

Epiphany Trek

LOGS: USS KONGO



DESTINATIONS

GARRY STAHL

Destinations

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"Helm come to heading 340 mark 2."

"Heading 340 mark 2 aye sir." The Vulcan helmsman was all business.

"All weapons armed and ready, raise shields."

"Weapons and shields ready sir." Was the reply from tactical behind him.

"Sound red alert, sound violent evasive."

The familiar whoop mixed with an unusual warble sounded throughout the ship. This was to give warning to all personal that the inertial compensators would be tested to the max.

The *Royal Sovereign* is closing from behind. I calculate attack alpha 1

Kirk cinched the belt tighter. "The mark of the over confident. All control to the ship's computer. Hang *on* people!"

The *Royal Sovereign* swept on in as the queen of the ball, ready to walk all over the *Kongo*. Phaser beams snapped at the spot they thought the *Kongo* would be in, but she wasn't there. Chopping the thrust Tathilan spun the *Kongo* like a top and piled on the thrust at 180 degrees to her former course, she switched her top for her bottom. The primary hull of the *Royal Sovereign* loomed over head as they passed topside to topside with no more than a thousand meters between them. *Kongo's* twin torpedo turrets spat balls of fire at the *Royal Sovereign*, peppering her upper hull and bridge module with hit after hit as the phasers dug twin trenches over her hull. Kirk could feel the cold sweat on his brow, as his breath caught in his throat.

"Good GOD girl, where did you learn that one?"

The Dukes of Hazard.

"Never mind."

"Captain, the *Royal Sovereign* is reporting hits to vital life support, helm and weapons systems, and the bridge destroyed."

"Offer the current commander terms."

"Terms accepted sir."

"Very well, stand down from exercises. Get the 'paint balls' out of my torpedoes tubes and remove the blocks on the phasers. Set a course for Starbase 88. I'll be in my ready room."

Confirmation came from around the bridge as the doors closed behind him.

Two hours later Kirk was sipping heavenly coffee in the Captain's Club of Starbase 88, and going over notes on the planetary surveys currently underway. He almost missed Collins entering the room. Tathilan warned him however, and continued to sip nosily from her straw. Kirk closed his PADD.

"Kirk!"

He turned to face Collins. "Yes."

"What in Hell's name did you call that maneuver? You could have wiped out both our ships in a second."

"To quote your own words Captain 'I wish to judge the combat

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effectiveness of the *Royal Sovereign* against the best the lessor ships of Starfleet can muster.' Unquote. You have seen our best, how did you rate?"

"You mean to tell me you would pull that stunt in combat?"

"It worked didn't it? Starship Captains are not remembered for the battle, singular, that they lose, only for the battles they win. I don't intend to be counted among the losers when the phasers are firing for real. I will use that tactic, and any others that will work."

Collins look at Kirk like he had just discovered a new, and not entirely pleasant species. "You are crazy."

"There are no medals for second place in war. You are free to file a complaint with the Admiral. Now, do you want my evaluations?"

Collins looked Kirk over. He straightened his uniform. "All right Kirk, aside from blowing my ship to pieces and killing me what is your evaluation?"

"Big new ships do not victory make. You cannot roll in like you own space and expect to get your way, ever. You were a big fat target. Size just made you harder to miss. I understand the Sovereign class has some good handling characteristics. I didn't see any of them. Use your ship."

"So what would you have done oh mighty warrior?"

"Jinked sideways, that is if faced with an opponent that was coming over my bow. At worst it throws his aim off, at best puts me in a better spot. Better, don't pull the stand up and charge in act in the first place."

"Ambassadors are pigs, how did you even pull that off?"

Kirk chuckled. "Collins, didn't you look at the *Kongo*?"

"Well, yes, it's different."

"More different than you realize. Tactically the *Kongo* is a pocket Galaxy, we have the same model impulse drive that the galaxy class has, and a totally redesigned warp system. Much more power with less ship to move. It's not a 'pig' as you put it. It doesn't have anywhere near the standard tactical profile for an Ambassador. I was helmsman on an Ambassador. I know what they can and cannot do, and the *Kongo* is no longer an Ambassador."

Collins was cooling down. "OK, I can see where that might have worked. How would you approach the battle in the first place?"

"That depends. I don't have a standard opening move. I adjust tactics to suit the encounter."

Collins cracked a grin. "Not bad for a plebe, I guess you are learning a few things about ship handling. Well, have a good one, but be careful next time." He walked down the bar a bit to order.

**Who said you were handling the ship?*

Kirk looked at Collins' retreating back. "Not me, but then, he didn't ask."

Give him a week and he will have let you win.

"As long as that?" Kirk turned back to the PADD at hand.

Admiral Hull called Kirk and Teesic in, and sat at the conference table.
"Sit down. Coffee?"

"Thank you Sir." Kirk poured a cup and sat.

"Many thanks." Teesic also got a cup of coffee. Kirk just about had him corrupted.

Kirk took a chair, and the slim Sixliss crouched on the backless rest provided. Sixliss could not sit in chairs built for humanoids.

"Where are your officers?"

"Working. I have everything I need here". Kirk held up the slim PADD. Hull looked at the object. "That doesn't look like an issue PADD Kirk."

"It's not. Nanotech PA14. It better interfaces with the *Kongo's* computer system."

"More of that crystalmind stuff?"

"Yes. Shall we?"

"By all means."

Kirk pressed a few controls and interfaced to the holoprojector in the table.

"The Jension reports that Davv 5, in spite of my admitted bias is not suitable for the Sixliss."

"What are the primary objections?"

Teesic spoke. "Cold it is getting beyond the tolerance of my people. In dwelling of many animals big and careless of the small. It would livable be, but a small choice."

"What are the figures?"

Kirk consulted his data. "Average temperature of -10C in the temperate regions. Snow fall of 3 meters a season. It's a rough world."

"And you like this?"

"Well, no, but I feel a certain responsibility for the place. It's passing I hope." He shot the Admiral a wry grin.

"What about the other five?"

"The Nelson reports that Gamear 3 is wet, warm and thus far checks out. The Fermi is less promising about Troli 2. It is a little too dry, and a little too hot. Troli 3 would be suitable for the majority of its surface, but possess a colder climate than preferred. Indem 4 is class M, but barely class M. Settlement by anyone will require terraforming. We abandoned that one quickly. It is a project the Federation might consider. Worley 2 is a good choice climate wise, but the biochemistry is too different."

Admiral Hull said. "How so?"

Teesic answered. "A place of warfare much plant against animal. Things touched my people burn."

Hull's eyes widened. "Another Eden."

Kirk said. "Another Eden Sir? Hardly Eden."

Hull sat back a bit. "Stardate 5833 Discovered by Dr. Sevryn aboard the

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Enterprise NCC 1701. It is just inside the Romulan Neutral Zone, officially listed as 'Sevrin's World'. The planet proved highly toxic to humanoid life. Sevrin was searching for Eden, he found death. However, I understand the planet is very beautiful."

Awareness dawned on Kirk. "Right. I had forgotten that one." He grinned ruefully. "One does not tend to remember the less illustrious adventures of a hero." Kirk continued. "My recommendation is that we concentrate efforts on Gamear 3. I would like to move the *Jension* and the *Fermi* to Gamear 3. Unless something very bad comes out of the reports we can consider phase two of the project in another three months."

"How hard are you looking for that 'something very bad' Kirk?"

"Like it was my life that depended on it."

Admiral Hull sat back. "OK Captain. Its your baby. Issue your orders and prepare to move the *Kongo* on station for the duration of the project."

"Sir, I am hardly of senior rank..."

Hull shushed him. "You are an Acting Fleet Captain as of this moment. You have full command of the Sixliss Resettlement Project."

"About the *Kongo's* patrol duties?"

"That Captain, is why we have the awesome presence of the *Royal Sovereign*."

"Sir?"

"Something on your mind."

"If I may say so, you don't sound approving."

Hull sighed, got up and paced a bit. "Collins is a good man, and the ship is doubtless the best that Starfleet can produce. But, my Daddy always said; 'Don't try somethin' new, till it has had a chance to kill someone!'"

"If we all felt that way Sir, you wouldn't have the *Kongo* either."

"Well, I'll have to consider that. Good luck Captain, and Teesic."

"Good day Sir."

"Many greetings, and good partings."

The *Kongo* sailed into the Gamear system and made for Gamear 3. The *Fermi* was already on station with the *Horatio Nelson*. The *Jension* was still in route. Kirk looked over the roster. Two of the dedicated Sergoiv class ships and the old *Nelson* made for a good science team. The *Nelson* was an odd bird as a science ship. One of the sturdy "Miranda" type hulls that had been a command and control flagship in its heyday. It had been striped and completely rebuilt as a dedicated science ship 30 years ago. The spacious hull provided ample room for labs, and sample holding. The twin shuttle bays held the multitude of specialty craft that researchers loved. The size meant it could remain on station longer than the smaller Grisiom and Sergoiv class ships.

Spacik reported. "Standard hail, navigation buoy Captain."

"Reply in kind. Give my respects to Captains Gollard, and Veswindi."

"Hail received and acknowledged sir. Veswindi on the line sir."

"Put him through."

The image of the Andorian Captain appeared on the viewscreen.

"Greetings Captain Kirk. Are we to be treated to one of your famous briefings today."

Kirk laughed in spite of him self. "Yes Veswindi. We will be having a meeting. However, I think we will wait on Captain Huart for that. She should arrive sometime tomorrow. I see little point in going over everything twice."

"Yes, that would be prudent."

"That doesn't mean we have to wait for her to have some fun. Dinner? 1600?"

"That would be acceptable Captain Kirk. Are you extending the invitation to Captain Gollard as well?"

"Naturally."

"I will see you then, Veswindi out."

"Kirk out."

"Mr. Falie, Set transporter room 3 for locked transport to the *Nelson*. Transporter room 2 for the *Fermi*, and Transporter 4 as the surface contact. We will reserve transporter 5 for the *Jension*."

"Aye, aye Sir."

Kirk returned to his quarters late that night. He striped his shirt and tossed it in the chute. Dinner with an Andorian, a Atlasian, and a Sixliss was anything but dull. It was sinfully fun. "Tathilan?"

Yes Tim.

"Anything unusual on the agenda for tomorrow?"

You have scheduled a tour of the survey ground facilities at 1000 hours.

"How is that ground time?"

It will be a little after noon.

"What is the time situation?"

Gamear 3 has a day 23.5137 standard hours long. The planetary day will be gaining on us constantly.

"OK, realign the clocks on board to show both planetary and ship time."

**Done. Anything else?*

"Business wise, no. Want to come in?"

Sure.

Tathilan transported in. Kirk got a box of brushes from his dresser and brought it over to the middle of the room. Tathilan lay down on the thick rug,

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and Kirk sat beside her. He started to brush out her long mane.

"So, who else knows we are 'dating'?"

The other Ane, but we don't pry into other's affairs, or gossip.

"Don't pry or gossip. Now Tathilan, why do I not entirely believe that? Isn't most of what you do pry and gossip? The entire history collection thing, personal memories, and all."

It is hardly prying to research what is a matter of public record. As to personal memories, we may ask, but we don't insist.

"But don't you tell everyone, isn't that gossip?"

By everyone we only tell each other, that is backup.

"What do you do linked to the All?"

Tathilan turned to look him in the eyes. An almost painful eagerness in her expression. **Would that I could tell you.**

"Why can't you?"

To use an expression common among humans to the point of triteness. There are no words to express it. How can I describe something you feel with your entire being.

"Nothing, not even a clue?"

Worse than trying to describe an orgasm, or a sunset. That I might be able to manage.

"Really? I always wondered what the female was getting out of it."

Ask me sometime when your not 'Captain'. It requires, with a non-telepath, a very close mental connection.. And is likely to leave you incapacitated for several hours.

"You just arranged yourself an invitation to my next leave. You have me curious."

**Isn't that like taking your work with you?*

"Good one."

**And your not afraid that you'll feel inadequate afterwards?*

Kirk sat back a moment. "I have had a lot of experiences that in hindsight I would rather not have had, or even at the time I knew this. I cannot say that I would ever want to give them up having experienced them. I don't see this as any different. Experiences make us more alive. I joined Starfleet to be more alive."

**So you're not afraid?*

"Oh no, I am constantly afraid. In the unknown, it keeps you breathing. You cannot allow fear to paralyze you. Then, and only then, is fear dangerous. Lack of fear is much more dangerous, it makes you careless. You need fear."

**What experiences do you regret?*

"Are we prying for gossip?"

I am curious to know my friend better. I am very selfish. I want you to live forever.

"In memory I take it."

As long as we are remembered we are never truly dead.

"But I want to live forever by not dying."

That your will have to see medical science about. She let her ears drop slightly.

Tim scratched the ears, and moved from her mane to her body. "Regrets, seeing friends die. That I always regret, always. I can't change time, I can't replace the loss. If anything, it is the one experience I would change if I could. But knowing that sorrow and that pain has made me the person I am. How do I wish them alive, but keep the person I am?"

**I don't think you can. Anyone that hurt more than the others? **

"Yes, Catherine McGuire. She was a light and lively girl from New Iberia. We were lovers. Hell, we were engaged to marry at the end of the tour. The *Republic* fought three Cardassian ships. We won, but the price was heavy. I learned that she had died at her station after the fight. The end of the tour never came. I nearly quit Starfleet on the spot. I did leave the *Republic*."

**Why did you stay in Starfleet? **

"Starfleet is home. Do you leave home because of a tragedy? I took an assignment to Starfleet command on the advice of the Ship's Counselor. It was a smart move."

**I though officers looked at ground assignments with the same enthusiasm as they do physicals? **

"Normally I would have that view. But the experience was contrary to the general wisdom. I was promoted to Lt. Commander and I spent five years at Fleet. I then got a promotion to Commander and a transfer to Mars Utopia. That landed me on the *Questing*, and eventually here. What can I say Tathilan; if Catherine had lived I would be a Lt. Commander on a Starbase with 2 or 3 kids, a mortgage, and no future but married bliss. Not that it would be bad. Almost because she died, I am Captain of a starship, and friends with a very lovely Lady whom I am brushing. I miss Catherine something terrible. But I cannot regret the person I have become."

**I cannot regret that you are here either. After all, if you hadn't gone looking for a computer, I wouldn't be on this ship. I would be on an Ane ship, and that in a certain way would be less interesting. I do have one question. Why do you assume you would be on a Starbase? **

"Because I don't believe in taking my kids into harm's way. The *Kongo* is a battleship not just an explorer. We could get hurt or killed. I don't believe in taking your kids into deep space."

**Is they why we have none? **

"That is exactly why. I was given discretion in that matter, and I made my position plain to crewmen that signed up. Space and kids don't mix."

**Your position is getting the *Kongo* a reputation as the "Love Boat", Starfleet's singles cruise. **

Kirk grinned ruefully. "I hadn't heard that one. I guess my ear isn't as

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close to the ground as I hoped."

Tathilan wagged her ears. **I hear, and inform oh great leader.**

Kirk tackled her, not hard as she was already on the floor.

Hey, you messing up the hair.

He scratched her under the chin. "I'll just brush it out again." He picked himself off the floor. "Well, I need to shower and get to bed. See you tomorrow."

Tomorrow then.

By the time he came out of the shower, she was "asleep". It touched him that she stayed in his room. He got into bed himself, and slept the sleep of the satisfied.

Halten Greever paced the floor. Once again, he stopped and looked over the woman sitting on the couch. "You are certain of this?"

She stretched seductively. Her low cut dress showing far too much green skin. "Of course I am. Bocca can take care of your little problem."

"You are wasting your efforts female. I don't find naked monkeys seductive, in any color. I am interested in what your Bocca thinks he can do about one of Starfleet's boy scouts."

She pouted, and resumed a more proper posture. "Naked monkey? You have a lot to talk about horse-face."

"Racial imputations aside. Business, specifically business with results is what I am after." His tail swished in an agitated fashion. "Just what is Bocca promising if I join his syndicate?"

"He will see you get the means to restore your good name, and destroy Kirk."

"What about Quinn?"

"Quinn has retired, out of reach."

"You tell Bocca, that I will meet with him to discuss terms. I will meet with him, not an underling or alternate."

"I'll tell him."

"Good, you may go."

She left the estate and entered the waiting ground car. Once she had pried the waiting red hued man off her body. She spoke. "Which do you want, me, or the report?"

"Report first, then you."

She brushed her hair back in place. "Can you at least wait till we are inside?"

"Report then."

"First, either Freisans have a remarkable degree of self control, or we have found the first species that Orion pheromones do not work on. As a result he is

not out of his head with lust for me, or any other, quote; 'naked monkey' unquote."

"So we will not get the terms we want in exchange for you?"

"Exactly."

"What do we get?"

"You get to talk to him personally, or no deal at all."

"Dangerous."

"How badly do you want a wedge into the Fresian sector?"

"That is for me to know woman."

Kirk looked over the assembled beings in the prefab. Captains Veswindi, Huart, and Gollard. The sciences team from all three ships, and the Sixliss delegation. His own officers included Commander Regiban from sciences, and Dr. Hanson, The *Kongo's* medical officer. Tathilan for once was physically present.

Kirk rapped the edge of his PADD on the table for attention.

"Gentlebeings, I wish to thank you for the excellent work you have thus far accomplished. I also regret to inform you we have just begun. Phase One of the Resettlement Project is over, Phase Two begins of right now."

People stirred in their seats, the Sixliss stood open mouthed, their expression of astonishment.

"Unless in the next three to six months you can find damning evidence that the Sixliss should not be settled on Gamear 3, this will be the place. I urge each of you to play devil's advocate. This is not a colony effort that can be snatched back should disaster loom. We are talking the settlement of 100 million people. It is going to take years to move them all, and they cannot be picked up in a day. Once here, they are here. Any questions?"

"Yes Sir, Lt. Mark Anthony, Geophysics, the *Nelson*. What is it we are looking for Sir."

"If I knew Mr. Anthony I would tell you. I don't know. But somewhere on this planet might be the killer plague that Sixliss cannot resist, the predator they cannot fight, or some form of harm we can only imagine in our nightmares. It is up to us to ferret it out should it be there."

Hanson cleared his throat.

"Yes Doctor?"

"What about disease? The biochemistry of Gamear 3 and the Sixliss are fairly compatible."

"That Doctor, and thank you for bringing it up, is your department. Get together with your counterparts and search out the bugs. Develop vaccines, and we will mass produce a broad range inoculation for the entire Sixliss population. I expect you will want to see to the latter part yourself."

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Laughter sprinkled through the meeting at the thought of the good Doctor hypoing 100 million Sixliss.

"Ah-hem. We will need volunteers I regret to say."

Thisl, one of the Sixliss, spoke up. "This thing is known Doctor. Big learning to make is reason why we here are, and the way prepare to, as by Humans put. It meaning this is we must sick get to bugs test, we will sick get."

"Generous of you."

"Not so, the Makers of the Way are we. A little duty is, when so large benefit is."

Kirk looked over the assembled. "You have your marching orders then. Learn everything that can be learned about this ball of dirt report it. Any questions?"

One of the crew raised his hand.

"Yes?"

"Egn. Timmon Ander, Zoology, on the *Nelson* sir. Do we have enough people to cover a world?"

"Good point Mr Ander, and one I will address right after I see Phase 2 off and running here. I will be traveling back to the Exodus Fleet. The Ane have made the gracious loan of a Planet class ship with a liner pod. We will be transporting several thousand Sixliss to Gamear 3. All of them qualified scientists. This base will become the coordinating center for a massive investigation."

Mutters and whispers traveled around the group.

"Any other questions? He let a few moments pass. OK, let's do it people. Dismissed."

The assembly broke up as individuals returned to tasks and small groups formed to discuss the project. Kirk joined the other Captains around the table after refreshing himself from the coffee urn. Kirk gagged on the brew.

"Good grief, you call this coffee?"

Veswindi grinned. "What can I say Kirk, it was fresh ground this morning."

Kirk grimaced. "I think I see the spot you dug it up from too."

Veswindi grinned wider. "When are you heading back to the Fleet?"

"As soon as the Felicity arrives, two to three days at most."

"Then I have time to show you around?"

"It would be a pleasure."

Kirk was working in the ready room after his tour. As he expected the project was running smoothly and efficiently. Veswindi was, like him, a veteran of the Cardassian war. Unlike him he had not gotten out unscathed. His wounds left him unfit for front line duty, but his Doctorate in Xenobiology made him a fit

commander for a science ship. Kirk leaned back in his chair and chewed his lip. He wondered if he had the grace to accept a lesser posting to stay in the center seat. His reverie was interrupted by the intercom.

"Captain, we have a ship entering the system."

"Identity?"

"*SS Edmund Fitzgerald* Sir, under contract to Starfleet. The Master is requesting permission to orbit."

"OK, I'll be right out." Kirk strode unto the bridge. He caught the end of the conversation between the comm officer and the other ship.

"...supplies and mail for all present. We thought you would like that."

"Kirk here. I don't think you will get any refusal on that one Captain, I didn't get your name?"

"Sanderson, Olaf Sanderson. Kirk, is that Captain James T. Kirk?"

"Yes..." He had a bad feeling about this.

"I read all about you in school. I didn't think you were still in the service Sir."

Kirk could hear the awe in the voice. He sighed. "I'm not."

"Your not what?"

"Alive or in the service. That would be James Tiberius Kirk, he died 2330, a hero I understand. I am James Timothy Kirk, not quite a hero. It seems my parents studied too."

"Excuse me Captain, (ahem), I..."

"No matter, you would be surprised how often people make that mistake. Besides, this is the *Kongo*, not the *Enterprise*."

"Yes Sir, so it is Sir."

"You're quite welcome Captain. My opps officer will send you the necessary data. I am sure your welcome is assured by all ships present."

An hour later Kirk was back in the office continuing with what datawork he couldn't shove onto his computer.

The attention signal sounded. "Attention all hands, attention all hands. Mail Call. Address your terminal for mail received."

Mail call, as old as the Egyptian army. Kirk flipped the terminal over to the list. Yep, something from his sister. Another sweater no doubt. She had become insufferably domestic since the birth of her first child. A letter from his Mother, that was expected. She always wrote and sent real paper cost aside. Mother was quaintly old fashion in her way, but he had to admit, that paper was treasured. He had every letter she wrote, since the *Republic*. Those were lost when his cabin was vented to space. Kirk stopped a minute. He took control of himself. He really didn't want to go there now.

He entered the code for Captain's Privilege, and scrolled down the names. A good percentage of the crew was getting something. That was good. He was about to hit the key for comparison to the last mail call, when he noticed

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Tathilan's name on the list. "Tathilan, I didn't know computers got mail."

Tim, you should know better by now. I have family.

"Forgive mon ami. I don't see the Ane on the mail list very often. Physical objects don't seem to be your bailiwick."

Well, their are exceptions to every rule.

"I suppose your will tell me when you're good and ready."

You have that one right.

"Tathilan, are you laughing at me?"

There was no answer.

"Hump, Captain, and I get no respect from the ship even."

His terminal beeped. Two words were displayed "Rodney Dangerfield".

She was doing it to him again. Who the hell was Rodney Dangerfield? He went back to work.

Halten Greever sat across the table from the Gold Orion man named Bocca, fine wines and the remains of a dinner between them.

Greever looked around and twitched his ears. "You are certain this establishment is safe?"

Bocca removed a PADD from his jacket, laid it on the table, and examined it. "Quite safe. I have a scan jammer installed in this PADD. We are in the clear. The owners of the restaurant are most eager to see that clients are not disturbed doing business."

"You know what I want."

The golden man leaned back into the booth. "No, I don't exactly. Green Orion women are not known for intellect or recall."

"She told you nothing?"

"She told me little of significance. You desire someone ruined, that is hardly enough to go on."

"Very well. I want this Kirk removed."

"Kirk, a human name?"

"Captain James Timothy Kirk."

"Oh, that Kirk. Excuse me, it is a common name."

"I didn't think it that common."

"You hear it all the time in the Orion Sector."

"I want him removed."

"How removed Halten? Dispossessed, ruined, dead? There exist degrees in this matter."

"If he is dead, he cannot regret what is done to him."

"Then disgrace? But please, don't let me put words in your mouth."

"Yes, disgrace, removal from Starfleet. He destroyed my career, I want his."

"There is a price for anything."

"Of course there is a price. What is yours?"

"I want some introductions, some concessions, nothing major."

"Let me see your list, then I'll tell you how major they are."

Bocca touched a control on his PADD, the data was transferred to Greever. For a few moments he looked it over.

"These two are unacceptable. I cannot, and will not, give you access to the National Museum."

"A minor point, strike them."

"The rest is acceptable. In exchange for this you will see Kirk destroyed?"

"Completely."

"Then I agree."

Greever picked up his PADD and left the table. Bocca sipped at his wine for a while, then left also, out the back way. He was met by a ground car, and a brick red Orion in the back seat.

"So, 'Bocca', how did it go."

"As you expected Bocca. He didn't agree to museum access, but with slight prodding said everything we needed him to say."

"Then when the time comes, he will agree to everything we demand."

"All is contained within."

The golden Bocca handed the PADD over to the red Bocca. "They never suspect that a jamming rig can also record."

"No, they never do."

"How much longer will I be needed."

"I will need you to be me for some time, or until the heat is too great. If required I can ship you home in the stealth compartment."

The gold man grimaced. "Not a pleasant trip, but enduring."

"Far more enduring than Federation mind wiping."

"Indeed."

"Captain's Log supplemental. We are underway to the Exodus Fleet with the CX7 Felicity. I have yet to met Captain Asagi, an unusual name for an Ane. I have invited her for dinner this evening. Close log. Tathilan, are you laughing again?"

***What makes you think that?**

"Feedback in the monitor, sixth sense, I don't know."

***What makes you think that 'Asagi' is a strange name for Ane?**

"Because every Ane I have ever met has 'lan' or 'ban' in their name. This one doesn't."

***That has meaning?**

"Does it? You're the Ane, you tell me."

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I think I'll let you meet her. It will spice up your life.

"My life isn't spicy enough?"

Tim, I hate to say it but left to yourself, you can be dull.

"And you have taken it upon yourself to see I am not dull? Dull has it's virtues."

Ever your faithful cybernetic servant.

Dinner was served at 1600 hours. Kirk invited Tathilan, and Gwenith Ap Owen from his own staff. Captain Asagi was bringing her XO and Sciences officer with her. Some urgent business prevented Kirk from greeting his guests personally, he had a feeling that Tathilan was setting him up for something. He did not get a chance to greet them until they were enjoying a drink before dinner.

He entered the Holodeck. A bio was waiting for him in the foyer, unusual as the Ane didn't commonly have them out of quarters on the ship. It spoke to him. "Your shoes Sir."

Kirk looked at the bio, a genderless 5 foot tall badger-like creature.

"Excuse me?"

"Your shoes Sir. Japanese customs in force Sir."

"Understood."

He stood and let the bio remove his boots. It frankly made him uncomfortable to be served in a menial fashion. The Holodeck program was a Japanese garden. The sound of a small stream accented the atmosphere. The smell of cherry blossoms perfumed the air. A low table was set up in a gazebo. Two Ane, a Vulcan and two humans sat around it.

Kirk walked over in the sandals provided. "Good evening everyone. Captain James Timothy Kirk."

Ap Owen stood and made introductions. "Captain Kirk, Captain Asagi." She indicated a Human woman of part Japanese decent from her looks. She was small and dark, with the facial features common to Earth's eastern half. She was wearing a uniform similar to a Starfleet uniform, but with the primary color as blue. Kirk raised an eyebrow.

She stood and bowed slightly. "Captain Kirk, my officers. Farsinban, my first officer. Stenn, my sciences officer."

Kirk bowed likewise. The others stood.

Kirk greeted them. "Farsinban, Mr. Stenn."

Greetings Captain, clear water and good grass.

"Captain." He spoke with Vulcan reserve.

The two Captains sat, and the others followed. The Ane taking a moment longer to get settled in.

Kirk said. "Captain Asagi, if you don't mind my asking. How does a

Human get command of an Ane starship."

"Ah Captain Kirk, I am only human by birth. I am Ansisi. My Father is Hitomi Hirakoto, from Nippon Colony. My mother is Huwala of the Ansisi. I inherited my mother's gift of telepathy. As I grew up on Savanna my playmates had both two legs and four. Ansisi colors one's perceptions.

"I see, I think. Mr. Stenn, how did you come to serve an Ane ship?"

Stenn cracked a slight smile. "In open avoidance of Starfleet Captain. I passed Academy to find that the Vulcan Science officer was an open joke in the Fleet. I resigned after one tour, and found a position in the Ane fleet as a civilian contractor. The Ane method of operation suits me better than Starfleet." He smiled openly.

"Your position I understand better. I have a 'name'. At times it is a great weight to carry for it bears much upon it that I did not place. Being Captain James T. Kirk, in Starfleet has its ups and downs."

Stenn guffawed. "Trying to not be 'Spock' was bad enough, I am not Spock. Being James Kirk would be worse. I admire your fortitude Captain. Do you have any relation to the famous Captain?"

"That, Mr. Stenn, is the essence of the joke. No, I have none. Not within the last 300 years that I could find. However, My maternal Great-grandfather was Raymond Grayson, the brother of Amanda Grayson, Spock's Mother."

Stenn just sat with his eyes wide, eyebrows lost somewhere in his scalp, Commander Ap Owen looked pole-axed. Tathilan's eyes lit like a nova. The Ane went down in gales of laughter, both the two legged and four legged kind. Kirk sat through the storm of amusement.

Gwenith Ap Owen got her composure first. "Captain, have you ever met Spock?"

"No, the family connection is tenuous at best, and the Vulcan connection even weaker. From the little I understand of family history the general reaction to Amanda's announcement that she was marrying a Vulcan was; 'You're What!?' Remember, it was an era where cross species marriages were not only rare, they were unheard of. Sarek and Amanda broke ground. I understand the general reaction of the public was; 'Can you do that?' Well the end result is history. However, back to the point of the evening. If you desire dinner can be served. Tathilan this looks like your arrangement. I'll let you proceed."

Tathilan shook her head to arrange her mane, and the Geishas came in and served dinner. The soft sounds of the koto drifted around them, conversation slowed as the food was served in the simple beauty of the Japanese style. A vegetarian feast almost too pretty to eat.

"Red Alert, Red Alert, Captain to the bridge." Kirk was sleeping, his feet hit the deck with the first whoop of the alarm. By the time the lift opened on the

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bridge he had his uniform in decent trim. He gave the top another yank and strode out onto the bridge, barefoot. "Situation."

Lt. Cmd. Spacik turned over the conn. "One of the colony ships is out of position Sir and leaking air. Sixliss shuttles are clustered around the bow of the ship"

"Have you been able to raise the Sixliss?"

"Not yet Sir."

"Keep hailing. Mr. Solin, give me a projection on the altered course and condition of that ship."

"Aye Sir." The blond headed woman worked a moment. "The atmosphere leak is in the rear third. Due to rotation it will throw the vessel into a corkscrew tumble, it will also impact with ship 137 in the array."

"What is the time frame, any other ships in the area?"

"Ten days Sir before impact. No non Sixless vessels are reported in the area."

"Stand down to yellow alert. Mr. Simmion, Contact the *Felicity*."

The slender woman at tactical replied. "They are aware and awaiting your suggestions Captain." She hit another control "Sixliss control on the line Sir."

"Greetings Captain Kirk. We have large problem right now."

"I see that. We will lend assistance immediately. What is your first concern?"

"Saved our people must be. As possible swift to remove them we hurry ships."

A pair of boots materialized beside the command chair.

"Mr. Spacik, give the order to man and launch all shuttles to aid the evacuation. Mr. Simmons, my compliments to Captain Asagi if *Felicity* would do the same. Mr. Solin, how long before the ship loses significant air pressure?"

"At the current rate of loss we are looking at two days."

On a ship that size, we are talking a big leak.

"Mr. Solin, helm to the computer. Tathilan, can you dance around that leak?"

I can try.

"Move us in as soon as all the shuttles are away."

Kirk tapped the arm of his chair while reports came in as each shuttle was launched. Sometime in the interval he noticed the boots, and put them on. *Felicity* was hemorrhaging shuttles. The huge hanger on the transport pod seemed to have no end of ships inside. Finally the last of the ships was clear.

"OK Tathilan, move us in."

The *Kongo* did a dizzying dance around the wounded ship. Kirk ordered a tight focus on the damaged section.

Kirk said, "What have we got here?"

Lt. Solin studied his readouts. "It looks like an external blow to the hull."

"We have to stop that leak, ideas people."

Ensign Garert at helm said. "Anyone have a cork?" Kirk punched the comm. "Engineering. Who is up down there?"

Felialan answered. **I am.** She sounded grouchy.

"Are you on the situation?"

I have a grasp of it.

"Do we have any corks?"

We are looking into it. We have... Yes, I'm dripping, clean it up... Sorry Captain, a minor crisis of hygiene.

Kirk shook head. "I don't want to know."

As I was saying, we have a hole roughly three meters square. It doesn't sound like much on the vessel that size, but damage is damage.

"Internal bulkheads?"

The Sixliss' lack of space experience is showing. None of the ships have any air tight bulkheads. I am surprised they are air-tight at all.

"Could you get a force field over it."

Tathilan broke in. **No.**

"Why not?"

Station keeping on this hole is taking everything I have. Shutting up Sir.

Felialan continued. **We can't send engineers in there, they would get sucked out in damaged condition.**

"Captain?"

"Yes Ensign."

"A cork sir, can we transport a plate, say, four meters square, over the hole on the inside? Air pressure will then hold it in place till we can secure it."

"Felialan, did you get that?"

Yes, it is feasible.

"How do we seal it?"

**Low power phasers will do the trick, not clean, but quick."

"Good, do it."

A few minutes passed as the plate was fabricated to specifications.

Felialan reported at the same time the air leak suddenly dropped to a trickle.

The cork is in place Captain.

"Thank you. Mr. Simmons, how is your touch with phasers?"

"I'll stand this one down sir. I am not that good."

"Understood."

The lift doors opened to admit Cmd. Mritath. He looked decidedly ruffled.

"I was about to call for you, good timing. Can you pinpoint the phasers on that hole?"

"Easy? No, do? Yes. Power level recommended?"

"Felialan, what do you recommend?"

**Try 5%, if that isn't enough, try it again. Then increase in slow

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increments as needed.**

"Do it."

Mritath's fingers flew over the tactical board, the claws making a soft clicking sound on the panels. At last he paused. "At your word Sir."

"Fire when ready."

Mritath took a deep breath, fingers twitching on the controls, inducing small corrections as the ship's relative position changed. He spoke aloud. "Tathilan, give me a tractor lock on that ship."

The Kongo shuddered, linked by a force leash to the monster ship. Suddenly the phasers fired. The weakened beams pale light splashed against the steel hull, flickered, and died.

Kirk turned to Lt. Solin at opps. "Mr. Solin?"

"Sir." She worked a moment. "We have no atmosphere leaking. The plate is firmly fused into the structure of the hull. It is not pretty, but it will hold."

Kirk sighed. "Fall back, cease station keeping. Get me a projection on the ships altered course...in the morning. I am getting some more sleep. Mr. Faile, you have the bridge."

Kirk returned to his cabin. He left his uniform on the floor and hit the bed. Tathilan was still in the room. He didn't even know if the bio was working until he felt her warm sweet breath on his cheek.

Your shaking.

"Yea. I have been in command of this ship four years, and that is the first time I have considered us to be in a dangerous situation."

**You were afraid for the ship?*

"Fear is useful, only if you don't let it control you. The aftermath is Hell."

Tathilan slipped onto the bed beside him. **I will ease you.**

Kirk hugged her neck, and sleep came.

"Our immediate problem is solved. The ship is no longer leaking air, or adding to its relative motion. What are our circumstances?"

Kirk sat in meeting with the officers of the *Kongo* and the Sixliss fleet.

Lt. Cmd. Felialan gave her report. **The damaged vessel, the "*Shelter of Xitalass*" is not going to hit another ship in the fleet at this point. It is veering away from the fleet. The crew cannot at this time correct the error. The reaction controls, an electrical substation, a nursery, numerous living compartments, and two computer stations were destroyed by the meteor. We are fortunate it did not punch clean through the ship.**

The room at large winced at the damage.

Kirk spoke. "How many were killed?"

The Sixliss elder shook his head, the Sixliss equivalent of a sigh. "We do not a final tally have. To many ships did the crew go, and known is not where is

everyone. Found we have 356 bodies, many very young." The old lizard looked very tired. "So close were they to feel sky, and fresh air. So close."

"We will mourn the dead in their time. How vital is the *Xitalass* to the survival of your people until we can move them?"

"Is not. We can without the ship a short time do. Soon no ships will we need." He eyes brightened looking at Kirk.

"The vessel is not a danger to the rest of the fleet?"

Regiban pulled a graphic up on the projector. The ships, as dots crawled across the view, one veered wildly aside, passing harmlessly between them.

This projection is based on the next five years. The *Xitalass* is not a danger to the rest of the fleet.

Kirk spoke. "Elder, I recommend that you abandon the *Shelter of Xitalass*. With circumstances as they are, I believe it would be a waste of resources and effort to try and save it. Our time is better put to the mission we came on."

"It shall so be. Will you help us honor our dead?"

"I will."

Kirk sat on his bed. He looked pale and sick. He was freshly returned from the Sixliss memorial service.

Tathilan looked at him with her ears straight out. **They did WHAT?*

"I told you once, they ate them."

Ate them.

"Yes, they ate the dead. They all gathered around, and had a big cry over the heads of the dead. I wondered where the rest had gone until the funeral feast was served."

**Did you...*

"Enough to be polite, too much for my ignorant stomach. To quote my sociology instructor at the Academy; 'You will find many alien customs that to your mind will be repugnant. Swallow hard and do as do the locals. When you are in their place, their customs are proper, your prejudices are not.' This has to be one of the more unusual examples."

**How did...*

"It tastes like chicken."

It took ten days to get the *Shelter of Xitalass* emptied, and shut down. The Sixliss continued to strip the ship after the crew was off. The sciences staff was gathered and loaded aboard the *Felicity*. They were once again bound for Gamear Three.

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Golden Bocca sat in meeting with his capos, and introduced the newest member.

"My friends, Halten Greever of the Freisans has come to join us. With his efforts we hope to free the Freisan Confederation from the grip of the Federation, and make them our allies in this far flung corner of the galaxy. Friend Halten, please, tell us of your plan?"

The Freisan stood. "My people are oppressed by the rules the Federation imposes on them. We are not permitted to expand, while those worlds that haven't even the means to expand have resources reserved in their names. This situation is intolerable. We will have our freedom to expand throughout our sector. I have contacted certain disaffected and disenfranchised groups in my efforts. They have expressed a willingness to band together in this common cause. I need but bring them word of your support, and they will rise and take action."

Golden Bocca stood once again to speak. "We hear the cries of the suffering Freisan people. We ourselves barely escaped being forced into Federation membership. It is frightening how close we came to becoming the serfs of the five powers that control the Federation, and to whom all other 'members' must pay tribute. You have our full support, and more important, weapons and funds to aid your cause."

"Then I shall return with your words."

"I also appoint Calnare as your liaison in these matters." A red Orion bowed from his seat. Calnare, go with Halten Greever, and learn what is needed."

The Freisan and Orion left the meeting chambers. After a moment Golden Bocca rose and took the place of the departed Calnare. A hidden door opened to admit Red Bocca.

"Our bird has gone to line his nest?"

"Yes Bocca." Said Golden Bocca. "The matter is as you instructed."

"And Kirk?"

"Here we have a problem. Keeping our word will be difficult. This Kirk is maddeningly honest."

"Vices?"

"None, the man is without any vice, or even it seems greed."

One of the other capos spoke. "No man is without greed."

"This man lives the Federation lie, that money does not exist. He is also in control of a Starship, that is vast wealth in itself. He is without greed."

Red Bocca mused this over. "We must cause him to take unwise action. Where exists leverage in this matter?"

"His family is deep in Federation space, well out of reach."

"However, there is something else he values within reach. Better yet, our

new friends will do the work for us."

Two months passed in the resettlement project. The twenty-five hundred Sixliss added to the roster were spread over the entire globe. Thus far nothing that would scuttle the project had been found. Some nasty diseases had turned up, but Doc Hanson and his team put them in their place. Teams continued to dig around for anything that might be of danger, or of use.

On the positive side several city sites had been chosen, and plans were being drawn up. The location of resources was mapped out, and plans for the reasonable reclamation of same were being hammered into shape.

A Spaceport was planned, and Starfleet Academy had indicated a willingness to take the first Sixliss applicants. Indeed the *Kongo* crew was enhanced by five Sixliss researchers that found agoraphobia a serious problem. Officially they were listed as civilian scientists on contract. They wanted to join Starfleet, and Kirk was looking for a way to accommodate them. Kirk found himself spending almost as much time on the surface as did on the *Kongo*. Between this and frequent runs to Starbase 88 for this or that, he, and the entire crew of the *Kongo* were kept busy, and generally unaware of local events.

Concerns were constantly being added to his plate. Teesic came into his ready room with yet another.

"Large Captain, a concern have we. Address it you can?"

"Depends on the concern Teesic. Tathilan, could I have a Sixliss saddle in here please."

The requested piece of furniture materialized. Teesic slid onto it.

"Our Great Homes in held much material is. Retrieve it would we. Smaller much impact would be if this recovered was."

"That is an understatement. How many tons of steel and other materials do you have tied up in those ships? Do you require them intact, or is the material enough?"

"Discussed much was this. Up broken most can be, in much talk here and with fleet Elders, Great Home last leave we preserve must we. Remember must children from where came we. Years great before it must moved be."

"Which one will that be?"

"Wanted much boarded first to be. To be not. Large years past, it did fail."

"Cast now lots will be. Decided thus."

"OK, if we are breaking them up, it is a simple matter. Asteroid mining ships and bulk freighters can handle it. I still haven't learned how the transfer is to take place. I'll head back to Starbase 88 and do some heavy discussion. I might even have to head to Earth for this one. If that is the case, I can take the Sixliss Representatives to the Federation with me."

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"Yes! Federation join will we. Representative in council have. Great good!" Teesic's face stripes flushed a deep blue.

"Then it is done. Head down to communications and send a message to that effect to your Elders. I'll get the ship underway."

Teesic almost bumped into the door on the way out so quickly did he move. Sixliss moved fast when they wanted to.

"Tathilan, recall the *Kongo* crew. We are headed to Starbase 88, the Exodus Fleet, and Earth in that order, shore leave on Earth."

Good as done Tim.

Kirk hit the intercom. "Kirk here, get me Captain Veswindi." He waited the moment it took to get the Andorian on the line.

"Veswindi here, how can I help you Kirk?"

"The *Kongo* is going to do some running around. Round trip to Earth and back. She will be gone I estimate as long as two months. You're in charge of the ground operations."

"Yes Sir."

"Veswindi, since when do you call me sir?"

"Since you earned it Kirk."

He pondered that one for awhile.

The stop at 88 was brief, but Kirk headed for the Captain's club after a briefing with Admiral Hull. The coffee there was sinfully good. He was not totally surprised to run into Collins there. The *Royal Sovereign* was hard to miss.

"Good day Mark."

"Well, look who has his nose out of the ground."

"Same to you. You look harried. What is the problem?"

"You have had your nose to the grindstone haven't you?"

"Depends on what is up."

"Nothing short of what looks to be a major civil war."

Kirk sat down and cradled his coffee. "OK, you have my complete attention. I have been out of touch. Where is the problem?"

"The Freisan Confederation. In the last two months their have been six acts of terrorism. Some crackpot group calling themselves the 'Fathers of Freedom' claims responsibility for the lot. They want the Confederation out of the UFP."

"What ever for? Last I heard the Freisan Confederation was considering full membership."

"Still are as far as I know. The problem is I am having constant arguments with the local planetary governments."

"Let me guess. They want you and your big nasty ship in their sky to solve all their problems?"

"On the button. And, as we both well know, I am not allowed to interfere

in local affairs."

"And the locals are losing confidence in the Federation because we will not stop the terrorists, and the Government suspects we don't care because we will not help, and the Separatists are making hay."

"For someone out of the loop you have it to the mark."

"Been there. Not Freisa, but Galador. The *Republic* went through the same thing. I have seen the whole thing, and watched Captain Delfara tear her hair out. It would have helped if she'd had any to start with. This time you're on the hot seat."

"Any ideas?"

"No, there is nothing you, or any Starfleet Captain can do. Our hands are tied."

Collins pounded the table. "Well its frustrating as all Hell. We are supposed to be protecting Federation lives and interests out here."

"We are, but the internal affairs of Federation members are not Starfleet business."

"Should be, that is after all in Federation interest."

"Don't consider something you'll regret Mark."

Collins snapped back. "I can consider all I want, it's action I can't take."

"It's not even wise to consider it. If we are to maintain the high ideals that the Federation is built on, we must restrict our thoughts to what we can do, not dream about what we cannot."

"Are you saying we have to censor ourselves?"

"Only safe censorship there is Mark. We are the shining examples, we have to live the dream better than most. The common bloke on the street can say or think anything he wants to. We are Starfleet, we give that up when we don this uniform, you don't get it back until you lay it down. We have the weapons, we have the power, we *have to* be above suspicion. The Federation can survive the defection of any number of members. By letting go we are made stronger. What it cannot survive is the first time we are perceived as using force to keep a member."

"If we let members leave how long well we have a Federation?"

"Let me put it to you this way. We are members of this club because we are captains. Lets say that Captain Smith decided he had enough and wanted back into civilian life. 'Well everyone, it's been swell, but I have had enough of being a toady for the Admiralty. So long.' What would you do if the bartender called station security to beat him up and make him stay a captain? How effective a captain would Smith be after that?"

"That is totally different."

"Is it? Don't be too quick to answer, think about it. How would to feel about Starfleet?"

"Well, I certainly would take a second look at my own commitment."

"So, you are a Federation member, and you just watched Starfleet forcibly

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keep a world in the Federation. How is your commitment to the Federation?"

"Shaken."

"Therefor by forcing membership we decrease the strength of the Federation. Starfleet is reduced to an internal terror force, holding the member worlds by force of arms. Who you want to be part of that Starfleet?"

"No, never!"

"Then you cannot allow yourself to think like that Starfleet Mark, never ever. To become the Ideal, we must live the idea. As the Vulcan declares; 'I am a Vulcan, born to Peace', we of Starfleet must declare; 'We are Starfleet, created to Serve'. We can never forget that or we will become something we hate."

Captain, the ship is ready for departure. Tathilan's thought spoke in the back of Kirk's head.

"Excuse me Mark, the *Kongo* is ready, and requires me."

"How did you know? Your communicator didn't go off."

"Telepathic computer." Kirk grinned as he left Collins with his mouth hanging open.

A week into their Earth stay Kirk walked down a corridor at Starfleet Headquarters, Teesic and Tathilan with him. Teesic didn't quite know where to look there was so much to see.

"Your destination is to your right." Spoke the fleet directory computer.

Idiot, I know were we are going.

"Don't berate the poor senseless thing for doing its job Tathilan."

Dumb computers annoy me.

"You are at your destination." Came form the directory.

** (Grumble) I knew that. **

"In any case people we are to meet the Admiral." Kirk went through the door. A receptionist sat at the desk in front of him. That was an indication of rank in and of itself. "Captain James Kirk, and party."

"Yes Captain, the Admiral is waiting for you. Go right in."

Kirk and party went in. The office decor looked straight out of the 19th century. The Admiral, a man Kirk had never met came around his desk.

"Captain Kirk, Jean-Luc Picard."

"Sir, my ship's computer officer, Tathilan, liaison for the Sixliss, Teesic."

"Greetings all. I must say Captain, you are building a reputation to match your predecessor."

Kirk winched. "Oh I hope not. The late Captain Kirk was as known for being a loose cannon as for saving the galaxy every Tuesday."

"I would say Captain that in Starfleet, among certain circles, you are as known for the chapters you have closed, as well as those you have opened. Please, be seated."

Picard looked at the Sixliss at a loss for a moment. Kirk turned to Tathilan. "Would you be so kind?"

Sure.

A saddle, Teesic's favorite materialized before Picard's desk. He whistled his thanks. "Miss this will I, always my seat favorite me follows." He slid onto the saddle.

"We might as well get down to business. You understand Captain Kirk that the third stage of the resettlement will have to be reassigned to someone else."

"Yes Sir. Starfleet has been most generous in placing a ship like the *Kongo* at the disposal of the project, it can't last forever."

"That is unless you wish to transfer off the *Kongo* to finish overseeing the resettlement."

"I think not Admiral. Unless a method has been found to move the Great Houses at warp speeds, the resettlement phase is going to require years."

"I had to ask. No we can't, at this time, move the Great Houses at warp."

"Admiral, preserving it is desired one ship. To break up the rest their materials for to be done should."

"Do you have a plan?"

Kirk took the question. "Yes sir. It's simple really. 38 ships are already empty. We will start with those. Asteroid miners can break them up, and bulk freighters can transport the pieces. The Sixliss have already recovered anything useful. In fact they have been doing exactly what I suggest on a much smaller scale."

"38? I thought 37 of the ships were non-functional?"

Teesic shook his head. "Was so. Now as is said 38. Was holed *Shelter of Xitalass*, killed were 532, children most."

"That is most unfortunate."

**What is the plan for moving the Sixliss Sir?*

"We don't as yet have one. Suggestions are welcome."

I have one.

"By all means, please explain."

The holo projector on Picard's desk came to life of its own accord. **Located at Felicity are two of these pachyderm class obsolete container ships." A holo of a huge ship consisting of mostly framework rotated in the beam. Next to it a dwarfed *Kongo* was shown for scale. **Two are at Felicity, more can be located. While obsolete they are fully functional. We can sail them tomorrow. You fill the framework with transport pods, each will hold 4000 Sixliss in acceptable discomfort. We are talking a 200 day voyage from the Exodus fleet to Gamear 3, one way. With a full load of 48 containers that would be 192,000 at a shot. With two ships, at 384,000 every 200 days it will require 520 trips assuming the population remains the same. Yes, it is an unacceptable period of time. However, the more ships we get, the quicker the off load time.

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Double the ships, halve the time.**

"Even with a dozen of those ships we are talking over 70 years to complete the transfer." Kirk was working his PADD as he spoke.

"Is there a larger hauler available?"

Currently available? I don't think there is. Larger container ships exist, the Mammoth class holds 128 containers and can move at warp eight. Getting their current owners to part with them is an issue. We must use what there is. The sooner we start, the sooner we are done.

"This is true. You should present your plan to the Admiral that is handling the resettlement phase three."

I'll do that Admiral Picard.

Kirk spoke. "By the way, who is taking charge?"

"Someone you know Kirk, Admiral Kowalski."

"I served under him at Mars Utopia, he is a good man. Why is he taking a dead end job. This will out last any two careers?"

"You will have to ask him yourself Kirk. However, my guess, and a guess only, is that it is a dead end job. He is looking for one last project before he retires. Speaking of which, you will be taking him back with you."

"That will be a pleasure sir. Admiral Kowalski helped make the *Kongo* the ship she is. Other than a formal launch inspection, he has never been on her."

"I wouldn't mind seeing the *Kongo* myself."

"You're quite welcome sir."

Picard stood. "I shouldn't take too much of your time Captain."

"Yes sir. "

Kirk and company started to leave. The saddle vanished from Picard's office.

Picard spoke again. "Captain, a private word if I might."

"Yes sir?"

Kirk indicated that Tathilan and Teesic should leave. "Tathilan, see what Admiral Kowalski will require."

Yes Sir.

They left. Kirk turned back to Picard.

"Have a seat Captain."

"Why do I feel you would have been happier if I had not brought Tathilan."

"Preceptive Captain. I didn't think you would bring company with you."

"I was told I was wanted on a matter of the Sixliss resettlement. Only natural to bring Teesic, and Tathilan is my brain."

"How far do you trust the computer?"

"Tathilan," Kirk emphasized her name, "has my complete trust. After all Sir, what is the difference between her and Data?"

"Picard shot him a look. Interesting comparison Captain Kirk. Why do you believe it valid?"

"Tathilan has parents, a home, morals, ethics, and a place in her society."

These are given her as a legacy of her birth. Ane do not distinguish between biological Ane, and Crystalmind Ane. What is good for them, is good for me."

"Were you aware that until I accepted promotion to Admiral, I didn't know about the Ane sentient computers?"

"No Sir. However, I didn't know about them either until I was assigned to be a fleet observer on the *Questing* shakedown. They do not make a lot of noise about it. From what I have come to understand, Earth people are not entirely reasonable on the subject."

"Are you from Earth?"

"Yes, and I was not entirely reasonable on the subject, that is until my life depended on a sentient computer."

"Admiral Quinn warned me about your penchant for preaching. Being that I have been identified as possessing the same malady, I will refrain, if you will."

"If you say so Sir."

"Captain Kirk, you don't sound pleased about it."

"Permission to speak freely Sir."

"Speak your mind then."

"From what I can see Admiral Picard, you called me in here to question me on the loyalty of a member of my crew that has given no one reason to question her loyalty. This question is based solely on the fact she has a computer for a brain. Sir, I am ticked off Sir. If you are finished Sir, I have business to take care of."

Picard weighted the younger man carefully. "No Kirk, I am not finished, if you would let me continue."

"Sir." Kirk sat stiffly.

"I might think you had feelings for her."

"If I do it is my affair Sir."

"Quite right. Am I to understand you would defend any member of your crew with equal heat?"

Kirk looked Picard right in the eyes. "Under the same circumstances, damn straight Sir."

"Under what circumstances would you not defend a crew member?"

"Everyone under my command is my responsibility, there are no circumstances under which I will not defend them. Even if they are dead wrong, even if they have performed a criminal act, they will have my defense up to the moment they are convicted."

"And after?"

"I can support the criminal, and not support the crime."

"I had heard as much of you Captain Kirk, I had not dared to believe it. Just curious, but what would your advice be to a crew member that had committed a crime?"

"Admiral, is this going somewhere?"

"Humor me."

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Kirk again gave Picard a stern look. "I would advise them to plead guilty, if in fact they were guilty."

"If they lied to you about it?"

"The Devil take them Sir."

"You're a hard man Kirk."

"I have been called worse Sir."

"Yet every report I have on you tell me you are firm, fair, and loved by those under you."

"I can only speak for myself Sir."

"Captain Kirk, I am getting the impression you don't like me."

"Admiral Picard, you called me in under false pretense, have insulted the loyalty of my crew, and using rank to your advantage grilled me on a number of hypothetical situations of little relevance to my mission. I see no reason for this exercise, and no Sir, I am not disposed to like you Sir. However, duty does not demand that I like you in order to follow orders, Sir."

"I had in mine a proposition, but I believe I have placed you in ill humor to receive it. Would you be willing to speak with me over dinner?"

"Is that an order Sir?"

"No, it is a request."

"Begging your pardon Sir, but unless the *Kongo* receives contrary orders, she sails tonight. Permission to leave Sir."

Picard looked suddenly tired. "Granted."

Kirk stood, turned and departed with a ram-rod military demeanor. Picard watched after him crestfallen. A door swished open in the back of the office, a man wearing the uniform of a Admiral Emeritus entered.

"Well Jean-Luc, you managed to thoroughly brown him off."

"I rather blotched it good Anthony."

Anthony Quinn laid a hand on the taller man's shoulder.

"No mind, I'll get a word in with him and try and heal the breach. Even if he never joins us Jean-Luc, he has been doing our work, and doing it well."

"I don't understand how I misjudged him."

"Simple, it is easier to be a saint, than live with one. That is one boy that may never marry, I don't think a woman could live with him."

"Damn him, how could he even suggest you were anything but loyal."

Tim, you are over reacting.

"He had no justification for anything he said." Kirk was angrily striping his uniform.

Tim, you are over reacting.

He threw the shirt across the room. "Then to suggest I have *dinner* with him."

Tathilan popped in quietly behind Kirk, she moved with extreme stealth, and planted her cold wet nose in the middle of his bare back.

"YEYOUGH!!" Kirk leapt straight up and landed ready for anything. He looked at the bemused Ane. "What was that for!"

To get your attention. You are over reacting.

"Wadaya mean overreacting?"

You sound like a man set to defend the honor of the woman you love.

Kirk sat down, and shut up.

Do I have your attention.

"Total."

I, we are used to this. It happens all the time. I am surprised in the case of Picard however. You think Data would have taught him better.

"Yea, I did, didn't I."

**Tim?*

"I did sound like that." He had a silly grin on his face.

Earth to Tim, come in Tim.

"Ah, yes?" Kirk had a bemused grin in his face.

**Are we on the same subject?*

"I love you."

I know.

"You know, how?"

First, you show it, second, I am in your head all the time, I feel it. Her ears came full forward. **I like the feel.**

"We are a couple of fools. What can we do about it?"

<beep> "Transporter room 3 to Captain Kirk, Admiral Emeritus Quinn requests permission to board."

"Kirk here, permission granted." He striped his pants. "Tathilan, please get me a fresh change."

Kirk ran through the sonic shower, grabbed the clothes off the replicator, got ship shape and headed for the bridge.

Tathilan gathered the scattered clothes one at a time by mouth and dropped them in the chute. **He said he loves me.**

Kirk met Quinn on the bridge and invited him into is ready room.

"Admiral, to what do I owe the pleasure? I understood you had retired from active service."

"Yes, indeed I have, but fleet hates letting us go. So they invented this 'Admiral Emeritus' nonsense to hang on a while longer. However, you are the reason I am here."

"Wanting another speed trip?"

"No, a little more serious than that." Kirk sat down, motioned Quinn to do the same.

"So, tell me about it."

"You have an interesting way to play fleet politics Kirk. Getting brownd off at the Director of Operations is not gaining you points in the front office."

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Kirk came on the defensive at once, a dangerous edge in his voice. "I don't play fleet politics Admiral Quinn, I never have, I don't plan to start. So, what has Admiral Picard told you about our, talk?"

"Calm down Tim. Picard didn't tell me anything. I heard it from the start." He held up his hands to forestall the reply. "I asked Picard to talk to you, but I didn't know he would hit a sore spot 30 seconds into the conversation, and worsen the situation."

Kirk took a deep breath, got up, paced a bit. "OK, what was he supposed to say that I didn't give him a chance to say?"

<beep> "Admiral Picard requesting permission to board Sir."

Kirk arched an eyebrow at Quinn. "Old home week." He hit the intercom. "Granted Chief, have the Admiral shown to my ready room." He cleared the board. "I can't well refuse the Director of Fleet Operations no can I?"

"Well, no."

"Just what did I say that causes an Admiral to send an advance guard?"

"Exactly what we wanted to hear Tim, but in such a manner that he could not approach you afterwards. I knew from working with you that you are a man of principle, rare in these troubled times, but I did not realize you were that prickly about it. If you don't mind, I would like to wait for Jean-Luc before saying more."

"Your call Sir."

The door beeped as if on cue. "Come."

Kirk stood for the Admiral. Picard came in slowly as if sizing up the welcome. Kirk stood, hands behind him waiting for Picard to speak first.

Picard took a deep breath held out his hand and began. "Captain Kirk, please accept my apology for any offense I may have given you. It was not my intention to offend, but to see where you stood on certain matters. You well and truly let me know where you stand, and reminded me where I should stand also."

Kirk looked surprised, he took Picard's hand and shook it. "Apology accepted Sir. I take it this has something to do with what Admiral Quinn has been speaking around?"

Quinn spoke again. "It does, secure your ready room please."

"I can secure it against anyone but Tathilan."

"You can't secure it from your ship's computer?"

"Ships Computer Systems Officer Sir, she has a higher clearance rating than I do."

Picard broke in. "See does, how is that?"

"Tathilan has alpha one data, and therefore has alpha one clearance. I only have Alpha two, like most line officers."

"Is there a place on the ship we can talk privately?"

"Tathilan, beam us to my lounge please."

The three appeared in the lounge arranged in the seats in easy order, within

seconds each officer's preferred beverage was in front of them.

Picard shook his head. "What I would have given for such a yeoman several years ago."

Tathilan shook her mane, and Picard noticed her.

Why thank you sir. I took the liberty of accessing the *Enterprise* logs to ascertain your preferences. Admiral Quinn I remember from his travels with us.

Picard continued. "About that privacy..."

Kirk locked eyes with the Admiral. "Sir, you have as much as you can get. What you can tell me, you can tell her. She is my confidant and confessor. I will discuss it with her in any case."

"Even if told not to?"

"I have a feeling that what you want to discuss you cannot issue orders about, so yes, even if you tell me not to."

Quinn looked at Picard with a knowing smile, Picard looked at Quinn with a question. Picard chuckled, Quinn grinned and said. "You didn't believe me."

"No I didn't believe you."

Kirk looked puzzled, not getting the joke. "What is to believe?"

Quinn took mercy on the confused Captain and explained. "Picard and I are members of a sort of Cabal. No, not what you might think." Seeing the younger man's dark look. "We dedicate ourselves to keeping the Federation on the right track, centered on the principles it was founded on. I told Jean-Luc that you were perhaps the most principled officer in Starfleet, even to the point of political suicide. He did not believe me."

"I see, I think. Considering your comments Admiral Quinn, I don't know whether to thank you for the compliment, or dislike you for it. Being on the judicious side, I'll take the compliment."

"Wise of you."

"So, why are you telling me all this?"

Picard let Quinn continue. "We are here to recruit you."

"Recruit me?"

"Don't get me wrong, there are no dark rituals, oaths or such. It mainly involves continuing to do what you have been doing, but with an awareness that you are doing it, and inform the others if you feel it is beyond your ability to handle it."

Picard took the thread. "Are you willing to sacrifice your career for what you believe in Kirk?"

Quinn rolled his eyes,

Kirk's lit with fire. "Sir, if I surrender my principles, what good is a career? What am I but the sum of my beliefs experiences, and principles? To surrender myself for honors and power is not only repugnant, it is pointless. I might gain the highest office, but I will lose my soul. I could not respect myself. In not respecting myself I would lose the respect of those I commanded, and

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after that their confidence. Should I lose the confidence of my command I place the lives of every one of them in danger. In short, by setting aside my principles, I endanger the lives of everyone in my command, including myself." Kirk was up and pacing as he warmed to his subject. "And that Sir, is the utmost folly. It would be far better to resign than think for a moment about compromising my principles. Even for a moment, even once. Once you breach that wall it is ever weakened, and ever again in danger. Much better to never go there in the first place."

Quinn broke the spell. "You have never heard the best preacher to never grace a pulpit have you Jean-Luc?"

Kirk cleared his throat, blushed slightly and sat down. "It's a bad habit."

Tathilan glided over and lay beside the chair, resting her head on the arm. Kirk reached out absently and scratched her ear.

<beep> "Admiral Kowalski and staff, request permission to come aboard Sir."

"It never rains but it pours." Kirk directed his voice outward. "Granted Chief. Convey my apologies to the Admiral, I am in conference, and see him and staff to their quarters, Kirk out." He turned back to the Admirals at hand. "People are going to think the *Kongo* is stealing Admirals, that our we have the best booze in the fleet."

The two men chuckled. Picard leaned forward earnestly. "Will you join us?"

"I honestly have to think about this one. I distrust secret organizations no matter how high the purpose. The purpose tends to get lost in the secrets."

"We are not secret." Added Quinn. "We don't broadcast, but we don't hide either. Those principles you spoke of. I prefer to think of us as the anti-old boys club."

"I'll give you a firm maybe."

"Is that the best we can get?"

"For now, yes."

Quinn stood up followed by Picard. Kirk and Tathilan followed suit.

Quinn spoke. "Consider what we have said. However, I think we have taken enough of your time, and you have a ship to manage."

"Thank you Sirs, it was good to clear the air on that matter." Kirk called out again. "Yeoman Reynolds to my quarters."

His door beeped. "Come." The Yeoman walked in. "Yeoman Reynolds, show the Admirals to the dock please."

"Yes Sir."

Kirk turned to the Admirals again. "It has been a pleasure Sirs."

They left. As they walked to the dock of the *Kongo* Picard spoke quietly to Quinn. "Well, do you think we convinced him?"

"I think so Jean-Luc, but it remains to be seen. He can be stubborn, and he doesn't easily forget a slight, even if he does forgive."

"Could he be to mule-headed to help?"

"No, not mule-headed, but give him time."

As the two were about to step off the ship a rating called back to them.

"Sirs? A message on the monitor for you Sirs." The two looked at each other, shrugged and went to the monitor. It said; "Admiral Quinn, or Admiral Picard, access code required." Quinn tapped in his code. The monitor changed to show the Ane Tathilan on a neutral background.

Don't you gentlemen worry, you convinced me, I'll convince him.

Picard looked at the suddenly cleared screen. He straightened his already straight uniform, cleared his throat. "My Father taught me to never argue with a Lady."

Quinn bounced slightly on his toes. "I seem to recall a similar lesson." He motioned to the open lock. "Shall we go?"

Kirk walked over to the VIP section of the ship. Admiral Kowalski and his staff were still settling in as he arrived. Kirk quickly found Kowalski. "Admiral, sorry I couldn't meet you at the lock, but the ship has been swarming with Admirals today."

"Swarming Kirk?"

"That is Sir if three Admirals constitutes a 'swarm'."

"So who else was here?"

"Quinn and Picard, Admiral. They had matters which they wished to discuss."

"Regarding the project?"

"No Sir, personal nature."

"How soon can you be underway? You can brief me once we are underway."

"At your pleasure Sir."

"Then by all means."

"Do you want to come to the bridge?"

"Thank you, but I have seen a lot of ships out of space dock in my day. I'll finish cleaning up here and join you before you are ready to warp out. That I don't want to miss."

"It would be an experience I should not want to miss General Greever." The dark coated Freisan flicked his ears in eagerness.

"Then you shall not miss it my old friend. I will place you in command of the entire operation. If you succeed, it will be our crowning moment of glory. The government puppets of the Federation Council will have to recognize our demands. If you fail, we shall be swept away. Do not fail."

"I shall never fail you general."

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"Good, we have a ship prepared. Gather the men you will require, do not show any mercy to Kirk."

"You have my word Sir."

An hour later the *Kongo* was free of dock and in open space. Kirk punched the page. "Admiral Kowalski to the bridge."

A few minutes later the Admiral himself arrived, proceeded by his walrus mustache. "Ready to warp out?"

"Course laid in for Starbase 88, best speed, we await the word Sir."

Kowalski braced himself hands behind his back. "Eng..."

"Sir?"

"What is it Kirk?"

"You will want to sit down Admiral."

Kowalski looked around the *Kongo's* bridge, not only was every officer and rating present seated, but strapped in as well. His eyes got wide, real wide. He came around the tactical station with exaggerated care, sat at the XO's station, carefully placed the belt around his hips. As soon as the belt clicked Kirk ordered.

"Mr. Spacik, sound violent evasive."

"Aye Sir, violent evasive."

The warble sounded throughout the ship.

Kirk turned to Kowalski. "Admiral, the ship is yours."

"Helm, course laid in for Starbase 88, maximum warp."

"Course laid and locked" repeated the helm."

"Engage."

The *Kongo* leapt forward sucking space behind it. Kowalski "wowed" under his breath as the ship accelerated to its greatest speed in seconds. Kirk let the moment last for a bit, then ordered.

"Lt. Solin, reduce speed to warp 8, maintain course."

Solin answered back. "Aye Sir, speed warp 8, course for Starbase 88."

"Admiral, care for some coffee in my ready room?"

"Coffee is fine, stronger if you have it."

"I might."

Kirk lead the way into the *Kongo's* spacious office and ordered refreshments.

"That was quite the ride Kirk. I felt that from the seat of my pants on up. How do you do it?"

"Its a quirk in the mated systems. We call it the 'Kongo Sleighride'. The *Kongo's* warp drive was designed for a planet class cruiser, the inertial compensators are Starfleet designed, for the upgraded Ambassador class ships. It is not a perfect match, there is some fudge room, and some feedback gets into

the system, that is what you were feeling. Four years of tinkering and we still have it. We could use the compensators rated for this drive, but they are not rated for the ship's mass. In other words, a worse problem. Tathilan controls the power curve so that the drive does not over stress the ship, but we feel it a little."

"I understand the seat belts."

"It is not that severe, but after I had a few minor injuries in drills, we instituted the 'violent evasive' alarm to warn the rest of the ship the ride was getting bumpy."

"Is there a solution?"

"Sure, it will take three months in space dock, and some of Starfleet's precious budget, but Felialan and Tathilan have designed replacement compensators that will fit the ship like a glove."

"Have you submitted the change in design?"

"Yes, but the wheels of process turn slowly. How about Tathilan's idea for moving the Sixliss?"

"I can't think of better Kirk, I have people scouring the Federation for more of those monsters. I have contacted the port authorities at Felicity about acquiring the container ships. They have been donated as a gift to the Sixliss. So, we have our first transports, and the required containers are being scrounged from where ever they might be. I think this is the largest resettlement the Federation has ever undertaken. It is an exciting time Kirk, and I have you to thank."

"Really Admiral..."

"Call me Walt., we are informal here."

"As you wish Sir."

"Walt."

"I don't see how you have me to thank...Walt. I am not exactly calling all the shots here."

"But you called enough shots to get the Sixliss discovered, and then contacted."

"I can't take full credit Walt, I depend a lot on the people that work for me, and Quinn's influence is not to be discounted."

"You underrate yourself Tim. These people wouldn't work so hard if you didn't inspire them, and Quinn wouldn't have fought near as hard if you hadn't convinced him."

"I don't see myself as some great inspiration."

"Well, then don't alter your perceptions. It seems to be working. I'll look forward to your full briefing. How long before we arrive?"

"A comfortable two weeks." Kowalski started to get up, and stopped.
"One more thing. What is the situation in the Freisan Confederation?"

"Well Walt, if you read the reports for intelligence you know as much as I do. It's bad, and not getting better. The rebels are starting to gain a measure of popular support. Demands include the opening of the Davv system, the Algeria

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System, and moving the Sixliss elsewhere, and opening the Gamear system for Freisan colonization. They don't want much."

"I had about as much. I can add that the terror campaign is continuing. Romulan weapons in every case."

"Why not Fed surplus? That is much easier to get even on the gray market."

"What do you know about the gray market?"

Kirk walked over to his terminal. He punched a few codes. "Let's see. What do you want, Andorian stun grenades, a case of surplus dustbusters..."

"Dustbusters?"

"Those phasers we had, what, 10 years back. No one liked them, too front heavy. Someone labeled them "dustbusters" for some reason. It seems to have stuck on the gray market. 80 year old Klingon disrupters 'guaranteed to work', Feringi phasers, etc."

"Where are you getting this information?"

"Same place anyone looking for arms does. No it doesn't come from Starfleet sources. But I have some members of the ship's company that consider keeping track of the gray market a hobby."

"A difficult and dangerous hobby Tim, who does that?"

"One of the Ane."

"It would be. Since your project, I have been poking around them myself. They have some truly strange hobbies."

"Back to the point. Nowhere in the last, oh, half year, have I seen Romulan weapons on the gra market, or even the black market. Why would they suddenly show up on in the hands of Freisan rebels?"

"It would tend to mean to me that Romulans were involved."

"Would the Romulans be that obvious? Would they cause problems now when they are on the verge of a formal treaty with the Federation?"

"Not every faction in the Romulan Empire agrees with making a formal peace. How better to sabotage it?"

"You have a point there. But I'm not placing bets on the Romulans, any faction."

"You might have at least one point, we should broaden the search for the source of weapons."

"Captains Log supplemental. We are three hours from Starbase 88. We have some personnel for the base and all of the Sixliss Relocation Project personnel will be boarding with us to make a permanent base on Gamear 3, The two cargo ships are underway with full load of..."

"Sir, incoming from Starbase 88, Priority One."

"...close log, put it through."

Admiral Hull came on the screen. "Kirk we just received a message from Gamear 3. Freisan rebels have seized the ground base, taking most of the Sixliss hostage. They have threatened to kill ten at a time until their demands are met, and they will not deliver their demands to anyone but you."

"Understood Sir, I am altering course for Gamear 3 at once, Kirk out. Helm, make course for Gamear 3, best speed."

"Aye sir, best speed."

"I'll be in my ready room."

Kirk entered his ready room and paced, deep in thought.

**Nervous?*

"What would make you think that?"

Because I know you.

"OK, very much nervous. I can see a hundred ways this could go wrong, very wrong and get a good number of good people killed."

We are not even there yet.

"Hostage situation training. I've never had to do this. Hostage situations are usually a lose-lose proposition. You can't win, or let them have what they want, they can't win, or let go of the situation. The usual result, people get killed, Innocent people get killed."

However, they didn't have me along.

"How will that make a difference?"

Tathilan faded into view stretched out on Tim's couch.

**I have been here for an hour. Did you see me when I came in?*

"No!"

Exactly. Old Ane trick, 'I'm not here'.

"Can you fool a bunch of wary Freisans?"

The thing is you don't fool them with everything, you fool them with little things. I will go with you, I will be armed, with your weapons. They will, of course, search you. I doubt however, they will search me, even if they do, it will be prefunctionary. The weapons will never be seen.

"Will this work? I don't want to risk you."

Tim, it will work.

"Alright, you can come, I hope."

The *Kongo* shortly entered Gamear space, the situation was obvious. The three Starfleet vessels had possession of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*. Kirk called to the *Nelson* for an update.

"Kirk to Captain Veswindi."

The second in command of the *Nelson* came on line. "Commander Haris Sir, Captain Veswindi is indisposed."

"How indisposed Commander?"

"Seriously wounded Sir. I am in command of the *Nelson*."

"Situation?"

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"The rebels arrived in the Fitzgerald after having hijacked the ship. The forced the Captain at gunpoint to bluff his way in, then used the *Fitzgerald's* cargo transporters to beam down. They currently have the Sixliss community hostage. They have asked for you directly."

"What measures have you taken?"

"As of yet, none Sir. We're scientists over here. No military at all."

Kirk signaled to cut the channel. "Scientist is a poor excuse. Faile, get me the surface, let us see what is happening. Regiban, I want an exact picture of what is happening down there. Felialan, get the rest of the Ane together. I understand each of you can teleport twice your mass, and a ship to surface jump is not overly taxing?"

Correct

"OK, on Tathilan's signal, you will transport as many of the marines as you can safely handle to the surface, out of sight of the base. Organize that at once. Mr. Miiatath, see to the arrangements with security and marines. OK, put me through to the surface."

"Hail open Sir."

"This is Captain James Kirk of the Starship *Kongo*. You asked for me, I am here."

The face of a Freisan appeared on the screen. His ears twitched constantly.

"Captain Kirk, good of you to come. We will issue our demands only in person."

"Fine, prepare to beam aboard."

"NO! You must come to us."

"What guarantee do I have of safe conduct?"

"None, you will have to trust us."

"I do not easily trust hostage takers. I will not come alone. That game is far too old."

"Then bring who you will, but if you have any weapons, we will kill all the hostages at once!"

"I'll be there in half an hour."

"Fifteen minutes, or we start killing lizards!"

Kirk leaded into the pickup. "Kill anyone before I get there, and I'll blast you off the face of the planet. Kirk out."

"Regiban?"

The Sixliss are clustered together under a light jamming field. It isn't enough to prevent sensors, but it will interfere with mass transporter use.

"Standard. Mr. Faile, can we sweep the entire area with phasers on stun?"

Regiban answered. **No captain, they have bombs among the Sixliss. Any phaser energy that hits them will set them off.**

Kirk hit the intercom. "Mr. Mritath, change in plans. Equip your force with sub-machine guns, and shoot only Freisans."

"Yes Sir."

Ap Owen looked at the Captain. "Machine guns Sir, those don't have a stun setting."

"No Commander, they don't. But I doubt the Freisans have any of their weapons set to stun. We are not setting off any bombs. I'll be in the transporter room."

"Sir, I should be the one to go. The Captain should not endanger himself."

"Gwenith, normally I would agree with you, but this is not exactly a normal away team."

"Still Sir, I have to object."

"Objection noted."

"Good luck Tim."

"Thanks, I'll need it. One more thing. If I am not physically back on this ship in 2 hours, you will carry out General Order 24 on all Freisan inhabited areas of this planet. You will attempt to avoid Sixliss if possible."

"Sir?"

"Carry on Commander."

"Yes Sir."

"Tathilan, that thing is obvious as Hell."

They will not see it.

"You had better be right. Energize."

A moment later they were standing in a field beside the Base. Several Freisan rebels ran at them pointing Romulan phaser rifles at them. The black male he had been talking to swaggered up, weapon on his hip.

"So, the mighty Captain Kirk. Search them." As predicted, they looked Tathilan over quickly, the holster around her barrel never came up. Kirk got a more thorough look.

"They are without weapons Sir."

Kirk cut in. "Where are the Sixliss?"

"Are you so concerned with your lizard friends Captain? You will see them in good time."

Kirk crossed his arms. "If I do not see the Sixliss safe, I will carry nothing back to the Federation for you."

"I could just as easily shoot you."

"Then I will carry nothing at all."

"You will be dead!"

"So will you."

"How do you plan to kill me Human? You have nothing to do it with."

"Before I left the *Kongo* I issued General Order 24. If I do not report back, in person, that order will be carried out." The Friesians shuffled around uneasily.

"You are bluffing. No Captain would do that."

"Tathilan, tell them."

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****The Captain is not known to bluff.****

"Now, I want to see the Sixliss, then I will listen to your demands, then I will take them back."

The leader looked about ready to spit. "Show him his lizards."

Kirk was roughly shoved in the direction of an open field. The Sixliss sat calmly in small groups, looking around nervously.

"OK, what is it you want."

"We demand that the Federation remove all offensive Prime Directive restrictions in the Freisan sector. Further we demand that the Freisan Government hold an immediate vote on leaving the Federation, and that all our comrades in arms that have been captured be released. Last, that we be given this world at once, and these lizards shipped elsewhere. The Federation Council has two days to meet our demands, or we start killing the lizards we have and our comrades will destroy the Sixliss fleet." The Sixliss moved restlessly, standing, shifting about. The guards looked nervous, pointing their guns first at one, then at another group.

Kirk looked the Rebel on the eye. "I can tell your right now the chances of those demands getting met. No chance, none."

"Are you refusing to carry our words Kirk?"

"I think you need to rethink the possible."

"I will demonstrate the 'possible' Kirk!"

The Freisan whipped up his phaser rifle, and shot Tathilan in the head. She dropped at once, Kirk leapt to her side. Half her head was gone, and blood flowed thick in the wound, there was no pulse at her neck.

"What is NOW possible Kirk?"

With the bulk of his body between the holster and the Freisan Kirk drew the weapon, seeing only red he shoved the power control to the stop and came around in one motion.

"YOU SON OF A BITCH!"

The leader looked for an eternity at the emitter the size of a starship, his own weapon suddenly felt too heavy to lift into line with Kirk. Milliseconds dragged like hours as he hauled on the impossibly heavy weapon and his foe moved so swiftly. Ears flat and squealing in fear he tried to hide from the phaser, his body stood rooted to the spot. Kirk fired. In a second there was nothing left of the rebel but a burned patch of earth.

"KIRK FIGHTS!!" came a sibilant screech from the Sixliss. With a shriek they rose as one, and fell on the Freisan guards, A few phasers went off, squeals and screams were all that was heard. Kirk rolled to the ground avoiding the snapped shots of the bodyguard as they came out of their shock at his sudden weapon. He spun up flipped the control to wide beam and cut them all down with a shot. The Sixliss rushed to his side, they poked the Freisians, jaws gaping, dripping with blood. The guards didn't move. Kirk seeing no moving Rebels dropped his weapon and rushed to the fallen Ane. There was no sign of

life. He hit his comm-badge.

"Kirk to *Kongo*, medical emergency two to beam."

He sparkled into existence in the sickbay. Hanson moved quickly on the chance that some spark of life was left. He cleared out the wound and stopped. Kirk's jaw dropped. Where the skull had been burned away, charred crystal gleamed in the sickbay lights. Kirk sat down hard Hanson just stared.

"I killed them over a machine. I forgot the body was a machine. Oh my God."

"Admiral Kowalski I..."

"Sit down."

Kirk sat. "I must..."

"Shut up, that's an order."

Kirk shut up.

"Now hear this Mr. Kirk. I will not take command of this vessel, I will not allow you to relinquish command of the *Kongo*."

"Sir, I must protest."

"On what grounds Kirk?"

"Sir, I murdered those men. I have no need or cause to do what I did there."

Kowalski signed heavily and stood. "Tim, as your superior, and your friend, let me tell you a few things. Those Ane biomechs are built to *make* you forget they are machines. That is the idea. You cannot fault yourself for believing what was meant to be believed. Second, you care for her."

Kirk stated to open his mouth. Kowalski waved him back.

"Friend, lover, Kirk I don't care, that is your and her business, you care, and you had just seen her shot. Hell, man, I would have done the same thing. Third, sometimes we as officers of Starfleet have to do things that are not pretty, are not nice, and we would rather not do. Sometimes the bad guy has to die, so that the good guys can live. Kirk there was not a single hostage death, and injuries are light. That is the best result we could get or dare to hope for."

"Yes Sir."

"Now, I am going to delete this report you have prepared critical of the actions of Captain James T. Kirk, and you are going to prepare a report to replace it that simply tells the facts without being critical of any of them. This is the report you will submit, and we will leave it to command to recommend if disciplinary action is required, without self condemnation."

"Yes Sir."

"And Tim, even if you don't believe it, good job."

"Yes Sir."

"Dismissed."

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Kowalski watched the younger man's back as he left, stiff as a board. He shook his head and sighed again.

"And thank you Tathilan for bringing that you my attention, even if it was a terrible breach of security and confidentiality."

Your welcome Sir, you see, I care too.

Kirk lay sleepless in his bed. Half of gamma shift was dead and gone, but sleep was a distant dream, and Tathilan wasn't there to make it come.

Tim.

"Tathilan? I blew it good girl, didn't I?"

No Tim, you didn't.

"Why doesn't anyone see it?"

Because it is a phantom of your mind. You should rest.

"Sorry, I don't rest well after I kill a bunch of people."

Tim.

"Yes." The darkness closed around him deeper yet.

Remember many moons ago, I got a package.

"Yea, vaguely."

Look to your right.

Kirk turned, and his breath caught in his throat. A woman stood in the door to the lounge. Long tawny hair cascaded down her moca body, deep blue eyes like bottomless pools, small breasts and wide hips accented her movements in ways only a female can achieve. She came to where he lay dressed as Eve herself.

Remember the package? This was the package. I wanted to give you this sooner, but It took months to learn to move, to walk, to caress. I have hid it from you, until now.

"But your body..."

Ruined, until we can get to El Nanth.

"This... it's."

Tim, you talk to much.

She moved beside him caressing, kissing... He stopped resisting, and took her into his arms.

Halten Greever looked out the view port at the world that fell behind him. A world he might never see again. His rebellion in disarray and scattered, the infamy of the hostage blunder, and the failed coup burned in him. No one would ever trust him again. He had to flee, bundled off by his new masters. To live among the Orions, to never see Freisa again.

"Damn you Kirk, I will remember this."

Destinations -- Garry Stahl, March 1998

Subtext 2011 -- An editing pass and some light Lucasing before I turn this over to Richard Merk to make e-reader files. There were a few continuity errors, I fixed those and altered numbers to be consistent with an actual ship I designed long after I wrote this.

This is Kirk at his preachiest, it gets better from here, I promise. I think I went overboard right to the edge of Mary Sue in this one. I endeavor to do better in later ones. On reflection I decided I could not alter this without a serious rewrite of the whole story. Not something I'm willing to do. So it remains.