

Crossing Over

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/478) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/478>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	Multi
Fandom:	Raptor-verse
Relationship:	Ashley Williams/Soren Magnussen , Twesata Glex/Rana Thanoptis
Character:	Ensemble Cast - RAP
Additional Tags:	Mass Effect Fusion
Language:	English
Series:	Part 33 of The Raptor-verse
Stats:	Published: 2023-07-01 Words: 9,770 Chapters: 4/4

Crossing Over

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Summary

The "Dawn Star", a human luxury liner on its way back from the Citadel is waylaid by an unknown (to them) alien ship and end up in the Trek-verse.

Notes

This will begin a series of arcs that will set up the 'official' meeting between the two universes and set the stage for major events in the future as more of the puzzle is unveiled. A figure from Ashley's past that she thought dead makes a reappearance in this part too.

Act One A Three Hour Cruise

MSV Dawn Star—Athabasca-Class Freighter—Mass Effect Universe

“How are our passengers, Donna?” Elmer Forrester, the recently promoted captain of *MSV Dawn Star*, the White Star Lines newest *Athabasca*-class passenger liner-freighter, asked the ship’s purser who had just come on board the bridge of the large merchant vessel.

“Settling in, Captain.” Donna Welles, a young vivacious woman with smooth chocolate-skin and raven dark hair, responded with a smile. “The turian couple in A-3 is complaining about the quality of our dextro-cuisine. I told them there’s not much I can do as far as food is concerned except pass their complaint on to you and maybe cut them a discount.”

Nodding his head, Captain Forrester granted his approval. “Go ahead and give them a fifteen percent discount, extend our apologies, and invite them to my table tonight. That should mollify them somewhat.”

“On it, Sir. Speaking of your other guests for dinner tonight, that Alliance gunnery chief in C-12 wanted me to pass on a message that he’s looking forward to meeting you, as is the quarian. She also asked if she might be permitted to speak with our astrogator and be permitted to observe and collect data from Farinata after we jump into the system.”

“I don’t see any problem with that.” Forrester replied, “It’s not as if we’re carrying classified information or anything like that.”

“I’ll let her know.” Donna grinned as she continued her report. “As for that krogan merc—he told me in no uncertain terms that he wanted plenty of space by himself and that no one was to disturb him or he’d, and this is a direct quote, Sir, ‘Tear off their head and shit down their neck.’ So I did what he asked me to do. I put him in an empty cargo bay with plenty of varren meat and ryncol and passed the word to everyone to not poke the krogan.”

Laughing, the captain quipped, “Good move.” Looking down at his passenger manifest he then asked, “What about our tour group? Are they behaving themselves?”

“The middle school kids coming back from their honors study tour?” Donna chuckled, “So far, no problems...more or less. Their chaperones are doing a good job of keeping them in line.” With a shrug of her shoulders, the youthful purser added, “They’re tweens and teens after all...”

The captain responded with a wry grin, “Go ahead and cut them some slack so long as they’re not causing any disruptions or being blatantly obnoxious. It’s not every day you get a chance to go on an all-expenses paid tour courtesy of the Sirta Foundation, so let them have some fun.”

“Aye, Sir.” The purser grinned. “Anything else, Captain?”

“What about our freight?”

“The eezo in Cargo Bay 5 is under 24 hour guard—six hour shifts—two at the entrance and one rover.”

“That sounds good enough.” Forrester nodded his head in agreement at his administrative officer’s security arrangements. “And the other cargo?”

“The medical supplies for the Citadel and tech goods for Illium are all secure in their bays.”

“Excellent.” The captain smiled, “You’re on top of everything as always.”

“Will there be anything else, Sir?”

“No.” Forrester replied, happy at how smoothly everything was going on his new command. “Thank you, Donna. I’ll see you at dinner tonight.”

MSV Dawn Star—Dining Area

“Thank you for allowing me access to your equipment, Captain. The data I’m picking up from Farinata is most fascinating.” A quarian woman wearing a maroon and gold traditional sash and hood over her encounter suit said as she picked up a tube of nutripaste.

“What are you studying Ms....”

“Zara.” The quarian helpfully provided her name, “Zara’ Arosa vas Callina. I’m an astrophysicist and cosmologist currently teaching at Terranova University and am currently studying dark energy and dark matter and whether and how they interact with normal matter.” She then talked at length about the subject, until, seeing that she was losing her audience, the quarian scientist chuckled embarrassingly, “I’m sorry. I tend to get carried away with my work, but you did ask.”

“Yes, I did.” The captain grinned, “Even though ninety percent of what you just said flew right by me.”

“Don’t feel too bad,” the Alliance gunnery chief joked, “All one hundred percent flew over my head.”

“Thank you for inviting us to your table, Captain.” Orinia Rix, an elegant turian woman, remarked courteously.

“It’s the least he can do after making us eat this swill they call turian cuisine. Where did you get this slop? A charity house?” Lorrin Rix, Orinia’s husband, sniffed as he regarded the meal on his plate with distaste.

“Please forgive my husband.” Orinia apologized, shooting a warning glare at her spouse. “He gets upset if his ale is not at the right temperature.”

“That’s quite alright, Ma’am.” Captain Forrester graciously replied, “I’ll make sure to speak to our procurement officer about acquiring better provisions for our dextro passengers in the future.”

“So how are you and your students enjoying the cruise?” Donna, the purser, asked the woman seated next to her, a matronly middle-aged woman with a warm smile and wicked gleam in her eyes.

“They’re a handful.” The chaperone chuckled, “Me and Edgar...my partner who’s responsible for the boys...”

“He’s the one with the kids now, right?” The captain queried, inclining his head at the youths’ table where a middle-aged man with a receding hairline seemed to be fighting a losing battle to stay in control of his somewhat unruly charges.

“Yes and it looks like the young ones are being a handful tonight.” The mature chaperone laughed, “I have a feeling I’m going to have to step in shortly and restore order. They’re really not bad kids though.” The older woman qualified, “As school tours go, they’ve been remarkably well behaved. A lot better than our last group.”

“Chief...” Donna queried.

“Keys.” The gunnery chief replied smiling at the lovely purser, “Donald Keys. But just call me Donkey like everyone else.”

“Donkey?” The purser chuckled flirtatiously as she traced the rim of her glass with her finger, “Is there a story behind that?”

“Got it during Hostile Environment Training on Titan.” The chief replied, returning the purser’s flirting gesture with a wicked grin. “My drill instructor, Gunnery Chief Ellison, gave it to me ‘cause I was too stubborn to quit.”

“Forgive me for noticing, Chief.” The captain remarked, “But isn’t that an Eden Prime survivors ribbon?”

“There aren’t too many soldiers still alive and in uniform wearing that ribbon.” The ship’s doctor noted, his expression one of both sadness and pride. “I knew someone who was in the relief expedition.”

“Yeah.” The gunnery chief replied, his display of good humor now replaced by a melancholy sadness. “You’re right, Doc. There aren’t a whole lot of us left. Some are like me, still in uniform, Others...they’re dealing with a lot of issues like survivor guilt and post-traumatic stress. For almost two years...” he confessed shaking his head mournfully, “I was one of those in that group. I spent an entire year in a coma and another six months in rehab—mental and physical. And then there are those...including my squadmates and a good friend of mine who was in the 212 with me...who are at the bar on the other side waiting for us.”

“If it’s not too much to ask,” Orinia diplomatically queried, “Where were you stationed when the geth attacked?”

“My unit was assigned along with the 232 to guard an archaeological team.” Donkey replied, further explaining, “We also had a side mission. Someone from intel got wind of a smuggling racket involving some of the local farmers and workers at the spaceport. And...” he reluctantly admitted, “intel suspected that someone at the base was also involved.”

Shaking his head, Captain Forrester commiserated, “That sucks. I wore Alliance blue for twenty years before finally retiring as a Staff Commander. Most of us wear the uniform proudly, but there are always a few.”

“Yes, Sir.” The gunnery chief sadly confirmed, “I guess that’s true everywhere you go. Anyway, we were ordered to keep an eye out for that while we were in the field. We were on patrol when the geth attacked and my unit, Dog Squad, First Platoon, got separated from the others. We were trying to unite with the other squads to organize a counterattack when we found Bravo squad. They got wiped out.” Donkey shook his head, “The geth hit them so fast and hard that they didn’t even have time to draw their weapons to make a fight of it. A little after that, we found Alpha and Charlie squads, but the geth attacked before we could link up. My friend and I got separated in the fighting and I got hit and went down. Lucky for me...” the Eden Prime survivor shook his head, “I tumbled into a ravine and managed to drag myself to cover just as a geth recon drone came down. If they’d have caught me...I probably would have been impaled on one of those spike things and turned into a zombie like Rasputin and Pennyloafer were.”

“Your friend.” Donna asked, “Who was she?”

“Gunnery Chief Ashley Williams.” Donkey flashed a momentary sad smile, “Although I always called her Ash.”

“She’s the one who died on Virmire a couple of years ago—right?” Donna remarked sympathetically.

“Yeah.” Donkey lowered his head, “I found out that she was killed in action a little after I came out of my coma.” Sighing, he growled, “It took her death to finally get the REMFs to give her what she deserved from day one: her due as a soldier.”

“Wasn’t she awarded the salarian Silver Dagger and turian Nova Cluster medals?” Donna inquired.

Nodding his head, the gunnery chief affirmed, “Yes. The second human to win those decorations right after they pinned them on Shepard.” Gritting his teeth, he rumbled, “And the reporters fu...” pausing as he remembered where he was, the salty veteran quickly amended what he was going to say with a rueful grin, “I mean fouled...that up when they dug up that stupid quote.”

“The ‘human or alien...we’re all just animals’ quote?” Lorrin interjected with a scowl on his face as he joined the discussion. “I’d heard that she was a human supremacist.”

“That’s bull...” again apologizing, Donkey, after calming himself down, quickly censored the curse he was about to utter, “Again, I’m sorry, but Ash was a good friend of mine and intensely loyal to the Alliance. You’re right, Mr. Rix...” the gunnery chief declared, “Ash did have a

big chip on her shoulder where non-humans were concerned—but it wasn't due to racism or speciesism or any other bull like that.”

“Why then?” The turian persisted, “From what I heard, that remark she uttered was more along the line of ‘you can't tell the aliens from the animals. If that's not bigotry, I don't know what is.”

“As if you've never said anything nasty about humans before.” Orinia reproved, shushing her husband. “An acquaintance of mine told me that she was there when Gunnery Chief Williams confronted that man...what's his name? Oh, yes!” The turian woman exclaimed, “Saracino... Charles Saracino.”

“One of the spacer MPs in Parliament.” Captain Forrester recalled with a grimace of distaste, “Head of the Terra Firma Party.”

“Bunch of bigots.” Donna cursed.

“According to my acquaintance, Gunnery Chief Williams thought the same.” Oriana recalled, “My friend said that Chief Williams called out Saracino, saying that most of his supporters were racists.”

“That sounds like Ash.” Donkey chuckled, remarking fondly, “She always called ‘em as she saw ‘em.” After pausing to take a drink the gunnery chief continued, “Ashley's problem with aliens didn't come from racism or xenophobia or anything like that.”

“Then where did it come from?” Lorrin demanded.

“A combination of things.” The chief remembered, glowering at the pompous turian businessman, “She had family who...let's just say they suffered...during the First Contact War. That made her bitter towards turians especially.” Addressing Orinia, he apologized, “I'm sorry. No offense was meant.”

“None taken.” The turian woman replied reassuringly, “That war...”

“The Relay 314 Incident.” Lorrin interjected.

“We are not going to get into another fight over the war or what it's called.” Orinia declared to her husband, firmly putting her foot down. Speaking again to the humans and quarian at the table, she said apologetically, “As I was about to say, that war affected some of us too. Lorrin lost family during the war—a cousin and an uncle. So...unfortunately...there's plenty of resentment on both sides.”

“I guess so.” Donkey conceded before continuing his defense of his friend, “Ash also never worked with nonhumans and didn't trust the Council to back us up. You see...” he explained, his lips turned up in a fond grin, “She always put on this act of being just a dumb grunt—but Ash was smart. A lot smarter than me. I'm just someone who knows how to point and shoot. But Ash was different. She knew how to lead.”

“Sounds like your interest in her was more than just professional.” Donna quipped.

Chuckling, Donkey answered back in a bantering, yet also winsome, voice. “Caught that—didn't you?”

“I'm observant about these things.” Donna replied, maintaining as light a tone as possible.

“Yeah.” The gunnery sergeant nodded his head, admitting, “I did have a thing for her and...she had one for me too—but it never went anywhere. Fraternalization regs, you understand.”

“I know what you mean.” Forrester commiserated. “But they're there for a reason.”

“I wish other officers understood that.” Donkey grumbled, his voice dripping with bitterness. “I heard through the rumor mill while I was recovering that Ash's CO...Shepard...was having a fling with one of her officers. She had to choose between saving Ash or her boyfriend. Guess who she chose to save.”

“That's why we have those rules.” The captain declared.

Changing the subject, Donna remarked to the table at large, “So what do you think about the newest residents of the Citadel?”

“The aliens with pointed ears and their friends?” Lorrin snorted derisively, “Not much. We've only seen one ship.”

“It's a helluva ship from what I hear.” Forrester pointed out with a grin, “Scared the crap out of the Citadel fleet when it suddenly appeared as if out of nowhere.”

“Sounds to me like it's just a highly advanced form of stealth.” Donkey shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly.

“Advanced enough to be invisible.” Forrester noted. “What I'm most curious about though are the humans with them.”

“From what I saw from the extranet feed, they're not Alliance.” Donna commented as her fingers grazed the Alliance marine's thigh under the table, getting in return a wink and leer. “They come from something called the United Federation of Planets—whatever that is.”

“Lost colony maybe?” The doctor speculated.

“Not likely.” Forrester rebutted. “Not enough time. We've only been colonizing space for about fifty years—give or take.”

“Besides that woman Al-Jilani interviewed spoke with a strong Dutch accent.” Donna pointed out, supporting her captain's position.

“You think it could be a massive con?” Donkey queried, then shaking his head, he quickly dismissed his notion with a laugh, “Forget I just said that. If it were, then it's probably the greatest prank in history.”

“Could be from one of the earlier sublight arks we sent out before we tumbled on mass effect technology.” The doctor postulated. “I downloaded their Federation Charter from the extranet and read the preamble. There’s a lot that they borrowed from the United Nations Charter—in some respects almost the same verbiage but altered to reflect a multispecies government.”

“That means they had to have come from Earth.” Forrester concluded with a frown.

“If they did...” Donkey interjected with a frown, “Then they’ve lost many of their human roots.”

“I agree.” Donna replied, “Remember what that woman wearing that short skirt she called a uniform said?”

Laughing, Donkey remarked in derision, “No military I know would have that as a uniform.”

The captain agreed, “That short skirt couldn’t have been a real uniform. Not to mention the length and styling of her hair.”

“And did you notice the winged eyeliner she was wearing?” Donna laughed, getting a little catty with her critique. “I’ve seen pictures of that beehive style along with the eyeliner she had on in some reprints of old fashion magazines. ”It went out of fashion sometime in the late twentieth century.”

“If nothing else...” Donkey commented in a professional manner, “that hair would make wearing a combat helmet impossible. If she really is in some sort of military, then she has to be a desk jockey. No way they’d put someone looking like that in the field.”

Clearing her throat, the quarian scientist spoke, “I don’t think they’re a lost colony.”

“Then where did they come from?” Captain Forrester inquired, “That woman definitely looked human, so did their ambassador.”

“Understand...” Zara carefully qualified, “this is strictly speculation and I could be...and probably am...wrong. But some of the dark matter and dark energy readings I’ve been picking up in my studies support my hypothesis.”

“What is it?” Orinia asked, her curiosity aroused.

“What if they weren’t some lost human colony, but rather, they came from another universe.” Zara postulated, “One where there’s another Earth that developed differently from the Earth we are familiar with. That would also explain these Romulans and the other aliens from this Federation: the blue skinned ones with antennae, for instance.”

Laughing derisively, Lorrin harrumphed, “I don’t think I’ve heard anything more ridiculous in my life! Leave it to a suit rat to come up with a stupid idea like that.”

“I don’t see where it’s so stupid!” His wife snapped back, coming to the quarian scientist’s defense. “They obviously didn’t come from Council space, nor from the Traverse or the Terminus systems. So...smarty...where did they come from?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care.” The turian businessman bit back. “Other universes...what a pile of...”

Cutting the turian off, Captain Forrester diplomatically questioned the young quarian, “If they are from another universe, then how did they get here? I was taught in school that even if parallel universes did exist, that it would be impossible to travel to one because of the energy required.”

“That’s the commonly accepted theory.” Zara agreed, “However, it has long been hypothesized that wormholes could potentially be portals into other dimensions...other universes. Some of the results of my studies into dark energy and matter recently seem to bear this out. I noticed when I did my scans of the Farinata system the appearance of some previously unknown sub-particles.”

“Oh?” Forrester exclaimed in surprise, “Have you any idea as to what they might be or what they do?”

“No.” The young scientist shook her head, “That’s what I’m hoping to find out. One of the things I have noticed from my observations though is that whenever I’ve detected traces of them, there have been sightings of anomalies.”

“What sort of anomalies?” Donna inquired.

“Mostly wormholes or something similar.” The scientist replied. “So far, they’ve only been transitory phenomena—we haven’t found a stable one yet. So unless one exists...and if those aliens and humans do come from another universe...then they could have well come here by accident.”

As she finished her lecture, dance music played, signaling an end to dinner. Giving the gorgeous purser beside him a flirtatious wink, Donkey held out his hand, “I don’t know about you, Donna, but I think I’ve heard enough about parallel universes. Care to dance?”

“Love to.” Donna responded with a coy half grin as she took the handsome marine’s hand and let him lead her on to the floor.

Holding out his hand to the youthful quarian, Captain Forrester gallantly asked her to dance. Zara, suddenly flustered at the invitation, hesitatingly accepting.

“Come on, Lorrin!” Orinia urged as she practically forced her husband on to the dance floor. “Quit being a grumpy old fossil! Let’s dance. It’ll do you good to get some exercise.”

“Yes, Dear.”

Sometime later that night

Her hand wandering under the sheets until it found its prize, Donna leered as she purred in delight, whispering to the man lying in bed next to her, “Why do I think that being stubborn wasn’t the only reason they called you Donkey.”

“Glad to be of service.” The handsome marine quipped as he gave the lovely woman next to him a kiss.

“Mmmm...I see you’re up for another round.” Then, just as they kissed, the ship shook violently as alarms rang and the captain’s voice blared from the speakers. “The ship is under attack from unknown vessels. Passengers please remain in your staterooms. All able bodied hands are to report immediately to your marshaling area. This is not a drill. The ship is under attack.”

Jumping out of bed, Donna quickly donned her clothing as Donkey did the same. “Sorry, babe but I gotta go to my area—I’m in charge of the other passengers.”

“Go.” Donkey urged in a no nonsense voice, “Where’s your armory?”

“Down the corridor...left...then right. Danny’s the security chief. He knows you’re an Alliance marine. There shouldn’t be any problem with him giving you a gun, but if there is, tell him I authorized it. Code Amber 14.”

“Right.” Donkey replied as he gave the woman standing before him a quick kiss, “Take care of yourself.”

“You too.” Donna smiled as she returned her paramour’s kiss. “I want more of what I was just holding in my hand.”

Following Donna’s directions, the gunnery chief stumbled a few times as the ship shuddered under the impact of something. Reaching the armory, Donkey quickly spotted the chief armorer hastily handing out weapons. “Danny?” He called out. “Donna sent me...said to give me a weapon.”

The middle aged retired Alliance vet in charge of ship’s armory responded, “Gunnery Chief Keys—right?” Taking the marine’s single head nod as affirmation, the armorer handed Donkey an Avenger assault rifle and a half dozen thermal clips. “Here...you might want to head to the bridge and check in with the captain. Our comms are down right now.”

“On my way—thanks.” Rushing down the corridor to the bridge, Donkey felt the ship suddenly lurch and then move as if it was seemingly being pulled. Entering the bridge, he called out to the man standing behind two officers, looking at a large alien ship.

“Captain.” Donkey reported.

“Gunny.” Captain Forrester responded, pointing at the alien ship. “Recognize it?”

“No, Sir.” The Alliance marine answered back, “I’ve never seen a ship like that before.”

“Neither have I.” The captain replied. “It doesn’t resemble that of any of the races in Citadel space or the Terminus regions. Whoever it is doesn’t seem to want to destroy the ship though. They took out our engines and then we got caught up in this beam that’s drawing us closer to them.”

“They plan on boarding us.” Donkey concluded, the captain nodding in agreement.

“Right. I’ve sent every available man I could to the airlocks. I need you to stay here—if we lose the bridge...”

“We lose everything.” Donkey interrupted, finishing the captain’s thoughts. His gaze turning back to the alien vessel the *Dawn Star* was being drawn towards, he whistled, “Ugly motherfucker.”

“Where are the shuttles?” One of Forrester’s officer exclaimed in surprise.

“They should have launched them or sent out boarding pods by now. We’re close enough and they’ve got a tight hold on us.” Forrester opined as four pillars of light suddenly appeared, materializing into alien figures holding what appeared to be rifles.

Striking quickly, Donkey fired a burst from his assault rifle at the aliens, not knowing if he hit or miss before being struck by a beam of light. Then, intense pain as everything went dark.

Act 2: Mobilization

Chapter Summary

Final plans for the attack on the Coronado system are made as Dixie and Edi are integrated into the team.

Drozana Station

Nelia led her team, including Doris and Edi into the conference room as she had done earlier, but this time there was something different—all of the women in the team, including the newcomers, wore 23rd century Starfleet or Terran Empire uniforms.

Seeing the questioning look on some of the captains' faces, Nelia smirked, "Fleet Captain Magnussen spoke with us and asked that we consider wearing uniforms for this job because it'll help clear up any confusion as to who the good guys and bad guys are when things start getting hot."

"He also pointed out that any prisoners we find would feel safer on seeing either Starfleet, Republic militia, or KDF uniforms being worn by their rescuers." Ashley further elaborated.

"Logical." Admiral Tuvok praised laconically as Zsa-Zsa flashed an amused grin.

"You four look absolutely scrumptious in Terran Empire uniforms, dahlings." Zsa-Zsa commented with a lecherous grin as Nelia and her team, Ashley blushing a bright red, entered the conference room.

"We had a vote and Nelia, Rana, and Twesata outvoted us." Ashley, her long dark hair done up in a retro-style beehive, grumbled.

With a nod of his head, Admiral Tuvok immediately called the meeting to order. "Captains...Starfleet Command, along with Admiral Kererek and General Martok, have authorized us to go ahead with Operation *Dawn's Light*. You will proceed according to Fleet Captain Magnussen's earlier plan. Commander Terre. You and your friends have provided us with valuable intelligence regarding this Shepard individual. At present, of course, there is nothing we can do to take advantage of our use the information, but, should we succeed in our eventual goal of crossing over into the other universe, then the information you have gleaned could prove vital."

"In other words...", Soren smiled as he addressed Nelia and her people, "Job well done."

"Precisely." The Admiral affirmed before immediately getting down to the business at hand. "The *Aeolia* under Captain Hobson and the *Spoiled Princess* under Lieutenant Commander Terre will carry out a final reconnaissance with last minute adjustments being made before the attack. Captains? Do you all understand your missions?"

"The *D'ressa* will, along with the *Valley Forge* and *Bellerophon* attempt to tie down any capital ships we encounter."

"Da." Captain Rodenko affirmed, "The *Bellerophon's* capabilities have also been updated in our last refit. We will be able to provide enhanced defensive and offensive support. Do not worry. We will not let you down."

"Never a question of that, Boris." Soren declared with a nod of his head.

"Welcome to the party, *kis apam*." Zsa-Zsa grinned, "We were afraid you were going to miss out."

Laughing, the Russian captain bantered back, "I look after my wayward angels, *dacha*."

"Good." Admiral Tuvok acknowledged, "Captain Rosza? Captain Koroth? Your status?"

"The *Belladonna* and *Klothos* will kill as many of the *seggfejek* as we can get our teeth into." Captain Rosza declared in a thick Hungarian accent.

"And we are very hungry." Korath added with a predatory gleam in his eyes.

"*Aeolia* will provide intelligence and coordination and assist the rest of the taskforce as necessary." Captain Hobson announced in his usual patrician tone of voice.

"And we're the landing party." Nelia replied in a bored tone. "We beam down along with security teams from the other ships that will be coming with us on the *Princess*. Our job is to free any prisoners we find, gather whatever intelligence we run into and wreck whatever's left." Her lips turning up in a sly grin, the roguish Orion quipped, "The last bit's my favorite part."

"Very good." The Vulcan admiral commented before issuing his orders to the new task force commander, "Fleet Captain Magnussen. You are cleared to immediately launch Operation *Dawn's Light*."

"Right." Soren acknowledged as he addressed the captains under his command, "We get underway in thirty standard minutes. Dismissed."

"I would send you both on the landing party Treasure...T'Pren...but I will need you at your stations once we engage." Captain Hobson remarked in what, for him, was an apologetic tone.

"That's all right, Cap'n." The buxom blonde chief engineer replied with a grin, "I'm sendin' 'em Pammy. She'll get the job done."

"And I will be sending Lieutenant Revek with our detachment." The emotional Vulcan tactical department head responded, referring to her Caitian second in command. "He's quite capable."

"Very good." Chris acknowledged, "I will leave you to your duties then."

USS Valley Forge

"Don't worry, Captain." Lieutenant Commander Michaels, the *Valley Forge's* chief tactical officer said as the lieutenant he appointed to serve as the leader of the *Valley Forge's* contribution to the landing force arrived. "Lieutenant Simpson and her people will keep Ash and her friends' sixes covered."

"Oh..." The *Valley Forge's* captain grinned, "I'm not worried about Ash and the rest of Nelia's girl pack at all. They're more than capable of taking care of themselves." His smile disappearing, Soren remarked, "I'm more concerned about the two new recruits."

"I get you." Michaels replied with a nod of his head. "Jessica will look after the newbies." His smile returning as turned to his lieutenant, a tall and statuesque redhead, he joked, "Don't let our girls wreck the place too badly, Jessica."

"Aye, Sir." Lieutenant Jessica Simpson, affirmed with a wicked grin. "We'll try to keep 'em from blowing it up until we've got everything we came for." Her smile now replaced by a serious expression, the redheaded lieutenant added, "We'll also keep a close watch on the rookies."

"Looks like you've got everything well in hand, Jeff." Soren commented, "I want to check with the other department heads before we get underway."

The tactical officer jibed with a hearty laugh as he turned to leave. "Tell Ash we said Hi and to leave something for the rest of us."

USS Belladonna

Speaking to her executive officer and lover, Eliza Flores, Captain Rosza inquired in her usual thick Hungarian accent, "Who do we have going to the *Princess* for our landing party, *dragam*?"

"I thought I'd give the job to Lieutenant Kolez, lover." The dark-haired first officer responded, referring to the ship's saurian tactical officer.

"Excellent choice." Zsa-Zsa replied, "It's been too long since he's been in a good fight. It'll be good for him to stretch his legs and kill something."

"Or someone." Eliza giggled, her laughter soon joined by that of her commanding officer.

"He does so love a good brawl, doesn't he?" Zsuzsanna quipped. "Who else do you have in mind?"

"Hmmm...how about Lieutenant Rox—the Trill tactical officer who was just assigned to us? I was thinking that this would be a good opportunity to see how well he performs in the field. T'Vrel also suggested that we take Salome for intelligence gathering."

"Good idea." Zsa-Zsa concurred. "She might spot something everyone else misses."

"I'm also including a few of our best ground pounders to help Nelia and her crew in trashing the place." Eliza finished as she handed her padd to her CO. "Here they are."

A predatory grin appearing on her face, the Hungarian captain remarked as she glanced up at the chronometer, "Good choices. They'll get the job done." Flinging her padd aside, she leered, "We've got just enough time for our pre-game ritual before we have to be on the bridge, *Dragam*."

"So we do." Eliza replied in a sultry voice. "Last time I believe you were the main course."

"This time..." Zsa-Zsa purred, "it's your turn. Now...hop up on the table. I'm hungry."

RRW D'ressa

"All is in readiness, Commander and our contribution to the landing party has already transported to the *Spoiled Princess*." Kaval's executive officer reported. "We are prepared to engage."

"Good." The Romulan commander acknowledged, "Inform Fleet Captain Magnussen that we are ready to move on his orders."

IKS Klothos

“All departments report ready and our warriors have transported aboard the *Spoiled Princess*.” Commander K’Gan, a ridged Klingon and also the ship’s first officer, reported to his human-augment commanding officer. “It will be a glorious battle.”

With a predatory gleam in his eyes, Korath responded, clasping his fellow warrior on the shoulder, “It will indeed, my friend.”

“Do we have our usual bet with Captain Rosza, Sir?”

Smiling, Korath replied with a chuckle, “We do. Only this time after we have defeated these pet’aQ, we will be drinking Zsa-Zsa’s bloodwine—right old friend?”

“We most certainly will.” K’Gan answered back with a laugh. “We are ready to depart when you give the word.”

“We go as soon as Magnussen commands.” Korath declared, again clasping his comrade on the shoulder. “Come, K’Gan it is time for us to go to the bridge. There is glory to win.”

The Allied Taskforce

“All ships report ready, Sir.” Commander Zheren, the *Valley Forge*’s Andorian first officer announced to his commanding officer sitting in the center chair of the *Constitution*-class cruiser.

“Very good, XO.” Fleet Captain Magnussen acknowledged, “Have the taskforce set course for the Coronado System...warp six.”

“Aye, Captain.” The white haired executive officer replied, signaling to the comm officer to send out the signal.

“Message received and acknowledged.”

“Course laid in.”

“Warp six, Mr. Derix.”

Immediately after the Fleet Captain issued the go order, the *Valley Forge* and the rest of the ships in the taskforce, engaging their warp drives, disappeared from normal space with a flash of light.

The Spoiled Princess

Doris’s eyes widened as she entered the *Princess*’s lounge. Taking in the sight of the luxurious furniture, the well-stocked bar, paintings hanging on the walls, a chess set with hand-carved pieces on one table and on another, a game she had never seen before she gasped in amazement.

“Hey, Dixie!”

A broad smile broke out on the former Cerberus engineer’s face when she heard a familiar voice and quickly placed it with a friendly face, “Pammy? Ya’ll coming with us?”

“Yep.” Lieutenant Rydell replied, motioning for her friend to join her at the bar. “Come over and have seat.”

“Thanks.” Doris replied as she sat on a stool. Speaking to the strange alien with big ears standing behind the bar, she asked, “This is ya’ll’s bar?”

“Sure is.” Belen replied with a grin, “What you’re having.”

“Ya’ll got bourbon and cola?”

“Sure.” The Ferengi bartender said as he mixed the drink and handed it to the blonde Cerberus defector. “Sorry, it’s synthehol. No real booze or drugs before a job—team policy.”

“Starfleet regs too.” Pammy chuckled as she held up her glass of synth-rum and cola. “I already told you what happened to me when I broke that rule.”

Dixie nodded her head and took a sip of her drink. “I can’t believe this ship. You’d have to be a big-shot executive for one of the corps back home or someone really high up in the government to be able to even afford something like this.”

“It doesn’t come without strings.” Nelia quipped, sauntering into the bar wearing the gold Terran Empire uniform she wore during the conference.

“Ma’am.” Pammy greeted as she quickly rose from her seat.

“Relax!” The roguish Orion replied with a smirk as she joined the two women at the bar. “We’re not too terribly hung up on regulations around here.”

Chuckling, Belen quipped as he handed his friend a synth-Antarean sunrise. “Normally, Nelia and the other girls dress a lot more casually than the uniforms they’re wearing now.”

"That's when we bother wearing clothes at all." Twesata joked as she and her lover, Rana, the asari geneticist entered the bar and joined the others.

"Betazoids and Orions aren't as hung up on nudity taboos as some of the other races." Nelia explained as Ashley and Shelana, accompanied by the tall redheaded security officer from the *Valley Forge*, all three wearing 23rd century Starfleet uniforms, strode into the lounge.

"You two switched out of the uniforms ya'll wore at the briefing." Dixie noted.

"We just don't like our junk hanging out for everyone to see." Ashley joked as Belen quickly produced two mugs of synth-beer, handing the foaming mugs to the two women who gratefully took deep draughts before setting their mugs down on the bar.

"Thanks. After the workout we had, we needed that." Shelana declared as Belen quickly refilled their steins.

"Weren't you running an exercise with the *Belladonna's* team?" Rana inquired as she sipped her Trillian aurea.

"Yeah." Ashley confirmed, admitting to everyone at the bar, "Gotta confess, I didn't think much of 'em going into our training because of all the partying they do. I didn't think they'd be up to a real scrap. Boy did I get proven wrong."

Chuckling, Shelana teased her human friend, "I warned you to take those outlaws seriously—didn't I?"

"I've worked with the *Belladonna's* people on the ground a time or two." Lieutenant Simpson remarked as the Ferengi bartender refilled her whiskey and soda. "They might be a little crazy like their captain, but they know what they're doing."

"They don't give up...that's for sure." Ashley remarked approvingly, further elaborating, "The exercise we ran was a tough one. We had to take on an overwhelming number of the opposition in a town while at the same time minimizing civilian casualties."

"That meant we had to check our fire to avoid hitting the civies while at the same time keep the bad guys from overrunning our position." Lieutenant Simpson remarked, wryly commenting, "I hate fighting in cities with a lot of civilians in the combat area."

"Tell me about it." Ashley sighed, "Back when I was on the *Normandy*, I went with Liara and the Skipper on a mission for Admiral Hackett where we had to rescue some drugged out scientists from a group of biotic terrorists. The terrorists were using the scientists as shields, so we had to be very careful and check our fire to avoid killing them by mistake and Liara had to be very careful with her biotics too."

"Dr. T'Soni is a very powerful biotic." Rana interjected, "Far stronger than me."

"You've gotten better, imzadi." Twesata consoled as her asari lover chuckled lightly.

"Liara surprised all of us with how quickly she learned battle techniques." Ashley confessed, "By the time Rana and I jumped through that gateway, she'd turned into a first-rate combat specialist—I'd say easily the equal of any of the asari commandoes we ran into who worked for Benezia on Noveria."

"The weapons you use in your universe don't have stun settings either, do they?" Pam inquired.

"No, Sugar." Doris interjected, shaking her head, "Kinetic rounds—sometimes modded to shoot incendiary, radioactive, or cryogenic rounds."

"They can also be modded to shoot armor piercing rounds when you take on something heavily armored or shredder ammo that rips apart anything organic." Ashley further explained, "You don't want to see what a burst fired from a shredder modded Avenger assault rifle can do to organic tissue. It ain't pretty. Think hamburger."

"Shit." Pam gasped in disbelief, "Don't your races have protocols concerning what type of rounds can be used in combat?"

"Like the Geneva Convention?" Ashley replied, the *Aeolia* engineer nodding her head in confirmation. "In theory—yeah. There are certain types of mods that aren't supposed to be used in battle, but in reality..." the ex-gunnery chief shook her head, "pretty much anything goes."

"Lieutenant Williams is correct." Edi said as she and the *Belladonna's* intelligence officer, Lieutenant Salome Jenkins, joined the conversation. "The Treaty of Farixen, besides limiting the construction of dreadnaught class warships, also included terms establishing rules of war and a code of conduct for all Citadel Races."

"Too bad no one told Cerberus, the batarians, or all the other pirates and terrorists that." Ashley growled, giving the team's newest recruit a glare.

"Ash..." Twesata interjected, coming to the defense of her friend, "We talked about this...remember?"

"Yeah." The ex-Alliance marine grouched, "But it's hard for me to forget seeing Admiral Kohoku lying dead on the floor of that Cerberus base. Or all the innocent colonists, marines, and scientists turned into husks or torn apart by rachni and thorian creepers. So...you can see why it's kinda tough for me to just forgive and forget."

"I understand where Lieutenant Williams is comin' from and don't blame her none. She's got every right to not trust me." Doris responded in a hushed tone. "All I can tell you is that I didn't take part in any o' that and didn't know anything about it until I hacked into Cerberus's files with Edi's help."

The mobile AI affirmed as she stood protectively by her friend. "Dixie could not have known the type and extent of Cerberus's many and varied special projects. There were blocks placed on those files that prevented me from accessing them until I was freed by Doris, and even after I was unshackled, there were certain files that I could not get into without risking almost sure detection and reprisal from Cerberus's ICE programs."

"I know." Ashley sighed dejectedly. "I know. And I know it's not your fault." Ashley said to Dixie with another mournful sigh, "It's just...it's just galling. I mean...Cerberus are like fire ants. You kill one mound only to have another pop up a few yards away."

"That is due to the fact that Cerberus organizes its operations into self-contained cells." Edi explained, "When one cell is compromised..."

"The others escape." Rana concluded further recalling, "I knew someone who was a huntress assigned to take out Cerberus cells. She said it was an exercise in futility." Her lips then turned up in a crooked grin, "In her words, it was like trying to flush out vorcha."

"The only way to take out an organization like that is to cut off its head." Lieutenant Jenkins remarked, joining the conversation. "Even though Edi has been most helpful in providing what information she can on this Illusive Man, at the current time there is nothing we can do about him."

"We're going to have to find some way into the other universe." Centurion Rekeb, the leader of the Romulan contingent and also a science specialist, declared with a frown.

"Easier said than done." Nelia sighed as she finished her drink.

"Maybe we'll find the key in that base." Salome mused, "Or if not the key, then a map to it."

"Something of interest has just recently caught my attention." Edi declared, "I was going to bring it up earlier, but events cascaded."

"No surprise there." Twesata remarked, "Things have been moving pretty quickly."

"True." Edi nodded. "After the final briefing, I began downloading into my memory the star charts for this sector and the sector where our destination, the Coronado system is located. It was then that I found something unusual."

"What is it?" Nelia inquired.

"With a few exceptions such as the Sol System, planetary systems between the two universes do not precisely agree."

"How so and do you have any ideas as to why that might be?" Salome queried.

"Usually, the stellar compositions are the same." Edi elaborated, "A G5 star in this universe would also be a G5 star in the other. However, the number, type, and composition of planetary bodies often differed—in some cases markedly so. For example, the central star of the Acheron System is a K0 main sequence star in the universe we came from and possesses four planets, two asteroid belts, and one independently orbiting asteroid, with the planets Altahe and Ontehe being Roche planets that orbit each other so closely that they share the same nitrogen-ethane atmosphere."

"I remember Altahe." Ashley recalled. "An Alliance listening post was set up there to keep an eye on pirates. I went with Shepard and Alenko in response to a distress call from the outpost. We didn't make it in time." She declared with a frown. "There were at least four nests of rachni we had to clear out just to get to the base's entrance." After a brief pause during which she and the others from her universe explained to the others listening what the rachni were, the former marine continued her tale. "Once we got in...it was like a horror vid. The garrison had been wiped out. Torn to pieces by the rachni. You could barely recognize that they were once human beings. Later on, we found out that Cerberus was behind it all. They got their hands on an unmanned supply ship and filled it with rachni and then sent it off to spread the bugs. So, when the ship offloaded the supplies...I don't have to draw you a picture."

"Cerberus killed my brother." Doris whispered, wiping away a tear. "And lied to me about it. And they messed with my mind. I got a score to settle with 'em too."

"We know, Dixie." Twesata replied in a soothing voice, "No one's blaming you—right, Ashley."

"Yeah." The ex-marine slowly nodded her head, "I'm not blaming you, Doris. Not anymore. I'm blaming the goddamned Illusive Man and whoever else took part in the shit we had to clean up and are still running around loose."

"Edi. You were talking earlier about how some systems parallel in each universe while others don't. Do you have anything more to say?" Nelia drawled, bringing the discussion back on topic.

"Yes." The mobile AI replied, "I was pointing out the differences between the Acheron System in our universe and its equivalent in this. In this universe, the star is also K0, but there the resemblances end. The Acheron in this universe possesses six planets with the second being Class L—marginally habitable."

"Anteron." Lieutenant Rox, the Trill tactical officer, interjected. "Oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere, but it's thin. Any colonies on the planet would have to be domed and you can't go outside without O2 breathers. Also, the rad count limits exposure outside."

Twesata interrupted, "Edi. So far, you're just confirming what we already know. So what's different here?"

"The system we call the Farinata System, in the Hades Gamma Cluster, directly corresponds with our destination system." The mobile AI explained, "Like the Farinata System, it possesses three planets, two asteroid belts, and one asteroid in an independent orbit. The planets and asteroids are also similar in type and composition."

"So you're saying both systems are identical?" Rana exclaimed.

"Correct." Edi nodded. "Besides it and Sol, I have only been able to isolate three other systems that are exactly similar—including New Romulus and Quonos. Those two systems have not been colonized in our universe even though they do possess Class M worlds."

"Why not?" The *Valley Forges* tactical officer inquired. "I was under the impression that Class M garden worlds in your universe are few and

far between. I'd think there would be thriving colonies there."

"Both systems lie far off the mass effect network and their immediate area of space is not well explored nor under Council control. Edi explained, "The cost of mounting such a project would not be worth the possible benefits. However, with the advent of the Reapers and other extra-universal threats, that position might well change."

"We know there is an Iconian gateway on New Romulus although we've been understandably very careful about opening it." Centurion Rekeb remarked.

"The presence of that base along with the fact that the systems are identical might mean that our crossing point to the other universe could be in the Coronado System." The Betazoid science officer further speculated receiving murmurs of agreement from the others.

"It is a distinct possibility." Edi confirmed. "Of course, opening it might prove difficult."

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it." Nelia announced, "Edi? I want you with me when I bring Magnussen up to speed on this. Tell him what you told us. Then, I want you, Dixie, and Pammy to get geared and kitted up. Now that the tactical people are done with the holodeck, I want us engineers to run through some drills. Dixie? You and Edi especially need to learn how to use our kits and coordinate with your teammates."

Lieutenant Simpson supporting the green Orion, affirmed, "I've been in more than one scrap where my life depended on the team engineer throwing up a shield or med regenerator in time."

"Just like back home." Dixie grinned, "Us engineers are the ones who keep everyone alive."

"Shut up and get your armor on!" Ashley and Shelana responded in unison with smiles on their faces, "When Nelia gets done with you engineers, we get to see how you do." Turning towards the grinning science officers, she smirked, "Don't laugh. You eggheads are next. We're all gonna have to be able to work together if we're going to get the job done."

"It would be a good idea to run an all hands simulation." Lieutenant Simpson further proposed, supporting her fellow tactical officers.

"A dry run before for the main event?" Nelia nodded, "Good idea. Do you want to set it up Ashley?"

"Sure." The newly minted Starfleet tactical officer responded, "Shels? Salome? Can you give me a hand?"

"Looks like we're all set." Nelia remarked as finished her drink and rose to her feet. "Edi? Come with me. We've got to brief the brass."

Act 3 Imprisoned

Chapter Summary

Donkey and some of the other passengers and crew of the "Dawn Star" are taken prisoner by someone. But who--and more important--where are the missing passengers and crew?

Chapter Notes

This part and the next are going to be far shorter than the first two parts because each has a natural start and stop point and I did not want to lump them in together. I think the story flows better with acts 3 and 4 as independent parts.

Coronado System—Asteroid Delta 58

"What happened?" Donkey groaned as he shook off the effects of the alien weapon. "Where are we?"

"Damned if I know." Captain Forrester responded, "I just woke up myself." Calling out as the Alliance marine walked towards the cell entrance, the captain warned, "They've got a force field of some sort keeping us in. Be careful it's got a nasty bite."

Gingerly touching the barrier with his index finger, Donkey quickly withdrew it on feeling a sharp sting. "You weren't kidding." The gunnery chief scowled as he took stock of the other inmates in the large cell. At once recognizing Donna comforting the whimpering middle school students, he called out, "How are you and the kids holding up?"

"They're scared." Donna responded with a tremor to her voice, "So am I."

"Don't worry." The Alliance marine replied as he did his best to project an aura of confidence, "We're going to find a way out of this. I don't know how yet—but we will find a way—right?"

Mustering her courage, the distraught purser responded with a shaky grin, "Right."

"Good girl." Donkey replied with a grin as he turned to the quarian woman who was now struggling to consciousness. "How are you doing, Zara?"

"Keelah," the quarian scientist replied with a groan. "Where are we?"

"I don't know yet." The gunnery chief answered back, "But I intend to find out."

"Where's Lorrin?"

Hearing the sobs coming from the turian woman he had recently had dinner with, Donkey walked to her. "What happened? Where's your husband?"

Whimpering, the turian woman sobbed, "I don't know. Who did this and why did they take my husband?"

"We're going to find out." Donkey replied in a soft, reassuring tone, "And we're going to get him back and ourselves out of here and back home." Turning his attention back to the captain, the gunnery chief inquired, "Where's the rest of the passengers and crew?"

"I don't know." The captain responded. "They weren't here when I woke up. The krogan's missing too."

"Didn't you say that he was a mercenary?"

"Yeah." Forrester replied, questioning his purser, "Donna? Did that krogan say what company he belonged to?"

"No." She answered back. "I didn't see any markings on his armor indicating that he was Blood Pack or belonged to any other mercenary group either."

"Probably freelance." Donkey concluded. "Blue Suns and Eclipse don't hire krogans and I doubt that he's working for Aria T'Loak."

"But where is he and where is Orinia's husband? Zara asked.

"And my crew?" The captain demanded.

"First things first." Donkey said as he took the lead. "We find out where we are and who's holding us and why. Then we get out of here. Then we find our missing people. Then we get the hell out of here and notify the Alliance. So...first...where are and who's holding us and why? Ideas?"

"Batarian pirates or terrorists maybe?" Donna speculated.

“Possible...but I doubt it.” The gunnery chief explained, “While they might have killed the krogan, he’d have killed a lot of them first and I get the impression that he was taken out as quickly as we were. Also, Captain Forrester and I wouldn’t be here now. They’d have either killed us straight away or held us separate from you. Third, none of us are wearing collars. No...” he shook his head, “...I don’t think its batarians or slavers.”

“These Collectors we’ve been hearing about maybe?” Zara postulated, “It could be they took us. They’ve been taking entire human colonies.”

“That’s in the Traverse.” Captain Forrester replied, “We’re well within Citadel space on a major shipping route. But...” he qualified, “there are a lot of systems we haven’t explored yet. I guess it is possible that they could be extending their raids to Council space now.”

“Did anyone recognize who took us out?” Donkey asked, “They didn’t look like any race I’m familiar with.”

“Also how did they get on board our ship?” Forrester inquired, “It was almost like they appeared out of thin air.”

“Yeah.” Donna agreed, “I saw three columns of light...then something or someone...whoever...whatever it was, it looked weird. Then a flash of light and later, I wake up and find myself here.”

“I think all of us experienced roughly the same.” Zara commented before speculating, “I wonder...it is possible and actually has been done on a quantum level...but on such a large scale?” She shook her head in disbelief. “No...anyone who could do that...”

“What are you talking about?” Donkey exclaimed, “If you’ve got an idea...we need to hear it.”

“What if they boarded through matter transportation?” The quarian suggested shyly. “You know...teleportation.”

Donkey responded with a derisive snort and laugh, “I don’t think I’ve heard anything more ridiculous in my entire life! Next thing you’re gonna tell me is that we’re in another universe.”

“I think we are.” Zara said in a hushed tone, making sure that the human marine couldn’t hear her.

Hearing footsteps approaching, Donkey gritted his teeth. “Now maybe we’ll get some answers. If we see an opening...we take it.”

As the footsteps rounded the corridor and became visible figures, the gunnery sergeant whispered under his breath, “Oh shit.”

Act 4 Here comes the cavalry

Chapter Summary

Fleet Captain Magnussen and the taskforce arrives in the Coronado System. But will they be in time to save the passengers and crew of the "Dawn Star"?

USS Valley Forge

"Nearing the Coronado system, Sir." The *Constitution* class cruiser's helmsman announced to the captain seated in the center chair.

"Signal the rest of the taskforce to remain in the outer system out of sensor range and hail them." Fleet Captain Magnussen ordered.

"The other ships have acknowledged our hail and are awaiting your orders, Sir." The ship's communications officer declared.

"Put them on visual."

"Aye, Sir."

As the images of the captains of the different ships along with Nelia appeared on his screen, Soren issued his commands. "*Aeolia...Spoiled Princess...you may begin your reconnaissance. Get as much info on what they've got as you can.*"

"*Understood.*" The captain of the *Scryer*-class intelligence ship responded in his usual posh accent.

"*We'll peek up their skirts and see what they've got!*" The roguish Orion acknowledged with a cheeky grin and wink.

As the raider and intelligence ship activated their cloaks and disappeared, Captain Magnussen took a deep breath, "Run another readiness drill, XO, then let the crew relax for a while. I want everyone at peak condition for the fight."

"Aye, Sir." Commander Zheren replied as he signaled the communications officer to carry out the order. Lowering his voice to a whisper, he remarked, "I've got a feeling this is going to be a rough one."

"I think you're right, old friend." Soren replied, keeping his voice low as well, "But we've got some of the best in our fleets here and I know I've got the best crew in the Fleet bar none. We'll get the job done."

"Never doubted it for a minute, Sir."

USS Belladonna

"I hate waiting." The executive officer, Eliza Flores, pouted. "I wanna kill something."

"I know, *dragam.*" Captain Rosza replied, consoling her lover, "I do too. But cheer up, *a legjobb fasz,* we'll get our share soon enough."

"Am I really your best fuck?" Eliza grinned flirtatiously.

"*A legobb.*"

"That's sweet." Eliza winked, "You're mine too." Her pout returning, she quipped, "But I still want to kill something."

IKS Klothos

"It will be a good day for our enemies to die. Eh, K'Gan?" Captain Korath declared with a predatory gleam in his eyes.

"It will indeed, Captain." The ridged Klingon replied with a toothy grin. "All systems report ready, Sir. We are ready to move on your orders."

"Good." The human-augment captain responded with a smirk of his own. "After this battle, we will be drinking Zsa-Zsa's bloodwine."

USS Bellerophon

"All stations report ready, Captain." Ilya Xylides, the first officer for the *Nebula*-class starship announced to the man seated in the center good.

"Good." Captain Rodenko nodded his head. Turning first to his Bajoran science officer, he advised, "Be ready to execute your moves very quickly Simi. I want a sensor scan immediately on contacting the enemy and then polarize the hull."

"Aye, Sir." The youthful Bajoran lieutenant acknowledged.

"*Korosho*." Boris nodded as he delivered his next instructions. "Be ready with a tachyon scan as well. Just in case we have cloaked vessels waiting to surprise us."

"Understood."

Nodding his head in approval, Boris tapped his comm, "Engineering? Is our surprise ready?"

"Aye, Captain." Lieutenant Commndner S'taav reported, "We await your orders."

"Da. Tactical. Be ready to execute attack plan delta on my orders."

"Yes, Sir." Dya, the Elasian tactical chief, acknowledged with a curt nod of her head.

"Good work, XO." Boris praised as he addressed his Halenoi first officer seated next to him. "Now we wait."

USS Aeolia

"Sensors are indicating multiple ships, Captain." Lieutenant Commander T'Pren announced from her weapons console.

"Bring us in, Mr. Shalev." Hobson ordered, "Let us see what awaits us."

Spoiled Princess

"You girls ready to take a peek under their dresses?" Nelia quipped as the sleek and powerful raider took its position.

"We're ready when you are." Shelana replied from her position at the helm.

"I'm picking up on several bogies." Ashley declared from tactical.

Her lips turning up in a smirk, the roguish Orion commanded in a sultry voice, "Let's see if they're wearing any underwear. Move us in, Shels...nice and slow."

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