

# Star Trek: Independence

## Wounds of Chin'toka

By Dnoth

*"All those escape pods...So small...So vulnerable. I'll order their destruction immediatel-"*

*"No, let them return to the Federation. Those pods are filled with frightened, demoralised troops."*

*"...troops that will spread fear throughout the Federation with tales of what happened here today. Founder, it is wise."*

*~Founder and Weyoun (DS9: "The Changing Face of Evil")*

**Stardate: 52774.4 (10 October 2375)**

**USS Midas, Recreation Room**

**In Orbit of Starbase 371**

The large windows in the rec. room revealed the slowly rotating silhouette of the Starbase. For the last month, the *Veracruz* and the *Midas* had been making supply runs from here to AR-558 and other points in the Chin'toka system.

The war had nearly become routine for the crew. It wasn't simply the repetitive task of supply runs. There had been a general lull in the war for a month or two. People were still dying and ships were still being destroyed, but not on the order of The Battle of Tyra or Operation Return. Besides, with successes at Chin'toka, Ricktor Prime, Monac IV, Benzar, and Betazed, the Dominion seemed to be backed into a corner.

All of Starfleet and the entire Alpha Quadrant were willing to stop holding its collective breath. It wasn't a matter of *if* the Federation Alliance would win the war, but *when*.

“So when do we get back on the road, Sintina?” asked Karim bin Nadal, the security chief.

The Latin American first officer responded after she took a drink, “The last of the cargo should be loaded by the end of the day. Then, we’re off once again.” The commander fumbled with her glass.

“What’s wrong?” Ensign Kimula asked.

The Andorian was one of the most mature junior officers Sintina had ever encountered. Early on, the counselor’s blunt and honest recommendations endeared her to the first officer. “It’s just,” she began, “I don’t mean to sound ungrateful for the down time, but...Captain Camar and this ship deserves better than to be hauling cargo.”

“You’re kidding,” Karim sat back. “I can’t believe you’re complaining that we aren’t getting shot at. The *Midas* was at Torros III, the liberation of *Deep Space Nine*, and Chin’toka, how much more excitement do you want?”

“Starfleet is greatly underutilizing Captain Camar, she’s a great tactician,” countered Aurelia.

Kimula mused, “Aren’t all Zakdorn?”

“That’s the rep...” started bin Nadal as an announcement signal interrupted him.

“This is the captain, I’ve just received word that there’s been an attack on Earth.”

The whole room gasped in shock. Some, like Sintina, stood from their seats; as if ready to pounce.

The captain continued, “Starfleet Headquarters and the surrounding city of San Francisco were bombarded from orbit. Ships from the Breen Confederacy were able to pass undetected, decloaked, and attacked. Fortunately, all the hostile vessels were destroyed shortly thereafter by orbital defenses.

In addition, Dominion and, apparently their new allies the Breen, are mobilizing a force to retake Chin’toka. The fleet has gone to yellow alert. Senior officers report to the conference room immediately. That is all.”

Aurelia, bin Nadal, and Kimula didn't waste anytime getting to the exit.

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**Stardate: 52781.5 (13 October 2375)**

**USS Midas, Main Bridge**

**Federation Alliance Rally Point (just outside the Chin'toka system)**

Over three-hundred Starfleet, Imperial Romulan, and Klingon Defense Force vessels gathered and were organizing into formations.

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The Zakdorn captain once again addressed her crew. She strode confidently around the bridge, but her words carried to all on board. "The *Midas* was part of the fleet that took this system. For nearly a year, the Federation Alliance has been fighting tooth and nail to keep it. The *Midas* has done her part by running supplies to Chin'toka. Now, the Dominion, and their new Breen friends, want to take it back again. I tell you, we are not about to let it go!" Clapping erupted on the bridge, and probably around the ship. She concluded, "You have proved yourselves time and time again during this conflict. I have every confidence in each one of you...Red alert! All hands to battle stations."

The Andorian counselor also doubled as the communications officer. She reported, "Captain, Admiral Ross in on the line."

It was odd. The fleet commander often conversed with the squadron commanders, but not the *Midas*. The *Ambassador*-class wasn't in a leadership role. Camar put her hands behind her back, "On screen."

The burly, dark-haired human appeared. "Captain, I need your ship to hold position."

The Zakdorn's face crunched up, "To what end, sir?"

"When escape pods start ejecting, I need you to recover and extricate them."

Sanora Camar got a look of defiance in her eye. "With respect, the *Midas* could prove useful in the coming battle. Perhaps a *Miranda* or even some *Danubes* could..."

Ross had the tone of a man that didn't have the time to explain himself, "I want the *Midas* to do it exactly because she can defend herself. You can fight you way in and out if need be. Your priority is to get people out of the kill box, understood?"

The captain regarded her first officer. Aurelia's face was red and her hands were clinched. It was an expected reaction from her impulsive XO. Fortunately, Camar had trained her enough to prevent her from saying something counter-productive.

Camar conceded with a slight puff, "Yes sir."

He concluded, "Two other starships will assist: the *Tempest* and the *Victory*. I need you to inform Captains Berkhalter and Zimbata about the assignment. Ross out."

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*One hour later...*

The three lone vessels, an *Ambassador*, a *Sabre*, and a *Constellation*, remained abreast of each other. The ships silently waited for the dawn.

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Captain Camar sat stoically in the center seat. She watched the tactical display on the main viewer. The icons of the various factions neared each other.

Sintina opted to stand; her arms crossed. "The *Defiant's* on point. She's getting too far ahead of the rest of the fleet."

"Relax," advised the Zakdorn. "Captain Sisko can afford to draw some fire in that ship of his."

"I'd love to have a ship like that," commented Commander Aurelia.

"Pauuuh," replied the captain, "A ship like that doesn't require any real tactics. Just point and shoot. I prefer a little more challenge."

A few chuckles broke out on the bridge.

"Sir," reported Karim from tactical, "The *Defiant* has opened up."

All eyes were now intently watched the battle unfold on the main screen. Bin Nadal served as commentator.

"One...two Breen ships down..."

The first officer said, "That's right. Give 'em hell."

"Wait," the Persian began, "Something's not right."

Camar looked back, "Specifics, mister."

"The *Defiant*...it's lost power." He rechecked his readings just to make sure. "Now a *D'deridex*, the *Addis Ababa*, the *Cuffe*..." He looked up, panic on his face, "they're all losing power."

Aurelia walked over to Camar, "We should go in and help them out."

She shook her head, "No commander, I'm not rushing head long into a situation I know nothing about." Then, she got up. Sintina back away. "Commander bin Nadal, report."

The tactical officer was in total disbelief, "Over half the fleet has been disabled. The Breen and Dominion are just picking them off, one by one!"

"What are they using to disable the ships?" pressed the captain.

He manipulated the controls, "It's...it's some type of energy dampening weapon from the Breen ships. It's disabling weapons, engines, shields...Captain, they're sitting ducks out there."

"Sir, the *Tempest* and the *Victory* are requesting instructions," Kimula relayed.

Camar looked again at the main viewer. The small Starfleet insignias were disappearing rapidly. Scenarios played out in her mind. Finally, she said, "We can't help them. We'd only perish with the rest of them. Then, we couldn't help anyone."

"But captain..." began Aurelia.

The Zakdorn raised a hand, "Not now, commander." She spun around, "Mr. Kimula, tell them both to stay on station. We'll go in, when and if, we can get back out alive."

"I strongly object to this course of..." attempted the first officer, again.

"Noted," Camar snapped. She moved closer to her XO and whispered, "You need to learn to lead from your head, as well as your gut, commander. But for now, hold your tongue!"

Sintina literally bit her lip and went to parade rest.

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The collective crews looked on; watching vessel after vessel succumb to the Dominion forces. The feeling of helplessness was overwhelming. To just observe...and not being able to do anything about it. It was torture. Only a very few vessels were able to limp away from the slaughter. After nearly an hour of a living hell, it suddenly ended.

"Sir," said bin Nadal, "the Dominion and Breen forces are falling back."

Camar regarded him as if he had sprouted wings, "What?"

"They're moving to the far side of the system."

Sintina added, "They've left nearly all of the escape pods intact."

The Zakdorn rose, "They've made their point." She sighed and ordered, "Kimula, signal the *Tempest* and *Victory* to follow us in. Mr. Nar'vook, take us to the battle coordinates."

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The *Midas* neared its newest customer. The ship spun slowly in the void. The *Thunderchild* was still in relatively good shape...at least it was still recognizable as an *Akira*-class.

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The holodecks, the cargo bays, the gym, the shuttle bay, the rec. room, and even the corridors began to fill with survivors. Sintina roamed the now

cramped walkways. Surprisingly, most everyone was quiet. Some sobs were heard; most just had a distant stare their eyes. The XO remembered watching some footage of death camp prisoners during Earth's Second World War. The people before her had the same look on their faces.

She noticed a doctor, he wasn't from the *Midas*, hovering over an unconscious Bajoran military officer next to the bulkhead. Then, he moved to another injured officer and began treating him. Sintina was about to ask him if he needed any help when the ship jolted sharply. It could only be a phaser hit. Many people became frantic. The doctor took charge of the refugees, "Everyone calm down and sit tight! We'll be ok."

Aurelia was satisfied with the doctor's actions and didn't feel as bad when she forced her way through the crowd. Her place was now on the bridge. It was almost a welcome distraction. She had seen enough despair.

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Camar stood, "Report!"

"A *Keldon* and a *Hideki* were hiding behind some hulks. They've opened fire!" said Karim.

"Suspend SAR-Ops. Raise shields and return fire!" she ordered, "Kimula, ask for aid."

"The *Agamemnon* has just entered the system." The Andorian continued, "The *Tempest* and *Victory* are several minutes away in another part of the debris field."

An EPS relay sparked. "Understood," yelled Camar. She looked over Kairm's shoulder, "Use that derelict Warbird. The *Hideki* is near it. Target the Warbird's quantum singularity the shockwave should disable it." She moved back to the command chair.

"Aye sir." The tactical officer followed her instruction. The results were better than expected. "The *Hideki* has been destro...The *Keldon* is targeting the bridge!"

Captain Camar looked up in time to see part of the overhead falling. She would see nothing else.

A pile of rubble covered the captain. Kimula, bin Nadal, and others left their station to remove the support beams, panels, and circuitry. Luckily, the hull hadn't breached. After a few seconds of work, they reached Camar, or rather her corpse. Kimula looked away. Karim didn't want to look at it either. He returned to tactical and tapped on his compin, "Commander Aurelia to the bridge."

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Moments later, Sintina exited the turbolift. "What happened?" she burst as she crossed the threshold.

"We're under attack by a *Keldon*."

Kimula injected, "Captain Camar is dead."

"I have more bad news," offered bin Nadal. "Three bugships are advancing on our location."

"Damn it!" Aurelia cursed. "What's the status of the *Keldon*?"

"We managed to weaken their port and dorsal shields, but we're in worse shape. Three friendly starships are closing as well. They'll be in firing range a few seconds after the attack ships."

"We can hold our own until then," said Aurelia. The statement was more of a reassurance than fact. "Keep us on their dorsal side, target their sensor array."

"Ma'am," reported bin Nadal, "The Dominion ships...they're attacking the *Keldon*."

"Why would they..." she started.

"We're being hailed by one of the bugships," came from Kimula.

Her tone was one of confusion, but her curiosity was peaked, "On screen."

A Vorta, it looked like a "Yelgrun" became visible. He said, in a cool and apologetic voice, "We regret the actions of our Cardassian Guls. They have acted on their own accord and against the wishes of the Founder. They will be punished. You may continue your retrieval operations unmolested."



The channel closed and the attack ships escorted the *Keldon* away.

Sintina looked at Karim and then Kimula; both had a look of astonishment. Her mind slowed. She finally had time to examine the bridge. Camar's body still lay half covered by debris. Then, she looked to the viewscreen. There were still so many life pods to recover. "How kind of you," she grimly mused.

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