

STAR TREK



GALLOWAY

Through the Eyes of Tomorrow

by

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THROUGH THE EYES OF TOMORROW

BY DAVID DIETZ

WITH SEAN O'KEEFE

PROLOGUE

The planet was bleak, barren.

It had been that way for countless centuries.

Grey dust scattered and blew as a wind made a low and ominous howl. Very few people ever came here. The soil was bereft of mineral nutrients. The landscape devoid of all vegetation. In fact, there was little to attract anyone here at all.

Except for one thing. An ancient object which, according to an early report made years ago by a certain Federation constitution Class Starship, was known as the Guardian of Forever.

Recently the Guardian had attracted many visitors to the barren, rocky surface, three of whom were standing before it. By all outward appearances, two of the three looked like typical human beings. Except for their garments, the two dark haired men would have been able to walk freely among any of the many planets colonized by the Federation.

The third member of the party was different though.

She was a stunningly beautiful woman with long, flowing, almost reddish locks of hair cascading around her shoulders. Her clothing was made of some type of reflective silver material embossed with a kind of criss-cross patterning. She paced before the other two who stood rigidly at attention. Her steely grey eyes inspected the men thoroughly as she spoke.

“Very well. Are your instructions clear?”

The men nodded in agreement.

The woman stopped in her tracks and glared hard at them both. She glanced from one man’s face to the other, obviously in anticipation of a verbal response. Finally, the man on the left spoke.

“We are to step through the portal,” said the man, nervously indicating the huge, nearly circular maw of the Guardian behind it. “And into the established period in Earth’s past.”

“Where we will carry out our search and destroy instructions,” added the second man.

A cold smile wormed its way across the woman’s otherwise stony face. “Excellent,” she slowly replied. “When your mission is completed you will terminate yourselves to prevent discovery. Is that clear?”

The two men acknowledged that the order was indeed quite clear.

The woman smiled to herself once again. All was ready. If the mission was successful, their names would become a glorified part of history.... and the Federation would cease to exist. The woman felt a warmth of contentment course through her slender body as the wind whipped around her face. She brushed her long hair from in front of her face with her right hand, carefully securing it behind her point-tipped ear.

CHAPTER ONE

Captain's Log. Starship USS *Galloway*. Stardate 62177.3, Captain Tanara commanding. The *Galloway* is en route to Starbase 345 where the ship's crew will enjoy a well-deserved few days of shore leave. On board our vessel is Starfleet Commodore Sterling Cross whom we are transporting to Starbase 345 where he will assume command of the station. Our present course will bring us within range of the planetoid known as Gateway. Per Starfleet orders, we will assume orbit above the planet and our medical team will administer annual physicals to the research team assigned to the planet.

I have also granted permission to several of our ship's historians to use the allotted time for the physicals to conduct historical research on the planet via its unique artifact known as the Guardian of Forever.

* * *

Starfleet Commodore Sterling Cross proudly strolled down one of the *Galloway*'s lengthy corridors. Tall and lanky, with grey hair showing at his temples, the man kept himself fit. He had to, as trouble seemed to make a habit of following him around. He gave a passing young ensign a smile, which was instantly

returned. His youthful looks hadn't left him and his charm had won him many an argument – which was handy when his position was weak. All the same, looking after himself was handy as, ever since the days of the Galaxy class starships, interiors had become much more luxurious and spacious. Dark maroon carpeting was everywhere, even on the floors of the miles of corridors which cut the ship's interior into a spider web-like maze.

Now Starfleet engineers had gone and done one better with their new design: The Universal class.

A variation of the original Galaxy class design but with yet another level rising from the rear of the main saucer section and sweeping back until it connected with the improved warp nacelles, the *Galloway* was the first of its kind, Sterling Cross had always felt that the Universal class ship looked as though a Romulan Warbird had landed atop a Galaxy class Federation vessel. In fact, he wasn't far from the truth.

Ever since a truce between the Federation and the Romulan Star Empire had been achieved, waves and waves of Romulan natives had migrated to Federation worlds. The two most popular were Vulcan and Earth. It had been a Romulan engineer named Toehrl who had originally come up with the design for the Universal class vessel. Starfleet had quickly commissioned the design, no doubt to demonstrate an openness to new

Romulan ideals. The *Galloway* was the prototype, with hopes of more to follow in her wake. Once she was even commanded by a Romulan.

* * *

Sterling Cross, being a Starfleet veteran of some, oh what was it, thirty years now? So hard to keep track of time these days. He did not feel comfortable on a ship that was designed for comfort. In his days, starships were smaller and didn't make allowances for things like personal comfort. Of course, there were no families on board Starships in his day either. Oh well, he sighed to himself, time waits for no one.

Lost in his thoughts, Sterling Cross had almost forgotten where he was heading in the first place and to his surprise found himself in front of the last place he thought he wanted to be on the ship: Sickbay. He was about to simply turn and walk away from the sickbay with a shudder when his ears picked up the sound of voices from inside. He heard his name mentioned and out of sheer curiosity peered his head around the doorway so he could see who was discussing him. He spotted the ship's XO and the CMO, Dr T'Leya. He noted the lovely, tall Vulcan woman, with her dark, nearly black hair, was almost facing his direction and he realized he must be careful if he was going to get away with his eavesdropping.

“I said, I don’t care how sound of mind and limb he is. I just can’t allow a Starfleet Commodore to come along on an Away mission.”

“Gwenn, take it easy. You’re more jumpy than the time you refused to let the Captain beam down to Altair 3.”

Cross had noted that T’Leya was one of the most emotive Vulcans he had ever met. Perhaps she had spent too much time among humans?

“Do you blame me? Altair 3 had an entire tribe of poison-tipped-spear-throwing savages waiting in ambush!” Cross shook his head; she was at it again.

Commander Guinevere Scott, Executive Officer aboard the ship, had been causing Cross grief ever since he decided that he wanted to beam down to Gateway with the Away mission. He realized it was the duty of an XO to protect their captain from beaming down to an obviously hostile environment, but Gateway was nowhere near hostile and Cross had found her balking at his coming along unreasonable.

Now the fiery-haired woman was trying to plead her case to the ship’s Vulcan chief medical officer, T’Leya. Cross liked Scott a lot. She was a fine officer and a credit to her ship; but she had this maternal protective streak in her that nobody could seem to shake. A quick glance reminded him that Gwenn, as she liked to

be called, was clearly of Celtic stock, with a slender, athletic frame that reminded him of a high jumper he once saw in the Federation Olympics. Like many other Gaelic women he had met, he liked her inner strength and rock-solid determination. If she was asked to move the mountain she would simply answer: "Where do you want it?"

"Could you imagine what would happen," said Gwenn. "If it got back to Starfleet Command that I lost a Commodore while in command of an away mission? I'd be lucky to get command of a tug."

"I intend only to give you the highest possible commendation in my report, Commander."

Gwenn Scott whirled around in surprise to see Commodore Cross leaning up against the frame of the entrance to sickbay, a smile curled across his lined face. It only took Gwenn a moment to recover from the shock before she approached her superior officer.

"I'm afraid I stand by my decision sir," she said with that charming Scottish lilt in her voice. "I can't risk letting you come along with us.

"I mean no disrespect Commander," Cross began gently. "But what possible risk could there be? The only inhabitants on Gateway are the research team Starfleet posted there a year

ago and, as they will be busy with Dr. T'Leya giving them their physicals, we will have the planet all ourselves."

Gwenn had not wanted to go another round with the Commodore on this subject. With a groan of frustration, she stormed out of the sickbay. Commodore Cross followed closely behind her with a smile of contentment on his face.

T'Leya watched them go serenely and shook her head marveling at these humans she had chosen to serve with.

* * *

The bridge of the *Galloway* was bustling with activity.

Every console on the spacious horse-shoe shaped bridge was occupied by uniformed officers performing routine duties, and the image of a greyish, oblate spheroid grew larger and larger on the main viewing screen. Seated in the middle chair at the base of the horse-shoe was a tall, fair-haired Taarakian female. Even seated, she had an air of authority about her that seemed to affect everyone even remotely in her presence, which was quite typical for a female of her species. Many human men from around the Federation had a nickname for them: Valkyries. Their physiques were muscular and tall, yet they did nothing to detract from their feminine beauty. Taarakians had broken the hearts of many men with nothing more than a look. They could be charming and terrifying in the same moment.

Soon the image on the viewscreen settled into a constant shape which filled the entire left side in a dull grey crescent that nearly blended in with the black background of space. Captain Tanara heard her conn officer, Kojiro, report that a standard orbit had been achieved. She then ordered him to contact the research team.

The ship's ambassador of all things Japanese, Kojiro quickly complied with his captain's order and opened a communications channel. For several seconds, he attempted to gauge a response from the research team, but his efforts proved to be surprisingly fruitless.

"There's no response, Captain." Kojiro ultimately concluded.

The message perplexed Captain Tanara perhaps even more than it did Kojiro. The research team hadn't been on the planet all that long. So why was it taking so long for them to respond?

Tanara had little time to ponder the question for, as she rose from her command chair, she heard the familiar hiss of the turbolift doors opening. Onto the bridge stepped Commander Scott, closely followed by Commodore Cross. Tanara could not help but chuckle to herself. They were at it again!

"No sir," said Scott with considerable restraint. "You cannot talk me out of it!"

“Commander, don’t make me pull rank on you,” said the Commodore with a devilish grin.

Tanara strode around the rear horse-shoe to the upper level of the bridge. She placed herself alongside the Commodore while Scott stood at the far end of the bridge next to Dogh, the *Galloway*’s chief of security, a beefy Klingon with a proud family history.

“What seems to be the problem here, Number One?” asked Tanara.

Gwenn Scott let out a barely audible hiss escape from her lips before she answered. “The Commodore is insisting on accompanying us on the Away mission, Captain. I am simply restating my opposition to the idea.”

Tanara let another slight laugh out as she turned to face the Commodore. “Is she being a stubborn pain in the ass again, Sterling?”

“No more than you used to be under my command, as I recall.”

Tanara smiled at her XO as she paced over Gwenn’s way. “I wouldn’t be too concerned about the Commodore, Number One.”

Tanara then leaned in to Gwenn a little more closely and whispered confidentially in her ear. “He once took a poisoned

dart on Colga 3, and only two days later was instructing a classical dance class on the ship's holodeck." She then leaned up from beside her first officer and spoke more openly. "Besides, the Commodore is quite an expert on the Guardian of Forever."

"Only an amateur." said Cross with obvious embarrassment.

Gwenn glanced up into the eyes of her friend, Dogh, who was standing at her side, with obvious bemusement. The two of them shared a similar sense of humor, one based on not taking the follies of others too seriously. It was the core of their relationship. They humored the Commodore and listened as Cross then went on to say that his senior thesis at Starfleet Academy was on the Guardian. Tanara added that the paper was still published in the Academy's collection of scholarly journals. Cross's embarrassment was less severe at her remark, but his lined face was nonetheless pink with blush.

"I had no idea, sir," said Scott in a tone that surprised even her. "Very well then. Commodore Cross, would you care to join us on the Away team?"

"I would be delighted, Commander," replied Cross with a smile of triumph.

Scott raised her arm in the direction of the turbolift. Cross moved toward the brownish metallic doors which opened with a hydraulic hiss when he was close enough. Scott inclined her

head and stepped towards the door herself, followed by Dogh, when Captain Tanara called out to her. Scott whirled around to face her commander.

"We haven't been able to contact the research team on the surface," said Tanara.

"You mean there's no response to our hails?" asked Gwenn gravely.

"Exactly," replied Tanara. "It may be nothing. The time current interference from the planet may be affecting communications. But be on the alert, just in case."

"I always am, sir."

With that, Commander Scott turned around and joined Dogh and Cross in the turbolift.

As the doors closed obscuring the faces of the three officers, Tanara nodded to herself as if to say, "Yes, you are."

* * *

Commander Guinevere Scott had always had a generous way of choosing an Away team. Since she was friendly with nearly every officer aboard the *Galloway*, she always found it easy to choose companions for Away missions. She had approached several officers about coming along to the surface of Gateway.

Only one had refused.

The *Galloway*'s new research officer. Lieutenant Commander Y'Vrn Martyn—a Yarzonian who had been raised on Earth—to Gwenn's great surprise, declined to join the Away team.

Gwenn had questioned the reasoning behind his denial to come along. After all, he was one of the reasons Captain Tanara was allowing *Galloway* officers to research the Guardian.

Y'Vrn had said that anyone fiddling around with the Guardian was asking for trouble. He had read of two encounters the USS Enterprise had concerning the Guardian and had not been pleased with the outcome of either. Y'Vrn told her to go if she wanted to, but she should be careful. "Time," he said, "is a very dangerous thing to be playing with."

Had it been Gwenn's imagination, or did the somewhat aloof young man, with that beautifully long hair and those exquisitely colored green eyes, seem more concerned for her personally than the Away team as a whole? She decided not to ponder it. Not for now anyway.

Instead of Y'Vrn, the final slot on the Away team was filled by the *Galloway*'s ever curious Betazoid counselor, Tara Aindrea. Aindrea bounded into the transporter room with a skip in her step almost akin to a schoolgirl bounding through the playground at recess. Her almost childish delight and joyful

attitude to life reminded Gwenn of a pixie from ancient lore. There were times when she could almost see sparkling dust floating about her. It didn't help that her hair differed from the majority of Betazoids in that was a mass of golden curls that matched her bright, blue eyes.

Aindrea stepped onto the last available transporter pad and finally stood still. Gwenn shook her head with mock disbelief. She even thought she heard a chuckle from the Klingon, Dogh.

“Do you think we can get on with it now?” asked Commodore Cross with feigned annoyance.

Gwenn silently agreed. She then announced to Transporter Chief Matthew Kirwin that they were ready to beam down.

Kirwin performed a series of adjustments on his expansive transporter console. Finally, Gwenn noticed his right arm move straight up the far right end of the console. Here it comes, she thought to herself.

Her perception blurred as the familiar image of the transporter room faded from sight in the silvery blue aura which now surrounded her. Within seconds, Kirwin and the *Galloway* transporter room had faded totally from sight - and a decidedly different view began to form.

* * *

Barren. Grey.

That's how it appeared at first. Finally, the image ceased to swirl and began to solidify into the surface of a planet. A planet whose topsoil was almost a fine, grey dust. There was no vegetation. No indication that there had ever been any animals either.

Gwenn Scott had heard that Gateway was like this, but always thought the reports had been exaggerated a little. She glanced around to see the other members of her Away team standing close by reorienting their perception after the transport. Tara Aindrea shivered slightly even though the wind was not cold or hard.

Commodore Cross stepped towards Gwenn with T'Leya closely behind him. Be asked Gwenn where the research team's encampment was.

"According to the ship's records," said Gwenn. "Close to the Guardian itself."

She then suggested that they split into two teams and see who could locate the actual spot first. Dogh, T'Leya and Aindrea headed off in one direction while Gwenn and the Commodore took the opposite route.

* * *

Dogh's group had not been searching for long. Perhaps only fifteen minutes at most. He had wondered what the encampment actually looked like. Aindrea had explained that the scientists more than likely used temporary, silicon-based structures as shelters. They weren't as comfortable as the quarters on the *Galloway*, but they did give the necessary protection from the elements. Being Klingon, Dogh understood that survival came before comfort. He began to wonder how really alike humans and Klingons were when he came upon a rise in the ground. Feeling it would grant a better view of the surrounding area, Dogh scaled the inclined rock face.

After several seconds of strenuous climbing, a regular human would have been gasping for breath, but Dogh's respiration remained relatively stable. He shielded his eyes from the incredibly bright light of Gateway's orange sun and surveyed a valley several hundred feet below. What Dogh saw caused him to call out to T'Leya and Aindrea.

Seconds later the Vulcan doctor and Betazoid counselor joined Dogh on the crest of the cliff. He pointed to the valley below. T'Leya managed to maintain control, while Aindrea gasped at discovering the source of her shivers.

There had once been a settlement there. Solid, greyish structures which stood boldly against the barren backdrop of the planet, were now piles of smoldering rubble. Blackened

craters charred the landscape while plumes of smoke from still smoldering fires clouded the valley with a sickening fog.

T'Leya shook her head in confusion. "Why would anyone have done this?" she asked aloud. "They were merely scientists. It's not logical."

"Whoever they were," Dogh said in his ominous, deep voice. "They were not overly concerned with logic."

T'Leya took her tricorder from the pouch on her uniform's right hip and scanned the valley below. Aindrea mentioned to her that it wouldn't be necessary as she sensed no life whatsoever. T'Leya nevertheless continued to scan until her findings were precisely the same as the counselor's.

Dogh touched the insignia/communicator on his uniform, opening a channel to Commander Scott. Scott's disembodied voice answered the call and asked for a report.

"The research team's encampment has been annihilated." said Dogh, matter-of-factly.

"Annihilated?" replied a surprised Gwenn.

"Totally obliterated sir."

"Do you have any idea who the attackers could have been?" asked Gwenn.

"From this distance, sir, it could have been anybody. The charring of the ground surrounding the encampment to me suggests phaser—or possibly disruptor—fire."

Dogh then expressed his desire to investigate the encampment further. Scott, however, denied his request and ordered the three to rejoin Commodore Cross and her at the Guardian itself. With a grunt of reluctance, Dogh complied.

* * *

Commander Scott and Commodore Cross had had the Guardian in sight for several minutes before Dogh called with his grim report. Now, as the pair approached the ancient stony object from another high cliff face, Scott noticed that they were not alone. She quickly stooped low and suggested that Commodore Cross do the same.

Standing before the portal of the Guardian were two unfamiliar men. They seemed to be waiting for something. Gwenn noticed that inside the nearly circular maw of the Guardian was a swirling, misty light. At first Gwenn hoped that these two were scientists, but that hope quickly faded when she noticed the clothing the two were wearing.

They were out of date by modern standards. Some of the more fashion-conscious members of the Federation would have

called them ancient. Gwenn wasn't really a fashion expert so she asked Commodore Cross for his opinion.

"Twentieth century Earth would be my guess," replied the Commodore.

"Think maybe they know what happened to our research team, Commodore?"

"Undoubtedly."

"We're more alike than we think, sir. Alright then, let's have a little chat with our friends shall we?"

Scott slowly rose from her crouched position behind the rather large boulder. She was preparing to take them by surprise, but it was the Commodore who surprised her.

He stood up very quickly and called to the two strangers with almost childlike glee. "Excuse me! I wonder if we might have a word with you?"

Gwenn could hardly believe her ears as she turned her attention to the men below them. She saw that they had now drawn from inside their jackets double handled weapons of some kind. From some of the lessons which Dogh had tutored her on alien weaponry, it didn't take Gwenn long to recognize the design.

"Romulan disruptors," gasped Gwenn.

"Something is definitely wrong with this picture," commented Cross to no one in particular.

Suddenly a beam of deadly orange light sprang forth from the man on the right's weapon. It grazed past Commodore Cross' head, singeing the hair on the back of his neck. The second man followed suit and as his disruptor fire reached the Commodore and Gwenn, the pair dove for cover behind the giant boulder once again.

Gwenn felt herself flinch each time another disruptor bolt flashed past her. She drew her hand phaser from her side pouch and held it at the ready. She noticed that Commodore Cross already had his phaser in hand and was itching to use it.

Gwenn soon realized that she could hear the disruptor fire more than she felt it. She boldly stuck her head above the top of the boulder and noticed that her two opponents were now firing in a different direction. They were fighting another barrage from above.

Gwenn's eyes followed the lines of light flowing from the disruptors' noses and saw that the new barrage of fire was coming from Dogh's phaser. He, Aindrea, and Dr. T'Leya were holding the enemy at bay with a phaser crossfire. Gwenn tapped her communicator, calling the *Galloway* for help.

* * *

Commander Guinevere Scott's voice reverberated through the bridge's overhead speakers as she made her report.

"Under heavy fire on the surface," she said. "*Galloway*, we need transport immediately!"

Captain Tanara listened gravely to her first officer's report. She hated having to be heartless with one of her crew. Especially with someone she liked as much as Gwenn, but at the moment she had no choice.

"I wish I could, Commander," Tanara said. "However, we're encountering some fire of our own." She turned back to the viewscreen. "Open hailing frequencies." Tanara didn't wait as she heard the chime of open comms sound. "Vessel from the Romulan Star Empire, you are in Federation space and have fired on a vessel of the UFP's Starfleet. Unless you withdraw immediately your presence and actions will be regarded as an act of war."

Tanara didn't really expect them to comply. Whatever machinations were going on down on the planet were being aided by someone else up here.

"Incoming fire!"

The bridge rocked as the saucer took another hit from a photon torpedo. The Captain remained on her feet, as if they were kept in place by cement in the floor. “Hit them hard and fast! They may have friends out there.”

The *Galloway* was a flying arsenal and her weapon's officer was happy to show them off. The Romulan's shields fluoresced as they tried to absorb the incoming energy salvo.

As they fired Tanara addressed Gwenn once again. “Our shields are up, and we're at red alert, Number One. We can't transport anyone up right now.”

“Understood, *Galloway*. Happy hunting.”

The Captain would have felt more confidence if she was certain there was only one enemy ship. That was yet to be proven.

“Romulan decloaking aft!”

There were times when Captain Tanara hated being right. Now was definitely one of them.

She considered the tactic and had expected this. A standard pincer maneuver. “Warp one evasive!”

The *Galloway* shot forward into warp and avoided the torpedo barrage that would have severely strained their aft shields.

Standing like a Viking warrior in the midst of the bridge Tanara began barking out orders. "Bring us about in a wide arc back to Gateway. Scan the two Romulan ships. I want to know which one is radiating a weaker power signature. It will be target One. Bring up our position on Tactical."

The viewscreen shifted into a three-dimensional image of the space around Gateway with the planet in the middle. Tanara could see the *Galloway* looping around in space, their speed a leisurely Warp One. The two Romulan vessels appeared on screen. One was still in orbit of Gateway and the other was following them. It was clear they were starting to catch up.

Tanara smiled to herself. In such a tight turn as they were performing you couldn't go much faster without tearing your ship apart.

"Scans complete," she heard her Science Officer announce. "Painting the vessels as ordered."

The display altered to show the vessel following as #2 with #1 the ship still in orbit.

Tanara thought that, if she was given to betting, she would have won this wager. She brought her focus back to the problem and ordered: "Bring us out of warp at point blank range and fire everything we've got at their impulse reactor. I want to collapse her shields as before their friends arrive."

* * *

Damn! Gwenn cursed to herself. I should have known!

“Understood Captain,” replied Gwenn in smooth, even tones disguising her frustration. “Happy hunting.” She then closed the channel.

Scott tried to think calmly to herself for a moment. After only a second, she tapped her communicator again, “Scott to Dogh. I could use some tactical advice right about now.”

“Romulan disruptors are deadly,” came Dogh’s reply. “However, their high energy output causes them to drain rapidly. If we can hold them off for a moment or two longer, their weapons would be out of energy.”

And we could take them! Gwenn thought triumphantly to herself. She then ordered Dogh to maintain his fire on the enemy before closing the channel. Gwenn then turned to the Commodore. “Concentrate your fire with mine on the left Romulan. Dogh and the others will keep the one on the right busy.”

* * *

In orbit kilometers above the surface of Gateway, yet another phaser battle was raging. This one between three great starships. The *Galloway* held its own against the Romulan ships,

partly because of the similarities in the two ships' designs, but mostly because of her commander's tenacity.

The Romulan ship designated #1 was hanging in space, its lights on but nobody was at home. What was left of the ship's impulse drive was a sparking ruin. While the ship's main power unit, it's forced artificial quantum singularity, was intact it could still put up a fight but its ability to maneuver was limited to thrusters and warp. It could crawl or leap, but nothing in between.

Captain Tanara stood, watching the scene play out on the tactical display. "Kojiro," she ordered. "Keep our bow on #2 and swing us around behind it. Keep us away from #1. She's not going anywhere but she still has teeth."

"Yes, Captain!" the young pilot said, on one hand frightened but on the other feeling more alive than ever had. This was battle and it was the real thing! His father had told him stories of the ancient samurai, with their codes of honor and their epic battles, but he had never expected to be one! Manipulating the controls, Kojiro obeyed his commander's orders and kept the *Galloway*'s formidable weaponry to bear on the enemy.

"Mister Quinn," Tanara ordered. "Keep up a steady barrage on #2. Whenever we come into range of #1 send a volley of torpedoes at their exposed section."

Quinn nodded, not quite understanding why she would waste ordinance on #2 but he followed her orders without question.

Tanara watched the viewer and watched as the readouts for the different vessels changed with every second's scans. There was no way she was going to give the Romulans the upper hand in this situation. She was reminded of the *Galloway*'s former captain, a Romulan named Tyrek, who had once warned Tanara that the Romulans as a rule never take prisoners. It saves them from doing too much paperwork. "Keep minimal aspect on #2 Mister Kajiro," she ordered. "We don't want to give them too big a target."

The ship rocked as another shot from #1 hit their forward shields.

"Auxiliary power to the forward shields!" Tanara ordered when she saw they were about to buckle. She took a deep breath to calm her nerves. She determined in her heart that the *Galloway* was not going down without a fight.

* * *

On the surface of Gateway, the two Romulans disguised as humans seemed finally to be on the verge of defeat. Their disruptors were steadily losing power thanks to the constant combined phaser fire from the two Federation teams.

Gwenn Scott smiled contently to herself. It seemed victory was well in hand.

Suddenly, another series of disruptor blasts erupted from above. Gwenn couldn't quite pinpoint the origin of the blasts but they were giving the Romulans the break they had been in search of. As the two human-looking Romulans stood looking at each other somewhat disoriented, Gwenn heard a stern feminine voice call from above. "Forget the humans," it said. "Jump through the portal!"

The two human-looking Romulans were quick to obey. Simultaneously they backed up, preparing to take a couple of quick strides before leaping through the swirling, illuminated portal. Commodore Cross quickly realized their intent and boldly stood straight up from behind the boulder. He fired his phaser and the beam struck the right Romulan in his left shoulder an instant before he and his companion disappeared into the swirling portal.

Suddenly, the boulder behind which Cross had been standing shattered into a thousand pieces. A disruptor blast not only destroyed the rock, but the force of the explosion sent Commodore Cross sailing backwards until he hit the dusty grey ground with a thud!

Gwenn Scott had watched helplessly as the Commodore's body flew briefly through the air like a rag doll angrily discarded by a petulant child. She then noticed Dogh fire his phaser upwards from where he was standing. She heard a shriek of pain and saw the body of a female Romulan commander, dressed in the traditional uniform of the Romulan military, slump several feet down the loose, rocky hillside. Dogh let out a very Klingon cry of triumph. "K'plah!"

* * *

On the bridge of the *Galloway*, Tanara paced. The battle could still go either way as neither Romulan vessel was bending to her will. Whilst she had managed to keep the *Galloway*'s shields going by cajoling Arcturus, the Chief Engineer, to find every last vestige of extra energy he could find on the ship and channel it into their defenses, she knew that, without the capability of offensive weapons they would soon be at the Romulan's mercy.

"Status of weapons," Tanara ordered.

"Twenty photon torpedoes and our main phaser banks are down to ten percent," Quinn replied, sounding worried.

"Are we within range of #1?"

Kojiro looked down at his board. "Coming into range now!"

Tanara ordered: "Fire five photons at #1, then focus all weaponry on #2."

Quinn looked at her quizzically but he was of old Navy stock. One didn't question orders. It was simply your job to carry them out. "Photons away!"

Tanara watched them streak towards the enemy and felt some comfort from the knowledge that, one way or the other, she was going to take those Romulan bastards with her!

* * *

T'Leya examined the wounds inflicted upon Commodore Scott from the shattering of the boulder by the Romulan disruptor. They were not severe and the Commodore would most certainly live another day. Scott marveled at this man lying on the ground. Captain Tanara was right; he did have the constitution of an elephant.

"It still hurts like hell." moaned Cross.

"It will pass," said T'Leya. "However, I would advise against dancing for a couple of days, Commodore."

Gwenn Scott laughed inwardly as the Commodore let another moan escape from his lips. Scott then turned and noticed Dogh and Aindrea. While Dogh stood guard over their prisoner,

Aindrea was pondering a small, black object the size of a rectangular box.

Scott came over to Aindrea and added her thoughts to the Betazoid's already occupied mind. "A Romulan tricorder?"

Aindrea looked up from the box. "That's what I thought as well. One of those other two dropped it before he entered the Guardian."

Scott nodded her agreement and turned to face Dogh. "Probably filled with all the details of their mission on this planet," said the burly Klingon.

Scott stooped down to face her Romulan prisoner. The once stunningly beautiful face was now soiled with dust and green blood streaks. Gwenn took a hard look at the Romulan's face. She hadn't really noticed how familiar it was until now.

"Well, well, well," said Gwenn. "Commander t'Arla. I thought we'd seen the last of you."

The Romulan sneered defiantly through the pain in her face. "Be very careful, Gwenn. Your overconfidence nearly cost you your life the last time we met."

"Yes, but then it's always good to have friends around." Gwenn looked over to Dogh.

“Or pets,” sneered t’Arla.

Dogh growled almost imperceptibly.

“So what about it, t’Arla? Are you going to tell us what you and your buddies were doing on this planet?” queried Gwenn.

“You must be more insane than I thought,” snorted t’Arla, “if you believe that I’m going to reveal the details of my mission to you.”

“We’re going to find out eventually, you know,” snarled Dogh.
“So why not make it easier on yourself and tell us?”

“Back off, you mongrel!” spat t’Arla. “Romulans are no strangers to pain. And besides, now that my mission is completed, my existence is no longer important.”

Gwenn could tell by the disgustingly satisfied smile on t’Arla’s face that she was up to something. Gwenn ordered Dr. T’Leya to examine the Romulan Commander.

T’Leya quickly came over to the Romulan’s side and opened her medipak. She took a medical scanner from inside and ran it over the Romulan’s shapely body. After several seconds of examination, T’Leya made her report. “There appears to be some kind of foreign substance in her bloodstream. However I cannot be certain what it is.”

t'Arla smiled again. "This I will tell you. It's a new type of time-released poison our scientists have developed. Quite deadly, but quite painless. Sometimes you can't even tell when it's..."

Gwenn stepped back in surprise as the Romulan began to convulse. One severe convulsion was followed by several lesser ones until finally t'Arla calmed herself. She slowly began to slump on her side. As she did, she looked into Gwenn's eyes with a vindictive smile across her lips.

"...going to take effect," were the Romulan's last words before all signs of life left her body and she fell over dead.

"So much for truth in Romulan advertising," Dogh remarked darkly.

T'Leya confirmed Scott's suspicions. Gwenn shook her head to herself. Even though t'Arla had been a Romulan, she hated to see life wasted in such a manner. It was true that had Scott's and t'Arla's positions had been reversed, t'Arla would have felt no remorse at Gwenn's death, but perhaps, that was what made them different.

Gwenn cursed under her breath. "Damn! I was really hoping she would tell us."

"Does that really matter?" Aindrea inquired.

"Of course it does."

Gwenn turned around, surprised to see that it had been Commodore Cross who had made the last statement. He was standing now and looking remarkably stronger than he did moments before. He approached them. "Anything regarding the Guardian of Forever could have massive repercussions throughout the universe."

At that moment Gwenn heard a familiar ringing type sound. She glanced over her left shoulder and notice a silvery-blue aura forming in front of her. Slowly the aura began to take on a humanoid shape, two humanoid shapes in fact. Someone was beaming down from the *Galloway*. Within a few heartbeats the images sharpened into clear definition. Though their backs were turned, Gwenn recognized the two figures as Captain Tanara and Commander Quinn.

Aindrea approached the two new arrivals smiling. "Well, we won't have time to discuss it now. Captain..." Aindrea stopped dead in her tracks. The others' faces froze with expressions of shock.

Tanara had turned around to face them. While she had always been a very forceful, dominant, almost Amazonian woman, there was now something distinctly different about her. A black eyepiece covered the entire left-hand side of her face. Her usually shiny golden hair, was dingy and ratty from neglect.

Gwenn even noticed the end of a red gash peeking out from under the bottom of Tanara's eyepiece.

Tanara's expression was not its usual forceful indifference, but purely sadistic. Quinn's expression mirrored Tanara's exactly.

Commander Scott and the others were so in shock that it took them all a moment to notice that Tanara and Quinn had two very large and mean looking laser weapons pointed right at them.

CHAPTER TWO

“Captain? Captain, what’s going on?”

Commander Gwenn Scott found herself mentally repeating Aindrea’s question.

The figures standing before the Away Team were identical in every way to the Captain Tanara and Commander Quinn Gwenn had known for years. Yet there was something distinctly different about them. A difference that disturbed Gwenn.

“Silence!” barked Tanara in a tone more forceful than anyone could recall.

Gwenn studied the Taarakian Captain. Yes, she could see the difference now. Apart from the eyepiece covering the left side of her face, there was something distinctly strange about her clothes. They weren’t standard Starfleet issue and didn’t conform to the familiar uniforms worn by *Galloway* personnel. Tanara’s uniform was of a shiny, black, form-fitting material. It was only a one-piece jumpsuit of some kind which covered every inch of her body. The snub-nosed weapon she held in her black gloved hand was certainly not a standard hand phaser.

There was even something peculiar about the Federation emblem on the upper-left breast of her uniform. It appeared to

be the right design, but the coloring of it was all wrong. A bluish wedge surrounded by a blood red circle. And why was it tilted on its side?

“You are all under arrest!” said Tanara with obvious revulsion.

Gwenn barely had time to recover from Tanara’s announcement herself when Dogh boldly stepped forward. “Arrest?” spoke the Klingon. “Captain, what are you talking about?”

Tanara was taken somewhat aback by the security chief’s protest. It seemed to Gwenn that Tanara had never seen a Klingon before. Nevertheless, the Taarakian stood her ground. “Remain silent and your lives will be spared.” said Tanara evenly. “You will spare our lives? Captain, what is the meaning of this?”

Tanara boldly stepped towards the Klingon. She stood toe to toe with him and glared at him almost eye to eye.

“You are beginning to annoy me,” she said. “Do you not recognize the uniform of the Federation Security Forces?”

* * *

The Captain’s statement only added to Dogh’s confusion. Klingons did not enjoy being confused; it was a sign of weakness. It had become evident to Dogh that the Captain was acting according to Federation regulations. He decided to take the only action he knew to be his duty.

"Captain Tanara, as chief of Security, I am hereby placing you under arrest pending a full investigation into your conduct."

Perhaps if Dogh had been human, he would have realized the redness steadily building on Captain Tanara's face indicated her rage. He might have even known to be afraid. But as it was, he stood firmly to his ground as Tanara raised the snub-nosed weapon in her hand and pointed it steadily at his chest. A microsecond later, she squeezed the trigger.

Dogh fell backwards as a cloud of smoke rose into the air a few feet above Tanara's weapon. Instinctively Doctor T'Leya dashed to the aid of her fallen comrade. She removed a hypo from her medkit and placed it on Dogh's arm. As the liquid hissed into the Klingon's muscular arm, T'Leya noticed him beginning to convulse. Had this been an ordinary phaser wound, T'Leya would have known immediately what to do. However, the unfamiliarity with Tanara's weapon caused her to hesitate. And within moments, Dogh's convulsions ceased and he laid still on the dusty ground.

T'Leya felt the Romulan blood inside her boil with anger. She crouched ready to pounce on Tanara but caught Commander Scott out of the corner of her eye, warning her not to. T'Leya heaved her breath in anger and sadness.

"Any further insubordination will be dealt with in a similar manner," calmly announced Tanara. She then instructed Quinn to bind the Away team as her prisoners.

Gwenn was the only one brave enough to inquire as to why.

"First degree mass murder," replied Tanara. "Fifteen counts."

Gwenn couldn't believe her ears. The Away team was being arrested for the slaughter of the research team!

* * *

Twenty minutes later, Gwenn Scott, Commodore Cross and the remaining members of the *Galloway* Away team, sat around a fire that their captors had built. Captain Tanara—that was all that Gwenn could think to call her—had taken their phasers and laid them in a pile near where she could keep watch on them. The Away team members had their legs bound together by crude and painful metallic manacles. Captain Tanara seemed to be dictating something to Quinn, who attentively took down her every word.

"At least tell us what you're going to do with us," demanded T'Leya.

Gwenn tensed with the feeling that something similar to Dogh's fate would befall the Vulcan doctor. However, Captain Tanara

merely answered the doctor's question, never glancing up from her recorder. "You'll be tried and executed."

"What about our trial...?" pressed the doctor further.

"This," interrupted Tanara, "is your trial."

The Vulcan doctor was appalled. "You have no right..."

"I have every right!" spat Tanara, glancing up to glare menacingly at the doctor. "Under Federation penal code 268, established at the beginning of the second calendar. Don't feign ignorance!"

Ignorance of what? wondered T'Leya. She was about to open her mouth to speak again, but was halted by another look from Scott which told her to remain silent.

Finally, Tanara clicked off her recorder. She then stepped forward to address the entire group seated before her. "The evidence has been collected and the decision to execute has been rendered," announced Tanara with a hint of satisfaction. "You will be granted fifteen minutes to prepare yourselves."

With that last statement completed, Tanara turned on her heel and stepped away from the Away team. She rejoined Quinn a few feet outside of earshot. Gwenn leaned inward and the others copied her movement. She spoke in a low tone of voice close to a whisper.

"I'd appreciate any suggestions you might have," said Gwenn.

After several indecisive seconds, Commodore Cross spoke, addressing Aindrea. "What are your impressions of the Captain?"

Aindrea gathered and collected her thoughts for a moment before replying. "I can sense nothing that would suggest deception or mind alteration of any kind. I believe she has every intention of carrying out her duty."

Cross nodded at the Betazoid's report. He then turned to Commander Scott and asked if she still had the Romulan tricorder in her possession. Gwenn thought momentarily and then reached inside her uniform top to produce the tiny black box. Scott had been surprised that their captors had not removed it from her person.

Gwenn handed the tricorder to the Commodore. Cross cradled the device in his lap and activated it. As the tiny object began to hum with power, a slight bluish luminescence surrounded Commodore Cross' features. His expression changed from puzzlement, to alarm, to fascination all within the course of a few seconds. Finally satisfied that he had absorbed all the pertinent information, Cross leaned inward once again and addressed the others clandestinely.

“According to the information on this,” he began, “there have been some major alterations to the established historical timelines.”

Cross could see that the others were not fully grasping the impact of what he was saying. He decided to explain it a little more clearly. “Remember those two Romulans who jumped through the Guardian?”

Scott and the others nodded.

“They must have been sent back into the past to do something to alter history,” concluded Cross.

“In what way?” queried Scott.

Cross pointed towards Captain Tanara, “Notice the uniform she’s wearing? Well, if memory serves, those uniforms belong to the period of the Earth Federation.”

Finally Gwenn realized what Commodore Cross meant. She remembered reading about the historical period to which the Commodore was referring.

The Dark Era.

It had been the time of the post atomic horror. The Earth’s governments had long since crumbled and anarchy ruled the planet. It was a time when humans began to migrate away from

Earth to establish a new order on other worlds. The first major planets in this new order had quickly realized that to maintain order, they needed to be united and so an alliance was formed. An alliance that eventually became known as a federation.

As the human population continued to expand, new worlds were being founded faster than the Federation had the ability to control. The leaders of the Federation decided that they needed something to quickly gain control of the population. They decided upon mind-controlling drugs.

Finally, there came a rebel movement who fought long and hard for the reformation of the Federation. They succeeded in ousting the Federation's corrupt leaders and in the establishment of a newer and a better kind of order.

"So what you're saying sir," ventured Gwenn. "Is that the two Romulans went back in time and did something to ensure that the Federation never got out of the Dark Era."

"No," Cross replied. Gwenn was surprised by this, she thought she been doing well. Cross then went on to explain what he meant.

"That's merely a side-effect. Their intent was undoubtedly to ensure that the Federation, as we know it, never came to be."

“I see,” said Gwenn. “One less enemy for the Romulans to worry about.”

T’Leya was still confused. “I don’t understand. What action could have been so dramatic as to reshape reality as we know it?”

“You do agree that lives can be changed by a single action, don’t you?” asked Cross.

“Certainly,” replied T’Leya. “It happens all the time. It is quite logical.”

“Well,” said Cross penultimately, “in this case, a single action changed the course of the universe. And it all centers around one man.”

“Who?”

Cross handed the tricorder to T’Leya. She stared down at the image of a human male on the tiny view screen. He was older, with salt and pepper hair and a pleasantly pudgy wrinkled face. T’Leya passed the tricorder on to Aindrea who continued it flowing until it completed a circle around the group. Scott wanted to know who the man was.

“An author,” started Cross. “A philosopher of sorts. His books contained within their pages the philosophies of peaceful

coexistence and universal harmony regardless of size, shape, color or gender that was the basis for the new Federation."

"So what did the Romulans do to him?" wondered Aindrea.

"Simple," said Gwenn. "They killed him."

"More importantly," added Commodore Cross. "They killed him before he was able to write the principles upon which the Federation is based."

"If this philosopher, this man is so important, then there's only one course to action to take," Gwenn concluded. "We have to go back in time ourselves and prevent his assassination."

"Gwenn?" asked T'Leya. "Would that not constitute a violation of the Prime Directive?"

"What Prime Directive?" countered Gwenn. "If Commodore Cross is right, Federation Law as we know it has never been written."

"There's just one problem," Aindrea interjected. "What do we do about our friends in black over there?" She cocked her head to indicate Captain Tanara and Commander Quinn.

Commodore Cross rose to his feet, the tricorder still in his hands. "Leave them to me," he said.

Sterling Cross then called out to Captain Tanara. The statuesque woman with the eyepiece obscuring the left side of her face, turned and approached the Commodore questioning him as to what he wanted.

"We wish to confess our guilt," said the Commodore simply.

Cross noted by the expression on Tanara's face, that the announcement had taken her by surprise. He decided to bait her further. "We throw ourselves upon your mercy."

"Very wise," said the Captain finally. "Your confession will grant you a more honorable death."

"All that you wish to know is on this," said Cross handing her the tricorder of Romulan origin.

Tanara accepted the small black box and called Quinn over to inspect it with her. She activated the device and Cross heard the low hum of power steadily building. The bluish light bathed Captain Tanara's face in an eerie aura.

Suddenly, Tanara began to quiver.

Slightly at first, but soon the shaking of her body became much more intensive. Quinn placed his hands on her shoulders in an attempt to calm her. However, the source of Tanara's violent convulsions soon took over Quinn's body as well and the pair of them shook in a sickening flurry of movement. Tanara and

Quinn simultaneously let out a blood-curdling scream as the convulsions reached their plateau. Finally, the stress upon their bodies became too great to bear and their bodies plopped to the ground.

They lay there motionless for several moments as the remaining members of the *Galloway Away* team, freed from their manacles, rushed over to Commodore Cross' side. As Cross stooped down to pick up the tricorder, Gwenn Scott picked at the shackles around his ankles with her hairpin.

"You killed," said a shocked Gwenn.

"Ho, no," the Commodore reassured her. "Merely stunned."

"How?" asked Aindrea.

"Well, I simply programmed the tricorder to discharge a massive burst of static electricity through its casing the next time it was activated."

Gwenn finally succeeded in releasing the manacles that bound Cross' legs. "Fortunately, it was enough to knock out her gorilla as well," he then added.

Gwenn shook her head herself, marveling at the way this commodore, who she originally had insisted not come along, had now given the Away team the break it needed. All that needed to be done now was to enter the Guardian's portal and

find where the Romulans were. The question on Gwenn's mind was where they could be? Or was it when? She didn't want to think about it too hard; it made her head spin. She asked Commodore Cross instead.

"Well," said the Commodore. "Judging by what they were wearing, twentieth century Earth."

"But when exactly?" queried Aindrea. "That still gives us a hundred different years that they could have arrived in."

Cross had to admit that the Betazoid counsellor had a point. He paced in a circle for a few moments thinking quietly to himself. Soon he stopped dead in his tracks, as though struck by inspiration from the heavens above.

He whirled around and approached the almost-circular maw of the Guardian. He called out to the ancient object, asking if it could hear him.

Gwenn and the others were surprised when an ominous, but avuncular voice spoke in reply to Cross' question. As the voice spoke, acknowledging Cross' presence, the stone-like arch of the Guardian glowed with a brilliantly bright light, matching the syllables of each word it spoke.

"Do you know of the two beings who passed through you earlier?" Cross asked the Guardian.

“I do,” replied the voice of Gateway’s mysterious past.

“Can you tell me where they have gone?”

“They have gone forward and journeyed back,” concluded the Guardian.

Cross shook his head to himself. He hadn’t phrased the question properly. “I know that they have gone into the past. Can you tell us when?”

“The period in question is, according to the old calendar, the early 1990s.” said the Guardian.

“Access the period and prepare a portal.”

Gwenn Scott and the other members of the Away team came up beside the Commodore. It seemed like each time he spoke, he garnered another portion of Commander Scott’s respect. The more he did for them, the more she wondered why she had hesitated to let him come along. She expressed her feelings to the Commodore.

“How did you do that?” Gwenn asked.

“Remember my thesis at Starfleet Academy concerned the Guardian?” said the Commodore. “It’s actually similar in many ways to a gigantic Starbase library computer. It’s all a matter of

finding the correct file and then accessing the desired information.”

Gwenn nodded at the Commodore’s explanation.

Presently, the voice of the Guardian spoke once again. “The portal is prepared.”

Cross nodded to himself and then turned to face the others. “Alright then. Now, we must all leap through the portal at the same instant if we’re going to end up in exactly the same point in time. If we’re successful, the Guardian will return us here.”

Aindrea voiced the concern held by the rest of the group. “And if we fail?”

Cross thought silently for a moment before giving them the best answer he could think of. “Well, living in the past will be preferable to living here.”

The others agreed.

Without a moment’s hesitation, the four people joined hands. Commodore Cross counted down from three as the swirling mists gathered inside the Guardian’s portal. As Cross counted one, he and the three officers of the *USS Galloway* jumped through the swirling mists of time.

Into the past, where their destiny lay.

CHAPTER THREE

The city was large, expansive, and very modern in appearance. Buildings rose from the concrete streets to near lofty and dizzying heights. People dashed about, their feet pounding the grey sidewalks, while automobiles raced through streets congested by the number of other, bulkier forms of transportation.

Anyone passing by a particular alley set between two of the smaller buildings in the heart of the city might have noticed, if they cared to, four strange people suddenly appear as if out of thin air. The four members of the *Galloway Away* team stood motionless for a brief moment, attempting to rediscover their bearings.

“Where the hell are we?” wondered Gwenn Scott.

“At a guess, a city,” replied Commodore Cross.

Gwenn turned her head hearing an unexpected noise. She noticed Tara Aindrea coughing almost uncontrollably.

Doctor T’Leya had moved closer to the Betazoid counsellor and was gently slapping her on the back. Finally, Aindrea’s cough ceased long enough for her to catch her breath.

"The air here is so foul!" gasped Aindrea.

Cross inhaled briefly. For a moment afterwards, Gwenn Scott thought that he was going to collapse. However, he seemed more accustomed to it than the others. "Yes," he concurred. "I had noticed it myself."

Cross then turned to T'Leya. "Is there anything you can give us for it?"

"An oxygen booster," suggested the Doctor. Cross and Scott nodded their agreement and T'Leya produced another hypo from her medkit. She attached a somewhat large bottle of greenish liquid to the end of the hypo and then placed it onto Aindrea's arm. She repeated the injections on the remaining two team members as well as herself. Gwenn asked T'Leya how long the calming effects of the injections would last.

"A few hours at least," replied the Vulcan. "However, we must use it sparingly. There's not much of it I'm afraid."

"With any luck," said the Commodore. "A few hours is all we'll need."

"It's a wonder that people were ever able to live in such an environment." commented Aindrea.

"Yes, but they'll begin to realize how bad it is soon enough," replied Commodore Cross. "If they haven't already."

“Commander! Commodore!”

Gwenn and the Commodore turned around and noticed that T’Leya had found something lying on the hard asphalt ground. She picked it up and handed it over to the Commodore. Cross examined the small leather pouch stitched together with thread. T’Leya asked the Commodore what it was.

He opened the tiny leather flap to reveal a layer that had been concealed. There was some kind of image encased in a clear plastic window. The image of a man. Recognizing the man immediately, Cross passed it around to the others who also recognized the man as one of the two Romulans who had jumped through the Guardian.

“They’ve beaten us here,” sighed Gwenn disdainfully.

“But we have the tricorder,” said Aindrea hopefully.

“We also have some currency,” said the Commodore taking a few pieces of green colored rectangular paper with varying numerical denominations on it. He divided the paper as evenly as he could to each member of the Away team who regarded it with puzzlement. Cross explained to the Away team that at this time, every nation on Earth used some form of currency to exchange for goods and services. A practice that had been deemed impractical and was abolished by their time.

Commodore Cross glanced up from his explanation and noticed two elderly women, each carrying a different colored plastic shopping bag, had stopped in front of the alley and were staring at the Away team members with the same perplexity they had used on the currency. Cross smiled at the two ladies as congenially as he could. He felt he must have frightened them away, for they hurriedly scurried away from the entrance of the alley.

Cross then noticed that he and each of the others were still wearing their standard issue Starfleet uniforms. It made them conspicuous. He immediately removed his top and tossed it into a nearby garbage dumpster. He replaced his removed comm badge on the plain short sleeved undershirt worn beneath it. The others followed the Commodore's lead. T'Leya even tore a strip of cloth from her uniform and wrapped it around the top of her head neatly concealing her upswept eyebrows and the pointed tips of her ears.

Satisfied that they were ready to blend in with the other people of this time, Commodore Cross gave the order for them to move out.

For close to twenty minutes, the Away team walked closely together through the streets of the mysterious city. They marveled at what they saw, as if it were all some exotic new, unexplored alien world that they had stepped on to. Gwenn's

fancy in particular had been caught by the sounds of a man playing a saxophone on the corner of one of the streets they had passed.

She had been so moved by the sweet sounds that she had dropped one of those pieces of green paper into his instrument case, as many other people seemed to have done as well, but with coins. The black man had stopped playing momentarily and picked up the piece of paper which had the image of a bearded man and the number fifty printed on it.

His eyes widened with delight and he thanked Gwenn for her donation. Gwenn, in return, thanked him for playing so beautifully. She then smiled and rushed down the street to catch up with the others.

Commodore Cross was explaining to Aindrea the theory that time flowed like a river from a distinct source to a distinct ending. This meant that anyone traversing the river of time could get on and off it at any point along its route. He also said that the Guardian was like the ferryman who at every stop along the banks of the river of time could direct someone as to where they must go in order to locate a certain event. And the Guardian had brought them all here, consequently, this had to be where it had brought the Romulans as well.

"Alright," Aindrea finally said. "So now that the Guardian has given us the correct era, how do we find the correct location?"

"You yourself pointed it out, Counsellor," remarked Commodore Cross. "The tricorder."

He produced the small black box and held it before Aindrea where she could plainly see it. He then activated it once again and studied the information readout on the tricorder's tiny view screen. "And according to this," said the Commodore. "The location is someplace called 'Station Square'?"

He glanced up from the view screen somewhat perplexed. He stopped dead in his tracks. The others followed suit nearly colliding with the Commodore and each other in the process.

"Where's that?" queried Aindrea.

"Presumably within the city limits," replied the Commodore.

"Can't that thing give us something a little more useful to go on?" asked Gwenn. "Like, say, a direction?"

"Probably," Cross replied.

"Well?" demanded Scott.

"Unfortunately, that's the one part of its functioning I haven't figured out yet," admitted the Commodore. Gwenn let out a

sigh of exasperation. Cross suggested that perhaps T'Leya could figure out what the proper encoding was to retrieve the information. Unfortunately, T'Leya had to admit that like the Commodore, her Romulan was a little rusty.

Cross then addressed the even more downhearted group with an air of authority. "Remember what you all are. You're Starfleet officers. You're supposed to be daring and resourceful. Boldly going where none have gone before, remember?"

The group silently admitted to themselves that the Commodore was right. He then suggested that they split into two teams in order to widen the search and cut down on time. With any luck, one or the other of the two teams would get the desired information and lead the other team there.

* * *

Commander Scott had chosen to go with her longtime friend, Counsellor Aindrea. Gwenn had expected the pair of them to be talking inanely to one another about frivolous subjects to pass the time, as they always did in *Galloway West*. However, as the pair had walked together for the last fifteen minutes, not a word had passed between them.

Gwenn had had enough of the silence. She was nervous enough as it was and the lack of communications wasn't making it any easier to cope with their current situation. She was about to

open her mouth when Aindrea asked Gwenn what she wanted. Gwenn was taken aback. It was sometimes difficult to remember that her friend, the Counsellor, could read minds as easily as most people could read billboards.

“What do you think of the Commodore?” Gwenn asked.

“I like him,” Aindrea admitted.

“I mean, what are your impressions of him? As an officer?”

“Well, he certainly seems to know more about what’s going on than any of us.”

“You noticed that too?” Gwenn paused for a moment.

“Sometimes I get to thinking that the Commodore, well that he...”

“Has done this sort of thing before?” suggested Aindrea playfully.

Gwenn nodded.

“Well, after all,” Gwenn pointed out. “His thesis at Starfleet Academy concerned the Guardian. And you can’t write a thesis without doing a certain amount of hands-on field research.”

Aindrea placed a matronly hand on Gwenn’s shoulder as they continued to walk. “Commodore Cross’ record in Starfleet goes

back over thirty years. Gateway has always been restricted except for the research team that was there. I think that like most of the students, Commodore Cross based his award-winning thesis on the information gathered by that research team. Nothing more."

"You don't know," commented Gwenn. "He could have gone back and altered our memories. Captain Tanara even said that she thought he looked different from the time when she served with him."

Aindrea eyed her friend quizzically. "I think your Klingon friend has given you some kind of conspiracy complex."

Gwenn stopped dead in her tracks, a look of astonishment on her face.

"I'm sorry," Aindrea quickly said. "I didn't mean..."

"Look," Gwenn replied instead, pointing ahead of her.

Aindrea looked in the direction of Gwenn's pointed finger and noticed three people approaching. A tall and rather greasy looking man accompanied by a small brunette woman and a five-year-old boy. The man had a fierce look in his eyes that almost reminded Gwenn of Dogh, while the woman stared ashen faced at the concrete as they walked. The boy's face was dirty.

Aindrea and Scott moved to intercept the trio as they came closer. Aindrea called out to catch their attention. They stared at the Betazoid woman through wild eyes akin to a ravenous wolf. "Wadda ya want!" he demanded forcefully.

"I was wondering if you could help us. We're a bit lost," said Aindrea pleasantly.

"I ain't got time to be helpful!"

The man began to move away again but Aindrea diligently kept pace with him. "We just need to know where we can find a friend of ours," she said plaintively. "I'm sure you know his location better than we do."

The man stopped. He turned to face Aindrea with a wry smile across his lips. "What's it worth to ya?"

"I beg your pardon?" said Aindrea uncomprehendingly.

"Come on. What'll ya give me to tell ya?"

The man's female companion, silent up to this point, finally spoke. "Honey, please don't do this..."

"Shut up!" shouted the man. He raised his right arm and struck the woman hard across the face. She reared back with a whimper.

"Hey!" shouted Gwenn. "There was no need for that!"

"You trying to tell me how to treat my family?" demanded the man, coming straight over to Gwenn and looking down upon her comparatively diminutive frame. "What are you two, huh? Social workers?"

Gwenn looked to Aindrea for an explanation of the unfamiliar term. However, Aindrea was as clueless as to its meaning as was Gwenn.

"Look," the man continued. "Times are tough and money's tight! If you want some information, you'd better be ready to pay for it!"

"Can I have a word with you please, sir?" said Gwenn in a sugary sweet tone.

She crooked her finger and indicated that the man should follow her a few steps away from the frightened woman and boy. Aindrea looked to her commander questionably, but the look on Gwenn's face indicated that she had the situation well in hand.

Gwenn stopped after only a few steps. She then looked up into the man's eyes, a smile on her face. The man demanded to know what Gwenn wanted. Her reply came as a forceful blow to the man's muscle-hardened stomach by her right fist.

Despite the tough veneer with which the man came across, the force of Gwenn's punch, combined with his sheer astonishment of it even happening in the first place, sent him to his knees. With the grace of a cat, Gwenn pounced behind the man and grabbed his right wrist. She then twisted his arm behind his back in a painful but effective move that Dogh had once taught her while the pair had sparred with alien monsters on the *Galloway's* holodeck.

The man painfully expressed his agony at Gwenn's hold on him.

"Oh," said Gwenn sarcastically. "You can dish it out real good, but you can't take it, can you? Eh?"

Meanwhile Aindrea had moved to the woman and child. At first the two backed away from the Betazoid Counsellor like frightened rabbits. But Aindrea motioned with her hands, reassuring the pair that she meant no harm.

Aindrea noticed the black and blue bruises on the arms and face of the woman and her child. The red scars and coagulated blood on the boy's arms were all the indications of the man's violent nature that Aindrea needed.

"Where did you get those bruises?" she asked the woman. Aindrea already knew the answer from the woman's mind, but she needed to say it out loud to someone who would listen.

“We...” the woman began hesitantly, nervously glancing back and forth from Aindrea to the man held in a submission hold by Gwenn.

“We fell, okay!”

No, that’s not it, thought Aindrea. *Tell me what really happened.* “He beats you, doesn’t he?”

Even though Gwenn had the man held securely, it was obvious by the expression on the woman’s face and the thoughts in her mind, that she was still very much afraid of him. “I said we fell, okay!” screamed the woman. She then glanced over at the man. “Let him go! You’re hurting him!”

It was hopeless. There was nothing more Aindrea could do. She couldn’t force the woman to speak the truth. It would have been dishonest and wouldn’t have the same effect. “Gwenn, let him go,” said Aindrea quietly.

“What?” spat Gwenn. She couldn’t believe the Counsellor, who had dedicated her life to helping the mental well-being of everyone she encountered, was letting this go.

Aindrea repeated her demand that Gwenn let the man go more forcefully. Reluctantly, Gwenn loosened her grip on the man’s arm. He quickly rose and darted over to the woman and the

little boy. He shot Aindrea a satisfied smile before he led his wife and child away.

Gwenn came over to Aindrea's side. Despite Aindrea's relatively serene outward appearance, Gwenn noticed a tear trailing its way down the right side of the Betazoid's face. "What is it?" asked Gwenn gently.

"I don't know," said Aindrea quavering. "I'd read about family abuse at the Academy. But to me, it has always been a thing of the past. And now I come to see it actually happen and there's nothing I can do about it."

"It's not your fault. You know that eventually it did end."

"Yes," sniffed Aindrea. "But before how many people like them suffered?"

Gwenn had no answer.

* * *

Commodore Cross and T'Leya had gone the opposite direction of Gwenn Scott and Tara Aindrea. They had covered many blocks of the city with no success. Finally, they had ducked into a recreational park near the edge of town.

The park was situated under an expansive suspension bridge over which many automobiles travelled every passing minute.

The pair had been caught up in the beauty of the trees blossoming in the pleasant spring afternoon weather. They saw children playing the ancient game of baseball and their journey finally took them to the concrete bank of a widely flowing river.

It was there that their pleasant thoughts were brought back to the unpleasant nature of their mission into the past.

The water was sparkling with the sunlight and expectantly muddy from the spring flooding. But it had been T'Leya who pointed out the spectral colors of a petroleum slick on the surface of the water. Floating amongst the swirling slick and debris was a lone fish, which T'Leya could tell was losing its fight for life. It had been unfortunate enough to swim into the water polluted by the slick and had been overcome by the poisoned water sent through its system. The consolation T'Leya felt was that it would die soon and its suffering would be ended.

"It's amazing to me," marveled T'Leya. "These people do not realize how fragile their own environment is."

"They will," said Sterling cross. "Eventually."

"But not before they nearly destroy themselves."

"Sometimes, T'Leya, it takes a tragedy to make a triumph."

Suddenly, Sterling Cross heard a noisy, hacking cough emanating from behind him. He glanced at T'Leya to be certain that it was

not the oxygen booster wearing off of them. The cough persisted and Cross and T'Leya turned around to locate its source.

Lying on the ground before them was a crumpled mass of a man. His clothes were caked with grunge from the tips of his worn-out shoes to the top of his rumpled hat which obscured his face. T'Leya and Cross approached the man. T'Leya bent down and produced her medical tricorder which she activated and ran over the majority of the man's body. The Commodore quizzed her as to the source of the man's troubles.

"There appears to be an overabundance of alcohol in his bloodstream," T'Leya began. "Alveolar sac count is unusually low and what little he does have is heavily congested."

T'Leya reached over to the man's head and removed his hat. She hesitated a moment. To her great surprise, the face beneath the cover of the hat, although dirty and unshaven was undeniably familiar.

"Kojiro!" she said with astonishment.

"What?" demanded the Commodore.

"It's Commander Kojiro. The *Galloway's* conn officer."

The Commodore took a closer look at the man. He had to admit that there was some resemblance between this man and the

third officer of the *Galloway*. But he reminded T'Leya that the man she knew as Kojiro lived sometime in the future. It was possible, however, that this man was one of Kojiro's ancestors.

"You a doctor?" the man asked in a raspy voice, looking up at T'Leya.

"Yes," T'Leya gently replied. "Please. Stay still and try not to talk."

T'Leya reached into her medkit and produced the familiar hypo once again. This time, she clicked a tube of red liquid into the base of the device and locked it into the mechanism. She then placed the hypo on the man's arm and emptied the liquid into his body.

Despite his discomfort, the man made a puzzled face. "What was that?"

"Something that will make you feel better."

"Who are you?"

"Friends," said Commodore Cross. He then whispered confidentially to T'Leya. "We can't say too much. Remember, the Prime Directive."

"As Commander Scott pointed out, the Prime Directive hasn't been written yet. However, the Hippocratic Oath has, and as a doctor I must follow my own directives."

Cross couldn't damn her for that. No one had ever successfully argued with Vulcan logic and won. The best thing Cross could do was to let T'Leya carry on.

As Cross turned away to let the Doctor continue her work, he noticed that their activities had not gone unobserved. Another young man, dressed in a black leather jacket and looking stronger and fiercer than the one on the ground, stood before him. Cross smiled dismissively at the young man, until he heard a mysterious click. Cross glanced back at the young man and noticed that he was holding a small and shiny yet deadly looking knife in his right hand.

"Nice going man," said the tough to the sick man on the ground. He then turned back to the Commodore. "Now, nobody move, and ya won't get hurt!"

T'Leya had now noticed the tough looking newcomer and slowly rose from over her patient's body. The tough nervously wavered his knife back and forth between the Commodore and the disguised Vulcan physician.

"What is it you want?" asked T'Leya calmly.

“Money!” demanded the tough.

“Oh, is that all?” asked the Commodore with some relief. He then reached into his pouch and produced several of the tiny green pieces of paper from the Romulan wallet. He handed the paper to the tough.

The young man regarded the money questionably. He looked up at the Commodore suspiciously. “What the hell is this?”

“I believe it’s sixty some of your currency,” said the Commodore pleasantly.

“Is this some kind of a joke?” demanded the tough.

“Not at all,” replied the Commodore innocently. “Now then, if you don’t mind, I’d like to ask you something...”

“What the hell’s with you? Ain’t you never been held up before?”

“I was stuck in a turbolift for an hour once, if that’s what you mean.”

With a swift and calculated movement, the tough grabbed the svelte Vulcan woman by her waist and pulled her close to his side. He held the knife menacingly at her throat. Commodore Cross tensed for action, but at the moment could do nothing.

Even T'Leya was not in a proper position to hit the thug with the Vulcan nerve pinch.

"How look, man," said the tough nervously. "I don't wanna do this, you understand? You provoked me, right? Now I wanna hear you beg me to let her go!"

"There's no need for this," said T'Leya. "Your friend was sick. We helped him."

"What are you talkin' about?"

T'Leya indicated the sick man on the ground.

"Who, him?" queried the tough. "Ah, he ain't got nothin' that a good stiff drink wouldn't fix!"

The tough then turned to Commodore Cross. "Now then Mister King of Comedy, I'm gonna count to three. And if you ain't on your knees by the time I hit three, Sweetness here gets wasted."

Commodore Cross tensed, uncertain as to what to do as the tough began his countdown.

"One.... two..."

"Three!"

CHAPTER FOUR

“Three!” repeated the thug more forcefully.

Commodore Cross reached behind his back for his phaser before he had remembered that it had been left in the future. Still, he tensed his body. Ready to spring into action at the first opportunity.

Suddenly, Cross heard the crack of wood against some object. At first Cross' mind thought of the children playing baseball in the park, but then he noticed the expression of agony across the young tough's face. His grip on T'Leya loosened considerably and as he crumpled to the ground, Cross noticed the dirty older man who so resembled the *Galloway*'s third officer. He had risen from the ground and was holding a rather large piece of driftwood in his hands which he brandished like a samurai's sword.

“Kojiro! Thank you! You saved my life,” said T'Leya with perhaps more emotion than she would have normally liked. She had also unknowingly used the name of the man's future counterpart, however he said nothing to correct her.

“I was returning the favor,” said Kojiro’s doppelganger. His tone was much stronger than it had been when the Doctor and Commodore had first encountered him. “I don’t know what was in that thing you used on my arm,” he added. “But it really did the job.”

T’Leya smiled. Then she noticed the Commodore glance at her curiously.

The Commodore extended a friendly hand to the man. “Glad we could help. And thank you for saving us from your friend.”

“Who?” quizzed Kojiro. The Commodore indicated the young tough, now splayed out unconscious on the concrete ground.

“Oh,” commented Kojiro. “Well, some people will do anything for money.”

Kojiro walked around his two new found friends. He was enjoying the new feeling of health that had been alien to him for so long. He inhaled deeply, enjoying the way the air smelled, unhindered by his formerly congested lungs. He glanced over at the Commodore and T’Leya, laughing with a joy he hadn’t felt in years. The Commodore and T’Leya could not help but be moved.

“Listen,” Kojiro joyously began. “If there’s anything I can ever do for you, just name it!”

Cross glanced at T'Leya with a wry smile. "Well," he said addressing Kojiro. "Actually, there is something." Kojiro's expression momentarily became nervous. "Oh. Well, I'm afraid I don't have much..."

"Do you know of a place called Station Square?" interrupted the Commodore before Kojiro was given the wrong impression.

Kojiro's unnerved expression disappeared. "Station Square? Sure, it's just across the river. There."

Be pointed towards the east. The Commodore and T'Leya peered in the direction of his finger. There, about two miles in the distance was a sign in large red letters which read "Station Square". There appeared to be a platform underneath the roofing upon which the words appeared. People sat on benches watching a huge winding series of differently shaped cars pass by them on what appeared to be a ladder laid flat and stretching on forever. Cross had read of these things, railroad trains they were called.

The Commodore also made note of a series of shops that lined the way several feet behind the railroad tracks as well as a huge building with many windows. The word Marriott appeared on this building, but the meaning of it had momentarily escaped Cross. The Commodore turned back to Kojiro.

"You have no idea how grateful we are," said the Commodore.

"Can you show us the quickest way to get there?"

Kojiro had little time to be surprised by the reward the strange people who had helped him asked. He affirmatively answered the Commodore's question and asked the pair to follow him.

As Cross and T'Leya carefully treaded nearly the same footsteps as their derelict friend, Commodore Cross' comm badge beeped. He tapped the Starfleet emblem shaped communicator to respond. It was Commander Scott checking in.

"Aindrea and I have figured out where this Station Square is sir," she said.

"So have we Commander," affirmed the Commodore.

"Rendezvous with us there in fifteen minutes."

* * *

As Commodore Cross closed the channel between them, Gwenn Scott stared at her Betazoid friend dumbfounded. The man was a constant source of amazement to her. She kept asking herself why she had been so set on the idea of not allowing him to come along on the Away mission. He had turned out to be a valuable asset to the team.

Gwenn noticed Tara Aindrea urging her to accompany her to the rendezvous point. Gwenn started to exit the tall, rectangular

glass casing when something pulled on her, resisting to let her leave.

She whirled about ready to attack, but instead of some horrific alien monster, Gwenn glanced down at the black covered book which she had held in her possession little more than a moment ago, swinging back and forth inside the glass booth's confines on a metallic chain.

Gwenn felt slightly embarrassed.

Maybe Aindrea was right. Maybe she was a bit too paranoid.

* * *

Fifteen minutes later, Gwenn Scott and Tara Aindrea were happily reunited with their comrades from the *Galloway*. The four people exchanged quick greetings and Cross and T'Leya introduced Gwenn and Aindrea to their new friend.

Like the Commodore and the Doctor, Gwenn and Aindrea were at first taken by surprise at the man's resemblance to their colleague, Kojiro. Gwenn couldn't help but laugh. The Commodore had asked her for an explanation of the joke, and Scott had said that so many strange things had happened to them all day, but somehow, discovering this man made sense. The other three *Galloway* officers shared in Gwenn's joke.

Kojiro, naturally was lost on the jocularity of the strange people. However, he felt a twinge of concern when one of them, the not-bad-looking redhead named Scott, suddenly began to hack and cough rather harshly for no immediate apparent reason. He came close to the youthful officer, placing his hands upon her arms. Steadying her, he looked to the Doctor who helped him before and asked what was wrong. "The oxygen boosters," said T'Leya. "They're beginning to wear off."

Kojiro was uncertain of what she meant by the remark, but he could detect a sudden urgency mount in the group. Especially in the man they called "Commodore". As he stood steadyng Gwenn, his eyes cast downwards where he noticed some peculiar puddles on the asphalt. He wasn't certain if they were important or not but not wanting to feel completely left out of the action, he pointed them out to the Commodore.

The Commodore likewise glanced down at the puddles and seemed genuinely intrigued by them and he asked T'Leya to examine them. The Vulcan doctor crouched low bringing here medical tricorder out into the open once again.

Kojiro watched in awe as he ran the device over the puddles. After a few moments she rose and made her report to the Commodore. "No doubt about it," she said. "Romulan blood."

Realization dawned on Gwenn's face. "The one you hit, Commodore! They're already here!"

"It hasn't dried yet," pointed out T'Leya. "They can't have been here very long."

Commodore Cross noticed a trail of tiny droplets extended outward from the larger source puddle. He suggested that the group follow it. They carefully walked forward up a small flight of stairs and through a set of clear glass doors.

* * *

Through the doors the *Galloway* team and their twentieth century companion found themselves in a brightly colored and decorated corridor. Many openings lined the length of the hall each with different objects inside the display glass. Clothing, food and some other objects which at the moment Cross and the other *Galloway* people could not recognize.

Kojiro noticed the confusion in his peculiar friends' eyes and took the opportunity to finally explain something to them, "It's a mall."

"Mall?" queried T'Leya.

"Yes, a collection of different shops housed under the same roof. Anything you ever need to find, you can find it in the mall."

"Ah," said T'Leya. "Intriguing."

Kojiro was disappointed at the Doctor's lack of enthusiasm.

"I don't suppose you could find a man in this mall, if you wanted to?" Gwenn asked plainly.

"Why? Did you have anyone in particular in mind?" said Kojiro raising an eyebrow with just a hint of seductiveness.

Flattered as Gwenn was by the proposal from the man who resembled Kojiro so closely, her mind was on her duty. "An author. Some kind of philosopher."

"Sorry", replied Kojiro, "I'm afraid most of my recent philosophies have come from the men's room wall."

Gwenn's attention had left Kojiro completely. Soon, like the others Kojiro noticed the reason. Commodore Cross had stopped in front of a bookstore which had a sign in the front of its entrance. There was a smiling photograph of a cheerful looking plump faced older man with waves of salt and pepper colored hair. The sign read thus:

APPEARING TODAY:

Professor George Rodenberg

author of

“Signs of Life: A New Guide for Humankind”

Commodore Cross didn't need to look at the sign long to know that the man in the photograph was the same one that they had come back in time to save. The Commodore led the group through the open entrance and into the bookstore.

The Commodore quickly came forward to the counter where a nerdy young salesman stood. The boy pushed his glasses back onto the bridge of his nose as the Commodore spoke.

“Excuse me”, the Commodore began. “My friends and I urgently need to see Mister Rodenberg.”

“Mister Rodenberg is on his lunchbreak,” said the salesman with a very nasal influenced voice. “He'll be signing books again at one o'clock.”

“That may be too late. I need to speak to him now!”

“I'm sorry, but he's not here. You'll just have to wait in line like everyone else.”

“Look,” said the Commodore with increasing annoyance. “You don't seem to understand. It's a matter of life and death.”

“No, you don’t understand,” snapped the salesman. “I have about forty other artsies waiting to see Mister Rodenberg and to all of them it’s a matter of life and death, you’ll just have to wait!”

The Commodore sucked air through his teeth. This little twerp obviously had no idea that his holding the Commodore back could have dramatic repercussions on the whole of the universe for generations after his bones turned to dust. And what exactly did he mean by “artsies”?

* * *

While the Commodore attempted to explain his case to the unyielding young salesman, Gwenn Scott and the others had begun to circulate through the racks of books inside the store. She found herself close to the man who resembled Kojiro, examining the row upon row of differently colored and worded covers. Gwenn picked a book at random and took it down from the shelf. She began to flip through it, marveling the actual printing more than the contents of the book itself.

Kojiro glanced over at the red-headed women quizzically, “Something the matter?” he asked.

“No,” she replied. “It’s just that I haven’t seen one of these in a long time.”

"You mean the title."

"No, the book itself, by our time all books were printed on microtapes and read on view screens." Gwenn's remark confused Kojiro even more, "I don't understand."

"Never mind, it's not important."

* * *

People have a tendency to notice when someone is bleeding. And when a person begins to bleed in a color other than red, more than a few heads turn. The two Romulans had found this out the hard way as they appeared in the twentieth century. Nobody noticed as their feet touched down on the ground seemingly out of nowhere outside of the mall, mere moments before the *Galloway* people had arrived on foot.

The first Romulan dragged his injured companion through the clear glass doors and into the same brightly decorated corridor. There had been quite a few offers for help from bystanders but the Romulan in human disguise had refused all of them.

Finally, the Romulan had managed to drag his injured companion, while violently shoving aside more offers and the bystanders who had made them, into the sanctuary of a place called the Men's Room. Any human male still inside the room

made quick notice of the two newcomers and immediately finished their business and hurriedly vacated the room.

Now the two Romulans were alone and seemed none would bother them any further. The first Romulan, a tall, lean man with piercing black eyes began to tend to his smaller companion.

Their mission thus far had been more difficult than originally calculated. The intervention of the humans from the Federation Starship had caused the smaller Romulan to lose his tricorder and a pouch filled with necessities for survival on twentieth century Earth. To top it all off, one of the humans had successfully hit the same Romulan with a phaser. The Romulan was now experiencing what few had ever dared to display in public: agony.

“Be thankful that the Commander is not here to see you,” hissed the tall Romulan as he tended his companion’s wounds. He dabbed a bloody gash on the smaller Romulan’s shoulder with a pad covered in a foul-smelling ointment. The Romulan shifted uncomfortably, sucking air through his clenched teeth as the ointment made contact with skin.

“Varoll!” the taller Romulan cursed his companion. “Face your pain! It will bring you strength!”

The injured Romulan continued to draw his breath through his teeth for several moments. Finally, the pain appeared to ease and the Romulan's expression became more serene. The taller Romulan stood up, allowing his companion to travel what was left of his agony alone. Within moments he joined his taller compatriot in the standing position.

The tall Romulan nodded with contentment. "Tomak," he said, "if you ever do that again, I will not hesitate to reduce your status in rank."

"Yes, Centurion," said Tomak obediently. "I'm sorry. It will not happen again."

"Excellent. Come."

The Centurion led his young junior officer out of the white tiled room and into the corridor once again.

* * *

Commodore Cross had long given up his argument with the salesman. He had rejoined the other members of the Away team and patiently awaited the arrival of the man whose life or death would shape the future. The Commodore tapped his foot nervously.

"Take it easy, sir," suggested Gwenn. "He'll be back soon, and then we'll have our chance."

"I've been talking to some of the people who have come here," commented Aindrea. "Apparently George Rodenberg's work has only reached a certain amount of people. The majority of the population doesn't seem to take his message very seriously."

"What about the ones who do?" asked Cross looking around nervously.

"They are very devoted to it. Seem to think that his is the correct path to follow."

"Then the seed's already been planted. Unless it is fed and taken care of regularly over the next couple of centuries, it'll never blossom into the Federation we know."

Just then, T'Leya tugged on the Commodore's arm. He glanced at her and noticed that she was pointing to a table at the opposite end of the store. The pudgy man from the photograph on the sign sat in the chair placed behind the table. No one else appeared to notice George Rodenberg take his seat to begin the next session of signing. The Commodore motioned that the group should be the first people he saw.

* * *

George Rodenberg had a hard day thus far. The bookstore had asked him to come in for a signing of his latest work and thus far few people, less than the store had expected, had turned up.

And the ones who had shown up, although enthusiastic, had not given Rodenberg the impression that the book had make some kind of impact on their lives.

He was understandably depressed.

However, he had to press on and hope for the best. He glanced up from his table putting on his best smile for the next group. When he saw them, his heart lifted slightly. Now this group seemed to have potential. They were relatively young and dressed very nicely, with the possible exception of the dingy oriental man. Their leader was an older man, thin and with a well-defined face wrinkled by time.

They all seemed to be wearing some sort of wedge-shaped insignia on the upper left-hand corner of their shirts, again with the exception of the oriental. Perhaps the older man was a profession of some kind leading a group of his students to meet him. When he smiled at the man, he meant it wholly.

“Hello”, greeting George Rodenberg cheerily. He took a copy of his book from the pile stacked neatly on the table. “Who do I make this out to?”

“What?” said the man, obviously puzzled.

“Your name! What’s your name?”

“Sterling Cross.”

Rodenberg smiled and jotted the man's first name into the book with a "best wishes" message written next to it. He then signed his name below it. He turned the book around so the man could read the autograph himself.

At last, Commodore Sterling Cross understood what Rodenberg was doing. "I'm really not interested in that," he said with a smile.

George Rodenberg's expression changed to one of disappointment. "Oh," he said downhearted, "well, is there something I can do for you?"

"As a matter of fact, there is," said Sterling Cross somewhat seriously.

Rodenberg asked if Commodore Cross could move aside so that he could sign books for other people who were interested in his signature. The Commodore continued.

"Mr. Rodenberg, I'm not exactly certain how to tell you this, but..."

"The Romulans!"

Commodore Cross looked up to see Commander Scott waving frantically towards the entrance of the bookstore.

There stood the two Romulan agents in human disguise.

They had apparently intended to simply sneak in and do the job quietly, but the shouts of the red-headed Commander had caused them to behave in a manner that was decidedly less than convert. The two Romulans reached inside of their jackets and drew their disruptors. They aimed the noses of their weapons in the direction of the table and prepared to fire.

However, it was Gwenn Scott who drew the first shot.

She quickly pulled her hand phaser out of her side pouch and in one movement fired on the taller Romulan. She hit the hostile alien square in his chest. A tiny electrical pulse erupted from the point where Gwenn's beam came into contact with the Romulan's body. He was sent careening backwards, almost through the display window of an antique glass shop.

The second Romulan fired.

His beam found a mark, hitting George Rodenberg in his upper right shoulder, splashing blood on the bookcase behind him. Only a quick shove by Commodore Cross had saved Rodenberg from being hit in his heart.

Gwen fired once again.

Like a true marksman, she hit the second of her targets the first time. The Romulan, Tomak, took the shot as a true warrior would. He stood his ground fighting the agony until it ultimately

consumed him and he slumped to the floor, dead, like his companion.

Gwenn hadn't noticed until then the commotion the phaser fire had caused. People were screaming and running through the halls stricken with panic. The bookstore had been vacated with the exception of the *Galloway* personnel. Gwenn hovering over to join Commodore Cross and Doctor T'Leya who, at the moment, were hovering over George Rodenberg's unconscious body.

Gwenn bit her lip nervously as T'Leya ran her medical tricorder over the man's blood-soaked shoulder. "Is he..." asked Gwenn uncertain if she really wanted to hear the answer.

"He's alive," said T'Leya. "But his injuries are severe."

"Can you treat him, Doctor?" quizzed the Commodore.

"I could do a much better job in sickbay."

"We don't have a sickbay, Doctor. You're just going to have to do the best you can," said the Commodore, his eyes stern.

* * *

Several minutes later, it seemed that the commotion outside the bookstore had ceased. Or maybe it hadn't, Gwenn Scott couldn't tell. At the moment her mind was focused on Doctor

T'Leya performing delicate operations on the man whose work shaped the Federation. She could hear her heartbeat pounding in her ears and she wiped her brow when a bead of salty moisture dripped into her eye.

The equipment which T'Leya had to work with was crude, even by the technologically advanced standards of Starfleet. But nonetheless, T'Leya pressed on in her attempt to repair the damage done to George Rodenberg's shoulder by the Romulan disruptor.

After what seemed like an eternity of waiting, T'Leya stopped. She looked up from her patient at the others with a look of contentment across her obscured Vulcan features. Gwenn knew the look all too well.

"He's going to be alright, isn't he?" she asked with a smile.

"I believe so," replied the Doctor in typical Vulcan fashion. "Only time will tell."

The members of the *Galloway* Away team let out a collective sigh of relief. They exchanged handshakes and warm hearty congratulations on a job well done to one another. Even Kojiro's help was acknowledged.

As the team exchanged their compliments, Commodore Cross removed his shirt and exchanged it for the torn and blood

stained one worn by George Rodenberg. He dressed the man carefully in his own garment taking care not to rouse him from his slumber. As Cross finished placing Rodenberg's old shirt on his body, he noticed Gwenn eyeing him curiously.

"Why did you do that?" asked Gwenn.

"When he wakes, I don't want him to remember being shot." explained the Commodore. "Let him think that he came to no harm."

Gwenn nodded in agreement of the Commodore's logic.

The Commodore then turned to Kojiro. "You'll look after him, won't you?"

"Why?" wondered a perplexed Kojiro.

"Someone has to be here when he wakes up."

"You're leaving?" the Asian asked, incredulously.

The Commodore nodded.

"But why?" queried Kojiro. "You've saved a man's life here. Two, if you count me. You're all heroes. Why are you leaving?"

"Our task here is done," said Gwenn touching his arm lightly.

"However, yours is only beginning," continued the Commodore. "You and that man have a great responsibility ahead of you: building a better future for mankind. Don't disappoint us."

The Commodore smiled at Kojiro who suddenly realized the impact of what he was saying. Kojiro returned the smile and accepted Commodore Cross' extended hand. He took it in his own and shook it vigorously for moment until he realized that it was no longer there.

Kojiro stopped pumping his arm in the air and whirled about. The man was gone, as were the other three who were with him. Where or how they had gone, Kojiro could only imagine. But it really didn't matter.

He heard a groan emanate from behind him and he rushed over to help George Rodenberg back to his feet. He helped dust off the shaken author and led him over to his seat once again. After Rodenberg had been seated he asked Kojiro what had happened.

"I'm not really sure," said Kojiro. "But I think humanity has just been given a little hope."

* * *

The swirling mists engulfed the *Galloway* crew. Similar to a transporter beam, they obscured and changed reality. One

moment they were standing in a bookstore on twentieth century Earth. Now, the mists had completely faded that image and they now found themselves looking out at the dusty grey soil of Gateway. The Away team stepped forward from the Guardian onto the familiar surface of the planet.

All was silent as they surveyed the barren grey landscape. Finally, they heard a voice speak, the deep, ominous voice of the Guardian.

“All is as it was,” said the voice.

Seconds later, another voice called out. It was softer, more feminine. The Away team turned around and saw Captain Tanara and two other *Galloway* officers descending the hillside towards them. Gwenn Scott smiled with relief. Tanara was wearing her standard issue uniform and a black eyepiece no longer obscured her beautiful Taarakian features.

Gwenn called out to her approaching superior. She noticed that Quinn and Kojiro came up alongside her. Within moments, Tanara and the others had joined the Away team standing before the Guardian.

“Captain!” sighed Gwenn. “It is so good to see you again!”

"And you, Number One," acknowledged Tanara in a business as usual manner. "We've been trying to contact you for the last hour. Where have you been?"

"It would take too long to explain sir," said Gwenn. "My report will fill in all the details." She shook her head and suddenly remembered that, while she had been in the past for hours it hadn't been that long since the Captain had told her about Romulan ships attacking the *Galloway*. "What happened up there?" she asked.

Quinn came up behind the Captain with a broad grin on his face. "You should watch the bridge monitor video when we get back. It was epic!"

Tanara was a warrior at heart, but she was also blessed with humility. "Let's just say that when the ship in orbit decided it'd had enough of a beating it warped out for the border and the other one wasn't about to take us on alone."

Gwenn thought about it for a second and grinned. "I can see that."

Next to Gwenn, the ships counselor asked: "How did you find us, Captain?"

"From me," said a familiar deep voice.

Gwenn slowly turned around to see Dogh leaning against the remains of a stone wall. Gwenn rushed excitedly over to her Klingon friend and embraced him warmly, nearly knocking him over. Dogh was naturally overwhelmed by her display of emotion, but gratefully returned her affection.

“Commander, control yourself,” said Captain Tanara uncomfortably.

Gwenn looked up—smiling with joy—into the Klingon’s eyes. “Dogh, you’re alive! How...?”

“All is as it was,” said the Commodore repeating the Guardian’s last words.

Hearing the stone monolith speak again drew Gwenn’s attention back to it. Lying next to it was the prone form of t’Arla. “Is she...?”

Dogh nodded. “Yes, Commander. She took the coward’s way out. She died without honor.” He attached a signal transponder to the corpse and stood, readying for transport.

Tanara looked over the faces of her officers with a mixture of confusion and joy across her usually stern face. “Let’s get back to the ship,” she finally said.

The assembled officers huddled close together in a circle, awaiting the signal to transport back to the *Galloway*.

Commodore Cross stood beside Captain Tanara who inspected the Commodore's torn and bloodied clothes.

Something caught her attention as she turned to the Commodore. "Sir," she began. "Where's your communicator?"

Gwenn Scott and the other members of the Away team hadn't noticed that until then, Commodore Cross did not have the Communicator badge attached to his shirt. Gwenn then remembered the Commodore exchanging his garment for the bloodied one that George Rodenberg had on. The badge had been on the Commodore's original shirt. It wasn't there now.

The Commodore smiled knowingly.

EPILOGUE

The newscaster checked her earpiece and then counted into her microphone testing the sound level. When all was at the proper balance, she turned to her cameraman with a ready look. The rotund bearded man in the baseball cap hefted the large video camera over his right shoulder and moved the eyepiece into position. Be lined up the perfect shot to fully capture the upper body of the beautiful, petite woman. She began to address the camera.

“This is Christine Brown,” she said. “I’m standing here in front of Border’s Bookstore here in Station Square. Where this afternoon, the everyday bustle and bustle of this busy mall was shattered by gunfire.

Two unidentified terrorists made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of noted author and Professor George Rodenberg, who was in town for a book signing. The bodies of the two terrorists have been taken to Mercy General Hospital for autopsies and identification. No information has been released by the hospital as to the identities of the two men.”

Christine then moved to her right slightly. The camera followed her closely as the image of the two men came into focus standing beside her.

“I’m here right now with Professor Rodenberg and the man who saved him from severe injury. Your name, sir?”

She leaned the microphone into a slightly dirty oriental man’s face. “Gregory Kojiro,” said the man.

“And where do you live, Mister Kojiro?”

“At the moment, I’m homeless.”

“Can you describe what happened here this afternoon?”

Kojiro thought for a moment before speaking. “Well,” he began. “I mean, uh, I was here, you know. And I happened to be down around the bookstore here when I see these two guys with guns, right? And I see that they’re pointing at Mr. Rodenberg here. At that point my instincts just took over, you know? I rushed in and shoved Mr. Rodenberg out of the line of fire.”

“And were you able to treat any of Professor Rodenberg’s injuries?” asked Christine.

“Well, I was a medic in ‘Nam, you know. And that’s just something you never forget.”

"And Professor Rodenberg. You feel no ill effects from this attempt on your life?"

"No," answered Rodenberg. "In fact, I'm encouraged. Despite the fact that two people meant to do harm to me today, another human being put his life on the line for me. It's renewed my faith in the human spirit."

"There you have it," concluded Christine. "Hope springs forth from a near tragedy. A lesson in humanity we should all take heed of. This is Christine Brown, Channel 8 Action News."

As Christine closed her report, her cameraman took one picture. He zoomed in for a close up of the unusual, wedge shaped badge that adorned the upper left corner of George Rodenberg's black shirt.

* * *

The *Galloway* made its final approach to Starbase 345. Standard orbit was established over the blue/green planet below. Commander Gwenn Scott and Commodore Sterling Cross stepped on to the bridge to see the final stages of the *Galloway's* approach to the planet.

Captain Tanara looked up as the officers exited on to the bridge and could hear the tail end of a conversation being carried on with Kojiro and Dogh.

“... and you say that this guy you met was me?” asked an astonished Kojiro.

“Well, he looked and sounded a lot like you,” replied the Commodore.

“I was killed by Romulan disruptor fire?” wondered Dogh.

“Yes,” said Gwenn gravely. “No one should have to see that.”

“Impossible,” insisted Dogh as he turned and assumed his station at security.

Gwenn shook her head chortling to herself. She and Commodore Cross proceeded down the horseshoe walkway until they stood beside Tanara, watching the blue/green planet fill the view screen. Tanara turned to the Commodore.

“Your new home sir,” introduced Tanara. Cross only grunted and nodded for a reply. “Would you like to contact them, sir?”

“No, I’ll leave that honor to you, Captain,” replied Cross. “I just need to get something from your ready room and then I’ll be on my way.”

“Very well, sir,” acknowledged Tanara as the Commodore turned away and entered the Captain’s ready room from a door on the far end of the bridge.

Simultaneously, Gwenn Scott and Captain Tanara backed into their command chairs at the base of the horseshoe. They joined the already seated Tara Aindrea and Captain Tanara ordered a hailing frequency to be opened to the Starbase. Quinn reported that the frequency was open.

“Starbase 345,” she began. “This is Captain Tanara of the USS *Galloway*. Respond please.”

The image on the view screen changed and a balding older human male with a slightly rotund face filled the screen. He smiled warmly at the Captain.

“Ah, Captain Tanara,” he said. “It’s been a long time.”

Tanara sat slightly confused. “To whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?”

“Has it been that long, Tanara? Perhaps it has. Your old commander, Commodore Sterling Cross. In charge of Starbase 345.”

Gwenn glanced at the captain in shock. Tanara held her ground.

“That’s quite impossible, sir,” continued Tanara. “We have Commodore Cross aboard the *Galloway* this very moment. Waiting to be transported down to assume command of Starbase 345.”

“Captain, I can assure you that I am Sterling Cross,” insisted the man on the view screen. “I have the files to prove it.”

Tanara was even more confused now. “When did you assume command of the Starbase?”

“Three days ago,” replied the man. “If you wish, you can check with Starfleet Command.”

Tanara quickly rose from her chair and Gwenn Scott did likewise. She then abruptly closed the channel with the Starbase and turned questionably to Gwenn. “If that’s the Commodore,” said Tanara. “Then who is in my ready room?”

The doors parted and the pair stepped inside the plush, decorated room. They glanced around the interior. They could hear a sound emanating all around them. A grinding, almost wheezing noise.

Tanara then noticed that a piece of her furniture, an ancient grandfather clock that had been a gift from Commodore Cross, was no longer in its place.

Gwenn and Tanara stared blankly at the now bare wall.