

Hope and Fear

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Hope and Fear

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Summary

While inspecting the Enterprise NX-01 following a test flight to Alpha Centauri, Professor Erika Hernandez is summoned by Director Nogura of the United Earth Space Program Agency to discuss the future direction of the Warp 5 program.

November 21st, 2151

Four months after the events in "Falling Skies."

A constellation of a dozen Orbital Drydock Facilities orbited Earth, their metal frames gleaming against the backdrop of space. While most of these shipyards were occupied with ships from the United Earth Stellar Navy or Earth Colonial Shipping, one drydock had captured global attention for months, and with good reason: it housed the starship Enterprise NX-01, Earth's first vessel capable of reaching warp five.

The Enterprise, with its sleek saucer shape and twin nacelles, was a testament to human ingenuity: a vessel designed not only for speed but for exploration. Outfitted with the latest technology, it was ready to boldly venture into uncharted space.

On board the Enterprise, Professor Erika Hernandez - currently overseeing all ship-based activities - strolled down a corridor on D deck. Helm Officer Vivienne Mayweather walked beside her, and both appeared to be in high spirits.

Hernandez glanced at the data on her padd, a broad smile spreading across her face. "Warp 4.9 from Earth to Alpha Centauri and back without a hitch. I don't know about you, Viv, but I think this ship is finally ready to chart those new frontiers."

Mayweather's expression, however, was far from celebratory. She frowned, and Hernandez immediately noticed, stopping in her tracks. "What? You don't agree?"

Mayweather hesitated, glancing aside as she weighed whether to share her concerns. Finally, she met Hernandez's gaze. "Oh, I agree, Professor. The ship is ready. But honestly, I'm not sure if the Agency is willing to go through with the mission."

Hernandez's eyes widened in disbelief, and she let out a soft chuckle. "And why wouldn't they be?"

"Haven't you seen the news from Earth lately?" Mayweather replied, her voice tinged with worry. "People are scared. Ever since those Romulan refugees crash-landed on Terra Nova, there's been nonstop talk about fortifying the Sol system against the Romulan Star Empire."

"And you're worried about the Romulans too?" Hernandez asked, more curious than concerned.

"Of course I am. Who wouldn't be?"

Hernandez resumed walking, and Mayweather fell in step beside her. "So, what do you suggest? We just hang around in Earth's orbit, guarding the planet, waiting for the bad guys to show up?"

"Don't ask me," Mayweather replied with a humble shrug. "I'm just a pilot, not a military strategist."

They arrived at the door to the engine room, and Hernandez paused, turning to face Mayweather. "Neither am I, Viv. But one thing I do know is that fear should never drive our decisions. Fear only exists for one reason."

Mayweather raised an eyebrow. "And that reason is?"

"To be conquered," Hernandez said with a confident smile, handing the padd back to Mayweather. "See you on the bridge."

Mayweather nodded, returning the smile as she took the padd and continued down the corridor alone.

As the doors to the engine room slid open, Hernandez was immediately struck by the buzz of activity. A dozen crew members darted from station to station, voices rising above the hum of machinery as they exchanged rapid-fire technobabble. The room was alive with the final preparations for launch.

A warm, calming voice drew her attention to the reactor control platform above. "Come to lend a hand?" called Henry Archer, the chief architect of the warp five engines, his smile as big as ever.

Hernandez returned the smile. "Looks like you've got plenty of hands down here already."

Archer descended the ladder with ease, still wiping sweat from his brow with a cloth he pulled from his pocket. "We're triple-checking every main and secondary system, but I don't expect any issues. I'll have my final report on your desk by 1800 hours."

"I look forward to reading it," Hernandez replied with a nod.

As Archer pocketed the cloth, his tone became more serious. "So, heard anything from the Agency yet?"

Her smile faded slightly, replaced by a hint of frustration. "Other than the usual daily reports? Nothing."

"I'm sure they'll make their decision soon," Archer reassured her. "This ship needs a captain, and no one knows it better than you."

Her smile returned, this time with a touch of gratitude. "It's good to know someone has faith in me."

"Not just someone - every crew member on this ship," Archer said firmly. "And if they don't put you in command, well, they'll have my resignation on their desk instead."

Hernandez shook her head in disbelief. "You'd abandon your baby?"

Before Archer could reply, Hernandez's communicator chirped. She flipped it open and responded, "Hernandez here. Go ahead."

A female voice came through the speaker. "Professor, we've received a transmission from HQ. Director Nogura is expecting you for a meeting at 1600 hours."

"Understood. Hernandez out." She closed the communicator and turned to Archer with a playful grin. "Should I take your resignation letter with me, or do you want to sleep on it?"

The launch bay of Shuttlepod Four, one of four bays on the ventral side of the Enterprise, slowly opened. As the shuttlepod was released into space, Hernandez, at the controls, ignited the engine and set a course for Earth below.

Earth, San Francisco Bay Area

The Bay Area had never looked more captivating, a seamless blend of nature and human innovation. As Shuttlepod Four soared above San Francisco, Hernandez was treated to a breathtaking view of the city: towering skyscrapers, vibrant green parks, and the shimmering expanse of the bay below. She steered the shuttle toward the United Earth Space Program Agency headquarters, the heart of Earth's exploration ambitions.

HQ United Earth Space Program Agency

Director Nogura's Office

Hikaru Nogura stood by the window, hands clasped behind his back, deep in thought. The doorbell chimed, pulling him from his reverie. "Enter," he called out.

The office door slid open to reveal Erika Hernandez.

"Punctual as always," Nogura remarked with a warm smile, turning away from the window.

Hernandez stepped inside, offering a polite greeting, "Good afternoon, sir."

Though she had visited this office countless times before, this visit felt different. Her heart pounded in her chest, knowing that this meeting could be the culmination of her lifelong dream - to lead humanity's first warp-five mission, to explore uncharted worlds, and to make contact with alien civilizations. Yet, the outcome remained uncertain.

Nogura gestured toward one of the empty seats in the cosy corner of his office. As they sat down, Hernandez noticed Nogura's unease. He seemed restless, avoiding her gaze, which only heightened her anxiety.

Finally, Nogura settled into his chair, gripping the armrests as if anchoring himself. He met her eyes, ready to deliver news that could change everything. "I asked you to come here because I have good news."

Hernandez exhaled, a wave of relief washing over her. Perhaps she had misread his earlier discomfort.

Nogura continued, "For months, the Admiralty of the Stellar Navy has been using the Romulan refugee crisis to push their agenda. Recently, they've been pressuring the government to halt the warp five program."

Hernandez scoffed, "Of course they would. They don't share our passion for discovery. They think our curiosity is a threat, something that could lead us to disaster."

Nogura chuckled softly, his demeanour easing for a moment. "Well, here's the good news: for once, the president has decided not to follow the Admiralty's advice."

Hernandez leaned forward, hope flickering in her eyes. "Really?"

"Yes," Nogura confirmed. "The president and his cabinet believe that our mission of exploration will open new doors for trade and economic growth, which is especially crucial given the potential threat we face."

"The Romulan Star Empire," Hernandez concluded.

"Precisely," Nogura said. "It's more important than ever that we gain access to advanced technologies, to ensure we stay ahead."

Hernandez nodded in agreement, but she sensed a shift in Nogura's tone.

"But," Nogura began, his voice heavy with the weight of what he had to say.

Her heart sank. She had been waiting for this, the inevitable 'but' that could undermine everything. She braced herself, forcing her emotions under control. "What kind of compromise did the Navy force upon us?" she asked, her voice steady.

Nogura took a deep breath. "The president agreed with the Admiralty that the mission should be led by a seasoned veteran of the United Earth Stellar Navy." He hesitated, knowing his next words would crush her dream. "I'm sorry, Erika. We all know how hard you've worked."

"Who?" Hernandez interrupted, swallowing her disappointment.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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