

Epiphany Trek

The LaSaille Chronicles



The First Principle

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The First Principle

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Command of the USS Kongo, Constitution class starship and one of the queens of the fleet. All his long life he never expected this. He could feel sweat prickle on the palms of his hands. Now he understood the requirement for white gloves as well as full dress when reading in. Captain LaSaille checked his reflection in the glass of the gangway, tugged again at the unfamiliar white gloves, and crossed the gangway orders in hand. As he crossed the threshold of the ship the honor guard came to attention, the bosun's pipes sounded on his entry. LaSaille saluted the keel, and the pipe salute ended. He turned to the smart female Commander waiting for him.

"Permission to come aboard Commander?"

"Permission granted Sir."

LaSaille stepped up to the waiting podium. He laid the elaborately scribed orders on the surface, and began to read.

"By order of Starfleet Command under the Commission of the United Federation of Planets, the Office of Fleet Operations I Captain Jerold Ryan LaSaille am requested and required to take command of the USS Kongo, NCC-1710 as of and after April 17, 2261. Commander I relieve you." He folded the orders smartly and handed them to the waiting Ensign.

"I stand relieved Sir. Would you care to inspect the ship?"

"That will be well Commander. Proceed."

The Commander turned and Captain LaSaille fell in beside her.

"The years have treated you well Mr. Meyers."

"Thank you Captain and you as well. You don't look a day older."

"Do I sense a little sarcasm?"

"The truth is the truth. Main engineering sir is the usual starting point for an inspection."

"Yes, indeed." LaSaille turned to the Chief Engineer. "Captain LaSaille."

"Lieutenant Commander McCaffrey Sir, please come this way."

LaSaille walked down the line of engineers, decked out in duly fatigues. The engineering department was, as expected, in perfect order.

Four hours later, the inspection over, Captain LaSaille looked around his new quarters as he stripped the abused dress uniform. It wasn't exactly the Ritz, but it beat the old Ennex class cruisers. His kit had been delivered during the inspection, and currently sat on the floor beside the room's one table. He reached into the kit bag and pulled out a steel blue slab of metal, an ancient Colt 1911. He checked the safety and action. He pulled a clip out of the bag as well, emptied it, counted the rounds, loaded the clip, loaded the gun and set the safety.

***Looking for a place to put it?**

***What do you think girl?**

Sometimes wonder about you and that gun.

I keep it safe. It keeps me safe. We are going to need a bigger bed.

I believe he thought sleeping alone was a virtue.

Captain Diaz was a "stern" commander.

I believe "prude" is the term.

Neither here nor there. It is me now, and I do have my own style. The bed has to go. See how big a bed we can get in here, and get it.

**So?*

**So what?*

**How did it go?*

She was polite. I was polite. Long term it remains to be seen.

**Which worries you more, you, or her?*

I'm not sure. I'm really not. In any case, I need to get some real furniture in here and a new bed.

Captain LaSaille sat down at the briefing table. The senior staff was fully present.

"Gentlebeings, we have had introductions. I will be getting to know you all better in time and will make time for some one on one with each of you to discuss your concerns and views on your departments. In the meantime, Starfleet would really like the *Kongo* back on station. We are responsible for getting her there.

I understand that the *Kongo* has just undergone a standard refit. I am not familiar with the Constitution class of ships as a Captain, although I did serve in a command staff position on the *Republic* under the late Joe Marshal, and the *Enterprise* under Captain Pike. We are assigned to routine patrol in the Orion sector. Let's go down the line. Mr. McCaffrey?"

Lt. Commander Ian Shaw McCaffrey was a fair man, red headed and freckled. He spoke eagerly. "Engineering is fit and ready sir. Most of the upgrade was to the warp drives and the computer system. We have the latest model of the Mangiflux warp drive. The design boys promise us warp factor 8 flank, warp factor 6 in cruise. As this drive has also been fitted to the *Exeter*, with excellent results, we can expect this performance.

The second major change was to the computer system. We have the new Daystrom Duotronic systems on board. It is a vast improvement from the older computers in both performance and memory storage, especially memory storage. We can now store the entire Federation database, and have room for growth.

"Impressive. We will endeavor to stretch the systems a bit. Mr. Ghurn?"

Lt. Commander Burt Ghurn a somewhat thinner than average Tellarite started from his inner musing. "Hum? Oh, yes. Sciences is ready. We have the

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new system up to speed, and fully integrated with all labs. It promises to cut down our reliance on independent computers in each lab setting."

"I hope we can find some science to do worthy of your department. Dr. Ballard?"

Lt. Commander Denise Ballard, a long time veteran of the service, turned her crusty attention to the Captain. "I'm getting used to it. With the new computer everyone is so proud of, sickbay got a complete switchabout. I can't find anything, including my office. However, medically we are set to go. I managed to keep my staff out of the clutches of fleet reassignment, so we are all use to each other. In medicine it is the people that matter, not the gadgets. Oh, we got a few of those as well. That includes a new regeneration rig that I don't want anyone eager to try out."

"We will endeavor to do so I am sure. Mr. Tate?"

Lieutenant Vivian Tate a bright blue-eyed human woman with chocolate skin and platinum hair spoke. "Tactical and security are at peak performance sir. We had minimal turnover during the refit."

"Any major changes in your department?"

"No Sir. Weapons are much as they have been. We did replace all the phaser emitters and one torpedo delivery system, but with like equipment, no upgrades."

"Noted. We will try not to test them too much."

Meyers said. "I understand your cruise with the *Lydia Sutherland* was noted for being a quiet one."

"If by that you mean we didn't shoot people much, yes, it was. However, it was interesting enough on all the other fields. I would prefer the Kongo had a similar cruise."

Tate said: "Are you trying to avoid fights Sir?"

"If we can, yes. However, we are not leaving anyone defenseless to do so. The Galaxy being what it is, I suspect we will not get away without some excitement."

Meyers said. "Captain LaSaille is not known for leaving people defenseless."

"Thank you commander. Mr. Collard?"

Lt. Jean Collard, a dark and petite Izarian woman spoke up. "We have had a basic shake down with the new engines. Mr. McCaffrey's confidence is proven out in the handling of the ship. Best she's ever been. I'm looking forward to this."

"Good, Mr. Liquard?"

Lt. jg. Kerabom Liquard, a taciturn Andorian said. "Navigation is prepared, Sir."

"And Mr. Steel?"

Lt. Kyle Steel, clean cut and very Prussian looking said. "Ve have every thing ready. Da new computers are on line as mentioned. Ve should experience

much quicker translation solutions."

"What factors are we discussing here?"

"Minutes to real-time, instead of hours."

"Impressive. Everyone knows their job. My trust is in you. Let's get underway. Mr. Meyers, is the ship provisioned and ready to sail?"

"Yes Sir."

"Good. We will depart 0900 hours tomorrow. Dismissed."

Captain LaSaille rose and quickly left the room. Most of the officers of the *Kongo* lingered for a few minutes.

Lt. Collard looked after the retreating figure. "So Candice, rumor has it..."

"...That rumor is usually worth what you pay for it Mr. Collard." With that Meyers left the room.

Jean Collard cocked her hip as the door slid closed. "Well, that was short shift."

Lt. Tate looked up from closing down her terminal. "The Captain, is a private man, and the Commander doubly so."

Collard sighed. "I had hoped for a looser administration."

Tate smiled. "Jean, in the matter of your private life, it will be, but Captain LaSaille is a private man."

Kyle Steel said. "Yet, I thought it was Commander Meyers that served with him?"

Lt. Tate rose to leave. "Yes, but we are neighbors after a fashion. I've heard a lot about him."

Collard pouted. "So, give, what's he like?"

"I have heard that he is fair, he listens, and he is a private man." She said before the door closed behind her.

"Now hear this. USS Kongo is scheduled for departure at 0900 hours tomorrow. Repeat, The Kongo leaves at 0900 hours. All personnel consult your terminals for final orders. That is all."

****And...****

****They look like a good bunch, Starfleet competence all the way.****

****But...****

Jerry stroked Aleilan's mane. ****I don't really know them yet. I can't even say I know Meyers anymore. Ten years, a lot can happen in ten years.****

****A lot usually does.****

****Where did you get this bed?*****

****Fabrication. I couldn't find one I liked, so I had it made. You're avoiding the subject.****

****Yes, I am.****

****But the subject will not pass away.****

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Aleilan, what good does you and I discussing it accomplish? We parted, hurt, ten years ago. I can't call what passed between us love. It was lust. A needful lust yes, but lust.

**Only lust?*

No, after two years, lust wouldn't have lasted. I had hoped friendship was there. Love? I didn't feel it was love. When you have two people who are the only two humans on the whole planet, it changes things.

**What does it change?*

Call it what you will, love, lust, it doesn't matter. It hurts that she felt she had to leave that way.

Jerry I sensed jealousy.

**Of you?*

Yes, I was a fifth wheel she hadn't planned on.

But I have had relationships in the past, and you never got in the way of those.

You are not the only Ansisi with close ties to an Ane. All you past loves have been Ansisi.

Anne wasn't.

Anne was special. Aleilan moved closer to him.

He hugged her closely **Yes, Anne was special. We never had a chance to fulfill how special that could have been.**

**Regrets?*

Always. Life seems to be a series of regrets.

It is unlike you to get maudlin.

**How can I with you for a stabilizer?*

**Do you regret that?*

Answer your own question Aleilan.

No regret there.

**I have some datawork to finish before we sail. Are our personal effects in order?*

Yes.

Then I had best see to the ship.

Giles watched her brush her hair. "If you pull any harder, you will be bald."

Candice smirked at him. "What, you don't like the Deltan look?"

"Not as a preference, no. Why don't you talk about it?"

"Because I don't want to."

"You had a hot affair with this guy for two years, and dropped it?"

"No, he threw me over for his four-legged girlfriend."

"I've seen her. Girlfriend?"

"Well, he said it was him and her, or nothing. They had something 'special!'."

"Candice this isn't like you. Catty is not your temperament."

Candice Meyers flopped into the chair. "Look Guy, the man... I thought we were at least friends. Five minutes after we got to base he was all over her, in preference to good food and a hot shower. How am I suppose to deal with that?"

"Did he dump you?"

"Not exactly. I got an assignment. I guess I ran away before I had to deal with it."

"Well, he's the Captain, are you going to run away, or deal with it?"

"I like the job. I had better learn to deal."

Captain LaSaille settled into the center seat at 0850. Cmd. Meyers stepped beside the command chair. LaSaille looked in her direction with an expression of concern. He continued with the ritual of the ship leaving Spacedock.

"Report. Mr. Meyers, are we are ready for space?"

"Yes sir. All crew are aboard and fit. We are fully fueled, all goods are secured, and all systems are green." She dropped her voice. "Why the look?"

LaSaille replied in kind. "It occurs to me that starship designers have not taken the comfort and safety of First Officers into consideration."

"I didn't realize it should be considered."

"I think it should, but we'll get back to it."

Lt. Collard said: "Spacedock confirms, we are cleared for departure at 0900 hours."

"Acknowledged all. Mr. McCaffrey, sever all umbilicals."

Lt. Cmd. McCaffrey worked his board. The thump of the dropping power umbilicals could be faintly heard through the hull. The atmosphere changed. Where the *Kongo* had once been tied and dependant on the dock for life and power she was now once more a free and living thing. McCaffrey said.

"Thrusters at your discretion sir. Impulse and warp drives on standby."

Lt. Steel broke in. "Message from Spacedock Sir. The Commodore says 'Good mission, and good luck'."

"Convey our thanks to the Commodore and spacedock. Mr. Collard thrusters at your discretion at 0900, depart Spacedock."

"Aye aye sir. Thrusters at my discretion, 0900 depart Spacedock, in three two, one. Thrusters now."

The *Kongo* drifted away from its slip and into the exit lane of the spacedock. The huge doors yawned open and she silently slipped into the harsh void that was her natural environment.

Lt. Liquard said. "We are in clear space and free to navigate."

McCaffrey added. "Impulse and warp at your discretion Sir."

LaSaille said. "Mr. Liquard. Set course for Starbase 24

"Aye aye Sir. Course set, heading 87 mark 5."

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"Helm give me one quarter impulse."

"Aye aye, one quarter impulse."

The *Kongo* pulled quickly away from the blue and white globe of the Earth. Captain LaSaille stood and took a quick look around the bridge.

"Mr. Collard, come to full impulse. We will engage the warp drive after we pass the Jupiter perimeter. I will be in my office. Mr. Meyers, you have the con. Call me when we reach the Jupiter perimeter."

"Aye aye Sir. Full impulse and warp drive at the Jupiter perimeter. I shall call you then."

Several hours passed as Jerry worked thorough the piles of datawork that a ship the size of the *Kongo* required. Four hundred people seemed to generate four times the amount of data that 200 did. Prestige and rank aside, captaincy of a heavy cruiser involved hours per day of boring work. He had been a Starship Captain all of a week, and he was rapidly getting buried. The chirp of the intercom was a relief.

"LaSaille here."

"Bridge Sir. Ten minutes to the Jupiter Perimeter."

"Understood, I'll come up."

He left the desk with no regrets. He walked quickly to the nearest turbolift and headed for the bridge. It had been two years since he had been at warp speed. He was looking forward to this.

The doors opened to the bridge. Jerry took in the atmosphere again. The *Kongo's* bridge was much larger than the bridge of the *Lydia Sutherland*. He liked that.

"Captain on the Bridge."

"Report."

Meyers surrendered the command chair. "We are at the Jupiter Perimeter. We are at full impulse heading 87 mark 5."

LaSaille slipped into it. "Good. Proceed on that heading at warp six."

"Aye aye, warp six."

The deck rumbled beneath them as the warp drive came up to speed. The stars streaked.

"We are on heading 87 mark 5, warp six."

Jerry smiled. "Smooth. A good ship. My compliments to the Engineer."

The new Captain of the *Kongo* spent the rest of the shift getting into things. He moved his way down the decks using the companion ways, avoiding the turbolifts. Sure they got you around fast, but you didn't see anything. Elimination took him to deck six, and the Sickbay.

Dr. Ballard was in the main ward, so was most of her staff. It looked like a briefing of some sort. Jerry slipped into the examining room before anyone noticed him. The new bio beds looked to be a good improvement on the models

the *Lydia Sutherland* had. He was examining the examining instruments. The Fineberger was a new model as well.

He heard the door open, and relaxed. There was no point in jumping the Doctor in her own sickbay.

Ballard noted that LaSaille had the Fineberger in his hand. "So Captain, are you a Doctor too?"

He ran it over her. "You look to be in good basic health. Your heartbeat is a bit elevated."

Her eyebrow arched. "OK, you can work a Fineberger. That rates you as having more medical knowledge than 90% of the Captains in the fleet."

Jerry smiled. "Yes, I am an MD. However, I haven't done much doctoring lately. I try to keep up on trends and knowledge."

"How lately?"

"It's been at least 50 years." He handed her the Fineberger.

"According to the records you are not that old Captain."

"The records are wrong. We need to talk, privately."

Ballard led the way back to her office. "Alright, talk."

"This is a doctor patient talk."

"Understood."

"The records are wrong. I am not 46. I haven't been 46 since 1994."

Ballard gave him a long measuring look. "You better be convincing, or this could be the shortest commission on record."

"You think I am crazy?"

"You have to admit, it's a good assumption."

"Let me ask you this, how old is Aleilan?"

Ballard cocked that eyebrow again. "Ane are unusual, so I looked. She has a birth year of record of 1976. That would make her Ane middle aged."

"She nearly died in birth. Her mother had a torsion of the uterus. Good thing I was there to help. She was born into my lap."

"Telepathic bond?"

"Yes. My first, and most violent."

"You are starting to convince me. Why?"

"To be trite, I am not like other men." Jerry lifted his shirt. Scars crossed his belly and chest like a map. "I got the majority of these in the four years war fighting six Klingons, and loosing. I healed."

"Holy... "

"You're the ship's doctor. Things happen. I don't want you surprised when the 'dead' Captain gets off the table."

"How bad can you heal from?"

"I am not trying to test the limits. I might find them. That was about the worst I have dealt with."

"About?"

"There was the car bomb in 2063. I was in the car. I was hit by a

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considerable number of machine gun bullets in 1968. That was the first time. You tell me which is the worst way to almost die? I stopped comparing."

"Your medical records reflect none of this."

"No, they don't."

"So why tell me?"

"You need to know. You are the Doctor."

"Do you have complete medical records? Correct ones?"

"Yes." He held out a data solid. "Please do not let that get around."

She took it and placed it in her smock. "I would like to have a more thorough talk on this subject, and others if you don't mind."

"I'll think about it Doctor. I need to get to know you a bit better. All the medical information I can remember is on that solid."

"How good is your memory?"

"With Aleilan's help it is good, not perfect, but good."

"You're not going to try to practice medicine too, are you?"

"No, one Chief Surgeon is all we need. I will make an effort to understand the reports you send me. You doctor, I'll captain, agreed?"

Ballard smiled. "Agreed. Who else knows about your 'quirk'."

"Aleilan of course, and Commander Meyers."

"Meyers?"

"She was with me on Anaxar for two years. She witnessed that fight with the Klingons. After that it would have been hard to hide."

She shot him a look. "Anything else I should know?"

Jerry shot her one back. "No, I don't think so."

The Mark 14 photon torpedo; It was best weapon in the fleet. At least that was the opinion of Lt. (jg) Giles Masterson. The diagnostic module beeped. He pulled it from the access hatch and put it back into his tricorder. With the weapon verified as functioning normally he closed the hatch and turned the connectors. The hatch light turned green. Masterson keyed it off, and pressed the stud to stow the torpedo.

"Very good Mr. Masterson."

Giles nearly jumped out of his skin. "Ah, yes, good."

"I can see you don't have a future in security Guy."

"I won't have one as weapons specialist Candy if you give me heart failure by sneaking up on me. What's the good word?"

"Our Captain wanders the ship."

Masterson flipped his tricorder off. "I would expect that really, it's a new ship to him."

"I suppose. What is the junior officer scuttlebutt?"

"Those things too delicate for line officer ears?"

Meyers cocked and eyebrow. "All of it."

Masterson leaned back on the torpedo housing thoughtfully. "Scuttlebutt has it that he has a more 'fatherly' command style, and a few weird habits."

"Any specifics?"

"Nothing I would trust. I didn't hear any weird things from the *Lydia Sutherland* crew."

"You chatted them up I take it?"

"Honestly. I knew you would ask, and I wanted to know myself. Us lowly lieutenants junior grade must keep up on the latest trends. Flogging might make a come back. You have to be ready."

Meyers smirked. "Fatherly."

"A real papa bear."

"Yea, bears can be mean."

"That was the impression I got. Fatherly, but don't cross the line. So how mean can he get?"

"I saw him put two slugs into a Klingon officer with no more emotion than you use putting a fork into a steak."

"Slugs?"

"Slugs, lead bullets, it is an affectation of his. He carries an old slug thrower, and I do mean old."

Guy's eyes lit up. "OK, spill, how old is it?"

"Earth, Second World War. I am quite familiar with the workings and weight of the weapon. I never got to fire it. He didn't have many bullets."

"Reproduction?"

"No, real."

"Daaamn. I wonder how much is original? An antique like that could be worth a small fortune. He just carries it around?"

"And kills Klingons with it. Your obsession with weapons is showing."

"Sorry. That's the scuttlebutt. He's Papa Bear. Kind, fatherly, fair, and holy Hell in five flavors if you cross the line."

Meyers nodded slipping back into a more formal stance. "Mr. Masterson how is the torpedo supply."

Masterson taking the cue assumed his role. "I have inspected 28 percent of the torpedo inventory. Thus far all weapons are 100% functional. If that situation holds, which I expect it shall, you will have a full report on your desk by the end of the watch."

"Very good Mr. Masterson, carry on."

"Aye aye sir."

Now hear this. Battle station drills will begin at 1100 hours and will randomly occur after that. That is all."

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With the *Kongo* smoothly making progress toward Starbase 24 her Captain was poking around the engineering spaces. He could hear the spines stiffen as he passed crewman at their posts. Several times he looked over a crewman's board and nodded his approval with a cheerful "carry on." His informal tour took him at last to the Chief Engineer's lair. As he expected the Chief Engineer was in it.

"Mr. McCaffrey, a moment of your time if I might?" Captain LaSaille leaned against the door to the Chief Engineer's office.

"Why of course sir. What can I be doing for ye?"

"I noticed that the bridge seems to be a station short."

"I don't catch your meaning sir. The bridge has all the stations it is designed to have."

"Yes, and that leaves my first officer standing. Now, the only time both the first officer and I are going to be on the bridge is in a crisis. The ship can be shaken quite badly. People have been killed that way."

"Aye sir, that they have."

LaSaille handed McCaffrey a data solid. "Have a look."

McCaffrey inserted the solid and looked. The schematic showed a station to the right of the center seat, mostly out of the way. It featured an anchored seat and a small panel. McCaffrey considered the plan. "When would ye be wanting this done Sir?"

"Can it be done underway?"

"Aye, but not with ease."

"Can you have the parts fabricated, and ready for when we reach Starbase 24?"

"Easy enough, and plenty of time to work out the details."

"Good. Then we will do it that way. I want the parts ready when we make dock at 24."

"Thy will be done Captain."

LaSaille smiled. "Good. I'll leave you to the business you know well Mr. McCaffrey."

Now hear this. Final call for instructors for the voyage out classes. We have a 100 day haul at the least, let's make the most of it. Classes currently available are listed on the Ship's bulletin board. That is all."

Meyers had just gotten her tray from the slot and was looking for a place to sit. Lt. Tate waved. "Candice, over here." The woman was sitting with several other officers. Lt. Gene Collard, the Izarian woman was anything but the stiff warrior that Fleet Captain Garth had made popular. Also present was Lt. Kyle Steel.

She smiled and made her way to the table. "Good morning. What is the news?"

Collard said. "I was hoping you could tell us. Are we going to get the traditional layover at El Nanth?"

"Are you looking to a few days at home?"

"Yes, you need that real El Nanth sun to keep this tan. UV beds don't make it."

Lt. Steel looked. That's a tan? I thought is was your natural color?"

"Tan. I am told I was born pink as they come. On the El Nanth worlds you wear sunscreen, swallow melalin daily, and watch your exposure. All that and you still end up chocolate so deep it never comes out."

Lt. Collard said. "Is that wise, all the sun exposure?"

"Wise or not it's what you get. El Nanth is a blue-white furnace. It's a hostile land for humans and just about everyone else. You do what you can to protect yourself. I fully expect to get skin cancer. You get it cured and keep on stepping."

Meyers said: "I haven't inquired to the Captain as of yet. I understand he is from the same area. I shouldn't assume."

Lt. Steel said. "I understand it's a great leave. Even if only a few days. A lively nightlife and all the fresh orange juice you can stomach."

Lt. Tate beetled her brows. "Did you know it is possible to tire of fresh orange juice?"

Steel feigned a shocked look. "Impossible."

Cmd Meyers added. "It is a 74 day haul to El Nanth and we are still not to the Orion sector, which is our assigned patrol area. I'll clear it up with the Captain."

Meyers pressed the call on the Captain's Office. "Come." The voice sounded a tad irritated. She walked in, Captain LaSaille had a good half dozen PADDs on his desk, and was working the terminal as well. Meyers noticed Aleilan lying behind LaSaille's desk.

"Do you have a minute sir, or is this a bad time?"

LaSaille looked up, and shoved the PADDs away. "They are all bad times." He waved at a chair. "Have a seat. What's on your mind?"

"I have had some inquiry's from the crew as to whether we will lay over at El Nanth."

LaSaille paused. "Yes, we do pass close by and it is a long haul. Sure give the necessary orders to alter course for El Nanth. I will talk to whoever is Admiral of the Starbase and get the *Kongo* a quick look over as well. I have some modifications I want done. We might as well do them there."

"If I might ask Sir?"

"Sure, as you are the main beneficiary. I want another station inside the ring for the first officer."

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"Why, if I might ask?"

"Well, think about it. About the only time we are both on the bridge other than entering or leaving a dock is crisis situations. The first officer has no tactical screen, no terminal, and has to grip the rail if things get rough, if the rail is close enough."

"That's true, but I don't think there has ever been such a station."

"We have always done it that way is the worst reason to do it that way."

"Yes Sir, but why now? I would think that someone would have done it by now."

"Every idea has a first."

"I guess this time you're first."

"It doesn't happen often. Anything else Mr. Meyers? As much as I would love to chat, there is way too much datawork to do."

"You didn't bring a yeoman with you."

"No, I've never needed one. Light cruisers are not huge Starships."

"Well Sir, huge Starships are huge and have huge crews with huge piles of datawork.. I suggest you get a yeoman. It really is a necessity on a heavy cruiser."

"Good idea Commander. Recommend someone please and assign them ASAP, before the Captain vanishes under the PADDs."

Meyer's smiled. "Yes Sir. I will review personnel and you shall have a yeoman before the end of the shift."

LaSaille smiled. "Thank you."

Now hear this. Ensign Janice Joyce, report to the Captain's office. Ensign Janice Joyce, report to the Captain's office.

Commander Meyers stepped onto the bridge. Lt. Sawyer was relaxed in the center seat. The end of another shift was coming up. Two engineers were taking readings of the deck next to the command station.

"Good morning Mr. Sawyer."

Sawyer stifled a yawn. "Morning Commander."

"Long shift?"

"Dull enough."

"Report."

"We are on heading 87 mark 5 warp factor 6 steady as she goes. No incidents, no special orders."

Meyers read the situation back. "We are on heading 87 mark 5 warp factor 6 steady as she goes. No incidents, no special orders. I relieve you."

Sawyer stood up and turned over the center seat. "I stand relieved."

Meyers slid into the seat. "Good night Lieutenant."

Sawyer yawned again. "Thank you sir." He made is way to the turbolift.

Other stations were being relieved as well, in order, one at a time as the Captain desired. Meyers took a quick look around. All was in order. The viewscreen offered no diversions. She flipped out the command tactical screen and called up the security report she had been reading at breakfast. Starfleet command could never be happy with thing as they are. A new Admiral in security meant everything was getting turned upside down.

The proximity light started blinking. Lt. Collard's hands flew over her board. "Proximity alert. Two vessels sir."

"Identify."

SS Quantum Foam, the other is a Qzin police cutter, registered as the *Ready Tooth*."

"Raise shields and ready phasers, yellow alert. Hail them Mr. Steel, let's see what is going on."

"Hailing sir. I have the *SS Quantum Foam* on visual sir."

The screen flickered to show a grizzled human in a faded Tellarite merchant marine jacket. "Federation Starship, we have been pulled over by these pirates. Help us."

Steel continued working his board. "Qzin ship is hailing sir."

The screen split showing the blunt muzzle and fan ears of the Qzin. "I am Charr-Captain of the *Ready Tooth*. This vessel is carrying contraband. Our actions are legal!"

The *Quantum Foam's* Captain did his best to look scared. "They're out to steal my cargo and eat my crew!"

"Nonsense, even if you deserve it. We are protecting our system as is our right by treaty."

Meyers broke in. "Captains, please. *Quantum Foam*, I didn't catch your name."

"Harrison, Captain Paul Harrison."

"Captain Harrison, Charr-Captain, I must investigate. I will call my Captain to investigate both your claims. Remain at station keeping. Mr. Steel, cut channel." Meyers hit the all call. "Captain to the bridge."

LaSaille, who had been following the exchange from his office, hauled himself to his feet. "You're on your own for a while Mr. Joyce."

Eng. Janice Joyce, his new Yeoman, smiled grimly. "Yes sir."

LaSaille trotted to the bridge. Things looked about as he expected. Meyers slid out of the command chair as he came down the steps.

"I've been following it."

"Yes sir."

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"Looks like the usual?"

"I don't know. The Qzin don't tend to hold their ground like this when they are wrong, and know it."

"We can solve this quickly enough. I'll..."

"Sir."

Yes Mr. Meyers."

"There is a new security directive on your desk."

"Yes, I hadn't gotten to it."

"I believe it involved the Qzin sir."

"Right." He swung the tactical screen around and entered his code. "Secure eyes only. Crap. Mr. Steel tell our birds to continue to stand by. Mr. Myers, Fleet insists I read this in private. I shall return."

Three minutes later, back in his office LaSaille chased his yeoman out and pulled up the necessary White Paper. Ten minutes later he was headed back to the bridge.

The turbolift doors slid open. Mr. Steel announced "Captain on the Bridge."

"As you were. Mr. Meyers I need to handle this in person. Will you go to transporter room two and escort our guests to my office. Mr. Steel."

The channel opened. The Captains were waiting each with his own look of impatience. "Captains. If you would come over to the *Kongo* we will get this matter settled."

Charr-Captain bristled. "Why do you want me off my ship?"

"For the same reason I want Harrison off his ship Charr-Captain, so I hold the upper hand."

"I do not trust the Federation."

"As that might be, if you wish a just resolution, you must come here."

"I would bring my Telepath."

"As you please."

Harrison broke in. I want my mate present then."

"Suit your self Captain Harrison. Mr. Steel, cut channel"

"Mr. Ghurn you have the con. I'll be in my office."

LaSaille had just finished piling his yeoman with the excess PADDs as the call buzzed.

"Take them into my quarters." He shoed her through the door. "**Aleilan, come in here please.**"

Captain LaSaille got himself looking 'Captainly' and Aleilan settled.

"Come."

Harrison and his wall of a mate led the way. Charr-Captain and a scrawny Qzin he assumed was the telepath followed. Meyers and two security guards

ended the procession. LaSaille remained seated. He looked at the over crowded office. This would never do. He got up and led the way into the captain's conference room. He indicated seats around the table. Meyers took a seat, the wall and the two security guards remained standing. Aleilan followed and found a corner. The Qzin telepath kept sneaking looks at her.

"Captains, what is the problem." Harrison started to open his mouth. LaSaille interrupted. "Let's hear from Charr-Captain first, he has the complaint."

"This person," he spat it out, "is carrying a dangerous drug for sale on the Patriarchy."

Harrison interjected. "I have no drugs."

LaSaille looked at him. That was the truth, but not quite. "Charr-Captain, explain please. What is this drug?"

"*Rass thaan*. An addictive euphoric. It destroys my people. *Rass thaan* eaters do nothing but lay about, occasionally eat and use more *rass thaan*. It steals their spirit and will, yet they forever crave it."

Harrison continued to look smug.

LaSaille said. "And what is the human name for it?"

The Qzin's eyes flicked from Harrison to LaSaille. "Basil."

LaSaille made a mighty effort to control the impending mirth. One of the security guard snorted. Jerry shot him a withering look. "Are you aware Charr-Captain that basil, or *rass thaan* as you call it is, to humans, a harmless herb used in cooking?"

"Yes, I know this. Doubtless something we enjoy would be harmful to you."

Jerry nodded. "Yes, that could well be true. However, for a human ship to carry basil is no crime. We have a good deal aboard ourselves."

"Crime is in the intent is it not."

"Yes, that is often true."

"If this basil is headed for the Patriarchy for sale, it is contraband."

"I would agree yes."

"Ask him his next port of call."

Harrison laughed. "Yes, I am headed to the Patriarchy. I am also headed to other places as well."

LaSaille said. "Did you plan to sell any basil or *rass thaan* on the Patriarchy?"

"No."

The scrawny little Qzin pointed a claw at him. "He lies."

Harrison snorted. "Are you going to believe that, thing."

LaSaille folded his arms. "Yes, I am, because you are lying."

"What?"

"Aleilan?"

He's lying.

The little Qzin flinched. Charr-Captain cuffed him.

"He is a telepath, Aleilan is a telepath, I am a telepath. We all say you are

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lying."

Charr-Captain's ears were straight out. "You, agree with Telepath?"

"Yes. Truth is truth Charr-Captain."

"Then you will turn him over to me."

"No, Charr-Captain."

"You agree his is a criminal, but you will not surrender him?"

"You know and I know that is not the way it is done. I agree that enough evidence of a crime exists to arrest him."

Harrison and his wall of a mate started to move. Security covered them with phasers.

Charr-Captain spat. "But I caught him, it is my prize."

"Charr-Captain, he will be transported to Starbase 6, and tried. Please attend so you can place your complaint. If he is convicted you can request extradition."

Charr-Captain bristled. "Why? It is never granted."

"Stop eating criminals, and that could change. Captain Harrison, you and your mate are under arrest for carrying contraband. Mr. Vort."

The security guard stepped forward. "Sir."

"See that our two prisoners are transported to the brig. Mr. Meyers if you will see that Charr-Captain and Telepath are returned to their ship. Thank you all."

When the room and corridor cleared LaSaille made for the bridge again.

He sat down and tried to look cool. "Mr. Steel, ask Lt. Kaswheel to report to the bridge please, then connect me to the *Quantum Foam*."

The connection was quickly made. "Second Mate Carter here." Said the face on the screen.

"Mr. Carter, your Captain and mate have been arrested for carrying contraband. My prize commander will be aboard shortly. I expect your full cooperation in all matters on your way to Starbase Six. Do I have your understanding?"

Carter looked pole axed. "Yes Sir."

The turbolift doors opened, Meyers and Kaswheel. Jerry turned to them with the connection open.

"Mr. Kaswheel, you will take command of that vessel and sail her to Starbase Six at her best speed. Take a crew of 20. Secure the ship's company."

The Andorian came to attention. "Aye, aye sir."

"Now hear this. Lieutenant Saul, please report to the main biology lab. Lt. Saul to the main biology lab. That is all."

Crewman Vort sat eating with his circle of friends, all security strangely.

"Yea, he treated the pussycat with respect."

Lt. Gomez chided. "Mr. Vort, never consider the Qzin 'pussycats'. They are still dangerous."

"Begging your pardon sir, but we have them contained."

"We also have the antimatter that fuels this ship 'contained'. It is no less dangerous."

"True sir, but Qzin?"

"And how would any of us fair against one without phasers?"

"Point taken sir, but why treat with them respectfully?"

"The older man shook his head. "If we are ever to teach them to respect others, we must respect in turn."

Crewman Franks said: "Agreed. The important question is, how long do we get to spend at Starbase Six."

Gomez dug into his green beans. "I don't imagine it will be long. I wouldn't even count on station passes."

The *Quantum Foam* was not a speed demon, it took twelve days to get to Starbase Six. The *Ready Tooth* kept formation the whole way. LaSaille watched the crew relax as they locked down after docking. Meyers stood beside the command chair.

"Orders sir?"

"Top off our consumables. You may authorize station passes to the crew once the ship is seen to. I'll need to see Admiral Decurte and file statements with the Advocate General. I'll have a good idea of the stay time after that."

Aleilan made herself comfortable in the foyer while Jerry went into the Admiral's office. Admiral Decurte, a broad, white haired man that favored a Vulcan haircut and a walrus mustache was waiting for him.

"Well Captain LaSaille, I didn't expect to see the *Kongo*."

"I didn't expect to stop, but we ran into an incident in progress."

"You put the Qzin in their place I assume."

"Actually sir, they have a legitimate complaint. I'm filing with the Advocate General and turning the prisoners over to them. I imagine that Charr-Captain is already there.

Decurte frowned. "I don't like giving them any leverage Captain. What is it this time?"

"Basil."

"Basil, that again. Captain, if every human ship that carries basil was stopped they would own us."

"Intent is the crime. From the evidence I have gathered Harrison intended

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his basil for sale on the Patriarchy."

"What evidence is that"

"Harrison lied about it when directly questioned."

"Qzin telepath?"

"Backed up by the two I have aboard."

"You have two telepaths?"

"Yes, myself and Aleilan."

"That is mighty damming. I still don't like it. They are sneaky and over a hundred years after the last war they still push every chance they get."

"If we expect reason, we must be reasonable, and abide by our own laws."

"Yes, but I still don't like it."

"I don't find myself inclined to 'like' them either, but fair is fair."

"Harumph. So, what does the *Kongo* need?"

"Very little Sir, we are only 12 days from Earth and 24 days out. I would like to top off, and get going as soon as the Advocate is done with us."

"I see little reason to amend your orders. Carry on then."

"Aye aye sir."

"Dismissed."

Aleilan got up as he came out of the office. **Advocate next?*

Yes, I hope they don't give Charr-Captain too much trouble.

Charr-Captain and Telepath were sitting in the outer office when LaSaille and Aleilan entered. Both had their ears back. Charr-Captain got up as they entered. He came over to LaSaille.

"Captain LaSaille, this one will not convey my complaint to the Advocate." He pointed at the Lieutenant manning the desk.

"Come with me."

"Lieutenant?"

"Yes sir?"

"Why have you not recorded this being's complaint?"

"Sir, he's a Qzin, they are always making false complaints."

Charr-Captain was baring teeth.

Jerry turned to him. "Calm yourself." Back to the Lieutenant. "You're dismissed."

"Sir?"

"And you are reduced one grade in rank pending disciplinary review."

"Sir?!"

LaSaille put an edge to his voice. "Ensign, it is not your *job*, to pre-judge the complaints that are brought to you by any being. It is your job, or was, to record them for the Advocate to hear."

"But sir?"

"And since you are slow to obey orders, confine yourself to quarters until

further notice. Computer?"

"[Working]"

"Log the previous exchange. Forward the log to the Ensign's commanding officer. Signed, Captain Jerold Ryan LaSaille, *USS Kongo*, commanding."

"[Log recorded.]"

LaSaille narrowed his eyes. "You are dismissed."

The former Lieutenant stumbled his way out of his chair and into the hall.

A voice spoke from the Advocate's office door. "You were pretty hard on the kid Captain."

LaSaille turned to the lanky Bantu woman standing there. "Do you honestly think so?"

She looked thoughtful for a moment. "No. I'm Captain Jamala Haki, Advocate General for the sector."

"Captain Jerold LaSaille, *USS Kongo*."

"Come it, and bring your friends with you."

He followed her in as did the two Qzin and Aleilan. Telepath putting as much distance between himself and Aleilan as possible. One they settled in Captain Haki continued. "Computer?"

"[Working]"

"Begin recording, Complaint of Charr-Captain."

"[Recording]"

"I am Captain Jamala Haki, Starfleet Advocate General for sector 8. Now comes Charr-Captain of the Qzin Police Forces and Captain of the *Ready Tooth*. Also present are Captain Jerold LaSaille, *USS Kongo*, commanding, the Qzin Telepath from the *Ready Tooth*, and Aleilan, an Ane. Charr-Captain, what is the complaint?"

Charr-Captain said. "I accuse the master of the *Quantum Foam* and his crew of conspiring to transport *rass thaan* to the Patriarchy with the intent of selling it there."

"What evidence do you have of this alleged crime.?"

"*Rass thaan* is on his ship, he had a stop planned on the Patriarchy, and he lied when asked if he planed to sell it there."

"What evidence do you have that he lied?"

"A statement to that effect by Telepath, and corroborated by Captain LaSaille, and the Ane Aleilan."

Captain LaSaille, do you agree with this as a statement of fact."

"I do. I wish to append the log of the *USS Kongo* as evidence."

"It is so noted that the log of the *USS Kongo* is appended."

"Captain LaSaille what are your qualifications to know if someone is lying?"

"I am Ansisi, a Human telepath that is part of the Ane All."

"So noted. And Aleilan, do you corroborate the statement of Charr-Captain as well?"

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I do.

"So noted."

"[No testimony recorded.]"

Advocate Heki looked stymied. "Computer, pause log."

"[Affirmative, log paused.]"

"It can't hear her."

I don't have a telepathy to speech device. They exist, but I don't have access to one.

"Where can we get one?"

The *USS Nia* has them, it is currently in shake down testing near El Nanth.

"Too far away. We will have to strike your testimony."

Charr-Captain's eyes narrowed. "Well that affect the trial?"

"No, it shouldn't. Telepath and Captain LaSaille's statements are more than enough to file an indictment. The truth will be known. Start log."

"[Recording log.]"

"The statement by Aleilan is telepathic in nature, and failed to record. I testify that she answered the question in the Affirmative. End log."

"[Log ended.]"

LaSaille said. "How much time are we talking? I do have a ship to get on station."

"Three days on the outside. Both the prosecution and the defense will need a day to get statements and do discovery. We will hold the trial after that."

Jerry and Aleilan walked back to the ship. **Well,** said Jerry, **that was inconvenient.**

Yes, that is why the interface was invented.

But we don't have one.

We can call ahead, I'll have one readied should we have a need.

You do that.

Crewmen were coming off the gangway as they approached the ship.

Jerry said. **That was quick.**

We barely had time to touch the consumables.

**True. Shall we catch a bit of rest ourselves?*

Sure.

Now hear this. Now hear this. "USS Kongo NCC-1710 departs at 2100 hours. All crew are recalled to the Kongo. The USS Kongo NCC-1710 departs at 2100 hours. All crew are recalled to the Kongo. That is all."

Captain LaSaille trotted onto the gangway. The trial was quick and sweet.

Admittedly the Qzin were not happy. Harrison and crew were getting off with hefty fines, and a warning not to enter Patriarchy, if they valued their lives. Then Harrison wasn't happy either. He had a conviction on his record that would look bad when his master's license came up for review. He smooched Aleilan on the nose as she got off on the fifth deck. He continued to the bridge. LaSaille slowed down as he came off the turbolift. Mr. McCaffrey was sitting at a new station and checking out the attached tactical display. A crewman was running a fuser along the seam in the carpet. McCaffrey turned to a technician at the sciences station. "Run the data stream again Mr. Clarke."

Clarke turned to the board and did as asked.

"That looks good. Top o' the afternoon Captain."

"Mr. McCaffrey, I hardly expect this done so soon."

"Now sir, tis well ye should know that ye never give engineers an idle moment, or they change the whole ship around on ye."

I'm glad you only had three days."

"Sadly, not enough time to be dismounting the warp drives for the flossing of them, that would take at least four."

"Is it done?"

"Yes sir. Try it out." McCaffrey got up and waved broadly to the new station.

LaSaille had a seat and checked out the controls. "Mr. Clarke, send your data stream again."

"Yes sir."

LaSaille watched the results then shut the panel down. "Very good Mr. McCaffrey. Just what I wanted."

"Yes sir, thy will be done."

Now hear this. Ensign Mirmyr's 1100 belly dancing class has been canceled due to extra duty. That is all.

Vivian Tate carried her tray to the table. Conversation was lively today.

Ensign Miller was talking: "This new Captain is different. Dock passes within two hours of docking, and less than a month in space?"

Eng. Card broke in. "Giving the Qzin an even break. That's unusual."

Lt. Tate said. "Captain Diaz would have done the same thing."

"Well yes. Not to imply that Captain Diaz was less than just. Captain LaSaille is well, more easy going."

Lt. Tate pointed her fork at him. "In some things Ensign, but not in others.

Miller came back. "How about that new station for the First Officer? I've been in fleet ten years and I have never seen something like that."

Lt. Tate continued attacking her sausage. "That one I'll give you. Obviously the Captain considered that it was needed to better serve the ship. Mr.

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McCaffrey was his usual self in efficiency in getting it in.

Card mused. "I wonder if he would vet a change in the hall carpeting, I've never liked that color."

Miller snorted. "That would improve efficiency."

Card looked hurt. "It would improve mine."

Ian McCaffrey pressed the call on the Captain's office door.

"Come."

He entered and took a seat. "Ye be wanting to see me sir?"

"Yes, I am going to punish you for being good at your job."

"Another special project?"

"Yes, in a word. Something not so simple."

"Well give."

"In the recent incident I found myself running around the ship. Why is my office on deck five, the main briefing room on deck three, but the bridge is on deck one.?"

"That's where the designers put them sir."

"Not very efficient. As you are aware the business of the ship keeps me down there more than on the bridge. I don't like being this out of touch."

"What would ye have me do sir?"

"I want an office on deck one."

"Aye, I'm good Captain, but where would ye be wantin me to put it, the head?"

"I looked over the plans." Jerry brought up a graphic. "This bulkhead here to the right of the main view screen has nothing behind it. If we extend the bow of deck one like this, we would have room for a small office and a conference room. Not as big as the main briefing room to be sure. But enough for those quick off bridge chats."

"Begging the Captain's pardon, but that is a lot more than a chair and a tactical display. That's major dockyard work ye be talking about."

"Can you do it?"

"Well, I'd have to get approval from Fleet. I need to schedule the dock time. Have the thing made. All this not to speak of the designing of it. Aye, I could do it, and lay the ship up another month."

"If you had the cap prefabricated?"

"A week, if it was done to the last conduit."

"I can arrange that, if I can get the design from you."

"Might I be asking how."

"We are going to El Nanth. I have some Influence there. Give me your designs and I can have the cap fabricated to your exacting standards by the time we arrive."

"And the matter of permission?"

"My concern."

"Aye Captain, it be a big leap off a steep step. Altering the lines of a Starfleet cruiser."

"Don't worry Chief. My problem. You just design it for me."

"I'll do that for ye. But I hope ye know what you're in for."

"Now hear this. Ensign Malloy to sickbay. Ensign Mallory report to sickbay. That is all."

Candice Meyers reached up to the comm panel and muted the all call. The man beside her stirred.

Guy Masterson rolled over. "Can't sleep?"

"No. My brain won't shut down."

"So what is it this time? Protein stores? Plasma flux readings?"

"No, our Captain."

"Why should he worry you? We seem to have drawn a gem. The crew is really starting to like him, and you served with him once."

"It got a lot more personal than that. I don't know Guy, the man has become a cipher to me. It's like someone totally different. Kind, gentle, non violent."

Was he some kind of... animal?"

"On Anaxar? Controlled cold fury. I saw him kill without so much as a flicker of emotion. It's like that man was erased and someone different with the same memories replaced him."

"I think I would be glad to see that man erased."

"Thinking about it he was that way period. Through the entire patrol he seemed to have a chip on his shoulder about the whole war."

"I've heard of people taking war personally before. He might be one of them."

"Yea, but that personally? He really was mad at the Klingons for starting a war with him. Not the Federation, but with him."

"And you don't see any of that?"

"No. Now he is calm and even handed, not even much of a temper. He never did show any temper."

"Can I suggest something?"

"Suggest."

"The man on Anaxar was the anomaly. Candy you told me this man is old, old enough to have fought in the last wars on Earth."

"Yes, but keep that under your hat Guy, seriously under your hat."

"Could it be that he does take war personally, in that he is tired of it?"

"Yes, he even said something to that effect. 'Every time I stick my head up, it's another lousy war.' War is not on his list of things to do."

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"Can you really say you even know him?"

"No, I can't. Two years as the man's lover, and I don't even know him. He is, and I suppose always was, a cipher."

"Do you still want that?"

Candy turned to her lover. "No Guy, it's over."

"But it isn't."

"How do I resolve unresolved issues that are ten years old?"

In country... The term sprang unbidden and unwelcome to his mind. In country, that was Anaxar, only wetter, and colder. In country. He had been here nigh on to two years now. He knew the forest well. The eternal hiss of the rain, the sounds of the animals, the lay of the land. Jerry hunkered lower suddenly tense with the caution that thought engendered. The last assignment had gone well, too well. He knew he couldn't work forever without the Klingons getting wind of it. He was being followed, tracked back to the cabin he and Meyers shared. That would not do.

The stream was up ahead. Jerry slipped into the cold water. He bit back the gasp that threatened to escape. Two hundred yards, up stream, double back, follow his own track. Stay upwind, these guys had great noses. There, the hunter was at the steam, trying to follow the track. The Klingon froze, Jerry stopped cold. Their actions were too swift to follow. The Klingon warrior whipped around the knife flashing, (BOOM!) The bullet entered his left cheek and blew out the back of his head. The Klingon warrior fell heavily into the water. Jerry pulled the knife from his gut. Damn that hurt.

Rustling in the brush... Jerry turned and fired. The bullet caught the Klingon in the hip, spun him around and dropped him. The warrior used the momentum to roll back to his feet. (BOOM!) The second bullet caught him square in the chest. He sat down. Slowly this time he tried to rise. Jerry flicked the knife into his neck. He dropped and stayed there. Jerry quickly retrieved the knife and rifled his person for further weapons. As he worked Jerry counted off, three more bullets. He only had two left. There would be a third hunter at least. He was being more cautious in his approach. He better have some weapons as well. Jerry needed them.

Aleilan's blue eyes washed the scene away.

Jerry rolled over and sat up. **Why? **

**Why the memories? **

**Yes, I haven't thought of Anaxar in years, never mind dreamed about it. **

**It is usually the older wars that trouble you. **

**Am I being troubled, or reminded? **

**Only you can answer those questions. **

Candy. I never did resolve that and now, well she is here. Anaxar was the place, so that is what surfaces in my mind.

**What is to resolve?*

Jerry brushed the mane from Aleilan's face. **A question to make me think?*

You haven't dwelt much on Anaxar or Candy for five years.

I see her every day. It makes her hard to avoid.

**Or the questions she arouses?*

Or the questions. Being the commanding officer has problems. I can't properly say "Mr. Meyers, we need to resolve old lover's wounds today".

It would rather make things worse if I read Humans right.

You do, this time.

**I know you. So what will you do?*

Keep stepping, and look for an appropriate opportunity.

Builder Station grew large in the viewscreen. Jerry smiled at the sight. It meant home to him now. The Savanna was still docked at the spot he left her. He would have to see to a visit.

Mr. Collard said. "El Nanth Starbase is asking for helm control sir."

"Let them have it Jean."

"Aye aye sir. Helm control to El Nanth Starbase, now."

Jerry was impressed, he couldn't tell the difference.

The big door irised open as they approached. The *Kongo* rode into the massive dock as if on rails. The ship slowed as they approached the red dock membrane. As the last of their momentum died the amoeba like dock membrane gently reached out and grasped the hull of the *Kongo*.

Collard's eyes bugged a bit. "How does it do that?"

McCaffrey chuckled. "Ye tell them Jean, and thanking ye for it they will be."

Jerry said. "Ian has it to a 'T'. No one knows how they work, or how anything works on the station. It's an artifact three quarters of a million years old. We take it as it comes."

The bridge crew finished locking down the stations. Soft thumps indicated that umbilicals were being attached to the ship.

Jerry hit the all call. "Attention all hands, this is the Captain speaking. We are docked at El Nanth Starbase. Consult your monitors for duty rotation and leave schedules. Please address any questions to your section leader. Enjoy your leaves, and we will see everyone in two weeks. Captain out."

Jean Collard finished locking down the helm she turned to the Captain. "Are you taking leave sir?"

He smiled. "I'm going home for a few days. I hang my hat in this system."

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Oh and people take the sun warnings seriously. El Nanth will peel your hide off in layers quicker than any place you have ever been."

Admiral Hull looked the plans over. He flicked between the pages. "I don't know Jerry. It's a big modification to make."

"Mark, I wondered on the *Republic* and later on the *Enterprise* why the class didn't have a day room for the Captain. It's an old and practical idea."

"That's a lot of modification to make. It will change the whole look of the ship."

"And how often do we look at them? Look I had the cap made on my own dime. It's over at El Nanth Starships. My Chief Engineer says he can get it on in a week. Yes it will change the look of the ship, but will not alter her warp dynamics in the least."

"What does this thing mass?"

"A couple of tons. Yes it will change the ship's trim. I've worked that out with Mr. McCaffrey as well."

"How much?"

"Slight reballast. The simulations we ran show no loss in tactical performance."

"I don't know Jerry. It's a big change for a convenience."

"I see it as a matter of efficiency. I've done this job now for a hundred days. In that time I have hopped from the office to the bridge dozens of times. Sometimes several times in an hour. I want to do the mundane work of the ship a little closer to the action. You know how critical a Captain's call can be sometimes. What if that call is needed in the time it takes to get from the office to the bridge?"

"You have the thing made?"

"Yes, we only have two weeks here."

"What if I said no?"

"I'm out the effort. I'll let the Ane weld it on the *Nia*."

Hull flipped through the designs again. "I don't have the dockyard workers to spare you."

"I'll have El Nanth do the work. They fitted out the *Nia*. They know the class."

Jerry I am not at all certain about this, but your ideas have generally worked in the past. If you have it done, 'on your dime' as you put it, I'll let you do it."

Jerry grinned. "Thank you. There won't be any regrets."

Hull grumbled. "I better not regret it. Now, what are you and Aleilan doing for dinner."

"We're at your service Mark."

"Now hear this. Technicians Bell, Givens, and Kessle report to the Chief Engineer's office. Technicians Bell, Givens, and Kessle report to the Chief Engineer's office. That is all."

Denise Ballard watched the crew passing through sickbay for "sun care kits". She grumbled to her Head Nurse.

"Dammit all Jimmy. I wonder how many are going to come back with any skin?"

"I wouldn't worry too much Doctor. I notice how much the sun warnings are stressed here."

"Blue-white suns and class M worlds are not supposed to mix."

James Maxwell continued to make up more kits. "Well they do here. How do Ane survive?"

"They're built for it Jimmy. Their eyes reflect ultraviolet, and a good deal of blue. That's why they look solid like that. They have one tough hide and pigmented mucus membranes. They have the evolutionary adaptation, that's how."

"Are you going on leave?"

"Sure, but I am saying off the beach. I am also taking a hat, with a wide brim. First, I have another call to make."

Denise Ballard leaned against the old dock space. Two over, the *USS Ulysses S Grant* had docked there. Howard Nelson and his crew had walked this very deck.

"Good men, every one. I was saddened to learn of their loss."

She turned, the Captain stood in the open area. This level of the docks was not frequented. "How do you know I was thinking of that?"

"Well, you're here. The "Grant Dock" seems to be becoming a place of pilgrimage. Two, you are very loud when you think."

"Reading minds again eh?"

"The hard thing to learn is how not to read them. I take it communing with the lost was not your reason for coming."

"It was one of them. You were the other. I figured this would be one of your stops."

"I always visit the old girl." Jerry walked up to the aging hull. He entered the code, and the door slid back into the hull. "Come on in Doctor."

Ballard followed him in. He led her to the wardroom, took a bottle down and two glasses. He poured a measure each.

"Prescriptions eh? I thought you were going to let me do the doctoring."

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"This is bartending, different but subtly the same."

She sat down and looked into the glass. "I am singularly dry of toasts."

"Don't let it bother you. I'm not the toasting and drinking kind. Since you are in a history mode, Admiral Barnard last drank from that decanter."

She took a longer look at the glass, and the bottle. "You don't drink much."

"Worse than that. "Mark Sylow gave me that bottle of bourbon in 2062."

"Two-hundred year-old bourbon?"

"Yes Madam. From the most famous distillery in Kentucky." Jerry took a small sip. "It has improved."

She sipped likewise. "Hmm, yes, that IS smooth."

"So what are the questions?"

"So many to ask I don't know where to start. Who was Mark Sylow?"

"One of the young men that helped me build this ship. I understand he was one of the victims of Wintermute. He probably died hating my guts. Then again, he likely wasn't thinking about me at the time. So many young men, young women, bright, beautiful, all dust. Colin Powell, fresh faced second lieutenant in 'Nam. He was killed in the Eugenics war. Mark Sylow, Shara Green, 'Padre', those kids off the Grant. None saw a quiet grave at the end of a fulfilled life."

"Who was 'Padre'?"

"I don't know. A man on the African plains with a priest's collar, and a deep faith in his God. He wanted to help people, and he knew a little jackleg medicine. He was as much a doctor as any of us. What demons chased him he hid well."

"Have you never had good times?"

Jerry smiled. "Yes, this is a good time. Those hundred years I spent baking my brains out on Savanna. My first marriage, all happy times, and forever too short."

"Have you been married since?"

"Several times. I buried two wives on Savanna. A good dozen or more love affairs, some serious. I'm no monk. They all end the same, she dies."

"I worry about the stability of the Captain, Jerry."

"Because I ramble on about old friends and lovers over Kentucky bourbon? I thought that is what old bourbon was for. You are asking the leading questions."

"I'm an old woman by Human standards. Late middle age if I get into the right state of denial. You are, how to say it, a look beyond to a place I cannot go, but really want to."

"I used to tell people that immortality was not something they wanted, if it is immortality at all. They would call me a liar with their eyes, or even right to my face. Make up your own mind Denise, would you want to be me? You can't pass it on, you can't gift it. You and you alone may have the golden prize."

"I don't know. Life is attractive to me. I love life, but to live on passed one's time and one's friends, I don't know."

"I don't know is a good place to leave it. I don't know. I step a day at a time. Right now I am Captain of the *Kongo*, and that is a happy place to be. What about you?"

"Ah the worm turns. What about me?"

"Why are you still out here?"

"Because my good man, that is where my friends are. There is one more important thing."

"That is?"

"I have yet to see it all. For that reason Jerry, I envy you. You will get to see more of the universe than I ever will."

"How do I deal with it?"

"Seeing the universe? Why, enjoy!"

"No, my delicate condition. How do I deal with it?"

"In what way?"

"Humans do not live to be 320 years old. Yet here I sit. I've been cursed, wondered at, attacked, even worshiped. The last was the most disturbing. How do I deal with it?"

"What have you done so far?"

"Lied, mostly, told the truth when it was too obvious to deny."

"I don't know that I have advice you can take on that Jerry. But is has been my experience that lies catch up with one, usually when least convenient. I tell the truth, it leaves my life less complex."

Jerry knocked back the rest of the bourbon. "My Father always said much the same thing. I'll keep that advice in mind."

Candice Meyers looked out from the shelter of the Starfleet hostel in Crystal City. The pavement simmered and it was only mid morning. A few people moved around, all worn long sleeves, big hats and sunglasses.

"Man Vivian, you where not kidding. It looks evil out there."

"It's not that hot. We are far enough away the the sun to keep the heat no worst than tropical. However, the UV exposure is 5 times worse. Your SPF 20 is only SPF 4. You did use the third spigot on the shower?"

"Yes, full blast."

"Good. That helps a lot. Now the shopping is to die for. Let's go."

Jean Collard adjusted her native costume and headed out with the others. "Will we see many Ane?"

Vivian was wasting no time getting down the street. The pedestrian ways had covered awnings, and people used them. "Not likely, there's a couple to the right. Most are out on the open plains. If you want to meet the locals we can rent a hovercar and head out. They will question your eyes right out of their sockets. The young are the worst."

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"It would be a shame to be here and not see Ane."

"If you two want to. Ane are old news to me and I'm old news to them."

Candy asked. "What's it like growing up here?"

"Well there are not many non-Ane people, less than a quarter million humanoids. This is the only city in the system. Most of the Ansisi live on Savanna, which has the only small town. Other than having the universal market at your doorstep and an awareness of the sun delivered with mother's milk, it's a lot like any other small colony world."

Jean was rubbernecking. "This city is beautiful. When was it built?"

Six thousand years ago by someone called the El Aurians. They eventually left and the city was left behind. It was here for the first refugees from Earth. They also built High Crystal. Here is the mall. Ladies, shopper's paradise. If an Orion calls you 'good stock', kick him in the balls. He hasn't been here long enough and needs the lesson."

The women worked their way down the stalls. Slowly they gathered the usual bits that Starfleet bought. Candy was looking over an intricate bowl.

"That guy looking at me is giving me the creeps."

Vivian looked at him. "Yea, if he creeps you out that badly, shoot him. On stun, kill will get you talked about."

The man quickly wiped any expression from his face, and busied himself with something else.

Candy looked after him. "You aren't kidding?"

"No, look mean, I'll tell you why later."

Candy put the bowl down. "Lunch sounds good how about you Jean?"

"Suits, my feet are killing me."

A few minutes later the three women were enjoying crisp salads with tall drinks to match.

Jean couldn't get enough of the salad. "This is great stuff."

Vivian was digging in likewise. "Local farms, we grow for export now."

Candy waged her fork. "Are you a farmer's daughter?"

"Nope, Fleet brat. My Dad is a Chief Petty officer in the Fleet construction corp. Mom likes dirt-side better than Builder Station. She said the place gave her the creeps. Oh, Mom wanted me to bring you home for dinner, if that's all right?"

Jean said. "Sure, sounds good, home cooking and all."

Candy squirmed a bit. "Can I take a pass. Guy was meeting me tonight."

Vivian smiled. "No pressure, it's my fault for not saying something sooner."

"So, what's the deal with just shooting people?"

"Did you read the local rules issued?"

"Obviously not as well as I should have. I got the part about stay armed. I assumed the place was dangerous."

"There are two laws here. 'Be it harm none, do as you will.' and 'There is no such thing as an over reaction to force.'"

Jean dropped her fork. "You really meant kick him in the balls."

"Every bit of it."

Candy mused. "This explains some of the stuff I have seen for sale."

"Yes, much that is illegal elsewhere is not illegal here. Be careful what you buy to take off planet."

Captain LaSaille watched the zero pressure painters at work. McCaffrey was as good as his word. The work was almost finished and they still had 6 days of layover left. Well, he had an Admiral to see.

Hull got up as the door slid open. "Jerry, I've got a plum for you. A chance to do a little science."

"Those come rarely enough. What do you have?"

"Sigma Terantix Three. It's on the way to Starbase 24." Hull pulled up the chart. "They are in an industrial stage as of the last report. We recently recorded a burst of radio from that location, and we are now getting indications of spaceflight technology."

"You want us to sneak around and snoop?"

"Yes, exactly. Get as much information as you can without contact. They are at a delicate stage."

"Technology is at the spaceflight cusp, how are they politically?"

"Better than many worlds at that stage. They have three nations. Tarnax, Gendrot, and Endvore. No active war as of last report."

"Could be they found a better way to compete?"

"Could be. Give it a good looking at, take your time."

"No chance of cultural raids?"

"No, they will see you. They have some fine telescopes and radar technology. They have bragged about them among themselves. You can't risk a direct orbit."

"Load up all the data for my science officer. He will want a look for sure."

"It will be in the standard update."

"Good. Anything else we need?"

"Just the usual Orion warning. They have been steering clear of our big units. It makes me think they might have gotten a sensor upgrade."

"I'll keep that in mind. It's an improvement if they can see me coming from further away, that increases the effectiveness of my patrol."

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"That's one way of looking at it. What plans do you have before you sail?"

"I plan to get home long enough to sleep in my own bed a couple of nights. I think I can sneak a three-day pass in there."

"Good luck on that. Enjoy your time off. Dismissed."

Candy cuddled deeper in the bed, afterglow was, dreamy. Guy nuzzled closer.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

"Don't know I have any Guy, you drive them right out of my head."

The windows boomed and rain beat against the pane. Candy looked out. "So much for our romantic view."

"I'm told they pass quickly. The rain comes nearly every night with the terminator. Besides the real romantic view is in bed with me."

"Flatterer."

"Truth. Have you been here before?"

"Once, I didn't get planet side. We, had a war to fight."

"That still bothers you."

"I don't think it will ever stop Guy. I don't know that I would want it to."

She hugged closer. "I don't like war. I've been there, and it hurts."

"Nothing is here to hurt you now."

Jerry wracked his jaw to pop his ears at the sudden pressure change and opened is eyes. Yep, they were home. Teleporting was not fun. Transporters were less jarring.

I heard that.

Sorry love, but it's true. The transporter is smoother.

But it won't reach from Builder Station to Savanna.

Neither can you without help. He ruffled her mane. **Go play. You haven't gotten much of that either.**

Aleilan trotted out of the house, and broke into a dead run before she reached the roof edge. Jerry stood in the courtyard and looked around. Home, he relaxed just looking at it. The UV dome softened the light in the courtyard and let his transplanted Earth plants thrive. The house was large by Earth standards, and built on the Roman model. The central courtyard and garden offered a sanctuary from the harsher atmosphere outside, but the house blended into that outside seamlessly. Water flowed from the cascade in the North and through the pebbled stream of the garden. Rooms bordered all four sides. Some rooms were enclosed, but most opened on both sides. Patios and low walls beyond the roof

line made telling where the house started and ended difficult. It ambled its way down the low hillside, shaded by native trees and is open to the plains beyond.

A tall blonde woman came out of one of the rooms facing the courtyard. "JERRY!" She flew across the space and gave him a hug. Two things were immediately apparent, one, she had Elizabeth's "face", and second she wasn't wearing a stitch. Jerry pulled back a little for a better look. "Elizabeth?"

"Yes?" She took a step back.

Jerry admired the effect. "Ah, this is new."

"I've had it for several months. It's the new Stoner biomech."

"I like."

She giggled at the physical effects her state of dress was having. "I can see that."

"So how functional is it?"

"Very. Everything works at least from the outside. It doesn't have the brain capacity so I have to run it as peripheral. R&D is working on that too."

"Sensate?"

"Every bit as much as I would like, and a little more than I would like sometimes."

"So have you, done anything with it yet?"

"Not yet. It's taken me the last several months to learn to walk and talk."

"What is the more than you would like part?"

"Eating is a chore, but I am learning to like some foods. You have the results of eating to deal with. I cannot simply turn it off and leave it in the corner."

Jerry moved close to caress her. "So, what is the opinion, worth it?"

"Oooo. Biology is messy, but, yes I like the sensate world. I want to learn more."

He caressed her hip and she moved closer. "I think that can be arranged."

Jerry came out of his study. The lights against the dome gave a soft effect. It was enough light to see by, but not enough to obscure the outside view. Low rolls of thunder filled the evening air as the sunset thunderstorms moved west. The high green note of the setting sun graced the clouds as they followed the slow roll of the terminator. He had too little time this time. Home was good, but adventure waited. Adventure is what he had signed up for. That three day pass was Starfleet time, not the Savanna 36 hour day. Several dozen Ane lay about the courtyard in clumps. He went around and gave his friends a last hug and cuddle. Elizabeth had a light shift on now. It didn't hide much. Her body was a pleasant surprise. He would look up the technical details later.

Aleilan, time to go. Take care everyone. I'll see you around the All.

Green grass and fresh water. Came the massed reply.

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Jerry grabbed his kit bag and Aleilan's neck. He closed his eyes. Once again he popped his ears. El Nanth Starbase hadn't changed.

"Captain to the Bridge."

Jerry smiled for about the tenth time that day as he walked from the new day room to the bridge. It really was worth fighting to get. "What do you have Mr. Sommes."

"Proximity alert Sir. Unknown target."

"On the screen." A lump appear in the middle of the screen. "Magnify." The lump resolved into a ship-shaped lump. "Drop to impulse at one hundred thousand kilometers. Mr. Ghurn, what do you make of that?"

"Unknown Captain. I am not getting an energy reading. Mass is one million tons. It is an artificial construction."

The ship's engines ramped down and the view slowed to a crawl. Collard said. "Range one hundred thousand kilometers, proceeding on impulse."

"Close slowly. Burt?"

"I am getting minimal power levels now. The mass is a hollow cylinder 3 kilometers long and a kilometer across. The center holds a mechanism I would take to be Bussard ramjet."

LaSaille frowned. "But ramjets don't work."

"That is correct Captain. The interstellar medium is not dense enough to power a ramjet unless you are already over 0.5c. Nonetheless, I believe we have one here."

"Vivian, what is their speed."

Lt. Tate consulted her board. "0.001c sir."

"Nowhere near fast enough."

The turbolift doors opened. Candice Meyers emerged. She slipped into the XO station without comment and proceeded to come up to speed. By this time the Kongo was in close weapons range.

"Burt, any life signs?"

Ghurn turned back to his scope. "I'm not reading any sir." He made an adjustment. "No, not even accepted hibernation levels."

Commander Meyers said. "Do you want to board Captain?"

"Burt, life support?"

"No sir. You will get one tenth G due to spin, but it's way too cold."

"Candice, you want to take a look?"

"Yes."

"Assemble your team, and be careful."

The haze of the transporter faded. The landing party looked about getting their bearings. Frost covered everything.

Lt. Sommes said. "Damn it's cold. It eats right through the suit."

Lt. Cmd Ghurn added. "Correct. Commander we should not linger. The current temperature is 32 Kelvin. Our suits are not rated for very long in this."

"Understood, fan out in twos. Get all the readings you can. We are out of here in fifteen minutes."

Sommes scraped the frost off one of the nearby boxes. "Commander!" Meyers came over. "Bodies."

Meyers peered though the haze of frost. "We figured as much. Ghurn, how frozen are they?"

He ran his tricorder over the box. "Ambient temperature. Exceedingly frozen."

Meyers shook her head. "That means they are dead."

"Effectively, but perhaps not permanently."

"They could be unfrozen?"

"Today no. However, I am aware of developments in the works that could successfully revive them."

"OK, let's get back and report."

Mr. Ghurn finished his report. "That is the extent of it Captain. From the evidence the ship is a failed colony effort. We counted 2000 deep hibernation tubes, all frozen at ambient temperature. We found no computers."

"What was the energy reading?"

"Superconducting in the hull sir. It's dead."

Meyers said. "Mr. Ghurn indicates it might be possible, in the future to revive them."

Dr. Ballard took the question, nodding to Ghurn. "Yes, there are some solid leads in that direction. Nothing I can say that will be ready in 'X' years."

LaSaille asked. "What is your recommendation Doctor?"

"Leave it, they ain't getting any deader."

LaSaille nodded. "We will take that recommendation. Burt, do what science you can remotely. Vivian, find me a nice souvenir by sensors and beam it over. Something that will look good in my office. Ian, make me a salvage tag. Starfleet ID."

Lt. Sommes looked a little confused. "Sir, why beam something off?"

"Ancient salvage rights Lieutenant; still in force. If we leave her as she is, anyone can still claim it. If I take so much as a teacup, it's ours. If it's ours, Starfleet can protect it until medical science catches up with the problem. Burt, I'll give you 48 hours to get your readings."

"Am I permitted to board sir?"

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"I don't see why not. Just keep the dangers in mind."

Now hear this. Man down high energy physics, Medical to high energy physics, STAT."

Lt. Tate pressed the call for the Captain's day room. She wore white micro-fiber gloves, and carried an ancient looking weapon.

"Come."

"I have your souvenir sir."

Jerry smiled. "You finally have it warm enough?"

"Yes, admittedly it took a week, but we couldn't warm it too fast." She set the stand under her arm on the table and carefully placed the gun in it. Then she locked the built in force field down.

"Is the force field necessary?"

"If it hits the floor it could shatter."

"Oh. If I might ask Mr. Tate, why that item?"

"Mr. Ghurn's science team found it on the bridge sir, in the Captan's hand."

"Indeed."

"He killed himself with it."

Jerry stopped. "A message Mr. Tate?"

"For all of us sir. Mistakes can be costly."

"Thank you. That will be all."

She left the room. Jerry stared at the gun. "Talk to me."

Captain LaSaille settled into the command chair. "Report."

"We have arrived at Sigma Terantix sir."

"Give me a cometary orbit, and cut the engines. Mr. Ghurn, the sensors are yours."

He grunted a reply and got busy.

Now hear this. Ensign Fine, Ensign Howard, to sociology. Ensign Fine, Ensign Howard, to sociology. That is all.

Lt. Tate wandered into the main Rec-hall. The big screen was on. The show was local. Some analog video signal cleaned up and translated. Two smaller screens showed the survey in progress. Several people sat in isolation zones, doubtless listening to audio programming. She spotted Janice Joyce, the Captain's yeoman looking over the smorgasbord. "Can't decide?"

"No sir. This is really exciting."

"Call me Vivian. We're off duty. I love this stuff, 'strange new worlds'."

"Yea, new people, new cultures. When I was a kid I was part of the group that surfed the Starfleet academic databases for music and bits of culture from uncontacted worlds. If we got news that someone had joined the warp drive community their music was colder than two-day-old oatmeal. It had to be edgy and uncontacted."

"Interesting hobby. Now we are on the collecting end."

"Yea, this is so rad."

"We could hold a dance, using local music."

"I like it. Lets."

Jerry slumped in his seat in the Captain's conference room. He had gathered the senior officer quietly. "Asteroid..."

Bert shifted in his seat. "Yes sir. We have the orbit calculated. They have two months to live."

"Damn. All for nothing." He slammed his fist into the table.

Vivian looked from one of her fellow officers to the other. "Let's shoot it down."

Bert waved a hand aimlessly. "You know it isn't as simple as that."

Candice jumped in. "No, it isn't simple, but we have the most powerful ship in the fleet! If we can't come up with a plan we are not worthy of her."

Jerry turned to Ghurn. "Bert, tell them."

"They have powerful optical instruments in orbit. We cannot act without being seen."

Candice looked from Ghurn to LaSaille. "Do they even know?"

Bert continued. "Yes, one of their lesser Instruments is pointed right at it. I am sure they know."

Dr. Ballard said. "There is no indication of this in any of their media."

LaSaille shook his head. "It wouldn't be the first time that a government kept something from the public, 'for their own good'."

Collard looked around the table. "Candice is right, we have the power."

Jerry shook his head. "We have the power, but do we have the right? There is that little sticking point of General Order Number One. We must not interfere in the natural development of a pre-warp culture."

"Collard spoke again. "Sir, how can that apply? They are dying. Bert how big is it."

The big Tellarite replied tonelessly. "Big, enough. Major extinction event, might crack the planet."

Candice turned to Ballard. "Doctor, don't you have anything to add?"

"What's to add? I don't like it, I don't approve, but I don't recall being asked

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if I approve."

LaSaille's eyes narrowed. "Has anyone here ever seen a Ceetian?"

Negatives came from around the room.

"Nor are you likely to. They are the reason we have the Prime Directive as I have heard it called. It is still questionable as to whether they have a sustainable population left. No one may ever see a Ceetian, again."

Meyers looked at the long faces around the table. "But why should that apply here? These people are reaching into space, not hiding under the trees. We need to save them." Collard and Tate were both nodding.

LaSaille sat up and straightened his uniform. "I would agree, but orders are not something we can ignore when we feel like it. That is why they are expressed as orders. General Order Number One says no interference, and as much as we might like to interfere just this one time, we are not disobeying orders. Dismissed.

Ghurn levered himself from his chair with a grunt and left. Vivian Tate fled the room, on the verge of tears. Dr. Ballard gave LaSaille a long, hard look, and departed without a further word. The last of the senior staff left the room, nothing was said. LaSaille still sat there. Meyers stopped at the door and squared her shoulders. She turned around, shaking slightly.

"Sir, I must protest!"

LaSaille sighed. "There is nothing left to protest. We have a principle to uphold, as painful as that might be."

"What about the principle of life? Billions of people are going to die, not might not, could, but will! Doesn't that count for something?"

"Yes it counts, but we have gone over this. We must not interfere in the natural development of a pre warp culture."

"Even if that 'development' is to die?"

Jerry spun out of his chair. He paced, angry. "Life dies all the time. More life rises to replace it. One asteroid will not make a difference to life."

"But it will make a critical difference for *that* life, *those* people. I frankly, Sir, do not care about life a million years from now, or a million years ago. I care about, the, life we, have, *now*."

Jerry looked at her flatly. "Epsilon Thirty Cee."

"They didn't get hit by a rock."

"No, they didn't. They got hit by us. We were the cause of the collapse of an entire culture, the near extinction of a species because of an *arrogant attitude* that we knew best. The issue is still not decided. They could yet die to the last. Who is to say that will not happen here?"

"Excuse me Captain, but that rock is going to do some hefty interfering if we do nothing."

"And nothing is what we must do."

"Captain... Jerry, what do we have to lose? You said it yourself, they are doomed. If we walk away, **BAM!** One million metric tons of death, express

delivered. They are as good as dead. By the time we reach Starbase 24 it will be over. The ecosphere might not even make it. A billion years before life forms again. Unless we try."

"Candice it's a natural event, we have no say."

"*Natural?* Are we unnatural? What force outside of nature made us, or makes this ship run? Everything is within the laws of physics or it couldn't work. Sir, the attitude that we are an unnatural force is more arrogant than any contact, no matter how disastrous. Are we God to decide who lives and who dies and by what means? If that asteroid was an alien fleet you would be calling for reinforcements and prepared to sacrifice this ship and all within to save those people, and we would be right behind you. But because it is an asteroid, and not a fleet, and all we risk are the phasers, we do nothing. I challenge you to tell me how this ship and her crew are any more or less natural than that hunk of cosmic slag."

Jerry stood poker faced. "Are you done?"

Candice realized she was panting, sweaty. "Yes Sir."

"I accept your challenge, and I will give you my answer tomorrow." He left the office by the door to his quarters.

Candice Meyers stood there for a long moment. She didn't know if she had won, or lost, but it was movement."

Back in her quarters Candice Meyers looked at her reflection in the mirror. The gold uniform, the section patch on her breast. "Guy, I'm resigning."

"A bit hasty aren't you? He hasn't said no absolutely."

"I have to be ready. I cannot serve in a Starfleet that will stand by and watch an entire world die. That isn't what I came out here for."

Jerry scrubbed at his face. He couldn't do it tonight. Three centuries of practice or not, too much on his mind tonight to find his center. So much for throwing the question to the All.

**If your mind is so troubled, perhaps you have the answer already?*

Jerry rolled to face Aleilan on her three quarters of the bed. **Why would an answer trouble me?*

**Are not answers often more troubling than questions?*

**Don't go getting all Ane on me. **

**I am already 'all Ane'. How could I be otherwise?*

**Not now. What would you do?*

**Nothing. Ane do not have the means to act, no matter what we might

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choose.**

I have the means to act.

Then you are blessed with a meaningful choice.

Blessed, you call this a blessing? I want to do something, but the memory of that little golden man, and his abject, fear... I never want to be the cause of that again.

**Is she right?*

My heart says yes. How can we be different from the universe that contains us? Hell, even that is an arrogant statement, we are not "contained" we are part of the universe, made of stardust.

**And your troubling answer?*

The difference between us and that rock is we have the responsibility of choices.

**And what is your choice?*

I cannot choose less than life, and face myself.

**And if you lose your commission over it?*

**I have lost greater things, and survived. Cuddle, Sweetie?*

Aleilan moved closer to him and he snaked an arm over her neck. Captain Jerrold Ryan LaSaille slept the sleep of the just.

"Captain on the bridge." The tension was palpable as the Captain walked across the bridge without a word and entered his day room. It was barely closed when the comm chirped. "Bridge, LaSaille here. Commander Myers to report to my day room."

All eyes were on her as she stood. "Lt. Collard, you have the con."

Meyers was not as calm as she hoped she looked as she pressed the call. "Come." She entered and the door closed behind her like a guillotine blade.

"Captain?"

"I gave full consideration to your words last night Commander. It was a difficult night indeed."

"And?*

"The difference between us and the asteroid is that *we* have the responsibility of choices. I wish for you to call a briefing at 0900 hours for all senior staff members. The subject will be, how to smash that rock. Dismissed.

The tension in her chest snapped like an over-wound spring. "Yes, Sir, at once Sir." She turned to leave.

"Candice."

She looked back. "Yes Sir?"

"Don't be too relieved until we see if we have any career left."

"Sir, if you hadn't decided this way, my career was over anyway."

"You planed to resign?"

"I spent the night drafting the letter."

"It may be needed yet. Send me a copy, I might crib from it."

"Yes Sir."

"As you are all aware the subject of this briefing is, 'how to stop the rock'. I am of the opinion that this action will violate General Order Number One. Anyone not comfortable with the idea of not having a long and illustrious career in Starfleet should retire from the proceedings now."

Ballard snorted. "Been there, done that, but I ain't never saved a whole planet. Let's get down to business."

No one got up. McCaffrey added: "I would be guessing that will speak for the lot Captain."

Nods around the table.

LaSaille smiled. "Good, let's do this. First problem, can we reduce that rock to the point it is not a threat to the life and ecology of the planet?"

Lt. Tate said. "We have the fire power. While we can't destroy it all at once, we can nibble it away."

"How long?"

"Given the mass of the asteroid, I estimate three weeks."

McCaffrey interjected. "Lass, if ye will be taking three weeks, how do ye be planning to do it."

"Phasers Mr. McCaffrey."

"Ye should well know lass that the ship's phasers, while powerful, are not meant to be fired for three weeks solid. I am not wanting to be a wet blanket here, but if we burn out the phasers, the good people below are in the same boat they are now."

LaSaille tapped his stylus on the table. "How heavy a duty cycle can the phasers take?"

McCaffrey thought for a moment. "Hours, perhaps a full shift. If we keep it down to burst, no long blasts."

"Can you maintain the banks between the shifts they are used?"

"Aye, I can keep them going a while like that."

"What is our state of replacements?"

"We are fully stocked, I have enough spares to replace one bank, four times, completely. I have or can fabricate additional spares of the most perishable parts."

Tate said. "The *Kongo* has four phaser banks. If we rotate them one bank a shift, and they are maintained between shifts, and we keep it to short bursts, can we do it?"

McCaffrey shook his head. "I wouldn't want to be pinned down on that lass, I wouldn't. Try, I can. Assure, well that I cannot."

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LaSaille said. "Will you try?"

"Aye sir, with all me heart and skill, but I'll not be makin' promises I cannot keep."

"We will try then. The question remains to astrophysics. Mr. Ghurn can you, given our limitations, devise a plan to cut the rock up?"

Ghurn started. "Devise it yes. In the time we have... that depends on your definition of 'destroyed'."

"Explain please."

"To disintegrate the asteroid completely, and fulfill Mr. McCaffrey's requirement we go gentle on the phasers, we don't have enough time, on rough estimate. How destroyed is enough?"

LaSaille said. "Small enough to not kill people, or as few as we can get away with."

Tate added. "Under a meter would be best. That is still going to result in a lot of minor hits. Statistically people will die 4 billion people, a whole planet, some rocks will hit people."

Ghurn grunted. "But, the ecology, and the culture will not be impacted."

Meyers said. "I don't think we can average a meter either. It has to be a meter and under."

LaSaille said. "What is the impact zone?"

Ghurn replied. "The area they call the Indrun Sea." He pecked at his terminal and brought the graphic up on the central screen. "The resulting tsunami will hit 30% of their most populated coastlines it will destroy land as far as 500 miles inland. That is not the worst. The returning ejecta will, well the effects are well known. Destruction of civilization, mass extinction event, minimally. This asteroid is large enough and fast enough it could disrupt the crust."

LaSaille paused. "Mr. Ghurn, being we are going to the trouble, what do the natives call themselves?"

"Boliars, sir."

"Then we are working to save Bolia then. Mr. Ghurn, get us some real figures to deal with. Mt. Tate, work with Mr. Ghurn and formulate a plan to fire the phasers by. Mr. McCaffrey, I suggest you prepare your team for a good deal of phaser maintenance. We will be effectively under battle stations for weeks. We won't have anyone shooting back at us. But I expect this will be wearing on everyone. I know that all departments will pitch in. We will reconvene at 1500 hours. Dismissed."

LaSaille scrubbed his chin. Stubble was forming. Time to depilate again, heck he might grow a beard. Two days of plan and discuss, discuss and plan. No one had gotten a lot of sleep. The final proposal was in front of him. "OK, we

have a solid plan. We can nibble the asteroid away to the point that it is only the most spectacular meteor shower of all time, and keep our phasers working while we do it."

Lt. Tate said. "Yes sir. By the final action plan it will 25 days and we can conserve the phaser relays and emitters."

McCaffrey said. "Aye, but we won't be in any shape for a long fight."

LaSaille nodded. I'll take that under advisement. We still have the Prime Directive."

Meyers scowled slightly. "I thought we had gone over that?"

"I agreed that we have to help, but we still have the Prime Directive, and we are going to try and uphold that."

Tate said. "Respectfully sir, with us blasting chunks of rock off the asteroid, how? They have some pretty good telescopes."

"We will keep the asteroid between us and Bolia Vivian."

"Will that work?"

LaSaille stood up and stretched. "Frankly? I doubt it, but we will make the effort. Mr. Meyers, isolate and seal the logs from these briefings. No doubt they will be required at the court martial."

"Yes sir."

"Open fire."

The Kongo's phasers reached out to the asteroid and blew a chunk the size of the Kongo herself from the main body.

"Fire at will according to plan Mr. Tate, lets be efficient about this, time is short."

"Aye aye Sir."

Padway Weenot levered himself out of bed. Sleep was useless. Two months, that was all, just another two months. He and his colleagues had worked the figures again and again, there was no mistake. He still wasn't sure that silence was the best course of action. However, the Leaders had been adamant. The people would not be told. Nothing could be done. Let the people live and die in ignorant peace. He wandered into the bathroom and blinked at the brightness of the light. He ran a hand over his bald blue head, stubble. To perdition with fashion. He refused to spend one more minute of his remaining two months removing perfectly good hair from his head. Padway went to his workroom and turned on the computer screen in the darkness. A few moments with the key board had him logged into the telescope that was monitoring the

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object of their fate. AEG-2435 rolled impassively on the screen. A bright flash backlit the object for a moment. When it cleared a small piece of the great asteroid had broken away. Again the object was backlit. The smaller piece was further reduced. Within half an hour the smaller rock had been reduced to gravel.

Padway Weenot sat glued to his seat. His mouth hung open. He could well be the only person that was watching this in the whole world. He was gripping the monitor sides, his shoulders ached. Another flash another large rock broke off. He willed himself to let go of the computer. He found himself sobbing. Tears welled in his eyes till he could no longer make out the screen, only the frequent flashes. He dabbed at his eyes, and stumbled for the phone. It took three tries to get the number right. The phone rang.

"Tyrant's Palace."

His voice squeaked. "Put the Tyrant on."

"Sir, Tyrant Melnose is sleeping."

"This is professor Weenot, PUT HIM ON!"

"Sir be reasonable, you..."

"This isn't a time to be reasonable. Get him up and PUT HIM ON THE PHONE!!"

"One moment please."

Across the room the monitor continued to flash. A long tense silence followed. A sleepy voice answered.

"Melnose here, Weenot. This had better be good."

"I have been monitoring the object, I couldn't sleep."

The voice got cranky. "Fine, now neither one of us is sleeping..."

"It's breaking up."

"Say again?" The cranky tone was gone.

"Something is breaking up the object. I am seeing bright flashes, then a bit drifts off, and that is destroyed."

"You're drunk."

"NO Sir. I am dead sober. Pull it up yourself."

The phone on the other end hit the table. Weenot waited. After a few minutes the phone was picked up again. "HOW?!"

"I do not know sir. I suspect it is an artifice however. I don't see how a natural phenomenon could account for it." In the background his computer continued to flash.

"We heed a better picture." All tiredness and crankiness was gone.

"The Big Instrument would show much more detail, but you have forbidden it from being pointed that way."

"Yes, I had my reasons."

"Good ones at the time. Could you countermand that order?"

"Hold on."

Weenot could hear a bit of the other conversation, likely on a second phone.

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He carried the phone back to his computer. The screen flicked again but not with the bright flashes. A larger and more powerful instrument was now on the channel.

"Can you see anything?" Tyrant Melnose was back on the phone.

Weenot increased the magnification. From behind the Object, beams of energy lanced out, the rock broke up further. "Yes sir, I can see something. Beams from behind the Object of some type. It must be a ship.

Melrose stared at the screen. "I will compose a message. Can the Obecara telescope reach that far?"

"Yes sir that and much more."

"Good we will use that, in the morning."

"Yes Tyrant. Thy will be done." The phone hung up from the other end.

Weenot didn't move from in front of the screen that night as the strange people of the unseen alien ship lent them mercy for what reason he did not know.

When LaSaille woke up he went to the bridge at once. Gamma shift was still hard at work on the rock. The *Kongo* was working off the ventral phaser bank as planned. Karl Steel was up early and manning the board. He looked concerned. LaSaille wandered over to communications.

"What do you have Karl?"

Steel looked up briefly, nodded. "I'm not sure Sir. It's a binary message, sublight, it keeps repeating."

"Aimed at us?"

"No doubt sir. Big radio telescope if I am not mistaken."

"What are they saying?"

"It's a common code, one they have been using for centuries. 'Our grace to you.' and it repeats."

"Thank you."

"Yes, that's it."

"We've been spotted. I rather figured we wouldn't avoid it. Make, 'You are welcome. We must work now,' in their codes Mr. Steel."

Lt. Cornish looked at the Captain. "You're going to contact them sir?"

"Yes Mr. Cornish. If one will hang for a sheep, they might as well hang for a horse."

Tyrant Melrose looked at the answer. "They understand us?"

Weenot lapsed into professor mode. "Sir, we have been sending radio

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signals out for two hundred years. If starfaring people exist, which obviously they do, then we are known."

"But they have waited this long to contact us?"

"I don't know."

"Message back. 'Who are you, will you come to see us?'"

Captain LaSaille looked at the latest translation. "OK, message back. Let's see if your universal translator is up to the task. (ahem) People of Bolia, we the peace loving people of the Galaxy hold life and self determination as the highest of values. To that end we do not contact a people until by self determination, they come of their own accord out among the stars. As life is also among out highest values we will not willing see a people die if we have the means to prevent that death. We will do all we can against the asteroid. Our best efforts will not completely destroy the asteroid, but reduce it to smaller stones that will still rain on your world. These stones will each be dangerous, but no one or even the whole mass will threaten life, or your civilization. Once we have done this work, we will leave you to your own self determination. We will eagerly await your coming to the stars. End transmission."

"You're not going to identify us?"

"No Lieutenant, it's better if we don't."

Weenot handed Tyrant Melrose the message. He read it slowly.

"Then that is how it will be."

"Tyrant, how will we ever thank them?"

"By becoming the people they expect us to be Weenot. We now have an appointment with destiny"

"Now hear this. Chief Engineer McCaffrey to the main phaser bank, Chief Engineer McCaffrey to the main phaser bank. That is all."

Captain LaSaille rubbed his face. "Switch to the starboard bank. Rake them again"

Lt. Tate bent to the task. "Aye aye sir."

Once again the phasers fired into the debris field that had once been an asteroid.

Lt. Tate said: "Firing sequence complete."

LaSaille turned to science. "Mr. Ghurn?"

"Analyzing Captain..." Several minutes passed. "We do not have any stones larger than one meter in diameter."

The Intercom beeped. "McCaffrey to bridge."

"Yes Mr. McCaffrey?"

"Captain, we won't have the using of the main phasers until I can see a dock. I have weakening in the main coolant fixtures."

"Shut it down and drain it Ian. We're done."

"Blessed St. Mary for that."

LaSaille punched the all call. "Attention all hands. This is the Captain. Mission accomplished, the asteroid has been reduced. My deep thanks for the extra effort all hands have put into this project. It is likely all the thanks you will get. Job well done people. Captain out. Mr. Liquard, plot a course for Starbase 24. Mr. Collard, lay it in and best speed. It's time to pay the piper."

The *Kongo* pulled into Starbase 24 a sorry sight. Covered in dust, blast marks all around the phasers. The Captain turned to the bridge crew as they shut down the stations.

"Ian, you can get started. You have informed the dockyard of our needs?"

"That I have."

"Candice, you're with me. Time to face the music."

Admiral Toloth was waiting for them. "LaSaille, you said you were conducting a rescue. It looks more like you fought a fleet action the last month."

Jerry sighed. "A little of both Sir."

"Explain."

"Bolia was the rescue site."

"I got that, what was the rescue, and why so long?"

"They had an appointment with an extinction asteroid. We converted it into gravel."

"Holy... You were successful?"

"Yes sir. They will have one nasty meteor shower and nothing more."

"You couldn't divert it?"

"Not enough time."

"How long did they have?"

"Two months."

"Bolia is a fairly advanced culture LaSaille. Did they know?"

"Yes, they did."

"Were you spotted?"

"Yes, we were."

"A serious matter. What was the nature of the contact?"

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"It's all in the logs sir, sublight radio."

"Did they see your ship?"

"Well we hid behind the rock until we didn't have enough rock to hide behind."

"I suggest you do not say any more until the hearing."

"Yes Sir."

"All rise." The admirals entered and sat. "As you were."

Rear Admiral Nogura spoke. "This is a formal hearing to determine if courtmartial proceedings should be brought against the Captain and officers of the *USS Kongo* for violation of General Order Number One. Mr. Prosecutor, you may proceed."

"If it please the court I will enter into evidence the logs of the *USS Kongo* pertaining to the incident in question. You will find within those logs that the Captain and officers in question are quite aware of the nature of General Order Number One, considered that they could well be breaking General Order Number One, and willfully chose actions that in the opinion of the Advocate General are clear violations of General Order Number One."

"The logs are so entered and shall be exhibit A. Captain LaSaille, to you in whole or in part dispute these logs or the statements pertaining to them?"

"No sir."

"Do you have any reason or explanation for your actions?"

"Yes sir, I do."

Naguaro leaned forward. "Then please explain."

"Sirs. The Federation itself is based on certain principles. These principles guide the laws and orders under which we govern ourselves. It is my opinion, and that of my officers that these principles come first, and over ride any order that under the circumstance present may violate them. General Order Number One prohibits a Starfleet officer from interfering in the natural development of a sublight culture. What I ask are we? Are we somehow meta-natural? Are we apart from the universe that contains us? I came to the conclusion that no, we are not. We are every bit as natural as the asteroid. The difference being that we have the responsibility of choices.

What choices did we have? Two that I could see. To take action was to risk discovery. To risk polluting the culture of Bolia with the knowledge that we exist. To not take action was to ensure that the cultures of Bolia would never, *never* change at all. They would be forever free of pollution. They would be dead.

It is proclaimed in the document that binds us that life is sacred. This is the First Principle of the Federation. Life is sacred. To preserve life, to cherish it, to help it flower, this is the reason we are gathered together. We chose to follow

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the First Principle, to preserve life. Culture will take care of itself. Indeed, by this time had we not acted four billion people, would, be, dead. All civilization and culture on Bolia would, be, erased. There would be nothing to defend with General Order Number One. This is the sole article of our defense and justification for our actions. I rest.

The hearing board whispered among itself for a moment. Naguaro spoke. "We will retire and consider the logs of the *USS Kongo* and the statements given here. The hearing is adjourned.

The senior staff of the *Kongo* was gathered in a quiet corner waiting for word from hearing board. Candice looked over her fellow officers, each showed signs of nervousness. The Captain sat still as death, watching the activity in the spacedock. She moved beside him. "Nervous?"

"No."

"Worried?"

"No."

"How can you be so, calm?"

"This too shall pass."

"Is this another 'perspective of the old' thing?"

"Yes it is. four billion people live and love because we acted. The ire of men for the way we acted cannot change that."

"Yet you were ready to walk away."

"Proof that age and wisdom do not go hand in hand. I have you to thank for that."

"And you thank me, even with this?"

"Ah, but we knew the consequences before we started. It is a little late for regret and worry now."

"Human nature."

"Youth."

A staff lieutenant came in. "The court is ready to reconvene."

Once the hearing panel had settled in Rear Admiral Nogura began. "Captain LaSaille, I have a number of questions as regard to your actions concerning the Bolian attempt at contact. I wish for your to explain them."

"Ask sir, I will do my best."

"Why did you answer their hails?"

"Well Admiral, my Mother always taught me to be polite. It was obvious the Bolians knew we were there. They aimed the signal right at us. Now for

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myself. If someone tried to save my life, and I tried to thank them, I would feel funny if they didn't even reply."

"You are projecting your feeling onto the Bolians Captain, do you think that wise?"

"They made the effort to contact us. As the logs indicate once we had admitted to being there, an obvious fact, they invited us down for dinner if you will."

"And could you tell this court your answer?"

"I said, no, thank you, and explained the principles of General Order Number One, and why we had it."

"And the Bolian reaction to this?"

"They made no further attempts at contact."

Once again the Admirals talked among themselves at the table. At last they turned again to the hearing.

Rear Admiral Nogura read from a prepared statement. "It is the finding of this hearing that the Captain and officers of the *USS Kongo NCC-1710* acted within the principles of the Federation, and by association, those of Starfleet. This court further finds that if the wording of General Order Number One is so flawed as to cause doubt in the minds of any officer that they should hesitate in the saving of life; that a review of General Order Number One is in order, and should commence at once. This court recommends to Starfleet command that a committee of officers review General Order Number One and institute changes in the wording so that no doubt or ambiguity will remain that in any case where life is endangered, Starfleet must act. Further more this court recommends that the *USS Kongo NCC-1710* be awarded the Red Cross Unit Citation for valor in the saving of life. This hearing is ended.

Candice looked the Captain over. Jerry ate quietly. "You worked to get the *Kongo*, why?"

"It's a family connection."

"I thought your family was long dead."

"It's still a family connection. My Father helped sink her."

"Right. Could you explain that?"

"I've told you most of it Candice. My Father served in the United States Navy in the Second World War, on Earth. He was a Navy pilot, that is, he flew prop driven aircraft."

"I've seen pictures."

"He was a Dauntless pilot. The Dauntless was a dive bomber."

"Dive bomber?"

"Dropping gravity bombs and aiming by dropping them while in a dive." His hands demonstrated the concept."

"Singularity devices in the 20th century?"

"No, high explosives. The gravity made them drop."

"So, what is the family connection?"

"My Father flew the mission that damaged the *IJS Kongo*. That damage later led to her sinking."

"IJS?"

"Imperial Japanese Ship."

"All right, so you wanted this *Kongo*?"

"It satisfied an inner desire. I claim no logic or reason for the decision."

"Your Father collected his *Kongo*, you wanted one too?"

Jerry shrugged. "As good a explanation as any. The *Kongo* is one of the queens of the fleet. I wanted one, like every other Captain in Starfleet. I could have placed my sights on the *Exeter*, or the *Kongo*. I considered the *Lexington*, but Wesley doesn't look to be going anywhere."

"Why *Lexington*?"

"My home town, Lexington, Kentucky."

"So you aimed at the *Kongo*?"

"Yes."

"And got her."

"Yes."

"Do you get everything you want?"

"No. You walked out of my life."

"So, you still want me?"

"Now? Why reopen the wounds? I want to settle things with you."

"It seems to me that would require reopening the wounds."

"Have they ever closed?"

Candice played with the food on her plate. "No, I can't say they have."

"You don't impress me as a two man woman."

"I don't impress me that way either."

"You have a good thing with Guy. Is that something you want to give up for a old man?"

"Why?"

"Why what Candice?"

"Why her, I thought we had a good thing going."

"By her I take it you mean Aleilan?"

"Yes."

"She was born into my lap. Mine was the first mind she touched after birth, and she nearly killed me. I've explained all of this before. Aleilan is my other half. She came first, by several centuries."

"So you're a two woman man."

"Not in the manner you picture it. There is more than one kind of close relationship Candice."

"She's not your lover?"

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"That's a shallow viewpoint."

"That is not an answer."

"What do you mean to me to deserve an answer Candice?"

She stood over the table. "That two years was for nothing?!"

"Was it? You assumed a kind of relationship. You didn't stop to consider that a sexual relationship was not the only kind of intimate relationship that could exist. I don't even consider sex 'intimate' anymore. Sex is so shallow a contact compared to mind to mind."

"You don't even care."

Jerry sat back. "If I didn't care, would we be having this conversation? I'll point out, you started it."

Candice sat back down. "I was sacred, I was lonely. You were heroic, you rescued me. I... I wanted you."

"I understand. I was sacred too. Holding you was a great comfort. I respect the depth that most humans place on sex Candice. I would have married you, if you had asked."

"Why didn't you ask?"

"I don't need the pain."

"Pain?"

Jerry sat ramrod straight, his voice a dry whisper. "You're going to age, you're going to die. I have the cursed luck to live. How many times can I love and lose? 20, 30? When does my heart crumble from being broken Candice? How many loves can one man bury?"

Candice sat quietly at the cold recital. "Jerry?"

"I'll lose Aleilan eventually. Ane are long lived, but they don't last forever. Will I go mad? Will I live a thousand years a madman?"

"I, I don't have answers for you."

"I don't have answers for me. I am an explorer of the most frightening kind, and I can't even quit the journey. Can you understand? Love hurts, it always hurts me. I have walked away from the graves of a dozen women that I loved."

"So why do you love?"

"Because I am Human. I need love as surly as any man. I yearn for woman, and I love her. Fragile and short lived as she might be, I need her. I never ask, I wait for her to ask, and if my heart agrees, I marry, I love, and I know I will suffer the pain of loss. That is what it means to be immortal."

"Jerry, I, didn't realize..."

"How could you?"

"You could have told me."

Jerry sat still for several minutes, silent. "Yes, I could have told you. So obvious, so simple, and me so blind. Will you forgive me?"

"Yes, if you can forgive me."

"Yes. It's better for both of us. You have Guy. I will live."

"So we can be friends?"

Jerry stood. "Better, we can be comrades." He held out his hand. She shook it. "Let me say it again, Welcome aboard Sir."

Epilog: -- 2361 El Nanth Starbase.

"Are we almost there Grampa?"

"Yep, just a little farther."

The Old Bolian brought the cargo lifter to a halt. The young boy jumped from the craft and ran to the window. There, framed in the transparency, was an old starship in perfect trim. The *USS Kongo NCC-1710* enjoyed a golden retirement. The young boy pressed his face to the glass.

"Wow. An old Constitution class. Does it work?"

"Yep, it's privately owned now, and it is kept in perfect trim, fueled and ready to fly."

"You said this one was special, how?"

"One hundred years ago, that ship saved Bolia from destruction. Only my Grandfather and the Gendrot Tyrant knew. When I was your age my grandfather told me of the starship that saved us. The Night of Falling Stars would have been the utter end, if not for that ship and her crew."

"Really?"

"Yes, truly and really. It took me years of research in old logs to find the one ship that was there. I was surprised to find she still exists."

A third voice said: "Would you like a tour?" The sandy haired Human smiled.

"A tour, could we Grampa?"

Grampa hesitated. "If that would be alright."

"Sure, I'm the ship's caretaker."

As they left the old Bolian stopped at the open hatch. He caressed the old hull and softly whispered. "Thank you."

Jerold Ryan LaSaille said never a word.

The First Principle -- Garry Stahl, March, 2004

This story beat me up for over two years, more like three. I forget when I first wrote the opening phrases to this tale. It has languished in the directory for years. March 2004, it finally jelled. This is my first contemporary TOS effort. It is two years before James T. Kirk becomes a Starfleet hero and gains the USS

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Enterprise. *Jerold Ryan LaSaille less bold, and a class ahead of him is just getting his "Queen of the Fleet".*

Several other notes:

The IJS Kongo was sunk in 1944 by the HMS Sealion II. As mentioned she was returning to Japan for repairs. The damaged suffered at the hands of American dive bombers

The USS Lydia Sutherland is an old fan tradition that is drawn from the "Hornblower in space" idea. The Lydia (32) was the firsate we first see in the Hornblower tales (in order of writing.) And the Sutherland (74) Hornblower's only ship of the line command. Tradition has it that Commander James T. Kirk loses the light cruiser in a heroic defense, and is rewarded with promotion and command of the Enterprise. The matter is covered in one of the pro books, but I forget the title.

Qzin are my take on Kizn which appear in the one Larry Niven written tale from the Star Trek Animated series: "The Slaver Weapon". A frank re-write of his short story "The Soft Weapon". I am of the opinion that Niven could have written a new story thank you. Either way. I change the spelling and a few details. I do stick with the idea that Qzin and Cait are related species as Allen Dean Foster suggested in his adaptation of the TAS stories to novel form. I believe Foster did a beautiful job in the "Logs" and often regret that I sold mine.

Last, why the Kongo? "Kongo" was one of the names suggested for use in the Making of Star Trek and it made the final list even though it never made it to the screen. I latched on to the name as a kid, and it was my ship when ever we played Star Trek. Jerry Saille was my captain. The character has evolved from the frank Mary Sue of playing Star Trek in the basement to I hope a more rounded and dimensional character.

Subtext 2011 -- *I made few changes here. A couple of words, a paragraph division and scene separations. This is one of my newer tales and therefore I hope less embarrassing. Oh, and I managed to get the Foster Logs back too. And added the Animated Series DVDs as well.*

This one was done out of order spurred on by my making the cover. The scene is perfect and only required altering the ship slightly and adding the title.