

STAR TREK NIGHTFALL

SOMETHING IS STIRRING BEYOND THE FINAL FRONTIER...



PAST LOYALTIES

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON

STAR TREK: NIGHTFALL **PAST LOYALTIES**

By Stephen J Dutton Bsc (hons) Beng (hons)

When terrorists strike a Federation world the crew of the *USS Nightfall* investigate despite the lack of co-operation from the local government. However, the investigation becomes even more complicate when it appears that the terrorists responsible are former members of the Maquis who died before the Dominion War...

The complete *Nightfall* saga:

1. Maiden Voyage
2. Fleet of Ghosts
3. Consequences
4. A Beacon in the Darkness
5. A Conflict of Logic
6. Clouds in Blue Skies
7. Root of all Evil
8. Past Loyalties
9. Peace in Our Time
10. Coming of Age
11. Virtual Warfare
12. Echos Of the Distant Past
13. Cold War
14. Revelations
15. The day the Sky Fell
16. Dark Science
17. Ghost in the Machine
18. The Long Way Home
19. Proxy War
20. The Omega Stratagem
21. The Peacemaker
22. To Storm the Gates of Heaven

All available online at:
<http://thehazugfiles.uk/Index.htm>

Copyright notice:

Star Trek is the intellectual property of CBS/Paramount. Star Trek: Nightfall is unofficial and has not been authorised or endorsed by the copyright holders in any way.

i.

Stardate 65508.3 Starship *USS Nightfall* NX-82008 approaching colony world Letun Secundus, in the former de-militarised zone close to Cardassian space.

When Lieutenant Jenna West, chief of operations of the *USS Nightfall* entered the officers' lounge she saw that several of her fellow senior officers were already present. This was not surprising, the ship was heading for the Federation planet Letun Secundus where it was expected to remain for three weeks while maintenance was carried out. This meant that the ship was not on high alert and only one or two of its more experienced crew were required on duty at any time while more junior officers carried out the duties of the others. Right now the other senior officers that West could see were Lieutenant Commander William 'Snowman' White, the commander of the fighter squadron attached to the *Nightfall*, Captains Gary Heart and Shry who commanded the two companies of ground troops provided by Earth's MACOs and the Andorian Imperial Guard stationed aboard the ship and Lieutenant Commander Robert Cole who was the *Nightfall's* second officer as well as its tactical officer and security chief. There were also two individuals present who were not part of the official crew of the ship, Sublieutenant Nayal was a Romulan who had remained aboard as a liaison officer to advise the ship's captain about her people. This was considered important because the *Nightfall* spent most of its time patrolling the Romulan border to prevent the civil war in the former Romulan Star Empire from spilling over into the Federation. The second individual was Nikki Carr, the seventeen year old daughter of the ship's first officer Lieutenant Commander Grace Carr. As West walked towards this group she saw that they were clustered around Lieutenant Bradley Hamilton, the *Nightfall's* chief helmsman as he sat slouched forwards across the bar.

"Hi everyone." West said, "What's going on?"

"Bradley's drowning his sorrows." Cole replied.

"I'll drink to that." West said and as she put an arm around Hamilton she looked towards the barman, "Get him another and I'll have one too." she called out.

"What's wrong with you?" Nikki asked.

"Yes, weren't you sitting you exam today?" Cole said.

"Oh yeah." Nikki said, "The bridge command test."

"I take it that it didn't go well." White commented.

"I crashed and burned." West said as two small glasses were set down on the bar and she picked one up before adding, "Seriously, I crashed the ship into an asteroid and it caught fire."

"The ship?" Heart asked.

"Or the asteroid?" Shry added.

"Both." West answered before downing the contents of the glass and wincing, "God Bradley, this tastes awful." then she looked back at the barman, "Another!" she shouted, holding up the glass.

"Didn't you spend months studying for that test?" Nayal asked and West nodded.

"I think I'm even dreaming about studying. That's the problem, I'm sure I was half asleep for the test." she said,

"Lieutenant Mackey's going to freak out I know it."

"The ship's counsellor?" Nikki responded, "Why?"

"Because even now he still insists that I see him every week for him to evaluate whether I'm serious about being in Starfleet after leaving to join the Maquis before the war."

"And then spending more than a decade in stasis after the Cardassians caught you." Nayal commented.

"Yeah, thanks for reminding me about that." West said, "But Mackey thinks I may have issues about it. I'm sure he'll think I failed on purpose." then she looked at Hamilton, "So what's up with you Bradley?" she asked.

"Relationship issues." Cole replied.

"I was dumped." Hamilton said.

"Oh I'm sorry Bradley." West said, "Well I'm sure you'll find someone else real soon."

"She left me for a ninth level dark elf." Hamilton said and West slowly removed her arm from around him.

"Okay." she said, "I think I better keep out of this one."

"Apparently his former girlfriend has been seeing someone who shares their interest in fantasy role playing." Shry said.

"The kind with dice, not the kind-" Nayal began.

"Yeah, I get it." West said.

"A level nine dark elf." Hamilton repeated, "How lame is that?"

"On a scale of one to ten?" West commented and the others all turned to glare at her, "Okay, sorry." she said.

"You know what the worst thing is?" Hamilton said as he picked up his drink and then drank it down in one go,

"There's a massive convention on Letun Secundus and we were both due to go. Now she's going with him."
"So get your own back." Nayal said, "Go with someone else as well."
"Who?" Nikki asked and then she looked at West.
"No way." West said.
"I'll go with you Bradley." Nayal said and everyone, including Hamilton looked at her, "What? You think I don't know anything about wanting to get your own back on someone who leaves you? Bradley, I will happily help you have a good time at your convention and also take revenge on the woman who wronged you. I have just one question."
"What?" Hamilton asked.
"What exactly does one do at one of these conventions? We didn't have them in the Romulan Empire." and the others around her all grinned.
"You know," White said, "I think that maybe spending some time at this convention could be a good idea. I'm sure I can come up with a costume of my own before we enter orbit."
"Hey that's a great idea." Nikki added, her eyes widening, "Wouldn't you agree Commander Cole?"
"Normally yes. But unfortunately I'm scheduled to be on duty." Cole told her.
"Can't you find anyone to cover for you? My mom maybe?"
"Well I suppose it's a possibility." Cole said.
"Great. I'm off to find a costume." Nikki exclaimed before jumping from her chair and rushing from the room.
"Well she sure seems excited about this." Nayal commented, "Obviously I'm in for an unforgettable time."
"That's one way of looking at it." West responded.
"You should come too Jenna." White said, "It's just the thing to take your mind off your abysmal failure in the test." and West frowned.
"I don't think so." she said.
"Why not?" Hamilton asked, "Worried all that grief you give me for my hobby will turn out to be unfounded?"
"Yes you have been somewhat narrow minded about it." Cole added.
"Don't you want to support our friend?" Nayal asked, stepping up to Hamilton and putting an arm around him.
"I am not narrow minded." West protested, "And of course I want to be there for-"
"Good." White interrupted, "Then go pick out a costume and be ready to beam down with the rest of us."
Then Cole looked at Heart and Shry.
"That just leaves you two." he said.
"Sorry Rob." Heart replied, "Us ground troopers already have plans."
"All the MACO and Guard officers are going hunting." Shry added.
"Not with grenade launchers I hope." White commented and the Andorian grinned.
"No. Area effect munitions tend to take the sport out of it." he said.
"Not to mention there's not much left to eat afterwards." Heart added, "We're hiring some hunting rifles when we get down there. I doubt the local government would appreciate us beaming down with military hardware."
"That's a shame." Nayal replied, "It looks like you're going to miss a good time."
"I don't know." West said, "I've got a very bad feeling about this." and Hamilton grinned.
"See?" he said, "You're getting into the spirit already."

Captain David Edwards sat and watched as the bridge crew flew the *Nightfall* towards Letun Secundus with little need for any input from either him or his first officer who was sat beside him. Aside from the two most senior officers in the ship's chain of command the only other department head present was the female Vulcan at the science station, all of the others being more junior officers instead. There was a hiss as the doors to one of the turbolifts slid open and Carr looked around to see her daughter step onto the bridge.
"Nikki, you shouldn't be here." she said.
"I'm sorry mom. But I need to speak to T'Lan urgently. It's about my college applications."
"They can use my office." Edwards said.
"Go on then. But be quick, we're almost at the Letun system." Carr told her daughter and without saying a word T'Lan got up from her post and followed Nikki into the captain's ready room that adjoined the bridge. As they disappeared from sight Carr sighed.
"Going to miss her when she goes to university?" Edwards asked.
"I won't miss the hassle of trying to keep an eye on her behaviour." Carr replied, "She'll be the university's problem instead." and Edwards smiled.
"You need something to take your mind off the thought of her leaving." he said, "I know a place on Letun Secundus that serves the most amazing fish. A hotel on the coast that has a first class restaurant. They catch the fish locally and cover it in some sauce derived from a local plant."
"What, is this something that you don't have in that massive culinary replication database of yours?" Carr asked.
"No it's not unfortunately. I tell you what, we should go there when we arrive." Edwards replied and Carr

smiled.

"It's a date." she said and then when she noticed the rest of the bridge crew exchanging glances she added.

"Well obviously not a date-date."

"Oh obviously." Edwards replied.

"How may I assist you?" T'Lan asked Nikki when they were alone in Captain Edwards' ready room, "Is there a problem with the reference I wrote for you?"

"Oh I'm sure that's fine." Nikki replied as she looked at the PADD she was holding, scrolling through data as she looked for what she wanted, "Look, I've come up with a great idea for getting you close to Robert."

"Lieutenant Commander Cole is scheduled to be the officer in command of the *Nightfall* for the shift after we reach Letun Secundus." T'Lan said, "I have arranged my department's shift patterns so that I will also be on duty then."

"Then you need to change it." Nikki told her.

"That may not be easy. I have noticed that humans do not often react well to sudden changes to their schedules. Even Starfleet officers tend to react negatively."

"Well Robert's going to be down on the planet. There's a bunch of us going to a convention with Bradley."

"I was not aware that Lieutenant Commander Cole was sufficiently interested in Lieutenant Hamilton's pass time to want to join him for one of his conventions." T'Lan said.

"I don't think he is. But Bradley got dumped and Nayal told him to take her so he can pretend he's not bothered when his ex-girlfriend sees them together. But the important thing is Robert. He's already said that he'll be wearing this." and Nikki held up the PADD and on the display T'Lan saw an image of a muscular human male dressed in a close fitting dark green hooded outfit and eye mask with a bow in his hand and a quiver of arrows on his back.

"Yes, I recall the costume from the celebrations of the *Nightfall's* first warp flight." she said.

"Well it'll give you an opportunity." Nikki said as she began to search for another image.

"I do not understand." T'Lan said.

"The super hero Robert's going to dress as is often associated with another female super hero." Nikki explained, "See? Her." and she held out the PADD again, this time showing T'Lan an image of a blonde woman wearing a black leotard, boots and eye mask, "All you need to do is dress like that and I'll make sure Robert thinks that you both look like you're a double act."

"A matching costume would make it logical for us to remain in close proximity." T'Lan said, "Though the character you are suggesting is human, not Vulcan."

"Doesn't matter." Nikki replied, "The blonde wig will cover your ears and the eye mask will hide your eyebrows. Just don't comment on how illogical everything is and you'll get by."

"Very well." T'Lan said as she took the PADD from Nikki, "I shall accept your advice." and the pair turned to return the bridge.

"Oh mom." Nikki said, pausing on her way to the turbolift.

"Yes honey?" Carr asked.

"Is there any chance you could swap shifts with Commander Cole? There's a bunch of us going to that convention Lieutenant Hamilton's been talking about and he wants to go as well."

"Well I'm sorry, but I already have plans with the captain." Carr replied and Nikki's face fell as she saw her plan to help T'Lan with her long held objective of entering into a relationship with Cole failing before it had even begun.

"I'll check with Doctor King." Edwards suggested, "I think he said he was going to be staying on board. He's expecting a call from his granddaughter." and Nikki's smile returned.

"Thanks captain." she said before entering the turbolift and leaving the bridge.

"So what do you think she's up to?" Carr asked, "She used Cole and Hamilton's ranks rather than their first names like I keep telling her not to."

However, before Edwards could reply the *Nightfall* dropped out of warp.

"Approaching Letun Secundus now captain." the helmsman announced.

"We are being hailed." the operations officer reported.

"And targeted captain." T'Lan added.

"What?" Carr exclaimed.

"Letun Secundus orbital defence platforms are targeting us." T'Lan explained.

"Shields up." Carr ordered.

"And put them through." Edwards added, "I want an explanation for this."

"Yes sir." the operations officer said and the view on the main viewscreen changed from the star field ahead of the ship to that of a stern appearing man in a military uniform.

"*USS Nightfall* this is Letun Secundus defence command." he said, "Your ship is being targeted."

"Yes we noticed that." Edwards replied, "Care to explain yourself?"

"Your vessel will not approach within one million kilometres of Letun Secundus." the man replied, ignoring

Edwards' request for an explanation.

"We are a Starfleet vessel. We are authorised to visit any world in the Federation." Edwards replied.

"Your crew are free to visit captain, but I am instructing you to not to bring your vessel within one million kilometres. Failure to comply will constitute a violation of space traffic control regulations."

"Captain, they do have the right to impose such navigational restrictions in their system." T'Lan pointed out.

"Yes, I'm familiar with space traffic control regulations lieutenant." Edwards replied.

"How are our crew supposed to reach your planet if we can't even get within transporter range?" Carr asked.

"You are free to conduct shuttle operations." the man replied, "And additional craft can be made available to you if they are needed."

"Shuttles?" Carr said, looking at Edwards.

"You still haven't explained why you are targeting us." Edwards said to the man.

"I have my orders. Your vessel will remain under close observation while it remains in our system. Letun Secundus out." and the screen automatically switched back to the star field as the channel was closed at the other end.

"Orders captain?" the helmsman asked.

"You heard our hosts." Edwards said, "Take us to one million kilometres and maintain that distance."

"We're going along with their demands?" Carr asked.

"As T'Lan reminded us they are within their rights to make us wait that far from their planet. Though I can't image what they think they're gaining from making us do so." then he turned to T'Lan, "Lieutenant off hand do you know what permanent presence Starfleet has on Letun Secundus?"

"Yes captain. I review such information on every world we visit." she answered.

"Then do tell." Edwards said.

"Starfleet has only a limited staff here." T'Lan began, "There is an orbital observatory with a crew of a dozen science and engineering personnel, plus a recruitment office in the capital staffed by four service officers and fifteen enlisted personnel."

"Put me through to that observatory." Edwards said and a few seconds later the main view screen changed again to show a Starfleet sciences division officer with a lieutenant's markings on his collar.

"*Nightfall* this is Orbital Observatory Lima Sierra One. Go ahead." he said.

"Lieutenant we've just had a rather interesting conversation with Letun Secundus' local military. Can you explain why the planetary government doesn't want a Starfleet vessel entering orbit?" Edwards asked.

"Ah. Well it's not just any Starfleet vessel captain, it's yours specifically."

"Care to explain that further lieutenant?" Carr asked.

"The local government is dealing with a sizeable independence movement. There's still a lot of anti-Federation sentiment left over following the treaty with the Cardassians that the locals blame for their occupation during the war and the way that your ship intervened with the government of Prestus-"

"I get it." Edwards said, "They're worried that we're here to install a more pro-Federation government and put down the independence movement."

"Exactly sir." the lieutenant answered, "The local military is aware of your ship's capabilities so they're keeping you far enough out that you can't attack them without them getting enough warning to respond."

"Sounds like the best thing to do is just go along with it and submit a protest through the Federation Council after we leave." Edwards said and Carr nodded in agreement, "Okay lieutenant, you've been very helpful."

Nightfall out."

Stood on a balcony that overlooked most of the city a human male used a set of hand held magnifiers to study it carefully in the morning light, sweeping them back and forth slowly. Then as he lowered the device he noticed that there was a girl sat on a nearby lounge who had not been there just seconds earlier.

"Hello Harry." The Girl said and the man looked around, studying the interior of the room connected to the balcony, "Looking for someone?" The Girl asked.

"Just wondering where your bodyguards are." he replied and The Girl smiled as she got to her feet.

"Oh, they can be here soon enough if I need them. But do I?" she said.

"Not against me. So why are you here anyway? It's not like you to just drop in to say 'good luck'."

"I'm here to give you a warning." The Girl said, "There's a Starfleet vessel approaching."

"They had to get involved eventually. My plan depends on it."

"Our plan depends on Starfleet acting without knowing what's going on Harry. But this vessel is one that we've encountered before and they've managed to inflict some minor setbacks on us."

"They've beaten you?"

"They've slowed us down in a few areas, but nothing important." The Girl told him, "Just be careful Harry. Starfleet is already here and if you aren't careful they'll see right through what you're doing. So be warned Harry, if you fail me then I can easily replace you."



"Enter." Edwards said when he heard a chime from the door to his ready room and he looked up to see Carr entering, "Ah commander, there's not a problem is there?"

"No captain. I thought I'd just let you know that we've reached the million kilometre mark and are holding position. "We've received all the details regarding visitation permits for non-Starfleet personnel and there appear to be several shuttles approaching from the surface, presumably to help ferry our crew back and forth."

"So at least the locals are keeping to their word." Edwards said, "Hopefully there won't be any further hitches. Though I've encountered one minor one."

"Really? What?" Carr asked.

"Unfortunately the hotel restaurant I was trying to get us a table for is booked solid for the next month." Edwards said and Carr sighed.

"That's a shame." she said, "I was looking forward to that meal."

"Well I found a way around it." Edwards told her, "I got us a room instead, one that overlooks the bay. That way we can enjoy a private meal with a better view."

Carr pointed back over her shoulder with her thumb.

"You know what that lot will think of that if they find out." she said and Edwards grinned.

"Yes, yes I know. So I wasn't planning on telling anyone else. Fortunately the hotel that is holding this convention everyone else seems to be heading for is on the other side of the city so we won't be seeing any of them."

"Well that's one thing I suppose." Carr replied.

"Yes it is. Though just in case I'll be taking a phaser with me." Edwards said.

"A phaser? How rough is this hotel?" Carr asked.

"Oh it's excellent. But do you remember the last time we shared a hotel room?" Edwards said and Carr smiled.

"Ah yes. Perhaps a sidearm is in order."

Commander Henry King, chief medical officer and technically the highest ranking officer aboard the *USS Nightfall* after its captain could not help but smile when he saw Cole in his costume while he was on his way to the ship's expansive hangar deck.

"What do you think?" Cole asked.

"You don't want to know." King replied.

"Well thanks for covering for me." Cole said, "I always heard Romulans could be devious and vengeful and today I'm hoping to see it in action."

"Just try and make sure you don't end up being the target for any of that revenge lieutenant commander. Part of standing a watch on the bridge means I don't have to put up with people demanding my attention."

"You mean the sick and the injured?"

"That's them. Bloody time wasters most of them." King said, "Oh and by the way can you ask young Nikki Carr to come and see me."

"Is she okay? Cole asked, concerned.

"Oh she's fine. I couldn't tell you even if she wasn't anyway though. It's just about her university applications that's all."

"Okay I'll let her know when I see her."

"Excellent." King said as they reached a turbolift, "Anyway this is where we part company. So have a good time and if you take lots of pictures remember I'm not interested in seeing them."

"Not even if they're of people getting hurt in amusing ways?"

"Especially not then. I get enough of that here." King replied as he stepped into the turbolift. But before the doors could close he reached out his hand to hold them open, "Oh and Robert I meant it when I told you to be careful about becoming the target of a Romulan's revenge. They have long lives and memories to match." then he stepped back and allowed the doors to close.

At the same time T'Lan was also stepping into a turbolift to take her to the hangar when she heard Noyal call out to her.

"Hold that elevator cousin." she shouted and T'Lan held the door long enough for the Romulan to join her in the turbolift.

"Hangar." T'Lan said and the turbolift began to move. Both women briefly glanced at what one another was wearing before T'Lan then asked, "Are you going to refer to me as your cousin for the entire duration of our

leave?"

"Oh I doubt it." Nayal replied, "It would be weird to be calling out to you while Bradley and I are sharing a bed."

T'Lan looked at Nayal.

"I was not aware that you were intending to pursue a romantic relationship with Lieutenant Hamilton." she said.

"Oh I'm not. This is just a for a night or two." Nayal answered.

"But I fail to see what has prompted you to be planning even such a limited relationship with him." T'Lan said.

"Because Bradley is my friend and maybe this will help him get over his break up cousin. Besides which I've been on this ship well over a year and I've spent every night of it alone so I'd like to spend just one with someone else for a change." Nayal explained. Then she smiled, "Turbolift stop." she said and she stared at T'Lan, "Hang on, is Bradley the mysterious individual I know you must have your eye on for when your pon farr comes around? He is, isn't he?"

"I have already refused to answer questions on that subject. Why do you persist in asking them?" T'Lan replied, "Turbolift resume."

"Well all, you have to do is let me know who he is and I'll be right there to help you snag whoever it is. I've got your back cousin." Nayal said.

Moments later the turbolift came to a halt again and opened to reveal a corridor leading to the *Nightfall's* vast hangar. Nayal and T'Lan exited the turbolift and headed into the hangar where most of the available space was currently taken up by the shuttles that were the only way for the crew to get to and from Letun Secundus while the *Nightfall* was forbidden from approaching within transporter range though at the far side of the hangar there were also two Peregrine-class fighters positioned ready to launch if necessary. The shuttle that Nayal and T'Lan were interested in was not a Starfleet vessel. Instead it was painted in the darker olive drab typical of MACO assault vessel. Intended to deploy a full platoon of troops each, the four such shuttles carried by the *Nightfall* would be bearing the brunt of the transporting people to and from Letun Secundus though they would not be carrying their usual ordnance packages as well.

Nikki and White were already waiting beside the assault shuttle, both of them dressed in the outfits they usually wore as part of the fantasy role playing group that Hamilton ran. The *Nightfall* had very limited holodeck facilities so this group met in Hamilton's quarters and played the game using old fashioned maps, figures and dice but the participants still chose to dress up. Nikki's costume represented that of a medieval thief while White's was a far more elaborate recreation of ancient plate armour, replicated from a lightweight plastic that made it easy to wear though offered no real protection.

Nikki looked around when White indicated to her that Nayal and T'Lan were approaching and she frowned.

"One minute." she said to White and she darted towards T'Lan, pulling her aside, "What's going on?"

"I do not understand." T'Lan replied.

"Your costume. What happened to the one I picked?" Nikki asked, pointing to what T'Lan wore. Though the Vulcan's outfit was the same black colour combined with a long blonde wig it was far less revealing than the image Nikki had shown her. The simple leotard was gone in favour of a close fitting pair of trousers and top covered by a leather jacket while the high heeled boots had been replaced with a more practical pair with a military look to them.

"The exact costume you suggested was not very dignified." T'Lan explained, "Therefore I researched the character and discovered this alternative representation."

Nikki sighed.

"T'Lan that was the point. It wasn't supposed to be dignified. It was supposed to show off the goods."

"Show off the goods?" T'Lan asked, confused, "What goods?"

"Your goods. You know, the goods." Nikki said, but she stopped trying to explain any further when she saw her mother and Edwards entering the hangar together. Unlike any of the others waiting for the shuttle to depart both Carr and Edwards were dressed smartly, though not in their Starfleet uniforms, "Mom." Nikki said, "Looking good. All ready for the hot date then?" and Carr scowled.

"Nikki. It is not a date." she replied sternly.

"So what's with the flash dress then?" Nikki asked.

"Lieutenant commander," T'Lan added as she evaluated the dress that Carr wore, paying particular attention to its overall short length, "in your opinion would wearing that constitute showing off the goods?" and Nikki winced. Fortunately Cole then arrived and Nikki saw her opportunity to shift everyone's attention.

"Robert!" she called out, "Look, your costume matches T'Lan's."

"So it does." Cole replied.

"So will you enter the costume competition as a pair?" Nikki asked, "Obviously you'd have to hang around together but I'm sure you'd win if you did."

"If our costumes do match then it would be logical for us to remain in close proximity." T'Lan added.

"I don't get it." Edwards said, "Robert, why are you dressed as Peter Pan?"

"It's not Peter Pan." Cole said, "It's the Green-"

"Okay so can we get this over with?" West's voice interrupted as she too arrived in the hangar.

"Oh no." Nikki responded when she saw West and at the same time White looked down and shook his head slowly.

"You have got to be kidding me." he said.

"What?" West asked, "What's wrong?"

"Your costume." Nikki replied, "Do you know what that is?"

West's outfit consisted of a bodysuit typical of many fictional superheroes, dominated by one colour, red in this case and with an identifying symbol marked on the chest. West looked down, wondering if her freshly replicated costume was damaged in some way.

"I don't get it." she said and then she reached into the bag she was carrying and took out a PADD, "See? I just copied this." and she handed the PADD to Nikki.

"Let me guess," White said, "you just did a search for female superheroes in the computer and that one popped right out."

"That's right. She's just called 'The Lady'. Why? Did I do something wrong?"

"That rather depends on what impression you want to give people." Nikki said, "If you'd checked that character out in more detail you'd have found out that The Lady is a rather specialised comic book character."

"Specialised?" T'Lan asked, "What does that mean?"

"It means she does stuff like this." Nikki said as she used the PADD to call up more images of the character chosen by West for her costume and returned it to her, "Just scroll through." she said.

"Oh it can't be that-" West began but then her eyes widened and her jaw dropped, "Oh no." she said as she began to scroll through the images, "Oh no, no, no." then she looked up, "Wait, this isn't a problem. I can just go and get changed. Nayal's not wearing a costume so I don't have to either."

"I am wearing a costume." Nayal replied.

"What, that?" West asked, looking at the long coat the Romulan wore.

"No. This is just a coat. This is my costume." Nayal said and she opened the front of her coat.

"Wow." Nikki said, "That's a lot of paint."

"And not much else." Cole agreed.

"Nayal are you not concerned that that leaves very little to the imagination?" Edwards asked.

"Oh I don't know." Nikki responded before Nayal could answer, "I'm sure every guy that sees it will be imagining quite a lot."

"And a fair few of the women as well." West added as Nayal closed her coat, grinning.

"It's amazing isn't it?" she said, "I never knew that your people had created a Romulan super villain. She's called 'The Raptor' and amongst other things she has the power to run in these heels." and she lifted up one of her boots to show off the height of the heel.

"So you managed to paint that on yourself?" Carr asked.

"Oh no, Bradley did it. It took him hours, especially the design on my chest."

"Yeah, I'll bet." West commented.

"That's why he's not here yet. He washing the paint off his hands and then getting changed. Wait no, here he is." and Nayal waved to Hamilton as he arrived dressed in the uniform of a fictional space exploration force, "Bradley! Hurry up we're ready to go."

"Sorry for the hold up," Hamilton said, "I couldn't find my-" and then he stopped and stared at West, "Jenna. Wow." he said, "I had no idea." and West scowled.

"Enough. I'm hungry." Edwards said, "Everyone on the shuttle."

"But I need to change." West protested.

"No you don't lieutenant. On the shuttle and that's an order." Edwards said.

"You first though." White added to West, "No way am I letting someone wearing that stand behind me."

West sighed as she boarded the shuttle first and then as the others were following her Nikki pulled T'Lan aside once more and pointed to Nayal.

"For the record T'Lan, that is showing off the goods." she said softly.

3.

There were seven cylinders lined up on the table, one for each person present including the individual that The Girl had referred to as Harry. The cylinders were small enough to be carried in one hand, though not so small that it could be completely hidden in one.

"You all know what I expect." Harry said, looking around at the others. Three of them were human males like him while a further two were human females. This left just Syran the Vulcan who was the first to reach out and pick up one of the cylinders, "Syran will plant his charge at the main communications node while Sarah and Greg will hit the secondaries. That leaves Mark and Wolfgang to target the power distribution nodes and Felicity the starport control tower. Meanwhile I'll hit the armoury." and then he too picked up one of the prepared charges, followed by each of the other humans in the group.

"What about that Starfleet vessel?" the woman known as Sarah asked.

"Yes, if it was serious enough for her to come all the way here to warn us about it then shouldn't we do something about it as well?" Wolfgang asked.

"No." Harry replied, "We stick with the plan. If we start deviating from it at such a late stage then we risk the whole thing coming crashing down around us and I won't have that."

"You sound concerned Harry." Felicity commented, "Pressure from high up?"

"Something like that." Harry replied, "But her warnings about that ship were clear. Others have encountered that ship before and it has disrupted our efforts elsewhere. I don't want a repeat of their failure on my hands so I'm ordering all of you to steer clear of it. Let me know if you see any signs of Starfleet personnel that aren't from the regulars deployed here but under no circumstances are you to engage them without permission."

"How do we set the timers?" Greg asked, holding up his charge.

"You don't." Harry replied, "The timers are already set and synchronised. All seven will go off at the same time. Guaranteed."

"So we're standing here with primed explosives in our hands?" Syran said, inspecting his charge for any sign of the running timer.

"Yes you are. So be careful with them." Harry told him.

"Of course I will. It is only logical." Syran replied before he turned around and took a single step away from the table, vanishing into thin air before it was complete.

Harry then looked around as one by one the others in his group turned and began to walk away, each of them disappearing just as Syran had done before their first step was completed. Finally alone in the room, Harry also turned away from the table and took a step and when he completed it he was in a vastly different room, surrounded by weapons mounted on every available wall. Checking that he was alone, Harry walked past the racks of small arms that he had appeared beside and made his way to the stacked crates of power cells for these weapons. Opening the top crate on one of the stacks at random he removed a single power cell, replacing it with the explosive. The power cell was a slightly different size and shape to the charge but the packing of the crate was soft and pliable enough that Harry was able to press it into the recess. Tucking the power cell into his pocket Harry then closed and resealed the crate before turning around and disappearing from view, leaving the armoury in the same way he had arrived.

The assault shuttle touched down at a defence force landing zone and the passengers disembarked, following signs that pointed then towards a nearby transporter station. Meanwhile the two MACO crew began checking their craft ready for the return journey. This involved checks both outside and within the shuttle and it was in the passenger compartment that one of the crew found that one of their passengers had dropped something.

"Hey come take a look at this." he called out to the other pilot, holding up a PADD. The device lacked the more rugged construction of a MACO or Imperial Guard issue device, proving that it was one of the Starfleet officers that had dropped it.

"Where did you find that?"

"Just down beside this seat." the first pilot replied as he activated the device to see it could identify the owner.

"The captain and XO were sat either side of there. It must belong to one of them."

"I think you're right." the first pilot said, a smile spreading across his face, "This is information about a hotel booking." and he held up the PADD.

"So? They're going for a meal."

"Oh really? Since when does a meal require a room with an ocean view?"

"A room? It's not the honeymoon suite again is it?"

The group heading for the convention materialised outside the hotel in which it was to be held and found themselves surrounded by more people in a variety of costumes depicting favoured fictional characters. But Nayal also noticed something about the racial make up of the crowd.

"There are a lot of Klingons here aren't there?" she commented, watching a group of Klingons heading into the hotel, "We're pretty far from Klingon space so what are they doing here?"

"You get a lot of Klingons at these events." Hamilton explained, "They come for the super hero comics. There's something about the idea of a gifted individual using his powers to help people in an honourable fashion that they like. They don't go in for the costumes often though."

"Talking of which," West said, "is there any chance you lot could crowd around me? I can see the looks I'm getting."

"Just keep your hands to yourself." White replied as the group encircled West and then together they headed for the entrance, squeezing through a door as one to find themselves in the lobby.

"There she is." Hamilton said.

"Who?" Cole asked.

"I assume that he means his former girlfriend." T'Lan pointed out.

"Where?" Nikki asked.

"Over near the reception desk in the green." Hamilton said, "Looks like her new boyfriend is going to check them in."

"Okay leave this to me." Nayal said, "You just get us booked into the convention and I'll make sure we get the right room." then she planted a kiss on Hamilton's cheek and headed for the hotel's reception desk.

Nayal kept her attention focused on the new boyfriend of Hamilton's ex-girlfriend, dropping into line behind him in time to hear the room number he was given and when he turned to return to his new girlfriend Nayal stepped forwards and smile at the woman behind the desk.

"Hi." she said, "I need to ask a favour. Could you make sure my boyfriend and I have the room next door to our friends that have just checked in? We're here as a group."

"I think that can be arranged." the woman replied, "Yes, one of the neighbouring rooms is available. Do you have a reservation?"

"No. This is a late decision. Here's my ID." and Nayal presented a card that identified her as a Romulan.

"I thought you didn't seem Vulcan." the receptionist said as she worked at her computer, "I thought maybe you were a human with fake ears." and Nayal frowned briefly.

"Oh no. In fact us Romulans tend to consider that offensive."

"I'm sorry I-" the receptionist began, concerned that she had just insulted a guest.

"No bother." Nayal interrupted, "You only made an observation. Is that my key?"

"Thank you, yes here it is. Enjoy your stay."

"Thanks." Nayal said as she took the key and looked around to see that Hamilton's former girlfriend and her new boyfriend were now heading for the other members of the group and Nayal headed after them.

"Bradley? I didn't expect to see you here." Hamilton's ex-girlfriend called out to him and almost in unison the entire group turned towards her.

"Oh hello Laura." Hamilton replied. Then he looked at her new boyfriend, "Hi Martin." he added before looking back at Laura, "Well since you ended our relationship I figured that you wouldn't mind me bringing my new girlfriend."

"New girlfriend? So which one is it?" Laura asked, looking at the female group members in turn, "I can tell it's not the wood elf's girlfriend."

Cole frowned.

"I'm not a wood elf." he said, "I'm the Green-"

"So that just leaves the little girl or the pervert." Laura interrupted and West sighed.

"Actually it's me." Nayal said as she walked up from behind Laura and Martin to stand beside Hamilton, "here you go Bradley. Our room key. Room four fourteen."

"That's right next to ours." Martin commented.

"Really?" Nayal responded in mock surprise, "What are the odds of that?"

"Given the number of rooms in a hotel of this size, the odds of two people randomly being assigned adjacent rooms are one in-

"That was a rhetorical question cousin." Nayal interrupted.

"It's just too bad she couldn't be bothered to come in a costume." Laura said and Nayal smiled.

"Oh I'm wearing a costume." she said as she opened her coat, "What do you think?"

The hotel Carr and Edwards were booked into was equipped with its own transporter system so they were able to materialise directly inside it and were met by a receptionist who checked them in before they headed up to their room. Just as Edwards had stated this was located so that it was facing the ocean and Carr headed straight for the balcony.

"Well if the food's as good as the view this could be one of the best meals I've ever had." she said.

"What, including all those ones that I've prepared for you?"

"Not fair." Carr replied, pointing at him, "You claimed that the food here was better than those."

"Yes, I did didn't I?" Edwards said as he picked up a PADD from the table in the centre of the room, "Ah, here's the room service menu. Shall we order Grace?"

"Oh let's do David." Carr replied as she sat down at the table on the balcony. Then she reached into her bag and took out a phaser, "Though if some thug comes to the door I'm shooting him."

A short time later Carr and Edwards sat with their meals laid out in front of them while Edwards poured wine into their glasses. Then they raised them.

"So what are we drinking to?" Carr asked.

"How about a good meal with good company?" Edwards suggested and both smiling, they touched their glasses together. At the same moment the sky lit up.

7.

Just as they were designed to do, the seven explosive charges detonate simultaneously. The charges applied to the communication nodes were all placed to damage the computers that routed messages, meaning that signals coming in could not be sent on to their destinations and with both secondary arrays also disabled the entire city's communications were shut down. Meanwhile the power distribution network was similarly attacked with charges being placed at generator substations. The destruction of these two substations cut off the power to two city districts, bringing them to a standstill. At the same time the charge placed in the control tower at the city starport shut down its communication system. With the city's communications down this was the last remaining communication hub remaining and its destruction guaranteed a total communications blackout. But by far the most instantly damaging of the seven charges was the one that Harry had placed in the defence force armoury.

When the charge in the ammunition crate went off it raised the temperature of every power cell close by to such a level that they could no longer keep the energy they held contained and within the space of a second they all exploded, releasing all of that stored energy. In turn this was enough to push the radius of the explosion beyond the area allotted to the storage of small arms and to the stock of heavier weapons kept at the base and before the armoury's automated fire suppression system could respond the stored munitions cooked off together, producing a blast that engulfed the entire base and left a crater four times the size of the armoury itself.

Turning around, both Carr and Edwards gasped as a plume of smoke and flames rose up into the air. "There's another." Carr said, setting down her glass and pointing to where a second explosion had occurred and another fire was burning.

Edwards reached into a pocket and produced his combadge, sticking it to his chest and tapping it.

"This is Captain Edwards calling Orbital Observatory Lima Sierra One, do you read me?"

"Yes captain, we read you." a voice replied.

"I'm in the capital now and there have been at least two large explosions. Can you tell us what's happening?" Edwards asked.

"Not yet captain. We're not reading much in the way of communications though, it looks as if the planetary communication systems had been damaged."

"There are backups to the main system." Carr commented, "It would be a very big coincidence if they had suddenly overloaded at the same time."

"And that big blast came from outside the city." Edwards replied before then continuing to question the Observatory crewman, "Can you give us a location on the largest explosion? It looked to be west of the city."

"Yes sir. It looks as if the defence force's main base has been badly damaged."

"Okay thanks. Edwards out." and the captain tapped his combadge again to deactivate it, "We need to get to the main government building." he told Carr, "I better get the others to meet us there."

"And here was me hoping we'd be spending a quiet day together, just the two of us." Carr replied as she took her own combadge from her bag and placed on her chest while Edwards activated his own again.

Even though it was only the first day of the convention there were already more than a thousand people making their way between the various displays, most but no means all of them wearing some form of costume.

"Do you think Bradley will let me use his room to get changed into something less conspicuous?" West asked as she tried to squeeze between Cole and White so that she would be less noticeable.

"Why would you wish to do that lieutenant?" T'Lan asked, "A lot of people seem to want to get to know you and I thought that the purpose of being at an event such as this was to meet people."

"Well the sort of people this outfit is attracting aren't the sort I want to know." West replied, "And when you lot sneaked off and left me on my own I turned around and an eight year old kid burst into tears right in front of me. Now where's Bradley with that room key?"

"He and his date are over there with the Klingons." Nikki told her.

"The Klingons?" West repeated.

"Yeah wouldn't you know it?" White responded, "Klingons don't normally get along with Romulans, but when that Romulan is painted up like a comic book super villain then they all want to get their picture taken posing as if they're doing battle with her."

"I'm a bit worried though." Cole added.

"How so?" West asked.

"Well as payment for posing with them she's getting them to accidentally get in the way of that Laura and

Martin whenever they can." Cole told her, "Nothing serious, but I can sense trouble brewing."
"And what about Bradley himself?" West asked.
"I think he's been made an honorary Klingon." White said, "They think he's tamed a Romulan after all."
"Well I'm going to go and get that key." West said, "Come on, I need you to hide me."
"Actually we're heading to the bar." Cole replied, "Drinks are on me."
"Oh come on." West said, "You can't-" but before she could continue there was a dull rumbling and all the power in the massive convention hall went out. Fortunately it was still daylight outside and enough natural light was able to get in for people to see but all of the powered elements of the displays immediately shut down and there was a series of collective groans while people tried to figure out what was happening.
"This isn't good." Cole said, looking at White.
"No it's not." the fighter pilot agreed.
"What's happening?" Nikki asked, "Was that thunder?"
"It was an explosion." West told her, "I heard plenty like that when I was a member of the Maquis."
Cole was just reaching into his pocket for his combadge when the badges of everyone in the group triggered.
"This is captain Edwards," Edwards' voice said, "there has been a series of explosions around the city. I want everyone to meet myself and Lieutenant Commander Carr at the main government building to liaise with the local authorities as soon as possible. Edwards out."
"Well that explains that." Cole said, "We better get Bradley and be out of here. We need to find a working transporter if we're going to avoid having to walk across the city dressed like this."

Well outside the city the officers from the *Nightfall's* contingent of ground troops had been stalking their prey for several hours now, dividing up into pairs to act as shooter and spotter. Each of them carried a rented hunting rifle and wore a jacket designed to make them easily visible to prevent another hunter accidentally targeting them on which they wore their own combadges so that they could stay in touch.
"There's one up ahead." Heart told Shry when he spotted a deer-like creature through his magnifiers.
"No tag?" Shry asked as he steadied himself against a tree and raised his rifle.
"No tag. You're clear." Heart told him.
Shry breathed in and out slowly then exhaled and held his breath as he lined up on the grazing animal, but just as he was about to squeeze the trigger of his rifle there was a distant rumbling that spooked the creature and caused it to suddenly flee into the undergrowth.
"What the hell was that?" Shry said, lowering his rifle and he and the others turned towards the source of the sound.
"Good God." Heart said, his eyes widening as plumes of smoke of rose up into the sky from over the horizon.
"No way all those are just some accident." Shry said, "The city's under attack."
Heart tapped his combadge.
"All personnel head back to the rendezvous point and stand by for operational deployment." he broadcast, "Sorry everyone, but leave has just been cancelled."

The transporter at the hotel Carr and Edwards were booked into was still functional, therefore in order to reach the headquarters of the government of Letun Secundus all they needed to do was present their Starfleet credentials for the transport to be authorised and a matter of seconds later they were materialising in the government building.
"How may I help you?" a young administrator asked the two Starfleet officers as they stepped off the transporter pad.
"I'm Captain David Edwards of the *USS Nightfall*." Edwards told him, "And this is my executive officer Lieutenant Commander Grace Carr. We're here to offer the assistance of our ship."
"You're from Starfleet?" the administrator asked, looking at their clothing and then at the phasers they wore on their waists.
"Yes. We're from Starfleet." Carr answered, "Now is there a grown up around here we can talk to?"
"Follow me please." the administrator said, "I'll take you to the Prime Minister's office."
"Excellent." Edwards said and then as they were being led from the transporter room he leant closer to Carr and whispered to her, "A grown up?"
"Well he's being an ass." Carr whispered back, "Anyone can see our combadges and if we weren't who we say we are then how would we have been able to beam over here?"
The corridors of the building that Carr and Edwards were led through were bustling with activity and they even saw several groups of armed military personnel hurrying about, most of them looking sternly at the armed Starfleet officers who wore no uniforms. However, the administrator was as good as his word and he escorted them directly to the office of the Prime Minister of Letun Secundus. This room was almost as busy as the corridors were with numerous advisers already crowded around the Prime Minister's desk and bombarding him with damage and casualty estimates.
"Prime Minister Clayton, Captain Edwards and Lieutenant Commander Carr to see you sir." the administrator

told the Prime Minister, "From Starfleet."

"Already here to take over no doubt." a Tellarite in a military uniform muttered.

"Prime Minister, my ship and my crew are at your disposal." Edwards said, ignoring the insult.

"We don't need their help." the Tellarite soldier said, "Our own forces can handle this."

"But as you just pointed out Colonel Bresk, it appears that the capital garrison has been crippled if not wiped out entirely and we are unable to communicate with any units outside the city thanks to the destruction of our communications."

"The *Nightfall* can make up for the lack of local communication hubs Prime Minister." Carr said, "Let us bring the ship into orbit and-"

"And they'll be able to bombard us with their mass accelerators before we could react." Bresk responded, "Hyper accelerated projectiles could level this city in seconds."

"A poor decision given that we'd both be killed along with you." Edwards said and the Tellarite stared at him with a confused expression. Then Edwards looked at Prime Minister Clayton and continued, "Prime Minister, even with my ship in orbit, working with you will be easier if I'm right here in the same building. My crew are professionals and right now you need all the help you can get."

Just then the office door opened again and the group from the *Nightfall* that had attended the convention was shown in, all still in their costumes.

"Captain, we came as soon as we could." Cole said.

"So I see." Edwards replied as Carr bowed her head and covered it with her hand.

"Professionals?" Prime Minister Clayton asked, "Captain, forgive me for saying this but you and your first officer are dressed as if you were planning on conducting an illicit affair while your crew resembles Robin Hood and his merry men."

"I'm not Robin Hood." Cole said, looking round at the others in his group, "Why does no one get that I'm the Green-" but before he could finish his sentence Nayal interrupted.

"Captain," she said to Edwards, "I protest. I am not a merry man."

"These are my senior staff." Edwards said, "Lieutenant Commander Cole, my tactical officer. Lieutenant T'Lan is my science officer, Lieutenant Hamilton my chief helmsman and Lieutenant West my operations manager. Lieutenant Commander White commands the *Nightfall's* fighter squadron. Then we have my Romulan adviser Sub-lieutenant Nayal."

"And the young lady lurking by the door?" Bresk asked, looking at Nikki.

"Oh I'm not an officer, she's my mom." Nikki replied, pointing to Carr.

Then the door was opened again and Heart and Shry were shown into the increasingly crowded office.

"And now we have the Elmer Fudd appreciation society." Prime Minister Clayton said when he saw them.

"Prime Minister, please allow me to introduce Captains Heart and Shry. They command the ground forces assigned to my ship by-" Edwards began.

"So you expect to deploy soldiers from the core worlds to ours?" Bresk interrupted.

"The search and rescue training of the Imperial Guard is without equal." Shry pointed out.

"Perhaps we could make use of their skills colonel." Clayton said, "Though obviously not in any military capacity."

"I suppose that would be acceptable." Bresk reluctantly replied, "Though I would have to insist on their not carrying any arms."

"Makes it a bit difficult to pull people out of wreckage." Nikki muttered and Carr glared at her daughter who immediately averted her gaze.

Edwards looked at Heart and Shry, who in turn exchanged glances and nodded before Shry replied.

"We can do that captain." he said.

"Then I suggest we contact Commander King and have him bring the *Nightfall* into orbit. We can use it as a transporter hub and communications relay station."

"I'm sorry captain but I still can't allow that." Clayton said and the *Nightfall's* crew all turned their attention to him as he explained, "A large number of the people of this world are currently highly sceptical of the Federation. Now I'm sure they'll accept relief teams operating under the command of our own military and even Starfleet security conducting an investigation, but the presence of your ship in orbit will only make matters worse."

"As you wish Prime Minister." Edwards replied.

"Are you serious captain?" Nayal exclaimed, "Someone's just tried to blow up half his city and he's worried about upsetting the locals? Just tell them what's going to be done and don't give them a choice."

"Sub-lieutenant, Nayal isn't it?" Clayton asked, "This is not the Romulan Empire. We do things differently here in the Federation."

"Don't worry Prime Minister, we'll go along with your wishes." Edwards told him, "Lieutenant Commander Carr and I can begin work immediately, though I think it may be an idea if the rest of my people returned to our ship to change."

"Yes, I think that would be a good idea." Clayton agreed, nodding.

“Captain, my attire does not affect my ability to assist you.” T'Lan said, “Perhaps I should remain as well.”
“Very well then.” Edwards said, “The rest of you I want back in under two hours though. Oh and don't forget, the MACOs and Imperial Guard are not being deployed as combat troops, so no unauthorised weapons.”
“Just one last thing.” Clayton said as the crew of the *Nightfall* were about to leave his office, “Lieutenant West?”

“Yes sir?” West asked in reply.

“I don't want to judge your personal life, but I'd rather you avoided the child care facility on your way out while dressed like that.”

King was just emerging from the captain's ready room when the turbolift door opened and a Borg stepped onto the bridge.

"Hello Max." King said, "What brings you up here?"

Lieutenant Maximillian was a part of the breakaway faction of Borg led by the former drone known as Hugh and had been instrumental in the design of the *USS Nightfall*, now serving as its chief engineer.

"I was conducting maintenance on the short range subspace antenna when I noticed a sudden variation in emissions from Letun Secundus." Max replied, "Have you noticed anything unusual commander?"

King shook his head.

"Actually I was just talking with my granddaughter." he said, "The signal looked fine to me. A bit of a delay, but we are some distance from Earth so I didn't think anything of it."

"Long range communications may not be affected. I think that something has happened on Letun Secundus itself."

With the *Nightfall* operating with only a skeleton staff for the duration of the maintenance there was no-one stationed at either the science or tactical stations to alert King of variations to communications output so he and Max headed for the tactical console together to investigate.

"The communications output from the capital has dropped to almost nothing." King said.

"Indeed. But communications from surrounding areas have increased massively." Max added, "Perhaps if we scanned the area we could learn more."

"I'm not sure how well that would go down." King responded, "The locals appear quite displeased with our presence here."

"As you say commander." Max said before the ensign at the operations console called out to them both.

"I have a signal coming in from Captain Edwards now." he said, "It's somewhat distorted though, I think its being relayed to us from the orbital observatory."

"Not the planetary communications hub?" King commented in surprise, "Put him through ensign."

"*Nightfall* this is Edwards."

"We hear you captain." King answered, "I have Max here with me."

"Good. Now listen very carefully because I'm in a hurry so I only want to have to go through this once. There has been a series of explosions in the capital city, the nature of which point towards their not being accidental. The local government has accepted my offer of help in the relief effort and investigation but only under limited circumstances so the *Nightfall* will have to stay where it is. But I'm going to want both of you down here."

"Will you be returning to command the ship captain?" Max asked.

"No, I'm still hoping to be able to persuade the Prime Minister that we can be more effective if we can bring the *Nightfall* into orbit. Likewise I'll need every senior officer to help me. Carr and T'Lan have remained with me while we set up an operations centre here but the others are on their way back to you. I'll probably be sending further orders for them, but I want you two on the same shuttles when they come back here."

"Understood captain. Is there anything else?" King asked.

"No, that's all for now. Edwards out."

Harry stood on his balcony again and watched parts of the city burn. One by one the rest of his group appeared behind him as if from nowhere and he turned to face them.

"Well done." he said, "I'd say that given the damage we've inflicted it will be at least a month before the authorities can restore everything to the way it was, even with Starfleet's help."

"Starfleet will be looking for us." Sarah pointed out, "And their communications won't be disrupted like the local investigators' will be."

"Don't worry." Harry replied, "Starfleet involvement has always been a part of our plan. I want you all to go out into the city and watch for any signs of Starfleet activity. Then do whatever you can to stir up trouble, the messier the better. Ideally we want footage of Starfleet officers firing phasers at demonstrators."

"And if they don't?" Syran asked.

"Then we'll just have to take more direct action that makes it look like they did." Harry answered.

The room provided to the crew of the *Nightfall* for use as an operations centre was spartan, with just a handful of desks, chairs and basic computer terminals available for their use. However, T'Lan, who had now dispensed with the wig and mask portion of her costume, had been able to connect with the local hard-wired communication network rapidly and was already building up a database of the information being collected from the site of each suspected terrorist attack.

"Tricorder scans by rescue workers have detected identical anomalous chemical compounds at each location captain." the Vulcan observed.

"The footprint of an explosive?" Edwards asked as he and Carr looked over T'Lan's shoulder at her computer display.

"Enough to identify a type?" Carr added.

"I believe so." T'Lan replied, "But this computer is not currently configured to conduct such an analysis. We must either request the local authorities carry out such a test or wait until reinforcements arrive from the *Nightfall* with tricorders. Then I will be able to copy this data across and run the test myself."

"A pity we only thought to bring along phasers." Carr said to Edwards, who nodded in agreement.

"T'Lan flag that information but just keep logging all the information you can for now. We'll wait and see exactly what we've got and take it to the locals in one go rather than feeding them information piecemeal."

"Yes captain. I have been able to access security camera footage from areas around three of the targets. It is possible that the perpetrators were caught on some of them." T'Lan replied.

"That would be handy." Carr said, "Then we could get the locals to run a face recognition algorithm and see if they can come up with a name for us."

T'Lan continued to search out any information being generated about the explosions, no matter how trivial it appeared at first glance while Carr and Edwards instead worked to familiarise themselves with the local government organisation. Though the Prime Minister had accepted the assistance of the *Nightfall's* crew it was clear that there were those who had reasons to not want them there and the Starfleet officers felt it would be better if they did not have to rely on any of the locals more than necessary. Knowing who to approach with specific requests seemed like the best way to minimising this interaction by cutting out asking the wrong people.

While this was happening no one from any local organisation made any contact with them at all to try and co-ordinate their actions and they were not interrupted until eventually the door opened to allow the returning department heads from the *Nightfall* to enter. This was not quite the same group that had gone back to the *Nightfall*, Lieutenant Commander White had remained aboard the ship with the other pilots of his squadron both to protect the cruiser as well as being ready just in case the Starfleet personnel on the ground needed air support. In addition both Captain Heart and Captain Shry had been deployed along with their men to help with the ongoing search and rescue operations at the sites of the explosions. However, to offset this both Doctor King and Max had joined them.

"Ah, now we can get things moving." Edwards said, "Everyone grab a chair and I'll let T'Lan inform you of what she's found so far."

Then as the officers moved chairs into a group so they all faced the same way, with the exception of Max who remained standing instead, Carr noticed Nikki slipping into the room behind them.

"What are you doing back here?" she asked, pulling her daughter aside.

"I figured I could help. I've no studying to do and most of the non-essential systems aboard the *Nightfall* have been shut down. I'd be bored out of my skull up there."

"Well it's too dangerous down here." Carr said sternly, "You're going back."

"How? Nikki asked, "The ship isn't in transporter range and all the shuttles and runabouts are busy with the rescue effort."

Carr scowled.

"Well you just stay right here. You can run errands but you are not leaving this building." she said before letting go of Nikki and returning to the front of the room where Edwards and T'Lan were in position to brief the rest of the crew.

"Okay this is what we know so far," Edwards began, "there were seven explosions, each one at a different location that occurred simultaneously."

"There was a variation of point four of a second between the first and last primary explosion." T'Lan pointed out.

"Wow. Time to send for raktajino." Hamilton commented but Edwards ignored both comments.

"Some of the primary explosions look to have been used as triggers for much more destructive secondary explosions such as the chain reaction in the local defence fore armoury that demolished most of the planet's largest military base as well as taking out most of their senior staff."

"Casualties?" King asked.

"Variable." Edwards answered, "Very heavy at the military base, lighter elsewhere. These attacks look to have been intended to cause material damage over casualties. For example there have been no reports of additional devices being placed to impede search and rescue efforts. Now I believe T'Lan has some more technical information." and he stepped back, looking at the Vulcan.

"I have isolated a chemical agent present at all of the explosions though without being able to analyse it fully I cannot confirm that it is explosive in nature. I have also reviewed security camera footage from each site that had sensors operating just before the attack. Most of the data from these was corrupted, but I have been able to isolate this one significant image from the starport, where all communication and tracking functions

were destroyed by an explosion in the control tower's computer core. Though complete security records are unavailable, this individual does not appear to have been granted admission to the building but was still able to penetrate the core shortly before the explosion." and T'Lan used her PADD to place an image of a human female on the large viewscreen mounted on the wall behind her.

"Felicity?" West exclaimed.

"What's that lieutenant?" King asked.

"That looks like someone I used to know." West replied, "Back when I was in the Maquis. She was called Felicity Bond. But it can't be her. I mean look at her, she looks exactly the same as when I knew her fifteen years ago."

"So do you." Cole pointed out, "Could she have been in suspended animation as well?"

"You are suggesting that we may be dealing with a group of disgruntled former Maquis members?" T'Lan asked.

"Well it's a possibility." Cole said, "Not everyone from the Maquis was so keen to rejoin the Federation after the war and Letun Secundus was smack bang in the de-militarised zone."

"That's true." West added, "There were a lot of us here."

"Were' being the operative word there though." King said, "The Dominion swept through here even before they occupied it when war broke out. They'll have conducted a purge."

"But they may not have been fully successful." Edwards said and then he looked at West, "Lieutenant, do you know of any places where the Maquis used to meet on this planet?"

"Some yes. But not in the capital." she answered.

"Then you and Mister Hamilton can take a shuttle to try and find these people." Edwards said.

"I don't know." West replied, looking at Hamilton, "These people may not react too well to Starfleet types asking questions."

"Ooh! I'm not Starfleet." Noyal called out, raising her hand and waving it, "Maybe I should go as well. Bradley can wait in the shuttle if they don't like him."

"Okay then, Noyal goes as well and take one of Commander Cole's men just in case there's trouble." Edwards said.

"I think maybe I ought to head out to the military base that was attacked." King added, "If there are still casualties there then I may be able to do more good than I can sat waiting here."

"It would also be useful if the doctor could collect more physical evidence for me." T'Lan said.

"Okay fine." Edwards said, "He can hook up with Heart and Shry there. The rest of us will wait here and sort through whatever is found."

"Lieutenant Commander Cole's assistance would certainly be beneficial captain." T'Lan responded.



Using the transporters from one of the *Nightfall's* two runabouts that were currently orbiting above the capital city, King was able to move rapidly to the site of the military base that had been attacked. As he had expected the area was swarming with people in military uniforms as well as civilian rescue workers. What he was not used to was the sight of MACOs and Imperial Guardsmen wearing helmets without the rest of their body armour however, the wearing of this having been deemed inappropriate to local sensitivities in the same way as the carrying of weapons by them. The result of this was that King was the only person he could see that was actually carrying a phaser.

"You better take one of these." Heart said to King as he walked up to the newly arrived doctor and handed him a spare helmet.

"What for?" King asked, "Have you found more bombs?"

"No, but several of the structures are still unsound and could come down at any time of we're unlucky."

King took the helmet and placed it on his head.

"Right then, where are the wounded?" he asked.

"This way. The locals have set up a triage centre." Heart told him and he began to lead king away, both unaware that they were being watched.

Harry and Syran watched the continuing rescue effort from a hill that overlooked the military base, focusing on the clothing worn by the rescue workers. Most of the rescuers wore either civilian attire or the uniforms of the local defence forces. But also amongst them were numerous humans and Andorians in alternative uniforms.

"MACOs and the Imperial Guard." Harry commented as he zoomed in on one group of rescuers from the *USS Nightfall*, "No use for what we want."

"Why not? Syran asked.

"Because they're just planetary defence troops as well. We want to turn people against the Federation itself."

"Then you may want to see this. We have another visitor." Syran told him and Harry turned to see the newly arrived King speaking with Heart before the pair walked away together.

"Ah, now that's better." Harry said, "We can work with that."

"What? With a single science division officer? He's probably just a doctor come to help treat the injured."

Syran responded.

"But look at his collar." Harry said and Syran zoomed in on the blue coloured collar of King's uniform were there were three small gold circles in a row, "See? He's a commander. Now take a look at all of the other military officers here. We've got lieutenants, captains and the occasional major."

"So he outranks them all." Syran commented.

"Exactly. As for treating the injured, I wouldn't say that required a phaser would you?"

"No I wouldn't. A person could easily believe that he'd come to take command of the operation here."

The type nine shuttle was one of eight carried by the *USS Nightfall*, all of which had now been deployed to Letun Secundus. The craft was a compact design that allowed barely enough room for its four occupants as Hamilton piloted it towards the settlement West had identified as one that had been sympathetic to the Maquis before the war.

"I'm still not sure how these people will react to being quizzed by Starfleet." West said.

"Then perhaps I ought to ask the questions." Nayal suggested.

"That Romulan uniform isn't likely to be any more welcome than ours." West told her, "A Klingon one may get better results."

"Perhaps we should go back to the convention and get some." Hamilton said and West snarled.

"No chance." she said.

"What, worried they'll recognise you as the woman who dresses like someone who likes to-"

"Cut it out Bradley." West interrupted.

"What he's saying only seems fair to me." Nayal said, "You've made fun of his hobby ever since I've known you both. No he gets to do the same."

"Well we're not going back there and that's final." West said.

"You do realise that Bradley's in command here don't you?" Nayal said, "After all he's passed-"

"That's not important Nayal." Hamilton said before she could explicitly remind West of her failure to pass the bridge command test.

"Okay, but if it helps I've still got my costume on under my uniform." Nayal said.

"No time to wash it off huh?" West asked..

“Actually I figured that since Bradley painted it on me it should be him to clean it off.” Nayal replied.

“That does sound fair.” Bradley added with a smile.

“Oh knock it off.” West said.

“Maybe the captain and Lieutenant Commander Carr would let us use their hotel room since they're too busy to.” Nayal said and West frowned.

“What room? They just went for a meal.” she said.

“Oh didn't you hear? Those MACOs who flew us here from the *Nightfall* that first time found a copy of their booking form on a PADD one of them dropped.”

“It wasn't the honeymoon suite again was it?” Hamilton asked. Then he pointed through the cockpit canopy at an area of open ground that had been concreted over, “There's the landing field.” he said, “I'm taking us in.”

The shuttle touched down to no fanfare. No locals headed towards it to greet the new arrivals from Starfleet who disembarked and took a look around. There were several other shuttles of various types, including some that looked to be Starfleet cast offs on other landing pads but of more interest was the single warp capable ship there. This vessel had a similar design to the Peregrine-class fighters carried aboard the *Nightfall*, but was somewhat larger and clearly older than any of them were.

“A Maquis fighter.” Hamilton commented.

“Possibly.” West replied, “Though don't forget the Maquis just used whatever we could get. Not all of those ships found their way into our armoury and there's no proof that whoever that belongs to is anything other than a law abiding citizen.”

“But if this ship is a type that the Maquis used then it at least suggests we may be on the right track for finding some of them.” Nayal pointed out.

“Yes it does.” Hamilton said before turning to West, “So are we just going to stand here and wait for the owner of that ship to come back or shall we go and find someone who may be able to answer our questions?”

“Last time I was here there was a bar over there.” West answered, “I suggest we start there.” and she began to walk away.

“So the Maquis gather in this bar then do they?” Nayal asked as the others followed West.

“Sort of. The guy who ran it was one of us.”

Arriving at the building West had identified as a bar the Starfleet team discovered that it was still used for this purpose and they proceeded inside. As soon as they stepped through the door a number of the patrons of the gloomy establishment looked in their direction and glared. The reaction of these individuals was noticed by others and it soon became apparent that most of the patrons were staring at them.

“Perhaps you should wait outside.” Hamilton said to the security guard that had accompanied them and the man nodded before withdrawing.

“Okay, let's try the bar.” West said and doing her best to avoid making eye contact with anyone she walked towards the bar where the large Bolian stood behind it was giving the appearance of deliberately avoiding looking at them. He maintained this even when the trio was standing right in front of the bar until West spoke to him, “We're hoping you may be able to help us.” she said and the Bolian frowned as he turned towards West and stared directly at her. Then his expression changed to a wide grin.

“Jenna?” he said, “Jenna West?”

“Yes.” West replied.

“It's me, Toll Combra.”

“Toll?” Jenna repeated, “Oh my God I didn't recognise you.”

“I got older. But you don't look like you've aged a day in fifteen years. How have you managed that?”

“Long story.” West said.

“I heard you'd been killed when the Cardies came through the DMZ. We lost a lot of good people then.” Toll said. Then he looked at West's uniform and at Hamilton and Nayal, “So what's with the fancy dress costume?” he asked.

“You heard about that?” Nayal asked, “She claimed it was an accident that she ended up looking like a-”

“He means my uniform!” West snapped.

“You're not back with Starfleet are you?” Toll asked.

“Yes I am Toll. From what I hear the DMZ is gone and the Cardassians can't threaten us anymore.” West answered.

“Yeah, the DMZ is gone but the Federation just moved right back in.” Toll said.

“Do you know anyone that may be getting back into your old business?” Hamilton suddenly asked, “Only targeting the local government instead of the Cardassians?”

Toll frowned.

“Toll, we're looking for Felicity Bond. Do you remember her?” West asked.

“Oh yeah, I remember here. Some Jem'Hadar stuck a knife through her.”

“So she's dead?” Hamilton asked and Toll frowned.

"Yes mister Starfleet man, she's dead. That's what happens when Starfleet just sits back and watches while good people fight for their homes. The Cardies dragged her body off though so there's no grave for you to visit if that's what you want."

"If the Cardassians recovered the body then maybe she wasn't dead after all." Nayal said, "They could have patched her up and frozen her, just like you."

"Are you saying that Felicity is still alive?" Toll asked, looking at each of the group.

"We think she carried out an attack on the starport control tower in the capital." West told him.

"Listen Jenna," Toll said sternly, "the Maquis is gone. Oh there are some of us still alive but we're not in the business of blowing stuff up any more. So I can tell you that there is no way that Felicity Bond is out there waging a guerilla campaign against anyone."

"What about a relative?" Nayal asked, "A daughter or niece that may resemble her?"

Toll looked at West to give his answer.

"Didn't you tell your new friends how Felicity ended up with us?" he asked her and Hamilton and Nayal both glanced at West.

"Cardassian terrorists killed her entire family." West told them, "She joined to get revenge."

"And look where it got her." Toll said, "So no, Felicity Bond is not attacking anyone. Let alone her own people. Now get out of here, I don't serve Starfleet officers while they're on duty and you lot look like you're on duty."

"I'm not from Starfleet." Nayal said, "Could I get a kali-fal?"

"Sorry, fresh out." Toll replied.

"Come on let's go." West said and the group turned to leave, still watched closely as they headed for the door. But just as they reached it Toll called out.

"Jenna." he said and she turned around, hoping that he was about to change his mind and offer some piece of information he had been withholding. But the next words from his mouth were not what she was hoping for at all, "You need to remember whose side you're supposed to be on." he said before he turned away from her again.

So far Nikki's role in the investigation had been just what her mother had said it would be. Every so often someone would need something trivial and be too busy to go and fetch it, a drink, a snack or some insignificant piece of equipment that they did not have to hand and Nikki would be sent to fetch it. The nearest replicator that served food and drinks was located in a communal area where the staff who worked in the government building could take breaks. The room was fairly busy each time she went into it due to the extra staff being called in to deal with the current crisis and Nikki soon became used to standing in line waiting for her turn at the replicator. While she waited she turned her attention to a large wall mounted display screen that showed a local news broadcasting channel that unsurprisingly seemed to be showing continuous coverage of the aftermath of the explosions.

There was no sound to go with the images, the display's speakers having been muted, but each report was accompanied by text at the bottom of the screen as well as a scrolling information bar and it was here that Nikki saw something that shocked her.

STARFLEET SEIZING CONTROL OF GOVERNMENT?

"Hey kid are you going to get what you want?" the man behind her in the queue asked and Nikki suddenly realised that it was her turn for the replicator.

"No." she replied, "I need to be somewhere else." and she ran from the room.

"Dumb kid." the man said, "Who let her in the building anyway?"

Nikki ran all the way back to the room being used by the crew of the *Nightfall* and as soon as she was back inside she grabbed hold of a nearby PADD, selecting a larger type for its superior display and began to try to connect to the local computer network.

"Did you get my coffee?" Edwards asked.

"Not yet, I'm busy." Nikki answered without thinking.

"Nikki!" Carr snapped, "Just what do you think you're doing."

"Trying to get the local news but I can't get this thing to connect." Nikki replied.

"Try going to the general connection menu and searching for open remote ports." Max suggested.

"Thanks Max." Nikki said, "A-ha! Got it!"

"Nikki, I've had enough of this. If you can't act like an adult-" Carr began before Nikki rushed over to her and Captain Edwards and thrust the PADD towards them.

"Look at what they're saying about us." she said and the two officers both started to watch the broadcast.

"-definitely divided into three main groups." one of the individuals involved in the broadcast was saying and the image changed from one of several people sat round a table to a map of the area surrounding the capital city with three locations marked using the emblem of Starfleet, "The largest group is here at Fort Freedom. Now supposedly these are independent forces from Earth and Andoria conducting search and rescue operations but they were deployed from the Akira-class *USS Nightfall* that is still maintaining a position in the system and an eye-witnesses have confirmed the presence of a Starfleet officer who has arrived to take

command of the base. Secondly is the starport where Starfleet engineers are in the process of setting up emergency tracking and communication equipment that they will have control of while the entire starport perimeter has been surrounded by heavily armed Starfleet security staff. Finally we have confirmed reports that soon after the attacks the commanding officer of the *USS Nightfall*, a Captain Donald Edwards, entered Government House and announced that his personnel would be occupying the building to ensure that the Prime Minister's office did not attempt to impede their operations."

"Oh that's ridiculous!" Carr exclaimed.

"They didn't even get the captain's name right." Nikki commented.

"Yes, because that's what's really wrong with all that." Cole said, "Captain, that broadcast is going to cause no end of trouble. Those so called heavily armed security staff have phaser two's and one rifle per squad. All set to stun I might add. And our ground troops aren't armed at all."

"I agree." Edwards replied, "I doubt that anything we say will change anyone's mind though. I better go and see the Prime Minister. Maybe if his office puts out a release quickly enough we can put this right." then he walked out of the room.

"This is all going to go really badly isn't it?" Nikki said, looking at the four Starfleet officers still in the room.

"I do not see why Nikki." T'Lan replied, "The local population will calm down when their Prime Minister assures them that we have not taken control of their government."

"Seriously?" Cole responded, "Our captain tells their Prime Minister to make a speech and he promptly does as he's told? You don't think that looks like we've taken over?"

"Lieutenant commander, I take it you think that this is another example of a predominantly human population being told one thing and automatically believing the opposite?" T'Lan asked.

"T'Lan, you always seem to know exactly what I'm thinking." Cole replied.

"Well I think that while the captain is trying to get the media to put things right, I'm going to warn everyone to watch their backs out there." Carr said.

Toll was just heading back to the bar after depositing trash in the recycling units behind the building when Harry suddenly placed a hand on his shoulder from behind.

"How do you do that?" Toll exclaimed, gasping from the surprise.

"Do what?" Harry asked with a smile.

"Just appear without even the sound of a transporter operating?"

"Never mind how it's done, just tell me why you've been leaving me messages." Harry told him.

"Starfleet were here." Toll said and Harry frowned briefly, surprised that Starfleet had been able to connect the Bolian with anything at all.

"And you contacted me afterwards? Are you trying to lead them right to me Toll? I thought you knew better than that." Harry said angrily.

"I know what I'm doing. I used a terminal that can't be linked to me." Toll replied, "But here's the weird thing Harry, the woman from Starfleet used to be Maquis and she was supposed to have died before the war."

"Let's face facts Toll, those were chaotic times for the Maquis. A lot of people went to ground."

"Yeah, but she was asking questions about someone else who was supposed to have died around that time. In fact I even got told how she died. But somehow she's come back as well and it just so happens that she's planting bombs around the place. I don't suppose you'd like to explain that would you?"

Harry smiled again.

"Toll, you did us a great favour by telling us what you knew and you can rest assured that my organisation still intends to drive the Federation off Letun Secundus just as we promised. But you have to accept that we aren't going to tell you everything. After all, what you don't know, you can't tell to someone else. Surely you of all people must understand that. Now get back to your bar, your customers will be waiting for you."

Toll snarled, not happy at being kept in the dark over actions that could land him in serious trouble. But from what little he knew of the man he knew only as 'Harry', Toll did not think that he was the sort of person to change his mind easily and so he turned away and continued to head back to the bar. However, when he did not hear the sound of footsteps behind him he paused to look back around, only to find the corridor behind him completely empty.

7.

The first signs of trouble were when several vehicles approached the perimeter of Fort Freedom, halting only after the duty guards threatened to open fire. The doors to the vehicles promptly opened and the passengers disembarked, yelling abuse at the guards as they advanced towards the perimeter on foot and waving placards bearing anti-Federation and anti-Starfleet slogans and images. Most popular was one bearing the logo of Starfleet crossed out in red.

Positioned in view of the main gate where the crowd was being joined by more protesters arriving behind them, Heart tapped his combadge.

"Stand to." he broadcast to all of the MACOs and Imperial Guardsmen on the base, "We have a crowd gathering at the main gate and I don't think they're here to offer help with the relief effort."

"I'm on my way." Shry responded and about a minute later he came rushing up to Heart with a small of Andorians behind him. By this time the protest had expanded to a crowd of several hundred people, all of them yelling loudly while the guards of the gate stood back and waited for orders.

All of a sudden one of the protesters made a rush for the fence surrounding the base and leapt up at it, grabbing hold of the chain link and pulling himself towards the top. Two of the guards reacted by rushing to head him off, standing ready to arrest him when he reached the top and leapt over. But in doing this they left the gate undermanned and the crowd surged forwards, pushing past the remaining guards who dared not use their phasers on unarmed protesters without authorisation.

"Oh this isn't good." Heart said, tapping his combadge again, "All personnel to the gate, the crowd have forced their way onto the base."

Just then something hurtled close past Heart's head.

"Lookout!" Shry yelled, pulling the human back before another object passed through where he had been standing. Looking around, Heart saw that some of the crowd had halted just inside the gate where debris from the explosion had been piled up and they were grabbing hold of fist sized chunks of metal and concrete to use as improvised missiles to hurl at the Imperial Guardsmen who were easily identifiable as being from off world.

"Can we get the doctor up here?" one of the Andorians, a platoon lieutenant, asked."

"Who's hurt?" Heart asked, looking around but not seeing any injuries to the Andorians who had been able to take cover swiftly.

"He has a phaser." the Andorian replied and Heart and Shry looked at one another.

"That Tellarite pig will be furious." Shry said.

"At least we'll be alive to hear about it." Heart replied and then Shry activated his combadge.

"Doctor King do you read me?" he asked.

"King here captain."

"The trouble Lieutenant Commander Carr warned us about has arrived. We could do with that phaser of yours." Shry told him.

"Hold on captain. I'll be with you as soon as I can."

"Thank you doctor. But hurry, this crowd looks angry." Shry said, ducking as another lump of debris was thrown in his direction.

"One phaser may not be enough." Heart commented as he peered around the corner he was using for cover at the crowd just as another group of vehicles arrived, "We need the locals to get into gear and do something useful."

"A pity that the only ones I've seen with phasers were down there guarding that gate." Shry replied.

Syran pushed forwards through the crowd that had by this point given up on all being able to get through the gate and groups were now helping one another over the fence as well. The guards had been completely overwhelmed and had fallen back to the guardhouse and locked themselves in. Unconcerned with them the crowd was happy to swarm right past in search of the Federation forces they had been led to believe were taking direct control of their world.

But right now Syran was more interested in the guards, or more accurately in their equipment. Though the guards had dithered about firing even with weapons set to stun they had been able to keep hold of all their phasers and they were now locked inside the guardhouse with them. However, even an armoured door meant little to Syran.

Looking in through a reinforced window he saw the four guards all huddled around a communication terminal as they desperately tried to get help. But in doing so they had left themselves vulnerable to attack without realising it. Syran ducked behind the guardhouse where no one could see him and vanished from view, reappearing moments later inside the small building but behind the four guards and he struck immediately,

slamming the head of one guard against the terminal screen hard enough to crack it. Startled, the guards began to turn and Syran lashed out at another, striking him in the neck with enough force to crush his windpipe and the guard drooped to the floor, choking.

Had Syran been an ordinary Vulcan he could have simply used the infamous nerve pinch to quickly disable the two remaining guards, but he lacked this skill and instead continued to make use of the physical strength that his body afforded him instead. This meant that when one of the remaining guards drew his phaser, Syran was able to seize his arm and twist it enough to break it at the elbow before head butting the guard with enough force to render him unconscious.

"No, please!" the final guard exclaimed as Syran took hold of the phaser belonging to the other guard, but the Vulcan ignored the plea and shot him from point blank range. The weapon was set only to a light stun, but at this range it was enough to incapacitate the final guard as well. Syran was now left with four dead or unconscious guards that he needed to dispose of. Disintegrating them with a phaser was one option, but that would leave physical evidence that Syran wanted to avoid and so instead he crouched down by each guard in turn and placed a hand on their chests. As he did so each guard, whether dead or alive simply vanished and when all four were gone Syran also disappeared, taking the phaser with him.

He reappeared inside a heavily damaged building holding not only the phaser he had used to shoot the guard but also a second phaser removed from another guard's holster.

"For me?" Felicity asked, holding out her hand.

"Of course." Syran replied as he handed her the weapon, "Now all we need are some suitable targets."

"Lieutenant Hamilton, this is Captain Edwards." Edwards announced over the shuttle's communication system, his combadge signal relayed via one of the orbiting runabouts.

"Reading you captain." Hamilton replied.

"Doctor King has just checked in from Fort Freedom. He says they're under attack from a local mob."

"Are they armed?" West asked when she heard this.

"Just rocks it seems. This is a protest that's getting out of hand." Edwards told her, "The local police are en route, but your shuttle can get there quicker. I want you to reinforce our troops there and provide air cover."

"Are you ordering us to fire on the crowd?" Nayal asked, leaning forwards.

"No I am not sub-lieutenant. The Federation does not perform strafing runs on demonstrators, no matter how violent they are." Edwards answered, "I want you to use the shuttle to give our people on the ground eyes in the sky, not fire support."

"Understood captain." Hamilton said, "Changing course. Our ETA is six minutes."

King kept low as he darted between buildings with his phaser in his hand and medical kit slung over his shoulder. On several occasions since leaving the emergency first aid centre that had been set up he saw small groups of protesters running through the base but he avoided contact with them, instead leaving it to the local troops as well as MACOs and Imperial Guard to wrestle with them until they were subdued and could be restrained. Approaching the main gate he saw that Heart and the Andorians were still coming under attack from a group of protesters that appeared to have no desire to get any closer to them. Though they were in cover at least one Andorian was bleeding from under his helmet where it appeared that he had been struck by a flying rock but King headed for Heart and Shry first.

"Here you go." he said as he handed his phaser to Shry, "Its set to level one."

"Thanks." Shry replied, adjusting the setting of the phaser to a heavier stun and widening the area of effect from a narrow beam to a wider cone.

"You're welcome." King said, looking back towards the injured Andorian before adding, "Now if you don't mind it looks like I have a patient." and he dashed towards the Andorian.

"So what do you think?" Shry asked, "Single volley to stun the lot?"

"Make sure you do get them all though." Heart said as he nodded in agreement, "If any get away they'll probably go and get more of their friends."

"Okay, here goes." Shry said as he lined up the phaser at the centre of the group hurling debris at them. But when the sound of phaser fire filled the air it was not from the weapon held by Shry and there were screams along with it.

An alarm sounded in the shuttle's cockpit as it made a pass over the base.

"We've got phaser fire!" West exclaimed as she looked at the sensors.

"This is Lieutenant Hamilton, is anyone down there firing?" Hamilton transmitted.

"Not us." Heart responded, "We were about to stun some of the protesters but we've not had the chance."

"That's no stun setting." West commented, "I'd say level six or seven from these readings."

"I'm taking us down." Hamilton said, "Shields up." and he turned the shuttle towards the source of the phaser fire.

On the ground below them, the occupants of the shuttle saw a crowd of protesters that had made their way

as far as a parade ground and lacking any idea of what to do next had been content to start chanting loudly while a handful of their number recorded their actions. But the size of the group made it a target too tempting to miss and short bursts of phaser fire erupted from a nearby building to pick off individuals seemingly at random. All of this recorded.

"Captain Heart, hostile fire is coming from the building located east of the parade ground." Hamilton signalled as he looked down, expecting the energy blasts to start heading up towards the shuttle as it flew directly over the crowd of panicking protesters. Several of them had been hit and the rest were torn between seeking what little cover there was to be had and attempting to flee." Be advised there are casualties amongst the crowd."

"Copy that lieutenant." Heart replied, "We're going to try and get there. But this may take some time, we have only one phaser between us."

"Understood captain. Hamilton out." Hamilton said and then he looked at West who nodded before he could speak.

"Set us down." she said, drawing her phaser. Then she looked at the security guard sat behind her and saw that he too had drawn his sidearm.

Hamilton brought the shuttle down to the roof of the building that was the source of the phaser fire, hovering just above it while West and the security officer leapt out of the back and rushed towards the doorway leading inside. Then he lifted off again and began to circle, both him and Nayal watching the building carefully for any signs of the mysterious gunmen. But the sight of the shuttle appeared to have spooked them and the phaser fire ceased.

"Perhaps we should leave." Felicity suggested but Syran shook his head.

"That shuttle dropped someone off on the roof, I'm sure of it," he said, "and given that there are civilians out there they're bound to have their phasers set to stun. That gives us the advantage. All we need to do is get them to fire a few shots at us before we depart and they'll never be able to prove that it wasn't their phasers that were used to fire on the crowd."

"Very neat." Felicity replied, "So do we stay together or split up?"

"Split up. We can confuse them more that way. But reset your phaser to level one and don't actually shoot any of them. Any physical damage could show that we were here."

a.

West and the security guard darted from doorway to doorway, checking each room and corridor in turn as they searched the heavily damaged building. Though the supporting structure of the building had remained intact, some of the less reinforced parts had suffered damage when the armoury exploded and every room was strewn with debris from collapsed ceilings, shattered windows and fittings that had come loose. Had she brought a tricorder with her, then West could have simply scanned for the gunmen but she had not considered one necessary when she went to speak with Toll so now her own eyes and ears were all she had. Another complication was the presence of civilians close by. It was quite possible that some of them could have entered the building before the shooting started and were still hiding here. The only thing that West could do about this was make sure that she saw a weapon in the hands of anyone she was tempted to fire at.

They reached a landing that consisted of a walkway running around the outside of the room and open space in the centre that allowed them to see down onto lower floors and approached this cautiously, peering over to see if they could see anyone below them. But there was a sudden flash of a phaser beam that went wide, striking the wall behind them and both West and the security guard looked up to see a figure vanishing back into a corridor opposite them.

"I've got him!" the guard snapped, rushing around the walkway, firing his phaser as he went to keep the figure pinned down.

But the damage that the building had suffered had affected the walkway and the weight of the guard was enough to trigger a collapse. From her position, West saw the walkway's supports start to crumble and heard the sound of something breaking free.

"Get back!" she shouted, but her warning came too late and there was an almighty crash as the walkway gave way under the guard and he dropped down with it. Letting go of his phaser, the guard was just about able to grab hold of the edge of what remained of the walkway while the collapsed section crashed down through the levels below until finally reaching the lowest floor, "Hold on." West shouted, "I'll be right there." and she began to walk around the walkway in the opposite direction to the one the guard had taken, hoping to be able to reach him before he lost his grip. But her rate of progress was slow, made so by the need to check that the walkway could support her weight with each step rather than just rushing around it as the guard had done and even this became a complete halt when the mysterious figure fired again, aiming towards West and missing her only narrowly.

Ducking behind the safety barrier around the walkway for cover, West returned fire despite not having a clear target. The fact that she was being shot at was good enough for her. Then she heard a scream and for a moment West thought she had hit her target, despite not having a proper line of sight. But then to her horror she realised that the scream had come from the security as his grip finally gave out and he plummeted to the floor several storeys below. West gasped as she looked over the barrier and saw the guard lay on top of the rubble from the collapsed walkways with blood splattered around him.

Then she saw another figure appear and she was about to aim her phaser when she recognised Captain Heart rushing to the fallen man.

"Captain!" she called out and he looked up at her, "Is he-" she began before Heart responded with what she feared had to be the case.

"He's dead." he called out.

"There's one up here." West shouted, "Fifth floor."

"Okay, I'm on my way up." Heart replied, reaching into the debris and picking up a metal rod that had been used to reinforce part of the building to use as a weapon and he ran towards a nearby stairwell, disappearing from view.

The phaser fire from the corridor had ceased now and West crept forwards, every creak of the floor making her worry that either it was about to collapse or whoever it was that had been shooting at her would use the sound to target her more accurately than they had been able to so far. But West reached the corridor without being shot or falling to her death and she advanced down it with her phaser held level.

A figure leapt out of a doorway and fired, the beam hitting the ceiling above West's head without doing any damage and West returned fire, her rapidly aimed shot striking a door frame as her opponent dived through it. West paused, suspecting a trap.

"Starfleet officer!" she shouted, "I order you to throw out your weapon and surrender."

West doubted that the demand would have any effect, but it gave her more time to consider what she was going to do. As expected there was no response and West advanced towards the doorway. Pausing again right by it before suddenly spinning around to point her phaser into the corridor beyond. She was just in time to see her opponent vanishing around a corner and West rushed after them, still keeping her phaser held

ready just in case they doubled back. Following the fleeing figure, West found herself running down another corridor that led back to the landing and as she reached this West finally saw her opponent properly as she was making her way around the walkway.

"Felicity?" she called out and the other woman stopped and turned to look at her, keeping her phaser by her side, "Drop it!" West shouted, pointing her own phaser at Felicity just as Heart burst out of the stairwell on the opposite side of the landing, separated from West by the collapsed section of walkway.

"I think not." Felicity replied and she began to raise her weapon towards Heart.

West did not give her time to take aim, firing before the phaser was pointed at the MACO. The beam struck Felicity in the centre of her chest and she staggered back. But rather than collapse from the effects of the beam she just looked up and smiled.

"Oh that's just great." Heart exclaimed as he ducked, guessing at the nature of the woman. Then he looked towards West, "Forget stun. You need a lethal shot." he called out to her and West glanced down at her phaser as she adjusted it before taking aim again. But just as she was about to fire she suddenly found herself unable to press the trigger. She knew that she was facing a corpse that had been reanimated and was being guided by some unknown force but she still could not manage to open fire. It felt to West as if someone else had hold of her and was preventing her from firing.

"What are you waiting for?" Heart yelled, "Do it!"

"Felicity drop the phaser." West shouted, unable to act. But instead Felicity climbed up onto the safety barrier and simply hurled herself from it. As soon as she dropped from view West felt her thumb press down on her phaser and the bright red beam sliced into the wall right behind where Felicity had been stood. Then both she and Heart leant over the safety barrier and looked down to find that Felicity had vanished, never reaching the floor far below.

"What the hell were you playing at?" Heart demanded as he made his way around the walkway, taking care not to trigger another collapse, "You had her. All you had to do was pull the trigger. Now God knows where she'll crop up again."

"I know." West replied, "I don't know what happened. I just froze when I saw her."

"Do you know who she was?" Heart asked and West nodded.

"She was in the Maquis at the same time as I was." she replied, "She's called Felicity."

"Yeah, I got that." Heart said, "Well your old friend is already dead, you know that don't you? All that was was a walking corpse." and then he halted right in front of West and held out his hand, "Now give me that phaser. You need to remember whose side you're supposed to be on."

West gave Heart the weapon and he looked around.

"Okay so where have you already checked?" he asked.

"We were working our way down." West replied and Heart nodded.

"Then let's keep going that way." he said, "Just call out if you see anything."

"Look." Nayal said, pointing through the shuttle's canopy. But she was not looking at the building that Hamilton was still circling, instead she was focused on the main road approaching the base. Looking around for himself Hamilton saw that there was a column of vehicles heading in from the capital. Exact details were not yet visible with the unaided eye but it was obvious that this was not another group of protesters coming to hurl abuse or debris at the MACO and Imperial Guard rescue teams. Each vehicle was topped with blue flashing lights made all the more noticeable by the now rapidly fading light that made it obvious that they belonged to the planetary emergency services and since there were already adequate rescue workers present that could only mean that the police were finally responding to the protest.

"This is Hamilton, police reinforcements are en route. I estimate arrival in five minutes." Hamilton broadcast.

"Thanks lieutenant." Heart's voice replied, "One suspect has escaped but West and I are continuing to search the building."

"Can you define 'escaped'?" Hamilton asked.

"Isn't it when someone gets away and you can't catch them?" Nayal responded.

"Not over this channel." Heart answered, "But be aware that phaser stun will have no effect if there are more."

"Oh-oh." Hamilton said, looking at Nayal, "I've got a very bad feeling about this."

Syran heard the sound of distant sirens as he continued to move downwards through the building, trying to stay ahead of Heart and West and planning to attempt to circle back around them if he got the opportunity. But the imminent arrival of reinforcements meant that staying risked his encountering local police officers and if that happened it would be obvious that someone other than one of the *Nightfall's* crew had fired on the crowd outside. Reluctantly he opted to withdraw earlier than planned, vanishing as he stepped forwards just moments before Heart turned the corner at the end of the corridor, pointing his phaser at when Syran had been.

"It's clear." the MACO said.

"But I was sure I heard someone down here." West replied as she looked around the corner as well. "Probably just the building shifting." Heart said before he advanced along the corridor.

Toll leant back and sipped at a drink as he watched the media reports from Fort Freedom. Thanks to the recording devices carried by the protesters there was plenty of footage of the protesters being fired upon but given the basic nature of the equipment and the lack of training of those operating it was of relatively poor quality. However, despite these limitations the pictures did an excellent job of showing the unarmed crowd being fired on with phasers from a building.

The reporters commenting on the footage were repeating that the individuals firing on the crowd had yet to be identified but at the same time they stressed that the protesters were there to express their opposition to the Federation expanding its power over the planet.

Toll sighed as he set his drink down. When he had been approached to help a group dedicating itself to withdrawing Letun Secundus from the Federation it had been on the understanding that although subterfuge and some covert direct action would be used, the innocent would be protected. Then when bombs had been planted the casualties had been justified to him on the grounds that they were people working for a government that still supported Federation membership. But this latest incident was a direct attack on civilians who had most likely been incited to act by the same group that was responsible for firing on them and Toll knew that he could no longer just sit back while his people died for some shadowy group that was looking increasingly like it was not interested in what the people of Letun Secundus wanted at all.

The arrival of the police made it possible for the personnel from the *USS Nightfall* to be evacuated while the protesters were dealt with. Most of them were beamed in groups via the orbiting runabouts to the starport where protesters had been less keen to storm an area guarded by Starfleet security staff. However, both Captain Heart and Captain Shry instead joined the Starfleet officers in returning to Government House where Captain Edwards was waiting for them to report what they had seen.

"The media are going wild." Edwards announced as the group entered the room.

"It's a set up." Heart replied, "Some old friends are trying to get Letun Secundus to secede."

"You mean those walking corpses?" Carr asked, "They really are here?"

"Felicity was there." West told her, "But she looks the same age as she did then and the former Maquis member I spoke with told me she'd died before the war."

"He also said that you died." Nayal pointed out.

"Maybe," Heart said, "but Lieutenant West didn't just keep standing after being hit with a stun blast before throwing herself off a landing and somehow managing to miss the floor entirely."

"Was she alone?" Cole asked.

"Not according to the footage on the news." Edwards replied, "There were at least two of them firing from that building."

"Then the other must have left before we saw them." West said.

"They'll be back." Carr commented.

"Yes they will." Edwards agreed, "But rather than just waiting for them to launch another attack I want us to keep on with our own investigation." then he looked at T'Lan, "Lieutenant, what do you have?"

"I have been able to identify the compound used in the explosives." T'Lan replied, "It is a commercial compound used across the Federation for more than forty years now."

"So not something difficult to get hold of then?" Hamilton commented.

"No." Cole said, "But it is easy to trace. Isn't it?" and he looked at T'Lan.

"Batches of the compound are chemically marked and part of the residue left behind following each blast was this marking. I have traced it all to a batch delivered to this world eighteen years ago. Samples have previously been recovered from the sites of Maquis attacks."

"So we have a dead Maquis and explosives used by the Maquis." King said, "Question is how did whoever it is that's reanimating these corpses get their hands on all of them?" and then there was silence as everyone waited for someone else to provide an answer. Eventually it was Captain Edwards that broke the silence.

"Okay I think that now is a good time to break for the night. Lieutenant Commander Carr and I will keep working with T'Lan and Max, neither of who needs to sleep as much as the rest of you."

"I'm fine to stay up longer as well." Nayal added and Edwards nodded.

"Fine, I'm sure that T'Lan can use your help." he said and Nayal smiled at the Vulcan, "In the mean time there are bunks set up for the rest of you."

"What about Nikki?" Cole asked, looking around at where Carr's daughter was lay out on a couch, fast asleep.

"Oh she's fine where she is." Carr replied.

"I need to speak with Lieutenant West." Toll said, staring at the display of the communication terminal in his apartment.

"There is no Lieutenant West here." the Starfleet officer who had answered his call responded.

"She came to see me earlier." Toll said, "Along with another Starfleet officer and a Romulan woman." then for a moment he considered that he may have made a mistake. He had believed West to be dead, just as he had thought Felicity dead. But if the people he had co-operated with to drive the Federation off Letun Secundus were bringing back the dead then maybe West was not all she had seemed either and his supposed allies could have been testing his loyalty.

"Are you certain that she is stationed on Letun Secundus?" the Starfleet officer asked, "There are currently over two hundred officers and enlisted personnel from the *USS Nightfall* here as well."

"I didn't ask, but that sounds likely." Toll said,

"Hang on, I'll transfer you to Government House. The *Nightfall* crew is commanded from there." the officer said and then his image on the screen was replaced by the emblem of Starfleet. But before the transfer could be completed the screen went completely blank and the lights went out. Toll frowned, wondering what had gone wrong before he heard the sound of something being knocked over in another room.

Rushing to the other side of the room Toll opened a drawer and took out a Klingon manufactured disruptor that he had kept hidden for many years and then with this weapon in his hand he crept towards the sound of the disturbance.

All of a sudden someone stepped out from behind a corner and struck Toll in the face with a blow powerful enough to send him sprawling backwards across the floor and the disruptor flying from his grip. The intruder advanced and kicked Toll before he could get to his feet the intruder kicked him in his stomach and knocked the wind from him. Two more figures appeared and rushed forwards to drag Toll to his feet, holding him upright by his arms so he could not fight back and now he saw that all three intruders were dressed entirely in black and wearing masks to hide their faces.

"Hello again Toll." Harry said from beneath his mask, "Allow me to introduce my two good friends Mark and Wolfgang. I must thank you for introducing us. They have proved most loyal in their service, certainly more loyal than you have been."

"What are you talking about?" Toll gasped.

"Oh come on now, did you really think that we would not have placed a tap on your communication terminals both here and at your bar just in case you thought about betraying us as you seem to be in the process of doing? I'm sorry but we just can't have you talking to Starfleet." Then something glinted in what little light there was in the apartment before Harry thrust his knife into Toll.

Mark and Wolfgang let go of the Bolian, letting him fall back to the floor as dark blue blood flowed from the wound in his chest.

"Shouldn't we finish him off?" Mark asked.

"Why bother?" Wolfgang asked, "His lungs are punctured, he's not calling out for help and that wound's not closing. The only question is whether he bleeds out or drowns in his own blood."

"Well that's something we're not going to be around long enough to find out." Harry said, "Come on, let's go." and then all three stepped away from Toll, disappearing as if by magic and Toll finally knew why Harry had been able to suddenly be able to appear behind him.

Alone now, Toll knew that he really was dying and that without a functional communicator to summon help he had no chance in the longer term. But right now he could still try and do something good and he began to drag himself across the floor towards the drawer he had kept the disruptor in and he reached up to pull it loose, spilling the contents on the floor. From amongst these he found a PADD and was just about to activate it when his strength finally failed him and he gave out one last gasp that sprayed blood across the device before he died.

3.

"Lieutenant." Max said quietly, "There's been a call for you." he could see West lay on a bunk, her face dimly lit by a PADD she was reading but she did not respond so the former drone advanced towards her and placed a hand on her shoulder, "Lieutenant." he repeated and West jumped.

"Max be careful!" she exclaimed, "I was sound asleep."

"You were reading." he replied.

"I was?" West said and then she realised that she was indeed holding a PADD.

"Starship command protocols?" Max said when he saw what was on the display, "Have you been studying to resit your test?"

"This is academy stuff." West said, confused, "I guess I must have started reading and accidentally opened the wrong file when I began to nod off."

"Most likely." Max said, "But as I was saying, there has been a call for you."

"A call? Who from?"

"I do not know. The call was originally placed to the orbital observatory but transferred to us here. Unfortunately when I answered the channel had been disconnected at the source. And before you ask it was not my handsome features that frightened the caller off." and Max smiled.

"Did you just make a joke Max?" West asked.

"I do have a sense of humour."

"What, like 'How many drones does it take to change a light bulb?'"

"Four. One to-

"Yes I know." West interrupted as she began to climb out of the bunk. As she did so she accidentally banged her head on the bottom of the bunk above where Cole was asleep. Then while she rubbed her head he murmured.

"T'Lan." he said before becoming silent again and West looked at Max open mouthed.

"Is he saying T'Lan's name in his sleep?" she said.

"That was how it sounded to me." Max replied, "Will we be using this to make fun of him tomorrow? Or rather later today given that it is after midnight."

"Oh Max I think that we can get way more than just one day out of this." West told him as she got up.

When Max and West returned to the room being used by the Starfleet crew as a command centre they found both Carr and Edwards drinking mugs of coffee strong enough that they could be smelt from the doorway.

"Ah lieutenant, someone's been trying to get hold of you." Edwards said.

"So I heard." West replied, "Any luck in finding out who?"

"All we know is that it was a Bolian." Carr answered, "T'Lan is trying to locate the source of the signal."

"Unfortunately the current state of long range communications is making that rather difficult." T'Lan added.

"Well why not use the observatory to trace it?" Nayal asked, "They're the ones that forwarded the message to begin with. Won't they have a record of where it came from? In the Romulan Empire the source, destination and duration was logged by the Tal Shiar."

"There's no need." West said, "It must have been Toll, the former Maquis member I spoke with today. He's the only Bolian I know on this planet."

"Do you know how to get in touch with him?" Edwards asked.

West shrugged.

"I suppose we could try his bar." she said, "Even if he's not there someone ought to know where he is."

"Then take T'Lan and a shuttle and go and find out what he wants. If the bodies of Maquis are being used then maybe a living Maquis is what we need to fight them."

Given that West had had little sleep, T'Lan took the controls of the shuttle as they flew to the landing field close to Toll's bar. There they were told that Toll had finished his shift several hours earlier and gone home. At first the other staff were reluctant to give his address to anyone in a Starfleet uniform but they changed their minds when one of them remembered seeing Toll and West talking to one another when she had last visited and this took them to an apartment block a short distance away from the bar. Standing outside the door, West pressed the bell.

When no reply came, West pressed it again and then knocked on the door itself.

"Toll." she called out, "It's me Jenna. Open up."

But still there was no reply.

"Perhaps he is asleep." T'Lan commented.

"Then he needs to wake up." West replied and she banged her fist on the door, "Come on Toll. You were willing to wake me up, I'm just returning the favour."

At the same time T'Lan reached into the pocket of her jacket and produced a tricorder, then held it against the locking mechanism beside the door.

"Perhaps if I can isolate the correct modulation of the radio frequency identification antenna used in this lock I can bypass it and open the door from here." she said.

"How long will that take?" West asked.

"A domestic lock of this type has over two billion possible combinations." T'Lan said, "So given that my tricorder can manage approximately one point four three seven combinations per second the process may take up to one thousand three hundred and ninety two seconds. Or just over twenty three minutes. But that would only be if the very last combination in the sequence was the correct one."

"Fine. You stand there and try picking the lock and I'll wait over here by the wall." West said and she leant against the wall opposite Toll's apartment door. But after just a few seconds T'Lan's tricorder beeped and the door hissed open.

"Of course if the combination happens to be one that is amongst the first to be attempted we will gain access far faster." T'Lan said as she put her tricorder away and drew a phaser instead.

"You think you'll need that?" West asked.

"I cannot say." T'Lan replied, "Therefore it is more logical to be cautious."

"I get your point." West said and she drew her own phaser before stepping into the apartment.

Inside the apartment was in darkness and when West saw a light switch she tried to activate them.

"There's something wrong with the lights." she said.

"I think it may be all of the internal power." T'Lan replied, "I can see several devices that should have visible displays on them that all appear to be inactive."

"I don't suppose you have a flash light do you?" West asked.

"No." T'Lan answered, "But perhaps if I increase the brightness of my tricorder display we can use it for illumination."

"Got to be better than nothing." West said and T'Lan took out her tricorder again and opened it, using the light from the device as an improvised torch that promptly illuminated Toll's body lying at the side of the apartment.

"Oh no. Toll." West said, rushing to his side and crouching down, "T'Lan I think he's dead." she added as she failed to find a pulse.

"Be careful." T'Lan warned her, "Bolian blood is mildly corrosive."

"Yes I know, I'll clean it off my hands before I eat." West said.

T'Lan joined West by the body and helped her roll it over.

"That appears to be a stab wound." T'Lan said.

"And I doubt it was self inflicted." West added, "Unless he found a way of getting rid of the knife after stabbing himself."

"It looks as if he was stabbed over there." T'Lan said, pointing and holding out her tricorder so that West could see the trail of blood across the floor.

"But why drag himself here?" West said, "There's no comm unit here."

"Perhaps for something that was in this drawer." T'Lan said, no turning to the drawer that Toll had pulled free.

"Like a PADD he wanted us to find perhaps?" West suggested when she realised that he had been holding a PADD close to him at the moment he died.

Picking the PADD up, West saw that the surface had been attacked by the blood Toll had spat up with his dying breath. However, all of the damage appeared to be external, with the touch screen being the only operational component affected.

"T'Lan, do you think you'll be able to recover the information on this?" she asked.

"Providing that there is no internal damage it should be a straight forward procedure." T'Lan answered, "Though Lieutenant Maximillian may be able to access the data more rapidly. Of course there is still the matter of what to do with the body."

"I suppose we ought to call this in." West said.

When T'Lan and West returned to Government House they found that the other members of the *Nightfall's* crew were now awake. They brought with them both the PADD and also Toll's body that they handed over to Doctor King to carry out an examination on at the local hospital.

"So your trip was for nothing then?" Nikki asked as she presented West with a mug of coffee.

"No, actually we got-" West began as she sipped at the drink before wincing, "God Nikki, how strong is this?"

"Sorry. Mom and the captain are pretty much running on this right now."

"Does King Henry know?" West asked, using one of the crew's nicknames for their medical officer and Nikki smiled.

"He's said that he's not letting them cut in line if it makes them sick or psychotic." she said.

"Figures. Now where's Max? I need him to take a look at this PADD."

"Downstairs near the main doors. Some protesters tried to force their way into the building. Building security

stopped them, but with a Borg drone standing right inside the glass doors and staring at them they're too scared to make a second attempt."

"Yes, I suppose looking like a member of a genocidal species can have that effect on strangers. I just hope he's got time to look at this for me."

West found Max standing next to the security desk in the reception area of the building, still looking out at the crowd that was still gathered outside waving placards denouncing both Starfleet in particular and the Federation in general.

"Max can you take a look at this for me?" West asked him, passing him the PADD.

"What is this?" he asked in return, indicating where Toll's blood had burned into the casing.

"Blood." West replied, "Toll was dead when T'Lan and I got to his apartment. I think he wanted us to see whatever's on this though."

Max clenched his free hand into a fist and from between his finger two narrow tubes extended, plugging themselves into the PADD.

"Injecting nanites." he said, "Accessing core memory." then he paused, "The majority of the data on this PADD is in the form of video files dated between stardates four seven six one to point three and five one zero two four point seven."

"So while he was active with the Maquis?" West commented.

"I will have to take your word for that." Max replied, "However, by randomly selecting video frames it would appear that Cardassians appear in all of the videos."

"So he recorded his attacks? Seems pretty stupid. My superiors in the Maquis would have gone ballistic if anyone in my unit did that."

"There is no evidence of phaser fire in any of the videos. It is my opinion that these recordings were made on surveillance missions so that they could be studied later for the planning of attacks against the recorded targets."

"So he wanted us to see something that the Maquis attacked."

"Or perhaps something they didn't attack, but that they knew about." Max said, "Do you want me to copy these files to the computers in the office upstairs so that Captain Edwards and Lieutenant Commander Carr can see them?"

"Yes, definitely." West replied, "Thanks Max." and then she rushed to the nearest turbolift to take her back up to the office.

"Toll had a record of Cardassian targets that the Maquis scouted." West told the other Starfleet officers gathered around her, "If we check out each of these then we may be able to figure out what he knew about the aliens' operations here."

"There are seventy two files here." T'Lan commented as she studied the computer record of the files transferred by Max, "That is a lot of footage to examine."

"Perhaps we can narrow it down a bit." Edwards said, "Do you have any idea of what your former Maquis friend would have wanted us to see?"

"No, I'm sorry captain I don't." West replied.

"If the Maquis attacked a target then either they would have destroyed it or the Cardassians would have made changes to its security afterwards just in case they came back." Cole pointed out, "I think we should look for targets they didn't hit before they got driven out of the DMZ."

"That means we still need to identify each target." Hamilton said.

"I believe that may be straight forward." T'Lan responded as she opened up one of the video files Max had already copied from the PADD, "The file is stamped with global positioning data."

"And the Cardassians will have recorded the position of every installation on the planet that got attacked." Cole added, "That means all we need to do is look for places where video was taken but that never got attacked."

"We'll need to ask for a list of Cardassian installations that were attacked from Starfleet." Carr said and Edwards nodded.

"Assuming such information still exists." T'Lan said, "It may have been lost during the war."

"I'll get right on it." Edwards said, "In the mean time I want the rest of you to take a few files each and start listing where they were recorded."

"Admiral Schmidt, may I speak with you?"

The admiral turned around to see a woman approaching him.

"Commander Brown, of course." he replied, "Walk with me."

The two officers were not in a Starfleet installation and neither wore a uniform, instead both wore similar dark clothing.

"I've been keeping an eye on Captain Edwards and the *USS Nightfall* as you asked." Brown said.

"Have they uncovered any further information regarding our mysterious alien foe or how they came to be in

possession of Iconian technology?" Schmidt asked.

"No sir. But they do appear to have uncovered another cell of them on Letun Secundus. But they're asking about Cardassian facilities on the planet during the time it was occupied."

"And why are you coming to me about this?" Schmidt asked.

"Because the precise information they need is longer held by the Cardassians. The two locations where it was stored were their planetary command centre during the occupation and their central command on Cardassia Prime."

"Both of which were destroyed during the war." Schmidt said.

"Exactly." Brown replied, "But our section collated the same data while we were monitoring the activities of Maquis cells in the DMZ."

The admiral came to a sudden halt and Brown halted with him.

"Give Captain Edwards what he needs commander." he said, "But make sure that the origin of this information cannot be traced back to us."

Brown smiled.

"Of course sir." she replied before turning around and walking away.

Captain Edwards yawned as he walked back to his command centre. Despite the almost constant flow of caffeine from the coffee he was drinking he was still feeling the effects of going without sleep for more than twenty four hours now. If he had been able to bring the Nightfall into orbit and base his operation from there he would have rotated command between himself and his senior officers. But here on Letun Secundus itself he felt it better for the locals to have a single point of contact.

"I'm sorry everyone." he said as he entered the room, "But apparently the Cardassian habit of keeping records of everything can't help us this time. There were only two places where the information I asked for were kept and both were destroyed."

"So who sent us this?" Carr asked and she turned a display to show a list of planetary co-ordinates and stardates.

"Where did you get that?" Edwards asked as he walked over to his first officer and began to study the list for himself.

"The information was forwarded via a Cardassian communications array to the orbital observatory and from there to us." T'Lan explained and Edwards frowned.

"But the Cardassian government denied having any of it." he said.

"Perhaps some former Cardassian intelligence operative kept an extra copy and sent it to use privately." Hamilton said.

"Kind of dangerous if he gets found out." Cole said.

"Do the locations on this list match what we know from the videos?" Edwards asked.

"So far I have found thirty-four correlations." T'Lan replied.

"I'll take that as a 'Yes'." Edwards said, "We'll carry on using this list and just hope that our informant has our best interests at heart."

"Got one!" Hamilton suddenly called out, sticking his hand in the air and Carr, Cole and Edwards all rushed over to the terminal he was working at to see what he had found, "See?" he said, pointing to an entry on the list of video files, "The final entry is at a location that was never attacked."

"The Maquis probably never got time before they were scattered by the Jem'Hadar." Carr said. Then Edwards looked at T'Lan.

"T'Lan, would you mind showing us the video file from stardate five one zero two four point seven?" he asked.

"Of course captain." she replied and she brought up the requested file on the large wall mounted display for everyone present to see.

The footage had clearly been taken using a hand held recording device, but apart from that it was impossible to tell anything about how it had been made or who by since the creator was not visible in the shot. All that was visible was a squat pre-fabricated building that was of Cardassian origin.

"There's one now." a voice said from out of the frame.

"I see him." Toll's voice responded and the camera panned to focus on a Cardassian walking towards the building, "No uniform." Toll added.

"There are no civilian Cardies on Letun Secundus." the other voice commented, "This spoon head must be an agent. This is the place they're bringing all of our people they've seized."

"Incoming!" a third voice hissed and the camera was tilted upwards to show a Jem'Hadar attack ship flying low over the building. The ship came to a halt and hovered directly over it for a few seconds and then began to accelerate away. But rather than fly off into the distance the ship began to turn around and head back towards the camera.

"They know we're here." the first voice said.

"Okay, we've got enough. Let's go." Toll said and then the video ended abruptly.

"A Cardassian Intelligence Bureau outpost?" Carr said.

"It looks that way." Edwards replied nodding, "And I'm sure that such a place would be filled with everything someone needed to carry out a terrorist campaign." then he turned to Cole, "Lieutenant Commander Cole, I want you to take Lieutenant Hamilton and Lieutenant T'Lan in a runabout along with the largest security team you can get inside with full armament to investigate that facility. I'll contact the Nightfall and have Lieutenant Commander White bring some fighters to provide you with air cover."

"Captain Edwards," Shry began, "my men and Captain Heart's MACOs are better trained and equipped to assault a fortified facility."

"Yes I know." Edwards replied, "But we'd need permission from the prime Minister to deploy troops from either of your companies and I'd rather not have any information about the existence of the target get out of this room until after we've secured it. We just can't be sure that the aliens haven't infiltrated the local

government.”

“That is a logical concern. On Prestus the governor himself was one of them.” T'Lan commented.

“I'd still welcome their support captain.” Cole said, “I'll have my men carry cameras to provide a live feed from us that the captains can offer their professional opinions on if that's agreeable.” and then he and Edwards both looked at the two military officers who in turn looked at one another.

“Sounds okay to me.” Heart said and Shry nodded as well.

“Then it looks like we have a plan.” Edwards said, “Mister Cole, assemble your team and prepare to move out.”

“I've got the target on my scope.” White signalled to both his wingman and also Hamilton as he piloted the runabout *Thames* towards the location of the Cardassian outpost.

“I don't see it yet.” Hamilton responded.

“Try using the targeting system.” T'Lan suggested from the seat beside his.

“Got it.” Hamilton said as he brought the *Thames'* phasers on line and the computer's targeting routines identified the concealed structure, “ETA three minutes.”

“Okay you heard the man.” Cole called out to the more than twenty security guards crammed into the runabout with them, “Lock and load.” and they all began to check their phaser rifles, “Remember, stun settings will not have any effect on primary targets but we can't be certain that there aren't any others present. So set your phasers to level six but make sure you check your targets before you accidentally shoot a civilian.”

The two Peregrine-class fighters circled around the Cardassian outpost. In the more than ten years since it had been abandoned by its makers the building had become heavily overgrown but its general shape was still recognisable from the air.

“No movement and no energy signatures from weapons.” White transmitted.

“Copy that Snowman.” Hamilton replied, making use of White's squadron call sign, “We're going in.”

Hamilton brought the runabout down about a hundred metres from the outpost, just behind a low ridge that allowed the security team and T'Lan to disembark safely without exposing themselves to fire from the outpost if there were any defences that had been overlooked.

Then while the runabout lifted off and began to circle along with the two fighters the team rushed to the ridge and lay prone, aiming their phasers towards the outpost while T'Lan activated her tricorder for a close range scan.

“How does it look?” Cole asked.

“Apart from some very basic animals, I detect no signs of life.” T'Lan replied, “But the structure appears to be constructed of a material that refracts tricorder emissions. My scans cannot penetrate more than a few metres inside.”

“Did you get that?” Cole asked, tapping his combadge.

“We got it.” Heart's voice replied, the camera clipped to Cole's ear having sent back everything he had seen and heard since disembarking from the runabout, “I suggest you send a small group ahead while the others cover them.”

“Understood.” Cole said. Then he looked at a group of his men crouching just behind the ridge, “Okay move in.” he told them, waving them towards the outpost structure.

Keeping their rifles pointed towards the outpost, the security team ran towards it, watched closely by the others remaining on the ridge.

“I detect no changes in the state of the outpost.” T'Lan commented just as the advance team reached the structure and took up positions beside the entrance.

“Okay then we're next.” Cole replied to her, “But stay behind me. You're not in uniform and if there is anyone out there I don't want them thinking we're dragging a civilian along with us.”

“As you wish lieutenant commander.” T'Lan said, “Would you prefer I did not draw my phaser?”

“No, keep it ready.” Cole said, “Just stay as close to me as you can.” then he looked at the guards to his left and waved them forwards as well.

Like the first group to have gone forwards, Cole's also kept their rifles at the ready. But their sprint across the open ground between the ridge and outpost was just as uneventful.

“Would you like to try and open the door?” T'Lan asked.

“if you wouldn't mind.” Cole replied and then he tapped his combadge, “Final group, advance.” he ordered and the remaining group of security guards left on the ridge came rushing towards them just as the door opened with a hiss, “That was quick.” Cole commented.

“It was not locked.” T'Lan replied.

“Okay now I know something's not right here.” Cole said, “Everybody watch out.” and then he began to creep inside the outpost.

Given that it was no longer in use the outpost's lighting system was not active, but fortunately each of the security team's phaser rifles mounted a flash light on top that meant the team had adequate illumination. The

corridor just inside the entrance soon split up into three and Cole waved groups of his team down each possible route in turn, making sure that T'Lan stayed with him.

"There is a slight energy signature coming from ahead." she whispered to him.

"And we're clearly not the first ones here either." Cole added, lowering his rifle so that the beam from his flash light illuminated footprints in the dust on the floor.

"Lieutenant commander, can you focus on those tracks again?" Shry's voice asked and Cole halted to look down again.

"How's that?" he asked.

"Good." Shry said, "Yes, it's just as I thought."

"What is?" Cole replied.

"There is only one set of tracks and they are going in. So whoever made them-

"Didn't come back out again. At least not this way." Cole interrupted.

"Exactly." Shry said.

Cole looked at T'Lan.

"I think we should follow them." he told her.

"Your suggestion is logical, as I have come to expect from you." she replied and Cole began to move again, following the footprints in the dust.

The footprints led down into a basement level and to a large chamber that was filled with shelves and cupboards.

"Ah, the infamous hoarding instinct of the Cardassians." Cole commented as the team entered the room and began to spread out to search between the rows of shelves, "The Obsidian Order prided itself on never throwing away anything that could be useful later on and the Cardassian Intelligence Bureau kept the habit going."

"Lieutenant commander, the energy signature is coming from close by. Though it is rather weak." T'Lan said.

"Which way?" Cole asked and T'Lan pointed, "Okay, follow me and tell me where to go."

Cole advanced in the direction indicated by T'Lan and this took them to a doorway that was not as large as the entrance to the storage vault itself but was still wider than most standard doors intended for humanoid use. The room beyond this was empty, but the wall opposite was lined with drawers, several of which were open to reveal long flat trays inside. But the most noticeable thing about the room was that its temperature was clearly much colder than anywhere else in the outpost, well below what a Cardassian would find comfortable.

"Cole to control centre." Cole said, activating his combadge, "I think we've just found the morgue."

"Lieutenant commander, over here." T'Lan said, crossing the room to where a Cardassian PADD was clamped to the wall and she removed it, "The device still has power." she added after turning it on, "I think that it is a manifest."

"Does it say anything interesting?" Cole asked.

"I cannot say whether you would find it interesting but the final entries indicate that there were six bodies stored here at the time the facility was evacuated. One of the names is Felicity Bond." T'Lan said and Cole looked at the open drawers.

"Six." he said, "Six open drawers. Six preserved bodies missing. Lieutenant I think you've identified all of Miss Bond's co-conspirators."

"Not entirely lieutenant commander." T'Lan replied, "Someone had to remove the bodies. We are looking for seven alien infiltrators, not six."

"Does that PADD have any information on the bodies besides names?" Cole asked.

"Yes lieutenant commander. It includes full biographical information on each of them, including images."

T'Lan replied and Cole smiled.

"We need to get this back to the command centre." he said, "The rest of my men can secure this place and finish going through it, but that needs looking at right away." then he tapped his combadge, "Cole to *Thames*, come in Lieutenant Hamilton."

"Hamilton here sir. Go ahead."

"Hamilton T'Lan and I need beaming out. We've found evidence vital to the investigation that needs to be examined immediately."

"Understood commander." Hamilton replied. But then after a short pause he added, "I can't get a lock on you where you are. Can you return to the surface?"

"The shielding in the structure must be interfering with the transporter signal." T'Lan said.

"Yeah, I get that." Cole replied before signalling to Hamilton once more, "Okay lieutenant, we're on our way out. We'll let you know when we're ready to be beamed up."

ii.

As soon as Hamilton returned to the command centre with Cole and T'Lan they plugged the Cardassian PADD into their computer network and began copying the data.

"According to these records the Cardassian outpost was being used to store six Maquis bodies." T'Lan said.

"Yes we know that bit cousin." Nayal commented, "But who were they?"

"Felicity Bond was one." West replied.

"There was a total of six humans and one Vulcan." T'Lan said as she transferred images of them all to the main display, "Syran the Vulcan and Mark Devon were both dead when they were taken to the outpost." she added and from the images it was easy to see that their photographs had been taken by the Cardassians after they had died. The other four on the other hand were of individuals who had been very much alive when their pictures were taken, "Gregory Turner, Wolfgang Schwartz, Felicity Bond and Sarah Mann have all been listed as dying during detention however."

"The Cardassians tortured them to death." West said.

"It would appear so." T'Lan agreed.

The door to the room then opened and Prime Minister Clayton entered with Colonel Bresk.

"You asked to see us captain?" Clayton asked.

"Urgently. This had better be good." Bresk added.

"My crew appear to have identified some of the culprits in the bombings." Edwards replied and he pointed to the main display and the images it showed.

"Who are these people?" Clayton asked.

"Former members of the Maquis." Carr replied and Bresk snorted.

"Impossible." he said, "Only the Vulcan would have been anything other than a child when the Maquis were active, "And I can see that he's dead. That wound to his neck would have been fatal within minutes. What are you trying to pull here captain?"

"Colonel, Prime Minister," Edwards said, stepping towards them, "What I am about to tell you is not yet common knowledge, Starfleet is still attempting to determine the exact nature of the threat. However, what we do know is that there is what seems to be an alien force at work within the Federation and possibly elsewhere in the Alpha and Beta Quadrants if not the entire galaxy. This force takes the corpses of sentient beings and is able to reanimate and control these somehow. The six individuals you see on this screen were all taken from the morgue in an outpost of the Cardassian Intelligence Bureau that is on this planet." Bresk straightened up at this point, concerned that a foreign government was undertaking covert operations on his planet, "Don't worry colonel," Edwards added, raising a hand, "the outpost was abandoned a long time ago. Though the contents of the storeroom and morgue were left behind. Anyway, someone apparently was able to locate this thanks to another former member of the Maquis who is now dead and they removed these bodies for reanimation."

Clayton frowned.

"So you're saying that zombies bombed my city?" he asked and King winced at the use of the word.

"We don't fully understand the reanimation process." he said, "But the handful of examinations I've been able to carry out on body parts or a near complete corpse indicate that widespread use of a form of synthetic flesh is made."

"It is perhaps better to think of them as some kind of machine made from biological components." T'Lan suggested.

"And what can we do to stop them?" Clayton said as he stared at the display.

"They can be detected if you know what to look for." King said, "They are dead and nothing can change that. Their flesh is necrotic so a cellular analysis will show this up."

"We can't sweep an entire city carrying out cellular analyses on everyone we find." Bresk exclaimed in the usual angry sounding Tellarite fashion.

"You don't need to." Cole told him, "You only need to check out your own people to make sure the aliens haven't infiltrated your administration. For these six we need access to your city's CCTV network, plus a facial recognition program to match them. Then my people can do the rest."

"Our people if you'll let us." Shry added and Cole nodded.

"The Imperial Guard and MACOs are very effective at fighting them." he said in agreement.

"What can they do that our own forces can't?" Clayton asked.

"Stun shots don't work on these reanimated bodies." Carr said, "But they may be mixing themselves in with civilians. Our ground troops carry old fashion projectile rifles with phasers mounted beneath them. They can engage with phasers set to stun and switch to lethal fire far quicker than anyone with a standard phaser can."

"What nonsense!" Bresk snapped and he looked at Clayton, "Prime Minister, projectile rifles became

obsolete centuries ago.”

“They remain effective against the Borg.” Max pointed out, “The collective cannot adapt to the random nature of physical impact and penetration. Many systems aboard the *USS Nightfall* are intended to fight the Borg.” “Prime Minister, you cannot just let them bring their soldiers onto our soil. The people will not stand for it.” Bresk said, “Next they’ll be bringing their ship into orbit to carry out bombardments.”

“The protests are probably being encouraged by the aliens.” Carr said, “Give us the chance to deal with them and you won’t have any more trouble.”

“I’m sorry captain, but Colonel Bresk is right. I can’t allow forces from Earth or Andoria free reign to operate on Letun Secundus.” Clayton said, “But if there really are only six of them then you should have no trouble dealing with them using the security teams you have available. You can have access to our CCTV system though, I’ll speak with my people about it immediately. Now is there anything else?”

“No thank you. That will be all for now.” Edwards replied.

The after the Prime Minister and Colonel Bresk had left the room Captain Edwards’ crew turned to him.

“You’re really letting him off that easily?” Heart asked, “You know you could go to the Federation Council about this.”

“And where would that get us?” Edwards asked, rubbing his eyes, “It could take a week before they issue an order allowing us to deploy your troops and bring the *Nightfall* into orbit. The truth of the matter is that Lieutenant Commander Cole’s people probably can handle this group of aliens and we’d just end up wasting time in waiting for the Federation Council to overrule Prime Minister Clayton for no purpose. Now I want that facial recognition scan running as soon as we’ve got access to the CCTV. I suggest starting with the demonstrations we’ve seen since we arrived. We know that at least two of our suspects were present at the riot at Fort Freedom.”

The security cameras located around the perimeter of Fort Freedom had recorded every moment of the protest from the arrival of the first vehicle to the crowd storming through the gates and out of their field of view. The computer software provided by the planetary government was then able to isolate the face of each member of the crowd, including those who had tried to conceal their features with masks. These full or partial images were then compared automatically to the images that the crew of the *Nightfall* had of the former Maquis members.

“There are two matches captain.” Max said when the search was complete and he brought up images of Felicity and Syran from the protest footage.

“I’ve got two more outside here.” Hamilton added from a different terminal, “Wolfgang Schwartz and Sarah Mann.”

“And Gregory Turner and Mark Devon were both present at the starport demonstration.” T’Lan finished. Then she paused for a moment and added, “Interesting.”

“What is it T’Lan?” Carr asked.

“Both Gregory Turner and Mark Devon are stood beside someone in an identical jacket.” T’Lan replied, “In fact I think that they are standing either side of the same person.”

“Who?” Edwards said.

“One moment captain, I will check the base footage.” T’Lan said as she checked the camera reference and time stamp of the images isolated by the computer search program. Then on the main display she brought up an image that showed both Greg and Mark. Standing between them was Harry and it was clear from their stance that the three were talking together.”

“Our seventh man?” Cole suggested, “The one who went into the outpost and retrieved the bodies?”

“If it is then he would have met with Toll at some point.” West pointed out, “Maybe the staff at his bar would recognise him.”

“Go.” Edwards said, “But we’re in a hurry now, so take Mister Hamilton with you and he can beam you in and out from orbit.”

“Understood.” West replied, nodding and she and Hamilton got up to leave.

“In the meantime I want this man’s face run through every other piece of footage we can get hold of along with all of the others. I want to know where they are operating from.”

Toll’s bar was quiet when West materialised outside it and to being with she was concerned that there would be no one there and her trip would have been wasted. But as she walked around the building a door opened and one of the staff emerged, a young woman carrying bags of rubbish under her arms.

“Excuse me!” West called out and the woman looked around at her, scowling when she saw the Starfleet uniform.

“I don’t talk to Starfleet.” she said.

“I’m here about Toll’s murder.” West replied, “You do want the killer caught don’t you?”

“Police say it was a break in.” the woman said.

“It was, sort of. But I’d like you to tell me if you know any of these people.” West said and she held out a

PADD with the faces of the seven alien agents shown on the display.

"Never seen them." the woman said, still staring at West.

"Try looking at the screen." West said and the woman snarled before looking down. Then her eyes widened,

"So you do know them." West added when she saw this.

"I saw him a few times." the woman replied, pointing to the image of Harry, "He came in a couple of months back and got talking with Toll. But they were old Maquis buddies I thought."

"What's his name?"

"Harry something. I never really spoke to him."

"Never mind." West said, lowering the PADD, "You've told me all I need to know."

Slowly but surely, more and more instances of the seven alien agents moving around in public were uncovered by the facial recognition algorithm. A large proportion of these were taken near to the sites of the bombings, suggesting that they had reconnoitred their targets before striking them. But there were more that showed them moving around in the city, meeting with one another and also with others not currently under suspicion.

"Probably the locals that they're stirring up." Cole commented and behind him both Heart and Shry nodded in agreement.

"Captain I believe I may have discovered the aliens' base of operations." Max suddenly announced. Unlike the others who had to use display screens to check each instance of one of the aliens being caught on CCTV, the former drone was able to simply download and scan the images in his head.

"Let's see it." Edwards said and Max turned to the main screen, mentally changing it to show the images he had uncovered. All of these showed one or more of the aliens entering or leaving the same building.

"I have an address for that location captain." Max said, "It is an apartment building towards the outskirts of the capital."

"And we've got a name for the seventh guy." West then announced as she and Hamilton entered the room,

"Well a first name anyway. Harry."

"One moment, I am checking the city communications directory." Max said and then a moment later he added, "There is one individual named Harry resident in that building. He has an apartment on the seventh floor."

"Then I think its time we paid him a visit." Edwards said, "Mister Cole, put together a team. Take as many people with you as you want." then he turned to Heart and Shry, "Gentlemen as you know the locals don't want your troops involved in operations. But there is one thing that one of you can do for me. Something where technically Starfleet still has full authority to act."

Harry looked at the others.

"Well Starfleet knows we're here now." he said, "And they're bound to be moderating their actions in response to avoid antagonising the locals. But we can still do something that will force them to do something drastic and turn the population against the Federation fully." and then he picked up one of two grenades on the table between them, "Sarah and Syran, I want you to take these to Government House." he said, "Use them to assassinate Prime Minister Clayton."



From a nearby rooftop Hamilton and West observed the apartment through hand held magnifiers.

"I count five of them." West said.

"I agree, including the leader." Hamilton replied and he tapped his combadge, "Hamilton to Cole. There are five targets present, I say again five targets present."

"Copy that lieutenant." Cole responded, "Who are we missing?"

"Looks like Sarah Mann and the Vulcan Syran." Hamilton told him.

"Five's still good." Cole said, "Captain, are you getting this?"

"Yes, I hear you." Edwards said from the command centre, "You may begin your operation whenever you are ready. But remember, stun settings are ineffectual and the enemy's ability to transport away means that ordering them to surrender will just allow them to escape."

"I understand captain. Lethal fire only." Cole said, "We transport in twenty seconds."

Back in the command centre Carr looked at Edwards.

"Shoot to kill?" she asked softly.

"What other choice do we have?" he asked in reply.

"I know. It's just that orders like that have a way of coming back to haunt people." Carr said.

Sarah and Syran appeared in an alleyway opposite Government House and crept to the end to observe their target.

"If we'd scouted this place out before now we could have just materialised inside." Sarah commented.

"Yes, but we didn't, did we?" Syran replied, "So now the question remains of how to get our weapons past security at the door."

Reaching into her jacket, Sarah took out the photon grenade as well as a compact hand disruptor and passed them both to Syran.

"I'll go in first." she said, "Then after I've found us a nice quiet spot I'll come back and we can transport ourselves to it." she said before calmly heading towards the main entrance to the building where a short queue of people was waiting to get inside and joining it.

The unit led by Cole beamed down in the street right outside the entrance to the apartment block and there were stunned looks from passers by at the sudden appearance of a large group of Starfleet security officers armed with phaser rifles. Access to the building was limited by a locked door, but Cole's team had brought with them a device that overrode the lock in moments and the entire team rushed inside.

"Squad one stay here and cover the turbolifts." Cole ordered, "Everyone else with me. We're taking the stairs so I hope everyone's up to date with their physical fitness requirements."

Sarah walked through the security scanner without a problem, the synthetic flesh used to rebuild her body and house her consciousness being invisible to the types of scans the device could run. Then she calmly followed the signs that pointed the way to the offices that would be commonly visited by members of the public. But she stopped as soon as she found a door that was labelled 'DO NOT ENTER' and looked around to see if she was being watched. Satisfied that she was not she opened the unlocked door and stepped into the room beyond.

A startled man looked up from a desk inside the room and was just about to speak when Sarah struck first, striking him the throat hard enough that he instantly went bright red as he brought his hands up and grasped at his own neck. Then Sarah grabbed hold of him by his hair and slammed his head against his desk with enough force that there was a loud 'Crack!' from his skull as it fractured and the man just collapsed in a heap.

Smiling, Sarah took another step and simply vanished.

"Okay, we're in." she said when she reappeared in the alleyway and took her weapons back from Syran.

Then both of them stepped forwards and disappeared.

Cole led his team out of the stairwell and right up to the door to Harry's apartment. Then he nodded to one of his men, an enlisted man who in addition to his phaser rifle also carried a rolled up length of shaped charge. Acting quickly, the security guard began to press this against the door to form a closed loop around it before stepping clear. Cole then tapped his combadge.

"Team one in position." he said, "Going in." and then the shaped charge was triggered and the door blown inwards.

Nikki flinched when she heard the sound of the shaped charge going off over the communication channel in the command centre. At the same time Max frowned slightly.

"Captain we appear to have a problem." he said.

"What's wrong?" King asked.

"The computer system is still set to search all CCTV records for appearances by any of the seven aliens."

Max said, "And it has just matched their faces to two individuals now in this building. Sarah Mann and Syran."

"Oh great." Edwards exclaimed, "We can't pull anyone back. T'Lan contact building security and tell them to be on the look out. Then stay here with Commander King and look after Nikki. The rest of us will go and find them. Commander Carr, you're with me and Nayal can go with Max."

"Why would they attack us here?" Nikki asked while the others all checked their phasers, adjusting them to a lethal setting.

"Logically speaking we are not the highest value target in the building." T'Lan replied.

"Then who is?" Nikki said.

"The Prime Minister." Edwards said and he looked at Carr, "I think we should make sure that he's safe." he added.

Cole's team burst in through the ruined doorway before Harry or any of his subordinates could react to the explosion. Cole himself spotted one of the aliens straight away opposite the doorway and fired, the bright red energy beam slicing through Wolfgang's chest. This was followed by a volley of fire that enveloped Greg before he could even turn around to see what was going on.

Realising that they were under attack, Felicity dived towards the large doorway leading to the balcony where the phasers taken from the guards at Fort Freedom were lay on the table. But before she could reach them there was a roaring from overhead as a pair of Starfleet shuttles descended, their rear doors opening so that a pair of security guards could slide down lines dropped from each, grabbing hold of the balcony rail and firing their phasers at Felicity as she was caught neatly framed in the doorway.

"Davis lookout!" Cole snapped as he saw Mark stand up and grab a chair. But the alien was able to swing his improvised weapon at the security guard, smashing it against him. He was then able to tear the guard's phaser from his grip and was just swinging it around to aim at the rest of Cole's team when they turned their attention to him and opened fire in unison.

However, in focusing on Mark the security team gave Harry time to act and just as the second team to arrive was entering the apartment from the balcony he lunged at the first of them. The impact of Harry pushed the guard back out onto the balcony and the pair of them rolled across it until they hit the railing around the edge. Though the rest of the team watched this they were unable to intervene for fear of hitting their own man.

Harry made no attempt to take the guard's weapon away from him though, nor did he try and reach for one of the phasers that still lay on the table. Instead he reached up for the safety rail and used it to pull himself back up to his feet and then threw himself over it before any of the other Starfleet personnel could react.

"No!" Cole yelled as he ran out onto the balcony and looked over the edge. But just as he had expected Harry had vanished. Still looking over the rail, he struck his combadge with more force than was required to activate it and spoke, "Cole to Heart. One of them got away from us. He may be heading for you."

The sound of phaser fire attracted the attention of Carr and Edwards as they headed for the Prime Minister's office.

"Sounds like they're ahead of us." Edwards commented, "We better hurry."

"Wait." Carr replied.

"Grace, there's no time." Edwards said but Carr paused and pulled off her shoes.

"I've been wearing those heels for over twenty four hours. I can run much quicker this way." she said and then they set off running towards the Prime Minister's office. Along the way they came across the bodies of Bresk and two uniformed security guards, all with phasers in their hands and Edwards knelt to examine one, wondering why three armed men would be taken out so easily.

"Set to heavy stun." he said, shaking his head.

"You did warn them." Carr pointed out.

"Yes, but they didn't listen." Edwards said, getting back to his feet and they continued to run.

Then there came the sound of an explosion and the two Starfleet officers felt a shudder run through the building just as they were nearing their destination. This was followed by the sounds of more phaser fire and as Edwards rounded the last corner before reaching the Prime Minister's office a phaser beam fired by one of the Prime Minister's bodyguards forced him to duck back again, colliding with Carr and knocking her to the floor where he landed on top of her. Then he activated his combadge.

"Max. Nayal. We're at the Prime Minister's office. Both the aliens are here."

"Understood captain." Max's voice replied, "We are on our way." and then Edwards shut off his combadge.

"Err David, perhaps you should get off me if we want to fight evil today." Carr then commented.

"Ah. Of course." Edwards said, getting up off Carr and positioning himself right by the corner and peering around it more carefully this time.

It was clear that a grenade had been used to demolish the armoured doors to the Prime Minister's office, killing the security detail positioned outside. Now though the bodyguards who had been deployed within the office itself were acting to protect Prime Minister Clayton and from the way that both Sarah and Syran had taken cover to return fire rather than just rushing up to the door it was obvious that the Prime Minister had heeded Edwards' warning about stun settings being useless on the aliens even if his military adviser had not. Unaware of the presence of the Starfleet officers, Syran tried to reposition himself for a better angle of fire against the bodyguards using the remains of the door for cover and in doing so exposed himself to Edwards' line of fire. Seeing an opportunity, Edwards fired his phaser and the beam struck Syran in the shoulder. Against a living target, even one as resilient as a Vulcan, the shot would have at least incapacitated him, possibly killing him. But against a reanimated corpse the beam managed only to tear through the muscles and nerves driving his arm and the limb suddenly dropped to hang uselessly by his side. Appearing unconcerned at the sudden loss of the use of his arm, Syran turned and fired back at Edwards, who was just able to duck out of the line of fire again.

"So much for taking them by surprise." he said to Carr before several more short bursts of phaser fire shot past them.

"Max, where are you?" Carr asked, activating her combadge.

"Almost with you lieutenant commander." Max answered.

"Which way are you coming from?" Carr said.

"We have just passed by the break lounge." Max told her.

"That's on the other side of them." Carr said to Edwards.

"Are you thinking crossfire?" he asked her and she nodded, "Tell them."

"Max when you and Nayal get here we need you to lay down fire and draw their attention. Then the captain and I will move in for the kill. Understood?"

"Yes lieutenant commander." Max replied, "We will comply." and then he closed the channel.

Just to keep Sarah and Syran busy, Edwards fired his phaser again. He did not bother to aim carefully, regarding this as too risky and instead just fired quick snap shots intended to remind the aliens that he and Carr were there.

Then another phaser beam shot passed Sarah and she turned to see Max and Nayal taking it turns to fire at her and Syran from another corridor that approached the Prime Minister's office. As expected the two aliens turned to fire back at the new arrivals and disruptor hits scorched the walls behind them as they took cover "Can you get them to fire at you some more?" Max asked, turning to Nayal and at the same time he took a tricorder from his waist.

"Sure." Nayal replied and she leant around the corner to fire again, jumping back as both Sarah and Syran returned fire at her, "How's that?"

"Good." Max replied, "I think I have what I need."

"What's that?" Nayal asked.

"The operating frequency of their disruptors." Max replied as he put his tricorder away again. Then he activated his combadge, being able to do this with a thought rather than needing to strike it, "Captain I am about to draw their fire. Please be ready to act quickly."

"Got it Max." Edwards replied as he and Carr increased the levels that their phasers were set to, "We're ready whenever you are."

Then Max simply stepped out into full view.

Seeing the Borg standing right in front of them, both Sarah and Syran opened fire. But rather than striking Max the beams were blocked by the sudden activation of the force field built into his body. Normally the Borg Collective would acquire data about an energy weapon by monitoring strikes on drones, but without this option being open to him Max had instead used his tricorder to scan the beams Nayal had prompted the aliens into firing. The drawback was that without the massive energy reserves of the Collective to replenish him, Max could only withstand the assault for a short time.

But it was enough time for both Carr and Edwards to burst out from the corridor where they were sheltering and charged towards the alien position concealed behind some desks. Firing as they ran, Carr and Edwards' phaser first began to blast apart the desks. Then a beam from Edwards' phaser struck Sarah and before she could even cry out she was vaporised. Seeing this, Syran ceased firing at Max and turned around with the intention of attacking Carr and Edwards.

Max threw himself at the Vulcan, his weight more than enough to spoil Syran's aim. Grabbing hold of each of Syran's arms, Max turned so that he held Syran towards Nayal. In response Nayal fired her phaser again, the beam hitting Syran cleanly and he went limp in Max's grip, the disruptor falling from his hand. Max then let go of the body and turned to Edwards.

"Mission accomplished captain." he said.

"Now there's just the issue of the one that got away from Lieutenant Commander Cole to deal with."

Harry appeared in the darkness of the storeroom in the abandoned Cardassian Intelligence Bureau outpost. The modifications that had been made to the vision of his host body allowed him to see perfectly and he went straight to the section where captured weapons were kept. Pulling back a plastic cover, Harry revealed a Federation manufactured photon torpedo that had been seized from the Maquis. The yield of this weapon was enough to level a large area, all that Harry had to do was transport it to a location with a suitably large population. But opening up the access panel near the warhead he found that the detonator circuit had been removed. All of a sudden flash lights lit up behind him and he turned to see a mixed group of armoured humans and Andorians aiming rifles of a design unfamiliar at him. "Looking for this?" Heart asked as he held up the detonator circuit before dropping it and at that moment there was a barrage of projectile fire that tore Harry apart.

Despite having saved the life of the Prime Minister and dealt with all seven of the aliens responsible for the terrorist bombings, the crew of the *USS Nightfall* were still forbidden from bringing their ship any closer to the planet. This meant that the senior officers returned to their vessel aboard one of the ground forces' assault shuttles.

"Well as leaves go that wasn't one of the best." Cole said as most of them disembarked in the *Nightfall's* hangar.

"Well Bradley's isn't over yet." Nayal commented.

"It isn't?" Hamilton replied.

"Oh no." she said, "I'm still covered in paint under this uniform and you and I are going to head to my sonic shower to remove it." and she grabbed hold of his arm and began to pull him away.

"Somehow I don't think you should have seen any of that." West said, looking at Nikki, "I doubt your mother would approve."

"Who cares?" Nikki replied, "She and the captain are sound asleep." and the group turned to see both Carr and Edwards still sat next to one another asleep, leaning against one another.

"We can't leave them there like that." West said.

"Absolutely right." Shry replied and he looked at Heart, "Captain Heart, would you mind giving me a hand?"

"It would be my pleasure Captain Shry." he replied and they both walked over to the two sleeping officers. Carefully they took hold of one of Edwards' arms and wrapped it around Carr. Then they gently rolled her over to face Edwards and lifted one of her legs over his lap, placing his other hand on it. Carr's arms were then wrapped around Edwards before Heart and Shry finally repositioned the two Starfleet officers' heads so that their faces were pressed together before standing back.

"There," Shry said, "that's much better. Max, could you get a picture of that for us?"

"Already done captain." Max replied, "How large would you like the hard copies?"