

The G'Nex survivors could barely wait for the shuttles to safely land on Excelsior's flight deck. The short decontamination process seemed endless to them. When Briscoe and Smith finally opened the doors the students gratefully spilled out onto the flight deck.

Dr. Patrick and Lt. Commander Gonzoles waited for them. Drs. Shimerman and Caruso reported to Patrick. Gonzoles stood in front of the group. "May I have your attention please?" The group took a minute to stop talking and look her way. "My name is Lt. Commander Gonzoles. The Captain has asked that I make sure you are comfortable. I would like you to accompany the doctors to sick bay to get everyone checked out. Then we'll assign you quarters and get you something to eat. If you need anything, feel free to ask. Doctor?"

"This way folks." Pat called. The survivors followed Dr. Patrick.

Gonzoles faced the rest of the away team. She looked briefly at Mirek and Briscoe. But her eyes locked with Tomas Smith's. "The Captain is waiting in briefing room two. Everyone's all right?"

"No casualties." Smith reported. He wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her.

"I'll catch up with you in a minute." Lt. Briscoe said. "I want to stop in the ladies room."

"I'll go with you." Mirek quickly added. Lt. Wong made no effort to move, so Mirek grabbed his arm and pulled. "Come on, Aaron."

"I am not going to the ladies room." Wong protested but let her pull him along.

"The men's room is in the same general direction." Mirek insisted.

Smith and Gonzoles did not acknowledge the junior officers, but were grateful for a minute alone. Not exactly alone. The maintenance crew immediately moved in to work on the shuttles.

"The Captain is waiting." Gonzoles said. Smith nodded and they left the shuttle bay together. Neither said anything until they were alone on the corridor. "I was a little worried when I reviewed Briscoe's log while we were on our way to rendezvous with you."

"Just wait until you see my report." Smith couldn't help but smile at her.

"What?"

"While I was alone with the villagers, they started talking about their gods being displeased and demanding cleansing." Smith said.

"Tomas!"

"Yeah." Smith turned more serious. "I know what you're thinking. And I couldn't get the tribal rituals of Garna Three out of my mind."

"They killed six Starfleet officers in the name of religious cleansing." Gonzoles shuddered at the thought of the recent problems in the Beta quadrant. "Burned them alive."

"Believe me, I thought about it." Smith said as they stepped into the turbo lift together. "Deck two. But this woman was actually talking about bathing. It seems they were concerned about infections and diseases we might be carrying."

"I'm glad it went well." Gonzoles smiled and leaned against him. "But you missed our date."

Smith wrapped his arms around her and kissed her. "I'm sorry. I will find a way to make it up to you."

The lift came to a stop. They had just stepped back from each other when the door opened. The corridor was empty, but Smith and Gonzoles maintained proper military decorum

for the short walk to the briefing room. The rest of the away team followed in short order. Captain Sulu and Commander Chekov had already reviewed the mission logs.

"Mr. Smith." Sulu said "I have reviewed the mission logs. The only thing that is missing is an account of your time alone on the planet."

"Yes Sir." Smith nodded. "There is not much to report. Praag returned before Lt. Briscoe could beam me out. He accurately surmised that if I was left alone again, I would disappear. I was taken before a group that can best be described as a council of elders. It was decided that a cleansing ritual was necessary."

"A cleansing ritual?" Chekov asked.

"Luckily these were a peaceful people, Mr. Chekov." Smith said. "The ritual involved an herbal bath and prayers. They were washing away any contamination of outsiders. I told Ualla, their leader, that I needed a few minutes of private meditation before the ritual. Praag wasn't happy about it, but he left me alone in the building where the G'Nex survivors had been held. I signaled Lt. Mirek and was transported back to the Newton."

"A good job." Sulu said to the away team. "Was there any discussion of the G'Nex's observations or mission before they abandoned ship?"

"No Sir." Smith said. "But we had the crew and a few students on Newton Three."

"The professor in charge was on Newton Six, Captain.." Lt. Briscoe said. "But she was not inclined to talk. She had her hands full with one student who was evidently extremely claustrophobic."

"On a crowded shuttle?" Gonzoles asked. "That must have been fun."

"Ok." Sulu said. "We haven't had any evidence of spacial interphase since the ion storm has subsided. But I want to talk to the professor. What's her name?"

"Lish Mosyn." Briscoe said.

"They should be finished in sick bay soon." Gonzoles said. "Then I promised them food and beds."

"After food before bed, Commander." Sulu stood up. "Dismissed."

Gonzoles walked into sick bay to find that the doctors had finished with the G'Nex survivors. The normally efficient exam room was a chaotic tangle of officers and civilians. The graduate students were sitting on exam tables and standing in the open areas. They were talking about nothing just to pass the time. The medical crew had run their tests and now were doing their best just to stay out of the way.

"About time." Dr. Patrick grumbled.

"Sorry, Pat." Gonzoles smiled. "But the briefing only took a few minutes."

"Commander." Captain Karim left his two crew members sitting alone in the corner and walked up to Gonzoles. "I'd like to see your captain."

"Regarding?" Gonzoles asked.

"Regarding what happens next." Karim said somewhat peevishly.

"Excelsior will be taking you to Starbase 36." Gonzoles explained. "What is left of the G'Nex has been taken in tow, but she's in pretty bad shape."

"I know." Karim said.

"Our engineers aren't sure she can be salvaged." Gonzoles said. "But Commander

Chekov is trying to get her computers back on line."

"I'd like to speak to the captain." Karim repeated.

"I'll relay that message to him." Gonzoles said.

"That's it?" Karim demanded.

"Right now, yes sir, that's it." Gonzoles said. She turned to the rest of the survivors. "If you will follow me, I will take you to dining hall three. While you are eating, we'll get the sleeping arrangements settled. I have four cabins that sleep four each. All right, let's go."

While the survivors ate, Gonzoles explained where they were allowed to go and what areas were off limits to them. She arranged and then rearranged the cabin assignments until everyone was happy with their bunk mates. She explained recreational facilities and answered their questions.

"Ms. Mosyn." Gonzoles said as everyone was finishing their meal. "Captain Sulu would like to speak with you. I am to bring you to him after you've eaten."

Lish Mosyn was a short woman with traces of grey going through her short light brown hair. The Arkarian mask effect covered her eyes and temples and was only slightly darker than the rest of her light brown face. She looked up at Gonzoles and nodded. "I'm ready."

"She's going to see the captain?" Karim asked.

"Those are my orders." Gonzoles said. "I will relay your message to Captain Sulu. I am sure he will have time for you later today."

Captain Karim got up and left the dinning hall without another word. Lish Mosyn smiled at Gonzoles and shrugged. "He is not normally that abrupt."

"He's lost his ship." Gonzoles said. "That is hard for any captain. This way Ms. Mosyn."

"Captain Sulu." Gonzoles said when they walked into his ready room. Sulu looked up from his computer. "This is Lish Mosyn."

Sulu got up and came around his desk to shake her hand. "Ms. Mosyn, nice to meet you."

"Captain Sulu." Mosyn smiled. "It is very nice to meet you. Thank you for coming to our rescue."

"Your welcome." Sulu returned her smile and led her to the chair in front of his desk. "Please sit down."

"Captain." Gonzoles said. "Captain Karim of the G'Nex has asked to speak to you."

"Thank you, Gonzoles." Sulu nodded and returned to his seat. "I'll speak to him shortly. Please relieve Mr. Chekov on the bridge."

"Aye Sir." Gonzoles left the ready room by the door that led to the bridge. A minute later, Chekov came into the ready room from the same door.

"Ms. Mosyn." Sulu said. "This is my first officer and science officer, Commander Chekov."

"How do you do." Chekov came in and sat in the other chair facing Sulu. He did not wait for Mosyn's return greeting. "I have been attempting to get the computers on the G'Nex on line to get more information on the readings you transmitted shortly before abandoning ship."

"Ah." Mosyn nodded. "I have never seen an actual spacial interphase before this. But it could have been nothing else."

"Perhaps." Chekov said. "But I would like to study the readings further. The Arkarian

computers are not responding to my remote commands. Can you help on that front?"

"There was a lot of damage." Mosyn frowned as she thought. "All power was gone. I'm not sure it will be possible to reactivate the computer. I'm not sure anything is left to it."

"You had no protected memory?" Chekov added.

"One of my students, Lugh Indine, was in charge of the data storage." Mosyn said. "I don't know if he backed it up to PM or not."

Sulu opened the comline to the bridge command station. "Sulu to Gonzoles."

"Gonzoles here."

"Commander go find one of the students named Lugh Indine and bring him to my ready room." Sulu said.

"Aye Sir."

"And Gonzoles." Sulu added. "Bring the G'Nex captain with you too."

"On my way, Captain." Gonzoles said.

Gonzoles went first to the cabin assigned to the three man crew of the G'Nex. Karim did not look happy when he answered the door. "Captain Sulu requests your presence in his ready room, Sir."

"About time." Karim mumbled and followed her.

"Yes Sir." Gonzoles nodded and continued down the hallway. "I am also looking for one of the students. Lugh Indine. Do you know him or her?"

"I know him." Karim nodded. "He spent a lot of time on the bridge."

Gonzoles checked her padd and stopped at Indine's door. She touched the signal pad on the bulkhead. Getting no reponse, she pressed it again. After a moment a groggy voice called. "What?"

Gonzoles pressed the control to open the door. The light from the corridor dimly lit the dark cabin. "I'm looking for Lugh Indine."

"Not here." One of the students said from under his blanket.

"Do you know where he went?"

"Rec room."

"Thank you." Gonzoles said and let the door close.

"Students." Karim shook his head and followed Gonzoles to the rec room. They found Lugh Indine sitting with three other students playing a competitive computer game. "Indine. Let's go."

"Go?" The young Arkarian looked up from the game.

"Captain Sulu requests your presence in his ready room." Gonzoles explained.

Lugh Indine stood up slowly. He was about the same height as Gonzoles but he was thin with scraggly light brown hair that fell just short of his shoulders. His skin was particularly pale making the mask across his eyes and most of his nose seem darker than most. "Why?"

"I don't know." Gonzoles said. "The Captain simply ordered me to bring you to him now. This way."

"Ok." Indine shrugged and followed her.

When Gonzoles walked into the captain's ready room, Chekov and Lish Mosyn were leaning over Sulu's desk studying his terminal screen. Sulu was walking around the room with a cup of coffee in his hand.

"I do not think so." Chekov said to Mosyn. He pointed to the screen. "The chroniton particle reading is not significant."

Gonzoles joined Sulu. The two G'Nex survivors followed her. "Captain Sulu. This is Captain Karim and Lugh Indine."

"Thank you, Commander." Sulu nodded. While Gonzoles returned to the bridge, Captain Sulu addressed the graduate student. "Mr. Indine, you were in charge of data storage for the project?"

"Yeah."

"I believe Mr. Chekov has some questions for you." Sulu directed the young man towards his desk.

"Lugh." Mosyn called. "We need to access the protected backup memory. I know there is more to this than was transmitted to Starfleet."

The grad student looked at the screen that Chekov and Mosyn were studying. "You're kidding, right? There's nothing left."

Chekov straightened up and looked at Sulu. "This will take a while. I will take them to my office to work on it."

"Good idea." Sulu nodded. While Chekov took the others with him and Gonzoles returned to the bridge, Sulu finally faced Captain Karim. "Captain. Thank you for your patience. You wanted to see me?"

"Yes." Karim nodded. "Gonzoles tells me my ship is in bad shape. It will take quite awhile to fix her."

"I'm afraid Commander Gonzoles was overly optimistic." Captain Sulu said. He walked over to the wall and a panel that slid open at his touch. Sulu took out a bottle of Saurian Brandy and two glasses. He poured a generous portion and handed the glass to Karim. "She's damaged beyond repair."

Karim downed half the glass. Sulu poured himself a considerably smaller amount. Karim said. "She was a fine ship."

"She did her job. And so did you." Sulu agreed. "All the passengers and crew are safe."