

## Damn the Torpedoes! Part Two

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## Damn the Torpedoes! Part Two

by [LordMcCoveyCove](#)

### Summary

#### Season One, Episode Two of Star Trek: Full Speed Ahead (Series Premiere/Pilot)

Stardate 43224.75: (Continued from the previous episode) Newly-promoted Captain Krystine Leone and the partially-assembled crew of the starship USS Farragut are vaulted across the galaxy into the space of a previously unknown force, the Tristnor Hegemony. Upon arrival, they're immediately ordered to forfeit their starship and become property of the Hegemony without condition or guarantee of their safety. Will Farragut ever return to Federation space? Will the Hegemony prove to be a formidable enemy? And who are the pair of intruders that brought them there in the first place? (This story will be concluded in Part III)

### Notes

Warning: Graphic heterosexual adult situation in Act Five.

# Teaser

## Star Trek: Full Speed Ahead

By Lord McCovey Cove

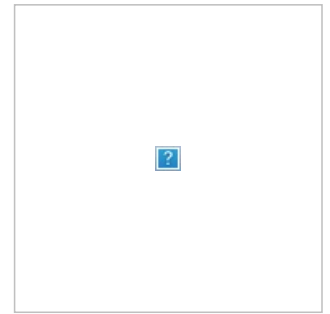
Episode Two: Damn the Torpedoes! Part II

NCC-60597 (USS *Farragut*)

Within Tristnor Hegemony territory

Main Bridge

Stardate 43224.75



The viewscreen blinked and an angry-looking male face greeted them. "Identify yourselves."

"My name is Captain Krystine Leone, of the Federation starship *Farragut*. We mean you no harm." She made sure her posture was as non-threatening as possible, keeping her arms at her sides

He pointed his finger at her. "You have penetrated deep into the core of Tristnor Hegemony territory. Your vessel is forfeit and your crew is now the property of this ship. Hold your position and prepare for boarding!"

"Sir, we do not intend to allow anyone to take this ship. Nor will I allow my crew to become anyone's property. If necessary, we will defend ourselves against any attack."

"Your presence here is an act of war!"

"Our presence here was not by choice! We will depart your space, if you will allow us to."

"No more discussion! Prepare for boarding!" With that, the viewscreen switched back to the starfield and the nebula.

"Red alert," ordered Leone immediately. "Someone please tell me what our present location is?"

Lieutenant Commander Ariel Elannis, the ship's chief operations officer, worked her console quickly. "The computer is attempting to match sensor data to known star charts, sir."

Leone nodded as she moved behind the ops console and peered over Ariel's shoulder. "Fine. Petra, we're going to need shields and weapons, soon."

Lieutenant Petra Bartlet called back, "Shield emitters are coming back online, now, sir."

From the tactical station, Lieutenant Wilson Nieves confirmed, "Shields activated, Captain."

"Computer's got a location report," said Ariel. "According to this, we're over thirty-five thousand light years from our former location. Near the rim, within the Beta Quadrant."

Leone could not believe it, at first. She leaned in closer to look at Ariel's console, and there it was in the orange text of the LCARS display. "Okay," she said after blowing out a deep breath. There would be time to deal with that, later. "That settles that."

Nieves said, "Sir, my contact vessel is slowing to sublight speeds."

"Weapons range?" asked Leone.

"At present speed, fifteen minutes."

"Our weapons status?"

Nieves turned to look at Petra, who gave him a shrug. "I'm working on it."

"We left the yards with a rather limited store of photon torpedoes," noted Leone.

"Sixteen, sir."

Leone pushed herself away from the ops console and approached her chair. "All right, launcher status?"

"Fully operational," said Petra quickly. "I'm still working on phasers, sir."

"I'm getting some sensor data on their ship," said Nieves. "It's some kind of crystalline hull structure. Comparable in size, and I'm not sure what kind of armament they're using."

Leone walked back to her chair. "I guess we'll find out, soon enough. Propulsion?"

Lieutenant (jg) Gregory Aspinall replied, "Impulse power only."

"We're going to have to make repairs to the warp drive," said Petra. "There's no way I'd trust the engines after we passed through the anomaly, anyway."

"So, now, all we need to know is if our weapons will be effective against that kind of ship," said Leone. "Or if our shields will protect us from them."

"Not at first," said a new visitor from near the turbolift. "But, with some luck, I'm sure we can help to protect this ship."

Everyone turned to look at the newcomers on the bridge. One was a large, barrel-chested man; the thin and lanky man stood at his side wearing a peculiar smile given the circumstances. Both wore the civilian engineering jumpsuits worn by those who had stayed aboard to observe the warp trials.

"And who the hell are you?" asked Leone.

"We're the ones who brought you here, Captain," explained the lanky man. "You see, we need your help to put an end to this war."

## Act One

Leone raised her hand toward Nieves, as he had a phaser in his hand. "Hold your fire, Wilson." She stepped forward to address the pair. "Who are you?"

The lanky man smiled. "My name is Saleb, and this is my... companion, Belkis."

Belkis inclined his head toward Leone, but said nothing.

"Charmed," said Leone sarcastically. "Now, what the hell is the Tristnor Hegemony and what war are you talking about?"

Saleb leaned down to reach into his carry-all, which alarmed Nieves enough for him to raise his aim toward them once more. But all Saleb did was pull out a small device with a display on it. "Uh, first things first. Lieutenant Bartlet will need to remodulate the shields to this range of harmonics in order to counteract their primary weapon." He gestured with the device. "May I?"

"Petra, look it over, and make sure it's on the level, before you make any changes."

"Aye, sir." Petra looked at the device and then back at Leone. "Sir, it seems pretty clear to me. We'd just be shifting the shield harmonics."

"Fine."

"Reinitializing the harmonics, now."

"Captain, the target vessel is showing a power buildup in... I don't know. It could be a weapon."

"It is," assured Saleb. He turned to face Leone. "Hegemony ships are based on crystalline-based hull structures. Their weapons are sonic in nature. Ultrasonic, in fact. If they had fired while you were unprotected..."

"Sonic weapons wouldn't do anything to this ship."

"It wasn't the ship I was worried about."

Leone opened her mouth and immediately understood. "They could've knocked us all out."

"Exactly."

Nieves reported, "They're firing!"

Heads turned toward the viewscreen, where the weapon had no visual effect. Or any other kind of effect, for that matter.

"Damage?"

Ariel shook her head. "Nothing detectable, sir. Shields are barely registering any impact, if they actually directed their weapon at us."

"Mister Saleb," said Leone said with a relieved sigh, "your stock just went up."

"I'm pleased to hear that, Captain."

"Now, since we've nullified their ability to attack us-"

"Uh, not so fast," said Saleb. "They have a secondary weapon that might be a little more effective."

Leone turned. "What secondary-"

"Sir, I hold a projectile contact dead ahead!"

"Mister Saleb?"

Saleb frowned. "Evasive maneuvers are highly recommended, Captain."

"Mister Aspinall, evasive pattern alpha."

"Aye, sir." The helmsman's fingers danced across the flight controls. The viewscreen shifted as the ship's course moved as quickly as it could, but the torpedo continued on its course.

"Hang on," warned Leone, as she held onto the arms of her seat. The torpedo drew closer, and angled around to make contact with their ship.

The torpedo impacted against the shields, exploding into a million crystal shards. The energy from that explosion carried through to the ship itself, causing the hull to lurch under them.

"Damage?"

"Shields holding. Total strength down to ninety-seven percent, Captain," said Nieves. "Shall I return fire?"

"I don't know," she admitted. "Mister Saleb? Are our weapons effective against them?"

Saleb looked up from the engineering station, where he had seemingly braced Petra during the explosion. "Your antimatter-based torpedoes will do damage, but I suspect your phased energy weapons may be useless."

"Let's find out. Wilson, target their weapons and propulsion systems only."

Nieves nodded. "Target locked."

"Fire phasers."

The red-orange beam of energy shot out from the top of the saucer section, as *Farragut* continued to run through its evasive maneuvers. The beam struck its target, but instead of causing damage as it was designed to do, the beam angled away from the ship as it reflected off of the crystal's flat surface. And back at them.

"Cease fire!" Leone ordered quickly. They damaged their own shields! "Damn."

"Another torpedo inbound," warned Nieves. "Make that two."

"Can we target their torpedoes?"

Saleb called, "I wouldn't recommend that, Captain. They are made of the same material as the ship."

"Ariel, start working on a solution to the problem." Leone weathered the impact of the two torpedoes as they proved too fast for the heavy cruiser to maneuver around. "Wilson, load forward torpedo tubes." Both officers replied and carried out their orders. As soon as Nieves reported that the torpedoes were ready, she hesitated briefly before giving the order to fire.

Did she really want to drag the Federation into a war?

"Torpedoes incoming!"

Leone muttered to herself, "No choice." To Nieves, "Dispersal pattern: Sierra. Fire forward tubes."

"Torpedoes away!"

Twin red dots flittered across the top of the viewscreen and toward the multi-angled Hegemony ship. The first torpedo impacted against the forward section and shattered the outer hull, exposing the inner hull to space. The second one followed close behind and penetrated beyond the inner hull, for the entire front half of the ship crushed inward before exploding outward as the antimatter warhead detonated inside the ship.

Nieves slammed his hand down on the rail in triumph. "Target severely damaged, sir. Reading secondary explosions inside the ship."

"Hail them, quickly. Let's see if we can-"

Saleb talked over her. "No, sir. They'll self-destruct with that much damage. Get us out of here."

Leone barked, "Helm!"

Aspinall did not wait for the order, "Getting us out of here, aye, sir. Engaging impulse engines to full on relative bearing two-seven-zero mark zero."

"Reading massive power buildup, Captain," said Ariel. "Estimate twenty-three seconds to critical mass."

"Petra, reinforce the aft shields."

"I'm lowering the forward shield and redirecting power to the aft emitters," said Petra quickly. "Structural integrity field to full."

"Fifteen seconds to critical mass," said Ariel.

"Are we clear of the blast radius, Mister Saleb?"

"Since they took massive damage, I cannot say for certain. Were we dealing with a fully powered ship, the answer would be no," replied Saleb. He remained at the engineering console as Nieves shot him a menacing look to prevent him from leaving Petra's side.

"Five seconds."

"I guess we're about to see," muttered Leone. "All hands, brace for impact!"

The crystalline ship appeared to vibrate heavily and then shattered, sending small shards in every direction. The magnitude of the shockwave appeared to be high as some of the shards shattered as they flew away from the ship they previously held together. A distortion ring formed as the energy from the ship passed into vacuum, heading for *Farragut* quickly.

The ring reached *Farragut* and the aft shields took the punishment from it. Some shards of crystal broke up against the barrier protecting the outer hull, while others were deflected away from it. However, some of them seemed to penetrate the shields.

"The aft shields are destabilizing. The shockwave is acting like a giant isolytic burst; we have to reinitialize the shield harmonics," said Petra. "Some of the debris is getting through!"

"The starboard nacelle is taking damage," reported Ariel as an alarm went off on her console. "The plasma vents are hit! We have coil damage!"

"We can't reinitialize the shield emitters or else the shockwave will crush the ship like an empty shell," warned Saleb. "Better we take damage to a section than risk the destruction of the whole."

Leone grimaced through the ship being overtaken by the shockwave, threatening to rattle the teeth out of her skull as it passed by. Everyone gripped their stations tightly, but Ariel fell to the deck as the shaking grew more violent. Nieves fell against the rail above her; his arms flailed out and nearly slapped her in the face as he did so. Then, it passed and the ship was calm.

"Full damage assessment, all decks, all sections," ordered Leone as she got to her feet. "Wilson, any other contacts?"

Nieves returned to his standing position and entered in a few commands. "Negative, sir. But I don't know for how long that'll be."

"Mister Saleb, any suggestions?"

"I recommend course one-one-three mark thirty-nine. That will take us to a Kasui-held base that the Hegemony doesn't know about," replied Saleb. "We'll be safe, there."

"Who are the Kasui?"

Belkis chose that moment to finally speak, and when he did, Leone thought her had a tuba lodged in his throat. "The Kasui are a race of people enslaved by the Tristnor Hegemony, Captain Leone. We have been fighting for our freedom for the last twenty-five years. They will provide us with supplies, protection, whatever we need."

Leone considered it, but the anger of having her ship thrown across the galaxy on a whim did not sit well with her. "Will our present course take us deeper into Hegemony space or out of it, Mister Saleb?"

"Well, we're running parallel to the theoretical boundary..."

"Theoretical?"

"The Hegemony believes in manifest destiny, Captain. They believe that their gods have provided the entire galaxy for their benefit," explained Belkis. "They also believe that all other races were placed here to serve them without question."

"Sounds like a great group of people," snorted Ariel.

Belkis growled, "I assure you, they are not, Lieutenant Commander."

"That does not answer my question, Mister Saleb," barked Leone. Realizing that it was futile to even attempt to get a straight answer from either of them, she sighed. "Mister Aspinall."

"Sir?"

"Set a course for Earth."

"Aye, sir. Altering course to three-zero-one mark twelve."

"That's in the opposite direction, Captain," said Saleb. "We can make repairs at the fortress."

"I'm sure we could. However, while I appreciate your self-preservation in helping to protect this ship, you still have to answer for stealing Federation property, and taking almost two hundred people away from their homes!" She turned to Nieves. "Wilson, I want a security team on the bridge, *with* their sidearms!"

## Act Two

Within the confines of the bridge observation lounge, a majority of the senior staff gathered around the long curved table. Rather than sitting at the end of the table, Leone sat in the middle on the side that faced the viewports. Ariel sat on her immediate left, in her place as the acting executive officer.

"The debris that penetrated the aft deflector caused major damage to the warp coils, Captain," reported Petra, as she stood in front of the starboard side viewscreen to give her damage assessment. "Luckily, with our scheduled warp trials, we are carrying spares aboard, but I'm not quite ready to sign off on warp drive, just yet."

Leone nodded. "How long to make the replacements and get us up and running?"

Petra did the calculations out loud. "Sixteen hours for the coil replacements, give or take an hour. It'll take longer to repair the damage to the plasma vents; an additional twelve hours. I'll say at least a day, maybe a day and a half if we have to fight some more, sir."

"Start your repairs. Let's not waste any time. Did you find out what our friends in the brig did to the navigational deflector?"

"The device that was connected to the control computer burned up and left very little to go through, sir. Luckily, there does not appear to be any long-term damage to the deflector itself; we just had to replace a few isolinear optical chips and a stretch of ODN cable."

"I would say we were lucky, there, but given the nature of our guests, that might have been by design," said the captain. She turned to Ariel, "Given our present position, how long would it take to reach Earth at maximum warp?"

"Thirty to forty years," said Ariel. "That's if we had the luxury of running at maximum warp the entire time. Which we don't."

Leone nodded slowly. "So, longer, then."

"Add another five to ten years to the trip, unless we happen to recreate what they did to our ship, or we get lucky and find a wormhole or some other space-time anomaly that'll help us out."

"Noted. Doctor, crew status?"

Sovera replied, "Minor injuries, such as lacerations and bruises, were brought to my staff's attention."

"Nothing more serious than that?"

"No."

"Lucky."

The doctor agreed with a slight incline of her head. "Most fortunate, considering the violent nature of the shockwave's effect." She continued, "I have examined our guests at your request and have found that both underwent extreme dermal alterations to appear human. Mister Saleb is actually carrying an exoskeleton which is covered by a synthetic dermal layer to not show his... scales, so to speak. Mister Belkis, on the other hand, could be considered human, although his DNA has some drift between his species and homo sapiens."

"They're different races?"

"That is correct."

"Did they tell you what race they are?"

"They did not appear to provide me with much information, other than they are oxygen-nitrogen breathers, same as most carbon-based lifeforms discovered throughout the galaxy," replied Sovera. "Both have declined to be restored to their natural state."

"Now that the cat's out of the bag, I wonder what would be the point?" asked Ariel.

Leone ignored Ariel's question. "We'll respect their decision for the time being, unless the doctor believes there is any more subterfuge to be gained from it."

"The ship's computer can now distinguish their lifesigns. It will be easier for them to be tracked than before," said Sovera.

"All right," said Leone. "Since our departure from Antares, I've asked Commander Elannis to stand in as acting first officer. As I expected to have at least completed the first day's trials by now, and not be halfway across the galaxy, I will need to make further temporary appointments to fill key positions. Therefore, I am designating Lieutenant Nieves as second officer."

The rest of the table accepted the news with a nod or a quiet verbal acknowledgement.

"Unless there's any other news...?"

No one said anything.

"Then with the exception of the commander, here, you're all dismissed."

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A four-man security team stood over Saleb and Belkis as they sat within the observation lounge. As a testament to Belkis' formidable

presence, two of the security guards were chosen specifically for their strength and ability to contain a larger target. Saleb wore the same little smile he did when he first appeared on the bridge, while Belkis scowled at the fact that he was being handled against his will. Their equipment lay out on the table, out of reach near the head on the starboard side.

"Let's start at the beginning, shall we?" said Leone, from across the table.

Belkis and Saleb traded nods of their head, indicating that the other should proceed first. Finally, Belkis growled, "You tell them. It was your idea."

Saleb grinned. "Yes, it was," he said, proudly. "All right. So, in the beginning, the Kasui were a somewhat underdeveloped bipedal species living on a planet near the edge of known Tristnor space about three hundred years ago."

"I am a Kasui," announced Belkis. "Twenty-five years ago, following centuries of enslavement and conditioning, my people determined that our existence as slaves to the Hegemony required extreme change. We live in a caste society, and my people are at the bottom of the system. We are bred for service, hunted for sport, raped, forced to perform dangerous labor; we are in complete and submissive service to all of the other races for any whim they desire."

"Okay, and Mister Saleb is one of the other, less subjugated races?" asked Ariel.

"No, I am a Tristnor," answered Saleb. "Top of the proverbial heap."

"How nice for you," Leone commented, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

"It wasn't, really. The Hegemony may treat the other races like property, but when you're among the elite, they demand much more of you there," said Saleb, his smile dropping somewhat. "I am... was... one of their most brilliant minds in the area of quantum-level propulsion. My studies have led to a breakthrough of a new method of propulsion that the Hegemony is very interested in. A quantum-level manipulation of space-time, which would allow a ship to traverse great distances by way of an anomaly."

"Prior to that," interrupted Belkis annoyedly, "there was a growing faction of Kasui who had freed themselves and acquired Tristnor technology and ships in order to try and free as many of the Kasui as possible."

Ariel leaned forward, her interest obviously piqued. "Is the aim of your group to destroy or overthrow the Tristnor?"

Belkis shook his head. "No. We just want to rescue as many of our people as possible, and find a new place to call home. Someplace far enough away from the Tristnor that would allow us to build our own military and defenses."

Saleb continued, "As much as I was involved with a number of projects relating to the conquest of other worlds, our goal was to attempt a full systems integration of this new drive system into one of their frigates for testing. We got to the third stage, before I decided--"

"We," corrected Belkis.

Saleb gave him a sheepish grin. "We. Sorry."

"Forgiven."

"We decided to pull the plug... forcibly. Giving the Tristnor this level of technology would mean that no section of the universe would be safe. And so, it was decided, that we needed to find another more advanced race to help us."

"The goals of the Tristnor being what it is, I suppose I can see the threat to the Federation. However, what I fail to hear is that you approached the Federation in a more open manner." Leone looked at Saleb with narrowed eyes. "I assume you reached Federation space using your handy invention?"

"We equipped a starskiff with the beta device." Both officers gave him confused looks. He explained, "It's for ships that might have an inadequate system for generating a quantum field. It includes the necessary equipment."

"How long ago was this?"

"We arrived roughly three months ago, and started studying Federation culture with particular emphasis on Starfleet."

"In your studies, did it not occur to you that approaching us in friendship would be a better option?" Leone's tone turned edgy.

Belkis cleared his throat. "Do not get upset at him. He did suggest approaching a Starfleet ship under a flag of truce and explaining the situation. I forced him to adopt--"

"Hold on, now. It wasn't all your idea. I was the one who came up with stealing a ship in refit," complained Saleb quickly. "You were the one who was determined to steal the *Enterprise*!"

"The *Enterprise*?" said Ariel with a blink. "Worf alone would have ripped you two in half, let alone the others."

Belkis looked embarrassed. "In our studies, the ship named *Enterprise* is legendary in your history. We thought it was a logical choice."

Leone and Ariel shared an amused look. "Yeah," said Leone, "they are pretty well-known in our neck of the woods."

"Being on a deep-space exploration mission, *Enterprise* was obviously out of our reach, being that we required a vessel powerful enough to help us. We were able to use some techniques to gather information about ship locations and status," said Saleb. "The Nebula-class heavy cruiser is comparable to the Galaxy-class, and luckily we found *Farragut* undergoing several system upgrades."



Ariel snorted. "Lucky."

"Yes, well, er... be that as it may, we felt that it was better... how do you say it... ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission. We arranged to have ourselves admitted as civilian engineers on the refit team approximately one month ago. We installed the alpha device the night before launch within your primary navigational deflector's control computer, to run a warp plasma power node through the deflector dish and create the anomaly."

"So we've seen," said Leone. "And from what I understand, the device is now burnt out and useless. Leaving one hundred seven-four people stranded deep within the Beta Quadrant, involved in a war with a race they know nothing about." Her tone grew in intensity as she laid out the obvious. "You have deliberately plunged the Federation into war with a species it hasn't even made first contact with!"

"Uh, all circumstance aside," said Ariel, placing a hand on her captain's shoulder and squeezing it gently to remind her of their surroundings, "how did a Tristnor like yourself get mixed up with the rebel Kasui?"

Belkis chuckled. "Saleb is hopelessly in love with my sister," he said, matter-of-factly.

Shocked, Saleb turned his head toward Belkis. His mouth hung open and the air of smug superiority vanished completely. "N-No! I mean... how you could *possibly* know that?!"

Belkis smirked. He ignored him and continued, "My youngest sister was a lab slave that brought them whatever they needed throughout the day. Her name is Bettis, and Saleb took a strong liking to her."

Saleb looked down on the table, furious. "Please tell me how you know that."

Preventing Belkis from speaking any further, Leone said sharply, "Perhaps we could move on to topics that bear directly on our predicament." She placed her hands on the table and looked at the upset Saleb. "Mister Saleb, is it possible to get this ship back to Federation space?"

In a dejected tone, Saleb said quietly, "Yes."

"How?"

Saleb said nothing, obviously upset.

"Mister Saleb, I require an answer."

Composing himself quickly, Saleb replied, "The remnants of the alpha device are not useless, as you put it, Captain. They require a replacement of the core crystal that runs the device. It was not entirely compatible with Federation systems, so I had to construct an isolinear-based bridge between the two systems."

"That must have been what Petra had to replace," remarked Leone to Ariel. "Where do we find a replacement for your device, Mister Saleb?"

"We find the frigate we were testing and we can replace the whole unit, if need be."

"I take it that the frigate is not in an area where it could easily be found?"

Belkis looked at Saleb. "What do you think? Stage three?"

"It would be the right time for it," answered Saleb. "Yes... yes. They would have started back to the first stage with the devices taken." He turned to Leone. "We took both the alpha and the beta from the lab during transfer to the frigate for installation. But, there were backup units built in case the primaries were destroyed during testing."

"Wouldn't they have been tested alongside the primaries, though?"

"They were. But we destroyed all of the testing data before we left."

Ariel asked, "So they'd be forced to start over?"

Belkis nodded. "It gave us some time to find you and bring you here."

Leone rose from her seat, satisfied with the information so far. "We've already destroyed one of their ships, and based on the information you've shared with us regarding their technology, they appear to be comparable in technology to the races near the Federation. I'm not sure if they would actually present a threat to the Federation or not, but I agree that a culture bent on total domination of the Milky Way would meet with some resistance where I come from."

Ariel stood up, as did Belkis and Saleb. Saleb asked, "Can we count on your assistance?"

"I... don't know," admitted Leone. Off their disappointed expressions, she added, "It's the best I can do. This isn't a decision I can make lightly and I do appreciate that time is of the essence. My first priority is to find a peaceful way to extricate ourselves from this conflict and get my people back home," she told all of them. "Ensign, please see to it that our guests are escorted back to the brig."

"Aye, sir."

"The brig!" squealed Saleb as the security team moved to escort them away. "Captain, may we please not be treated like criminals?"

Leone snapped, "You *are* criminals, Mister Saleb! Until I make my decision, I want you as far away from computer access as possible." Just before they left, she called after them, "You'll have my decision in one hour."



## Act Three

Gregory Aspinall ran his fingers through his hair as he lay back on the bunk in his stateroom. His hands moved behind his head and interlocked as he enjoyed the spaciousness of a double stateroom by himself. Being a junior grade lieutenant had its advantages, he decided. "So, what do you think?" he asked his visitor.

Ensign Thomas O'Day frowned. "I think this sucks."

"The room?"

"The situation."

Greg rolled his eyes. "Are you kidding me? I hope we never have to go home. My own room is beyond what I could have hoped for. And besides, adventures in the Beta Quadrant? *This* is what I signed on for."

"I'd rather go home and see my family."

"We've been away from them for a whole eight hours... we were going to be doing trials for two days! You're already homesick?" Greg clicked his tongue at him. "I think Starfleet might've been a bad choice for you."

Tom sighed. "It would've been a better two days if it were inside Federation territory... or at least within shouting distance."

Tommy O'Day was a fresh-faced graduate of Starfleet Academy, and it was his very first assignment after taking his summer leave. Greg felt a pang of guilt for not remembering that, but he shook it off. "Captain Leone's one of the best. I'm sure she'll find us a way home."

"Is she better than your mom?"

"No one's better than Mom," Greg assured him. His mother, Joy, was a rear admiral serving at the commanding admiral of Starbase Eleven. But before that, she was a starship captain of good repute. "There's a reason she urged me to sign on with Captain Leone."

"Because you're a legacy, and she's a legacy, too?"

"More than that. She's a friend of the family."

"Well, great. You use your inside hookups to get all the plum assignments, while little Tommy O'Day has to make do with being the first member of his family to join Starfleet," he said, throwing up his hands. His tone betrayed the fear he felt. "And what happens to him on his first assignment? Some whack-job steals the ship and sends it clear to the other side of the galaxy!"

"Calm down, Tommy. You're going to give yourself hives," said Greg in a mutter.

"What are hives?"

"I don't know. It's just something my grandma used to say."

"Oh. Anyway, whatever you may think of Captain Leone, I honestly doubt she's going to magically whisk us back to Federation space."

Greg grinned.

"What?"

"You obviously underestimate the power of a starship captain, my young friend."

"I put more faith in Lieutenant Bartlet," affirmed Tommy. "She is a..."

Greg's interest in his friend's words was apparent as he looked for an apt adjective.

"Brilliant officer. Smart, and funny... she's really nice and cares about people who serve under her."

"Didn't I tell you not to get crushes on your superior officers?"

"What about you and Commander Elannis?"

Greg blushed. "That's different."

"How do you figure?"

"I don't go gushing all over her."

"What the hell. You do so. Last night, before we launched, you were talking about how disappointed you were that Starfleet redesigned the uniforms, because you would've killed to see her... rear end in a one piece jumpsuit."

"Oh, man, I so would."

"See?!"

"No, it's different. When I look at her, I see a well-toned drop-dead gorgeous specimen of womanhood," Greg's voice turned soft. "If looks could kill..."

"You'd be dead by now? I'm not that lucky."

Greg slapped Tommy on the shoulder. "Asshole."

"You just lust after her. Lieutenant Bartlet deserves better than that from whoever she dates. She's not to be the subject of some pervert's wet dream."

"Commander Elannis... no, Ariel... she's not up on some pedestal. She's real. Attainable."

"I suppose you think Captain Leone's lustworthy, as well?"

"Uh... not really."

"Why not? She's pretty attractive. Red hair, green eyes, fair skin, great body. Especially after having a kid."

"A surrogate had the kid. She was on-duty when Dom was born."

"Still, she's quite a babe in her own right."

"Then you date her."

"I've got my own goals, thanks. But you still haven't really answered my question."

"Then actually ask one."

"What's wrong with the captain?"

"It's wrong! She's like my older sister."

"But she really isn't."

Greg blushed again. He mumbled a response.

"I'm sorry. What was that?"

"She... used to babysit for me."

Tommy threw his head back and laughed. "Oh my God, that is priceless!"

Greg sat up and pointed at him, angrily. "Don't you dare say a word!"

"I can't, I'm laughing too hard!"

"I never should've said anything."

"I can't believe she was your babysitter! That's hilarious!"

"Her dad and my dad are old friends," explained Greg, realizing that he wouldn't be able to do anything but. "When I was young, she would come over and watch me while our dads would go out. They would beam all over Earth, while our moms were serving."

"Okay," said Tommy with a nod, still letting the odd giggle out. "Keep going."

"She came over a lot. In fact, we spent a lot of time together. As much time as a young, impressionable boy such as myself might think that one day we were going to be more than just friends."

"Greg, was Captain Leone a hot teenager?" asked Tommy in a playful accusatory tone.

"Oh, yes."

"What?"

"Hot."

"Like...?"

"Hotter-than-Ariel-Elannis-hot."

"Holy Kolker," breathed Tommy. "I can see that, totally. With the freckles and the red hair in curls, maybe... in a thin t-shirt on a hot summer's day..." The ensign's voice trailed off as the mental image formed in his head.

"Anyway, she went off to prep school for the Academy. One of those schools that requires you to board at them, so you get used to the experience that the Academy has to offer." Greg continued his story, knowing that perhaps Tommy was lost in his fantasy world. "I was twelve years old, and I didn't know what was going on, except that she was sixteen and I stupidly thought she was my girlfriend."

"Did she like bathe you?"

"No!"

"Maybe she climbed in with you?"

"Tommy."

"Did she ever wear like a low-cut shirt and bent over to pick up a toy... and you were like all excited but you didn't know why, because she wasn't wearing a bra?"

Greg stared at him, dumbfounded. "For your sake, I sincerely hope the Beta Quadrant has a place like Risa, so we can pop that cherry of yours and be done with it."

"I can't hear you. In my mind right now, Captain Leone and Lieutenant Bartlet are promoting me to lieutenant, in the nude," said Tommy with his eyes closed.

"God, I want to go home, now," said Greg in a barely constrained scream.

"See? I knew you'd come around."

---

Petra sat in front of Captain Leone's desk within the ready room. "In short, warp drive is available for all flight modes, sir."

"Nice work," said Leone. "What about the rest of the damage when we passed through the anomaly?"

"That's going to take a little longer, sir. We did take some outer hull damage, and that will require hull patching."

"Which we could do out here, but we would have to find someplace that was safe for EVA ops."

"I wouldn't recommend trying to perform repairs on the hull while at impulse power."

"Goes without saying. Weapons?"

"Fully operational, sir."

Leone nodded her understanding, and leaned back into the seat. "This isn't how I imagined my first command going," she admitted. "I had hoped for smooth trials and then on to Starbase 310 to patrol the border."

"I think we all did, sir," replied Petra. She smiled at her encouragingly.

"I'll get us back there. Rest assured."

"I don't doubt that at all, sir."

"Thank you. Would you be kind enough to send in Ariel on your way out?"

"Of course, sir."

Petra left as quietly as she entered, and Ariel entered with a grin.

"So, are we in it or what?"

Leone pressed her lips together in annoyance. "Gods, Ariel! At least wait until the doors closed to start spouting off."

"You haven't answered my question."

The captain sighed. "We have to make repairs, and we're going to need some coverage while we do it. Our choices are to engage warp drive and get the hell out of here, start a long journey home and take our chances."

"Or?"

"We go to the Kasui fortress, make repairs there, get ourselves a new alpha device and get ourselves home."

"While at the same time, involving ourselves and the Federation in a war without authorization."

"Yeah."

"What does the book say?"

"The Prime Directive keeps flashing like a big warning sign in my face. Non-interference in the internal matters of another culture." Leone shook her head. "I can't imagine this not qualifying."

Ariel sighed. "I figured that pesky little General Order Number One would come into play, sooner or later. However, I think you missed a class or two at the Academy about its application."

"What do you mean?"

"We're already involved, Krys. We destroyed a Tristnor vessel, and undoubtedly they got off a transmission to the home base since then."

"Something about that's been worrying me, actually. We've been cruising at full impulse through their 'core' territory and we haven't seen so much as a shuttle running around, here."

"Saleb said something about their belief in manifest destiny. Maybe the subjugated races don't believe in-"

"Captain to the bridge," said Nieves over the intercom.

Leone spat, "Damn. We just jinxed ourselves, didn't we?"

Ariel smirked, and followed her out to the bridge.

"Report."

"Incoming transmission. Long-range, very powerful, but I can't get a lock on the source. It has the same communications protocol as the Tristnor vessel, so I can only assume..." he stopped talking, eyeing his console. "It's a wide-band alert. For us."

"Let's hear it."

"It's a text message, sir. It took the universal translator some time to work on the written form of their language, but it reads, 'USS *Farragut* NCC-60597, destroy on sight.'"

"Great." Leone settled back into her seat, while Ariel occupied the executive officer's seat to her right. "Wilson, have security bring Mister Saleb and Mister Belkis to the bridge."

Nieves did not hesitate. "Aye, sir."

"Helm, lay in a course for the Kasui fortress and engage at warp eight."

The helmsman turned to look at her in confusion. "Sir?"

"You heard me, Ensign."

"Aye, sir. Course laid in. Engaging warp engines."

"Ariel?"

"Yes, sir?"

"To answer your question; yes, we're in it."

Ariel showed her pleasure with a large grin. "Yeah, I figured."

## Act Four

*Captain's Log  
Stardate 43225.1*

*Since our arrival in Tristnor space, we appeared to be entangled in a conflict that could have repercussions on the Federation in the far future. The Tristnor have decided to eradicate us from their space by any means necessary, and I have an obligation to see this crew safely back to the Alpha Quadrant. Our involvement in this war was sealed the moment the Tristnor fired on this ship, and so we're forced to seek allies while deep in the Beta Quadrant.*

*To that end, I have ordered a course change to reach the Kasui fortress. Mister Saleb and Mister Belkis have been most helpful in instructing me in the culture of their people. I have no reason to doubt their sincerity in bringing our two peoples together to face a common enemy. I plan to make my appeal to their leader, Prime Barris.*

"May I introduce the leader of the only Kasui fortress known to exist, Prime Barris," said Saleb, with his head bowed before the massive Kasui male. "Prime, I would like to present Starfleet Captain Krystine Leone, the commanding officer of the Federation starship *Farragut*."

Barris showed off his teeth as he inclined his head out of respect. His huge hands rose and opened toward her. "Your ship, and your title, are most impressive, Captain."

Leone reflected the gesture as Belkis instructed her. "Thank you, Prime Barris. The accomplishments of your people are even more impressive, when you consider the circumstances."

Barris accepted the compliment from her and seated himself at the head of the table, as was his right. Even sitting, he had presence within the room, and she knew he would be a formidable opponent for negotiating an agreement or alliance. She needed some insurance to make sure their talks went well. "Commander Elannis to the observation lounge."

When she entered, Leone gestured to her, "Prime Barris, this is my executive officer, Lieutenant Commander Ariel Elannis."

Ariel elected to wear the jumpsuit variation of the recent Starfleet uniform. No doubt, somewhere between the bridge and the observation lounge, she unzipped the front of it to expose the bare skin underneath. She drew near to Barris and bent over at the waist with a respectful bow. "A pleasure to meet you, Prime."

"I am comforted to know that a distant people would choose to entrust a fearsome warship such as the *Farragut* to two beautiful women," he said, never once taking his eyes away from Ariel's form. "Saleb and Belkis have done well during this operation, by bringing powerful allies to our cause, but even more for ensuring the company is most pleasant."

Belkis opened his mouth to warn the Prime, but Leone cut him off, "It is we who are honored to be here, Prime, in spite of the circumstances." She gave him a quick glance to assure him that she was not offended.

Ariel's voice dropped to husky levels, "Indeed, Captain. It's so nice to see a powerfully handsome man at the ends of the galaxy, fighting for the freedom of his people. It's a very romantic notion amongst our kind."

Barris blushed briefly, then composed himself.

Leone hid her smirk with a clearing of her throat. Ariel had him, for sure. "Prime, we are in need of a safe haven to make repairs to our ship. We intend to seek and locate the backup device Saleb mentioned, so that we may return home in a timely fashion."

"You wish our help to get home?"

Ariel pushed a little more. "It would most gracious of you to do so, Prime. And I... er, we would be exceedingly appreciative."

Belkis' jaw dropped. Saleb reached over to close his mouth, while keeping a watch upon the discussion.

The Prime did not answer immediately, but his eyes continued to drink Ariel in; moving up and down as she chose to stand near her captain instead of depriving him of her figure by hiding half of it behind the conference table. "Y-Yes, well, our facility is not fully equipped," he admitted. "It is a prize of war, and supplies are hard to come by."

Leone leaned back in her chair and crossed her legs at the knees. "What kind of supplies do you require?"

Belkis answered, "Food, mostly. As more and more refugees make for the fortress, our food supplies are replenished only when we go on a raid against the Tristnor supply lines."

While Belkis spoke, Barris enjoyed the close proximity of Ariel. He closed his eyes and inhaled her scent. "Our supplies are not so low, however, that we cannot invite our guests to share a meal with us."

"We can provide you with food, Prime. We have a device that converts energy into matter. Using our system, we could provide you with months of rations to feed your people," said Leone. "Therefore, you wouldn't have to risk sending them out to raid for supplies."

Barris' eyes glanced away from Ariel, as if noticing Leone for the first time. "Perhaps you would be so kind as to share the technology, instead? That would allow us the ability to feed ourselves forever."

Leone winced inwardly. It was one thing to meddle in a war, quite another to supply them with technology. "Prime, I am bound by Starfleet regulations preventing me with sharing technology with another culture."

Barris looked up at Ariel, as though he trusted her more.

Ariel nodded, almost pouting. "She's right. We can use our technology to help you, but we can't just hand it over. You understand, right?"

It was easy. "O-Of course, I understand. You have your obligations and I have mine. It would have been foolish of me not at least inquire."

"I understand," said Leone. "Where shall I deliver the rations to?"

"I will arrange for a skiff to start transferring them, immediately."

"Prime," said Saleb. "They have a device that uses teleportation to move objects... and people, without the need for skiffs."

"You have done well, Saleb and Belkis," rumbled Barris. He rose to his feet, and so did everyone else who was seated around the table. "Captain, you shall have my fortress' protection for as long as you need it. And we will ride into battle at your side. I will accept your gracious offer of food for my people, but if I may make a small request for myself?"

Ariel placed her hands behind her back and smiled as though she knew what was coming next.

"Before you do, Prime, I would like to assign Commander Elannis as our liaison. She can go with you to your fortress and help us coordinate operations from there." Leone said, snapping her fingers toward her friend.

"Aye, sir," Ariel replied, not taking her eyes off of the Prime.

"That is most kind of you, Captain," said Barris.

"My apologies for interrupting you, Prime. You had a personal request?" Leone waited patiently for his reply, but when none came, she said, "Prime?"

"What? Oh, yes. Never mind, Captain. I forgot what I was going to say."

Leone grinned. "If you should think of it, please don't hesitate to contact me."

Barris nodded quickly, and gestured toward the exit. "I will do that. Shall we, Commander?"

As the Prime and his men departed, she heard Ariel tell him, "You can call me Ariel."

Belkis shook his head. "I cannot believe what just happened here."

Saleb only said, "That was remarkable work."

"You may not get your first officer to return, Captain," warned Belkis.

"You underestimate Commaner Elannis, Mister Belkis. It is Prime Barris who will most likely want to join Starfleet, after she gets done with him," Leone chuckled.

---

Greg Aspinall could not believe his eyes as he watched Ariel and the huge Kasui man walk from the lounge to the turbolift. She was giggling like a schoolgirl while hanging off of the man's massive arm. Her jumpsuit zipper was pulled down enough to further his fantasies for weeks. He stared hard until they walked off the bridge, and even then, he could not help but stare at the doors when they closed.

"Holy Kolker," he breathed.

"No kidding," said Nieves from the center seat, unable to tear his eyes away from the scene.

"Sir?" said the helmsman with a sly grin.

"Uh, mind your station, Lieutenant!" snapped the tactical officer.

Greg quickly found his console very interesting.

The captain, Saleb, and Belkis arrived shortly after. Leone stepped down the ramp to the command center and relieved Nieves, who returned to tactical. "Helm, ahead slow and bring us into close proximity to the fortress."

"Aye, sir. We're not docking?"

"No. The fortress does not have a compatible docking airlock. Just hold position for close formation, and then set thrusters for station-keeping."

"Aye, sir."

Leone called, "Wilson?"

"Yes, Captain?"

"Commander Elannis will be residing aboard the fortress until our repairs are completed. You will stand in for her."

"Yes, sir," replied Nieves with a succinct nod.



"Your first task is to replicate four months of rations and transport them to the fortress."

"Yes, sir. Shall I maintain a transporter lock on Commander Elannis?"

"I don't think that's necessary," the captain said with a smirk. "I'm sure Ariel will comport herself as befits a Starfleet officer."

## Act Five

Barris snored softly.

Ariel ran her index finger along the length of the Prime's chest, noting how tense his muscles were even in rest. She stretched her legs out over his, feeling the heat of his leg against hers as she snuggled against him. She sighed contentedly, and it carried through the bedroom of the Prime's suite aboard the space fortress.

In the three days since their arrival, Ariel spent every waking and sleeping moment with the Prime, secluded within the confines of his suite. They broke their commiseration only for food and other necessities, but quickly returned to their marathon sessions of sex and laughter as they thoroughly enjoyed each others' company. While he slept, though, she reveled in her well-earned afterglow. Barris was not an easy man to please, and it took a majority of her skill to bring about his climaxes, which were as powerful as he was.

He instructed her in the proper use of his sex organ, and she delighted at how little adaptation it took to ensure mutual pleasure. Kasui men were not all that different from their Alpha Quadrant counterparts, though it seemed as if the Beta Quadrant men proved to be the superior beings in staying power that she had seen, if Barris was any indication.

Her finger continued its stroll along his midsection, playing with the patch of hair above his abdomen. She felt the involuntary muscle spasm as she splayed her entire palm over the patch, caressing it softly with her fingertips and enjoying the sensation of its springy nature. As she expected, his manhood began to rise hesitantly as blood filled it. Engorged and angry-looking, it curved toward her as she laid her head against his chest and listened to the coordinated beating of his twin hearts.

Ariel smiled at the result of her ministrations, continuing to move around it but not making direct contact. Teasing was a pleasure they both enjoyed, but even a Kasui had his limits, she found out on their first night together.

Awake now, Barris' huge right hand moved over her back and snaked around her midsection. His soft hand moved down to caress the skin of her right thigh, feeling the play of her muscles underneath before moving upward over the cheek at the top of it. He felt the small of her back and lightly massaged it before moving to feel her muscled stomach. Finally, his hand reached up to cup her breast completely, before stroking it and moving his fingers to play with her sensitive nipple.

She sighed, smiling; enjoying the sensation of his skin against hers. Ariel moved her head to look up at him, hiding the lower half of her face behind the curve of his chest and kissing it gently. She glanced at him through her bangs, which covered her left eye.

"Morning," she said, after moving her chin to rest against his chest. "How're you?"

Barris stretched his legs and his free arm, keeping his hand against her. "Sore. You?"

She kissed his chest again, and moved her hand down lower. Her fingers slipped over the top of him; gentle caresses from the tip to the base as it throbbed hotly to her touch. "I'm ready."

A deep rumbling in his chest gave away his laughter over her response. "You are a monster," he accused her with a grin. "Sent here by the Tristnor to sap me of my strength."

Ariel climbed atop him, pressing her chest into her. She spread her legs so her knees touched the bedding, draping her thighs over his sides. She smirked as he accused her and replied in a playful tone, "You've discovered my true identity, Prime Barris. Now I have to finish the job, over and over and over, until you're nothing but an empty shell." She reached underneath for him, pulling him to the apex of her legs. The strands of her long, jet black hair pooled against his chest where moments ago the ends tickled him as they brushed from side to side.

"Oh, my..." his voice trailed off, as he felt the heat of her. "You know, my father always said that this was among the best ways to end a life."

"Or create one," she quipped. Ariel continued to rub him up and down the length of her, and then stopped. She kept her eyes on his face, watching the change from contortion to pleasure and back again. They were both slick; drenched in her. He was ready, now.

Barris grabbed her thighs and ran his hands up and down her sides as she kept him waiting. In a hungry voice, he begged her, "Finish me, Ariel. *Hurry.*"

"Yes, my Prime," she told him. With her free hand, Ariel closed her eyes tightly and gasped as she sat up, guiding him into her with a single motion.

---

"Iced tea, mint and Earl Grey, double-sweet," requested Captain Leone of the replicator in her ready room. The replicator materialized her request, and she retrieved it from the receptacle and returned to her desk. Padds stacked on top of one another waited for her, each of them containing information about the ship's repairs.

Three days after they arrived at the Kasui fortress, everyone on board lent a hand to making repairs to the ship. More importantly, they were getting *Farragut* battle-ready by integrating a sonic weapon to use against the Tristnor ships. The likelihood of a live-fire test in battle conditions was high, but Petra assured Leone that the weapon would be ready.

Once again, they made use of the ship's navigational deflector, fresh from being repaired to Starfleet specifications. Except now, they would use it as a massive vibration cannon to use against the vulnerable crystalline ships.

Prime Barris' cooperation was more than she could have hoped for, and she would express her gratitude, except she was certain that Ariel was expressing it handily. In their spare time, they attended meetings with Leone to discuss plans for attack. Based on the information presented

by the Kasui and Saleb's intelligence from having worked inside the facility, they agreed upon the course of action that would yield the best benefit for everyone involved.

To gather information on their enemy position, a class nine probe was dispatched from *Farragut* and positioned at the edge of its sensor range for maximum cover while sneaking a peek at their formation.

Leone looked over the reports and began applying her acknowledgement to many of them. When they returned to the Federation, she made certain to write a letter of commendation for Petra's performance under such conditions.

If they returned...

No, she could not afford to think like that.

The door chimed.

"Enter," she said. Ariel stepped inside, wearing her two-piece uniform this time.

Leone grinned. "Well, well, well... she lives."

Ariel blushed. "Barely."

"Uh huh. Dare I ask for details?"

"You want them?" asked Ariel with a raised eyebrow.

"Er, not really, I guess." Leone gestured for Ariel to sit down in front of her and used her arm to push a stack to the side so she could see her. "Was it at least fun?"

"Very fun."

With a slow shake of her head, Leone smirked. "You didn't have to... you know..."

Ariel shrugged, "I know. But I wanted to. It was a new experience, and you know how I am about new experiences."

"Oh, yes. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised, but I guess I must admit to being shocked when you walked out with Barris so boldly. It's not like he's an Alpha Quadrant race; you didn't know what went where."

"I'm a fast learner."

"Hmm. Must be that Orion blood in you," Leone said with a wink. Ariel's mother was Orion, while her father was human. She gained her black hair and killer body from her mother, while her father was responsible for the blue eyes and the tanned skin.

"The hyper pheromones come in handy, especially in situations like this. But my mother never let me learn about the Technique. That was forbidden."

"I remember. I also seem to recall it not being that big a deal considering you had all the men at Starfleet Academy eating out of your hand."

Ariel grimaced. "Made my grades a little harder to attain, when all they think of you is sex."

"I know."

"You brought it up, is all I'm saying."

"Anyway, have you dropped by sickbay, yet?"

"My first stop. Sovera says I'm good and cleared me for duty."

"Excellent!" Leone reached over and pushed a stack back toward Ariel. "You can help me with these reports I've been doing since you went on your little sex safari into the Beta Quadrant wilderness."

"Shit."

---

Leone replied, "Ready here, Prime. We're waiting on the preliminary data from our probe."

Prime Barris looked relaxed and well-rested. His eyes continued to drift over to Ariel, as she sat in the executive officer's seat to Leone's right. "Uh, very good, Captain. I trust that my men are settling in nicely?"

"I've assigned Commander Elannis to see to Troopleader Bertas' every need," she told him, knowing full well what the implication might be.

A look of horror appeared on the Prime's face as he looked between the two. "You don't mean...?"

"She means I've made sure they have quarters and food, my Prime," replied Ariel, who moved her leg up and down once, to kick her captain in the shin. "Captain Leone did not mean to imply otherwise."

Leone coughed. "No, uh, no, of course, not. We will depart your fortress shortly to get into position to go to warp."

Barris eyed them, unconvinced of their attempts to assuage his fears. "Success to you and your mighty ship, Captain."

"To us all, Prime." The viewscreen blinked and showed the stars once more.

Ariel scowled. "Are you trying to break his heart?"

"Just easing him into it, Ariel."

"We're getting data back from the probe, Captain," reported Nieves from the tactical station.

Leone did not look up. She could access the data from the display on her armrest, as could Ariel from the executive officer's position. But, she wanted the bridge to know what they were going up against. "Report."

"I'm reading at least ten Tristnor warships of varying sizes running a blockade of the facility. They've laid a minefield in a sphere formation, a little less than half a million kilometers from it.

"Mines, Wilson?" asked Leone. She could not help but smirk at the news.

Nieves nodded. "Aye, sir. The computer's counted at least two thousand or so. Spaced pretty close together."

"Damn, that's just too much for coincidence," she said, *sotto voce*. To Ariel, she said, "Commander, please take Ops."

Leone rose from her seat as Ariel moved to ops. She raised her voice to address the officers on the bridge. "You know, about six hundred years ago, almost to the day... the namesake of this vessel, Rear Admiral David Glasgow Farragut, was fighting in the Battle of Mobile Bay during the American Civil War. His flag flew atop the sloop *Hartford*. Their objective was to take two Confederate forts that defended the bay. Mobile Bay had a wide mouth, making it easy for a fleet to sail down it and wreak havoc on them. So, the Confederate navy laid a minefield in the bay to constrict the traffic of ships entering and exiting, and making it nearly impassable unless ships travelled in a single line.

"He had eighteen ships, and his opponent, Admiral Franklin Buchanan, had four. But, back then, they didn't call them mines... they called them torpedoes. His fleet entered the field and the sloop *Tecumseh* stuck one of them and sank with all ninety-four hands aboard. Seeing this, the other ships in the Union fleet began to pull back. Admiral Farragut watched them from his perch on the fighting top of the *Hartford*. He called down from his ship to the nearby USS *Brooklyn* and asked them what the trouble was. The commanding officer of the *Brooklyn*, Captain Drayton, called back, 'Torpedoes, sir!'"

Nieves smiled at the reenactment from Leone. Ariel turned around to watch the performance. Greg looked as though he had heard the story before, and kept a watch on his console. Saleb and Belkis looked on with interest.

Leone continued in a wistful tone, "Admiral Farragut didn't care. He wanted his fleet to charge the bay." She cupped her mouth with her hands, "He shouted back, 'Damn the torpedoes! Four bells, Captain Drayton! Full speed ahead!'" She lowered her right hand to her side, but held out her left hand palm-up as she continued, "They made it safely through the minefield, took Mobile Bay, and captured the forts."

As her officers all smiled at her, having endured her impromptu performance, she placed her hands on her waist. "I feel like this is a similar situation. Our enemy has mined the approach to a facility that holds the key to our return to the Alpha Quadrant. I'm nowhere near as brilliant a commander as Admiral Farragut, but I'd like to think that if he were here right now, his order would be pretty obvious."

While Leone spoke, Ariel's smirk transformed into a huge grin. In response to her last sentence, he offered, "'Damn the torpedoes,' sir?"

The captain smiled. "'Four bells', Mister Aspinall."

Greg did not turn as he asked, "Sir?"

"Warp nine, Greg," supplied Ariel helpfully.

"Damn straight," confirmed Leone, as she settled back into her seat. With a gesture of her hand, she pointed toward the viewscreen. "Full speed ahead."

The helmsman entered a flurry of commands before the familiar velocity command was confirmed by the computer. "Aye, sir. Engaging at warp nine."

Outside, *Farragut's* warp engines flashed a brilliant blue before vaulting itself into subspace.

**... TO BE CONCLUDED...**

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