

# Star Trek: Independence Prisoners of War

By Dnoth

*"After each war there is a little less democracy to save."*  
~Brooks Atkinson, Once Around the Sun

## PROLOGUE

**Stardate: 52925.9 (14 December 2375)**

**USS Midas**

**Near the Cardassian System, The Battle of Cardassia**

The cold blackness of space was calm and tranquil.

The serenity was shattered by the unmistakable pattern of light caused by pulse phasers. The USS *Defiant* maneuvered skillfully around the hulk that was, a moment earlier, a Dominion attack ship.

The chaos of battle was in every direction. Shields glittered. Hulls breached. Phasers burnt through space. Torpedoes filled the darkness like small stars.

The lucky ones died when a warp core exploded or when an EPS conduit blew. The unlucky ones were still alive in small pockets of atmosphere in the wreckage of their ships. Their fate was to wait for death in the form of asphyxiation. Many, in their delirium, tried to get out. That would lead, to what most considered, the worst-case scenario; being blown out into space.

Contrary to popular belief, one will not freeze to death when exposed to intra-stellar space, Ensign Nar'vook remembered from his training. His furry hands were moving about the helm. He had been on the *Midas*, since before Captain Aurelia was in command. He sometimes wondered what it would be like to die in such a way. Assuming you were in a star system, you would immediately begin getting a severe sunburn and tissues would begin to swell. After about 15 or 20 seconds, you would lose consciousness and die of lack of oxygen to your brain a few minutes after that. *'But what a view that would be*

*for those 15 seconds,'* he morbidly thought. He was jolted back to reality when the Galor he had been following disappeared in a fiery plume.

It was just as chaotic on the bridge of the USS *Midas* as it was outside. The air was heavy with the smell of smoke and various melted polycomposites. A small fire was burning at the environmental station. It was left unattended for the moment. The smoke made the already dark-lit room seem like some sort of accursed pit from hell.

Security Chief Karim bin Nadal called from the aft of the bridge, "Captain Aurelia, the Galor's been neutralized."

Captain Aurelia, still clinging to the arm rests of her chair, called out, "Excellent!"

Keagan Wilson, her first officer, braced himself on the railing. He didn't celebrate, "Scan for the next nearest target!"

Bin Nadal, anticipating his commander's order was scanning. That's when he saw it. The most dangerous ship on the field of battle was bearing down on them. All he could utter was, "Ah, hell."

Upon hearing that, Sintina Aurelia's gut sank. She turned to see the fear in bin Nadal's eyes justifying her feeling. "What is it, Karim?" she coolly asked; loathing the answer.

Bin Nadal was already targeting phasers at the weakest point on the hostile's shields, "A Dominion battleship is closing on us and opening fire!"

There were only a few tense moments before the salvo of phased polaron beams and bursts pound the dorsal side of the *Ambassador* class ship. In less than a second, the attack finished off the shields in that section. The last two bursts impacted on the hull, leaving a 6 meter hole aft of the bridge.

A plasma conduit blew beneath Commander Wilson's feet. It launched him from the railing behind the captain's chair, over the helm, and into the main view screen. The display shattered. The impact sent razor sharp debris hurtling into the air.

Ensign Nar'vook felt Wilson's boot hit his right shoulder. Next, he looked up and saw what looked like a meter long shard of glass hurtling toward him. He had time to think, *'I guess I won't be enjoying those 15 seconds.'*

The Latin American captain had already called for medical teams to the bridge out of instinct. Then, she saw her first officer and helmsman and realized the call had been a waste of time. Sintina had lost many friends over the last 3 years. The sight of death had become common. She knew all too well how to delay her mourning. She was grateful bin Nadal was behind her; as it gave her a reason not to look forward.

"Dorsal shields are gone!"

Captain Aurelia jumped up, knowing what she had to do. She was almost ill at the sight of her fallen comrades. '*No time,*' she thought. In one step, she pushed Ensign Nar'vook's body out of the helm chair and took the post. "I'm turning one hundred eighty degrees on the Z-axis," she yelled to bin Nadal over the noise of klaxons and fires, "Return fire!" She turned her head so only her left eye meant her Ops officer's, "Call for back up." He acknowledged. Sintina didn't really know the officer. He was transferred from another posting a few days ago. '*No need to get to know anyone new, anyway,*' she decided, '*It'd just be another person to miss.*' She altered her train of thought. "Bridge to Engineering," she barked.

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Engineering looked no better than the bridge. In that particular section of the ship, there were lots of things that could explode. Jinal was very aware of that fact as he moved about, but also realized there would be little he could do if the console he was working on decided to overload.

Lieutenant Jinal had been assigned to the *Midas* the pervious year as Chief Engineer. He was amazed he had been made a section chief only four years out of the academy. The war dictated fast promotion. Still, he was well qualified. In his off hours, he read all the engineering manuals he could get his hands on. It made for a limited social life; not that he felt comfortable socializing anyway. It was the price he had to pay to maintain his Vulcan demeanor. "Go to the impulse deck and replace that driver coil before we're adrift," he said as calmly as he could, under the circumstances.

Jinal then heard the com activate, "*Bridge to Engineering.*"

"Jinal here, captain."

Over the speaker, Jinal heard Aurelia's voice again, *"Any problems down there?"*

Jinal sarcastically thought to himself, *'Any problems down here? Yes, I don't have time to explain all the problems I have.'* He replied, "There are many malfunctions, but all manageable." He thought that sounded nice and Vulcan.

Aurelia simply came back with, *"Understood, out."*

*'That's one thing I like about Sintina,'* thought Jinal, *'Once you get her confidence, she stays out of your business. It's getting her confidence that's the trick.'*

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Back on the bridge, bin Nadal glanced at the tactical display of his target. "The battleship's shields are at 85%," he relayed to Aurelia, "Our ventral shields are at 12%."

Aurelia shot back, "I'll keep our strongest shields facing the battleship." She began to enter a new heading into the navigation computer, when she realized she lacked information. "Which are those?"

Bin Nadal was distracted as he fired a phaser array. He knew what the captain's next question would be, but he couldn't react fast enough. "Starboard," he said without looking up. He decided what he was going to say next was worth eye contact, "Ma'am, may I recommend bringing our aft to them momentarily so we can launch photons at them and return to a defensive position."

Aurelia didn't have to think twice, "Alright, moving into position. Do it." She had learned to trust Karim in the short time she knew him, which admittedly was quite a feat for her. He was in Starfleet Intelligence before he was assigned to replace her tactical officer that died at the first battle of Chin'taka. *'Chin'taka... the second battle of Chin'taka, when we recovering the survivors...those Cardie bastards killed Captain Camar. No time.'*

The photons exit the battered vessel. The *Midas* had several scorch marks on its hull. One on the starboard pylon, another just below the impulse engine, still others scattered here and there. Many of the wounds were from previous battles that had never been repaired. The torpedoes head for the battleship.

They were absorbed into the shields, which become visible for a moment from the impact.

“Direct hit on the battleship, they’re returning fire,” reported bin Nadal.

“Bringing our starboard shields to bear,” Aurelia said as she manipulated the controls.

A flurry of positron pulses and two torpedoes emerged from the Dominion warship. The pulses impacted on the shields of the *Midas*. The first torpedo collapsed the starboard shields. The explosion of the torpedo was still visible when the second torpedo moved through the fire. It crashed into the saucer section of the ship. Debris and at least three crewmembers flew out of the breach before a flash of blue stopped the evacuation.

Karim didn’t have to look at his console to know there was a major hull breach. He felt the quake indicating the ship was severely damaged. “Starboard shields down! Hull breaches on decks 8, 9, and 10. Force fields holding.”

Out of desperation, Aurelia asked, “What are our strongest shields?”

Bin Nadal glanced down, “Port at 20%.” He felt the need to state the obvious, “It won’t make any difference. If they hit us with another volley, we’re dead.”

Sintina had been fighting this war since the beginning. The first battle which involved Starfleet was Torros III; she was there when the shipyards were destroyed. Ever since then, it had been one vicious battle after another.

She could feel the *Midas* creak and moan in response to the punishment she was receiving. If she was going to go out, it would be on her terms. It would be a warrior’s death.

Aurelia made the decision she said she always would if she were backed against a wall. Every captain had to think about the possibility, but not all captains had the guile to actually do it. “I’m shifting all available power to engines and setting a collision course.”

Bin Nadal knew better than to protest. He, like Aurelia, was the type to go down fighting.

The *Midas*' impulse engines became bright red as the ship made a turn to starboard. *Ambassador* class ships were not very agile, to say the least. The battleship, luckily, had even less maneuvering ability.

Sintina had only her read outs to determine how long she had to live. 1.3 kilometers ... 0.9 ... 0.4 ...

Bin Nadal's only warning of what would happen next was a proximity alert.

As the *Midas* closed the distance to the battleship, two Starfleet vessels come from underneath the Dominion dreadnought and waylaid the ventral side of the battleship with phasers, pulse phasers, and quantum torpedoes. The battleship exploded as the attack caused its warp core to lose containment. An *Akira* and a *Defiant* class flew through the fireball.

Aurelia registered what her readings are telling her. "Whoa! Full reverse!"

Only now did bin Nadal realize he hadn't been breathing for awhile. Then, a chime sounded at his station. "We're receiving a hail," he managed. "It's Admiral Ross."

Without thinking, Aurelia looked up to the main view screen only to have a reminder of the cost of this war. She then, looked back, "Patch it to the helm."

Bin Nadal saw her discomfort after looking at the view screen, if only for a moment. "Aye," he somberly said.

Admiral Ross appeared on a small screen on the helm console. He was in charge of the overall assault. She had never talked directly to the admiral before.

Ross began the conversation, "You gave them one hell of a pounding, Captain. Good work. But the *Midas* is in no shape to continue the assault. Fall ba..." Suddenly, Ross looked off screen as some one on his ship shouted, "Sir, the Cardassians are turning on the Dominion and Breen ships!" At that, Ross spouted, "What?" He then realized he was still on the line with Aurelia and he obviously wanted to end the conversation. He stated, "You have your orders, Captain. Ross out."

Aurelia sat back and twisted the helm chair to look at Karim. Her orders were in her eyes.

Bin Nadal taped some controls. "Ma'am, it's true. The Dominion forces are retreating to Cardassia Prime."

The fire in Aurelia's soul was relit. She almost smiled, "What's our tactical status?"

Bin Nadal couldn't help but smirk a little, "Overall shield strength at 16% and rising. Six of 10 phaser arrays are online...twenty-eight photons left." He decided to cut to the point, "Ma'am, we're not heading back to the rally point, are we?" Bin Nadal had worked with Aurelia long enough to know the answer already. She was a soldier. If she could fight, she would.

Aurelia's smile widened ever so slightly, "As far as I'm concerned, that last order was unintelligible."

Not surprised in the least, bin Nadal replied, "The fleet is heading for Cardassia."

Aurelia turned her chair back around, by now the medical team was removing the bodies on the deck. With resolve, she said, "Then, that's where we're going."

The blackness of space is nearly turned into daylight with all the Federation alliance ships warping to Cardassia Prime.

## CHAPTER 1

**Stardate: 52969.1 (20 December 2375)**

**Deep Space Nine**

**Bajoran System**

The Cardassian monstrosity of Deep Space Nine, the “bicycle wheel” as some called it, never looked so beautiful. Several dozen starships of all types: Romulan, Federation, Klingon, Ferengi, Nausicaan, and even a few Cardassian, orbited the space station. A number of those vessels were launching harmless, but colorful starbursts; which added to the already party atmosphere on the promenade.

The large oval windows of the promenade were filled with people watching the fireworks outside. Hardly any were without a glass of some type raised in celebration. Flags of the Federation, Klingon and Romulan Empires were draped from the ceiling along with the Bajoran flags that normally reside there.

Quark couldn't remember the last time he saw the Promenade so crowded ... or if it had ever been so crowded. He couldn't keep up with the orders. “Dabo,” he heard from across the room. Even though it'd take a week to count his profit from tonight alone, he still cringed every time he heard the word. He glanced over to see who won this time; a relatively young female human. She had a darker skin color than Miles or Julian, but lighter than Sisko's. It reminded him of the color of raktajino. He wasn't sure but he thought he saw four pips on her red collar. *‘Great,’* he thought, *‘another Starfleet officer, a captain no less, is going to take my money.’* Don't get him started on why humans, who don't believe in money, were so willing to take his. Then, at the bar he saw Kira talking to yet another Starfleet officer. This one wearing gold, or amber, or whatever Starfleet called that color, was talking to her. He'd have to remind her about the party soon. The party, he thought, he had to get up to the holodeck!

“It's just very rare, that's all,” Karim bin Nadal said to the station's second-in-command.

Without warning, the Ferengi jumped over the bar and forced his way up the stairs between the partygoers.

The security officer looked at Colonel Kira in an attempt to gain some understanding of the Ferengi's actions. She just dismissively waved her hand.



He shrugged it off and continued, "Studying religions and beliefs is something of a hobby of mine and it's rare to come in contact with a religion where the existence of the deities is confirmed; not just based on faith."

Kira looked up from her drink and said, "We feel very blessed to have the Prophets. You say you study religions, which one do you subscribe to?"

Bin Nadal smiled, anticipating the question. "None, actually," he elaborated, "In my opinion, and I hope this doesn't insult you, in my study 9 out of 10 times religion is more about social control than individual salvation. But if it gives people comfort, who am I to judge."

Kira gave a polite grin and thought for a moment. The grin left, "I can see where you might see that, but I think the Prophets have more in mind for us than social control. In fact, we once had D'jaras, a cast system, and..."

The Bajoran's combadge chimed. Quark's voice followed. "Everyone's gathering in the holodeck for the going away party, Colonel."

Bin Nadal nodded in understanding, "That explains a few things." He chuckled a bit.

Kira was unable to hold back and joined him, "Yes, yes it does." She took a moment to laugh and got up, "I'm sorry Commander, there's a gathering for the station command crew."

Karim knew better than to request to go. The first thing out of Kira's mouth once he sat down was, "I'm taken." Obviously, he was not the only one that night who had tried to sit next to her. He had acted as if his intentions were innocent and managed to turn the conversation to religion. *'Another failed attempt,'* he thought. He said, however, "Of course, nice meeting you."

"You too," Kira said, as she made her way to the stairs.

Karim then turned around on his bar stool. Sintina seemed to be having more fun than him at the Dabo table. Her smile faded suddenly. She looked as if she were talking into the air. She gathered her winnings and she made her way to the exit. *'That can't be good,'* Karim concluded.

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Captain Aurelia stopped a few meters from Admiral Ross who was sitting at the head of the table in *DS9's* wardroom. He was conferring with a Vulcan commander, presumably his aid, whom was hunched over with a padd. They both looked over momentarily as she stopped. She didn't hesitate, "Acting Captain Sintina Aurelia of the *Midas*, reporting as ordered, sir."

Ross examined this officer that had announced herself with out the courtesy of waiting before he was finished with his current conversation. She was Latino, mid-thirties...young for a captain. That was now an unfortunate side effect of the loss of officers during the war. Her straight, jet black hair stopped below the grey in her uniform; a few strands partly covered her combadge. He had expected her to be taller for some reason.

He reminded himself what he had read of her record a few hours earlier: promoted to Lieutenant, two years after graduating, in 2364 and Lieutenant Commander 5 years after that. She was Security Chief on the *Renegade* for another 4 years before becoming the *Midas'* first officer. If it were his decision, he would place her back in a first officer's slot and let her season a bit more. The decision, however, wasn't his. Her actions during the war impressed his handler. And *they* didn't necessarily want a good captain, just an obedient one.

'*Captain in 14 years,*' the admiral sorely thought. He reconciled himself with the fact that it still didn't beat James Kirk's record. Then, he remembered the last time he saw her face. He began, "If I wasn't in such a good mood, I'd give you a harsh talk about disobeying my orders to fall back. You're lucky the combat was over."

This was what she was expecting. She was ready to defend her actions, "With respect, sir ..."

Ross raised his hand to her and looked down. He continued, "Before you say anything to ruin my good mood, I didn't call you here about that." He returned her gaze, "In fact, overall, you're abilities in battle are superb. Three months ago, the captain of the *Midas* died in battle. Since then, you have been operating an underpowered and undermanned ship very well with relatively little experience."

Aurelia was taken back. She was getting complimented now, but she kept on expecting the other shoe to drop. She cautiously managed, "Thank you, sir."

Ross stood up and made his way to Aurelia while saying, "Because of your performance, I hereby am upgrading your field commission of captain to full captain." He extended his hand, "Congratulations."

Aurelia finally began to realize this was not going to be a dressing down. This meeting was only going to be good news. She let the smallest of smiles slip, "Thank you, sir," as she shook the offered hand.

Turning his back and returning to his previous position, Ross said, "You'll have the *Midas* for one last mission." Sitting down and losing any congratulatory tone he had, he elaborated, "You have the responsibility of transporting the Founder to *Starbase 375*. She's been cooperative, but don't take any chances with her."

Aurelia was surprised at the mission, but wasn't about to let herself show it. She simply said, "Understood, sir." She couldn't maintain her curiosity, "What happens after we reach *Starbase 375*?"

Ross, slightly annoyed that she didn't show more concern about her more immediate mission, "Then the *Midas* will be decommissioned. You, your chief tactical and engineering officers, along with your counselor will be transferred together."

She felt the excitement twinge in her stomach despite herself, "Transferred to where, sir?"

Ross started searching for a padd, one among many on the table. As he did, he replied, "It's a new type of vessel, called *Interceptor* class."

Aurelia's excitement grew and extended to her eyes, which seemed to swell in their sockets.

Luckily, Admiral Ross didn't notice. "It was meant for the war, but is now being retro-fitted to be a more well-rounded ship. Here are the specifications." He handed over a padd. "It was built basically a cruiser version of the *Defiant* class."

Without thinking, she nearly ripped the padd out of Ross' hand. "Thank you, sir," she said as an afterthought. She didn't bother to actually look at him.

Ross now saw her immaturity first hand. He felt the need to add, "Do not underestimate the responsibility Starfleet is giving you. You are being put in charge of the Federation's most powerful, warship."

Aurelia, realizing her mistake, regained her professionalism and said, "I won't, sir."

The admiral sat back in his chair, "The *Midas* needs to be ready to go by 08 in the morning."

With resolve, she assured him, "She will be, sir. You can count on it."

"Good." He added, "And Captain, we want to keep the media off us. You are not to tell anyone outside of your senior staff about the nature of your mission."

"Yes sir."

Ross ended simply, "Dismissed."

Aurelia clutched the padd he had given her as if it was her child. In a way, it was. She smartly did an about face and left the room.

Once the combined sound of air and metal indicated to Ross that the door had closed, he looked to his aid, "For her sake, I hope she lives up to our expectations."

## CHAPTER 2

**Stardate: 52970.5 (21 December 2375)**

**USS Midas, Deck 21**

**In Orbit of Deep Space Nine**

Vulcan engineer, Jinal, walked toward main engineering. The condition of the corridors was anything but shipshape. They were clear of major debris, but several small fragments of various materials littered the floor. Only occasionally did hazards hang from the ceiling. The crew had become accustomed to the ship being in such a state. Its appearance was actually markedly better, Jinal thought, from past months. The captain joined him from an adjoining corridor.

She went right to business, “Are all the internal force shields working?”

He prided himself on knowing the ship, Jinal immediately responded, “With the exception of deck 20, section 3; where the emitters that have not been replaced yet.”

“Make that a priority,” the captain ordered, “I want all of them operational ASAP.”

Jinal stopped in his tracks, he thought he knew every Starfleet acronym there was, “ASAP, ma’am?”

Aurelia halted in kind, the inside of her eyebrows moved up and her mouth opened slightly, “We’ve worked together for over a year, and you’ve never heard me, or any human, say ‘ASAP?’”

Jinal searched his memory; a feeling of incompetence began to sweep over him.

Aurelia noticed the look of panic on Jinal’s face. She had noticed it on him before, though only in social occasions; never professionally. She sought to alleviate his apprehensiveness, “As soon as possible, Jinal.”

That seemed to cure him, “Ah, very well ma’am. They will be replaced within the hour.”

Aurelia held in a small smile, “Good.”

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The bridge had a whole different aura about it when it wasn't filled with smoke and corpses. Aurelia exited the turbolift. The blood had been removed, but the painful reminders of her last battle were still fresh. The view screen had been repaired, but there was still a hole in the deck plate behind and to port of the command chair. She only glanced down long enough to see that the EPS conduit had been replaced. She sat with a sense of melancholy; this ship had been her prison, and her sanctuary, for two years.

Aurelia looked over her left shoulder to see Lieutenant Kimula sh'Somachanar, an Andorian, sitting at the communications console. Kimula was ten years her younger, but they were assigned to the *Midas* at the same time and instantly bonded. Both of them were assertive and didn't apologize for it. The female Andorian had the characteristic white hair of her species, which ended just below her mouth. Kimula had acted as the captain's conscience on more than one occasion. She seemed involved in her work, so Aurelia decided to make her presence known.

Aurelia leaned beside the com. station, hunching down to make the conversation a bit more private. "How is Commander Wilson's wife handling his death?"

In addition as serving as ship's counselor, Kimula had decided to take Starfleet's correspondence courses for communication's officer. It seemed only natural at the time. Besides, because of the losses during the war, the ship necessitated a certain amount of cross-training. "She's been preparing herself for it," Kimula then made eye contact, "Which is a double edged sword, but she'll be ok. She'll be better after she disembarks and sees her family again."

Aurelia looked at the battered and scorched carpet, "I'll miss him."

"He was well liked with the crew," Kimula said as she returned to the console. The thought passed through Kimula's head as to how casual death had become. Not just to her, but to everyone. No doubt, she would be treating many post-traumatic stress disorders in the coming months and years. But for the moment, everything was too raw. Everyone was still celebrating; they hadn't had time to think about what had happened to them ... or what they had done.

Aurelia shifted her weight to her other foot as if to shrug off the last subject, "After we get our new ship, we have to come back here and pick up our new 1<sup>st</sup> officer and doctor. For the moment, they're still in Cardassian space."

Not looking up, as she needed to transmit certain data to *DS9* operations before departing, "Do you know either one of them?"

"No, I haven't worked with them before."

A few meters away, bin Nadal had been manning the tactical station, "Captain, *DS9* signals they're ready for the prisoner transfer."

Aurelia took a few paces toward him, "Are you ready for our guest, Karim?"

The Persian stood straight to emphasize his confidence, "Yes, ma'am. She'll be transported directly to the brig with a full compliment of guards; and for good measure, all containment fields in that section will be active."

The captain somberly said, "I want this to be an uneventful trip, understood?"

Bin Nadal was fully aware of how serious she was, "I'm not going to lose her on my watch, Captain."

Sintina Aurelia considered Karim a friend. Granted, he had a crash course, pardon the pun, on the real world of starship tactics; but he never hid his ignorance. A trait Sintina admired; if not, practiced. He had enough confidence in his skills and ability to learn and to admit when he didn't understand a concept. His experience in Starfleet Intelligence was valuable, but it was nothing like defending a starship. "Are our escorts in place?"

Bin Nadal looked down, "Confirmed. The *Diablo* and the *Saber* are in position."

Aurelia moved to stand shoulder to shoulder with her security chief, "Karim, I would feel better if you, personally, supervised the guard team in the brig."

Bin Nadal smirked ever so slightly, "I'd prefer it that way, Captain."

Sintina curtsied. Without further orders, bin Nadal walked around the hole in the floor and entered the turbolift.

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The *Midas*' brig housed a surprising number of prisoners during the war, most of them Cardassians. Policy dictated, the captain rescue any survivors from destroyed enemy vessels. Occasionally, a Jem'hadar soldier was beamed aboard but he would promptly kill himself.

Now, Karim would be responsible for the incarceration of the leader of the Dominion in the Alpha Quadrant. '*No pressure*,' he thought to himself. He had a meeting with his staff last night to brainstorm possible precautions. No idea was rejected, no matter how outlandish. Maybe he was overdoing it, but he would not underestimate the shapeshifter.

Bin Nadal entered the brig after deactivating and reactivating three force shields along the way. Four of this best security officers were there waiting for him. "All the fields in place?"

One of his officers reported, "Yes, sir."

After one final look around the room, Karim tapped his chest, "We're ready down here, ma'am."

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On the bridge, Aurelia stood from her chair, hoping her nervousness didn't show. She turned to Kimula, "Tell *DS9* we're ready."

Kimula swiveled her stool, "Aye, ma'am."

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Bin Nadal had coordinated the plan with the new security chief on *DS9*. Bin Nadal had given the chief the exact shield modulation of the fields around the brig and weakened them just enough to allow a safe transport into the holding cell. This would eliminate any possibility of the Founder shapeshifting her way out.

In a quick, dazzling array of golden light, indicating the Cardassian transporter of the station, the Founder appeared in the holding cell.

Bin Nadal turned slightly to the guard and nodded. This indicated to the officer to do several things: first, rotate the shield harmonics of the fields



around the brig to ensure any possible leak on *DS9*; second, to bring the fields up to full strength; and finally, to signal to the station that they had her.

The security chief was rather disappointed. He imagined the Founder to take a far more intimidating form. As it was, the Founder looked like a small middle-aged woman; hardly worthy of what he was expecting. The thought entered his head, '*We fought a war against her?*' After a moment, he forced out his complacency.

Bin Nadal took a few steps. He opened with, "Welcome to your temporary accommodations. The reports say you've been cooperative so far. I trust that is a trend you intend to continue."

Obviously unmoved and unimpressed, the female changeling casually looked away, as if he had said nothing, and sat down without so much as an acknowledgment.

Karim honestly informed her, "Ok, don't be sociable. I enjoy silence." He then, took a seat behind the console a few meters away and began reading a padd about this new ship, the *Independence*; but always ... always, keeping the Founder in his peripheral vision.

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The *Midas*, flanked by the two smaller ships, left orbit of [i]Deep Space Nine[/i] and moved away at full impulse. When the task force was a safe distance way, the trio's nacelles flashed blue for an instant before penetrating sub-space and going to warp.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Stardate 52991.3 (28 December 2375) USS Midas, Main Engineering En-route to Starbase 375**

Jinal slacked in his repair duties. It seemed a waste of time seeing how the ship would be retired in the coming days. He didn't feel too guilty since all the major system were working well. Still, he sat in engineering and monitored key systems. He felt the need to prop his feet up on the console, but that wouldn't be professional; so he restrained himself. He observed Kimula entering engineering.

"I've been thinking," she started. "And I need a dose of Vulcan logic."

*'Oh great,'* Jinal thought, *'I have to put on the persona.'* Kimula was one of the few people on the ship that sometimes sought to spend time with him. Everyone else left him be. It could be because she was ship's counselor and didn't want him to feel isolated. What she didn't understand, however, was his isolation was his buffer zone.

Kimula sat next to him, "It still doesn't make sense to me. Why would Starfleet transport its most dangerous criminal on a ship, that's about to be decommissioned, with a skeleton crew on board?"

Luckily, this was something he had already considered. He prepared to present that famous Vulcan arrogance that others expected him to show, "Simple. In the event the Founder escapes, or if ships attempt to rescue her, our escorts could destroy us." He supplemented, "If it becomes necessary, of course."

The Andorian's antennae involuntarily arched back. She leaned in, "Sintina told you that?"

Jinal almost unnoticeably shook his head, "No, but it is a logical conclusion."

Kimula sat back, her antenna moving forward again, "I certainly hope the Founder behaves herself."

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Looking past his padd, bin Nadal noticed the Founder leaving her bench and pacing, as she did occasionally. For a week now, twelve hours a day, everyday, Karim had been observing her in silence. Every 16 hours she became a pool of golden goop on the floor. Then she reverted back to her humanoid form, sat, laid down, and paced. That consisted of her day. The changeling then stopped a short distance away from the force field. For the first time in his presence, she spoke, "Do you realize the Federation detected the Breen assault force prior to them attacking Starfleet Academy?"

Her voice was rather soothing and totally calm. Bin Nadal couldn't resist responding, "Before they decloaked?"

The Founder coolly confirmed, "Yes. The attack was allowed to happen."

Bin Nadal then realized he had stepped into her trap. "Spouting Dominion propaganda is not a good way to engage me in conversation."

She casually paced a bit more. "Is it so hard to believe? Do you remember when Starfleet cadets, under the orders of Admiral Leyton, sabotaged Earth's power grid?" That statement caught Karim off guard and she knew it. "They wanted to instill fear that only a Dominion attack would accomplish."

Karim was close to that incident and he couldn't stop her from getting under his skin. "That was an isolated incident and all those involved were punished," he spat.

The Founder showed no emotion in her rhythmic voice, "You really believe Admiral Leyton was the mastermind of that?"

Defiantly, Karim shot back, "Yes."

She put her hands behind her back, "And *all* those involved were brought to justice?"

Bin Nadal knew she was trying to bait him, but for what? "Yes," he said, regaining some of his composure.

The shapeshifter glided back to the bench and sat. "Denial is a wonderful thing." As she began to lie down, facing the wall, she ended the conversation with, "The Dominion should start employing similar tactics. It is very efficient."

Bin Nadal considered pursuing her on the issue, but thought better of it. No doubt that was what she expected him to do.

He worked in Starfleet Intelligence, which gave him a very critical view of most governments; including his own. He even came across some old files that implied the Tomed Incident was a SI operation. What she was implying, though ... no, Federation citizens wouldn't do that. So he shook off the exchange and returned to reading.

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The *Ambassador*, *Saber*, and *Defiant* class ships moved abreast of each other on their final approach to *Starbase 375*.

*Captain's log: Stardate, 52996.1. We have reached Starbase 375 without incident. Soon we will transfer the Founder and be decommissioned. This will be the last entry of the USS Midas. She's served us well. Forty-three souls have been lost on this ship during the war. They will be missed. But now, it's time let her, and them, rest.*

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The Founder didn't speak again in the last 2 days of their trip; which suited bin Nadal just fine. He was more than ready to make her someone else's responsibility. It was customary for the previous head guard to brief the new guards, as someone from *DS9* had for him. Once that was done, he wouldn't have to deal with her again. He leaned down to open a channel to the Starbase brig. "*Three-seven-five, we're ready for transfer.*"

Over the com, a voice reported, "Confirmed, energizing now."

In the next instant, bin Nadal saw the blue energy indicating the transporter containment field being established just before the Founder began to disappear and finally faded.

The voice sounded again, "This is 375. We have her."

"Very well, *Midas* out." The second bin Nadal closed the channel he found himself exhaling with a grin. He looked up to see his security team just as relieved. "Good job everybody. Let's get out of here." With that, everyone exited the reinforced doors of the brig.

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From her command chair, Aurelia enthusiastically ordered, "Alright, put her on screen."

Bin Nadal entered the bridge and rested his hand against the railing behind the captain's chair; joining Jinal and Kimula, who were already there.

The main viewer flashed to life. A ship was centered on the screen. At first glance, one could mistake the ship as an *Intrepid* class. Upon closer scrutiny, however, the vessel was significantly smaller than her larger cousin.

Aurelia studied the schematics thoroughly in the last 9 days, but decided to test how much her crew had studied them, "Bin Nadal, impress me with how much you've been studying this new ship."

Bin Nadal smiled. She knew how ... thorough he liked to be. "Well for starters, she is the USS *Independence* NCC-77199; the class is called *Interceptor*. She's one hundred-ninety meters long, 9 decks, armaments include: two type IX pulse phaser cannons; 11 type X phaser arrays; two launchers, one fore, one aft; with a compliment of 200 quantum torpedoes."

Aurelia was giddy. This was truly a warship. She raised her hand to stop him. "Ok, what about you Lieutenant Jinal, what else does she have?"

Jinal had a padd in hand to assist him. "It has ablative armor and regenerative shields, which have a total output of 4,085,100 terajoules; 89% that of a *Sovereign* class." He looked up and commented, "Impressive for a ship its size." He continued, "It has a maximum cruise speed of warp 9.98; maximum rated speed of 9.992 for 5 hours. Our auxiliary craft load out consists of: three *Javelin* class light starfighters, two worker bees, and one *Morpheus* class runabout."

Aurelia had noticed that before but wanted to comment on it. "The *Morpheus* detaches from the ventral hull?"

"Yes ma'am. Similar to the *Aerowing* shuttle on the *Intrepid* class."

Sensing she wouldn't get anything more out of him, she then turned her head, "Kimula, how about the perks?"

Kimula didn't look down but maintained her gaze on the new ship. "It has 2 holodecks; a primary and auxiliary sickbay; and one science lab, but only because of the refit. She's got four transporter rooms, two cargo bays and one shuttle bay. And...this is what sounds really neat to me...she has holo-emitters throughout the ship for the EMH."

The captain swiveled her chair to get a better look at her counselor/com officer, noticeable disgust in her voice. "Is it a mark I or II?"

For the answer Kimula had to turn to her console for a moment. She spun back around and said, "A new mark IV."

Sintina acknowledged and continued, with the command chair almost backward. "I don't like the EMH's. I was treated by one at *Starbase 371*."

"Which one?" came from Kimula.

Aurelia scowled, "The bald one, a mark I."

A lack of response indicated to Aurelia that Kimula didn't agree with her viewpoint, so she shifted her eyes to her security chief. "So what are her downsides?"

Bin Nadal started talking almost before the end of the question. "*Interceptors* aren't as nimble as the *Defiant* class, but she has stronger shields and hull. She's meant to quickly destroy a ship and move on. She's not very subtle."

"Fits me like a glove," Sintina said, under her breath.

Jinal offered his opinion, "I believe she has an excess of firepower."

Bin Nadal looked over to the engineer, "You'll keep thinking that until she's in combat."

Aurelia swung her chair back forward, sitting straighter, "Ok, let's bring the *Midas* to port and get on board the *Independence*."

## CHAPTER 4

### **Stardate 52992.8 (29 December 2375) USS Independence, Main Bridge Docked with Starbase 375**

Captain Aurelia spent her first night on the USS *Independence* last night. The overall color scheme of the ship consisted of grays, blues, and silvers. The corridors were not quite as wide as they were on the *Midas*; but then again, there would be less people on this ship.

The bridge most reminded her of an *Intrepid* class bridge, but with notable differences. The LCARS displays used cool colors rather than the warm colors she was accustomed to. There was a “pit” forward of the captain’s chair, like an *Intrepid*. But instead of just the helm, the “pit” housed the tactical station as well. Due to the combative nature of this ship, someone thought it was beneficial for the helm and tactical officers to sit next to each other. Probably a good idea, she thought.

The command chair was flanked by foldable displays that doubled as armrests. Her first officer and her mission specialist/counselor had chairs as well; something they lacked on the *Midas*. The far left of the captain’s chair was the operations station; to the far right, the engineering station.

There was a railing behind the captain’s chair and beyond that, a large master systems display of the ship. She had always questioned the logic of having the MSD in the background when she was talking with a potential enemy over the main viewer, but apparently no one else had a problem with it. Below the MSD was the environmental station; to the right of that, the com station; to the left, the science station.

The ready room, directly aft of the bridge, defiantly did not remind her of the *Intrepid* class ready room. The office on an *Intrepid* was huge, a veritable sanctuary for the captain. This ready room on the other hand, was little more than a glorified closet. Or at least Aurelia thought so. There was room for a crescent shaped desk, two chairs for visitors, an adjacent restroom ... and a cylinder shaped fish tank that started at the deck and went all the way to the overhead. She thought who in their right mind would have a fish tank in their ready room?

About an hour later, Aurelia was reading a padd in her new closet, when the door chime sounded. “Come on in.”

She put the device down and nearly jumped out of her seat when she realized it was an admiral. He was an Andorian, a rather fat one, and he wasn't alone. That meant he was Admiral Boral, Head of Security in this sector.

Shadowing him was a much smaller person. Aurelia wasn't entirely sure what species the shadow was. He...she presumed a 'he'...wasn't wearing a Starfleet uniform. He was wearing earth tones, greens and tans, with two diagonal straps going from his belt over his left shoulder. Some sort of ornament was attached below his right shoulder. His skin tone was peach, for the most part. The alien had a smooth ridge running down the center of his hairless head and two smaller ridges on either side of it. The nostrils were elongated and the ears were little more than holes, above where they would be on a human. Then, she noticed the sheathed knife attached to the two straps.

Normally she didn't like admirals, even the nice ones, but Boral reminded her of what Santa Clause must be like on Andoria; assuming they had such a character. He even put his hands on his belly. She half expected him to bellow, "Ho-Ho-Ho." To her disappointment, he didn't. Instead he began, "Captain, how are you settling in?"

She thought about an 'admiral appropriate' response, "The potential of this ship amazes me, sir."

Boral nodded in agreement, "It is the Federation's rabid dog at the moment. I'm sure you'll do us all proud as her master."  
"I intend to, sir."

The admiral then stepped aside to introduce his companion. "Captain, I wanted to introduce your new helm officer personally. This is honorary Ensign D'nas. He is the first of a new officer exchange program between us and the Tamarians."

*'God no,'* thought Aurelia, *'not a political appointment.'* She despised playing the little political games that most officers of her rank considered part of the job. Surfing through the internal politics of Starfleet was bad enough, but to play this part for the sake of Federation-Tamarian relations was too much. She knew her body language transmitted her annoyance to the admiral...as it was intended. Out of common courtesy, she rounded her desk, shook the Tamarian's hand, and disingenuously said, "Good to meet you, Ensign D'nas."



The young Tamarian, probably about 20 Earth years old, was obviously nervous. The captain's cool reception no doubt added to his trepidation. The universal translator was working but he still was obviously thinking hard about what he said and how he said it, "It is good to meet you, Captain Aurelia."

Boral explained, "D'nas is one of only a handful of Tamarians who have learned to change his speech pattern from the use of metaphors to how we speak." Then he leveled his gaze directly at the captain, "He is slated to be a member of your crew for about one year."

Aurelia prepared herself for a fight, but wanted to avoid collateral damage. "Well D'nas, I hope you enjoy your Starfleet experience." She tapped her combadge, "Commander bin Nadal, report to my ready room."

"Aye," came Bin Nadal's voice. A moment later, he entered the room and made eye contact with Aurelia.

"Commander, help our new helm officer get familiar with the bridge."

Bin Nadal sized up the Tamarian for a moment.

D'nas shot the officer a perplexed look.

Karim smiled and looked back at the captain, "*I'm* still getting familiar with the bridge...but I'll do my best, ma'am." The Persian gestured D'nas to the bridge. They left, leaving Boral and Aurelia alone.

Aurelia fired the opening salvo, "So Command is giving me a helm officer with absolutely no experience?"

Boral lost any semblance of Santa Clause he might have had. "He's been through an orientation of Starfleet operations. Besides that, the Tamarians are slightly ahead of our technology. He won't have any problems learning."

That hardly comforted Aurelia, "With respect, sir. I don't want to baby sit a political appointee."

Boral was in no mood to fight. Besides, this little woman (she was no more than 1.7 meters tall) could be rather intimidating when she wanted to be. He respected that. So, he used a different tact. "This isn't generally known Captain, but the Federation and the Tamarians were in negotiations. Had the

war continued, the Tamarians would have joined us against the Dominion. I want this program to be successful and if you are going to have preconceived notions about D'nas' performance, you will set it up for failure. Do you understand?"

Him saying it in such a non-confrontational tone, defused Aurelia, "Yes, sir. Sorry, sir."

Boral was satisfied with the route he took. It was a subtlety that seemed to be lost on this young captain. He leveled with her, "There are those in Command that didn't want to promote you." He paused to see Aurelia's shields going back up, but he thought she needed to hear this. "Some people thought you weren't quite mature enough for it. Sure, your good in battle, but captains have to do more than fight. And that's all you've seen of command so far." Boral knew the importance of ending on a good note. "You'll learn, you'll grow, but try to be a bit more open minded." The Captain had no response. Boral, knowing neither one of them had anything left to say, started for the door. He paused only for a moment to look back and say, "Godspeed, Captain," then left.

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The admiral had just moved down one of the two staircases that flanked the bridge. It wasn't necessary for Boral to taken them, the bridge did have lifts, but he wanted to see deck two before moving on.

Karim returned to hovering over D'nas. The Tamarian was a quick study. He was already familiar with most of the controls. Obviously, he had a similar position in the Tamarian Space Force. He handed the controls like an adult putting together a child's puzzle. Karim got the distinct feeling D'nas could teach him a few things about the helm.

D'nas looked up at his new superior and chanced an admission. "I have the feeling your captain does not prefer my presence on this ship."

Bin Nadal seemed dismissive, "Oh, don't worry about her. We've been through a lot together. She sees us as family. She's rather protective of us." The security chief cocked his head as if realizing for the first time, "Maybe too protective." He continued, "That makes her weary of new people that aren't part of our little group. But she'll warm up eventually."

Genuinely, but still struggling with non-metaphoric speech, "That is comforting, Commander. Thank you."

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Aurelia was sitting at her desk, still reeling from the admiral's words. She'd rather be yelled at than have someone calmly point out her failings. Hell, she knew she wasn't much of an explorer or diplomat. She was a fighter. What's wrong with that? It had served her well in the past. Most importantly, it kept her and her crew alive. She heard three quick tones indicating a com line opening, then she heard Kimula's voice, "Captain, Admiral Ross is on the line."

*'I wonder if he was one of the 'she's-too-immature' people?'* thought Aurelia. Admiral Boral was right, as much as she hated to admit it. She would have to learn new skills and grow up a little. She sighed, "Put him through."

Ross filled the screen on her desk. He didn't even try any pleasantries. "Captain, do you have all the crew you're getting from *Starbase 375*?"

Aurelia leaned forward and crossed her arms on the edge of her desk. "We still have a few that haven't reported in, Admiral; but not many."

"Well, come back to *DS9* as soon as you can and pick up the rest of your crew. We already have a job suited to your talents."

Aurelia nodded, "Yes, sir. I'll speed up the process."

In what Aurelia could only describe as 'an admiral's tone,' Ross said, "See that you do. Ross out."

## CHAPTER 5

### **Supplemental Starbase 375, Security Deck Near the Former Cardassian Border**

Bin Nadal had already sent his formal report on to Admiral Boral's office, but considering the high profile of this particular prisoner he felt the need to personally brief the security unit on 375. He could have just forwarded the report to the head guard, but he was ... thorough. Some people described the trait with a different word.

Disappointment swept over Karim. He didn't go through one checkpoint to reach the brig of the starbase. Then he realized, he over did it. Oh well, at least he didn't lose her and it wasn't his watch now. He pressed a panel next to the heavy door of the brig. The door opened seemingly immediately. In fact, in the interim, the computer had scanned his DNA, confirmed his biosigns, searched him for most known types of weapons and explosives, ran his DNA through a Starfleet database, and authorized him for clearance.

The brig was, of course, bigger than one on a starship. It had several sections. He had to ask directions to the proper wing where the Founder was being held. Finally, he felt a bit better now that he saw the security was more prominent and challenging him more.

Bin Nadal rounded the corner and saw something that shocked him. The Founder wasn't behind a force field. He instinctively reached for his phaser; which, of course, wasn't there. Even though he was a security officer, he wasn't allowed to bring his own phaser onto the starbase. That privilege was reserved for the security team on the station.

His alarm eased slightly when he realized the three security guards in the room were laughing and didn't seem concerned at all. He stepped closer and saw the source of their jubilation. It was the Founder herself. She looked different ... she was ... crusty.

Her skin was almost like dry, ugly, ripped leather. She sat in a fetal position in the corner of the room. Pieces of her clothing, if you could call it clothing, were peeling off. She rocked back and forth slowly; her eyes locked at some undefined point on the wall. She obviously attempted to control her agony as much as she could to spite her captures. She resembled a corpse; not the cool, calm person of twenty-four hours before.

Bin Nadal then turned his gaze to the three security officers. They hardly noticed, or cared, that he entered. The Commander in charge was smirking and had his arms folded as he supervised his two officers taunting the Founder. One Lieutenant, crouched down, as he yelled all types of profanities inches from her ear. The other, was actually pulling at her already torn 'skin.'

For a moment, Karim couldn't believe his eyes. Slowly, a burning sensation grew in his gut. Until it finally exploded, "What the hell is going on here?"

The three officers turned and regarded bin Nadal as if he were insane. If any of them had any concern, they didn't show it. The head security guard then said, "We managed to get a device from the Romulans that prevents the Founder from shapeshifting." As he ended the sentence, he gestured to a free standing device a few meters away. It was an orange glowing cylinder with three supports around it. The guard continued, "It produces a quantum stasis field."

The Lieutenant who was yelling at her looked back down at the creature on the floor, "Look at her, not so tough when she's on equal footing with us is she?"

Even though he wasn't the senior officer in the room, he ordered, "Turn that device off, now! It causes her pain. The fields will keep her from going anywhere."

The Lieutenant spoke again, "Come on sir, look at her; all degrading and pathetic. Doesn't it give you a sense of satisfaction?"

Bin Nadal's mouth was agape while his head began to move his head in disagreement. In a tone that showed his soberness, "People like you scare me." He took a step forward, "Now, turn that machine off."

The Commander in the room, his arms still crossed, began to move closer to bin Nadal. Karim stood his ground, preparing himself for the confrontation. Just as the Commander was going to begin, his eyes moved past bin Nadal. Bin Nadal heard Admiral Boral's voice, "Lieutenant Commander bin Nadal, shouldn't you be on the *Independence*?"

*'Just in the nick of time,'* thought bin Nadal. The admiral would back him up on this one. "I wanted give my report personally to these security officers, when I walked in on them torturing the Founder!"

Still, the security officers had no look of concern in their eyes. The admiral looked at the Commander in charge, the Founder, and then back at bin Nadal. "Torture, that's not torture. We are just keeping her secure."

Bin Nadal felt his knees get weak, and a wave of mild vertigo hit, but he did his best to regain his composure. "You know about this, sir?"

Admiral Boral put his hand on Bin Nadal's shoulder as if he were an old friend. Karim fought the urge to push it off. Karim then realized, the admiral was escorting him out of the room.

The Founder spoke. It was quiet, almost to herself, "Your society is not governed by the same people you think it's governed by. It's quite effective; almost as effective as how the changelings created the Dominion."

Boral looked over his shoulder as he continued to move away with bin Nadal. "Shut her up."

For bin Nadal's part, part of him was in shock and part of him realized he could get himself into a lot more trouble by resisting the admiral. He saw no alternative than to allow Boral to guide him out.

The admiral and bin Nadal walked together until they exited the brig complex. The heavy door closed behind them before Boral spoke. There was no anger in his voice. It more resembled the tone of a parent explaining to a child why he shouldn't touch something hot. "Now don't go starting rumors, Commander. I think its time for the *Independence* to leave anyway."

Karim stood there, thinking of his options. He could think of only one. "Sir, I have no choice but to report this incident to Admiral Raner." Raner was the current Head of Starfleet Security.

Boral's reaction was not what Karim had hoped. The admiral actually laughed out loud, "Go right ahead, Commander, but where do you think I got the Romulan device from?"

Bin Nadal looked down unable to plan his next move. He could go to the Federation Council, but there was an unwritten code in the officer corps. Going to the Council was always an official option, but there would be unofficial consequences. One's life in Starfleet could be made into a living hell.

Seemly amused, Boral ended the encounter with, "Run along, Lieutenant Commander."

Without comment, Bin Nadal felt he had no choice but to comply.

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The large, Andorian admiral entered the secure location, again. The three guards looked at him. He only said, "Dismissed."

Without protest, the officers filed out of the room.

Boral rolled a chair next to the defeated changeling. He sat in it and leaned forward. In a cold and malicious voice, he asked, "Now, when *exactly* did the Founders become aware of Section 31?"

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Kimula noticed bin Nadal immediately when he entered the bridge. He seemed lost. She had never noticed this behavior in Karim before. She meant him as he took a seat at the tactical station. "You look spooked. Are you ok?"

Bin Nadal knew Kimula would catch on, she always did. But he had hoped he would have more time to think about it himself before being confronted about it. "I a...I don't want to talk about it."

The counselor knew better than to press the issue. At least not at the moment, "Ok, but you will later." She smiled as the security officer looked up at her, "whether you like it or not." The Andorian was notorious for being blunt. She knew bin Nadal liked that about her.

Bin Nadal forced a grin, "Yes, ma'am." He returned to his duties as Kimula went back to communications.

A few minutes later, Aurelia entered from the ready room, "D'nas, are we secure to leave?"

Showing exact Starfleet protocol, he used only one eye to look back, "Yes, sir. All moorings and support craft are clear. We can depart at anytime."

Bin Nadal was about ready to correct D'nas but the captain beat him to it. "I prefer ma'am."

This took D'nas off guard as he turned in his chair, "But according to Starfleet regulations..."

Aurelia raised her hand to cut him off, "I know, D'nas. Despite them, I don't want to be called 'sir.'"

Hoping he hadn't offended her, he said, "Yes, ma'am. Sorry, ma'am." He then faced forward.

Aurelia was tempted to offer the Tamarian a comforting word, but decided against it. Instead she ordered, "Set a course for *DS9* and engage at maximum warp. Let's go get the rest of our crew."

**END OF "PRISONERS OF WAR"**