

Star Trek: Independence For the Empire

By Dnoth

*“QAJDS W’ NAYSQSP PAXIGJJS SAP YAF S PAXEPJJS
NVA’ - QPSS KJQPEX*

*“Yojbe’ ta’,voDleH mo’che’Daj poH ‘ach, ‘a mo’wlvDaj nuwuq”
- Iljbe’ qeyllS*

*“A leader is judged not by the length of his reign but by the decisions he makes.”
– Kahless the Unforgettable (DS9: “Tacking into the Wind”)*

PROLOGUE

Stardate: 54279.5 (13 April 2377)

In Orbit of Hachar (Klingon Designation: Fo’puk II)

Unclaimed Space Near the Federation and the Klingon Empire

A single bi-stage rocket left the confines of the planet. It separated. The second fuel source ignited and it sped away with new vigor. Just as it neared its target, a disruptor beam annihilated the nuclear device.

Supplemental

State of Ko’hachar

Hachar, Northwestern Continent

General Vacham watched the nightmare overhead from a tracking station as her planet’s desperate bid to ward off the alien ships failed. She, like most Harcharans, stood about two meters in height. Her thick, long locks of hair whipped around as she strode to another display. “Launch warheads 11 through 20! All at the lead space ship!”

The launch never came. A subordinate reported, “General, the aliens have destroyed our launchers!”

“Which ones?”

The response sent a cold chill down the general’s spine, “All of them.”

Dumbfounded, Vacham sat. There was an inevitability to her tone, “The Universe is against us.”

**Supplemental
State of Go’hachar
Hachar, Southern Continent**

“Elder Tahocha!” called his aide, “It has been confirmed by observatories on all three nations! Five alien spacecraft are in orbit and have begun bombardment of the planet!”

Tahocha was 78 years old. His age and war record earned him the governorship of Go’hachar. He examined his petrified wood desk in contemplation. His already tired face looked up, “Evacuate our cities and military bases. Hide as many of our fighters and tanks as possible. Go’hachar has been occupied once. We will not be occupied again.”

The aide replied, “At once!” and ran out of the office.

The elder whispered to himself, “So this is how it ends.”

**Supplemental
State of Do’hachar
Hachar, Northeastern Continent**

Lord Rachu pounded his fist on the wardroom table, “What do you mean our fighters can’t reach them!”

His vassal explained, “Milord, we have to wait until the invasion fleet enters our atmosphere. Our fighters can’t operate in outer space.”

Rachu growled, “They can wait like cowards in orbit and destroy my fighters from there!”

One of Rachu's lieutenants stepped forward, "Milord, we are defenseless...until they come to us."

"*IF* they come to us," the lord complained.

Supplemental IKS *Jev'Iw* In Orbit of Fo'puk II

The voice of General K'vada could be heard in the transporter bay. Six individual transporter stations ran along the perimeter of the large room. The stench was thick of bloodwine and body odor as warriors filed onto the daises. ..."*batlh Daqawlu'taH!*...You will be remembered with honor!" continued the general's speech through the intercom.

The newly minted first officer observed the chaos from the upper catwalk. It was time for him to join the invasion force. Though, he was of noble blood; he wouldn't have been made officer...first officer, no less...without the influence of others. It was a fact, he...and the second officer, J'pak...was keenly aware of. He needed to prove himself to survive. This was his chance. The first officer stepped onto the officers' transporter platform and commanded, "*jol ylchu'.*"

The *Jev'Iw's* second-in-command found himself in the middle of a large group of his kin. As soon as they materialized, they ran and roared battle cries. Some wielded disruptors, others *bat'leths*, many only held a *d'k tahg* as they charged. The first officer joined them. He didn't know where he was running to...he simply followed the group in front of him. He knew the transport site was identified as a military compound.

Soon, the first officer heard the sounds of combat, grunts, small arms fire, and death groans. Despite his better judgment, he moved toward it. His warriors were meeting resistance from the natives.

The first officer got a first glimpse of their victims. The Hacharans were tall and strong. He remembered Captain Ch'Pogh saying, "They would make great subjects for the Empire." The Hacharans used magnetic projectile weapons.

Many Klingons fell in their charge, only to have others step over their dead bodies.

The officer picked his first target. A single Hacharan was fighting his warriors with a *bat'leth* from a fallen Klingon. The Hacharan fought with ferocity. Two...three...Klingons fell at his hand in as many seconds.

Without thinking, the young Klingon officer drew his *mek'leth* and screamed as his legs propelled him to the imposing fighter. In the chaos, he lunged. After a blur, the first officer found himself face to face with the dark-skinned soldier. The Hacharan's hand was around his throat, but he wasn't squeezing. The expression on his enemy's face changed.

The anger in the Hacharan's face faded, his eyes dulled. Blood spouted from his mouth. Slowly, he slowly fell to the ground.

Only then, did the Klingon realize his blade was protruding from the fighter's chest. He was in shock. The officer had fired torpedoes, but he had never killed like this. ...Not this close.

One of his warriors, an old male named Gow'ka, joined him and looked down upon the dead man. Gow'ka clutched his superior's shoulder, "Well done, Alexander, son of Worf!"

CHAPTER 1

Stardate: 54333.1 (2 May 2377)

Hachar (Fo'puk II)

Unclaimed Space Near the Federation and the Klingon Empire

"First Officer's Log: the 1,005th year of Kahless, the ninth day of Lay'tok. Ra'wl'Sogh Alexander, reporting. It's been over two weeks since we first landed on this planet. I never liked to idea of doing...this. At first, the Hacharans fought bravely...but soon, they were overwhelmed.

As per my responsibly, I sometimes tour the labor camps. Those people...they're in shock. I can see the disbelief in their eyes. A month ago, they only knew of aliens in myths and legends; add to that, their new servitude... Now, they are a lost and demoralized race.

On more than one occasion, I've stopped the troops from...well, going too far. Everyone else seems to look the other way. The warriors now look at me with suspicion.

I hate myself for being a part of this."

A black, heavy, leather boot, with a protruding spike smacked the face of a Hacharan female. She cried out as her body tumbled to the concrete ground.

Echi lay there for a moment on the street. The few Hacharans that dared to venture outside quickly scattered, including her daughter, Uli. The city was in ruins. The only movements were of Klingon patrols, small animals, and the occasional Hacharan that scurried about the devastation looking for food or survivors. Bodies littered the area.

As Echi spittled blood, her eyes found Uli. She silently pleaded to her to stay hidden...to not cry out.

A Klingon Defense Force solider picked her up. His uniform crackled as he moved. He clutched her by the throat. "You have not earned the right to look me in the eye, Ha'DIbaH!"

The last syllable produced a bit of phlegm that landed upon her cheek. The other Klingons laughed in amusement.

The ebony Hacharan sunk her thumbs into her attacker's eyes. He immediately let go and wailed.

"Then you will have no eyes!" Echi taunted.

Two KDF soldiers leveled their disruptors.

"No!" called the injured warrior as he took his hand from his bloodshot eyes. "I will teach this bitch respect!"

He grabbed her by the jaw and bit her shoulder, drawing blood. "I enjoy a challenge. I...and my warriors...will break you and then I *will* kill you."

Over the next hour, Uli looked on with horror as the aliens beat, raped, and eventually murdered her mother. Tears flowed, but she made no noise.

Supplemental IKS *Jev'Iw* In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Alexander entered the dimly lit engineering section of the *Fek'lhr* class vessel. Smoke and sparks emitted from workers' tools. He maneuvered around engineers in the cramped compartment and made his way to one of the control stations.

A relatively small Klingon female manned it. Her skin was light and her hair bound in a ponytail. She, unlike some other females, didn't reveal much skin in her uniform. It was more a matter of practicality, being an engineer.

She smiled as she saw his approach, "Alexander."

"Hello Yaava." He stood behind her and put his arms around her waist, "How has your day been, mate?"

She raised his hand and sniffed his wrist. Yaava turned to face him, "Fine...but it isn't over yet."

"Expecting trouble?"

She gently raked his cheek with her nails. "With you around, always."

The ship's second officer, J'pak, could be heard barking orders and walking closer to the couple. "Yaava, why is the coolant pressure low?"

Alexander and the engineer separated. J'pak didn't acknowledge the first officer; itself could be perceived as an insult.

She responded, "We're bleeding the lines. Coolant has to be replaced occasionally, *Sogh*. It will rise again when we are done."

Getting a satisfactory answer only seemed to perturb him further. It was well known what J'pak thought of Alexander. In Klingon tradition, J'pak had a right to challenge Alexander for his position at any time. It was a wonder why he hadn't done so yet.

He added with intent, "I just want to make sure you weren't...distracted."

The subtle attack went unaddressed by Alex. He stumbled, "I need to upload this week's security report, anyway. I'll see you later, Yaava."

She nodded as he left.

As soon as Alexander was out of hear shot, J'pak commented, "What do you see in that *nuch*?"

The engineer went toe to toe with the warrior, "You confuse morality with cowardice, J'pak." She chided, "I'm not surprised you don't know the difference."

The second officer snapped, "Watch your tongue, *lagh*. Your mate is weak. He does not even defend you. He disgusts me." He leaned in, "Soon, I will have his post and when I do, you had better choose your words more carefully!"

"Is that a threat?"

J'pak gave her more space, "It is the way of things."

The heavy, metal door slid open with a clang. Alexander strode in to Captain Ch'Pogh's office with a padd and tossed it on the steal desk. "The report for

this week: 80,000 Hacharans dead. Several were raped before being murdered."

Ch'Pogh, obviously annoyed, put down a handful of *gagh* and slid the bowl aside. He sniffed before saying, "There is a saying on Earth, I'm told; 'boys will be boys.'" The response was not only meant to provide an excuse, but by referencing Earth, Ch'Pogh took a slight jab at Alexander as well. He continued, "How many warriors have we lost?"

"This week, thirty-seven."

"Good, the Hacharans are still fighting. They have strong spirits," the captain said as he put a clump of worms in his mouth.

Alexander stepped forward, "Captain, we should control our troops better. Their behavior is unacceptable."

Ch'Pogh's expression became one of cold malice. He chewed for a moment and swallowed. "You were raised by humans. I would not expect you to understand." He added, "Your position is a precarious one, Alexander, son of Worf. You would be wise to return to your duties and not bring this up again."

"But sir..."

He snapped, "If you want to make a fool of yourself, go ahead and send a complaint to *Qo'noS*. But I will hear no more of this!"

Slowly, Alex realized he got what he wanted: permission to send a complaint up the chain of command. He nodded and exited. On the surface it felt like a victory, but he knew it was only a small step...and perhaps a step in the wrong direction for his career.

After the son of Worf left, Ch'Pogh sighed and activated his communications terminal. The face of the General Lorath, the governor of the prosperous Khemet Sector, appeared.

The gray haired General grinned slightly, "Ch'Pogh, my old adjunct, *nuqneH?*"

"Circumstances have provided an opportunity for us to advance our cause, General. My first officer is the son of Worf...and he does not approve of our mission at Fo'puk II."

Lorath's grin grew, showing his jagged teeth.

CHAPTER 2

Stardate: 54354.3 (10 May 2377)

State of Do'hachar

Hachar, Northeastern Continent

Magnetically propelled bullets shredded through the Klingon uniform. The warrior taking point fell erratically to the deck as he rounded the corner of the underground bunker.

"They've found us!" called out the Hacharan with the automatic weapon, "Get to Lord Rachu! Get him out!"

Those were the guard's last words. Less than a second later, multiple disruptor beams slammed into him.

Duke Nilu saw the carnage from down the corridor. There were still two guards between him and the aliens, but that's all. He didn't need to be prompted to run deeper into the compound.

Within moments, he reached the wardroom. The duke frantically opened and resealed the blast door. He breathed heavily and was barely able to sputter, "Milord...the aliens...they're in the bunker!"

Lord Rachu, a rather dark and bulky man, said with defiance, "Arm yourselves! These creatures die as well as we do!"

The young duke ignored the order, though many others didn't. Nilu made his way through the chaos to the rear exit. As he reached it, the blast doors of the forward entrance exploded out. He knew what would come next. He ran and didn't look back.

An onslaught of red disruptor fire streamed out of the smoke filled corridor. Two natives fell in the first volley. A few Hacharans were able to return fire. Like the warriors they were, the Klingon charged into the room. They took no notice of the enemy fire. If they were shot; they were shot. If they died; they died.

Lord Rachu was more cautious. He took cover behind a console. The aliens seemed to keep flooding into the room. How many were there? He shot one...two of the invaders. But they were nearly on top of him.

One of the aliens reached his position. The creature swung down at him with a long, curved blade. Rachu was able to roll in time to avoid the impact. In desperation, he kicked at the alien and quickly grabbed the handles of the blade. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw his guards floundering against the menace.

Both fought for possession of the *bat'leth*. Rachu saw the eyes of his opponent. The Klingon had a look of intense, brutal, satisfaction on his face. The creature was actually smiling.

The ruler of Do'hachar felt his muscles failing against the alien's. It was only a matter of time. If this one didn't kill him, one of the others would.

Even in his last moments of life, Lord Rachu's ego would not allow regret or defeat. He fought with all his might to gain control, but the alien had maneuvered the blade in the direction of his throat. It crept closer and closer. Rachu began to feel the cold steel press against him. The flow of blood...blackness came.

Supplemental Starbase 90 In Orbit of Cestus III

Lieutenant Jonin Faltyne adjusted his golden, security undershirt as he looked in the mirror. The Andorian scratched his antenna; it instinctively flicked in response. His new ship was scheduled to arrive tomorrow.

Though he'd miss *Deep Space Nine*, there were too many memories there. It was there where he recovered from his months of imprisonment by the Cardassian insurgent group, known as the Crimson Shadow. The counselor there, Ezri Dax, suggested group activities with Bajoran science officer Okala Lahn and Lieutenant Commander Aquiel Uhnari to 'take his mind off things.' He developed a fondness for Lahn, but she was dealing with her own loss. It just wouldn't work out.

He decided it was time to get his career back on track. He applied to all open security/tactical chief slots aboard starships. Personnel cut him orders to the USS *Independence*. Apparently, they lost several security people during a recent mission.

Jonin went on to research more about the ship and crew. Just last year, the *Independence* was the *Jaap Penraat*. This Captain Aurelia must have some connections for her to get that privilege, he thought.

Sintina Aurelia's record looked impressive on the surface. On the *Hood*, she got the Prentares Ribbon. While serving on the *Renegade*, she received the Starfleet Citation for Valor. Then, at 35, she was made captain of the *Midas* during the war. Aurelia then had one of two *Courageous* class vessels for less than a year, before a design flaw destroyed it. Most of the crew was lost.

He knew all too well what that feeling was like; having lost two ships he served on. The destruction of his previous ship, the *Phoenix*, is what led to his captivity. Ironically, the dead on that ship were more lucky than the survivors, which were still at Starfleet Medical; victims of a neural toxin.

The Andorian picked up a padd to read further on his new CO. Aurelia, along with others, saved Norah Satie, the new UFP president, from an assassination attempt. *'That answers the connection question,'* he concluded.

Her psychological profile was, of course, restricted. But via the 'grape vine,' Jonin heard Aurelia had a reputation as being impulsive; a shoot-first-and-ask-questions-later throw back from the last century. On one occasion, she even engaged a *Sovereign* class ship. The other captain, according to the newscasts, had mental issues and was a rapist, however.

'A captain forged from the Dominion War,' he mused, *'maybe this will work out after all.'*

Supplemental IKS *Jev'Iw* In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Alexander got up from his padded bed...he was often criticized for it. He just couldn't sleep on the metal rack that other Klingons were accustomed to. Yaava, whom slept beside him, rustled but didn't wake.

He logged on to the communications network. Red light reflected off his face. After a moment, he puffed, leaned back, and hung his head.

"What is it?"

The first officer looked to his mate. He obviously had made too much noise. "The High Command still hasn't responded to my protest."

Yaava held a unique view on the ship. She was raised on a rather liberal Klingon colony on the far side of the Empire. There, the warrior caste didn't dominate. Her colony promoted the arts and sciences. It was quite a culture shock when she decided to join the KDF during the war. She had no idea how narrow minded many Klingons really were.

Then she meant Alexander, the only Klingon she could relate to. Later, she understood why. He was born of a hybrid mother and raised, either on a Starfleet ship, or on Earth.

"I'm not surprised," she commented, "If they did, they'd have acknowledge they're doing something wrong."

"It's so frustrating!" exclaimed Alex, "I was taught to believe our people were honorable...noble...respectable. In my time here, I've seen very little to back that up." He returned to bed and wrapped his arm around Yaava. "Of course, my father didn't spend much time around Klingons anyway, so how would he know?"

"Maybe you should contact him," she suggested, "You said he is close to Martok."

Alexander shook his head, "I'd rather not. He's done too much for me already. I wouldn't be first officer if I wasn't a member of the House of Martok."

"Martok offered you that privilege, not Worf."

He countered, "Martok felt pressured to allow me in because my father was already a member."

"Still," Yaava said, "you have options you have not yet explored. If you think what we are doing here is wrong, you must set your pride aside." She scooted closer and licked his cheek, "That's why I love you, Alexander. You're one of the few Klingons around here that *can* set their ego aside."

After bathing and dressing, Alexander took his mate's advice. He looked upon his father over sub-space.

Worf shook his head, "It is not wise to question the chancellor on this right now."

"Father," Alex continued, "if you had seen the things that I've seen, you would agree."

"Alexander, there are more things going on at the High Council than you know. Chancellor Martok cannot afford this criticism now. The rest of the council members are always testing him...looking for weakness." He looked off screen for a moment in disgust, "They plot like Romulans."

The son's anger boiled, "So you refuse to address this because it is politically inconvenient?" Without thinking, he added, "Now who is acting like a Romulan?"

The comment took Worf off guard. He snapped all his attention on his son and growled quietly.

Alexander immediately realized his mistake, but he did his best to not show fear.

The ambassador visually calmed himself just enough to prevent an outburst. He said in a low, menacing tone, "Ever since the Second Empire, our people have been expanding in this way. It is what we have done for centuries. Many times, we improve the lives of our subjects."

The response was surprisingly cool and even, "Do you really believe that, father?"

Worf's jaw went tight and he looked down. A part of him was very proud of his son for standing up to him. The situation caused conflict, however.

Alexander saw his father's defenses dwindling, just as they used to when he pleaded to go to the holodeck when he was a child. He pressed on, "Our people are pillaging, raping, and murdering the Hacharans. What is honorable about that?"

With a deep sigh, the son of Mogh found the eyes of his son. He ended the conversation with, "I will...discuss it with Martok."

CHATPER 3

Stardate: 54356.9 (11 May 2377)

State of Go'hachar

Hachar, Southern Continent

Elder Tahocha's thin, long, silver hair flowed in the breeze as he held an impromptu war council.

He ordered what machines of war he had left to scatter across the country side. All were quickly discovered by the invaders and destroyed; except the ones hidden in this wooded valley.

Senior Guardian Pasho addressed the unasked question on everyone's mind. "Our scientists can only guess deposits of various heavy metals in the mountains are hiding us from these...Klingons."

"We can only hope these aliens' overconfidence will allow us to go unnoticed," commented the Elder. He continued, "What resources do we have left?"

Pasho held down a paper that was lifted by the wind. "Twelve tanks, 9 aero-fighters, 1500 soldiers, and we are in contact with 2 remaining submarines." He grimly assessed, "About 2% of our former forces."

Tahocha solemnly nodded. He looked at his council. Many were faces he'd never seen before. They were lower guardians placed in an unnatural situation. Fear was plastered on their faces. The Elder began, "Many of you are not old enough to remember, but many years ago, Go'hachar was occupied by the forces of Lord Chamis of Do'hachar." He made eye contact with each of his subordinates. "Our cities were burned. Our children were taken. Chamis nearly wiped our people out." He placed a frail hand on Pasho, "But we concealed ourselves. We waited and we watched for weakness. When the time came, we forced the Do'hacharans off our lands.

We will do that again. It will not be easy, but it *will* be done."

The group appreciated the anecdote, but doubt still encompassed them.

The cloak of leadership hung off Martok's shoulders. He walked with the son of Mogh in the corridors of the Great Hall.

Worf, who bore the robes of an ambassador, spoke, "I wish to speak of our invasion of Fu'puk II, Chancellor."

The one-eyed, former general, searched his mind. "Ah yes, the Gorn ambassador stated his displeasure at the attack. Luckily, we convinced his government to accept it."

"How did you manage that, Chancellor?"

The Leader of the High Council rejoined, "We conceded our claims on another system we found to be of little value. The Gorn wanted it for some historical reason."

Worf nodded, "That is fortunate. We are not in a position to challenge them at this time. However, I desire to speak of the planet itself."

"I've read reports on that planet recently," stated Martok. "The natives are proving to be worthy foes, despite their less advanced technology. General K'Vada estimates it will take another month to secure the planet."

"I too, have heard reports from the front, Chancellor."

Martok rolled his eye slightly, for two reasons. Despite many promptings, Worf refused to address him by his given name since he had ascended to the chancellorship...and he anticipated the direction of the conversation.

The ambassador continued, "Our warriors' actions have been bringing dishonor to the Empire, there."

Martok stopped and spun around to his companion, "Worf, I know of your son's complaints."

"You knew?"

The chancellor sighed, it was almost a low groan, "You, more than anyone, know how much pressure I am under to expand our borders." He stepped closer, "I was not born of noble blood like the rest of the Council. I am tolerated as leader because of my...support from the lower classes, and my actions during the Dominion War, but that tolerance is waning, Worf."

The former Starfleet officer paused. A hint of guilt hit him. He was the one who put Martok in this position. Worf could not very well complain about the chancellor's performance, now.

"What would you have me do?" pressed Martok, "Withdraw our forces?"

Worf shook his head and admitted, "No...No, the fight has begun. We cannot pull back, now."

"Then what?"

Worf considered, "Perhaps a...a code of ethics...of honor could be imposed upon our warriors."

"Ethics?" Martok repeated as if it were a foreign word, "How do you propose we instill *ethics* to warriors -- Klingon warriors -- who have been trained to kill for generations?"

The son of Mogh looked to the stone floor.

The chancellor's eye found the ambassador's. He continued in a more sympathetic tone, "You're intentions are noble. But if we move forward with this, it will only serve to empower our enemies."

After a moment, Worf began to nod. "Of course, Chancellor. You are right. Now is not the time."

Martok grasped Worf's shoulders, "I need your support, Worf. Do I have it?"

Worf stood taller, "Yes, *Qang* Martok."

With a heavy *CLAK*, the hatch slid open. *Sogh* J'pak walked into the captain's office. His footfalls were loud on the metal deck. Instead of the full uniform, J'pak preferred a vest-type garment. The old and worn uniform belonged to his father. It showed off the young warriors defined muscles.

The second officer pounded his fist on his chest and offered the Imperial salute. "*HoD* Ch'Pogh, you summoned me."

The master of the vessel rose and rounded the desk. "You plan to challenge the son of Worf?" It was more of a statement.

The second officer proudly responded in the affirmative, "*HIja*"

"That is your concern. I have no issue with it," said Ch'Pogh. He walked right up to the warrior and continued, "But you will not act before *I* say you can."

J'pak was confused, "*qatlh*"

The captain blasted, "It is not for you to question 'why,' *Sogh!*" He put his face right up to young officer's. To J'pak's credit, he didn't recoil. "Unless, you intend to challenge me."

As ritual demanded, the second officer looked down, "*ghobe' HoD* Ch'Pogh."

"*maj*," concluded the captain. He returned to his seat, "I look forward to having you as my first officer. Now, be gone."

J'pak saluted once more, "*HIja' HoD*," and promptly left.

An image of Worf repeated on the terminal, "I did attempt to convince Martok, but he could not be swayed."

"These people have done nothing to us!" pleaded Alexander, "They don't deserve what we're doing to them."

The ambassador considered for a moment, "I am sorry, Alexander." He continued, "But you must bear this out. Nothing more can be done."

The son of Worf crossed his arms and leaned back. After a moment of silence, he said, "I understand, father." Without waiting for a valedictory, the KDF officer ended the communication.

Yaava, who overheard the conversation, moved to comfort her mate. "It was worth a try, *loDwlj*." She placed her hands on his shoulders.

Alexander sighed, "There must be something more I can do."

"I don't see what," observed Yaava, "You've protested to everyone that could make a difference in the whole Empire."

He bit his lip and shook his head. A feeling of total dejection came over him. It felt like he had no friends left in the Empire...aside from Yaava, of course.

'...in the Empire,' he thought.

Suddenly, Alexander nearly jumped out of his seat. He grabbed Yaava by the arms in excitement. "Can you get a message out without anyone knowing about it?"

Half startled, she answered, "I could."

CHAPTER 4

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Main Engineering Patrolling the Federation-Gorn Border

The swirling intermix chamber of the *Intrepid* class starship glowed various shades of blue as Lieutenant Angela "Treasure" Barrows, enjoying the rare downtime in the area, propped her feet up on a console as she read a technical report while the country tunes of L. Q. "Sonny" Clemonds played in the background.

The double doors of main engineering parted to allow the first officer, Anara Rysyl, to enter. The smooth headed, female Deltan had a stoic look on her face. Quickly spotting Lieutenant Barrows, Anara walked towards her as the well endowed chief engineer took a more professional posture.

"As you were, Treasure." Commander Rysyl said quickly, flashing the engineer a shaky smile.

"Well hey, Commander," the North Star native began in her usual twang, "Can I help ya wit somethin'?"

"Captain Hobson wanted to put together a requisition request to fleet logistics in advance of our stop at Starbase 90," explained the first officer.

Barrows jumped in, "No problem. I'll make up a list of parts and supplies and get it to ya as soon as I can."

Anara curtsied, "Thanks," and began to walk away.

Concerned about her longtime shipmate and friend, Treasure quickly added, "You ok, hon? Usually this time o' day, you're bouncin' off the walls, but now you look like somethin' the cat dragged in."

The Deltan sighed. She wasn't offended by the casual tone in the least. They had been through enough to drop ranks.

"Is it the captain?" guessed the engineer.

She nodded in response and added, "Let's just say, I picked up on an ...old feeling when I was talking to him."

"Oh," she replied. Treasure was well aware of Hobson and Rysyl's former relationship and how it had changed following their first mission last year.

Not in the mood to talk about it, Commander Rysyl walked off, "Excuse me, I have to talk to Lieutenant Velen."

The engineer understood; a worried look on her face as the Deltan woman retreated back the way she came, "Sure thing, Commander."

"Captain," T'Pren, the lovely Vulcan female head of tactical, called out. Her long, auburn hair was dresses up in a pony tail. "We're receiving a sub-space message. It has a Klingon signature."

Captain Christopher Hobson, sitting in the captain's chair of his first command, looked towards his tactical chief, "Where is it coming from?" He asked in a cool, detached tone.

"I'm not sure. It's being routed through various relays."

Nodding his head, the captain stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Whoever our friend is..." he speculated, "...he doesn't want anyone else to know that he's placing the call. Alright, Mr. T'Pren...put it on screen, if you please."

A young, Klingon officer appeared in the visor staring at Hobson, his eyes filled with a mixture of anguish, disgust, revulsion, and...fear. *Possibly fear of being found out.* The analytical Hobson thought as he regarded the image on his screen.

Standing up Hobson introduced himself, "I'm Captain Christopher Hobson of the Federation ship *Perseus*. Can we assist you?"

"Captain," said the Klingon in a rushed cadence, "My name is Alexander Rozhenko. I'm an officer on board a KDF ship in the Fu'puk system. There is a desperate situation here. Thousands are dying everyday."

With neither his facial expressions nor mannerisms giving any indication of the suddenly very concerned captain, Hobson stepped forward. "What is happening? Are you under attack? It is a virus?"

Alexander shook his head, "No, no. You don't understand. *We* are doing the killing."

Turning his head towards his security chief, Hobson raised an eyebrow in an almost Vulcan gesture as the Vulcan woman shrugged her shoulders in a remarkably human manner. Turning his attention back to the main screen, Chris spoke in a level voice, "Perhaps you should explain what is going on, Officer Rozhenko."

An hour later, the senior officers were in the forward facing conference room.

Standing up as the rest of his officer remained seated, Captain Hobson elaborated to his crew. "According to this Alexander Rozhenko, the Klingons arrived there weeks ago. They've been killing and raping indiscriminately ever since."

T'Pren, a *v'tosh katur* - a Vulcan without logic, added, "I've confirmed his identity. He's the son of Worf..."

"As in Worf...the person who installed Chancellor Martok...Worf?" injected the operations officer, Lieutenant Commander Devon Miller, his eyes widening in astonishment.

"That's right," confirmed the tactical officer testily as she barely restrained herself at the operations officer's interruption.

Junior Lieutenant Yitzhak Shalev leaned in as he brushed back a lock of dark hair, "Why would he ask us for help?"

The first officer fielded the question, "He claims he exhausted his options within the Empire."

"Sir, what does he expect us to do about it?" asked Miller.

Hobson spoke, "He wants us to bring it to the attention of Starfleet Command and the Federation Council, so they can apply political pressure to the Klingons." He walked around the table, "I've contacted Command about the situation and requested instructions. I've also asked additional starships to meet us at the Fu'puk system."

Chuckling at the Klingon designation for the system, Treasure quipped, "Well...at least they didn't call it Fu..."

"Treasure..." Hobson quickly interrupted, "Now, what did I tell you about making fun of the Klingons?"

"That they're too easy a target, sir." The engineer, the smile still on her face as the sound of stifled snickers temporarily filled the room.

"That's right, Lieutenant." Hobson deadpanned with a straight face as he once again addressed his officers. "Are there any other questions?"

"Why do we have to go there, sir?" asked Lieutenant Velen, the Denobulan science officer. "Doesn't this fall under the Prime Directive? After all, the Hacharans didn't issue the distress call. It appears to be an internal Klingon matter."

The captain answered, "A fair question, Mr. Velen. As I see it, we've been given a distress call on behalf of the Hacharans. Fu'puk II is in unclaimed space. We have as much right to be there as the Klingons."

"Captain," started Miller, "with respect, this could become a very...tense situation-especially if there is a Klingon power play going on."

"Don't worry, Mr. Miller" Hobson replied, "I have no intension of starting a war with the Klingons, but we still have a responsibility to at least investigate the claims. Once we get a handle on what is going on, then we can move on from there."

Supplemental

USS Independence docked with Starbase 90

In Orbit of Cestus III

Captain Aurelia, Lieutenant Commander bin Nadal, and Counselor Kimula sh'Somachanar waited at the port side hatch. They heard the gantry contact the hull and begin to pressurize.

“Are we supposed to get a new helm officer?” asked Aurelia. Her jet black hair nearly touched her combadge, “I’m gonna catch hell for getting so close to the spacedock hatch.”

First Officer Karim bin Nadal searched his mind, “Um...yes, actually. But he’s right out of the academy.”

“I’m sure he’ll be a step up from Crewman Orlaka,” commented the Central American captain.

“Oh come on,” said the Andorian counselor, “You were a helm officer once. Surely you’ve had some close calls too.”

A smirk appeared on Sintina’s cappuccino-colored face. “Once when I was on the *Hood*, Commander Riker yelled at me when I...”

The noise of the heavy hatch opening caused Aurelia to cut off her story. Kimula was visually disappointed. The trio straightened up as the starbase commander came into view.

Rear Admiral Kavig, a stout Tellarite, immediately pointed to Aurelia in an accusatory fashion. “You nearly put a dent in my spacedock!”

The captain was relieved to see a Tellarite in charge of the base. She wouldn’t have to hold back. “Who would notice one more? This place looks like its run by a group of Pakleds.”

“Pakleds?” repeated the admiral.

Aurelia quickly added, “What’s a matter? Can’t come up with a comeback?”

Several heavy puffs came from Kavig. He eventually relented. A large smile emerged, “Well played, Captain!” He opened his arms, “Welcome to Starbase 90!”

She curtsied, “Thank you, sir.”

“Unfortunately,” he continued, “We’ll have to rush your personnel and supply transfer.”

“Why’s that, sir?” asked the blue-skinned Kimula.

"I was getting to that! Give me a chance to breathe!" blasted the admiral. He did so, "As I was saying, The *Perseus* has requested assistance, so we need to get you in and out."

"How long do you think it'll take your crew to do that, sir?" questioned bin Nadal.

Kavig responded with pride, "I can get you ready to go in three hours." He jested, "Whether you can get your ship out the door after that is debatable."

Sintina repressed a '*kiss my ass.*' Resorting to profanity was considered a weak defense. She was beginning to flounder. Soon, Admiral Kavig would claim victory.

Luckily, Kimula came through. She said, "We have good motivation. ...To get away from the stench."

The Tellarite let out a belly laugh and said, "I best not linger..."

"Too late for that, sir," cut in the counselor.

Karim winced. The game was over, but the Andorian perpetuated it.

The admiral, however, simply didn't have the time. He commented, "Impressive." Kavig shook it off, "We have work to do, Captain." Then, he walked back down the gantry.

"So much for shoreleave," observed bin Nadal.

The trio headed back into the vessel. Sintina shook her head, "I knew you were blunt, Kim, but damn..."

She grinned, "I like Tellarites."

CHAPTER 5

Supplemental IKS *Kang*, Fleet Commander's Office In Orbit of Fu'puk II

The room was red lit and the air was thick.

"I will bring this *petaQ* before me and have him executed! Son of Worf or not!" blasted General K'Vada.

"No," commented General Lorath from the screen.

An indignant K'Vada repeated, "No?" He continued, "Your lap dog," he gestured to Ch'Pogh who stood in the room, "has told me about his signal sent into Federation space. That alone is enough to warrant his removal."

"General," began Lorath, "Martok does not deserve leadership. There is an opportunity here to weaken his support. ...He didn't even kill Gowron himself!"

K'Vada spat, "If you want his post, then challenge the chancellor directly, *QuchHab!*"

Lorath rose from his chair and glared at the fleet commander. K'Vada had used one of the most heinous insults in the Klingon vocabulary ... 'smooth forehead.' It was true, Lorath's family, for an unknown reason, hadn't recovered from the unspoken affliction. "You forget your place, Commoner," huffed the governor. "I served the Empire long since before you were born. I have earned my position through bloodshed and sacrifice...and you will show me respect, *Sa'K'Vada!*"

The younger general stood down. Lorath did indeed have a reputation for being a true Klingon, but in this instance...

Lorath continued ominously and unnecessarily, "My House is powerful, K'Vada. I could break you *and* your family."

The threat was not very 'honorable,' but the general knew all too well it could be done. He hated Klingons like this. Despite Lorath's service, too often in the Empire wealthy also meant powerful. Nearly gone were the days when battle prowess earned rank. He and Martok were exceptions. Though, he didn't like

the chancellor. He hated the aristocracy. K'Vada was a good general, so he knew when and how to pick his fights. He relented, "What is it you want from me?"

The door parted to reveal Jonin Faltyne's first look at the bridge of the *Steamrunner* class *Independence*. Flight control was the nearest station. A young, human pink-skin sat there. His hair was a light brown. They made eye contact.

"You must be Lieutenant Faltyne," he ensign observed. He rose and offered a hand, "I'm the other new guy on the bridge, Bradley Weston."

The Andorian took the hand, "Good to meet you, Ensign." He added, "Where's the captain?"

She's in her ready room, answered another Andorian. The female had a warm smile, "I'm Kimula sh'Somachanar, Comm. Officer and Counselor."

"sh'Somachanar?" he repeated. "That's rather formal, isn't it?"

"Well," she explained, "My family is very...traditional."

Jonin read between the lines. He spoke a bit brasher than he intended, "Traditional or elitist?"

"Well...we...um..." she stammered.

He backpedaled a bit, "I don't mean to offend, Lieutenant sh'Somachanar..."

"Kimula," she corrected, "I just go by Lieutenant Kimula around here."

Faltyne asked, "Why don't you just use an abridged name, like the rest of the so-called nobility has for hundreds of years?"

Under normal circumstances, Kimula would have taken issue with him, but the topic of discussion took her off guard. Nobility existed on Andoria in name only. Her mother insisted on using the unabridged version. The sh'Somachanar's were a 'well off' family and Kimula grew up in a privileged environment. It was not often she had to deal with the social consequences of

her mother's decision. Finally, Kimula responded, "I guess I could go by 'Soma.' I've...just never worried about it."

Jonin suddenly felt guilty. He was not off to a good start. He offered, "I'm sorry, Lieutenant. I didn't mean to judge."

She unconvincingly said, "No, that's fine." Kimula pointed aft, "Aurelia's office is the port door."

The new Andorian security/tactical chief nodded and said meaningfully, "Thank you."

The enunciator sounded. It was the fifth time in an hour. "New people," Sintina grumbled. She put down the padd, leaned back and said, "Come in."

An Andorian wearing gold trim of medium build walked in and announced, "Lieutenant Jonin Faltyne reporting for duty, sir."

Aurelia rolled her eyes. She hated training new people. "Ma'am."

"Sorry, sir?"

She raised her voice just a bit, "Refer to me as 'ma'am.'"

"Oh," he recovered, "Yes, ma'am."

"Better." She picked up another document. "You said your Faltyne?"

He still stood at attention, since she hadn't yet said differently. "Yes, ma'am."

"We have something in common. We've both lost two ships," she observed without looking up from the text.

Unsure of how to respond, he stated, "Yes, ma'am."

"Your former CO's give you high praise, Lieutenant," she continued. This time she looked up, "At ease."

"Thank you, ma'am."

She read about his captivity, but consciously didn't mention it. There was something else, though -- something Donald Sandhurst told her yesterday. She wasn't as unprepared for the meeting as she appeared. She stated, "You once refused a direct order from Captain Sandhurst of the *Gibraltar*."

He was caught unprepared. Commander Ramirez agreed not to report the incident. "How..."

"I have my sources."

The Andorian nearly reassumed the more ridged position, "Yes, ma'am. But I did eventually comply."

"Eventually," she echoed as she got up. "I know Captain Sandhurst. The *Gibraltar* saved our asses once. He strikes me as a good man and a competent officer. Why would you disobey him?"

"With respect ma'am," he began, "you weren't there. My ship was under attack and I wasn't so willing to let the people who did it to go unpunished."

She got up closer and said in a command voice, "Lieutenant..." Her tone became softer, "If you show that same loyalty and dedication to this ship, we'll get along fine."

A wave of relief flowed over Jonin. A small smile escaped.

Captain Aurelia concluded with, "Take your station, Lieutenant. We'll be underway in a few minutes."

He curtsied, "Aye, ma'am."

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Captain's Ready Room In route to Fu'puk II

Captain Christopher Hobson viewed one of his peers via subspace.

Long range scans of the fleet identified it at the Eighth Klingon Task Force. It was lead by General K'Vada, most recently known for his deplorable tactics used against the Cardassian colony of Lakesh.

The possibility of Alexander's allegations being true jumped up a notch in the captain's mind.

One Starfleet captain saw K'Vada's actions firsthand. Captain Sandhurst continued his insight, "In my opinion, there are two types of people in the universe: Klingons... and everyone else."

A very subtle smirk momentary emerged on Hobson's face.

"K'Vada is a Klingon's Klingon," he elaborated, "He wasn't much for talking or having to explain himself. He'll respect your actions, not your words."

Hobson nodded and leaned forward, "So attempting to verbally dissuade him would be futile."

The slightly graying captain tilted his head, "That'd be a fair assessment, Captain."

The *Perseus* captain took a deep breath, "Thank you for your advice, Captain Sandhurst."

"One more thing," volunteered Sandhurst, "I once heard a quote from a former ambassador to *Qo'NoS*. He said, 'In the end, the only ones who can really handle Klingons...are Klingons.'"

Hobson searched his mind, "That's from Ambassador Dax, as I recall." He added, "I know what you mean, Captain. But with Commander Worf gone, there are no Klingons serving in the fleet."

"True," admitted the *Gibraltar* commander, "but we have the next best thing."

CHAPTER 6

Supplemental USS *Destrier* Gamma Orionis System

Since *Defiant* class vessels lacked any sort of recreational facilities, the crew of the *Destrier* were masters of converting any nook or cranny of the ship into an impromptu rec. area. Currently, shuttlebay one served as a *pa'qeq*, a training room; in this case for *mok'bara*, a Klingon martial art.

Captain Nandali Kojo paced around her sparring students. She was a very toned and muscular Kriosian. She could be mistaken for human, if it wasn't for subtle 'Trill-like' spots. She dispassionately assessed her small class. Then, with a single, thunderous clap, ordered them to pause.

"Mister Rawl, your form is excellent," she commented, "however..." She charged him and screamed with fury.

Rawl, a rather large Bolian, froze. He wasn't sure how to act or what to do.

Kojo made a simple downward hammer attack, which he failed to deflect. The security officer fell to his knees with a groan. In an instant, the Kriosian had the much larger Rawl in a head lock. Her arm expertly targeted his carotid arteries.

The Bolian's eyes began to flutter.

The five other members of the *mok'bara* class watched on in bewilderment and shock.

She released Rawl. His reflexes forced him to cough and he began to massage his neck. The captain casually asked the remaining students, "What was Lieutenant Rawl's mistake?"

Her only response was blank stares and agape jaws.

After an appropriate silence, Kojo answered her own question, "He began to think." She helped the still recovering man to his feet and continued, "*Mok'bara*...and many other martial arts...are about teaching you to act without thought."

Ensign Stell, the ship's primary helm officer, inquired, "Captain, how can one act without thinking, first? The concept seems illogical."

She began to pace, "On the surface, Mister Stell, I can see your confusion. However, if you practice your forms over and over again, your body...your muscles...will remember the movements and react quicker and without conscious thought." She planted herself, and concluded, "So the next time you get attacked suddenly, you will not think 'Why is that person attacking me?' or 'What technique should I use to defend myself?' Your body will already know what to do."

The students confirmed with "*Hlja' pIn'a*"

The Kriosian pointed to another student, "Work on your head butts. If you want to fight like a Klingon, you had better get used to it." She dismissed the students with a booming, "*naDev vo' ylghoS*"

As the class dispersed, the com activated, "Captain Kojo, we're receiving a priority message from the USS *Perseus*."

Kojo responded with a simple, "Understood."

Supplemental Ko'hachar Submarine Twelve Under the Northern Ocean

In the blackness of the deep, two vessels of pervious enemies rendezvoused. An umbilical joined them.

A guard swung open the water tight hatch. In the room beyond was General Vacham. The female Hacharan seemed to have an excess of muscles. She was, in fact, a more impressive specimen than the Duke.

Duke Nilu cautiously entered the chamber.

Vacham was flanked by two other officers. She stood and offered, "Thank you for meeting with us."

He silently nodded and took a chair at the table.

The general sat and continued, "I'm sorry for the death of your uncle, Duke Nilu."

He spoke it as he was tired of saying it, "We've all lost loved ones to these invaders."

Vacham was in no mood for pleasantries, particularly with current company. "Then, let's press on to the problem at hand," she said. "Despite our history, we must unite our forces."

Nilu morbidly chuckled, "Forces? With the exception of that sub, I have no forces."

"You have nothing left?"

"For the last 30 years," he explained, "Do'hachar has enjoyed a superior military stance. I'm afraid my uncle had no concept of fighting a guerilla war."

The general leaned back and crossed her arms, "I've already been in contact with someone who does."

Do'hachar's de facto head of state bitterly sighed, knowing exactly who she was talking about.

Stardate: 54368.1 (15 May 2377)
USS *Independence*, Main Bridge
At Rendezvous Point (Two Light-Years from the Fu'puk System)

Captain Aurelia stood from the center seat, "Report."

Lieutenant Faltyne began, "The *Perseus* is holding station 54 kilometers to starboard."

"They're hailing," added Kimula.

Aurelia turned, "What's this guy's name?"

'Guy? We're talking about a Starfleet captain.' thought the new tactical chief.

"Hobson, Christopher Hobson," answered the female Andorian.

“Put him up,” ordered Sintina.

A light-skinned man with brown hair appeared. There was no warmth in his face. He evenly started, “Captain Aurelia, we’re expecting the *Destrier* within a few hours. When they arrive, please report to the *Perseus* for a briefing.”

Aurelia blinked several times. She glanced at Karim, whom shrugged a shoulder. She addressed her peer, “Well...ok.”

“Very well,” crisply responded Hobson, “*Perseus* out.” The screen reverted to a live view of the *Intrepid* class starship.

“It makes sense, now,” commented Kimula, whom had recently started going by Lieutenant Soma. The conversation with her brethren had guilt-tripped her.

Karim turned in his chair, “What makes sense?”

“I’ve heard rumors about Hobson,” she explained, “People who’ve worked with him call him ‘Iceman.’”

“Iceman?” questioned the Latino captain.

“Yeah,” continued the Andorian com. officer, “apparently, he shows very little emotion and doesn’t rattle at all under pressure.”

Aurelia commented in a hushed tone, “Why I don’t I have a nickname?”

Commander bin Nadal heard her complaint and leaned in with a grin, “You do. We just don’t say it to your face.”

She rolled her eyes, “I can imagine.”

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Captain’s Ready Room At Rendezvous Point

Commander Rysyl entered. She sensed it again. A thought...just a passing thought. She was bonded to this man as only a Deltan can be. The former

intimacy allowed for a psychic link. Powerful pheromones didn't help the situation. The factors intensified when they were alone. She felt a fleeting sense of anxiety and longing from him. As soon as she felt it, it was successfully repressed.

"You wanted to see me, Captain," she began.

"Yes," he handed her a padd, "I've been scanning over the profiles of our assistance and I want a second opinion."

Anara took the document and sat.

Hobson prompted, "Take a look at Captain Kojo, first."

After a few moments of silence, "I can see why you wanted her here. She's from a Klingon subject world, was married to a Klingon, and has an impressive, if not -- troublesome record."

"What's your opinion of Captain Aurelia?"

"Well," the Deltan observed, "she seems to have an ... independent streak." She supplemented, "No pun intended."

Hobson wasn't fazed by the comment. He sat forward and assessed, "Neither one seems to play well with others."

"I don't know if that's fair, Chris," she said. "Didn't Captain Shelby work with Aurelia once after we left the *Sutherland*?"

"Yes," confirmed Hobson, "and she found her to be a bit too arrogant for her own good. Aurelia's recklessness nearly ruined the mission."

Anara tipped her head in concession.

"And to top it off," added the Iceman, "take a look at the *Independence's* chief engineer."

"Windslow," she read. Anara looked up, "I've heard that name somewhere."

"He was once a captain. Windslow was convicted of deserting his crew and covering it up."

“And he’s still in Starfleet?” questioned the first officer.

Hobson cocked his head ever so slightly, “A testament to our losses with the Dominion.”

Suddenly, Rysyl was concerned, “You’re not holding that against him, are you?” It wouldn’t be the first time Chris held a grudge.

“Yes I do,” he honestly replied. “Don’t get me wrong, I don’t chastise him for running.” He leaned forward and said with resolve, “But any captain...any person capable of consciously hiding something like that has no business walking around free, let alone wearing the uniform.”

Anara gazed down for a second, unable to think of anything to say.

The Iceman leaned back, “But having said all that, it won’t affect my professionalism. It’s other people that I’m concerned about.”

CHAPTER 7

Supplemental

USS Independence*, Auxiliary Conference Room Holding Station with *USS Perseus

The meeting room had no windows and it was sparsely furnished. The entire security compliment of the ship stood in formation.

“With the exception of Ensign Lemipil and a few others,” continued the new Andorian security chief, “we’re new to this ship and new to each other.” Jonin looked at the 38 faces. All of them looked rather young. Most of them were only crewmen. None were war veterans. He went on, “But we are now the guardians of this ship and the people on it. It’s up to us to keep them safe...and by gods, they will be. Because we are going to train until we become an outstanding fighting team.” He paused and saw everything from trepidation to excitement. “I’m going to have bi-weekly drills. The scenarios will run the gamut from ship to ship combat, to repelling borders, to colony defense. Any questions? ...No? Then report to your shift team leader.”

As the personnel rearranged into smaller groups, Ensign Folana Lemipil, a Zakdorn female, approached him. “Sir,” she started, “I want to make you aware of a possible safety concern with one of our officers, Lieutenant Commander Ethan Windslow, the chief engineer.”

His antennae perked up, “What do you mean?”

She told the tale of the incident at Pentath III and Windslow’s subsequent court-martial.

Faltyne listened intently. When Lemipil was done, he asked, “Why are you telling me this, Ensign?”

“Well, sir,” she started, “I just wanted you to know about Commander ‘Runs...’” She corrected, “Commander Windslow’s...disposition. It would be risky to have him on an away team, sir.”

The Andorian nodded understandingly, “Thank you for your opinion, Ensign, but I prefer to make my own judgments.”

The cool reception to her advice caused the Zakdorn to stiffen up, “Yes, sir.”

Supplemental
IKS *Jev'Iw*, First Officer's Chamber
Orbiting Fu'puk II

"It's been four days, Yaava," complained Alexander, "More than enough time for Starfleet to get here." He sat in an uncomfortable metal chair and surmised, "They may not be coming."

His mate walked behind him and began to massage his shoulders, "We did what we could, Alex."

"It's not right." He tugged at his Klingon armor, "I don't belong in this. I never should have joined."

"Don't say that," she whispered, "I know how you feel. The warrior caste has all but consumed our culture, but there is still honor in us. ...You are an example of that."

He huffed, "'Honor'...it's just propaganda. A rallying cry for us to do what the powerful wants."

Yaava straightened up, "Do not become bitter, *loD*. Honor still means something to a great many Klingons. Change will come."

He placed his hand over hers, "I hope so."

Supplemental
USS *Independence*, Transporter Room One
Holding Station with USS *Perseus*

"So whacha gonna do here?" questioned Treasure to the *Perseus*' helm officer as they stepped off the transporter dais.

The junior Lieutenant, Yitzhak Shalev, responded, "Simple, I've never been aboard a *Steamrunner* class ship. I hear they have a large officers' lounge."

"Yeah," she observed, "it'd be nice to have one of those. Too bad Hobson doesn't open the Captain's Mess unless it's for an official function."

“What about you? Where are you heading?”

“Engineering,” she said as they entered the corridor. “*Steamrunners* have unique warp-field geometry. Besides, it’s always a good idea to chat it up with fellow engineers. Ya neve’ know what you might learn, sugar. Wanna tag along?”

“I don’t know,” Shalev began, “If I transfer to another division, I thought it’d be security; not engineering.”

“Aw come on,” she pressed, “when I’m done, I’ll join you in the lounge.”

He sighed and resigned, “Alright, I guess. I just hope I’ll be able to understand all the shoptalk.”

Lieutenant Angela “Treasure” Barrows rounded the corner to see the warp core. The Class-V M/AM Drive pulsed rhythmically. It was a much older model than the *Perseus*’ Class-IX, but it was a proven engine.

Barrows immediately noticed the lack of enthusiasm in engineering. People moved around and tended to their duties, but there was an overall feeling of the doldrums. It could be just an off day for the crew...or it could be a simple difference in command style. She was after all, a rather laid back section chief.

A tanned young man approached her with short, brown hair. He approached them, “I’m Crewman Jackson, can I help you?”

“I’m Lieutenant Barrows and this is Lieutenant Shalev from the *Perseus*. I was wonderin’ if I could talk to your chief engineer.”

“Oh ... well the Commander *should be* in the master control office on the upper level.” He pointed up, “Just up that lift and to the left. You’ll see it.”

“Thanks, sweetie,” she offered with a warm smile. She and the helm officer made their way to the control station.

Once on the upper level, the duo saw a middle-aged man with reddish-gray hair through a transparent bulkhead. He didn’t look up at them. Yitzhak

glimpsed the chief engineer's face. There was something vaguely familiar about him. He knew the face from somewhere, but he was sure he'd never met the man.

The *Perseus* chief engineer rapped on the open door frame, "Commander?"

He regarded the visitors, "Yes."

"I'm the chief engineer of the *Perseus*, Angela Barrows."

A genuine smile formed on the *Independence* engineer, "So you get to work with a swirl intermix chamber?"

She grinned back, "Yes sir, they sure can be touchy."

"I know," he said as he got up, "the last ship I was on had one." He extended a hand, "I'm Ethan Windslow."

"Nice to me..." she started.

"Windslow," interrupted Shalev, "formerly captain of the *Bismarck*, Windslow?"

The smile died. Windslow cleared his throat. He knew where the conversation was going. It had happened before. It seemed every station they went to, every Starfleet ship they encountered, at least one person had heard of him and what he had done. Months ago, he accepted it as his curse. He admitted, "That's right."

Yitzhak's face became red and his jaw clenched, "I was on the Border Cutter *Merlin* during the war. We were tasked out to the Second Fleet. I remember seeing your ship in formation."

Ethan avoided his eyes, emotionally preparing himself for the latest attack.

The Eretz Israel native gave Windslow a look that was filled with nothing but contempt and he uttered, "Nearly everyone on my ship was killed by the Jem'hadar! My captain fought to the very end! But not you. You left your crew to die."

Treasure protested, "Yitzhak!"

Still breathing heavy, he calmed down slightly. "If you'll excuse me, Lieutenant..." Shalev exited the area without further comment. As he left, a non-com who overheard the exchange gave him an approving nod.

"I'm sorry, Commander," Barrows offered.

He held up a hand and lied, "It's alright, Lieutenant. I'm getting used to it."

"Well I, for one, don't share his feelings." An awkward silence followed. She decided to change the subject and gestured to the displays, "What temperature do you run your pre-stage flux chiller at?"

Windslow appreciated her efforts and offered her a seat.

CHAPTER 8

Supplemental **USS *Independence*, Deck Three** **Holding Station with USS *Perseus***

Kimula stood for several seconds in hesitation. Her antennae twitched nervously. She raised her hand to the enunciator only to pull it away. "This is ridiculous," she said to no one. "Who cares what he thinks?"

She began to move down the corridor. After a few steps, she paused and took a breath. "You're a stupid...stupid..." she said in a hushed tone. The Andorian went back to the door and announced herself.

The hatch parted to reveal Jonin. He seemed perplexed to see the counselor, "Can I help you, Lieutenant?"

She didn't edit her thoughts, "I just wanted you to know, I'm not elitist in the slightest. I never even thought about the old class system when I grew up. It was just -- I was raised by a very...old fashioned matriarch and I never even thought anything about it. If you get to know me, you'll find out I'm one of the least traditional people around here. And I guess, in the back of my mind, I always knew about some of the old stereotypes and prejudices -- but I've never had to really deal with it before... And why I'm I apologizing for your preconceived ideas? You're the one who got this off to a bad start, not me."

Faltyne paused longer than he should have. It was more to make sure she was done talking than thinking about his response. He stated in a matter of fact manner, "You're right, counselor. I was born of the labor class and I assumed something before getting to know you."

The answer fully satisfied Kimula to the point of causing a twinge of guilt. "Oh. Well, ok." She offered a hand, "Fresh start?"

Jonin nodded and took it, "Agreed."

The contorted shape of a *Defiant* class vessel dropped from warp near the *Steamrunner* and *Intrepid*. The *Destrier* glided abreast of them.

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Deck One, Conference Lounge
Holding station with USS *Destrier* and *Independence*

Lieutenant Commander Devon Miller entered the room, “They’re onboard and Commander Rysyl is guiding them here.”

The Iceman sat at the head of the table, a starscape behind him, “Very well.”

“Sir,” ventured Miller, “is this meeting to include the senior staff?”

Hobson looked up. Miller always wanted to be in the loop, even when it wasn’t his place. The captain assumed it was associated with his ambitious personality. “No, not yet. This initial meeting is only for captains and first officers.”

Though, disappointed, Miller curtsied, “Aye sir.” He left.

Moments later, Anara entered the meeting chamber and stepped to the side. Four other people followed her in, two males of moderate build and two females. Both women had a tropical complexion and a sober face. One female was rather small and petite, with smooth, black hair. The other had ash blonde hair, and was taller.

Captain Hobson stood in anticipation of the introductions.

Anara began, “Captain Hobson, this is Captain Kojo and Commander Marcus Bolden of the *Destrier*.”

The *Perseus* captain nodded in respect, “Captain, Commander.”

“And Captain Aurelia and her first officer, Lieutenant Commander bin Nadal,” the Deltan finished.

Hobson gestured and said, “Please, everyone, take a seat.”

Anara took the immediate seat right of Hobson. Right of her was Kojo and Bolden. To the left sat Aurelia and bin Nadal.

The Latina captain started, “So what’s this all about, Hobson?”

The Iceman raised an eyebrow in moderate irritation at her lack of courtesy. He let it slide and explained "I've been in contact with a Klingon officer in the nearby system. He said he was part of a task force sent there to conquer the people of the second planet."

"Klingons conquer planets on a regular basis." observed Kojo.

"True," he continued, "but never this close to the Federation. He also claims the Klingons are committing atrocities there: raping, indiscriminate murders; in short, war crimes."

The Persian leaned in, "Does this planet have relations with the Federation?"

"No," answered Rysyl, "It's a pre-warp civilization." She added, "And it's in unclaimed space."

Aurelia shrugged her shoulders, "So what can we do about it."

The first officer of the *Destrier*, Bolden, seemed much less intense than his captain, "This is all hearsay. We can't act on the information from one Klingon officer."

"Who is this officer?" questioned the Kriosian captain.

Hobson handed a padd to everyone with more on his answer, "His name is Alexander, son of Worf."

"The son of Worf?" repeated Kojo in surprise and admiration. "Worf has a reputation for being a meritorious man."

Hobson nodded in the affirmative and continued, "I think you all know the significance of who his father is; if you don't, this information will explain it."

"If his transmission to you was discovered," Kojo stated, "he is surely dead by now. No captain or second officer would tolerate his actions."

The *Independence* captain commented, "I still don't get what we're supposed to do about it."

"I've contacted Starfleet Command," Hobson said, "Apparently, this has become a bit of a hot button issue. The Federation Council is debating what to do about it."

Bolden assessed, "So it's out of our pay grade."

"Not entirely," the *Perseus* captain continued, "Command wants its own intelligence. We are to go into the system and look into Alexander's claims."

Kojo gave a morbid chuckle, "And if the Klingons do not want you to look in to it?"

"That's why I wanted assistance," he admitted.

Concerned, Karim asked, "At what cost are we going to confirm this, sir?"

Hobson made eye contact with his peers as he said as meaningfully as he could, "We are, of course, going to avoid a confrontation."

The room was silent. Everyone contemplated the odds of avoiding combat. Most concluded: not good.

Reluctantly, the Iceman regarded the Kriosian, "You have the tactically superior ship, Captain Kojo. How we proceed is up to you."

She received the news with out a visible response, though internally, she was taken aback. She initially assessed Hobson as a typical starship captain – someone who liked to be in control. She included herself in that category. It took a man of integrity to volunteer the fact of his subordinate status -- despite the regulations. Aurelia, on the other hand, had a look of mild irritation. Her respect for the *Perseus* captain upped a few notches. Kojo finally said, "I was a subject of the Klingon Empire for most of my life," she stated, "My people fought a rebellion against them for years. I know how they can be. Some do not take the teaching of Kahless to heart." Her tone turned cold, "If they are acting without honor on that planet, we *will* discover it. They desecrate the memory of all the great warriors that came before them."

CHAPTER 9

Supplemental IKS *Kang*, Main Bridge In Orbit of Fu'puk II

General K'Vada strode on to the metal deck like a predator, "*ja*"

Captain H'ta, an Order of the Bat'leth member, promptly reported, "*Sa* K'Vada, three Federation ships have entered the system and are on an intercept course."

Though, K'Vada expected this, he was annoyed; annoyed that General Lorath correctly predicted the event, annoyed that he was involved in his scheme, and annoyed that he now had to play his part. A low grumble evolved into, "*naDev Suq ghorgh*"

H'ta turned toward his sensor officer and scowled.

The officer seemed to fear for his life as he confirmed and relayed the data, "At full impulse, they'll be here in 20 minutes."

The *Kang* captain closed the gap between him and the general, "All three vessels have their weapons active...and their shields down."

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Main Bridge In the Fu'puk System in delta formation with the USS *Destrier* and *Independence*

The Iceman sensed the room. The bridge was tense, yet professional.

Captain Kojo was adamant about their posture.

Outwardly, Captain Hobson was stoic. Inwardly, however, he was concerned. He wasn't sure this gesture would be received as it was intended.

Supplemental

**IKS *Kang*, Main Bridge
In Orbit of Fu'puk II**

K'Vada stood a bit straighter at the revelation, "*cha'jIH*"

At his command, the viewer displayed the Starfleet formation with tactical data overlaid.

**Supplemental
USS *Independence*, Main Bridge
In the Fu'puk System in delta formation with the USS *Destrier* and
*Perseus***

Rap, tap, tap. Rap, tap, tap. The sound permeated the bridge. Kimula glanced around. It was not distracting only her. Finally, she left her post to confront the culprit.

"Sintina," the Andorian counselor whispered, "I thought we talked about making the bridge crew nervous."

Aurelia stopped rapping her fingers on her armrest and looked up, "Better?"

Lieutenant Soma grinned and returned to her seat.

"Have they noticed us, yet?" questioned Aurelia.

Faltyne answered, "I sure they have, ma'am."

The Honduran captain crossed her arms and said a barely audible, "I hope she knows what she's doing."

**Supplemental
IKS *Kang*, Main Bridge
In Orbit of Fu'puk II**

The general nodded in respect, "*chaH van*"

H'ta stepped back in bewilderment.

"You heard me," pressed the general, "They have honored us. We shall salute them in return."

Supplemental
USS *Destrier*, Main Bridge
In the Fu'puk System in the lead position with the USS *Independence* and *Perseus*

Kirce Carrick, a rather attractive human female, reported, "Captain, the Klingon fleet has powered up their weapons."

"And their shields?" asked the Kriosian task force commander.

Lieutenant Commander Carrick responded, "Down, sir."

Kojo smirked in triumph. Her knowledge of Klingon naval tradition would put her on a respectable footing with the general.

"The *Kang* is hailing," said the tactical officer, "it's General K'Vada."

The *Destrier* captain stood, "Patch him through."

An image of the Klingon general appeared. Kojo noticed gray forming in his long, black locks.

The Klingon seemed to begrudgingly admit, "You honor us with your show of respect."

Kojo curtsied, "As you honor us."

K'Vada then dropped all pretence, "What do you want, Starfleet?"

"I'm Captain Nandali Kojo of the USS *Destrier*," she elaborated, "we are here to observe your actions on the planet."

"Observe us," repeated the general in a tone of a rebellious teenager.

Kojo went on, "We have reports that your warriors are acting dishonorably."

“What would you know of honor, you Kriosian *ghew*?” spat the general.

She stepped forward, “*web qaq Hegh*”

His face hardened and he huffed with his nostrils, “Perhaps.”

The general’s response forced her brows to crunch up.

He ended with, “If you do more than...*observe*...you will be fired upon.” The channel closed.

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Main Bridge
In the Fu’puk System in delta formation with the USS *Destrier* and *Independence*

Hobson ordered the conversation to be shown on split screen. Once the images dropped off, helmsman Shalev turned back, “What did she say?”

“*web qaq Hegh*,” said the captain. He translated, “It means: death is preferable to disgrace.”

Tactical Officer T’Pren questioned, “And the general said, ‘perhaps?’”

He looked back at her with intent and repeated, “And the general said ‘perhaps.’”

CHAPTER 10

Supplemental

USS *Perseus*, Captain's Mess

In Orbit of Fu'puk II along with the Federation and Klingon Task Forces

Shortly after the initial contact with the Klingon Eighth Task Force, Captain Kojo called a conference. She wanted all the senior staff from all three ships to meet at once, to minimize any miscommunication. Hobson offered the Captain's Mess on the *Intrepid* class ship as the meeting spot.

The tables in the dining hall were rearranged in a circle for the impromptu conference. As he looked around the room, Marcus Bolden, the *Destrier's* XO, found it amusing how the crews tended to keep to their own groups. The helmsman of the *Perseus* glared at the *Independence's* chief engineer for some reason. The engineer, and everyone else, pretended not to notice.

Kojo continued, "I am amazed at General K'Vada's lack of outrage."

"Or surprise," added Commander Rysyl.

Captain Hobson chimed in, "According to my research, K'Vada is a pragmatist. He's much more calculating than your typical Klingon."

"So he won't go in guns blazing without thinking about it first," surmised bin Nadal.

"He's still a Klingon," corrected the Iceman in an even tone, "He won't think twice about lashing out if he feels the need. We're talking about the man that tamed the Crolsa System, after all."

"Tamed," repeated Aurelia, "That's an interesting word for it. I'd say he kicked the snot out of 'em."

A few muffled and humorless chuckles dotted the room. The *Independence's* new security chief, Faltyne, developed an evil smirk. He derived a twisted sense of satisfaction. Cardassians in the Crolsa System were responsible for his captivity and torture. He darkly mused, '*Maybe I owe K'Vada one.*'

Kojo struggled with the quote, "Kicking the snot out of people' is what he does best. No doubt, his actions in the Crolsa System were considered when he was assigned this mission."

Counselor Kimula Soma spoke, "But that doesn't answer why he was so...unresponsive to our showing up."

"He threatened to shoot us," remembered Kirce Carrick, the *Destrier* tactical officer, "I wouldn't call that 'unresponsive.'"

Lieutenant Commander Miller, of the *Perseus*, wondered aloud, "Since the son of Worf is involved, I have to believe there is something more going on here."

"What does K'Vada think of Worf?" asked Sintina.

Captain Hobson replied, "I haven't found any evidence that the general has any misgivings toward him."

The Kriosian's blonde hair swayed as she shook her head, "No, K'Vada isn't prone to subversion. If he doubted his leaders, he would challenge them."

After a short silence, the Iceman refocused the discussion, "Our first priority is to gather more information about the situation on the ground."

"A preliminary scan of the surface," began Tang Zian, the science officer on the *Indy*, "indicated the Hacharans have a global database that is still operational. We could download it."

"That would be a good start, Lieutenant," concurred Hobson.

Miller leaned in, "We should try to contact Alexander again."

"We need boots on the ground," inserted the Latina captain. She uncrossed her arms, "That's the best first hand intelligence we can get."

Hobson countered tactfully, "Captain, with respect that could lead to a whole new set of problems that could be avoided." He saw her annoyance growing. The *Perseus* captain knew he had to walk a very, very fine line; mostly because of all the subordinates in the room. He continued, "Not the least of which is the Prime Directive."

Kojo voiced Aurelia's response, "The Prime Directive seems to be irrelevant, Captain Hobson."

Hobson hesitated slightly. This debate shouldn't be held in present company. "Captain Kojo," he finally said, "perhaps we could discuss this in my ready room."

"If you have a concern," she persisted, "voice it. I do not fear a break down in ranks, here."

The Iceman glanced at Anara and the rest of his crew. He wasn't concerned about his crew's reaction. He was embarrassed for his counterparts. They shouldn't have to be reminded of one of the cardinal rules of Starfleet. He explained, "Just because the Klingons have invaded that planet doesn't mean the Prime Directive is no longer valid. We have rules about contact with other species, the Klingons don't. Yes, there has been a dramatic change to Hacharan society in recent weeks, but doesn't mean we can add to it."

For such a crowded room, there was an unusual still.

"Isolation suits," said Windslow. Unexpectedly, everyone's eyes fell on him. He continued a bit more subdued, "We could observe in isolation suits. The mission could be treated just like a duck-blind."

Bolden commented first, "That would have the added benefit of hiding us from any Klingons on the surface as well."

"Unfortunately, the suits won't hide us from a short range tricorder scan," observed Velen, the Denobulan science officer on the *Perseus*.

"Still," started Kojo, "it seems our best option."

"I'd like to gather more information through...other channels as well," suggested bin Nadal.

"What did you have in mind?" questioned the Task Force Commander.

He gestured to all three vessel masters, "With the captains' permission, I'd like to covertly board one of the Klingon vessels and hack into their records."

Hobson began, "If the Klingons catch you, Commander..."

"He knows," Aurelia interrupted. "It wouldn't be the first time Karim has been behind enemy lines."

Though his facial expression didn't viably change, Hobson's eyes betrayed a growing animosity toward Aurelia from her lack of courtesy. He was about to make a rebuke when the *Destrier's* captain ended the debate.

"We'll board the *Jev'Iw*. If the son of Worf is still alive, we'll want to talk with him."

It was obvious, several people disagreed with the decision; Hobson, Bolden, and Miller among them. To their credit, they remained silent.

The Chief Medical Officer of the *Perseus*, Helen Nor, ventured, "I hate to be the pessimist in the room, but if this goes sour, what are our chances against the Klingons?"

Jonin Faltyne fielded the query, "I ran five battle simulations. Our three ships against a *Vorcha*, a *K'Vort*, a *Fek'lhr*, and two *CharghwI'* class troop transports." He looked around the room as he revealed the results, "We win the battle, but the *Independence* or *Perseus* is either severely damaged or destroyed."

"It's a moot point," declared Hobson, "we can't afford to spark a war with the Klingons."

The Kriosian captain took charge. The time for discussion was over. "Then we'll need three teams: a research team, a duck-blind team, and a boarding team."

Hobson offered, "I suggest we utilize the personnel we have according to their talents, regardless of whose command they're under."

"Agreed," said Kojo.

Aurelia less enthusiastically confirmed, "Fine."

"Commander Rysyl," began Kojo.

"Sir?"

"Assemble and lead the researchers. Attempt to find Hacharan accounts regarding the invasion." Then, the *Destrier* captain looked to her own first officer, "Commander Bolden, organize the duck-blind." Her gaze then fell to bin Nadal, "Commander, as much as I would like to go with you on your

mission, I believe it would be best if the captains stayed with their ships. Pick two others to accompany you."

"Aye, sir."

Kojo then stood, "Let it be done. Dismissed."

CHAPTER 11

Stardate: 54369.7 (16 May 2377)
Go'hachar, Southern Continent
Fu'puk II

"BBRRUUUUGGGGHHHH," triumphantly bellowed the old, fat warrior Gow'ka. He and his small platoon loitered in the remains of a luxurious home. Their bellies were filled and their blood flowed with local alcohol that was plundered from the residence. It wasn't bloodwine, but it was adequate.

A young commoner, Nu'gh, rose and placed his hand on his stomach. "*nuqDaq'oH puchpa'e*"

The five other Klingons let out echoing laughs. Gow'ka jested, "What's a matter, the food not agree with you?"

Nu'gh reluctantly confirmed, "*HIja*"

This led to another round of bellowing. Eventually, the elder Klingon pointed to the proper direction.

As the young warrior departed, Gow'ka plopped his feet on a low table and looked out the one wall that had been destroyed by some previous battle. The house sat atop a hill and had a vista of the city below. The only towers that were left in the settlement were towers of smoke.

There was a noise. Footfalls, Gow'ka realized, outside the house. The other warriors noticed as well. With out giving commands, the five Klingons made their weapons ready.

The foot steps came closer and closer. Despite their drunkenness...or perhaps because of it...they were ready for anything.

A Klingon rounded the damaged wall. Immediately, Gow'ka's platoon relaxed. The old warrior recognized the man. "The son of Worf! What bring you here?"

The other Klingons reacted to the arrival with visible annoyance.

Obviously, Alexander didn't expect to find anyone here. "I was just...walking...thinking."

“Do not think too much. It only causes problems,” half-mocked S’qI, one of Gow’ka’s subordinates. Alexander was infamous among the warriors on this mission. The son of Worf had often ‘corrected’ behavior. He was one of the few officers that harassed them. There were often rumblings of killing him, though none had acted on the sentiment.

The elder Klingon came to his defense, “When we first arrived at this planet, I witnessed *Ra’wl’Sogh* Alexander fell a mighty Hacharan soldier.”

The *Jev’Iw* first officer remembered the incident as if it were years ago. “I was just lucky,” he responded without ego. The admission only served to weaken his position in the room.

“It certainly wasn’t talent,” chided S’qI.

“bIjatlh’e’yImev,” spat Gow’ka, “The son of Worf deserves your respect!”

“I’ve heard rumors,” persisted S’qI, “that you have the *bat’leth* skill of a five year old.”

It wasn’t the first time Alexander had heard such things. There was only one way he could address it: change the subject. He attempted to summon a command presence. “Where is the owner of this house? Did you kill him?”

Gow’ka spoke honestly, “No, it was already abandoned. We found no bodies in it.”

“What if we did kill them?” questioned S’qI with meaning.

Alexander ignored the question, “I want you all out of here. This house isn’t yours.”

The five Klingons looked at him as if he were developing a second head. S’qI’s flatulence was their only reaction.

After a few moments of continued unresponsiveness, he added with a false sense of authority, “*DaH*”

Slowly and deliberately, S’qI got up from the cushioned chair. His long, braided hair clacked when all the ornaments in it hit together. He snuffed as he approached Alexander.

The *Jev'Iw* first officer knew he couldn't dare flinch.

S'qI went face to face with him and stated plainly, "Make us."

Luckily for Alexander, Gow'ka stepped forward and resolved, "*I will make us, S'qI.*"

The son of Worf and the warrior were locked in a gaze. It took great effort for Alexander to stop his eyes from shifting.

S'qI finally broke the stalemate. He placed a hand on Gow'ka's shoulder, "*This man has my respect!*" The warrior stepped back.

Gow'ka leaned into Alexander's ear, "*Ra'wl'Sogh*, I will do as you order. But perhaps, it would be best if you continue on your walk."

Alexander was grateful for the man. The old warrior had created an opening for him to safely retreat. "Very well," he responded.

As the one-fourth human exited, S'qI commented, "*ghu*"

The platoon leader only grunted in disapproval. Then, he yelled, "*Nu'gh, moD.* We're leaving."

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Planetary Development Lab
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

"The total network is over 12 petabytes," observed Tang Zian.

Commander Rysyl frowned in understanding, "So it will take a while to search."

"Luckily," commented *Indy's* Andorian counselor, "We only need information inputted in the last two months."

"Alright," Anara said to her research team as she sat at a station, "Let's begin."

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Sickbay
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Captain Hobson entered the medical center. He immediately saw the three biobeds to his right. They were occupied by what appeared to be Klingons; two males and a female. He walked up to who he assumed to be the team leader, the *Independence's* first officer. "I see you've taken my helm officer from me."

The tan-skinned, mock Klingon confirmed, "Yes sir, I considered taking your tactical officer, T'Pren, but I already recruited the *Destrier's* security chief," he gestured to the female, Kirce Carrick, "and Mr. Faltyne is going down with Commander Bolden. I didn't want to handicap the fleet too much in case you're forced to engage the Klingons. Is that going to be a problem?"

The Iceman shook his head, "I don't object, Commander." He found his chief medical officer, "Doctor Nor, are their alterations complete?"

The human/Ktarian hybrid reported, "I'm just putting on the finishing touches, sir."

"Very well," the captain rejoined. He gestured to bin Nadal, "Commander, could I speak with you?"

The two moved a few meters into the medical office. Once there, Hobson began only to be interrupted by the intercom. "*Lieutenant Barrows to Captain Hobson.*"

His face lifted, "Yes, Lieutenant."

"Captain, I've asked Commander Windslow to help me adjust the theta-matrix compositor. He has much more experience doing it than I do, but we need to shut down the core for a bit."

"Is this something that really has to be done now, Treasure? We're not exactly in the best position at the moment." asked Hobson.

"This 'ill only take 'bout a half hour, sir. It will make the dilithium much more efficient and frankly, I can't do it with out him."

With a perfect poker face, he made his decision. "Proceed, but don't take more than one-half hour."

"You got it, sir. Barrows out."

Hobson said to himself, "I did not open them-for to be rude -- To such a one as him was courtesy." He assumed the meaning would be lost in present company. He was wrong.

"Dante's Inferno," identified Karim immediately.

The *Perseus* captain had a very fleeting look of surprise.

"As I recall," continued bin Nadal with an alien face, "It refers to the ninth level of hell, the level reserved for people who betray others...the lowest level."

His meaning now known, Hobson offered, "I apologize. It was an unprofessional comment."

Karim further remembered, "Immediately upon the betrayal, the offender's soul is sent to hell and the body is possessed by a demon." He made eye contact with Hobson, "Dante was right. Windslow is being punished as we speak."

A twinge of guilt surfaced in the *Perseus* captain. He didn't allow it to live long. He returned to his original intent, "Commander bin Nadal, you know how sensitive your particular mission is."

"Yes sir."

"If you're discovered, General K'Vada will give you no quarter...and then he'll most likely attack our task force."

"I understand, sir," bin Nadal replied, "We'll get in, retrieve the data, and get out. That's it."

Though Hobson desired to cancel the boarding plan, he knew he couldn't. Instead, he nodded slightly and offered, "Then Godspeed, Commander."

The Persian, now Klingon, curtsied, said his valedictory - "Captain," and returned to his team.

CHAPTER 12

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Main Engineering In Orbit of Fu'puk II

The swirling intermix core was dark. Windslow replaced the access hatch, "That it. That will increase the life span of the crystals by 26 percent and the efficiency by 14."

The voluptuous, North Star native said with gratitude, "Good thing you were here, Commander... Do ya mind if I call ya 'Ethan?'"

Windslow was caught off guard, "I ah...guess not."

She continued, "...There were a few times, I woulda screwed stuff up."

"Well," said the terra-cotta haired engineer, "it's good to know my time at Utopia Planitia still does some good."

"You put starships together?"

Windslow smiled, "No. I designed starships. I worked on the Defiant Project."

Treasure joshed, "Didn't the *Defiant* have a lot of bugs when it was first deployed?"

"Hey," Ethan rejoined, "we would've worked it out had the design not been moth-balled."

They both allowed a chuckle. The disgraced captain didn't remember the last time he had a healthy laugh.

The *Perseus* engineer walked closer, "Have you ever rode a horse?"

He slowly shook his head, "Can't say that I have."

Her bosom was raised a bit higher, "Would you like to learn? I have a really nice holo-program..."

"I'm married," Ethan quickly and awkwardly interjected.

Treasure laughed again, "Well hell sugar, I didn't say anything about sleeping with me," ...*'yet.'*

"Oh," he started as his face got beet red, "I'm...sorry. I thought..."

Her smile was still wide, "Don't worry 'bout it, hon. Ya got kids?"

Ethan nodded, "Two...both boys. They're 14 and seven."

"Now we *gotta* go horseback riding!" she pressed. "Your boys 'ill love it!" She jokingly rolled her eyes, "I guess your wife can come too."

Feeling much better...and less embarrassed...Windslow smirked, "I'll see if they're interested."

"I'll hold ya to that."

Supplemental
USS *Independence*, Cultural Sciences Locker Room
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

"I've served with her for over six months," volunteered Hatora of J'Bel, the *Independence's* senior noncommissioned officer. "She reserves her trust to a very select few. Until she sees how you react under pressure, she'll keep you at arms reach."

"So I've been told," responded the new Andorian security chief as he pulled his isolation jump suit up.

Commander Bolden sat on the bench, his hood hung behind his head, "I've noticed a lot of similarities between your captain and mine. Captain Aurelia reminds me of what Kojo must have been like when she was younger."

The *Perseus'* Denobulan science officer, Velen, spoke, "I've found people who are similar don't particularly like each other." The others looked like they wanted an explanation of the comment. So he continued, "They remind each other of aspects of themselves they don't care for."

Bolden nodded in agreement.

"Forgive me for saying so," Chief Hatora said, "but there is one critical difference between Aurelia and Kojo."

"What's that, Chief?" asked Velen.

"Beyond experience," he went on, "Aurelia seems much more apathetic."

Velen commented, "Apathy can't be a good characteristic for a captain."

"She's a war captain, just like Kojo," offered the *Destrier* first officer, "I've heard a lot of people having problems making the transition from war time to peace time. After doing something as dramatic as defending the Federation in battle, 'normal' missions just don't do it for them. I'm sure she'll adjust." He stood once everyone donned their dull orange suit, "Ok people, let's head to the transporter room."

Supplemental USS *Independence*, Main Bridge In Orbit of Fu'puk II

A tactical display of the planet and all orbiting vessels consumed much of the main viewer. A transparent cone shape emitted from each ship, indicating their sensor capability. The top, left corner showed Captain Kojo; the top right, the *Perseus* commander.

The time was coming up. Lieutenant T'Pren had calculated a 17 second window in which the *Independence* would be in a 'blind-spot' of the Klingon sensors. It would be the only time they could beam the teams down with out being detected.

"Commander Bolden," began Sintina as she paced the command center, "is your team in place?"

"Aye ma'am, our suits are active. We can beam down at anytime."

The Latina captain then queried, "Transporter room two, how about you guys?"

"We're good to go," came from Karim.

She looked at her new helm officer, "Ensign Weston, maintain our orbit. Don't deviate or slow down. We don't want the Klingons to think anything's up."

One of the recent academy graduate's blue eyes made contact, "Aye, ma'am."

"Dorian," the captain asked, "how long?"

The dark-skinned European reported from Ops, "Twelve seconds."

Everyone looked to the screen...watching the icon representing the *Indy* slowly arching around the planet.

"The Klingons can no longer detect us," said the petty officer at operations.

"Transporter rooms, get 'em down there, now," ordered Aurelia.

"Initiating transport," came one; *"Energizing,"* from the other.

Hobson commented after a short silence, *"Now comes the hard part...we get to wait."*

Both Kojo and Aurelia grimaced in a similar way.

CHAPTER 13

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

Bin Nadal, Carrick, and Shalev materialized in a wooded area. The superficial Klingons immediately determined if anyone witnessed their arrival. They were alone.

Shalev, a light-tan skinned Klingon with a rank of a *Bekk* first class, commented, "Well, we're planet-side. Now all we have to do is get the Klingons to beam us up." His altered and seemingly un-kept teeth were exposed as he spoke.

The team leader asked him, "*nuqDaq veng*"

The *Perseus* helmsman pulled out a scanning device commonly used by the KDF. "The nearest Klingon presence is in an urban center about three kilometers away."

"Get in the role, *loDHom*," chided Carrick.

"Sorry, sir," began the junior lieutenant.

"*tlhIngan jatlh*," she persisted.

Yitzhak corrected himself. He knew the importance of getting into character on a mission like this. "*QoS qaH*"

Karim allowed himself a mild grin, "*majaH*"

As the trio moved through the brush, Yitzhak decided to practice his Klingon, "*la'ra'wI'*, forgive me for asking, but are you Muslim?" Of course, 'Muslim' didn't translate.

The Persian looked back, "No, though my grandfather hoped I would be."

"Bin Nadal means 'son of Nadal', right?" asked the helmsman out of genuine curiosity.

“That’s right, but my father wasn’t Nadal” explained the first officer, “My proper Arabic nasab name is: Karim bin Hami bin Niyoosha bin Jonathon bin al-Hasan bin Muhammad bin Jabir bin Eyad bin Ibrahim ibn ar-Rahman bin Nadal.” He looked up and considered, “I might have missed a few generations.”

“Ah,” absently responded Shalev.

“My family has been using ‘bin Nadal’ since before the Federation was founded,” he explained. “Why do you ask?”

“Religion is an interest of mine,” the mock Klingon rejoined.

Karim’s mood picked up, “It is? I’m a student of philosophy, myself. I assume you’re Jewish.”

He confirmed, “Yes sir, I was born on the Eretz Israel colony.”

“I grew up in Chah Bahar on Earth,” offered the Persian.

The *Perseus* flight officer commented, “It’s hard to believe our peoples nearly annihilated each other.”

Bin Nadal added, “It took the post-atomic horror for humanity to stop destroying itself.” He caught his first view of the city, “And these people are going through a similar thing, now.”

“*bljatlh’e’yImev*,” said Carrick, who seemed right at home taking on the persona of a Klingon.

Both men stopped their conversation, which had degenerated into a mix of Federation Standard and *tlhIngan*.

The team crouched down in the foliage. Shalev consulted the scanner, “There are over 1,000 Klingons and nearly 40,000 natives in that town.”

The *Independence* first officer gave his final bit of advice to his team, “Whatever happens, act like you belong there.” He stood, “*Ha*”

Supplemental

IKS *Kang*, General K'Vada's Office In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Captain H'ta reported with a salute, "The Starfleet vessel has emerged from the sensor gap. If they were planning espionage, their team would be on the planet by now."

K'Vada snarled. His hands were tied. Allowing the blind-spot went against everything he knew about deploying a fleet. He despised anyone telling him how to operate or what to do. His tactics had many critics, but they always worked. In this case, the governor of the Khemet Sector intervened.

The general found himself in the middle of Governor Lorath's scheme. Lorath's goal was to embarrass Martok. K'Vada's goal was to effectively subdue the planet's population. He began to realize, the two were mutually exclusive.

"We have become pawns, *HoD* H'ta," grumbled the task force commander. "Even if Lorath's plot works, blame and dishonor will fall upon us."

The dark-skinned Klingon stepped forward. He was a trusted advisor to the general and knew of the situation, "We must tread carefully, *Sa'*. Lorath would be a powerful enemy."

K'Vada looked up from under his brow, "As would Martok."

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

Jonin's left antenna itched as it rubbed up against isolation suit's hood. New data on the heads up display relegated it to the back of his mind. "Sir, I've confirmed the orbital scans. There's a labor camp up ahead. It's less than a kilometer away."

Commander Bolden's earpiece received the report. "Alright, Lieutenant. Be careful as you move about everyone. These suits aren't failsafe"

"And be prepared to see some...pretty disturbing things," somberly added Chief Hatora.

Quiet permeated the comline as each team member contemplated his words.

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Planetary Development Lab
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

"...reports are coming in from all over the planet," continued the reporter in a near state of panic. "The aliens are appearing out of thin air and are using a combination of laser guns and blade weapons."

Kimula slowly shook her head with her hand cupped over her mouth. She, Tang, and the *Perseus*' first officer watched the pre-recorded news broadcast.

The Hacharan male continued on the screen, *"They attacked military installations first and our soldiers were quickly killed. Now the creatures are ...materializing in civilian centers. Government leaders are advising evacuation of urban areas. Though, that is difficult since many of the shuttle rails have been damaged beyond use."* The reporter allowed himself a breath, *"We don't know who they are or where they come from, but their intent is clear...they mean to destroy us all. Please, do what you can to survive."*

Science Officer Tang froze the image. It was the latest of several reports the team had watched.

The Andorian lowered her hand, "They really thought their world was at an end."

"I can't imagine the fear they were...are in," commented the Deltan.

Zian rolled his chair to another console, examined it for a moment, and observed, "The Klingons have been slow to dismantle the Hacharan's information network. Though, the traffic has decreased to almost nothing, people are still uploading data."

The hairless first officer surmised, "I'm sure the Klingons don't consider it a high priority."

Lieutenant Soma sighed, "I don't know how many more of these I can watch."

Anara put a comforting hand on Kimula. No words were said.

Commander Rysyl returned to her station and continued the search. With a heavy heart, so did the *Independence* counselor.

CHAPTER 14

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

Already broken glass cracked under Kirce Carrick's heavy, black boot. Presumably, it fell from a nearby skyscraper, or rather, what used to be a skyscraper.

The stench of death hung in the air. According to Yitzhak's scans, there were forty thousand Hacharans still in the metropolis, but none could be seen.

The team saw a few groups of Klingons from a distance. Luckily, the Defense Force warriors paid them little attention.

"*la'ra'wl*," stated Commander bin Nadal, "we're in position. Request a beam up."

Shalev couldn't help but to have a slight look of surprise, "That's the plan? We just ask to be beamed up?"

"All five Klingon vessels are beaming groups up and down all the time," explained the mock, female Klingon. "Their protocols aren't nearly as strict as ours. As long as the bio-signature emitters are sending Klingon life-signs, we won't have a problem."

"Won't they challenge us?" persisted the *Perseus* officer. "Or at least, ask for a reason why we need to go up?"

"In this case," chimed in Karim, "less is more." He gestured for the *Destrier* security chief to continue.

She raised her communicator, Starfleet had long since had the design in the replicator archives. "*Jev'Iw jang*"

Supplemental IKS *Jev'Iw*, Transporter Room In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Sogh Ursva just sat down from transporting several warriors from one site to another. She didn't know where they came from or where they were going or why. It was all just coordinates to her.

Ursva plopped her boots on the stool next to her. With a sigh, she grabbed the electronic book she was reading. She was just beginning to get back into the contemporary, romantic, action drama, when a high-pitched indicator sounded, followed by: "*Jev'Iw jang*"

In frustration, she slapped the padd on her thigh and tossed it aside. She sat up, "*Jev'Iw jolpa' jaH*"

"*Jol wej*," was the response.

Ursva had anticipated the request and located the signal source. The person asking to be beamed up was one of three in an urban area. Transporting people to the ship was easier than from place to place on the surface, so that was good. It wouldn't take too long. "*luq*", she said as she activated the energizers.

Moments later, two males and a female appeared on the dais. They looked at her. She blinked at them....and then returned to her fiction.

Bin Nadal glanced at Shalev to see his reaction at the ease of their insertion. To his credit, the helmsman had a poker face the Iceman would be proud of. Karim moved with a purpose to the metal door, "*mughoS*"

Ursva heard the door screech open and close as she settled in with her novel – at least until the next interruption.

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Recreational Lounge, a.k.a. *Andie's Place*
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Since she was off duty, Lieutenant T'Pren wore her hair down. It was long, well below her shoulders. Such long hair was odd for a Vulcan. She couldn't be accused of being very traditional, anyway.

Immediately upon entering the lounge, she caught sight of Helen Nor, the ship's human/Ktarian hybrid doctor. She sat at a table near the center of the

room with two others. One was the *Independence's* reptilian medical officer; the other...the other was Kimula Soma. For a fleeting second, the emotional Vulcan considered not joining them. '*She isn't Larissa,*' T'Pren reminded herself. With renewed confidence, she approached the group, "Mind if I join you?"

"T'Pren," Nor welcomed, "of course not. Have a seat."

The Vulcan extended a hand to the Arkonian doctor, "We didn't actually talk to each other at the staff meeting. You're Commander Do'matar, right?"

"Arkonians don't use family names except in rituals and I never cared much for ranks," corrected the female reptile. For a scaled face, she managed a warm expression, "Call me Zo'Kama."

"Zo'Kama," repeated T'Pren as she assumed the empty seat. Then her eyes fell on the *Independence's* counselor. A twisting feeling developed in her gut. She caught herself before she gazed too long. "Kimula," she greeted.

The lovely Andorian smiled, "Good to see you again."

For the first time since entering, T'Pren noticed the mellow music playing in the background. A comforting sensation followed.

"Any word from the away teams?" asked the *Perseus* doctor.

"No," replied the Vulcan, "They're in communications blackout. We can't risk the Klingons picking up our transmissions."

The other three silently acknowledged. The conversation stalled for several moments.

Finally, Kimula offered, "There are enough first hand accounts in the Hacharan network to convince me that the Klingons need to be stopped. I'm sure the Federation Council will pressure them off the planet."

"Don't be so sure," tempered Zo'Kama, "Politicians view the world through a warped lens."

Helen leaned in, "But if half of the things Anara and Kimula have told me are true, surely the Council will act."

T'Pren focused on some undefined point on the table's surface, "Let's hope so."

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

It was the first time Commander Bolden had a close look at a Hacharan. Most were slightly taller than humans. They were striking specimens: broad shoulders, dark skin, thick locks of long hair. He could only imagine how impressive they would be when they weren't subjugated. Now, they looked hopeless.

Several hundred natives dug into the ground with simple shovels. A hole nearly a kilometer wide scarred the landscape. Scans indicated a vein of boridium under the surface. A mineral used for everything from power cells to blade weapons.

Velen invisibly shook his head in disgust. Even the Hacharans have much more effective ways to excavate the material, but that wouldn't have the effect the Klingons desired. The people of this planet were now little more than expendable labor. If they worked hard and earned the Klingons respect, they might be promoted to cannon fodder.

Thanks to his heads up display, he could see the other team members and his own body. He tapped a control on his wrist, which activated a recorder. He made a point of getting images of the Klingon guards. *'You'll get yours,'* he thought.

"Faltyne," began the commander, "how many guards per prisoner?"

After consulting his suit's computer, he reported, "There's about one Klingon for every 27 Hacharans in the area."

Chief Hatora trotted up from several meters away. There was concern on his voice, "Commander Bolden, something is about to happen. I overheard some Hacharans getting ready to..."

A distant, but booming, “AAAHHHH!” was heard in the direction that Hatora came from. All the team members turned to see a native charge the nearest Klingon. The Hacharan ran with his shovel raised, ready to strike.

The guard turned in time to see the desperate attack and relieved the laborer of his discontent with a single disruptor blast. The Klingon had no time to gloat.

The other Hacharans followed their peer’s lead. Mobs of natives rushed their captures. Several laborers were quickly gunned -- or chopped -- down, but there were simply too many. The Klingons were overwhelmed, but not before one of the guards yelled into his communicator, “*QaH muHlvtagh*” The warrior was bludgeoned to death shortly thereafter.

It happened so quickly. The Starfleet team and the Hacharans stood in shock for a second when it was over.

Upon the realization of their victory, the natives began to celebrate.

Bolden and the others didn’t share their enthusiasm.

The *Destrier* first officer got a cold chill go down his spine. He addressed his team, “We’ve got to get out of here, now!”

He didn’t have to explain. The away team moved with a swift stride away from the recent slaughter, but the camp was huge. And it wouldn’t take long for the Klingons to retaliate. The newly deceased KDF officer had reported, “Help! We’re being attacked!”

CHAPTER 15

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

Velen was bringing up the rear of the group. Bolden, Faltyne, and Hatora were several paces ahead of him. The away team invisibly passed unsuspecting Hacharans in jubilation. It was surreal. He felt like a ghost.

Hatora's heart felt like it was ready to burst out of his chest. He, and the other team members, made their way through the pockets of people. He tried to avoid running into them. Some times he failed, leaving a very confused person in his wake.

For some unknown reason, the *Perseus'* science officer looked backward and into the sky. For a moment, the thick cumulus clouds glowed green. Soon, three disruptor blasts became visible.

Everything slowed for Velen. He knew that death was surely awaiting the Hacharans in the camp...and possibly the away team. His body resumed running, though his eyes couldn't turn away from the slaughter that was about to occur. Most of the Hacharans didn't even see it coming. Those that did, were as helpless as he was.

Like balls of hellish lighting, the blasts impacted on the surface. Despite the fact, all three pulses hit within a second, Velen could see what each one did. The first hit about 700 meters away. Dozens of people were vaporized immediately. Dozens more shot away from the epicenter as if they were splinters.

The second blast came so quickly, the Hacharans still didn't understand what wrath they had unleashed. This one was closer. Velen felt the heat through his suit. He saw a woman's flesh begin to flake away. For a fleeting moment, her expression changed...she looked right into his eyes. Her skeleton was visible for an instant, then it too, turned to dust. She did not die alone.

The final strike rained down just as everyone took their first steps of panic. This one was brighter, bigger, and hotter. Velen had enough time to realize, he was too close.

Jonin hit the ground hard. He didn't lose consciousness, but he desperately tried to regain his breath. Even before he did, he began to search for the rest of the team. Bolden was already recovering a few meters away. Chief Hatora did fare so well. He wasn't moving. The Andorian found his footing. It took him a second to find the Denobulan. Velen's suit was no longer working.

The *Destrier* first officer met him at Velen's side. Luckily, the surviving Hacharans were more worried about additional incoming fire than the orange clad humanoid on the ground. "Is he alive?" asked Bolden.

"No time to check," replied the *Independence* security chief, "the Klingons will start beaming down warriors to finish the job."

Marcus nodded in agreement. It sounded morbid, but whether he was dead or alive didn't matter at the moment. They needed to get him out of sight. He scanned the terrain for a hiding spot. Dust hung in the air. There were trees in the distance, but nothing close enough. Dirt was the only thing close. He picked some up in his invisible hand. It was loose. He looked up, "We have to bury him for now, until we can get him back to the beam out site."

Lacking another suggestion, Faltyne and Bolden quickly began to bury the officer. Only when they were done, did they think how macabre their action was. But there was no time for that. A battalion of KDF troops would beam down at any moment.

Supplemental
USS *Destrier*, Main Bridge
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Security Officer Philip Westin turned back from his tactical display. "Captain, the *Kang* as fired on the surface."

Kojo rose from the command chair, "Where?"

Before he could respond, an indicator sounded. He elaborated, "The *Independence* is hailing."

"On screen."

Aurelia's face burned, "They've fired on the same camp our team was supposed to investigate!"

Westin offered, "Confirmed, sir."

"We have to get them out of there!" demanded Sintina.

Nandali viewed the young captain's comment as a challenge to her authority. She said with resolve, "Our team knew the risks."

The Latina captain didn't back down, "To hell with this sneaking around bullshit. I'm sending in a team to..."

"You will do no such thing!" blasted Kojo. She approached the screen. The Kriosian was not impressed with this girl. "My first officer is down there, Captain Aurelia. I worry for him as much as you worry for your crew members. Now is not the time to act. I will contact General K'Vada. *You* will standby."

By this point, both bridge crews were focused on the exchange...even if the didn't look like it.

Aurelia stood there for a moment, her rage brewing. Sintina didn't want to admit it, but she knew she wasn't the biggest dog in the pack; not this time. Kojo had forced her to heel. Without a word, the *Indy* captain sat back down, tapped a control, and the transmission ended.

Despite...or because of her display...Nandai's respect for her younger peer went up. '*She has a fire,*' observed Kojo, '*but an untended one.*' She returned to the matter at hand, "Get me General K'Vada."

Supplemental IKS *Jev'Iw*, Deck Four In Orbit of Fu'puk II

A series of sharp tones indicated Karim's latest failure. "*toDSaH*," he cursed. "I've got most of what we need, but I need an access code to get a copy of the Chain of Orders for this mission."

The trio allowed a warrior to pass in the narrow corridor.

Shalev suggested, "We were supposed to find this Alexander, anyway. Maybe he'll give us the codes."

"Contacting Starfleet is one thing," Carrick said as her head shook, "giving us command codes is entirely different." She added, "He might even blow our cover."

Bin Nadal looked up Alexander's whereabouts, "It's a risk we'll have to take."

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

After dragging Hatora out of the way of anyone who might trip over him, Bolden and Faltyne took up positions close to their injured teammates. Ironically, if either regained consciousness – assuming they were alive – they might get themselves killed.

Groups of Klingons had already begun to materialize in the open-pit mine. Only a few Hacharans choose to fight back. Most ran for the cover of the forest. It wasn't so much a fight, as an exercise in butchery.

A young man ran passed Bolden, followed closely by a Klingon. The Hacharan, wearing only rags, began to outpace the warrior. The soldier was obviously annoyed when he had to sheath his *D'k tahg* and pulled his disruptor. He unceremoniously shot the man as he ran.

It was all Bolden could do to stay put.

Faltyne was too busy witnessing the unhonorable act to see the middle-aged woman until it was too late. She ran right into him and stumbled to the ground. The Andorian stepped back, but managed to stay standing.

The woman didn't have time to wonder how she fell. As she stood up, a *mek'leth* penetrated deep into her back. She died at Jonin's feet.

The Klingon that tossed the blade began walking toward him to reclaim it. The Andorian knew he dare not move.

CHAPTER 16

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

Faltyne made himself stone. The Klingon warrior was close now.

From a few meters away, Commander Bolden could do nothing but watch. Via his suit's technology, he could see the Andorian. The warrior was now steps away.

The Klingon knelt down and pulled the *mek'leth* from the Hacharan torso. It tore a chunk of flesh out. Slowly, he stood. He looked as if he caught a sent. By now, most of the natives were either dead or fleeing into woods.

Jonin looked directly at the warrior from less than a meter away. The Klingon literally looked through him. The KDF soldier sniffed again in an effort to pick up what he smelt before.

A single drop of blood fell from the Klingon's blade. It dropped on Faltyne's foot. The warrior was too focused on something in the distance to look down. If he had, he would see a small red blob hovering a few centimeters off the ground.

The Andorian couldn't do anything but be still. The Klingon's eyes were filled with bloodlust.

The Klingon took one, long, last sniff.

...then ran off in pursuit of another Hacharan.

Only then did Jonin realize he hadn't been breathing. He allowed himself a sigh of relief.

A very long minute later, the duck-blind team found themselves alone. All the Klingons had moved on, giving chase to their laborers.

Bolden was the first to move. He went to the pile of dirt that concealed the Denobulan. He began to uncover him, "Come on, we have to get back to the beam out site."

The Andorian checked the chronometer on his HUD, "We have over 12 hours until the next blind spot in the orbital pattern of the ships."

"That's right," confirmed Bolden.

Faltyne voiced one last concern before relenting, "And if anyone sees a floating isolation suit?"

"It's not like we have a choice," said the Destrier first officer with finality. He continued, "You get Hatora. I'll carry Velen."

"Aye, sir."

**Supplemental
USS *Destrier*, Main Bridge
In Orbit of Fu'puk II**

"I do not answer to you, Starfleet," defiantly stated K'Vada.

"What's the matter," deliberately taunted the task force commander, "Are the Hacharans putting up more of a fight than you thought they would?"

The Klingon was visibly annoyed at the comment. But his expression changed as he said, "They are proving to be much more formidable foes than the Kriosians were when we conquered them."

The jab hit its target, but the captain had a return volley. She methodically came closer to the display, "Yet here I am -- your equal -- in command of a fleet that could out power your own."

The thinly veiled threat only served to empower K'Vada. He responded, "I look forward to the moment you give me a reason to attack you...and we shall temper your arrogance." The channel closed.

**Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Captain's Ready Room
In Orbit of Fu'puk II**

Captain Hobson sat at his desk, listening to the dialog. When the monitored communication ended, he shook his head. He quoted to himself, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't."

Supplemental
IKS *Jev'Iw*, Mess Hall
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

"*'ej HumtaH 'ej DechtaH 'Iw*," continued the drunken warriors. S'qI and Nu'gh violently butted their heads together as they sang the next line, "*'ej Doq SoDtaH ghoSpa' Sqral bIQtlq*"

S'qI suddenly stopped as he saw someone enter the darkened chamber. It was Alexander. He grabbed Nu'gh by the collar and whispered to him, "There he is. That's the *petaQ* that has caused us so much trouble."

"J'pak is a fool for allowing him to live," observed Nu'gh.

"If he will not act," suggested S'qI, "then I will." He pushed himself up and began to stagger toward the *Jev'Iw*'s first officer.

The son of Worf retrieved his plate of *gladst* from the synthesizer and took a seat in an unoccupied section of the hall. He read reports as he ate the seaweed-like dish.

As he brought a fork up to his mouth, a half-empty cup of bloodwine hit him upside the head. He recoiled for a moment, but it didn't take long for him to see where it came from. It was the same warrior that challenged him on the surface.

S'qI bellowed, "Alexander, Son of Worf, you are a weakling and a coward!"

The other Klingons sat up and took notice. There could be only one respectable response.

Hesitantly, Alex stood up. His hair dripped of wine. He looked at the warrior with less than confident eyes. Words failed him.

The drunk Klingon began to close the gap, "Gow'ka is not here to stop me, now." He gestured to everyone else in the room, "And no one here will help

you.” His eyes rested on Alexander, “Because they are Klingons.” He stepped closer, “But you will never be a Klingon. You don’t have the stomach for it!” He pulled his *D’k tahg*, “*Gre’thor* awaits your arrival.”

S’qI’s blade was swung and Alex’s midsection. The first officer jumped back in avoidance.

The warrior prepared his blade for a downward strike, “Draw your blade! At least die like a Klingon!”

In an unnatural and clumsy motion, Alexander managed to do so. He held it as a novice would.

The sight caused S’qI to laugh out loud. “It’s true! You don’t even know how to hold a blade.”

The others watching joined in the torment.

“This isn’t a fair fight,” concluded S’qI. He tossed his knife to a nearby table and gestured for Alexander to attack, “Go ahead, *puq*. Show us your skill.”

A white, hot flame grew in the Son of Worf. His entire adult life, he had been mocked and underestimated. S’qI was only the latest in a long line of Klingons that saw him as a child. He had enough! Enough of this constant battle of egos! Live or die, it would end! With a cry, he charged the warrior with his blade leading the way.

The larger Klingon easily side stepped the amateur attack, grabbed Alex’s wrist, disarmed him, and put him in a head lock.

“Pathetic,” stated S’qI. “I’ll break your neck, *taHqeq*.”

CHAPTER 17

Supplemental Ambassador's Hall Qo'noS, First City

"To reiterate," concluded Worf as he addressed the Federation Council via subspace, "The Klingon Empire should be allowed to annex Fu'puk II." He spoke with practice, but not with passion. "The Martok government values its relationship with the Federation. But the Empire's right to expand must be respected."

The screen zoomed in from a panoramic view of the Council floor to President Satie. She spoke for the congress, "Thank you, Ambassador Worf. We appreciate your viewpoint and your time. We will continue to deliberate. Tell the High Council it will be informed of our decision shortly."

He bowed, "Madam President."

She curtsied back and ended the transmission.

A cloud hung over the Son of Mogh. He made his way back to his sparsely decorated office. A trefoil of the Empire was backlit on the wall. He felt alone. ...as he usually did.

He had been to the homeworld several times, but never for a long period of time. He was hit by culture shock. Knowing Klingon culture and tradition was not the same as living in Klingon society. The high regard he felt for his people had lessened as of late. Many Klingons looked at him as if he belonged in some fictional, idealist time in the past.

Worf leaned forward and accessed a file on his computer. He watched it regularly. It was his wedding ceremony to Jadzia.

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

It was now getting dark. Small blue and orange colored lights began to flash in the brush; bugs, Bolden finally realized.

A few hours ago, they made it to the beam out site. They were not totally unnoticed as they traveled. A Hacharan family saw Velen's seemingly floating body. They ran in terror. But then again, all Hacharans were in a state of terror.

Now they sat in a dense, wooded area. Hatora woke even before they reached the site. Velen, however, was still unconscious. They were all worried about him.

"Denobulans hibernate," offered the *Independence's* Illyrian senior chief, "maybe his body was forced into that state due to his injuries."

Faltayne shrugged invisibly, "Maybe. His respiratory and pulmonary systems are slow, but stable."

"How's your shoulder?" asked Bolden to Hatora. The chief had dislocated it when he landed.

He didn't lie, "It's painful." Hatora continued, "But as you humans say, 'I'll grin and bear it.'"

Bolden nodded, "The hard parts over. We'll be beamed up before sunrise. We just have to sit tight."

Supplemental IKS *Jev'Iw*, Mess Hall In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Alexander remembered a move his father once taught him; a counter to a head lock. Quickly, he put one foot behind S'qI's. Then, reached up and hooked his mouth. Finally, Alex twisted his hips. The larger Klingon released him and toppled to the deck.

It took a moment for the Son of Worf to accept the success of the maneuver. At this point the observers stood and began cheering. Alexander even began hearing some encouragement.

S'qI didn't bother standing up. He lunged for Alexander's midsection. He grabbed on tight and hefted the first officer off the ground. S'qI then slammed him to the metal floor.

Alexander found himself on the deck. He wasn't sure how he got there. But he knew S'qI was looming over him. Without thinking, he gave the warrior a swift kick to the groin.

Immediately, S'qI's face became contorted with pain as he hunched over. His scream evolved into a gurgle.

The audience responded in a similar way.

Alex saw his opening. He got up and belted S'qI in the face; once, twice, and third time. The fourth, S'qI blocked.

S'qI's eyes were burning with rage and embarrassment. He straightened his posture and squeezed Alex's throat with a powerful grasp.

Any confidence Alexander had disappeared. He felt his feet leave the ground as S'qI lifted him by his neck. The larger Klingon tossed him like a rag doll several meters. The Son of Worf ungracefully landed on a table full of food and then rolled to the deck once more. A mixture of *pipius* claw, *gagh*, and bloodwine splattered on him.

S'qI retrieved his blade, "No more games, *petaQ*"

Watching the brawl from a dark corner was bin Nadal and his team. They were shadowing Alexander when the warrior challenged him. They desperately wanted to come to his aid, but didn't see how without violating Klingon tradition and exposing themselves.

Of the three of them, Kirce Carrick knew the most about Klingon culture. It was impossible to not pick some things up from serving with Kojo. She searched her mind for some justification to defend Alexander.

"Isn't there anything we can do?" questioned Yitzhak.

Carrick responded, "Alexander was given a lawful challenge. If we help him in any way, he'll lose face. It'd be worse than if he lost."

"But we can't allow him to get killed," pressed the helmsman.

"He's not dead yet," injected Karim. "Let's give him a chance to win."

Cradling what was surely a cracked rib, the *Jev'Iw* first officer got to his knees. S'qI neared him, his d'*k tahg* at the ready. Alexander held up a hand, "Wait!"

The large Klingon paused.

Alex looked down. He knew he was outmatched. There was no way he could best S'qI. There was one way to save his life. ...but any respect he had earned among Klingons would be void. No one would follow his orders. He would be an untouchable. He hoped this day would never come. He uttered, "*jljegh*"

S'qI cocked his head as if he didn't believe what he heard, "What?"

The Son of Worf continued to look down, but spoke louder, "I surrender."

The warrior slowly moved out of his attack stance. A look of disgust formed on his face as he gazed at the pitiful thing on its knees. He spat on him.

Alexander did not respond to the saliva running down his cheek.

S'qI sheathed his blade, "There would be no honor in killing a glob fly like you." He walked out.

Methodically, the other Klingons in the room filed out at well in silence. A few spat on Alexander as well, most simply leered as they passed.

Kirce volunteered, "We must do the same. The Son of Worf no longer has any honor."

Alexander didn't move as they chastised him. Soon, he was alone. His failure as a Klingon was complete.

CHAPTER 18

Supplemental IKS *Jev'Iw*, Deck Five In Orbit of Fu'puk II

The covert boarding party loitered outside the Mess Hall. Alexander would eventually come out in disgrace.

"I can't believe your suggesting we abduct a KDF officer," criticized Carrick.

Bin Nadal in Klingon garb rejoined, "Not abduct – offer him asylum."

"You said it yourself," offered Yitzhak, "he's totally discredited. He has nothing to lose."

The *Destrier* tactical officer still wasn't convinced, "So we just walk up to him and say: Hi! We're a secret Starfleet insurgency team. Wanna come with us?"

Karim wasn't offended by her sarcasm. He stated deadpan, "Something like that."

Before Kirce could come up with a retort, the trio fell silent. The Son of Worf exited the chamber with his head hung low. He didn't make eye contact with them as he moved by in the cramped corridor.

The three Starfleet officers shared one last conference in an instant with body language. Ultimately, it was up to Karim. They all understood that.

As the defeated figure trudged along, the *Independence* XO called out, "Alexander."

The KDF officer paused and turned back. He was obviously expecting more torment.

Bin Nadal spoke in Federation Standard, knowing that the former Earth resident would understand. "We need to talk."

Alex's brow crunched up, "Who are you?"

He hesitated for only a moment, "We're a Starfleet reconnaissance team. We came to investigate your claims of Hacharan abuse...and we need your help."

The *Jev'Iw* officer's face held little surprise, but it had plenty of self-pity. He began to shake his head absently, "I can't help you. I can't even help myself."

Shalev fatefully spoke out of turn, "Hey! We risked our own necks to get this far. And those people down there on the planet are still suffering. Your own problems haven't changed that."

"I did everything I could to save them!" spat Alexander, "All I got from my efforts was dishonor!" Tears of rage and disappointment ran down his cheeks.

Words evaded everyone for a moment, until Yitzhak offered in a calm, but stern voice, "Walking away from a bully is nothing to be ashamed of – even smart, but if you turn your back on the Hacharans, you truly will have lost your integrity."

The Son of Worf examined the cold, hard deck for several seconds. A distant memory came to him at the exact right moment. He smirked slightly, "My mother always said Klingons had a lot of dumb ideas about honor." He wiped away a tear and looked up with as much confidence as he could muster, "What do you want from me?"

"Access codes," quickly responded Karim. He didn't know resolved Alexander was about helping them, but he knew he had to seize the moment. "We need to get a copy of the Chain of Orders for this mission. Afterwards, you can join us and request asylum."

The KDF officer nodded and swallowed. Something else suddenly came to him, "I'll help you, but I have to talk to someone before we leave."

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

It was Faltyne's watch. The team would be beamed up in less than one-half hour. He slowly and invisibly patrolled a few meters around the other three team members. The night proved to be no obstacle for his helmet's light enhanced display. Though Andorian hearing wasn't as good as human's, he could feel slight vibrations in his antennae. Something was coming closer...a lot of somethings. He activated his tricorder. "Commander Bolden," he said

into his microphone, “over two dozen Hacharans are coming this way on foot.”

Velen was already hid as best as he could be in the underbrush. Hatora was propped up against a tree. His suit, unlike the unconscious science officer’s, was still operational.

Bolden stood, causing a mild movement of weeds. He consulted his own built-in device, “They’re too close to move Velen. At least the dark is on our side. It’s doubtful they’ll see him. Let’s just let them pass.”

The Illyrian got up with a grunt, “Commander, the Hacharans might very well have their own night vision technology or even thermal scanners.”

“Our suits should shield our thermal signatures,” Jonin informed the group, “as for night vision, we only have to worry about Velen.”

The *Destrier* first officer considered the information. There was nothing to be done. Attempting to hide the Denobulan further would only cause a ruckus for the Hacharans to investigate. He said over the comline, “noted.”

Supplemental IKS *Jev’Iw*, Engineering Section In Orbit of Fu’puk II

Alexander strode through a jet of steam. By tradition, he should have been looking at the floor. Instead, he looked proud. He quickly found Yaava.

She met him and began, “What happened in the Mess Hall?”

“There’s no time for that, now,” he responded. “I’m leaving the ship...and I want you to come with me.”

Yaava desperately tried to keep up with current events, “What do you mean? Where are you going?”

The specific questions took him off guard. He searched for an answer, then said, “I don’t know...probably to the Federation.” He grabbed her arm, “But we have to leave now.”

She pulled away, "Alexander, I can't just leave."

The Son of Worf's expression changed, "I...I don't want to leave without you."

"Then don't," she stated.

He shook his head, "I can't. My career in the KDF is over. No one will respect me." He looked into her eyes, "I don't want to live with Klingons anymore."

She stepped back, "I care for you, Alexander. *'ach tlhIngan jIH'*"

His heart sank. He lingered for a moment in a desperate attempt to see if she'd change her mind. Her face was solid. His shoulder's slumped and he walked away, leaving Yaava behind. She told him, "But I am Klingon."

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Main Bridge
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Captain Hobson walked to the center seat from his ready room. He stopped short of sitting down and looked at Mr. Miller. "How long?"

The lieutenant commander reported, "Assuming all orbiting vessels don't deviate from their paths, a Klingon blind spot will occur on our current course in 22 minutes."

"Any activity at the beam up sites?"

Miller responded, "I'm not detecting any Klingon bio-signatures at the infiltration team site."

Hobson didn't visibly react to the news.

The operation officer continued, "As for the duck-blind, the suits dampen life signs from a distance, but I am detecting the materials of four isolation suits." He added with concern, "And there are several Hacharans nearing the site."

The captain somberly nodded in understanding.

Supplemental
IKS *Jev'Iw*, Deck Four
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

As the three mock Klingons neared the transporter room, Bin Nadal handed a padd to Alexander, who accompanied them. "We need be at these coordinates within 20 minutes to be beamed aboard the *Perseus*."

He took the information, "It shouldn't be a problem."

The hatch to the transporter room screeched open. Without hesitation, the covert team took their places on the pad. Alexander plopped the information on the operator's station and joined them. He ordered, "*ghojol pa*"

Again annoyed, Ursva lowered her novel for a moment. She didn't move to input the coordinates. Instead, she returned to her data padd and dismissingly stated, "News of your actions have already reached my ears -- your orders no longer do."

For a brief moment, the four shared uneasy glances. It didn't take long for word to spread. As far as the Klingons were concerned, Alexander was now a non-person.

CHAPTER 19

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

Senior Guardian Pasho's company of elite soldiers walked cautiously and in silence. They were hours too late to aid in the labor camp liberation. By the time they got there, all that was left were craters and bodies. They didn't even encounter an invader. Moral was nearly non-existent as they traveled back to their ground transports in the wooded darkness.

This war of resistance had degenerated into a quest for mere survival. All the major cites were rubble. Luckily, the aliens were concentrating on the urban areas, though there were rumors of small bands of invaders "hunting" Hacharans in the wilderness.

Yet amidst all the destruction, something amazing had occurred. The three nations of the world, blood enemies for centuries, had begun to cooperate. All it took was their near annihilation.

Quite unexpectedly, Pasho found himself falling into the weeds. He had tripped over something. At first he thought it was a log...but this was softer than wood. Several of his troops paused and took covering positions, as they were trained to do. The sudden movement could cause unwanted attention.

A junior guardian squatted nearby, "Are you alright?"

Still on the ground, the senior guardian rolled over and got a closer look at the mass he stumbled over. It was...an orange, plastic fabric. He got to his knees and looked even closer. It was similar to a biological contamination suit. At first, he thought it might be a Hacharan scientist, so he brushed away the foliage covering the body and moved it onto its back. The face plate was transparent. He desperately wanted to activate a torch for more light, but knew he shouldn't in a tactical situation. He had enough light to see, however, that what ever was in the suit wasn't Hacharan.

Supplemental IKS Jev'Iw, Transporter Room In Orbit of Fu'puk II

It only took a moment for Lieutenant Comander Carrick to act. She had to be convincing for it to work. An apology would have to come later. Without warning, the *Destrier* security chief violently backhanded Alexander. The force was enough to twist his entire torso. She yelled, "See how pathetic you now are, *yIntagh!*"

Three small lacerations etched his face from her gauntlet. A genuine look of fear and confusion could be seen on Alex's face as he recovered.

The group reacquired Ursva's attention.

She had to continue, lest he or the others didn't catch on, "Is it clear to you now how truly helpless you are? No one will notice your absence!"

Bin Nadal picked up the queue. He walked over to Ursva and grinned most viscously, "We wanted to show him how powerless he was before we rid the KDF of this filth."

The Son of Worf finally understood and began looking as lamentable as he could.

"You mean to kill the *nuch?*" surmised the female transporter operator.

Karim nodded slowly.

Carrick stepped forward and added, "We didn't want his blood to taint an Imperial vessel. He will *not* be returning from the surface."

Ursva looked at Karim, Kirce, Yitzhak, and finally Alexander. She sat up and manipulated the controls. "Put that creature out of its misery," she commented.

Shalev grabbed Alexander roughly by the collar and moved him back onto the dais, "Come. Meet your fate."

The other two Starfleet officers followed. Within a few seconds, they disappeared in the transporter effect.

Supplemental

Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

The com chatter was intense ever since the Hacharan had tumbled over Velen.

"We have to stun them," advised Hatora.

The *Independence* tactical officer retorted, "There are over 25 armed soldiers here. We can't stun them all."

"At least not before they return fire," added Commander Bolden. "Isolation suits or not, once they see phaser fire, they'll likely saturate the whole area with projectiles and hit us."

The Illyrian asked, "Then what can we do?"

Marcus watched as a Hacharan lifted the science officer on to his shoulders. Then the soldiers began to move off.

"Sir," pleaded Hatora, "we can't let them take him!"

The troops continued to walk away.

Bolden sighed, "It's not up to us, now."

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Main Bridge In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Lieutenant T'Pren looked up from her display, "Sir, one of the Hacharans is now in direct contact with one of the suits and is moving away from the beam up site."

"And the others?" Captain Hobson inquired.

She consulted her console, "For the moment, they're stationary."

"Mister Miller," ordered the Iceman, "is there anyway to determine whose suit that is?"

The operations officer indicated the negative, "Not at this range, Captain."

The Deltan first officer leaned over, "Eight minutes until the window."

The captain shook his head slightly and repeated under his breath, "Eight minutes."

**Supplemental
Go'hachar, Southern Continent
Fu'puk II**

The *Destrier* first officer made a decision. He spoke to the Andorian, "I'll follow Velen and make sure they don't abuse him. You and the chief stay here."

Faltyne felt he needed to point out, "Captain Hobson may not beam you up if you're too close to the natives."

"Well, Velen is really close," was the retort. "And I'm not leaving without him." Bolden began to pace to the soldiers. "Don't follow me, either. Beam up and report the situation to Hobson."

Faltyne's sensors soon lost Bolden as he entered the thick brush. He looked at his chronometer. Less than two minutes until extraction.

CHAPTER 20

Supplemental IKS *Jev'Iw*, Captain's Chamber In Orbit of Fu'puk II

The toned J'pak entered. His thick, black hair was pulled back and tied with a strap of leather.

Captain Ch'Pogh looked up as he approached, "*nuq*"

"Alexander has left the ship with the Starfleet team," he reported.

The captain grinned as he leaned back in the chair, "Good. Things are happening as I had hoped." He stood, walked around the desk and offered an arm, "It seems you have been promoted, J'pak."

The younger Klingon took it with his own, "My loyalty is yours, *HoD*."

Ch'Pogh returned to his seat, "Now, be gone."

J'pak sharply saluted and exited.

Waiting until the door clanged shut, Ch'Pogh activated his terminal. Soon General Lorath appeared on the screen. The captain stated, "*Sa'Lorath...Qapla'* The Son of Worf has fled in disgrace. The House of Martok will be humiliated."

"This is good news, indeed," replied the elder Klingon. "But that is not enough. The entire mission at Fu'puk II must fail. If the chancellor is unable to keep such an insignificant planet, few in the Council will continue to have faith in his leadership."

Ch'Pogh shook his head, "I do not believe General K'Vada will assist us in that. His reputation would be at stake."

"You forget," Lorath said, "Alexander set certain events in motion. Starfleet is now involved. Humans have a tendency to defend the oppressed."

"True."

"None the less, continue to do what you can to encourage the opposition."

"I have redeployed troops in such a way to allow refuge to certain pockets of resistance. The Hacharans are making full use of them." He grimaced, "But K'Vada is relentless. Eventually, he will find them."

The ridgeless Klingon cautioned, "Do not overtly counter K'Vada. You can claim incompetence in some matters, but I need your position within the fleet intact. Do not give him enough reason to kill you."

"Yes, Milord."

The General sat back, "With any luck, others will do our work for us."

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Main Bridge In Orbit of Fu'puk II

"We're in the blind-spot," Devon Miller reported from ops.

Hobson left his chair, "Status of the teams."

The non-traditional Vulcan at tactical stated, "The boarding team plus one is on location."

"Plus one?"

She nodded. Her silence told Hobson there was no more information she could give.

The window wouldn't last long; less than one minute. There was no time to ask too many questions. "Alright, beam them up." He looked at Anara, who was monitoring the duck-blind team from an aft science station. "Are two officers still near the Hacharans?"

"Yes sir," rejoined the Deltan female.

According to the strict letter of the regulation, beaming those two up was a breach of protocol. In this case, however, the barn door on cultural contamination had been blown off its hinges. There was no point in keeping the officers in continued danger. "Beam up the entire duck-blind team, now."

Anara hesitated for only a moment. If she were in his position, she'd make the same call, "Aye sir."

He looked back at T'Pren, "Contact the *Destrier* and *Independence*. It's time for a debriefing."

Stardate: 54372.5 (17 May 2377)
Chancellor's Office
Capitol City, Qo'noS

"You wanted to see me, Chancellor," Worf began.

Martok rose from his seat, the Cloak of Leadership hung from his shoulders. He snapped up a data padd from the ancient, hardwood desk and nearly threw it at the Son of Mogh. "Do you know about this?"

The former Starfleet officer read the report. His heart sank. He was disappointed, but not terribly surprised. He straightened his back before responding. "No, Chancellor. This is the first I have heard of it."

The one-eyed leader grumbled as he paced, "Your son has dishonored my entire House."

Worf looked around at nothing in particular, "My son has never truly embraced his Klingon heritage."

"Yet, he joined the Defense Force," replied Martok, "Yet, I allowed him into my House." He stepped closer, "Yet, I made him an officer."

The chancellor was now very close to Worf. It was not threatening, but it sent a message, none the less.

Worf relented and asked, "Do you intend to discommendate him?"

"Ah," he grimly laughed, "that would be a more preferable fate to his present status."

The Ambassador blankly examined the stone floor, knowing his words to be true.

Martok continued, "Henceforth, he is no longer a member of the House of Martok." He added per custom, "He will be stricken from Klingon records. His name will no longer be spoken."

Worf slowly nodded, "I understand. As his father, I bear responsibility for his actions as well. I shall share his fate."

The chancellor corrected him, "No, Worf. You will not."

"I...do not understand."

Martok placed a hand on his shoulder, "You are too important an ally, Worf. Your son *will* have to live in exile, but you need not." He removed his hand, "And to be fair, I believe this will be better for Alexander."

The ambassador looked up from under his brow, "Perhaps." He found his leader, "But word will spread. My presence will only serve to weaken your standing with the Council."

"It's possible, but I want to have you at my side, Worf," retorted the chancellor. "I need all the loyal allies I can get. Will you continue to serve?"

Worf's jaw locked. He breathed heavily. He fidgeted slightly. Finally, he answered, "Of course, Chancellor."

CHAPTER 21

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Fu'puk II

Senior Guardian Pasho continued his tale to the leaders of the world, such as they were. Elder Tahocha listened intently. Duke, now Lord, Nilu heard the story through a surviving military audio network. Ko'Hachar actually still had an orbital communications satellite. So General Vacham was there via a visual monitor. The two latter transmitted from their submersibles.

"The alien was not a Klingon," he stated.

"Are you sure," the female general pushed from the screen.

Pasho nodded, "I could see the face. It had head ridges, but they were different and on the sides of the face, not the forehead." He made eye contact with them to bring home the point, "It was something else." He added as if it were an afterthought, "Also, when the invaders appear, there is a red light. When this one disappeared, there was a blue light."

The aged Hacharan rhetorically asked, "And if it were Klingon, why would it bother wearing a contamination suit?"

"Perhaps," started Nilu, "these new aliens are vulnerable to some virus or bacteria on our planet."

"My point," continued Tahocha, "is they behave differently. The Klingons would have come, killed you, and retrieved their warrior. But these new ones did not."

"They have another agenda," concluded Vacham.

"The question becomes," said the new Lord of Do'Hachar, "are they allies or enemies of the invaders?"

The question went unanswered and there was silence until Tahocha hopefully ventured, "Perhaps we have an ally we didn't even know we had."

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Captain's Mess
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Again the combined command crews met. This time, however, there was a much larger degree of intermingling. The respective team leaders reported the events of their missions.

The first immediate question came from Captain Hobson. "What's Velen's status?"

The Ktarian hybrid leaned in, "He's stable. I could wake him at anytime, but for now, I recommend letting his body rest."

The *Perseus* captain nodded in satisfaction.

After a few tense seconds, the elephant in the room was addressed. Sintina asked plainly, "So what do we do with Alexander?"

Kojo was silent. Her arms were crossed. She huffed slightly at the mention of the name.

Bin Nadal, now appearing naturally, chimed in, "I recommend allowing his asylum."

"How can we not?" questioned Yitzhak, "His father is our ambassador to Qo'noS."

"Its not a matter of allowing it," rejoined Hobson, "He and his father hold dual citizenship with the Federation and the Empire. He will be granted protection by the Federation."

The conversation again stalled. The next step was obvious to all. The reports were in. The information gathering mission was a success. Eyes began to drift toward Kojo.

Finally, the blonde haired captain began, "Very well. I will send our findings to..."

"Bridge to Captain Hobson."

If anyone was annoyed with the interruption, it didn't show. The *Perseus* captain tilted his head upwards slightly, "Go ahead."

"Sir, we've been monitoring the Fed newscasts. I highly recommend you access the Council's most recent public announcement."

Treasure happened to be closest to the display in the bulkhead. The engineer got up and called up the broadcast. It began as she sat back down.

The Speaker of the Federation Council, a Vulcan female, stood from a podium and began:

"Greetings. As many of you are aware, the Imperial Klingon Fleet has annexed a pre-warp capable world, which they designate: Fu'puk II. The Council has debated at length on this subject and we have passed the following resolution.

In summary, it states: The Klingon Empire has the right to expand its borders in territory unclaimed by other regional powers.

I understand how emotion might run high at this action by the Empire. However, this star system is in unclaimed space, no treaty has been broken, and the Council does not believe there is any threat to the United Federation of Planets or its protectorates.

This concludes the announcement. Thank you."

The screen reverted to the emblem of the UFP.

The collective room began to boil, even the Iceman could feel it. It was Captain Aurelia that popped first, "Son of a bitch!"

Marcus added, "They didn't even get our evidence."

"Our entire mission was for nothing," said the *Destrier* tactical officer.

T'Pren shook her head, "A classic example of the right hand not knowing what the left hand was doing."

"They probably never had any interest in seeing our evidence," commented Karim.

Zo’Kama, the reptilian doctor, surmised, “That’s right. If they got proof of what they’re doing here, it’d be politically harder to pass that resolution.”

“Enough!” blasted the *Destrier* captain. The conversation and grumbling stopped. She continued, “What’s done is done.” She began to pace, “I will contact Command for further instruction. Dismissed.” She strode to the exit.

Everyone else lingered for a moment. Hobson then, stood and encouraged the others, “You heard her. Return to your posts.” The *Perseus* crew got motivated.

The *Independence* crew began to stand as well, but they looked at Aurelia, who remained seated. The side of her head rested on her fingers. To say she looked annoyed was an understatement. Only her eyes moved as she addressed her people, “Let’s get out of here.” She finally got up, “Away team members, you’re on light duty for 48 hours.”

A few “Aye ma’ams,” followed.

Bolden caught up to Kojo in the corridor. He discreetly asked, “Captain, is there something bothering you?”

She walked on, “Nothing about the mission. In war, there are sometimes objectives that later prove to be useless.”

“Then what, sir?”

The Kriosian stopped and spun around, “What has happened to Klingons?”

The commander didn’t have a response.

She continued, “I am glad my mate is not alive to see this day. Some Klingons treat their vassals without respect. Other Klingons have become cowards. Both are allowed to escape their just punishment.”

Bolden searched vainly for an appropriate comment. He could find none.

Kojo didn’t wait. She moved on to the transporter room.

Faltyne walked abreast of his executive officer. The Andorian security chief commented, "I guess we'll always know where Captain Aurelia stands, huh?"

The Persian looked over with a smirk, "Yeah, she pretty much wears her feelings on her sleeve."

"What do you think of the Council's decision, sir?" Jonin tempted.

Karim considered keeping his feelings to himself, but decided to be at truthful, if vague. "I think the Federation has lost its way, Lieutenant."

CHAPTER 22

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Guest's Quarters In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Once again Alexander Rozhenko found himself on a Starfleet vessel. The environment was lighter, softer. It felt...familiar...comforting.

He stood opposite a full-size mirror. The image was of a Klingon warrior. But Alexander knew it was only an image.

The enunciator chimed. He turned away from the mirror. "Enter."

Two Starfleet officers with blue trimmed uniforms came in. An Andorian and what appeared to be a half-human, half- Ktarian.

The Andorian spoke, "Alexander, hello. I'm Kimula Soma and this is Helen Nor. We just wanted to stop by and see how you were doing."

Worf's son examined the two. There was a certain quality to them. He knew what a ship's counselor looked like. They fit the bill. He looked down, "I've failed."

Kimula didn't miss a beat, "Failed who?"

"Myself," he began, "my father, the Empire."

"Of those three," the hybrid doctor countered, "which is more important?"

The question took Alex by surprise. It was obvious he never really thought of it before.

The *Independence* counselor stepped forward. She didn't want to press him too far, too fast. "Is there anyone in the Federation you'd like to contact? Your records indicate you have adopted grandparents on Earth. I could..."

"I think I'd like to talk to Counselor Deanna Troi of the *Enterprise*."

The two female officers shared a grin. Nor responded, "I'm sure that can be arranged."

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Captain's Quarters In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Christopher Hobson sat at one end of the couch. Anara sat at the other. Both focused on the screen inlaid in the bulkhead. The UFP President, Norah Satie, responded to the Council's most recent decision.

"...Though, I grieve for what the Hacharans must be going through, we must resist the temptation to ride in on our white horse and save them. I agree with the Council. It is not our role to police the galaxy. We cannot continue to use our finite resources to aid everyone in need, especially when there are so many projects at home that deserve attention.

And we must remember how valuable the Martok administration is to the Federation.

It is time we take care of our own. The interventionist policies of prior presidents are no longer practical...or desirable.

I will now take a few questions."

An off-screen reporter began, *"Mister President, do you intend to intervene in the mining dispute between Peliar Zel and Coridan?"*

"I believe..."

"Computer, end broadcast," ordered Hobson. He got up and strolled to the window. A large, blue, white, and green orb, Hachar, rotated slowly in the vista.

The female Deltan adjusted on the couch to address him, "You don't like just walking away from this do you?"

Without looking at her, he shook his head. After a moment, he glanced over his shoulder and said, "No one deserves to go through what these people are going through." He sighed, "It's always more complicated than simple right and wrong, isn't it?"

Commander Rysyl's eyes wondered down, "It seems that way."

The captain returned to his vantage point of the planet. His reflection overlaid it. "We're turning a blind eye on them...on our own values. Our allies are little more than bullies, but we were ok with that when it served our purpose."

The bald woman couldn't find an appropriate comment.

"...And now, we're accomplices to genocide."

Anara softly responded, "I don't know if I'd go that far..."

The captain drummed his fingers on the railing as his steel gray eyes remained fixed upon the placid appearing planet. With just the slightest shake of his head as he contemplated the irony of how well the billowing white clouds of Hachar's atmosphere covered the brutal rape of its soil, Chris answered back with a barely audible sigh, "I would. By not acting, we're allowing it to happen. Bullies can only succeed when there's indifference." He walked back to the couch, "Too many times in history people have justified their apathy by saying, 'well, it's not us.'" He continued an octave lower, "Once injustice, anywhere, is tolerated; it spreads. Fiat iusticia ruat caelum."

"Let justice be done...even though the heavens fall." Anara replied, translating the Latin, and then remarked wryly, "A particularly apt phrase." Shaking her head, the lovely Deltan pointed out somberly, "But, you said it yourself, Chris. It's not that simple. Martok is the most Federation-friendly chancellor ever." She paused, "We don't want to change that."

Chris put his hands behind his back as he turned back towards his first officer, the Iceman darkly mused, "How much is our security worth, Anara? Maybe we should ask the Hacharans."

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Ready Room In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Kojo entered the ready room of the *Intrepid* class vessel. Captains Aurelia and Hobson were already loitering there in anticipation of her arrival.

The Kriosian skipped the pleasantries. "I've spoken with Command. Obviously, our orders have changed. Our mission in this system is over." She handed each captain a padd. "My ship is to met up with the *Venture* near Tholian space. The *Independence* needs to relieve the *Victory* in Sector 1607. Captain Hobson, you are to take your ship to Starbase 90 for resupply and crew rotations. The defector will join you."

"Say 'hi' to Rear Admiral Kavig for me," humorlessly joshed Sintina.

The Iceman placed the padd on his desk, "So we just wash our hands of it."

"It's not our problem, anymore," commented the Latina captain.

Hobson's face remained stoic. He was, once again, disappointed in his peer's reaction.

The *Destrier* captain added, "I am not pleased with the situation, either. ...But we have our orders."

"Captain," came over the com, "*The Independence is reporting they are receiving a laser-based communication from the surface.*" It was Anara's voice.

"What?" questioned Aurelia.

The captains began to head for the bridge.

Bin Nadal was already on the large forward screen.

"What's going on, Karim?" Aurelia asked as she strode on to the command center.

He repeated, "A low level laser beam just hit our hull. Obviously, the Hacharans have detected our vessel."

From her station, T'Pren commented, "I thought their ability to detect us had been destroyed by the Klingon bombardment."

"Apparently not," came from Miller at operations.

Already having a good idea, the Iceman asked, "Mr. bin Nadal, what does the message say?"

The first officer hesitated, only because it depressed him. "It's a plea for assistance against the Klingons."

Silence permeated the bridge. No one wanted to ignore the request. Several people shared concerned looks.

Finally, Kojo stated, "Unfortunately, this changes nothing. Starfleet has already made its decision."

The female Vulcan at tactical reported almost immediately, "The *Jev'Iw* has targeted the source of the laser." She looked up, "And firing."

There was nothing anyone could do.

A second later, T'Pren followed up with, "The site has been destroyed." Before anyone could mourn, another indicator sounded at her station. She made eye contact with Kojo, "Captain, you're getting an incoming message from the *Kang*."

The task force commander gave Hobson a requesting glance. With a slight nod, he gave her free reign of the bridge. "On screen," she ordered.

The image of the Persian officer was replaced by that of the Klingon general.

He started right away, "I have been informed of your government's decision. Your mission is over. Leave, now."

Kojo didn't break his stare, nor did she respond immediately. "We will leave orbit within the hour."

"Why the delay, Starfleet?"

She shook her head mildly, "There is none. It is simply when I choose to leave."

The general sat up straighter, deciding whether to be combative or not. In the end, he decided to accept her response, "Make sure you do."

The Kriosian began the gesture to end the transmission, but K'Vada injected, "Oh, and I am aware of the...creature you took from the *Jew'Iw*."

The almost casual comment got everyone's attention.

Satisfied with the reaction he got, he continued, "Take it. ...But make it known, if it ever steps foot on another Imperial world or vessel, it will be killed."

Present company managed to stifle any visible reaction to the threat.

Captain Kojo stated coolly, "Get him off the screen."

CHAPTER 23

Supplemental Sitka, Alaska Earth, Sol System

Deanna Troi, in a plush robe, looked out the large, dining room windows of the cabin. Will was a short distance away, fishing in the sound. She sipped a cup of hot chocolate. It was an absolutely beautiful morning. Otters were floating on their backs, eating, in the distant water.

The vacation on Earth had been wonderful. She went to visit her father's relatives in New Mexico, where she heard more tales of her pioneer ancestors. Will and she traveled to all the major sites on the planet: the Grand Canyon, Cairo, Chichen Itza, the Great Wall. She even got to catch up with Reginald Barclay...and set him up with a teacher friend of hers, Maril. They're up to their third date! But by far, the best time was here at a cabin in Alaska. The time here was just for them.

Unfortunately, today was their last day of shore leave. They would have to catch a transport to Starbase 32 late tonight. From there, the *Enterprise* would send out a shuttle to pick them up.

She noticed her cup was empty. The Betazed hybrid went to refill it when the terminal on the end table began to alert her of an incoming communiqué. She looked at herself, she wasn't exactly looking her best, but she was presentable. So she pulled a chair in front of it from the table and activated it.

A Klingon on the screen wasn't what she expected. Her brow crunched up for a moment, until she recognized who it was. Instantly, a wide smile emerged, "Alexander? Is that you?"

He nodded, "Hello, Counselor Troi."

Her smile persisted, "Alexander, please -- Deanna. It's been years, how are you?" She asked optimistically, but she knew from his face the mood he was in.

"So the news of humiliation hasn't reached you, yet."

"Humiliation? What humiliation?"

With a deep sigh he explained, "A warrior challenged me to the death. I wasn't going to win, so I surrendered. Now, any standing I had in Klingon culture is gone."

She slumped. Her face showed nothing but sympathy. "Oh, Alexander, I'm so sorry."

He continued, "My father must know by now. How do you think he'll react? Do you think he'll treat me like an outcast, like the other Klingons?"

"Alexander, your father loves you," she offered. "He won't just abandon you like that."

The Klingon huffed, "Wouldn't he? He sent me away before."

Deanna cocked her head, "That was different."

"How?" protested Alex. "I didn't live up to his expectations. So, he sent me to live with his parents on Earth."

Gently, she said, "Alexander, that's not why he sent you there."

He persisted, "Can you honestly say that if I were the model Klingon child he wanted, he would have sent me to Earth?"

The counselor frowned and looked down for a moment. She looked back up and explained, "He would never admit this – but he sent you to live with the Rozhenkos not because you failed to live up to his expectations as a son...but because he wasn't living up to his own expectations as a father."

The revelation hit Alexander like a ton of bricks. "My father didn't have confidence in himself?"

Troi shook her head, "Not when it came to being a parent."

The Son of Worf sat back, blown away.

She ventured, "Alexander, if I may...you don't have to do anything to win approval from your father. His opinion of you isn't a gauge of your own worth, anyway. You be the person you choose to be. Don't follow someone down a path you know is not yours. Find your own way. You'll be happier for it." She added, "In some ways, your father still hasn't learned that lesson."

Slowly, Alexander began to nod in understanding. It could not be made more clear to him. For the first time, he felt as if his life was truly his.

Troi urged, "Talk to him."

His mind still raced to process the information. He managed, "I will. Thank you, Deanna."

She concluded with an upbeat, "Hey, keep in touch with me, too."

A mild grin formed on his lips, "I promise."

Supplemental
USS *Independence*, First Officer's Quarters
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

"So you agree with the decision as well?" asked bin Nadal to the person on the small screen.

"Yes, I do," was the response from Admiral Alynna Nechayev, a member of a counter-Section 31 group. She continued, "It's possible 31 has an interest in this situation, but you don't have to attribute the Council's actions to them. It's simply the reality of politics." She leaned forward, "And frankly, considering the circumstances the Federation is in at the moment, it was the right call."

Dejected, Karim sat back. He put his hand up to his chin.

Nechayev recommended, "Let this one go, Commander."

He didn't respond.

She concluded with, "And, in the future, don't contact me, even if it is on a secured line. It might raise suspicions. If I need you, I'll find a way to get a hold of you."

Karim absently nodded. The transmission ended.

Supplemental
The Great Hall
Capitol City, Qo'noS

"You've done well, Worf," Martok declared as he raised a cup of bloodwine.

Unenthusiastically, the ambassador raised his as well.

The chancellor continued, "The Federation's decision to not interfere was made in no small part because of your testimony."

He nearly grumbled, "I live to serve, Chancellor."

Martok rumbled in understanding. He placed the cup down and said, "You fret for your son."

Worf silently and reluctantly acknowledged.

"You need not. He is with Starfleet. He is in good hands."

The Son of Mogh sighed deeply. He stood taller as he began, "I've been thinking of the teachings of Kahless."

The one-eyed Klingon waited for him to continue.

"During the war with the tyrant Molor, Kahless was attacked by a child assassin." Worf told the story with conviction, "Kahless easily parried the blow and upon realizing it was a child, he shooed him away. But the child did not leave. Instead, he attacked again. Again, the Unforgettable One deflected the strike. Kahless' followers told him to simply kill the child, but he did not. It happened a third time and the people asked him, why do you not counter-attack? And Kahless said, 'I respect the child. It takes courage to attack one that is stronger than you. I do not attack, however, because there is no honor in killing the weak.'"

The meaning of the parable was not lost on the chancellor. However, it wasn't well received. Politically, it was too late to reverse course, now. This was the first sign of wavering from his friend. He grunted in frustration, retrieved his wine and strode out of the room without a word.

Worf didn't regret the telling of the story. As he was alone in the chamber, he realized; perhaps he wasn't alone here on the homeworld, after all.

CHAPTER 24

Supplemental **USS *Independence*, Captain's Ready Room** **In Orbit of Fu'puk II**

"But what about the plea from the surface?" desperately asked Karim.

Captain Aurelia looked up from her report and retorted, "What about it?"

The first officer leaned over and supported himself with his hands on the desk. "Starfleet has a standing policy to respond to all distress calls."

She tossed the padd aside, "The Federation Council has already decided that we are not to interfere with the Klingons."

"Those people are suffering, Sintina."

She threw up her arms, "What do you want me to do about it?" The Latina stood, "Launch a few torpedoes at the Klingons?"

At that, bin Nadal physically and verbally backed off. He quickly adopted a new tact, "What if it was us down there?" He pressed on, "What if it was your family...or this crew that were being raped and slaughtered?"

"It's not."

Karim was becoming more perturbed. It was not the first time he had to force Sintina to see her own conscience. It was a chore he grew weary of. "Does the extent of your giving a shit really end at the perimeter of our hull?"

"That's enough, Karim! You've made your point. Now..."

"No, I don't think I have," he blasted, "Those two captains out there care about the Hacharans. At least they recognize an atrocity when they see one!"

There were very few people in the world she would tolerate speaking to her like this. Luckily, Karim was one of them. She rejoined, "I'm not some heartless bitch! I feel terrible for those people."

Totally unconvinced, the commander finished with, "Yeah, I'm sure you do. You just don't feel terrible enough to do something about it." Without permission, he left.

Sintina sighed, returned to her seat and placed her head in her hands.

Supplemental
USS *Destrier*, Main Bridge
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

From the center seat, Kojo casually asked her helm officer, "Mister Stell, if we needed to, how quickly could we reach the *Venture*?"

The Vulcan male promptly reported, "The *Venture* is approximately 82 light-years away. If we were able to sustain warp nine, we could arrive in 19 days, 18 hours." He looked back from the conn, "But Starfleet has allotted 45 days, assuming we would be traveling at our normal cruising speed of warp seven."

She sat back in contemplation, "Thank you, Ensign." A second later, she tapped her compin, headed for the portal, and said, "Commander Bolden, report to my quarters."

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Captain's Ready Room
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

After shedding his Klingon uniform, Alexander sought out Captain Hobson. The master of the vessel invited him to speak with him in his large office adjacent from the bridge. The captain briefly explained the situation and the Federation's decision.

Alexander's jaw went slack, "So after all this...after everything I've done, we're just - leaving?"

The Iceman asked...almost hoped, "Do you have an alternative?"

The disgraced Klingon searched the room with his eyes for a moment. Finally, he offered, "Take me to Qo'noS. I have to convince my father to help. Martok listens to him."

Hobson plainly stated, "I thought you already tried that." He strolled to the railing and rested on it, "Besides, if you go there, your life will be in danger."

"What choice to we have?" resolved Alexander, "Someone *must* be a voice for the Hacharans."

Despite himself, the Iceman cracked into a small grin. He only needed reassurance that Alexander was up to the task. He stepped forward. Then tapped a control on his desk, "Commander Rysyl, I want to set up a conference channel with Captains Kojo and Aurelia."

Supplemental USS *Destrier*, Captain's Quarters In Orbit of Fu'puk II

The captain's quarters on *Defiant* class ships doubled as a ready room. Though, it was larger than the other cabins, it was by no means an ambassadorial suite. Kojo dismissed her first officer before beginning the conference call.

Captain Hobson and Aurelia shared the screen. The former stated, "I've already decided to take Alexander to Qo'noS, but the Klingons may need more persuasion."

"What are you proposing?" asked the blonde haired Kriosian.

He leaned in, "That we pool our resources once again and pressure the Klingons off that planet."

Aurelia relished in pointing out to, what she perceived as, a by-the-book captain, "You mean ignore our orders?"

The Iceman, taking subtle pleasure in tweaking the nose of his hot-tempered counterpart, rejoined with a straight face, "Not at all. There will be no violation of the letter of our orders if we do this."

Picking up on Hobson's thread, a quick smirk crossed the Kriosian captain's face, "To be honest," conceded Kojo, "I already had a plan in mind to...help level the battle field."

Aurelia puffed in surprise. "I can't believe I'm the voice of reason here," she prefaced, "but if we get caught, it'll be the end of us. Not to mention, the political ramifications."

Kojo observed, "You don't seem to be the type to concern yourself with 'political ramifications,' Captain."

The *Independence* commander sneered at the – albeit true – insinuation.

"All you have to do," inserted Hobson to Aurelia, "is to try to find some advocate for the Hacharans. According to public records, the Martok administration just barely managed to convince the Gorn to stay out of their way. Stir up trouble. See if you can't get them to reconsider."

She commented with a casual expression, "I am good at causing trouble it seems."

He continued, "Do what you can until you absolutely have to leave for your rendezvous."

"Actually," began the *Destrier* captain, "There is something else you can do before you leave. My mission would be more likely to succeed if Commander bin Nadal and his team were reassembled."

"Do I want to ask what you're planning?" inquired Hobson.

The equivocal response was, "I alone will take the responsibility if complications should arise."

"If you want Lieutenant Shalev," rejoined the *Perseus* captain, "I'll ask him, but I won't order him."

Kojo nodded, "As it should be."

Eyes fell on Aurelia. She sighed, "I'll send Karim over." She added, "I don't want him to steal a shuttle again."

“There is one more thing,” the Kriosian female said, “This operation will require a master engineer.” She admitted, “I fear mine has little experience. It seems Commander Windslow is the most experienced engineer we have.”

Hobson remained silent.

Aurelia grimaced, “I don’t doubt his technical skills, but I’m sure you’re aware of his past...” She let the sentence drift.

“Perhaps you’re right...” started Kojo.

“Lieutenant Barrows is good,” interrupted the Iceman, “She’s very good.” He continued, “But Windslow is better, at least when it comes to engineering. If you want the best we have, then you want him.”

“Partial to your chief engineer, are you?” half-joked Aurelia.

The Iceman responded bluntly, “Yes, but that’s not why I’m recommending Commander Windslow.” His demeanor required no further explanation.

For too long the line was silent. Finally, the Latin American captain said, “Ok, I’ll ask him. But I’m not sure he’ll accept. You’d better have Barrows on standby.”

CHAPTER 25

Supplemental USS *Independence*, Chief Engineer's Quarters In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Lieutenant Commander Ethan Windslow entered his family's quarters in a rush. He found Susan, pulled her aside from the children and said, "I have five minutes to make a decision."

Susan's short, blonde hair swayed as she shook her head, "What decision?"

"Captain Aurelia asked me to go the *Destrier* for a mission."

"What type of mission?"

"That's the thing," Ethan explained, "she didn't elaborate...and she made it very clear it was totally voluntary." He surmised, "but my guess is, Captain Kojo isn't quite done here."

The German woman, nodded, "I see." After a moment, she found his eyes, "What do you want to do?"

He paced a bit and said, "Do you know how long it's been since I've been trusted enough to go on an away mission?"

She strolled up and cupped his cheek, "Yes, in fact, I do." She didn't prompt him further. She knew he only had to think it out for himself.

Predictably, he continued, "But, I don't want to leave you guys, again."

"Ethan," she said softly, "you can't hide on the ship. It's not the first time the boys and I have watched you beam off on a dangerous mission. Granted, it's been awhile. So it's really up to you," she added, "but don't use us as an excuse."

He bit his lip and nodded. "You're right, that's not fair." After a moment of thought, he leaned in and hugged her, "I'll see you in about a week or so."

She returned the embrace; then, pulled back. "You'd better tell the boys."

Supplemental
USS *Destrier*, Transporter Room
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Yitzhak Shalev didn't need any persuasion to beam over. Kirce Carrick, whom was much more attractive without head ridges, greeted him, "Welcome to the *Destrier*, Lieutenant."

He walked off the platform and joked, "I didn't think saying 'no' to Captain Kojo would be good for my health."

Carrick grinned, "That's been my experience."

The Eretz Israel native had been waiting to bring up, "Is it true Kojo once pulled a knife on a science officer?"

The tactical officer acknowledged, "That's what I hear, while she was first officer on the *Cuffe*."

Shalev was genuinely surprised. He was sure it was just a rumor.

She almost casually added, "But from what I hear, he was a particularly annoying science officer."

He cocked his head, "Oh...well...in that case..."

They continued down the corridor.

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Sickbay
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

T'Pren looked over Velen. She and the Denobulan had become acquaintances during their time in San Francisco. After a year and a half of serving together, she was truly concerned for him. She had considered contacting his wives, but decided against it. There was no need to worry them.

Nor approached, "I won't be waking him for at least another day."

The Vulcan glanced up, "I know. I just wanted to visit him all the same." She asked, "Are you sure he'll be ok?"

The doctor smiled, "I'm sure." She leaned against the next bio-bed, "He took quite a hit, but nothing we couldn't handle." She changed the subject to emphasize the confidence she had in Velen's recovery, "Do you think our mission to *Qo'noS* will succeed."

T'Pren shrugged, "If Martok can be dissuaded, maybe."

Helen followed with, "Do you think there will be any repercussions for Captain Hobson for diverting?"

The tactical officer considered. She looked up, "If our mission to *Qo'noS* succeeds."

Supplemental
USS *Destrier*, Main Bridge
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Captain Kojo slowly eased into the command chair. She stated, "It appears to be time to break orbit, Commander Bolden."

From an auxiliary station, he replied, "I agree, Captain."

She activated a control adjacent to her, "This is Fleet Commander Kojo to all ships. Break orbit and assume a course of 094 mark 127 from my location."

The Skorr ops officer reported, "The task force has acknowledged."

Nandali Kojo took a long look at the planet in the view screen, knowing it would not be her last. She ordered, "Engage."

Supplemental
IKS *Kang*, Bridge
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Captain H'ta saluted and reported, "*Sa'K'Vada*, the Starfleet ships have left orbit and are now traveling at impulse out of the system."

"*majQa'*," replied the general, "If they have enough sense to stay away, the situation might still be salvaged."

The *Kang* captain observed, "You are walking a very fine line, *Sa'* If either Martok or Lorath realize what you are doing..."

"I am loyal to the Empire!" blasted K'Vada. "Not scheming politicians." He strode around his metal desk, "The Empire will be stronger once we have the resources of this planet. I will not forfeit them to please Lorath. Nor will I win them simply so Martok can gain more confidence from the High Council."

Genuinely, H'ta stated, "Your words inspire me, sir. If only all Klingons thought as clearly as you."

K'Vada grasped the captain on the shoulder, "You and I are true warriors of the Empire." He conceded, "*HoD* Ch'Pogh, however, makes me weary. His loyalties are not ours."

Solemnly, H'ta nodded.

CHAPTER 26

Supplemental Go'hachar, Southern Continent Hachar (Fu'puk II)

The increasingly older looking ruler asked, "Did General Vacham get the message out?"

Tohacha's senior guardian gravely responded, "We're not sure, Elder. However, we've lost contact with her submersible."

The leader sighed and hung his head. Vacham knew the risks of sending the transmission. It was an opportunity they couldn't ignore, however, once they located the spaceship. He quietly vocalized, "We are alone, then."

Unwilling to let the Elder mope, Pasho offered, "I have spoken with Lord Nilu. We have agreed to organize a strike against the invaders."

The older man looked up from under his dark brow, "This is not like the invasion of Do'Hachar all those years ago. Where ever we attack, the Klingons need only bombard us from space." He morbidly admitted, "This is not about winning anymore. It's about surviving. Perhaps we should accept our fate."

"Elder, we mustn't give up hope."

Not wanting to hear the words, he continued, "They don't kill populations that are not resisting."

Pasho knelt down before the leader in order to see his eyes, "Elder, do not lose faith. As long as we *can* fight them, we should." He stood, "I know I will not stop until I leave my body...even then, I will fight them."

Slowly, Tahocha sat straighter. A hint of a grin formed on the old man's wrinkled face. "Tell me of your plan."

Supplemental Tolar'tu, Emperor's Fortress Qo'noS, Klingon System

The sky was greenish-blue and the clouds were dark. It was not the first time Worf walked up the stone steps to the ancient stone fortress.

Fire torches dimly lit the chambers. He passed several groups of chanting Klingons in the sacred place.

Rather than being a unifying force, as Worf had hoped years ago, Kahless' clone -- or Kahless the Second -- was a divisive figure among Klingons. None the less, he had a loyal and growing following.

The figurehead emperor recognized the Son of Mogh, "Worf!" he called out.

Like most species, as Klingons grew more successful, the taller they became. Hence, the emperor was short in stature compared to most. It didn't diminish his charisma; nor did his ceremonial status.

As was the custom, Worf knelt, "Emperor Kahless."

The clone gave a dismissive wave, "Get up. You speak with me regularly, yet you insist on doing that."

Worf returned upright, "I would speak with you again, Emperor." He added uncomfortably, "I seek guidance."

Kahless' animal skin attire shifted as he crossed his arms, "Yes, I imaged you would." He gestured, "Come. Let us sit around a fire."

After settling in and taking a few drinks of warnog, Kahless asked, "So what troubles you, my friend."

"Are you aware of our annexation of Fupuk II?" the ambassador quizzed.

Setting the cup aside, "I am."

"I understand the need for the Empire to expand," began Worf, "but I fear our warriors have become little more than marauders. They abuse their enemies. Their violations have become common place."

The emperor nodded in understanding, "And a victory without honor is no victory at all."

“Precisely.”

Kahless took another gulp, “Do I understand correctly, these...Hacharans cannot travel the stars, as we do.”

“They cannot.”

“But surely,” he continued, “they can offer resistance to our great battlecruisers.”

“No, Emperor.”

“Ahh,” said the clone, “but they do fight back?”

Silently, Worf nodded.

The stout figure got up and began to walk around the fire pit, “My...Kahless the Unforgettable’s...empire fell after...his death. Do you know why it collapsed?”

He gestured in the affirmative, “The Outsiders – the *Hur’q* – came. For three hundred years, the aliens pillaged our world.”

The Emperor dropped his pretence of ignorance, “I often wonder what would have happened to our people if the Outsiders never came.”

Worf considered, “But Emperor, without the *Hur’q*, we would not have gained warp drive and their advanced weaponry.”

“And dominated this region of space for hundreds of years,” he finished, “Yes, I know. But we did not gain that knowledge through our own efforts. We simply took it.” He sat back down on a bed of skins. “And the Klingon mind has stayed dormant.” He sighed, “Tell me, Worf, what advancement can Klingons truly call their own? Instead of a proud, independent race, we have become scavengers; more animals than men.”

The Son of Mogh dipped his head. He wanted to dispute the claim, but he knew he could not.

Kahless concluded, “Should we continue to do to others as the *Hur’q* did to us?”

Supplemental USS *Destrier*, Shuttlebay Traveling at Warp Three

A Type-10 shuttle was the backdrop. Once again, bin Nadal's team was clad in Klingon attire. The original team was heavy plus two: Windslow and Kojo. The five mock Klingons were joined by Commander Bolden.

Yitzhak's confidence in the success of the mission was dashed when he realized the disgraced captain would be joining them. This operation was tenuous enough without the presence of someone who's courage was...questionable at best. *'If Windslow's cowardice exposed them...'*

Captain Kojo continued the briefing. "We will continue this course for another twenty minutes." She gestured to a display of the Fu'puk System. "Then, we will go to the far side of the star and reenter the system. The ship will stay on the opposite side of the star in relation to the second planet."

Shalev raised a hand, "That means the team will be out of contact with the *Destrier*, correct?"

Commander Bolden fielded the question, "No, we'll deploy a relay probe protected with metaphasic shields and hide it in the star's corona. If the situation becomes untenable, we'll get you out of there, come hell or high water. I guarantee it."

Kojo continued, "We'll take this shuttle," as she pointed to it. "It's been rigged for silent running. In addition, Commander Windslow has suggested we use the star's gravity in addition with a thruster burst to drift toward our target, to maximize our stealth. One of my security officers, Mr. Westin, will stay aboard the shuttle while we transport at long range to the *Jev'Iw*. From there, we'll proceed. Any questions?"

"What if the Klingons are running with their shields up, Captain?" asked Windslow.

Carrick spoke slightly out of turn, "Not likely, Commander. There's a lot of transporting going on, ship-to-ship and ship-to-surface."

"If we're discovered," ventured the *Perseus* helmsman, "should we resist capture?"

"Absolutely," the Kriosian captain stated as if it were a forgone conclusion, "This is not a Starfleet sanctioned operation." She added in a matter of fact tone, "As of right now, I consider us guerrilla fighters, not Starfleet officers."

The revelation was a wake up call for the team. They would be afforded no protection under the Khitomer Accords.

Once the ship was in place, Kojo began, "This is still a voluntary mission." She looked over the personnel, "If you still choose to accept it, board the shuttle now. If you choose not to, exit the shuttlebay. No dishonor will come to you." Her eyes lingered on Windslow.

Carrick was the first to reach the hatch. Shalev was close behind, though he glared back at Windslow. To his displeasure, he was only a few steps away. Then, Karim boarded.

Bolden caught up with Kojo as she moved toward the shuttle. "Captain, are you sure you want to do this?"

She looked back as if to say, 'You know me better than that.'

The first officer relented as the hatch closed. It wasn't long until the shuttle seemed to sink into the infinite chasm as it deployed.

CHAPTER 27

Stardate: 54375.7 (18 May 2377)
USS *Independence*, Main Bridge
At the border of the Gorn Hegemony

"Captain's Log, Stardate: 54375.7, 0512 hours. We've arrived at the Gorn border. They and the Klingons have settled into what might be described a stalemate status. The Empire knows attacking and subduing the Hegemony would be a long and costly affair. The Gorn, on the other hand, don't have the resources to be any real threat to the Empire. Aside from a few skirmishes, the Empire and the Hegemony have left each other alone. Unfortunately, the Federation's relationship to the Gorn isn't much better."

The arrival of the *Steamrunner* class vessel at the border wasn't exactly well received by the Gorn. It didn't take long for the ship to go to yellow alert.

Losing patience at the two uncommunicative patrol ships, Aurelia stated, "Tell your government, we're here on a diplomatic mission on behalf of the inhabitants of a planet less than ten light years away." She asked the Andorian in an aside, "What's their name for that planet?"

Kimula called back, "*Ikula nuv*."

The captain repeated louder, "We come on behalf of the inhabitants of *Ikula nuv*."

Again, silence was the Gorn's answer. Aurelia sighed deeply, and indicated to close the channel. She looked to tactical, "They still have their weapons hot?"

Faltyne gave the affirmative and added, "But they haven't locked on."

The counselor surmised, "They just want to make us feel uncomfortable."

"I could think of nicer ways to say 'go away,'" commented the new helm officer, Ensign Weston.

Sintina regarded him as if he hadn't earned the right to make snide remarks, yet. She said to no one in particular, "We're not going anywhere." Then she

looked to Kimula, "Find me something...some reason for them to give a damn."

The female Andorian moved from the com station to the science station, "I'll see what I can do."

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Main Bridge Entering Klingon Space

The olive-skinned Vulcan at tactical reported, "We're being hailed."

Captain Hobson nonchalantly commented, "That's to be expected. On screen."

The starfield on the display changed to that of a young, male Klingon. He started in a demanding voice, "You have entered Imperial Klingon territory. State your purpose."

Casually, Hobson stood, "I'm Captain Christopher Hobson of the Federation starship *Perseus*. We intend to deliver a Klingon the homeworld. He is the son of Worf, the Federation ambassador to *Qo'noS*."

"I know who Worf is," the officer coarsely responded. He ventured, "Word spreads quickly in the Defense Force. Is it true? Did the Son of Worf forfeit his honor?"

Unphased by the question, the Iceman responded, "I don't engage in spreading rumors."

"Huupph!" replied the Klingon. He continued with less enthusiasm, "I will alert my command of your presence. Do not deviate from your present course."

Hobson curtsied, "Understood."

The transmission ended. T'Pren asked, "Do you think they'll try to stop us, sir?"

He shook his head, "We might get an escort, but that's it. This isn't between Starfleet and the Empire. This is between Worf and Alexander. Martok will

understand that. We'll get safe passage." He admitted, "What I'm concerned about is Alexander, once we get there."

A few minutes later, Devon Miller found an excuse to leave his station at operations. He went to his quarters and locked the door behind him. "Computer," he continued, "activate encryption sequence sierra two-nine. And send the following message to recipient 'Zackary.'"

It acknowledged.

He dictated, "We are now in Klingon space, en route to *Qo'noS*. End message."

"*Message transmitted*," confirmed the computer.

Supplemental Shuttlecraft *Bedivere* Silent Running near Fu'puk II

The broad-shouldered Philip Westin called out, "We're just in transporter range. I'll have to use minimal thrusters to keep a relative position."

"Make sure it's very minimal, PO," stated Kojo coldly.

Philip was used to the odd relationship he had developed with his captain/casual lover. She defiantly didn't let it get in the way of their professional interactions. The Petty Officer didn't have any delusions about it either; it was purely a form of recreation for both of them. He replied, "Aye, sir."

"What's the chance of them detecting the transport?" asked Carrick as she gave her disruptor a final check.

Windslow, who made a surprisingly good looking Klingon, fielded it, "Klingons have much less advanced internal sensors. Besides that, I've narrowed the confinement beam as much as I can. So to answer your question: slim. Someone would have to see us materialize."

"And I'll make sure that won't happen," inserted Westin.

"How's the target location look?" queried bin Nadal.

The petty officer examined his scanners, "The junction is clear. No one will see you."

"Then now's the time," said Kojo. "Energize."

Supplemental IKS *Yaku*, Troop Transport, Deck Seven In Orbit of Fu'puk II

The dimly lit corridor brightened for a moment as the five officers appeared. The stench hit Windslow first. His eyes adjusted to his new environment. It took him another moment to get his bearings.

"Well?" started Shalev in Federation standard. Knowing Windslow didn't know Klingonese.

The engineer glanced at his KDF data device, "It's this way," as he gestured in a direction. "There's a computer access terminal down the corridor. The troop transports will be easy. The battleships, though, will have more security measures. Then we can activate the program by remote."

"Can the program be discovered?" asked Kojo.

He shook his head, "Yes, sir. That's the beauty of it."

She cocked her head.

He elaborated, "Once it's activated, it integrates itself into whatever code I choose, in this case transporter control and weapon's systems. Then, the computer's own security systems, in an effort to destroy the infiltration program, will erase the code it was integrated with as well. They'll be no evidence and it'll take months for the Klingons to rewrite the affected programs."

"It's best if you avoid talking in Fed standard, Commander," recommended the *Destrier* tactical officer.

Ethan immediately enacted the advice and nodded. The group began their task.

CHAPTER 28

Stardate: 54380.8 (20 May 2377)
Capital City, Ambassador's Hall
***Qo'noS*, Klingon System**

Worf entered his office and checked his messages. Among the routine bureaucratic correspondence was a text message from the chancellor. It was a single sentence: *ghoS puqloDIlj* – 'Your son is coming.'

He took a deep breath and leaned back. His thoughts were tortured.

Supplemental
IKS *Kang*, Lower Decks
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Captain Kojo's team dare not rest. Despite the fact, it had taken nearly 30 hours for Windslow to circumvent the security measures of four ships. It was a grueling time for everyone, especially for those that had little to do other than look inconspicuous.

They were very careful to beam into isolated sections. Twice, however, were they questioned about what they were doing. The first time was on the *Vaj'la*. The Klingon obviously wasn't an engineer and was satisfied with bin Nadal's explanation of, "The computer's broke." The second instance proved to be more difficult to deal with. On the *Grolkam*, a *K'Vort* cruiser, a technician approached them and was beginning to become suspicious until Captain Kojo...distracted him, by picking a fight...or initiating foreplay. Ethan wasn't sure which. They disappeared for several minutes. No one asked Kojo what happened when she returned. No one wanted to know. She came back with a grin...though, that didn't really give any clarity.

The mock-Klingon engineer logged out of the terminal. "Ok, that's it. Time to move on."

Bin Nadal offered, "The *Jev'Iw* is the last ship."

"Well, at least we know the transporter operator," remembered Shalev.

The *Destrier* tactical chief commented, “We’ve been lucky that we have encountered more scrutiny.”

Kojo stated, “Luck is not something I rely on.”

The group moved to a more common area of the ship and called for a beam out.

Supplemental
Rally Point Eight, near the Port City of Jato
Go'hachar, Southern Continent

A small village, whose populace had not yet received the invaders served as one of several gathering points near one of the larger cities on the planet. Jato had a large number of invaders policing it. It was decided the retribution would begin here. A coordinated attack would either force the Klingons out of the city, or end the organized resistance; there were no other options.

“Are the others in place?” asked Senior Guardian Pasho.

A subordinate responded, “Yes Guardian, including the Do'hachar submersible.”

The elder warrior concluded, “Hold this position until dark morning. Then we start to take back our world.”

Supplemental
USS *Independence*, Main Bridge
At the Gorn Homogeny Border

Sintina glared at the two patrol vessels. It had become a staring match; which made it competitive...which made it a matter of pride with the captain. *‘I will stay here until hell freezes over or I get a positive response from these bastards.’*

Behind the center seat, Lieutenant Soma scrolled through Hacharan documents. She’d been doing it for hours. The Andorian counselor discovered the Gorn didn’t have any real interest in the system. Though, they weren’t too pleased about a Klingon presence so close to their border.

Faltyne, who helped when his duties permitted, confirmed the High Council made some concessions to the Gorn before invading the system. So, their reaction to the annexation was tempered, but just only.

Something caught Kimula's eye: *"Myth of the Lizard Men."* She read more. *"Among conspiracy theorists, there is a belief that the state of Ko'Hachar discovered a buried alien vessel in the Botham Desert over 250 years ago. Supposedly, several mummified bodies were in the vessel. They appeared to be Hacharan-like lizard people. Those that believe this claim Ko'Hachar reversed engineered several components of the alien ship to build their advanced military machines. Machines that later played an integral part in their war of aggression. Most people believe this to be only a desperate attempt to explain Ko'Hachar's swift expansion. In truth, it can be explained by inadequate preparation and the naivety of other states. The story also takes away from the ingenuity of own species."*

She turned around and eagerly said, "I've got something."

Captain Aurelia joined her at the station.

"Read this," the counselor suggested.

After a moment of hovering over her, Sintina replied, "If I remember my history, didn't Gorn once attack Cestus III because one of their early space craft landed there?"

"Years before Federation colonists got there," said the Andorian, "That's right. It took decades for the Federation and the Gorn to agree to our current borders."

Sintina thought out loud, "All that because a single craft touched down."

The counselor pointed out, "They're even more obsessed when it comes to their dead."

She looked down, "Find more specifics."

Kimula could see the praise in her friends face, though it wasn't vocalized. "Gladly."

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Transporter Room One
In Orbit of Qo'noS

Alexander, wearing a civilian garment, entered with Captain Hobson, First Officer Rysyl, and Lieutenant T'Pren.

"Are you sure this is wise?" prodded Anara.

The Iceman sensed her concern, "We'll be fine." He looked to the Klingon, "I won't allow any harm to come to you."

"Thank you, Captain," he replied, "but I don't think anyone will kill me." He huffed and added, "I'm not worth the effort."

"All the same, I take care of my passengers. My security chief and I will be joining you."

"Alright."

The three took up their positions. The transporter operator reported, "The chancellor's office has transmitted coordinates."

Hobson acknowledged with a slight nod, "Energize."

CHAPTER 29

Supplemental Chancellor's Office, The Great Hall Capitol City, *Q'noS*

Captain Hobson, T'Pren and Alexander found themselves immediately in the mist of Chancellor Martok and Ambassador Worf. There were no guards and the doors to the chamber were closed.

The battle scarred Martok rose from his desk. "You are brave to come here. If you venture outside of these walls, I cannot guarantee you safety."

The young Klingon stepped forward, "I come on behalf of the Hacharan people."

"Have you not caused enough trouble for my house?" bellowed the chancellor.

He was undeterred, "Chancellor, you must reconsider..."

Before Alexander could utter another word, Martok's heavy, gloved hand rose up; prepared to strike the boy with a backhanded slap.

With a glance, Hobson restrained T'Pren from intervening. It was their way...and a necessary step.

Worf took a step, but didn't move to protect his son.

Alexander flinched in anticipation of the blow. It was minor, but a flinch none the less.

Just as the chancellor's hand was about to land, it stopped. It hovered centimeters away from Alex's face. Alexander's reaction was all the chancellor need to see. This boy looked Klingon, but he was not. He never should have allowed the boy into his house. Sirella attempted to warn him about this years ago, but he didn't listen. It was a matter of honor, he told her. The Son of Worf must follow his father into his house. Now, he could see his mate was correct. He lowered his hand. "I see," was all he said.

To Worf, it was a confirmation of his worst fears for his son.

Martok turned his back on Alexander, "You have nothing to say that I will hear."

The ambassador addressed his former comrades, "Please, let us be with Alexander alone."

"He is under my protection," countered Hobson, "I'm sure you understand that, Ambassador."

Worf rose to his full height, "You know I once served on the *Enterprise*."

The mention of Picard's ship stiffened his jaw...Picard and his android. The android he was forced to serve under. Hobson pushed down the emotions and returned to the present. "Yes, Ambassador."

"Then," began Worf, "as a Starfleet officer, I give you my word no harm will come to him here."

T'Pol glanced at her captain for guidance. The Iceman silently checked with Alexander, whom seemed alright with the arrangement. Hobson nodded and said to his charge, "We'll be just outside the door."

Worf activated the controls and allowed the two officers to assume their post out of earshot. With a clang, the hatch slid shut. He looked to his son, "It is not practical for us to withdraw our forces from Fu'puk II, Alexander."

"Those people are suffering needlessly!" he proclaimed.

"There are other things you must consider," countered Worf.

"What? Your own selfish political interests?"

"Enough!" blasted Martok. "Worf, get your son out of my sight!"

The Son of Mogh looked into his pleading son's eyes. They were not the eyes of a boy; but eyes of a determined man, seeking justice. A distant memory came rushing up to the forefront. A discussion he once had with Ezri back on *Deep Space Nine*.

August 2375

Quark's Bar, *Deep Space Nine* Bajoran System

Chancellor Gowron was employing a foolish strategy against the Dominion. He was attempting to make himself the hero of the war...and ruin General Martok's growing reputation. After Martok refused to face Gowron, Worf asked Dax, "Tell me what you think."

She took a sip of coffee, "Ok, but I'm not sure you're going to like it."

"Tell me," he persisted.

The counselor was blunt, "I think that this situation with Gowron is a symptom of a bigger problem. I think the Empire is dying and I think it deserves to die."

"You are right," he replied as he crossed his arms, "I do not like it."

"Don't get me wrong," she continued, "I'm very touched you still consider me a member of the House of Martok. But...I tend to look at the Empire with a bit more skepticism than Curzon or Jadzia did. I see a society that is in deep denial about itself. We're talking about a warrior culture that prides itself on maintaining century's old traditions of honor and integrity. But in reality it's willing to accept corruption at the highest levels.

He remembered saying, "You are overstating your case."

Her come back was quick, "Am I? Who was the last leader of the High Council that you respected? Has there even been one? And how many times have you had to cover up the crimes of Klingon leaders because it was for the good of the Empire? I...I know this sounds harsh but the truth is, you have been willing to accept a government that you know is corrupt. Gowron is just the latest example. Worf, you are the most honorable and decent man I have ever met, and if you are willing to tolerate men like Gowron, then what hope is there for the Empire?"

Supplemental Chancellor's Office, The Great Hall Capitol City, *Q'noS*

Martok repeated, "Worf, remove your son."

Slowly, Worf shook his head, "No."

"No," repeated the chancellor.

"No," the Son of Mogh continued, "Alexander is correct. If we want to lead the Empire with wisdom and honor, we must find another way to gain support. Rallying the people by presenting them with an enemy to hate is not leadership, but the lack of it."

Martok reached for his sheathed blade. He couldn't believe his ears, "What are you saying, Worf?"

"Don't you see?" he persisted, "We have allowed ourselves to be drawn into this...this system of underhanded politics. We have become apart of it, Chancellor."

Martok began to understand. "The change you seek, Worf, would cause a civil war. I will not be the cause of that."

He nodded, "I understand, Chancellor." He stood tall and sighed deeply, "but it is not something I can participate in any longer. I will resign my post."

"Think about this, Worf," beseeched Martok. "With you gone, I'll have one less ally. It will make my role all the more difficult."

Resolute, he confirmed, "I am sorry, Chancellor. But I fear if I stay, I will become someone I cannot respect."

In a low grumble the former general stated, "I did not seek this position. It was thrust upon me...by you, Worf."

Worf readied himself, "I am prepared for whatever punishment you would set."

The chancellor walked closer, "No Worf, I will not punish you. You have been a trusted companion. You may even bear my house's mark." He continued, "You helped install two Leaders of the High Council." He planted himself right in front of Worf, "My greatest wish for you is that you kill me and assume the Cloak of Leadership one day...There is no greater curse I can put upon you."

Alexander shared a guilty look with his father.

The one-eyed chancellor plopped in his chair, "Now, go."

With intense mixed feelings, Worf and his son exited the chamber. Martok was left, alone.

CHAPTER 30

Supplemental USS *Independence*, Main Bridge At the Gorn Hegemony Border

"Captain Aurelia," called Lieutenant Faltyne from an aft station.

She joined him and Kimula, "Whatcha got?"

"It's confirmed," explained Soma, "we've hacked into an encrypted section of the database. The Hacharans recorded physiometric data from the mummies. They're Gorn."

Aurelia stood straight, "Alright. That's what we needed. Open a channel."

"You're on."

"This is Captain...well, by now, you know who I am. I have new data..."

The ships began to move on the screen. She looked to the male Andorian for a report.

He said, "They're moving off, Captain."

"It looks like they've lost interest in us," observed Kimula.

Sintina returned to the center of the room. "Oh hell, no. Don't you turn your backs on me," she warned. "Charge phasers. I want a warning shot across their bow."

The order took Jonin by surprise, "Captain?"

The Latina captain looked back with a fire, "Do it or I'll do it for you."

Faltyne decided not to press the issue, "Aye, ma'am. Firing." He scanned his station, "They're coming back around...and targeting us."

The captain crossed her arms, content. "That's more like it." Calmly, she strode a few steps, "Gorn vessel captain, as I was saying. I have new information you may be interested in. I know how important your culture values its dead and its history." She made eye contact with Kimula, "Send the

data." She continued, "I'm sending information concerning both. I await your reply."

The bridge was quiet for several moments.

Just when Aurelia was ready to prod them again, Soma reported, "Incoming message."

Sintina smiled wide, "On screen."

A yellow-eyed Gorn with dark green hide appeared on the screen. Its snout shifted as it saw the human female. "I am Muk. Adminisstrator for this area of sspace. Unfortunately, my patrol commanderss didn't inform me of your pressence until reccently."

"Of course," placated Aurelia.

"Tell me," he continued, "Where did you get thiss information?"

"As I said," she responded, "from the database of a planet in a neighboring star system. They are currently being attacked by the Klingons." She added the next sentence with purpose, "The Klingons are desecrating your dead and your history."

"Thiss sship was lost to us centuries ago," said Muk. "And if Gorn sset foot on that planet and rest there, we have a claim on it."

Sintina cursed herself for her short sightedness. She attempted to recover, "These Hacharans are formidable. You would not want to subjugate them. The Klingons are making that mistake now."

Muk smiled, at least it might have been a smile. "You need not fear for the Hacharanss. Know that our government has been looking for an excuse to challenge the Klingonss' claim on a planet so close to our sspace. Now we have one." The channel closed.

Bewilderment covered the bridge. Kimula was the first to vocalize it, "Did we just help or hurt the Hacharans?"

Captain Aurelia replied honestly, "I'm not sure."

Supplemental
Do'hachar Submersible One
Near the Port City of Jato, Go'hachar

Lord Nilu was transfixed to the digital display. The readout changed. It was time. He made eye contact with his commander. "Begin the operation."

The naval officer ordered, "Equalize the pressure and open the dorsal tubes."

He received a confirmation from a subordinate and informed his lord, "At your command."

The young aristocrat thought briefly of the irony. A Do'hachar attack sub launching missiles on a Go'hachar city...this time, at their own request. There would be Go'hachar casualties. He wasn't sure what to think when the idea gave him pause. Somberly, he said, "Launch."

Supplemental
Near the Port City of Jato, Go'hachar
Fu'puk II

The axils several armored vehicles hummed with anticipation of combat. A mismatch of military and civilian ground transports sped to the city. Senior Guardian Pasho knew the aliens would react quickly. He had to have his troops enter Jato just after the bombs hit. The real challenge would be holding the city once the Klingons regrouped. In the still dark dawn, he saw multiple lights arc up from the ocean.

Supplemental
IKS *Jev'Iw*, Deck Six
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

The task of installing the invasive program had become old hat. Windslow could do it in his sleep; which was a good thing considering he was going on 40 hours without it.

"How many more levels of security?" asked Carrick in Klingon garb.

Ethan blinked his eyes in an effort to un-blur the characters on the screen. "Just one. It'll be about five minutes until I can install the program."

"Do not become complacent now," warned Kojo, "The mission is not over yet."

Bin Nadal was a few meters away, keeping watch. He informed his team, "*naDev tlhInganpu' tu'lu*"

The away team had heard the sentence before. They began to do more than simply loiter and took up a non-conspicuous perimeter around the engineer.

The footfalls became louder on the metal, grated deck.

A small, female Klingon rounded the corner. She was immediately startled to see the others, "*bl'Iv*"

Kojo flawlessly replied, "*jonwl' tI' De'wI*"

The Klingon was obviously not convinced. She countered, "I'm the chief engineer on this ship, *Sogh* Yaava. I would have been informed about any repairs to the computer." She took a few slow steps backward. She repeated, "*bl'Iv*"

Everyone saw the caution in Yaava's face. Kojo realized she was inching toward the intercom panel. The *Destrier* captain came to a conclusion.

Nandali rushed the Klingon engineer.

Yaava had a split second of reaction time. She lunged for the activation button. It was depressed for only a moment before Kojo tackled her. It was enough, however, for her to relay to the bridge, "*'urwl*" – traitors!

With a single furious jab that slammed her head into the grating, the Kriosian rendered the Klingon engineer unconscious.

Kojo got up, "We no longer have the luxury of time."

CHAPTER 31

Supplemental IKS *Jev'Iw*, Main Bridge In Orbit of Fu'puk II

A tactical officer called out, "*Seng ja'Sogh Yaava*"

First Officer J'pak moved to the station in the dimly lit command center. "*ja'HoD Ch'Pogh*," he said once reviewing the display. The young warrior strode to the captain's chambers adjacent the bridge.

J'pak saluted before beginning, "Yaava reports trouble. The call came from the lower engineering section."

"The fools allowed themselves to get discovered!" he spat.

The comment perplexed the first officer, "*HoD*"

Captain Ch'Pogh didn't elaborate. Instead he ordered, "Take warriors, isolate that section! I will be there shortly."

Though still confused, J'pak nodded, "*jlyaj*" and exited.

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Captain's Ready Room En Route to Rally Point

After offering his guests a drink and a seat near the forward looking windows, the russet-haired Hobson joined them and began, "What do you think Martok will do now?"

The former Ambassador Worf sipped his prune juice and sighed, "He cannot withdraw from that planet without losing supporters in the Council. There are many Houses that resent a commoner coming to power. They will exploit any weakness he shows."

Alexander chimed in, "I'm sorry I put you in that position, father."

Worf glanced at Hobson and then back at his son, "It can be discussed later." He addressed the captain, "What is your next course of action, sir?" Strictly speaking, he didn't have to add the title. However, for Worf, it wasn't an option.

The Iceman placed his coffee on a table, "I need to pick up my helmsman near the Fu'puk System. There, we'll rendezvous with the *Independence* and the *Destrier*. After that, the *Perseus* is scheduled to dock with Starbase 90. Where you go from there is your decision."

"So all this was for nothing," grimly commented Alexander.

Hobson offered without explanation, "There's still hope for the Hacharans."

Supplemental USS *Independence*, Main Bridge En Route to the Rally Point

"Captain," started the male Andorian from tactical, "I'm reading multiple contacts at high warp on a parallel trajectory."

Sintina spun her chair around, "Put your display on the main viewer." She turned back to see a tactical view of space for one-twentieth of a light year. The *Independence*, represented by a Starfleet emblem, was traveling at warp five. Point zero-three seven light years away, a fleet of eight Gorn vessels of various configurations were passing them. She asked, already knowing the answer, "What's their course?"

Faltyne responded, "The Hacharan's system."

Aurelia nearly mumbled, "They don't waste any time, do they?"

One of Weston's blue eyes found Sintina, "Sir...Ma'am, I'm sorry for bring this up, but...shouldn't we warn the Klingons?"

She crossed her legs and said, "Warn them of what, Ensign?"

"Well...the Gorn, ma'am."

She knew he wasn't the only one that was dubious about these events. Hell, she was before she made her advocate mission personal. But now things had been set in motion and there was nothing to do but sit back and watch. Her aloofness to the situation, now, resumed somewhat. "Nope. Our role in this is over."

She offered her friend, Karim, a silent, *'Watch out for yourself.'*

Supplemental Just outside of Jato Go'hachar

They were just outside the blast zone. The city grew near. Several small suns lit up the horizon. Pasho covered his eyes from the blasts. Next he felt the ground shake from the impacts. With any luck, Nilu's sub would be heading into deeper water and avoid getting targeted from orbit. Now, it was his turn. He radioed, "Guardians, we punch through any remaining defenses. Don't stop until we reach the center of the city. From there take up a perimeter and widen it, just as planned."

His caravan found a main street that went into the heart of the city. Soon, a Klingon checkpoint could be seen. They were stationed behind a make shift barricade. The small compliment of aliens had their energy weapons at the ready.

Pasho's armored transport was the third in the convoy. Green disruptor blasts pelted the led vehicle. Luckily, either by intent or in death, the driver swerved out of the way before it exploded.

The transports had no intension of slowing. They raced toward the checkpoint at top speed. The second vehicle, more of a tank, opened up an onslaught of projectile fire. Several of the aliens were mowed down by the automatic weapon.

They were very close now to the Klingon barricade. Pasho wasn't worried about the obstacle itself. Any of his military transports could demolish it at these speeds.

Suddenly, the led tank was lifted up high into the air with a massive explosion. The Senior Guardian could see the heavy vehicle's undercarriage

as his own passed underneath it. The hulk landed with a mighty crash just behind his transport. It rolled several times and took out at least one more vehicle. Others were able to go around the remains.

Before he realized it, his armored carrier bashed through the barricade. Amazingly, the surviving Klingons didn't move. Two were crushed under the large, reinforced wheels.

He looked back to see the other members of his convoy penetrate the checkpoint. The aliens never stopped shooting their hand weapons. Another invader's bones shattered as a vehicle slammed into him.

Pasho had enough experience to not be overly excited about this successful first step. The hard part was yet to come.

CHAPTER 32

Supplemental **IKS *Jev'Iw*, Deck Six** **In Orbit of Fu'puk II**

In a dimly lit corridor, Lieutenant Commander Windslow worked frantically to begin the installation process. Any fatigue he felt by the marathon of subterfuge had thoroughly disappeared.

Yaava had been rendered harmless by a hypospray and was placed along the bulkhead. She'd be out for hours.

The rest of the team watched for the inevitable arrival of Klingon warriors. All stood with weapons ready. It wouldn't be long until...

From a perpendicular corridor, a bolt of green energy hit the bulkhead near Yitzhak. The wall over his shoulder sparked from the impact. He instinctively ducked and returned fire.

Kojo forced herself to remain at her position. She was covering another adjoining hallway. Her turn to be fired at would come soon. There would be no escape. She could call Westin on the shuttle – assuming he hadn't been discovered – but the job wasn't done yet. Carrick joined her. The *Independence* first officer supported Shalev. Down the corridor, she saw Klingons taking up covering positions. She fired.

Supplemental **IKS *Kang*, Fleet Commander's Quarters** **In Orbit of Fu'puk II**

The dark-skinned Klingon captain, H'ta, reported, "General, the Hacharans are launching an attack on our planet-side headquarters." He added with hatred and embarrassment, "Over 3,000 Klingons were killed in the initial bombardment."

K'Vada did not yell. He did not pound the desk. He looked from under his brow and stated in the most serious tone, "Redeploy the ship. Temporarily recall the warriors in that city. Then target it with photons. I want that place to be a grave for all of them."

Supplemental The Port City of Jato Go'hachar

After establishing a perimeter at the city's center, Pasho's forces began expanding outward. His heart swelled as he saw his countrymen come out of the woodwork. They were only armed with sticks and cooking knives, but they were fighting with passion. It was awe-inspiring.

He observed the Klingons preferred a long, bladed weapon. Therefore, he brought his grandfather's *imchaa*, it resembled a nightstick with a blade running along its edge. It didn't take long for him to have to use it.

The remaining invaders in the city rushed to their position. He was impressed at how quickly they reacted. All throughout the shattered city, small arms fire, energy bursts, and the clanging of metal could be heard.

A few meters away, an alien disemboweled one of his soldiers. The Klingon charged with his *bat'leth* raised and ready to strike. Pasho was able to block the blow with his *imchaa*, which protected his forearms as well.

The two warriors were locked in combat as chaos erupted all around them.

S'qI looked down upon the native. He supposed it was one of their more senior leaders the way he carried himself. The young warrior was impressed with the Hacharan's talent. The native would be a worthy foe, not like the outcast Alexander.

Finally, after several attempts, S'qI got one tip of his *bat'leth* under Pasho's guard. The blade penetrated the Hacharan's side several centimeters. The Senior Guardian let out a howl of pain.

S'qI predatorily smiled as his opponent's flesh was cut. He assumed victory as he twisted the blade to cause even more damage.

Pasho knew he was going to die. The wound was too large and too deep. It did not mean, however, he would die alone. With great effort, he plunged the elbow tip of his *imchaa* into the invader's neck. The look of confidence on the alien disappeared. Pasho could see the Klingon berating himself for easing

his defense as he fell to his knees. Then, the life left his opponent and the Klingon landed with a dull thud on the stone road.

The Hacharan military leader pulled the heavy, dangling weapon out of his side with a cry of agony. There was no escaping it. Whether he received treatment or not, he would bleed to death soon. He pushed his fate out of his mind. He had a few minutes and he wasn't done defending his homeland yet. He painfully hobbled to one of his soldiers to assist him with another foe.

Before he could reach him, however, the invader disappeared in a twinkling, red light. He had heard of this ability, but he expected more warriors to appear; not disappear. Then, the realization came to him.

The soldiers began to celebrate as one-by-one, the invaders vanished. Pasho held his side as a subordinate came to aid him. The senior guardian grabbed his collar and whispered with his last breath, "Get everyone out of the city."

Pasho's *imchaa* hit the ground with a clatter.

Supplemental IKS *Jev'Iw*, Deck Six In Orbit of Fu'puk II

A third Klingon fell by Kojo's disruptor. But they were advancing...and there was nowhere to go. She resumed her cover and blasts passed her position, "How long, Commander?"

Windslow called back over the sound of battle, "The installation has begun, but it'll take another fifteen minutes complete."

Bin Nadal fired a few blasts and commented, "They'll overrun us in less than one."

Shalev pointed out, "Four out of five will have to do."

The *Destrier* captain looked to her tactical officer for her input. Carrick gave an approving nod. Kojo addressed Ethan, "Prepare to activate the program."

Windslow stopped his work and retrieved a padd from his satchel.

It took a second for Carrick to observe, "The disruptor fire's stopped."

The explanation came quick. A commanding voice came from the Klingon position near Kojo said, "*DoH.*" '*Back off?*' she internally questioned. Then, she realized the voice wasn't taking to them.

Another voice objected, "*Iv machol*"

The first voice responded with a thunder, "*Haw*"

There was a pause. It was a surreal moment. The team members glanced at each other in an attempt to understand what was happening.

Finally, a dejected voice stated, "*jlyajbe*"

"*ra'pab*"

"*HoD Hlja*"

Boots could be heard returning in the direction in which they came. Heavy doors closed behind them.

A voice said in Federation Standard, "I am Captain Ch'Pogh, master of this vessel. I know you are a Starfleet infiltration team."

No one responded.

He continued, "Do you really think you could be so lucky as to go unnoticed until now? There are many who are loyal to me in the fleet. If it were not for their efforts, you would surely be dead by now."

Again silence.

"Is it not your custom to at least thank an ally?" he prodded.

Nandali suddenly abandoned her cover and looked upon the Klingon captain, "Why would you help us?"

"I have my reasons." He offered, "I want your mission to succeed as much as you do."

Kojo eyed the Klingon with suspicion.

Ch'Pogh informed her, "This section will be off limits to all personnel for...say 30 of your minutes? After that, I suggest you leave." Without further comment, he exited the area. The hatch locked behind him.

Karim looked to the Kriosian captain, "A trap?"

She nodded, "No doubt...but not for us."

"Now what?" questioned the *Perseus* helmsman.

Kojo considered. There was obviously more going on here than she thought, but the repercussions would have to be dealt with later. Her purpose here was to help the Hacharans resist the Klingons. That had not changed. "We complete our mission."

CHAPTER 33

Supplemental IKS *Kang*, Main Bridge In Orbit of Fu'puk II

The weapon's officer reported, "We're in range."

Captain H'ta yielded to K'Vada.

The general did not hesitate, "*baH*"

Supplemental Shuttlecraft *Bedivere* Silent Running near Fu'puk II

Philip Westin swiveled his chair aft. All five members of the team were now in the shuttle. He ventured, "So I take it everything went well?"

They looked back at him with a mixture of grogginess and annoyance.

After a moment, Yitzhak responded, "It could have been worse."

Kojo regarded Windslow, "Activate it."

Without fanfare, the engineer tapped the padd.

Supplemental IKS *Kang*, Main Bridge In Orbit of Fu'puk II

Perplexed the weapon's officer said, "It's not working."

"What do you mean?" blasted H'ta.

"The weapons," he elaborated, "They're offline."

K'Vada pushed the officer side and tried it himself; then, again with the same results. He looked up at H'ta with fire in his eyes. "We've been sabotaged!"

H'ta questioned, "Who?"

Another officer informed them, "Milord, all the other ships in the fleet are reporting their weapons and transporter systems are malfunctioning."

K'Vada roared, "Someone will die for this!"

The Kang captain offered a practical solution, "General, until we determine what has happened, we can utilize dropships to punish the Hacharans."

Repressing his rage, K'Vada approved the move with a nod. He grabbed H'ta to the side, "You know who will benefit from this."

"Lorath," he replied.

The weapon's officer double checked his displays. He might be killed for the bearer of bad news today. None the less, he called out, "Sir, eight Gorn ships have entered the system."

The general could only rejoin with, "What?"

Supplemental USS *Destrier*, Shuttlebay Near the Fu'puk Star

Commander Bolden met his captain as she and the rest of the team disembarked the shuttle. "The *Independence* reports success in enlisting the help of the Gorn. They are approaching the planet at impulse as we speak."

Karim observed with some regret in his voice, "The Klingons will be defenseless."

"Good," stated Yitzhak, "Turnabout is fair play."

Nandali ordered a moment later, "Take us to the rendezvous point."

Supplemental
IKS Kang, Main Bridge
In Orbit of Fu'puk II

"The Gorn have weapons and shields active," said the weapon's officer.

Someone else reported, "*lurI*"

K'Vada clinched his fist so tight it drew blood. He had suddenly become powerless. These series of events could not be coincidence. He had been set up to fail. There was no point in delaying. The technicians said they didn't even know what was wrong yet, let alone fixing the problem. He gestured to open a channel.

The reptile predictably said, "We demand you remove your troopss from the planet below and withdraw from the ssystem. The Hegemony officially rejectss your empire'ss claim on it."

The Klingon general didn't look surprised in the least. *'Had this been planned from the beginning?'* he wondered. There was nothing he could do, at least, not now. Grudgingly, he stated, "I will need enough time to recall my troops with shuttles." He added with an evil irony, "My fleet's transporters are disabled."

The Gorn was convincingly outraged, "You are sstalling!"

'As if you didn't already know about the sabotage,' mused K'Vada. He rejoined...hoped, perhaps, "Your other option is to destroy my ships."

The reptilian seemed taken aback by the comment. Finally, he said, "You have one rotation of the planet below to be gone!" The screen returned to the triangular grid of the tactical display.

K'Vada turned to H'ta, "Get our warriors off the planet." He moved to exit the bridge.

"General," asked the captain, "Where are you going?"

Silence was his only response. The hatch clanged shut behind him.

**Supplemental
Resistance Camp
Go'hachar**

An aide ran up to Tohacha, "Elder, reports are coming in from all over. The invaders are leaving!"

The old man sat in a nearby chair and sighed deeply. People around him expected him to say something inspiring and profound. Instead, he somberly hung his head.

**Supplemental
IKS *Jev'Iw*, Main Bridge
In Orbit of Fu'puk II**

The metal door slid open with an un-greased screech. Coldly, methodically, General K'Vada crossed the threshold.

Ch'Pogh turned and in mock surprise said, "General? What has happened? Our weapons and transporters are offline."

Without a word, the fleet commander walked up and backhanded Lorath's former aide. "I cannot prove it, but I know you had a hand in this." He unsheathed his *d'k tahg*, "You are a traitor."

Quickly, Ch'Pogh struck the dagger out of the general's hand. It flung to the deck. Being disarmed only seemed to please K'Vada. He didn't try to recover it. He clutched his subordinate by the throat and squeezed with all his hate.

The *Jev'Iw* bridge crew watched on as Ch'Pogh struggled and clawed at the general's face. It didn't faze him.

K'Vada's thumbs began to cut into flesh.

Suddenly, a disruptor was pointed at K'Vada's face. He paused. The wielder was a young warrior, J'pak, he believed. Though his grasp eased, he still had a death grip on the captain. He looked at the newly minted first officer, "You just made a fatal mistake."

He retorted with, "I don't think so, General."

K'Vada heard another weapon being un-holstered...and another. He looked around. All were pointed at him. He eased up on Ch'Pogh, who immediately pulled away coughing and holding his throat. The fleet commander stated, "You man your ships wisely, Ch'Pogh."

His only response was a barely audible, "Get him back to his shuttle and off my ship."

Several disruptors emphasized the point.

K'Vada was not afraid. His eyes were cold. This cowardice and treachery would not go unanswered. He calmly began to retreat out of the bridge, "Hide well, Ch'Pogh. Hide well."

CHAPTER 34

Stardate: 54387.5 (22 May 2377)

The Port City of Jato

Go'hachar

Elder Tahocha and Lord Nilu walked side by side among the rubble that was once one of the planet's most modern cities. The skyscape was made of sharp points and jagged edges. Glass, stone, and blood littered the streets. Invader and Hacharan bodies had yet to be disposed of.

The young Nilu looked around, "My gods, how will we recover from this?"

The wise older man scanned the scene for a moment and rested his eyes on his former enemy. He said, "Together. We will recover from this together."

A sudden grin emerged on Nilu's face. He nodded, "Agreed."

Some ran up frantically to Nilu, "Milord, I have news." He obviously wanted to discuss it away from present company.

The Do'hachar head of state commented, "We no longer keep secrets from the Go'ha. Speak."

He bowed and cautiously proceeded, "Milord, our facility in the Botham Desert has been discovered and raided. The ship, the remains, everything has been taken!"

Tahocha looked over, "Is there something you want to explain to me?"

Supplemental

IKS *Kang*, Fleet Commander's Chambers

En Route to Klingon Space

After his confrontation with Captain Ch'Pogh, the *Jev'Iw* broke formation and made for the Khemet Sector.

The general did not shy away from his responsibility. He looked at Martok over subspace, "I will accept any punishment you deem fit, Chancellor." He

added, "However, I must make you aware of the treachery I was forced to deal with, first."

"Go on."

K'Vada explained, "There are records indicating that Captain Ch'Pogh assisted the Hacharans by undermining my troop movements and patrols. He also allowed saboteurs to disable the fleet's weapons and transporters. That is why I could offer no fight for the Gorn and was forced to abandon the planet."

"Saboteurs," the chancellor repeated, "Our own warriors did this!"

"It is possible the Gorn infiltrated our ranks," offered the general. "Their...timely arrival is more than coincidence."

"It seems my enemies are everywhere!" blasted Martok. He leaned into the screen, "However, it appears you are not one of them."

K'Vada thought for a moment. He replied, "I live and die for the Empire."

The words reminded Martok of something he once said to Gowron, *'I will fight any battle, anywhere...for the Empire.'* He leaned back, "It is obvious to me, the blame for this failure is Captain Ch'Pogh's, alone. He is a traitor."

"I agree, Chancellor," rejoined K'Vada.

A few minutes later, the fleet commander tapped the terminal off.

Captain H'ta, who had sat silently across the desk during the conversation, curiously observed, "Why did you not tell him about Lorath's involvement?"

He leaned back in his seat, "It is too early for us to...as the humans say, tip our hand."

Supplemental

USS *Perseus*, Captain's Ready Room

At Rally Point with the *Independence* and *Destrier* (Near the Hacharan System)

Karim, appearing human again, entered the large, lounge-like office. He went up to Hobson's desk, "Captain, I just wanted to give you the courtesy of..." He looked over at the book self, "Is that *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius?" He examined it closer, "That's real leather. When was this printed?"

The Iceman couldn't help but smirk. He got up and joined bin Nadal, "Eighteen sixty-two." He added, "There's a 1905 copy of Augustine's *City of God* next to it."

The *Independence* commander thought for a moment and quoted, "As to those things which truly confer dignity upon mankind, namely, security and good morals, I entirely fail to see what difference it makes, aside from the most empty pride of human glory, that some men should be conquerors and others conquered."

Hobson nodded, "An all too common trait in the galaxy, it seems."

"You even have some of Ibn Rashid's works," continued Karim.

Chris stood next to him, gently reminding his visitor that he came there for a reason.

Bin Nadal assumed a more professional posture, "Sorry, sir. I just wanted to relay how well Lieutenant Shalev conducted himself while he served with our team."

"I knew he would," replied Hobson, "but I appreciate the courtesy, none the less." He returned to his seat, "And from all accounts, so did Commander Windslow."

"I don't know if I can take credit for that, sir," he said, "but I'll pass it along." He moved to dismiss himself, "If you'll excuse me, sir. I have a division meeting in a few minutes."

He acknowledged with a nod, but said before Karim could leave, "Commander."

"Yes sir?"

"Do you happen to know how to play bridge?"

Supplemental

USS *Independence*, Main Lounge - "Jinal's"

At Rally Point with the *Perseus* and *Destrier* (Near the Hacharan System)

The large recreation lounge was the default place for members of the three ships to congregate. In the morning, the small fleet would disband.

Velen placed the miniature humanoid, which represented his character, on the table. He wasn't yet back on active duty. So he and T'Pren decided to try a game that was all the rage on the *Indy*; an old Earth game. They called it, *D&D*.

Soma, Velen, T'Pren, Ensign Weston, and another *Indy* crewmember sat around the small, simulated landscape. Jonin Faltyne walked up to the table.

Kimula warmly offered, "Want to join in?"

The male Andorian raised a hand, "I'll just watch for the moment."

"Ok. Let me set the scene..." started Kimula. "You're in a dark, damp chamber."

T'Pren observed her Denobulan crewmate begin to shift in his chair. Ever since he was revived by Doctor Nor, he was...subdued, nervous. His normal light-heartedness had faded. She assumed it had to do with emerging from the induced hibernation, but now, she had her doubts.

The *Indy's* Andorian counselor continued, "It's totally dark and..."

Suddenly, Velen got up, "I'm sorry, excuse me. I'm...I'm afraid I can't play right now. I'm sorry." He left.

The others seemed to look to T'Pren for an explanation. She stood, "I'd better go see what's wrong."

Kimula began to join her, "Maybe I can help."

"Thanks," rejoined the Vulcan, "but I'll talk to him. We've known each other since the academy."

"Are you sure?"

The *Perseus* tactical officer waved her down, "I'm sure. Enjoy your game."

Reluctantly, Soma sat back down. She looked at Jonin, "It seems we're in need of a barbarian."

Confused, he asked, "What?"

EPILOGUE

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Holodeck Two At Rally Point

"No, no," reminded Treasure, "Mount on the left side, the left."

Ethan hopped along with one foot stuck in the stirrup. Fine dirt was kicked up with each hop. The environment reminded him of Arizona or New Mexico. The American Paint Horse continued to inch away from the inexperienced rider. Paul, Jeff, and Susan Windslow were already on their mounts, thanks to Lieutenant Barrows. The boys were laughing unrestrained at the sight. Susan was just barely holding her smirk. Finally, he got his foot out.

The North Star native expertly guided her palomino near the flustered former captain. She looked down at him, "Lady always was a bit picky about that. Wanna legup?"

He grinned. Obviously, he found it just as amusing as everyone else. "No thanks." He looked into the chestnut colored mare's large eyes, "Let's try this again."

Supplemental USS *Perseus*, Holodeck Two At Rally Point

T'Pren caught up with the Denobulan in the corridor. He seemed to be hyperventilating, "What's wrong, Velen?"

He paused, leaned against the bulkhead and slowly slid down. He held his head and said into his hands, "I woke up after they buried me, T'Pren."

"You woke up?" she repeated.

He sobbed gently, "I was terrified." The *Perseus* science officer wiped at his cheeks, "I was so scared, I couldn't move. ...And...and then I don't remember anything."

She squatted down next to him, "Your mind must have induced your hibernation as a safe-gap measure."

He didn't respond.

The emotional Vulcan wrapped her arms around him, "It's ok. We'll get you through this."

Stardate: 54389.8 (23 May 2377)
USS *Independence*, Main Bridge
At Rally Point

The Latin American captain viewed her peers on a split screen.

The blonde-haired Kriosian began, "I cannot delay any longer. I must make for Tholian space."

"It seems," observed the Iceman, "we make an effective team after all."

Sintina grinned devilishly, "Did you have any doubt?"

With a perfect poker face, he rejoined, "Of course not, Captain Aurelia."

Kojo nodded with respect to both of them, "Good journeys, Captain Hobson, Captain Aurelia. *Destrier* out."

The screen now displayed only the *Perseus* captain. Hobson took a moment to make eye contact with bin Nadal, "Commander, for the record, you and Anara got lucky. I believe a rematch is in order."

Karim smiled wide, "You're on, Captain."

Hobson nodded in acknowledgement, gave his regards to Aurelia and closed the channel.

Immediately afterwards, Sintina spun around and joshed, "Make a new friend, Karim?"

It was subtle, but he could detect a hint of jealousy in her tone. He shrugged, "I guess so."

Captain Aurelia turned around with a roll of her eyes. She ordered, "Ensign Weston, get us to the *Victory*."

Supplemental
USS *Perseus*, Operation's Officer Quarters
En Route to Starbase 90

His eyes were cold. They almost seemed lifeless. Miller sometimes wondered about Captain Collins. He had an artificial cheeriness about him.

Zackary Collins spoke to Devon over a secure channel, "You've done well, Commander. Your information will prove very useful to us."

Miller fidgeted, "I feel...uneasy. Captain Hobson won't get into trouble because of it will he?"

The *Philadelphia* captain grinned unemotionally, "No, no, this is merely an evaluation program for Command. We're not out to punish captains."

Devon absently nodded.

"And you," added Collins, "have demonstrated, through your participation in this program, what type of captain you will be someday soon."

The operations officer grinned at the thought.

Supplemental
Jato, Go'hachar
Ikula nuv/Fu'puk II

In a large, domed structure the remaining leadership of the Hacharan people began to decide their fate. Sunlight shined into the chamber through an improvised skylight, courtesy the invaders.

"A confederation seems the most reasonable why to join our three very different types of government," offered Elder Tahocha.

The crowded chamber burst into a series of incoherent objections. The arbiter banged a gong in vain to regain order.

Suddenly, three green, glowing pillars of light appeared on the floor. Terror caused everyone to be silent. Guards readied their weapons. After a moment, three bipedal lizards stood amongst the assembly. A common gasp could be heard.

The formidable reptilians calmly observed the room. One of them began, "We repressent the Gorn Hegemony, an interssstellar government not far from here."

Tahocha stood, "Do you associate yourselves with the Klingons?"

The raptor-type being swooshed his head around to look at the mammal, "No." He took a few steps and addressed the crowd, "Your planet iss near three galactic powerss: the United Federation of Planetss, the Klingon Empire, and usss. The Federation will not interfere. The Klingons want to enslave you. We offer to assisst in defending yoursselvess againsst another Klingon attack. Your enemy iss our enemy." He locked eyes with Tahocha, "We are the only alliess you have. Do you accept our offer?"

Stardate: 54396.0 (25 May 2377)

Starbase 90

In Orbit of Cestus III

Worf approached his son. A large window next to on of the docking ports dominated the background. Several vessels glided into and out of view. Alexander had a duffle over his shoulder. Worf, once again, donned his red-trimmed Starfleet uniform.

"Are you sure this is what you want, Alexander?" began Worf. "I could still sponsor your application to the academy."

The young Klingon shook his head, "I'm sure father. If there is one thing I've learned it's that I must find my own way."

Somberly, the Son of Mogh nodded, "I understand. Working with the sentient rights' group is an honorable path." He placed a hand on his son's shoulder, "Your mother would be proud...as am I."

Alexander grinned bitter-sweetly, "Thank you, father." He stumbled, "When...when will you be leaving?"

Worf removed his hand, "My transport taking me to the *Enterprise* will arrive in a few hours."

The hatch to the docked ship finally opened, allowing travelers to board.

"It's time for me to go," observed Alexander.

His father stiffened up, "Be well, Alexander."

The Son of Worf decided not to press for a hug. Instead he said, "I love you, father," and headed for the hatch. He didn't expect a response.

"Alexander," called Worf.

He paused and turned back.

"Thank you. You have reminded me that strength is not a trait exclusive to warriors."

With a knowing smile, Alex nodded and continued to board.

Supplemental
IKS *Jev'Iw*, Transporter Room
Undisclosed Location

'And the blood of his foes moistened the dirt. He jerked his mate next to him, violently grabbed a lock of her hair and shed blood with his dagger-like teeth. pItlh'

Finally, Ursva was done. She tossed the novel on the terminal. *'I've read better,'* she thought. She twisted around to a display built in the bulkhead and activated it. It was a news broadcast. She turned it on for background noise. She wasn't particularly interested in it.

'...It is also reported the untrustworthy Gorn have broken another agreement with the Empire and have made the inhabitants of Fu'puk II their protectorate. Many council members are blaming the Chancellor for this turn of events...'

THE END