

Border Cutter Silverfin S.O.S.

By Brydon Sinclair

Bridge, U.S.S. *Silverfin* NCC-4470
Hugora Nebula, Ronara Sector
52744.1 (September 29th, 2375)

“Damage report!” Susanna Leijten called, her voice barely rising above the din on the Bridge of the Border Service Cutter *Silverfin*.

“Shields down to thirty-eight percent, aft phasers still offline,” Lieutenant Commander Ling-Na promptly replied from Tactical. “Captain, we are down to seven photon torpedoes,” the Chinese tactician added.

“Hull breach on deck four,” stated Ops Officer Kolanis Daezan, the newest addition to the Bridge staff, “we have ruptured power conduits and blown EPS lines throughout the deck, main power is barely holding.” He glanced at another monitor. “Sickbay reports multiple casualties.”

“The hit to the port impulse engine is making it difficult to manoeuvre sir,” added Harriet Llewellyn-Smyth from the Conn. “I’m attempting to increase power to the thrusters to compensate.”

Leijten took in all the information with a nod of her head. The old Cutter was holding up well under the circumstances, but she hadn’t been designed to face off against a Cardassian Keldon-Class heavy destroyer—she doubted any Border Cutter in service would be able to take on the bigger, more-powerful ship and hope to come out alive. But the *Silverfin* didn’t have an option. Over two thousand lives depended on them.

“The *Britannic*?”

“Her warp drive and shields are both still inoperable. She is moving, but is limited to one-quarter impulse. Commander Amarin’s last report put repair time at thirty-two hours,” Daezan reported on the stricken ship. The *U.S.S. Britannic* was an Olympic-Class medical ship, laden with injured and dying from a nameless battle against Dominion forces that occurred three days

earlier. Just over twenty-four hours after retrieving the survivors, the hospital ship had gone missing close to the Hugora Nebula and the *Silverfin* had been called in to search for her.

It had taken them the better part of two days searching the dense nebula, hampered by high levels of ionic distortion, but they had found the *Britannic* adrift after striking a gravitic mine, a throwback from the last war the Federation fought against the Cardassians almost thirty years earlier. The ship had taken damage to her warp drive and impulse engines, as well as shields, sensors and communications, leaving her all but defenceless. She had managed to limp into the nebula and attempted repairs.

As soon as the *Silverfin* had found them, Commander Amorin, Leijten's XO (who had been the Chief Engineer up until six months earlier), had led a contingent of engineers over to help with repairs and ready the ship for a warp tow. But before they could move out, the Keldon-Class had emerged from a particularly dense cloud of dust and gas and opened fire. They had barely been able to get their shields up before the first disruptor beam hit them, and now the *Silverfin* was all that stood between the cruiser and the helpless medical ship.

"What about the Cardies?" she asked, not realising she'd used the racist term that had come into use in the last war, which had no doubt been passed on to her by either (or both) of her Starfleeter parents, who had fought in that war.

Ling-Na glanced over her slim shoulder. "They are coming about for another pass. Their shields are at fifty-four percent, ventral weapons array is offline and they have some minor hull damage to their port warp engine, but not enough to slow her down," she stated, then looked back at her display.

They had been relying heavily on their photons in the battle, which was the reason they had inflicted as much damage as they had—that and Leijten had one hell of a weapons officer at the controls. After those torpedoes were gone all they had left were their phasers and the Rat-Traps. Things weren't looking good.

"Options?" she asked. Unfortunately no one had any. The *Silverfin* was alone in the nebula, and no other ships were close enough to render assistance, retreating would mean the deaths of the crew of the *Britannic*, the hundreds of patients she carried and the *Silverfin's* own repair team that had been beamed over, it would take too long to transform the non-lethal Rat-Traps into makeshift photon torpedoes, and even with their shields in a weakened

state the electro-magnetic pulses wouldn't have any effect against her military-grade deflectors.

They were stuck tight in between a rock and a hard place. *The Captain would've known what to do*, a snide voice in the back of her mind whispered. She shook her head to shut it up. Captain Hilgrat Ja-Inrosh had been killed in action six months earlier, during a rescue mission in the Badlands, and she had assumed command of the *Silverfin* on his recommendation. But since that day, she had found herself asking how he would have done something, wondering if she had made the right call, the spectre of self-doubt never far from the corners of her mind.

"Harriet, set intercept course, two-thirds impulse. Then keep us in nice and close. Ling-Na, all available power to shields and switch to phasers—conserve what photons we have left. Mr Daezan, if you can contact the away team, tell them to get a move on!"

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Bridge, U.S.S. *Britannic* NCC-54492
Hugora Nebula, Ronara Sector

Amorin sat at the Engineering console on the Bridge of the Olympic-Class hospital ship *Britannic*, from which he could oversee all the repairs and direct both his repair team and the ship's own small engineering staff to where they would be needed. They were in a race against the clock to restore enough systems and power to allow them to escape, as the *Silverfin* went up against the Cardassian heavy cruiser.

He glanced over at the viewscreen, which depicted the battle, though the image was still fuzzy due to the damage their optical sensors had taken. The smaller Cutter was using her size and manoeuvrability against the larger ship, ducking and diving close to the cruiser and firing at almost point-blank range to make the most out of her type-VIII phaser banks. But the Cardassians still managed to hit the *Silverfin* more times than Amorin would have liked. Part of him wanted to be back onboard in the ship's engine room, routing power to shields and phasers to give them every edge he could. But he was needed on the *Britannic*, where over two thousand people were relying on him and his team.

"*Th'Shaan to Amorin*," came the voice of the *Silverfin*'s new Chief Engineer—his assistant up until six months ago.

“Go ahead Lieutenant.”

“Sir, we’ve managed to patch up the impulse reactor for now. Radiation levels are high, but the temporary repairs seem to be holding for now. We should have full impulse at your disposal.”

“Good work Elak. Evac that section and seal it off under radiation exposure protocols. We’ll send in the scrubbers once we’re out of here. Get to the shield generators and help out there. Amorin out,” he said, closing the channel. He turned to look at the *Britannic’s* CO, Captain Wentworth Jones MD, who sat in the centre seat, looking nervous and helpless. “Sir, impulse power has been fully restored.”

Jones looked over at Amorin and nodded, a faint look of relief on the older human’s face. “Good to hear Commander. Conn, increase to full impulse,” he instructed, with a quick look at the young Trill at the controls, then back to Amorin. “Will that be enough to get us out of here, and call off the *Silverfin*?”

“More speed will help us, but without shields, one lucky shot and the Cardassians could cripple or destroy us.”

The Captain nodded. He, like Amorin, was a specialist that had been promoted into command by circumstance rather than by plan. But whilst Jones had been a doctor who found himself in the big chair, Amorin was and always would be (in his heart at least) an engineer. The death of Captain Ja-Inrosh had seen Leijten promoted to CO, and she had then promoted him to fill her post. He had objected and tried to get her to reconsider, to look for someone else. But experienced officers were stretched pretty thin across the fleet, and most of those that were left were being assigned to the regular Fleet to fight the Dominion and their new Breen allies. He had been the *Silverfin’s* Second Officer, a post that he’d found to be more a title than any real responsibilities, commanding a watch every so often, leading an occasional away mission (though mostly repair or technical-based ones), and of course the crew evaluations that he’d done with Leijten. He wasn’t ready for more. He had never considered going in for command, a decade or two down the line maybe, but he’d been happy in the engine room, now he stood on the Bridge, with a red collar that seemed itchy and much tighter than his previous gold one.

On the viewscreen, the *Silverfin* took another brutal hit, this time to her port nacelle. He couldn't tell how bad it was from a visual inspection, but it didn't look good.

I have to do something! Rising from his seat he looked at Captain Jones. "I'm going below to help with the shields."

"I don't need to tell you to work fast Commander," Jones replied before Amarin headed for the lift.

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Bridge, U.S.S. *Silverfin* NCC-4470
Hugora Nebula, Ronara Sector

"Direct hit to the port nacelle," Daezan called out from Ops, "we're venting drive plasma."

"Cut warp power and lock down the plasma flow," Leijten ordered, not glancing back at the large station on the port side—the memory of Ja-Inrosh's and Murphy's burning bodies, torn apart by the metal and plastics of the console and bulkhead was a hard one to shake off.

The Cardassians landed another bone jarring hit. "Aft shields have collapsed!" yelled Ling-Na. "Captain, we can't take much more of this."

"Sir," Llewellyn-Smyth quickly interrupted, "the *Britannic* has increased to full impulse, but I'm picking up a radiation leak from her impulse reactors—I don't know how long she'll be able to sustain it."

"Fires reported on deck six. Suppression systems are not responding," Daezan added. "DC teams en route."

The *Silverfin* was taking a thorough beating, and despite her valiant effort, she wouldn't last much longer. Leijten gripped the armrests as a volley of plasma torpedoes crashed into the port side. Their weapons were almost depleted, the shields were all but gone, and the hull wasn't reinforced with ablative armour—once the shields went, the hull wouldn't last long against the Keldon's powerful disruptors.

Surrender was an option, but if they weren't blasted into dust right then and there, they would be tortured in Cardassian custody, but whatever fate they

faced, the crew and patients of the *Britannic* would share. A kamikaze run was a possibility—evacuate the ship and then ram the *Silverfin* into the cruiser, which would either destroy or cripple the attacker. She kept that idea in the back of her mind, but she needed another option. Something that would give them an edge—after all she doubted the Cardie crew would have faced a Border Cutter before, and saw the old ship as an easy target. Unlike Fleet ships, they carried Mark-22 “Rat-Trap” torpedoes to disable smugglers and pirates, several heavy tractor beams to snag and tow ships of various sizes (including ones far bigger than the *Silverfin* herself), tactical drones which were designed to—

The drones! The idea was like a slap in the face. Something so simple that she’d never considered it.

Spinning to Tactical she ordered, “Ling-Na, rig the Rat-Traps to implode—I want the full force of their EMP directed to as small an area as possible. Once they’re ready, load them into tube two, and get our remaining photons into tube one.” Not giving the diminutive Second Officer a chance to tell her that the Rat-Traps wouldn’t work against military-grade shielding (even in its weakened state), Leijten turned to face forward, slapping her combadge at the same time. “Leijten to Syva!”

“Go ahead,” came the Vulcan Chief of the Boats prompt response.

“Chief, get to cargo bay one and ready the tactical drones. Set them to maximum and rig them for continuous fire as soon as they re-materialise, then get them to transporter rooms one and two on the double.”

“Understood Captain. They will be ready in three-point-four minutes,” she replied, and Leijten knew that they would be ready in exactly that time.

She closed the comlink and turned to the Conn. “Harriet, get us in closer. I want to keep them off balance. Mr Daezan,” she called over her shoulder, “coordinate with the transporter rooms. Target their engine room and shield generators; we’ll beam two drones into each location as soon as we’ve punched a hole in their shields.”

“Transporter targeting scanners online and locked.”

“Captain, torpedoes ready and loaded,” said Ling-Na a few moments later, the tone of her voice showing that she now understood Leijten’s plan. Once a Rat-Trap detonated it sent out a wave of electro-magnetic interference, which

scrambled a ship's propulsion, navigation and computer systems, leaving it dead in space. What Leijten was hoping for (as she wasn't even sure it would work), was that if that energy were instead directed into one singular point, it would be enough to disrupt the shields on even a heavy combat cruiser like the Keldon.

On the viewscreen, the humped-back, arrow-shaped cruiser loomed larger. Llewellyn-Smyth brought them closer, weaving and rotating the *Silverfin*, trying to make the ship as hard a target as possible. Few of the Cardassian disruptor beams hit them full on, several grazed their remaining shields, but the Englishwoman at the helm kept them moving fast and random (despite their damaged impulse engine), never giving them a chance to anticipate her actions.

As they moved closer, Ling-Na fired off several volleys from their forward phaser banks, holding back on their torpedoes, waiting for the order to launch the destructive packets of antimatter. Leijten had come aboard the *Silverfin* at the same time as the Tactical Officer, and in all that time she had been constantly surprised at the petite woman's quick-thinking and decisive tactics.

"Syva to Bridge. Drones are ready."

"Acknowledged," Leijten replied. "Harriet take us to minimum safe torpedo distance. Ling-Na I want one photon then five Rat-Traps, followed up by a final photon."

The *Silverfin* plunged down its z-axis and after a scant few hundred kilometres, the ship spun back around sharply, aiming its two forward torpedo tubes at the cruiser. As soon as Llewellyn-Smyth completed the manoeuvre she called out, "In position."

Leijten leaned forward. "Fire!"

She watched the viewscreen as a volley of seven torpedoes leapt out from under the saucer section. The two photon torpedoes were a bright orange colour, whilst the Mark-22's were a pale yellow, but all of them traversed the distance between the two ships quickly and slammed into the shields of the enemy craft. The first photon exploded, the five subsequent Rat-Traps flared brightly, and the last photon ploughed straight through the gap they had opened up and into the cruiser's dark yellow hull.

“Energise,” she ordered, not waiting for confirmation on the effectiveness of her ploy.

“Initiating transports,” said Daezan. A moment later he added, “The drones are onboard.”

Leijten could imagine on the Keldon, the crew hearing the whine of the transporter and expecting to see boarding teams. The appearance of the spherical probes, floating a meter or so off the ground, brimming with phaser nodes, would catch them off guard; then before they could react, the drones would open fire. Their primary target was equipment with high levels of energy consumption, with humanoids being the secondary targets. New to the Border Service, the drones—ordinarily set to stun—were ideal for beaming into dangerous locations and pacifying the crew. But they weren’t looking to subdue smugglers or pirates; they needed to stop a hostile ship and crew.

“Their shields are collapsing,” announced Ling-Na.

“Reading massive power failures across the ship,” added Daezan.

“Torpedoes, target their warp core.”

“Target locked.”

“Fire,” she stated, her voice level.

Their remaining five photon torpedoes crossed the distance to the Keldon-Class cruiser in a matter of heartbeats. Each one collided into her unshielded hull, tearing through the metal, into the oxygen rich interior, through power conduits and fuel tanks causing great plumes of fire to leap into the vacuum of space. The last two torpedoes hit the warp core, which was buried deep inside.

The effect was almost immediate. A massive flash of blinding white light that no one could look at, followed by the shockwave a warp core breach caused, and then stillness.

The Bridge of the *Silverfin* was quiet, the red alert panels flashed in the dim light, casting reddened shadows across the faces of the crew, a few warnings and alerts chirped softly from various consoles, and the crew were still feeling the effects of the adrenaline that the battle had pumped through their veins.

She didn't know who started it, but someone slowly clapped. The clapping got louder and faster, quickly joined by hoots and cheers as the applause filled the Bridge. Leijten looked around at the Bridge crew and saw they were all looking at her, their faces a mixture of relief and victory and pride, all directed straight at her. She could feel her cheeks burn and suddenly felt a little silly at the ruckus applause she was receiving. Though the crew more than needed the chance to release their pent up feelings from the battle, they still had work to do before they could celebrate.

Standing, she held up her hands, calling for order once again. The noise slowly diminished. When it was quiet on the Bridge once again, she slowly looked around at the men and women who sat and stood at their consoles.

"Good work everyone. Ling-Na, scan the debris for survivors and alert Security to have the brig ready just in case. Commander Daezan, get me a full damage and casualty report."

"Sir," stated the Betazoid at Operations, drawing her gaze towards him and the rebuilt console. "Incoming hail from the *Britannic*."

She took a moment as she looked at the station and the man who now occupied it, trying to see him and it as it was, and not how it had been six months ago. She noticed Daezan's onyx-black eyes looking straight at her, almost through her, quickly followed by a look of sorrow and understanding. Ever since he had come aboard, she had kept him at arms length, unsure about his ability at Ops—Alec Murphy was a hard act to follow—and his telepathy. But he had proven time and again to be a hard-working and dedicated young man.

"Put them onscreen."

"Aye Skipper," he replied softly.

A faint smile tugged at her lips at the ancient term, as she turned to face the viewscreen. The image of Captain Wentworth Jones appeared, looking just as relieved as she felt. Jones had maybe fifteen years on her, if his silver hair was anything to go by, but like many on support ships he'd been promoted up to captaincy due to the staff shortage and the need for experienced Captains on the front lines.

“Captain Leijten, I don’t know what the hell you did, but my crew and I thank you. One thing I can promise you, is that you’ll never need to buy a drink for yourself again—there are over two thousand people over here that will see to that!”

“We’re not out of the woods yet Captain. We’re running a cursory check on the debris, and then we’ll be alongside. When we get out of this nebula, I’d imagine we’ll both need a tow.”

“Understood. We’ll ease back on the reigns and wait for you to catch up. If you need any assistance with casualties, we stand ready to help.”

“Thank you for the offer. I’ll let you know if I need to take you up on it. *Silverfin* out.”

The channel closed and the image reverted to the debris field—all that remained of the Keldon-Class cruiser.

“Sir, the *Britannic* is slowing to one quarter impulse,” said Llewellyn-Smyth.

“Sensors, aren’t detecting any active lifesigns in the debris field. There is a lot of radiation and bio-signatures though that could be interfering with our scans however,” stated Ling-Na.

“Understood Commander. We’ll leave the salvage for someone else, right now we have to worry about the *Britannic*. Stand down from red alert and begin repairs to the shields.” As Ling-Na complied and the lighting reverted to its normal level, Leijten turned to the Conn. “Harriet, set an intercept course with the *Britannic*, take us alongside and match speed.”

“Aye sir.”

Leijten lowered herself into the central seat and almost slumped back, relieved that their latest battle was over. She had yet to learn just how bad a beating the *Silverfin* had taken, or if any more of the crew had been lost. Silently she prayed that there wouldn’t be any losses on their side, they were still recovering from the memorial the ship had held for Ja-Inrosh, Murphy and ten others who had been killed in the Badlands.

“Sir,” Daezan spoke up. She turned her chair to face him. “I’ve got a full damage report and casualty list.”

“Did we lose anyone?” she asked, almost afraid to hear the answer.

He gave her a very faint smile. “No fatalities reported and all crew accounted for. Sickbay does report fifty-seven injured, though none are life-threatening.” As he began to reel off all the damage the ship had taken, she was half listening. Relief washed over her and she felt almost giddy. She shook off the feeling as quickly as she could and gave Daezan her full attention.

From their damaged port nacelle (which would have to be fully repaired before they could go to warp), to three separate hull breeches, blow power conduits and overloaded circuitry, the *Silverfin* was in a bad way—made worse by that fact her shields were almost non-existent, her aft phasers were still out and she had used up her entire stock of photon torpedoes.

“Any estimate on repair time?”

“Lieutenant Mulligan says we’ll need to dry-dock for a week to ten days. But that she’ll have warp drive patched up in twenty hours, enough to get us to the closest Starbase.”

“Good to hear. Anything on sensors?”

“Not at present.”

“Keep scanning, and prepare a call for assistance as soon as we clear the nebula.”

“Will do Skipper.”

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Captain’s Ready Room, U.S.S. *Silverfin* NCC-4470
Starbase 209, Brechtian System
Stardate: 52758.2 (October 4th, 2375)

Repairs to the *Silverfin* were on schedule, and the ship would be released from dry-dock in eight days time. The station’s Maintenance Officer had been shocked that the old Cutter was able to get to warp given the amount of damage she had taken—obviously one of the many Fleet officers who underestimated the Border Service. They were used to making repairs on the

fly with a tight budget, which bred ingenuity into every engineer who served on a Cutter.

Leijten was kept up to date on all the work, which Commander Amarin was helping out with. It was going to take a lot in order to get him to stay out of Engineering for longer than three days (which he'd only managed due to an injury he'd sustained when they were conducting a SAR-Op following a battle at Minos Korva). The Ready Room was just as Captain Ja-Inrosh had left it, devoid of personal effects and with only the desk, the chair she sat in and two guest chairs. It was a room she always felt a little odd in, being on the other side of the desk, doing all the paperwork that came with being the CO. Now however, she sat in relative darkness, staring out the small viewport, watching EVA teams move across the hull and Workbees buzz about.

The door chimed.

"Computer, lights," she ordered, turning back to her desk. Once the lighting became brighter she called out, "Come."

The doors parted and Lieutenant Commander Kolanis Daezan stood in the opening, hands clasped behind his back. He stepped inside, far enough to allow the doors to close, but no further.

"Commander, what can I do for you?"

He took a couple of steps forward and produced a PADD from behind him. "The cargo requisition request for Starbase 209 needs your authorisation before it goes out."

Accepting the PADD she said, "Thank you Mr Daezan." She started to look over the lists of supplies and gear they needed—including four new tactical drones—but paused when she felt Daezan's dark eyes burrowing into her. She looked up at him, and found him looking at her intensely. "Is there a problem, Commander?"

"I need to apologise Captain."

"Why?" she asked, drawing the word out, not sure what he was talking about.

"I scanned you. I'm usually very careful about it—I know that there are people out there who don't like serving with Betazoids, due to our strong telepathic abilities. Usually I have better control, but when faced with a lot of

intense emotions, I sometimes slip. During one of those slips, I scanned you by accident. But out of all the Bridge crew, your emotions are the most intense, because of Captain Ja-Inrosh's death. I am truly sorry for my actions, sir."

Susanna Leijten sat back in her chair, looking dumbfounded at the tall, handsome man in front of her, and his bizarre confession. She had served with Betazoids before, and had never known any of them to be so hard on themselves. But she could understand, Daezan had specifically requested reassignment to an Albacore-Class ship, and when the billet onboard the *Silverfin* opened, he'd been immediately transferred. Was he now worried that his time onboard had come to an end?

Though she didn't particularly like the idea of being scanned without her consent, she could hardly blame him for her own emotional state. All of the crew had liked and respected her predecessor, and his death had affected them all in different ways. The strain they must have been putting on the young Betazoid must have been immense.

She set the PADD to one side and gestured to one of the chairs opposite her. "Take a seat, Commander." He did as she asked his expression clear that he still didn't know how this would go. She clasped her hands and rested them on the desk. "Firstly, thank you for coming to me with this. Secondly, your apology is accepted but not needed. And thirdly, *I'm* sorry.

"We've all suffered a great loss, and I can't imagine how difficult that must be for you to deal with," she continued. "You've been dealing with this for six months now, and I never thought to see if you were alright with the emotional strain of one hundred and twenty people in mourning." She looked down at the desktop for a moment and then back at him. "As for my own feelings, I'll try to keep a lid on them. I don't want you to take them to mean that I don't appreciate you or your abilities as Ops Manager."

"I haven't taken offence. I've had to face a lot of frayed nerves, grief and anger over the last couple of years. I'll try and make sure I don't slip again, and if it should ever happen I will inform you immediately."

"Thank you Kolanis."

"Thank you Skipper," he replied as he stood up and left the ready room.

After he left, Leijten looked after him for a moment. *'Skipper'...I quite like that,* she mused to herself. A faint smile tugged at the corner of her lips as she picked up the PADD once again and set to work.

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