

Bellerophon: Into the Unknown

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Bellerophon: Into the Unknown

by [DavidFalkayn](#)

Summary

Here begins the Raptorverse voyages of USS Bellerophon and its Captain, Boris Rodenko. In this story we meet the captain and some of the crew as the ship, under Boris's command, embarks on a mission to find the missing Admiral Morgan Bateson. This will propel the Nebula-Class Starship on an adventure leading it into the Raptor-verse.

Notes

This story will take place initially in the UT universe but will diverge from it very quickly. This story will also in all likelihood mark the last appearance of UT Elizabeth Shelby other than the odd name dropping here and there. Joseph Akinola also gets a brief cameo here, but this will in all likelihood be the last time we see him except for the odd mentioning. Both Boris Rodenko and Joseph Akinola were characters created by TheLoneRedshirt for his most excellent Bluefin series. If you have not read any of his works yet, I would strongly encourage you to do so and TLR, if you are reading this, I hope you're doing well.

Last Goodbyes and New Hellos

USS Bellerophon (Universe UT-01)

Captain Boris Rodenko spoke reassuringly to the two women on his viewscreen: one blonde and sitting in the center seat of a *Nebula*-class starship, and the other Asian wearing a lab coat and standing in what was obviously a medical facility, his thick Russian accent lending weight and confidence to his words.

“We will find him, Denise.” Captain Rodenko promised his lips turning up in a comforting smile. “I intend to make sure that he hears from your own lips that he is going to be a father.”

“Thank you, Boris.” Denise Murakawa smiled warmly at her and her husband’s dear friend, “I’ll light a candle and say the rosary for him and you.”

“*Spasibo*.” The burly Russian starship captain replied, his supportive smile still on his face as the blonde starship captain spoke.

“I’m sorry I can’t be there with the *Suthy* to help you *kis apam*.” Captain Elizabeth Shelby, commanding *USS Sutherland*, apologized, “But there have been Borg sightings in the Elkoli Sector...”

“And you are the best we have when it comes to dealing with the Borg, Elizaveta.” Gazing fondly at both women, Boris promised, “Do not worry. I will bring our wandering admiral back home.”

“Thank you, *kis apam*.” Liz smiled, further cautioning, “Be careful. There have been numerous anomalies in that sector and also sightings of strange ships. We haven’t been able to id any of them though. By the time we arrive on scene—they’re gone. If I were to hazard a guess, I’d say that someone is probing our defenses.”

“Maybe so, *dacha*.” Captain Rodenko nodded as he repeated his vow, “I will be careful and I will bring Morgan home.”

As the images of the two women on the viewscreen were replaced by stars, Captain Rodenko took a deep breath and exhaled, “Let’s see if we can find our missing admiral. Take us to the Fregan sector, Mr. Harmon, Warp six.”

“Aye, Captain.” The athletic and attractive platinum-blond haired human woman at the helm crisply responded, “Warp six.”

“Engage.” As the *Bellerophon* entered into warp, the Russian captain nicknamed the Commissar, by his crew during his time in the Border Service, turned to his first officer. “What is our ETA to the Fregan System, XO?”

“Approximate seventy-two hours at current speed, Captain. Fregan Sector is literally on the edge of the frontier.” Commander Ilya Xylides, a strikingly beautiful woman nearly human in appearance, her naturally purple hair and lilac eyes marking her as Halenoi, a new member of the Federation, responded. “Sir?” She added in a low concerned voice, “Might I suggest that you get some rest? You’ve been up ever since Admiral Bateson’s shuttle was reported missing thirty-six hours ago. With all due respect, we need our captain at his best.”

Taking another breath and exhaling, Boris barely suppressed a yawn. “You are right, XO. The crew needs rest too. Drop our alert status to green and resume normal watches. You have the con. I will be in my quarters.”

“I’ll comm you if anything happens or we get word, Sir.” Ilya promised as the burly Russian vacated the center chair.

“*Spasibo*.” Boris smiled, “Have a good watch, XO.”

“And you have a good rest, Sir.”

Retiring to his quarters, Boris first walked to the replicator, “*Ryazhenka*.” After unzipping and putting away his uniform jacket, the ‘Commissar’ picked up the fermented beverage and sat down on the couch. “Computer. Play the last message from Admiral Bateson. Stardate 56912.4. As the face of his former Border Service comrade and friend and later commanding officer appeared, Boris leaned back on the couch and, sipping his drink, watched again his old friend’s final message.

“*Hello Boris.*” Letting out a breath of air on hearing the baritone voice of his old friend, the burly Russian captain took another sip of his drink and paying close attention, listened. “*I’m sending messages to Denise, Liz, and Joseph as well as you, but if what’s going on is what I think might be happening, I’m going to need you to ride point on this. Borg activity in the Disputed Territories is picking up, so I need Liz to handle that and what I’m going to ask you to look into is way outside Joseph’s wheelhouse.*”

“Computer pause playback.” Boris ordered as he took another sip of his drink, “Why me, Morgan? I’m just an ex-Border Dog skipping a *Nebbie* now because of what happened to Liz a few years ago. Yes, I have a good ship and crew and we’ve done some good out here...but... why me?” After ordering another of the Russian fermented yogurt and milk drink and returning to his seat, he commanded, “Computer. Resume play.”

“*You’re probably asking yourself why I’m asking you to do this favor for me instead of Liz or maybe Sam. Like I said, I need Liz to deal with the Borg—that’s the immediate threat. This is something that’s more long-term—that is if there really is something there and I’m not finally going crazy. As for Sam—while he’s on his way to becoming a great starship captain one day, he isn’t there yet. He still has a lot to learn.*”

“Don’t we all.” Boris muttered as he sipped his drink.

“*And...Liz is going to need him and the Victory along with the other ships to tackle the Borg.*”

“So why are you sending me off on this possible wild goose chase when Elizaveta is going to need all the help she can get?”

"If you're getting this message, Boris, it's because I'm not able to talk to you in person. Something's happening. Something big. I think bigger than what happened with Liz."

"Bozhe moi." Boris muttered as he continued to listen intently to the message.

"If it is what I think it is, then it ties in together a lot of stuff I've seen over the years. A crooked grin appeared on Bateson's face as he uttered his next words, "I know what you're about to say and no—I'm not saying that I'm the center of the universe or anything like that. Do I look like Terrance Glover to you?"

Laughing, Boris continued to listen.

"The first time I noticed something odd was when I was on the Merlin back in the day. You remember me talking about Sonny Parker and Brooks Erdolan? The Merlin was my first posting out of the Academy. We were a Border Service cutter so we didn't do much in the range of exploration, but occasionally we'd have to send landing parties to the odd planet or planetoid. Mostly those planets were H, K, L, P type planets—not exactly places you want to spend your summer vacation at so they generally got a quick orbital scan, charted and that was it."

"Da." Boris nodded, "I am aware of them. They're usually located in barren areas of space of little to no strategic importance to any of the big or not-so-big players and quickly forgotten by almost everyone but..."

"But they make perfect hiding spots for pirate and smuggler dens or drop off points."

Nodding his head, Boris again agreed with his old friend, "Da tovarisch. Joseph was telling me about how he and his ship had to deal with a pirate's nest in the Mulari Badlands a few months ago."

"Anyway...that's when I first saw them. Old ruins. We didn't have the gear to carry out any sort of archaeological or scientific work, so Brooks and Sonny noted it in their reports and bucked them up the chain where they were apparently filed away and forgotten."

"Bureaucracy." Boris groaned, "One of the few constants in the galaxy."

"Second time was when I was on the Ajax. I noticed what seemed to be a wormhole opening and closing again when I was standing watch with Dee-Dee."

Chuckling Boris commented, "Standing watch tovarisch? Don't forget, you've shown me a holo-image of Lieutenant Del' Vecchio. I doubt very seriously you were merely 'standing watch' with her."

"All right." Bateson smirked as if the recorded image was live, "You caught me again, old friend. We were doing a little more than just standing watch, but we both saw the anomaly. We alerted Bob...Captain Wesley and reported to the bridge. Bob ordered the Ajax to the coordinates of the anomaly to investigate and our science officer picked up traces of verteron and chroniton radiation as well as dark energy. Robert dropped a sensor buoy and we departed. Starfleet kept the buoy active for a couple of years, but no other readings were recorded and nothing unusual happened so they picked it up and closed the case. Then I went to the Lady and that's when it got a little more real—and weird."

"Da." Boris nodded, "I remember. That is why I am on the *Bellerophon* and not still captaining the *Scamp*."

"You know about what happened to Bob, Aliz, and Jennifer with that obelisk and what Talana discovered—that poor Klingon and Vulcan—what those aliens did to them. You also know about the ruins we found on Eleuthra IV. And you know about me, my crew, and the Bozeman being caught in that time loop. But there's more. Recently I got reports of more and more of those anomalies appearing and disappearing. They never stay open long—seconds at the most. And they all have the same thing in common: the presence of trace amounts of verteron and chroniton particles accompanied by dark energy and sometimes dark matter. A few weeks ago, a scout ship found more of those ancient ruins on Fregan III—another L class planet. I'm going with Lieutenant Saunders to investigate. Once is coincidence, old friend. Twice? More times? No...there's something going on out there and I think it's big. So. If you're seeing this, that means that Saunders and I ran into something and we're not able to reach anyone. If that's the case I need you to go to the Fregan system. Find out what's going on and if it is as bad as I think it might be, then do whatever you have to do. Take care of yourself old friend. I hope one of these days we'll meet again. Tell Joseph the same thing. Give my love to Liz—tell her to try to take care of herself. And...tell Denise I love her. The only reason I am doing this is that I want her to have a future and if what I think is happening is occurring, then we are all at risk. Take care...good hunting...and I'll see you on the other side—wherever or whenever that other side might be."

"Bozhe moi. How big a pile of mugatu shit did you get yourself into Morgan and that you're getting me into as well tovarisch."

"Say, Angie, do you know what's going on here?" Lieutenant Luciano Conti, operations officer and navigator of the *Bellerophon*, asked the platinum blonde woman in the seat next to him.

"I've got no idea, Luciano." Angie responded with a frown as she lowered her voice. "All I do know is that when the Commissar gets that look on his face, something serious is going down."

"Simi?" Commander Xylides called out to the Bajoran science officer, "What can you tell us about Fregan III?"

"Class L planet." The chestnut haired Bajoran woman responded, "Marginally habitable but on the cool side. You'll definitely want to wear your parkas." She joked before continuing her report. "It was charted in a survey of the Fregan Sector by USS *Carlyle* in 2347. They investigated some old ruins and catalogued their findings."

"Which were promptly forgotten thanks to the outbreak of hostilities with the Cardassians that year." Ilya finished.

“Correct.” Simi confirmed with a barely disguised scowl at the mention of the word Cardassian. “After the war the sector lay within the neutral buffer zone between the Federation and the Cardassian Union.”

“And since there’s no Class M planets in that sector and Fregan III was in contested space, neither the Federation nor the Cardassians wanted to take the chance on a possible confrontation over what amounted to a pile of rocks.” Dya Alevastos, the Elasian weapons officer stated.

“Right.” Ilya nodded her head in affirmation. “And given the present state of Cardassia and Bajor and the Federation facing potential and real threats on multiple fronts, the sector is still low priority.”

“Making it a great place if you want to hide something ugly.” Angie commented.

“Exactly.” Ilya agreed before addressing her weapons officer, “Dya? I want you to run another check on our weapons and defense systems—just in case.”

“Do you want me to call a surprise drill?”

“Not now.” The Halenoi first officer replied with a shake of her head. “Let’s let the Captain sleep for a bit—he’s earned it. But I will recommend that we do so once he wakes up, so be prepared.”

“Aye, Sir.”

Twelve Hours Later

Hearing his door chime ringing, Boris, wearing a sweatsuit, answered, “Enter.” Smiling as his old doctor and friend entered, the Commissar joked, “I’ve been following your orders and doing my daily exercise routine. In fact, I’m on the way to the holodeck for a workout now. Care to join me?”

“Don’t mind if I do.” The Denobulan doctor responded joining his old friend as the pair walked down the corridor to the turbolift. “Do you have any ideas as to what Morgan might have run into?”

“Da.” Boris nodded as the pair entered the turbolift, “All bad.” Calling out to the computer, the Russian captain commanded, “Deck Five.”

“Not like our days on the *Scamp*.” Vordus remarked as the turbolift moved to its destination.

Answering with a snort of laughter, Boris agreed, “Da. Joseph and I never chased anomalies or poked around in old ruins.” His laughter now a winsome smile, he joked, “Well...there was that one time...”

“I know. I was there.” The doctor laughed, “So...have you heard anything from Vribb or the rest of our old gang?”

“Da.” Boris replied as the pair exited the turbolift and made their way to the holodeck. “Ronata is doing well as is the *Scamp*. She’s concerned about the Orion Syndicate though—it’s gone quiet in her sector.”

“Could be good.” Vordus pondered, “Or it could be bad.”

Nodding his head, Boris agreed as the pair entered the holodeck, “Da. They could be relocating their operations as she and Joseph have done a pretty good job of shutting them down. Or they could be preparing a trap for one or both of them.” After a momentary pause, the Russian captain ordered, “Computer. Initiate Rodenko One.”

Immediately the holodeck transformed into a gym with a treadmill, weights, and a punching bag. The Denobulan doctor added, “Computer. Weighing scales for human.” As the scales materialized, Vordus smirked, “Get up on them Boris. I want to see where you’re at now and then I’m going to perform a stress test on you. I’m interested in seeing your progress.”

“You are a slave driver.” Boris muttered as he got up on the scales. “Satisfied?”

“Not bad.” Vordus nodded, “You’ve lost three pounds. Now get on the treadmill. I want to see how your heart’s doing. If that’s showing improvement too, we can see about altering your diet somewhat.”

“How much improving?” Boris asked as he got on the treadmill and began his workout.

“Good...good.” Vordus nodded his head in satisfaction as he read the tricorder results. “Your heartrate is strong...respiration well within normal.” After a while, the Denobulan doctor instructed, “That’s good enough, Boris. Don’t overdo it. Go grab a shower, Captain—you owe me breakfast.”

“Da.” Boris laughed, “I’ll meet you at Babushka’s for breakfast.”

Returning to his quarters, the Russian captain grabbed a quick sonic shower and dressed only to have the red alert alarm ring out just as he was zipping up his jacket. Rushing to the bridge, the Commissar, taking the center seat, nodded his head in satisfaction as the department heads reported in.

“Shields raised and weapons online.” Dya called out from her tactical console.

“Engines are ready.” S’taav, the Vulcan chief engineer, announced from his station.

“All decks report ready. Damage control on standby.” Lieutenant Commander Tanvir Kumar, the operations chief, declared.

“Sciences ready.” Lieutenant Commander Simi announced from her station.

“Helm and navigation ready for action.” Angie and Luciano exclaimed in unison.

“All stations ready for action, Sir.” Ilya reported to the captain. “One minute thirty seconds.”

“Very good.” Boris nodded his head in satisfaction. “Take us off alert status, XO, and my compliments to the department heads and crew and...” he added with a crooked grin, “Good job, Ilya.”

“Thank you, Sir.” The Halenoi first officer responded as the red alert lights and alarms faded and the ship returned to normal. “Orders, Captain?”

“Time until we reach the Fregan system?”

“Eighteen hours at current course and speed.” Lieutenant Harmon responded.

“Very good.” Boris acknowledged, “Maintain current speed. My office, XO?”

“Aye, Sir.”

“Have a seat, Ilya.” Captain Rodenko requested, motioning to the chair in front of his desk.

“Is there a problem, Sir?” Ilya asked as she noticed the worried expression on her captain’s face.

“Da. I think so.” Boris affirmed, “What I’m about to tell you now is classified at the highest levels, but you need to know now in case something happens to me.”

“Yes, Sir.” The Halenoi first officer responded, “What is it?”

“It concerns Admiral Bateson.” Boris replied, “Besides hopefully finding our friend, we are following a trail he has been following for over a hundred years.”

“Sir?”

“These are Morgan’s personal logs—don’t worry, you’re cleared to see them. After you’ve gone through those, I’ve got some logs from the old *USS Lexington* and the *USS Sutherland* I want you to peruse. Finally, once you’ve done all that, I’ve got some of my personal logs for you to examine.”

“That’s a lot of homework, Sir.”

“Da.” Boris nodded, “It is. But you need to be aware of at least a little of what we might be dealing with.”

Rising from her seat, Ilya smirked as she made her exit, “Then I better get started. I’ll see you later, Captain.”

Angie

“You’re relieved, Angie.” Ensign Rarek, a young Caitian male just recently graduated from the Academy and one of the newest members of the *Bellerophon* family announced as he placed a friendly hand on the blonde lieutenant’s shoulder. “Go to Babushka’s and grab yourself something to eat and maybe a drink or two.”

“Good idea.” Angie responded with a bright smile of her own. “I am feeling kinda hungry. After dinner, I think I’ll wind down with that program I ordered last month. Have a good watch.”

“Will do.” The Caitian responded, “Have fun.”

Waving at friends and fellow crewmembers as she entered the *Bellerophon*’s unofficial pub, the blonde helmsman, making her way to a replicator, placed her order, “Pepperoni pizza with extra cheese, tossed salad with oil and vinegar dressing, and large cola.” Smiling as her order appeared, she walked to an empty table and, sitting down, began to eat.

“That looks...different.”

Looking up, Angie smiled as she recognized the attractive petite auburn-haired Trill woman wearing the blue-trimmed uniform of the sciences, ensign’s pips on the collar. “Hey...Lexa is it?”

“Yeah.” The youthful Trill replied, “And you’re Angie...right?”

“That’s right.” The blonde helmsman answered, “You’re one of the new ensigns that came in—aren’t you?”

“Yeah.” Lexa responded, “Just last week.”

“So...are you coming off shift or going on?” Angie asked, motioning for the other woman to join her.

“Coming off.” The Trill science officer responded as she took the seat on the other side of the table. “Hmmm...that smells good.”

“Grab yourself a slice. There’s more than enough for the both of us.” Angie chuckled as she pushed her plate to the center of the table.

“Thanks.” Lexa replied as she flagged down a waiter and ordered a sparkling water for herself. “So...do you have any idea where we’re going or is it hush...hush?”

“I don’t think it’s a secret or anything like that.” Angie mused before taking a bite of pizza and washing it down with some cola, “We’re headed out to the Fregan System. It’s out in the boonies so who knows—you might get something to do.”

“I wish!” The youthful planetologist exclaimed, “I’d like to go out and stretch my legs but...”

“But what?”

“I don’t think Commander Simi likes me.” Lexa heaved a dejected sigh, “I think she’s still upset because I was late reporting to my station when we had that alert.”

“That was when you first reported aboard and you didn’t know your way around.” Angie consoled. “I know you got your butt chewed out, but take my word for it, the Commissar chewed Simi’s rear out first.” Smiling, she placed a hand over that of her Trill friend. “Besides, you’re not the only one who’s gotten chewed out by a department head. I got my rear reamed by Tanvir once when I was an ensign. Think of it as a rite of passage.”

A big grin on her face, Lexa commented before taking a bite of pizza, “You’re always so cheerful! How do you keep it up? I don’t think I’ve ever caught you in a bad mood.”

“Oh, I have my bad days and bad moments.” Angie confessed as she brushed back a lock of blonde hair, “Believe me.”

“You wouldn’t know it from seeing you.” Lexa commented, “You’re always smiling and happy.”

“Not always.” Angie replied, the expression on her face now more pensive, her lips turned up in a tender smile. “It’s just that when I feel down, I kinda conjure up one of my ghosts.”

“What do you mean—ghosts?”

Her smile still gentle, the youthful blonde explained, “I don’t mean ghosts as in dead people.” Angie chuckled softly, “It’s kinda hard for me to describe. I just imagine that one of my parents or my best friend or my first love or friends of mine who I went to school with when I was a teenager are here with me, backing me up. They keep me from sinking—if you know what I mean.”

“Are you sure you’re not part Trill?” Lexa laughed, “Someone I know who’s joined told me something like that once. That whenever he felt down or felt like he was going to give up, one of his old hosts would speak to him and give him a boost.”

“You see.” Angie laughed merrily as she finished her pizza, “It works. That proves I’m not as crazy as you think.”

“Damn!” Lexa swore as she glanced up at the chronometer. “I’m sorry, but I’ve gotta go—a bunch of us are getting together to celebrate Jessek’s ascension day. I’d invite you to come with, but...”

“Hey.” Angie smiled, “It’s a lower deck thing. It wasn’t that long ago for me. Go on and have a good time.”

“Thanks.” Lexa grinned. Then, after a moment’s hesitation, the petite Trill asked—really pleaded, “Would you mind if we could hang out together sometime?” she blushed, “I’m still trying to get used to how things work here and haven’t really met many people and well...”

“Sure.” Angie smiled back, “Let me know when’s a good time for you and we’ll get together and do something—spend some time on the holodeck or something like that.”

“Yeah.” The young Trill smiled back, “I’d like that. I’ll get with you once I get a good idea what my schedule will be and we’ll set it up.”

“Works for me.” Angie grinned back, “Have fun and I’ll see you later.” Watching as Lexa walked away, Angie reached into her pocket and pulled out an old coin that had been carefully protected from wear and the elements. “Hi Dad...” the young blonde smiled a sad smile as she gazed down at the coin, “Something good happened today. I think I might have found a new friend.”

Simi and Luciano

“Something wrong?”

“What?” Simi looked up from the game of backgammon she was playing with Luciano.

“Something’s on your mind.” The handsome dark-haired Italian operations officer observed, “This is the third game in a row you lost. Normally we break even. What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing.” The Bajoran science officer replied, shaking her head.

“Simi...” Luciano gazed intently into his friend’s eyes, “Come on.”

Sighing, Simi reluctantly confessed, “I got some news from Bajor a few days ago. Until yesterday I wasn’t sure what I was going to do.”

“What is it? Bad news?”

Nodding her head, Simi answered back, “Yes. Ever since the *Bajora tava* formed that coalition with the Bajor First Party and gained control over both the Council of Ministers and the Vedek Assembly, Bajor’s become more and more isolationist.”

“I know.” Luciano nodded, “It hasn’t been that long ago that Federation citizens were expelled from Bajor. Why? Is your family in trouble or something?”

“No.” Simi shook her head, “They’re not in any trouble.. The government issued an order that’s going out to all Bajorans serving in non-Bajoran governments or organizations like Starfleet. I’ve been given a choice: renounce my Federation citizenship and resign my Starfleet commission and return to Bajor where I can accept a commission in the militia if I so choose or refuse and stay in Starfleet and be stripped of my Bajoran citizenship and barred from entering Bajoran territory.”

“What are you going to do?” Luciano asked.

“I sent a message back telling them that I was not going to leave Starfleet or give up my Federation citizenship—even if it meant that I would lose my Bajoran citizenship. I got their response a few hours ago.” Taking a deep breath, she groaned, “I’ve been stripped of my citizenship and excommunicated.”

“That’s why you’re not wearing your earring.” Luciano noted.

Nodding her head, Simi admitted, “Right. I’m forbidden from entering any temple, retreat, or any other shrine and banned from having any contact with any Orb of the Prophets and no Bajoran of faith will talk to me.”

Putting the pieces together, Luciano reached across the table and took his friend’s hand in his. “Your family has disowned you—haven’t they?”

Nodding her head, Simi burst into tears, “Yes!”

Acting instinctively, Luciano rose from his seat and reaching over to his friend, embraced her as he consoled, “You’re not alone, *cara mia*. You have friends and I am one of them.”

Ilya

As she listened to the logs, Ilya let out a breath. “I don’t know if I’m more worried about Morgan being right or wrong. If it’s wrong, it just means he’s crazy. But if he’s right...” shaking her head, she murmured, “I hope you know what you’re doing, Boris.”

Boris

“*Are you sure about this, Boris?*”

Smiling at the image of his old friend and former Border Service compatriot, Boris replied in a grave, rumbling voice, “Da. Tovarisch. I am. Have you ever known Morgan to act irrationally or to deliberately lie or exaggerate—except when he’s telling one of his stories that is?”

“No.” Joseph Akinola shook his head, “Not in the many years I’ve known him.”

“Same here.” Boris affirmed, “Something is happening and I think we’ll discover at least part of the puzzle on Fregan III. I wish I could ask you to join me but...”

“*Neither the old Bluefin nor its skipper is built for this type of work, my friend.*” Joseph responded with a sad smile. “*Take care of yourself and bring our friend back home safe. Fair winds.*”

“To you as well my old tovarisch.”

Making Preparations

Chapter Summary

Captain Rodenko and the crew of the Bellerophon prepare to explore the ruins of Fregan III. Lots of character work here.

Holodeck—48 hours before Fregan III

“Not bad!” Angie clapped her hands, pleased at how the ship’s cheerleading squad was shaping up. “I think we’re ready to move up to the intermediate level next time. Guys—we’re really going to be relying on you for our new routine, so be sure you all study the pics I’ll be sending to you and keep up with your exercises.”

“Do you think we’ll be ready for the game against the DS-11 Panthers?” Crysta, a vivacious young Bolian cadet asked as she took a towel and wiped off the sweat.

“Almost.” Angie smiled back, “We’re just about ready to give them a good show. A little more work and we’ll be there. All of you are doing a great job. We’re gonna start doing pyramids next week. Once we get those down, we’ll be in business. Now, if there’s nothing else, go and hit the showers.”

“Angie?”

“Yeah, Lex.” Angie responded, waiting for her Trill friend to catch up with her. “What’s up?”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Sure/” Angie prompted, “Shoot.”

“Okay.” The young Trill ensign took a deep breath before asking, “How can I get Lieutenant Nalo to give me a chance.”

“Simi’s not still mad at you, is she?” The platinum-blond helmsman queried.

“No.” Lexa shook her head, “At least I don’t think she is.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“It’s...it’s like this...” Lexa stammered, “it’s like no matter what I do...how well I do my job...I can’t seem to get her to notice me.” Letting out a dejected sigh, the young ensign groaned, “I’m sorry. You must think that I’m a shallow self-centered brat. Forget I ever brought the subject up.”

“Hey!” Angie consoled, draping her arm on her friend’s hug and giving her a reassuring hug. “It’s okay—really! My best friend from high school was often a self-centered brat.” Speaking now in a more serious tone of voice, she confided, “I can’t get into specifics, but Simi’s going through a rough stretch right now. Just give her time and keep on busting your butt. She knows how good a job you’re doing.” The light tone of voice returning, she joked, “Take my word for it, if you get Simi really mad at you, you’ll know it.”

Pausing at the turbolift, Lexa smiled warmly, “I better get to my quarters and clean up before I start my shift. Thanks, Ang. I needed that.”

“Any time.” Angie replied, returning her friend’s grin with one of her own. “Breakfast tomorrow?”

“Sure.”

“I’ll see you then!” Angie exclaimed as the turbolift closed. “Time for me to grab a shower and get some sleep too.” She murmured as she got a whiff of her body odor. “I think you’d have liked the girls here, Britt.” The platinum-blond commented, mentally conjuring up an image of her best friend from her youth, a blonde teenager with a sunny smile and innocent face. “We’ve even got a few guys wanting to join up. You know...” she laughed softly, “we could have used them on our squad—especially when it came time for pyramids.”

The door to her quarters sliding open, she entered, commanding as the door closed, “Computer...dim lights.” Stripping off her clothes, the attractive reasonably well-endowed blonde made her way to the sonic shower. After a short time in which she permitted the sonic vibrations to clean off the sweat of the day, she emerged from the shower and slipped on a pale blue chemise. Exiting the bathroom, her eyes widened at the sight of the dark-haired man wearing a Starfleet uniform with captain’s insignia lounging comfortably on her couch.

“Q?”

“Have a seat, my dear.” The cosmic entity requested, patting the sofa, “We have a lot to talk about.”

“About what?” Angie gulped as she complied with the near-omnipotent being’s polite request.

“Something very important.” Q answered, his expression one of rare gravity. “Cataclysmic forces are about to be unleashed. Forces that will devastate and even destroy entire universes. And you—my dear—will be on the front lines.”

“I thought that ended when my...my...” Tears appearing on the normally perpetually happy girl’s face, she sobbed, “My love...” her eyes drifted down to a sketch of her as a teenager and another young teenage girl, both wearing dresses that resembled the ones flappers wore in the

1920s, “when she...”

“Her sacrifice...and yours...delayed it, *mon cheri*. You closed one door...but there are other doors...other windows. They are still open.” Q explained as he conjured a white handkerchief and handed it to Angie.

“What doors?” Angie asked as she daubed the moisture from her eyes, “Who opened them? And why?”

“These doors were left open billions of years ago by a race that even the Continuum fears.” Q somberly replied. “I can’t tell you everything, my dear—I’m not permitted to. As I told you long ago, there are limits even on my powers. I can give you this ray of hope though: you will not be alone. Your friends on this ship...and new friends...some of whom you might meet very soon...will be there fighting with you and beside you. And I will pop in on you from time to time to see how you are doing.”

“And my mother? My friends?” Angie asked worriedly, “What about them?”

“Don’t worry.” Q answered with a reassuring smile, “They are in a little pocket universe I’ve created for them that I put safely in the past and just to be sure, I also put them into a time loop.” Seeing the look of disappointment on the young blonde’s face, the cosmic being explained, “I had to do that, *mon cheri*. It was the only way I could guarantee their safety from the storm that is about to come. But to keep them from missing you, I’ve taken the liberty of conjuring up a duplicate of you with all of your memories and characteristics from just before our first meeting. They’ll believe it’s you and that you never left them.”

“Thank you, Q.” Angie sobbed as she leaned forward and kissed her benefactor on the cheek. “I think Britt would go crazy if she didn’t have me to talk to. You’ve done so much for me. Given me a new start...a new life.”

“It was the least I could do for you, my dear.” Q replied with a blush, “You and your beloved helped me at a time when I truly needed help and you both willingly paid a high price to do so. I promised you that I would protect your loved ones and if I’m nothing else, I am a Q of my word.”

“Thank you again.” Angie responded softly as she again daubed her eyes. “So...what happens now?”

“Now, *mon cheri*.” Q said in a gentle tone as he passed the palm of his hand over Angie’s face, “You sleep.” Smiling warmly at the now slumbering young woman, her head resting on his lap, the cosmic entity picked her up and carried her to her bed. Tucking her in, he kissed the palm of his hand and laid it on Angie’s forehead. “When you wake up, my dear, know that you will embark on the adventure of a lifetime. Your father and beloved would be proud of you.”

Sickbay—24 hours before Fregan III

“Let me guess.” Dr. Vordus snorted as Simi entered the sickbay with a noticeable limp. “You pulled a muscle playing springball in the holodeck again.”

“Yup.” The Bajoran science officer grimaced as she limped to the Denobulan CMO. “I was playing in the 2380 summer Bajoran Open and drew Falon Nerel as my opponent.”

“The same Falon Nerel who won the Triple Laurels four years running?” Dr. Vordus asked with a crooked grin on his face, “The one who led the League in cautions for unsportsmanlike conduct?”

“The very same.” Simi laughed as she sat down on the examination table.

“All right. You know the drill. Stay still while I do my thing.” Vordus replied as he ran a medical scanner over his patient. “Hmmm...”

“Hmmm...what?” Simi asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Looks like you’ve injured your hamstring. Analgesic for the pain.” The doctor explained as he injected his patient with a hypospray. “Nurse? Hand me that subdermal regenerator please?”

“Here doctor.” The Caitan nurse responded as she handed the device to Vordus.

A few minutes later, after he had finished his work, Vordus declared, “That should take care of the hamstring, but I’m putting you on light duty for three days.”

“Three days!” Simi exclaimed, “We’re going to be in the Fregan system in one. I’m supposed to go on the landing party!”

“Commander Xylides will just have to get someone else.” The Denobulan physician answered and then suggested, “What about that new ensign? The Trill? I’ve heard that she’s a planetologist and that she’s itching for something to do.”

“I don’t know...” Simi frowned, shaking her head, “She’s just out of the Academy and this is an important assignment...”

Vordus took a deep breath and exhaled before speaking, “I probably shouldn’t be telling you this, Simi, but I’m going to anyway. That girl thinks that you’ve got it in for her.”

“What?” Simi exclaimed, “That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard! Why would she ever think something like that?”

“From what I’ve heard, you really lit into her when she just came on board.” Vordus patiently explained, “It seems that she was late for orientation because she’d gotten lost and, again, I’m going on hearsay here so I’m not sure how accurate it is—you were very rough on her. And since then, she’s been itching for a chance to prove herself to you, but at the same time she’s scared to death of you.”

Racking her memories, Simi recalled, “I think I remember what happened now, Doc. It happened just before I was excommunicated and my family disowned me. I’ll admit I was on a hair trigger—still am somewhat.” But...” she shook her head, “I’m not holding a grudge against her or anything like that. Until now, nothing’s come up where her capabilities would prove useful.”

“Looks to me like something’s come up now.” Vordus prompted, giving his patient a searching look, “Don’t you think so?”

After a momentary pause, Simi nodded her head, “Yeah. Okay. I’ll put her name in for Ilya. But she makes the final decision.”

“That’s fair.” The Denobulan physician agreed with a wide grin, “I guess that’s all—just remember you’re on light duty for the next seventy-two hours.”

“Okay, Doc.” The Bajoran science officer acknowledged, “I’ll take easy. Promise.”

“Good.” The doctor said before offering one final suggestion to his patient as she made her exit, “Oh...one other thing. You might want to clear the air with young Ensign Cato before we arrive at our destination.”

Dya and Luciano—Holodeck—Twelve hours before Fregan III

Wearing an Elasian tunic, cuirass, and greaves and holding a short sword in his hand, Luciano asked the woman before him wearing similar armor and also bearing a short sword in a bantering tone, “So, Dya, is this how a typical Elasian date works?”

“This isn’t a date.” The raven-haired tactical officer chuckled. Her expression now more serious, Dya explained, “Have you read those *Lexington* logs like you were supposed to?”

“Yeah. Of course I did!” Luciano declared before blushing at the skeptical look on Dya’s face. “Well...okay.” He guiltily confessed, “Maybe glanced at would be more accurate. It’s just that some of the stuff was well...”

“Disturbing? Unbelievable?” Dya prompted.

Nodding his head, the Italian operations officer affirmed, “Exactly.” Then, looking down at the blade he was holding, queried, “Why are we doing this?”

“Remember when Wesley and some of his crew were teleported off their ships and dumped into what they think was a parallel dimension?”

“A little.” Luciano confessed, “To be honest, it kind of confused me. I wasn’t sure if they were dumped into another universe or another galaxy or what.”

“Don’t feel bad..” Dya laughed, “I don’t think anyone else knows the answer to that either. It doesn’t matter. Wherever they were dumped, they couldn’t use their phasers so they had to improvise using makeshift spears and clubs and relying on traps for food and to defend themselves. We’re doing this in case the same thing happens you’ll know how to use an edged weapon or something like that.”

“What about the others on the landing team?” The young Italian ensign persisted, “Are they going to get the same training?”

“They’ve already had it. Either from me...the Academy...or from someone else and before I’d let them get out of training they had to prove to me that they knew what they were doing—even Lexa. In fact, she completed her course a couple of hours ago.” The Elasian tactical officer declared, “Now it’s your turn. You wanna be on the landing party, you’ll learn how to use that sword.”

“All right!” Luciano grumbled, “Let’s get this over with.”

An hour later, Luciano, sweaty from several practice bouts with his Elasian teacher asked, “So how did I do teach?”

“Not bad for a beginner.” Dya replied, continuing her evaluation. “Your endurance and muscle strength is good as is your reaction time. You have a tendency to telegraph your moves and you fall for feints too easily—but that’s the sort of stuff you’ll learn to look out for in practice.” Her expression now taking on an air of gravity, the tactical officer cautioned, “Combat with melee weapons like swords, knives, and even clubs can get messy—very messy. You have to learn to shut that out and let your muscles and reflexes do their work. Close combat is not the time for hesitation or squeamishness. Save all of that for after the fight is over. Understood?”

Nodding his head, Luciano acknowledged, “Yeah. I understand.”

Dya smiled as she patted the young operations officer on his shoulder, “You did good, Lucky. Hit the showers and I’ll see you for lunch at Babushka’s before our shift begins.”

Returning to his quarters, Lieutenant Commander Tanvir Kumar at once made his way to the replicator and, after ordering a cup of Darjeeling tea, commanded as he sat down on the couch, “Computer, open a subspace channel to my husband.” The image of a dark haired human in his thirties appeared on the monitor soon after. “Hey, Derek.”

“*Tanvir! Where are you? You’re supposed to be at DS-11.*”

Chuckling, the Indian operations officer quipped, “You knew what you were getting when you said, I do, honey.”

“*Yeah. I guess so.*” Derek responded with a winsome grin, “Deidre was looking forward to seeing you.”

“How is our little imp?” Tanvir laughed.

“She’s doing fine—staying out of trouble for a change.”

“Heh. That’s a switch.”

“She wants to try out for the school gymnastics team.”

“That’s good.” Tanvir nodded his head approvingly, “It’ll give her a way to burn off some energy—provided she keeps her grades up, that is.”

“That’s one of the conditions I demanded when I told her she could try out.” Derek explained, *“She has to keep at least a B average and stay out of trouble—no demerits or reprimands.”*

“Good.” Tanvir smiled, “She’s a good girl—just a little rambunctious at times. Tell her I miss her.”

“I will” Derek promised. *“So...do you have time to talk? It’s been a long time since we’ve spoken to each other.”*

“All the time in the world.”

Science Lab:

Silently watching as her newest officer worked studiously at her monitor, Simi coming to a decision, called out to her. “Lexa? Would you come into my office, please?”

“Yes, Ma’am.” Lexa responded with a nervous hitch to her voice, taking a deep breath and then exhaling as she entered her superior officer’s office.

“She looks like she’s marching to her execution.” Simi commented to herself as she observed as the anxious young ensign slowly make her way to her office. “Have a seat.” The Bajoran science chief requested, gesturing to a chair in front of her desk. Waiting patiently until Lexa had taken her seat, Simi gave the young woman an encouraging smile, “I’ve heard good things about your performance from Lieutenant S’kar. He’s a hard man to please—almost as hard as I am.”

“Ummm...” Lexa shifted in her seat, timidly responding, “Thank you, Ma’am.”

Heaving a sigh, Simi, carefully choosing her words, admonished her skittish young officer, “I’ve studied your Academy record, Lexa. You consistently scored in the top five percent of your class academically. The only thing keeping you from graduating at the top of your class was one very important detail.”

“Ma’am?”

“When it came to your leadership classes, you consistently placed in the lower tier. After reading the comments of your instructors and seeing you in action, I find myself in agreement with them. Your main failing is a lack of confidence. That—more than anything else—is what is holding you back. That is why I am recommending you for Commander Xylides’ landing party when we get to Fregan III. You’ve been cleared for access to the classified portions of Admiral Bateson’s logs. Study them and be ready to move out once we arrive in system. Any questions?”

“No Ma’am.” Lexa responded as she tried without success to keep from smiling.

“Good.” Simi, keeping a poker face, nodded her head. “It won’t be long until we’ve arrived at Fregan III and you’ve got a lot of prep work to do. Dismissed.”

Chuckling softly as she heard her subordinates enthusiastic “Yes, Ma’am!”, Simi muttered under her breath, “I hope you don’t get yourself killed, kid.”

Bridge

“Approaching Fregan System, Captain.” Angie reported from her position at helm.

“Drop us to impulse and maintain course to Fregan III.” Captain Rodenko commanded. Turning to his first officer, the Commissar grunted, “Thoughts XO?”

“According to Admiral Bateson’s logs, we should start picking up trace amounts of verteron and chroniton energy along with dark energy now.” Commander Ilya Xylides, the purple haired, lilac-eyed Halenoi first officer commented. “Simi?” the first officer prompted the Bajoran science officer.

“Sensors are picking up slightly increased presence of those particles.”

“Can you trace them to a source?” Boris inquired.

“Affirmative.” The Bajoran science officer responded as she cross referenced her results with the admiral’s log. “The particles all seem to stem from a location on Fregan III.”

“Right.” Rodenko acknowledged with a single nod of his head, “Assume standard orbit around Fregan III, Angie.” Turning to the youthful

Trill seated at the science station next to his chief science officer, The Commissar, testing her mettle, quizzed, "Ensign. What are we dealing with on the ground here?"

"Class L planet tidally locked to Fregan, a Class K0 star." Lexa replied as she read off the details of her scans. "Thin oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere. The temperatures on the nighttime face average approximately minus one hundred degrees Celsius."

"Environmental suits would be required if we have to beam down to the surface." Lieutenant Commander Kumar, the Punjabi Operations chief remarked.

"Correct." The Trill planetologist officer affirmed. "Temps on the daylight side are somewhat more hospitable though with average temperatures approximately minus thirty degrees Celsius."

"We're still going to need more than standard parkas." Ilya noted receiving an affirming grunt from her captain.

"Da." Boris nodded, "Full cold weather gear plus portable shelter."

"And plenty of hot tea", Angie quipped.

"Anything else?" Ilya inquired, "Life signs? Radiation? Signs of former habitation?"

"No signs of life." Lexa reported, her Bajoran superior officer giving her a smile of encouragement. "Slightly high levels of radiation with the highest concentration near some ruins my scans have picked up at the terminator. I'd recommend anti-rad injections for the landing party and possibly booster shots."

"Da. Very good, Ensign" Boris acknowledged approvingly before issuing his next command, "XO? Is your team ready?"

"Always, Sir." Ilya responded with a crooked grin.

"Good." Boris nodded. "Time for you and your people to stretch your legs. Go down there and see if you can find any clues as to where Admiral Bateson might have gone."

"Aye, Captain." Commander Xylides responded, "Ensign Cato? Do you think you're ready to take a walk?"

"Yes, Ma'am!" The young Trill officer exclaimed, blushing slightly as she realized that she was almost shouting.

"Good to see that you're enthused." Ilya quipped with a smirk. "Angie? You're on the team too. Dya? You also and bring a security trooper with you."

"Aye, Commander." The Elasian tactical chief replied.

Tapping her comm, the Halenoi first officer issued her next set of orders, "Dr. Vordus?"

"Yes." The Denobulan CMO replied.

"Report to Transporter Room One for landing party detail. We'll have cold weather gear available there. Also, we'll all need anti-radiation treatments before beaming down."

"Acknowledged." The doctor affirmed, "I'll meet you in the transporter room."

"Ang...Dya...Lexa." Ilya ordered, gesturing towards the turbolift. "Ready?"

"Aye, Sir."

"Then let's get moving. We've got some ruins that need exploring and maybe some questions to answer."

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