

Dallas

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Dallas

by [LordMcCoveyCove](#)

Summary

Stardate 51901.4: Lieutenant Ushiyama handles a reconnaissance mission deep within Dominion territory... and his feelings for his captain.

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Notes

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Historian's Note: This story takes place during the sixth season of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, between the episodes "Valiant" and "The Sound of Her Voice."

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The Quarterdeck Breed **By Lord McCovey Cove**

Part Four: *Dallas*

NCC-31357 (USS *Dallas*)

Dominion-held territory relative to Federation Sector 117-Gamma

En route to Starbase 375

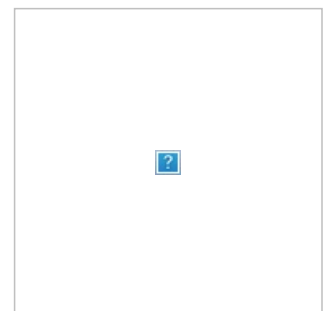
Stardate 51901.54

The siren of the battlestations klaxon filled the air as the atmosphere on the bridge matched the heightened state of alert all over the ship. Scarlet light from the emergency systems fell across the faces of the bridge crew at their stations, monitoring the flight of their ship as it sped between the stars at one thousand five hundred sixteen times the speed of light. Evasion and maneuvering appeared the only way to win against their attacker, and with the minor damage sustained in the last confrontation, it seemed as though all hope was lost that day.

Commander Emoni Lau gripped the edges of the arms of her chair in the center of the bridge as she watched the aft view from the main viewscreen. It had been fifteen minutes since she gave the order to retreat from the sector, but the single Jem'Hadar attack cruiser decided to be tenacious about its quarry. Its image was at the center of the sensor output on the screen, reminding them that it would be a difficult task to evade and return to fight tomorrow.

Lau looked to her acting executive officer, seated at the bridge operations console between her and the viewscreen. He was a lanky full lieutenant named Ken Ushiyama, thrust into the role by the death of his predecessor. Like her, he was weary of running every time they were outnumbered, often voicing his desire to stand and fight their way out of the situation. It was the order of the sector admiral that they evade capture, as the information they were bringing back to the starbase was of vital importance to the effort against the Dominion.

"Maintaining speed at warp nine, sir," said the officer at the helm in a very thick alto tone. The tall and willowy Lieutenant Phendara was the only Andorian officer aboard the ship, and her reputation preceded her as one of the fleet's finest pilots. Her efforts over the past forty-eight hours had solidified that reputation, as she manipulated the flight controls of the light cruiser with such amazing skill. The decision to name



her as the ship's chief helmsman was a sound one given her innate talents.

From the engineering monitoring station, the short and chubby young lady with the short black hair reminded the captain, "At our present speed, with the damage we've sustained, we will have to do a cold shutdown of the warp core in twenty-seven minutes." Petty Officer Second Class Odessa McComas was standing in as one of the assistant engineering chiefs, despite her junior enlisted rank, as manpower grew shorter and shorter with each and every mission.

Emoni did not look at the petty officer to acknowledge her, "Understood." It would mean that they would fall short of their destination by a large margin. If they lost warp capability or slowed to allow the Jem'Hadar to catch up, the ship would be lost. She pushed up from her chair and put a sweaty hand on top of her exec's shoulder, "Might as well pull out all the stops, Ken. Let's see if we can get in touch with the *Agamemnon*. I want to see Hank Grayum's face on the viewscreen."

The risk was indeed a great one. Though the Jem'Hadar was pursuing them and no doubt the Dominion knew exactly where they were, the fact that they were alone and intruding that far into enemy territory was something known only to Starfleet Command and Rear Admiral Ross. Contacting another Federation starship would be in direct contravention to their orders. Emoni Lau knew it would probably end her career, even under these circumstances, but the safety of her ship and the information they risked their lives for had to be paramount above raising suspicion among their peers.

Not wasting any time, Ken keyed in the secured channel onto his station and began to encrypt the transmission. "USS *Dallas* to USS *Agamemnon*, Captain Lau sends her compliments to Captain Grayum. Come in, *Agamemnon*."

Phendara nodded to the screen, "I think our pursuers have raised the stakes, sir. They've increased speed and will overtake us in ninety seconds." The image of the enemy craft began to loom a little larger as the distance between the ships shortened.

"Odessa, stoke the fires. We're going to need everything you can give us," Lau said as she released Ken's shoulder and returned to her seat, her motion suggesting that her presence there would will the ship to outrun the Jem'Hadar. Before the engineer could offer any protest, she looked at Odessa and made it clear, "No complaints, just get it done."

Ushiyama decided to make his suggestion, after reporting that there was no response from the *Agamemnon*. "Sir, it's just one cruiser. We should make a stand here."

"Much as I want to, Ken. We have our orders," Emoni's soprano tone was as apologetic as she could make it under the circumstances. As the ship appeared to grow in size on the viewscreen, a plan formed in her mind. "Perhaps we can slow them down a bit. Mister Kirk, let's throw a little bit of a jolt to them. Ready a salvo of quantum torpedoes, maximum yield and stand by to fire them at our friends over there."

The tactical officer, a junior grade lieutenant who had the misfortune of studying at the Academy with the same surname as the legendary Starfleet officer, Jonas Theodore Kirk, nodded at the order, "Readying torpedoes, sir." Once the display satisfied his commands, he turned to the captain from his station and replied that the projectiles were ready to be launched. "Target, sir?"

"Proximity fuses, Lieutenant. I want them to detonate as close to their shields as possible without touching. I need them blinded by a series of wide radius explosions," the captain ordered. She crossed over to Kirk's console and explained a little more clearly, "It should blank out the sensors with interference for a few minutes, enough time for us to alter course. Phendara, what's around here that we can use for cover?"

Her blue hands danced across her computer console as she plotted courses to various stellar bodies. "I have a star system within five minutes travel. It's a white star, with three planets... and an asteroid field. It's the closest option." Phendara tapped her console a few more times, "But we have to move fast."

Ken suggested, "We should also divert as much power to the aft shield generators as a precaution. Those torpedoes are not going to direct their energy at the Jem'Hadar." In fact, the blast pattern was likely to be a lot closer than he would like, given the recent acceleration of the attacking cruiser. Moments after voicing his concern, the sensor information on his display alerted him to the fact that, "The Jem'Hadar have acquired a weapons lock. They're charging weapons and are preparing to fire."

Lau ordered, "Reconfigure shield power as Ken suggested. Fire torpedoes."

Twin dots of blue-white light flew away from the lower portion of the main viewscreen out toward the Jem'Hadar. Within seconds, they traversed the distance between the two ships and when the warheads split from their respective housings into the desired number of eight, they exploded in such a brilliant light that it filled the screen entirely and brought the bridge from the dim scarlet into bright sapphire.

Ken called out, "Brace for impact!" His warning gave the others a couple of seconds to do just that as the shockwave impacted against the reinforced shields on the aft quarter. Warnings and alerts from the various bridge stations began to go off as *Dallas* endured the energy output.

The deck vibrated slightly at first, and then the vibration became furiously violent. Emoni tried with all of her might to maintain her standing position against the tactical station, gripping the edge of the console with white-knuckled hands. She turned her head to see that the other officers had not fared as well; Ken had failed to maintain his grip on the operations station and lay less than a meter away from his chair while Phendara had decided to rest her upper body against the helm.

Once the shockwave had passed, she called out, "Is everyone all right?" Relaxing her hands and walking over to help Ken up from the deck and back into his seat, everyone on the bridge appeared to only suffer some minor bumps and bruises as they mumbled their well being to her. "McComas, I need a damage report. Phendara, are we still on course?"

"Stand by, Captain," the helmsman said, looking at her display. "This is a little difficult to tell, but I'm showing we're on course toward that star system based on our position before the shockwave hit. We're maintaining our speed at warp nine."

"Status of the Jem'Hadar?"

Ken scanned the ship to aft, "Sensors are having a hell of a time getting through that interference, but they're proceeding on the same trajectory toward Federation space, as far as I can tell." He moved to the side to show Emoni exactly what he was seeing. The captain leaned over to witness the interference pattern playing across his screens.

"I have a preliminary damage report, sir," said McComas. Not waiting for Lau to respond, she listed the affected systems as quickly as possible, "The shield generators took the biggest hit, the power feedback shorted the deflector grid on the aft quarter. The primary structural integrity field generators are offline. The long-range communications transceiver array has been destroyed. The rest of this is mostly physical hull damage across the aft sections of decks four through ten."

Lau said, "Thank you." Returning to her chair while gripping her left fist with her right hand, she tried not to dwell too much on the dent she just put in their chances of a safe return. Hiding out within the asteroid field in enemy territory to make repairs sustained from torpedoes fired from her own tubes! She decided that now was not the time for her to begin admonishing herself for her mistakes. Emoni looked at Ken's back, taking a deep breath in relief that he was not wounded or worse. Losing her executive officer during the first attempt to gather information was bad enough, to lose two of her senior officers in a single mission was unthinkable to her.

Lieutenant Kenneth Ushiyama had become a fast friend among the bridge crew, with the captain in particular. He proved himself to be competent as the operations officer, while knowing when to take things seriously and when not to. Ken's sense of humor seemed to be his trademark, and it was very well received on the bridge. The previous executive officer had not fit in so quickly with everyone, due to the fact that she was a Vulcan who maintained her distance on a personal level, seeking solitude in her off hours and interfacing with the crew so long as it was of a professional nature. Emoni did not wish to think ill of the dead, but she was beginning to prefer Ken's personality to T'Nala's lack of one. In the six months he had been assigned to the ship, she had come to know and respect Ken a great deal, and when it was time to let her hair down, they engaged in a far more intimate relationship that was agreed between them would have no further development than mutual satisfaction.

It was probably a violation of protocol, she had tried to caution herself when they decided to pursue that kind of relationship, but some of the missions and risks they took on behalf of Starfleet and the Federation put them above those constraints in her eyes. Barring that, they were both adults, and how they spent their off-duty hours was of their concern and no one else's. Emoni did not fool herself into believing that the crew was ignorant to their activities, but then they also had never flaunted that knowledge. So long as they maintained a modicum of respect for that, she did not care. There was one fact she was sure of, and that was that the other members of *Dallas'* crew were also finding pleasure in entertaining themselves in a similar vein.

"What's our ETA?" Emoni asked of Phendara.

"Two minutes, sir."

"Status of our friends?"

"Still unable to get a clear picture, but they're pulling away from us. I'd give it another five minutes before the interference clears up enough for them to realize we pulled a Houdini right in front of them," replied Ken.

Emoni looked up at the bulkhead, "Bridge to Engineering."

"Engineering," replied the bulkhead in a gravely male bass, "this is Whitaker. Lieutenant Lindh was wounded, she's been taken to sickbay."

"Senior Chief," she said, not wanting to waste any time, "we're about to take up a position in an asteroid field, and as soon as we secure from flight operations, I want you to start making repairs. You're cleared for EVA ops." Emoni intended to allow her engineering crews to use the ship's three workbees and other equipment necessary to make repairs to the exterior of the ship. Under the most ideal circumstances, they would be able to use the field long enough without being detected and then make a run for Federation space at maximum warp without having to worry about shutting the engines down.

Whitaker's tone was one of gratitude, "I hear that, sir. We'll do the best we can as soon as we get our gear set up."

"How long do you need to get us back into shape?"

"Better part of a day, Captain," came the reply. "Twenty hours, maybe less if I cut some corners."

Lau shook her head, "Don't cut any corners. Twenty hours is reasonable, so long as we don't draw any attention to ourselves."

"Now entering the star system, sir," said Phendara. "With your permission, I'd like to power down the warp drive and proceed on guided inertia."

"Permission granted." No sooner had the captain said it that the ever-present hum of the warp drive faded away.

Whitaker's voice spoke up, "We can get a head start on the engines this way. Thanks, Lieutenant."

"I want a report on your progress every hour, Senior Chief," Emoni ordered. "Bridge, out."

Senior Chief Petty Officer Harold Leslie Whitaker was the stereotype of every engineering chief petty officer they told stories about in the Academy's cadet barracks. He was large, barrel-chested, and spoke with a gravely voice that reverberated off of the bulkheads. When he spoke to you, you had no choice but to be intimidated by his rank and experiences. Ensigns and some junior grade lieutenants trembled whenever he walked into the room. At times, even the chief engineering officer took her cues from his suggestions.

When Tammy Lindh suffered injuries falling from the second engineering level due to the shockwave, the assistant chief engineering officer, Lieutenant (junior grade) Walter Rabbitt, did not make any attempt to assume command of the engineering section. He fell in line with the

senior chief's orders, carrying them out as he believe that if they were going to get out of this situation in one piece, it would be by Whitaker's decisions based on his years of experience in the field. The others followed by the lieutenant's example, not questioning Whitaker's authority even once.

Following the order to maintain station within the asteroid field, the warp core was taken offline. The Miranda-class light cruiser was essentially defenseless without primary power online, but the fusion generators accepted the increase in load as they were designed to do. Whitaker wasted very little time in assigning the high priority tasks to his teams, sending a third of his section to make direct hull repairs as efficiently as possible.

In the tenth hour of making repairs to *Dallas*, the bad news was relayed from the bridge to Whitaker; Lieutenant Tammy Lindh's injuries were too severe to save her, and she died in the surgical unit. He had to break the news to the staff, but only after they had completed the job they set out to do. He assembled group of officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, near the large master systems display on the main engineering deck.

"All right, listen up," the senior chief said, addressing the assembled team leaders. "So far, we've patched up the hull as much as we can afford to in twenty hours. Mister Rabbitt assures me that the damage to the long-range transceiver will be repaired well in time. Odessa, where are we with the warp drive?"

Everyone trained his or her eyes on the short woman, who wore her charcoal uniform unzipped and hanging off of her shoulders. Patches of coolant exposure appeared in white streaks across the mustard yellow turtleneck, undoubtedly from the repair efforts to the plasma injectors. She looked at Whitaker for a moment before responding in a muted voice, "Behind schedule, Senior Chief. I'm afraid that we will not have the warp drive back online for another eighteen hours. We made our repairs to the plasma injectors just fine, but we also found severe fatigue in the starboard power transfer conduits. I'm recommending that we use this time to do a full replacement of the conduit in question, or else risk a breach later on down the line." McComas left the rest unspoken, for if another cruiser out there caught them, another hit would spell disaster for the *Dallas*.

Lieutenant (jg) Rabbitt looked at the others with a look of relief on his face. "That shouldn't be a problem," he said in a cheerful voice.

"I'm not finished," said McComas, fixing the lieutenant with a glare. "The magnetic constrictors are on manual control right now, and held in the locked position to prevent the flow of antimatter into the chamber. We were lucky that the ship was at warp when we took that hit, because before we shut down the warp core, Ensign Hines had to force the constrictors into place. I don't want to have to rely on manual control for warp speed."

Whitaker frowned, "I don't, either. Tell Ensign Hines that I'll be down as soon as we're done here and I'll give him a hand with the magnetic constrictors. Was that all?"

Odessa shook her head, "One more problem. I've taken the liberty of sending a team into each of the nacelles to do a visual inspection of the warp coils. That shockwave shook us up pretty badly, and I'm sure that we're all right, but I did not want to take any chances." She looked at Whitaker, "I apologize if I stepped out of line on that."

The senior chief decided not to say anything to her right then, instead optioning to address everyone at once, "You heard her, we've started the inspection and we'll finish it. Send whatever people you can spare to help speed that process up. Other than that, I think we're making some good progress here. You're dismissed." He looked to McComas, "Odessa, you're with me." He pointed toward the turbolift door, to indicate exactly where he intended to go.

"Aye, aye, Senior Chief," she said, trying to keep the worry out of her tone.

Once within the confines of the lift, Whitaker decided to take more dramatic tack with the young woman, looking at her with a slight frown on his face. "Odessa," he began, with the tone of his voice presenting difficulty in trying to see if a storm was about to come in the form of one of his famous lectures. "Odessa, I think that you have proven yourself as a very capable non-comm time and time again. Your decision to send teams into the nacelles proves that."

Odessa allowed herself to breathe again, "Okay, whew."

"Whew?" he asked, the look on his face expressing his puzzlement.

She wore wearing a relieved smile on her face as she admitted, "I thought you were going to chew my ass off."

Whitaker harrumphed, "I've been known to say a good word from time to time, you know."

"Not in my lifetime," she was unable to keep from replying.

The senior chief shot a look toward her, "What was that?"

"Why, nothing, Senior Chief. Nothing at all."

Emoni closed her eyes as Ken expertly massaged her shoulders within the confines of her quarters. She rolled her head from side to side as he relieved her of the tension of the last three days, and she was grateful for his attention to her in that moment. Their moments together had been fleeting since the mission to provide long-range tactical data of the Monac star system. "Remind me to recommend Phendara for promotion," she said, her voice almost a moan. "It's not quite Federation territory, but I'm sure glad to not be running for a while."

Ken continued to move his hands over her shoulders and back as the captain lay on her couch, face down. As she spoke to him, he looked up at the viewport that showed the asteroid field in front of the ship and admitted his fears, "I don't want to be the one to break it to you, but how exactly did this system go unnoticed by the Jem'Hadar?" The truth was told, ever since they arrived, he felt as though something weren't

right. There were so many places the ship could travel to in the short amount of time that the interference blinded them, and with the methodical nature of the military forces of the Dominion, it seemed rather miraculous that they had been able to take nearly sixteen hours of uninterrupted rest.

"I'd be lying if I said that thought hadn't crossed my mind," Emoni said, her tone serious.

"How long before the next progress report from engineering?" asked Ken.

The captain gave a slight shrug in response, taking in a deep breath and letting it out slowly.

"Look, Emoni, I don't think we should be relaxing our guard here."

Pushing herself to flip over on her back, she looked at him before speaking, "Not that I need to explain my orders to you, but there's not much choice in the matter."

Ken rested on his haunches as she moved, and when there was an opportunity to do so, he rested an elbow upon her thigh as she explained what they were doing. His presence in the captain's quarters was a part of their routine on those days where anything resembling off-hours presented itself.

"We need to be able to nurse the wounds that we've taken so far. We were damned lucky to make it out of that system with the lumps the Jem'Hadar handed out," Emoni began. "With the warp core less than a half hour away from shutting down, it was either we pull a disappearing act or we try to outmaneuver them on impulse power."

"Which we could have done," he pressed.

Her eyes betrayed her anger, "Damn it, Ken. I'm tired of having to go over our orders with you every time you decide you want to prove that you have a bigger penis than the other guy."

Ken blanched, "That hurt, Emoni."

"That was my intention." She sighed, "Look. This mission calls for discretion, not heroism. We've done this hundreds of times. Starfleet Intelligence orders us to go out, get information, and bring it back. We're not here to earn kills."

He sighed, this time taking a deep breath in a mimicking gesture. "I'm beginning to feel as though you don't think much of my opinion."

"That's not true."

"Isn't it?"

Emoni opened her mouth to say something, but instead she closed it and shook her head in frustration.

"I'm sorry," he said, after a moment of shared silence. "I don't mean to come off sounding like an asshole. What I am trying to say here is that I would feel better knowing that there was one less cruiser out here looking for us."

"I can appreciate that." She sat up, moving her thighs out from under his arm. "But this is where I get to point that I'm in command. I made the decision and I'll stick by it."

Ken stood up, folding his arms and looking very much like a child, "Why do you always have to do that?"

"Do what?"

"Throw your rank in my face to win an argument."

"Because sometimes you forget your place, Lieutenant," she said, emphasizing his rank.

He turned around, staring at her intently, "And what exactly is my place, Captain?"

"To carry out my orders," she replied, her voice growing tense.

"That's not what I mean."

She looked at him and asked, "What do you mean, then?"

Unsure of his emotional footing, Ken seemed to take his time before answering that question. He knew full well that their relationship was purely physical, but that was in the past, during a time when they had discussed it as though it were merely an academic issue rather than a real one. He was so certain of his ability to keep his heart reigned in that he decided to involve himself personally with her. In looking at her seated on her couch, he felt his heart jump within his chest.

Ken remembered how excited he was to have been granted his transfer request to the *Dallas* six months ago. He had come up through the ranks aboard the *Fearless*, in the operations department, and with his knowledge and experience as the assistant department head, he felt it was his turn to step up and take the opportunity to prove his leadership ability beyond any doubt. He had been grateful to Captain Simpson's recommendation to Commander Lau, but when he stepped aboard ship for the first time he had not been so certain as so how he would fit in.

He reported in to her and he remembered feeling tongue-tied in her presence, as though he were a newly commissioned ensign making his report to his first assignment rather than a full lieutenant with over six years of service on his record. She was beautiful beyond words, he said to himself. Emoni Lau regarded him with two of the darkest brown eyes he had ever seen, and spoke with a warm, yet regal tone. He could

not believe she was his commanding officer, wanting so much to be able to approach her without having to worry about the consequences. He had convinced himself that the brief exchange in her ready room would be the extent of their interaction, until he served his first bridge shift. But that was not the case.

From the start of his tenure as a bridge officer, he noticed that there was a relaxed nature about everyone. It proved to be a very stark contrast to the strict environment he had come to appreciate aboard the *Fearless*. He felt as though he had transferred to a cruise ship rather than a Starfleet vessel. Gone was the discipline, all of the adherence to the protocol that his former captain drilled into his officers and crew. By the second day, Ken began to feel as though that his decision to transfer was fueled more by his ambition.

In the end, it was Emoni who had a hand in making him feel comfortable. The executive officer, T'Nala, was a Vulcan, and she made sure he was aware of her personal boundaries from the beginning. The others had not turned such a cold shoulder to him, within days of his arrival, he had been known to crack up the bridge crew with a few carefully crafted remarks and maintained a sense of levity about him. Officers like Phendara and the late Tammy Lindh had grown to like him a great deal. Even Senior Chief Whitaker warmed up to him, which was an unprecedented move by the older non-commissioned officer. One month later, Ken found himself amidst a new group of friends and colleagues whose company he enjoyed a great deal more than he had on the *Fearless*.

When Emoni had approached him with an invitation to share meals with her on a regular basis, he had no idea what to expect. The first meal was spent discussing ship's business, and he set his expectations accordingly. It was not unusual for her to reach out to him like that, given T'Nala's demeanor, she would wish to have contact with the next officer in her command structure. After the first day, he felt he had gotten to know her a little better. A week passed, and then a month. By then, they had discussed everything they felt necessary, going through personal history and exchanging anecdotes that had relevance to their conversations.

One evening, Emoni cancelled their dinner plans due to a personal matter. Feeling slighted by that explanation, he began moping about the ship and being generally unresponsive to his friends. They had been docked at Deep Space Nine at the time, and without warning, she took emergency leave and returned to Earth. With T'Nala in command, and the ship enjoying an extended period of relaxation on the converted Cardassian mining station, he found the opportunity to seek solitude without calling any more attention to himself. T'Nala obliged his request for extra duties, and she even made her approval known with only a few choice words in the corridor, breaking her months-long off-bridge silence.

When Emoni returned to the ship one week later, her first order of personal business following the report from T'Nala was to seek Ken out and explain what had happened. The officers and crew of the starship *Exeter* had lost their lives in an attempt to evacuate a Federation colony near the demilitarized zone near the Cardassian border. She explained that a great number of her classmates ended up serving together on that ship, and she used what clout she had with Starfleet Intelligence to make the voyage to Earth in time for the memorial services. She felt as though she had lost a family, rather than a single person, and in her moment of remorse, she told him she had regretted shutting him out so suddenly.

That night, over dinner and wine she had brought back with her, she made a resolution. To all of those friends around her that she felt close to, she would make sure that she did not lose touch with them. They ate, they drank, she cried, and he tried to do his best to console her. He offered his arms to embrace his captain, and she settled into his arms and continued to weep openly. He had never felt as close to anyone as he had with her, and it was in that moment of surging emotions that he dared to lean down and kiss her.

The next morning, she made it clear that what had happened was the result of the loss of inhibitions and the emotionally charged atmosphere. They had gotten lost in the moment, she said to him, it won't happen again. But it did happen again, the next night and the night after. It was dinner, conversation, and physical intimacy. Ken's demeanor could not help but change dramatically, and the other officers and crew began to speculate about what went on behind those closed doors. Nothing was ever said, despite their actions both Emoni and Ken were well-liked, and it took a motion from Harry Whitaker to simply turn a blind eye and prevent the lower decks from speaking ill of their captain and second officer.

Tonight, on the other side of the border yet again, he stared into those brown eyes and wondered if he should tell her how he felt about her. The questions began to dance in his mind; was this the right time? Should he wait until they got back to the Starbase? What if they never got back to the Starbase? No, he could not bear to think that, but it raised a point about seizing the moment.

Emoni looked at him expectantly, waiting for an answer to her question.

"Never mind," he said lamely. "Forget I said anything about it. Why don't we go see if engineering has a better idea of where we are."

It was the heat of the arc welder that was causing him to sweat profusely. His officer's jacket had already been discarded on the floor in a heap of cloth and the large wet patches from his armpits and back turned the mustard yellow turtleneck a discolored brown. As he ran his tongue along the inside of his mouth, he figured that the reason why there were so many dry patches were because all of that moisture was now outside of his body. His body demanded that he replenish what he expended, but if he stopped his welding now, he knew he would be behind schedule.

Though not a regular member of the engineering team, he felt useless sitting in his quarters. With limited knowledge in repairs, he was pressed into service where he would do the most good; welding fatigued spots of the superstructure, and placing new hull patches over worn ones to reinforce them. It was not much, nor as big a contribution as some of the other well trained engineers aboard ship, but it was the least he could do.

"Whitaker to Kirk," said the ship's internal communications system.

Jonas did not stop welding. "Yes, Senior Chief?" his tone was loud, over the noise the welder made. He was glad he did not have to touch his commbadge to acknowledge the signal.

"How much longer are you going to be patching up that hole in my hull?"

"I'm almost done, Senior Chief. Give me fifteen minutes."

"You have ten. Whitaker, out."

He cursed inwardly, stealing a glance up at the rest of the tritanium hull patch. Ten minutes would be doable, if he could get a tricorder down here in time. "Kirk to Phendara," he called out.

"Phendara, here," she replied in an annoyed tone.

"Hey, where are you?"

A pause. "I'm in my quarters."

"Are you up to doing me a favor?" he asked.

There was another pause, as she considered his question.

Kirk stopped welding, sitting back on his feet as his knees screamed in agony from being abused. "Phendara, all I need is a tricorder and some water."

She did not find that to be unreasonable, "Very well. I shall arrive shortly. Is that all?"

"Yes. Thank you very much."

"Phendara, out."

It always started like that with her; he noticed that she regarded him with contempt. He did outrank her, but that was not the source of their unease. But he tried not to think about it he waited for his tricorder and his water.

Lieutenant Ushiyama's eyes scanned over the PADD containing the latest engineering report. Despite the captain's order that they would remain within the asteroid field for twenty hours, it was now over twenty-four hours since they arrived. The report in his hand showed that while the discovered problems with the warp drive were identified and corrected, they were requesting an additional two hours to complete the repair process.

"Harry..." Ken's voice trailed off with a warning tone.

Whitaker shrugged, "We took some serious hits, Ken." He was unapologetic about it, as he always was about such matters. "I supposed we could go right now, do what we can en route."

The executive officer was not buying it. "I feel one of your famous doomsday lectures coming on."

"No need. I think we're about waist-deep in it already," replied the senior chief.

Ken could not disagree with him, "I hear that. All right, we do it en route, because I do not want to be sitting out here with our pants rolled up around our ankles, waiting for the next Jem'Hadar ship to shove their gun up our asses, and pull the damned trigger."

Whitaker laughed loudly, "We'll wrap up what we've got going in ten minutes. Half that to pull the EVA crews back in."

"I'll inform the captain," nodded Ken, and the impromptu meeting in the ready room was over. The executive officer handed the PADD back to Whitaker and departed to return to the captain's quarters, where she was asleep.

There was a decided advantage to serving on a ship assigned to Starfleet Intelligence, and that was in the fact that whenever possible, the ship would find itself at the head of every upgrade list. Most of the Miranda-class light cruisers serving within the tactical fleets were pressed into service from the mothball fleet, or recommissioned into active service to replace ships lost in the first six months of the Dominion war. *Dallas* was one of those vessels, having been put into the mothball fleet just shortly after the end of the Cardassian war, as one of fifty ships that Starfleet determined to be no longer needed to maintain a peacetime fleet. Once pressed back into active service, however, it was retasked from the tactical fleets that would engage the Dominion, and into a smaller fleet that was operated by Starfleet Intelligence.

Dallas received a series of upgrades to its weapons systems, and modules, including the main bridge. The main bridge module that was installed contained a ready room for the captain; a luxury not enjoyed by her sister ships. Along with the other advanced systems came the installation of the prototype medical holograph, the prototype developed by Doctor Lewis Zimmerman. Rather than assigning a chief medical officer, the holograph fulfilled that role very capably, and his ability to escape the confines of sickbay, thanks to the shipwide holographic emitters, added to his value among the members of the crew.

"Good morning, Odessa," said the Doctor, looking up from his desk within the now-empty sickbay; he addressed her by her preferred method of address he had on file. "What can I do for you?"

Odessa smiled, "Nothing, Doc. I'm here to take care of some power node repairs." She indicated this by raising her repair kit up. As the exterior repairs were cut short and the warp core about to be brought online, many of the repair teams found themselves reassigned to the next critical system. "We're going to switch to the secondary network in a minute so we can finish repairs on our way back home."

The Doctor took on a worried look, "I hope this doesn't take too long."

McComas could not help but smile at his programmed responses. Her assignment to the ship came only four months ago, and in that time she

had come to learn a great deal about the systems that worked on the ship. Odessa's favorite system to maintain was the PMH's holographic generator. As the other engineers tended to not wish to interact with the program, she reveled in the opportunity to talk and discuss various topic with the program. It was as if she melded her work and her hobby into one, with being an engineer and working with holography. The programmed emotional responses fascinated her the most, and when she encountered those subroutines, it always amused her. "We'll try and get this done as soon as possible, Doctor," she assured him.

"I should hope so," he replied. The Doctor turned away from her to return to his work.

She opened her toolkit, removing her instruments and tools to begin using them. When both of her hands were free, she opened one of the large access panels against the starboard bulkhead and connected a monitoring device to it. "That's odd," said Odessa, once the small display on the device lit up and began to provide her with information.

"What's odd?" the Doctor asked, his attention divided between continuing their conversation and his medical scans.

Odessa frowned at the device once more, resetting the sensors to make sure what she was seeing was accurate. "I think I'm reading a low-level energy drain."

"A damaged node, perhaps?"

"If it were a damaged node, it wouldn't be returning a signature like this," she shook her head at the results. "I wonder..." her voice trailed off. Odessa brought her right hand up to tap at her communicator, "McComas to Senior Chief Whitaker."

The familiar gravelly voice carried into sickbay, "Go ahead."

"Check the primary power grid on deck five, section five-baker-eleven. I'm reading an energy fluctuation in this area."

"Stand by." The sound of computer commands being entered in the background could be heard before Whitaker replied, "That's very interesting. Stay where you are, I'm coming up to..." The transmission was terminated without warning, followed by the lights switching off.

"Chief?" she called out, looking around at the dimly lit room. Her eyes searched for the Doctor, and she watched him approach her.

"What's going on?" was his question.

"I'm not sure." She checked her device once more, scrutinizing it. "This is really strange. I'll wait until the Senior Chief gets up here, because I can't make heads or tails of these readings."

Before the Doctor could reply, the doors to sickbay slid aside. Odessa looked over; expecting Harry Whitaker to be there, ready to provide his assistance in solving this mystery. In the second immediately following her movement to look at the doors, she reacted on instinct as the weapons fire shot through the Doctor's image and over her head as she hit the deck and rolled behind the biobed. Grabbing her phaser from its holster on her hip and bringing it to bear on the intruders, she fired short bursts in a quick pattern through the open areas of the biobed's legs.

She kept her phaser at the ready, approaching the edge of the biobed slowly in an attempt to maintain her cover. Odessa peeked around that corner to look at the three intruders closely, through the dim lighting of sickbay. To her right, the Doctor had already opened his medical tricorder and began to run scans of the deceased. Within moments, he verbally confirmed her suspicions.

It was the Jem'Hadar.

"Holy Kolker," she whispered as the extremity of the situation replayed in her mind. She had to push aside her shock and disbelief in order to press on and perform her duty. Slapping her communicator, she called out, "McComas to Bridge. Intruder alert." There was no response to her call. In the silence of sickbay, she looked at the Doctor and said, "Can you transfer your program to the bridge and warn them?"

"I have already tried, it's part of my program. The sickbay systems appeared to have been isolated," he said immediately.

Odessa moved for the doors, "I'm going to have to hoof it, then."

"Wait! What if there are more of them?"

She never had an opportunity to reply. As soon as she was within three feet of the doors, they slid aside once more. Automatically, she brought her phaser up in defense, rolling to the side again. She hit the ground, but kept her eyes and her weapon trained on the person coming through the door.

That person brought both of his hands up and called out, "Stand down!" It was Whitaker, his own phaser at the ready after seeing her threaten him, though inadvertent as the action was. "Jesus, have you lost your mind?"

The Doctor indicated toward the bodies, "Under the circumstances, I hope you can forgive her jumpiness, Senior Chief."

McComas drew herself up from the ground, apologizing for her actions, "Sorry about that."

"It's all right," he said, after getting a good look at the Jem'Hadar. "Have you tried contacting the bridge?"

Odessa spoke up first, "The communications system isn't responding to my commands." She walked over to the other two, keeping her phaser in her hand. Her heart was already beating rapidly; she had no intention of dropping her guard any more.

Whitaker reached down for the rifles that the Jem'Hadar carried into sickbay, and handed one to Odessa. He offered the other to the Doctor, who refused it.

"I'm a doctor. I swore an oath to do no harm."

"Fine," he said. "Can I count on you to prevent any more of these uglies from accessing sickbay? We might be sending you some wounded."

The Doctor seemed to think about that, "I can seal the room, but for that I require primary power online."

The senior chief guided the petty officer toward the crawlway access panel very near the open panel that Odessa was preparing to work on. He swung open the door and allowed her to go first. "Fair enough. We'll try to accommodate you, Doc. Try not to let these sons of bitches push you around." Once she was through, he dove into the crawlway after her.

The PMH activated his tangibility subroutine and used his suddenly solid hand to close the door behind them.

The door chimed for the third time, but it was the first time she had heard it. The audible chirping noise penetrated a dream that she already forgot by the time she was on her feet. Ken had told her he would wake her once the engineering report had been made, and as always, he was quite punctual. Actually, she thought to herself as she noticed the time, he was early. That could only mean one of two things, good news or bad news. She reached over to her uniform jacket to put it on before the door chimed a fourth time, allowing it to hang freely rather than zipping it up in front. Her phaser dangled from its holster, which was attached to the lower part of her tunic. Emoni opened the door.

Ken noticed that she looked as though she had woken up. His concern was the fact that it took her four chimes before she answered the door. Usually she was a light sleeper, but it seemed lately that she had not been getting enough sleep. He felt a little guilty about waking her for something that he could easily handle himself, but her orders were very clear on the subject. As he walked into her the living area of her stateroom, he said with an indifferent tone, "Sorry. Harry says we can move, now, but he doesn't recommend it. He wants two more hours to complete some more repairs."

As the doors slid closed behind Ken, Emoni smiled as she envisioned the conversation between the acting chief engineer and the acting executive officer, "I'll wager you told him that you're going to recommend that we leave immediately."

"With all due respect, sir," he said. "Hell, yes. We've been here long enough."

The lights dimmed suddenly. Emoni had her mouth open as she was about to reply, but instead she looked up at the lights as though the reason were inscribed upon them. "Computer, restore illumination."

"Unable to comply," replied the computer. "Primary power is offline."

Lieutenant Ushiyama shot Commander Lau a look of warning, "They are doing some quick repairs to the primary grid, but the secondaries should've come online pretty quickly."

It was agreed then, something was wrong. The captain fastened the bottom of her jacket and zipped it up to the top. Tapping her communicator, she got a hold of the bridge. Or at least, she tried to.

Ken did the same, seeing Emoni's failure to contact anyone. "Ushiyama to Bridge."

She darted a glance at him in annoyance, as he repeated her action in futility. "It's probably just a down power node."

He was not as dismissive, "What if it's not?"

"Good point," she said, looking down at her type two phaser. "Heavy stun, and be prepared for anything."

The lieutenant put his hand upon her shoulder, to prevent her from being the first to leave her quarters. He touched the door control on the bulkhead to the right, and when it slid open, he poked his head out to make sure there were no ambushers lying in wait. The corridor was too dark for him to truly see anything, but he seemed to be satisfied that it was clear. With a gesture to her, he led the way down the corridor, noticing that it was unusually devoid of anyone, including the *Dallas'* crew compliment.

Once they left the section that her quarters were in, the lighting appeared in the next section, confirming Emoni's supposition that the power node in her section of the deck had indeed been faulty. Holstering her phaser, she smirked at him for being so cautious, and entered the turbolift ahead of him and called out their destination of the main bridge.

When they arrived at the main bridge, Emoni's position within the turbolift did not give her enough time to see the main bridge when the doors parted. Ken slammed into her from her left side and pushed her against the turbolift wall. She got a yelp of surprise out, and angry before she realized that blue-white bolts of energy had discolored the turbolift wall in front of her, and her quick-acting executive officer had already ordered the turbolift to auxiliary control.

Ken's view of the devastation on the main bridge was unforgettable. The third shift personnel were all dead, from what he could see. They ripped apart the officer of the deck, Ensign Nystrom, along with the other four members of the bridge crew. From what he could determine, at the time that the lift doors opened, two of them were making attempts to gain access to the ship's computers. Nystrom, he guessed, must have locked down control of the ship as soon as he saw the bridge was taken.

"The Jem'Hadar have taken the bridge," he informed Emoni of the obvious, checking his phaser charge and despite her order earlier to set it to heavy stun, his rage forced his weapon to full. "I recommend you localize command function, sir." There was no longer any more time for anything other than duty.

It was his best recommendation, and she took it with a nod. Tapping her communicator to open up a communications link, she addressed the main computer directly. "Computer, sound intruder alert. All orders regarding command function are only to be accepted from auxiliary control. Authorization: Lau-alpha-one-one-three-zero." She had effectively disabled the main bridge, or any other location aboard the ship,

from accessing any command that would alter the ship's state. Powering up the warp core, changing course, activating the weapons systems, any order would be refused unless the order originated from auxiliary control.

Shortly after the public address system called the attention of the ship's security teams, the computer replied, "Orders acknowledged."

The turbolift doors opened out onto deck five within seconds. Across the corridor was the auxiliary control room, from where all of the bridge functions were duplicated in situations exactly as a hostile boarding. To prevent unauthorized access, entry into the control room was restricted to members of the senior staff. From inside, the captain and first officer would be able to conduct ship's business.

"First things first, we need to get the hell out of here," Emoni said, taking the helm. She motioned for Ken to take the operations position. "Status of the warp core?"

He had barely logged himself into the console when she asked. Taking a moment to redirect his reading on the engineering systems, he reported, "According to this, we can initiate the startup sequence at any time."

"Do it. Raise shields. Bring the lateral sensor array online and let's see if we have any long-range company." Her cursory check of the short-range scans showed that they appeared to be alone. But where had these Jem'Hadar come from?

"Shields online. Seventy-three percent fore, fifty-six percent aft," reported Ken.

Emoni looked at him, "More than enough to stop any transporters from setting more Jem'Hadar on the deck."

Whitaker and McComas made their entry into the room not long after, both carrying the rifles they had taken from the fallen Jem'Hadar in sickbay. The senior chief was the first to report, "We just got out of a firefight on deck eight. They're trying to take the impulse deck. I've got Rabbitt and a few others defending main engineering." He tossed the third rifle he had been carrying to Ken, who took it and holstered his phaser to let the rifle strap hang over his shoulder.

Ken nodded to him, "Harry, I've already started up the warp core. We've got to get out of here."

"No shit, Lieutenant," he said as he placed himself before the engineering station and engaged the link to the warp core. "Three minutes until we have warp speed available."

Captain Lau pointed Odessa toward the helm as she took the command station in the center of the room. "What have we got on long-range sensors?"

"Scanning," replied Ushiyama. "I'm not picking up anything, sir."

Emoni looked toward Harry, "I want to release anesthezine on every deck."

"Sir, we're not sure if the Jem'Hadar are affected by anesthezine. We'd be putting our own people at risk," cautioned Ken.

Emoni hesitated after hearing his warning. That much was for certain, though the information gathered on the Jem'Hadar was limited, it was never fully understood what weaknesses they had. If she did use anesthezine, it would certainly put her own crew to sleep, and if it failed to bring down the Jem'Hadar, then she would be sending her crew to their deaths. With their enemies down, they would brutally murder them without hesitation or sense of fair play. They would have to fight them hand-to-hand. "Belay my last. Get a hold of Lieutenant Kirk, and tell him to coordinate his teams to defend key positions. Sound general quarters, and tell all personnel who have not already reported to their duty station to remain in their quarters and to arm themselves."

Whitaker called from his station, "Warp core online now, sir."

"Odessa, take us away from the field at full impulse power," ordered Lau. "Once we're clear, resume course and take us away from the system at warp nine."

The helm answered her commands, and with the computer's help, she brought Phendara's previous course onto her screen. "Uh, system departure in two minutes, we can engage the warp engines once we clear the gravity well."

"Very good," Emoni looked at the command display before her. It was one of the nicer things about commanding the ship from the control center. A full computer station that allowed her to watch the ship's status change in real time replaced the captain's chair. Twin inputs on the arms of the chair on the bridge could not compare to the ability to configure a large display with the vital information she needed to make decisions. "Ken, I need you to put a call to Jonas. We need to nail a lid on these intruders."

The call to all security teams to repel boarders came only seconds after he had finished welding that hull patch. Sharing a strange look of surprise with Phendara, Jonas believed it to be a drill when he heard several of those intruders storming down the corridor, approaching their position. In either case, as the tactical officer, he had a duty to perform. With his phaser drawn, he was ready to face whomever it was that felt the need to come sprinting.

"Identify yourselves!" called Kirk, trying to search and watching the shadows as they advanced around the bend.

A female voice replied back, "It's Corporal Quinn and Private Watters." They came into view, both of them wearing phasers on their belts and carrying Jem'Hadar rifles.

Phendara eyed them both while also eyeing their rifles and putting the situation together. "We have to get to the bridge, immediately."

"No can do," said Quinn, a little winded. She was a tall woman, with dark red hair and a muscular build. Private Watters was as equally muscular, but with blonde hair and average height. Both of them were members of the Marine contingent that the *Dallas* carried, led by

Gunnery Sergeant MacDougal. "They've taken the bridge. The CP has been set up in cargo bay four, and the captain's transferred command to auxiliary control." The marine command post or CP, Jonas knew, was only enabled when hostile forces had compromised at least fifty percent of the ship.

Kirk acted quickly, "Corporal, continue on your assignment. Phendara and I will try and reach auxiliary control. Good luck." The full realization of the situation invigorated him, he felt the stress of the invasion and he felt as if he had just been awoken from a slumber. It was a chance to fight back, to make a difference, to do something other than run. "Armory, deck seven," he ordered, once they entered the turbolift.

The call from Ushiyama came through, telling Kirk what he already knew, and what his duty was. He informed the executive officer that he and Phendara were together, and that they were going to do what they could to comply with the captain's orders.

Phendara took up a position against the right side of the lift door, while Jonas moved to the left. With their phasers pointed up toward the deck, they were ready for anything to come through that door once they arrived.

The doors parted, and a barrage of phaser and rifle fire crisscrossed the corridor in front of them. Starfleet personnel had set up a barricade using empty cargo containers brought in from the lower decks. Marines and regular fleet security were holding the line against the Jem'Hadar. Kirk shouted over the noise, "Go ahead! I'll cover you!"

She moved out of the doorway, firing her phaser wildly in an attempt to force them to take cover. Kirk whipped around with his arm and began to fire as well, striking one of the soldiers in the chest. "Move! Move!" he shouted, not wanting her to take the time to aim let alone fire her phaser.

Phendara tucked in her arms and rolled after leaping behind the barricade. The doors to the turbolift had opened in the middle of the fight, with the Starfleet side only a few feet to the left. The Jem'Hadar took position over twenty feet to the right.

Satisfied that she made it through safely, he ran from the doors, firing in the same fashion as she had. Once he reached the barricade, he leapt over containers. The storm of rifle fire seemed to increase as he did so, and after rolling over, he lost control over his movement and spun into the bulkhead, clutching at his arm. One of the rifle hits had found its mark on the upper part of his right arm, smoldering from the point at where his uniform and flesh melted away.

Kirk cried out in tremendous pain, dropping the phaser to the floor. He was far enough away from the fight to not worry about stray fire hitting him.

Crawling over to him, Phendara took a look at the hit he took, and began to drag him by his good arm down the corridor and out of the range of fire completely. She was strong, he noticed, much stronger than her physique let on. Once clear, she continued to drag him the other four feet into the ship's armory. The two security crewman defending that station helped her get him onto one of the empty desks, as she grabbed the field medical kit from its housing and opened it to begin treating Jonas' wound.

"Hold still," she asked him. Outside, the fight continued, as the sound of weapons fire penetrated the bulkheads. The medical tricorder told her it was a third degree plasma burn, and that the fibers of the uniform had fused itself to his skin. The most she could do for him was to sedate him, but she knew he would not want to be asleep when the fight was so close. Phendara looked to the other two crewmembers, "He needs to be moved to sickbay. Can we do a site-to-site transport?"

The shorter of the two wore the rank of a senior crewman, the equivalent of a marine sergeant. "Transporters are offline right now. Last I heard, they just did the warp core startup sequence. We're leaving the system."

Phendara asked the question everyone else appeared to be asking, "Where did the Jem'Hadar come from?"

"We don't know," came the reply.

Jonas grimaced, "I'm all right. You need to get to aux control, Phendara. They're going to need you at the helm."

"As you wish." She pushed away from him and turned to the other two, "Please look after him."

"Now exiting the system," reported Odessa from the helm position. She looked down at her display and ran a navigational scan of the sector. "I'm not reading any further stellar bodies between here and our destination, sir. Estimated time of arrival to Federation territory is just under two hours."

Emoni had already done that from her station, pulling the latest sensor reports from every type of scan. "Thank you, Odessa. Harry, how're we doing on the warp drive?"

"Holding up just fine, Skipper."

"Good to hear. What's the word from the fight in the halls, Ken?"

Ken's security report flashed on the operations display again, updating. "Looks like we have them on the run. Contained on decks five through seven, but they still have control over decks one, three, and eight."

"How many of our personnel are on the decks that the Jem'Hadar have control over?"

"Showing fifteen on deck three, and thirty-one on deck eight," replied Ken.

Emoni looked over at Ken, "The Bridge is under their control, still?"

"Technically, yes."

She duplicated that information on her screen, showing the decks that were in contest with more detail. "Ken, can you run a forcefield pattern to keep them contained to certain sections?"

Ushiyama looked at his screen again, trying to anticipate her order by paying attention to the locations of the intruders. The difficult part was that the internal sensors tended to not get a good lock on the Jem'Hadar. "I can try, but I can't guarantee I'll get them all."

"Your best shot will be good enough," Emoni did not move her eyes from the display in front of her. "Let's also erect forcefields around the critical areas: Main Bridge, Main Engineering, Impulse Deck, Armory, Computer Core, and Sickbay. That'll prevent them from getting in, and keep the ones on the bridge contained. Once you get that done, flood the Bridge with anesthezine. I want to run a little experiment."

Whitaker chuckled, off to her right. "If you want to call it that."

Ken stifled a laugh, "Running a forcefield pattern, now. I think I have roughly eighty-seven percent of the intruders contained behind the containment fields. We're showing that they're trying to shoot their way through, but the fields are holding." He reconfigured his display to bring the Bridge's life support systems controls. "Standing by to release anesthezine, sir."

Emoni shared in the humor of the statement, inadvertent as it was. "Five parts per million, Ken. Monitor their lifesigns, and let's see if we can take back my bridge."

"Aye, sir. Releasing anesthezine," replied the executive officer.

Emoni realized the danger in having a screen like this in front of her. There was so much information she wished to see; it was impossible to devote enough time to it all. Grateful for her officers, she leaned back in the chair and kept her eye on the readout. There was no change. "Increase to six parts per million."

The order was obeyed, and still the Jem'Hadar did not take much notice to the increase in airborne anesthetic gas. She shared a look with Ken, silently acknowledging that his earlier warning had been dead on the money. Emoni took a deep breath, asking quietly, "Are we still working on the transporters?"

Harry Whitaker explained, "Transporters are still offline right now. They were not high on the priority list, sir."

"Understood. We're just going to have to do this the hard way." Emoni entered in commands on her screen and called up the engineering status. "If we can't put them to sleep, then we're going to have to use a little more force. They can breathe anything, but I'll bet they can't breathe vacuum. Disable deck one life support."

The senior chief had been expecting that command, because it was something he would do, had he been in command. "Aye, sir. Overriding each independent safety system will take about five minutes." There were seven in total, to prevent a single life support system from failing, the other six would be on stand by to compensate for the failure. Since the systems were automatic by design, the acting chief engineer needed to switch each safety to manual; thereby preventing it from engaging once the primary was taken offline. Eventually, the atmosphere would bleed out into space and with any luck, the Jem'Hadar would lose consciousness and die.

Off of that order and acknowledgement, the door chime sounded. Each person within the control center reached for their weapon and pointed it at the door. Lau rose from her seat and called through the door, "Identify yourself."

"It's Lieutenant Phendara, sir," replied the person on the other side.

No one moved; though everyone allowed his or her eyes to move toward the captain, ready to carry out her order. She appreciated their caution and shared in it. The Jem'Hadar would not be above using a hostage to gain entry, or forcing an officer to do something against their sense of duty. "Come in."

Phendara moved into the room, slowly, looking at each of the pointed weapons in her direction. Raising both of her hands, she moved into the command center slowly. "I'm alone," was all she said.

Not a single officer dropped their aim from the door, until it slid closed behind her. Emoni was the first to put her weapon back into her holster. "Good to see you, Lieutenant. Take the helm, please."

"Aye, sir," said the Andorian. She smiled at Odessa as the position was vacated, and reported that the Jem'Hadar were being contained on deck seven by a contingent of marines and security personnel, as well as the status of Lieutenant Kirk. The captain responded by bringing the helmsman up to speed on the situation. Phendara nodded her understanding, and kept her eyes on the helm sensors. It was then that everyone on the bridge had something to worry about.

Ken was the first to report it, "Three Jem'Hadar attack cruises, advancing on our position at high warp. They will intercept us in fifteen minutes."

"Sound battlestations." The klaxon began to wail once more, alerting all decks to prepare for battle. "Advise internal security to keep their teams in place, until the intruders have been neutralized. Where did those cruisers come from?" Emoni asked.

"Based on their trajectory, I would say that they came from the same place we did," reported Ken, his tone suggesting that he did not quite believe what he was seeing. "How did we miss three cruisers on short range sensors?" he asked, nonplussed.

"How did we miss a few platoons of Jem'Hadar soldiers boarding my ship?" asked Emoni, though her tone suggested that she was indifferent to the idea of cruisers hiding in an asteroid the same way they did. "Phendara, time to pull out all the stops and introduce some fancy flying to the Dominion. Ken, keep trying to raise the *Agamemnon*. I know she's out here somewhere."

As Phendara acknowledge the order to evade, Ken replied, "Even if we do raise them, unless they're already en route, they won't be able to get

here for another hour."

Whitaker completed his task. "Skipper, I've got the systems overridden. Life support is offline on the Bridge. I even killed the audio alerts," he said with a smug tone.

The captain maintained her gaze upon the command display, but she praised Whitaker, "Good work." Ken's point was mulled over, "If I know Hank Grayum the way I do, Ken, he would not let a couple of hours stop him from charging across that border to my rescue." She smiled wistfully at that thought.

Ken did not like the way she talked about him, as though they had a history. He felt a knot in his stomach form, and his demeanor changed as the jealousy washed over him like a tide crashing upon the shores of a beach. "If you say so, sir," he barely hid his annoyance.

If Emoni noticed, she did not let on. Instead, she began to examine the Bridge's atmosphere and noticed, accompanied by Whitaker's report, that the Bridge was a vacuum. "I need a lifesign scan on the Bridge."

"I think that did it, Captain." Ken did another scan, to make sure that he was not mistaken. "Not reading any lifesigns on the Bridge at this time."

"Long-range sensors detecting another ship, approaching our position," reported Phendara. "I can't make it if it's a friendly or not."

Captain Lau nodded, "It might be the *Agamemnon*."

"It might be another Jem'Hadar ship," replied Ken.

Whitaker joined in with a shrug, "Or a Cardassian battlecruiser."

Emoni shook her head, thinking out loud, "No, Odessa said there were no stellar bodies between here and the border. Unless it's a stray patrol, which is pretty unlikely, I doubt it would be a Dominion vessel. How far away are our friends behind us?"

Phendara quickly scanned her information, "Every time they increase speed, they gain about thirty to forty seconds on us. They will be within weapons range in roughly seven minutes, give or take a minute." She tried to pull up another scan of the sector, but she could not make out anything more than the fact that a warp field was approaching their position. "I have an ETA on the inbound ship ahead of us. They will intercept at twenty-two minutes. They're at warp nine-point-five."

Lau asked, "Speed of our friends?"

"Warp nine-point-one-five-five."

"Harry, how long can we maintain warp nine-point-two?"

"Twelve hours before we have to shut her down again, Skipper. More than enough time."

"Good, because I want to go to nine-point-six."

Whitaker turned his head in alarm, "You're pushing the engines beyond their design limits, sir."

"Do I have a choice?" Emoni replied. "We have to outrun them and get to Federation territory."

Shaking his head away from her and at his station, Whitaker began to enter information into the computer and ran simulations to better understand what might happen if they were to increase speed dramatically. Every time, the ship fell out of warp less than an hour away from the border. There had to be a compromise between what the captain wanted and what the ship could do, in order to get where they needed to go. "Instead of jumping to nine-point-six, what we can do is try to jog our way toward the border."

This brought a question to her eyes as she stared at the senior chief. "Jog? What exactly do you mean?"

"We increase speed to nine-point-three-five for two minutes, and then decrease speed to nine-point-two," he began to explain. "The coil heat can be managed a little easier if we give them a chance to catch their breath. Heat doesn't begin to accumulate until we cross warp nine-point-two."

Emoni seemed to understand, "That's... interesting. Let's put theory into practice. Phendara, increase speed to warp nine-point-two, and then take your cues from the senior chief as far as your speed is concerned."

"Aye, sir."

Following Phendara's departure from the armory reception area, and in spite of his pain threshold, Jonas had managed to prop himself up with the assistance of the two guards. He ordered them to stand him up and then allowed him to assist the team protecting the ship's armory. Within a few minutes, the marine medic gave him enough painkillers to not impair his ability to fight, but to dull the pain of his shoulder enough. He could not bear to lie on the desk while his fellow officers and crew were fighting to defend their ship in the corridor. The medic further stated that he was a lucky man, as the plasma wound cauterized itself, and prevented any further blood loss.

The scene in the corridor was not much different than it was earlier. Members of the armory squad had moved behind the frontline team firing from behind the cargo containers setting up concussion grenades to throw at the Jem'Hadar. The hesitation to use those grenades was clear. Using grenades in such an environment as a starship corridor was akin to setting off a firecracker within a metal tube or a glass jar. The force of the explosion would be contained.

Alongside the hand phasers were the large compression rifles that the marines carried, far more meaner looking than the type-two phasers that most of the fleet personnel had holstered on their belt. The requirement to have all personnel armed with the phaser was a part of the wartime policies enacted by Starfleet Command, specifically for situations where the ship's crew would have to defend against boarders. The foresight and wisdom of such a policy was one that Jonas felt drew the line between life and death in a fight like this one.

Soon after he joined the fight, a series of forcefields seemed to appear around the Jem'Hadar, trapping them behind it. They kept firing, trying to bring the forcefield down, but to no avail. They were effectively contained on deck seven, though he had to wonder about the other decks. The marines, satisfied that the fight had been ended, relaxed slightly by lowering their arms but keeping them at the ready in the case of the Jem'Hadar breaching the forcefields.

Jonas took the opportunity to lean against the bulkhead and issue orders to start switching out the teams holding the line with a fresh group of security personnel, getting in touch with the gunnery sergeant issuing orders from the command post in the ship's fourth cargo bay. "Kirk to MacDougal. What's your status?"

"Looks like the captain managed to get them all contained. We seem to be all right for the time being, none of the critical areas were compromised," said the sergeant, in her gruff tones.

Kirk nodded, "Good to hear. I need you to send me another team to relieve the team I've got."

"Right away, Lieutenant." She paused, hearing the pain in his voice, "I heard you took a hit. Are you all right?"

"Been better. Son of a bitch got me in the arm. Your medic did a good job, but he's being a bit of a nag in telling me that I need to get to sickbay," Kirk said through clenched teeth, as the painkiller began to wear off. His stance staggered and the pain forced him to land on the deck, very nearly sprawling out. "It's a little painful, nothing to worry about."

"Sir, if he says you need to get to sickbay, I would heed his advice. I'll send up two of my people to escort you."

"Gunny," Kirk said, "That's not necessary. Keep your men where they're needed the most. These forcefields won't hold forever."

"With all due respect, Lieutenant, I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that. I'm sending you some help. If two of them happen to drag you kicking and screaming to sickbay, then so be it. MacDougal, out."

Under normal circumstances, Jonas would have given her a piece of his mind. However, all he could do was smirk to himself and contain his laughter in spite of it all. She was just being a good NCO, supporting her lieutenant in the best way she knew how. Pushing himself back onto his knees, he leaned back and rested his good shoulder against the bulkhead, heaving deep breaths as the pain returned in full force. Any movement involving his shoulders amplified that pain, until he could no longer fight back the tears.

Dallas slid from side to side, as the weapons fire made unsuccessful attempts to hit their target. Lieutenant Phendara's pre-programmed evasive maneuvers were up to the task. The Jem'Hadar cruisers had come into firing range despite the jogging technique imposed by Senior Chief Whitaker, though putting distance between the two ships was not the only option available to Captain Lau.

"That's some pretty good flying, Phendara. They haven't landed a hit, yet," reported Ken. Though the operations officer of the ship, he had to hand off his primary responsibilities to Petty Officer McComas, as he operated the tactical systems in Kirk's absence. "The shield generator repairs appear to have been completed. We have full shielding back."

Emoni nodded at the good news. With the shields at full, the cruisers striking the ship would not be as detrimental as it would have been. "Good work, Lieutenant, Senior Chief. Have we gotten any closer to identifying the ship approaching ahead of us?"

Odessa pulled the information about that ship accumulated so far on her screen. "I'm trying to see if I can match the warp field signature to a Federation or other known signature. Stand by." She had an idea. The signature itself was too faint to get a clear indication, but as with any kind of signature, the local space around the subspace field would have a radiation signature as well. "It's very faint, but some of the background radiation is similar to three known types. Federation, Cardassian, and Klingon."

Lau smirked at Odessa, "Two of those I'd be very happy to see. The other might not like us hanging around in their space. Keep on it, please."

"Wild horses couldn't drag me away from here, Captain," the petty officer replied.

Whitaker turned his attention away from the engineering console long enough to give Odessa a very encouraging smile. She blushed, noticing him, and quickly continued her scans.

"Good to hear it," Emoni said. "Can you try and raise the *Agamemnon* for me, Ken?"

Ken accepted and acknowledged the order, but not before the ship lurched from beneath him as the weapons fire from one of the Jem'Hadar cruisers impacted against the aft shields. "Shields holding at ninety-eight percent, Captain."

Phendara shook her head at her console, "They're anticipating my flight patterns, sir. Must be a smart Vorta on board."

"Same choices as before, Captain," Ken warned. "Stand and fight, or duck and hide."

She shot him a dirty look for a moment before she realized that he was simply trying to provide her with options. "Be a little more specific about either. If we stand and fight, what do you suggest we do?"

Another hit landed upon the shields, breaking his train of thought, though he reported, "Aft shields now at ninety-six percent. My suggestion is to deploy quantum torpedoes as we did with the other ship yesterday, and then instead of taking the shockwave on the aft shields, we punch it up to warp nine-point-six to clear the radius."

"Same song, different verse?" quipped Emoni. She needed to be sure, "Phendara, get ready to open her all the way up. Ken, target the lead vessel and coordinate your fire with the helm."

Ken replied in the affirmative, readying the torpedoes the same way Jonas had more than twenty-one hours earlier. Since his torpedoes needed to fire as part of a timed sequence to allow the ship to speed up and avoid being hit by the blast range. "Torpedoes loaded and the dispersal pattern has been programmed into the targeting computer. Coordinating my fire with the helm. Synchronization of the firing program will commence in ten seconds," he nodded to Phendara's direction to indicate to Emoni that the information would appear on her screen right then.

The numbered sequence appeared on Phendara's display, and she entered in the speed program within two seconds of the order. She was ready to engage the warp engines beyond the emergency limitations imposed by the spaceframe of the Miranda-class starship. But if Senior Chief Whitaker had no problem with the order, she had no problem with pushing *Dallas* above and beyond her design limits. It was one of the reasons she joined Starfleet in the first place. She kept her eye on the display, "Sequence acknowledged and I am synchronizing now." Five seconds were left on the counter, Phendara felt her adrenaline rising as the moment approached.

Lieutenant Ushiyama did nothing as the final second ticked away. The computer took the firing command in delay and engaged the targeting sensors to lock onto the lead Jem'Hadar cruiser. "Torpedoes away," he reported.

"Aft view," ordered Emoni.

On the screen, just as before, a full salvo of torpedoes appeared. Emoni's fingers tensed upon the computer station in front of her as the helm already increased speed. As expected, the ship began to vibrate slightly as the spaceframe was pushed into extreme acceleration.

Warp nine-point-two was one thousand six hundred forty-two times the speed of light. The increase to warp nine-point-six accelerated the ship to two thousand forty-one times the speed of light, thereby putting more distance between the small flotilla of Jem'Hadar cruisers and *Dallas*. The torpedoes, for all intents and purposes, drifted aft of the ship at virtually no speed, having been deployed and not launched at a warp speed. The ship needed enough time to speed ahead of the torpedoes, enough time to get away.

The ship did not lurch at all when the torpedoes detonated; the radius was cleared well before then. The three Jem'Hadar ships, having been in close pursuit formation, flew into the radius believe that the hit would impact upon the shields and the generators would absorb the energy output. Instead, as before, the interference pattern caused the ships to alter their trajectory to avoid collision. Two of the ships, the lead and its ally to the left, collided. The top of the lead ship impacted against the bottom of the left, at high warp. Visible damage could be seen from the viewscreen, causing Whitaker to whoop from his station.

"Yes!" he shouted. "Good shooting, Lieutenant."

Emoni was all grins, "I couldn't have said it better myself."

The two ships that collided fell out of warp as the damage sustained also destabilized their respective warp fields. Scoring and plasma discharge appeared in a long steam from the vents, as though space were a body of water, and the vented plasma appeared like a wake.

The celebrations were cut short, as the third ship appeared to have only caught the outskirts of the interference reacquired *Dallas* and began to open fire. "They're accelerating to warp nine-point-nine, Captain. They will overtake us in less than forty-five seconds," reported Phendara.

Ken keyed in another scan of the remaining ship, noticing that its forward sensor array had been taken offline shortly before the torpedoes detonated. It did not take any longer for him to make the correct conclusion, "Captain, that ship is the same one we gave the slip to yesterday. He wasn't fooled by our little fireworks display."

"That's okay, Ken. That's not the only trick I know," Emoni assured him.

The aft shields underwent a barrage of sustained energy fire and projectile fire; the deck reflected that increase in firepower. Odessa immediately reported, "Shield generators are beginning to take too much of the energy feedback from the attack. Aft generator efficiency is suffering." She was beginning to feel like a part of the bulkheads, having nothing to contribute until then.

"Confirmed, aft shields down to seventy-one percent," reported Ken, once his hands were free from bracing himself against the attack. "Looks like they've decided to stop fooling around, sir."

Multiple hits from the Jem'Hadar impacted on the aft shields, lighting up the energy barrier in a splash of blue and white colors. Emoni decided that were it not for the violent nature of the display, she would consider it a pretty sight. "Phendara, keep them off our tails long enough for us to whip around. We're going to bare our teeth and take a chance right here." It was either let them continue to wear down their defenses in accordance with her orders, or stand and fight in direct violation of them. Either way, the ship and the information it carried were in jeopardy. At least she would be able to do something about it by pursuing the latter option. "Ken, target the attack cruiser's propulsion and weapon systems. Prepare to fire when we bring her about."

Ushiyama acknowledged the command with a quick couple of words, and proceeded to establish his target locks. "I have a weapons lock, Captain."

"Phendara, when I give the word, I want you to reposition the ship down and under the Jem'Hadar. Give Ken a nice optimal firing position to open up with the forward arrays and tubes," Emoni said.

Moving her fingers over the helm controls, she prepared to initiate that maneuver, "Aye, sir. We'll slow to warp nine-point-four. That should give Mister Ushiyama more than enough time to do what he needs to do."

"This has to happen quickly or else they'll evade if they see us dropping out of warp," warned the captain, her tone betraying a little bit of the excited anticipation she was feeling.

Phendara knew that, but she was not going to express her irritation at her captain's statement of the obvious, instead replying as she was expected to, "Aye, sir. Standing by."

Emoni looked over to Ken, just before turning her head back to the viewscreen and ordering, "Now."

On the main viewscreen, the scene appeared to pan like a camera, showing the keel of the Jem'Hadar vessel as Ken carried out his orders. A series of phaser and quantum torpedo hits scored against the shields of the attack craft, without a single miss. It appeared to be a furious storm of energy discharges, in rapid succession, just as the enemy cruiser attacked *Dallas*. Within seconds of the initial hit, it was clear that the concentrated firepower penetrated the shields, damaging the hull. As the final set of attacking phaser beams lanced out at the Jem'Hadar, the ship began to pull away and slow down as a trail of green floated behind it.

Odessa ran a damage analysis of the enemy vessel, being the first to report her results, "Captain, I'm reading massive damage to their power distribution network, as well as damage to their subspace propulsion systems. They're dropping out of warp and venting drive plasma to prevent a breach." She said it with a cheeriness expected of a successful tactical maneuver. "They're transmitting a distress call, sir."

The captain smiled widely, "Outstanding work, Lieutenants. Now, let's go home."

Phendara carried out her orders, and within thirty seconds, *Dallas*' bow was pointed toward Federation territory once again. "We are back on course, at warp nine-point-four."

"Captain, the ship ahead of us is signaling. The transponder identifies it as the *Agamemnon*," reported Odessa with a smile.

Whitaker harrumphed, "Rotten timing."

"On screen, Odessa," said Emoni, ignoring the senior chief.

The viewscreen blinked and showed the aging face of Commander Henry Grayum, the captain of the Apollo-class light cruiser USS *Agamemnon*. "This is Hank Grayum calling *Dallas*. Come in, *Dallas*."

Commander Lau smiled into the visual pickups of the main viewscreen, "Look what the cat dragged in."

Hank chuckled briefly, before putting on an air of mock anger, "How dare you! After we come all this way to rescue you?"

"You're a day late and a dollar short, Hank. We dispatched our pursuers with no help from you," she accused, pointing a finger at the older Starfleet officer. Emoni was not truly upset, in fact she was a few moments away from losing her composure and collapsing in laughter. The entire ordeal, the stress, and the resulting conversation across space were beginning to express themselves through her sense of humor.

Captain Grayum's image smirked, "Then I guess you won't be needing an escort back to Federation space."

"Oh, well, if you feel it's necessary..." she trailed off, waving at the screen with her hand.

The rest of the crew within the auxiliary control center wore expressions of amusement on their faces, with the exception of Ken. If anything, his expression clearly stated that he was far from amused as he could possibly get. The rapport between Captain Grayum and the woman he had been intimate with began to unnerve him. He felt threatened by this man, despite his age, and the casual nature by which he addressed her. Insult her, will he? Make light of their situation, will he? Not while he has anything to say about it. But then, he could not bring himself to say a word to interrupt their conversation. It was not his place to lay claim to her, or her relationships to others. He tried desperately to win over his emotions with the cold logic of reality, and continued to listen to the exchange.

Hank rose from his seat and performed a sweeping bow for the viewscreen, "It would be my extreme pleasure and privilege, milady." He winked at her before addressing his helmsman, "Ed, take up formation with the *Dallas*. We'll escort her to Starbase 375, where I'm sure Billy Ross will be more than happy to see them."

"More than happy," she repeated. "I doubt that, but that's a conversation for later. What say we get together for dinner tonight, and discuss old times?" Emoni said in a rather sultry tone, or was it merely Ken's imagination?

Regardless, he felt his cheeks grow warm, and the goosebumps form across his skin. His rage was tightly contained underneath his suddenly icy demeanor. It was all he could do to maintain his composure when he heard the response from the viewscreen.

"It's a date. I'll bring the wine," Hank winked again. "*Agamemnon*, out."

The main viewscreen returned to show that the vessel approaching was a Federation design. By the time it circled around to take up formation at high warp, Ken's anger had subsided, and all that was left was the pain of knowing that in spite of all of the time they had spent in her quarters, sharing meals, exchanging ideas, becoming intimate in both mind and body, meant nothing to her. In his mind, he felt as though she had reached into his chest and removed his heart with little regard for him. It was then that he wanted so much to do nothing more than to run from the auxiliary control center and retire to his quarters. His quarters, which had not seen his presence but for a change of clothes and a quick shower every day over the last three months, would see him for a good long while, he had decided. At the earliest opportunity, Lieutenant Kenneth Ushiyama would seek out Admiral William Ross, and request a transfer from *Dallas*.

Emoni regarded Ken curiously as she ended the communication with Hank Grayum and turned around to face him, noticing that he had suddenly become very quiet and very still. She thought she had witnessed his hands trembling against the tactical console, but decided that perhaps it was her eyes playing tricks on her. Ken Ushiyama had been her rock through one of the toughest missions this crew had faced down since the Dominion war began over a year ago. Through all of the difficult times she endured on a personal level, he had been her friend and confidant. As an executive officer, she had never felt such trust and devotion from anyone, despite their intimacy. She saw the advantages to having an officer like Ken serving under her command, and she decided then and there that when she spoke with Admiral Ross, she would recommend him for promotion to lieutenant commander. Soon after, if the war let up, she might consider the future on a personal level with

the young man. Now was not the time for any of that, not when so much was at stake. She was sure that he understood that.

After all they had been through together with this crew and this ship, how could she imagine the next mission without him?

End Notes

And now, a word from the author...

This was actually the last story I wrote during that spread of time between June and August when I belted out four shorts. Seeing as how I wrote three male captains in a row, I needed to even the odds a little bit and feature a female captain. One of the suggestions I received from an alpha reader was to pair off the captain and XO. So I did. Then, I had to rewrite the whole thing because simply putting subtext into it didn't work right. It read like the relationship was an afterthought on my part, so I had to weave it in tighter to the core of the story.

So, *Dallas* became more about Ken and his feelings for Emoni, and the foreground event of the war became background to the relationship. I think it turned out better this way. Don't you?

Thanks for reading! Stay tuned for *Exeter*.

-- McCC

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