

Opening Moves

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Opening Moves

by [DavidFalkayn](#)

Summary

The battle for the Coronado System and to rescue the prisoners begins.

Notes

An advantage of the written word over video games and even movies and television serials is that you can stretch out time much more easily in the written word. You have to move at a quicker pace in video games, movies, and video serials. As a result of that, events and character development that should take weeks...months...years...is done in hours...days...weeks. I have taken full advantage of this "time stretching" in this story. For example, Ashley and Rana have been in the ST universe for quite a few years (give or take). They've built new lives for themselves and neither will have any desire to go back to their old lives. Now, that doesn't mean they want to cut out ALL connections. For example, Ashley most definitely misses her family and friends from the Normandy, but, she's got no intention of returning to the Alliance. She's a Starfleet officer now and feels a new sense of purpose and has built new relationships and bonds. Not everyone in her old life will be pleased at this occurring. Expect more than once for old associates of hers and others in the Alliance to refer to her as having 'gone native' or worse. Rana is also very happy with her new life--she's gotten a fresh start and is very much thankful for that.

I have never liked the "Ashley the space-racist" stereotype. I think that's a very simplistic view of a far more complex and nuanced character. If you take her out on missions and talk to her instead of keeping her warehoused in the armory until she's Virmired, I think you'll find that she is worth the time. In this story, she's had over two years of working with and living with and bonding with a primarily non-human crew on the Spoiled Princess. Added to that, she's been exposed to new ideas and perspectives. Ashley is a very intelligent individual driven heavily by family history and obligations as well as resentment over how her father and grandfather were treated--ironically by the same Alliance military she used to be a part of! To be honest, it's amazing that she even joined the Alliance military and I think you can make the case that she was never really very happy wearing Alliance blue--that she did it more as a result of family obligation and baggage than anything else--she did what she was expected to do by her family--not necessarily what she wanted to do. Now, in a new universe, she's doing what she wants to do--probably for the first time in her life. Here we see Ashley really coming into her own as a leader as she also makes her final break with her old life.

Eyeing the Dance Floor

Coronado System

Nelia sat nervous in the center chair tapping her fingers on the armrest as the *Spoiled Princess*, accompanied by the *Aeolia*, closed to within passive scanner range of the asteroid. Speaking to her Betazoid science officer, she inquired, “What are we looking at Twes?”

“At least a half dozen Syphon frigates.” Twesata reported from her science station, her lips turned down in a frown.

On the other reconnaissance ship, the *Aeolia*’s executive officer, Commander Anara Rysyl, reported to her captain. “In passive scanning range, Sir.”

Leaning forward in his chair and cupping his chin, the captain, his poker face, and cool aristocratic voice giving evidence as to how he earned his nickname, the Iceman, addressed his science officer, “Composition of enemy forces, Mr. Velen?”

“Two *Exeter*-class Terran Empire cruisers and a Tal’Shiar *D’deridex*-class warbird.” Lieutenant Commander Velen, the *Aeolia*’s Denobulan science officer called out to his captain.

Back on the *Spoiled Princess*, as Twesata read off the next ship, she cursed, “Shit! I’ve got a goddamned Elachi *Monbosh*-class battlewagon.”

“Fuck me dead.” Nelia muttered.

“Terran *Miranda*-class frigates.” Velen, on the *Aeolia*, recited as Captain Hobson nodded his head in response.

“It looks we’re going to be very busy today.” Anara remarked to her lover in the captain’s chair.

“I would say so.” Chris replied in his usual level tone. “Anything else?”

“One other ship.” Velen reported, “Unarmed. Configuration unknown. Fusion power source detected, but at low levels.”

“Hmmm...” The stoic captain vocalized, “Run it through the ship database that Edi uploaded for us. See if there’s a match.”

“Playing a hunch, my love?” Anara whispered.

Nodding his head slightly, Chris responded with the slightest of smiles, “Call it a feeling.”

Carrying out his captain’s request, the Denobulan science officer responded, “The database classifies it as an *Athabasca*-class freighter from the other universe. Systems Alliance origin. Configured to carry both freight and passengers.”

“Interesting.” Hobson mused, “It would appear our friends have been busy.”

“I’m picking up two Nausicaan destroyer escorts.” Twesata announced from her science station on the *Princess*. “That’s it for the starships.”

“That’s enough to fuck up anyone’s day.” Nelia grouched, “What about station defenses?”

“Two squadrons of fighters, a phaser turret, and a photon torpedo turret.” Twesata grimaced, “And a giant ‘No Trespassing’ sign.”

“Well...we’ve got everything we came for.” Nelia sighed, “Signal *Aeolia* and tell Tight Ass we’re heading back to the fleet.”

“*Aeolia* acknowledges.” Ashley reported.

Taking a deep breath, the green Orion requested, “Take us back Shels so that we can give Magnussen the bad news.”

The Outer Coronado system where the taskforce is hidden.

“We are going to have to alter our plan of attack somewhat.” Captain Hobson declared to the other captains on his view screen. “*Belladonna* and *Klothos* are not sufficient force to keep the frigates and light ships from flanking and targeting our capital ships.”

“Agreed.” Magnussen replied with a nod of his head. “Suggestions?”

“We need to distract those fighters so that we can take out the turrets and beam our people down into the base.” Nelia mused. “I have my peregrine, but we’ll need a pilot. I’m going to be needed on the bridge, and Shelana and Ashley will be leading landing parties and they’re the only other ones in our crew other than myself checked out to fly it in combat.”

“I can provide the pilot, dahling.” Captain Rosza volunteered, “He used to fly peris back in our old universe and has over a hundred confirmed kills. He’ll take care of your bird as if it were his own.”

“One peregrine alone is not going to get the job done. No matter how good the pilot is.” Soren pointed out with a frown. Addressing the Romulan and Klingon ship commanders, the Fleet Captain inquired, “Do either or both of you have fighters you can spare?”

“I have half a squadron of scorpions I can deploy.” Commander Kaval responded in the affirmative.

“And I have two To’Duj fighters with pilots aching for battle and glory.” Korath declared.

“They’ll get that chance, Captain.” Magnussen replied before once again turning his attention to the *Aeolia*’s captain, “That still leaves us those light ships.”

“Yes, Sir.” Chris nodded his head, “I can bring *Aeolia* in to help the escorts.”

“That’ll work, dahlings.” Zsa-Zsa replied, “But Soren...Boris...Kaval...*edessegek*...you’ve still got those cruisers and that *Monbosh* to play with.”

“Sirs? I think I have an idea.” Ashley chimed in.

“Go ahead, Lieutenant.” Soren encouraged.

“Thank you, Sir.” Ashley responded, “Once the *Princess* drops off our landing parties, she cloaks and hits the capital ships in the rear while you, the *Bellerophon*, and the *D’ressa* have them tied up. If the breaks go our way, we might be able to knock out at least one of the cruisers before they even know what hit them.”

“I love it, dahling.” Zsa-Zsa praised as she gave Soren a wicked grin and wink, “I can see why you see so much potential in her, *dragam*.”

“Da.” Captain Rodenko further suggested. “*Bellerophon* can also keep those annoying support craft of the *Monbosh* occupied and watch for extra uninvited guests.”

“Good ideas--both of you.” Soren acknowledged, “Chris? Your thoughts?”

Inclining his head slightly, the *Aeolia*’s captain also responded positively, “It’s a doable plan, but it’ll have to be executed precisely.”

“It’ll work.” Nelia asserted, “The only problem is that Shels, Ash, Twes, and Rana have to be on the landing party. Twes and Rana are our teeps. Ash and Shels are experienced in ground combat and Ash, along with Rana, will be needed on the spot if they’re holding extra-universal prisoners. I’ve got engineering on the *Princess* covered with Belen, but I’m going to need a good helmsman, tactical officer, and science officer.”

“I can take care of the helmsman and science officer positions for you.” Soren replied adding, “I believe you’ve seen both Atris and Candy in action.”

“Yes, sir.” Nelia answered back with a nod of her head, “They’ll work well.”

“And I’ve got a helluva tactical officer for you, dahling.” Captain Rosza announced with a leer, “You remember Joachim? He’s as good with a weapons console as he is with other things.”

Her lips turning up in a wicked grin, the roguish Orion replied, “I remember everything about Joachim. He’ll do nicely.”

“The last issue is that freighter. Lieutenant Williams.” The Fleet Captain interjected. “What can you tell us about that class of ship?”

“The *Athabasca* is basically a larger version of the *Kowloon*-class freighters that you’ll generally see in the other universe.” Ashley recalled, “Both classes are modular in that you can trade out cargo, lab, and passenger compartments as needed. They’re also lightly armored and don’t have any weapons.”

“Easy marks for pirates.” Zsa-Zsa sneered, her lips turned down into a frown. “Fucking pirates are as bad as the barbarians.”

Adding his voice to the conversation, Boris recalled, his thick Russian accent coming to the fore, “Da. Back in my old universe when I was in the Border Service captaining the *Scamp* there was more than one occasion where we’d run into the end result of Orion pirates stripping an unarmed or lightly armed freighter and slaughtering its crew.”

Ashley nodding her head in agreement, added, “Back when I was on the *Normandy*, we boarded more than one *Kowloon* that had been taken by pirates, geth, or Cerberus commandoes and set adrift after they’d gotten what they came for—usually with the crew dead—those crew not taken to be sold as slaves or for other purposes, that is.”

“Why didn’t they carry at least minimal armaments and shields?” Commander Kaval queried, “Even the *Tuffli*, *Kobayashi Maru*, and *Tong’Duj*-class freighters we generally use possess defenses that are capable of warding off most solitary pirate ships. And as for Ferengi ships—they’re as much commerce raiders as freighters.”

“Both classes only have a standard energy core and can’t maneuver very well.” Ashley replied, further elaborating, “Another reason is simply credits. The *Kowloons* are generally owned by independent traders or small corporations on the Traverse and can’t afford defenses, while the majority of the *Athabascas* are owned by the larger corps and mostly stick to the shipping lanes. The corps are willing to either pay off the pirates or lose a ship or two in exchange for larger overall profits.”

“Rule Number 71.” Belen interjected, “Gambling and trade have two things in common: risk and latinum.” After a momentary pause, the Ferengi businessman then remarked with a sardonic grin, “Only problem is that Rule 71 sometimes conflicts with Rule 155...”

“What’s mine is mine and what’s yours is mine too.” Nelia chimed in with a sarcastic laugh.

“What FTL system does it use and will it work in this universe?” Zsa-Zsa asked thoughtfully.

“It should be equipped with a standard mass-effect drive that uses an eezo energy core.” Ashley answered.

Before she could continue with her explanation, Edi interrupted, “The mass-effect core reduces the overall mass of the ship where it can travel at superlight speeds with minimal time dilation effects. However...” the AI further qualified, “...the engine core alone will not allow the

vessel to move. It merely lowers the mass. The ship still requires some sort of motive power—chemical rockets...fusion torch...ion engine...”

“The military ships use an anti-proton drive.” Ashley interjected.

“So you do have some means of anti-matter propulsion.” Soren mused.

“Very limited compared to this universe.” Edi replied, “The thruster is dependent on the mass effect core reducing the ship’s mass in order to attain FTL travel. Without that, it is merely a form of impulse drive. The engine core also builds a static-electric charge while engaged in superlight travel.” The AI further explained, Zsa-Zsa interrupting.

“That would mean that it would have to stop and discharge all that energy before boom...no more ship.” Tapping her chin thoughtfully, the Hungarian destroyer captain put forth, “That effectively limits both speed and range of your ships. Large ships would require large energy cores to maintain the reduced mass which in turn builds up more energy faster—especially at higher speeds.”

“Correct.” Edi confirmed. “This is why the mass effect relays are so important. They are the equivalent of the veins and arteries of the interstellar societies in the other universe. They also permit the use of ships without interstellar drives to travel outside their systems.”

“Lessening the cost for civilian shipping traveling in safe areas.” Hobson concluded.

“Mmmm...” Korath mused as he pondered the implications. “That would also make those systems with primary relays choke points. Whoever controls them also controls any systems using subsidiary relays.”

“That’s what gives the Reapers their biggest edge.” Doris declared, joining the discussion. “They left behind the Citadel, mass relays, and mass effect technology to make sure that whoever comes later develops along the lines they intended. Makes it easier when they come back to wipe everything out.”

“Which they do every fifty thousand years.” Ashley interjected.

“In other words, they rigged the dabo wheel.” Zsa-Zsa quipped, earning brief chuckles from everyone. Getting back to the subject, the Hungarian captain pondered aloud, “If we can’t find any survivors with engineering experience, we’ll have to take the ship in tow.”

“Ma’am?” Dixie tentatively spoke up.

“Yes, dahling?”

“Between Edi and I we can probably get and keep those engines runnin’. Although it would help if we could find one or more of the crew’s engineers alive.”

“That will work.” Soren decided, “What would be the safest warp equivalent speed that freighter could travel at?”

“Assuming no damage to the engines and enough fuel...” Edi quickly ran the calculations, “...approximately warp two and the ship would have to stop to discharge its engines every twenty light years.”

Making his decision, Soren announced, “Very good. If the freighter can move on its own, then it’ll accompany us to Drozana Station. Otherwise we tow it and, should that not prove possible, we destroy it.” After giving the other captains a few moments to bring anything else up, Fleet Captain Magnussen gave the order, “Bring the fleet to red alert and prepare for action. We’re going to battle.”

Taking a deep breath, Ashley recited, “By the rude bridge that arched the flood, Their flag to April’s breeze unfurled, Here once the embattled farmers stood and fired the shot heard round the world.”

“Emerson.” Hobson remarked approvingly as he heard the former gunnery chief’s words. “Most appropriate. Commander Rysyl...take the ship to red alert.”

Spoiled Princess

“Launching peregrine.” Shelana reported as Nelia’s sleek fighter exited the raider’s shuttle bay.

“Take care of my baby.” Nelia commanded the pilot of her personal ship.

“Don’t worry *mon cheri*.” A French accented voice responded, “I will treat it as I would my lover.”

“You better.” Nelia quipped back, “Otherwise no nookie for you.” Speaking to her crew on the bridge, the green Orion commanded, “Ash... Shels...Twes and Rana...head down and prep your people for landing.” Turning to their replacements, she commanded a light green skinned Trojan woman wearing a mustard colored minidress, her long mauve tinted hair hanging loose and a tall and leggy human woman with a bright smile and blonde hair also loose wearing a blue miniskirt, “Atris...Candy...take their positions.”

“Yes, Ma’am.” They both responded as the Trojan woman took the helm while the human assumed her place at the science station.

“Joachim?” Nelia leered as she turned her attention to a handsome blond-haired human male with slightly long hair and a goatee wearing a 23rd century Terran Empire uniform, “You know what to do.”

“Aye.” The tactical officer formerly assigned to the *Belladonna* replied as he took Ashley’s position behind the tactical console. “Ready when you are.”

Belladonna

“Now we kill something, dahlings. Bring the ship to red alert and start the music, Eliza, *dragam*.”

“Anything in particular, Captain?” Commander Flores asked as the red alert klaxon sounded.

“Anything with a beat, dahling.” Captain Rozsa licked her lips in anticipation as her executive officer, also breathing heavily at the prospect of the coming battle, called out her musical selection to the computer.

“Play the Maia Threes’ cover of *Bad Reputation*.”

Klothos

“Launch fighters. Action stations. We go to battle.”

“Fighters launched. Weapons at the ready.”

The *Klothos* moving as a predator stalking its prey, took its station with its fellow killers, its captain stroking his beard in eagerness for the coming battle.

D'Ressa

“Deploy fighters.” Commander Kaval ordered, “Action stations and cloak.” As he issued his orders, three scorpion fighters exited from the *Dedi*’s shuttle bay and cloaked just before the big warbird also cloaked itself.

Bellerophon

"Dya?" Boris turned his head towards his Elasian weapons officer, "Run a final check on our weapons. Simi? You're going to have to be very quick and smart in your executions of those maneuvers we talked about."

"Don't worry, Boss." The Bajoran science officer responded, "I'm ready."

"I never doubted that." The Russian captain responded with a toothy grin. "Angie...Lucky...you know what to do."

"Aye, Sir."

"Tanvir?"

"Damage control parties are on standby, Sir." The Indian operations chief responded, "We're ready for whatever they throw at us."

"Good." Boris nodded his head in satisfaction. "Inform *Valley Forge* that we are ready to move on their orders."

Valley Forge

“The fleet reports ready to engage, Sir.” The *Valley Forge*’s Andorian first officer reported.

“Take us to red alert, XO and inform the fleet that we're ready to move.” Soren ordered, “We have work to do.”

Inside the base just before the fireworks start

“What in hell are they supposed to be?” Donkey exclaimed as three peculiar looking aliens coming from races he’d never seen before walked up to the cell he and the other prisoners were being kept. Two of the aliens were at least somewhat humanoid looking. Burly with large ridged foreheads, long dark hair styled in dreadlocks, and tusks protruding from their mouths, they screamed ‘bad news’ to the Alliance marine. The third alien appeared truly bizarre to the soldier and his friends.

“Looks almost like some sort of walking fungus.” Captain Forrester murmured as the alien pointed to both Donkey and Donna. One of the large aliens, brandishing what seemed to be a whip, stood at the ready as the other pressed something on the side of the cage, lowering the barrier.

Deciding that it was now or never, Donkey struck quickly, charging the alien who had just opened the cage only to feel intense pain as if every nerve on his body caught fire as he was struck by the alien with the whip. The gunnery chief was then roughly yanked to his feet only to have the alien he was charging punch him hard in the gut, commanding in guttural English, “Move! Both of you—now or you’ll receive another lash from the neuro-whip.”

“Better do as he says, Donkey.” Donna urged as she cautiously stepped out of the cage. Raising her voice, she pleaded, “Where are you

taking us?”

“Evaluation.” The strange alien uttered, seemingly through a vocalizer.

“Evaluating us for what?” Donkey demanded as he and Donna were pushed forward.

“Indoctrination.”

“I don’t like the sound of that.” Donna whispered, only to be silenced by a push from behind.

“Hey!” Donkey shouted only to receive a powerful shove that almost knocked him to the floor.

“The subjects will remain silent.” The weird looking alien commanded as the two humans were once again shoved towards a door at the end of the corridor. As they approached the door, it opened to reveal two almost human looking aliens except for their pointed ears with both wearing uniforms.

“These are the subjects.” The strange alien announced. “They are yours.”

One of the aliens commanded in a silky voice, “We will take charge of them now. You may go.”

“Who are you and what is this indoctrination?” Donkey demanded as he and Donna were pushed in the direction of another door by the two aliens.

“You will find out soon enough.” The first alien replied with a sneer.

Passing through the door, the two humans saw what looked like a large laboratory where Lorrin, the turian with whom they had only recently dined laying on one slab, his body splayed open, brain case exposed as one of the weird aliens seemed to be working at a console. The pair saw the krogan mercenary lying on a second table with two more of the pointed-eared aliens hunched over him. Then, they recoiled in horror as one of the aliens took something and jabbed it into the krogan’s eye.

“What are you doing to him?” Donna screamed, “Is that what you’re going to do to us?”

“No.” The leader laughed, “We have something else planned for you. Now...move!”

The Dance Begins

Chapter Summary

The Battle for Coronado System begins as combat in space is joined.

The Battle in Space

"Just as I thought." Captain Rosza smirked contemptuously as she pointed to the markings on the Terran Empire *Mirandas* her ship was preparing to engage. "From one of the Mirror 'verses."

"Probably the one Loony Leeta and her idiots come from." Eliza snorted derisively.

"Not this time, *dragam*." Zsa-Zsa replied, "Take another look at their markings."

"They're from one of the timelines that branched off in the 22nd century." Eliza mused, "One of the less...stylish...ones."

"*Igen*." The Hungarian captain affirmed, "Those *seggfej* most likely come from one the grimmer Empires."

"Prudes and brutes. Barbarians." Eliza scowled, "Assholes with no fashion sense. Can we play with them now, lover?"

"You know how much I like to play, *dragam*." Zsa-Zsa replied as a predatory smile appeared on her face. "Attack plan Alpha, dahlings. T'Vrel? Give me a gravity well in the middle of those two *seggfej* would you please, *kedvesem*."

"My pleasure." The lovely Vulcan science officer replied.

"Eliza, *dragam*. Fire at will and give me a quantum torpedo spread. Let's see if we can attract their attention."

Laughing as he watched the *Belladonna* go into battle with a barrage of phaser and torpedo fire, Captain Korath turned to his first officer, "What are we waiting for, K'Gan? I want my bloodwine! Full impulse. Jam their sensors and target that cruiser supporting the frigates."

Bellerophon

"Zsa-Zsa and Korath seem to be enjoying themselves." Dya, the *Bellerophon's* Elasian weapons officer noted with a wicked gleam in her eyes. "Wish we could join them."

"We'll get our chance soon enough, *dacha*." Boris quipped, consoling his aggressive tactical officer. Addressing his next remarks to the Bajoran woman manning the science console, he directed, "Begin your sensor sweeps with a tachyon burst, Simi. I don't want any cloaked Tal'Shiar ships to take us by surprise."

"Aye, Sir." Moments later, the chestnut-haired science officer called out as a *Mogai* warbird accompanied by a *T'Varo* appeared.

"*Valley Forge*." Boris tapped his comm, "We have unexpected guests. Don't worry, tovarisch. We will deal with them."

"*Thanks, Boris, and good hunting*."

"Helm. Course 270 Mark 30 on my order."

"Aye, Captain." Angie acknowledged

"Dya. Attack plan Delta and prepare a spread of quantum torpedoes on my order. Simi? I want another tachyon burst on my command."

"Aye, Sir." Both women answered in unison.

"Closing on *Mogai*." Lieutenant 'Lucky' Luciano Conti, sitting at the seat next to the blonde woman manning the helm reported.

"Let them get a little closer." Boris commanded, his voice now a rumble.

"The *T'Varo's* cloaking. Probably attempting to flank us." Ilya warned, further commanding, Dya. Let them have it--fire all phasers. Simi--hit them with the tachyon burst now!"

Watching in satisfaction as the *T'Varo* was forced to decloak as the *Mogai* accompanying reeled under the concentrated phaser fire, Boris praised his Halenoi executive officer, "Good catch, *Dacha*. "Now, Dya! Fire quantum torpedoes maximum speed. Angie--change course to 45 degrees mark 20. Dya. Phasers. Target the *T'Varo*. Simi--positronic beam targeting the *Mogai*. Bring down those shields. Dya. Once those shields are down, I want a high yield quantum torpedo targeting that *Mogai*."

Shivering under the impact of the plasma weapons and torpedoes fired by the two Romulan warbirds, Tamar called out, "Shields down fifty percent. Damage control parties dispatched to decks five and eight."

"A few bumps and bruises, but no casualties so far." Dr. Vordus announced, his voice carrying through the comm speaker.

"Maintain course and fire on my mark." Boris commanded. "Now!"

Valley Forge

Watching as the battle began to unfold, Fleet Captain Magnussen ordered, "Have the fighters engage the enemy squadrons and close with that Empire *Exeter*. Attack plan Omega. Power to shields, we're going to suck up some hits as we close. When we're in range of that cruiser I want a tachyon beam with overloaded phasers striking simultaneously. Target weapons and shields."

"Aye, Captain" Commander Zheren acknowledged, inclining his head at the man at the tactical console, Lieutenant Commander Michaels who nodded in return.

"In weapons range." Michaels called out from his station as phaser beams lanced out from the enemy *Exeter*.

Shrugging off the slight shaking as the deflector shields absorbed the energy beams, Captain Magnussen responded with a grin. "Patience, Jeff. We need to buy enough time for Kaval to get into position. We can suck up a few hits. Carry out Plan Omega as ordered. Talana—tachyon beam when I say—not before."

"Aye, sir." The Andorian woman manning the science console acknowledged.

"They're closing...as expected." Zhreven smirked, "Standard Empire doctrine."

"They never learn, do they?" The Danish starship captain chuckled as he watched as the *Belladonna* carried out a bone-jarring set of maneuvers, taking the Terran *Mirandas* it was tangling with completely by surprise as it raked first one of the Empire light cruisers and then another in rapid succession.

"Looks like Zsa-Zsa's having fun." Jeff chortled as he prepared to carry out his next set of moves.

"How is Boris doing?" Magnussen inquired as he caught a glimpse of his Russian friend's *Nebula*-class starship engaged in a ferocious battle.

"Captain Rodenko reports that they're holding their own, Sir. He says he's more worried about his...*dacha*?" Jeff laughed, "Whatever that means."

"Boris and his 'wayward angels' as he calls them." Soren laughed before once again returning to the matter at hand. "Hmmm...we're missing someone. Where's the *Monbosh*?" That's the real threat."

"Hanging back, Sir." Michaels responded, "It's launched its support craft."

"Keep an eye on them." Magnussen ordered, "Those bastards can ruin your day if you let them."

"Nausicaan destroyers closing on the *Exeter*'s flanks for support." The tactical officer reported as the escort craft appeared on either side of the Terran cruiser.

"Good thing we have the Romulans with us." Soren smirked as he addressed his communications officer. "Hail the *D'ressa*. Is Commander Kaval in position?"

"Affirmative, Sir."

"Cruiser's in range."

"Now, Sir?" The Andorian XO asked as the ship once again shook, this time more violently, from the Empire vessel's weapons fire, now joined by that of the Nausicaan ships.

"Now."

Aeolia

"Cloak holding." Lieutenant Commander Velen reported from his science station. "So far we're undetected."

"Very good." Captain Hobson replied, "What of the *Belladonna*, *Spoiled Princess*, and *Klothos*?"

"Engaged with the frigates and fighters." The tactical officer, T'Pren replied. "So far they don't seem to be having any difficulties to speak of. Check that." The emotional Vulcan quickly amended, "One of the Terran cruisers has altered course and is moving towards their position."

"Inform them that they are about to have more company." The Iceman coolly commanded, "Status of the *Valley Forge*, *Bellerophon*, and *D'ressa*?"

"*Bellerophon* is holding its own against a pair of Tal'Shiar warbirds that tried to ambush from cloak. Caught them with a tachyon burst."

Nodding his head in approval, the Iceman noted, "Captain Rodenko has a good eye. What else, Commander?"

T'Pren continued her report, "One Terran cruiser is closing with the *Valley Forge*, along with the two destroyer escorts. Fleet Captain

Magnussen has succeeded in drawing the cruiser and Nausicaans up close.” Her lips turning up in a sly grin, T’Pren quipped, “Who wants to bet drinks with me on Drozana Station that the *D’ressa*’s sitting cloaked just waiting.”

“Not after our last bet.” Lieutenant Yitzhak Shalev joked back from the helm just as the *D’Deridex* battlecruiser decloaked, catching the two Nausicaans in its tractor beams as it unleashed a torrent of plasma torpedoes. Laughing, the Eretz Israeli helmsman exclaimed, “Nothing beats watching someone else getting tagged in the face by a blast of exploding plasma diarrhea!”

“The key words in that phrase are ‘someone else’.” T’Pren deadpanned.

“Very good analysis of the situation, Lieutenant Commander.” Hobson dryly remarked, only the smallest hints of a smile revealing the humor behind his comment. “Now...to matters at hand. Engage the Syphons. I want a Tyken’s Rift in the middle of those frigates and follow that up with a full barrage from our phasers then a high yield torpedo. T’Pren? What is the status on that *Monbosh*?”

“Holding position.” T’Pren declared, “But it has launched its support craft.”

“Hmmm...” The captain calmly cupped his chin as he leaned forward in his chair. “Positioning itself as a reserve and command and control. We need to disrupt that.”

“You’re not thinking about taking on a *Monbosh* one on one—are you, Chris?” Anara asked in a whisper.

“Of course not.” The Iceman whispered back. “Ready an electromagnetic pulse probe and be prepared to fire a sub nucleonic carrier wave on my order, but first, contact the *Belladonna*, *Spoiled Princess*, and *Klothos*—the participation of those ships is vital for this plan to work.”

“What about that Terran cruiser closing on the *Belladonna*?”

“Already figured into the plan, Number One.” Chris replied. “I’m going to need you, Velen, and T’Pren to carry out the following commands in the order I give them once we engage the *Monbosh* and the cruiser. When I give you the signal, it will be vital for you all to follow that sequence promptly along with the other ships. But...before we can do anything, Captains Magnussen and Rodenko, along with Commander Kaval must first hold their own against their current opposition and second force the *Monbosh* to commit itself. Until then, we help clear out the smaller ships.”

“A lot of variables, love.” Anara murmured worriedly, her voice low so that the rest of the crew couldn’t hear.

“I know.” The Iceman acknowledged, also speaking in a low whisper. “And I wouldn’t even attempt something like this if I didn’t trust all the other participating captains to carry out the plan.”

“What about the *Spoiled Princess*?”

“They’re my infra-finesse between two honors.” Chris replied with the slightest of grins as he signaled his tactical officer to contact the raider who was at that time engaging a Syphon.

“*Kinda busy here.*” Nelia exclaimed as her helmsman executed a difficult...and dangerous...barrel roll that succeeded in evading the attacking Nausicaan frigate while at the same time putting it under all of the *Princess*’s weapons. “*Now...Joachim...everything you’ve got!*” As the frigate exploded, the roguish Orion turned her attention back towards the Iceman. “*You’ve got thirty seconds.*”

“T’Pren...upload the plan to the *Princess*.”

Chuckling as she read the Iceman’s scheme, Nelia replied with a mischievous glint in her eyes, “*We’ll be ready when you are.*”

“Thank you.” Hobson replied formally, “*Aeolia* out.”

IKS Klothos

“Concentrate fire on those two frigates.” Captain Korath ordered, pointing to a pair of Syphons guarding the asteroid base. “That should clear a path for our friends.”

“Yes, Captain.” The first officer acknowledged as he gave the order to open fire.

Watching in satisfaction as first one, then the other Syphon went down in fireballs from the *K’tinga*’s concentrated fire, Korath’s lips turned up in an icy grin. “It is now up to the *Spoiled Princess*.” The Klingon captain then tapped his comm, “*Spoiled Princess*...the path is open. Qapla!”

Spoiled Princess

“We’ve got our opening.” Atris declared from the helm as their Klingon allies destroyed two of the Syphons while Zsa-Zsa and the *Aeolia* kept the *Mirandas* and the second Terran cruiser occupied.

“Go!” Nelia ordered, “Joachim. Target those turrets and their subsystems the moment we come out of cloak.”

“We’re in range.” Joachim announced. “Weapons locked on.”

“Decloak and fire.” Nelia commanded, “Landing parties. Transport the moment those buffers go down.”

Almost immediately the *Spoiled Princess*, becoming visible again, fired its entire weapons array at the enemy phaser and photon torpedo turrets.

“They’ve been damaged but…”

“Still working.” Nelia finished the blonde science officer’s sentence as the ship shook under the impact of the turrets’ return fire.

“Shields holding at eighty percent.” Belen called out from the engineering console. “Diverting power to auxiliary subsystems.”

“Am I hot or am I hot.” The youthful Trojan woman at the helm declared as she successfully steered the *Princess* through a photon torpedo barrage with only a grazing hit.

“We almost got tagged by that last one.” Candy smirked as she teased her amiga.

“Pish-tosh.” Atris bantered back as she executed a barrel roll, evading another brace of torpedoes. “Nothing this baby couldn’t handle. These controls handle like a man’s…well…you know. I wouldn’t mind a permanent assignment here.” The mauve-haired beauty mused in a half joking-half pleading tone.

“I wouldn’t either, amiga.” Candy echoed in that same tone of voice.

“All right! All right!” Nelia exclaimed, “I get the message. I’ll talk to Magnussen when we get back.” Turning her attention to Joachim, she leered, “What about you stud-muffin? Wanna hang with us girls?”

“What do you think?” The Flemish tactical officer replied with a smirk, “I am many things, but stupid is not one of them.”

“Smart man.” Nelia joked, “Now…be a dear and take out those turrets and that transporter buffer and I’ll talk to Zsa-Zsa about it.” Her lips turned up in a crooked grin, the Orion temptress quipped, “I’ve got a good idea what her price is gonna be.”

“I’ve got a lock on their subsystems.” Candy reported, “Take ‘em down when you’re ready Joachim.”

“Consider them taken out.” Joachim triumphantly declared as the opposing turrets finally fell to a barrage of phaser fire and quantum torpedoes. “The buffers are down.”

“Door’s unlocked girls and boys. Kick it open and have fun.” Nelia announced through the comm to the landing parties.

“You heard her.” Ashley echoed, “Time to kick ass.”

Kicking in the Door

Chapter Summary

The ground forces make their move as they race against time to secure the prisoners. At the same time, Donkey and Donna take advantage of the attack to make a daring escape attempt.

Inside the base

Urged on by a shove from one of the pointy-eared guards and the dangerous looking pistol wielded by the leader, Donkey and his companion entered the door into a room that looked like another laboratory with yet another one of the bizarre aliens manning a console. “Place them in the chambers.” The alien ordered, pointing to two empty cylindrical tubes.

“You do not command the Tal-Shiar, Elachi.” The lead pointy-eared alien declared with a sneer.

“Do as the Elachi asks, Major T’Rell...this time.” A human, wearing what appeared to be a garish black and gold one piece uniform with a sheathed dagger and holstered pistol attached to a wide gold belt said to the alien leader, whom Donkey had finally tumbled on to as being one of the Romulans he had seen in a recent vid.

“Who the hell do you think you’re supposed to be?” Donkey demanded, aiming his remarks at the gaudily clad human, “You’re not Alliance—not with that ‘uniform’. Pirate? Mercenary?”

Laughing, the human replied with a sarcastic sneer, “Not that it’s going to matter to you in a few minutes, but I am Commander Tyrell... Terran Empire...the true Terran Empire.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Donkey inquired in an effort to buy time. “There’s no such thing as a Terran Empire. There’s the Systems Alliance and terrorists, mercenaries, and criminals. Since your obviously not Alliance, which of the other categories do you fall into?”

Shaking his head, the Terran commander snarled, “We don’t have time for this. Put them in the infusion chambers.” His lips turned up in a cruel smirk, Tyrell mocked his prisoners, “You’re about to become a whole new you. Pity you won’t enjoy the process.”

“Infusion chambers?” The Alliance marine shouted, “We’re not about to let you sons of bitches turn us into some sort of...thing.”

“We’d rather die first.” Donna declared, echoing her friend’s thoughts before he could speak them.

“Stun them and put them in the chambers.” Tyrell commanded as he turned to walk away only to have the roof almost literally cave in as explosions rocked the station, knocking him, the other guards, the alien, and Donna off their feet.

Recovering at nearly the same time as the Terran human, Donkey struck quickly with a punch to the man’s gut followed up by a kick that sent Tyrell careening to crash up against a wall, instantly killing him. At once spotting the commander’s strange looking pistol lying on the floor, the Alliance marine clumsily pointed it at the first of the Romulans to struggle to his feet. However, before he could fire, the alien spoke in an unfamiliar language into device on his wrist, leaving the gunnery sergeant and his companion’s mouths agape as he and the other Romulan disappeared in two columns of light.

“What the hell?” Donkey gasped as he helped Donna to her feet. “Did you see that?”

“Yeah.” Donna, shaken up by the seeming earthquake and then the disappearance of the aliens, gasped. “What was that?”

“I don’t know.” The gunnery chief replied as he walked over to where the strange alien lay motionless trapped under debris. “Dead—I think. So’s the other guy—the big mouth.” Donkey announced as the chamber again shook. “That was no earthquake.” The Alliance marine declared with a big grin on his face, “Someone’s attacking this place.”

“The Alliance?” Donna exclaimed as she leaned against Donkey in an effort to stay on her feet.

“Gotta be!” Donkey whooped as he took the lovely purser’s hand in his. “We’re well within Alliance space. It has to be our people. Come on! We need to find the rest of our people and get back to the others. Maybe we’ll either run into the marines on the way or when we get to the cells.”

“That man came from over there.” Donna pointed. “I think it’s a door. I saw it sliding open.”

“Let’s check it out. If we’re lucky, our people will be on the other side safe and sound.”

“What are we waiting for?” Donna exclaimed. “Let’s go!”

The landing parties

The *Princess’s* landing party immediately opened fire as they beamed into a hot zone. The Klingons, their bat’leths at the ready, engaged a

squad of Tal'Shiar who had the misfortune of standing too close to the savage warriors when they materialized while the *D'ressa's* team fired their plasma weapons at a party of Nausicaans charging them with melee weapons.

"Barbarians!" Salome yelled at a group of Terran Empire soldiers as she quickly activated a module on her kit. "I'm activating a sonic disruption!" She shouted to the others, "I'd appreciate it if one of you techies would hurry up and set up some shielding!"

"I'm on it, Sugar!" Dixie replied as she set up a shield generator while Edi quickly activated a cover shield and Lieutenant Rydell set up a medical regenerator.

"Active immunity overload." Twesata explained as she released a cloud of microbes from her kit, healing the landing party while at the same time infecting its opposition caught in the cloud, weakening them in the process. "Rana!"

"Got it!" The asari shouted as she threw up a biotic barrier, "It would be nice if you all would hurry up and kick these guys asses!"

"Working on it!" Ashley shouted back as she and Shelana both lobbed photon grenades at the entrenched Terran Empire troops.

"We'll give you covering fire." Jessica exclaimed to the engineering and science support teams. "I'd appreciate it if you hurried up though."

"We are moving as fast as we can." Edi responded as multiple copies of the mobile AI suddenly appeared.

"Nice. Can I get one of those?" Pam quipped as she fabricated a pair of phaser turrets after activating the medical generator.

"I am sorry but that came with my body." Edi deadpanned, "You might want to ask Doris about it when we get back."

"Less talking! More killing!" S'nurl, a large Gorn warrior who had beamed in with the Klingons hissed as he removed the heads of two Tal'Shiar simultaneously with a single swing of the large Tzenkethi sword he wielded.

"You heard the big dinosaur!" Nealo Mtolo, leader of the *Belladonna* security detachment, shouted in a Zulu accent. "Time to put these assholes down!"

After a brief, but savage melee, the landing party, battered and bruised, emerged triumphant. "How are you feeling Rekeb?" Ashley asked the Romulan centurion as a Romulan medic injected him with a hypo.

"Give me a moment and I'll be ready." The centurion replied with a grin as the medic ran her medical scanner over him.

"He'll be fine." The medic reassured, "He's got too thick a skull to stay down."

Wincing momentarily as he let out a chuckle, Rekeb joked, "Don't think this gets you out of our bet over the next Karo-net match between Keldon of Tarsus and Bela the Zakari."

"Better have the wine chilled." The medic smirked, "Now...get off your ass and on your feet you shirker. I've got more work to do."

"Anyone hurt bad or killed?" Shelana asked as she joined the conversation.

"Other than a few phaser or disruptor grazes, everyone's okay." The medic responded, "I don't think they expected us to beam in when and where we did."

"Okay...you all know what you have to do." Ashley called out to the other team leaders.

"Secure the prisoners." Shelana and Jessica replied as they summoned their teams to their sides.

"We are to secure barracks and crew sections." Rekeb answered back as his Romulans stood at the ready.

"And we will take the engineering, the armory, and any other security stations." S'nurl hissed as the Klingon warriors under him cheered.

Nodding her head, Ashley announced, "My team and Salome's will secure the labs and command and control. Then after we get all the prisoners and intelligence we can get...we blow this place into the next universe. Everyone ready?" Taking a deep breath at the grins and nods she received in reply, the former marine's thoughts drifted momentarily to Eden Prime and her first meeting with a certain redheaded Alliance Commander as she commanded, "Move out!"

The Minuet Commences

Chapter Summary

The battle in space continues while Ashley and her teams prepare to engage on the ground.

The Battle in Space

Valley Forge

“We’re taking a pounding, Sir.” Commander Zheren exclaimed as the *Valley Forge* shuddered under the impact of a barrage of weapons fire from the Terran *Exeter*.

“Divert power to shields and strengthen the structural integrity fields.” Captain Magnussen ordered as the *Constitution*-class cruiser’s phaser beams struck true, damaging the Terran’s port nacelle.

“That had to hurt ‘em.” Lieutenant Commander Michaels whooped as the *Valley Forge* followed up with a spread of photon torpedoes only to have the Terrans successfully intercept them with phaser fire.

“They’re not beaten yet, Jeff.” Soren cautioned as he turned to his communications officer, “What’s the status of the *D’ressa* and *Bellerophon*, Layla?”

“They took out their oppo and are moving to engage with the cruiser.” The chestnut-haired communications officer responded.

“That *Monbosh* is moving now.” Michaels called out. “Some of its support craft are preparing to engage the *Belladonna*, the rest are concentrating on the *Klothos*.”

“Remind me to learn how to play bridge sometime.” Soren chuckled as he witnessed the Iceman’s scheme begin to bear fruit, “Signal the *Aeolia*. Tell Chris it’s time.”

USS Aeolia

“I see the *Monbosh* has finally committed.” Chris Hobson commented as he noticed the large Elachi battleship move towards the *Valley Forge* and *D’ressa* while two of its support craft peeled off to deal with the *Belladonna* and *Klothos*.

“Aye, Sir.” Commander Rysyl affirmed, “Electromagnetic pulse probe and sub nucleonic carrier wave ready on your orders.”

“Treasure?”

“Diagnostics are all in the green, Captain. We’re ready when you are.” The chief engineer responded from her station in engineering.

“Cloaked ship just went to warp.” Velen, the Denobulan science officer, reported from his science station.

“That would be our friends in the Tal Shi’ar.” Captain Hobson surmised as he stroked his chin.

“Do you think our landing parties flushed them out?” Anara inquired as she read the latest reports on her display.

“That would be a likely assumption.” The fastidious captain replied, “But you know what they say about assumptions.”

“They make an Ass out of U and Me.” Shalev bantered from the helm, receiving in return a cough from his captain. “Sir.”

“Not an inaccurate statement, Lieutenant.” The captain replied, cautioning, “One should always keep in mind the risks in overbidding, Mr. Shalev.”

“Captain?” Lieutenant Commander T’Pren called out from her tactical station. “*Valley Forge* says it’s time.”

“Very good, T’Pren.” Chris replied, maintaining his outward exterior of calm. “Inform the other captains to stand ready. Commander Rysyl...” the unflappable captain turned to his Deltan XO, “...carry out the plan on my mark...” After receiving acknowledgements from the other captains in the fleet, Hobson exhaled, “Now.”

Inside the base: Donkey and Donna

“Take this.” Donkey said as he took one of the rifles and handed his companion the dead Terran’s phaser. “Fire it by pressing that button but be careful what you’re shooting at. It doesn’t look like much, but it packs a punch.”

Looking down at the fallen Elachi, Donna barely kept herself from retching. “What the hell is that?”

“Damn if I know.” The gunnery chief replied, “Ugly son of a bitch though.”

“Yeah.” Donna agreed before commenting, “I think I saw those aliens...the ones with the pointed ears...before.” After pausing for several moments while she wracked her brain, she suddenly exclaimed, recalling, “Now I know where I saw them! It was on a special Emily Wong did that I caught on the extranet. They were the same as those aliens that just opened up a consulate on the Citadel...Romulans!”

“I saw the same thing on Westerlund News.” Donkey recollected. “Khalisah Al-Jilani—you know—the reporter who interviewed that woman from this so-called Federation?” As his partner nodded in response, the Alliance marine continued, “She was warning us about them sounding too good to be true. I guess she was right.”

“Maybe.” Donna cautiously concurred, “So, what do we do now?”

“Right now...” Donkey decided as he weighed his options, “We go back and rescue the others and then we link up with the Alliance marines who are probably looking for us.”

“What about if it’s not the Alliance that’s attacking?”

“Shoot first and ask questions later if they’re not wearing Alliance colors.” Donkey commanded, “Understood?”

Taking a deep breath and exhaling, Donna replied, “I understand.”

“All right...let’s get the hell out of here.”

Shelana’s team

“The prisoners should be up ahead.” Shelana whispered to the three women close to her. “What are you picking up Rana?”

“Nausicaans and humans ahead.” The asari whispered as she scanned the area with her tricorder. “I’m also picking up on several humans and two unknown lifeforms close together.”

“Probably the prisoners.” Jessica murmured. “Their guards will be under cover and waiting. They’ll also have one or two near the cells with orders to kill the prisoners, so we’re going to have to move quick and hit ‘em hard.”

“Right.” Shelana commanded, “You all know the drill. Edi. I need you to set up a quantum mortar to shake them up and detonate any mines they’ve laid. Rana...hit ‘em with a sonic pulse to knock ‘em back and disorient them and then be ready to use those biotics of yours. Nealo...take out any targets you can get in your scope.”

“Jessica...”

“I’ll lay down some smoke grenades.” The redheaded *Valley Forge* tactical officer interrupted as Edi fabricated the mortar. “That should cover us while we charge in. Ready?”

Nodding her head, the Andorian tactical officer gave the signal, ‘Go!’

Edi’s mortar fired off two rounds, the first round detonating a mine field in front of the enemy fireteam hunkered behind a cover shield. Rana then struck, her sonic pulse stunning a pair of Nausicaans as it also shattered the cover.

“Now, Jessica!”

On cue, Jessica lobbed a smoke grenade as Nealo locked the sights of his phaser sniper rifle on a Terran officer, firing just as the smoke filled the chamber. Moving quickly, they charged through the smoke, Rana biotically throwing one Nausicaan against a bulkhead as another fired his disruptor, hitting one of the *Valley Forge* security officers.

“That’s for Matthew, you son of a bitch!” Jessica cursed as she fired her phaser, killing the mercenary who had just slain her teammate.

Spotting another Nausicaan taking aim at Shelana, Edi activated her decoy function, creating a duplicate of herself close to the pirate, distracting him long enough for the AI to fire her phaser, bringing him down.

“Shit!” Shelana swore as she spied a Terran officer reaching for a button on his console. Not even pausing in her charge, the Andorian woman fired her weapon, disintegrating the officer just before he could press the button.

“That was the last of them.” Jessica announced as her Andorian compatriot caught her breath. Approaching the console, the redheaded security officer heaved a sigh of relief, “You stopped him just in time. He was about to flood the cell with a neural neutralizer/hyperonic radiation cocktail. The concentration was strong enough to kill them instantly and the hyperonic radiation would have been a rotten way to go.”

“Who did we lose?” Shelana asked, as Edi and Rana joined the pair.

“Kristof and Matthews were killed in the melee.” Edi replied, her voice tone reflecting what seemed to be one of regret.

“Nealo and the others are okay and are guarding the corridor.” Rana announced as her eyes fell on the prisoners in their cells. “A quarian and a turian? We’re going to need to replicate dextro- food and drink for them.”

“We need to check up on them first...make sure they’re okay.” Shelana declared as she tapped her comm badge. “*Spoiled Princess*. Team

Blue reporting. Objective secured. Checking on the prisoners now.”

“Affirmative.” Nelia responded, “*We’re going to have to return to the fight.*”

“Understood.” Shelana responded, “Take care of yourselves.” Approaching the prisoners along with her companions, Shelana muttered in a low voice, “Shit.” Tapping her comm badge, she called out, “Team Blue to Team Red. We’ve secured the prisoners and we have a problem.”

“*What sort of problem?*” Ashley replied through the comm.

“Some of them are children.” The Andorian tactical officer reported, “Human. Approximately ten to fifteen years old.”

“*Understood. We’re on our way to the labs and then command and control. How secure are you?*”

“We’re safe. Nealo and S’kor are standing watch.”

“*Losses?*”

“We lost two—Kristoff and Matthews, and all of us have our share of bruises and grazes.” Shelana reported gloomily.

“*Don’t blame yourself, Shels.*” Ashley consoled, “*We knew going into this we were going to take losses.*”

“I know. Shelana replied with a sigh, “It comes with the territory and the red uniform. But it sucks when you lose people you were drinking with a couple of nights earlier—you know.”

“*Yeah.*” The former marine responded, “*I feel you. When we get back to Drozana, we’re both getting shitfaced—my treat—deal?*”

“Deal. Team Blue out.”

“*Team Red Out.*”

As the strangers approached their cell, the prisoners stood up. Noticing at once the strange uniforms, Captain Forrester, taking the lead, demanded, “Who are you?”

Recognizing the fear in the eyes of the grey-haired man who had confronted her and of the other prisoners—especially the children who were being protectively shielded by the two aliens, Shelana took a gentle conciliatory approach. Speaking in a soothing tone of voice, the Andorian tactical officer introduced herself and the rest of her team. “I’m Lieutenant Shelana and this is Lieutenant Rana Thanoptis, our medic…” the asari scientist, wearing her blue minidress, stepped forward “and this is Edi from *USS Spoiled Princess*. The other officers are Lieutenant Jessica Simpson from *USS Valley Forge*, Lieutenants Nealo Mtolu and S’kor, along with additional security from the *Belladonna* and *Valley Forge*. They are watching the corridor outside. We’re from Starfleet and we’re here to help you.”

“Starfleet?” Captain Forrester questioned, “You’re not from the Alliance or the Citadel?”

“No.” Shelana shook her head, “We’re from the United Federation of Planets. We found out that prisoners were being held here and are part of a rescue taskforce along with the Klingon Empire and Romulan Republic.”

“You’re from the other universe, aren’t you?” A female wearing what seemed to be an environmental suit spoke, her voice filtered by a vocalizer.

“Yes.” Shelana confirmed, her lips turning up in a slight smile, “Although from our perspective, you’re the ones from another universe.”

“But you’re asari?” The female alien declared, pointing to Rana.

“Yes I am, I arrived in this universe over two years ago with a friend of mine. Please believe us…we’re here to help you.”

“You killed the people who were about to kill us.” Captain Forrester, finally introducing himself, declared, “That automatically scores you points in my book.” He then asked, “Can you tell me who the people were who were keeping us prisoner?”

“We’ll answer all your questions.” Shelana answered back reassuringly, “But first, we need to see to any injuries you might have. I’m going to lower the forcefield keeping you in your cell, then Dr. Thanoptis is going to check you all out…okay?”

“Thanks.” Forrester agreed, “Our doctor’s still unconscious. Is your medic set up to handle turians and quarians?”

“Basic first aid only right now, I’m afraid.” Rana apologized to the quarian and turian women as Shelana lowered the shield. “We’ll have to wait until we can get you into a sickbay to properly take care of dextro species, but can you tell me if you’re hurt.”

“No. I’m not hurt.” The turian woman haltingly responded, the quarian nodding her head in agreement.

“We’re fine for now.” The quarian assured, “Please…see to the children first.”

“Are you the only ones from that freighter?” Shelana asked as Rana went to work on the prisoners, starting with the children.

“No.” Forrester shook his head. “They took most of the passengers and my crew. Like I said, Doc’s over there in that rack still sleeping off whatever they hit him with.”

“He probably got stunned by a phaser or something similar.” Rana said as she quickly rushed to him and ran a medical diagnostic scanner over him. Nodding her head, she affirmed, “Yeah…he got tagged by a heavy stun setting from a phaser.” Taking out a hypospray she injected him with it. “I gave him something for the pain. Best thing for him now is to just sleep it off. Other than a headache and maybe some muscle

pains, he'll be okay when he wakes up."

"What about the rest of the crew?" Shelana asked.

A worried frown on his face, Captain Forrester replied, "They said something about taking them in for 'processing'—whatever that means."

"They also took my husband, Lorrin." The turian woman sobbed, "You haven't seen him—have you?"

"I'm sorry." Jessica shook her head as she moved to comfort the desolate woman, "We've got people on the station looking for him and anyone else."

"They also took an Alliance marine—Gunnery Chief Donald Keys, and my purser, Donna Welles." Forrester interjected adding in a grave tone of voice, "Oh..." he added in a worried tone, "They took a krogan mercenary who was a passenger too. We were all knocked out at the time, but I think they took Orinia's husband and the krogan first."

"Shit." Rana swore as she saw to her patients, "That's all we need—a fucking krogan in full blood rage." Calling out to the Andorian team leader the asari geneticist cautioned, "Shels! Better clue Ash and the others in that there might be a krogan on the loose and he's probably not going to be in a good mood!"

"Done!" Shelana responded as a young human boy attracted Rana's attention.

"Ma'am?"

"Yes?" Rana replied with a smile.

"My Momma would tell you that you've got a potty mouth."

"Yeah." The asari's smile widened, "I guess I do. You can blame my friends. Now...let's give you a quick checkup."

"Will it hurt?"

As she ran her diagnostic scanner over the youth, Rana replied, "Nope. All done. You're in perfect health."

"Cool!"

Turning her gaze to a teenage girl, the asari medic smiled, "You're next."

Ashley

"You all heard that. Besides the other passengers and crew, we've got a turian, an Alliance marine, and a krogan to keep an eye out for. The marine's liable to shoot first—ask questions later, so for now put your weapons on heavy stun."

"What about the turian and the krogan?" Twesata asked as she and the others on the team adjusted their weapons.

"Heavy stun should work on the turian—provided they haven't done anything ugly to him—the krogan and the turian are the ones who've been absent the longest." Ashley replied with a grimace, "As for the krogan...we're going to have to hit him hard and hope like hell that he stays down long enough so that we can get him into a secure area before his redundancies kick in. Otherwise..." she shook her head, "we might not have a choice. Any other questions?"

"Nope." Salome responded, answering for the others, "We're ready when you are."

"All right." Ashley took a deep breath as she once again channeled a certain Spectre, "Move out!"

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