

Lt. Commander Gonzoles was wearing her skin-tight grey sweat pants with a faded pink t-shirt that was at least two sizes too big when Captain Sulu saw her. A matching faded pink sweatband held her long black hair off her face.

"Good morning, Captain."

"Morning, Gonzoles. Good workout?" Sulu asked with a smile.

"My leg is a little stiff from getting shot on the fighter." Gonzoles frowned. She gently rubbed her thigh while they walked down the hall together. "I could only run half my normal distance."

"It will come back." Sulu unconsciously slowed his pace just a bit. "I assume you had Pat's ok."

"Only if he ran with me. And he brought his medical scanner." She smiled and shrugged off the doctor's concern. "He can be a real mother hen sometimes."

"I know." Sulu nodded.

"I heard the Herlans finally agreed to leave their base and give up their fight." Gonzoles said. Sulu nodded but did not comment. Gonzoles stopped walking and turned to her Captain. His concerned expression made her ask, "We don't believe them?"

"They're moving, all right." Sulu faced her. "I gave them no choice in that. But they have been fighting for over a generation. Do you think they are just going to give up?"

"That wasn't the feeling I got on the fighter." Gonzoles said. "They knew reinforcements were coming. They knew we had superior weapons. Yet they rushed us in an attempt to take hostages. They did not go down easy."

"Exactly."

"So we move them." Gonzoles said. "What good does that do?"

"Well, it solves the immediate problem." Sulu shrugged. "The Cardassians are looking for a way to blame Starfleet for the border attacks. No attacks, no blame. But long term, I'm not sure it does any good at all."

"I would imagine the Herlans have stockpiled a few weapons." Gonzoles said.

"Do you think so?" Sulu started walking down the hall again.

"It makes sense to me." Gonzoles followed him. "They are zealots and terrorist. I doubt there is a household on their base that is not armed. And while some of their ships were damaged in the battle, many are armed and in good working order."

"And you think we should do something about that?" Sulu asked.

"Disarming them makes sense to me."

Captain Sulu stopped in front of the turbo lift. "I would not want to leave anyone defenseless. Remember, the Cardassians are watching."

"The Herlans have demonstrated a lack of respect for the law and a disregard for life." Gonzoles said. "They are the aggressors here."

"Interesting." Sulu said and stepped onto the turbo lift. The door closed before Gonzoles could say anything else. She shrugged and returned to her cabin to change.

When Captain Sulu came on duty, Lt. Commander Smith sat in the center seat. He stood as the captain approached. "How are they progressing, Mr. Smith?"

"It is an amazing process to watch, Captain." Smith reported. He nodded to the large ship that was coming together before their eyes on the main view screen. "Evidently they came to this moon on a barge and used it to make the beginnings of their base. They are now using the Theta cruisers as tugs to reassemble the barge. It has doubled in size during third shift. I don't know how big it is going to be when they are done."

"Any problems?"

"No Sir. The Tian Nan Men is now on route to Klingon border. The Potemkin and Dekka One came in at oh four hundred. All prisoners were transferred to Excelsior. Dekka One is held in our tractor beams. And the Potemkin has resumed her scheduled course." Smith reported. "Communications is monitoring Herlan transmissions and reports only normal com traffic for an evacuation operation."

"Very well, Mr. Smith." Sulu said as the rest of first shift reported for duty. "You are relieved."

After Smith left the bridge, Chekov came over to the command station. He nodded towards the screen. "This is interesting. Unbolt prefabricated compartments, drag them into orbit, and bolt the compartments together into a...what?"

"A barge, Smith said." Sulu said. "It makes sense. The only thing they have to worry about is life support and shields. I assume they will use the cruisers to tow it to the colony."

"It is going to take forever to tow it to Arneb III." Chekov sighed. "They will not be able to obtain warp speed that way."

"Anything we can do?" Sulu asked.

"I don't know." Chekov looked at the screen. "We could tow it at low warp, but I'd rather not do that. Warp towing with a tractor beam is unstable at best."

"Agreed." Sulu said. "What about a Starfleet tug? Are they compatible? Could they make the hard connection required for warp towing?"

"I need to know a little more about their configuration." Chekov said.

Captain Sulu tapped the control pad on the arm of his chair to access the command comline. "Sulu to security."

"Lt Miller here."

"Have Adat Guid brought to the bridge, Lt. Miller." Sulu ordered.

"Aye Sir."

"Terrel Lebner said they had been on this moon for fifteen years." Sulu said. "Guid would have only been a boy, but he should be able to answer some questions."

"According to Spock, the Cardassians have been in the Herlan system for nearly a century and the last of the refugees fled over thirty years ago." Chekov observed. "Where were they before this?"

"I don't know." Sulu shrugged. He sipped his morning tea and watched the barge take shape. It was only moments later when Lt. Miller escorted Adat Guid onto the bridge. "Mr. Guid. We have been watching the assembly of this massive barge."

"Barge?" Guid squinted at Sulu. "I do not think it translates."

"What would you call this ship they are building?" Chekov nodded towards the screen.

"An integrated transport." Guid said. "We have used this type of ship for generations." Commander Chekov was about to ask for a more detailed explanation, when Lt. Mirek

reported. "Captain, I have sensor contact bearing 334 mark 12. Just coming into sensor range."

Sulu turned his chair towards the science station. "Identify. Is it another Theta cruiser?"

"Negative." Mirek said. Chekov joined her at the science station. "Too big. It's a Cardassian warship. Correction. Two Cardassian warships, Sir. Galor class."

"Red alert." Sulu automatically opened the command comline. "Senior staff, report to the bridge."

"It is the Wolmof and the other Galor class from our recent battle. They are traveling at high warp." Chekov reported. "ETA five minutes."

Adat Guid watched the activities on the Excelsior bridge with interest. It was not much different than getting ready for a battle on his own fighter. Commander Rand was the first off duty senior officer to answer the call. She relieved Ensign Skorny at the communications station. Adat Guid made no attempt to hide the surprise in his voice when he asked Sulu, "You've fought the Cardassians before?"

"Yes." Sulu answered the question without looking at the Herlan man. He turned his chair towards the science station. "I assume they have made repairs."

"So it would seem." Chekov said while he studied the tactical readouts of the approaching ships. He looked up from his work to Sulu. "I doubt they would have ventured this far into Federation Space without full defensive capabilities."

Lt. Commander Gonzoles came off the turbo lift and relieved Ensign Schlieman at the navigation station. He quickly and quietly brought her up to speed on the situation. Lt. Commander Smith came off the turbo lift just seconds after Gonzoles. He took over the helm station and reassigned Ensign Sadat to weapons. As Smith & Gonzoles brought their stations to battle readiness, he sighed. "I was just sitting down to dinner."

"Isn't being on call fun?" Her tone was sarcastic but Gonzoles smiled while she checked the location of all the Herlan vessels in relation to Excelsior and the approaching Cardassians.

"At least you don't miss anything." Smith glanced her way and smiled, but she was concentrating on her work.

"Rand, alert the Potemkin and Tian Nan Men to our situation." Sulu said. Dr. Patrick came off the turbo lift and down to the command station. He glanced at the Herlan man who stood at ease next to the Captain's chair, but said nothing. "Request assistance."

"Aye Sir."

Commander Chekov joined the Captain and Doctor at the command station. "You realize they will not be able to return in time."

"Of course." Sulu nodded.

"Won't the Cardassians be monitoring all transmissions?" Patrick asked.

"That is standard procedure." Chekov said. "Hopefully they won't have any idea how far away our reinforcements are."

"What is the Herlan's battle status?" Sulu asked. He turned towards the science station. "Mirek, what is the shield situation on this integrated transport they are putting together?"

"Looks like they are battening down the hatches," Lt. Mirek looked up from the sensors to report. "However I am reading structural integrity shields only, Captain."

"Great." Patrick's tone was mildly sarcastic. "There is no way we can extend our shields around that beast. They will be helpless."

"That's not entirely true." Adat Guid said softly.

Sulu, Patrick, and Chekov all turned to the young Herlan man. He straightened under their intense gaze. Sulu asked. "Meaning?"

"The body of the transport is protected by the shields of the pilot ships." Guid explained.

"Pilot ships?" Chekov asked.

"Yes." Guid looked from Captain to First Officer to CMO. When he realized they didn't understand, he added. "You call them theta class cruisers. They integrate into the transport to supply engines, shields, and weapons."

"How many of these pilot ships integrate into the transport?" Chekov asked.

"Depends on the size." Guid shrugged. He looked at the ship on the view screen and shrugged. "Maybe six. Maybe more."

"Commander Rand." Sulu said. "Hail Kem Lebner."

"Aye Sir." Rand nodded and sent the encryption code that Elea Guid had input into the communications system earlier. "The signal is getting through, Captain. But they are not responding."

"Nobody home?" Pat asked Adat Guid.

"Guid?" Sulu asked.

"I don't know."

"Pavel?"

"The Cardassians are holding course." Chekov said. "Three and half minutes."

"I have it, Captain." Rand said. "Coming on screen now."

Kem Lebner appeared on the screen. He was in a control room of some kind. People hurried behind and around him. Sulu did not wait for the Kem to speak. "Mr. Lebner. If you have a way of protecting that transport, do it now."

"We are taking steps to protect ourselves, Captain Sulu." Lebner spoke quickly while giving his attention to the control panel in front of him. "Unless you have something more productive, I have things to do."

Lebner terminated the transmission without waiting for Sulu's answer. As the screen returned to a view of the transport with the moon behind it, the Captain just shook his head and mumbled to himself. "Excuse me." Unsuccessfully trying not to laugh, Dr. Patrick turned his back to the Captain and at least muffled the sound. Sulu turned to the task at hand. "Mr. Smith, cut the Dekka One loose of tractor beam and close shields."

"Aye Sir."

"Captain." Adat Guid stepped closer to Sulu. The battle preparations had his adrenaline flowing. He couldn't stand on the side and just watch. "Let me take a crew on the Dekka. Let us meet the enemy in battle."

"I am going to try to get out of this without a fight, Mr. Guid." Sulu said. He understood how the young man felt, but there were already too many loose cannons ready to explode in this small system. Sulu glanced at the security guard that stood near the turbo lift. "Lt. Miller, take Mr. Guid back to the brig."

"Aye Sir." Lt. Miller stepped forward to take possession of Guid.

"I'll let you know what happens, Adat." Sulu said. Remembering his orders to tell Sulu what he wanted to hear, Guid took a couple of deep breaths and nodded.

Lt. Miller took Guid by the arm and led the reluctant man off the bridge. Once in the lift Guid sighed and forced himself to relax. Miller let go of the man's arm. As soon as he had, Guid shoved his entire body into the security guard, slamming him against the wall of the lift. Miller reached for his weapon but Guid managed to knock it loose of his fingers. Guid smashed Miller's head against the wall again. After the third time, the guard lost consciousness and slid to the floor.

"Sorry, Miller." Guid said once he had the phaser and Miller's communicator. He stopped the lift one deck above the security deck. The lift doors opened and he looked cautiously into the hallway. It was empty. He dragged Miller's body out of the lift. Without knowledge of the ship's layout, he had no idea where to hide the unconscious guard. He leaned him against the bulkhead and hoped everyone was too busy to notice too soon.

Adat Guid took the lift down to the security deck. As soon as the lift door opened, he stunned two guards with the heaviest stun setting. He confiscated their phasers and ran quietly towards the brig. Another guard stood in the hall outside the main brig. Guid stunned her before she even knew he was there.

With a phaser in each hand, Adat Guid burst into the brig. Two security officers were on duty. He stunned the first and aimed his phaser at the other. "Don't try it."

Lt. Gena Destino just looked at him and said. "You won't get very far."

"Open all the cells." Guid ordered. When she did not immediately comply, Guid came closer and growled, "I may not get far, but your death won't stop me."

"Computer." Destino said calmly. "Open all cells."

"Authorization code required." The computer responded.

He came closer still and leaned over the desk with the phaser pointed directly at her chest. "If you don't mind, Lieutenant."

Destino stood up to face the Herlan man. She said nothing, but watched as Guid calmly set the phaser to kill. He leaned across the desk and held it against the base of her neck. She looked him in the eye for a moment before adding. "Authorization Destino blue four red."

"Authorization accepted." The computer replied. The ring of emitters around each cell door flashed and disappeared as the force fields dropped. The Herlans came rushing out of the cells. They surrounded Adat; all congratulating him.

"Thank you." Guid said to Lt. Destino and stunned her. "Get her phaser and her communicator."

Elea Guid wrapped her arms around her husband and hid her face momentarily in his chest. She was torn by her emotions. Glad to see him, angry at the chances he took, excited by the prospects of escape, and proud of his command abilities. Adat understood her well and massaged her back. When she could look up at him, he smiled.

The other Herlans were all talking at once. One of the men hushed them. "Quiet! Tell us Adat. What is happening."

"There is little time." Adat said. "Dekka One is adrift near Excelsior. If we can get to a transporter room we can get to her. The Cardassians are probably here by now and they will keep Excelsior's crew busy while we escape to join the fight."

"Surely Excelsior's shields are up." One of the woman said. "How will we get to Dekka?"

"Elea." Adat turned to his wife and top engineer. "Can you do it? Can you bypass the

shields and beam us out?"

"I don't know." Elea said. "But the systems on this ship are very similar to our own. And I understand Starfleet command codes. We could try."

"Adat." Another man said. "We can not all go running through the corridors of this ship and expect no one to stop us."

"I know." Adat nodded. "Herma and Jel, go to the turbo lift. On the deck above us is an unconscious Lt. Miller. Bring him back here."

"Right away." The two young men left to accomplish their mission.

"There are three guards in the hall. Bring them in here too. Put them all in cells." Adat said. A couple of the Herlans went out to bring the unconscious guards in. "Most of you will hold the brig. Elea, Grun, and I will try to get to the transporter room. If we make it, we will transport everyone to the Dekka."

"Do you think it will work?" Grun asked.

"It's our only chance." Adat said. He turned to the tallest man who had been his first officer on the fighter. "Socee, you will be in charge here. Keep everyone together and hold the brig. We have no way of finding anyone who wanders off."

"Good luck." Socee said.

The bridge crew was ready for the Cardassian. They watched as ten of the Theta class pilot ships closed on the transport. Eight gently docked with the transport, fitting into prefabricated slots on the edge of the rectangular barge. Two landed on top of the transport and settled into deeply indented ports that swallowed the bottom third of the ships.

"The transport now has shields." Chekov reported. "Just in time. The Cardassians are dropping out of warp. Their shields are up and their weapons are powered."

"That's amazing." Dr. Patrick watched in awe.

"Hail the Wolmof." Sulu said.

"Aye Sir." Commander Rand nodded. "Coming on screen."

"Gul Rowkant." Sulu said when the familiar Cardassian appeared on the Excelsior bridge's main view screen. "It is my understanding of the agreement between our governments that all Cardassian military vessels would remain in Cardassian space. Why have you crossed the border?"

"Captain Sulu." Rowkant nodded slightly as was proper in the Cardassian Union when greeting an adversary. "The agreement also states that Starfleet vessels would stay out of the disputed area. Yet here you are. Still."

"Just how big do you consider this disputed area?" Sulu asked. "I would say we are solidly in Federation Space."

"That is why it is called disputed." Rowkant smiled his insincere diplomatic smile. "But borders aside, I am here to take custody of the leaders of the Herlan Resistance Force."

"Really?" Sulu asked. Out of the corner of his eye, Sulu saw Chekov circle the upper bridge to talk to Rand. "On what authority?"

"On the authority of the first judicial minister of the Cardassian Union." Rowkant said. "I have arrest orders for the Lebner family, Ripti family, Tialoon family, and Oola family."

"I see." Sulu said slowly to give him time to think. "I assume these orders would include the adult members of these families only."

"You assume wrong, Captain Sulu." Rowkant said. "Every member of these families is held responsible for attacks on Cardassian citizens and properties. My orders include any and all unnamed leaders that I find have been involved in the attacks."

"That's a little broad." Sulu said. "I'm afraid without a formal extradition treaty between our governments, I can not allow you to execute your arrest orders in Federation Space. I would suggest your ambassador bring the request to the ongoing discussion and your ships return to Cardassian space."

"Unacceptable." Rowkant barked. "We are here. The Herlans are here. I will carry out my orders and go. No need for Starfleet intervention."

"You have no authority here, Gul Rowkant." Sulu said. "Power down your weapons and leave the area."

"Do you think these Herlans will back you up in a fight?" Rowkant asked. "Do you think they will make a difference in facing two Galor class ships?"

"It is my job to protect civilians living in Federation space. I don't expect them to make a difference. And I'm sure you realize I am not afraid of the odds, Rowkant. You have five minutes to set course for home. Excelsior out." Sulu said. He turned to Chekov at communications. "What?"

"The Herlans have taken the main brig." Chekov reported. "They are holding five security officers and have stunned several others that have attempted to enter. I believe Adat Guid will try to get to Dekka One."

"But they are contained in the brig?" Sulu asked.

"Yes." Chekov nodded. "However they have activated emergency lock down procedures. They control the brig's isolating shields. And they have disrupted internal sensors on the security deck. We can not get any accurate readings inside the brig."

"Meaning we don't know if they are all there." Sulu said.

"Exactly." Chekov said. "Although, there are no reports of Herlans elsewhere on the ship. I told Mr. Johnson to advise when he had retaken the brig."

"Good." Sulu said. "Computer, lock all command codes for bridge access only. Authorization Sulu omega green."

"Acknowledged." The computer replied. "All command codes locked for bridge access only."

"Captain." Chekov came down to the command station. "If there is extensive damage to the bridge, we will not be able defend ourselves."

"The Herlans had that fighter for months." Sulu said. "They had Starfleet codes. We can't afford to have them lowering shields in the middle of a battle."

"Puk!" Elea tossed her bangs in irritation and tried again to use the transporter controls to bypass the shields. Adat and Grun waited anxiously by the door with phasers ready. "All command controls are routed through the bridge. I can not bypass."

"It must be because of the alert." Grun rushed over to the controls and started checking

all the other command codes. "I don't see any way around it."

"There's got to be something." Adat said. "What about one of their shuttles?"

"Let me see if I can find a landing bay." Grun scanned the Excelsior using the internal scanners.

"Be sure not to alert anyone to your search." Adat said.

Grun made a face at Adat while he continued his computer search. He suddenly smiled. "Adat! The fighter is in the landing bay."

"Is it in a position to launch?" Adat asked quickly.

"Yes." Grun said. "But there are still the shields."

"One thing at a time." Adat hurried onto the transporter pad. "Transport Elea and me onto the fighter. If it is successful, send the rest. Only use the communicator if necessary."

"The fighter is not big enough to hold us all." Elea said.

"Puk." Adat paced on the pad for a few seconds. "Grun. Transfer everyone here. Then send the fighter crew to us. The rest of you continue trying to get to Dekka. But don't interfere with Excelsior's ability to fight the Cardassians."

"I hear, Adat." Grun nodded. Elea joined her husband on the transporter pad.

Adat and Elea transported into darkness. Adat tried the computer's voice interface. "Emergency lights."

The computer did not respond. Without any kind of palm lights they had to feel their way to a duty station. Elea powered the duty stations and accessed emergency lighting. She leaned over the science station to take readings of the ship's surroundings. Adat sat down at the pilot's station to begin the preflight check. Elea warned him in hushed tones. "Careful not to use too much power."

"I know. I know." Adat finger's raced over the control board. "They won't know we are here until the last minute."

"What about Excelsior's shields?"

Adat turned the pilot's chair towards her. He pulled at his lower lip as he went over his options. Finally, he asked, "Elea, what would happen if we fired the pulse cannon?"

"In here?" Elea bolted upright and stared at her husband.

"Yes!" Unable to sit still any longer now that a plan had taken form, he jumped up and paced around the small bridge. "Direct hit, 000 mark 0, ten meters. Will it destroy the fighter?"

"I don't know." Elea said slowly. Since they had taken on the fighter, Adat was always challenging her understanding of the physics of space flight. The possibilities raced through her mind as she fed data into the computer at the science station. "It would probably cause a fire. Kill anyone on the landing bay. If the fire suppression systems are working properly, it would not have time to substantially damage our ship. Pulse cannons wouldn't ordinarily take out shields, but at this range. We might poke a hole."

"Where are the rest of the crew?" Adat asked. He pulled out his confiscated communicator and adjusted it to the frequency the Herlans had designated for emergency battle communications. "Grun? What's up?"

"Socee's got shields up in the brig. Security is trying to take it back." Grun said. "Stand by."

"We've got to be ready to go, Elea." Adat said. "As soon as Socee lower's shields and

transports, Sulu will know where we are."

"I'm powering the pulse cannon." Elea said. "The real problem from firing from this point will be an intense shock wave backlash. Set structural shields on maximum. At least no one is on the landing deck itself."

"Grun." Adat called again. "We will only have one chance to do this. Have Socee pick the most important four crewmembers and send them. We'll go with minimum necessary crew. The rest will keep trying to escape."

"Got it." Grun said. "Stand by."

Without warning the entire ship rocked momentarily to the port side. Adat and Elea looked at each other. Elea said. "The battle has started. I am bringing everything on line. There is no point to try to hide now."

"Good." Adat nodded. Three Herlan men and a woman materialized on the bridge of the Starfleet J class fighter. Adat smiled at Socee's choices. "Trey and Kella, man the wing weapons stations. Keep an open comline. Jel, you are engineering. Go. Inda, you are operations."

Inda was a slight young man with dark skin and hair. While the others scattered to their posts, he brought the three starboard stations on line and started preparing for launch. He turned to Adat. "The pulse cannons are powered?"

"Yes." Adat said. "Ready them to fire at the launch shield."

"Adat! You can't..."

"Yes, I can." Adat turned to the younger man to make his order clear. "It will be a rough ride but it will work."

"And Starfleet doesn't know we added the pulse cannons." Elea said. "That's an advantage."

"Unless they've looked." Inda said.

"They haven't had the time." Elea said.

"If this is going to work." Inda moved back and forth between the three stations, picking and choosing controls settings with great speed. "We better take out their tractor beam."

"Right." Elea nodded. Once she was satisfied with the readings on her station, Elea took a deep breath and said. "Brace yourselves. We are ready, Adat."

"Evasive actions, Mr. Smith. Give me some room to work." Sulu said. "Return phaser fire, Ensign Sadat."

"Aye Sir." Smith took Excelsior away from the transport and the moon. Ensign Sadat fired phasers at both Cardassian ships.

"Direct hits to Wolmof shields." Lt. Wong manned the third science station. "Minimal damage."

"The Herlans are launching their two man ships." Chekov said. He watched as wave after wave of the small ships launched from the moon base. "There must be fifty of them."

On the main view screen the small two manned fighters flew directly at the two huge Cardassian ships. The Wolmof responded immediately by firing phasers on the first wave. The small attacker's shields would not withstand the barrage of fire for long.

"Forty two." Mirek corrected him.

Chekov glanced at Mirek. She shrugged. The first officer continued as if she hadn't spoken. "The eight remaining unattached pilot ships have broken into two attack groups and are engaging the Cardassians."

"The transport is changing course." Lt. Mirek reported. "She's on an attack course for the Wolmof."

"Hit to Excelsior port shields." Wong reported. "Holding at ninety five percent."

"Most of their civilians are on the transport." Mr. Smith said.

"Damn." Was all Dr. Patrick could say.

"With ten pilot ships." Gonzoles said. "Most of their weapons are on that transport."

"I should have known they wouldn't..." Sulu's thought was interrupted by the Excelsior's sudden violent shaking that lasted several seconds. Dr. Patrick grabbed the bridge railing to keep from falling. It reminded the captain of the earthquake he had experienced as a teen. "What the hell was that?"

"Damage reports coming in, Sir." Rand held her ear-piece as she listened and reported. "Main landing bay. Fire suppression activated. Emergency bulkheads closed. No injuries. Launch bays were clear."

"Launch bay shields have been disrupted." Chekov reported.

"How?"

"The transport is engaging the Wolmof. Firing all weapons." Wong said. "She is responding with disruptors and torpedoes. The small ships are concentrating on the other Cardassian."

"Mr. Smith, bring us around to 045 mark 5." Sulu ordered. "Let's try to give the small ships some cover. Continue phaser fire."

"Aye Sir." Smith said. He lowered his voice and leaned towards Gonzoles. "Look at that. Every one of those pilot ships can fire while integrated into the transport."

"Makes it one powerful ship." Gonzoles nodded.

"Two of the small ships have lost shields. They are making a run for the moon base." Lt. Wong reported. The Cardassians fired disruptors. The unshielded ships exploded one after the other. "That makes eight of the two manned ships destroyed and two of the free pilot ships seriously damaged. The Cardassian's damage is limited."

"Torpedoes, Mr. Sadat. Target weapons systems." Sulu said. Without waiting for the answer to his order, Sulu turned his chair towards science. "The launch shields, Chekov?"

"Unknown, Captain. But the effect is on the interior surface of the shield. It has been impacted by a directed energy weapon." Chekov said. "Stabilizing. They must be trying to take the fighter out."

"By firing the fighter's phasers inside the bay?" Sulu asked.

"Not phasers." Lt. Mirek jumped in from the second science station. "It is a different wave pattern. An energy pulse of some kind. It will take some time to analyze, Sir."

"Even if they can get by the launch shield, there are still the ship's main defensive shields." Gonzoles asked. "What are they thinking?"

"They're desperate." Smith said. Another small ship exploded into a fireball. After the flash had faded, there was virtually nothing left of the ship.

"Who can blame them?" Patrick said to no one.

"How many on that fighter?" Sulu asked.

"I'm reading six." Chekov said. "They must be desperate to try to launch with such a small crew."

"Beam them out of there." Sulu ordered.

"Transporter room." Chekov opened the senior officer's priority comline from the science station. "Emergency beam out. Any and all life forms on main landing bay."

"Fighter's forward shields are up, Sir." Mirek said. "And tightly configured to the ship's hull. It is the only thing protecting their ship from the backlash generated by using this directed energy weapon in a closed area. It could be tricky."

Before the transporter room could answer, the Excelsior shook violently again for a few seconds. Lt. Mirek checked internal sensors again. "Launch shields have collapsed."