expect that to take?"

"The initial tests should be about a day's work," replied Alena. "After that, we're going straight to Bajor to deliver an artifact, so we can stop at DS9 for a couple days to complete whatever they didn't finish here."

"And what about the rest of crew. If I remember correctly, some are scheduled to arrive after Monday. Should I send them a notice to board at DS9?" He looked grim, the lights were way too bright. He tried to write a imaginary note, so not to forget stuff, but it wasn't really working.

"We'll be able to run the ship with the crew we have for now. As for the rest, yes, arrange transport directly from here to DS9 for them; we'll meet up with them after the tests." Alenis could detect that Timothy wasn't feeling all that great; his voice was strained, and she could see bags under his eyes. "Are you alright? You look like you have a headache."

"A headache is an understatement. I feel like there is a herd of cows trampling around in my head." he said as he rubbed. "I think I had a bit too much fun last night, sort of speak"

"Ah, I understand," replied Alenis. "Spare me the details, and allow me to assist. Waiter!"

"Yes ma'am, is there something I can help you with?"

"Yes. Get this man a Bajoran Deka Tea, lots of honey."

"Right away, ma'am."

Tim smiled. "Your joking, tea and honey?"

"It works, trust me" replied Alenis. Deka tea and honey was an old home remedy for a hangover that helped Alenis recover from many an academy party back in the day. "Believe it or not, I was young and impulsive at one point." Of course, since then, Alenis had largely given up drinking -- she was not one of those officers who would get themselves plastered as soon as they got onto shore leave. Rarely would she have more than a glass or two of wine with dinner. Control was very important to her, and losing her composure was something that she feared.

"I'll take your word for it." He quickly finished his coffee before the waiter returned with Alenis brew. "Just to get thing straight. This isn't really me." he paused a moment. "I had the anniversary of a difficult day yesterday. I guess I let myself go too far."

"I see. Well, if you ever need to talk about anything, my door is always open. I've been an XO for three years, and I know how lonely these sort of positions can be." Alenis always took care to keep an appropriate distance from those under her command. Unfortunately, when she became an Executive Officer, which meant that the only person left on the ship that she could relate to was

Captain Baxx. For her, loneliness came with authority, but she took it as the price she had to pay to accomplish her dream of becoming a Starfleet captain.

"Well, loneliness is something I did not experience last night." he said with a chuckle, still wondering who the woman was he spent the night with.

Author: Timothy Rouse
USS Portland - Deck 6 - Sickbay

Ellen Washington hurried down the hallway. Ever since she woke up she had to rush to get in Sickbay on time for the start of her shift. As the doors whooshed open to let her enter, she saw everybody being ready for the briefing jet. She moved to the back of the crowd, to the place her colleague and best friend since the academy, Maria Hill, was standing. As she reached her the other woman spoke in a hushed tone. "Where did you go yesterday? We have been looking all over for you."

Maria and some other nurses had taken the night off, so they could properly welcome Ellen on board. They had gone from bar to bar. "Remember your lecture from earlier. About living for once?" Ellen didn't drink and according to Maria you couldn't have a good night out without drinking.

"Yes, but last time I saw you, you were still drinking some very colourful, non alcoholic drink" Maria replied.

"Well, I took a page out of your book and hooked up with a guy. And I told you I was leaving." she murmured back.

Maria looked at her shocked. "You did what?" when the shock of Ellen's word decreased Maria continued. "You, the brave admiral's daughter hooked up with a guy, a complete stranger. Hell, that's not what I meant with starting living. I meant get a drink, dance. Stop being so rigid."

Ellen schussed her. "Well, tell me about him. Who is he? What happened?"

Ellen's cheeks just grew red. "That's uhm.." she sighed. "I don't know who he is. We didn't really got to talking yesterday, and this morning he was gone before I awoke."

"He did what?" Maria exclaimed loud enough to get the attention of a colleagues around them. She continued on a lower tone. "He didn't"

"Jeps, he did. Ah well, it's better than having to have an awkward morning after conversation. It's not as I will meet him ever again. We will depart soon."

Introducing Petty Officer's Ellen Washington and Maria Hill, Medical Department

Author: Jason Beauvoir
Starbase 302
Guest Quarters

["Bonjour, Mon Grand Frere. "]

"Bonjour, Ma Petite Soeur, what do you want, Yvette?"

["Can't a girl just call her big brother to say hi?"] Yvette asked with a pretty smile.

"Sure, but you never do?"

["Fine." She said the smile now gone. "Papa received a message from a teenage girl who was looking for you."]

"What? Why would a teenage girl be looking for me?" Jason asked puzzled.

["I have some ideas." Yvette said. "Anyway, she said her name was Colm Jena and that you knew her mother. I did some digging and found out her mother was a Starfleet officer, a Bajoran Lieutenant Commander Coln..."]

"Tela." Jason interrupted. "We dated at the Academy, but lost track of each other after graduation. Did this Jena, say how she was doing?"

["Coln Tela is dead, she was killed in action two months ago. I'm sorry, Jason."]

"Do you know how it happened?" Jason asked sadly.

["The Tulsa, the ship she was serving on, was destroyed while trying to protect a merchant fleet from an attack by Orion pirates. At least that's the official story."]

"What's the unofficial story?"

["The Tulsa was doing covert surveillance, I can't give you any details, but I can tell that 'your old friend' Admiral Graham Cresswell authorised the mission."]

"Cresswell, they made that pompous, self-righteous bastard an admiral?"

["Yeah, but isn't that how you'd describe half the admirals you've met?" Yvette said. "But forget him, you're missing the point, I saw a copy of Colm Jena's birth certificate and guess who's listed as the father?"]

"I don't know." Jason replied his mind clouded by anger.

["You, you dolt, I thought you science types were supposed to be smart. Congrats, you're a Papa."]

"What? How could this happen?"

["If you don't know, I'm not gonna be the one to explain it to you."] Yvette said cheekily.

"Very funny. I meant that she never even told me she was pregnant." He said. "So, I'm a father?"

["Technically, you've been a father for the last fourteen years, but I can understand how it could come as a surprise. Papa will be so happy to be a grandfather again. What do you think the 'bitch' will say?"]

"Mother, will probably give me a lecture about how I should be more responsible in my 'sexual liaisons' and then order me to get a paternity test."

["Yeah, that sounds like the heartless bitch, but enough about her. So, are you going to meet your

daughter?"]

"I'll have to, even if it's just to explain to her why I wasn't in her life."

["That's good, because she's on her way. She should be knocking on your door in a couple of hours. Have fun. Au revoir, Mon Grand Frere."]

"Au revoir, Ma Petite Soeur." Jason said and closed the channel.

2 hours and 30 minutes later

Ding dong!

Jason was awoken by the door chime.

"Un instant, s'il vous plaît?" He said as he adjusted his uniform.

When he opened the door he found a young Bajoran woman standing in the doorway. "Are you, Lieutenant Jason Beauvoir?" She asked.

"Oui. I mean, I am he." Jason replied.

"I'm Coln Jena, your daughter." She told him matter-of-factly.

Even with Yvette's warning Jason was understandably taken a back and stared unbelieving at his visitor, unsure what to say.

"May I come in, before someone gets the wrong idea?"

"What? Ah yes, of course. Come in, make yourself at home. Can I get you something to from the replicator?"

"No, thank you." Jena said as she looked around the living room. It was decorated in the default style, so told her nothing about the man that was her biological father.

"Heard about your mother's death, I'm sorry."

"I don't want your sympathy. Why didn't you follow my mother, when she left?"

"She told me not to. She said she'd found someone new." Jason said.

"Didn't you love here?"

"Yes, very much." Jason said overcome by emotions as he remembered the time he and Tela shared together.

"Then why didn't you fight for her?"

"She made it clear we were though."

"She didn't tell me anything about you, you know? Until about 2 weeks ago, I thought my father was Peter Vaughn. I found out about you when I was looking through my mother's belongings and found

her diary and a photo of you." She said seeing if she could get a rise out of him.

Jason didn't know what to say. Did he have the right to ask her if this Mr. Vaughn had been a good father to her?

"So this Mr. Vaughn is he good to you?"

"He was, he died when I was 10."

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know."

"For a Linguist, you done seem to be very good at talking to people." She said.

"Come on, give me a break. This is new to me. I only found out you existed, 2 and a half hours ago."

"So you don't have any other children?"

"No. The closet I have is a nephew named Dylan, he's 6. He's my brother, Jean-Pierre's boy."

"So I have a cousin and an uncle?"

"Yes, and two aunts, Yvette and Bianca. Grandparents, great grandparents and two great uncles. "

"Wow, all my life, it's only been me, Mom and Peter. When do I get to meet everyone?" She asked unable to hide her excitement.

"Well, I don't know, everyone's pretty spread out and I'm leaving on a mission soon."

Jena's face fell. "So, you're going to leave me too? I knew this was a mistake, you don't need a teenage kid cramping your style. It's okay I just take the next shuttle to Bajor and you won't see me ever again." She said as she headed for the door .

"Stop!" He said.

She stopped and turned. "Why?" She asked.

"Because you're my daughter and I want to get to know you. Now I still have to leave soon, but I'll talk to my new CO and see if I can bring you along. If not you can go to Earth and live with your Uncle Jean-Pierre, aunt Bianca and cousin Dylan. What do you say?"

She stared at him for a while trying to ascertain whether or not he was being genuine. Finally she said. "Okay, you're on."

"Good, now let's go find some place to eat. If you're good we can get ice cream."

She thought about telling him that she wasn't child, but instead she smiled, said. "Yumm, Ice cream." and followed him into the corridor.

Introducing Coln Jena.

Author: Alenis Meru

Captain's Office
USS Portland
The day before launch

"Admiral Washington, to what do I owe the pleasure?" Alenis sat at her desk receiving her first transmission from Starfleet command. On her screen was a greying, thin figure with deep set eyes. His collar was decorated with the markings of an Admiral.

"I'd like to congratulate you, Ms. Alenis, on your new command. You were very highly recommended by Captain Baxx."

"Thank you, Admiral. It is an honour to serve the fleet." Alenis paused for a moment, pondering why Admiral Washington would be contacting her. She had her orders, and the mission was fairly straightforward. "But this more than just a social call, is it, Admiral?"

"Yes, you are quite perceptive." Washington paused. "Ms. Alenis, are you familiar with Tolic shards?"

"Of course." As a Bajoran refugee growing up on Earth, Alenis as a child devoured any information about Bajor that she could get her hands on. Historical texts, religious tomes, and even ancient poetry, she would carry with her wherever she went. "They're shards of the lost orb. During the occupation, to prevent an orb that was housed in the Tolic province from falling into Cardassian hands, the resistance split it into six pieces and smuggled them off Bajor. But so far, only four of the pieces have been recovered."

"Five."

"Admiral?"

"A fifth shard has been recovered. It is in the possession of Lt. Tyrlai Zade. The USS Portland has been assigned to return it to Bajor."

"Sir, that's quite an honour." Alenis tried to conceal her excitement. But to her, this was the sort of assignment that Starfleet officers would be lucky to see once in a lifetime.

"Yes. There is a catch though. We want to find out everything we can about this shard before handing it over to the Bajorans. It's not that I don't trust them, it's just..."

"It's what, Admiral?" Alenis gritted her teeth.

"According to Federation law, the orbs and any pieces of orbs that are found belong to the Bajorans and legally we have to return them. But, knowing them, they'll want to just stick it in a temple somewhere. We want to study them. I'd like you to get your science officer to find out everything he can about this shard before we hand it over to them."

Alenis furrowed her brow. "Sir, with all due respect, I don't think we should be messing around with this shard. It's a religious artifact, and needs to be transported with care and returned undisturbed to its rightful owners."

The Admiral's expression turned serious. "Lieutenant Commander Alenis, as a Starfleet officer, not only are you required to follow the orders of Starfleet Command, but you should show a little more scientific curiosity."

With her right hand, Alenis touched her earring. "We shouldn't be going behind the backs of the Bajorans – a Federation member – and tampering with their religious artifacts. How would you feel if someone took your... your... holy grail, and started probing it in some science lab?"

"Look, Alenis, I'm aware of your background, but these orbs are devices of immense power. We can't waste an opportunity to study them because of silly superstitions--"

"Those 'silly superstitions' sustained my people in the darkest depths of the occupation, and you've got some nerve--"

"You have your orders, Ms. Alenis," interrupted the Admiral. "Use non-destructive techniques, but find out everything you can about this shard."

"Fine. Alenis out." Meru hammered on the button to end the transmission, hanging up on the Admiral. A moment later, she brought her fist down on her desk. Her rage was interrupted, however, by the chime of the door. "Enter!" she shouted, her anger evident in her voice even through the door.

Author: Tyrlai Zade

Tyrlai covered her mouth, her eyes beaming as she gazed over the railing and out the refit bay windows of Starbase 302. "Thosk," she grabbed his arm in excitement, "do you know what that is?"

Thosk goggled and tried to extract his arm, his sanitizer was still packed away with his belongings. "I most certainly do. It's a deathtrap! That hull has to be eighty years old!!"

"One hundred and twenty, possibly a hundred-thirty if it has been renamed." Tyrlai gazed out at the Miranda class vessel. She had seen one of the first being built at Earth spacedock on her first trip up as an ensign back in the 2250's. Well she sort of had, it was a pre-joined Cedria Zade but she could still remember it.

"Hulls start breaking down at eighty years, microfractures, residual radiant damage, particle scoring! A spanner could probably knock a hole in this piece of junk."

Tyrlai rolled her eyes, she was far too used to Thosk's negativity to let it alter her mood. "It has had at least two full structural refits based on configuration and nacelle shape. No doubt countless lesser upgrades, oh this is going to be wonderful. They never got better stylistically than the post Constitution-refit days. I wonder what it looks like on the inside, maybe they kept some of the details intact here and there."

"We can only hope to be sucked out through a void breach in an aesthetically pleasing bulkhead." Thosk deadpanned still looking at the Portland with deep suspicion.

Tyrlai turned in a circle and did a little hop still smiling and beaming like a ten year old who didn't get the sort of solstice presents that Thosk's mother gave him. "We have to go aboard, how do I look?"

Thosk scrutinized her as she stood still smiling like a crazy woman. "Well, you are out of uniform. What you are wearing is inappropriately tight and looks torn,..."

"That's part of the design."

"Well then the design is also inappropriate, your hair is too long and its disheveled,..."

"It's styled that way."

"Well I recommend a nice tight bun if you mean to keep it that long. You are too tall for those boots."

Tyrlai looked down at her boots, she had replicated them for the mission. "I thought they looked adventurous."

"You need to do something about those spots."

She decided to abandon the rest of Thosks advice and headed for the airlock whistling for her hoverpallet with her stuff to follow. Thosk scampered to keep up having to guide his on pallet manually because he didn't trust the pathing on that particular model. He managed to keep up with new suggestions until well after she had left him in his quarters with his horrified looking new roommates. She made it to her own quarters and unpiled her stuff and then went looking for her new commanding officer. She visited two lounges, engineering, sickbay, one of the holodecks, communications and the cafe. After an hour, she checked with the computer and headed for the bridge.

* * * * *

Tyrlai hit the chime and heard what seemed to be an angry and frustrated 'Enter!' echo through the substructure in reply. She realized she hadn't changed from her combination backwater trading, mildly revealing outfit and quickly shined her combadge, the only regulation part of her outfit and walked through the door.

The CO was a Bajoran, average height, wiry strong build with expressive dark eyes and hair that almost matched Tyrlai's. Tyrlai usually read bios before reporting places but it was a Miranda and she had to see everything, now she was stuck not remembering which name she should use as a surname or how she was going to avoid completely ticking off her superiors on yet another ship. 'Wing it,' her inner voice said to her. She called it Zade, though recognized it was probably more Tyrlai.

"Tyrlai Zade, reporting for duty, Captain. Sorry about the outfit, and my hair and umm, whoever was just on the comm. Aren't Miranda's awesome though." She smiled hopefully.

Captain's Office

USS Portland

The day before launch

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. Tyrlai Zade

Alenis sat in awe as the doors to her office opened and her new Chief Counselor introduced herself. She'd seen officers out of uniform before, but never this out of uniform. Looking Tyrlai up and down, she didn't know where to begin. Her eyes bounced around, from Tyrlai's hair, to her boots, to her comm badge, to the revealing tear in her shirt.

Alenis held her head in her left hand and looked down into her empty cup of tea. Glancing back up at Tyrlai, her eyes settled on the bag over her shoulder.

"The shard." Alenis' voice was authoritative but strained; she didn't even remove her hand from her face. "You have it?"

'Oh for five' Tyrlai thought as she reached into her belt pouch and pulled out a tightly wrapped cloth parcel, she set it on the CO's desk and carefully unwrapped it until it sat in the middle of the desk on the square of black fabric softly pulsing with a soft golden light. "From what I found out a Cardassian courier lost this or perhaps had it stolen by a Nevian trader who got rid of it as soon as he figured out how much of the Obsidian Order had been dispatched for him. Illicit goods generally flow coreward from Cardassia towards Ferengi space. The Federation sent a few of us in that direction."

Standing up from her chair, Alenis stared into the shard with awe. Her eyes were captivated by its soft glow, and a soothing feeling came over her.

"She has not been home in some time."

"Ms. Zade?" Alenis raised an eyebrow.

"She has been wandering for many years." A male voice echoed from behind her.

"Arvel? Is that you?" Alenis turned, only to be interrupted by another voice.

"A lost child of Bajor." This time, the voice was that of Lt. Cmdr. Rouse.

Alenis looked around. "What's going on here?" she asked. Her office was bathed in the glow of the orb and she was surrounded by familiar figures -- mostly officers that she had served with.

It was Captain Baxx who responded this time. "The wanderer wants direction."

"Who are you?" Confused, her mind began racing. If this really were one of the lost tolic shards, perhaps she was having an orb experience. But orb experiences were rare -- very few Bajorans would have the opportunity to communicate directly with the prophets in their lifetime. And the few who do are generally those who were more devout than Alenis. "What do you want with me?"

"It has been foretold."

The last voice touched Alenis' deepest memories. It had been so many years since she last heard it. Nearly three decades, in fact. But to Alenis, the memory of that voice was as vivid as though it were yesterday. "Father?"

But there was no answer. Only a dim glow emanating from the shard and a Trill with a confused expression on her face.

"Oh, wait, you saw something! Man! I carried it for four days and they didn't speak to me at all." Tyrlai looked down at it dismayed. Perhaps the prophets just didn't feel her life needed to get any more interesting or complex at the moment. "I guess that seals the concept of its authenticity."

"Do not be disappointed, the prophets speak to very few people and work in very mysterious ways." Alenis tried to make sense of her experience, but to no avail. Many Bajorans had gone to the prophets seeking guidance, only to spend the rest of their lives trying to understand the meaning of their experience. "In fact, I'm not even sure why they decided to speak to me. Or what they were saying." To say that it was unlike anything that Alenis had ever experienced would be an understatement.

As she was trying to process what just happened, she remembered that between her frustration with the admiral she hadn't even properly introduced herself. "I'm sorry, please forgive my lack of

manners. As you've no doubt figured out by now, I'm Lt. Cmdr. Alenis. Welcome aboard the Portland." Alenis' eyes wandered back down from Tyrlai's face to her attire. "I take it you haven't quite settled in yet?"

"My stuff is still floating on a hoverpallet in my quarters. I had to see the ship, I served on one of these back in '58 when they still had the round nacelles. Its amazing how much internal configuration survived. Engineering is completely different obviously but the balance of the saucer still follows the old deckplan." Tyrlai looked over at the CO's replicator. "That was a plasma conduit originally, four injured CO's later they moved it to the other side of the bridge. What color do second officers wear nowadays?"

"Ah yes, previous hosts." For a moment, Alenis forgot that the young woman in her office had experience and memories going back hundreds of years. It was an easy mistake to make with joined Trill. "Second officers wear the colours of their department, which in your case is teal." Alenis took a deep breath. "And I hate to be a stickler, but you are a tad out of uniform."

"That's just it really," Tyrlai said taking the seat she hadn't actually been offered. "I didn't receive that half of my orders. The Federation moves me around now and again. I'm not entirely sure I'm a Counselor this time."

Alenis picked up a PADD on her desk and stared at it intently. "It says here you're my Chief Diplomatic Officer. And second officer as well."

Tyrlai raised her brow and her lip curled a little in disgust. "Diplomacy again, ugh. The Federation never forgets what you have received training on, that stuff is just in your jacket forever." She smiled again shortly looking around at the Miranda stylings of the office. "Hopefully we won't get much diplomatic action out here." Then she looked in horror at the shard. "There's going to be a formal dinner for that isn't there?"

Alenis smiled. "I'm sure our invitations are in the mail. Just remember to wear something a little more... classy."

Deck Six

USS Portland

The day before launch

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir

As she made her way through the hallways in the underbelly of the Portland, Alenis walked like a woman on a mission, blowing by a gang of workmen repairing a plasma conduit. Tightly clutched under her arm was an object wrapped in black cloth. Easily finding her destination, she walked briskly into the center of the science lab.

"Mr. Beauvoir, I presume." Alenis continued without even giving the man a chance to respond. "I have something very important that Starfleet Command wants you to take a look at."

Jason looked up from his work as Alenis entered the lab. He found her quite attractive, he'd always had a thing for Bajoran women.

"Okay, ma'am, let's see it then." He said.

Brushing aside some PADDs, Alenis found space on a desk for her package. Carefully, she placed it

down and unfolded the cloth around it, unwrapping the shard. The faint glow that illuminated the shard was absorbed by the black cloth around it. "This here is a Tolic shard. It's a piece of an orb which was broken up and smuggled off of Bajor during the occupation." Alenis paused for a moment. Though she found the Admiral's orders distasteful, she was bound by duty to carry them out. "Starfleet command wants us to study it and find out as much as we can before returning it to Bajor. Now, I'm sure I don't need to tell you that these orbs are very unpredictable, so you will need to take proper precautions. Further," Alenis' voice took on a sterner tone, "this is a religious artifact. It is very sacred to the Bajoran people, and is an important part of Bajoran culture. You will only use non-intrusive and non-destructive investigatory techniques, and you will treat it with the proper respect at all times. Understood?"

Jason looked at the Tolic shard as Alenis explain what it was and what he was to do with it. The shard shone with a beautiful inner luminescence. The Science officer had heard of the shards, but this was the first he'd actually seen. As an honorary member of the Bajoran Archaeological Institute he'd been shown some of the Bajoran Orbs.

He could tell she was unhappy with these orders. "Ma'am, I am aware of this artefact's significance to the Bajoran people and I assure you I'll treat it with the respect it deserves. " Jason told her.

"Thank you," replied Alenis. She could see in his eyes that her science officer was understanding, perhaps even sympathetic, to the situation. Relaxing her chest, she let out a deep breath, allowing a little bit of tension to escape. "As for tomorrow, you will be on the bridge, ready to monitor the testing of Mongoose, right?"

Energy fields weren't exactly Jason's speciality, but as Chief Science Officer you had to be a jack-of-all-trades so to speak, so he spent the majority of his off-duty time getting up to speed on any new experiments or fields of discovery he was meant to oversee.

"Aye, Ma'am, I've familiarised myself with the Mongoose system and I'll be on the Bridge, bright and early." Jason said with what he hoped was a reassuring smile.

"Excellent. I'll leave the shard in your capable hands. Oh, and welcome aboard."

"Thank you, Ma'am, it's great to be on a Starfleet vessel again." Jason said.

As the Captain left, Jason watched her go, she was indeed an attractive and an emotionally strong woman, one that he'd like to get to know better.

He filed those thoughts away for later and began working on his 'new project.

Author: R'vahis
USS Reliance
Captain Jace Crenn's Ready Room
16 Hours before launch of the USS Portland

"Wait. I'm going *where*?" R'vahis's usual calm demeanor twisted slightly askew as he looked up from the PADD bearing his new orders, glancing back and forth between the Chief of Operations and the Captain of the Reliance.

"Starfleet says you're to get your essentials packed and report to the shuttle bay a.s.a.p. and that means pronto, Rev." Jaeg Tlondar, the Chief Operations Officer chuckled at the Caitian's obvious

confusion. He'd had a similar reaction when the Captain had called him only minutes before to inform him of the pending transfer. "Seems I'll be needing to find myself a new Assistant Chief here for the Reliance...and that the USS Portland's got herself a brand spanking new Chief."

"But...when did this happen? I didn't even know there was an opening..."

"There wasn't. At least not as of yesterday, but it seems that the officer originally designated for that spot was pulled from active duty this morning. Some sort of personal matter, I'm told, but none of the specifics." Captain Crenn grinned and stood, offering his hand in congratulations. "Her loss is apparently your gain."

The caitian accepted it and stood himself. "Thank you sir. But, frankly, I'm only a..."

"Ensign?" Crenn anticipated the question and proceeded to slap the felinoid on the back, "Well, we certainly can't have a lowly Ensign ordering senior officers around, now can we? As of this moment, Mister R'vahis, consider yourself promoted to Lieutenant, Junior Grade, with all the responsibilities and perks that go along with the rank."

Tlondar hugged the Caitian warmly as R'vahis still seemed to be trying to get a handle on this recent turn of events.

Crenn continued, "Unless, of course, you don't want it, Rev?"

"Oh, no, sir. Quite the contrary."

"Then, Lieutenant R'vahis, as my last order as your commanding officer, I will repeat Commander Tlondar's instructions and tell you to report as soon as possible to shuttle bay three. Your ride is waiting to take you to your new accommodations, which from what I hear, are due to leave Starbase 302 sometime early tomorrow. Anything you can't pack quickly will be shipped to you as soon as we can. Dismissed."

R'vahis nodded, finally getting his bearings somewhat. "Yessir. Thank you sir. Both of you." And with that, the caitian officer bolted from the room and off to gather his travel bag.

"You know he's never going to make it in time for that launch, right?" Tlondar offered as soon as his former Assistant was gone. "Just isn't enough time. Starfleet's cut it too close."

"I dunno, Jaeg, seems to me that if anyone can adjust the settings to coax a bit more out of the engines of that shuttle just so he can keep from inconveniencing his new commanding officer, it's that Cat."

Author: Daniel Tobin
Floren's Bar, Miami, Earth
Three Months Ago

"Y'know," Rawlings drawled, "it's a real shame, seeing the team fall apart like this. We stuck together through two ships. You guys are like family. I ever tell you that?" She rapped her knuckles on the table, accenting each word. "Like. Family."

Tobin smirked. "I think you're drunk." Mimicing Rawlings, he banged his fist on the table. "Very. Drunk."

"No, really!" Rawlings insisted. "All that time staring across the Neutral Zone, waiting for the Romulans come test our sensors with their latest cloaking toys." She downed her Andorian ale. "And then -"

"Oh, you remember that sensor ghost?" Malos interjected.

Rawlings doubled over with laughter. "Yeah! And when Captain Novik thought it was a Warbird?"

Malos chuckled. "And when it didn't answer our hails, and he threatened to fire if it came any closer - did you ever see that vein on his head get so big?"

Practically giggling, Tobin slapped Roberts on the back. "I thought he was going to get us all killed. A Nova threatening a D'Deridex! And there he was, shouting like the eighteenth fleet was right behind us!"

Malos let his smile fade. "I guess you're right, Rawlings. I'm gonna miss you guys. I'm going to Starfleet Headquarters, Rawlings is going to the Heusen, Tobin is... Geeze, I forgot."

"The Portland. It's a Miranda, believe it or not."

Malos frowned. "So it won't be a dedicated intelligence ship? Wait, aren't Mirandas the ones with the little thing on top, kinda looks like a roll bar?"

"Roll bar?" Rawlings smirked. "What's a starship gonna do with a roll bar?"

Tobin shrugged and lowered his voice. "Laugh all you want. But mark my words - someday, somehow, you're gonna wish the Heusen had a roll bar."

Once again, Rawlings doubled over with laughter. "Yeah, sure. I'll call you the minute it happens."

"I'll be waiting." Tobin replied.

Starbase 302 Present Day

Tobin walked over to the replicator. "Omelette."

The replicator chirped in response. [Please specify.]

Tobin sighed. "Omelette, like I had yesterday."

His breakfast materialized, and Tobin took it back to his desk. "Computer, resume log." He poked at his meal as he spoke.

"The Portland is just about ready to begin her shakedown. I've just boarded two days ago, since the ship's computer finally recognized my security clearance - until that, I was more productive on the starbase."

He began cutting the omelette into strips. "I've begun reviewing the ship's logs. As I understand it, the Portland has been tasked with returning an artifact to Bajor. Coincidentally, the captain's

Bajoran. I'm beginning to wonder if Command arranged this on purpose."

"At any rate, there shouldn't be much for me to do on this mission, at least after I'm finished with the ship's records. I suppose I'll take a little tour of the ship, get to know everyone. Maybe I'll check what holonovels are installed here. Computer, end log."

He dug into his meal. It was only now that he realized he hadn't eaten dinner the night before. Instead, he'd spent the night digging through the ship's systems, checking for holes in the computer's security. He was relieved to find none. As old as the design was, the Miranda's upgrades seemed to be comprehensive enough to keep intruders out.

USS Portland - Bridge

05:55 Hours - Five minutes to launch

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. Tyrlai Zade, Lt.(JG) R'vahis and Lt.(JG) Jason Beauvoir

This was it. All of Alenis' training, all of her hard work, every career move she had made to date all culminated in this moment. If it weren't for her medication, she wouldn't have gotten a wink of sleep all night.

Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru sat down in the command chair on the USS Portland.

"Status," she called out.

Tim answered the question he'd been waiting and preparing for. "All divisions report ready for launch" he said, as he rechecked the data on his chair console.

Tyrlai stepped through the turbolift doors as they whooshed open, she was not going to miss the sight for anything, even though technically she didn't have a station to monitor. She pulled at the collar of her purple diplomats tunic and walked over to a station on the outside port side and sat. She programmed the console for library data and external sensors giving her a good eight views of the last minute scramble of the drones to clear all of the equipment and external leads.

"Excellent." Alenis nodded at Tyrlai, acknowledging her presence on the bridge. "Operations, request clearance for launch."

"Aye, ma'am." As the Benzite operations officer chatted with the controllers at Starbase 302, the turbolift doors opened to reveal an irate Andorian.

"This is unacceptable! We are thirty-seven seconds late for launch!" Commander Shras th'Zarath, a project director at Starfleet R&D, had a reputation as a bit of a mad scientist, however this was the first time that Alenis had the misfortune of having to work with him. "I demand an explanation as to why the testing of my prototype has been delayed!"

"Commander, we are preparing for--"

"Oh, you're preparing? We should have been en route," he glanced at his chronometer, "Forty-four seconds ago! I will not stand idly by and watch as the testing of my life's work is delayed by the incompetence--"

"And I will not stand idly by and let you interfere with the operation of my ship!" Alenis was fuming

as she stood up from her seat to look him in the eye. It was bad enough that Shras was annoying the bridge crew, but when he started questioning her competence, it was the final straw. "Now, unless you want to see further delays, I'd recommend you sit down and be quiet!"

Taken aback by the power of Alenis' voice and the fury in her eyes, Shras relented. "This is going in my report," he muttered, just loud enough for most of the bridge crew to hear, as he turned to find a seat. Fortunately for him, there was an empty console next to a Trill officer in purple.

Tyrlai watched him take his seat with as much lightly invasive bluster as possible. He meant it to be known and understood how much he was being put out by taking a seat to one side of the bridge. He fussed and muttered just loudly enough to not be heard clearly. She was almost completely distracted by the calculated display of arrogant petulance, he wasn't quite as good at it as she had gotten but he was very practiced, clearly. "You have a report, Commodore?"

He looked at her quizzically, his overly large head swiveling in her direction twice. "I am not a Commodore and yes, a report the Federation Sciences Commission will find most disheartening."

"You tried to boss the Captain of a ship around, I just assumed you must be a Commodore." Tyrlai smoothly adopted a puzzled look. "And all of the impressive stuffy blustering. Can I call you Commodore Stuffypants?"

The man glared at her with a menacing stare. "You just made the report, missy."

"Zade," she said pleasantly. "Z, A, D, E."

Jason watched from the Science station as the man who had made the job of getting his department ready for launch a damn sight more difficult, entered the Bridge with all the arrogance of king sweeping into his throne room. Commander Shras th'Zarath, 'The great and powerful' had gallivanted into the Science Department commandeering Jason's staff without a word and over his protestations. Then had the gall to complain that the Department was inefficient and that it was Chief Science Officer's fault and would become part of his report.

Jason had held his tongue, which had taken him all the skills in emotional control, that he'd learned in his 4 year sabbatical on Vulcan. Still, he couldn't stop a smile from briefly crossing his lips as the Captain dressed the pompous Scientist down, who, clearly defeated, took a seat to one side.

It was Ensign Belyok at the Operations station who broke the silence. "Ma'am, we're cleared for departure, following departure lane three to nav point echo, then proceeding at heading 210 mark 15."

It was at that moment that the turbolift's door swished open and a lean, golden-furred Caitian officer stepped onto the bridge. He paused, possibly for effect, "Captain, my sincere apologies. As I'm sure Ensign Belyok informed you, my shuttle only just arrived. Permission to come aboard and take my station?"

"Welcome aboard." With a wave of her hand, Alenis dismissed the Benzite, clearing a seat for her chief of ops. She was thankful to have an experienced operations officer on board -- Belyok was fresh out of the academy, and she hadn't expected R'vahis to arrive in time to catch the departing vessel. "Mr. R'vahis, release the docking clamps," she added, wasting no time in issuing orders to her new crewman. "Helm..." Alenis paused for a brief moment, mentally preparing herself for leaving port as commanding officer of a starship for the first time. "Make it so."

Author: R'vahis

The switch between the bolian and caitian officers was quick and efficient, as should be expected for bridge crew members, and R'vahis's hands were nimbly working the Ops station's controls the moment he was seated. "Docking clamps are away. Departure lane three is open to us to nav point echo, and then proceeding at heading 210 mark 15."

USS Portland - Bridge Launch time!

"Excellent." Acknowledging R'vahis' confirmation, Alenis turned to her helmsman. "Proceed with thrusters only, go to one quarter impulse upon reaching a safe distance."

Alenis remained on the bridge until the ship went to warp, at which point she decided to leave the ship in the hands of her capable first officer and retire to her office and try to get some paperwork done before the test of the prototype. But it was only a few minutes before she was interrupted by a chime at the door. Responding simply with a shout of the word "enter," she was surprised to see that it was none but Commander th'Zarath. Unconsciously, her eyes squinted in anger. "What do you want?" she asked, the irritation plainly audible in her voice.

"Regarding what happened on the bridge earlier," Shras stepped forward, the door closing behind him, "I do believe an apology is in order."

"Oh?" Despite her best attempt at a poker face, Alenis let out a bit of a smile. "Yes, I suppose I would concur."

An awkward silence filled the room for a few seconds.

"Well?" Alenis was the first to break the silence.

"I'm waiting," sneered the Andorian.

"You mean--" Alenis was flabbergasted. Could Shras actually be so dense as to think that he was owed an apology? "You barge onto my bridge, disrupt the operations of my ship and accuse my crew of incompetence. If anything, you owe me an apology."

"We were more than a full minute late. Your cavalier attitude towards tardiness is indicative of--"

"Get out of my office!"

"Lieutenant Commander, I'd like to remind you that I outrank you," Shras replied with a smirk.

"Oh? Are you a flag officer now?"

"A flag officer?" Shras furrowed his brow, wondering where Alenis was going with this.

"I am the commanding officer of this vessel." Alenis sprung her trap. "Pursuant to Starfleet General Order 104, only flag officers have the authority to relieve a CO of command. Ergo, unless you've been promoted to Commodore recently, you do not have the authority to order me around. I am the captain and you are a guest on my vessel, a passenger, and I expect you to behave as such. Do I make

myself clear?"

"Well, I'm sure Admiral Washington will be interested in reading my report." With that, Shras pivoted and walked out the door.

Alenis let out a deep sigh and pressed her fingertips against her temples. The mission was supposed to be a simple one, but Shras was turning it into a nightmare. Only a few seconds later, the chime rang again. "What!" she shouted, at the top of her lungs.

Author: Arvel Darze
Utopia Plantia Fleet Yards
Hours before launch

Arvel wasn't ever on time, for anything even his own joining a few years back and yet fate still had yet to punish him forever being late. The last time he had been on time was when he had lived with his parents on Trill which had taken at least forever ago.

The career route he had chosen wasn't the most popular choice in which to make. He had, had several detractors from the Federation Naval Patrol that denounced him from their brotherhood of sailors the moment he had joined Starfleet. Now Starfleet oddly enough had been a tad more forgiving and had welcomed him with open arms.

That had been several years ago and though the arrangement with Starfleet hadn't been perfect it still worked somewhat. Though what perplexed Arvel was the fact that Starfleet had started the program with those Miranda-class vessel's like the one that he was approaching.

The ship was from his guesses with the memories of the symbiont inside of him was a few decades old. The symbiont of course had been right when he had cross checked and found the ship was a little bit old but not out of place for her mission, whatever it was.

As the ship's now Counselor Arvel wasn't sure what he was going to do exactly maybe perhaps test the crew's reactions on the deathtrap of a starship they were to serve on? Who knew.

All he knew was that he hadn't ever served on a Starship as old as this one, he just hoped that he would be able to keep the menagerie of animals or "pets" as he called them inside the little cargo space between his quarters and the Counselor's office.

As he guided his personal shuttle into its docking berth aboard the Portland he wondered if life was about to get more interesting than it had any right to be.

U.S.S. Portland
Counselor's Office several hours later

He had managed to offload his menagerie of creatures into the space, which he found out was actually connected between his quarters and that of his office, which he found quite nice. It would give the appearance to the crew that he never left his office and yet was always refreshed. His menagerie would be used for various therapies and didn't contain any of what most would deem "creepy crawlies", for he had found in his line of work those rarely were ever useful except for the exceptionally rare strange crewmember.

He was careful to avoid contact with the Captain, whom he had served with and had known from a

previous posting. "Best to let things lay low for a while". He thought to himself and allowed himself time to deal with the crew in general by walking around the ship careful to avoid the bridge and the upper decks. Thankfully his lower rank kept him from standing out and he enjoyed spending time with the lower deck crewmembers.

Author: Jason Beauvoir
USS Portland
Lieutenant Beauvoir's Quarters

Jena looked around the quarters which she was to share with a man she didn't know. Sure he was her father, but they'd only met each other recently, so he was still a stranger.

Why had her mother lied to her? Was there something wrong with him? Was she protecting her from him? He seemed nice, but was that just an act? The two people she'd trusted most in all the world had lied to her, her whole life. Why would this Lieutenant Beauvoir be any different? Maybe he knew about her all along, but didn't want anything to do with her, after all he mentioned sending her to live with her uncle, aunt and cousin on Earth. Not that she didn't want to meet them, she'd always wanted a brother or sister, and a cousin was the next best thing apparently.

She took a deep breath to calm her thoughts. *'Maybe I'm being too hard on him, 'cause if what he says is true, I'm more of a surprise to him, than he is to me.'*

Jena was about to get up and order a *jumja* iced tea, when door chime sounded.

"Enter." She called.

The doors opened and in walked a young purple skinned woman. "Good day, Ma'am, I'm Petty Officer Twilin, we met when Lieutenant Beauvoir and yourself came aboard."

"Oh, yeah . You're a Kelsynian, right?" Jena asked.

"That's correct, Ma'am. I stopped by to see how you were settling in and if you needed anything."

"Well, for a start you can call me Jena, 'ma'am' makes me feel old." Jena said with a smile."

"Jena, it is then. So, is there anything you do you want to do?"

"I'd like to visit the Science labs."

"You want to see where your father works? Very well, but it's a working department, so you'll have to make sure you keep out of the way of the staff." Twilian explained.

"I understand."

"Good." That said they headed for the Science Department.

Author: Daniel Tobin
USS Portland - Intelligence Office

Tobin yawned and tried to refocus his eyes on the report in his hand. His PADD had marked it for

priority review. Given that the report contained nothing more than speculations on Breen cuisine, he strongly suspected he hadn't configured his PADD correctly.

He downgraded the report's priority and moved to the next. "Computer, how long until we launch?"

[The USS Portland left the Starbase twenty-two minutes ago.]

Tobin cursed. He'd meant to be on the bridge as the ship set off, if only to show his department's flag during the Portland's maiden voyage.

He tossed the PADD aside. He could still make an appearance, and maybe even configure one of the wall terminals to connect to the Intelligence database.

He strolled out of the office and towards the turbolift. Mentally reviewing the ship's personnel records, he tried to recall the names of the crewmen he passed. He managed to get two before reaching the turbolift. Tobin smirked with pride as the doors closed behind him.

USS Portland Bridge

Tobin stepped out of the turbolift and quietly made his way to an unused wall terminal. He began tapped out his security codes and glanced over the bridge crew while the terminal processed his authorization.

Author: Arvel Darze USS Portland - Bridge

Arvel had made his way to the bridge and looked around bit, the bridge itself was nice and shiny and new. The crew well some of the background crewmembers were also that shiny and new. It made Arvel wonder if he was either getting older or if he was seeing things as everything young and new? Good thing he was the shrink and didn't have to answer to anyone.

He saw a younger Officer and approached the man and extending a hand that was typical for what humans found comfortable he said to Tobin, "Hello there. I'm Arvel, Ship's shrink. And you are?"

Captain's Quarters USS Portland The night before launch Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. (JG) Arvel Darze

"Damn," muttered Alenis as she emptied the last pill from the bottle. For the past few months, she'd been taking tranquilizers nightly to help her sleep. They were prescribed by her doctor on the ShiKahr, after Alenis practically begged him to give her something to help her relax at night.

But tonight, her fear wasn't the Borg. She had an appointment in the morning that she was dreading. Starfleet's mandatory psychological assessment program, for officers with a history of mental health issues. She'd been on the program since that fateful day three years ago, when as Chief Tactical Officer, her ship was destroyed with the loss of most of the crew.

With a drink of water, she took her last pill and went to bed, hoping she wouldn't have the dream again.

Counselor's office

USS Portland

The morning of the launch

Arvel had been rummaging around the Counselor's Office, getting things setup in his own particular way. He was a follower of the early Interspecies Medical Exchange Doctor Phlox's way of bringing animals on board. He had to get clearance for all sorts of creatures which he kept mostly in the Counselor's office behind a door normally used for medical storage but, thanks to his suggestions was now partially opened to the Counselor's office via a door that was left open.

The layout of the Counselor's Office was of a typical layout found aboard the Galaxy-class Explorer's, which had gotten the original layout of this type of Counselor's Office from the class of ship that he was currently aboard. "Not ever older just better," was the motto that the Starfleet Corps of Engineers had told him about the Miranda-class design when they had a new Counselor's office for him.

Thankfully he hadn't met with the Captain yet; he had done all this ground work through the First Officer - an interesting man that Arvel had yet to decide what he thought about him.

Now he knew who the Captain was and that relationship well was complicated hence why he didn't want to talk to her just yet.

And yet... here she was. As he had heard her voice, he turned around and looked at her.

"Doctor, I'm sorry I didn't make an appointment, but-- Arvel?" Alenis stood there, empty pill bottle in hand. People said it was a small galaxy, but she'd never expected to see this man again.

"Why hello!" He smiled instantly and yet genuinely, "Its good to see you again..." He wasn't sure what to call her but stuck with the Naval traditional term, "Captain," He said with a knowing grin, "Though the title doesn't match the pips on your collar yet..so what shall I call you?"

"I'm sure that's just an oversight on the part of command. Ma'am or Captain is fine." Alenis returned a nervous smile. Her feelings towards him were complicated, and seeing him again was like being immersed in a jumble of emotions. "Or Meru, in the proper setting." Her eyes frantically darted around his office, as though they couldn't bear to focus on him. "I wish this were a social call, doctor, but I've got my mandatory psychological assessment."

He looked around the office, "Though since you came down here and since you have an assessment I think Meru is appropriate." He said, "Now since you had time to come down here I think you should take a seat on my couch and we shall plan out the assessment."

He was trying to act as professional as he could so he couldn't betray what he was really feeling.

Though it had been a long time since she last saw him, Alenis could tell that something was wrong. There was just something off about his tone of voice, and she could sense some discomfort in her eyes. Not that she could blame him. The last time she saw him, her bags were packed and she had a shuttle to catch. She didn't want to end their relationship, but just couldn't turn down this new assignment. "Are you sure?" she asked. "I don't even know why this is necessary, if you could just

give me a refill, I could be on my way," she added offering the empty pill bottle to Arvel.

"You know that's not how it works. And I would be remiss if I let you just up and take something that's strong enough to tranq a Gorn who's having a bad hair day." He added for emphasis, "Who is the quack that gave you license to take something as strong as these? You weren't taking anything when you decided to up and leave." He shook the bottle she had given him in his hand.

"Also I know you to know better than to ask me to give you something that is bad for you. If it wasn't for the fact that we've had a previous relationship," he stated simply for her though he knew what he meant as he gave her a stare, "I would relieve you of duty on the spot! We can't have the Captain of a old ship like this Miranda-class frigate passing out or zonking out from to many of these! Explain to me very simply what got you started on these and what we can do to get you to stop taking these right now without relieving you of duty?"

"Those pills were prescribed to me by the Chief Medical Officer on my previous assignment. They help me sleep." She let out a sigh. She knew her weak attempt to evade treatment wouldn't work on Arvel; she could never lie to or hide anything from him. Well, except for that one time. "I've had a lot of trouble sleeping. Ever since I started having those dreams about the Gol and the battle with the Borg." Alenis let out a deep breath. "As for our relationship, if that's going to be an issue, maybe we should talk about it--" she was interrupted by the call of a large bird in a cage "--though this might not be the best time and place for that."

"And what better place to talk about your talking things to sleep that could kill certain animals," Arvel responded again as he cooed at the bird to quiet it down, "I picked that one up on Alamis IV she actually has a soft soothing coo that calms some of my more less sane patients at times." He looked right at Meru, "I could use her on you. This drug is highly addictive, and right now is a good a time as any to get you a better way to sleep than this vile thing." He paused and watched her carefully, "What you need to do is talk about what happened there during the battle not suppress it. Also Vulcan neuropsychology would help, and since I studied how to do it properly we could do that as well to help you sleep."

"Well, you're the doctor," said Alenis as she resigned herself to his treatment.

Arvel smiled and then said, "Yes I am, and I know what is best for you. I don't have any appointments so do you want to start with the neuropsychology?" He asked.

Alenis glanced at the chronometer. She didn't have any pressing matters to tend to; at least nothing that couldn't be pushed back a few hours. "Sure," she said, unable to come up with an excuse. "On his couch here?" she asked as she began removing her tunic. Her back to the doctor, Alenis pulled her undershirt over her head and clutched it to her chest. Though there was nothing that he hadn't seen before, she wasn't quite ready to relax in front of Arvel yet.

"Yes of course," He said giving a slight smile as he helped her and performed the pressure as expertly as he had learned how to do so and then he looked at her and simply said, "You are still tense so that you will need to come back tomorrow and again the next time. If you prefer more intimate setting we can do so in your quarters tomorrow."

"I... sure, that would be great," replied Alenis.

Noticing her hesitation he raised an eyebrow like the Vulcan's would have his first thought was to apologize but then again he did nothing wrong it was just a step by step thing to gain her trust, "I remember you liked this bird." He said as he opened the cage as she put her tunic on herself, "She

remembers you, and in fact has been a bit testy since you left the last assignment we were together on. She will help you soothe and coo at you. You will wear her during your duty shift. Which starts when exactly?" He added.

"I'm the captain; I'm always on duty," replied Alenis jokingly as she beckoned the brightly coloured bird to perch on her hand. Though there was an element of truth to her statement. She worked long hours, and even when she did get a couple hours to do as she pleased, she would be constantly thinking about the ship. From Arvel's expression, she could tell immediately that that wasn't something he wanted to hear. "I remember you, Ko-ko. It's been a while," she quickly added as the bird lept onto her hand with a flap of her wings. She was with Arvel when he first got the bird, and it was Alenis who named her. "You're a good bird, aren't you, Ko-ko?"

Introducing Ko-ko, Chief Morale Officer

Authors: Arvel Darze and Daniel Tobin

"Daniel Tobin, Chief Intelligence Officer." Tobin replied, shaking Arvel's offered hand. "I have to say, I've never met a Ship's Counselor who refers to himself as a shrink." He grinned. "I like it. It's very direct."

Smiling at Tobin, Arvel nodded, "Well that's how I approach things, this whole pretending to be a counselor and such isn't exactly the right thing. Direct and simple eh me hearty?" He said with a grin.

USS Portland - Bridge

25 minutes after launch

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse and Lt. Jg. Daniel Tobin

Timothy looked up from his chair to see the young officer chatting with the Counselor. "Lieutenant, nice of you to join us." He said, turning back to his console.

"Sir." Tobin replied with a nod, before returning to the terminal. "My apologies, I'd meant to be here earlier. Too engrossed in my daily reading, I suppose."

"It's ok, next time just pay more attention on the time." Tim said as he stood up and walked to Tobin's station. "I don't believe we've been officially introduced. Timothy Rouse." He offered his hand at the last.

The XO wasn't mentioning ranks. That suited Tobin just fine. He smiled and shook Tim's offered hand. "Daniel Tobin. And thank you sir, I promise it won't happen again. It's just that, in my new position, there's far more reports to review. But I'll adjust soon enough."

"I understand that. So far everything going good with your department?" Tim asked.

"For the most part, yes." Tobin replied. "We've seen some minor permissions issues crop up, but it's nothing terribly important."

Tobin tapped in a set of commands, and the terminal chirped in response. "Anyway, I've been reading up on the wormhole aliens. I've always found them a little terrifying. Incomprehensible beings capable of wiping out fleets - it's Intelligence's worst nightmare."

"Not just Intel's worst nightmare." Tim replied with a grin. He got a headache every time he heard about them. "Keep me posted if you discover something interesting" he said and moved on to another station.

USS Portland - Captain's Office

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. Jg. Daniel Tobin

Tobin flinched as the captain shouted. Evidently, the commander hadn't left her on the best of terms. With a sigh, he straightened his uniform and stepped through the door.

"Captain, the computers claiming I don't have clearance to access cargo bay three's internal sensors. I'm guessing there was some oversight when my permissions were set up, and the computer's telling me I'll need your codes to fix that. Unless there's something in cargo bay three I should know about. Or something I should know I shouldn't know about. But if that's not the case, could you update my access?"

"And who are you, exactly?" asked Alenis in a stern voice, the slight scowl on her face highlighting her Bajoran features. She knew she'd seen his photo before in one of the personnel files, but was just too frustrated with Shras and with the thought of the Federation poking and prodding at Bajoran religious artifacts to think clearly.

Tobin stiffened and saluted. "Ah, sorry. Lieutenant J.G. Daniel Tobin, your Chief Intelligence Officer." It wasn't the first impression he'd wanted. His eyes briefly darted to the door. Maybe he could run to the turbolift and come back later, when the captain was in a better mood. If he told everyone he had the Levodian Flu, he might even get away with it.

"Welcome aboard," replied Alenis, returning the salute. Though an adept tactician, she didn't care much for the cloak and dagger business of Starfleet Intelligence. "Allow me to make that change in the computer. As you were. Tobin..." she squinted as she tried to sort out the personnel records, which had all jumbled together in her head. "You were at New Algiers, correct? Many good men died that day." 486 of them on the Gol, she added, mentally.

Tobin dropped the salute, but kept his posture. "Yes ma'am. We were on the Semblance to start. Cutting beams tore off the better part of the ship. I was in the shuttle bay at the time, along with a few crewmen. As the ranking officer in the area - possibly the entire ship, for all we knew - I gave the order to abandon ship. A few of us tried to search for survivors before we left. We found an ensign who said we'd been boarded. We were in no condition to fight Borg, so we headed straight for the pods."

"Anyway, the Albany transported us aboard almost immediately after the escape pods launched. Dropping their shields was risky, but given the casualties they'd taken, they were desperate for personnel. Were you there, ma'am?"

"Yes," replied Alenis. For a brief moment, she saw the viewscreen of the Gol again, with the Borg plasma torpedo closing in. She closed her eyes, but the image didn't go away. For a second, she could hear the chaos that was the bridge of the Gol after the hit. "I was on the Gol," she replied in a quiet and sombre tone.

Tobin frowns. "The Gol." He struggled to connect the name with the records his team had reviewed after the battle. "That was one of the first ships we lost, wasn't it?"

"It was not the first, but yes, it was lost. Only a few dozen made it off, the rest..." Alenis trailed off, staring into space as she thought about the lives lost that day. "I'm sorry, Lieutenant, was there anything else you needed?" she asked, partly to fill the silence and partly to change the subject.

MD1 (launch day), 1100 hours

Sickbay, USS Portland

Authors: Commander!!! Alenis Meru and Lt. Cmd. Timothy Rouse

"Please state the nature of the medical emergency."

"The captain needs a physical," replied Ellen Washington, "and we do not have a Chief Medical Officer on board yet."

"That is not a medical emergency. Need I remind you that I am an emergency medical hologram, not a full-time doctor?"

"If you will excuse me," interjected Alenis, "I'm very busy and if I don't get my physical done now, there will be a medical emergency." She was irate – her day wasn't going well, and she didn't like seeing doctors. Especially not for routine physicals.

"Very well," replied the EMH as he picked up a medical tricorder. "Lie down on this biobed, Captain, I'll take it from here."

15 minutes later...

Alenis lay perfectly still on the biobed. They had found something that may or may not be a tumour, and now she had to stay for further imaging. As the imager did its work, Alenis found it hard to relax. The silence around her in sickbay only made it harder to focus on remaining still, as she found herself staring at the ceiling, trapped with her thoughts. Her ears perked up; from the next room, she heard a sound. Listening closer, she could tell that it was a conversation – though somewhat muffled by the distance and the partition between rooms.

"So, Ellen, who is this mystery man?"

"Sttt," 'Ellen' shushed her friend and then continued. "I still don't know who he is, haven't seen him since."

Alenis' ears perked up. She didn't mean to eavesdrop, but there was nothing else to listen to.

"Come on, at least describe him," replied the other voice.

"Maria please, I've told you this before. Why do you want to hear it all the time" The woman was silent for a second. "Ok, short blond hair. The most gorgeous blue eyes I've ever seen, and a perfect, well trained body to die for. Happy now?" 'Ellen' said annoyed.

"Yes, I can only imagine. The sweet, young, innocent admiral's daughter hooking up with a hunky mystery man. It's romantic. Or at least it would have been, had he not abandoned you in the morning."

"Oh please, don't start again." there was a silence. "I've done whatever I could think of to find him. Unfortunately, there were more than a dozen ships stationed at Starbase 302. Just assuming for a

moment he serves on one of them, there would still be... I don't know how many people that fit the description. And besides, my father would have a fit if he ever found out. No, let's just forget the whole deal and move on."

"Right, well, if I see anyone fitting that description, I'll give him a piece of my mind. No one just loves and leaves my best friend Ellen Washington like that!"

In the next room, Alenis lay still. She'd already heard too much.

Rendezvous, part I

USS Portland

Mission Day 1

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr Timothy Rouse, Lt. (JG) R'vahis

As the USS Portland sped towards the rendezvous point, Alenis returned to the bridge, this time with a large bird perched upon her shoulder. As she made her way to her station, she could tell that its brightly coloured plumage caught the attention of everyone on the bridge. "What's our ETA?" she asked as she sat down in the big chair. "Are we picking up the Fox and the Quebec City on our long-range sensors?"

"Ten minutes till we reach our destination. Other ships are on the sensors, but no contact has been made yet. I left that honor to you" He said as he stared at the bird. "You know there is a bird on your shoulder right." He said on softer tone.

"Thank you." Alenis leaned in towards Tim. "The bird is..." she didn't even know how to explain it. "Well, it's doctor's orders."

Tim honestly didn't know what to say and just shook his head.

Looking at her chronometer, Alenis could see that they were right on time, having made up the minute and eleven seconds lost at departure due to what Shras' report would refer to as gross incompetence. And is Mongoose operational?" she added, looking around the bridge, to see Shras sitting at a terminal, stewing in the frustration he created for himself.

The Caitian Operations Chief nodded as he spoke in a deep, pleasant baritone, "Affirmative, Commander. Engineering is reporting that teams are in place for the testing, and..." R'vahis paused as his fingers danced over his control console, "...and the supplementary power cells installed in shuttlebay two on deck seven are powered and ready for commencement."

"Excellent." She pressed a button on her chair to activate the intercom. "All senior officers to the bridge, we are to rendezvous shortly."

"I'm sorry, but this is most peculiar," interrupted Shras, who could not keep quiet any longer. "You are bringing wild animals onto the bridge while testing my prototype? This is supposed to be a bridge, not a zoo!"

Hearing the loud voice, Ko-ko flapped her wings, propelling her onto Alenis' shoulder. The bird nuzzled itself against her hair and let out a soft coo. "Shras, be quiet," replied Alenis in a stern yet soft voice, not so loud as to alarm the bird. "This bird is a valued member of this crew. Isn't that right, Ko-ko?"

"This is absurd. My report will have something to say about this!"

"So noted," replied Alenis in a dismissive tone. "Hail the Fox. On screen."

"Ah, Commander Alenis, right on time," The face of Captain S'rress of the USS Fox filled up the screen. "Is that dinner, or have you taken up piracy?" asked the Caitian, her voice breaking into a slight purr on the "R" sounds.

R'vahis glanced up from his controls and one of his ears twitched slightly as the viewscreen abruptly drew his attention to the other ship's captain.

"Neither," said Alenis, horrified at the notion that someone might want to eat Ko-ko. She quickly glanced at R'vahis then back to the main viewer. "This here is Ko-ko, she's... well, it's complicated. Doctor's orders. Are we ready to commence testing?" she asked, quickly changing the subject.

At this, the Portland's Chief of Operations offered a subtle, almost indecipherable sound of purring amusement, but otherwise maintained his professional demeanor.

"Yes. The Quebec City is powered up and rigged for remote control. As perrrr the plan, we'll control the Quebec City and observe, while you test out the weapon."

"Mongoose is fully installed and online, and we'll be arriving shortly," Alenis said as she petted her bird.

"Excellent. Once you drop out of warp, approach to within 25 kilometres of the Quebec City and stand by for further instructions"

"Roger. Portland out."

Rendezvous, Part II

USS Portland

Mission Day 1

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. (JG) R'vahis, Lt. (JG) Arvel Darze, and Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir

In the time it had taken for them to reach the test site, Jason had almost gotten his department under control. He'd be happier when the megalomaniac with Commander's pips was out of his department for good.

Now as he made his way to the Bridge couldn't help smiling as he dreamed up accidents that th'Zarath might experience.

Tobin stepped out of the turbolift and walked towards his terminal. After opening his stored configuration, he turned his eyes back towards the bridge crew and frowned. He hadn't imagined it - there was a bird on the bridge, perched directly on the captain. He supposed that was one the privileges of rank, although he couldn't imagine why the captain had chosen to embrace this particular privilege.

Jason entered the Bridge. Addressing the CO, he said. "Captain, I apologise for my tardiness, but I seem to have misplaced some equipment and members of my staff." He briefly turned and stared daggers at Commander th'Zarath, before returning to the CO and adding. "I like the bird, by the way,

gives the Bridge a bit of colour." The bird made him think of pirates and a smile crossed his features as he imagined forcing 'His Lordship' th'Zarath, to walk-the-plank

"Thank you," replied Alenis, offering Jason a sympathetic eye-roll. She wanted to take him aside and reassure him that soon the nuisance would be out of his hair, but that would be somewhat impolitic. "This is Ko-ko. She's... well... it's kind of complicated..." She was stumbling over her words. Though it was most unusual to have a pet on the bridge, she had a perfectly valid reason for it. The only problem was it was not a reason that she wanted to divulge to the crew; as a new commanding officer, the last thing she needed was for rumours about her mental health and fitness for duty to be floating around among her senior staff. As she stammered, Ko-ko flapped her wings and perched herself on Alenis' head. The door to the bridge opened, but instead of a welcome distraction, the figure who appeared was all too familiar.

As Arvel stepped onto the bridge he couldn't help but smile at the sight of Alenis with a brightly coloured bird perched upon her head. Ko-ko was a smarter than average bird with intelligence nearly equal to that of a human.

He let a low whistle and he heard Ko-Ko responded, "What do you think of the new Chief Morale Officer?"

"Oh, Ko-ko is just wonderful," she said, letting out a chuckle as she coaxed the bird off her head and onto her arm. "Her presence definitely brightens the bridge."

"ETA in 15 seconds, ma'am," the helmsman chimed in.

"To your stations, everyone," called out Alenis as she sat back down in her chair. "Helm, get us into position. Mr. Beauvoir, configure sensors for the test. Ops, charge power cells and prepare Mongoose for test fire."

"Power cells charging, Captain." R'vahis answered crisply, all but ignoring the ship's new morale officer for the time being. "Mongoose will be operational and awaiting yourrr command in seventeen seconds."

"Aye, ma'am." Jason said and went to his station and brought up the sensor configuration interface. Entering in the required instructions, he then waited for the program to run its course. Moments later he reported that the sensors were ready.

"Roger," replied Alenis as she turned to Tim. She could feel the Portland dropping out of warp and slowing to a stop. "Here, hold Ko-ko for a moment," she said as she passed the bird his way.

He immediately passed the bird on to the armrest of his chair, while he was seriously questioning if the whole bridge had gone mad.

"We're in position, Commander," said the helmsman. The Quebec City, a ship not unlike the Portland, was visible on screen.

"Hail the Fox," called out Alenis. The Caitian captain again appeared on the main viewer. "We're ready and in position."

"Purrrfect," replied S'rress. "Haneda, commence the first test." She turned back to the main viewer. "Commander Alenis, you will see that the Quebec City is powering up. In a moment, it will begin proceeding on a course of 120 mark 10 at half impulse. After ten seconds, your task will be to

intercept the Quebec City and disable it with a projected stasis field from Mongoose. Remember to monitor your power usage, we want that data for future studies."

"Aye captain," replied Alenis. "Portland out." As the screen faded to an outside view, she could see the Quebec City's engines powering up and the other ship, a sister to the Portland, begin to move away. Alenis stared out "Helm, prepare an intercept course. On my mark, engage full impulse. Tactical, target the Quebec City and prepare to fire the projected stasis field when in range..."

Tim looked at the young tactical officer and saw the uncertain look on his face. He stood up, walked over there and relieved the officer, glad he could assume a more practical task on the bridge. He'd missed his old spot. He checked the state of the weapons and accessed the targeting system. He pinpointed the Quebec City and said "Quebec targeted and Mongoose ready to fire." while holding his finger close to the fire button.

"...Mark."

Rendezvous, Part III

USS Portland

Mission Day 1

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, and Lt. (JG) R'vahis

As the helmsman's fingers danced across the controls, the Portland lurched forward, quickly accelerating to speed close in on the Quebec City. Alenis took Ko-ko in her lap to keep the bird from wandering the bridge. "Mr. R'vahis, call out the range as we approach. Tactical," she looked up to see Rouse standing beside the rookie tactical officer, trying to show him the ropes, "Hit them with the stasis field once we close to eight kilometres."

"Hold on," interrupted Shras as he walked across the bridge towards the tactical console. "You think I'm going to let some meatheaded tactical officer with no science training operate a highly experimental projected stasis field? That would be like allowing a simpleton to perform brain surgery!"

For a second all Tim could do was stare at the man. Did he just called him a meat head? He straightened his back, making him a great deal taller than the scientist. "Well, I don't want some karskat klahz to operate the ship's weapons. That's like letting a child play with a phaser." And he looked back at Alenis to wait for her instructions to continue, completely ignoring the scientist.

From his station at the fore of the bridge, Lt. R'vahis attempted to cover his amusement at the XO's comments by quietly clearing his throat and then saying, "Seventeen point two kilometers and closing, Captain..."

"Oh, the pink-skin simpleton knows a few words in Andorian. Well, perhaps he is familiar with the term zhal--"

"Enough!" shouted Alenis, loud enough to scare Ko-ko, who, sitting on her lap, buried her head in Alenis' chest. "Mr. Rouse, continue. Mr. th'Zarath, sit down and be quiet!"

"Fifteen." R'vahis counted down the distance to target.

"This project is my baby, and I will not allow my her to be left in the hands of the sort of imbecilic--"

"One more insult towards my crew and I will have you removed from the bridge!" Alenis, furious, stood up and looked him straight in the eye. "If you have a problem, you will address me and only me."

"Twelve"

"Oh, well in that case, Commander Alenis, you are clearly unable to manage your crew, and the fact that you would bring a wild animal onto the bridge betrays a stunning incompetence and inability to command a starship."

"Ten"

Alenis was seething mad, so much so that she unintentionally reverted back to her first language. "Mr. th'Zarath, you are by far the most annoying, stuck-up, irritating, pavrak kheetagh I've ever met." Fortunately for Alenis, there were a few words in the Bajoran language which were untranslatable by the UT. Even Ko-ko got in on it, angrily cawing at Shras.

"Nine"

Shras stared back at her. "I'm going to--"

"What, you'll put this in your report? I look forward to reading it." Alenis' anger was about to boil over. "In the meantime, do us all a favour and keep your mouth closed."

"Eight"

Alenis turned her head back to the tactical console. "Rouse, fire the stasis field!"

"Stasis field fired" Tim said at the firing of the weapon, his hands itching to remove that man from the bridge. An arc of blue energy, visually similar to a tractor beam, extended from the stasis field emitters on the Portland to the Quebec City.

"Is it working?" asked Alenis as she stared intently at the screen. Her question was answered when the lights on the Quebec City dimmed, flickered, and went out.

"It's beautiful," said Shras in a calm tone. "Thank you. Thank you, Commander."

"You're... you're welcome?" replied Alenis in a confused tone. Only a few seconds earlier, Shras was the terror of the bridge, accusing her of incompetence and making life hell for her and her crew. Looking over at the Andorian, Alenis could see him tearing up. She breathed a sigh of relief -- perhaps now that he's seen his project successful, Shras may show a bit of a softer side towards the crew. "Confirm that target is disabled. R'vahis, how is power usage?"

"The energy drain is rrrrather intense, Captain, even with the buffering measures we have in place." The caitian spoke as he consulted the screen monitoring to the Mongoose apparatus. "Auxiliary power is at 62% and falling at a rate of rrrroughly 4% every second."

Lt. R'vahis glanced back over his shoulder and added, "We simply can't maintain this sort of energy expenditurre much longer...Sir." the felinoid paused as he finished speaking, uncomfortable with his possible breach of ship's etiquette and determined that he'd take up the matter of Lt. Commander Meru's preferred prefix, be it Sir or Ma'am, as soon as time and events allowed.

Alenis thought for a second, making some quick calculations about power usage. "That should be enough for the first test. Shut her down, and recharge auxiliary power in preparation for the next test."

"Cap'n, we're receiving a distress call" Tim said from the Tactical station.

"On screen."

A fuzzy, grainy image of a Bolian woman clad in a bomber jacket appeared on screen. "This is the freighter Asmi" A console exploded behind her. "We are under attack by Orion pirates. Our engines are disabled. We need assistance. Please help!"

Instinctively, Alenis knew what to do. "Set a course for the Asmi's position, maximum warp. Engage."

MD1 (launch day), 1100 hours
Sickbay, USS Portland
Authors: Brad Silverton

Doctor Brad Silverton walked into the Portland's sickbay and stopped to admire it. It was his sickbay to shape and mold. To guide the staff in their education and to conduct what would eventually be ground breaking research. It was a grand sickbay if not for the fact that it was a disaster.

Only 2 of the 6 biobeds had been installed. About half of the cabinets and storage lockers were yet to be delivered by engineering. Jefferies tube doors were left about on the floor. Luckily most of the computer terminals were ready to go so he could still fill out his daily reports. Finishing touches here and there were missing as well as a hole in the wall of the doctor's office where decorative glass would someday be installed causing a rather glaring hole.

"What could be taking engineering so long in building my sickbay? Don't they know we will be leaving any day now? Nurse Washington, Nurse Hill?"

The two medical staff came out from a side room where they have been talking, and Brad presumed, working in helping setup sickbay.

"Where did the building crews go?"

"They haven't been here yet doctor."

"What?! But its past 1100 where could they be? Ok I can't wait for them if they are going to be this late. You two stay here in case they arrive. I'm going to Cargo Bay 2 to see what medical equipment I can find. If they aren't going to build sickbay then I will."

Brad quickly walked out the sickbay doors as another crew member entered through the opposite doors.

45 minutes later

Captain Alenis had finished her exams and left sickbay. As those doors finished closing, the ones on the opposite side of sickbay opened. An anti-grav sled was pushed in with boxes and crates of varying sizes stacked rather high. Brad Silverton stepped from behind it and walked over to Ellen and Maria.

"Well I think I gathered up most of what was scheduled to be sent to sickbay. Its hard to be sure though. It seems like a lot of departments are still settling in. This isn't everything we'll need, but it should get us up and running enough to have a functioning medical department. I should be able to assemble and set these up without us having to wait for engineering."

"Dr. Silverton?" Ellen began, "We think that the captain was just here."

Brad questioned slowly with a slight tilt of his head in disbelief. "You THINK the CAPTAIN was here?"

"Yes. Well she was here. She literally just walked out as you came in."

"Hmm. I thought it was customary for the department heads to go to the captain when their departments were prepared. She must have stopped by to greet me and then left when she couldn't find me."

Maria corrected the Doctor, "No, she was here for awhile I think. She activated the EMH."

"What in the world for? I could have taken care of any need she has. Computer activate emergency medical hologram."

The EMH materialized in front of the medical staff and stood tall and firm. "Please state the nature of the medical emergency."

Brad was short and curt, "What did the captain want with you?"

"I'm sorry I cannot divulge that information due to patient doctor confidentiality. Who are you?"

Ellen snickered but held most of it back. Brad was no longer in a mood for any of it. "Who am I?! I'm the Chief Medical Officer of this ship!"

The EMH was unimpressed, "I'm sorry but my records show nobody assigned currently to the Portland for that position."

"That's because I'm newly transferred and we are still settling in!" Brad waved his hands around at the incomplete sickbay. Then he turned and looked at his staff for a little help.

Ellen and Maria both jumped to the defense of their doctor, "Oh yes we can attest that he is the Chief Medical Officer."

"I see well in that case my findings will be transferred to your office terminal. She demanded a routine physical..."

Brad sighed in relief, "Well small wonder that nothing was wrong."

"... and I detected a possible growth. More tests will need to be ran that are beyond my programming."

Brad held his fingertips together at the bridge of his nose and sighed. "Just so I am perfectly clear on this matter. On my first day of my new assignment, the captain came in for a medical need, I wasn't here and failed to take care of said need, she saw that her sickbay was less than halfway outfitted yet of course you were installed," Brad waves dismissively at the EMH program. "She activated you to perform my duties, and you found a possible growth? What's next, do you want to write my next research paper too?"

As if in response to Brad's question, the EMH deactivates itself.

Rendezvous, Part IV
Sickbay, USS Portland
Mission Day 1

Brad looked around at what would have to be for now, a completed sickbay. There were still 3

biobeds missing as well as some of the more advanced and delicate medical scanning and operating equipment. Luckily the Portland wasn't scheduled for anything beyond testing some new defensive technology so there was nothing to worry about currently.

While the more advanced drugs were still being synthesized by the replicators, the basics were fully stocked. This was as good as it was going to get for the time being.

"Well I've put this off far longer than I should have but I wanted medical to be as ready for the captain. Time to go meet her."

Brad checked the time, "Oh wait, they are doing the testing now. Last thing they need is for me to walk in on the middle of that. Another hour or two wouldn't hurt. It's not like anything serious will happen."

And unto the breach...

Bridge, USS Portland

Mission Day 1

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. Tyrlai Zade, Lt. (JG) R'vahis, Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir

"How dare you!" As the Portland and the Fox sped towards the source of the distress call, red alerts blaring, everyone was busy preparing the ship for combat. That is, everyone but Shras, who was complaining about the testing of his precious prototype being interrupted. "Going into combat with my prototype on board is a completely unacceptable risk!"

"Shut up, Shras." Alenis didn't have time to argue with lives at stake and simply turned her back on the Andorian. "Mr. Rouse, I'm afraid to inform you that regarding our tactical situation, four of our type IX phaser arrays will not be ready until Tuesday."

"I am aware of that. Guess we'll need to make the best of the phaser that do work!" Tim responded grumpy. He had tried to get the engineers to fix those before launch, but apparently they weren't considered necessary for the testing of the stasis field weapon.

Tyrlai stepped out onto the bridge, she hadn't been overly interested in the weapons testing, but the klaxons were a new touch and they were at warp, which was also not in the prospectus Commodore Stuffypants had sent out. She walked over to the tactical station and peered over a shoulder at the displays. It was an Orion signature, unmistakable and probably a match for a normal Miranda. It was also abnormally far from home. It took a formidable amount of bluster to try their luck on this particular border, or a formidable amount of desperation. Or perhaps something else, perhaps they were after something specific.

She walked over to where the Captain stood with some kind of colorful bird. "Not that I expect you were planning to, but, I wouldn't mention my name in this situation." She smiled sympathetically as if Alenis should understand such an instruction as a matter of course.

"Ms. Zade, remind me to ask you afterwards if there is any specific reason why not." Alenis pondered the tactical situation. Critical components for four of the Portland's six type IX phaser arrays were still sitting in the cargo bay. With only two type IX phasers, four Type VIII phasers and torpedoes, she'd be relying mainly on the firepower of the Fox to drive off the Orions. "This is a little far from the usual Orion stomping grounds; any idea what they're doing all the way out here?"

"Arrogance, vengeance or desperation. I doubt it's the latter, I would have heard if one of the cartels had been pushed out of Orion space. As for vengeance, that's anyone's guess, but it would be a

strange location for an Orion feud to break out. If I had to hazard a guess I would say that something unusually valuable was aboard the Bolian freighter. Enough to coax an Orion ship a couple hundred light years from it's home to play the risk. As much of a fan of the flashy violence as I normally am, we may be able to get him to back off. He must realize that even if he disables us hes not going to be able to cross the core of the Federation without being intercepted." Tyrlai turned away from the screen and smoothly blended into the background as the communications board lit up.

"Agreed," replied Alenis. "We'll have to see what's on that ship. Though..." she paused to ponder the possible intentions of the Orions, "Thieves and pirates typically make sure to have a getaway plan before engaging in this sort of business."

The conversation was interrupted by an incoming transmission. An older man, perhaps in his '50s, with intense, deep-set eyes and salt-and-pepper hair appeared on the screen. The bridge was dark and menacing, lit mainly in green. The stations were crewed by a diverse range of aliens, mostly wearing civilian clothes. On his arm was an Orion with close-cropped hair and a revealing leather outfit.

"Federation starships, I am Vike. I see you approaching on long-range sensors. I am engaged in a private matter and do not need your assistance."

"Mr. Vike, I'm afraid to inform you that piracy is not tolerated in these parts of space," replied Alenis, staring down the figure on her screen.

The stern-faced man stifled a chuckle. "Madam, I'm not sure if you are aware of this, but the bird on your shoulder makes that statement less credible. Besides, I'm not engaging in piracy, just a little... pre-emptive salvage."

Alenis glanced at Ko-ko and then back at the screen. "I'm afraid your salvage operation is going to come to an end soon, one way or another."

"I don't think so," replied Vike. "My cruiser is more powerful than your two measly, archaic vessels combined."

"I doubt that, but even so, is it more powerful than the entire fleet? You're awful far from home, and Starfleet isn't going to just let you get away with this."

"I'll be long gone when they find your debris," Vike replied smugly. "Though if you leave me to my business, I will let you live." He squinted, making out a young officer in the background that he recognized. "Oh, and Mr. Tobin, it's good to see you again. Sad, however, that if your captain continues on this foolish course, our reunion will be short." With that, he cut the feed.

Alenis pivoted in her seat. "Mr. Tobin, tell me everything you know about this Vike fellow in..." she glanced at her chronometer, "the forty-five seconds we have until intercept."

"Drezna Vike is the most dangerous and manipulative man I've had the displeasure of meeting. A tactical genius. He used to be a political figure on New Sydney, practically a cult leader. He was involved in some dirty business, before Starfleet exposed him. Some abandoned him, but for many of his followers, that only increased their devotion. On the run from the law, he led them into the arms of the Orion Syndicate."

"And how do you know him?" asked Alenis.

"I... I used to follow him. Captain, whatever he says, don't trust him."

"Noted."

Jason looked up from studying his console. "Captain, the sensors are detecting tachyon emissions consistent with cloaking technology, coming from the Bolian freighter, that class of vessel doesn't have the energy output to power it, so it's just transporting it. Perhaps that's what Mr. Vike is after," he reported.

"Possibly," replied Alenis. "That could also be his exit strategy. Which makes it all the more important that we stop right here, before he gets his hands on it." She shuddered at the thought of cloaking technology in the hands of the Orions. No ship in the quadrant would be safe from Orion raiding parties. And that is not even to mention who they might sell it to -- the Tzenkehti, the Kzinti, or even the Breen. How events played out in this little corner of space today could drastically alter the balance of power in the quadrant.

"Five seconds, ma'am," called out the helmsman.

Alenis looked up at the screen. "Power up weapons and prepare for battle."

While the Red Alert continued to pulse in the background, R'vahis called out, "Auxillary cells for the Mongoose device will be fully recharged in two point three minutes, Commander. Provided, that is, we are not required to re-route power to other systems."

"Excellent. Lets hope we don't have to use it."

Space Battle!

Bridge, USS Fox

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir, Lt. (JG) Brad Silvertan, Lt. (JG) R'vahis

It was quiet when the Fox dropped out of warp. Too quiet. The Orion raiding vessel which was visible on long range sensors only a moment before was gone. The only ship on sensors was the beat up Bolian transport off the port bow.

"Reporryrrt!" called out Captain S'rress. "Where are the Orrrrions?"

"I don't know, they were on sensors a minute ago!" An exasperated young Betazoid manning the ops station tried frantically to scan for anything unusual.

What he didn't know was that the asteroids off to the starboard had an abnormally high concentration of Iridium, which gave off just enough radiation to conceal an Orion cruiser. And in the few brief seconds that the sensors of the Fox were blinded by the collapsing warp field around the ship, Vike had taken the opportunity to preserve the element of surprise. With a quick warp jump into his hiding place, Vike prepared an ambush for the approaching Starfleet vessels.

"Captain!" he gasped, seeing the red dot appear on his scanners. But it was too late; before S'rress even turned to face him, the ship was rocked by the powerful forward-firing weaponry of Vike's raiding cruiser.

"Evasive maneuvers!" demanded S'rress as the ship rocked and the lights on the bridge flickered.

"Return fire, attack pattern beta-four!"

Bridge, USS Portland

By the time the Portland dropped out of warp a moment later, the USS Fox was deep in battle with the Orions and it wasn't doing well. Vike's initial volley had done a number on the shields of the Fox, and Alenis wasn't sure if the Portland, with so many of its phaser banks online, could turn the tide.

At least, not until Tuesday when the remaining phaser banks would be installed.

Still, she had to try. "Helm, bring us in closer, attack pattern Delta two. Tactical, fire at will, all available weapons."

When the Captain gave the orders to engage, Jason braced himself for another battle. As Chief Science Officer there wasn't much for him to officially do, but he did have access to the non-tactical sensors and he'd learnt to keep a watchful eye on the sensors for anything that might give his ship an advantage.

As the Portland closed in, her few remaining phaser banks lit up, firing away at the Orion ship. But it was to little avail, Vike's ship was just too powerful and his shields brushed off the . Realizing that the Portland, with half its phaser banks offline, could do little more than serve as a distraction, Vike pressed his attack on the Fox.

Bridge, Orion Cruiser

Second in Command Schaezel watched the battle on the main display. The Portland was of no threat to them and Vike had given the order to concentrate on the Fox. Schaezel turned to his station and got back to his task.

"Schaezel to Chokar. Report!"

On the thin and scrawny human's display appeared a one eyed klingon. Scars covering his face and his dead eye healed over with thick scar tissue denoting his many battles as much as his gray hair denoted his advanced age. Phaser fire shot past his head though he didn't so much as flinch.

"Chokar here. We beamed over before our ship hid in the asteroid field. There is more resistance here than we thought for a freighter but only light weapons. They're holed up pretty tightly but nothing we can't handle."

Schaezel nodded and replied, "The Federation has arrived. They aren't much threat but we do need to hurry. I'm afraid no time to toy with prisoners this time my friend."

The Klingon sneered in disappointment. "Understood. We'll make it quick but flashy and loud." Chokar lifts into view a heavy shoulder cannon. "The Federation might detect us so be quick about your work and be ready to beam us out of here before they can get to us. Chokar out."

Bridge, USS Fox

"Shields at 23%!" shouted Lt. Broxx, the tactical officer of the USS Fox. "We can't take much more of

this!"

"Increase power to facing shields." S'rress remained seated in her command chair. Though her eyes remained fixated on the screen, she was able to process the various status reports from tactical, operations and helm, and shout her orders loud enough that the entire bridge could hear them over the explosions. "Evasive pattern epsilon three. Prepare aft torpedoes for--"

Violently, the ship was tossed about, faster than the inertial dampeners could react. Left and right, crewmen were tossed about, either thrown into the air by the ship's sudden movement, or blown into the air by exploding consoles.

"Report!" shouted an injured S'rress. Her arm was broken when she was flung across the bridge, but she didn't have time to focus on it now.

"Direct hit, captain!" The young betazoid scampered to his console, crawling over the unconscious body of Broxx. "Hull breaches, multiple decks. Emergency force fields are holding. Warp and impulse reactors are down, we've got auxiliary power only. Casualty reports are coming in!"

Bridge, USS Portland

As the left nacelle of the USS Fox flew across her viewscreen, Alenis knew that everything was up to the Portland. She couldn't retreat and leave the Fox and the Asmi at the hands of Vike. And she couldn't fight Vike with half of her phaser arrays sitting in the cargo bay awaiting installation. She was left with only one option, and she hoped to the prophets that it would work. If it didn't, her command would be very short-lived.

"Mr. Rouse, hold your fire. Helm, bring us in closer. Mr. R'vahis, prepare Mongoose for firing."

On the viewscreen, the Orion vessel turned to face the Portland.

Bridge, Orion Vessel

"The Fox is disabled, shall I finish her off?" asked Schaezel, hunched over the weapons console.

"No!" shouted Vike in a firm voice. "A disabled Federation starship is more useful to us alive, as a hostage. Concentrate fire on the Portland."

"Aye," replied Schaezel, saddened that he was robbed of the opportunity to finish off the target.

Bridge, USS Portland

As the Portland closed in on Vike's cruiser, it was bombarded by blasts of green energy. The two ships were closing head on, and both sides knew that the cruiser had stronger forward shields and more powerful forward weaponry. The Portland shook violently as it absorbed blow after blow from the Orion cruiser.

Alenis stared at the screen, waiting for the right moment.

"Shield holding, but down to 25 percent. We can't hold this much longer" Tim said from the tactical

station, the last intended as a plea for the Captain to do something about it.

"Mongoose is rready, Commander." The caitian officer offered as the ship rocked under its bombardment. "Re-rrouting excess auxillary power to shields."

"Might I remind you that Mongoose is a highly experimental--"

"Not the time, Shras," replied Alenis, dismissing him with a wave of the hand. "Steady as she goes," muttered Alenis as the Portland closed. As she focused on the screen, watching the green bursts of energy impact her shields, she was nearly rocked out of her chair with Ko-ko by a particularly violent hit. They weren't quite at optimal range yet, but she knew it was now or never. "Now, Mr. Rouse, fire!"

Tim fired as mentioned and saw the stasis field envelop the Orion ship, trapping it in a stasis bubble and draining its power. "Stasis field holding"

"Gotcha," muttered Alenis. "Do we have any weapons online?"

"All weapons are offline" Tim muttered, seriously not liking project Mongoose. "We should have some axes and swords in the armory, we can always throw them at the enemy," he continued on a soft tone.

Alenis sighed. "So, what you're saying is that we're both disabled?"

"Yes."

"To add to the fun," R'vahis said, half turning, "At our current rate of energy usage, the transporters are completely unsafe to use. They do not have enough energy to maintain rreliable signatures in the buffers."

"Okay, I need some ideas, fast." Alenis desperately tried to think of something, anything, that they could do. They couldn't maintain the stasis field forever, and when it came down, the Orions would unleash all their firepower and surely destroy the Portland. "We're disabled and so is the Fox. We need to hit them hard, before Mongoose drains all our energy."

"We could go over there and surprise them," Tim said out loud to his own surprise.

Alenis turned to her executive officer. "What do you mean?"

Tim thought for a moment. "We can take a shuttle. Shuttles aren't affected by the stasis field and the power drain, right? We can fire on them, they have no way of defending themselves at the moment"

"A shuttle won't have enough firepower," replied Alenis. But it gave her an idea. "Unless... Mr. Rouse, how would you like to be the next captain of the USS Quebec City?"

Tim looked up, not understanding what the Captain meant. Then it hit him. "The Quebec City can be run by only a few people. We'll go there by shuttle." He said as he mentioned a tactical officer to take over. "He looked over the bridge for a second to decide who to take with him. "Zade, Beauvoir, you're with me!"

"Aye, sir." Jason said locking down his station and trying to keep the smile off his face. 'Action at last.' He thought.

While the tactical changes were taking place, R'vahis manipulated the ship's energy output and called out, "Compensating for energy drrrain as much as I can, forward shields now at 36%, Commander. Aft at 20%. 'Best I can do, and therre's no guarantee it'll last."

"Mr. R'vahis, throw in everything but the kitchen sink. We need every second we can get. Mr. Rouse... please hurry."

Meanwhile in Sickbay...

Sickbay, USS Portland

Authors: Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton

The red alert signal had been flashing for 20 minutes but it felt like an eternity.

"Ellen don't worry about those, focus on getting triptacoderine for the kits. It'll be of more general use."

Brad and his staff rushed to put together various emergency kits. For them and the rest of the staff to be ready for, well, an emergency. The captain had signaled red alert for a reason and it certainly wouldn't be for a positive one. Brad had just gotten sickbay to a somewhat stable condition for regular exams and day to day needs let alone the needs of a Starship warping off to who knows what. There was still the issue of the advanced drugs still being synthesized by the replicators. Whatever they had on hand would have to do.

For the eighth time since red alert was signaled Brad mumbled, "you've got to be kidding me. This first day just keeps getting better and better."

"Maria double check that each kit has two hypos. I don't want one breaking and us being stuck away from sickbay with patients in need."

Maria rolled her eyes and double checked, for the third time.

The Portland was rocked by weapons fire, at least Brad thought it was weapon fire.

"Combat? There is no way the Portland..." *sigh*.

For the ninth time since red alert was signaled Brad mumbled, "you've got to be..."

More weapon fire strikes the Portland but this time slams into the hull striking hard.

The Portland's computer announced the damage.

[Warning. Plasma conduit leak. Radiation levels critical. Decks 4 and 5].

For the tenth time since red alert was signaled...

Maria tried to be helpful, "Perhaps the captain won't need you yet and you can keep getting ready. Maybe she'll choose to use the EMH instead of you and you won't have to worry about it."

"OH NO! THAT'S IT! That's where I draw the line. Right here. Right now. I don't care if there is a Borg cube out there. Formal introductions be damned!"

Brad slams his chest communicator hard with his hand.

"Lieutenant Junior Grade Brad Silverton to the Captain. My team is en-route to decks 4 and 5. The EMH will be unnecessary."

Space Battle! part II

Main cargo bay, Freighter Asmi

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. (JG) R'vahis, Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton

"No please. I'm just a simple trader. I beg you, don't...."

Chokar's blaster fire ended the captain's begging.

The klingon grumbled. "Sniveling coward."

The rest of the pirate away team found what they had come for. Hidden amongst the crates of grain was an experimental prototype cloaking device. Chokar didn't know who had tipped Vike off that it was secretly being transported on the freighter or who was to receive delivery nor did he care. His orders were to get it back to Vike.

"Chokar come quick to the viewscreen. The Federation fired an unknown weapon at our ship and disabled it."

"WHAT?!"

The klingon pirate quickly came over to assess the situation. "The Portland has disabled our ship. Propulsion, shield, weapons are all down. Ahh but look here. They have done the same to themselves. Their systems are all offline too. Quickly! Fire the freighter's phasers."

Three quick shots from the Asmi struck the unshielded Portland before burning out the phaser banks.

Chokar slammed his console. "BAH useless freighter. I'd kill the captain if he wasn't already dead. There is nothing more for us to do. Beam over to our ship and lets get the cloak back to Vike."

Bridge, USS Portland

The Portland shook three times as the phaser blasts from the freighter tore into her hull. Sparks erupted from one of the conduits along the back wall of the bridge. Alenis braced for another impact but none came.

[Warning. Plasma conduit leak. Radiation levels critical. Decks 4 and 5] blared the computer.

"Report!" shouted Alenis.

"That freighter was shooting at us!" replied the young ensign at the tactical station. His sweaty hands darted over the tactical console. "They've burnt out their phaser banks, we're safe now."

"You've got a prrretty funny definition of safe, Ensign..." R'vahis said under his breath as his fingers flew across the controls of his own console.

"I meant... we're not in danger from..." the Ensign was interrupted by the intercom on the bridge.

[Lieutenant Junior Grade Brad Silverton to the Captain. My team is enroute to decks 4 and 5. The EMH will be unnecessary.]

"Who the hell is Brad Silverton?" muttered Alenis. Still, she couldn't turn down any assistance at the moment. She pressed a button on her chair to reply. "Roger, assist casualties as you see fit. Bridge out."

The Caitan lieutenant called out, "I seem to have found a kitchen sink after all, Commander, although this one has a holographic interface. I'm shutting down the feeds to all six holodecks as well as Stellar Cartography and re-routing power to the shields." A small pause and then R'vahis added, "They stand at 53%."

Bridge, Orion Cruiser

"I want power online now!" shouted Vike.

"I can't!" Schaezar shouted, banging his fists on the console.

"Now!" muttered Vike as he stood up from his chair. "I need power now!" as he walked over to Schaezel, he tightened the glove on his right hand before balling it into a fist. While in the syndicate, Vike had found that beatings were quite an effective motivator.

"Captain, wait!" Vara, a green-skinned Orion called out as Vike cocked his arm to deliver a blow. "The power drain on that weapon is massive. There's no way they can sustain it for more than a few minutes."

"You mean..." Vike paused for a moment, then laughed. "Hail them. We've got them right where we want them."

Bridge, USS Portland

"Commander Meru. We're being hailed by the Orion cruiser..." With several of the senior officers en route to the Quebec City, Lt. R'vahis was doing his best to pull double duty from his own station and assist the ensign at Tactical.

"Put it on screen," replied Alenis. A second later, Vike appeared on the main viewer, seated in his command chair, stroking his greying goatee. Behind him, the bridge was darker than usual, and his crew were frantically trying to restore power, to no avail. The stasis field had shut down nearly all of the systems on Vike's cruiser.

"Commander Alenis, how is your bird?" he asked,

"Ko-ko is fine," she replied, "but you didn't call just to discuss avian matters, now did you?"

Vike smirked back at Alenis. "Ah, right down to business. I appreciate that. You appear to have my ship trapped in some sort of stasis field."

"How perceptive of you," replied Alenis, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "I presume, then, you are calling to offer your surrender?"

Vike laughed. It was not the response Alenis was hoping for. "Surely you jest, Commander. You and I are both well aware that your ship can not handle the energy drain from that weapon."

"Actually, I've got all day," replied Alenis. With the chess game inconclusive so far, she decided to try her hand at poker. "It is you who is running out of time. Starfleet has been notified and surely they're sending in reinforcements. After all, they can't let a cloaking device fall into the hands of a pirate like

yourself."

"Ah, you know about the cloaking device." Vike glared over at Schaezel; clearly, someone failed to obscure the unique tachyon emissions of the cloak. That person would have to be punished for his failure. "But, Meru, why do you lie to me? I know about the power drain on that weapon, and quite frankly I'm surprised that an archaic bucket of bolts like your USS Portland can even fire it. And we both know that my ship is more powerful than yours, so allow me to counter your offer. While I am interested in the cloaking device, this 'Project Mongoose' of yours has also caught my fancy. Release my ship and turn it over, and in exchange I will spare your lives and those your comrades on the Fox."

"You know I can't do that, Vike." Alenis remembered Tobin's earlier comments that Vike could not be trusted; even if she were to consider his offer, there was no way to guarantee that Vike would keep his word. She was shocked that he knew the code name of the experimental weapon, but chose not to react.

"Very well. It is a shame that I will have to kill you; I'd have liked to get to know you first." He glanced down at Tobin. "Oh, and Mr. Tobin, I truly regret that it is under such tragic circumstances that we meet again, but your captain gives me little choice." With that, he ended the call.

"You have the most interesting friends, Mr. Tobin. Are they all this much fun at parties?" The Operations chief sighed.

"Vike is not the most interesting, but he is definitely the most devious," replied Tobin. "And as for parties, he's no longer on my guest list."

Alenis stared at the screen. Even helpless, Vike's cruiser was a menacing sight. Its main weapons were pointed directly at the Portland, and surely he was anxiously awaiting the inevitable moment when the stasis field would come down. "How much longer can we sustain this?" asked Alenis.

"At our current rate of energy drain?" R'vahis turned completely in his seat to face Alenis, "Six minutes. If we sacrifice a few...amenities, I may be able to increase that."

Ensign Burton visibly blanched at the revelation from the Tactical station. Lt. R'vahis arched an eyebrow at him and gave him a small nod of reassurance...not that actually expected it to help. Fresh out of the Academy, these situations always hit the hardest. Nothing was ever as easy as it was in the Academy simulators.

"Best of all worlds, Commander? No more than twelve minutes before we're down to running with little more than emergency lighting and life-support."

"Do what you can, Lieutenant. We need every second." Alenis glanced up at Vike's weapons once more. Even Ko-ko could feel the tension. "Please, Tim, hurry," she added under her breath.

And "officially" introducing, Ensign James Burton, Tactical Officer

Science Labs

The Previous Day

Authors: Lt. Tyrlai Zade, Coln Jena

Tyrlai stepped through the doors and into the main science lab, carrying a pair of strangely shaped

meter long tubes. A variety of stations lined the curve of the hull the inside curved lined with enclosed laboratories and various offices. She looked around noticing her shard sitting on one of the scanning consoled, placed at the center of a circulatory lab console capable of a variety of scanning and erecting containment functionality. She stepped over and smiled down at the palm sized glowing thing giving it one more chance to give her a life altering vision of her future or something. It pulsed away silently revealing nothing. There was a teenaged Bajoran girl standing next to it staring at her.

"Computer, location of the temporary office of Commodore Stuffypants."

[There is no officer aboard of that name or designation.]

"Computer, create identification stub; substitute identification Commodore Stuffypants for all references to Commander Shras th'Zarath, authorization Zade-alpha-blue."

[Confirmed.]

"Computer, please erase command security signature from previous order, authorization Zade-alpha-blue."

[Confirmed.]

"Computer, location of the temporary office of Commodore Stuffypants."

[Commodore Stuffypants is assigned to Science Office six-one-B.]

Tyrlai smiled and winked at the girl standing in front of her. "Hello, Im Tyrlai Zade, who might you be?"

Jena had come to see what Lieutenant Beauvoir was up to. She couldn't quite bring herself to think of him as her father just yet. Anyway she'd been brought here by Petty Officer Twilin who'd been called away. She'd promised not to touch anything, so now she stood with her hands behind her back watching as the science staff as they went about their tasks around her. She was starting to get bored when she noticed a newcomer dressed in Diplomatic department purple enter and head towards the shard. The woman appeared to stare at it intently, as if expecting something to happen.

"I might be any number of things, as it happens I'm Coln Jena." Jena replied.

"Never heard of you," Tyrlai replied with a playful smile. "but I do have a need for assistance with a very important mission." She offered one of the odd meter long tubes. "This device creates helium filled balloons, used in ancient Earth holy rituals I believe. It will be your mission, if you so choose to assist me in filling Commodore Stuffypants' temporary office with as many of these as can possibly fit inside and then a couple dozen more. What do you say, hmmm, up to the risk??"

Tyrlai beamed her bright blue eyes sparkling with mischief and shardlight.

"Well, I was 'ordered' to wait here and not touch anything." Jena told the Trill. She made a pretence of thinking over, then smiled wickedly and said. "But, since I'm a civilian, let's go decorate this Commodore Stuffypants' office." She didn't know who this Commodore was, but obviously he'd done something to offend Tyrlai and this mission sounded like a fun way to spend an afternoon.

"Excellent." Tyrlai said flipping one of the tubes around and handing it to the girl. "Now I was recently a ships councilor so I should begin by telling you that it is wrong to undermine authority in the

manner we are about to do and we should be very ashamed of ourselves. And with that said, we need to fill the little corners first and then we set it on helium and fill the rest from the top down." Tyrilai pointed out the few simple controls on the tube and walked into the office and began filling the area behind the desk. The tube filled a balloon every second and a half with the pull of a trigger they popped loose. The varying colors making a small festive pile as she moved. "So have you lived on a ship before?"

"I'm a Starfleet brat, both my parents were in the service, so I've spent most of my life on one ship or another." Jena replied as she started filling the room up balloons herself.

Tyrilai began backing towards the door and nodded to Jena to change settings and the balloons began floating upwards and slowly filling the room from ceiling down, spreading out of their own volition and that of physics. "Oh that would have been fun, that's basically how I wanted to grow up but I went about it the wrong way." She frowned a decided to offer a stern bit of life advice by way of a disclaimer. "Don't hack orbital station security and stow away on a freighter, its bad and wrong and can only lead to trouble young lady." She smirked sidelong at the girl, half wishing someone had offered her that seemingly crazy advice whence time was.

"I'll keep that in mind." Jena said with a smile. "But, you're life must have been a lot more interesting than mine, since you're older than me and a Trill." She then put another helium filled balloon into the room and watched as it floated to the ceiling.

"Trills are exotic it is true." Tyrilai said only half sarcastically. "On Trill we value science, your social stature is based almost entirely on academic performance. Accomplished children bring prestige to their families, being chosen by the symbiosis committee is even more prestigious. Being chosen for joining yet another rung on the social ladder. And at each step comes more pressure to perform and more responsibility to perform well." Tyrilai glanced over at Jena, still firing more helium balloons into the office which was approaching a third of the way full. "I was pretty and good at sports and getting into trouble which is a collection of very disappointing burdens for Trill parents to have to deal with."

Tyrilai looked over at the girl sympathetically. "Im sorry about your parents, Jena. It is no fun being suddenly alone."

Jena said thank you to Tyrilai. She then looked quizzically at the Trill. "Hang on you said you'd never heard of me, how do you know about my parents?"

Tyrilai smiled softly. "Until like forty-five minutes ago I was the chief councilor, so I get briefings on everybody who stepped on board. Yours was the only one I read, it reminded me of me a little. But don't worry about that, I'm not a councilor anymore, I'm a diplomat now. My main concern is finding a dress to wear to a stuffy reception on Bajor cause I found one of their shards."

Jena smiled. "I saw shard. It's beautiful. My mother used tell me about the Tears of the Prophets, but I never dreamed they'd be so pretty." She said.

Tyrilai nodded, having to lower herself to fit the nose of the balloon gun to the floor and fill the last few empty spaces. "Ready." She nodded to Jena, "hit the button marked turbo." She waited a moment for Jena to find it and suddenly balloons where shooting in a flod from both nozzles and then inflating inside the room pushing the mass towards the door. Tyrilai stopped and shut the door with a whoosh as balloons kept inflating for a few moment pressure sealing the room with festive multicolored non-regulation frivolity. "Well done, you would make an excellent petty criminal." Tyrilai smirked.

"Thanks, I think." Jena replied with a half-smile as she looked at their handiwork.

"Well it's always good to have something to fall back on." Tyrlai shouldered her 'weapon' and reached for Jena's. "One of the chefs in the commissary is a friend of mine from San Francisco and he knows how to make an old Earth delicacy called the bacon cheeseburger, fancy a stroll or did you have some science you were waiting to do?"

"Ummm, bacon." Jena said. "Petty crime sure makes me hungry. Let's go." She added taking Tyrlai's arm.

Meanwhile on Deck 4

Mission Day 1

Authors: Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton, Lt. (JG) James Beauvoir

The turbolift doors opened and Brad Silverton was quick to exit and headed to the leaking plasma conduit. He was accompanied by Nurse Maria Hill. Ellen had staid back in case other casualties came to sickbay. They came upon several members of Engineering trying to clear the debris that was partially blocking the hallway. Brad didn't wait for formalities, "Ensign what happened here?"

"The ship was struck by phaser fire after shields went down. It overloaded a plasma conduit in the walls causing it to explode. A few crewmen were moving to a safer location to the interior of the ship when they got unlucky. We got most of them out but more could be stuck behind this debris."

"Maria attend to the ones that got out, they probably have minor radiation poisoning." Brad turned back to the ensign. "Look, if the plasma is still leaking anyone in there will be exposed to higher and higher doses. It could reach terminal levels. There's an opening right there." Brad points near the bottom of the debris pile. "We can pull anyone out from there."

"Begging your pardon sir but that's too dangerous. The pile could collapse and make it worse. Plus you just mentioned the radiation."

"I can manage and treat small doses but the longer it takes to get someone out the worse it will be. Look I'll go in myself to check."

"I can't let you do that sir." The ensign became visibly nervous at addressing a superior officer in that way.

Brad had a reassuring smile on his face. "No problem ensign. Maybe we can get at it from a different angle. How about inside this room here." He points to a side room. "Let's check to see if we can get to them from here."

The relieved ensign started to head inside. "It's possible sir but we'd have to...." with engineering distracted, Brad ran forward, dove, and slid through the debris opening.

The hallway was a mess. Metal beams and sections of wall were all about. Ceiling lights were either inoperative or flickering. The air was thick with the smell of burnt plasma. Luckily there was only one person trapped inside, a young woman who appeared to be unconscious. Brad reached her and saw the open damaged conduit nearby. It was still flaring uncontrolled.

Dammit. She's had a lot of exposure.

Brad started to pull her away and her leg was stuck, pinned down by the partially collapsed ceiling.

"Oh come on!" For the eleventh time since red alert was signaled, Brad mumbled...

A few minutes later Brad pulled the young woman out through the opening in the debris wall.
"Nurse Hill report."

"Doctor, we have three others who have minor burns and cases of radiation poisoning. They've been taken care of with the meds we have."

"Good. At least something is going partially my way today. I'm not sure about this one." Brad looks down to the young woman he pulled away from the plasma conduit. "We both got a lot of exposure. She's alive but.... Do we know who this is?"

Maria nodded, "I know her Doctor, its Coln Jena."

Quebec City to the rescue! Part I

Bridge, USS Quebec City

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. Tyrlai Zade, Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir

As the crew of three beamed over to the Quebec's bridge all lights came on automatically, just same for the displays. "Ok guys, let's get this thing moving." Tim walked to the closest display. "Perfect, all systems are still online." he said out loud.

Tyrlai stepped down the couple stairs to the command level of the bridge and looked around for a few moments, her violet glittering eyes smiling as she surveyed Quebec's control stations.

"Diplomatic systems are functional, commander, though I expect we are past the point where they would even be useful. I can take tactical if you like?" She smiled over her shoulder and looked at the sad state of the Quebec's armaments.

Captain Algard Trebonne stood gazing out at the viewscreen as it flickered, an Orion ship seeming to be suddenly stuttering in and out of existence right in front of his vessel. "Ensign Chan, identify that vessel."

A green eyed Chinese helmsman worked furiously at the controls as the Orion ship flickered and shimmered in front of them, the interference almost blinding her sensor display. She was nervous and looked to be no more than nineteen. Her voice cracked as she reported her meager findings. "Captain, the design is unfamiliar, it looks new. I'm getting hawking radiation interference with the readings, sir."

The Captains eyes widened at the words of his helmsman, she turned and for a moment his eyes locked on those of a tall Trill woman who had materialized at his tactical station. His eyes widening once again.

And then he vanished. Tyrlai reached to her belt and flipped out a hand scanner, looking down at the readings. Science had been one of her many 'weaker' subjects at the Academy and the blur of readings she was seeing displayed on her hand unit reminded her of a van Gogh painting with their mish mosh of vibrant colors. She did a few quick mental calculations and looked over at the XO. "I have no idea what these readings mean. But I met that girl at the Academy when I was a cadet, I'm sure of it. And she was thirty years old then."

"What are you saying? That we are seeing people from the past?" Tim asked as he looked at her very vague.

Jason checked his tri-corder readings. "Sir, I'm detecting a flux in Chronitons and a high level of

Hawking radiation. I hypothesise this as the cause of the temporal echos." He reported as he took the operations station.

Tyrlai looked at Jason contemplating his readings and then back at the bridge as the others appeared once again, their own scanners out apparently taking readings of Tyrlai, Jason and the others. She had a notion as they vanished once more, and walked over to where the Science officer stood. "Can you transmit a message on these two frequencies," she said, tapping furiously on her handcomp, "and send our tactical data on the Orions and their ship."

Jason arched an eye brow. "I can't guarantee they'll get it in one piece, but I can try."

Looking over Tyrlai's shoulder, he couldn't make heads or tails of the readings. Temporal anomalies were not his forte. They weren't his priority at the moment either. "We'll have plenty of time to analyze these readings later. For now, we have a more pressing matter to attend to. Mr. Beauvoir, set a course for the Portland's last position, maximum warp. Ms. Zade, prepare tactical systems for combat." As he turned back to the center chair, his gaze was met by that of a heavy-set man occupying his chair, wearing the classic red jacket uniform that was phased out of Starfleet use in the 2350s. "And let us hope we don't have any more visitors from the past."

"Aye, sir." The Science Officer said, bringing up the nav controls on his station. As he plotted the course, he was thankful the ship was mostly automated, as it had been quite some years since his mandatory pilot lessons back at the Academy.

Tyrlai walked back over to the tactical display and tapped the configuration up, frowning at the display until it changed to an older one. A few seconds later when it had flickered back to present state she confirmed her findings. She concentrated waiting for the precious seconds when the past version of the ship was fully present and could hear her. "Quebec City has no weapons, sir. Everything was-- Capatain we are going to need your help--stripped out for the test. It is standard procedure for unmanned test weapons -- we have no weapons and are at the mercy -- it is possible a few torpedoes are stored somewhere in safe mode but we would need to find, activate and load them manually. The main deflectors and shields are online and fully operational." She looked over at the XO waiting as the past crew flickered in once more. "I sent Xiao a tactical report." The green eyed helmsman looked surprised when Tyrlai mentioned her by name. As they flickered away once more she turned back to the XO. "If we coordinate this correctly and get very lucky we might be able to have the Quebec from the past fight for us."

Tim rubbed his temples. He could swear the Quebec City was supposed to be armed for the final test but perhaps, like everything else, its weapons were to arrive on Tuesday. Dejected, he slumped down in his chair and rubbed his temples. Temporal anomalies gave him headaches, and the one important thing he knew about them was that they were to be avoided. Still, aside from whatever Tyrlai had up her sleeve, they were out of ideas. "Ms. Zade, whatever your plan is... I hope it works. Do it."

Space Battle! part III

Bridge, USS Portland

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. (JG) R'vahis

"Do what you can, Lieutenant. We need every second." Alenis glanced up at Vike's weapons once more. Even Ko-ko could feel the tension. "Please, Tim, hurry," she added under her breath.

"Aye sir....uhhh, wait...Commander?" R'vahis literally sat blinking at his console readings for a moment and then continued in a mystified tone, "I'm detecting an energy influx of some sort aboard

the Quebec City. If I'm not mistaken, it's a buildup of chronitons and something else I can't quite pin down yet."

"Chronitons? That's impossible, my calculations were exact!" Shras bolted towards the Ops station, pushing R'vahis to the side to get a view of his screen. This weapon shouldn't cause a buildup of chronitons!"

"You wanted to test your weapon, Shras, we're testing it," replied Alenis.

"This can't be my weapon! It's not possible!" Shras looked up at the viewscreen, desperately trying to figure out what was happening. Coming to a striking realization, his eyes fell on Alenis with a dagger-shooting fury. "You! You brought aboard some mysterious artifact from some non-corporeal beings! You caused this!"

"Mr. R'vahis, scan the Orion vessel for chronitons. Compare with internal sensor readings on the Tolic shard. Oh, and feel free to remove Shras from your station with as much prejudice as you see fit." Alenis was rapidly tiring of dealing with the scientist.

"I can't say definitively what is causing this buildup of chronitons," R'vahis said as he stared down at his sensor readings. He only had to put a paw on Shras' shoulder to "encourage" the Andorian to stand aside, "but I'm not detecting any unusual activity from the shard. I'm saving this for--"

"Bridge, this is main engineering," The woman on the other end had fear and panic in her voice. "We've taken a lot of damage! Blown plasma conduits on decks four, five and six, and damage to the number three injector assembly. I canna maintain this level of power usage! We need to shut down this stasis field, or--"

"Shut down the stasis field and we're all dead!" shouted Alenis. "Keep the power online!"

"Aye captain, but--" a loud explosion was heard over the intercom, then the panicked shouts and screams of engineering officers desperately trying to fight fires.

"Ms. Kazumi! Status!" Alenis barked into the intercom, but there was no reply apart from the sounds of panic. Finally, she heard a voice on the other end.

"Captain, this is Ensign Blix. The number three injector has blown. Emergency shutdown in progress." His voice was dripping with desperation. "We've got casualties, Kazumi is... she's..."

"Captain, we've lost main power!" shouted R'vahis. "Auxiliary powers drained, we're a sitting duck. Also, I'm getting some strange readings from the shard--"

Alenis looked up at the viewscreen. The white glow of the stasis field around Vike's cruiser faded, being replaced by the green glow emanating from his nacelles and his plasma cannons. While the Portland was a sitting duck with no engines, shields or weapons, Vike's ship had completely recovered. As the bursts of green energy from his cannons closed in on the Portland, Alenis closed her eyes. It was sector 262 all over again, only this time, Alenis knew there wouldn't be any survivors. In the split second before her certain doom, she made peace with the prophets.

Then, silence.

Second chances...
Bridge, USS Portland

Alenis opened her eyes. Surrounding her was absolute chaos on the bridge. Bodies were flying through the air in slow motion, consoles were sparking, and through a breach in the hull she could make out the Orion cruiser and a couple approaching torpedoes. Her feathers singed, Ko-ko was flapping her wings in panic. Everything around Alenis was bathed in a white light.

"Am I..." she was perplexed. Growing up so far from Bajor, Alenis never knew whether to believe in the afterlife or not. But she never imagined it to be the bridge of the Portland.

"This can not be how it ends," said Tobin in an emotionless voice.

"The prophets," whispered Alenis. She was having a vision -- the white light, the voices of people she knew. It was similar to her previous orb experience earlier in the day. "What do you want?"

"You still have work to do," said Arvel, his voice unnaturally soft. "Your story can not end here, it must be told"

"But I don't know--" stuttered Alenis.

"You understand what must be done?" asked the prophet who had taken the form of R'vahis.

"No... well, yes, but I don't--" With a bright flash, Alenis found herself back in her command chair, the bridge having returned to its normal state.

"...but I'm not detecting any unusual activity from the shard." Hearing R'vahis' voice, Alenis knew where she was. Or more precisely, when she was. "I'm saving this for--"

"Bridge, this is main engin--"

"Emergency power to the warp core containment field, and reduce flow to the number three injector by thirty percent!" Alenis didn't even let Kozumi finish before forcefully interrupting her.

"Captain--"

"NOW! That's an order!" Alenis was shouting at the top of her lungs.

"Aye, captain." Down in engineering, Kazumi's fingers danced across her control panel. "It's done, power readings are stabilizing. But... How did you know?"

"I--I--" Alenis stammered. She didn't know how to even start explaining what just happened, and could feel all eyes on the bridge staring at her with curiosity. "Call it a hunch."

"Roger," replied R'vahis. "Main power is stabilizing at 88%, and I did detect a momentary buildup of chronitons and Hawking radiation from the location of the orb shard, but that's gone now. Readings are normal."

"And the Quebec City? Do we have time to--"

"Their ETA is one minute. We've got..." R'vahis made a quick calculation, "about sixty seconds of power left before we're completely drained." A horrified expression appeared on his face. "Captain,

we're cutting it awful close."

"I know, Lieutenant. Let's just hope our support arrives on time." Alenis rubbed her temple and let out a deep breath. Stunned, she tried to comprehend what just happened. Until today, her belief in the Bajoran religion was mostly academic. As a refugee, she was separated from the temples, the Vedeks, and the street preachers that dotted the Bajoran countryside. And she had never had a religious experience until the miracle she witnessed today.

Quebec City to the rescue! Part II

Bridge, USS Quebec City

Authors: Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. Tyrlai Zade, Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir

Tyrlai looked around, her eyes unfocused in a way she often would employ when thinking up mischief. The deck vibrated as the Quebec City hurried to the Orion ship's location. She gathered herself as the bridge shimmered once again. "We are going to need you to fire everything you have at our target – "The visitors from the past shimmered away once again. She looked over at Jason. "Mister Beauvoir, can you divert as much power as you can channel straight through our deflector dish and into the Orion shields with the intent of overwhelming their shield capacitors and bringing them down, however temporarily?"

"I can, ma'am, but I have to warn you that once I do so, the plasma relays will burn out within a matter of minutes and the main deflector will be scrap." Jason said as he began to re-route power from non-essential systems.

Tyrlai busied herself setting up targeting controls and a trigger display for the deflector dish on her console. She was interrupted once as the phase shift brought the old Quebec City crew and their many tricorders and at least a few extra security officers than she remembered from before. "on our mark, we aren't going to get two shots—" The past version of the ship faded again.

"Timing is going to suck, whatever power Jason can't funnel through the deflector will have to go into the shields." She looked over at the XO, "twenty some year old weaponry is not going to be a threat to the Orions, but if we can short out their shields, even a Constitution era photon torpedo burst could disable them." Tyrlai smiled reassuringly.

"Short out their shield. And how exactly do you want to do that?" Tim said.

"If you wanted practical suggestions you shouldn't have brought me along." Tyrlai looked back and saw the Quebec City's former Captain staring at her face to face this time.

"How do I trust you, whomever you are?" Captain Trebonne demanded, having to look up at the taller Trill woman.

"You—" Tyrlai tried to answer as the past version of the ship faded out again. "Damnit this is a difficult way to have a conversation."

Jason connected an anodyne capacitor, he'd found in one of the storage cabinets, up to the EPS at the back of the Bridge. He'd already adapted the capacitor to absorb the chronitons and Hawking radiation and was in process of setting up a shunt.

Tyrlai waited with her hands on her hips for the deckplates to shimmer back to the old-timey amber. When they did she looked straight back at Captain Trebonne. "You can't really, save what readings

you have managed to get and the fact that I know the frequencies to Xiao's neural implants." The past faded away once more.

She tapped her foot impatiently and tried to come up with a good way of identifying themselves in a way that would work going back twenty plus years when the captain shimmered back into existence holding a PADD in one hand and examining what looked like a genetic readout. "Very well ambassador."

Tyrlai smiled and exclaimed, "yes! Scan my symbiont, I should completely have thought of that." She jumped and beamed over at Jason and the XO while the old version of the ship's crew faded away. "Damnit, I wasted that cycle."

Tim checked the numbers on his console one more time. "60 seconds to arrival"

Jason makes some final adjustments and even says a silent prayer.

"Other time in 5 seconds" Tim said as the timer on his console began its last 5 seconds.

Tyrlai whirled back around and almost fell over her words. "Target the Orion ship and fire in exactly seventeen seconds from,...Now!" Tyrlai shouted the last part as the other time frame had just begun fading.

Tyrlai watched her display and let it count down the seconds. As the moment approached she nodded at Jason and said. "Now."

"Ici rien ne va (Here goes nothing)." Jason said as he activated the controls. There was loud hum and the Bridge was bathed in red emergency lighting as burst of high energy shot forth from the deflector. EP relays blew, but he by-passed them as best he could to keep the burst going as long as possible.

As the beam arced over to the Orion ship the timeframe shifted and the Quebec from the past launched everything it had, just a few seconds too early. Tyrlai blinked in horror. "We changed the time cycles by sending the chronitons over in the burst." The Orion ship rippled with energy as the deflector burst struck, shield capacitors over the alien's hull shimmering as they overloaded. The shields went down. The past version of the Quebec City shimmered back a few seconds later, their torpedo barrage shimmering back in as well, but well past the target. She turned back to the Captain, to thank him for trying when an explosion made the Orion ship shudder.

Captain Algard Trebonne spoke as they watched the Orion warp core forcibly ejected through the top of her hull by a photon torpedo blast. A torpedo that had apparently materialized inside the Orion engine room. "Xiao figured out your mistake, Ambassador, and we took the chance of sending an extra torpedo." Tyrlai turned only to see the old timers fade out for the last time as their deflector exhausted the stray chronitons from the ships frame.

The ship shuddered, and the lights flickered and went out along with the control displays. The deflector stopped a second or so later, and the viewscreen terminated a second or so after that leaving the three of them in the dark.

“Thirty seconds,” said R’vahis, counting down to the moment that the Portland would run out of power and become a sitting duck.

“Come on, Tim,” muttered Alenis under her breath. Aside from R’vahis’ countdown, the bridge was deathly quiet. With nothing they could do but hope their power held out long enough, the entire crew was fixated on the screen. Even Ko-ko was dead silent. One way or another, this battle would be over soon.

“Twenty seconds,”

Alenis pondered what just happened. She had witnessed the destruction of her ship, but somehow – without knowing how – she was able to go back and prevent it. Perhaps it was the chronitons, or perhaps it was the orb, but somehow, she had gotten a second chance. There was an ancient earth superstition known as a guardian angel – perhaps she had one?

“Ten seconds,”

On screen, the Quebec City dropped out of warp, but instead of a barrage of phaser fire as Alenis expected, Vike was greeted by a burst from the Quebec City’s deflector.

“Five,”

“What are they... no!” shouted Alenis as the torpedoes appeared past their intended target. The lights on the bridge flickered as the Portland lost power. “It’s over,” she said in a dejected tone, watching the Orion cruiser begin to power up. “Make your--” Her words were interrupted by an explosion on the main viewscreen, ripping apart large sections of the Orion cruiser. “Report!” she shouted.

“An explosion in their engine room, captain,” called out Burton. “Yield is consistent with a Mark IV torpedo, but those haven’t been standard issue in decades.”

“They did it! I don’t know how, but they did it!” A single tear of joy ran down Alenis’ cheek, which was quickly wiped away. “Mr. R’vahis, inform Mr. Rouse that he and his colleagues are free to return to the Portland at their leisure, and there will be a heroes’ welcome waiting for them. Communications, hail the Fox and see if they require assistance. Also, call Starfleet command and--”

“Captain, the Orions have launched a smaller vessel, a shuttle of some sort,” called out R’vahis. “I’m reading the cloaking device on board.”

“Stop them!”

“I can’t, ma’am. Weapons and engines are offline, we’ve got nothing.” Burton loudly sighed. “They’ve gone to warp.”

With a heavy sigh, Alenis watched the cruiser explode. They had managed to rescue the freighter and destroy an Orion cruiser, but Vike’s escape with the cloaking device meant that though Alenis won the battle, Vike was making progress on winning the war. Gaining cloaking technology easily outweighed the loss of one ship. Make no mistake, Vike came out ahead. “Hail the freighter. On screen.”

“Zuwtt here. Captain, you’ve saved our lives and our ship!” The Bolian first officer offered a

seemingly effusive thank you. "However can we repay you?"

"Well, you can do one thing," replied Alenis. Her expression suddenly turned to a scowl. "You can give yourselves up freely when we place you under arrest and impound your ship."

"Captain, we're the victims here. I don't know--"

"You were illegally transporting a cloaking device, which in and of itself calls for a harsh sentence."

"But captain--"

"Not to mention the fact that the Orions found out about that cloaking device somehow. Which means that someone tipped them off."

"It must have been that crooked Ferengi who--"

"So you admit to dealings with a crooked Ferengi?" Alenis had caught him in a trap and she knew it.

"No! Well..." the Bolian stammered; he'd been caught in a catch-22. "I didn't tip off the Orions!"

"Perhaps," replied Alenis, getting into the character of Detective Meru from her holo-novels. "But surely there are easier ways for this crooked Ferengi to deliver the cloaking device into the hands of the Orions than to stage an attack on a freighter, wouldn't you think?"

"Well... maybe, but that doesn't mean..."

"And I wonder who would benefit the most from the death of the captain? Perhaps someone with a share in the ship? Maybe a partner of the captain?"

"Surely you're not implying..."

"If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear," Alenis said firmly. "But whoever did this put my ship and my crew in danger. More than that, with a cloaking device in the hands of the Orions, that person may have put every ship and station in the quadrant in danger. I intend to find out who that person is, and when I do, that person will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Do I make myself clear, Mr. Zuwtt."

"Yes, captain," he responded, glumly.

"Now, put away any weapons you may have and prepare to be boarded. I think we've both had enough trouble for one day. Portland Out."

Alenis leaned back in her chair and let out a deep breath. With everything seemingly under control, she extended her arm, allowing Ko-ko to walk down her arm and perch herself on Alenis' forearm.

"It's over, Ko-ko," she said in a quiet, gentle voice as she pet the bird.

"Ahem!" Alenis turned to see Shras standing over her. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

"And what would that be?"

"My tests! You've completely ruined them!"

"Well, I submit to you that the purpose of this whole exercise was to test the combat potential of your projected stasis field device," replied Alenis, gritting her teeth. She'd just fought off Orion pirates and didn't care to deal with Shras at the moment. "As the wreckage of Vike's cruiser can testify, we've done that."

"Really, Captain, you are comparing a battle with Orion space pirates to a controlled experiment?" As Shras shouted, Ko-ko made an agitated chirp and ruffled her feathers. "You clearly know nothing of the scientific method, which is not surprising given your simple nature."

"Calm down, Shras. You're scaring Ko-ko."

"Oh, I'm scaring your stupid bird? Who cares about some dumb bird?! My weapon, my life's work, you've ruined my tests, you nearly got it destroyed, you almost got me killed, which would truly be a tragedy because unlike you I possess an intellect of value..."

Panicked by the shouts of the Andorian, Ko-ko's fight or flight reflex was engaged. This time, she chose flight, taking to the limited skies of the bridge. Though Ko-ko was more or less housetrained, one curious factoid about her species is that when frightened, they tend to release their cloaca. Flying around near the ceiling of the bridge, it was bombs away for Ko-ko.

"...and you are by far the most idiotic, incompetent, inept--" Shras' shouts were interrupted by a plop on his head. Shaking, he touched the impact zone with his hand and examined the white residue. "AAAAAARRGHH!" With that, he stormed off the bridge.

Alenis turned to Arvel. "You think this is going to go in his report?" she asked, barely able to conceal her laughter.

"Meanwhile in Sickbay" Part 1 of 3

30 minutes after Vike escaped

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. JG Jason Beauvoir, and Lt. JG Brad Silverton

Brad Silverton looked over the biobed readings one last time to be sure. He knew it was unnecessary but there was little else to do. Coln Jena lay unconscious with red blotches of skin on her neck, left cheek, and left hand. Radiation burns.

"How bad is it Doctor?"

Brad turned and looked at Nurse Hill. "Its bad Maria." he said with a deep sigh. "Hyronalin would be the choice for plasma radiation and would cure her easily if only the blasted equipment had been installed." He looked over to an empty wall panel above a vacant table. "Unfortunately we won't have enough time to make it until next Tuesday."

"But we are replicating other drugs why not Hyronalin?"

"Hyronalin is a very effective radiation therapy drug but its hard to replicate. Basic replicators can't handle the delicate intricacies of the more advanced drugs. We'd need a medical grade one. Not only that but it can take hours. Keep that in mind to always have some ready well in advance."

"What do you mean keep that in mind? You'll be managing the stock won't you?" She laid a reassuring hand on his back. Brad winced in pain.

Brad sighed and knew he couldn't hide it anymore, "When I got to Jena the conduit was flaring stronger than I had feared and she was very close to it. It was either condemn her to certain death or throw my fate in with her's and hope to come up with something later." He looks at the pile of basic meds he had ramaged through several times and had come up short.

"Nurse so you are ready for when the time comes. Prepare doses of Morphenolog to ease our pain. Most of the symptoms of plasma radiation will be internal. Increased bleeding. The breakdown of mucus lining tissue of the organs. Your main focus will be to keep your patient's as comfortable as long as possible. Eventually neurological damage will set in where I will become unable to assist you further."

Maria sunk her head. "Yes Doctor".

Brad put his fingertips pinched together to the bridge of his nose and thought to himself. This wasn't even close to how I envisioned things going. At least I can carry out my duties as CMO and go out with dignity.

Brad tapped his chest communicator.
"Doctor Silverton to the Bridge"

Doctor Silverton, thought Alenis, he must be the new CMO. "Yes, doctor, is everything all right?"

"Captain, permission to have Lieutenant Beauvoir to come to sickbay immediately ma'am. Its Jena."

Alenis looked up at Jason, who had pivoted in his chair to face her. "Go, Lieutenant," she said. "He's on his way."

Jason wasted no time leaving his station and heading for the turbolift. He was a mass of emotions. Fear, guilty, sadness and anger. Heaven help anyone who got in his way.

"Meanwhile in Sickbay" Part 2 of 3

35 minutes after Vike escaped

Authors: Lt. JG Jason Beauvoir, and Lt. JG Brad Silverton

Doctor Silverton injected Jena with a stimulant. It would wake her up and posed her no danger. She'd be able to talk with her father. At least Brad could give them that much.

Jason stormed into Sickbay, sparing no thought for anyone that he'd nearly run down in his urgency to get here. Jena was currently the only thing on his mind. A nurse met him at the door, she was about to say something to him, but seeing the haunted look of determination on his face, thought better of it and stepped aside.

"Where is my daughter?" He demanded in a tone that made it clear that he would brook no refusal.

Brad turned from Jena and looked up.

"Lieutenant, she's over here. She'll be coming to in a few moments so that will give us time to discuss her condition. She was in a hallway with some others on Deck 4 when the pirates attacked from the freighter. Their phaser fire struck the hull and the explosion collapsed that ceiling around here and overloaded a plasma conduit that resulted in a level 6 radiation exposure."

Jason made his way to his daughter's bed. He looked at her with concern as the doctor took an

awfully long time to explain what had caused Jena to be in this state. The Science Officer had been in combat before and serving as an EMT he'd seen firsthand the aftermath of explosions and what flying metal shards, plasma fire and radiation can do to organic tissue. He also knew the odds of most humanoids surviving level 6 radiation exposure. They weren't good.

Jason took a deep breath to try to calm his turbulent emotions. "Doctor, I understand the severity of the damage, what are you doing to treat her?"

"Unfortunately there is little I can do. The medical grade replicators weren't delivered and we can't make any Hyronalin." Brad points to an empty shelf and a bare wall plate.

"The tissue regenerator is likewise not going to be sent to us until next Tuesday. I don't even have an intensive care unit biobed." Brad balls his hands into fists and slams them on a table beside him.

"If it was a matter of the equipment down in a cargo bay I would have got it and installed it myself. Hell I practically built this sickbay with my own hands. The problem is they weren't delivered to the ship at all. I'm sorry Jason, there is nothing I can do."

Jason made a mental note to find out who was responsible for getting the medical supplies and equipment aboard and indulge in some 'remedial education'. To the Doctor he said.

"Thank you for you've done, I'd like to talk to my daughter now."

"Of course." Brad nodded and stepped back and stopped for a second. On the back of his hands and forearms were red blotches of skin were forming. He quickly pulled back and went back into his office next door. He sat down lazily and started reading on his main viewscreen.

"Jason, is that you?" Jena asked, groggy from the pain medicine.

"Yes, it's me, I'm sorry."

"What for?" Jena asked puzzled.

"For getting you into this mess." Jason replied a tear forming in his eye.

"Hey, it's not your fault, I was the one who insisted on coming along, but I don't regret it. I got to spend time with the father I didn't even know existed and I feel blessed to have been able to do that." She said.

"I love you, Jena." Jason said sadly, as he took one of her hands his his own.

"Me too, 'Dad'." She replied, trying the word for size. Then she smiled. "Enough sadness, sit down and tell me about your brave adventures on the Quebec City."

Jason could help himself from smiling at his daughter's bravery. "So you heard about that did you?"

"Yes, one of the nurses said something about you, Tyrlai and the XO coming to the rescue."

"You've met Lieutenant Zade?"

"Yes, we did some decorating, but it's not important. Less questions, more story."

It was now Jason's turn to be puzzled, but he did as he'd been 'requested'. "Well we beamed aboard and that's when the time echos began....."

USS Portland - Deck 1

Authors: Cmdr Alenis Meru and Lt. Cmdr Timothy Rouse

As soon as he managed to get his duty done he pasted to Meru's office. They needed to talk, before this ship would turn into a real loony bin. He pressed the chimer when he was standing in front of it.

"Come in!" shouted Alenis, as she finished typing up a sentence on her terminal. Having just fired the ship's weapons in anger and witnessed a possible temporal distortion meant one thing for Alenis: lots of paperwork. Ko-ko had perched herself on top of her monitor, and from time to time would try to peck at the screen. Fortunately, it was made of the same scratch-resistant polycarbonate that protected PADDs from rough handling. "Mr. Rouse, I don't suppose you came by to help me with paperwork, did you?" she said, trying to welcome the XO with a joke.

"That is definitely not why I'm here." he said suddenly regretting his free way of speaking.
"Permission to speak freely?"

"Of course," replied Alenis, talking over the bird which, still perched on her monitor, turned to caw at the new entrant. "Calm down, Ko-ko," she said, gently, as she ran her hand over Ko-ko's back, soothing the distressed bird. "Go ahead," she added, looking back up at her XO.

"What's the deal with that bird? Sorry for being blunt, but you look like a fool with it." Tim said, trying to restraint himself still.

"The bird..." Alenis paused, trying to figure out how best to explain it. "Ko-ko is..." Her mind raced to try to think of an explanation that wouldn't go into too much detail, yet satisfy Tim. "I've been prescribed this bird for medical reasons, by Dr. Darze."

She could tell by the expression on her Executive Officer's face that that explanation wouldn't suffice. And that their respective positions demand a certain openness that goes deeper than mandatory disclosure. She stood up from her desk and stared out the window for a moment, contemplating what she was about to say, and then turned back to Tim.

"Timothy, three years ago, I was at the battle of New Algiers, in sector 262. I was Chief Tactical Officer of the USS Gol. Four hundred and eighty six people on the Gol died that day." She let out a deep breath. That was hard enough to say, but what was to come would be even more difficult. She'd only shared this with Arvel and a couple other counselors. "Since then, I've been having... visions. And nearly every night, I've had the same dream, of being on the Gol, where I'm powerless to do anything to prevent the ship from being lost. The only thing that has helped, that has let me get a decent night of sleep since then, has been these tranquilizers that I've been taking." Alenis could see the confusion on her executive officer's face. He asked about the bird, not about her life story and mental problems. "I had an appointment with Arvel earlier today. He took away my medication and told me to carry this bird around instead. Ko-ko's presence is supposed to have a calming effect, but I think he only did it as revenge for..." Alenis paused, realizing she may have went too far, "...never mind."

"No, finish that! Revenge for what?" Tim said. He suddenly got the urge to protect her, like he would with Jud.

Alenis sighed. "While we were stationed together on a previous assignment, Arvel and I were together. In a relationship. And then..." she gazed out the window. "It's funny, with all the stars in the galaxy, it's actually a very small place. I never thought I would see him again. And yet, here he is."

Alenis looked back at Tim, realizing that she was off on a tangent. "We had a relationship. We had one... then I got offered a position as an XO on another ship. So, I left." She feebly looked up at Tim, feeling cold-hearted just saying it.

"So what? You sometimes need to put you career ahead to get somewhere." Tim paused a second. "Wait, are you uhm, rekindling that relationship? Come on, Meru. You should know better. You're the captain! You can't date an officer on this ship, someone that's below you!"

Alenis immediately shot back. "That's rich, coming from the guy who..." she trailed off, immediately regretting starting the sentence.

"The guy who, what?" Tim was indignant. First Alenis was violating all sorts of regulations about fraternization, and now she was trying to make it about him.

Alenis let out a sigh. She was hoping to have a couple days to think up a more tactful way of breaking this news to him. But now that it was out there, she had to finish. "I found out who that woman on Starbase 302 was. The one you hooked up with and then abandoned in the morning without even saying goodbye." Alenis took a deep breath. "It's Ellen Washington. And that's Washington as in Admiral Washington, who just so happens to be her father. She's a nurse on this ship."

"That's impossible," Tim said as he plumbed on the coach. "Ellen," he started, but was interrupted by the intercom.

"Petty Officer Washington to the Captain. Please come down to sickbay. There is something you need to see." said the female voice on the other end.

Alenis looked up at Tim, a shocked expression still on his face. "We'll be down shortly. Alenis out."

"Meanwhile in Sickbay" (Part 3 of 3)

A few hours after Part 2

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. Cmdr. Timothy Rouse, Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir and Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton

Nurse Ellen Washington stood in sickbay across the way from the Chief Medical Officer's office. She could see Brad Silverton in there through the open hole of the unfinished office wall. He was still reading and too engrossed in... well whatever it was he was reading to call the captain and his condition. Well if he wasn't someone had to, though perhaps a little quietly so he wouldn't hear.

"Ensign Washington to the Captain. Please come down to sickbay. There is something you need to see."

"We'll be down shortly. Alenis out."

The sickbay doors opened with Alenis Meru and Timothy Rouse walking into sickbay. Jason Beauvoir was still here talking with his daughter. Jena had at this point gotten visibly worse. The meds were keeping the pain down, for the most part but her discomfort was easily seen by all and she held her abdomen.

Nurse Maria Hill was also beside Jena trying to make her comfortable. She looked up at the commanding officers coming in and approached them.

"Captain, Lieutenant Commander. Thank goodness you're here." She looks over at Ellen, "We weren't sure if you were told about the status down here or if we should have even called or if we should have just... well you should go see Doctor Silverton."

Tim just stood back and stared at Ellen, still in disbelief that she was here.

Alenis glanced over at Tim, to see her executive officer frozen in place. "Show me to the doctor, Ms. Hill." She recognized both nurses from her appointment earlier in the day, and as a commanding officer, she strove to always remember the names of all her crew. "I suspect that these two have some... important matters to discuss."

"Yes, Captain, but..." Maria froze in place, her eyes resting on Tim. Blond hair? Check. Gorgeous blue eyes? Check. Perfect, well trained body to die for? Ellen may have exaggerated a little on that last point, but not by much. She gasped at the realization that the mystery man was none other than the ship's executive officer. "Um... right this way, captain."

Tim nodded for Ellen to follow him. He wanted privacy. Somehow his love life had become a local soap opera. Looking at the face of the other nurse she also knew who he was.

Maria Hill poked her head around the corner and into Brad's office. "Doctor Silverton?"

Brad sighed as he responded and didn't look up from his view screen. "Maria I said I didn't want to be bothered there really isn't time for CAPTAIN?!?" Brad stood up straight with his hands behind his back.

"At ease, doctor." "What's her status," she asked quietly, tilting her head in the general direction of Jena. She had read the damage reports; all things considered the Portland was fortunate to get off easy. But there was one casualty, a young woman with radiation poisoning who was in critical condition. It was all Alenis could think about for the past few hours. She struggled in vain against the mountain of paperwork that she knew would be demanded of her after the battle. Every few sentences her mind would wander back to Coln Jena lying in sickbay. She'd fret, worrying about Jena and also worrying about Jason. For him to lose his only daughter only a few days after meeting her would be devastating, even for a half-Vulcan. Alenis wondered whether to go down there or not; eventually deciding to wait until she was summoned so as not to disturb anyone. But most of all, she wondered if there was something she could have done differently. If she had only waited for the refits to be completed, or had done something different during the battle, maybe Jena wouldn't be clinging to her life in a sickbay far from home. "Is she going to make it?"

"Under normal circumstances she would easily. But, well as you can see here in sickbay we are missing a lot of the necessary equipment to treat her. I'm told it wasn't going to be ready until next Tuesday. By then I'm afraid it'll be far too late. We can make her comfortable for a while still. Let her and Jason talk and say their goodbyes." Brad paused for a moment.

Alenis silently cursed herself for launching without waiting for the retrofits to be completed. But then again, she didn't anticipate - she couldn't anticipate - being in combat on what was supposed to be a routine environment. Of course, Starfleet command was breathing down her neck to get the tests done; presumably they were as sick of dealing with Shras as she was.

"Captain I want to apologize for not reporting to you for duty as soon as I came aboard. Sickbay was a mess, IS a mess. Then we lose our first patient and now this." Brad points at Ko-Ko. "You are sitting there being patient with medical when one of the stupid research animals got out and perched on you. I didn't even know we had any on board yet. Here let me get it off." Brad stands up and reaches

to grab Ko-Ko.

"No," said Alenis as she stepped back. With a whistle, she commanded Ko-ko to perch on her forearm. She was so used to carrying Ko-ko around already that she almost forgot that she was perched on her shoulder. "This is Ko-ko. She's my... well, she was prescribed to me. Doctor's orders, I'm sure you understand." Of course, she suspected that her explanation wouldn't suffice, but it would have to do for now. "And she's very intelligent, isn't that right, Ko-ko."

"As for sickbay, it's my fault, Doctor. I should have delayed the testing until the retrofitting was complete." With the Quebec City having been stripped bare, the Fox without power on half its decks including the one containing sickbay, and the freighter not having any medical facilities to speak of, as inadequate as they were, the Portland had the best medical facilities in the neighborhood. "I didn't know..."

Brad sat back down and winced across his face. The captain obviously noticed it and stopped talking. "I suppose I had better come clean. Jena won't be the only casualty I'm afraid. I came across her in the debris strewn hallways. Engineering would go in after her. Said it was too dangerous and more would be at risk. They were just doing their jobs in protecting people but I had to do mine as doctor. Jena was trapped under some beams. No broken bones or anything but it took me a bit too long to pull her out. We have about 8 hours or so. Give or take."

Alenis rubbed her left temple. It was bad enough she had a casualty, but now she had two. And worst of all, the second was the doctor who was supposed to take care of the first. "I... I don't know what to say," she said. What Brad did was either very brave or very foolish, and possibly both. The ship's only doctor was too valuable to lose when they had a patient in critical condition, but if he hadn't faced the radiation, Jena would surely be dead already. And Alenis could hardly fault his foolishness, she probably would have done the same thing herself. "I'm afraid the nearest vessel is twelve hours out. But, please, doctor, don't give up."

Jason came to the end of his story. "My father the hero." Jena said with a smile strained somewhat by the amount of pain she was in.

Jason tried to smile back, but couldn't quite pull it off. She was handling this all, a lot better than he was.

They both knew there was nothing to be done. Without the facilities of a fully stocked Sickbay, Jena would be dead in a matter of hours.

As he sat there holding his dying daughter's hand, tried desperately to come up with a way to save her or at least give her some extra time, but his medical knowledge was limited and he found himself dismissing each idea almost as soon as he thought it up.

At last he resigned himself to the facts. He'd only known her a few days. He hadn't been there to see all her firsts. Her first steps, her first words, her first day of school. Now he wasn't going to get to see her graduate high school, date, perhaps graduate the Academy or marry.

The loss of so many moments hit him like a metric ton of thermal concrete and he couldn't stop the tears from flowing.

When Jena saw his tears, she broke down too.

When she'd first found out about her biological father, she'd made her mind up to be cold and aloof to him, make him work for her affection now, lying here close to death, it felt so childish. After all,

since they'd he'd treated her with nothing, but kindness.

"I love you, father." She said. "I just wish we'd had more time together. You didn't get to see me play soccer. "

"I love you too, Jena. I would have liked that." He said managing a brief smile. "Now, I'll let you get some sleep." He kissed her on the forehead. "I'll be back soon, ma chere."

As he left to find the doctor, he cursed himself again for bringing her into such a dangerous environment.

Author: Timothy Rouse
Deck 2 - Rouse's Quarters

Tim walked from one side of his quarters to the other. Shaking his head meanwhile. "So," he said, still not able to believe it. Alenis was right when she told him that it was a small galaxy. "We have been serving on the same ship for the last few weeks."

"Believe me, I had no idea" Ellen stuttered. She was shocked when she had seen him in sickbay minutes earlier. She'd almost fainted. Of all the people she'd expected to walk through the door, he was the last.

"I had to hear it from the Captain that the woman I can't get out of my head for the past week is only a few decks lower, and has been for all this time." Tim said loudly.

"You what?!" Ellen looked up abruptly.

"Meru just made me aware that I had no right to lecture her about dating a subordinate." he said. "Forget that," he added, quickly remembering he was talking about the Portland's CO.

"I ..." Ellen tried getting between Tim's rambling.

"And she also mentioned that your father is a high ranking officer within Starfleet, one we're going to be dealing a lot with soon." Overwhelmed by the jumble of emotions running through his head and the predicament he found himself in, he ran his hand through his hair. Of all the things he thought might happen on this assignment, falling in love with the Admiral's daughter was the last thing he might have expected. "What are we going to do now?"

Ellen was still sitting, watching him walk across the room until he suddenly stopped and looked at him. She shook her head. Those eyes. She was lost in his gorgeous blue eyes. "That's very easy. We can just forget we ever met before and go about our own business," she added.

Tim walked to her and crouched before her. "What if I don't want that?" He left the question hanging in the air, before he continued. "Look, I'm sorry for freaking out, I just... I never expected to see you again. That didn't sound good. I mean, geez."

"That's not what I want either," replied Ellen, placing a hand on his cheek.

"I'm sorry" he said softly.

"Sorry for what?" Ellen asked as she stared into his eyes.

"I shouldn't have left like I did. Without saying anything, you were just sleeping so... so beautiful. I just couldn't wake you." Tim said. "I couldn't be late either. I had a meeting with the Captain. I already should have been on board earlier."

With her other hand, Ellen raised a finger to her lips. "Shhhhhhhh," she said, gently telling him to stop talking before closing her eyes and moving her lips in closer.

Tim framed her face with his hands and brought his lips to hers to kiss her. She smelled exactly as he remembered: a combination of vanilla and lavender.

As their lips met, Ellen was brought back to their night of passion on Starbase 302. Though the kiss only lasted a second, it rekindled the deep connection that was made that night a week ago.

For a moment, they locked eyes. Then, without speaking, gave in to their passion.

Meanwhile in Sickbay, Part IV

Sickbay, USS Portland

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir

As Alenis was about to leave the Chief Medical Officer's office, she paused in the doorway. She couldn't make out their words, but seeing them both cry before Jason kissed her good night made her eyes water.

"You're the captain, Meru. You have to be the strong one," she thought to herself as she wiped away the tears with her sleeve. With a deep breath, she forced her emotions into the pit of her stomach and put on an almost Vulcan-like facade of stoicism.

As Jason turned around, Alenis approached. Gently, she placed Ko-ko on top of a cabinet in front of the window to Brad's office. "Lieutenant, I'm sorry. We're doing everything we can for her."

"Thank you, ma'am, I know you are, just feel so useless." 'And guilty, and angry.' He finished in his head.

The last time he felt this way was when Sarah was dying in his arms, her life's blood seeping in to the stones of the Champs-Élysées no matter how hard he tried to prevent it.

Alenis stepped in closer. "You're not useless, Lieutenant. You're here for her, comforting her in her time of need." For a brief moment, Alenis thought of her own father. He was but a distant memory, left behind when Alenis and her mother fled Bajor. They never heard what happened to him, but Cardassian justice being what it was, it would have been safe to assume that he was dead. "Jason," said Alenis, placing her hand on his shoulder to comfort him. "I have no doubts that Dr. Silvertan is working hard to save her. But more than anything, she needs a father right now. You're the only family she has; you're doing more than you know by just being here for her. I know she only came into your life a few days ago, but I've seen the connection between you two. If there were any doubts that you are her dad, these past few hours have put those to bed."

"I can't lose her, ma'am." Jason said with pleading in his eyes.

"I know," replied Alenis. "We're doing everything we can." She wished she could tell him that everything would be all right and that Jena would be fine. But she couldn't; she didn't know that. And

right now, without the proper medication and with help twelve hours away, it wasn't looking too likely.

Tired of pecking at the transparent aluminum window between sickbay and the CMO's office, Ko-ko took to the air. Before Alenis knew it, she perched herself on Jason's head and, with her claw, began massaging his scalp. "She likes you," said Alenis, a hint of a smile appearing briefly at the corner of her mouth.

"Well, I've always been a hit with the ladies." Jason joked and then felt bad that he'd found humor in such a bleak situation.

Alenis let out a weak smile at the joke; the situation was simply too dire for any attempts at humor to be successful. "You can hold on to her for a little while if you want. Ko-ko is very... soothing. You look like you need her more than I do right now."

"Thank you, ma'am." Jason said. Then to Ko-ko he said. "Bonjour, Mademoiselle Ko-ko, I'm Jason. You remind me a little of my father's parrot, Perroquet. My father taught him to eat food right out of his mouth, and would pull at the hairs on my father's face, when he was hungry. I won't do that for you, so don't get any ideas."

With a flap of his wings, Ko-ko jumped down onto Jason's shoulder. Softly, Ko-ko let out some relaxing coos into Jason's ear and nuzzled herself against the side of his head. "If she gets hungry, I've got a menu in the replicator for her under Alenis Kappa Three. Don't worry, it comes with a bowl so you don't have to put it in your mouth." Alenis shared in the joke with Jason, knowing that in this bleak of a situation, any brief moment of levity would be invaluable. "Take care of her, and if you need anything at all, hail me right away."

Jason felt his stress reduce some as Ko-ko cooed softly in his ear. He smiled at Alenis' joke. "Thank you again, ma'am, I'll take good care of her."

Meanwhile in Sickbay: Finale

Sickbay, USS Portland

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru, Lt. (JG) Jason Beauvoir and Lt. (JG) Brad Silverton

The Captain walked out of Brad's office and he went back to reading. Maybe he had missed something. All the new groundbreaking research required groundbreaking equipment, of which he had zilch. Ko-Ko hopped up on a cabinet near his doorway and Brad just looked at the bird.

Hmmm, thought Brad. Maybe I've been looking at this wrong. I don't have the equipment for traditional radiation treatments so I'm going to have to get creative and perhaps a little crazy. Which seeing as stage 3 neurological damage will be on setting soon isn't out of the question.

He continued to look at Ko-Ko who was now staring back at him locked eye to eye. Brad tilted his head quizzically. Ko-Ko mimicked his head tilt perhaps out of quizzical curiosity what this human who tried to grab her was up to. Brad then started to frantically search through some historical research. Ko-Ko went to pecking at a transparent aluminum window but grew bored and flew out of Brad's sight.

Several minutes past and Jason and Meru had finished talking. The Captain was leaving when Brad shouted, "AH-HA!" and raced out of his office.

Hearing the shout, Alenis turned away from the door to face the Doctor.

"Nurse Hill I'll need your assistance here," said Brad, "My hands are a bit shaky. Replicate 50 CCs of Trimetephane..."

Maria looked on confused, "Um. Sir that is a veterinarian cancer drug used for birds that hasn't been used for 80 years?"

"Yes I know I know just do it. It's one of the few drugs we can actually replicate. Then replicate 100 CCs of Omygdolan and combine the two."

Maria shook her head but did as the doctor said. "Doctor Silverton that was an anti-rejection drug used back in during live organ transplants. I barely remember it from my medical history class."

Brad sighed, "Yes Maria I am aware of that and wouldn't mind a good discussion on it but Jena and I really don't have the time."

Concerned after hearing Nurse Hill's comments. "Doctor, are sure this will work? You could make yourself and my daughter worse." Jason said.

"Yes well this is all I have to try with what I have to work with." Brad waves his hands around the incomplete sickbay.

"Don't worry though I wouldn't dream of pulling some crazy stunt on your daughter."

Brad grabs the hypo out of Maria's hand before she could consider if he had brain damage from the radiation yet or not. He injects himself with it.

"Well I'll either die horribly any moment now from the Trimetephane or live as the Omygdolan prevents my body from shutting down. Either way the radiation problem should be cured."

Everyone looked on at Brad who seemed fine. "HA-HA. I'll have to contact Doctor Huxergard that his theories seem to be correct."

"Doctor Huxergard?" asked Alenis. "Who is he? Did he come up with this treatment plan?"

"It was Ko-ko that gave me the idea actually. She reminded me of Doctor Daryl Huxergard's work on Tesderal IV. He had worked with an avian humanoid race whose planet's star had increased radiation output. He was able to use Trimetephane to help their sick due to their avian physiology. He had made some cross species theories based upon the rougher cruder drugs of old that weren't as refined and specialized as the modern drugs. He never had a chance to test them but I just proved them. Not the ideal way to do research but it seemed to do the trick."

"Well, I told you Ko-ko was a smart bird," replied Alenis. "Will this work on Jena?"

"Nearly positive. We'll give it another 30 minutes just to be sure there are no side effects in me and that everything is ok." Brad turns to Jason and Jena.

"Unfortunately Jena I'll have to ask you to continue to suffer a bit more discomfort and slight pain for a while but I suspect you'll have a full recovery." Brad turned to Maria.

Jena smiled in spite of the pain. "Well, I think I can manage that, Doctor, after all I don't have any

pressing engagements at this time." She said in the over-exaggerated way of a holovid countess.

The stress and strain of the last few hours finally catching up with him, Jason's leg buckled beneath him and he crumbled to the deck. Ko-ko sensing what was about to happen alighted from his shoulder and onto a nearby cabinet, before the Chief Science Officer met the deck.

"Jason!" shouted Alenis, rushing in to catch him but not being quite fast enough. As Maria and Brad surrounded the Lieutenant collapsed on the floor, Alenis cautiously backed off, reasoning that it was best to leave the practice of medicine to the professionals. She went to the replicator; normally she would turn her nose up at replicated teas, but in a pinch, some replicated Pyrellian ginger tea might help the Lieutenant relax a little. Not to mention that he probably hadn't eaten or drank anything since the morning.

When Jason came to on a bed next to Jena's, the first thing he saw was a large colorful bird perched on his chest, staring him down. Alenis stood beside him, offering him a glass of tea and apologizing in advance for the poor quality.

"Hello, Jena, Ko-ko, Captain. What happened?" Jason said turning to each in turn, before sitting up and accepting the tea from Alenis.

"You neglected to consume your required minimum daily intake and as such experienced a instance of syncope." Jena explained.

"I didn't eat anything, so I passed out?" Jason asked before taking a sip of tea, something he instantly regretted.

"In layman's terms, yes." Jena replied.

"Oh." He said. Then turned to Alenis and handed back tea cup. "Thank you for the tea, but that really is a disgusting blend. I have some real Vulcan spice tea in my quarters, if you'd like to share it with me some time." He told her.

"I'd love to," replied Alenis, one not prone to turning down a good cup of tea. She gave Jason a warm smile. "My apologies for the tea. Normally, I wouldn't offer my worst enemy a glass of replicated stuff, but without a teapot handy, I didn't have much option."

Jena rolled her eyes. Jason really was incorrigible sometimes. Lying on a biobed, in a weakened state, he'd just asked the Captain out, or rather 'in'.

And even more incredulously, it seemed to be working.

Author: Alenis Meru
Bridge, USS Portland
After the sickbay scene

After the excitement in sickbay, Alenis returned to the bridge, but not before making herself a glass of tea in her office. It was a long day, and with her Executive Officer taking care of some "personnel issues," it would be a couple hours before she would be relieved for the night. After the excitement earlier in the day, sitting on the bridge while nothing of note was happening seemed anti-climactic. That is, until they received a message.

"Commander, message for you," said R'vahis. "It's Vike."

"Put him on screen," replied Alenis as she placed her tea mug to the side.

On the screen, Vike's face appeared. But it wasn't the same as before. His hair was singed, and the left side of his face was covered with plasma burns. And instead of being at the command chair of a powerful warship, he was flying a small Orion auxiliary vessel, about the size of a runabout. "Well done, Commander Alenis," he said in a sarcastic tone, slow-clapping for emphasis.

"Ah, Mr. Vike." Alenis stared him down on the viewscreen. "I'm afraid at our last encounter, you left before I could say goodbye."

"My apologies for any rudeness," he replied, sneering, "But I had some... urgent matters to attend to on my ship."

"I see. Well, to what do I owe the pleasure?" Alenis was rapidly getting tired of this conversation.

Vike smirked at Alenis. "I just wanted to drop you a line to tell you that I'll be seeing you again. And next time, you won't be so lucky," he added, scowling for emphasis

"You know, Vike, those are strong words for a guy who just had his ship destroyed."

"Touché, Commander. But I've gained something far more valuable today. The Orion syndicate has many ships, and you've made a powerful enemy today. For my ship, my crew, my face... you will pay tenfold."

"Threatening a Starfleet captain?" replied Alenis in a dismissive tone. She was not one to take kindly to threats. "That's a bold move; a foolish one too."

"Perhaps. But I am a man who keeps my promises. And I promise you, you and your crew will regret crossing me. Goodbye, Captain."

Old flames...

Captain's Quarters, USS Portland

En route to DS9

The evening after launch

Authors: Cmdr. Alenis Meru and Lt. (JG) Arvel Darze

Alenis looked around her quarters. The Portland, being an older ship, meant that they weren't quite as large or luxurious as those on newer vessels. Hers were nearly bare; she was still living out of her suitcase, as she hadn't even had time to unpack. She'd done almost nothing so far to make these quarters her own; the only things not standard federation issue in her living room where her tea kettle on the counter and her belaklavion in one corner.

And Ko-ko, of course. She had an adventurous day the day before, and was resting in a cage near the window, pecking away at the food that Alenis replicated for her.

Tonight Alenis was brewing tea for two. The counselor graciously offered to come by for a house call, and it would be rude not to offer him a drink. Doubly so considering their previous relationship. As the water boiled, she was interrupted by the chime of the door. "Come in!" she shouted as she

quickly straightened her uniform.

Arvel stood outside her quarters and wanted to go inside but waited a minute he didn't want to appear too eager to go inside her quarters. He cared for her and wasn't sure what to think of how this relationship/counseling would work or if she even wanted that to happen. He was glad she wanted to keep Ko-ko, that bird had made his life miserable with her friend Alenis gone.

He came inside and looked at her she looked nice even in her uniform, "Hey there," He smiled at her the smile was warm and genuine and added as he came towards her then glanced at the cage with Ko-ko, "Seems like Ko-ko is right at home, and what kind of tea is this?" He asked noticing the tea kettle.

"Pyrellian ginger tea. I remember it was your favorite," Alenis said without thinking as she strode towards the counter. As the boiling water filled Arvel's mug, she suddenly realized the implications of her words. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to... what I meant was..." she paused to exhale and collect her thoughts before babbling any further. "Look, Arvel, we can't keep beating around the bush any longer. We need to talk."

Smiling Arvel said to her simply, "You are right talking right here right now would be perfect. I think it would be the best thing at the moment. And as for the tea it is my favorite. When will it be ready?" He smelled the scent of the tea and smiled, "What kind of things would you like to discuss about us?" His eyes were warm and tender towards her.

That look. He had to give her that look. It was the same look that he had given her so many times years ago. When they were just Meru and Arvel, not Commander Alenis and Lt. Darze. She'd not expected to ever see him again, but by some cruel trick of fate, here he was, in her quarters.

Yet, for the past two years, a part of her missed him dearly. For a long time, she carried at the back of the mind the words she would say on the off chance she ever saw him again. Yet now that he was here in her quarters, Alenis was at a loss for words.

"Arvel..." Alenis glanced back down at the steeping tea for a moment, staring into the swirls. Her eyes closed, she let out a deep breath before starting over. This was difficult for her, and it was not made easier by the fact that she barely got a wink of sleep the night before without the help of the tranquilizers she'd been taking. "Arvel, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for how things ended between us. What happened at the end, none of it was my intention." With a mug in each hand, she made a beeline for a seat on the curved sectional sofa next to her guest. "You have to understand, I... I..." Normally stoic, Alenis was beginning to crack. "I didn't want to hurt you."

Arvel accepted the mug in his hand and took it gently his hands brushing up against hers slightly and for sure on purpose. As he then looked up slowly into her eyes there was warmth and a bit of pain, though the pain didn't show in his voice, "A saying I heard once I am not sure whether it is from Earth or elsewhere, though I believe it is applicable throughout the Universe is this: 'All things happen for a reason and a purpose' What I mean to say is I forgive you, I've spent a lot of time thinking and realized that I can't change what has happened in the past what I can change is how I can approach this in the future."

He smiled at her, "I've learned to let it go because every moment I spend here with you is worth more than any moments that I could've spent worrying and fretting over things. It's what is ahead of us not behind that matters." He then heard Ko-ko chime in with slight noise that was soothing. "Oh and by the way the tea smells exactly how I remember it."

"If you would ever like a cup, feel free to stop by," replied Alenis with a smile. For a moment, she stared longingly into his dark eyes. "That's why this is so hard. I'd like to... but this can't be." A single tear began to form at the corner of her eye, which she quickly wiped away. This is what they meant by the loneliness of command. "I'm your captain; you're my doctor. And Starfleet regulations..." Alenis held her head in her hands. She couldn't bear to have him see her cry.

Arvel grew quiet for a moment he wanted this to happen, he had hoped it would but now that it had he was just in complete shock and awe. "Well then," He smiled at her as he sipped his tea, "Just because it's against regs doesn't mean we can't bend the rules a little bit. Don't you agree? I mean I am your Doctor so I can come back for sessions here many times and people don't have to know if I leave or not. It's just that simple. We can continue or start anew it's up to you."

Alenis looked back up at Arvel as she wiped away the tears. As captain of a Starfleet vessel, she had sworn to uphold the rules and regulations of Starfleet, and hold herself to a standard that was beyond reproach. Were something like this to get out, it could ruin her career and damage any sense of order on the Portland. It saddened her to think that they had to keep everything secret. As long as Alenis was the captain and Arvel was a member of her crew, their feelings for each other had to be kept under wraps. They couldn't hold hands, or visit each other in the holodeck, or even sit together in Ten-Forward. In fact, outside of the bare minimum required for duty, they couldn't be seen together lest rumors start spreading.

"Let's just take it slow for now," said Alenis. "It's not perfect, but if we have to." She wasn't quite ready to be so suddenly thrown back into the arms of the man she left two years ago. "Now, I believe I'm in need of some neuropressure," she added as she began unbuttoning her tunic.

Watching her carefully he hated the fact that this would have to happen nothing other than this though is this better than nothing? It was. "Alenis," He said softly towards her as he helped her off with her tunic, "You are totally correct you are in need of Neuropressure, more so now than ever. Though," he said with a smile in his eyes he couldn't help but joke about this, "What about Ko-ko? Can we trust she will keep her mouth shut?" He said as he placed the tea cup which was now empty down and started to work on Alenis's shoulders.

"I'm sure Ko-ko can be trusted," replied Alenis as she tried to relax her muscles. "And please, it's Meru," she added. To her, it was jarring to hear Arvel refer to her by her first name, especially in such a setting. As he manipulated her flesh, working out months of knots and aches, Alenis pondered their situation. Having to sneak around like a couple of teenagers trying to hide from their parents was hardly ideal. They were adults, and it was criminal for Starfleet regulations to try to rob them of what they both clearly desired. But her thoughts always turned to Arvel. She didn't realize when she left the depth of his feelings for her. Nor did she realize, until she was light years away, that they were mutual.

"That was wonderful, Doctor," she said as she turned back towards him. In doing so, their dark, expressive eyes caught each other's in a way they hadn't before, at least not for two years. Drawn closer, she slowly leaned in...
