

The Domsday Arc, NPT 2707

By
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(Rigel VI really is nice in the summer though.)

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to all my fellow Trekkers out there who through their dedication, endless research, and detailed websites, helped me write this story.

Star Chapter One: What are Little Colonies Made of

“Shield’s status?” Peter Kent snapped in a command voice as leaned back in his chair. He crossed his legs as he put his elbow on the armrest and wrapped his fingers around his chin; it was a classic pose. “Damn it all, what’s happening out there?”

The woman to his left giggled. “You do remember that is a recliner, not a command chair, dearest?”

Peter swiveled his head around to look at the woman -his wife of now eight years- without changing his pose. “I am well aware of where I am sitting.” His tone had not changed but a hint of a smile moved across his face. “*Admiral.*”

“Fine, fine, *Captain,*” Celia answered, still smiling. Her tone took on the clip of a professional sciences officer- which she had actually been for almost eleven years. “The environmental shields are well within tolerances, as anticipated. Interior winds are fifteen miles per hour with light precipitation, exterior winds are one hundred twenty-three with gusts to one hundred thirty-two miles per hour, accompanied by heavy rainfall; a high Category Three hurricane bordering on four. Twenty-one inches of rain have been recorded outside the shields within the past twenty-four hours.”

“Hurricane Celia, pounding at the gates.” Peter remarked. His face now grim. “Hell is empty and all the devils are here.” He added, quoting Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

“First off, that’s a *tempest*, not a hurricane. Secondly, I will have you know that the naming of this hurricane was done under protest.”

Peter swiveled around in his chair (since it was a recliner that didn’t pivot), putting his legs over the arm closest Celia, he put his hands on his knees and smiled wide. “Protest? I thought the vote was unanimous.”

“You and Dom deciding to name this hurricane after me is *not* unanimous.” Celia raised an eyebrow at him. “Honestly.”

“He also named a flower after you, if you remember. That one with red and orange petals”

“Yes.” Celia admitted with a shrug. “He did do that.”

“But the fairest of Castor III by far is you.” He waggled his eyebrows as he stared at her.

A triple chirp sound from the communicator sitting in a drink receptacle in the arm of the chair made him jump.

“Hah!” Celia pointed at him. “Behold the fearless Starship Captain!”

Peter picked up the communicator and flipped it open. “Kent.”

“Pietro,” Dominic Caricchio, the colony’s chief medical officer and Peter’s close friend said. “Celia is giving a good showing, no?” He said in his heavy Italian accent.

Peter swiveled his eyes to Celia then narrowed them. “Yes, the lady doth protest too much.”

Celia stuck her tongue out at him then stood and padded to the kitchen portion of the room- it was almost twenty feet away. “Not listening anymore.” She said as she started to make coffee.

The house was a typical colonist expansion-thermocrete structure with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a larger combined living/dining/kitchen area. There were almost a hundred of these homes in the colony. The remainder of the 75 homes were four or five-bedroom models as colonists tended to have a large number of children. There was also a large, well-outfitted medical facility and a school that was in the process of being expanded. All told 252 people lived in the Castor III colony, located in a system five light years from Pollux IV in the Beta Geminorum system. Which was close enough for help to be called, but not close enough for visitors to stop by regularly. Even though more and more colonists were moving to that planet every week. Within three months after the death of the last of the supposed Greek Gods; Apollo, colonists arrived and began to set up a town on the now-uninhabited planet with many convenient buildings and lovely gardens already in place. That colony popping up so quickly had made the decision for Peter and his colonists to set up on Castor III seem like a perfect idea.

Uninhabited.

That was to become an issue with Castor III; it was not in fact uninhabited when the colonists arrived ten months ago. While their initial survey of the planet indeed showed no advanced life, the locals were discovered only a month ago when a scout flier spotted a small settlement on the main continent, 9,000 miles away. After careful reconnoitering, it was discovered that there were about 2000 primitives living along the coast in less than a dozen small villages. An easy number to miss for an entire planet. These locals had not migrated more than a hundred miles and did not seem to have boat building skills beyond simple rafts and dugout canoes. Latter Stone Age was the final determination.

After a colony-wide discussion, it was decided to remain on their massive island that was 2500 miles from the coast. It also happened to be on the opposite coast from where the primitives were living. Scientists’ calculations were that it would be at least a hundred thousand years before the primitives’ population would recover to the point where they would venture the 6,500 miles across their continent to the far coast -with a massive mountain range running down the middle of it- then across the water to the island; Meyers Island as the colonists had dubbed it for a technician that had died the day they had arrived.

A subsequent anthropological study of the indigenous population showed that the planet had experienced a massive extinction similar to Earth's over 900,000 years ago when the breeding population of Humans was reduced to a mere 1,280 individuals for over 117,000 years. Humanity literally teetered on the edge of extinction for a thousand centuries before clawing back from the very edge of extinction. The colonists decided that by the time these locals had advanced enough to even notice them, technology would allow their descendants to just simply fly the island away to another planet. If they even still existed at that point in that far-distant future.

Even so, Peter Kent was wary of visitors. Having spent eleven years in Starfleet, he was keenly aware of the Prime Directive and enforcement thereof. The methods and logic behind enforcing it was actually the reason he stopped serving in Starfleet; case-by-case instead of hard black and white. Sometimes a Federation vessel would visit a primitive society and completely turn it upside down with no ramifications at all, as the Enterprise had famously done on Gamma Trianguli VI, destroying the self-aware computer Vaal that kept the primitive society running smoothly. The Captain telling the locals to 'figure out childbirth' before beaming away, happy to be back on their exploratory mission.

Later, the computer Landru on Beta III, also running a society successfully, was destroyed by that very same Captain. Official logs showed where he felt the society was 'stagnant'. A dozen different times, that one ship violated what should have been a simple 'non-interference' rule. When added to the other ships in the fleet there were hundreds of instances where a Captain made a decision to violate the Prime Directive for whatever whim they felt was important to them at that moment, or to save a crewmember who according to the Prime Directive was expendable to ensure the directive was adhered to.

Then, when Captain Kent came across a space-faring yet non-Warp capable society that was in the midst of a planet-wide pandemic with a fatality rate reaching 99.5%, his request to provide a safe, already-on-hand vaccine that the society could easily replicate was turned down. "They are not stagnating or pretending to be old Earth gangsters or Romans, they are dying at a rate that will wipe them all out! They may not have Warp technology now but if we save them, they will easily have it in ten years! They already have a half dozen colonies in the solar system that are also infected!" was met with cold silence from Starfleet. Then he was ordered to leave. Soon after that, he read a report stating the inhabitants of Gamma Trianguli VI had become extinct due to rampant in-fighting. Colonists moved onto the planet within six months, using the conveniently left intact thatched huts as a quaint starting point.

It was the final straw for Captain Peter Kent.

Coming to the end of his five-year mission, Captain Kent decided to just end his service and his command of the *Lexington* and return to civilian life, leaving the ship to Commodore Robert Wesley not two months before "The M-5 Incident" as it was now being called. Unfortunately for the disgruntled former Captain Kent, while he technically did leave Starfleet for civilian life, being a 'Colonist' still put him under the purview of Starfleet.

So Peter kept visitors to his colony as close to none as he possibly could, and when someone did visit, he thanked them for stopping by on their second day. On the third day, he would escort them to their ship, thank them again and tell them if he needed anything or had anything to trade, he would definitely let them know. And bid them a firm 'good bye'.

Barely-visited was almost as good as uninhabited, especially with a hard deadline approaching.

"So what's the prognosis, Doc?" Peter asked.

"How should I know? Ask one of your scientists if there are any more hurricanes brewing out on the Aegean Ocean." There was a slight pause. "As far as I'm concerned, I think we've lasted through our first hurricane season quite well."

"We have indeed." Peter replied. A crack of thunder made him look up. "But I think we'll keep our heads down for another couple of days."

"A wise move, Pietro." Dom said. "Well, I was just making my rounds, making sure everyone was doing okay."

"That's very kind of you, Dom."

Dom chuckled through the speaker. "Well, don't let *that* get out. Otherwise people will bother me for all sorts of simple things. I don't do splinters."

"I'll make sure to keep it quiet." Peter said. "Kent, out." He said out of habit.

"Ciao." The Doctor -who had never served in Starfleet- replied.

The line went dead so Peter closed his communicator. "One hurricane season down." He looked at his wife. "How many more to go?"

"Well, I plan on living a long, long time." Celia held up a steaming cup. "Cuppa? We can sit on the porch and watch the lightning."

"Yeah, you never know when we'll get a chance to do that again." He flipped the communicator open again. "Kent to Kelso."

"Oh don't call Kelso." She moved toward him, two cups in her hands. "You're already in a mood. Just wait till tomorrow?"

"Kelso here." A young man's voice replied. "I was just going to call you."

"Hold one." Peter said as he stood and moved to the door, opening it for her. He held the communicator up to his chest instead of closing the channel. "I'm just worried. We're ten months in, and settled. We're so close."

"It's just two more months." Celia said. "We will make it to a year, then we can easily petition to stay here even if the locals are discovered. Which so far they haven't been. There is precedent on our side at that point. But really, it could be years."

“Two months is a long time.” Peter said as he stepped behind Celia, pulling the door shut.

“It will be if you keep that attitude.” She moved to a rocking chair and sat, holding a cup out next to the other rocker. “Sit and watch the lightning with me.”

“Yes, dear.” Peter lowered himself into the chair, as it rocked back forward he took the cup.

Celia looked at him and smiled. “You have that poor boy waiting.”

“Oh.” Peter let out a long breath then brought his communicator up. “I was just checking in before calling it a night... Wait, you said you were going to call me?”

“I was.” Jeremy Kelso, the colony’s former navigator who now worked in operations said. “I’m... I’m tracking two ships settling into a standard orbit.”

Peter looked at Celia. “What are they; more traders? I thought we were off the beaten path out here.”

“No.” There was a long pause. “No. No, Sir. A Miranda Class, a frigate. The *Auburndale*.”

When the man didn’t say anything else, Peter said: “You said two. What’s the second one?”

“A Ptolemy Class Container Tug. The *Rigel Sunrise*.”

Celia reached over and put her arm on his shoulder. “We’re over ten months in, that might be close enough.” She said softly.

“Are they hailing?” Peter didn’t look at her.

“No. I think since they see the hurricane and are just waiting for it to pass.”

“Yeah.” Peter said. “No sense coming down in a hurricane and getting all wet.” He let out another long breath. “How long till the storm passes?” Now he looked at Celia, “I suppose two months is too much to ask for.”

Celia gave a weak smile.

“Two days.” Jeremy said. “But projections have it at twenty-five hundred hours; almost the end of the second day. If they wait until daybreak, then it will be three days.”

“That puts us at ten months, three weeks exactly.” Celia pointed out.

“It does.” Jeremy confirmed. “If they come two hours after dawn, then it’s ten months, three days, ten hours.”

“Okay. Spread the word.” Peter said. “No sense in everyone getting surprised when they show up.”

“They might let us stay, Sir.” Jeremy said.

“Spread the word.” Peter said again. “We’re going to watch the lightning. Unless something drastic happens, I’ll see you in a couple of days. Kent out.” He flipped the communicator shut.

“Oh, Peter.” Celia said. “I’m so sorry.”

“Let’s enjoy these two and a half days. We’ll worry about the *Auburndale* then.” He reached over and wiped a tear from his wife’s cheek. “It will be okay.”

The pair, like so many others in the colony, watched the lightning crackling above the environmental shields for hours before going to bed. The colony was quiet with hardly anyone leaving their homes over the next two days- everyone was trying to spend as much time as they could with their loved ones before the inevitable happened.

The third morning since speaking to Jeremy, Peter moved through the colony, speaking with people here and there. While there was quite a bit of debris outside the perimeter, inside was as it had been the week before Hurricane Celia blew in. It had been taxing reallocating energy to run the environmental shields for the entire week but with the storm moving at a leisurely three miles an hour, it took it that long to push past the chain of islands the colony occupied.

“Peter, do you have a minute?” Elizabeth Dunning, one of the colony’s lead scientists called from the front of her home; a two-bedroom design since she was single.

Peter looked over. “Elizabeth. Good morning.” He turned and started her way. “What’s going on?”

Elizabeth wrung her hands. “Well, because of...” She pointed upwards. “I’ve been going through the Colony’s equipment to get it ready to move.”

“That’s good planning.” Peter said. He looked toward the operations building. It was still dark out; he wanted to be there before dawn and the arrival of their unwanted guests. “Good work.”

“Well, it’s going to take another week to get everything ready to move. Will...” She pointed upwards again. “*they* give us time to do that?”

“Starfleet. Use their name; *Starfleet*. Even the demons of Hell have names they must answer to.” Peter let out a long breath then he shrugged after a moment. “I don’t know. Bureaucracy is an unstoppable force that usually can’t be reasoned with.”

“Oh.” Elizabeth’s shoulders drooped.

Peter gave a smile to the young woman. “But maybe we can slow it down a little to get everything out.”

Star Chapter Two: The Prime Directive Trap

“This is outrageous!” Peter roared at the man- the second in command of the *USS Auburndale*. “OUTRAGEOUS!”

The man and a security contingent of six had beamed down right in front of the operations building at exactly eight o'clock local time. Peter was not only infuriated by the fact that the man had arrived at exactly eight, but also that he had brought six very large, grim looking security men with him as if the colonists were some sort of threat. Two of them were even armed with phaser rifles, the rest with hand phasers.

The man looked back at Peter, seemingly unaffected by the outburst. “You have two hours, Kent.”

“That’s *Captain* Kent to you, *Lieutenant Commander* Paltov!” Peter roared again.

“You have two hours, Captain Kent.” The man said without missing a beat. “Two capitainly hours.”

Peter rushed up to the man, practically nose to nose. “I want to speak to your Captain. Now.”

“Peter, please.” Celia said. “Don’t.”

Peter looked back at her, and as he turned he looked at what was probably a hundred members of the colony. All of them had sullen looks on their faces. Sullen or shocked.

“The Captain sent me to deal with this evacuation and I am most capable of doing just that.”

“Evacuation?” Peter looked back at the man, genuinely surprised by the explanation. “Wait; are we in some sort of danger here? Some sort of biological threat? Large carnivore that we missed? Is there a Romulan outpost nearby?” He asked, genuinely concerned.

“You missed something all right.” Lieutenant Commander Paltov said matter-of-factly.

“We did?” Peter looked at Celia. “Science Officer Kent. Do you know what sort of pathogen or animal he is talking about? I know our scanners did not pick up any Romulan activity but they do have cloaking technology.” He looked at the man then back at Celia. “Romulans?”

“No. There were no indications of any outposts. They can cloak a ship, not an entire outpost.” Celia said, also perplexed by how the conversation had suddenly changed direction. “Everything seemed clear here on the island as well. There are indeed large reptile carnivores on the mainland, which is why we chose this island. And we have no indication of contagions which could be dangerous to the colonists.”

Peter looked back at the man, expectedly.

“You are the contagion.” Paltov explained. “To the indigenous life.”

“We all went through the transporter’s biological scrubbers when we arrived.” Peter said, now hoping the entire mission was a mistake. “We have no pathogens. Perhaps there is some sort of...”

“To the indigenous population, you are the deadliest pathogen there is.”

“They are 9,000 miles away and don’t even have a written language.” Peter said without considering what he was saying. He shrugged. “It will be over a hundred thousand years before they even have a chance of knowing we are here. Starfleet won’t even exist then.”

“Ahh, you DO know they are here!” Paltov gave a curt nod. “You have two hours.”

“Absurd doesn’t even cover this situation.” Peter said. “I will be filing a formal complaint with Starfleet Command. They might as well be amoebas at this point.”

“The Prime Directive is clear on...”

“The Prime Directive?” Peter’s voice rose again. “How about I just say they are stagnating or show them how to kill each other so they can go the route of Gamma Trianguli VI!”

“Where?” Paltov’s eyebrows went up, now himself confused by the direction the conversation took. “Who?”

“We’re not going anywhere until I speak to Starfleet Command.” Peter said. He turned to look at the colonists in the clearing. “We are not going anywhere.” He said in a loud voice.

“If you’re trying to stall to twelve months, it’s not going to work. I’m warning you.”

“You’re warning me?” Peter said. “*You’re warning me?*”

Lieutenant Commander Paltov let out a long sigh as he pulled his communicator from the back of his uniform. “Fine.”

“Good. Now we’re getting somewhere.” Peter gave a curt nod. “Finally.”

“Paltov to *Rigel Sunrise*. Ready?”

“Wait, who?”

“Standing by,” a voice, ostensibly on the *Rigel Sunrise* said.

“Commence evacuation of colonists.”

“What!” Was the last thing Peter Kent ever said on Castor III.

Star Chapter Three: The Rigel IV Maneuver

Peter stalked along the corridor of the Starbase on Rigel IV. It had taken three days to get there with the entire colony cramped inside a Mark V cargo container. Once they arrived, the container was placed near the edge of the base, it was thankfully alongside two other cargo containers that seemed to be prepared for them. There was a pile of other containers and other equipment as well- it seemed they were placed in the dump, adding insult to injury. The colonists were told to “make due” until more permanent arrangements could be made. It took another day for Peter to get an appointment with the director.

As he approached the director’s office, he slowed and tried to calm himself. While the colonists weren’t prisoners per-se, they were now effectively marooned on Beta Rigel IV. They could of course leave the planet as families or ones and twos, but leaving as a complete colony would be a difficult thing since they no longer had any of their ships, or equipment. Peter and most of the colonists watched in horror as the *USS Auburndale* fired a dozen Photo Torpedoes at the colony, reducing it to unrecognizable rubble to ensure there was nothing left to ‘infect’ the locals. Volley after volley of photon torpedoes destroyed everything there, then the ship went to Warp.

While the colonists did have some personal funds -as Peter did- the loss of everything except what they were wearing was devastating.

After another deep breath, Peter opened the large glass door and stepped into the Director’s suite of the government building. He looked left and right, expecting to see a secretary seated at a desk. Someone who coordinated his schedule and made sure that people didn’t barge in on a whim. The entire open area was just that; open. There was no secretary, no desk. No furniture at all.

“Huh.” Peter put his hands on his hips. He cautiously walked into the middle of the area. There were three doors on the far side of the room, none of which had any sort of sign indicating who was behind them. “Hello?” He called. “Anyone here?”

After a moment, the door in the middle opened. “Yes?” A young man asked.

“I’m Captain Peter Kent. I had an appointment with a... Koresh?”

“That’s me. Rigel Beta IV Director Gil Koresh.” He beckoned Peter in. “Come in.” He let go of the door and disappeared.

Perplexed, Peter half walked, half jogged to the door as it started to swing close. He caught it just before it closed then pushed it open making it bang against the stopper set low on the wall behind it.

“It’s not locked, you know.” Gil said.

“Without someone out front, why wouldn’t you lock it? Anyone off the street could just walk in here.” Peter closed the door and turned, half expecting to find the office as bare as the foyer. It was in fact, very well apportioned.

Gil Koresh moved behind a very large polished wood desk- it was almost ten feet across. The chair that he sat in was plush dark leather. The brass tacks running down the sides of it were polished. As was the wood portions of it.

In front of the desk two overstuffed chairs that matched the one behind the desk sat at angles. Between them was a polished wood table with what appeared to be several bottles of liquor on the bottom shelf. Two empty glasses sat on the top of the table, waiting to be used. The walls were completely filled with floor to ceiling bookcases- all also dark polished wood. The lower three shelves had glass covers on them, the top were open. A brass and wood ladder sat on an also polished brass rail that ran in a large “U” to ostensibly allow access to every book on the top shelf.

“You blew your budget in here so now you can’t afford a secretary?” Peter tried as he closed the door.

“What?” The man looked up from his desk. There was a computer screen mounted in it. “Oh. Sit. Please.” He gestured at the chairs. “I’d rather not shout at you from across the room.” His eyebrows went down. “And I would really prefer not being shouted at from nearby as well.”

Peter moved to the chair on the left. “Well, I have to tell you I am doing my best to control my anger.”

“Rules are rules.” Gil looked back down at his monitor and seemed to move files around.

“That’s the issue though. It’s not really a rule. And it really isn’t a directive either. Hell; it’s barely a guideline.”

The man let out a long sigh. “Yes, the Prime Directive. The reasoning behind it is...”

“I am well aware of the reasoning behind it and you may be surprised to know I agree with the reasoning behind it. What I don’t agree with is how for some it is a hard and fast order and for others it’s just something you hear about in a meeting but doesn’t carry any sort of weight.”

“I imagine you are going to bring up specific instances that you disagree with.”

“Oh, you bet I am.” Peter forced himself to not raise his voice. “Specifically, the colony on Castor III.”

The man looked down at his computer screen, moved things around for almost a minute, then looked back up. “Never heard of it.”

Peter took a deep breath. “It’s the colony that I was a part of until very recently when we were forcibly removed and deposited in Container Alley. All two hundred fifty-two of us. Then everything we owned in the Galaxy was blown up behind us.”

The man nodded. “Yes, yes; I am familiar with that planet. It’s just that Starfleet doesn’t call it Castor.” He laid his hands over his computer screen and interlaced his fingers. “So that’s what the hullabaloo is about.”

“Hullabaloo?” Peter’s voice rose. “Is that what you call forcibly relocating... kidnapping then marooning really, over two hundred people then blasting everything they own out of existence?”

“That’s not what my records show, Peter.”

Peter fumed. “Listen...” He stopped himself from using the man’s first name. “I am going to file a demarche with Starfleet for your actions on Cas... whatever you want to call that planet. Because that was completely uncalled for.” He narrowed his eyes at the man. “Because I know without a doubt that you were the official that sent that starship there.”

“The planet was already occupied. You built a colony on an inhabited planet.” Gil said defensively. “What did you expect would happen?”

“We did not know the planet was inhabited when we first arrived. All indications were that it was in fact *uninhabited* by sentient life.” When Gil opened his mouth, Peter pointed at him. “And once we discovered there were primitive natives on the planet, *nine months after we arrived*, the first thing we did was conduct an intensive study of them to determine if our presence would impact them.”

“And what did your survey determine?” Gil looked back down at his screen, ostensibly to find the survey conducted by Starfleet.

“Our archeology and exo-anthropologists determined that the Quads were a pre-writing species limited to a five hundred square mile area on the far side of the planet.”

“Quads?”

“They are a hexapod species; they walk on four of their legs and the upper two are appendages similar to arms. Opposable thumbs even. Covered in a short fur. Eyes forward.”

“Like the mythological Centaur? That’s very interesting. I’d love to see that report.”

Peter narrowed his eyes, it seemed the man was trying to change the subject. “They are a bit bigger than Earth goats.” He held his hand up to his chest. “About eighty pounds. Large brain pan so our team expects them to develop writing, sciences, and in the far future even space travel.” He frowned then moved back to his original, prepared discussion about the indigenous population. “In any case, a planet-wide event, we suspect a meteor strike had decimated the Quad’s and many other species three hundred thousand years ago. The Quads numbers are currently around two-thousand. From historical data, it was determined that it would take over a hundred thousand years for their

population to start to recover from this near-extinction level event. If they even did; dying out is still a very distinct possibility. They are on the edge, really. But even if they survive, it would take tens of thousands of years for them to travel across their continent to the opposite coast, a distance of six thousand miles. Then at that point, they would have to develop blue-water sailing vessels to travel the two thousand five hundred miles to the island we were occupying.” Peter paused; the man still had not looked up from his screen. He wasn’t even sure if the man was listening. “So the end report estimated that it would take the Quads close to two hundred thousand years of development to reach the island. And by that point, if anyone was still living there, they would be able to just fly the island to someplace else.”

The man finally looked up. “Are you trying to make a joke?”

“A joke about what? The destruction of millions of credits worth of our personal property and communal equipment? The psychological effects of ripping children from their homes and stuffing them into a cargo container? You think I’m trying to joke about *that*?”

“The Prime Directive is no joking matter.”

“The problem is, Director Koresh.” Peter stood. “That it *is* a joke. You... you administrators.” He said it as if the word tasted bad. “Sit here behind your polished desks and come up with rules, regulations, *directives*, that you expect people who actually go out there into the darkness of space to follow. Lives are on the line, day in and day out.” He pointed at his own chest. “*Our* lives and the lives of our crew.” Peter’s voice rose. “The lives of friends and families. While you administrators sit in the comfort of your space stations and bases, drinking coffee that is exactly two hundred degrees while explorers and colonists are out there living and dying, getting our hands dirty.” He took a step forward. “I shouldn’t have to but it seems I must point out that the *only* reason there is even a Starbase on Rigel Beta IV in the first place is because of colonists like us! Showing up on some alien planet, beating back the environment, setting up a few small houses to stay out of the weather. Trying to figure out strange diseases.” He raised his hands plaintively. “Hoping to last the winter, however long *that* is. Breaking our backs month after grueling month to build more houses, bigger houses, then buildings. All so people like *you* can show up and decide on a lark that the people that gave you a place to live should be treated far worse than any pet. No rights, no due process. Just faceless bodies that you can look down your nose at.” His voice rose considerably. “Or ignore by looking at a computer screen which is damned rude of a host that has invited someone into their office!”

Gil looked up from his screen. “Is there a special class that Starship Captains go to, to learn how to give impassioned speeches?”

Peter took another step forward. He was at the edge of the desk. “You...”

“Listen.” Gil held up his hands. “I understand what you are saying, Pete.”

“I am *Federation Starship Captain* Peter Kent and you will address me accordingly! I ended my tour of service with Starfleet after the overwhelmingly successful completion of my five-year mission

after twelve years of service, and am therefore entitled to all the customs and courtesies afforded to such rank as was attained. WHICH IS CAPTAIN!" He roared. The last part of his sentence was actually verbatim from the regulation.

"Captain Kent." The young man said. "Please calm down."

"Calm down? My life and the entire lives of everyone on that colony has just been ruined and you expect me to calm down?" Peter did however calm down some. Partially because the man addressed him properly, but mostly because he did not need security showing up and tossing him into the corridor before he made any sort of progress. He took a breath, then smoothed his shirt. "Sir, I have people that look to me for guidance and leadership." He took a step back. "And right now, they are in dire need of that." He took another step back then sat in the chair. "But I can't give either because at the moment our hands are tied. We are *marooned* here." He looked around. "Unless you have a spare Hermes or Viceroy Class ship sitting around that all two hundred fifty-two of us can leave on together." He pointed at the man. "But I'm telling you, you better make it quick; three women are very pregnant so that number will be two hundred fifty-five in the very near future."

"We do not." Gil said. He leaned forward. "But I would like to think we are not at an impasse. And *definitely* not at the point where a demarche is warranted."

He's new, Peter thought. *And he doesn't want me making a formal complaint to Starfleet where they will send in someone to investigate.* "Well, I am not sure how we can proceed from here. My crew." He hesitated. "Which is how I feel about my fellow colonists, are marooned here at *your* facility. Will you feed an additional two hundred mouths? Clothe them? I have minors with me that were up until very recently, in school. Are you able to assimilate thirty children of varying ages?" He pressed the man. "Because they are now all TOTALLY UNDER YOUR CARE, DIRECTOR."

The man looked down at his computer screen again. "I hadn't... I will have to..."

"The top priority, as I see it," Peter began in a softer, more counseling tone, "is food and clothing. If we can get two more containers put in place, one can act as a dining facility and medical station. The other can be used to expand the living quarters to allow some privacy for families. I would also appreciate it if I could have office space allocated to act as an operations center."

The man looked surprised. "Operations center? For what?"

"For me and my command team, of course. We need to figure out where we are going next." Peter sat back in the chair, feeling that he was making some headway with the young man. "And I'd rather have a table we could sit around instead of just talking in a hallway or huddled on a street corner drawing raised eyebrows from security teams." He gestured at the desk. "Nothing at all like this; a simple table with ten spaces to sit and perhaps twice as many seats around the outside."

"Space for thirty?" Gil said. "That seems like a lot of space."

"Well, while I am considered the leader of the colony, as with most colonies, important matters are put to a vote. So when we were going to make a decision with some importance,

colonists would send representatives to sit in the meeting. Or we would set up visual stations in the containers if it was felt that a unanimous or majority vote was needed.” He shrugged. “While colonists are independent people, they also tend to be democratic.”

Gil nodded. “That does seem reasonable.” He looked back at his screen. “I can give you a conference room near the cargo containers in a secondary building used by the sciences division.”

“I appreciate it, Director Koresh.” Peter said. “But...”

“Please call me Gil. And believe me I didn’t mean anything by calling you by your first name; you’re the first colonist I’ve talked to that was prior Starfleet.”

“That’s fine, Gil. Please call me Peter.” He held up a finger. “No one calls me Pete.”

Gil smiled. “And no one calls me Gilgamesh.” He blinked. “But?”

“Yes; but. But the first order of business is getting clothes. All everyone has is what they are wearing. And we have been living off one food processors in a cargo container. Which when you’re trying to feed two hundred means that when the last person finally eats breakfast, you’re serving the first-person lunch.”

“Oh. I hadn’t considered that.” Gil said. “I am sorry.”

“Well... let’s fix the now problems now.” Peter said, inside he felt that he had gained enough from the man to be able to press him some. At least before he was able to sit and process the conversation and regain some of the advantage he had lost. “Something else that can happen now is if I could send over one of my techs to sit with one of your people to go over the assets that were destroyed.”

“Destroyed?”

“The *Auburndale* fired photon torpedoes onto our colony, destroying it after transporting us up all at once at eight in the morning. There are a good number that only have their sleep clothes. Several don’t even have *shoes*. Additionally, we lost a good amount of equipment as well as homes and furnishings. The loss was complete.” He gave a shrug. “It would be best since the list is extensive if one of my people came to your office and sat with one of your logisticians to deal with compensation. I am sure that the *Auburndale* made extensive targeting scans of the area before firing so it will be easy to corroborate what was lost and what they destroyed... which was everything, without me having to petition Starfleet for their data banks.” He fired a shot across Gil’s bow just because he could.

“Compensation?” Gil sat back in his chair. “I must confess that I am new to this position, Peter. I do not think that I can afford...”

“What would be easiest for us all would be to generate credits in a collective Castor Colony account for replacement equipment and then sub accounts for the colonists themselves from Starfleet’s accounts.” Peter interrupted the man. “Just keep in mind that when I say two hundred

fifty-two colonists, that includes a great number of families. That's really just over seventy accounts."

"Oh, that's a relief." Gil said. Both to the number of accounts required and the fact that he would not have to personally fund them.

"I could have one of my team meet one of yours this afternoon to get that ball rolling. So..." Peter coaxed.

"So?" Gil said. "I'm sorry, I understand what you said and I suppose I agree with all of it, but I'm not sure where you are going next." He gave a smirk. "I suspect bulldozing over local authorities is another secret class they give Starship Captains."

"I meant: 'so you'll get us another two food processors and have a crane put two more containers next to the three so we can at least be comfortable until we leave and you'll have someone from your staff contact me later today so I can have them coordinate with one of my people to get the accounts set up."

"That's a lot in a 'so'." Gil said with a smirk.

"In all honesty Gil, I want to get us off this planet and on our way in the quickest, least disruptive way I can. Having a place we can plan and having families not at each other's throats will make it go quicker. Living on cots one beside the other will do just that. And perhaps not just each other's throats I should point out; I know of at least three very angry people that would like to have shoes at the very least." Peter raised his hands plaintively. "Honestly, if we can be gone in a month, all the better."

Gil stood. "Well, here's hoping." As soon as he said it, his eyes got large. "Not that I mean that in a bad way."

"I get it." Peter stood as well. "Director Koresh has a base to run, not deal with a bunch of colonists who put a strain on his resources and commandeer briefing rooms."

"I'm glad you understand." He pointed upward. "I mean, we do get visitors here of course. We are a Starbase. But we aren't a shore leave locale so visits are short and visitors are a half dozen at a time or less."

"I'll try to make ours as short as we can."

"Right." Gil gave a curt nod. "By the time you get back, there will be two other food processors being hooked up and I'll have an Air Crane move two containers next to the three."

"Excellent." Peter stepped forward -this time with a smile- and extended his hand. "That's good news."

"Indeed." Gil shook it. "Let me know if you need anything else."

“I hope the next time we talk it will be when we say goodbye.” Peter said. He turned to leave then stopped halfway to the door. “Okay, I have to ask; why is that foyer completely empty?”

Gil smiled. “Oh, we just moved into the building. I had my office transported in this morning. My secretary is going to do the front office tomorrow.” He shrugged. “She was off today.”

Peter nodded, gave a wave and left quickly. When he got to the hallway, he pulled out his communicator. “Kent to Windham.”

“Windham here. What’s the latest?”

“Casey, we’re in business. We’ve got a headquarters, two more food processors on the way, and some air support to move three more containers in the next few minutes.”

Casey Windham, the colony’s chief engineer laughed. “Did you get the keys to the base?”

“No, but get one of your minions ready to come up here to set up accounts for each colonist family and an overall colony one for the equipment that we lost.”

“Wow. How young is this guy?” Casey asked. He was Peter’s senior by fifteen years, making him almost 50.

“Late-twenties I’d say.”

“Poor kid.” Casey said. “Hey, when do we get that operations center? I’ve been talking to the boys and we might have a plan. We just need a quiet place to sit while we work in it.”

“Tomorrow, I think.” Peter said. “I’ll check it out on the way back. Get those containers put in place and I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“Roger that, boss.”

“Kent out.” Peter flipped his communicator closed. Casey referred to his engineering team of six as ‘the boys’ even though two of them were female. Peter was always impressed by Casey’s technically proficient and conniving team of engineers; what they couldn’t create they invariably ‘acquired’ when no one was looking. “Poor Gil doesn’t have a chance if ‘the boys’ are working on it.” He said aloud as he started down the hallway.

Star Chapter Four: The Domsday Machine

“Okay, what have we got?” It was two days after he had spoken to Gil and a lot had happened. Peter put his hands flat on the table in the conference room. It was really only a table in name; it was very large, flat piece of steel sitting on four almost equally sized boxes. The chairs around it did not match- there were however fifteen of them. Around the outer edges of the room- which was apparently a storage room until very recently, were a variety of other crates and boxes. Which, since they were against the wall, could be regarded as ‘bench seating’. He wasn’t sure if this was Gil’s doing or the science officers who had to give up space to a bunch of ‘lousy’ colonists. Either way, he had a working conference room that would double as an operations center. “Around the horn we go.” He pointed at Casey. “Go.”

Casey Windham nodded. “Families are spread out more comfortably in the cargo containers now. We have one Mark II, two Mark III and two Starliner Pods in use. I used the smaller Mark II as a dining facility, medical facility and classroom. After an initial walkabout, there are thirty-five cargo containers here at the dump. Twelve are Starliners that will pressurize as they sit. Five more would require repairs of varying degrees to be space-worthy, and the other eighteen are Mark II to IV and will only keep the rain out. Mostly, that is.”

Peter smirked. “You planning on taking them all?”

“Not the ones that won’t go into space.” Casey said matter-of-factly. “Definitely the operational Starliners since they have sub-light engines and food processors installed. Those are luxury living. Add a transporter pad and you have a runabout all of a sudden.” He shrugged. “If they wanted to use them, they wouldn’t be pitched out here in the dump. I say everything here is free for the taking.”

“Well, we could run them as a train if we could find a tug they’d let us have, but I doubt they will.” Peter said. “Could we pull twelve of them along?”

“We could but another issue is that with sixty-three families, two hundred fifty-two bodies, seventeen Starliners would be cramped living even if we got them all space-worthy. We’d need to either get another dozen of them or of some other type container and then refit them. For all intents and purposes, living in a container is a short-term solution.”

Peter frowned. On a planet, they could spread out as much as they wanted, in containers they were extremely limited. Another solution needed to be found. “Anything else?”

“Funds are in accounts so families are replacing lost clothes and other supplies. Businesses are experiencing a sharp rise in sales here.” He raised an eyebrow and smiled. “I’m quite happy with what they gave us in the colony account as well.”

“They didn’t *give* us anything.” Peter snapped. “They were forced to reimburse us for what Star Fleet destroyed.” He caught himself. Now he gave a smile. “But yes, there are substantial funds in that account.” He raised a finger. “But funds and equipment are not the same thing; can we even replace some of the things we lost? This place isn’t a depot where we can buy things; environmental shield generators and such?”

Casey looked at one of his subordinates. “Well, Miss Jenkins has something to say about that that I think you will find very interesting.”

Peter looked at the woman- she was in her late twenties with striking red hair that in zero-gravity formed a halo around her head. “What are ‘the boys’ up to, Amy?” Out of the six engineers working for Casey, she was by far the smartest and most innovative. “Surprise me; what’s the plan?” He smiled wide. “We stealing a star base while no one is looking?”

“It’s a good thing you’re sitting, Sir.” Amy smirked. “What would you say to returning to Castor III? I think I found us a ship.” She looked at the far wall. “Oh.”

Peter looked at the same spot. “What?”

“It’s just I was just expecting a viewer. Sorry.”

“I’m sure one will be there by our next meeting if the pilfering level remains constant.” Peter smiled. “Just explain it the old-fashioned way.” He realized what she had said. “Return to Castor III?” Peter’s smile faded. “In case you’re not keeping up with current events, we were just kicked *off* that planet. I’m pretty sure Star Fleet is going to be keeping an eye on it for a while.”

“That is true, Sir.” She shrugged. “But the system is still in an ideal location; a few days from support yet not on any major travel routes. A leisurely solar orbit would not raise any eyebrows.”

“Are we going to stay in Casey’s Starliners? We’d be at each other’s’ throats in a month.” He looked at Casey. “Are you planning on commandeering a Deep Space Station no one is keeping an eye on?”

Casey nodded. “Something like that.” He hesitated. “Only bigger. Amy? It was your idea. Say it.”

“Bigger? Amy, has Mister Windham turned you to *piracy*?” Peter shook his head. “Oh my.”

“Not piracy, Sir; *salvage*.” Amy looked down at her tech pad- something that Peter suddenly noticed all ‘the boys’ now seemed to have even though they had brought none with them from the colony. “It’s a ship that’s 2.77 kilometers long and has a diameter of about 607 meters fore, tapering down to a hundred meters aft.”

“No ship in the fleet is that big.” Peter said flatly.

“Not in *our* fleet.” Amy said. “However, not three days away... at Warp three, is a derelict ship that size.” She looked down at her pad again. “The interior of the ship is empty, and vast. We could

easily take three dozen or so of those containers and mount them on the inside of it as living quarters.”

“Wait. That planet killer?” Peter said. He, as all other Starship Captains, had read the report of the Enterprise and the Constellation’s battle against it. “How would that work?” He looked at Casey then back at Amy. “So we’d be living inside that thing inside containers? Again; we’d be at each other’s throats.”

“No.” Amy shook her head. “We’d mount a landing bay shield over the opening. It’s six hundred meters across so a Class III shield would do that. We could actually mount two for redundancy.” She said referring to the special shield generator used for shuttle and cargo bays that kept atmosphere in yet allowed ships to pass through. “Yes.” She said as she thought it out. “We run them on their own circuit so even if all power is lost on the ship, they would keep operating.” She tapped her pad. “Right, right...”

“Yes but...” Began Peter.

“And... it would be easy to tie in a bank of auxiliary power cells so even if all reactor capability were lost, we would have thirty minutes to either resolve the problem or move to airtight locations.” She looked up at him. “Simple.”

“But... it would still be a vacuum.” Peter said quickly- before the young technician interrupted him again.

“Temporarily.” Justine, another of Casey’s technicians and the only other female said.

“Well, we can’t just beam a million cubic meters of air.” Peter said. “Transport buffers couldn’t handle that kind of data.” He shook his head. “I mean, air isn’t empty; it’s full of molecules that would need to be converted from matter to energy and back again. The power draw would be staggering. That’s planetary-level power requirements.”

Now Justine shook her head. “No; you’re looking at it wrong. Yes, of course that is too much to transport all at once. However we break it into batches. If we assume...” She smirked. “Rightfully so, I must add, that a boosted cargo transporter can handle five hundred cubic meters of air per cycle, that’s about two thousand cycles to hit the million cubic meters of air.”

“Really?” Peter’s eyes got large. “I see you’ve done the math on this.”

“It’s pretty standard math.” Justine continued. “And with each cycle taking ten to thirty seconds, plus recharging the transporters, that’s fifteen hours. Four techs on four-hour shifts can take care of that in a day.”

“That’s astounding.” Peter looked at Casey. “And these numbers work?”

“They do, Peter.” Casey confirmed. “Then *all* the containers here in the dump would be useable just like they are sitting here on the planet. Because once the air was in the ship, the life support system would keep it viable.”

“And, if I may point out.” Amy interrupted. “We can cut those cycles down to half if we have access to a tractor beam.”

“A tractor beam?” Peter asked.

Amy nodded. “We can compress the air so we can transport twice as much at a time. So those two thousand cycles goes to a thousand and the twelve hours goes to six.”

“But...” Peter thought it over. “But... where are we going to get a million cubic meters of air?” Peter said. He smirked. “I think Director Koresh would notice that disappearing.” He pointed at the pad she was using. “Not like data pads.”

“Castor III would be the donor planet for not only breathable air but also soil and water.” Justine said. “Same principle just with more solid soil and water. And we’d need less of those, obviously.”

“And we can just take a million or so cubic meters of air from the planet? I can’t imagine Star Fleet would approve of that.”

“There is precedent.” Amy said. “Where do you think all the air that is in Federation ships comes from?”

Peter opened his mouth then closed it.

“They take it from the planets where the ship yards are. Of course it’s one section at a time, but they do fill the entire things with atmosphere.” Justine added. “Besides, planets lose air into space constantly as it is. The amount we are talking about on a planetary scale wouldn’t even be a blip on the chart.”

“I’m glad you two ladies are on our side.” Peter said. He thought for a moment. “And you said water and soil as well?”

Justine nodded. “The interior is big enough we can set up a substantial farm. A kilometer by a half kilometer. Easily. And once the Eco ecosystem was set up, it would be self-sustaining.”

Peter looked at Casey. “Wow.”

Casey nodded. “There are a lot of small details we can go over later, but that’s the big picture. Otherwise this will be a five-hour meeting.” He smirked. “Next around the horn?”

“Right.” Peter nodded. “Right. Doc, you’re up.”

Domenico Caricchio, the chief physician smiled. “Things are moving nicely. You know we have three pregnancies.” He held up two fingers. “But the Simpsons are having twins so four babies.” He said in his heavy Italian accent. “All healthy and ready to be born from two to five months from now.” He held his hands up plaintively. “There are probably other pregnancies that I don’t know about yet. We have many young people in love, you know.”

"I know." Peter smiled. "Anything else?"

"I would prefer either delivering in the up-to-date facilities they have here or on a starship, not in some cargo container on the way someplace."

"We will see what we can do, Dom." Peter said. "If nothing else, they can stay here until the babies are born while the rest of us move. Then we'll have them come over."

"Si. That sounds like a good plan." He smiled wide. "That's it for me. No one is sick. No one is hurt."

"Excellent." Peter looked at Elizabeth Dunning, the head of the science department- such as it was. "Liz, what's going on in your world?"

"Nothing, Peter." She said with a frown. "The sciences section is pretty inactive right now." She perked up. "So we are now handling security."

"We need security?" Peter asked.

"Yes. Now that we have five containers and are living on the edge of civilization." She lowered her voice. "The container depot."

Peter smiled. The only person that called the area what it actually was; a dump, was his wife Celia. Everyone else had a nicer euphemism for it: Container Alley, Storage Facility, Refuse processing, and now apparently 'container depot.' "Yes, I can see how... that area could be prone to theft. Good call."

"Oh." She added. "We've also been surveying the containers and are marking the ones that we would want to take with us. Once that decision is made."

"Another good call." Peter said. "How many security personnel do you have right now?"

"Well, since we moved the containers into a circle with only one entrance, we really only need to keep an eye on that one spot. So we are running continuous two person shifts for six hours with our twenty-tree volunteers, including me."

"That many? Twenty-three?"

"I had more volunteers." Elizabeth said. "But I wanted it to be a manageable number with four shifts with two people each on it. We're passing two phasers between shifts. If we can get another dozen of them, that would make things a lot easier."

"Understandable." Peter said. "I'll see what I can do. Anything else?"

Elizabeth shook her head and looked at Clay Andersdotter- he was a ship's navigator that was now working in hydroponics. "The esteemed Mister Clarence here has some ideas."

"Oh? Hydroponics?" Peter asked. "I don't think we will be here long enough to set up a system."

“I sure hope we’re not. I’m working on getting a ship.”

“Listen.” Peter looked from Clay to Casey and back. “We can’t just rob this place empty. Pads are one thing, but I mean... someone is going to notice a ship not docked here anymore.”

Clay shook his head. “No, no Sir; I’ve been talking with other navigators. I’m sure we can borrow a ship without any trouble.”

“What do we need...” Peter began, then realized. “Oh, to go get that planet killer.”

“Well, first we need to figure out how to move it. And fill it with air and these containers.” Clay shrugged. “But we need a ship to get out to it to figure those things out.”

“So what sort of ship are you... *borrowing*.” Peter emphasized the word.

“It’s all on the up and up, really.” Clay said. “There are several ships assigned directly to the station but they aren’t always doing things. We can technically book time for a ship.”

“When you say things like ‘technically’, Clay it makes me think it’s in the same league as how these data pads are now technically ours.”

Clay shrugged. “It’s more an official requisition. We just need to give a window of several days that we would like to use a ship for forty-eight hours and then when the missions here allow it, we’d get use of one. They still provide a crew, but we’d get to run the mission.”

“And this is official?”

Clay nodded then smiled. “Remember, as colonists we fall under Star Fleet’s organization so we’re one big happy family.” He pulled his data pad closer to himself.

“Yeah, we’re the family that they’ll cry at our funeral but no one wants to sit next to us at Thanksgiving.” Peter said with a headshake. “Okay, that’s medical, engineering, security.” He looked around the table. “Anything else? No?” He nodded. “More information on that Planet Killer mission would be nice if you could provide that.”

“Well...” Clay looked at Casey. “Actually...”

“Actually?” Peter’s eyes got large. “What else you have planned?”

“There’s actually a ship running in that general direction early tomorrow morning.”

“You’re going tomorrow morning? Tomorrow?”

Clay nodded at Peter. “A lucky window of opportunity. I asked the Captain if he’d be willing to tow a Starliner out with him and drop us off.”

“And you have a Starliner all prepped?”

“Yes sir. Remember there are a few that are completely operational. We added a portable transporter; three pads, to it so we can get off and on quicker. They’ll tow us out there then when they come back a week later, they’ll tow us back here.”

“A week?” Peter shook his head. “That’s a long time to be out in the middle of nowhere.”

“We will be within communication range of operations here.” Clay said. “And we have subspace engines if we need to get around. Not back here of course but we have the ability to go other places.”

Peter let out a long breath. “Well, sooner rather than later is how I’d like to leave this place.” He held up a finger. “And not in shackles so please try to keep the pilfering to an absolute minimum.” He knew that saying ‘not at all’ was an impossibility. “We want to leave this place with good relations in place.” He pointed at the doctor. “There’ll be women and babies left behind.”

“Got it, Sir.” Casey smiled. “We’ll be on our bestest behavior.”

“That’s all I can ask for.” Peter stood. “Well, go forth and do good things.” He gave a smile.

With that, everyone went to their task, and Peter went to have lunch with Celia- in one of the newly acquired Starliners.

Star Chapter Five: Shore Leave Pollux Compound

It was late in the afternoon the next day when Peter stepped up beside the security guard at the entrance to Pollux Landing- which is what their area was now called. Pollux being Castor's twin brother in Greek mythology. Both of which had been considered the protectors of sailors, and now colonists. In fact, someone had made a large sign that read "Compound Pollux, no outside visitors allowed without escort" that the security guard now stood beside.

"How goes it, Gary von Hoven, farmer turned guard?" Peter asked the tall, solidly build man. He was an agricultural specialist in both Terran and as well as several alien crops. His family had been farmers for at least six hundred years. Before that, records were sketchy so while it couldn't be unequivocally confirmed, Gary insisted the number was 'a thousand years'.

"Quiet. Like watching corn grow." Gary smiled. "You?"

"I'm doing okay." Peter frowned. "Mostly." Celia had left very early that morning for the mission to the planet killer. As usual, there was a note on her pillow that Peter found after he woke. Casey had said after the meeting that he was sure that the hull would prevent any transmissions so the Starliner would be 'dark' while it was inside the monstrous ship. But they would move to open space to send an update at the end of their workday. So until they did, all Peter could do was wait. "They should have definitely been there a while ago." After sulking around Pollux Compound the entire morning and most of the afternoon, he decided to go to Operations, to where the call from the Starliner would be received. "I'm thinking of going to Ops. Wait there to hear any news."

"That group could get a food processor to fly if it had wings." Gary said. "Best in the quadrant."

"Yeah, I know." Peter replied. "It's still harrowing not knowing what's going on. You know how it is."

"Oh." Gary patted Peter on his shoulder. "I do indeed know."

Peter smiled again at the man. "Where's Beth?" He asked, referring to the man's sister.

"Beth? She's in operations." Gary answered. "She's making sure she's around in case Elias calls. She slept there last night." Now he smiled at Peter. "You know?"

"No, I didn't. I'll go relieve her. See you." Peter walked away from the man. While Gary didn't have a significant other as far as he knew, there were several colonists who were deep in the throes of relationships- Elias Dunnings and Elizabeth van Hoven being one of the most tumultuous. What started as a hate-hate relationship between Elizabeth the shy and quiet sciences officer and Elias the

loud and boisterous engineering technician had inexplicably turned into a loving to hate relationship. Or perhaps a hating to love relationship. There was a secrete pool going on when the marriage proposal would happen- within three months was where everyone's guesses were. The colony being ripped away from its home did not seem to affect the betting at all. Opposites did indeed attract, was Gary's opinion on the matter, since he decided not to place a bet.

After only ten minutes, Peter walked into the operations room., It had improved a bit since they first acquired it; there were now more actual chairs in it as well as a large viewscreen that could be used for briefings and discussions. A communications station had also been set up along the far wall before the Starliner had left. All with the director's approval, Peter was pleased to hear.

Elizabeth was sitting with her back to the door at the communications station. She seemed to be asleep, slouched forward with her head on her arms.

The door closed quietly and Peter stood there for a moment. He cleared his throat. When she didn't wake, he started toward her, purposefully knocking into a chair to make it scrape on the metal deck.

Elizabeth startled awake and turned. "Oh, Peter." She smiled. "I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about. How long have you been here?"

She looked at the computer screen for the local time. "Only since last night."

"Last night?"

"Well, early evening. Just after dinner, really."

"Elizabeth." Peter said as he neared her. "Elias will not be pleased that you are not taking care of yourself. Gary isn't pleased either, you know." He gestured. "You can't just sleep on a table like that."

"Oh, I set up a bed." She pointed at a corner. There was indeed a cot set up with a blanket as well as a pillow. "I just nodded off for a moment."

"Why don't you go get something to eat and I'll keep watch." Peter smiled at the young woman. "If I hear anything important, I'll call you." He tapped his side where he had his communicator. "I promise, Elizabeth." Only her brother called her 'Beth'.

"Yes." She stood and stretched. "I could go for some food. And a shower."

Peter laughed. "Do both, I'll keep watch." He pointed at her. "See you in no less than two hours. Okay?"

"Okay." Elizabeth agreed as she walked out of the operations room.

Peter sat at the communications desk and started reading status reports from various colonists as well as other reports on the planet killer. After an hour, he too dozed off.

An hour after that, the communication station buzzed at him because of an incoming call. It took two times before Peter woke.

Star Chapter Six: Balance of Power

“Status?” Casey asked. He was sitting in a chair several feet back from the navigation station of the Starliner. The cockpit was identical to the one on a Starfleet shuttlecraft- as were the engines.

The Starliner had been left a half hour before by the *Odessey* which had dropped out of Warp, released the container, then sped off again.

“Do you want to sit up here?” Jeremy asked; he was sitting in the pilot’s seat. Celia was in the co-pilot seat. There were two other chairs set up in pairs behind those two. Two additional chairs had been brought in making the small navigation section of the container even more cramped.

Casey was the farthest back, on the left. “I suppose not.” He shrugged. “Not much to see anyway, I imagine.”

“Oh.” Jeremy said. “Wow.”

Casey stood and looked at the viewscreen. Without saying a word, he reached over and pulled Amy, who was sitting beside him, to her feet.

“Wow.” Amy said as well.

“There it is.” Jeremy maneuvered the Starliner around so the Planet Killer filled the viewscreen. “Man, oh man. There it is.” He pressed several buttons. “Cutting engines to coast in.”

The miles long ship was drifting along at a leisurely 10,000 kilometers a second with a slight spiral taking place. The monstrous opening still leading the way.

“What’s the magnification?” Justine asked.

“Twenty percent.” Jeremy responded.

“Twenty? How far away are we?”

“Thirty thousand meters.” Jeremy said.

“That thing is huge. I just... it’s huge.” Justine said.

“It will make a great colony. Castor Two.” Jeremy suggested.

“No, not Castor Two.” Now it was Amy.

“It’s going to orbit Castor, isn’t it?”

“That thing could go anywhere.” Amy pointed out. “We could fly that to the Gamma Quadrant. See what’s there.”

“If we can get it moving.” Casey said from behind them. He moved up between the two chairs. “That’s incredible. I can see why it took two Constitution Class starships to stop it.”

“Okay, I’ll do a flyby around the end to see if there’s anything that looks like a hatch.” Jeremy said as he powered up the engines again. “Coming about.” The Starliner turned in a graceful arc as it ran toward the front of the ship. A thousand meters before the front, he turned up and started a spiral along the long shaft of the ship. “Celia, can you scan it?”

Celia moved to the side and stood at the small sciences station. She flipped several buttons then pulled the viewer down to eye level. The blue light illuminating her face before she pressed it close. “Scanning for openings as well as any radiation levels.” She turned the dial on the side of the viewer.

“I’ll run to the end then spiral up the other way. It’s not a hundred percent coverage but it should be something.” Jeremy said. “Taking it slow.”

True to his word, the Starliner completed a spiral down the almost three-kilometer shaft then performed a loop and came at the ship from the aft, spiraling to the end. The entire trip took almost thirty minutes.

After traveling down the ship and back in silence, Celia broke it: “Nothing. No openings, no leaks, nothing. That neutrino hull is impenetrable.”

“Perfect for our colony.” Justine said. “Air, land, and water is all it needs.”

“Engines would be nice.” Casey pointed out. “Flying randomly across the cosmos doesn’t sound too professional.”

“I guess we’ll have to check it out from the inside.” Jeremy performed another graceful loop, aiming directly into the huge open front of the ship.

“Hold on; let’s give a quick update before we run in.” Celia suggested. “Hail operations.”

“Right, right.” Jeremy slowed the ship and opened a channel. “Operations, this is Starliner Seventeen. Do you copy?”

No one answered.

“What time is it? Are they all asleep?” Elias asked. “You’d think someone would be on watch.”

Jeremy tried again. “Operations, this is Starliner Seventeen. Do you copy?”

“We’re here, Starliner.” Peter responded. He sounded half awake.

“It’s sixteen hundred hours, are you taking the day off?” Celia said with a laugh.

“It’s been pretty hectic around here.” Peter explained

Jeremy’s eyes got large. “Hectic?”

Celia shook her head. It was something Peter would tell her when he didn’t have anything to do all day- which was many days while they lived in the colony on Castor III. Being bored was torture to him. “I’m sorry to hear that, dear. We just wanted to give you an update.”

“Oh; what’s the update?”

“There’s nothing to update.” Celia deadpanned.

“What?”

“Sir, we’ve done a sweep of the ship’s hull, there are no signs of damage or entry points. We will be entering the ship which means we will be unable to communicate for a while.” Jeremy explained. “We will recontact when we exit the ship with an initial assessment.”

“Thanks for that update, Jeremy.” Peter said. “Good luck in there and don’t take any chances.”

“Right.” Jeremy nodded.

“Oh.” Justine cut in. “Find us some grav gens.”

“You need gravitational generators?” Peter asked, confused.

“This thing will, once we get it going.” Justine said. “Twenty-seven hundred meters long, six hundred wide. It’s a big open space.”

“So how many is that?” Peter asked.

“Let the techs figure the math out.” Justine offered.

“See you next week.” Celia said.

“Oh... I...” Peter tried.

Elias leaned forward from his middle seat. “Tell Elizabeth we are all okay.”

“I will.” Peter said. “She was here earlier; I sent her off to get a meal.” He finished, glad to be back in familiar territory. “She was worried when she didn’t hear anything.”

“Thanks for looking out for her.” Elias leaned back.

“Alright then. We’re getting to work.” Celia said. “Twenty-seven by six hundred. Stay hectic. Starliner out.”

“Ops out.” Peter replied, sounding confused again.

When the communication link closed, Celia looked at Jeremy. “Hectic is code for there’s nothing going on at all and he’s bored.”

“Oh.” Jeremy smiled. “Hopefully we can have a hectic day as well.”

“I’m hoping for a successful day, personally.” Casey piped up. “Ship online, heading to Rigel.”

“In one day?” Justine looked at him.

“I’ve got the team with me to do it.” Casey said. “Let’s go.” He pointed. “Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more.”

“The game’s afoot.” Jeremy replied. It was a line that King Henry said later on in his monologue in Shakespeare’s play Henry V. He activated the ship’s engines and started into the ship’s gaping maw. “Going in.”

Star Chapter Seven: A Taste of Power

The Starliner moved slowly into the Planet Killer. When it passed the opening, it shuddered

“Whoa; what was that?”

Celia moved back to the sciences station and looked at the screen. “A force field of some sort.”

“Atmospheric?” Casey asked. “Like a Class III shield? That’d be nice.”

“I’m not sure what it’s supposed to keep out. Or in. There’s no atmosphere in here.” Celia pressed her face against the viewer. “It’s... like an atmospheric one but... it’s just keeping radiation out.”

“Radiation?” Justine asked. “Out here?”

“Yes, space is full of ambient radiation.” Celia explained, “Inside solar systems there are high-energy particles from the star; solar particles. And out here in open space there are Galactic Cosmic Rays. Long-term exposure is dangerous and potentially lethal. Ships are shielded so people tend to forget how dangerous space can be. There’s also general cosmic microwave background radiation. The lack of air is only the start of the problem with space.” She turned the dial. “Yes. Interior radiation levels are well below recommended levels.”

“Better than recommended is outstanding.” Jeremy said.

“Maybe the aliens who built this were overly susceptible to radiation?” Amy offered.

“That may be.” Celia said. “Either way, it’s good for us.”

“That’s true; it will make living in here healthy.” Amy leaned back in her seat. “I remember my brother telling me about having to get treatment after being on an asteroid that had improper shielding. He was setting up some mining equipment.” She smiled. “So that’s one less thing to worry about.”

“True.” Celia replied. “Maybe we can adjust them to keep atmosphere in.”

“I’d still like a redundant system.” Casey said. “Just in case.”

“I agree.”

“But hey, that also means not all the systems are inoperative.” Casey pointed out. “So that’s real good news. Systems operating means there’s operating power”

“Also true.” Celia modded. She continued to look through her scanning viewer.

“Where do you want me to go?” Jeremy asked. “See anything, Celia?”

“There are rings of what look like antiproton beams situated along the front end of the ship. They are spaced out at a hundred meters. Ten of them.”

“Anti-proton beam generators? I wonder what those would be worth to miners.” Casey looked at Amy. “And if they’ll come out, you should ask your brother, Amy. That would be a bit of funds.”

“Scanning showed that the outer hull of the ship is neutrino however the inside seems to be... Huh. It’s Tritanium.”

“Oh, that’s more good news.” Justine said. “Cutting those antiproton generators off of that will be a breeze.”

Casey looked at her. “You have salvage experience?”

“Welding.” Justine clarified. “Putting things together. But taking them apart is pretty similar.”

“Nice.” Casey nodded. “You can run that operation.”

“Where am I going?” Jeremy asked again. “Whole lot of nothing in here.”

“It looks like the weapon generator is mounted to the aft of the ship. There’s an emitter centrally located at the rear of the maw.” Celia was back to peering into her scanner. “Wow, it’s massive.”

“Centrally located?” Casey asked. “Centrally located on what?”

“There’s a wall... or bulkhead I suppose about two thousand meters back.”

“What’s the total length of this thing?” Jeremy asked.

“Two-thousand seven-hundred seventy-two meters.” Celia answered.

“Wow; that’s seven hundred meters unaccounted for.” Casey whistled. “That’s enough space for an entire Starship to sit back there.”

“Well, not really. I mean, it’s seven hundred seventy-two meters from the tail end but the ship tapers off pretty good. It’s only seventy-five meters tall at the bulkhead and it gets smaller the farther back you go. Down to five meters before it just turns into hull.”

“So... there?” Jeremy asked.

“Yes. Head towards the rear of the ship and I’ll scan for openings. Tritanium is easy to scan; that outer neutrino hull just looks fuzzy on scanners.” Celia answered.

“Aye aye.” Jeremy adjusted the controls to guide the ship to the monstrous wall at the rear of the open area. “Aft it is.”

“You know, depending on how the decks are set up back there, there might still be enough to set us all up in there.” Amy said. “A deck is what, five meters counting the mechanics under it? So that’s fifteen decks at the start and it could run down to two decks at the end before we stopped, but they’d still be seven hundred meters long. That’s a whole lot of living space.”

“If it even has decks back there; it might be full of the mechanics that make this thing run And work that energy beam.” Justine pointed out. “I still think we should grab as many Starliners as we can get on Rigel just in case.” She panned her hands around. “If nothing else, these work great as shuttles. Jeremy can start a Starliner flight school, right Jeremy?”

“Well, if I’m not busy flying that big thing, I suppose I can.” Jeremy said.

“If we can get them for free, that is a good idea.” Celia said. “I don’t think Peter said the director was thinking of charging us for any of them.”

“They’re just rotting in the dump.” Amy pointed out. “He should be glad we are taking them off his hands to give him more space.”

Celia laughed. “Maybe you should go with Peter when he talks to him. Between the two of you, we’ll get more than we need.”

Star Chapter Eight: What are Little Elizabeths Made Of

Two hours after the call from the Starliner, Elizabeth came back in.

“Anything?” Elizabeth asked.

Peter kicked himself mentally; he had promised to call the woman when he had word and he had not done so. “Oh. Well, nothing of substance.” He offered.

“So they called?” Elizabeth furrowed her brow. “While I was away?”

“Only to say they had arrived and were heading inside the ship.”

“That’s it?” Now Elizabeth seemed to be getting upset.

“Well, yes. They got dropped off by the *Odessey*, then called to say they were going in. The hull prevents them from transmitting from inside you know, so before heading in, they called to say they were going in.” Peter realized he was rambling. “That’s about it.” He hoped it would be enough to placate the young woman. “Oh, but Elias said hello.”

“There wasn’t more?” Now she crossed her arms.

“Elizabeth, you can listen to the transmission if you’d like.” Peter gestured at the station. “It’s saved there. The entire call lasted less than a minute. Forty seconds, tops. You’re welcome to listen to it.” He put his hands on his hips. “I also would have preferred something more detailed but it was just ‘we’re here. We’re heading inside. Bye.’ and that’s it. Oh; and get some grav-gens. Once they look around inside the ship for an initial evaluation, they said they would move out to call again to let us know what sort of supplies or equipment they will need.” He pointed at the communication station again. “You’re welcome to sit and wait for that message.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to snap. It’s just...” Her voice trailed off. “Gravitational generators?”

“It’s okay. Yeah. They’re already sending me shopping lists.” Peter smiled at her. “Listen, I want to talk to the director of the station so I was going to leave once you got here anyway.” He gestured. “Have a seat and keep an ear open for our away mission.”

“Okay.” Now Elizabeth smiled. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” Now Peter frowned. “If you get more out of our extremely untalkative away mission, let me know.”

Elizabeth laughed. "I'll do what I can." She looked at the door. "You're not leaving on my account, are you?"

"No. I need to see where I can get some gravitational generators." Peter replied. "But I'll stop by here afterwards."

"Oh. Okay then."

"Is there something you need? Want me to bring you something?"

"I didn't get that shower. I went to one of the dining areas on the station instead of back to Pollux. Then skipped the shower so I could get back faster."

"I'll stop by after talking to the station director." Peter assured her.

"Thanks." Elizabeth smiled as she moved to the chair and sat.

Peter left the room then took out his communicator and flipped it open. "Kent to Barnes," he said, referring to Charlie Barnes the only engineer that did not go on the away team.

"Barnes here." Charlie said.

"Charlie, I was told to get gravity generators. A lot of them."

"We have a ship? Nice. I can start unbolting them from the less traveled part of the Starbase. Every other one. By the time anyone notices, we'll be long gone."

"Charlie. I'm talking about *buying* them." Peter shook his head. "You boys are going to get us kicked off this Starbase."

"Then I'd say the space docks on Regulus III. Large facility so cheaper prices and they're nearby. That would be the best choice." Charlie replied. "If you really want to go that route."

Peter smiled. "We're going to give colonists a bad name."

"No one likes colonists." Charlie pointed out. "We're the worst of the worst."

"I thought that was pirates."

"Pirates rank above colonists." Charlie assured him. "Ask anyone."

"Regulus. Thanks."

"Regulus III." Charlie corrected. "That's where the docks are. There's a half dozen inhabited planets in that system."

"Right. Kent out." Peter flipped his communicator closed. He walked to a nearby comms panel and pressed the white button on it. "Director Koresh."

After a moment Gil Koresh answered. "Director Koresh here."

“Gil, it’s Peter. Peter Kent.”

“Peter. What do you need?”

“A moment of your time if you have it.”

“I’m in my office. If you can come in the next ten minutes, I could see you. I have a meeting in half an hour in orbit that will take the rest of the day.”

“I’m on my way.” Peter smiled. “Quick; who do you like more pirates or colonists?”

Without a moment’s hesitation, Gil answered: “Pirates, you always know what to expect from them.”

“See you soon.” Peter mashed the button sourly.

Star Chapter Nine: The Power Factor

“How’s that? Anything?” Casey asked for what could have been the hundredth time. He had been in a space suit for over eleven hours by this point and he was exhausted from replacing broken circuits or bypassing them on the Doomsday Machine’s computer banks. Climbing through small passage ways which were obviously not designed for humans had only made it worse. There were places where he could see what needed to be fixed but he couldn’t fit so he had to have two of the female engineers squeeze into those places. From what they could determine, the ship still had substantial power reserves but the connections between those reserve banks and the rest of the ship were severed thanks to the *Constellation*’s Warp core exploding. Fortunately, the radiation shield seemed to be on its own circuit which not only made it healthier inside the massive ship, it left them with one less thing to repair.

When they had discovered that the radiation shield circuits were still operational, they tried routing all the ship’s power through them. It ended up blowing those relays. So, before anything else, those needed repaired. After an hour fixing what they had broken, they were back to step one. With an unfamiliar ship, everything that followed was trial and error and guesswork. Even so, it seemed that progress was being made as the gaps between the power reserves and various ship’s functions was getting smaller.

“Oh, I’m getting something.” Celia replied. “Yes. That’s got it. You’ve got it, Casey!”

“Casey?” Amy said. “Who’s chest deep in these circuits?”

“Me and you.” Justine replied. “Up to our armpits in blown circuits.”

“Well, it’s been a team effort, I think.” Celia said diplomatically. “But you two were pivotal, that’s for sure.”

“Yay, team small!” Jessica said. While scanning the rear of the ship, they had found a large bulkhead into the rear portion of the ship, but were unable to dock because the two systems were incompatible. Thankfully, the portable transporter pad had allowed them to beam to the other side of it. After three hours of searching, the fused computer relays were found- deep within the ship’s systems. Thanks to the confined spaces- nowhere near as big as Jeffrey Tubes- it was only Justine and Amy that could fit. So Casey stayed at the main bank, working there while the two women crawled over and under computer machinery to search out the faulty controls there.

While they were doing that, Elias had found a supply room full of various items to include replacement couplings that were then beamed to whoever needed them. He had also found what seemed to be a ship’s galley. Along with those two rooms, he had also discovered what seemed to be the sickbay (although he was unsure how any of the machines or computers in there operated) as

well as engineering and weapons sections. There were hundreds of feet of corridors with rooms that were set up as living quarters with oversized furniture and doorways. The previous occupants seemed to be closer to eight feet tall. There were close to three hundred living quarters spread out across one to five decks that ran from the front bulkhead to the rear of the ship. The only thing they would need was for a door to be cut between two cabins to create two and then three-bedroom units. Even so, they would accommodate all of the colonists.

Next to the infirmary, Casey found what seemed to be the ship's bridge. He had then moved to this main control room to monitor the progress of the other three engineers as systems came online, invariably shorted out and then eventually returned.

It was indeed a team effort.

"So what have we got?" Casey asked yet again. "Anything?"

"Wait a second." Elias said. "It's... coming up."

"I said I'm ready for a hot shower. Has that come up yet?" Amy said. "Before we do anything else, we need to get some air back here so we don't..."

"Hold on..." Elias interrupted.

"Hot shower." Amy said again.

"Hold on... Wait... Wait... Oh, would you look at *that*!"

"What?" Casey asked. "Look at what? All I can see is a little view out my helmet!"

"I can see a whole lot more!" Elias said. "So what do you want?" Elias asked. "Because we've got it!"

"What?" Celia asked. "Got what?"

"*Everything*. Propulsion, navigation, sensors, weapons. You name it, we've got it!"

"Atmosphere?"

"Well, no." Elias admitted. "Life support seems to be active. But we'll have to bring our own air. There's just nothing for the system to circulate. I'm going to shut that down so we don't burn it out in the meanwhile." Elias said. "But systems show the area back here is ready for it. Do you see it, Casey?"

"Yeah... Yeah." Casey looked over the panels as they came to life. "I'm tracking here as well. I don't understand all these control stations but they're all up and running. Maybe the computer on the *Odessey* can give us help with that."

"Wait, why don't we just sail this thing back home. We don't have to wait for the *Odessey*. Right?" Jeremy asked. "We've got Warp capability?"

“You want it, we’ve got it.” Elias said again. “Well...”

“Oh, that’s not a word I want to hear.” Celia said. “Well what?”

“Well, we need to figure out the controls in here. I mean, there’s a place to sit in front of the boards and everything is running but I’m not sure about piloting this thing.” Elias said. “But it’s all on.”

“That’s a big first step.” Casey said. “Well done, team.”

“Want me to take a look?” Jeremy asked.

“Yeah. That would be a good idea.” Elias sighed loudly. “But I’m with Amy; I need to get out of this suit for a while first. I’m beat. We can go over what we’ve got and what we have left to do. But a shower and food first.”

“I agree.” Justine offered. “How about we pick up in the morning?”

“It *is* morning.” Casey said. “We’ve been at this for ten... no twelve hours.”

“Twelve hours?” Elias asked. “Oh man, they’re going to be upset back on Rigel.”

“Yeah. I say we get back to the Starliner, talk over what we’ve got and send a detailed update.” Celia suggested. “How’s that sound?”

“If there’s a shower before we talk, you’ve got my vote.” Amy offered. “Twelve hours in a suit is...is...” Her voice trailed off.

“Yeah, you said it.” Celia agreed. “Let’s beam you all back here and start fresh after some rest and refit.”

Star Chapter Ten: I, Peter

“You need what?” Gil asked surprised.

“I don’t *need* anything.” Peter replied. “Who said I needed anything?”

“You did. Just now.”

“No; what I said was: ‘I want to *purchase* gravitational generators from the ship yards on Regulus III with the credits that are in the Castor Colony account’; no one is *giving* us anything.”

“Fine, fine.” Gil put his hands on his desk. “But... Enough for twenty-seven hundred meters by six hundred meters?”

“That’s what I was told.” Peter shrugged. “I mean, total. Spread out.” He added, not wanting to say too much.

“Are you stealing an asteroid?”

“You know, most of those are unaffiliated, so...” Peter shrugged. “It’s not like we couldn’t just claim one for ourselves.”

“An *asteroid*?” Gil raised an eyebrow. “Come on now. Really?”

“No, of course not. We aren’t taking an asteroid. We... my people are currently working on getting a... a ship and apparently they have no gravitational generators.” He paused. “Well, as far as I know anyway. I haven’t had an update in a few hours.” He frowned. “More than a few hours, actually.”

“That’s a huge ship.” Gil’s other eyebrow went up. “It’s one ship, right? Not a fleet.”

“It’s one ship. A derelict.” Peter didn’t want to say too much about the ship because he was sure that Gil would tell Starfleet as soon as he left the office. And while the ship was indeed a derelict, Starfleet would probably still not want some colonists to take control of a ship that was, until it was confronted by two Constitution Class Starships, eating entire Solar Systems just because it could. “No one is on it.” Now his eyebrow went up. “No indigenous lifeforms of *any* kind. And it’s free floating in space with no atmosphere, and has been for quite some time. It is rightfully classified a derelict ship and us taking it and refitting it will actually be a benefit because it will remove a large piece of space junk that could potentially be a hazard to other ships as well as planets. And really, what we’re using those generators for is not important. All I need is a way to get to Regulus III to pick them up.”

“They have that much in stock?” Gil asked, genuinely confused. “How many of those are even used in a normal ship? Or even a Starbase for that matter?” Truth be told, artificial gravity was a solid-state system that never seemed to require any work at all so Gil did not know anything about it; it was something that was always there.

“I made an initial inquiry and they said they did.” Peter replied. “The Boyson shipyards on Regulus III are a pretty big operation, both on the surface and their four dockyards in space. Oh; they said it would probably take ten generators to cover the entire ship with overlapping fields.” He smiled. “I had no idea either.”

“I see.” Gil said. “That’s not as many as I thought. Still; do you need to get these things back to here then? Will you install them yourself?” He considered that for a moment. “Wouldn’t it be better to take this derelict to the Boyson yards and let them do it? I imagine they could do it in a tenth of the time it would take your people to do it.” He raised his hands plaintively. “I mean, your colonists aren’t *all* engineers, are they?”

“No, actually they aren’t.” Now Peter considered it. “You know, that may be a good idea. I’ll run it by my team that’s out there now. If we can get the thing towed there, that would really solve a lot of problems.”

“And where is this ship?”

Peter looked around the office then pointed at a far corner. “That way, I believe it is. The *Odessey* dropped them off this morning in a Starliner. They borrowed a portable transporter to get in and out of it to go over the derelict to do a damage assessment of it.”

“It’s damaged?”

“Folks don’t just leave perfectly good ships drifting in space.” Peter said matter-of-factly.

“Very true.” Gil said. “Well, if you need to get to Regulus III, I know there are regular runs going from here.” He stood. “If you are able to get this ship running and it gets you to your new home, that will indeed be grand. Does Starfleet know where your new colony will be set up?” He started to sit again. “Or are you unsure where you will go with this ship?”

Peter realized that Gil didn’t consider the ship to be the new colony; it was just going to take them to wherever that was. He stood. “I think my people have got a pretty good plan in place, Gil. And none of it will even be a concern for Starfleet.” Peter gave what he hoped was a friendly smile. “I can assure you of that.”

“Well, if we can’t trust a Starfleet Captain, we’ve got bigger problems.” Gil stood again with a smile. Now wanting the man to leave so that he could call Starfleet immediately.

Peter put out his hand. “I’ll go over to the bays and see what’s on the schedule for Regulus III.”

Gil shook it. “Does this mean you won’t be needing those cargo containers?”

“Oh, you know, I’m not sure about that. Once I know, you’ll know. I will need to borrow one to get those generators here if that’s the plan.” He held his hands out plaintively. “Until I hear back from my team, and pitch the idea of taking the planet...” He caught himself. “Derelict ship to the *planet* or one of their space docks, I’d just be guessing. But you’ll be the first to know.” He let go of Gil’s hand.

If Gil thought anything of the slip, he didn’t let on. “Right. Well, thanks. I appreciate you keeping me up to date.” He now desperately wanted the man to leave to call Starfleet. He absently wondered if the *USS Auburndale* was still close by.

“Sure thing.” Peter looked at Gil’s face; he was now sure of two things: If the Planet Killer was a viable ship, they needed to be on it as quickly as possible without going to Regulus III, and he would never play poker with the Director of Rigel Starbase.

He made his way back to Operations as quickly as he could.

Star Chapter Eleven: The Trouble With Salvages

Casey, Amy, Justine, and Elias sat around the table on the Starliner exhausted, having a long-needed meal and coffee. They had decided to have a round-table discussion before calling the Operations Center so they would have a complete update. Jeremy had decided he would have a look at the navigation system as well as other systems to see if he could figure out how they operated, since he really hadn't done very much physically while the others worked on the Planet Killer's systems all day long.

"So, I'd say that was pretty successful for an initial attempt." Casey smiled. "What isn't working?"

"Well, gravity doesn't seem to be." Justine said. "Either the aliens who build it didn't install any because they didn't need it, or we haven't found that circuit yet. The more I think about it, if it's an autonomous weapon it might not have gravity installed." She shrugged, "Why bother with an unnecessary power drain?"

"That is true." Casey replied. "But from what we think these aliens look like, gravity would have been something they'd need while they were aboard. And with all those cabins I would think they were on board for a while."

From moving around the various parts of the ship, as well as the crawl spaces and access corridors they had decided the aliens were about seven feet tall, bipedal, and skeletally thin. In fact the chairs that they had come across were all both tall and narrow; a larger colonist would have difficulty sitting in one.

"We can just install our own gravitational generators." Amy suggested. "That would be the easiest thing to do."

"Well, I told Peter we needed grav-gens for the entire ship, so he's hopefully running down some. I had a feeling with all those big open spaces inside, gravity wasn't happening."

"I'm sure any large depot would have them." Elias considered that. "Regulus would be the closest space dock to us."

"They get replaced that often?" Casey asked. "I've actually never had any go bad on me. Solid dependability is what they are."

"They build new ships there," Elias explained. "So they're installing them fresh." He nodded. "They are some pretty durable tech."

“So what are we telling Peter then?” Casey asked. “Ships functions marginally operational? Mostly operational? Operational but not understandable?”

“I’d say they are totally operational but not yet manageable.” Justine said. “That’s more accurate, I think.”

“But systems that we can’t use aren’t really operational.” Casey pointed out. “We can’t send false hope. What if we can’t figure out how to make navigation, or life support work? It’s just a floating hull at that point. We need a Plan B if this thing isn’t going to work for us, and not providing an accurate assessment doesn’t help with that at all.”

“We could always take it to a depot. I’m sure they’d be able to figure it out.” Amy offered.

“Oh, I think taking that thing.” Elias pointed downward; the Starliner was currently positioned on the top of the Planet Killer with a tractor beam holding it in place, “is a terrible idea.” He shook his head. “If Starfleet gets word of what we’re doing here, they’ll be on us harder than they were on Castor.”

“What would they care?” Amy asked. “It’s a derelict ship.”

“It’s an alien-built planet eating ship that took two Constitution Class Starships to defeat. Do you think they want something with that kind of firepower just wandering around out of their control?” Elias shook his head. “No, if we are serious about using this thing, it needs to stay as far away from Starfleet as we can get. I’m amazed they didn’t tow it to one of their facilities to take it apart when it was defeated.”

“There’s plenty of space that the Federation doesn’t control.” Celia said. “We can take this thing anywhere once it’s working.”

“We can’t just sail it into the Klingon Empire.” Justine said. “If two Starships will put it out of commission, that means two Klingon Battle Cruisers will also put it out of commission. Except this time with us in it.”

“Then we just set course for the Gamma Quadrant, away from Starfleet space.” Elias said.

“But we don’t know what’s...” Amy began.

“We are getting off course here,” Casey interrupted. “We don’t even have a ship we can operate. Talking about where we are going to sail it is a bit preemptive. And counter-productive. We need an update for Peter. Good or bad. That’s what engineers do.”

“Fine then.” Justine began. She held up her hand and made a fist. “Systems operational but not manageable. Plan for Starliners as living quarters for colonists still in place.” She raised two fingers. “There is room in the aft for all colonists once they are adjusted as living quarters with multiple rooms.”

“Right. Internal living quarters available but not outfitted.” Casey interjected.

“Yes.” Justine raised a finger. “And Gravitational Generators will be required.” She raised a fourth finger.

“What if we attached a nacelle and added our own navigation to it?” Amy asked. “Fly it remotely from a separate bridge.”

Casey shook his head. “We can’t afford a nacelle. And it would take two, really. So that’s twice as unaffordable.” He pointed at Celia. “But we will need a hangar shield to back up what’s already here. We should start looking for those.”

“Right.” Justine extended her thumb. “Plus we should see what we can get for those anti-proton beams. Maybe we can trade them for a ship with two good nacelles, then swap them over. Bridge as well.”

“If we can swap the beams for a ship, why not just take that ship and go where we want?” Justine asked. “Then we are truly on a salvage mission that no one can deny us.”

“Let’s hold off on that until we try to figure out the systems here for more than a day. Remember the *Odessey* isn’t coming back for five more days.” Casey said. “So... anything else?”

“That should be good enough for now. Five points is a good start.” Amy said.

“Yes; five is a really good start.” Casey smirked. “Don’t forget the engineer’s secret motto: under promise, over deliver.”

“And add ten percent to any time estimate.” Celia added.

“Well, how else are we supposed to look like...”

The entire Starliner shuddered around them.

Casey gripped the table. “What was that; something hit us? Elias?”

“On it!” He hopped to his feet and moved quickly to the navigation station as another shudder ran through the cargo container. He grabbed the side of the door to steady himself then practically leapt into the pilot seat when the shudder stopped for a moment.

The rest followed close behind, using the table, then the wall as support as they went. The shuddering was getting worse.

“What have we got?” Casey asked as he entered.

Elias turned on the navigation station then scanned the readouts.

Casey sat quickly in the copilot seat. He had not had as many flight lessons as Elias had, but was easily the second-best pilot out of the engineers. “Tractor beam is holding. Did something hit us?”

“What? No!” Elias looked over the readouts. “We’re *moving!*”

“Well sure; we’re in that slow spiral with the ship moving at ten thousand kilometers per second. We knew that.”

“No.” Elias looked at Casey. “We’re at Warp One.” He looked back at the readout. “One point two... and *climbing*.”

Star Chapter Twelve: Waiting to Tomorrow

Peter stepped into Operations. “Anything?”

Elizabeth turned and shook her head. “Nothing. It’s been eight hours since they were dropped off.” She frowned. “What if something went wrong?”

“Nothing has gone wrong.” Peter smiled. “You go get your shower and I’ll take over here. Okay?”

Elizabeth looked at the communication station then back at Peter. “I’m not sure I want to leave.”

“Elizabeth, believe me; staring at a comms station won’t make things happen. Go take your shower and I’ll keep watch.”

She let out a long breath. “Fine. I’ll go. If you hear anything, you’ll let me know?”

“Even if it’s quicker than the last call, I promise I’ll tell you right away.” He smiled again.

“Maybe we should take a ship out to see how things are going?”

Peter shook his head. “One thing I learned as a Captain was you have to trust your team. They are the best. If anyone can get that ship running, it’s Casey and his team.” He smiled. “The Boys have never let us down before, have they?”

“No.” Elizabeth frowned. “Still.”

“And really, I’d rather not have any ships out there. The less people that know about what we are doing, the better. Starfleet especially.”

“What does Starfleet care about a derelict ship?”

“It’s a massive weapon. And if they get it running again, all of a sudden it’s an operational massive weapon that they don’t control in the middle of Starfleet space.” Peter said. “They aren’t going to like that.”

“Oh.” Elizabeth said with another frown.

“So go get your shower. I’ll sit and wait to hear something.”

When Elizabeth left, Peter took out his communicator. “Kent to Barns.”

“Barns here. What’s up?”

“Can you contact Regulus and run down those gravity generators? I’m sitting in Ops waiting to hear from the away team.”

“Still nothing?”

“Not yet.” Peter replied.

“Well, it’s only been eight hours or so. Assessing an entire alien ship can take some time. They have a week before their ride comes back. Maybe they’re pacing themselves?”

Peter laughed. “Casey is Warp Ten all day long.”

“Yeah, the boss is pretty driven. I’ll see what I can find. How many are we looking for?”

“I think it’s ten generators to cover the entire ship.” Peter hesitated as he considered that. “Would a grav-gen mounted on the bottom of a six-hundred-meter-tall ship still affect the very top of it?”

“Through decks? No way.”

“No; a big open space.” Peter explained.

“Well...” Charlie considered it. “Those plates do have limitations. They aren’t manipulating gravitrons indefinitely. At six hundred meters, the gravity at the uppermost deck would be less than at the first deck. Do you want me to run numbers or give an estimate?”

“The word on the street is that an estimate from an engineer is the same as running the numbers by other people.” Peter pointed out.

“Then it must be true.” Charlie chuckled. “I’d say it would be probably three-quarter Gee by the time you get to that uppermost deck. Okay for short periods, but not for living. You’d need another one about halfway up.”

“Well, we’re not doing decks.” Peter said. “It’s a large open area with water and farmland at the bottom and Starliners and cargo containers along the sides for people to live in; a giant habitat geosphere.”

“I missed the brief. How big of an area?”

“About six hundred meters wide, and say... three kilometers long.” Peter replied.

“All that and people live in the Starliners?”

“Yes.” Peter confirmed. “Starliners and cargo containers.”

“Well... That’s even easier then. I’d put a small one in each cargo container for one Gee. Then spread six down on the bottom. If that’s where the water is, that’s where you want one Gee. If it’s all open above it, no one will notice three quarter Gee up there. Unless the kids start skydiving.”

“One problem at a time, Charlie.” Peter said. “Wow. So one per container. That’s a lot between seventeen Starliners, and probably twenty cargo containers.” Peter became worried. “That’s going to get expensive.”

“Starliners are already equipped with gravity.” Charlie pointed out. “Just the cargo containers would need one. A small one, really. Put the big ones on the bottom of the ship and you’re done.”

“Well, that’s not as bad.” Peter replied. “Start working on that then.” He hesitated. “Not purchasing anything, just finding them.”

“Got it, boss.” Charlie said.

“Great.” Peter closed his communicator and let out a long sigh. “Where are you people?” He said to no one.

Star Chapter Thirteen: The Ultimate Colony

“Warp two point five.” Elias read off the display in front of him. “And holding.”

“What is going on down there?” Justine asked.

“It seems Jeremy has figured out propulsion.” Casey said.

The ship had stopped shuddering but the instruments still indicated the ship was moving at two and a half Warp Speed.

“I hope he’s figured out navigation as well before he runs into something.” Amy said. “Can we at least see where we’re going?”

Casey turned on the main viewscreen. It showed stars going by horizontally. He chuckled. “We’re sitting sideways. Just a sec.” He adjusted the viewscreen to show what was on their right- or ahead for the Planet Killer. It was empty space with very familiar stars pushing towards them at a relatively quick speed. “Clear sailing, I suppose.”

“Yeah, until it’s not. At Warp, things pop up pretty quick.” Amy pointed out.

The entire ship shuddered again.

“What now?” Amy asked. “How is this thing even moving at Warp without nacelles? Paired nacelles for that matter. How are we having balanced, efficient Warp field generation with no nacelles?”

The ship shuddered again.

“I’m not sure this could be called balanced or efficient.” Casey said. He looked at Elias. “What’s happening?”

“We’re slowing.” Elias said. “Warp two. One point seven... four... two... Warp one... back in sublight.” He leaned back in his seat. “Oh man.”

“Let’s go ask Jeremy what he’s up to.” Casey said. “I’ll put us back inside.”

“What about our update?”

Casey exhaled. He knew that whatever he told Peter would turn into a long drawn-out discussion. Especially now that the Planet Killer seemed to be Warp capable all of a sudden. “I’ll send a subspace radio message for now. We can talk back and forth later.”

“Oh boy. You be the one to do that to Peter.” Elias said. “I’m not brave enough for that.”

Casey smiled. "Fine." He pressed a button on the instrument panel. "Update from Starliner Seventeen. The... derelict ship systems are operational. We have not figured out how to manage them but they are working. Ship is also Warp capable. Two point five. We will need to go back inside to speak to the navigator for an update on that. We will move back outside the ship for a full update and discussion afterwards." He pressed the button sending the message. "Let's go."

"Oh man. I would love to see Peter's face when he gets that message." Jeremy smiled.

"The good news is we won't be back for a week so he will have calmed down by then." Celia offered. "And if we have more good news when we get back outside, all the better."

"Right." Casey deactivated the tractor beam and lifted the Starliner off the Planet Killer's hull. "In we go."

Star Chapter Fourteen: The Gilgamesh Web

Peter sat at the comms station, lightly dozing. It had been hours and he had heard nothing. He jolted awake as Elizabeth came in.

“Anything?” She asked as she moved closer.

“Not a word.” Peter frowned. “I’d dock their pay if they were actually getting any.”

Elizabeth laughed. “Well, I suppose...”

An indicator flashed on the communication panel.

“Oh!” Elizabeth dropped into a seat beside Peter. “It’s them!”

“Finally.” Peter pressed the button. “It’s good to hear your...” His voice trailed off as the recorded message played.

When it stopped, the pair sat in silence for almost a full minute.

“I was expecting... I don’t know, someone to talk to?” Elizabeth finally said.

Peter gestured at the speaker. “That’s what we get after a full day of them away? That?” He pressed the button again, replaying the message. It only took a few seconds to play. “Oh man, that’s annoying.”

“Well, the ship’s systems are operational, that’s a good thing.” Elizabeth offered. “So they got those running. That’s the first step, right? And Warp Speed is good.”

“I suppose.” Peter looked at her. “Warp capable? Do they have that thing *moving*?” He frowned again. “Not that you’d know because you know as much as I do right now. Which is absolutely nothing.”

“At least everyone is okay, right?”

“I suppose so.” Peter replied. “I guess we need to just wait for them to get back out of that thing to get a good and proper update.” He smiled at her. “At least you got a shower, right?”

“Right.” Elizabeth nodded. “I can wait here if you need to go.”

“Well...” Peter looked at the door. “I would like to get back. If we are really leaving soon, we need to get some plans in place.” He thought of the logistics of moving all two hundred people. They could be put inside the space-worthy Starliners but that would mean leaving behind the other

ones. Not to mention the regular cargo containers that had no propulsion. Suddenly things were moving a lot faster than he wanted. “You have this?” He gestured at the communication station.

“If I hear something,” Now Elizabeth smiled. “Even if it’s shorter than that last message, I will let you know.”

Peter stood. “Deal. And if you get them before I get back, scold them properly for me.”

Elizabeth narrowed her eyes. “Oh, at least Elias will; I can guarantee you that.”

“That’s a good start.”

With that, Peter left to go back to the colony. He hoped his lone engineer could manage to get the remaining Starliners operational. How to get the other cargo containers into space was something else that needed to be accomplished. And unfortunately speaking to the director sooner rather than later was another task that needed done. With a relegated sigh, he stepped over to a comms panel and pressed the white button. “Director Koresh.”

After a moment, the man answered. “This is Director Koresh.”

“Gil, it’s Peter. Do you have a moment to speak?”

Gil didn’t respond for a moment. “I was actually on my way out in the next couple of minutes.”

“Okay, I’ll make it quick. How do you feel about us taking those Starliners?”

“*All* of them?”

“Well...” Peter frowned. “Yes, those ones sitting in the dump that no one wanted so they ended up at the dump.”

Gil laughed. “Well, when you put it that way. I suppose I’m okay with it. Actually, I feel like you’re going to take all of them anyway. Are you... leaving in them?”

“We might very well be, yes.” Peter said, not wanting to say too much.

“With how many of you there are, that seems like cramped living. And they only have sublight speed. You’re staying in the neighborhood?”

Peter frowned again; the director was fishing for information. He knew something, but wasn’t going to let on how much. “Well, we may have found a ship. Maybe. It depends if we can get it space worthy.” Peter now hoped that the communication station he had in his ops room wasn’t also tied into the director’s. “I’m just trying to stay ahead of any problems. Knowing we have those at our disposal is a step in the right direction. And by that I mean off this planet and out of your hair.” He hoped to keep their relationship friendly as long as possible.

“I understand.” Gil said, remaining reticent.

“Well, that was it for now. When I get more updates I’ll let you know.”

“That sounds fine, Peter.”

“Great. Peter out.” Peter mashed the button with his thumb and pulled out his communicator. “Kent to Barns.” He started walking quickly to their compound.

“Barns here.”

“We need to be ready to move out of here on a moment’s notice. I suspect the cat is out of the bag.”

“What? Starfleet knows what we’re trying to do?”

“I think that Gil Koresh knows. And if he knows, I’d bet you credits to navy beans that Starfleet knows. Get working on an evacuation plan.”

“That makes it sound desperate.”

“It is, all of a sudden. Kent out.” He snapped shut the communicator and continued his quick walk to the dump.

Star Chapter Fifteen: Whom Gods Search For

“Gil out.” Gil pursed his lips. He had been asked by Captain Sobel on the *Auburndale* to monitor the communications of the colonists to ensure they did not do anything rash. When he listened in on their meeting discussing salvaging a ship, he really didn’t consider that rash. In fact, he was glad that they had possibly found a way to move elsewhere. The more he heard about the ship however, the more he felt he should let Captain Sobel know.

Gil swiveled his chair to his computer. “Contact Captain Sobel on the *Auburndale*, Rose.”

“Okay.” Rose, his executive assistant replied. “When I find him I’ll let you know.”

“Good. I am heading to the *Roquefort*.” He said, referring to a privately owned ship that often visited the Starbase. The captain was a personal friend of his. “I’ll be back tomorrow. But if something urgent happens with... you know, *those people*, please let me know.”

“I will keep track of them.” Rose replied. “Enjoy your day off.”

“When you reach Captain Sobel, can you patch him up to the *Roquefort* as well?”

“Yes. Now go enjoy your day off.”

Gil smiled. “Thanks.” He had complete trust in his executive assistant; if anything unusual happened, she would let him know. He stood and moved to the single transporter pad in the corner of his office. He had already loaded the coordinates for the Captain’s lounge on the ship.

Star Chapter Sixteen: The Lights of Casey

The Starliner executed a graceful loop and then headed straight into the giant maw of the Planet Killer.

“We really need to figure out how to get a hatch in that thing.” Casey said as he piloted toward the aft of the monstrous ship. “It would be pretty handy.”

“We could cut one out of those useless Mark III cargo containers.” Justine suggested. “If we could figure out the power system in this thing, it would be easy to cut one out, bring it here and plug it in.” She shrugged. “There’s not even atmosphere back there right now we’d have to be worried about.”

“That’s a great idea; make that your task when we get back.” Casey nodded as he considered that. “Yeah. That would give us a dual sized entry point with a built-in airlock even. Nice.”

“It would take me an hour to get one out, and probably a couple of hours to install it here if I can get the power to match up.” Justine said as she considered the task. “Yes, that’s pretty accurate, I think. Three hours tops. Especially with a couple of helping hands.”

“Hopefully we can get that thing closer to Rigel so we don’t have to hitch a ride to get back here.” Amy remarked. “Flying here in a Starliner to drop off a hatch would take a long time.”

“Oh, I’m not sure how close we should bring this thing to Rigel.” Casey replied. “I’m sure Peter wants to play this close to the vest. Starfleet will definitely not like us commandeering this thing.”

“Salvage.” Amy said. “We’re *salvaging*. Commandeering would mean there was a crew aboard when we showed up. Salvage has centuries of legal precedent.”

“Tell that to a Starship Captain when he’s looming over you.” Casey said sourly.

“The good news is that that neutrino hull would make it impossible for them to beam us out once we were inside.” Elias pointed out. “Actually, they’ll have a hard time seeing us at all.”

“We get that weapon online and they’d think twice about even getting near us.” Justine pointed out.

“We don’t need a fight with any Star Fleet vessels. That’s a can of worms I definitely do not want to open. A fistfight maybe. Ship to ship combat? No.” Casey moved the Starliner close to the interior bulkhead. “Okay, I’ll hold her here while Justine and Elias go see what those two have been up to.” Casey said. “Amy, can you run the transporter for them?”

“Sure.” Amy stood and started out of the small area. “I’ll get it set up.” She said as she left.

“Just the two of us?” Elias asked as he too stood to leave.

Casey set the tractor beam. “I don’t think we need everyone over there.”

“Too many cooks, huh?” Amy said with a smile.

“Exactly. Plus we can start working on a list of things we need for this thing.” Casey said. He pointed at Justine. “Like what you’ll need to install that bulkhead.”

“And we could use a transporter pad. A cargo one if at all possible.” Justine added. “Once I cut a hole in this thing, we can beam the hatch into place and then weld it in.”

“I’ll start the list.” Amy pulled her data pad out. “We can send it via a buoy back to Ops.”

“We have a comms buoy?” Casey looked at her.

“Two of them. Apparently, they’re standard on these things for some reason.” Amy shrugged. “Who knew?”

“Not I. Yeah, we’ll send an update back to Ops. And a shopping list.” Casey said.

“And hopefully we can send a second update about Jeremy’s endeavors.” Elias smirked. “Getting this thing to move is definitely update material.” He gave a wave as he too left.

“Stay in touch.” Justine called after him.

“We will.” Casey let out a long breath. “Let’s get that list going while they’re out there.”

“I’ll prep a buoy.” Amy offered. “And meet you back at the table.”

“A good plan.” Casey replied.

Star Chapter Seventeen: The Engineer

Justine and Elias floated through the wide and very tall corridor.

“At least we won’t feel cramped in here with these soaring ceilings.” Elias said with a smile.

“High ceilings are nice.” Justine agreed. “Not as nice as open sky above you, but still nice.”

“Well, maybe we can take this thing to some planet that isn’t occupied then just leave it in orbit.”

Justine nodded even though Elias couldn’t see her head move. “True. Of course it will definitely draw attention circling some planet.”

“We could crash the thing. That would solve the problem. Of course, from an engineering point of view, this is some unique technology.” Now he shook his head. “Warp without nacelles. That’s crazy.”

Justine pointed at a tall door on the right. “Maybe Jeremy can explain it.” She offered. “In there.”

“Okay.” Elias fired one of the dozen small nozzles on his atmosphere suit jet to angle him toward the door. “We really need to figure out gravity in this thing.”

“And atmosphere.” Justine reached the door and pressed a button to open it. “After you.”

Elias entered with Justine right behind. The room was a large semi-circular room with a viewscreen on the curved wall. It was not on but it was obvious that was what it was- the layout was similar to most every space-faring vessel. Situated in front of it were five large workstations of some kind. There were several along the back wall, however oddly enough there was no centrally positioned chair where a captain or leader of some sort would sit.

Neither Justine nor Elias saw Jeremy.

“Jeremy?” Justine tried nervously. “Are you in here?”

“Where is here?” Jeremy’s voice replied; he couldn’t see them either.

“The bridge. Or command center. Or whatever you want to call the big room that looks like where this thing gets controlled from.”

Jeremy’s helmeted head popped up from the work stations on the far right. “I’m over here at navigation.”

“You sure that’s navigation?” Elias pushed off the wall and floated over the stations; the ceilings were sufficiently high he could make the move easily.

Jeremy held up his tricorder. “That’s what the ship says it is.”

“Oh.” Justine pushed off as well. “So the Universal Translator is able to talk to the ship?”

“More or less.” Jeremy stood. “It’s getting better the more I get it to talk to the onboard computer.”

“So what’s working?” Elias asked. “Besides the warp drive.” He looked around. “Whatever that looks like.”

“Just like you said.” Jeremy moved around to the station and hopped onto the tall seat. “You want it, we got it.” He held his tricorder up over the station and looked at the small viewscreen. “Forward view.” He pressed a button.

The viewscreen sizzled to life, starting out looking like static, then turned into a strobe effect.

“What’s that? It looks like... I’m not sure what that looks like, but it is going to give me a headache.” Elias said.

“Oh. Sorry. Wrong C-F-F.”

“What?” Elias asked again.

“Critical flicker fusion frequency. We humans see between fifty and ninety hertz; usually it’s averaged at around sixty.” He turned and looked back at the pair. “Dogs see around ninety so sixty looks like a flipbook of pictures to them.” He gestured at the screen. “These aliens saw at twenty hertz.”

“Twenty? Just twenty?”

“Well, I think there was some sort of dimensional thing going on as well but, yes; twenty is how it translates to our math. And they also saw into the infrared.” Jeremy looked at the control panel through the tricorder and made several adjustments. Within moments, a familiar star field was showing on the viewscreen. “There we go; that’s better.”

“Much. Stars. Very nice.” Justine remarked. “So how does this ship go to Warp without nacelles?”

“I have no idea.” Jeremy shrugged in his space suit. “I just know how to turn it on now. Really, that’s all we need for now.”

“What we really need is gravity.”

“I’ve been going over that, Justine.” Jeremy said. He hopped up and went to another control station. “I can get that going as well. I’ll need to turn it up twenty percent from where they had it to

where we need it, but that's easily within the range of the gravitation system. As long as everyone is aware that I'll be turning it on."

Justine nodded. "That's important. Except it's just the three of us on the ship at the moment."

"Gravity it is." Jeremy pressed a button, then slid another up slightly.

Almost instantly, the trio felt the comforting pull of gravity. Down was once more where it should be.

"Nice." Justine said.

"It's amazing what you've accomplished." Elias said. "Well done, Sir."

"What did I do?" Jeremy raised his hands plaintively. "Once we fixed the control boards, the ship was fully operational. I'm just turning on systems."

"Can you turn on air?" Elias asked.

"Oh, I have a crazy idea how we can get air into this thing." Jeremy put his hands on his hips. "Have either of you ever heard of a Ram Jet engine?"

"I've heard of one. Atmospheric craft." Elias said. "Why?"

"Well, there's this planet not a day's travel away."

"Another uninhabited habited planet?" Justine smirked.

"Yes, there are inhabitants there. Four different cities in fact." Jeremy said. "Lots of locals. And plenty of atmosphere."

"Oh, wait a minute..." Amy said.

Star Chapter Eighteen: StarFleet Syndrome

Peter stood. "I'm heading out." He had been at the comms station for two hours.

"Where are you going?" Elizabeth asked. She was laying on the cot.

"Anywhere but here."

"They might call at any moment." Elizabeth pointed out.

"It had been *hours* since we've received any sort of update." Peter gestured at the comms station. "And really they really weren't any sort of real update." He scowled. "This is killing me."

"Peter..." Elizabeth began as she swiveled around and sat up. "I'm sure they are hard at work."

"Oh no, no." Peter held his hands up. "Don't get me wrong; I don't think they are not working out there. It's just that I know we are on a timeline down here and I can't tell them that."

"I'm sure they are working as fast as they can."

"They sure aren't communicating as fast as they can." Peter's hands went to his hips. "That's for sure."

Elizabeth laughed. "Keeping the Captain informed is imperative."

"It is indeed." Peter smiled. "But seriously. We are in a race against time here. Once the director gets Starfleet involved, we will be stuck here."

"I don't think Director Koresh wants to keep us here."

"It's not a matter of Koresh wanting to keep us here; it's a matter of how we will be leaving here that Starfleet won't like."

"You think they will get that ship running?"

Peter shrugged. "It's the only reason I can think of for why they haven't contacted us yet."

Elizabeth considered that for a moment. "So... what do you want to do?"

Peter started for the door. "Get ready to pull out of this Starbase in thirty minutes after I hear from them because I'm sure they are going to tell us they are driving that ship this way."

"Thirty minutes?" Elizabeth asked in vain; Peter had already moved quickly out the door.

“Charlie. Peter here.” Peter said quickly into his communicator.

“Charlie here. What’s going on? You sound upset.”

“We need to be ready to get off this rock.” Peter said. He still hadn’t slowed his pace.

“Well, I’ve been working on that.” Charlie offered. “I’ve got a good plan laid out that will get us...”

“I mean within thirty minutes of notification.” Peter interrupted the man.

“Thirty minutes?” Charlie asked. “When will this thirty-minute notice be given, exactly?”

“I have no idea, but it will be soon.” Peter replied. “We are in a race to get off this planet before Star Fleet grounds us for good.” He finally reached an outer door and stepped out onto a large sidewalk. “I’m almost to the compound. Where are you?”

“I was heading to base operations to see when the next ship to Regulus is.”

“Okay, do that and see if you can find anything else out while you’re there. I have a bad feeling we are being set up by Director Koresh.”

“Right. I’ll see what I can find out.”

“Meet me back at our operations. Peter out.” Peter shut his communicator and moved to a jog. He was no longer concerned if anyone reported his actions to the director.

Star Chapter Nineteen: Successes and Doomsdays

Elizabeth was dozing off in the operations room when the comms station beeped at her. She jolted awake and pressed the button anxiously.

“Operations, this is... Uhhh.” A voice said.

Elizabeth sat up straighter. “Elias?” She said without pressing any buttons. “Oh dear.” She pulled her communicator and flipped it open. “Peter?”

“Peter here.” Peter replied after a moment.

“We’re getting a message from Elias but he seems confused.”

“Join the club.” Peter said. “What’s he saying that...”

“Hold on!” Elizabeth said. “He’s talking again.”

“Operations, this is Doomsday Arc.” Elias said.

“The what?” Elizabeth said confused. “There’s a doomsday?”

Peter could hear the conversation. “Tell him that our comms are likely compromised.” He said quickly. “I’m just in the corridor.”

“Oh!” Elizabeth nodded. “Elias, Peter says that our comms are likely compromised.”

“Right. Okay then. Well, let Peter know that the mission is moving along well. Things are falling into place nicely and we would like to set up a rendezvous with him and the others when he feels it’s possible.”

“Is that it?” Elizabeth frowned.

“No my dear Elizabeth.” Elias said. “I’ll be back soon. Warp three in fact.”

“That will be nice. I’ve been awfully worried about you.” She frowned again. “Updates have been...”

“If we can keep the personal chatter to a minimum,” Peter stepped into the room- he still had his communicator out. “Until we get a...” Peter’s communicator beeped at him- someone was trying to contact him. “Hold on.” He twisted a knob. “Peter here.”

“Peter, Charlie. I’ve got news.”

“Is it good news?” Peter looked at Elizabeth.

“Not for us.” Charlie said.

“What’s going on?” Elizabeth asked. “Elias, something is wrong.”

Now Peter frowned. “Elizabeth, let me step back into the corridor and take this. Continue your non-work-related discussion with the wayward Elias.”

“Perfect.” Elizabeth said.

“Kids.” Peter shook his head. “What do you have, Charlie?” He continued as he stepped into the corridor.

“I was in Base Ops trying to find out when the next ship to Regulus III was when I heard a couple of navigators talking.” He paused. “The *Auburndale* is on her way here.”

“Well, this is a Star Base, ships come and go all the time. It might be nothing.” Peter had a sinking feeling in his stomach. “Yes?”

“No. It seems Director Koresh knows about our plan and when he asked Star Fleet for help, the *Auburndale* said they would come.”

“It seems that Paltov isn’t through trying to push us around.”

“Who?” Charlie asked.

“He’s the second in command on that Starship.” Peter explained. “So when will they get here?” He asked warily.

“Ten days.”

“The closest Starship is *ten* days away?” Peter asked incredulously. “That’s strange.”

“No. The Captain said he would deal with us. There were two ships closer by several days but he waved them off.”

“And they are ten days away? Where are they??”

“They are on Elona.” Charlie explained. “Dropping off some geological equipment.”

“I’m not familiar with that planet.” Peter let out a long breath, then realized what Charlie had said. “Wait, *ten* days? We have ten days until they get here?”

“At Warp Six, yes. I don’t think the Captain will want to put his engines in danger so that’s what I expect them to do.” Charlie chuckled. “You cross paths with Commander Paltov at some point? Rub him the wrong way?”

Peter thought for a moment. “I don’t think we’ve ever met.”

“How about Captain Sobel?”

“Sobel?” Peter frowned. “Abraham Sobel?”

“That’s him.” Charlie confirmed. “You cross paths with him?”

“No; his sister. She was my Yeoman on the *Lexington*.”

“Oh.” Charlie said. “And... you and her?”

“No. There was no her and I. She thought there was but there wasn’t. When I started seeing Celia, Rebecca took on the role of jilted lover even though there was never any ‘us’.”

“Oh.” Charlie said. “That sounds difficult.”

“It was until I got her transferred to a medical research ship.”

“She went from a Starship to a M-R-S? Wow, that’s a downgrade.” Charlie said.

“Listen, that’s all in the past. Our right now problems are that we need to get people ready to move.”

“I’ll go to the compound and get things rolling. I have no idea where we’re rolling to, but I’ll get them ready.”

“I’ll see what our wayward engineers have worked out. Peter out.” Peter turned around and reentered the operations room.

“Still talking with Elias?” Peter asked.

“Oh well...” Elizabeth hesitated. “I mean, I was worried.”

Peter chuckled. “I get it. I’m worried about Amy as well. But if you still have Elias on the line, patch him to my communicator so I can talk to him in private.”

“You don’t want me to listen?” She sounded hurt.

“You I don’t mind at all. Anyone else who is monitoring our comms station, no.”

“Oh, right. I’ll patch him through.” Elizabeth said.

With a nod, Peter once again left the operations room. His communicator beeped. “Elias?” Peter asked.

“Elias here.” Elias answered. “You are worried our comms are compromised?”

“More than worried; I’m sure of it. The Director has called Starfleet to come deal with us. The *Anburndale* is on her way.”

“I’m beginning to not like that Paltov.”

“Me neither.” Peter admitted. “But, I think their dislike for us might be their undoing.”

“How so?”

“They are ten days away and the Captain called off any ships that were closer.”

“Ten days? Wow.”

“So.” Peter thought about what he had been told. “Where are we sitting on this ship? Are we in any position to move the colony?”

“We’ve got most all systems operational.” Elias began. “There’s some translation issues we’re dealing with so we can use some extra tricorders if you can buy some.”

“So gravity, air; it’s all working?”

“Gravity is. I think we can solve the air problem.” Elias said. “We’ll need some extra food processors; this ship is set up with a large galley and cold storage. I guess the previous owners brought their own food along.”

“How soon can you be here?” Peter asked.

“I could be there in two days but if we have ten, there are some things we can do to make this a more accommodating ship.”

“We can’t be here when the *Auburndale* arrives.” Peter warned. “They aren’t coming here for a friendly chat.”

“Well, we can manage Warp Three so we’re within two days of you. How about we plan on meeting in nine days. Can you get everyone out into orbit by then?”

“Nine days?” Peter nodded. “Why the delay?”

“I want to try to work out more kinks with this ship before we pick up passengers.”

“As long as you remember we have a hard deadline of ten days.”

“How about we meet near the moon of Rigel VII. That should be close enough for those Starliners.”

“When?” Peter asked.

“In nine days from now, ten hundred hours.” Elias said. “We’ll be long gone before the *Auburndale* gets into the system and with this ship’s hull, they won’t even know which direction we went.”

“We’ll be there.” Peter said.

“See you then.” Elias said. “Doomsday Arc...”

“We need a better name than that.” Peter interrupted.

“Do you have any suggestions?”

“How about the *Tempest*.” Peter offered.

“Works for me until there’s a vote. Not sure if we can paint it on the side though.”

“We’ll worry about that later. Good luck and keep me posted.”

“Fine then. *Tempest* out.” Elias closed the communication link.

Star Chapter Twenty: And The Atmosphere Shall Lead

“This is nuts. Have I said that?” Celia asked nervously.

“I think so.” Jeremy said. “But that still doesn’t mean it won’t work.”

The entire group had moved to the bridge of the Planet Killer after the gravity had been turned on.

There was a large blue planet on the viewscreen and it was getting bigger by the second.

“And you’ve run the numbers on this?” Casey asked, also sounding nervous.

Jeremy turned his head to look at Casey- he was sitting at the control panel off to his right; the sciences station. “Run numbers; on what?”

“This.” Casey gestured. “This running into a planet plan you have come up with.”

Jeremy looked back at the viewscreen. “We’re not *running* into anything; we’re just passing by it real close.”

“And really, really fast.” Elias said. He was sitting beside Casey. “So you want us to open every bulkhead there is?”

“If we want the air to get everywhere, yes.” Jeremy adjusted their trajectory slightly.

“Through the ten-foot square you had us cut in the only bulkhead that was between us and the expanse of space.” This time it was Amy. She was sitting to the far left at what was the engineering station.

“Trust me. This will work. It’s just like a Ram Jet Engine. You see, they ingest atmosphere at a...”

“We get how that engine works.” Justine said. “It’s the running this thing through the atmosphere that we’re all concerned about.” She was sitting at the communications station.

“Right, right. Exactly.” Jeremy said as he looked over the instruments.

“Are you even listening to us?” Justine asked. “Because it doesn’t seem...”

“Get ready to switch the polarity, Amy.” Jeremy reminded because he wasn’t really paying attention to anything except the readouts on the large panel in front of him- which were being

replicated on his tiny Tricorder positioned directly in front of him. “We need to get this on the first pass.”

“Okay.” Amy looked down at the panel in front of her- she did not have the benefit of a Tricorder to translate it for her; she had used Jeremy’s to see which buttons she needed to push and in what sequence to get the polarity in the main shield switched so that it would allow atmosphere to pass through it, then reverse the polarity to keep it in. “Just say when.”

“We are going to get a lot of angry letters from the locals for this maneuver.” Casey smirked. “Kicked off two planets in one month.”

“No one will have any idea whose ship this is.” Jeremy replied. “Get ready Amy.” The planet now completely filled the viewscreen. “Seven seconds to Exosphere. Two more to the Stratosphere. Then one to the Troposphere.”

“The Stratosphere would give us plenty of oxygen, I’d think.” Amy said. “And it’s a lot farther from the ground.”

“Exosphere. Get ready.” Jeremy said; he was focused on his tricorder. “And... Now!”

Amy pushed three buttons across the large panel, stretching to reach the last one. “Done.”

The ship shuddered as it entered the lowest -thickest with oxygen- atmospheric layer of the planet at just over seven thousand miles an hour. The ship shuddered several times as repeated sonic booms rumbled across the landscape below.

A huge rush of air pushed into the bridge, jostling everyone.

“And... reverse now, now, now!”

Amy was still stretched up toward the farthest button. Dutifully she pressed that one then the other two. “Done!”

“Stratosphere... Meso... Thermo...Exo... And space.” Jeremy leaned back in his seat. “How was that?” He looked over at Casey, “Readings?”

“Give me the Tricorder.”

Jeremy swiveled around in his seat and tossed the Tricorder the four feet between him and the other man. “All yours.”

Casey held the tricorder up to the sciences panel as it translated the readouts. “Seventy-Seven nitrogen...Oxygen twenty two percent. Argon point nine five, remainder is trace elements. Huh. Water vapor is at three percent; I think we ran through a rainstorm or two.” He looked at Jeremy. “Nicely done, Sir.”

“I just push buttons.” Jeremy said with a smirk. “Smarter people than me get them turned on. Speaking of pushing, how many atmospheres are we pushing in here?”

Casey pressed several buttons as he looked at his tricorder. "Oh, we're sitting at forty-four P.S.I. That's... just over three atmospheres. We need to get that down to fourteen or we'll be breaking blood vessels."

"Give me a readout." Amy said. "Ready?"

"Ready." Casey confirmed.

Amy pressed two of the buttons and reached out toward the third. "This will be quick."

"Okay."

Amy pressed the buttons in rapid succession to switch the polarity back and forth. "How was that?"

"We're just over two atmospheres. Do that again just a touch slower." Casey said.

With a nod, Amy repeated her motions. "Now?"

"We're down to fifteen. That's point three high. Nothing to worry about."

"So we're there now?" Elias asked.

"Atmosphere wise, yes." Casey said. "We still need to patch that hole."

"We can use the hatch in the Starliner to do that." Justine said. "That way when the others get here, we have a working airlock and a hatch. Not that we need an airlock with the entire ship pressurized."

"That's a good plan. I hate to lose a Starliner though." Elias said.

"We can weld it to another one to make a larger home. Easy." Justine suggested.

"So can you make that happen out here?" Casey asked.

"I brought a small welding rig with me. If I can figure out the power on this thing, that would be better. If I can't, I can use one of the batteries from the Starliner. That would give dozens of cycles of use. And it would be an easy way in and out of here."

"Make it so." Casey said. "The next button we push needs to be a communication one."

"First there's a button I really want to push." Elias pressed the release button on his helmet and removed it. He took a deep breath. "Yikes, it's humid out here." He took another breath. "But still that's beautiful. And... warm. We might need to raise the temperature in here a little too."

The others removed their helmets in turn.

"Mister Kelso, I believe I will put you in for a commendation and a promotion." Casey said with a smile. "That means a hefty pay raise."

“We’re getting paid?” Jeremy asked. “When did that start? And a promotion? So now I’m stinking colonist, first class?”

“You are indeed first class.” Justine said.

“Okay, so what we really need is...”

“More tricorders.” Jeremy said with a smirk.

“Comms.” Amy corrected.. “We need to let Peter know we’ve got him a ship. A mostly operational ship.”

“I’ll put us into orbit.” Jeremy said. “While I work out the rest of these panels. I think I’ll see if I can’t patch them onto the main viewer so we can see the readouts. When I get time, I’m sure I can build an overlaying interface.”

“Once we pick everyone else up, there will be plenty of time.” Amy said.

“True.” Elias said.

“I’m going to let Peter know we’ve got life support up and running.” Casey said. “Wow, this is going to be a great update. Peter will be pleased.”

“And we have six days left so...I think Elias and I will work on beaming up a bunch of soil.” Justine said. “We’re going to need a lot of it so I’m hoping I can get some transporters on the surface to give us a hand with that.”

“Smooth talking locals; leave that to Amy.” Jeremy suggested. “I’ll see if there are any supplies on the ship I can use to make overlays.”

“Good thing Starfleet put that money in our colony account. I’ll see what I can get from the locals down there.” Amy offered.

Elias pointed toward the door. “We’ll have to beam down atmosphere from out there since we’ll be reducing the volume. Otherwise we’ll all get headaches. But we can use our small transporter for that, I think. Just beaming the air out into space will be quick and easy.”

“Everyone to their task. Go forth and do great things.” Casey pressed several buttons on the communications station as he looked back and forth from the Tricorder. “Operations this is the *Tempest*.”

Chapter Twenty-One: The Way to Rigel VII's Moon

"What have we got left to move?" Peter asked. He was standing at the front of Compound Pollux with Gary von Hoven and Charlie.

"Well, the pregnant women and their families aren't going," Charlie replied.

"Yes; I'm aware they are staying behind," Peter said. "That was the plan."

"I think Doc is thinking of staying with them," Gary added.

"He said that?" Peter looked at him. "To you?"

"Well no; I didn't hear it from him personally," Gary shrugged. "It was just something I heard."

Peter frowned. "We really need a doctor for the colonists." He pulled out his communicator. "Peter to Dominic."

After a moment a voice replied. "Pietro; how goes it?"

"It goes well. We are pretty much ready to take off but you aren't here. Are you... coming with us?" Peter asked worriedly as he continued to look at Gary.

"Not come along? Pietro; you are my rock. I was just making sure everyone was settled."

"And is everyone?"

"Is everyone what?" Dominic asked.

Charlie chuckled.

"Is everyone settled?" Peter clarified tersely.

"They are now," Dominic replied.

"Great. Now we need to get going. I'd hate to be late for the rendezvous. It's going to be close as it is."

"I am moving to you now. I should be there in ten minutes. Less even," Dominic sounded like he was now walking very quickly. "You will wait, yes?"

"We will wait for our only doctor, yes," Peter said with a smile. "I'll start sending up Starliners but I'll wait for you, so if you see them taking off, don't get worried."

"Excellent."

“See you soon, Dom.” Peter closed his communicator. “Let’s start getting these Starliners up, Charlie.” He gestured at the group of vessels all staged together. In the time they had, they managed to get four of the inoperative Starliners space-ready so they now had sixteen of them.

“I’ll lead them toward the Moon.” Charlie started toward one of the Starliners- the one he was piloting. “See you aboard.” He gave a wave over his shoulder.

Peter looked down at his communicator.

“You’re going to call him?” Gary asked.

Peter nodded; he had been dreading the call he now had to make. “It’s the polite thing to do.”

“He’s been politely maneuvering behind your back, Peter.”

“I know.” Peter flipped the communicator open again. “Peter to Gil Koresh.”

“Gil here.” Came the reply.

“Well, I’m glad to say we are mostly out of your hair, Gil.” Peter said.

Gary gave an approving nod. “The less said the better.” He whispered.

Peter narrowed his eyes at him.

“Mostly?” Gil asked.

Peter nodded. “We have three families staying behind due to pregnancies, if you remember. But arrangements have been made for quarters for them.”

“I had not heard.” Gil said. “And you’re flying off in the Starliners?”

“That was also the plan. We got a couple more of them space worthy so we have sixteen of them taking off.” Peter started to close his communicator.

“That sounds like tight living arrangements. With only sublight speed will everyone be okay until you get to where you are going? Do I need to find a different ship for you to use? Something with Warp capability? Or perhaps some more food processors?”

“He’s stalling.” Gary whispered. “Fishing for information.”

Peter frowned because he knew Gary was correct that Gil was now trying to stall him and the colonists from leaving until the *Auburndale* arrived- the next day. “I think we’ll be okay.”

“How far are you going?” Gil asked amicably.

“For right now we’re only heading toward Rigel VII’s moon.”

Gary ran a finger across his throat. “Just say good bye.” He whispered again.

“That’s just ten or fifteen minutes away.” Gil said. “And you’re establishing a colony on that moon? It has no atmosphere you know. Rigel VII isn’t that populated; it would be a better choice I think.”

“Yes.” Peter said tersely. “We are aware of that. However we are not staying on the moon; we will be moving on from there. Once we’re all together.”

Gary shook his head disapprovingly.

“I imagine then that living space is not an issue when you get to where you’re going?” Gil did not seem ready to end the conversation any time soon.

“Close the channel.” Gary said flatly.

“No.” Peter took a breath then regained his composure. “It will not be an issue. But I need to get everyone loaded and off the ground so I need to get going.”

“Oh, well okay then.” Gil said, still seeming to want to keep Peter talking. “And the families will catch up with you later then? The ones expecting, that is.”

“I believe that is the plan.” Peter replied. “It will be up to them, really. While we’re a colony, we’re not a penal colony; people can come and go as they choose.”

“We choose to go now.” Gary whispered.

“Is your doctor staying?” Gil asked.

“No.” Peter said almost too quickly. He sighed. “He’s going with us. Oh, here he is.” Peter lied. “Doc, glad you’re here.”

“Sil!” Gary said loudly. “Andiamo.”

Peter narrowed his eyes at Gary.

“I’m glad you’re all together.” Gil said. “So when...”

“Well Gil,” Peter interrupted. “You have been really helpful and I appreciate you for it. Take care.” He closed the communicator.

“He’s trying to keep us here until the *Auburndale* arrives.” Gary said. “That’s tomorrow right?”

“As far as Charlie or anyone has heard.” Peter said. “Get to your Starliner and I’ll wait for the Doc; we will be right behind you.”

“Want us to wait in orbit?”

Peter shook his head. “Just head straight to Rigel VII. Casey said they’d be waiting for us there and I’m not sure how docking will work. I doubt we can do all sixteen Starliners at once.”

“Right. See you aboard... whatever they’ve worked out.” Gary gave a sloppy salute then moved to the second to last Starliner.

“Let’s go, Doc.” Peter said to no one. “We’re sitting ducks here.”

Star Chapter Twenty-Two: Wink of a Starliner

“Status?” Casey asked.

“Coming out of Warp now.” Elias said. He pressed several buttons. “Sublight and heading toward Rigel VII. Their moon is currently on the far side of the planet in relation to us.”

“Ahead of schedule by two hours.” Jeremy was sitting in the other chair at the navigation station, beside Elias. “We should be at the rendezvous point in ten minutes.”

Over the course of the six days they were in orbit around the planet, they were able to access the colony account Starfleet had established and bought several dozen tricorders, six food processors as well as a large amount of other supplies- and livestock as well.

Something else they had managed to do -with the assistance of some very enterprising engineers- was create overlays for the control stations on the bridge, the sickbay, as well as the galley so they didn’t need to use tricorders to read them.

“Smoother and smoother every time.” Casey said. He was sitting on the far side of the bridge at the sciences station since the bridge didn’t have a centrally located ‘Captains chair’.

“Sensors are picking up several small ships leaving the Regulus IV.” Amy said, from beside him.

“Starliners?” Casey asked.

Amy looked at her readouts. “Looks like them.”

“I’ll try hailing them.” Justine said. She pressed several buttons. “Pollux Starliners, this is... this is the Tempest. Do you read?”

“We read you.” Charlie said. “It’s good to hear your voice.”

“Good to heard yours.” Justine replied. “We are ten minutes from the rendezvous. What is your status?”

“We have fifteen Starliners up and heading there. Peter was waiting for the Doc, then he was catching up.” Charlie said. “How... how are we handling docking?”

“You’ll just navigate right on in.” Charlie explained. “Aim for the middle of the gaping maw.

“There’s a shuttle bay?”

“Not exactly. Just a large opening on the front.”

“But.. what keeps the atmosphere in?” Charlie asked since with most all Starfleet vessels, shuttle bays were depressurized for ships to enter before the shuttle bay doors were opened.

“This ship seems to have annular forcefields” Jeremy cut in. “So they are able to stay in place and keep atmosphere in without the use of a bay door. The locals were able to do it just fine.”

“If it keeps air in, how does it let us in?” Charlie asked. “Not that I don’t believe you.”

Justine laughed. “It does sound odd. We just match shield modulation between us and you and you ease right in.”

“One at a time?”

Justine looked at Jeremy.

Jeremy shrugged. “It shouldn’t matter one way or another; shields are shields.”

“Everyone at once will work.” Justine said. “Probably.”

“Probably?” Charlie said.

Justine looked at Jeremy again.

“It will work. It’s just like when two ships get close to each other and merge shield envelopes.” Jeremy assured her. “A shuttle craft can approach the pair without any issues.”

“And all fifteen Starliners will fit in at once?” Charlie asked.

“Three or four starships would fit in as once.” Jeremy replied.

“Just adjust Starliner shields to two hundred twenty-one megahertz.” Justine said in an authoritative voice. “Once you are inside, we can figure out where to put all those Starliners down. Just watch out for the cows.”

“Affirmative, *Tempest*. I’ll pass the word along.” Charlie replied, taking the same tone, then he chuckled. “Cows?”

Chapter Twenty-Three: The Tempest Web

As the *Tempest* approached Rigel VII, their scanners picked up the *Auburndale* entering the system.

“What is the *Auburndale* doing?” Casey asked. He had moved to stand in the middle of the bridge so he could oversee what was happening without being burdened with working the scanner.

“She’s moving toward Rigel IV.” Amy replied; she was sitting at the sciences station and monitoring the scanner.

“Does she seem to know we’re here?”

“Not as far as I can tell. The Starliners are almost at the rendezvous point.” She added.

“Should I open a channel to them?” Justine asked.

“No, no. If they don’t know we’re here yet, let’s keep quiet.” Casey said. “Come to a stop once we get there so the Starliners can just head right in.”

“Right.” Elias said. “We’re almost there. Starliners are moving closer. I’m sure they will have a visual on us within a minute.”

“You know, if the Starliners come in before the *Auburndale* gets to the other side of the moon,” Jeremy said, “they’ll just disappear off their scanners.” He was at the second seat at the navigation station. “They’ll either get confused or angry.”

“I think angry is the default setting for that captain.” Amy offered.

“I can do a tight beam to Peter’s Starliner.” Justine suggested. “Charlie knows where to go and the others will just follow him in. I think Peter’s too far away. I can send him the coordinates so he can come straight in.”

“If you’re sure the *Auburndale* won’t notice it.” Casey said, “do it.”

“They won’t.” Justine assured him. “Sending now.”

Star Chapter Twenty-Four: Whom StarFleet Destroys

“Status?” Captain Sobel asked as he leaned forward in his captain’s chair. The *Auburndale* had just come out of warp in the Rigel system. “How are the engines, Chief?”

“Engines are stressed.” The engineer answered. “Eight days at Warp Six and one at Warp Seven has put a tremendous strain on them Captain. We really need to conduct some maintenance on them.” He added worriedly.

“We’re through moving fast for the moment, Chief.” The Captain assured the man. “You can give them my thanks and tell them they have the day off.”

The engineer kept a grim look. “Aye, Captain.”

Captain Sobel swiveled his chair around to look at the sciences station behind him. “What do we have, Lieutenant Briggs?”

“Scanning.” His sciences officer said. “Sir, there are fifteen Starliners that are heading in the direction of Rigel VII. They will be there in a minute. They are traveling in a group so that must be the colonists.”

“Where are they heading in Starliners? Subspace will take them weeks to get anywhere. Any other ships in the system?”

The Lieutenant peered into his scanner for several seconds, adjusting the knob on the side as he did. “There are dozens of ships moving around in the system.” Lieutenant Briggs stood upright and looked over. “They seem innocuous, Captain.”

“So where are they going?” Captain Sobel sat back. “Where are you off to Peter?”

“The group of Starliners seemed to be on a heading toward Rigel VII.” The sciences officer offered.

Captain Sobel pressed a button on his command chair. “Lieutenant Commander Paltov to the bridge.” He looked back at Lieutenant Briggs. “Anything else out of the ordinary in the system?”

He returned to look into the scanner, blue light glowing on his face. “No, it appears to be just normal traffic. The Rigel system is a busy system with so many inhabited planets, Captain.”

“Change course to two seven five; head towards Rigel VII.” He said to his navigator. He looked at Lieutenant Briggs. “Anything else?”

“Nothing out of the... Wait. Sir, I have one more Starliner leaving Rigel IV. Given that there are fifteen already heading towards Rigel VII, the odds are that this one also has colonists aboard. So sixteen total Starliners.”

“A straggler, you say?” Captain Sobel once again leaned forward. “The Captain is always the last to leave.” He raised a hand at his communications officer. “Hail that straggler.”

“Sir?” The communications officer asked. “Who?”

“That Starliner that just left Rigel IV. Open a communications channel with them.”

“Aye.” The man pressed several buttons and as most communications officers did, looked up as they spoke. “Starliner leaving Rigel IV, do you read?” After several moments, he turned to look at his Captain. “No response, Sir. The channel is open however.”

“Peter, I know you can hear me.” Captain Sobel said. “If I don’t hear from you in the next ten seconds, I’ll lock a tractor beam on you.”

“Abraham. How are you?” Peter said after a long moment.

“I am well.” Captain Sobel smirked. “And you? How are you? You seem to be leaving in a hurry; were you kicked off Rigel IV as well?”

“Speaking of being in a hurry, you seem to be here earlier than Director Koresh expected.”

“We caught a solar tail wind.” Captain Sobel said with a smirk.

“That must be that ill wind that blows nobody good that I have read about.” Peter said flatly.

The man at navigation stifled a chuckle.

Captain Sobel ignored him. “Peter. I am here because...” He began.

“Well, I hope you enjoy your shore leave at whichever planet you are stopping at.” Peter interrupted. “Rigel IV is nice but kind of cramped. Starliner...”

“You know why we’re here, Peter.” Captain Sobel cut him off.

“No, actually I don’t *Abe*.” Peter replied. “You’ve destroyed our entire colony once already. Are you going for two colonies in a month, brave Starfleet Captain?”

Several of the crew on the ship turned to look at their Captain. The assessment was accurate. The crewman who chuckled continue to look straight ahead.

Captain Sobel frowned. “Listen Peter. I know what you’re up to and...”

“Sir.” Lieutenant Briggs said.

“And Starfleet is not going to allow...”

“Sir!” Lieutenant Briggs said again. This time louder.

Captain Sobel turned to look at the man. "What is it Lieutenant?"

"The other ships have dropped off our scanners."

"What do you mean they have dropped off scanners? Starliners don't..."

"Sir." The Communications Officer now said.

"... have Warp capability." Captain Sobel continued. "Did they land on Rigel VII?"

"No, they were closer to its moon. And they didn't land their either, Sir. All I can tell you is that I can't..."

"Sir, shall I cut communications?" The Communications Officer interrupted.

"Where those ships some sort of decoy, Peter?" Captain Sobel asked angrily. "I'm really getting tired of your games."

"My games?" Peter said, now sounding angry himself. "My game is to just try to live a quiet life without Starfleet kidnapping everyone I know and then photon torpedoing everything they own. That's my game and it would be wonderful if I could just play it". A message flashed on his screen-coordinates and shield frequency settings. He increased speed and turned in that direction as he adjusted his shields.

"Prepare a tractor beam." Captain Sobel snapped.

"I'd prefer not to be that close to you." Peter said. "O, that way madness lies; let me shun that." Peter quoted King Lear.

"Sir, we are being hailed." The Communications Officer said as he held his hand up to his earpiece. "It's the *Tempest*."

"Who?" Captain Sobel swiveled around in his chair. "Who in blazes is the *Tempest*? A local ship?"

"I'm not sure, Sir; there's no registry with the signal." The man replied. "Shall I open the channel?"

"Do you see where they are, Lieutenant Briggs?"

"Who?"

"Those Starliners." Captain Sobel snapped. "I am not concerned with the *Tempest*."

"No, Sir." Briggs was back to looking into his scanner. "One second they were there, the next they weren't." He twisted the dial again. "There's a lot of subspace interference in this system for some reason."

"A lot of..." Captain Sobel's eyes got large. "Subspace... interference?"

“Yes, Sir.”

“Peter, I’m warning you.” Captain Sobel said again.

“Sir, the *Tempest* is hailing us again. This time, there’s a threat included.”

“Yellow alert.” Captain Sobel snapped.

Lieutenant Commander Paltov stepped onto the bridge. “Captain?” He asked.

“Finally.” Captain Sobel snapped. “Take tactical.”

Paltov moved quickly in front of Captain Sobel and sat at the left seat of the helm. He pressed a button raising his own scanner.

“Peter, I want to know where that ship is.” Captain Sobel said. “You are not to board it. That’s an order!”

“The only orders I take are from my wife, the Admiral.” Peter replied.

“Sir?” Lieutenant Briggs said worriedly.

The Captain looked at the man. “What is it?”

“That last Starliner... the one Captain Kent was on has dropped off my scanner as well.”

Star Chapter Twenty-Five: Spectre of the Colony

Peter banked the Starliner and headed straight at the Planet Killer- it was monstrous; bigger than even a Starbase. The maneuver was unnerving.

Reflexively he leaned back as he passed the edge of the giant maw. A shudder ran through the Starliner.

“Welcome aboard Peter.” Casey said.

“This... this thing is just huge.” Peter said. He panned the viewscreen around. “Is that a lake?”

“Just a small fifty acre one.” Casey replied. “Head to the back of the area. There is an airlock there. You can land your Starliner alongside...”

“Are those *cows*?” Peter interrupted.

“Well... yes. We now own two hundred fifty-three herd of cattle, of varying ages.” Casey said.

“How are we going to support that many cattle?” Peter adjusted his thrusters to land the Starliner by the other fifteen. “That’s just absurd. How did you pay for all of this?”

“Well, we have fifteen hundred acres of useable land after filling the area with fifty feet of dirt, seventy-five under the forest. So two hundred fifty cattle is very easily manageable.”

Peter landed the Starliner and quickly moved to the door. “We’ll finish our discussion about ranching in person.” He hesitated. “Where are you exactly?”

“On the bridge. I have Elias waiting at the hatch to bring you here. The *Auburndale* does not sound pleased.”

Peter opened the Starliner hatch. As Casey had said, Elias was standing there.

“Welcome aboard the *Tempest*, Peter.” Elias said with a smile.

“You people are out of control.” Peter gestured at the open area. “What is going on here?”

“We’re a fully sustainable colony. Fifteen hundred acres of farmland, cattle, a lake for aquaponics. All real, non-synthesized food.”

Peter stepped out of the Starliner. “Let’s get to the bridge. You can explain this mega farm to me later.”

“There’s also a hundred-acre forest to meander through if you need a break.” Elias gestured. “Follow me.” He quickly started walking through the corridor. After fifty yards, he stopped and they entered a turbolift. The buttons were over chest high.

“Kids are going to have a hard time getting around this thing.” Peter remarked.

“We were thinking of putting in little footstools in the eleven turbo lifts. It’s the simplest solution.”

“I suppose so.” Peter said as the turbolift rose three decks then the door opened.

Elias stepped out and continued his very quick walk.

“What’s going on?” Peter half-jogged to keep up.

“Captain Sobel wants to speak to you.” Elias explained. “Apparently a rogue planet killer with an anti-Federation Captain is not what Captain Sobel wants to deal with today.”

“Maybe I can explain it to him.” Peter offered.

Elias stopped in front of a doorway then sidestepped and pressed a button. “Doors aren’t automatic.” He explained.

As the doors opened, Peter saw Casey standing in the middle of a large area with several workstations spread out in front and beside him.

“Welcome to the bridge, Captain Kent.” Elias smiled wide.

“Stop that.” Peter said as he stepped into the large room. Being called “Captain” was something he did not like.

“Sorry, Peter.” Elias smiled. “I’ll go check in on Charlie and the colonists to get them settled.”

Peter smiled back at the man. “Thanks. Go forth and do great things. In our hundred-acre forest, no less.” His smile faded as he turned and entered the bridge.

Star Chapter Twenty-Six: The Gamesters of Tempest

"Status?" Peter asked as he moved beside Casey.

"The *Auburndale* has gone to red alert; weapons are charged and locked on us."

"And our status?" Peter asked.

"We're surrounded by a solid Neutronium hull. All of Starfleet together couldn't penetrate it." Casey said matter-of-factly.

"You know what we really need at this very moment?" Peter asked.

Casey looked at his friend. "No; what's that?"

"A chair to sit in." He pointed downward. "Right here. Maybe even two of them now that I think about it."

Casey laughed. "I'll get right on that."

"Hail the *Auburndale*... uhm..." Peter looked around. "Whoever is running communications."

Casey pointed. "That's over there. Justine has figured it out."

"That may be an overstatement," Justine said. "I have an idea of what a few of the buttons do but that's about it. A week of training would be nice."

Peter nodded. "Right. Training first, chair second." He smiled. "Can you hail the *Auburndale*?"

Justine nodded- she had pressed this sequence of buttons several times now. "*Auburndale*, this is the *Tempest*. Do you read?" After a long moment she looked at Peter. "We are transmitting but they aren't responding."

"Open the channel please." Peter asked.

"Open." Justine nodded at him.

"Captain Sobel, this is Peter Kent on the *Tempest*. I believe you have weapons locked on us at the moment. Care to talk about it?"

After a few seconds, Captain Sobel spoke: "Peter, this is getting out of hand. You cannot take that ship anywhere. I won't allow it."

"Abraham. I understand that you have your orders from Starfleet. And I know you also have your orders from your sister, and Commander Paltov, but hear me out."

“I don’t take orders from anyone by Starfleet.”

“If that were true, Captain, you would have let another ship come deal with us instead of blazing across the galaxy at Warp Seven.” Peter said. “The bottom line is that you have a personal issue with me because of your sister, whom I did not lead on. Yes, I had her transferred to another ship.” He raised his hands plaintively even though it was an audio-only channel. “What was I supposed to do with a Yeoman who was obsessed with me? Allow her to keep making outbursts on my bridge? Allow her to continue to harass my actual girlfriend? Was I supposed to allow a Petty Officer to bully me, a Starfleet Captain? No other Captain in Starfleet would have put up with that level of insubordination. However, instead of having her thrown out of Starfleet, I had her transferred to another ship, where I do believe she has been doing quite well.”

“This isn’t about my sister.” Captain Sobel said flatly. “It’s about a bunch of colonists commandeering a potentially dangerous weapon.”

“We salvaged this ship.” Peter corrected the man. “It was a derelict and my crew got it back in working order. A working *peaceful* order, I might add. We have women, children, and livestock.”

“That is neither here or there.” Captain Sobel insisted. “You aren’t going anywhere.”

“You do realize that all of this could have been easily solved if you had just left us alone on Castor III?” Peter said. “Then none of this would be happening.”

“I was under orders from Starfleet.”

“I believe I read where a Captain once said ‘My orders are subject to *my* interpretation.’ ” Peter retorted. He looked behind himself then shook his head. He wanted to sit but had nowhere to do it.

Casey chuckled and moved off, leaving Peter to stand alone in the middle of the alien bridge.

“We won’t discuss this any further, Peter.” Captain Sobel said. “The bottom line is that you are not taking that ship anywhere.”

“Abraham, listen.” Peter said wishing he had a captain’s chair he could be leaning forward in. “Please understand I mean no disrespect in this at all...”

“But...” Captain Sobel interjected.

“No; I really mean it. Don’t take this the wrong way: There is no way one Miranda Class frigate is going to do what took two Constitution Class Starships to do; put this ship out of commission.” He looked at Justine and ran his finger across his throat.

“Off.” She said dutifully.

“Do we even have any weapons?”

“Yes and no.” Casey answered. “The main anti-proton beam is still operational. We did trade six of the lateral anti-proton beams to miners on the planet for everything aboard. But if we fired the main beam, it would vaporize everything in the maw.”

“Those poor cows.” Peter said. He looked at Justine. “Okay so we’ll have to bluff a little..”

“Channel open now.” Justine said.

“And I’m not looking for a fight.” Peter continued as if he hadn’t muted the transmission. “I’m actually looking for the opposite of a fight; to be left alone. But keep in mind that the main weapon on this ship cuts entire planets into digestible chunks. So if you are looking for a fight, let me tell you; this isn’t the ship you want to pick one with.”

The *Auburndale* fired several phaser shots at the *Tempest*- they bounced off ineffectually.

“Captain Sobel, I wasn’t threatening you; just stating fact. And I’d appreciate it if you stopped scuffing our newfound ship.” Peter said. “Actually, I’m not even sure if you could scuff the outside of this with photon torpedoes.”

“Starfleet will be coming after you, Peter.” Captain Sobel warned. “And it will be personal when they do.”

“Well, they’re going to have a hard time finding us with how this neutrino hull masks us.” Peter said. “Tell Starfleet that we will be dismantling the main weapon on the ship once we feel we are away from any interference, so it won’t be a danger to anyone.”

“They won’t care.”

“You need to convince them.” Peter said emphatically.

“I can tell them, but that’s the best I can do.” Captain Sobel replied.

“Starfleet Captains usually do their best.” Peter said. “But sometimes the massive machine that is Starfleet can lead us Captains off course. You, I, and all the other Captains of ships are given such incredible power and latitude. You sitting in that chair can project more power than any nation on Earth a mere two hundred years ago could have. You can guide entire planets. Shape civilizations. Stop wars between different races. It’s staggering what a Starfleet Captain can do.” Peter took a step forward. “But sometimes we need to stand up out of our chairs of immense power and look around. Look around to make sure that we are actually doing our best and that the juggernaut that is Starfleet Command is doing what is best.”

“I’ll do the best I can, Captain Kent.” Captain Sobel said; it was the first time he had addressed Peter that way. “Safe travels, *Tempest*.”

“I wish you a long and successful career, Captain Sobel. I really do.” Peter dragged his finger across his throat again.

Peter narrowed his eyes at Casey. “What’s this I hear about Warp capability?”

“We will do up to Warp Three.” Casey confirmed.

“Then give me Warp Two straight ahead then a broad arc to one-seven-zero after a minute so they won’t know which way we’ve gone.”

“On it.” Jeremy said as he pressed buttons on the navigation panel. “Warp two then coming about to one-seven-zero.”

Peter looked down. “We really need a chair or two in here.” He let out a long breath. Casey, Celia, “How about I get the tour. Livestock and all.”

Casey stood quickly. “I’ve been dying to tell you: We’ve got one thousand five hundred fifty-three acres of useable land with fifty feet of soil under it.” Casey began to explain as he gestured at the exit door. “Five hundred acres for cattle, seven hundred for crops, two hundred pasture in reserve.”

“I noticed a forest in there.”

“We have a hundred-acre forest with seventy-five feet of soil under it to better support the trees.” Casey said as he pressed the door open button.

“Living quarters?”

“All aft. At least for now. I think some folks might move out into the maw.”

“It will need a better name, I think.” Peter said. “What’s in that lake?”

“Two boats and lots of fish so far.” Casey said.

“Nice.”

“I think Gil was right.” Celia said finally as she interlaced her arm through his.

“About what?” He looked at her, surprised.

“I heard he suspected Starship Captains took secret classes in giving impassioned speeches.” She smiled. “I think he was right.”

“Well, it was an upper-level elective.” Peter said matter-of-factly.

The trio walked off, discussing the ship for the better part of the day.

Star Chapter: Twenty-Seven: The Next Frontier

Peter looked at Celia beside him. “Should we see how far we can take this ship?”

“Bid me run, and I will strive with things impossible.” Celia replied.

Peter leaned forward in his command chair. They had been traveling at Warp Two for the better part of five days since sailing away from the *Auburndale* without incident or contact from any ship.

The colonists had moved into the living quarters and crops were already being planted. A routine was developing; the colony was coming alive again.

Peter took in a long breath then let it out. “Gamma Quadrant Mister Kelso, give me Warp Two point five and keep it there till your kids are grown.”

“Peter, I’m not even married yet.” Jeremy replied.

“Fine, fine. I’ll make sure you have enough down time to make that happen.” Peter leaned back in the overstuffed chair they had placed in the center of the bridge. There were two identical ones on either side of it. Celia was in one; the other was currently empty.

“Aye, aye,” Jeremy looked over his shoulder with a smile. “To both of those orders.”

The End



To unpathed waters, undreamed shores