

Star Trek: The Breen War

Prologue

"A mind troubled by doubt cannot focus on the course to victory."-- Arthur Golden, *Memoirs of a Geisha*

Breen Homeworld Thotha Council Chamber

"He's late."

A lonely gloaming had settled over the Thotha council chamber as Namateth turned to his old friend. He had known Jugartha for almost fifty years now, ever since he'd joined the Lardotha Orchestra as an idealistic adolescent, fit to burst with the promise of musical adventure. And she was already there, a talented musician but with a temperament that would often get her into trouble. That was a good time, but now those heady days of musical indolence were now gone. Having failed to make a difference in the musical world they had both chosen careers in military, and then later, the government. Now there was just war. Stretching on and on. War upon war. Doubling to infinity.

"If it wasn't for their plasma technology," said Namateth, dragging himself back to the matter at hand, "we might well be facing an invasion. We can afford him the generosity of grace."

The Generosity of Grace was one of their early compositions. It had been promising, and attracted some cautious praise from their peers, though in the end it came to nothing. Now, the title hung between them, reproaching them; a stark reminder of what they had let themselves become.

But Jugartha dismissed the reference, and instead she went on, "And who is to blame for that? You assured this chamber that the positions of our depots would remain absolutely secret. But the Starfleeters found them, and now our advance has become broken and chaotic. The symmetry is fracturing. And to add further to this discord our prototype has been destroyed. Namateth, it was your job to keep all our movements coordinated."

"And has your conduct been any more astute, Jugartha? Need I remind you of the fiasco on Cardassia? You were meant to bring them into the war against the Federation, but instead they are now negotiating a treaty to allow them to use their drydocks."

Again, the two old friends found themselves at an impasse. Had they not been so close in years past, had they not shared so many hours together in musical contemplation, then they might have clashed more forcibly. But Namateth was unwilling and Jugartha was unable.

Jugartha said, "No matter the mistakes of the past, I still believe we should be more discriminating in our choice of friends. These Federation terrorists, for example: they have been helpful, but how did they obtain the technologies that they have provided us with? And how did they manage to place operatives in such sensitive positions?"

"Discriminating? Jugartha, if we are not careful we are going to end up facing a two-front war. At *least*. We'll be drowned out. Even with the Tholians signing a none-aggression treaty with us, we're not powerful enough to defeat the Federation on our own. It has been proven time and again that our enemy's strength lies in its ability to make friends when they need them. We must draw inspiration from this; form duets of our own."

As Namateth watched his friend's reaction, he was reminded again of the past Jugartha. Even in her music Jugartha had been brash and impatient, with Namateth providing the thoughtful, cautious, counterpoint. It seemed that some things never changed, and despite their obvious differences, the tensions, disagreements, and damn-right hatred that had consumed them in recent times, Namateth still felt a deep affection for her.

Before Jugartha could reply though, they were interrupted by the news that they were receiving the signal. Namateth nodded to the aid and a moment later a new voice filled the chamber.

"You lied to us."

"Pardon?" said Namateth turning to the view-screen as the various knots of conversation broke up and the members of the Thotha council took their seats.

"We held up our end of the bargain. You've failed to hold up yours."

At his side, Jugartha tensed with frustration, but Namateth clutched her hand to warn her to remain calm. The rest of the council mumbled discontentedly in the background, but let their leader speak.

"Our new weapon is functional and we are ready to send it to you," said Namateth, the very model of composure. "Our only failure is in understanding what you mean when you said you cannot hold up our end of the bargain."

"The weapon is useless. The Federation's shielding technology will render this a pathetic side-note to your war. This war; that you are going to lose." Their contact took a breath. "This alliance is finished. We won't send you the plans for the plasma torpedoes; what few you have left will be the last you will ever receive. I suggest you use them wisely."

"Wait," cut in Jugartha, finally tired of staying in the shadows with the rest of the council. "You underestimate us. Our new weapon is more powerful than you could ever have hoped for."

CHAPTER ONE

USS *Dauntless* Captain Koloudi's Quarters

"This is his ship, not mine."

"Sir," replied Lieutenant Commander Shen Yu, "the crew is loyal to you."

Koloudi sat down and put his head in his hands. He was tired and frustrated, and it didn't help that his mind was still in a state of disorder from their encounter with the *Bosuet*. It was hard to remember sometimes that he had not so long ago trusted Admiral Martin with his life, but now Koloudi was finding the man's actions increasingly hard to stomach.

In the dim shadow of ship's dusk, Koloudi looked up at his first officer. Shen Yu's Asian face was impassive.

"Maybe they are. And I am loyal to the admiral. It's just that I've begun to fear where that loyalty might take us. Martin's not the man he once was. This war's hurt him. It's damaged him."

Shen Yu went to reply but stopped, and together the two officers looked round at the window. The stars had shifted out of place.

Main Bridge

As Koloudi walked onto the bridge, followed by his first officer, he found Admiral Martin sat relaxed in the centre chair. Martin didn't move.

"We've changed course," said Koloudi as Shen Yu went to the ops station.

"You're off-duty and out of uniform, Captain."

"I should have been informed."

"Really, Captain. Are you so petty that you would wish to be woken for every minor detail of our mission? We simply have to deliver a message before we reach Cardassia."

"What message?"

Martin sighed, irritated. "If you must know, the USS *Kennedy* is not responding to subspace transmissions and we have been ordered to find out why. There's little Breen activity in this sector, and most likely they've suffered some damage to their communications array. It should only be a very slight detour."

Koloudi glanced over at Shen Yu, who with a slight inclination of his head, affirmed that what the admiral was saying was true. It was strange though. Despite Martin's assertion that there was little Breen activity in the area Koloudi found it hard to believe in a time of war, that a Federation starship patrolling the front lines, and that had dropped off the subspace network would prove a 'minor detour'. Even if it were true that the *Kennedy* had suffered only minor damage to their communications array during a light skirmish, that must mean that the Breen did indeed have an interest in this part of the line.

"I would like to be informed when we rendezvous with the *Kennedy*."

The admiral didn't reply, but made a kind of indifferent gesture. Despite the fact that he had addressed the remark to his superior though, Koloudi had been talking to Shen Yu. Martin wouldn't think twice about keeping him in the dark, but his first officer was still loyal to his captain.

Captain Koloudi's Quarters

Captain Gook Koloudi lay awake in the darkness for hours, staring out of the window into the space beyond. He could feel every motion of his ship; he didn't need to see the stars slide this way and that. Since he had retreated back to his cabin, the *Dauntless* had changed course at least four times, three of them in the last hour, yet no one had contacted him to explain why. And though Koloudi wasn't quite astute enough to say for certain, he suspected they had entered some kind of search pattern.

He didn't move, but instead started to doze, dreaming fitfully of the ship tearing away from him: bulkheads dissolving into fire, and merging into the void. And him there, cast into the abyss, helpless, free.

Thrown back into consciousness in the murky red glow of his quarters, Koloudi picked himself up off the floor. He would have a few bruises when morning finally came, but that was the least of his worries.

They were under attack.

Main Bridge

By the time the captain had reached his bridge the battle was all but over. He arrived just in time to see the *Dauntless* swing round and spear the Breen destroyer with its phasers.

"What the hell's going on?" Koloudi demanded as he watched the enemy ship spin away and explode. "Why wasn't I informed that we were going to engage the Breen?"

"There was no warning," Martin replied short of patience. "They came out of nowhere."

"Nowhere?"

"It's true, sir," Shen Yu reassured him. "I don't understand it; I was running constant sensor sweeps for cloaked ships. But that destroyer – there was no sign. Not even as it decloaked. One second there was nothing, and then it was coming at us, like it just suddenly popped into existence."

Koloudi considered this a moment. "Could this have something to do with what happened with the *Bosuet*?" he asked.

"Do you think that our encounter with the *Bosuet* has had a detrimental effect on our ability to perform our duties?" asked S'pon. "It's possible. But none of the crew have thus far reported any similar incidents of lapses of concentration."

"Sir, with all due respect, I was fully focused," protested Shen Yu.

"The sensor logs do seem to validate the commander's assertion," S'pon said as he double-checked the data. "And it is extremely improbable that any kind of after-effect of the *Bosuet* attack would prevent us from discovering the deception in retrospect. I suggest we run a full diagnostic of our sensor array."

"Agreed," said Shen Yu. "But we can't discount the possibility that the Breen have developed a new form of cloaking technology, something we are unable to detect any trace of, even during the process of decloaking."

Koloudi looked at Admiral Martin, who was stood on the command platform clearing contemplating what he himself was thinking.

"If that's true," said Martin. "Then it the Breen could reap havoc through our lines. We have to find out what happened to the *Kennedy*. Continue with the search and inform me as soon as we find something. Captain, you have the bridge. I'm going to see if I can speak with our guest."

Breen Homeworld

Namateth moved within his mind, shifting from one part to another. He hadn't slept for almost two weeks and so had to keep shutting parts of his brain down in the quieter moments so he could get at least a little rest. He would have liked to go home; to spend some precious time with his family but, as always, he couldn't be spared.

Taking a moment to read through a planetary dispatch, Namateth put his name to it. The people needed to know that the war was going well. He wouldn't lie to them though. Unlike in the Federation, all setbacks were made

public, but his aids would always put the best possible spin on things. A long time ago he would play with the wording to make the truth plainer, but now he left it as it was. He didn't need to burden with the same weight of worries that he carried. And there was a small part of him maybe, that might have liked opposition to the war to breed unchecked through the bows of their subterranean cities, but, as ever, such feelings were marginal. The people were loyal to the Confederacy and could see clearly the reasons they were fighting.

The Federation was polluting the entire quadrant with their corrupt ideals, insidiously spreading through the stars, a force akin to the Borg, only more devious, and in many ways, more dangerous. In the name egalitarianism they sort to homogenise the entire galaxy, to wash it clear and mould it in their own image; their own universal concept of what was right, and what was good. But the Breen would never submit to such a totalitarian regime, for though the Federation claimed to be democratic and to work for the people, this propaganda was laughable, and in recent times the Thothis had watched with a mixture of horror and dismay as the Federation grew in power and influence; the way it consumed new races, offering them vital protection and support if only they would become just like them, adopt their values and systems of government, submit to Federation law.

Many of those on Breen that studied the Federation had believed that the Dominion would provide a natural end to what was effectively the Earth Empire, and that galactic sociology would enter a new, healthier phase of growth and diversity after the war. But that had not been the case. Earth had won. They enlisted the help of other races, the Klingons and Romulans, through their deviousness and cunning, and turned the tide against not only the Dominion, but also nature. That was why the Breen had entered the war. It was said that within the Federation that it was the influence of the Dominion shapeshifters, or fear that they would be next, or even the opportunity of territorial gain, but the real reason was that, albeit too late, they'd realised that the Federation was going to be victorious, and so they had to act to prevent that. But they had lost, and as their scientists theorised that, with the Cardassian Union in tatters, the Klingons and spent force, and the Romulans fighting amongst themselves, with all the normal checks and balances gone, that there would be an era of unprecedented expansion for the Federation, the Thothis made their plans. Nature had failed to break the Federation's stranglehold on the minds of hundreds of star systems within its borders, and so they had took the responsibility. It was a risky gambit. If they failed then that era would surely come, and all cultural divergence would be wiped out; there would be a genocide of ideals and ideas and everything would become Federation: Earth would rule all.

Jugartha was standing office, having suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

"What is it?" asked Namateth sweeping back through his mind; bringing all parts of it back into focus.

"There is a problem with the demonstration. Another Federation warship has been detected in the area. They've destroyed the *Notan*."

USS *Dauntless* Sickbay

"I'm telling you; there's nothing I can do!"

"Doctor, I don't think you quite understand what's at stake here," said Admiral Martin following Doctor Golding as he tried to retreat to his office and end the discussion altogether. "We need answers, and that man is the only one that might be able to provide them."

"He's in a coma! If he was a member of a race in the Federation, I wouldn't be able to bring him out of it, but considering he's half Breen, there are too many unknowns to even contemplate what you're asking."

"There must be something you could try. He's also half Bajoran. Isn't there anything in the annals of Bajoran medical science that might point to a possible way to revive him? I know you've looked. I know the requests you have made to Starfleet Medical over the past twenty-four hours."

Golding snorted at that. "It doesn't make any difference. There's nothing I can do. And if I started experimenting blindly, I'm more likely to kill him altogether, instead of bring about any kind of miraculous recovery."

"I can order you, Doctor."

"You most certainly cannot. You can throw me in the brig, that's what you can do. Or you can leave me to do my job. But there is not a cat's chance in hell that I'm going to break my oath to sate your lust for intelligence. This discussion is over."

With that, Golding slammed the door of his office closed, leaving Martin fuming outside.

Main Bridge

"Sir, I think I have something," said Shen Yu.

What his first officer had detected looked like Breen warp signatures, but it was hard to tell from such a distance, and there was no sign of the *Kennedy*. Koloudi ordered an intercept course nonetheless. If there were Breen marauding apart this part of the front line then that might explain the *Kennedy*'s disappearance. But what they'd picked up looked like just a couple of small vessels, not nearly enough firepower to take out the *Kennedy*, unless they were all that were left from the battle in which the Federation

starship had succumbed. And there was of course another possibility though – it might be an ambush.

“You’re still out of uniform, Captain,” Admiral Martin barked as he reappeared on the bridge. So Golding had justified Gook’s faith in him. Good. He didn’t move from the centre seat as Martin came to sit by his side.

“We’ve located what look like two Breen warp signatures,” said the captain. “And are moving to investigate.”

Several minutes passed wordless. Considering Koloudi’s improper dress, Martin could have easily have ordered the captain off the bridge, but Koloudi suspected that he was too preoccupied with Golding’s refusal to attempt to extract information from Fonon to worry about something so petty as a uniform.

As they entered visual range of the Breen ships, they gasped; no one could believe what they were seeing. There were the two Breen ships, two frigates, and between them, secured by tractor beams, seemingly undamaged but powerless, was the USS *Kennedy*. The huge, elegant silver form of the *Sovereign* class starship dwarfed the Breen vessels, yet it was defenceless and at their mercy.

“How the hell did two frigates capture a *Sovereign*?” said Martin.

“Even taking into the account the possibility of the Breen having developed a new form of cloaking device,” said S’pon, “I fail to see how two such inferior vessels could have overpowered such a starship.”

“S’pon’s right,” confirmed Shen Yu. “And I’ve conducted a cursory sensor sweep of the *Kennedy*. I didn’t pick up any Breen, but what looks like a full complement of Federation crew.”

“What if there aren’t just two though,” said Koloudi. “If the Breen have really made major advances in cloaking technology, then all our estimates of their fleet strength, and all our intelligence of their movements and locations, could be wrong. For all we know there could be dozens of vessels all around us. If this cloak is so perfect, we might never know.”

That notion only served to reinforce the heavy sense of strangeness that’d descended on the bridge; the gravity of their captain’s words pulling on everyone of them. Suddenly, the *Dauntless* felt like a very small ship in a very big, and unfriendly, universe. She was a large and powerful vessel relative to other ships of the fleet, certainly, but against an armada of enemy ships, they could quickly find themselves overwhelmed, especially if those ships had the ability to pop in and out of existence as that destroyer had. They might engage two ships and in a heartbeat find themselves under fire from a dozen others, swept into destruction before they could draw breath to order retreat.

“We can’t let the Breen keep that prize,” said Captain Koloudi.

“Agreed,” replied the admiral. “Ensign, bring us around to course four-two-eight mark seven. Commander, target the near Breen frigate. But understand, if we should find ourselves surrounded, if those ships are not alone, don’t hesitate to switch your target. The *Kennedy* must not fall into the hands of the Breen, no matter what the sacrifice. Understood?”

“Aye, sir.”

CHAPTER TWO

USS *Dauntless* Main Bridge

On the view-screen at the head of the bridge, the two Breen ships, upon seeing the Federation starship coming out of warp, disengaged their tractor beams and wheeled round to attack. Everyone held their breath, fearing that if their captain's fears were realised, that it might be their last.

A moment before the *Dauntless's* phasers plunged into her, the nearest Breen frigate tried desperately to get out of the way. It was too slow though, and beams of powerful energy tore into its shields, overwhelming them.

"Their shields are collapsing," reported Shen Yu as the *Dauntless* sailed past her target and began to come around for a second pass. "We hit them pretty hard but they still have weapons."

The point was proven as the *Dauntless* was jolted this way and that, as the two Breen vessels found their feet and returned fire on the large Federation ship. They were no match a *Galaxy* class though, and their next run against their primary target proved devastating. They all watched the Breen ship break apart, half of it exploding into nothing, the other tore to bits by the explosion.

"Target the second vessel," ordered Koloudi before Admiral Martin could.

"Aye-Sir...they're gone!"

Martin glared at Shen Yu. "Gone?"

"Gone, sir. Like the destroyer; they just disappeared. I'm detecting absolutely no trace of them."

Martin looked like he was about to burst with frustration. The evidence pointing to the Breen having some kind of strange new technology was mounting. The Federation was just beginning to gain a little purchase in the war. Their success in destroying the Breen depots, and their progressing negotiations with the Cardassians had given them cause for optimism. But if the Breen had suddenly made a jump in technological expertise...

"Can you raise the *Kennedy*?" asked Martin.

"Negative," reported S'pon. "The ship has power for little more than rudimentary life-support, and the explosion of the Breen warp core has irradiated the outer hull to such an extent as to render the signal from their comm badges too weak."

“Sir,” put in Shen Yu suddenly. “I’m detecting several lifesigns aboard the wreck of the Breen frigate. They seem to be hold up in a section of the vessel that’s survived the blast.”

“Can we beam them out?” asked Koloudi.

“There’s too much interference, and the lifesigns are too weak.” S’pon told them. “We’d need to send a team aboard.

“We don’t have time,” said Martin. “I’ll lead a team aboard the *Kennedy*; see what’s going on. You watch our backs, Captain. If the Breen return with overwhelming force, my orders still stand.”

“What about the Breen survivors?” Koloudi asked tersely.

“Leave them. If they’re still alive once we’ve investigated what happened to the *Kennedy*, then we’ll send a team over. But we can’t afford to have two away teams dividing our attention when the Breen can seemingly reappear in an instant.” Satisfied that he had made himself clear, Martin signalled to S’pon and a security officer to join him, and then made for the exit.

“Sir,” gasped a young ensign. “I want to come with you.”

Martin turned to appraise the woman that had stopped. He didn’t need to ask her reasons for wanting to join the away mission; it was clear from her English accent, but he said anyway, “We hardly need a cosmologist on such a mission, Ensign Ali.”

The dark-skinned ensign fixed him with an unflinching glare, out of character for her normally demure demeanour. “I know. But I want to come.”

Martin turned away, and as he walked off the bridge, he said, “Very well.”

USS *Kennedy* Main Bridge

They appeared in blazing light shining out of the darkness. Shielding his eyes, Admiral Martin heard someone give the order to lower weapons, and the light resolved into a ghostly darkness.

“Nikolai! It’s good to see you again.”

As his vision readjusted, Martin could make out the speaker, which was the captain of the *Kennedy*, a tall, balding man with blond eyebrows and moustache.

“Your Highness,” replied Marin with a little bow.

“Now then, let’s not stand on ceremony. Sir will be just fine.”

“Yes, sir,” said the admiral to the captain.

Captain Windsor smiled, “So what brings you all the way out here?”

Martin hesitated just a moment, wondering if the old prince had even noticed that his ship was without power and adrift.

“You actually. There hadn’t been any communications with the *Kennedy* for two days and we were sent to find out why. You were being tractored back to the Breen Confederacy.”

“Yes, of course. Terrible business. Two Breen ships came out of absolutely nowhere, and before we could respond, everything went dead. Our entire EPS grid just cut out and we were left utterly helpless.”

“Didn’t you have your shields up?”

“Of course! But it didn’t make a difference.”

A chill went through Martin, and he prayed that the *Kennedy* had suffered so catastrophic failure in its power matrix. The other possibility was almost too dreadful to contemplate.

“But Nikolai,” Captain Windsor went on after a moment, “where are your manners? You haven’t introduced me to your crew!”

“Oh, sorry, sir. This is Ensign S’pon, Ensign Hashim, and Ensign Ali.”

S’pon and Hashim made little respectful bows, but Ali, a considerably more heartfelt curtsy.

“Alice Ali, is it? Always nice to meet a fellow countryman out here. Nikolai here leans towards his Russian side I think,” the prince enthused while shaking her hand. “Have you been in Starfleet long?”

“Captain! Sir,” interrupted Martin. “With all due respect, I think we should stick to the matter at hand. The Breen could return at any moment.”

“But of course! Of course. It’s sort of ingrained, you see? Ever since I could stand up straight and talk I’ve been taught to play the role of the dignitary. But you’re absolutely correct. Commander Garcia here – where are you? Oh, there you are – has been put in charge of restoring power.”

A rather put-upon looking woman emerged from the shadows having been beckoned by her captain.

“Ensign,” Martin said to S’pon, “work with the commander and see if you can restore power. And try and figure out what happened. Sir, may I have a word in private?”

USS *Dauntless* Bridge

As the static filled transmission ended, Koloudi sat back in his chair. It wasn't good news. Bad enough that the Breen had seemingly developed the ability to pop in and out of existence at will, but if they had also found a way to render, in the blink of an eye, such a powerful starship helpless, then things really didn't bode well. Especially since Evans was still trying to patch up the damage from their two skirmishes.

"As soon as the tractor beam is back online tether the *Kennedy* and set a course back to Starbase 521. And send a coded message back to Command summarizing what's happened."

"Aye, sir," replied Shen Yu, seemingly as uneasy as his captain. These new revelations were expanding the universe still further, and, conversely, shrinking them. It felt as if they were becoming more helpless and insignificant by the moment, and though the vanished Breen fleet had thus far not appeared, there was at least one enemy ship out there, and Koloudi was sure that it would be back.

USS *Kennedy* Captain's Ready Room

"Well? Spit it out man!"

Martin tried to find a way to broach the subject tactfully, but it wasn't easy. One of the worst responsibilities that came with increased authority was that of delivering bad news.

"I'm afraid it's your mother, sir. Starfleet Commander received word from the royal physician yesterday that she had taken a turn for the worst. They don't think she'll recover."

The normally exuberant captain went quiet for a moment, as he assimilated the news.

"They want me to go back?"

"Yes, sir."

"Impossible! There's a war on! I have responsibilities to my ship, my crew."

"With all due respect, sir, you have other responsibilities now; to your family, and to your country. You always knew this day would come."

The prince mulled that over, his effervescent character suddenly darkened.

"I could abdicate."

"And let your daughter take the throne?"

"Don't be a bloody fool! She's just a child for God's sake. No, my brother."

"Succession will pass to Princess Beatrice. Only the British Constitutional Committee could determine otherwise, and they are unlikely change the rules."

Captain Windsor let out what seemed like a growl of frustration and started pacing his ready room, a look of fury on his usually benign face. "This is all my mother's doing. She's probably not half as bad as she makes out, you know. She never wanted me out here, would rather I was at home shaking people's hands and pinning medals to other people's chests. I said to her, I said: *what right have I to represent a nation if all I've ever done with my life is prance about in a uniform covered with medals I never earned?* And you know what she said? That it was my birthright and that was enough! That I'd only get myself killed out here and the line would be broken. Of course when she realised that I wouldn't be swayed by her nonsense, she had me married off so fast my feet didn't touch the ground. She thought, of course, that a pretty young wife would discourage me from pursuing a career in Starfleet. Imagine her disappointment when it didn't. I think if it wasn't for my daughters, she would have worried herself to death long ago; just to get me back."

Captain Windsor stopped his pacing and finally dropped down into the seat behind his desk. "Forgive me, Nikolai, my old friend, this is just all a bit much to take."

"I quite understand, sir. But maybe it doesn't have to be the end of your career. You will have to go back, for a while at least, but after that, who knows?"

"Maybe you're right. I could take a posting on Earth. Always plenty that needs to be done there, and then I could still fulfil my other duties." Windsor sighed. "I suppose I knew the jig was up when Admiral Bailer gave me a *Sovereign*. The bloody irony was too much for the universe to bear." Again getting to his feet, seemingly a touch revived, Windsor went on, "I suppose Commander Garcia deserves her chance in the centre seat. And like all fathers, I will have to live vicariously through my daughter. She's just been assigned to the *T'Vran* you know, Starfleet liaison. Chip off the old block that girl!"

USS *Dauntless* Main Bridge

"We've managed to restore very minimal power on the *Kennedy* by tapping directly into the warp core," reported Admiral Martin over the comm. "We've

got back short range sensors, manoeuvring thrusters, and one phaser array, as well as a number of other internal ship's systems. But it is unlikely that we will be able to reinitialise much else. The *Kennedy's* EPS grid needs a complete overhaul. We can't even be completely sure what the Breen did to it, let alone fix it."

Koloudi could feel his head growing thick and muddy with all the sleep he had missed, and all the worry that was piling up on him.

"We'll have the tractor beam back up and running in just a few minutes. But Admiral, we can't discount the possibility that the Breen are monitoring us. If they attack and hit us with what hit the *Kennedy*, we'll be helpless."

"We may have devised a rather drastic defence against this new weapon."

"Drastic?"

"Well, it seems based on the fact that the *Dauntless* hasn't thus far been attacked by the weapon, that it must take time to recharge after each use. It also seems likely that to some extent the device is reliant on the target ship's own energy matrix. Commander Garcia theorises that if you were to shut down your reactors, and take your main computer off-line, then the weapon might be rendered useless against you."

"Might? Admiral, have you any idea how long it will take to reinitialise the *Dauntless* from scratch? You hardly have a phaser to your name, if we come under attack the last thing we need to be doing is shutting down."

"What's the alternative, Captain? If you get hit in the same way as the *Kennedy* then the Breen will come away with two prizes."

"We don't even know this weapon exists!"

Before the admiral could reply though, the signal was lost, and Koloudi was knocked flying forward out of his seat.

"The Breen are back!" called Shen Yu.

Crawling back into his chair, Koloudi replied, "How many ships?"

"Just one."

"Koloudi to engineering, Chief, what's your status?"

USS *Dauntless* Sickbay

Twice, Doctor Golding was knocked clean across his sickbay. He cursed as he took hold of a biobed. Steadying himself as the ship lurched under the

attack, Golding prepared for the influx of injured crewmen. Where was Ensign Scheunemann? She should have been back by now.

Just as Golding was about to summon her over the comm though, two strange things happened. The first were the lights started to fade, and then went offline altogether. And the second; as the darkness consumed the ship, Fonon Jo'Uva sat up on his biobed.

CHAPTER THREE

USS *Kennedy* Bridge

"The *Dauntless* has been hit," called Ensign S'pon. "They've lost power."

"Hit?" asked Admiral Martin frantic with worry. "Was it the weapon or did they shut themselves down?"

"It's impossible to tell, sir. My sensor readings seemed to indicate that they were trying to shut down, but I cannot determine whether they were successful. Also, we don't know that effecting a shut down of her EPS grid would have protected her from the effects of the weapon."

The *Kennedy* was jolted again knocking Martin sideways across the dimly lit bridge.

"What about the weapon itself?"

"The object only materialised for a few seconds. There is no sign of it now."

"Sir," said Commander Garcia to Captain Windsor as the ship lurched again, "The Breen frigate seems to be focussing its firepower on us now."

That didn't bode well. Clearly the Breen believed that the *Dauntless* was out of the picture, because if they suspected that a *Galaxy* class starship could rejoin the fray, then surely they would have battered it to death while it was helpless.

"Can't you blow up that bloody Breen ship?" demanded the captain.

"Sir, we have only one phaser array and minimum manoeuvring thrusters. They're just too fast for us."

"Why don't they just lock onto us with their tractor beam?" asked Ensign Ali.

"They want us defenceless," answered Commander Garcia. "It's likely Captain Koloudi was right and they were monitoring us. When they realised the *Dauntless* was about to bring its tractor beam back online they decided they didn't have any choice but to attack. And now with one ship powerless and the other almost as helpless the Breen captain probably sees this as his or her big chance for glory."

"So they'll stop when they knock our weapons out, right?"

"I wouldn't bet on it ensign," said Martin. "That frigate can only tractor one ship home. More likely their captain will settle for destroying one of the most powerful ships in Starfleet, and capturing another."

Breen Homeworld Thotha Council Chamber

Jugartha was watching the unfolding battle intently, willing victory with all her might, but Namateth had other things on his mind. The phase cloak had worked perfectly. The Federation's sensor technology didn't appear to be able to detect any trace of it and would give them a great tactical advantage in the coming months. And as for the weapon, it had worked flawlessly when they had used it on the vessel that the Starfleeters referred to as the *Kennedy*, but Namateth still had cause for concern. It took too long until it could be used a second time, which was something they would have to perfect. Also, there was irregular sensor data from the other ship. Their power matrix had collapsed in a way that varied from their models. It was a different class of ship on course, but Namateth wasn't inclined to underestimate the Starfleeters. Time and again they had proved to be resourceful in a crisis.

"Send a message to the commander of the Ocath to concentrate its fire on the other ship," Jugartha ordered suddenly. "It is less advanced. We should keep our initial prize."

"No," protested Namateth before the order could be sent. "We still need to gather sensor data on the effects of the weapon on the second target."

Jugartha blistered at having been contradicted. "They are dead! There is nothing more we can learn from them!"

"The sensor data is different from the first time the weapon was used. We need more information and more time to study it. Destroy the first vessel and capture the second. That's an order."

Again, Jugartha looked ready to object but the consensus of the council was with Namateth. Few of them were as military minded as Jugartha, most being scientists of some description, and thus willing to sacrifice victory in battle if it meant collecting valuable data.

Jugartha had no choice but to acquiesce as Namateth went back to studying sensor readings. For a moment he shifted about in his mind, opening and closing doors, attempting to find a few seconds of rest so that he might be able to focus that little bit more.

USS *Dauntless* Sickbay

"No more night! The neo-classical distinctions of temporal divergence poring into the night..."

In the pitch darkness that sickbay had been plunged into, Doctor Golding tried desperately to find a torch as he listened to Fonon's crazed ramblings. Why

hadn't the emergency lights come on? What the hell had happened? At least they were no longer under fire, but for some reason that omen didn't feel as reassuring as it should of. At least if the ship was being battered then he'd know where and what the enemy was. Now though, in the dark, it was hard to be sure of anything.

Fonon was up on his feet, and had stopped ranting. Golding froze. He couldn't tell where the half-Breen was, but suspected that the man was stalking him. Fonon was a dangerous man with his mind intact, but there was no telling what he might do in his deranged state.

Talking a step back, Golding reached behind himself, trying to find a weapon. He regretted not having restrained Fonon, and having the security guard Martin posted in sickbay sent away, but his condition had seemed such that even if he had woken up he'd be more or less helpless. People in such comatose states generally came around slowly, half paralysed, and not quite knowing what was going on. Obviously though, the Breen were a different matter entirely.

As his fingers crept along the smooth mental surface behind him, Doctor Golding came across what he thought might be a laser scalpel. In his haste to grab it though, he knocked something onto the floor. It landed with a clatter and Fonon came flying at him through the blackness. Golding brought his makeshift weapon round at his assailant and there was a brief flashing of dark red light as the laser sliced across Fonon's forehead. But it was on minimum setting and didn't even slow him down.

All at once Fonon's hands were clasped tightly around Golding's throat.

"No more night!" the deranged half-Breen shouted into the doctor's face. "No more night!"

For a moment Golding thought he was going to die. Fonon lifted him clean off the ground as he crushed the human's throat. Desperately, Golding reached back behind him hoping to find something to defend himself with, but everything he touched seemed to go flying away from him. In his panic, in the pitch darkness, he couldn't focus.

Then suddenly he could breath again. Fonon let go and the doctor dropped back onto the floor and fell forward against him.

"What's this?" asked Fonon with the confusion of a child. "What is it?" As Golding recovered he felt Fonon's hands on him again, cupping his head and tilting it up to him with tenderness rather than menace. "Doctor, I rather think I've lost my mind."

"I'll...be the judge of that," Golding replied in-between coughing fits.

"Sorry, Doc. I think I'm going to have to kill you now. Nothing personal."

Open Space

As the dead form of the USS *Dauntless* drifted on its back, the USS *Kennedy* lumbered round to port, aiming its one weapon at the energetic Breen frigate. But it was too slow, and the Breen vessel easily avoided the spike of red phaser energy that cut through the void. Then, safe for a moment, the frigate wheeled round and unleashed its weapons of the huge Federation starship. They ripped all across the hull and, more importantly, the phaser array.

USS *Kennedy* Main Bridge

“Our weapons are gone!” shouted Commander Garcia.

All around was chaos. Twice the Breen vessel had targeted the bridge and twice Ensign S'pon, their makeshift helmsman, had only just managed to manoeuvre them to relative safety. But the shots had grazed the bridge and caused half the supporting structure to crumble. Men and women lay wounded or dead.

“Can we abandon ship?”

“We can try, but with the turbolifts down it's a hell of a hike.”

USS *Dauntless* Sickbay

For a few moment's Golding flirted with unconsciousness. Fonon had struck him hard in the side of the head, knocking him halfway across sickbay. And then as he lay confused, the half Breen had slammed his foot into the Doctor's ribcage.

Golding tried to roll away, and somehow clambered back up to his feet. He heard Fonon lurch towards him and tried to up some defence, but it was too feeble and he went crashing back against a biobed. In his desperation Golding scabbled over it and dropped onto the floor on the other side and both panicked and dazed the doctor attempted to stand but collapsed in an instant. He was too badly beaten up. There was blood in his mouth and in one of his eyes, one side of his face felt too big for the rest of his head. He was fairly certain he'd had at least one broken rib and a sprained wrist. Golding crawled towards what he thought was his office.

“Fonon, please,” he pleaded feeling that several of his teeth were loose. “I've tried to help you. I've taken care of you.”

Suddenly there were hands on the back of his uniform and Golding was being pulled backwards. He went crashing to the ground and slid into some

cabinets as Fonon's foot again found his ribs. This time Golding heard a clear snap and found himself suddenly gasping for breath.

"Sorry, Doc." said Fonon with what seemed a trace of regret. "No more night."

USS *Kennedy* Deck Two

Mere moments after Martin had ordered the evacuation of the bridge it had suffered a direct hit and decompressed. Now, their rag-tag group lurched towards the escape pods. No one believed they would get there though. The ship was coming apart around them.

"Well," said Ensign Ali. "At least with the warp core offline there is no chance of a full scale breach."

"No, they'll just tear through the engineering section and make sure they the core is destroyed," said Martin.

"Cowards!" yelled Captain Windsor. "Damn them!"

A large explosion knocked them all off their feet and plunged them back into utter darkness. And then as Martin regained his senses he became aware of was the sound of metal warping. He rolled onto his back and looked up. The ceiling was glowing faintly, and bent out of shape.

"Dear God," gasped Captain Windsor. They must have taken out half of Deck One with that."

The roof above them was all that was protecting them from the vacuum beyond. And judging from both the sound and the look of it, it was about ready to give.

USS *Dauntless* Sickbay

Gasping for breath, Golding felt Fonon's foot collide with his head as if from outside of his body. He watched or was aware of several of his teeth go skidding across the floor. The doctor knew what bad shape he was in, what Fonon had done to him and what he was still doing. It was the curse of his profession.

He lay sprawled and helpless, covered in blood and numb with pain. Fonon was ranting again and absently, Golding noted the severe shifts in Fonon's lucidity. Then, as yet another blew fell upon his broken body, Golding found himself bathed in light.

**USS *Dauntless*
Bridge**

“Main power is back!” called Shen Yu.

“Target that Breen frigate! Put us between them at the *Kennedy*!”

**USS *Kennedy*
Deck Two**

As S’pon and Martin dropped down through the access hatch to deck three the hull finally breached. It was just a tiny tear at one of the points where two sections of deck plating joined, but with emergency force fields offline, the atmospheric pressure against the vacuum of space meant that it would only be a matter of moments before the entire section was spaced.

“Captain!” shouted Ensign Ali over the increasing roar of the atmosphere that was being vented, and the metallic screech as the pressure began to tear the decking away.

Captain Windsor smiled weakly as the gravity plating began to give way. He grabbed the young ensign and shoved her into the hatch. Martin and S’pon caught her.

A moment later the elderly prince slammed shut the small square trapdoor, and then found himself being yanked upwards into space as the ceiling was finally torn away above him.

**USS *Dauntless*
Bridge**

“Sir, the Breen ship is gone, and they’ve rescued the survivors of the other Breen frigate.”

Koloudi shook his head in despair, both at their failure to destroy the enemy ship, and at the opportunity they’d missed in not taking prisoners when they had the chance. Clearly the Breen had made a striking leap forward in technology, and those survivors might have helped them understand just what that meant for the future. But the chance was gone and the Breen had escaped having done terrible damage to the *Kennedy*.

“Put a tractor beam on the *Kennedy* and get us the hell out of here.”

**USS *Dauntless*
Sickbay**

As Captain Windsor materialised he found a tall alien of indeterminate race and dressed in the kind of standard hospital smock that indicated he was a long-term patient, screaming, covering his eyes, and staggering back from a severely beaten up Starfleet doctor.

“I say, what’s all this then?” Windsor demanded with some indignation.

At the sound of another man’s voice Fonon became lucid again and glared at the old Englishman, a look of fury in his eyes.

“*No more night!*” he yelled, and then went for the captain with all his might.

Captain Windsor quickly shifted his body weight and deflected the madman away from him. He then drew his phaser and with three quick blasts, rendering him unconscious.

“Resilient fellow,” he commented putting his weapon away and tapping his comm badge. “Windsor to Captain Koloudi. Sir, I suggest you requisition one of my doctors with all possible haste. You have a medical emergency down in your sickbay.”

CHAPTER FOUR

USS *Dauntless* Ten-Forward

After only a few minutes dragging the wreck of the *Kennedy* back towards friendly space, the *Dauntless* received a transmission from the USS *Swordfish*. Starfleet had dispatched a small task force into the area to investigate the report that Shen Yu had sent back concerning both the Breen's capture of the *Kennedy*, and the evidence of a new form of cloaking device.

Martin had been stunned when he'd seen the damage that the Breen had done to the *Kennedy*. From inside it had seemed bad, but looking at the broken form, which the *Dauntless* passed over to the *Swordfish*, Martin realised that the Breen had spread their fire equally about the ship. The starboard nacelle had been completely destroyed, and the engineering section had been mauled. Ensign Ali had been right; they *were* lucky their warp core had been off-line, or else it would have certainly breached. Still, the damage was devastating, and there were few survivors from that part of the ship.

That meant two Sovereign-class starships had taken out in the past few months, and a kind of dread was building in Martin. Before they had encountered this new technology the Breen now seemed to possess, the war had been going badly, but they were holding on, and even beginning to look like gaining ground. But now he found a certain part of himself making plans in case of ultimate defeat; for the day when Starfleet as a whole was as paralysed as the *Kennedy* and the *Swiftsure*, and the Federation was left at the mercy of the Breen Confederacy.

"Admiral." Martin turned to see Captain Koloudi approaching. "Shen Yu and Evans have finished their debriefing, and Intelligence has finished going through our sensor logs. We've received orders to continue with our mission."

"Good. Good. How's the doctor?"

"He'll be on light duties for a while. We've had a few extra medical personnel assigned to ensure he gets the rest he needs, but there was no chance of relieving him altogether."

"No. He's a stubborn man," said Martin with a trace of irritation. He then went on, "Trust me, Captain; Fonon will pay for what he's done. But we still need him. He's our best lead on Section 31."

"The man is clearly unbalanced. Whatever happened to him on the Bosuet homeworld has torn his mind apart. I'm not even sure if he knows the difference between reality and fantasy anymore."

"He's still our best lead," said Martin with a shrug.

Koloudi frowned but said nothing more. Martin knew how he felt about the mission, and how he felt about him personally. And in part Martin could understand it. The events of the last couple of days made Martin wish he could get back into the fight proper rather than chasing ghosts. But their mission was necessary. If the Federation was going to stand any chance then they needed to track these people down and bring them to some kind of justice.

Breen Homeworld Thotha Council Chamber

The Breen Thotha Council poured over the telemetry from the demonstration. Jugartha was furious that the Breen commanders had failed, but Namateth chose to look at the pluses. They'd put a very powerful Starfleet battlecruiser out of the war, and demonstrated the effectiveness of their weapon. If the other ship hadn't shown up then they would have surely held onto their prize.

"We're receiving a transmission," said Lethlan. "It is our contact."

"On screen," ordered Namateth.

"I've been studying the data you sent me on the energy dampener," he said. "You lost two ships for the sake of this demonstration. I hope it wasn't anyone you knew."

"Casualties were inevitable," Namateth replied. "I trust you are not blinded by the intervention of the Federation battleship. This test was a success. We've proven that we can uphold our end of the bargain. Now it is a question for you: are you with us?"

Their contact smirked.

"Despite the stupidity of your Breen commanders, I can see the potential of the weapon. In the hands of someone who knows how to use it, the Federation won't stand a chance. Send it to me, and you'll have your alliance. Our forces will remain on Haldar and we will send you the plans for the plasma torpedoes."

Jugartha was ready to spit blood at the insult levelled at the Breen commanders, despite the fact that she privately agreed with it. But she held her tongue and let Namateth reply with a curt, "Very well."

Their contact nodded, and then vanished from the screen.

"I don't trust him," said Jugartha as the transmission was terminated. "He will betray us at the first opportunity."

Namateth gazed up at the now blank view-screen. "And we will betray him. But first we will destroy the Federation. What happens then will simply happen."