

Orpheus Descending

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1360) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1360>.

Rating: [General Audiences](#)
Archive Warning: [Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings](#)
Category: [Multi](#), [Other](#)
Fandom: [Expanded Universes \(General\)](#), [Star Trek: Deep Space Nine](#)
Character: [Daniella Reese](#), [T'Mur](#)
Additional Tags: [Adult Language](#)
Language: English
Stats: Published: 2024-02-16 Words: 7,633 Chapters: 1/1

Orpheus Descending

by [Courageous41986](#)

Summary

The beginning of the end of the Dominion War, through the eyes of the crew of the Steamrunner-class USS Orpheus



" Orpheus Descending "

Written By Alex Matthews

Produced by Sojournerverse Productions

=====

starring

Vicki McClure ----- **Captain Daniella Reese**

Andrew Hayden-Smith ----- **Commander Vre Ra-Kobathii**

Cobie Smulders ----- **Lt Commander T'Mur**

David Ames ----- **Lt. Commander Charles Cinaran**

Stephanie Beatriz ----- **Dr Bonita Mendes**

Manish Dayal ----- **Senior Chief Rajesh Chandra**

special appearance

=====

The cold darkness of space felt nothing.

It was a harsh mistress that had witnessed the births of galaxies, the deaths-throes of stars and the passing of eons while remaining wholly untouched by it all.

It mattered very little to the void that hundreds of people - innocents that had believed they were being carried away to safety - were dying as a Federation hospital ship was slowly and sadistically carved up by two beetle-like Jem'Hadar attack ships.

The *Olympic*-class starship's once pristine hull was now pockmarked and scarred by phased polaron beam impacts. The proud markings of its name and registry practically obliterated by antimatter discharges, fired into it by the *Chel Grett*-class Breen interceptor that hung nearby.

Atmosphere vented through the too-many-to-count breaches. Power gave out with the failure of overtaxed and fractured EPS conduits. A nacelle floated free, sheared off from its strut.

Space did not care about any of this.

But Captain Daniela Reese of the *Starship Orpheus* did.

"All ships, open fire, weapons free!"

It was with no small degree of satisfaction that Reese watched from the comfort of her command chair as quantum torpedoes shot from the *Steamrunner*-class starship's forward tubes to make short work of the shields of both Jem'Hadar ships. The phaser strikes that followed pierced their hulls as easily as a knife through butter, resulting in twin explosions as their warp cores ruptured, tearing them apart.

"Both Jem'Hadar vessels destroyed, Captain!" Reese didn't need to look over her shoulder behind her to see the victorious grin her Executive Officer would be sporting. Despite being Efrosian, Lt. Commander Vre Ra-Kobathii was not known for the usual big displays of enthusiastic emotion. The only exceptions to his general taciturn demeanor were in the heat of battle, which Reese could understand and appreciate.

"Excellent shooting, Commander," she offered, before focusing on more important matters. "Bring us in closer, Helm. But be ready for evasive if those Breen bastards try to take a shot at us."

"Acknowledged," calmly answered the Vulcan woman manning the flight control console at the front of the bridge, "Moving to within 50 kilometers."

Nominally Reese's Second Officer, Lt. Commander T'Mur was not an experienced combat pilot, had never taken any real training in the art of warfare, but she had learned by doing. Like the USS *Cassandra* and USS *Ariadne*, the two corvettes that comprised the rest of their squadron, the *Orpheus* only has a skeleton crew on board. This meant that many of the senior officers were forced into double duty.

They all had, in the darkest days of the Federation Alliance's war with the Dominion and their Cardassian and Breen cohorts. Days that may very well be over soon, one way or another, if the planned invasion of Cardassian went ahead.

But right now, all Reese cared about was finishing taking out the enemy right in front of her, and saving as many people as she could from the stricken USS *Avicenna*.

On her tactical display, Reese sneered as she watched the nimble *Sabre*-class vessels moving off to take on the now-retreating Breen vessel. *That's it, scurry away, you damned cowards.*

She couldn't help but flinch when she saw blue/silver energy burst forth from a central array to strike the much-smaller *Cassandra*. But aside from a momentary flux from their shield bubble, the *Sabre*-class starship continued returning fire. Reese let out a relieved breath. *Good to see those new shield modifications from R&D are doing some good.*

Knowing that her fellow starship commanders could handle their task, she pushed and focused her attention on making sure she did the same. "Status of the *Avicenna*?"

The voice of her Betazoid operations officer had a hard edge to it, "Not good, Captain. The warp core took heavy damage. We're looking at a core breach in the next five minutes." Looking over his shoulder at her, Reese saw the despair in Lt. Commander Charlie Cinaran's dark eyes, "Massive delta radiation flooding throughout the ship. No life signs."

Reese felt her heart sink. Dear God. They wouldn't have known what hit them.

The manifest she'd consulted earlier had told her that the *Avicenna* had left starbase with a complement of 400 before picking up over 2000 survivors from New Copenhagen. The colony had been the latest wholly-civilian settlement targeted by a Breen flotilla. The most recent atrocity in the campaign of terror they'd waged since the secretive and mostly-unknown Confederacy had chosen to side against the rest of the Alpha Quadrant.

Damn these bastards, Reese cursed privately. There are rules! Even in war.

But then, the Dominion soldiers did not care for anything but to live and die for the glory of their so-called 'gods', the Founders. The Cardies

were no better, given some of the horror stories that Reese had heard from veterans of the Border Wars; tales of the massacre at Setlik III, the bombardment of Tirros Alpha and the sneak attack on Starbase 252.

Killing hundreds, if not thousands of men, women and children. Innocents. Just like her son, Darren. Not even a year old, yet. Relatively safe and sound with his father on Alpha Centauri. Away from the front. Away from her. Where it was best.

Enough woolgathering, Reese admonished herself, *there's work to do*. She stood from her command chair and approached Cinaran at his forward-facing console. Trying to ignore the brutalized sight of the *Avicenna* on the main screen. "Any sign of escape pods that made it through the attack?"

She waited as Cinaran ran a check over his readings, and uttered a silent prayer of thanks at his nod of affirmation, "About a dozen or so, but they won't be able to clear the blast radius in time," He turned to her again, anticipating her next question, "Transporters are a no-go, with all that weapons discharge clogging the targeting sensors."

There was a series of chimes from the aft of the bridge, prompting Reese to turn and face her XO as he reported. "The *Cassandra* reports that the Breen ship has eluded them and jumped to warp. Captain Dayan is tracking their course and requesting permission to engage in pursuit."

Reese wanted to say yes. She wanted to lead the hunt herself and make those spoonheads pay in blood for what they'd wrought here today. She wanted to watch as their hull split apart under the fierce intensity of the *Orpheus's* Type-XII phaser arrays, just as whatever That that commanded the Breen ship had watched as the *Avicenna* burned.

But she didn't. She knew where her duty lay. What they had to do.

"Permission denied," she responded. "Have *Cassandra* and *Ariadne* fall back to our position and engage in rescue ops. We've got less than 5 minutes to get those people out of there."

Her orders relayed and met with a chorus of 'aye, Captain', Reese took her chair as her crew went about their tasks. Keeping up the appearance of calm and collected for their benefit when inside, she seethed with fury. Wanted to rage openly at the unfairness of the galaxy, of a war that had taken so many lives already.

A dozen escape pods meant only a handful of people left, from nearly two and a half thousand. It wasn't right. On any level.

But if they could save just one of those poor souls, then Daniela Reese knew she would sleep that little bit easier tonight.

God knows I already have enough deaths on my conscience thanks to this fucking war...

* * *

[Captain, we're getting a signal from Starbase 375. It's Admiral Ross for you.]

Putting down her mug of coffee, Reese suppressed a grimace. *I wonder what that bastard wants from me now.*

To say that the admiralty and Daniella Reese didn't always get on would be an understatement. Since earning her captain's pips, Reese had made it a personal mission to never let bureaucracy get in the way of doing what needed to be done. It was a lesson she'd learned early on in her career, thanks to Helena Tel.

The late admiral, one of the many who perished at Wolf 359, had been her mentor when it came to command. Everything she knew about commanding a starship had come from her and it had served her well. It didn't ingratiate her very well with the higher-ups, though. Still, it allowed her to do what she did best - lead from the front.

Her attack squadron stationed out of Starbase 113 near the borders between Tzenkethi, Cardassian and Federation space had become known as 'Reese's Raiders', employing Klingon-like tactics with hit-and-run maneuvers. Just enough to keep Dominion and Cardassian forces from pressing forward. It may not have been as newsworthy as the battles being waged closer to the front, but every little helped when it came to keeping morale up among the troops.

Then the Breen happened.

Their surprise assault on the heart of the Federation two months ago, striking at Earth in a blitz attack had taken everyone by complete surprise, followed by heavy losses at the Second Battle of Chin'Toka. Decimating the Allied Fleet so badly that Command was hard-pressed to find any kind of way to bolster flagging morale in the face of such defeat

Thankfully, that advantage had only been short-lived. Now, all Allied ships had been given modifications that would render the Breen weapon useless, leveling the playing field back up. Enough that the Dominion had pulled back from many of the systems they had annexed, retreating deep into Cardassian territory.

But was it a case of too little, too late..?

Shrugging off the thoughts of what could be, Reese tapped her combadge, "Put it through, Mr. Cinaran."

The embedded monitor in her desk rose up, the face of Vice-Admiral William Ross appearing on the screen and Reese almost did a double-take. Her superior officer looked beyond tired. Almost haggard. Deep dark shadows under eyes that, to Reese's experienced gaze, had spent many hours staring over casualty reports. It was clear to her that the military commander of the Federation Alliance forces was having many sleepless nights.

Part of her, an aspect of herself that she normally kept buried deep inside but which became louder every day the war stretched on, voiced its thoughts. *Good. The sheer number of our people he's sent into the killing fields should keep him up.*

Reese immediately felt a stab of guilt. She knew it wasn't that simple. That black and white. Even before she'd taken the center seat on a permanent basis, she'd lead enough security responses and away teams to understand that with command came responsibility. The simple fact that when you gave out orders, you could be sending someone out to their death.

It was part of the job. No one ever said command was easy.

Ross immediately got down to business. [*I've read your after-action report, Reese. It's a damn shame, what happened to the Avicenna.*] His expression seemed to become even more haunted, [*Only 78 survivors?*]

Reese offered a nod before replying, "Yes, sir. *Cassandra* and *Ariadne* have the walking wounded while we take the major cases. My CMO is doing what she can, but a lot of them..." She struggled to find the words for a moment, "They require a level of care we just can't provide."

Admittedly, that was sugarcoating it more than a little. *Orpheus*, a *Steamrunner*-class frigate, had a larger complement of medical personnel and equipment compared to the smaller *Sabre*-class ships. But there was only so much Dr. Mendes and her staff could do. Almost all of the survivors in her care were now either on full life-support being prepped for stasis, or in need of major surgery that only a starbase could offer.

As for the rest... All that could be done for them now was to make them comfortable. Until the time came.

Ross frowned, before his eyes widened with a glimmer of understanding. [*Of course. Do what you can. You can offload them to the DS9 staff when you dock there.*]

What the..? The offhand mention of the former Cardassian mining station, the point of first contact with the Dominion five years ago, brought Reese up short. "Sir? You don't want us to head back to 113?"

Ross shook his head firmly, tapping at an off-screen panel. There was a brief chirp a moment later as the comm. system confirmed a dispatch arriving for her immediate attention. [*You and your squadron have new orders, Captain.*]

As she skimmed the dispatch, Reese felt her heartbeat speed up, "We're going on the offensive?" Of course, she'd heard the rumors across the fleet, that HQ had decided enough was enough. That they could not allow the Dominion a chance to fortify their position and rebuild forces before striking out once again.

That now was finally the time to go in for the killing blow and cut the head off this snake once and for all. End this war once and for all.

It's about damned time.

* * *

The smell of death was enough to make T'Mur nauseous.

Stepping into Sickbay, the lithe Vulcan woman was thankful she had taken a moment to apply some nasal numbing agent before leaving her quarters. The olfactory senses of her species were particularly acute, and had been a source of much contention when they had first started serving alongside other species.

To say that the likes of humans or Tellarites had distinct musks was putting it mildly.

T'Mur had long learned to live with them without resorting to the numbing agent. However illogical it was, she prided herself on her ability to interact with a myriad of races and not be affected by the scent.

But the scent that attempted to assault her as she entered the primary medical ward was one she was not prepared to endure without assistance. Something about the odor that lingered in a room that was filled with wounded, despite the efforts of air recycling systems, disturbed T'Mur on a deep level that no amount of meditation could allow her to process and move past.

Steeling herself mentally, she continued to present her flawlessly cool, placid demeanor to the medical staff as she walked past them to enter the office of the Chief Medical Officer. Offering no visible hint to her highly illogical discomfort.

She found the Latina woman sitting at her desk, reading over patient charts, "Dr. Mendes, I am here as you requested."

"Thank you for coming so quickly!" Dr. Bonita Mendes was relatively young, compared to T'Mur, but she carried herself with a certainty and assuredness that spoke of someone much older. Even given the horrors of war that she had seen in battlefield medicine, she somehow still maintained a genuine joviality that T'Mur, despite her Vulcan heritage, found endearing.

She quickly stood and made her way out of the small office cubicle, ushering T'Mur to follow to a secondary treatment area, "I need your help with something." Mendes faltered, grimacing, "Well, actually, with someone, really."

An abrupt sense of unease came over the Vulcan woman, though she maintained her control and composure, offering no physical indication of her discomfort. "I am uncertain how I can assist in a medical matter, Doctor..?"

Mendes looked uncomfortable as she tried to find words to explain her meaning. "Yeah, that's the thing. While it is a medical issue in some respects, it drifts more into esoteric areas."

T'Mur's growing suspicions were confirmed when Mendes led her to a bio-bed, on which lay a prone Vulcan man. He appeared young, perhaps no older than 30 years old, with strong features and the dusky orange hue of a native of Vulcan's harsh desert climate.

What was most striking was his eyes. Bright blue, most unusual but not uncommon in Vulcans. They were wide open, staring out at nothing. Yet in a constant state of motion, while his body remained still and unmoving.

They were also filled with unabashed terror. Perhaps not noticeable to a non-Vulcan, but to T'Mur, it was clear as day. Very disconcerting.

Dr. Mendes paid a cursory glance at the bio-signs display before explaining further, "This is Lieutenant Sojek. He was a bridge officer on the *Avicenna*. We've repaired all physical injuries but it's his psychological well-being I'm concerned with."

Although not medically trained, T'Mur had started her career as a science officer with generalized training that included the biological sciences. She knew how to read the EEG readouts on the bio-monitor, and she could see what was the cause of Dr. Mendes's worries. "Did he suffer damage to his mesiofrontal cortex? That could explain his erratic brainwave patterns."

Mendes shook her head, "Not that we detected." She seemed on the verge of saying something but seemed to change her mind.

Allowing herself a moment of minor irritation, T'Mur decided to be blunt, "Doctor, please explain what it is you want of me."

Mendes had the grace to look embarrassed. "Look, I know when it comes to emotional wellbeing, Vulcans are not the easiest people to engage. But I interned on Vulcan as part of my xenobiology fellowship. I worked with several of their specialists on extreme cases of psychosurgical trauma."

She offered T'Mur the PADD she was holding. On it was displayed a neurographic scan, which, even with her limited knowledge, T'Mur recognized the early signs of synaptic neural degradation.

She had seen it once before a long time ago.

"I know how resilient the Vulcan brain is," Mendes continued, almost in a rush to get her words out now, "but I also know what it can succumb to and what it takes to treat it when that happens."

T'Mur decided to cut to the chase. "You are aware of what happened to my eldest foremother."

As a child growing up on Vulcana Luunis, one of the oldest colonies of the Confederacy, T'Mur had witnessed the pitiful psychological breakdown of her family's matriarch. It had been a difficult time for her family, as V'Nan had been a most respected elder and savvy political leader, and they were forced to simply watch as her mental faculties failed her.

All because she had not sought treatment due to the embarrassment a diagnosis could have brought. *Why is it that so many of my people do not see that pride and stubbornness can be just as inconvenient as other emotions we are taught to suppress..?*

"You believe the lieutenant's condition is similar in some way?" T'Mur handed the PADD back to Mendes. It was not surprising that the doctor would seek out her assistance. V'Nan's decline was part of T'Mur's medical history, after all, given the possibility that the same could occur,

Mendes nodded again, emboldened as T'Mur, as the humans said, 'connected the dots'. "I do, and I think you might be able to help."

T'Mur had her counter-argument ready, but Mendes quickly waved her hand in the air, "This isn't just because you're a Vulcan and have experience with this condition, T'Mur. I've done my homework."

T'Mur listened as Mendes explained her reasoning, finding herself impressed with how thoroughly the CMO had approached the problem before she had reached out to contact her. In fact, she had not even been aware that, of the 27 Vulcans serving aboard the *Orpheus*, she herself had the highest psi-rating.

"I'm not expecting miracles, and I'm not assuming you're going to agree to do anything, but for the sake of my patient, I had to at least ask that you consider whatever help you could offer," Mendes finished

T'Mur appreciated the doctor's honesty and plain speaking. There were still many reasons she should decline to assist. Her telepathic skills, while appreciably trained, were 'out of practice'. The idea of melding with someone who had not given express permission was also uncomfortable.

But then, she remembered how, in her final days, V'Nan had begged, pleaded for relief from the emotions overwhelming her. The pain she endured as her mind failed and body gave out. All because of hubris.

If I do nothing to assist, then, surely I am guilty of being no better.

* * *

Captain's Log, stardate 52898.6: The Orpheus has arrived at Deep Space 9. Repairs to minor systems damage are underway. All tactical, weapons and defensive systems are being looked over with a fine tooth comb in preparedness for the assault. I've strongly encouraged the crew to take advantage of what little down time we have before the fleet launches.

Staring out the windows, all Charlie Cinaran could see was starships.

Vicious looking Klingon birds-of-prey and destroyers. Majestic and gargantuan Romulan warbirds. The more familiar curves and line of Starfleet cruisers, frigates and fighters. Hundreds of them. Behind it all, Deep Space Nine, the former mining station now under Federation jurisdiction, hung in space, ever-watchful over the Bajoran wormhole.

It was breathtaking. Almost awe-inspiring. If not for the fact that this was an armada preparing for the fight of their lives. Instead, Cinaran looked out at the sight and felt a chill run down his spine. The odds were that most of these ships would not survive to come out of the other side of the coming battle.

Gee, that's a warming thought. He pushed down those nagging doubts and biting negative concerns, choosing to focus on the one beacon of joy lighting the darkness of his mood. [Message recording for transmission.]

Since the monitor screen displayed the standard 'stand-by' Starfleet, Cinaran instead looked at the holo-photo he had on the desk next to the computer. The image was of himself and his husband Iain, both grinning like the Cheshire Cat from the bizarre story Aunt Danni used to read to him. Taken on their wedding day with the gorgeous vista of Lake Cataria behind them, only two short years ago.

"Hey, handsome," he finally started. He knew, even as he made the effort to sound chipper and optimistic, that his startlingly-insightful human partner wouldn't be fooled in the slightest, "I hope life on Deneva Station is keeping you busy."

The truth was, Cinaran was glad that his beloved Iain was hundreds of light-years away, doing his duty and protecting one of the major Core Systems. They may not be as far from the front lines as had previously been believed, as the Breen strike demonstrated, but they were far enough away that Cinaran could sleep easier at night knowing his husband was safe.

"Listen, I know we said we wouldn't do the sappy love letter cliché, but the truth is I need to get some things off my chest right now." Blinking back a tear, Cinaran smiled as various moments in his life with Iain played out via the holo-photo. A gift from Danni created from various recordings of their vacations to Risa, Cestus III and Mantilles.

"Marrying you was the best decision I ever made, and I am really hoping that the Gods are smiling on us today, so I can grow old with you." Clearing his throat with what dignity he could manage, Cinaran continued, "But if I don't make it, I want you to remember just how much I adore you and how much better my life became when I met you. I can't give a guarantee I'll make it home, but what I will do is promise to do everything I can to make sure I come home to you."

"See you on the other side, *imzadi*."

With a few taps, Cinaran closed down the system. The message would be transmitted to DS9's communications array for later dispatch with hundreds like it from starships across the amassed task forces and battle groups. Forwarded on to Starfleet HQ for later delivery to whomever it concerned if and when it became necessary.

Cinaran prayed that it wouldn't be. He was in no rush to greet Death.

As he took a sip of water to ease his dry throat, the chirp from his door annunciator almost made him spill some. A quick glance at the chrono on the monitor confirmed the time and made Cinaran smile. *Punctual as ever*, "Come on in, Raj!"

It was practically impossible to suppress the need to laugh as Senior Chief Raj Chandra, the ranking Engineering Officer of the *Orpheus*, walked into Cinaran's quarters. Not only was his uniform liberally covered in what looked like bio-neural lubricant, but several clumps of it were in his dark hair.

"Holy Rings," he finally managed to say once he stopped chuckling, "what happened to you?!"

Chandra flopped down into the nearest chair, as Cinaran made himself busy pouring out two glasses of Saurian whiskey from his private stash. He began picking at the dried goop on his forehead, "An overload in the secondary ODN processing hub on Deck 7 we were repairing. The safety system kicked in and cooled down the gel-packs but three of them still ruptured."

The engineering NCO took the offered drink, sipping at it gratefully, "Thanks. I need this after today, even if it's synthehol."

As a copious globule of dried gel fell onto the deck, Cinaran couldn't help a grimace. "You know, you could have grabbed a shower and a fresh uniform before coming," he teased gently.

Chandra shot him a look, "Today's been shitty and we both know how tomorrow could go, so right now, I just want to relax, have some drinks with my best friend, while whooping his ass at dom-jot."

The devilish smile he offered softened the harshness of his words before he continued, "Then all will be right with the universe and I'll clean up before I get some rack time."

Taking the cue, Cinaran headed over to the dom-jot table that took up a fair chunk of space in his quarters. It had been a huge indulgence of replicator credits to get it made, maybe, but it was worth it, because it always reminded him of his parents. Leelara and Xerxises Cinaran had played away many an evening with him as a child over a table just like this one. After Mom had died, father and son had continued to play in her memory, a practice Cinaran continued in the present.

His weekly matches with Raj had been a fixture from pretty much the day the *Orpheus* had launched. It was a chance for them both to decompress and relax, ranks forgotten, to focus on something besides the War. Or in Cinaran's case, to take his mind away from the everpresent background assault his telepathic senses endured on a day to day basis.

As bad luck would have it, he was the only Betazoid aboard. There were a few Vulcans aside from T'Mur within their minimal complement, and once in a blue moon or so, when the mental pressure became too much, he would join them in meditation sessions T'Mur organized.

But they could only help him so much, as the suppression of emotions didn't come as easily to him as it did to them. He needed to feel, to remember that it was the freedom of choice and expression the Federation Alliance was fighting for. That people were dying for.

It had to be worth it. It just had to be.

"So...?" Chandra asked as he lined up his first shot, "how are the nightmares?"

Cinaran shrugged in response, not really feeling like talking about it, but touched Chandra thought to even ask. "Not as bad as they have been,

I guess. I'm getting about 5 or 6 hours of sleep most nights."

The war had touched everyone in some way; in Cinaran's case, it had left him suffering severe night terrors. The official diagnosis of PTSD did nothing to really ease the symptoms, but they helped him understand he wasn't crazy, that he was legitimately dealing with trauma.

Having a ship blown up from underneath you can do that..., he bemoaned privately.

In the first salvo of the Dominion War, the U.S.S. *Renegade*, the *New Orleans*-class starship that Cinaran had served on since graduation, was assigned to the offensive against an enemy shipyard in the Torros system. Their victory had been at a heavy cost, though, with the *Renegade* one of the 17 starships that didn't make it home.

Rajesh Chandra more than understood that sentiment, Cinaran knew. This was a man who'd worked his ass off to be accepted to and later graduate the Academy, only to resign his commission when the Federation Council had surrendered his home of New Arcadia as part of the treaty negotiations.

One of the few survivors of the Maquis Massacre just before the official declaration of war, Chandra had accepted the offer of amnesty, re-enlisting as an NCO, his experience as an engineer crucial and much needed during times that were growing more desperate. His quick thinking had pulled the *Orpheus* out too many tight scrapes in the last few months of fighting.

Whatever luck Chandra seemed to have, Cinaran hoped that it continued to hold out for them all a little while longer.

* * *

Do not fight the emotions. Accept them.

Do not deny them. To deny them, gives them power. Gives them strength.

Acknowledge them to control them. Control them to contain them.

These were the mantras that T'Mur had used for decades. For the vast percentage of that time, they had allowed her to guide her meditations to an agreeable outcome.

However, tonight, she found them insufficient.

She took a moment to again acknowledge that the emotions burning with her, refusing to be cooled by logic and reason, were not truly hers. Instead, they came from Sojek. Emotions so intense, even with the brief meld they had engaged in, that T'Mur was having difficulty filtering them from her conscious mind.

To ignore is to give strength, she reminded herself. *Though these memories are not my own, they are now part of them.*

Giving herself over to them, T'Mur allowed the events she had witnessed within Sojek's tormented psyche to play out--

--and so she watched as Sojek manned his post with a thin veneer of calm. To any observer except T'Mur, he would appear as stoic as ever, but she could feel just how much terror ran through him as the Avicenna was blasted at without mercy--

--following through on Captain Howard Miller's bellowed order to send out an emergency distress call, only to report that the Breen ship was blanketing the area with interference and he was unable to confirm if the message had been transmitted before another weapons strike took out their communications array--

--how when his console overloaded, he had managed to back away enough in time to avoid the explosion of heat, but still get propelled backwards by the sheer force--

--landing, dazed, on the lower deck, as Captain Miller leapt from his command chair to offer assistance, while giving the order to abandon ship, hoping that someone would have picked up their abortive signal--

--how, even dazed, Sojek's superior Vulcan hearing picked up the tell-tale creaks of an imminent bulkhead collapse but, as he blinked emerald blood from his eyes and Captain Miller tried to help him to stand, he couldn't seem to speak--

--how he could only watch and feebly point as the overhead panels ruptured, raining down debris, burying them both, sending Sojek into a pit of unending darkness...

Letting out another breath, T'Mur visualized that the memories were being exhaled along with. She knew that it would take several more weeks of meditation to be free of them, but she took satisfaction that her taking on this burden would assist in allowing Sojek to begin his own long path to recovery.

A recovery that Matriarch V'Nan had denied herself due to the stigma of being a Vulcan unable to process and suppress overpowering emotions.

Naturally, T'Mur had given Dr. Mendes only a cursory report, choosing not to go into great detail. While the medical officer had been a little put out at first, once T'Mur had explained her reasons, she had acquiesced. As the doctor had herself pointed out, it was well known that Vulcans could be, as the human phrase went, 'tight-lipped' when it came to certain matters.

It would not have been proper for T'Mur to openly discuss what she had seen within the privacy of the meld. What Sojek was experiencing.

What she had to help him deal with, in order to help herself.

[Reese to T'Mur.]

Allowing herself a moment to acknowledge her understandable surprise at the abrupt interruption, T'Mur opened her eyes. Fixing her gaze on the flame of her meditation lamp, as it wavered and flickered, her breath stirring it gently, she tapped at the communicator attached to her off-duty robes. "This is T'Mur."

[Sorry to disturb you, Commander.] the captain apologized unnecessarily. [I need you and Commander Ra-Kobathii to report to my quarters.]

"I shall be there momentarily, Captain. T'Mur out." Closing the channel, she leaned forward and extinguished the flame with a short puff of air. She watched the errant trail of smoke rise from it for a brief moment before pushing herself into a standing position.

The inflection in her commanding officer's voice had not indicated any acute stress or anxiety, so T'Mur did not indulge in any concerns for what she was being summoned about. There was a chance that she was going to be reprimanded for her actions in assisting Sojek without clearing with the captain or X.O first.

However, T'Mur found that possibility highly unlikely. She had served with both officers intermittently for more than two decades. They were not just colleagues, but dear friends.

Not to mention somewhat hypocritical, considering their own propensity for 'bending the rules' when the situation was deemed appropriate.

Illogical, perhaps. Commendable and deserving of respect, absolutely...

* * *

Handing the PADD to her X.O., Daniella Reese studied his reaction, allowing only a small smirk at his curiosity.

The commanding officer of the *Orpheus* has known the Efrosian for a little over twenty years. Their initial time serving together had been a little tense at times but after a while they'd figured out a decent working relationship. When she'd need a new first officer back on the *Renegade*, she had reached out to Ra-Kobathii and after a little convincing, he'd accepted her offer.

Just another bullet-point on the list of reasons I'm not on Starfleet Command's Christmas card list, but I can live with that.

"The U.S.S. *Ironside*?" Ra-Kobathii queried. "I don't know of it."

"*Defiant*-class, crew complement of 35, ablative armor hull coating alongside newly redesigned shield generators," T'Mur offered without prompting. Reese wasn't at all surprised that her Second Officer had already made herself familiar with ships in their battle group. "I believe the vessel is named after a historical figure of royalty from Earth's 8th century, Björn Ironside."

"Thanks for the history lesson, T'Mur," Reese quipped with a grin. "She's practically just rolled off the production line," she explained. "Coming directly from Starbase 375, but lacking an experienced C.O. That's where you come in."

She took great satisfaction in seeing the dawning of understanding in her X.O.'s ice-blue eyes. "Sir..?"

"Both Admiral Ross and I already signed off on the transfer," she quickly assured, before reaching behind to pick up the small box she'd carefully kept out of sight so far. "I've been lucky to hold on to you as my X.O. for as long as I have. It's well past time you got that fourth pip on your collar."

Opening the box, she watched as Ra-Kobathii stared long and hard at the solid gold pip within it. After allowing him the moment, one she remembered from her own past not too long ago, Reese plucked the rank insignia from the box. The Efrosian stood at attention, perfectly still as she secured it to his collar alongside the three already there.

Standing back, Reese offered an outstretched hand, her heart filling with so much pride that it threatened to choke her as she said, "Congratulations, Captain Ra-Kobathii."

"Well deserved, sir," T'Mur offered as well. "Your absence will be felt most keenly by the crew."

Grinning, Reese couldn't help but tease the Vulcan, "You've got some big shoes to fill, T'Mur. Think you're up for it?"

Seeing the brief flash of surprise that crossed the other woman's face for a split second only made Reese's grin widen. Not that she'd ever admit to it, of course. "From your line of enquiry, am I to infer that I am to be made acting First Officer?"

With a dismissive snort, Reese shook her head, "No 'acting' about it, T'Mur. I don't want some newbie as my X.O. when we're about to go into the battle of our lives."

"I appreciate your faith in me, Captain," T'Mur replied. "I will endeavor to live up to it." She then offered Ra-Kobathii the customary salute of her people, "Peace and long live, Captain. I will do my utmost to be a worthy successor."

"Thank you, Commander," Ra-Kobathii allowed a rare smile. There was a twinkle of amusement in his eyes as he continued, "If you ever need tips on how to wrangle your hotheaded commanding officer, feel free to give me a call."

Okay, I'll allow him that one, Reese conceded. *It's funny because it's true.*

T'Mur cocked an eyebrow, and responded somewhat archly, "Thank you, but I believe I already have a firm grasp on how to deal with the captain's overemotional nature."

"Hey!" Reese groused, shooting her new X.O. an overdramatic patented 'dirty look' that she'd mastered during her Security Chief days. "I can

still change my mind, you know."

"Indeed," T'Mur replied demurely. "However, I doubt you would find a suitable replacement for an officer of my caliber that easily."

Oh great, a sarcastic Vulcan. Still, if she's cracking jokes, she must be firing on all cylinders. It was good to see that T'Mur's little mental sojourn hadn't caused any lasting issues, although she would be having a talk about that with her in due time.

Dismissing the Vulcan to go about her duties with a good-natured final jibe, Reese turned back to Ra-Kobathii, who was again studying the PADD. But now, he was looking at it with more intent and longing. His first command.

"Savor it, Vre," Reese advised. "Burn that feeling into your heart. Because that is what lights the fire under you, when you have people counting on you."

When he met her gaze, she saw the understanding and the weight of it within his bright blue eyes. "A lot of good people aren't going to come back from this, are they?"

Reese shook her head. Even if he wasn't her peer now, he was still a friend who deserved honesty. "No. They're not. Hell, there's no guarantee we'll come out of the other side of this." She chuckled mirthlessly, "It's not like we're the main characters in someone's story."

She called on that part of her she only acknowledged in the darkest of times. The warrior. The fighter. The killer. The aspect of herself that would do whatever it takes to protect the people she loved, or avenge them in death.

"But for everyone of us who dies, we're going to make the Dominion, the Cardassians and the Breen pay in blood, sweat and tears."

* * *

The bridge of the *Orpheus* was too quiet for its own good.

True, a starship's command and control hub could never be truly silent. There was always the thrum of life-support and the engines always ever-present. Odd chirps and chimes of consoles, as personnel went about their duties.

But as Daniella Reese sat in her command chair in the bridge's center, she couldn't help but be aware of the absence of the usual quiet chatter among the crew. No idle comments or gossip being exchanged. No status reports being offered or communicated over the intercom.

Silence could indeed be deafening... and it was grating heavily on Reese's taught nerves.

This needs to stop. "Commander Cinaran," she called out with such abruptness she saw her Betazoid godson flinch in surprise. "Open a shipwide intercom channel."

As she stood from her seat, it hit Reese that she had no idea what she was actually going to say. She had never been one for long-winded pep talks or inspirational oratory. More 'get it done', than 'rally the troops'. Some captains seemed to have motivational speeches ready at the drop of the proverbial hat. *Hell, Helena Tel never used the same one twice*, she remembered back from the early days on the *Antares*.

A long-forgotten piece of advice her mentor had given her came to mind. 'If you don't have faith in what you're saying, the crew can tell. It doesn't matter if you fluff your lines a little, as long as you speak from the heart and mean every word. You have their trust already. Just remind them of that'.

A calmness settled over her. Her inner warrior settled back to allow the gentler, nurturing aspect of herself to come forward, the part of her that had excelled during her tenure as an Academy professor. Damn, a life-time ago...

When Charlie looked over his shoulder from Ops and gave her the nod, she began, "All hands, this is the captain."

"I won't lie to you. This is going to be a bloody, costly fight. The losses we took at Chin'Toka were a bloody nose by comparison."

"I want to believe we're going to come out of this intact. Not just this crew, this fleet, but the whole damn Federation. But lives will be lost, that's a certainty. I want you to look around at the people beside you. There is a chance some of them won't be coming back."

"This isn't fatalism or cynicism, but reality. You've been in this fight for over two long, hard years. You know the costs of war. Of beating the Dominion advance back, tooth and nail. No-one has been left untouched by it."

"But this is going to be the final fight of this war. One way or another."

"This ship has proved itself again and again in combat. We are going into Cardassian territory and we are going to take out each and every enemy ship that gets in our way. Not because we have to, but because we must. For all the friends, loved ones, children and parents that didn't make it through."

"Do your duty. See it through. Push forward and by God, stay the course."

As she concluded, Reese looked around the bridge at the alpha-shift crew. Met the gaze of each one in turn for several seconds. Saw that her words had sparked a glimmer of determination and resolve in each of them. Even T'Mur, standing at Tactical, her usually-impassive visage displaying just the barest hint of feeling.

Silence again fell on the bridge, but this time it wasn't heavy with dread. As people returned back to their tasks, it now had a hopeful air. Better than nothing.

There was a chirp from Ops. "Fleetwide transmission coming in from *Bellerophon*, sir," Charlie reported. "All ships are to get underway and

assume position with their assigned battle groups."

Show time. "Acknowledge the order, Mr. Cinaran. Lieutenant Anavi, take us out."

The Kantare woman, newly promoted to fill the empty flight controller position, nodded, "Aye, Captain. Joining up with the rest of Attack Wing 6-4 at designated coordinates."

Attack Wing 6-4, which comprised 15 vessels in total, would be part of the second wave, flanking the initial fleet that would be pushing into Cardassian territory. With the Dominion's withdrawal from Allied territory, little resistance was expected as the Fleet made its way there.

Taking her chair again, Reese settled in to get comfortable for the rest of the watch, "Ops, put frequency 1-9-8-1 on audio. Let's check in with the rest of our merry band."

The overhead comm. came alive with the chatter of the other ships, before a clipped British accent cut through it all. [*This is Attack Wing Leader, all ships fall in. Formation epsilon-gamma-2. Tactical officers, link up for coordination.*]

The voice belonged to Captain Harold Windsor, the C.O. on the lead ship, the *Excelsior*-class U.S.S. *Courageous*. It would act as command for the smaller ships that made up the rest of the Wing, coordinating moves and keeping real-time tactical plots of the overall field of combat. With the Fleet being the single-largest gathering of Federation, Klingon and Romulan ships ever gathered, a decentralized hierarchy would allow greater operational efficiency.

That was the plan, at least...

As she listened to the myriad of overlapping voices, Reese was able to pick out a few ship names. *Messenger, Redemption, Surefoot, Ajax, Ironside*. All ready for battle.

All ready to finally end this war.

"All ships have confirmed ready for departure," T'Mur reported. "The *Bellerophon* is signaling all ships to move out."

Time to get this party started. "Next stop, Cardassia. Punch it, Helm."

As the *Orpheus* moved into position under Anavi's guidance, Reese took in the sight on the viewscreen. A thousand ships, heading into history. Whose history was yet to be decided.

But by God, the Prophets or whatever hell omniscient presence was watching over this universe, Daniella Reese was going to move Heaven and Earth to make it back home. Back to her son.

And to Hell with the universe if it tried to get in her way.

The End...

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!