

STAR TREK: SWIFTFIRE



United We Stand

By Jay L.R.

Captain Jonathan Masters lent on the window of his ready room. He looked out into space, a place of wonder and a place of death. He then looked down on his home, Earth, the birthplace of the human race and of the United Federation of Planets, one of the wonders of space and if they weren't vigilant a place of death. Several species had tried to attack Earth, many more had dreams of conquering it, but so far only one had managed to actually pull it off and cause death and destruction. But again a species had come to take what was theirs.

The door chirped.

"Enter."

Jonathan heard the door open and someone enter.

"We have finished preparations, Captain. We are ready to kick some Vendoth butt."

"Do you wonder why, Susan?"

"Wonder why what?" asked Commander Susan Core. "Why everyone is out to get the Federation? Why no matter whom we beat someone is always ready to try and take what is ours? Or why is it that the Warp drive is always the first system to fail?"

Jonathan smiled at the last comment.

"We make it clear that we are explorers. We are happy to peacefully coexist with everyone, but they still try and destroy us," asked Jonathan.

Susan had silently moved up and was standing next to Jonathan and was leaning on the opposite side of the window.

"I guess some see it as a weakness, one that they can take advantage of. Others think it is propaganda to hide how truly evil we are and some fear us for what we may become."

"What do the Vendoth fall under?" asked Jonathan.

"Crazed, psychotic race of misguided honour zealots."

"These zealots could succeed where the Dominion and the Borg failed. Do you know how many ships are coming? Sixty-four. Do you know how many ships we have to stop them?"

"I'm guessing a lot less."

"And you would be right. We've already started to take loses."

Susan looked shocked. "We lost a ship? Which vessel?"

"We lost two. The USS Incipiens and the USS Excalibur. What's worse the Excalibur was the old retired Excelsior vessel. She had managed to escape from Memory Alpha with some of the old crew, they were taking the ship out on its annual cruise."

"I can't believe we've already lost two ships. One of them to be a Sovereign, this isn't good. Do the crew know?"

"No. I think we should keep it to ourselves. It would only hurt moral if we tell them one of the most advanced ships and one of Starfleet's legendary ships have been destroyed without getting a kill. If only we could get the 59th here we would have double the number of ships to meet them."

"You've contacted Admiral Douglas?"

"Computer, play recording 452."

The Computer beeped and Jonathan's voice came from nowhere.

"Admiral, I have urgent news."

"I know," replied a female voice that Susan recognised as that of Admiral Jennifer Douglas. "The Vendoth are attacking. Command sent a fleet wide broadcast. We got it and we are heading back at full speed, but we aren't going to get there in time. I

hailed Admiral Ross and he is bringing the 9th Fleet from Bajor but even with his Prometheus class Cerberus he won't make it."

"We could really use your help here."

"I know you are short on ships, but with most of the Fleet occupied with the relief effort in Cardassia and the liberated systems, guarding the Wormhole and on the Breen border we left the core under defended. But there is nothing we can do about it now. I just want to wish you the best. You beat the best the Dominion threw at you, these Vendoth jokers should be a walk over."

The recording ended and the room fell silent.

"We're on our own," said Susan. "But we are ready."

Jonathan sighed and looked back up into space.

"I wonder if this is how the Captains of the ships at Wolf 359 felt, knowing they were leading their crews into certain death, knowing that failure meant the end of everything they stood for."

"I can't answer that, Captain. All I know is that we have faith in this ship, each other and you."

Again the room fell into an uncomfortable silence.

"I've never heard you sound so doubtful. We beat them last time."

"Not in straight combat."

"Straight combat!" laughed Susan. "There is no such thing. No side would ever take on another if everything were equal. One side always needs to feel it has an advantage, an ace up your sleeve."

"You're right, it's just...well, we have only just come out of a devastating war and now we have another one, I was hoping that the Galaxy would just settle down for a decade or two."

"And the Borg are going to get that assimilation is bad and instead give cookies to war orphans."

"Well, that was second on my list of "things this Galaxy should do to benefit us"."

For the first time since Susan entered Jonathan turned and faced her.

"You forgot one thing when you were saying there is no such thing as straight combat."

"What?" asked Susan perplexed.

"A side doesn't need to feel it has a military advantage. All you need is to know you are fighting for the greater good. Fighting to make this place better for all freedom loving beings. We showed the Dominion this now it's the Vendoth's turn."

Lieutenant Frank Cole ran a diagnostics on the ship's Structural Integrity Field. He had matured a great deal in the four years he served on the Swiftfire. He wasn't embarrassed to admit that he was a very raw recruit when he first stepped onboard. He had learnt a lot from the crew, especially the Captain.

Though he felt a bit strange not having his usual partner upfront, the Vulcan Karak, sitting next to him. But some things you cannot control. Karak was in a better place, doing what he had to do. The new helm officer was Ensign Nair, a Bolian. She was a lot like Frank was four years ago, everyone called her Kid, even Frank did despite the fact he was only four years older.

"Nervous, Kid?" asked Frank.

"No," said Ensign Nair, her voice filled with false courage.

"It's okay to be. Everyone gets nervous, that's how you know you're not dead...or a Vulcan."

"What was your first combat experience, Lieutenant?"

“My first? You noticed how some of the crew call me Jim?”

Nair slowly nodded, not getting the importance.

“Ask them why they call me Jim and you’ll hear how my first battle went. Just remember your job and everything will be fine.”

Lt. Commander Terri Letac and Nikki Whitechapel moved around several console at the rear of the Bridge.

“Sensors are operating at optimal levels.”

“All departments reporting ready.”

Terri looked over to the Helm and saw Frank and Nair speaking.

“It’s good to see Frank and Nair getting on.”

“It’s good that the old crew are getting on with the new,” came a voice behind Terri and Nikki.

“It would not be a good sign if the drivers argued. We wouldn’t be able to travel straight. One would go left, the other right...it would be insane.”

Lieutenant Aimee Wessling moved next to the two Lt. Commanders as she spoke.

“It’s good to see you, Aimee. I didn’t think you would make it on time,” said Terri. She hugged her long time friend.

“Me too. I was in a black zone. No communications could come in or leave. Luckily someone who came into the black zone had heard of the mobilization. I packed up and got here as soon as I could.”

Nikki shook Aimee’s hand.

“So how do you think they will do?” asked Nikki

“The unfortunate truth is that some of the new crew will probably die in the coming battle. But they should handle it better than we would have when we were new. They have had Borg attacks and the Dominion War to get more use to it. They know what can happen, but can they handle it? Only time will tell.”

The door to the Captain’s ready room whooshed open and the Captain and First officer stepped onto the Bridge.

“Helm, prepare to take us out of orbit. Tactical I want all systems on hot stand by, including the Fighter Squadrons.”

“Heading, sir?” called Lieutenant Cole.

“Plot a course to Jupiter’s solar orbit in grid 143, but take the course around the Sun. We’re going to go the long way. I want to “warm” this lady up before we take her into battle. I know you’ve all done checks of the systems but I want a field test now, not when we have Vendoth warriors knocking on the Bridge door.”

The crew replied affirmative and Jonathan took his seat. Susan sat to his right and Lieutenant Wessling sat to his left.

“Course set. Engines running hot!” reported Frank.

“Take us out, Lieutenant.”

Sol filled up most of the right side of the Swiftfire’s viewscreen. Solar flares and energy spikes leaped from the star, as if it was trying to reach out and touch everything around it. The Swiftfire was so close that the viewscreen had to dim its light significantly.

“You know we could just warp around the sun and we could go back in time. Warn Starfleet, have a big fleet waiting for them. Send them back to their own Galaxy with their tails between their legs,” suggested Susan.

“I much as I’m tempted I’m in enough trouble with Temporal Investigations as it is,” said Jonathan. “Plus we could make the situation worse. By strengthening our core

we could expose the fringe to attack. We might make sure Earth is secure but we might lose control of an entire fringe group of sectors. This is how we have played our hand and we must deal with it.”

“Captain,” said Lt Commander Letac. “We are getting a Priority message from Admiral Hayes.”

Jonathan motioned for the message to be put on the main viewscreen. Admiral Hayes was the Admiral in charge of all the Starfleet ships in the Sol system and was in charge of organising the Fleet’s defence of Sol. Admiral Hayes was a veteran of many battles and was a good leader.

The Admiral appeared on the viewscreen.

“Captain Masters, I have a task for you. Is your ship ready?”

“Yes, my ship and crew are ready.”

“Good. Our sensors show that the Vendoth are sending ships into the system.”

“An attack force?”

“No, they seem to only be sending Scouts. They are splitting into groups and heading to different parts of the system.”

“What do you want us to do?”

“We have a group heading to Uranus, from there they can come around our flank and to Earth without hitting the Mars Defence Perimeter. I want you to discourage this. The Scout group will most probably do a close run of Uranus and its satellites then head towards Sol. I want you to make a slashing attack out of warp on them.”

“For an attack like that to work requires precise timing. We’ll also have to be travelling very fast. If we go in at low warp they’ll have a lot of warning. We’ll risk overshooting and missing the attack, even worse we could slam into Uranus or its moons at warp or coming out of warp, either way we’ll make a big hole,” mentioned Jonathan.

“I know it is risky, but not impossible. Once you have fulfilled this mission return on your original course and link up with the defensive line. Remember you don’t have to destroy any ships, just make them fall back. You can get all the information you need from the surveillance satellites near the Vendoth Scouts.”

“I understand and we’re on it.”

Admiral Hayes nodded and the viewscreen returned to show the star that supported the Sol system.

“Lt. Commander Whitechapel, link up a data feed with the satellites near Uranus and put up a tactical layout on the viewscreen.”

A picture of the Sol system appeared on the screen. It zoomed in to show Uranus in one corner and the sun in the other corner. It showed a representation of the Vendoth scouts closing in on the planet.

“Plot the most direct course from Uranus to Earth and then line us up with that course but heading to Uranus.”

On the Tactical display a lit blue line appeared that led to Earth and Uranus, the Swiftfire moved until it was lined up.

“If Admiral Hayes is right then this is the course the Vendoth will take. This is the tricky bit; I want to know as soon as the Scouts take this course. When they do go to Maximum Warp. This is going to be tight but we need to exit warp very quickly and when we do we are going to come out here. Zoom in on the Scouts.” The viewscreen zoomed in and Jonathan, using the controls on his armrest indicated a point. “Right on top of the Scouts. I want a full spread from the launchers on the underside of the saucer section. Just cut loose with the Phasers. Go to hit all the Scouts. If you can try and damage weapons or engines. We go on my mark.”

Jonathan watched the tactical screen until the Scout group turned towards Earth.

“Ready. NOW!” ordered Jonathan.

The Swiftfire shot to warp and almost as quickly it dropped out of warp directly in front of the Scout group.

“Damn! I miss timed it!” cried Frank.

“Don’t worry about it. We have a slight change of plans; I want a complete Quantum torpedo spread, all launchers that you can bring to bear on them. Phasers, fire at anything and everything,” ordered Jonathan

The Scout group was a lot further away than Jonathan had planned. Lt. Commander Nikki Whitechapel worked quickly and soon the space ahead of the Swiftfire was swarming with the blue glow of Quantum torpedoes. The torpedoes impacted on the Vendoth Scouts. As the Swiftfire closed it fired its Phasers. Nikki managed to penetrate three of the Scout’s shields. She took full advantage of this and just concentrated fire on these three Scouts. The Scouts broke formation and flew around the Swiftfire as it ploughed through the formation. As the Swiftfire turned to engage the Scouts again the Scouts broke away from Earth and started to head back to the rest of the Vendoth fleet.

“Looks like we startled them enough,” said Commander Susan Core. “Good shooting, Lt. Commander Whitechapel.”

“Lt. Commander Letac deserves a lot of that credit. She feed me some great targeting information.”

“Everyone did a good job,” said Jonathan. “So Ensign Nair, how did you like your first taste of real combat?”

“I can’t wait to toast some more Vendoths, Captain!”

“That’s the spirit. Put us on a course to rendezvous with the ships in Jupiter’s solar orbit.”

“The Scouts have returned, Roj Ch’Dak.”

“Excellent. What do they report?”

“Minimal resistance. A ship, Akira class, USS Swiftfire, attacked the group that attacked Sol 7. No loses. But three vessels did receive medium to heavy damage.”

“From one vessel! I want those VenQa’ relieved. They will be punished for such incompetence!”

“In their defence, Roj Ch’Dak, the Starfleet vessel used a clever move. It went to warp and come out close to the Scouts. They had little warning. It was a daring move. One that would not be expected from a race like the Federation.”

The Roj Ch’Dak hissed in a way that indicated that it was a sign.

“Once again, Re’Ijom you stop me from making a rushed and harsh move. But those Ven with be punished when the battle is over.”

“A wise decision.”

“Continue your report.”

Re’Ijom glanced back at his Padd device.

“The defences around the fourth planet are gone. The group that were headed for the fifth planet encountered several vessels. There were no losses but they were driven away. It seems they are protecting something.”

“What?”

“The data files we got from their Memory Alpha state that the only asset around that planet is a single research station noted for its holographic research. There could be a covert facility hidden there. The communications we intercepted indicate that whatever is there is very important to the Federation.”

“Hmmm...how many ships did the Scout group encounter?”

Re’Ijom moved to a 3D tactical display of the Sol system and started to point out places on the display.

“Five. But a sixth, the Akira ship that attacked our ships at the seventh planet is moving to join them. They are in the solar orbit of the fifth planet. They seem to be offering protection for a number of planets, the third planet, which is their homeworld Earth, the fourth planet and the fifth. But their formation and position is designed to offer more protection to Earth, to draw hostile forces away from Sol V. A lesser race would continue into this system and change course here and attack Sol V. But the Starfleet would move ships to flanking positions, here and here. The outcome would be heavy casualties to the attacking forces.”

“What do you suggest?”

“We don’t give the Federation the satisfaction, we head straight for Sol V. It will force their ships into moving and engaging us out here, not in their place of choice.”

“Fine. Start the invasion, we go with the ships we have. You may lead VenQa’ Re’Ijom.”

Re’Ijom bowed. “I am honoured by your confidence in me, Roj Ch’Dak.” Re’Ijom turned to and faced the Helm officer. “Helm, set a course for the fifth planet. Standard formation. Maximum speed.”

Throughout the entire sector transmissions and communications were interrupted. From the transmission between families on Earth to the tactical channels, which Starfleet was using to organising their defence, all were suddenly blocked. Then came the message.

“I am the Roj Ch’Dak of the Vendoth Empire. We are here to right the errors of your ways. No longer will you interfere in other’s cultures as you did in ours. You will now humble yourselves before the might of Vendoth and learn subservience...or die.”

Just as suddenly as it began the transmission disappeared and the transmissions returned to normal.

Jonathan raised his glass and toasted, “Here’s to best command crew a Captain could ask for.”

The eleven other beings raised their glasses.

“Here’s to the Captain, who despite his slow start is the reason we are all still here,” said Susan, who was seated to Jonathan’s right.

From right to left of Susan, Lieutenant Frank Cole, Lieutenant Aimee Wessling, Lt. Commander Terri Letac, Lt. Commander Nikki Whitechapel, Wing Commander Maxine Benton, Colonel David Tiki, Doctor Carol Murphy, Lt. Commander Pavlo Celcho, and Lt. Colonel Rachel Daley on Jonathan’s left saluted and said “to the Captain”.

They were in the Captain’s private mess having a meal together before the battle, a small tradition that they had picked up from the Dominion War. Because of the time it would take for the Vendoth fleet to close and engage Jonathan had rotated the crew so that his main Bridge crew would be fresh for the battle. They started to eat the fine, though replicated, meal.

“So, how long until we engage the Vendoth?” asked Colonel David Tiki, the commanding officer of the Marines on the Swiftfire.

“Another 13 hours,” said Terri. “So there is enough time for us to get a couple of hours of rest. The Vendoth are pretty much doing what he wanted them to do. They are headed straight for Jupiter where the bulk of the fleet is waiting to surprise them.”

“Has anyone heard from Karak?” asked Aimee.

“I called him a few days ago,” replied Frank. “He has gotten a job with the Starfleet Academy, on Vulcan. He tells me he was the logical choice for the position because of his extensive service with non-Vulcans.”

“It was a pity that he choose to leave the crew, he was a good friend to all of us,” said Jonathan. “But it is good that he is doing something that he feel very passionate about.”

“Talking about passionate, I hope you’re keeping Jonathan in line, Rachel,” said Susan.

Rachel smiled broadly.

“He has so many bad habits, that I wouldn’t have the time to name them all.” Rachel smiled mischievously and looked over at Jonathan. “But I’m beating them out of him.”

“I have bad habits!” scoffed Jonathan. “Who is the one who...mrphf!”

Rachel stuffed a potato into Jonathan’s mouth to stop him speaking.

“As you can see I’m still having trouble with his table etiquette.”

The others laughed.

Jonathan finally swallowed the potato and spoke, “Not a good move people, laughing at your Captain before battle. Pavlo, get me ten torpedo casing. We have some volunteers who are going to try and broad a Vendoth vessel via torpedo launching,” ordered Jonathan.

“Ah, I also laughed, sir,” said Pavlo.

“In that case, prepare yourself a torpedo casing.”

The crew laughed again.

“We’ll be unbeatable if we can get the torpedoes power from Pavlo’s ego. The weapon would destroy a planet!”

“Hey, that was uncalled for,” said Pavlo over the laughter, sounding hurt. “It’s not my fault I just happen to be the best engineer in the universe.”

This comment got Pavlo several extra napkins as some of the crew groaned and threw their napkins at him.

“Thank you! Thank you! I’ll be here all week.”

The group went back to more serious matters as they chatted as they had their meal. Over an hour later they finished their meal and returned to their quarters to get some rest before the upcoming battle.

The Roj Ch’Dak surveyed the Bridge from her raised position. She was the leader of the Vendoth Empire, the most powerful being in their area of space. Unlike a lot of species whose leaders were voted in or were part of a royal bloodline, she had got to her position by killing the previous Roj. As was the custom, when a Roj got old and they started to fail the most powerful VenQa’ would take the position of Roj by sending the previous Roj on a suicidal mission that would glorify the Roj one final time for all Vendoth to see. She had been chosen by the previous Roj to serve as his VenQa’ on his flagship. She had learned a lot from the countless military conflicts she had served in.

VenQa’ Re’Ijom was her choice. One day she hoped he would take over and lead the Vendoth to more glory that she had. She was even considering leaving him in charge of the Vendoth armada that would stay in this galaxy to destroy the rest of the Federation, once they had conquered Earth and she had returned to their Galaxy to rule from the homeworld.

Roj Ch'Dak looked at the 3D tactical display; they were just about in the right position for their next move. But Re'Ijom still had a lot to learn and it was just about time to teach him.

The Roj Ch'Dak signalled for Re'Ijom to come over.

"What is the position of the Federation ships?"

"They continue to fall back along the same course."

The Roj Ch'Dak sensed confusion in Re'Ijom's expression.

"Is everything okay, VenQa'?"

Re'Ijom looked uncomfortable at the Roj Ch'Dak's question. He did not want to appear weak in her eyes.

"Yes, Roj. I just don't understand the Federation tactics! They just keep retreating, not moving to stop us, just retreating. It is almost like they want us to go to the fifth planet."

"It is okay, VenQa'. But I will know teach you an important lesson in combating our enemies. Helm, adjust course and head for their homeworld, Earth."

"Bridge to Captain Masters!"

Jonathan's eyes slowly opened.

"Captain Masters' here," said Jonathan as he woken.

"The Vendoth fleet has changed course."

Jonathan was fully woken by this news. He moved Rachel's arm of his chest and sat up.

"Where are they headed?"

"They are on a course towards Earth."

They called our bluff. Thought Jonathan.

Jonathan knew that because of the course they had taken the Vendoth fleet had an open path to Earth.

"Signal Admiral Hayes and..."

"Admiral Hayes already knows. He has sent new orders. We are to move to a position to block the armada."

"Okay. Follow the Admiral's orders. I'll be on the Bridge as soon as possible."

"Yes, Captain."

Jonathan stood up and moved to get a fresh uniform to wear. Rachel stirred.

"Some people are trying to sleep you know!"

Jonathan pulled out a uniform and turned to face Rachel.

"If you want you can always go back to your own room?"

"And let you get back into bachelor mode, I worked too hard get rid of it. So what's going on?"

"The Vendoth fleet has called out bluff. I'm going to go to the Bridge and assess the situation. So you might be back to duty a few hours earlier then planned."

Rachel slowly sat up.

"They don't pay us enough for this...sleep deprivation."

"They don't pay us," shouted Jonathan from the sonic shower.

"I keep meaning to say something to Command about that."

Jonathan was soon out of the sonic shower, in uniform and on his way to the Bridge.

The sensor officer turned to face Roj Ch'Dak.

"Roj, twelve ships have appeared from the far side of the fifth planet."

Re'Ijom eyes bulged as he heard the new. He crisply pivoted to face the Roj and bowed.

“I apologise, Roj Ch’Dak. I made a mistake, I was leading us straight into an ambush.”

The Roj Ch’Dak motioned for Re’Ijom to stand straight.

“You made no mistake. Your tactic was a correct response to the situation, a typical Vendoth response. An enemy tries to defeat you with what they think is superior tactics you turned it around. You choose to show that they’re tactics will fail, that you are superior. But if you wish to one-day command the Vendoth you must learn that sometimes directness is the best strategy. No fooling around as you let your ego led your actions. No matter what they did they would never let a hostile fleet go unopposed to their homeworld, no race in the universe would do so. You have to force their hand. VenQa’s like Var’tak and Ch’Lok’meh are prefect examples. They don’t care for fancy tactics they do straight for the kill.”

Re’Ijom tensed up as the Roj Ch’Dak mentioned the other VenQa’s.

“Are you concerned neither appeared with the fleet,” asked Re’Ijom.

Roj Ch’Dak waved the idea away with her hand.

“They probably exited early so to have the first crack at the Federation or somewhere else to carve out an Empire for themselves. That is why you are my VenQa’ and they are not. They are too reckless, too overconfident; think that they know all that there is to know about warfare. They cannot be taught. They will only ever be half the Vendoth you will become. If they are still alive one day they will serve you.”

“Roj, we approach the Federation fleet.”

“Excellent. Continue and do not deviate from our course.”

Admiral Hayes surveyed the collection of ships and felt dismayed. Most independent planets could field a better defence of their home system, hell most respectable pirate groups could! Only seven ships out of the eighteen rated cruiser or better and three of the rest shouldn’t even be there, the Antares class USS Hermes, nothing more then an armed freighter, the Apollo class Ajax, a ship only still in service because Starfleet had needed every ship in the Dominion War and the Constitution class USS Republic, a training ship, which had not left the Sol system in a century. The USS Republic had been fully armed after the Breen attacked Earth as a last resort. But if it had to fight you knew you were in trouble, which they were in.

Heading towards them was a hostile fleet, not a large one it numbered only sixty-four ships. But its make up was enough to make it a match for a much larger fleet. One ship was half the mass of a Borg cube, the Command ship, with two other ships not around two thirds the Command ships size but still huge, which flanked the larger ship, holding a position slightly above and behind the Command ship. There was just over two-dozen ships the size of a Romulan Warbird in close formation around the three huge ships. The rest of the ships were much smaller, the size of the Starfleet Intrepid class ship. The ships were packed very tightly together.

Compared to the Vendoth fleet the Starfleet formation was very spread out. The ships were in a curved formation so that the ships on the outer edges would have the Vendoth ships in their weapons range at the same time, if not before as the ships in the centre. The centre of the formation was the Nebula class USS Lexington and at the outer edges was the Akira classes, USS Thunderchild on the port edge and the USS Swiftfire on the starboard edge. Between the Akiras and Nebula were three large ships. Moving from the Thunderchild in was the Norway class USS Maximus, the USS Prometheus, Prometheus class and the USS Hood, Excelsior class. Moving in from the Swiftfire was the USS Bonaparte, New Orleans class, the USS Apex,

Steamrunner class and the USS Latoka, Excelsior class. The smaller ships were located between and behind several of the larger ships. Behind and above the USS Lexington was Admiral Hayes ship, the Galaxy class USS Roddenberry. The Republic, Hermes and the Ajax flank the Galaxy for extra protection.

“The Vendoth fleet has enter the torpedo range of the Thunderchild and Swiftfire,” reported Admiral Hayes’ Tactical officer.

“Tell them to open fire. Signal all ships to open fire as the Vendoth ships enter their weapon range.”

Admiral Hayes watched as the two Akiras fired their impressive torpedo bombardment. The torpedoes hadn’t even reached the Vendoth fleet when the rest of the fleet opened fire.

“Roj, several Scouts are reporting breaches in shields and hull,” reported on of the Bridge officers.

“Order them to the back of the formation and bring the rear guard forward.”

“Do you want me to signal the fleet to open fire?” asked Re’Ijom.

“No, I appreciate the effect this will have on them. The enemy is bombarding us yet we don’t slow. We ignore they assault as if it is nothing. They will be questioning themselves and their ability to stop us. A military without of faith in itself will soon be a defeated military. Keep going any losses here will not matter. They cannot defeat this ship or our race.”

“Sir, the Vendoth are still closing!” yelled the sensor officer on the Roddenberry. “Impact in twenty seconds!”

“All ships break formation and get out of the way of that command vessel. Helm, course Bearing 000, Mark 90.”

Hayes gripped his armrest, though it was unnecessary as the Inertial Dampeners made sure that they would not feel the manoeuvres as the Galaxy class ship headed straight “up”. He knew it was impossible to block a ship of that size. A ship with that kind of mass could force its way through any blockade. Hayes had hoped against hope that the Vendoth would have stood off and engaged in a battle out here in open space. It would have bought Starfleet more time to get more ships here and time for Earth’s defences to prepare.

“Lieutenant, signal the Fleet to target the damaged ships. We need to cut down the number of ships to give Earth the best chance of survival.”

Re’Ijom watched the Starfleet ships directly ahead scatter as the Vendoth armada bore down on them. The other ships slowed down their firing on the Vendoth fleet in fear of hitting the wildly manoeuvring Starfleet ships as they dodged the Vendoth.

Roj Ch’Dak continued to give out orders.

“Separate the Fleet. I want ships to go to Sol IV and Earth. Plus despatch five Scouts and two Battlecruisers to Sol V. We might as well destroy that station in orbit of the planet. We have more then enough ships to spare.”

“Captain, the fleet is breaking up,” said Lieutenant Letac.

“Headings?”

“Two large groups are heading for Mars and Earth. A smaller group is also headed for Jupiter.”

“Signal the Admiral. We are the closest ship to Jupiter; ask if we can have permission to pursue the Vendoth ships. Put them on screen.”

The seven Vendoth vessels broke away from the rear of the armada and headed towards Jupiter, in the opposite direct to the rest of the Vendoth and Starfleet ships.

Terri sent out the request and quickly got a response.

“The Admiral has given us the go ahead. He has also dispatched the USS Latoka and USS Apex to assist us. But he wants us to leave our fighter squadrons to assist with the main fleet.”

“Okay. Helm, wait for the Apex and Latoka and then get into formation. Then full impulse, we have some catching up to do.”

The three Starfleet vessels steamed after the Vendoth vessels. The Vendoth vessels got half way to Jupiter before the Starfleet ships finally got them in range. The three Starfleet ships fired at long range using Photon and Quantum torpedoes. In response three Scouts broke formation and fell back to slow the Starfleet ships. Both sides had even numbers but they did not pair off. For the Vendoth Scouts it would be pointless, the Starfleet ships were far larger and more powerful and one on one the Vendoth would lose. So they concentrated their attack on a single ship, the Steamrunner class, USS Apex. The Starfleet ships also followed the same tactic so to destroy the Scouts in as short a time as possible so they could continue to catch up with the other Vendoth vessels. The Vendoth were also at a disadvantage in the terms of weapons range. They had no projectile weapons and relied on energy weapons, which had a far shorter range than weapons like torpedoes. The Vendoth were under fire long before they were in a position to return fire. As they returned fire the Apex was already involved in a complex series of evasive manoeuvres. The Steamrunner’s low forward profile aided it as it dodged to avoid the weapons fire. The Swiftfire and Latoka flanked the Apex on both sides in a high formation, firing at the Vendoth Scouts. One Scout disintegrated into atoms but the other two made it through and started to loop back for a second pass. Another Scout was destroyed as it came back to attack the Apex. The final Scout continued below the Apex before it turned around, using the Apex’s bulk to protect it from the other two Starfleet ships. The Apex and the Scout exchanged fire, but the Apex was only able to fire a few of its weapons at the Scout because of its angle of attack. The dorsal shield of the Apex gave way and the Scout’s weapons chewed away its dorsal hull plating. As the Scout came up, the Apex also went up. The Swiftfire and Latoka dropped and before the Scout knew it the Swiftfire and Latoka cleared the Apex’s bulk and opened fire on the ship destroying it.

“Letac, signal the Apex and Latoka to resume course, maximum impulse. Those Vendoth ships have already made it around to the outside of Jupiter where Jupiter station is,” ordered Captain Masters.

“Sir, the Apex is reporting some structural damage at the rear of their saucer section. They have remodulated their shields to cover the hole left in it from the Scouts weapon fire. But are having some problems with their shield matrix and they don’t know if the modifications they have to disperse the Vendoth weapon’s solidifying affect will hold.”

“Tell them to fall back a bit and let the Swiftfire and Latoka go in first. We still have two Battlecruisers to deal with.”

By the time the three Starfleet ships rounded the Gas Giant Jupiter the Vendoth attack on the station was well under way. Jupiter station was a unique design. It had six large circular sections in two columns of three. Each column had a long, thin section coming out of the bottom of each column and each column had connecting walkways

below each circular section. It, like all space stations, had powerful shields but it was a research station and had very few weapons. The two Battlecruisers just held position and fired on the station, while the Scouts flew around the station firing on as many different spots as they could. But they had not managed to pierce the shields of the station.

The three Starfleet ships were in an inverted triangle formation, with the Apex trailing behind the Swiftfire and Latoka.

“Full power to forward shields. Bring all Phaser arrays to full power and target the Scout ships. Lock Quantum torpedoes onto the Battlecruisers. Be careful not to accidentally hit Jupiter Station. What’s their status anyway?” asked Jonathan.

“Their shields are still holding. But there are several weak points, which the Vendoth will breach soon if we don’t stop them.”

“Okay. Prepare to open fire. Signal the Latoka to open fire, on my mark. Fire.”

The Latoka and Swiftfire fired their torpedoes and Phasers at the distant Vendoth ships. All the weapons targeted at the Battlecruisers easily hit, as the ships were stationary. The Scouts were manoeuvring and caused several of the shots to miss. In response a Battlecruiser and the two Scouts moved to attack the Starfleet ships. The Latoka and Swiftfire fired at the Scouts and the Battlecruiser. When the Vendoth ships fired back they surprised the crew of all three Starfleet ships. They fired between the Swiftfire and Latoka at the Apex.

“They’re targeting the Apex, Captain!” reported Terri.

“The Apex’s shields are failing! The shield modifications have failed,” reported Nikki.

“Signal the Latoka and get them to close formation,” ordered Jonathan. “We have to shield the Apex.”

The Latoka and Swiftfire started to close formation but it was too late. Several balls of energy fired from the Battlecruiser hit the Apex’s shields, shattering them. The two Scouts ships passed between the Swiftfire and Latoka before they could close the hole. The Scouts headed under the Apex where they strafed the dorsal hull. As they got to the end of the saucer section they concentrated their fire on a small spot. There was a large secondary explosion that engulfed the rear saucer and half of the starboard nacelle. Several more explosions ripped the Apex’s hull open. The Scouts had looped back and fired again. The Apex exploded. The Latoka got some revenge on the Vendoth as its Phasers pierced the shields of a Scout. Three torpedoes followed, destroying the Scout.

But they could not celebrate for long. The Battlecruiser attacking Jupiter station finally broke through the shields of the station. The Battlecruisers weapons hit the hull of the station ripping large holes in it. But on its own it would take a long time for it to destroy the station so its VenQa’ showed some creativity. Using the ships tractor beams the Battlecruiser pushed the Station back slightly, towards the gas giant it orbited. The VenQa’ decided that it would be far quicker to let the gas giant destroy the station. The Battlecruiser followed the Station as its orbit started to decay. Every time a thruster came online to stop the descent the Battlecruiser would quickly destroy it. The Battlecruiser also fired on any shuttles and escape pods that launched from the doomed station.

“Jupiter Station’s orbit is decaying, the Vendoth have done enough damage that they can’t right their orbit,” reported Terri.

“They’re slaughtering them!” exclaimed Lieutenant Aimee Wessling. “They aren’t even giving them a chance to escape.”

Jonathan watched as another shuttle exploded under the fire of the Battlecruiser.

“Get a message to the station, tell them to hold off evacuating personnel until we get there,” ordered Jonathan. “We’ll get the Battlecruisers attention so they can escape. Helm, lay in an intercept course.”

The Swiftfire accelerated out of the battle, leaving the Latoka to deal with the Scout and Battlecruiser. The Swiftfire approached the rear of the Battlecruiser, which was still, like Jupiter Station, heading into the gas giant.

“Weapons are locked on the Battlecruiser.”

“Hold fire. Transfer power to forward shields and to engines. I want more speed.”

“What are you planning, Jonathan?” asked Susan.

“How long do you think it would take for us to destroy that Battlecruiser?” asked Jonathan.

“I’m guessing long enough that it would doom the crew of the station,” said Susan.

“I’m thinking the same,” said Jonathan as he stood and walked to Frank’s helm station. “So we’re going to take it out of the battle, immediately.” Jonathan inputted a course correction and the Swiftfire shifted to its new course.

“Captain, you just put us on a collision course with the Battlecruiser,” said Frank.

“Just follow it. Lt. Commander Letac, tell the crew to brace for impact. Put as much power to Inertial Dampeners as possible.”

“Ah, Captain,” said Terri. “Our shields won’t protect us if we crash into the Battlecruiser at Full Impulse. The Battlecruiser is moving away from us, but it still isn’t fast enough for the kinetic energy of the Swiftfire to pass safely to it to prevent us from being splattered.”

“I know. That is why we’re going to do what they did to Jupiter station. We’re going to push it with our tractor beam. The ship will increase its velocity towards Jupiter and when we hit it we’ll continue to push it toward the planet.”

“That is a bit risky, isn’t it Captain? Even for you!” said Susan. “If we do manage to push the Battlecruiser far enough into Jupiter for it to be trapped we’re going to have to be quick to get out of there.”

“It will be tight, yes. But if we do make it out it will be a great manoeuvre. And you know what happens when you come up with daring manoeuvres that defeat a superior foe? They name it after you and teach it at the Academy. The Masters Manoeuvre, sounds good, doesn’t it?”

“Alliteration, M and M. Sounds good enough to eat,” joked Aimee.

“When do you want me to engage the tractor beam?” asked Terri.

“As late as possible. The less time we give them to apply reverse thrusters the better and monitor their velocity, if the tractor beams don’t get the Battlecruiser up to a velocity that will not mean we die, then I want to tell Lieutenant Cole and Ensign Nair so they can slow us down,” said Jonathan as he returned and took a seat.

“Time until you engage the Tractor beam?”

“20 seconds.”

“Signal Jupiter station to resume launching evacuating Shuttles and escape pods. The Battlecruiser is about to be a bit busy.”

Lieutenant Letac acknowledged the captain and sent the message.

“Brace for impact,” ordered the Captain.

He saw Ensign Nair look over to Lieutenant Cole, who smiled back reassuringly.

Susan slouched as she braced for the impact and said, “Here we go, again.” As she stared at the Battlecruiser as it got bigger and bigger in the viewscreen.

The Battlecruiser had not even shifted out of the Swiftfire's way. Either the VenQa' was too busy shooting up the station and waiting for more fleeing shuttles and escape pods or they didn't think the Swiftfire would ram them. Either way the VenQa' was going to get a surprise. The Battlecruiser had just about filled the viewscreen when a blue, wavering light shot out in a broad beam from the Swiftfire and hit the back of the Battlecruiser lurching it forward.

"They aren't going fast enough! Slow down!" yelled Terri.

Frank and Nair quickly responded, applying reverse thrusters and decreasing the thrust to the impulse engines.

The Swiftfire was just about on top of the Battlecruiser when Terri yelled, "We're still too fast! Slow us down more! We're going to..."

The Viewscreen flashed different colours as the Swiftfire's shields and the Battlecruiser's shields impacted. The force of the impact jolted the beings on the Bridge with fury. But Jonathan managed to keep his eyes on the viewscreen, watching the teeming colours dance. Watching for the shields to finally buckle and the Swiftfire to drive into the hull of the Battlecruiser. But it did not happen.

"Report."

"Shields are holding," reported Terri. "I don't believe it, but they are holding."

"Is everyone okay?" asked Susan.

Everyone looked around and nodded at each other.

"Well, that wasn't too bad," said Jonathan.

"Not too bad!" said Susan surprised.

"We just rammed a ship that is three times our mass, Commander. And we lived to tell the tale."

"You are certifiable, Captain."

"Thank you." Jonathan turned to Nikki. "Position?"

"We need to push the Battlecruiser another 583 km if we want to trap it in the planet, Captain."

"What is our velocity?"

"Only around 4000 km/h."

"Really? I thought we would be going a bit faster," said Jonathan.

"Well, I totally shut down the impulse engines and put full thrusters on just before we hit when Lt. Commander Letac was yelling that we were doomed," said Frank.

"We slowed down a lot, which is why the initial impact was light. But I engaged full impulse not long after we hit the Battlecruiser, but the Battlecruiser was already increasing their speed. We're in fact slowing down."

"Will we be able to push them the distance?"

"No. We'll come to a standstill around 134 km short. Then the Battlecruiser will start to push us back."

Jonathan swore under his breath.

"The station, has the evacuation been completed?" asked Susan.

"The last personnel are leaving," said Terri. "They'll be clear long before the Battlecruiser starts to push so back."

"Shields, will they hold," asked Jonathan.

"They should hold for a while longer. But this kind of stress is not good for them," said Nikki. "If we were to disengage and retreat now the shields are significantly weakened that the Battlecruiser could destroy us before we retreat out of its range."

"So what do we do?" asked Aimee. "We can't keep pushing on the Battlecruisers shields and the longer we stay the weaker our shields if we retreat."

Jonathan looked at the Battlecruiser in the viewscreen. All he could really see were its massive engines.

“We have to somehow take out its engines and thrusters,” stated Jonathan. “Without them they’ll fall into the planet and be crushed.”

“What do we use to take out their engines?” asked Frank. “If we fire a torpedo it will hit their shields which is where our shields are. It would do us as much damage as it would to them. Phasers, they would also have to crack their shields and then pierce their armour enough to disable their engines, which will take time. Plus all the Vendoth have to do is fire at our shields and they go solid and we wouldn’t be able to fire at them anymore.”

“He’s right, Captain,” agreed Nikki. “We would have a better chance of going out and knocking on their front door and asking for them to shut down their engines then taking them out with our weapons.”

Jonathan looked over to Susan who nodded grimly. They had managed to save the Jupiter Station personnel, but now they couldn’t save themselves.

“I...I have an idea, sir,” came a small voice from the front of the Bridge.

Jonathan looked up. “Pardon?”

“I think I have an idea, sir,” said Ensign Nair.

“Go ahead, Ensign.”

“W...well,” started the nervous Ensign. “The Vendoth use a shield system that operate by changing an area into solid matter, right? Well, why don’t we melt it?”

“Phasers and torpedoes are out of the question.”

“I know and we don’t need to use them. We use the deflector dish.”

“We would need an incredible amount of heat for this to happen. The Badland’s plasma storms couldn’t do it, so I doubt we could create the heat needed with the deflector dish. We could warm it until it happens but that would be a slow process.”

“We don’t need heat. All we have to do is excite the molecules,” said Terri. “As they did more excited they will move away from each other and a solid will turn to liquid and then a liquid to gas.”

“Yes,” said Nair excitedly as Terri caught onto the plan. “That area will be a liquid and a torpedo could penetrate. When it explodes will have the Vendoth’s shields between us and the explosion.”

“Will, that work?” asked Jonathan.

“I think so,” said Terri. “Since we don’t know much about Vendoth shield’s energy/matter conversion the pulse we need it will take time to complete.”

“Run the idea by Lt. Commander Celcho, Lieutenant.”

Terri nodded and rushed to the Turbolift and headed for deflector control.

By the time Terri and Pavlo reported back the Swiftfire had come to a complete stop.

“Captain, this is Lt. Commander Celcho. We have made the modifications to the deflector dish. It should melt an area of a couple of metres squared. We’ll fire a nine second blast that should do the job, but you’ll only have a few seconds before it returns to a solid. There is one small problem. The blast is a modified electro magnetic pulse; it will charge both our shields and the Battlecruiser’s shields to the same polarity. It will have enough force that it will force our ships apart. Since we are the smaller vessel it will affect us more than the Battlecruiser.”

“Noted, Lt. Commander.”

“Okay, Lieutenant Letac and I will remain here so to make an adjustments that are needed. Celcho, out.”

“Lt. Commander Whitechapel, have you found the targets?”

“Yes, sir. Three quantum torpedoes will do it. Two at the rear of the neck that connects the hull to the Bridge area will take out the main thrusters and the third one straight into the rear engines should do enough damage that they won’t be able to get out of Jupiter’s gravity well.”

“Alright. Helm, on my mark full reverse and then swing us around.”

Jonathan looked to see if the crew were ready and then gave the order.

“Fire Deflector dish.”

A bluish cylinder of light appeared from under the saucer section and struck the Vendoth Battlecruiser’s solid shields, washing it in light blue energy.

The ship rocked as the magnetic forces pushed it back and away from the Battlecruiser. The Swiftfire’s shields lost their colour as they moved off the Battlecruiser’s shields.

Jonathan counted to seven and said, “Now! Fire the torpedoes. Helm, full reverse.”

Three torpedoes were launched from the tube at the forward dorsal edge of the Swiftfire just as the pulse ended. The three bright blue lights hit the softened shield area, which rippled like water, before disappearing, when they emerged on the other side, they no longer glowed blue. They had been coated with liquid, hiding their brightness. The first torpedo to complete its journey was the one aimed at the rear engines. It impacted with the hull exploding, the other two soon reached their impact points and detonated. Three separate explosions covered the Battlecruiser.

“Swing us around and get us to a safe orbit,” ordered Jonathan.

The explosions soon died down. The Battlecruiser now started to tumble end over end as it succumbed to Jupiter’s mighty gravity. There were several smaller secondary explosions as the Swiftfire headed away and the ship started to break up. As the Swiftfire headed out of the Planet they passed Jupiter Station. Its heavily damaged frame had numerous flames leaping out of holes in it. There were dozens of explosions happening all over the station as it gave in to the pressure Jupiter was already exerting on it. There was a large explosion as the connecting arms between the two columns gave way. The two columns slowly drifted away from each other as they continued their course into oblivion.

As the Swiftfire cleared Jupiter the Excelsior class, USS Latoka came into view.

“Sir, we’re been hailed by Commander Benteen.”

“On screen.”

“Captain, it is good to see you made it out of Jupiter alive,” said the young Commander.

“Thank you. How did your battle go?”

“It could have been worse. We managed to bait the Scout and Battlecruiser far enough away from Jupiter that the ex-Jupiter station crew could escape and that they couldn’t head back and attack you. But we were unable to defeat either ship. They seemed to be more interested in keeping us from coming to aid you. So we were both not really into battling each other. Once they detected all the shuttles and escape pods that were escaping they figured out that you had somehow dealt with the Battlecruiser. Then they steamed past me to go and rejoin the attack on Earth.”

Jonathan nodded. “We should head back to Earth.” Jonathan motioned to Frank and the Swiftfire started on a course back to Earth. The Latoka soon joined it.

“How goes the battle?” asked Jonathan.

“We keep getting dribbles of reinforcements. A Starfleet ship arrives every now and again. But a Klingon fleet of 22 ships arrived some time ago. They are mostly engaged with the Vendoth ships around Earth,” reported Commander Benteen.

“Losses?”

“Half a dozen. It’s hard to tell with ships popping up all the time. But we seem to lose one ship every time another joins.”

“Mars?”

“Fighting is heavy. Our docks are taking a pounding. There is going to be a lot of repairing to do once this is done. If any of us survive that is,” said Benteen grimly.

Jonathan nodded, looking equally grim.

“Have faith, Commander. Have faith.”

“BREAK HARD LEFT, LEAD!” Yelled someone over the communication channel.

Wing Commander Maxine Benton didn’t think she just acted. She reeled the control stick to the left throwing her Valkyrie fighter into a hard dive that made space twirl.

There was a large explosion to her starboard. She guessed that the Klingon Bird of Prey she had been next to had caught a salvo from one or both of the Battlecruisers that they had been assaulting. She righted her fighter and headed back for the Battlecruisers. So far casualties had been light among her three squadrons Puma, Oasis and Overcome. The same couldn’t be said for some of the other Squadrons. She lined up with the Battlecruiser and fired her Pulse phasers. As she closed she launched a pair of micro torpedoes, she went to launch more but got a message saying that she was out of torpedoes.

She flicked on the Squadron’s tactical frequency.

“Weapons check?”

She got back replies. Most of her Squad mates were just about out of torpedoes.

“Once you are out of torps, regroup at point K.”

She broke off her attack and headed to point K, which was just a position they had chosen out of the field of battle to regroup.

“Commander Waugh, Lieutenant Fenris, how are your squads going?”

Maxine couldn’t monitor all 36 fighters of the group so she had the Squad leaders do it for her.

“Puma squadron, is down to 9 fighters,” reported Lieutenant Fenris.

“We still have 10 fighters left,” said Commander Waugh, squad leader of Oasis Squadron.

Maxine thanked the two men for the news. So out of the 36 fighters they had started with 29 were still in action.

As soon as the remaining nine fighters of Overcome Squadron had all arrived at Point K, they headed off to one of the Starbases on the far side of Earth. A few orbiting facilities had been stocked with micro torpedoes and full sized Photon and Quantum torpedoes specially to rearm the fighters. As they headed towards the station Maxine checked her sensors. The Swiftfire had still not returned from Jupiter. None of the ships that had gone had. There was a good chance that the ship had been destroyed. Maxine didn’t even want to think about it, but it refused to leave her mind. She had served with the crew for three years and they were her good friends. If the Vendoth had killed them, there would not be a place in this Galaxy where they could hide.

Maxine landed her fighter in the shuttle bay of the station and popped open her canopy and climbed out of her fighter. The technicians ran around her fighter. Quickly checking systems and reloaded the launchers. She walked over to where the other pilots congregated. They all looked tired and uncertain.

“You noticed the Swift hasn’t reappeared?” asked one of the pilots.

“It’s been gone for several hours. Odds are the Vendoth destroyed it,” said another pilot.

“Those Vendoth ships haven’t returned either,” retorted a female pilot. “They could be still fighting it out.”

“Or the Captain destroyed the Swiftfire to stop them.”

All the pilots flew silent. Captain Masters was the type who would take as many of the enemy with him when he fought it.

“The Captain has made it out of worse situations,” said Maxine. “He’ll make it. He won’t let the Vendoth beat him, he won’t let anyone beat him.”

It took over ten minutes but the fighters of the Overcome Squadron were heading back to the battle.

“Lead, check your sensors,” said one of the pilots.

Maxine checked her sensors and her heart sank. Coming in from the direction of Jupiter were a Scout and Battlecruiser, both looked like they had been in a tough battle.

“It looks like it is official,” said Maxine, her voice starting to crack. “We lost three good ships at Jupiter.”

The channel was silent as each squad member reflected on this news.

“Course change, squad,” ordered Maxine. “Come to Bearing 0106, Mark 043. Full impulse. Those ships aren’t going to last much longer.”

The fighters were just minutes of been in weapons range of the Vendoth ship when Maxine started to hand out assignments.

“We’re going in hot. Three groups. One for the Scout and two for the Battlecruiser. I want one high and one low. Split on my mark.”

Before Maxine could give the order there were two flashes of light as two ships exited Warp right behind the Vendoth ships, one Excelsior class, the other an Akira class.

The ships fired on the Scout, quickly destroying it. They turned on the Battlecruiser, releasing volleys of torpedoes and Phaser beams. The Akira class cruiser used its superior speed and quickly caught the Battlecruiser. As it passed over the ship it fired its Phasers, which pierced the Battlecruiser’s stressed shields. The Akira continued until it was well ahead of the Battlecruiser. The Excelsior class continued to attack from the rear as the Akira pulled up slightly and launched a dozen torpedoes from its rear torpedo tubes. The torpedoes quickly overwhelmed the forward shields of the Battlecruiser and struck the Bridge and its connecting neck, destroying them. The Excelsior finished off the rest of the Battlecruiser.

Maxine received a hail and answered it.

“Good to see you made it Wing Commander,” said Jonathan.

“Captain! We thought that you didn’t make it!”

“You owe me a bar of latinum, Wing Commander. Don’t even think that I’m going to even consider dying until you pay me back.”

Maxine smiled widely at Jonathan.

“The Apex, where is it?” she asked.

“They…didn’t make it. Neither did Jupiter station,” reported Jonathan. “Most of the personnel evacuated the station but we couldn’t save it.”

“You tried, Captain. That is all that matters.”

Jonathan nodded in agreement before straightening up.

“Enough of this reunion, Wing Commander. There are still Vendoth ships around Earth. I think it is time we rejoined the battle.”

“Aye, aye sir!”

Wing Commander Benton thumbed the trigger, releasing a wave of pulse phaser fire, obliterating a Vendoth personnel transport as it made its way towards Earth. The Vendoth had started to release waves of transports for Earth. The slow lumbering ships were easy kills for the fast and nimble Valkyrie fighters, the only problem were the sheer numbers. There were a lot of fighters around but the bulk were Peregrine class fighters. These craft were larger and more heavily armed but were slower and less manoeuvrable, so they were helping with the destruction of the large capital ships.

Maxine hauled her fighter up as the Transport in front of her exploded thanks to two micro-torpedoes. She checked her sensor for another Transport. There was a large group of transport that looked like they were going to make it to Earth, they were too far away from any of the fighters to stop. She looked in the direction they were in. She could just make them out. Suddenly several Valkyries appeared in view and quickly caught up with the transports and started to tear into them. A Vendoth Battlecruiser, probably the ship the transports came from closed on the Valkyries. Maxine was about to warn them when she saw a Klingon Vor'Cha and K'Vort attack it. The Battlecruiser must have already been damaged because it exploded just about straight away. The explosion sent a large piece of debris hurtling like missiles at the Valkyries and transports. Maxine saw them break away but couldn't tell if they all made it.

The impact of weapons fire on her shield brought Maxine back to where she was. She had flown into the path of several Transports. The transports, while easy kills were still armed. They had one or two forward facing light energy weapon banks. Probably great for clearing a landing zone but other than that they were pretty useless...unless you let them hammer away at your shields for a long time. A transport had decided to come after Maxine, who had been flying on a straight course.

“You want to dance,” said Maxine. Though it was directed at the Vendoth, they obviously couldn't hear her since they weren't communicating to each other. “Let see you follow this.”

She yanked the control stick hard to the left but the ship refused to turn.

“What the? Computer why can't I turn?” asked Maxine.

“Thrust directional system is offline.”

“Then bring it online,” ordered Maxine.

She took a look at her shields. Her rear shield quadrant was dropping fast.

“Computer!”

“System will be online in 5 minutes. Suggest evasive manoeuvres.”

“How? I can't frinkin' turn!” abused Maxine.

Something started to flash on her HUD, getting Maxine's attention. Her rear shields were at critical.

Suddenly there was a hail of Phaser fire and the transport exploded. Two Valkyrie fighters appeared through the explosion and each flanked Maxine's ship.

“You okay?” asked the fighter pilot on Maxine's left.

“I'm fine thanks to you.”

“You know you should try and evade enemy fire?” joked the pilot to Maxine's right.

“Really? I didn't know that. This is my first day on the job,” said Maxine.

“Are you having a problem with the thrust directional system?”

“Yes, it’s coming back online as we speak. The weapons fire must have knocked it offline.”

Maxine looked out at the fighters.

“I’m not familiar with your unit crest. Where are you from?”

“We’re from the USS Adventure, Wolfpack squadron.”

“I owe you one Wolfpack. When this is over I’ll buy your entire squadron a couple of rounds of drinks!”

“We’re glad we could help,” said the pilot to the left.

The two fighters pulled up and away from Maxine.

“We’ll see you at Chez Sandrine after we kick these Vendoth out of our galaxy. Good luck.”

The Swiftfire with the help of two Birds of Prey destroyed a trio of Vendoth Scouts.

“The Klingon Captains are sending their thanks for our assistance, Captain,” said Terri.

“Tell them anytime, Lieutenant. Now, find us another Vendoth ship.”

“That shouldn’t be too hard,” said Susan. “There are still around forty left.”

“Sir, Admiral Hayes is hailing us.”

“On screen.”

“Captain Masters, I need you to drop some troops at Spacedock, they are getting overrun by Ven warriors. The USS Adventure has already dropped some troops in the stations reactor core, but we need more troops. Drop them in or near Spacedock's command centre. We’ve lost communication with them. We don’t know if they have been killed or if the Vendoth have disrupted communications.”

“As ordered, Admiral.”

“Good. Then come and reinforce the port flank attacking the Vendoth command ship.”

Colonel David Tiki stood in front of his men in the Marine’s briefing room.

“We are going to be boarding the Spacedock in orbit around Earth with seventy personnel, or four squads. The Vendoth have landed several hundred Ven, or warriors, in the structure. A team from another ship are already in on the lower levels. We will be beamed in here, the command centre at the top of the facility. Squad one will secure the Bridge. Squads two, three and four will secure the five levels below the command centre. I will be leading this mission. Major Daley will remain here with the rest of you to protect the Swiftfire and will be in command in my absence. I want you all in full personal body armour and I want you to completely suit up. The enemy weapons have a splatter effect so if they have a near miss you can still get serious burns, but if you suit up your armour will protect you. As for weapons, heavy. Set them all to kill, even your Hand phasers for those of you who take a sidearm. The Vendoth are thick skinned and cannot be stopped by a low powered blast. Advise that you all take a Starfleet issue combat blade and those of you who have Klingon bladed weapons should also consider taking them as we might get a bit of hand to hand action. Is that all clear? Good. We have five minutes until we are beamed onto the Spacedock.”

Colonel Tiki materialised in what would have been the commanding officer’s ready room. He looked around and saw that the 5 other Marine was also with him. So far so good. There were three rooms connected to the Command centre and he had split his sixteen being squad up. He raised his rifle and pointed it at the door to the

command centre. He motioned and two other Marines moved to the door, rifles raised. He held up one hand and counted down from five using his fingers. When he got to zero he quickly pulled his hand down, signalling for the door to be opened. The Marines opened the door and charged in yelling for whom ever was in the room to drop their weapons.

As the Colonel went in he saw that there were no Ven in the room, just a dozen shocked Starfleet officers.

One, an Admiral stood up and spoke, "What the hell are you doing? Who are you? How did you get in?"

The Colonel signalled for the Marines to stand down.

"Colonel David Tiki and my Marine squad from the USS Swiftfire. We beamed in. You should change the emergency shields frequency. If we could find it out it's a good chance the Vendoth can."

"They knew our main shield's frequency. They beamed straight into the station and landed transports and caught us off guard. I thought we would be safe since the emergency shields are on a different frequency to the normal shields and the only place you can view the frequency is here. It worked so far the Vendoth haven't been able to get in. I doubt they have figured out why they can't pass through it yet. Is this all the men you brought to help?"

"No, I have another three squads clearing out the decks below us. Give you some breathing room. All in all, that's 70 beings."

"70! There are hundreds of Vendoth roaming this station. Are any more coming?"

"I doubt it. But there is a group from another ship near the reactor core. How many Starfleet officers do you have left fighting the Vendoth?"

"We don't know. We lost internal communications not long after the Vendoth arrived. Though your communication systems might work since its not tied into the stations network, so you might be able to contact your friends."

David checked his communication system.

"Squad two, three and four, this is the Colonel. Status?"

"This is squad four, Colonel. We were beamed into Deck four and we didn't detect any Ven on the deck and are holding it."

"This is Squad two. We ran into seven Ven on deck three. All dead, no casualties."

"This is Squad three. There were 32 Ven on deck two when we arrived. 8 are left and we are hunting them down. But we have captured two who don't appear to be warriors and are dressed differently. They were working on a way to bring down the shields around the command centre. What do I do with them?"

"Hold a minute, three. Admiral, is there anywhere on Deck two that we could store two prisoners?"

The Admiral thought for a while.

"No. All the rooms on that level are not suitable, especially if they are engineers or scientists. They can easily get into a system panel and mess around."

David nodded.

"Squad three, your orders are to shoot them and remember that you cannot stun them."

"Wait a minute Colonel! You can't execute them!" complained the Admiral.

"I can't spare the men to guard them. I can't secure them in a room on that level. I can't let them roam loose; they would not hesitate to rejoin the rest of the Ven and kill us. I have no choice."

The Admiral looked like he wanted to argue more but the way the Colonel ended the conversation showed that he was no going to change his mind.

“Squad three. Your orders remain. And from now on you don’t take prisoners, is that clear everyone? Good.” The Colonel faced his squad. “Saddle up, were moving out.”

As the Colonel prepared to leave he turned to the Admiral and threw him a headset and told him to put it on.

“I advise you do the same, Admiral. Set your phasers to kill, don’t hesitate to shoot these Vendoth and don’t take prisoners. They wouldn’t offer you the same courtesy.”

“If we do that it just makes us no better than they are, Colonel.”

The Colonel just turned and walked out of the command centre. But after he left the Admiral could still hear him over the headset the Colonel had given him.

“Who said we were, Admiral?”

On the port flank of the Vendoth Command ship Starfleet and Klingon ships clashed with Vendoth ships as they tried to break through the wall of ships to get to the Command ship. The Swiftfire was one of these ships.

“Target destroyed, Captain.”

“Good work. The way this is going we’ll be done by teatime,” said Jonathan.

In the distance, at the other side of the Command ship were more Starfleet and Klingon ships were fighting a Vor’Cha class assault cruiser exploded.

“One way or another,” added Susan. “We still need to get to the command ship.”

Jonathan nodded as he surveyed the battlefield.

“I know. But they are throwing a lot of fire at us. Looks like the only way to get through is a game of chicken with a Battlecruiser.”

Susan look appalled at Jonathan.

“Again. You’re not going to try ramming one out of the way again?”

“No.”

“Your not planning just to ram it, are you?”

“Well...yes. Lieutenant Cole, do you know the Shield Bounce?”

“Yes. It’s where you glance a larger ship’s shields at speed. The impact will hurl you at an angle away from the ship. Why?”

“Because I want you to do it, now. Set a course for the Battlecruiser at grid three, one, one.”

“Yes, sir. It will take a minute or so from me to plot a course.”

Aimee lent closer to Jonathan and said, “You use to love dodgem cars as a child, didn’t you.”

Jonathan faced Aimee and smiled.

“How did you guess?”

“Course plotted, sir.”

“Full impulse on the course, Lieutenant.”

“Yes, sir.”

Frank’s fingers danced over his console as he sent the ship on its course. He turned to Ensign Nair.

“Ensign, on my mark I want you to fire the starboard thrusters and turn us 90°.”

“So how many times have you done this manoeuvre, Lieutenant?” asked Nair.

“Twice, at the Academy. But that was using a shuttle not a starship and it was on a holodeck and it was for fun.”

“But you’ve done this twice, still.”

“Well, actually I’ve only completed the move once. The first time I tried it I smashed rather than bounced. But I’ve done it once I can do it again. I think.”

“What?”

“Nothing. Okay, 10 seconds until impact...9...8...7...6...5...turn now, Ensign!”

The Swiftfire cruised towards the Battlecruiser at full impulse. The Battlecruiser and surrounding Vendoth ships fired at the Swiftfire as she did. But the Battlecruiser did not move. The Swiftfire suddenly altered its course slightly and then it swung around 90° to port. A second later it hit the upper rear edge of the Battlecruiser. Both ships' shields flared. The force of the impact and the angle sent the Swiftfire at an angle that cut straight through the surprised Vendoth ships. By the time the Vendoth responded the Swiftfire was bearing down on the Command ship and its escorting Dreadnaughts.

“It worked!” cried Ensign Nair. “That was amazing!”

“We'll toast to the Lieutenant's flying abilities after we beat the Vendoth.”

Colonel Tiki kicked over the body of a downed Ven. A rather sizable hole in its chest suggested that it was very dead.

“The only good Ven,” said the Marine next to him.

“What?”

“Is a dead one, sir.”

“You'll get no arguments from me, Marine. Move on and prepare to move down another deck.”

The Marines had travelled quite a fair distance so far. They hit four decks at a time and because the Spacedock had well over a thousand decks and there were only a few hundred Vendoth not every deck had Ven on it. As soon as a Marine team arrived on a deck they would check the decks own scanners for intruders. So far they had found only small pockets of Ven and had easily dealt with them.

The Marine who checked the decks sensors came up to the Colonel.

“Another one is clear.”

“I wonder where all the Ven are? Maybe there is a lot of local resistance on the lower decks.”

The Colonel was about to issue the move out order when there was a beep over his helmet's communication system.

“Colonel, this is Squad three,” came a low voice.

“Go ahead Squad.”

“We're in a huge cargo bay on the 175th level. We've found a large Vendoth force.”

“Number?”

“Around 100 warriors and a dozen or so others. They are working on something here, not sure what.”

“Hold position and wait for back up. We'll be there soon.” The Colonel switched off his communication system. “We have a large Vendoth force on deck 1-7-5.

Move out.”

The Marines let out several whoops as they heard this and rushed to the Turbolifts and Jeffery tubes.

The Colonel followed.

“Colonel Tiki to Squad two and four. Party on the 175th level, everyone is invited. BYO Phasers.”

The Swiftfire closed on the Command ship. Already the closest Dreadnaught had opened fire at long range, but with some fancy flying the Swiftfire avoided most of it.

“Is there a plan with this attack or do you plan to try and ram that Dreadnaught into the Command ship?” asked Commander Susan Core.

“That’s not a bad plan, but no. We can’t take on those two Dreadnaughts and the Command ship on our own. This is just going to be a hit and run attack then we hit the smaller ships from behind and hopefully more ships will be able to slip through and help us.”

“Is this going to be a flyby, sir?” asked Frank.

“No. Lets give them the pinball alley Swiftfire special.”

“Yes, sir!” said Frank excitedly.

“You up to it Lt. Commander Whitechapel?”

“I’m always up for the PASS, Captain.”

The Swiftfire kept closing on the Dreadnaught flanking the Command ship jinking to avoid the ever-increasing weapons fire. The Swiftfire closed until it was a mere 30 kilometres away before it turned and ran parallel to the Dreadnaught heading toward the front. After the Swiftfire past well clear in front of the Dreadnaught it slowed down and swung around heading back. The Swiftfire headed for the space between the Command ship and the Dreadnaught at an angle so that each side of the ship pointed towards each Vendoth ship. Once it got between the two ships the Swiftfire opened fire with its twin launchers on the Starboard and Port saucer edge. Torpedoes poured out of the launchers and into the side of both Vendoth ships. The explosions from the torpedoes collided between the two Vendoth ships behind the Swiftfire. The torpedoes were launched so they were angled backwards; this kept the explosions of the torpedoes from engulfing the Swiftfire. It looked as if the Swiftfire was running from an explosion as its torpedoes exploded giving the impression of one large moving wall of fire. The manoeuvre had been so quick that even after the Swiftfire had cleared the two Vendoth ships the explosion from the first two torpedoes still hadn’t faded away.

Jonathan watched the viewscreen as it displayed their handiwork; he had a big smile on his face. A wall of fire seemed to connect to two huge ships.

“I never get tired of this view,” he said. “Any damage to the Vendoth.”

“Nothing to speak of, sir.”

“Well, we better get out of here before they...”

Jonathan was cut off as the Swiftfire shook heavily.

“...return fire,” completed Jonathan. “Full impulse.”

The Swiftfire shook again.

“Rear shields are down!” reported Nikki. “I’m detecting transporter beams from the Vendoth ships.”

Suddenly three Ven warriors appeared right in front of Captain Jonathan Masters and Commander Susan Core. The Commander was the first to respond. She quickly stood and drew her Phaser quickly downing two of the Ven. The third raised its energy rifle at Jonathan. Susan again stepped in grabbing the Ven’s rifle and forcing it upwards. But she was no match for the Ven. The Ven smashed his palm into Susan’s face throwing her backwards. The Ven levelled his rifle at Jonathan who was just getting to his feet when the ship lurched forward, throwing everyone to the ground.

Jonathan was thrown into the back of one of the Helmsman’s chairs. Jonathan slowly got up and pulled out his Phaser. He was facing the back of the Bridge. Nikki had just dispatched a Ven while the two Marines standing guard were fighting it out with a sole Ven. He couldn’t see Lieutenant Wessling or Lt. Commander Letac anywhere. There was a slash of claws and a blade and if the Marines had not been wearing armour he was sure that the Ven would have sliced them into little pieces.

There was a scream from behind Jonathan and he swivelled around only to receive a backhand across the face knocking him to his knees. Jonathan brought up his Phaser but it was kicked from his hand and then Jonathan was knocked back to the ground. Jonathan got back to his feet and saw a Ven picking up its rifle. Jonathan rushed over and punched the Ven as it turned to face him. The Ven stumbled back. Jonathan grabbed his throbbing hand.

“You’re definitely think skinned,” mumbled Jonathan.

The Ven growled and swung his rifle at Jonathan. Jonathan grabbed it and the two started to wrestle over the weapon. Even with one hand the Ven was a match for the much larger Captain. Jonathan saw the Ven pull out a knife and strike. Jonathan moved the rifle and it deflected the Blade. Jonathan risked letting go of the rifle with one hand and grabbed the Ven’s hand with the knife. He twisted its hand and caused the Ven to drop the knife. Jonathan quickly returned his free hand to the rifle and tried to reef it from the Ven’s grip. The Ven replied by bringing his second hand and clamping it around Jonathan’s hand driving its sharp claws into Jonathan’s hand. The Ven twisted its hand around causing Jonathan great pain. Jonathan was losing feeling in his hand. The Ven would soon end up with the weapon and he would be dead. Suddenly the Ven stopped and gargled. Blood came out of its mouth and it collapsed. Susan was behind the Ven on her knees. Her face was covered in blood from her nose and a cut on her forehead.

She looked up at Jonathan.

“Some day you have to learn how to fight. I’m sick of saving your life.”

Jonathan smirked. Then looked around. There were seven dead Ven warriors around the Bridge. There were also four Starfleet officers down. At the back one of the Marines lay dead, his comrade knelt by his side. Close by two bridge officers were dead. Lt. Commander Nikki Whitechapel was kneeling by one of the officers and Lieutenant Aimee was with the other talking to the officer as she ran a Medical Tricorder over him. Lieutenant Terri Letac came from behind Jonathan to Susan with a medical Tricorder and started to fix her wounds.

Jonathan turned to the front of the Bridge. Frank was on his knees over the body of the young Ensign Nair and had her head propped up in his arms. Red blood stained her blue features. Her eyes were open and she was looking up at Frank. She said something and Frank nodded and spoke back. She smiled weakly and said something before passing away. Frank’s head dropped as he felt her take her last breath. Frank’s shaking hand moved over Ensign Nair’s face shutting her eyes.

“There was nothing I could do to save her,” said Terri who now stood behind Jonathan. “She was too far gone.”

“I understand, Lt. Commander. Its one thing you have to get use to as a Captain. You are going to lose crew no matter what you do. You just can’t save everyone.”

“I don’t like the look of this,” said David as he surveyed the Cargo bay.

The Colonel had been escorted to Squad Three’s position by one of its Marines. The Bay was huge, probably over a hundred metres long and fifty metres wide. It was sparsely packed. At one end was a large door, which was where most of the Vendoth were and where a large Vendoth device was. At the far end were the bulk of the room’s contents. There were crates of all sizes stacked several high, which was where the Marines were. They had come in from a Jeffery’s tube at this end of the bay and were behind the crates. The Colonel and the Marine in charge of Squad three were looking between two large crates at the Vendoth using combat binoculars.

“Looks like a dozen or so Starfleet officers tried to put a fight up near the door.” He pointed out. Over a dozen Starfleet officers lay dead on the ground near crates, which they probably used for cover.

“Do you have a deck plan?” asked David.

The Marine handed over a Datapadd, which displayed a detailed plan of the deck.

“There are a lot of entry points around this cargo bay. But not many are close to sufficient cover. These two points should do it. A Squad should be able to get in and have cover from cargo pods and crates. If we’re lucky they should be able to get in without anyone noticing. Get me a runner.”

The Marine signalled and another Marine crept from his position to where the Colonel was. He handed the Marine the Datapadd.

“Get this to Squad two and four. Tell them they are to enter at these points and set up to ambush the Ven. Then bring my Squad back with you.”

The Marine nodded and crept towards the Jeffery’s tube opening at the rear wall. Because of the way the cargo was packed at that end of the bay there was little chance that the Vendoth would see them but they could still hear them. The room looked like it would echo very well, so all the Marines were keeping low and quiet.

It took several minutes for the runner and Squad one to turn up. When they did the Colonel quietly moved all the Marine’s closer to the Vendoth and into firing positions. The Marines from Squad two and four took twice as long to appear. Squad two appeared on the right side of the room about three quarters of the way up to where the Vendoth were. The first sign of them was when a small opening in the wall appeared. First out came the tip of a Phaser rifle as it scanned back and forth for any hostiles. A Marine on his hands and knees soon appeared and crawled forward. The position he was in was a relatively safe place. Crates blocked all view from the Vendoth. Not long after this Squad four arrived. Their position was a lot closer to the Vendoth’s than Squad two’s. Plus while their entrance was covered the main position they had for cover was separated from them, meaning that to get to it they would have to pass through clear view of the Vendoth. It was risky but the Vendoth were busy watching the door. They didn’t expect an attack from within the Cargo bay. The first Marine from Squad four quickly crossed the gap without been seen. Once over he watched the Vendoth and signalled the next Marine. Most of Squad four had crossed the gap when everything went wrong. As one of the last Marines was crossing the gap he stumbled, dropping his rifle, which hit the ground with a loud clank. The Marine fell to the ground as he tried to catch the rifle.

The Ven turned to face the sound. The Ven closest to squad four yelled and fired at the Marine as he scrambled for cover.

Colonel Tiki watched as a firefight broke out between the Marine Squad and the Ven.

“Well, there goes our surprise.” The Colonel activated his comm. System. “Squad One, I want Isometric Disintegrators to open fire. Squad three sharp shooters are to take them out. Squad two, shower them with Phaser fire.”

Squad one had already set up its Marines with Isometric Disintegrators. The Marines fired and light blue balls of energy streaked into the Ven position. A hail of Phaser fire followed that closely from Squad two and a more sedate Phaser fire from Squad three. The Ven were taken by surprise and a third of their forces were killed before they could get to cover.

“Sir, they are going for the device,” reported one of the Marines.

The Colonel looked over and saw what he thought was probably a Doth, or scientist, crawling for the device. A Phaser blast neatly took its head off.

“Might as well take it out. Disintegrator team, take it out.”

“With pleasure, sir,” came a reply.

One of the Marines close to David reoriented his Disintegrator and targeted the device. The Marine smiled and said, “Consider it gone.”

The Marine thumbed the trigger but nothing happened.

“What the?”

The cargo fell into a strange silence as every single energy weapon fell silent.

“The device, its active. It must be some type of giant dampening field generator. Weapons, communications, Tricorders, everything is offline,” yelled a Marine close by.

It was replaced with howls as the Ven threw down their rifles and charged the Starfleet Marines.

“Break out the TR-111s,” yelled the Colonel.

He heard the clang of rifles hitting the ground as the ten officers; all in Squad one dropped their rifles and picked up their TR-111s.

The TR-111 was an odd weapon for the 24th century for it wasn't an energy weapon. It like weapons from Earth's past they fired pieces of metal at very fast speeds to pierce a beings skin. The weapon was quite a bit bigger then the Phaser rifles, but kept with the design or stock, handle, barrel design.

There was a low hum as the Marines fired the TR-111s. Charging Ven fell as the projectiles smashed into them. The TR-111 fired a large amount of projectiles quickly, which made them good for attacking large groups of enemy. But the draw back was that it ran out of projectiles quickly.

“The ammunition replicators aren't working, Colonel. The dampening fields got them too,” said a Marine with the TR-111.

“Looks like we're down to hand to hand,” mumbled the Colonel.

Already Squads four and two were in a bitter hand-to-hand combat with the Ven but more came charging at Colonel Tiki and his two squads.

The Colonel stood up and pulled out the met'leth he had appropriated during the brief conflict between the Klingons and the Federation in 2372 and raised it into the air.

“CHARGE!!!”

The rest of the Marines were soon on their feet and drawing their combat knives, met'leths, Bat'leths or wheeled their rifles like clubs. The Marines all joined in the cry. The cargo bay filled with the battle cries of the two sides as they charged towards each other.

The dead crew were taken off the Bridge while the Ven were beamed into space. The Swiftfire had taken damage to its engine had and drifted out of the battle zone.

Jonathan sat back in the Captain's chair and looked at the viewscreen, which showed the battle. Starfleet and the Klingons were doing better then before. They had managed to breach the outer defences and now the fighting was much closer to the Command ship. The Vendoth didn't even seem worried. They had a Dreadnaught leaving the Command ship on a heading for Luna, which had now moved from the other side of Earth.

“When are engines going to be back, Lt. Commander Celcho?” asked Jonathan.

“Soon. The damage was mostly superficial. But thrusters are back online so you can start us back in the right direction.”

“Thank you, Lt. Commander.”

Jonathan sat quietly until Lt. Commander Celcho reported that the engines were back online.

Jonathan addressed the new helm combination of Lieutenant Cole and Lieutenant Wessling, who replaced the deceased Ensign Nair.

“Take us back into the battle, Lieutenants.”

“Sir,” responded Aimee. “I hope I remember how to do this, it’s been a long time since I steered a ship around.”

“Don’t worry, Lieutenant. It’s like riding a bike,” said Susan.

“Target, Captain?” asked Nikki.

“The Dreadnaught flanking the Command ship. Letac, signal the USS Hood and USS Republic and ask them where then want us to hit.”

Terri had an answer very quickly.

“They are hitting the port shield. They said a spread of twenty quantums on the solid area would be helpful.”

“Do it.”

The Swiftfire had seven forward facing torpedo launchers so it only took three torpedoes from six and two from the seventh, an easy task. The Swiftfire soon filled the space ahead of it with blue light as it launched the torpedoes. They impacted on the solid area of shields that the other two Starfleet ships had been hitting. One torpedo made it through and hit the hull. The three Starfleet ships quickly fired their phaser but by the time they hit the shields had come back up. The Swiftfire made its pass and circled around for another.

“Captain,” called Terri. “I’m detecting a strange energy signal.”

“Where?”

“From the Bridge.”

“Can you be more specific?”

“Well, it’s coming from you,” said a very surprised Letac as she read the computers findings.

Jonathan looked around to find most of the crew looking at him. Jonathan slowly stood up and stepped away from his chair.

“Its still coming from you, sir,” said Letac.

Jonathan looked puzzled and started to pad himself down.

“Stay on the attack course,” ordered Jonathan as he checked himself. Then he came to his pocket and pulled out the small round device Che’va had given two years ago. The usually dull grey object now had several parts glowing red.

Jonathan was about to ask if the device was responsible for the signal when a yellow light surrounded him and he disappeared.

Colonel Tiki knocked the Ven’s blade up and slashed its neck open with his met’leth. The cargo bay was littered with bodies most of them were Vendoth. The Starfleet Marines had an edge. Their body armour was tough enough that it protected the wearer from most attacks by bladed weapons but they were no invulnerable. Despite been thick skinned the Vendoth could still be sliced open by the Klingon weapons. Starfleet combat knives were a bit less effective but by now all of the Marines who used them had armed themselves with blades from fallen Ven.

But not everything was going the Marine’s way. The Vendoth had made a call for help before using the energy dampener and what seemed like a steady stream of reinforcements appeared. The Starfleet Marines had been driven back by just the pure numbers of Ven. They were now trapped with no escape, they couldn’t get out the Jeffery’s tube since they would be cut to pieces as they got into them.

The Colonel found himself in the odd position of having no opponent. He looked around and saw that several metres away from the fighting were a line of Ven, just standing and watching weapons sheathed. The Colonel helped a Marine near him and then sent the Marine to help another Marine and went to find one of his squad leaders. But instead one found him.

“Colonel, you alright?”

“I’m fine. Do you know what is up with those Ven watching?” he asked as he sliced the side open of a Ven who had just downed one of his men.

“They have a different, elaborate symbol on them. Probably some type of special unit,” replied the officer as he downed a Ven with one of their own blades.

“With our luck they’re going to be a crack death squad.”

With the Marines helping each other they soon overcame the Ven and regrouped. The watching Ven still stood and watched as the Marines regrouped. Neither side approached the other.

Finally one of the Ven stepped forward.

“Who is your leader?” spoke the Ven in a very commanding voice.

The Colonel stepped forward.

“I am.”

The Ven looked him over.

“Human, male. Rank: Colonel. You are a decorated combat officer?”

“Two wars.”

“Excellent. I shall give you the honour of killing you myself.”

“We’ll see who kills who.”

The Ven chuckled, something that the Colonel found very unpleasant.

“You can not match us. We are the Roj Ch’Dak’s honour guard. We are the supreme warriors.”

Then the Ven barked...rather growled out something in its native language and the Ven all stepped forward and drew their weapons in unison. The Ven growled something else and the Ven marched forward towards the near exhausted Marines.

The Marines let them come to them hoping that the short walk would make the Ven as tired as they were. Then it begun again.

Jonathan materialised in a small room with a Vendoth in front of him. The Vendoth looked very surprised. Jonathan went for his Phaser but the Vendoth was quicker and Jonathan stared down the barrel of an energy weapon.

The Vendoth said something in its native language before it spoke to him.

“Where is Che’va?”

“Che’va? He’s dead.”

“You lie!” hissed the Vendoth. “No human could kill Che’va.”

“You don’t understand. I didn’t kill him. He died protecting me from Var’tak.”

“Var’tak is dead? Then Che’va fulfilled his mission.” Then the Vendoth returned to his native language.

From what he was saying Jonathan guess it was some sort of blessing or prayer.

“I am sorry for this,” said the Vendoth. “I will return you to your ship.”

“Wait! Wait. Are you the leader of the Mer’jat Vendoth?”

The Vendoth looked surprised at Jonathan’s question.

“How do you know of the Mer’jat Vendoth?”

“Che’va told me. He gave me this device.” Jonathan held up the small, round device. “He wanted me to contact you. To help you.”

“How can a human help us?”

“Then you are the leader of the Mer’jat?”

The Vendoth slowly nodded.

“Che’va wanted me to help you. I promised that I would do that. I promised as he passed away. If you refuse me then you disgrace Che’va.”

The Vendoth looked solemn.

“Very well.” He handed over a small, thin device to Jonathan. “This device is linked to the transporter system. Press it and it will automatically beam you to a safe area of the ship, where the Mer’jat Vendoth can help you. It is a one time only device. If you get caught you will need it. The Vendoth are not kind to prisoners of war.”

“I know. But how did you get me out of my ship when its shields were up?”

“There are many ways to beam a single being out of a shielded vessel. It is much more complicated than beaming many when the shields are down and much more dangerous. But sometimes the reward is worth the risk. It works the same when you beam a single being back on board. But if you wish to help us, you must tell me what you can do?”

“Anything you need. But I don’t have to be the only one. You beamed me in without the rest of the Vendoth knowing. You can beam others in,” said Jonathan as he slipped the small device up his sleeve.

“Who do you wish to join you?”

“I have Marines...warriors on my ship who can help us.”

“I can only get another ten at the most,” said the Vendoth. “Any more and they will detect what I am doing. But you will need to tell you ship to open a window in its shields for me to do it. It will be safer and faster.”

“Can I communicate with my ship?”

“Yes, but for only a short time.”

The Vendoth went to a console and started to work on it. Then he called Jonathan over. Once Jonathan was at the console the Vendoth uplinked to the Swiftfire.

Susan appeared on a small screen on the console.

“Captain! Where are you? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. I’m on the Command ship.”

“You’re what?”

“Look, we don’t have much time. I need you to get ten Marines to the transporter room 1 straight away. They will join me.”

“Captain, what is going on?”

“Just have the Marines ready in five minutes. Trust me, Commander.”

Susan nodded slowly looking very concerned.

“Famous last words, Captain. Don’t go and get yourself killed, sir.”

With that the transmission ended.

Five minutes later the Vendoth beamed in the ten Marines.

“Who is in command?” Jonathan asked the Marines.

One of the Marines raised their helmet’s visor.

“I am of course.”

Jonathan nearly swallowed his tongue.

“Rachel! I mean, Major Steven.”

“I knew you would be happy to see me,” beamed Rachel. “So what’s the score? Are we going to take over this ship, because if we are I think we might need more than twelve people?”

“You will wait here. I will go and gather my people.”

The Vendoth turned to leave.

“Wait!” called Jonathan. “What do I call you?”

The Vendoth turned slightly and said, “You may call me He’Oka.”

The Vendoth then exited the room.

Rachel walked up the Jonathan.

“What a pleasant guy,” commented Rachel.

“You ignored me,” said Jonathan. “You know how I feel about us been on highly dangerous missions together.”

“Yes, you prefer if we weren’t. You think that if one of us get injured that the other will do something stupid or ruin the mission for selfish reasons.”

“It does happen.”

“Fine. If you get injured I’ll be sure to leave you to die. So what is happening here, Captain?”

Jonathan opened his mouth to speak but closed it again as he thought about what to say finally he spoke, “I am not really sure.”

He’Oka led Captain Masters and the Marines through several corridors until they reached the ships engineering room.

“You took control of Engineering?” asked a surprised Jonathan.

“Tell me what type of Vendoth you see here.”

Jonathan looked around the huge room. There were around thirty Vendoth.

“Mostly scientists, Doths,” answered Jonathan.

“Exactly. Our rebellion is small and most of it is made up of Doths and intellects that can see past the rhetoric of the Roj Ch’Dak and at the truth. They are the ones who run our ships, our industry, and our empire. They are few but powerful. The warrior castes are many and aren’t very open to our ideas, they can only see as far as the next battle. But some are sick of the bloodshed and want a better future for their sons and daughters. We have grown in strength that we can finally challenge the Roj. Plus it helps if your leader is the VenQo’ of the vessel or head engineer, like I am. If it had not been for your Dragon we would have engaged the Roj at our home sector.”

“You said, “our dragon.” What did you mean by that?”

“Your warship, the Dragon. It helped dissidents and in response the Roj Ch’Dak launched this invasion.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard of a USS Dragon. But I can’t be expected to know every vessel in Starfleet; there are thousands of vessels. Continue, He’Oka.”

“We weren’t prepared to go to war. The Mer’jat Vendoth that remained at the homeworld are tasked with taking control and without the Roj Ch’Dak and her armies there it will be much easier. The Mer’jat Vendoth with the armada were tasked with taking out key figures and making sure that the Roj does not return from this campaign.”

“You plan to assassinate her?”

“Yes. We planned to destroy her and this ship, a symbol of all our past tyranny.”

“Well, you control Engineering, just set off the self destruct. I guess you were right when you said you didn’t need my help.”

“If it was only that simple. We can’t use that system so we have to set our own bomb. This I need your help with. I do not have the enough Ven to do this. Your warriors will make up for this.”

“Make a bomb? This is real terrorist stuff.”

“Terrorist? What is that?” said He’Oka perplexed.

“Don’t worry. So you just need the manpower for this?”

“Yes. We can’t beam all the material to where it needs to be without attracting attention from the Bridge. So we need personnel to transport and guard the materials as we put them in position.”

“But if we run into any of the normal crew they will warn the Bridge.”

“Do not worry about such things, Captain. I have such matters under control.”

Colonel Tiki coughed up blood as he tried to get back to his feet. So far the Ven had thoroughly kicked his Marine’s butts. The Marines had outnumbered the Ven but the Ven had been more than equal to facing two Marines at a time. Very few of the Ven had been killed so far. In fact few Marines had been killed also. The Ven seemed to be more into humiliating the Marines. They snapped arms and legs and knocked Marines unconscious. They took pleasure on beating the crap out of them. The Marines wouldn’t give up. As long as they could stand they would keep fighting. So far the Colonel had killed two Ven honour guards before their leader had stepped in. So far their leader had thrown him around like he was nothing and from the pain in his right arm he guessed that the Ven had also broken it.

The Colonel was knocked back to the ground and rolled onto his back. A foot stomped on his chest, pinning him to the ground. He looked to his left and reached for his met’leth. Another foot pinned his arm to the ground. He looked up to see the leader of the Ven. The Ven picked up the Colonel’s met’leth and studied it.

“Interesting weapon, different from your other weapons, most likely a Klingon weapon. After we subjugate Earth and the rest of the Federation I look forward to conquering the Klingon Empire if they use and fight with these weapons.”

“Go...to...hell!” spat out Colonel Tiki.

“I presume that was some kind of insult. But do not worry, soon you will have no need for them.”

The Ven lifted the met’leth high into the air ready to strike. Suddenly there was a room shaking explosion and the Ven instinctively ducked as pieces of metal flew through the air. The Ven turned and was knocked back by a blast from an energy weapon. The Colonel saw energy weapon blasts cutting through the air. Then they stopped. Several Starfleet officers appeared. They were in a variation of the EV suit and several carried Vendoth rifles. Then slowly advanced checking the Vendoth bodies. One of his Marines knelt over him.

“Colonel, are you alive?”

“Yes. What happened?” asked the Colonel as he sat up with the help of the Marine.

“These Starfleet Special forces officers from the USS Adventure saved us.”

“You’re damn right,” said voice from out of the Colonel’s view. A Special Forces’ major walked up to them. “We detected the dampening field around a dozen decks below. It was effecting a large portion of the Spacedock so we decided to come up and destroy it. It wasn’t too hard to find, we basically followed the Ven here. They seemed very determined to kill you all. So we took out as many as we could without energy weapons and then we blew up the device and nailed the rest of Ven in the room.”

The Colonel stood up with the help of the Marine and looked around. Only nine other Marines appeared to be alive.

“You took a lot of casualties,” said the Major. “Some of your men are still alive but unconscious. All in all sixteen of your men are still alive.”

“Sixteen out of seventy,” repeated the Colonel. “Thank you, Major. If it wasn’t for you...well, none of us could thank you.”

Jonathan lowered the hoverpad and pushed the crate off the pad. They were in a large cargo bay roughly in the halfway up the ship. The cargo bay was close to what He'Oka called a weakness in the ships armour. He'Oka had explained that if they gathered enough explosives that it would rip through the armour and just about split the ship in two and take out one or two of the nearby power generators and when they went up, bye, bye Command ship.

Major Daley came up to Jonathan.

"We ran into another group of Ven. We killed them all but one of my Marines is dead. He'Oka also sent word for you to get back to him."

Jonathan nodded. He'Oka had been right about one thing so far. The ship was fairly empty of Ven. They had only encountered three or four small groups of Ven and all had been dealt with without notifying anyone. Jonathan guessed that He'Oka and his Ven had control of the ships communication system or at least the part that covering the area they were in and that is why the Ven never seem to get a word out of their actions.

"Okay, hold positions until He'Oka tells you otherwise," said Jonathan. He motioned for a Marine to take his hoverpad and continue relocating the explosives.

"I'll escort you back to Engineering, Captain," said Major Daley.

"I'd appreciate that, Major."

The two Starfleet officers started their way back to Engineering, which included a long turbolift ride.

"So what do you think of the plan, Captain?"

"It reeks of desperation. It is more of a last minute thing then a well thought out plan. But it's got potential."

"So, do you have any idea who we get off this ship when we go to blow it up?"

"No, I guess we'll flee on an escape pod or be beamed off. Whatever the Mer'jat Vendoth do we do."

"And if they plan to become martyrs?"

"If they really believe their ideals they won't force us to die here if we don't want to."

Rachel just quietly nodded.

They spent the rest of the journey in silence until they reached Engineering.

When they entered they found that Engineering was in chaos. He'Oka motioned them to quickly get over to here he was.

As Rachel and Jonathan got to He'Oka side he brought up a display of the battle.

"The situation has changed. The Roj Ch'Dak's forces are getting sparse and outmatched by your fleet. Even one of our Dreadnaughts was destroyed."

Jonathan looked at the display of the battle and He'Oka was right. Klingon and Federation forces were besieging the Command ship and its escorting Dreadnaught. The second Dreadnaught was nowhere to be seen and as he watched several Vendoth ships exploded. Even the lone Dreadnaught had several hull breaches. It looked as if it was only a matter of time before the Starfleet and Klingon ships destroyed the Vendoth fleet.

"The Roj Ch'Dak now doubts that the remaining forces can take and hold your homeworld," continued He'Oka. "So she has decided to destroy it."

"They're going to bombard the planet?"

"No, they are going to destroy it. This ship has one of the most powerful weapons in existence. It has the ability to destroy a planet many times the size of your homeworld."

"We have to stop it!" said Rachel. "We can't allow them to destroy Earth!"

“We cannot,” said He’Oka shaking his head solemnly. “The Roj Ch’Dak herself controls the weapon from the Bridge. The weapons control system is so heavily encrypted that it would take days for my Doths to break into it.”

“You knew of this weapon yet you have done nothing to disable it!” accused Rachel.

“We did not expect her to use it. It is more honourable to capture a planet and add it to the empire than to remove it from existence. We did not expect you to make her use it.”

“You’re trying to blame us for this? You are the ones who invaded our space and are trying to kill us!”

“Calm down, Rachel. He’Oka means that he didn’t expect us to stop the Vendoth from conquering Earth.”

“That is correct, Captain. There are few species that have forced a Roj to use such a weapon.”

“We still have to stop it. Jonathan, this is Earth! We can’t let it be destroyed,” Rachel pleaded to Jonathan.

“I know. Let me think. He’Oka, can we warn Starfleet about this? Get them to concentrate fire on this ship.”

“There is.”

“Okay, I want you to patch me to the Galaxy class ship taking part in the battle. I need to take to Admiral Hayes.”

He’Oka complied with Jonathan’s wishes and hail the USS Roddenberry.

“You have two minutes, Captain. Then I must end the communication,” said He’Oka. He walked away and to another console and left Jonathan to warn Starfleet.

A picture of a very surprised Admiral Hayes appeared on the console’s viewscreen.

“Captain Masters? How did you get on the Command ship?”

“That doesn’t matter, Admiral. I have important information. The Command ship is powering up a doomsday weapon to use on Earth.”

The Admiral didn’t look as surprised as Jonathan would have thought when he heard this news.

“So that’s what they are up to. The Vendoth suddenly disengaged from all the battles and have converged on the Command ship. We also just detected that they are transferring power to the ship. Now we know what they are up too. I’ll signal the fleet to start concentrating on the Command ship. Since you don’t appear to be a prisoner on the Command ship I want you to do whatever you can to try and stop or at least stall the firing of the weapon. Hayes, out.”

“Commander, new orders. We are to concentrate fire on the Command ship,” reported Terri.

“Any reason why?”

“The Vendoth are powering up a planet destroying weapon!” said the shocked lieutenant.

“Just when you think the day can’t get any worse. Helm; take us to the Command ship. Tactical, I want you to use everything we’ve got.”

“We are starting to run out of torpedoes, Commander.”

“Then you better make every shot count.”

“Commander,” said Frank who had been silent since Ensign Nair’s death. “The Captain and the Major are still on the vessel. If we destroy it, they’ll die.”

“Don’t worry about the Captain, Lieutenant. He was in a similar situation last time and he made it out. Just concentrate on avoiding as much enemy fire as possible.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The Swiftfire closed on the remains of the Vendoth fleet. The Starfleet and Klingon ships already there were mercilessly hammering the Command ship with torpedoes and energy weapons fire. Suddenly three Vendoth ships, one Battlecruiser and two Scouts broke formation with the Vendoth fleet and opened fire on the Command ship.

“I don’t believe it!” said Frank. “Those ships are turning on their own fleet!”

“I don’t know what’s going on but let’s get in on the action. Target the same area as those Vendoth ships.”

The Swiftfire fired a full spread of torpedoes at the Command ship. The torpedoes hit the solid area of the shields that the three Vendoth ships were hitting.

“Our torpedoes and the Vendoth’s weapons aren’t cracking the shell. We need more firepower,” reported Terri. “Wait, we’re getting a transmission from Starfleet Command.”

“Starfleet Command to all ships. We are authorising the use of Tricobolt devices

“Tricobolt torpedoes. Did we get a fresh stock at Spacedock?”

Terri checked the ships inventory.

“We have six tricobolt torpedoes. In the Deck 15 torpedo bay.”

“Load two of them into the launcher.”

“Torpedoes loaded.”

“Target the shells. Fire.”

Jonathan, Rachel and He’Oka watched the tactical display as it showed the attack on the Command ship.

“Is that the Swiftfire?” asked Rachel as an Akira class starship moved to help the rebel Vendoth ships.

During Jonathan’s communication with Admiral Hayes He’Oka had sent a signal to three ships that had enough Mer’jat Vendoth onboard so that they could take over the vessels. Now these vessels joined the attack on the Command ship.

“I don’t know. I’ve seen two Akira class ships, but not close enough to make out the registry.”

Jonathan watched the Akira fired its torpedoes at the Command ship, but couldn’t see the result. Jonathan looked to a nearby display that showed the shield’s status. Slowly the Federation, Klingon and now Mer’jat Vendoth ships were breaking through. There were dozens of red areas displayed, meaning that the shields were at critical. He saw one red area disappear, then two, then three. All over the ship holes appeared in the shields.

“They’re doing it! They’re penetrating the shields!”

On the tactical display two larger blue streaks appeared from the bottom of the Akira class ship and hit the Command ship. On the shield display another red area disappeared.

“Tricobolt devices,” explained Jonathan. “Much more powerful than photon and Quantum torpedoes but because of their affect on subspace you need permission from Starfleet Command to use them. But I’m not sure that there would be enough of them to destroy this vessel completely.”

He’Oka led Jonathan to a separate console.

“I agree with your last statement. I doubt that your fleet have enough weapons left to destroy this ship before it fires, which draws ever closer. Plus we do not have enough explosives at the weak spot to destroy this ship. So I have decided to combine our plans. You will signal your ships to fire on the weak spot in the armour. It will detonate our explosives, which will cause great damage but more importantly it will give your ships the chance to strike deep into the heart of this vessel and destroy it.

Two tricobolt or five of your normal torpedoes will penetrate the weak spot enough to set off the explosives. One or two more of either will be enough to set off an explosion that will destroy the vessel.”

“Why can’t you signal the fleet?”

“I am a Vendoth, they will not trust me. They will trust you.”

“I understand. How do I do it?”

He’Oka showed Jonathan what he had to do.

“Everything is ready for you to transmit. You know what to do, Captain.”

“I just have one question. How do we escape? Once this message is out it won’t be long until this ship is space dust.”

“Once you send the message we will take you and your warriors to...”

“He’Oka! Captain! Come here, quick!” shouted Rachel.

The two being rushed to Rachel who was still watching the battle. When they got there they saw the three Mer’jat Vendoth ships under heavy fire from the Command ship. Soon all three vessels were destroyed.

“I’m sorry, He’Oka. Your men were heroes,” apologised Jonathan.

“They did not die in vain,” said a sorrowful He’oka.

Rachel put a hand to the side of her helmet as if she had heard something. She excused herself and stepped away from Jonathan and He’Oka. She started to talk into her helmets communication system.

“They helped bring down this ship’s shields and have forced the Roj Ch’Dak to divert power from the planet-destroying weapon to its conventional weapons. They have given us some extra time,” said He’Oka.

Rachel rejoined them.

“Excuse me, Captain. Something is up. I got a garbled message from my team. Now I can’t reach any of them.”

He’Oka looked worried for the first time.

“We must hurry. I fear that they are on to us. Quickly transmit the message.”

Jonathan rushed to the console he was using. Jonathan put his Starfleet ID on the message and just before he could transmit the message all hell broke loose.

Suddenly the door to Engineering exploded inwards. Ven stormed into the room firing. Rachel, Jonathan and He’Oka had ducked for cover when the door exploded and were protected as the Ven slaughtered the other Mer’jat Vendoth.

In twenty seconds the Ven had surrounded them and took them prisoners. They spoke harshly to He’Oka as they forced them out of the room.

Jonathan spoke to He’Oka as they were pushed and shoved down the corridor.

“What did they say?”

“You do not want to know.”

The three beings were taken to the Bridge and before the Roj Ch’Dak, where they were forced onto their knees. All but two guards left. The Roj Ch’Dak was facing away from them when they arrived. She looked at the main viewscreen, which showed Earth slowly spinning in front of them. The odd Starfleet or Klingon ship would zip past as it attacked the ship. The Roj Ch’Dak finally swung her seat around and faced the three prisoners. She immediately looked at He’Oka.

“VenQo’ He’Oka. I should have known you were part of the Mer’jat Vendoth. The rebels always knew about where and when this ship would appear, the Vendoth in charge of Engineering is the perfect position to monitor this ship and my movements. I must give them credit for turning one of my original and most devoted supporters against me.”

“You assume that you know so much, Roj Ch’Dak. You presume that you are superior to all. You think you are better. There was a time when I would follow you to the ends of the universe, but that time is over. I turned a blind eye to your massacres in the name of the Vendoth once too often. I finally came to see that this was not the way. I soon found that many Doths shared my disgust at your actions and I formed the first organised resistance against you.”

“You are their leader? I am surprised. I never thought you would have the strength of character to lead. Or the weakness to go to aliens for help.”

“These aliens are kicking your fleet’s butt!” said Rachel.

“Your fleets actions are pointless. We will destroy your homeworld in a matter of minutes.”

A Vendoth how looked like the second in command came up to the Roj Ch’Dak.

“What do you want me to do with these, things,” said Re’Ijom with contempt.

“Execute He’Oka. These two humans will watch as we destroy their planet.”

“As you command.”

Re’Ijom signalled and a Vendoth levelled its rifle at He’Oka.

“Wait!” commanded the Roj Ch’Dak. “VenQo’ He’Oka, renounce your rebellion against be before you die and I will grant you a place in the glorious halls of the afterlife.”

He’Oka looked at the Roj Ch’Dak, defiant to the last and spoke, “You may kill me, but there will be others to take my place. We will not stop until we free our people from you.”

“And I will kill them as I will kill you, like a misbehaving slave. Fire.”

The Ven fired. He’Oka’s body crumbled to the ground. Jonathan, who was knelt next to He’Oka, quickly turned He’Oka over. The Vendoth looked straight up at the ceiling, his breathing was shallow.

“Captain,” said the Vendoth weakly. “Captain. I am sorry I could not save your world for you.”

“You have done more then I expected. You have done yourself proud.”

“But these words cannot change the fact, I failed. I was to make sure Roj Ch’Dak was not to return.”

“The day is not over yet.”

“For me it is. For me...” He’Oka gasped his last breath and died.

“Move away from the traitor, human,” said the Ven who had shot He’Oka. “I said move!”

The Vendoth placed a hand on Jonathan’s shoulder and Jonathan lashed out. The move caught the guard by surprise. Jonathan was able to get the Ven’s blade and stab the Ven in the throat. Rachel was quick to take the initiative and attacked the second guard who moved in to help the first guard. She quickly overpowered and killed the guard. She turned to look for another target and saw Re’Ijom targeting Jonathan as he started to level the rifle he had taken off the now dead guard at the Roj Ch’Dak.

“WATCH OUT!” yelled Rachel. She leapt at Jonathan and pushed him out of the way. Jonathan fired his rifle but the blast went straight into the ceiling. Re’Ijom fired. The blast caught Rachel in the stomach, throwing her back.

Jonathan was sent sprawling across the floor. He as sat up he saw Rachel laying on her back not moving.

“Major?” called Jonathan. He crawled over to where Rachel lay. “Rachel?”

Rachel slowly moved her head towards Jonathan.

“Rachel? You’re hit!”

Rachel had a large hole in her abdomen. Smoke came from the wound and blood stained the floor around her.

“Perceptive, aren’t you?” joked Rachel. “Next you’ll be telling me that icebergs weren’t good for the Titanic. Could you remove my helmet?”

Jonathan nodded and slipped Rachel’s helmet off. Jonathan held her head in his arms and ran his hand through her soft brown hair.

“You’re going to be okay,” said Jonathan reassuringly.

Rachel smiled weakly at Jonathan.

“Please, don’t give me that crap. I know it’s bad. I need medical attention right now and I doubt the Vendoth are going to patch me up. I’m going to die on this ship.”

“Don’t talk like that! You’re going to be fine!”

Rachel reached up with her hand and stroked Jonathan’s cheek.

“Its okay,” said Rachel sweetly. “I’m ready. I love you.”

“I love you, too,” replied Jonathan with tears in his eyes.

“How touching,” said the Roj Ch’Dak loudly. “It is a pity your mate will miss the death of your homeworld. Do not worry, you will join her soon enough.”

Jonathan tried to think of a reply that would sting the Vendoth as badly as he had been stung. But he failed to think of anything. The Roj Ch’Dak swung her chair around back to the battle. Jonathan looked at Rachel’s face. She had closed her eyes had was her breathing getting shallower with each breath. He needed to get her off the ship, but how? Then Jonathan remembered the transporter device he had been given by He’Oka. Jonathan slowly pulled the device out and held on to Rachel tightly as he pressed the button.

The Roj Ch’Dak turned to berate the humans and saw them surrounded in golden energy and disappear.

“Re’Ijom! They have beamed away!”

“Yes, Roj Ch’Dak. I saw.”

“FIND THEM!” yelled the Roj Ch’Dak. “These humans must not miss the end of their homeworld.”

“I will lead the search myself.”

“When you find them, do not kill them. That will be my pleasure.”

Jonathan and Rachel materialised in the Engineering room. Jonathan carefully placed Rachel’s head on the floor and stood up. He ran to the console, which he had used to set up his message to the fleet. He found the console the way he left it and transmitted the message. Now it was up to the fleet to save Earth.

“Commander, we’re getting a transmission,” reported Terri. “It’s from the command ship!”

“It must be the Captain,” said Susan. “On screen.”

“It’s not a visual message. Or audio. It’s text.”

“Well, read it to me!”

“All Starfleet and Klingon ships target section 32, 43, 56 of the Command ship. Authorisation code: 9-0-2-Alpha-2-Alpha-4. The Computer is identifying the code as the Captain’s code.”

“Target that section, Lt. Commander. The Captain must have found a weak spot.”

The Swiftfire closed on the section of the Command ship and fired its Phasers. They did little damage. Several other ships joined in with their Phasers but got the same result as the Swiftfire.

“Phasers are ineffective, Commander. And we’re out of torpedoes of any description.”

“Damn! Send out a call for any ship with torpedoes!”

Terri sent out the signal and soon got a response, but not one that Susan wanted to hear.

“Most of the ships are reporting a similar status as us. The only ships to have torpedoes left are out of the battle and won’t be joining it anytime soon.”

“What are we going to do? Phasers are going little damage, this ship is powering up its doomsday weapon and could fire any minute now,” asked Frank.

“I don’t know. Just turn around and keep hitting the area with Phasers. We might get lucky.”

Jonathan put Rachel’s body on the transporter pad. He had run from Engineering to the transporter room he had come onto the ship from. He didn’t know if it was the closest one but it was the only one he knew of, so he didn’t have much of a choice. Rachel was hardly breathing now. Jonathan was glad she was still alive. The armour she wore must have taken a lot of the energy from the blast because normally an energy blast to the abdomen would be fatal in a few minutes.

Jonathan went to the console and looked at it. In was in Vendoth, of course! Jonathan couldn’t understand it so he tried to remember what He’Oka had done when he had beamed in the Marines. He was about to press the last button, which he thought was the transport button, Jonathan paused as he prayed that he had gotten it correct and then pressed it. Nothing happened. Jonathan swore loudly.

Had the Swiftfire been destroyed and the transporters couldn’t find it? Or had he simply not pressed the right key?

Jonathan was about to try again when blue lights swirled around Rachel and she disappeared.

“Have you got it?” asked Commander Core.

“I’m still narrowing it down,” reported Terri.

“Have a security team go to Transporter room one. Just in case we’re beaming on a Vendoth.”

Susan went back to watching the fleet hammer at the Vendoth ship. Moments before the Swiftfire had received a strange signal. Someone had tried to tie in with the ships transporter system and beam out someone or something from the transporter pads in Transporter room one. Of course nothing happened since there was nothing on the transporter pads at the time. But it was an unusual thing to have happen, so the Commander decided to find who had tried to do it. The source had come from the far side of the Command ship and Lieutenant Letac was now finding the culprit. They hoped that the culprit was the Captain.

“I got the location, it’s a transporter room. I’ve got a being on a transporter pad. I’ve locked on and I’m beaming them out.”

Susan waited for news from the Transporter room as to how they got. The answer came quickly.

“Commander, this is Transporter room one. We’ve beamed Major Daley back onboard. She’s badly wounded.”

“Take her to sickbay immediately. Is she conscious? Can she tell us what happened to the Captain?”

“Negative, Commander. She’s barely breathing let alone awake.”

“Lieutenant, are there any more beings in the Transporter bay?”

Terri checked the sensors.

“No. It looks like Rachel was the only one.”

Jonathan struggled as the Ven tried to force him onto knees before the Roj Ch’Dak. Re’Ijom hit him on the back of the head with his rifle. Jonathan fell to the floor in pain.

“We have recaptured the human, Roj Ch’Dak,” reported Re’Ijom as he bowed before her.

“I trust you searched him this time?”

“Yes, Roj Ch’Dak. He has no devices on him.”

“Good. Have the Ven who captured him the first time executed for failing to search him.”

“As you command, Roj Ch’Dak.”

“Where is the other, the female human?” asked the Roj Ch’Dak.

Re’Ijom, who was still bowed, nervously fidgeted before delivering the news.

“I am sorry to report that we could not locate the female. We suspect that he beamed her off the vessel.”

The Roj Ch’Dak looked slightly displeased.

“No matter. The female was close to death before they escaped. It has probably already died. What is the status of the weapon?”

“We have enough power, Roj Ch’Dak,” reported one of the Vendoth. “We now await your command.”

“Excellent.”

For the first time that Jonathan had seen the Roj Ch’Dak stood and stepped down from her elevated position. Compared to the other Vendoth she looked smaller, which surprised Jonathan. For some reason he always expected rulers of bloodthirsty empires to be rather tall. Even on his knees Jonathan came up past her chest. The Roj Ch’Dak came so close to Jonathan that he could smell her breath, which was not a pleasant experience.

“Your antics have caused me much embarrassment,” hissed the Roj Ch’Dak.

She backhanded Jonathan, knocking him backwards. Jonathan had barely hit the ground when the Roj Ch’Dak picked him up and threw him towards the front of the Bridge like a rag doll.

Jonathan was trying to get up when he felt a knee drive into the small of his back. He cried in pain and collapsed on the floor. A hand grabbed his hair and pulled his head up, adding to his pain.

“Have a good look, human,” whispered the Roj Ch’Dak into his ear. “Have a good last look at your homeworld. For soon it will be nothing but a memory.”

Tears rolled down Jonathan’s cheeks as he forced his eyes open. In front of him on the viewscreen was Earth, like a glistening jewel in space. Also in the picture were the front mandibles of the Command ship. They crackled with energy, distorting space around them.

“Why don’t you just kill me and be over with it!” spat out Jonathan.

“And let you miss the show, never,” hissed the Roj Ch’Dak. “You do not have to worry about death. After we destroy your planet we will take you back to our homeworld where you can spend the rest of your days in a zoo. Been gawked it like an animal. Been teased by little children. Been humiliated by your captors. You will have no future other than that of a pathetic caged animal.” The Roj Ch’Dak laughed and she explained Jonathan’s fate. Then she lent in so close to Jonathan’s ear that he

could just about feel her teeth and whispered. “You will wish you had died with your planet.”

The Roj Ch’Dak let go of Jonathan’s hair and stood up.

“Fire the weapon.”

Jonathan watched as the mandibles danced with more and more energy as it begun to fire.

The Roj Ch’Dak looked down in disgust at Jonathan and said, “Now watch your future end.”

The weapon looked like it was about to fire when there was a loud explosion and the ship rocked violently.

“Report!” yelled the Roj Ch’Dak.

“There’s been a massive explosion on the port side. We’re...”

The Vendoth’s report was interrupted by another large explosion, which was quickly followed by another and another.

“The reactors! They’ve exploded!”

The explosions got louder and the floor shook more violently each time as they got closer and closer to the Bridge. The ship was tearing itself apart.

Blue lights swirled around Jonathan. He turned to face the Roj Ch’Dak and just before he lost sight of her he saw her throw her head back and let out an ear splitting roar.

“Commander, the USS Adventure is warning all vessels to move away from the Command ship. They’re going to ram it at the coordinates the Captain transmitted.”

Susan wanted to say that it was a crazy move. She wanted to hail the Adventure’s captain and argue against it. But by the looks of the ships forward mandibles it was getting close to firing on Earth. They had run out of time.

“Helm, move us away from the Command ship and Earth. Lieutenant Letac, transmit this message to the USS Adventure, “God’s speed”. Keep the Command ship on the main viewscreen.”

The Swiftfire like the few remaining Klingon and Starfleet ships broke off their attacks and headed to a safe distance of the Command ship.

The Swiftfire’s crew watched as the Akira class, USS Adventure closed on the Command ship. Suddenly several blue streaks appear out of nowhere and impacted on the Command ship, right were the Adventure was going to ram. There was a huge explosion than engulfed the entire side of the Vendoth Command ship. More blue streaks appeared and continued to hit the same spot digging into the exposed innards of the Command ship. A large portion of the top of the Command ship exploded outwards. More explosions that worked their way over the ship followed this. Finally the ship exploded in a spectacular ball of flame and debris. The explosion was like a sun; it lit up the entire Bridge of the Swiftfire, forces shadows to retreat into the darkest of corners. The crew had to avert their eyes as the Command ship exploded because of the pure brilliance of it all. But the time it fade, nothing remained. The Vendoth Command ship was gone and with it the rest of the Vendoth fleet. Out of the diminishing explosion came a Sovereign class starship. The lights reflecting off the top of its hull revealed its hull markings.

“The Enterprise,” said Nikki.

Nothing more needed to be said.

The explosion was brilliant. Maxine cheered as she watched the Vendoth Command ship explode, taking the rest of the Vendoth fleet with it. Then the shockwave hit.

Maxine had taken her ship into Earth orbit and was rounding the planet. The course led her away from the Command ship and also gave her a chance to jump to warp if the Vendoth destroyed Earth. But it was not far enough from the shockwave. The shockwave threw her fighter around like a raft on a stormy sea. The Valkyrie fighter was thrown off course and into Earth's atmosphere. The fighter's hull was illuminated as the ship hit the atmosphere, the friction turning the hull red hot. Maxine tried to regain control of the craft and managed to stop it from spinning and let the bottom of the ship take the brunt of the friction from re-entry. Soon as the fighter had fully entered the atmosphere it started to descend at a steady rate.

Maxine viewed the long list of damaged systems. Engines, shields, main life support, weapons, sensors, just about everything were offline. If the fighter wasn't so aerodynamic it would have dropped like a stone, but with some thruster power it was gliding, though incredibly fast.

"Computer, slow this ship down before we crash!" ordered Maxine as she tried to bring any of the offline systems back online.

Maxine felt a slight deceleration as the ship fired thrusters to slow it down.

"Predicted speed of impact?" asked Maxine.

"693 km/h."

"Kind of fast," muttered Maxine.

"Probable disintegration of fighter on impact," continued the computer.

"I'd say definite disintegration."

Maxine tried everything she knew but she couldn't bring any more systems online. Her fighter broke through cloud cover and Maxine found herself over the ocean, not surprising since the planet was two-thirds water. She had about 15 seconds before the fighter hit the water.

"To hell with this fighter, I don't have to pay for a new one!"

Maxine inputted the emergency beam out code and hit the energise button. The next thing she knew she appeared outside the fighter. She felt the sensation of nothing beneath her before she fell half a metre into the water. The transporter had beamed her to just above the water and she fell the rest of the way.

Maxine sunk like a rock. She had several kilograms of equipment on her. Maxine immediately started to shred it. She undid her equipment belt, her helmet and the top part of her flight suit and let them sink to the bottom of the ocean. Now lighter Maxine found it easier to swim back to the surface. As she surfaced she took a deep breath of air. She looked around and saw nothing but ocean. She looked up and saw a trail of smoke leading into the distance, each had probably come from her fighter. Maxine raised her wrist and pressed a button on her wristband, which activated a short-range distress beacon. I only had a range of several thousand kilometres, which in space was short-range. Maxine lent back and started to float on her back and look up at the sky. There was an amazing light show on as debris from the exploding Command ship and Vendoth fleet burnt up in the atmosphere. Despite losing her craft she couldn't help but laugh. All the tension, nervousness and doubt were released all at once. They had won; it looked as if it was going to be a beautiful day after all.

In orbit the remains of the Federation and Klingon fleets regrouped. No ship survived the battle unscathed. Most ships had large breaches in their hull, several were missing parts like nacelles or wings. On the Swiftfire the crew were about to get good news.

"Commander, we're been hailed by the USS Enterprise."

"On screen."

Captain Jean Luc Picard appeared on the viewscreen. Captain Picard was one of the most famous captains ever to serve in Starfleet, only Captains like Captain Pike, Captain Kirk and Captain Spock were more famous.

“Commander Core, I have someone who wants to talk to you.”

Captain Jonathan Masters stepped into the picture.

“Captain!” exclaimed Susan. “You made it!”

“Was there any doubt?” came back Jonathan’s cocky reply.

Susan beamed from ear to ear.

“Of course not, Captain. I presume Captain Picard rescued you from the Vendoth Command ship?”

“In the nick of time.”

“Thank you, Captain Picard. The Captain is very good of getting in these situations but not too good at getting back out.”

“It was my pleasure, Commander. We lost too many fine officers today it was a relief that we could save one. We’ll transport the Captain back to the Swiftfire immediately. Picard out.”

Captain Jonathan Masters lent on the window of his Ready Room. He looked down onto Earth, a glistening jewel in space that had nearly been stolen away. But the jewel was no longer flawless, even from orbit Jonathan could see the scars on Earth from the battle. The image would forever be burned into his mind’s eye.

Jonathan looked down into his hand, where he held four pips. These pips had defined Jonathan for most of his life. They were part of him; they represented him, what he stood for, what he would fight for. As long as he wore these symbols he would fight for the Federation, because he believed in it.

Jonathan looked back down at Earth. He then started to place his rank pips onto his collar. This latest conflict had only reinforced what he already knew, that they were much greater than the sum of their parts and that would never change.

Once his pips were on Jonathan straightened up and looked at his reflection in the window. Several ships came into view, Starfleet, Klingon, Romulan and Cardassian. Jonathan remembered an old Earth saying as he watched the various ships orbit one that summed up the events of the past few days.

Jonathan looked at the various starships orbiting Earth and muttered three words, “United we stand.”