



# Dickess



*Three Queens  
and  
the Ace of Spades*

*by  
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# **Dickess: Three Queens and the Ace of Spades**

By MD Bruffy 2016©

## **Chapter One**

**Stardate: 48653.06**

The redhead in the center seat watched as her new first officer stood by his former station, looking over the shoulder of the crewman that now sat there. "Status," she ordered.

"They are maintaining course and speed," he replied.

"They appear to have reached their maximum output on their engine systems."

"Go to Warp Seven," another voice ordered. "Overtake them."

The redhead looked to her left, where an identical redhead was seated. The only difference between the two was the first redhead was the captain. The other was an admiral.

The hum of increased power could be heard even on this bridge of a *Sovereign*- class starship as it tore through space at ever faster speeds.

The golden skinned first officer looked back at the admiral. "We are now at Warp Seven."

At that point, the crewman seated at the navigation console spoke up. "Captain, we're picking up some kind of distortion forming ahead of the renegade fleet."

But it was the admiral that slowly stood. "My god..."

The captain was beside her in an instant. "What is it?"

"Aunt T'Pel was right. Somehow, they've gotten their hands on a Gateway Device."

The crewman spoke up again. "All twenty ships in the fleet are changing course toward the distortion."

The first officer noticed something else and leaned over the console. His captain noticed. "What is it Data?"

"There are unusual readings inside the distortion," he replied. He moved his own hands over the console. "They do not conform to our records for the Gateway Device- "

Captain Tamera Kirk stepped toward him. "Talk, Data."

"The readings conform almost exactly with those of the Ta'Laren Rip we used against the Borg six months ago."

Admiral Janet Kirk traded glances with her sister as she spoke. "Are you saying they've figured out how to merge the two?"

Data tilted his head slightly. "At the very least, they have found a way to use the Gateway to open a portal into Other Space."

The navigator spoke up once more. "Captain, they're entering the Rip."

"Maintain course and speed," Jan ordered.

Tamera looked at her like she'd gone crazy. "Jan- "

Her sister met her gaze and cut her off. "We have to find out what they're up to and stop it. We can't do that if we stay on this side of the gateway."

She looked to the navigator. "Maintain course and speed.

"Follow them in."

## **January 21, 2516**

Dylus Four

The lagoon and its beach were just as Dillion remembered . As she stood off to one side in her own bikini and wind breaker, she smiled at the sight of Jin



watching over Ashley as the three-month-old played in the sand. Her smile grew at the feel of her husband's arms sliding around her waist. He sniffed her hair as he spoke. "You smell nice."

She laughed. "All I did was go for a swim." She turned to look past him toward where the *Defender* was sitting with its ramp down. "Where's Megan?"

"Still on board," the ship's doctor replied.

"We need to get moving again in a few more days," Dillion stated. "We may not see another beach for months." She stepped out of her husband's arms as she headed for the ship. "Her engines can wait awhile."

She headed for the three-deck scout ship with the intention of dragging her young partner out into the sunshine by her ponytail if she had to.

But once she reached the cargo deck, a low rumbling noise was heard. She looked around for the source as the rumble exploded into a thunderous explosion of light, a blinding, eye-searing eruption that washed out everything-

And all Miles could do was stare at the spot where the *Defender* had been.

Jin had picked up Ashley the moment it all began.  
Now, the android turned to its only remaining owner.  
“Doctor- ?”

But Miles could only shake his head. “I have no idea, Jin.  
But until something brings them back, we’re stranded.”

\*

Next thing Dillion was aware of, was holding onto the ship’s gangway for all she was worth as the atmosphere was sucked out the open ramp. A gale-force wind whipped through the ship until the ramp finally closed with a thump and Dillion fell to the steps.

“Dillion!” Megan came running down the gangway and was beside her in an instant. “Dillion, are you okay?”

“I...don’t know yet,” the raven-haired female gasped.

“I saw that bright light on the screens of the emergency console in Engineering,” the blond said as Dillion sat up.

“I closed the ramp as soon as I could.”

Dillion nodded as Megan helped her up. "Let's get up to the flight deck and see if we can find out what happened."

But once there, all they could see out the canopy was stars.

Dylus Four was nowhere to be found.

The computer spoke up then. "Dillion, none of the stellar geography I'm scanning matches any of our star charts."

Megan had more bad news as she checked the console. "Wouldn't matter if it did." She looked to Dillion. "Our engines are dead. Everything else seems to work except them."

There was a bleeping noise, and the computer spoke once more. "Dillion, we are receiving a message. It's not on an Alliance channel."

The two females traded glances. "Put it through."

"This is the *ASC Apollo* to scout ship. Please identify yourself."

Megan looked to her friend. "Dillion, no ship in the



Alliance uses that registry.”

The senior of the two shrugged. “At least they’re willing to talk- and right now we need help getting to the nearest planet.”

She reached for the console. “This is Captain Stephanie Dillion aboard the *ALEC Defender*. We seem to be having a problem with our engine system. Right now, we can’t get any power to them.”

“*Apollo* to *Defender*, understood. With permission, we will lock on with our MFD<sup>i</sup> and tow you to Dragoon.”

The two females traded glances.

Dragoon?

## **Chapter Two**

**SY: 1002.430209**

ASF Central Command

Chief Aierowen Dickess glanced around as she entered the office. As she did so, ASF Chief Eppilene looked up from the file she was reading and leaned back in her desk chair as the office's lights reflected off of her ruby-red crystalline form. "Your call sounded urgent," Arrow told her. "Something happen to Cindy?"

"No. she's fine," the Zolgarian stated.

"Then what's going on?"

"That is what I would like to know." Eppilene indicated the file. "The STC reports that a large ship is requesting permission to assume orbit." She met her friend's gaze. "Arrow, according to our scans, it is at least five times larger than any ship we have."

The Dregan's eyebrows rose at that. "Do we have anything nearby?"

Eppilene nodded. “Three cruisers. I have sent word for them to come. But if this alien’s firepower matches its size, they will be no match for it.”

Arrow nodded. “If they have anything resembling a captain, request a meeting- here at Central Command. That way if this *does* turn into a fight, there won’t be any civilians involved.”

Her superior officer nodded. “Agreed.”

The intercom buzzed for attention and Eppilene reached for it. “Yes?”

“Chief, the STC reports that the *Apollo* is coming in towing a scout ship with an unknown registry.”

Arrow met her friend’s gaze. “Is someone throwing a party without telling us?”

### The *Defender*

Dillion- now in a blouse and slacks- watched along with Megan as a ‘service vehicle’ towed them toward the surface and an obvious spaceport. “Megan, get to work

on the engines in case we have to get out of here in a hurry.”

The younger female looked over at her. “You think this place is dangerous?”

“Something brought us here,” Dillion stated. “Until we find out what that something was, *everything* is dangerous.” Then she noticed something outside.

“They’re turning away from the spaceport.” She activated the communication system. “This is the *Defender*. Why are we turning away from the spaceport?”

She looked to the blond. “Is the forward laser working?”

Megan checked and nodded.

Dillion activated the system and the laser’s exterior hatch irised open. She then activated the comm system once more. “This is the *Defender*. You have one minute to reply before we open fire.”

Then, before anything else could be said or done, a voice seemed to appear in their minds. “Captain Dillion, I am Chief Aierowen Dickess, Second-in-command of the Alliance Security Force. There are several pieces to the current situation. Please, you are not under arrest or in

any danger. You're being brought to our Central Command runway. I will meet you there- alone.

"Please believe me when I tell you there's no reason for this to lead to a useless fight." Dillion and Megan traded glances.

Then Dillion closed the laser hatch.

## ASF Central Command

Arrow stood beside the runway- alone like she promised. Eppilene wasn't crazy about the idea. But Arrow had sensed confusion and a little fear in their guests' minds and knew this was the right approach. The fact that the *Defender's* captain closed her weapons' hatch proved she was right.

Now, she watched as the service tug from the STC brought the *Defender* in. She was a large scout- one of the bigger ones Arrow had seen. Once on the ground, the tug released her and took to the sky once more, returning to the STC.

It was a moment before the boarding ramp came down. Arrow slowly approached the foot of it and looked inside. "Permission to come aboard?"

A loudspeaker somewhere on the outer hull came to life. "Permission granted. You'll be met on Deck Two."

Arrow looked around as she carefully stepped into the ship. She'd been in this situation too many times over the years to move quickly. She found herself in what was obviously a cargo hold. Spotting the gangway- it was rather hard to miss, she glanced up it, before she set foot on the steps. She came up slowly- having no desire to spook the crew into shooting her. But when she reached Deck Two, all she found were two apparently human females.

The dark-haired one tapped her own chest. "Stephanie Dillion." She then nodded toward the blond. "Megan."

Arrow nodded. "Aierowen Dickess."

Dillion watched this alien as she spoke. "Do you have any idea what's going on, Chief? That was your title, wasn't it?"

“My rank actually,” Arrow replied. Then she shrugged. “And no, I don’t. All we *do* know right now, is that another- larger ship- will be assuming orbit anytime now and we have no idea who they are.”

The *Defender’s* captain turned to its engineer. “Stay here and get those engines working.”

Megan looked from her to Arrow and back. “Dillion- “  
Dillion raised her hand, cutting her off. “We need those engines working if we’re ever going to get home- and I for one intend to get home.”

Megan looked at Arrow again. “At least take a radio with you.”

Arrow nodded. “I have no problem with that- in fact, I’d expect it.”

The blond headed for the gangway. “I’ll go get one.” A few moments later, she was watching as Dillion and Arrow headed down the ramp.

Once they were clear of the *Defender*, Arrow looked up and pointed. “Look.”



Dillion's eyes went wide as she took in the sight.

"Impossible. They don't exist."

Then they both said it at the same time. "A Next Generation shuttlecraft!?" They

traded glances.

Arrow got over her shock first. "Star Trek?"

Dillion shook her head. "Nova Trek."

Before they could pursue it further, the shuttle had touched down, and Dillion pointed. "Look at the registry."

Arrow's eyebrows rose. "FSS?"

"Federal Starship," Dillion explained.

Arrow glanced over at her. "There's no Federation in your...Nova Trek?"

Dillion shook her head. "Federal Union of Planets."

Arrow looked at her, the shuttle, then back at her.

"We'll have to compare notes later if we have a chance."

The hatch of the shuttle opened, and they watched as three people got out. Dillion indicated one with a nod.

“That one’s Admiral Janet Kirk. The other redhead’s her sister Captain Tamera Kirk.”

“I recognize the yellow guy from ‘Star Trek’,” Arrow said. “Commander Data.” She glanced at Dillion. “But ‘Kirk’? This is getting more confusing as it goes along.”

“Tell me about it.”

By that time, the new arrivals had reached them. One redhead indicated herself and the other. “I’m Admiral Janet Kirk. This is my sister, Captain Tamera Kirk and her First Officer, Commander Data.”

“Chief Aierowen Dickess.”

“Captain Stephanie Dillion.”

Arrow raised her hand slightly. “Excuse me, Admiral, but do you know a James Tiberius Kirk?”

The sisters traded shocked glances. Then, when Jan spoke, the confusion was clear in both her face and tone. “How in the hell do you know Jim?”

Arrow took a deep breath. “I think we’d better move this conversation to some place private. I think we all have a

lot to tell each other.” She then took her own radio from her belt. “Arrow to DC.”

At the eastern end of the island, on Arrow’s private runway, the flight deck of a scout ship more streamlined than the *Defender* came to life. “DC here, Arrow.”

“I’m at Central Command. We have guests. Come and pick us up.”

“Yes, Ma’am. Estimated arrival is in ten minutes.” The *Darlla T.*’s engines came to life then and within minutes, her orange and white form was barreling down the runway and rising into the sky.

### **Chapter Three**

With ASF Chief Eppilene along, the *Darlla T.* had no sooner touched down at the Salmak Cove runway than Dillion's radio came to life. "Megan to Dillion."

Dillion glanced at her companions as she answered. "Dillion here."

Aboard the *Defender*, Megan was standing on the flight deck as she spoke. "I found out what happened to the engines. Something totally drained the power cells. I'm recharging them now. Should have them back up to full power in about five minutes."

Arrow touched Dillion's arm as everyone began to disembark. "Have her bring the *Defender* here. There's plenty of room."

The Human nodded. "Megan, once you're done, bring him to the east end of the island. You'll find a house with a runway just across the street. We have permission to set him down here."

"Understood. We'll be there in about ten minutes."

As Dillion replaced her radio, she followed as Arrow led the group across the street and through the carport to the deck at the back of the house, where two young girls were clearly dealing with homework. "Vicky? Michel?" Arrow nodded toward the people with her. "I'm afraid I need the deck for a while."

Both girls- both humans- began gathering up their things. "No problem, Mom. We can use the den." "Do me a favor and head off Alexander, okay?" The two nodded as they headed into the house.

"They call you 'Mom'?" Dillion asked.

"Adopted," Arrow answered. "And I love them just as much as my natural children."

Megan arrived soon after and as soon as everyone was seated around the deck, the explanations began. Dillion went first and the more she said, the wider Tam's eyes got. "...TV series?"

The *Defender's* captain nodded. "The original series went for three seasons and several movies."

Arrow looked to Jan. "The same with James Kirk."

The sisters traded glances and then Jan told everyone the story of the Battle of Starbase 98<sup>1</sup>. “...He and his *Enterprise* returned to their universe when the fighting was over.” She then looked to Data. “That’s classified, Mister Data. We three are only ones left now that know the real story.”

Arrow shook her head and told them her tale of the *Enterprise*, the Maskott and Q<sup>2</sup>. Then she looked to Jan. “It’s too bad there’s no way to confirm whether or not our James Kirks are one and the same.”

Eppilene had listened to all of this without really understanding it. These sorts of things never happened on Zolga-5. She sighed as she remembered that in this part of the Alliance they seemed to happen all too often. “So, what happened to bring *this* situation about?” she asked.

Jan took a deep breath. “We were on a mission to seek out new races and if they were advanced enough to have FTL<sup>3</sup> technology, we were to make contact and try to talk

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<sup>1</sup> \* “Nova Trek: Books 5,6 and 7- “A Tale of Two Captains”

<sup>2</sup> Star Trek/Dickens: Where No Dregan Has Gone Before

<sup>3</sup> Faster Than Light

them into joining the Union. Then our aunt called with intelligence reports that Romulan Renegades had stolen a Gateway Device- the same kind of device that allowed Jim to come into our universe.

“We were called back and ordered to patrol the Romulan Neutral Zone in order to find these renegades and shut down whatever their plans were. Their fleet of twenty ships ran as soon as we spotted them.

“We found out the hard way that they *did* have a Gateway Device. But they had modified it to trigger what we call the ‘Ta’laren Rip’. Certain weapons frequencies can actually tear open a ‘rip’ in the fabric of Space-time. We call the existence on the other side of the portal ‘Other Space’. For years, our scientists thought it was just another type of wormhole.

“But once inside, the renegades changed course- something no one had ever done before. The result was a blinding discharge of energy that wiped out everything else.

“When we could make sense of things again, we were just outside sensor range of one of your outposts.” Jan



glanced around. "Dragoon's the first planet we've made contact with."

Arrow thought for a moment. "Admiral, it's always been my understanding that each plane of existence is self-contained. What if your 'Other Space' is actually the space between the planes? When the Romulans changed course, they penetrated our plane and the energy discharge randomly struck Captain Dillion's plane, hitting the *Defender*."

Dillion nodded. "And dumping us here with drained engines."

Megan shook her head. "Talk about involved."

Data spoke up then. "There is something else." Everyone looked to him as he indicated the tricorder he'd been using. "I have been recording our conversation for the ship's records, and I have been picking up something else."

Tam had the question. "What is it, Data?"

"Several years ago, when Worf was a member of the crew, he became involved in a situation in which he was... 'bounced' from one quantum reality to another. It

was only by matching his quantum flux readings with the correct reality that we were able to recover him<sup>4</sup>.” He indicated the tricorder. “In this case, however, it is not quantum flux readings I am scanning, but the more basic universal harmonics. In fact, I am scanning three distinct sets- Ours, Captain Dillion and Megan and Chief Dickess’.”

“So, what does that mean?” Dillion asked.

“In both cases the Flux readings and the Harmonics are unique to each reality-“He looked around at the group. “And apparently to each plane of existence.”

Jan leaned forward in her seat. “Our readings aren’t blending in with the plane we’re in. That sounds like we’re still connected to the ones we belong in.”

Tam looked from Data to Jan. “But that would only be possible if- “

Jan nodded. “The rip never closed behind us. For some reason, it’s still open.” Megan looked around at everyone. “So, what do we do?”

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<sup>4</sup> ST: TNG: Parallels

Jan met her gaze as she answered. "We seem to have two problems: The Romulans and the Rip. These Romulans are renegades- the last dregs of the one militant organization the Empire ever had. They've turned their back on the Empire's peaceful co-existence with the rest of the Alpha Quadrant."

Arrow met her gaze. "That sounds like they intended to hop planes and set up their own Empire."

Jan nodded. "We have to find them and stop them."

Dillion had the next question. "And the Rip?"

"We have to figure out what's wrong with it before we go back through it," Tamera said. "Otherwise, we might just make things worse."

Eppilene rose to her feet. She'd never admit it out loud, but the whole conversation was making her dizzy from trying to follow it. "I doubt that even *your* ship can be in two places at one time. I will call in some more of our ships and set them to searching for your renegades."

Tam raised her hand slightly to stop her. "With all due respect, Ma'am, we scanned your ships when we entered orbit. They're no match for a Romulan Warbird."

Arrow looked up at her. "She's right. If they find them, don't let them engage."

Eppilene down at Arrow for a moment and thought back over the past few years and how many times the Dregan's advice had been sound. "Very well." She sighed. "Arrow, from what I've heard and from what I know of you, you seem to have a better grasp of this situation than I do. So, I will defer to you. Do what needs done."

The Dregan female nodded. "I'll make sure you get a full report when it's all over."

Eppilene took one last look around at the group. "I just hope I can understand it." Then she nodded to their visitors and headed for the house workshop- where a gateway unit would provide transportation back to Central Command.

Tam watched her go, then looked to Arrow. "I don't mean any disrespect, Chief, but she didn't sound too sure of herself."

Arrow sighed. "As you've probably noticed, Eppilene is a crystalline being. Their racial culture, society, mindset- is all geared toward structure- order and structure.

"When Eppilene first came to this end of the Alliance, she was your typical Zolga-5 native. She believed in structure and order above all else. It took a while for her to understand that there are different kinds of order- and that *disorder* is going to rear its ugly head when you least expect it."

Jan stood up then, followed by Tam and Data. "We'd best get back to the ship," she said. "We've got to find out what's going on with the Rip." She looked to Dillion and Arrow. "We'll be back as soon as we can."

Megan was confused. "What about your shuttle? It's still at Central Command."

Tam shrugged. "We'll call it back before we break orbit."

Jan tapped her combadge. "Kirk to *Enterprise*. Three to beam up. Energize."

Dillion's eyes went wide as they beamed out.

Arrow just shook her head. "I never could get used to that."

Dillion turned to face her. "Seeing it?"

Arrow shook her head. "*Doing it.*"

Megan turned to Dillion. "So, what do we do while they're off doing their thing?"

Her friend could only shrug. "The *Defender's* no match against Romulan warbirds either.

"All we *can* do is wait."

## **Chapter Four**

Megan had returned to the *Defender* and Arrow had excused herself to see to some work she had to see to. This left Dillion alone on the deck. She stood by the railing and the steps that led down to the boat dock. She looked up at the sky, seeing Drega Luna fill over half of it, then around at the wooded presence of the cove. She closed her eyes as she thought of Miles and Ashley.

Then her fist struck the rail.

With her work done, Arrow had been standing in the patio door, watching her visitor. Now, she stepped out onto the deck. "Pardon my saying so," she began with a gentle smile. "But you seem a little lost."

Dillion looked at her, and they both smiled. "I feel *a lot* lost," the human replied. "Time travel I've done. But hopping planes of existence?" She shook her head. "This whole mess is beyond me."

Arrow led her over to a bench positioned against the railing and sat down beside her. "I don't know things go on *your* plane, but here on *mine*, I'm afraid this sort of thing is all too common. Time travel, alterations in reality,



twists in existence..."She shook her head. "Sometimes I wonder how my plane keeps from shattering.

"You wouldn't believe some of the people I've met over the years. Everyone from superheroes to- "She nodded toward the sky- "Starship Captains."

Dillion watched her close. "How do you keep it all straight?"

Arrow shrugged. "Sometimes you don't. Sometimes, you just have to take Reality as it stands and go with it."

She looked to the younger female and nodded toward the house. "I've raised my share of kids over the years- both natural and adopted. I know what it feels like to be separated from them."

Dillion looked down at her hands, then out at the cove as she spoke. "Ashley's only three months old. She and her dad were out on the beach when this mess started."

Arrow's voice was gentle. It could have been any of her own kids she was talking to. "I wish I could tell you that getting home is a sure deal. But I think we both know better."

Dillion looked over at her- and nodded.

“Why don’t you and Megan join us for dinner?” Arrow invited. “I’ve had family that lived on scout ships, and they’ve always enjoyed the chance to...’eat out’.”

A weak smile came to Dillion’s face. “Thank you, Chief.”

“Arrow.”

“Stephanie.” She stood as she continued. “I’ll go see if I can pry Megan away from her engines.”

\*

Elsewhere in the sector, the *Enterprise* flew on as it backtracked the course that brought it to Dragoon.

On the bridge, Data looked up from the free-standing console positioned near his chair. “Captain, we are detecting readings matching the Admiral’s records of the Gateway Device. But they appear to be fluctuating.”

Tam rose from her own chair as she glanced over at him.  
“Put it on the screen, Data.” Then she looked up.  
“Admiral to the Bridge.”

The turbo lift doors opened, and Jan stepped out. Jan’s eyebrows rose. “That was fast.”

Jan shrugged. “I was already on my way.” She stepped toward the center of the bridge, her gaze going to the image on the main viewscreen. She frowned. “That’s not the way it should look.”

“Data said the readings are fluctuating,” Tam noted.

Jan was studying the image. “Look how jagged the edges are- and dark. Almost as if they were burnt.” She glanced at her sister. “It was over-loaded.”

“What?”

Jan nodded. “Too many ships in too short a time. Data, measurements?”

The ship’s first officer looked up from his console. “It has expanded by ten kilometers since we sighted it. It is already one hundred kilometers larger than any previous portal.”

Tam shook her head. "My god..."

Jan couldn't take her eyes off the screen. "Just going back through it won't close it. Not this time. Data get all the readings you can. Then you and Geordi get together and find a way to shut this thing down."

Tam was watching her sister closely. "Is it me or do you sound like we have a bigger problem than I thought?"

Jan glanced at her. "Just a gut feeling. If we don't shut this thing down, it's going to continue to tear until every plane in the multi-verse is affected.

"Those renegades have literally torn a hole in existence that could destroy everything."

## **Chapter Five**

Dinner at Salmak Cove was exactly as Arrow liked it. No cases interrupted the evening. Vicky, Michel, Alexander and Megan all watched and listened as Arrow and Dillion compared their respective 'Treks. It was the first time in a long while that Arrow had met anyone with an interest in those old stories- even if there were variations brought about by different planes of existence.

For Vicky and Michel, it'd been a while since they'd seen their mother this involved in anything other than her work. As for Alexander, he tried his best to listen and keep track of what his aunt and her friend were talking about- but they were going into such detail, he just shook his head and gave up.

As for Megan, she watched the kids more than she did Dillion and the Chief. The way they interacted with each other.

When the ash blond twins Sonya and Jamie came out to clear the table, Megan thought her eyes would pop out of her head when Vicky casually transformed her clothes from top and slacks to a swimsuit and headed down to the boat dock. Her sister and cousin took it in stride and

headed back into the house- it was nothing unusual to them.

“...I have something in the house I want to show you,” Arrow was saying as she and Dillion also rose from the table.

Dillion looked to her partner. “Megan?”

The blond waved her off. “Go ahead. I’m fine.”

But as the others went back inside, Megan’s thoughts were on Vicky and the family’s reaction.

In the house, Dillion looked around as Arrow showed her to a door. “I call this the Collection Room,” Arrow said. She shrugged. “Not too original, but it fits.” She pressed a switch and stood to one side as the door slid aside.

Dillion glanced at her and then carefully looked into the darkened room. Something in the center of the room was lit up. She stepped slowly inside; the lights came up—and she could only stare.

The lit object was a model—a large model—of a certain

*Galaxy*-class starship. She turned to Arrow. "It's called a 'studio model,'" the Chief explained. "It was actually used for filming."

Dillion's gaze traveled around the room, taking in display cases filled with hand props, costumes, matt paintings- there was even an original series captain's chair. "That's a reproduction," Arrow told her. "But everything else in here is genuine."

"Where did you get all of this?" the human asked as she slowly walked around the room.

"Here and there over the last hundred years," Arrow replied. "Once it became public knowledge that I was a fan of the original stories, people began leaving me their collections because they knew I'd take good care of them."

Dillion's glance was everywhere as she tried to take in everything. She finally shook her head and looked to Arrow. "I wish we had the time. I could spend *days* in here!"

They both laughed.



\*

It was almost Midnight when a lone figure left the *Defender* and made its way across the street to the Dickess house. She paused at the door, debating with herself.

‘Come in, Megan.’ It was Arrow’s thoughts. ‘It’s not locked.’

The younger female did so, speaking as she came.

“Why don’t you- ?”

Arrow was standing in the living room. “Because I was expecting you. I could tell you wanted to talk at dinner.”

Megan shrugged. “You and Dillion were involved. I hadn’t seen her that relaxed in a long time.”

The Dregan nodded toward the patio doors. “Let’s go out on the deck. There’s someone out there I think you should meet.”

Puzzled, Megan slowly followed her to find a Dregan-human male standing on the deck, with question-mark shaped antennas, a shoulder cape and a pendant that

hung from a chain about his neck. "This is our Planetary Premier- and my first born- Yaska Dickess."

Megan's eyes went wide. "Sir- ?"

Yaska shook his head. "No need to be so formal, Megan. You're a member of the Club."

She looked from son to mother and back. "Club?"

Yaska nodded. "You're a shape-changer." He indicated his mother. "Kind of hard to hide from telepaths." He raised his hands in a calming gesture when he saw the growing fear in Megan's eyes. "It's all right. I used to be able to change shape myself."

"Used to?"

He nodded again. "In our plane of existence, if you don't use your ability for a long length of time, it fades away- in much the same way as a muscle atrophies if it isn't used."

Megan looked to Arrow. "Does your whole race- ?"

"No," the Chief told her. "We've encountered a few other mutants over the years, but it's mostly just the family. We teach those with abilities not to think of them as a curse- and neither should you."

Megan concentrated and they watched as she resumed her own natural form. “For most of my childhood, my family turned their backs on me. A human finally befriended me and took me in. It’s only been in the past year that I was able to make peace with my father.

“Watching your children at dinner was like watching a dream- a wish I knew would never come true.

“Dillion accepted me right off- she’d grown up with stories that had shape changers in them. She says that it’s no different than being able to paint better or sing better than someone else.”

A gentle smile came to Arrow’s face. “She’s a smart lady.”

“Megan, why didn’t you say something before now?”

The shape changer resumed her human form and turned to see Dillion coming from the carport tying her robe shut as she came.

The now-blond sighed. “Because, as much as I know you care, you don’t know what it’s like to be me. To have your family turn their backs on you. To have people literally back away from you in terror when they find out what you are.

“For all you’ve been through, you’re still a normal human being.” She looked to Arrow and Yaska. “You’re not a member of the club. Until we ended up here, I didn’t know of anyone else that was.”

Dillion went right up to her and took Megan’s hands in hers. “Yes, I’m a normal Human Being with a normal friend that just *happens* to have a special gift. And if the rest of existence can’t accept that, then to hell with them.”

A gentle smile came to Arrow’s face as she and Yaska traded glances. It was clear to both of them that Dillion had more than one daughter in her life.

The Chief gently cleared her throat. “I suggest that you two return to the *Defender* and get some sleep. I’ve got a feeling that it’s going to be a busy day tomorrow.” Dillion looked over at her. “Based on what?”

The Chief shrugged. “Call it the ‘Voice of Experience’. We’ve been dealing with the lull. I’ve got a feeling it won’t be much longer before the storm moves in.”

## **Chapter Six**

Next Morning

Dregol's light was shining through the *Defender's* canopy as Dillion stood on the flight deck with a cup of coffee in hand. She turned at the sound of Megan's cabin door opening to see her come into the rec area. The blond paused at the sight of her.

"Dillion...I'm sorry about last night."

The ship's captain waved it off as she came down and joined her. "It's all right. For the first time in your life, you've found people like you- people with special gifts. I understand why you wanted to talk to them. But you should also know by now, that if you've got a problem, you're welcome to come to me."

Megan smiled sheepishly. "If I didn't before, I do now." She placed a hand on one of the rec area chairs. "Do you think we'll ever get home?"

Dillion met her gaze for a moment, then shrugged. "I don't know- and I want to get home so badly, I can taste it. The *Enterprise* is here because they were chasing the Romulans. We're here because we were in the wrong

place at the wrong time.” She shook her head. “I don’t know.”

The computer spoke up then. “Dillion, we’re receiving a call from Chief Dickess.”

She set her coffee cup on the rec table as she spoke.

“Put her on the screen.”

The screen on one bulkhead of the rec area came to life with Arrow’s image. “Stephanie. Megan. I didn’t wake you two, did I?”

“No, not all,” Dillion told her. “We were just getting ready to fix breakfast. What’s up?”

“The *Enterprise* is back,” the Chief told them. “Admiral Kirk wants to meet with us on board. She’s left it up to us whether to use their transporter or take the *Darlla T*. The Admiral says the *Defender’s* too tall to fit in their hangar bay.”

The two ALE officers traded glances before Dillion turned back to the screen. “Well, “she began with a slight smile, “Knowing how you feel about the transporter, the *Darlla T*. will be fine.” Then her smile grew. “It’ll also give us a chance to see the *Enterprise*.”

Arrow nodded. "True. I didn't have that chance with the other one. Meet me on board and we can have breakfast en route."

Dillion returned the nod. "On our way."

\*

The flight into orbit was uneventful and both Dillion and Megan watched out the forward viewport as they flew past Dregan Outpost One. Breakfast was out of the way by the time DC announced that the *Enterprise* had come into sensor range.

"DC?" Megan asked. "Your ship's computer has a name?"

Arrow nodded. "DC is unique. Her programs have been on-line in one form or another for almost a hundred years. She's the house computer as well as the ship's. She's about as close to sentience as is possible for a machine." Then she pointed. "There."

The *Enterprise* had finally come into visual range. Dillion shook her head. "I never really got a feel for how big she was."

“Hard to believe she only exists in stories back in our own plane of existence,” Megan said as they drew closer.

“I don’t think the Admiral would mind if we took a look around,” Arrow said with a smile.

Her hands moved over the flight console and the *Defender’s* crew watched as they began to move past the *Enterprise* and around her. The warp nacelles, the lower hull, the saucer. Dillion shook her head as Arrow finally guided the *Darlla T.* toward a hangar bay. “In some ways, this whole mess has felt like I’m living in a fantasy.” She looked over at Arrow. “I keep expecting to wake up any time now.”

There was a slight spark of energy as the *Darlla T.* passed through the hangar’s force field. Then Arrow set her down on the deck.

Both the Admiral and the Captain were waiting when they disembarked. Arrow was first to speak. “Hope you didn’t mind the inspection flight?”

Tam shook her head and smiled. “Not at all. I’m always glad to show her off.”



Jan waved a hand toward the nearest airlock. “Why don’t we go on up and get started? We’ve got a lot to cover.”

As they walked through the corridors, Dillion and Megan didn’t bother to hide the fact that they were looking everywhere, taking in everything they could- including all the different races they passed.

Tam couldn’t help noticing. “Is all of this that new to you, Captain?”

“Spaceflight? No,” Dillion answered. “But the sector of space that we spend most of our time in is populated mostly by Humans- or branches of the Human race. There *are* other races- Megan’s people for example- just not very many in our neck of the woods.”

Upon reaching the Briefing Lounge, Arrow and Dillion both took a good glance at the display case and its models of all the ships that had been named *Enterprise* before accepting the chairs Jan offered. It was here that they hit their first snag.

The briefing lounge chairs and Arrow’s dorsal were not made for each other. She sighed. “Dillion and Megan are

aware that I have telepathic abilities,” she told Jan and Tam. “I’m going to have to reveal my other ability if this chair and I are going to get along.” She looked to Megan and smiled as she concentrated and shaped away her dorsal. The redheads’ eyes went wide, and Megan smiled as Arrow sat down. The Chief shrugged. “Most everyone on Dragoon- at least those I work with- know about my abilities and I don’t bother to hide them.” She looked to Megan as she added, “There’s no need to.”

Data came in at that point and Jan gave Arrow one last glance before she began the briefing. Once she had filled everyone in on the condition of the Rip, she nodded to Data to continue.

“...The Rip is extremely damaged,” he stated. “Its power levels are fluctuating. It can be closed down, but only if the right charges are fired at specific points around the Rip’s edge when the fluctuations are at their lowest point.

“The problem is that the Rip is also throwing off turbulence in the form of shockwaves. As such, no automated system would be able to hold position long enough to fire the charges.”

Dillion looked to Megan, then glanced around the room. “The *Defender* can do it. We can alter our missile system to handle the charges.”

Data met her gaze. “I was not finished. There is a fifty percent chance, any delivery system would be destroyed in the ensuing detonation.”

Megan’s eyes went wide and she looked to Dillion. But the raven-haired human shook her head. “You just said there’s no other option.” She looked to Jan, Tam and Arrow. “It’s either this or we watch the multi-verse tear itself apart.”

The ship’s intercom whistle blew. “Dr. Crusher to Briefing Lounge.”

Jan looked up. “Admiral Kirk here, Doctor.”

“Admiral, I’ve been running tests on the crew, checking the universal harmonics that Data mentioned to you earlier.” “And?”

“The readings are growing weaker even as the readings of Chief Dickess’ plane of existence is growing stronger.”

Megan looked to Tam. “Is it supposed to do that?”

The captain shook her head. “No.”

“This plane is rejecting us,” Crusher continued. “Like a living body rejecting a virus or infection.”

Jan sighed. “What’s it all boil down to, Doctor?”

“All of us- and I mean the Romulans as well- have to leave this plane of existence in the next twenty-four hours, or we’ll all be dead.”

Silence filled the briefing lounge for several moments till Jan looked up. “Thank you, doctor. Kirk out.”

Megan looked around the table before meeting the Admiral’s gaze. “You have any *more* good news?”

A weak smile came to Jan’s face. “Oh, we always save the best for last.”

Arrow shook her head. “And we still have no idea where the Romulans are. The ships Eppilene has looking for them haven’t reported in.” She looked to Jan. “What are the odds they never left the area around the portal? That they were cloaked and you didn’t see them?”

Jan raised an almost Vulcan eyebrow at that. Then she nodded. “Possible. We were so focused on the Rip, we

never thought to look for them.” She shook her head. “Stupid lapse.” She met Arrow’s gaze and nodded. “I’d lay odds that’s exactly where they are- that’s the way our luck runs.”

“Why hang around?” Dillion asked. “Why wouldn’t they move off as soon as they arrived?”

“They’re in unknown and potentially hostile territory,” Arrow told her. “In that kind of situation, you don’t burn your last bridge till you have to.” She looked to Jan. “How many ships did you say came through the Rip? Twenty?” She stood up. “I’ll call in as many of our ships as I can.”

Tam looked at her with growing concern. “Chief-“

Arrow met her gaze without hesitation. “Our ships may be smaller and maybe they don’t pack as much punch as yours, but we’ve fought off our share of invasions over the years. If nothing else, we can still distract them, delay them.”

She paused at that point and tilted her head slightly. “Distract...”

Dillion beat everyone else to the punch. “You have an idea?”

Arrow nodded. "We have devices called 'illusion enforcers'. Once they're programed, they completely cover the person or object they're attached to. Those who aren't aware the device is there, will react as if the illusion is the real thing." She looked to Jan. "How would your renegades react to the sight of the *Enterprise* leading a full strike force of Starfleet vessels right at them?"

Tam smiled as she looked at her sister. "They'd panic like crazy."

Jan nodded slowly as she stared off in thought. Then her eyes narrowed. "Especially if we add one more twist..."

## Chapter Seven

An hour later found the *Darlla T.* back on the runway at Salmak Cove. Arrow was at the flight console doing a systems check when she heard the sound of the *Enterprise's* transporter and turned to see Admiral Kirk arrive. "Do you always barge in without knocking?" the Dregan asked.

Jan didn't flinch. "Only when I think I need to knock some sense into someone."

"You'd lose," Arrow told her as she rose from the pilot's seat.

"You might be surprised," Jan replied. She stepped toward the older female. "You're not coming, Chief."

"Yes, I am," Arrow stated calmly. "The *Enterprise* is going to have its hands full. If one- just one- Romulan gets past you and goes after the *Defender*, you won't be able to give chase without exposing yourself to the other nineteen ships in their fleet. They'll be all over you."

Jan indicated the scout as her voice took on a stern tone. "The *Darlla T.* is no match- "

“I know that,” Arrow snapped as her brows furled in frustration. “But at best, I can delay them, give the *Defender* time to get into position.

“Don’t worry, Admiral. I’ve died before.”

Jan’s eyebrows rose at that. “I wish I had time to hear *that* story.” For a moment, the two stood on that flight deck facing each other- both stubborn and determined. Finally, Jan sighed and shook her head. “All right. Since you’re so determined to get yourself killed, do you want to come with me while I check on the *Defender*?”

Arrow nodded and they left the ship together. Jan glanced around as they headed toward the *Defender*. “I have to admit, you do have an attractive world, Chief.”

“Thank you. Dragoon’s seen some hard times over the years, but she’s always managed to recover- just like the rest of the Alliance.”

Dillion welcomed them on board. It was Jan’s first time, and her eyes were everywhere as Dillion led them to the ship’s workshop where Megan and Geordi LaForge were surrounded by several disassembled missiles. “Geordi,” Jan called as they entered, “How’s it going?” The



*Enterprise's* chief engineer glanced around as he answered her. "Their missiles are a little more basic than our photon torpedoes, but they'll do the job."

"Why not just use the torpedoes?" Arrow asked.

It was Megan that answered. "They won't work with our launch system."

The Chief nodded as Jan spoke again. "How much longer, Geordi?"

The engineer sighed as the cabin lights reflected off of his visor. "They're replicating parts for us on the *Enterprise*, but it still takes time to assemble them. Two more hours at least."

Jan nodded. "I've got your assistant, Data and Tam dealing with the rest of it." She met his gaze. "Two hours, Geordi."

She then turned and joined Arrow and Dillion as they left the ship. At the bottom of the ramp, she planted her hands on her hips, closed her eyes and sighed. "This is the part I've always hated- the waiting."

Arrow waved a hand toward her ship. “Since you two have some time on your hands, why don’t you let me give you the two-hour tour of Liminien?”

A few minutes later, the *Darlla T.* was launched.

## **Chapter Eight**

The 'tour' actually lasted only an hour and a half, so as to make sure everyone was back in time. Soon, the *Enterprise*, the *Defender* and the *Darlla T.* were all breaking orbit.

Aboard *Enterprise*, every scanner and sensor was at maximum as they searched for the renegade fleet.

Aboard the *Darlla T.*, Arrow kept a close eye on her own sensors, knowing fully well the dangers of space travel from natural phenomenon.

Aboard the *Defender*, as Dillion handled the flying, Megan checked and re-checked the necessary systems that controlled the missile launch system.

A half hour out, on the bridge of the *Enterprise*, Jan looked to Data. "Status?"

"Nothing on the motion sensors."

The Admiral nodded. "Bring the jammer on-line."

Tam's eyebrows rose at this. "What jammer?"

Jan glanced at her then over at Data. "The one I had

Geordi's assistant build. It's based on a device Scotty came up with just prior to the Battle of Starbase 98. As you'll recall, we were slightly outnumbered then, too- and every Romulan ship had a cloak. Even the motion sensors couldn't have tracked them all. So I asked him to come up with some way of jamming the cloaks so they wouldn't work. That's why, when the Task Force arrived, all the Romulan ships were visible- and stayed that way."

"Cloak jammer is on-line and functioning," Data reported from his console.

Tam glanced over at him, then turned back to her sister. "Always got to have a trick up your sleeve, don't you? Data, what are the other scans showing?"

"All scans show clear at the moment," he reported.

Tamera smiled as she looked to her sister. "Wake the 'Fleet'."

With a single touch of a screen, starships began to appear around the *Enterprise*- ships of all shapes and sizes. Both sisters smiled as Tam spoke again. "Continue on course."

\*

At the Rip itself, the area appeared to be abandoned. But as Arrow and Jan now suspected, this appearance was wrong.

Aboard the Renegade command ship, Commander Tor'len turned from his command center view screen. "Report."

"The scouts have just returned, Commander," a female crewman replied. "There is one Class-'M' planet less than a day's travel from here. It appears to be fairly well developed. There is a great deal of civilian space traffic."

"Military presence?"

The female shrugged as she studied the report on her console screen. "One outpost in planetary orbit that could be of a military nature. Several smaller ships were sighted that were armed and might be warships, but their technology is no match for ours."

Another crewman then spoke up. "Commander, there is a Starfleet Strike Force approaching!"

Tor'len turned toward him. "Impossible!"

"On screen, Commander."

He turned to see the Strike Force for himself. "How?"

It was the female that answered. "There must be a version of Starfleet on this plane of existence as well." A bleeping noise called for her attention. "We are receiving a signal." She hit a switch.

"...This is Admiral Janet Kirk to Renegade Fleet. If you check your systems, you will find that we have neutralized your cloaking devices. All of your ships are now visible. You will surrender or we will open fire. You have one minute."

"Commander?"

He turned to meet the female's gaze. "The cloak?"

She checked. "Not working- just as she said."

The male turned away. "If Barlen were still alive, he would never surrender." He looked around at his command crew. "As his legacy, neither will we. Contact the rest of the Fleet.

"Go to War Alert."

## **Chapter Nine**

Jan stood in the center of the Bridge. Tam was standing back by her chair. They both looked to Data as he spoke. "The Renegade fleet is moving toward us."

Tam sighed. "There's our answer."

Jan nodded. "Data send in the 'Fleet'."

On the Renegade command ship, the female crewman looked up from her screens. "Commander, we are picking up two small ships heading for the portal."

"Change course to intercept," He ordered. "Order the rest of the fleet to engage the strike force."

On the *Enterprise*, Data looked up from his console. "One Renegade ship is breaking off from the rest of the fleet." He looked up at the sisters. "It is pursuing the *Defender* and the *Darlla T*."

Jan shook her head. "Damn it. She was right."

"Who?"

“Chief Dickess,” the Admiral replied. “We can’t help them. If we try to intercept that ship, we’ll leave ourselves open to the rest of their fleet.”

Tam met her sister’s gaze for a moment. “Yes, we can- and we should have thought of it before now. If we had, Chief Dickess wouldn’t be out there. “Her tone of voice turned formal. “Admiral, you have the Bridge.” She turned toward the turbo lift.

Jan stopped her with an equally formal tone in her own voice. “As you were, Captain. Under the current circumstances, your place is on the bridge of your ship.” Then she met her sister’s gaze.

“I’ll go.”

Aboard the *Darlla T.*, Arrow watched her screens. She’d see the Romulan ship change course. Now, she opened a communications channel. “*Darlla T.* to *Defender*. We’ve got company coming. Go on and do what you need to. I’ll delay them as long as I can.”

DC spoke up then. “Arrow, you are aware that we have no chance of winning?”



“So everyone keeps telling me, DC. But we have to hold their attention long enough for Stephanie and Megan to do their job. Systems status?”

“All systems are nominal. Weapons and shields are online.”

The Romulans opened fire and Arrow’s hands flew over her console. The *Darlla T.* dropped-

-and the plasma torpedo shot over head, missing the ship by only a few inches.

What followed was the deadliest ‘dance’ Arrow had ever taken part in, Romulan plasma torpedoes and Alliance energy bursts sailed back and forth. The *Darlla T.* ducked and dove, twisted and turned and Arrow still managed to stay between her enemy and the Rip even as the *Defender* drew closer to it.

Back on the *Enterprise*, Tam paced the Bridge as the ‘Fleet’ made contact with the Renegades.

Some Romulan crews began to panic when their torpedoes seem to pass right through the solid Starfleet

vessels even as those vessels drew closer and closer without firing a shot.

Then, the secret was out as the remote drones- under cover of Alliance illusion enforcers- collided with Renegade shields- allowing the explosive cargo they carried to explode on impact.

Scanning and watching for just this moment, *Enterprise* opened fire- blasting through those points of impact- the momentarily weakest point in the enemy shields.

Renegade ships exploded under the combined barrage.

Elsewhere, the *Darlla T.* rolled as a plasma torpedo passed- only to take one on her shields a moment later! The ship tumbled and it was all Arrow could do to hold on till the scout righted itself-

-only to find the Romulan bearing down on her.

Phasers struck the Romulan shields and a second later, an armed runabout sailed between the enemy and the *Darlla T.* "Janet Kirk to Chief Dickess: Are you alright?"

“Just knocked about,” Arrow replied. “You want the high road or the low?”

On the runabout, Jan just shook her head. “Chief, these are not regulation Romulan ships. The renegades threw them together wherever they could find a rock to hide under.”

As both ships sailed clear of their enemy, Arrow spoke. “DC, scan the Romulan for anything out of line.”

She sent the ship into a dive as torpedoes shot past. Then DC spoke. “Admiral Kirk is correct, Arrow. When that ship was built, their shield generators were not installed correctly. Their aft shields don’t overlap like the rest. There’s a one-millimeter gap.” As DC finished, one of the console screens lit up with a diagram showing the finding.

Arrow began adjusting her flight even as she opened a channel. “Admiral, try to hold their attention for a moment.”

Aboard the runabout, Jan’s confusing was clear. “What are you going to do?”

Arrow took a deep breath as she replied. "What I have to."

Aboard the *Defender*, Dillion and Megan traded glances as they reached the edge of the Rip. "Ready?" Dillion asked.

Megan swallowed. "As I'll ever be."

"*Defender* to *Darlla T.*," Dillion called. "We're going in." Under her hand, the cargo ship began moving into the Rip as shockwaves of energy buffeted them and surged past them. "Missile system stand by."

Megan reached out to her own side of the flight console and hit a switch.

All along the *Defender's* sides, missile hatches irised open.

\*

As Tam and the *Enterprise* continued to face off against-  
and cut down- the renegade fleet-  
As Jan and Arrow continued their deadly game of tag  
with the Renegade command ship-

Dillion checked her readings. "Coming up on Data's coordinates. Rotating ship's orientation now." As her hands moved over the console, the *Defender* took on a slight roll to get into position.

"Stand by to launch missiles," she told Megan. "Ten seconds..."

The last renegade ship in the fleet surged toward the *Enterprise*. It was desperation move, and the Starfleet vessel easily altered course, avoiding the ram.

"Five seconds," Dillion counted.

Commander Tor'len swore as Jan continued to weave and duck in front of him. While Arrow managed to slowly approach from behind.

Plasma torpedoes shot harmlessly past the runabout as Arrow checked her weapons. "Weapons locked on target, "DC reported.

“Three seconds,” Dillion stated as she watched the energy levels of the Rip begin to drop with its fluctuations.

“Fire,” Arrow ordered.

Jan eyes went wide as the Romulan ship exploded.

“Chief? Arrow come in!”

A moment later, she slumped in her seat as the *Darlla T.* cane sailing through the debris cloud.

Dillion looked to Megan. Now.” The blond hit the switch.

Throughout the *Defender*, missiles came to life, shot from their launch tubes and began their programmed flights.

The *Enterprise* was approaching the runabout-

The *Defender’s* missiles reached their target coordinates and detonated-

-releasing a blinding, glaring, eye-searing explosion of light that washed out everything.

When Arrow could see again, space outside the *Darlla T.* appeared to be empty. “DC, status?”

“One engine is out,” the computer replied. “But I can still get us back to Dragoon. As for the Rip it’s gone. So are the *Enterprise*, the *Defender*, and all the debris from the renegade ships.”

Arrow slumped back in her seat as the tension began to drain from her. “Take us home DC. Best speed you can manage.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

## **Chapter Ten**

January 22, 2516

Dylus Four

Dillion shook her head as she came up the ramp with Ashley in her arms.

The *Defender* had returned to the exact spot it had disappeared from- with only a half hour passing in this plane of existence. She still couldn't quite wrap her head around the whole thing.

Megan had almost jumped for joy upon realizing they were home. Now, a day later, she out swimming. Miles was taking an inventory of the Med Bay and Jin was cleaning the cabins.

Upon reaching the rec area, she sat down in one of the built-in seats and positioned Ashley in her lap as she spoke. "Computer?"

"Yes, Dillion?"

"Were you able to read the copy of Chief Dickess' files she gave us?"

"Yes. They are ready for viewing."



“All right. Let’s start with episode one.”

The viewscreen on the rec area wall came to life and a moment later a male voice was heard. “Space, the Final Frontier...”

She smiled down at Ashley. “Too bad we don’t have any popcorn...”

\*

SY: 1002.430212

Arrow sighed as she entered the den. The *Darlla T.* was now parked at Dickess Aero-Space being repaired and refurbished. It had taken the rest of yesterday and most of this morning, to put together a report for Eppilene- and then another hour to go over it with her.

Now, as she sat down, she activated the intercom.

“Sonja?”

“Yes, Arrow?”

“I’m going to be busy in the den for a while. Would you bring me a snack and something to drink?”

“Yes, Ma’am. I got some popcorn at the store today, will that do?”

Arrow smiled. “That’ll be fine.” She turned off the intercom. “DC?”

The workstation lights flashed. “Yes, Arrow?”

“Were you able to scan the files Stephanie gave us?”

“Yes, Ma’am. They’re ready for viewing.”

“Start with the first one.”

The den viewscreen came to life as Sonja came in with the popcorn and a drink. A moment later, a female voice came from the screen.

“Space, the final frontier. This is the voyage of the Federal Starship *Enterprise*...”

\*

Stardate: 48653.10

Jan nodded to passing crew members as she approached her sister’s cabin. Upon returning to their own plane of existence, they’d found themselves at the exact position

they'd been at when they entered the portal three days ago. On Jan's order, they headed for the nearest Starbase where a complete report was filed.

The debriefing on that took two days.

Now, back on course to resume their previous mission, Jan sighed as she reached Tam's door and pressed the buzzer. The door slid open on a dimly lit cabin. As Jan entered, she found Tam on the cabin couch wearing a T-shirt, shorts and ankle socks. She was sitting cross-legged with Isis curled up beside her and a big bowl of popcorn in her lap. The cabin viewscreen was lit up, but she couldn't see what was on it from the doorway. "What are you watching?"

Tam smiled sheepishly and turned up the volume. A familiar male voice filled the air. "...These are the voyages of the Starship *Enterprise*..." Tam turned it back down as Jan stepped further into the cabin to stare at the screen.

Then Jan turned to her. "How did you-?"

Her sister shrugged. "I got curious and asked Chief Dickess for a copy of her files."

Jan sat down beside her and shook her head. Then that lop-sided smile came to her face. "I don't have any room to talk."

Tam looked at her for a moment and then her eyes went wide. "You *didn't*- !"

Her sister shrugged. "I askes Captain Dillion for a copy of *her* files."

Tam laughed and then met her sister's gaze. "Jim's first. Okay?"

Jan sighed and nodded, then reached for the popcorn as Tam turned up the volume once more.

"...To boldly go where no man has gone before."

END

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<sup>†</sup> Magnetic Field Device