

# Star Trek: The Breen War

## Prologue

"...Section 31 is the greatest evil of our civilization, and since its quiet unveiling at the hands of Julian Bashir, I have what I could to fight its influence. But I clearly have not done enough. That will change..."-- excerpt from Admiral Jason Bailer's personal log, Stardate 57261.5

### **Utopia Planitia Briefing Room**

Jacob Harkness sat down beside Falco, amidst the crushing press of all the other captains trying to find seats in the crowded room. Utopia Planitia had never been intended for such a purpose. Never been intended to host a briefing for an operation on this scale.

A lot of things were being used for purposes that weren't intended these days.

"You know what this is all about Marz?" asked Harkness.

The Caitian shrugged. "Not really. All I know is that Colther is behind it."

Harkness nodded and idly tapped a few keys on his PADD. "Well, I hear that he's something of a rising star in the "new" Starfleet Command that Bailer's trying to set up. Either way, with this many captains here, he's planning *something* big."

Falco nodded, belying the somewhat haunted look that passed quickly over his face. "Something needs to be done about the 'northwestern' front. That's probably what he has in mind."

"Mhm," was Harkness's only response.

The doors opened, and the rest of the captains settled down with a sudden burst of rapidity. Amazing what the presence of an Admiral could do to a group of mere captains.

Admiral Colther walked up to the podium and visibly composed himself. "I'll keep this brief, captains, for I know you have duties and responsibilities to attend to. Hell, we all do."

"As you all know, it's been two weeks since the attack on Earth. However, it seems that their primary purpose in attacking Earth was to try and hurt our morale *and* divert our attentions from the frontier. As I'm sure you've seen,

they've succeeded in both instances. Our logistical train has been geared towards securing the core, and Federation-wide morale is at an all-time low, especially amongst Starfleet and the Corps. What's more, the Breen have moved more than forty light-years into the frontier."

"The local planetary governments are also insisting that we 'adequately defend' them. What this means is that a full quarter of our starships basically have to be tasked to defend the core, and another five hundred ships are down for repairs or routine maintenance. That's nearly forty percent of our fleet strength tied away from the front, and we can't engage in truly offensive operations with what remains. The Romulans and Klingons have both offered military support, but it'll take a while for them to concentrate significant forces and deploy them more than two thousand light-years from their frontiers."

"Starfleet R&D has begun work on a revitalized system of short ranged defensive starships and probes based on the Defiant and Nova family of starships, but it is unlikely we'll be able to start production for at least seven months. In the meantime, we'll be using some shuttle facilities to mass-produce defense probes." A snicker or two was heard throughout the room, but the Admiral continued regardless. "Until then, it is a given that we will have a significant amount of our mobile assets tied down in the core"

"So we can't engage in a counter-offensive operations to try and retake the occupied systems. But we can't accept the current state of affairs, retreating every time a Breen raiding force appears on our scopes."

"Which brings me to why I gathered you here." Colther tapped a few buttons on the podium, and a holographic map of the Federation and the space around it appeared. It then zoomed in, showing part of the Federation, with slivers of the Cardassian Union and the Ferengi Alliance on the fringes. Only the Breen Confederacy appeared in full, and the black cluster "beneath" it. Four red dots appeared in the cluster, apparently evenly spaced just beyond the frontier.

"Long-range scans have picked these facilities up. They appear to be supply depots, resupplying the Breen forces that are occupying our space. Intelligence believes, with all of the usual qualifiers of course, that if we eliminate these depots, the Breen will find it vastly more difficult to carry on operations."

"You'll divide into four battle groups, led by the *Swiftsure*, the *Mjolnir*, the *Thunderchild*, and the *Challenger*. Your specific rendezvous points will be mentioned in your downloads. The Romulans have diverted the Warhawks *Norexan* and *Tiviure*, the only ships that they claim can make it in time. They will join the *Swiftsure*'s battle group."

"We'll be loading your ships with fighters, naturally. The battle to restore Earth's shields has proved their effectiveness against the Breen beyond any doubt. We'll

be assigning at least one squadron of *Kestrels* to any ship with the capacity, and we'll be assigning *Golden Eagle* bombers and *Osprey* interceptors to every ship that we can."

"Any questions?" He glanced over the gathered captains. "Yes, Captain...Harkness?"

Jacob stood up. "Given the proven effectiveness of our 'tactical shuttles' against the Breen, shouldn't we try to focus on reactivating the *Typhon* program? A fighter-carrier could provide a valuable tool against the Breen."

Colther nodded. "Good question Captain Harkness. Admiral Bailer has already given orders to bring the *Typhon* out of mothballs. As for new construction, we aren't so sure. We need every drydock that we have for building combat cruisers and escort ships, not to mention the *Avengers*. While the *Typhon* is capable of defending herself, she's hardly combat-worthy."

Harkness nodded and sat back down.

"Any other questions? Yes, Captain Tiam?"

An aging Andorian stood up, his antennae constantly roving around the room. "Sir, what happens if we meet overwhelming defense? I suppose that what I'm asking is, should we sacrifice ourselves to complete our objective?"

"A good question. You should do whatever you can to fulfill the objective. But do not sacrifice yourselves unduly. We need your ships more than we need these stations destroyed. If the battle becomes too intense, withdraw. I know that it goes against the grain, but your ships and your lives, and those of your crews, are far more important. We've just lost the main academy campus, so it will take some time before we can train enough officers to replace losses."

Tiam nodded and sat down in his seat, a thoughtful expression on his face.

"Are there any more questions? If not, then you are dismissed."

The gathered captains got up and began to file out of the room. But then, Colther reactivated the microphone. "One more thing captains: good luck and Godspeed."

## Chapter One

### **USS *Dauntless* Ten Forward**

"I just don't like being three hundred light-years from the front, when there's people dying out there," said Jacob Chan Shen Yu. "Does anyone beside the Admiral and Gook know what we're doing in the Demilitarized Zone?"

"I'm sure they have their reasons," said Arthur Evans. "Doesn't take a warp physicist to know that something strange is happening. Those two have been closeted in meetings with each other all week."

"Well, I'm the acting XO," said Shen Yu. "If Gook dies, then the Admiral's the only one who knows what's going on, and he's the only one who knows all the contingency plans. That's never a good thing."

Simon Golding took a gulp of syntha-beer, then shrugged. "If they tell us what's up, they tell us. I'm not going to lose any sleep over it. Admirals and captains have kept secrets before, even from the officers. They're not going to stop now."

"Still damn frustrating."

"I didn't say that it wasn't. All I said is that if they decide it's our place to know, they'll tell us. And not a minute sooner. Now then, I go on shift at oh-six-hundred, so I've got to hit the sack. Good night."

Evans raised his glass. "Night Simon. Don't lose any sleep now."

### **USS *St. Louis***

Fonon tapped a few buttons, then leaned back and stretched. He'd slept maybe six hours in the past week, if that.

"Computer, scan for ships following us."

"There are no ships following us," it replied.

"Odd. I'd have expected *someone* to show up by now..."

"We have now passed into the Demilitarized Zone."

"Oh? Oh, good. Almost there, I guess. Not too much longer..." Fonon looked around the cockpit of the *St. Louis*. "I guess you don't really care, do you?" He sighed. "It seemed so clear a week ago...join my people. But which ones? The

Bajorans would reject me again, and they're part of the Federation now anyways...not like anyone else would take me in either."

### **USS *Dauntless*** Martin's quarters

Martin delicately balanced the laser-grooming device, vaporizing the fine mist of stubble that had marred his jaw. He spared a nervous glance out the window. After all he had been through during the Dominion War, just being near the DMZ, let alone inside it, made him uneasy. He set the razor down and splashed a bit of cold water on his face, rubbing it into his pale skin. He should go over the message again, see if there wasn't any further information, clues, or speculation. And who was this Fonon person?

He kicked himself. It was only 0630 hours, and he was already thinking about work. He combed his graying brown hair and put on his uniform jacket. He tugged the hem of the sleeves and prepared to leave the room, then sat down. No, he did not feel like going to the mess hall today.

A far more common occurrence than it used to be.

His comm. badge chirped. He instinctively tapped it, but connected with only cloth. He had left it on the coffee table. He retrieved it a few moments later. "Martin."

"Sir, this is Koloudi. We've got a *Stuttgart* class runabout on sensors, traveling at a pretty decent clip. Transponder reads as the *St. Louis*."

Martin frowned and went back to the table, taking another bite of breakfast. Probably nothing important. "What's her home port or ship?"

"She's registered to a minor spaceport outside of Anchorage."

"That's odd... Have you hailed?"

"Yes sir, no response."

"All right, set an intercept course. I'll be right there. They have no business being here..."

### **USS *St. Louis***

The console's rude beeping drew Fonon out of the doze he'd fallen into. One quick glance at the screen told him all that he needed to know.

"What the hell's a *Galaxy* doing out *here*?" he asked to no one in particular. "Can't run, got to hide," he continued, muttering to himself. Suddenly the runabout jerked. Fonon closed his eyes. That *Galaxy* had him. It would only be a matter of time now...

### **USS *Dauntless* Shuttlebay Two**

Shen Yu and two security squads watched as the old Runabout drifted into the shuttlebay. As soon as it settled, he nodded his head at a computer tech standing by, and jerked towards the small ship. The tech nodded and walked over to the *St. Louis*'s hatch and opened it. The guards quickly raised their rifles at the occupant.

Out walked a strange-looking man, with a Bajoran nose and earring, but clearly not Bajoran. "I was not aware that Starfleet was in the habit of kidnapping ships," Fonon called out to the officers. "What is the meaning of this?"

Shen Yu smiled. "We were about to ask you the same question. Who are you?"

"My name is Kojack Alia," said the strange-looking man. "I must protest this illegal seizure of my vessel and my person!"

"Illegal?" asked Shen Yu. "I suppose that's arguable. But what isn't arguable is that you've stolen that shuttle. You are a long way from Anchorage, aren't you?"

"I have legitimate business. Let me go!"

Shen Yu looked at him incredulously, then nodded to the squads. "Take him to see the admiral."

### **Martin's office**

"I am Fleet Admiral Nikolai Martin, Mister 'Kojack.'"

"Is that supposed to mean something to me?"

Martin eyed the half-Bajoran. "Do you have any idea what trouble you're in? Stealing a Starfleet vessel and entering restricted space. You could be looking ten, twenty years on a penal colony. Last I heard, Tantalus was looking rather empty... Now then, you have 'legitimate business' here. Care to tell me what it is?"

"I bought that runabout from a surplus store. I fail to see why I'm here has

anything to do with you."

"Still, you won't mind staying here for a few days, will you?" Martin nodded at the three guards standing watch in the room. "Show Mr. 'Kojack' to his quarters."

They grabbed Fonon and 'escorted' him to the brig without saying a word.

Martin slapped his com badge. "Martin to Koloudi, have the *St. Louis* searched. If you find anything, tell me. Martin out."

### **USS *Swiftsure* Main Shuttlebay**

Ian Wallace stepped out of the shuttlepod and walked towards the waiting officers, with Falco at the head. *Four out of six days leave wasn't too bad* he thought to himself. He looked around the shuttlebay. *Busy, isn't it? I wonder what they're prepping for...* "Permission to come aboard sir?"

"Permission granted," said the straight-faced Caitian. Then the latent grin appeared in full force. "Welcome aboard *Commander* Wallace. Er, how's your--" Falco's eyes flicked down towards Wallace's hands.

"What? Oh! They're fine. Right now I've just got a basic package, though I'm thinking of trying out some upgrades later. Possibly adding a tractor beam to the mix."

Falco's smile grew even broader, and the two turned and walked into a turbolift. "Bridge," said Falco. "It's good to see you in one piece Ian. How's your daughter?"

"Chloe's fine. The Moon was largely left along in the attack." He paused, and gazed down toward the floor. "Is it too late to convey my condolences to Admiral Bailer? I feel slightly strange about taking his son's old position. Well, more than slightly."

"None of us like the circumstances of your promotion, Ian. I know you'd it give up if it could bring Mikey back, but refusing this will only cause more problems. And let's be honest, you deserve it."

"Leaving me at tactical won't help matters much. You *know* how much I love extra work."

The turbolift stopped and the doors opened onto the very crowded and busy bridge. "Think of it as a challenge Ian. You love challenges, or so you told me once."

"Oh joy..." Suddenly Ian glanced over at the console a work crew was installing by the first officer's--his--chair. "Hey, what's this?"

"Like I said, I insisted that you stay on as tactical officer despite your promotion, though McBain's getting security full-time. But I wasn't going to deprive you of the comfort of the XO's chair. It's a fully functional tactical operations console. Probably the only reason that they agreed to install it--not to mention let you keep both jobs--was because we're going to have a personnel shortage very soon, and Starfleet's going to need every officer they can get."

"I guess..."

Falco nudged Wallace. "Give a speech Ian. It boosts crew morale!"

Wallace glared at his captain, then composed his features. He cleared his throat, and then said, "It's good to see the Swiftsure in such good condition. I'm sure you all did your part, but I'll be congratulating Kentar myself later. Well done people." Wallace looked down at what had been Mikey's seat. Now it was his... He hesitated a moment, then sat down. Looking around, he noticed the new Ops officer. Bolian, eh? *Odd that he didn't look up at all during my little speech...*

The Bolian turned around and looked Ian over, like he was sizing him up, and then turned back to his work, without giving further acknowledgement of the new XO's presence.

*Most odd.*

**Demilitarized Zone  
Undisclosed location**

"You said that you would keep an eye on Fonon."

"I *was*. You were supposed to be the one keeping an eye on Starfleet."

"Among other spheres of responsibility," said the Vulcan woman. "And the *Dauntless* is just one ship, out of thousands. But I do admit, I should have been more vigilant in observing Starfleet actions near the front."

The human woman made a dismissing motion with her hand. "What's done is done. More importantly, do you see any way out of this? I sure as hell don't..."

"You must control your passions. They cloud your judgment."

"Spare me the Vulcan philosophy..."

"All that I am stating is that I see a way to perhaps fix our errors, *and* remove Bailer's most prominent and vocal supporter. A human might even say that it is 'poetic.'"

"Don't leave me in the dark..."

"I am sorry, that was not my intention. This will take some careful planning, but I think that it may work well..."

### **USS *Swiftsure* Main Bridge**

"You'd never have thought this ship was in a battle," said Wallace as he and Captain Falco walked onto the bridge.

"Utopia Planetia does good work," said Falco. "And Kentar ran her crews near to the ground."

Ian leaned over to Falco. "What's wrong with her?" he asked *sotto voce*.

"She never told me."

"Ah."

Falco looked around the bridge; the work crews had departed the previous day. He nodded. It was time.

"Mr. Wallace, if you will please take us out of dock?"

*Me?* mouthed Ian. Falco nodded, firmly. Wallace gulped, then walked forward. "Mr. H'kut, request clearing trajectory from dock command."

"Aye sir," said the Bolian Ops officer. He tapped a few buttons, then, without looking up, said, "We have our trajectory sir. Uploading to Conn."

"I've got it sir," said Maro. "Plotting into the computer now."

"Understood. Is our path clear Lieutenant?"

"Affirmative sir," said H'kut.

Wallace's mouth twisted, then straightened again. "Clear all tractor moorings. Bring Structural Integrity and Inertial Damper fields online. Navigational deflector full power."

"All tractor moorings cleared. Structural Integrity Field and Inertial Dampers online. Navigational deflector is at full power."

"Take us out, Ensign Maro, thrusters only."

"Aye sir. Ahead, thruster velocity." She paused. "We have cleared drydock."

"Set a course for the rendezvous point, maximum warp."

"Aye sir."

Falco smiled. "Ops, send a message to *Alabama*. Tell them 'I'll see you in a week.'"

Finally the Bolian officer showed emotion: confusion, maybe infused with some contempt? "Aye sir," was all he said though. "Message sent."

"Good. Commander Wallace, you have the conn. I'll be in my quarters."

Ian looked toward the center seat, which he now had every right to sit in. He then sat down in his own chair.

## Chapter Two

### **Alpha Centauri Constitution City Council Chamber**

"We must elect a provisional president. Logic dictates that leaving the Federation without a clear executive until the next general election would be unwise, especially in time of war," said council-member T'kal, the sole surviving representative from Vulcan.

"I'm still not comfortable with electing even a provisional president," said Bailer. "How do we know that Ja'alt's not still alive?"

"It has been eight days since your Starfleet retook Earth. Probability suggests that Ja'alt would have been found by now, or he would have found some way to contact us, were he still alive. Since he has not, logic would suggest that we act as though he were dead."

The other council members murmured agreement.

"We must take the first step toward rebuilding Federation morale. Even on Vulcan and its colonies, there is a feeling of pathos, and the outright despair is palpable on the worlds of the more passionate races. It is my opinion that having a strong executive for the citizens to look up to would help lay the foundation of improved morale."

"My Starfleet?" Bailer shook his head. "Who do you propose?"

Jedna from Cait stood up. "I nominate T'kal for the position of acting president," she said, loudly and clearly. One by one, the other council members stood up and added their consent, even Bailer, though grudgingly.

There were no challengers.

### **USS *Swiftsure* Ten Forward**

"Look at him," said Wallace to Falco, nodding at H'kut. The Bolian was sitting by himself at a table over near the window.

"I'm looking..."

"He never says a word he doesn't have to, never talks with anyone, and any time he's not asleep or on the bridge, he's in here, sitting by himself."

"So maybe he is just not social?" asked Kentar. She nodded at the growing pile of cards on the table. "It is your turn."

"Oh, right." He take the top card off his deck and put it into the middle of the table, a king. "Jack, I do believe it's your turn." Ian grinned. McBain groaned.

"Of all the..." McBain put his last three cards down in the pile, two, three, and five.

"I do believe that makes this pile mine," said Ian, drawing it in and absorbing it into his own deck."

"I'm out." McBain looked over at Falco. "You've known him longer than anyone else here, was he an amateur magician before he came aboard?"

Falco glowered at Ian. "I don't *think* so, but his outstanding luck surely indicates it."

"It's all in the reflexes." Wallace put a two down, followed by a six from Falco. "Look, all I'm saying is that it's not natural behavior for a new officer aboard ship to withdraw like that. Especially not a Bolian."

Kentar put down another two, and then all the officers immediately put their hands out, trying to slap the deck. Falco's hand hit first, and he took the miniscule pile.

"Reflexes, right," grinned Falco. Wallace stuck his tongue out.

"Just hurts your density. Now play."

"If you insist." Falco put out an eight, and Kentar followed with a five.

"Maybe he just lost someone," she said, suddenly looking haunted. "That is enough to make anyone withdraw."

Wallace put a jack down, which made Falco glare at him again. The Caitian closed his eyes and took out his next card, a queen. He visibly sighed in relief.

"What?" shouted Wallace. "That's not supposed to happen! You were supposed to put down a number card!"

"The amazing Wallace, finally thwarted," said McBain. "Kentar, I will kiss you if you put a queen down."

"I would rather you not," she said, pulling off two cards and putting them on the

pile, one after the other. A nine and a four. She shrugged. "It is yours Captain."

"I can't believe I lost a *Jack*," Wallace grumbled. McBain beamed at him. "Wipe that smile off your face, Jack, or by God I'll punch it out."

"Yessir," said McBain, immediately sobering up. But his eyes still gleamed.

"Excuse me, mind if I play?" asked a young ensign.

Falco smiled. "Sure. Anyone can slap in, Ensign..."

"Jameson, sir. Toby Jameson. I transferred aboard two days ago. I'm in fighter ops."

Falco smiled. "Pull up a chair, Toby."

Wallace glanced over at the seat where H'kut had been sitting, but the Bolian was gone. "Hey, he's gone!"

"Who?" asked Jameson.

Kentar gave her rather unique grimace. "The Commander has been noting the rather odd activities of our new Ops Officer." She glanced around. "I wonder where he we went to?"

"Probably back to his quarters." Wallace looked down at the middle of the table. "Hey, Marz, it's your turn *again*, you ever gonna move?" Then he looked over at the time display. "Ach...I've got to run, I go on duty in ten minutes. See you later."

"Can I have your cards?" asked McBain, eyeing the first officer's rather largish deck.

Wallace smiled evilly. "Here you go Ensign. Enjoy."

### **Main Bridge**

Wallace looked around from his chair; the Bridge was quiet; unsurprising, seeing as how it was the night shift. Still four days from the rendezvous point...

Wallace sat in the center chair, slowly waiting for his shift to end. To pass the time, he had tried to come up with new strategies for attacking the depots, but he had grudgingly decided that the existing tactics would be fine. Grumble.

Sighing quietly, he put the PADD he had been reading on his chair and looked

around. The rest of the nightshift was obviously just as bored as he was. Four days to the rendezvous point, another five to their intended depot. More than a week until the battle. And that's what they were all looking forward to; everyone aboard had acquired a certain...bloodthirstiness, where the Breen were concerned.

Deciding to get a mug of coffee, he stood up and headed for the observation room to drink it.

"Mr. Kati, you have the Bridge. Call me if anything happens", he said as he walked out the bridge.

"Aye, sir, I have the bridge", H'kut called after him.

Walking up to the replicator, he called for a mug. After it materialized, he picked it up and walked over to stare out the window.

"Bored, Number One?" asked a voice from behind him.

Turning in surprise, Wallace saw Falco sitting in his seat at the top of the table. "Couldn't sleep, sir?"

"No", said Falco, placing the PADD he had been holding on the long table and rose from his chair. "To be honest, I keep thinking about that incident in Shuttlebay Two. Type-twelve shuttles don't just fly themselves down to Alaska. Why the hell did Fonon leave?"

Wallace shrugged. "I asked around a little after I got back. His co-workers and customers all agree that he'd been on edge ever since the attack. My guess is, he just couldn't handle it anymore and bugged back to Bajor."

"Can't say as I blame him. At least we got the shuttle back."

"Yeah." Wallace shrugged. "Sir, I have a bit of a confession."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I've...I've been thinking a lot on all the casualties we took back on Mars and Earth. Bailer especially. I can't help but feel, if I'd been faster, better somehow..."

Falco snorted. "Mikey was killed by a shot from a sniper, and long after you were taken out of the action. There was nothing you could have done."

"I know, but..."

"...you regret not making amends with him?" asked Falco.

"Yeah." Draining his mug, Wallace put it back in the replicator, where it promptly dematerialized.

"This isn't going to help, but it always seems worse when you're in command."

"So I guess I should just resign myself to being in a funk after every battle? Just put it in the back of my mind and get on with my job?"

"I didn't say that. Better to be a person, to feel every loss, than to just be a machine"

"But it's what you do."

"Yes." Falco stood up, a change overtaking his face. "Your crew seems to be getting a bit bored, Ian. Keep them on their toes." He smiled.

Ian smirked, a little wistfully. "Aye aye sir." He walked away from the replicator and out the door. "All right! Status report. I want a full sensor sweep of the surrounding area. This may be the night shift, but I'll be damned if we're going to sit here and do nothing"

The people at their stations around him snapped back from their thoughts and started pressing buttons. The first of the status reports started flooding in.

From the darkened doorway of the observation lounge, Falco watched in silence. Ian would do just fine.

### **USS *Dauntless* Martin's office**

Martin turned around as two guards followed the half-Bajoran into his office. "Hello Mr. 'Kojack.'" He picked something off his desk and started twirling it around, an isolinear chip, as the guards walked out.

"Admiral," replied Fonon, not altogether politely. "You've held me here for three days. I was wondering--what is that?"

Martin cocked an eyebrow at him, and smiled. Fonon shuddered. "I thought you'd never ask." He slipped the chip into a slot on the desktop computer, and then pressed a few buttons. A voice wafted out of the speakers.

"The council has decided you should remain where you are..." said one voice, a woman's voice, eminently familiar to the half-Bajoran.

"Are you insane?" shouted another one, very familiar to him. "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?" asked the other, and Fonon listened as the entire conversation with his former superior replayed. Every time he heard his own voice on the speakers, he seemed to sag a little further.

Finally, the conversation ended. Martin ejected the chip and put it back in a pile with others on his desk. "It took our computers all week to clean up all the crap that we got when we received this message, interference and the like. But even the cleaned-out copy was useless to us, until now. Thankfully, we took the recordings from the computer on the *St. Louis* and tested them against this sample. And, surprise-surprise, they were a perfect match, or near enough at any rate."

Fonon closed his eyes.

"We managed to scan your face and compare it with our database; you're a Federation citizen, Bajoran." Martin leaned on his desk, nearly breathing every breath into Fonon's face. "What did it take for you to sell out the Federation, become a traitor? What was your thirty pieces of silver?"

Fonon drew back, and then he seemed to visibly change. He leaned forward again. "I may legally be a traitor, but at least I didn't betray my people," he sneered.

"You're a Bajoran terrorist?"

Fonon snorted. "Hardly. Trust me Admiral, if I could get rid of my Bajoran DNA, I would. I have no love for them."

"Then who are do you consider 'your people?'"

Fonon smiled. "The Breen."

### **USS *Swiftsure* Main Bridge**

"Sir," said H'kut, "There's a *Miranda* bearing down on us, the *Archer*. She says that she had personnel that she wishes to transfer over."

"Hail them," said Falco.

"They're responding."

"On screen."

"Captain Falco," said Admiral Walker from the screen. "I'm glad to see that you're still in one piece."

"And you too Admiral. Could you tell us why you're on a *Miranda* and why you're bearing down on us?"

"Not on an open channel captain."

Falco nodded. "Understood. I'll meet you at the transporter."

"A pleasure. Walker out."

### **Transporter Room Three**

Falco watched as the blue beams played on the pad and slowly coalesced into a recognizable form. Admiral Walker stepped off the pad and grasped Marz'ief's hand. "Hello captain Falco."

"Admiral. What's in the works?"

"Top secret," said the admiral, suddenly serious. "I can only tell you and your first officer."

Falco gave him a look. "Understood. If you'll please come this way, I'll take you to the observation lounge."

"Of course."

### **USS *Dauntless* Martin's office**

*How the hell did that happen?* thought Martin to himself. *The mind boggles.*

He leaned back in his chair, faux casually. "So if you're half-Breen, then why aren't you still in Earth orbit, trying to wreak havoc on our forces?"

"Section 31." Martin suddenly sat up straight. "Good, I have your attention," sneered Fonon. "I thought they were a group of Federation terrorists when they first recruited me. Bastards. Turns out they're part of Starfleet!"

"We don't consider them as such."

Fonon snorted. "You both act the same way; high-handed and oh-so-superior. They just don't have the same ideals about themselves that you do. But philosophy aside, by the time I got deep enough in to find out what exactly they were, it was too late to back out."

"So why did Section 31 instigate the Breen to launch an attack against Earth? I thought they considered it their sworn duty to try and protect the Federation, if in a rather twisted way..."

Fonon shrugged. "To be honest, I didn't ask. But they've got their reasons, I'm sure."

Martin leaned back and eyed Fonon. "You're going to help us track down Section 31."

"Oh? And what makes you think that?"

"Because, whoever you consider your 'people,' Mr. Fonon, you are a traitor, in every legal definition at least. You're looking at a minimum of one-hundred-and-fifty years in prison, and I'm sure if we perform a full investigation, we'll turn up a whole host of other charges. I don't know how long a half-Breen, half-Bajoran lives, but at least three-hundred of however long that is will be probably spent in prison."

"Oh, I've never been in trouble with the law before," said Fonon sarcastically. "I grew up during the Cardassian Occupation! Prison time doesn't scare me."

"But that's assuming you even get to prison."

"Come again?"

Martin suddenly stood up and leaned over his desk again, putting his face right in Fonon's. "Because of you, eight hundred million innocent civilians are dead. You want to know who's among them? My wife and son. Dead, because of you, and others like you. If you don't help me, you're never going to see the inside of a prison cell. When I'm finished with you, I'll just hand you off to the next person who lost someone dear to him. And he's going to be so much worse than I. You'll be begging to help by the time he's done. Do you want to continue down this path? Because I sure as hell do."

Martin sat back, and then looked at Fonon. "Well?" he asked. Fonon didn't respond. Martin smiled and pushed a button on his desk. "Guards, take him to the brig."

The two guards walked in when Martin's comm badge went off. "Bridge to Martin," said Koloudi.

Martin slapped his badge. "Martin here."

"We're receiving another one of those messages, sir. The encryption's too tough to crack. Again."

"Understood. I'll be right there. Martin out." He looked at the guards, who had stopped dragging the half-Bajoran out of the room, and were waiting to see if this new development had any impact on their orders. "Continue taking him away."

"Wait!" shouted Fonon. "I know their encryption! There's no way they've changed it yet; the machines are too complex to change that easily. I can open this message for you, and any others you've gotten. I think."

Martin looked slightly downcast, then turned to the guards. "Take him to Captain Koloudi," he said, dismissively. "But if he does anything, *anything* that you or Gook don't like, don't hesitate to kill him."

He glared at Fonon. "It's more than he deserves."

### **USS *Swiftsure* Observation Lounge**

"This is not to go past this lounge, understand?" asked Walker.

Falco and Wallace exchanged glances. "We understand," Falco reassured him.

"We've received some disturbing reports from the DMZ, about a possible a Breen spy ship in the area, one that can mimic Starfleet signatures." Walker eyed Falco and Wallace. "Naturally, we have to try to find it and destroy it."

Falco and Wallace exchanged glances. "We'll do it sir," said Falco. "Whatever it takes."

### **USS *Dauntless* Observation Lounge**

Martin walked into the room, as Koloudi and Fonon looked up from the PADD they were both hunched over. Martin ignored the two guards standing by the windows, as the others seemed to be doing.

"All right, I'm here. What has our little prodigy produced?"

Koloudi looked grim. "I think you'll want to hear this."

"Put it on then."

"I have informed my subordinates of our plan," said the voice of a Vulcan woman. "The *Swiftsure* is now en route to destroy a Breen 'spy ship' in the DMZ."

"Where do I know that voice from?" asked Martin. Koloudi shushed him.

"I hope so," said another familiar voice, Fonon's former superior. "Do they realize what's at stake?"

"They do. They assure me that the *Dauntless* will be destroyed by the end of the week, and with minimal disruption to the operation the *Swiftsure's* currently participating in."

"And that's where we lost the signal," said Koloudi.

"If that's what I think that sounds like..." started Martin.

"They're sending one of the best ships in the fleet after us," finished Koloudi.

## Chapter Three

### **USS *Dauntless* Observation Lounge**

"How soon until the *Swiftsure* could possibly get here?" asked Martin.

"I don't know," said Gook. "A day, maybe two. What I don't understand is why they think that the *Swiftsure* will destroy us. Why would they fire on a fellow Starfleet ship?"

Fonon looked up. "If they have even one Section 31 agent aboard, it'd be easy," he said. "The message also implied multiple."

Koloudi looked like he had a bad taste in his mouth. "Captain to the Bridge."

"Bridge here," said Shen Yu.

"Sound yellow alert."

"Sir?"

"You heard me. Koloudi out."

Martin looked over at the guards. "Take him to the brig," he said, glancing at Fonon. They nodded acknowledgement and took him away.

He looked back at Koloudi. "Gook, we need to try and hide. If the *Swiftsure* finds us..."

"Understood sir. We'll think of something."

### **USS *Swiftsure* Main Bridge**

Ensign Jameson walked onto the bridge, accidentally bumping into H'kut, who was coming off shift.

"Sorry sir," he said, head down. H'kut merely gave him an odd look and walked on. Jameson watched H'kut as he walked into the turbolift, then walked down to the center seat and offered his PADD to Falco.

"Here's the report you requested on my squadron's readiness sir," he said.

Falco graced him with a smile. "Thank you Ensign. That will be all."

Jameson nodded and walked off the bridge.

Wallace leaned over, smiling. "He's a wee bit too anxious to please, isn't he?"

"He'll get over it."

"I think he's got a case of hero worship where you're involved sir."

Falco favored his first officer with a foul look, and then looked back at the viewscreen. "ETA to the coordinates Mr. Maro?"

The Andorian glanced down at her console, then back at Falco. "Eighteen hours sir."

"Thank you Ensign." Maro nodded and turned back to her console. "I think that I'm going to turn in. Commander, you have the bridge."

"Aye sir," said Wallace. "I have the bridge."

### **Falco's Quarters**

Falco activated his terminal, to check on things one more time before going to sleep. He checked his messages. Nothing new. He was about to close the terminal when an image appeared on his screen. What the hell was Fonon doing on his screen?

"Hello captain," he said. "I'm sure you have forgotten me by now, but that's okay. You must know by now that I am not just a bartender. I won't take you away from your Breen mission, however what I have to tell you is just as important. You must change your ship's command codes. As of right now they can't be trusted. I have already used them against you, and so can any other Section 31 agent."

Falco jerked up. "Computer, access command--" he started, when the door chime activated. "Come," he said, .

The door opened, and someone walked in. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

Suddenly, the intruder brought up a phaser and fired. The phaser's stun effect quickly overwhelmed Falco, and the short Caitian slumped to the ground.

## **Bridge**

"Medical Emergency in Captain Falco's quarters," said the computer. "Med-team to Captain Falco's quarters."

"What the hell?" asked Wallace. "Mr. Maro, you have the bridge."

"Aye sir, I have the bridge," she said, obviously equally confused--and worried.

## **Falco's Quarters**

"What the hell happened here?" he asked as Dr. Brown and a couple of nurses scanned Falco.

"Sir, the Captain's was stunned," said Brown. "I must respectfully request that you leave the room until we can perform a full forensics sweep."

"I'm not leaving until you tell me what happened."

"He was stunned," said Brown. "Phaser, setting three. He'll be out for at least a day."

"Sir, look at this," said one of the nurses, pointing at the floor. A small hypospray, filled with some reddish fluid, was lying on the floor by the captain. Dr. Brown scanned it.

"Shit," he said.

"What is it?" asked Wallace.

Brown looked at the nurses. "Poison. If that hypospray had actually been applied, the captain would be dead right now."

"Which means that someone wants him dead. Why didn't they?"

"I honestly don't know."

## **Outside Falco's Quarters**

Wallace groaned as he saw Walker run up to him. "Commander, what is going on here?"

"The Captain's been attacked."

"My God...how is he?"

"Stunned, but according to Dr. Brown, he isn't hurt otherwise. But it could easily have been different."

Well glory be, that actually stopped Walker. "Who?"

"I honestly don't know. Dr. Brown is sending a forensics team to try and find that out as soon as he can. Of course, he doesn't have anywhere near the equipment that a starbase team would have."

Walker closed his eyes, painfully. "Commander, as much as it pains me to say this, you do realize that we can't divert to a starbase, don't you?"

"Let me make this clear, *sir*," said Ian. The captain said that we'll do whatever it takes, and we will."

"So where are you going now?"

"I'm getting a drink."

### **USS *Dauntless* Main Bridge**

"Sir, can you tell me why we're hiding in a gas giant?" asked Shen Yu.

"No," said Martin. "Captain Koloudi, can I talk to you in the observation lounge?"

"Of course sir."

"Talk to me Gook, what are the chances of their tracking us here?" asked Martin as soon as the doors closed.

"To the gas giant? As long as they come across our warp trail in the next few days, it's virtually impossible for them not to. But to find us at a specific point *in* the gas giant? There aren't enough atmospheric probes in Starfleet to pull that trick off. The radiation cloud will make sure of that."

Martin breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank God for that."

"Of course, we will need to leave sooner or later."

"We'll just have to burn that bridge when we get there."

## **Brig**

"You killed me," said Martin. "And me," said a formless figure that Fonon somehow knew was the admiral's wife. "And me too," said a somewhat smaller figure, somehow the admiral's son.

"We're your chorus," said the Tellarite woman. "We're going to sing you to the temple," said Alia. She smiled. "Join the prophets."

The Chinese security officer, the odd-looking aboriginal Koloudi, and many others walked up behind them. Somehow, without counting, Fonon knew that there were millions of people out there. Millions and millions.

"You've killed all of us," said Koloudi. "And your numbers are going up. The chorus is expanding. How many will join it Jo'Uva? One billion? Two? You'll soar high. The prophets await."

Fonon woke up, bathed in a cold sweat, breathing hard. His breath misted in front of him. "It was just a bad dream..." he said. He started sobbing. "Just a bad dream..." he repeated.

He tried to compose himself, and starting reciting some of the prayers of his mother's people. While he did not believe that the prophets were gods, the familiar chant of the prayers still helped soothe his mind.

## **USS *Swiftsure* Ten Forward**

"Do you mind sir?" asked Toby Jameson, indicating a chair across the table from Wallace.

"Not at all," said Ian, taking another sip from the mug he was nursing.

"How is he?" asked Jameson, sitting down.

"He'll live," said Wallace, "though he'll have a hell of a headache when he wakes up. And when he wakes up, we'll nail whoever did this."

"Ah. Good." Jameson looked down, seeming somewhat sheepish. "Forgive me if I'm too bold, but you two are close, aren't you?"

"Yeah. And, no, you're not."

"How long have you known each other?"

"Three, four years. We met on the old *Sutherland*."

"I served on Spacedock as a pilot," said Jameson. "At least, up until it was destroyed. I lost nearly everyone I knew in that battle, all of my friends. I was the only survivor from my squadron. I probably wouldn't be here myself, if the *Swiftsure* hadn't come along. A Breen fighter had gotten on my six, and I couldn't shake it. Then a phaser from the *Swiftly* just swatted it like it didn't exist."

Wallace looked at the young ensign. "That was probably more my doing than his." He tried to smile.

Jameson grunted in acknowledgement of the weak joke. "The point is, I owe Captain Falco my life--and you--my life. Believe me when I say this Commander, but I will do my best to find who did this to the Captain, and when I do..."

"You'd best be letting security handle that, Ensign."

"My mind knows that, but my heart doesn't. You understand, don't you sir?"

"Aye."

The two kept silent vigil for a few minutes, then Toby piped up again. "Sir, you fought in the Dominion War, right?"

"Yes..."

Jameson opened his mouth to say something, then closed it as if to reconsider, then said, "Every indication is pointing toward this war being almost as bad as the last one. You lived through it once, sir, aren't you scared about living through it again?"

Wallace smiled. "Lad, If you survived the Battle for Earth, and kept your head during it, you'll do fine."

### **Main Bridge**

The doors to the turbolift opened, and Wallace trudged onto the bridge.

"Hello Commander," said Walker, not mentioning what happened before. Wallace appreciated it.

"Admiral."

"We should be arriving at the coordinates in a few minutes," said the Admiral.

"We'll be ready."

"Good," said Walker, smiling a little as Wallace sat down in the center seat. "Truth be told, I'm more than a little anxious to finish this. I have other things that I need to be doing."

"Oh?"

"I was ordered to just drop everything and come out here as soon as physically possible, and to reveal details about my mission to you and the Captain only."

"That's odd..."

"It happens."

"We're here sir," said Maro. "Dropping out of warp now."

"Run a sweep of the system, Mr. H'kut," said Wallace. "Check for anything that even remotely looks like a starship."

"Aye sir." He tapped a few buttons, waited for a few seconds, then said, "Nothing sir."

Walker leaned over to Wallace. "They must have moved on," he whispered.

"Aye," responded Ian. "Mr. H'kut, scan for any warp trails."

"Aye sir." He tapped another set of buttons, then looked up. "One warp trail leaving the system. But it's Starfleet sir."

Ian looked over to Walker. "Follow it Mr. Maro," he said.

"Sir?"

"You heard me."

"Aye sir..."

"Sickbay to Captain," said Brown over the comm badge.

"Wallace here."

"You might want to come down here sir."

"On my way."

## Sickbay

"You *will* be more specific next time you call me down here," said Wallace as he walked into Sickbay.

"I didn't want to give a detailed report over an open channel sir," said Brown, without even looking up.

"Right. So what is it Doctor?"

Brown put a vaguely biological-looking image up on a screen. "When I looked over the captain's body a little more closely, I saw that his claws had seen recent use. I unsheathed them, and I found these. Blood cells sir."

"At least we know why the attacker didn't kill him. Sloppy of them though to leave the hypo behind."

"I ran a DNA analysis on them, to determine the race."

"Let me guess, Bolian?"

"Yes sir."

"Thank you doctor. You've told me all that I need to know." With that, Ian turned around and walked out of sickbay.

## Chapter Four

### **USS *Dauntless* Observation Lounge**

"Where is she, Gook?" asked Martin as Koloudi walked into the lounge.

"Hot on our trail."

"And the chances that they'll find the probe?"

"Minimal, but since they'll know our general location anyway, it doesn't matter."

"Okay." He looked over at Fonon, diligently working under guard on another message. "Any luck?"

"No sir," said the half-Bajoran without even looking up. "The encryption they used is...weird."

"How so?"

"Hard to explain." Fonon sighed. "Always knew Starfleet would be the ones to get me," he said under his breath.

"You're not dead," said Martin. Fonon noticed the "yet" that was unmentioned.

"Sir, I was planted aboard that ship, and I know her systems inside and out. I'd say that it's better than even that she'll cut through this murk, especially if there's even one Section 31 agent aboard."

"Well, let's hope you're wrong."

"I'm not sir. They'll find us, and with an agent aboard, they'll kill us. Doesn't matter what the crew wants. They will kill us." Fonon looked up at Martin. "The only question is, are you willing to defend us?" He threw his PADD down in disgust. "I'm getting no where on this. I need to sleep on it."

"Fine." Martin nodded at the two guards. "Take him away."

Just before he left the observation lounge, Fonon turned around. "Sir, in case I die, I just want to tell you that Fonon Jo'Uva isn't my real name."

Martin smiled mysteriously. "I never suspected that it was."

**USS *Swiftsure*  
H'kut's Quarters**

Wallace hit the chime button. "Come," said H'kut. The door opened, letting Ian in.

"Sir, what are you doing here?" asked H'kut.

Suddenly, Ian threw a punch that sent the Bolian sprawling. "Are you out of your mind?" asked H'kut.

"Near enough. Why'd you do it?"

"Do what?"

Wallace pulled a type-one phaser out of his sleeve. "Maybe this will open your lips."

"You're insane."

"You tried to kill my Captain and my friend."

"You think I... Commander, I wish I could tell you how far that was from the truth."

"We found Bolian blood cells on the captain's claws. There are six Bolians aboard. Five of them had perfectly verifiable alibis. You were 'in your quarters,' and, lo and behold, the sensor readings were faked."

H'kut winced.

"You admit it," said Ian, gloating.

"I admit nothing."

"This phaser, if set to kill, will set off the alarms if I fire it. But I know plenty of ways to kill with just stun."

"I hate to say it 'sir,'" said a familiar voice from behind Wallace, "but you've got the wrong man."

Ian spun around, and immediately recognized the origin of the voice. "Ensign Jameson? You said you owed the captain your life!"

'Toby Jameson' sneered, and pointed a phaser right at Wallace. "Drop your phaser Wallace. Or I swear by any god you believe in that I will shoot you."

Wallace let his phaser drop to the floor. "You know," continued Jameson, "that was all crap, all that bullshit about 'owing Falco my life' and all the stuff about me being a pilot from Spacedock, all intended to win you over. I'm half-surprised that it worked, that you believed all that drivel. I wasn't even anywhere near Earth during the attack." He surveyed the room. "You know, this set up couldn't be more perfect. I have to hand it to you Commander, you definitely helped out a good deal."

"I'm so glad for you," replied Wallace.

"The vengeful commander seeking out the one who killed his beloved captain--by the way, nice job letting your 'heart' rule your mind--and confronting the one who killed him. And then the oh-so-evil criminal blasts him, and then in a burst of madness, shoots himself in the head. By the way Kati, thanks for those skin cells from when you bumped me. My job would have been a hell of a lot harder without them. I suppose it's ironic, one of you helping one of us knock you out of the picture."

"Go to hell," said H'kut.

"I'll see you there first."

"Are you going to blab us to death?" asked Ian. H'kut took advantage of the momentary distraction to get behind the agent.

"No." Jameson stuck his phaser up, when a kick from H'kut sent it flying.

Wallace immediately dropped and picked up his own phaser, then stunned the Section 31 agent. "Thanks," said Ian.

"Don't mention it," said H'kut. "Please."

"Right." Wallace slapped his badge. "Security to Lieutenant Kati's quarters."

"Aye sir," said McBain. "On our way. So it was the new Ops officer?"

"Actually, it wasn't. Wallace out." He turned back to H'kut. "By the way, sorry about punching you there."

## **Brig**

"Hello Toby," said Ian.

"Go to hell."

Ian eyed the young "ensign." "Such language." He paused. "Why are you here?" he continued. "On the *Swiftsure* I mean?"

Suddenly, Jameson started shaking. "Suicide device," he said in response to Wallace's concerned look. "You won't get anything important out of me now."

"What the hell was your mission?"

The dying man appeared to think it over. "We will succeed," he said. "Sacrifices will have to be made, on the way. But in the end, we will win." He smiled, and then his eyes glossed over.

He was dead.

"Sacrifices...? Oh shit!" Wallace slapped his comm badge. "Captain to the Bridge, reverse course. I repeat, reverse course!"

"Sir?" asked Maro.

"You heard me!"

"Commander," said Walker, "this is in direct violation of my orders. You *will* give an explanation as to why you're disobeying me."

"It's a trap! Some group snuck a spy aboard the ship, in order to destroy the ship we're tracking! She's not Breen, she's Starfleet!"

"That's preposterous!"

"Sir," said Maro, "helm control's locked out."

"So is tactical!" shouted the relief weapons officer.

"Not so preposterous now, is it Admiral? Wallace out."

Ian ran out of the brig.

### **H'kut's quarters**

"Come," said H'kut. "Sir? You'll forgive my saying so, but I'm a bit leery letting you in again..."

"Lieutenant, if that's really your rank, whose side are you really on?"

"Right now? Yours. There is little love lost between us, and the splinter group

represented by the man that is likely lying dead in your brig."

"How are you with computers?"

"Better than average for us, that is to say, pretty good."

"Good. Helm and tactical control are locked out. Kentar's got some computer techs working to restore them, but I want you to try too."

"I take it that you've figured out their plan?"

"I think so."

"I'll do it." With that, H'kut activated his terminal and started typing.

"Mr. Kati, you and I are going to have a long chat when this over."

"I look forward to it."

"And H'kut, good luck."

"Thank you sir."

### **USS *Dauntless* Main Bridge**

"The ship that has been following us is entering the system," said S'pon. "Sir," he continued, "it is the *Swiftsure*. Why have we been hiding for them?"

Martin and Koloudi exchanged looks. "We believe that a rogue group of 'Starfleet' personnel have taken over the *Swiftsure* and are moving to attack us," said Martin.

Shen Yu snapped his fingers. "It's because of that 'Fonon' person that we picked up a week ago, isn't it? They don't want him blabbing to us, right?"

"Essentially. According to Jo'Uva, it's child's play for them to hack the command codes and lock out ships' systems. No matter what her crew tries to do, in ten minutes, that ship will try to find us and destroy us."

"Then we'll have to disable her first."

"Yes," said Koloudi. "She's a *Sovereign*, mark three. Call up her schematics Jacob, and find any systems that will disable her with minimal loss of life."

"Aye sir."

S'pon looked up. "Sir, even if we do surprise them, there is the very good chance that they will destroy us."

Martin looked grim. "That's not going to happen."

### **USS *Swiftsure* Sickbay**

Falco's eyes opened. "What the hell? Why am I in sickbay?" he asked.

Ian smiled. "You're awake."

"Yes. Now you can answer my very reasonable question."

"You were attacked, and nearly killed."

"Oh yeah... it was that young ensign, Jameson."

"We know. We captured him, but he's dead now."

"Ah. Good. Ian, just before I was attacked, I found a message on my computer. It was from Mr. Fonon. He said that he had manipulated our command codes, and warned me to change them."

"A bit late for that," said Ian.

Falco looked concerned. "What's our situation Commander?" he asked.

"Well, you're in sickbay, we can't access command functions, and we're well on our way to destroying the *Dauntless*--which we finally got an id on about five minutes ago--thanks to interference from our Mr. Jameson."

"Why are we all of a sudden attacking Admiral Martin's flagship?"

"A plot from some terrorist group is our current best bet, though I imagine that if we get the chance to talk to Lieutenant H'kut, we'll find out more."

"Oh?"

"Long story."

Dr. Brown walked up to the biobed. "Excuse me sirs, but Captain Falco is very weak, and I'd like him to rest now."

"Understood Doctor. I should be on the bridge anyway."

### **Main Bridge**

"Any change in status?" asked Ian as he walked off the turbolift.

"Negative sir," said Maro.

"We've tried hailing the *Dauntless*," said Walker tonelessly. "But it turns out that's locked out too."

"Don't kick yourself too hard Admiral," said Ian. "Of course inter-ship communications is locked out." He looked at the Ops Officer on duty. "Ensign, if you can, send a general message throughout the ship: if you are near a key system, evacuate. I expect that the *Dauntless* will try to disable us by targeting those systems, if they know that we're coming. And unless Admiral Martin had a sudden desire to go skydiving in a gas giant, they know what we're doing here."

"Aye sir," replied the officer. Suddenly, a light started flashing on his console. "Sir, they're here."

Wallace turned to the viewscreen, and saw the *Dauntless* pull out from behind a small moon, with weapons armed and fully ready. Wallace winced as orange beads of light started at the endpoints of the dorsal array and spun around. As soon as they reached each other, a massive phaser beam leaped out from the *Dauntless*.

The battle had begun, and all they could do was watch.

## To Be Continued