

STAR TREK NIGHTFALL

SOMETHING IS STIRRING BEYOND THE FINAL FRONTIER...



CONSEQUENCES

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON

STAR TREK: NIGHTFALL **CONSEQUENCES**

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Following the events on Prestus, the USS Nightfall docks at Starbase 10 where Captain Edwards is expected to explain his actions. But before this can happen his ship is targeted by the same enemy responsible for what happened on Prestus...

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
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i.

Stardate 64210.5. USS *Nightfall* NX-82008 docked at Starbase 10, near the Romulan Neutral Zone.

Lieutenant Commander Grace Carr peered out of her bedroom.

"Nikki have you seen my clean uniform?" she asked the teenage girl sat at the table studying a PADD.

"You left over there." Her daughter replied, pointing to where a Starfleet uniform was hung over a chair.

"Thanks." Carr said, dashing to collect the uniform and then returning to her bedroom to put it on.

It was then that there was a chiming sound from the door to the quarters that Carr and her daughter shared with one another.

"Come in." Nikki said out loud and the doors slid open to reveal the *Nightfall's* captain.

"Come in Captain Edwards." Nikki said, "Mom will be right out."

"I'm ready, I'm ready." Carr said as she reappeared, fastening her combadge to the front of her uniform.

"So I see." Edwards said, "And just in time as well. Now let's get going, we've been summoned to see The King."

Nikki watched as her mother left the room with Captain Edwards and the door slid shut behind them. Then she set down the PADD, smiling and reached under the table from where she took another Starfleet uniform. Like that worn by her mother this was of the command division and it bore the unconventional patch worn on its sleeve by all members of the *Nightfall's* crew but there was just a single rank pin on the collar, indicating an ensign's rank.

His eyes flickering open Alex George, former governor of the Prestus colony found himself lying on a raised platform in the same featureless room he had been in before oblivion had claimed him.

"How long?" he asked as he realised that he was not alone and what seemed to be a young human girl walked into view. Accompanying the girl were two other humanoid figures. Each of these was tall and muscular but they lacked facial features, instead appearing as if they were just silhouettes given solid form.

"Not long governor." The girl replied, "About a month in fact." And the man lay on the platform frowned.

"Why bring me back so soon?" he asked.

"Because your mess needs cleaning up and I convinced the others that you should be the one to do it." The girl told him, smiling.

"My mess?"

"Yes, your former associate Katrina never returned to us and we believe that she was recovered by that Starfleet vessel."

"The *Nightfall*?"

"Yes. Now that ship has returned to one of the Federation's bases and that makes it vulnerable. The crew will not notice strangers coming aboard it. We are sending you back to the outside universe governor. There you will arrange for the *Nightfall* to be infiltrated. The primary objective is either to recover or destroy Katrina's remains. Additionally the ship's computer is to be accessed to determine exactly how much Starfleet knows about our activities. Finally governor, I want the *Nightfall* destroyed along with as many of its crew as possible."

Commander King looked up from his desk when he heard the doors to sickbay opening and saw Carr and Edwards entering.

"Ah captain, commander, you're here." He said as he got up and approached them.

"Yes, you asked to see us both." Edwards replied.

"Indeed I did captain." King replied, "I'm afraid to say that I may have uncovered an attempt to sabotage the ship."

Carr and Edwards looked at one another nervously and then turned back to face King.

"Sabotage?" Edwards repeated, folding his arms in front of him.

"Yes captain. I discovered it while running my usual checks on sickbay's systems. It's probably easier if I show you."

"Please go ahead." Carr replied.

"Computer, activate emergency medical hologram." King said. Instantly an image appeared of a tall woman with an athletic build.

"Please state the nature of the medical emergency." She said.

"Ah." Edwards said.

"Ah indeed." Carr added.

In front of them the holographic woman stood motionless, waiting for instructions. But it was not her behaviour that was at issue, it was her appearance. Emergency medical holograms were intended to supplement or even replace living medical staff aboard Starfleet vessels and as such were designed to appear in standard Starfleet medical division uniforms. However, rather than this uniform the holographic woman was presently depicted wearing an extremely short and figure hugging white dress with matching hat and shoes. In addition an archaic stethoscope hung around her neck.

"Oh who'd do something like that to Emma?" Carr said.

"Emma?" Edwards commented.

"It's what Nikki calls her. As in EMH." Carr replied, "Before doctor King arrived she was our primary medic."

"It would seem that someone has been tampering with the core program captain." King said.

Edwards sighed.

"Who?" he asked.

"I can't say." King replied, "But it has to be someone with considerable knowledge of-" and then he paused and frowned, "Are you feeling alright commander?" he asked Carr and when Edwards looked at his first officer he noticed that she appeared to be uncomfortable.

"You're fidgeting." He commented.

"Sorry captain." She replied, "I got dressed in a hurry and this uniform isn't sitting right." Then after squirming again she added, "I just replicated this an hour ago."

"Oh my." The holographic woman suddenly said as she fanned her face with her hand, "Is it getting hot in here?" and she reached for the fastenings at the front of her dress.

"Computer deactivate emergency medical hologram." King said quickly and the figure vanished, "The appearance of the hologram is annoying enough." He said, "But given that there also seems to have been behavioural modifications I can't be certain that there's been damage to the treatment protocols."

"Speak to Max." Edward said, "We're in spacedock right now so we shouldn't need the EMH in the next few days, but I want this fixed before we depart. If whoever did this has left any evidence behind he should be able to find it. Then we'll deal with it."

"Yes captain." King replied and Edwards turned to Carr.

"Do you want to change before we go over the reports about what happened on Prestus for Starfleet Command?" he asked.

"If you don't mind captain." She replied, squirming once more.

"Not at all." Edwards said.

"Come in." Lieutenant Jenna West said, looking up from the PADD she was reading and the door to her quarters slid open, "Oh my God Bradley. What are you wearing?" she asked in amazement when she saw the ship's helmsman Lieutenant Bradley Hamilton standing in the corridor outside in a reflective silver jumpsuit.

"Isn't it great?" he replied, grinning, "It's my official Frontier Explorer replica uniform. I'm meeting up with my girlfriend on the surface and we're going to a convention. I just thought I'd see if you wanted to come along as well."

"To a Frontier Explorer convention?" West said, "In fact never mind that. You're telling me you have a girlfriend willing to be seen in public with you dressed like that?"

"Yes." Hamilton said, "And it's not just a Frontier Explorer convention. It's the sector's largest general science fiction, fantasy and superhero convention. Karen's going dressed as Lady Emerald, she's a-

"Yes I remember Lady Emerald from when I was a kid Bradley. I was only frozen for a decade."

"So are you in?"

"No thanks Bradley. I've got too much to do right here." West said and a puzzled frown appeared on Hamilton's face.

"I thought you were off duty for the next seventy-two hours same as me."

"I am." West responded, "But I'm studying for the command competency exam."

"The command competency exam? Why?" Hamilton asked and West sighed.

"Because I've got Lieutenant Mackey breathing down my neck." She said.

"The ship's counsellor?"

"Yes. He still insists on seeing me twice a week until he's satisfied that I've recovered psychologically from being kept in suspended animation and then stuck in that tube to be experimented on. I figured that if I could pass the test and demonstrate that I'm looking for promotion it would convince him that I'm fine. The last

thing I need is for him to declare me medically unfit for duty.”

”I wouldn’t worry about that.” Hamilton said, “Good old King Henry can’t stand Mackey. He’d never agree.”

”I can’t take that chance.”

”Okay then, but the offer still stands, you can reach us on the surface and the convention lasts for the next two days. Oh and the test is easier if you’re willing to kill all your friends. Good luck.”

”Thanks. I think.” West commented then just as Hamilton began to turn away she added, “Oh and Bradley?”

”Yes?”

”You’re meeting your girlfriend yes?”

”Yeah, she got a week’s leave from the Yorktown and came here to meet me.”

”Never let her go Bradley, because dressed like that you’ll never get another woman.” West said and she grinned.

”Oh ha-ha.” He replied before the door to West’s quarters slid shut. In the corridor outside, Hamilton turned and headed for the nearest turbolift.

Now wearing the uniform of a command division ensign Nikki peered around a corner at one of the hatchways where the *Nightfall* was docked with the starbase. She saw several people heading out of the ship, not only Starfleet personnel but also humans in MACO uniforms and Andorians in Imperial Guard uniforms. The presence of the Federation starbase meaning that these non-Starfleet combat troops were able to travel to the surface without accusations of being an invading force.

Nikki waited until these people had gone through the hatch and then darted after them, slowing to a more leisurely pace so as not to draw suspicion when she entered the starbase. As she had expected there were two Starfleet security guards just beyond the hatch, but these two enlisted personnel were both part of the starbase’s crew rather than the *Nightfall*’s, their uniforms lacking the distinctive patch on the sleeve.

”Hi guys,” Nikki said to the closest, “can you recommend a good place to get a drink on the surface?”

”Yes ma’am.” The man replied, “There’s a place called The Neutral Zone. It’s right outside the starbase’s south entrance.”

”Thanks.” Nikki said and she walked away, following the signs directing her to a transporter room.

Standing in a turbolift car Carr continued to squirm.

”Captain could I ask you a favour?” she said.

”Of course.” He replied.

”Could you unzip me a bit? This uniform really is uncomfortable.”

”Go on then. Turn around.” Edwards said and Carr turned to face away from him, placing her hands on the wall of the turbolift.

”You know you could always try one of the two piece variants.” Edwards suggested as he took hold of the zip fastener running down Carr’s back, “You always seem to be wearing the single piece type.”

”I like this type.” She replied, “Normally anyway.”

”Okay how’s this?” Edwards asked, pulling the zip down a few centimetres.

”Better.” Carr answered, “But frankly I can’t wait to get out this and into something more comfortable.”

”I’ll take the next one shall I?” Hamilton said and both Carr and Edwards looked round to see that the turbolift door had opened and their helmsman standing there open mouthed. Before either of them could respond he stepped back and the doors closed again.

”This probably didn’t look good did it captain?” Carr said.

”I doubt it Grace. I doubt it.”

When the turbolift doors next opened it was close to Carr’s quarters and she and Edwards exited the turbolift, Edwards standing close behind her to hide the fact that her uniform was half undone should anyone else happen to come along.

”Nikki it’s me.” Carr called out as she entered her quarters, “I just came back for another uniform. Nikki?”

Carr looked around, “Where is she?”

”Could she have gone for help with her schoolwork?” Edwards asked, “Max and T’Lan help her don’t they?”

”No her PADD is still here.” Carr replied and she walked over to the table and picked up the PADD lay on it.

Then she noticed something on the chair, “And so are her clothes it seems.” And she picked up the clothes that Nikki had been wearing when Carr and Edwards had last seen her, “Captain, could you double check the size of this uniform for me please?” and she turned around again.

”Sure.” Edwards replied and he stepped forwards to read the label inside Carr’s uniform, “It says, hang on, it says one sixty-five. Aren’t you taller than that?”

”Yes I am.” Carr replied, “I take a one seventy-five. Now I see what’s happened.”

”Mind explaining it to me then?” Edwards asked and Carr sighed.

"Nikki has clearly used the replicator to provide her with a copy my uniform in her size then forgotten to reset it before I replicated this one."

"But why?"

"So she can pretend to be older. Old enough to get liquor."

"Ah." Edwards said, "But none of the bar staff aboard this ship would serve her. They know her. That means she must have gone down to the surface."

"She can't have beamed down directly." Carr said, "So that means she must have gone onto the starbase first." Then she took a deep breath, "Okay, I know what to do." She said calmly, "First I will replicate a uniform that actually fits me, then I will go down to the surface and locate her. Then I will bring her back up here, physically dragging her if I have to and finally I will murder her." Then she smiled, "I take it you can bring Lieutenant Commander Cole up to speed as to why he's being promoted to first officer?" she added. "Grace, you're going to need help." Edwards said, "Get changed and I'll go with you. If we're quick enough and we use the *Nightfall's* transporters we may even be able to beat her to the surface."

"Thank you captain, I really appreciate this." Carr replied. Then she wandered over to the replicator set into the wall, "Reset uniform preference to length one seventy-five and produce one copy." She told the machine.

"Don't mention it." Edwards replied as Carr took the new uniform from the replicator and headed for her bedroom to change and then he tapped his combadge to activate it, "Edwards to bridge."

"Cole here captain." A voice responded, "How may I help?"

"Lieutenant Commander Carr and I are beaming down to the surface. I'm leaving you in command of the ship." Edwards said.

"Yes sir. Do you want an away team assembling? I can have a security detail arranged for you in five minutes." Cole asked.

"No thank you lieutenant commander." Edwards answered and he looked towards Carr's bedroom, "Carr and I are beaming down on a personal errand. Edwards out." And he tapped his combadge again.

On the bridge Lieutenant Commander Cole looked towards the science station where a female Vulcan sat at the console.

"Did you get that T'Lan?" he asked, "A personal errand. What do you think that may be?"

"Without further information I am unable to offer any suggestions lieutenant commander." T'Lan replied.

"Of course not lieutenant." Cole commented.

2

The MACO and Imperial Guard contingents aboard the *Nightfall* were commanded by a dozen commissioned officers, ten platoon commanders of lieutenant rank and two captains to command their respective companies. With the opportunity presented to them to be able to enjoy some time relaxing on the planet's surface all twelve had beamed down together and made their way to a club for something to drink. The Neutral Zone, as the club they came to first was called seemed to offer everything the off duty soldiers were looking for. A bar served a mix of genuine and replicated beverages in addition to a range of food. Music was performed by what at first appeared to be a live band, though this turned out to be a holographic projection that allowed customers to select from a massive variety of music for them to play. Those who did not fancy music for their entertainment instead had the choice of one of the games of chance played at several tables on the club's upper floor or renting out a holosuite for fully customised entertainment. Right now though, the party had decided to settle for claiming a table and sitting down to relax as a group. As they discussed their various lives Captain Shry, the commanding officer of the Andorian Imperial Guard company caught a brief glimpse of a woman in a Starfleet uniform entering the club and heading straight for the bar.

"Hey Heart, who's she?" he asked his MACO opposite number and the man turned to look in the same direction as Shry.

"I don't know, just some Starfleet type." Heart replied before he turned back to his drink.

"Well you should know." Shry said, "She's one of ours. I mean part of the *Nightfall's* crew. But I can't place her."

Heart turned around again and looked at the woman. From this angle it was not possible to see her face, but she was fairly short and from the red band on the cuff of her sleeve it was obvious that she was a command division officer. As she turned slightly Heart spotted the distinctive Imperial Guard and MACO inspired patch on her sleeve that marked her out as part of the *Nightfall's* crew.

"You're right." He said, "She's obviously one of ours, but I can't figure out who she is. She's about T'Lan's height, but she's not wearing science division colours." Then he looked at his junior officers, "Wait here." He told them, "I'm going to check this out."

"Wait for me." Shry added, "This is going to bug me until I know who she is." And the pair of officers got up and headed back towards the bar.

Positioning themselves either side of the mysterious woman, Heart was the first to approach her.

"Well hello there lieutenant." He said, "How about you let me get you something?"

"Actually it's ensign and-" the woman replied as she turned to face Heart and his eyes widened as he found himself looking straight at Nikki Carr. Nikki's jaw dropped and she slid down from the tall stool on which she was sat, "I need to go." She said as she turned away from Heart, only to then find herself standing face-to-face with Shry instead.

"Well isn't this interesting." The Andorian officer said, "So when did you graduate Starfleet Academy Ensign Carr?"

"They'll take anyone nowadays." Heart added.

"Your drink miss." a voice said and one of the bar staff set down a glass on the bar.

"Beer?" Heart asked and the bartender nodded.

"Yes sir. Would you like one?"

"No. But I'll take a soda." Heart replied and then he pushed the beer to Shry as he looked back at Nikki,

"Come with us." He said just as the bartender set down a glass of soda on the bar and Heart picked it up.

"Is everything alright miss?" he asked when he saw that Shry now had hold of Nikki's drink.

"Of course it is. We're shipmates." Heart said, "Isn't that so ensign?" and Nikki nodded.

"Yes, that's right." She said and then the three of them returned to the table where the other human and Andorian troops were sat. Heart pointed out a vacant chair to Nikki and when she sat down in it he placed the glass of soda in front of her while Shry retained the beer.

"What's she doing here?" one of the MACOs asked when he recognised Nikki.

"And what's she doing dressed like that?" an Andorian added.

"I think that this answers both questions." Shry said, holding up the glass of beer.

"Well?" Heart said sternly, looking Nikki in the eyes, "Do you have an explanation for why you're impersonating a Starfleet officer? A rather serious crime in the eyes of the Federation I might add."

"I just wanted a drink. There's no harm in it." Nikki replied.

"Of course not." Shry said, "Unless you're the owner of this place who could lose his licence for serving a minor."

"Or maybe any one of the Starfleet security guards you must have come past to get here, any one of whom could have arrested or even shot you as a spy." Heart added, "I'm guessing that your mother thinks you're still aboard the ship right?" and Nikki nodded.

"Right then." Heart said, drink that soda and then we're getting you back to the *Nightfall*. If we're quick enough about it then maybe the commander won't notice you're gone before you can get out of that getup."

George stood outside the perimeter fence of the starbase's ground facilities. To get any closer than he was would risk the security net running a detailed scan of him that may detect the modifications made to the human corpse that provided him with a physical form.

"A Starfleet starbase? You want us to break into there?" one of the trio of two men and a woman stood just behind him asked.

"You know, when you said you wanted us to steal something from a ship, you never mentioned anything about it being a Starfleet vessel." The man's female accomplice then added.

"Are you saying that you are dissatisfied with our arrangement Miss Turner?" George asked without bothering to look around.

"I think that what both Jenson and Turner are saying is that they want more latinum." The other man said, "And so do I."

"Oh really?" George replied, now turning to face the three humans he had hired to carry out the assignment, "How about an extra fifty percent each Mister Lake?" he asked and the three humans looked at one another, nodding.

"That sounds alright." Lake said with a grin.

"Very well then." George replied and he suddenly lashed out at Lake, striking the man in his throat. As the other two humans watched in horror Lake dropped to his knees, clutching at his neck as he tried to draw in air though his crushed windpipe, "There you go," George told them even as Lake was still struggling to breathe, "that's an extra fifty percent for each of you. Now do you have any more complaints? And before either of you think of backing out you may want to consider the demonstrations of my associates' power that has already been given to you."

"We're good." Jenson said reluctantly and George turned back towards the starbase fence, just in time to see Captain Edwards and Lieutenant Commander Carr come walking out of the nearby gate.

"That's so good to hear." He said with a smile, "Because I've just figured out exactly how I'm going to get you aboard the *Nightfall*." And at that moment Lake produced one final gurgling and lay still, his lifeless eyes gazing up into the sky.

Heart, Shry and Nikki materialised on the transporter pad aboard the *Nightfall* and immediately Heart stepped off and approached the operator on duty.

"Is Lieutenant Commander Carr about crewman?" he asked.

"Actually she and the captain beamed down to the surface about ten minutes ago on a personal errand."

The crewman replied, "Shall I contact her for you?"

"No." Heart replied, looking back at Nikki and Shry as the Andorian officer led her off the transporter pad, "In fact do us a favour would you? If she asks then none of us were here okay? Especially her and especially don't say a word about how she's dressed."

"Yes sir." The crewman said and then Heart and Shry took Nikki out of the room.

"Looks like you're in luck." Shry said to Nikki when they were alone in the corridor outside, "Now your mother never needs to find out that you committed a felony."

"She never would have known anyway." Nikki replied.

"I wouldn't bet on it kid." Heart said, "Parents have a way of finding out. Now let's get you back to your quarters and just to make sure you stay there I'm putting a guard in the corridor. In fact no, I'm staying right here with you myself."

"I better stay too in that case." Shry added, "She may try and escape."

The quarters that Nikki and her mother shared were only one deck away and so it took barely more than a minute to get there from the transporter room. When the doors slid open Heart and Shry escorted Nikki inside, whereupon she came to a sudden halt.

"Oh no." she said.

"What?" Shry asked.

"My clothes." Nikki said, walking over to the table where her own clothing was now lay.

"What about them?" Heart asked her.

"I didn't leave them on the table." Nikki said, "I left them on the chair underneath it. That means mom's been back here and found them. She knows."

"Told you so." Heart said with a grin.

Back in the transporter room the control console chimed to indicate that there was an incoming signal. The point of origin appeared to be the starbase and this confused the operator. Given that Heart, Shry and Nikki had only just beamed aboard it was odd that a second party would be beaming over so soon. However, the code was good and so the crewman activated the materialisation sequence without querying it.

Only a single figure materialised on the transporter pad, a woman in the uniform of a science division lieutenant. There was no patch on her arm so it was obvious that she was not one of the *Nightfall's* crew.

"Lieutenant Brown. Starbase ten support staff." The woman said in a friendly manner as she stepped off the pad, "I'm here to check your medical inventory." And she handed a PADD to the crewman.

"Yes ma'am." He said as he confirmed that the orders on the PADD bore authentic Starfleet security codes, "Sickbay is on deck eight."

"Yes I know the way thanks." Brown replied, taking the PADD back and then she too headed out of the room and towards the nearest turbolift.

When she entered sickbay Brown unexpectedly found herself confronted by a Borg drone and she gasped.

"Oh don't mind Lieutenant Maximillian." King said as he came out of his office, "He's our chief engineer."

"Right." Brown said, looking at the Borg and he in turn looked away from the exposed circuitry he was inspecting, revealing the Starfleet combadge on his chest.

"I get that a lot." He said.

"Max is just checking our EMH." King went on, "Some joker's been fiddling with it. Now how may I help you lieutenant – lieutenant?"

"Brown commander." Brown replied, "I'm here to check your inventory."

"My inventory? But I sent a copy to the starbase medical office when we arrived." King replied.

"Yes sir, I know that. But our system is being overhauled and we're losing messages at random. My superior sent me to verify your stocks rather than waste your time on it."

"Did you hear that Max?" King asked, "A starbase MO actually making my life easier. Does that strike you as normal?"

"No it doesn't." Max replied, "But I believe you humans have a saying about the dental health of equines given as presents."

"You mean 'Never look a gift horse in the mouth'?" King asked.

"That's right sir." Max said and then he placed the isolinear chip he was holding back in the socket he had removed it from, "Computer, activate emergency medical hologram." He said and once again the image of the woman appeared in sickbay. This time however she was correctly attired.

"Please state the nature of the medical emergency." She said.

"This is just a test." Max said. Then he added, "Computer deactivate emergency medical hologram." And she vanished again.

"So who was messing with my hologram?" King asked.

"No one commander." Max replied.

"Max, she was dressed like something out of a holosuite program." King pointed out.

"I know. But there was no corruption to the file. It would seem that the alternative attire and behaviour were down to an option inserted in the base coding by the developers. Perhaps as a joke."

"Oh great." King said, "Well just let me know how to reset it would you? The last thing I need is to have to keep calling you in here to fix it." And then he turned back towards Brown, "Now I believe that you said you wanted to check my inventory lieutenant." He said, "Right this way."

The Neutral Zone was the third drinking establishment that Edwards and Carr came to and when they entered they discovered to their disappointment that not only was the establishment far larger than the previous two they had tried it was popular enough with Starfleet personnel that their black and grey uniforms were everywhere they looked.

"Where do we start?" Carr asked as she tried to pick any uniformed woman that looked about Nikki's height.

"The bar." Edwards said, "Unless she got someone else to get her a drink, that's where she'll have had to go and tricking someone else kind of defeats the point in the uniform doesn't it?" then he began to push his way through the crowd to the bar with Carr following close behind him.

"What can I get you?" the barman asked when they reached the bar, expecting them to be customers.

"We're looking for an officer that could have come in here earlier." Edwards said, "She's human, young and about this tall." And he held his hand up to illustrate Nikki's height.

"Command division." Carr added with a frown.

"Did she have a patch on her arm like those?" the barman asked, indicating the patches worn by Carr and Edwards on their sleeves.

"You have seen her." Carr exclaimed, "Oh thank God."

"Where is she?" Edwards asked.

"Oh she left with two other officers." The barman answered and Carr winced.

"Security." She said.

"No miss. They weren't Starfleet." The barman said, "One was human and the other an Andorian. I'm not too good with other uniforms but they had that same patch on their arm. She seemed to know them. Look, there are more of them over there." And he pointed to the table where the *Nightfall's* MACO and Imperial Guard platoon leaders still sat.

Carr breathed a sigh of relief.

"It must have been Heart and Shry." She said, "They'll have taken her back to the ship."

"Let's get going then." Edwards said, "At least we know she's safe."

"Until I get hold of her." Carr muttered as they began to head back for the door.

As they stepped onto the street outside Edwards looked around casually and then he suddenly turned his head back to stare in the direction where a familiar figure had caught his eye.

"That's George!" he hissed.

"What?" Carr replied.

"Governor George."

"What? From Prestus?"

"Yes, look for yourself, he's right over there." And Carr looked in the same direction as Edwards where she saw the former governor who had caused them so much trouble looking right back at them. All of a sudden he turned and began to run.

"He's seen us." Edwards exclaimed, "Quick, after him." and the two Starfleet officers ran after him.

3.

"Okay they're following you." Jenson's voice sounded via one of the implants in George's head and he smiled to himself. George knew that he could easily escape his pursuers simply by returning to his own realm, but that was not his intention. For now at least George intended to allow the Starfleet officers to follow him, though he would keep them at a safe distance until they were in the perfect position. This meant being fed a running commentary about their location by Jenson who was at that moment positioned on the rooftop of a nearby building with a tricorder that enabled him to pick out their combadges even without a direct line of sight." Careful, you're pulling too far ahead. You're up to forty metres now." Jenson warned him and George slowed his pace, "That's better, they're closing the gap. They should just catch sight of you before you reach the next corner."

That was perfect for George, letting them keep catching glimpses of him was essential but the longer he could remain out of sight the less likely Carr and Edwards were to be able predict where he may head for and try to cut him off. George was not just following some random path, he knew exactly where he wanted to lead the two officers to and at which point he needed them to lose track of him.

As he neared his destination George ran around a corner where Turner lay in wait and she nodded as he ran past her before ducking down an alleyway. Once he was safely out of sight of even his associates he came to a halt for a moment before taking one more step and simply vanishing.

"Okay I'm ready." Turner signalled using the compact communicator she carried.

"Good because they're almost right on top of you." Jenson replied, "Fifteen metres. Twelve metres. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six," Turner turned to face away from the corner and took a deep breath, standing right up against the wall, "five, four, three, two-" and then Turner stepped backwards, suddenly appearing right in front of Edwards and Carr who both promptly ran right into her and all three let out cries of alarm as they tumbled to the ground.

"Watch where you're going!" Turner snapped as she disentangled herself from the two Starfleet officers, "Those uniforms don't give you the right to go charging into people you know."

"I'm sorry." Edwards replied, "Look, we were chasing someone. Official business. I don't suppose you saw anyone else come past here?"

"What? That other lunatic who almost knocked me down before you had the chance?" Turner asked.

"Probably." Carr responded.

"Oh he headed over to that building across the street." Turner said and she pointed to a two-storey building made of polished metal and glass.

"Thank you." Edwards said, "And once again we're very sorry."

"So you should be." Turner said before she strode away leaving Carr and Edwards looking at the building she had indicated.

"So what now?" Carr asked, "Do we just go inside and see if he's there?"

"No." Edwards replied, "This place must be important enough for George to head for rather than just pulling his disappearing act. But it could be a trap. I want to keep an eye on the place for a while and see if anyone else comes or goes."

"So we just stand here?" Carr asked.

"Of course not. We can only see the front from here and there's probably a back door as well." Edwards told her.

"So what's your plan?"

"Look over there lieutenant commander." Edwards said and he pointed to the building next to the one Turner had claimed George had gone inside. Above the door was a sign that read 'Centauri Hotel', "Why wait outside when we can sit in comfort?" and Carr smiled, "Look." Edwards then added, "There's an information terminal just down the street. Maybe we can get what we need from that." And they headed towards the freestanding computer terminal.

Edwards used the terminal's interface to call up a listing for the hotel in front of them and smiled.

"I thought so." He said, "These places always advertise themselves on public networks. There's even the floor plan we need to pick the right room." And then he looked up at the hotel building, comparing its alignment with the map, "Ah, here we go. Room seven oh four is listed as vacant and it overlooks the building next door."

"From that high up we should be able to see pretty much everything that goes on over there." Carr responded, looking at the building beside the hotel. Then she glanced at the display herself, "Does that say luxury suite?" she asked.

"Yes it does." Edwards said, "Look at it this way. I'm a captain and you're a lieutenant commander. Shouldn't rank have its privileges?"

"Oh definitely captain."

"Then let's go lieutenant commander."

When Carr and Edwards entered the hotel they went straight up to the reception desk and the woman sat behind it.

"How may I help you?" she asked, "Do you have a booking?"

"No actually." Edwards replied, "But we would like a room."

"Certainly." The receptionist said and she picked up a PADD from behind the desk.

"Err, actually there's a specific room we'd like to request." Edwards added.

"Well I can certainly see if it's available." The woman replied, "Do you know the number?"

"It's seven oh four." Carr told her.

"Oh of course, I didn't realise." The woman said, smiling at the two officers, "That room is certainly available right now. May I have your names?"

"Edwards." Edwards told her.

"Okay. Captain and missus Edwards." The woman said and she passed the PADD to Edwards.

"Oh we're-" Carr began before Edwards interrupted her.

"Never mind right now." He whispered as he placed his thumb on the PADD's touch screen.

"Do you have luggage?" the woman asked.

"No, this was a spur of the moment thing." Carr said and the woman smiled back at her before sounding a bell mounted on the desk and another hotel employee appeared.

"Show the captain and his wife up to seven oh four please." She told the young man as she handed him a room key.

Shown up to the room they had requested the hotel worker unlocked the door for them.

"Here you are." He said, "Enjoy your stay and congratulations on behalf of the hotel."

"Congratulations?" Edwards repeated and then he felt Carr tapped his arm, "What?" he asked her. And she pointed to a plaque mounted beside the door that simply read 'HONEYMOON SUITE' and his eyes widened. Recovering his composure Edwards looked back at the hotel employee and smiled, "Of course. Thank you." He said.

Carr entered the room and walked straight across to the windows opposite.

"Not much noise from the street up here." She said as she looked out and saw that Edwards had been correct about the room offering the perfect view of both the front and rear of the building next door.

"Oh that will be the built in white noise fields." The hotel worker told her, "There are active noise dampening fields built into every room so you won't be disturbed."

"And we get to make as much noise as we like right?" Edwards said.

"That's right sir. I'll be leaving you now, so enjoy your stay." The hotel worker said and he nodded briefly before walking off down the corridor.

Edwards stepped into the room and closed the door behind him.

"Ah, alone at last to celebrate our nuptials." He said and Carr glared at him, frowning, "Oh lighten up Grace." He added as he wandered over to her, "Now let's see what we can see shall we?"

Death was a risk that everyone serving aboard a starship faced. Space was filled with natural hazards from diseases and dangerous lifeforms to radiation fields and bizarre stellar phenomena even without taking into consideration hostile action from other space farers. Therefore it was only to be expected that Starfleet vessels featured a morgue where bodies could be stored properly.

There was only one body stored in the morgue at the current time and King opened up the drawer where it was kept and rolled it out.

"How come you haven't transferred that to the starbase?" Brown asked from behind him and King turned to see her standing in the doorway leading back to the main treatment area of sickbay.

"Because I'm not done with it yet." He replied, "Now if you're done making your list you can give me a hand with this lieutenant."

Brown joined King by the drawer and they moved the body onto a trolley before wheeling it out of the morgue.

"I take it that this body's not infectious?" Brown said.

"No." King said, shaking his head, "This body was brought to me with a projectile wound to the head that had taken out vital parts of the brain. But it's not really the body I'm interested in."

"Then what are you interested in doctor?" Brown asked and King opened up the bag holding the body to reveal the corpse of a human woman who looked to have been in her late twenties or early thirties that had a hole punched in the forehead where it had been shot.

"Take a look." King replied and he tilted the dead woman's head to expose the exit wound of the bullet. Through this larger hole the brain was visible, but more importantly so were numerous white fibres running through the organ.

"What are those?" Brown asked as King reached for a medical probe.

"It's some sort of advanced synthetic flesh. The body is riddled with the stuff. It seems to be capable of mimicking pretty much any type of organic cell as well as certain electronic functions. In this case it was used to reanimate an already dead body well enough to give the impression it was still alive. It walked and it talked like a human being and I want to know how it did it." King explained and he gently inserted the probe through the hole in the back of the skull.

All of a sudden the body's eyes widened and it let out a gasp as it sat up straight and both Brown and King leapt backwards in surprise. Instinctively King reached for a medical laser, intending to wield it as a weapon if needed. But after a few seconds of apparent life the body fell backwards again and lay as lifeless as before.

"I think I must have triggered something there." King said as he returned the laser to its place in the equipment rack, "Oops."

"Right. Oops." Brown replied and then they both bent back over the body.

Carr and Edwards had moved a small couch over to the window to sit on while they kept watch when there was a chiming sound from the hotel suite door.

"Who is it?" Carr called out.

"They won't hear you." Edwards reminded her as he got up and headed for the door, "The sound suppression field remember?"

"Oh yeah. I wonder who it is anyway?" Carr replied.

"Maybe room service with some complementary champagne." Edwards said.

"Ooh, that would be nice. Though drinking on duty isn't really allowed is it?"

"Well in that case we'll just have to take it back to the ship with us." Edwards said as he opened the door and turned to face the man standing in the corridor wearing a hotel uniform. Having never seen Jenson before, Edwards did not recognise him and took him to be the hotel employee he seemed to be.

"Yes can I-" Edwards began but while he was distracted by Jenson standing right in front of him he failed to notice Turner stood at the end of the corridor with a phaser.

Carr spun around as she heard the discharge of the phaser and was just in time to see Edwards fall back into the room.

"Captain!" she exclaimed as Jenson leapt over Edwards and produced another phaser from under his jacket. Carr ducked behind the couch, though she knew that it would not last long as cover against a directed energy weapon from such close range and reached for her combadge.

"Carr to *Nightfall*! Emergency beam up now!" she snapped, but in return there was nothing but static.

Then Jenson fired and the beam just clipped the top of the couch. However, rather than incinerating a large part of it the beam did not even scorch the covering and Carr realised that the weapon was set to stun.

Carr peered around the couch before leaping to her feet and rushing at Jenson head on. But the man reacted quickly and he fired again, the phaser blast catching Carr in the chest and she too collapsed to the floor unconscious.

"Okay they're both down." Jenson said as Turner appeared in the doorway, "Get him inside and let's do this."



When Jenson and Turner returned to their safe house they found George already waiting for them.

"Well?" he asked simply.

"Worked like a charm." Turner said as she opened up the holdall she had slung over her shoulder and pulled a Starfleet uniform from it.

"Excellent." George said, "And what of their owners? Dead?"

"No." Jenson replied, "Using a lethal setting on our phasers would have ruined the uniforms. We just stunned them."

"Stunned them? But what if they come round in time to raise the alarm?" George asked, scowling.

"Calm down Mister George." Jenson said, "We made sure that they won't be warning anyone about us anytime soon."

"These could be a problem though." Turner then said and she held up one of the uniforms so that the patch on its sleeve was visible, "We're bound to be seen by the ship's crew and it won't take them long to realise that these uniforms don't belong to us. We need them to think that we're part of the starbase crew who have come aboard temporarily."

"Then just unpick them." George said, "And do it quickly, I can't leave until this is done and I don't want to spend any longer here than is necessary."

"You have the bomb?" Jenson asked.

"Right here." George replied and he opened up an equipment case marked with Starfleet insignia and removed the pre-prepared charge it contained, "Just place this anywhere near the *Nightfall's* warp cores, impulse reactors or torpedoes and it'll have enough power to completely destroy the ship."

"You realise that we won't be able to beam aboard with this?" Jenson told him as he inspected the bomb, "Even in a shielded case the transporter's sensors would pick up the explosive."

"Yes I realise that." George said, "Which is why I'm eager for you two to get a move on."

Edwards awoke to find himself in bed and he tried to remember how he got there. The room's blinds were now closed and with the lights out it was only dimly illuminated by what little light could get through the blinds. The last thing he could recall was opening the hotel suite door to a hotel employee and then everything went blank. One of his hands was raised above his head and he tried to lower it only to find that it was stuck. Looking at the hand he saw that a shiny metal set of handcuffs had been locked around his wrist and then threaded through the bed frame before the other half was locked around another wrist. A wrist that was not his.

"Oh no." he said to himself as he looked along the slender arm bound to his until he came to a head that was covered in long red hair, "Oh no." he said again. Then he reached out and put a hand on Carr's shoulder to shake her, "Lieutenant commander." He said softly as he shook her and Carr groaned, "Grace, wake up."

Carr's eye's flickered open and she looked back at Edwards.

"Captain?" she said and then she too tried to lower her arm only to find it bound, "What's going on?"

"I think we were shot." Edwards told her.

"Oh yeah, the guy in the hotel uniform with the phaser." Carr said and then she looked around the room,

"Can you see a key to these cuffs?" she asked.

"I think that would defeat the purpose of handcuffing us to the bed if we were to be left a key." Edwards pointed out.

"I suppose so." Carr said and then she tugged at the handcuffs, trying to pull her wrist free.

"Ow!" Edwards exclaimed as all she succeeded in doing was pulling his hand against the metal bed frame,

"Would you mind not doing that?"

"Sorry captain." Carr said and then she added, "What about the communicator?" and both she and Edwards looked at where a communicator had been set into the wall beside the bed only to see that it had been crudely ripped out leaving wires dangling from the hole in the wall.

"Doesn't look like it's working." Edwards commented.

"So what do you think he wanted our uniforms for?" Carr asked.

"I don't know." Edwards said, "Hopefully it was just an attempt to procure a pair of uniforms for the local underworld without there being a specific use in mind. But we can't discount the possibility that it has to do with George. We may have been deliberately led here so we could be ambushed."

"Which means that the ship could be in danger." Carr said.
"That is a distinct possibility." Edwards replied and then there was a brief pause.
"Captain?" Carr said.
"Yes lieutenant commander?"
"Well, I was just wondering something. Would you mind answering a question?"
"Go ahead." Edwards told her.
"Well, its kind of awkward."
"Just spit it out commander."
"Okay here goes. Are you wearing anything? I mean anything at all?"
"Ah." Edwards responded, "I was really hoping you weren't going to ask that."
"Oh great." Carr said, frowning, "We're never going to hear the end of this you know. Chained together naked in the honeymoon suite. We'll be the laughing stock of the fleet." And she took a deep breath, "This is ridiculous." She said, "That guy must have left us a key, we just need to find it that's all. I bet it's under the covers somewhere." And with her free hand she reached under the sheets and began to feel around for the key.
"Lieutenant commander." Edwards said sternly.
"Yes captain?"
"Does that feel like a key?"
"No sir."
"Then let go of it."
"Yes sir. Sorry." Carr said and she lifted her hand from under the covers again, "That sound dampening field means that we can't shout for help doesn't it?" and Edwards nodded.
"That would seem to be the case." He replied.
"Then we could be here until someone from the hotel comes to find out why we're still in here." Carr said as she lay back and tugged the covers upwards to cover herself.
"Which could potentially be a very long time." Edwards said in agreement, "Overnight at least I'd say." And Carr turned to look him in the face.
"So what are we supposed to do until then?" she asked.

With the *Nightfall* patches removed from the uniforms, Jenson and Turner looked just like any other command division officers as they passed through the perimeter gate. The only other change that they had made to their uniforms was to the rank insignia on their collars. A captain and a lieutenant commander may draw unwanted attention so each of them had removed enough pips to make them appear as lieutenants instead.

Once they were within the perimeter of the starbase's ground facilities they headed towards the surface docking bays. Here a large number of small atmosphere capable craft up to the size of runabouts were kept in several large hangars and the two infiltrators headed towards a large shuttlecraft that was being loaded with cargo pallets.

"You heading for the orbital platform ensign?" Jenson called out to the pilot.

"Yes sir." The woman replied.

"Good. Then you can give us a ride up there." Jenson told her.

"I'm not supposed to carry passengers sir." She replied.

"That's okay ensign." Turner said, "Officially you'll be transporting this." And she held up the equipment case that contained the explosive device, "It's a biological sample that can't be sent through the transporter. We're just here to see it reaches the right person."

The pilot looked puzzled for a moment as she thought about this, aware not only of her standing orders to move cargo only but also that she was apparently facing two superior officers.

"Okay then." She said, "Climb aboard, I'm about to take off."

It took just a few minutes for the shuttle to travel as far as the geostationary orbit in which the orbital portion of the starbase was positioned and to enter one of the many small shuttle bays. From here Jenson and Turner headed upwards, pausing when they reached an observation lounge that overlooked the massive internal docking bay. From here they could see more than a dozen starships docked inside it and even to the spacious dry dock chambers on the opposite side that could each fit a Galaxy-class vessel inside. For more than a hundred years Starbase Ten had been the focal point of the Federation's defences against any potential Romulan aggression and the resources put into it were obvious to see.

"There she is." Jenson said, pointing to an Akira-class heavy cruiser, "The *USS Nightfall*. Docking port thirty-four."

"Then let's go." Turner replied, "No point just standing here staring at her."

Getting directions from a computer terminal Jenson and Turner made their way to docking port thirty-four where they found the ship guarded by two Starfleet security officers. This was not unexpected though and both of them simply walked past the two men, their uniforms proving adequate to trick them into believing that they in fact had every right to be there. Once aboard the *Nightfall* they found a quiet spot and opened up the equipment case.

"So what first?" Jenson asked as Turner took out the two phasers that the case contained in addition to the bomb and handed one to him that he promptly fixed to the waistband of his uniform, "Body or bomb?"

"Bomb." Turner replied as she fixed the other phaser to her own uniform. Neither of the weapons was of the latest model, but until drawn from their holsters it would be difficult to notice this and it would take a detailed inspection to discover that they were in fact not Starfleet-issue but commercial models with restricted energy output, "George wants us to try and recover that body for him, though I've no idea why and I'd rather not have to explain to anyone why we're wandering about with it. We'll plant the bomb, grab the corpse and then take it to the nearest transporter room and beam it down to the surface."

"Okay then." Jenson said, "Well since you're our explosives expert, where do you suggest we stick it?"

"Ideally I'd say the warp core." Turner answered, "But that's an obvious target. Besides, even in spacedock the engineering section isn't going to be un-manned and we're wearing the wrong colour to be sneaking about in that part of the ship. Same goes for the impulse engines."

"Then where? The torpedo stores?"

"Actually I was thinking about the hangars." Turner said.

"The hangars? But why?" Jenson asked.

"Because this is an Akira-class ship right? So it means that it's carrying fighters. We rig the engines of one of them to blow and it should still be enough to trigger a reaction that will rip the guts out of the entire ship."

"Along with half the station." Jenson pointed out.

"Yeah I know. George better be right about being able to get us off world pretty quick because I'd rather not be around when bits of this place start dropping on the planet." Turner said, "Now let's go. I think that the hangars are this way."

The hangar deck on an Akira-class cruiser was one of the largest single spaces aboard any Starfleet starship. Doors were located at both the front and rear of the saucer section to produce a 'through deck' hangar from which auxiliary craft would be launched from the main door at the front and recovered through the two smaller doors at the rear. In addition to the class six shuttlecraft and two Danube-class runabouts the *Nightfall* also carried a full squadron of fighters and several assault shuttles belonging to the MACO and Imperial Guard contingents. Right now most of these had been brought up out of their individual hangars and onto the main hangar deck to give the ground crews more room to work on them. This meant that the hangar was a hive of activity, with engineers and pilots going over every detail of their craft.

Paying particular attention to the goings on in the hangar was Lieutenant Commander William White, commonly known by his call sign Snowman. White was the commanding officer of the *Nightfall's* attached fighter squadron and so he had a vested interest in their serviceability and what he saw did not impress him. "Chief!" he yelled, waving at one of the senior ground crew as he strode towards one of the fighters.

"Yes sir?" the engineering replied, following White.

"Chief what is this man doing?" White asked as he came to a halt close to the fighter and looked down at a crewman working underneath it. Startled, the crewman stepped back and looked at both his superior and Lieutenant Commander White.

"Answer the officer." The chief ordered.

"I – Err, I'm checking the impulse ignition system chief." The crewman replied.

"That's 'sir'." The chief said, "You're addressing an officer."

"Yes sir." The crewman said and White glared at him.

"And where exactly is this fighter positioned crewman?" he demanded.

"I'm sorry sir, I don't-" the crewman began before White pointed at the deck below the fighter, specifically indicating the groove that one of the landing struts rested in.

"You idiot!" the chief snapped, "You don't work on the engines while the ship's connected to the magnetic launch accelerators!"

"Did you stop to consider what would happen if your testing happened to send a charge into that accelerator?" White asked loudly and the crewman stared back at him dumbfounded, "Let me explain crewman." White continued and he pointed towards the large open hangar doorway at the front of the ship, "The accelerator would trigger and send this fighter hurtling out of this hangar bay, taking out every other ship in its path. Then just for good measure this fighter would slam into the internal wall of this spacedock

facility. Not only destroying several extremely valuable craft here on the Nightfall, but also inflicting severe damage to the starbase itself and causing God only knows how many casualties.”

Then the chief looked around.

”Come on.” He called out, waving other crewmen over, ”Let’s get this fighter moved over there.” And he pointed to a vacant spot close by on the hangar deck.

From one of the hangar exits Jenson and Turner watched all this as it happened.

”Okay here’s our chance.” Jenson said, ”No one’s watching those fighters over there.” And he and Turner calmly began to walk across the hangar towards the row of four fighters.

”We should be wearing service division uniforms.” Turner whispered as she took note of the uniforms worn by the vast majority of the other people in the hangar. Only a handful wore the red or blue collars of the command and science divisions with a few more in non-Starfleet uniforms.

”Well next time we’ll asked Mister George if he wouldn’t mind luring someone more suitable to your taste into his ambush shall we?” Jenson replied as he looked about to make sure that they had not attracted any undue attention.

Reaching the fighters the pair slipped between them and Jenson followed Turner as she walked around to the rear of one.

”This should do.” She said, setting down the equipment case and removing the explosive charge from inside, ”Go get me one of those drivers.” She added, glancing at a row of individually numbered tools on a cart.

”Why not just tuck it inside a panel that’s already open?” Jenson asked as he fetched the tool for her and she sighed.

”Because if I put it somewhere that’s not been signed off as complete someone is likely to find it.” Turner responded and she pointed to a PADD resting on the fighter’s wing, ”Now this says that this fighter has been fully serviced. No one’s going to be opening it up anytime soon. Or ever again after this goes off.” Then she took the gun-shaped tool from Jenson and inserted it into one of the fasteners holding the impulse engine inspection cover closed. Then she waited while Jenson kept watch.

”Get ready,” he aid, ”they’ve moved that other fighter.” And a few moments later there was the sound of a power tool being activated elsewhere in the hangar. Using this for cover Turner promptly unscrewed the inspection cover and removed it, passing both the tool and cover to Jenson to leave her hands free to set the bomb.

5.

With the explosive in place and the inspection cover replaced Jenson and Turner headed straight for the nearest turbolift to take them up to the level that the *Nightfall's* sickbay was on. They timed getting aboard the turbolift so that they were alone, seeing no point in risking discovery by putting themselves in any situation where the crew could get closer to them than was necessary. However, once inside the turbolift they were left unable to pick and choose how close others could get to them.

The turbolift doors slid open before reaching the deck where sickbay was located and revealed a figure that looked somewhat out of place aboard a Federation starship. Sublieutenant Nayal was a Romulan who had fled from the fighting in her own species' territory when the colony she had lived on became the victim of determined attacks by Remans. One of the minority whose forehead lacked the prominent brow that often set them apart from Vulcans, the only way to tell her from that closely related species was by the slowly fading designs inked down each side of her face, marking her out as still being in mourning for those she had lost when the planet Romulus had been destroyed by a supernova. She had been allowed to remain on the *Nightfall* as an advisor in Romulan matters but was not a Starfleet officer, therefore she still wore a Romulan military uniform and both Jenson and Turner exchanged puzzled glances as she stepped into the turbolift.

"Deck seven lounge." She said as the doors closed again. Then she glanced at the two people in Starfleet uniforms and smiled at them. Neither responded in kind, instead both of them remained silent and looked straight ahead.

Nayal was about to turn away when something about these two people caught her eye. She did not recognise either of them as part of the *Nightfall's* crew and their uniforms did not possess the patch that most of the crew wore in any case. But at the spot on their sleeves where the patch would typically be worn it looked to Nayal as if patches had been removed, pieces of the thread used to secure them still noticeable. Then Nayal looked up to the collars where rank pins were attached to the red shirts of Starfleet's command division and she noticed that both wore the two solid gold pins of lieutenants. But on the collar of Turner, who was stood closer to Nayal than Jenson the Romulan noticed that there was a small tear where a third pin had been removed carelessly.

Briefly she considered challenging the pair, but then her attention was drawn to the phasers holstered at the waists of both 'officers' and Nayal decided that discretion was called for here. Then the turbolift came to a halt again and the doors opened on deck eight, this time revealing an empty corridor and without a word from either of them Jenson and Turner got out and walked away. Then the doors closed again and the turbolift began to move.

"Cancel destination." Nayal said suddenly, "Take me to the bridge."

While in spacedock the *Nightfall* like any starship needed only a skeleton staff on its bridge and when Nayal suddenly burst out of the turbolift she found most of the stations unmanned. Lieutenant Commander Cole was sat in the captain's chair rather than at his usual place at the tactical console behind it while junior officers were present at the operations and life support monitoring stations. Interestingly Nayal also noticed that Lieutenant T'Lan was sat at the science station despite there being no need for a science officer to be on the bridge at this time.

"Robert." Nayal exclaimed.

"You should address him as Lieutenant Commander Cole sublieutenant." T'Lan commented.

"I'm not in Starfleet cousin." Nayal replied.

"And please cease calling me 'cousin'. We are not related." T'Lan said.

"Never mind that." Nayal said as she rushed to stand in front of Cole, "Commander I think we've got a problem."

"What sort of problem?" Cole asked.

"A security breach." Nayal told him.

"In spacedock?" T'Lan said, "Attempting to infiltrate a starship at a starbase is illogical. Security is—"

"Not good enough it would seem." Nayal interrupted, "Commander, you've got to believe me. We have intruders."

Getting up from his chair, Cole walked around to the tactical and security station with Nayal following him.

Likewise, T'Lan also got up from the science station and joined them both standing at tactical.

"Show me." He said, calling up a deck plan of the ship on the LCARS display.

"What? Aren't you going to sound an intruder alert?" Nayal asked, "Even with the amount of people you've got on leave you must have enough security guards and troops aboard to conduct a search."

"Yes." Cole replied, "But I'd like to get a head start by figuring out where they should be searching. Now show me where you first saw them."

"Here." Nayal said, pointing to where she had boarded the turbolift, "There were two of them in Starfleet uniforms in the turbolift when I got in. Command division and they weren't part of the crew."

"There are numerous officers from the starbase aboard at this time." T'Lan pointed out, "Most are from the services division, but there are some from both command and sciences."

"And how many of them have pulled *Nightfall* patches from their sleeves cousin?" Nayal responded, "Or altered their ranks? Commander you need to check your crew."

"You say they altered their ranks?" Cole said, "How?"

"It looked like one of them had pulled out a rank pin from her collar to make her look like a lieutenant. So the uniform must have belonged to a lieutenant commander or commander. I don't know about the other. His rank showed a lieutenant as well, but I couldn't tell if it was altered in any way."

"That is not possible." T'Lan said, "Lieutenant Commander Carr is the only person to hold such a rank."

"Then where is she?" Nayal asked.

"Down on the planet." Cole replied, "With the captain. They went there on some secret personal errand."

"Those two should just get a room." Nayal commented. Then she looked at Cole, "Did I use that right?" she asked.

"As a matter of fact yes." He replied, "But if we could get back to the matter at hand, I believe you thought we have uninvited guests aboard?"

"Yes, that's right." Nayal said.

"Okay, now let's see if Commander Carr can shed any light on this." Cole said and he activated the *Nightfall's* communication system, "*Nightfall* to Lieutenant Commander Carr." He said but there was no response, "*Nightfall* to Captain Edwards." He said but again there was no reply.

"I'm guessing that neither of them should have deactivated their combadges right?" Nayal asked and Cole shook his head.

"No, they know the regulations. They should be reachable at all times." He said.

"In that case, logic suggests that the uniforms the sublieutenant claims to have seen these intruders wearing were stolen from the captain and Lieutenant Command Carr."

"Then we need to find them." Cole said sternly, "Our people could be in danger."

"If you saw them in the turbolift, where are they now?" T'Lan asked.

"Well they got out before I got here obviously. Isn't that logical cousin?"

"It is. Though I suspect your comment was facetious."

"It was. They got out here on deck eight." Nayal said, pointing to the display again.

"So what's on deck eight that would interest them?" Cole said.

"The computer core is accessible from that level." T'Lan replied.

"Yes, but the nanite hive is centred on the computer. If anyone tried to gain access then the nanites would warn us."

"The transporter rooms on that level perhaps then?" T'Lan said.

"Inactive right now." Cole said, "Only rooms one and two are manned and they're on deck three."

"Did you consider questioning these individuals when you saw them sublieutenant?" T'Lan asked.

"They were armed." Nayal replied, "Each had a type two phaser. I may be strong enough to overpower a human or two, but I wasn't taking any chances against phasers. Did the captain and commander have any weapons with them when they went down to the surface?"

"I don't know." Cole replied, "The captain didn't speak to me face to face, he just called the bridge to let me know they were both beaming down. In any case, it doesn't seem like they need access to our weapons so what else could they be after?"

"Perhaps we should widen our field of expertise." T'Lan suggested, "The senior staff may be able to offer more input."

"Good idea." Cole replied and he reached for the communication system again, "Senior officers to the bridge." He said, broadcasting the message to all of the *Nightfall's* department heads still aboard.

"Did you hear that?" Nikki said to Heart and Shry as the two soldiers sat at the table playing cards while she gave the appearance of actually studying, "I guess you'll have to go."

"She's right about that." Shry said, tossing down his cards.

"Yeah I know." Heart said and he got up and then reached out to grab Nikki by the shoulder, "Which means you're coming too." He added.

"I'm kind of busy down here." King said in reply to the summons, "How can you have an emergency in spacedock anyway?"

"That's okay doctor." Cole responded, "Finish up what you're doing first. This isn't really a medical matter anyway."

"Good." King said as he tapped his combadge to deactivate it. Then he turned to Brown.

"This is remarkable." she said as she looked at the scans of the artificial flesh pathways that wound their way throughout the inside of the dead woman's skull.

"Notice how they compare with these scans we took of the original samples obtained from a Romulan." King replied as he brought up a second image on the display screen, "The chemical structure is identical, yet the arrangement is different. In the Romulan the substance was mimicking muscle tissue while here it has replaced parts of the brain. Our science officer theorises that it could in fact be used to reproduce any body tissue required and what's more it can double as a data storage medium."

"Just like the Borg." Brown commented.

"What was that lieutenant?" King asked.

"I said it's just like the Borg. They take members of other species and then assimilate them by adding cybernetic implants. This just takes the idea a bit further."

"Yes but the Borg's assimilation process requires a living brain, whereas whoever is doing this instead appears to have to take a corpse and then reanimates it. So far every single individual we've encountered has been identifiable by the necrotic tissue in the unmodified portions of their body."

"Perhaps it's a method of control?" Brown suggested.

"What do you mean?" King asked her.

"Well if someone doesn't do what the people doing this want them to then maybe the implants will be deactivated and that person goes back to being dead."

King considered this.

"It's a thought I suppose. But look at where some of these implants go. These are parts of the brain associated with memory. I doubt that this woman had any memory of who she was or that she had ever died."

Just then the sickbay doors slid open and King looked around to see two officers in command division uniforms standing there, neither of whom looked to be hurt.

"I'll be with you in just a moment." He told them before turning back to face Brown, "Excuse while I see what they want." He said, "Feel free to look over these scans and notes if you want, but don't touch that body while I'm gone."

King then turned to face the newcomers again and he found that as he had been talking to Brown they had both headed for the table on which the body lay.

"Unless you've a blue collar there's nothing on that table to interest you." King said sternly, approaching them, "Now what do you want? You don't look hurt and I'm very busy."

"Just step aside and give us the body old man." Jenson said, snarling and he reached for his phaser.

"Look out!" Brown yelled and she leapt towards King, pushing him out of the way. Then she delivered a blow to Jenson's wrist that made him let go of his weapon and give out a sudden surprised yelp as the phaser slid across the floor, ending up near the door.

Looking around, Brown saw Turner drawing her own weapon and Brown lashed out with a foot, striking the woman with her heel and sending her toppling over backwards. As she landed she too let go of her phaser and the weapon slid across the floor. Instantly Brown dived for it, hoping to get there before Turner as she began to scabble across the floor towards it.

West was the first of the department heads to answer the summons to the bridge.

"What's going on?" she asked as she stepped from the turbolift.

"We've got intruders." Cole replied.

"In spacedock?" West said as she joined the others by the tactical station, "How did they get aboard?"

"It would seem that they obtained uniforms from the captain and Lieutenant Commander Carr." T'Lan told her, "Both are out of contact."

"What's happened to mom?" Nikki's voice suddenly sounded out as the turbolift doors opened again and she rushed out, followed by Heart and Shry.

"Ah." Cole said, "Well we're not certain."

"Nice work cousin." Nayal said, looking at T'Lan.

The turbolift opened for a third time, this time revealing both Max and White who stepped out onto the bridge.

"Okay now that everyone's here we can get on." Cole said.

"What about the doctor?" West asked.

"He's busy." Cole replied.

"And where's our helmsman?" White asked, glancing towards the helm station that was naturally enough unmanned while the ship was in spacedock.

"Bradley's gone to one of his conventions." West told him.

"Just tell me what's happened to my mom." Nikki said.

"We're not sure." Cole replied, "She beamed down to the planet with the captain for some reason and we think that something may have happened to them."

"This is my fault isn't it?" Nikki said, looking at Heart and Shry.

"It is not logical to blame yourself for this." T'Lan tried to reassure her.

"Err, the young lady went down to the surface herself." Shry said, "Captain Heart and I found her in a bar and brought her back."

"Costing us part of our shore leave I might add." Heart commented.

"Well now it seems that we have two intruders aboard wearing Starfleet uniforms. Nayal spotted them in the turbolift." Cole explained.

"So where are they now?" Heart asked.

"They got out on deck eight." Nayal answered.

"And we're trying to figure out why before sending in a security detail." Cole added.

"Well you lot can stay here talking amongst yourselves if you want, but I suggest that Shry and I go down to the barracks and get what's left of our men aboard this ship together and start sealing the deck."

"I'm all for that." Shry said.

Turner had made it to the phaser first but Brown was close enough that before the intruder could use the weapon she grabbed hold of her wrist and the pair wrestled for control of it. Meanwhile King as able to strike two blows in rapid succession, startling Jenson with his speed and accuracy. But then Jenson dived into him, knocking him to the floor and landing on top of him.

"Not bad for a medic old man." He said with a scowl, "But I'm still faster."

As King tried to free himself from Jenson it became obvious to him that he and Brown needed help. The problem was that neither of them could spare a hand to activate their combadges to summon it. However, it suddenly occurred to King that help was available here in sickbay.

"Computer! Activate emergency hologram!" he snapped and the familiar form of the EMH materialised in the middle of the room.

"Please state the nature of the medical emergency." She said.

"Get this guy off me!" King yelled, "Quick!" and the EMH rushed towards Jenson, wrapping her arms around him and dragging him off King. Seeing this Turner swung her arm towards them so that the phaser was pointed at the EMH and she depressed the trigger button.

The bright red beam passed straight through the EMH's holographic body, producing nothing more than a brief disruption in its appearance before the beam struck the ceiling.

"We've got a phaser discharge in sickbay!" Cole exclaimed as an alert sounded from his console. Then he rushed to the arms locker at the side of the bridge and opened it, taking out a phaser, "I'm going to sickbay." He told the others, "Tell Heart and Shry to meet me there and send a security team as well." Then he ran into the turbolift.

The turbolift doors opened on deck eight just as a pair of security guards was running past with their phasers in their hands.

"You two with me!" Cole ordered and as a group they rushed towards sickbay.

6.

Inside sickbay King went to help Brown, rushing over and grabbing hold of Turner's wrist and twisting it until she cried out in pain and let go of her phaser. Then she kicked Brown in the stomach and pushed her into King. Scrambling to her feet she ran for the door and scooped up Jenson's phaser. Her proximity to the door had caused it to open and as she spun around to take aim at Brown and King she heard a shout from behind her.

"Drop it!" Heart shouted and Turner turned again to see the MACO standing with Shry and a squad of Andorian troops blocking the corridor. Each soldier held a rifle of unconventional appearance. They had the look of projectile weapons rather than Federation standard phasers, but mounted beneath each one was what looked to be a secondary weapon that was definitely an energy weapon of some form.

Turner fired first, the beam from her phaser hitting the armoured torso of one of the Andorians and the soldier fell backwards. But in response the rest of the troops returned fired, a volley of phaser beams shooting from the weapons mounted beneath the rifle barrels and Turner died without a sound.

At that moment Cole and his security team appeared from the other direction and the Nightfall's security chief looked down at the body.

"What's wrong with the stun setting?" he asked.

"Not now commander." Shry replied and keeping his rifle at his shoulder he rushed through the open doorway into sickbay and Cole followed him.

Inside they found King and Brown getting back to their feet while Jenson thrashed about helplessly as the EMH held him fast.

"Doctor there's a man down outside." Cole said as he holstered his phaser.

"I'll get my kit." King replied.

"No hurry doctor." Heart said from the doorway as he stood supporting the Andorian who had been hit by the phaser beam, "These vests work pretty well against low power phaser blasts."

Cole spotted the weapon that King had knocked from Turner's grasp and he retrieved it.

"This isn't Starfleet issue." He said.

"I can see that." Shry commented, "An obsolete type isn't it?"

"Actually I don't think that it ever was a Starfleet weapon." Cole replied as he opened up the cover of the phaser, "Yes, see here? The casing is carbon lined instead of duranium alloy. This thing can't be used at anything more than setting eight."

"Still enough to kill." King pointed out as he walked over to the injured Andorian.

"And set off the security alarms." Cole said, "Luckily for you." Then he looked at his men and nodded towards Jenson, "Secure him in the brig." He ordered them and the men went over to Jenson and took hold of him.

"Thank you." The EMH said as she let go her grip on him, "I'm a doctor not a wrestler." Then she gave the impression of exhaling sharply and fanned her face with her hand, "And is it me or is it getting hot in here?" she asked and she reached for where a genuine Starfleet jumpsuit would fasten at the back of her neck.

"Computer deactivate emergency medical hologram." King said quickly and he frowned, "Max said he'd fixed that." He added.

Stripped of his stolen uniform, Jenson now wore a set of non-descript overalls as he sat in the detention cell while Cole, Heart and Shry watched him from the other side of the force field. The door to the security section opened and Cole glanced over his shoulder to see Max entering carrying the uniforms taken from Jenson and Turner.

"Well?" Cole asked him.

"I have confirmed that these uniforms were replicated aboard the Nightfall commander." Max replied and then he held up Carr's jumpsuit, "This particular one was replicated only a few hours ago. In addition I have found evidence that the uniform that this man wore had been fitted with four rank pins."

"So it's looking pretty likely that they belong to Captain Edwards and Lieutenant Commander Carr then?" Heart said.

"I can think of no other explanation captain." Max said and Cole looked back towards Jenson.

"You hear that?" he called out, "That's what we in security like to call evidence. As if you and your friend firing off a phaser wasn't enough."

Inside the cell Jenson just shrugged.

"Hey, I had no idea she was going to start shooting." He said, "And unless you can prove that I took those from your people then I don't see you can hold me responsible for anything that's happened to them. Now how about you let me speak to my lawyer?"

Before Cole could respond to this the door opened again and Nikki rushed in, followed by T'Lan.

"I am sorry lieutenant commander." T'Lan said to Cole, "I tried to stop her but she—"

"Has he said what's happened to my mom yet?" Nikki asked before T'Lan could finish.

"No." Cole replied.

"Just let my men walk him around the ship a few times commander." Shry said sternly, "I'm sure that a little exercise will jog his memory."

"And I'm sure that when he accidentally falls over your men will be there to help him back up right?" Cole asked.

"They will. We know how to treat our prisoners." Shry replied.

"Well this is a Starfleet vessel captain and though the Imperial Guard may occasionally look the other way when its personnel bend the rules we don't." Cole warned him.

"Let him do it." Nikki said, "He deserves it."

"There you have it commander." Shry said, "Your missing first officer's daughter approves. Are your principals really that important?"

"Yes they are." Cole said, "You are dismissed captain."

"You're dismissing me?" Shry replied.

"Yes I am." Cole said, "My Starfleet rank is superior to yours and right now I am the acting captain of this ship. So you are dismissed captain."

"Yes sir." Shry said, snapping to attention and saluting.

Cole waited as Shry held the salute, then returned it and the Andorian officer turned and marched from the room.

"I'm with him." Heart said and then he too strode out of the room.

"Okay T'Lan," Cole said, "do you think you can get me some answers?"

"Most likely lieutenant commander." She replied, "Though I should caution you that any information I gain may not be considered admissible in court."

"That doesn't matter. We've already got enough to make sure that he spends a long time in prison. I just want to get the captain and Commander Carr back as soon as possible." Cole said.

"Very well, I will do it." T'Lan said.

"Okay." Cole responded, "Max you and I will hold him still while T'Lan does this okay?"

"Yes sir." Max replied and he placed the uniforms he held on a nearby chair.

"Release the force field." Cole told the guard sat behind the security control console and the energy emitters surrounding the cell doorway went dark.

"Hey! What are you doing?" Jenson exclaimed as the three Starfleet officers approached him, "You keep that damned zombie way from me." he added, looking at Max.

"Now just hold still." Cole said as he grabbed Jenson by the arm just before Max took hold of the other one and they forced him to his knees, "This won't hurt a bit."

"Actually the process can be quite painful if he resists." T'Lan pointed out.

"Then I guess he just needs to be co-operative then doesn't he?" Cole said and then T'Lan reached out and placed the fingers of one hand against the side of his head. Jenson tried to pull away, but with Cole and Max holding him tight he could not escape T'Lan's reach.

"Our thoughts are one." She said as she stared into his eyes, "Your thoughts to my thoughts." And Jenson screamed.

"Is it working?" Nikki asked and Cole looked at her.

"Just stay back there." He said, "Let T'Lan do this."

"A man." T'Lan said, "They were hired by another human to do this. Three of them."

"Is there another intruder aboard?" Cole asked, concerned at what this third person could be up to while they were trying to get answers out of Jenson.

"No." T'Lan replied, "He is dead. He was killed by — by their employer." And then she paused, "By Governor George."

"Wasn't he the guy who was in charge on Prestus?" Nikki asked.

"Yes he was." Cole replied, "I guess now we know why they came after that body. George and his associates don't want us finding anything out about what makes them tick." Then he looked at T'Lan again, "What about the captain and Nikki's mother?" he asked her.

Jenson screamed again as T'Lan pushed further into his mind.

"They were shot." T'Lan said as she got an image in her mind of both Edwards and Carr being struck by phaser beams.

"No!" Nikki exclaimed, "Mom can't be dead. She's not!"

"She is not." T'Lan said, "The phaser was set to stun so as to avoid damaging the uniforms."

"Then where are they?" Cole asked.

"He left them where he ambushed them." T'Lan said, "The Centauri Hotel. Room seven oh four."

"Okay that's it." Cole said.

"No it's not." T'Lan replied, "There is more."

"What?" Cole asked.

"A bomb." T'Lan said, "He and his partner planted a thalmerite based explosive aboard the *Nightfall*."

"A bomb?" Nikki exclaimed.

"T'Lan where is it?" Cole asked, but she did not reply, "T'Lan? I need to know where that bomb is."

"I am trying." T'Lan replied, "He is resisting me." And as if to back up T'Lan's statement Jenson let out another scream, "The hangar." She then said, "It is on one of the fighters, concealed in its impulse engine."

"T'Lan we've got a dozen of those ships aboard." Cole said, "Which one?"

"He doesn't know. He didn't take any notice of the serial numbers." T'Lan replied.

"Oh that's just great." Cole exclaimed, "We need to go now." And he let go of Jenson. Max and T'Lan also stepped back from the man and he gasped as he dropped to all fours and the Starfleet officers hurried out of the cell. As soon as they were clear the force field emitters lit up once more, sealing Jenson inside again.

"Cole to bridge." Cole said as he tapped his combadge.

"West here commander."

"Lieutenant we've got a bomb aboard." Cole told her.

"A bomb?" West repeated.

"Yes a bomb. Call spacedock control and get us clearance to depart. It's on one of the fighters and if that goes up the secondary blast could take out the ship. We need to get the ship out of spacedock and clear of the station." Cole told her.

"Err, but the helm—" West began.

"Don't worry lieutenant." Cole interrupted, "Ignore the manual interface. This ship handles just like any other using the automatics. You can do it without waiting for a helmsman to get there. And get Snowman and an EOD team to meet me in the hangar. We've got to try and find this thing. Cole out."

"What about me?" Nikki asked as Cole tapped his combadge again to deactivate it.

"T'Lan take her back to her quarters and wait with her. Be ready to get her to an escape pod." Cole told T'Lan, "Max, you're with me. Now let's move people."

When Cole and Max reached the hangar they found the ground crews already inspecting the fighters. However, their ability to search was hampered by a lack of knowledge about the bomb itself. Fearing that it could be triggered by any interference with the fighter it was aboard the crewmen were conducting visual inspections only, not risking removing any inspection covers.

"Cole!" White called out from beside one of the fighters when he saw Cole and Max arrive, "What are we looking for?"

"A thalmerite based explosive located close to the impulse engines of one of the fighters." Cole replied.

"Right then," White said, "that rules these two out. Their impulse drives are in pieces over there. But that still leaves us ten to deal with."

Before Cole could reply the *Nightfall* suddenly lurched and through the open hangar doors the walls of the spacedock could be seen moving.

"Looks like West has got us moving." Cole commented.

"And I thought Hamilton liked to throw this ship about." White added.

Cole tapped his combadge again.

"Cole to bridge, would someone please remind Lieutenant West that we're looking for a bomb down here. Shaking the ship about is not helping."

"Sorry commander." West's voice replied, "I'm a bit out of practice at flying a starship."

"Just try not to get us blown up." Cole said before deactivating his combadge.

"So where do we start?" White then asked, looking at each of the fighters in turn.

"I believe that I may be able to help here." Max said.

"How?" White asked.

"I can inject a small number of nanites into the impulse engine of each of the suspect fighters." The Borg explained, "They can then determine if there is an explosive device inside it."

"Can they defuse it?" Cole asked.

"No sir. Not without more knowledge of the bomb's construction. But they should be able to give us the location and size of the device."

"Do it." Cole ordered and Max walked up to the closest fighter.

Standing behind the craft he held out his fist and a pair of short tubes extended and pressed themselves briefly against the impulse engine exhaust before retracting once more. Then the Borg calmly walked from fighter to fighter, repeating this procedure at every one he came to until all ten of the suspect ships had clusters of nanites making their way through them, hunting for the hidden explosive.

As the gathered officers waited to see if the microscopic machines would be successful a group of service division personnel came rushing into the hangar carrying a heavy container between them with the help of portable antigrav units.

"Over here!" Cole called out to the explosive ordnance disposal team.

"Where's the device sir?" one of them responded.

"We've not found it yet." Cole replied, "We know it's in the impulse drive of a fighter but we've not isolated which one yet. Max has nanites hunting for it now."

"Okay then sir, I'm going to need everyone out." The bomb disposal officer said. Then he looked at Max, "The lieutenant can stay while we wait, but my men need room to work."

"Okay everyone, you heard the man." White called out, "Clear this deck." And the other personnel present began to head for the exits.

"I'll be on the bridge." Cole said.

"And I'll watch from the flight control room." White added, pointing to a room that overlooked the hangar. Then both men joined the others leaving it until only Max and the bomb disposal team remained.

"Is mom going to be okay?" Nikki asked T'Lan as she sat down heavily when they reached her quarters.

"There is no information to the contrary." T'Lan replied, "And as soon as the current situation aboard the *Nightfall* is dealt with then Lieutenant Commander Cole will undoubtedly do his best to retrieve both your mother and the captain."

"And how long will that take?"

"You are asking a question that requires information not yet available to provide an answer. Do you actually require one?" T'Lan asked in return. Then when Nikki did not reply she looked at the PADDs on the table and added, "I have observed that humans can handle stressful situations if they are distracted from the cause of that stress. Perhaps if you were to use this opportunity to study it would keep your mind off the situation." And Nikki glared at her.

"How am I supposed to concentrate on schoolwork at a time like this?" she said.

"Then is there something else that you feel could distract you?" T'Lan responded.

"No. I don't think so. Wait." Nikki said and she looked directly at T'Lan.

"What do we need to wait for?" T'Lan asked after a pause.

"You told me that you might want my advice." Nikki said, "So how about you tell me what you want to know and maybe that will help keep my mind off mom."

"I do not think that now is an appropriate time for this." T'Lan replied.

"Fine. Then I'll just sit here and wait for more news about mom." Nikki said, folding her arms.

"It is somewhat awkward." T'Lan said. But when Nikki just continued to stare at her T'Lan said, "Could you perhaps tell me what human males find attractive when looking for a mate?" and Nikki's jaw dropped.

7.

George sat on a park bench watching as people walked past without noticing him. Officially he was a fugitive from Federation justice, but there were few people on the planet who would recognise him in spite of this.

"You look like you're waiting for someone." A voice said from behind him and he frowned as the girl sat down beside him.

"What no guards?" George asked, looking around.

"Come now, this place is far too public for that." The girl said, "Of course if I really need them then they can be here quicker than the time it would take for you to draw a weapon. Assuming you're carrying one."

"I'd rather not take the chance on someone noticing it and reporting me." George replied.

"Very good governor." The girl said, "Such a pity you weren't as cautious on Prestus. You cost us that system."

"So have you come here simply to remind me of what you've already told me, or is there a pint to this visit?" George asked, frowning again.

"I was just wondering if you knew where your subordinates are right now." The girl asked and George looked at the watch he wore on his wrist.

"By now they should have exited the *Nightfall* and will be—"

"They've been discovered." The girl interrupted.

"How do you know?"

"Because the *Nightfall* is leaving spacedock right now and since it only has half of its crew board that can only mean that they have discovered the bomb and are seeking to limit the damage to their starbase. I suggest you start working on a plan 'B' Alex. Because until you've done what you were told to do you won't be rejoining us." The girl said sternly and then she got up and began to walk away, heading for a cluster of nearby trees. George turned to watch but as she walked away she reached the tree line, unobserved by any of the other people in the park she simply vanished.

"This one." Max said suddenly as the nanites injected into one of the fighters reported to him that they had located the bomb, "It is just inside an access cover on the underside of the fighter."

"Okay, is the cover rigged?" the leader of the disposal team asked as they rushed to the fighter, taking the floating container with them.

"Now. It is set away from the cover itself and does not appear to be fitted with any anti-handling devices." Max told them.

"Right this should be easy then. All I need to do is get this cover off."

The disposal team's leader removed the inspection cover from the fighter's impulse engine and then shone a compact flashlight inside.

"Yeah, I see it." He said and he looked towards the rest of the team, "Bring that container over here." He told them and they pushed the armoured container to him as he continued to inspect the bomb, shining his light directly at it and making use of a small angled mirror to give him a view of the other side of the device. Then he reached inside with both hands and carefully detached the bomb from where it had been placed. Slowly he removed this from inside the fighter and turned to lower it down into the armoured container.

"Get that sealed up." He said, "Then we'll get rid of it."

"How do you plan to dispose of this device?" Max asked and the bomb disposal expert looked towards the massive main launch doorway at the front of the hangar.

"Well since we're not in spacedock any more I was planning on just throwing it outside." He said, "Then we can just back off and use the ship's phasers to deal with it."

"Very well, continue. I will inform the bridge to be ready." Max replied and as the disposal team began to carefully carry the bomb towards the open doorway Max tapped his combadge, "Lieutenant Maximillian to bridge." He said, "The device has been located and removed from the fighter. The EOD team is moving it to the front of the hangar to be ejected into space. The team leader recommends destroying it with the ship's phasers."

"Understood Max." Cole replied, "Just tell us when."

The EOD team halted when they were about a metre away from the low powered force field that maintained pressure in the hangar. One of them then modified the controller for the antigrav units that bore most of the weight to further increase their power and he nodded to the others, prompting them to give the container and its deadly cargo a powerful shove that sent it through the force field into space.

Seeing this from the control room overlooking the hangar White activated the intercom.
"Bridge this is White, the bomb is outside."

"Copy that commander." Cole responded and he looked to where West still occupied the helm station, "Back us away lieutenant." He said before adding, "Gently if you don't mind." And West frowned briefly. Firing the *Nightfall's* forward thrusters, West slowly backed the ship away from the drifting bomb. "Is it in our field of fire yet?" Cole asked, glancing at the officer sat at tactical.

"Yes sir, but it is rather small." The officer replied, "I'm not sure I can get a lock."

"Transfer phaser control to my headset and raise shields." Cole said and he swung the eyepiece of the headset he wore into position. Immediately the device projected a virtual targeting display showing the drifting container in front of him, along with a representation of the phaser controls. Moving his head, Cole aligned the crosshairs with the container and held it over the target until it pulsed and there was a bleep, "That's it." He said and he reached out to where the phaser controls appeared to be to him and pressed them.

On both his headset and the bridge's main view screen the phaser blast stood out as it struck the container. The sudden input of such energy triggered the bomb it carried and there was a visible blast. Though relatively close to the *Nightfall* when it went off the bomb had been intended to be detonated inside the ship at a location when secondary explosions would have inflicted the real damage and destroyed the ship. Therefore, detonating out beyond the *Nightfall's* shields and with nothing to amplify the power of the explosion the bomb failed to inflict any damage at all.

Cole paused, waiting to see if there would be any reports of damage and when none came he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Okay I think we're done." He said, "Lieutenant West I want you to start recalling our people from the surface and I want a meeting of all senior officers in the briefing room in fifteen minutes."

The *Nightfall's* senior officers, including those not part of Starfleet all sat around the conference table and looked at Cole expectantly as he stood beside a wall mounted display screen.

"I'm sure you're all aware of what's been happening until now." He said, "Fortunately the explosive planted aboard the *Nightfall* was discovered and removed before it could detonate. From the report Max prepared it seems likely that if it had gone off it would have set in motion a chain of events that would have not only destroyed the *Nightfall* but also inflicted severe damage to Starbase Ten's orbital facilities. Now we need to focus on recovering Captain Edwards and Lieutenant Commander Carr." Then Cole pressed a button on the small console set into the wall beside the display and immediately the images of three people appeared on it. Jenson, Turner and also George, "These are the people that we believe are responsible for the captain and Commander Carr's disappearance." Cole explained.

"Isn't that Governor George from Prestus?" Hamilton asked from the far end of the table.

"Yes it is." Cole replied, "Lieutenant T'Lan carried out a mind meld with this other man," and he pointed to the image of Jenson, "which revealed that both of the intruders, along with a third individual were hired by Alex George."

"Are we looking for another intruder?" Heart asked.

"No." Cole told him, "It would seem that this individual was killed by George before the other two boarded the ship. Now the mind meld also revealed that Captain Edwards and Lieutenant Commander Carr were ambushed in a hotel room. They were disabled by phasers set to stun and their uniforms taken to provide easier access to the ship. As far as we know they are still being held there."

"Do we know why they were at this hotel?" White asked.

"Why were they even on the surface?" Hamilton added, "I thought they weren't supposed to be reporting to the admiral about Prestus until tomorrow."

"They may have beamed down to look for the commander's daughter." Cole said, glancing at Heart and Shry, "Though we've no idea why they then went to the hotel."

"Oh I think we can all take a guess." Nayal muttered.

"That would be illogical." T'Lan said, "It would be better to wait for evidence."

"Oh get real cousin. We all know how those two feel about one another." Nayal replied. Then she looked at Cole, "What about the pair who came aboard. Are they like this George?"

"No." King said before Cole could speak, "I've examined the woman that Captain Shry's men shot and she's perfectly human. Or at least she was. No sign of any implantation of the artificial flesh material and there hasn't been time for any significant tissue necrosis to become apparent."

"Added to which they didn't pull the disappearing act that the others have pulled." Shry added.

"Yes, there is that as well." King agreed.

"I want to get a look at this hotel." Cole said and he altered the display to show an image of the Centauri Hotel, "Lieutenants Hamilton and West will scout it out. Confirm that the captain and Commander Carr checked in and see if they spoke to anyone. We don't know what level of resistance we'll meet and I'd like to improve on that. In the mean time I'll put together a security team to carry out the actual raid to release them."

"What about our troops?" Heart asked, indicating himself and Shry, "They're trained for this sort of thing." "So far I haven't had permission from the planetary government to deploy them." Cole replied, "Unless that changes I'm limited to Starfleet personnel and I'll be leading the operation myself."

"You?" West said, "But aren't you supposed to be in charge of the ship?"

"Yes, but I think that the situation requires my presence." Cole told her.

"So who will you leave in command?" T'Lan asked.

"Doctor King is qualified." Cole said and those present looked in the doctor's direction. In response King grinned and folded his arms.

"It's true." He said.

"Besides," Cole added, "it's not like he'll be required to take the ship into battle."

"Doesn't look like much does it?" Hamilton said as he looked at the front of the Centauri hotel.

"Maybe not to you," West replied, "but when I was in the maquis this place would have been considered the height of luxury compared to most of our camps. Now shall we go and see if the captain and Commander Carr did come in here?"

"After you." Hamilton said, waving her towards the door.

Inside the hotel the pair walked right up to the reception desk and Hamilton knocked on it to attract the attention of the receptionist.

"Yes sir? How may I help you?" the woman asked him.

"We're here about room seven oh four." Hamilton said and the woman smiled at him.

"Ah the honeymoon suite. Congratulations." She said, looking at West as well, "But I'm afraid that it's already taken."

"Did you just say 'honeymoon suite'?" West asked.

"That's right." The woman behind the desk answered.

"Look honey, we aren't married." West told her, "We're here on official business."

"Hence the phasers." Hamilton added, tapping the weapon strapped to his waist.

"We just need to know who is in that room." West said.

Initially the receptionist just looked back at the two Starfleet officers.

"Normally we don't just give out details about guests." She said before picking up a PADD and sliding it across the desk, "But I suppose since they're Starfleet officers as well I can make an exception."

Hamilton picked up the PADD and looked at it, his eyes widening and his jaw dropping.

"What is it?" West asked.

"It's a device for storing data on, but that's not important right now." Hamilton replied, still staring at the screen.

"Oh give it here Bradley." West said and she snatched the PADD from him, "Oh my God." She said as she read what was on it.

"The what?" Cole said as Hamilton and West reported in to the *Nightfall*.

"I believe that he said the captain and Lieutenant Commander Carr had checked into the honeymoon suite together." T'Lan said.

"I heard that." Cole replied.

"It gets better." Hamilton said, "They checked in as Captain and Missus Edwards."

"Oh you are kidding!" Cole exclaimed.

"I have noticed that Lieutenant Hamilton is prone to joking at inappropriate moments." T'Lan commented.

"It's true." West added, "They specifically asked for the honeymoon suite and checked in as a married couple."

"Have you been able to speak to anyone that spoke to them?" Cole asked.

"No sir." West answered, "According to the staff they went straight up to the room and didn't ask for anything. The employee that showed them up just explained some of the features of the room and left them alone."

"Okay stay there and wait for me." Cole told her, "See if there's a quiet spot that we can use as a beam down point. Somewhere that we won't be seen."

"Copy that commander." West replied before the communication link was cut off.

Cole got to his feet and headed for the nearest turbolift door.

"Okay let Doctor King know that he's needed on the bridge." He said as he walked.

"Lieutenant commander I should go with you as well." T'Lan said to him before he reached the door.

"Why?" he asked, pausing and turning around.

"Because you may need me to scan for any individuals who may be in the room with the captain and the lieutenant commander." She told him.

"Come on then." Cole said, "Draw a tricorder and a phaser."

"Yes lieutenant commander." T'Lan said as she dashed to catch up with him.

Cole and T'Lan joined the force of security guards that had assembled in the transporter room. Each of them carried a phaser rifle in addition to the type two phasers in holsters.

"Hostage rescue unit ready for deployment sir." A man with an ensign's rank pin said when they entered the room.

"Here you go sir." Another of the security guards said as he handed a phaser rifle and power cell to Cole. He nodded in acknowledgement, taking both the weapon and its power cell then checking them and loading the rifle.

"Ready?" Cole asked, looking at T'Lan and she nodded, "Okay then," he went on as he walked to the transporter pad and stood on it facing the control console, "let's do this." And when the rest of the team were in place he looked at the operator and added, "Energise."

8.

The transporter chief had locked onto Hamilton and West's combadges and the security team materialised to find themselves in a small courtyard where the two Starfleet officers waited along with a man in hotel uniform.

"Lieutenant Commander Cole, meet Mister Kelly." West said, "He's the security manager here at the hotel." "You've not been having your staff do anything that would draw attention to what we're doing here have you?" Cole asked.

"No sir." Kelly replied, "The staff have been kept away from the seventh floor but we're monitoring anyone that moves to or from the floor."

"Good." Cole said, "Then show us the way."

Kelly escorted the Starfleet team to a large turbolift used for moving bulky items between floors. As soon as the doors opened onto the seventh floor Cole and the other security officers brought their rifles up to their shoulders.

"Which way?" Cole asked.

"Left." Kelly told him.

"Okay, follow me." Cole said as he advanced out of the turbolift.

The team moved along with Cole, another security officer positioning himself beside him while T'Lan kept close behind with her tricorder in her hand. Along the way one of the bedroom doors opened and a guest came to a sudden halt and gasped.

"Could I ask you to wait in your room for a few minutes please?" Kelly asked and the man nodded nervously before backing into his room again and closing the door behind him.

Upon reaching the first corner from which the door to room seven oh four could be seen Cole halted and the rest of the team copied him.

"T'Lan," He said, "what are you reading?"

"There are no noticeable surveillance devices lieutenant commander." She replied, "However, there is an energy field being emitted from within the room."

"There's an active noise dampening system in place for additional privacy." Kelly said.

"Privacy? Really?" West said.

"So can you read anything inside that field?" Cole asked, glancing at T'Lan again.

"No lieutenant commander. I would say that the noise dampening field has been increased in its power output specifically to interfere with tricorder scans."

"Then we assume that the captain and commander are being held in there under guard." Cole said, "Make sure phasers are set to stun, I don't want an accidental shot or two putting me in permanent command of the *Nightfall*."

"That is unlikely," T'Lan said, "the more logical outcome is that Starfleet would assign—"

"I know that T'Lan." Cole hissed, interrupting her, "Just let me know if your readings change." And he advanced towards the door.

The team took up positions all around the door to room seven oh four and Kelly stepped back, giving the Starfleet personnel the room they needed.

"Mister Kelly, do you have a key to this room?" Cole said softly, despite the noise dampening field ensuring that no one inside the room would be able to hear him. Kelly nodded and reached into his pocket for a key card.

"This opens all the doors in the hotel." He said as he held it.

"T'Lan take it." Cole said as he activated the flashlight mounted on top of his phaser rifle, "Then when I give the order unlock the door."

"Yes lieutenant commander." She replied, taking the key card and holding it next to the lock.

"Okay on the count of three." Cole said, looking around at the rest of his team.

"Err, is that one, two three and then go, or go on three?" Hamilton asked.

"That is a good question lieutenant commander." T'Lan added, "Timing is key to—"

"No it's not a good question. It's Bradley being smart." Cole said sternly, "Now I will count to three. T'Lan will unlock the door and when I see that this has happened I will kick it open and enter the room with the rest of my men following me. Science officers, operations chiefs and sarcastic helmsmen will all wait out here.

Understood?"

"Yes sir." T'Lan said.

"Okay." Cole said, "Here goes. One. Two. Three!"

T'Lan slid the card through the lock and the door released. Immediately Cole did exactly as he had said he would and kicked it open before rushing into the room.

"Starfleet security! Drop your weapons!" he yelled as he burst in, sweeping his rifle around the room as he hunted for any signs of opposition. However, he came to a sudden halt when the beam of his rifle mounted flashlight shone across the bed to illuminate Edwards and Carr, "What the-?" he exclaimed as the rest of his security team followed him in and all aimed their weapons in the same direction before they too froze while Carr squealed and slid down beneath the covers.

"What's going on?" West said as she, Hamilton and T'Lan entered the room after the security team and looked to the team, "Oh my God." She said.

"Would you mind getting those lights out of my eyes lieutenant commander?" Edwards asked, holding up his free arm to shield his eyes from the beams.

"There's a light switch right here." Hamilton said.

"No don't." Carr called out from under the covers but it was too late and Hamilton turned on the lights.

"There's actually a very good explanation for all this." Edwards said as the team stared at him and Carr as she peered out from under the covers.

"Yes sir, I'm sure there is." Cole replied, "I take it that you're alone in here."

"Yes." Edwards replied, "Our captors decided that these would be enough to hold us." And he tugged at the handcuffs still binding he and Carr to the bed, "I don't suppose you would happen to have brought a key to these would you?" he then asked, "Oh and some clothes maybe?"

Nikki was waiting in the transporter room when the team beamed back up to the *Nightfall*.

"Mom!" she cried out when she saw her mother who, along with Captain Edwards was wearing a robe with the hotel logo on it and she rushed forwards to embrace her.

"Hey! It's okay, I'm fine." Carr said as she hugged her daughter, "But don't think I'm going to be forgetting about what you did young lady."

"What? Oh yeah." Nikki said.

Cole then turned to Edwards.

"I'll let you and Lieutenant Commander Carr get fresh uniforms before I return command to you sir." He said.

Then a slight grin appeared on his face, "Or should that be Lieutenant Commander Edwards?"

Congratulations by the way."

"What?" Edwards replied.

"You were in the honeymoon suite captain." Cole said and Carr frowned.

"What? Are you married?" Nikki asked suddenly, "Why?"

"No we are not married." Edwards responded

"If you say so sir." Cole said.

"Oh shut up Robert!" Carr snapped.

"Hang on." Edwards said as he stepped down from the transporter pad and he turned to look at Cole again,

"If you're supposed to be in charge of the ship while Lieutenant Commander Carr and I are off it, then who did you leave in charge when you beamed down after us?"

"Ah." Cole replied, "Well, let's just say that The King is on the throne shall we?"

Edwards and Carr were the last ones into the conference room where the *Nightfall's* senior officers were waiting for them and as they entered the room fell suddenly silent as the other officers looked at them and with the exception of T'Lan they all smiled.

"See?" Carr whispered to Edwards while they were still stood in the doorway, "The laughing stock of the fleet."

"Let's just get on with this." He replied and he sat down in the chair at the head of the table, Carr then sitting down beside him. The Edwards looked around the assemble officers before continuing to speak, "Lieutenant Commander Cole has informed me that you are aware that former Governor Alex George of Prestus colony is here on the planet below." He said, "Lieutenant Commander Carr and I had been in pursuit of the governor when we were informed that he had entered a building adjacent to the Centauri hotel and were setting up an observation post when we were ambushed."

"Observation post?" White commented and both Carr and Edwards frowned at him.

"Now from what Doctor King says it would appear that Governor George is anxious to recover the body of the woman shot by Captain Shry." Edwards went on, "Now I understand that the two individuals who assaulted us were human?"

"That's right captain." Doctor King replied.

"We've got one in the brig and the other's in the morgue." Cole added.

"So we've got a link to George then." Edwards said, "He must have met these two somewhere and they must have been planning to turn the body over to him at some point."

"What about the local authorities?" Heart asked.

"I've actually just spoken to the command staff of Starbase Ten about them." Carr replied, "Since we're familiar with Governor George we'll be leading the hunt, but his description had been circulated to starbase personnel, local defence forces and all planetary law enforcement agencies."

"And is there any word on our troops being able to operate on the surface?" Shry asked.

"So far they'll accept you in a supporting role only." Carr told him, "Sidearms only and no obvious body armour."

"You're kidding." Shry said, "Makes us little better than your security staff."

"Still better though." Heart added.

"Tell them the good news." Edwards said, looking at Carr.

"There's good news?" Heart asked in reply.

"Maybe we're all invited to the reception." Hamilton said softly and to either side of him Cole and King smiled slightly.

"The local government hasn't placed any limits on the transportation that our MACO and Imperial Guard units are allowed to use." Carr explained, "So since all your vehicles have at least some transport capability you can-"

"We can use what we like." Shry interrupted with a grin.

"Exactly." Edwards said, "So I suggest you have your men prepare them for action." Then he looked at King,

"I understand you are part way through studying the body, yes?"

"That's right captain. An officer from Starbase Ten has been assisting me." King replied.

"I hear she helped save you from those two intruders doctor." Nayal said.

"Oh she got stuck in like a pro." King agreed, "I can swing a punch or two myself, but she can really handle herself. Oh and Emma helped out as well."

"Who's Emma?" West asked.

"It's the name that Nikki gave to the EMH." Carr told her, "EMH, Emma. Get it?"

"Oh yeah. I like it." West replied.

"I'd still like to keep some extra guards on sickbay while the body's in our custody." Cole said, "Just in case another attempt is made to board the ship."

"Whoever Governor George represents has demonstrated the ability to board and leave our ship in the past. Even with our shields raised." Max pointed out, "Enhanced security seems like a good idea to me."

"Agreed." Edwards said.

"Fine by me." King responded, "So long as they don't get in my way."

"In that case I want all departments to be ready for action." Edwards said, looking around at his senior officers, "In the mean time I will be speaking with the prisoner. Lieutenant Commander Carr and Lieutenant Commander Cole are with me. The rest of you are dismissed."

"If it's alright I'll be along in a minute captain." Cole said.

"Very well, but make it fast." Edwards replied, then he glanced at Carr and nodded and the pair of them got up and left the room.

"Well there we have it." Cole said, "They were setting up an observation post before they wound up in bed together. Did anyone have that in the pool lieutenant?"

"No sir." T'Lan replied without even needing to check her PADD.

"So does this mean that we're not all going in together on a gift for them?" Hamilton asked.

"No." Cole replied.

"Just give it time lieutenant." King added as he stood up, "Give it time. Now if you'll all excuse me, I've got an appointment with a corpse."

The door to the brig slid open and the duty guard looked up from his console to see Carr and Edwards enter.

"We're here to see the prisoner." Edwards said.

"Right over there sir." The guard replied, turning towards the nearest cell.

Jenson was laid out on the platform that served as both a seat and bed in the holding cell that he had been placed in and he turned his head to look at the two Starfleet officers as they stood on the other side of the force field and smiled.

"So your loyal crewmen rescued you then did they?" he said as he swung his legs off the platform and sat up, looking at them, "And now you've come to gloat." Then he looked specifically at Carr, "Though I must say I thought you looked better without your uniform." And Carr scowled.

"Tell me about Governor George." Edwards said.

"Who?" Jenson replied.

"Alex George, former governor of the colony on Prestus." Carr said.

"Do I look like the kind of guy who hangs around with government types?" Jenson asked.

"He's the man who hired you to infiltrate this ship." Edwards said.

"Listen captain, people who get appointed to governorships make speeches about how they're going to put people like me in rooms like this. They don't drop by for a chat about opportunities for employment." Jenson replied.

Just then the door to the brig opened again and Cole and T'Lan entered the room.

"Lieutenant what are you doing here?" Carr asked.

"Since I performed a mind meld on the prisoner earlier it seemed logical to accompany Lieutenant Commander Cole here just in case you require me to repeat the procedure." T'Lan replied.

"You keep that Vulcan witch away from me!" Jenson snapped, leaping to his feet, "I should press charges against you all for what she did."

"The only charges you need to concern yourself with are the ones you're facing." Edwards said, "In addition to federal indictments for attempted murder and impersonating a Starfleet officer I believe you're also facing local charges for assault with a deadly weapon, theft, kidnapping and unlawful possession of a weapon."

Then he looked at Cole again, "What's the maximum sentence for that lot?" he asked.

"I'd have to check." Cole replied.

"Up to three hundred and twenty years for the federal charges and a further seventy five years for the local ones captain." T'Lan said.

"So almost four hundred years then." Edwards said, "So how about you do yourself a favour, co-operate with us and maybe we can knock a century or two off that lot?"

"This George guy you're so interested in wasn't the one who hired me." Jenson said, "I was hired by some guy called Lake and before you ask, he's dead so I can't tell you how to find him."

"So he hired you to attack us?" Carr said.

"No, he just hired me and Turner to help out whenever he got an assignment from the group that runs ours." Jenson said.

"What group?" Edwards asked.

"I don't know. I don't even think that Lake knew." Jenson replied, "But every so often someone would turn up with some identifying phrase and pay us to help them out with something. They paid in latinum and we didn't ask questions. This George is just the latest in along line of those creeps."

"Creeps?" Carr commented.

"Yeah, they're all creepy. They just appear right next to you even when there's no way they could have crept up on you or beamed in. Then they vanish just the same. You look away for a second and they're gone." And then he snapped his fingers, "Just like that."

"You mentioned being part of a group." Cole said, "How big is this?"

"I don't know. About a couple of dozen of us maybe. People come and go so you don't always see the same faces around. Lake told me that some people get taken somewhere by the people giving us our assignments but never come back. Someone else said that he saw one of our lot get killed on a job but then he turned up again a few weeks later, only he acted like he'd never met any of us before and this time he was giving out assignments."

The Starfleet officers looked at one another and Edwards backed away from the cell, beckoning to the others to gather around him.

"Okay, this guy definitely sounds like he's on the inside of whatever's going on." He said.

"I agree captain." Cole said, "We've got to turn him over to Starfleet Command."

"That shouldn't be a problem." Carr said, "With the charges he's facing Starfleet can exercise jurisdiction easily."

"There will still need to be an extradition hearing." T'Lan pointed out, "He will have to be placed in the custody of the local authorities first."

"A hearing will just be a formality." Cole said, "A delay of a day or two at most while a magistrate gives a ruling. Once the situation's explained I don't see the locals raising any objection. Heck, they may even be glad not to have the hassle of keeping him in one of their criminal rehabilitation units."

"This group must meet somewhere." Edwards said, "Seems like if George is giving them orders at the moment then he'll be there."

"Normally that would be a logical conclusion captain." T'Lan said, "But given what we know about the ability of him and people like him to apparently transport without trace he could be anywhere. It is possible that he isn't even in this system any more."

3.

"What did you bring me here for?" the man in the police uniform asked, folding his arms as he looked at George. The man was part of the same underworld group that Jenson, Lake and Turner had been and George had instructed the police officer to meet him at the group's hideout.

"You reported that my description has been circulated. Is that correct Officer Conner?" George asked.

"Yeah that's right. A bulletin came round from Starfleet." Conner replied.

"I see. And did this bulletin say how they had come about my description?"

"No it didn't and I didn't ask. I'm taking enough of a risk going off my patrol route to come here without asking about stuff like that."

"I see. But was there any mention of Jenson or Turner? It seems that they have been delayed." George said, "One of my associates seems to think that something may have happened to them."

"What? You mean Starfleet could be on to us and you're just sat there?" Conner exclaimed and he turned around and stormed towards the door.

"I haven't given you permission to leave yet Officer Conner." George called after him.

"Like I care, I'm getting out of here before Starfleet security can arrive." Conner called out without looking back at George and then he opened the door out of the hideout.

Only to find George standing right outside.

"Do please go back and take a seat Officer Conner." He said.

Conner instead reached for his phaser, but George was quicker than Conner gave him credit for and as he was drawing the weapon George knocked it from his hand before reaching out and grabbing hold of him by the throat.

"I asked you to sit down Officer Conner." George hissed, pushing him backwards while keeping hold of his throat while the panicked policeman tried to prise George's fingers loose. Releasing his grip, George watched Conner drop to his knees as he gasped for breath, "Now Officer Conner, I'm going to need access to the police computer network." He said.

Edwards had Heart and Shry join him, Carr, Cole and T'Lan in his ready room to discuss what had been revealed by Jenson.

"We know that the group the prisoner is a member of maintains a number of safe houses in addition to a primary hideout where they can store weapons and other illicit items for collection later." Edwards explained.

"So where do you think that George will be hiding then?" Shry asked.

"One of two places." Edwards replied, "Either the safe house that our prisoner was operating from at the time of his capture or the main hideout. It depends on whether he's aware that his plan hasn't run – err, to plan."

"You mean if he knows then he'll have run away to the main hideout?" Heart asked.

"Precisely." Cole answered, "The safe house is a specific location with an address we got out of the prisoner. On the other hand the main hideout is somewhere in a rural area."

"The directions and co-ordinates were not obtainable through a mind meld." T'Lan added, "Though I was able to gain an image of it and some basic details that may help in locating it."

"You know my thoughts on how to handle this." Shry commented, looking at Cole.

"Yes, the lieutenant commander informed me of your suggestion captain." Edwards responded, "And you may want to consider how many people in the Federation, both in Starfleet and outside it would use such actions as an excuse to try and shut down this project. Do you understand?"

"Of course captain." Shry replied.

"And you?" Edwards added, looking at Heart now.

"Oh what Starfleet wants, Starfleet gets." He said.

"Here." Conner said to George, pointing to a doorway up ahead, "This is Detective Styles' office. He's out on a stakeout so you can use his terminal to access the network."

"Excellent." George replied as Conner opened the office door for him.

"But be quick. I'll wait here. Are you sure you can log on?" Conner asked.

"Oh I have a way with computers Officer Conner. Now whatever you do, don't disturb me." George replied and he slipped past the police officer and closed the door behind him.

He found himself in a small office that was dominated by a desk style computer terminal and George headed for this, sitting on the single chair behind it. Detecting his presence the terminal activated, with an LCARS style display similar to Starfleet style interfaces appearing on the touch screen. However, apart from

identifying the terminal as being on the police network there was no file data presented yet. Instead there was a request for an identity code and a keypad to use to enter it. Of course George had no idea what the code was and so the keypad was of no use to him. But he did have an alternate way of getting onto the network.

Bending over he reached beneath the desk and opened an unsecured access panel to reveal the physical data lines connecting the terminal itself to the planet-wide network. Then from a pocket he produced a data cable that had a flat disc connected to one end and a needle like prong at the other. Pressing the disc against the data lines he smiled as tiny metallic filaments the thickness of hairs sprouted from it and burrowed into them. Then he sat up.

Only to find himself staring at the girl as she leant across the terminal.

"Up to something?" she asked with a smile.

"Yes." George replied with a frown as his attention was drawn to the two bulky white figures standing behind the girl and looking down at him, "I'm going to get Jenson and Turner back."

"Jenson? Oh yes. The human who proved so fallible." The girl said, standing up straight but keeping eye contact with George all the same.

"So are you actually here to do anything constructive this time?" George asked her.

"I'm here to give you a warning." The girl replied, "The others have decided. If you put us at risk by letting Starfleet question either of those two then you're won't be allowed back. Ever."

George stared at her.

"This will work." He reassured her.

"It had better. For your sake." The girl replied and taking a single step backwards she vanished. Her two hulking bodyguards turned their heads to one another and then without a word they each took a step forwards and also disappeared without a trace, leaving George alone again.

Then there was a gentle knock at the door.

"What's going on in there?" Conner asked through the door.

"Nothing." George replied, "Just keep watch and warn me if someone comes." Then he jabbed the needle at the end of the cable into his arm.

In an instant the police network was visible to him. The request for an identity code was still there but George simply ignored it, the primitive security lockout was useless against the technology of his people and he pushed deeper into the network.

On the terminal in front of him the display changed to match George's navigation of the network and it rapidly shifted to show a list of the reports passed to the local police by Starfleet. Starfleet facilities often had to deal with intruders of various types, some were mere pranksters, while others were there to steal or inflict damage to the facilities themselves for one reason or another. Those that were believed to be agents of foreign powers would be kept in custody by Starfleet and passed to its own security branch for questioning and prosecution, but where the perpetrator was a Federation civilian they would normally be turned over to local law enforcement to be dealt with by the local authorities and as such Starfleet would regularly send lists of those it had detained. George scrolled through this list rapidly with his mind until he found the names of Jenson and Turner and he went into the reports.

The report on Turner included a notice of death, though the cause was unspecified. This was a relief to George; if she was already dead then she could give no information to Starfleet. As proof of her death he copied this report, storing it in the modifications made to his physical body. Then he came to the report in Jenson's name and as he had feared it indicated that Starfleet had taken him alive. What was worse was that Starfleet appeared to have determined that he represented a genuine threat and was making moves to have him transferred to Starfleet Security. From there it would only be a matter of time before he was also questioned by Starfleet Intelligence and George would be condemned to permanent oblivion.

But fortune appeared to have smiled on George this time and although Starfleet had requested to take permanent custody of Jenson, the local prosecutor's office had not yet formally responded. There was little doubt that they would approve the request, but for now George still has a chance to do something. George flagged Jenson as a person of interest to local law enforcement and assigning him top priority. He knew that without any further intervention this note would be passed to Starfleet as a request to have Jenson transferred to the local authorities without delay. By the time it was realised that no one in particular among the local police was actually looking for Jenson it would be too late, either he would have been freed or he would be dead.

Stood in the corridor outside Conner heard voices and looked around to see who was coming. Horrified, he saw Detective Styles along with two other detectives heading his way and he knew that if George was to get

out of the office unseen he would have to move quickly.

"George." he hissed as he knocked on the door again, "George, Styles is back."

Worryingly there was no reply and as the three detectives came closer Conner knocked again.

"George, hurry up!" he said frantically, trying to keep his voice low enough that the detectives would not hear him.

"Conner what the hell are you doing?" Styles suddenly called out from down the corridor and Conner turned to face him.

"Oh, err, I was just seeing if you were in your office detective." He said.

"Well obviously I'm right here." Styles replied, coming to a halt right in front of Conner with his two fellow detectives, "So what do you want?"

"What do I want?" Conner responded.

"Yes, I'm guessing there's a reason why you're knocking on my office door so you may as well tell me." Styles said.

"Of course." Conner replied as he tried desperately to think of a reason why he would be looking for the detective. Then an idea came to him, "Have you seen any of the Starfleet reports today?" he asked.

"I haven't even set foot in my office yet man. Of course I haven't." Styles said and then he opened the door to his office and Conner gasped, taking a step backwards. But through the open doorway he saw that the office was empty and a puzzled look appeared on his face, "What's wrong now?" one of the other detectives asked, noticing this reaction.

"Oh, err, nothing." Conner replied, "I just thought I'd forgotten something."

"You're up for the detective exam next month aren't you Conner?" Styles asked.

"Yes detective." Conner answered.

"It will be a sorry day for the department if you pass." Styles said, "Now get out of here."

"Yes sir." Conner said and he turned around and walked away, trying to figure out how George had got out of an office with only one exit and in a building that had alarms to detect unauthorised attempts to beam in or out.

The safe house identified by Jenson was an apartment located in a narrow street that did not allow for vehicles to be brought down it. Cole's security team approached cautiously, using non-descript cloaks to conceal their Starfleet uniforms as well as the phaser rifles they carried. From the end of the street Cole looked all the way down to the far end and spotted more cloaked figures that he knew to be the other half of his assault team.

"Okay let's move in." he said to his group and he advanced towards the door to the safe house.

When he reached the door Cole stood beside it and took another look around. Satisfied that the team was not being observed he undid his cloak and let it drop to the ground as he raised his rifle. Around him the rest of his team did the same, leaving only the second group at the end of the street in disguise.

"Okay blow the door." He said and one of his men began unreeing a shaped explosive cord that he fixed around the edge of the door.

"Okay its set." the man said as he backed away and unslung his own rifle.

Cole waited, counting the seconds until there was a sudden fizzing sound as the explosive was triggered.

Rather than a concussive blast, the charge produced an extreme thermal reaction that burnt through the door in under a second and Cole spun around to face it, kicking the loose section away to leave a large hole that he leapt through.

"Starfleet security!" he yelled, "Drop your weapons!"

Following Cole through the hole in the door the team spread out through the apartment, checking that each room in turn was unoccupied and only when they had confirmed that there was no one in the apartment did they lower their weapons.

"You know," Cole said as he looked around, "just for once I'd like to kick down a door and find something on the other side worth kicking it down for. Naked officers and rooms full of junk just don't count." Then he tapped his combadge, "Cole to *Nightfall*. The safe house is secure. No one's home. Well start going through what's here and let you know if we find any clues to the location of their main hideout."

"Copy that Cole." Carr's voice replied, "Nothing to report at this end either. Snowman's ships are still doing flybys of likely areas. *Nightfall* out."

As Carr shut off the link to Cole, West looked up from her station and looked at Carr as she sat in the captain's chair.

"Lieutenant commander, Starbase Ten has just relayed us a message from the surface." She said.

"What is it lieutenant?" Carr asked.

"It's about the prisoner. They want him." West replied.

"they want him? What for?" Carr then asked as she got up and walked over to see the display for herself.

When she saw the message that West was referring to she frowned, "This can't be right." She said, "They've put in a priority request to claim jurisdiction."

"Starfleet's ordering us to turn him over immediately." West added, bringing up a second part of the message on her console.

"I better tell the captain." Carr said, "He's not going to like this." And she headed for the door to the captain's ready room.

"Come in." Edwards called out as a chime alerted him to the presence of someone outside, "Ah Grace." He said as she entered the room and the door closed behind her, "Are you here to discuss what—"

"The locals want that guy we've got in the brig." Carr interrupted and Edwards stared at her.

"You're kidding." He replied, but Carr shook her head.

"I'm afraid not captain." She replied, "We're to transfer him immediately."

Edwards sighed.

"See if you can stall them." He said as he got up, "And try and find out why they're so interested in him all of a sudden."

"Where are you going?" Carr asked as Edwards walked around his desk.

"Back to the brig." He replied, "While you're talking to the local police I'm going to try and get some answers from the prisoner."

"Back again captain?" Jenson asked when he saw Edwards standing outside his cell.

"The planetary police want you transferred to their custody." Edwards said, "They're calling you a high priority suspect. Why?"

"Perhaps you should ask them." Jenson replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"Oh we are. But I thought maybe you could be persuaded to shed some light on this situation."

"Ah, so you're afraid that you won't be able to put me in an interrogation room and have your security people pry all the little secrets from my head if a bunch of local cops get there first are you?" Jenson said, "Well tough luck captain, because I can honestly say that I've no idea why they'd be so keen to get their hands on me."

Carr stood looking over Cole's shoulder as they did their best to determine the precise origin of the request to have Jenson transferred to the local authorities. The Nightfall's chief of security had just returned from the surface and had immediately been called upon to put his knowledge of law enforcement to use.

"Perhaps I may be of assistance." T'Lan suggested.

"Do you know anything about the law enforcement on this planet?" Cole asked.

"I'm afraid not lieutenant commander, but my expertise in computers should be of some use." She said.

Cole frowned briefly and he looked towards West at the operations station.

"Lieutenant West, when did we send out the notification that we'd arrested this Jenson?" he asked her.

"I copied your report to the planetary network as soon as you'd filed it in our system." She answered.

"And did they flag him up as being of interest to them at all then?" Cole asked.

"No sir."

"I thought not." Cole said.

"What are you thinking?" Carr asked Cole.

"This request has Jenson flagged as a high priority suspect right?" Cole said looking at both Carr and T'Lan.

"That is correct." T'Lan replied.

"But just a few hours ago they didn't care about him at all." Cole pointed out.

"So they just came across a lead since then." Carr said.

"But leads like that don't generally materialise out of nowhere." Cole said, "There would have been some point at which the local police investigators would have wanted to speak to him and they could have just asked to come up here. Starfleet wouldn't stand in the way of a local criminal investigation. Instead they've got straight to requesting that we give him up without any explanation of why."

"So you're saying that from a procedural point of view this doesn't add up?" Carr asked.

"Exactly." Cole said, "So trying to chase down the request by following the procedural route is a waste of time. We need to actually look at how the request itself got to us in an electronic manner. For that T'Lan is perfectly qualified." And he got out of his seat and guided T'Lan into it instead. Then he rested both his hands on her shoulders and bent down, "Pull this off T'Lan," he said directly into her ear, "and I'll buy you a steak dinner."

"That would be illogical given that I am a vegetarian." T'Lan replied.

"Just find out where that request came from lieutenant." Cole said, "I'll have the computer replicate you a plate of nuts and leaves or something. Is that better?"

"It would be more practical." T'Lan said as she began to try and track the source of the request. After a few moments she paused and raised an eyebrow.

"What?" Carr asked, "Have you found something?"

"That depends on your point of view." T'Lan replied, "What I have found is the lack of something."

"Care to explain that remark?" Cole asked.

"There is no trace of the request having come from a particular prosecutor." The Vulcan explained, "It would seem that it just appeared directly in their central computer for relaying to Starbase Ten."

"So what you're saying is that although the locals want Jenson back urgently, his doesn't seem to be wanted for anything in particular or by anyone?" Cole asked.

"I believe so commander." T'Lan replied.

"It's fake." Cole told Carr, "Someone down there hacked the prosecutor's system and fed in the request."

"Who though?" Carr asked.

"If I had to hazard a guess I'd say Governor George." Cole answered, "If he didn't do it himself then he probably got someone else to do it for him. He must be worried about what Jenson can tell us."

"Like the location of his group's hideout." Carr said then she turned towards the operations station, "West, get me Lieutenant Commander White."

"Channel open now commander." West replied.

"Snowman this is *Nightfall*." Carr said, "Have you found anything yet?"

"Sorry *Nightfall*," White's voice responded from the cockpit of his fighter, "but T'Lan's description wasn't exactly detailed and there are a lot of small remote structures on this planet. I doubt we're making many friends here by performing low level flybys over them all. Any chance of drafting in some extra help from the starbase's squadrons?"

"The news service is already asking why we left spacedock in such a hurry." Carr told him, "If the starbase starts mobilising forces then there's no way we can conceal what we're up to."

"In that case you're going to have to patient." White replied, "This is going to take some time."
"Okay, thanks anyway commander." Carr said, "*Nightfall* out." Then she looked down at T'Lan again, "Well it looks like we're still relying on you." She said.
"I may have something commander." T'Lan said, "The request appears to have come from a police terminal."
"So it is official then?" Carr said.
"No." Cole said, "A cop doesn't have the authority to put in a request like that. He'd have to go through the prosecutor's office. But as I said earlier, he'd be more likely to just ask to come and speak to Jenson in our brig. Of course, if Governor George has a cop on his payroll then he may know a back door into the system that he can add a request to transfer a prisoner."
"Unfortunately I cannot isolate the exact terminal used from here commander." T'Lan told Carr, "But I have identified the police station from which it originated and I should be able to determine the terminal if we can go there and patch in directly."
"Then that's where we're heading next." Carr said, "Cole, T'Lan, you're both with me. Cole have one of your security officers meet us in transporter room one."
"Barely worth coming back aboard." Cole muttered.
As the trio headed for the turbolift the door opened and Captain Edwards stepped onto the bridge.
"Going somewhere?" he asked.
"It looks like the transfer request was faked captain. T'Lan thinks that she can locate the precise computer terminal used to get it into the system." Carr replied, "I'm taking an away team down to help her find it."
"Fine, keep me apprised. I'll do what I can to stall the transfer from here." Edwards said and he stepped out of the way to allow his officers into the turbolift. Making his way to his chair, Edwards was just sitting down when West spoke up.
"Captain I've got a Mister Cooke local justice department wanting to speak to you. They're wanting to know why we haven't sent Jenson to them yet."
"Put them through lieutenant." Edwards replied and on the main view screen at the front of the bridge an image of a grey haired man with a stern expression appeared.
"Captain why are you with holding our prisoner?" he demanded.
"I'm sorry Mister Cooke but we're having trouble confirming your department's request. If you could just tell us what you-" Edwards replied before Cooke interrupted him.
"I don't answer to you captain." Cooke said, "Now Starfleet has been sent a formal request for transfer and I expect you to carry it out. If you want him back afterwards you can apply to the courts once we're done. I should warn you captain, I'm friends with several officers from Starbase Ten's JAG office and if I need to I'll have them take him from you. Your choice captain." And then the transmitted image showed Cooke jabbing at his touch screen and the display went blank.
"What's his problem?" Hamilton asked from the helm station.
"He's a big fish in a small pond Mister Hamilton." Edwards replied, "He doesn't care if the transfer is legitimate so long as he gets to clear it from his system."
"So what are your orders captain?" West asked and Edwards sighed as he paused to think.
"I don't see that we've any choice about moving the prisoner down to the surface. However, I'm well within my rights to send along a suitable security detail to protect him as well."
At that point Nyal leant across from the seat where she had been sat quietly watching what had been going on.
"Captain I think I may have an idea about how to turn this situation to your advantage." She said softly, "Assuming that this transfer of the prisoner is indeed some sort of ploy."
Edwards smiled.
"And would this cunning plan be the sort of underhanded scheme that Romulans are infamous for?" he asked.
"I'd be lying if I denied it could get you in trouble." She replied.

Materialising outside the police station to avoid setting off its alarms, Carr's away team headed straight inside and made their way to the main desk.
"What does Starfleet want here?" the desk sergeant asked when he saw their uniforms.
"We need access to your computer network." Carr replied.
"What? Doesn't your ship have any computers?" the sergeant said.
"Your network has been used to plant a falsified message into official systems." T'Lan told him and the sergeant just stared at them.
"Could we just speak with whoever's in charge here right now?" Cole asked.

"Of course." The sergeant answered and he tapped his combadge, "Lieutenant Franks, there are some people from Starfleet here to see you." He said.

"I'll be right down." The police lieutenant's voice replied and about a minute later the lieutenant appeared in the reception area, "I'm Lieutenant Franks." He said, holding out his hand in greeting to Carr.

"Lieutenant Commander Carr, first officer of the *USS Nightfall*." She replied as she shook it, "This is our security chief and tactical officer Lieutenant Commander Cole and science officer Lieutenant T'Lan."

"And how may I help you?" Franks asked.

"We need access to your computer network." Carr said and Franks frowned, "We've evidence that a terminal in this building was used to create a transfer request for a prisoner aboard our ship." She added.

"No." Franks replied, shaking his head, "A request like that would have to be approved by a watch commander like myself and then be passed to the prosecutor's office."

"We believe the request to be fake." T'Lan said.

"What harm can it do lieutenant?" Cole asked, "You can watch us if you want. Then we'll be out of your hair."

"Oh very well. Come this way." Franks said and he beckoned for the away team to follow him.

The room that Franks led the Starfleet officers to was located in the basement and consisted of a computer core the size of a desk that had four chairs spaced evenly around it. Two police computer experts were present when they entered and they both looked up as they wondered why the Starfleet officers were here.

"Can one of you log Lieutenant T'Lan here onto the system?" Franks asked the other policemen.

"Here, use my login." One of them replied and he got up to allow T'Lan to take his place. The police computer system was arranged in a very similar manner to the Starfleet one aboard the *Nightfall*, so T'Lan had no difficulty in locating the network use logs she was looking for.

"So what's all this about?" Franks asked Cole, hoping that the security officer would be responsive to the question because of the similarities of some of their duties.

"I'm sorry lieutenant, but that's classified." Cole replied.

"Here it is." T'Lan then said, "I've found the time that the connection was made to the prosecutor's department and I can back trace the source to the exact terminal."

"What? Are you saying that someone in my department's been sending out fake messages?" Franks asked angrily.

"It would appear so." T'Lan replied. Then she turned away from her computer screen and added, "The terminal was in office fourteen." And Carr and Cole both looked at Franks.

"That's Detective Styles' office." He said, "Come with me."

Franks now led the Starfleet team towards the detectives' offices and along the way they ran into another plain clothed officer.

"Have you seen Styles?" Franks asked him.

"In his office I think." The other officer answered.

"Good." Franks commented.

The police transport was parked just outside the perimeter fence of Starbase Ten when Captain Shry and four of his troops led their prisoner towards it.

"You lot aren't taking any chances are you?" one of the two police officers commented when he saw the hooded and handcuffed prisoner, "What did he do?"

"Your guess is as good as mine." Shry replied, watching as the Imperial Guardsmen lifted the prisoner into the back of the transport, "We've not been able to get a straight answer out of your prosecutor's office."

"Captain, he's secure." One of the other Andorians then called out and the rear door of the transport was slammed shut.

"Okay he's all yours." Shry said, holding out a PADD that the police officer pressed his thumb against. Then both officers got into the front of the transport and Shry watched as it drove away. Then he smiled and tapped his combadge, "Shry to *Nightfall*. Tell that Romulan that her package has been delivered."

ii.

"Lieutenant, what can I do for you?" Styles asked when Franks came striding into his office and then he frowned as Carr and her away team entered behind him.

"Step away from the terminal detective." Styles responded, "These people need to inspect it."

"Inspect it for what?" Styles asked as he got up and made way for T'Lan as the Vulcan made her way across the office and sat down.

"Your terminal was used to feed a falsified request for a prisoner transfer into the Starfleet network." Cole told him and Styles noticed that both security officers had their hands resting on the grips of their phasers. "What are you accusing me of?" he demanded.

"Nothing at the moment." Carr said, "But we've traced the message to right here in this office."

"Well I don't know what you're talking about." Styles said, but then T'Lan spoke up.

"Lieutenant Commander Carr, I have found it." She said, "The full text of the message is still present in the terminal memory."

"That's ridiculous!" Styles snapped.

"Styles what have you done?" Franks asked, glaring at the detective.

"Actually I do not think that the detective is responsible for the message." T'Lan said before Styles could reply.

"Why not?" Cole asked her.

"All events are time stamped in the terminal memory lieutenant commander," T'Lan replied, "and the time stamp for the message is at a time when the detective was not logged onto it. In fact no one was. The message simply appeared in memory and was forwarded via the prosecutor's office."

"How is that possible?" Carr asked.

"It is beyond my understanding." T'Lan replied, "But Detective Styles did not log on until approximately five minutes after the message was sent."

"Five minutes?" Cole said, "Then if the message was sent as soon as it was input into the terminal then he must have seen who did it." And everyone turned to look at Styles.

"Conner." He exclaimed, placing a hand on his forehead, "That idiot. I should have known he was up to something."

"What about him?" Franks asked.

"When we got back from the stakeout he was hanging around outside my office. But he couldn't have been in to input that message."

"No but he could be league with the person who did." Cole said.

"But I'd have seen them." Styles replied, "There's only the one door and sensors to pick up unauthorised beaming. How else could anyone have got out without being seen?"

"The how is something we don't know I'm afraid." Carr told him, "But we've got a good idea of who."

"Now we just need to find this Conner." Cole said.

The officer driving the transport vehicle frowned when he saw the flashing lights in the rear view mirror.

"There's a patrol skimmer right behind us." He said to his partner, "It looks like he wants us to stop."

"You're kidding." The other officer replied, looking in the mirror mounted on the other side of the transport.

Then his eyes widened and he added, "I don't believe it, he is waving for us to pull over."

"This had better be good." The driver said as he pulled over to the side of the road and brought the transport to a halt. Then the two officer climbed out as the skimmer pulled up behind them, "What's going on?" the driver demanded.

"New orders." Conner replied as he got out of the skimmer and he held up a PADD, "Here, check them out for yourself."

"Give me that." The driver of the transport said, snatching away the PADD and looking at the display, "Why not just radio this to us?"

"Central thinks that someone's monitoring the frequencies." Conner said, "They could be trying to break your guy out."

Just then the driver's combadge came to life.

"All units be on the look out for a department skimmer operated by an Officer Conner. Vehicle is stolen and driver is wanted for-"

The two officers from the transport did not bother listening to any more as both looked at the name tag just under Conner's own combadge and saw his name. The driver dropped the PADD and was just reaching for

his phaser when Conner struck first, plucking the stun baton from his belt and jabbing it into the driver's stomach. The man let out a brief surprised gasp and then collapsed in a heap as Conner turned to face the other officer. This man had already drawn his phaser, but as he lifted it Conner lashed out and used the stun baton to knock the weapon from his hand. Then he swung it back again and struck the man across the forehead, knocking him to the ground where Conner pressed the tip of the baton against him to incapacitate him as well. Quickly he removed the two unconscious officers' weapons and combadges before climbing into the transport and starting the engine.

As he drove away Conner took a communicator from his pocket and activated it.

"I've got him," he said, "But I'll need a way off this planet after this."

"Don't worry Mister Conner." George's voice replied, "My associates can handle that easily."

"Captain are you seeing this?" Carr asked from the police station's communications room.

"Yes commander, we're getting the feed transferred to us in real time." Edwards replied, "The transport is overdue and hasn't checked in."

"So what do you want us to do?" Carr asked.

"Are the police searching for it?" Edwards asked her in response.

"Yes, they've got patrols following the route it was supposed to take from Starbase Ten to the prison." Carr told him.

"Then remain there to liaise with the local police." Edwards said, "But can you have them send another transport to Starbase Ten? Captain Shry will meet them at the entrance."

"Yes captain. Is there anything else?"

"No commander. Hopefully this Conner isn't up to Romulan standards of duplicity. *Nightfall* out." Edwards said, then he looked across the bridge to West, "Lieutenant, what is the status of Captain Heart and his men?" he asked.

"Their equipment has been moved to the cargo bays captain." She replied, "He's signalled that they're ready to go."

"So far, so good." Nayal commented.

"Now all we have to do is wait." Edwards added.

Conner had taken care to make sure that he was not being followed; ironically using the same counter surveillance techniques he had learned in his police training to evade his former comrades and their Starfleet allies. Now he drove the transport at its maximum safe speed towards a cluster of buildings in a remote area, the main hideout of his gang and the only safe place now that their safe house in the city had been raided.

As the vehicle approached the buildings a pair of figures emerged from between two, each one clutching a phaser rifle and Conner slowed down and brought the vehicle to a halt.

"I've got him," he called out as the two figures came towards him, their rifles raised until they saw who it was,

"Go tell George." And one of the figures turned and rushed back towards the largest of the buildings while the other slung her rifle over her shoulder and walked up to Conner, "Give me a hand." He told her and he led her to the back of the transport and opened the doors.

Inside the back of the transport they saw the hooded prisoner sat on one of the long bench seats running down each side.

"Here let me help you with that." Conner said as he climbed into the back of the transport as well and he pulled the hood from the man's head and gasped.

"Surprise." Hamilton said and all of a sudden the handcuffs fell from his wrists.

Conner reached for his stun baton but Hamilton did not give him the chance to reach it, instead kicking him in one of his knees so that he collapsed to the floor of the transport, howling in pain. At the same time Hamilton slipped a compact hand phaser from the pocket of his overalls and pointed at the woman who was trying to unslung her rifle and point it at Hamilton. Instead Hamilton fired before she even had her hands on the grips of her own phaser and the beam clipped her neck, sending her sprawling backwards and the rifle clattering to the ground.

Hamilton spun around to see Conner now drawing his police issue phaser and he jumped back out of the transport just a moment before a bright red beam passed through the air where he had been. Looking down he saw that he had landed just beside the dropped phaser rifle and he picked this up, tucking his tiny hand phaser back inside his overalls. Then he adjusted the controls, setting the emitter to produce a wide beam rather than a tightly focused one. Then it was just a matter of poking the muzzle of the weapon into the back of the transport and keeping the trigger pulled back as he swept the inside with phaser fire.

With both of his opponents now stunned Hamilton crouched down and looked towards the buildings. Then he reached into his overalls again and took out his combadge, fixing it to his chest.
"Hamilton to *Nightfall*," he transmitted, "I'm in position. Begin deployment."

Sat on the bridge of the *Nightfall* Edwards looked at Naya and she looked back at him as they smiled at one another.
"Bridge to cargo bays." He said, "Energise."

"Mister George! They're here!"

George rushed to the doorway when he heard the shout coming from downstairs and he looked down the staircase to see one of the sentries looking back up at him.

"Conner's arrived with Jenson." The man said.

"Excellent." George replied, "I'll be-" and then he was interrupted by the sound of phaser fire coming from outside, "What's happening?" he asked and he ran down the stairs to join the sentry in looking out through the open door behind him.

They were just in time to see a brief flash of light from the direction of the police transport vehicle before everything went quiet. Then moments later there were the tell tale lights of transporter operation as the orbiting *Nightfall* began to deploy its troops. The sentry raised his rifle, expecting a cluster of Starfleet security personnel who would be vulnerable until they were able to find cover to materialise. But rather than these fragile security guards, George and the sentry found themselves looking at the bulk of an eight wheeled armoured vehicle that mounted a large weapon in a turret.

"Get down!" George yelled and he dragged the sentry to the floor with him just as the turret swung around to face the building they were in and a bright red beam swept across it from a heavy phaser mounted beside the vehicle's main projectile launcher. Fortunately for them both the phaser cannon was set to stun and so it did not bring down the entire lightweight building around them, but George realised instantly that hand held phasers would not be good enough to stand up to the armoured vehicle.

"We need to fall back." He said to the sentry, "Tell everyone to get away from the outer walls and gather near the courtyard. If they're going to attack us they're going to have to get out of that vehicle."

From his position Hamilton could see not only the armoured vehicle that had just fired at the building directly ahead of him but also a second vehicle that had beamed down off to one side of the cluster of structures. His knowledge of the plan meant that he was also aware that there were two other such vehicles in place so that they surrounded the buildings on all sides. A phaser beam shot from a window and struck the first vehicle as one of the occupants reacted in desperation, not considering how ineffective a handheld phaser would be against such a target. Even Starfleet issue weapons would do little, so the limited output of the weapons that this group seemed to have access to meant that their situation was hopeless and to make matters worse, the shooter had just given away his position.

Hamilton reset his newly acquired rifle, increasing the power and returning the beam width to a narrow focus before he fired at the window he had seen the phaser fire come from. Under these circumstances a stun level shot would have been preferred, but without a clear target Hamilton needed to be able to punch through the lightweight walls of the building. Sure enough the beam cut through the wall and Hamilton kept the stream going as he swept it across, slicing a narrow hole where the beam struck the wall. The phaser fire ceased, indicating that either Hamilton had hit the shooter or that they had withdrawn away from the window. Then he noticed that smoke was beginning to billow out through the window. Obviously Hamilton's phaser shot had ignited something inside and the building was now starting to burn.

"Hamilton!" a voice yelled and Hamilton looked around to see Captain Heart and a squad of MACOs disembarking from the rear of one of the armoured transports, "Hold your fire! We need to get in there." Hamilton nodded and then after checking for any signs of targets at any of the other windows he darted across open ground before he ground to a halt in front of the captain.

"I think George is inside." Hamilton told Heart, "I heard one of them mention his name."
Heart nodded.

"Good work. Now get behind us and let the professionals handle this." Heart replied and he tapped his combadge, "All units advance. Use transports for cover." And the engine of the armoured vehicle beside them growled as the driver advanced slowly towards the buildings.

Hamilton wondered why the MACOs had bothered disembarking at all, but his question was answered before he even had the chance to ask Heart as an improvised incendiary device was hurled from a window in an outlying building and one of the other transports was enveloped in flames. The vehicle came to a halt and most of the troops behind it spread out, firing their phasers back at their attacker in the building while two of them used portable extinguishers to put out the flames trapping the vehicle's crew inside.

George looked around at his followers. Most of them had been unarmed when the Federation troops had launched their surprise attack, but now what weapons they had were being distributed. Unfortunately the reports coming in from the later arrivals was that the enemy was advancing and that they appeared to have overwhelming numbers and firepower. Apparently the armoured fighting vehicle that George had seen was only one of four such vehicles now surrounding them and even by attempting to draw their opponents into the close confines of the buildings was unlikely to produce favourable results. George then noticed that no one was looking in his direction at the moment and he decided that discretion was the better part of valour in situations such as this and that it was time to leave. He took a deep breath and then stepped forwards, expecting to find himself transported to safety. But to his horror nothing happened and he remained in the same room. A quick diagnostic of his implants told George that there was nothing wrong with him, which left only one other answer.

The others had intervened to keep him here.

The sounds of phaser fire were getting closer now and George looked around again.

"We need to get out of here." He said to a nearby man who was desperately trying to reassemble a phaser rifle that the group had been attempting to modify to produce higher beam settings, "Hold this position while I look for a weak point in their lines." And then George headed for the door. Just as he was about to leave the room he remembered the trouble that Jensen being captured by Starfleet had caused him and he knew that he could not allow that to happen again. Instead he turned to face the followers gathered in this room and raised his phaser. Before any of them could react he opened fire, sweeping the beam back and forth across the room until only corpses remained. Then he turned around again and headed for the exit.

The armoured vehicle in front of Hamilton and Heart came to a sudden halt and there was the sound of its main gun firing. The projectile weapon launched a short volley of rounds designed to produce energy pulses

similar to phasers set to stun that flew in through the ground floor windows of the building now right in front of it. As soon as the first of these detonated the MACOs broke cover and rushed forwards, leaping in through the broken windows and calling out the rooms as secure when no opposition was found. "Okay we're in." Heart broadcast to his men, "Advance and secure this building."

As George headed for the nearest exit he suddenly came face to face with a pair of MACOs when the men suddenly rounded the corner ahead of him and one fired his phaser at him. The beam struck George in the chest, but it was set to stun and he simply ignored it. Then as the startled MACOs attempted to adjust their phasers George struck back. Taking a step forwards he grabbed hold of the closest man and threw him against the wall, making sure that the MACOs head took the brunt of the impact. Then he pointed his own phaser at the second and shot him dead.

Crouching down, George then discarded his phaser and swapped it for the superior military models that the MACOs had been armed with and adjusted them to their maximum setting. With one in each hand George then continued on his way.

Reaching the door that led into the courtyard between the buildings George heard the sound of phaser fire from outside and realised that the MACOs had got their first. Cautiously he peered out through a window and saw that one of their transports had been driven right into the courtyard and was being used to provide suppressing fire for the MACOs. With no way of knowing that George had already slaughtered his own followers the soldiers were simply being cautious by targeting any location that looked suitable for an ambush.

"Over there!" A voice called out and George realised that he had been seen. Taking aim he fired at a MACO pointing in his direction and the man briefly became a torch as the energy blast reduced him to nothing. This had the effect of scattering the other nearby MACOs as they sought substantial cover, but it also attracted the attention of the armoured vehicle's crew and its turret swung round towards him.

"George!" Heart yelled as he and Hamilton appeared in the doorway behind George, "Drop the phaser!" Instead George raised both his weapons and pointed them towards the two men who dived out of the way just time as he fired, blasting a hole in the wall behind them. Then he ran from the building and into the courtyard and before the armoured vehicle or any of the MACOs waiting there could shoot him he fired again with both phasers. This time though he aimed at the ground beneath the transport and vaporised a large portion of it. No longer on stable ground the heavy vehicle rolled sideways into the hole and there was a crashing sound as it landed at the bottom.

The MACOs moved to help the crew of the stricken vehicle, but more fire from George kept most of them pinned down and in the confusion he slipped out of the courtyard and to the open ground beyond.

White looked down as he flew over the cluster of buildings. From this altitude the flashes of phaser fire were clearly visible, even where part of the main building was obscured by smoke. The sensors aboard his fighter offered him even more information, able to track the combadges of Hamilton and all of the MACOs as they cleared each building in turn. Then he noticed something else, a single figure running away from the buildings that was holding two phasers that showed up clearly on the sensors because of the heat that had built up in them from repeated firing on a maximum setting.

"*Nightfall*, I have a single individual heading towards caves to the north-east." He transmitted, "Do I have permission to engage?"

"Negative Snowman." Heart's voice responded before the *Nightfall* could, "That's George. We'll take him."

Aboard the *Nightfall*, West looked at Captain Edwards.

"I wonder why he's running. Shouldn't he have just done his usual disappearing trick?" she asked.

"Let's not look a gift horse in the mouth lieutenant." Edwards replied before he addressed Captain Heart over the communication channel, "I want him alive captain. Do whatever you have to to achieve that."

"Understood *Nightfall*, we're heading after him now." Heart responded.

George looked up to see the Starfleet fighters overhead. From where he was he could see four of them clearly, while specs in the distance looked to be moving as if they were more of the craft. So far though they had not made any threatening manoeuvres despite George being out in the open and totally exposed. Then he heard the sound of a ground vehicle's engine and looking back towards the hideout that he had fled he saw that one of the armoured transports was now pursuing him.

Fortunately the entrance to the cave system that George was heading for was just up ahead and once inside he knew that he would be beyond the reach of the Federation vehicles, both ground and air. Picking up his pace, he ran on.

Sure enough George reached the cave entrance before his pursuers caught up with him and he rushed inside before sliding to a halt. Turning around he raised one of his phasers, pointing at the cave ceiling above the entrance.

A single blast ought to be enough to collapse the entrance, he thought to himself and that would leave the Federation troops either trying to dig him out or searching for an alternate way into the cave. But when he pulled the trigger nothing happened and only then did George check the energy gauges on the two weapons and discovered that between the MACOs using them and his own use of the phasers on their maximum setting they were both depleted. Furious with himself for not thinking to take any of the spare power packs the MACOs carried George threw both of the useless weapons away in disgust and ran deeper into the cave.

Soon after, the armoured transport came to a halt outside the cave entrance and Hamilton and Heart disembarked with a squad of MACOs.

"Careful." Heart said as Hamilton immediately headed for the entrance, "George could be waiting right inside for us."

"I doubt it." Hamilton replied, "Look." And he pointed to where the two discarded phasers had landed, "He doesn't intend to stand a fight, he's running." And then he headed into the cave followed by the MACOs.

The route that George took through the cave opened out into a wide cavern and in the distance he could see a tiny pinprick of light that told him that there was another way out in that direction. The problem was that a wide chasm split the cavern in two and the only way across was a narrow ledge at one side.

"Stay where you are!" he heard Hamilton shout as he headed for the ledge and then he felt the impact of another phaser set to stun. George slowed slightly as the beam continued, but he easily recovered and then broke into a run.

"Stun doesn't work on these guys remember?" Heart said to Hamilton as the Starfleet officer lowered his rifle.

"I just thought maybe it was a matter of keeping the beam on him a bit longer." He replied and then he slung his rifle over his shoulder and he and the MACOs gave chase.

George reached the ledge well ahead of his pursuers and he grabbed hold of the cave wall as he began to make his way along it. The ledge was barely half a metre wide and protrusions from the wall made it necessary to either duck or climb over them every so often, so his going was slow and his pursuers, led by Heart and then Hamilton were soon coming after him.

The problem here for George was that Heart had had extensive training in moving over difficult terrain and the soldier soon began to clear the gap. Nervously George found himself repeatedly looking back to check on Heart's progress, only to see him getting steadily closer.

"Give it up George." Heart said as he drew closer.

"Never!" George snapped, "I'm not being taken prisoner by the likes of-" but before he could finish his sentence George put his foot down without looking and it slipped from the ledge, taking him with it.

"No!" Heart yelled and he looked over the side of the ledge, expecting to see the man tumbling to his death below.

But the former governor of Prestus had simply vanished.

George gasped as he landed heavily on a metal surface and looked up to see the girl and her two bodyguards looking down at him.

"Pick him up." She said and the two silent monstrosities reached down and pulled George to his feet.

"I thought I wasn't to be allowed back." He said as the girl stared at him.

"Oh we couldn't allow the Federation to acquire another of us for study now could we?" she replied, "But our judgement stands. I will do what I can to clean up the mess you have left in your wake but you will never be allowed to rejoin us." And she reached out towards him.

"No wait!" George snapped just as the girl placed her hand flat against his chest. But then he fell silent as his eyes widened and his mouth opened in an unheard scream. Then the girl pulled her hand away and George's body went limp in the arms of the two milky white figures.

"Recycle that." The girl said, "Then we need to pay a visit to a man called Jenson."

Edwards was present in the cargo bay when the MACOs were beamed back to the *Nightfall*.

"I'm sorry captain." Hamilton said as he climbed out of the armoured transport.

"What for?" Edwards asked, "George may have escaped, but whatever he was planning here he's had to abandon. Plus we may have a witness who can shed some light onto what we're dealing with."

"You mean Jenson?" Heart asked, "What's happening with him?"

"I had Shry turn him over to the locals just after the police transport was attacked." Edwards replied, "But now that the request for a transfer has been proven to be a fake their prosecutor has gone quiet about keeping him. Starfleet Security expects him to be turned over to them without a fuss tomorrow."

King watched as a pair of crew from the starbase loaded the body he and Brown had examined onto a stretcher.

"Take good care of that." he told them, "There are a lot of important people who want to see it." And one of the two crewmen nodded before the stretcher was wheeled out of sickbay. At the same time a science division ensign appeared in the doorway and stood aside for them to pass. Then he entered sickbay and approached King with a PADD in his hand.

"Doctor King?" he asked.

"Who's asking?" King replied.

"Ensign Carter sir. I've been sent to run an inventory on your supplies. Our system is all messed up at the moment so my superiors want a visual inspection carried out." And King frowned.

"Yeah, I'll say your system is messed up." He said, "Lieutenant Brown's already done it."

"Who sir?" the ensign asked in reply.

"Lieutenant Brown. Tall woman. Brunette. Has a wicked right hook." King said.

"I'm sorry sir, but I don't know what you're talking about. I'm the only one assigned to gather this information from the ships in spacedock and I've never heard of a Lieutenant Brown."

"Then who the hell was she?" King said.

Now dressed all in black Brown entered the restaurant by the back door and immediately saw one of the staff slumped just inside the doorway. She knelt down to confirm that the woman was still alive and then continued on her way. Moving through the kitchen she saw more unconscious bodies and she walked past them into the dining area. Here she found even more unconscious people, both staff and customers.

However, there were two men dressed as she was sat at a table in the middle of the room eating.

"Admiral Schmidt. Commander Jones." She said, smiling to them.

"Do take a seat won't you Commander Brown?" Schmidt replied and he indicated an empty chair at the table.

"Yes we were able to order you a meal before the staff became indisposed." Jones added.

"Not gag is it?" Brown asked as she sat down and removed the cover from the plate in front of her and was relieved to see that it was not covered in live worms. The she looked around, "Anesthizine gas?" she asked.

"With a little something extra unique to our section." Jones replied, "They'll all wake up in a couple of hours with banging headaches and assume that the gas used to cook the food leaked out and rendered them unconscious."

"More importantly none of them will remember us being here." Schmidt added. Then he took a sip of his drink before asking, "So what did you learn commander?"

"Apart from it's really weird being called 'lieutenant' again?" she replied and she placed a PADD on the table that Schmidt then picked up, "I learnt that the technology that went into reanimating those corpses is way beyond anything we've got."

"But what about where they come from?" Jones asked.

"Ah, now that's a different matter. Quite frankly I don't have a clue." Brown told him.

"We were right to come here." Schmidt said as he set down the PADD, "From what we've learnt the crew of the *Nightfall* have been handling themselves well and I think that we should do our best to support them."

"You're not suggesting we contact them are you?" Jones asked.

"Of course not." Schmidt answered, "Our section must remain a secret. But we can do what we can to make sure that the *Nightfall* project is not cancelled and that the resources its crew need are made available to them. For now they are our first line of defence."

It was still dark in his cell when Jenson awoke but he soon realised that he was not alone.

"What the-" he exclaimed as he tried to figure out why a young girl was standing in a prison cell staring at him.

"Mister Jenson?" she asked.

"What? Yes. Who the hell are you and how did you get in here?" Jenson replied.

"You worked for Mister George didn't you Mister Jenson? Well he worked for me." The girl replied.

"You expect me to believe that? You're just a kid."

"I may look like a child Mister Jenson, but I assure you that I was travelling the stars before your ancestors were painting them on the walls of caves. Now unfortunately I can't be sure just how much you've managed to find out about my people and so I can't let you talk to Starfleet about us." The girl said and then Jenson became aware of another figure standing in the shadows in the corner of the cell.

He gasped as the milky white giant stepped closer and reached out for him. With one hand it grabbed hold of his collar and held him down on his bed. Jenson opened his mouth to scream but before he could make a sound the giant picked up his pillow and pushed it down over his face, holding it there as Jenson thrashed out helplessly.

"I'm terribly sorry about this Mister Jenson." The girl said calmly, "But to reclaim what is rightfully ours is going to require some sacrifice."