

# Tales of the Fleet

## To Dream the Impossible Dream

By David Falkayn

### Part 1

Leaning forward on the imitation wood railing, Quartermaster Second Class Gary Lockwood gazed longingly at the majestic form of the USS *Lexington* from his vantage point on the observation deck of the newly commissioned Starbase 31. Sighing as his eyes took in the graceful lines of *Constitution* class vessel, Petty Officer Lockwood admired how the separate parts of the *Lexington*, its saucer section, main section, and nacelles, all flowed seamlessly together to create a beautiful whole that was truly greater than the sum of its parts.

“Forget about it, Lockwood. Right now you’re as close as you’re ever going to get to one of those babies.”

Jerking his head rapidly towards the source of those words, Gary frowned as he recognized the *Evergreen’s* Executive Officer, Ensign Winston Morris. Not wanting to antagonize his superior officer, the young petty officer settled for a non-committal grunt as the bearded dark haired Morris flashed a toothy grin. “You’re a cast off.” The ensign spat out, “That’s all we are, you know—Starfleet’s garbage. And that’s all we get from the Fleet. We get their old phasers, their old uniforms.” He swore as he tugged at the gold shirt he wore that the Regular Fleet had discarded the previous year, “And we get their old ships. Like that rust-bucket of ours over there.” He growled as he pointed at the renovated hundred plus year old tender occupying the berth next to the *Lexington*, the *Evergreen*, known in a former lifetime as the NX-class *Endeavor*. “Hell, we even get their retreads as our CO’s. So, forget about the Academy, kid—as far as those bastards are concerned, you don’t even exist.”

Refusing to rise to his tormenter’s bait, Lockwood uttered a quiet, “Yes, Sir,” smiling inwardly at the ensign’s low growl as he stomped away. Watching warily as his brooding superior disappeared into the Orion owned casino, Gary turned his attention back to the Lady in the window, dreaming about how it must feel to sit at the helm of that powerful craft as it sped its way to

the next unexplored world.

\*\*\*\*\*

As Petty Officer Lockwood's fingers flew gracefully over his console, the *Evergreen*, reacting to his instructions, shifted to its new course. The youthful petty officer's sense of accomplishment at his near flawless course correction was short-lived, however, as the tender's executive officer growled, "You're slow, Longwood! My brother's Irish setter could have done a better job."

"Aye, Sir." Lockwood quietly acknowledged, knowing that it wasn't either his or the old girl's fault that she was so slow in making her turn. After all, *Evergreen's* best years were long behind her. Rather, it was the fault of the plodding XO who had ordered the turn far too late, forcing Longwood to strain the ship almost to its limits as he brought her back on course to her first destination, Subspace Communications Relay Substation Gamma 542.

Laughing, Morris declared in a voice loud enough to carry throughout the tiny bridge, "And you think you can cut it in the Academy, Lockwood? They'll wash you out after your first run in the simulator."

Stoically bearing the snickers and guffaws coming from most of the bridge crew, the woman sitting at the comm station being one of the few exceptions, Lockwood almost missed the executive officer's call "Captain on the bridge," until he was nudged in the side by the on duty comm tech, Communications Technician Third Class, Melissa Pappas. Standing up just in time, Gary sighed in relief as Lieutenant Walsh arrived on the bridge, along with the rest of Beta Shift.

"Thank you, XO." Walsh responded in a bored tone as he took the data slate containing the previous shift's log from Ensign Morris. Settling down into the center seat, Walsh studied the entries, his lips turning down into a frown as he read. Glancing up from his reading, his eyes fell upon those of his young helmsman, "Petty Officer Lockwood? Meet me in my office in two hours."

"Aye, Sir." Gary replied almost forlornly, feeling Melissa's soft fingers momentarily touching his in a gesture of comfort and support as she whispered in his ear, "Meet me in the galley after you see the skipper and we'll talk."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Petty Officer Lockwood..." Lieutenant Walsh greeted upon hearing the door chime, "Come in. Sit down." Watching as the young ensign took the chair opposite his small spartan desk, Walsh cleared his throat as he set the data slate he was reading down. "I'm sorry..." looking compassionately on the young petty officer, the gray haired CO continued to speak, "Starfleet Academy turned down your application."

"Did they say why, Sir?" A crestfallen Lockwood inquired as his heart sank at the bad news.

"Here." The *Evergreen's* commanding officer replied as he slid the data slate across his desk to the petty officer sitting opposite him. "Read this—it'll tell you everything."

"It says..." the youthful quartermaster read; his heartache growing as he recited every word "...that even though my service record is more than adequate, that the current class has already been filled. That I should apply again next year."

"Well..." Walsh responded, his lips turning up in what he considered to be an encouraging grin, "You can always try again."

"Yes, Sir." A dispirited Lockwood answered back.

Taking pity on his dejected crewman, the old lieutenant offered some guidance, "Young man. Starfleet Academy gets tons of applications from beings throughout the Federation." Bitterness rising in his voice, the older man continued, "But, as you've probably already figured out, getting in is a rigged game. Unless you or someone in your family has connections in the Federation, or you come from a family with a history of service in the Fleet like the Stiles, the Shelbys or the Owens's, or you're from one of the newly admitted worlds like Betazed or Trill, you have to do something to set yourself apart from all the other names, faces, and numbers that are competing against you. Something that will catch the initial screening committee's eyes and make them give your application a closer look."

"Like what, Sir?"

"For one thing, show some initiative and self confidence." The older man advised as he recalled opportunities that he had let slip by leaving him now, at the end of his career, in command of an obsolete ship on its last legs. "You have to show everyone—beginning with me—that you belong out here. Be

your own man—but be careful. Don’t confuse arrogance for self confidence. I’ve seen the careers of too many officers ruined because of that.” Pausing long enough to make sure that his words had sunken in, Walsh concluded their meeting, “Dismissed.”

\*\*\*\*\*

As he walked down the narrow, somewhat dingy corridors of the converted buoy tender towards his ultimate destination, the galley, Petty Officer Lockwood imagined what it must have been like to have been aboard during the ship’s prior lifetime—when it was still the pride of the Fleet. The fourth of the NX line to be commissioned and the first with the new warp seven engines, the *Endeavor*, under its first captain, Jeremy Porter, had distinguished itself first during the Romulan War and then later on several voyages of exploration before finally being retired. Brought back into service several years ago, the old girl was overhauled, given a new name and registry number, and sent out to the frontier as a workhorse tending buoys and relay stations and ferrying supplies. *A sad end for a great lady.* Lockwood thought as his mind’s eye saw the ghosts of those blue jumpsuit clad men and women moving briskly down the corridor, brushing past him as they went about their tasks.

The galley door sliding open for him, Lockwood at once spotted Melissa sitting at one of the tables all by herself in her red coveralls, her dirty blonde hair done up in a ponytail. Flashing a smile as she recognized him standing in the doorway, she called out to him, “Hey Gary! Grab yourself some chow and come on over. Try the chicken salad—it’s actually pretty good today!”

Unable, in spite of himself, to resist the young communications tech’s infectious good cheer, Lockwood walked over to the food processing stations. Slipping in a disk for the chicken salad, Gary waited patiently until the door slid open revealing a plate with his chicken salad and a glass of iced tea. Putting his food on a tray, he walked back towards the table where Melissa sat. “So how did it go with the Old Man?” She asked, taking a bite out of her sandwich.

“They rejected my application again.” Gary announced in a morose voice. “That’s the second time.”

“So, you can apply again, can’t you?” Melissa asked helpfully between bites of her chicken salad.

"I can apply one more time" Gary replied as he took a sip from his ice tea, "But if they reject that one, I won't be able to apply again for five years." Shaking his head, the young petty officer moped, "I don't know...maybe Morris is right...maybe those people in admissions are right to turn me down—maybe I don't have what it takes."

"Don't have what it takes?" Locking on to her friend's eyes with her own piercing blue eyes, Melissa quickly responded, her voice now taking on a challenging quality, "If that's the way you think—then maybe you don't." Getting up, she added fiercely, "Maybe this is where you belong with the Old Man and Bristle Face. The three of you can mark time together complaining about how the universe screwed you over while the rest of us are out doing stuff." Turning her head as she walked away, she added one last parting remark, "What you do is up to you—but for whatever it's worth, I have faith in you."

Chewing on the lovely communications tech's remarks as he chewed on his chicken salad, Gary almost missed the intercom call ordering him to the bridge. Finally picking up on the call after it had been repeated, Longwood dashed out of the galley, making his way as fast as possible to the bridge. Arriving at last on the bridge, the young quartermaster was greeted by a snarling Ensign Morris.

"About time you showed up, Lockwood!" The bearded ensign growled as he pointed at the main viewscreen where he saw the cylindrical form of Subspace Communications Relay Substation Gamma-542 rotating slowly on its axis against the background of stars. "You and Petty Officer Pappas are to beam over to the substation and carry out whatever maintenance needs to be done there. The *Evergreen* will be back in approximately six hours. That should give even you two enough time to get your jobs done."

"Aye, Sir." Both petty officers responded in unison before dashing off the bridge. As the pair made their way down the corridor, Melissa suggested, "Meet me in the transporter room after you've changed into your EVA suit. I've got to pick up my tools and then get changed myself. Hurry up—looks like Bristle Face has got it in for you today."

"Right." Gary replied as the pair split up, his mood improving slightly at the opportunity to be both off the ship and alone on an otherwise uninhabited space station with the lovely Melissa Pappas. "See you in a few."

"You two ready to go?" Transporter technician first class Alan Greer growled

as he tapped his chronometer impatiently. “Morris is getting impatient. I think he’s bucking for JG again.”

“Pfft...” Petty Officer Pappas snorted, “Hope he gets it this time—it’ll get him out of our hair.”

“Unless the Old Man finally decides to retire and they decide to bump him up in his place.” The transporter tech pointed out morosely.

“We better get going if we don’t want him in our faces again.” Longwood pointed out as he leaped up on to the transporter pad, holding a helping hand out for his companion.

“Good idea.” Melissa agreed as she took the proffered hand. As both petty officers gave their silver environmental suits one last check, they heard Alan’s voice through their comm units.

“Gravity should be on when you beam aboard, but it’ll take a couple of minutes or so for atmosphere and pressure to reach optimal levels. If something goes wrong, just give a holler and I’ll yank you back.” Receiving in reply two thumbs up, the transporter technician grinned as he activated the transporter controls, “All right...have fun, you two, and don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Rematerializing in the main control section of the substation, Gary activated his tricorder. “Atmosphere and pressure rising...” he reported, nodding his head several moments later as the readings reached standard levels. “We’re safe.” He declared as he cracked open his space suit. Activating his comm unit, he reported, “Maintenance party to *Evergreen*, pressure, temperature, and atmosphere are within operational parameters—we’re beginning work.”

“About time.” Ensign Walsh’s voice sounded out from the comm unit. “We’ll be back in six hours.”

“Well...” Melissa grinned as she stripped off her EVA suit, tossing a gray jumpsuit hanging from a peg on the wall to Gary as she slipped on one of her own, “...it’s time to get to work.”

“Right.” Lockwood replied as he slipped on his coveralls. “I’ll get started on the internals while you run a check on the comm systems and logs.”

"Sounds like a plan." The young communications tech responded as she sat down before a communications console. Turning her attention to the console, Melissa typed in a sequence on the antiquated keyboard. "That's odd..." she mused to herself as an unfamiliar code sequence popped up on the display monitor. Cursing under her breath the fact that the computers on these old relay stations still relied on keyboard input rather than the voice activated computers that were common throughout the rest of the Fleet, Petty Officer Pappas typed in the code sequence to order the computer to run a full diagnostic. Punching the enter key, Melissa leaned back in her seat anticipating the expected test screen to appear on her monitor only to be jolted back to full attention as a pop-up window accompanied by a warning bell appeared instead. "Unable to comply—authorization not approved?" The young communications tech shook head. "What the hell?"

"What's up?" Gary inquired with a smirk as he looked up from his station. "Found something you couldn't handle?"

"Nothing that a spanner upside the head of an obnoxious quartermaster's mate couldn't deal with." Melissa responded with a mock grimace. "Seriously...for some reason or other, I've been locked out of the computer's functions—can't even run a basic diagnostic. What about you? You tried getting into the sensor logs yet?"

"Not yet." Lockwood admitted, "I've been concentrating on some strange readings from the internal life support systems."

"What sort of readings?" Melissa asked, her head tilting slightly to the left in that way it always did when the young blonde was confronted by a puzzle.

"There's a slight uptick about a month ago..." Gary answered back, his brow furrowed, "...and then another a month before that...like the system had been briefly activated."

"Yup." The communications tech declared, nodding her head firmly as she typed in another sequence on her keyboard, "Someone's been mucking around with our stuff. I just tried to type in a bypass code and the damned thing spat it back at me. Whoever's been snooping around here knows their stuff." Pausing for a moment to ponder the situation, the lovely petty officer advised, "You might want to check those sensor logs sooner rather than later..."

"Yeah." Gary agreed as he attempted to access the nav systems. "Hmmm..." the quartermaster's mate murmured, "That's odd..."

"What?" Melissa asked as she wiped a greasy smudge off her cheek.

"The sensor logs read as if nothing unusual happened..." Gary explained, "...but there's an inconsistency in the sequencing...it's like they've been cut and spliced..." Shaking his head, the ambitious young rating remarked admiringly, "Whoever did it knew what they were doing—no question about that. I only stumbled on it by accident."

"Thanks. Hear that Simon? We need to do a better job covering our tracks."

Turning about quickly, both petty officers saw a blinding yellow light and then nothing.

## Part 2

“Ooohhh...” The first thing that struck Petty Officer Second Class on regaining consciousness was how bright the light was. As his eyes narrowed in a vain attempt to reduce the glare, the young enlisted man gritted his teeth at the second experience, a throbbing headache. “What hit us?”

“Phaser beam set on heavy stun.” The voice of his companion, Communications Technician Third Class Melissa Pappas groaned as she also struggled to wakefulness. “We were checking out the systems and noticed some weird readings...” She attempted to recall.

“And then I heard this voice behind me and the next thing I know...” Gary interjected, “...we wake up here. Wherever here is...” He remarked as his eyes took in their cramped surroundings. A narrow space barely the size of a broom closet with a ceiling so low that he would only be able to just stand up without having to stoop over, although Melissa should be able to stand erect just fine, Gary thought. No cots or chairs—the only thought given to their comfort was two ratty looking sleeping bags stuffed into a corner. And as for personal needs—well there was what appeared to be a waste receptacle in the back—but with no provision made for privacy.

“Thank God I don’t have to pee yet.” Melissa jibed, making a face as she pointed at the open privy. All signs of humor vanishing from her face, the young blonde remarked in a worried voice, “I wonder where we are.”

Scrambling awkwardly to his feet, Gary attempted to open the heavy metal door only to find it locked tight. “I don’t know...” the young man replied, “...but I have a feeling it’s not where we started.” Hearing footsteps approaching their position, both crewmen froze in place. Moments later, they heard a clunking sound coming from the door and then, a few seconds after that, the door began to creak open.

“Stand back...or I’ll stun you again.” A voice called out.

“Better do as he says.” Melissa whispered as, clambering to her feet, she pulled Gary back from the door.

The door opening, the two *Evergreen* crewmen saw a human and a red Orion standing before them, both armed with old model Starfleet issue phasers.

“Outside.” The human ordered, gesturing with his phaser for the two to step out of their cramped quarters.

Following their captors orders, Melissa and Gary meekly stepped out. Once out of their cell, Gary asked, “Who are you? Where are we? Why have...”

“Shut up.” The Orion growled, gesturing menacingly with his phaser, “And move...this way.”

Doing as the man with gun said, the pair walked down the corridor until they reached another metal door. Gesturing for the two crewmen to step aside, the human entered in a cold sequence into a keypad on the side of the door. As the door slid open, the guard then motioned with his phaser for Gary and Melissa to enter.

Entering what appeared to be the bridge of the ship, they saw a tall man with brown hair and beard and wearing what appeared to be a very well tailored blue suit with an open collar greeted the pair. Standing next to the man was a dark-skinned woman with alert brown eyes also wearing fine clothing. Individuals of various races: an Andorian, a Tellarite, a green Orion, and another human, this one a thick-chested man with a bushy auburn beard and shaved head, manned various crew stations, the burly human manning what appeared to be a tactical station.

“Who are you and why have you kidnapped us?” Gary demanded of the brown-haired man, guessing that he was the leader.

Laughing, the brown-haired man responded with more than a hint of menace in his voice, “You’ll speak when you’re spoken to, kid—or...” he jerked his head towards where the stocky human stood, “... I’ll have my man Rychek over there pull your tongue out.” As he nodded his head, the two guards standing behind the pair pushed them down on to their knees.”

Feeling Melissa’s hand squeezing his, Gary held back the retort coming to his lips. “Smart move.” The leader remarked, “...keep following the lead of your little lady and you might just live through this meeting.” Looking the pair over, the pirate chief shook his head, “A pair of Border Dogs—not even officers at that! Just two enlisted grunts. What are you? Communications techs? Engineering techs?”

“Quartermaster Second Class Gary Lockwood, Serial Number 352841.”

“Communications Technician Third Class Melissa Pappas, Serial Number 438201.” Melissa announced as both ratings gave only their names, ranks and serial numbers.

“By the book.” The man snorted. “Your CO would be proud. Not that I couldn’t get you to spill all sorts of stuff if I wanted to—but then I doubt you really have anything of value to say—so why should I go through all that trouble?” Shaking his head, the pirate mused aloud, “Now...what the hell am I going to do with you two? Can’t let you go—you’ve stumbled on to how we’ve been using your communications relay as both a listening tool and a means of finding targets. I can’t take the chance of you talking—even if Starfleet were to pay a ransom for you—which it wouldn’t. I could just space you...” he thought idly, “...but there’s no profit in that. I’ve got it!” He grinned, “We’ll sell you at the slave market on Chorisios III.” Approaching the kneeling Melissa, the brown haired man leered as he bent down slightly and cupped her chin, raising her face so that he could get a good look at it. “Hmmm...not bad...not great...but not bad. You’re probably not attractive enough to get some ahmet to bid on you for his harem—but I’m sure that you’ll fetch a good price from some whorehouse or other. Hell...they might even put you on a vid and make you famous.”

Pushed down hard back on to his knees, an enraged Lockwood tried to rise up to his feet, his fists balled in rage at the pirate leader’s words. Smirking at the angry reaction he drew from the young quartermaster’s mate, the pirate snorted, “And as for you, kid, a whorehouse might buy you—but I kind of doubt it. You’re a little too old for most of the clientele around here and you’re not built enough to attract any of the buyers looking for arena bait. So...it’s probably off to the dilithium mines for you...hard work...bad conditions...short life expectancy.” Before he could continue, the woman standing next to him whispered into his ear. Nodding his head at her words, the leader turned back to his two prisoners, “My associate brought up a pretty good point. You both managed to track down our taps into your system—and here I thought that we’d covered our traces pretty well. I could use a couple of skilled techs like you. The pay’s a helluva lot better than what you’re getting in the Border Service and you don’t end up either as whores or dying in a dilithium mine. You’ve got a few days before we get to where we’re going—think about it. But don’t take too long—otherwise I might change my mind.”

Pulled back to their feet as the leader jerked his thumb up and over his shoulder, Melissa and Gary were marched back to their cell. As they reached the door of their tiny prison, the human called Simon advised as his compatriot opened the door, “You’d be smart if you took Walker up on his

offer. He doesn't make it often—especially to 'Fleeters—and it's a helluva lot better than the alternative." Gesturing with his phaser, he then ordered, "Get in."

As the wrist holding the phaser came close, Gary recognized that this would be his and Melissa's only chance. Lashing out quickly, he grasped the man's wrist while tripping him with his leg. Keeping the human called Simon between him and the red Orion, Gary grappled for possession of the phaser as the Orion aimed his weapon at Melissa. Ducking as the alien fired, Melissa managed to avoid being hit. However, the man grappling with Gary wasn't as lucky as the pale blue beam nicked Simon's arm, causing him to cry out in pain, releasing his grasp on the weapon in his hand. Getting control of the phaser, Gary quickly squeezed off a shot, striking the Orion in the chest. As the red-skinned humanoid fell to the deck, Melissa, regaining her feet, struck Simon in the back of his neck with a quick karate chop, felling the human.

"Let's get these guys into the cell." Melissa suggested. In short order, the pair, after confiscating the weapons of the two guards, had carried them into the cell which had only just so recently housed them.

Closing the door and locking it, Gary considered their options. "We have to get out of here quick before someone notices our two friends are missing."

"But if we take a shuttle..." Melissa pondered, "...they'll be able to either tractor us back or just simply blow us away in no time. We have to find some way of slowing the ship down and drawing attention to ourselves."

"I've got it..." Gary grinned. "We need to find a way to get into the engineering subroutines. The bridge is out...as is engineering." His grin growing broader, he exclaimed, "Auxiliary control—they have to have an auxiliary control room of some sort."

"Assuming we can find it and get in there before they tumble on to us..." Melissa replied as the pair began to make their way down the corridor in the opposite direction from which they had come, "...I should be able to hack us in. But what have you got in mind? They'll override us the moment you try anything."

"Anything obvious—yes." Lockwood acknowledged, "But what about if it isn't so obvious." Seeing the perplexed look on his friend's face, he smiled, "I'll explain it all once we find whatever they have that passes for an auxiliary control room."

Sighing, the pretty blonde petty officer quipped, “Why don’t we just ask one of ‘em?”

His smile turning into an evil grin, Gary jibed back, “You just took the words right out of my mouth. Spotting a door on the side of one of the walls, Lockwood lowered his voice as he dialed down the setting on his hand phaser to mild stun, “Let’s see if we’re lucky.” Motioning for his companion to stand to one side of the door, Gary took the other. Cracking the keypad open, Melissa nodded her head as she connected two wires together. As the door slid open, Gary rushed in to find one of the pirates lying on his bunk.

“Sssshh...” The quartermaster’s mate ordered, aiming his pistol at the man as Melissa quickly entered, closing the door behind her. “We don’t wake up the neighbors, now, do we? All you have to do is answer a couple of questions and we’ll be out of your hair.”

“And if I don’t?” The prisoner growled, his muscles tensing.

Sighing, Gary answered back, “Then I’ll have to reset my phaser to a cutting setting and cut off your nuts. Yeah—you’ll scream and that’ll probably bring your friends over and then I’ll have to kill you and we’ll get in a big firefight and we’ll probably die too—but you see...” the young petty officer declared, his eyes taking on a fierce cast, “...me and my friend don’t care. You people are planning to sell us off as slaves...”

“I’d rather be dead than trapped in some brothel or ending up as some ahmet’s plaything.” Melissa interjected, her face also taking on a hardened expression.

“So you see...” Gary continued, “...we’ve got nothing to lose.”

As he gazed into the eyes of the two youths holding him prisoner, the pirate exhaled, “All right...what do you want to know?”

“Where’s your auxiliary control room?” Gary asked.

“What auxiliary control room?” Their prisoner laughed, “What sort of ship do you think you’re on—a Starfleet vessel?”

“You have to have some backup in case the bridge gets knocked out.” Lockwood pressed, “Where is it? I’m getting impatient...”

"All right...all right..." The man exclaimed as Gary aimed his phaser his prisoner's groin, "The shuttlecraft control station does pretty much what an auxiliary control room does. It's on the third deck. The elevator down the corridor to your left will take you there.

"Get up." Gary ordered, gesturing with his phaser in an up and down motion.

"Why?" The man retorted, "I did what you wanted me to!"

Smiling, the young petty officer responded, "I just want to be sure you're telling me the truth. If you're leading us into a trap, you'll be the first to go. Now..." Gary again gestured, this time towards the door, "You first."

Unmolested, the two Border Service ratings, along with their prisoner, arrived at the turbolift. Entering, their prisoner said, "The elevator opens straight into the control room. Silas is usually on duty by himself at this time."

Nodding his head, Gary pushed his prisoner forward while Melissa activated the elevator's controls. Moments later, as the doors slid open, Gary fired his phaser, stunning first the surprised man sitting at the control console and then his reluctant guide. Dragging the unconscious man out of the elevator behind them, Lockwood pointed at the computer console, "Can you do anything with that, Melissa?"

"I'll see." The pretty communications tech responded as she made her way to the console. Several minutes later, she turned her head back to where her companion stood. "Am I good or what?" She grinned, "I can't slow the ship down much—not without tripping alarms, but I can slow us down enough where they won't be able to go to maximum warp. I also rigged it to where the warp flux will modulate on a repeating cycle. Hopefully, one of our ships'll pick up on it and investigate..." Pausing for a moment, the lovely blonde lowered her eyes, "...but what if they don't? What do we do then, Gary?"

"We take our chances on a shuttle." The young petty officer answered immediately. Putting forth an air of confidence, even though he was unsure himself as to their chances of success, Lockwood grinned, "But let's cross that bridge when we come to it—all right?"

"Ok, Gary." Melissa smiled back. "We might want to hide in one of the shuttles." She suggested, "I can rig it where we can activate the shuttle-bay

doors from there if we have to.”

“Good idea.” Gary responded, “Let’s go.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Marietta DeVees was bored and a bored Marietta DeVees was an unhappy Marietta DeVees. Sitting in the center seat of the *Scipio*, the *Saladin*-class destroyer that she commanded, the auburn-haired South African tapped her chair arm. *Three weeks!* The fiery starship captain thought to herself as her tapping increased in tempo, *And we’ve got nothing to show for it! No Klingons feeling froggish...no Orion pirates looking for trouble...not even a lost freighter! Nothing but stars! I’m a destroyer captain, dammit—not a star charter!*

“Ma’am?” Lieutenant Ilara called out from her science station, lifting her naturally bald head from the sensor visor, “I’m picking up some unusual readings—they look like a warp trail, but...they’re broken up.”

“How so?” Marietta replied, her ears pricking up very much as a big cat would at the prospect of finding prey.

“It seems to be a repeating pattern.” The Deltan science officer responded. “Three short bursts...one long....three short. Then nothing for thirty seconds, and then the pattern repeats.”

“Ma’am?” Lieutenant Commander Thanh Nguyen, the *Scipio*’s first officer, interjected. “That sounds like a distress signal.”

“It is.” Captain DeVees affirmed. “Old Earth Morse code—it’s an SOS.” Addressing her helmsman, she ordered, “Ensign Alvarez...follow that warp trail. Mr. Nguyen...bring us to yellow alert.” *Maybe this cruise won’t be so boring after all!* Marietta smiled as she leaned forward in her seat, her fingers no longer tapping the chair arm.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Eliot?” Artie Rychek, The barrel chested human who had once served with former Captain Eliot Walker on the *Capek* called out from the tactical station of the *Revanche*, the Orion built corsair currently commanded by the disgraced captain. “I’m picking up something on the sensors...at maximum range and closing fast.”

"I'm also picking up some unusual readings coming from our engines." Karen Soren, another of Walker's senior officers who had been disgraced and imprisoned with him declared from her station at the first officer's console. "Shit!" She swore, "It's a distress signal."

"Take us to maximum warp." Walker ordered, secure in the knowledge that his modified Spinner could outrun anything short of a Connie and there was only one of those operating in these parts, the smug ex-captain thought. The ship's engines straining, Walker once again heard his first officer/lover's voice.

"Eliot! Something's wrong with the engines...the best I can do is ninety percent..."

"The pursuing ship is closing rapidly." Rychek interrupted. "It's a destroyer—*Saladin*-class."

"Do we fight?" Karen inquired, "We're about evenly matched."

"No." Walker decided, "You can bet that were there's one destroyer, its friends won't be far away. One, we can probably handle—three..." The brown haired pirate captain shook his head as he activated his intercom. "Tharas! Get my engines fixed within the next two minutes or you're walking the rest of the way back home—without a vacuum suit. Got that?"

"Yes, sir!" The Andorian engineer quickly answered back.

"Evasive action!" Walker then ordered his helmsman as a tiny speck grew larger in his viewscreen, "Now!"

"The prisoners!" A voice called out from the speaker after Walker had issued his command, "They've escaped!"

"Then find them and kill them!" A suddenly worried Eliot Walker ordered.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Got him!" Ensign Alvarez called out, "It's an Orion spinner. He's moving away on an evasive course."

"Pursue." Captain DeVeers, better known amongst both peers and enemies alike by her nickname, The Leopard, ordered, "And take us to red alert."

“Red alert, Aye.” Her first officer acknowledged as the alert klaxon rang out.

“Phasers charged.” Ensign Alvarez reported as the phaser fire control unit rose up from its concealed location. “Photon torpedoes loaded and ready. We’re in range.”

“Hail the ship and fire a shot across their bow.” The Leopard ordered. Turning to her first officer, she smirked, “I’m following regs, Thanh—I’ve given them a hail and a warning shot.”

“They’re continuing their evasive actions.” Alvarez announced.

“No answer to our hails.” The unjoined Trill communications officer, Ensign Dala Moran declared from her station.

“Target engines.” DeVees commanded, “Fire!”

### Part 3

As the corsair shuddered under the impact of the *Scipio*'s phaser blasts, Melissa looked at Gary, "What's happening?"

"I don't know." The young quartermaster responded, but I think the ship might be under attack.

"You think it's ours?" The lovely blonde asked.

"I hope so." Lockwood responded, "But right now I wouldn't care if it were the Klingons."

"Oh hell!" Melissa swore as she looked out the shuttlecraft window, only to see three pirates in the control, one of them pointing in the direction of the shuttlecraft. "They've made us."

"We're outta here then!" Gary replied as he took the shuttle's controls. "Open the hangar bay doors—it's time to go."

Pressing a button on her console, Melissa sighed in relief as the shuttle-bay doors slowly opened, the atmosphere in the bay, along with two of the pirates, escaping with a rush into space.

"The shuttlecraft doors are opening." Karen Soren reported from her station, "One shuttlecraft exiting."

Nodding his head in appreciation, Walker replied as his ship shook again, "A hundred credits those are our prisoners." As he watched the shuttlecraft from the viewscreen, he ordered, "Target disruptors on that ship...destroy it."

"Targeting weapons...firing..." Green beams lanced out from the *Revanche*, their target—the diminutive shuttlecraft and its two passengers.

"Captain!" Lieutenant Ilara called out, "Shuttlecraft emerging from the spinner with two life signs on board—both human. The spinner's locked weapons on it."

"Lower shields and beam those two aboard!" DeVees ordered, "And then raise those shields back up the moment they're aboard."

Watching as the shuttlecraft exploded, the South African captain held her breath as she awaited word from the transporter room.

“We’ve got ‘em!”

“Raise those shields—NOW!” Marietta shouted. Moments later, the *Scipio* shuddered under the impact of the corsair’s disruptors.

“Got ‘em up just in time, Captain.” The first officer declared with an audible sigh of relief.

“I want that spinner outta my sky.” The fiery captain ordered, “Fire all phasers.”

“Engines are back on-line!” A voice called out from the corsair’s intercom just as Walker ordered his ship back into evasive action.

“Get us the hell outta here!” The pirate captain ordered as his speedy raider raced away at full speed leaving behind an angry and frustrated Captain DeVees.

“We’ll get him next time.” The South African promised. Turning to her first officer, she commanded, “Have those two we snagged from the shuttlecraft brought up here—I want to talk to them.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Several hours later, Petty Officers Lockwood and Pappas found themselves back on the *Evergreen*, standing before their commanding officer. “That’s quite the adventure you two had.” Lieutenant Walsh remarked with a broad grin. “You two also seem to have made an impression on Captain DeVees—and that woman does not impress easily.” Giving Lockwood an appraising look, the old lieutenant recalled, “Young man, I remember telling you that you needed to show some initiative and self-confidence to set yourself apart from all the other names and numbers—I’d say you’ve done that in spades. So...have you given any further thought into putting in your application?”

“Yes, sir.” Gary replied with a wide grin, “I’d like to submit my application for the next year’s class.” Unsure as to whether to continue or not, the young man paused.

“Go on...” Lieutenant Walsh prompted.

"Well, sir...Captain DeVees told me that she'd endorse my application and provide a personal recommendation, but I'd like one from you as well."

Visibly touched by the young man's request, the old lieutenant smiled warmly, "Of course, Petty Officer—I'd be delighted to." Turning to the lovely blonde woman standing next to Lockwood, the *Evergreen's* skipper asked, "And you, Petty Officer Pappas...am I going to lose you to the Academy too?"

"I'm afraid so, sir." Melissa replied with a shy smile. "I'd like to put in my application to next year's class as well—with your permission, sir?"

"Of course...of course..." Walsh responded, "I assume that Captain DeVees has recommended you as well?"

"Yes, sir." The young woman answered back, nodding her head, "But sir—would it be possible to have your recommendation as well?"

"It would be my honor, Petty Officer Pappas." A broad grin appearing on his face as he brushed away a tear, the lieutenant allowed the two young prospective cadets to go, "You better go now—I believe your shipmates are throwing a party in your honor and it wouldn't do to keep them waiting. Dismissed."

Again moved by the loyalty showed by his two enlisted ratings, the old lieutenant, knowing that his days in the service, lackluster though they might have been, were nearly over, smiled as he watched them leave. If he couldn't make his own mark in the stars, the old man thought, he could at least see to it that the next generation would.

**The End**