

Star Trek: The Breen War

Prologue

"Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became the truth." -- George Orwell

USS *Thor* **On patrol at the edge of the Black Cluster**

Space was dark and cold. It was lifeless and devoid of warmth of any kind.

At least, it used to be.

The bridge of the *Thor* was washed with flashing red and spraying coolant as she took yet another massive hit from the Breen frigate on their tail. Already three crewmen had fallen during the attack, lost to consoles too weak to handle the massive output of energy sent through them. *When will they fix that problem?*

Commander Ian Wallace sat at the edge of the center seat. *His* center seat. One arm crooked up in a contemplative manner with the other locked, as humanly tight as possible on the tiny armrest. He looked very much the commander of a vessel in a tight spot, which wasn't far from their current position.

When Wallace had been given the *Thor* almost the morning after the *Swiftsure's* remains were brought to Starbase 462, he had expected to not see any combat for at least a month. *The universe isn't that cruel, right?* Unfortunately, that hope had been crushed after only two days after his reassignment. His very first patrol had met an entire squadron of small yet deadly Breen frigates, and they weren't going down easily.

"Ready torpedoes," ordered Wallace over the overwhelming noise of the battle.

The tactical 3D view of the area on the view screen continually flashed with psychedelic color as weapons fire both friendly and enemy discharged in their deadly dance.

"Fire!"

On the main view screen, flickering like an ancient television from a lucky Breen shot, two blue dots left the green wire-frame model of the tiny *Thor* and sped rapidly towards the red wire-frame model of one of the Breen frigates. The blue dots rapidly closed on the vessel before merging with them completely. After a

tiny white flash to signal detonation, the enemy ship and the torpedoes were gone.

In response to the wanton destruction, several younger crewmen not completely shell-shocked let out whoops of joy. Unfortunately, their jovial spirit was silenced by a particularly nasty torpedo impact.

"We're not out of this yet!" Wallace shouted to the bridge crew, all of whom returned to their duties with perfect discipline.

"Sensors show one remaining Breen frigate, heading away at zero-four-three mark eight," Maro reported.

"Increase speed to maximum impulse and shunt all remaining power into the phaser banks," Wallace ordered.

"Aye."

The viewscreen shifted from the simplistic tactical view to a forward camera as the battle died down. Wallace could make out the tiny shape of the Breen frigate making a run for it. *Cowards. Sure, you can handle five on one, but not single combat?*

"Sir," science officer Howard reported, "Their warp core is powering up."

"Dammit." Wallace allowed himself to say. "Can we reach them in time?"

Maro turned from the center console. "No, sir," she said.

Wallace sat back in his chair, allowing his self-imposed rigid spine to relax. He hadn't expected combat so soon after...after what happened before, and it showed in everything he did today. From allowing five enemy ships to sneak up on him during a routine patrol to not reacting fast enough to raise the shields or fire back. Two people died before Wallace got the nerve to even order evasive action. Two people were dead because of his incompetence in battle. It happened here and it happened back then.

Before Wallace succumbed to such damning thoughts as those, however, a familiar voice rang through the crystal clear communications system.

"Lieutenant Evesham to Captain Wallace."

Wallace tapped his comm badge, grateful for the mental interruption. "Yes, Mark?"

"We're still having some trouble with the aft thrusters. I'd like to dock at Starbase 462 for a spacewalk to have an outside look at them, if that's all right with you."

As they spoke, Wallace watched the Breen ship slip into warp speed, disappearing from both sight and sensor range.

"Not a problem, ensign." Wallace paused, taking comfort in the stillness of peace. "Did anything else pop up during our tangle with the frigates?"

"No sir. The *Thor* did just fine." Wallace detected a slight twinge of pride in the young ensign's voice. "Evesham out".

He'd made sure that Evesham was assigned to the *Thor*, even after Harkness' objections. The captain had argued that Evesham should at least have a month of leave after surviving not one, but two disastrous battles. Wallace, however, knew that with already having experience in a Defiant-class vessel, it would allow him to keep the ship up to full standard. Besides, he knew the kid could take it. It was reported that the ensign actually held a loose conduit had hit the Swiftsure's engineering hull together long after Kentar, raising his stock considerably in everyone's eyes.

Before Wallace's eyes welled with pride, however, he flew back to reality with a quick cough.

"Yellow Alert. That was well done, people." Wallace was feeling better with each spoken word. The more he spoke, the less he thought of previous events.

"That's five less frigates for the Breen to no casualties on our side. Signal the *Arkantos* and tell them we're heading home." He looked back at the empty viewscreen. "Our patrol is over."

Wallace slowly leaned back in his chair, letting its soft construct soothe the last of his anxiety. The twelve-hour patrol had been quiet until they scanned a nebula just at the edge of their sensor range, one that wasn't supposed to be there. Unfortunately, it had been a trap, and five frigates had jumped them. It was only through his crew's near damnable courage and discipline, not to mention quite superior weaponry, that they had survived.

"Aye sir, sending message."

"Should I set course for Starbase 462, Captain?" asked Maro.

"Yes, warp 6. Engage when ready." Wallace sighed and stood from the comfortable chair. Even captains of little ships had paperwork to file after battle.

"Williams, you have the Bridge," said Wallace, nodding at his tactical officer and left the Bridge. He headed for his small ready room a few feet away thanks to the small bridge.

Before he slipped past the doors, however, Wallace was stopped by a sudden voice.

"Sir, there's a message from Starbase 521. Shall I send it through to your ready room?" asked the young ensign at communications.

What could it be? Probably Starfleet with another trap order. Maybe I should have someone else take it...

"Yes", Wallace turned back to his ready room and strode in.

The small room was littered with the few decorations Wallace had replicated during his short time on the ship. Unfortunately, the battle had been intense enough to shatter most of them and send the smaller knickknacks into their own piles.

At least it wasn't as bad as the Swift...No.

Wallace slowly moved to sit at his desk. The room was cramped, more so with the clutter, but Wallace didn't mind. It was till his ship, after all.

Activating his computer screen, he brought up the message. It was a fairly short text message, and although he was glad to see it, the words echoed with some ghostly presence that didn't seem real.

Ian, I've finally been released from Sickbay. The operation was a success, so I'll be on my feet for a good few years. I'm now free to return to duty immediately if I wish.

I see you've been given the Thor. Congratulations. I remember my first command, the Relentless. It was back in 23... oh, but I've already told you that old story. Ah well, I'm sure you know what I mean. I'll expect to see you back on the Swiftsure at some stage though!

Good luck out there. -- Falco

Wallace stood up and walked over to the narrow window with measured steps, careful to not crush the already shattered glass on the carpeting. It was slow going, but he relished the time. He was the captain here, and he could do whatever he wanted.

Standing by the small pane, he stared out into the endless void of space, watching the stars streak by as they sped at warp. He was glad Falco was all right, as his last update was when the doctors had just started the procedure, just after he left for Starbase 521. But the mention of the *Swiftsure* had once more brought back the memories of the losses they'd taken, the damage done, and that one time of pure hell...

Chapter One

USS *Arkantos* Black Cluster

A sparse light cast through the window in to a darkened room from a distant star. The light crept across the width, like the hands of a clock marching across time in a show of their slow journey through open space. The *Arkantos* punched out in all directions with the most powerful sensors Starfleet could befit a starship, in a lone patrol within a stones throw from the Black Cluster. The cluster's tentacles reached out in all directions, like a cancerous void that cutoff the Federation from the territory that lay beyond. Sensors couldn't penetrate it and all but the strongest communications were lost to interference, making it an ideal shield for the Breen Confederacy that stood watch on the other side.

The light shifted suddenly; jumping back out the window as another star cast it's light into the ships darkened ready room. It was the only indication that anything had changed. Captain Jordana Klyce's new command, a ghostly image of her previous command, was still too foreign a place to feel such security. She couldn't feel the course correction they had just made, the accompanying adjustment in speed, or even the benefit of a trusting crew. Perhaps that would come in time, but until then she still had to face the reality of this place.

It had been an emotional strain to step aboard the *Arkantos* that first day. The eerie similarities, even though she knew such things were ordinary between ships of a common class, were enough to make her shut her eyes at times. She imagined seeing dieing crewmen carpeting the deck amid cries for help that she could not answer. She had spent that first night, as the *Arkantos* made it's way out of Sector 001, locked in her quarters, too frightened to venture out beyond the safety of those walls.

If the similarities were haunting, the differences raised the hair on the back of her neck in a way that she could not ever justify. At first, she had gawked at the differences, but upon consideration had taken comfort in the ships abilities, even if they would only prove to highlight her inadequacies. Unlike her *Avalon*, which had come off the line in the original batch of twelve *Intrepid's*, the *Arkantos* was a combat upgrade, designed to face the now numerous threats that lingered just beyond the Federations borders.

Thrust out upon the line, all her past transgressions had been forgotten, or ignored in favor of a shortage of experienced officers. Even if the experience Starfleet was banking on had gotten her entire crew killed, it was her word against no other. In the aftermath of it all, a new command had come easier then she ever imagined, and she hated herself for it.

The door chime interrupted...nothing. For all the self-loathing and depression she was trying to cast on her psyche, her mind was generally clear and calm.

“Enter.”

Her XO, framed with a physique of labor-intensive hardships, walked into the ready room. He was perhaps like so many others in the fleet, an exemplary officer with a distinguished service record. Even if only little more than a year of it had been under the charge of Starfleet.

From a distance he might have seemed human, but if the earring didn't give him away then the nose ridges surely would have. Commander Barez Ronin, previously a Major in the Bajoran Militia was one of the many officers assimilated into Starfleet once Bajor had joined the Federation.

He wasted no time with pleasantries. “Lieutenant Rainer would like to run another weapons drill before the evening shift comes on duty.” His voice, rich with a flavor of command presence, echoed through the hollowed room, still yet unadorned with any personal effects.

She turned to look at him only briefly, and in that glance saw no hint of the disapproval she suspected would explode across his face. He betrayed no opinions about his new Captain, making it all the more difficult for Klyce to judge him.

It wasn't enough that these people followed her orders; they had to trust her as well. It was not a feeling she ever expected to receive from these people.

Moving the conversation ahead as quickly as possible, she nearly blurted out, “Tell him to go ahead.”

“*She*,” he said emphasizing the mistake, “specifically requested your presence this time.”

Klyce chastised herself for forgetting another name. It was the third time it had happened this day alone.

“Tell the lieutenant...” she drifted off for a moment, before deciding she would have to get past it one way or another. “Tell her I'll be there.”

“Very well captain,” he said. The commander paused a moment unsure how to break the subject, or rather cut his losses and leave while he still could.

“Is there anything else?” she asked.

“Some engineering bugs have popped up,” he said thinking quickly of something other than what he had intended to discuss. It wasn’t a lie, but surely wasn’t the exact truth of his intentions either. “I’m handling it.”

“What kind of bugs,” she said trying to fain the interest of a devoted captain. She played the part well lest her crew discover the fraud of an officer she had become. Or maybe she had always been a fraud.

“It seems theirs an intermittent flow problem in the antimatter injector. Moura assured me he could work out the bugs by tomorrow at the latest.”

“I’ll contact starbase 462 and ask for assistance,” she said deciding that a starbase was a far safer place to be than sitting alone on the edge of Federation space.

“It’s a quick fix captain. Nothing that should require a layover at a starbase.”

She thought quickly, knowing that even liars told the truth once in their life. “We surely don’t want to get caught out here in the middle of repairs or even worse with an inoperative warp core.”

“I suppose not.” He agreed, simply for the truth in her words.

“I don’t intend for this ship to suffer the fate of my last command,” she said, almost in a whisper.

“Some things are beyond our control captain.”

“And sometimes it’s better to be safe than sorry,” she corrected.

Starbase 462
USS *Thor* docked
Mess Hall

"Sir, I've got some bad news", said Evesham, sitting beside Wallace in the Starbase's mess hall. It was rather full with officers not only stationed on the facility, but of the six other vessels either docked or in low orbit. Wallace sat at a table with his senior staff, somewhere in the center of the lounge. Evesham, with bags under his eyes to rival an Evoran’s during mating season, gave a quick report on the engine’s performance.

"We've discovered extensive submicron fractures in both of the aft thrusters. They need immediate replacement."

"And the forward thrusters?" Wallace asked through a cup of replicated coffee.

"I'm having checks performed on them as we speak."

Wallace sighed and tipped his head back to stare at the ceiling of the large mess hall for a moment. "How long until we can get replacements, install them and get back out, Mark?"

As he spoke, another shipload of tired crewmen wandered into the already stuffed lounge.

"It would take just over two weeks to get the ship back to full health if we ordered a new set. However, we've had a spot of good luck. This Starbase received all the parts to do a full refit on a Defiant class ship six days ago." Evesham smiled an uncharacteristically melancholy grin.

"Unfortunately, the ship they were requisitioned for was destroyed the day after the parts arrived. That leaves the Starbase with a complete new set of thrusters, the latest model, an enhanced, more efficient warp core and a ventral phaser array."

"And we can use them?" Wallace asked after another bland sip.

"We'd have to have a lengthy stay to get the phaser array installed, but I believe, that with the refit parts, we could be back out in eight days" the chief engineer smiled. "Sir, if we get permission for this, and I don't see why we shouldn't, when we go back out, we'll be 18% more maneuverable and the warp core will be 27% more efficient than our previous status."

Wallace gave his engineer a grin. "Alright, I'll speak to the quartermaster about it." He paused. Engineer types usually stuck together, right? "Unless you know him better than I do, of course."

Evesham smiled again. "Oh, I know Spikey. Him and I were buds back at the academy and he owes me one for a third-year physics exam. I'll get those parts and fix up the *Thor* in record time. If you could arrange for some Starbase personnel to help us with the installations, we'll be out even quicker."

"No problem. Nice solution, Mark. As much as the crew would no doubt enjoy some extra leave, we need to get back out there. We're already getting low on ships as it is." Wallace said as Evesham stood up and left quickly. Wallace grinned again. Evesham would have his work cut out over the next week or so, but if he knew the engineer, he wouldn't mind a bit.

As he left, Wallace stretched his legs in the direction of the departing ensign. In a ship so cramped as the *Thor*, legroom was at a premium, and he was learning to

savor every moment of physical comfort he could. Just before he could close his eyes in bliss, however, Maro spoke up.

“Sir, any word on the *Swiftsure*?”

Wallace looked up at his helm officer, one of the dozen of people assigned to his command from the former vessel. Each and every person from that ship told him they were glad to be serving with him, but Wallace could tell their secret feelings from their hard looks. They blamed him for the loss of the *Swiftsure*.

And they were right.

“No, I’m sorry. Nothing since the last estimate of repair.”

“Six weeks, right?”

“Ten.” The science officer, Howard, said bluntly.

“Thank you, mister holographic memory.” Maro replied.

Howard smiled briefly before returning to his green beverage. Maro turned back to Wallace.

“What happens to the Thor when we’re back aboard the *Swift*?” her tone was apparent, she was homesick.

“I don’t know, honestly. I guess she’ll get a whole new crew.”

“How undignified.”

“It’s our business,” he said with a deflated air. He turned

Wallace saw an *Intrepid* class starship drop out of warp, on approach to the station. From the direction the ship had been traveling, he knew it was coming from the boarder.

As it moved closer he could finally read the hull registry. It was the *Arkantos*.

Starbase 426 Later

Wallace walked alone through a corridor he knew would be empty for at least five minutes. He relished the relatively open space of stations and larger ships. Even he had his limits when it came to personal space, and the Thor just didn’t have much of it.

He didn't kid himself. He knew the *Thor* was a damn fine vessel, but she just lacked that essential space he got used to back on the *Swiftly*. As his mind drifted with the space of the room, Wallace couldn't help but think back to that battle, that desperate struggle over Cardassia. Of course he blamed himself. He should have known the Breen would come at him from behind like that. He should have evacuated earlier. He should have done a thousand things differently.

Most of all, however, his thoughts drifted to those who died in that battle. Case was just one of hundreds who sacrificed their lives for a people who would never know their saviors. Case and the casualties of the *Swiftsure* died in anonymity, and there was no way to bring their memories back. If anything, Wallace blamed himself for their anonymity than their deaths. He should have sent a note of each and every one of their names to Starfleet Command to give them all medals of commendation, but he knew that would never happen. Even the materials used to make those medals were being used to patch one more rent hull or repair one more shattered warp core.

"Captain!" Evesham's voice echoed through the empty corridor.

Oh no...

Bounding down the straight space like a man on fire, Evesham made his way toward Wallace with intent. His youthful face was flushed and his usually spit-and-polish uniform was undone to allow greater ease of motion. Clearly, he had just come from an extensive repair job.

"I'm so glad I found you here, sir." The younger man huffed as he caught up with the commander. "We'll be finished with the thrusters in a day or so. Those extra engineers from the Starbase really helped. We'd be lucky to have the aft thrusters finished by now if we were on our own." Evesham took in a long gulp of air and sighed quietly. He'd been working eighteen hours a day for the last five days to get the *Thor* out as soon as possible. Of course, he probably greatly enjoyed bossing some Starbase engineers around for once after having to endure their lashes back on 462 to get the ship back into active duty.

Wallace regarded the engineer for a moment, taking in the good news like a sponge, letting it slowly take the place of the dark thought building in his mind.

"You've been doing a great job, Mark. I want you too take the next twelve hours off though. You need to catch up on your sleep."

"But..." Evesham started to protest. The pained look in his eyes was priceless. Wallace, however, was not in the mood to laugh.

"No buts about it. A tired engineer makes mistakes, no matter how good they are. Make the most of the guest quarters on the Starbase."

Evesham's shocked expression slackened slowly as Wallace stood still before him. Eventually, every molecule of excitement left the young man as the thought of a comfortable bed began to call his name. If Wallace didn't know better, he would have sworn Evesham lost a whole two inches in that moment.

"Thanks sir. I guess I could use a little sleep."

"No problem, Mark. See you in twelve hours or so." Wallace turned completely around as the Chief Engineer walked off. He'd try to put as much distance between himself and the young man before he came back with that one invariable last question. Engineers...

Fortunately, Evesham never came back, once again leaving Wallace alone with his thoughts. They immediately began to return to that dark place.

They all blame you...

Suddenly, however, that reverie was broken. The corridor's light spectrum suddenly shifted to red as harsh klaxons began to blare in earnest.

"This is a red alert. Battle stations," base commander T'kir said tonelessly, "All captains to your ships, all personnel to your stations."

Wallace ran as fast as his legs could take him toward the docking ring. As he did, the empty hall suddenly exploded with other people, slowing his pace dramatically.

"The Breen have arrived in this system," the base commander continued.

CHAPTER TWO

USS *Thor* Bridge

Being an aging human, Science Officer Howard was already winded by the time he reached his station. He had been involved in a rather heated game of holographic chess with a Tellarite crewman when the alert sounded, which was fortunate for him since he was down only to a king and pawn to his opponent's still intact set. He never was particularly adept at the game, but he really enjoyed the mental rush he got while playing. The analytical thought and strategy put into every move, every instance of the game. It was most likely why he was always passed up in his youth for the promotion to command officer. He just lacked that killer edge.

But one thing he was exceedingly good at was science. He'd dipped his hands into every branch of science known in the universe from basic exobiology to advanced dimensional transwarp theory. His specific genius was known from his earliest days, much to the pride of his family. Indeed, to use his oldest living relative's words, he was a gigantic 'nerd', and he was fine with that. He could tell twenty different asteroid types apart by eyesight over three hundred kilometres away (provided they were big enough, of course) In reality, the last place he should have been was on the bridge of a starship. He should have taken the opportunity to join that research colony on Betazed all those years back. Of course, he realized that if he had done that, he would have likely been captured and killed by the Dominion during their occupation of the planet.

By and large, Science Officer Howard was a dull-edged, nerdy, lucky son of a bitch.

When he arrived at his station still winded, Howard immediately brought the Thor's sensors to life. With a few masterful button sequences, he already had complete scans of the immediate area and was already hard at work scanning the rest of the sector.

And what he saw wasn't good. Not at all.

"Where's the captain?" he finally managed.

To answer his question, Wallace staggered onto the bridge not a moment later, even more winded than Howard and twice as exhausted. He painfully made his way to the centre chair before issuing orders.

"What's out there?" he asked taking careful place among them.

Howard confirmed his readouts before replying.

“Breen. Lots of them.” His voice shook more than he wanted.

Wallace studied the viewscreen, where the entire compliment of the station’s defences came online. Fifteen starships, most of them smaller vessels like the *Thor*, almost powered their shields and weapons in tandem, making an impressive, yet brief, display.

“It looks like about fifty in all.” Howard continued.

“What’s anchoring their fleet?” Wallace asked.

When there was no answer, Wallace turned to ask again. “Howard?”

Howard made no audible acknowledgement, but simply tapped a button to put his findings on screen.

Wallace studied the spectacle for a moment before his own thoughts caught up with him.

“What do you make of her?” he asked not immediately being able to make out the design.

In the centre of the Breen flotilla was a lumbering ship of sheer destruction. To the untrained eye, the ship might have appeared to be some sort of custom variant of the Breen combat carrier. But as the ship moved closer, and every starship standing guard began to engulf the large vessel with intense sensor scans, the ships true nature became frighteningly clear.

“It looks like a carrier,” Howard replied, “but the readouts don’t match up. I’m reading four large disruptors emplacements as well numerous torpedo launchers.”

Maro turned to look back at him, and he knew instantly that they were in more trouble than they could handle.

“It’s... an artillery ship.” Wallace whispered. “All hands stand to battle stations!” His voice spiked more than he had intended.

“Yes, sir.” Maro weakly answered, “All hands reporting battle ready.”

On the screen, the fleet began to form into a tight formation in perfect sequence. They were protecting the main asset of the engagement.

“They’re lining up that artillery ship to strike against the starbase,” Howard said gravely.

“At least we know why they’re here.” *But why now?*

“Starbase commander is ordering all ships to form a defensive line between the fleet and the base.” The communications officer piped up.

“He’s playing it safe.” Wallace guessed.

In the face of a spear-shaped column of ships, the best was to deflect it was to make a wall of fire, concentrating on the lead ship until it either disengaged or was destroyed, throwing the spear point off and forcing a reforming on the line, which cost valuable time. Unfortunately, with fifteen light vessels against fifty heavy combat ships, the line tactic was risky at best.

“We’ve been ordered to take the centre position.” Communications continued.

Just as he feared. His ship was the most powerful of the defenders, and he was going to take the brunt of punishment to maximize the battle length. No ship in the middle of the formation was ever expected to survive, and very few ever had.

They’d just have to prove history wrong.

“Status of weapons?” he asked tactical.

“Our photon and quantum torpedo compliments are at full capacity and all phaser banks are charged and hot, sir.”

“Shields?”

“One hundred percent.”

As Wallace went over the checklist, the station commander’s toneless voice filtered over the open subspace channel.

“Attention Breen fleet, you are in violation of the Federation border charter. You must identify yourselves and exit this space immediately. Failure to do so will be considered an aggressive act and will be met with force.”

Always with the Vulcan pride. It was painfully obvious that such empty threats never reached the ears of their intended targets anyway. Wallace would be surprised if the Breen even had their subspace transceivers active at all during battle situations.

“All other ships have entered position.” Maro reported. “They’re just waiting for us.”

This was it. This would be another hopeless battle in a situation Wallace wasn't even supposed to be in. What did he do to deserve such luck in this lifetime? Was there some kind of spiritual karma at work for something he did before? Of course, this could be the universe's way of reaping its payment for Wallace's survival over Cardassia. That had to be it. He cheated death before, but death never gives up so easily.

"The Breen fleet is heading directly toward us at full impulse. They'll enter weapons range in two minutes."

Wallace stared at the massive fleet of ships oriented against him and inwardly shivered. Their point vessel, a battlecruiser, was a particularly sadistic construct of twisted metal and almost crystalline shards. While she wasn't spectacularly large, she was easily three times the Thor's size. Behind it floated a dozen similar vessels, almost perfectly obscuring the massive ship behind them. And behind that frightening array were a good number of regular frigates and destroyers Wallace was intimately familiar with.

"Station commander has given the USS *Arkantos* control of the line and wishes all of us good luck."

Of course. Let the ships all fend for themselves while you sit back and plan your next move.

Wallace quickly looked over the ship manifest to find the new command ship. The *Arkantos* was a new model Intrepid-class with a nearly pristine hull, most likely fresh out of the assembly yards and still not sporting a full crew or weapon compliment. Hell, it probably still had that new starship smell.

"All ships, this is the *Arkantos*, concentrate your fire on the lead vessel with full force. Remember to hold the line."

As each ship rattled off an affirmative, Wallace couldn't help but think about the last fight like this. How long would it take before their carefully laid plans completely collapsed and it became a melee of shattered ships and floating corpses? How long would it take to become a bloodbath like Cardassia?

Lost in his thoughts, it took Howard reaching across the small space of the bridge to shake Wallace back to reality.

"Thor? You with us?" the *Arkantos*' captain Klyce inquired.

"Uh, affirmative. We'll hold the line." Wallace said, very unsure of himself.

"Very well. Realize that you're our focal point, so we'll try to keep you alive as long as possible."

Oh great, now other ships are going to die for me. What else could go wrong?

“Breen fleet within weapons range.” Maro said quickly.

“Fire!” Wallace shouted louder than needed. If anything, it was good stress relief.

In space, the combined firepower of fifteen starships and a fully functional starbase poured through the void and onto the hull of the point ship of the Breen formation. Not surprisingly, it went down in seconds. But that wasn't the end. Like computer-driven drones, the ships around the first victim slipped out of the shockwave's path and rejoined formation just as quickly as they left it. After but an instant, another ship identical to the last retook the lead position. Forty nine vessels continued their relentless push forward.

As they did, each alien ship unloaded their weapons on individual targets, weakly striking the shields of twelve of the defenders. Both sides knew it was a ruse, and both formations held.

“Fire!” Wallace shouted again not four seconds after his first order.

The dance happened again, one ship falling, the others taking its place, the exchange of fire.

“They're right on top of us!” Howard shouted.

Wallace could nearly see each individual rivet of the third lead vessel, every glowing weapon, every lit window. It was a damn ugly ship. And, to use the ancient phrase, it was within spitting distance. They were all close, and they weren't slowing down. Wallace pushed down an instinctive shudder of overwhelming fear at the sight. They were so close.

The line wouldn't last long enough for another volley, and then they'd be overrun. Why wasn't the *Arkantos* giving the order? What happened? Were they hit? Wallace's fear suddenly sprang into his chest, threatening to explode out of his stomach like so much vomit.

They blame you...

“This is the *Arkantos*. Fire at will!”

And with that word, the organized slugfest between stately ships exploded into a horrendous melee of confusion and death. Breen broke their precise formations and literally began to swarm their opponents like bees over intruders. For every Federation defender, three or four Breen marauders stuck to their tail. And for the starbase slowly loomed the overwhelming Dreadnaught.

Just seconds into the battle, four ships, Breen and Starfleet both, exploded in brilliant conflagrations of flame, their shattered pieces scattering into the void, some impacting onto the hulls of the still engaged fighters.

“Increase power to the phaser banks!” Wallace shouted over the powerful noise of battle. Maro was keeping the *Thor* behind as many Breen frigates as possible, but the sudden motions and blazingly fast manoeuvres were disorienting even to the stoutest of hearts. Fortunately, those moves kept all but the most insane Breen off their tail.

As they moved, three concentrated pulse blasts met three enemy ships, sending their broken pieces into the black.

“Status of the Breen fleet?”

Howard worked quickly, making sure to keep his eyes away from the viewscreen as long as possible.

“Down to thirty seven ships.”

“And our fleet?”

“Four.” Howard’s voice could barely be heard over the chaotic voices of both the red alert klaxons and the shuddering thunder of impacts. After he spoke, a powerful Breen torpedo impacted the *Thor*, sending a good number of the crew to the deck plates.

“The *Odin*’s been destroyed!” Maro shouted.

Down to three.

“Who’s still with us?” Wallace shouted as he staggered back to his seat. It hurt. A lot. He was sure his left arm was bruised and his right knee damaged, but he had to push it down. At least it wasn’t as painful as those sparks back on the *Swiftsure*.

They blame you.

Wallace barely had time to grip the armrests of the command chair before another savage torpedo impacted the hull of his ship. The voices of his crew were lost in the destruction.

“Get us behind the station! We can’t keep fighting!”

Those under his command not unconscious or wounded obeyed his command as best they could. Howard kept his composure, taking over the engineering console after his met an explosive end.

“Shields are failing, sir!”

“Find some power and put it in there, Howard! Take it from weapons if you have to!”

“Aye, sir.” Though it wasn’t his true calling, in battle, everyone could do another’s job when pressed.

And they were very pressed.

Upon the order, Maro dipped the *Thor*’s nose 90 degrees down, causing several Breen torpedoes to streak by dumbly. Following the nosedive, the pilot took the small ship into a sickening barrel roll just above the desperately battling starbase. Though Wallace only caught the most fleeting of glimpses at the base from the violent manoeuvres, he could tell things were as desperate there as any of the ship-to-ship combat had been. And that Artillery Ship continued to sit there, pumping volley after volley into any opportune target.

What kind of luck was Wallace’s? Two losing battles in less than three months? That had to be a record anywhere.

“Sir, the station’s losing structural integrity! They’re ordering all ships to evacuate!” Howard shouted, actually manning two stations simultaneously.

“Any escape pods or shuttles?”

“Aye, sir. All pods are ejecting now.”

Maro’s mad jerking finally finished as she brought the *Thor* in line with the other surviving vessels, the *Arkantos* and a Norway-class vessel too beat up to even read its name on the hull.

“The Breen fleet?”

“They’re still pounding the base with all they’ve got. It won’t last much longer. Sir, the *Arkantos* is pulling away.”

“What do they think they’re going to accomplish?” Wallace wondered allowed.
“Hail her.”

“Ship to ship is down,” Maro reported.

He watched as the *Arkantos* manoeuvred around the station out of view. His gut wanted to go after them, but he knew better than to try. They were gone and he had his own problems to deal with.

In the eerie stillness of the moment, Wallace took a brief moment to take stock of the ship. Sparks flew from consoles unfortunately pushed beyond their limits and several panels were scorched from flash flames hastily extinguished by emergency repair teams. The air smelled quite heavily of ozone from obviously damaged air scrubbers, making the already small bridge quite oppressive.

At least it's not on fire.

Shaking the memory, Wallace tapped his combadge.

"Evesham?"

"Sir?" the younger man's voice was crystal clear. *Maybe it's not so bad.*

"Status of the warp engines?"

There was a slight pause. "We're just fine, sir. Just don't overstress her, and we'll be good to go."

Wallace had to smile. Things were looking up for once.

"Very well. Coordinate with the survivors and prepare to take on survivors, Evesham. Then plot our escape course."

"Aye."

Just as Ian Wallace prepared to close his eyes and relax, he was once again ripped into reality.

"Captain!"

Wallace looked forward to the viewscreen for only a moment, because that was all he needed.

The entire Breen fleet menacingly moved through the wrecked remains of the starbase, smashing through debris like butter. He expected to see small blasts of blasters and disrupters, sending those in escape pods to their undeserved graves, but there was nothing of the sort.

They were headed straight for him!

"Take us to warp now!"

Unfortunately, before anyone could comply with the order, the entire fleet bore down on the Thor, sending the bridge and Wallace's perceptions into black.

CHAPTER THREE

Haldar, Breen Territory One week later — Day 7

The Alpha shift klaxons started wailing in their alien tones, causing his ears to hurt like they always did. As usual, he expected to feel the horribly unfamiliar wetness of bleeding eardrums, but it never came. But as usual, he did feel completely deaf, and would be until several hours later.

Wallace pushed himself up from the hard bunk that they called a bed and stood, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Of course, even that was a chore because of his recently bruised arms and elbows, but that little bit of comfort was all he could afford at the moment.

It had been at least five days since the battle at Starbase 462 and the capture of the *Thor's* crew. The Breen fleet's sneak attack ended just as swiftly as it begun, with the surviving ships and escape pods surrounded and crippled beyond the ability to escape to warp. Through a series of painfully long and tedious text messages sent back and forth, Wallace had surrendered to the Breen. They were then beamed aboard various Breen ships, leaving the *Thor* abandoned in space, probably to be used as target practice for the rest of the fleet.

Wallace really couldn't tell the total time spent on the massive Breen ship as they were transported to this place. The massive chamber the Breen had dumped their prisoners into was kept at a uniform dusk-level light setting. Nobody captured was of Vulcan or any other race with similar faculties for counting time. At best guess, they had been held in that room for thirty hours straight with only a few cans of horrible-tasting algae paste to tide their hunger.

After the long hours of dark imprisonment, the entire ship jostled with the unmistakable sound and shudder of docking. Immediately after, guards, numbers equaling the number of captives, poured into the room and herded the Starfleet officers into their new home, a Breen prison colony on a world long devoid of any major native life. Wallace and the rest of the crews were thrown into a small compound containing about a dozen shacks of various sizes. While it was apparent among the prisoners that the Breen fully expected them to fight and squabble for the best lodgings, those of surviving rank handed out boarding assignments based on rank and place of assignment. Of course, Wallace was assigned to bunk with the other higher officers in the largest shack, but he declined, giving his relatively extravagant space to a survivor of the starbase with a badly burned arm. Instead, he chose to board with the *Thor's* senior staff, all of who survived.

Only four people were injured beyond help in the brief battle on the *Thor*. Four people Wallace didn't even know.

Those thoughts and memories haunted Wallace from the moment he arrived in the colony. And every day he had to push them back if he had a hope of surviving his arduous schedule with any amount of sanity. Indeed, the Haldar colony was more than just a POW camp, as previously thought. Much more.

After only a single night getting used to wooden cots and an algae-based mush for meals, half of the captives were marked with red pigment over their uniforms and the other half with blue. Alpha and Beta shifts for the main focus of the colony: dilithium mining.

Wallace and the rest of the Alpha shift were all herded like cattle down into the pitch-black mines and given uniform shovels and other ancient tools and basically set loose in a single, long shaft in the stone. Wallace recognized a few veins of dilithium, but bypassed them to try to communicate with the other prisoners. It was a mistake that brought the steel lash of the guards down upon his arms. Wallace's cheap shovel snapped like a twig under the Breen's far superior equipment, leaving him defenseless as they smashed his arms for his indiscretion. After that, using a broken shovel, he cleared out several veins of dilithium. When it was over, it took every scrap of his will to not cry out from his sore and bleeding limbs.

The Alpha shift had settled into a regular schedule of work and sleep with no discernable end. Every day, at least one person was taken before the guards to be beaten and shouted at in their strange, mechanical-sounding language, but their treatment wasn't seen as particularly threatening after the first day.

Now, on day six, shift five, Wallace was already resigned to his fate. While he was sure to tell himself that rescue was imminent as much as possible, he knew any outward signs of such seditious thought was punishable (how the Breen knew human expressions, however, was beyond him) so he kept it all under wraps as much as possible. Fortunately, it wasn't ever as hard as he feared simply because old, more familiar thoughts always flitted through his mind at every opportunity.

Add four to that list, Ian. They all blame you...

As he gained enough strength and energy to walk out of the small shack that housed the *Thor's* command crew, Wallace headed for the small food-point of the colony. It was most comparable to ancient vending machines at public displays on earth. One had to simply stand in front of a massive spigot that had origins in some subterranean cistern, and the green goop would slowly pour out. Those unfortunate enough not to have a bowl or plate handy had to hold their meager food in their open palms, giving their days of toil a miserable, green-tinted and slippery consistency. And anyone that didn't meet their quotas, almost randomly decided every day by their Breen masters, could forget their food for

the next day. Needless to say, a lot of people were rather hungry in this compound.

Wallace patiently waited in the short line for his tiny portion of green mush. Some junior officer, trying to preserve some semblance of a chain of command, had given Wallace her bowl in the rush between shifts. Since she was a Beta-shifter, he hadn't seen her since and was resigned into thinking he would never do so again.

With the number of able-bodied people decreasing every day due to sickness or a more violent than usual beating by the guards, the food lines were always a bit shorter than before and the portions slightly larger. Some part of him enjoyed the comfort, but the back of his mind kept reminding him that, should the guards turn their fancy on him, someone else would eventually take his little creature comforts for themselves. Of course, more food also meant more work, thus making it an endless cycle of degradation and work. No one could survive that indefinitely.

Eventually, Wallace's time arrived, and he stood lazily in front of the metal spigot, holding his crude wooden bowl under the spout as a steady stream of mush dripped into it. When the contents reached just above the rim of the small container, Wallace stepped away and let the remains fall to the ground. He couldn't eat that much algae and not get ill, anyway. And as he and others had quickly learned, any loose food was always fair game for someone who couldn't eat through normal channels anyway. Though he was always working when the loose food was taken up, he knew it reached at least one hungry mouth, and that was more satisfying than taking out any number of guards in an escape attempt.

Like every morning in this place, he had but ten minutes to eat before he had to go down the mines, so he walked at as brisk a pace as possible to conserve as much eating time as he could. Of course, he only spent a few miserable seconds wolfing the gruel down, so as to keep from remembering the awful taste of the stuff. The other nine minutes and fifty seconds were spent with anyone and everyone he could talk to, not only for reports on general health and morale, but of any news of a breakout or rescue. All the talks had been the same every day, and Wallace was sure they would be for the duration of his stay.

Routinely, someone asked about the *Arkantos*, and like clockwork someone always began to speculate on her fate. Wallace had ordered his bridge crew not to reveal what they had witnessed the last time they had seen the ship.

He had offered his own opinion only once and it was speculation at best, but as the ship's backside had been the last he'd seen of her, he suspected the ship had been lost with all hands. Maybe they were the lucky ones, but he wasn't ready to say it out loud yet. He knew any knowledge of a starfleet vessel cutting out and

making a run for it would serve no real purpose other than to infuriate some and depress others.

He couldn't say that he blamed them, the crew of the *Arkantos* that was. Even if they had stayed in the fight, it wouldn't have changed the outcome of the battle. It would just have given the Breen more prisoners to play with; more slave labor to help support their war effort.

The alarm began to wail a second and on Wallace's lead, the alpha shift workers lifted their sore bodies from the tables and headed for the mines.

Haldar Day 8

The previous days work had claimed eight lives. The Breen supervisors had pushed Beta shift further into an unsupported section of mines. The constant flow of excavating both earth and minerals had weakened then mine enough to cause a collapse. Two workers had died instantly in the cave in, while several others had been injured.

In a show of force, which Wallace could still not comprehend, the Breen guards had killed the six most seriously injured workers. The sight of Beta shift returning from the mine was gruesome. They were worked beyond exhaustion, only carrying on to escape the fate of their fallen comrades.

Wallace found his thoughts drifting away from those that had died, to the rousing sound of the alarm that had cut through the night's air. Waking the entire camp, it was not until morning that the grim truth had been revealed about the cave in, and by that time the Breen had already made an example of the injured workers.

In a way it almost seemed as if it had happened to someone else and didn't affect him. Of course Wallace suspected the Breen knew this as well and would emphasize the point specifically for the benefit of Alpha shift.

So it was of little surprise when, midway through the mush, he saw the Breen soldiers moving across the yard with a prisoner in tow. Indeed, today they were going to be taught a lesson.

Haldar Ten Hours Later

Ian Wallace walked back up to his sleeping cot and more landed atop it than lay down. Ever since that morning he had literally been exhausted, and the endless hours of work did not help one bit. Even though it was solid alien wood, its

alternative to standing over warm stone, endlessly picking away at them in the small hope of finding dilithium, was pure heaven.

Wallace allowed his muscles to finally relax as much as they could, considering the day's toil. Ever since that morning, when the news hit him, Wallace had to physically stomp his overwhelming emotion down lest the guards take notice and crush him like everyone else.

The latest Alpha shift had been particularly taxing on Wallace due to the captive's sheer efficiency after spending so long under the Breen's outrageous demands. Wallace was sure he'd loaded nearly three hundred kilograms into the Breen's stores just this day, goaded on by not only the early events, but the near constant lash of the guards.

It took Wallace mere moments to finally lie still enough to contemplate what had transpired that morning. He'd tried to think during his shift, but the constant work made it impossible.

That morning, just before Wallace's time to enter the mines, the Breen had executed a Bolian ensign to serve as an example to the rest of the camp. No, executed was too dismissive to describe what the Breen had done to that man. The Breen had butchered, murdered, and tortured that man to death in a manner so gruesome he was sure that nightmares would plague those that had witnessed the event.

The Bolian, whose name he didn't even know had not served aboard the *Thor*. But as the ranking officer in this place, he had been Wallace's responsibility. It was as much his failure as a leader that had killed him as every Breen soldier that had taken part in the execution. But it didn't end there.

When a couple of crewmen had tried to take his body down from the post he had been strung to, they too had received their own beating from the Breen guards. Their injuries were nowhere near as severe; given the brutal death of one prisoner was enough to drive their message home. It seemed, though they couldn't be sure because of the incomprehensible Breen language that they intended to leave the body on display just to reinforce their message. He had to give them credit in that at least, it was working.

The morale of the entire camp seemed to have died in that instant.

Wallace could not close his eyes without seeing him. He had forced himself to watch, to bare witness to their malevolence in hopes it would give his spirit the drive he needed to push on. As the scenes replayed in his mind, blood splattering across the ground as the Breen implements of punishment impaled the young man, he realized it was not having the effect he had hoped.

He heard the scream again and again, a final cry of agony that threatened to overwhelm him. His eyes shot open and he bolted straight up in bed. His heart thundered in his chest, a cold sweat poured down his forehead. He was sure he would not sleep tonight.

Chapter Four

Shuttlecraft Hawking Starbase 521 - Primary Dock Facility

The Type-12 shuttlecraft Hawking slid clear of the main bulk of Starbase 521, and out into the light of the local star, heading for the main dock facility.

In the pilot seat, Harkness sent the shuttle on a course that would take it to the furthest set of drydocks, where a new task force had just arrived, among them, the latest batch of Nova-X class ships. He remembered the *Alabama*,

A group of *Defiant's* passed by the shuttle. They had all seen better days, but as true to their design, none of them showed signs of giving up the fight. They were heading out on a mission, and he knew they would need so much more than luck.

A pair of *Niagara* class cruisers were side by side, exchanging parts and engaging in mutual repairs.

Harkness passed over the wreck that was once the *Swiftsure*, and his heart sank for a moment. Starfleet Engineering Corps was no longer sure they could fully repair the hull damage to the saucer, and a new one might need to be constructed from scratch. In the meantime, Harkness had ordered the stardrive section to be refitted with additional weaponry, and brought up to space-worthy as soon as possible.

When the shuttles sensors began to wail, signaling a ship was approaching, he looked up to see something refreshing...

Haldar The Next Morning – Day 8

The crushing fatigue had taken Wallace sometime during the night, proving that the strenuous workload was more potent a force than the images of the things he had seen. The early morning light was just beginning to shine through the hut when the surviving members of the *Thor's* senior staff approached their captain.

"Sir," someone whispered, the words barely registering on his conscious.

That should have been enough to rouse Wallace out of his slumber, but spending over a week in this place, the Breen had pushed him to a level of exhaustion he had previously not thought possible

“Captain Wallace,” another voice said, slightly louder this time. He felt the nudge on his arm and rolled over away from them. The hard bed cut into his side, and he realized there was no use; he was awake.

“Since I haven’t yet been deafened by the morning bell,” he said rolling over, “either all the Breen have mysteriously disappeared and we’re free to go, or you’ve woken me up early. It had better not be the latter.”

“Sorry captain,” Maro said, “but I think you’ll be interested in what we have to say.”

Apparently, through Howard’s close observation of the Breen’s guard changing schedule, they had revealed a very short window of time where they could potentially begin work of a means of escape.

They spoke of it in only shot vague terms, as to not alert any Breen guards that might be listening in.

USS *Arkantos* Approaching Starbase 521

A fire had raged in engineering. Moving with an intensity of forceful release, the flames moved in a camouflage of noxious gasses and other toxins that smothered the room in a thick fog. It didn’t however spare any person or thing from the blistering heat spawned out among the smoke. Burning plasma had burst through a weakened conduit and rolled through the room in a crushing wave. It scorched the deck plates and turned previously working equipment into melted pieces of unidentifiable chunks of mass. But that was only part of it.

Chaos erupted as green enlisted personnel found themselves without an officer in sight. Many scrambled to remember the basics of survival training, while skin blistered and dropped off the bone of crewmen that could not flee after the initial blast had blown apart their senses. Several had died instantly and maybe they were lucky because those that suffered longer would know a fate worse than death.

It was like this all aboard the *Arkantos*. The ship had somehow managed to survive the Breen attack, only to suffer one greater defeat after another as she limped back to friendly territory.

Captain Jordana Klyce stood in the hall of main engineering, taking careful stance not to get in the way of the working engineers. The warp core, which had only days ago been an excuse to get them away from the front, was now their best chance of ever getting home. The core pulsed slowly creating a low hum that was lost among the voices of the engineering crew.

“Captain,” said a voice, ringing out of nowhere. “We’re beginning our final approach to the station. Captain Harkness is coming aboard to personally inspect our damage.”

Commander Barez looked as downtrodden as many of the survivors did. A brace on his knee impeded his mobility. Minor cuts and abrasions that had gone untreated had scabbed over on their own. She might have said something, ordering him to take a minute get his wounds tended to, but she knew he was the real reason why the *Arkantos* was still in one piece. The ship belonged more to her first officer than her captain, and if Klyce had her way Barez would be her captain soon enough.

“Understood,” she said finally letting the moment sink in. “Moura?”

Barez paused for a long moment. It was common knowledge that there had been something more than friendship between them. She could see the grief begin to well up in his eyes and wondered if he would blame her for the loss.

“She didn’t make it captain,” he answered finally, looking away to try and fake his sudden lack composure.

She had fought for five days, long enough to see the new injectors installed and brought online. And to see a good portion of the repairs underway, but even the strongest of wills could not hold out indefinitely.

“Let’s go and greet the Captain,” she said. Klyce was ready to face her accusers, ready to account for what she had done. At least then she would no longer be responsible for anyone other than herself.

They walked from engineering to the nearest working turbolift, half the length of the ship away. Along the way they passed crew who looked exhausted and seemed to be carrying on by adrenaline alone. Most had some kind of injury that had only been temporarily healed, to allow the skeleton crew of medical techs to tend to the severe cases.

The turbolift doors jerked open at their approach, stopped then closed partially. Each grabbing one door, they forced them apart, but couldn’t get them to close.

“Docking port two,” the Commander ordered. Transporters were still out and interference from too many damaged components made beaming aboard the ship dangerous. The shuttlebay doors were torn open and the atmospheric forcefield was inoperable. For the time being, the only way to get aboard would be to manually dock.

“How did you know?” he asked.

Klyce turning away from the sight of the exposed turbolift shaft, watching it curiously as the decks whizzed by just out of arms reach. “Know what?” she asked.

“Moura said that if we had sustained this much damage with those faulty injectors the core would have gone up like a supernova. Taking us back to the starbase might have cost us...” he trailed off almost ashamed he could see any bright side to their current situation. So many were dead and most of those that had survived were injured, but... “It saved this ship,” he said finally.

She didn’t know how to answer. She could look at him, the injuries he had suffered, or go down to sickbay and see the bodies laid were in stasis awaiting their final resting place, or even just look around at the destruction the *Arkantos* has taken on—and she could chalk it all up to dumb luck. “I didn’t...”

“It was one hell of a piece of good luck then.”

She caught a glimpse of her face in the reflection of a panel. She had fared better than most and hated herself for the cursed luck it made others think she’d been given.

“I didn’t want us to be on the border,” she said letting the guilt of her actions speak for itself. “I took us back to starbase 462 to avoid getting this ship into a fight. It was a fluke the Breen attacked the starbase, and dumb luck we’re still alive.”

“I see.”

The turbolift finally stopped and they made the short trip to the airlock in silence.

He began to punch in the activation code to begin the airlock cycle. “You probably saved all our lives,” he said as the docking collar began to pressurize.

“Don’t say that ever again,” she said in a whisper, staring at the deck. Shame forced her eyes from seeing anything else, but duty forced her to look up when the doors parted to allow Captain Jacob Harkness to come aboard.

There was a conflicting hint of expression running across his face. “Captain Klyce,” he said extending his hand. “We didn’t know that any ship had survived the battle. My congratulations to you and your crew. Well done.”

She didn’t take his hand, and physically backed down as if to await punishment. “I don’t believe so sir.” She knew that desertion was the least of her worries, but perhaps there was one saving grace.

He took an encouraging look around, trying to fain an impressed feeling towards their accomplishment. The ship had seen better days, but Harkness also knew that bringing a ship home that could live to fight another day would not go without notice.

“So how bad is it?” he asked.

Klyce had spent the previous week building herself up for this moment and now that it was here, she wasn't about to let it pass. “With all due respect sir, before we get to that, we need to talk.”

Starbase 521

Returning to the starbase, Harkness was on a mission. Without focusing on any particular aspect of what might happen, plans, tactics, and fallback strategies began to come together in his mind. Lists of available ships began to scroll through his conscious, those that could make the trip and support a full on assault, some that would be needed for support, and the growing list of others that would simply be a waste of time even to consider.

By the time he had returned to the starbase, the basis for a solid rescue mission had taken form. Now all he had to do was plead his case. Starfleet would listen to reason, even jump at the opportunity to rescue their own. The boost in morale such a victory would surely launch was reason enough alone to approve the mission. He was sure of it. *All I have to do is plead my case*, he kept telling himself.

In the shuffle of thoughts, his mind completely lapsed from the responsibility Captain Klyce had played in this mess. There was no guarantee that had the *Arkantos* stayed in the battle, the situation would have evolved any differently. Captain Klyce was no more his responsibility than any other stranger. Her fate was not his to decide.

When the turbolift jerked to a stop in Ops, Harkness nearly bolted from the cab and ran across the room. He simply pointed to the admiral's office, signaling he was going in.

“The Admiral asked not to be disturbed,” the lieutenant on watch, said.

Harkness never slowed his pace. “Oh, well then by all means I should go on in,” he said before hitting the door release.

Admiral Zareka, a female Vulcan occupied an isolated desk. Her office was a picture of organization, a far cry from his own jumbled mess of work.

"I'm drawing up mission specs for a rescue operation to Haldar," Harkness said, laying it flat out rather than asking for permission

"What's on Haldar?" her adjutant asked. He stood by the Admirals desk, as composed and neatly arranged as the rest of his surrounding.

"A Breen prison camp," the Admiral answered.

Harkness caught the words like a phaser hit to the chest. How could she know already when he had just found out less than ten minutes ago? Then the realization hit him. They had known about the prison camp all along, and simply not told anyone

Admiral Zareka remained in her seat to assert that she was in control of the conversation. "Before you no doubt begin to plead your case Captain Harkness, let me assure you that a full evaluation of the situation has been made. Any incursion into Breen territory could result in a counterstrike that we would be ill advised to solicit at this time. It is unfortunate that we are unable to act, but we must consider the benefit of the whole over the lives of a handful of starfleet personnel."

And that had been it. She would hear no more and had dismissed him without even letting a single word come forth on the subject. The emotionless tone of her heartless voice still echoed in his ear as he left the room.

"Lock the door," Harkness yelled once back in his own office.

In a fit, he pushed through the piles of PADD's still stacked on his desk, sending them crashing to the floor. Now scattered across the deck, he kicked them out of his way as he paced back and forth in the small office.

Harkness stood at the large observation window in his office. The now all too common sight of damaged starships jockeying for the best position in line for repairs filled his sight. It wasn't enough to look out upon those ships and simply plan for the worst possibilities

Far off in the distance, he saw another ship just arriving at the starbase. It's awkward bricklike shape and quad-nacelle design instantly gave away its identity.

"The *Typhon*," Harkness gaped.

As the ship moved closer to the station, he noticed the ships clean unscarred hull, and something snapped in the back of his mind like a light going of. It was then he realized it was time to change the rules.

To Be Continued