

STAR TREK: SAVAGE

By Mike Cavaroc



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By Mike Cavaroc 2023©

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Prologue

The stars are shining brightly over a darkened landscape, both from the shade of the planet, and from destructive rot and decay in an expansive area on the surface. A large swath of land appears charred around a mining installation on the otherwise wild and inviting planet of Evum, an uninhabited world teeming with wildlife, virgin forests, and lush landscapes. A Klingon bird of prey and a D7 cruiser are parked on either side of a mining operation setup by the Klingons. Inside the main command office of the mine, a series of heads from the local wildlife adorn the walls in the dimly lit structure. A pair of Klingons receive a transmission.

“Captain Grishik, we’ve just received a communication from Kronos,” announces a Klingon voice on the other end. “The weapon is ready.”

One of the two Klingons listening to the message is Captain Grishik, a relatively small Klingon with an unusually long goatee, a bald head, and a cunning wit that’s made him a strategic ally in battle. Though small in stature, he’s every bit as wrathful as his counterparts. One thing his enemies can attest to is the anger and vengeance behind his eyes. He is fiddling with a large, serrated dagger as he listens to the message, its handle a green crystal resembling a dense dark forest, cut down to fit his hand.

Standing across an imposing desk from him is his trusty second in command, Commander Skarn, a large and imposing Klingon warrior, his right arm voluntarily branded with his conquests, something the scar down his left cheek would also attest to. Though younger in age, he has formed an unofficial allegiance with Grishik, the two discovering their combined talents are virtually unbeatable when they work together.

Grishik looks up from the communicator and instructs Skarn, “Begin the final extractions. Starfleet’s days are finally numbered. Revenge is at hand, my friend.” Skarn only nods and heads out the door.

Chapter One

Hours later and several light years away, the *USS Enterprise* is flying gracefully through space at warp speed, escorting the *USS Moab*, a science vessel heading to the planet Evum to do research on ecology and the effects of potential ecotourism.

Inside the *Enterprise* is the familiar crew, with the exception of newcomer Irajā, piloting the ship after Chekov's untimely but heroic death years before. She's of Indian descent with long dark hair, a quick knack for piloting ingenuity, and, when needed, a fearlessness that was what initially caught Kirk's attention, recently replacing their prior replacement for Chekov. Her fearlessness, however, is hidden behind her own personal doubts about her abilities, particularly on the flagship vessel of Starfleet, a bit of imposter syndrome. In just a couple of short missions, Kirk has noticed in her an overenthusiastic tendency to go out of her way to please him, seemingly worried about her job. Sensing the planet can't be too much farther, he asks her, "Time to arrival, Irajā?"

She quickly turns in her chair and responds, "Ten minutes, sir!" She stumbles a bit, "Well, technically, ten and a half minutes. Sorry Captain."

"It's fine, Irajā."

Dr McCoy enters the bridge with a smile on his face, wondering out loud, "Are we there yet?"

"Ten minutes, Bones," Kirk responds, deliberately leaving off the extra seconds.

"Jim, why don't we take a little shore leave while we're down there? We could use a little break on a paradise planet."

Kirk is clearly not interested, responding, "Bones, we're going to complete this mission to the best of our abilities, and we're going to head straight back to Starfleet and get assigned a more standard one."

"Why *did* we take this mission, Captain?" Sulu wonders. "Seems like we're a little overqualified to just be an escort."

Dr McCoy responds, smirking, "Carol Marcus is why. Jim here wants to make sure her new post is up to his standards."

Sheepishly smirking, Kirk clarifies. "Her—" He corrects himself. "*Their* new assignment happens to be a little close to Klingon space, so I just want to make sure the coast is clear and make sure she's comfortable in her new surroundings."

"Comfortable, huh? With her assignment or you?"

Sulu looks back to Dr McCoy and Kirk, wondering what Dr McCoy was implying.

"All's good, Bones. We're gonna make sure there's no danger, bid them farewell, and then we'll be on our way. That's how we managed to leave spacedock with only a skeleton crew. A quick and easy routine mission."

"By bidding farewell, do you mean get on the same page as her?"

"Call it what you want, Bones."

"You're worried about her."

"Is that your professional opinion, Doctor?"

"Doesn't take a doctor to see it, Jim."

Sulu interjects, "I don't really care why we're out here. I'm just happy to be exploring."

"Good attitude, Mr. Sulu!" Kirk exclaims.

"I think Sulu would be happy anywhere," Uhura adds.

Scotty chimes in, "Aye. Give me a good bottle of scotch and I'd be happy with an extended shore leave here. I've read amazing things about this planet."

"Quick shore leave, sure. Extended stay, no thanks." Sulu states.

"What's wrong with Evum?" Irajia wonders.

"There's nothing to do. It's completely primitive and wild," Sulu clarifies. "I need some civilization to get back to."

"I'd take a garden of Eden planet any day," Dr McCoy responds. "It's about as close to pre-colonized North America as we'll ever get to see. Imagine the things that that crew over there will get to see."

"Well, Doctor," Sulu offers, "you could always trade places with their doctor; work under their captain?"

"Thank you, but no. Captain Coyote's a little too rigid for me. Too...by the book. Which is gonna get her killed one of these days, if you ask me."

"Aye," Scotty begins to contribute again. "And that Vulcan of theirs rubs me the wrong way. I'm glad I don't have to work with her."

"Easy, gentlemen. It's Captain Coyote's first command," Kirk says. "They'll find their footing."

"We'll see," Dr McCoy counters.

"Spock, anything to add?" Kirk wonders, noticing the absence of communication from his first officer and good friend.

"I see no reason to partake in meaningless conjecture, or, as humans refer to it, gossip."

There's an air of excitement on the *USS Moab*, as the young science crew is realizing their proximity to their new study area, the planet of Evum. The state-of-the-art science vessel is captained by Georgia Coyote, visibly descended from Native Americans. While she is friendly and on good terms

with her crew, she still commands with a firm hand, exuding a strong presence, compensating for the nervousness behind her demeanor as she tries to maintain an air of confidence on her first official command. Her defining long, jet black ponytail keeps her hair comfortably behind her head as she rises from her chair at the sight of the planet coming into view on the viewscreen.

Her second-in-command is Dr Carol Marcus, a former weapons expert who's become jaded from her work since the events involving her father and the *USS Vengeance*. Rather than studying how to take life, she's begun to steer more into a career revolving around sustaining it. It's led her into biology and ecology, specifically on virgin worlds. More recently, she's grown a little disaffected with Starfleet, reluctantly taking the first officer command on the *Moab*, which she's nonetheless highly qualified for.

The rest of the bridge crew begins with the logical Vulcan engineer, Vyorin. At the top of her engineering class at the Vulcan academy, her curiosity of the history of worlds got the best of her, and becoming an engineer on a Starfleet science vessel was her way to enjoy the best of both worlds. She's as excited as a Vulcan can be about the prospect of reaching the planet to study a similar ancient ecology as Earth's and Vulcan's. Her knowledge of engineering will be essential in maintaining the initial base.

The *Moab's* main pilot is a female Denobulan, Marlotte, who is always looking to lighten the mood through sarcasm and wise cracks, and yet is impervious to taking anything personally. Riding a cloud of confidence in everything she does, she happily declares, "Three minutes to Evum, Captain."

Stationed at a science station on the bridge, their chief ecologist and science officer is a man of Mexican descent named Hasen. He has strong ties to ancient wisdom passed down before pre-colonization of the New World and is young for a bridge officer, only 26 years of age. While short in stature, he's sharp as a tack with anything relating to the natural world. He has formed a close bond with Captain Coyote, taking on more of a little brother role, since he's not only the youngest member of the bridge crew, but also the only male. As such, she's become somewhat protective of him, having also risen through the ranks together on the same ship prior, and his sensitive nature feeds into that role.

Arriving to join the bridge crew is their Andorian doctor, Semil, a female of the species who has a nearly flawless track record and was specifically requested for the mission to treat potential newborn diseases and symptoms. As the eldest on the crew by a noticeable amount, she was eager to leave Earth due to its "suffocating warmth." As such, she accepted the position to travel to Evum, whose average initial readings appeared four

degrees colder than Earth's. Much to her dismay, it was decided that the new installation was to be based closer to the equator to be closer to Earth's climate. Despite her confident proficiency in Sickbay, she still enjoys a generously large glass of Andorian Ale, something her Vulcan colleague has taken issue with.

Marlotte notices her arrival and asks, "No Andorian Ale for the bridge? We're almost there! We should celebrate."

The captain chimes in, "Let's stick to protocol, Marlotte."

"Worried about something going wrong on your first flight as Captain?"

Semil asks.

"Let's just keep these last few minutes by the book. We've got Starfleet's flagship at our side. We don't want to do anything to raise any red flags."

"Indeed," Vyorin adds. "There's no need to impair the judgment of the crew this close to our new base of operation. I'm sure Mr. Scott is drinking enough for all of us."

"You two never really hit it off, did you?" Semil asks.

"That would be an understatement."

"That's a shame," Hasen throws in.

"And why is that, Hasen?"

"Because it's Starfleet. We should all be working together to achieve greater things."

"Have you ever worked with Mr. Scott, Hasen?"

"No."

"See how well you can tolerate his drunken belligerence when you do."

"That bad?" Marlotte asks.

"That bad," Vyorin answers bluntly.

"Sounds like my type," Marlotte says partially to herself.

"And Dr Marcus?" Coyote asks, still trying to break the ice with her first officer.

"Wish you were still studying weaponry?"

Her overtly fake smile contradicts her response. "All good. Happy to be here."

Noticing the tension, Semil interrupts, "Captain, perhaps we should get an away team ready to beam to the planet's surface? It's coming up quickly."

"Yes," Coyote answers. "Good call, Semil. Dr Marcus, Vyorin, Hasen, let's head to the transporter room. Marlotte, you have the con."

On the *Enterprise*, Kirk is also assembling his away team. “Bones, Spock, you’re with me,” Kirk begins. “We’ll meet Captain Coyote and her away team on the surface. Mr. Sulu, you have the con.”

As Kirk and his away team leave the bridge, Sulu moves into the captain’s chair, feeling the natural fit of it against his body.

Uhura notices his ease in the chair and remarks, “It suits you, Sulu.”

“You know, I can see myself captaining a ship of my own one day.”

“Not me,” Irajia interjects.

“And why not?”

“Are you kidding? Way too much pressure. I can barely pilot the ship.”

“Nonsense,” Sulu counters. “You’re one of the best pilots around! That’s why you’re here. Command is more of a gradual thing. I’ve been at the helm for years now, and from time to time, gotten a little taste of command. It just may or may not be what you’re into.”

“Likely not into.”

Both ships approach the equatorial zone at the largest continent, already facing them, and begin to establish an orbit around the planet. The away teams from each ship beam down to the surface in a large meadow surrounded by immense trees reaching into the sky. Bright golden-yellow clouds break up as sunlight hits parts of the meadow and the surrounding forests. The plant life in the meadow is lush and colorful, rising only about knee-high. The leaves and grasses are a deeper and bolder green than on Earth, even straying toward teal, with a pastel blue and orange dotting the meadow via large wildflowers, roughly the size of an outstretched hand.

From the *Enterprise*, Kirk, Dr McCoy, and Spock have beamed down, while from the *Moab*, Coyote, Dr Marcus, Vyorin, and Hasen have all beamed down nearby. Noticing Dr Marcus distractedly inching away from her crewmates, Kirk walks over to chat with her.

Nodding towards Coyote, Kirk asks, “How’s she doing?”

“Not terribly,” Carol begrudgingly answers. “Definitely seems like she’s aware that she’s got something to prove.”

“Well, it could be worse. Just be glad there aren’t any Klingons around.”

Unamused, she’s left with nothing to say. Noticing the awkward pause, Kirk asks, “And what about you? You doing ok with all of this?”

Dr Marcus looks down, trying to gather her thoughts. “Jim,” she starts off with, but before she can get anything else out both away teams are startled by a loud rumbling noise emanating from the trees behind them. As the noise intensifies, a massive deer-like beast with antlers three meters wide

and standing slightly higher at the shoulder than its antler width runs with a debilitating limp out of the trees and through the meadow, the ground thundering with every hooved impact. Believing the encounter to be over, the group can barely contain themselves when an enormous bear-like predator, likely weighing over 800 kilos storms out of the trees in pursuit. The immense size of such a predatory animal freezes everyone in their tracks, as all they can do is watch the gargantuan animal lumber through the meadow past them in pursuit of its prey. In a slow-motion moment, the animal looks over and locks eyes with Kirk. Though the eye contact only lasted a fraction of a second, it felt like hours to Kirk, imprinting the vivid memory of eye contact with such a powerful creature into his mind. The animal had pierced into his being, triggering in him a transcendental experience before returning its attention to the chase and disappearing from view. Oblivious to his surroundings, Kirk simply stares into the woods where the chase had vanished, the others also looking on in less impactful amazement.

Silence grips the away teams for dozens of seconds as they process what they had just seen. Captain Coyote's duties return to her as she shouts out, "Did anyone think to get a hollection of that?"

"Sorry Captain!" Hasen shouts out.

"Vyorin?" she checks again.

Vyorin holds up a small circular device filling her palm and gripping it by the tips of her fingers. "Affirmative, Captain."

Confused, Dr McCoy finally asks, "I'm sorry, but what is a hollection and what is that device?"

Captain Coyote pulls hers out to display as she begins to explain, "It's a relatively new device that science crews have been using for missions like ours. We keep them on us at all times specifically for events like that. It's called a hollector, or hologram collector. It allows us to take samples of our surroundings without actually taking any physical samples."

"In essence," Vyorin continues, "I was able to get close enough to that creature to study it in more intimate detail without disrupting its behavior."

Vyorin pushes a couple of buttons on her device, then turns it ninety degrees so it's facing sideways. In the next second, a life-size and life-like hologram of the bear-like animal appears, frozen mid-chase.

"The magic, of course," Coyote adds, "is that once we've taken a sufficient scan, which Vyorin did in this case, we have enough data to extract to even alter its moods. This allows us to study it in more detail." As she's speaking, she makes a few adjustments to Vyorin's hollector and instantly the image of the animal relaxes and sits on its rear, its massive front arms and paws draping onto the ground in front of it as its head begins curiously

looking around. Transfixed by the experience, Kirk walks over to the front of the hologram to try to look into its eyes again.

“Incredible,” admires Dr McCoy.

“A truly groundbreaking invention,” Spock marvels. “Quite possibly the perfect solution to studying new flora and fauna without the fear of external contamination.”

“Exactly. This way we can study this world in detail,” explains Coyote, “without affecting any of it. They even think that within a few more decades, we could have an entire room filled with these that could generate an entire environment that you could interact with. You could visit a planet without going anywhere!”

“Well, that doesn’t sound very fun,” Dr McCoy argues. “What’s the point of exploring if you can just cook it all up in a room?”

Hasen contributes, “My impression is that it won’t *replace* exploring. It’ll be more for nuanced records, fitness exercises, and what I’m looking forward to, interactive movies.”

Kirk is still staring in wonder at the animal when his communicator interrupts him. Snapping from his daze, he answers, “Kirk here.”

“Captain,” Sulu’s voice rings out, “we’ve detected Klingons.”

Coyote overhears and a look of panic washes over her face. “How far out, Mr. Sulu?” Kirk asks, refocusing.

“Captain, they’re on the other side of the planet.”

Surprised, Kirk instructs the *Moab* crew to hold off on any further studies until the Klingons are cleared from the planet.

Captain Coyote is horrified and instantly begins badgering Kirk with questions about their potential encounter. “Why are there Klingons here? This planet was supposed to be clear. What are we supposed to do about them? We’re not equipped for this.”

Dr Marcus appears more annoyed at this point as Kirk and Dr McCoy go to calm Coyote.

Kirk begins doing what he can to comfort her. “Captain Coyote, listen, we don’t know the circumstances, but it’s not like it’ll turn into a full-blown war or anything dramatic like that. We’re going to get back to our ships and evaluate the situation. Sound okay?”

She nods in affirmation. Dr McCoy next checks in on her. “You ok? Breathe with me.” He emphasizes his breathing to her to try to get her to relax.

Kirk rejoins Dr Marcus on his way to his crew and requests, “You weren’t kidding. She’s definitely not built for this.” Dr Marcus only makes an agreeing, but frustrated, facial expression. Kirk tries to look for a way in, but knows they need to move. “Talk later?”

Agitated, she responds, "Sure."

Kirk then orders everyone back aboard their respective ships until they know what they're dealing with.

On his bridge, Kirk wants answers as he's pressuring his crew for details. "Why didn't we detect them until just now?" he inquires.

Sulu responds, "They have a dampening field, sir. A powerful one. We wouldn't have even noticed them had it not been for the clear indicator of their presence."

Kirk doesn't understand until he sees a striking black region of the continent on the main viewscreen, approximately twenty-five kilometers in diameter, appearing charred and lifeless.

"What the hell have they been doing to this planet?" Kirk wonders out loud.

Kirk calls over to the *Moab*, "Captain Coyote, are you seeing this?"

"Yes, I am, Kirk," she responds, more relaxed at this point. "I just can't understand what their interest in this planet is. Any idea what's caused that devastation?"

"Knowing the Klingons," Kirk begins, "they've been testing weapons here. We've gotta put a stop to this before they do any more damage. Captain Coyote, you and your senior officers beam over here and we'll figure out how best to handle the situation."

"Understood. And Captain Kirk?"

"Yes, Captain, what is it?"

"I'm sorry for my behavior back there. I know it was a little unprofessional."

"Don't sweat it," he reassures her. "Your first mission was thrown a massive curveball, so all we can do is just assess the situation and come up with some answers."

"Roger that."

On the *USS Moab*, the bridge crew is marveling at the damage and the surprising settlement as they begin to get up to beam over to the *Enterprise*.

Examining the mine more closely, Marlotte points out, "Hey, there's a Klingon bird of prey! I've been on one of those."

The senior officers look at her in disbelief, waiting for an explanation. Feeling the stares, she turns to look at them, offering a vague response. "It

was my pre-Starfleet days. A little blood-wine goes a long way with the Klingons. Got the deluxe tour, if you know what I mean.”

“With a Klingon?!” Semil shouts in disbelief.

“Definitely one of my wilder nights,” Marlotte says, smirking.

They all walk out to beam over, mildly disgusted with Marlotte.

Tensions are rising moments later in the *Enterprise*’s briefing room as they debate the proper course of action.

“They’re Klingons,” Kirk affirms. “Diplomacy won’t work.”

“That doesn’t mean you give up on it,” Coyote shouts back. “We have to try. If nothing else, they won’t attack us if we go in unarmed. It wouldn’t be the Klingon way.”

Realizing she has a point, Kirk finally concedes. “Alright,” Kirk begins, “it’ll be me, Mr. Spock, Captain Coyote, and…” Kirk, after a quick hesitation, points to Semil. “Sorry, I don’t think we’ve met.”

“I’m Semil, Captain Kirk.”

“Semil, yeah. Any questions?”

“Uh, yeah.” Dr Marcus adds, insulted her rank wasn’t taken into consideration, while also being glossed over by Kirk. “Any reason I’m not going?”

Kirk responds, “We’ve got our away team, Dr Marcus. It’s better if you stay here.”

“Better for who? I may not be active in it anymore but I’m still the most qualified weaponry expert here, and if the Klingons are testing weapons down there, you’re going to need that highly qualified weapons expert taking a look. And let’s not forget that I’m first officer on the *Moab*.”

Kirk hesitates as Dr McCoy leans over and says quietly to him, “She got you there, Jim.”

Overhearing, she acknowledges Dr McCoy, saying softly, “Thanks Bones.”

With no alternative, Kirk accepts. “Fine. Dr Marcus, you’ll join us. Semil, you’ll stay here.”

Semil accepts, “Understood.”

Kirk continues, “Alright. We’ll go in to discuss what they’re up to and see if we can work this out diplomatically.”

Sulu wonders, “And what if you can’t?”

Kirk pauses to think for a second, and finally comes back with, “We’ll improvise.”

“Wait, so that’s it? That’s the plan?” Hasen challenges. “Both captains and both first officers are going into hostile territory on an away mission to try to talk it out with Klingons? Captain Coyote, I feel obligated to point out—”

“Not now...” Kirk interrupts, looking at Hasen but unsure of who he’s addressing, pausing for his name.

“Hasen, sir. Chief science officer.”

“Smooth, Jim,” Dr Marcus points out.

Kirk acknowledges Dr Marcus’ jab and turns back to Hasen. “Chief science officer, Hasen, don’t worry. We’ve dealt with Klingons before.”

Hasen turns to his captain for some kind of vindication. Instead, she responds, “I know, Hasen. It’ll be ok. Apparently, he does this all the time.”

As they begin to walk out, he begins talking to himself, “Don’t worry, Hasen. It’s just the four highest ranking officers in a dozen light years going into a Klingon base unarmed.” He sarcastically adds, “And of course Captain Kirk is highly renowned for his diplomacy skills. What could go wrong?”

Chapter Two

The new away team beams to the planet's surface and begins to make their way to the Klingon base. As anticipated, they're intercepted just outside the perimeter by several Klingon guards. Immediately they all raise up their hands, Kirk announcing, "We're unarmed. We only came to talk."

A guard radios in to his superior, and after a brief moment of deliberating in Klingon, is instructed to bring them in. He motions for the away team to follow him.

After passing through a series of corridors that prioritize efficiency over comfort, they enter into Grishik's office where Kirk immediately notices the heads of the local wildlife, one in particular appearing similar to the large bear-like animal he had made eye contact with. His anger over the head is clearly evident, adding an extra layer of uneasiness that Coyote and Marcus are also showing. As the only Vulcan, Spock meanwhile, is maintaining his composure. Noticing the away team's gaze on the heads, Grishik immediately follows Kirk's eyes to the subject, as a menacing smirk appears on his face. Grabbing his dagger, partially for something to fiddle with and partially to intimidate, he gets up from his desk to greet his guests.

"Fantastic, isn't it?" he asks, hoping to rile up the visitors. "That evil beast put up quite a fight, but I finally conquered her by impaling her numerous times through the heart with this dagger. It wasn't until we had finished our battle that we discovered three unborn offspring still inside."

Kirk's anger intensifies as Grishik's sharing his story, Coyote reacting horrified as well.

"Up to three more worthy opponents that we won't get to fight, but a stunning trophy nonetheless," he concludes.

Noticing the rest of the away team succumbing to their emotions, Spock speaks up. "Indeed. And yet by removing these animals from the gene pool, you've just weakened the overall population."

"I disagree," Grishik smugly responds. "There are hundreds of thousands of these animals all over this continent alone. These trophies don't even account for a fraction of the overall population."

"Until more are hunted, of course."

Captain Grishik only smiles while studying his subject with a glaring eye.

Spock resumes, "Captain, I presume?"

"Captain Grishik. And you?"

"First officer Spock."

“First officer Spock!” An expression of surprise and delight washes over his face as he turns his attention to Skarn, already grinning as well. Skarn walks over to Kirk, concluding, “So that must make you the infamous Captain Kirk.”

“That would,” Kirk responds, unsure of how he's known to them. “And you are?”

“I'm Commander Skarn. And you have no idea how excited I am at the prospect of facing you in battle. If nothing else, I'll enjoy knowing I met you firsthand before our mission is complete.”

“And why is that?”

“I'm afraid in Klingon literature,” Grishik answers, “it's become something of a cliché in compelling storytelling. It's the good old fashioned revenge angle.” Kirk appears confused as Grishik continues, “Well, we'd get our revenge either way. But knowing you'll be front and center in the picture now is quite possibly the most gratifying surprise we could have gotten here.”

“What revenge? We've never even met.”

Unsure of where he's going, Coyote speaks up to get things back on track. “Captain Grishik, we're not here to fight.”

Grishik's smile turns to annoyance as he walks over to greet Coyote, his fierce eyes examining his new subject. “And whom might you be?”

Coyote composes herself more professionally, answering, “I'm Captain Coyote of the *USS Moab*.”

“Captain Coyote of the *USS Moab*,” he repeats while sizing her up. “If I had to guess, I'd say this is your first mission.” Her reaction confirms his theory. “It is, isn't it? Ah, how much fun it must be for you, taking the captain's chair for the first time, sprinkling your wide-eyed ideals across the galaxy, the naivety your Federation has instilled in you about the worthiness of your morals and ideology. Well, I've got bad news for you, Captain Coyote. One person's morals are another's grievance. And you don't yet possess enough experience or expertise to be worthy of my time.”

Skarn resumes the dialogue, picking up where Grishik left off, “But Kirk on the other hand! I couldn't have asked for a better gift on the eve of our success.”

Fed up with the mystery, Kirk finally asks, “Are you gonna let us in on what you're talking about or do you two just prefer to speak in riddles and inside jokes?”

“Our revenge, Captain Kirk, is with you,” Skarn clarifies.

“I don't understand. As I've pointed out, we've never met.”

“No, we haven't,” Skarn confirms. “But you knew my father,” he says as he walks closer to Kirk to intimidate. “And Grishik's closest ally.”

At the same time, Grishik reaches into a drawer in his desk and pulls out four piercings leftover from his friend. They were the forehead piercings of a Klingon warrior before he was attacked and killed by Khan, the *Enterprise* crew intercepting him before the Klingons could. He throws them on the desk and waits for a reaction from Kirk.

“Are you proposing to us? I’m flattered, but the answer’s no.”

Grishik lets out a menacing chuckle. “Your wit precedes you, Kirk. But no. These belonged to Skarn’s father. You see, they were his forehead piercings. You and your Federation slayed him before he could even counter an attack.”

Confused, Kirk looks to Spock, then back to Grishik. “I think you’re mistaken. That doesn’t sound like anything I’ve done.”

“No, of course not. The Federation’s excuse was to blame your pet soldier, Khan.”

“Khan? Khan’s been asleep for years.” Kirk thinks for a moment as Grishik waits for him to put it together. “You mean when he went to Kronos?”

“Oh, so you do remember! You were there after all!”

“We went to capture Khan. He alone slaughtered those soldiers.”

Skarn cuts in, “He alone was representing the Federation! And you came in to help him!” He moves closer to Kirk, dwarfing Kirk as he’s standing in front of him. “Do you know what it’s like to lose a father, Captain Kirk?”

“As a matter of fact, I do.”

“And yet you still allowed this mercenary to kill without an honorable battle?” Skarn asks. “I should finish you right here for your lack of honor.”

“I told you; he was acting alone.”

“Lies!” Grishik shouts. “More Federation lies! All we ever hear from the Federation is lies. Well now it’s time to end the lying.”

“Look, if your problem is with me, then deal with me. Leave the rest of the Federation out of it.”

“That’d be entirely too easy,” Grishik remarks. “You think I haven’t noticed that two captains and two first officers from two ships in orbit are sitting here unarmed right in front of me?” He begins waving his dagger back and forth. “I could kill all four of you, right now, with no problem.”

“That wouldn’t be the Klingon way though,” Kirk argues.

Coyote hears her words echoed through Kirk and looks up at him, a bit betrayed, but says nothing. Grishik, keen on personality and behaviors, catches the subtle glance and smiles.

“How wise you are, Kirk,” he says, as he glances back to Coyote to see if he’s riled her up at all. Turning his attention back to Kirk, he continues, “You see this was the last straw in our quarrels with the Federation. You’ve been antagonizing us at our back door for too long. The Empire has been

working diligently to advance our noble cause yet is constantly harassed by the Federation. As such, the High Council unanimously voted to finally rid the galaxy of the Federation once and for all.”

Coyote finally speaks up, “The Federation is a peaceful organization. I’m certain we can come to terms if we try.”

Grishik smiles as he walks back over to Coyote. “Tell me, Captain Coyote. What was your reaction when you found out there was a Klingon presence here?” Her posture sinks a little. “I thought so. A slight panic attack at the unexpected on your first, supposedly routine, mission, perhaps? Did those high-minded morals not help you come to grips with the situation then?” He pauses, examining her reactions. “No. They certainly didn’t, did they? So much innocent faith in the Federation. Captain Coyote, unfortunately your inexperience doesn’t make you relevant to this conversation. You haven’t yet experienced the gray areas of command; those circumstances when traditional rules don’t apply. Your faith in following your Federation code will ultimately be your undoing. And I’m looking forward to you attempting to put up a fight, so that I can thrust this very dagger into your chest and show you what your faith in your Federation has brought you.”

Dr Marcus, noticing her captain getting rattled, asks, “What kind of weapons are you testing here? Is it what you’re planning to use to try and destroy us?”

Grishik responds, “There are no weapons here…” He pauses, realizing he hasn’t met her yet, hanging on his last word to cue her to answer.

“Dr Carol Marcus, first officer of the *USS Moab*.”

“Marcus,” Grishik repeats, a smile once again coming over his face. “You were in on that little escapade with Kirk and Khan and the like all those years ago. And your father; what a coward he was! Trying to start a war under false pretenses.” He watches as her face fades from curiosity to anger. “Yes, I’m glad you’re here as well to witness the consequences of your father’s actions. But to answer your question, the weapon is already complete and awaiting us on Kronos. It’s been in development for years. We simply came here to mine the ore we need.”

Kirk recomposes and rebuts, “Yeah, except this is a Federation planet. You have no valid claim here. You can’t just come in and occupy claimed land and take what you want with no regard for the life there. You’re not only trespassing on Federation space but are in direct violation of the terms of the cease-fire, something our two governments agreed on. You don’t get to just make up new rules that suit your changing needs.”

“You don’t get it, Captain Kirk. In just a couple more days, there won’t be a Federation anymore. For your continued disrespect toward the Klingon Empire, and for my friend, and for Skarn’s father, we’re already poised to

retaliate in a way that will make the Xindi attack a century ago look like a child playing on a beach.”

“You can’t do that to this planet,” Coyote interjects. “Please, just leave this land and its wildlife alone.”

“Yes, we’ll be sure to take that into account,” Grishik demeaningly addresses Coyote. “It’s already begun. We’re just a couple of days away from victory. Though admittedly, your arrival does pose a bit of a problem. As such, I’ll be forced to send Skarn here back to Kronos with what we already have while I finish the final extraction, then rendezvous with him at Earth.”

“And then what?” Dr Marcus asks.

“And then...,” Grishik responds before pausing. Completing the rest of the sentence with hand gestures, he mimics a small explosion with his hands. “Once Earth is destroyed, we’ll continue to mine this planet, and then we’ll head to New Vulcan next.”

“Captain Grishik,” Spock weighs in, “it is illogical to extract finite resources in the expectation more will be readily available.”

“First officer Spock, there will be plenty to fulfill our needs,” Grishik counters.

“Or so you think. You’ll likely create a dependency on this resource, applying it to other forms of technology, which will only accelerate your need for it, thereby limiting the supply much sooner than anticipated.”

Grishik’s irritation begins to grow. “I don’t need a Vulcan telling me how to exact my revenge. We don’t have all day to mingle. Guards, get them out of here.”

“Grishik, listen to me!” Kirk shouts back.

Grishik turns his back as Skarn calls out one last farewell. “So long, Kirk. I would have enjoyed facing you in battle.”

Before Kirk can respond, he and the others are forced out of the office and back out to the perimeter of the base. Reluctantly, they begin walking back to the beam-up point.

Coyote speaks up, “He needs to be stopped. We can’t let this continue.”

Kirk responds, “Don’t worry, we’re gonna stop that savage bastard.”

“If you don’t,” Coyote adds, “I will. This star was sacred to my ancestors and now they’re completely desecrating it. And if no one stops him, he’ll just keep overpowering and exploiting more worlds.”

Spock contributes, “The parallels between the European colonization of the American continents and the present Klingon behavior are remarkable.”

Kirk replies sarcastically, “Thanks for finding a silver lining, Spock.”

“That was not intended to be a silver lining, Jim. Just a surprising correlation between two points in history between two races.”

Kirk is already distracted, noticing Dr Marcus walking separately from the others. “Fair enough, Mr. Spock,” he states, before catching up to Dr Marcus. “Carol, we need to talk.”

“Not now, Jim. We’ve got bigger things to worry about.”

“Carol, please. I know you don’t want to be here.”

“Doesn’t take an army of Klingons to see that.”

“But look, I just didn’t want you to give up on Starfleet yet.”

She stops, infuriated, as the others walk by. “Give up on Starfleet? Jesus, Jim, don’t you realize Starfleet gave up on me? Not only did I watch my own father get murdered, but then I find out that he was behind a plot to start a war, and now, here on this planet, I find out that that war is now quickly crossing the ocean between our worlds.” She pauses to collect herself. “Look, we’ve had our problems, but I was ok with you being gone from time to time, so I took this mission as a favor to you since you wanted me on it so badly. I was hoping it might provide some kind of relief in all of this. But I realized on the trip over here, this isn’t where I want to be. I can’t be in Starfleet anymore, and I can’t be with you either.”

She begins walking away to catch up to the others, leaving Jim behind to accept her decisions.

In Grishik’s office, Skarn is questioning his next moves. “And you don’t want me to simply destroy them?”

Grishik returns, “No. I want them to see the extent of the damage once we’re done. I want them to live with the consequences of their actions. But I also don’t want them coming to the rescue too quickly. Disable their ships only. By the time they get them repaired, there won’t be a Federation for them to return to. It’d take a miracle worker to get them back online before we’re victorious. I’ll finish up here, and rendezvous with you at Earth with the final extraction, where justice will finally be served.”

“And what of the Federation fleet?”

“Not to worry. I’ve already handled that.”

Skarn smirks as he acknowledges, “Understood.”

Chapter Three

The senior officers from the *Moab*, along with Kirk and Spock, are collecting ideas on board the *Enterprise*. Discussing their next actions, they've gathered inside the briefing room.

"All this sounds great, but first things first," Kirk states, "we need to notify Starfleet Intelligence."

Over the comms, a voice comes in. "Captain, one of the Klingon ships is lifting off."

"Uhura, get that message out to Starfleet. Sulu, fire everything at them! Do not let them leave orbit!" Under his breath, Kirk adds, "This is why I hate wasting time in briefing rooms," as they all run toward the bridge.

Sulu begins firing phasers and photon torpedoes directly at the D7 cruiser as they all explode in a cloud of fire around the target. When the explosions clear, the D7 remains exactly where it was, completely unscathed.

"Spock?" Kirk mutters out, requesting an explanation.

"Fascinating. No damage, Captain. Our weapons had no effect on their shields."

"Great," Dr McCoy sarcastically quips. "The Klingons are indestructible all of a sudden. But at least Spock's entertained."

"On the contrary, Doctor. I was simply—"

"Gentlemen, please," Kirk interrupts. "Uhura, hail them."

Skarn appears on the screen, smiling at his success. "Is that all the legendary Captain Kirk has got?"

"This isn't over, Skarn."

"You're right. It's not. I'm going to disable your ships now, but leave you all alive. That way, by the time you get them repaired, you'll be able to see the devastation to your Federation for yourself."

Skarn switches off the communication and begins firing at both vessels, neither one able to defend itself against the Klingons' weaponry. The attack shoots right through both ships' shields like they weren't even there. Sparks fly and small fires ignite as the bridge of the *Enterprise* is rocked in all directions from the attack. When it stops, Skarn's ship is gone as Kirk begins looking around the bridge at the damage. "Damage report."

Scotty answers, "Long-range communications are out, as is the warp drive. Impulse only, Captain."

"Damn it."

Scotty adds, "They knew where to hit us, Captain."

Kirk looks to Vyorin, "Vyorin, are you able to help out Scotty to get us up and running?"

"It pains me to say it, Captain, but logically, that is our wisest course of action right now."

"Great," Kirk says. "Captain Coyote, can we borrow your engineer for a bit?"

"Of course."

Looking for an alternative, Scotty speaks up. "Captain, even with the extra help, it'll still be a few hours at least. Maybe Vyorin should get her ship back up and running in the meantime."

"Scotty, we're in a race against time. The quicker we have one ship up and running, the better."

"Aye sir."

"Whatever you can do to cut that time down as well."

"Understood, sir."

Kirk turns his attention to Uhura. "Uhura, did that message get out?"

"I don't think so, sir. They were already jamming our communications."

"Captain Kirk," Coyote begins, "I'd like to get back to my ship to assess the damage there."

"Good idea. Let me know what you find out." As the *Moab* crew leaves, Kirk turns his attention to his first officer. "Spock," he asks, "what's the status of the Klingon mine?"

"As promised, a small contingent still remains, Captain. They appear to be extracting more of the ore they referred to."

"Uhura, how much longer till we have long-range communications?"

"At least another hour, sir."

Kirk looks over to Dr McCoy. "Bones, any casualties?"

"Not that I've heard, Jim. Just a few rattled crew members, but nothing I can't heal quickly and easily."

"Good. "Get down there and help out," Kirk says to Dr McCoy, as the doctor makes his way to the turbolift. Looking around, Kirk accepts his reality. "So, we're dead in the water for at least another hour."

Scotty and Vyorin are struggling to make progress in engineering. Scotty has crawled underneath a panel with its underside removed and is digging around, trying to troubleshoot multiple problems.

"Hand me that phase inverter."

Vyorin hands him the tool, saying, "Perhaps it would be more efficient if you relayed to me what you were troubleshooting so that I can be of better assistance. I am also an engineer, you know."

"I'm just getting a few of the systems back online."

"And I'm more valuable assisting rather than standing around."

“Look lass, I don't want you here any more than you want to be here. So, the quicker I can work, the quicker we can be on our way.”

“On the contrary, Mr. Scott. My priorities are not to help you, but to help the ship, thereby getting us closer to our common goal. You simply happen to be the path of least resistance to accomplish that goal. My personal feelings toward you are irrelevant at this time. Now, is there something more useful I can do than hand you tools, or should I inform Captain Kirk that I'll be returning to the *Moab* to begin repairs there?”

“Very well,” Scotty says with a sigh. He gives the panel a nudge and the illumination returns, signaling a working panel. “Let's see if we can get the warp core back online. Start at that panel over there and I'll see what I can figure out at this one.”

On the bridge, Kirk's impatience is beginning to show.

“Uhura, where are we at with long-range coms?” Kirk asks anxiously.

“It'll still be a little bit, sir. We're still not quite there.”

“Alright, keep going. Spock, were you able to take any scans of that mineral they're mining down there?”

“Negative. We were under too close surveillance to get anything. Unfortunately, we don't yet know anything about what they're mining.”

“That is unfortunate. See what you can do to change that,” Kirk commands as he anxiously stares out the viewscreen, tapping his finger on his command chair. He rhetorically asks himself, “What on Earth were they doing around that mine to make it look like that if they weren't testing weapons?”

Kirk radios over to the *Moab*. “Dr Marcus, were you able to assess any information about the weapon they spoke of?”

She responds over the comms, “Unfortunately not, Jim. I didn't see anything that looked like a weapon. He said it was on Kronos, so they must just be getting fuel for it here through that ore they're mining.”

“Understood. Thanks.” He turns his attention back onto the bridge. “Sulu, Iraja. Try and help Uhura get the coms back up.”

“Aye sir.”

Sulu and Iraja get up from their seats to go over and help Uhura, who's underneath an open panel, working to repair the damage. Looking at the damage, Iraja wonders, “How are we gonna get this all repaired?”

“One step at a time,” Uhura answers, handing her a tool. As a trio that's begun to bond, they're all happy to work together, which also improves their efficiency.

“Captain Kirk,” Coyote radios in.

“Yes, go ahead, Captain.”

“Kirk, it looks like we’ve sustained heavier damage than you. I don’t see how we’re going to get up and running again in our state any time soon, and also with a smaller crew than you.”

“Understood, Captain. Stand by and we’ll get something figured out.”

“Captain,” Scotty radios in.

“Go ahead, Scotty.”

“We can give you warp one now, but we’ll have to keep working *en route* to give you full warp.”

“Great job, Scotty. Stand by.”

Kirk radios over to the *Moab*. “Captain Coyote.”

“Go ahead, Kirk.”

“It looks like we’ve got warp one and we’ll have full warp back soon. We’re going to take the *Enterprise* and head toward Earth to try to amass a defensive fleet. Do you mind if we take Vyorin along for the ride?”

“With all due respect, Captain, we’re dead in the water here and without our engineer we have no chance of getting up and running in a decent amount of time.”

“I understand that, Captain. That’s why I want you to go down to the surface and stop that second ship and Captain Grishik from taking off by any means necessary. He seems to be the brains behind all this. Do whatever you need to do. Is that understood?”

“Captain Kirk, Starfleet is going to need every ship at Earth’s defense.”

“I understand that, but if that last batch of ore never reaches Earth, it’ll give those defenses an extra advantage we might not have had.”

Reluctantly, she responds, “Understood. We’ll make it happen.”

“Thanks.” Kirk pauses, staring into the speaker, wanting to have a fuller conversation with Dr Marcus, but realizing the meaninglessness given the situation.

“Is there anything else, Kirk?”

He hesitates some more. “No, nothing more, Captain Coyote.”

“Kirk out,” Coyote’s com rings out. Dr Marcus overhears and despair washes over her.

The *Moab* bridge crew turn their attention to the viewscreen as they watch the *Enterprise* power up and turn away, leaving at warp one.

Frustrated, Dr Marcus wonders, “Think we’ll ever see them again?”

Captain Coyote puts a hand on her shoulder, “Stay hopeful. Sometimes it’s all we have.”

Dr Marcus notices her hand and appears annoyed, partially at the gesture, but also at the trite response. She would clearly love for Captain Coyote to move her hand away, but she's too caught up in the moment staring at the viewscreen.

On the *Enterprise* bridge, Sulu, Iraja, and Uhura are working diligently to get comms back up and running, while keeping the chatter light-hearted.

Sulu continues from his previous thoughts, "There's just an instinct that takes over in quick situations. It's a trust that you begin to gain in yourself."

"You mean like, in making decisions?" Iraja asks.

"Yes and no," Sulu continues. "It's a trust in your instincts, but also in the ship itself. There's frequently too little time to think, so you just act only on those instincts. And when that happens, a few seconds seem like dozens of minutes, but everything plays out, and you're left with this stronger bond to the ship that you just commanded through a tight situation. You begin to trust that ship more, like it's a member of the crew itself."

"I don't know," Iraja adds as she continues repairs. "Sounds intimidating to me."

"I'm with Iraja," Uhura says. "I'm happy expanding my knowledge beyond linguistics, but I'd rather someone else issue the commands."

Sulu acknowledges Uhura, then smiling back to Iraja continues, "You never know. Some of the best captains began, unsure of their skills. They just needed an opportunity to prove what they had. Often to their own worst critic: themselves."

As he finishes his thought, the panel lights up around Iraja. "Did we just do it?" she asks.

"That's it!" Uhura responds. "Nice work, ensign." She turns her attention to Kirk. "Captain, long-range communications are back online."

"Excellent work, you three. Uhura, let Starfleet know immediately what's going on."

"Aye sir."

"Sulu, Iraja, I'm expecting Scotty and Vyorin to give us full warp at any moment now so be ready."

"Yes sir."

Uhura interjects, "Captain, I've got Admiral Abbey now."

"Perfect, Uhura. Put him up."

Admiral Abbey appears on screen. He's a youthful but wise 66-year-old African American man with a thick beard and kind eyes. Seeing Kirk on

screen, he gives a welcoming smile and asks, "Captain Kirk. What can I do for you?"

"Admiral, we've got a bit of a situation."

Captain Coyote is meeting with her senior staff in the *Moab's* briefing room, minus Vyorin, to discuss options to infiltrate the Klingon base.

"Point is," she continues, "we're running out of time. We need to go in there and overtake them."

"Captain," Dr Marcus counters, "with all due respect, we're outgunned and outnumbered. If we just go running in there, we'll get slaughtered before we even get to the base."

"We have to stop them from leaving. So, we need to figure out a way to not get slaughtered."

"I'm not trying to go against you, Captain," Dr Marcus replies. "I just think we need something a little unorthodox. Something unexpected. We need to take a more elaborate risk."

"Well," Hasen adds, "we still have phasers. Maybe we could sneak up on them somehow."

"Ok," Coyote affirms, "that's an idea. Let's try and build from that."

Marlotte adds, "We could potentially take out their guards from a vantage point outside of their perimeter."

"With some of their guards down it might help to level the playing field," Semil contributes. "Skarn took some of them so there's not that many left."

Hasen adds, "And it's not like we need to overtake all of them. We just need to stop them from leaving. If we can disable their ship somehow once we're past the guards, that'll at least buy us some time. All we need to do is just cripple it so it can't leave."

"That's exactly what I'm looking for," Coyote confirms. "Ok, let's work up something from that."

Dr Marcus goes along with it, but still appears uneasy, hoping for something a little more creative.

Kirk, meanwhile, is wrapping up the report to the admiral on the *Enterprise* bridge.

"So that's where we're at, sir."

"Jesus," he lets out. "The timing is horrible, Jim."

"Why's that, Admiral?"

"The bulk of the fleet is nowhere near Earth."

"Where'd they go?"

“They were ordered to intercept a Klingon attack fleet on the far side of the Alpha quadrant.”

“An attack fleet? Grishik didn’t mention anything about that.”

“It’s been confirmed, Kirk. They’re out there.”

“But Admiral, we know this weapon is on its way to Earth. Shouldn’t we get at least some of that fleet back to Earth to intercept the more immediate threat?”

“Things are stable out there, and we want to keep it that way. If we start pulling ships out the Klingon fleet could exploit a weakness in our line. Then, including this weapon you described, we’d be facing two different fronts converging on Earth. No, I’m sorry, Kirk. There should be enough planetary defenses here to hold off any experimental weapon.”

“Admiral, I think you’re understating the threat.”

“One crisis at a time, Kirk. With the *Enterprise* back here with the remainder of the fleet, we should be able to handle it.”

“Admiral, again—”

Admiral Abbey’s interrupted with more reports being handed to him.

“Sorry Kirk. Get here as soon as you can, and we’ll discuss further action.”

The screen goes blank as Kirk casually vents his frustration. “Unbelievable.”

Hoping for better news, Kirk radios for Scotty. “Scotty. How’s it coming along?”

“It’d be better if I had my own people, Captain.”

“You’ve got all the help you need, Scotty. Make it happen.”

“Aye, Captain.”

Chapter Four

Coyote and her crew have taken their initial position on a shaded hill overlooking the Klingon base. They agree to split up into two groups, flanking the perimeter by 180 degrees while using nearby drainage channels as cover.

Coyote finishes up her plans with her crew. “Marlotte, we’ll need your expertise once we’re closer to the bird of prey.”

“Not a problem, Captain. Happy to share in my bird of prey nostalgia.”

“Perfect,” Coyote confirms. She looks down and breathes a heavy sigh.

“Don’t worry, Captain,” Hasen begins. “We won’t let you down.”

Coyote smiles and responds, “I’m not worried about that, Hasen.”

“You should be,” a deep voice bellows out from behind them.

They all turn around to see two Klingons with disruptors pointed at them. Hasen and Marlotte both look at their captain as they gesture toward their phasers. She nods in disapproval, and they restrain themselves and relax as the group surrenders.

Their captors lead them directly back to Grishik, where he’s awaiting their arrival, already on the Klingon bird of prey.

“So predictable,” he begins, fiddling with his dagger. “The mighty Starfleet, faced with unprecedented obstacles still hopes to triumph on the eve of defeat, hoping for one last crushing blow to save the day. I’m sorry, Captain Coyote. This is not your day, and you’re clearly too inexperienced to be any real threat here. Your capture was far too easy and entirely too anticipated. You will not go down in history as a hero, but as a failure. Your short, unimpressive career will remain just that. Your ship is disabled. You’re outnumbered. You’re outgunned. And you’re outsmarted. You and your crew don’t possess the technical knowledge to incapacitate this ship, and even as a unit, you’re no match for the contingent here. I was really hoping you’d be clever enough to fight your way in, at which point, I’d be able to fulfill my promise to you,” he remarks, his dagger waving near her upper body. “However, given how insignificant of a threat you’ve proven to be, it’s time to simply go back to your ship and let us finish our mission.”

Hasen flares up and grunts, “You won’t get away with this.”

Grishik walks over and stands directly in front of him. Grishik lunges, but Hasen doesn’t flinch. Grishik looks over to Coyote and says, “You should have made this one captain.” He looks back at Hasen and in a threatening voice, says, “Don’t try to be a hero, boy.” He turns his attention back to the away team. “Once again, it’s time for you to go back to your ship. Accept your

fate, Captain Coyote, and I'll reluctantly accept that we will not, in fact, be meeting in battle."

He pauses, waiting for Coyote and her crew to comply. When no-one moves, he waves his hand, palm down, demeaningly gesturing, "Shoo."

With no alternative, Coyote and the others begin walking out, escorted by the two guards that brought them in. Hasen appears especially aggravated at not getting the chance to do something positive for his captain, while Marlotte sneaks in a few discrete readings on her tricorder, thanks to her positioning in the middle of the line.

As they're walking through a corridor, Hasen looks sharply at exposed panels as another Klingon works on them nearby. Noticing his glares, Captain Coyote walks up from behind him and whispers, "Whatever you're thinking, don't."

Hasen hears her but doesn't respond. As they near the exit, Hasen stops. One of the guards pushes him forward, at which point he whips around with his phaser in his hand, pointed directly at the guard and fires, disabling the guard while also getting the first shot off, able to stun the other as well. Immediately he begins firing at the exposed panels, but is fired upon by the Klingon working on them, his body falling to the floor. The others fire in retaliation as they begin backing toward the exit. Phaser fire lights up the dark corridor in bright glowing green and red, the blasts shooting back and forth. At last, they take down the third Klingon while Marlotte shouts, "We have to get out of here!"

Captain Coyote is shocked, staring at Hasen's lifeless body on the ground, Semil immediately rushing to check his vitals. She simply looks up at her captain, tears beginning to fill her eyes. Captain Coyote is completely unaware of the situation around her, the anguish and jolting action of the recent seconds drawing her jaw downward. As Klingon voices begin shouting from down the crooked hallway, Marlotte reiterates the need to escape.

"Captain, I'm so sorry about Hasen. But we have to get out of here right now. Otherwise, we're all going to end up just like him."

Coyote takes a step backward, her daze fading as she turns to look at Marlotte.

"Now, Captain," Marlotte adds.

"Semil," Coyote solemnly instructs.

With a nod, Semil rises from Hasen's body, and they all begin running out. With the Klingons in close pursuit, they use a nearby drainage ditch initially proposed for cover on their way in to escape. After about a mile of running out of the Klingon base and back into the natural world, they notice a discrete cave opening and retreat inside to regroup.

"Are they still following us?" Coyote wonders.

Semil peers out the opening. "It doesn't look like it."

Before Semil has even finished responding, Captain Coyote is sitting on a rock with her head in her hands.

"What were you thinking?" Dr Marcus begins shouting. "Was that supposed to be the great plan? Getting caught and then getting escorted out?"

"I don't need this right now!" Coyote barks back, tears filling her eyes.

"I told you we needed something different, and all we did was just get escorted back in there, and then back out. Again! Only this time we lost one of our crew."

Captain Coyote is too distraught to fight back. Semil and Marlotte can only watch as tensions begin flaring.

Dr Marcus knows she should ease up, but her built up frustration begins pouring over. "What's the plan now? We've lost a crewmember. We're stranded in a cave. And the Klingons are about to take off to kill billions of people along with the Federation. So now what? What the hell are we supposed to do now?"

Coyote finally snaps, yelling back, "I don't know! Okay? Is that what you want to hear? I have no idea what we're supposed to do!"

Dr Marcus cuts back, "Well, maybe if you took the advice of your first officer, we might have succeeded, and we could be on our way to helping the *Enterprise* out."

"So, you have all the answers then? Is that it?"

"I didn't say that."

"It sure as hell sounds like that's what you're saying. Is that why you accepted this assignment? Just to see if I'd fail?"

"No, of course not!"

"Then why did you? What the hell are you doing here? You've been distant and uninterested from day one. So why would I take the advice of my first officer who clearly has no interest in being here? How did I know you weren't just setting me up for disaster?"

Offended, Carol snaps, "I wouldn't do that!"

"What evidence did I have to the contrary? You've been checked out since you got on board, so again, what the hell are you even doing here? I've been trying to connect with you. I've been open and friendly, and you've given nothing back to this mission. Nothing! What kind of a first officer are you?"

"I'm not, okay?" They both pause, Dr Marcus feeling the relief of opening up, while Captain Coyote tries to understand. "At least, I didn't want to be."

"Then what?" Coyote inquires further.

"I wanted it to work with Jim."

“Captain Kirk?” Coyote clarifies.

“Yeah. With Kirk. We’ve been having some problems lately, and he convinced me to stay in Starfleet,” she struggles with her following words. “But, I don’t know. It’s just been...confusing being in Starfleet ever since everything with my dad happened. I’m just not sure this is where I belong.”

“I get it,” Coyote responds, easing up on her anger. “You went through something horrific. To be honest, I was surprised you were still in Starfleet. I was actually happy to see you veering more in a science direction, so I was looking forward to serving with you.”

“Really?”

“Really. I was very sorry to hear about your father, but I figured that hard of a loss would make you stronger and wiser. Someone who knows how to lead. And, it turns out, you’re right. We should have done something more unorthodox. I just wanted to be a good captain. I wanted to show the admirals and their golden child, Captain Kirk, that I could be just as effective as them. That I could handle command, even if it was just supposed to be a basic scouting mission to a primitive planet. But I completely failed.”

“You didn’t fail, by the way. There was an unexpected Klingon presence. You tried to do something, but, sadly, it just,” she hesitates as she thinks of Hasen, “wasn’t the right choice.”

The group is silent for a moment, then Coyote adds, “It was the only choice I knew how to make.”

“What do you mean?”

“I was always going to make the safest and most predictable choice. It’s all I know how to do.”

“Why is that?”

Coyote pauses, digging back into her own history. She reluctantly begins, “I was an ensign years ago on the *USS Eagle* with my best friend from graduation, another Native American, a pilot named Grey Bull. Captain Shazen, an Andorian, was just...reckless. She took matters into her own hands and frequently made her own rules—and we went along with it. It felt great. We were fresh out of the Academy, and it seemed like we were invincible. Untouchable. The crew exhibited the same feelings, so we just figured, that’s how it is on a real ship, on a real mission. The admirals gave her leeway because she had the track record to back it up, and because she was the first Andorian pilot on a Starfleet ship.

“We were on our way back from a mission where we were fighting off the Klingons from an alien world. We were all tired. It was the night shift, so I was at the science station and Grey Bull was piloting. Shazen was ready to get back to the nearest space dock, but the quickest route teetered on the Neutral Zone with the Romulans. She was under strict orders to take the

extra eight hours and avoid the Zone, but she didn't want to hear it. She just wanted to get back. And with all of our escapes and triumphs, we were overconfident.

"We were barely inside when we got a Romulan distress call from a shuttle craft. It was practically right in our path, so why wouldn't we check it out? Help those in need, friend or foe, right? The Romulans exploited that one. They begged for our assistance, just enough to get back on their way. As requested, we lowered our shields, and that's when two Romulan warbirds decloaked right behind us. With the shields voluntarily down, an army of Romulans immediately transported all over the ship. The bridge was lost in a matter of minutes. Shazen got out a distress call, but rather than surrendering, and knowing she was beaten, she fought the odds.

"I can still see the phaser fire right in front of my face from a missed shot. But as scary as that was, I saw Grey Bull beyond the beam that missed me. There was another beam. It hit her directly in the chest. In this frozen moment of green light, I still see my best friend, so much happening in just a split second. Her body reacting to a massive jolt of energy, much more than it could withstand. Her face going from concerned to sheer shock and horror as the reality of her nervous system frying sank in, unable to move a muscle, but wanting so badly just to cringe and curl up."

By now Coyote is completely distraught, reliving the past and coming to grips with past trauma that she had worked so hard to move beyond. Tears have begun rolling down her cheeks from saturated eyes as she continued.

"And then, in a flash, someone grabbed my arm and the next thing I knew I was in an escape pod following dozens of others. The Romulans managed to stop a few, but about half of the escape pods somehow cleared the Neutral Zone.

"Knowing Shazen had disobeyed their orders, the admirals were forced to pull the *USS Farragut* from a diplomatic meeting with the Arcturians to provide potential backup. It was the closest ship, and the only reason we weren't stranded in space and pursued by the Romulans. And of course, it would take another eight years to reestablish communication with the Arcturians. Naturally, Shazen's ego finally caught up with her. She hasn't piloted a Starfleet ship since.

"All that loss. My best friend, my captain, a diplomatic meeting with a potential ally. And all because bending and breaking the rules led to too much overconfidence. That was why I switched from the military to a more science-based career."

"And why you're so adamant about following the rules," Semil concludes.

She at last looks up, her three crew mates sharing her tears and showing deep concern and empathy.

“Captain,” Dr Marcus lets out. “I had no idea. But, as you know, I can certainly relate.”

“I know, Number One. And I’ll completely understand if you don’t want to continue your assignment with me.” She laughs a hollow laugh at her own statement, adding “Assuming we even make it out of here.”

“We’ll make it out of here,” Dr Marcus declares, making eye contact with Coyote, then the others. “This isn’t where our story ends.”

Marlotte contributes, “I wound up killing that Klingon I was with years ago.”

The others look at her in disbelief. She clarifies, “I mean, not me personally. But he missed his shift because of me. His captain didn’t like that. I had to sneak my way off the bird of prey.”

“Kinda sounds like everyone’s had a little trauma.” Semil says. “Things like that are exactly why I keep saying we should have at least one counselor on every ship. Some of the things we experience are just too horrific.”

“Yeah,” Coyote responds. “I guess I let my past really screw up our future, huh?”

Marlotte gets a pensive look on her face and peers out of the cave opening. In the distance, she can see a bit of the Klingon bird of prey in the distance.

“Captain,” Marlotte says. “I don’t know if this will help you feel any better, but I took a few readings when we were walking out of the Klingon ship.”

“Any good news?”

“Hasen didn’t die for nothing. According to my readings, they were ready to take off shortly after we were being escorted out.” She clarifies, “They should have left by now. Whatever he did, he bought us some time.”

Coyote rises to her feet, thinking. “And you know your way around a bird of prey?”

“Are you gonna report me if I say yes?”

Cracking a smile, Coyote responds, “I think we can let this one slide.”

“Then yes, I’m familiar with a bird of prey.”

Coyote asks, “How well do you know their onboard computers?”

“We became fairly well acquainted during my escape.”

“If we got onboard undetected, could you eliminate our biosignatures from its database?”

Marlotte smiles, “Now this is starting to sound like a plan!”

Dr Marcus gets up to participate. “You’re not thinking of boarding their ship, are you?”

Coyote's smile grows, responding, "You wanted unorthodox? I think it's time we do a little monkeywrenching."

Her crew looks at her confused.

"The Monkey Wrench Gang! An Earth classic!" The others are still expressionless.

Coyote sighs in frustration. "Ok, long story short. A group of four ecoterrorists sabotage construction equipment in the southwestern region of the North American continent throughout the story with their bare hands."

"Meaning?" Semil wonders.

Coyote excitedly answers, "Meaning, we don't need phasers or heavy artillery or even to overpower the ship. We just need to get on that ship, undetected, and we can disable it piece by piece with our bare hands. Hasen started it. We'll finish it."

Semil points out, "Captain, I should point out that I don't have my med kit. If anything were to happen, we'll be just as helpless as the characters you're referencing. We should really get back to the ship and get better prepared."

Marlotte peeks out the cavern opening again. "I don't think that's an option. I'm seeing steam rising from around the ship."

"Sorry, Semil. We're on our own." She turns to address the group. "We'll get in position, wait for the last of the crew to board, then we'll sneak in through the landing struts. Hopefully they don't expect that as an entry point, so we can at least find the nearest computer that way and remain undetected. Questions?" They all look at each other, then back to Coyote.

"Perfect. Let's go."

They all leave the cave and head back out into the daylight, following the drainage for low cover. As they near the perimeter of the Klingon base, they see the last of the Klingon crew running toward the main entryway. They continue discreetly moving closer and closer until they're within a close, but challenging and exposed, sprint from the ship.

They watch as the entryway begins to close, and as soon as they're out of the line of sight from any Klingons, Coyote instructs them to begin a sprint toward the nearest landing strut. Coyote, Marlotte, and Dr Marcus all reach the strut first as Semil is just a few steps behind. As the initial three grab hold, the ship begins to lift off, Semil frantically still trying to catch up.

"Jump!" Coyote shouts over the noise of the ship as Semil makes a desperate leap. Shocked, Semil sees one hand clutching Coyote's arm with the other in Dr Marcus' arm. As Semil dangles in the air, the group is exuberant as they begin pulling her up. The landing struts quickly follow, closing up completely as they begin to reach the top of the planet's atmosphere.

As they share a quick breath of excitement at their accomplishment, they immediately jump into action looking for the nearest console.

Coyote's eyes light up as she states, "Over there, by the access door."

They run over and Marlotte wastes no time jumping to work navigating through Klingon symbols and code as the others can only watch. Growing impatient, Semil asks, "Are you able to find it?"

Not answering, Marlotte continues working, and after a longer-than-comfortable pause since Semil's question, Marlotte begins smiling as she manipulates more processes in a frantic manner. She aggressively taps one final symbol as she excitedly exclaims, "Got it! We're good."

"Do they know we're here?" Coyote asks.

"I saw a bit of their scans while I was in there. It looks like we're good to go."

"Great work, Marlotte. Alright, let's come up with a plan. We've only got a few hours before we reach Earth."

Chapter Five

The *Enterprise* is still cruising along at warp one, much to Kirk's dismay. He radios to engineering. "Scotty what's taking so long with warp?"

"Captain I'm working as fast as I can here. The Klingons did a number on the drive."

Suspecting that Scotty's not using Vyorin to her full potential, he asks, "And what's Vyorin doing?"

Scotty looks over at her, engaged in a game of Kal-toh. He embarrassingly responds, "She's...playing a game, Captain."

"Damnit, Scotty! Put her to use! We need warp drive now!"

"Aye, Captain."

Scotty reluctantly looks at Vyorin and then back at the systems. Looking back at Vyorin, he finally says, "Alright, lass. Enough games. Time to get to work."

"Oh," she says, mimicking surprise. "Did Captain Kirk give you a change of heart?"

"Look. I don't like you. And I know you don't like me. But like the Captain said, we need warp drive, and regardless of what I think of you personally, I'll need your help to get this up and running quicker."

"Mr. Scott. I'm impressed. That must have taken an incredible amount of effort to admit that."

He mutters under his breath, "You have no idea."

"And where exactly shall I begin?"

"At that console," he says, pointing to the far wall.

"My experience tells me that it would be far more efficient for us to complete work together on this panel first," motioning to the panel that Scotty had been working on.

Scotty's beginning to get fed up and irritated, saying only, "Maybe. But I don't want you on this panel with me."

"What you want is irrelevant, Mr. Scott. Logic dictates that in a time of crisis, which this would certainly qualify—"

"Enough of your robot logic! Go to that panel and get to work!"

"Is that what you think of Spock as well? A robot? What would he say about that?"

"I've had it. Get out of engineering! All you're doing is slowing me down."

"I'm slowing *you* down. How ironic," she says, finally succumbing to Scotty's arguing.

"What are you talking about?"

“Your drunkenness slowed my progress at the Academy.”

“Excuse me?”

“I was an ensign six years ago, working on a report for Admiral Jacobs that I had stayed up throughout the previous night preparing, and spending the rest of the day completing. I was on my way to deliver the report at 1700 hours. You, Kirk, Dr McCoy, and Chekov had apparently been day-drinking, representative of the boys club you are, when our paths crossed right outside of the Admiral's office. In your drunken stupor, you tripped, running into me. My pad fell to the ground, and again, in your drunken stupor, you stepped on it, crushing it. My report was lost, and I had nothing to turn into the Admiral. Your parting words were, and I quote, 'Sorry about that. I hope it wasn't too important.'”

“Well, how come it wasn't backed up?”

“It was backed up, as all our systems are. But I wasn't near a transporter pad, and it would have taken me thirty minutes to go back and get a new copy—transported or not. I had to make a decision. Show up late to an Admiral's office, or show up without the requested report.”

“Well...,” Scotty looks for another reason to pass blame. “Why'd you wait so long to do it?”

“I didn't. I was given the assignment that previous morning. He wanted to know why I'd make a successful Chief Engineer to serve on his ship. Needless to say, I did not get the position.”

“Well, why didn't you just send it to him when you were done?”

“He wanted me present, in person, to explain my answers and to answer his questions. Being late, giving him an excuse, or giving him no report at all would have resulted in all the same conclusion. So again, Mr. Scott, thanks to your drunkenness, it took me over two years to recover from that incident; two years that I lost serving aboard a command that was practically handed to me.”

“But, you're a Vulcan. I thought your people didn't harbor resentment.”

“My anger is under control, and I do not internalize resentment, but I can still choose not to like someone, especially when they have habits that endanger their peers and those around them.”

Defeated, Scotty looks down in shame and tries to offer some condolence. “My god. I'm sorry Vyorin. I had no idea. That would certainly explain why I picked up on the grudge you've been holding against me.”

“Wallowing in guilt gets us nowhere. Unless we get full warp speed back online, it is completely irrelevant.”

Scotty gets up and walks over to a discrete cabinet. He pulls out a bottle of scotch and a glass and begins to fill it.

“Mr. Scott. Is this really an appropriate time to drown in your sorrows?”

As he brings the glass to his mouth, he looks at her, affirming that he heard her, but offers no rebuttal. He finishes the drink, then drops the glass onto a nearby panel. He turns back toward Vyorin, and finally says, "Let's get to work. Take this phase inverter. When I tell you, sync up with my work, and we should start making some progress."

"Very well."

Kirk is staring out the viewscreen on the bridge, agitated at the relatively slow speed he's getting. Irajā looks back at Kirk, who appears bored and irritated. She turns to Sulu and asks, smirking, "Are these those lightning-fast moments where instinct kicks in that you were talking about?"

Sulu looks back at Kirk and back to Irajā. "That's the other thing," he begins. "It's not all action and quick decisions. Sometimes it's putting all your trust in your crew to do their job so you can do yours. Scotty wasn't doing his job, and so Kirk's irritated about that."

A signal chimes in on Kirk's chair.

"Scotty, what is it?"

"Good news, Captain. We've got the full warp drive back online!"

"Excellent work, Scotty." Kirk turns his attention to Sulu. "Mr. Sulu. Get us to Earth as fast as possible."

"Aye, Captain."

Coyote and her crew have managed to regroup in a cargo bay on the Klingon bird of prey undetected as the vessel races toward Earth. Coyote looks at her crew. "Everyone know what to do?" They all nod in confirmation.

"Good. We'll take advantage of these shafts. They're basically the equivalent of Jefferies tubes, so we can access the entire ship through them. We'll start here."

Captain Coyote, Semil, and Dr Marcus all head toward an opening as Marlotte jumps out and walks toward a communication panel. She begins navigating through commands and Klingon symbols and within seconds, sparks begin flying and the panel bursts into flames. Immediately she jumps back into the opening to rejoin the others, the group scurrying deeper into the shaft.

On the bridge, Grishik gets an alert about the malfunction and sends two guards to inspect the cause. The two guards arrive at the cargo bay, open the doors, and find the space empty, the burnt-out malfunctioning panel

only a few meters away. They report back, "Captain, it must have shorted out."

Captain Grishik is skeptical, but responds, "Understood. But be ready. That may not have been an accident."

"Yes sir."

Grishik turns toward another officer on the bridge and instructs him, "Scan for life signs other than Klingon."

She begins scanning but doesn't detect anything. "Nothing sir," she reports.

Grishik is unconvinced but continues commanding his ship.

After working their way through more shafts, Coyote and crew next arrive at the mess hall. Coyote looks into the room, perplexed, then back at Marlotte and says, "You said this was supposed to be engineering."

Marlotte works up an explanation. "I mean, I did have a lot of bloodwine that night."

Coyote smirks. "Well, we caught them after lunch, so it'll do," she says as she jumps out while the other three remain in place. She sneaks into the kitchen and begins tampering with the cooking equipment, adjusting the settings to their maximum values.

She runs back to her crewmates and jumps into the ventilation shaft with them.

"What'd you do?" Semil asks.

She gets a blank look on her face and offers back, "I don't know. I never learned Klingon."

They begin moving down another shaft when a massive explosion shakes them down off of all fours. The other three look back at Coyote, who looks just as surprised as them.

"Guess it worked," she says.

On the bridge, Grishik is clearly agitated, shouting out orders as he stands up, pulling out his dagger on his way up. "We have intruders. Locate them and bring them to me alive! I want to confront them before I slaughter them. They have no honor hiding."

Wandering through the shafts some more, they arrive at empty crew quarters. Dr Marcus jumps out of the shaft and into a dim room coated in metal. A soft amber light illuminates a corner nearby. On the far wall, a

communication panel fills in the remaining darkness with glowing green and red displays. She pulls out her phaser and fires at the communication panel. She continues firing through sparks until flames begin to erupt from the wall. She runs back into the shaft with the others as they begin moving away.

Grishik is now furious, sending out two more of his three remaining bridge officers on a hunt for the saboteurs. "Where are they?" he radios to his guards scouring the ship.

"We have nothing, Captain Grishik. There's no sign of anyone else on board."

"If you were here telling me that to my face, I'd slay you down for incompetence. In fact, I may do just that the next time I see you out of principle. I don't want to hear anyone else tell me that they're not here. Find them and bring them to the bridge or I'll execute every one of you instead!"

As they work their way through the shafts, Dr Marcus, crawling alongside Captain Coyote, asks, "You know what Hasen would be wondering right now?"

"What?"

"Did we really just abandon the entire crew of the *Moab* without any word?"

Coyote smiles. "I left a notice. Semil had already treated the injured and I let them all know we'll be back to get them soon."

Dr Marcus' smile fades. "What if we don't make it back?"

Coyote ponders that thought for a moment, then looks at her reassuringly, saying, "This isn't where our story ends."

Dr Marcus smiles, seeing a newfound strength and leadership in her captain.

"Works for me, Captain," she remarks back satisfyingly.

With some more crawling, they reach the bridge, Coyote and her crew peering down through a vent over Grishik as they prepare to take the ship. They all look at each other, then nod in support. Coyote kicks out the vent shaft, where Semil jumps down and fires at the one remaining bridge officer, disabling him. The other three drop down with their phasers pointed at Grishik. Grishik, recognizing a well-devised and unconventional plan, chuckles as he begins slowly clapping.

"Marlotte," Coyote says. In an instant, Marlotte aims at the panel by the bridge door, sealing the doors shut.

"Well done, Captain Coyote," Grishik begins, ceasing his clapping. "I'll admit. I didn't think you had it in you, though don't be misguided by your illusory string of luck. You're still the inferior commanding officer in this room."

"Captain Grishik. Stop the ship," Coyote instructs.

"My dear, Captain. From one captain to another, I think you know that I cannot do that."

She steps forward with a phaser more accurately pointed to his head, saying, "And I think you know, we've taken this ship. Now drop out of warp."

"But you see, Captain Coyote, if you had taken the ship, you'd be dropping out of warp yourself. And I congratulate you for making it this far, but we all know you won't kill your enemy in a standoff. We all know you won't pull the trigger first."

Coyote tries to cast an expression of anger on her face that compensates for knowing that he's right.

"That's not the Starfleet way." Grishik's face turns cold. "It's the Klingon way." Immediately he raises his hand, still clutching his dagger, but flipping it around so he's holding the point, then rapidly throwing it directly at her. Predicting a turn of events, Marlotte had moved gradually closer to the captain, and at the last moment, jumped in front of her, the dagger puncturing her upper abdomen.

"Marlotte!" Coyote screams as she turns her focus back to Grishik, who's now right next to her, anticipating a shot from her phaser. He swiftly knocks it out of her hand while Dr Marcus surprises him with a blow that knocks him down next to Marlotte. Grishik sees his dagger in front of him sticking out of Marlotte and reaches to grab it back, extracting it from her. Semil, recognizing that the dagger was keeping necessary pressure, shouts to Grishik, "Don't! You'll kill her!"

"An honorable death," he grunts, grabbing the dagger and yanking it out of her chest. Marlotte goes unconscious as Semil continues to treat her to the best of her abilities. She rips off a piece of her clothing from her arm and shoves it into the wound to slow the bleeding.

Dr Marcus and Coyote are now fully engaged with Grishik, vengeance fueling their attacks. To their dismay, Grishik still manages to block every blow they throw at him. Finally, the two deliver a synchronous kick, one to his head and one to his gut, that throws him backward.

"Duck!" Semil shouts from behind them.

The two drop down, looking back to Semil, who has a phaser ready to fire. Grishik's eyes go wide as she fires, sending him to the ground, his dagger lying next to him.

"Stunned?" Coyote asks.

"Affirmative, Captain."

“Good. I don’t want to cheat him out of spending his life in a Federation prison.” They all rush back to Marlotte. “How is she?” Coyote asks.

“She’ll live,” Semil states. “But only if I get her proper treatment right away.”

“Dr Marcus, can you see if you can figure out how far from Earth we are?”

Dr Marcus goes over to a panel and hovers over it, unsure of what she’s looking at. “I don’t know. I can’t read Klingon.”

“Semil?”

“Not me either.”

“That makes three of us.”

As they approach the Sol system, the ship drops out of warp, the coordinates pre-programmed into the system. Earth comes into view on the viewscreen, only a few million kilometers away, clearly visible in the star-filled void.

“We’re too late,” Dr Marcus points out.

“No,” Coyote counters. “That’s the *Enterprise* in orbit around Earth and I don’t see any sign of any Klingon weapon yet, or any other ship.”

Semil reiterates, “We need to get Marlotte onto the *Enterprise*.”

The group looks to Coyote for their next move. “Anyone know how to send a hail from a Klingon ship?” she asks.

Before they can figure it out, a light begins flashing on the panel that Dr Marcus had gone toward. “There’s a light blinking,” she points out.

“Could it be a hail?”

“Probably?”

“Punch it.”

A confused Kirk appears on the screen, trying to put together what happened. “Captain Coyote,” Kirk says in bewilderment. “You’re not exactly who I was expecting but it’s good to see you there. And congrats on your new prize,” Kirk continues, “and on your first mission no less.”

“It wasn’t easy, and I apologize we weren’t successful until now.”

“Not at all, Captain. I’m glad you’re here. We could use your help.”

“Likewise. Marlotte’s fatally injured. We need to get her to sickbay immediately.”

“Understood. Drop your shields and we’ll beam you over.”

“Yeah, apparently none of us are well versed in Klingon.”

“Uhura?” Kirk asks.

“Look for this symbol,” she instructs as she displays a large red symbol on the viewscreen for them to see.

"I got it," Dr Marcus exclaims. She pushes the button and Coyote nods to Kirk, who then gives the instructions to beam the four aboard the *Enterprise*, plus Grishik.

"Bones, Spock, you're with me."

Kirk, Dr McCoy, and Spock all leave the bridge to meet the *Moab* crew in the transporter room. Kirk orders nearby security guards to get Grishik to the brig, while everyone else gets Marlotte to sickbay as quickly as possible. They all rush out, carrying the unconscious Marlotte, and lie her down on a bed once in sickbay.

"Bones," Kirk begins to ask, "how bad is it?"

Speaking while taking readings, he answers, "It's pretty bad, but with Semil's help we might have a chance."

"Good. You two do what you need to save her."

"Of course, Jim."

Kirk turns to Coyote. "Captain Coyote, she's in good hands. But right now, I need you and Dr Marcus to help us figure out a way to stop that other Klingon ship."

The remainder of the two bridge crews are all gathered in a briefing room moments later, where Kirk has a look of desperation on his face. "Alright, I need ideas, and I need them now. The Klingon weapon will be here at any moment, so we have to have some kind of plan to stop it." Silence fills the room. "Anything! I don't care how far-fetched it might seem."

"Uranium?" Iraja throws out. "I studied its properties while doing some natural history in the southwestern North American continent."

"What about uranium? What can we do with it?"

"Well, it is radioactive," Scotty points out.

"And based on Earth's elements that I've studied," Vyorin adds, "uranium 235 is naturally occurring. If we were to combine it with the ore the Klingons were mining, and split both atoms together—" she states, before Scotty jumps in.

"We could create an old-fashioned bomb."

"Nice to see ya'll have made up," Kirk quips. "But where do we get the ore?"

"The Klingon ship we got here in," Dr Marcus points out. "There's a whole payload onboard."

"Now we're talking," Kirk states, a little excitement coming back over him. "How do we deploy it?"

"A rigged photon torpedo would be the most logical choice," Spock states.

"Could we jerry-rig multiple torpedoes together? To give it a little extra impact?" Kirk asks.

"It would increase the amount of uranium needed, but would also prove to be quite effective," Spock replies.

"Good. Scotty, Vyorin, get to work on the bomb. We'll get you the materials you need asap. Dr Marcus, beam as much of that ore as possible onto our ship immediately. I want to leave the Klingons scrambling."

"Yes, Captain."

Scotty, Vyorin, and Dr Marcus all get up to begin their respective tasks.

"Iraja, where can we get some uranium?"

"There used to be high concentrations in southwestern North America. The Colorado Plateau area would be a good place to start."

"Perfect. Spock, start scanning for a large vein of it."

"Yes, Captain."

While Spock leaves to begin scanning, Kirk turns his attention to Captain Coyote.

"Now, Captain, what exactly did I miss?"

Coyote begins to try to put all the pieces of the recent hours back together, but is interrupted.

"Captain," Spock radios in. "I've found a sampling of uranium that would perfectly suit our needs, but there's an issue."

"What's the issue?"

"It's underneath the former Navajo Nation."

Captain Coyote's jaw drops. "Oh, come on. There has to be somewhere else."

Spock adds, "The only other readily accessible place would be Australia, coming up in orbit shortly."

Coyote remarks, "Ok, so you either screw over my people or the aboriginals of Australia. Take your pick."

"I'd prefer not to screw over anyone." Kirk turns his attention back to Spock.

"Hang tight, Mr. Spock. We'll be there in a moment."

Kirk, Coyote, and the remaining officers all reconvene on the bridge of the *Enterprise*.

Kirk resumes his conversation with Spock, "Is there any way to extract it without affecting the surface?"

"Negative, Captain. The radioactive decay would cause too much interference with our transporters."

Kirk looks back to Coyote. "Captain?"

She gestures her hand toward the findings, summing up centuries of

reservation treatment. "What choice do we have? If it's not here it's another indigenous tribe."

Spock wonders, "Curious that so much of your planet's fossil fuels and natural resources coincided with the native peoples of their respective land."

Coyote confirms, "Which is why it took so long for our people to trust the white man. That was well into the 22nd century."

Kirk, feeling antsy, is quick to get everyone back on track. "It was a horrific and embarrassing part of our culture, but let's focus on the present day.

Spock, will it fit in a cargo bay?"

"That should be sufficient, Captain."

"Good. Get it up here."

"Yes, Captain."

Sulu interrupts, "Captain, Skarn just dropped out of warp."

"How much time, Mr. Sulu?"

"No approach vector, Captain. He's here."

Kirk turns to the viewscreen. He and the others see a large vessel, dwarfing the *Enterprise*. Its shape is primarily an elongated pyramid. The point, directly facing Earth, is cut off where a large orifice at the end clearly marks the weapon's firing shaft. In the rear, the bottom of the pyramid, the shape rounds out more as it bulges farther toward the bottom. Evenly spaced out along the base are four glowing green nacelles spread out over the diameter.

"Spock. Analysis."

"It's just as they described, Captain. There's enough energy and firepower on that ship to cause irreparable damage to both Starfleet and Earth."

Kirk radios to Dr Marcus, asking, "Dr Marcus, how much of that ore have you gotten from the Klingon ship?"

"We're at eighty percent, Jim."

"Great work. Keep getting what you can but expect to be cut off soon. The weapon just arrived."

Sighing over her reply, she lets out a broken, "Acknowledged."

He next radios to Scotty. "Scotty. Where are we at with that bomb?"

"Another thirty minutes, Captain."

"We don't have thirty minutes, Scotty. We barely have thirty seconds."

"But Captain..."

"I have faith in the two of you, Mr. Scott. Make it happen."

"Aye, sir."

"Next move, Captain?" Spock inquires.

“Have you beamed up that uranium, Spock?”

“Directly to the cargo bay, as ordered.”

Kirk radios to the cargo bay, “Cargo Bay Two, what’s the status of the uranium?”

Concerned, he hears, “Captain, we haven’t received the uranium yet.”

Confused, Kirk looks to Spock. Spock raises an eyebrow and replies, “The uranium was programmed to go to the cargo bay, Captain. The only logical explanation is that something must have malfunctioned during transport.”

Uhura interrupts, “Captain, we’re being hailed.”

“Onscreen.”

Kirk is shocked to see Grishik alongside Skarn on the viewscreen. “Captain Grishik?”

“Well, hello again, Captain Kirk.”

Kirk looks to Spock for an explanation, Spock only returning a blank and baffling stare.

“How rude of me,” Grishik continues. “Naturally you’re probably wondering why I’m not in your brig.”

“That crossed my mind.”

“Skarn here was nice enough to beam me out, along with another valuable find from your ship. Tell me Captain Kirk. What are your plans for all this uranium?”

“You stole our uranium?”

“Stole is such an unpleasant word. I prefer...reappropriated.”

“I still prefer stole. It implies that you broke a law.”

“Laws can be bent when those in power need to adapt to changing conditions.”

“Captain Grishik,” Spock interrupts, his curiosity overwhelming. “How exactly were you beamed off along with our uranium?”

“A little superior Klingon ingenuity, Mr. Spock. I’d love to teach it to you and your engineer, but then, you know why we’re here.”

“Captain Grishik,” Kirk resumes, before he’s cut off by his nemesis.

“You know, I can’t help but notice there’s not much of a fleet here. Hopefully they didn’t go chasing a phantom signal of some enemy fleet on the other side of the quadrant.”

“A decoy signal,” Spock announces.

Grishik smiles, not answering.

“You planted a decoy signal to distract our fleet,” Kirk clarifies.

“Well, I didn’t personally. But thank you, Kirk. I’ll take credit for the idea. No, I’m afraid this won’t be the massive triumphant stand with a massive

fleet of ships saving the day, but rather, a dominant overpowering over a whimper of Federation forces.”

“Well, we’ve got the ore from the bird of prey, so looks like we’re at a stalemate.”

“Do you, though?”

Suspicious, Kirk radios to Dr Marcus. “Dr Marcus, what’s the status of the ore.”

“I’m sorry, Jim. It was transported out just moments ago.”

Defeated, Kirk looks back up at Grishik, who’s grinning from cheek to cheek, an evil triumph behind his eyes.

“Captain Kirk, you have no idea how delighted I am that I’m able to watch this all play out in real time by watching the emotions and realizations pour down your face. By now, you must grasp the fact that you’re beaten. In a matter of minutes, my weapon will be active, and Starfleet will be history.” His expression changes from glee to menacing. “Now, stand down.”

“I’m afraid I can’t do that, Captain. See you soon. Kirk out.”

Kirk motions to Uhura to cut the communication, who complies, then radios to Scotty. “Scotty, where are we at? Did you manage to get any of the ore and uranium installed?”

“We were interrupted, but we got enough to add a bang, Captain. It’s officially loaded and awaiting your command.”

“Excellent work, Scotty.” Kirk turns to Spock. “Spock. Fire!”

Kirk watches on the viewscreen as the bright light of the torpedo dims as it nears the Klingon weapon. Fading dimmer, it finally explodes in a gargantuan explosion, the shockwaves rocking the *Enterprise* and other nearby ships. The massive burst continues to burn over itself until the magnitude of the explosion finally begins to fade. As the flames exhaust themselves and the explosion clears, the weapon begins to appear through the cataclysmic burst unscathed. Kirk looks baffled.

“Spock,” he simply asks.

“Curious, Captain. While the weapon itself is undamaged, I am detecting a slight weakening of their shields. Though they likely won’t stay that way for very long.”

“Can we fire on them?”

“Negative.”

Coyote wonders, “What about beaming through?”

“Again, negative.”

Kirk and Coyote look at each other in dismay.

“However,” Spock continues, “according to these readings, it might be possible to get a shuttle craft through at a precise moment at high velocity.”

Kirk’s confused and asks for clarity. “Meaning?”

“Meaning, Captain, if we fly a shuttle craft directly at the weapon, timed precisely with the recurring weakness in their shields that we exposed thanks to the bomb, we could get through. This would of course require a beam out just before impact.”

“That sounds like a lot of precision,” Kirk rationalizes.

“Indeed. In addition, the shuttle craft alone would likely be fired upon before reaching the weapon. As such, it will require cover from the *Enterprise*.”

“Ok, hold on,” Coyote interrupts. “So, you’re saying a shuttle craft needs to fly,” raising quote fingers, “at high velocity, directly at the weapon. And in between the time it clears their shields and crashes into it, the party on board needs to beam into the weapon? With no knowledge of the interior design of that thing?”

“In a manner of speaking, Captain, that is precisely what I’m saying.”

“So, who’s on the shuttle?”

Kirk speaks up, “It’ll be me and Mr. Spock.”

“And myself and Dr Marcus,” Coyote contributes.

“Captain Coyote—”

“Captain Kirk. You’re going on a full-blown kamikaze run into the belly of an unknown Klingon weapon with two merciless Klingons hell-bent on revenge against you and you think you can stop them and the weapon with just you and Spock? The transport on the shuttle can handle up to four people, so we’re joining you.”

Surprised to see Coyote’s initiative, Kirk agrees. “Very well, Captain. Nice to see this side of you.”

“Nice to be seen.”

Kirk radios to Dr Marcus. “Dr Marcus, meet us in the Shuttle Bay.”

“Acknowledged.”

“Sulu, think you can handle being the cover for us?”

“Gladly, sir.”

“You have the conn.”

Sulu gets up and sits in the captain’s chair, giving Irajā a confirming nod as he sits.

Now joined by Dr Marcus, the four are walking to the shuttle bay. Kirk asks Spock, “Spock, do you have a general idea of where we’re beaming onto, or is it just going to be dumb luck?”

“On the contrary, Captain. With a weapon of that size, it would be safe to assume there would need to be ample space toward the rear of the vessel

for the energy buildup to be successful. Using logical engineering design, I'll be able to estimate what should be a discreet location in the main chamber."

"Sounds logical enough."

"You should know by now, Captain, Vulcans never rely on dumb luck."

"Of course not, Mr. Spock." Kirk, a little rattled at the prospect of their plan, looks for reassurance. "Dr Marcus? Sound logical to you?"

Not expecting the question, she simply agrees. "Yeah, sure. That sounds...logical."

"Great. We'll just beam onto the most logical point into a weapon we know nothing about. Should go smoothly," Kirk exclaims.

Coyote adds, "Assuming we time the beam out correctly."

Kirk looks at her, his facial expression letting her know that she's not helping.

The party of four reach the shuttle bay and climb into the shuttle. Kirk and Coyote sit in the front two seats, while Spock and Dr Marcus sit behind them. Kirk instructs, "Alright Spock, can you get those coordinates punched in?"

"Affirmative Captain. I'll also lay in our trajectory and instruct the computer to increase speed once we've cleared the *Enterprise*. At that time, I recommend we head to the transporter pads in the rear and let the system take care of the rest."

"Sounds like a plan," Coyote quips.

Kirk radios to Sulu for confirmation, "Mr. Sulu, we're ready to head out. You all set there?"

"Affirmative Captain. All courses synced. You're cleared for departure."

"Thanks Mr. Sulu. And remember, you've got a small contingent of the fleet still there. So be sure to use them."

"Roger that, Captain."

Kirk mutters, "Battle of the Little Bighorn, here we go."

Coyote corrects him, "I think you mean Battle of the Greasy Grass."

Kirk looks at her, not used to being called out. She smiles as Dr Marcus asks from behind Kirk, "You always put this much trust in Spock?"

"He hasn't let me down yet."

Carol turns to Spock and clarifies, "And you're absolutely certain you can get us on there safely?"

He addresses Dr Marcus matter-of-factly, "Not at all, Doctor."

Her face tenses up as Kirk turns around to reassure her, "But he believes his logic is good on the ship's design. Right, Spock?"

"As good as it can be without having any knowledge of the schematics, Captain."

Kirk turns back to Dr Marcus and sheepishly comforts her, "See?"

The shuttle takes flight and emerges from the rear of the *Enterprise*, turning quickly so as to not be noticed by the crew on the Klingon weapon. In seconds, the *Enterprise* begins heading straight for the weapon, accelerating rapidly, the shuttle craft hidden in the rear. As the *Enterprise* races closer and closer to the weapon, Grishik is in an unusual place, struggling to understand their plan. In a matter of seconds, the weapon is now filling the *Enterprise's* viewscreen. The *Enterprise* rises upward in a steep cut in its trajectory, revealing the shuttle craft. Grishik's eyes widen, as he whispers, "No." The shuttle craft passes effortlessly through the shields before impacting with the craft. A massive explosion ensues, though it leaves little damage on the whole of the immense artillery ship. The bridge crew on the *Enterprise* stares and waits for confirmation.

"How will we know if they made it?" Iraja wonders.

"We won't," Uhura answers. "Not until the weapon is deactivated."

Sulu chimes in, "We have to assume they were successful. Until they complete their mission, our job is to buy them as much time as possible."

Chapter Six

In a large chamber toward the back of the interior of the weapon, four transporter signals fill a large open space on the floor. Large conduits run erratically through the space, their density increasing closer to the walls, shaded from any light. Four Klingons watch the transporter beams in bewilderment. Once the beaming has finished, the party of four are staring the four Klingons in the face with disruptors pointed directly at them.

In preparation for any potential danger, the away team already had their phasers pulled.

Both groups are now staring at each other in a drawn stalemate.

Kirk locks eyes with a Klingon, the two realizing the circumstances simultaneously. Kirk smirks, as does the Klingon. The rest of the party puts the pieces together as they all drop their weapons. One Klingon says as he begins approaching the crew, "You better make this a worthy battle." Both parties jump into action toward each other, a brawl ensuing in the open chamber.

Grishik is impatiently fiddling with his dagger, inquiring of Skarn, "Anything?"

Skarn is operating a scan of the vessel, reporting back, "Nothing yet. The size of the weapon requires more time." As he finishes speaking a light flashes on his screen. He looks up at Grishik and reassuringly relays, "We have them."

Grishik relaxes as he exclaims, "A valiant attempt, Kirk." He turns his attention back to Skarn. "Is it ready to fire?"

"Ten more minutes."

"Good. Let's go greet our guests."

In the deep of the weapon chamber, the away team is fighting their way from the Klingons. Coyote and Dr Marcus have gotten the best of their enemies, while Spock finishes knocking out his opponent. They all turn their attention to Kirk, who's about to be bested when Spock walks up behind the Klingon and casually puts him out with a Vulcan neck pinch. Kirk watches the body fall to the ground and asks Spock, "You ever gonna show me how to do that?"

"It would be futile. Humans cannot achieve the proper alignment."

"Fair enough."

Coyote keeps them on course. "Come on, let's shut this thing off."

Kirk is helped up to his feet as a familiar voice calls out from the shadows. "If only it were that easy, Captain Coyote."

Out of the shadows both Grishik and Skarn walk toward them, Grishik's dagger clutched in his right fist. He speaks again, "I'm not surprised you made it this far Kirk, but you," pointing his dagger to Coyote, "I didn't expect you to still be sticking around. You're quite wily after all."

"You'll find I'm full of surprises," Coyote snaps back.

"It would appear so," Grishik acknowledges. "You may yet prove to be a worthy opponent."

"What's with that dagger anyway?" Dr Marcus inquires. "It's not exactly standard Klingon issue from what I've seen."

"Oh this? This is simply my weapon of choice. It's quick, precise, and deadly. Much more so than a bat'leth, when used properly."

Coyote gets a defiant smirk on her face as she retorts, "That's probably because you're too short to use a bat'leth properly."

Dr Marcus and Kirk let out an instinctive chuckle. Proud of her newfound confidence and strength, Coyote's smirk grows without breaking eye contact with Grishik.

Grishik's smugness fades into anger. Ready to engage his opponents, he puts an end to the conversation. "Enough. It's time to take what we came for. Your heads will look perfect next to my trophies back on Evum."

Grishik lunges at Coyote but the other three defend her as Skarn now engages with the others as well. Seeing a window of opportunity, Spock, now behind Skarn, reaches up to apply a Vulcan neck pinch. Seconds later, Skarn only turns around smiling, his muscles too big for the technique to be properly applied. Stunned, Spock can only muster saying, "Fascinating," before he's knocked backward by a blow from Skarn.

On the *Enterprise* bridge, Sulu is getting impatient. "Uhura," he begins, "any way of knowing what's going on inside that ship?"

"Unfortunately not, Sulu. I can't get through their shields."

"Well, we have to assume that as long as it's still there, Kirk and the others are still trying to figure out how to disarm it."

"Assuming they made it on," Irajia chimes in.

"We have to assume they did," Sulu replies. "But that doesn't mean we can't try to buy them some time anyway. Uhura, radio the fleet. Tell them regardless of the impact, we're going to begin making attack runs. It could wind up making a difference in a critical time. Irajia, it's time to break out some of those fearless piloting skills that got you into that chair. You ready?"

Nervously, she answers, "Ready as I'll ever be."

She looks over to Uhura for support, who nods and says, "You got this."

"Iraja, attack pattern Sulu delta theta. Let's give them a little distraction."

"You got it, Captain."

The *Enterprise* begins maneuvering in a corkscrew pattern around the weapon, while they and the other few ships begin firing phasers and torpedoes throughout their run.

As the *Enterprise* swings back around for another pass, a fleet of short-range fighter vessels emerges from the back of the enemy spaceship to engage with the Federation ships.

"Evasive maneuvers!" Sulu shouts. "Uhura, target one at a time and fire at will!"

Iraja immediately begins steering the ship directly through the fighters as Uhura targets the closest one, unleashing phasers on it and finally a torpedo, destroying it as they pass through, though rocked from other fighters.

"Damage report!" Sulu commands.

"Shields at eighty-five percent," Uhura shouts back.

"Iraja, Uhura, give 'em hell." Sulu commands.

Iraja begins steering the ship back toward the other fighters, maneuvering the *Enterprise* in a dogfight unlike Uhura and Sulu have seen before. Uhura has taken over at Tactical, and while Iraja's piloting skills are as rapid as they are unique, Uhura and Sulu are completely in sync with her as she approaches the remaining fighters for another pass.

Kirk, Coyote, and Dr Marcus are keeping Grishik and Skarn occupied while Spock has escaped to a terminal to try to initiate a shutdown sequence.

Struggling with Grishik, Kirk shouts over to Spock, "Make it fast, Spock."

Spock, perplexed at Kirk's words, calmly replies, "I was already well aware of the urgency, Captain. There's no need to reiterate the obvious."

As Grishik's dagger inches toward Kirk's throat during their struggle, a massive surge of energy explodes in a nearby larger chamber, connected to the one they're occupying. The vibration knocks everyone to the ground as the room is filled with a green glow from the firing sequence, entering its final phase of powering up. In the confusion, Kirk sees Grishik's dagger in front of his face and makes a quick grab for it, jumping up and joining Coyote and Dr Marcus. As the two Klingons rise, Grishik nods to Skarn, prompting him to abandon the fight and head toward Spock. Putting the pieces together,

Kirk yells to Spock, at which point he turns around to engage Skarn. As a timer on the control panel passes under four minutes, Skarn easily overpowers Spock as Kirk and Dr Marcus rush over to help him. Coyote, meanwhile, takes her turn with Grishik.

Using Grishik's dagger, Kirk goes to stab Skarn in his upper body, but is met with a large hand around his throat, while the other hand continues to hold down Spock. Unsure of what to do, Dr Marcus feels helpless as she watches Skarn bring Kirk and Spock to a ledge, the immense energy stream in the center of the weapon pulsing in front of them. As he reaches the end of the ledge, he tells Kirk and Spock, "This is where your legacy ends."

As he's about to throw them over, he hears the background noise of the energy surge power down and go silent while the light from the beam fades. Skarn looks around, dropping Kirk and Spock to the ground as he looks back toward the panel, seeing Dr Marcus standing there, giving him a defiant stare. Grishik also stops his fighting with Coyote to evaluate the surroundings.

"No!" he yells. "Not on my watch!"

Grishik runs back over to the control panel and effortlessly shoves Dr Marcus to the ground, reinitializing the countdown sequence. Coyote runs to help her up as Kirk and Spock are still regaining their strength, Skarn leaving them to help Grishik. Within seconds, the beam fires back up, the countdown sequence now only at three minutes remaining.

Both Coyote and Dr Marcus begin attacking Grishik while Spock and Kirk regain their strength to engage with Skarn.

More Klingon fighters have emerged as the valiant fleet continues to take heavy damage.

A large explosion rocks the bridge of the *Enterprise*. Sulu shouts over the chaos, "Report!"

Uhura shouts back, "Shields at forty-five percent!"

Sulu gets a call from Dr McCoy, answering bluntly, "Dr McCoy, what is it?"

"Just a reminder, I am trying to treat the injured down here, and all this rocking and bumping isn't helping."

"Thanks Doc. We'll take that into consideration."

Realizing the odds are stacked against him, Sulu begins devising a new plan.

Noticing Sulu's pensive expression, Irajā also cooks up something new.

"Sulu...sir," Irajā begins. "I have an idea."

“Let’s hear it.”

“We have eight ships, so we all scatter into a large diameter, but leave two or three in the center as bait, maybe looking like they’re still fighting, but easy targets for the fighters. That concentrates the fighters into a relatively small area for the remaining ships to close in on and attack.”

Uhura questions her logic, “And potentially sacrifice our own ships?”

“If we don’t do something soon, none of us will make it. We can use the ships that still have the strongest shields in place.”

“Quick thinking, Iraja! Let’s do it. Uhura, get the word out.”

“Aye sir.”

A broad view of the battle reveals two Federation ships sticking close together while the others appear to retreat in separate directions. The remaining Klingon fighters close in on the two ships, firing extensively.

Sulu watches on the viewscreen as their formation tightens. “Now!”

The remaining Federation ships race back to the action, weapons blazing at the fighters. Multiple explosions light up the empty space as one fighter after another explodes, the remaining fighters regrouping away from the action. With one Federation ship left dead in the water, the others regroup for a more evenly matched fight.

Sulu evaluates the new scenario. “Alright, let’s see if we can finish them off, once and for all.”

Fighting together, Coyote and Dr Marcus have found themselves oddly in sync with each other, beginning to make significant progress in taking down Grishik. Kirk and Spock are struggling with Skarn, who has finally bested them. Kirk’s struggling to get back up after his latest blow from Skarn, while Spock is lying on the floor, unconscious.

Coyote and Dr Marcus are nearly about to have Grishik beaten when Skarn surprises them from behind, throwing each in two different directions. Coyote lands beside the main control panel while Dr Marcus falls between Grishik and Skarn.

Knowing she can’t take on both of them, she braces for the worst.

In the next second, a shocked look appears on Skarn’s face. Grishik notices, and too out of breath to speak, he gets a bewildered look on his face. Skarn says nothing, but falls to his knees, then to the floor next to Dr Marcus. In his place, Kirk is looking down at the body, Grishik’s dagger protruding from his back.

The action sends Grishik fuming as he looks up from his friend’s body. Seeing past Kirk, he notices Coyote at the control panel. He shouts, “Enough of this! None of you will stop me from fulfilling justice!” He pulls out his

disruptor and points it directly at Coyote who, seeing the disruptor, begins running from the control panel. Her actions prove futile, as he fires directly at her. Her comrades watch as her body falls lifelessly to the ground. Kirk and Dr Marcus are horrified, watching a captain, just beginning to hit her stride, lying still, unbreathing, on the floor. They look back at Grishik, infuriated. By now, Spock has regained his strength and is walking toward them, noticing Coyote's body on the floor.

Grishik points his disruptor to Kirk, then Dr Marcus, then Spock. Realizing he's just initiated a deeper resolve within his opponents, he nervously points the disruptor back and forth between all of them, not sure of who he should target first. Within seconds, Kirk's fist meets his face, completely taking Grishik by surprise. Dr Marcus delivers a powerful kick to his chest, knocking the wind out of him. Seeing his friends have the situation under control, Spock heads back to the control panel to shut down the beam once again. Dr Marcus and Kirk continue to disable Grishik, eventually leaving him unconscious on the floor.

The two rush back to the control panel and check in with Spock. Kirk asks, "Spock, how's it coming?" The two notice the timer reading 45 seconds and continuing to count down.

"Another 30 seconds, Captain," he begins, "and we'll have it shut down for good."

Unaware to the trio, Grishik wakes back up quicker than expected. He rises to his feet and begins approaching them, ready to put an end to their annoyances once and for all. As he's walking toward them, his disruptor once again clinched in his fist, he begins to raise it, finally shouting, "Kirk!"

The three turn around shocked to see him up already, about to put an end to their momentary triumph. Before he can fire though, all four are surprised to hear footsteps running toward them. Out of the shadows, Coyote emerges in a full sprint directly to Grishik, closing the gap between them remarkably fast, running right past her own lifeless body. With everyone's jaw dropped, especially Grishik, it buys her just enough time to run the last few meters, at which point she pulls out his dagger and jabs it straight into his chest.

The impact sends a shock through his system. Instinctively, his disruptor drops from his hand, as both hands work in vain to remove the dagger, but he's already too weak. The precise penetration leaves him speechless and dying, as he looks up at her. She takes this opportunity to tell him, "One final trophy for this hideous dagger. And now, we'll go reclaim our land."

Grishik falls to the floor, almost right next to the body of Skarn, still lying face down. In that moment, the green glow of the weapon fades once again with the noises.

They all turn their attention back to Spock.

Kirk asks, "Spock, any way to disable this for good?"

Spock replies, "Unfortunately not, Captain. Instead, I've disabled the shields and filled the remainder of the ship with a gas that should put the rest of the crew to sleep. Once we beam out, we can put the Klingon crew in the brig, then destroy the weapon with a series of standard photon torpedoes."

Impressed with Spock's foresight and initiative, Kirk responds with a simple, "Well done, Spock."

All three then turn to Coyote, completely bewildered.

"And you," Kirk begins.

"Georgia," Dr Marcus utters. "How the hell are you alive?"

Smiling, she reaches toward the ground and retrieves her hollector, saying only, "A little Federation ingenuity." Kirk and Dr Marcus are shocked, as Dr Marcus exclaims, "A hollector!"

Kirk begins to speak simultaneously with her, but forgot what the device was called, and stumbles over the term.

"Captain Coyote," Spock states, "it would appear your ingenuity and creativity will make you a formidable captain in the coming years."

"Thanks Spock," she says proudly.

Kirk wonders, "Hey how do I get one of those things?"

Coyote answers, "Science vessels only, Kirk."

Spock, not one for idle chatter, gets everyone back on track. "Captain, perhaps it would be prudent to beam off this ship and continue completing the mission."

"Yes, of course, Mr. Spock. Thanks for keeping us on track." Kirk pulls out his communicator and activates it. "Mr. Sulu. May we request a beam out?"

"Captain!" he hears back. "It's great to hear your voice. We'll get you out of there right away."

Home once more on the *Enterprise*, the group rushes to sickbay. Though limping and badly bruised, they're more interested in checking on Marlotte. As they enter the room, they see an empty sickbay aside from Dr McCoy, sorting a few items. They all get a horrified look on their faces.

"Bones," Kirk begins. "Where's Marlotte?"

Frustrated, Dr McCoy sighs. The others expect the worst. "I told her she wasn't ready, but once everyone heard that you were successful, Semil

insisted on having a drink with her. So, they're in the mess hall, likely with a bottle of Andorian Ale."

They all breathe a sigh of relief as Dr Marcus says, "You know, Bones, you could have started with, 'She's alive.'"

"Well of course she's alive! But it looks like you four need to stay for a little."

"Not now, Bones," Kirk responds.

They all continue away from sickbay, as Dr McCoy is left to mutter to himself, "Yeah why listen to your doctor? You're just limping down a hallway covered in gashes and bruises. Why waste time with treatment? Just leave your doctor to talk to himself."

The four enter the mess hall where they see Marlotte back to her usual self at a table with Semil, Scotty, and Vyorn, a bottle of Andorian Ale between them. They reconnect around a large table as Sulu, Iraja, and Uhura also walk in to join them.

Kirk turns to Iraja and says, "From what little I've already heard, it sounds like you might be a future captain one day, Iraja."

Nervously, she responds, "Oh, I don't know, Captain. I just did what was needed in the moment."

Kirk looks more deeply to her, instructing, "Iraja, that's called command."

Her eyes light up, having been validated and seen by the captain she's come to admire.

Captain Coyote takes the opportunity to address Dr Marcus' concerns about working under her.

"Dr Marcus," she begins, "I know our original mission went off the rails a little bit and so it wasn't quite what we signed up for. So, I'll still completely understand if you're ready to resign your commission and steer away from Starfleet."

"While it's true that Starfleet took my family away..." As she starts to reply, Coyote begins to accept the worst. "...I'd be pretty stubborn to pass up the opportunity to join a new one."

Coyote's face lights up as she responds with a big hug. Once done embracing, she says, "I know it technically hasn't been that long, but I really can't imagine anyone else as my first officer."

"I can't either," Dr Marcus replies. "Plus, I kind of enjoy fighting to promote life versus the opposite."

Dr McCoy finally walks in to join the party, saying to Scotty, "Everyone left me alone in sickbay just talking to myself."

Scotty pats Dr McCoy on the shoulder and says, "Well, glad to have you both here."

At that moment, Kirk walks over to address Dr Marcus. "Carol, can we talk?"

The two step aside as Kirk starts off, "Look, Carol. I totally get why you're bitter about Starfleet."

"Jim—"

"And I get it. Especially after all this now."

"Jim wait—"

"No, Carol. I owe you an apology. I shouldn't have forced you back into somewhere you don't want to be. And if you want to leave, that's your decision. Not mine."

"Jim, I'm staying on board as Coyote's first officer."

"You are?"

"Yeah, we just talked about it."

Eavesdropping, Coyote adds, "Just don't let it feed that ego of yours, Kirk."

Coyote and Dr Marcus laugh with each other as Kirk's face is covered with confusion. "Ego?"

As they start walking away, Kirk asks again, "Seriously, what ego?"

Seconds later, Captain Coyote offers one final toast. "To Hasen, who inspired our victory."

The group, overcome with bittersweet emotion, raise their glasses and continue their celebration.

Epilogue

Two weeks have passed since the attack, and the *Enterprise* is escorting the *USS Moab* once again back to Evum, Vyorin rejoining her original crew back on the bridge of the *Moab*, as have Kirk and Spock for the final approach. Sulu, meanwhile, was left temporarily in command of the *Enterprise*.

"There it is," Coyote begins. "Magnify." Evum appears on the viewscreen, and the entire bridge is transfixed, endeared to the planet that just caused so much turmoil. Zooming in on a meadow, she adds, "I think that looks like an ideal location for Hasen base."

"Yeah," Semil adds, "I think he'd like that area."

"Where's the Klingon base?" Kirk asks.

"Coming into view now," Marlotte answers.

The charred black region, still visible from space, appears as a large scar on the planet's otherwise pristine surface.

"Anyone been there recently?" Coyote asks.

"No sign of any activity," Vyorin begins, "but also no sign of weapons fire either."

"How's that possible?" Dr Marcus wonders. "What else would have caused that?"

Spock joins Vyorin over at the science station to assist. "Confirmed. Aside from minor phaser fire weeks ago, there is no evidence of any weapon ever being fired or detonated at that location, nor anywhere near it."

"Well then, why is it charred like that?" Semil asks.

Spock, still deep in the data, finally responds. "I believe I have an answer."

"Well, can you share it with us, Spock?" Kirk requests.

"Captain, the landscape reacts at an accelerated rate to resource extraction, causing the flora and fauna nearby to become malnourished. As such, what we're seeing is the remnants of the decay from the landscape that was affected by the ore extraction."

"Translation?" Marlotte follows up.

"It's the ore the Klingons were mining," Coyote clarifies. "What he's saying is that what they were extracting starved the landscape and disrupted all the nutrient flow."

"Precisely."

"Like the old strip mines on Earth," Dr Marcus adds, "or all the crude oil extraction."

"A fair analogy, though apparently with much more rapid decay on Evum. Likewise, in studying the ore more extensively the past couple of

weeks, it appears to amplify properties around it, likely a contributing factor to the decay. If this ore were to be applied to shields or weaponry, for example, it would greatly amplify their power output.”

Kirk, putting the story together, concludes, “Which is how Grishik was able to have such powerful shields and weapons.”

“And teleport through ours,” Spock adds.

Dr Marcus continues, “And if we were to do the same...”

“...it would ultimately destroy this planet, and all the life on it,” Coyote finishes.

“Not unlike the pace Earth was on, even well into the 21st century,” Vyorin contributes.

Feeling guilty about potentially working on an otherwise undisturbed and pristine world, Dr Marcus remarks, “If only there was some way we could terraform a lifeless moon or something, instead of disrupting an existing one.”

Kirk walks over and puts his arm around Dr Marcus as he declares, “That would certainly be a game-changer.” She leans into him, the group staring at the viewscreen.