

A promotional artwork for Star Trek: The Next Generation. It features a 3D rendering of Captain Picard in the upper right and T'Pol in the lower left, both in Starfleet uniforms. The USS Enterprise-D is shown in the upper left and lower right. The background is a dark space filled with stars.

STAR TREK THE NEXT GENERATION

*"THELEN"
"Q ESQUIRE"*

*BY MOBRUFFY
BASED ON CONCEPTS
CREATED BY G. RODDENBERRY*

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Thelen

by MDBruffy

Past:

Omicron Theta

The Tripoli's transporter released an away team led by Lt. Commander Thelen. At 49, the Andorian had seen her share of desolate worlds.

This wasn't supposed to be one of them. She turned to Lt. Banks. "Isn't this supposed to be an agricultural colony?"

"That's what the records say."

One of the few Orions in Starfleet, Ensign Sallen checked her tricorder. "Well, it's not now. Something's drained all the life out of-

"Commander!" Thelen turned to see the blond Banks at the top of a rise. The human female was pointing.

"Over there."

'Over there' turned out to be a small gulley. As they approached, Thelen spotted what looked like a humanoid stretched out on a stone bench. She gently touched him. "He's covered with dust." Her antennas nearly twitched as she holstered her tricorder, and leaned over the inert form, raising it to a sitting position. Her hand hit something in its back and its eyes opened, surprising everyone as it began examining each of them.

"Who are you?"

Thelen performed the introductions. "Now it's your turn." He called off their names in the same manner she had. "No. I meant, what's your name?"

He cocked his head to one side. "Data. My name is Data..."

Present:

Captain's log, Stardate 47317.2. The Enterprise's survey of Sector 102 has been delayed by Starfleet due

***to reports of a space-time distortion in Sector 103.
We've been ordered to investigate.***

Seated in the Observation Lounge, Picard took in the faces of his command crew as he briefed them on the new orders. "Isn't Sector 103 near the Cardassian boarder?" Riker asked.

Picard nodded. "And *Deep Space Nine* reports increased Cardassian activity on Bajor's side." He leaned forward in his seat. "With relations strained lately, Starfleet has assigned a second ship to assist us- The *Constitution*."

Geordi whistled. "I remember studying her at the Academy. She's over a century old."

Dr. Crusher glanced around the table as she spoke up for the first time. "Isn't it unusual to keep a ship in service that long?"

It was Worf that answered her. "This is a special case. She serves as a living memorial to the ships and crews of her class that defended Federation ideals for over 60 years."

Geordi nodded. "She may look like she belongs in the last half of the 23rd century, but she's got all the latest technology of the 24th stuffed inside her."

Picard looked down the table. "Data, is Thelen still in command?"

"Yes, sir."

Riker turned to his captain. "Do you know her, sir?"

Picard nodded. "12 years ago, the *Constitution* and the *Stargazer* were assigned to a relief mission to Beltor Nine. A Cardassian squadron launched an assault. Thelen and Jack Crusher handled their ships while Data and I handled their ground forces." Picard leaned back in his seat. "It was the first time I'd ever laid eyes on our Mister Data. But I knew from that point on, that I wanted him on my next command."

Constitution

Thelen had no memory of why she had come to her cabin. Now at 79, she spotted the holo-crystal on her desk and took it in hand. She smiled at its projection of

Data. The door chime went off twice before she responded. "Come."

The door opened and Lt. Commander Roberts to enter. "I tried to intercom, but you didn't answer."

She glanced toward her first officer as she spoke. "What is it, Jim?"

"We're about an hour from our rendezvous with the Enterprise. You asked to be notified."

Thelen's expression was blank for a moment, then she gave him a shaky nod. "All right."

Roberts watched her as she stared off. His concern was clear. "Captain, are you all right?"

Thelen faced him with an edge to her voice. "I said I'm fine. Now get to the Bridge."

"Yes, Ma'am."

As Roberts left, she turned and looked down at the holo-crystal she was still holding. "When did I- ?" She turned it off and left the cabin in frustration.

Enterprise

Captain's log, Stardate 47118.2. Having arrived in Sector 103, we found the distortion threatening Outpost 114, Starbase 296 and Deep Space Nine- depending on which way it expands. I have ordered Mr. Worf to alert them to the danger and the possibility of evacuation.

Picard shut off his log as Data's voice filled his Ready Room. "Data to Captain. The *Constitution* has entered visual range."

"Hail them, Mr. Data. I'm on my way."

He entered the Bridge to see the image of the distortion replaced by one of Thelen. "Jean-Luc. Not a pretty sight, is it?"

"No, indeed," He answered. "I'd like to co-ordinate our science teams so they- "

Data interrupted." Captain, the distortion is emitting unusual readings and is expanding toward Outpost 114."

"Stay with us, Thelen. On screen."

The picture changed to show the distortion with a Regula One- class station being dragged toward it. LaForge spoke up from his engineering console. "They're caught in a gravitational field."

Worf spoke next. "They are transmitting a distress call."

Riker looked to the Chief Engineer. "Evacuation?"

Geordi shook his head. "With a field that strong, the transporters are useless and the shuttles'll take too long." His eyebrows rose . "We might be able to tow them out with the tractor."

Picard gave the nod and as the beam came on-line, he turned to someone else. "Thelen?"

"...Jean-Luc?" The Andorian's voice sounded far from certain, but Picard couldn't pursue it.

"Lock your tractor beam on the outpost." As the *Constitution's* beam snagged the station, Picard's voice filled the Bridge. "Engines full reverse."

But Geordi shook his head. "No good. We're being dragged in with it."

Riker met Picard's gaze. "Like a drowning victim dragging his rescuers down with him."

The glare Picard threw back was sharp. He didn't like the comparison- or what it meant he had to do.

"Disengage the tractor. Thelen ?"

"I heard. Disengaging now."

They could only watch as the outpost was dragged into the distortion and the pressures tore it apart.

Riker's voice was somber. "Data...?"

"215, sir."

Worf had been checking his console. Now, he looked up. "Captain, a Cardassian ship has entered long-range scan. It will be in phaser range in one hour, thirty minutes."

Data spoke up once more. "Captain, the Cardassian and the distortion are putting off the same energy readings."

"Could the distortion be affecting him?" Riker wondered.

Picard thought it over and then waved his hand in Riker's direction. "Turn it around, Will. Data, could the Cardassian be causing the distortion?"

The Second Officer considered this. "That is a possibility. Further investigation should confirm it."

Worf again. "Sir, Captain Thelen is hailing us."

"On screen. Yes, Thelen? "

The Andorian's image focused and this time, she sounded certain. "We better talk, Jean-Luc. That Cardassian coming in is commanded by our old friend Gul Balad. I recognize the markings."

"Beltor Nine's Gul Balad?" Riker guessed. Both captains nodded.

"I suggest you beam over so we can discuss it," Picard invited.

Thelen sighed and nodded. "On my way."

Constitution

Thelen shook her head. She didn't want to, but what choice did she have? "Mr. Roberts, you have the con- Please try to keep the Bridge attached to the rest of the ship." She turned toward the turbo lift, noticing only then, the ship's doctor standing nearby. "Erin." She stepped into the lift and Dr. Holmes followed. "I assume you had a reason for being on the Bridge?"

Wearing her medical smock, Erin shrugged and her brunette hair bounced about her shoulders. "Since you keep refusing to report for your physical, where else am I going to lay eyes on you? And yes, I do have another reason. As Chief Medical Officer and Ship's Councilor, It's my opinion that you're riding Roberts too hard." She nodded toward the distant Bridge. "That crack about the ship wasn't exactly a morale builder."

The Andorian sighed. "I've never had to deal with an inexperienced first officer before."

"The good ones have to get experience somewhere." The doctor hesitated. "He's been to see me three times as Councilor. He thinks you don't trust him- and judging by what I heard upstairs, I agree."

Thelen spoke to the lift. "Halt." Then she turned to Erin. "Say you're right. I don't have time to work with him right now."

"Then you're going to have to trust him, just like Captain Jackson trusted you."

Thelen met her gaze square on. "I served with Captain Jackson for five years before he made me Tripoli's First Officer. He knew I was ready. I don't know that about Roberts."

The Doctor didn't hesitate under the Captain's gaze-and matched her tone for tone. "And you never will if you don't back off and give him room."

Thelen was quiet for a moment. Then she spoke. "Resume." as the lift began to move, she nodded. "You're right." She tapped her combadge. "Thelen to Roberts."

"Roberts here."

"...Jim, when I get back, we need to have a talk. I understand we have a few things to straighten out."

"Yes, Ma'am. Whenever you're ready."

"Thelen out." The lift doors opened, Thelen reached into Erin's smock pocket and took out the medical scanner she'd heard the entire trip. "Do I need to ask?"

"Do I need to pull medical rank to perform a physical on you?" The doctor countered. "It's no secret that something's bothering you- Night shift has seen you wondering the corridors three times this week."

"That's my problem." Thelen erased the sensor's memory and tossed it back to Erin.

"It becomes my problem when your poor health begins affecting the operation of this ship," the Doctor stated. "And I do have the authority to deal with it."

They were outside the transporter room and Thelen turned to face her, surprise clear in her voice. "You wouldn't dare."

Erin's voice remained steady. "Try me."

The Captain took a step toward her. "Would you rather have Roberts facing Gul Balad?"

"Thelen, your health won't wait. If we don't deal with it now- whatever it is- it's only going to get worse."

"I know." Thelen stepped away- then sighed. "We'll deal with it after I talk to Roberts."

"I'll hold you to it," Erin told her. Once the doors had slid shut behind Thelen, Dr. Holmes reached for her combadge. "Holmes to Mendez. Talk to me, T'Kel."

"We received ample readings to work with, Doctor."

Erin glanced at the closed doors. "Good. We're going to save our captain's life whether she wants us to or not."

Enterprise

Data watched as Thelen materialized and his systems easily accepted the sight of her. She on the other hand smiled as she stepped off the platform. "Data. It's been too long."

"It is good to see you, too, Captain." she made a disapproving face that he remembered only too well. "Thelen."

Her smile returned as they entered the corridor. "You're still a Lt. Commander. With your letters so rare,

I've had to resort to channels to keep track of you. You'd be a full commander by now if Starfleet wasn't so closed-minded."

"That attitude is not as pervasive as it once was."

Shocked, Thelen stared at him. "Have you forgotten how Maddox tried to block every promotion you received? He argued that Starfleet was promoting a machine."

They reached the lift and as they entered, Data spoke. "Observation Lounge." He then turned back to Thelen. "Until Captain Picard forced a hearing concerning my status, Commander Maddox challenged every step of my career. Since then, he has been much more understanding."

If an Andorian could snort, Thelen would have. "I managed to get a copy of the hearing's transcript. If I could've been there, I would have knocked Maddox into the next sector."

"How did you get a copy of the transcript?"

She glanced at him. "You never read your application for the academy after we filled it out, did you?"

He shrugged. "I never saw any reason to."

The captain looked to the ceiling. "They asked for family they could contact in case of an emergency. Since we thought he was dead at the time, we couldn't put down Dr. Soong, so I put down my name- as your foster parent. When I found out about the hearing, that gave me the clearance I needed."

"So you lied."

The hurt was clear on Thelen's face. How could Data still not understand? "Halt," she told the lift. She stepped away, then turned to face him. "I did not lie. I was the one that activated you. I'm the one that stood by you when everyone else wrote you off as just another android- sponsored you for the Academy.

"When you graduated, everyone had family present- and I made damn certain you did, too. If I'm not your foster parent, then who is?"

If it were possible for Data to look apologetic he was doing so now. "There is no one else."

She spoke to the lift. "Resume."

"Thelen if I have accidentally offended you, I am sorry."

She squeezed his arm affectionately, a weak smile on her face. "Not your fault. I've got a lot on my mind right now."

The lift arrived and as they entered the Lounge, Picard rose to his feet. "Thelen. Welcome aboard." He then introduced the others in the room. "My First Officer, Commander Riker. Chief Engineer Geordi LaForge, Lt. Commander Deanna Troi."

She nodded to each of them and pulled out a chair. As they settled in, Riker had the first question. "What can you tell us about Gul Balad?"

"He fights like a fanatic," Thelen replied. "By now, he's close enough to recognize the *Constitution* and that'll put revenge at the top of his list- he has an almost Klingon mindset about such things."

Picard shifted his gaze. "Data, what have you found out about the distortion?"

"It is artificial, sir. Gul Balad's ship is transmitting an energy beam into it. It is this beam we detected as an energy reading."

As Data spoke, Thelen shifted in her seat. "However, in order to maintain the distortion, He would require a full squadron. Therefore, it is probable that there are two more ships just beyond sensor range."

Deanna was very aware of Thelen's uneasiness. "Captain, are you all right?"

Startled, Thelen turned toward her. "I'm fine. When are we going to get this meeting started?"

Picard glanced at Deanna. His reason for including her now confirmed. "Thelen, we started ten minutes ago."

She met his gaze and no one needed telepathy to know she had no memory of those minutes. With a confused look on her face, she turned away in fear, knowing she couldn't bluff her way out of it this time.

Picard spoke gently. "Councilor, Data, escort the captain to Sickbay."

As the 3 left, Riker could see the concern on Picard's face. "Sir?"

His captain met his gaze. "I've known Thelen for over 20 years, Will. It's not like her to go blank like that."

"I'm sure Beverly'll find the answer."

Picard nodded. "I just wish I knew if I wanted to hear it." He sighed, forcing his thoughts back to the other matter at hand. "Mr. LaForge, since the distortion is artificial, is there any way of shutting it down?"

Geordi shrugged. "If there is, I need time to find it."

Riker leaned forward in his seat. "We've got one hour before Gul Balad starts taking shots at us."

Picard nodded as he leaned back. "Work as quickly as you can, Geordi, or we may find ourselves in the middle of a new Federation-Cardassian War." He looked to both of them. "Dismissed."

Upon reaching the door, Riker looked back. He could only see Picard's head and one arm around the chair, but it was enough to see that the Captain was worried.

About the mission. Thelen.

Everything.

Captain's log, Stardate 47318.5. While Commander LaForge continues to work on shutting down the

Cardassian distortion, Dr. Crusher has discovered the cause of a far more personal problem....

"...Actually, it wasn't me at all," Beverly stated as she, Picard, Deanna, Data and Thelen stood in Sick Bay.

"When I called for a copy of the captain's medical records, Dr. Holmes told me that she not only knew about the problem, but had the answer ten minutes ago."

Surprised, Thelen stared at her, then closed her eyes and shook her head.

"So what is the problem?" Picard asked.

"She has Falballak- it's the Andorian version of Diabetes."

"But that was wiped out on Earth back in the 21st century," Deanna noted.

Beverly nodded. "Yes- on Earth. But the Andorian version has continually eluded all efforts to find a cure. The best we've been able to come up with is a

maintenance medication that she'll have to take for the rest of her life."

Picard turned to his friend. "Thelen?"

She nodded. "It picks its victims once they enter middle age. It began...creeping over me about two weeks ago."

Data was confused. "I do not understand. With the medication, You can still live a full life."

Beverly sighed. She couldn't face him as she explained. "Data, in order to avoid the possibility of these blackouts happening during a crisis, Starfleet regulations require any Andorian with Falballak to be medically discharged."

Thelen began pacing the deck- the growing resentment clear in her voice. "The regulation's an outdated relic." She met Picard's gaze squarely. "I am *not* stepping down."

Beverly stared at her in shock. "You don't have that choice, Captain. According to reg- "

Thelen turned on her sharply. "*Don't quote the book to me, Doctor!*" Her angered frustration exploded with every word. "You are not my chief medical officer. You don't have the authority to relieve me."

"Then I'll call Dr. Holmes over here and she can do it herself!"

"Doctor," Picard held up his hand for silence. "Thelen, there's only one authority in this sector that you have to recognize- and that's mine."

The Andorian sighed. She knew what was coming and she had no argument against. "You have been captain longer than I have."

Picard took a deep breath. "Whether I like it or not, as senior officer present, I am ordering you to stand down as captain of the *Constitution*."

Silence filled Sickbay like a smothering fog. Thelen stood by one of the beds, staring at the silent monitor above it. When she spoke, her frustration was easy to hear. "And what about Gul Balad? He's not out here alone- That's not his style." She faced this human male. "You're going to need help from my ship before this is

over- and my first officer is so damn green he could pass for an Orion! James Roberts has never been in command during a combat situation and I'm not giving him my crew to practice with!"

"I'm afraid you don't have that choice." Picard tapped his combadge. "Picard to Bridge. Mr. Worf, report to Sick Bay."

"Acknowledged."

Thelen met Picard's gaze from across the room and it was clear this wasn't over. She then turned away in silence.

A moment later, Worf came in. Picard's eyes never left Thelen's face as he spoke. "Lieutenant, due to medical reasons, Captain Thelen has been relieved of duty. Escort her to guest quarters. She goes nowhere without an escort."

"Aye, sir." The Klingon looked to Thelen. "Captain?"

She sighed and started toward the door-

The Klaxons started to wail-

And Riker's voice filled the air. "Red Alert! Captain to the Bridge!"

"Picard here."

"Gul Balad's opened fire on the *Constitution*- and Captain, she didn't even have her shields up."

As Picard replied, Thelen's glare would've given Beverly's surgical scalpels a run for their money. "Give her what cover you can. I'm on my way. Picard out."

On the Bridge viewscreen, the Cardassian closed on the *Constitution*, firing as he came. The *Constitution* returned fire- only to miss.

Riker stood next to the ensign manning the helm. "Bring her round and lock phasers on target."

As she obeyed, the ship came round and the lieutenant filling in for Worf spoke up. "Phasers locked on target."

With Picard and Data arriving on the Bridge, Riker replied with one word. "Fire."

The dorsal array lit with energy, then coalesced into a single beam that sliced through space to strike the Cardassian's shields.

"Report," Picard ordered as his ship fired again.

"He's ignoring us and going for the *Constitution*," Riker replied as Data took his station. "She's taken hits on both her saucer and secondary hull and her shields are still down."

Picard turned to Data. "Put us between them and maintain fire."

"Aye, sir."

On Deck 5, Worf activated the doors to the guest quarters and as they entered, the *Constitution* was hit-the explosion lighting up the viewports. "*Damnit!*" Thelen turned-

-to find Worf blocking the exit. "Stand aside, Lieutenant."

These two descendants of warrior races eased into fighting positions as he answered. "The Captain ordered you to remain here."

"He said I was to go nowhere without an escort," Thelen replied. "Now either accompany me or stand aside- but make up your mind before my crew is butchered!"

Constitution

Red alert signs flashed. Status reports filled the air as the helmsman, Lt. Bailey, fought to hold things together and evade Gul Balad at the same time. There was the sound of a transporter and Bailey turned, half expecting a Cardassian boarding party. Instead, he got his captain- and a Klingon? "Report," Thelen ordered as she assumed her seat.

"Both portside power and phaser array are off-line."

"Shield status?"

"Fifty percent- starboard side only."

"Where's Roberts?"

It was Worf that answered her. "Dead."

She turned to look at him and looked down to see the body on the deck- an exploding panel and a piece of shrapnel in his chest told of Lt. Commander James Roberts' end. "Damn." She turned from the sight-

-and the *Constitution* bucked, calling her back to the situation at hand. "Where are the *Enterprise* and Gul Balad?"

Bailey checked his board as he answered. "*Enterprise* is trying to get between us- but she's having to maneuver on impulse so she won't over shoot us."

"Bring auxiliary systems on-line," Thelen ordered. "Divert shield power to the port side. Stand by to bring the starboard weapons to bear on my order."

Silence filled the bridge. Thelen watched as the *Enterprise* fired again and Gul Balad drew closer.

And slowly, her face grew blank.

Bailey's eyes were on his console. "Ready for your orders, Captain."

Worf, however, had been watching Thelen- mindful of Picard's comment about 'Medical reasons'. Upon seeing her face, he turned to Bailey. "Hard to port- do as she planned."

There was no time to argue. Bailey brought the ship around, her port phasers firing, striking the Cardassian's shields. The ship continued her turn as Balad returned fire, striking her starboard shields.

Enterprise fired again. There was an odd flash, announcing that part of Gul Balad's shields had collapsed. He quickly brought his ship around, throwing it into warp- and left the area before the two ships could launch a coordinated attack.

Enterprise

"Cease fire," Picard ordered.

"Aye, sir."

Picard glanced at Riker. "At least Commander Roberts-"

"Crusher to Bridge."

"Picard here."

"I just went to check on my patient, Captain and she's gone- so's Worf."

Captain and Commander exchanged glances as Picard rose to his feet. "Open a channel." The viewscreen changed to show the *Constitution's* bridge- with Thelen in the center seat and Worf standing nearby. To say that Picard was slightly angry would be putting it mildly.

"Lieutenant- !"

Thelen cut him off. "If you're going to yell at someone, Jean-Luc, yell at me. Mr. Worf was the only one available when I needed an escort."

"Thelen, I do not enjoy having my orders so freely interpreted."

"Then next time be more specific." Picard stood in stony silence as Thelen went on. "I have Roberts and three other dead, 15 injured. Not to mention damage to shields, phasers and power systems." She allowed her report to sink in. 18 casualties and ship-wide damage because she hadn't been aboard her ship. "Now," she concluded, "Do you want to relieve me again?"

Captain's log, Stardate 47318.7. Repairs to the Constitution continue under Captain Thelen's command. According to Starfleet, she is medically unfit to hold the center seat- yet, there is no one else that knows the ship as well as she does and both her knowledge and experience may prove crucial before the day is done.

From his Ready Room viewport, all Picard could see of the *Constitution* was her saucer and warp nacelles. He didn't like being at odds with any friend- especially one he's known for over 20 years.

The door chime sounded. "Come." He turned as Deanna entered. "Yes, Councilor?"

"Captain Thelen has a very strong personality," she noted. "When I sensed her blackout earlier, it was as if someone had...turned her off."

Picard thought about this. "Are you saying that I shouldn't leave her in command?"

Deanna shook her head. "Try to relieve her again and you'll have a definite fight on your hands. She found Data soon after her brother died. Except for him, her crew is all the family she has."

Picard nodded as he came over to his desk. "I know. Family to an Andorian is like honor to a Klingon. They build their lives around it. If not for that damn reg- "He stopped and his head slowly came up. After seven years, Deanna could 'read' him fairly easily, but she didn't need empathy to know he'd just gotten an idea. Before he could voice it, the door chime sounded. "Come." They both watched as Geordi and Data entered. "Yes, Gentlemen?"

The engineer spoke. "We can shut down the distortion, Captain. It means using a variation of the navigational beam we tried to use against the Borg. Only this time we have to tie in every weapons system the Battle Section has."

This confused Deanna. "The Battle Section?"

Data nodded. "Yes, Councilor. The energy band needed is far more dangerous. All non-essential personnel will have to be evacuated."

Geordi took it from there. "The other drawback is that it only leaves us the shields for protection. If there's a fight, it's going to be up to the *Constitution* to hold the line."

Worf's voice filled the air. "Bridge to Captain."

"Go ahead, Mr. Worf."

"Sir, long-range scans show 3 Cardassian warships approaching. They will be in phaser range in one hour."

Those in the Ready Room exchanged glances as Picard replied. "Acknowledged- and Lieutenant, inform Commander Riker, that I want the ship prepared for saucer separation."

"Aye, sir."

"Picard out." He then turned to Geordi. "Get on it, Mr. LaForge." He then turned to Data. "Commander, I have another job for you."

Captain's log, Stardate 47318.8. With Lt. Worf in command of the saucer, we have performed separation. He will take it and all non-essential personnel to Deep Space Nine. Once there, the saucer will provide the means of emergency evacuation if it should become necessary.

Constitution

Thelen was seated at her desk in her quarters. She didn't use her ready room as much as some did. If she was off-duty, she 'worked at home'. The door chime was heard. "Come." She looked up from repair reports as Dr. Holmes entered. "Erin." The human handed her a filled container. "What's this?"

"Albaine. The maintenance medication for Falballak. According to the computer, one dose a day is enough to prevent the blackouts." Erin leaned over the desk and her brunette hair fell down about her shoulders. "And if you take it like you're supposed to, and allow yourself to be monitored till we reach a starbase, you should have the evidence you need to get that regulation repealed."

Then Erin handed her a data disk. "And this?"

"A transfer request. You couldn't trust me with your secret and I violated your trust by scanning you without your knowledge."

Thelen sighed and tossed it back at her. "Erase that damn thing before somebody finds it. I didn't tell you because I didn't want you in the same position Jean-Luc was in." As Erin nodded and pocketed the disk, the door chime sounded once more. "I get more privacy in my ready room," Thelen complained gently.

"Come." Her eyes went wide at the sight of her visitor. "Data? Don't tell me Jean-Luc sent you to relieve me?"

"That is not the case," he replied. "As the senior officer, he has assigned me as your acting first officer for the duration of the mission."

Holmes smiled. "Welcome aboard, Mr. Data."

"Thank you, Doctor."

There was a gleam in Thelen's eyes. "Well, if someone's going to be watching over me, I'm glad it'll be you."

"That may not be necessary." Data held up a container he was carrying."Dr. Crusher has sent the medicine that you..."He stopped at the sight of the container in Thelen's hand.

"I have a lot of friends, Data."

Holmes folded her arms. "One of which is still waiting for you to start taking your medicine- now that you have an ample supply."

"Is that an order, Doctor?"

"Yes."

The captain opened the container and quickly took one of the capsules. She then set both bottles aside as she rose to her feet. "Now, Data, I think we just have time for a quick tour before Gul Balad arrives."

"Just remember," the doctor said as the 3 entered the corridor," We need scans of you with the medication in your system if we're going to challenge that regulation. So you'd better get to Sick Bay first chance you get."

Thelen nodded and her antennas bounced. "I'll be there."

Holmes spoke once more as the 2 moved off. "I'll believe it when I see it."

Enterprise

On the Battle Bridge, the turbo lift doors opened and Picard watched as Geordi crossed to his engineering console. A moment later, he spoke. "Beam's at your discretion, Captain."

Picard sat up straighter in his chair. "Number One, inform Thelen that we're beginning operations. Mr. LaForge, raise the shields and bring the beam on-line."

The beam came into view and sliced its way through space, to disappear inside the distortion.

Constitution

Thelen watched from her chair. Data was seated to her left as Mr. Bailey continued to man the helm. "Ship's status?"

Her First Officer answered quickly. "Port phaser array is still off-line. However, power has been restored to portside shields- which are now at eighty percent."

Bailey's eyes were on his console. "Captain, Gul Balad's squadron is coming into short-range scan."

"Open a channel."

The picture on the screen changed to one of Balad's hate-filled glare. "Calling to surrender, Thelen?"

The captain had a hard time keeping the incredulous tone out of her voice. "Not hardly. I'm calling to give you a chance to keep your squadron alive this time."

The Cardassian's face was easy to read. He had no intention of withdrawing and considered surrender insulting. "I should have destroyed you 12 years ago."

Thelen's voice took on an urgent tone as she tried to get through to him. "Balad, by the time the battle was over, you only had one ship left. Consider your men."

"I will see your precious *Constitution* reduced to a cloud of debris before this day is done!" he growled before cutting the signal.

Thelen sat up straighter. "That'll be the day. Mr. Data, sound Red Alert. Helm, plot an intercept course. Tactical, bring all weapons to bear." She paused. "It seems that Gul Balad needs to learn his lesson all over again."

Data turned to his temporary commanding officer. "Captain, suggest we bring the port shields on-line."

"Negative. I want Balad to think we're as helpless as when he left. Let me know as soon as that port phaser array is back on-line." The *Constitution* rocked as the Cardassians opened fire. "Report."

"Surface scaring only," Data announced after a quick check. "No system damages or injuries."

Bailey spoke up next. "Captain, we're between *Enterprise* and the Cardassians."

"Hold position," she replied. "Let them come to us."

Enterprise

On the viewscreen, the *Constitution* assumed her position. "She's drawing a line," Riker noted.

Picard nodded. "And daring Balad to cross it. LaForge, beam status?"

"Holding steady, sir."

On the screen, Gul Balad's disruptor fire exploded against the *Constitution's* shields.

Constitution

"Gul Balad's coming round to our port side," Bailey announced. "His wingmen are continuing toward *Enterprise*."

Data turned from his console. "Captain, port phaser array is now on-line."

"Balad's position?"

Bailey had it. "Still coming at us on our port side."

Thelen rose to her feet. "Lock and fire."

The port phasers came to life, rattling Gul Balad's ship. Then this reminder of another age came round, her forward phasers firing across the bows of the other Cardassian ships, forcing them to change course.

Thelen stood before her command chair. Her stance, voice, expression, making it clear that she was exactly where she belonged. "Come about. Bring shields to full strength. Keep us between them and *Enterprise*."

Data reported even as his hands moved over his console. "They are splitting up. One is going for the *Enterprise* while the others keep us busy."

Thelen nodded as she stood by her command chair. "You know which ship is Balad's, Mr. Bailey. Keep us in his way."

The helmsman nodded. "He and his wingman are dead ahead."

The *Constitution* rocked again. Thelen had one reply: "Return fire."

Data's eyes never left his board. "Captain, I am detecting the energy beams coming from all 3 Cardassian vessels. I have their positions plotted."

She nodded. "Take the one headed for *Enterprise*. Lock torpedoes and fire."

The *Constitution's* torpedo tube flared as the photon was launched. It struck the beam and exploded, sending the Cardassian tumbling. "Their environment is intact," Data reported. "But they have lost power to their weapons and engines."

Thelen nodded again. "Good enough. Now let's concentrate on the others."

Enterprise

Picard barely had time to appreciate Thelen's maneuver before the lieutenant at con spoke. "Captain, the distortion's expanding. It'll reach Deep Space Nine in 15 minutes."

He turned to Riker. "Tell them to get out- NOW." The ship suddenly rocked and he looked to engineering. "Report."

Geordi checked his console as he spoke. "We're being pulled toward it, Captain."

Picard's reply was instant. "Reverse engines."

His chief engineer did so. "That's slowing us down, but it's not enough."

"How long can we hold out?" Riker asked him.

Geordi shrugged. "Another ten minutes at most."

Involuntarily, all eyes went to the screen and the distortion as it grew closer with each passing second.

Constitution

Data turned from his console. "They are taking aim on the warp nacelles."

Thelen turned to Bailey. "Bring us around. 127 mark 5."

Before he could act, the Cardassians cut loose with everything they had. The *Constitution* shook violently under the barrage. A panel next to Data exploded-throwing him across the bridge. "Data!" Thelen was the first one to him. His uniform was burnt and in some places, his outer casing was gone- revealing damaged circuits beneath.

Bailey's voice sliced through the air. "Captain, we've lost the warp drive and Balad's circling back."

Thelen turned her gaze to the screen as the Cardassian ship drew closer.

Enterprise

Standing before his chair, Picard turned. "LaForge- ?"

Geordi's frustration showed. "There's nothing I can do. All the weapon systems are tied into the beam."

Riker had been staring down at his tactical board, trying to figure an angle. Now, his eyes lit on one system and he looked up. "The tractor beam. It's not part of the weapon system."

Geordi nodded. "Adjusted to repel, it'd be like getting hit with an asteroid."

Picard nodded. "Do it."

Geordi worked as quickly as he could and soon the tractor beam was on-line. Gul Balad took evasive action and the beam struck his wingman, sending the ship

tumbling into the distortion where the pressures tore it apart.

Constitution

Thelen turned from the sight as Data sat up. "Are you all right?"

"No," he answered. "My right arm is off-line." A shudder ran through him. "Several...systems...have been...damaged."

"Can you stand?"

"With help."

She got him back to his console and to his seat. "Can you man your post?"

"No...choice." He quickly turned his head to the left. When he spoke again, it was clear that whatever he had done, had stabilized his condition. "There is no one else available."

The Captain glanced at the viewscreen. "I'm afraid you're right. What's our status?"

Her Acting First Officer checked his board. "Warp drive and all phaser arrays are off-line. Impulse and photon torpedoes are still available,"

Thelen looked to Tactical. "I want a full spread across Balad's bow- *NOW*."

The photons exploded against his shields as the Cardassian sailed through them. Even as his shields failed, he altered course as the *Enterprise's* tractor beam shot past.

Enterprise

Geordi was checking his console. "Captain, we're getting feedback on the beam and energy levels are rising." A note of urgency entered his voice. "It's gonna blow!"

Picard's orders came with the rapidity of an old-style machine gun. "Cut the beam. Divert power to the shields. Helm, bring her about. Full-"

The distortion erupted with all the force of a small nova, catching the three surviving ships in a shockwave before anyone could react.

Constitution

Thelen and Data were the only ones to hold onto their seats. It was a while before the ship stopped tumbling and the rest of the crew could reclaim their stations. The captain looked around the bridge as she spoke. "Anyone hurt?" No one was. "Report."

Data did so. "The shockwave has carried Gul Balad closer toward *Enterprise*."

"Torpedoes- "

"The system just went down," Tactical reported.

Data turned to the captain. "The *Enterprise's* shields have collapsed."

Thelen turned. "On screen." The image showed Gul Balad diving toward *Enterprise* like a bat out of hell.

Enterprise

The lieutenant manning the con spoke as he studied his board. "Captain, his shields and weapons are off-line."

Riker confirmed it. "He's planning to ram us."

Picard rose to his feet. "Bring us about, Ensign- head on."

Constitution

Thelen's words were crisp as she stared at the screen, "Maximum impulse. Data, I need something- *NOW*."

"I believe I have - "

"Then use it!"

Gul Balad's ship continued to bare down on *Enterprise*-

The Battle Section came round, it's forward tractor beam emitter coming into line-

the *Constitution* pressed her impulse drive to the limit-

Enterprise's tractor beam lashed out, bashing in Gul Balad's bow-

-As *Constitution's* crushed his engines.

The battle was over.

Enterprise

Riker checked readings as he spoke. "His environment's stable, but he's not going anywhere on his own."

Picard nodded and the tension slowly faded. "Cancel Red Alert. Contact Worf. Tell him he can return Captain Sisko and his crew to DS9 and arrange a rendezvous."

"Aye, sir. *Constitution's* calling."

"On screen."

Gul Balad's ship was replaced by Thelen with Data standing nearby. "Jean-Luc, can I assume the shouting's over?"

"That depends."

"On what I do next?" The Andorian sighed. "Come with us to Starbase 296. While the ships are repaired, you can help me challenge that damn regulation." She nodded toward Data. "You do have some experience with legal matters."

"Agreed. But we have to rendezvous with the saucer first."

Thelen nodded. "Understood. We'll take Gul Balad in tow and await your signal."

Data spoke up then. "Captain, I will need Geordi's services as soon as he is available."

Only then did Data's damage register with Picard. He glanced over at Geordi and nodded, speaking even as the engineer ran for the lift. "He's on his way. Picard out."

Constitution

Thelen paused as she entered Sickbay. Most of the beds were full, but none of the injuries seemed to be life threatening. Nurse Mendez approached her. "Captain."

"T'Kel. Is Erin busy?"

The Nurse shook her head. "Not for you, Ma'am. She left standing orders for you to be brought to her immediately."

Thelen had to smile. "Don't give me a chance to escape. Is that it?"

An exotic eyebrow rose. "I believe that was the intention." But the Mexican sparkle in her eyes belied the Vulcan calm she tried to project. She led Thelen into Holmes office. "Doctor?"

Erin looked up from the reports on her desk and almost did a double take. "Well, you actually showed up!"

Thelen indicated the work in front of the human. "I can come back later if you're busy."

The Doctor looked to the Nurse. "Lock the door."

Her captain laughed.

Enterprise

Captain's log, Stardate 47323.4. After one of Commander Riker's patented dockings, we arrived at Starbase 296 and both ships were given priority in the Spacedock. While repairs were being seen to, Thelen, Dr. Holmes, Data and I met with Admiral Givens and his medical officer, Dr. Sortel. Records of the meeting were sent to Starfleet Command and for the last 3 days, we have been awaiting a reply.

Constitution

Thelen stood before the viewscreen in her cabin looking at it's image of the stars, when the door chime sounded. 'Come.' She turned as Data entered. "Yes, Data?"

"Your new First Officer has arrived," he said as he turned and the door opened again.

Thelen's eyes went wide, then she smiled. "Sallen."

The Orion returned the smile. There was a definite touch of grey in her hair now, but the ensign's energy was still evident as the Commander spoke. "Reporting for duty, Captain. When I heard you needed a First Officer, I asked for the assignment."

"Welcome aboard." Then Thelen shrugged. "I hope I get to stay long enough to see you at work."

Sallen nodded. "Data filled me in."

"That is the other reason I am here," he added. "Admiral Givens has sent word for us to report to his office."

Sallen offered Thelen her hand. "Good luck."

Her Captain sighed. "Thanks."

Starbase 296

Givens was waiting when Thelen, Picard, Holmes and Data arrived. He waved them to seats and spoke without preamble. "Computer, replay message received from Grand Admiral Mikels this stardate."

All eyes went to the office viewscreen as it lit with the image of a human male in his mid-70s. "Hello, Steven. I suggest you call Captains Thelen and Picard, Dr. Holmes and Lt. Commander Data to your office." The admiral paused before continuing. "I'll assume you've done so.

"Thelen, I make it my business to know who my ship captains are- as such, I was already familiar with your record. Your challenge of your medical discharge has caused quite a stir here at Command.

"The Chief of Starfleet Medical even called for a review of your case- which is why it's taken so long for me to get back to you.

"Medical regulation 298-7B was initiated when Andor joined the Federation. It's believed to have preserved the lives of both Andorians and the crews they served with. At that time, we knew very little about Falballak and Albaline didn't exist. However, it does exist today and it's been proven effective. As such, effective this date, I am ordering 298-7B repealed."

Mikels leaned forward as he went on. "Thelen, not everyone can be a Starship Captain. Your service record

to date makes it clear that you belong in the center seat. Now that the choice is yours, it's my hope that you'll remain in that seat for many more years to come.

"Whatever you decide, you have my full support. Mikels out."

The screen went blank and only then did the tension drain from Thelen's body. Givens offered his hand. "Congratulations, Captain."

Constitution

One of the few areas on board to retain its original function throughout the ship's history was the huge two-story rec room. Tonight, a party was in progress- Doctor's orders. In Holmes' opinion, Thelen had taken on Goliath- and won- and that called for a celebration.

While all of the *Enterprise's* command crew was present at Thelen's invitation, it surprised no one to see her spend her time with Data- and everyone left them to it.

Picard hated to interrupt, but he had no choice. They both looked up as he and Geordi approached. Thelen

noded to her old friend. "Jean-Luc. Thank you for standing by me."

"Family" can have many definitions," he replied. "Friends" can fit as easily as "Mother and son". He sighed. "But I'm afraid that even friends must eventually take their leave. We've received orders for our next assignment."

Thelen gently squeezed Data's arm. "Take care." Then her tone took on a semi-serious note. "And I expect more than one letter every couple of years- is that clear?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

Moments later, with the good-byes said, Thelen and Holmes watched as they beamed out. "Did they say where they were headed?" the doctor asked as Sallen joined them.

Their Captain shook her head, sending her silvery white hair bouncing about her neck. "No. But you can bet that wherever it is, it won't be dull."

END

Author's note

The story you have just read was originally written as a spec script and submitted to Paramount during Next Generation's sixth season.

For whatever reasons, Paramount passed on it. What you've just read is as close to what the TV episode would have felt like as I could possibly get it.

The reason I state this, is because there will be a Nova Trek Universe adaption of this story in the Graphic Novel series- Book Twelve, the next to last book in the series.

Now, the story you are about to read is a totally different animal and deals with two of the best known energy-based life forms in the Trek universe.

From the first moment Q appeared on screen in "Encounter at Farpoint" fandom seemed to jump to the

assumption that he and a certain Squire were of the same race.

I never bought into that. Throughout all the 'Trek series, they presented numerous energy-based life forms. There was never any reason to believe that these two were of the same race.

In the story that follows, they meet for the first time- and one of them finds himself on the wrong end of an attitude adjustment....

mdbruffy 2014

Q-Esquire

by MDBruffy

Captain's log, stardate 471124.3. The Enterprise has assumed orbit around Albirus Four. Our mission, is to observe this young world as it cools and it's geography settles into place. A fairly routine scientific mission. The only fact that raises some concern is that Albirus Four has three moons- each in it's own orbit, which could make our own orbit somewhat complicated...

Seated on his recliner, in his quarters, Picard held his Kataan flute in hand as he listened to the tape Nella Daren had sent him.

The flute disappeared from his hands-
-to reappear in it's case on a nearby table.
" Computer, stop playback."

The captain rose to his feet and looked all around for the one being he knew of that could accomplish such an act. He vanished-

-to appear on the Bridge. Before anyone could ask him how he got there, a voice was heard "Greetings, Captain. Greetings and Fleicitations to you all."

Having arrived facing the ship's dedication plaque, Picard turned toward his Ready Room and for a

moment, thought he was skipping through time again. But instead of a being standing before him dressed as an Elizabethan sea captain, what appeared to be a human male stood before him dressed like a British officer straight out of the 19th century Napoleonic Wars. "Please rest assured, Kind Sir, that I mean you no harm."

"Who are you?" Picard asked.

The being actually bowed. "You may address me as Squire Trelene."

Upon hearing this, Data tilted his head slightly as he began searching through his own vast memory. But for once, someone else beat him to it. "I've read about you." Picard turned to Riker in surprise. "Remember sir? My first year on board, I read all the old Enterprise logs. "He stepped up beside the captain as he went on."If I remember correctly, the Squire here, seized the original Enterprise- then under James Kirk's command- while they were making an emergency supply run to Beta Six- it was still a colony then. He nearly killed Kirk and his crew before his parents stepped in and took his toys away."

Trelene had stood quietly throughout Riker's recital. He even nodded as the commander spoke. "I admit all of it, sir. Every word you've spoken is true."

Surprise best described the expression on Picard's face. An old Enterprise enemy admitting his mistake? It was a novel approach if nothing else. "So why are you here now- a hundred years later?"

"To put it in Human terms, Captain, I was grounded," The Squire answered. "I was allowed to observe your Federation, but my parents refused to let me take part. Needless to say, with a century of time on my hands, I was able to do a great deal of thinking and I came to realize that my behavior had left a great deal to be desired.

"When my parents lifted their ban on my movements, I knew that the one thing I had to do immediately, was seek out the *Enterprise*- the current one-" he indicated the Bridge-" Since the original is no longer available and apologize for my actions."

Picard looked over to Deanna, where she had remained seated and saw her nod. He had no problem translating it. Trelene was being sincere. "And what do you expect in return for this apology?"

"To simply be allowed to visit," Trelene replied. "I still consider you humans to be a fascinating study." Riker looked to Picard. "While his methods left a lot to be desired, his intense interest was noted in the logs."

"Captain," Trelene called, "Granted I did get off on the wrong foot, as it were with the other ship. But as you humans say, with age comes wisdom. I am simply asking for a second chance."

"Oh, please!" It was a hard, cynical voice that filled the air. "Jean-Luc, if you believe this twit you're a bigger fool than I ever gave you credit for."

Picard closed his eyes and released a deep breath. Hoping he hadn't heard what he knew he had, he turned and opened his eyes to see him standing by the doors to the Observation Lounge, his arms folded across his chest in clear disgust.

Q.

"And who is this impertent fellow?" Trelene asked.

Picard sighed, hoping things wouldn't get out of hand and knowing better. "Squire Trelene, this is Q-of the Q Continuum."

Trelene raised an almost snobbish eyebrow. It was clear this new arrival didn't frighten him in the least. "An entire race named after one letter? Not very imaginative is it?"

Riker was finding it hard to keep the smile off his face. Q on the other hand, stepped up to the railing and the hatred was clear in his eyes. "I'll give you imagination!"

The *Enterprise* rocked and Geordi turned from his

engineering station in shock. "Captain the engines are- *gone!*"

"We are falling out of orbit, "Data announced. "We will enter the atmosphere in one minute."

Q's gaze locked with Trelene's. "You have that long to leave- or these people are dead."

That eyebrow rose again. "My dear sir, you have yet to learn the lesson I learned a century ago. That one can not have everything one wants." The Squire then waved his hand as if waving the matter away.

Geordi stared at his screens in disbelief. "Captain, the engines are back."

"We are also back in a stable orbit," Data added.

Q came down the incline, stopping only a few steps away from the Squire. An instant later, he vanished in an uncharacteristic clap of thunder.

Trelene met the Captain's gaze and Picard couldn't miss the excited gleam in the Squire's eyes. "Oh it's so much more fun on the side of the angels, eh?"

Captain's log, stardate 471124.4. Our observation mission to Albirus Four continues despite the arrivals of both Squire Trelene and Q. Upon researching the Squire with Commander Riker's assistance, I have to admit to being leery of his continued presence.

However, I must also admit that since his arrival, he has behaved himself- something Q has never done.

On Deck Eleven, Deanna was showing Trelene around. Avoiding the high security areas, she decided to concentrate on the civilian areas of the ship."...This ship is really a remarkable accomplishment, Councilor," the Squire noted as they passed an exercise hall where Lt. Worf was holding one of his martial arts classes. "I've paid very little attention to the Klingons over the years," Trelene noted as he glanced back at the hall. "Perhaps that's an oversight I should correct."

Deanna gently touched his arm. "May I offer a word of advice?"

The eagerness leaped from the Squire's face. "Certainly."

"Keep in mind what happened the first time you approached humans," Deanna said. "Then spend twice as long studying the Klingons before you approach them."

The Squire considered this and nodded as they reached a pair of doors unlike any other he'd seen onboard. Stepping up to a control pannel, Deanna worked for several moments. "Program complete," the computer announced. "You may enter when

ready."

"Enter what?" Trelene asked.

Deanna's smile grew. "We call it the Holodeck." She stepped up to the doors and they parted to reveal a grand Napoleonic ballroom- perfect in every detail.

Trelene's face was like that of a child's on Christmas morning. "Oh! This is magnificent!" He turned to Deanna. "May we have a dance? Just one?"

The innocent desire was clear and Deanna looked up slightly as she spoke. "Computer, give us a waltz suitable to-no. "Her eyes sparkled with a mischief of her own as she changed commands. "Make it a full ball with guests."

An instant later, that's exactly what they had and the Squire was clearly overjoyed with the experience. He turned around completely, taking it all in, then he looked to Deanna. "If I may?" His hand moved just a fraction and her uniform gave way to a ballroom gown suitable to the time and place.

An orchestra somewhere began to play and soon the two were gliding across the floor amid the color and pagentry of the early 1800's.

As they danced, there was one character present that the computer had not created. With a goblet of

wine in one hand and a uniform covered with medals, Q watched as Deanna and the Squire danced. As he watched, his eyes narrowed in seething hatred. Draining the goblet, he set it down and walked out-

-non-stop through a bulkhead.

Eleven decks above, Picard was studying the ship's status reports when the computer terminal and every light in the Ready Room went dead. He reached for his combadge. "Picard to Bridge."

There was no answer. Rising to his feet, he headed for the door. It didn't open.

"I suggest you look out the viewport, Mon Capitaine." Q's voice. Yet, Picard knew he wasn't in the room. Crossing to the viewport, the Captain looked out to see one of Albirus Four's moons coming toward the ship. "I've altered the orbits of all 3," Q stated. "Unless you tell that idiotic squire to leave, they'll converge and crush the *Enterprise* like an eggshell."

But threats have a tendency to backfire and Picard had never been one to allow himself to be threatened easily. He hadn't stood for it the first time he and Q met and he certainly wasn't going to stand for it now. "Then go ahead and do it," he said. "You'll

probably kill everyone except the Squire."

There was no answer and Picard watched as the moon drew closer and closer.

It was gone.

The lights came up and he turned to see Q standing in the middle of the room. "How did you know I was bluffing?"

The captain shrugged. "Kill us and you'll have to find someone else to pester."

Q turned away. "I don't understand you humans."

"What else is new?" Picard countered. "I'm just surprised to finally hear you admit it."

"Everytime I try to bring a little color and adventure to your puny lives, you reject me," Q said. "Yet, you accept that...prattling dandy right away."

"I don't understand it."

For a moment, Picard could only stare at him in disbelief. This was the being that had the nerve to put Humanity through a seven year trial! "Then let me spell it out for you," The captain said The Squire apologized for his past actions the moment he arrived. You on the other hand, have done nothing but cause trouble since the first day we met.

"This crew has no reason to like or trust you."

Q turned to face him and his voice was all too calm. "I can change that very easily."

A blinding glare washed out everything.

The waltz came to an end and Deanna took a deep breath. It'd been awhile since she'd gone dancing. "I'm afraid we have to be going," she told the Squire with a gentle smile. "I have appointments scheduled for later."

Trelene nodded and watched as she turned to speak. "Computer, end program." Conversation and the mix and mingle of people continued around them. "Computer, exit." The guests were starting to look at her strangely. "Computer, arch."

None of the commands worked. Then Deanna noticed something else These aren't holodeck characters- I can sense-"She turned to Trelene. "Why did you-?"Then she got a good empathic take on him. "You didn't do this."

Trelene gently took her by the arm and led her over to one side of the ballroom. "We are no longer on your holodeck,"He told her as he looked around. "This is the real 1800's- courtesy, no doubt- of that most disagreeable Q." He shook his head. "I fail to understand how your captain has put up with him for so long."

"Q does what he likes when he likes," Deanna stated.

"That must end," the Squire stated firmly. He met Deanna's gaze. "It really must." He changed her gown back into her uniform. "I suggest you prepare yourself, Councilor. While I've studied Earth's past, I've never been here. This may be a rather rocky trip. "He then waved his hand-

-and they were on the *Enterprise* Bridge with the business ends of several phasers aimed in their direction. Deanna sought out Picard. "Captain-?"

He surprised her and Trelene both by turning to Q. "What should we do with them?"

"Kill them of course. What else?"

The Councilor turned her angered glare on him. "What have you done to them?"

Phasers were raised as he answered. "I simply showed them who their real friend was."

Trelene gently moved Deanna to one side as he spoke. "Mind control is a very petty way of getting what one wants." He snapped his fingers. "Don't you agree, Captain?"

Phasers were lowered as Picard glared at Q. "I do indeed."

For a long moment, Q was silent as his anger boiled and then erupted in an energy discharge that slammed the Squire against a bulkhead! He stepped

toward Trelene- only to find the captain in his way.
"Stand aside, Picard."

"Why? So you can commit murder?" the Captain asked. "The great Q in a murderous fury- or is it jealousy?"

Q stared at him in shock. "What? don't be absurd."

But the captain nodded and pressed on. "Yes. You're jealous. The Squire has behaved himself- proven he's learned his lesson- that he's grown up." He stepped toward Q. "He's achieved something with this crew that you never will- acceptance."

In two flashes, the Captain found himself moved aside as Q moved toward Trelene. But the Squire was far from helpless. He let loose with a charge of his own that enveloped Q, slammed him to the ceiling and then dropped him to the deck. The Squire watched him closely as he stood. "My dear Q, you have been most discourteous."

Q rose- slowly- to his feet as they squared off on opposite sides of the Bridge. Picard looked from one to the other. "Squire..."

"My dear Captain, I suggest you keep everyone back." He indicated the First Officer. "Riker knows this isn't my first duel." He turned to meet Q's glare and his tone became deadly serious. "But it is one I

intend to win."

With that, the crew could only watch- and hope they left the ship in one piece.

Trelene closed his eyes and his human form dissolved as he allowed himself to revert back to his normal energy form. Q quickly followed suit, becoming a flashing, sparking, almost twisted ball of energy. Discharges leaped between them enveloped each of them and exploded around them.

Data was the only one still manning his post while all of this was going on. Now, he had to shout to be heard over the discharging energies fighting it out behind him. "Captain, the engines are off-line and the moons are converging again. They will crush the ship in thirty seconds."

The ball of energy that was Trelene threw itself at Q and the intermixing life forces lit up the Bridge to the point that the crew had to cover their eyes.

The *Enterprise* vanished from it's orbit-

The three moons collided-

The *Enterprise* reappeared, clear of the star system.

There was a flash and Q fell to the deck in rags. An instant later, Trelene resumed his human form and while his uniform was in disarray, nothing was ruined. Riker caught him as his knees gave way. "You

saved the ship."

But the Squire shook his head. "It wasn't me."

Riker looked to Picard. "Then who-?"

"Don't tell me you've forgotten me, Will."

Everyone looked toward the forward viewscreen to see what looked like a young human female standing in front of it.

Picard stepped toward her even as Q decided to keep his distance. "Amanda. What are you doing here?"

Amanda Rodgers had been born and raised on Earth. It wasn't until a trip on the *Enterprise*, that she found out that she and her parents were Qs. She indicated the other one. "The Continuum sent me after him. Two months ago, he did away with an entire star cluster just because it blocked his view of Andromeda." She nodded toward the screen. "He destroyed three moons just now- and would've destroyed you as well." She looked down at her one-time judge and Picard couldn't help feeling a sense of poetic justice as *she* passed sentence this time. "I hope you've learned something from all of this, Q. Sooner or later, you're always going to run into someone better than you are." She looked to Picard. "Tell Dr. Crusher I said hello."

Then both Qs were gone.

A heart beat later, a ball of energy appeared and hovered in front of the viewscreen. Trelene took a shaky step toward it. "Mother? Why are you here?"

"Your father and I have been following your actions, Trelene."

"Have I done wrong?" turned to Picard. "Captain-?"

Picard stepped forward. "Madam-"

"You need say nothing, Captain. I am not here to punish my son. On the contrary. His father and I are quite pleased with how he has conducted himself.

"Trelene, continue as you have today, and we will have no complaints." She pulsed and glowed for a moment more and then silently faded away.

Picard looked to the con. "Data, what's our status?"

"Ship's status is nominal, sir. All three moons are back in their normal orbits." The android looked to his captain. "Everything is exactly as it should be."

Picard sighed and turned to Trelene. "Squire, as far as I am concerned, any debt you believe owed has been paid. You will be welcome aboard this *Enterprise* whenever you wish to visit."

For a moment, Trelene couldn't answer as he took in the words he'd waited a century to hear. Finally, he nodded. "Thank you, Captain." He looked around, nodded to the others and then turned to meet

Deanna's gaze.

"I think my appointments can wait till tomorrow," she told him.

He offered his arm. "May we continue the tour then?"

Her smile grew as she accepted his arm. "We might even get in another waltz before dinner."

As the two left the Bridge, crewmen returned to their posts, scans were resumed and both the mission and the voyage continued.

***Dedicated
To the memory of
William Campbell
1923-2011***

END