

Star Trek: The Breen War

Prologue

"What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?"-- Mahatma Gandhi, Non-Violence in Peace and War, © 1972

USS *Dauntless* **Stardate 57239.3**

A graveyard. A vast, spinning graveyard, locked in orbit around the blue marble floating beneath. Hulks of metal and bodies and parts of bodies, all spinning endlessly, beyond all hope of recognition or discovery.

Many of the bodies were gone, destroyed in the titanic clash of energy on energy.

Damn them. Damn those who had done this. On both sides.

Nikolai Martin looked out the window of his office. The debris field looked thick enough that you could almost walk on it. He didn't want to think of the masses of dead, the huge numbers that had died to make that debris field.

Your fault the back of his mind whispered. *You could have done better. Drove them off sooner. Prevented this from happening in the first place.*

He closed his eyes, cursing his demons. The image of those hulks of starships was burned into his mind forever, adding itself to the general clamor of rent, broken forms, living or no. *Your fault.*

"Sir," said S'pon over the intercom, "we have Low Earth Orbit."

"Understood," said Martin. "Have we reached Starfleet Command yet?"

"Negative sir."

"Okay. I want you, Commander Koloudi, Golding, and Captain Horace to meet me in transporter room three; we're beaming down with the rescue teams. Until then, keep trying to reach Starfleet Command. Martin out."

Martin spared one more glance at the shimmering jewels outside his window, debris catching the sunlight, yet too far out to see still.

He closed his eyes once more in shame, and then left the office.

San Francisco

Blue beams illuminated the wreckage around, and then faded away, leaving Martin, S'pon, Koloudi, CMO Simon Golding, and Captain Horace looking around.

"It looks like a bomb hit..." said Horace, gazing around.

"According to my tricorder, three torpedoes impacted this part of the city alone," replied S'pon.

They looked over the ruins of what had once been called Chinatown. Not a building was left standing for kilometers around. The streets and sidewalks had been cracked with heat. But that wasn't what hit the five the most. It was the silence. Two weeks ago, this had been one of the busiest cities in the Federation, with the constant noise of hovercars, trolleys, and, above all, people. Now, it was quiet, a veritable wasteland of quiet. The only sound other than their breathing was the whistling of wind through the ruins.

Martin looked around. "Let's move," he said.

Chapter One

USS *Swiftsure* Main Engineering

Standing in the doorway to Main Engineering, Captain Falco gazed upon an impressive sight. In a mix of repair teams and technicians from the remains of Utopia Planitia and the *Swiftsure's* own crew, Lieutenant Commander Kentar Tokhis stood in the collected center eye of a raging storm of engineers that swirled throughout the room.

They were compiling lists of the parts and materials that would be needed to get the *Swiftsure* back into space. The *Swiftsure* had seen heavy combat and managed to pull through mostly intact. It was the best he could hope for, given the damage dispersed by both sides during the previous days actions.

He was glad to see his crew jump back into their routine, even if that routine was preparing them for war. Having something to do--something to work towards would helped them to move on, and they all needed to put the events of the past week behind them. Some more than others.

"Commander," he said finally calling for her across the room. "We need to talk."

She scowled as he moved towards her, annoyed by the interruption.

"It's going to have to wait Captain," she said darting back behind an open panel to continue whatever repair she had been making. "As you can see we're not exactly ship shape down here."

Looking around, Falco could not imagine such a clear statement of the obvious. All across the ship, engineers had the *Swiftsure's* inner workings sprawled out to get at the damaged sections.

"Stand at attention Commander!" he barked just to get the attention of the room. He had never been one to chastise someone in public, but there were times when people needed to be reminded of the chain of command.

On his word, Kentar snapped to attention, followed by all of main engineering stopping to see what had happened.

"You all no doubt have duties to attend to," Falco said moving them on their way. It had been enough to get their attention. No point in making a show of it.

"Follow me Commander," he said heading out of main engineering to her to her office.

"I have let this attitude of yours slide for the past couple of days commander, but it's now becoming a problem. We've been through too much not to get a little stressed out, but this is where I'm drawing the line. You have to let it go eventually, and the sooner you move on the better."

"I don't know what you're talking about sir," she said.

"The Breen hurt all of us in some way or another, but we're going to have to put that behind us if ever expect to defeat them. I need all my officers performing at their best, so whatever you need to get off your chest, do it now."

She turned now, and grimaced, nearly bearing her teeth in disdain, and barely holding back her contempt.

"With all due respect sir, my personal life is my own and the concern of no one else."

"Fine," Falco said. "I won't force the issue. If you want to keep it all bottled up inside until someone trips a nerve and you explode across the deck then that's fine by me, but lose the attitude."

"I'll keep that in mind," she said.

"You do that, because this is your only warning. The next time we have to discuss this," he said, "it will go on your record, and I will not be so lenient."

"Understood Captain."

She watched the Captain leave, careful not to let her guard down till he was beyond the main doors.

"Chief," said a brave soul, breaking Kentar out of her momentary lapse. Lieutenant Benji, now her second in command after...after her last most senior engineer had been killed.

"What?" she snapped.

He nearly retreated, but held his ground. He was young, bright, and understanding.

"We're getting some unscheduled activity from the long range subspace antennae."

She managed to calm herself for a moment. She had to remind herself that it was none of these people that she was so angry with. None of them had killed her best friend in so easy a fashion as swatting an insect, and it was none of

them that would pay for his death.

"I thought that system was shut down?" she asked taking the padd to look over the diagnostics she had been running before the captain's interruption.

"Not yet," he answered. "We were about to..." He stopped for a moment. "That's strange," he said looking back at the display. "It's gone now."

"Probably just someone calling home," she said, not paying much attention.

"Aye Sir." He went back to work, scrolling through various system readouts.

"Complete the shutdown procedure," she said finally, "and move on to the secondary systems."

"Will do," he said before moving to another console.

She left the lieutenant to complete his task, and headed back out to main engineering. Several engineers turned to look at her while passing by. Maybe they weren't moving fast enough.

"Lets go!" she yelled. "This ship isn't going to fix itself."

Fonon's Quarters

Fonon Jo'Uva looked out the window in his quarters, the quarters that he was still sealed into. He had tried not to panic when security officers had locked his door-that was standard operating procedure when one had civilians aboard a *Sovereign* and the ship went to red-alert.

The *Swiftsure* seemed at peace now as she slowly pulled into an awaiting drydock.

He let out another breath, fogging the window. Hiding the twisted metal of the debris field from him. That and the burnt and broken hull of the *Swiftsure*. Normally the obscuring mist would be mere annoyance for him. Now he was glad for the effect.

His handiwork.

Bad thought. I was just following orders. Just a pawn. One of many.

That didn't help.

He had been so eager when he was recruited, and trained. Strike a blow for all

that was right. Strike a blow against the evil Federation that had invaded everything, even his own genes now.

Where had he fallen?

He could see every step he had taken along his chosen path. Every thought, every action. But he couldn't see the turning point. Where had he gone from righteous warrior to guilt-racked fool? Possibly when he had found out whom he'd *really* been working for?

The fog-clouded window offered no solace.

He remembered the old Vedek at the camp his mother lived at, droning on about the ways of peace and loyalty and solidarity. Often with significant glances at Jo'Uva. The Vedek would always rap the young half-breed's too-cold hands when he started snoring. The other boys and girls in the camp always made fun of Jo'Uva for his red skin, his white hair.

He also remembered the Cardassian guard who'd taken pity on the poor, young half-breed with the mother of ill repute. Barik. Jo'Uva often prayed that that man was his father, wished it with all his might. But his father's blood was no more Cardassian than it was Bajoran.

His robes shook, shaking him out of his reverie. He pulled out the communicator and put it up to his ear.

"Report," said his commander curtly.

"Starfleet forces have retaken Earth," whispered Fonon. "Unless I'm mistaken, there's still pockets of resistance on the planet's surface and in the Jovian radiation belts, but the impression I've received is that it's just a matter of time before total control of the system has been established."

"I know *that*. I wish to have a report as to why you didn't attempt to try and slow the Federation assault as much as possible?" She hadn't raised her voice any, but then again, she didn't need to.

"Because I felt such an attempt would be counter-productive to my mission and to my own safety."

"Your mission was to hinder Starfleet efforts in key places. The *Swiftsure* was a key place."

"But, given the Breen assault, I thought that your--"

"We didn't train you to *think*, no more so than that which you need to carry out

your orders. Out."

Jo'Uva closed his eyes and muttered a curse.

San Francisco

They had walked for hours, observing the mass of metal that had once been San Francisco. Occasionally the tricorder beeped, and they dug out a survivor--or a body.

The tricorders alerted them again, and Martin grimaced, looking up at the lowering sun. Without a word, they pulled out their phasers and started drilling to roughly the depth that the tricorder indicated. Within a meter, they put their phasers away and started literally picking up debris--S'pon of course leading their efforts.

They uncovered the graying body of an older woman, in her mid hundreds. Another body. The bodies were getting more and more frequent. Too damn many bodies. Martin quickly slapped a tag on it for beam-up, so it could be identified and returned to its former relatives. Any that survived at any rate.

And so it went. They went up and down the hills of what had been San Francisco, searching for survivors. Trying to assuage their troubled consciences. Failing.

Failing miserably.

Beep. Stop, dig. Rescue someone or uncover a body. Move on. Repeat. Over and over. Almost always futile by now.

If it weren't for the rare survivor that they actually did find, Martin would have ordered them straight on to Starfleet Command. That, and the fact that he dreaded what he would see when they got there. Duty warred with compulsion, and as always, duty won. However painful.

Finally, the Golden Gate Bridge came into view, twisted and warped. Starfleet Command, as always, stood by it. The command building looked relatively intact compared to most of the buildings around it. That illusion held up until they walked inside.

Chaos.

Phaser and disruptor hits gouged the walls, those that were still there. Bodies were strewn indiscriminately around the halls and rooms. Scorched silhouettes of bodies adorned the standing walls--the only remains of those vaporized by

Breen disruptors.

Horace crossed himself. Koloudi closed his eyes and bowed his head. Martin mouthed something, impossible to tell what, and closed his eyes. Golding just stared. Only S'pon appeared unaffected.

"They must have held out for days..." said Horace. "But Command was never as heavily defended as the shield centers. Imagine what it must have felt like to fight here, in Starfleet Command itself, knowing that your enemies had every intention and means of killing you."

"S'pon," said Martin quickly, his eyes still closed, "scan the building for survivors."

"Aye sir," replied the Vulcan.

"Why...why do this?" asked Golding. "What reason did they have to push on like this?"

Martin finally opened his eyes. "Intelligence. Kill off as much of the top brass as possible. Force our morale even lower. Especially that last one. The Breen are masters at attacking morale." He looked around. "It's a damned effective attack too." He looked around. "Damn them...damn them all to hell."

Koloudi snorted in agreement. Golding looked like he had a bad taste in his mouth.

"Excuse me sir," said S'pon," but I believe I've found signs of survivors. Two of them, to the south."

Martin perked up, somewhat imperceptibly. "We march on," he said.

After corridor after broken corridor, they stopped by the Control Room. The famous control room. They stepped over the bodies and refrigeration suits to get in. A pitched battle had been fought over the passage through this door.

The Breen had won.

This was where Admiral Cartwright had held Earth against the Probe nearly a century before. Where nearly every strategic decision since the signing of the Charter had been made. But the Breen had ruined it.

The main viewscreen on the back wall had been nearly destroyed, smashed by disruptors. Several of the consoles had been blasted, apparently by phaser fire. Starfleet had fired on their own consoles to keep the Breen from accessing their vital information.

Martin looked around the blasted room, taking it all in. "We need to move on, find those survivors."

"Over here sir!" shouted Koloudi. He brushed dust off an active console, one that had escaped the holocaust. Martin seemed to sag slightly, then walked over and typed in his access code.

"The Breen tried to get in," he said flatly. "Looks like someone wiped the system. I think it was us."

"So then they didn't get anything, right sir?" asked Koloudi.

Martin looked around quickly. "Impossible to tell. Depends on the efficiency of their computer techs. Even a full wipe can't wipe out an entire computer's memory. It would take a subspace surge powerful enough to send a starship into warp to wipe out Starfleet Command's central and aux computers." Martin shrugged. "We probably didn't have time to pull it off."

"Oh."

Martin typed some more keys. "From what I can tell, whoever wiped this comp did an amazingly good job given what they had. But not good enough. I just hope we killed enough of the bastards to prevent this from going through." Martin looked up. "S'pon, are there any survivors at all in the control room?"

"No sir."

Martin grimaced. "I want to know just how much the Breen got out of the computers." He glanced over at his Flag Captain.

Horace slapped his badge. "Horace to *Dauntless*."

"*Dauntless* here," said the disembodied voice of Lieutenant Commander Evans, the *Dauntless*' chief engineer.

"Arthur, we have a computer down here that we need analyzed. I want to know just how much information was taken off it. Send a team of computer techs down to these coordinates."

"Aye sir. I'll start getting the team together immediately."

"Good man. Horace out."

Martin gave his Flag Captain a quick approving glance, and then gestured on, somewhat jerkily. "We have yet to find S'pon's survivors. Ever minute, every second's vital."

They walked through broken corridors, and around blasted floors. Every body, every burn on the wall filled Martin with that much more rage at the Breen desecrators. Rage and fear. Every so often, S'pon led them down a side corridor. Finally, they reached a spot where the roof had collapsed in.

S'pon nodded. "Beyond that cave-in sir."

Martin glanced at Horace and Koloudi, and they all pulled out their phasers and fired. Three beams dug through the faux stone and metal, burning a hole for the officers to walk through. After less than a minute, they were through, and carefully stepped over the treacherous chunks of roдинium and metal.

They finally emerged into the chamber of horrors behind. Body after body after body, piled and shot. From the marks on the bodies and the dried blood on the floor, it looked as if they'd been hit just hard enough to start bleeding, and then the Breen had left the poor souls. Left them to die a slow, painful death. Looking more closely, it was apparent that only half of them had been shot. The others had been left relatively unharmed to watch their fellows die, to die of starvation later.

"Our Father, who art in heaven," someone started. Horace.

"Hallowed be thy name..." continued Golding, staring in horror. He then pulled out his tricorder and started searching furiously, desperately for the survivors S'pon had detected.

"This..." Horace said, with a catch in his voice. "This must be where the Breen took the survivors of the control room battle...and...and...vengeance for nearly wiping the main computers...God..."

Suddenly, Martin gave out a shout and ran. He crouched down and cradled two corpses, who at first glance didn't look any different from the rest of the humans. Then the others noticed one of them was a teenage boy. There was a woman in a Starfleet uniform covering him, his mother. She had died protecting him. They saw the boy's similarity to Admiral Martin.

Nikolai's tears dropped onto the stiff, cold faces of his wife and son.

Chapter Two

USS *Swiftsure* Fonon's quarters

"The time is now oh-six-hundred," said the thousand-times annoying "feminine" computer voice.

Fonon was instantly awake, as he had been trained. Every abnormal sound might be an attack, a sign that one had been revealed. Death could come quickly to those who were slow to wake. But he doubted much of a threat existed now, not with Starfleet's attention so concentrated elsewhere.

He looked around the dark quarters. The only thing moving were his puffs of breath.

Fonon pulled himself out of bed and quickly showered and changed into his light robes. He walked over to the replicator in the wall.

"Cooling gel, Nerydrous Extra Strength, single pack."

A slight buzz, and a small tube of the gel appeared. He applied it to his exposed skin efficiently. That tube would keep his body temperature within acceptable bounds--far more efficient than his mother giving him more than half of her water ration.

He looked at himself one more time in the mirror and then turned into the corridor. His quarters had been unsealed early last night by a grim-faced security crewman. He had breathed a sigh of relief when the doors opened in the standard test--no one suspected him.

If they had, he'd probably be dead.

Fonon walked down the still-unfamiliar corridor to Ten Forward, now torn by rents and gouges where power surges and superheated plasma had blasted through the corridor.

"Shit!" Fonon heard someone yell. A forcefield sprung up right in front of him, and a large flame raced right for him, impacting on the field with a great deal of force. He turned down a side passage, which hadn't been so blocked, trying to detour around the weakened EPS conduit.

He walked down the corridor, and then turned again onto another one, hoping that it would lead back to Ten-Forward. Odd...this corridor seemed an awful lot more damaged than the other ones. Warped bulkheads, visible supports. The corridor was still passable, but only just barely. Fonon walked up to a particularly

warped bulkhead--an EPS relay must have blown there for it to have taken so much damage. Then he saw something, something that he wished he hadn't.

Wedged into the bulkhead, so that it almost was wrapped around it, was a body, Tellarite, female. Positioned almost perfectly so as to be nearly invisible unless one looked right at it.

Fonon just stared at it, unable to look away.

He had done this to these people as payback for his life, but this was overkill. Those responsible for the freak of the creature he was--human's maybe, but all these others...They were just innocent bystanders caught in the cross fire.

He didn't even want to think about the innocent that had died on Earth. The Breen...what they had done to San Francisco and the rest of Earth was not what he had thought planned, or wanted. At least not anymore.

USS *Dauntless* Captain's Ready Room

"Captain's Log, supplemental," said Horace, speaking to the computer. "It has been three hours since our landing party has returned from the horrors of San Francisco, during which time we rescued no more than thirty-eight people. In total, Starfleet and civilian rescue teams managed to recover slightly more than two thousand people. In light of the pre-attack population of San Francisco, this is far greater than a ninety-nine percent death rate..."

Horace words trailed off as he leaned back in the chair, letting a deep sigh pass as if it relieved some great weight. He sat up from his chair and walked over to the painting of the *Dauntless* on the wall, in full dramatic glory. He caressed the glass surface covering the paint with his fingertips, running them over the curve of the neck.

"Admiral Martin has not left his quarters since we returned from the surface. I fear for his emotional stability, frankly. Then again, I would fear for mine in the same situation. His wife and son...dead..."

He turned back to the window, seeing the dock supports that now encased the *Dauntless*. The structural damage was minimal, and she would soon move on to allow other ships the use of the dock, finishing the remainder of repairs while in stationary orbit. Horace remembered to make note of it.

"The *Dauntless* has thankfully suffered little damage, at least compared to other ships in the fleet. I estimate that she'll be space-worthy after at most a week, and probably less time. We should be moving out of drydock by day's end. There

are certainly ships far worse off than the Dauntless. Better to give them our space I suppose. No doubt we'll need them in the coming days."

Suddenly, the computer on Horace's desk started beeping. "Computer, end log," he said, walking over to the console and pressing the "accept" button.

He read over the message from Starfleet Command, and groaned. Under normal circumstances, that message would delight him. But now? When Martin would need every familiar face he could have?

Horace read over the orders again, closed the terminal and walked out his door.

USS *Swiftsure* Ten Forward

"...with evacuation flotillas en route to Earth, Starfleet is beginning the long process of rebuilding its shattered forces," said the news on the LCARS screen set aside for the news services.

"Casualty reports are still coming in, but the civilian death toll is reported to be in the hundreds of millions, possibly over half a billion. Search and rescue teams have been dispatched to the most heavily populated areas, but the chances of finding survivors, particularly in key cities such as San Francisco and Paris, have been described as 'extremely slim.' Contact has yet to be made with the members of the Council who stayed behind on Earth last year."

"Most Starfleet facilities in the Sol system have been destroyed. Utopia Planitia has lost over sixty percent of its docks and command stations, while Jupiter Station was abandoned a few hours ago after a major structural failure. Nearly all civilian installations have been abandoned or destroyed."

"Speaking at an emergency conference in Constitution City, the remaining Federation Council members formally declared war against the Breen Confederacy."

"Meanwhile, Breen ships continue to emerge from the Black Cluster, making hit-and-run attacks on Federation and allied outposts. They have also occupied an area of space thirty light-years deep on our 'northwest' corner."

"The Romulan and Klingon Empires stand behind the Federation in their condemnation of this horrific attack on Earth. Talks of a new Two Quadrant Alliance have been rekindled by this tragic event, and a statement from both governments is expected shortly."

"While there are countless heroes and crews worthy of mention, of special note is

the heroism of Captain Mar'zief Falco, of the USS *Swiftsure*, and the forces she detached to retake the shield generators on Earth. Admiral Nikolai Martin, charged with defense of the Solar System, has attributed the success of the counterattack solely on the bravery of the landing forces. Sadly, the commanding officer of the landing forces, Commander Mikey Bailer, son of the Commander-in-Chief of Starfleet, died almost as soon as the shield was reformed. Our condolences go out to his father."

"On an historical note, the Breen Confederacy has remained virtually a mystery ever since they were first contacted back in..."

Fonon tuned out the screen, though most of the people in the Lounge were staring at it avidly. He picked up a couple of used glasses and almost put them in the replicator, before he remembered that it was still out. Instead he picked up a rag, soaked in sanitizer, and cleaned the glasses off, still steadily ignoring the announcer getting much of the history of the Breen wrong.

"I said, can you get me a Scotch?" said an irate voice, all of a sudden.

"I'm sorry?" replied Fonon.

"Can...I...please...have...a...Scotch," said the human. "That's three times now!"

"I'm...I'm sorry. Coming right up." Fonon poured the drink quickly, from his stores of synthehol.

"Good," said the man when the glass was finally handed to him. He downed it in one gulp, then gagged. "Yech! That synthehol crap! Give me the real stuff you idiot bartender!"

"I--I'm sorry, I--I don't have any real Scotch," replied Fonon.

The man growled in disgust and walked away from the bar, muttering under his breath.

Fonon beckoned to one of the waiters, who walked over to the bar.

"Yes sir?" asked the waiter.

"Jennir, take over for me," replied Fonon. "I've got to go..."

The waiter watched his boss leave in confusion, and then started cleaning the glasses.

USS *Dauntless*

Martin's quarters

The doors opened into blackness, and Captain Horace walked in. The doors closed again behind him. The only light was from the glowing fish tank on one side of the room. The rest was dark. Pure dark.

Sitting at the desk was Martin. Nikolai. He was just sitting there, staring off into space. Five pictures adorned the surface in front of him, all of a man, woman, and boy grinning wildly at the camera. *His family*. Martin wasn't looking at them. He was just sitting there, leaning slightly forward, and just staring off into...nothingness.

Not even crying.

Horace coughed into the darkness.

No response.

He tried again, putting a bit more emphasis on the sound.

No response.

"Sir?" he asked. Despite the fact that again he received no response, he continued on. "I'm being promoted to Admiral sir, first-star. They've put me in command of Solar System defense. I guess that Bailer wants you on the front or something..."

"Whoop-de-do," said Martin.

"I'm sorry sir?"

"So who are they putting in command of the *Dauntless*?" Martin asked, without moving his head at all.

"Gook Koloudi is going to be promoted to captain and placed in command. Frankly, I think it's time and past time for them to promote him."

Martin snorted.

"I'm to report to the *Columbia*, she'll be my flagship. I leave at oh-eight-hundred tomorrow."

"Patrick, please leave."

"Sir?"

"You heard me."

Horace looked at Martin in confusion. "Aye sir," he said.

Admiral Martin had not moved at all in the entire time that Horace had been there.

Ten Forward

Horace walked into Ten Forward to the celebrations. Balloons and streamers adorned the lounge, and the two dozen or so people there wore bright pointy hats. A sign stretched from wall to wall, reading "Congratulations Captain and Admiral." Everyone there cheered upon his entry.

Captain Gook Koloudi walked up to his former captain, grinning, handing him another party hat.

"Congratulations sir!" he said, still grinning.

"Thanks..." replied Horace unenthusiastically.

"My, you're a bucket of joy today," said the Australian.

"I was just talking to the Admiral."

Koloudi nodded. "That explains it. We tried to invite him here for the party. He ignored our comms."

"Let's be fair," said Horace. "The man just lost his family." He snorted. "Hell, I don't know if I'd be cheerful even without having to deal with him..." Both men stole a glance at the blue planet spinning outside the windows.

"It's my opinion that when faced with great tragedy, one should try and be happy." A haunted look briefly crossed Koloudi's dark features. "It balances out the soul, as it were." The new captain then perked up. "Come on Pat. This is a party! If the subjected appear grim, it depresses the rest of the party-goers."

Horace's mouth twitched slightly, and somewhat more festive features appeared on his face.

The two endured the felicitations of what seemed like half the ship's complement. It surely wasn't, but it was obvious that the enforced cheerfulness was starting to draw on even Koloudi's reserve.

Finally, near the end of the party, Shen Yu and Golding walked up to the newly

minted captain and admiral. "Well sirs, congratulations. We'd have gotten here sooner, but *someone* had us on duty for the duration," said Shen Yu, the *Dauntless'* tactical officer. He smiled at Koloudi. "It's about time you got that fourth pip Gook."

"That's Gook *sir* to you Jacob," replied Koloudi. The others laughed. A somewhat weak laugh, but a laugh all the same.

Shen Yu then drew them all in close. "Seriously, what's with the Admiral?" he asked quietly.

Golding nodded. "I haven't seen or heard from him at all since we got back," he said.

Horace grimaced. "He *did* lose his wife and son you know..."

"I know. I was there," replied the medical officer. "So were you." He paused. "If this keeps up for more than a few days, I'll have to relieve him."

It was then Koloudi's turn to grimace. "Does it have to come to that?" he asked.

Golding nodded. "Yes. It does."

Chapter Three

USS *Dauntless* Martin's Quarters

Martin heard the door lock being forced. He didn't care.

When the doors opened and the thin strip of light cast inside, Martin stumbled into the main room.

"You again," he said catching the doorframe with one weak hand. "Go away."

"Why would I do that?" asked Horace

"I'm an admiral in Starfleet and I command it."

"You don't seem able to command much of anything right now," he said stepping into the room and letting the doors close. Martin had sort of slid to the floor, like he had just decided out of the blue to sit down where he had been standing.

"Why are you wearing that?" he asked, indicating Horace's white dress uniform.

"I'm on my way to the main shuttlebay. The crew is assembling for my send off."

Martin snorted. "Good luck 'Admiral.' You can't do any worse then I did. Admiral Nikolai Martin, the man who let the Breen rape paradise."

"I doubt that's how they'll remember you," Horace said, offering what little sentiment he could.

If I'm lucky they'll only say I failed. All that other stuff, all the things that end careers, will no doubt come later. "Is there a point to you being here?"

"Sir, what's done is done. There's no changing that now. We have no choice to move on with our lives, or we risk never leaving this place."

"Spare me the dramatic overtures of your sentimental banter," he said.

"Fine, but if you're not stuck here, then why haven't you left this room in days?"

Horace walked closer to Martin, crouching over him.

"You're an Admiral in Starfleet. That's power and that's authority. It also means you have the resources to change things for the better."

Martin scoffed at the man's attempt to appeal to his patriotism. Or was it his

sense of duty? He thought both were rather pointless and naive.

"Make them pay for they've done," Horace continued. "Or history will remember you just like this, as a coward. Plain and simple. A broken man who couldn't get up off the floor."

"You call me a coward? Who the hell are you to call me a coward?"

"You are. You refuse to face the fact that your family died. You refuse to pick yourself up again. You're afraid to fight the ones who did this again."

Horace turned and started to walk to the door.

"Make the choice. Don't stay here," he said looking back. "Take back your life and use it for something. Or else your family's..."

Martin rushed him under new strength. Grabbing Horace's collar, he forced the man against the bulkhead.

"Don't tell me about family," he growled.

"Look at what you've become," said Horace, contemptuous. "You're a shell of the man I knew, dead inside and to the world. Stay here and rot for all I care." Horace shoved Martin off and left the room.

USS *Dauntless* Shuttlebay One

It seemed like the entire crew of the *Dauntless* had arrived to see their former captain off. The roaring crush of the crowd pressed down on Horace. He'd been expecting something, but nothing to this degree.

The entire senior staff of the *Dauntless* was gathered around the shuttle that would take Horace to the *Columbia*. They were very somber and dignified in their white dress uniforms that held no hint of being worn only a few days earlier.

Koloudi walked up to Horace and nodded slowly, and then extended his hand out. Horace grasped it and shook it.

His lips twitched a little, though he felt tears welling in his eyes. "You've been a damn good XO Gook," he said. "You'll make a damn good captain."

"Dammit Pat, they promoted you too soon. I'll be lucky to be *twice* the captain you were," replied Koloudi. "But in all seriousness, we'll miss you. All of us Good luck out there."

"Thanks." Horace glanced down at the new pips, two of them on either side of his collar, inside a golden box. "I wonder if I'll ever get used to these," he said, clicking them with his index finger.

Gook smiled crookedly. "They look good on you sir," he said.

Koloudi took a step back. Commander Shen Yu took a step up and shook Horace's hand. Then Arthur Evans. Then Golding. Then S'pon. In turn, what seemed like half the crew of the *Dauntless* shook Horace's hand. Except for one.

Admiral Martin had never shown up.

USS *Dauntless* Martin's Quarters

A thin light cut through the main room from the adjoining bathroom. It cast a wide glare as it bared into the darkness that had been Admiral Nikolai Martin's refuge. The room was torn apart, furniture turned upside down--couch leaning against the bulkhead, desks and chairs knocked over, and a variety of stains spewed across the carpet. All in the name of rage, or cowardice. He wasn't exactly thrilled by the prospect of having to decide which of the two.

"Computer, time," he said walking on untested legs. It felt strange, like he hadn't moved in years, and now the act of simply walking from one room to another was a chore of unimaginable undertaking.

"The time is 16:34 hours."

Too late for some things, but time enough for others, he thought. *But what to say?* Sometimes the truth was the simplest answer.

"Computer, I want to send a message to captain...Admiral Horace aboard the starship *USS Columbia*."

"Acknowledged," the computer responded.

"Begin recording."

He paused a moment to find the words that he was sure were there. He hoped they were there, he owed the man that much.

"Admiral Horace," he said making sure to respect his new rank, "you were right about me--about everything. Watch your back out there."

He shut off the monitor. "Transmit when able."

The computer simply beeped to acknowledge the command.

Martin fastened his uniform jacket and headed towards the door.

USS *Dauntless*

The turbolift doors slid shut and left Golding and Koloudi alone for the first time. Both knew they subject that was hanging there over them like a dark storm cloud, only growing in size and destructive force as each hour passed. Neither however was entirely sure how to breach the subject; he was an Admiral after all.

"Bridge," Koloudi ordered.

"We may as well admit it. With Pat gone, the responsibility to get Admiral Martin going again is ours. To do with as we please"

"Agreed," said Golding.

"Doc, you've known Martin longer than anyone aboard the *Dauntless* now. I'll offer whatever help I can, but I'm afraid you will have to take the lead on this one."

"Frankly I'm not sure what if anything will bring him out of his funk."

"Well we had better think of something. Before..."

USS *Dauntless* Bridge

"Gentleman, I'm glad you could join us," Admiral Martin said rising from the center seat.

Golding and Koloudi both stopped halfway down the ramp, as if unable to believe what they were seeing.

"Of course Admiral," Koloudi answered.

Golding stepped forward. "Are we to assume then..."

"Assume nothing gentlemen," he said stepping aside from the command deck. "Except of course that we have much work ahead of us."

“Yes sir,” they both answered in unison.

“Admiral Martin,” S’pon said from his station at Ops. “You are receiving an encoded message from an unidentified source. All we’re receiving is the channel identification.”

“Let me see identification tag,” he said. Looking over the Vulcan’s shoulder at the display, he snorted. “They’re late.”

He motioned towards the captain’s ready room, and Koloudi nodded.

“In the captain’s ready room please. Captain if you would join me.”

Martin strode the short distance to the ready room with Koloudi falling in step. When the doors closed, Martin stood in front of the desk, careful to remember his place.

“Computer, authorization Martin-four-seven-one-seven-Zulu. Decryption code MARTIN-NINE. Receive message and begin decryption.”

The computer responded plainly. “Acknowledged.”

Koloudi was unfamiliar with that particular authorization sequence or the decryption code. He was suddenly very intrigued, and very worried the first test of his command was about to get underway.

“Authorization accepted,” the computer replied.

The computer snapped on, but the screen remained blank.

“Sir,” said the voice, “we’ve intercepted a message originating from the DMZ, being transmitted to somewhere within sector 001.”

“Can you lock onto the receiving party?” Martin asked the operative.

“We’re barely managing to keep up with the cipher as is,” the voice continued.

“Understood. Encrypt what you’ve recorded so far on a separate channel and stream us the rest.”

“Aye sir.”

The message was audio only, badly garbled, but two distinct voices could be heard.

“The council has decided you should remain where you are...”

A woman's voice echoed through the comm system. Cold and precise, she held only the slightest hint of emotion as she spoke to the person on the other end.

USS *Swiftsure* Fonon's Quarters

Once again locked in his quarters, this time of his own free will, Fonon sat in front of a blank screen. To anyone that might have seen it, it would appear as if he was talking to himself, but that was hardly the case.

"Are you insane?" he shouted. He thought it loud enough for the entire ship to hear, and part of him hoped they did. It just might be easier that way.

"I'm in the middle of quite possibly the most heavily defended sector in the entire Federation and I stick out like a sore thumb. It's only a matter of time before they put the pieces together and link me to the sabotage."

"Haven't you ever heard of hiding in plain sight?" she asked. "Besides, for the time being Starfleet is more concerned with licking its wounds than looking for saboteurs. Or have you forgotten the events of the past week? You were there."

"Don't remind me," Fonon said.

"I shouldn't have to," she said, seeming to change into another person. "That was some fine work; you should be proud."

"I think I might be sick."

"We're thinking of giving you a medal," she said lightly.

"Your humor is lost on me," Fonon said finally.

A pity," she said, slightly annoyed. "I'll be blunt," she continued. "Remain where you are for the time being. We have other objectives that require your attention."

"I'm done," he said.

"You will receive a packet with your new instructions in--"

"I said I'm *done!*" Jo'Uva shouted.

The woman chuckled. "If it were only that easy. Please Fonon, give us some credit. Do you really think we would ever let you go so easily?"

“No.”

“Then be a good little operative and do as we tell you. And maybe just maybe we’ll forget about this little incident.”

“You’re wrong,” he said simply.

“About what?” she asked.

“About being finished,” he said, his voice sounding more resolute than he felt. “Sometimes it’s as easy as taking that first step.”

He switched off the monitor and closed the channel. His hands were shaking.

“What have I done?”

USS *Dauntless* Captain’s Ready Room

In Koloudi’s ready room, the two men were still not sure what they had just seen. Martin was somewhere else for a moment. He had a name to go on now. It was hardly anything, but it was something, and for that he spirit thrived just enough to move forward.

“What was that?” Koloudi asked standing up and moving around the desk.

The question caught Martin off guard. He collected himself before the Captain noticed.

“I fully intend to bring you up to speed, but at the moment we need to get underway.”

“We’re hardly in any condition to go anywhere,” Koloudi replied.

“I understand the circumstances of our current condition, Captain, but we need to be in space yesterday. I want a full report on our status within the hour, and make preparations to leave as soon as the dock master will allow it. Get on it.”

“Aye sir,” Koloudi said, leaving Martin alone again. This time he was not as worried as he had been the last. The Admiral seemed reasonably better. He hoped.

Martin sat in a chair in front of the desk, holding his head in his hands.

They were moving faster than he thought possible. *But why?* he wondered.

What's making them risk so much?

One thing was for sure however. This Fonon character was part of the problem, and that made him as responsible for the Breen's actions as if he had fired the weapon himself.

Chapter FOUR

USS *Swiftsure* Fonon's Quarters

Fonon was breathing hard, unsure of his next move. He typed out a few commands on his screen and then starts packing a few bare necessities. He'd need room for what he was about to do.

He could not live with what they would make him do.

Suddenly, an idea hit him. He smiled. It seemed...almost worthy of his former employers.

"Computer, begin recording..."

"Acknowledged," said the annoying voice. *"Recording."*

"Hello captain. I'm sure you have forgotten me by now..."

USS *Dauntless*

Koloudi stepped into the conference lounge, into the middle of a long-range discussion between Admirals Bailer and Martin.

"...it would seem that we're left with no other choice," Martin said.

"But to assign one to every ship? That seems a bit drastic."

"I wish it weren't necessary, but I don't see other way." Koloudi saw Martin grimace.

Bailer scowled. "Neither do I. I'll see to the assignments. You do what you have to do."

Martin nodded. "I'll check in when I have something."

Bailer winked out.

"Well, Gook?" asked Martin.

"I'm sorry sir. I should have knocked first."

"It's quite all right Captain," replied Martin. "What's our status?"

"As per your orders, repairs are preceding with greater-than-usual rapidity. We

have clearance to leave the dock within the hour.”

“As good as your word.”

“Yes sir,” said Koloudi. A quick flash distorted his face, and then he walked closer to Martin. “Admiral. May I ask what that...”

“You may not,” Martin said cutting him off.

"Permission to speak freely sir?"

Martin sighed. "Granted."

“Sir, with all due respect, if the *Dauntless* is to operate as your flagship then I need to be in on the loop. So to speak.”

“As the spooks of another generation once said, ‘there are certain things that are simply above your pay grade’ captain.”

"Does the admiral intend to keep me completely in the dark?"

No,” he said motioning for the captain to take a seat. “Your point was valid and there are things you need to know.” The admiral seemed to engage in some sort of internal debate. Apparently, the side in favor of revealing information won.

“What do you know about Section 31?”

USS *Swiftsure* Shuttlebay Two

Fonon was careful to look like he belonged, as much as someone with his awkward appearance could, even with his fake uniform. Walk straight, acknowledge nods from what few techs were in the bay, look bored. Easy, right?

Hardly.

Fonon glanced at a type 12. Round, sleek. Large enough to get where he needed to go, small enough to be relatively difficult to find. That and it was the only one shuttle in the bay at the moment, all the rest having been displaced for the Avocets and fighters for the *Swiftsure's* recent mission to Earth.

Fonon pulled his specially configured tricorder from his pocket, and waited for the device to synchronize with the *Swiftsure's* main computer. He walked on, as if to perform maintenance, then tapped a few controls that told the *Swiftsure's* computer to "ignore" the shuttle on sensors, and then to simulate an imminent disaster in the shuttlebay.

"Warning, fuel leak detected. Evacuate Shuttlebay Two. Warning, fuel leak detected. Evacuate Shuttlebay Two."

Right on schedule. Fonon smiled as the various techs ran out of the bay. He then ordered the doors opened--an event that would appear on no log in the computer--and flew the shuttle out.

Main Engineering

"Now, that's damn peculiar," said Lieutenant Benji, looking at the readouts from the shuttlebay. "Commander, come over here!" he shouted.

Kentar walked up to the screen. "What is it Lieutenant?" she asked.

"I just got an alert from Shuttlebay Two. The computer ordered an evac because of a fuel leak, but I'm not detecting any deuterium or other volatiles in the atmosphere now that it's cleared, and I should be." Benji tapped some buttons. "What the hell...? Shuttlecraft Icarus is missing."

Kentar slapped her comm badge. "Tokhis to Falco..."

Location: Unknown

The two women talking to each other via screens were all who remained in the conference of the council that had set so many actions in motion.

They all glanced toward the display on the comm. "Unable to establish contact," it read in fierce yellow letters.

"It would seem your Fonon has moved on," said a particularly calm and dispassionate feminine voice. "I hope for your sake that Starfleet doesn't catch him."

The woman glanced around the darkened table and grimaced. "He'll come back. They always do."

"Such is the case with human and Vulcan operatives, but Fonon is far from human. His behavior will be more difficult to predict, and his actions more difficult to control. His mistakes more difficult to cover up."

"I see your faith in me is lacking once again."

"You risk too much."

"Don't we need this? Didn't the entire council agree it was necessary? Including you yourself? He's a wolf in sheep's clothing, and it's only a matter of time before he's discovered. When Starfleet is ready to have him drawn and quartered, he'll return to the fold."

"A most...interesting analogy..."

Earth Alaska

Fonon's shuttle landed in Alaska at a relatively abandoned shuttleport; its crew was somewhat busier with other things. He set it down on a pad and got out, looking at his new prize.

A slightly older make of Runabout. The USS *St. Louis*. Maybe it wasn't as fast as the *Danubes* or the newer ones that would be coming out soon, but still efficient. More than able to get him to the De-Militarized Zone.

He climbed aboard and started up the engine. The sooner he was off, the sooner he could complete the path he had set himself on.

Location: Unknown

"...but it highlights the urgency of the obstacle he represents. Should he fall into the wrong hands--in fact, should he fall into anyone's hands but our own--then the consequences for our further plans will be disastrous."

"We can handle this on our own. There's no need to involve the rest of the council."

The Vulcan woman's eyebrow rose slightly. "This would be true if our attentions weren't divided. They are. You have the Breen to watch over. I have my own priorities. Even between us we do not have the resources to attend to this issue."

"Hell, everyone's attentions are divided. Goddammit, this plan has too many parts. Too many wheels set in motion. We should have realized that one small piece of grit would fuck up the works. And Fonon has every possibility of becoming said piece of grit."

"Then what do you suggest?"

The woman bared her teeth. "We improvise."