

Games in the Dark

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Summary

2251: How does an officer become a ship captain? Sometimes it's not about merits, but who you know ...

The silence was a welcome relief compared to the hustle and bustle of his office; as much as he loved his job, some days he wished he was at his cabin on the lake, concerned only with what bait to use for his fishing line and the weather. He scratched at his salt and pepper beard as he stared out the large viewport before him. Part of him wondered if any of the new ships being built would go on to do great things.

Part of him knew that some of them would be lost to the vacuum of space ... maybe abandoned. Maybe destroyed. Maybe with all hands or maybe just alone, in the dark.

He chuckled. "Alone in the dark, like me."

Almost on cue, the lounge doors opened and a fellow admiral arrived. His beard a stark white with his prim and proper uniform exacting in their appearance. The man sat down beside him and glanced out the viewport. "You've done great work, Enrique."

With a sigh, Admiral Enrique Solano faced his colleague. "Lucius." He picked up a PADD beside him and handed it over. "You have my recommendation ... but I still don't like it."

Admiral Lucius Reilly quickly read the PADD, nodded, and then set it down beside him. "No one likes these bureaucratic games. It's the nature of our position."

"I'm taking an officer who's worked years on this project and rescinding their command appointment. That doesn't feel right, and the two of us know that we'd *hate* whomever approved this, regardless of their reasons, were we in the same situation." Enrique leaned forward, his voice dropping an octave. "What the hell is going here?"

Lucius flashed one of his trademark smirks. "We're going to want an experienced captain for this mission. While Commander Purva is an excellent officer, she's never been a captain."

"And my recommendation to pull someone out of retirement is the *better* option?"

"It is," Lucius assured. "This is why anyone in the admiralty puts up with the red tape and stupid political games ... so we can affect the Federation on a larger scale." Lucius pointed out at all the ships outside the viewport, each in some state of construction. "You can easily assign Purva one of these next ships off the line."

Enrique felt a knot in his stomach. "If I were still a captain, I'd be furious at myself. This is the exact kind of overreach I saw when I was in the center chair."

"It's not overreach if we're doing our jobs," Lucius countered. "We both accepted the promotions to the admiralty because being in command of a starship was too limiting. We were only as effective as our vessel and only where we were assigned."

Enrique shook his head. "Maybe you took the promotion for that, but I took it because I was tired." He stared out at the ships and found himself envious — not a feeling he ever thought he'd have again for a starship captain. "I thought I could do some good here and I have." He regarded Lucius with a suspicious gaze. "But I don't know if this is part of that good. Especially because we're doing this outside normal channels."

Lucius gave him a pat on the back and stood, PADD in hand. "Normal channels would take too long and this mission is critical to the Federation. It may just look like a dinky rescue operation, but it's far greater than that."

"Is it because of your personal reasons that it's that important?" Enrique asked pointedly.

Lucius frowned. “As much as I would like to say this was some last, desperate attempt on my part to repair things ... no. Nor does it have anything to do with saving what remains of my family life. Everyone made their choices.” He stared out at the ships for a moment, then looked back at Enrique. “Including us.”

Lucius exited the lounge, leaving Enrique alone in the dark once more. He found himself staring at the unfinished ships, considering their future and his own.

Maybe it was time to really, truly, end his participation in all this.

But he never was much for quitting.

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