

Border Cutter Silverfin

Ambush

By Brydon Sinclair

Bridge, U.S.S. Silverfin NCC-4470
In orbit of Alpha 441, Badlands
Stardate 52209.4 (March 18th 2375)

All around him, it sounded like a tropical storm pounding against the duranium hull of the Border Cutter *Silverfin*. At the sound of metal groaning, Captain Hilgrat Ja-Inrosh looked up at the domed ceiling of the bridge. The Albacore-Class ship had been in the Badlands for four days, in search of a mysterious signal, believed to be of Maquis origin. With the fleet stretched thin to hold the frontline against the Dominion, the *Silverfin* had been ordered to track the signal and locate its point of origin.

They had tracked the weakening distress call to a small rogue planetoid simply called Alpha 441. It was roughly half the size of Earth's moon and made barely habitable by high levels of geothermal energy, this combined with its location deep inside one of the most treacherous regions of the Badlands, made it the perfect base of operations for the Maquis, and a logical fallback point.

They'd arrived to find over sixty humanoid lifesigns on the planetoids surface. Due to the density of the plasma storms they couldn't use the transporters, so Commander Leijten had taken three of their Star Stallions down to evac the surviving Maquis. The op would take less than two hours, and was almost complete. Being Efrosian, Ja-Inrosh wasn't known for his optimism among the crew, but he had faith in his people and had made a special plea to the Blessed One to see them through the mission as smoothly as possible.

Twenty minutes and we'll be heading back to Federation space, he thought to himself.

Moments later, an alarm from Tactical got his immediate attention. He looked up at Lieutenant Commander Ling-Na, who was already scrutinising the readouts on her monitor. His hearts had only beaten twice when she turned to look at him.

“I’ve got two Jem’Hadar strike ships on the edge of sensor range, closing fast,” the diminutive Chinese officer stated, her slate-grey eyes focused and her ageless face set hard.

“*Kasst*,” he cursed under his breath—not a saying often uttered by the son of a priest. “ETA?”

“They will be in weapons range in nine-point-one minutes.”

Ja-Inrosh turned back to the viewscreen and tapped the companel on the armrest of his chair. “*Silverfin* to Leijten. We have a situation.”

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Landing Platform, Maquis Supply Depot Alpha 441, Badlands

“Understood sir. We’re heading back to the boat now. Leijten out,” she said, closing the commlink with the *Silverfin*. Susanna Leijten looked across the landing platform the Maquis had installed on Alpha 441 when they first arrive on their secret base, aside from the three Star Stallions from the cutter, there was a single Ju’day-Class modified freighter, the hull of which was scorched and potholed, and would never take off from the surface of the planetoid again, as well as several smaller shuttles, including a design of runabout not used in over ninety years. None of these ships would be coming with them, all of them were damaged and out of supplies and fuel.

The surviving Maquis understood this and grabbed what they could before loading onto the three Stallions, a mixture of relief, anger and anguish playing across their faces. In calling for help they were walking straight into a Federation penal settlement. But given the other options available to them, there wasn’t much of a choice. If she had to choose between death and prison, she would take the latter.

But now it looked like they might not see the inside of a Federation cell, not if the Jem’Hadar had their way. It was believed that when Cardassia joined the Dominion two years ago, the Jem’Hadar had been used to eradicate all of the Maquis cells still active in and along the Demilitarised Zone. Starfleet Intelligence had warned them this mission could be a trap. Leijten had tried not to think about that, and focused on doing her job. Though was now

loathed to admit that Intel might actually have been right about something for a change.

Trust the damn spooks to be right about this! She shook the thought from her head and tapped her combadge. “Team one to teams two and three. Report status.”

“Team two here,” came the voice of Ops Manager Alec Murphy. *“We’re fully loaded and prepping to take off.”*

“Team three reporting in,” said Senior Chief Syva. *“We will be finished the evacuation in approximately one-point-three minutes.”*

“We have Jem’Hadar incoming. Syva, get those people onboard fast. Alec, don’t wait for us. Take off and get back to the ship.”

“Understood,” the two team leaders replied in unison.

Leijten looked back at her own line of refugees. There were only six others waiting to get onboard. Crewman Zronn was outside the Stallion helping a heavily pregnant woman with her belongings, Crewman Henderson was ensuring the safety harnesses were securely fastened, and Petty Officer Smith was at the controls, ready to take off at a moments notice.

She looked over as Stallion Two lifted off and headed back up to the *Silverfin*, whilst Stallion Three had another five people waiting to get onboard, Syva outside directing them to move quickly and calmly.

Most of the Maquis didn’t have much in the way of possessions, but those that did have something were determined to hold onto their keepsakes and mementos of a different time. Leijten knew that these people had been through hell in the last few years, their homes being handed over to the Cardassians in order to keep the peace, finding themselves cut off from Federation support and protection, forced to take up arms to safeguard what little they had left, and then organising into the Maquis. Some saw them as freedom fighters, others as terrorists, she saw them as victims. Victims of circumstance, of politics, or location, but mostly the last victims of the first Cardassian War. So she wasn’t about to force them to leave behind what little they had left—of course everything was scanned to make sure they weren’t trying to smuggle out weapons or explosives.

She noted that Syva got the last man onboard, as she herself was helping the pregnant woman up the steps into the aft compartment, which was rigged for passengers, and then the last two people in the queue. Zronn was just climbing onboard as Stallion Three took off. The Bolian security guard helped her team-mate get the last few people into a chair and helped with the harness, as Leijten stepped up to the cockpit.

“Smitty, tell me what I want to hear.”

“We’re prepped and ready sir,” Petty Officer 3rd Class “Smitty” Smith replied in his thick Manchurian accent. No one onboard the *Silverfin* knew what (or even if) Smith had a first name, always preferring to be called just “Smitty”.

Henderson popped his head into the cockpit. “Everyone’s secured sir,” he stated.

“Get buckled in,” she instructed the guard and then slipped into the co-pilot seat. “Take us up Smitty,” she told the pilot before getting her harness fastened. They would be cutting it close, but they would be able to make it back to the *Silverfin* in time. In time for what she wasn’t exactly sure, as there was no way they could fight two Jem’Hadar ships, and in the plasma fields they were limited to impulse speeds only.

The shuttle lifted off the metal landing platform and under Smitty’s expert hands, she quickly headed up through the atmosphere.

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**Bridge, U.S.S. *Silverfin* NCC-4470
In orbit of Alpha 441, Badlands**

“ETA?” Ja-Inrosh asked again.

“We’ll be in their weapons range in two minutes. Mark,” stated Ling-Na.

“Captain, Stallion One is approaching the hanger deck,” Lieutenant JG Llewellyn-Smyth said quickly from the Conn, every word perfectly pronounced. “She’ll be aboard in twenty seconds.”

“As soon as Stallion One is through the doors, take us out of orbit and lay in the shortest course towards Federation space,” he ordered the slim helmswoman.

“Aye sir.”

Ja-Inrosh kept an eye on the chronometer above the viewscreen, as the twenty seconds Leijten needed to get aboard ticked away. He gave a silent prayer to the Blessed One, something he had always done when under duress. He knew he could count on his XO to get the job done.

“Stallion One is aboard,” Llewellyn-Smyth stated. “Thrusters online. Breaking orbit.”

From the Engineering station, Lieutenant Commander Amarin, *Silverfin’s* Chief Engineer, looked up. “I’ve boosted power to the impulse engines, they are at one-hundred twenty percent,” the Benzenite stated in his booming voice. “I’m attempting to increase our shield output as well.”

“Weapons range in ninety seconds,” reported Ling-Na.

“On heading one-seven-eight-mark-two-nine-six. Impulse engines at maximum.”

Just then the turbolift doors opened and Lieutenant Murphy stepped onto the bridge, his Stallion having returned a few minutes earlier. He quickly took his post, relieving Petty Officer Jackson.

“Captain.” Ja-Inrosh looked up at Ling-Na. “The strike ships are increasing speed. We won’t be able to keep our distance for much longer.”

“Sound battle stations. All available power to shields and ready weapons,” he ordered, feeling a tightness in his stomach. Since the war began, no Albacore-Class ship had ever engaged a Jem’Hadar strike ship, but he knew the specs of the *Silverfin* better than anyone else, having been onboard since the ship had been commissioned, and like all Starfleet Captain’s he’d been briefed on Dominion ships and technology. Unfortunately, what he knew about Jem’Hadar strike ships trumped the *Silverfin*, but the Border Service was used to being up against the odds, and it just made them more imaginative and cunning.

The turbolift opened again and Leijten stepped out onto the bridge. He looked up at her and she gave him a single nod before she headed over to the Tactical console, where she stood behind Ling-Na.

“Intercept in two-point-three minutes,” stated Murphy, without looking up from the sensor hood on his console.

Ja-Inrosh nodded at the information, knowing that the fight was inevitable and that his people would make it one to be proud of. He held off saying a prayer to the Blessed One, feeling that to do so would be a sign of defeat even before they began. The chronometer above the viewscreen continued to count down the seconds until the Jem’Hadar intercepted, and he braced himself in his chair, ready for the first hit—seeing as how their weapons were effective at a greater range than their own.

All over the *Silverfin* the crew would be securing systems, diverting power to key areas, dispatching damage control teams and medics to strategic points throughout the ship, security guards were being armed and deployed, the auxiliary control room was manned and ready in case anything happened to the bridge, and their Maquis refugees would be taken to heavily shielded sections where they would be safe. Ahead of him, Llewellyn-Smyth expertly manoeuvred the ship through the plasma storms, avoiding the densest regions and the numerous plasma funnels that erupted at a moments notice. She had only held the post of Chief Flight Control Officer for six weeks (although she had been onboard the *Silverfin* since she graduated from the Academy four years earlier), replacing Lieutenant Marcus Graves who had been reassigned to a Defiant-Class ship in the Fleet—his experience at the controls of an Albacore-Class would stand him in good stead on the small but over-powered warship. Llewellyn-Smyth had quickly proven herself to be Graves’ equal as a pilot, and was cool and calm under pressure—an impressive asset in one so young.

“They’ll be in firing range in forty-five seconds,” stated Murphy, his usual jocular attitude replaced with an all-business demeanour.

“How long until we can return fire?”

“They’ll be in our torpedo range nine seconds after they open fire,” Ling-Na told him.

Leijten looked over at Amarin, who sat diagonally opposite the Tactical console. “Amarin, can you give us any more power to aft shields?”

“The shield generators are taking all they can,” the Benzenite replied, his booming baritone filling the bridge. “We were still working on repairs from that ion storm last week. This was suppose to be out dry-dock time.”

It was the nature of war. Too much that needed to be done, but not enough people or ships or time to do it in. Ja-Inrosh had lived through the Federation wars against the Cardassians, the Talarians, the Tzenkethi and the brief conflict with the Klingons prior to the Dominion War. He had seen many fine people killed doing their duty, whilst others were just in the wrong place at the wrong time, and some had been targeted as a ploy to demoralise the Federation forces. When the current conflict was over, he would retire and return back to Efros, and spend the twilight on his life meditating and praying. He would not atone for the lives he had taken, as every time had been in service to others, taking the life of an aggressor to save an innocent was a just action in the eyes and hearts of the Blessed One. But he would pray for every loved one and friend who had gone before him into the Way After. It was the least he could do for them.

“Ten seconds,” Murphy counted down.

“Viewscreen aft,” he told the Ops Manager, and a moment later the magnified image of the approaching insect-like attack ships appeared, their weapon ports glowing.

Leijten slapped the intercom panel on Ling-Na’s station. “All hands, brace yourselves.”

The first volley slammed into the aft shields and the *Silverfin* lurched forward under the assault. In front of him, Llewellyn-Smyth quickly entered a new evasive pattern, as the Jem’Hadar fired again. Despite her best attempt, the strike ships found their target with almost every blast, each hit slamming into the shields and weakening them.

“Aft shields down by twenty-seven percent,” called Murphy. “No structural damage.”

“They’re in torpedo range,” announced Ling-Na.

“Photon torpedoes. Maximum yield, dispersal pattern sierra,” Ja-Inrosh instructed the Tactical Officer. He gave her a moment to input his commands then ordered, “Fire.”

On the viewscreen, six torpedoes streaked out from the *Silverfin*’s aft launcher, the annihilation of matter and antimatter making them glow orange as they lanced through the plasma field and then into the fronts of both

attacking ships. He saw their shields flaring under the impact of the torpedoes, but both ships continued forward.

“Minimal shield damage to both ships,” stated Murphy, looking through his sensor hood. “They are increasing speed and adjusting heading, I’d say their moving into a strafing attack run.”

“Conn, evasives. Tactical, full power to phasers and target at will,” he ordered, gripping the armrests of his chair as both women acknowledged and set about their assigned tasks.

The *Silverfin* banked to port as Llewellyn-Smyth adjusted their course and heading, trying to throw the two attackers off balance. Another two torpedoes pounded into the lead Jem’Hadar ship, but like the others they had only minimal effect. The strike ships were designed for tactical engagement and could better withstand the effect of their weapons. Both ships quickly returned fire, the Border cutter jolted.

Just as Murphy predicted, the two ships passed the *Silverfin* on either side, one focusing on the small saucer the other on the elongated drive section, both firing almost constantly as they passed. The *Silverfin* bucked and lurched under the multiple hits, whilst returning fire with her own phasers. On the bridge, officers and non-coms struggled to remain at their posts, those standing at the aft consoles were thrown to the deck but quickly scrambled back to their stations. Ja-Inrosh noticed Leijten helping PO Jackson back his feet, and checking to make sure he was alright.

“Damage report,” she ordered once the non-com was back at the port auxiliary console that flanked the MSD.

“We’ve taken heavy shield damage; integrity is down to fifty-five percent. Buckling along the starboard nacelle. Hull scoring and micro-fracture reported on the port side of deck seven, emergency forcefields are active and stable,” stated Lieutenant Murphy, as streams of telemetry filled the numerous screens on his console.

“Both ships are moving off and regrouping, bearing one-oh-six-mark-nine,” added Ling-Na. “One ship has moderate shield damage, the other has taken a few minimal hits. Neither has any hull damage.”

Ja-Inrosh quickly rose and moved over to Ops, he wanted a closer look at the sensor data, to see if there was some weakness that either ship had they could

exploit—no matter how insignificant—or if they could use the plasma fields to their advantage. When he got to the large console on the port side of the bridge, he saw that Murphy had had the same idea and was running multiple scans on their battlefield and the two attack ships.

From the opposite side of the bridge he heard Leijten order, “Harriet, pattern theta. Ling-Na, ready a full spread of torpedoes from both forward launchers.” He felt a faint smile tug at his lips, pleased with how his XO stepped into the role of leader so smoothly. In his request for retirement, which he had written six months earlier, he had named her as his successor to the centre seat of the *Silverfin*, a positions she more than deserved.

On the main sensor display, he saw both ships coming at them again, the scans showing a build-up in their weapon arrays, as well as their projected flight path, which would take them over the top of the primary hull. The tightness in his stomach clenched harder.

Blessed One, protect me people, he silently prayed just as both ships re-entered their optimum weapons range.

The moment before he died, Hilgrat Ja-Inrosh saw a blinding flash of light and felt a searing wave of heat pass over him. He was dead before the roar of the explosion filled the bridge.

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Bridge, U.S.S. *Silverfin* NCC-4470 Badlands

With Ling-Na more than capable of handling the ship’s weaponry in their fight, Commander Leijten had been moving towards Amarin at Engineering, to see if she could help route power to increase their shields. She was just over five meters away from Ops when the power conduit behind the bulkhead overloaded. The superheated plasma tore through the metal and plastics that made up the instrument panel like it was tissue paper. Neither Murphy nor Ja-Inrosh had a chance of surviving, but the explosion caught both herself and PO Jethro Jackson in the shockwave. The non-com was pounded into the Master Systems Display before he slumped to the deck, bloody and broken. Leijten herself was lifted off her feet and into the railing that surrounded the command arena, where Ja-Inrosh’s chair was located. As she smacked into the metal bar she heard two ribs break, and as she landed on the deck, her

chest was burning, her breathing heavy and laboured, she felt intensely dizzy and nauseous.

She rolled onto her uninjured side and tried to draw in breathe. The stench of burning metal, plastic and meat filled her nostrils and made her gag. Somehow she kept from retching, but couldn't stop from coughing, and noticed on the carpet in front of her face droplets of blood as she coughed—each one filling her chest with pain and very little air.

Leijten managed to look up and saw a flurry of activity, as two members of the bridge crew tackled the fire, and another flipped open a medical tricorder and began to check on the prone bodies that were scattered over the upper level of the bridge. Grabbing the same railing that broke her rides, and must've punctured her lung, she dragged herself to her feet.

Sucking in as much air as she could, she used the sharp pain in her right side to keep herself conscious and focused. She clenched her right arm to the side of her body, to try immobilise the shattered ribs she gritted her teeth.

“Report!” she barked.

“Hull breach on deck two, sections four through six. Conduits have overloaded in multiple sections on decks one, two and three,” Amarin replied first, as he looked to be routing Ops control to his board. “Dorsal shields have collapsed, attempting to reroute power.”

Without dorsal shields, the bridge was completely defenceless. Just then, the turbolift doors opened and a DC team charged in, with Corpsman Echor, Zronn and Henderson followed pushing anti-grav gurneys, their phaser carbines hanging from their shoulders.

“The Jem'Hadar are coming back around for another pass,” announced Ling-Na. “Phasers are down.”

Leijten moved around the emergency response team, trying not to wince and be hospitalised by Echor—not while they still faced two attack ships without their Captain. She forced herself not to look at what was left of Ops—though she could see that the fires were now out—as she approached Amarin. The short journey across the bridge had her wheezing and she coughed onto the arm of her uniform and noticed the blood was more than before.

“Where is the most volatile expanse of plasma storms?” she asked, fighting to keep her voice strong and steady.

“Bearing three-oh-seven-mark-two-two-four,” he replied looking up at her behind the special goggles he needed to wear when in well-lit locations.

“Any way we could make them worse?”

He thought on her request for a moment and then nodded his bulbous head. “We could direct an antimatter beam into the eye of a plasma funnel as it forms, it would increase the energy output by at least a factor of five.”

“Patch the coordinates to the Conn and rig a particle emitter,” she said to him in a low voice, and then stepped down to Llewellyn-Smyth, who was still struggling against the eddies and currents of the Badlands. “Harriet, alter heading to the one from Commander Amarin. One half impulse.”

“Sir, at half impulse the Jem’Hadar will be on us in seconds,” the pilot pointed out.

“I know Lieutenant. We need them in close,” she replied, wheezing heavily and leaning on the banister for a moment. It was getting harder to draw breath and she found herself becoming headlight because of it. But when she did, all she needed to do was inhale deeply and the pain in her right side helped to keep her focused for a moment longer. She noticed that Echor led the two security guards back into the turbolift, both gurneys occupied, whilst the DC team still worked on the console and the two scorched bodies in the middle of the melted plastic and twisted metal. She quickly looked away.

“Jem’Hadar will be on us in twenty-six seconds,” stated Ling-Na.

“Approaching the volatile stretch sir,” added Llewellyn-Smyth. “Reading multiple plasma funnels in close proximity to one another, as well as strong currents and energy wakes.”

“I know you can get us through it Harriet,” she said, setting reassuring hand on the younger woman’s shoulder.

The Cambridge-born Englishwoman looked at Leijten squarely in the eyes. “Aye sir,” she said firmly, and then fixed her full concentration back on the controls.

As the *Silverfin* entered the denser, more volatile expanse of the plasma storms, the ship vibrated and shook. The bridge seemed to grow quiet, almost sullen, as they all knew that what Leijten was risking could well kill them all, but that it was also their best chance.

“Commander, the Jem’Hadar are slowing,” said Amarin.

Come on you bastards! You wanted us, so come get us! She seethed at their cowardice, how they had been so brash and confident when they had the upper hand, but now that their prey was leading them on they weren’t so keen.

“Aft torpedoes. Fire!”

She watched as another fierce volley of Starfleet-issue torpedoes pounded into the two Jem’Hadar attack ships. One torpedo pierced the shields on the lead ship and tore into the hull. Flames leapt into space with the escaping atmosphere and were quickly extinguished. The lucky hit was just the thing to force the two Dominion ships forward, and they continued the chase once again.

“Amarin standby to engage the antimatter beam. Harriet the second that funnel appears, run like hell.”

The *Silverfin* buckled under the renewed Jem’Hadar attack, her already overtaxed shields holding out gallantly, as Ling-Na continued to trade blows with the two attack ships, the Border Cutters torpedoes finding their target every time.

“Commander, I’ve got a new funnel starting to form to starboard, twenty-seven thousand kilometres ahead,” the Chief Engineer stated, scrutinising the sensor readouts.

“Adjusting heading,” Llewellyn-Smyth replied instantly.

Leijten’s chest ached, her breathing was getting harder and harder, and her coughing brought up more blood on the sleeve of her uniform. She wouldn’t back down. She couldn’t. Ja-Inrosh wouldn’t have and she wasn’t about to sully his reputation by giving up.

“Aft shields down to twenty percent and dropping,” stated Ling-Na.

“Emitters charged. We have eight seconds until optimum output,” announced Amarin.

“Coming into position.”

“Amarin now!”

At the touch of a button, the Benzenite officer sent a crimson antimatter pulse into the swirling mass of plasma that was about to form another hull shattering column of superheated energy. The focal point seemed to ignite, the normally beautiful swirling mass of purple-hued energy blazed red and fiery, and quickly expanded outwards as the funnel descended to meet another column of plasma.

Alarms blared throughout the bridge, with the increase in energy readings, the failing shields, the speed at which the funnel came towards them, the massive surges that rippled throughout the dense expanse of the Badlands. At the Conn, Llewellyn-Smyth hit the acceleration and the *Silverfin* quickly moved ahead of the funnel and the near searing red plasma wake they had caused. Leijten imagined the energy roaring like a feral beast. And the Jem’Hadar were flying right into it.

Doing their best to stay ahead of the energy wake, the ship jostled and shook. “Shields nearing upper limits of their tolerance,” Ling-Na said. “Collapse eminent.”

“Structural integrity failing in all aft sections. Impulse power is fluctuating and I’m having problems with sensor resolution,” added Amarin.

Just then, there was a flash of light on the viewscreen. Leijten squinted for the second it was visible, and was blinking it away when Amarin announced, “One ship destroyed. The other looks to be heavily damaged.”

She wheezed heavily once more and coughed. The blood on the sleeve on her uniform was now soaking through to her skin, and felt warm and clammy. She gasped softly. “Harriet, resume course out of the Badlands. Best possible...speed,” she stuttered, trying to draw air into her body.

Leijten dropped to her knees and slouched against one of the railings, trying desperately to breathe. As she did she heard Amarin’s booming voice call out a medical emergency on the bridge, as he moved towards her, a look of concern

behind the goggles and breather mask that dominated his face. It was the last thing she saw before the world went black.

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**Captain's Quarters, *U.S.S. Silverfin* NCC-4470
En Route to Starbase 375
Stardate 52229.2 (March 25th 2375)**

Commander Susanna Leijten gingerly sat down at the desk in the room that had once been the domain of Captain Hilgrat Ja-Inrosh. She was only just out of sickbay, and despite Doctor Mbeki's orders to get some rest, she felt compelled to go to the Captain's Quarters. The space was slightly larger than the standard officer's cabin, but despite that fact, being a follower of the Blessed One, Captain Ja-Inrosh had renounced all worldly possessions. It was the reason his ready room and quarters were so bare. All he had in his cabin was the bed, desk with chair and work station, a cupboard and a low coffee table with a small stack of cushions to one side for visitors to use. On the table were *jhos'a* prayer candles, made from a blend of wax and the owners own blood, which gave them a pinkish tinge. All he had hanging in the wardrobe were two other uniforms, his dress whites, a long simple grey gown and one set of civvies.

Ja-Inrosh now lay in the *Silverfin's* morgue, along with the body of Lieutenant Alec Murphy and eight other members of the crew, with two others being unaccounted for—most likely blown out into space through the hull breach on deck two. Their crew complement now stood at one hundred and twenty-three, and given the demands of the war on service personnel, as well as the low-priority of the Border Service during wartime, she doubt that those posts would be filled anytime soon. A further twenty-one had been injured, herself included. Though through Mbeki's administrations her ribs were fused together and the punctured lung had been repaired, she would be in pain for a few days as the muscles and tissue strengthened, so she was officially on medical leave for a couple days.

But she doubted that would keep her from the bridge. With the Captain dead and Amarin, the ship's Second Officer, needed in engineering to oversee repairs, she needed to be at her station, to help the crew with their loss, as well as ensuring that they complete their mission. The *Silverfin* was headed for Starbase 375 to offload the Maquis survivors—who had all come through the battle in one piece—and make temporary repairs, before moving on to a fleet yard for some serious dry-dock time.

She activated the work terminal. “Computer access personal database for Captain Ja-Inrosh.”

“That database is restricted to Captain Ja-Inrosh.”

“Override, medical protocol Alpha-five. Command authorisation, Leijten-Delta-six-six-one.” The computer chirped in compliance and opened up the private database, the medical protocol logging in the death of Ja-Inrosh.

The database contained all the normal things that anyone kept in their private files; letters, pictures, reports, logs, holodeck programmes, music, all the personal nuances and intimate details that made a person who they were. She had just begun to look at the file headings, in order to sort out what reports and logs would need to be officially filed on the ships central database, before the rest could be sent back to his surviving family on Efros—the son of his sister’s daughter, seeing as how he had never had a family of his own—when a new window opened up on the screen.

Ja-Inrosh’s face appeared, his expression neutral, but his peaceful and gentle aura seemed to radiate from the screen. *“Susanna. If you are seeing this message, it means that you have used medical protocol Alpha-five to access my personal database. Though I would have hoped to retire peacefully from my tenure in Starfleet, I always knew that may not be possible, the nature of life being what it is. Once this message is complete, a separate one will be sent to Border Service HQ, which will tell Vice Admiral Bouvier one thing. You will be the new Captain of the Silverfin. I couldn’t imagine anyone else in the centre seat other than yourself, and if the Admiral has any sense at all, she will see that as well.*

“You have been the finest XO I could’ve asked for,” he said, a warm smile spreading across his lips, making his bushy white moustache dance. *“You are more than ready for this responsibility and I know you will do the ship proud. Treat her right and she will always get you home. Be there for the crew. Help them to understand that I have passed to the Way After, and not to waste tears and regrets on my death. I could not have had a better crew. Their dedication and courage and ingenuity made me proud to wear the uniform each and every day, and I only hope that I, in turn, did right by them. I will carry each and every one of them in my hearts. May the Blessed One guide you Susanna.”*

With that, the screen returned to the various files and folders and menu options. Susanna Leijten didn't see any of them. Her face was buried in her hands as she wept.

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