

Changing Course

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Summary

When the Enterprise picks up a mysterious signal, Edison faces the critical decision of whether to alter the ship's course to investigate.

February 1st, 2152

Enterprise NX-01

Ready Room

Balthazar Edison leaned against the viewport of his ready room, watching the stars streak by at warp five speed. His thoughts drifted back to the recent past, the journey that had led him here.

It was hard to believe that only two months had passed since Admiral Reed had unexpectedly landed his shuttlepod at his sister Sarah's farm on Terra Nova, offering him the command of the fastest starship ever built by humans. Edison looked down at his uniform, a blue jumpsuit with gold piping at the shoulders, specially designed for the crew of the Enterprise NX-01. The four silver pips on his chest confirmed his rank: captain.

The word "captain" suddenly triggered a cascade of memories.

After the loss of his ship, the USS Invincible, nine months ago, Edison had been ready to retire, to settle on Terra Nova and perhaps start a family. His plans had seemed so clear then. But Admiral Reed's visit had shifted his trajectory dramatically. Now here he stood once again, commanding a starship. The Enterprise NX-01 might not have been his first choice for command, but Reed had convinced him that an experienced hand was needed to guide the untested crew of the Enterprise through unexplored space. Reluctantly, he had accepted.

A sudden chime interrupted his reverie. He straightened and turned towards the door. "Enter."

The door to the Ready Room slid open, revealing Commander Erika Hernandez. She wore the same uniform as Edison, but with blue piping on her shoulders, signifying her role in the science division.

Since leaving the orbital drydock five days ago, Edison and Hernandez had only interacted over daily ship operations. He had hoped to build rapport with her, knowing the importance of a trusting relationship between captain and first officer. But despite his invitations, she had declined his offers for dinner, citing work commitments. Now, he wondered if gaining her trust might be the greatest challenge of their mission.

Hernandez stepped into the room, her expression inscrutable. Just like Edison moments before, she seemed to be lost in thought. Her mind replaying the moment when Director Nogura had informed her of Edison's appointment as captain of the Enterprise. Although Hernandez had been a key figure in the NX-01 project, she had been passed over for the captaincy in favour of a seasoned navy officer. The blow to her aspirations had been hard, but with encouragement from her mentor Henri Archer, she had chosen to stay and accept the role of first officer.

"Please have a seat, Commander," Edison said, gesturing to the small couch to his left.

"Thank you, Sir, but I prefer to stand," Hernandez replied curtly.

Edison nodded, acknowledging her preference. As he settled behind his desk, Hernandez handed him a padd. "About half an hour ago, our sensors picked up a signal with a pattern consistent with a communication transmission."

Edison took the padd and reviewed the data. His interest was piqued. "Origin of the signal?"

"A planetary system, Sir. Only two light-years from our current heading. With your permission, I'd like to adjust our course to investigate the signal's source."

Edison glanced at the star chart projected on his desktop monitor. “This planetary system isn’t on any of our charts.” He maintained a neutral expression, trying to conceal his excitement. “We both know the Agency has given us a specific flight plan. They’re unlikely to appreciate deviations. If something goes wrong, it would be nearly impossible for them to set up a rescue mission.”

Hernandez looked surprised by Edison’s emphasis on regulations. Was this the same captain who had the reputation of being a ‘space cowboy’?

As she folded her hands behind her back, she made her case. “May I remind you, Sir, that one of our missions is to seek out new life? This signal could be a unique opportunity for first contact with an alien civilization. We shouldn’t dismiss it solely based on Agency directives. Their rules are guidelines, not rigid restrictions.”

Edison leaned back in his chair, his smile widening. “You’re absolutely right, Commander.”

Hernandez’s eyes widened slightly in surprise. She sensed that Edison’s earlier insistence on the rules was a test - one she apparently had passed. Her tension eased as a small smile appeared on her face.

Edison rose from his chair and handed her the padd. “Order Helm to set a course for the signal’s source.”

“Yes, Sir. Right away,” Hernandez responded, her tone now more enthusiastic.

As she turned towards the door, Edison added, “Perhaps this could be a task for Ensign Skon. Let’s see if our Romulan friend can decipher this signal as effectively as his people claim.”

Hernandez nodded, a hint of amusement in her expression, and exited the Ready Room.

Edison returned to the viewport, watching the stars streak by with renewed anticipation. For the first time since leaving Earth, he felt a genuine connection with his first officer. Perhaps this mission, and their collaboration, held more promise than he had initially imagined.

TO BE CONTINUED

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