

# Star Trek: The Breen War

## **PROLOGUE**

“Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster. And if you gaze long into the Abyss, the Abyss gazes into you.” --Nietzsche

### **Somewhere in Between...**

It was something out of a dream, if such a thing could be true. The feeling was like realizing mid-thought that everything you knew was real had actually been conjured into existence in a whim of fear. If only that mattered, for when the truth was revealed, the dream was so much better than anything else that had ever come before.

The pure fancy of it all was intoxicating, absorbing every essence of a person into the fantasy that lived in a single mind. It was made real from a cache of memories and desires collected over a lifetime, which flamed its hold on a person.

For Nikolai Martin it was like this, but he didn't care to stop it. It was home, even if he had never laid eyes on the house before; more importantly, the distance of duty did not strain the family that this place had created.

There was a nagging call, a pull to something else, and some other life—some duty other than the one of family obligations. But a duty to what? A service... something that called to him, pulling at him as if his life had taken him somewhere else.

In this world, where his son played off in the distance safe from any threat and his wife was dressed as beautifully as he had ever seen her, he didn't care to find an explanation to any of it. This was enough, more than enough to settle his heart content for the rest of his days.

Suddenly, he saw his wife wearing something else. It was some kind of uniform that he didn't recognize. The black pants and jacket with gray ribbed shoulders, letting the red collar poke through just enough to be seen.

Although he had no idea how he knew it, the red signified command.

She stood holding a PADD reading some type of tactical report. “Have you heard the news?” she asked.

“What news?” he asked.

“The Breen are pushing forward on all fronts.”

"The Breen." It was not a question so much as a statement of something he had heard before, but not fully understood.

"We may not be safe here," she added.

His face glazed over, as if he had just plugged into some system of information. He instantly began recalling strategic information on the Breen and their ships, like he had always known it and it was more than second nature.

"They'll come in with capital ships first, perhaps with fighter support," Martin said plainly. "The carriers are difficult to take out, but if you watch for the gaps in their shields--"

The words spilled out of his mouth with no conscious effort. He had no idea and wasn't sure he wanted to know where that had come from.

A voice pulled him back.

"Hey dad, you okay?"

He looked towards the voice, recognizing him in all strangeness of this place. Peter. His son. He seemed happy in this place, content as if nothing could harm him. Or maybe it was just the innocence of a child. Before Martin could answer, he ran off, chasing some ball as it flew down field.

What were they doing? Then it struck him. Peter played soccer, but that seemed like ages ago. Only because of the games he had missed--how many games would never be played.

He turned back to his wife, now dressed, as she had been earlier. The uniform was gone and with it the feeling of security and obligation he had felt in its presence.

She moved towards him now, taking his hand in hers. "Are you all right, Nikolai?"

He could feel here warmth, from the touch of her hand as he held it in his; smell the scent of her perfume, and picture, without looking, the color of her eyes. It was more than a memory or some delusion. She was real. He wanted to hold her and be with her here in this place for as long as he desired.

So much in something so simple. It was a family, and so much more.

When he finally found the words to answer, they were not what he expected. "This isn't right," he mumbled as two parts of him struggled to lead, one fighting to stay in this paradise. The other fighting to regain the life Fate had dealt him.

It was then that he realized this life was different. Fragments of memories began rushing back in a torrential stream, pushing so quickly, that he couldn't keep up

with it all. He only barely caught glimpses of things here and there, but it was enough.

He remembered clothing, something he had worn often enough that it felt right resting on his frame, and as if a part of him was missing when he took it off. A uniform, maybe? Had he ever been in the military?

It was then that Martin saw someone new. A man standing off on his own that he was positive had not been there before. He couldn't place his name but was confident the face sparked some recognition.

The figure seemed to be calling out to him. At first the words were inaudible, as if he had no voice, simply mouthing the cry to him.

He concentrated on the face and slowly, like the steady scream of an approaching locomotive; the man's voice took root. Words began to form, clumsily at first, but quickly finding a pattern he knew.

*"Admiral Martin,"* he finally realized the man was calling out.

Someone grabbed his shoulder, pulling him away. He turned to see who would distract him when he was finally beginning to put it all together, and like a bright flash of newly lit room, he was somewhere else.

The voice was distant, but familiar. Like something he had heard in a dream that faded into a whisper the more he tried to hold on to it.

"Who...where...?" He stammered, fumbling as his thoughts tripped over one another in even a basic attempt to put thought to words.

He took a quick look around. The place was unfamiliar, filled with consoles and displays that he didn't really understand. People drifted back and forth, most wearing the uniform he had seen earlier. It was the same uniform he was wearing as well.

He looked back to the man that had pulled him out of that...he didn't know what it was. Maybe it was real, and this was all a dream. Or maybe that place—that perfect place, with a family and everything that was better than what he had ever wanted in life, was the really the dream.

The man spoke again. "Admiral Martin, can you hear me?"

Martin could hear him, but had no more of an idea who the man was than what he was going on about.

Martin looked up at the man's alien features, the points of his ears, the angle of his eyebrows, and straight cut of his hair, but didn't pull away. Was he familiar? Had they met before? He wasn't sure.

The only thing he did know was that he couldn't really be sure of anything at all.

## Chapter One

### **USS *Dauntless* Open Space**

The USS *Dauntless* had been cast adrift among the stars. Moving far slower than anything that might cause it harm, the ship might have been passed over—left for dead, but not for long. Her crew labored to restore vital systems that would protect them, and within an hour of regaining consciousness, the tide was turning.

If not for the vacuum of space, the noise of the ship's warp core powering up would have torn across the sector to sound the first deep breath of a life restored. There were, however, no such dramatics within the void. Instead, the ship silently picked herself up under the use of skilled hands, to let her crew begin the arduous task of investigating their present condition.

### **Admiral's Quarters**

Hours later, Admiral Martin was beginning to piece his life back together. He had spent the better part of the morning discovering little things that triggered memories that, at first, seemed to belong to someone else.

Doctor Golding had been kind enough to inform the crew the memory loss was not permanent. With time, and as each person immersed themselves in his/her old life, the lost memories would return, some sooner than others.

It had been like that for hours. Reading crew reports and mission logs, trying to find out what they were supposed to be doing out here. It was a strange feeling. Each time he accessed a mission log, sure that he had no idea what information the file contained, he was only able to read the first few lines before bits and pieces of fragmented memories began rushing forward. Some of them were too intense to handle all at once, forcing him to stop reading several times and try and force the thoughts from his mind. As of yet, the process had not been entirely successful, or entirely pleasant.

For instance, he had spent most of the morning in his quarters, but he still felt only a latent familiarity with the room. Like a face he had passed a thousand times on some busy street, but was sure he could not place.

He still found it necessary to feel the rank pips on his collar, just as a reminder of this life that he was just beginning to reconnect.

*Admiral*, he thought.

He remembered something else—something that he couldn't be sure was real. A family...his wife...his son. Martin couldn't remember how or why, but he knew they were gone.

That was until he read the official report.

Stardate 57218.4, the Breen had begun their assault on the Federation, by sneaking past all defenses, eventually striking Earth itself. Days later, after Earth had been abandoned by Starfleet at Admiral Martin's order and occupied by the Breen, Starfleet had fought their way back to retake the planet.

There was massive damage not only to Earth but to the very infrastructure of sector 001. Entire starbases had been lost, shipyards nearly crippled, and most of the system's industry had been all but wiped out. Entire cities had been leveled to the ground; first among them, San Francisco. Starfleet Headquarters made for an excellent target, a fact obviously not lost on the Breen.

The death toll was too high to fathom. It made the war personal for every human in the Federation, and more so for those who had lost family.

He had been taken back by the enormity of the casualty list, but when he scanned for his name, the loss came crashing down around him. The flood of memories were too intense.

He could see them there, lying in the rubble, his wife draped over Peter, to protect him. He began to break down from the weight of the loss, feeling as if he couldn't go on, and not wanting to, even if there had been a reason to stand fast.

Then, a solution finally came to him. A phaser. He needed a phaser. Moving to a weapons locker, he knew there could be no other choice.

Taking the weapon from its place in the locker, he ramped up the setting to kill, his finger on the firing stud...

...But nothing happened.

"Admiral." The comm link broke his train of thought, pulling him back into reality. He still held the phaser, his grip tightened around the curved handle, his finger still on the stud.

"What?!" he yelled at the interruption.

"This is Captain Koloudi."

He lowered the phaser a bit, eased his finger off the trigger, and felt the button snap back into place. How close had he come?

"What can I do for you, Captain?" The man's name was familiar. It was so clear now it was amazing he had ever drawn a blank.

"It seems we have a prisoner, sir," he said over the comm. "I'm sending you a video feed."

The monitor blinked on, and Martin looked at the screen showing the video feed of the brig. A man, if one could call him that, sat alone in the cell. He seemed eerily content, as if amused by his own personal entertainment.

"What do you make of him?" Martin asked.

"He's a strange one, sir. As far as we can tell, he's a hybrid. Half Bajoran, half Breen."

Martin thought for a second, and then began to remember. The Bajorans were a spiritual race and one of the most recent planets to join the Federation. The Breen...he remembered them as well. He remembered leaving Earth while the Breen tore apart the planet's surface from orbit. He remembered the ruins of San Francisco and the way that Starfleet Command had been leveled to the ground. And he remembered his family. Sasha, Peter.

Then, suddenly, the rest of it was all there in front of him, spread out in that tapestry of memories that formed a person's life.

"His name is Fonon Jo'Uva," Martin said. "He's... responsible for..." His resolve wavered under the weight of his memories.

Pulling himself back, he finally found the words. "He's a collaborator, and if anyone knows what happened to us, it's him. I'll meet you in the brig, Captain."

Martin got up to leave, but stopped to look at the phaser lying on the desk. It was then he realized there was another choice.

## **Brig**

The brig was smaller than most, with only the one cell and an open area for a guard station. It was more than a holding cell; it was solitary confinement.

Captain Koloudi stood near the back, letting Martin take the lead. To Martin's left, Doctor Golding monitored the conversation with an open tricorder.

Fonon sat on the small bench, one of the few luxuries within the cell, determined to make the most of a bad situation. He simply smirked and laughed at the seriousness with which they regarded the situation. He had to give them credit though; it took a particularly special type to mind to undertake the same mistake twice.

"I don't have a clue as to how we got here," Fonon said. "I can't say it any plainer."

"I find that hard to believe," Martin said. He turned away from the cell, attempting to hide the frustration this whole thing was causing. He wanted to throttle Fonon, squeezing his neck until there was but a flicker of life left within his eyes. Then he would take the time to see him restored to health, and begin again. All in an attempt to make him understand he was beaten.

A glaze of seriousness began to overtake Fonon's face. "What if I told you Section 32 was involved," Fonon said.

"Don't you mean Section 31?" Koloudi said.

Fonon seemed to think for a minute as if he had to dredge up the memory from some ancient thought. "That's right; it is 31. You'll have to forgive me," he said, a grin widening across his face. "My memory isn't what it used to be."

Martin walked back to the holding cell. He looked back at the security guard and signaled him to lower the force field. When the field lowered, he stepped inside, walking within arms' length of Fonon. The half-Breen held his position despite the confrontation. He was sure he had been in worse situations and that he could handle whatever persuasive techniques the Admiral had in mind.

"Let me make one thing clear to you," Martin said stressing his point. "I've spent the past four hours reliving the death of my son and wife on top of the sight of the Breen laying waste to my homeworld. Whatever reservations I might have held before this, towards pressing you for information, just flew out the nearest airlock."

"Admiral..." Koloudi said, an odd note in his voice.

Fonon remained seated, still as comfortable as ever. Or, at least, so he tried to appear. "I assume this is the part where you make some type of threat in which my continued existence is directly proportional to the level of my cooperation."

"If that's what it takes," Martin said.

"You obviously have little experience with interrogations, Admiral, or you would know such threats are useless. If you threaten to kill me and fail to act on your threat, it weakens your position. If you do kill me, well, then that gets you nowhere, doesn't it, Admiral?"

"Maybe you have the answers and maybe you don't. At least now we'll know for sure." He stared into Fonon's face for another minute, and then shouted, "Guard," without turning around.

The young lieutenant stepped forward, ever ready to follow the word of his Admiral. "Sir."

“Give me your side arm and wait outside,” Martin ordered him.

He relinquished his phaser, but didn't move. “Sir, I can't leave the prisoner.”

Martin looked to the Captain for support.

He paused for the briefest of moments. “Wait outside, Lieutenant,” Koloudi said confirming the order.

On the word of his captain, the guard turned and left the brig.

Fonon tried to keep up his composure even now, but his joyful smirk and sense of ease were beginning to fail. “How quaint this display of questionable morality has become.”

Martin keyed the phaser to level three and fired once. The weapons beam hit the wall beside Fonon.

“You're a poor aim,” Fonon said looking at the scorch mark on the wall.

“That was level three. A fairly heavy stun that would render even you unconscious. Computer, disengage small arms safety protocols aboard the *Dauntless*. Authorization Martin, one-seven-four-seven-bravo.”

The computer responded in turn. “The confirmation of a second senior officer is required.”

“Captain Gook Koloudi, and I concur,” he said, though that odd tone still lingered. “Authorization Koloudi, alpha-alpha-omega.”

“Small arms phaser safeties have been disengaged.”

Martin increased the setting before firing again, hitting the wall in a different place, but closer to Fonon this time. The proximity of the blast made him flinch.

“That was level six. The last setting before a hit from this weapon will require the life-saving services of our doctor. That was also the last time I intend to aim for the wall.”

Martin suddenly jumped forward, grabbing Fonon to force him against the wall. He shoved the phaser against the side of his face, burying the emitter in his temple.

“Can you still feel the heat of that last shot? Can you smell the singed air and imagine the smell your burning flesh will produce. Of course, you won't be conscious to experience that particular sensation. There's a good chance you won't be alive, either.”

“Admiral!” Golding yelled. He rushed forward to pull Martin off Fonon, but with a simple push, the move was deflected.

“Back off, Doctor,” Martin said, not budging from his spot.

Playing along, a part of Fonon hoped Martin was only bluffing. “I don’t think you have it in you, Admiral,” he said.

“Let’s see.”

Knowing a shot from such close range, directly to his temple would kill him, Martin stepped back to get a safer shot. He increased the power one more setting, leveled the phaser against Fonon and fired. The phaser blast hit him squarely in the chest, laying the half-Breen out. He fell back, and hit his head on the wall and fell to the floor.

Golding ran forward, tricorder in hand, as Martin moved aside to let him work. Fonon was, after all, no good to anyone dead, but the fear that Martin would go as far as needed had to be displayed for all to see. No matter the cost.

It took the doctor several minutes of frantic work before reporting, “He’s alive, but this wound is going to require attention.”

“Wake him up,” Martin ordered.

“Admiral, this is going way beyond...”

“I said wake him!”

“I won’t,” Golding said.

Martin pushed past the doctor and grabbed his medkit as Golding fell back out of the way. The admiral pulled a hypospray from the medkit and pressed it to the neck of the unconscious Fonon. He slowly began to stir and, suddenly, bolted upright as if remembering a bad dream that he suddenly realized was real.

“You’ve lost it, Martin,” Fonon said. He grimaced through the pain, forcing the words forward.

“We can do this again,” Martin said.

“I won’t be a part of this,” Golding said.

“Then he’ll die here in this cell,” Martin said. His face betrayed no emotion, showed no hint of backing down.

Golding turned to Koloudi looking for support to ease his conscience. “Captain,” he said, pleading for a life that many would have left for dead.

Koloudi stepped forward. "Admiral, maybe we should..."

"Those that don't want to be here are free to leave," Martin said, nodding towards the door.

"How is this going to look to Starfleet when your own crew is siding against you?" Fonon asked. He was bartering for his life, trying desperately to appeal to some sense of decency, or the fact that Martin was ultimately responsible for his actions, or something.

"If our present company chooses not to see this through to the end, then I'll go down to sickbay and find a med tech fresh out of the academy that will have no problem following the orders of a superior officer. Then I'll come back, and we'll do this for the rest of the day, and into the next."

Martin raised the phaser and leveled it on Fonon. Golding and Koloudi moved off now, with Martin's finger on the trigger; they had resolved that there would be no stopping whatever came next.

"If you can sleep at night and in the morning recognize the man that stares back at you in a mirror, then whether the Breen win or lose, Starfleet and the whole Federation is damned. And you deserve everything you have coming." Holding onto the bulkhead, Fonon used the leverage to steady himself as he got to his feet. "Bring up a star chart of this sector," he said.

Koloudi brought up the star chart on the wall monitor, and focused in on their present location.

"There," he said pointing to a star system that seemed as randomly chosen as any other.

"Why there?" Martin asked.

"I don't know how or why, but I know that is the place you're looking for. But you're not going to want to go there."

"And why is that?" Martin asked.

"Hasn't it occurred to you yet that maybe you got off easy? Your memories are wiped, and you have no record of how we arrived at our present location, but you're alive. We should be grateful for small favors and be on our way."

"You're suggesting we found the Section 31 base and they let us go," Martin said.

"Only after trying their best to make sure we couldn't find them again."

“Why?” Martin asked.

“You’d have to ask them,” Fonon said.

“I thought we were.”

“Regardless of what you may think, I don’t have all the answers, Admiral. It’s not like they send me memos on all their latest activities.”

Martin turned away from the cell, to within whispering distance of Koloudi and Golding. “What do you think?”

“I think he’s the best lead we have,” the captain answered.

“Doc?” Martin could tell he was hardly pleased, but he still had a job to do.

“My best examination says he’s telling the truth,” he said begrudgingly complying, “or at least, what he believes to be the truth.”

“Are you suggesting he could be misleading us without realizing it?”

“His mind has received a level of mental conditioning the likes of which I have never come across in all my days as a physician. You have to take into account that the level of multi-compartmentalizing his brain has undergone would drive any human into a level of schizophrenia undocumented in any Federation database.

“He’s not human though.”

“How good of you to notice. I can’t say how the brain of a hybrid Breen-Bajoran would react to such conditioning. It is very possible that he is misleading us without being aware he is doing so, even if some part of him desires to help us.”

Martin considered their options, and wasn’t terribly thrilled by any of the prospects that lay before them. This little excursion into the DMZ to look for Section 31 had yet to bear any fruit and it was becoming apparent that the leads with which they had started with were quickly drying up. They needed a break and they needed it soon.

Turning back to Fonon he said, “We’ll go with your recommendation, but this doesn’t mean I trust you.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to,” Fonon said, his words slightly slurred.

“Guard,” Martin said calling the lieutenant back into the room. “Help take the prisoner to sickbay,” Martin said. He could see the confusion in the lieutenant’s eyes, the internal struggle between following the orders of a superior officer, and obeying the law of Starfleet.

Martin didn't care which side won. Some green lieutenant who felt morally justified to follow his convictions wasn't about to slow him down.

Golding helped Fonon to his feet, and with the guard's assistance, left the brig.

Koloudi turned slightly to Martin, never completely looking him in the face. It wasn't difficult for Martin to pick up on the signal.

"That had to be done, Gook," Martin said.

"I'll be on the bridge," Koloudi said, heading for the door. He didn't look back.

## Chapter Two

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

Lieutenant Commander Shen Yu was in the center seat. Weeks later, and he was still settling into the position of acting executive officer. While a substantially increased workload, he felt he was handling it well.

“Chief,” said Shen Yu as he looked up to see the chief engineer exit the turbo lift. “Just the people I wanted to see. I need some good news, aside from remembering your own name.”

Evans' spirit visibly dropped a peg, as he walked across the bridge. Commander Shen Yu was not pleased; he would have thought the joke would have gone over better.

“It seems there was little to no damage to any of the ships' systems,” Evans said looking over a PADD. He knew all the reports by heart, but was trying to stall. “All but the most basic systems had just been taken off-line.”

“Any clue to who might be responsible?” the commander asked.

Evans sort of skirted around the issue before answering. “It seems that we're responsible, sir.”

“Come again?” Shen Yu asked.

“There's no evidence that any sort of sabotage was involved, and a check of the logs showed that our own command codes were the last ones to be used.”

“That's just perfect,” the Commander sighed. “Just when we need some answers, we get more questions.”

“It doesn't get much better, sir,” Evans said.

“Do I even want to hear this?” he asked.

“We've finished reviewing the memory files and it's as bad as we suspected.”

He settled back into his chair. “It's that bad?”

“I'm afraid so, Commander,” Evans said handing him the PADD that detailed all their efforts to restore the computer files thus far.

“So our best engineers are telling me that they were completely unable to restore our missing computer files, the same files that may very well shed some light on our current...predicament.”

“I’m not even sure how the files were removed. There are none of the usual traces that every method of data removal I know of leaves on a computer. All I know for sure is that we didn’t do it.”

Shen Yu sighed in defeat, certain Evans felt the same. He had hoped for better news, but faced with the level to which the crew’s memory had been affected, he held out little hope.

### **Martin’s Quarters**

Martin had spent over an hour watching Fonon on the monitor, once his stay in sickbay had been completed. The entire time he had kept the only door out of his quarters locked for fear that if he couldn’t keep his temper in check, Fonon would not live through the day.

He held up the picture of his wife and son. The glass was still broken from his fit of rage the first time he had lost them. The picture was damaged now, slightly torn from the anger he’d felt. It was the only copy, and one of the few remnants of that old life. Tears began to well up in his eyes, but he wiped them away.

Through his tear blurred vision, he saw the phaser still sitting on the desk where he had left it earlier. A part of him was ashamed of the man who had picked up that weapon, held it to his temple and pressed the stud only to be stopped by a damn security protocol. He told himself that such actions were not befitting a Starfleet officer, but this had hardly anything to do with Starfleet. It was more personal than that.

Some part of him wanted out of this life. It was the same part of him that had conjured up that fantasy world in a life of contentment. As much as he dreamed of that place, he knew it would never be like that—knew it could have never been like that. Starfleet had pulled them apart across the quadrant. He had let the service draw him away, and his family had died for it.

Martin turned back to the monitor showing Fonon sitting contentedly in his cell. He was not as cheerful as he had been before their previous discussion, but he still seemed to take the whole situation less than serious. A course of thoughts ran through Martin’s mind, all ways he could make Fonon see just how serious his situation actually was.

It was an ever-growing part of him. That little voice in the back of his mind, the devilish angel sitting on his shoulder, that whispered in his ear the idea of marching down to the brig, phaser in hand and giving Fonon what he had coming. But that would hardly serve any real purpose other than a momentary glimpse of fulfillment. Fonon was better served as a conduit for information, and that was what he would remain. His service to Starfleet and the bigger picture demand it.

So for now, Fonon would live...

*"Hold on,"* a voice said, as clearly as if the person it belonged to had been standing right behind him.

He turned to see where the voice had come from, but could see no one.

"Who's there," he called out with a haunting suspicion who the voice belonged to.

Of course, no one answered. He was alone, and hearing voices. Perhaps the loss of his memory had affected him more than he had thought. Or, perhaps, he was losing his mind.

The intercom snapped on. "Admiral to the bridge," Koloudi said; his voice almost echoed through the room. "We're approaching the planet, sir."

Either way, he wasn't going to let it stop him from making sure Fonon paid for his crimes. He slapped his combadge. "I'm on my way."

## **Brig**

Fonon sat on the single bench in the cramped cell, watching the security guard as he attempted to stay busy, running diagnostics and security checks. It was mild entertainment in an otherwise tedious moment, and as he focused in on the mundane procedure, it triggered something in his memory.

He tried to remember the past few days and the more he concentrated, the more difficult it became to see any of it. That was, until he began to focus on some little something that sparked a flash, and suddenly it seemed as if someone had lit a candle in a dark room. He was not sure why or even how the memory had surfaced, but it was there regardless. That little technique was one of the many tricks Section 31 had taught him...

His thoughts trailed off. Had they really taught him anything or had they simply programmed him with the knowledge as if he were some mindless automaton? Regardless of how he felt though, the technique worked, and he knew that if he wanted to live through the coming days, he would need every little trick Section 31 had given him.

When the memories began to resurface, they came faster than he could control and more intense than he had ever experienced, he realized that something had changed.

They were probing his mind, bringing things to the surface of his consciousness that he would prefer left alone. In a seconds' thought, he was aware that the

sudden burst of memories were not his own, and every mental block he was capable of erecting was quickly fixed in place.

He suspected they would try once they the *Dauntless* began to approach the planet, but he had thought they wouldn't get as far as they had last time. He focused his thoughts just a little more than idle thought to block their efforts and settled in for what was surely going to be rough going.

"So, it begins," he said, just louder than a whisper.

"What was that?" the guard asked looking up from his console.

Fonon stood up and walked towards the force field. "We're in for quite a ride," he said rather vaguely. "You may want to sit down."

"Back away from the force field," he said placing his hand on his phaser to emphasize his authority.

"It's your head," Fonon said. *I wonder why they never take my warnings seriously.*

The guard simply shrugged off his statement and returned to his console.

Fonon felt a sudden wave of lightheadedness, and sat back down. They were trying harder this time, doubling their efforts to break through his mental barriers. He had to give them credit for trying though, even if their efforts would ultimately prove useless.

## **Bridge**

*Have the turbolifts on this ship always moved so slowly?* Martin thought.

When the turbolift doors finally opened, he walked onto the bridge, looking at the main viewer that now displayed an almost barren planet.

"Report," he said, as it seemed he was catching the tail end of a conversation.

"--I'm positive our sensors detected humanoid life signs on the surface, sir," S'pon was saying.

"And now they're gone?" Koloudi asked.

"Yes, sir," he said continuing to run sensor sweeps of the planet. "Sensors show a class-K planet that is barely habitable."

Martin continued down the ramp to the command deck, standing off to the side. One thing he remembered for certain was that while he was in command of the mission, the *Dauntless* was Koloudi's, not his.

"Get Fonon up here," Martin ordered.

"Sir," Koloudi said, objecting to the order. "I don't think we need to expose ourselves to such an obvious security risk."

"Fonon is the only lead in all of this. If we don't use him we'll be flying blind."

"I would rather not have him on the bridge, Admiral," Koloudi said in an attempt to put his foot down.

"Your objection is noted," Martin said. "Now, carry out my order."

"Yes, *sir*," said Koloudi. "Shen Yu, have the prisoner brought to the bridge. He is to be shackled in wrist, leg, and waist restraints the entire time. Assign as many security personnel as you deem necessary."

"Aye, Sir," he said. The lieutenant commander made the arrangements through his station then moved to the turbolift, leaving the bridge.

Koloudi looked at Martin as the Admiral watched the viewscreen. Over the past few days, they had not agreed upon much and the captain didn't like where that was leading.

### **Bridge Minutes later**

Fonon hobbled onto the bridge, his movement restricted by the restraints. Four security guards walked with him, each with a phaser rifle in hand. Martin thought it was a bit much, but he didn't say anything. There was already enough tension on the bridge.

"Let me guess," Fonon said, trying to look as if the restraints weren't bothering him. "You detected faint life signs when you entered the system, but now the planet seems uninhabitable?"

"Why do I get the feeling you've been here before?" Martin asked.

"We all have, and if you know what's good for you, you'll turn back now."

"All the more reason to go forward," Martin said. He stepped forward. "Helm ahead full impulse."

Koloudi stood up, angered at the admiral for this breach. "Wait," he said.

"The fact we haven't had our memories wiped, again, is a sign that they're not going to be as friendly this time around," Fonon said.

"Would you mind explaining what the hell is going on?!" Koloudi nearly yelled.

Fonon was impressed; he hadn't thought the captain had it in him. "All I know is that the aliens on this planet have the telepathic skill that would put the Talosians to shame. Which could explain how our memories were affected."

"Some more than others," Martin said.

"Do these people have a name?" Koloudi asked.

"They call themselves the Bosuet, of course that's not what Section 31 called them. Would you care to hear--"

"No," both Martin and Koloudi sounded in unison.

"But why would they do anything to us?" Martin asked. Then another thought accrued to him. *What could we have done to deserve such a punishment?*

"Section 31 has a habit of burning its bridges," Fonon explained.

"So, there was a base here," Martin said.

"I believe so, and unless we want a repeat of '*What's my name,*' we should leave immediately. If they haven't scanned us yet, they will soon enough."

"We're not detecting any advanced technology, nothing that would signify the existence of a sensor array," said S'pon

Fonon became visually frustrated, as he realized that they still did not appreciate the seriousness of their situation. "They don't need a sensor array--"

The human officers on the bridge suddenly collapsed, clutching their heads in unbearable pain.

"Admiral! Captain?!" S'pon shouted before succumbing to the attack. His own mental discipline only held off his collapse by seconds.

Apparently unaffected, Fonon took off towards the turbolift, as fast as his restraints would allow.

S'pon shouted after him while pulling his phaser. "Jo'Uva!"

He fired once, hitting Fonon in the shoulder. The half-Breen collapsed to the floor, only seconds before S'pon lost consciousness.

## The Bosuet Homeworld

The Bosuet homeworld was a paradise captured in sweeping feats of sculptured architecture, framed with lush gardens of exotic flora, in the midst of a bustling metropolis. Or at least, that was the particular scene they chose to show people. Of the few people who had managed to leave the homeworld with even the slightest recollection of their visit, they all reported the same paradise that seemed completely untouched by time—completely unmolested by the hand of progress.

The serene landscape of their world was a strange confliction in regards to the Bosuet themselves. The average person, with no specific gender, stood well over three meters high, with ghostly pale skin earned from a life spent sheltered from the sun. Long stands of gray hair, among even the young, framed a sunken face with eyes of intense red, orange, and blue.

In a temple located in the mountains high above the largest city on the planet, a group of twelve sat watching the ship approach. There was no technology. Together they simply projected the image of the Federation starship into the room. It was a representation of a telepathic scan made by dozens of minds in such scrutinizing detail, that each mind aboard the ship could be monitored in random and deliberate thought.

At the sight of the large spacecraft, one of the seasoned elders began the discussion. *“They have returned,”* he said without making a sound. His words projected through the thoughts of those within the room, faster than he could have spoken them.

“That is unfortunate,” Bal said. He made the effort to speak the words, even though it was not necessary. Something about actually articulating a thought into spoken word had always fascinated him; it was unfortunately becoming a lost art.

At two hundred and forty-seven years old, Bal was middle-aged middle aged and considered one of the younger representatives on the council. That had not however, curtailed his ambition in the slightest.

*“We should destroy them this time,”* a third member of the council suggested. Val, as most called him, was another elder who followed much the same pattern as the first, choosing not to directly speak with anyone.

The elder spoke again, this time using words to directly speak to Bal. “That will not ease the situation, but will instead draw more of their kind to us.”

“That much is assured,” Val said, “but we will not take their lives.”

*“It is agreed,”* the elders thought as one.

"We should speak with them," Bal suggested and before the words could be spoken the council had reached a consensus.

"I will arrange it," Val said.

## Chapter Three

### Somewhere in Between

He recognized the place as the bridge of the *Dauntless*, but something was different. It was as if someone had messed with the environmental settings and let a fog roll in across the deck.

“What’s going on?” Martin asked, confused by the things he saw. “Where is this place?”

A voice echoed through the bridge. “This place exists between the real world and your subconscious.”

He spun around to find the person, but didn’t see a soul.

“What do you want?” he asked, hoping that he wasn’t just speaking to thin air.

A figure suddenly materialized and without knowing how he was standing there, Martin spun around to see him.

“The nomenclature of ‘male’ is incorrect,” he said. “And my name is not important. You need only know that I speak for my people.”

“You can read my thoughts,” Martin said, realizing that nothing in this place was private.

“Among other things,” the alien answered.

“Then what do you want?” Martin asked.

“We want you to leave and to never return,” he said simply. There was no emotion in his voice. No sense of arrogant domination that one might expect, given the fact this being virtually held the life of everyone aboard the *Dauntless* in his hands.

“We can’t do that,” Martin answered. “At least, not yet.”

Suddenly, another figure materialized beside him. It was Gook Koloudi. He seemed to be as initially dumbfounded by the experience as Martin had been.

He took a step forward, unsure of his surroundings. “Admiral...”

Martin raised a hand, to hold off his questions. “Not now, Captain.” He wondered why they had brought Koloudi into this fabrication. Perhaps they saw something in the captain that was missing in Martin. For whatever reason, Martin didn’t take kindly to being second-guessed.

“We know of your prime directive,” he said, making the effort to speak, “which prevents the interference of Starfleet personnel in the development of alien cultures. We expect you to honor your directive.”

“It isn’t that simple. We need to know what happened to our memories the last time we were here.”

“Of what importance is that matter?” he asked.

“It’s of vital importance, and I can promise you the sooner we find out what happened to us, the sooner we will be on our way.”

He seemed to consider the validity of Martin’s offer for a moment.

“It is not our way, but if it will expedite this encounter we will assist you. The memories of you and your crew were altered by the ones that came first.”

“The ones that came first?” Martin asked, not understanding exactly what the other meant.

With the sweep of his hand, the alien figure manipulated a section of the fog to form some kind of display.

“The ones that came first were barbaric,” he said pointing to the display. The scene switched from a peaceful view of the planet to a convoy of unmarked transport ships heading towards the planets surface.

“They came in ships, abducting our people and using them for their own vices. They were from your Federation, but they were shielded against our thoughts. We could not expel them.”

*Section 31*, Martin imagined. “Are they still here?” he asked.

“No,” he said with some level of joy. “They left shortly after your vessel was sent away from our planet.”

Martin noticed the change, and wondered if *Section 31* had really done as much harm as they were claiming. And who had been harmed more.

“Several were lost in the incident,” the other said as if to answer him. “It is a damage that can never be repaired. As with them, we wish for you to leave, and never return.”

“I have one more question,” Martin said. He intended to take opportunity of every chance that presented itself.

He simply nodded.

"There is a person aboard our ship, who was not affected the same way we were." Martin said

He changed the display again to show a visual of Fonon in a holding cell aboard the *Dauntless*. Watching the display, he saw himself in the brig, pointing a phaser at Fonon. Just as before, he fired and Fonon collapsed to the deck.

"Like those that came before you," he continued, "his mind has been conditioned to greatly resist our influence. I believe the process was only partially effective." He looked back at Martin. "You will leave now," he said.

"If that is your wish," Martin said plainly. He made a conscious effort to try and focus his mind on the decision at hand and nothing else. He wished to betray none of his true feelings,

"It is," the other said, nodding. And as quickly as the thought was finished, the light began to intensify and engulf them completely. Before Martin could realize what was happening, he was gone. Koloudi remained.

"Why wasn't I sent back?" Koloudi asked.

"Captain, we must speak," the other said, approaching Koloudi in a very un-confrontational manner. There was a calm about 'him' that exuded safeness.

"Regarding what exactly?"

"Nikolai Martin. As I believe you may suspect as well, he is not the man you knew some time ago."

### **USS *Dauntless* Bridge – Over one hour later**

When his mind began to clear and the fog started to lift, Martin soon realized where he was. At least they hadn't wiped his memory this time, although maybe they should have. Now if only he could forget this headache that felt like it was about to crush his skull.

His eye blinked open; S'pon was hovering over him with a tricorder in hand. He was getting tired of seeing this particular scene. Sitting up, he could see that the rest of the crew was just beginning to regain consciousness as well.

"Admiral, your vital signs are returning to normal. The remainder of the crew seems to have experienced the same vision."

Climbing to his feet, Martin could feel the stress of communicating with the Bosuet. It had been more difficult this time.

Martin wobbled a bit as he tried to find his footing. "We have to put a stop to this," he said.

"I know of no way to combat a species with such a superior telepathic ability." S'pon said. "Even my extensive mental discipline only delays their efforts by a few seconds."

Once Martin was up moving on his own, S'pon began checking on the others, some of which were already beginning to stir on their own.

"What's our status?" Koloudi asked. He was standing by the ops console, not nearly as groggy as the rest. Martin suspected that S'pon had played favorites and revived him first.

"We...I--I woke up at the helm, sir," said someone. "I don't know how, but we're no longer in the Bosuet system."

"He is correct, sir," S'pon said, now letting the expertise of a medical team see to the bridge crew. "Sensors confirm we have traveled approximately half a light-year from the Bosuet homeworld."

"It would seem the Bosuet didn't trust us after all," Koloudi said.

"I can't say I blame them," Martin said. He almost fell down into his chair. He felt weak from the experience, like a daze, life or more had been drained out of him.

"Where is Fonon?" Martin asked checking the bridge.

"He is missing," S'pon replied in earnest. "I managed to incapacitate him before I lost consciousness, and while I am quite sure I saw him hit the deck, he seems to have escaped."

"Computer, where is Fonon Jo'Uva?" Martin asked.

The computer's feminine voice responded plainly, "Fonon Jo'Uva is in the main shuttle bay."

Martin cursed under his breath, but before he could even suggest a course of action, the crew was already moving into position.

"Use whatever force is necessary to apprehend him," Martin ordered.

Koloudi wasn't sure how to proceed. Apprehending Fonon was a priority, which meant he couldn't exactly confront the admiral, even if he had the backing of the crew.

With no other course to take he acknowledged the command. "Aye," Koloudi said nervously. "Security alert, level one. Lock down the shuttle bay."

“He’s entered some type of override,” S’pon reported. “I’ve never encountered this kind of encryption code before.”

“If he gets off this ship, you all can start looking for new assignments,” Martin barked.

“The shuttlebay doors are opening,” S’pon reported.

After several seconds of impatient waiting, Martin asked, “Can you lock down the shuttlebay or not?”

“No, sir,” Shen Yu said. “We’re receiving casualty reports. It looks like Fonon was armed.”

Martin fell back into the chair to Koloudi’s left. “Damn,” Martin said, clutching his head.

### **Main Shuttlebay**

Fonon had walked through the corridors, phaser in hand almost completely unopposed. When he did encounter the crew of this damn ship, they were all as comatose as the bridge crew had been, and in no position to stop him.

His shackles rattled, although they no longer impeded his movement. A quick phaser shot had aided his escape. Unfortunately, his luck hadn't held out. By the time he reached the main shuttle bay, the crew was beginning to come around.

“Stop!” yelled some engineer across the bay.

“I don’t think so,” Fonon said. He wasted no time using the phaser to remove any obstacles that stood in his way.

He didn’t particularly wish any of these people harm, but he had had his fill of life aboard the *Dauntless* and felt for certain that it was time to leave. He didn’t exactly have faith that Admiral Martin would return to his old self once this mission was over. The things he had seen, the things he had done...that man was scarred for life

He began the emergency preflight sequence, and effortlessly piloted the shuttle clear of the shuttlebay.

Once free to maneuver, he set course towards the one place the *Dauntless* would be foolish to follow, the Bosuet system. If they had any sense, they knew better to follow him.

## Bridge

"Tractor beam," Koloudi suggested.

Shen Yu glanced over the controls only once. "It's not responding, sir. It's been disabled."

"Keep a sensor lock on the shuttle," said Martin, beyond frustrated. "Helm, lay in a pursuit course and engage."

Before the *Dauntless* could get underway, the lights on the bridge dimmed briefly, as a sudden noticeable drop in power swept across the ship. Auxiliary power kicked in and the lights came back up.

"Our warp core has been taken offline," said S'pon.

"Switch us to auxiliary power," Koloudi ordered.

Martin slapped his combadge. "Chief, what's going on?"

"This is Owens, sir. The chief just shut down the core and restricted access to his personal codes. Now, he's just sitting in the corner smiling."

"The Bosuet are playing games with us," Martin said.

Koloudi snapped into action before Martin could even suggest a response. "Helm..."

"I'm on it," said the helmsman, working before the captain could even finish the order. He worked for only a few seconds before reporting that impulse was off line as well.

As the *Dauntless* began to drift in space, Martin suddenly struck upon an idea.

"Have all shuttle pilots report for duty, and get an engineer, copilot, and weapons officer for each shuttle."

"Sir?"

"We're going to see just how many minds they can control at once."

Koloudi didn't object, but Martin could see the disapproval on his face.

Martin didn't comment, knowing they didn't have time to argue.

## **The Bosuet Homeworld**

In another part of the same temple where the Council held its deliberations, a sanctuary deep beneath the surface was home to a council of a different kind.

This place was different, a stark contrast to its well-lit counterpart. In this place, another meeting had convened. Smaller than the first, the four that had gathered here pressed their luck by even associating together outside

“The hybrid has acquired a shuttle and is proceeding on course. They are responding just as predicted.”

Bal leaned back in his chair, pleased with the outcome so far. He held his hands firmly together, steeped in thought as the situation continued to devolve.

“Excellent. And the *Dauntless*?”

One of his colleagues turned to him to answer. “Our vessel will intercept the *Dauntless* in four minutes.”

Bal was pleased with the successfulness of the plan. With a simple implanted thought, they had successfully lured the Federation ship back to their planet. Soon they would have the hybrid in their custody, and the federation vessel would pay for their curiosity.

## **USS *Dauntless* Bridge**

Fonon’s shuttle was no match in speed for the *Dauntless*. However with both warp and impulse off line, Fonon was in clear.

“Admiral Martin, perhaps you should see this,” S’pon said.

Martin crossed the bridge to the ensign’s science station. The sensor display showed a uniquely designed starship, moving towards them

“Where did they get a ship?”

“They’re hailing us.”

Not waiting for any objections this time, Martin gave the order. “On screen.”

“We have little time, so I will be brief. You may refer to me as Bal. We can help your friend unlock his mind, but you must help us in return.”

“Let’s get one thing clear,” Martin said. “The individual in question is many things, but he is not my friend.”

“The fact remains that we can both benefit from this agreement.”

“Explain.”

“The ones that came before you did horrible things to our people,” he said, altering his image so it appeared as if he had personally been injured. Martin even thought he saw some splash of hate trace across his face.

“In exchange for aiding in the apprehension of Fonon,” Bal continued, “we will provide you with all the information we have gathered in our encounters with them.”

“Why can’t you capture him on your own?” Martin asked.

“We are unskilled in such matters,” Bal began to explain. “The knowledge of space flight and armed conflict is known to us, but we have no practical experience in either. You, on the other hand, appear to be well versed in both.”

“We’ll help you,” Martin said, accepting the deal without a second thought. “I take it you’re no longer acting on behalf of your people.”

“Indeed.”

“Can you shield our people from the rest of the Bosuet?” Koloudi asked.

“I believe so, however your vessel will need to stay within one thousand kilometers of our vessel.”

“Helm, move us into position,” Martin ordered as he settled back into his seat. This was going to turn out better than he’d hoped. “Lay in a course back to the Bosuet homeworld.”

### **Starfleet Shuttlecraft**

The small Starfleet shuttlecraft split the atmosphere as it raced towards the planet’s surface. The shuttle creaked, as it made its descent towards the planet and a part of Fonon wondered if the old ship would hold together. Fonon pushed the shuttles impulse engines further still.

Fonon wanted away from all this, and he knew that as long as the Breen were at war with the Federation, Starfleet would never let him go. They would keep him under lock and key until earth’s sun grew cold and flamed out and then some, he suspected.

Caught in the middle with no side to turn to, he was repelled by all and sought by none. His life had become the definition of solitary confinement, so in that vein perhaps they could understand why he had to risk it. Maybe this would show them why he had to run, and keep running, until he was so far away that the stars were foreign and no one knew of the Federation, the Breen, or even the Bajorans.

This shuttle couldn't take him there; it was only the first step. But if he could make it to the planet, a planet he had seen with his own eyes on more than one prior occasion, then he might just have a chance.

A sensor alarm suddenly sounded, and to his disbelief two ships were approaching from astern. The sensor display showed the *Dauntless* being escorted by a ship that he knew was *Bosuet*. How they had managed to slip past him to hook up with the *Dauntless*, was a separate issue altogether.

## Chapter Four

### USS *Dauntless* Bridge

As the *Dauntless* moved towards the planet, the bridge was strangely quiet, despite the feverous work being done to keep up with the tampering the Bosuet council was causing. Even with the help of their escorts, some thoughts were still getting through, causing officers and crew to behave contrary to their training.

Every few minutes, an alarm would go off signaling another system had been sabotaged. Each instance forced them to relieve whoever had caused the problem, while at the same time rushing to fix it. More than once the alarm signaling a warp core containment field failure had sounded and for the time it took to correct, fears of being blown apart spread throughout the crew.

With the Bosuet ship in close proximity, the *Dauntless* was heading back towards their homeworld at warp speed. Fast enough to make up the time lost by tampering thoughts and catch up to Fonon, but slow enough not lose their Bosuet escort. If he had had the time, Martin might have found that particular circumstance strange.

"We should end this now and get as far away from this planet as possible," Koloudi suggested. He had stopped trying to hide his disapproval of the admiral's actions and was now flat out questioning him at every turn.

"Circumstances have changed," Martin told him.

"These people have already proven they hold no qualms toward altering our minds," the captain said. "I can only imagine what might happen if we try and push them now."

When Martin didn't respond, Koloudi decided it was time to up the ante and take their disagreement to the next level. "Can I speak with you for a moment?" Koloudi asked motioning towards his ready room.

"Now is not the time, Captain." Martin was in no mood to seek a more private venue for their argument.

"Better now, than when we've gone too far," Koloudi said.

They walked off the bridge and into the ready room, neither man sitting down. Martin wondered how close they were to coming to blows and resolved he would go as far as he needed.

"I feel it's my duty to inform you," Koloudi began, "that I believe you've been compromised."

“Compromised?”

“We have no idea what the long-term effects of having our minds altered will be. For all we know, we could all be acting off-kilter.”

Martin simply sighed, knowing that they didn’t have time for any of this. “Do you intend to file an official complaint with Command?” he asked.

“I had hoped it wouldn’t come to that.”

“It will,” Martin, said, “because the last time I checked, my mandate from Starfleet Command was to track down Section 31 by any means necessary.”

Koloudi was tired of hearing that excuse. “Surely Command didn’t expect you to...”

“We’re at *war!*” Martin shouted, crashing his fist into the table. “Certain exceptions to the rules have to be made, if we expect to defeat the Breen.”

“The Nikolai Martin I knew would have never gone this far,” Koloudi said.

“Things change,” Martin said, still stuck in his resolve.

“I could have Doctor Golding declare you unfit for duty.”

“Then you can explain to Admiral Bailer how Fonon managed to escape, and why we failed to follow up on our the best lead to date.”

Koloudi suddenly took a step back, the wind knocked out of his argument. Martin had him and he knew it.

Breaking the silence, the comm snapped on. “Admiral Martin, we’re entering the Bosuet system.”

He slapped his combadge to respond. “Maintain warp until we’re ready to make our final approach to the planet.”

“Aye, sir.”

“If there’s nothing else...” Martin said, moving past Koloudi on his way to the bridge. Even if there had been anything else, he wouldn’t have heard it.

“Have you got anything, yet?” Martin asked S’pon as soon as he was fully on the bridge. He was overstepping his bounds, a fact that he could clearly see irritated Koloudi, but he didn’t care. Martin was going to make sure that Fonon didn’t get away, and he didn’t care who he stepped on to see it through.

“We’re having trouble getting a fix on his life signs,” S’pon said.

"He's the only half Breen, half Bajoran on the planet! It shouldn't be too difficult to tell the difference!"

Koloudi gave the admiral a look. He was clearly becoming irritated.

"Don't start, Koloudi." Martin turned back to S'pon. "Can you at least get a fix on the shuttle?" Martin queried, his frustration rising.

S'pon began to report, "Interference from the..."

"There is no interference in the entire system. It's the Bosuet projecting their thoughts into your mind to make you think that this system is full of interference. I wouldn't be surprised if a simple tricorder couldn't track down our missing shuttle."

Just then Martin was struck with an overpowering sensation. From nowhere and everywhere, Bal's voice echoed through his mind. *"You must hurry. We cannot maintain this level of protection for much longer."*

### **Bosuet Homeworld**

Fonon had reached the planet, setting the shuttle's autopilot to slowdown only enough to allow transport, before resuming its prearranged course away from the planet. He seriously doubted anyone would fall for such a ruse, but it was worth a shot. In any event the shuttle would hide itself in the sun's corona for safe keeping just in case he required it later.

He activated the communications system and keyed the transmitter to a rarely used frequency. Following the set protocol, he made his request without waiting for confirmation. "Transport one. Authorization Fonon."

He materialized in a room and the lights came on as he stepped off the pad. The one and only work station in the room was a computer console that seemed to be off-line but it came to life as he approached it, just as the lights had done.

The room was the first in a series of underground bunkers designed to facilitate Section 31's activities, while working amongst the Bosuet.

Taking a seat at the computer station, he began a search of the compound's main computer to try and bring the facilities masking systems online. The last thing he wanted was for Starfleet to suddenly beam down. Scrolling through the system directory he saw that a number of systems, were in a hibernation cycle, meant to be restarted at some later date. *It would seem today is that day*, he thought.

Continuing his search through the computer, he noticed room upon room of stasis chambers, and other research programs. He recognized a few of them, but most were unfamiliar and for the time being were of no interest.

After a few minutes of searching, he began to become frustrated. The farther he proceeded into the computers subroutines, the more he was being faced with inane security checks. His authorization codes had unlocked most of them, but some required a security clearance higher than his own.

He was suddenly locked out of another system, the computer waiting while he entered the correct authorization. He input his standard security authorization, hoping it would be enough while trying to remember the higher authorization codes he had at one time been entrusted with.

*What was the code*, he tried to remember. His own security codes were no longer working.

The computer suddenly switched into another security mode, making a series of sensor sweeps before responding. "Working. Authorization rejected. Initiating backup protocol zero-one. Primary functions have been terminated. Countdown initiated."

"What countdown?" Fonon asked, despite the fact no one would ever answer him.

"Welcome back, Fonon," a voice echoed over the comm system. Fonon jerked in surprise. The viewer blinked on, and a face he knew all too well appeared on the screen. It seemed Mr. Cohen was still upset with him. Would that man, who at times seemed incapable of operating far from the shadow of *her* employ, ever get over his little indiscretion.

"We can't imagine why you would choose to return to this god-forsaken planet," he began, no doubt speaking for the whole of Section 31, or at least the parts Fonon had had direct contact with. "On the off-chance you did decide to take refuge here, we thought it appropriate to accommodate you with a wide selection of parting gifts. Think of it as a going away present for all your hard work on behalf of Section 31."

The computer seemed to lumber into a new sequence of protocols, initiating a series of equipment. "Stasis chambers activated."

"I'm sure you remember our colleagues from the Bosuet," Cohen said as the viewer switched to a display of one of the stasis chambers. Although they were technically conscious, the level of awareness they were privy to was questionable at best. They were all integrated into the bunkers secondary computer system via neural links connected to amplifiers, which allowed them unrestricted thought across most of the Bosuet system.

"I'm sure they remember you," he continued, "and are no doubt eager to catch up on old times."

A forcefield snapped into place around Fonon. His mind was suddenly a flood of thoughts, a blinding surge of memories that zipped too fast to recognize. They were tearing his mind apart from the inside out.

Fonon fell to the floor, his hands pressing to his head as if they might stall the attack. He hit the forcefield first, which still held him in place, and as the field seemed to shrink in size his arms were suddenly pulled down and pinned back by some unseen force.

His screams began to echo through the bunker, piercing the first room and carrying on throughout the instillation.

### **Bosuet**

In the absence of the regular council members, several new people had taken up positions on the council. Behind them, reinforcing their efforts, the defense council was actively attempting to strike against the Starfleet vessel. Their efforts however, were meeting with limited success.

A general spokesman from the defense council stepped forward, speaking as one in the place of many. "Elder, the Starfleet vessel continues to approach. We have been unable to halt their advance."

"After agreeing to leave," Val said, visibly angered. "Why can you not stop them?"

"They are accompanied by an escort. A vessel of Bosuet design," he said bringing up a display of the ship. Val was only vaguely familiar with the design, but knew it was one of their won.

"Bal," he said, looking at the now occupied seat Bal had vacated.

"We cannot reach them," the spokesman for the defense council said. He was visibly disturbed by this turn of events, neither angered nor vengeful, but more disappointed.

"Nor can we," a second council member stated.

The display changed to a larger image of the area. It now showed the Bosuet vessel traveling in close proximity to the *Dauntless*.

"They protect the *Dauntless*," Val said.

"Indeed," several of the council members said in agreement.

“We should eliminate them all,” the defense council answered in unison through their spokesman.

“Those are our own people...” said Val, outrage creeping into his voice.

“Aiding outsiders. There is no greater crime,” the spokesman added.

“Have the defense council refocus their efforts on the renegade vessel. Let the Federation vessel have their hybrid and be done with it.”

“It shall be done,” the council replied.

Val nearly fell back into his seat, feeling repugnant by the actions he was being forced to take. He had no such ideal as “no Bosuet had ever harmed another.” It happened occasionally: crimes of passion, criminal punishment, and other such incidents, but actively taking part in killing people he knew, a person he had worked with and called friend, was another thing altogether.

Bal had brought it on himself however. He had to remember that. He had to believe that what was about to happen was required was required for the greater good. *Yes, keep telling yourself that*, he thought.

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

The crew seemed to grow tenser, as each minute brought them closer to the Bosuet homeworld. Martin felt it as well, but couldn't let that distract him now. They were too close to Fonon, too close to finally finding a lead after months of endless searching.

“We're detecting a massive power surge emanating from the planet,” S'pon reported.

“No technology,” Martin said to know one. He almost laughed at the lies the Bosuet had been telling them. If he hadn't been so focused on Fonon, he might have taken offense. “Can you localize it?” he asked.

“Yes sir,” S'pon answered. “It's coming from one of the southern continents, approximately three kilometers beneath the planets surface.”

“Assemble a strike team in the main shuttle bay, and signal our escort to follow our lead. We're going down there.”

“I can't allow you to beam down to that planet, Admiral,” said Koloudi.

“Your concern for my well-being is noted, Captain.”

“The closer we come to the Bosuet homeworld, the more I become concerned with the safety of this ship over your well being, *Sir*.”

Martin, angered and insulted by that last comment, rose sharply from his chair.

“The Bosuet vessel is breaking off,” S’pon reported. Martin turned to the front of the bridge.

“We have to stay with them,” Martin ordered.

The ensign at helm worked to comply, trying not to focus on the drama unfolding on the bridge. “They’re increasing speed,” she said.

Martin was determined as ever. “Match them.”

“They’re moving past our upper sublight limit,” she replied.

“Then set a new upper limit,” Martin barked.

“I’m detecting a transporter signal from the Bosuet ship,” S’pon said. He then seemed puzzled by what his sensor display showed him. “They have Fonon.”

“Request the data transfer,” Martin said. He suddenly didn’t like the situation they were being forced into.

“No response to our hails,” Shen Yu reported.

“Those double-crossing...”

“They’re changing course and heading towards the planets surface,” S’pon reported.

“Like hell they are,” Martin said. “Lay in a course to intercept and engage. Repeat the request for the data transfer. Include the fact we expect them to hold up their end of the deal.”

“Still nothing,” Shen Yu replied.

“Can you get a transporter lock on Fonon?” Martin asked.

“I have a clear reading of his life sings,” S’pon said, “but interference from the vessels is preventing me from establishing a solid lock.”

“Stand by phasers and send a security detail to sickbay,” Martin said. “Helm, pull us away from the Bosuet ship as soon as Fonon is aboard.”

“Aye sir.”

"You can't be serious," Koloudi objected.

"I've had about enough of your insubordination," Martin said. "I've let it slide till now because of some misguided veil of friendship, but if you don't step down, I will have you removed from the bridge."

"Aye sir," said Koloudi.

"Are we within range?" Martin said almost without stopping for a pause.

"Aye sir."

"Slow them down, Commander, and pick at them with weaker shots. Try to break their concentration. Transport Fonon directly to sickbay as soon as you get a firm lock."

"Aye, sir," Shen Yu responded. He worked over his tactical console, checking the setting twice for the precision shot. The phasers lashed out with pinpoint accuracy to find the ships impulse drive, followed by a flurry of shorter less powerful bursts. A small explosion flared, followed by the quick shut down of the ships engines. The *Dauntless* moved closer.

"I've got a lock. Energizing," S'pon reported. A second later he added, "We have him."

"Helm, now," Martin ordered.

As the *Dauntless* pulled away from the Bosuet ship, a ripple of explosions began to chain within the ships interior.

"Sir, their warp core is going critical," S'pon reported.

On the bridge of the *Dauntless*, the main viewer switched to show the Bosuet ship begin to free-fall in space. The ship exploded and was instantly engulfed by the vacuum of space, never so brilliant as the one thought such an explosion might be.

"It wasn't us, sir," Shen Yu reported from his tactical console. "Our weapons' fire didn't cause that much damage."

"Sensor's logs show a massive destabilization of their antimatter containment system. Is it possible the Bosuet destroyed one of their own ships?" S'pon asked.

"Why'd they do that? Martin asked.

"Because they helped us," Koloudi said. He brushed past the Admiral, taking the center seat. "Helm; get us out of here before they turn our attention to us." The ensign acknowledged the order and in a flash of a second, the *Dauntless* jumped to warp and away from the Bosuet homeworld.

### **USS *Dauntless* Sickbay**

Martin stood at the window looking in on Fonon, now confined to a biobed in an isolated section. Some part of him let a smile creep across his face, but as a nurse passed, nearly catching his reflection in the window, he quickly composed himself. For now this moment was something to keep to himself.

"How is he?" Koloudi asked. Martin had been so caught up in his own thoughts he had not heard the captain enter the room.

"Whatever they did to him has seriously fragmented the mental blocks he already had in place. If and when he comes out of the coma, I'd say he would be lucky to remember his name, let alone anything of any importance."

Captain Koloudi took another step forward, pausing only for a moment to show the decision he had made weighed heavily upon him.

"Admiral, I'm noting in my official report that I believe you overstepped your bounds in the pursuit of Fonon."

Martin didn't turn to look the Captain in the eye. Maybe he had gone too far-- maybe he had overstepped his bounds, but there was little he could do to change that, now. For whatever actions he took from that day forward, he was committed to the fight his soul and all.

"That's your prerogative," Martin said.

Koloudi turned to leave sickbay, but stopped at the door, looking out into the general ward. There were still several occupied beds, his crew injured in this escapade. Others had not been as lucky.

"This had better be worth it," he said

"Anything that brings us closer to Section 31..."

"Keep telling yourself that," Koloudi said, the sarcasm bleeding through his voice.

Martin turned on a heel. "Captain Koloudi," Martin said catching him before he left.

“When does it become too much, Admiral? What line do we have to cross before there's no turning back?”

“The war... The loss...” Martin started several times, but couldn't place the thought just right. “History rarely speaks of the things that keep us awake at night long after the deed is ended. These acts that try our souls and push us to the breaking point...they're not things that can be explained or even rationalized in any conventional sense. It's just something that has to be done. The needs of the many...”

“You're suggesting that some must be sacrificed if the rest are to be saved?”

Martin only nodded in acknowledgment. “It is my burden to bear.”

“Then for your sake, I hope this was worth it.”

He began to turn to leave, but was stopped by the sight of so many of his officers and crew occupying sickbay. He understood that in times of war, casualties were a part of daily life, but he could not reckon his mind around the need for carelessness. And that was all this was.

“This is becoming a problem,” Koloudi said, his back still turned to Martin. “We both can't command this ship, and I can't sit back and do nothing while you take us on some wild trip the details to which you alone are privy.”

“It's something you're going to have to get used to,” Martin said.

“I'll remind you of that when it gets us all killed.”

Martin almost laughed at that, but held back the urge. At the moment, there was something else he required of Koloudi.

“The *Dauntless* needs to be at Cardassia no later, then five days from now,” he said offering no other details.

“Should I even bother asking why?” Koloudi wondered aloud.

“See, you're getting the hang of it already.”

The sarcasm was lost on Captain Koloudi, who promptly turned to leave sickbay.

“Make the necessary preparations, Captain.”

Koloudi stopped at the door to look back. “If I don't, who will?”