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Star Trek: - The Cataline Race

Chapter 1

(McGregor)

Sitting comfortably in a chair that was not designed for comfort, McGregor devoted his private time to completing the endless amount of work in the form of files on his glass-computerized tablet. He wondered how long it would take for the next shipment of valuable cargo to drop into his lap.

He was the type of man not to fuss over the necessities of life and was more devoted to making money than anything else. But his recent shipment provided him with the materials and staff to run his massive vessel called the USS Explorer.

He drifted his eyes over the immediate area drinking in all the details and he always felt taken back by the amazing view. The towering waterfall in front of him stood like the centrepiece of a huge model, with the flow of the water displacing the warm processed air, creating a mist of cool water vapour that often cleaned all his problems away. Trees and birds would rustle and sing in the background, making this place one of the best areas to rest in. The undergrowth beneath the canopy of interlocked trees flourished in the artificial light that illuminated the large area of recreational space.

It was an area that McGregor often wandered into when he was off duty; it offered him a refuge to be away from the troubles of running a Starship and he was the type of man to always run into trouble. His biggest annoyance was that of Starfleet, and due to recent financial strain on his enterprise, he had to part contract with them, something he frowned upon daily.

With plenty of dirt under his fingernails and many years of service to Starfleet, his requests for promotions had always been rejected and this soon left him with no option than to leave Starfleet and adventure in his own command.

The Explorer fell into his lap when the Ferengi desperately tried to get the upper hand in a game of cards. Their subtle cheating soon brought on the wrath of McGregor who gave them two choices, give up the 250-year-old ship, or die. They chose the latter, but not before they threatened McGregor; because the Ferengi had spent many years nicking the vessel from a scrap recycling dock.

Straightening his immaculate custom made uniform and running a perfectly sculpted hand through his distinguished black and grey hair; he gazed across the area and saw Sam grinning like a boy. He was the type of Jack-the-lad that would always chat up the newest female crewmember and try to get himself into more trouble than he could get out of. But he was one of McGregor's friends and associates who provided invaluable help to his personal crew. The rest of his staff was on loan from Starfleet to help in the operation of the ship. For this deed, he will need to take on Starfleet missions and help the greater good.

"Greater good! That will be the day!" McGregor murmured to himself as he thought about the missed payments Starfleet often made. In fact the recent bill was not paid and he would need to chat with Arania who was the bright spark in the ship.

Now excitement thrummed through the warm processed air that indicated someone unique was wandering the area. Even the plant and animal life lifted with spirit offering a calming effect to all the humans and aliens that worked together.

McGregor raised his eyes from his notes, as if expecting someone to appear around the wooden shelter corner. Proud and beaming, Arania appeared in front of McGregor as if she knew exactly how to find him. Her soul was pure and fragile, not to mention the effect she has on the crew with her stunning beauty for her species.

Her skin was a pure patterned blue that covered all of her body and acts as natural clothing. Spots and different colour patterns imprint fabric-like images all over her skin, forming hard protective areas and soft light fabric that hangs down like clothing. These creatures offer a level of harmony that cannot be matched by any other species. They have silvery blue hair and cat-like ears, finished with small fang-like teeth. Beautiful cannot describe these creatures, as their nature is very hard working and passionate about their lifestyle.

Arania was brought up on Earth with fifty-five others from her species. Their arrival was a complete mystery; The USS Peacekeeper picked them up twenty years before, floating in space in what looked like a beaten up ship that was failing left right and centre. They were all taken back to Earth and given shelter. Every attempt was made to find their home world and reunite them with their families, as they were all very young children at the time. But all attempts failed and eventually they took their own paths on Earth: Arania was one of the many that joined Starfleet and ended up on McGregor's ship for over one year.

McGregor was immune to the effects of her eye-catching beauty but he often wondered about her attitude. It was not childish, as one would expect, but a more mature and intelligent attitude for her age. Being second in command offered her a position that she was proud to uphold.

Arania stood at her location with the golden artificial light beaming of her blue skin. Her fin like clothing flowed down her body like silk fibres that emanate from her chest and cover most of her body. It enriched her natural beauty and McGregor could almost feel that she was standing there on purpose, deliberately trying to provoke a response from him. But McGregor remained committed to his work, refusing to acknowledge her attempt at playful distractions.

She knew that McGregor was spending too much time working and little time resting, such hardship will only begin to erode his performance in running a vessel such as the Explorer. But she did show some care for her captain and often had to put her foot down in order to get things done. She was contemplating what to do.

When an over-eager pale-skinned man named Sam hurried to her location, McGregor knew instantly what he was after. Sam and Arania often battled each other through failed chat up lines and overenthusiastic turndowns that often left Sam without a victory. He would always chat up Arania because of her stunning beauty and kind natured heart. But McGregor was not overly impressed.

Quiet and unassuming, McGregor slipped past the two arguing individuals, but he noticed that Arania tried to keep her composure with the most ridiculous chat up lines Sam could invent. But this was not the time to entertain himself; he needed to find a quiet place out of the limelight of his crew. He melted into the wilderness of the habitat dome. Watching. Observing. Thinking.

Sam was young and in his prime, his hormones ran his life and he often chased more than he could catch, but this stunning creature was something that hypnotised him the most, her smile would melt his heart all the way past the outer bulkhead. He looked deep into Arania's blue eyes that glided with a hit of glowing yellow that could not be noticed unless someone looked deeply.

Sam looked at her with a distracted smile, "You know, you have been on this ship for over a year and we really haven't chatted that much, I would be honoured if you would accompany me to the dining hall."

Arania frowned, "You asked me that two days ago. I said No, remember I'm a Starfleet officer, stop bothering me and return to your duties."

She spoke with perfect English, but Sam was not going to back down. "You know, I do have some matters that need discussing about the Space Cars, I would like to discuss it over a more relaxed environment."

Arania's expressing became somewhat condescending, "Look around, don't you think this is a relaxed environment? We are at warp, in a forest in the middle of this great ship."

Sam did not shade his answer, he knew that she was not going to give in lightly and needed to take another approach, but before he had the chance to say something clever, Arania noticed that McGregor was gone.

McGregor sneaked himself into another wooden shelter out of the way from prying eyes, the waterfall still stood paramount in the middle of the dome and this time, shrubs covered most of the area that hid him from view.

He sipped at his flask of earl grey tea that he managed to replicate at a refresh station before all his concentration focused on his documents on the tablet. He took a moment to look up at the sky and past the hardened transparent aluminium, admiring the streaming matter of the stars whizzing past, this reminded him of the Starship Voyager.

It was five years after the appearance of voyager in the Alfa-Quadrant and the one person that remained at the foremost centre point of his mind was admiral Janeway. She always found a way to get under McGregor's skin and he always found the way to avoid her, luckily his Starfleet dealings went through a more respected individual and McGregor received a steady stream of income for his endeavours.

But the iron maiden was hunting him down and it would only be a matter of time until she finds him. McGregor had all the answers and secret places to hide, but even a man with his experience knows that Janeway always gets her man.

Suddenly a blue figure appeared in front of him, as if a gust of wind swept away his daydreaming and brought him back to reality.

"I knew I would find you here!" Arania said hiding her grin.

Nothing frustrated McGregor more than to be constantly interrupted over trivial matters and it did not matter who was causing the interruption. Even Arania would come face to face with his wrath once in a while and she was immune to his actions. Work needed to be done, bills needed to be paid and nothing was more annoying than endless amounts of reports that he needed to fill in.

But sometimes his carefully scheduled routines fell apart, reminding him that even firing a photon torpedo could set him back in weeks paperwork.

McGregor took a deep breath and smiled, "Arania, have you finished teasing Sam?"

Arania steepled her fingers on the wooden shelter as she secretly disapproved with that line of questioning, "I made him vanish!"

McGregor glowed with her silent expression knowing he hit a nerve. He kept his personal life secret and never fell in love or was attracted to anyone after his first marriage ended in disaster. He vowed not to fall in love or marry again, but he

always sensed that Arania had deep feelings for him. But he kept her in check and always backed away when things got hot.

"So why are you chasing me around the habitat dome. I don't want any more reports to fill in." McGregor finally said.

Arania stared at McGregor, as if he hurt her feelings, "I came to tell you that we have found that Ferengi you are after!"

McGregor snapped to his feet, like a fire was lit under him. "That sad excuse for a Ferengi! We've got him now."

Wide-eyed and full of energy, McGregor marched out of the habitat dome towards the nucleus of his vessel, Arania following close behind with much on her mind.

"Captain, may I remind you that Starfleet protocol forbids you to beat up any prisoners!" Arania responded in a raspy voice with her fine featherlike clothing fluttering with the motion.

But McGregor rushed through the factory style decks that lacked the Starfleet cleanness, like a fire was lit behind his ass. "That bloody cheated me all those years ago and threatened to hunt me down. Now I know that there is a huge reward for his skin."

Arania prayed that he knew the terms and conditions of the bounty otherwise he will have a lot of explaining to do if the Ferengi was returned to Starfleet dead.

"Don't worry about Starfleet regulations, I am independent and I don't care about them," McGregor said with a maddening smile. "Everything is under MY control."

The doors of the Command Deck hissed open with the massive panoramic windows lining the far wall that displayed the breathtaking view of the Explorer. The bow was massive and long portraying the true size of the 283 decks, two and a half kilometres long hull.

McGregor walked on and wrapped his fists on the metal railing, as if he needed to be anchored down as the stars whizzed passed the massive windows like a view from a cruise ship.

"What's our speed?" McGregor ordered pointing a finger at the helmsman.

"We are at warp seven, the three-phase warp drive is steady and no damage to the vessel." replied the ensign.

McGregor could almost imagine the alarms ringing in the cowering Ferengi vessel as it burns its engines to the max, trying to escape, pathetically.

The profiles of the Ferengi vessel were unmistakable and McGregor portrayed the look of a teenage boy that just got himself a new hot-rod. His eyes gleamed within the florescent-lit room as he slowly edged his way to his command chair, secretly grinning.

McGregor was cold as he issued orders, "Bring us closer to that vessel!" He clenched the armrest of his chair as he ran through the painful techniques he will perform on the Ferengi. He even let the mercenary Klingons slip into his mind, as he could picture them ripping of the Ferengi's ear lobes and feeding them to their pets.

When the navigation officer confirmed the distance, McGregor thought of another idea. "Move us into firing axes and target that ship with the main Beam Cannon. Activate all the flood lights on the hull."

McGregor hid his excitement of what a display this will cause for the frightened Ferengi onboard the small vessel. As the Explorer moved above the

Ferengi ship, one of the massive Cannons rotated and pointed directly at them. The floodlights lit the hull in a dazzling threat.

McGregor pressed his lips together, he had transmitted a surrender message, now he needs to wait and see if the Ferengi resist. But after a short while, a meek and frightened transmission came through from the vessel.

"May the profits be with you Captain McGregor." Said a boldfaced Ferengi, his ear lobes seemed larger than he last remembered, "What a dazzling display of force you have and may I offer my regards at any business propositions you may want to make with us."

McGregor thought for a moment. "I see that you remember me and I have not forgotten your last words." He got up and slowly walked around the control deck, feeling the power. "You have clearly overstepped your bounds and continually threaten me and my crew. Also, there is a large reward for you head."

He stopped and looked directly at the transmitter camera, making sure the high-resolution image of his face was being received on the other end, he needed to sound firm and invoke fear into the Ferengi, he loved to see them scream.

Sounding worried, the Ferengi replied in all his cowardly acts and hidden smiles that reached from one earlobe to the other, "McGregor, Sir, My dear friend, I have a wealth of supplies that a man of your intelligence and power would gladly purchase from me, and my reward is nothing compared to the services I can offer you."

McGregor could sense that the Ferengi was getting himself into a knot and unable to barter himself out of this one. He decided to end his suffering and reel him in. Besides, his appearance at grovelling was pathetic. He gestured towards the Comm officer and the screen went black.

Without warning, the Ferengi fired a volley of torpedoes that hurled in space at warp. They smashed into the Explorers shields with a pathetic lightshow. Not even a vibration was felt through the massive vessel.

McGregor grinned, he wondered if he should use the 1 TW(Terra Watt) Beam Cannons and melt the small vessel into a blob. But he needed the reward and held back his stabbing finger that had a mind of its own.

Travelling at near-relativistic speeds, the Ferengi fired all its remaining torpedoes at the massive Explorer. But its Hyper Advanced Regenerating Shields did not falter under the onslaught and made the scurrying Ferengi look like a young teenager playing chicken against a massive eighteen-wheeler lorry.

He finally ordered the Ferengi ship on the view screen; McGregor snuck a little grin and ordered a tractor beam on the very tiny ship trying to escape. The scale of the USS Explorer and the tiny Ferengi ship would leave anyone thinking that this was a bit over the top, but knowing the power he has, McGregor drags the ships to a halt in normal space.

A disgruntled Ferengi opened a channel again and instead of offering gifts and himself, he insulted McGregor, but this merely made him happier as he remembers that this was the same Ferengi that tried to cheat with him at cards and threatened him years before.

Chapter 2

(Trip Home)

McGregor, being that man that he is, forced the small Ferengi ship into one of the cargo bays and God only knows what he has planned for the Ferengi.

Approaching the Ferengi ship in one of the cargo bays McGregor bangs on the hull of the alien vessel demanding him to open the door. As you can imagine, the frightened Ferengi didn't comply at all.

All is silent in the cargo bay, just the hissing of pipes and the strange humming and pulsating sound of the USS Explorer.

The silence is suddenly broken when McGregor puts his hand out and calls for explosives to force the door open.

Arania, who followed him to the cargo bay, stated that she was concerned that this is not a suitable course of action and not part of the regulations. However after one of the officers gave him a cylinder device he muttered that he would make sure that he would not hurt him, MUCH.

However the Ferengi opened his door and cowering like a small girl he said, "Please, don't blow up my ship."

Towering down at the Ferengi, McGregor displays a semi smile as he gives the look of death into his eyes, "You have been giving me more trouble then I can handle Ferengi..." he then grabs him by the earlobes and drags him out of the cargo bay.

"You tried to cheat in the game of cards, you tried to kill me and then to top it off, you have been spreading rumours about me around my major contacts and affecting my business..." McGregor speaks as he drags the Ferengi to the holding deck.

Stopping in his tracks he then speaks directly to his face, "Fate is good to me..." the Ferengi then mutters, "Fate is not good to me!"

Arania then says in concern "What are you going to do with him?"

"I might put him in the observation dome and then shut down the force field and space him..." with that comment the Ferengi then looks very worried and tries to speak his way out of it by complimenting the caption on his work and it would be unnecessary to do this.

"Look, I am sure you are a reasonable man that would not think about doing this to a poor and defenceless Ferengi," speaking like a true member of his species as he is dragged through the steal corridors of the ship.

"I know many people and I know many things that can help you in your quest for profit. If you like I can join you." This comment was just like adding icing to a cake for McGregor.

The Ferengi was shocked and lost when he was then thrown into a cell that did not have a force field as a door. Speaking in mystery the Ferengi says, "What's this? No force field? How are you supposed to keep an eye on me?"

McGregor then turn and looks at the puzzled Ferengi, "Yeah! I know how good you are at escaping; it's going to be a little harder with a grid bolted locked door. Enjoy your stay." McGregor then shuts the 6-inch steal door looking trough a small view hole at the Ferengi.

McGregor then walks out of the cellblock back to the control centre with Arania following him. "What will you do to him?" she gracefully asks.

"Hand him back to Starfleet, this Ferengi is their number one thief and they will give us a lot of supplies for turning him in. I intend to get it."

"I am not an unreasonable and harsh man, you should know this by now," said McGregor. This comment then reassured Arania and relaxed her mind.

The captain's office is basic to his personality but there is not much that could be said for the decoration, as there was not much that can be done because the basic makeup of the room is mainly metal and the LED lights on the ceiling generate a more basic area.

Speaking onto his communication screen on his desk, McGregor informed Starfleet of the capture of their most wanted thief and collecting up to date information on the current situation on transport rights and the usual red tape that a typical cargo ship captain needs to know. However the situation then got a bit more serious when the next topic was addressed.

"I've got a large transport that needs clearance to sector one zero nine to starbase seven eight two, once I have collected it from earth, so I will need clearance for that also," said McGregor reading a document on a glass computer tablet and looking a little sarcastic on the last comment.

"That should be no problem, however McGregor! Once you leave earth for the star base I will need you to investigate an anomaly located in your path and report back. A few ships have gone missing in that area and you will be the closest." Said the admiral over the COM unit being arrogant as ever to McGregor. Starfleet does not agree too much about their relationship however they are living with it.

"One more thing before I go, there's a new crew member joining your crew, Tulack from Vulcan. He will be your operations officer," said the admiral on the COM unit.

"Another Vulcan? Admiral, with all due respect, I haven't had any good experience with the one I have at the moment and you want to assign another one?" McGregor said in an agitated state.

They both argued over the COM for a few more minutes before they decided to end their call with the standard computer voice saying, "connection terminated" which happens on every communication with Starfleet. However they did come to some agreements that benefit both sides.

McGregor marched onto the command deck to give his science officer the good news that he was to have a friend and not be the only Vulcan on the ship. The Vulcan, being as they are, showed no emotion and just carried on his job with the classic nod he does in agreement and understanding.

A few hours later, the colossal USS Explorer docked with the orbiting space station that orbits the Earth and the sheer size of the ship brings an impressive sight to the space station and the USS Explorer together.

McGregor performs the routine of ordering cargo to be offloaded and loaded with the exception of the Ferengi that needs to be taken down to Earth to stand for his crimes.

Arania meets up with the McGregor as he escorts the Ferengi to the transporter room.

"Captain, with your permission I would like to go to Earth before we take off on our next assignment." She asks in a shy but professional manner.

"Where are you going?" he said in a blunt and distasteful manner.

"I am going to meet up with other members of my species, I haven't been around mine for sometime and would like to be around mine for a few hours." She reluctantly replayed.

McGregor then noticed that he might have upset her or given her a scared look so he apologised, "Forgive my blunt question, I am not too happy about handing this Ferengi over after I spent a long time hunting him down." After

nudging the Ferengi he continued, "OK, Take one of the space cars down, I am sure you know how to drive them and if anything happens give us a call. But you need to be back before we leave."

After that comment, this put Arania at ease and she proceeded to the space car bays to go down to earth.

Then once she left the Ferengi stated "Why can't she take the transporter?" McGregor then grabbed his earlobe and said, "Her species can't be transported, now come with me because you have a date with destiny!"

A few hours passed and most of the loading has already been completed, just the usual red tape and the rounding up of crew was all that is left before the mighty ship can make it's journey to the space station. Before long Arania arrived back on the ship with the space car and supplies she managed to get from her friends, which is specific to her species.

While offloading her supplies she is confronted by the common person that she always runs into every now and then. That someone that always tries to chat her up and never stops. He is someone she would gladly like to see off the ship, but she secretly finds humans extremely humorous and very interesting to be around. However this individual called Sam works as maintenance and controls the space car bay. This leaves him the perfect opportunity to try and find every little bit of information about this blue haired beauty and perhaps introduce him to some of her friends who have not been influenced by Starfleet and are free.

Sam is completely harmless and Arania knows this so she normally teases him to the point he leaves.

"So, What's all this? Trying to move house are we?" Sam said in a cheeky way.

"Sam... I know what you are doing, my species may be a little telepathic but I can still read your intentions like an open book and no, I have not passed on your request to my friends." She replied with equal quality and sarcasm to Sam with an added authority, "remember you are talking to an officer so control yourself."

With that said, she walked off with courage and a slight smile as she claimed victory in this situation.

Back on the command deck after a slight delay in getting things set, McGregor began to order the ship to depart Earth space for the space station but to make an investigation stop on the way.

"Please make sure that phase three warp drives are in sink with the governors or we will not get warp nine out of any of them and overload the buffers." Said McGregor as he prepares the ship to warp.

The ship glides through space at impulse before reaching optimal speed to disappear into warp.

"Two and a half months travailing to this place and we need to make a stop in the middle... Why did I agree to this?" McGregor said to himself grabbing the attention of the operations officer, the new Vulcan, Tulack

"Captain, as I believe, you have the free choice of taking this assignment. If you did not like it, why did you choose it?" Tulack stated in a blunt and Vulcan way.

"Because I had to. That's all I can say." With that he then stated that he's leaving the bridge and heading for the life habitat area of the ship.

The life habitat area of the ship is located in the middle with a glass dome all around. The area is massive in size and contains a small forest with plants, animals, water and resting areas.

This was mainly designed to produce oxygen and food in the means of vegetables and a means to relax stressed out people on long journeys through space

to new worlds. The dome itself is a type of plastic with safety force fields to prevent damage and atmosphere being vented into space. In the centre is a light that can produce the same energy as the sun if the ship is in deep space with no natural light. Sitting in the gardens McGregor looks at the sky and ponders about what's going to happen next.

Chapter 3

(Worm Hole)

Few weeks passed and all is well on the USS Explorer, so much so that work and the daily life were a little too quiet and there was something in the air (or rather, onboard the ship) that no one could quite work out.

The ship, still in warp, passes gracefully past all the stars and planets with its inhabitance carrying on with their daily routines.

Arania walks into McGregor's Ready Room with the daily report on what's been going on. McGregor sits back on his chair checking the information on his desk terminal before looking at Arania and speaking with a slight tone of being bored and criticism. "So anything new to report?" Arania then replies "Nothing much, here you go." She then passed the glass-computerised display to McGregor for inspection.

"Well, just as I thought, usual space and..." he then lifts the sarcastic tone of his voice up a bit "That bump we felt was the ship smashing into a comet at high warp?"

"I wonder into how many pieces we smashed that into with the shield and sent it at high warp," McGregor said dumping the panel onto the ground.

"I've got a message from Starfleet for you. It just arrived a few hours ago." McGregor said moving up closer to his desk as he moved aside the glass-computerised display "I've had a request, for you to visit there scientific department for some more scans once we get back to earth. Starfleet wants to add more to your races profile and since you have gotten older from your last scans, this might give them a better understanding about your species."

McGregor then stands up and puts a more serious pose on to show his care and loyalty towards her.

"If you do not want to do this, I will support and defend your decision. I know how much Starfleet has an interest in your species or any other for that fact, but I will not let them force you into anything you do not want to do."

Arania then looks flattered and says she needs time to think about it. They talk a little longer about matters before she is dismissed.

"Before you go, can you send in Tulack?" Said McGregor quickly brushing off the creases in his uniform.

Moments later, Tulack enters his Ready Room sanding and acting like a proud Vulcan.

"What is that you are wearing?" McGregor says pointing at Tulack uniform.

"This is the standard uniform I was given when I joined Starfleet." Tulack replies standing to attention.

"Well, I don't want you wearing that! It looks like a red plastic bag and I do not want my officers looking like that." Although Tulack was a little surprised at hearing McGregor's remark, he didn't show it because of his race's nature to suppress feelings.

"I have made an arrangement for you to pick up your new uniform. It should make you look more respectable and give you more authority." Said McGregor handing him the information.

The uniform that McGregor is referring to is something he brought on his ship when he took control and gathered a crew. He did not approve of the Starfleet uniform and didn't like it when he was part of them. So all his officers and crew now wear a more respectable, military type uniform with rank colour displayed on the

collar and buttoned epaulettes on the shoulders of the jacket and the uniform colour, which is not bright and noticeable like the custom Starfleet ones.

"As soon as you are ready, you are to wear it. Also it will make you look more respectable. That's all." McGregor says sitting back down on his chair dismissing Tulack.

"If I may sir, there is one more thing" Says Tulack reluctantly but with a pressing need to say it.

"Go on." McGregor Replies looking at the computer screen.

"I have noticed that you have hired twenty Klingon Mercenaries as a military presence on this ship. Do you think this is wise?"

McGregor then raises his eyes but keeps his head in the same position pointing down, he is slightly reluctant to explain their presence, however he decides to let Tulack know what they are onboard for, "They are here to offer their services and provide adequate protection from invasion. Also they were kicked out of the Klingon command for trivial matters, so I decided to use their services. We have a mutual agreement."

Before Tulack can reply to the answer, a sudden call and red alert was called over the computer system. A female computer voice then started to warn of impending danger.

"Warning, Unknown Anomaly detected ahead. This ship is automatically dropping out of warp; however, due to speed and mass this ship will not come to a complete stop for one minute, time to impact with anomaly, thirty seconds. Shields and full engine reverse has been automatically engaged." The computer voice then started counting down from thirty seconds.

The ship eventually dragged out of warp and the reverse engines that are on the bottom and sides of the ship bellowed out thrust as the ship tried to avoid the massive "hole" in space that looked like a massive black hole incorporating black clouds and lightning all around.

Everyone tried in vain to make the ship stop, but all their efforts failed as the USS Explorer marched without care or control straight for the black hole.

The front part of the ship then started to touch the horizon of the hole and then it disappears into the anomaly with the shield letting of a bright light with waves of plasma flowing down the shield area. Ripples started to cover the shield and before long, the front end of the vessel just vanished in space as this hungry hole began to eat the ship.

Back on the control deck of the ship they started to calm down as they soon realised that the ship was not being eaten but just travelling through a point in space that will take them to another location.

McGregor then asks, "What's going on with my ship?"

Operations Officer Tulack then announced, "Sensors from the front deck are operational and not damaged."

Science Officer Leeli from Vulcan then tells McGregor that the ship must be travelling through a wormhole in space. She then explained that the mass of the ship and shields are keeping the ship from being crushed by the gravity being produced and it explains why other ships did not survive the trip through.

"Shut down the reverse engines and activate the forward engines on full burn, I'm sure this ship will not survive if we are stopped in the middle." McGregor orders.

The back engines that are attached to the main hull of the ship just behind the warp cell ring armour then begin to turn to life with a massive gush of fire and plasma flares as it pushes the ship forward with tremendous force. At the front of the

ship on the opposite side of the reverse engines the forward engines also join the back ones to give a better and more powerful forward motion.

Inch by inch the ship slowly begins to accelerate at breathtaking speed with the centre of the ship disappearing in a great display of lightshow as it passes through the anomaly.

On the other end of the anomaly in a far and unknown place, the great USS Explorer emerges travelling straight up in a forward motion compared from where it entered the anomaly.

It does not take long for the whole ship to pass through, but this only leaves one question once the ship does pass.

All is quiet on the ship as everyone tries to get there bearing on things.

Then, out of the silence McGregor speaks "What's our current location?"

The crew then tries to determine their location with great difficulty and with nothing to lock on to or even a single subspace transmission makes it even more difficult.

"Captain, I am unable to identify any of the star patterns in our database, I am deploying the Doppler to try and gather background radiation on all the known positions of galaxies and then our location" the helm officer said typing onto his station.

"That's strange." Replies the helm officer.

"Explain" McGregor replies. "I am not getting any known radiation readings, It's like our universe is not here and we are in a different location in space."

McGregor then looks at Leeli and gets her to check the readings.

"He is right sir, from the readings I'm getting from the Doppler we are out of our known universe; however I do not believe we have travelled in time or gone to another universe and the wormhole does not display any of the characteristics of this function." Leeli replies with a deeper interest in their situation more than anyone else which is surprising for a female Vulcan.

"I have adjusted the Doppler to start uploading all information it receives to build some kind of star map of this area of space, but from what I can receive, we're in a completely different universe, in a different galaxy. Also captain..." McGregor then interrupts her "Can we send a message to Starfleet?"

Arania who is standing next to the communication console then replied in a sense of urgency but calm manor "I have already sent a signal, but it just bounces back. I cannot send anything through the horizon of that thing, in normal space or Subspace."

McGregor then follows the next thing in a list of ideas, as he always does, "OK, will a data module be able to pass through the anomaly with our current status?"

Leeli replies in a type of Vulcan sarcasm way "As you are well aware, the gravity will just destroy anything smaller than this ship and without the shields." She then replies anticipating McGregor next comment "Also captain, I would suggest not travelling back as our shields are currently at 25% and the energy discharges have caused several systems on the ship to go offline for the moment."

"OK thank you, all stations I require damage reports from all sections." McGregor said.

He then received information from different areas of the ship, nothing to major, just minor damage done by things falling over, some systems going offline and maybe a few bruises from someone falling over because they were not being careful which is generally the modern behaviour of some people on the ship.

Then through a COM channel the weapons officer Greg says, "Sir, the rear beam cannon assembly has moved off its standby point."

Greg is more of a fat, unfunny and more serious person on the ship that you would not want to meet if you are on your own. He holds his own, drinks and could smoke if they reinvented cigarettes. However he is close to McGregor and if there is anyone you need to trust, Greg is your man. Over the years of service to McGregor he has never betrayed him and always been around when needed.

"Arania, I'm going to take Greg in the space car to look at that array cannon, when the shields have charged back to 100%, I want you to pressurise the area between the ship and the shield" McGregor says getting prepared to go.

"Tulack, you can come with us if you want, it should be an interesting experience walking on the hull of the ship breathing in space." Says McGregor.

Tulack then followed McGregor assuming it was an order. Outside the ship can be seen full of smoke and blue fizzing on the shields as the space between the ship and the shields is pressurised with a breathable atmosphere. The heat from the switched off engines provided temporary heat so any life forms do not freeze straight away in space. The shields deflect radiation and harmful effects with gravity provided by the ship.

Chapter 4

(Contact)

The space cars are designed as a means to get around from planet to ship with the ability to travel around at great speed. Designed like the normal car on Earth but without the wheels and made safer for space travel, the space car was modified from the car in late in Earth's history.

It was then reinvented by some unknown company on Earth in the past and then bought by the captain of the USS Explorer. The space car is more flexible than the modern shuttle however it cannot travel at warp, but it is able to travel at incredible speeds and easy to control on land and in space. Using antigravity technology it can float and travel around the magnetic poles of any planet and then use other means to travel in space. Having the characteristics of the old De Lorean, the vehicle doors open like the shape of a gull's wings with two similar doors in the rear, however the cars come in many different colours.

McGregor sat in the space car with two of his crewmen waiting for the cargo bay doors to open. McGregor typed commands with added information into his glass-computerised tablet trying to look the part.

With a deep rumble and sudden movement from the motors; the cargo bay's massive steel doors began to open slowly displaying the deep blackness of space.

Once the doors have opened to their furthest point all that can be seen is the faint glow of the force field keeping back the air from inside the ship.

"OK, shut down the force field," yelled McGregor holding onto the vehicle door opened upward.

Tulack momentarily forgot that the area of the ship was pressurised and tried for a moment to stop McGregor, however the force field was shutdown before he could do anything and a sudden gush of wind ended up leaving the ship as the air from outside and inside tried to equalise.

"Feel that! That's the feel of wind in your hair!!!" Greg could not resist pointing his head in the path of the wind. "I love this moment, always."

After the rush of air calmed down, McGregor then turned the sky car on with a humming sound coming from the engine and the vehicle floating three inches off the deck.

"Let's look at that beam cannon..." Said McGregor driving the space car out of the cargo bay and into the space between the shields and the ship.

Tulack could not help to notice that the doors were open on the space car and enquired, "What happens if we accidentally pass through the shields?"

Greg replies in a not too interested tone, as he is busy looking for the beam cannon with McGregor, "Nothing, we'll bounce off the shield. But it won't be a nice experience."

"There it is!" McGregor points to a long creamy shaped gun attached to the main hull of the ship.

Greg then mutters out on the passenger side. "Man I never have seen that up close before, it must be at least fifteen meters long!"

"Yes I know, those beam cannons rarely go wrong because they are so big, the wormhole anomaly must have knocked something loose. We have to locate the problem and fix it. I do not want to stay around here with one of these things out of commission." Said McGregor driving closer to the beam cannon and parking the space car.

The hissing of the air hitting the shield can be heard far in the distance as McGregor and Greg used their tricorders to locate the problem with the cannon. Tulack stood out of the car looking around as if he was guarding something. However standing on the mighty hull of the ship leaves him feeling very small, and a little stale.

The tricorder beeps with a positive tone because it has identified the problem.

"Looks like I found the problem!" Said McGregor looking closely at the cannon turret base. "One of the mounts that support the base has been ripped apart. Might have happened when we entered the anomaly and the cannon was not parked in its position properly."

"There is not much we can do with the mounts, they need to be repaired in space dock. Can't do it here. The cannon should still work but the target might be off a few degrees" Said Greg looking at the mount in more detail before heading back to the vehicle.

"I agree, nothing....." McGregor is then interrupted by Tulack who was at the time staring into space, "Captain, if I may be so bold, I am seeing a ship on an intercept course to us."

Pointing up into space, the small vessel can be seen past the distortion of the shields getting closer and Arania then calls McGregor over the COM unit.

"Captain, we are picking up a ship on an intercept course, and they have their weapon systems armed." Arania alerted

"Shit, everybody in the vehicle now! Arania once we are in the cargo bay, depressurise the area between the ship and shields immediately." McGregor demandingly shouts pointing and hinting for everybody to get back in the car.

"If they fire their weapons with us in here, the shockwaves in this pressurized area and the sound will deafen us and blow out the top decks that are exposed to space." McGregor says starting the car up and closing the vehicle's doors.

Once everyone was ready, the space car hovered up and travelled at great speed back to the cargo bay.

Moments later the space car entered the cargo bay and then the force field was activated. Once this was done, the outside area that had been pressurized was sucked back out until nothing but space was present between the ship and the shields.

Marching back onto the control deck McGregor and Tulack returned to there stations to look up on the unknown ship approaching.

From a far glance the ship looks like a black jumble of rubbish with no distinguishable shape or function, but as it got closer it formed a more rectangle shaped ship that drifted in space on top of white lights emanating form the bottom. The ship can be described more by the feelings it can give, think of it as something out of your nightmares hidden in a shroud of darkness. A dark and more sinister glare can be felt from this ship, something that you really do not want to see. It is not big like a star ship but smaller in size and able to hold a good twenty crewmen if you can call them that.

Back on the bridge McGregor approaches the view screen more closely to have a better idea at what he is dealing with, then without warning Tulack breaks the silence.

"Captain, the ship is hailing us," Tulack states.

McGregor then replies getting back to his chair and with the hint of curiosity, because he'd never done a first contact situation before. "Put it on screen."

As soon a Tulack pressed a few buttons on the console a sudden electrical spark shorted out the COM unit behind one of the panels on the wall.

With the smoke slowly emanating from the gaps in the panel, Tulack then replied, "The COM unit has shorted out but we can still receive audio. Patching it in."

A strange horrible and uncanny sound then came from the speakers in the ceiling as the alien race tried to talk to everyone. However, since the computer cannot translate their language, it is not understandable.

"Arania, What do you make of that?" McGregor said pondered the question to her.

"I do not know sir, but I am picking up fifteen life forms and some strange readings too." Arania said typing at the workstation trying to make sense out of all this noise.

McGregor got up and walked over to the panel that produced the smoke. He opened the panel and pulled out the draw, which housed all the electrical circuits. He then pulled out a black transformer that had blown with the power surge when the ship travelled through the anomaly.

"Get this replaced with a new one in the cargo bay, we'll need to see what these aliens look like." McGregor said, throwing the blown transformer to a crewmember as he rushed to get a replacement.

Tulack then stated with some good news, "Captain, I got the computer to translate the message, running it through now, you should hear it in a few seconds."

A few seconds later the message was repeated and the main voice became faded as the computer voice replaced it in English. "You have a life form that belongs to us! Turn her over to us or you will die!"

McGregor giving sidelong glance at Tulack questioned, "What's that about?" After a moment pause he then continues, "Can we send a reply so they can understand?"

Tulack Replies in a positive notion "I believe we can, the computer can send it in their language."

McGregor then prepares his message and after a few moments he replied, "OK, open the channel." He turns to the screen and starts to talk, "My name is Alex McGregor, Captain of the USS Explorer, I do not know of this life form you are speaking of. We have just arrived and we haven't picked up anyone. If you can give us more inform."

The other ship yelling and demanding over the COM link suddenly interrupted the silence. "YOU HAVE OUR PROPERTY, YOU ARE TO HAND OVER THAT BLUE CREATURE IMMEDIATELY. WE KNOW SHE IS THERE WITH YOU!"

McGregor then looked at the only blue creature on the control deck and uttered a small un-tasteless joke, "I know a lot of people on this ship fantasise about you, but I didn't know it can span to the far reaches of space."

Arania looked at McGregor in shyness and shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know why they want me."

One of the crewmembers then inserted a new transformer into the tray and the screen came to life with a watery plasma screen effect before it focused onto what was looking at them.

The whole crew on the control looked in utter shock and disarray, the alien ship looked like something out of a nightmare, but the creature looked like something from Hell. Looking almost humanoid, it could send a grown man to his death. Terrifying and revolting, the control deck crew soon gathered their bearings on things and acted in a professional manner.

The creature, leering at Arania through the screen started to make her feel unsettled. A smile could slightly be seen in his face, a grey and horror looking smile or a sexual smile that soon draws the attention of McGregor.

"If you do not surrender that creature to us NOW. I will destroy your ship!" The creature demands.

McGregor the replies with a firm and very strong feeling "No! You..." With the first word the view screen was shut down and the alien vessel returned to the display in the middle of the room.

"What the hell was that all about?" McGregor questions, then suddenly Tulack announces in a state of urgency "The alien vessel is moving into firing position and powering its weapons."

McGregor, looked at Arania to try and reassure her. He then gives the order "Arm the blast cannons and target that ship. Firing control, return fire but only if that ship attacks us. Use minimal force to disable them."

Everyone then looks at the view screen to see what the ship is going to do. Slowly the ship moves around like it's ready to pounce on it's pray, then firing control announces that the enemy ship is spiking it weapons and ready to fire. After the comment, the enemy ship fires it's phasers at the massive USS Explorer with a shimmer of light on the shield that protects the ship. Onboard a slight noise can be heard through the bulkheads with no vibration. The enemy ship then fires more phasers and rockets at the USS Explorer with little effect on the shields.

"Shields are holding and no damage reported on the lower decks," Tulack responds.

"OK, do we have a firing solution on that ship?" McGregor said.

"I predict that three shots will be sufficient to disable the ships shields and weapons." Said Tulack checking the readings on the console.

"Fire when ready!" said McGregor looking at the view screen displaying the enemy ship attacking them.

On the deck of the USS Explorer, two jellyfish shaped guns rotated into position and aimed at the enemy ship. Then with a blast of two bright white beams, only lasting for half a second, both cannons fired intermittingly three times. Both first and second shot disabled the shields on the enemy ship with a physical blast force. Then a rocket fired from the enemy vessel detonated beside the third gun causing it to jolt the ship slightly then it caused the second cannon to misfire from its target. When the second cannon fired for a third time, the aiming was off and the beam shot through the soft hull section of the ship creating a 'two meter hole' and ripping parts of the bulkhead of the enemy ship, but not destroying it.

Immediately the air escaped from the enemy ship and all life onboard would have been vented into space. No air to breathe and no atmosphere it was a mistake that will open a new insight on what all this is about.

Chapter 5

(Discovery)

Giving a disappointing look at whoever was controlling the blast cannons, McGregor slightly shouted, "I didn't ask for the life forms on the ship to be killed!"

"Sorry sir," replied one of the offers controlling the firing of the cannons. "The ship moved 0.5 degrees and the cannon didn't compensate for it."

McGregor then replied, "Well, lets see what information we can gather from their computer core and we might have some survivors in a isolated part of the ship still alive."

McGregor ordered his helmsman to move the Explorer closer to the damaged alien vessel. Once the ship was in range for the corridor arm (like the ones at the airport that extend out to the planes for passengers to get on and off) it reached out and attached itself to the enemy ship.

McGregor then announced, "OK, Tulack and Greg you are with me."

McGregor then went over to the COM unit and tried to call the Klingon personnel to answer. "This is Kane, Captain, how can we be of service?" Kane replied in a proud Klingon attitude and toned voice.

"It's time to show us what you are made off! We are on our way to the enemy ship we need you to choose three of your best men and come with us." McGregor said.

"All my men are the best Captain, but three of us will be happy to protect you." Kane replied in a slight sarcastic tone to McGregor's request.

"Good, meet us in the docking port seven, captain out." Turning off the COM unit McGregor then orders a repair unit to head out to the damaged parts of the enemy ship and repair the hole.

A small bot leaves the USS Explorer and headed for the damaged enemy ship. Once the bot reaches the damaged area it begins to emit foam that hardens once it is in place over the hole. Soon the whole area is covered in foam, which then hardens forming a tight seal. The bot then travels around to the other side of the ship to do the same thing.

McGregor and the rest of the team wait patiently at the entrance of the docking arm ready for the repairs to be done. Reminding everyone about the rules, McGregor makes it clear that any life form must be treated with caution, as any unknown life might be hostile and not to rush in without having the locked areas checked for diseases and other hostile life forms that could be hostile and escape.

"Repairs done?" said McGregor

"Yes Captain. The ship seems to be able to hold breathable atmosphere and I am still not reading any life forms." Tulack states.

"OK, breach the hull and desterilise the ship." McGregor orders.

The attached head of the corridor then burns a hole in the side of the enemy ship to form an airtight seal and a way in. Once this is done a dark purple smoke starts to fill the enemy ship. The smoke is designed to kill any bacteria and leave the whole ship cleaner than a medical bay. After a few minutes when scans of the ship's bulkheads are complete the purple smoke is than removed and human breathable atmosphere is then pumped in to re-pressurise the ship.

"OK people, remember, if you find a locked door, call for an science officer to check the area behind the door. Do not open it because you might infect all of us with some kind of virus and watch yourself, you never know what might be on this ship." McGregor instructs his crew in much detail.

The crew then moved their way down the corridor with the Klingons leading the way and being a little over enthusiastic.

"Captain, are you sure it is a good idea to let the Klingons lead the way?" Tulack asks McGregor following behind them.

McGregor replies in a low tone holding on to a hand weapon and walking to the air hatch transfer room "Don't worry, I trust them."

Kane then replies in a tone that is typical of a Klingon that has just been insulted "Vulcan, are you testing my ability to perform?"

McGregor interrupts as he can tell that this line of conversation was going to lead to an argument and anyone can guess what the outcome was going to be.

"OK, people, control yourselves." McGregor said before carrying on with his sentence. "We are at the airlock. The area behind is clear for us to enter, keep the weapons on stun and look out," McGregor instructs typing a code into the console on the airlock hatch.

The steel iron door clicks open to a small room where everyone enters before they close the door behind them. McGregor then types into another control panel to open the outer door, which will lead them directly into the ship itself. Large locking bolts unlock the door and McGregor opens the door exposing them dark and derelict alien ship.

Covered in cables, organic conduits and bulkhead bars, the crew cautiously walks through the wet dreary walkways exploring the ship and trying to locate the main computer or a computer terminal.

"Remember we are looking for a computer interface so we can download any information about this race and find out what that strange conversation was back there." McGregor said walking in front holding the hand weapon and lighting the way with a high-powered light device attached to it.

"I am not reading any life signs and it all appears to be cl..." Tulack then paused when they walked past a dead body of one of the aliens they viewed on the screen.

"What's that smell?" Greg asked with a loud and advertising tone to the whole ship.

"What smell? I do not smell anything, just the sweet sent of home," Kane said taking in a deep breath and looking at his fellow Klingon friends with laughter from all of them.

"OK Everyone, split up, looks like this is going to be easy. Keep your COM units on at all times and report any computer terminals or the control deck to us. This ship is not big and shouldn't take too long." Said McGregor

Few minutes later, Greg reports in to McGregor saying that he might have found some kind of computer terminal and he was preparing to "hack" into their systems to download all the information they might have.

On other parts of the ship some of the crew has stumbled upon some closed doors leading to two rooms. "Sir, We have come across two doors." A crewmember said.

"OK, I am on our way." Replied McGregor. He also called for a desterilising device from their ship.

After a few minutes, McGregor arrives at the locked doors accompanied by another crewmember holding a large box shaped device. "OK, attach it to the door. Everybody, stand back!"

The crewmember then attaches the device to the door, which then begins to drill a hole through the door to the other side. After this is done, it then pumps the same dark purple smoke into the rooms to sterilise it for entry.

After a moment of doing this, the device is detached and McGregor, standing behind one of the Klingon members orders him to open the door into the room.

The door opens to reveal a room full of purple smoke. "This stuff is not harmful, but should clear soon." He said.

One of the Klingons who got a little too excited, jumped into the room and waved his gun about looking at every corner before realising that nothing is alive in there, however he was met by something horrifying.

"What cowardly and unspeakable act happened here?" muttered the Klingon holding his weapon in his hand. Once the smoke had cleared, he glanced around the room and was able to see clearly. Four dead mutilated bodies laid out on the floor in front the Klingon. He recognised their species from the coloured patterns and blue skin clothing that the deceased possessed. The Klingon then looked further into the blood soaked room and discovered pod like cocoons in the corners of the room. He managed to count six in total and four have been ruptured like something came out. He put two to two together and realized that these creatures on the floor in horrific conditions; emerged from the cocoons. Upon closer examination, cuts and torture marks could clearly be seen, not only this, signs that these creature have been molested just as they emerged from their pods was also present.

The Klingon, who's normally strong, could not believe what coward and shameful act was going on and he called for McGregor, because they all know what species of alien they were.

McGregor walked into the room and within moment of seeing the horrific sight put his hand up to his mouth, as if, to hold back a sickness deep down within his soul.

"I... haven't seen anything so horrifying. What the hell was going on here?" McGregor spoke, in mystery as a crewmember walked in with curiosity only to end up running out to be sick.

"Now we know why that alien gave Arania that strange look and wanted here. What a sick race this is." McGregor spoke holding his tricorder to see if there are any survivors

"Captain I found the bridge of this ship. I am attempting to download the computer data." Greg states over the COM unit.

Then the Klingon and McGregor inspected the room only to see four dead creatures in horrific positions and conditions.

"We better not let Arania see these. She will get in a state." McGregor tells the crew by the door.

As the crew take a curious look, they all notice and begin to realise what this alien race is, looking at the blue skin clothing and patterns all over there bodies, it becomes apparent that they are Arania's people.

All four females who emerged out of the pods (like being reborn) where molested and tortured by the evil crew on this ship, in fear and shock they could not cope and eventually died. The picture couldn't be clear at the moment, but the silence of everyone was suddenly interrupted when one of the two pods started moving. The moving was of panic and worry. McGregor, who was startled by this, moved the tricorder over to the pod to see what was going on.

As he got closer, the mist slowly began to subside making the pod visible to his view; something can be seen inside moving around, something young, innocent and very scared.

"We have two live ones here!" McGregor states as he activates his COM badge "Medical, we need a team down here ASAP, we have two pods that need taking onboard!"

With a rush of people the pods were moved off the alien ship and taken to the decontamination chamber before it was moved to the medical centre onboard the USS Explorer.

McGregor then walks over to Greg in the bridge to see how the downloading is coming along. "Sir, what did you find down there? Is it true? You found more of Arania people?" Greg asks McGregor.

"Yes, but they were all killed except for two. It is horrifying. I've never seen anything like it." McGregor replied looking at the data.

"Can this stuff be translated? We need to know what is going on." McGregor asked.

"We should be able to translate most of this. I am currently 50% complete, they have a lot of data here." Greg said typing on the console trying to understand the language.

McGregor then told Greg that they found two live pods and the information is vital for the knowledge of what is going on.

Few hours later the information on the alien ship was downloaded and currently being deciphered by the explorer's computer. Arania on the medical deck can be seen looking at the two pods with curiosity and sadness.

"So helpless" she said touching the pod.

"What's that?" the doctor replied.

The doctor on the USS Explorer is a respectable man, looking out for life he's always trying hard to keep injured people alive and believing in his job and the oath he has taken.

The doctor's name is Michel and he joined the Explorer as ship's doctor so he 'has the chance' to explore the deepest areas of space and witness first contact with new alien races. Medical data is his biggest interest, always looking for the new alien or thing that can expand the human database and his knowledge, never stopping. He joined McGregor's crew three years ago because of the ship and the nature of his mission.

"As you know, doctor, our species goes through a phase each section of our life." Arania was then interrupted as McGregor walked into the medical room.

"We have left the alien ship behind and collected as much data as we can, at the moment our computers are translating all the data. These are the only remaining beings that are still alive." Said McGregor walking in and approaching Arania.

"How are our guests?" McGregor asked the doctor.

"Well, they seem to be stable at the moment, I have injected translator microbes into them so when they do hatch, they can understand our language and we can find out more about what happened. However they seem to be in a state of shock and fear. It is hard to keep them calm. If they get worse, they could die. It is too early to tell." Said Michel taking more readings of them with the tricorder.

"Arania, I looked at your species database and I understand that this of one of the phases your people go through, is this correct?" McGregor asked turning to Arania.

"Yes captain. There are two stages. Each stage changes us each time it happens. The first stage happens when we are fifteen or sixteen earth years. We develop into a cocoon then for two months and then change into a more mature being. Once we hatch out we are older and called the second generation like I am now. Once we are thirty-five we go through a final stage, which is another cocoon for two months and develop into a more mature being. This is called the third and final stage." Arania explained to McGregor and the doctor.

The doctor then replied in interest. "Yes, I understand. I always wanted to witness this. It is supposed to be unique."

McGregor then asked about the other four bodies that were brought back from the ship for autopsy.

"I have looked at the bodies. They died from extreme shock and torture. When Arania's people goes through a cocoon process it is very delicate. They need peace and utter care going into a cocoon and hatching, when these four were hatched the aliens immediately molested and tortured them. I have never seen cruelty on a scale like this before. It was so bad that they could not take it. I guess these two saw what happened to their friends and that's why they are extremely scared now. I just do not know what is going on." The doctor told McGregor.

"I guess we just have to wait and find out when they hatch. For the moment, we have to use the data we downloaded from the alien ship. If there is medical data I will transfer it to your terminal doctor." McGregor said getting ready to leave the medical room.

The doctor took a closer look at the cocoons and a faint blue creature in the shape of Arania and her design could be seen curled up in fright almost like it can see through the almost clear wall of the cocoon.

"Take care of them doctor, inform me on any change." Arania said leaving the medical bay after McGregor.

Chapter 6

(The First Creature)

Later on in that day, McGregor checked the data that was collected on the alien ship to grasp a better understanding about what has been going on.

Reading through all the files, he dismisses most of them as junk before finding a few interesting data files. He then calls for all senior staff to the meeting room where he will post his findings and discuss the most sensible course of action.

The crew all meet in the conference room, which is of fair size. In the room, the crew sat around a table next to a view screen on the wall with the windows along the side portraying the darkness of space and stars.

Arania, Greg, Kane, Tulack, Leeli and a few other staff all sat around the table in the middle of the room, idling their time, until McGregor walks in with a glass-computerised tablet in his hands.

"Thanks for coming everyone, now any idea on exactly where we are?" McGregor asks sitting down and slipping the computer tablet into the table's data port that displayed a holographic diagram of their location in the middle of the table.

Tulack replies in a Vulcan manor, "As you are aware sir, we have deployed the Doppler and have been trying to retrieve as much information on this part of the galaxy as possible, but, as the information is new, there is no comparison to calculate our distance from the Alpha Quadrant."

McGregor types on a holographic keyboard positioned in front of him on the table to display the information he managed to get from the alien ship.

"Here, I have managed to find some star charts from this part of the galaxy and even though it is not complete, it does show the general makeup of this galaxy and alien races we might run into." He then leans back on his chair before continuing, "But, from what I can work out, this is a completely different universe than ours, and God knows where our location is. We need to make sure we arrive back at the worm hole before it closes otherwise, we are stuck here permanently."

"OK people." McGregor said changing to the next subject.

"I have also been looking at the logs that we managed to download from the alien ship. From what I can tell there is not much information in it, just limited junk about their empire and something about the slaves that they captured." McGregor then said the next sentence as he altered the holographic image on in the middle of the table, "I assume these are the slaves."

He then gives Arania a sympathetic look about the race that is on display. She looks at her fellow species in a somewhat frantic state, but she holds in her emotions because she is second in command.

"As everyone knows, we managed to save two of them and they seem to have been very lucky given their circumstances." McGregor carried on saying stating the fact that the ship was depressurised as it was shot at.

He then asks the doctor about their condition, in which the doctor replies, "From what I can gather, it is still early days. As you are aware, we do have knowledge about this species cocoon cycle, so from my estimations they should hatch fairly soon then we will know more. However they are in a lot of stress and it is proving difficult to keep them alive, but at the moment they seem to have settled down and I have dimmed the lights in the medical room and made arrangement to help them for when they do hatch."

"Arania, I will need you to be there for when they do hatch. Maybe if they see a member of their own species, it might help calm them down and trust us." McGregor said turning the screen to another image.

Arania then decides to bring another pressing matter to the table "Captain, I have also been looking over the logs and I would like to point out that I think I have found an opportunity to save more of my people."

Arania then loads her images of a ship onto the desk hologram display in the middle of the table clearing what was already on display. "Disturbing details in the log state that a ship will be arriving here in a few hours with more of my people onboard. The ship we just intercepted was on its way to capture and escort them; I believe we should intercept them."

McGregor then gets a doubtful look in his face, as this is not the course he really wants to go down. But he knows Arania very well and he also knows that she is in deep shock and really wants the support of her captain, however his duty for the ship, the running costs, the mission and the last thing he wants is to end up staying in a area that is not known endangering the lives of his crew, there're just too many variables. However he makes a fast decision knowing it will assure her and maybe, just maybe they can find out more information about this elegant blue race that has been the main focus in this region of space.

Sitting back in his chair he asks, "So, what's the story about this ship?"

Arania then replies, "The data shows that they will be passing in this sector carrying about five hundred life forms" her tone then slips down when she carries on "to be used as slaves and other... acts. I just don't understand what's going on with all of this."

She then carried on, "Not only this, it also appears that other races are taking part but they are not as bad as the race we just run into."

McGregor says, "Five hundred people? I guess we'll get a better picture when we get closer to the time. Speaking of which, how long before we can travel back through the anomaly, Leeli?"

McGregor then looks at Leeli in a hope that it will not take too long to travel.

Leeli replies, "Several systems are still reporting overloads and we're still getting circuit breakers going off in the breaker room. But I believe the ship can travel back in forty six hours."

McGregor then finalizes the session "Well, if everything's finished we can go and rescue the five hundred people and find out what the hell's been going on!"

A few last minutes of chatting still carries on as McGregor makes his way to the bridge and sets the explorer on an intercept course with the slave ship, which will be intercepted in a few hours.

On his way to the control deck, Tulack catches up with McGregor with a need for some answers.

"Captain! If I may, I have been doing some detailed studying of the layout of this ship and its design, in particular, there's something I do not understand, and I am hoping you can explain it to me." Tulack said.

The McGregor stops in his tracks and gives him a look of surprise "You've studied my ship, you are very detailed," he said

"Correct, I am a Vulcan it is my duty to study every aspect of this ship and, it's only logical for a senior officer to make himself familiar with the ship he is assigned to." Tulack replies standing to order.

McGregor carries on walking after he said "Carry on, what is it?"

"After studying the schematics of the ship I have noticed six red rectangle shaped objects outside on the main bulkhead located at different central points of the

ship." He then carries on with a slight sarcastic tone. "They do not appear to be on the plans. As I do not know everything could you perhaps fill me in on what they are?"

McGregor replies "They are the repair arms of the ship."

"Repair arms?" Tulack questions with interest

"Yes, it's an interesting story, four years ago when I first got this ship we had a run in with the Romulans." McGregor generally said

"Very nice people, you should meet them!" McGregor said in a very sarcastic tone, which even a Vulcan, can recognise.

Carrying on, back to normal tone McGregor said "After they attacked us for our cargo, this ship was very badly damaged. It did not include the shields and weapons at that time, so we had to use what little we had, ten torpedoes and limited phasers. Luckily the warp core and the warp cells are hidden behind that large cylinder armour that covers the whole engine compartment of the ship, so we outran them and hid. We then desperately needed repairs and that's when we found the space station."

"Space station?" Tulack questioned bringing them both to a stop.

"Yes, it was strange" McGregor said before carrying on, "The station looked dead until we scanned it, then it scanned us and it invited us in to have our ship repaired. We beamed over to a sterilised white environment, but after a few moments I realised what the station was. In the early years of the Federation a captain called..."

McGregor took a moment to remember the captain's name and said, "Archer, came across a station like this and since I read the report he made, I was ready for its pleasant helping hand." He said.

Carrying on McGregor said, "We managed to disable the stations power supply, found a load of bodies and then nicked the technology including their database. It was not easy and it took two days to plan and execute.

The replicators on this vessel are from that station and also the repair arms were installed once we activated minimal systems on the station.

That's what the Red Boxes on this ship are. When this ship gets a hull breach or damaged, we activate the arms to deploy and they repair the damage within hours depending on the severity. They use some kind of replicator and transporter technology. Also Cargo bay one is manly off limits to everyone because the replicator arm uses that space to store materials in random areas."

Walking closer to the control deck "Once we got hold of the technology we kept it secret from the Federation because they had no interest with me at the time. So I used plans and schematics in the alien database we captured to rebuild and upgrade the ship. Before I had the station recycled. Very cost effective."

Tulack replied in an impressive but hidden tone as they walked onto the control deck "Very impressive, I have never thought of that, a ship that can repair while in deep space. Very well, I will keep an eye on cargo bay one and I will alter the plans accordingly to keep things up to date."

However an hour later things in the medical bay began to get desperate and very worrying, one of the pods started to hatch and a blue creature, exactly the same species as Arania began to come out.

For this life form, emerging from the cocoon is the most worrying and terrifying thing to experience and think about.

She saw four of her friends emerge like she is doing now. They came out slowly and in a very defenceless state, she watched inside her cocoon as their captives grabbed her friends one by one and right in front of her they began to do

despicable acts of indecency that cannot be described in words. The race was like animals that found a lovely pray. But instead of eating it, they did something else that cannot be described. Almost like they were out of control and under basic instinct. No one can help them.

One at a time they hatched out, then taken and abused, the treatment was so severe that they did not live long. She could only watch in horror as this happened and she could be next in line. It was only a matter of time before it was her turn and she was terrified to the point of death. Not only hiding in her cocoon, but her friend was also holding on for dear life too, trying to stay inside. It appears that the aliens will not force them out, or it's something they have not witnessed before. They're were six of them and now just two remain.

Now it is her turn, she had no choice to crawl out and meet her terrible fate, in a state of shock and worry she crawled out and tried to run away, but because of her weakened state she could not stand and could not run. She could see that the room was well lit, and looked very different from the room she remembered. However she has never seen humans before and just assumed they would treat her the same as her other captors. She tried with all her strength to escape and save her life. She panicked like an animal caught in the jaws of a predator, fighting and slipping; the doctor had no choice but to put her back to sleep.

"OK, OK, It looks like she's out for now... We better get Arania down here, I didn't expect this kind of reaction." The doctor said carrying her motionless body to the bedding area to be cleaned and up and kept warm.

The doctor and his staff cleared all the remaining slime and cocoon from the medical bay and she was left to rest in a warm and comfortable bed with the lights dimmed.

Arania came down to see her in a hope to help and try and calm her down. Arania looked at her and was shocked at how well she looked and she almost became overwhelmed with joy to see someone different from her own species. But because she was a Starfleet officer she had to keep her emotions minimal to show authority and manor.

"Doctor, is she OK?" Arania asked.

"She went into a panic, the likes I have never seen, she will be waking up soon, you better try and calm her down. She nearly died from a heart attack a moment go." The doctor said getting medicine ready for when she wakes up.

Her eyes slowly began to open. Her mind was cloudy and not very focused, within a few seconds she remembered what was going on and began to get in a state again. She almost jumped out of her bed, looking frantically around trying to escape. Her heart began to beat so fast that she could feel herself beginning to get ill and faint, but suddenly she saw a familiar sight. She began to focus her eyes on this person she was looking at, Arania. She got confused; she can sense that Arania is different, that she was calm. Not worried like her friends where.

"Can you understand me?" Arania softly said to her as she tried to calm her down.

She began to notice the soft silky bed that she was lying in and the feeling made her feel a little more relaxed, however seeing the humans still kept her in a panic mode.

"Can you understand me?" Arania then replied in their own language.

This then immediately caught her attention. She looked at shock towards Arania.

Arania talked a little more to her and explained that she is on the medical bay. But when the doctor approached her, she curled up tight into her bed.

“My name is Michel, I am the doctor onboard this ship, Can you understand me.” Michel said talking slowly and softly to her.

She could not understand at first, the translator microbes needed time to adjust the brain of this species but it soon began to fall into place and she was able to answer, but she chose not to.

By this time Arania called McGregor down from the control deck to see the creature that just came out of the cocoon,

McGregor marched in, not knowing the fright he was putting into this life form, his marching could be heard and she immediately looked at him as he entered the room and came straight for her. She got very scared and tried to hide even more under the blanket and was getting ready to escape.

Arania noticed she was getting very scared and could feel her heart racing fast.

McGregor slowly looked at her and said with a kind and pleasant smile “Hello. My name is McGregor, Captain of the USS Explorer. Can you understand what I am saying?”

She nodded her head in fear as this has never happened before and she does not know what is going on. She thought that she’d better respond or this stranger might hurt her.

Chapter 7

(The Second Creature)

With the response she gave, McGregor was reassured that the alien creature could understand him. But not knowing the initial reaction she gave as she came out of the cocoon, the doctor moved him to one side in order to fill him in about her state.

"I do not know what has been going on in the ship you rescued her from, but from her reactions she gave when she left the cocoon it couldn't have been good. I had to sedate her and her life signs were off the charts, we're lucky she is still alive." Said the doctor.

"I guess she will talk to us when she is able to trust us. Try not to push and prod her doctor because it might send her over the edge, you didn't see the full extent of her situation on that ship, it was a nightmare." McGregor said before moving back over to the young blue alien still curled up on the bed.

"You are safe now; we will not let anything happen to you." Arania softly said to her.

She looked into Arania eyes with fear and confusion; all she knew was hurt, pain and hunger. Nothing like this has ever happened before.

She can sense that Arania is pure and has not been touched in a way like herself and her friends were during their captivity; this provided her with more comfort knowing that a member of her species is at peace and unharmed.

She continued to look around the medical bay to scope the land and see who and what this new alien race is and what their intentions are.

The clean and pleasant brightness of the medical bay brought some kind of comfort to her and she has not experienced any of the horrible things that she witnessed in the darkness of the other ship. Perhaps she is in a safe place like Arania described.

But the memories of what happened still haunt her mind and it will be harder for her to trust humans, even though Arania is of her own species. She chose to remain silent for the moment, to look and listen.

The silence of the medical bay was interrupted when one of the nurses attending to the other cocoon noticed that it is going to hatch very soon and sounded the alarm.

McGregor, looking at the blue alien woman with his hands folded and holding his chin, looked at the other cocoon when the nurse alerted them to the development.

Slow and hesitating movements can be seen as this creature, slightly bigger and looking different tried to come out, but she tried to delay as much as possible because she also witnessed the terrible things that happened to her friends onboard the dark nightmarish ship.

After several minutes something more serious started to happen, the blue creature trying to come out of the cocoon started to get into stress, a lot more violent than the first creature and she started to cry and scream out in pain. Something was wrong, very wrong.

Panicking and screaming she came out, but not like the first creature that came out of the cocoon. Holding herself and rolling around it was clear that she was in terrible pain.

Dr Michel immediately rushed to try and help her, her body, covered in dirt and slime emerged out of the cocoon, the cat shaped ears drooped down because of the slime and the delicate skin fibres that normally make the clothing was all bunched together with the slime.

Dr Michel got hold of the medical tricorder and started to take readings and to ascertain about what's wrong. Holding the scanning device over her, Dr Michel was confused with the readings.

"That's odd!" said the doctor.

McGregor, trying to hold the blue creature that looks slightly more mature than her younger friend looked at the Dr Michel with a confused look.

"What's odd doctor?" he replied.

Holding the tricorder he replies, "I am not too sure, but from these readings it looks like that every nerve in her body is displaying the symptoms of pain. Every one!" he then continued with a confused look in his face "But I cannot find any cause of it."

He then asks the nurse to pass him a hypo spray to put the creature to sleep as her vital signs started to get dangerously high and just one step away from death.

Injecting her, she soon drifts back to sleep lying on the makeshift table bed area where her cocoon is placed. They then moved her to be cleaned before placing her in one of the empty beds just on the opposite side from the first creature.

After a few minutes later Dr Michel carried on scanning her with the medical tricorder to determine the cause of the pain, he then drifted over to the younger creature lying on the bed. As he got closer to her the young woman backed a little on the bed, showing her fear.

Dr Michel looked at her and tried to reassure her that he was trying to find the cause of her friend's discomfort. However, when he tried to compare the two readings he looked in a disappointing and useless way as the two readings did not match at all, because the more mature life form had changed internally from the younger life form so the readings was useless.

McGregor walked closer to Dr Michel and asked him what was wrong. Dr Michel tried to explain that he was not completely sure what is wrong but told him that the life form was in tremendous pain

Dr Michel said "I am afraid that we have never documented this species in this stage in their development before, so I do not know if this is normal or not." Dr Michel then went over to his computer terminal to do a deeper scan on the DNA of the creature.

"Arania, do you know what is going on?" said McGregor looking at her standing over the younger life form lying on the bed.

Then suddenly before Arania could speak the younger life form got up slightly and began to talk, her voice surprised everyone in the room, it was not a normal voice, but a soft gentle and graceful voice, not too loud and not too soft to understand. She talks clearly and it could almost be perfect English.

"Our captors attacked her before she transformed." She said.

McGregor stood straight and walked slowly and gently to her. She was still scared of humans and did not know whom to trust, but she could clearly see that they are trying to help her older friend and the only way she can help more is to give them some information. Sceptical she remained calm and prayed that nothing bad will happen.

"Do you have a name?" McGregor asked. After sharply trying to get rid of the chilling comments that this creature just told him.

She replied after a shy and low toned voice because no one asked her this before. Their captors just took her and her friends and did whatever they wanted. This is a very strange and interesting environment, which has confused her. "The name my family gave me is Nes-Al-Sar"

Arania had a small and slight smile as she can sense that progress was being made.

"It's OK, you are safe, nothing will happen to you while you are on this ship, the aliens that captured you are no longer alive and we will not let anything happen to you. You can trust us." Arania said trying to get Nes-Al-Sar to open up.

McGregor then asked Nes-Al-Sar for the other mature life forms name after he slightly had trouble pronouncing hers.

"Her name is Lei-Lie." She abruptly said.

McGregor then carried on and asked Nes-Al-Sar about what happened to her fiend. "Our captors raped her before she developed into the cocoon, this will cause great problems in development." As she said this Dr Michel got up and scanned Lei-Lie with a deeper scan.

"OK, Now I see. It appears we might have a problem Captain." Dr Michel closed the tricorder and looked at him.

"We have studied this races cocoon cycle for some time with the survivors back on earth. The process is very simple and yet very complicated." Then Dr Michel was interrupted by McGregor.

"Well, hopefully you can explain it in a form I can understand?" McGregor said looking at him, as he knew Dr Michel would start to talk all scientific.

"During the cocoon process, their body does a complete liquidation and rebuilding all from scratch." Dr Michel then said in an exciting tone "All very exciting, as I have never witnessed this." He then continued. "So during this time, any foreign DNA might cause some undesirable effects."

He then said in a disappointing and slower tone as the tricorder beeps in a negative tone "I am! Reading foreign DNA in her makeup. It looks like it's attached it's self to every nerve in Lei-Lie's body."

"But there is some good news, the DNA is being cleared up, but from my calculations it will be two months before she is completely clear of the DNA." Dr Michel said in a suppressed tone during the last part of the sentence.

McGregor said in shock "She is going to be in agony for two months?"

Dr Michel then replied with what little information he has "I just do not know what will happen, it is quite possible she can die."

McGregor replied before heading out of the medical bay "Do what you can doctor; I know you don't have the correct facilities but see what you can do."

A few moments later McGregor walks onto the large control deck and asks for an update on their current situation.

"We are approaching the coordinates that we managed to get from the enemy data." One of the crew said controlling the navigation.

"Just one second sir," the same crewman said as he was typing onto the console "I am picking up weapons fire from inside the asteroid."

Tulack who was listening, then began to check the sensors to confirm this situation and also investigate a little deeper into what was going on.

"Sir, it appears that there are four ships attacking a larger vessel, the attacking ships are from same configuration as the ship we encountered." Tulack said.

He then said with some urgency "The ship being attacked is seriously damaged and will not survive any longer if we do not intervene."

McGregor then looked out of the windows of the control deck and sure enough, he can see the phaser fire in the background behind the asteroids. What is he going to do?

Chapter 8

(The Escape)

(Now, before we get into the big fight with the USS Explorer and the alien ships, lets take the story back to view on the lives of the creatures on the ship that is being attacked. We need to know their story.)

Their story is a story of hurt and pain. Their treatment was so severe they had no choice but to find a means off their planet and escape to the anomaly.

The race we are talking about is Arania's race; they are called the Cataline. A blue humanoid creature with cat like ears that have been plunged into a time of darkness

They know this anomaly, because they created it some time ago for the purpose of sending a group of children through it in order to give them a better life somewhere.

They didn't know if it worked or not, but their fate would have been a lot better than now. The ship that did pass through the anomaly ended up being rescued by the USS Peacekeeper and this is how Arania came to be.

The Cataline home world has been plunged into so much darkness that their species is on the brink of extinction. Aliens from all over the galaxy have been taken these creatures for acts that cannot be described. Not to be hunted as prey or because of a war in the past. It is because of another reason, which will be explained.

Knowing their fate, a small group of people on the Cataline home world have been making plans to escape in the last working and remaining space ship and travel to the anomaly for safety.

Most of them are all female because the invaders killed all the male Cataline and kept the females alive. It didn't matter how old they were, the aliens took them and sold them at trade or to whomever can afford the extremely expensive prices.

A small group passed the word on and eventually they all gathered at the sleek blue ship, which was preparing to take off. About four hundred and seventy six people arrived to board the ship. Families, children and some even carried cocoons found in different locations in their villages where rescued.

"Is this all of them?" Lolai-yu said as she kept the door of the ship open.

The stormy weather in the desert area kept the rescue efforts very difficult, all the people stumbled as they tried to board the ship and they also had pressing fear, where is the enemy?

The last of the people boarded the large blue ship that was due to take off. At the moment, none of the aliens that occupied the world knew of the Cataline's plan of escape, but it was just a matter of time.

Lolai-yu is a harder person compared to her fellow friends; if she is attacked she will try and fight back and she has done this on many occasions. But by showing this type of behaviour, it doesn't go down well with her captors and she is often beaten and molested, more then others due to her nature.

She walked onto the flight deck to see when the ship can take off; they have a limited window because someone inside the alien-scanning array disabled it for a short time. A very risky and dangerous act that will get her noticed and never be able to have a moment to herself again, because a Cataline that takes risks, is highly desired flesh.

Their captors see the Cataline race as very precious and will not kill them, unless their captors are of lower and drunken nature in which torture and

molestation is commonplace, that's why the precious Cataline race has dwindled to such a low number.

Leaning on the door of the flight deck, which is the size of a small room and mainly able to hold two people sitting down and a one standing, Lolai-yu asks for an update.

Kraile-li who is flying the ship reported that they are ready to disembark for the anomaly. With that said, the ship lifts off with a great cloud of smoke and shimmering array of lights before it exit the planets atmosphere.

"We are on our way," Kraile-li said with a slight look of relief on her face.

In the back of the ship in one of the large cargo areas, over one hundred people all crammed inside this area prayed for a miracle, especially one young person.

She's called Lay-Yi, a young and timid person who has not undergone her first transformation. But like all the others, she has endured so much pain and suffering. This blessing of leaving this hell, that was once there home has offered her some new hope. However she is the type of creature that wants to be part of something. She prays everyday that someone can rescue her and her family from the hell that she was born into. Very open-minded and willing take any path in any direction.

If there is something big out there, she is the type of person to seek it out and want to be part of it. Lay-Yi works very hard and loves to learn anything she can. She would spend what little time she could find to learn anything during her time with her captors. Passionate and kind and always willing to help she was glad at the opportunity to escape and hopefully have a better life on the other side of the anomaly.

Her friend, Cann-Li is developing inside the cocoon, which she had no choice to develop and Lay-Yi would try and protect her as much as she can from her captors. Her efforts often failed but now, they have escaped together and are hoping for a better life and freedom. However Cann-Li, who is still inside her cocoon, doesn't know that she has been rescued and so, her friend Lay-Li is taking extra care of her.

Kraile-Li who is holding onto the navigation controls, then looks at Lolai-Yu in a matter of concern at their pressing problem, which has been pressing on everyone's mind.

"I don't know how far we can get before we are located. We are carrying three final stage people, they will be emitting an Electro-fluidic field at full capacity and we will surly be sensed and recaptured." Said Kraile-li.

"I am aware of that! But we have to try. We cannot leave them down there, you know what will happen to them at their final stage, I wish it on no one." Lolai-yu said directing her determination to Kraile-li.

"I am sure you can fly this ship without being detected," Lolai-yu said.

"Yes, I can at the moment." Her tone then changes "But as soon as we leave our planet's orbit our Electro-fluidic field that we emit will not look like it's are coming from the planet anymore, they will be able to track us down easily!" Kraile-li worryingly said.

Lolai-yu changed her posture to get a more comfortable position as she was leaning on the doorframe of the ship for too long. She then responded in kind to the statement. "Try and use any means to disrupt or jam the signals we cannot allow this ship to get captured. I am sure they will fight over us and our treatment will be a lot worse now."

Kraile-Li then replied after spotting something in space, "I think there's some kind of plasma stream in our area, we should be able to travel in it and it could provide some protection."

Meanwhile, their great escape did not go unnoticed, sure enough they were spotted by a hiding enemy ship lurking around the debris of a once massive space station that was created by the Cataline people in their early years.

The captain of the ship leeringly looked at this graceful blue ship leaving the orbit of the planet and heading for the deepness of space. His crew checked to make sure no one spotted the ship before following behind just outside their scanning range.

The captain of this ship sees a great opportunity here, a ship full of the most prized possessions in this galaxy, a ship full of Cataline people. They will bring a very fine price in the open market and the captain, being sick as he is, gets over excited about taken as many as he wants and will be more than willing to allow his crew to indulge themselves. The captain closes his eyes in order to feel the sweet sent of the Electro-fluidic fields flowing from the escaping vessel. His mind echoes with sick thoughts as he waits for his chance to capture them all.

Slowly and surely the ship enters warp to follow the sleek blue vessel.

As time went by, the travelling time was quite long; the distance from their home world to the anomaly was about two months at maximum warp on the Cataline ship. The maximum they can travel is warp four point five. It is the standard speed for all vessels in this galaxy, as they have not developed faster speeds.

Lolai-yu walked around the ship checking all her people, she reluctantly became their protector and everyone looked at her for comfort and orders. Without knowing it, she became the commander and their leader. She didn't want this burden and she doesn't know how to control and make her people safe, the longer the trip went on the more she doubted her ability. She just wants someone else to do this job. The food and supplies slowly began to run low and some of the people can even feel that they are being followed from a far distance.

Lay-yi still talked to her friend inside the cocoon, trying to reassure her that everything is OK; she doesn't know if her friend can hear her while she is still developing inside the cocoon to become a second stage Cataline. But Lay-yi has almost reached that time in her life where she needs to transform herself, but it was just a matter of time.

Talking beside a small breathing hole on the cocoon she talked about her life, what she wants and prays for help. Worried and lonely for something she curls up beside her friend and tried to get some sleep.

As more and more time went on as they reached deeper into space, the worry that was on everyone's mind was the effect of the three final stage people on their vessel and the massive Electro-fluidic fields they are emitting. Their Electro-fluidic fields will be like a massive subspace-beacon for the whole galaxy to find them. This is how this section of space works.

The Cataline people emit a Subspace Electro-fluidic field that interferes with other life forms in this universe. Because every life form in this new universe is not carbon based, the effect of the Electro-fluidic field is very addictive. It acts as a powerful reproductive and hormonal drug that drives all the male life forms crazy. They can also sense and feel where the Cataline people are and can use this to track them down. During the early years, a shield blocked the Electro-fluidic field that was protecting their home world for hundreds of years, but recently that shield was destroyed and their presence was known. Then the darkest most horrible creatures came from the deepest depths of space to have their meat.

Things were beginning to heat up. Sure as planned, everyone's worries were over, the alien vessels managed to find them and instantly they opened firing on the blue ship travelling at warp.

The original commander that followed them became angry that five more ships managed to track his prized bounty. They shot at each other for a moment before they finally agreed on a deal to resolve their differences.

This became bad news for the small Cataline ship trying to escape and before long beams of phasers rained down on the small blue vessel damaging the engines and forcing it out of warp.

"Warp drive is offline! We have minimal weapons too!" said Kraile-li in a state of panic.

Kraile-li's panic started to get worse as the attacks came; each bang and shake just put her into a more dire shock. Everyone knows that the enemy will not blow up their ship, but a dire fate is waiting for them.

Then the view screen came online with the look of horror as this alien stated his demands. This put a deeper fear into the lives of the people on the flight deck.

"Fast, enter the asteroid field, we might be able to destroy a few of them in there" said Lolai-yu pointing in the direction of a huge mass of asteroids.

The ship slowly moves at impulse into the asteroid being followed by the flashing lights of the phasers being fired at them. The small vessel also fired back at each enemy with equal force before a direct hit from one of the enemy's disabled their weapons.

The idea did not work; the evil aliens still pursued them in firing and finally disabling the ship completely. The Cataline people are now panicking, knowing what will happen and knowing they cannot run, the only action is to surrender and let whatever happens, happen.

Kraile-li then shouted out "Another ship has just jumped out of warp. It is massive and I have never seen this type of configuration before"

Lolai-yu rushed to the windows to have a look, and sure enough this colossus ship bellowed down over the asteroid field putting even more fear into the hearts of everyone.

"Great! More aliens that want to abuse us!" Lolai-yu said without any thought in what to do.

Chapter 9

(The Battle)

McGregor stood on the deck of his massive control room overseeing the battle taking place through his twenty-foot windows being fought inside the asteroid belt between six ships and a defenceless transport.

Tulack pierced through the idle murmurs with his announcement, "Captain, if we do not intervene the defenceless vessel will be destroyed." But little did the crew realize that the Cataline people are highly valued and the enemy is not likely to destroy them. But this was not the image the crew could see.

"Open a channel to the alien ships," ordered McGregor walking to his chair in the middle of the spacious command deck trying his best to hold back the anger he has been developing over the pointless attacks he could see through the windows.

"Channel open," replied Tulack adding a slight Vulcan touch to his answer.

"This is Alex McGregor of the USS Explorer, you are to stop your attack immediately and leave this area or we will engage your ships." McGregor demanded in a mood not to over-intimidating however he did show a slight 'not caring' attitude.

A few moments pass and the fighting still continues to no avail. McGregor repeated in a more harshly tone than before, "I will not ask again!"

After that, the channel was closed with no response coming from the enemy. McGregor, being tired of this race attacking these people, decided that something needed to be done before the ship that carried about five hundred souls would be destroyed.

"Tulack, are there any other life forms on the lead alien ship?" questioned McGregor as he spun in place getting a good and un-obscured view at Tulack who will eventually give him the go-ahead for his next stage of attack.

"Negative, I am not reading any other life forms on the attacking ships." Tulack replied.

McGregor looked at a situation that demanded immediate action, if he was going to save the people on that sleek blue ship then he needs to open fire or attract the fighting ships away otherwise the life of five hundred people will be on his head.

Being fed up and muttering under his breath McGregor said, "OK then, if that's the way you want it."

"Lock the primary beam cannon on the lead ship." said McGregor standing up from his post and directing his eyes in the direction of the lead vessel gliding around the asteroids.

As the command was acknowledged, one of the massive 15-meter long beam cannons sprang to life and rotated creating a perching hollow deep rumbling sound from the motors allowing the cannon to track the position of the enemy ship.

As soon as the cannon locked onto the enemy ship, the enemy also noticed this action and began moving closer to the Explorer to attack.

The attacks on the transport stopped immediately, which per-stowed a state of confusion and worry for the crew on this defenceless transport.

Looking through the large windows at the front of the vessel, Lolai-yu could see the massive Explorer hovering in the distance and the tail, tail signs of the crummy enemy ships on an intercept course to attack. Suddenly small flares or fireworks began to drift from the surrounding areas in space and into the cannon that can barely be seen at their distance.

After three seconds of this method of charging, a beam of yellow light with a core of fire in it, shot across the asteroid field. Slowly the massive endless beam of

light drifted across space disintegrating and destroying asteroids before it drifted gracefully through space towards the enemy ship.

The beam moved towards the enemy ship and as the horizon of the beam struck the shields. Great shreds of light glittered of it before the full core of the beam took out the shields and penetrated the hull. The hull melted and blew apart with a great lightshow like a welder welding metal together.

The beam stayed on for a further 5 seconds before discharging and cooling down.

After the lead ship was blown to bits the remaining ships pause in mid air before they decided foolishly that the remaining five ships could attack from different locations.

"Captain, the remaining ships are on an intercept course from different locations." Tulack followed up immediately displaying holographic repartitions of the fight scene on one of the projectors in the middle of the room,

"When they are in range of the normal weapons, activate the phaser banks and blast cannons. Then prepare the ship for docking with that transport." McGregor held his breath slightly at the view of the approaching enemy ships. He hoped that seeing their leader's demise would prove to be an adequate example of what they are up against and decide not to pursue this course of action. However as he briskfully waited, he saw no sign of them leaving, "Are we jamming their signals?" McGregor knew that having there communications jammed would make it difficult for them to coordinate an attack and even though he is in command of a very powerful ship, he just wanted to make there lives difficult.

"Yes sir, they are unable to communicate for reinforcements." replied the communications officer.

The enemy ships flew closer to the Explorer from different locations; the jellyfish shaped cannons moved and tracked one of the enemy ships that was closing in. Unable to fire, the cannon idly waited for the ship to enter firing range before releasing a sharp blast of energy at the approaching ship.

Two blasts from the cannon disabled the enemy shields before the third blasted a hole in the side of the hull hitting the ships warp engines and causing it to explode.

The exploding ship, which was moving at high speed, crashed into the Explorer's shields leaving a mess of smoke and light that blinded the view of the battle for a short time.

Phaser banks then opened fire with the normal charging and firing of phasers in different locations of the ship, not as powerful as the blast cannons but each shot weakened the enemy shields before a blast cannon with nothing to do got board and decided to finish the ship of.

However, the remaining ships then launched fighters.

"We are getting a launch of smaller ships sir, about thirty smaller ships are launching from the enemy. They are heading this way," Tulack stated with a slight tone of urgency, which is uncommon for a Vulcan

"OK, activate the security guns. They are automatic and designed for this type of combat, concentrate the main guns on the larger remaining enemy ships." McGregor gave of a slight grin as he looked at the real-time activates on a holographic display on the command deck.

Blasts of enemy fire struck the shields of the Explorer causing no damage.

Suddenly all over the ship, under, top and on the sides, chambers opened in which a single gun turret would be holding four gatling pulse guns. As the cannon

rose out of its protection chamber on the ship, the barrels of the guns began to rotate and the guns then locked onto the individual enemy fighters.

The guns can only fire when the enemy ships are within one thousand meters however they carry their own power supply, shields and are self-targeting.

"All sixty-six pulse cannon turret guns are operational and locked on to the enemy fighters. Once they are in range they will open fire" one of the officers at firing control enthusiastically said because these guns are his babies and having them perform to the best of the ability makes him proud and overjoyed that they are being used in this manor.

Kraile-li watched the massive battle take place between the small puny ships and this massive god like vessel that appeared out of no ware. Who are they, and what do they want pondered their minds as they glared out of the windows?

"I don't recognise their markings" Kraile-li said clutching the control panels trying to hide her panicking fear.

Lolai-yu replied, "I have not seen them before. But you can guess they're after us. Can we escape out of here?" she then got a simple but abrupt answer, "No! We are severely damaged. Our life support is failing also. I guess we have no choice but to surrender." She gave a slight defiant look at Kraile-li before she finished her last statement. She looked to the floor while pondering all the hateful things that could happen to her.

The enemy fighters entered range of the pulse cannon turret guns and immediately the cannons opened fire with a hail of yellow plasma bolts which flew in space in sets of four destroying anything that gets in its way.

Sparks of lights displayed the destruction of each enemy fighter as one by one, the fighters were destroyed. The larger enemy ships then retreated in a retarded manor as they realised that there 'so called friends' got destroyed.

Suddenly out of the blue, a sudden flash from behind the Explorer that displayed the characteristics of a nuclear explosion struck the shields and destroyed everything in the area. Luckily the transport was behind the Explorer and protected by the blast.

The shockwave shook the Explorer and all its inhabitation causing damage to a few systems and caused some problems.

"What the hell was that?" McGregor roared in anger at the sudden jolt that sent his ship sideways causing him to fall over ass first on the floor.

The ceiling, which is covered in florescent lights behind glass panels, all flickered off and then struggled to turn on as the blast shook the lighting cables and shorted out a few systems on the command deck. Because all the systems are protected by circuit breakers, the damage or explosions from this didn't happen and the systems just went off.

"Shields are down to 67% but they are recharging back to full strength. Minor damage sustained to the outer hulls and radiation has been detected decks 150 to 214. Decontamination systems are in operation." Tulack stated as he gained his footing and listed the reports coming in.

"This is the breaker room, What the hell are you guys up to, I just had several rows of breakers shut off, do you know how long it takes to switch on each row!" shouted an angry individual down the com, with the endless clicking of circuit breakers going off in the background.

"A nuclear device just went off outside our shields, do what you can to get systems back online" McGregor replied shutting of the COM Unit and interrupting the individual that was about to carry on his ranting and raving towards him.

"Tulack, are there any more ships out there with nuclear devices?" McGregor questioned.

"I am not reading any signs of nuclear weapons on any of the remaining fighter's captain. However they might have developed a way to mask their nuclear signatures" Tulack replied performing detailed scans.

"Make sure all weapons are locked onto the fighters, I do not want another attack like that!" said McGregor

Few moments pass as the fighters were cleaned up by the pulse cannon turret guns and blast cannons. Leaving nothing but clear space and the drifting of rocks, debris and bodies.

Kraile-li who witnessed the battle looked in fear as she can see the massive ship heading towards them. The Explorer pushed rocks and debris out of the way with its shields as it headed straight for the small defenceless and disabled blue transport.

Kraile-li jumped out her chair to warn the others that they are about to be boarded with Lolai-yu following behind.

Suddenly large banging sounds echoed throughout the ship as the Explorer lowered its docking arm and attached it to the side of the ship.

Silence followed after a shudder and clanking of metal on the outer hull. The suspense was epic, everyone stood in silence to know whom this new invader was, everyone clearly knew about the treatment they're going to expect and this massive size ship can only mean that they are most feared in the quadrant. There have been rumours of a very powerful sect that takes Cataline people and they're never heard from again, perhaps these are the people.

Kraile-li stood in fear almost ready to faint with Lolai-yu ready to fight anyone that enters the ship; she grasps the nearest weapon and builds up her anger ready to strike.

Lay-yi being young and having the memories of her past experience begins to get very worried, sticking close to her friend who is still inside the cocoon.

A small hole is then drilled in the side of the hull and purple smoke pumped in which will decontaminate all infections and diseases. However the Cataline people don't know about this and they all could do was to hold their breath and pray. They don't know who they are, but they know the enemy will not kill them due to the high value they pose.

McGregor stood outside the airlock door going over all the checks before the break the seal into the blue silky ship.

"OK everyone, remember be careful and we must get these people to the decontamination and treatment centre at the end of this hall way. Once they get the translator microbes it should make our job more easier, but for the time being we must be careful, and watch out for weapons." McGregor warned.

With a small charge, the transports door springs open to a dark and musty place. The crew and McGregor walk in only to turn and find a large opening full of Cataline people all holding each other and looking very scared.

McGregor then calls out for Arania to help and convince the people that they are safe.

A state of confusion erupted, as no one knows who the humans are and why a member of their own species was helping them. After a while everyone got the hint that they are needed to walk out and down the tunnel. A few of the crew helped to carry the cocoons out of the ship to the treatment centre.

But McGregor ended up having a run in with Lolai-yu who was standing behind a hatch ready to pounce on the first person who came through and take out

before she was subdued. As McGregor walked into the room, he was met by an angry female who proceeded in bashing his head in. McGregor, who was caught of guard came plummeting to the ground and was unable to fend of the angry female. A few of his crew managed to overhear the yells for help and capture then remove Lolai-yu who by this time was out of control in a fit of rage.

"Captain, are you OK," One of the crewmen, lamented as he tried to pick him off his feet.

"Damn it, that female bashed me in, god!" said McGregor muttering to himself as he checked his blood soaked hand he moved form his head. "I will have to go to the medical bay, take over," McGregor then left the area with a slight stumble as he tried his best to leave with some dignity after being beaten up by a cute blue creature.

At the treatment centre a few crewmembers can be seen marching the Cataline people through different rooms, one room had more purple decontamination smoke. Then they passed into the room that contained translator microbes to be breathed in. No one from the Cataline people knew what was going on, but the crew directing them did not help matters as they rushed them through. "That's it! Go on through, I know you don't understand me, but never mind! You will eventually, that's it, move it!" as one crewmember said pushing the people through the rooms.

A good old fella, who has a small crush on these people, was eagerly watching them pass through the treatment centre. Sam who works at maintenance and controls the Space Car bays was watching the Cataline people, as if he was window-shopping. His friend came and began to talk to him.

"See anyone you like?" Said Sam's friend.

"They are so hot!" Sam over enthusiastically said with his eyes fixated on the females walking past like lost children. "They're kind of like a human with blue skin, cat like ears, small teeth like a vampire, sexy skin clothing and the spots of a Trill without the symbiont. Very unique"

Arania spotted Sam's hasty response towards her people, which prompted her to tell them of. This then sparked more confused and bewildered look from the Cataline people because no one, like them has ever disciplined or talked in a manner that Arania just did.

Chapter 10

(The Calm)

The treatment centre. It's a place that everyone will end up visiting some time in their lives. Mainly used for treatment or decontamination, it's a place that McGregor would not like to visit every single day of his career. However on this occasion he decides to catch up on how his new guests are progressing.

Walking into the room, he holds a glass-computerised tablet in one hand catching the attention of the remaining people working. A quick survey of the room and all its inhabitation gives McGregor a basic idea of the conditions everyone is in before approaching Arania for more information. "So, tell me, how are our visitors progressing?" he questions in a deep and hollow voice that overshadows the idle background chatter.

Arania who was startled by his appearance immediately remembered her role and answered, "Captain, you startled me! Everything seems to be going ok, we have checked most of my people and they seem to have different problems reported however we are dealing with it."

McGregor slowly walks up to the one-way window and rolls his eyes in the direction of the Cataline moving from one room to another like products on an assembly line.

"That's good, are the translator microbes working?" he questioned knowing that the microbes are the most important aspect in this whole mission. Without the microbes, communicating with the Cataline will be extremely difficult, a task that McGregor does not want to put time and resources into.

"Some might be working, it takes 20 minutes for the microbes to connect with the brain and allow translations to take place. They are very nervous and we are trying everything to calm them down," replied Arania following McGregor's footsteps towards the window and portraying a compassionate look towards her people being processed.

"They'll be OK once they can understand us." He then turns to look at her in a more serious matter spotting Sam in the background looking at her backside in a perverted way. "Make sure that everyone has their identity taken and logged into the computer, the last thing we need is the internal defence grid to come online and shoot anyone that does not belong to this ship."

After finishing his sentence, McGregor drifts his head to the side in order to get a good and uninterrupted view at Sam and shouts at him loudly! "Sam! I want you in my ready room immediately!"

Lolai-yu went through the standard process and resisted, as a girl of her nature would do. She surveyed each room to get a better understand about her current situation. The manner that she is being treated confused her a lot, "What are they doing?" she spoke quietly to herself making sure not to draw any attention because the rooms they are being transferred in are idly quiet. "Purple smoke? What's this for?" Lolai-yu questioned herself as she moved from one glass room to another the only thing she can think about is... More questions.

She would often cause a struggle with any human that tries to touch her. They soon learned not to handle her but encourage her through by more unpleasant ways. It's crude but necessary to get the line moving.

Lolai-yu felt slightly strange sitting down in the semi musty room with eleven of her own kind glaring at each other. Uncomfortable thoughts rummaged through their minds about the next instalment and they also waited to be molested.

Feeling slightly strange, Lolai-yu slowly began to understand the humans. It didn't come on like a flick of a switch, but more like a dimmer switch. As she leered at the crew talking outside the door, phrases and words slowly began to change into a language she can understand. This causes her to speak out loud and catches the attention of Arania who was waiting behind the wall. "What, the humans are speaking my language? But how?"

Arania walked into the room and took a sporting glance at all eleven of her kind who became slightly relaxed after she walked in. Arania would have liked to speak to them in their own language, but she cannot remember much from her childhood days and her own language, so she chooses to speak English at them.

She spoke to everyone and explained that the USS Explorer is here to help and they are not in any danger. Other crewmembers all tried to help with the sick and injured, to make sure they were taken to the medical deck and that everyone was assigned rooms where they can stay until they reach their home world. The cocoons were taken to the medical bay and everyone was logged into the computer.

Hours later when everything had settled down and the ship was moving again after recycling the transport and the hostile enemy ships, Lay-yi stood in her quarters worried about her friend. No one told her anything and being worried she leaves her room in search for her.

She walked and walked which felt like hours until she finally got the courage to ask one of the crewmembers. She was reluctant at first; she would just look around at the crewmembers, like a shy girl, trying to keep out of everyone's way. Different races always attacked her before and this is the first time no one has done this. This made her feel safer and slowly sparked an interest in this new alien race.

But worried about her friend she asked a female crewmember that just passed her. "Excuse me!" She asked lowering her head to the metal floor.

The crewmember stopped and looks at her in a pleasant way.

"Hi, are you OK?" the crewmember said.

"Yes, I am trying to find my friend who was taken from me. They told me that she was being taken to the medical area," questioned Lay-yi looking at her, but secretly studying this new alien race for their reactions and getting ready to spot the tail, tail signs of an incoming attack. "This alien is female and perhaps I can defend myself," she muttered to herself.

But the crewmember then brings Lay-yi back to reality with a response to her question, "that should be easy, just ask the computer to guide you." She then went up to the computer panel on the side of the hallway wall.

"Computer, can you please show." She then looked at Lay-yi and asked for her name, before continuing. "Lay-yi the way to the medical bay."

"Please follow the marker lights on the floor to guide you to the medical bay, if you require assistance please use the computer terminals throughout the ship." instructed a cold and computerised voice that echoed through the computer terminal towards the individuals. To help Lay-yi on her way, a band of lights began to flash on the floor as a clear and precise path for her to follow. She thanked the crewmember before embarking on the journey.

Lolai-yu, who resisted her way throughout the decontamination and organisation of the ship, became shocked and confused to learn that she was given her own room. "This doesn't make sense, why did they give me a room?" She questioned taking a slow and cautious glance around the room. The uneasy feeling of not trusting her saviours slowly begins to creep into Lolai-yu's mind. "What are they up to?" She often questions herself inside the dimly lit room just waiting for the sudden rush of people to attack and abuse her.

She needed to investigate and find out what their intentions are going to be. So being persistent she asked Arania to organise a meeting with the captain to discuss what is going to happen to them.

The ready room glowed with the light emanating from the florescent lights in the ceiling. The idle humming of the ship filled the void of silence as McGregor sat at his post discussing the current situation with his crewmen. "We managed to transfer about four hundred and seventy six life forms; however a total of ten of them died from panic." Tulack said getting into more detail, "A total of three hundred and eighty female, fifty male and forty six cocoons are currently on this ship. All the people are registered in the main computer and the cocoons have been taken to the medical bay."

Tulack looked around before continuing with his status report, "I have taken the liberty in providing the survivors living quarters during our voyage and I believe everyone is settling in." His tone then changes slightly into a cautious announcement, "However, I must caution you captain that security teams have been struggling to control several individuals."

The room fell victim to a sudden low rush of murmurs from the crew before Tulack added some good news for once, "We have managed to recycle most of the vessels and our material reserves in cargo bay one is up by forty-five percent. However, due to minor damage done to the ship in the last conflict, the maximum warp speed we can travel is warp three point five"

That last comment just ruined the good mood for a lot of people in the room and the chatter began to rise. Standing up McGregor placed his hands out in an effort to calm everyone down, "OK, calm yourselves down." He orders as he briskfully walks closer to the holographic projector showing the view of the ship and damage to the outer hull.

"This can present a small problem. Can we do repairs out of warp and with the shields down?" McGregor questioned as he viewed the damage done to his vessel. Red marks spewed all over the rear end of the ship that clearly marked the damaged areas and numbers filled in the gaps.

"That would be unadvised, dropping out of warp and lowering the shields will render us defenceless and I believe that the two remaining ships that escaped are currently gathering reinforcements." Tulack said.

"Computer, how long will it take to repair the damage using the repair system?" McGregor stared at the results that was displayed on the image in front of him before a few seconds passed before the computer interrupted his thoughts.

"Total time to ship repair, 30 minutes." Replied the computers voice in a cold female tone.

McGregor clenched his fists ever so slightly as he prepared to take his next big decision that could cause massive problems or repair the ship. The thought weighed down heavily on his mind and a decision was needed now. "Captain to the bridge," said McGregor as he opens a COM channel on the communicator located on his desk in front of him. "Are there any hostile ships in our scanning range?" Almost immediately, a voice bellows out in front of all the static and delivers the good news that everyone was waiting for, the area is clear.

It was a moment that everyone onboard wanted to see for a long time. The ship that can repair itself just like being in space dock. So without delay, McGregor gives the all clear and orders the computer to begin repairs on the damaged areas of the ship that was caused by the nuclear blast.

At the forward section of the ship, all the red rectangle containers attached to the hull snapped open with the force of a spring opening and an arm unravelled itself

from it's home. The arm was long, grey and heavy. Holding a claw type pincers at the end with several tools for replicating and de-replicating. The arm stretched into space before moving around to the damaged outer hull. Within minutes a beam of light began dematerialising the damaged hull plating and cleaning the whole area.

Once the area was clean the arm then replicated the whole section of plating and then installed it onto the hull with a final beam of light to seal the edges.

"Holy crap, look at that" some of the crew whispered enthusiastically looking at the entire hallway being replaced in a flash. The crew have heard rumours about this ships ability to repair it are self, but no one has seen it until now. Looking stunned, they just stared at the work being done.

Normally anyone who sees an Explorer type ship will have the luxury of seeing one twice in a lifetime. But to see an Explorer type ship repair itself is never heard of.

Within twenty-five minutes the damaged and buckled hull was brand new with the repair arm going over a few spots just like polishing the chrome on a car before packing itself back into the red container with the spring hatch closing.

"The repairs to the damaged sections have been completed, a total of three hundred and fifty units was used from cargo bay one and fifty units recovered." The mechanical voice of the computer announced.

Once again the ship went back into warp travelling at warp eight to the Cataline home world.

Drinking tea was one of the few pleasures that McGregor was able to indulge himself from time to time. In times of hard workmanship and command he often hid into his office and happily sipped a few cups of tea to make the stressful mood fade away. The taste was good too.

Sitting at his desk, he feels at home with his feet on the table and looking over a report on the glass-computerised tablet. Suddenly a piercing beep startled McGregor from his slumber. With a sudden moody reply McGregor yelled, "What is it!"

Arania walked in with Lolai-yu who had every intention in ruining McGregor's peaceful time. Lolai-yu marched in and DEMANDED to know his intentions. McGregor was not in the mood for chitchat and being forty-seven years old, he was not in the mood for a lengthy conversation.

Putting his pad on the desk he asked, "Well, go on."

"Sir, I found someone who is representing the Cataline people on this ship. She would...." Arania was then interrupted with a sudden outburst from Lolai-yu.

"What are your intentions with us? You took us onboard your ship and for what purpose?" Lolai-yu angrily interrupted as she slowly leaned towards him.

McGregor placed his cup of tea on the table and carried on reading the very last paragraph on a not so interesting report about Sam's behaviour before. With a slight pause he eyeballed Lolai-yu before placing the pad on his desk.

"I sure hope that your people are not as rude as you!" He exclaimed challenging Lolai-yu's authority.

"I'm the captain of this vessel and I do not like being talked to in that manor. Do you understand?" McGregor returned Lolai-yu attitude in kind, because after all his efforts in saving her ass and her crew, he wanted to be treated with a little respect.

However the intimidating look that McGregor gave didn't dismay Lolai-yu but made her more determined then before to question this captains authority.

"I'm asking you a question, what are you going to do with us?" Lolai-yu demanded in a sharper tone.

McGregor took one final sip from his hot tea trying his best to control his emotions. After all, this race does spark some interest in his curiosity and he does have good experience from Arania. However, this other person is slowly beginning to piss him off.

McGregor typed a few commands onto the computer table and a few seconds later, the doors opened and a Klingon walked in standing with his head up straight looking at McGregor.

"Captain, you called for me!" He said in a dark and hollow tone typical of a Klingon.

"Yes, can you escort THIS person to her quarters and make sure she does NOT come back!" McGregor said in the most shallow and calm tone he can muster.

Then with a hint of eagerness, the Klingon grabbed her by the arm and almost dragged her out of McGregor's ready room saying, "With pleasure!"

The Klingon almost threw Lolai-yu into her room. Swearing and cursing, Lolai-yu didn't give up the struggle until the Klingon released her. Her thoughts stewed around her mind at the thought of McGregor's actions

She stood in her room angrier than ever, and also with a slight confused look in her face, the captain and the Klingon did not hit her, or abuse her. This was a test she performed to see the outcome. The results are looking interesting. She had been getting reports from her people about the treatment they have been receiving. The humans haven't harmed one person. This was very confusing.

The silence then began to fall on the occupants in the ready room; McGregor looked at Arania and said, "I hope she doesn't speak for the rest of your people."

Arania immediately replied "No, please forgive her; she has the burden of being in control of a large group of people, and the things she has been through. May I ask? What is the plan for them?"

McGregor then went back onto his desk and said, "I am planning on sending them back to their home world I believe they will be safe there. We have their home world's location and this is our current course for now." He then offers a slight pleasing smile towards Arania, "Hopefully you will be able to see your home world."

McGregor then carried on "Everyone seems to have settled in fine and it will take a few weeks to reach their home world."

The sudden urgent chime through the COM channel interrupted the peaceful conversation. McGregor then turned on the view screen located on his desk and was summoned to the medical bay for more important information that the doctor and with help from a few new people discovered.

A section of the medical bay can be seen cluttered with cocoons, all nicely placed with dim lighting. Soft mattresses provided comfortable areas for the creatures to be born in.

Lei-lie who was the last creature to emerge out of the cocoon is still in great pain; curled up in the medical bay not much could be done. Nes-al-sar still remained beside her friend and tried everything to comfort her and make her unpleasant stage pass. The arrival of more Cataline people made Lei-lie and Nes-al-sar happier and relaxed.

Some new Cataline people arrived into the medical deck to offer their assistance because they're doctors in their own race, Michel was relaxed and more than thrilled that help arrived, nevertheless he made it clear that this was his station and to follow his orders.

One of the Cataline doctors approached Lei-lie in an effort to help her. She said in her own language, but because the translator microbes are in everybody,

everybody on the deck was able to understand. "Hello, I am one of the doctors that arrived on the transport. How are you feeling?"

Lei-lie replied in pain, "All of my body is burning, what is happening to me?"

"You are experience gene contamination symptoms, they will go away in a few weeks, Let me give you something." The Cataline doctor then gave her an injection of something that began to relieve her symptoms.

However Michel then took the device from the Cataline doctor and said to her with a glare in his eye, "Excuse me! Can you please consult me before you start injecting my patients with unknown compounds?"

He then leered at the syringe and questioned, "What is this?"

The Cataline doctor then reassured and apologised for her actions and explained to the doctor that the substance temporary un-bonds the foreign DNA that is causing the pain and she will feel better for a day.

Lei-lie then sat up from her bed feeling a little better, looking around she scopes the area and sees the complexity of her situation.

This is the first time she is able to think clearly and using this opportunity she looks around enthusiastically like a young child. Spotting her friend Nes-al-sar she is overcome by joy and relief that her friend is in good health and looking much better. Still her mental health and being on a strange ship brings a slight doubt about how she will be treated and her current situation.

She hugs and holds her friend Nes-al-sar with the doctor hovering over with a tricorder still a little puzzled at the medicine that was just given.

McGregor walked into the medical bay to witness the young girl feeling much better which gave him a little relief that something is going OK for once.

"What do you have to report doctor?" McGregor announced.

"I was asked by one of the alien doctors that they needed to talk to you." Michel replied, but then the alien doctor then updated them on the name of their race.

But before the Cataline doctor had the chance to talk, Lolai-yu walked into the medical bay leering at McGregor as she walks past. "What are you doing here? I don't want to see you!" Lolai-yu said with her nose stuck up.

"If I could transport you to the last deck on this ship I would have." McGregor angrily replied with a slight lowered and sarcastic tone "That will take you a while to get back up here!"

But before Lolai-yu could reply to the comment, McGregor just did not want to argue and told them the news that he thought might get Lolai-yu of his back and hopefully ease and remove tension among the Cataline people.

"Do not worry, we are on a course back to your home world where you can go back home" McGregor happily said.

But before he can continue all the Cataline people in the room worryingly said "NO!"

"Please do not do that, we spent our entire life trying to escape there!" Lolai-yu said in desperation with a few shocking comments from other Cataline in the room.

McGregor stood there with the look of confusion, why does this race refuse to go back home? So with curiosity he asked the question.

"Why?" he questioned.

Chapter 11

(The truth)

The truth was bound to me told sooner or later and the question of “Why” would be told, a secret that impelled a race to despair.

Lolai-yu stood in a trance as she fought to say something. Something needed to be said otherwise they all would be back on their home world facing the very horrendous acts they tried to escape from. She did not know what these humans are trying to do. Or their intentions, but from the current actions observed she could finally understand that they mean no harm to herself or her people.

McGregor felt the presence of eyes watching him, as he looked around the room trying to workout what’s wrong. Lolai-yu looked, as so did the rest of her people, praying that she can say something to change the captain’s mind. Everyone was in a state, standing there waiting for the response and still in shock about where they’re going.

Lolai-yu then explained, “Our world has been over run by a race called the Krainers. A very brutal and savage race with the most powerful ships and weapons in this part of the galaxy”

Moving his posture closer to Lolai-yu, McGregor looked directly at her and replied, “They’re the people attacking you?”

Lolai-yu carried on, “Yes, they invaded our world centuries ago and turned our beautiful flourishing world into a dark and baron place. They enslaved and abused us plus they killed many of my people.” She then carried on, “We have spend our entire life trying to escape our planet and getting away from the enslavement camps. We almost didn’t make it getting past the massive battles that happen around our solar system.”

“Battles?” McGregor questioned as he moved his hand towards his chin.

“Every race is at war with each other to obtain us. Because we release an Electro-fluidic field it drives all the other races crazy, it’s got something to do with their genetics, however it does not seem to affect the people on this ship.” Lolai-yu explained, looking around with confusion after saying the last words because she herself was unable to understand why humans are unaffected.

Then Michel interrupted, “That’s one of the things I wanted to tell you, from readings I have discovered from around the ship and the... Krainers that you have colourfully named them,” Michel said looking at Lolai-yu with a sly smile before carrying on, “the Cataline people are releasing an Electro-fluidic field that drives the Krainers mating drive into overdrive. Well, it makes them go crazy... But from scans I have preformed from the Krainers they are not carbon based and this seems to be a major factor. It does not seem to affect us or the rest of the crew.”

Lolai-yu then worryingly interrupted, “If you go to our world you will not only endanger us, but with all our people onboard your ship. They will sense you coming and immediately come for us.”

“Three of our people are already at stage three in our lives and they are producing the strongest fields which got us into danger when we tried to escape, you must escape this area before we are intercepted and attacked.” Lolai-yu begged almost kneeling down to her feet that she had done many times for her Krainer masters.

McGregor bowed his head down showing a sly unhappy facial expression with the situation, because he now has a new problem to solve, what to do with all the Cataline people onboard his ship.

Moving away slightly he ponders. From a momentary glance at things, it looks like he will have no choice but to take them all to earth. After all, they wanted to escape and from what they told him, things are not good on their own home world. However there is a sense of curiosity to see how bad things are and he also ponders if he's able to do something to stop this madness and get these damn people off his ship. Food and supplies are rapidly being used and he just wants his vessel back.

"Lolai-yu!" McGregor said looking at while he racks his mind for a moment as he tried to remember her name, "I want you to accompany me to the meeting room with the other senior officers to discuss matters in more detail in one hour." McGregor ordered before walking over to the doctor to discuss other matters.

McGregor then walks over to the Michel who was standing by other patients. "Michel, you had something else to talk to me about." McGregor questioned as he walked closer to him.

"We might have a small problem. From my counting we seem to have fifty seven Cataline people heavily pregnant and this medical bay is not equipped to deal with this at the moment." Michel did all he can to improve the situation in his limited medial bays, but being a ship of transport and not a proper Federation star ship their supplies are limited.

McGregor stood with the expression of, 'what else can go wrong.' However he did not say this out loud because tempting fate was not a good idea at this moment in time. But much to his relief one of the Cataline nurses who is helping Michel had some good news. "We should have plenty of medical supplies and resources back on our home world. If you can find some way at getting them." She elegantly announced in a sweet and meaningful way.

"They are under the ground in hidden bunkers but I can give you the information when you need them." She said finishing of the sentence with a smile. McGregor acknowledged the comment and took a mental note of the information before proceeding to the door.

Lei-lie got up from her bed and stood next to her friend Nes-al-sar with one burning question in her mind. "Who was that?"

"I don't know, he might be the one in charge of these people." Nes-al-sar replied. After saying that she then grabbed her friend enthusiastically on the arm and chirped "Come with me, I have something amazing to show you!"

Nes-al-sar, who grabbed Lei-lie's arm left the medical bay dragging her friend behind like two children running to the park, Michel took a momentary glance at them and before placing the pad on the table. He proceeded in stopping them, but because of their fast speed, they escaped leaving Michel eerily standing pointing at them down the corridor, "I didn't authorize those two to leave!" He laminated under is breath.

McGregor walked down the corridor and entered the large mess hall that bustled with his crew going about their everyday activities. Arania sat alone at her table busy chewing away at some kind food that he was sure had no name, so approaching he interrupted her idle playing with the food. "Your people are very interesting."

He carried on after taking a bite from his food, "looks like I have a small problem on my hands, a large number of your people are heavily pregnant and we have a medical bay with no supplies for this. Then to top it all off, we are unable to drop them off at your home world."

McGregor gave a slight sigh towards his food as he wondered into the thoughts of bliss trying to contemplate the reality of the situation. Interrupting him

from this deep thinking Arania questioned with a hit of concern, "So what's the plan?"

McGregor looked around the large mess hall seeing all his crewmembers lining up preparing to receive their meals being served by a team of cooks. An assorted array of meals laid out in containers on the panel warmers with all kinds of meals that can be picked.

Large spacious windows offered an uninterrupted view into space and McGregor could not help but escape the fact that most of the inhabitance of the room is all Cataline. None of the crew didn't mind the large number of them and besides, some even liked the young sweet blue people.

Gazing back at Arania the background slowly merged into this one person he knows for over a year. "I have no Idea, I am eating!" He stated the obvious as he gave her a very uncommon smile.

"Do you want to know something interesting?" McGregor said changing the subject. "Before you joined this ship I didn't expect a Cataline person to join my crew. Also something strange happened when you joined." He pointed his fork at her during the last sentence.

McGregor grabbed his glass of replicated water and proceeded in removing the food stuck in his throat with it before carrying on with his in-depth description of the events leading up to today. Although still looking at the water he thought using normal water instead of the replicated crap would be more beneficial to the rest of the crew. His mind then drifts back to reality on the matter at hand.

"Before, I would have a steady stream of crew joining and leaving. The work was sometimes not for them. But as soon as you joined from Starfleet I have not had a single resignation during the whole time you have been here. Also it feels like the whole crew is at peace. I think your Electro-fluidic field is affecting us in a --good way." McGregor said hinting that he is planning on doing something.

Sam then walked into the mess hall with the biggest smile a human can have on his face. Eagerly scooping around he looks for a Cataline female that might be sitting on her own. Spotting the cutest one he can find, Sam makes his move. Being a little nervous, as he never really made a move on a species like this except for Arania who didn't show any interest in him.

A cute looking blue creature idly and curiosity picks at her food trying to wonder what to do with it. Being given Earth food has left her slightly out of sync with the rest of her people and having such a colourful array of food to choose from left her speechless for choice. She was accustomed to blobs of goof back on her home world that barely kept her alive let alone meet on her body. Poking at the food, she was interrupted by an overenthusiastic Sam.

"Hi, do you want company?" Sam said with a distracted smile pulling her attention away from the array of food.

Sam suddenly became captivated by the appearance of her pink eyes that glowed with the florescent lights. He had never seen such marbles before and as he stood beside her, he became hypnotised by the overpowering elegance of them. "Wow, Pink!" He chimed inside his mind, he has only seen Arania's eyes and they were blue.

Before the young woman can answer Sam buttered out another strange question "Your eyes are pink?" Realising what he has done, his face almost went bright red with embarrassment when the woman looked at him as he sat down.

"I am sorry, I have never seen such a beautiful creature with pink eyes before" Sam said trying the obvious to chat her up. "My name is Sam" he continued to speak to her but not noticing McGregor looking at him in the background.

McGregor frowned slightly as he spoke to Arania "Looks like Sam is up to his old tricks again..."

Arania rolled her head in the direction of the troublemaker and a small smile crept along her face as she returned to her normal position. "That lad will never give up..." Arania chimed as he ate a piece of food that almost looked like some kind of green jelly plant.

"Well, he is persistent and harmless as always, at least he has his sight on someone else and not you." McGregor said with a small and slight smile with the last comment.

Arania looked slightly embarrassed but carries on with their original topic "The only idea I can give to you captain is to take them with us, after we have gathered our supplies and also rescued more of my people."

McGregor sat there with a slight sign of perspiration showing in his skin, the sudden rise in his body temperature was a clear signal that a sharp and uneasy thought progressed throughout his mind. Last thing he wants to do is take a whole planet of people back with him. His mind raced into the future about what might happen when his massive ship arrives in orbit at their home world. "Lets just get there and see what the situation is like; I do not want to take a whole planet with me. This ship can only hold about 15,000 life forms or even more and if this problem can't be resolved, then I will follow that option."

McGregor stood up and took a deep breath of processed air before explaining that a crew meeting will be held in forty minutes. Feeling the stuffiness of the mess hall, he decided to take it leave in his ready room.

The humming and idle silence of the corridors was interrupted by the sound of running feet as Nes-al-sar followed by her friend Lei-lie ran towards the habitat dome.

Running in, they where engulfed with a sea of green and warm moist air, Lei-lie stood there in utter shock as she has never seen anything like this on a ship before. They both looked around in utter excitement and anticipation before spotting another Cataline woman standing a few meters away.

The area enriched them with the dazzling array of colours from trees, plants, grass parks, small built buildings and a huge glass dome that protected everything from the vacuum of space. Not only this, as soon as they walked further in, a breathtaking waterfall enriched their view on the entire experience of the habitat dome. "WOW, I have never seen anything so beautiful," chirped Lei-lie feeling the warm moisten air emanating from the waterfall towards her face.

"How was this all made?" Lei-lie quickly added almost falling over as she walked from the stone path to the nicely cutgrass to get a better view at the waterfall and small lake.

Kraile-li who is always afraid and very worried about being taken and boarded by the people on the USS Explorer had forgotten all about her worries as she stood on the bluff lining the side of the lake.

Lei-lie and Nes-al-sar spotted the other Cataline and decided to approach her, feeling the excitement with harmony to their own, they all introduced each other.

Kraile-li just stood there for ten minutes looking at the view of this massive habitat and hydroponics dome. Her fear and loneliness just vanished out of her mind, seeing such beauty and care in creating this unbelievable area on the ship has left her without words. Not only her but Lei-lie stood there feeling her legs weakening and almost succumbing to falling.

Suddenly Nes-al-sar nudged her and cheerfully diverted her attention, "Look at this..." she said with a cute but not so big smile. She placed her hand in the air and within seconds a bird flew down from one of the trees and sat on her hand.

Nes-al-sar pulled her hand gently down and stroked the small and defenceless creature with Kraile-li and Lei-lie eagerly and excitingly looking at it.

"What's that?" Lei-lie questioned.

"It is called a BIRD!" Nes-al-sar said with a great excitement with the word 'bird' that encouraged her rise up on her tiptoes making her ears instinctually stand to attention higher than normal.

"This is what the humans call them. There are hundreds of them all over the place," she said passing the small zebra finch to Lei-lie.

Kraile-li drifted her eyes towards the dome and spotted the whizzing effects from the stars indicating that the vessel they are currently on is travelling at warp. "Look at the stars, we are travelling at warp, this is very strange" Kraile-li murmured to herself noticing the strange ball of light in the middle of it all creating a pleasant dawn-break effect throughout the dome.

"How big is this area," Lei-lie gasped trying to comprehend all that is around her.

"I don't know, I have only been here a short time." She then quickly continued after a brief pause. "My name is Kraile-li who are you..." Kraile-li said getting closer and with a friendly smile...

The three Cataline people introduced themselves before they made the choice to look around the habitat ring, which took most of the space in the centre of the ship. Expanding several decks and having many layers the enchanted three had plenty to explore.

Few moments later back on the command deck in the meeting room the senior staff was discussing their next plan. Lolai-yu sat on the chair looking slightly out of place but not at all frightened as Arania sat next to her.

"From what I can understand the Cataline people are emitting some kind of Electro-fluidic field that drives all the non-carbon based life forms in this sector crazy." McGregor drifts his eyes across the room before continuing with his sentence, "Unfortunately they can use this to track us."

He then looked back down towards the computer terminal on his desk plotting the ship and the Cataline home world on the holographic display in the middle of the room.

Lolai-yu jumped a little when the holographic image flashed to life, but became fascinated once she figured out it was not a ploy to hurt her.

Lolai-yu then replied in kind to the remark, "Yes, while we escaped, the enemy began to follow us and because we had such a large number of people onboard, the ship was easy to track."

Tulack pierced the idle murmurs of the room and stated his fact for everyone, "I have managed to pinpoint the frequency of the Electro-fluidic field and have modified the primary shields to mask their signatures and the attacks have stopped since I have done this."

Tulack's cold and emotionless manor drew the attention of Lolai-yu who stared at him with much curiosity. She also noticed his ears and surmised that he was not human and felt more interested in this new species that looks human. Realizing what he said she spat out, "This ship was attacked again?"

"Yes, about six times since we left your vessels location." Tulack replied. Lolai-yu replied in a confused and surprised manor. "But I did not notice anything."

Razing his right eyebrow Tulack sarcastically said, "You would not, their weapons are not efficient enough to overwhelm the mass of this ship and cause the ship to alter its position and the weapons on this ship are far more advanced than the enemy that has occupied your home world."

Leeli helped in the conversation stating that the Cataline home world offers a very prosperous place to gather supplies and resources for the voyage home. If they wanted information about what has been happening this was going to be the best place to visit.

McGregor then made a decision, "Well, since we are over half way there and it's only a matter of time before we reach their home world, I have decided to go for Leeli advice on this matter" he raised his head towards her before adding, "But before that, I want to know how this once prosperous world, became the way it is now."

Lolai-yu then told them the truth after receiving the hint from McGregor. "All this happened before my time but from what information I can obtain, about two hundred and fifty years ago our planet was protected by a shield that our ancestors created to block the Electro-fluidic field. Because they knew the effects that our chemistry caused, they made the shield. Having Millions of people on our planet and once the shield failed, our Electro-fluidic field was strong enough to reach halfway across the galaxy."

She then carried on displaying a lowered and upset tone to her voice, "This is when the aliens attacked... Bombing our cities and capturing us, millions of us died and they tried to enslave or kill us. Especially the male population. Our female hormones and the Electro-fluidic field drove every alien crazy. There was mass rapes, kidnapping and before long, most of our people were taken away and only a few were left on our home world." Lolai-yu paused slightly for a rest bite before continuing.

"Constant battles remain for the remaining people around our home world and it wasn't long before camps were made up to sell us to the highest bidder, I decided to rescue as many people and head to the anomaly for a better life... Our world is completely dead we should rescue as many people and leave... Please help us.." Lolai-yu pleaded to McGregor.

The atmosphere grew stale with everyone looking at McGregor for the hopeful answer that was plaguing their minds. The word of "OK" would make them more than happy.

Replying in a typical tone classic to McGregor's money caring attitude, "We will see what can be done once we reach your home world, with the shields configured and our victories against the enemy... Let's see shall we..."

"How long until we get there?" McGregor inquired to navigation on the control panel on his section of the desk.

"We should reach the Cataline home world in one hour captain," replied a board and uninterested voice that spewed over the com unit.

McGregor searched his thoughts for a plan after hearing the news about the journey. He thought hard and hiding the ship will be the first step toward infiltrating the world and to survey the current situation. He looked towards the holographic image and representations before succumbing to a decision.

McGregor feeling the tiredness of the debate and using his mind in such a manor, used the remaining time to enlighten everyone, "Good, now, I want someone to find a place we can hide this ship so we're not detected." He then added quickly,

gesturing again with a slight sly smile towards Tulack, "Tulack I'll leave that to you, hiding a one mile ship should be easy for a Vulcan."

Tulack gazed motionless into the endless void of space as he contemplated the hard work McGregor forced him into.

Chapter 12

(Orbit)

Within half an hour, the Explorer dropped out of warp only to be face to face with a new problem that could cause navigation problems. Arania stood in front of the broad window looking out towards the mass of obstructions in their way. Anticipating the helmsman interruption, she prepares herself for the instructions he was going to say.

“Captain, we are picking up a massive amount of obstruction ahead, we will not be able to travel at warp safely because the objects are too big for the deflector to handle.” The helmsman informed Arania before trying his best to calculate the best course of action. .

Arania turned around and stared at the helmsman’s station before walking gracefully up to him. She focuses her attention on the workstation panel displaying an endless array of writing scrolling down the screen. Taking in all the information, she carefully processes it all before making an announcement.

She pondered over the fact that the shields are powerful and might be suitable to handle the physical force of the objects if they choose to activate them. However she needs clarification before she makes the final order, “Can’t we carry on with the shields up?”

Tulack overheard Arania’s conversation and hesitantly performed some complex calculations on his station and with the help with his superior Vulcan mind, something that all Vulcan proud themselves on. It didn’t take him long to punch thought the idle sounds of the computer terminals and humming of the ship to condescend Arania’s line of thinking, “I would advise against it, I am detecting unexploded ordinance and mines within the debris, if we just travel through we will undoubtedly alert the enemy to our presence.”

Arania looked back down at the monitors to confirm his logic and sure enough, he was correct as always. She calculated that a vessel of this size would set off too many ordinances and alert the enemy to their presence. She sighed slightly realizing this mission just got harder and asked the next logical question she could think off. If we cannot bring the ship to the planet, perhaps we can use something smaller to bring the people to us.

“How far from the home world are we?” Arania asked, as if pleading for the answer she wanted.

Tulack, being ever so charming and showing no emotion began to type into his console and a 3D holographic representation spring to life of their current location on the main view screen that converted itself from one of the windows. After receiving the results and displaying it, he announced, “We are currently outside the Cataline star system holding position.”

McGregor waltzed onto the nucleus of his vessel to investigate why his ship was out of warp and to assist in any problems that has arisen. He was not amused when his idle time became interrupted in the habitat dome. He almost felt himself drifting off to sleep before the sudden motion of the ship brought him back to reality, however the tiredness still followed him like a shadow that will not leave its host.

Arania sighed again slightly at the sight of her leader arriving on deck that looked a little worse for wear. She found it to her amusement, as she watched her captain try and straighten himself up before approaching her.

Hiding a slight smile at the incident, she hesitantly informed him with reports and updates on what has happened during the past thirty minutes.

“So Tulack, while we are currently waiting? Show me the whole map of this star system.” McGregor said standing up and looking at the view screen in more detail. Tulack typed smoothly into his workstation bringing up all the necessary information on the holographic display for McGregor to see.

McGregor looked at the map very closely which consisted of six planets orbiting a twin star. It also showed in great detail a ring of asteroids on the outer rim and the unsightly scattering of destroyed ships all orbiting the planets around the sun.

McGregor stared at the unsightly wreckage and destruction that could have only come from endless wars. Miniature holographic hull fragments spewed all over the atmosphere in front of McGregor causing him to stand back unobtrusively. “Look at this, there must have been endless wars here. My god, this looks like trillions of ships have been destroyed.”

Standing at his post away from the holographic mess, Tulack responded to McGregor’s order to perform a deeper scan on the debris and to determine its age. His eyes rose briefly as he explained that the wreckage had been orbiting the sun for the past one thousand years. Murmurs echoed through the control deck as everyone looked towards the unsightly mess and death that awaits them.

McGregor interrupts the idle chatter and gets down to business, “OK, this planet here, it looks like a gas giant which is emitting some kind of static field that should hide our signature from all the ships that are fighting each other,” it was clear that McGregor spotted this little trick before he opened his mouth, as he looked at the green gas giant. Looking slightly larger than our Jupiter, it would provide a good hiding place.

The holographic ships carried on playing their endless fighting games right in front of the crew as real-time readings came from the real ships fighting outside in the rubble. The whole holographic demonstration rotated in place showing everything in great detail including the light flashes from weapons fire that caused Arania to step back.

While the display continued to rotate showing the detailed battles taking place, McGregor continued with his guessing work, “From the looks of it, we might need to find another strategy in getting information we need before we barge in there with guns blazing.”

Tulack could not help but wonder what the plan will be, so tactfully he wondered, “So captain, what is your plan?”

Even though Tulack was new to the crew, McGregor had the feeling that he couldn’t resist in saying that remark and decided to inform him and his crew on the plan. “We are going to pretend that we are alien traders looking to trade”

Being quite knowledgeable in this area of space, Lolai-yu thought it wise to attend the meeting on the control deck to offer her insights into the plan that McGregor explained to her about, prior to the current gathering. Her presence was quickly noticed as the doors to the command deck hissed opened and missing this blue creature was impossible. She still had her reservations about McGregor and they didn’t get off on a very good start at the beginning. However holding onto her fleshy clothing, she put all her faith into the humans to help them out.

“I am fairly confident the enemy doesn’t know we are here and this might provide a perfect opportunity to sneak in undetected and get the information we need. Maybe we can trade and rescue more Cataline people before hand.” Said McGregor looking at the star map on the view screen.

After his confident speech in explaining how they are safe, McGregor remembered that water was a very precious commodity and a very good tool that

could be used for trading. This would prove to be the leverage he needed to barter and infiltrate the Cataline home world. But to confirm this he needed to check with someone who knows the in's and out's.

"Lolai-yu, I looked at their database and it seems that water is a very precious commodity and we can use this?" McGregor said turning towards her.

Even though the idea of using water seemed a little uneasy for Lolai-yu. She wanted to get in and rescue her people, not participate in under the table bartering. However in response to McGregor's question she reluctantly said, "Yes"

Lolai-yu kept her face calm and dignified even though the idea shivered up her spine and there was nothing she could do about it. The idea was not much to be desired, but she needed to live with it.

Attracting each other like magnets, Lolai-yu and Arania both looked at each other over the slight and short conversation she had with McGregor. Arania shrugged her shoulders to Lolai-yu in a signal that his plan could work, no matter how crazy it might sound.

McGregor decided to use this opportunity to prepare for his next stage in his plan. He knew his vessel has secondary ships attached to the bottom of the main vessel and he has always wanted to use them in such a manor. But piloting the secondary ships would have to be completely human because, if a Cataline female were to be onboard, it would give the whole plan away. He turned and announced his big plan to the crew. "OK, I need a team of people to pilot the secondary ships because we are going to use that to approach the planet, Arania I am going to leave you in charge of the USS Explorer because I think the plan will be given away if we approach with you onboard..."

Lolai-yu froze in disbelief that a Cataline was left in charge of a star ship. She was more than curious at how this person, Arania acquired such power and ability from the humans. "What would let McGregor give command to one of us?" She thought to herself. Suddenly it dawned on her, "Perhaps the humans are more fair and opened minded then I thought."

Sam dwelled in the Space Car by playing around with tools trying to pass the idle time with nothing to do. Suddenly a sharp and canny beep rained through his COM unit placed between the mess he always left on his desk. The sudden beep caused him to drop a somewhat strange device onto the floor before looking at the terminal screen like a guilty boy that just nicked sweets from his mother's cabinet. "Sam, I need five Space cars transferred to the secondary ship, make sure they are ready to go."

McGregor bellowed over Sam's terminal screen.

Taking his much-respected team to the secondary ship, McGregor could not help, but invite the Klingons along, he surmised that they would love this part of the mission and provide the manpower, or, Klingonpower to keep the enemy off their backs should something go wrong. However, their smell was something they needed to put up with during the voyage as the air systems on the secondary ships was not perfect.

The Secondary ship is a smaller vessel attached to the bottom of the USS Explorer, Containing five decks and able to hold a crew of about sixty people, it was a secondary and also served as a larger life pod. Equipped with warp engines it is a self-sustaining ship independent from the main.

It was designed to be a transport vessel to shuttle people and supplies down to a newly discovered planet, which USS Explorer was originally designed for. Due to the size and weight of the USS Explorer it would not be possible for the ship to

land on any planet due to its mass. So having a smaller and lighter vessel, which is clamped to the underside of the USS Explorer, this provided an easy and convenient way in getting supplies and people to the planet and up again.

McGregor and his crew all walked onto the command deck of the secondary vessel setting up systems ready to take off, Sam quickly loaded all of the five space cars into the shuttle bay before joining them himself. His method of transporting the cars was basic. Drive them in and not in a very professional manor.

“Are we all set to go?” McGregor asked, feeling the effects of the cold stale filtered air coming from the processing vents.

Activity on the command centre in the secondary ship bustled as helmsmen and officers read off results to McGregor in a bid to get the vessel up and running for the new voyage to rescue the Cataline people. Weapons, propulsion, warp drive, life support and all the basic needs of the ship needed to be confirmed before the decision was made to detach the ship.

McGregor double-checked all the results, because a mistake at this early stage could spell disastrous later on in the mission. The last thing he will need is to end up in a firefight without weapons. Finally, the all clear was sounded before McGregor made his final decision, “Detach the ship”

Massive clamps that held the ship in place sprung open forcing a blast of thrust making the secondary ship fling away from the USS Explorer. Leaving a slightly large hole that can be seen in the middle of the ship, it became obvious that five other ships of the same design were attached to the underside of the Massive USS Explorer. The extra vessels added decks to the main ship and the Explorer could function as normal.

Gracefully floating beside the Explorer like newly born deep-sea creatures that swam beside their mother, the Secondary Vessel sprang to life with the warp nacelles displaying the ominous blue streak down the side of the cell assembly.

The Secondary Ships held the characteristics of the modern day Starfleet vessel with the slightly odd look of a jigsaw puzzle. This would eventually stand to reason because the whole thing would fit perfectly into place under the Explorer.

McGregor looked out of the view screen displaying the overwhelming size of the explorer before making his orders clear, “Lets do this, Set course for the Cataline home world, maximum speed, and keep an eye on the fighting...”

Few minutes into the flight, battles can be seen from the view windows of the ship. An endless dance of fighting and ramming spilled throughout the sector with lasers and torpedoes being the tools of the trade. This was indeed a dangerous place to be in and the small Secondary Vessel looked like a virgin in a nightclub. Deep in the rubble a defence platform fired phasers at an approaching dark shaped ship. This caused it to rupture into bits making it disappear into the surrounding debris.

Suddenly a nightmarish vessel similar to the one McGregor encountered before appeared from behind a large ruptured hull of a ship floating in space.

“Captain we are being hailed!” The communications offer said sounding slightly anxious at the familiar vessel.

Then suddenly, the familiar face of a horrid creature appeared on the screen, the same species they had encountered before. Because the computer was able to translate their language at a breathtaking speed, McGregor and his crew was able to understand.

“Your ship and your passage has not been recognised, State your business or you will be destroyed!” The intimidating voice bellowed throughout the speakers in the control centre.

McGregor began to show a slight sign of perspiration under his armpits as his mind instantly became black for a response. Typical behaviour that happens once in a while, but McGregor portrays a slight poker face towards the hairy hellish creature that looks like he'd been over by a truck.

However, McGregor needed to make a statement and the Secondary Ship does not have the same firepower as the Explorer. Both Vessels are evenly matched and both teams know this. But he said the first thing that came to his mind.

"We understand that you have ... Cataline people you are trading! We wish to trade." McGregor unemotionally replied.

"We are always open for new races to trade, what do you have!" ordered the Alien Krainer who displayed the characteristics of someone being noisy.

"We understand that you are need of water! We wish to trade." McGregor replied making sure not to offer too much information as he stared at the creature down the screen.

The alien Krainer looked at his fellow comrades on the view screen blissfully unaware that he is advertising his double-crossing body language to McGregor crew. The Krainer's on the vessel knew that the Cataline are valuable and stealing the water from the small vessel would be easy for them.

McGregor rolled his eyes in the direction Tulack and sarcastically said with his head leaning on the headrest of his chair, "I know what this thing is thinking, attack us and take the water."

"I believe that it would be a logical course of action." Tulack replied squinting his eyes at the sarcastic comment.

McGregor made it abundantly clear that attacking this vessel will only lead him and his crew to poison the water and no one will get the large supply. After he mentioned how much they have onboard, the suspicious alien at the receiving end paused as he deliberated with his crew.

The Krainer frowned before he decided to threaten McGregor. "Give us one hundred litres of water and you have my word that you can pass freely to the trading planet!"

Now McGregor's expression became somewhat reluctant at the comment, but he didn't want this to end up in a firefight. Although he would love to test the firepower of the ship on the horrid blob outside, this will only make their job harder. So he reluctantly transferred one hundred litres of water, by a pipe, to the ship for the right to have free passage.

The Krainer looked at McGregor through the view screen with a distracted smile. "I have uploaded the path you will take; I suggest you do not deviate from it." The screen then turned black with only the hollow idle sound of the ship.

McGregor spun around in his chair as he glanced around at his crew. "Well, looks like we have been granted passage, but operations, keep a close eye on their ships. If there's any sign of a problem I want to know about it." He leaned forward and placed his hand on his mouth as he gestured the possibility of a trap, "this all seems a little too easy!"

McGregor walked over to his chair in the middle of the command room and before sitting down he ordered, "Navigation, take us in!"

Activity soon flared up as all the crew scrambled around getting systems online to negotiate the massive obstacle course outside.

Hull fragments and asteroids sprayed the entire area with possible dangers as this small sleek grey vessel slowly manoeuvred in the hostile environment with the added threat of fighting in the background.

Suspicion always followed McGregor around and this mission was no different. Having a crew to look after, not to mention the large task in helping Arania, he kept a scrutinising eye on the controls and sensors for any sign of trouble. They did not communicate with the USS Explorer in case their signal was intercepted which would cause more problems.

Twenty minutes passed and the vessel finally arrived at the Cataline home world. Flying into orbit, the crew had to take extra care due to all the heavily damaged ships and floating debris in orbit.

Safe in orbit around the Cataline home world, the crew stared in disbelief through the view windows at the dark and derelict world. Their view on this world was one of beauty, like earth. But as they all looked they shuddered and gasped in disbelief. Brown and dirty, dust and storms swept the lands. The planet was rich in plant life and had seas of water, but now the planet is dead. Craters from time distant orbital bombings left great cities to rubble on the ground and clouds of storms bellowed over the land.

The moons surrounded the planet from different orbits. Rubble spewed the moon's surface from crashed vessels and bombed moon bases that indicated a vast network of cities that once inhabited the moons.

Far away in the distance, the secondary ship hovered in harmony between the moons and the mother world. McGregor broke the silence with an order as he shuffled around in his chair. "Navigation, try and set us in standard orbit beside all this junk." He then spun his chair in the direction to Tulack and added. "Tulack, scan the planet for Cataline."

As all the acknowledgements came in, Tulack said after completing his scans, "Captain from the scans I am reading there is a total of 55,765 life forms matching the description on the planet. Most are batched in caps of some kind and several hundred are scattered in several continents." The computer console chimed in the background during the speech with positive tones.

"Gather as much information as you can and send it to the main ship via the Astro-layer communication node." McGregor said anticipating a slight question from Tulack as he made a reply ready. .

"Astro-layer?" Tulack questioned with a puzzled look. He has a wide knowledge of devices and terms but he appears to be unfamiliar with this method of communication.

McGregor was happy to enlighten his Vulcan friend and he happily replied with a sly grin, "It should be in the system, the astro-plane is an area of space between normal space and subspace. I came across it when I read Voyagers logs about an encounter they had, so I sent a Node in there few years ago to act like a hidden communication path." He then shows a slight grin on his face, "It worked out very well, I used it once to outsmart the Klingons."

Tulack's eyes gleamed with interest towards this new device that he has managed to tap into and use. He knows many forms of communication, but this new form leaves him intrigued. Something that will keep him busy once they return to the Explorer.

"Captain, from what I can gather there is a trading post at this location" as he finished talking, Tulack displayed the location on the main view screen of a small and very dirty town. It laid in runes and the tail, tail signs of camps could clearly be seen.

"If we transport to this location we should be able to join the trading." Tulack paused slightly as he pointed towards a large structure in the middle of the dirty

stoned compound. "I believe this building is where the trading is taking place. I am picking up Cataline life signs."

McGregor then made the hasty decision to land on the planet with the ship. This is what the vessel was designed for and using the jamming technology will make travelling easy. Landing in an isolated area would not be detected.

Crewmembers scrambled around as they prepared the space cars for travel on the planet. This method will make any journey simple and they can transport Cataline people efficiently and quickly. McGregor decided not to use the transporter's because the Cataline can't be transported and the enemy does not have this technology. This is what he likes to call an ace in the hole. Only show it when you really need it.

Holding several Starfleet COM badges, Tulack marches up to McGregor and advises. "Captain, I believe that this team might require these. They will be able to translate many alien languages and provide us a means of communication."

McGregor picked up the COM badge from Tulack's hand and looked at it. The Starfleet COM badge brought back many memories of the times he served with them. A time he wished to forget. With a sarcastic tone and a crooked smile he replied, "God, Starfleet COM badge, I hate these things, however you are right!"

Succumbing to Tulack's logic he then placed the COM badge onto his chest, which stands out very well against the navy blue uniform.

"Captain, I would like to come," asked Sam who stood beside the sky car with a gleam in his eyes. "You might need an extra vehicle" he carried on saying appealing to his good sense of judgement.

"Very well" acknowledged McGregor, "You can have the Klingons travel with you!"

The happiness of going soon lifted when Sam stared at the smiling Klingon portraying a feeling of love and excitement at the thought a human will be travelling with them. "Swell!" Sam said as he sat into the drivers' seat.

The doors of the cargo bay opened to show a thick swell mist of sand and dust blocking the view ahead. Only a few meters can be seen outside the shuttle bay. The force field kept the sand out as the cars floated above the deck.

McGregor closed the door on his vehicle before he led the way out of the shuttle bay. "The encampment should be a few hundred kilometres away and it will take a little while to get there and stay close. We will be travelling at full speed." Said McGregor holding onto the steering wheel as he talked through the COM badge to the rest of his men.

The cars travelled at increasingly high speeds across the rocky land and through a sandy mist blocking the view ahead. All they had to rely on the sensors to guide them through the terrain.

"Captain is it wise to travel at such high speeds through the storm?" said Tulack trying to spoil McGregor's fun.

"Calm down Tulack the scanners are working perfectly and we will get there safely and in time... SHIT!" Before McGregor had the chance to finish the last part of his sentence, the space car plummeted off the edge of a cliff.

As McGregor space car fell off the edge of the cliff, Sam's vehicle hovered over it. "I think the captain forgot to switch the controls to fly and not hover!" Sam sarcastically said to himself as he opened the vehicle door and looked down.

Sam moved back slightly as the darkly lit car rose up through the sandy fog. McGregor frowned at him, "I heard that! Lets go!"

The cars then flew off towards the settlement in a bit to discover what horrors await them.

Chapter 13

(Trading)

Sam eagerly turned and pulled out a snack bar from the vehicles compartment in a need to fulfil his temporary hunger, but he forgot to take into account the Klingon leering at him from the back seat!

Sam showed his discontent as he handed his snack bar to the Klingon and everyone else in the car, before he becomes the food. Sam looked out of the window with the facial expression of help written all over it.

The chaotic storm suddenly cleared, which left a smooth and unobstructed view at the land below. As McGregor looked down, he could see the fine detail of all the structures, however it was obvious that no Cataline was present on the land.

"Fuel cells are OK, engines are working at ninety-five percent and we are getting a clear homing signal from the ship." McGregor said trying his best to look through the sandy filled windshield. He activates the sonic wipers, which blows the dust and crap of the windows leaving them clean and fresh. The path to the village was now clear as day.

"Captain from my estimates, we should reach the settlement within ten minutes. I would like to warn you to proceed on the side of caution," instructed Tulack showing his Vulcan cynicism as he leaned over from the passenger side and tried not to spook one of the younger ensign's in the back seat, feeling very comfortable.

"Don't worry Tulack, we will get you back to the ship in one piece just in time for you to play your Vulcan game!" McGregor replied as his face lit up with a smile as he tried to ease the atmosphere inside the space car.

"I wonder how Sam must be feeling? Being cooped up with all those Klingons." McGregor added with a slight smirk on his face before Tulack had the chance to speak about his last comment.

Moments later, as they approached the settlement McGregor made some final checks before landing the car down in a remote area of the town in order not to attract too much attention.

However, not making much of an effort they were approached by a few Krainers who approached the cars with an eager eye.

A strange and spider crawling sensation went down his spine that indicated something might happen if he does not get out and do something.

Opening the door, the two Krainers jumped back when the doors flung open like gulls wings. McGregor slowly stepped out looking at them with the look of contempt and warning.

As he stood in the open space, McGregor breathed in a deep breath of the fresh air. But he regretted that decision when he almost choked on the polluted air. As he recovered, one of the Krainers interrupted him with a demanding voice, "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

The Krainer moved his posture in an attempt to intimidate him.

McGregor stood tall and mighty. He glanced around, eyes blazing. Several of the Krainers try and invoke a response by jolting forward. However, McGregor stood there and tried his best to hold back the disgust and opinions on their grotesque look.

The idle hissing and murmurs in the village was interrupted when McGregor said, "We are here to trade!"

“Those vehicles of yours, they look interesting!” The Krainer replied as he took an interest in the Space Cars.

McGregor followed the path of his glare to the space cars and warned while turning back exaggerating “Those vehicles are booby trapped, touch them once and BOOM! You are all dead!”

The Krainer looked at him with an evil eye before more important and intimidating activities needed his attention. The mob left McGregor’s team alone, for now.

He could not help but brush of his strange and uncomfortable emotion after coming face to face with one of those creatures. He turned and looked at Tulack while spotting Sam in the background struggling to get out of the car and away from the Klingons.

“This is going to be fun getting the information and leaving without causing problems” McGregor gestured towards to Tulack as he formed a grim line on his lips.

The Klingons stood out of the space car and starched their backs and arms in the blissful sunlight that shone out through the thick cloud cover. As they patted each other down, Kane, leered at a few passing Krainers. The look of them was more than enough to get Kane wound up. He has never felt so much anger towards a species before. Perhaps if the Klingon Empire stumbled on this race, they would be the most hunted and pleasure full pray

“Un-honourable and despicable race these Krainers... I should kill them where they stand!” One of the Klingons barked before making a very threatening gesture to a passing Krainer that prompted his reaction.

Grabbing him by the scruff of its neck, the Klingon was more than happy to kill the Krainer, but McGregor managed to calm the Klingon down and they just barely made it out of the situation.

Walking down the dirty and sick streets of a once beautiful and prosperous town, McGregor and Tulack secretly tried to take tricorder readings of the surrounding buildings. Other crewmembers also scanned all the other alien races that were looming around the place.

“Captain, I am detecting an ion radiation storm coming from the sun, we will need to take shelter in one of the buildings!!” Tulack sounded on the edge of caution trying to hide the alarm results from the tricorder.

With the threat of an ion storm looking, the team decide to use the nearest building for cover. Tulack scanned the area and nodded to the rest of the team that it was safe to go inside. With the conformation, everyone dives into the rundown stony building.

Wind howled around as the loose connections of wood and materials vibrated in the wind. The gentle taps of acid rain reminded everyone that this world was dangerous. As some of the crew looked outside, the rain caused clouds of smoke from each droplet that hit the floor. This was the result of an environmental disaster.

McGregor slid a glance towards Tulack and asked, “How long will it take?”

Still taking results, Tulack replied, “It will pass in moments.”

Other crews drifted around the room taking results and scanned every room in their proximity. Their tricorders also picked up a few new readings coming from the densely isolated room that they dived into.

“Captain, I am picking up reading of cocoons,” said one of the crewmembers gesturing McGregor towards a dark and dreary area.

They all looked towards the dark. The corner stood untouched by the light and an object could almost be seen in the darkness. McGregor turned on the inbuilt torch on the tricorder to illuminate the corner.

The lights illuminated the area that revealed two badly damaged cocoons. From the patterns and colour, everyone knew what these were. With human curiosity in tow, the crew approached to take closer readings.

The medical officer walked closer to the cocoons and raised his tricorder to perform a detailed scan and prayed that the life forms are alive. However, deep down in his soul, he knew they had perished long ago. Sure enough the tricorder returned negative results.

"I am sorry commander!" The doctor confirmed in a sad tone, "It looks like acid was poured into the breathing hole at the top of the cocoons, it burned and kill the life forms inside."

McGregor bowed his head in respect, trying his best to keep his anger inside. "Why would they do this? These sick people... Are there anymore around?"

The crewmembers scanned the area for more cocoons, but each tricorder brought back negative results. "I am not detecting anymore sir!"

The storm began to subside and the strange sound of the rain stopped. Daylight once again started to show the way. But after the grim sight that McGregor and the rest of his crew just witnessed, gave them more anger.

McGregor ordered the rest of his crew out after he tried to shrug off the helpless feelings he could imagine about the defenceless creatures being killed like that. "What a sick way to go" He muttered to himself.

The crew continued to walk down the street and done their best to brush of the horror they just found in the small musty room. "That was horrible, how defenceless they must have been, and the pain! Why would they do such a thing?" frowned the female crewmember.

"We will rescue as many as possible, stay with us." Sam replied as he tried to calm the young helmsman down, obviously flirting.

"Sir, I believe the trading is taking place inside that structure." Tulack said looking at a makeshift stone building slightly on a hill above the few buildings below.

Taking a sideward glance at the stone structure, he makes no effort in checking the area, as he dug his nails into his hands, he hissed. "OK let's go!"

The crew felt a slight apprehension as they approach the stone structure. As they walked along the stone path that was made by all the traders walking on it, they stopped by an unpleasant Krainer guarding the door.

The Krainer gave them a stare that almost looked like human leering. However McGregor was not sure. So, as he dismissed the facial expression as he walked right up to the creatures face. The Krainer replied in kind, "We do not recognise your species, who are you!"

"We are here to trade! Water for some Cataline." McGregor replied with his eyes blazing.

The Krainer looked at everyone in the group trying to scope them out and check if they have weapons. The Krainer was told time and time again to check weapons and to kill anyone who does not submit, however he becomes aroused when his eyes settle on the young ensign standing at the back of the group.

"That female looks very nice! Give her to us and we will let you... Trade" The Krainer ordered displaying the largest crooked smile anyone could have towards a human female.

McGregor did not like that comment, he did not like it at all, a sudden burst of anger crept out of the depths of his soul and with all the shit he has seen, there can be no reasons why he cannot get angry. McGregor grabbed hold of his hand weapon and shoved it right up between his furry neck and face placing the tip of the gun under his rotten and disgusting teeth.

"Don't fuck with me!" McGregor angrily spat almost spitting the words into the Krainers face, "If you do not let us in I will blow your fucking head off you rotten fuck!"

The Krainer got the god of fear into him as this human inched the gun into his last moments of life. The charging of the gun didn't make things better for him. The Krainer offered a sly smile and allowed them to enter, trying his best not to look at the human female passing, who's skin colour changed to a pale white.

Tulack strolled behind him a little shocked and dismayed at his colourful choice of words. Even if he is Vulcan and does not show emotion, this small fact does not mean he cannot feel some logic to the whole experience.

"Excellent choice of words McGregor I am sure you will make a good Klingon warrior if you were born Klingon!" shouted one of the Klingons enthusiastically with a huge smile on his face as they walked down the hallway into a large open space.

Squeezed into the room, McGregor and his team tried their best to blend in and not draw attention. Before they entered, they nicked some local clothing to blend in. Using their nice clean uniforms in a place like this was not going to work very well, but they slowly blended into the crowd and disappeared. The room was not much to be desired. Very basic for the business it was in for and had primitive commodities, typical third world trading post.

"Listen, I need to team to scout around and try to find anyone that might have information or data that could help us rescue these people and gather supplies." McGregor hinted as he talked to his group of people.

McGregor had chosen his group of people to scout around and this only left himself, Tulack and the female ensign behind. McGregor was worried about letting her go, just in case she went missing.

McGregor received a message on his COM badge. "Captain, we have located an unlimited source of water under the surface of the planet, we can use that to beam water into the containers."

Surprised, McGregor looked at the readings that were sent to him and a smile crept along his face, he now has something to barter with. Something no one else can possibly match.

"Do you know what I am thinking?" questioned McGregor towards Tulack, changing the subject.

"I do not know captain!" answered Tulack in a typical Vulcan manner feeling slightly annoyed at his half logical suggestions.

"I'm thinking that we might be able to activate the cloaking device on the USS Explorer to fly right up to this planet." McGregor said checking the information on the tricorder

The female ensign remembered something in her past and brought it to McGregor's attention, "Captain, if I remember correctly I have been onboard during the tests two years ago and it does not work properly, the software keeps crashing!"

"Yes I know, however I think the device might work for a limited time!" McGregor said as he checked the calculations and watched the scruffy Krainer up on the make shift stage in front of them flogging products to people.

Idle murmurs in the room became louder and louder as the Krainer dragged a young and pure virgin Cataline on the stage. The excitement was ecstatic as everyone sniffed the air for the pure sent of this creature. The all clambered over each other desperate to start the bidding war.

McGregor looked around and could not help but feel sick by the perverted expressions the Krainers portrayed on their faces. He just wanted to nuke the entire room. He also could not help but feel angered even more at the young defenceless girl bound and gagged on stage with something that resembled a chain strapped to her fragile blue ankle.

Then a Krainer walked on stage eager to start the trading. More sicker and devious than the Ferengi, he explains everything in great detail. The fur on his face that looked so dirty, it pulsates when he talks.

"Welcome my fellow trades men, here you can see the delights of them all. Discovered from the hills of Sangore, on the southern most tip of this world, we have managed to ascertain this beauty of all creatures. This young Cataline female was captured in the prime of her age, this cute young fresh virgin is just right for the picking and available to any of you fair tradesmen," McGregor then interrupted his private atmosphere as he turned to talk to Tulack.

Adhering to the message and a good tip-off, McGregor ordered secretly, "Pass the message onto the ship to scan the Sangore region of this planet, there might be more. Better us get to them before these animals do."

Tulack nodded in response as he typed into his tricorder attempting to send a secret message to the secondary ship.

"Now, who will bid for this excellent prime young creature, remember virgin meat is prime," The sick Krainer then shuffled towards the creature as he carried on his next sentence, "look, she is just waiting for the pain of transformation." The Krainer on stage began to touch up the female in a bid to stir up the crowd.

"That's it, smell her sent, you can feel the essence from her, who will bid the highest for this creature!" He bellowed out advertisements as he attempted to excite the crowd. They all began to smell the air and draw their noises closer toward the stage.

"This is fucking sick," McGregor replied in anger holding back his stomach. His deep down nature wanted him to do something, but he held it back because nothing can be done at the moment. It will only cause problems.

The crowd all went crazy, they smelt the air as they tried to saver her sent which forced them to bid all kinds of items. Warp cores, ships and trading colonies. The young creature stood on the stage as she shook in fear for her life, as she looked down towards all the hungry animals bidding to take her. She prays that a different alien race can outbid the Krainers because each race produces different effects during the cocoon cycle and their treatment is different.

"I have that bet, one war ship with two hundred litres of water! Beat that!" A Krainer captain yelled. His bet installed fear into everyone; currently he was the only one to outbid everyone.

The defenceless creature stood there almost ready to faint, her worst nightmare has come true. A Krainer has outbid everyone! She will be brutally handled and left to die on some planet once they have finished. Not to mention the agony of the first abuse.

"I have an outstanding BID! Who will beat that! Come one! Someone must be out there that can win this! Look at this prime virgin Cataline female." Shouted the overenthusiastic announcer.

Suddenly out of the darkness McGregor stood up, causing the whole place to collapse in silence after his offer was said!

"Five million litres of water!" McGregor bellowed out with a deep tone that could be similar to thunder clearing all the crap away!

The scale changed everything; someone was being very serious and professional about this, the sheer scale brought the fear of shock into everyone. This was not a small game anymore.

"Five million litres of water?" the Krainer on stage repeated almost finding it hard to believe!

McGregor then instructed everyone to look through the dusty windows to the dried up lake besides the building. Taping on to the COM badge he told the ship to energise.

The whole area around the dried up lake lit up with light that created a gush of wind, which engulfed the whole area as tons and tons of water ended up being created out of thin air. The last of the energiser beams completed the filling of the lake with leaving everyone standing by the lakeside completely shocked at what they saw.

"Sorry it might be a little more then Twenty million litres of water!" McGregor sarcastically announced.

McGregor turned towards the stage and asked in a firm tone, "Do we win the bid?"

A slight hesitation went through the trading Krainer's voice before it was forced out, "Y. Yes, we have a winner"

McGregor and his crew stood up ready to collect their prise female as one of the aliens's brought her down. A slight "Enjoy this little virgin!" was muttered from the alien before she was given to him.

"Come with me," McGregor asked the young woman in a soft voice trying not to scare her. However the young Cataline woman was a little resistant and scared at the same time, the main concern was getting her out before questions are asked about the water.

Leaving the building they noticed the streets were clear of people. McGregor surmised that this was due to the lake they just created on this dark and baron world. The Cataline female started to panic and McGregor had no choice but to pick her up and drag her towards the space car.

"Tulack, this has not gone to plan, we need to think of something!" explained McGregor tossing the woman into the back seat of the space car.

A slight frown could almost be made out on Tulack's face as they prepare themselves around the car. "What other idea do you have in mind?" He asked as he wondered what brilliant idea McGregor could have come up with.

McGregor decided to evade the topic altogether because they managed to snatch the girl and she is better off with them. A flashback came into McGregor's mind about the location from which the female came from. He then paused and said; "They discovered her in a region of mountains. The Sangore RegionI believe?"

In the back seat of the vehicle, the young Cataline female overheard what McGregor and his crew talked about. With that in mind, she started to panic. She understood the words Sangore Region and the Starfleet translators in the COM badges offered her the chance to overhear some of the conversation. However she misunderstood their good intentions and she had the wrong idea.

He spotted her in distress and leaned behind his seat and tried to calm her down. All her family is in that area, and the last thing she wants is for these aliens to take them all. She doesn't know what these alien races intentions are and she tried to

protect her family and friends. "This race can make water out of thin air, mercy, only knows what they can do to us!" she exclaimed in her fragile mind.

"Calm down, we are not going to harm you. We have already rescued over five hundred of your people and we have come to rescue more and take you to a better place!" McGregor gently gestured as he tried to calm her down. But the female started to panic and her heart beat rapidly fast.

Not listening, she carried on struggling and managed to scratch him several times causing slight a pain for McGregor. Holding her hands McGregor realised that this female was to panicked-stricken to help.

"We better take her back to the ship!" McGregor shouted towards his team standing outside.

The idle silence of the small town area was hustled with action as the rest of McGregor's crew ran towards the space cars.

"Fast, Fast, Lets go NOW!" Sam yelled as he ran to the space cars with the Klingons behind covered in yellow blood!

"What happened?" McGregor asked as he frowned at the sight of the Klingons.

"We managed to get our hands on important information, but we ended up in a fight, we need to go!" Sam stated in a matter of urgency to leave.

Phaser fire streaked throughout the street as the angry Krainers accompanied by aliens fought in vain to capture the humans and Klingons for the violence they caused. Great fury sparked in their eyes as they approached the space cars with their weapons in tow.

McGregor and his crew all hopped into the space cars and with a sudden gush of air, they vanished into the sky leaving a whirlpool of smoke on the floor.

The alien mob stewed around the location before running off into the dusky dawn in the town.

McGregor decided to show a little spite in his actions and to cause more pain for enemy. The suffering that the alien Krainers have caused deserves more punishment, but this action will have to do for now. Taping on his COM badge, McGregor displayed the most evil crooked smile as he orders the Secondary Ship to transport all the water back to where it came from.

McGregor almost hissed in his seat as he drove the vehicle upwards into the sky. He contacted the other Sky Car for an explanation for the sudden alien outburst, "Now, can you tell me in detail, what all that was back there."

The small view screen in McGregor's vehicle showed the troubled young man almost smiling as he explained his adventure with the Klingons.

"We were seeking out some information about locations of the Cataline people, but we got intercepted. We managed to get hold of a data disk containing the camp information and supply documents." He paused slightly before carrying on with a proud forceful tone. "You can get these with the right negotiation techniques."

"Anyway we got the information and that's when we got discovered. Luckily, I had the Klingons who enjoyed killing them," He leered at the Klingons before continuing. "Just little too much, then before we knew it, we ended up being chased by a whole gang."

McGregor felt tired about the explanation Sam was babbling about and he decided to end the conversation by saying. "OK, we will make our way back to the ship and review the information. McGregor out."

McGregor laminated to himself, "Just swell, now they know we're here! Hopefully they cannot follow us, we'll have to drive at full speed back to the ship."

Tulack then stated "Captain, from my observations it looks like everything down on the surface is very unorganised and there is no clear signs of authority or military presence, I am fairly sure no one will remember us."

McGregor looked at Tulack as he tried to read his face and find out his true meaning. But just as he expected, nothing. Not even a response by his facial expression. "Is his hypothesis correct?" McGregor rattled towards himself.

"I am holding high hopes for that Vulcan logic." McGregor winked as he tried to tease Tulack's logic. But deep down, he tried to forget about the horrid trading in that building. If he gets the chance, he will probably nuke the entire place out of existence.

Driving the space car, McGregor ponders over the idea in using the Explorers cloaking technology. "It's an ideal time to try it out," he thought to himself. But the first mission now, will be to investigate the Sangore region. But he needs to drop young Cataline female off first.

"What will happen to me?" The Cataline female thought, as she shivered in the back seat of the vehicle. Her memories re-winded back to the time she was with her mother. Her mother would often hide and provide protection for her. She often watched the Krainers perform hellish acts upon her defenceless mother and she was next, after the cocoon cycle. A scary thought for a young child. Cataline mothers would often hide their children and teach them how to survive. Training them how to hide and to behave once they were caught was very important. There are two things they need to learn once caught. Submit to the Krainers molestation, and do not resist.

The Ensign noticed the Cataline's shivered behaviour and tried to calm her down, she moved closer to the frightened creature and gently talked to her.

Being told this by a female human did help her nerves and opened a little trust within the Cataline woman. However, all the events leading up to this moment has been very hard. Getting lost in the dead forest and being captured by the Krainers made her weak, not to mention being dragged into the testing rooms while getting poked and prodded. She even received light mutilation because she was fresh. The final moment when she was put on stage to be sold: almost caused her fragile heart to break.

She has not been informed about humans and she hasn't seen them before, which put her into the world of unknown. She just wants to be left alone and in a better place.

McGregor leaned over slightly and offered her a portion of Starfleet rations. (Which magically found its way onboard the USS Explorer on their last stop inside Federation space.) He offered it to the Cataline female while he informed her the taste was bad, however she did not offer any resistance to that.

"We are approaching the vessel, hold on, getting ready to dock!" announced McGregor piloting the vehicle onto a landing course.

From her location in the Space car, the Cataline female looked through the window towards a dazzling bright ship that stood parked on the ground reflecting the suns rays into the air. Even if the ship looked old, the design and illumination on the Tritanium hull plating offered an insight towards humans. The design depicted that this race built ships not meant for war. This slowly installed a sense of trust and interest. "Perhaps these aliens are friendly" She laminated to herself, memorized by the vessels beauty.

Chapter 14

(Sangore Region)

McGregor was delighted to be back on the secondary ship. The vessel stood soundly on the sandy misty ground soaking up all the suns rays ready for the next mission.

McGregor relaxed in his ready room as he gently worked on the next pressing matter that always seemed to sneak up and distract him from the day's events.

Still, the looming experience and hassles everyone needed to go through in order to save that girl soon left a bitter taste in his mouth.

At least one thing made him feel better; they have saved one girl from the grasps of something terrible. McGregor drew a slight smirk on his face as he remembered his order to return the water back underground. "I would have loved to see the look on their faces," he proudly spoke to himself as he raised his cup towards his mouth placing the glass-computerised tablet onto the table.

His attention soon became diverted as he managed to decrypt the data disk they managed to barter. It contained far more data than they anticipated, which was probably accidentally added, however due to the large size and complexity of the data; the small glass-computerised tablet was unable to decrypt all of it.

McGregor felt uneasy with the vessel parked on the surface for all to see. So he decided to use the data as an excuse to approach the command deck and catch up on current operations. More importantly he wanted to get airborne.

"OK, people, I would like to get airborne, how are we?" McGregor said as he entered the command deck. He placed both hands on the railing and leaned over towards the operations officer gesturing him for good news.

Tulack recognised his posture and replied in kind with some good news for once. "All systems are functioning and the last of the ground teams are onboard."

On queue to the good news, McGregor walked around toward his chair as he portrayed a professional manner to his movements. He placed his hand on his chin as he gave the order. Slightly nervous, he prays that the vessel can lift of this dissolute place. "OK, activate the thrusters and take us up." He ordered as his face-hardened with the prospect of the vessel not taking off. Deep down he knew that he should have tested the take off thrusters, but he never got around to doing it.

The Ensign typed a few commands on his station that brought the ships thrusters to life. With tremendous force of thrust, the ship slowly eased away from the ground. Slowly it hovered above the ground gaining height every second. The ship soon disappeared in the cloud of smoke it produced by displacing all the sand, but moments later it was at a height that the sand couldn't hide the ship anymore.

McGregor paused as he waited in suspense for the vessel to hover. He hid his emotions from the rest of his crew because they have no knowledge about this little oversight. However his fears soon left as the ship hovered gracefully.

McGregor took long deep breaths as he pored over the encrypted data stored on his computerised-tablet. He wanted to get more information, but all he could see was rubbish that could not be deciphered. Suddenly, like a miracle sent down from god, the screen came to life with a basic search program. McGregor smiled as he typed in the Sangore Region. They now have a chance.

McGregor's tone changed with a slight hint of eagerness as he stepped forward towards the individual at navigation, "I have managed to locate the area called the Sangore Region, we will need to hurry, I am sure we are not the only ones

going there. Here," he passed the computerised-display to him, "I am giving you the coordinates and we better set up a small team for defence."

The vessel glided over the surface of the land as it headed towards its destination. McGregor looked through the windows to a baked and scarred world. Thoughts pondered in his mind about what devastating weapons were used and what this planet once looked like. His attention slowly diverted towards his crew that he saw plotting their landing coordinates.

More of the scarred and battered landscape began to reveal itself, as dead forests and dried up riverbeds scrawled up closer to the view screen. However the tail tell signs of Krainers could be seen from the distance as they make their way on land by the use of vehicles intent on capturing as many of the Cataline as possible.

"You know, it would be helpful if that Cataline female we bartered for would help us." McGregor hinted towards Sam to do something about it.

Sam tried his best to talk to the female, even adding a slight hint of romantic chat up lines to break the ice. Being a man with his character this should second nature to him. However, all he received was a spaced out and frightened look. Sam responded trying to keep his pride intact, "I tried sir, but she still does not trust us and is refusing to help."

McGregor looked down towards the surface of the planet and he browsed his eyes across the patched up machines that crawled along the ground relentless in hunting down the Cataline. Looking more like insects McGregor feels safe in the knowledge that his vessel is well out of their reach.

His mind drifted back to reality as he sighs at the fact that it will have to be done the old fashioned way. Stood in place, McGregor put his hands on his hips and turned around towards Tulack "Well it looks like we will have to do this the old fashioned way." He ordered as he walked closer to Tulack, "Activate the scanners and scan the region for Cataline life signs."

Idle tones of the console erupted a wave of scanning beams that scanned the entire area for any sign of the Cataline people. Feedback then sounds a positive tone on Tulack's console. He then replies raising his left eyebrow, "I have detected them sir, about fifty-six Cataline people five kilometres out, however a group of aliens are rapidly approaching the location and they will intercept them in two hours."

McGregor stood as he stared out of the window. The smoke of the makeshift machines could be seen in the distance chomping their way through the dead forest as if the Krainers knew where their pray stood. He surmised a good few hours before they arrived in range, so he made some rash decisions. "OK, activate the defensive cannons on the ship and get the Klingons out there to do something.... They want to carry on fighting, let them."

Now preparing to go down towards the planet, he hastily assembles his landing teams and makes sure the Klingons are aware of the plan. He keeps a scrutinising eye on them especially the Klingons. Last thing he wants is for the Klingons running off killing anything they see fit. The vessel lands on the surface of the baron woodland with the gush of wind that snapped trees and dead shrubs.

The doors of the ship opened providing a means to walk onto the surface of the planet, all dried up and musty it did not offer a very pleasant sensation or feeling. The burned and dried up forest could almost injure people if they looked at it. Dead and lifeless, how and what caused this was a question that rattled everyone's mind.

The thickness of the forest offered no comfort for the select few that wondered deep within its grasp in search for the Cataline people. The dark barks, dead plants and scorched earth showed a world blighted in death. The crew

swallowed with uncertain nervousness at the darkness and stale environment they have walked into. Each person looked at each other hoping for a way out. But McGregor marched on without a care in the world.

“Captain, I am unable to detect any life signs, this close to the surface. I am picking up some unusual interference coming from the soil.” Tulack informed, as he waved his tricorder around in the air. McGregor then replied with a slight sarcastic tone, “Great! Well it looks like we will have to use eyes and ears people.”

Everyone treaded with light footsteps in an effort to be as quiet as possible, if the Cataline people hear them approaching, then chances are they will run and end up captured by the Krainers. The deeper they walked the dead forest grew darker and thick as they progressed further but the sensation of being watched played on everyone’s mind, especially McGregor who led the way.

A few mummies erupted from some of the crew as they walked over black logs and twigs that snapped when stepped on. Every so often a slight glare from McGregor would ease the tension. However, the feeling of being watched burned deeper and deeper behind his neck.

The wind howled and the air tasted like burned ash, but all that was disturbed when a message cleared the stale silence, “Captain, long range sensor have detected enemy units inbound, we can only detect their machines but they should be upon you in one hour!” an alarming call stated over the COM Badge.

McGregor frowned, he did not know what to do and he just wanted to get this over with. But he followed the next best plan and ordered a Space Car out to investigate. He scratched his chin and proceeded with no heed into the densely populated forest with his crew trotting behind.

The Space Car whizzed out of the parked vessel and into the sky leaving behind a wake in its path. Whizzing past all the dead trees and lifeless land, it was not long before they spotted the horde of machines on their way to McGregor’s location.

Then all hell broke loose.

One of the old and rusty robots piloted by the Krainers spotted the space car. One of the Krainers recognised the vehicle and shouted with his hand held high, “They are the humans that double crossed us!” Soon after the alert, the rusty cannons of the robots lifted into the air at the location and shot green blobs that catapulted into the air. Initially nothing brilliant happened as these green blobs flew into the air. But seconds later the whole sky lit up with fire and explosions, the ground blew apart and shockwaves disturbed the air that carried the sound for a great distance.

The pilot in the Space Car was taken by surprise at the sudden effective firepower these rust buckets posed. As he approached, the only threat he thought off was of getting stepped on. But when it razed its arm and shot out green blobs that exploded on impact, he soon panicked. With an almost direct hit, the windows and bodywork shattered on the vehicle that caused the pilot to loose control.

The Space Car flew out of control into the sky and before long, the Krainers offloaded more fire towards the vehicle. In the form of rockets that travelled speedily, the Sky Car had no chance. After a direct hit, the Vehicle disintegrated into a million pieces killing the only driver.

Everyone turned their heads in the direction of the explosion, “What the hell is that?” questioned McGregor as he activated his COM badge.

Even though he called for the answer, deep down he already knew the answer to that question. Hearing the conformation that the Space Car was destroyed made him bow his head at the decision he didn’t have to give. Now he has killed one of his crewmen and he was the one to blame. He swore never to let any of his crew

perish. However, this mistake was extremely reckless and could have saved someone's life.

During the time with Starfleet McGregor was trained to deal with the death of crewmembers. But this was the real and first time that something like this happened. Before, only people that left and arrived were the worst he had to deal with, he vowed not to have a death on his command. McGregor clasped his hands in anger as a few members tried to offer their support. But it was all in vain, he knew his incompetence and now he has to live with it. He also had got the feeling that more deaths were on the way, which slowly drew out his fury even more.

Tulack approached McGregor and tried to bring him back to reality. He explained the importance of this mission and they needed to move on. It would not help the rest of his crew if McGregor had a nervous breakdown in the middle of the deadly forest.

McGregor snapped out of his regret and carried on after patting Tulack on the shoulder. More reports flowed in through the COM unit about the approaching enemy armada and it soon became apparent that it was a race against the time to find these people before the Krainers do.

The ominous night slowly began to creep upon the crew who struggled to progress through the densely packed forest. Dead trees and shrubs lined the path ahead as they blurred the view. McGregor looked ahead as if something lured his eyes into the dark area of the forest, as he felt something staring at him. As he squints his eyes towards the darkness, he begins to detect a faint colour tone different from the surrounding area.

McGregor walked along as he concentrated on the object in question leaving the rest of his crew behind. As he homed in on the strange colour, he spotted a blue and green indent on a tree, something that did not belong there. Being even more curious, McGregor walked closer to the far distant object attached to the tree.

"What is that?" He muttered as he progressed closer to the strange colour indent on the tree, his curiosity got the better of him as he drifted closer and deeper into the wilderness followed by the fear that sent slight shivers up his spine.

But, as he got closer to the object he looked in disappointment as it disappeared before his very eyes. He then dismissed it as tiredness and proceeded in turning back towards his team.

He shrugged his shoulders to brush off the giddy feeling that sneaked upon him. Once his heart began to slow down, he turned to head back. Then he saw her, which caused McGregor to step back in a gaze.

Deep within the confines of the forest she stood there behind the tree staring at McGregor. She did not know who this person was and her overwhelming instinct was to run. She looked around before she decided to escape. McGregor stood still as he watched this creature run into the darkness that displayed all the characteristics of a Cataline female, but he noticed she was quite different.

She still resembled a typical Cataline female with the blue clothing skin, spots that run from her forehead down her back and cat shaped ears, which are slightly longer. However several distinguishable features was clearly viewable to McGregor. The area around her eyes and over the base of her nose had a graceful red band that could clearly be seen with the long green hair and she also had an unclear object on her chest. The entire environment and her appearance amongst it will make it easier for McGregor to remember her face.

He waited in silence for any sound that might indicate that she is still watching; however he carefully looked around and became startled when one of his crewmembers shouts through the whirling wind.

He walked back and explained his discovery to his crewmembers that listened with sarcastic tones and failed optimism. "My I state captain that this environment is intimidating and being tired might effect your views on things. May I recommend you get some rest?" Tulack interrupted trying to be ever so Vulcan and annoying at the same time.

The forest began to close in on him, his methods now were to get the Cataline people and leave this damn planet. He shrugged at Tulack's comment and laminated, "I saw her, she is around here somewhere, if we can only find her, perhaps she can convince her group to come with us, I want to get off this damn planet."

He drifted his gaze towards the packed food in the middle of the makeshift camp and proceeded in opening the foiled wrapped food before singing interrupted the silence of the area.

McGregor stood up as he took a bite from his food; his crew also stood up in unison and gazed towards the source of the music being sung. The music was calming and enchanting, something was obviously singing, but whom?

McGregor first and un-thoughtful words were. "What the hell is that?" which was promptly replied by Tulack, "It would appear to be singing commander!"

McGregor began to surmise that it could be some kind of sick Krainer trick to lure innocent pray to their grasp. So he grabbed his handgun and was more then eager to silence it.

The group stopped and listened to the enchanting music, "There's no way a Krainer is singing!" one of the female crewmen announced while she listened to the soft and gentle tones emanating in the distance. "It's strange, more like a sad opera," another crewmember said. McGregor interrupted the idle chatter, "I agree, there's no way that could be Krainer's; I doubt they can sing, even to save their lives."

Clutching his weapon, McGregor proceeded deeper into the dark dreary forest in a mission to search for the source. To indicate his intentions he turned, while holding his weapon and said, "Lets follow the singing, I am as interested as you are! Come on."

They progressed closer to the source of the singing and the idle murmurs of the crew whispered out gently as everyone discussed about who or what could be causing it. Excitement and fear engulfed the group as they wondered if it was a trap. However, one overenthusiastic individual talked too loud and disturbed the singing creature was sat on a log.

They all froze in place as they witnessed the elegant blue creature scamper off into the wilderness disturbed by their presence.

Initially, McGregor spotted the creature sat on the log with its legs curled up beside herself as she looked into the grey sky singing. But it never registered in his mind until she moved due to the noise one of his crew made. He wanted to talk to the creature and have her lead the way to their camp before the Krainers barged in. But thanks to his overenthusiastic crewmember, that chance is now over

"Damn!" McGregor barked softly, "These Cataline people are like ghosts and figments of your imagination."

Stood around like lost children, crying and screaming interrupted their idle thoughts. "Captain, the sound appears to be originating from the same area the creature escaped too." Informed Tulack as he scanned the area with his tricorder.

McGregor took half a step forward before making the decision to run to the creatures aid, "perhaps this is the moment we have been waiting for." He thought to himself as they ran to the location.

They blew through some dead plants that blocked their view before they saw the young blue creature in distress. The Cataline female, which was the same McGregor saw in the woods, had gotten herself trapped in quick sand and would slowly sink to her death if nothing was done.

Without any thought to his own life, McGregor rushed to the aid of the creature and grabbed her. Thrashing about, the young female began to drag McGregor to his death as well; on queue, the crew all grabbed hold of their captain and tried to pull him in.

They managed to pull the woman out of the deep quicksand, however McGregor accidentally placed his arm too close to the creature's mouth and she bit him hard on the arm.

The Cataline female dug her teeth deep into McGregor's fleshy arm drawing blood. But he carried on dragging her to safety before a second sharp pain forced him to drop her onto the floor. Feeling free, the creature sprang to life and escaped into the wilderness without a thought to the help they gave.

The creature ran as fast as she could into the deep forest along the paths she knows by heart, she just wants to return home and escape the strange aliens that seemed to have saved her. She could taste the salty blood in her mouth, something she has never experienced before, but she decided to clean it off once she was safe.

McGregor stood in a daze as he nursed his arm that contained several bite marks and he said in an angry tone, "That's gratitude for you!" He then changed the subject, "I've not seen a Cataline creature like that before, she's different."

"I agree, however her life signs are Cataline, but she looks different on the outside," stated Tulack who stood emotionless the entire time.

"Do you know where she went?" McGregor asked.

"No, She disappeared from sensors and this land is not providing us with a very clear signal." replied Tulack as he moved forward with his tricorder taking terrain scans.

McGregor's wounds bled out lightly but the pain was still adamant in his mind, a constant reminder to the help he tried to give. Unfortunately the crew neglected to take any medical supplies down to the planet, which Tulack stated before, was a bad idea. Against the advice from Tulack to return to the vessel, McGregor decided to press along and heal the old fashioned way.

The crew descended the land and talked amongst themselves towards the dark musty woodland homing in towards the Cataline camp using the tricorder readings. Idle chatter focused on the creatures singing and her apparent rescue effort carried on for a ten minutes. The further they walked, the more bleak things looked, trees, rocks and shrubs all began to look the same in this depressive place.

"McGregor," a deep hollow voice boomed through the brush sounds of the forest. "I believe I have detected the female's trail, if you would follow me." The Klingon ordered as he adeptly jostled his team out of the way.

As the Klingon marched past, McGregor's COM badge activated with urgent messages from the ship about the Krainers slowly approaching. He looked down at his weapon and knew it was only a matter of time before he will need to use it. A smile crept along his face as he followed the Klingon.

The trail of the young female Cataline woman led to a cave embedded in the rocks at a mountain base, which could not be seen due to the dense forest.

"Captain, my tricorder is reading the cave terminates a one hundred meters in. Whoever is in there is not getting out," said Tulack

“OK, I will go in and try to talk to her; I think she can help us.” He then walked closer to the cave and made a humorous comment, “If she doesn’t eat me first!”

He approached the entrance of the cave that looked like a black mouth waiting to eat him up. He raised his weapon in the ready position. Even if everyone surmises that the Cataline female is inside, he edged on the side of caution just in case it was not the person they thought it might be.

He entered the cave and the sound of his own heart echoed down the passage into the opening. He turned on the tricorder’s light which illuminated the cave. Not very bright, but the light was suitable to see the small creature cowering in the corner.

She looked at McGregor with her red eyes, trying to work him out; she can still taste the blood she drew when she bit him. Deep down she knew that McGregor rescued her, but she also knows about the horrid activities that have been happening around the place. Her appearance indicated to McGregor that she was a different species of Cataline and not common.

He tried to spark a little trust and talk to the frightened female, so he gently spoke, “You know, it’s not the best way to thank someone for saving your life.”

“We are here to help you and your colony. There’s an army of Krainers on their way and they intend on capturing all of you. We are here to help.” McGregor talked as he approached closer to her. In response to his movement, She made a slight noise that McGregor did not understand, but could clearly suggest a warning to stay away.

Tulack talked down the cave in an attempt to get McGregor’s attention, however, his shouting made the young Cataline woman scared even more. “Captain, they have located the camp, the ship has just taken off and is en-route. The Space Cars are on their way to pick us up.”

McGregor then acknowledged the message and then turned around towards the female. “Sorry, I don’t have time for this.” He muttered as he raised his weapon and shot the female. The weapon was set on stun and she fell to the ground displaying all her beauty and pigmentation on her fin like skin clothing.

He then carried her on his shoulders like a bag of coal out of the cave to the Space Cars nicely parked in a very limited space. His crew all leered at him as he placed her into the back seat of the vehicle. After everyone was ready and McGregor shrugged off the idle leering, they all departed the area and headed back to the vessel.

Sitting in the passenger side McGregor took the time to rest while Sam drives back to the main ship, he glances at the green haired Cataline female in the back seat with one of the ensigns.

“Why does this crap happen to me?” McGregor complained as he looked at the wound on his hand that mysteriously looked like it was getting worse.

“Well, if it has to happen to someone, might as well be you sir!” Sam jokingly said with a huge crooked smile on his face. His comment was received by a long leering look from McGregor.

“You keep pushing your luck and you might end up cleaning the plasma chamber for the rest of the trip.” McGregor warned not finding that joke very funny.

“Sorry sir!” Sam distractingly answered while taking a quick glance at the Cataline woman in the back seat. “She is very cute!”

As the Space Cars approached the ship, sudden sharp explosions came from the vessel. It can clearly be seen that the ship started to be attacked by something on the ground. Thousands of bullets struck the shields that exploded and this started to shake the Space Cars as they approached the shuttle bay.

“Captain you better get back fast, we are under heavy fire from the surface.” informed Leeli who took command while McGregor was on the ground.

McGregor had no choice but to order the vehicles away from the ship as the enemy ground unit’s concentrated their fire on the largest object in the sky. McGregor used his initiative to use the vessel as cover as they made their way to the encampment on the ground. Round after round of explosions echoed flashes in the background as the slowly progressed towards their target.

After a few moments, Sam informed, “I believe this is the location sir.”

“We can land here, it looks like the life signs are concentrated in this area, and there looks like enough space for the ship to land.” Informed Sam as he checked his readings on his glass-computerised tablet.

With the offset of dust and cloudy skies, the Space Cars landed in a clearing surrounded by makeshift structures made from the local materials, something that resembled a temporary village. As they emerged from there vehicles no one came to greet them. The village was as dead as it could be. Only the howling of the wind and a few cracks from the wood greeted them. Gunfire from their vessel echoed in the background as it tried to hold off the approaching enemy units.

“This looks creepy” McGregor said scooping the area. He had a bad feeling about the whole situation and darkness closed in around his heart. He felt very venerable.

Then suddenly without warning, the small group was surrounded by a horde of Cataline people with hostile intentions in their minds.

McGregor stood there with his hands in the air as six male Cataline held makeshift weapons at him. The Klingons and the rest of his crew all stepped out because one of the Cataline men demanded it. The translators on the COM Badge translated their language easily.

McGregor’s eyes drifted toward the lead male Cataline who pointed his weapon at him, looking tall and having all the characteristics of their female counterparts, muscle tone clearly showed and very well built. McGregor guessed that even his combat skills might not help in a hand-to-hand battle with this huge creature standing before him.

Dread suddenly engulfed him as he remembered the female he shot and plumped into the back seat of the Space Car. “Shit, Hope they don’t discover her!”

But that was too late, one of the Cataline people spotted her in the car, and all hell broke loose.

Shouting and demanding, they all pushed McGregor and his crew deeper into the confines of there camp. A few Cataline people collected the stunned female from the space car before all attention was on McGregor and his crew.

McGregor knew that they would eventually take their anger out on his crew, so he stepped forward and made it clear he was the commander; perhaps the ship can discover their problem and help. All he needed was to delay the inevitable for a few more minutes. As he guessed, the Cataline males soon diverted their killing attention to HIM!

Chapter 15

(The Bite)

The atmosphere around the camp became intense as everyone stared at each other, idle hisses and murmurs erupted in the background as McGregor and the male Cataline eyeballed each other.

The male Cataline approached McGregor as he clenched his weapon in his hand as a warning that his answer to these questions had better be good. However, enraged by the treatment all these years and the chance to exact his revenge he roared on. "You captured one of us!" He paused and raised his weapon as he thought about a good location to stab McGregor. He wanted to inflict much pain, but not kill him

The male Cataline was full of questions, but he didn't know how to ask. Full of rage and fatigue, he hesitantly said, "I know what you people do, capture us, sell us! And..." a slight stutter paused his sentence as he looked at the pink human.

McGregor studied the Cataline male with a calculating glance as he tried to detect his real intentions, perhaps he's only bluffing and this might provide a route to reason with him.

However his glance was received and the Cataline returned the expression in favour as he asked, "What are you? I have not seen your species before."

Even though McGregor had the sensation of danger, he needed to calm the situation down. The idle blasts and weapon fire in the background made his conversation that much harder. Using this as a good starting point for his conversation, he announced with a firm and unaltered tone while trying to offer a sense of trust in his eyes. "We are here to help you. Right now, an army of Krainers is on their way to take all of you back to the city."

A sarcastic smile crept along the lead Cataline face. Although he has never seen a human before, he finds it hard to trust this person especially if they have one of their own kind drugged in the back of the vehicle.

McGregor knows all too well that this person does not believe him and he needs to think fast. His expression and body tone was basic to the attitude Arania would show before she went ballistic, which she has done in the past. Being at the centre of attention, a moment that McGregor doesn't like to be put in. He knows that any reaction the Cataline male will give will be directed towards him. After all he was the one that stepped out the vehicle first, he is the one that spoke first and he will be the only one to accept the consequences.

"Do you hear that?" McGregor shouted, pointing in the direction of the gun and phaser background noise that was getting closer. "They are getting closer; I can save all your people and take you out of this sector!"

The Cataline male looked deep into McGregor eyes before his eyes rolled down his chest and along his arm. A fit of anger slowly erupted deep inside his body when he noticed the bite marks on McGregor's fleshy skin caused by the rare green haired Cataline creature. He knew she would bite anyone that tried to molest her. This is a piece of information the male Cataline knows all too well and was to McGregor's disadvantage.

"Animals!" the Cataline male shouted. Without warning, he stepped forward with his fists clenched hard that seemed to swell his physical appearance before he hit McGregor in the face.

Chants and raves soon erupted from the Cataline crowd as McGregor regained his balance while stepping back. Suddenly murmurs erupted from the crowd, murmurs asking for something to be done about the new arrivals.

Just as he regained his balance and recovered from the sudden punch, the horde of Cataline ran towards him like sharks swimming in for the kill. McGregor moved around trying to find the best course of action with the sound of his heart pounding in his ears at the overwhelming number of angry individuals heading his way. The split second search for the best way out failed, so he decided to do the next best thing. The Cataline expected the human to run, but instead he done the unexpected and rushed at them head on. McGregor launched himself towards the lead Cataline male with a flurry of fists, hard knuckles and even his bony forehead. He used such grace at attacking the Cataline using every hard part of his body. Some of the Cataline fell to the ground with injuries sustained as McGregor fought for his life, then before he knew it; he was overpowered by the ranging mob.

Tulack took heed of the situation at hand and tapped on his COM badge for an emergency beam out of the entire crew and vehicles.

Suddenly the whole place lit up with a flash of light as everyone and all signs of the humans were beamed onto the Starship hovering over the enemy troops on the ground.

The Space Car vanished along with all the humans. The Cataline female that was sitting comfortably in the back seat plopped toward the ground, because she cannot be transported with the vehicle. The Cataline mob got up with puzzled looks to the disappearance of the humans before they rescued the stunned green haired female.

McGregor laid passed out on the transporter pad with clear signs of bruising and cuts all over his face and body. Blood started to flow down along the transporter pad and into the circuits that prompted Tulack to call for medical assistance.

McGregor lightly struggled on the pad, he muttered without any reason or care for his words. Suddenly he spoke clearly while curled up, "Stupid god damn fucking Cataline, I'm going to skin that man alive." Those where his final words before he passed out. Due to the blood in the circuits, the transporter went offline, but the crew was more then happy to carry him towards the medial bay.

"We need to get back to the Explorer. His body has sustained critical damage." Tulack stated while hovering over his motionless body with the medical tricorder.

The ever so graceful Leeli, who walked into the transporter room relaying the message that the Explorer is currently cloaked and is orbiting the planet. They both talked to each other with Vulcan professionalism and stale emotion. Resembling the actions of two lovers who are hiding their emotions from their family and friends.

The small secondary vessel drifted upwards like a small pebble sinking into the dark depths into the sea. As it progressed slowly upwards into space to meet the USS Explorer, nothing could be seen in the view windows of the ship.

Flash-cooled rubble that resembled parts of a once advanced and long dead space station dispersed in a widening ring around the planet. Somewhere, the Explorer orbited perched high above the planet waiting for them to arrive. Once the secondary vessel penetrated the cloaking field, the view of the Explorer could be seen inside a distortion cloud of green that changed the appearance of the massive ship

After the secondary vessel penetrated the cloaking field, it gracefully slid back into its location it originated from like a jigsaw puzzle.

News about McGregor's condition slowly reached Arania who, with a panicked heart rushed to her captain's aid without any care for the operations of the ship. Very worried and concerned, Tulack tried his best to distract her and prompted her to carry on her duties as second in command.

However, Arania stayed close to her captain's side mentally holding his hand, but not doing this in reality as to alienate the crew who rushed around the medial bay. Michel hovered over his motionless body frantically waving the tricorder across his abdomen. Slurry of tools flew across his wounds and within seconds, they dissolved the wounds into perfect pink skin as they repaired the physical damage done to his body.

Curiosity overcame two Cataline children, who were rescued before they approached the planet. News spread fast about who the captain was, plus everyone took the time to study the human race and the crew of the explorer. After all, they saved them from the grasps of the Krainers. It didn't take long before they held the highest regard for the captain.

Michel rushed around like a headless chicken as he tried to save McGregor from something strange that was sucking the life from him. Stumbling over the watching crowd, he barked aloud, "Will you all please leave? How am I supposed to work with everyone in my way?... Leave NOW!"

Adhering to the warning, the crowd slowly disembarked the medical bay and left the doctor to perform his emergency surgery on McGregor.

Arania walked down the large central corridor with Tulack. She tried her best to keep her composure with all that has happened. Still in command, she needs to keep things in perspective until her captain can take control, a responsibility that she has dealt with before, but she will gladly give it back to its rightful commander, who she loves and treats with the utmost respect.

"He saved my life more than once." Arania muttered to Tulack reciting the memories of McGregor past. She owed a lot to McGregor and deep down she feels deep emotion for this stubborn hard man. Although it's nothing romantic, someday it could be. She carried on after a long heartfelt pause; "I got captured by a group of raiders and they were about to do the usual thing that raiders do. Then he came to my rescue, it was the most pleasant thing I have ever experienced, and he did it with such skill and finesse." Arania continued as she tried to hold back her discomfort and tears

Tulack replied in a manor typical to Vulcans, "I must admit, being around him and this crew has enriched my perspective of humans"

Arania was about to carry on when they were interrupted by a message through the COM system, "Arania could you come down to the medical bay. There is something you need to know!" said Michel with an urgent tone to his voice.

Arania arrived back at the medical bay with Tulack in tow. They expected the doctor to have some good news. However as they entered, all they saw was a group of people stood around staring McGregor's motionless body scratching their heads.

"What is it doctor?" said Arania anxiously as she looked at McGregor's unshaven face. It's a little unusual to see McGregor in this state. She normally finds him attractive, but due to recent events, no one could blame him for not shaving.

With his hands folded, Michel ponders over McGregor's condition before he held out his hand and said to the approaching individuals, "I have managed to stabilise his wounds and they seem to be fine, all internal organs are stable too, but..." He pauses for a brief moment before he proceeded with a questionable tone, "Was he bitten by anything down there on the planet?"

Tulack stepped forward with no emotion in his stride and informed the doctor about the unknown individual they encountered on the planet. With a projected voice, he replied, "That is correct doctor. The captain recklessly followed and tried to rescue a female that eventually got herself into trouble. As he tried to rescue her, she bit him on the arm."

One of the Cataline assistances beamed forward with wide eyes full of questions. She had some idea about who this creature could be, however she needed more information. She stepped forward and asked for a description hoping, praying that it's not the creature she suspects.

"Do you know what she looks like?" the young assistant asked as she gestured towards Tulack

"Indeed I do," Tulack said in a tall and firm tone as he turned towards the female that asked the question. "She had red eyes, green hair, long pointy ears and something unidentifiable on her chest."

Tulack then drifted towards the female as he sensed that she could have important information about McGregor's situation. He slowly hinted for her to speak by the facial expressions he projected, almost frightening the poor female. He then held a glass-computerised tablet with the uncanny image of the female that bit McGregor.

Michel then interjected after he confirmed his findings with the Cataline assistant, "I do not know what this girl is, but it appears she has injected some kind of neural-toxin into McGregor blood, and it's breaking down his cells, I've done everything I could at the moment, but it's just a matter of time."

Lolai-yu walked through the long and weary hallways in the massive Explorer as she went from room to room and checked all the people she was responsible for. She helped them escape from the planet and ended up being rescued by the unknown human race. But her people still looked up to her for guidance as a leader. She was eventually interrupted by one of her people that informed her about McGregor's condition. She reluctantly went to the medical bay to offer her assistance.

With a more detailed description about the incident, Lolai-yu had good knowledge about who attacked him. She sighed lightly at the possible low survival outcome McGregor would have, however unscathed by this, she carried on.

After an uncomfortably long silence, Lolai-yu walked in and offered her insight, "You will find it hard to treat his condition but I believe it can be done." She then continued in more detail after she frowned herself for stating that. She was doubtful that they could find the creature again, but she needed to let them know the options, "This person is an extremely rare life form that used to live with us. They are just like us but with a few differences. They can live under water and on land, they look slightly different, however, their teeth can contain poison, which when bitten can cause death." She then finished her sentence "Your captain seems to be lucky not to get the brunt of it otherwise he would be dead now, but you need to find her because she can provide you with the cure."

Lolai-yu raised her eyes towards the image displayed on the computer tablet perched on the desk. She then drifted towards it picking it up. She then lowered her voice as if she felt sorry for the creature, "I thought they all died out, they were the most hunted."

Arania looked at McGregor as if she held back tears for him, but she informed the group about the bad news, "That might be difficult, after the landing team was beamed up, the Krainers moved in closer to the camp, without resistance nothing can stop them."

They carried on the debate for a few moments and none of them noticed the time they wasted. Suddenly and unexpectedly McGregor roared, "Will you all shut up and launch a landing party to find this bloody creature!" Full of drugs, he struggled to get up. But once he did, he ordered, "You'd better take a crew of your own people Arania and don't get your sorry ass caught!"

Arania spun around and her face lit up like a Christmas tree. She was overfilled with joy, without realising it she grabbed hold of McGregor and gave him the most heartfelt hug alienating the crew around. She felt McGregor comforting presence and warm body close to hers. Her smile was so big she could not contain her excitement. What felt like moments, she held onto her captain far longer than she needed to, but McGregor chimed in as he tried to be as polite and professional about this delicate situation, he had no idea that she cared for him like this.

Work needed to be done to save his life and it would only be a matter of time before the poison kills McGregor. Being held in such a romantic position made McGregor smile slightly, but he was not interested in Arania's overenthusiastic actions and needed her to act like an officer, "Arania, you are a Starfleet officer, act like one!"

The word Starfleet caught the attention of Nes-al-sar who was helped out in the medical bay. She often wondered the name of the humans unit would be called. Every army or alien race she stumbled upon had different designations or names. The word Starfleet must indicate the name for the human's army and the word itself sounded important. She whispered the word "Starfleet" to herself before she drifted out of the medical bay in a trance with that single word in her mind. She needed to know what this Starfleet was.

Arania tried her best to hold back her excitement and prepared to gather a group of people to take one of the secondary ships back down to the planet to gather all the individuals at the Sangore region. The thought of McGregor awake gave her the energy and strive to find this mysterious individual and it soon became her obsession. Beaming with pleasure, she led her team towards the Secondary Vessels.

Excitement ran through the mind of Kraile-li who glided her eyes at the wondrous controls at her navigation workstation. Banks of controls blinked and talked to her as if they are meant for this one creature alone.

"Warp six, thrusters, weapons and sensors this is amazing, so hi tech." She chirped out loudly as she caught Arania's attention.

Arania stared towards the source of the cheerful outburst, "Are you sure you will be OK flying this thing. It will be new and I need a very good pilot."

Acting excited and being brave Kraile-li then replied trying to mimic Tulack's emotionless tone of speaking, "Having the translator microbes makes understanding English easy. I believe I can fly this ship."

Arania knew what Kraile-li was doing and squinted her eyes almost telling her not to do it. But she finally gave the approved nod because she knows that Kraile-li is able to fly the ship. From her observations over the last few days and with a little reassurance from Lolai-yu, Arania has assessed Kraile-li's abilities and was happy with them.

Perched in the nucleus of the command deck and full of energy, Arania ordered the vessel on its way. Determination crept along her face as she stared through the huge panoramic windows before ordering the release of the vessel, "Release the docking clamps and let's proceed to the Sangore Region."

Loud release mechanisms echoed through the entire vessel accompanied by a jolt that indicated that the ship was free from the Explorer and drifted away towards the endless sea of space.

Arania gave thoughtful imaginary get-well kiss to her captain as she ordered the vessel down to the planet and rescue more of her people. But more importantly, she needed to find the rare and exotic creature that caused his demise. She slowly began to worry as she looked at the massive planet before her. "How am I supposed to find this creature?" She questioned herself without showing doubt to her crew. With a graceful glare at the globe, she orders, "Kraile-li, take us down"

Arania looked around at her crew that comprised only of her people and this made her feel uncomfortable. She would have preferred to have her normal Starfleet crew, however, given the previous encounter with the village, humans might cause a problem this time around. But she cast all her fears aside and carried on defiant in finding this creature to save her captain's life.

The view of space slowly disappeared in the panoramic windows as the vessel skipped and finally dived into the red sandy planet, the view became obscured with the friction rush of wind and the shield began to heat up illuminating the atmosphere inside the ship to a shady red.

Arania felt the descent was too fast and realized that her energetic pilot forgot to engage the dampening thrusters to slow their descent. She approached Kraile-li who was still a virgin to the controls. Her mistake slowly made her worried, but she was reassured when Arania corrected the mistake in the most simple, yet effective way. Kraile-li felt embarrassed and a warm smile from Arania indicated that she had forgiven her.

The familiar view of the Sangore Region appeared in the distance as the vessel glided through the sky as it displaced the clouds on the way. Before they knew it, they have skimmed the treetops of the dead forest at rapid speed. Large hilltops hindered the progress of the Krainers, which provided the extra time for Arania to evacuate the town. However, Arania was able to look at the dead forest in more detail as the ship came in to land. She felt a creepy sensation from all the death and destruction, which changed her view from curiosity to leaving as soon as possible.

The defending Cataline people soon spotted the large five-deck ship approaching them from the sky. They stood around the clearing as the ship landed. Expecting the worst, the Cataline men all held weapons and tried to protect their wives and children from this new enemy about to land.

After the smoky dust settled, the huge ship stood like a giant gleaming building. It didn't take long for the defending Cataline people to realize that it was the humans again. But as soon as the docking doors opened, Arania rushed out to greet her fellow people and encourage them on the ship.

Murmurs erupted through out the crowd as the Catalines looked at each other. They expected the humans, but instead, this creature, one of their own kind has arrived in front of them freely and not enslaved by the humans. Lolai-yu and Kraile-li both came out of the ship and the idle murmurs became louder until they became recognized. Lolai-yu marched up gracefully towards one of the male Catalines before she said, "I see you have been looking after our people well."

The lead male Cataline leered at Lolai-yu for a moment that seemed like eternity, not one word was said. They both stood and looked at each other as if waiting to see who will give in first. His strong body tone overwhelmed her and if there was a fight, he surely would win. He grabbed her causing a slight ripple of sighs throughout the small crowd before he hugged her in an emotional embrace. "I am so glad you are safe, when you spoke of escaping I was sure you had been captured." He said full of emotion.

Arania felt out of place and lost to explain what just happened. For the moment, she thought Lolai-yu would end up in a fight and this could cause great confusion with her crew, who has come to help them. But the emotional embrace has cast aside all doubt except for one burning question, "Do you know him?" Arania asked.

Lolai-yu turned and a small friendly smile crept along her face, "Yes he is my brother."

Arania gave a long, dry sigh at the outcome and felt better, she returned a sly smile that Lolai-yu's brother gave towards her which signified he was interested in her and checking out her body. Initially she didn't notice until later. But she was happy that she helped reunite a family lost to this terrible tragedy.

However as Arania tried to gather her thoughts and still worried about her captain, she was interrupted by Lolai-yu's brother, "Who are you and I sense you are different." He said with a smile that was sparkling and sincere.

"That lovely smile is not getting you anywhere," Arania thought to herself as she remembered the individual that attacked her captain. She saw the whole thing on the view screen when they approached the planet and this was the perfect time to project her thought towards him. "I am Arania, second in command to the USS Explorer and that human you have just beaten up was my captain!" Arania barked as she narrowed her eyes and glared at his face.

"Your captain?" His heart ran to his mouth blocking any words from escaping. After a moment of recovery he continued in a shocked tone, "You are second in command?"

"Yes, now get your people on the sh.." Arania then paused when the rest of the camp emerged out of the dead bushes. However this is not what made her stop in mid sentence, it was the sudden approach of a large number of Cataline that resembled the creature that bit McGregor on the arm.

Arania looked at them with eyes wide open, their unique patterns and red eyes made her realize that these people are all in one place and she had a chance to save her captain, she needed to rush and get back before he died.

But she needed to stick to her duties and evacuate the town as fast as possible because the sound of the marching Krainers grew ever so closer with each second that passed by. With the assistance from Lolai-yu and her brother, who kept on eyeing up Arania, everyone was happy to leave the town. Arania gave Lolai-yu's brother such a look of scorn that he immediately stopped looking at her.

Arania turned around and to make sure no one was left in the village before leaving, she needed to ask for the female that bit her captain, however she can do that once they are airborne.

After confirming her identity, the ship then began to take off. And not a moment too soon, the approaching forces soon spotted the ship and they began shooting at it.

A volley of rockets from the rusty robots created a showing lightshow on the shields of the vessel before it went out of range.

Arania sat in her seat as she watched the dead planet disappear off the corner of the window. She could sense Lolai-yu's brother on the command deck and it wasn't long until he introduced himself as Kai-Yu.

Arania gave a scorned view towards him still. She hated him for the pain her captain is going through, but his question caused her to look at him, the question of, "Where are we going?"

This question remained on everyone's minds and it got a little more pressing when they approached the debris of a space station. It looked like they were going

nowhere. But as soon as the ship interacted with the cloaking shield of the USS Explorer the questions stopped. The sheer size of the Explorer brought everyone to a silence once they saw it through the windows.

Minutes later, Arania with the help from Lolai-yu unloaded all the people down the factory styled hallways to their designated areas to be scanned and treated for any problems they might have experienced. Everyone was understandably nervous about this new environment and worried about their treatment. Arania explained that this is a human ship and the crew will not harm them. When the doors opened they immediately saw the humans and their own kind ready to sort them out.

Arania anxiously waited to see the female that bit McGregor on the arm; she looked frantically in the small crowd of people, but the harder she looked, the more she could not find her. She held onto the image of this creature hoping for a breakthrough. But she was interrupted by Kai-yu who tried to apologise for his behaviour to her captain. But she leered at him and said, "You need to apologise to my captain, not me!"

"Are you looking for someone?" Kai-yu asked as if trying to get around her defences.

"Yes, I am looking for this person," she then lifted the glass-computerized tablet to his face with the female's image appeared on the screen.

He looked at the faint image on the screen and within a few moments his eyes widened. It was clear to Arania that he has seen her before, so she adds more to the conversation in a bid to get him speaking, "My captain tried to save her and she bit him, now he is dying unless I can get her to the medical bay."

While she talked about this creature to Kai-Yu, she caught a glimpse of her in the corner of her eye. She turned slightly and realized that it was the female in question and then approached her with Kai-Yu hot on her trail like a puppy following its master.

She walked up to the unusual creature that can be seen out of place slightly with her green hair and red eyes, although other people of her type are around, she is the only one with green hair, so making her noticeable was easy.

Arania approached the female in question with caution as to not startle her. She could feel the stress that this female was in and the last thing she wants is for her to disappear into the depths of the Explorer. With a little care and thought Arania and Kai-Yu managed to convince her into follow them to the medical bay.

"His condition is getting worse" Michel looked alarmed but he still kept his composure as he fiddled around with the medical tricorder. Turning towards his assistant he exclaimed, "If we do not find the cause of this poison, he may die"

Michel's attention was soon diverted when he saw the green haired creature enter the medical bay. Understandably she was very scared and shy, but she was able to remember the person laid out on the bed injured and his face has haunted her for a while. She knew what the bite will do and she regretted doing it. Now she was more than happy to offer her services to help the doctor.

The doctor managed to perform some tests and with the help of the Cataline assistance, they are now able to synthesise an antidote to the poison.

Then, while everyone treated the sick and injured, especially McGregor, the natural green haired female sneaked into the depths of the Explorer.

Chapter 16

(Rumours)

For hours, McGregor laid out in the medical bay as he slowly recovered from his wounds blissfully unaware of the efforts his crew undertook in recovering as many of the Cataline people as possible. However, efforts stagnated as people had no plan of rescue.

Michel returned to the medical bay to check up on McGregor. As he walked into the room, a dimly-lit environment met him with the only light source being the few LED lights still on.

Curiosity got the better of Michel as he approached a figure that was perched up on his bed. Michel paused, assessing. "McGregor, Captain... Are you OK?" he asked.

McGregor lifted his head from the downward position and looked towards Michel. He muttered without thought, "These Cataline," He paused, reciting painful memories deep within his past. "They can have a profound impact on someone's life, if they're involved with one."

Michel found that puzzling and uncomfortable, he did not know what McGregor talked about and he surmised that he just dreamed it. He took a step forward, squinting his eyes and assessing the situation.

McGregor carried on talking to the doctor as he held out a medical tricorder, "I can still feel and smell, a slight aroma from her." His face started to write an impression of despair and anger from a past he damaged and caused. If he could cry he would, however McGregor was the type of person not to.

"Do you know doctor, I was married once." McGregor looked up towards the ceiling, like calculating. "But she died a long time ago. The actions I caused long ago, caused her death."

Michel stood back slightly taken by the surprise and confused, "I don't understand captain." He said.

McGregor shook his head slightly as he woke up back to reality. Memories from his long past were suddenly buried into his unconscious and he was now wide-awake.

"Sorry about that doctor, how am I?" He questioned as if he was full of energy.

Michel looked at his scans and found nothing out of the ordinary, the poison levels has disappeared and he was fit for duty. However he was slightly apprehensive about the strange behaviour, but he gave McGregor the all clear and advised him to return at the end of the day. He then shrugged off the strange conversation he had. At least he knows that McGregor was married once, something he did not expect to learn.

The evacuation of the planet was not going as fast as Arania would have liked, she worried and pondered over her captain more times then she should. The work at hand was more important, however she often saw herself dazing into memories about him and she worried about his life. Even though, she knows he had the treatment. She would like to see her captain sat in his chair giving orders again.

Standing at the holographic representation of the planet, Arania's graceful blue body stood in a curved motion with the light dazzling from her fine fin like skin that gave her the appearance of a defenceless beautiful creature.

"Are you OK?" Kai-Yu chimed in, disturbing Arania's concentration and bringing her back to reality.

They both looked at each other in the command deck on opposite sides around the holographic planet in front of them. Lolai-yu stood next to her brother offering her incites into the rescue effort. Arania didn't like to have this individual around because of the damage he had caused, but he has knowledge about the rescue effort and enemy camps.

Arania gave an acknowledged look that prompted Kai-yu to continue, "The camp at this point should be the easiest to break into and rescue about two hundred or three hundred." Kai-yu pointed at the location. The point went red as to indicate the camp on the holographic projection of the planet.

"And how will these people get on this ship!" A disembodied voice bellowed throughout the command deck in a familiar tone.

The bridge crew snapped their eyes around to the entrance doors as they rushed to see him, Arania's heart jumped into her mouth as she also looked.

McGregor narrowed his eyes and glared at Kai-Yu who stood at the projection like he owned it. The atmosphere turned stale as everyone waited in suspense at the actions the captain will take. Kai-Yu stood as he fidgeted and waited for McGregor to speak noticing the exit. He was not on the planet anymore with his friends and this captain has every right to beat the shit out of him. He felt worried, but did not show it.

McGregor stood cold, like a shark as he hid the immense anger he has towards this individual that encouraged his friends to smash his face in and after an uncomfortable long moment, McGregor snapped, "Who the hell are you and why are you on my bridge?"

The atmosphere grew even more intense as McGregor looked at Kai-Yu's blue face.

McGregor was not going to give him the opportunity to reply. Without warning, he smashed his hard fist into Kai-Yu's face and took a step back with satisfaction. Sighs erupted throughout the control deck towards McGregor followed by idle murmurs.

Clenching his hand, McGregor bellowed angrily, "You nearly got me killed and now you want our help?!" he carried on after a long dry sigh, "I feel like throwing you out at the nearest air lock! You bastard!"

Arania showed deep concern for McGregor; she was worried about his anger and his recovery, so she approached him in an effort to calm him down.

Accepting his punishment, Kai-Yu stood back and attended to his broken nose that bled out slowly. He then reluctantly blabbed out an apology that only seemed to make him angry. After a sharp movement, Kai-Yu grew even more worried that McGregor was about to deliver on his promise.

Interrupting McGregor in his stride, Arania pleaded, "Captain, a Starfleet officer does not act this way. Please calm down!"

McGregor barked, stating the facts, "I'm not part of Starfleet!" He paused showing a sly smile, "Not only that, I have been looking forward to a little payback!"

He gasped as he recovered from the effects of the poison and he could see the plea for help and compassion within Arania's eyes. So he decided to hold back on his threat. But he did not want that individual on his command deck, so he turned and looked at Tulack.

McGregor ordered in a razor sharp voice, "Tulack, I want him of my command deck! NOW!"

Tulack obeyed his orders and escorted Kai-Yu of the command deck to his quarters with McGregor leering at him all the way off the deck.

Arania squinted her eyes while she showed her anger towards McGregor. But he was someone she'd cared for deeply and she could not hold a grudge against him for long. But she stewed in anger for a short time because Kai-Yu did offer his services in the rescue effort that McGregor now messed up. With a tone of protest she said, "You didn't have to kick him off the command deck!"

"That individual assaulted and nearly killed me, I am not in the mood to talk to that asshole and I'm not having him on -MY- command deck." boiled McGregor as he stared at Arania

Lolai-yu interjected, "But he was helping us find a way to rescue our people."

McGregor tapped his fingers on the railing showing his impatience at Arania's moaning. "You know, I am getting fed up of this! I have been bitten, shot at, beaten, lost a ship, got crew members killed and lost lots of valuable time, cargo and to top of it all, I nearly died too. This is a cargo

ship, not a starship!"

He walked towards the holographic display of the planet with the current mission plotted out on it. He then muttered taking a long dry sigh, "I feel like leaving this whole area now!"

Lolai-yu barked out as she demanded they help rescue her people, "You can't just leave, there are thousands of people and they are relying on us to save them, we planned on helping them and please do not abandon us."

The demand on her face soon changed to a plea of mercy and she almost begged in front of McGregor. Although she tried not to show it she could not hide that fact from McGregor.

McGregor leered at Lolai-Yu unsatisfied with her comment and he felt the effects of the medication and exhaustion, in the end he did not care. But as he looked at the plans on the holographic image, he decided to go ahead, and came up with a method of execution.

"OK, crew up and detach all the secondary ships, they should provide the capability to carry all the people and provide the cover, also deploy all the Space Cars and make sure crews take weapons with them. I want to get this over and done with as quick as possible." McGregor ordered before he called Arania, Tulack and Lolai-yu into his ready room.

Activity around the vessel erupted with everyone doing their part in getting all the tasks done for the rescue effort. Sam rushed around in the Space Car bay training the large number of people who wanted to help. It didn't take a great amount of training or skill to drive them and the idea of using the Cataline people would make the rescue effort that much easier.

Sam looked at the glass-computerised tablet before he was interrupted by one of his friends. He approached with a large smile on his face. Large build and clean-shaven, he had the hairstyle that was more like a mop than anything else. He leaned on Sam's arm and with a sly tone and said, "So, I heard that making love to one of these creatures is, indescribable!"

Sam turned slowly at the remark and chimed in, the devious and dirty chap he was, "You heard correctly, I also heard that they have long soft silky hairs in their va..." Suddenly their discussion was cut short when a Klingon looked down at them.

"What am I going to do?" Shouted Kane holding his Klingon prized weapon in his hand expecting to take his group out for hunting.

Sam and his friend looked at this bloodthirsty Klingon before they gave a nervous gulp.

McGregor's raised his voice slightly as he looked towards his crew who had

gathered in the private ready room for the discussions. "We might have a problem, I counted over fifty thousand people left down on that planet, and this ship is only large enough to carry around fifteen thousand people, it is going to get very crowded. Plus we will have a shortage of food too, it is a long trip home."

McGregor narrowed his eyes as he looked at everyone in the room waiting for an answer, a few glasses of water already placed around everyone's spaces, signified that this meeting could take a long time.

Lolai-Yu sat next to Arania who was lightly tapping her hands on the table as she looked at McGregor. She was not sure what to make from his sudden actions and his behaviour was strange. Arania was slightly telepathic and could feel a deep sadness in his soul that could have added to this whole situation, but because she is young and not accustomed to her telepathic powers, Arania was at a loss to explain.

Tulack and Leeli who was also present stared at each other from opposite sides of the table almost hiding their boyish fantasies from each other. But they mealy waited for a response from McGregor breathing in the freshly created air that emanated from the habitat dome.

Lolai-Yu felt pleased that McGregor decided to help her people and retracted her impression on him. But she was still scorned about his attitude towards her brother and hoped that they could work something out.

McGregor grew impatient at the stagnant situation in the room. No one really had any ideas and he was not going to be the only one to think of something. He threw his hands on the table causing a slight shiver in everyone. Food was the biggest problem and this planet looked like it didn't have any. So changing the subject he asked, "Tulack, what's the situation on the planet"

"It appears that the Krainers are aware of us. I have been detecting large amounts of communication about shoring up defences and plans to counter act us. However, I am also picking up communication between the Cataline people, they are aware that we are here trying to rescue them, it seems that word has gotten out" said Tulack.

McGregor walked to the nearest chair and sat down with his replicated tea he ordered from the replicator unit. He often prized the relaxing aroma of earl grey tea and it offered his mind a way to be creative, "OK, set-up decks to receive people, everyone needs to be registered and assigned places to stay..."

"As I understand, several decks in the bottom part of the ship are currently not being used, if we can use them I am sure we can help with the overcrowding." Lolai-Yu interjected.

"Those decks have not been inspected and checked." McGregor grumbled as he turned in the direction towards Lolai-Yu. "When I first got this ship it was disused and on its way to being decommissioned. Most of the decks were damaged and those few are the last ones I have not been able to check. They might not be suitable for habitation."

McGregor brushed the glass-computerised tablet to one side and took a sip from his tea. He looked back towards Lolai-Yu, who from her facial expressions, indicated that she was about to speak again.

"McGregor," She paused realizing that she made a mistake and he should be addressed as captain, "Captain, with your permission, I am sure we can check the decks and if there is any damage, we can do it ourselves."

McGregor looked at her over the top of the cup he drank from, he then realized that this proposal could finish the rest of the repairs to his vessel, like free

labour. He placed the cup back on the desk and stared at her graceful blue face that tried to convince him to change his mind.

McGregor looked away and paused, deep in thought. Unexpectedly he replied, "OK, feel free to take a look, but be careful. If you get into trouble down there it might take some time to send a rescue team and make sure you take a radio walky-talky with you. The communications down in that sector does not work properly."

Tulack followed McGregor's gesture and gave her a walky-talky that was attached to the bulkhead of the wall in the ready room. Around the vessel, primitive hand held walky-talky's are located in certain areas of the ship. Mainly used as a last resort, they provide short-range communications around the ship. Independent and hard to jam, they're the ideal tool for emergencies.

A small smile crept along Lolai-Yu's face, as she was pleased about the decision McGregor made. She felt that this human was not as bad as she thought and there was room for improvement. But McGregor gave a grunt and ordered her to help with the rescue efforts as well. The tone he portrayed towards her wiped the smile from Lolai-Yu's face.

Arania showed an approved and graceful smile before the conversation carried on for few more minutes. When it was over Arania turned towards McGregor and said, "Captain, please fully recover soon and its nice to have you back."

"Arania," McGregor interrupted Arania before she had the chance to leave the room. She turned to his direction and waited.

McGregor spun in his chair towards Arania and with a smile he complimented, "Arania, that was ingenious about bringing the Explorer to the plant cloaked. Because of your actions I was saved and now we have the chance to save your people. Thank you."

Arania turned and left the room grinning.

Tulack then went closer to McGregor to offer him some advice, as a knowledgeable Vulcan will do. "May I offer you some advice sir?"

McGregor's face drew a cold and annoyed expression towards Tulack's cold and harsh way of speaking. Something Tulack always seemed to do when he offers some advice, normally good advice that McGregor does not want to hear. McGregor laminated to himself, making sure Tulack heard while tilting his head all the way back on his chair in a lazy fashion, "Why not!"

McGregor leaned forward after a brief moment and took a sip from his cup, however the bitter taste still remains in the tea, no matter how hard he tried, he cannot get the damn replicator to make the perfect tea. His ears opened to Tulack's advice, "I think you need to take some rest, Arania is in good control and after all that has happened, I think it will benefit you well."

McGregor grunted at the suggestion, however it was the correct suggestion that he really wanted to hear. He felt tired and this was a good time to get some rest. "OK, I will, thanks, you are dismissed."

Tulack and the remaining crew departed the ready room, and McGregor sat at his table as he looked out towards the dead planet in the abyss of space. The light shone through the windows and the red glow changed the mood of the room to a warmer atmosphere, which then prompted his memory about the strange creature that bit him. He rubbed his bite mark as a constant reminder of the thanks he received.

However the innocence and defencelessness of the creature made him pleased that he was able to rescue the Cataline people. But getting bitten and

poisoned was not the highlight of his day, even the mission, as a whole seems little out of the ordinary.

McGregor stood up from his chair and walked towards the huge windows in the ready room. The massive view of the Explorer spanned as far as the eye can see below the windows as McGregor stood on top of his world. He looked towards the glass habitat dome and felt a sense of pride and accomplishment. The Cataline people walked around as they touched and explored their new environment and the habitat dome became the star attraction. But he sighed at the cost it has caused. "So much death and pain to get this far, when will it end?" He pondered to himself as he finished the rest of his tea.

McGregor turned away; it was clear and apparent that mission was now under way. He walked out of the ready room with drive and determination with a clear view for the mission: Evacuate the planet, escape to the anomaly and hand them over to Earth so he can get on with the normal routine of trade in the Alfa Quadrant.

Back on the hopeless planet, the word was out and spreading between the Cataline people. What first seemed like a horrible trick preformed by a new race even more powerful than the Krainers, had turned out to be a method of hope.

Excitement and thrill went through the Cataline that were rescued, this prompted them to use the communication equipment in their own quarters to contact family and friends down on their planet. However it was Lolai-Yu's call that started the rumour. Once the word was out in the resistance, it spread to all four corners of the globe. However, this news was a little too late for some, as they have been tortured, molested and sodomised beyond surviving. The camps got worse and worse. The Krainers carried on their daily routines blissfully unaware of the rescue efforts and the problems they're about to encounter. They knew about the human presence, but they surmised that they are only lurking around and they have no idea about the massive vessel in orbit over their heads. It was not long now.

All the secondary vessels began to disembark from the Explorer with the trail of Space Cars behind them, like fish following a huge whale in the sea. It was clear that the rescue effort is now in full swing.

A mixed crew of Cataline and humans piloted the massive secondary vessels with a small team of humanoids piloting the Space Cars. The Cataline were very fast and intelligent creatures able to absorb the information and methods at will. Once they began to trust the humans, both species began to work in harmony for the greater good.

The plan was simple, the Space Cars were to scout the planet at high speed and pick up any Cataline that might be in small groups or by themselves and take them back to the nearest secondary ship. Failing that, they can head straight for the Explorer. The secondary vessels would then progress to the smallest camp first and liberate it from the Krainers.

Arania stood and ran a palm across her perfectly smooth scalp feeling the pressure of the massive mission ahead. Doubt went through her mind and she prayed for a miracle. No one has ever undertaken a mission like this in her career in Starfleet.

Her thin lips curled into a smile, "Change course and take us in." The vessel changed its course and skated along the planets atmosphere before it broke inside. The light show was impressive, but Arania was smart not to get noticed before they could approach the camp. They needed the element of surprise and she was more than trained to provide just that.

"Is the radar jamming in place?" She questioned as she checked the displays on the console beside her. The smile was slowly replaced by nervousness and sweat as she contemplated the involvement she is currently in. She has never been in a battle like this and the mere sight of a Krainer brings a shiver through her body. Once the ensign checked all the readings and confirmed that everything was in order, they proceeded to the first camp.

McGregor walked over to his desk and placed his jacket on the back of his chair, he sighed at the reports he needed to make before he could sleep. "The deaths!" He muttered to himself. Even with his crew down on the planet with advanced ships and weapons, he would prefer not to fill in another P88 form.

He spent moments jotting down the service record and letter to the drivers family about the death of their beloved son who was killed on their last mission. Even though he has never seen them, he pities the suffering they will have to go through, once they receive his letter. Most of the crew have no family and the Klingons would love to get a letter about sons or daughters demise in the brisk of a battle. Klingon honour knows no bounds. "But this is a human," he said to himself as he finished the draft.

Time drifted on slowly and he prepared himself for a much needed bed rest, something he always looks forward to, and gods help anyone who interrupts him. Even on a good day, he cannot wake up unless he is physically thrown out of bed, but the recent events will cause him to sleep lightly. As he makes preparations to sleep, a calling sound pierced the silent hum of the ship.

He walked over to the computer console on his deck and made it clear that he is getting some sleep and politely tells the individual to, "go away!" however not so nicely phased. He did not realize it was Kai-Yu who worked out how to use the communication system on the ship.

With that over, he orders the computer to turn off the lights as he got into bed. The brown-red glow of the planet through the dipped windows offers a peaceful and relaxing feel to the room that slowly sent him to sleep.

Nes-al-sar walked into her friend's quarters in the middle of the ship to catch up on matters and her health. After all, she did leave her cocoon in a lot of pain and she was worried. The massive walkways and environment of the Explorer gave her some comfort of safety and more importantly, it did not resemble the Krainer holding camps and rooms.

"Lei-lie," Nes-al-sar chirped softly, entering the room, "Are you OK?"

She heard slight noises of pain from the bedroom and her concerns for her friend's health returned to haunt her. The medication used to remove the pain has worn out, but luckily Nes-al-sar brought a replacement for this instance.

Injecting her, Nes-al-sar knows that the next few days will be important because the pain will subside. However, the next effect of the Krainers infection will be weakness and tiredness. Knowing this, she has vowed to stay by her friend's side and look after her no matter how bad it gets. One day, she will have to go through the same thing.

Even with the pain, Lei-lie felt a sense of safety and hope. The suffering will only last a short time, however the memories about being molested and abused will haunt her for the rest of her life. But Nes-al-sar had a matter to talk to her friend about, something that installed hope and passion in both of them.

Nes-al-sar was more than excited to tell her friend about the news she managed to research, "The humans have a place called Starfleet, I have looked at this organisation and I am very excited, it offers you and me some hope and purpose."

Lei-Lie had a new lease on life after the injection, the weakness and pain had subsided and she was more than interested in the news her friend had collected.

"I told you to keep an extra supply of this medicine to keep back the pain, you should know better!" Nes-al-sar said trying to be a more responsible to her friend but she still showed the characteristics of a young child.

Lei-lie prised her friend for helping her, but she could not get over all the activity on the ship. She heard running and machines clanking around. With a curious tone she said, "What's going on?"

Nes-al-sar replied and explained that the efforts are underway to rescue as many of their people as possible. Lei-lie looked through the window beside her bed and she shivered at the red-brown dead planet below them, she almost wept at being back.

One hour passed and the mission was well underway, vessel after vessel brought back Cataline from the planet followed by the Space Cars. The Krainers did not know what hit them, with the cloaking and radar jamming technology, the team was able to blast their way in and rescue the Cataline before the Krainers had the chance to react.

All hell broke loose on the planet as the secondary vessels hovered over the slave camps and began to fire at the Krainers defence platforms and soldiers on the ground.

Even some of the Krainers took the Cataline people as hostages, which ended in embarrassment when they were transported into the open desert on the other side of the world. In fact this is the method that most of the ships used, far easier to transport them in the middle of nowhere instead of fighting them. However, the Klingons still wanted to, 'Play with their pray'

Camp after camp was liberated from the Krainers with some of the Cataline not informed about whom the humans are. This caused some confusion and resistance on another side. Having Cataline crew help out speeded up the process and made things simpler. However, time was not on their side.

Even though the Explorer jammed and monitored the transmissions coming from the Krainers, it was not able to handle the Krainers ships that left the planet for reinforcements. This left an open window for other alien races to move in, which caused even more battles and it made a mess of things above orbit. The more the alien races slaughtered themselves, the better it was for the rescue teams to do their jobs.

The Space Cars whizzed across the land as they closed in over the groups of Cataline and stragglers that was discovered by the secondary ships. This method of detection was commonplace and they were picked up within moments.

The Klingons that flew the Space Cars never had so much fun in their lives, "I never had this much fun in the Klingon high command. The chance to use vehicles that can move and kill the enemy with my own hands," roared one bloodthirsty Klingon who hanged out of the car door with a phaser rifle shooting the enemy on the ground.

"You can drive soon, I want the chance to get some blood!" interrupted the Klingon driver with an eager eye for the chance to murder some annoying Krainers.

The battles all over the place offered confusion and the chance to really drive the space cars at their highest speeds, especially after the Krainers began to launch their own ships into the sky.

The ground units began to fire green blobs into the air which caused devastating damage to the surrounding areas and killing more of their own kind

then the Space Cars travelling afar in the distance. The crew looked back as if feeling a sense of intelligence that surpassed the Krainers

Due to the limitations on the number of Krainers that can be transported, ground battles broke out in the old towns and makeshift camps. But due to Starfleet training and tactical advantage, the battles were over within minutes. This showed how low the Krainers intelligence was and how unorganised. But numbers was to their advantage. They searched high and low for the Cataline people, finding them in the most unusual places and sometimes in pitiful conditions.

The Klingons took immense pleasure in inflicting punishment upon the Krainers. Kane took his prized Klingon Bat'leth and with a fast swoop, he slit the throat of the vile creature, which fell to the ground in a pool of blood. Kane stood and felt energised and ready to take on more. He raised his weapon into the air and yelled, "It's a good day to die!" With a defiant swing, he cut the chest of another insect like creature that rose up of the ground, as it pretended to be dead.

The remaining two Klingons shared a boyish fascinated grin as they proceeded into an old structure hoping for more chances to kill something, but as they entered they stumbled upon a grizzly site.

Two Krainers completely drunk, messed around with two cocoons, "Hay! You know, you are going to kill that thing," barked a Krainer sat beside his cocoon as he slouched back with a mind-altering drink.

However, his Krainers friend kept on raping the cocoon not listening to his comrade who was more stoned then awake. The stoned companion proceeded in poring his drink into the breathing hole of the large cocoon beside himself. Watching it struggle to breath.

"These Cataline, such pitiful pets, toys for our pleasure," announced the stoned individual who tried to stand.

He looked into the darkness and spotted something moving, "Who's there?" The stoned Krainer demanded.

Kane walked slowly and with a view to kill, no one could control his anger and Klingon pride, he has seen some terrible things in his life, but nothing can compare to the horrific sight he has just witnessed.

Drinking in all the details and actions he witnessed, Kane didn't bother in fighting these creatures; he just pulled out his hand weapon and shot both of them, it would not be honourable to fight these two. With a snarl, he called in one of the medical teams to check for life signs.

A sudden and uncanny breath, fluttered in the air from one of the cocoons, Kane and the medical officer, Frederick, rushed over to the cocoon that had fluid poured into its air intake hole.

Frederick was one of Michel's assistances and students onboard the Explorer, Blond hair, golden pink skin and a standard built body; he would not be able to handle difficult situations for a prolonged period of time. He was drafted by Michel to attend the landing party for assistance, which he objected, but obeyed.

"Quick, turn this over," said Frederick, "The breathing hole is used to allow oxygen into the cocoon so the creature can breath, I think they blocked it," They struggled to turn the huge cocoon to its side and allowed the fluid to drain out of the hole. "Ho my God!" Frederick stood up and backed away.

Kane stood up in unison and stared at him, "What is it?"

Frederick drew in a cold, astonished breath, reeling in anger over the acts that have happened, "This Cataline, inside the cocoon, I am reading two other life forms inside it. I think it's pregnant."

Stunned, they both looked on, then the tricorder started to emit negative results from the cocoon that was raped, "Looks like this one died, the shell was breached" replied Frederick. With one hand on the tricorder he moved over towards the larger cocoon that was tipped on its side.

Frederick tapped on his COM badge, "This is Frederick, we need assistance with a cocoon, we....", his conversation was caught short when the tricorder turned from positive results, to negative. The sighs of breathing stopped and the cocoon, which was pulsating slowly, stopped.

Frederick turned away as he tried to hold back tears for the deceased creature, he wanted to save the mother and children and perhaps get to know them. He felt a sense of connection and pride to save something like this, but his chance has gone now.

He closed the COM channel and stumbled out of the tomb towards the outside, regretting the chance to land on this damned planet.

Chapter 17

(Arania's capture)

Arania stood on the nucleus of the secondary ship, which she has done so many times before. Her mood was much better than before because the Krainers didn't pose that much of a threat. Reports came in from all the away teams about their successful missions. She was even more thrilled to learn that over ten thousand of her own people were taken safely to the Explorer. The main mission now will be to look for supplies for their long voyage back to earth.

The crew on the command deck muttered to themselves before a voice spiked through towards Arania. "Captain, one of the Cataline people has information on the location for a large underground storage facility that should still have supplies."

Arania turned to the location of the information and acknowledged the ensign before she stood up. Her skin clothing that was positioned with elegance and grace; flowed down her slender body and her soft blue hair fluttered about before it settled down. She moved into the section of light and her fine slender body stood elegantly showing all her blue patterned natural clothing. Natural short wavy skirt that was constructed in fragments connected to chest and body coverings that glowed slightly in the light. She looked back at the ensign, hoping, praying, "Can you get the location?"

Few taps on the control station brought back positive results in which the ensign nodded in response. However the ensign sighed slightly before she stated that the supplies are located deep underground and getting a positive transporter lock will be impossible.

Arania knew that obtaining the supplies was going to be hard, but just how hard was something she will discover. She walked over to the ensign's console and confirmed the results. As she surmised, it will require someone to set-up a transporter site near the location.

The ensign turned and stared at Arania before blabbing out, "Someone will have to go down there."

Arania looked at the young wide-eyed ensign, studying her. She also returned a dry sigh at the prospect at visiting her homeland for the first time. She often looked at the recorded images and felt depressed at her world. But this is not her world. Her home was back on Earth and she counted every second until she returned to the wonderful blue planet.

She placed her blue graceful hand on the ensign's shoulder and chirped to her, "I know, you can come if you like, I need some help down there."

Arania knew that the young ensign did not have the chance to go on an away mission so far, and she jumped at the offer for this one. With charisma and charm, both walked in unison off the command deck and into the Space Cars. The crew on the command deck turned and stared with a slight grin on their faces as they disappeared down the corridor. Having someone relaxed and happy at the command chair often raised moral of the crew and better results often followed. This was one of the many perks in working with the Cataline.

They marched down the corridor with elegance and grace until the young ensign added some bad news to the mission, "Captain, Arania," she said with a shy smile. "I have looked closer at the location and I worried about the stability of the old city."

Arania took the computerised tablet and studied the images and structure readings. She made some calculations of her own and surmised that it was safe. But Arania followed Starfleet protocol and asked for a more detailed scan before they arrived.

As they boarded the Space Car, Sam belatedly insisted that he accompanies them. Even though his real motivation was interest in the Cataline people, on this occasion, he was more interested in the well being for his captain, Arania.

“Captain, I should go with you, what happens if something goes wrong?” he insisted gesturing forward with his hand pointed towards her.

Arania looked at him, surprised. “Now, come on Sam. You need to stay here and look after things. Anyway, you have all my people you can chat up here.”

Arania stood and looked at Sam with a warm smile. She knew his intentions and she can feel his sincerity. But this mission was simple and she wanted to get some air.

Sam carried on, insisting. “Captain, it’s not like that, you are my captain and friend and I want you to come back in one piece.”

She felt honoured to have the attention of Sam trying to protect her, but she explained again, that the mission is easy and there’s nothing to worry about. She had the option to order him back to work, but she chose not to.

Sam bowed his head in regret and gave into her suggestion. He looked at her with sincere eyes and concerned feelings. He had a bad feeling about this. With a final good luck, Sam watched Arania enter the Space Car with regrettable feelings. He knew what the environment was like; he knew the terrible things she could get into if captured. He burned with desire to protect her.

Innovation seemed a foreign concept to the operatives in the shuttle bay, which liked to waste time and cause chaos. More damage was done than good and it took a few moments for the chaos to settle down. When it did, the outer doors slowly opened and created an exit for Arania and her companion.

The environment in the Space Car was extremely comfortable. Both female companions leaned back on the seats and Arania glided the vehicle down to the unknown city, which would take, between ten to fifteen minutes. They did not hurry and enjoyed the uneventful ride to their destination.

“That was very touching of Sam to worry about you,” the ensign finally said breaking the silence from the back seat

“Yes that man is very,” Arania gave a slight pause as she reflected the smile that crept unintentionally on her face. “Interesting and difficult to understand.”

The Ensign then leaned forward from the back chair and asked, “So, what’s the story between you and McGregor, is there something going on?” She asked with a farceuses smile.

Arania shifted in her chair with embarrassment and squeezed the steering wheel. “Excuse me!” she replied with a shocked look in her face. She did not expect something like that from an ensign.

The Ensign cheekily carried on. “Rumours are spreading around the ship that you and McGregor have some kind of mutual attraction between each other!” A small bump of turbulence caused Arania to gulp a small amount of air with uneasiness to this line of questioning. However, it’s all girl talk and she enjoyed talking about it, but her cheeks turned red with embarrassment and this could clearly be seen against her graceful blue skin.

Denying the truth from herself she barked with a soft voice, “There’s nothing to tell, we are just close friends and we have a working relationship.”

“Really!” She chimed in as she sat back not believing a word Arania said.

Arania looked intensely out of the windscreen for the location, because she wanted to end this line of questioning. Luckily on queue, the landing area showed up that prompted her to change the subject in a flash, “ho, look we are approaching the area.”

They casually hovered over the rubble that was covered in sand looking for any sign of the enemy presence. They took extra time to check every crack and entrance of the stone structure that looked like a cathedral, or meeting place. Arania did not want to take any chances and the last thing she wanted was to get captured. She rattled her thoughts and slowly regretted the idea about not taking Sam.

The Space Car landed displacing all the sand and this obscured the view for a few minutes. As they exited the vehicle, Arania’s eyes opened widely to drink in the un-obscured view of her homeland. She could almost feel the pain and despair that still lingered around the buildings and streets. She soon had the feeling to leave, “perhaps it was a bad idea.” She lamented to herself drawing the attention of the ensign.

“Are you OK Captain?” The ensign politely asked.

Arania shrugged of the emotion and gave a false smile. She tapped on the COM badge and signalled the Explorer that they have found the entrance and will be proceeding down into the chamber.

As they explored, the murky stone corridors widened into a small room that interconnected with steps leading down into a chamber covered in darkness. The ensign threw down a hover light that bounced of the chamber floor and hovered towards the ceiling. It then turned on with a ball of light that illuminated the entire area for all to see. Arania eased her way down the damaged stairs with the ensign hot on her trail.

The air in the room vibrated with a strange silence that created an unsettled environment for the two. But the black door in front of them soon drained all their worries and installed a new larger challenge.

The virgin door stood tall and intimidated all that saw it; it stood for years, undisturbed until now. Both struggled to open the door, until Arania decided to use the hand phaser to cut open the door. “Subtle and easy” the ensign said.

Arania rotated her head towards the ensign that stood beside her; she gave a slight smile before pushing the fried hunk of metal out of the way creating a rugged hole.

The ensign threw in more hover lights as hard as she could which floated above towards the ceiling. Then as they activated, sighs erupted in unison from the two individuals who stood at the rugged entrance. The chamber was massive, larger than a warehouse and carrying enough supplies for a few months.

“We have found the supplies,” Arania stepped back, drinking in every detail as she communicated through the COM badge to the Explorer. She looked astonished at the amount of crates in the wide room. ‘How could the Krainers not know this place?’ She pondered before she carried on with her communication. “We are going to set-up the transporter relays. Stand by.”

They both took a tripod transporter device out of a bag they carried down with them and stood it at the entrance of the chamber. When they twisted the head, the device sprung to life with a shimmer of lights and sounds. “Device online, you can transport now.” Arania announced making final checks.

Tulack stood at his station and glided his hands over the controls to activate the transporter beam, once he was satisfied that everything was in order he

confirmed with Arania, "I have a transporter lock on the supplies, I am transporting now!"

Within seconds, flashes of lights shimmered all around the room, like tiny suns being born and then dying out which took the creates with them. The chamber lit up illuminating the space that was covered in a blanket of darkness.

Arania could not control the movement of her mouth as it suddenly became heavy and the bottom of her jaw dropped to the floor with surprise at the size of the immense chamber they have invaded. "This should last a lot longer then a few months," She exclaimed

Looking at her computerised tablet, the Ensign replied, "From the information the I received, this place held the main resistances food and medical reserves until the Krainers killed them off, only a select few knew about this place."

Arania replied with a small smile before they started to chat, as they sat at the entrance of the chamber and ate their lunch for the duration of the transporter activity

Laughing at the more embarrassing discussions about the male Cataline, Arania turned her head towards the sudden silence and darkness in the storage chamber. The air stopped flowing into the chamber because when the objects were transported, the air rushed to fill the empty gaps. The small hover lights could not illuminate the surrounding areas because the chamber was so big. Suddenly, almost startling the two Tulack stated he was finished.

Arania checked the results and confirmed that they are heading back to the Space Car. They made a point to hastily escape the area after they recalled the hover lights and packed their belongings. Arania felt uneasy being there and wanted desperately to be airborne and back on the Explorer, the place gave her the creeps.

Enthusiastically the ensign jumped into the back seat and made herself comfortable for the ride back. This was a complete success and the mission was simple, another good star on her record. She made a point to relay her excitement towards Arania who, again, smiled at the girl's whiled open eyes. "That was very easy!" chirped the Ensign. "I should do this more often!"

"Don't get too carried away, we still need to get the rest of my people back." Replied Arania who tried her best not to let the excitement rub of on her.

The vehicle hovered off into the air and began flying across the land on its way back to the Explorer with the two individuals more then happy to be leaving.

Wide-eyed and enthusiastic, Arania was not prepared for the next set of words to flow out of the ensign mouth, "Hay! By the way, your men are very cute! Any chance in introducing one to me?"

The ensign often ran into the male members of the Cataline species on her duty rounds, which always ended up with her unable to tear her eyes away from them. Their features always took her breath away; they are the same design as the female with fine fin-skinned clothing, handsome face and perfectly sculpted muscular bodies. She yearned to get to know one.

"Excuse me!" Arania replied in a shocked tone. "I didn't know you're like..." Suddenly before Arania had the chance to finish rest of the sentence, the vehicle was struck by weapons fire that caused it to loose control and plummet into a pit in the ground.

The sun blazed down on the rubble of the black Space Car. Smoke and hissing erupted from the engine compartment and the gull shaped doors had fallen off, as they would do in the event of an accident. A foam type substance filled the interior of the vehicle that hardened on impact to prevent the inhabitation from being thrown around. This foam then disintegrated like candyfloss in a child's mouth.

Moans and rustling echoed around the rubble as the two shaken individuals climbed out of the vehicle. But as Arania looked up over the horizon of the pit, she trembled in fear! A sudden and abrupt comment came from her partner that also stumbled out, "Ho, Shit!"

Arania saw it! The person that shot them down! The most horrid thing that any life form should see! She is face to face with the animal Krainer!

The Krainer snarled and looked directly at her. It drooled all over the floor like a dog on rabies. The smell of putrefied flesh and death hovered over the area that came from it. The young ensign suddenly became upset and intensely aware of how alone and isolated she was. They had no weapons, no defences whatsoever.

"The great divine has given me the gem of gems! A lovely little Cataline virgin," it paused as it intensely sniffed the fresh Electro-fluidic field that came from Arania. It then looked at the young ensign, troubled at what to make of this alien human before continuing with its perverted speech, "You are something I have never seen before, I hope you are female little lady!"

Arania had the instinct to run, something that was berried deep down within her DNA and something that was implanted before she was rescued by the Federation. However as she attempted to make a run for it, forgetting her ensign, the Krainer grabbed her on the shoulder to prevent her from running away and she yelped slightly as it forced her onto the ground on her knees.

Leering and drooling like an uncontrollable frenzy of predators surrounding is defenceless prey, the Krainer chuckled with a grim smile just waiting to perform some of his terrible acts on her to fulfil its sickly pleasure. "I'm going to take every little bit of pleasure from you. You are going to submit to me and there is nothing you can do."

Arania could see his genitalia harden as it stood tall in the sun light, its fury body stank like a sewer and it's hair was clumped up like a fossilised body ready to crack itself to pieces. She secretly took of her COM badge and placed it under her delicate fabric skin to allow the Explorer to track her, because she knew that the ensign could be transported, however she was in more trouble.

Out in the open the horrid Krainer grabbed the two scared females by the hair and dragged them off into a disused building that looked like an industrial building that had collapsed. Arania struggled to free herself, but the more she struggled the more the Krainer got angry.

He yanked and pulled her hair causing deep pain; the ensign also struggled with the same effect. However the Krainer had more muscle mass then the two females put together and there was no way they could escape the grasps of the creature.

Now they both stood in the centre of a dark chamber. Idle hissing and blasting of the winds created a ghostly echo that disorientated them, however moments later the winds had fallen silent, enhancing the environment and the sick noises the Krainer made.

Arania was dumped into the spotlight of the sun that shone through the crack in the ceiling. All around she could not see anything, just darkness, only she, her ensign and the massive beast stood in the light. The size of the chamber vibrated with a strange humming silence absorbing any echo that could be made.

The ensign could not sense any restraint on her, so she decided to use the opportunity to make a run for it. It would prove to be a big mistake.

Back on the Explorer, Arania's vehicle did not return on its scheduled slotted time. Also Tulack noticed that no communication on any changes to the schedule was made. This prompted him to scan for the vehicle with limited results. He could

not be sure, but using his Vulcan initiative, he activated the Space Car cameras log and uploaded the images with terrifying results. Then to his horror on viewing the footage, he immediately called McGregor.

McGregor slept deeply and comfortably in his bed, even though he slept lightly nothing would normally wake him up. But as he slept he could sense something was wrong and it would only take something small to wake him up. He was also the type of man who did not like to be woken up forcefully, if he is, his temper will rain down on the poor soul, on Tulack.

A piercing beep echoed through the room, a sound with such a high-pitched tone, it could almost cause someone to jump. The sound happened again that emanated from the COM unit beside McGregor bed.

The steady alerts was not efficient to wake him up initially, until the auto-volume increased to a piercing racket that eventually woke him up in a very vile mood. Responding to the individual, and not caring for whom it was, McGregor barked, "I am fucking sleeping! Leave me alone!"

Tulack backed away from his console, as if he would be safer from the grumpy voice. But he returned and informed McGregor about the terrible news, "Captain it is Tulack, Arania and her companion has been captured by the Krainers!"

Expecting a response immediately, he heard nothing for about ten seconds. Then McGregor was transported semi dressed onto the command deck wild-eyed and full of anger. He cursed the fact that Arania was reckless enough to go down there without a full team to assist her. "What was she thinking?" He thought to himself.

"How the hell! Did this happen!" the tone of McGregor voice was one of utter desperation and one hundred percent mission focused. His mind is now on one thing, and one thing only, getting Arania back.

He shot around the command deck ascertaining as much information as possible before he gave command to Leeli and ordered the computer to transport himself and Tulack to the Space Car bay.

Tulack was unprepared for the sudden tactic. He did not have the chance to speak or ask anything, one moment he saw the captain running around the command deck and then, within a flash, he was beside the Space Car getting thrown in.

McGregor had the expression of a juggernaut with one thing on his mind, blast through whoever kidnapped her and get his crew back. McGregor felt a deeper chill than any he had felt before, he realized that Arania was in great danger and he was terrified.

The dark forces began to work down in the chamber where Arania and the ensign kneeled side by side. Arania began to shudder, worried about what is going to happen, she knew all the horrid things these animals do and she could hardly cope with that kind of treatment.

However the Krainer seemed to savour its interest for Arania until the last possible moment. He has never seen a human female and he drifted towards her with great interest.

He could not detect an Electro-fluidic field from the human, but the Krainer could detect something and he did not know what to make of it. However, the Krainer was aroused by the ensign's tanned pink skin and the humanoid feminine look. He placed his scabbed wrinkled hand onto her arm and was immediately captivated by the unusually warm body temperature. It was enchanting and addictive. Cataline body temperatures are slightly cooler and did not create such an effect. "A new play mate," he chuckled to himself as he shivered of the effect.

Arania and the ensign tried to take advantage of the situation and make a run for it. But soon as they stood up, the Krainer activated a device that was planed onto the skins of the two captured individuals. Arania fell to the floor with great stabbing pain, more pain than the ensign suffered because the device was designed for the Cataline. The Krainer drew a sly smile as he watched the fragile blue creature suffer on the dirty floor all curled up.

The ensign had more control over the pain and attempted to attack the Krainer. She rushed him, in pain and with a hard knuckle she punches towards his face, but he intercepted her hand and crushed it.

The Krainer diverted his attention to the ensign and tuned off the device, leaving Arania gasping for air on the floor. Curled up in a ball, she was unable to move.

“You are the feisty one aren’t you?” the Krainer growled.

It edged closer to her, he smelled her perspiration that was slowly oozing out of her skin. As he was about to place his vile hand on her slender oily skin, she vanished within the transporter beam leaving the whole area clear. It only took half a second with a high intensity beam of light, but the Krainer almost fell over in shock. “Wha... What happened?” He questioned, stepping back and puzzled. However, he soon changed his attitude when he saw Arania laid on the floor, shaking.

Arania stopped shaking when she could feel the footsteps closing in on her. Like a frightened cat, her ears drooped down and she tried to crawl back into the darkness. The sudden disappearance of her ensign made her slightly shocked that McGregor did not beam her off the planet too, but she remembered she couldn’t be transported. She tried her best to hold onto the COM badge and prayed for help.

The Krainer shot forward and grabbed Arania who gave a terrifying scream at the harsh approach and pain he caused when he grabbed her. He dragged her to the centre of the room again and she was forced to kneel down on the floor in front of the horrid Krainer.

It was raining now, the droplets crept their way through the crack in the ceiling and splattered all over the place, Arania face was slightly sprinkled with crystal shaped rain and the droplets reflected flashes of light from the only source. The Krainer moved it’s animal face out of the darkness and behind Arania who could feel his heavy scabbed hand edging ever so closer to her smooth wet skin.

Then he whispered into her delicate ear “I can smell the humans on you. But you are now mine, I will remove that human scent!” his voice turned cold and quivered with excitement.

The Krainer walked behind Arania and made a point as he held her delicate frame. He grabbed her by the arm and he kneeled down behind. His hand was a rough as sand paper, and cracked. It pinched her skin and crunched her fin like fabric clothing that was wrapped around her arm. Arania squeaked with pain as all her nerves fired up with super sensitivity. Even her delicate skin clothing had nerves that could feel the slightest breeze.

It took a deep sniff at her hair and enjoyed the fresh clean aroma that emanated from her; he could not control himself for long. The Krainer did not have the opportunity to be in the presence of such a pure and clean Cataline female before and this fuelled his fire inside him. She was healthy as well, full of meat and very strong, his mind raced on with thoughts about how exciting it must be to enter inside her.

Arania felt an object hard-pressed against her back, she stopped breathing for a moment, frozen in time. It was a matter of time before she went ballistic with panic.

She closed her eyes and began to shake very violently. She slowly began to cry and his smell killed all feeling in her nose.

His body was a lot closer now and hard pressed on her back, she felt the ebbing presence of his furry body and she began to sweat. Weeping, her breathing became irregular and she slowly began to feel petrified. This made the Krainer even more aroused and he decided to take a small taste of her!

Arania knew that something was about to happen, she wanted to run away, damn the stunner and she would rather die than let the beast touch her anymore. But as she tried, she could not. The device had temporarily paralysed her movements and she was frozen solid. The Krainer knew this and he grinned, moving his drooling animal mouth ever so closer to her fragile sensitive ear.

Her slender light blue ear with a slight tone of black highlights, slipped elegantly into the animal's mouth, which drooled providing more than enough lubricant. It's teeth showed slightly showing nothing more than black broken and pussy teeth. Even the insects that lived in the holes dropped down onto the surface of Arania's ear. The drool slurped and covered the tip of her ear, which made her give a sad and horrifying deep-throat cry that crackled.

She cried in the most horrific tone of discomfort, eyes closed. Arania's cute and pleasant face turned into a grim display of pain and torture.

Like a spider that has caught it's food, the Krainer held onto Arania with both hands tightly wrapped around her shoulders. He did not want his prized possession getting away and no one else will claim her virginity. Tasting the soft delicate smooth texture of her ear, it was like suckling on a juicy stake. He could not resist anymore, the Krainer began licking her ear even more and slipped the whole thing into his mouth completely sodomize her. Arania cried even more loudly and began panting and shaking even more violently.

Her body felt like it was invaded by ants and she desperately tried to move and get away. But it was hopeless the more she struggled to move, the more he caked her in drool and perverted actions, she was on the edge of despair. His mouth drooled like an open tap that leaked into her ear and over her hair; it was only a matter of time before he completely takes her virginity.

The Krainer made matters worse for Arania, her heart almost stopped and she gulped a large amount of air with the next action he performed on her; she could feel his rough hands slide up her slender side and under her armpits. The sensation sparked through her body like being struck by lightning, it was the most horrific experience she had ever felt.

She recalled a human that touched her in that area before, in her early years on earth. The graceful and pleasant stroke of the human's hand that reached under and caressed the sensitive pouch that resides under the armpit, gave Arania an overdose of pleasure she has never felt before. She was almost romantically involved with a human before circumstances forced them away, but the gentle warm touch of a human in that area of her body was extremely personal and epic.

But the Krainer knew this trick and enjoyed the suffering Arania was experiencing. Within seconds Arania started to hyperventilate and she passed out to the overwhelming horror, her final thought was of McGregor able to save her.

The Krainer got over retarded and excited, he almost blasted himself with pleasure when Arania fainted and spewed out her entire body all over the floor. Easily accessible for anyone and no resistance, the creature licked and sucked on parts of her body. The sweet and lovely taste of Cataline virgin suddenly changed to a cold, dirty and metallic taste of a hand plasma rifle as McGregor stood there with the weapon in its mouth.

The Krainer was unaware of the human because he was so busy molesting Arania and this would be his downfall. The Krainer froze in position the dark room and look on this humans face spelled one thing. The last and only thing the Krainer saw was the sudden twitch of his right eyebrow.

McGregor did not hesitate, he squeezed the trigger as hard as he can and the sound of the cannon blasted a massive hole in the Krainers head. His body dropped to the ground like so much garbage that showed a massive blood stream on the floor in a waterfall pattern that sprayed outwards.

McGregor tried his best to hold back his grief; he proceeded to pick up Arania who was passed out on the floor in a pool of water, drenched and defenceless.

When he gently picked her off the floor, she woke up and began to shake and struggle, she thought the Krainer was attacking her and she tried to fight accordingly. However, McGregor placed her on the floor gently and tried to reassure her.

"It's me Arania, McGregor!" He repeated it many times as she kept fighting before she opened her eyes and saw him.

It took a second for her to remember, but her whole mind had shut down and she could not recognise McGregor straight way. It only took moments before she remembered and when this happened she clutched hold of McGregor so hard she felt like a child that has found her parents after she got lost in the jungle of a fair.

She still stung and felt violated, she was worried now, she has been sucked and drooled over but thankfully he didn't have the chance to rape her. But there was already enough damage to contaminate her cocoon cycle.

McGregor could feel and smell of drool on her ear, "What the hell did he do!" he growled in anger, but he already saw the grizzly sight and surmised the horrific actions before he arrived.

He cradled her in his arms as they proceeded back to the Space Car they travelled down in. McGregor placed her in the back seat and used a medical tool to try and get rid of the drool on Arania ear and clean her up.

But Arania sat in the back seat and constantly watched McGregor like a ghost. She allowed him to clean her up and she vibrated with fright. The atmosphere was of worry and panic.

The Space Car travelled back to the Explorer almost mixing out its engines and McGregor seemed intent on cleaning every mark this Krainer placed on her.

Arania asked McGregor to clean the under pouch which was under her arm, this action is a very deep and intermit. The feel of the Krainer touching it was enough to cause her to pass out. However, McGregor gently removed all traces of his touch from the area, making Arania cleaner on the outside however her mind will be spoiled with the memory.

Arania held on to McGregor tightly as he saved her life and spared her from the most horrible fate she could experience. She felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude and commitment to him. The times he saved her life cannot match what has happened today.

"Tulack lets get back fast, I need to take her to the medical bay!" ordered McGregor almost demanding manor.

Even Tulack could feel a slight touch of emotion with the whole situation, after witnessing what he saw and with all the discipline he had used to control his anger, a little still slipped through.

"Yes captain, I will." He positively replied driving to the docking port at full speed.

Chapter 18

(Last few)

The Space Car edged itself into its bay with the crew inside prepared to leave. Arania sat motionless in the corner of the vehicle while McGregor painstakingly cleansed and attended to her needs. Every piece of DNA would need to be removed; otherwise unknown effects would happen when Arania finally goes through her cocoon cycle.

She often had flashbacks to the ordeal. Being trapped in the unused industrial building, being disabled and made to kneel on the ground while that animal intimidated and tried to sodomise her. She quivered in fright and did not know what to do.

Arania felt helpless and dirty, every inch of her body smelled like rotten flesh and she had shut down all her feelings to the rest of her body, she was trapped and she felt like death was the only way out.

But, as she slowly looked up from the floor of the vehicle, she saw McGregor, slowly, like a surgeon, removing every scrape of the Krainer's mark. Her heart slowly began to open to him. Like someone who has fallen in love with a doctor that has just saved their life. Arania drew that much closer to being in love with McGregor. This gave her the strength to prevent her mind from disappearing into the abyss.

"Arania, can you hear me?" McGregor questioned, with his jaws clenched, eyes blazing. He looked deep into her eyes, worried, frightened about Arania disappearing into the void of post traumatic stress. He could see her eyes open, but her soul was closed inside a corner with the door shut. He needed to revive her. He wanted the bossy and cheerful second in command back. He often cared for her and he held back a manly tear for the fact she was nearly lost.

Arania could only stare in awe for several minutes before looking away with depression and worry. Her slender frame shivered and she could not escape the torment of her memories. The atmosphere in the car was that of confusion and idle speculation.

People stood around outside in the far reaches of the bay, pondering in groups. The news about Arania's capture spread like wild fire throughout the Explorer and all the Cataline were fully aware about the treatment she would have endured. But for Arania, she never knew, she never experienced such touchier and utter cruelty before.

McGregor felt a sickly pain in his heart as he edged the device over her delicate fin clothing, trying in vain to remove the stench; he felt responsible and wanted the old Arania back.

Murmurs gripped the echoes of idle sounds in the Space Car bay as people stood around before a bellowing roar erupted, "Arania! Holy crap! I heard what happened; I heard that you got captured. Are you OK?" said Sam. His anger began to burn high at the prospect of what has happened, he closed in towards the Space Car and was unprepared for the sight. Arania was clasped in the corner, motionless and empty. His eyes drew icy cold and the feeling of guilt crept through his spine like a worm that has invaded his body. McGregor blocked the way, but Sam tried to pass in order to attend his pulverised second in command.

A silent stare from both of them caused a freeze in the back seat before Arania slowly snapped out of her trance. McGregor did not want much of a scene to erupt,

but it was too late. Unaware to McGregor, a lot of people cared for Arania and they wanted to know about her condition.

Now, organisation slowly began to develop between Sam and McGregor as both men agreed that they need to help her to the medical bay, with agreement, McGregor helped Arania out of the vehicle.

She was still zoned out, but with a little help from McGregor, they proceeded to the medical deck. He relayed his intentions to the rest of the crew, and demanded everyone returns to their duties because more Cataline are in dire need for help.

Sam could not stand around twitching his thumbs, he moved hastily towards McGregor for more information. "I heard what happened," His tone changed to one of revenge. "Where is that animal? I must do something about him!"

He carried on his raving, glancing around and clenching his fists before smacking them together, "How can they do this? It is sick, where is this bastard?"

He began to annoy McGregor, but he stayed focused and his mind was clear on one thing. He spoke abruptly and made sure to end Sam's rant for revenge, he stopped, turned and barked at him. "I killed the animal and there's no more justice to be fort after! Now calm down."

Sam stood in the cloud of silence as the reality of revenge slowly dwindled away. His revenge will go unpunished and his soul will begin its punishment for not accompanying Arania to the plant. He stood there with nothing to say, only the view of McGregor and Arania disappearing through the metal doors.

Guilt and unhappiness overwhelmed the young officer who knew he should have defied Arania orders and accompanied her before her capture. He is often in his own little world and never the one to question or do anything out of the ordinary. However as he watched them leave the area, he could not stand there and do nothing. Arania had some kind of power, some kind of aroma that brought the human crew together and installed a friendly and pleasant atmosphere. But this has become stale and everyone could feel the tremendous pressure she was under.

Without warning, something happened that snapped Arania from her trance, something she did not expect from Sam, it was enough for her to stare at him with a funny expression on her face. As she looked she could see Sam walking beside, helping. This was not his typical behaviour and McGregor also noticed this too. She spoke for the first time, it was not what McGregor expected, "What are you doing Sam?"

Even though her voice was cold and cracked near the end, McGregor looked at Arania with hope and excitement, she was finally coming out of her shell and it would only take a matter of time. "Perhaps having Sam around did help to some degree," he delegated to himself.

Even if Sam did shake her out of the trance, he still wanted to know why he was following. McGregor looked at Sam in a questionable tone, which was received by a prompt comment from Sam, "Sorry, I cannot leave Arania alone, I let you two go down and it should have been my responsibility to go with you and protect you." After a moment of pause and deep thought he carried on, "I want to be with you and make sure you are OK! I'm sorry Arania."

Arania felt the pity and sadness in Sam; she was touched that he was sincere in his words and his eagerness to help out in the aftermath. But the feel of the Explorer and the sense of being back in her safety net slowly began to drag her out of the deep hole she was in and it would not be long until she regained some of her strength. She tried to comfort Sam in any little way she could, "It's OK, It was my fault, I did not follow protocols and I was saved before anything can happen." She

then looked at him with a graceful glance in her appearance "You don't need to apologise."

Medical officers and assistances scrambled about as they attended to different types of life forms in need of care. McGregor clenched his free fist as they supported her into the busy medical bay. McGregor wanted her to be one hundred percent clean from the Krainers touch and he made sure Michel knew this.

The activity soon slowed down as everyone soon realized Arania was in there with them. Like a small celebrity, Arania sat and felt small in comparison.

Michel used even more larger and detailed machines to cleanse and revitalise her body. The machine scratched slightly at her skin as it removed all cell contamination and salver. Her ear was the most contaminated and it was no easy task. Arania even suggested that she would prefer to go into the decontamination chamber set to full level. But McGregor put a stop to her crazy comments because last time someone did that, they lost all their hair and skin was nearly burned off.

Final scans confirmed that all the Krainers DNA was removed and she was ready to leave. This news could not be offered to other members of the Cataline race who had no choice but to live with it. But jealousy was not commonplace between the Cataline people.

"It seems I have cleaned all the Krainers DNA, and you are pure again. You should not feel any dangerous effects when you transform into your cocoon cycle in the future." Michel then carried on with a slight tone of compassion "You might want to take a shower, it will make you feel better."

McGregor looked at her and said "That sounds like a good idea, take some time to rest, you don't need to return to duties at this moment. Remember that you are safe again."

Arania gave a pleasant smile before she left the medical bay in route to her quarters. She felt refreshed after her treatment and the shower option filled her senses with excitement. McGregor's heart went out for her, he knew she was a fighter and it would not take long until she recovered, he prised himself for reaching her on time, he does not know what to do if that fragile creature was raped.

People walked in all directions passing Arania every second due to the large number of Cataline on the Explorer. This rubbed on even more confidence and slowly restored her emotional state. Memories of that creature still stood paramount in her mind and she often felt a chill in her spine. The tips of her finned clothing would sparkle with a tingling sensation of needles when certain memories are recited as she hovered down the Spartan passages of the Explorer.

Arania was calmer now; she stood in the shower of her own quarters and savoured the gentle patters of water that flowed down her body. The warm soothing sensation induced a relaxing effect that she could feel all over her skin and body features. Like tissue paper drenched in water, Arania's finned like clothing became transparent, which enriched the natural beauty of this species.

She stood and cherished the cleansing sensation of the shower. It was unlike anything she had experienced before, more enriching and she took more notice, and she learned to appreciate the finer points in life.

But it was not long until she quivered at the uncontrollable memories that crept back into her mind. She suddenly experienced a deeper chill, a chill that twitched her ear that was the route cause of pleasure for the Krainer. She touched and shook her ear, trying to remove the uneasy feeling the beast created with no

effect, even the phantom presence of insects could be felt all over her ear and head, even after she knows that they have been removed.

She moaned lightly to the memory of her under arm pouch being touched by the Krainer. It knew how and when to touch her, it was the vilest thing she has ever experienced. She took extra care in allowing the water and soup to clean that area.

She allowed the filtered water to flow in every crevice in her body, even though the water was filtered and cleansed to the highest Starfleet standard, her hyper enriched skin cells could feel the aurora of human presence within the water its self. Something that cannot be removed, and Arania allowed this aroma to flow through her body, recharging herself with the natural experiences she has grown accustomed to.

She paused for a few moments as she could feel the spirit of the water flow through her, removing all traces of the hideous monster that tried to molest her on the planet. But all that changed when her next thought was of waking up in McGregor arms, which made the terrible experience stop.

She spent longer in the shower than usual; the feeling of total defenceless while in the clutches of the Krainer still resided deep within her mind. However, Arania was a strong creature capable of overcoming any obstacle and McGregor's intervention would make this experience nothing more than an inconvenience.

She eventually emerged out of the shower into the steam filled room and took hold of the soft white towel. The shower turned itself off leaving the idle humming of the vessel echoing through the bulkheads.

The clear crystal droplets fell of her body onto the warm steel floor as she tried to dry her delicate skin. Like a flower, it flourished into detailed patterns that covered her main skin and spread itself into the fine fin clothing loosing its transparency on the way.

Arania steepled her fingers and drew a deep breath before she looked at herself in the mirror. She had no idea what to expect and she cursed herself for getting into such trouble.

She looked down at the sink and allowed one leg to cross another as she pursed her lips and pondered her actions. She stared into the mirror and recited the event in her mind, thinking, calculating possible options. However she cannot escape the torment and humiliation the Krainer did to her.

She felt strangely refreshed by the human aurora within the water, she never took any notice of this before, but now, with everything she had wrenched away, this was the only essence that glowed deep within her body. Her body was far more cured from the ordeal and she needn't worry about the cocoon cycle anymore, only her mental state needed calming.

Even though Arania was in a fragile state, the hum of the vessel soothed any uneasy feelings she might have had and portrayed a sense of harmony and realism to the fact she is back home and safe.

A door chime interrupted her deep thought, startling her. Realizing that it was just the door, she felt pleased that the typical atmosphere of interruptions on the Explorer has helped add a foundation to her recovery.

She smiled slightly as she walked to the door, drying her hair.

"Come in.," she softly chirped to whoever was outside. She was safe in the knowledge that it would not be a Krainer, but even with the certainty, she still had a slight nightmarish scar about the whole incident.

To her surprise, the Ensign that was with her during the entire ordeal stood outside her quarters with a pasty concerned face. It offered her sense of relief that she was back on duty and no visible scars to be seen.

Arania was momentarily concerned for the ensign's safety down on the planet. The Krainer seemed to have taken an interest in her and she feared that the young ensign would receive a more devastating ordeal than herself, but as soon as the transporter light engulfed her, she had one less thing to worry about.

Grinning intensely, the ensign rushed in and gave Arania an over energetic hug, she was so happy and relieved that Arania was OK.

Taken by the shock, Arania stumbled backward by the force the ensign exerted. It was an action that was uncommon for this woman she got acquainted with for over the past year.

The room was warm and sparsely lit that portrayed the feel and condition Arania was currently in. As the two finished their emotional embrace, the ensign backed away and studied her physical state, looking for any sign of cuts, bruises or signs of abuse. To her relief, Arania was in good health and she looked like she was enjoying her shower.

She blushed slightly as she apologised to Arania, "Sorry for disturbing you," She paused and took a step closer, in concern. "I heard what happened, are you OK?"

Arania drifted her eyes into the emptiness of space with no logic in her eye movements; she backed away and sat down on the nearest sofa with her arms tucked between her legs, thinking.

The ensign followed her lead and also took a seat keeping a watchful eye on her. She was trained in basic counselling through Starfleet and hoped that her mothballed skills might come in handy, but more importantly, she wanted to make sure her friend, Arania was OK.

They fell into silence, the ensign not certain she wanted to pry too deep into her thoughts at this moment. Though Arania was settled, the ensign decided to share her emotions and try and get her friend to open up, perhaps she will feel more settled with the ordeal out in the open. But little does she realize that Arania was much harder to talk to than she had originally thought. The sheer scale of her ordeal will take huge amounts of time to settle her aching heart.

McGregor stood in the Space Car bay silent and unobtrusive while his crew made decisions and carried on their current jobs to the best of their ability. He waited patiently for Kane, who was inbound with a Krainer prisoner.

McGregor decided that having a Krainer prisoner might provide easy access to information to make the task run a lot smoother. He will undertake trial back on Earth and pose as a puppet for the Cataline people onboard. But much to his surprise, the Cataline did not care what happened and they frowned on the fact that a Krainer was brought onboard.

But before McGregor could interject with any comments on the Krainer, a sudden panic of voices warned everyone to stand back.

Kane, who showed little if no driving skill, was entrusted with the controls of the vehicle, to everyone's mistake. His driving skill was reckless and damn right dangerous. This was plainly demonstrated when he rushed into the bay.

He smashed the front of the vehicle on the bulkhead located the back of the bay which caused sparks and bodywork to be ripped apart all over the floor. McGregor knew Sam would go ballistic if he ever saw the damage caused and he will be the one to receive his stabbing finger if he ever finds out. However McGregor was not in the mood for Sam's complaining at the moment. He was more interested in the fur pile that was dragged out by Kane.

Kane showed his Klingon masculinity and drunkenness while he dragged the beaten up Krainer onto the hard grated deck. On the floor and clearly beaten, Kane carried on his relentless bloodthirsty assault with a flurry of kicks and punches, Kanes face was so full of joy and enthusiasm McGregor needed to do something or he will be without a prisoner.

McGregor made his point and shouted across the bay, "KANE! I need you to go down to sector eight one nine seven two, when you have finished playing around with your victim!" He paused, then added, "Throw him in the brig, but don't kill him, we need his information."

Kane snarled with a crooked smile before he decided to reply, "With pleasure captain" he grabbed the passed out Krainer by one of his grotesque dirty legs and dragged him along the grated floor that mashed his face like cheese on a cheese grater.

"Flipping Klingons always wanting to beat up the nearest thing they come across." McGregor growled under his breath as he flipped over the computer tablet he was scrutinising. He walked over to the damaged vehicle, studying.

He opened a comm channel to Tulack and enquired, "How many people have we managed to recover?"

Tulack hands went to work over his workstation as he displayed the passenger manifest. He then grouped all the people into one final total before he relayed the information to McGregor, "We have managed to collect eighty percent of the population and collect more supplies and materials from different sources. However the remaining camps are proving to be a small challenge."

Curious towards the last statement, McGregor enquired some more, "What's the problems with the remaining camps?"

Tulack replied in kind with a lack of human emotion on the edge of his voice, "The remaining Krainer forces are putting up a large fight and we are doing all we can to transport them into the nearby desert. However we are detecting a large number of enemy ships approaching this solar system. We will need to leave soon or we will be discovered."

McGregor shook his head at the damage sustained to the Space Car before he returned to the topic at hand. He often had the habit of changing his mode of thinking and the subject also changed with it.

McGregor's expression grew sterner, "Send more units to the heavy fortified camps and get the Cataline out of there, we need to leave soon. This place is pissing me off."

After the comm channel died, McGregor briskfully surveyed all the activity in the bay as he made a point to shout at a few people who lingered around with nothing to do. Even the Starfleet crew was being paid good money and he often made sure they did the work, if he was lucky to catch any disobedients.

Meanwhile the few Space Cars continued to glide over the land trying in vain to rescue any stay Cataline people still left on the ground. The crew, who piloted Space Car forty-seven, rescued a Cataline that was on the edge of death. They used the advanced technology that could detect the faintest of life signs, and to their amazement, they managed to rescue the stranded female, alive.

Two and a half weeks ago, she was left in the desert by one of the Krainers because she resisted too much and left to die.

With the sun blaring down on her delicate skin, she knew it would be a matter of time before she perished. She begged and begged to be taken back. It was not a concept that she, herself could not understand, nor she wanted to. But being cooked alive was more devastating than the things he will do. However, the Krainer did not listen and left her.

After she was cooked in the blazing heat for hours, she saw no hope for survival. The poor timid creature basked in the sunlight and cooked in her own juices as the sun relentlessly boiled her from the inside out. She finally gathered up the energy to transfer into a cocoon, which she hoped would buy her some time.

But the same result would wait for her a few weeks later. As the cocoon provided the protection for the two weeks, she had no choice but to emerge out. Her wet timid body was covered in scorching hot sand and the pain of Krainer contamination mixed with the heat, was an unbearable torture.

She looked up at the burning sky, wondering, praying for help. Suddenly she spotted a silhouette in the distance. She did not know what it was; perhaps her master had come back to retrieve her. But she was unable to move due to her excessive pain and burned body. She was trapped, trapped in her own body. She cried out in hope it could hear her.

The vehicle approached closer and like a guiding star from the heavens. It landed with a flurry of dust and a team of unknown humans rushed to her aid. She spotted a familiar figure that squinted towards her under the open door; it was using it as a shield from the sunlight.

The flurry of blue skin clothing perked up the emotions of the injured and burned Cataline female. The sun blazed behind the figure that stood under the door and the injured female found it hard to work out if she was a prisoner or not. However before she had the chance to think, she was whisked off into the vehicle. She yelped with panic, which is the basic form of welcome these creatures give. But once she was in the cool air-conditioned vehicle, she realized the luck she was given.

The Explorer rode in a stationary orbit around the Cataline home world, while the Space Vehicles travelled back to the Explorer with their final load of people. The secondary ships slotted back into their docking ports at the bottom of the ship, but it wasn't long until their activity was spotted.

Curious at the disappearance of a few vessels the captain of the Krainer ships ordered his swarm of ships to investigate its last location.

The Krainers did not know what type of trickery this was; all they saw were five unknown ships vanishing into space with no obvious reason. The Krainers may be animals, but they do possess some intelligence. Out of curiosity one of the smaller ships decided to approach the area, it got very close to the cloaking field of the Explorer.

Day after day, the efforts slowly nagged at McGregor to return back to the anomaly. But good news was on the horizon and he stumbled on to the nucleus of the Explorer to catch up on the latest events.

"Do we have everybody now!" McGregor's firm voice cut through the activity of muttering and idle computer chirps. His body gesture was directed at Tulack, indicating that he wants to get underway.

Tulack raised his eyes from his workstation and looked directly at McGregor. He understood McGregor's body language and was pleased to inform him with

some good news, "Yes captain, we have managed to rescue the entire Cataline population."

McGregor showed a dim smile at the suggestion until a more pressing matter diverts his attention towards the panoramic windows. Much to his disbelief, he was startled to clearly see the nightmarish Krainer vessel dangerously close to the cloaking field.

"If that ship touches the cloaking shield we will be in a lot of trouble." McGregor said on the edge of suspense. He added more technical gabble about the cloaking field, "We haven't been able to iron out the bugs in the software, it will cause a feedback loop if they skim the cloak!"

His tone changed to disbelief as he witnessed the Krainer vessel interact with the field that started to cause a chain reaction of feedback loops in the software. He stabbed his finger at Tulack, demanding him to prevent the crash or do something. But the control displays all around McGregor changed to from a green-celled grid, into a red disastrous display.

The ship shimmered into all colours of the spectrum in a few seconds before it completely discharged and showed the enemy the enormous USS Explorer.

Hundreds of Krainer vessels converged upon the massive Explorer like angry wasps to an invading predator and before long, all hell broke loose.

The whole area lit up with the stabbing swords of phasers and Rockets that travelled at near-relativistic speed slammed into the protective shielding around the Explorer, which created a wave that rippled around the vessel like a pebble that was dropped into a lake.

The habitat dome began to fill with hundreds of Cataline spectators who looked stunned and scared. Individuals that have never seen the spectacle of battle, looked into the night sky, as if amazed.

Streaks of stabbing lights and a storm of explosions rocketed throughout the Explorers shields, holding back the impending doom. The enemy fleet relentlessly closed in on the Explorer knowing all too well that the humans have taken all the Cataline, their anger was of revenge.

McGregor dived into his chair and roared, "That's it, activate all weapon systems, fire up the main cannons and launch all interceptors."

The Explorer dived into the flurry of fire lighting up all the phaser banks and pulse cannon turret guns. In the free-for-all weapons fire that rained around the Cataline home world, the Explorer dived right in like a hurricane of bullets, phaser swords and countless arrays of rockets that streaked out of its ports. Vessel after vessel descended into the cloud of fire, being destroyed. McGregor snarled with a cheeky grin, as he felt no regret or pity towards the futility of the enemy that tried to harm his ship. He drew immense pleasure when each fireball was the enemy exploding, "That will teach the bastards!"

Ship after ship split open and spilled the enemy Krainers into space like a split pea pod, bodies moved in the vacuum of space before they froze solid or was obliterated like dust in a blast furnace by the massive Beam Cannons that streaked across the endless void of space desecrating everything in its path.

Other types of enemy ships joined in the fight launching nuclear type weapons at the Explorer that blasted the shields and lit up the entire area.

As the shields drained faster than the reactors could recharge them, McGregor stood up and decided it was time to make a run for it, he roared with fists clenched tight, "Activate the main engines and get us out of here. Weapons control, activate - ALL- the forward Beam Cannons and clear a path out of this system!"

The massive engines lit up with immense force and the bellowed out engine wash blasted through the void of space and scattered the clouds on the planet. The planets musty horrid clouds danced like a blowtorch to water as they moved around the globe. The Krainers hesitated for a second as they saw the back end of the Explorer light up like a second sun; the display was breathtaking and frightening. But even a Krainer vessel that persuaded one of the Space Cars did not heed to the warning and wondered into the engine wash from one of the massive engines. Such a result would be obvious.

The Explorer with all its mass and weight slowly began to move through space. Such force was required that a rocket lifting of into space, could not compare to the power of the engines that moved the massive steal, Iron and Duranium ship.

As the Explorer gathered up speed, the four massive array cannons locked forward, began to charge to full capacity. The charge process was brief; with the flare of fireworks that spiralled from all directions into the cannon its self. The result was a superheated glow that emanated from the front section of the vessel. Massive amounts of energy was drained form the three-phase warp core as the cannons howled throughout the charging and discharging phases.

As the glow reached its peak the cannon blasted a long stream of yellow matter beam straight ahead, like a high pressure of water flowing from a fireman's hose. The beam ripped through anything that was in the path of the Explorer. It only lasted for about five to seven seconds, intermittingly on each of the four array cannons, but the tremendous heat restricted the amount of time they could be fired

McGregor sat and watched through the panoramic windows as the beams of energy reached ahead as they melted all the wreckage in space. The engines moved the great ship slowly. The vessel needed to reach optimum speed before warp engines can be engaged otherwise half the ship will be left behind, a rule McGregor knows well.

Then, without warning, the whole area in front of the windows lit up as one of the beams melted a nuclear mine. The beams stretch so far into space, it managed to reach a nuclear mine and prematurely, set it off. But because of the distance, there was no threat. However, the Explorer blasted through like an unstoppable juggernaut.

The Explorer pulled away further, and the Krainers began to suspect that the Cataline people might be on it, so a small defence platform, that blew away so many alien vessels, tried to lock onto the Explorer, but it disappeared in a beam of light.

Tulack turned to McGregor, who was eagerly watching the winning battle, "Captain, six Krainer vessels are approaching from the rear and they are charging weapons." McGregor looked at him, unable to believe the stupidity of these aliens. "Put them on screen!" He leaned forward, showing an evil grin.

Chapter 19

(Trip back)

The Explorer glided like a brick that was tossed into space. Relentless, it blasted its way through anything. It cannonballed itself through icy moonlets and asteroids that looked like a pile of planetary junk that was swept under the rug. It didn't offer much to the imagination, but the constant battles that waged around it could be seen everywhere.

Still, for the six ships that were sneaking up on the Explorer, this was called home and a place to trade the defenceless Cataline for profit. But all that changed when the Explorer drifted down from the depth of space and took the entire population away. The Krainer's went mad and tried everything to stop them and get their products back.

Unaware, the approaching Krainer vessels did not know about the Explorers Pulse Cannon Turret Guns. As soon as they entered its detection range, the guns began to spin up and deployed around the back of the vessel. When the Krainer's entered the guns firing ranges, they automatically began to shoot pulse blasts.

The steady stream of blue glowing bolts, drifted in space fraction of a second in turn, which struck the shields of the Krainer ships. The blast bolts themselves did not cause much damage, but the Pulse Cannons were designed to take on small fighters. However, they are automatic and will fire on anything without the correct identification.

As if the spooky Krainer did not notice the danger they are in, they still carried on behind, chasing, intimidating.

Tulack scanned his screen, keeping a watchful eye on the approaching Krainer vessels, even he knows that they are no match for the explorer and with a simple touch of a button, the entire fleet can be wiped out by the Array Cannons at his disposal. But he wanted the captain to give the order.

On queue Tulack announced over the idle computer chirps, "The enemy ships are in firing range captain!" As he finished his line, his console beeped with caution, so he replied accordingly. "They are firing!"

The phaser fire from the enemy ships blasted on the primary shielding of the Explorer and only created a pathetic lightshow with no force, they might as well been firing blanks. The inhabitants onboard did not feel one vibration or any sound. Undeterred, the Krainers continued to fire rapidly at the Explorer with little or no effect.

The array cannons at the front of the Explorer fired continually as it removed all the junk and defensive structures ahead. The yellow fire that bellowed out of the cannons disintegrated everything in its path.

At firing control the Ensign noticed the temperature on the barrels of the Array Cannons rising rapidly. He needed to say something but he did not want to ruin McGregor's fun, but it needed saying. "Captain, the heat sinks on the cannons are not meant for this kind of abuse, we will melt down our cannons if you continue to fire them!"

McGregor swivelled his chair towards the firing control station and stared at the individual that broke the silence, and his fun. Leering at him, he raises his voice up a level. "Navigation, can we go to warp?"

Sat at the Navigation controls, a dark coloured man ran his hands over the console with painful slowness as the vessel nearly reached its optimal speed. He broke a small sweat, as he did not want to tell the captain that it only needed five seconds.

McGregor tapped his hands impatiently on his armrest with coloured controls, waiting. He made a point to gesture this towards the person at navigation.

The indicator reached green and the Navigation Ensign relayed the information in a split second. "Yes captain we are at optimal speed!"

The ensign did not make eye contact but he could hear McGregor letting out a long sigh. "OK, Jump to warp. Engage!"

In front of him, the navigation officer nodded as he engaged the warp engines with a deep humming sound that escalated every second.

McGregor hated this part of space and all that was happening, he could not comprehend how all this happened and why the Cataline had such a tortured life. He dwelled on the fact that this species was completely useless at defending themselves, not to mention the more personal reason, which he kept from his crew.

The warp nacelles at the back of the juggernaut, hidden inside all the armour, lit up with a flash and the entire vessel disappeared into warp.

But the second it rushed into warp, a massive explosion emanated from the front of the ship and tossed everybody on to the floor. As the vessel entered warp, it travelled through all the rubble and mines, which prematurely set them off.

"Damage report!" McGregor scowled as he perched himself back on his chair.

"Minor damage to forward outer decks, main shields are discharged but charging and secondary shields are down to ten percent." Tulack replied, his face stony as he straightened himself up.

A faint smell of burned electronic equipment hovered in the air as McGregor studied the damage reports that flooded in from all sections. The faint patch of smoke drifted into the ventilation system and a slight crack in the window near the wall could clearly be seen, as a reminder.

McGregor glanced at the crack as he took very little notice at the whizzing flurry of stars; he was relieved to be underway and safe in the knowledge that no other enemy could catch them up. To make sure, he issued his final command, "OK, repair crews get to work, take us to warp eight!"

The Explorer cruised along space effortlessly and the streaking stream of matter offered a breathtaking view to every Cataline that was onboard.

Only the unlucky chosen was aloud on the Krainers vessels, but even then, the luxury of seeing the stars at warp offered no comfort to anyone that was enlisted. Being sold onto a Krainer vessel was almost a death sentence. If the constant battles did not get them, the sheer orgy of raping and molestation defiantly would. But the Cataline looked into the sky with different eyes now.

Arania interrupted the operations on the command deck as she walked on. The hiss of the doors caused all the personal to spin their heads at a leisurely pace. Gasps and murmurs erupted throughout the deck as they saw Arania stroll up to McGregor.

She could not lumber in her quarters for the duration of the journey and she needed to get out and return to duty. Even after the ordeal has taken its time on her, Arania felt confident that she could control it. Being back at work would take her mind of things.

McGregor carried on his grandfather role and was a little over protective at first. From a glance, he could clearly see her colour return and she seemed more cheerful at every light year they gain from their horrid home world. He sat at the nucleus of his vessel with his elbow pressed on the armrest of his chair, holding his chin up, staring at her.

Fighting back, and ignoring McGregor's sour expression she said, "Captain, I am perfectly fine to return to my duties, I would rather be working then sitting in my quarters doing nothing." She unintentionally displayed a small cute smile.

McGregor perched up higher on his chair, his uniform straightened, brighter. He gave Arania a long concerning stare, analysing and making sure she was OK.

He knew Arania very well, since she has been on the ship for around one year, they have always bumped places and shared command. He knew her limitations and capability; they were almost like a married couple without the romantic necessities.

With a decision set in his mind he decided to allow Arania to return to her duties, but he had a firmer action in mind. She still needed to account for her actions and he needed to have a chat with her. McGregor stood up, he swelled in physical appearance as he changed his posture to handle Arania request. "Very well," He turned and looked at her, pointing at his ready room. "But first I need to talk to you, in my ready room."

Either she'd done something wrong, or he needed something, Arania followed behind like a child sent to the head masters office. The shocked faces on the command deck could not understand what McGregor might do. His stern finger directed towards his ready room, indicated that she was going to get disciplined.

Arania could only surmise that it was her adventure down to the planet without a security escort. She wondered what type of punishment he would dish out. *Why he would do such a thing?* Even after rescuing her, she believed they had some kind of emotional bond.

Inside the ready room, Arania hovered around the window that displayed a stream of stars, hoping that McGregor will not go ballistic. She has seen this undesirable side of him before and she doesn't relish the idea at being shouted at. Instead, McGregor sat down on his semi-clean desk, crossed his legs in a leisurely fashion, and got down to business.

"OK! You want to return to duty, OK, I will grant you that, however you will have to account for your actions." He leaned forward with little effort and picked up a glass-computerised tablet that he had placed in the middle of his desk before hand. He anticipated Arania's desire to return to work and secretly held back a spiteful grin. Ho, how he loved these moments!

Arania tried to remain impassive, but she displayed an unconscious frowned look, just typical for McGregor to bring up something like that.

The stale environment in the room made Arania take in a deep breath, waiting for his next careless word to flow of the tip of his tongue.

"You broke Starfleet regulations. They state that all command personal going on an away mission should take security personnel for protection. You did not!" he hissed as he changed the page on his glass-computerised tablet, "Although I am not part of Starfleet, you are..."

Arania moved forward and tried to interject his comments with an explanation, but he brushed her aside and with a brief pause, he delivered his

punishment, "I am sorry Arania will still have to send a report about your actions to Starfleet."

McGregor did not want this to end on a stale note, not after what she has gone through. But she needed to learn and he could not face losing someone like this again. He saw her as a close friend and a valid member of his crew, so exotic and intelligent, she will be impossible to replace. He needed to set an example so she will think the next time she decides to do something reckless.

He placed the tablet onto the table and walked around with a compassionate look in his face. He placed his hands on Arania's soft and delicate shoulders and said softly, "You're my deepest en closest friend and I don't want you getting into any unnecessary trouble. I already have to write a report about one death and I don't want to write one for you. I will be lost without you."

Arania displayed a self-deprecating grin at his thoughtful words, trying not to overindulge McGregor harsh sense of punishment. She preferred to have a clean record, but she did not expect McGregor to role over and play for her needs, he always drove a hard bargain.

Foremost in her mind, she was glad that McGregor did not go over the top; this was as much discipline that she was going to face, and it did show he cared for her in some degree. With a dismissive gesture from McGregor, Arania left with a warm and enlightened feel. She was taken back by his kind words, but annoyed at the report he needed to send, perhaps he will forget about it later, she wished.

McGregor on the other hand felt nothing. He just replicated his cup of tea and proceeded on with his reports before wondering off the command deck into the bowels of the ship interested in the final decks that the Cataline said they would repair.

People filled the walkways and crowded themselves into every crack they could find in the explorer. McGregor could hardly move, it was almost like Deep Space Nine at rush hour, but instead of different varieties of aliens, the endless glitter of blue stood out all around him.

Like lemmings the Cataline all rumbled around the vessel, finding friends and getting comfortable for the trip to Earth. McGregor began to realize the need to get the other decks online, they're huge and should be able to elevate the overcrowding in some of the corridors. Otherwise, problems would eventually start to happen.

McGregor moved along like an interloper as he shuffles along the corridors in a pendulum-like walk as he progressed his way through the crowds to his destination. He reached the main shuttle carts that travel through the core of the vessel.

During the early years, the shuttle carts was the most easy and intuitive way to travel from one point to the other at great speed. A vessel being so long, this was the most convenient way of travel. But when McGregor took over the ship he only had a select few running.

Somehow the Cataline learned about this at breathtaking speed and before long, McGregor was waiting in line. He laminated to himself because he was not impressed about waiting in the queue. A few idle glares from the Cataline spooked him out, he seemed to be the only human in the shuttle port and he decided to get operations to activate more shuttles to move the congestion. It was quite a circus and very annoying, "This is a cargo ship, not a space station," he muttered to himself.

Looking worse for wear, like he stepped of the subway in rush hour, McGregor walked into Lolai-yu who was in charge of the restoration.

Deep in the lower levels, the enclosed walls dripped with water and condensation, the lights were barely lit and the passageways spewed with damaged bulkheads and cabling. The air smelled flat with an acidic undertone that even the environmental controls could not disperse. The deck beneath their feet felt very cold and very close to the void of space, as if it could give at any time.

"Hi captain, how are you!" Lolai-yu cheerfully said.

McGregor could feel the cheerful expression in her voice, as if she enjoyed the challenge and felt more pleased to be away from her world. In fact, McGregor could sense the entire workforce was happy, even if they are repairing the lower levels for free. He held back an evil grin to this fact.

McGregor did not cast any light to her cheerful question, but told her directly, "This is not a holiday trip it's just a way to get you from one place to another and the sooner I get you all of my ship the better!"

She returned his shady glance with a leering look, before she smiled and asked, "And how can I help you, things are progressing fine and we have all the materials we need, you don't have to come down here," She paused, being very brave with her next comment, "We will let you know when everything is done."

"I am checking the progress on these decks," He said, a bit sharply. He then waved his hand around and looked at the condition before he explained more facts. "The lights should stay on, if there are movement in the corridors and quarters. Life support and systems are back online. It just needs a clean." He touched the damaged bulkhead with his hand, taking note of Lolai-yu's criticizing glare.

"A little clean? Looks like the whole place needs replacing!" She thought to herself, before McGregor interjected with his final word, "I will need updates on the repairs and how many you intent to bring down here."

Self-consciously he rubbed his nose that became agitated by the stagnant air and decided to leave. It will take a few hours for the air to be filtered and cleaned; he did not want to 'Delay' them further.

Lolai-yu agreed and stated that the extra space will alleviate the overcrowding in some of the cargo bays. But as she turned and faced McGregor, he had already gone.

On his way back up to the main deck McGregor walked past Sam, who had blazing wide eyes and excitement trickled throughout his face. "Captain! This is amazing; I have never seen so many Cataline people in one place before. They used to be a myth until I saw Arania," he jumped forward, closer. "But now! WOW!"

Sam seemed to show more interest in the Cataline than his duties. He would often be seen chatting to selective groups of Cataline as he tried to single out one female. Jack the lad behaviour would describe him perfectly. Although McGregor new of his actions, he kept a watchful eye on him. Especially with one female he met before they arrived on the planet.

As he looks at the excited ensign, he questions the problems he will get into if Sam develops his relationship further. He could see that the young female was getting attached to him, but he felt Sam was not the faithful type. He would need to say something, and something soon.

But he replied to his comment with a basic and unprocessed tone, "Don't get too excited, once we return to Earth they will be leaving, so don't get used to it." He

changed the topic to more urgent matters, "How are the Space Cars? We lost a few and I need an inventory report from you."

They both walked in unison down the corridors, dodging the crowds who flew pass. Information was exchanged before they departed on their separate ways, but McGregor was considering ways to talk to him about his relationship and careless flirting. He needed to talk to the young man later.

The medical deck was almost filled to bursting with survivors; refugees crowded the rooms and hallways. All none critical patents were transferred out into different accommodations and even some cargo bays were set up as temporary shelter.

McGregor walked into the main medical bay only to be met with a chaotic site. The room was filled with injured and badly wounded people, blood splattered all over the wall and a long line of cocoons bellowed in the background, Michel was up to his old tricks again as he tried to save as many of the injured as he could. Unfortunately due to the battle, the Krainers injured large numbers of Cataline in the assaults. They did not care who got hurt; they always shot first and ask questions later.

"Doctor, how's things progressing?" said McGregor who became stern at the large amount of injured people, as if he walked into a slaughterhouse.

"We have a slight problem." Michel edged his way closer to McGregor and whispered, making sure no one else could hear. "The morgue is almost full and we still have a high number of critically ill Cataline."

Michel was at a corner stone in his career and this situation has put his humanity to the test. The next request he was going to ask from McGregor will be the hardest and saddest thing he has ever done. Faced with the prospect of no room to treat the injured, he needed to say something. With a nervous gulp he spat it out, "We need to get rid of some of the bodies or we will run out of space."

McGregor eyes blazed with disappointment and shock, he did not expect Michel to come up that a comment like that, *'What sort of way would you like me to get rid of them, throw the bodies out the airlock'* he thought to himself. So, he only replied with the only thing he could, "Make sure no more die!" He asked for the impossible.

Michel stared at him for a moment before he followed McGregor drift towards a young Cataline female who appeared to be stripped in an unnatural way. He approached her eyes squinted, assessing.

McGregor looked in dismay at this creature that was laid out on the bed, he did not know what to make of her at first, and then he realized that she was a Cataline female that was stripped. Her fin like clothing was torn off and her hair burned, only scabbed marks and scars filled the rooted areas.

McGregor's eyes were hard and angry, "Doctor, what happened to this person?"

The female heard his voice and looked at him, her eyes looked sad and in pain. She had no idea who this person was but she clearly vibrated in her bed at this gruff man.

"One of our saddest cases, a team found her in the hands of a alien race which peeled off all her skin clothing and hair. As you know Cataline clothing is made from their skin just like the fins on a fish, they are delicate and fine with veins and nerves running through them. The pain she must have suffered." The doctor hesitated his sentences and tried to act in the best possible manor he could. "I tried to re-grow her clothing and hair, but only a cocoon transformation can repair the damage, she will transform in a few days."

Overwhelmed by her ordeal, the young female began to cry as she touched her wounds a constant reminder at what she has lost. Like a person that has lost their eyesight, this effect was the same for her; her delicate skin clothing had ultra sensitive nerves that acted like a new sense that enhanced her abilities. All the Cataline were given this gift. But she had it torn from her, one of the worst things that could happen to this species.

"My skin is gone, I want it back, it hurts!" the young female cried with a vibrating pain in her tone.

McGregor could not distance himself from the ordeal. He looked in awe at the whole situation and her condition, until his help was needed elsewhere.

Nes-al-sar stayed with her friend Lei-Lie during the voyage back to Earth. Due to the lack of space, she volunteered to share her quarters with her and found it fun.

Back on their home world, most of the Cataline would be rounded up and placed into camps, often sealed in their own cages. Sharing a place together rarely happened, because the Krainers found it to be an excellent way to install obedience. The Cataline are a sociable race and they strived on each other company. But if they ever did end up together, it would normally be on a ship. Thus, would be a horror that they feared the most.

But now they are all grouped together unsure what to do. The Explorer offered them an insight into human civilisation and Earth, which slowly began to draw their attention, especially Nes-al-sar and Lei-Lie.

Nes-al-sar looked up the definition of Starfleet and followed the path to the Federation, her eyes lit up brightly in the darkness of her room as her friend Lei-Lie slept.

Looking through all the data, she was overwhelmed with excitement and fascination at the Federation Star Ships and human culture. She yearned for something in her life, after the treatment she went through and the loneliness all throughout her life; she could not contain her passion and excitement with this new discovery. She needed to share this information with her friend Lei-Lie and dragged her curled up body onto the floor.

Lei-Lie yelped slightly as she hit the metal floor and nearly lashed out Nes-al-sar. As she explained it did not take long before Lei-Lie got interested. The most interesting part was that anyone has the chance to join. They already knew Arania made it and this made them even more determined.

The computer gave detailed descriptions on Starfleet, what the Federation is, the Star Ship names and it carried on in more detail with consideration so security.

Few weeks passed and everything stayed very calm and peaceful. It became strange how everyone got on well. The crew interacted with the Cataline people well and all fear of humans soon disappeared. The sheer size and complexity of the Explorer meant that people can explore and there was much to do.

The habitat dome, which resided in the centre of the Explorer, was one of the main attraction points for all the Cataline. It took up thirty-five percent of the space. The central area represented a huge open space where the trees, grass and waterfalls stood, the decks that spanned around the outside of the dome contained areas for food and recreation. It was a huge epic site for anyone to see.

McGregor walked through the habitat dome as he took in the fresh moist air; the warmth also offered a sense of being back on Earth and a place for relaxation. The streaking of the stars in the transparent dome gave the place an interesting glare

of light that moved around in all directions. The Cataline walked around like ants that weaved in and out of the pathways and down decks using the small lifts located at the side of each deck. They stared at the beauty and felt more relaxed than ever. Surprised, McGregor noticed how silent and pleasant it was. He thought the place would have been desecrated or too crowded. But as he looked, he could see Cataline attending to the forests and wildlife.

He walked to a shelter hut located in different locations of the habitat dome as he held on to his glass-computerised tablet. He was prepared for the spectacle that was about to come.

After a few moments, massive jets of water around the perimeter of the dome sprayed into the air that created the illusion of rain. The rain came down in all sections of the dome, which surprised many of the Cataline people.

Some smiled with a pleasant surprised look while others opened their hands to collect the droplets, they did not notice their skin clothing become semi transparent.

McGregor raised his eyes at the rush of water that slowly drenched everything in sight. He sat in the shelter and looked at everyone who seemed to cherish the new moment. However, as their clothes became transparent, he respectfully looked away towards his work. He suddenly felt a very deep and embarrassing sense in his stomach. "I should not be here." He muttered to himself.

But as he looked at his report he stumbled upon Sam's name and realized that he would have no problem being here, in fact, this would be a dream for him. McGregor closed the page and moved onto the next pressing matter on his computerised tablet.

Without warning, Arania rushed in to protect herself from the rain, happier than usual. She was lucky; just a few stray droplets of rain sprinkled on her fragile body were not enough to make her naked.

"What has gotten you so happy?" McGregor announced, startling Arania

She turned her head in his direction and showed a secret smile. She drew closer to him as she accepted his warmth and looked into the rain. She felt happy about the situation of her people and all the positive reports she has received, she felt proud of herself.

Her heart fluttered slightly before she finally replied, "All my people are so happy and librated, they have all seen images of Earth and a hope of a new life has given them so much happiness. They have no idea how to repay you."

She couldn't take her eyes of the lush array of plants and trees and exquisite hanging gardens that glistened with rain water and slowly displayed a kindred smile.

He replied, staring at his computer tablet, "Do not worry, I'll send Starfleet the bill!"

Arania frowned at his cold hearted comment, but what she didn't notice was McGregor -IS- developing the bill for Starfleet. However, Arania's attention was soon diverted when one section of the habitat dome was dry from rain. "Looks like we have a problem in the far side" She said, pointing.

A few mechanics where tinkering around with the main pipes in one of the main corridors, which serviced the rain jets. Some release mechanism jammed and they endeavoured to fix it.

Banging on the pipe, one of the mechanics shouted, "Is that it, what's the reading?"

The other replied "No! The valve is jammed, Wait I am going to hit it with an hammer!"

Being typical mechanics that had no care in the world, the second mechanic hit the valve as hard as he can, accidentally releasing the dump tanks above a few un-expecting Cataline females walking under them.

They overheard their discussions but they became utterly shocked and dismayed when they ended up soaked in water. It was a moment they could not have foreseen and being drenched posed its own problems for them.

When the water eventually trickled away down the drainage system in the floor, the three Cataline people leered at them. "What a bunch of idiots," one of them sarcastically barked; normally this would not be the case. No Cataline would ever talk like that to their masters like this, but since they have been around humans for a long time, they feel more comfortable then ever. Each individual took risks with the humans and realized that they are for real and kind.

When the Cataline group walked passed, the mechanics that looked at their semi naked bodies with the look of desire. However they carried on with their work.

Arania looked deep into McGregor eyes, studying. She felt loyalty and responsibility for the man that saved her life, she has never forgotten it, nor will she. But she could also sense that McGregor was hiding a very deep secret and she really wanted to know. But she waited patiently for the correct time. *He will tell me when the time is right.*

But the hypnotic moment was interrupted when Tulack bellowed out through their COMM badges they are still wearing. "Captain," a cold and business like voice stated, "we are approaching the anomaly."

McGregor gave a stern look and gave Arania his jacket to protect her from the rain as they proceeded out of the habitat dome to the command deck.

As they rushed to escape the recreated downpours, McGregor questioned, "You know, I haven't seen that female that bit me on my travels any idea where she might have gone?"

Arania's eyes glittered as they managed to exit the dome and into the passageways, "I am sure they are around somewhere, we managed to collect over sixty of them."

"Well, I suppose I can always ask the computer, but let's get this over with."

McGregor then changed the subject because he had one matter that was pressed on his mind. Unknown to a select few, he realized that the whole ship must light up like a star. With a worried edge to his voice he said, "I am worried about the Electro-fluidic field your species is releasing, this ship must light up like a star, every race should be able to track us down!"

They stepped onto the command deck in the middle of his sentence and he interjected the idle chatter for a status report.

"We have currently dropped out of warp and heading straight for the anomaly. However captain" Tulack changed his tone into a more serious form of expression, "I am detecting a massive fleet of ships on long range sensors. Total number is unknown but they are in the thousands!"

McGregor felt like the universe was out to get him, *what did I do to deserve this?* He looked at the anomaly and gave a defiant order.

“Let’s get back to our one universe then, all primary engines, Full speed!” McGregor insisted with no care for the problems the anomaly might cause. “Close all the blast doors and activate the shields.”

With the vessel back to full strength, he realized that they should be able to travel back in one piece and the enemy cannot follow. Anything smaller than the explorer would surely be destroyed.

The massive engines on the Explorer lit up again with a vibration that roared throughout the ship as it charged for the anomaly.

Chapter 20

(Destination Earth)

The anomaly bathed in the sea of space, waiting and eager for anything that was unlucky to enter its grasp. It sparked with ark blasts and a ring of black-grey smoke with nothing in the core. This anomaly waited for any un-expecting vessel to approach. Created over twenty years ago, the Cataline hoped this could be a gateway to a better and more prosperous place. They sent a single craft, filled with children into the abyss, praying for a miracle.

Now, in the outskirts of its orbit, the gigantic Explorer hurled itself towards the anomaly and nothing could stop it. The ship, built like a tank, glided through space like an uncontrollable juggernaut.

The crew sat at their stations with a certain amount of no-nonsense glee as they watched the horizon of the anomaly increase in size for every minute they continue their journey. Most of the human crew already knew what to expect, but it was the Cataline that lacked the information. Standing around they wondered why this vessel was heading into it. They could do nothing but watch.

Inch by inch, the massive vessel edged its way closer to the anomaly, arcs reached out, like hands that stretched forth to grab hold and pull the ship in. All watched on, amazed.

Tulack worked in the background, occupied by some disturbance, which the crew was blissfully unaware of. His hands scanned his workstation with a symphony of beeps and taps, systematically calculating and checking his findings before he stared forward, alerting McGregor, "Captain, a vessel has just jumped out of slipstream! They are on an intercept course."

McGregor grabbed the armrest of his chair before he heaved himself to his feet, ready to deal with the new dilemma, sure enough; he surmised that it could be a new alien race that has an eye for the Cataline. But, as he turned into Tulack's gaze, he soon realized about his last comment. The vessel was exiting slipstream.

From current reports and scans, no alien race in this galaxy was able to produce such technology; even the Federation just received this new form of travel when Voyager returned with a gold mine of technology. He walked over to Tulack, thinking. *This could get interesting.*

McGregor paused and ordered Tulack to display it on screen.

A small gust of cool wind swept through the bridge as the ventilation system started. The vessel shuddered slightly with an unknown effect from gravity. It could have been caused by the anomaly, but no one knew for sure.

McGregor looked into the view screen at the unknown shape that was engulfed in electrical activity. Too far to see, but it was on an intercept course, mysterious, unknown, coming closer.

The sudden announcement from a crewmember that walked in startled McGregor as he watched the object grow in size on the view screen.

"What is it?" said the Ensign dropping all the computer tablets in her hands. "It is beautiful, like a dance of lights!"

McGregor looked on, thinking. The vessel grew into a monstrous size that resembled a blue jellyfish with a storm of electrical arcs all around the transparent body. He has seen many ships before, even a Borg vessel, but this thing, looked dangerous but beautiful. *What did it want?*

The crew stared on with even greater amazement before they realized that what they were seeing was a ship. It captivated their imaginations and questions developed as to who made it.

The explorer carried on towards the anomaly blissfully unaware of the vessel that creped up behind them. But still the alien ship kept coming, silent and ominous. By comparison, the Explorer was still large, but the alien ship could clearly be an even match with unknown weapons.

McGregor had never seen an organic ship before and from Tulack's scans, it was obvious that it was organic and a very advanced space dwelling life form. His mind couldn't grasp the flurry of activity inside the spongy hull that absorbed the arc beams that danced within its structure, as if nerves were transmitting signals to a central point.

He recited tales about Starfleet vessels making contact with life forms in the form of ships, but to see one in real life was a blessing. But still, his mind raced on with caution.

The organic vessel heaved itself into the flight path of the explorer, growing larger and larger.

"The ship almost looks alive, this is amazing!" gasped Arania as she forgot her past and just looked at the stunning ship displayed on the screen.

"The ship looks organic, like it's alive," said one crewmember filtering all the commands thought the controls trying to figure out the object.

McGregor looked at the screen, 'What are you?' 'What do they want?' His words could not offer any reassurance to his crew and even if the alien vessel heard them, they might not be able to comprehend his meaning. He knew that every race has hunted them for the Cataline and this new vessel must have the same agenda. But some form of communication was needed and now was the perfect time.

"Open a channel!" said McGregor holding back a slight tone of awareness in his voice.

"This is Captain Alex McGregor of the Federation starship Explorer can we be of assistance?" McGregor said with no idea what he is saying and he gave a small mistakenly sarcastic look when he said, 'Federation starship'.

He returned to his chair. He remained focused on the image in front unable to tear his eyes from the fearsome vessel looming outside. Sinking into his chair, he stares into the far edges of his ship through the panoramic windows.

As the enormous vessel loomed in front of the Explorer, it sent a low-frequency partial burst through space, like a basso words in a voice that might have been spoken by God. The vibration shook the bulkheads of the vessel, shaking and panicking everyone. Then all was calm for a moment.

A slight breeze went through the command deck as fresh air cleaned all the worry and panic away. Following it, a slight creepy feeling came to McGregor. "Something is not right!"

Suddenly the screen came on, displaying the alien race. Shocked and disbelieve went through everyone's minds at that exact moment. People all around on the command deck gasped as they saw what was on the screen.

The figure that was displayed before them on the screen is unmistakable. A Cataline woman stared through the screen, perfect in all her beauty but clearly something was wrong.

McGregor steeled himself, sat up straight and pressed his mind into overdrive. He could not comprehend why a Cataline was in control of a vessel this size, if she was in control. But before he had the chance to say something, the female

interjected, "You have taken a large number of our people, return them immediately!"

Taken by the sudden outburst by the female on the screen, McGregor was so frustrated he wanted to scream. He bowed his head and muttered under his breath, "Bloody hell, this is a load of shit! I knew it was too good!"

He squared his shoulders and spoke with pride, making sure the translators and the female could easily understand his words. He also wanted to portray a sense of power over this situation, "I am sorry, I don't believe you have told me your name, who might you be?"

The female replied in a tone that matched McGregor's, they both began to battle each other by tone and authority. "I'm Dre-Lama of the Cataline collection force, you have taken our Cataline people from the Krainers, we have been called to return them to their rightful place"

"What the hell is going on here?" McGregor said softly out of the corner of his mouth towards Tulack and Arania. They both shrugged their shoulders with no answer to give.

The female appeared to swell in physical appearance on the screen, trying to outmatch McGregor before she impatiently roared, "You will return all the Cataline people NOW!"

Everyone looked with a frenzy of emotions and confusion when a Krainer appeared on the view screen beside the female. His grotesque look could not be mistaken; it was a Krainer with some unknown control over the female.

McGregor looked closer at the female, he spotted cables and life support systems entering her body from her alcove she was slotted into, he was unable to see the details at first, until the Krainer changed the overall view on the screen.

Kai-yu walked onto the command deck after he spotted the alien vessel from the window of his quarters. He was well versed in the knowledge of his race, that was passed down through his DNA, and was well aware of the trickery that was facing McGregor. He was often plagued by flashbacks of horrific crimes and the destruction on his home world hundreds of years ago. Vivid memories that were passed down to him from family to family, a secret that could not be forgotten.

He needed to warn McGregor about the Krainers trickery and the dangers the massive organic ship posed, although he realized that McGregor was intelligent enough to realize this, the dangers of this vessel might be something he was unaware of.

Speaking with an urgent tone Kai-Yu was as clear as he could be, "Captain, you cannot trust them, they will take us back to be used as slaves again, they're loyal to the Krainers and you cannot trust them," He drew a long dry sigh before carrying on. "Captain, that is a Cataline battleship, you must escape immediately or it will destroy us."

McGregor responded with an arrogant gesture before he turned towards the view screen with the two individuals, appearing very impatient. He was safe in the knowledge that he commanded the most powerful space ship in this part of the galaxy, so, *what if that vessel has slipstream*. In a fire fight McGregor was sure he could disable the vessel without too much trouble.

He chose to dismiss Kai-Yu's opinion and was curious to find out what was going on. McGregor was going to turn his head towards Kai-Yu in an effort to get more information. But he changed his mind and decided to look back at the screen, "I am here on a rescue mission and I cannot allow you to take them back to that place..." but before he could carry on, he was interrupted by Dre-Lama who looked all drugged up on screen and clearly under the influence.

"You will return them now." The channel went dead. Silence swept through the command deck, as if the devil himself was snooping around, picking the souls he was about to steal.

The organic vessel hung in its path before the huge Explorer. Having delivered its message, the enemy fell silent and waited

McGregor stared through the windows as he tried to work out the next move the aliens will make, perhaps there was a way to rescue the Cataline trapped onboard, perhaps he could do some good.

But as he was pondering over his hero persona Tulack allured everyone to an unknown energy build-up. McGregor took heed of the warning and slouched on his chair, expecting nothing more than a lightshow. He quickly, but fairly, asked if the shields were online.

With a confirmed nod, McGregor was ready for what the enemy might be able to do. He ordered all the weapons online and waited.

Phaser banks and torpedoes came online and locked on the enemy vessel. Pulse Cannon guns spun up and the Blast Cannons stood to the ready position. McGregor waited for them to make the first shot.

The ship still bellowed towards the anomaly with no hint of stopping, its massive engines behind and on the side of the hull threw out clouds of thrust into space; an unstoppable mass of metal was not going to stop for anyone or anything.

The new alien ship gracefully turned and aimed its four tentacles at the Explorer with a static charge crackling between them, arcing as it charges.

The serpentine energy bolts reached its maximum intensity, sparking from tentacle to tentacle and then leapt outwards with an over intensified bolt of light.

Electrical whips engulfed the massive shield bubble that covered the Explorer sending static pulses throughout the metallic frame. If the shielding was not online, the whips would have tore open the hull with ease. But the Explorer didn't falter at all, as it still bellowed on towards the anomaly.

The command deck vibrated violently at the massive discharge shook all the operatives onto the floor. The lights struggled to stay on and the shields wavered with a static glow for a few minutes before it dispersed.

"Captain" said Tulack recovering from an exploding console, "Massive power surges all over the ship are triggering the circuit breakers. Primary shields are offline and secondary shields are down to ten percent, hull damages discovered on decks forty to one hundred, no casualties so far."

A second blast from the organic vessel blasted through the remaining charge on the shields and left the blast free to split the Explorer along the enforced armour that covered the warp nacelles. The armour buckled slightly under the immense force and energy discharge causing the massive thrust engines to flicker before they returned to normal.

The static charge travelled down the hull of the vessel, as if a spider was looking for a way in, causing chaos to all the electrical systems before it finally died.

The pulse cannon turret guns deployed automatically without command and came into action, they spun up and deployed on the hull at their normal locations and began firing rapidly at the enemy ship causing only a pathetic light show on its jelly constructed hull, dissolving.

The blue crackled lightning changed and sparked between the tentacles of the enemy vessel until its massive charge swept through space and obliterated the Turret Guns in a frenzy attack. The cannons ruptured into millions of pieces all over the hull, floating in space.

In a desperate attempt, the explorer launched a full spread of torpedoes that impacted the organic hull with dull sinking flashes, leaving only dark patches. Then McGregor upped the attack with a full volley of phasers and stabbing swards of blasts from the blast cannons that did little if no damage to the hull of the enemy ship.

In response, webbed lightning sparks drifted along the tentacles, as if a child playing with a ball from one hand to another. With a jagged blast of pure energy, the discharge streamed across space and completely engulfed the back section of the engine nacelle core in a constant stream of attack.

The arc stream heated up the armour at a rapid pace causing massive power failure of the Explorer and it would not be long until the nacelles popped in the tremendous heat.

A gasp of sick dismay went through McGregor as his command deck fell apart around him, arc blasts shot across the room and systems went offline. He needed to do something now.

With a diffident roar, he ordered the massive array cannons into action.

The Array cannons on the Explorer slowly moved and aimed at the organic alien ship, like the deck cannons on a battleship anticipating the next move.

While the cannons turned and locked onto its target, a glow that overpowered the darkness of the Explorer showed that the cannons were charging to full power. McGregor was not going to show any mercy this time, he revved up the charge to maximum, heating the barrels of the cannons.

Fireworks drifted in from space and into the barrels as all the dark matter collected, waiting. The entire middle section of the ship glowed a bright colour of white.

Parts of the armour on the nacelles started to melt away in a crumble of hot white metal, exposing the nacelles to the enemy. Still the massive impulse engine carried on bellowing out thrust, forcing the Explorer into the anomaly. But time was not on their side. Another hit would cause devastating damage.

The explorer reeled in space, already mortally wounded, parts of molten debris floating off into space. To add insult to injury the organic ship crackled again with its blue arc stream, striking the engine main support core between the armour and the primary hull. The Duranium ripped apart exposing the compartments, which became engulfed in force fields to prevent people from spilling into space. The damage reached all the way down to the first core barrier of the Explorer that protected the inner compartments. Still, the damage on the outer sections was severe.

"Captain, we have massive hull breaches on aft engine intersection C11 towards the first core barrier." Tulack paused to dodge more blasts that streamed across the control deck, "Decks one-hundred and fifty to two-hundred on the aft section have been ruptured, first core barrier is holding."

McGregor returned to his chair, his voice caught in his throat, "The core barriers are made from a neutronium based alloy," He waved his hand towards Tulack's surprised gesture, as Starfleet was unable to produce this kind of material, "The Iconians have docked with the repair station before I demolished it. The alloy was included in their database, but the core barriers took three years to install."

McGregor stood up, looking through the massive windows at the enemy vessel drifting behind the view, "The core of the ship is like an onion and there are three layers that protect the inner systems, it will be extremely hard for the enemy to penetrate the outer core."

The Explorer launched every weapon on there defensive systems: phasers, blast cannons, torpedoes, pulse cannons and even the beam cannons were almost at full charge.

Ignoring the furious hurricane of barrage inflicted by the Explorer, the alien vessel charged its crackling arc and blasted into the same intersection, leaving only a slight heat discoloration on the neutronium alloy, shattering more decks around it.

McGregor almost felt the damage done to his vessel like he was part of it. Fed up, he ordered the array cannons to fire!

Suddenly both array cannons discharged a gigantic fire beam into space at the enemy ship.

The command crew backed away from their stations as the light was so intense they couldn't stare at it. Resembling the chaotic activity on the surface of the sun, the beams streaked into open space and stabbed the organic vessel in its underbelly. After five seconds, one of the main beams finished pulverising the enemy armour while the second beam ripped through the bottom of the spacecraft eventually bursting out of the top creating a massive hole.

The organic ship drifted at an angle as its power failed and it appeared to die, creating a black goeey effect from the hole that spread into the ship at every point.

McGregor got up and looked at the view screen of the disabled ship only to be thrown again when the front end of the explorer went through the anomaly.

Struggling out of the other end, the ship became badly damaged due to both shields being disabled. The gravitational forces ripped huge chunks out of the hull and caused serious damage to the explorer. Huge force fields prevented people from falling out of the bulkheads as they provided temporary walls. The habitat dome received minor damage, as massive steel doors closed on the hardened transparent aluminium, protecting it.

The engines in the middle and the back of the ship carried on bellowing out thrust that even God himself cannot stop this massive ship from getting through.

Reclining in his chair on the nucleus of his vessel, McGregor basked in the sunlight of the new star that shone over the explorer. A new system, a new part of space, the crew felt a huge sigh of relief as they managed to escape the grasps of hell. No more so than the huge number of Cataline who also felt the dangers disappear suddenly.

"Damage report!" demanded McGregor as he shifted in his chair.

As McGregor brooded, a flurry of reports swamped Tulack's station with updates and news about the current affairs of the Explorer.

"We have taken heavy damage, forty percent of systems are offline, but most of them can be turned on in the breaker room." His tone changed as he recited more damage reports. "All outer decks have ruptures, we have lost thirty-seven pulse cannon turret guns, lost all phasers, torpedo bays are offline and three main beam cannons are offline or damaged." He then carried on with some good news "Primary shields are offline however all secondary shields are charging to full strength."

McGregor knew it was time to get the Explorer back in working order. They are back in the Alfa quadrant and there is no sign of pursuit. From the tactical readings they took before they vanished into the anomaly, the enemy organic vessel was dieing.

McGregor Stood up, and relayed his order towards the computer, "Computer, deploy all repair arms and begin essential repairs to the ship,"

The computer then replied in its typical hollow female computerized tone, "Identification of primary and essential systems have been identified, hull

replacement will begin on scheduled times. Please make sure areas undergoing repairs are evacuated. All systems are online, time to essential repairs, eleven days and six hours. Materials used will be in cargo bay one."

In unison, the red rectangle boxes all over the outer hull of the Explorer flicked open. Many of the inhabitants became startled while the massive replicator arms stretched into space and began repairing the engines and damaged hull at incredible speed.

Bit by bit, damaged hull fragments were dematerialised and re-materialised as the arm wedged bulkheads and wall plating back into place. The Cataline stared in awe at the marvellous technology that replaced passageways, right in front of their eyes.

Security teams had trouble at evacuating the damaged decks, as news spread and people from all directions came to see the spectacle that was repairing the ship in mid space.

Few days passed and the Explorer carried on with the engines at full burn trying to travel back into Federation space before any Alfa quadrant surprises could turn up. McGregor always ran into some minor problem that would not result in any big battles or incidents, but with the Explorers shields offline, he didn't want to take the chance.

McGregor walked into his ready room, which looked like a bomb had gone off and he was unable to block out the sounds the repair arms created. Clanking and knocking was the new idle sound of the Explorer.

"Damn maintenance teams, you would have thought they will have fixed this room by now!" laminated McGregor as he threw a broken part of the desk and computer terminal onto the floor.

The room was dark and damaged with the undertone of burned cables; a crack in the window drew McGregor attention prompting him to whisper under his breath. "This is going to be a long day!"

His next deed of the day would be to try and replicate a cup of tea from the replicator, however it created something hard, lumpy and semi green inside a cup, which he looked at before tossing it onto the floor with a huff.

McGregor sat on his chair brunching aside all the mess that has collected on his desk with a firm sweep of his hand, making way for his new belongings he was going to place at a later date. He mumbled at the hassle that had happened these few days, he just wants to get back to making money.

Eventually he managed to reboot a computer terminal and proceeded in calling the maintenance teams to repair his ready room. But his call was greeted by a computer voice that said, "Please wait, you call it being processed."

Due to the large number of people on the ship all using the ships systems, a backlog eventually developed delaying communications for ten seconds. This gave McGregor a slight surprise, as the ship has never been in such a demand before.

Arania walked in after several attempts to call him to no avail, she scanned the room with a slight pause. She took a deep sigh at the state of his ready room, before speaking.

"Looks like your office has seen better days!" she sweetly said trying to offer a joke to elevate the environment.

McGregor was not amused. He stared at the computer terminal and muttered, "I'm charging Starfleet for all this." After a brief pause, he leaned back on his chair and carried on, "Tell me, what's the ships status? Can we go to warp?"

"Most of the ships primary systems are back online including the shields and it won't be long until we can travel at warp." replied Arania, passing the status report on a glass computerized tablet.

She also added with anticipation, standing back. "I got some news. Admiral Janeway is on her way to see you on the Enterprise D!"

McGregor grumbled as he threw his computer tablet on the table, shattering into several pieces. He knew Janeway wasn't a fool, but she could not keep her cheep noise out of other people business.

"The queen bitch of the universe is coming? Damn that woman." McGregor grumbled as he stared out the window not noticing Arania's reflection grinning in the background.

"No telling what she wants to discuss and that bitch can go to hell for all I care!" hissed McGregor, as he had flashbacks about the problems Janeway caused for him in the past.

"Captain if I may?" Arania replied, asking to speak freely. "I know this person has caused a lot of problems for you, but you might want to put any differences aside and concentrate on the matter at hand."

McGregor then interjected Arania's thinking and asked how long it would take until she turns up. He will do everything in his power to avoid the iron maiden.

The USS Explorer carried on bellowing forward towards the Alfa quadrant with repair arms strewn all over the hull going from one section to the other repairing the hull and other important systems.

"Captain, all essential repairs are completed and we are ready to go to warp." Said Tulack.

"OK, retract the repair arms and take us to earth, warp-six." Ordered McGregor, cleaning his command chair.

With a sudden cut-off, the huge impulse engines terminated leaving behind a hot glow to the engine casing before a brilliant flash from the phase-three warp engines tossed the explorer into warp.

With a steady hand, Tulack said, "We should reach Earth in a few months from our current location, unfortunately the anomaly had shifted location and it will take longer to return to Earth space."

Arania added to McGregor list of news he was reciting over and over in his mind, "We will also have to stop by and gather resources and materials for my people."

McGregor leaned back on his chair; if he smoked it would be the perfect moment for a cigarette. But he doesn't and he reels on the idea about seeing Admiral Janeway in one and a half months. All in a days work for a captain.

Quietness crept through the ship; the lights dimly lit the hallways with a few Cataline still up and about in the middle of the night. The odd look and smile was all that kept everyone occupied. Starfleet personal were normally greeted with the utmost respect for the hard work they have done.

The atmosphere of the Cataline and humans could not be any more perfect. The happiness of the Cataline gave the crew a more lift from the long and strenuous missions they have undergone and it helped overcome the recent problems and battles.

McGregor took whatever peaceful time he had to take a leisurely stroll in the habitat dome and take in some 'fresh air' and relax. The past few months have taken

him to a new universe and save an entire race from the grips of hell, but for him, it was all in a days work.

He strolled up to the lakeside opposite the large sixteen-deck high waterfall to feel the fresh breeze of air, blowing from the waterfall. He knelt down to the waterside and placed his hand in the cool water creating ripples with his hand and feeling the sensation.

Suddenly, out of the darkness a familiar face gracefully popped her head out of the water. It was the same green haired creature that bit him back on the Cataline home world. Startled, he restored his posture and stared at her, "So, this is where you have been hiding."

"This water is fresh and pure!" said the young aquatic Cataline female in a soft tone that only angels could create.

He replied abruptly, getting back up on his knees after falling backwards, "It was fresh until you jumped in there!" he then added with a annoyed expression in his eyes, "You are not supposed to be in there!"

"We're sorry, we live in the water and need to go back to it from time to time. On our home world, all our water was taken and many of us died because of that and other activities." she replied looking into the water with sadness.

McGregor looked at her in more detail and noticed her arms and legs were slightly changed with the addition of delicate fins similar to that of a fish. He didn't notice this at first, just the natural clothing they normally process.

She noticed his bite mark and regrettably said, "I am sorry about biting you, I thought you wanted to attack me"

McGregor was confused. From his knowledge of the translator microbes, she was speaking clear English and how can she learn so fast, he asked the simple question after much thought, "You are speaking English very well!"

She replied, bobbing up and down in the water "Our species can learn new languages extremely fast."

McGregor lifted his eyebrow and looked at her before ending the conversation, he had work to do and did not want to chitchat with anyone. "Well, you should not be in there, when we get back to earth you will love the oceans we have."

Still, as he walked through the habitat dome, he could not help but think about all the strange and wonderful creatures he just saved. It's not everyday a man of his stature gets the chance to rescue a race from cruelty and extinction. He often read reports about other Starfleet captains getting the chance. Now it was his turn, and he believed he had done it admirably.

"This race is like a fairy tail!" he muttered to himself.

Chapter 21

(Medical and Janeway)

The inhabitants of the Explorer acted like they were on holiday on some exotic world. They rushed through the corridors thrilled about their new world called Earth that McGregor was taking them too. It was too overwhelming for a select few who could not keep their excitement at bay. But after a few weeks of travelling, the excitement died down as the reality of the whole situation sank in. There was still a distance to travel and the Explorer was not equipped with Slipstream.

Michel sat at his desk as he stared at the medical reports, trying his best not to chew another pen to pieces. Swaying from side to side on his chair, he ponders over some difficult calculations on his glass-computerized tablet. He drifted his eyes around the room feeling a slight pain in his neck and a glare in his eyes from the reflective metal bulkheads that reflected the light; this was a signal of tiredness and an indicator for him to get some rest.

He was the type of man not to sleep in the middle of a job and would always do his best to cure the people in need. But since they have escaped the Cataline home world, this would give him the perfect opportunity for much needed bed rest.

In his casual glances around the medical deck he notices a gentle smile from some of the Cataline medical staff that assisted his work. This propped him to do a final cocoon check. A task that could be distressing and also rewarding at the same time, but must be done in frequent intervals. With a graceful tone, he catches the attention of the nearest assistant and proceeds to the makeshift room that housed all the cocoons that hadn't hatched yet.

Walking down the passageway that lacked the Starfleet stile and was more on the line of a factory corridor with pipes and metal bulkheads, Michel made idle chatter, "I have been working twelve hours straight and I need a break"

Turning a corner, they enter a dimly lit room full of blue pattern cocoons giving off a slight misty and scented smell, which does not seem distasteful to his Cataline assistant.

But it was a smell that Michel had grown accustomed too and he knew all too well what the current smell was. It was a smell constant of mixed and tainted creatures that could live or die. He took the moment to wonder over to the control console that was attached to the wall that was amongst a bank of computer screens and monitors. He downloaded the results into his tablet and carried on doing a visual survey on each cocoon with his tricorder.

It didn't take long before one was found dead, Michel looked at it feeling sad and empty at the uncanny discovery. "Poor thing, the pain they must be feeling after being contaminated by the Krainers."

The lifeless cocoon reminded Michel at how defenceless the Cataline were and the help they require from him during this painful and delicate time. It was a burden that laid heavily on his mind and one he took with great determination.

He tried everything to make them comfortable, turning the lights down to a suitable level, regulating the temperature and keeping them away from activity so they can see and feel safe.

His deep thinking was interrupted by a voice a few meters away, "There's another one perished over here!" said the assistant, her voice followed a ghostly echo that resembled a prayer at a funeral.

Michel looked up towards his assistant who stood in a sad state over the cocoon that remained lifeless. She felt as if part of her own soul had died along with the defenceless creature that was in no danger at all. She could almost yell at the dead creature for dying, because she was frustrated at the fact that they were getting into a state to die which was not necessary.

Sadness could not spread any further as both individuals felt the need to carry on and save as many of them as possible, but a sudden sound drew Michel's attention.

"This might be one of them hatching!" Michel enthusiastically said as he ran over to the source of the noise, trying his best not to trip over any semi moving cocoons on the way.

The cocoon moved around before a small tear opened up after giving away from the pressure. This was a clear indication that someone was emerging. Michel checked his computer pad in order to identify the individual inside. Luckily, due to the cocoons location, it was a recent individual that had converted on the Explorer, so the person will be aware of the current situation.

"This is Anni-Lima," He paused, as he checked her details on his computerized tablet. "She's the one had all her hair and skin membrane clothing torn off a month ago." Michel was puzzled at the readings on the computer tablet, he was not sure, but the creature was emerging early. Finally he murmured to his assistant, "She must be emerging early."

Slime and mucus spilled out over the top of the cocoon before the entire top opened, spilling out a young and fragile creature. She gasped for air and struggled on the floor curled up in a ball trying to recover from the sudden emergence.

The young Cataline female forgot her location for a moment and thought that she was still on their home world being tortured by an alien race that skinned her alive. She immediately began begging for her life and not to be hurt in the way again, making a point to hide her new delicate skin clothing from Michel and his assistant.

Confused and in pain, she moved around gasping for air before lying out on the floor with her arms and legs spread out showing what she tried to hide.

Gasps echoed through the room as Anni-Lima desperately tried to breathe and being filled with the uncontrollable urge to shiver, even if the room was at comfortable temperature. After a few moments she slowly began to recover from her ordeal. But she fell silent and shocked at the sudden rush of feelings in her skin and nerves. This overwhelming burst of feeling was something she has not experienced since she was skinned. But the bust of sensation caused her to faint lightly.

Taken back by her sudden actions, Michel had the overwhelming urge to hold the creature in his arms for support. She faintly passed out and leaving her on the floor would be a heartless thing to do, his assistant thought it was a warm gesture as she hovered over Anni-Lima taking readings. "All her readings are normal doctor, we better get her to the medical bay for a deeper scan." She finally said.

In his arms, Anni-Lima recovered and trembled with her fear at what this person will do to her. She suffered from a memory hole that would recover in time. But for the moment, all she wanted to do is curl up and hide. She was unsure about being in this human's arms and her senses were heightened to the point of bursting. She was able to feel the texture of Michel's skin, the moisture of the air flowing from his mouth and the acute body odour that drifted from him. She was not sure what to do. She muttered like a small child that was lost, "Please don't hurt me."

Michel looked on with a hardened heart and soft eyes; he took a step back as he tried to process the confusion he was currently feeling from Anni-Lima's plea for

help. With an open mind, he explained that she was safe and no one will hurt her. The gentle smiles and increase in Cataline staff reassured her about her own safety, but the horrid memories still reside deep in her mind.

She attempted to clean all the slime and excess fluid off her skin that offered her some kind of kindred comfort, causing the memories to fade, as if she was in her own world experiencing new things for the first time. She was at bliss, unaware that Michel left the medical bay.

Michel was not the one to leave a job half done. After he was sure that Anni-Lima was in good care, he proceeded to finish his rounds. He gave a slight mental prayer not to find any more deceased cocoons. But unfortunately, as he progressed deeper into the dark misty room, he detected that a total of ten cocoons had perished.

He wondered around the room, computerized-tablet in one hand, marking out all the dead. He drew a long dry sigh at the mess he was in the middle of. If only there was a way to inform them about their safe location, all these deaths could have been avoided. But all he could do was keep the area clear and undisturbed.

One hour had passed and Michel was back at the medical-bay reeling over the data he collected. He swallowed hard, considering his place in all of this. He was a doctor and needed to save lives, this was his motto and something he pride himself upon. But as he looks at this timid creature that was once bald and scarred, transform herself into something beautiful, he could not help but relish the idea that he took part in this species eventual liberation. As he looked on he could see that he was not the only one relishing her beauty.

Anni-Lima stroked all the delicate skin fibers, which had re-grown and took extra care to cherish every moment of it. Now that she has new skin clothing, a whole new era of touch and feel made her bewildered for a few minutes. Her silvery natural blue hair flowed down her back with an untidy bundle at the end and she sat with her graceful figure on display. More thicker than the average Cataline, she felt special.

Michel asked her if she was OK, due to her excessive and bewildered touching of her skin clothing, but she replied, "I am very attached to my skin, when it was taken from me two years ago I felt lost." She said with passion and care.

Michel returned a lost look before he finally added, "Well, do not worry, you seem to be in perfect health, this ensign will take you to your quarters."

As a true doctor would do, he gave a sidelong smile before he left the medical bay prompting the next professional in charge to call him if there were any problems. But on a trip back to Earth, the only problems Michel guessed he would receive were that of more dead cocoons. A thought he frowned upon.

McGregor lounged around in the ready room with the look of boredom written on his face, even the view of the entire ship did not raise an eyebrow as McGregor has seen this view many times in the past, but it's a view to impress even the hardest person.

The ship still travelled at warp speed to the nearest star system to gather supplies to feed the overwhelmingly large number of people, which seemed a little unbelievable at times. However the view of them in the habitat dome reminds him of the reality.

"Captain, The Enterprise E has jumped out of slipstream!" said Tulack over the COM unit.

Moments later as Tulack waited patiently for a reply, McGregor marched onto the command deck knowing all too well who is onboard the Enterprise E and his anger began to reach boiling point.

He looked through the windows at the small object approaching at impulse towards them, the faint outline of the disk followed by the red and blue warp nacelles increased in size as the enterprise drifted closer to the Massive Explorer.

Few moments passed and the two ships faced side to side like a stand off in an old western. The Explorer dwarfed the fifty five-deck Enterprise as it made a clear statement that this ship may be old, but it was built for long durations in space and powerful.

"I thought they're not supposed to be here for another month!" McGregor spat out, looking at Tulack.

"It appears that they have installed slipstream technology onto the Enterprise E, I am also detecting Armour emitters and new weaponry." Said Tulack taking a curious scan of the Enterprise.

"We are receiving a hail," said Tulack as he looked at McGregor "It's Janeway"

McGregor's face turned to a shade of red before he had no option but to speak to her. "Put her on!"

The screen came on with a sharp, close up high-resolution video image of admiral Janeway's face, as if she could almost jump out of the screen. She was angry and reeled in the problems McGregor has caused and now she has the chance to wind her bate in.

"Mister McGregor, It has taken me a long time to catch up with you and you have a lot of explaining to do McGregor!" Barked Janeway as she stood from her captain's chair and walked closer to the camera; her imaged filled the entire screen on McGregor's end.

"Janeway," McGregor sarcastically muttered, "I hoped never to see you again!"

He copied her pose and added a little more weight to it before he finally said, "What do you want?"

The atmosphere grew tense on both vessels as the mood of red alert could be heard throughout the bulkheads of both ships and the mighty titian of space was about to be released! How he hated Jainway!

Jainway's face grew with an orgy of anger, with a touch of spicy pleasure as she finally roared on. "You have violated Starfleet rules, trespassed into a dozen star systems, attacked Deep Space Nine and disabled several Federation star ships including the defiant! You are looking at a lot of charges, you are to explain yourself McGregor!"

McGregor looked on, eyes blazing! "The only thing you are getting from me is a warning or I will send your ship straight to hell!" Her threat was not going to get the better of him, and this little female was not going to dictate anything to him. McGregor was strong minded, and he knew this.

Arania interjected with her kind nature and pleasant way at calming things down, her aroma engulfed even the most angriest of people, "Please, both of you, can we try and come to some arrangement?" She paused. Her voice carried the echoes of angels, "admiral, why don't you come onboard and we can sort out these differences peacefully we do not need a fire fight"

Janeway leered at Arania thought the view screen; her angel voice was burned away by the look she portrayed before she transferred her terrifying look towards McGregor. Janeway reeled in anger for all the problems he has caused, his

name and ship has appeared on her radar far too many times. Just like the times when she, herself violated the Temporal prime directive.

The argument continued with Arania caught in the firefight, the poor girl did not know what to do. But at some stage they managed to come to some agreement after arguing for some time, in the end it look the skill and calmness of Arania to finalize matters.

Janeway marched down the steal corridors of the Explorer following the computer guided lights to the ready room located at the highest point on the ship, being escorted by her security team. She marched like a relentless animal on the hunt for its pray not to mention the extreme pleasure she will get for taking this man down, he had been a thorn on her side for many years, not to mention the problems Janeway has caused for him.

"Captain if I may," Tulack urgently interjected in his ready room, "It may be advised for you to keep calm at a moment like this, I have studied your records on the matters at hand..." However, before Tulack had the chance to complete his sentence, Janeway marched in followed by the loud hissing from the door. Somehow, the hissing seemed louder than before, as if she caused it.

Janeway walked right up to his desk and slammed both her hands on it, she leaned over and leered into his face. Her perfume engulfed the entire room and her body heat could boil water one hundred meters away.

Her intimidating posture was not going to get the better of him; in fact he took it rather well. He placed his hot tea onto the surface of his desk and ordered Tulack and Arania out of the room

Silence engulfed the entire room as Janeway stood in a straight posture while her hand hanged down her side holding a computer tablet. She clenched a fist with her free hand before she continued with her ranting. "Your activities have been unacceptable, not to mention the incident at Deep Space Nine. You where ordered to surrender your vessel for an inspection. But you ignored it and transported illegal weapons "

McGregor raised a scrutinising left eyebrow at her statement, "I don't ask what I am transporting and I was unaware that I was transporting weapons." He paused, adding firmness to his tone, "I get the shipment and I deliver it. I don't care what it is nor do I enquire."

Janeway replied with an annoyed look and stubbornness "Well, maybe you should have taken the time to know what you are transporting." She **descized** a hidden smile as she barked, "Now you have to account for your actions."

McGregor replied making sure his leering posture was obvious. "I don't have to account for anything!" he stood up and carried on in a firm and unpolished tone "May I remind you, JANEWAY! I do not work for Starfleet!"

Janeway took a step back and almost displayed surrender in her actions before she leaned forward and attacked him with words, the nastiest way she could. "That's right, but you have preformed illegal activities and attacked Starfleet vessels with high penalties and it will be my pleasure to take you in!"

Believing that she got the upper hand, she folded her arms and changed the subject, as if she wanted to confuse McGregor. "What are you doing out here!"

McGregor grabbed his computer tablet and tossed it over to Janeway, "You are aware of this species?"

She looked at the images and replied in kind.

"We've just been to their home world and rescued the entire population, I have also included the BILL for my work which I expect to be settled at the earliest opportunity" McGregor made a point to hasten the word BILL, but as Janeway looked on, she was almost defiant not to accommodate his needs.

Reeling in delight, Janeway found it hard to hold back her laughter at this ridiculous comment before stating, "If you think Starfleet will pay for this... Kind act of yours, you are mistaken."

McGregor walked closer to her as he pointed out a simple fact, hiding his own crooked smile, "I may work for Starfleet on a part time basis. However, I work for the trading sub-division and not the Military, you have nothing to do with this, and why am I talking to you over this matter, what happened to the original admiral I talked to, we have a... understanding!"

Janeway stared at him before she replied with a slight smile on her face, "He's on vacation, so deal with it. I am in charge and after all, we can't have everything we want now can we."

McGregor stared at her, as if studying and examining, trying to work out what this iron maiden wants. Why did she take the Enterprise E all this way to intercept them?

After careful consideration and a moment of thought, he suddenly realized what she could be after. After all, he was the only one that could solve the impending danger the Federation is currently facing. He stood up, straightening his uniform as Janeway studied his every movement.

He snapped, getting to the point. "Cut the crap Janeway, Why don't you tell me the real reason you have come all this way, does it have something to do with Outer Frontier Station Seven?"

Taken back by the sudden outburst and unexpected name of the station, Janeway realized that the game was up. She frowned, promising herself not to sigh out loud and she needed to come clean about the whole situation.

Chapter 22

(Problems and Solutions)

Nothing frustrated Kathryn Janeway more than when carefully laid plans backfired. In her relentless pursuit for the truth and discipline, McGregor threw her a carved ball that derailed her mode of thinking. The cat was out of the bag and he had something to negotiate with.

It should have been an easy victory and a way to impound in ship and study the technology on it. The Federation had its own problems and having this vessel would have jumped started the technology race far beyond the dreams of Starfleet scientists, especially the huge alien database that was stored in the Explorers computer core. But McGregor screwed up her plans.

Janeway looked on, as she had no choice but to maintain the illusion that she was in control. She listened to his excuses and method of negotiation; perhaps this was the cornerstone of something new.

Stern but uneasy, Janeway looked on; listening to what McGregor had to say.

"I've heard reports that the Borg have decided to focus their efforts on the Alpha quadrant and frontier station seven is next to the trans-warp exit aperture for this sector!" McGregor projected as he searched for the information on the glass-computerized tablet. After he had found the file that he was looking for, he interfaced it into the holographic port and almost immediately, it displayed a 3D representation of the entire station suspended over the desk.

Janeway stood in the middle of the room like an angry Klingon that had his Bat'leth taken away. With cool eyes she looked at McGregor with contempt, "How the hell does he know?" she stirred in her own thoughts.

McGregor could read Janeway's mind like an open book and with that knowledge in mind, he stifles her before she had the chance to speak.

"When you trade in the jobs I have done, you pick up interesting rumours." McGregor said

Janeway looked sceptically at McGregor before replying, "You shouldn't listen to rumours McGregor."

McGregor began to show signs of tiredness about this pointless conversation and knew that this line of conversation was going to get nowhere fast. He knew what Janeway wanted from the start and she often hinted this through countless debates in the past. So he decided to give Janeway an offer she cannot refuse.

"I am well aware that the station has improved hull armour, Quantum Phasic Torpedoes and new Borg technology that you personally helped to install with seven-of-nine." He then leaned forward in anticipation, waiting for her reaction to his next words. "And you even managed to get the plans to build two 1 TW Beam Cannons."

McGregor knew that the Federation had managed to obtain some technology from his vessel by the confrontations they had in the past. But what really pissed him off was the fact that some of his database was leaked beforehand. He was unable to catch the culprit but he did discover the data the Federation managed to obtain had some major flaws. Something he knew about and hid a secret smile.

After a brief pause he added, "I would like to know how you got them?"

Janeway responded in a clipped voice, "That's not your concern..."

"Having trouble getting the cannons to work?" McGregor interjected cutting Janeway in the middle of her sentence knowing what the problem was.

Janeway glanced at him. "There's a part missing!"

McGregor decided to rub the wound with salt and display the Cannon on the holographic image illustrating the missing component, which, apparently the Federation was unable to create.

McGregor explained about the Beam Cannons, its function and ability and he made a point to highlight the weakness in his words. "Those Beam Cannons are the most powerful weapons ever created. They use anti-dark matter atom-photon phase-force technology that can destroy anything with a given specific charge. However they will not work without the Cannon Control Microprocessor Cartridges." McGregor then swung his chair over to his wall cabinet behind his desk and takes out two creamy white cartridges, from a batch of them.

After placing the cartridges on the table, in front of Janeway, as if he was teasing her, he crossed his arms over his chest. "I also know that the Federation's enemies have all disappeared into hiding because of the Borg." He listed the enemies like he was reading from a script, "The Romulans, The Dominion and everyone else I can think of. How fitting that they all pray for the Federations success and leave us to do all the dirty work."

McGregor leaned forward and looked at his cup of tea, but he saw that it was empty on his desktop. A slight hint of compassion went through his mind and hoped this gesture of good will, would get her off his back.

"I am not a cruel man Janeway, I will not stand by and watch the Borg invade this territory," McGregor said, passing the two cartridges to her.

"Insert these into the base of the cannons and they will activate them, however do not attempt to tamper with the chips, they will self destruct if the casing is breached or any attempt is made to read the chips." McGregor made it clear to Janeway, but he didn't see the reaction he hoped for.

"Look, if you insert these into the Cannons, they will activate and you will have the full power to destroy every Borg cube that leaves the Exit-Aperture."

Janeway looked at the small cartridges and suddenly grasped the magnitude of the whole situation; with the Cannons online the Federation will have the power to ward off the Borg.

Janeway paced around the room as she tried to contain her newfound excitement. However she could not help but wonder what kind of condition would be attached to this.

Inpatient for her to leave, he leaned back on his chair, "You better make your way to the Space Station and have them installed. Also Admiral, the bill still needs to be paid and I do need to hand all the Cataline people over to Starfleet. Here are all the details you will need." McGregor finally said as he quickly handed her the computerized tablet.

"You're a sneaky one McGregor, almost like the Ferengi" Janeway said as she took a moment to regain her composure.

She glanced at the information on the tablet before making any decisive decisions. She was intelligent and capable at her job and any mission she was assigned to. This one deserved no lack of judgement on her part, but Janeway needed to look at the big picture and this gift would certainly help push back the Borg invasion, no matter how difficult or scandalous the deal might be.

Before either of them had the chance to speak, a voice bellowed out over the Explorers intercom bypassing any general call announcement. "We're approaching the planet captain."

McGregor regained his composure after the gruff voice startled him over the intercom. The intercom should have signalled a soft tone before anyone could speak,

but due to the damage, this was bypassed. With an annoyed expression, he blabbed out, "Got to get that fixed."

Janeway ignored his comment and did not rise to the bait. "I must be honest with you McGregor, this indeed is a very welcoming gesture." She folded her hands together and sat down. "But you will still need to answer for the problems you have caused."

"Problems? Janeway! You off all people should be concerned about the Borg invasion and not me." McGregor got back up and proceeded in replicating himself another cup of earl-grey tea, not offering anything to Janeway. He turned away from the replicator savouring the rich aroma of the tea before he decided to go to all out war with Janeway.

He activated the console on his deck and displayed neat words of rules and regulations, witness statements and contracts signed by himself and the Federation. He sat down and leaned forward, "according to the Federation Charter, any captain that is accused of a crime, is entitled to fair representation at an appropriate hearing. In times of war, it will be at the admiral's digression to postpone or terminate the allegations." He toggled the files over to Janeway's display and he showed a thin smile, showing just a glimpse of teeth.

"May I safely assume that this would constitute a time of war and after my token of gesture, I am sure you can over-look the infringements." McGregor scanned down the documents until he came to the tactical information and scanner readings that indicated that the Federation ships intercepted his vessel outside Federation space. He was planning on using this as a bargaining chip in case Janeway did not see his case.

"Listen to me McGregor," Her voice was stern and defensive. "I will not be blackmailed, I accept that you have given me a valuable piece of technology, but that will only buy you some time. You will have a trial to go to and you will have the opportunity to state your case there."

McGregor still did not look disturbed. He leaned back on his chair and took leisurely sips from his earl-grey tea, as if he was provoking a maddening response from her.

McGregor knew that the unnecessary debate was going to carry on for some time and used the announcement over the intercom as an excuse to curtail the meeting. He pushed aside his glass-computerized tablet that displayed images and files, demanding his attention. "Janeway, we are approaching a planet and they need me on the command deck. Now I suggest that you should return to your vessel and bring the Space Station online before the Borg invades Federation space. I don't want to clean up the mess if they invade."

Janeway gave him a hard look; she was shocked and annoyed at his method of kicking her off his ship. It was subtle and rude, but she was unable to counter his actions because he marched out of the room without so little consideration to her feelings.

Marching along the stale corridors of the Explorer, Sam contemplated the seriousness of his current situation. For the past few months he has been getting close to a Cataline female he met while the Explorer rescued the stranded individuals from the doomed transport ship.

Named Cann-Li, Sam could not get over the cuteness of her hypnotic pink eyes and for this, he had been dating her from the first day they met. Every time he came in close proximity of her, his heart would feel like it would jump into his

mouth and she could sense this from him. Over time, they eventually began dating more and more until today.

But when he received the request to join her at her quarters, Sam was more than thrilled, like a girl. He wondered if she wanted to talk and progress their relationship further, even... Love. He could not contain himself and could easily accept such a proposal; after all, he was in love with her too.

The fantasy only lasted a moment, but he was not sure what her reaction would be and he often felt that she was idly exploring human relationships. Also he drummed through his mind about why a gorgeous woman like her would be interested in him after so many females blew him off, even the Klingons.

He turned a corner and her door was upon him, as if the door moved and planted itself right in front of him. He swore that this room was not here before, but his memory was not clear anyway, just endless amounts of worry and nervousness streamed in his mind.

He waited, his heart already beating rapidly fast. If he did not do something soon he would almost die from a heart attack. He drifted of into a momentary daze, thinking.

In the few moments they spent together on dates, at the habitat dome, in the mess hall, or general areas of the Explorer, Sam would do anything to spend a few moments with her.

The door in front of him seemed like an impenetrable gate to his life, something that stood there, threatening. He was not sure what to do, should he knock? Should he run away? No he could not run away.

Sam was very conscious of the entire situation within his own little world, his daydreaming led him to the female he has grown to admire and love so much, but all that disappeared in a puff of smoke when the door abruptly opened and a wild eyed and full of energy, Sam stood there out of place.

Startled, Lay-Yi walked past Sam grinning, like she knew what was going to happen and she knew Sam was in for a surprise.

Sam watched Lay-Yi trot of down the corridor full of hope and happiness. He wondered what the two of them were doing. But as he gazed back to the open room, darkness looked back at him, like a hungry mouth waiting to swallow him up. Unflustered, he tried to hide his overpowering nervousness; he could feel the burning sweat ready to burst out of his body like a water balloon being popped.

It was dark and the sweet scent of a flower-like aroma floated out of the room, luring him inside, he could not resist, nor did he want to. After taking a few steps. The door closed behind, startling him for a moment.

He wondered what kind game she had planned for him as they often played games and chatted while on their dates. He mainly lost interest halfway through and gazed upon her pink eyes that always glittered with a flicker of light from the main waterfall in the habitat dome.

Deeper inside the room he felt a presence beside him, he turned and saw Cann-Li. She displayed her colours on her skin with such finesse and beauty that Sam could not draw his eyes from her body. She seemed physically different and more alive then before.

Cann-Li reached out to touch his arm, then held his hand. He felt a electrical surge through his body with her warm touch, he was not sure if it was her that caused this or just his own feelings, but he let her grip linger there.

Sam smiled warmly at her and spoke with a soft voice. "You take by breath away with your stunning beauty, you have taken my heart."

She squeezed his hand knowing that the words he said was from the core of his soul and even if she did not understand the concept, she could clearly see the aroma of love flowing of Sam and into her.

Cann-Li did not answer his words, but moved closer to Sam, drinking in his essence of love that drifted in the air towards her, as if cherishing every moment, revitalising her.

Cataline have the ability to see feelings and emotions coming from any life form, so far, humans and Vulcans have the most beautiful colours, which are calm and sincere, however they find the colours of Vulcans somewhat limited.

Sam's Smoky eyes glittered as the stars whizzed past the windows that created a romantic effect that drew Cann-Li further to him. She smiled, which instantly melted his heart and sent a brief shockwave of essence into the air that she managed to catch, exciting her even more.

Her skin like garments showed off the contours of her body to good effect and fluttered about slightly, even though there was no movement of air, as if it moved on its own.

Sam made a bold move and intentionally snuggled closer to her, he could not hold back his need for her and instantly received the response he surmised she would give. They held each other in a romantic embrace, kissing.

Without a word and no stammer in her actions, Cann-Li undressed Sam with so much love and passion, but displayed a hint excitement. Sam felt as if the fin like clothing on her skin was being energised by his fleshy body.

Totally naked, Sam was tossed onto the bed that was not very soft, he felt a sharp bruising pain on his back, but did not sound it out. He watched her approach himself and could clearly sense her looking over his naked body, pleased at his muscular tone and handsome features.

Sam needed to be careful he could not just force himself on her, as he really wanted to do, but he held back his desires and left her to make the choices on her own time. His love knew no bounds.

She crawled closer to him and the faint white light -from a local flood light on the hull of the Explorer- showed her excited skin clothing. Sam did not hide his genuine admiration. Cann-Li was perfect, and stunning. But this alone was not enough to lure him away from his habits; her friendly and bubbly personality and gentle spirit drew him into love.

She climbed on top of him that caused the most outburst of emotion from Sam. She drank in the sudden burst of pleasure, which in turn fuelled her desire to mate.

Sam could not resist and his hands began to wonder around her body, first he gently caressed the fin-like clothing that tingled and flashed with each touch. Faint static sparked between the touches tingled Sam into complete seduction and it did not take long until his hands adventured under the central grouping of skin around her chest. He fondled her breasts, which released even more static energy and his essence build up like a sun going supernova.

Cann-Li knew what she was doing and had more passion then ever to begin; she needed no help in guiding Sam into her. She almost went supernova herself when she felt him go inside, it was the most central point of essence she could drink up.

Sam immediately noticed the effect while going in, he noticed the fine hairs touching and massaging with no need to move, he was in total bliss and he has never felt anything like this before, he was more then hard, he was in overdrive himself. But then something strange began to happen.

The central group of fin-like clothing began to detach from her chest exposing her breasts and finally resting around Sam. Cann-Li was almost like a butterfly with her wings stretched out around Sam's naked body, holding him. Then he felt even more aroused when she began to secrete bodily fluids out of her chest to enhance the bond. She slowly began to gently push and slide, forcing his essence to release even more powerful waves that she could drink up not noticing that she herself was exciting Sam into the point of ecstasy.

Her skin clothing began to spark massively, turning transparent and into a highway of streaming lights that zigzagged through her skin lighting up the dark room in an array of blue and dazzling white streaking lights. Her main body was unchanged but Sam was reaching his point.

Completely in their grasps, Cann-Li and Sam held on tight, as there roller coaster night continued.

If Janeway didn't have any important work do to, than anyone would not mind her exploring the massive ship that she was currently on. It was an admiral's choice to do things at a leisurely pace and McGregor could do nothing to hasten her departure off his vessel.

Upon arrival to the habitat dome Janeway could not help but be blown away by the sheer size and beauty of it. Her eyes were wild and open, drinking in all the details. She glanced around at the beautiful area that incorporated plants, animals and water. "Is all this real?" she questioned, mouth open.

"Yes, it is part of the eco system for this ship, fresh air, food and water. This is what the old explorers used for long travel" McGregor explained not getting into much detail, he just wanted to get her off his ship.

Blinking her eyes under the faint artificial light emanating from the centre point of the dome high in the air, Janeways attention was soon diverted when playful and soul-searching music drifted through the air.

Flowing through the air flowed a swirling river of music, melodies and tones that needed no words or phrases, only the colourful crystal of sound itself. It drew Janeway in like a moth to a fire. As she listened to the music it almost carried her through her thoughts and memories until her reality of spotting McGregor snapped her out of the illusion.

"That singing?" she said, "It is so enchanting and beautiful, where is it coming from?" she questioned.

"Some of the Cataline, especially the aquatic types like to sing, you get used to it after a while" said McGregor changing his tone halfway through his sentence as he remembers the specific tune sung by a specific person.

He took a momentary glance at the direction of the singing before Janeway diverted his attention to a few objects of unimportance in one of the gardens.

With stern resolve, he was about to mentally push Janeway off his ship, but before he had the chance to turn his thought into action, a situation appeared that he dreaded the entire time she was onboard.

Right in front of Janeway a small Cataline girl ran up to McGregor and gave him the biggest cuddle a girl can give a man. She gave cuteness to her appearance, as she held onto McGregor as tight as she can.

"Thank you for saving me and my mum!" she said in the most heart-warming tone ever heard before. This intern melted Janeways heart and she gave a

huge smile at the irony of McGregor's situation that will be burned into her mind forever.

"McGregor, I never took you for a sentimental type!" she sarcastically said witnessing another side to McGregor.

McGregor tried his best to hide his sudden shock from Janeway as this little girl made him look like a kind and gentle man. This would ruin his reputation in front of everyone. This was an action he did not want to give at all.

With embarrassed look clearly shown on his face, he gracefully pulled the girl away and stood up straight, restoring his posture and proud image. Janeway gave him a few angry looks at his carelessness before she talked to the girl and they carried on.

The momentary struggle with Janeway and McGregor ended as the Enterprise E disappeared into the darkness of space leaving a slight glow of streaking matter as it disappeared into slipstream.

McGregor stood on the nucleus of his vessel as he breathed a sigh of relief knowing he does not have to deal that that woman again. Trouble follows Janeway no matter where she goes and this sudden news about the Borg, which has determined to conquer Federation space, has left more to worry. Of course he had his fair share of run ins with the Borg on the outer rims of known space, however because the ship houses such powerful technology the Borg did not survive the power of the Beam Cannons, no matter how much they attempt to adapt.

Also the Cataline could not be assimilated either, their immune systems are so powerful that they have never contracted diseases and their makeup is very complex, Starfleet has made many medical breakthroughs in the past because of them and having an entire race moving to Earth has made scientists and medical teams very excited.

With the construction of the Alpha Quadrant Frontier Station Seven located between several major races and next to the Borg trans-warp exit aperture this was the sectors main line of defence. If this falls, the whole area is in danger. However the fighting began to heat up over time with the Space Station and the Borg, but with the new processors used to activate the two 1 TW array cannons the Alpha quadrant should be safe again, or so McGregor thought.

With nothing but space behind the panoramic windows, McGregor decided to return to his newly made ready room inspecting more useless reports before he was interrupted by a graceful tone at the door.

"Nice to have the door working properly, come in" he said whispering the first part of the sentence under his breath, but pleased with his own private alcove.

Arania walked in filling the room with a fresh breeze, moving away the horrid cloud of work portrayed by McGregor. "Captain," she gracefully said, "I have a request from two people. Nes-al-sar and Lei-Lie have asked me to tell you that they would like to join the Federation on their arrival to Earth."

McGregor moved his eyes towards her without moving his head and bluntly said, "I have nothing to do with Starfleet and you should have talked to Janeway when she was onboard!" His tone was cold and smug.

Arania gave a slight lost look and a grunt before answering, "Sorry, I missed her." Her answer was equally blunt and smug, as if she was trying to make a point. She often liked to flirt with words.

McGregor placed his eyes back on his glass computer tablet larger than an A4 sized paper. "It's down to you, there is nothing I can do except place a

recommendation." He paused before ending the discussion on a rude note. "Anything else?"

"Yes, we are on our way back to Earth and another starship is on an intercept course with us, they are dropping of someone to oversee the inspection and downloading of the Cataline refugee database. They should be with us in approximately one hour." Arania said before handing over the person's profile.

McGregor swallowed a sigh. Any moment of distraction was considered a respite from his endless reports he needed to fill in and approve. With a wave of his hand, he dismissed Arania before taking a look at the person on the computer tablet.

His heart began to race and a momentary shiver came through his hand. The memories and lifetime commitment came flooding back; he knew this individual and knew her very well. Someone he has not seen for so long and someone he would prefer not to see. Someone who has defied him in the past and has equal resolve that could match his own ego. However his anger cannot go unforgiving but he maintained the grip, though he felt as if he was drowning

McGregor sat in silence as a whirlwind of joy and anger swept through him. He held an image in his hand as he looked out of the windows over the breathtaking view of the entire ship. This was the reason he saved the Cataline people, this was the main reason he risked his life and crew, as if he owed it to someone.

He placed the image back into his draw located beside the window, not forgetting to lock it behind him. He does not want anyone to see this picture because his memories and life was in that image and it was something private to him.

Without care or consideration for a man of his nature, Greg walked in; being a typical weapons officer he marched over to him and gave him the status reports on the weapons systems.

After going over the systems and weapons he finally said in a chopped voice, careful not to over step his bounds. "I heard that she is coming onboard? Will you be OK sir, I know the story and I will be here to help."

McGregor gazed at him with strong resolve but replied in a friendly manor, "It's been a long time, I'm sure she is her normal self, but I did ask her not to join Starfleet, damn stubborn woman."

Being cautious, he departed McGregor sanctuary and left him to his own devices, he will need time alone and it's going to be a very hard trip back to Earth.

Arania was about to enter the ready room, but Greg pulled her back and explained the situation, trying to offer as little information as possible. This is personal issue and cannot be discussed with anyone even her.

Arania frowned with grave concern; nothing like this has ever put McGregor of his course before and forced him to be alone. However she obeyed her commander's wishes but still felt worried for a man she cares for deeply.

One hour passed and Nes-al-sar deliberately walked into Arania in the dull looking passageways excited about her request to join Starfleet.

"I've talked to McGregor and there's nothing that could be done." She paused, noticing Nes-al-sar's disappointment. "But, McGregor said that he would be happy to offer a recommendation. But I will need to speak to Captain Kim of the Rhode Island who will be arriving shortly, he should be able to help." Arania finally said, offering hope to Nes-al-sar who was clearly displaying a burning desire to join Starfleet.

Grinning like a girl, Nes-al-sar offered her thanks before they both departed on their separate ways.

Chapter 23

(The Scream)

The Explorer hovered around the Class M planet for a few more weeks as the crew scurried around the surface gathering supplies and minerals. The journey to Earth was going to be a long and tiring one, Especially for McGregor who needed to keep the peace and organise a maximum return on profit for the raw material science teams found down there.

Although it was a Class M planet with hazel-blue skies and clean fresh air, a strange undertone of oily feel could be felt on the skins of all evolved in the expedition.

The sun beams raced through the sky lighting up the crystal sands and the cool breeze of the wind kept the visible temperature down to a minimum, when night falls, many of the crew could not comprehend why the temperature would rise so high. It was so bad in one instance that a few needed to be beamed back onboard the Explorer for exhaustion, but during the day, the activity bustled with the roar of Space Cars and people on the ground.

"Grid seven-eight-nine poses the most concentration captain, we can set-up the enhancers and transport the raw material to the cargo bay." Said the science officer who gestured towards the COM unit, as if trying to project his enthusiasm through the airwaves.

McGregor sat at his station as he browsed through the numbers that flashed on his small screen attached to the armrest. He took an oversized bite out of an apple he replicated a few minutes prior to his shift, after he looked over some medical records regarding Sam.

A Few weeks before, a scared and worried Sam was the luckiest man alive after he had an intermit time with his new found soul mate, Cann-Li. But his joy and new found optimisation did not last long when he noticed that his skin had changed to a strange undertone of blue with a faint glow of white.

He stared in awe at his predicament and did not know what to do; it was clear as day, although he stood in the dark with Cann-Li sleeping with complete satisfaction on her face. She gracefully opened her eyes and was shocked to see the state Sam was in.

"Wow! Sam, you have taken the Calrame." She sat up, the soft warm sheets flowed along her body and all her skin clothing had restored to its previous positions. "I thought only our species can accept it..."

"What's happened to me?" He asked in complete mystery, his voice stuttered and choppy.

Sam walked over to her chair and sank into it, not sure what to do, his skin glowed like a glow fly and he could not walk down the passageways of the explorer like this...

"It's called the Calrame effect, our bodies have shared fluids through the skin and in our blood, you are part me, as I am part you" She stood up; her graceful figure glistened with the light coming off the hull of the vessel. She gracefully walked up to Sam and touched him on the shoulder. The effect was immediate, his skin tone returned to normal, but Sam was sure he could still see a hint of blue in his skin, like a faded suntan.

Sam looked in awe, rubbing his skin, his only words could be, "How did you do this?" But she returned a graceful smile as she kissed him.

But the effect would return to haunt Sam as he worked in the Space Car bay a few hours later.

Leisurely working on the engine compartment and inventorying a few supplies, he noticed the faint tone of blue appearing on his hand, graceful but not noticeable to anyone. But as time went on, his skin suddenly glowed with a faint spark of light.

Cann-Li did explain to him that the effects would settle the longer they are together, or apart. But being apart will incur withdraw symptoms, as both parties shared their bodies with each other. But he was worried and lucky, as people did not notice his little episode as he tried to find a dark spot to hide until the glowing vanished.

Chance would be a fine thing as he hid in the corner, keeping out of sight, Greg happened to notice the glowed face Sam. "SAM! Hell, what has happened to you! You should see the doctor!"

With panicked hands and gestured waves, Sam dragged Greg behind his workstation as he saw McGregor march in. This was trouble, big trouble.

Peeking over the top of the desk and spying on McGregor, Sam explained what happened, that he made love to one of the Cataline and this was one of the side effects, if not short lived.

Greg could not contain his surprise and it was clearly written on his face, no matter how he tried to hide it. He often noticed Sam trying to go after Arania, but as he rubbed the excess oil from his face, he knew Sam finally had done it.

"If McGregor catches you, you're in a lot of trouble, he has his reasons and personal reason why his crew should not get involved." Greg explained as he kept his eyes on McGregor, who marched around like a businessman, checking, inspecting and ordering.

"Where is Sam?" McGregor said to one of his associates in the background as Sam's face changed with horror.

Sam backed down behind the deck, shock and horror filled his glowing face and he did not know what to do, "By god, my god, He's going to throw me out of the nearest air lock."

While they attempted to elude McGregor, a voice bellowed out above them, like God himself spoke down to his minions, "Sam, Greg, What are you two doing down there?"

His question was like the Ten Commandments; he kneeled in complete worry, *Could he see the glow in my face? Does he know about my relationship? Damn him, it's my life!*

Sam stood up, prepared for the worst. But as he stood, McGregor stared right back, as if he did not notice the glowing skin.

McGregor handed him a computerized tablet with some specs displayed on its screen, "I need this completed before we arrive at the Plant." He walked away, his uniform impeccably clean and straight, as if he was going to an important meeting.

Sam looked on, with confusion filling every nerve. *Did he not notice the glowing skin?*

But as he looked at his hands, the standard human pink and pail white was unscathed and normal. He let out a long and dry sigh at the relief that flowed through his body. He looked on with the biggest grin a man could possible have. Greg patted him on the back and left the area after finally saying, "You are lucky this

time Sam, But you need to be careful... There is a lot you don't know about the Cataline."

Orbiting the planet, at the present time, the survey team continued there scans for the raw material and Sam and Greg decided to disregard their jobs and pleasure themselves in a friendly game of racing through the canyons at great speed.

The light from the local sun was only slightly brighter than the shine from a distant star located far out of the solar system that added heat to the entire realm of this sector of space, just perfect for a race through the canyons.

Racing and spinning around, the space cars recklessly twisted and turned as both people battled it out to the mentally marked point.

"This is what I like about these things, you can drive them like hell, unlike the shuttle crafts that can't do shit!" said Greg narrowly missing a hanging cliff that he spotted amongst the blue sky and sandy orange desert. It didn't take long before they ended up whizzing at six hundred Kilometres an hour through the forest hitting all the tops of the trees as they go.

"Damn, these are fast, almost had me then!" said Sam, narrowly missing a large tree.

Then, as fast as the sun came, they both ran into a wall of rain that plastered the windows with water. Luckily they had sonic wipers that removed the water so they can carry on with their games. However their fun was curtailed short when McGregor opened a holographic COM channel. His image appeared on the windscreen, cold and stern, but in a convenient location as not to block anyone's view.

"You two, back to the ship and stop messing around!" he said from the nucleus of the Explorer. With a subtle nod, they steered their Space Cars to the Explorer.

Ever since his little light show from the Calrame effect he received from his love Cann-Li, he had always been one step ahead of everyone, making sure he does not light up like last time. But as time went on, the effects began to dissipate. But his connection with the Cataline female drew ever so closer and got to a point where he would like to settle down on earth and start a family. He has seen the data reports that the Cataline and humans are very compatible, and he always enjoyed a life with one of them, especially now, after he is romantically involved with one.

But he needed to keep his relationship under wraps from McGregor, until he can leave the Explorer and start a life on Earth.

Meanwhile deep in the depths space, the anomaly began to swell in physical size and before long a static cloud of black mist emanated from the horizon, indicating that something is about to come through! No one had any idea about the horror that was about to enter the Alfa Quadrant, chasing the Explorer and all the Cataline people.

The Explorer carried on at maximum warp after the repair arms polished off their repairs to the hull leaving it brand new like it left space dock for the first time.

"All systems are one hundred percent captain, and we have managed to load up all the supplies discovered on the planet," informed Tulack as he scrutinised the repair teams' work with a close eye.

“Good, any news on the Rhode Island?” said McGregor, slightly anxious about the passenger it was carrying.

“They are on an intercept course and should be with us in a few minutes.” Tulack replied.

McGregor leaned back on his chair, holding his cup of replicated Earl-Grey tea, he needed the aroma from the tea to calm him down, especially now. A lifetime of commitment and change was about to walk onto his vessel and he; he held a slight spark of anxiety to the whole situation. He has not seen her in a very long time, and questions raced through his mind.

Deep down in the holding cells of the Explorer, the Krainer stood leering at the security officer through the force field. They decided not to lock him in a standard cell with the steel door because it was more fitting to allow the Cataline to torment the creature, such resolve McGregor showed towards it. But as the security officer looked on, he tried his best to hide the growing fear that this disgusting creature was growing inside of him. Without warning Kraile-li walked in startling the young officer out of his staring match. He was told time and time again, not to interfere or look at prisoners, but this creature was so revolting, he could not keep his eyes away.

Kraile-li smiled at the guard and cleared her authorisation to talk with the creature, however something deep in her soul had a connection with this Krainer.

The Krainer leered at her and smiled, showing its diseased teeth. “I smell that you are fresh! I enjoyed entering you, when I get out of here, I will have you again...”

The sick creature stirred the already seeded hate and dread inside her stomach, almost like it seeded the horrendous feeling she now feels. This weighed heavily on Kraile-li who stood at the cell door, staring at the beast that molested her. She built up a massive amount of energy in her body for this moment. It took some time, but now she is ready to get her revenge.

She stepped closer to the cell, her blue fragile frame stood ramrod straight against the Duranium bulkheads of the room. The LED lighting on the ceiling reflected her silky skin clothing and long pointed ears from the upper side of her head all the way to the top as she prepared for her payback.

She was in enraged to do something, she knew the Cataline had the power to inflict great pain and they don't have to touch their intended victim. But it required a lot of energy and time, something she had plenty off and Kraile-li made sure she saved up her energy for this very moment.

She leered at the creature, feeling its helplessness. She could still remember the horrid ordeal it did to her and the immense pleasure it displayed, as if the Krainer could do nothing else but torment Kraile-li to the point of despair.

She needed payback, even though it would not erase the horrid things it had done.

She bent her head ever so slightly to her left and gracefully opened her mouth after taking a deep breath. Suddenly and without warning, she let off an incornhensible high-pitched scream; a sound no human, alien or machine can create. The sound was at such a high pitch it could be heard from several decks, but this was minimal compared to the damage it caused. A stack of glass-computerized tablets that was stacked on the desk shattered, sending a flurry of debris flying around the room, the metal bulkheads howled and vibrated causing massive power disturbances that blasted lights and damaged systems. The scream was so loud the

Krainer could do nothing but curl up in the corner as tremendous pain as its ears almost melted on the onslaught.

Alerted to the cry, Arania rushed in and covered up Kraile-li's mouth to stifle her progress, "What are you doing? You must never do that on a human ship!" She looked on with worried eyes as Kraile-li swallowed hard, then she turned to the security officer who laid unconscious and in a coma on the floor.

The intercom chimed in and Arania received a hail from McGregor, "what the hell just happened? Over thirty of my crew have just collapsed in a coma, we are getting damage reports and the medical bay is full of people."

Kraile-li wished that someone could have turned back the clock and prevented her from doing this. To her dismay, the fragile human was on the floor bleeding from his nose and ears. She had no idea how the scream caused so much damage, she just wanted her revenge. Now as Arania frantically tried to explain the situation to McGregor, she crawled closer to the unconscious guard and a wave of unstoppable regret and sorrow flooded out.

"I'm Sorry, I'm Sorry, I'm Sorry!" She knelt down beside the unconscious officer trying to hold him, praying he will return to her. "I didn't know, I am sorry, please don't die!"

Arania asserted herself as she communicated with the computer, "Computer, transport officer Vanguard to the medial bay."

Kraile-li held on to the officer tightly, then with a flash of light, the officer dematerialised bit by bit as his molecules vanished, like tiny galaxies whirling around in her arms until nothing was there. She held her head in shame and wanted to die. Arania knelt down and tried to comfort her, but the snarling and mocking sounds drifted from the Krainer who had recovered.

Arania took Kraile-li out of the holding cells and explained the severity of her actions, "You can never do that around humans, they are very fragile and it can kill them instantly, we as a Cataline species can never do that scream, it can kill humans very easily. It was done once before and twenty humans died! We must inform everyone not to do it, it's our highest moral rule."

Kraile-li looked at Arania with wet eyes, her sorrow and regret could clearly be seen, "I am sorry Arania I did not know!"

McGregor stood in the medical bay as he towered over his injured crewmen. As Kraile-li entered the room, he turned and faced her, his face was cold as ice, "Don't tell me, you used the high pitched scream!"

Arania stumbled back, although she tried her best to hide her surprise, "You know about the scream?"

McGregor did not respond to the question at hand, he only stared and returned his concerning gaze back to his crewman who laid out on the medical bed with instruments beeping around him.

"Are they going to be OK, doc?" His voice bubbled in his chest, but McGregor kept his voice even.

"It's hard to tell, but they seem to be out of critical condition, their ear drums were destroyed and internal damage was found, I managed to repair most of it, but it's up to them now." Michel moved forward, looking diverted. "I've heard reports about this scream being used before on Earth, due to the mass hysteria and damage, I suggest you do not do it again."

Kraile-li sank her head inside her hands as she sat beside the young security officer; trying to force her energy and sprit into his body in an attempt heal the mental damage she had caused. *If only he would recover.*

Michel walked of as he took the results with him towards his next victim suffering from the same symptoms. With this new problem, Michel was not in the best of moods. But he was curious about the scream and this offered enough opportunity to study it.

McGregor dissolved into the background as he explained to Arania that he needed to make preparations to intercept the Rhode Island, there was nothing he could do and he did not want to hinder the efforts of Michel's treatment, but he did not want any more deaths on his hand and held a steady resolve in his stride as he walked away.

"How does he know so much about us?" Arania questioned herself as she tried to buff her stunned surprise. She often had some idea that McGregor knew a lot about her race, but she did not know the extent of his knowledge and how he acquired it in the first place, it was one of those mysteries that surrounded McGregor like a stormy cloud over a village.

Days later, the scene on the Rhode Island portrayed the look of a typical Starfleet atmosphere, everyone in uniform, the crew sat at their stations performing everyday tasks to the top of there performance. Nothing can be said about Captain Kim who sat proud at his captain's chair. He worked long and hard for his post and the experience he gathered during Voyager's trip home gave him much experience and respect from everyone at Starfleet; his command came swiftly after a few obstacles along the way.

"Captain, we are approaching the Explorer," informed the helms officer, his tone was professional and stern.

Kim heaved himself up from his chair; he often liked to spend extra time admiring his position and he resented leaving his post from time to time. But he was more than happy on this occasion, his dream was to see a Class D1 Explorer ship and this was the moment he had waited for.

The crew looked in awe at the ever-growing sight as the massive Explorer grew to incredible size on the view screen.

"Take a good look people, you will be lucky if you see an Explorer class ship like this once in your lifetime, cherish this moment. From what I understand, there is only two still left. One in a museum and this one!" Kim advertised, hiding his boyish grin at the sight, *now his time for exploration was about to start.*

"We are receiving a hail," said his comm officer.

After a brilliant flash of light that energised on the screen, McGregor's face appeared larger then life, Kim stepped back slightly, as if McGregor appearance was a little too close for comfort, "Greetings Caption Kim of the Rhode Island."

McGregor tone was stern and basic for a man of his age and position, but he still portrayed the businessman appearance.

Kim replied with his classic smile and it did not take long for them to work things out and prepare their respected jobs.

Nes-al-sar looked through her window at the approaching Rhode Island. Its bright colours and unique Starfleet style ships sent excitement throughout her body. She missed the Enterprise E, but that became history once she glanced her excited eyes on the small Rhode Island that grew larger and larger.

In a sudden burst of excitement, she grabbed her friend Lei-Lie in a bid to show her this remarkable ship, they both stared deep through the window, almost pressing their faces to the glass as they became hypnotised and obsessed with it. Its sheer size and design was captivating these two individuals.

"It's the most beautiful thing I have ever seen, such wonderful ships these humans make!" Lei-Lie chirped as she almost burst out with excitement.

"I want to command one of these someday," She said in a trance before reciting the Rhode Island specs, "The Rhode Island, 180 meters long, 43 meters wide, 276,000 metric tons, Duranium-Tritanium composite and 8 decks" she recited, getting a funny look from Nes-al-sar.

Lei-Lie stared at the vessel in complete fascination and favouritism, completely unable to feel the numbing sensation of the weakness and pain inflicted by her Krainer contamination. But her past did not seem important anymore, she had a light, a guiding star, it was Starfleet.

As the Rhode Island made preparations to deliver the representative from Earth, word was underway to depart, but this scheduled departure would take a few hours at best, just enough time for an overexcited Kim to come onboard and snoop around. This has been one of his long dreams, and he loved to follow them, no matter where they led.

Sat in an impeccably clean office, thanks to many hours of cleaning and restoration, Kim fidgeted on his chair. He had the lucky chance to be in the company of a beautiful young creature, Arania.

He may have been sent to go over a few items of an important nature, but that did not stop the heat that was building up inside himself, as he sat opposite her. It was not surprising, he always adventured into other species when he was on Voyager and he always had a slight interest in these blue fragile creatures before he ended up stranded in the Delta Quadrant.

"So we have a name for your species now!" Kim said trying to make small talk with Arania

"Cataline, that's a very nice name for your race..." he gave a shocked pause when he carried on reading the text on the tablet, toggling down to the molestation and rape. The text contained more information about the treatment of the Cataline people than he wished to know, but he carried on regardless.

"We have sent the same information to Starfleet so they know of any potential problems and offer any support my race might need" Arania gradually said.

After shaking the frozen look from his face Kim said, "That's why Jasmine has come onboard, she will download and assess all the Cataline people and update Starfleet records once the Explorer reaches Earth."

With the correct answer Arania gave Kim a heart-warming smile that almost drowned him in love, although he forgot for a moment that he was already married! Ho, how he loved to be single right about now.

"Jasmine?" Arania questioned as her ears twitched with the tone of the question, such an un-normal, yet interesting name.

"Yes, she was ordered to perform this task, she should be onboard now, Umm, You might want to prepare yourself once you see her." Kim replied as he held back a secret.

Arania's mode of thinking suddenly diverted as she remembered Nes-al-sar's request. This was the perfect opportunity to ask, "I have two people that would like to join Starfleet, would you be happy to take them on your ship back to Earth, it will be faster and I am hoping you can temporarily have them in your crew so they can gather experience."

Arania gave Kim another computer tablet with their profiles on it. Kim looked at it and realising that they were Cataline, he jumped at the chance to have them onboard. After all, some rumours have begun to spread around Starfleet ships that having a Cataline onboard will bring some kind of good luck and help boost moral. This has happened many times in the past and if a Starfleet captain was given the opportunity, they would normally accept. However they still needed to go through proper channels, *it was not a -Fancy that and want it- thing.*

Kim looked at Arania trying to portray a serious look, however he was admiring her mind and beauty at the same time, "OK, I see no reason why not, however they will be treated as the same as everyone else and as soon as we reach Earth I will pass them over to Starfleet."

Arania gave a small smile before standing up and leaving McGregor's ready room. Like a moth drawn to a flame, Kim's eyes followed Arania as she left, giving him a slight secret shiver down his spine.

"That's one attractive race!" he said getting a sudden shock as McGregor walked in overhearing his sly comment.

"I would watch it Kim, They may be cute on the outside, but they are just as bad on the inside." McGregor said trying to startle Kim boyish fantasies.

"McGregor!" Kim exclaimed, feeling slightly honoured at meeting the captain of this colossal sized ship. "This is a very impressive vessel you have"

"Thanks" replied McGregor, "I cost a lot of money to acquire and do up, kind of a hobby." For McGregor, the ship was like a hobby, some people like to do up cars and some people like to collect model starships. But he liked to build up an old wreck and then use it for business. He often thanked his lucky stars that he managed to stumble upon the repair station when he did.

"Just to let you know, your passenger is onboard and there has been a request by Arania to take Nes-al-sar and Lei-lie with me, with your permission." Informed Kim

McGregor walked around his desk and replicated himself a fresh cup of tea; he noticed that his other cup was cold. He swirled it around trying to remember who the individuals were before he eventually remembered.

"Yes, I remember now, I have no problem." With a pause, he thought about the other passenger. So with a leering look, he finally said, "So, Jasmine is onboard?"

Chapter 24

(Jasmine)

This wasn't what she's had in mind when she boarded the Explorer. She wanted to perform her duties and hide away from prying eyes.

After she was called to this god-forsaken ship, she would have to be the centre point for attention. It wasn't this that bothered her, but it was the fact she will have to spend her time with HIM. McGregor.

Yanked from her duties on a vessel that she'd settled down in and grown accustomed to, Jasmine had been sent to the Explorer to... inventory the Cataline people. "Inventory, what a pleasant name for it, why not pack them in a box and send them."

Standing alone at her workstation somewhere down the depths of the Explorer, she preferred to work out of sight. She had a lot of work to do and being disturbed would enrage her more.

Jasmine's journey was not the best she had experienced before. Being a hybrid from two species caused her a lot of publicity, especially on the trip.

She had locked herself in her quarters with Kim finding any excuse to interrupt her on the way; she finally had to lock the door physically to keep him and members of his crew at bay, but this only caused a security scare and before Jasmine knew it she had five men barging into her room, all keen on helping her. Perhaps with all these Cataline, she will be left alone on the Explorer. Chance would be a fine thing.

But being a Starfleet officer meant that she needed to follow her orders like everybody else. There was a chance for a promotion and it was something Jasmine strived to get, her total focus was promotions and improving herself up the ranks. She was doing a good job until they shoved her on the ship with McGregor.

Although she knew McGregor for the better part of her life, developments occurred during her childhood that implanted a seed of anger and spite towards the man. Now she had her anger in check, but she could only stand McGregor for a short time. Her bright green eyes blazed at the memories they had all those years ago, her mother and family. It was all perfect until her mother was killed. Such a tragedy that traumatised her while she was young. But McGregor helped her, despite the fact he could have caused her death.

With a distant smile on her face, she toggled through the huge database of Cataline that was rescued from their home world, Jasmine felt an icy shiver creep up her back as she scrawled to the crew reports about the ill fated treatment and molestation by the alien race, the Krainers. She could not control the shivers, as if she was somehow connected to the Cataline.

She straightened herself up as she tidied her Starfleet uniform that only covered half her body; fine fin type skin covered the rest of her body as her long black hair with natural blue highlights flowed down her back.

All she needed to do was to take a stroll around the corner and this will draw the attention of the many hundreds of Cataline who are walking around the vessel. So far she had stayed out of the spotlight, but now she will have to come out of hiding and people will notice her.

As the journey progressed towards Earth at low warp, McGregor kept himself wrapped up in business matters. The documents were not going to sort themselves out and countless entries flashed on his desk terminal demanding his attention.

There were no attacks and no people to rescue, so for a man who just blunders into someone else's space and steals a civilisation, McGregor did not seem to know or care about personal matters.

As a sign of good faith, Jasmine extended her hand in a warm gesture with an invitation to accompany her for dinner to try and tie up all the loose ends and end the hardship and ill will they felt towards each other.

But McGregor predictably brushed aside the invasion leaving Jasmine in a very annoyed mood for the rest of the day. At least she knew that McGregor would be busy working on his own and would not unexpectedly turn up and cause problems for her. She knew him well and planned everything before hand, like they are one person, knowing each other's moves in harmony. But she thought she was better at predicting his movements.

On the same day, Cann-Li walked along the ships corridors and unexpectedly uncounted McGregor as he stepped out of his quarters. Cann-Li felt as if she was a child who accidentally disturbed her father in his study and tried her best to hide the guilty look that was clearly written on her face. She knew by Sam's discussions that McGregor would go nuclear if he ever found out he were involved with her. She could not understand his resentment to a relationship, perhaps Sam should be working and not playing, or perhaps McGregor has some relationship problems with himself and he would be happy to take his frustration out on Sam.

But as she stood there with the cold-faced man who looked back at her, she flashed her most dazzling smile at him. "Captain, McGregor, Nice to finally meet the person that saved my me and my friend from the transport, I wanted to speak to you in person and offer my gratitude, but I was unable to find you."

McGregor narrowed his eyes and stared at her, "I have been a busy man, everyone on this ship wants to thank me personally, and I don't have the time."

Like a ferret that just popped his head out of his burrow, McGregor sneaked back into his quarters and locked the door behind himself. Cann-Li stood there stunned, as if her saviour was just a common person. She showed much respect for him, but her recent encounter has left her with more questions about this person.

She was not sure what McGregor was capable of, but from the tails that Sam told her, he would not approve of their relationship in the slightest, even if it were none of his business. But she cast away her sudden and unexpected fear and carried on down the corridor with a pressing matter that she needed to have confirmed. She was unsure about the results and did not know that her species and humans could be a perfect match; she was carrying a secret that gave her joy and fear.

Cann-Li progressed at a slow rate along the lower passageways, out of the praying eyes of many who walked along the corridors. She did not expect to run into anybody, nor was she ready for the shock she was about to walk into. She just wanted to get to the medical bay.

But as she turned a corner and looked up, a sudden figure stood beside a control console. A dash of dusky and exotic beauty stood before her, which shocked all reality out from under Cann-Li. She did not expect to run into this creature.

In shock and total disbelief, she stood in awe at the creature before her, her stomach felt amiss and she couldn't hold back the profound pounding of her heart. She was looking at the future, a view that will change her view about humans forever.

Although she was still standing at a distance, her detailed features could not be seen against the low light, but her figure and shape was unmistakable.

With a hint of elegance, Jasmine glided her hands over her console as she toggled through the endless list of individuals that need to be vetted and catalogued for immigration to Earth. She was confounded by the sheer number of Cataline McGregor was able to save and even thrilled that he would do such a thing. But the good thought only lasted for a moment until she realised that McGregor would only do this for his own gain and not out of the kindness of his heart, she knew him very well.

The rumour that Jasmine had eyes on the back of her head was well proven when she could see a figure staring at her in the shadow down the faintly lit corridor. She gave a long sigh before she mutters to herself, "I am not a freaking goldfish!" She carried on shifting through pages ignoring her presence.

With an overwhelming curiosity that she felt she inherited from Sam, Cann-Li walked closer to the figure. Under normal circumstances she would have dissolved into the darkness, to keep away from danger. Cann-Li almost shivered in her position as she remembered escaping from the vile Krainers while she was trapped on her home world, a fate she could still remember clearly while she was preparing her cocoon cycle with fear and dread filling her every nerve.

As she ponderously walked over to the figure, the individual's features slowly became apparent the closer she got, it got to a stage that she was not mistaken about her race. She was clearly a hybrid.

Cann-Li strolled ever so closer, drinking in all the details from this hybrid that stood tall and proud. She was very beautiful in all her features, from her sleek slim frame, to the radiant glow of her skin. Her Starfleet uniform was mixed in with skin clothing. While the Starfleet uniform only covered the top half of her body and reached halfway down her arms, the rest of her body was covered in fin type clothing. She was clearly a Cataline and Human hybrid.

"How was this possible?" thought to herself. As she looked at her features, she could clearly make out that she was in her mid twenties and very healthy. She felt a storm of relief that this creature was not born on her home world, as the Krainers would have concentrated their focus on this girl alone.

She then gazed further down her body and saw her short skin skirt that flowed at different lengths, made from the same fragile skin material.

Her colour markings did not resemble a typical Cataline individual but she was more advanced in appearance. Her fin like clothing was a mixture of Cataline blue and human pink, with black highlights along the edges. Her main body colours almost dazzled Cann-Li with faint textures that intimately weave themselves out of the basic tone of blue and pink which surrounded her entire body.

She hesitated as she approached the creature not knowing what to do. She had never comprehended the idea that the Cataline could mate with another race, because all the races that raped and molested them did not get any of the females pregnant or they could seal their eggs to prevent them from dying.

She knew all too well that having children was the most important thing; she knew the limitations the Cataline had. She also knew that a Cataline could only have six children in their life times, and the alien contamination of eggs had always killed the entire batch. She had the ability to close the path to the eggs to keep them protected, but under extreme circumstances some females have been known to release the entrance and lose her ability to bear children. Each alien race had not been able to fertilize the eggs, but apparently humans are compatible.

She was worried, but not now, she was unable to close the entrance to her own eggs when she made love to Sam, and now she could feel something happening inside her body.

Jasmine, who was working on the computer terminal sensed Cann-Li staring her and she returned the favour and looked directly at her. She flinched for a moment after seeing her face, the black spots on the forehead could clearly be seen disappearing down her neck and behind her uniform, the patterns on her face, the bright green eyes and the long pointy ears gracefully reached to the top of her head, took the Cataline female by surprise.

"Can I help you?" Jasmine said before Cann-Li could utter a word.

She didn't know what to do, she just looked in a trance and then without thinking she replied, "Who are you?"

Unflustered by the question, Jasmine turned her head back towards her terminal and decided to give her an answer, "I am Jasmine." Beeping on the keyboard indicated that Jasmine carried on with her work, blanking the young Cataline female who looked at her in a trance.

By this time Cann-Li was clearly not thinking, she did not know how to cope with the sudden realisation and unexpected communication she had with this creature. She was just looking in awe before Jasmine turned and spoke. Jasmine was so beautiful, she felt small in comparison and how can she exist?

Without thinking and mindlessly blabbing, she said, "How are you?" She soon realized her embarrassment and turned away, hiding the glow that appeared on her face.

That question made Jasmine a little annoyed. She has been on a long trip and hassled by every damn man or thing on the way, and for this creature to say that just annoyed her more. Not only this, she needed to catalogue her entire race.

She brushed her long black and highlighted hair behind her ear and replied, "Well," she leaned on the computer terminal with both hands, "Lets see, fifteen humans tried to chat me up. A Vulcan tried to do the Pon Farr on me and, ho yes, I remember now, A Klingon tried to initiate a mating ritual as well!"

Jasmine looked at Cann-Li and carried on with a slight sarcastic tone that only McGregor could possibly possess, "Apart from that, I am OK." She hoped the comment will throw the young lady off guard and she will simply go away. *Go away?* She did not look like she was planning on leaving; she needed to think from a different view.

Someone walked around the corner and Jasmine gave her such a look of scorn, she quickly walked away leaving them alone once more, "What do you want?" She grumbled.

Cann-Li then held her hands together and needed to ask the most burning questions on her mind, although she already knew the answer. But she needed to hear Jasmine say it. "What species are you?"

Jasmine looked back with a small element of surprise in her overwhelmingly beautiful face, she wondered if this individual was completely thick, or damaged somehow, but she extended her tone, "Why don't you guess?"

She froze in place with nothing to say, it was easy to say and she finally managed to fight the words out. "Are you human and Cataline?..." She froze.

Then Jasmine broke the idle silence of the ship and interjected, "I'm a human and..." She paused for a moment while she toggled down the data on her computer console, finding out the name of the species.

"Cataline," she looked pleased with the name, "I'm a Cataline and human hybrid."

The Cataline female stood back in silence as she tried to grasp the reality of her words. Again without thinking she blabbed out, "Are you the only one?"

"No, I have two brothers and three sisters same age as me." She cursed herself for giving such information away like candy, *why did I say that?*

Cann-Li was shocked; she knew that she would only be able to bear one child at a time, but knowing that Jasmine has five other siblings added even more uncertainty that she could be in more trouble than she realized.

The Explorers corridor hummed in the blackness of silence and before either individual realized it, a storm of people rushed in to see Jasmine. They heard about this hybrid, and it did not take long for word to spread around like wildfire.

Jasmine's family was the first of her kind on Earth to mix and only consisting of six children, Jasmine was a member of a very special family. However she didn't feel honoured and wanted to play out a normal life that many of her siblings have managed to do on Earth.

Earth was cluttered with so many different races that no one really paid any attention to her or her family. But being on the explorer put her into the limelight like a pop star.

Lolai-yu received the news about this creature and she could not believe her eyes when she finally spotted a glimpse of her on the command deck later on that day, "How is this possible, no other race can produce children with us unless its our own?"

However this comment didn't reassure Cann-Li who first talked to Jasmine, she indeed had something to worry about. Humans are able to reproduce with the Cataline, and Jasmine was the proof. She ran off towards the medical bay with panic and joy.

Chapter 25

(New Life)

The cell sparked with the life force of love, and then it grew into a mass of cells and then it expanded into a strange and wonderful life form. It may have been a passion of love and an unknown reaction to nature's way, but the process has begun and there was no stopping it.

Cann-Li knew something was growing inside her, she could feel it in her soul that was being shared with something else. A experience that engulfed her in joy and worry.

It may have been a short time on her clock and she too was shocked at the sudden development, but she needed answers and was more worried about the health of the children that were growing inside her. Knowing about Jasmine helped her understand what her children's appearance would be and she was relieved that no abomination was being created. Humans have the key for beautiful creatures, and they were growing inside of her.

She ran to the medical bay and almost knocked over Michel who was trying to clean his pile of papers on his desk. Even though he had computers and glass-computerized tablets, he always liked the feel of a white paper in his hands. "Hay, hay, Calm down there..."

Michel took a moment to look up her name on his database before attending to her, "Cann-Li you should be careful not to run in here, you could hurt someone or yourself. What's the problem?"

He grasped her arm in a gentle way and moved her to one side in order to find out what the problem was. He could clearly see her facial expressions on her face and she was in some kind of distress, although she looked tired from running.

"Doctor Michel," she said in a shy and timid tone. "Can humans give us children?"

Michel did not expect a question like that, his mind buzzed with even more questions he wanted to ask her.

Cann-Li looked excited and secretive; through she would not explain why Michel's mind was calculating the possibilities. *Someone does not run into the medical bay and ask if a human can give you a baby unless you have a secret to tell.*

He tried his best to hide his smile, he always wanted to study a Cataline and human hybrid and this was the moment for discovery. He crossed his arms and processed what he was about to say, but the words did not reach his mouth; McGregor stepped in from the shadowy confines of the medical bay with Arania behind.

"Yes they can! Not only that, the Cataline females are extremely fertile towards humans and if a Cataline is pregnant by a human, she will develop all her embryos together, but they can only have a maximum of six children, after that, they have used all their embryos." McGregor stepped forward, his mind working overtime trying to study her. He looked at her stomach, looking for the tail, tail signs, but found nothing.

Arania looked on, her graceful mouth slightly open in shock, she did not know humans can give a member of her species a large number of children at one time, and she certainly was unaware about the six embryo limit each Cataline has.

McGregor then said in a very serious manor at Cann-Li who looked like a lost puppy with her ears pointing down. "Don't get involved with humans until you are ready!"

For Cann-Li, that was like a warning saying, *stay away from humans or stay away from my crew.*

But it was too late and before she realized it, Michel was performing a scan with his medical tricorder and the tail-tail signs of the strange beeps caused his face to change into an expression of shock, even if he knew the result already, but it forced him to announce, "Cann-Li, you are pregnant."

Deeper scans then revealed even more shocking news, "Wait, you have five developing embryos," He paused as he tried to catch his breath, "and they are half human!"

Cann-Li was given the proof she needed, her life has now changed and she was filled with joy and excitement. She was too happy to be afraid of the consequences and this made her ordeal on her home world dissolve into nothing, her future was bright with the man she loved and shared her heart with.

Her graceful thoughts were cut short when she saw McGregor plainly snatch the tricorder from the doctor. She decided to use the human word '*Shit*' to portray her feelings. Sam was in trouble and he told her many times about McGregor's temper.

McGregor compared the DNA sample with his crew records, and he bolted off out of the medical deck, smoke trailed him behind as he scurried along the passageways, on the hunt. Arania followed trying to find out what happened.

"Captain" she called, almost shouted.

Roaring down the corridors of the ship, McGregor barked at Arania in a semi angry state. "Damn him, I told these people that they are safe on this ship and they will not be abused. And what does he do? He does this! I am going to kill that son of a bitch."

Arania needed to know who it was, or who was going to get thrown out of the air lock. She asked, "Who?"

She could not understand why McGregor was acting like this and she did notice that his behaviour had changed recently, which seems to be a little out of the ordinary. Worried he might do something wrong, she followed him.

With a violent push, the doors to the space car bay snapped open creating a horrendous blast sound by the bulkheads. A shocked Sam looks in awe as this uncontrollable individual stampedes towards him; he grabbed hold of Sam and orders the computer to transport them to his ready room. Within a flash, they disappear with Sam caught in a headlock.

Arania who was already breathing hard from trying to catch up, then learned she needed to head towards the control centre. She became worried that McGregor might do something he will regret and suddenly stumbled upon Jasmine who was also heading for the command deck too.

As Arania panted away and leaned on the turbo lift wall, Jasmine stared at Arania, who intern looks at her. Arania could not believe her eyes at who she was looking at. She has never seen a Human/Cataline hybrid before and she had heard rumours of a small family, but never seen a young adult one before.

But before Arania fainted at the site of Jasmine, the turbo lift doors opened and she stumbled out, trying not to fall over. With a skipped heartbeat, she then remembered McGregor.

Arania ran to his ready room, shouting and thumping could be heard through the bulkheads as everyone froze in place at their stations unable to do anything about the war that is bellowing out in the room. The atmosphere was of complete utter chaos; it felt like the entire deck would explode if nothing was done.

As the door opened, Sam stood up and leaned on the desk, eyes blazing in his stern resolve and utter defence to himself, he roared! "I am in love with Cann-Li, we have both consented to mating and I did not abuse her, we have had a romantic relationship ever since I saw her in the canteen back at their home world."

Arania walked in to see McGregor as red as a firecracker. "Do you know the fucking problems you have caused for yourself and me at the same time!"

As McGregor spotted Arania, he was about to carry on his abuse at Sam before his eyes fixated on Jasmine and his attitude dramatically seized, as if a switch was turned off.

"Sam, Arania, can you leave us for a moment." Said McGregor causing a sudden and unexpected confusion between the two, However Sam was taking the hint and ran off towards the medical bay to see Cann-Li and their new children.

On his way out Sam looked at Jasmine and realized that his children will look the same as this young female hybrid. However, he needed to get away from McGregor and he bottled his interest for the time being.

Arania looked at Jasmine with a slight confused look and obeyed McGregor's wishes. Jasmine walked up to McGregor after the doors closed, sneaking in a slight sarcastic smile.

"I see you haven't changed." Jasmine commiserated as she walked around the room, snooping at all his belongings, as if she had the free of will to do what she likes.

McGregor shuffled on his chair trying to calm down, "It's been a long time, I am surprised that you are still here. I thought I told you not to join Starfleet?"

Jasmine took note of McGregor's comment but it did not hinder her progress, she proceeded in snooping around, she saw a picture on his desk and took a look; it was the picture he always looks at when he can. "I see you still have this?" Jasmine asked as she teased McGregor with it.

McGregor got up and strode towards the replicator and ordered a fresh cup of tea, the smell alone was enough to free his globed mind. "And how is everyone?"

Jasmine looked at McGregor and sat down holding the image. Her slender body sat gracefully and the skin clothing wrapped itself around Jasmine with graceful effort.

He took a few sips from his sea and sat behind at his desk, he brushed aside a few documents that cluttered his desk and replaced his picture once Jasmine placed it back on the desk.

McGregor looked at Jasmine and felt guiltily and upset for her. They held a lot of secrets that boiled and churned around inside themselves, being apart was the only way to move on with their lives. But destiny had a cruel side

"The others want to talk to you, it's been a long time, it's time to patch things up and move on." Jasmine said feeling a deep and emotional bonding with the image she was holding.

McGregor looked up recalling his past and the eventual situation that let him to the Explorer. He sighed, wishing Jasmine did not come onboard, but she did have a point, perhaps it was the time to fix the past and look for the future.

Sam ran into the medical bay like a child running downstairs on Christmas day. He rushed over to Cann-Li who by this time was on the examination table undergoing some none-invasive tests to determine her condition in exact detail.

The doctor looked at the readings in an overexcited way, rushing and probing her anyway he could, without causing her distress and pain. More interested in the results, he examines all the details with great care.

“Amazing, truly, amazing, I have never seen embryos develop so fast in my life. By this stage Cann-Li will develop into another cocoon within one month and share the development with her children, a total mother and child experience.” He paused realizing she had more than one child.

Sam stared at Michel before he asked, “What?” After a moment of gazing he snapped out of his trance and asked the more important question. “Is she OK doctor?”

Cann-Li looked around, wide-awake as she held onto Sam’s hand; she gave a small squeeze indicating that she is awake and happy. Sam looked down and gazed into her lovely eyes, he gave her a warm kiss on the lips that caused a slight chatter in the background.

Michel looked over at Sam and felt a little disappointed in him. He should have controlled himself and taken care. He knew humans are supposed to show the Cataline care and compassion and not install fear of being molested, this clearly dictates otherwise. But he had no choice to put his feelings aside and answer his question, “Well, you’ve defiantly done it this time, you have gotten this young female pregnant.” He pauses slightly as he takes more readings with the medical tricorder.

“Her vital signs are stable and she seems to be developing well according to Starfleet’s database, however this will be the second occurrence of something like this.” Finishing, the doctor made his last statement clear, “So she will need to check back regularly.”

Cann-Li touched Sam in a passionate manor again that can only portray a deep sense of love throughout the entire bay that the inhabitation managed to feel. With such a pleasant and strong positive aroma flowing around the room, anyone sick would feel better. The Cataline knew these two are deeply in love and no ill hearted activities happened, in fact it strengthened their bond with the human race.

But the feelings of love and compassion between Sam and Cann-Li were shorted lived when a voice bellowed over the intercom, as if the devil announced his arrival, “Sam! Get your ass up to my ready room NOW!”

Chapter 26

(New Home)

After a week en route to Earth and with the steady escalation of problems brewing on the Explorer, Kim was more than eager to leave this vessel with a few special guests in tow.

One after another, crates and crewmen transported back and forth from between the Explorer to the Rhode Island like a busy spaceport. But for two special guests, whom Kim was happy to accept with good grace, needed to travel the old-fashioned way.

Sat in the Explorers shuttlecraft grinning like children, Nes-al-sar and Lei-Lie found it hard to control their excitement. It was a life changing moment and something Nes-al-sar looked forward to ever since she first laid eyes on the word, Federation.

Lei-Lie looked around the creamy lit cabin with her hands between her legs, looking nervous; Nes-al-sar began to mentally prepare for her introduction, as soon as they arrived in front of their commander of the Rhode Island.

"Why am I feeling like this?" Lei-Lie said, sitting back on her seat trying to fight back the butterflies that wanted to escape her stomach. For so long they have been tormented and abused. Now they have a new lead on life.

"This is a big moment for us; we will be one step closer in belonging to something." Nes-al-sar tried to hold back her grin, but she failed miserably.

"The suspense is killing me, what will the captain look like? How will he treat us?" Lei-Lie questioned, Nes-al-sar thumped her before she went out of control with worry.

Now the controls began to chime with idle beeps and tones as the shuttle entered range of the Rhode Island. Messages from the vessel sounded landing details and professional jargon, which the two passengers could not understand, this only added to the suspense they were experiencing.

Before they arrived onboard the shuttle, both Lei-Lie and Nes-al-sar took it amongst themselves to practice their subtle introduction to the commander, once they arrived on the Rhode Island. Such a task seemed important for Starfleet personal and they decided to make a long lasting impression. Something Kim would enjoy immensely. But as they approached the huge starship, that grew ever so large in the shuttles window, they forgot all they learned.

The shape of the vessel, its design was so beautiful and elegant they could not help but be amazed by its creation. Most humans would be impressed at such a sight, however for the two Cataline individuals who stared through the windows; it was like a guiding star that shone brightly.

For the past few minutes Nes-al-sar and Lei-Lie attentions were focused on arriving at the Rhode Island. An awkward silence engulfed them before it was interrupted by one of the crewmen, "We're approaching the docking port, prepare for docking."

Both Cataline passengers became overjoyed at the fact that they are nearly coming to the end of there incredible journey and they both held hands like excited children trying their best not to show this to the rest of the crew.

Odd boxes and scaffold laid around the shuttle bay as the vessel came to a complete stop just narrowly missing the walkways that were located half way up the walls. A few people gave the pilot a disapproved stare.

Kim stood on the deck; his uniform impeccably clean and tidy, ready for the new recruits.

Stepping out, both Cataline passengers overreact to authority and stood to attention. Lei-Lie studied the proper manors on how to behave in front of a Starfleet officer before they departed the Explorer. Because Starfleet follows a code of conduct and Federation rules, she thought it was an important concept in any race. She was honoured to understand and execute such teachings, even though many Starfleet captains and crew frown upon it.

Nes-al-sar on the other hand forgot the, 'Standing to attention' posture and a gentle nudge from Lei-Lie, jogged her memory. She quickly stood to attention after a thin smile crept along her face.

Kim could read their body language like an open book and he was well aware of their efforts to impress himself and follow the rules to the letter. So he decided to follow their example and act accordingly. After all, they want to join Starfleet, might as well start now.

Nes-al-sar was supposed to say something, like a line in a screenplay, but because she was too excited and grinning like a girl, Lei-Lie needed to nudge her again to kick-start her speech. After a moment of deep thought, trying to remember her line, Nes-al-sar blabbed out in strange manner, like a sound from an un-tuned instrument. "Ho... Captain, permission to come onboard?"

She mentally took a step back, realising that she should have done this the moment they stepped off the shuttle, but what was done is done. She hoped her good grace and her beautiful features would do the rest.

Kim offered a kind and gentle smile in his own way and said, "Permission granted, please if you could follow me, we will get you settled in and prepare your training."

The small Rhode Island then turned to the nearest star and began its journey back to Earth disappearing in a flash of light with all the matter of space whizzing past its windows.

The Explorer stood in space like a drunken bee before it eventually jumped into warp leaving only the engine wash floating in its original location.

Jasmine stood in the engine room as she stared at the massive three-phase warp core. The view was more impressive than the ship itself. A glass window at the main engine room was all that stood between the room and the engine shaft, which spanned one hundred decks and reached the entire rear end of the ship.

All dark, the massive warp engine rotated like the copper coils on a motor. In the middle, a massive arc beam streamed from the top of the shaft to the bottom.

From the centre, a ring held three large pylons that reached outward in a star pattern. Attached to the ends of the star were massive warp containers as long as the shaft itself and they rotated.

The arms were connected to it intermittingly. Each warp chamber attached to a large pylon whizzed past the viewing window. The whole area was filled with slight green transparent plasma and strange blue wakes would be left after each warp chamber passed by.

Every so often arc discharges would fill the entire room, but the glass windows around the engine room control centre prevented people from getting

electrocuted. The shaft was off limits to all personnel for obvious reasons and the whole assembly was located in the centre of the armour at the back of the vessel.

Kai-Yu took it upon himself to take his own-guided tour of the engine room, something he wanted to do since he arrived on the explorer. He decided not to ask for McGregor's permission because he knew the answer would be; *NO*.

But on his immediate entrance, he ran into the Human/Cataline hybrid and could not resist in talking to her. He walked up, thinking, assessing.

"Hi, you are Jasmine that everyone is talking about?" he questions feeling slightly honoured to be in the presence of such a graceful and beautiful creature. Sure the Cataline are beautiful in their ways, however add a little human into their DNA then you have something completely different.

Jasmine turned and looked at him. Her eyes squinted trying to find out what he wanted, studying him. Sure he was Cataline, but that did not interest her much.

Then to break the silence, Kai-Yu asked a good question, "I heard the story about all the children that disappeared through the anomaly about twenty years ago and was eventually saved by the humans. However, you are half human and Cataline, How can you exist?"

She un-squinted her eyes and replied, arms folded. "My mother was the pilot of the ship..." She gave a small sigh remembering her graceful face, "She came to Earth alive and started a family, I am one of her children, she was twenty-three at the time."

Kai-Yu then understood the explanation and was thrilled. This was a matter that had puzzled him for some time and now its been answered. With a relieved look on his face, he instinctually walked closer to Jasmine, which was a bad idea.

She noticed his advance and was threatened by it; she put up her defences and threatened him in the best possible way. She doesn't know this stranger and he was getting too close to her comfort zone. "Come any closer and I will throw you in there," she pointed at the engine core that arced pasted the window in a dazzling light.

"You're hostile," he said, holding his ground and trying to make her lower her defences. "I only wanted to talk closer to you, all this noise making it hard to hear."

"I get that from my father, and I know what you are doing!" she straightened up her posture and tried to look intimidating, skin type clothing buffing up.

"Who is your farther?" He asked, his hand drifted up and touched one of her skin fibres that buffed in the air, as if it called for his hand.

The sensation he felt from the fibres was unlike anything he has experienced before, yet it was so soft and warm. A slight silky sensation rubbed off onto his hands.

Suddenly a striking pane struck across his face as Jasmine placed her hand firmly across, slapping him. He stumbled back with the excessive force she used that didn't seem possible from her body makeup.

"You pervert, get your filthy hands off me!" she yelled in anger as she marched out of the engine control room leaving Kai-Yu behind to lick his wounds. He looked back, thinking. *This creature is clearly able to defend herself.*

McGregor sat in his ready room in a grim and angry silence, Sam had violated Starfleet rules and there was a book six inches thick about interspecies relationships, which he clearly broke!

But as time dragged on for the two individuals, Sam was relieved when Cann-Li turned up to offer his support. McGregor seemed displeased at the sudden appearance, but as she explained in a passionate and loving tone McGregor had no choice but to see the matter for what it was, even if Sam portrayed the look of Jack The Lad. But he knew Sam would be committed to her.

With an awkward silence that hovered around his ready room after Sam and Cann-Li left, McGregor slumped to his desk, "God, what is happening around here? I'll be glad to get this race of my ship... God Damn it... I hate this shit..."

He moved his head towards the picture Jasmine placed on his desk, he whispered a small 'sorry' and placed it into the desk draw before he resumed to his slumber.

When the Explorer finally arrived in Earths orbit, McGregor enthusiastically ordered the evacuation of all the Cataline people. He didn't want to waste any time and the faster they were off his ship the better.

Ships from all over the quadrant arrived at Earth to see this new race. Most of the Cataline people looked in a trance state, as the blue planet became so large it overwhelmed them. Thousands stared up in the habitat dome as the blue marble shone through. The plump white clouds covered the blue water, multi-coloured land crept across the surface and a flurry of movement helped the Cataline to fall in love with the place. Their home world was a dark and burned world, seeing a world full of life could not erase the hardships they thought, but it made their dreams for a future a reality.

Starships all hovered around the massive Explorer like bees to a pollen-laden flower. The space station; still the biggest, offered the most impressive site anyone would witness for a long time and countless captains ordered their vessels to take snapshots of the two objects standing side by side.

The more time went on, the more Starships arrived to take a look at the spectacle and the arrival of the unique species. It didn't take long before Earth orbit was filled with Federation vessels.

A frantic-sounding traffic control officer insisted that all vessels return to high orbit and wait for further orders. But many of the captains ignored the request and carried on. There were too many ships to offer an effective deterrent so Earths space will have to be a mess for the time being.

"Jesus Christ, this is not the publicity I wanted, why are they here?" McGregor said rolling his eyes at the view screen displaying the massive armada outside his window.

"I don't think they are here for you sir," Arania replied, happy to spoil his imaginary popularity. "They are welcoming my people, news about their treatment and rescue has reached all over this quadrant and I have never seen such a response for a race."

McGregor stood up and straightened his uniform, "Well, humans are a compassionate bunch, I am glad that we managed to rescue as many as we can."

He strolled over to operations console while he stared through the panoramic windows. "OK, prepare to load the people into the secondary ships, contact Starfleet and tell them we are on the way down to their headquarters." He added, as he walked towards the exit "Tell them to make some room!"

The Explorer entered the next phase of its operations, which was to release all its secondary ships. This stunned many Star Fleet captains who fought to get a

glimpse of a D1 Class Explorer ship. They have heard about this ability, but with only two vessels left in existence, it was a moment not to miss.

Space Cars launched like pees in a pod as people travelled to different cities on the Earth surface. Many countries and confederations offered to take them in, but Starfleet would keep tabs on them and make sure everyone was getting the care they needed. But for the majority of them, they would arrive at Starfleet HQ.

Anticipating the arrival of the Cataline people. Crowds of spectators stood around like fans at a football match, they waited for the secondary ships to arrive out of the clouds. The thundering sounds blew dust and smoke everywhere as they came. Many viewers thought the design of the secondary ships could have been improved to use modern day thruster technology; however it didn't occur to McGregor.

The buildings of the city drew the skyline reflecting the light in all directions; such clean streets and amazing sights brought on a shocking thrill to all the Cataline that left the ships. Like lemmings, they stumbled out in a wave. The smiling individuals gulped deep breaths and looked up at the sky. Being on a world full of life and spirit, friends clapped each other on the back, danced and enjoyed the new sensations given to them.

Seeing the crowd, many Starfleet officers could only smile and grin at the flow of positive energy as they mingled with the Cataline, trying to bring order and discover who was who.

Like a father waiting for his son to turn up home after an unauthorised night out, McGregor stood in the loading bay watching the entire Cataline people load into their respected ships to head down to Earth, until he saw Kraile-li preparing to leave.

He strode up to her and grabbed her on the shoulder; his grip was firm and strong. "You are staying with us, come with me."

He took Kraile-li to a private area in the loading area and talked to her.

Kraile-li felt a little nervous about the whole situation, she knew she caused many of his crew to fall into a coma for the scream and she was due for punishment, but she did not know what McGregor would do to her.

"You injured a lot of my people with your scream, and you will have to account for your actions. You're a pilot and managed to pilot ships well, yes?" McGregor asked.

She hesitantly replied with a look of fear in her face, "Y.Y.Yes, but I don't understand..."

McGregor stood straight and stared at Kraile-li. He paused making her feel even more worried; he enjoyed what he was doing. "You will serve under my command as a pilot, until I feel that you have redeemed the injuries you have caused to my crew." He pointed a warning finger at her, "or I can inform Starfleet about your actions. I'm sure they would want to see you about that and their punishments are far more severe."

McGregor's dark side showed and Kraile-li had no choice but to accept. However, this is what she wanted and she kept a scared look to fool McGregor. The chance to work on this ship, the vessel that saved her people and the technology it possessed made her even more thrilled to belong to something. She didn't know what she was going to do on Earth, but now, she's got the prospect of helping her saviour.

Stood on the nucleus of his vessel, McGregor's face turned to that of a businessman that has just won his deal. After countless amounts of wasted days and more delays, all the Cataline have been finally removed from his vessel. But a few remained to offer their services, except for a chosen few who did not volunteer to stay behind. McGregor made a point to keep the ones that owned him deeds, like Kraile-li.

After all the secondary ships clicked back into place, he spotted a flurry of activity from the disappearance of Starfleet ships, but because it did not concern him, he dismissed it. He then decided to take a look at Earth from a first person perspective. He ordered his crew not to disturb him on his time of relaxation. He needed it after the work he had done.

But still, no one knew the danger that was lurking in the deepest part of space.

Chapter 27

(Cataline Twins)

Ten minutes earlier, deep within the silence of space something colossal larked in the dark, creeping slowly into Federation space something wanted their Cataline brothers and sisters back.

"I can't take this any more, I can't take this anymore!" A shy and lonely cry lamented throughout the darkly lit room. She cried out in a slight pain from the integration into the ship, something she did not accept at first until the unsightly events that happened back on her home world.

She looked up and glanced around the horrid looking room feeling everything around her, even the ship. "What has happened to me?" she questions herself as she looked at herself suspended in some kind of alcove attached to the wall. She glanced around her fragile Cataline body and became horrified to find nerves and skin attached to the organic mess of the ship. "This is a ship?" She cried, "I am attached to the ship? Why?"

Those are the many questions that rattle around inside her mind as she awakes from her slumber. Suddenly, in the darkness, a familiar voice blurred out in an unemotional way. "Detecting unknown vessel, I will attack it."

Recognising the voice, the Cataline female snapped her head in the direction of the sound and became desperately distraught at the sight she was about to see.

"Sister, my twin! What have they done to you!" she exclaimed as she looked at her twin sister attached to an alcove with nerves and tissue running from the ship into her.

"Elli-lowe, it's me your sister Kine-lowe, wake up." She cried to her sister in an effort to cause a response from her bowed down head displaying highlighted coloured blue and red hair, her ears drooped down in coloured black and red highlights.

Elli-lowe slowly began to move her head upwards towards her twin sister Kine-lowe. She saw her attached to the wall and suffering in great pain. It looked like her transformation into the ship did not work. So she disconnected her sister and she plummeted to the floor. Kine-lowe gasped for air on the floor with her fragile body slightly different looking than the normal Cataline. It was dazzled with red highlights and her fin like skin clothing mixed with black and red tips giving the sisters their unique look.

"Enemy vessel approaching us, I don't know what it is," She then displayed the Romulan war bird on the view screen for her sister to see.

The room only echoed from idle sounds around. A heart beating also crept throughout the humming and pulsating noises that gave a freaky feeling.

Kine-lowe crawled up to the screen and replied, "No, sister, please, don't kill any more, we are not killers..."

The Romulan war bird then began firing weapons at the vessel, which did not cause any sound or effect on the ship they are on. The room remained steady without any disturbance as Kine-lowe looked at her sister.

"Our Krainer masters have given us a job to do, you know what will happen if we do not obey." Elli-lowe explained feeling a slight itch from the attacks the Romulan has been causing.

"We are free, we do not have to go back, please sister, no more killing, life is sacred!" Kine-lowe knelt down on her fragile knees in front of her suspended sister.

"My sister, you, know what the humans have done, they have taken all our people away and they're the worst. The Krainers, our masters are trying to protect us." She explained while displaying the 'made up acts' on the view screen of humans taking and doing utmost cruel things to their people.

Kine-lowe viewed the images on the screen and became traumatized by what she is seeing, she felt the anger slowly creep up deep within her soul and even though she is seeing the images on the screen, she believes them and bows her head down at the unseemly acts.

"The humans, why have they done this?" She wept trying to understand their actions, she felt that the humans would save them, that's what the general rumours was in their sector.

"I thought they would help us," she said. "Why do they do this?"

Elli-lowe looked up at the small fleshy view screen and said, "We will be the ones to collect our family and return them to safety, what's left of them?"

"Do not worry my sister, I will help control this ship and collect them, I will get rid of this enemy that is before us." Elli-lowe gracefully said as she moves her head towards the real-time direction of the Romulan war bird. She then lets out a scream as an indication that she is ordering the vessel to open fire.

Kine-lowe then watched as she can see the Romulan vessel become engulfed in three fireballs that emanated from the bottom section of the view screen. Within seconds the enemy craft disappeared.

Bowing her head Kine-lowe looks at her twin sister, "what are we going to do? We are the only ones on this ship, I feel lonely."

Elli-lowe turns to her sister and portrays a small smile on her face, "You are not alone. I'm here with you!"

Kine-lowe recognises something approaching, lifting her head from the direction of her sister, she looks at the real-time direction of the vessel approaching. "A vessel is exiting slipstream." She displays the approaching vessel on another view screen and spots the writing on the hull.

"USS Enterprise," She said looking at this large Sovereign Class star ship approaching from a distance.

Suddenly Kine-lowe begins to put together the name and matches it with what she was given by her masters. "USS Enterprise. No. Wait, USS..." Then she displays the hull writing of the Explorer that was in orbit around their home world, "USS Explorer... The two. Sister, they are the same, we have found our enemy." She exclaimed both writings on each ship matched by their font.

Riker stood on the bridge of the Enterprise that approached the wreckage right of its port bow. Not knowing what they are in for, the Enterprise carries on approaching towards the debris floating in space

"Captain, I am picking up debris from a ship about 1 million kilometres from the unknown vessel," informed Data piercing through the idle sounds on the bridge.

"Put it on screen," said Riker enthusiastically standing up from his captain's chair because he temporary took command while Picard was not on board.

"Is that Romulan?" Riker questioned as he squinted his eyes to try and identify any of the makings on the hull fragments.

Data then interrupts with his logical and computerized thinking with a slight dash of human feel to it. "I am picking up composites of Romulan alloys and technology; I concur with your hypothesis that this vessel was Romulan." A slight beep then diverts Data's attention to the massive ship that was sneaking up on them. "Captain, I am detecting a vessel approaching us."

"Let's see it," Riker said, standing tall and firm at the potential alien race that possibly destroyed a Romulan war bird and adding, "You know the routine data, raise the shield and activate the armour plating." Data replied with a simple but effective, "Aye sir."

As the view screen began to spark to life, the thumping echoing sounds of the hull armour could be heard through the idle sounds of the ship as section by section the ship is encased in a shell of armour.

Riker stood back in disbelief at the sight of this massive ship that dwarfed the size of the Enterprise. Not only this, he gets a strange and creepy sensation that slowly crept up behind his spine. The ship looked dark and spooky, it looked very long and had many tentacles reaching out the front of it prompting Riker to spit out the question, "Data, how big is that thing?"

Data who replied to the command, then types a few commands into his console at the speed of light before coming up with the answer, "The vessel appears to be ten kilometres in length and five kilometres in width captain."

Riker, almost falling over a step on the bridge that he didn't see because he was strolling backwards at the view screen said, "That thing is almost the size of a city."

Data carries on, "I am not detecting any shields and no weapons." Riker then felt a slight sign of relief at that comment, "However, the ship is on an intercept course for Earth."

"Open a channel," Riker announced as he prepared himself for first contact with this massive alien ship. Feeling slightly nervous, he subtly waits for the confirmation that the channel is open and stands tall waiting for the signal.

"Channel opened", Data lit the way like a beacon in the night for Riker to make the first move at talking to the unknown spacecraft that could be a powerful ally in the war with the Borg.

Riker rolled his eyes towards the view screen and feeling the spirit of someone watching at the receiving end, announced, "This is Commander William Riker of the Federation Star Ship Enterprise," he gave a slight pause at what his next comment will be. Feeling the presence of someone watching was not going to make his announcement easy. He also remembers the Romulan war bird that was destroyed and wondered if they had anything to do with it, but he could not accuse them of anything. "We have detected weapons fire in this area, can we be of some assistance?"

The bridge stayed silent with the anticipation of any response the alien spacecraft might send back, however as everyone stood silent, only the sounds of chimes and beeping of the idle controls filled the void of endless silence.

Riker turned around to the person in charge of communications and enquired, "Did they receive the transmission?" His question was quickly answered with a slight and hesitant nod from the officer.

Looking in slight disbelief at the lack of communication, Riker surmised that they might not understand the human language, even with the universal translator operational and so he proceeded back to his captain's chair for comfort on his legs, which became tiresome from all the excitement.

Suddenly, as he was preparing to sit, then entire ship and all it's occupants was shook violently with the clear sign that they are under attack.

"What the hell is going on up there?" Geordi screamed down the communications channel as an explosion nearly vaporised his optic implants in his eyes.

"We are under attack, get us into slipstream now!" said Riker completely confused and angered at the same time for this un-senseless attack.

Data then responded to the incident with technical gabble about the ship, "Shields are offline, armour generators are offline, weapons are down and torpedo bays are not functioning," A sudden pause then indicated that more bad news was on the way and Riker knew exactly what it might be, "Another blast is coming from the vessel!"

Just as Data managed to announce the discovery, the fireball ripped through the front saucer section of the Enterprise tearing of a massive chunk of the disk leaving a black smelting gaping hole filled with force fields and fire.

An unsightly event of bodies and ship bulkheads began to drift into the depths of space, as there was nothing that anyone can do. "Get us the hell out of here," Riker shouted as he quickly noticed the alien vessel beginning to charge its cannons in the view screen for another shot.

The severely damaged Enterprise slowly turned its disk away from the enemy and quickly went into warp leaving behind the massive fireball that was on course to destroy them.

"Are we going after them?" Kine-lowe asked in unison to her hand movements as she checked her slender body after she recovered off the floor.

"No, we are on our way to Earth, we will take out our revenge then" she then drifted her pale blue and patterned face towards her twin sister and said, "Do not worry, we will take back our people and return them to the Krainers." She then returned her head to the view screen and trembled in anger at the humans. "Those humans will pay for their mistakes!" Elli-lowe said raising her tone slightly from talking to herself.

Riker clenched his fists and walked to several stations in anger at the unnecessary and unknown attack that has severely damaged his ship and lost a large number of his crew. "Damage report?"

The communication systems then sprang to life with idle chatter of everyone panicking and sending their reports about the mess they have to repair, "Severe damage to the front saucer section, a large chunk is missing and we have lost seventeen crew members."

Riker bowed his head in respect for the fallen and vowed that he will not allow this to happen again, he rattled his mind for a few seconds and remembered that the enemy vessel is on its way to Earth. He sprang to life out of his temporary trance and said, "Open a channel to Starfleet!"

Geordi appeared on the view screen ducking from sparks and piercing through the smoke filled engine room, a constant reminder of the battle that they shamefully lost and the frantic pulses from the warp core indicated the vessel was at warp, "We can jump into slipstream now, but I don't know the effect it will have on the damaged sections."

Riker took what little good news he was given and ordered the Enterprise into slipstream.

Janeway glanced around her office with the view of the city behind her at Starfleet headquarters. She rolled her eyes over to the image displayed on her desk of her family and familiar memories about her past roamed in her mind.

A piercing hollow tone drew Janeway out of her daydreaming state and back to reality as she instead shot a cold look at the computer terminal on her desk.

The screen flickered to life with the cheerful face of Riker who looked worse then wear. Janeway offered a slight smile as she leaned back on her chair, "Riker, this is a surprise, what can I do for you?" Riker felt that Janeways mood was just right to

inform her about the bad news, if there was a better time than any, than this was it. So releasing the deep breathe he held, he informed Janeway of the incoming danger.

The USS Explorer orbited Earth in a slow and lazy fashion while transportation of the Cataline people kept going at a hastily rate. Moments later, when all the activity slowly began to subside; all the Federation vessels were ordered to intercept the incoming alien ship.

Travelling at warp, the alien vessel purged along all the defence lines and relentlessly destroying anything in its wake. Its mood was one of revenge and rescue of their people.

"We are being intercepted by a large number of USS Vessels." Elli-lowe announced to her twin sister who sat quietly in the corner of the room thinking about the day's events.

"I feel our people are onboard," She murmured as she looked at her suspended sister. "We cannot do anything for them now, I feel them tainted." Her sister replied in a cold and uncaring tone, "I will drop this ship out of warp and attack them."

Kine-lowe slowly bowed her head towards the floor and tried to make sense out of all this madness and how they became to be in the middle. The last and only thing she could remember was emerging out of her cocoon with her sister in tow. After that, her mind was filled with the endless void of darkness. However, if she thought hard, she could see the Krainers taking herself and her sister to some ship. It didn't make sense.

Elli-lowe looked straight down at Kine-lowe with her widened, wet eyes. "Don't worry, it will be over soon," Her tone then rages with anger as she leers at the fleshy view screen, "Engaging Starfleet vessels."

Chapter 28

(Decisive Battle)

When McGregor stated that he was having a much-needed break and enjoy his time, the crew did not expect him to take the whole thing literally. But this is what he did. He often took things to the extreme and did them with style. He did not want to take a trip to Earth because there was not much to see. McGregor was more thrilled to be in space than stuck on land.

Ever since he was a child, he would often look up at the stars and wonder when he will be able to command a starship, like Archer and Kirk who wandered into the wilderness of space. Such childhood dreams often opened his mind to new possibilities while he collected models of Star Ships and memorabilia. It was his dream and goal to command his own ship and something he strived for.

His father Carl McGregor often stated that he was destined for something that could shape the course of history. But like all parents, they believed their children are destined for many things.

Being a young child, Alex did not understand or comprehend the possibility of being big, nor could he imagine himself doing something so life changing for an entire alien race.

But as time went on, situations fell into his lap that created a definite path for his career. The wars the Federation fought drew in more recruits and when Alex was at the correct age, he did not hesitate to join Starfleet, even if the dangers were high.

His mother on the other hand tried to put a stop to his endeavours and it all ended up in a family row. His family was already under stress and his career path soon led to the divorce of Alex's parents. But he moved forward, forgetting his past.

Back on Earth when he was young, Alex was always watched by his parents and smothered by his family's expectations. But now he was his own person, in command of his own ship and he had the freedom to make his own choices. He still missed his family, but he reeled in the delight for freedom.

But that was short-lived when he learned about his responsibilities and hard work in adulthood would incur. Starfleet was not as easy as he thought and even when he worked hard, he could not progress towards being a captain.

Even being drafted for a Star Ship was hard and he almost gave up. But his smart wit and fast reactions took the space of a college who fell ill to some silly virus. But his climb up the ladder was stifled all the way, until he decided to take a leap of faith and quit.

Sat on the hull of the Explorer with a breathable atmosphere between the vessel and the surrounding shield, McGregor took his vacation time literally. With his sleek sunglasses firmly placed over his eyes and a chair placed above the 1TW beam cannon, he looked like a man on a sunny beach, sunbathing.

The Earth hovered overhead like a huge enchanting marble engulfing everything around it. The sun shone through the distance with incredible intensity as McGregor could almost feel the power while he relaxes with the whispers of the shield and his vessel all around him.

He placed his hand on a glass of water because he had drunk too much Earl Grey tea and decided to have something plain and soothing for the rest of the

evening. But as he looked into the deepest section of space, he is constantly reminded of the battles that took place and his own personal history.

But all that has changed, as he is now commander of his own vessel. With nothing to do, he enjoyed the view around him, watching the stars pass by as the ship gradually rotates around the Earth.

It was not like Sam to scamper around and worry about situations, but in this instant he did. Cann-Li was going through a life changing transformation that got Sam into a concerned state.

In the medical bay Cann-Li laid out in the medical bed with Michel hovering over her slender frame like a child pestering its parent for candy. But as Sam rushed in for a new update, he was startled to discover what was happening.

"Doctor, is she OK? What's happening?" Sam could hardly hold back the flurry of questions that wanted to escape from his mouth; he tried to hold them back as he stared at his lover lying on the bed covered in some kind of fluid.

"It's nothing to worry about, I told you, she's is going into the pregnancy stage. She will remain in a cocoon until her children are mature enough to emerge with her." Said Michel.

He placed more scanning equipment over her, recording every moment into his personal data file. This will be the first ever recording of a human and Cataline hybrid. The fluids alone could unlock many mysteries in the human genome.

But for Sam, the cables and monitors only reminded him about the recordings he'd seen about the Borg and all their intrusive surgery. He did not like it at all, but he wanted his children to be safe and healthy. "Doctor, is all this necessary? I don't want Cann-Li or my children electrocuted."

With a respectful smile, he turned and reassured Sam, "She'll be fine. I need to monitor everything, since this is the second encounter with something like this. Something could go wrong and I don't want you to loose this fine family."

Cann-Li looked up towards Sam and held his hand, she was covered in some kind of gel that began to harden on the outside, forming a crust. She smiled and told him that she will be fine. Sam knelt down beside her and squeezed her hand.

He gave her a gentle kiss, and allowed her to complete the process. The gel slowly crawled up her fragile neck, covering her face and hair. She stopped breathing and the transformation began slowly.

He looked in awe at the strange and bizarre process that created a cocoon. He was safe in the knowledge that the next time he will see her is with five little babies... *He'd better enjoy the free time he had now.*

"Sam, with your permission, I believe it might be better to transport her to a medical centre down on Earth. They have all the staff and facilities to deal with this situation; I have done all I can." He paused and placed a concerning hand on Sam's shoulder. "I think it will be wise."

Troubled by the prospect that something could go wrong, Sam agreed and allowed his fiancée to be transported to the surface. But he was not letting her go alone and he decided that he would accompany her with or without McGregor permission.

Although it had been only a few hours, the unpleasant roaring of a Space Car that hovered overhead interrupted McGregor. He shifted his sunglasses to see a stone-faced Vulcan step out and approach him.

"Tulack, What can I do for you?" He questioned, giving a long and disappointing sigh as he placed his sunglasses back.

"Captain, I have come to inform you that the cargo has been stored and we are ready to proceed. And if I can sir?" Tulack's tone was easy to recognise when he was about to ask something and McGregor already knew what the question would be. But he allowed it.

"It is not recommended for you to turn off your communicator while outside on the hull of the ship, if something was..." McGregor cut him off with a wave of his hand.

"Tulack, Shut up." Startled, he did not react with the comment, but a hint of surprise did creep along his face.

Still droopy, McGregor heaved himself up and leaned his chin on his hands, "I turned it off so I would not be disturbed." He often wondered what it would take for his crew to leave him alone for eight hours. But his long career did not make him regret his past decisions.

When McGregor stretched himself on the Cannon, he felt the warmth at his feet. A low level current flowed through the barrel, warming the device while he was on the hull.

He tapped Tulack on the shoulder and muttered a sarcastic joke, "No rest for the wicked!" Tulack shook his head and followed McGregor to the Space Car.

With the vehicle doors closed, the Space Car hovered over the Explorers hull and glided towards the bays.

Meanwhile in the depths of space, something sinister lurked that made its way slowly to Earth. It glided through space like a city of nightmares as it skipped solar systems and blasted anything that stood in its way; even planetary junk that floated around was targeted and destroyed. Relentlessly, it pressed on.

The first vessels to intercept the unknown alien ship were the challenger class ships called USS Armstrong and USS Kearsarge. They slipped out of warp and ran smack-bang into a sight that defined all reality. The two Federation vessels looked like two droplets of water compared to the titanic size of the vessel.

Suddenly without warning, incandescent bolts of white-hot plasma shaped like water droplets streamed across space like drunken bees, slowly heading to their targets. The USS Kearsarge banked to the left to avoid the incinerating ball and was struck broadside by the shields. The impact tossed the vessel out of its planned trajectory, but it managed to self-right itself and was unharmed.

"We have lost primary shields, but the Ablative Hull Armour is undamaged," Said the operations officer on the Kearsarge's bridge.

"Looks like we should be able to dodge the fireballs." The firing control officer said. He didn't know what to call them, so he used an innovative name, basic to his simple human mind. "But if we are struck by one, the impact could destroy the ship."

Captain Parkston crossed his arms around his barrel chest and looked through the view screen as the USS Armstrong dodged and spun around more fireballs that were hurled towards it from all directions.

"Fire up phasers and naturalize the source of the enemies fire!" Parkston said as he stood up and walked closer to the view screen.

The enemy blasted fireballs out of its chambers towards the two Federation vessels and Parkston could clearly see that they were the targets. But due to the

density of the weapons, the fireballs dragged themselves through space at slow speeds. The two vessels could easily outmanoeuvre them.

At high impulse the Armstrong took a calculated manoeuvre and dived under the massive enemy vessel, firing all its phasers, scoring direct hits on the entrances to the fireball bays. But disappointment crept along Parkston's face, as the chambers remained intact.

Whizzing around like a bee on drugs, the Armstrong got too close and the next fireball struck the Star Ship head on. The Armstrong spun out of control into the darkness of space; the Nacelles were torn off the hull. The venting atmosphere acted like an uncertain rocket jet, making the vessel twirl around.

Disabled, the Armstrong drifted in space, helpless. Panicked calls roared over the COM channel as the captain called for assistance over the sounds of alarms and explosions.

Parkston stood in terror; he did not expect a defeat like that. The fireballs were slow and easy to avoid. He cursed the fact that he was reckless and did not order the Armstrong to keep its distance.

As he continued to watch, like out of pure spite, several more fireballs flashed towards the doomed vessel, explosions tore open the saucer section as each fireball smashed huge chunks out of the ship. In a blinding flash the warp core breached and the vessel exploded in a blinding light.

Parkston clutched the railing to keep his balance at the sudden and complete destruction of his comrade.

Smouldering droplets of slag, which travelled at random trajectories, smashed onto the Kearsarge hull causing more damage.

A bright yellow light engulfed the view screen as Parkston looked on. Terror filled the air as a fireball streaked towards his ship.

Yelling for them to escape, the frantic helm officers tried to start the warp drive, but a gigantic shudder threw everyone around the bridge.

The operations officer smashed to the ceiling and broke his neck and the helm officer had his face burned off when the console exploded.

As Parkston recovered from his violent fall, silence filled his mind, as he was unable to hear anything. He was only able to see the frantic movements of his bridge crew, struggling and crying. Then like water draining from his ears, the alarms and screams hit him like a hammer blow.

He stood up and looked at the view screen that had been ripped from the wall, only a hollow hole lead directly to space, but the bridge was protected by a force field.

The enemy ship turned and pointed its tentacles directly at the mortally wounded Kearsarge. Parkston wondered what the enemy was waiting for, as he stared directly at the menacing vessel that looked like a small asteroid from a distance.

His wish was soon answered when he could see a tiny sun drift towards him. Slowly it got larger and larger as it crept along the voice of space. Parkston could not blink, staring fixedly, as the intense light got brighter and brighter.

Disabled and unable to move, the Kearsarge stood in the path of the fireball. Parkston could do nothing but place his arms up to his face as the superheated fireball slammed into the Kearsarge, vaporising it into a million pieces of smouldering metal that fanned out into the depths of space.

“The two Federation Vessels have been nullified,” Elli-lowe said, staring at the floor. Kine-lowe could only see a stony and dead look in her sister’s eyes as she crawled along the floor towards her alcove.

Feeling the death of more Cataline, Kine-lowe needed to do something. Even if her people were tainted by the humans she believed that there was be a better way to resolve the problems instead of killing everybody. Perhaps the humans can explain themselves.

“Sister, why don’t we talk to the humans? Maybe they can be reasoned with. It is unnecessary to kill more of our people...” She was cut off, when Elli-lowe barged forward, leaning out of her alcove. She waved her hand in the air and shouted, “Enough! Sister, you will remain silent and let me cleanse this universe.”

Kine-lowe could do nothing as she crept back into the darkness of the gigantic ship, looking for food. She unable to convince her sister the error of her ways and she was almost certain that the menacing nightmarish ship corrupted her soul.

The gigantic vessel hovered in space as it assessed the damage it had done. Then satisfied at the complete destruction, it vanished into warp, towards Earth.

Jasmine was not in the mood for interruptions, especially when she was enjoying her time in the mess hall with a cup of Earl Grey tea and some basic problems to solve on her glass computerized tablet.

She refused to leave the Explorer and decided to take over Sam’s role, while he attended his fiancée on Earth. She found it amusing that she will be able to annoy McGregor even more, and this brought on a thin smile on her beautiful multicoloured face.

Kai-yu strolled into the mess hall and found Jasmine hiding in the corner. He knew she’d been hiding from him ever since the incident in the engine room. He would not take no for an answer and he found this creature strangely attractive and was attracted to her. He needed to do something; he needed to open a dialog.

He sat beside Jasmine and got such a look of scorn, he could feel something painful about to happen to him.

Chapter 29

(The Trap)

Jasmine was the type of creature who liked to be alone. With a cup of tea on the table and a glass-computerised tablet in her hand, she sighed at the mountain of work Sam left for her. She expected some mountain of work but not two months worth. She vowed to shove him out the nearest airlock the first chance she got.

She placed the tablet on the table and continued with her meal. Jasmine could have done the work right there and then, but she was not the type of person to dwell on the hardships of work, she placed it to the back of her mind and focused on the delicious meal in front of her.

After a few minutes and when she was reaching the tastiest part of her meal, she noticed a familiar figure hovering around.

"In human society it is normally polite to ask a girl if it's OK to sit beside them." She Arched eyebrows and gave Kai-yu a ghostly stare.

He misread her body language and came closer, grinning. "May I sit beside you?"

Jasmine grabbed the handle of her fork and rolled it in her hand. She knew exactly what she wanted to do with it, but she held back her desire to inflict pain because this attractive creature was trying to chat her up and she decided to play hard-to-get.

"No you can't, go away." She barked, creeping away from him.

"I would like to get to know you a little better and the engine room was very noisy and inconvenient."

She watched him slide across the chair and now he was becoming an inconvenient person. Jasmine wrapped her hand around the fork and the desire to inflict pain poured into her like an open tap. She held back her desires just a little bit more.

"I left for a reason." Jasmine came to the end of the table and Kai-yu noticed her graceful skin colours and long slender legs were hiding a beautiful secret. Feelings began to race through his mind and he felt extremely aroused

When Jasmine noticed what he was gazing at, she lost her temper and slammed the fork onto the table just inches from his fine arm fin. The chill from the fork made his arm-fin twitch as he tried to regain his composure.

Angered at his lack of restraint, Jasmine decided to leave the mess hall like a vanishing tornado. She had enough of his sexual advances and decided to return to work. But she was unable to hide the secret grin that crept along her face. She liked him, but she wanted to know how much he liked her.

Kai-yu sat alone at the table with only her plate of food as company. He failed to understand why he was strongly attracted to her or able to explain the strange feelings he was experiencing. Every time he was near her he felt his heart race and butterflies take flight in his stomach.

A sharp stern voice bellowed out from the background chatter. "It's her mating cycle. She is producing hormones that attract males. You are being affected by it."

Kai-yu turned around to see McGregor staring at him from the table behind.

McGregor got up and approached him, but before he could say a thing, Kai-yu interjected. "Such a gorgeous person, I think I am in love... I don't need any hormones for that."

"I don't know why Jasmine is on my vessel, or you for that matter." He changed his tone and looked directly at him. "Why are you on my ship?"

Kai-yu felt a lump in his throat, "I'm staying because of Jasmine."

McGregor grabbed the fork that was embedded in the table and held it firmly in his hand. His anger exploded. "Listen to me you little shit! You tried to kill me down on that planet which is something I will not forget for a very long time. I want you to stop harassing my family otherwise I will toss you out of the nearest airlock!" Kai-yu eyes widened, not understanding what McGregor said. *Family, what does he mean by that? Perhaps humans see their crew as family.*

With a final outburst McGregor shouted. "You will leave my crew alone!" He slammed the fork on the table right in the middle of his arm-fin.

He straightened his uniform and marched off the mess hall, brushing off the idle stares from his crew. McGregor needed to put his foot down otherwise the situation would get out of hand, he had a deep emotional bond with Jasmine and it was his responsibility to protect her, from everyone.

With his head held high, he briskfully walked towards the command deck.

It was one thing to assist Janeway in her little problem with the Borg, but to be tricked into sending his ship into the firefight was something he was not pleased about.

"That two timing battleaxe!" McGregor murmured to himself as he stared at the starry field in the panoramic windows.

He was satisfied at how swiftly Starfleet paid their bill and assigned him a new mission. It was supposed to be a simple carry and drop cargo shipment of vital supplies and material for a 'Space Station.' However he failed to notice the missing name on the manifest at first.

But as long as he got paid for the huge task in rescuing the Cataline and the damages done to his vessel, McGregor had overlooked the mishap.

Halfway in his journey, when he was going over the manifest in more detail in his ready room, McGregor spotted the neglect. With some swift calculations and vector-calculations, the computer confirmed that they would be entering the Frontier Station Seven sector. A place he didn't want to go.

After giving Janeway what she wanted, the 1TW Cannon Control Microprocessor Cartridges and accepting some compromises, he did not anticipate being tricked to go there. The Borg conflict was with the Federation and not with his ship. McGregor had already given her the power to defeat the Borg and now she had taken advantage of him.

A casual voice brought McGregor out of his current thoughts, "Captain, we are receiving a message from the space station."

"Any identification on who it might be?" McGregor questioned.

"No sir, just a com channel."

"OK, on screen." McGregor looked at the screen and he wasn't sure who could be calling him all this way out. The Explorer was a simple trade vessel delivering goods, what point would there be in contacting them at the moment?

The image of a gruff and stern man appeared on screen. A strange resolution fluttered, but McGregor put that down to the subspace communications. But as he spoke, his voice sounded clipped and formal. "This is commander Paxton from Frontier Station Seven X-One-Seven-Five-Two-Three-Six. We understand that you have come to relinquish your supplies to us, we are happy to receive new shipments."

"That's correct; we have fresh shipments from Starfleet HQ." McGregor did not notice the strange tone in the station commander voice.

As the station commander continued, his expression did not change. "I believe your identification is USS Explorer, Serial Number Zero-Zero-Zero-Three."

Still, the strange tone and direct script reading of his ship's serial number did not ruffle McGregor's thoughts. "That's correct; I understand you are in the middle of a battle yourselves, how's the fight?" He looked at his crew expecting a swift and clean response, after all, they'd been given the most powerful weapon ever created and it was about time Starfleet received some good news for once.

"Thanks to your adaptation, we have managed to resist the Borg and everything is peaceful now. But we still require supplies, you will be here soon?"

The man seemed more like an ID image than a real person. But still, he assumed it was down to the subspace distortions. A news flash flickered on his personal screen a few minutes before the transmission, indicating such a disturbance and he continued. "That's good, I'm glad to help in the efforts, we should be there in a few minutes."

On the screen, the station commander's image still did not change, as if someone had frozen him. So out of curiosity McGregor carried on, "So, I am happy to assist you anyway I can, do you have any injured personnel that need treating?"

Again, his image did not change and the audio track did not transmit any background sounds. McGregor scratched his head and looked at Tulack, who was equally baffled in his own Vulcan way.

"Captain, I am not receiving any real-time transmissions from him, I believe the image you are seeing is a false projection."

McGregor frowned and looked at the cold image on the screen, it looked like a still image and then he had an idea. He asked for a data link and a list of station personnel. It took a few seconds but the list appeared on his personal armrest computer and in response, he slammed his fist down on his command chair.

"ALL STOP, IT'S A TRAP!" McGregor roared as his bridge crew scrambled around to execute his commands. But the Explorer exited warp on its original set course.

The Explorer arrived in the middle of a battlefield. Damaged hulls and exploded ordinance drifted at random trajectories smashing into each other. Gasses and clouds of vented atmosphere orbited the larger chunks as the massive domed and spherical station resided in the background.

It all looked dead and nothing was active, Borg vessels were scatted in parts, as if someone tossed a load of junk into space with a shovel. It was a mess.

"Battle stations, red alert and activate the shields!" McGregor rushed to the status control panel that flashed, then crashed due to the large number of junk in space.

Suddenly alarms sounded and the defensive system spoke. "Attention, five hundred and forty seven intruders detected on the Explorer decks. Lockdown protocol has been initiated, please evacuate to safe areas."

Without warning, thick bulkheads slammed down locking the bridge. Each deck was closed off by the huge bulkhead doors and the crew knew what to expect and stayed well clear. But the would be intruders rushed through the doors only to be cut down by them

"Identification of intruders confirmed, Borg presence detected on all decks. Warning, ship is in lockdown mode."

McGregor looked in horror as his vessel was invaded by the Borg. *How could this happen? How did they know? What is their goal?*

But he knew all too well what the goal was, to capture and assimilate the Explorer. McGregor was not going to let that happen.

Suddenly before he had the chance to walk over to Tulack, a Borg drone materialized on the command deck.

Greenish transparent beams created the black deadly looking robotic creature that twitched and sputtered as its systems came online.

As if fate had a cruel side, two more drones appeared on the command deck. Then the hollow sound of the shields came online after being drained by some unknown reason, an indication that no more Borg drones could invade the Explorer.

“Attention, Borg intruders detected on all decks, five hundred and two invaders detected on the Explorer.”

Even if the number was reduced, by fire fights or some being cut down when the bulkhead doors closed, he still had the Borg on the command deck to deal with.

Two of the three drones moved at astonishing speed. The nearest one spun around and its flesh-rotten robotic hand clamped around Kraile-li's neck. Before she could struggle free, the Borg's other hand extended and its wiggling worm-like tentacles moved in the air. They struck home, injecting the frightened Cataline in the neck. She fell to the deck with veins bulging out of her neck.

Almost the same instant, the second drone lunged forward towards the communications officer. The drone seemed uninterested in assimilating this crewman. So it rammed the individual's head through his console with the force of a jackhammer and exploded it, blood seeped through the controls indicating the crewman had been murdered.

No more than three seconds had passed while McGregor watched the entire command crew erupt in panic. Tulack backed away in worry as the third drone strolled towards him; it did not appear to be in a hurry, unlike the first two.

The first two drones moved away from their initial victims and homed on McGregor and Arania, as if they wanted to assimilate the commanders of the ship and they walked with staggered steps, as it was clear the two drones had been damaged in recent conflicts.

They raised their hands and tentacles wiggled around like worms in a can. The tentacles looked as if they could smell the fear in their victims; they wanted blood and to inject.

Arania clasped onto McGregor as if he could prevent the pain that was about to be inflicted. But McGregor had no idea what to do, there was so little time and he left his sidearm in his ready room.

Chapter 30

(Battle At Earth)

Admiral Janeway sat in her ready room while grim reports of death and destruction continued to roll in minute after minute. She felt disappointed and the fear in her voice slipped out while she replicated a cup of coffee.

McGregor had done his part by sending the Cataline to Earth. But as this new threat loomed in the distance, she'd already sent two vessels to intercept the alien intruder, but the *USS Nimitz* and *USS Challenger* had failed to return in one piece and it would only be matter of time before it arrived outside Earth's solar system.

With a final battle looming, Janeway had recalled all the fleets at short notice and had taken personal command of the *USS Calypso*, a Ronin Class Starship. Although it was suited for battle, she did not feel safe and regretted sending the Explorer away.

Her repeated calls to the Explorer failed and she clamored for any updates on the current situation. Eventually she gave up and prayed that McGregor could arrive in time to thaw off the invasion. News about the Frontier Station Seven flashed on her data screen. They also lost contact in that area. *Could the unknown vessel be jamming our transmissions?*

She looked at her reflection on the desk and she appeared paler than usual. She might have made a huge mistake in sending the Explorer away, but she was going to defend Earth with all her power.

Earth will not fall!

The intercom chimed in with news that Janeway didn't want to hear. "Sorry captain, we have sent several hails to Deep Space Frontier Station but we are still not getting a reply."

Janeway sighed as she finished dictating into her console. She thought for a moment and then decided to end the call, there was nothing more to say. "Keep trying, I am sure the transmission is being jammed by that alien ship, I'm on my way to the bridge, Janeway out."

She took her coffee and proceeded out of the room. More sensor reports flashed on her screen indicating that the alien ship was near.

Space looked calm from the view screen of the *Calypso* and Janeway strolled over to her command chair as her bridge crew kept a diligent watch for any sign of movement in the endless void of space. Sensor beeps and chimes echoed around the bridge, with idle chatter Janeway could understand. *Everybody is ready, but where is that damn ship?*

Starfleet vessels settled into a well-organized defensive pattern around Earth's orbit. A smaller fleet had already been dispatched to the outer fringes of Pluto to act as lookouts. So far nothing has been seen.

Janeway counted down the hours as her worry and fear turned to eagerness and it wasn't long until she was spoiling for a fight.

All the battles she had undergone in the Delta Quadrant had turned her into a stern woman. The Borg, Hirogen and even the Kazon posed no obstacle for her. She was confident in her crew and the new fleet of ships. One large alien vessel did not pose much of a threat and she wondered why her skin turned pale in the first place.

Probably too much coffee.

Still as she looked around and saw the frightened expressions of her bridge crew, she needed to install confidence.

“Steady as she goes. Communications contact the fleet and make sure they remain in formation, I don’t want any stragglers.” She didn’t have to give the order, but Janeway needed to give the crew something to do, something to keep their minds of the impending battle that seemed to take forever. She had no way to guess when the enemy would show up.

Runabouts circled alongside the larger starships chatting to each other and their captains. Some vessels didn’t respond as they tried to keep radio silence. Because most captains were new, they followed strict rules to maintain radio silence during battle.

More vessels joined the parade of ships already in Earth’s orbit and Janeway decided to create a second fleet higher out. But the enemy had not seen and she began to wonder if the whole thing was a game that the two captains decided to set up. She would certainly reprimand them for any trickery, if there was one.

But in the sea of space, without stealth, shields or even trying to hide, the titanic alien vessel ploughed through the sensor net triggering every single alarm the Federation had. The alien vessel looked like a titanic nightmare that ploughed through space like a cannonball. The initial warning came from the *USS Yamato* that was in its line of fire. “Captain, the alien vessel is heading straight for us and it is not slowing down!”

Janeway sat on her chair as adrenaline raced around her body; *the fight is about to start.*

“Captain, the alien vessel is passing the Utopia Planitia Fleet Yards and it appears to be on an intercept course to Earth.” The initial communication was overlapped by the Shipyard’s commanding officer.

“Thanks for the information. By the way, have you received instructions for the special package?” Janeway looked at the screen, she had an ace in the hole and she wanted to make sure everything was ready. Mars had a powerful weapon that might destroy the enemy if the situation warranted it.

“We are making preparations as we speak, the weapon should be modified within ten minutes.”

Janeway felt disappointed, “Ten minutes? That alien vessel will be here at any minute and we need that weapon.”

Her conversation was suddenly cut short when alarms sounded on the *Calypso’s* bridge. The crew already on alert, scrambled to their stations. The battle was about to start and Janeway ordered the enemy on screen.

The vessel appeared on the screen in a loonier orbit and Janeway watched the bridge crew react in utter disbelief at the nightmare that awaits them. She could clearly see doubt and the inset of panic setting in.

Janeway issued orders. “All ships withdraw from the outer system and converse on the enemy’s location, do not engage unless provoked.”

“Captain, the vessel’s moving, it’s heading into Earth’s orbit.” Said the operations officer in a clipped voice, he struggled to keep up with the situation as it progressed at alarming speed.

Janeway looked up from the console she stood next to, the huge vessel moved into orbit at alarming speed and she was not even prepared for this scenario. The vessel did enter the moon’s orbit and she assumed it would be studying their

defenses. It would give them time to create a counter attack or at least talk with the inhabitation. So why did it suddenly move into Earth's orbit so quickly?

The alien vessel hung in orbit over the Earth, its black deadly tentacles and huge body looked like a virus that was about to invade a cell. It loomed over huge landmasses and glided through the defense net.

Janeway opened a channel and tried to reason with the alien vessel, but it did not respond.

"We are detecting scanning beams ma'am." Said Janeway's exec.

Moments later, The *USS Rabin* was the first to receive a mortal blow from the enemy. Unprovoked and without visible reason, the enemy vessel spat out a superheated fireball that dragged through space and struck the shields of the unprepared *Rabin*. A shower of sparks and hull fragments remained where the vessel once stood. It was sent tumbling towards the Earth in which it burned up in the atmosphere.

Now that the battle was engaged, dozens of Starfleet vessels opened fire on the monstrous ship. In response, the alien vessel sent out swarms of incinerating balls of fire in all directions as it fired indiscriminately at any ship within range of its weapon systems.

Janeway joined the fight as her vessel swooped into the chaos. She retaliated, blasting away at the attacker without taking any aim. The *Calypso* mowed over the surface of the ship striking blows to the fireball launching chambers and the alien vessel could not fire its weapon fast enough to catch Janeway's ship. She opened a channel, "All ships, we have confirmed its weakness, keep moving and the enemy's weapons can't get a lock on you."

But even if they did find a weakness, Janeway knew from current reports that the alien vessel was not taking enough damage to slow it down. They were like nits annoying a fox.

Moments later the *Enterprise* swooped into the fray of activity and began to open fire. The hurricane of weapons fire and damaged ships made the area a dangerous place to navigate and the *Enterprise* swooped into hell storm. A fireball fragment sent sparks and vibrations through the ship.

Several systems on the *Enterprise* sparked and overloaded. "Stabilize the systems, raise our shields and activate the weapons." Riker shouted. "We've jumped into the middle of a battle and we're not going down today!"

But as he feared, the *Enterprise's* weapons did not have the firepower to inflict serious damage to the alien vessel. But they carried on, perhaps by some luck, they could hold off the main attack and allow the *special package* to be deployed.

Sam looked up towards the clear night sky and spotted something that resembled a firework show in orbit. He did not understand what was going on, but his suspicions were not good.

He assumed something terrifying was happening above him and he had nowhere to go. He touched his arm and felt a slight tingle from a discreet blue fabric ring circled his arm under his armpit. It was one of Cann-Li's skin-fabric-arm-fins she tied around his arm while they were together that romantic night on the *Explorer*. The memory flooded back to him. She called it a bonding ring.

The skin is alive; it is part of me and will connect with your body. Tiny roots will grow from my band and bond with your skin and grow inside your body. It will

add a little bit of me into your body, it will also open our minds to a faint telepathic link and we will feel the presence of each other always. It is the ultimate bonding sensation.

Sam was disturbed when the band grew roots that began to burrow (without pain) into his skin that night. Even now, the faint white roots could still be seen under the band, but he got used to it and it even gave him a strange satisfaction of bondage. As he looked at the band, he could feel Cann-Li and her soul inside his body, they were together helped by the bonding ring.

Echoing alarms pealed him back from his thoughts. All the lights in the city suddenly died and this only strengthened his suspicions. Only the shadowy buildings could be seen illuminated by the moon and the lightshow in orbit.

Sam wondered, *what's the point in hiding the city in darkness. If an alien fleet was in orbit, surely they could use scanners and just level the place.* He needed to get to his fiancée and make sure Cann-Li was safe. He could feel her, but he preferred to be there.

With every light turned off and only a few emergency lights left on, Sam used his tricorder's torch to light the way back to the hospital. It was a long journey but he was sure some form of transport was still active.

A bright flash in the sky indicated something had exploded with the force of a small sun. He didn't know what it was, but he prayed an enemy vessel was destroyed and the Federation was being successful. But his thoughts raced on with puzzling questions. *What enemy? How could the Federation allow an enemy fleet all the way to Earth?*

On a high point of the city, Sam gazed around at the entire view. The hospital resided behind him and the sparks in the sky offered the look of a firework show, but Sam knew how deadly it was. Suddenly massive bursts of plasma erupted from the city.

Defensive platforms, larger than a twelve-story skyscraper, scattered at several locations around the city, erupted in a hail of light.

Plasma bolts larger than twelve runabouts roared into the sky like cannonballs. The new land defensive system was about to be put to the test.

Sam felt the heat from the cannons as it swept through the landscape with the wind. The smell of hot Vulcan cream fudge lingered behind, but the show was terrifying.

Sam rushed into the hospital to assist in the evacuation. Somehow he hoped the Federation fleet could defeat the intruders, whatever they were.

Aboard the beleaguered *Calypso*, Janeway ordered her crew to fire indiscriminately at the single orbiting target. It was the easiest target to hit and it only lingered on one spot. What pissed her off more was the fact the vessel had no shields and no effective weapons, yet they could not destroy it.

"The target is right down there. Hit it and I don't want excuses for any misses!" She wished her surprise weapon was ready on time, but they sent her more bad news that angered her more.

Earth's orbit had been turned into to a minefield. Floating fireballs, damaged vessels and heavy hull plating had turned the area into a meteor storm. Explosions spangled space like a coronation day firework show and each ship had to fly carefully to avoid being part of it.

Tactical offers yelled over the barrage of frantic chats and intercom chatters, "Incoming defensive barrage from Earth."

Janeway stood as she watched the swarm of green plasma blasts rise up from orbit, like slow moving balls floating to the top of a lake.

They ploughed into the underbelly of the alien vessel with such force; it was shoved out of orbit and back into space.

Wave after wave sent concentrated blasts of plasma straight into the monstrous ship, large tentacles broke off and chunks of fleshy armor were blasted into space, it looked like success.

But Janeway looked in horror as the vessel changed its formation and targeted Earth.

The fireball chambers built up to an unprecedented charge of light before releasing what looked like an eighteen-meter concentration burst directly towards Earth. The charge took fifteen seconds to build up, but the fireball ordinance dragged through space into Earth's atmosphere.

Onboard the *Enterprise*, Data accessed the trajectories of the incinerating fireballs and his outlook was not good. "Captain, current scans indicate that the enemy is firing at the defensive platforms on the surface.

As Riker looked out of the view screen, the charged fireball roared into the atmosphere like a comet gone mad. Nothing could stop it. As the fireball vanished through the clouds, flashes of light indicated detonations and catastrophic destruction to the cities.

Frantic calls flooded in from everyone, calls for the bombardment to stop. But there was nothing anyone could do to stop it.

Riker stood on his bridge while he watched the alien vessel charge for another volley. He had fifteen seconds to do something.

But before he was to make the final command that was sure to stop the enemy in its tracks, Captain Summers of the *USS Valkyrie* had already beaten him to it.

"Summers, what do you think you are doing?" Riker was not going to let another good commander die, he wanted that honor for himself and it was his original idea to start with. He knew the risks, but also understood that the human race had no chance. He had to sound firm, but deep down; there was nothing he could do to stop him.

Summers appeared on the screen as he prowled back and forth on his bridge. "We have already made our choice Commander, our vessel is severely damaged and our warp core is on the verge of rupture, this is our only chance to use that power to take out the enemy."

More blasts from the *Enterprise* directed the fire that was coming from the enemy ship; it was now firing everything it had at the *Enterprise*.

Before Riker could bid farewell to the commander of *Valkyrie*, his warp core ruptured and his sleek Intrepid class starship vanished in a small-scale supernova that disintegrated the fireball launching bays.

The glow obscured all view for a few minutes as everyone waited patiently for the end result. But as the glow eventually began to subside, the nightmare vessel still loomed. Its fireball launchers were damaged and the entire broadside section was melted into a smoldered jelly.

It seemed to reel in space, injured and unable to fire its explosive balls towards Earth. But the damage inflicted was already done.

Green plasma bolts from Earth have ceased and no one knew what kind of damage was done to the alien vessel or what it intends to do now.

Janeway needed action and she ordered her fleet to destroy the alien vessel. "You there, did I tell you to stop firing, target that ship and fire everything we have, instruct the fleet to do the same!"

But as the Starfleet vessels fired indiscriminately at the alien vessel again, a new device was to be used.

Riker looked through the view screen at the *Calypso*; it took the lead and moved forward from the rest of the fleet. But when Janeway's ship nudged closer to the alien vessel, web-like tentacles stretched forth in an attempt to grab her ship. Fragile and easy to break, the web-like strands rapidly traversed the sea of space and struck the shields of the *Calypso*.

The shields glowed like a hand touching a plasma screen, while the strands drained all the energy from the shields. When it was depleted, the strands grabbed the hull and began disintegrating it.

Riker felt tired from the constant surprises and strange new weapons the alien vessel had, *what more could it have?* He stepped back, unable to comprehend what he was seeing. *Was the Calypso being disintegrated?*

"Data, anything?"

Data swiveled back to his console and his hands raced like a storm over the controls. It only took seconds for the nightmare to hit home.

"Captain, if my readings are correct, the web-like structure consists of millions of organic parasites that are devouring the *Calypso's* hull and using the raw components as material to initiate repairs." Riker looked on as the web-like strands changed color to the Tritanium and carried to the main ship.

"Data magnify the strands." The screen magnified and Riker watched his bridge crew stared at awe at the view screen. They saw trillions of insects clamoring over each other through space, like a whole army of ants devoting a tree and bringing the leaves back to the nest.

The saucer section of the *Calypso* began to disintegrate, like paper that was burned. Hull plating was peeled into liquid and red scorch marks indicated the next areas to go.

The *Calypso* backed away and fired its quantum torpedoes at the web-like structure, which grew in thickness. Luckily it managed to break free and the disintegration of the ship ceased.

"Admiral Janeway, What's the status of your vessel?" Riker walked closer to Data who was frozen in place, calculating the implications, or so Riker thought.

"We lost several decks to that new device they've used, but everything seems fine..." Her comment was cut short when her crewmember shouted, "Captain, the... the webs, they are spreading!"

Spoors of ultra-thin webs stretched forth and grabbed hold of any material or ship they came upon. The raw chunks were melted into useable material that helped the strands grow in mass and also created new ones. Riker could see the raw material being carried to the main vessel and visible repairs were highlighted by the discoloration on the hull.

Unstoppable and out of control, the strands jumped from object to object, hungry for anything. Janeway's fleet backed away, firing continually at the closing strands.

Chapter 31

(Battle on the Explorer)

The Borg came with relentless force. There was no way to stop the half-flesh and half-machine entities, which did not feel or care for other people's feelings. The Borg only wanted to assimilate everything they touched, and they did as they rampaged through the decks of the Explorer. What they could not assimilate, they destroyed.

Outside the Explorer's bridge, the Borg managed to force open some of the old bulkhead doors and they piled upon the last remaining door. But it was closed tight and McGregor heard the continuous pounding as if cannons went off every second. The Borg could not get in, but it wasn't the first of his problems. He had to deal with the Borg on the bridge first.

With its arm stretched out and assimilation tubules wiggling in the air, it approached McGregor and then lunged towards him like an asteroid on a collision course. He had no chance to avoid it.

Without care or hesitation, Arania lunged herself towards the drone and immediately, her body weight mowed the creature to the floor. She was instantly injected with the tubules, which looked like it was having an orgy with her neck. Her veins bulged and she began to spasm uncontrollably on the floor.

McGregor shouted her name, but like a puppet he was unable to do anything. The Borg threw her to the side like a used bag of crisps and went for McGregor again.

Tulack stood, with fear and panic roaring through his veins. The robotic flesh-rotten monster approached him, lazar eyes piercing the semi-foggy bridge as systems continued to spark and short out. He was doomed and he himself found it hard to keep his emotions in check, he had no weapon, no hope.

Suddenly a bridge crewman named Nathan fired a plasma burst in the drone's face. The blast blew its head off and the Borg fell to the ground, caking the area in blood. Tulack spotted the sickly smile on Nathan's face as he raised his weapon and looked for another target.

Now Nathan did not hesitate. The unruly scanning officer with his Einsteinhairstyle and well shaven face moved to the next drone that was about to attack the captain. He fired his weapon and struck the drone flat on the floor. He grinned with satisfaction and moved to the last drone that was about to take over the job of assimilating McGregor.

He fired and a shield prevented the blast from killing it. The drone stopped and looked at Nathan. *Ho shit!* He thought

"This is not good!" His clipped voice bellowed over the frantic cries and calls.

With brute force, he ripped his chair from the deck floor and waved it in the air like a cave man gone wild. Yelling at the top of his voice, he brought the chair's shaft down like a club on the drone's face. Its head bent back and blood poured all over the deck. With sputtered movements, it fell to the floor.

The last drone was finally dead.

McGregor backed away to an empty station and shook his head, the mess and chaos was something he didn't believe possible. His ship was invaded and countless lives would be lost.

He felt a sting in his heart as he looked at Arania who continued to spasm on the floor, he immediately ran to comfort her. He could only image the Borg

infestation in her body raging a huge war. It was tearing her apart from the inside out and she was clearly in pain.

McGregor knelt down and held Arania in his hands. "This fragile blue creature tried to save my life, now she is paying the price. Why did she do this?"

Tulack regained his emotions and rushed to McGregor side, he saw Arania in pain and said the obvious. "Captain, we need to get her to the medical bay. From my understanding, the Borg cannot assimilate the Cataline, but something is clearly wrong with her."

Rattled and confused, McGregor finally mopped the sweat of his forehead and regained his mode of thinking.

"Nathan, I need you to come with us, you brute force is just what we need." McGregor would never have considered using Nathan for the task. But as he witnessed his caveman-style attacks on the Borg, he assumed he was keeping more than just sensor sweeps under his thumb.

Kraile-li finally managed to kneel and was suddenly sick all over the floor. She had recovered from the infestation herself, but she swayed on the floor from the experience and woozed in and out of thoughts. Her sickness moved on the floor like a cluster of insects in fluid before it eventually died. However Arania was not so fast to recover, she needed urgent medical treatment.

"Damn it! Why did she do that?" McGregor cursed himself for not doing his duty by defending his crew, especially Arania. He saw this person as a close friend and would give his own life to protect her. But he did not expect this sacrifice.

But as he continued to dwell on Arania's fate, a frantic call from Greg came through the intercom. "Captain, we are up to our eyeballs with Borg, when is that damned defensive system coming online?"

Suddenly it hit McGregor, the defensive system should have come online when the Explorer's computer identified the invaders. He looked towards the center of the command deck, as if talking to god. "Computer, activate the internal defense grid."

At last they had the chance to remove the Borg. The defensive grid used standard slugs that have no energy signatures and don't need to rotate frequency. According to physics, the Borg must allow physical objects to pass through their shields; otherwise they could not assimilate anything. The defensive grid seemed the ideal tool.

"Unable to comply, activation control processor is un-powered." McGregor reacted with fury. How could his ship have an internal defense system that did not work?

"Breaker room, why haven't you activated the defensive grid?" His voice began to clip under the constant shouting.

Over the intercom, confusing barrage of echoes - shouts, the clatter of cybernetic noise rattled through the speakers. The breaker room was one of the securest places in the ship, what if the Borg beamed into the room? They could shutdown parts of the ship. However everything seemed to be in working order. *No it must be OK. We need to get there.*

The banging at the bulkhead door intensified as time went on. McGregor needed to get to the breaker room and check the situation for himself, so he had an idea.

He gestured to Tulack and pointed to the compartment under his chair, "Get me the med kit."

Feeling dizzy, Kraile-li got to her feet and waited by Arania's side. Tulack handed the medical kit to McGregor and he used the hypospray to stabilize her

seizures. She should be okay for now, but McGregor knew time was not on their side. He needed to move.

McGregor marched into his ready room with Nathan, they were the only ones able to make the perilous trip to the breaker room and get the defensive guns online. Perhaps they could mop up any Borg drones that still lingered on the ship. But the excessive banging on the emergency bulkhead door reminded them how hostile and adaptive the Borg were. Sooner or later they would get through the door; McGregor knew this and acted at lighting speed.

He sealed the ready room and pointed to a second emergency door in the corner of the room. It was old and faded against the surrounding wall, making it hard to spot to the casual observer. Nathan had never noticed it before, until now. The ready room felt quiet and peaceful, they could almost forget the battle that was raging on the Explorer.

"Looks like the shit had hit the turbine fan." McGregor slugged, as he entered his release code for the dubious bolthole. With a hiss, the door opened and the passage faintly lit up. The damaged and unused florescent lights failed to work, as this tiny section of the ship was not refurbished in the past. But it was their only hope.

Now they bolted down the long dewy passage to the turbo lift at the end of the corridor. It looked haunted and dead, dampness dripped from the edges and the tiny windows looked like clingfilm that could rupture at the slightest touch. It reminded Nathan how vulnerable they were to the cold vacuum of space, but they pressed on.

After they arrived at the turbo lift, both men were breathing heavily. Nathan thought McGregor needed more exercise. But McGregor put the entire tiredness down to stress. Still, as he pressed the call button on the old-style lift, a thunderous bang heard the lift-cabin plunge to the bottom. "Looks like we're not taking the turbo lift."

McGregor stared at Nathan, his iron gray-hair looked more tatted then before or it could have been the lighting. But still, he could not think about his crew's appearance at a time like this.

"Help me force this door open, there should be climbing rungs beside the hatch and the breaker room is twenty decks below." He opened the door and grabbed the rung to climb down the huge shaft. Nathan followed behind with his weapon hung around his shoulders.

Howling wind and eerie clanking echoed through the dark shaft, it was pitch black except for the faintly lit LED deck-indicating lights disappearing like stars in a dying universe. Nathan looked up and the same view enclosed him. "This brings back memories about the huge air shaft in the classic movie Forbidden Planet."

McGregor chuckled slightly as he did watch the same movie before. Nathan was spot on; more crackling echoed through the shaft as they both imagined the long drop to the bottom.

When they reached the desired floor, McGregor used the small catch to spring open the turbo lift door. A burst of smoke blew in his face and the small windows along the left wall lit the dark passage. They sprinted along the small corridor to the emergency hatch that lead to the main Jefferies tube.

"We should be able to enter the breaker room using this tube, once we're inside make your weapon ready. I'm sure the Borg have adapted to it. But I am using you as the distraction. Don't worry, I will shove this metal pole up its ass." He moved forward, "Time to show these half electric assholes who's boss."

At the hatch, Nathan waited, his face red from the increase in temperature, his heart pounding.

"The Borg shouldn't be able to assimilate the Explorer's technology that easily, every system is basic and uses old copper cabling, not like the bio-gel packs or neural-circuitry the modern Starfleet vessels use. The Borg would have to do it by hand." McGregor mopped some of the sweat of his face as Nathan replied.

"The replicators are modern technology."

"If they want to improve the devices to make my earl gray tea perfect, let them." McGregor suddenly had the craving for his favorite tea, but now was not the time.

Nathan flung open the hatch and the smell of shorted out high voltage electrical circuits rushed down the tube. A man, the size of a dwarf held a pulse blaster that was longer than himself. The entire view was completely unexpected. *How did that dwarf get a gun that big?*

"McGregor!" He lowered his weapon. "It's about bloody time, I have been standing here by myself flicking switches on and off and my hands are red roar!"

"Very good." McGregor squeezed out of the tube and stretched his legs. The dwarf man waved his weapon in the air rambling about being alone and defenseless, until he was cut off. "What about the defensive guns?! My crew is being slaughtered and you have not activated the system."

The small man stared at him; his goatee reminded McGregor about the old Earth custom of garden gnomes in the bottom of the garden and this man was the ideal example. "My assistant was trapped behind this bulkhead and I can't reach the activation switch." He pointed to a small switch at the top of the rack.

McGregor felt his anger boil. When he employed Raymond as the controller for the breaker room, he did not anticipate his disability hindering this very problem. He reached up and flicked the switch and almost immediately the computer barged in through the intercom.

"Warning, alien intruders have been identified as the Borg, defensive systems have been activated. All crews and visitors please evacuate to safe locations."

In the corner of the room, a hatch sprang open in the ceiling and a five-foot Gatling gun spun up and deployed. Its howling beeps indicated that it was primed and ready.

On the other side of the bulkhead door, gunfire drowned out the screams and mechanical sounds. Thumping on the bulkhead doors abruptly stopped and McGregor assumed the Borg were being slaughtered.

"Attention, Borg presence detected, one hundred and one Borg drones remain on decks one to one hundred and forty five."

McGregor sighed, the Borg's progress was delayed, but he knew that areas of the ship are currently undefended and the mechanical drones would eventually destroy the guns. He needed to get to the bridge.

Tulack held Arania as she slept, the Borg infestation continued to rage on and he could feel her panicked thoughts through the telepathic mind-meld.

He had initiated the mind-meld to calm her frantic struggling and help her through the difficult time. He noticed that she was slightly different compared to Kraile-li and her effects were more visible, probably because she grew up with humans and her immune system was weaker. Tulack brushed up on her personal record as well as the rest of the crew. The information proved useful during this very moment.

Arania failed to respond and she was defenseless like a kitten. Kraile-li approached, despite her joint pain. Her infestation was almost over and she had eliminated the Borg nano-probes. She looked confused and Tulack was unsure what she could do, but he was not going to deny her the right to help.

She held her hand and spoke softly to her, like a kindred spirit helping its partner. Tulack saw the immense effort portrayed in hiding her emotions; Kraile-li would have made a very successful Vulcan. If she was born one.

After a few moments, the Gatling guns deployed from the ceiling. Two deployed on opposite side of the bridge and began to open fire on the perished Borg drones. Tulack failed to see the logic as to why the guns would fire at the dead bodies. But it was later noticeable that the Borg technology was still active, the guns made sure they were completely dead.

Tulack turned and noticed the thunderous thumping on the bulkhead door had stopped, the bridge crew also looked with relieved expressions and he, himself almost smiled at the breathing room. *Finally, the Borg have been beaten.*

But Arania needed medical treatment and the only way to the medical bay was through the bulkhead doors. But they were sealed and there was no visible way to open them, McGregor was the only one with the override code, if it worked.

Before, McGregor had expressed his concerns to Tulack about the function of the system; it would be pointless if the captain was assimilated and then able to move freely around the ship. So with his Vulcan intellect, he was assigned the task to improve the system and offer his recommendations. He had yet to submit them. But most of the crew was unaware of the basic function command they could use, something that a select few bothered to look up.

McGregor placed his hands on the bulkhead door in the breaker room, listening for any sign of Borg movement. His heart pounded and he could not hear anything except for the intermittent beeps of the Gatling guns on the other side.

"Excuse me captain, I am not sure that's a good idea to open the door. What happens if the Borg are waiting outside for us?" Raymond looked smaller than McGregor last remembered and a lot paler, perhaps it was the situation.

"Computer open bulkhead door, circuit-breaker-room one."

The computer recognized his command and performed basic scans to see if he was assimilated. Satisfied, the doors sprung open. McGregor was pleased at how efficient the computer system worked in all this chaos, it was one of his best investments.

Raymond growled, annoyed that no one listened to his suggestions. He was about to follow them out of the room, but McGregor ordered him back to do his job, activate systems that switched offline. "Keep me posted on any systems that go offline. The Borg might be messing around and assimilating things. Use the walky-talkies for reliable communications."

McGregor ordered the bulkhead door closed and they progressed further. Huge guns waited over their heads, ready to mow down any Borg drones that happen to wonder in their way. Bulkhead doors remained closed; some battered and dented failed to open properly.

The two men plunged forward, weapons raised. They reloaded their power cells and gathered new weapons in the small armory in the breaker room, it was convenient and McGregor was glad it was there. They progressed to their primary target, the bridge. They needed to get Arania to the medical bay and assist in cleaning up the Explorer.

They ran to the next door and no audio sounds could be heard on the other side. *Good, no Borg!*

With a swift command, the battered bulkhead door opened only a few inches, just enough to get his hand in if he wanted to, but he knelt down and looked through the gap.

A Borg's hand flashed into his view, its assimilation tubules almost missed his face by mere centimeters. He was lucky. More hands waved about as they tried to force the door open. The door rose slowly, giving away.

Like worms under someone boot, more drones started to squeeze into the already cluttered gap. McGregor stepped back and allowed the overhead gun to fire. With swift action, every drone was blasted into shrapnel.

With their direct path blocked, the team needed another route, so they moved on, thundering across the deck floor.

As they hoped, the corridors remained empty with dead drones and damaged systems. The Borg tried to inject the cables with Borg nano-probes but it failed. The systems were so primitive nothing could be assimilated successfully. Only a few replicators stood visible in the distance. Without warning or command, they replicated Borg assimilation balls that hovered in the air, hunting for humans or aliens.

"Look out!" Nathan shouted as a Borg ball, no bigger than a golf ball, careered towards McGregor. He spun around and destroyed the device. It fell to the floor in smoldering ashes. McGregor then fired again at the replicator eliminating the threat permanently.

"Keep an eye out for any replicators and those balls. I think this is a new technique the Borg are using. I haven't seen them in any Starfleet records before..." Said McGregor. Nathan nodded and they moved on.

Both men walked into the turbo lift and ordered it to the bridge, which seemed like the best thing to do. But as they neared the deck, the lift failed to carry on. "Damn, a blockage. Looks like we have to use the Jefferies tube."

McGregor became annoyed; only one deck to go and they were under it. *How convenient.* He listened through the door, waiting for any Borg presence and then he finally opened the door.

When the doors opened, five Borg got up and looked towards the two men's direction, their laser eyes pierced through the air and locked on to their faces, like the laser sighting from a handgun.

Not expecting to see the humans, they stood up and walked vigorously towards their new victims. McGregor and Nathan opened fire.

Chapter 32

(Warhead Of Hope)

The Federation knew that they were in the path of an oncoming storm and Janeway was right in the frontline. Stood at the magnified image of the real-time insect string that carried raw materials towards the mother ship, Janeway scrounged her thoughts for ideas. The goal was clear, to kill the alien ship, but how?

She ordered her fleet back, while firing everything they had. Each ship was rapidly running out of torpedoes and Earth needed to rotate before a fresh batch of cannons could fire from different cities. The whole scenario appeared worse than before.

Janeway assumed at what the vessel had shown was merely an opening salvo. The destruction of all the Federation ships and the damage done to the gun platforms on the surface was barely even a warm-up; this monstrous vessel could do so much more.

She drank in all the details about her fleet and what the alien ship was doing. So far it was only collecting damaged hull fragments, and repairing the damage done to its weapon system, so they needed to act fast.

"Mars, we need that weapon now!" Her voice was harsh and on the edge of desperation. She knew time was limited.

"Mars here, we can't fire the Verteron Array towards Earth. If we miss, we could vaporize an entire city. You need to lure it out of orbit for us to get a clear shot." A tired, raspy spoken commander replied.

The argument could have carried on for several hours, but Janeway had an idea. "I'll contact you later Mars command, if this works I might not need your assistance after all." She closed the channel leaving behind a blank screen.

She turned to her tactical officer, an Asian looking man, with a pointed finger. "Do we have remote-controlled antimatter warheads onboard the fleet ships?"

He eyeballed the fleet's inventory and replied, "That's correct ma'am. We have thirty-seven, twelve isoton warheads with remote detonators."

Janeway spun around, the idea seemed perfect and she cursed that fact she hadn't thought of it before. "Weapons control, get the warheads down to the transporter room immediately, if we do this right we can eliminate this entire threat now."

"Captain, I know what you are doing, but several sections of the ship are heavily shielded, we'll need to beam down and move the warheads manually." Janeway was taken back by the ensign's sudden outburst, she couldn't remember her name, but the energetic navigation crewman did have a point.

"Then we'll assemble an away mission, any objections?" Her question almost bordered on the line of sarcasm. But she pressed forward; the fate of the entire planet depended on this mission succeeding.

Sam clamored over the rubble towards the hospital. Luckily the building was still intact, but the initial shockwave from the exploded gun platforms had caused severe damage to the surrounding structures. Millions of people would be injured by now. He needed to find Cann-Li.

He stood on the smoking ruins of a small building that was leveled to the ground and ran his hand over his bonding ring given to him by his fiancée. It stung, as if it cut the underneath of his arm with paper. But he ignored the discomfort and

ran as fast as he could to the hospital entrance. With no light to guide him, his tricorder torch provided the necessary illumination for the short journey.

As soon as he entered the hospital, frantic calls for help inside the darkness echoed throughout the entire area. Power was out and he had no way of finding Cann-Li, except for the tricorder device he held in his hands, the perfect tool.

He set the device to scan for Cataline life signs and went on the prowl. He couldn't help the injured that were crying or screaming, he wasn't a doctor. But he needed to move on and shuffled himself through the chaos.

Level by level he scanned the wards and rooms, but nothing came up on his tricorder. A Cataline life sign was being registered, but the device was unable give a precise location so he had to go old school, he used his eyes.

Smoke drifted through the passages and dust had begun to settle on everything. His torch shone up each ward and as soon as he entered, someone would lift their hand, begging for help. He could not help or call anyone, the entire system was down and there was only one thing on his mind. *I must find Cann-Li.*

"Is this everything?" Janeway looked over the torpedo-sized antimatter warheads, her current vessel had managed to carry ten of the devices and she'd received reports that other devices have been collected on other ships. To add more good news, Riker was going to beam down to her location to assist.

Of course Riker was to be stubborn and assist in helping a girl, but Janeway felt insulted by such actions, after all, she was the Admiral. But Riker loved to be the ladies man from time to time.

The transporter chief keyed in a few commands into the console and informed the away-team that everything was set to transport.

Janeway issued final orders to keep away from the disintegrating webs and to continue firing on the alien vessel. It was a hopeless gesture but the unlimited phaser fire might delay the enemy's advance.

She nodded and the transporter sprang to life with flowing beams of atoms that de-materialized the antimatter warheads and the away-team into a wash of light. Then after a few seconds, they vanished.

Was the enemy watching?

Janeway was not sure, but as she stood in the chamber of the massive nightmarish ship, she could feel a thousand eyes watching her. It was creepy.

The walls dripped with ooze and each section had a thick membrane frame that outlined passages and rooms.

She walked closer to a light source that appeared to be a tentacle pointing out of the wall, she wasn't sure. But human curiosity caused her to touch the device and it shot into its hole within under a second. *I guess the lights don't like to be touched.*

Moment's later Riker appeared in the same vicinity and his first movement on this virgin ship was to wave his weapon from left to right. After a moment, he calmed down. The ship seemed empty.

"This is a warm welcome." His tone was sarcastic as gray strands in his beard glowed in the eerie light, Janeway wanted to add humor to the situation by telling him he was getting old, but the moment did not warrant it.

"Have you brought the warheads?"

"Yes Admiral, our scans have shown several key areas of the ship that will need a double yield to cause the desired damage. The rest should be adequate to blast this ship to bits. We have also brought gravity carts along so we can move the warheads safely." Riker pointed to a small trolley that floated in the air.

More teams beamed onboard group after group. Before long, Janeway had just over thirty people with her. She separated them into teams and assigned them drop off points.

So far everything seemed easy, too easy. Not one soul or alien had challenged them and only the lights on the tentacles seemed to turn to their location, like cameras turning to follow a criminal.

One crewmember stopped and looked at a bulging sack that seemed to be hanging from the wall on a string. It reminded him of a raindrop.

He got close and looked at it. Small lights moved around inside creating a strange enchanting pattern. But as soon as he turned to inform Riker about his discovery, it burst, releasing hundreds of insects that rushed all over his body and began eating him alive. He fired his weapon indiscriminately in all directions screaming as the insects burrowed into his body.

Riker threw in a sonic grenade and the entire area was pulverized, cleaned.

"This is Riker, watch out for any hanging sacks on the ceiling and stay away from them..." But his prompt warning was cut short when tears in the ceiling oozed out egg sacks, which hanged on the wall. They pulsated and gave of an enchanting light. The away team was in big trouble. Everywhere they looked egg sacks were hanging from the ceiling.

No matter how hard he tried, something always hindered Sam in his efforts to find Cann-Li. He must have searched over one hundred wards and didn't find anything that resembling a cocoon, just injured people scrambling for help, his help, something he could not give. He had his own priorities first.

The lifts were offline and the only visible way up to the last floor was through the stars he arrived on. Hungry and tired he let of a defiant sigh and climbed to the next floor. *She must be here. It's the last damn floor.*

But as he was about to investigate the first ward, he was horrified to find the place filled with Cataline cocoons. The semi transparent blue Cocoons were dotted all over the stuffy ward and any one of them could be Cann-Li. The only illumination came from the moon and the battle overhead, through the ward windows. Strangely, the battle was not as intense as before.

But as he looked over the sea of cocoons, he wanted to shout, however that would solve nothing. In utter disbelief, he roamed the ward thinking.

His uniform was in tatters, hair messed up and he had not slept or eaten in days, he needed a rest. But he was not going to sleep until he found his soul mate.

Musty and dark, he carried on, thinking. *There must be some way to identify one Cataline cocoon from another?*

It took a few moments, but it then dawned on him, his fiancée would be carrying his children, five hybrids. All he needed to do was reprogram his tricorder to search for their life signs.

Easy... YES!

Finally after the reprogram was successful, he managed to find Cann-Li. She was located in an isolated room in the far corner.

Cables and monitoring equipment had been hooked up to her cocoon observing her development. It was all offline, but he could see and feel his partner developing with his children.

Now that he'd found her, what was he to do?

Riker felt like he was standing on thin ice and froze, as if movement could set the eggs off. He'd already seen what happened to one of his crewmen and he did not relish the idea of it happening to him.

So far the eggs just hang there, pulsating, doing nothing. But everyone knew that one move could set them off.

Then it happened. One crewmember got so scared he fired his weapon at the pulsating ball. It ruptured spilling the insects all over the floor.

Everyone opened fire and it set off a chain reaction that caused more eggs to rupture all around them.

Like a swarm of ants devouring everything, they raced along the ground towards the intruders.

Janeway backed away and set her rifle on wide dispersal and then opened fire. The blast vaporized the whole area before new egg sacs ruptured. They needed to act fast.

Running through the passageways with egg sacs rupturing all around them, it was a lost cause, they were being cornered and nothing could save them.

However, suddenly the insects paused in place and then hesitated, as if a command was sent to them to stop. Then the insects staggered and crashed to the floor, their many legs stretched out, shut down.

Riker looked at Janeway and then the other members of the away mission. He took a brave step forward and examined one of the insects. It was dead and cold. *What happened?*

Janeway raised her weapon as she spotted a humanoid figure in the passageway; she was clinging to the outer wall and then hid in the shadows. "Commander, over there... I saw a humanoid figure."

Everyone stared at each other and made their weapons ready, more trouble?

Janeway took the lead, raising her hand as a signal for her team to wait. With cautious footsteps, she walked slowly to the figure hiding in the shadows.

As she got closer, it appeared that the person was female and none threatening. Perhaps this was a real chance to talk to the crew of this vessel and find out why they wanted to destroy Earth.

She finally decided to say something. "Hello, I am Admiral Kathryn Janeway of the United Federation of Planets, I mean you no harm."

That sounded like a good introduction, she walked forward hoping that her speech would provoke some kind of response.

"I am Kine-lowee, I have turned off the internal defense system and you should be safe." She remained in the shadows and her body was ragged, Janeway could not make out her features.

"That is very kind of you -" Janeway moved slowly forward, trying not to scare the creature. She acted more grandmotherly than an admiral. "-But why did you come to Earth and attack us?" She hoped that her question would not start the hostilities again. Her crew cowered behind, worried.

"We came to retrieve our Cataline sisters and brothers, the Krainers told us you intend to eat them." Her voice bordered on a stern warning. "My sister is instigating repairs and will resume in collecting our sisters and brothers."

Janeway felt like she was talking to a child. "I can assure you, we do not intend to eat any of the Cataline. We are sheltering them under freedom, we have learned what the Krainers have done to your race and one of our ships had gone to your world and rescued your people and brought them here, to Earth. If you scan our planet you can see that they are unharmed."

“I have already scanned and pleased at what the humans are doing, but my sister is not satisfied. She has ignored my comments and will not talk to me.” She stepped into the open, her Cataline features were different, but Janeway knew she wanted to help.

Riker walked towards her, interested in knowing what was happening. Janeway explained the situation and it didn't take long before she asked the obvious question. “Can I see your sister? Perhaps I can change her mind.”

Kine-lowe looked doubtful, but she nodded and led the way to the core of the ship. Now Janeway needed to persuade a deeply corrupted sister from destroying Earth.

Chapter 33

(Dawn Of A New Problem.)

Nathan couldn't shoot the Borg fast enough; two of the five drones dropped to the floor in a pool of blood while the others adapted to the standard Starfleet weapons and pressed forward.

More blasts continued to deflect off the drone's shields and no amount of firepower seemed to hold them off. The local defensive cannon in the area was destroyed and Nathan didn't see any possible way to escape. But he clenched his weapon tighter as the Borg came closer, but he had a plan.

"Computer, close emergency bulkhead, deck two section fifty-five." Nathan shouted.

"Acknowledged, closing door on deck two section fifty-five."

With a violent metallic crash, the bulkhead door rammed shut, cutting a Borg drone in half. Blood painted the surrounding walls, while the remaining drones pounded on the other side of the door.

Finally the lift doors closed and they needed to find another route to the command deck.

Jasmine was trapped and the Borg closed in on her from all directions. Her companion, who stood at the other side of the mess hall, had never seen something so horrid in her life, she began to panic.

She frantically looked around for an escape route and struggled to control her fear, the drones looked none responsive and evil. Jasmine could do nothing to help as they also moved in on her location as well.

When the first drone tried to touch her, the frightened Cataline lowered her ears and took a deep breath. Then at the height of her panic, she released a defining scream. Unable to cope with the incomprehensible scream, Jasmine curled on the floor and covered her ears.

The scream was unlike anything she'd heard before. Clenching her teeth to help with the immense pain, she heard smashed glass and bent crockery that was scattered on different tables. When she thought it could not get any worse, the scream increased in intensity and the entire room began to vibrate.

Jasmine closed her eyes and waited for the sound to stop. After a moment, that seemed forever, the scream subsided with only the ringing in her ears. Jasmine realized she was unharmed.

Despite the disaster and the strange scream, Jasmine got up and looked around. The Borg drones had been killed and the room flickered intermittently. Water pored from burst pipes and plaster fell from the ceiling. It was as if a bomb blew the place up.

Curled up in the corner and frightened, the young woman looked around in awe, she did not understand what she had done, but whatever she had done worked. But she felt guilty in destroying the place.

As the area began to settle down, Jasmine got up and rushed to the young Cataline female, tossing aside any rubble that got in the way. She didn't know what the Cataline female was thinking or the mood she was in, but Jasmine could not leave her alone. Wiping a small amount of blood that seeped through her ear, she went over to the stranded woman.

Realizing that they both needed medical help, Jasmine placed her arms around her and guided the Cataline out of the destroyed area.

The entire deck shook as McGregor grabbed hold of the passageway wall. Nathan lost his balance and fell over, it would have been a funny scene but no one was laughing. Lights flickered and a recognizable scream bellowed throughout the hallway like wind in a cave.

McGregor instantly knew that a Cataline had released its scream and caused untold damage. But he did not blame them; he would have done the same if he had the capability.

McGregor executed his final command as they arrived on the bridge. He saw Tulack spin around with his weapon pointed at him, but lowered it when he realized his mistake, McGregor walked in; happy he'd not been shot.

"The decks are still crawling with Borg, but I am sure only a handful remains."

"Attention, Borg invasion detected on decks fifty-five to one-hundred and fifty, thirty-three Borg remain on the ship."

The computer almost made McGregor's calculations seem embarrassing, but at least they had an accurate count of the infestation.

"Captain, if I may point out, Arania is severely injured and we'll need to get her to the medical bay as soon as possible." Tulack stood ramrod straight and walked towards the turbo lift door.

McGregor could almost hear concern in Tulack's voice, which was strange for a Vulcan. But assumed it was down to tiredness, but he was right, Arania needed medical treatment.

McGregor cradled Arania in his arms and carried her out of the bridge, he gave his final orders to stabilize the ship and make the Explorer appear disabled. He assumed Borg cubes would be watching, out there in space.

In the turbo lift, McGregor made himself ready for the final stretch of the journey. He was not sure if the Borg would be waiting outside when the lift doors opened, so he informed everyone to run.

When the turbo lift stopped at the desired floor, the doors opened. McGregor ran out and proceeded to the central medical station. It was a designated safe point and secure from any Borg intruders.

McGregor noticed a defensive gun taking potshots at a Borg limb that was swinging from side to side behind an intersection on the passageway. Every time the gun shot, it would jolt the limb back behind the wall locking the gun in place within an endless loop. It was unable to kill the remaining damaged drones.

Tulack glanced around as he saw blood drip off the bulkhead walls; it was like a human horror movie that he saw no logic in watching.

As the group continued, the damaged and half cutup machines crawled along the floor like strange paraplegic crabs. One almost grabbed McGregor's leg but he kicked the horror away and ran to the end of the large passageway. The half destroyed drones scurried along the floor after them.

"You ensign, remove that bloody limb from the corner!" McGregor yelled as he spotted the defensive gun playing with the body part.

The ensign followed his orders and carefully removed the unknown limb away. The defensive gun spun around and mowed down the crawling drones.

When the blood spray calmed down and the area was clear, McGregor looked around at all the bodies. He was relieved that it was only Borg robotic limbs and black clothing. No crewmembers.

Finally he ordered the computer to open the main bulkhead. The door slowly opened as the hydraulic lock released and the air motors lifted up the huge door. Hundreds of crew stood behind with weapons ready and they almost cheered when they saw McGregor and his team.

But the cheering stopped and everybody fell silent when they saw Arania slumped out in McGregor's arms. The medical team quickly ran to assist her.

Then the final call came in. *"Attention, Borg presence detected inside computer core. Breach in security protocols is in progress. Level one decontamination will commence in ten seconds. Evacuate to designated safe areas immediately."*

Knowing what was install; McGregor rushed everyone behind the wall and ordered the bulkhead closed. His crew stared at each other before someone got the courage to ask what a level one decontamination was.

"The computer will blast out all the emergency walls and vent the entire ship to space; only the safe locations are secure. We'll lose the habitation dome as well. *Shit!*" He glanced at everyone in the room. He'd spent a lot of credit creating the paradise and the thought of venting the area into space chilled him to the bone. *Such a waste, but I cannot allow my ship to fall into enemy hands.*

The countdown reached zero and the whole ship vibrated as each section blew out its emergency hatches.

McGregor stood beside the outer window and watched all the hatches fling into space like spores on a flower. They reflected the local suns light as if someone had thrown quartz sand into a bright light. It was enchanting but he also hoped his crew evacuated to their safe areas.

Jets of air vomited into space like water fountains while Borg bodies spun around in the mess. They twitched, stopped and then finally drifted away.

Then his heart cringed as the massive dome ruptured sending a huge thump through the ship. Air geysered into space with a force of a rocket engine taking everything with it. Plant life withered and froze when exposed to the hard vacuum of space.

McGregor could not watch any more, he turned to the bulkhead door and could feel the icy cold drifting through the metal. With the slightest touch he retracted his hand faster than he realized he could.

Suddenly Jasmine ran out from the corner of the medical center and hugged McGregor. "Thank god you're safe. The Borg had us trapped farther and we nearly lost our lives, but somehow we managed to make it to safety."

McGregor clasped his hands around Jasmine and he felt her shiver as the experience washed of, it would take time, but Jasmine was a strong girl.

Suddenly McGregor realized that he was holding his daughter and with a sideward glance, noticed his crew staring at him. She bluntly told everybody about their relationship and the secret was out. Even Arania, who had gradually recovered, heard the announcement. She froze, unable to believe what she heard.

Now was the time not to question the relationships of their commander. McGregor had to turn that emotion into something productive.

"OK people, when the computer gives the all clear, I need teams setup to restore the ship to it operational status and the Borg should have been eliminated by now." However, his prized speech did not jolt his crew out of their shocked expressions and frozen gazes.

"Attention, final scans indicate that the Borg intruders have been eliminated. Atmospheric re-pressurization is in progress. Warning, force field failure detected on fifty-seven decks. Check bulkhead safety indicators before proceeding." The computers announcement couldn't have come at a more convenient time and McGregor used that to his advantage.

He gently gestured Jasmine away and walked over to the door with his hand weapon ready. Even though the Borg would have been sucked into the cold vacuum of space, he wanted something in his hands to give him added security. He needed it now!

"Computer, open main bulkhead door on safety zone sixty-six."

A whiff of wispy steam curled up under the immediate gap as the bulkhead door opened. Air was pressurized to equal levels and a gaping hole was seen where an emergency blast hatch once existed. It was the only method available to the computer in order to vent the entire deck and suck the intruders into space.

A force field covered the gap like a thin layer of cling-film that prevented the air from escaping. But the hole looked eerie and creepy, larger than the windows and no force field could be seen, but it was there.

McGregor looked through the huge hole and saw Borg drones floating around the area between the outer shields and hull. It was a grizzly site with plumes of atmosphere clinging to the hull. Objects from all the decks floated around like a storm of rubbish, the momentum of being jetted into space kept the slurry of objects moving in an endless circle.

When McGregor entered the turbo lift to arrive at the commander center, he was stood in a crowd of silence; his crew did not know what to say.

Tulack looked as if he was more shocked than anyone else, however he was a Vulcan and never showed any emotion before. McGregor assumed that his own thinking was affecting his own judgment, but he could clearly read the strange and surprised body language from the rest of his crew.

Like a scene from a movie about an elevator full of businessmen on their way to the top floor, everyone stood in silence. A pin could drop and the sound would be defining. A slight gulp or movement of clothing was all McGregor could hear apart from the background noise of the turbo lift; it was a tense moment for him.

The doors opened and the wide-open space of the command deck was soon bustling with activity as the crew scrambled out of doors to their stations.

McGregor wanted the vessel operational again and everyone knew the trouble they were in. It appeared as if the Borg had taken the entire sector and they waited for the Explorer to fall into their hands. But their plan failed.

A ball of ice suddenly formed in McGregor's stomach as he looked through the panoramic windows. *Who's in control of the Frontier space station?*

On his command deck, the sudden calm felt eerie, the Explorer was back in human control and everyone could move freely. He still hasn't been given a casualty report for the loss of lives, but he always assumed the worst.

The bridge looked calm and clean, the sudden decompression had blasted everything into space and even the crewman that was murdered at his station was sucked out. His station remained smashed and dried ice-cold blood stained the internal circuitry.

McGregor had one more command to give to the rest of the ship, although he tried to keep his voice stern and official, he could not prevent a grin from creeping

along his face. "All crews, I would like to say that the Explorer is clear of any Borg intruders. But I must warn everyone to be on their top form for the time being, some drones might be in hiding away from the ships sensors. Once search teams have come back with the all clear, we can officially relax. I want damaged reports from all stations."

McGregor pointed to Tulack. "I want a target lock on that space station, use the Beam Cannons." He wasn't sure if the station was invaded, but he didn't want to take the risk.

Tulack followed his orders and aimed the huge guns at the quiet space station that resided in the sea of stars. But when McGregor turned to look through the windows, a jet stream erupted from the station. What looked like a yellow line grew as it rapidly got closer to the Explorer.

Unable to do anything from the oncoming beam that lit the command deck in an increasing light, McGregor was tossed from one side of his chair to the other when the Explorer shuddered violently.

Huge amounts of energy clashed, like two hurricanes battling it out in a huge atmospheric storm. The Explorer was forced out of its original location and everything needed recalibrating

McGregor could not see out the windows for almost six seconds as the blast impact lit up the command deck like the surface of the sun.

After the light dissipated and the heat resided, the crew unshielded their eyes and looked out. The command deck looked incredibly dark for the captain as he looked at the blast. But with each passing second, he regained his vision and saw the Explorers hull untouched, so far.

"Captain, shields are down to twenty-seven percent. If we sustain another hit like that we'll lose primary shields." Tulack stated.

McGregor shot to his feet and issued orders. "Fire cannons two and three. Charge to full power."

McGregor prayed that Janeway did not install any improvements on the stations recharge cycle, otherwise they would lose their primary shields when the station fired again.

McGregor watched the two deck guns rotated into position. The firework show that was created by the dark matter entering the two 15 meter deck cannons was an impressive site. McGregor always saw it as an opening ceremony before he annihilated the enemy.

He was not the type of man to brag or make public speeches about his adventures, but what the Borg has done to his crew and his vessel was something he could not hold back. He allowed a small grin to creep onto his face as he watched the weapons prime to the bursting point.

Once the cannons were charged to the point of bursting, a rough blast of light roared through space like an unstoppable locomotive.

On the view screen that showed the entire battle from the rear camera, the captain watched the beam rip through space and plough through the stations shields. It dissolved the center of the station into molten blobs within seconds.

Without its primary structure, the station crumbled to slabs of hull plating and strips of Tritanium slowly broke away and dissolved into the rest of the sector's chaos.

But as the crew began to cheer at their good fortune, fifteen vessels powered up. An assorted mix of vessels hung in front of the Explorer as the markings on the hull indicated to McGregor that they have been assimilated. Shortly after, seven Borg drifted in from camouflaged locations.

McGregor looked at the un-escapable trap. He just wanted a simple transport mission and not all this crap.

Chapter 32

(The Verteron Array)

Elli-lowe hung motionless in her alcove, while tubes emerged from her spine and connected directly to the ship.

She was in great pain and felt each blow the ship had endured. She was unable to take the onslaught anymore. So far, she'd repaired the damage done and reeled in anger over the human resistance. But she was not finished, yet.

The loss of the fireball chambers was like losing an arm or a leg, but Elli-lowe put most of her concentration into rebuilding them. She was determined to rescue her people from the evil humans.

She looked into the fleshy view screen and saw the cowering human vessels backing away from the webbed strands. "They know about the regenerating transport webs." She raised her head. "Doesn't matter, I will exterminate them all soon."

She moved as far forward as her alcove allowed and called for her webs to stretch forward towards the Federation ships. She watched without any emotion as the web-like strands move forward, closing in on the Federation vessels.

As expected, the Federation forces scurried back at increased speed, but the web-like strands did not falter, they approached at ever increasing speeds.

Suddenly someone talked.

"Please stop this unnecessary conflict, you misunderstand our intentions." Janeway walked into the center of the flesh-constructed room and confronted the creature that controlled the ship.

She moved with caution and tried to open a dialog with the corrupted sister.

Elli-lowe gazed down at the human with a cold and stony expression. Janeway felt a chill down her spine, as her ghostly stare saw no room for negotiations.

Janeway gestured towards the fleshy screen that displayed the fighting Starfleet vessels lined up in random formations. "We do not want this conflict; your sister has explained to us that you think we have harmed your people." She walked closer and opened up her arms in a friendly gesture. "This is not true. Your people are living freely on our world and you can join them, see for yourself."

Janeway could not have been any clearer or passionate about her words; she was now the ambassador to her people. She did however notice that her appearance had halted the spread of the web-like strands. *Good news so far.*

But Elli-lowe didn't answer or make any gesture indicating that she understood; she remained cold and motionless, like a statue. Her skin-like clothing was beautiful and she looked like a very attractive creature. Her sister looked the same, but suddenly Janeway noticed she'd disappeared. Had she sent them into a trap?

But she continued. Janeway could clearly see that the creature in the alcove was controlling the ship. She needed to get through and stop this madness.

"Can you understand what I am saying?" She paused, waiting for a response. "My name is Kathryn Janeway, can you tell me yours?"

Still no response.

Like a ghost, she stared and followed her movements, like an owl following it's pray.

Riker decided to join the discussion and added his own flare into the one sided discussion.

"My name is William Riker; I'm the captain of the starship you attacked. We didn't ask for this conflict, but we will defend ourselves. Why have you decided to attack us? Why are you here? Who sent you?"

Janeway looked at Riker in scorn, annoyed at his blunt and rude attempt to provoke a response from this female. She needed to restore some kind of order.

Riker instantly recognized Janeway's body language and walked back into the shadows, annoyed.

Now the ambassador had the chance to correct the mistake and she added a motherly feel to the discussion.

"We are explorers who are fascinated by new life forms and new civilizations, it's in the Federation's charter. We would never harm or enslave any alien race. We have thousands of your people on our world who are free to make a life for themselves."

She decided to explain why her people were taken from their home world; perhaps this will instigate some kind of reaction. "The Krainers had tortured and molested your race for so long, we..."

"Do not talk about my masters that way!" Elli-lowe barged forward, shouting. The entire ship rumbled as if it was under some kind of demonic force.

"My masters have shown me what your people do. I will return them. You will all die!" her ears stood like hard ice crystals and her face was angered to the point of exploding.

Riker shot forward and whispered into Jainways ear, "Why don't we take the girl out of her alcove and leave the ship. If the ship has no controller to control it, maybe it will die."

His idea did sound perfect, but Kine-lowe showed up and all hell broke loose.

"Sister, you don't have..."

"You traitor, you have betrayed me and our race, you have gone over to the monstrous human, you must die also." Elli-low's anger exploded. She wasn't sure how the humans got on board her ship and how the defensive system was deactivated, but now she knew.

A transmission beamed through her COM-badge. "Admiral Janeway, We have the nukes in place, we can leave at the designated beaming points." Jainway was relieved at the news and it looked like the negotiations had failed. She had only one option left, leave and blow the ship up.

"All of you will die!" Elli-lowe waved her hand into the air releasing hundreds of egg sacks. They dripped from the ceiling, ready to release.

Kine-lowe looked around in awe. Her sister had turned against her. She pleaded and tried to explain, but her sister was none responsive. Janeway grabbed her arm and encouraged her to run with them.

They legged it as fast as they could, egg sacks pulsated all around them and the crew seemed to be on the edge of panic. They saw what had happened to their friends and now the same was about to happen to them.

Kine-lowe told everyone not to look at the egg sacks because it would accelerate their development and she highlighted the urgency to get off the ship.

"Captain, we cannot beam out because the hull is too thick, we need to find a weak point." Someone said. He did scan the area and discovered this problem before they installed the nukes.

Kine-lowe touched the wall and temporary connected to the ship. She managed to find a weak point, but looked more frightened than before. Jainway was about to ask why she was scared, but suddenly they heard the egg sacks rupture behind themselves. She yelled, "RUN!"

They followed Kine-lowe as fast as they could. Behind them eerie tapping sounds created a din that drowned out the hum of the vessel, they were being chased.

The sounds grew closer and a few individuals lagging behind decided to look. What they saw was horrific, the floor was a black moving mat, the walls crawled and the egg sacks burst like water balloons. The nightmare headed towards them.

Two of the crew raised their weapons and fired wide bursts at the insects, but the numbers did not diminish. More corners rewarded the crew with egg sacks. But this time they ruptured in front and from the sides, there was no escape.

Some of the crew were instantly caught and disappeared in the slurry of insects, while the rest followed Kine-lowe. The deadly insects got closer and the escape routes became death traps, they needed to act faster.

Suddenly Janeway received good news. They ran frantically to the hollow chamber and the transporter beams rained down on the crew, each one smiled with victory as they left the nightmare behind, the insects converged in all directions and the crew departed swiftly and safely.

Suddenly Kine-lowe was all alone, unable to transport due to her physiology, she stopped and looked around. The insects moved on her at rapid speed, they did not stop, and her sister did not turn of the defensive system. The tapping of the insects drowned out her screams.

The remaining away-team had been beamed aboard the Enterprise and everybody cheered, they were lucky. Riker walked around with a smile that portrayed his personality and Janeway took a moment for herself. But she still had the monstrous vessel to deal with. She decided to face the final stage of the battle on the bridge of the Enterprise.

But as she looked around, Janeway could not see Kine-lowe anywhere. She went over to the transporter ensign. "Did you transport a Cataline life form that was with us?"

The ensign stared back. "Don't you know admiral; the transports can't transport a Cataline."

A horrid expression crept along Janeway's face and Riker marched up, overhearing the conversation. "What do you mean? Where is she?"

"The Cataline have different physiologies than any life form in this galaxy, transporters don't work on them." The ensign stepped back; worried he was going to get thumped.

"You mean to tell me that we left her on the alien vessel... With those things?" Everyone in the transporter room stopped talking. There was an eerie silence. The away team knew the horrific way the insects killed any intruders, they couldn't imagine a more terrifying way to die.

Janeway leaned on the transporter console mortified; she'd left her there to die. But she decided to turn that feeling into revenge. "Come on captain, we have work to do."

The turbo lift doors to the bridge hissed open and the two officers marched on; one crewmember gave the, "Admiral on deck," announcement as they walked towards the view screen.

Janeway took the lead and issued orders. "OK, Communications send the detonation code, let's wrap this up now."

"Signal sent." Replied the COM officer.

The monstrous vessel lit up with a disappointing glow, weak points were blasted into space and huge antimatter explosions bellowed throughout the vessel. Finally the screen turned white, nothing could be seen for a few seconds. The filters kept the crew from screening their eyes as they watched and waited.

What felt like for hours, the blinding light finally died down and the bridge erupted in panic as everyone sighed in disbelief. The enemy vessel remained in orbit and only half its mass was vaporized.

Janeway fell onto her chair. The vessel turned and began to fire its incinerating balls towards them. Riker took the initiative and yelled his orders in the background for evasive maneuvers, but there was nothing else the admiral could do, she was truly beaten.

Ships swayed in all directions as they tried to dodge the incoming fury. Several Starfleet vessels made some miscalculations in the panic and accidentally rammed into each other or the floating debris in space.

The resulting impact caused more obstacles that were added to the navigation nightmare.

Suddenly, like an angel from the sky, Jean-Luc Picard beamed over the already frantic COM channel. "This is Picard to all ships, break off your attack and evacuate to a safe distance. I will take over the destruction of the alien vessel. All eastern ground defense platforms, open fire on the enemy vessel."

Janeway's fleet of ships backed away from the horde of activity and the barrage that was about to come from Earth.

Like a swarm of angry wasps, green plasma bolts ploughed into the thick bulky nightmare pushing the enemy ship into space and out of Earth's orbit. Picard watched via his vessel's view screen, while his temporary commandeered vessel flew straight through the barrage. "This is the only path left for us captain."

Picard felt fresh and rejuvenated after his vacation, he was barely able to put on his uniform before the *USS Agamemnon* arrived to pick him up. The new vessel was under its final stage of construction when the all channel attack came through. Every ship was needed.

Picard stood ramrod straight with a definite plan in his mind. He watched as his vessel ploughed straight through the dangerous activity missing the gigantic plasma balls. Aftershocks detonated beside the thick hull of the vessel, as the *Agamemnon* passed through.

Flying out the other side, like a ship doing a slingshot around a planet and emerging from the other side, Picard yelled down the COM channel for the second phase of his plan. "Mars Base, fire your Verteron Array at these coordinates, *use full power!*"

Nothing happened for at least a minute as the continuous barrage from Earth moved the enemy vessel further out of orbit. It was a tense moment and Janeway hoped that whatever plan Picard had would be successful.

The ground-based defenses that had been used at the beginning of the conflict had been destroyed, except for the other structures on the other side of the world. Janeway assumed Picard knew this and plotted to use that to his advantage. The barrage from the ground defense platforms would push the alien vessel away from Earth, so Mars could fire its Verteron Array. It was originally designed to push comets and asteroids away from Earth, but its immense power was more than enough to destroy the enemy, simple and easy.

But as she looked at the titanic vessel on her view screen, the plan seemed painfully slow.

The alien vessel turned towards Earth to deliver its final blow. Janeway watched as she could feel the time about to repeat itself. She clutched the railing, waiting.

But during the entire time she was thinking about the plan and its consequences, an unprecedented beam of light drowned out the darkness of space. Like a storm of plasma, it bathed the alien vessel until it finally broke apart and disintegrated into atoms.

The beam lasted for ten seconds perilously close to the Earth; the clouds in the upper atmosphere moved with the momentum of the beam and Janeway hoped that no environmental damage was done. But as she looked at the final result, nothing remained in orbit. Even the orbiting space junk was melted into atoms leaving the view of Earth as clear as crystal.

The silence was uneasy and frightening, just one minute ago the area was a bustling battleground, now it was as calm as the sea on a warm summer morning.

Picard's image appeared on screen through the emergency channel. "Admiral Janeway, it looks like I have arrived just in time."

Janeway responded with a motherly smile, but did not say anything.

"I will be taking back command of the *Enterprise* and discuss the cleanup operations. Permission to come onboard?" Picard was not the type of man to smile at such situations, but since the battle has been won and so many ships had been lost, he himself could not hold back a creeping grin.

The admiral gave him permission and preparations were underway for his arrival, the battle was now over and the Federation could salvage what's left of itself.

Although the battle had taken out a large number of vessels and damaged the area around Earth's orbit, cleanup operations had begun and it would be several weeks until everything was turned back to normal.

Janeway stared through the windows of the ready room and gazed down at the planet below, she knew how lucky the human race was, all because of a misunderstanding.

But as she discussed matters with Picard, she decided to dispatch a small force of ships over to the frontier space station; hopefully they can discover why there was no subspace signal, a mystery that has plagued her since the beginning of the conflict. She hoped a new problem hadn't developed involving the retched Borg.

A flood of light drowned out the darkness in the sky and Sam ducked for shelter. He wasn't sure what happened, but as he looked up towards the sky, he'd noticed the fireworks had stopped.

But all that didn't matter, because Sam had found his fiancé. He looked through the top windows and found the lights of the city returning to normal operations. Blocks of buildings were activated in a grid pattern; they shone in the distance, getting closer. It would not be long until the main hospital was restored, but all the staff still had vanished.

Sounds of ships and ground based emergency units began to scurry around outside the windows as rescue teams shored up damaged buildings and evacuated civilians. Then after a few minutes, the hospital power went back online, lighting the room in a shower of light. Sam had to flinch as the light was too bright, but he could see that the floor was untouched and everyone or everything was safe.

Dawn came quickly and Sam slept beside Cann-Li. He felt her cocoon pulsate and he felt a strong pulse inside. His bonding ring on his arm grew stronger and fine

filament strands connected it to his nervous system. His bond with Cann-Li was stronger than ever. The bonding ring was a direct way to feel and unconsciously be connected to his fiancé. It was an eerie feeling, but Sam grew to like it with each passing second.

Before they went to the hospital, Sam guessed that she would be just fine at home, but the medical team insisted on keeping an eye on her development, *such good that did!*

He thought very hard about taking her home now and not risk any more incidents, but the doors flung open and frantic looking medical staff rushed around checking all the cocoons.

As he approached the inner wall window, he saw a cluster of people approaching his room, *at last some help.*

He identified himself, but the crew rushed in and ignored his greeting. Sam felt insulted. Where was the staff when he needed them?

Sam groaned and then demanded, "Hey, what happened? And don't ignore me, I want answers!" he had gone through the motions of what he would say to them, but it didn't come out the way he intended.

One of the medical staff turned and looked at him. "Don't you know? A ship was attacking Earth, we all evacuated to shelter."

Sam knew about the battle above Earth, but when she said a ship, he could hardly believe that one ship caused all this mess.

"Was it the Explorer, McGregor's ship?" The idea sounded preposterous but it was the only ship powerful to cause such devastation.

"No, it was an alien ship, don't worry it's been destroyed." The nurse reactivated the machines and cleanup crews hovered around outside the hospital on lifting platforms taking curious glances through the windows.

"She is OK; we have reactivated the monitoring equipment and I suggest you remain here until everything has settled down." The Denobulan nurse thumbed about. Before the nurse left she added. "When she emerges from the cocoon, she's going to feel like a million bucks! Human DNA has very pleasant side effect to these people. Pity it only lasts a few months." She added a cheeky smile. "Enjoy."

Now he was alone again; refreshed to know he wasn't alone. Now he had to wait. Once things had settled down he could return home and make preparations for his new life.

The next day, the sun glowed in the air and birds flew past the windows in a dazzling display of acrobatics. Sam woke to the warm soothing light from the sun, it was time for him to leave and he was satisfied that Cann-Li would be safe. Now he had to make his way home.

The streets were damaged and rubble was slowly removed and recycled. He saw zones delineated by danger signs and flashing beacons indicated that huge burned structures were unsafe. He noticed the buildings used to be the defensive cannons, but now only smoldering rubble remained, but Sam guessed it wouldn't be long until they were replaced. He pressed forward towards his home, preparing for his new life.

Sam thought back at his time on the Explorer, as a young officer he always chased women whenever he saw fit. He was partially interested in other species; it was a fantasy he indulged himself in. He saw himself as a jack the lad and always had an answer for everything. But recent events have changed his view on life and

his behavior. He was becoming a father and husband, a huge responsibility that warranted these life-changing decisions.

Ever since he met Cann-Li she had touched his heart in a way he never thought possible, his relationship and feelings had developed to the point that they pledged themselves to each other. He was in love with the most beautiful creature he'd ever seen, which helped cement, his love into something new.

For Sam, this was the beginning of an incredible voyage.

Chapter 35

(Exit Aperture)

"Just great!" After McGregor managed to save his vessel from the clutches of a surprised Borg invasion, he was faced to face with the collective on the outside. The whole situation began to annoy him.

As soon as the enemy vessels entered range, they opened fire with a barrage of projectile weapons. They slammed into the already drained shields weakening them further.

Due to the extensive damage and the previous emergency venting into cold space, some of the shield energy converters had frozen solid and was unable to process the huge amounts of energy needed for the shield capacitors. The energy was gradually being drained.

"What's the status of our shields?" McGregor looked towards Tulack.

"Our shields are at forty-five percent and dropping."

McGregor stepped up to the railing and placed his hands on it. The weapons fire behind him through the panoramic windows flashed up the command center, as if they were at a disco.

"Activate all the guns and bring every beam cannon we have online. Its time to end this." McGregor saw this as checkpoint time and he wanted the battle over now.

But he still had the transwarp exit aperture to deal with. Without the space station, he would have to defeat every Borg vessel that decided to exit. He didn't want to be a doorstop.

"Tulack, contact Leeli. We need a method to destroy the aperture now." Given luck and determination, she might find a way to seal the aperture and prevent any more Borg from entering the Alfa quadrant permanently. *Unless they traveled directly from the Delta quadrant, which was unlikely because it will take them around 70 years,* McGregor thought.

The beam cannons, in view to the command deck crew, opened fired on the Borg. Each highly charged beam penetrated the hull of the Borg cube and rammed its way through the center of the vessel until it exploded out the other end, as if someone shoved a pole through a delicate toy.

Already three Borg vessels had been destroyed and the collective decided to pull them back. McGregor was not happy; the last thing he wanted to do is play cat and mouse with the damn Borg.

"Shit, I don't want to go and hunt the Borg down." McGregor gestured to the firing control officer. "Lock the beam cannons on the fleeing cubes, and fire!"

Streams of light stabbed through the Borg vessels, blasting huge holes through the core of the cubes. Some Borg Vessels broke apart into millions of pieces and some just hung in space mortally wounded. McGregor saw it as payback and grinned like a mad man as each strike hit home, *Adapt to that!*

Like a wild animal, Arania marched on the command deck more angry then a Klingon on a bad day. "Those robotic peasants, I will kill every last one of them, they violated my body and nearly killed me!"

McGregor looked at her fragile blue figure as she marched to the firing control station and shunted the original offer away. She grabbed the controls and began firing at the Borg. Each vessel was pulverized and the Borg could not flee the range of the massive 1TW Beam cannons. Arania rotated the barrels of the cannons at

such breathtaking speed that each charge cycle was completed by the time she got a lock on the next target. McGregor was impressed.

"Captain, if I may suggest, I believe Arania is venting her anger, and letting her loose on the primary weapon controls is probably not the best course of action at this moment." Tulack leaned over his station and McGregor met his gaze.

"Do you want to take her off the controls?"

Tulack looked back towards Arania and saw her grinning like a girl. She was receiving the necessary satisfaction and revenge to heal her wounds and he assumed it would be best to leave her alone.

"I stand corrected Captain; I believe this is the kind of help that will allow Arania to recover quickly."

A call came over the intercom, "Search teams here. We've done a sweep of the ship and found no Borg drones, just dead bodies. We have counted thirty seven dead officers." Dread filled McGregor heart as he finally realized how many people had died, even though they are part of Starfleet and not part of his personal crew, he still felt saddened.

A call suddenly overlapped the original transmission and then cut it off, "This is Kane McGregor, I have lost two of my warriors and I would like to thank you for this marvelous glory you have given my people. They have served you and the empire well, and my companions would like to celebrate their passing at a time of your choosing." McGregor initially forgot the Klingons were onboard and he knew they would fight to the bitter end. But now was not the time, there were still a number of Borg ships outside and the exit aperture needed closing. He thanked Kane for his information and closed the channel.

Blast cannons shot stabbing white beams towards the Borg vessels, draining their shields bit by bit. McGregor walked closer to the far side of a panoramic window and watched the rave of white lights streak through space at their own accord. The storm of lights and plasma bolts was an impressive view from the command deck.

A 1TW beam glided in space trying to catch the faster agile ships, but the beams only managed to skim the assimilated vessels. It was down to basic weapons.

Like moths to a flame, the assimilated vessels swarmed around the explorer trying to drain its shields. Pulse cannon turret guns opened fire and the entire area was a hurricane of ordinance. But the assimilated vessels adapted to the simple cannons and McGregor could see it would take more to destroy the ships.

Warning lights lit up several stations on the command deck as the primary shield of the Explorer was teetering on the edge of failure. McGregor knew that if the shield failed, the Borg could invade his ship again; he was not going to let that happen. Boy, he wished he had some quantum torpedoes.

"How many ships are left?" McGregor asked.

"I count two Romulan Warbirds, one Klingon war vessel and some other vessels... I can't get a lock on them sir." Someone shouted over the frantic noises the guns were making through the hull of the Explorer.

As if she wanted to make a point, Arania charged the primary beam cannon and fired it directly at the Romulan vessel; it was blasted into atoms.

"Correction, One Romulan Warbird left." Arania replied with her brow furrowed.

"Captain, main shields are down to eight percent and engine room reports it will take ten minutes to reactivate the converters."

McGregor slammed his fists against the station he was stood next to, *looks like we are going to have more Borg visitors.*

"All stations prepare for Borg invasion, activate..." McGregor was interrupted by a frantic call.

"Captain, six vessels have just jumped out of slipstream, it's... it's..." The ensign let out a long sigh as she realized it wasn't the enemy. "I'm counting six ships. They're Federation."

Out of the frantic activity, six Starfleet vessels plunged into the criss-crossed free-for-all battle with quantum torpedoes flying in all direction. Each hit struck a Borg assimilated ship sending shrapnel everywhere.

McGregor bent over his station, annoyed and abashed. *Great, Janeway will be rubbing her nose in this once she finds out.*

When the battle finally subsided, the Explorer edged forward with its running momentum, smashing into destroyed hulls and floating Borg bodies. The Explorers shield shimmered with impacts and no one dared lower their only protection, in fear of collision. But everyone still thought about the remaining threat that needed to be dealt with.

Leeli interrupted the eerie silence, bringing everyone back to reality. "Captain, I have made accurate calculations and surmise that a direct hit with three 1TW beam cannons at an emerging Borg vessel should destroy the Borg's exit aperture."

Leeli handed McGregor her glass computerized tablet and studied the results. He knew the Borg will be coming soon and decided to take the chance. There was no risk, the generators are online and the shields are back to one hundred percent.

"OK, make the preparations. Communications, tell the Starfleet ships what we're doing." McGregor walked away from the window and sat in his chair, waiting.

Now that everything had settled and the immediate danger has passed, Arania could not resist the burning question that has plagued the crew. She walked up with a burning question on her mind. "Captain, your daughter, Jasmine... I never knew."

McGregor did not respond and his face remained cold and blank; the bridge went silent except for one officer who relayed the ready command.

"Scan the aperture and fire when a Borg ship enters." McGregor stared into the sea of darkness, slightly embarrassed at the whole family discovery thing. He'd rather be assimilated by the Borg than answer any questions relating to that.

Whispers on the command deck caught McGregor's attention, like a knife to his thought. He could hear the words, words about his relationship to Jasmine. He felt embarrassed. It was something he wanted to keep secret and his crew was not supposed to know that he was a family man. That would change the image he wanted to portray and he'd forgotten about the situation until Arania brought it up.

Damn that woman.

Saved by the bell, or call, Nathan yelled over the whispers, "Captain, the aperture is powering up, I am detecting a Borg... thing. It's not on any Starfleet database, it's huge!"

"Right, power up the Beam cannons, now's our chance!" McGregor jumped to his feet and watched the pulsating blue anomaly in space. It began to grow.

Like the deck cannons on a battleship, the 1TW Beam cannons glowed like three hot suns, bursting to the limits with maximum energy.

The diamond shaped vessel slowly submerged out of the exit aperture covered in Borg indentations. Green streaks shot across its hull and millions of festering, shifting clumps of mismatched Borg components swum up and down the main structure. McGregor felt like he was out of his depth. *Where was Janeway when you need her?*

McGregor's legs had locked up, but he forced himself closer to the window. His voice was husky. He did not want this responsibility or the consequences if this idea failed. "Fire the primary cannons."

With the combined power of three 1TW cannons, the barrels of the cannons shot out their load of hot throbbing energy into the depths of space. Never before had McGregor witnessed the release of so much energy into space. White-hot stabbing beams ripped into the rupture causing a chain reaction unlike anything the crew had seen before. Explosions ruptured the hodgepodge Borg vessel and secondary explosions blasted parts around like popcorn inside a glass container.

The exit of the aperture spluttered and vomited parts of the destroyed Borg vessel before the transwarp suction sucked everything inside, like a black hole. Space remained undisturbed and calm.

"Is the aperture gone?" He questioned, it was directed to anyone who could gather the responsibility to answer.

Nathan replied with good news, "Yes, the aperture is closed permanently."

After a short concession of sighs and relieved gestures from the crew, everyone erupted in cheers and celebration as the threat was now neutralized and the Borg could not invade easily again.

McGregor assumed the same was happening on all the other starships and confirmation was sent to every ship in the known quadrant, the Borg has lost their only easy passage and Starfleet can now pick up the pieces.

Arania walked into McGregor's ready room and saw him staring out at the biggest junkyard in the sector. Damaged hull fragments and dead bodies floated in space, hitting at random objects. It was a sight she was glad to see pass as the ship entered warp and the stars began to wiz across the window.

McGregor turned and confronted Arania. He didn't know what to say and he wanted to keep his relationship with Jasmine private. It was a difficult past that he did not wish to share at this moment in time.

Arania recognized his body language and handed him the updates about the Explorers rebuild effort. She thought that perhaps when things return to normal, he would be more talkative. When the time comes.

McGregor offered her a warm smile as she left the room, not pressing the matter.

McGregor walked over to the port window and stared at his scarred vessel that would be repaired once they reach Earth. He made preparations to replant and grow the habitat dome and finalize his bill for Starfleet, after all he was going to get something from the fight, a fight he did not want.

A call came through his terminal, Greg appeared on the screen. "Captain, I've found some interesting things about this ship."

McGregor sat on his chair and leaned forward. "Go on, I thought I knew everything about my ship."

Greg seemed unruffled but she shifted the view slightly as one of the turret gun spun in its chamber in the background.

"I was running some maintenance on the weapons when I discovered an identification tag. Sir, it appears that Starfleet, or the Federation did not construct the Explorer class ships."

McGregor looked surprised; it certainly was a human ship from the initial setup, except it was old. "What do you mean it was not created by humans?"

"No sir. That's not what I mean, from the records I gathered, a private organization run by a rich tycoon funded the construction of twenty colony ships to setup industries on planets that would bring back a rich supply of resources to Earth. The project was lost and dissolved when the tycoon died from... health matters."

McGregor could not hold back a bitter smirk, "I guess he bit of more then he could chew... So, why tell me this now?"

"McGregor, this ship is made from components that Starfleet doesn't know about, or can't manufacture, we have lost a whole bunch of energy converts that I've never seen before." He held a device into view. It looked charred and unrecognizable.

"There's a whole list of schematics in the database that might have that device in it. Look under 'Old stuff' then convert the plans into the replicator system and make one. I've done it before." McGregor made a bitter noise. "Is there anything else?"

"No sir, I will get right on it." The terminal went black and McGregor's reflection appeared on the dark glass.

Caught up in a whirlwind of silence, he stepped back towards the window and removed his top. The room was warmer then he thought and as he fiddled with the climate control system, Jasmine walked in.

She stared at him and was supplied to find half his top off and T-shirt showing. He clearly looked embarrassed.

"What do you want, and you should chime in first!" McGregor could hardly breathe, she just walked in and their relationship was the talk of the ship. The clamor of emotions in his head drowned all rational thought.

"You should understand, it was not your fault, we all forgive you. You did not leave our mother to die; there was nothing you could of done. We forgive you." She walked over to him at the window relieved at the thought she was carrying for a long time. "My brother and sisters want you back in our life, it's been too long. We know what happened and we don't blame you."

McGregor snapped, "You don't understand. If it weren't for me, she would have never died. You have no idea what's it like to loose someone like your mother."

McGregor sat down feeling disorientated, barely able to stand. Then Jasmine saw it. She moved back making a surprised sound, staring at his arm. "You... You have mothers bonding ring."

He immediately placed his free hand on the bonding ring that has been embedded in his arm for over ten years.

"I knew it, I could always feel my mother, out there, now I understand why." Jasmine came closer to her father and touched the ring. It shimmered with a faint light that glowed into Jasmine's skin. She shivered slightly.

She backed away. "Mums spirit lives on inside you. She feels a peace and wants you to reunite our family. She does not blame you."

Jasmine leaned back, her skin began to return to normal from its glowing state. McGregor looked in shock, as if he'd seen a ghost.

"What was that?" He questioned, but he already knew the answer.

"I think you already know. I have to return to my station, I came to hand you the status reports." Jasmine walked out of the room and McGregor could not help but feel that she was frightened by the experience. But she will recover as always.

He stood up and looked at the bonding ring as it pulsed and glistened in the starlight, healthy and alive. She was right, as long as the bonding ring remains on his arm, his partner will still live on inside him. McGregor felt connected to her. Something that kept him alive and strong. Without her spirit and now his children, he could not cope with the universe.

With settled nerves and a clear mind, McGregor replicated himself a fresh cup of Earl Gray tea and sat behind his desk holding a glass-computerized tablet with the latest status reports.

With the cup in his hands, he took a much-needed sip. It was the most rewarding taste he had experienced in a long time. With all the battles and the huge rescue mission, he could finally get back to his normal job, which was to deliver goods; it was peaceful and profitable undertaking, until the next big problem knocked on his ships hull.

The end of Star Trek: - *The Cataline Race*