

The Mneventhia Encounter

a *USS Discovery* short novel

written by

AJ, Amanda, Caleb, Finley, Heather, Rich,
Richard, Sam C, Sam J, and, Skylar

edited by Richard

Star Trek: Borderlands

<http://www.startrekborderlands.com>

Star Trek: Borderlands is a play-by-email roleplaying community started in 1993. For more than 25 years, fans of Star Trek have come together to write their own stories of exploration, conflict, friendship, victory and defeat.

As the flagship of the Delta Quadrant, Discovery was designed with the specific intent of furthering exploration in the Federation's newest frontier. The vessel represents all of the speed, power, and versatility of modern starship design.

This short novel is a compilation of posts from the *USS Discovery*^{1,2} posting group.

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¹ https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/uss_discovery/info

² <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/ussdiscovery>

Characters

Ensign Alenis Kala
Counselor
played by Amanda

Captain Liam MacLaren
Commanding Officer
played by Caleb

Doctor Jack Armus
Chief Medical Officer
played by Heather

Jet McCarris
Time Traveler
played by Skylar

Lieutenant Samuel Bell
Chief Engineering Officer
played by Caleb

Mul'Nar
Lead Scientist,
Mneventhia Outpost
played by Caleb

Crewman Bevins
Security Officer
played by Rich

Ensign Maarten Nadacic
Tactical Officer
played by Richard

Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Brull
Tactical Officer; Security Officer
played by Caleb

Nuk'ol
Colonist, Mneventhia Outpost
played by Caleb

Lieutenant Danica Dante
Chief Security Officer
played by Rich

Lieutenant Xylina Patras
Pilot
played by Finley

Gardok
Interphasic life form
played by Richard

Ya Jung-Sook
Manager of Ten Forward Lounge
played by Heather

Glarr
Chief Sentinel of the
Spires of Mneventhia,
Order of the Voc'Nu
played by Caleb

Lieutenant Commander Mel Katt
Executive Officer
played by Finley

Chapter One

"Understood, Admiral," replied Captain MacLaren to the digitized face on the screen of his ready room computer. The man sat back in his sleek, wooden chair that was thickly padded by richly colored brown leather lined with golden studs. He ran his hand along the edge of the seat, admiring the craftsmanship. The captains of seafaring vessels of ages past didn't have such luxuries. He found himself almost feeling guilty for not having the primitive experience, but it quickly faded as he thought of how brutal that old life would have been. Coming back to his reality, he exhaled a long and relieving breath knowing that he might not be able to enjoy the solitude and quiet for however long this next stretch would take them.

He still marvelled at Command's decision to rush the repairs so that *Discovery* could get back out there and investigate this distress call they'd discovered. He was not one to question his orders, though. If to *Mneventhia* they were ordered, to *Mneventhia* they would go, and with haste.

He tapped his commbadge, opening a channel. "All senior bridge officers, report to the Bridge," he ordered, before exiting to inhabit the control center of the *USS Discovery* himself.

Ensign Nadacic reviewed the communications traffic. While in-dock, it consisted mainly of summaries prepared for *Discovery* by station personnel. "Captain on the bridge," he announced.

Lieutenant Commander Katt arrived on the bridge, ready for the next mission, and homesick for her family. She'd had more time to talk to them with this short break, and the way that the girls had grown had surprised and amazed her. She'd spoken to her husband and asked his opinion about her returning home, but he scoffed at the idea. The permission perhaps made her feel a bit more guilty, but she was ready to continue on.

Lieutenant Danica Dante wasn't entirely sure if she should go to the senior officers meeting. She was a senior officer, but not a bridge officer, so her inclination was no, but in view of everything that the

ship had been through lately, she didn't want to be left out of the loop on anything. "Captain, with your permission, sir. I'd be a fly on the wall in this meeting, just to stay abreast of matters."

The Captain nodded, waving his hand towards the back of the bridge. Normally, a briefing would be held in the conference room, but he hadn't planned to do a full length summary of their agenda. A day prior the room had been a scorched disaster area with no floor to walk on. The remnants of tragedy were now all but a not so distant memory with shiny new furniture that made the room seem like a luxury suite and, of course, a solid floor to place beneath one's feet.

"Alright, listen up, folks" MacLaren said, grabbing the attention of the Bridge. "I'll make this right quick as the clock be a-tickin' as many of you already know. Now, I know we be still patchin' wounds up from our encounter with the Brexat, but the situation that's arisen is this: We've received a distress call from a nearby system, a planet known as Mneventhia. It is an L-class planet in an ice-bound epoch. We have little information on this world, but we do know that it was colonized by a scientific research team. The basis of their exploration is not important, but what *is* important is that they had requested no interference from Starfleet. They were conducting sensitive experiments that they did not wish to be contaminated, so we have left them to their work. Upon arrival, communications will attempt to establish contact. Medical has been alerted and will be on standby, and I would like security to do the same. That is about all the information I can give ye."

"Mneventhia Colony--attack--reactor is off-line--within the ice--abandoning set--please help--in distress--unprovoked attack--loss of life--forced to abandon--please help us--under the ice--living--reactor off-line--dead--must leave."

Liam got up from the seat. The message seemed desperate and fearful and judging from the content, rightly so.

Mel nodded. "We'll be prepared. I'll organize away teams and distribute what information we can from the libraries about the planet."

“Lieutenant Bell, what is our status?” he asked of the Chief Engineer.

“We’re just about done here, captain” responded the Engineer.

“Very good, Lieutenant. That’s why you’re the Chief” MacLaren said with a crooked grin.

“Helm, set course for Mneventhia. Take us out and prepare for warp.”

Lieutenant Maradok initiated the thrusters that were ready for the command. The *Discovery* began to creep backwards away from its mooring. The large doors in the spacedock facility slowly began to open, the black of space revealed beyond littered with specs of stars. The ship emerged from the innards of the facility and gracefully came about, its momentum urging forward.

“Course set for Mneventhia, sir. Warp engines at the ready” reported Lieutenant Maradok.

“Engage” ordered the Captain.

The Insignia-class vessel shot forward with a flash of light towards the ice world of Mneventhia and her next adventure, whatever it may hold.

Chapter Two

Captain MacLaren was busy. Too busy. It seemed as though every order; every requisition; every personnel transfer required his immediate attention. He had authorized more transfers than he could count and was more of a stranger to his quarters than he had been as of late. The last round of Cadets-turned-Ensign had been brought aboard and were being whipped into shape by their department heads, no doubt. There was one more piece of business that needed attending to.

Ensign Kala wore the blue science officer uniform. There was precedent for a captain allowing a counselor wear civilian clothes on duty but she thought it would be wise not to assume. Her only exception being the ornate earring she wore on one ear which was not, strictly speaking, dress code.

“A pleasure to meet you, sir. I’m happy to be here. It’s not every day you get assigned to a starship.” She stole a glance around then came back to him.

MacLaren smiled. He appreciated the enthusiasm. He was nostalgic of his own excitement when he left Veritas Station to explore the cosmos aboard Discovery. It, too, was his first starship assignment. It just so happened that he never left. This had been his home for so many years now that he even found it difficult to return to Ireland on leave. Not that his time wasn’t enjoyable, but he found himself anxious to go back.

“Your first starship cruise, eh?” He said as they moved further away from the transporter room. “How do ye feel about soaring through the black after being station-side for so long?” He asked.

“I’m a little apprehensive. Spacedock didn’t get into a whole lot of trouble. Mostly if there was an emergency it was because the replicators stopped working.” She laughed.

“Well that would be a tricky situation.” Liam returned the chuckle. “I can’t say that that will be the biggest concern here. I’m sure you’ve

seen some interesting characters aboard the station, though” he said, walking along. He nodded at a passing ensign. That was the tricky part about taking on new officers. They undoubtedly would be familiar with him, but it would take him time to become acquainted with them all. It was challenging.

Kala nodded, “One time I had to stay up for two days straight because the entire crew of a Ferengi ship found out it would be free for them to get counseling. When they finally left, I dreamed my ears had grown over night as big as my hands.”

“I’m not going to throw ye right into the fray, but it’s been a right long while since we’ve had a proper counselor on board. I’m sure ye won’t be lacking in customers and that right soon.” he laughed. “Especially given recent events.” His face grew more serious as the words escaped his mouth.

“I don’t doubt it.” She’d only read a summary of the recent events and would eventually need more information. But she was sure the captain had things to do. “I can be on duty in an hour. Is there someone who can get me up to speed on the current events on board? You can only get so much from reports.”

“Indeed.” responded MacLaren, impressed with the counselor’s proactive take on her new assignment. “Ye can take a look over the mission logs for the details, but it wouldn’t be a bad idea to check in with Doc Armus in Sickbay. I’m sure he’d be pleased to meet ye and share any information he has with ye.”

“Alright. I’ll get in contact with him. Thank you, Captain.” She turned to enter the room but stopped. “Oh, and Captain, I’m here for you too. The more pips... the more stress. Any time you need to talk let me know.”

He smiled at the sentiment. Any good counselor worth their weight would have extended the offer and he was pleased to hear her slipping right into the role. “I’m sure we’ll be doin’ that soon, Ensign. Oh,” he said, stopping for a brief moment. “Welcome to Discovery.”

Chapter Three

Ever since Ya Jung-Sook boarded at the last station, she had been busy converting what was once known as ‘Forward Lounge 2’ into a much more social location with food and drinks. Traditionally, lounges on the tenth deck of Starfleet ships were fancier than the other lounges available to officers. Jung-Sook didn’t see any reason to part with tradition.

It was nearly time for the grand opening. “Positions everyone!” She hurried to her own spot while the rest of the staff took to theirs.

“Psst! Mrs. Ya. You’re bandanna.” One of the nearby waitstaff hissed.

“Oh.” She swiped it off her head and balled it up in her hand. “Computer, unlock doors.”

Vashic Martla had spent two straight days in Sickbay. A crewman with a sprained wrist had excitedly mentioned the reopening of the mess hall on deck ten.

“Welcome to the Ten Forward.” Jung-Sook said, coming forward. “My name is Ya Jung-Sook. Would you like a table over here, Doctor...?”

“Vashic. I’ll just take a table in the corner, thanks.” She knew the woman was trying to be friendly. Vashic questioned why she didn’t just go to her quarters, unwind with a bowl of broth and get some sleep.

“What can I get you this evening?”

“Something meaty and spicy.” Vashic might as well enjoy the meal.

“We have several items that you may enjoy.” Jung-Sook opened the menu and handed it to Vashic. “We have an Indian curry which can be cooked with chicken, pork or seafood. We have several spicy Andorian dishes that feature redbat cooked to order. Hasperat, of course, if you are in the mood for some Bajoran food. I also have kimchi jjigae, which has pork.”

“Hasparat?” Vashic was surprised the human woman knew of the Bajoran dish. “That would be lovely. Kimchi is pickled Earth cabbage? I’ll have that to.” It was a taste she had acquired through a friendship with a Korean nurse.

“Very well.” Jung-Sook said, collecting the menu. “Would you like anything to drink with that?”

“Mekju, please.” She and the nurse, Chun-ja, spent a lot of time drinking beer while complaining about their co-workers. She had lost her too.

“I will be right out with your drink then.” Jung-Sook said. She placed Vashic’s order with the kitchen. As she went back out on the floor, she was pleased to see the Ten Forward was getting busy.

Vashic tipped her bottle to the stars streaming by the window. “You put up a fight, Chun-ja.”

Covaar Enonco Tryutu stepped up to the window, looking out at the vastness of space. Compared to most of the people he would soon be serving with, this was still home, even though he was light years away from Kahless-to. In a way that world was no longer his home. The fact that it now had that name meant that it was no longer his home. House D’ghor ruined his past while he was at the Academy preparing for his future.

The Kazon tugged slightly at the neck of his uniform, realizing how out of place he felt. He was proud to represent the Delta Freedom Alliance on Discovery and he had no doubt that joining the crew of the flagship of Starfleet would provide him with no shortage of opportunities to explore the Delta Quadrant.

Discovery’s assistant security chief, the Capella-born Ma’al strode in and approached the counter. He hadn’t visited Ten Forward often, but the ‘Under New Management’ sign playfully placed near the door was encouragement enough. He had just completed a tour of the ship and had several hours to himself; and he was hungry. He wondered whether Capellan cuisine was on the menu, but even if it wasn’t, he’d

adapted to a large range of foods from across the galaxy. Gamier meats were still a bigger draw than the tamer flavor frequently ascribed to more domesticated animals.

The door to the Lounge opened again. A group of young crewmen strolled in. Behind them, a large, burly Klingon entered the room. He stopped as the doors closed and looked around at the tables of quiet, timid folk. He had become accustomed to the tameness in which most officers conducted themselves aboard a Starfleet vessel. For this reason, he tended to avoid these social situations. On this day, however, with the upcoming mission being littered with uncertainty, he decided to join the crowd and christen the new gathering place.

“TODAY!” he began, his voice rumbling across the lounge, silencing most of the occupants, “is a good day. Let us DRINK now, for tomorrow we ALL may meet our deaths.” he said, slapping a nearby officer firmly on the shoulder. He neared the bar, looking sideways at the large Capellan who was the only one in the room larger than himself. “And that, we will all do HONORABLY!” he said with a roar.

Ma'al listened to the bluster of the Klingon. He could understand a battle oriented society, his was, but the Klingon's felt it necessary to trap it in bravado and a foolish interpretation of honor. There was nothing more honorable than doing what you needed to do in any given situation to assure the survival of yourself and your fellows. To drink honorably, well, not so much. That was nothing more than justified gratification.

Jung-Sook exited the back room with a plate full of live gagh and placed it in one of the more discrete corners of the room. She walked away with a sly smile. She didn't have much in Capellan cuisine at the moment, but she had a feeling that he'd enjoy it as much as the Klingon.

Doctor Vashic tore open one the hasperat patties and let the spiciness fill her senses. It pushed the smell of live Klingon food to the background. The gas from the mekju-style beer enhanced the flavour of the hasperat, the pungent spice filling her whole mouth as the mekju foamed. She didn't share the same culinary tastes as the Klingon but she understood the desire to live in the present.

Brull's nostrils flared as the scent of the gagh filled the air. His senses were tuned for the scents of his homeworld. He made eye contact with the hostess. "I see you are no stranger to the more...delicate nature of Klingon appetite" he said, a laugh rumbling from his gut. He picked up the bowl and brought it back to the bar where he set it down in front of him. "And who will care to eat with me?" he asked, again looking around for any soul brave enough to indulge.

Ma'al smiled, then slowly rose and approached the Klingon. He had no love for live food, preferring his to be well cooked, however he had to eat a number of unorthodox things during survival training on Capella IV. He would have no problem with eating this food, and while it wasn't strictly for survival, at another place and time it could have been. That was enough for him. Besides, someone needed to keep this braggart in check. The Capellan grabbed a bowl, came over to face the Klingon, and reaching in lifted a handful of the worms to drop them into his open mouth. "The second course shall be of my choosing."

Chapter Four

Gardok swam near the surface looking for food blooms. It could feel nothing but the dark cold from above itself. It's lithe body moved in slow, undulating waves. It swam as far as possible from the hot, rolling waves of food at the bottom of the ocean. Intellectually, it knew how dangerous it was to eat what little food it had left. Each bite would form an inert lump. The lump would fall through it's jaw to the bottom of the ocean and never replenish. Eating one bite more than was absolutely required would bring about it's own death more quickly. It's animal instinct wanted to gorge on the boiling ball of food, consume it all at once. That would be suicide. It swam as close as he dared to death, the dark cold, to keep the animal instinct at bay, to calm it.

Chapter Five

Lieutenant Bell still had teams conducting repairs on the bridge. The decking was still metal composite bolted to the subframe rather than carpet. There was a metallic thump with each step.

“Alright ladies and gents,” said the captain upon entrance. “What be our status?”

Dante stepped up. “There’s no overt indication that there is anything to be concerned about, from a security standpoint, sir.

Ensign Nadacic still had his suspicions about the Brexat.

“And medical?” he asked.

Ensign Vashic saw her first prehistoric person encased in ice on Betazed. The encasing sphere had the same effect. She felt a chill in the unmoving, emotionless face. “I assume the sphere has a method of reviving the occupant.”

It was spherical in design and completely transparent. There was no doubt it was truly a human inside as he was on display for them all to see. He sat upright in the seat in the center of the pod, as if commanding a space ship of which he was the only occupant.

“I have new readings.” Ensign Nadacic examined his tricorder display. “I’m reading a tachyon field. It was not present while aboard the Brexat ship. The field is weak, ten millivorgons.” Ensign Nadacic cursed at the sudden appearance of the tachyon field. It doesn’t appear to be an immediate threat.”

“Tachyons are known to be associated with temporal distortion” Dante said, adding her own two cents about the possibility.

Ghee’s antennae twitched as he looked up. “Yes, tachyons can be associated with temporal distortion. They can also be associated with some transporters and cloaking devices... some weapons, in fact.”

“Understood” responded MacLaren. Rajec said that they had discovered him more than a century ago, so MacLaren figured he could wait a few more minutes.

Ensign Nadacic hesitated. “It doesn’t appear to be a directed tachyon field. I will continue to monit—I’m detecting physical motion!”

“It’s what? Did we initialize the reanimation sequence?” he asked, stepping closer to the pod.

Pierce had a hypospray and a small pharmacy at the ready.

Ensign Vashic took an instinctive step back. She was of two minds: the rational physician knew that the physical body was held in stasis and was simply reviving, but, the irrational side of her brain saw reanimation of the dead.

Lieutenant Dante considered the question carefully. “The man is an unknown factor, captain, and we’ve had our fair share of those in the last few days.”

Finally, the man inside began to show signs of consciousness. After a couple seconds, he started to blink, and then he attempted to speak. “It... it worked.... It actually worked...” He mumbled.

“You’re safe, aboard a Federation starship. I’m Captain MacLaren. Just try and relax.” he said.

The man looked at the Captain very closely, trying to figure out the different accent, the uniform, everything. “My name... my name is... Jet... McCarris.”

If the occupant was aggressive, he had two options: the brig, or, open space one hundred meters off the starboard ventral quarter. Ensign Nadacic didn’t have any particular preference.

“Jet,” he said using the name the man had given, “I know this must all be very unsettling for ye. We ourselves know very little of what is

going on here. Rest assured that we mean to help ye. I think it might be best for ye to go with our doctors.”

While others focused on the sphere’s inhabitant, Nadacic kept watch on the sphere itself. The tachyon field remained with the sphere. The sphere’s inhabitant emitted an even weaker signal which could have been absorbed over the many years in stasis.

“Sickbay’s going to be best for him.” Dante expressed. “I want to go along, just in case.”

“Do what ye deem necessary, ensign” the captain replied. “Security will keep sickbay isolated. Once he’s stable, we can start in on what he was talking about and figure out where he comes from.”

Jet stared to the ceiling. He tried to remember anything, but was unable to. “I wish I could tell you anything, but to be honest, I think my entire memory... is gone. I’m not a threat to you, I promise that. But I understand why you’re so cautious. I would be too in your circumstances.”

Was she really broadcasting that much? Danica Dante needed a better poker face than that! “We can’t operate on a feeling, Mr. McCarris. We’ll need more to validate your claim.” Dante said. She wasn’t dismissing him; she was challenging him.

Curious, Soren thought. For remaining in stasis for so very long, the being inside was in remarkable healthy.

“Can you tell us the names of any colleagues, friends, family members?” Vashic was curious whether his amnesia was purely autobiographical or more general.

“It’s good to meet you all with a clear head. And my own people. What are the odds?” Of all places he could’ve ended up, why here? What was the point of this place? He had a feeling he meant to go back in time to this century, but why this point in space, this vessel, which was clear by the outline of the entire room. “Is there anything to eat around

here? I'm starving." He looked around and noticed a replicator near him. He got up and walked over to it.

"We have more tests to do, and plenty of questions now that you're awake." Pierce replied.

"The Time Sphere." Jet remembered exiting the pod, so he'd seen it before, obviously.

Pierce started tapping at a padd. "Let's see if this brings anything back." He showed McCarris a standard photo of Earth. "Anything at all?"

Jet thought the planet looked familiar. "I'm sorry. If you don't mind me asking, what planet is that?"

"That's Earth. You know. Where humans are from." Pierce said. Curious that McCarris didn't recognize it.

Jet smirked. "You see, I wouldn't have guessed that. But Earth... I feel like the place I knew as Earth is different than the one you're showing me.

"Any thoughts as to where you might actually be from?" Pierce asked.

"Sigma.. Sigma Ceti. That's where I'm from."

Pierce looked up Sigma Ceti. The fourth planet of the system was class M, habitable. As of 2415 it was not inhabited by any advanced species.

Jet looked at the image. "That's it. That's Sigma Ceti."

Chapter Six

Liam sat at his desk in the ready room, cup of coffee in front of him on the desk. It was the only thing keeping him from crashing under the fatigue that had his head spinning circles. They were headed in to starbase for some much needed repairs. In their current condition, Discovery would barely be able to make it to Mneventhia.

Liam was now, instead of being home with Lina, who was undoubtedly quite cranky with him for being so late, pouring over the many authorizations that needed to be done. A smile came across his face when he came to a name he recognized: 'Lieutenant Jack Armus, M.D.'. He was glad to see the doctor returning to active duty.

He checked the time on his computer's chronometer and deemed not too late to make the call. A few buttons pressed on the desk console opened a comm channel to the station. =/\=Hello there, Doc.=/\=

Jack Armus was just finishing breakfast when the computer alerted him to an incoming transmission. He grabbed his mint tea and took a seat nearby.

=/\=Hello Captain, =/\= Jack said relaxing in his chair. =/\=I assume you received my request to have my old job back? =/\=

=/\=I have indeed. =/\= responded the captain. =/\=We haven't been assigned a new CMO yet, so ye might just be in luck.=/\=

Jack smiled, =/\=Well, after the Bolian Measles outbreak on Termitus IV, I'm sure whatever you've got to throw at me will be a walk in the park.=/\=

=/\=Ye say that now.=/\= MacLaren said, smiling at the man on the other end of the communication. =/\=See, we've got a bit of a unique character we picked up from the folks we were helping out here, which ironically enough, were the same ones that put us in the sorry shape we be in.=/\= he said, a slight laugh in his tone.

"So what's this character's story?" Jack said, leaning back. Truth was, he had rarely had a chance to sit back and chat with his once former and now future CO. His time on the Discovery was...eventful.

"We're not quite sure yet. They had recovered a strange looking pod of some sort. Not sure what it's purpose was, but it had a human male inside in some form of bio-stasis. I've got the medical staff on it now tending to him, but something tells me there's going to be somewhat of a mystery to this fella." said the Captain.

"You can send me the files so I can review them." Jack said.
"Any idea what we're being thrown into next?"

"Oh, another dire circumstance for sure." he replied. Yes, he was indeed happy to have Jack Armus back home amongst the ranks of Discovery.

Chapter Seven

The cargo bay largely emptied of personnel. Ensign Nadacic and Lieutenant Shralas remained near the sphere. Ringed around the pod were a dozen security officers.

“It’s almost like they are derivatives of our own technology,” he said to no one in particular.

“It would pass for Federation design.” Nadacic felt he had a keen eye for the differences in technologies between the major Alpha Quadrant species. There were marked distinctions in metallurgy, chemistry and composite engineering. “It’s remarkably close to contemporary Federation technology, but, it’s not quite right.”

Ghee looked up from the data and pondered how to put it to the Captain. “Inherited... or perhaps more like built upon. Like evolution.”

Nadacic nodded his agreement. At the Academy, every cadet is presented with case studies of time loops, temporal rifts, even parallel universes.

Ghee’s feathers ruffled a bit. Captain MacLaren was asking a lot of the Lieutenant. He wasn’t supposed to come up with the hows or the whys. That was not his job. “I have to study the data further.” he said, tartly.

The ensign took one small step towards the pod and stopped suddenly when the clear, external surface of the vessel began to rotate backwards, revealing an opening by which one would board the pod.

“It is possible there might be some sort of auto scan feature in the device, triggering the opening sequence.” she said, reassuring herself that it was not at all creepy.

“We cannot say that it’s Starfleet for sure. It could be alien technology fooling us.” said Nadacic.

Chapter Eight

Doctor Armus requested doctors Pierce, Vashic and Kala, as well as Lieutenant Dante's presence in his office.

"Sweet tea, cold, decaffeinated." And the southern favorite shimmered into existence. "Enter." Jack said as he took a seat.

Vashic entered first. She hadn't met the new CMO and wanted to make a good impression. "Doctor Armus. I'm Doctor Vashic. Welcome aboard, sir."

"How long have you two been on shift?" Jack asked.

"We haven't exactly caught a break between bizarre events. Mr. McCarris is an interesting case." Vashic had been running comparative anatomy and physiology tests for hours and she could confirm was that he was human.

"Please order yourself something to drink or eat." From his chair, Jack gestured towards the replicator.

Pierce stepped over to the replicator. "Coffee, black."

"Makapa bread, thick-crust." Vashic sat down in the chair and pushed her thumbs through the crust to crack it. The sweet aroma of peppermint filled the room.

Jack was surprised when the new counselor arrived before Dante, as the security officer's promptness was near legendary. "Alenis Kala, I presume?"

Kala smiled. "That's right."

"Soraya renga." responded Vashic, noting the ridges on the ensign's procerus. She subconsciously tilted her head to check for a d'jah pagh earring. Vashic wore her ears unadorned except in prayer.

Kala smiled at the familiar words. She noticed the subtle searching of her person and obligingly tucked stray curls behind her well adorned ear.

Dante entered a moment later.

“I brought you all here to discuss Mr. McCarris.” Jack said. “I can’t find anything in our scans to cause our mystery patient’s amnesia. In fact, we can’t find anything wrong with him at all.”

“That in itself is suspect from a security standpoint.” Dante said. “If someone were planted as a sleeper agent, how better to make sure that they don’t give themselves away than if they don’t know anything. Could he be the recipient of an *intentional* memory block?”

Jack shrugged. “I see no evidence of such. His anatomy and physiology is entirely human. There has been clear long-term exposure to tachyon fields.”

“He could ~~also~~ have been exposed to a damaged cloaking device or any number of tachyon eddies.” Kala was mostly thinking out loud. Several tachyon eddies ran through Bajoran space and people absorbed the particles without ever traveling through time.

“The thing is,” Jack said relaxing back into his chair and resisting the temptation to place his feet on his desk, “Mr. McCarris is claiming to be from the future. Kala, I’d like you to talk to the patient. Let us know what you think of the state of his mental health.”

“One more thing,” Jack said, standing up to signal the meeting was coming to a close. “When the counselor has finished with her testing, Sickbay will be prepared to release Mr. McCarris. After all, we can’t keep a healthy patient here indefinitely. Lieutenant, I don’t know what you have planned to do with Mr. McCarris next, but I thought you should know he’ll be released.

Lieutenant Dante nodded softly. “I’ll do whatever needs doing. I believe we should keep watching him, until we know more, but, ultimately it’s

going to be the captain's call how we handle this. Thanks for the head's up, Dr. Armus."

Chapter Nine

Many darknesses had passed since the first freezing. The Kaer-wind sending it's chilling wind. The ground cover had formed quickly, coating the land with a cold, crystal-like shell. It was then, when the Kaer-wind had completed it's fortifying and preserving of the planet that life was formed. The giant spires beneath the surface of the planet broke through the crust, climbing aloft until they towered over the crust. The Spires had always been present, residing beneath the surface, waiting for a miracle of miracles to save their planet and rid it of the destructive energy created by the Mneventhian sun, beating radiation down and keeping the planet warm. Now, the harmful warmth would no longer be able to penetrate the ice-wind that circulated around the planet's atmosphere, keeping the surface frozen and alive.

The Spires could now live on the surface freely. The first Voc'Nu was selected of the tallest and most majestic Spires to rule and to direct. His leadership was great and his compassion enduring. He established the majestic court of the Voc'Nu. His wisdom set the precedent, the standard by which all Voc'Nu should be held.

It was not until many darknesses and many Voc'Nu later that the off-worlders had arrived. They came to Mneventhia with purpose. They brought down their inventions from the sky and created shelters to protect them from the cold that the Spires relished. They generated gruesome warmth with their tiny suns and remained in the confines of their city shelters. The Spires saw no harm in their tiny civilization and had decreed to allow them to remain. The Spires even began to become fond of the off-worlders' presence in their little habitation. They would often place themselves in view of the outpost to watch the strange little creatures leave the tiny city to brave the cold for very short times. The Spires were amused by their mannerisms.

Chapter Ten

The scientists barely had time to properly affix their thermal suits as they leaped from the hatch in the outpost wall. The reactor was dead. The cold began to seep through the fortified walls. The ground had begun to shake with such ferocity that it felt as if the outpost, along with the ice it rested on would break apart at any minute. Outside they could hear the crashing of ice, sounding like giant sheets of glass exploding against the frozen foothills near which the outpost sat.

Mul'nar was the first to escape the confines of the Outpost. Once through the outer canopy, he stayed low to assess what was happening. It was like a fierce and brutal storm, raining shards of cold ice and snow erupting from the earth, the mountains and the towers of ice that reached towards the sky. The remaining inhabitants of the outpost began to pour out of the canopy.

“Stay down!” he shouted as they began to congregate around them.

“What is happening to the towers?” a woman behind him asked, the fear evident in her shaken voice.

“Where did this storm come from?” said another.

Mul'Nar hesitated a moment, observing the storm. “We must head for the mountain!” he said, turning to face the expectant group looking for direction. “The observation post in the peak will provide more shelter than we have down here. That is our only chance.” he said in defeat.

“But the observation post,” said Nuk'ol, “it was never intended to sustain us, certainly not *all* of us!”

Mul'Nar looked at Nuk'ol seriously. “Indeed you are correct” he responded. “It will provide temporary relief from the cold. And there are supplies there. It will need to be modified and expanded to sustain us, but it will be functional for the time being. Is it not better than staying here to die?” he asked.

Nuk'ol looked at the ground solemnly, knowing his brother was correct. The rest of the settlers looked on at the horror scene playing out before them. It appeared that they were no longer welcome.

A deep, deafening howl emanated from one of the Sentinels causing the settlers to cover their ears.

Mul'Nar began to slip around the back side of the outpost, the rest of the people following his lead. "It will be a long road. It is my belief that we will survive this. The mountain can provide a stronger fortress than the outpost."

"To what end, Mul'Nar?" asked Nuk'ol. "Shall we live out the remainder of our days in hibernation until we die a bitter and meaningless death?"

"Calm yourself, brother" replied Mul'Nar.

"Yes, of course. I will remain calm and go quietly to my death here in this grave. As will all of our people because you have said so." Nuk'ol said in disgust.

"Nuk'ol, when have I failed you so? That you lack trust?" asked Mul'Nar. "I do not expect to die in this place and neither should you. Before our departure from the outpost, I set the automated distress beacon. We only have to survive until the Science Commission organizes an Exodus to retrieve us. We must be ready."

Chapter Eleven

Jack spent a half an hour debating how to approach Alenis with his little problem. In the end, he found himself outside her office with two mugs, Jumja tea for the counselor, mint for himself. He rang the chime. Act casual, he reminded himself mentally. Nothing weird asking for a little help.

“Come in.”

“Hello, counselor!” Jack said brightly, walking in with the beverages. “I wanted to drop by and see how you were settling in.”

Jack handed her a drink, nearly sat down, then froze and realized that was a bit presumptuous.

“Thank you doctor, that’s very kind.” Kala smiled and motioned to the chair. “Please. Sit.”

Jack settled in. “So how do you find the *Discovery* so far?”

“Big.” She laughed. “I’m sure once I learn my way around it will seem a bit more cozy.” She sipped the hot tea carefully.

“I’m sure you will. And if you have difficulty, always ask. You’ll find we’re a friendly bunch.” Jack said.

“I haven’t had much of an opportunity to get to know people yet. But now is an excellent time.” She smiled raising her mug slightly to him.

Jack smiled and raised his mug as well. After a sip he shrugged. “I can’t say there’s much to know about me. I lived a fairly boring life.” Well, that wasn’t quite true. There was Ieva and the Ludlow... Jack’s smile faltered a moment but he recovered. “As I’m sure you can tell by the ears, I’m half Vulcan, but I grew up on Earth with my mother. Became a doctor and ended up here. So what’s your story?”

She had caught the slip but she let it go. All in good time. She laughed, “I find it hard to believe anyone who ended up on a Starfleet

vessel has a boring past... But if you say so, doctor.”

“Please, just call me Jack,” he said, relaxing his long and lanky frame into Alenis’ very comfortable chair.

“Jack then, and you can call me Kala.” She tucked an errant curly strand behind her ear. “I grew up diffusing tense situations. Everywhere I went people were angry or on edge. So it seemed like a natural progression to get here. Besides, who can ignore that call the stars seem to have.” She glanced out the wide panoramic windows admiringly.

Jack took a deep breath. This was as good an opening as any. “Actually, I was hoping you could help me with something.”

“Sure, that’s what I’m here for.”

Jack laughed a little. “You say that now...” He gave her a grin but it was obvious he was nervous. “But seriously, it isn’t exactly something that falls within a counselor’s job so please feel free to refuse...”

Kala’s eyebrows shot up. “Oh?” She smiled with amusement. Now, she was really curious.

“I was wondering if you’d play matchmaker for me.” Jack said. He put down his drink and began fiddling with his fingers.

She took a beat to gauge the situation. “I...”

“I wouldn’t ask, but I just turned 28 yesterday—”

“Well, Happy Birthday...”

Jack waved off the happy birthday. “I just turned 28 and as a half Vulcan I can expect to go into, well, this thing called pon farr, anytime within the next ten years. Have you ever heard of pon farr?”

“Yes, I have. It was part of my studies, though there is not a whole lot of information on the matter. I understand Vulcan’s tend to keep it very private.”

“I don’t want to be forced into some emergency arranged marriage on Vulcan or worse.” Jack frowned. “I need to find a wife and I’m clearly not having much luck on my own.”

“Well, Jack, must say this is a first.” She rubbed her chin. “I would like to help you. I simply don’t know anyone yet.”

“I figured that, but then again, maybe that would make you more objective.” Jack said.

“I’m willing to keep my eyes and ears open but it would most likely take some time.” She was going to have to look at Starfleet protocols and her duties as a counselor. She wondered if this was actually against the rules.

“I would like to settle down and have a family.” Jack said. “Maybe not all at once, but eventually.”

She nodded again. “Well I guess we need to find you a girl.”

Chapter Twelve

USS Discovery dropped out of warp speed not far from her destination. The icy blue planet hung in the midst of space, rotating slowly, brilliant white littering the surface. The sight of the giant seemed to sparkle, adding an enormous amount of light to the dark of outer space.

The cold beauty caught the full attention of the first officer. It was times like these when she remembered why she left Earth. There was nothing more stunning than her own ball of rock and gasses, but one could appreciate it so much more when there was a bounty of other types of beauty in the universe. From this distance, Mneventhia looked quiet, peaceful. Before them came a different group of explorers, ones with hope and excitement of discovery in their hearts. What had happened to them?

#

The sudden appearance of a heat source startled Gardok. Another being had arrived above the planet. It's white-hot core against the cold blackness broke down the barrier between it's logical and animal minds. Gardok left the ocean at the demands of it's animal instinct. It jumped from the lowest depths of the ocean, reaching higher towards the white-hot being above the planet. It's body stretched through the last, thin layer of warmth between the planet proper and the cold, black nothingness beyond. Gardok's mouth opened and closed. It had expended it's physical ability and it's will could not cover the distance between itself and the newly-arrived being. It reacted by instinct, desperate to escape the planet and it's limited food supply. Gardok's logical mind regained control. It turned back to the planet, back to the ocean. After the frozen chill of space, Gardok circled slowly, warming itself, watching the white-hot anti-matter at the centre of the being, never taking it's attention away from the possibility of escape.

#

"Helm, bring us closer to the planet, one quarter impulse." ordered the Captain. "Mr. Nadacic, I would very much like some detailed sensor

readings of this sector and the planet. I want to know what's down there and if there is anyone in the area we should be aware of."

"I have preliminary sensor data from the founding of the colony." Ensign Nadacic overlaid surface features onto the image of the planet on the bridge's viewscreen. "The atmosphere is oxygen-nitrogen-argon. Most of the sky is devoid of cloud. There is a large storm system in the northern hemisphere. The planet is in an ice age: land masses covered in ice sheets, plant life is largely lichen and shrubs, very little ocean surface is exposed to the atmosphere."

Liam remained in the center seat. "Let's just hope it be favorable for the inhabitants of the outpost. They have expressly requested no interference... until now. Makes me wonder, what have they been doing? Could be an experiment gone bad, and *now* they need us to swoop in and save them. It's pretty typical of isolated science types that neither want to befriend nor alienate Starfleet. They keep us at arms length until we're needed and BAM! Here we be." commented the Captain.

"It could be the message wasn't meant for us, or that they've already solved whatever went wrong." Katt offered, feeling charitable.

"I'm detecting no power sources in or near the outpost. Their reactor is offline." Nadacic checked the readings again to be sure. "Correction. Their reactor mass is inert. It's pure silicon. They've managed to burn through their entire fusion mass."

Behind the commanding officers, the turbolift doors swished open. Jack Armus stepped on the bridge. He wasn't technically part of the bridge crew and he quite frankly had no intention of training to become one, but as a senior officer and a doctor, he figured it likely that no one would object.

"I'm not reading any life signs at the outpost." added Nadacic.

Jack frowned and took a step towards the science station. "Is the distress call still broadcasting?" he asked.

“It is. I have an uninterrupted distress signal. It’s unchanged.” Nadacic located the satellite system above the planet transmitting the signal and focused sensors on the outpost. “I’m not reading any communications between the outpost and the satellite system.”

“Well, if they’re still down there, they may or may not be listening. Open a channel on a corresponding frequency.” said MacLaren. “Mneventhia Outpost, this is Captain MacLaren aboard the Federation starship, *Discovery*. We have received your distress signal and are here to help. Please respond.” said the Captain aloud. They all waited patiently in hopes of hearing an immediate response. The channel remained silent, with not so much as a peep in response. “Continue transmitting, Ensign.” MacLaren said. “Is there any movement on the surface?”

“Indeterminate. There is some activity in the ionosphere.” The false-colour sensor data on the view screen rippled across the planet. For the third time since reaching orbit a large circular area of the ionosphere lit up with ripples of alpha particles, photons and cosmic rays. “It’s interfering with sensors.”

“Are we being jammed somehow?” he asked curiously.

“The effect is rising from the planet surface.”

Liam looked at Commander Katt with curiosity. He did not like taking chances. He liked certainty. Perhaps it was his time as Chief of Security that had him focused on the risks and preparing for the inevitable outcome. The scientists below asked for help for a reason and they had their responsibilities.

Mel was lost out the viewport, watching the spinning of the planet below. For a reason she couldn’t explain a knot had formed in her belly. She expected that they would find disaster below. “We will need to go down to investigate. I’ll lead the team down. Is there a place central to their settlement that we can transport to and be reasonably protected from the elements?”

“There is an open plaza in the centre of the outpost. There is a large building on it’s North side with smaller buildings arrayed outwards. It appears to be a public gathering place. A ridge East of the outpost provides elevated views of the outpost and surrounding terrain.

“We can go down with a small group and assess the situation, but we’ll want to keep it close, then expand out from there. Ensign, can you give me a better view of this area here?” She asked, indicating a section of the screen.

The sensor resolution dropped suddenly. “I can’t get a clear view of the outpost. Ionization in the atmosphere. I don’t have consistently clear sensor readings. I don’t believe the transporters will function safely.” said Nadacic. Since their arrival, the atmosphere began reacting to Discovery’s presence.

“What does that mean for the surface conditions?” Liam added to the list of questions posed. “Would it be suitable for an away team on the surface, or would the atmospheric conditions be too harsh to ensure the safety of our officers, should we be able to make it to the surface?”

Jack walked up behind Nadacic and peaked at the readings. It looked too damn cold for his liking, that was for sure.

“If the outpost was active, they could set up pattern enhancers, transporter relays, any number of devices counter the effects I’m seeing.” Lieutenant Bell had been silently observing from the rear of the bridge. “Without the certainty of materializing on the planet surface in one piece, perhaps an alternative method of transport is in order.”

Jack wondered if any of them had taken the time to think of the return trip, or the limitations of the thermal suits combating the elements. The bottom line was, they just didn’t know what they were stepping into and the possibility of communications being unreliable between Discovery and the surface was probable.

The blue glow of Mneventhia lit the main viewscreen at the front of the bridge. Liam stared at the surface of the planet, imagining what the it

would look like, trying to feel the exhilaration of the brutally cold temperatures. “Commander.” he said, turning to the first officer, “Prepare an away team, medical and security complements. Ensign Nadacic should accompany ye as well. His Andorian blood will make him more suited to the environment as will his tactical knowledge. I will alert Lieutenant Patras that she will be escorting the away team by shuttle.”

“I can be ready in twenty.” Jack said. The half Vulcan wanted to ensure he was prepared in case they came across causalities, even if sensors read no life signs. Plus, he wanted to make sure he was dressed as warmly as possible. He glanced over to Dante.

“Security won’t need that long, commander.” She glanced at Armus. “No offense. I’ll provide a four-person team, plus myself, with two teams on standby.”

“You leave ASAP.” said the captain.

Chapter Thirteen

Jet strolled down the corridor, looking for the new counselor's office. He tapped the small panel beside the door.

"Come in. Please have a seat." She motioned to the seating by the window.

"So you're going to be helping me try to regain my memory?"

"That's part of what I plan to do. But I'd also like to monitor how you're doing through this. This is no doubt very stressful and taxing for you."

"I don't know. It's like, I can see something, and I know what it is." Jet felt a little more confused, but also a little more confident at the same time. "The whole memory won't reveal itself."

Chapter Fourteen

“You’re not going to make it impossible to fly for me, are you?” Lina asked, eyes narrowing as she watched him make his modifications.

The engineer smirked, keeping his eyes on the bulkhead he had torn apart. This was what he lived for. A pile of parts on the floor, navigational system half disassembled and a group of people waiting on him for the next leg of their orders. “Don’t worry about flyin’ this bird.” Bell said, his hands still working while he spoke. “Just makin’ sure she’ll be safe in the cold is all. Don’t want the guidance system crystallizing once we enter the atmosphere now.”

Lina snorted. “At least if you mess it up, I’ll have the comfort of knowing you’ll go down with me—just don’t make it compensate too much, I want to feel if we start to slide.” It was one of the biggest mistakes pilots made, letting the dampeners protect them from the motion. Sometimes one needed that extra second of reaction time.

Ensign Nadacic picked up a few items from his quarters, took a dose of IIGPs in preparation to return to a sub-zero environment and made his way to the shuttle bay. He signed out a phaser rifle from the armoury as well as a side arm.

Pierce made final preparations on a med kit. This particular med kit had more frostbite medications than usual. He gathered himself and took his seat.

“Everything ready?” Mel asked.

“Yes ma’am.” Jack said. Jack wasn’t only half Vulcan, but grew up largely in the Caribbean region of Earth and was more than a little daunted by the temperatures of the planet down below.

“Ensign, did you find anything further about the conditions we’ll find below?” Nadacic was becoming a knowledgeable officer. It wouldn’t be long before he’d add some pips.

“Yes, commander. The air temperature ranges from 40 to 50 degrees below freezing. There is a changing wind from 10 to 20 kilometres per hour largely blowing from north-east to south-west. There is little water vapour in the air, what one would call a dry cold. The ground cover is glaciated ice and snow. It will be a solid walking surface. There is exposed rock breaking the ice surface.” Said Ensign Nadacic.

Covaar repressed a shiver. While his people were not a desert people, it was rare for the Kazon to settle on worlds that were not of the warmer climes.

“All set.” the engineer said, forcing out a smile that was characteristic of him. “Whenever you’re ready, lieutenant.”

“Alright, let’s go.” Lina said, waving at everyone to get into the shuttle.

Bell pecked at the engineering screen with his fingertips. He examined the systems diagnostics, almost waiting for the proverbial ball to drop. He knew that the sudden changes in atmospheric conditions would be like electrical shock to the shuttle’s systems. “Distance to atmosphere?”

“We should be on the ground in just a bit, just be patient,” Lina said, most of her concentration focused on the shuttle. She’d get them down safely, though the conditions were a pain in the nacelles.

As they entered the atmosphere, Mel sent a little thanks up to whomever invented anti-motion-sick shots. The shuttle shuddered. There was just something about moving around in atmosphere that made her uncomfortable, and the last thing she wanted to do was vomit all over the rest of the away team.

#

Gardok sensed a pinpoint of heat leaving the large bloom within the deep, black void. It moved in serpentine figure-eights. It followed the heat as it tracked away from the large heat bloom. This planet had been a trap, a diminishing ball of heat at it’s centre, it’s corporeal beings making no attempt to travel beyond it’s outermost layer of

matter. Gardok felt anger at the beings that gave him no means of escape. Gardok increased its speed, moving in tighter and tighter figures. The earth rumbled and the air vibrated. Gardok broke the loop and moved with infinitesimal speed towards the pinpoint of heat. It braced to swallow the ball of heat at the centre of the object in a single pass. It shuddered as the ball of heat was absorbed. Directly ahead was the massive heat source Gardok had sensed immediately upon its arrival to the planet now behind it. Gardok was puzzled how the corporeal beings could master something so intense. The corporeal beings controlled a force greater than the cores of stars. Gardok emitted a cry of pain.

#

Bell gripped the console, steadying himself under the turbulence. He had been looking out the viewport briefly before the shuttle went dead and began plummeting rather than gliding. The power had flickered and died.

“Get me manual control.” Lina didn’t spare a glance at the engineer beside her. Their descent was uncontrolled. She spoke a few swear words that she reserved for special occasions.

At the first sign of danger, Dante had wanted to take control and start issuing orders. “Alright! Anyone who isn’t necessary to the flight of the ship, make sure you are strapped in as tightly as possible, bend forward, place your hands behind your head, and block your face with your arms in case of flying debris!”

Bell barely heard Dante’s orders. He was engrossed in the complex process of routing emergency power away from any available systems to revive any portion of helm control he could. Patras was trying her best to guide the shuttle down to the icy planet surface, but her efforts were little more than futile. The console refused to revive and remained dark and unresponsive.

As the shuttle continued its descent Lina did her best to control the attitude and pitch, wishing shuttles were better designed for atmosphere, but damn if she was going to allow them all to die on the

The Mneventhia Encounter

a *USS Discovery* short novel

<https://sites.google.com/site/borderlandsdiscovery/>

frozen planet—at least from a crash landing.

Chapter Fifteen

Captain MacLaren sat in his spot on the bridge, anxiously tapping the console on the left side of his chair. He was not the same lad that left his home of Ireland so many years ago. That boy was young and restless at heart, a hunger for adventure and a will to go where the stars lead. Now, he found himself waiting anxiously on the bridge while his crew were out in the unknown.

The turbolift doors slid open and two security officers emerged with a man in tow. “We’ll be continuing this in me ready room.” He rose from his seat and motioned for the man to follow him to the corner office. He eyed the security guards. “You two can stay here. I’m sure we’ll be just fine, but thank ye for your concern.” he said, walking in and allowing the doors to slide closed.

“Me apologies for the scrutiny. I’m sure ye understand the circumstances under which you’ve come to us here and the measures we must take. Please, take a seat, son.” He said, motioning towards the sofa in the wall opposite his desk. He himself walked to the replicator and replicated a cup of apple cider. It wasn’t quite the same as back home, but it had been so long since he’d tasted that concoction that he was almost beginning to forget the difference in the synthetic version.

“So, Mr. McCarris.” Liam began, saying his name deliberately. “How do ye find Discovery, or at least, Sickbay?” he said, realizing the man had been pretty isolated since coming aboard.

Jet smiled. “It’s a phenomenal vessel.”

“Well, medical has given ye a clean bill o’ health. Wherever you’re from, you seem to have been taken care of. I know ye have trouble recalling. I’m not going to push ye, but if there is anything ye remember, feel free to spit it out. I’d like to talk about what we’re doing from here, because *here* is where ye be, understand?” the captain asked, looking at McCarris curiously.

Jet nodded. He knew that he was here for a reason. But he just didn't know what that reason quite was. "I understand. I know that I'm supposed to be here. At least... mostly. I don't know, it's like, I don't have my memories, but I have like... what would you call them, impulses?"

"Hmm." MacLaren said, all of a sudden feeling more like a counselor than a captain, now certain the next step would be for the young man to lie on his back on the couch while he took notes. "And what do these impulses tell ye?"

Jet shook his head. "I'm not sure. It's like the feeling I know I'm supposed to be here, like something was going to happen."

"Ye say you're from the future, so maybe if something happened here, in the past, could ye have been sent to stop or alter it?" asked MacLaren. He had the nagging doubt in the back of his mind that Jet McCarris could very well have been sent with malicious intentions. A good captain couldn't afford to discount the possibility.

"All I get from this useless mind is the feeling of being in the right place. I wish I could understand my purpose in this point in time, my mission, what's going on here, but I have nothing."

He sympathized with the man's plight. "It's okay, Mr. McCarris." he said reassuringly. "Try to think less about your purpose and more about who *you* are. Maybe there be some knowledge or skill that could tell us what type of work you've done or the like. Understand?" he said, trying to give the man something more positive to think on.

"I found the technology around here somewhat familiar. I figured out how to use a tricorder back in Sickbay. It was like second nature to me like I was used to it; used to using that type of device."

"Captain, if you don't mind my asking, what happened here? This vessel looks a little rough, the crew seems to be on edge, and I've heard the name Brexat a couple of times with a bit of anger. I don't understand, what happened?"

“Ye don’t remember the Brexat?” Liam asked, realizing the impact of the statement. “Right” he said, answering his own question. “We took heavy damage during the mission we found you on. The Brexat were....misunderstood. They tried to take over Discovery, quite near succesfully, in attempt to save their dying species. All they really needed was a ride to their sacred spawning ground. Ye were a final parting gift from them to us, strange coincidence as it was.

“But why? How did *they* find me?”

“That be a mystery.” Liam said in response. “We don’t really know how or why they found you, only that they chose to keep you around for a very long time.” said Liam.

“Ensign Pierce mentioned you were having trouble accessing the logs. I could take a look.”

“Hmmm.” Liam said under his breath. “Me Chief of Security would have something to say about that. Sorry, lad, but I’m afraid we can’t afford to have ye onboard that thing; safety reasons and all. Until we determine what it is and why you’re here, it might be better for you to keep your distance.”

Jet nodded his head. “Captain, if I was in your position, I would be doing the same.” Jet was just trying to do everything he could to gain trust. And trying his best to gain friendship.

“What I would like to do, is have ye run through some of the Starfleet Academy placement and entrance exams. If your vessel is Starfleet in origin then chances are ye were too.” Liam had a feeling in his conscience that this man was of no harm. He couldn’t afford to risk it though. He hoped to have proof that would set their minds at ease before long.

Just then, the captain lost his footing and caught himself on the wall. The ship had seemed to jolt underneath them suddenly. The lights dimmed. His mind flashed to the many hours they spent without power at the hand of the Brexat. He seriously hoped they were not repeating that part of their history. “Ye good, lad?” he asked Jet.

Jet had hit the wall. “Agh. Yeah I’m fine.”

The captain lead McCarris onto the bridge. The crew was frantically at work at their stations determining the cause of the jolt and brief power outage. “Report!” MacLaren ordered, taking the command chair back from the lieutenant in charge. He motioned to the rear of the bridge, pointing out an empty seat for Jet to sit in.

“Captain.” responded Lieutenant Tec’la at the ops station. “We experienced a sudden loss in reactor response causing a brief loss in power.”

“Word from Engineering?” asked MacLaren.

“Uncertain as to the cause, sir” he said.

At that moment, Lt. Maradok rolled from his seat at the conn and slumped onto the floor.

=/\=Medical to the Bridge.=/\= ordered MacLaren.

The ship was in a decaying orbit, and there was nobody at the helm to fix the problem. Jet felt a sudden energy coarse through his body. Suddenly time itself seemed to slow down. He got over to the console. The controls were very familiar to him. He found the stabilization controls near his right palm and pushed the controls to stop Discovery’s decay. Time began to move at a normal pace once again. Jet looked up to the view screen and watched as the ship returned to its normal orbit. He blew a sigh of relief and moved away from the console. Looking at his hands, he couldn’t believe he’d done it.

Liam looked at Jet, placing a cautious hand on his shoulder. “Ok, lad. That was right good work. Just, how did ye know?”

Jet looked from the captain to his own hands once again. “I.. I don’t know.” He was shocked himself.

“I guess it would be safe to say that ye may have some piloting experience then.” Liam added. “I think we might start with the pilot portion of those academy exams, eh?”

“What is it, lad?” asked the captain, seeing the man hesitate. He wondered if he was experiencing some sort of after effect of whatever had happened. He didn’t want to send the man straight back to Sickbay.

“I’m not from here.” He whispered under his breath.

“Right.” MacLaren responded slowly. “The future, right?” he said in clarification. He wasn’t entirely sure he believed that, but looking at the equipment he arrived in, it was hard to explain it away.

Jet looked at him. “No, I mean, the odds are very likely I won’t be able to get back.”

Chapter Sixteen

Glarr moved with purpose. He had served the Voc’Nu for many darkneses. He was there when the offworlders arrived and the wonder that came with them. Word came that the Voc’Nu would allow the tiny creatures to remain.

“I must speak with the Voc’Nu.” declared Glarr, his deep voice reverberating in the frozen hall.

The minister of the court began to refuse, but, he could see in the Spire’s eyes that it would take more to dissuade him than a firm ‘no’. There were few who possessed the boldness to oppose a Sentinel.

The large doors to the Voc’Nu’s chamber were opened by the keepers as Glarr drew near. They were shut promptly behind him once he was inside, filling the hall with a thunderous noise.

Glarr approached the large, ornately decorated throne, where the Voc’Nu sat, anxiously awaiting the reason for this intrusion.

The Sentinel dropped to one knee, his face looking to the ground. “Sire.” began Glarr, with reverence. “I bear news of utmost importance.”

“Rise, my friend.” replied the Voc’Nu. “Tell me, what is it that now troubles you?”

“They have come, Sire. I am certain that with them they bring destruction.”

“Who, my friend?” inquired the Voc’Nu. “Who has come?”

“Friends of the offworlders. They have come in their tiny vessel and have awakened the Creature. They may be in league.”

“Now, now. Have we not discussed this? Those tiny creatures have done nothing to harm this world. How could they? They are so small and inconsequential. Are you certain you are not mistaken of their

involvement?” he asked.

“It is too coincidental, my lord.” said Glarr. “The Creature has awakened, and the tiny one’s are here. There must be a correlation.”

The Voc’Nu sat back in his throne, taking his ruling position once again. “Very well, then. You have been my trusted friend for many darkneses. If you feel that our world is now threatened, assemble the Sentinels. Observe the small ones.”

“As you wish, my lord.” responded Glarr, bowing to one knee before turning to walk back towards the large doors that enclosed the Voc’Nu’s chamber.

“Sir Glarr.” called the Voc’Nu, knowing the use of his official title would not go unnoticed. “If you are correct and the Creature is awakened, he must not be allowed to finish what his kind started so many darkneses ago.” the majestic leader said, his voice low and filled with authority.

“I...Understand” he replied.

Chapter Seventeen

Lauren quietly slipped into the mess hall. She knew that the strange man would be there. He always looked out the same window from the same chair at the same time.

Jet looked back behind him and around, but saw nobody. He then looked down a little to see a young blonde-haired girl standing in front of him. “Oh hello there.”

“I got these for you” Lauren said as she held out a pathetic bouquet of flowers that she gathered from the gardens she used to care for. She had an ‘incident’ with an alien species. They captured her, and before returning her, removed her memories. It took months for her to ‘grow up’ from the mental age of 4 back to 8, and she still had toddler tendencies. That was the real reason why she wanted to befriend the strange man who lost his memory; because she lost hers.

Jet took the flowers from her hand. They seemed a little beat up, but he didn’t mind at all. He smiled. “They’re beautiful, thank you.”

Lauren smiled childishly and put her hands behind her back and twisted slightly.

“It’s really kind of you to get these for me. “My name is Jet. What’s your name?” He held his hand out, offering a handshake.

“Lauren.” She said proudly as she took his offered hand and gave one big dramatic hand shake.

Jet smiled, “Well it’s very nice to meet you Lauren.”

“Where are you from?” Lauren asked.

“Well, I remember being from a place called Sigma Ceti. That’s all I know, though.” He said looking at her curiously. She was the first child he had seen since waking up.

“Dad told me you might not remember.” Lauren said.

Jet grinned. “Well there’s a lot of things I don’t remember. Where are you from?”

“Well, I am from Earth. I lived in a tiny place called Swan Landing in Canada with my grandparents. Then I moved to a foster home in Valemount, but I didn’t like it there—” Lauren would have gone on to tell her whole life story.

Jet cocked his head at the name of the place she mentioned. Those names sounded VERY familiar. “Sorry, where?”

“Swan Landing,” Lauren was taken aback at the sudden pounce in the man’s voice.

Jet felt like he was onto something now. “Canada. Come with me.” He got out of his seat and walked to the computer on the other side of the room. “Computer. Give me a map of Earth, specifically Canada.”

The computer responded with an image of North America. Jet looked at it and he was sure he’d seen this area before. Albeit, a little differently. “Tell me Lauren, what do you see?”

“I see Canada.” She was totally confused by the sudden change in the man’s attitude; it actually scared her a little. “That’s where I grew up.”

Jet looked closer to the screen. He was sure he’d been there before, but it didn’t look quite as he thought it should. “Maybe my memory isn’t as far gone as I’d thought. This place, this Canada, it looks so familiar. I know I was born on Sigma Ceti, but, maybe there’s more than that. Maybe I grew up on Earth.

Chapter Eighteen

“Report!” Mel said, clutching her seat. She was alive, she knew from the pain in her chest where the restraints held her tight. She sent a small prayer of thanks even as she pulled herself straighter. She reached for the restraints, but her hands were shaking too badly to remove them.

Ensign Covaar had seen something, something totally out of place, outside the shuttle. Even before the order had been shouted out, the Kazon had been working on the external sensors support what some of them had seen. He didn’t pull his eyes or his hands away from his console as he replied. “I am working on confirming it, but, it appeared like some sort of giant living being that tried to swallow us whole.” Upon hearing his own words, Covaar couldn’t quite believe he had said it. IT sounded like something out of some sort of second-rate adventure holo-novel. “Some sort of energy charge hit us. I am working on some sort of confirmation.”

“Get me manual control.” Lina didn’t spare a glance at the engineer beside her. Their descent was uncontrolled. She spoke a few swear words that she reserved for special occasions.

At the first sign of danger, Dante wanted to take control and start issuing orders. The ones that needed to be heard the most had been the ones flying the heavy shuttle. Having bit her tongue as long as she dared, she opened up. “Alright! Anyone who isn’t necessary to the flight of the ship, make sure you are strapped in as tightly as possible, bend forward, place your hands behind your head, and block your face with your arms in case of flying debris! The moment we make contact, those closest to the doors need to pop them and evacuate. Everyone else be prepared to render emergency assistance to get the rest off safely!” Considering the difficulty of piloting a dead stick through the upper atmosphere to a safe landing, the advice was probably pointless.

Jack disagreed with Dante’s orders. Unless the shuttle was in danger of exploding, they should stay in where it was warm, but, there would be plenty of time to argue that later... if they made it. Instead, Jack helped make sure those around him were strapped in.

Bell was engrossed in the complex process of routing emergency power away from any available systems to revive any portion of helm control he could. Currently, Patras was trying her best to guide the shuttle down to the icy planet surface, but her efforts were little more than futile. Bell's fingers danced across the console, portions of which refused to revive and remained dark and unresponsive. The emergency power was programed to push as much juice to the necessary systems in the event of main power failure, though the engineer couldn't see needing to target lock and fire weapons on their way to the ground.

As the shuttle continued its descent Lina did her best to control the attitude and pitch, wishing shuttles were better designed for atmosphere, but damned if she was going to allow them all to die on the frozen planet—at least from a crash landing. Glancing away from the controls, she saw the icy ground steadily approaching. A few more adjustments, just a little more time, just a little more—

Chapter Nineteen

The Ligonian pulled at the collar of his uniform. “Six hundred degrees,” Crewman Chikuhwa said aloud to himself. He couldn’t imagine how this section had reached such a temperature without any other signs of burning or melting. “I’ll replace it and let the lieutenant figure it out.” The section of cabling was his third stop of the morning.

Chikuhwa provided nanometre-scale measurements to the portable replicator as it dematerialized the fused fibers and painstakingly reconstructed them. After thirty minutes the cable was a perfect reconstruction of the original. The mechanic removed the safety lockout and checked the load through the damaged section. He nodded to himself and began to crawl back to a larger junction.

An alarm sounded on the tricorder. Chikuhwa looked back and forth between the tricorder and the newly-repaired cabling. The power draw was spiking and the temperature had exceeded the melting point of the transparent aluminum fibers. His tricorder was reading temperatures above one thousand centigrade but the air temperature hadn’t changed a degree.

The mechanic cautiously crawled into the Jeffries tube, testing the decking with the back of his hand before putting any weight down. The decking was cool to the touch. A 600-degree flash would leave some residual heat.

“Doesn’t make sense,” Dan said more to himself than the crewman.

“Yes, sir.” replied the Ligonian. He ran a quick scan of the two sections he had repaired earlier. “I don’t believe it.” Whatever had affected the cabling and triggered his repair order had happened again. Something linked these three sections and was causing simultaneous effects. They were part of a redundant power distribution system. None of the sections of melted cabling were tied to critical systems or high-load systems like shield generators or phaser arrays.

Truly puzzled, Dan sat in the tight space giving his crouched knees some relief. “Would this have anything to do with the nebula we

passed a few days ago?” Dan was shooting in the dark, hoping that something would suddenly reveal itself.

“I am unaware of any link between these conduits.” Chikuhwa looked at the schematics again. “The only link, to my eyes, is spatial. They are roughly equal distance from the warp core.” The mechanic felt the pressure of trying to find something, however minute, to satisfy the frustration of his superior officer. He shrugged knowing that a spatial relationship was weak reasoning. It was his only clue.

“How about trying the repair again,” Dan suggested, “and we can get a tricorder record of what is happening.

“Yes, sir.” Chikuhwa set up the portable replicator once again. “Do you wish the cabling to be repaired to its original state?”

“No.” Dan replied. “We just need it good enough to see what is happening.”

“Yes, sir.” The mechanic adjusted the replicator to a setting typically reserved for emergency repairs where time was critical and too few mechanics were available. It would also put the cabling in a workable state in five minutes instead of thirty.

As soon as current was applied, the temperature spiked. The cabling seemed to disappear entirely. Chikuhwa allowed his mouth to purse. The cabling certainly didn’t sublimate from a solid state into ionized plasma. What other explanation could there be? He turned to Lieutenant Grant.

Dan sat silently looking through the data. He needed more to go on.

Chapter Twenty

Bell was shaken from the crash. He tried to respond, but his breath had been knocked from him by the console. He frantically tried to catch his breath without success, to push the piece of equipment off his chest.

Lina found herself on the floor. “Doctor...” she said weakly. “Doctor!” She called for the engineer, not herself. She did not know her own medical situation. She felt no pain but was reasonably sure that she was intact. Certainly if anything had been broken off she’d have noticed, right? Besides, if she didn’t get back whole, Liam would give her hell. He might give her hell if she killed any of his crew as well. She closed her eyes tight against the possibility.

Jack, who was already using his tricorder on Ensign Bivens, quickly shouted to Dante, “He’ll be fine. Put pressure on the wound.” He waited until the other ensign complied before rushing to the front of the shuttle where he found Bell struggling to breath. Jack was pleased. It could have been worse, much worse. “Could I get a little help with this console?” Jack said as he pocketed the medical tricorder and moved to move the console.

Pierce moved over to help the CMO. They started to lift the console off of Bell trying to get some air into his lungs.

Ensign Nadacic felt unhurt. He felt some soreness from the rough landing but otherwise pleased with Patras’ piloting skills. He noticed two security officers poised at a hatch. Ensign Tryutu had stated something about a being attacking the shuttle. He couldn’t quite articulate how he perceived the event but the young Kazon’s description fit.

“What is the status of the shuttle?” Mel tried the restraints again, but her fingers were still not cooperating. Did she feel the cold or was it her imagination.

Covaar shook his head to try and get his own personal ‘gyroscopes’ back in order. “I don’t currently see whatever was out there to attack

us in the area. The shuttle is not in any immediate danger.”

“I appreciate your tactical assessment ensign,” bit Nadacic.

Covaar blushed, not really sure what else to say. He thought he had just been replying to information that had been requested from him. It was clear that he was not making the best of impressions on his first mission. “My apologies,” was all he could muster.

“Don’t apologize ensign. What is our position?” Nadacic wanted to order the ensign out of his seat and man the sensors himself. If there was an imminent threat, he’d rather be firing on it than watching it.

Covaar nodded, quickly bringing up a map. “It looks like it would be somewhat of a hike to the nearest settlement, but not anything we should not be able to handle, sir.”

Dante nodded her agreement to the ensign.

“Lieutenant.” Nadacic flipped through the multiple views on his padd, as provided by Ensign Covaar, as he crouched next to Lieutenant Dante. “We have clear lines of sight for five kilometres or more except for this rocky outcropping.” Nadacic indicated a rise in the terrain above the smooth glacial surface.

“You’re built for these conditions and will serve as scout. Your priority is to surveille the rocky outcropping and return to the away team as quickly as possible.” Dante was caught between wanting to scout the terrain herself and keeping the away team safe. She wanted both rolls. The ensign’s biology lent himself to work more independently of the away team. He was not going to freeze to death in these conditions like the Humans and lone Kazon of the away team... especially the Kazon. “Maintain an open channel. We’ll remain with the shuttle until you deem it safe. It’s the only defensible position within five kilometres.”

“Yes, ma’am. I shouldn’t need more than five minutes.” responded the ensign. In his blood pumped cyanoglobin to carry oxygen and ice-inhibiting glycoproteins (IIGPs) to keep it fluid well below the freezing temperature of water.

Bell gasped to catch his breath. The removal of the console that was crushing him caused the oxygen to rush in at more than he could handle. He attempted to roll over, but the shooting pain coming from his arm caused him to cry out.

“I want you to take some slow, deep breaths for me now, Mr. Bell.”

The engineer complied. He inhaled slowly and exhaled in turn. “My arm.” said Bell. “It might be broken.”

Jack smiled sympathetically. “I know. But it would have been a lot worse if you actually broke any of those ribs. You were lucky, really.”

Mel finally won over the restraints, breaking free and taking a deep breath. “Can we communicate with Discovery?” the XO asked.

“I have a very poor signal. The ionosphere must still be quite active.”

Mel considered the information. That wasn’t good—Discovery might expect to lose communication with them for the short term with the weather but they could not report their current status. “What about the colony? Can we determine how close we are relative to where we landed?”

“The colony is just over the horizon. There is no line-of-sight.” said Nadacic.

“We need to see if we can’t find out what caused the crash, but without environmental control we’ll freeze here. Doctor, how badly are folks wounded, can they be moved? We have to get to the colony.”

Jack frowned. He’d prefer to stay here as long as it was warm. “All things considered, we’re in good shape. Lieutenant Bell would likely need to be carried on a stretcher. Other than that, everyone’s mobile.”

“Let’s get ready to get mobile. Dante, I’d like you to come up with a strategy to get us there safely. Whatever happened might have started from the ground, and we do not know if we can move safely out in the open, but it’s our best chance of survival and communication.”

The Kazon quickly started to load a pack with anything that could be helpful. It was the type of mission a lot of them had signed up for as explorers.

Pierce helped Bell onto a stretcher. “Remind me to do more weightlifting before away missions.” he said.

“Ensign,” Dante stood next to Nadacic who was standing by the hatch. “On three, I’ll open the hatch. Get to the rocks, take a look and get back here.”

“Yes, ma’am. I should have no difficulty covering the distance and I’ll be careful not to allow the away team out of visual range.” Nadacic collected the few items he himself brought on the mission.

Bell watched the crew prepare to leave the shuttle. He was not crazy about the idea of being carried. He wanted to go with the crew under his own power, but the pain in his chest and arm were making it impossible for his body to comply.

“Brace for the cold, people. Hatch open in one, two, three.” Dante pushed the emergency release and the hatch popped open. The bitter cold blew in faster than she expected. She clenched her teeth as Ensign Nadacic brushed past her and out the hatch. As soon as he was clear, she pulled it shut and locked it.

Nadacic hit the ice running. The sensor drones bucked and shot upwards out of his hands. The padd with the drone’s control program was clamped to the phaser rifle in the ensign’s hands. He adjusted his snow goggles and glanced around but did not break his stride.

A cracking sound could be heard over the wind. Nadacic stopped, quickly scanned the ground with a tricorder and dropped to his belly. There were no crevasses beneath his feet according to the tricorder. He heard a fainter crack, then another more distant. Curious. It felt much longer than thirty seconds but, according to his chronometer, that’s how long he waited and listened. The sound didn’t repeat and it had never seemed to be approaching his position.

"Nadacic to Dante."

"Dante." The security chief's voice responded. "What's the situation ensign?"

"The far side of the rock outcropping is clear. There are no life forms, no unusual sensor readings. I'm initiating a wider sweep of the area." Nadacic iterated through false-colour optical scans, stretching and condensing the spectrum. A spectral analysis of the rock revealed that it was granite. There were no gravimetric variations, no theta radiation emissions.

"Sounds good. Be careful." Whether it was born out of genuine interest for him or for the mission wasn't as clear.

Nadacic jogged in the direction of the settlement. The drone was high enough to pick out the settlement. There was no apparent movement. He would reach an observation position as the away team made their way out of the shuttle. The most likely source of hostility was the settlement.

Mel kept from tapping her foot or pacing. There wasn't much that she could do while everyone was gathering their supplies. Having Bell confined to a stretcher was bad news. Lying still would make it more difficult for him to keep his blood flowing.

While Dante's team had looked almost eager to have an enemy to fight, Mel hoped that Nadacic didn't find any situations they were going to have to fight their way out of. She wanted to find the scientists sitting in a protected shelter with steaming mugs of hot liquid.

Lina kicked at the useless navigation console.

"Decided to take pity on a poor, injured engineer, lieutenant?" Bell asked, breaking the silence.

"Don't flatter yourself too much." she told Bell. "I just feel bad that your shuttle adjustments didn't work so well and now you'll have to be carried."

The engineer smiled as best he could through the pain. “I think they worked a might better than your piloting.” he said in jest.

“Do we know anything more about what happened?” Mel asked the Kazon science officer. “Can we retrieve any of the sensor readings?”

“I was working on that right after we landed.” said Covaar. “I don’t think that creature attacked us directly. I think just proximity to it somehow shorted out our systems like a severe case of static electricity.”

Nadacic walked towards the settlement watching the readings from the sensor drone circling overhead. There was nothing out of the ordinary as far as he could see. As soon as he started walking on the glacial surface, his stride changed, adapted from the smooth decking of a starship to a soft surface. =/>\=Nadacic to Dante.=/>\=

=/>\=Dante=/>\= The reply came back in no time.

=/>\=I’ve surveilled a 500-metre radius from the shuttle. There is no movement, no heat signatures, no radiation signatures. I haven’t detected anything between our landing site and the settlement.=/>\=

=/>\=Ensign, stay at your current position until I’ve had a chance to plan our movement with the commander.=/>\=

=/>\=Acknowledged. I’ll wait here for the away team.=/>\= Nadacic set the drone to full automatic, let his phaser rifle hang from it’s shoulder harness and pulled the hood over his head. Despite his natural adaptation to the cold, he was no longer moving and would want to conserve body heat. He closed his eyes and listened to the wind, the sound of snow blowing across the open terrain. It seemed particularly quiet without the ever present drone of a warp core.

Dante moved over near the door. “If we’re going to make for the settlement, we need to do it now, before the temperature really drops.” She turned and gave instructions to her security team.

Bell winced in pain as they moved from the shuttle to the bitter cold air. He understood the need to move with haste, but that haste jostled his stretcher enough to make it more than a little uncomfortable. He could see only what was above them. It was a brilliant bluish grey color. He could tell that there was a sun out there, somewhere.

He remembered the glimpse of whatever he'd seen, if he had actually seen it. His memory seemed to be fading. He wasn't even sure if it was reliable at this point.

Jack was cold, so incredibly cold. His half-Vulcan heritage meant he wasn't built for this kind of climate. Why couldn't they have crash landed in a nice, hot desert? Why did he always end up in places like this.

Covaar did what he could to get himself prepared for the extreme cold outside. His people settled on arid planets, rather than icy planets, but, his people were adaptable nomads. He would be able to hold his own out there. His people were not used to comfort.

"Commander, Lieutenant Nadacic is on that ridge." Dante said as she caught sight of him. "The settlement is just beyond."

"Ok, keep moving!" Mel motioned everyone forward. The sooner they got to shelter, the sooner they could take stock of everyone's injuries once again, and hopefully contact the *Discovery*. They could, hopefully, send the injured back to the ship and get back to finding out what happened to the missing scientists.

Lina decided that she would need to work more on her arm strength once she got back to the ship. Bell was not much of a burden at first, but as they moved forward the constant tug on her became tiresome. She wanted to drop him even less than having her hands freeze off; which was also a possibility.

Bell felt like a passenger, not really involved in what was happening. In the distance, the ice pillars seemed to be appearing more frequently. He adjusted his gaze to better inspect them. They now seemed less like natural formations of solid ice jutting up out of the

surface of the planet and more like towering statues at least 15 meters in height. He wondered them to be natural or the product of someone's imagination and labor. It appeared to have more of a biological structure than he had thought. It appeared to be solid and smooth, two gigantic leg-like columns running up to a torso well above their heads. What would be the head of the structure was far too high above to make out any discernible detail. He focused on the 'eyes' and nearly rolled off of the stretcher when he swore he could see them staring back at him. He was fairly convinced that now he was losing his mind. He was positive he had seen those round, icy, eye-like shapings in the formation turn to follow him as he looked at them.

"Ummm....Commander?" Bell called out, not nearly loud enough to be heard through the thermal head gear worn by all members of the away team.

Jack tried to give Lina a tight reassuring smile. He had been monitoring Bell throughout the walk and he was still in good health, all things considered.

Ensign Nadacic had watched the slow progress of the away team from his vantage point. The sensor drone had adjusted it's looping flight path. Other than one of the vertical ice structures, there had been nothing of note.

The Chief Sentinel looked down on the strange, tiny creatures. He had watched the settlement of like creatures from their first arrival on Mneventhia. It became a form of entertainment for him as he would watch the little creatures venture out of their tiny city, running this way and that, using their strangely constructed tools for what purpose, was not evident to him. They seemed so fragile, barely able to withstand any exposure outside of their shelters. The Sentinel had wondered, if so adverse to the temperatures on Mneventhia, why would these tiny folk have chosen to settle here, and what was it they wanted and were trying to accomplish? Perhaps he would never know, as any contact had incited such panic in the little things, that they had abandoned their tiny city and fled, taking refuge in the mountains. Perhaps it was safer for them there, as they hid inside their shelter in the peak of Mount Cindelari, he thought to himself.

Should the Gardok find them... he shook his giant head in an attempt to rid his mind of such awful thoughts, turning his attention back to the tiny folk below. They seemed to be traveling with such haste toward the abandoned city. He couldn't help his curiosity, though, and had chosen to take a position closer than would have been advised.

Noticing Bell's agitation, Jack carefully gave the engineer a gentle pat on an uninjured arm. "You're fine."

"Is there shelter?" Mel yelled when they reached Nadacic.

Nadacic checked the position of the sensor drone overhead. "There is an outlying structure 50 metres from this ridge."

"Let's get inside and see what we can find!" She felt... foggy and her head hurt, but she didn't know why.

"Commander. Are you alright?" Nadacic wasn't sure if her grimace was pain or stress. "Once safely inside the structure, we can warm it. You might be feeling a tension headache from the frigid temperatures and dry air. The structure is linked to the larger colony by a tunnel. It is important to keep moving. The kinetic energy expelled will help in keeping you warm."

Nadacic moved alongside Lieutenant Dante as the away team crested the ridge. His scout role had been superseded by three security officers serving as vanguard. "Looks like a concussion. The commander is holding her head and ignoring my question about it."

"Thanks, Ensign." Said Dante.

"Myself and a member of the security detail can search the rest of the settlement in the meantime." Nadacic was built for this weather; he didn't need to huddle in the structure. It would be a mutually beneficial pairing: the non-Andorian would be the proverbial canary in the coal mine—they would succumb to the cold far faster than he would—and he would have time to get them both to shelter because of his natural resistance to the cold.

As they reached the settlement, Lina was ready to drop Bell. Instead she stood, waiting for further orders. Damn, the engineer gained at least 23 kilograms since they started the trip. She should have just let him freeze in the shuttle. She looked down to see him still looking up ponderously. “What’s wrong?” she asked.

Bell hesitated before responding to her question, hoping to find favor with at least one person. “I don’t think we’re alone, lieutenant” he said plainly.

Lina took note of what was around them. Was there something they were missing? She looked back to Bell. “I’ll help keep an eye out,” she reassured him.

Nadacic glanced at the sensor drone’s readouts. “The entrance is on the far side. It’s the leeward side from the prevailing winds.” Similar structures had been built by arctic peoples on Earth and Andor.

The team wasted no time occupying the structure. It wasn’t warm, but it wasn’t nearly as cold. Jack slumped down against a wall, rubbing his hands together.

The XO was pleased to be out of the elements. “Let’s get to the control center. Stay together.”

Lt. Dante moved cautiously along the wall of the tunnel, manipulated the manual door handle and pushed. Leading with her phaser, she swept through the room. It was modestly furnished with a table with four chairs and a couple work stations. “This looks like a good base of operations. We might be able to keep warm in here too.”

Mel longed to take off the environmental gear and sit next to a warm fire. She looked at the dead control panels in vain. “Can we bring them up?”

The Kazon nodded. “There is a good chance that we might be dealing mostly with a power issue. I can’t imagine that it would take too long to get that resolved.” He set to work.

Mel turned to Jack. “How are you doing, doctor?”

“Cold.” Jack said, but at least his speech wasn’t slow and slurred anymore.

“Understandable,” Mel said with a half-smile. “I think you speak for us all. How about the engineer? Do you think Bell is fit enough to help us out?”

Jack fumbled with the medical tricorder, his hands feeling stiff and clumsy. “Bell shouldn’t lift, but he should be okay to work to a limited extent.” Jack scanned the group. “I’m still hypothermic, but improving. I think...”

“First priority is to get up communications; and environmental control if we can. We need to tell Discovery that we’re here.” The XO turned to Bell. “We’re going to need your help. Are you up for getting up and moving?”

The engineer perked up at the request. Until now, he’d felt to be a burden to the entire team and he was sure they had felt the same. He wasn’t entirely certain he would physically be able to do what was needed, but he wasn’t going to admit that to anyone, least of all himself. “Yes, ma’am. As long as the doctor can keep my pain at bay, I’ll give ya what ya need” he replied.

Jack squinted at the tricorder and waved it some more in Dante’s general direction. “Dante has a mild concussion.” Jack meant to replace the medical tricorder, but it fell out of his hands. Jack groaned, feeling embarrassed and still so very cold.

“Take two of your team and do another slow sweep of the entry. Turn over every rock if you have to,” she said to Dante. “I want to make sure that we’re not interrupted by visitors, and I want you to search for clues to where the scientists have gone.”

Dante was frustrated by the redirection from a deeper exploration of the facility to door guard, but Commander Katt was in charge and she would follow her orders without question. “Yes, sir. Whatever you say.”

“Bell was saying that he thought we might be under some sort of watch or surveillance. Maybe the scientists are nearby,” Lina volunteered.

“Dante will find them,” Mel said, not very hopeful. A lot of the crew seemed to feel uneasy, but that was explained well enough just by their current situation. If Dante found the scientists, they could at least tell them where the ‘on’ switch was for their damn machines.

Bell practically rolled off of the makeshift stretcher onto the ground. It felt cold. He was happy to have the walls shielding them from the winds, though.

Nadacic entered the room.

“Good news to report?” she asked.

“Good is a relative term, commander. A large open area to the north may have been a staging area. There is a lot of rubbish around the periphery.” Nadacic pulled up an aerial image on his padd. “I cannot determine if the colonists purposely abandoned the settlement, whether it was a frenzied escape or whether a group from outside the settlement was involved.”

Chapter Twenty-One

If it were the first time Ya Jung-Sook stepped on the bridge, it did appear as so. She stepped off the turbolift with a covered tray in her hands. The enticing smell of Beef and Guinness Stew filled the room. “Is Captain MacLaren in the ready room?” Jung-Sook asked.

Lieutenant Brull, standing behind the Tactical console, nodded an affirmation. He watched the woman for a moment before going back to his console.

Jung-Sook rang the chime to the Captain’s Ready Room.

“Enter.” called MacLaren.

Jung-Sook entered silently and placed the tray on his table. Taking off the lid revealed that the Beef and Guinness Stew was loaded on a pile of mashed potatoes. She looked decidedly pleased with herself.

“Mrs. Ya.” said the Captain, a bit surprised. After all, he had had little opportunity to visit the luxurious, new lounge known traditionally as Ten Forward. “To what do I owe this pleasure?” he asked.

“Even a captain must eat, sir, and since I have learned that you have worked for the last eight hours straight... well, if you aren’t going to leave to eat, your meal must come to you.” Jung-Sook said.

Liam looked down at the tray in front of him, the aroma permeating the air delighted his senses. “That,” MacLaren said with delight, “be a smell I have not had the pleasure of in a right long while”. He pulled the tray closer, examining the dish. “How did ye manage this?” he said, looking up happily.

Jung-Sook was pleased. Before joining the ship, she had researched the crew and the culinary dishes of their respective cultures. She was confident she had at least one dish for each crewmember that would remind them of home, wherever home may be. “I just happened to have the ingredients available.”

“Well,” continued the captain, “This be a great surprise. This isn’t really necessary, ye know.” he said appreciative, “but very kind of ye all the same.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

Lieutenant Samuel Bell walked along, slightly slumped over. He had to stop every so often to catch his breath. His chest felt like it was imploding on him, but the doctor had assured him he would be just fine. He walked through the dimly lit tunnels that connected all of the structures forming a sort of chain of small habitats, some living spaces and some working environments. He knew that he was slowing the others down. "I'm not seeing anything that looks like a reactor." Bell said softly to the others. "Do you detect any sort of residual power signature that might lead us in a direction?"

"They'd have to keep them warm enough to function. That has to be a concern, right?" Lina asked, looking at the ground beneath her feet. It seemed more like a tunnel hand dug through a massive bank of snow. "Everything would be well insulated."

They moved forward through the dark and cramped hallway. It took some force, but the officers were able to budge the door, more fortified than the others, open. It was apparently not meant to be manually opened. On the other side was a Y in the tunnel. One side veered to their right, while the other continued straight on.

"Now what?" Lina asked looking at the choice before them. "You'd think they would make it easy to service this stuff." Truthfully she was now getting annoyed. Running straight at a problem phasers firing was more like it.

"This looks different." Bell said, beginning to walk to the right. "If I'm right, we're just about halfway through the settlement here. And I reckon that if I was buildin' this structure, a centrally located power reactor would make sense."

Jack grunted, his eyes slid shut and he leaned against the door.

"Come on." Lina said to the doctor. "You can take a nap when we get back to the ship. I personally want to eat a nice hot dinner on board instead of freezing my ass off down here."

Bell visually scanned the walls to identify the components in the reactor system. He traced the conduits using his index finger.

“So?” Lina asked.

Bell looked at the system before him. Slowly, it began to make sense. The configuration that ran the settlement was crude, but efficient. He was confident that once he detailed how the system was linked together, he would be able to identify the fault and *hopefully* restore it. “Well, the good news, on preliminary inspection, is that nothing appears to be burned out.”

“Damn it, Bell, we have to get this this up and running or the doctor is going to die.” Lina said, adding a few extra swear words as she crouched down in front of the doctor. “I will smack your Vulcan ass if you don’t get up.”

“Mmmmpffff?” Jack mumbled.

“OK!” exclaimed the engineer. “Nothing seems to be fried or faulty. Granted, this is a guess, but, I think if we force feed this some form of energy, we *may* be able to jump start it and get this place running again.”

“May be able to?” Lina repeated, putting emphasis on the first word. “That sounds like a lot of doubt in three letters. I don’t know how much yield it’s going to take. What did we bring with us that has an energy source? Phaser too much? Medical tri-corder?” Lina motioned to the doctor. “Armus isn’t using it for much right now.”

Jack held out his medical tricorder towards the pilot and engineer.

Bell stepped towards the doctor and retrieved the device from his hand. In a matter of seconds, the rear panel on the tricorder was opened and the engineer was poking at the internals with the small, pointed tool in his hand. “I don’t know that this’ll be enough, but certainly close.” he said. “Maybe between this and a phaser...” Taking the hand phaser from Lieutenant Patras, he began to work the same procedure on that. He was now intensely focused on the task at hand

as he fumbled with the internals of the weapon.

Lina watched as the engineer changed two objects into something completely different.

Chapter Twenty-Three

"A large open area to the north may have been a staging area. Tracks are lost within metres under blown snow." Nadacic pulled up an aerial image on his padd. "I cannot determine if the colonists purposely abandoned the settlement, whether it was a frenzied escape or whether a groups from outside the settlement was involved."

"Very good. I'll rendezvous with you in just a few minutes to back you up." The security chief said.

Nadacic stood in the open intersection waiting for Dante. He slowly took in the view. He knew there was something malevolent on the planet's surface. Something had hit the shuttle causing it to lose power and crash, something had prompted the settlers to leave their homes and it was only a matter of time before the away team would confront it. He saw a glint in the sky above him as the sensor drone circled.

Lieutenant Dante came striding across the field of snow with security officer Bevins at her side. Her parka swished against her hips as she moved. She pulled her hood back to give herself a better peripheral view.

"There are no traces of blood on the ground, no phaser nor disruptor burns on the structures." said the part-Andorian.

"But definitely a big move occurred here. This was some kind of rally point for a mass evacuation. The debris indicates that they left in a hurry or otherwise didn't care about coming back." The security chief suddenly felt odd, not precisely dizzy, but possibly imbalanced from the fogginess brought on by her concussion. She might have pushed herself too hard, too fast. "There's movement!" She declared in shock. "It's like...piles of snow are moving! Not like it was blowing, but, under locomotion!"

Nadacic frowned at the notion. Bell had babbled about the snow piles moving as well. "What would you suggest, sir?" He was willing to give his superior officer some leeway. He had encountered some very

strange situations in Starfleet and if a fellow officer believed the snow to be under some sort of intelligent control, it was a valid theory.

“We’re going out there.” Dante said, realizing that it was going to be quite the hike.

“Yes, sir.” Nadacic directed the sensor drone northwards. “It’s ability to scan through the rocky surface is limited. It looks like magnesite deposits. The ground-penetrating scanners are scattering.” Nadacic tinkered with the settings. The scattering effect lessened when the scan hit open air within the rock. “There do appear to be cave structures.”

“We need to find some kind of transportation in these structures.” Dante said. “We’ll never make it, walking. Bevins!”

“Sir?” The startled officer responded.

“Check every structure for a vehicle of some sort. We’re moving that way.” said Dante.

“Yes, sir.” Bevins slung his weapon over his shoulder.

Chapter Twenty-Four

“Try them again.” Captain MacLaren ordered, becoming agitated at the lack of response from the away team. He knew that the possibility existed that communications would be limited to the surface, but he also assumed they would have made contact by now...somehow. The limited scans that they were able to collect of the surface showed nothing. “At what point do we send someone after them? The conditions we know to be inhospitable on the surface.”

Alenis could see this situation was wearing on the captain. “Each one of those people knows and accepts the dangers of this job.”

“Lieutenant Brull.” said the Captain, now addressing the large Klingon behind him. “Alert the shuttle bay to prepare another shuttle for departure and assemble a small team, security personnel *only*.”

“Are you going to send them right away, sir?” Alenis asked.

The Captain sat in silence, knowing he was probably being paranoid. He couldn’t help but think the away team was in jeopardy and needed assistance. “Lieutenant Brull, ye have the bridge.”

The Klingon remained serious.

“I guess this is just particularly tough given the people down there.”

“Yes. The Captain has chosen Lieutenant Patras as his mate, though she, too, is bound by duty. He understands this.”

“What about you? Do you have a mate on board?” She hoped her question would throw him. She’d been talking about relationships a lot recently.

Brull laughed. He would never admit it but he was beginning to become fond of this Bajoran. “No.” he said adamantly. “There is no one.”

“Ah.” She sat straight in her chair, “My apologies.”

“Do *not* apologize, counselor” he said with sincerity.

Chapter Twenty-Five

The snow field spread before Dante and Nadacic as they walked along the trail which led from the staging area into the snow dunes in the distance. There was no way that they could have reached them by nightfall.

The sound of an engine started low behind them. Bevins, racing up on a snowmobile, goggles lowered, phaser rifle slung over his shoulder, wore a big smile as though he were having the time of his life. He pulled up near the two. "I found transportation."

"It's quite small." Nadacic frowned. It would allow good visibility for a well-aimed phaser rifle.

"It seats two." Dante noted as she looked over the seating area. "A friendly two." she amended. "We *could* take it together."

Ensign Nadacic glanced at Lieutenant Dante in a thick thermal coat and pants and decided there was little danger of sexual innuendo.

Realizing that he had just been bounced from the mission due to seating accommodations, Bevins looked sick. He'd had fun piloting the snowmobile. ~I should have kept this for myself.~ he thought. Bevins stepped out of the canopied enclosure and looked back at the contours of the snowmobile. "It's a sweet ride." he said to Nadacic.

"It'll do." Nadacic surveyed the horizon and after his time on the surface, there was still no movement, no indication of danger. "There is quite a distance to cover to reach the caves."

Dante turned so that her commbadge was out of the wind. =/\=Dante to Commander Katt. Ensign Nadacic and I have looked over a series of tracks leading off into the distance and we also have a snow vehicle large enough to transport two. I'd like to investigate further out and see if we can figure out where the people from the settlement went, and why. =/\=

=/\=Keep regular check-ins. I don't want us to lose touch. =/\=

"Will do commander. We'll report in every two hours. Thank you, sir." Dante replied dutifully.

The snowplain had given way to small dunes strewn with rocky outcroppings. Dante turned the snowmobile into a clear path on the left, following the line of tracks that had led away from the settlement. She could feel the pressure of Nadacic against her back. Even with the thick clothing that both wore, he felt firm, his muscles tense. "Enjoying the ride?"

"Well enough." Nadacic had poor visibility from his seat.

"It shouldn't be much further." Her eyes scanned ahead. "Hopefully just over that rise. What does your drone say?"

"All clear." The drone had been flying circles between their position and the caves. Nadacic sensed the temperature change on his scalp. He lacked the antennae of a full-blooded Andorian but he retained some of the physical adaptations on the crown of his head. "The temperature is dropping."

"Then we'd better push it." Dante replied. "We may have to use the old tried and true 'heating the rocks with phasers' trick and stay on site." Dante pushed forward on the throttle. With the rough terrain beneath the snow, it made for a bumpy ride. "I don't want to give up the trail. It just might blow over tonight and we'd lose it all."

Nadacic lost the steady ping of the drone. He glanced upward and could see it out of the corner of his eye still circling overhead. "I'm losing the drone's signal. Perhaps the colonists chose these rock formations for a reason other than shelter."

An outcropping came into view almost too late. Dante swung the snowmobile away from the obstacle in its path. She shifted her weight to keep upright and stable. She felt Nadacic do the same. Seconds later, she pulled back onto the same trajectory. "Sorry."

"There's something entering the atmosphere." Nadacic looked upwards. The drone continued to circle but his attention was fixed to

the streak of fire in the sky.

With the snowmobile sitting sideways to their direction of travel, Danica first looked at Nadacic to see where he was looking. Once she had done so, she followed his line of sight into the sky. “Do you think it’s another shuttle from Discovery?” She asked squinting against the bright, yet lowering, sun.

“Could be. It’s heading in the direction of the settlement. Bell must have contacted the ship.”

“Well, if it is another shuttle, I’d say it’s in as bad a shape as we were... or worse.” She pulled open her parka and tapped her commbadge, keeping the neck open so that she could speak without her voice sounding muffled. “Lieutenant Dante to Commander Katt.”

“Go ahead,” Mel said, tapping her own badge, eager to hear news of how things were progressing outside. Bell’s news about the power was good, now hopefully Nadacic and Dante had good news to share as well.

“Commander, Ensign Nadacic and I have seen an object coming into the atmosphere. It’s approaching the settlement from the northwest, at a high angle of descent.”

Mel frowned. It couldn’t be from Discovery—the team had not been away long enough to warrant a search party, even when there was no communication. MacLaren wouldn’t send a shuttle down so soon after the first without more information. It could be a coincidence, but she did not like coincidences.

Realizing that Dante was expecting an answer she continued. “Is there anything else?”

“Yes Commander, there is more, thank you.” Dante responded.

“I think we’re getting close to the colonists, but, I’m not entirely certain we can get confirmation with the remaining daylight. I’d like

permission to seek shelter in some nearby caves so we can resume in the morning. If we turn back now, we'll have to start all over."

"Granted" Mel said without hesitation, but inside her insides twisted. There could be unexpected company coming and her security team was far away. "Keep regular check-ins. I don't want us to lose touch." Damn. Enough with pacing the floor to keep warm.

"Will do Commander." Lieutenant Dante replied dutifully. She looked over at Nadacic. "Alright, we're about to do some sub-zero camping. Let's find a good spot to bunk down for the night."

Nadacic nodded and scanned the nearby caves with his tricorder. "There are a number of shallow caves. If we have the time, we should find something better sheltered.

Dante lost her concentration. She caught a glimpse of something in the sky over his right shoulder. The thing looked much the way that a cloaked vessel might appear on a viewscreen. Ephemeral.

"You stated seeing something unusual earlier." said Nadacic.

"This was different. It was, I don't know. It was just weird." Dante stopped trying to make words explain the unexplainable.

With sunset approaching and the lieutenant beginning to exhibit hallucinations, shelter was critical. "There is a shallow cave on the leeward side of this rise. We can place the vehicle across it's opening and tent it."

"Sounds like a good idea." Dante said, as she headed in the direction of the indicated cave. The drone's data had come in handy to find them shelter, if not in finding the colonists. "In the morning, we'll pick up the trail and find the colonists."

"We have field rations for three days and ice with minimal mineral content and no harmful organisms." Nadacic was hesitant to crack the seal on his suit to eat a meal.

Danica suggested they take a meal once she heated up some of the rocks within the cave.

“I can take first watch, sir.” Nadacic was going to have a restless night maintaining vigilance even in sleep. He would have to maintain a wakefulness to ensure his own safety and that of his superior officer.

Dante looked at Nadacic closely, trying to determine what was bothering him, because not knowing was bothering her. Suddenly it hit her. “You think I’m at risk because of my concussion, don’t you Nadacic?”

“With all due deference, I am the more fit, sir.” Nadacic stood a little straighter.

“Well, you can squelch that right now, mister.” The lieutenant stated in a tone that could have been an order. “I’ve done well out there, and you can’t say I haven’t. Further, I did see something in the sky! Something more than the fireball. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t treat me like some kind of nutcase.” She began opening her own package of field rations and turned her back to him slightly. She may have been an officer, but she was also a woman, and the implication that she was at less than her best stung, whether she wanted to admit it or not.

Nadacic admitted to himself that she successfully navigated the terrain to this point. The chief of security had not reached her breaking point and Nadacic preferred to keep her from it. He did not need the burden. “Any injury you sustained, sir, is incumbent on me to compensate for.”

“Stop treating me like I’m a burden! Damn, Nadacic!”

“We must alternate watch.” Nadacic stood facing her squarely. He would not turn his back on an officer. “I volunteer for first watch so that you may recuperate for your own turn at watch.”

“Fine.” Dante said both conceding and condescending at the same time.

The cave suddenly began shaking vigorously. A cacophony of noise erupted—rock scraping on rock. Dante tumbled onto the cave floor by the violent quaking and instability brought on by a combination of her head trauma and the noise. “What’s going on?!” she cried.

Nadacic pulled his phaser rifle from its sling and into his hands as Dante was speaking. Satisfied that it was not an imminent attack, Nadacic flipped open a tricorder with his off-hand. “It doesn’t seem to be an earthquake. There is no seismology beneath the ice sheet. It’s very localized.”

Outside on a nearby rock face, three pillars broke away, but rather than sliding to the surface and spewing snow and other debris into the air, THEY...STOOD UP.

Nadacic believed Dante now. “There are no tractor beams. No energy signatures. I’m not reading any life signs. I don’t know what I’m looking at.”

“Come on. We need to see this.” The security chief pushed away the snowmobile that blocked the entrance. She stepped outside in time to see the three immense, monolithic figures move away into the distance. With their long strides they were barely identifiable, but were definitely humanoid in shape, having arms, legs, torso and head, typically arranged.

Nadacic decided his phaser rifle was useless against this threat. The pillars moved away from the two Starfleet personnel. “Where are they going?”

“Beats me.” Dante answered, still stunned at what she’d just witnessed.

“I don’t know if there’s a way to determine whether they’re headed to the settlement or the second ship from *Discovery*.” Nadacic followed the pillars of snow with the drone.

“Nadacic! I’ve got a reading on the colonists!”

“Whatever those figures were, they must have been masking or

shielding the life signs of the colonists.” Nadacic watched the monolithic figures of snow and ice moving quickly over the terrain in the direction of the second ship that passed overhead.

The security chief stepped up next to Nadacic, her tricorder indicating the mouth of a very large cave system. “There are *dozens* of life signs emanating from those caverns.”

=/\=Nadacic to Katt.=/\=

=/\=Go ahead away team=/\= Mel said, sounding a bit wary.

=/\=Commander. Large alien life forms are moving towards the settlement.=/\=

=/\=Are they hostile or friendly?=/\=

=/\=They did not engage Lieutenant Dante and I. I can only speculate at their intentions.=/\= Nadacic saw the tops of the figures disappear out of view. They would cover the distance in scores of minutes what had taken the security chief and himself had taken hours to cover.
=/\=Lieutenant Dante has detected life signs that may be the colonists.=/\=

The switch between the two sets of news reports was shocking. Mel’s brain took a few beats to catch up. =/\=Good job, that’s excellent news.=/\=

“We’re going to check this out.” Dante said. It wasn’t a question. She had said it with so much determination that there was no room to question it.

=/\=Get to the colonists and report back. We will need their help in getting their systems up and running. We need to have Discovery apprised of our current situation, especially if we have unknown players in the game. =/\=

=/\=Will do, Commander. Out.=/\= Nadacic turned to Dante. “I can’t determine whether the figures are sentient themselves or some sort of construct under remote control.”

“That’s not our priority right now.” Dante said, with authority. “We came here to find out what happened to the colonists, so let’s get do that.” She raised a hand to ward off an objection. “We need to trust in the ability of our crewmates. We’re too far away to do them any good anyway.”

“Without a clear scan of those figures, I can’t confirm whether there are more of them hidden amongst the terrain. They blended perfectly with their surroundings.”

“I know.” Dante admitted. “We’ll just have to be very, very careful.”

Chapter Twenty-Six

Captain MacLaren was at risk of being irrational. Something was not right on the surface of Mneventhia. The away team would have and should have found a way to contact Discovery by now. Sensors were unreliable, so they weren't even certain if the shuttle had landed safely or not.

His hand slapped his commbadge. "MacLaren to McCarris."

Jet was sitting in his quarters. "Yes Captain?"

"Jet, I need ye to meet me in Cargo Bay 1 in 10 minutes. Got that, lad?" he said, the end of his statement spoken with emphasis.

"Yes sir, I'm on my way". Cargo Bay 1 was where the Time Sphere was located. That would be the only reason he was being summoned there.

The Time Sphere was being monitored by a few science officers.

"At ease." said MacLaren as he approached the officers. "What be the status on the investigation?"

"We're digging furiously sir, but there seems to be little progress so far, the damn thing is stonewalling us." replied Lundt, shaking his head in frustration. "We're really only able to do a passive investigation though, unless you'd like us to start getting physical with it?" He eyes twinkled mischievously. "There's what looks like an access port up on top that's practically begging is to be pried open."

"Any luck accessing the mission logs?"

"We've accessed a couple of petabytes of data but it's heavily encrypted. Bynar might be able to crack the cipher in a month or two but we don't have processing power." replied Lundt.

"I see." responded the Captain. "If I'm not mistaken, ensign, you're going to be entering the duty rotation on the bridge?" he asked.

“Yessir!” replied Lundt, practically twitching with excitement at the thought. “Passed the qualifications last week for Helm.”

“Excellent. I think that babysitting an inactive craft be a waste of anyone’s abilities. Why don’t ye head up to the bridge now. Lieutenant Maradok is about to go on lunch. You man the conn while he’s on break. A little extra time on the bridge would be to your advantage. Sound good?” he asked.

“Logging more hours is always a good idea, sir” he replied, waving over one of the science team to take over.

“Thank you sir.”

MacLaren watched the man walk out of the Cargo Bay. He turned to the science officer at the station. “Dismissed” he said in a tone that would not be mistaken. Almost on cue, another body entered the room.

“You wanted to see me sir?” Jet asked with that little bit of nervousness in his voice.

“How are ye, Jet?”

“Well my memory is still mostly gone. But I’m holding up. Did you have something for me?” Jet hoped that he could finally do something, the sitting alone in his quarters doing nothing was not his style.

“I have a favor to ask of ye, son. Ye have the opportunity to say no, and I won’t hold it against ye. Understand?” he said in complete seriousness. “Thing be, we haven’t heard from our away team in... too long” he admitted. “Regulation tells me, given the circumstances, we wait to send anyone else into a potentially hazardous situation. This doesn’t set well with me. Something isn’t right down there. And if sending another shuttle would have the same result...” he didn’t bother finishing his statement.

Jet nodded. “So what are you saying?”

“What I be saying, Jet, is this craft be from the future, right?” asked MacLaren.

“That’s right. At least, as far as I can remember.” Jet had the slightest feeling he was going to be asked something crazy here. “You want me to go down to the planet, don’t you?” Jet held it back, but this prospect excited him greatly.

“You’re not under my command, Jet. I can’t order ye to do this. I’m not even sure I can *ask* ye to.” he admitted. “So, this be completely your decision, lad.”

Jet didn’t even hesitate for a second. “Sir, I’ve been alone and bored for the last couple days. What do you need me to do?”

“Get eyes on the away team. Think ye remember how to fly this thing?” he asked.

Jet felt that nervousness strike him again, and this time, it was a lot stronger than before. He knew that it was showing on his face. “I remember. But I’m just not sure how I’ll be able to handle it. The last time I entered that thing, I had my memories.”

“It’s okay, lad.” responded the captain.

Jet shook his head. “No sir, I want to do this. I *have* to. There’s something inside of my head telling me that whoever I was before, I was the kind of person that wouldn’t hesitate to pull off a mission like this. I need to do this captain.”

MacLaren smiled and put a firm hand on the man’s shoulder. “I had a feeling you’d say something like that” he said, handing the man a PADD. “These are the coordinates the shuttle used. Once they left Discovery, there is very little sensor data to verify their trajectory. Follow their course, and see what ye can find.”

“It’ll be a piece of cake Cap.” Jet spoke with enthusiasm.

The captain walked to the locker and retrieved the case of pattern enhancers. “It be cold down there, from what I hear, Jet. Ye may need this thermal suit. I don’t want ye taking any unnecessary risks, though. If ye get down there and there’s no sign of them, get back to Discovery.” he said, contemplative.

Jet nodded and took the cases. “Hopefully I can find the team and get out of there quickly. Don’t worry. They’ll be home before you know it.”

The captain couldn’t help but admire the craft and its design. He wished he was the one going.

Jet looked over to the Sphere, nervous of it. He wasn’t going to allow himself to fear his own ship. He walked up to the ship and got inside the open cockpit.

MacLaren moved to the side of the Sphere. “Good luck, lad” he said with sincerity. “And thank ye.”

“You’re welcome, and captain, thank you for trusting me and believing in me. In all this darkness, it’s nice to know I have a light of trust to follow.”

“Well, here goes... something.” He pushed the throttle forward and the ship moved out of the cargo bay and into space. The ship moved incredibly fast. Jet figured it was already at full impulse.

“Scan for any ion signatures consistent with a small craft please?”

The computer displayed a course from a shuttle heading down to the planet.

“That’s our team. Ok, let’s do this.” Jet turned the ship to follow the course of the shuttle.

Gardok wrapped itself at a safe distance from the cylindrical power source in the expansive darkness. The planet had been the only refuge known to Gardok for much time. It would accustom to the bright, hot power.

A small piece of the ship detached with a heat that was unlike those Gardok had consumed during its existence. The planet was a warm red, the cylinder he encircled a hot blue and the small ship a blazing, hot green. Gardok's maw opened with a craving that it had never known. It loosened his grip on the hot cylinder within the ship.

The Sphere entered the atmosphere on a steep re-entry. On the inside, it was a roller coaster. On the outside, the vessel looked like a giant fireball flying through the sky.

Gardok set off in chase of the blazing green light, the black coldness surrounding it.

Jet caught an alarm on a console. "What's going on here?" He looked up to see a large creature in hot pursuit of the Time Sphere. "Oh... my... god. The Gardok."

A magnificent trail of fire descended to the planet. The Sentinels on duty watched it with awe. They had been tasked with observing the newcomers. What the sky-flame brought with it was uncertain, but Krehln was convinced it would be of no good fortune. "We must warn Glarr."

"We must go to meet this phenomenon. May the Kaer-wind be merciful." he said.

The Sentinels traveled swiftly across the frozen plain. For creatures of such great height, their movements were swift and smooth; elegant.

"SENTINELS! OBSCURE!" ordered Krehln.

Without hesitation, the other Sentinels dropped to the ground and lay prone and motionless.

At such a velocity, Gardok had sacrificed all maneuverability. It had fallen into its own trap. The creatures of this planet appeared as deep, cold cyan standing out against the silhouette of the setting star. Trapped within the planet, Gardok could consume only enough to live. The deep cyan creatures had trapped Gardok when the ship it

inhabited lost control and collided with the planet's surface; all of its heat was released at once. Gardok was trapped. As Gardok consumed the planet's heat it became a smaller prison for itself and colder for the creatures that thrived on cold.

The flaming object was of no consequence now, for along with it came the destructive and viscous greed-devil that Glarr had banished so long ago. The Sentinels lay still and silent, watching both the flame and the creature crash to the ground

Gardok examined the ship. The pinpoint source of its heat pulsed. It remained intact. Gardok could not detect the deep cyan creatures.

Krehln watched the little creature exit the strange craft. This was different to him than the one that had brought the other creatures to Mneventhia.

Gardok felt the blazing, hot core of the ship. It had not gone cold like the heat on the surface of planet. That heat, once consumed, caused the small beings on the surface of the planet to scurry in search of other heat. Gardok consumed the core of the planet itself and felt the cold, dead iron sink deeper.

The beast seemed agitated, fixated on the spherical craft and its power. The Sentinel began to fear for the little creature for he was still close to the beast and its fury. The others had sought refuge but Krehln feared the little one would not make it.

The Sentinels made no attempt to conceal their approach. The stealth by which Krehln observed was for naught. "Why have you come?" asked Krehln of the others.

"We witnessed the descent of the beast." responded one.

"Will we not guard from its wrath yet again?" the other asked.

Krehln looked back at the Sphere and the slithering beast that rapidly circled it. "We will." he said with conviction. "You have left the mountain ones unguarded."

“My brothers.” said Glarr, his voice commanding the attention of all. “Our world needs it’s protectors, as do it’s visitors. Brandish your weapons, Sentinels! May the Kaer-Wind be at our backs! FOR MNEVENTHIA AND FOR WAR!” he shouted, his glistening sword held high above his head.

The band of Sentinels began to cheer a deafening, thunderous sound as they beat the ground with their weapons. Their cries filled the air as Sentinels began to appear from all corners of the plain. They flowed in as many rivers converging and becoming one. As far as the eye could see, the enormous, frozen creatures answered the chant of Glarr and his band. The cries grew in number and in strength until all were united and all were prepared.

Glarr stooped down seeing the small creature moving from the craft. He could not imagine how frightened and confused he must have been at this display. He bowed down on all fours, his massive head nearing the small creature. “You must leave this place, my small friend. It is not safe here for you. I can show you where to find your friends.”

Jet was shocked at what he was seeing. “Uh, yeah, I’d appreciate it.”

“You must travel to the mountains.” responded Glarr, pointing a giant, icy finger in the direction where the Sentinels that had formed the door of the cave. “There you will find your friends that arrived many darkneses ago. They have sought refuge in the depths of the tallest peak. You must go to them. Make haste my small friend. We must make war with this foul beast whilst you prepare your people. We have battled his kind before and been victorious.” explained the Sentinel. His memories flooded back to the sheer terror and difficulty his people had faced when the Gardok had first arrived.

Jet nodded. “Don’t worry about me.” He adjusted the straps that kept the transporter enhancers on his back. “Keep my ship safe, will ya?”

“As you wish, small traveler.” he said softly. “Now go. You will want to be far from here.”

Jet smirked and began running towards the mountains.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The thoughts that bounced around the inside of the captain's mind were far too loud to ignore at this point. The team was still silent on the frozen planet below. Lina was one of them. He knew his personal feelings were affecting his judgment. This was precisely why fraternization was discouraged where the commanding officer of a Starfleet vessel was concerned. The difference now was that the unsanctioned mission he had just sent a civilian on was one hundred percent due to the nature of his relationship with the pilot that had flown the team to Mneventhia. He was not regretful for so doing, but he was ashamed that he had let his feelings drive his judgment.

Lieutenant Brull looked up from the seat and, upon seeing the captain, vacated the chair. "Captain."

"Status?" MacLaren questioned.

"No change, captain" responded Lieutenant Brull.

"Sir?" Lundt asked, looking over his shoulder, confusion clearly showing on his face. "The sphere has gone from the cargo bay! Sensors are showing it on a heading towards surface."

"Thank ye, ensign." he said to the ops officer. "I be aware. Continue routine scans."

"Umm, aye sir, routine scans" he replied, perplexed.

Alenis leaned in confidentially, "Are you sure McCarris is up to this?" She wasn't sure the broken man she'd spoken to just days earlier was fit for this job.

"The decision was his. He's not a part of this crew and I couldn't order him to do anything. That also releases him from obligation that we be bound by." he explained. "His craft be more suited to the environment and the best choice for a follow up mission. Plus, he's lost, away from a home he'll never see again with no one and nothing to motivate him. He needed something to make him feel useful." The Captain knew that

the counselor's concerns were valid.

"He appears to be following the shuttle's course. Projections are that he'll land proximate to them." reported Lundt. "What the? The Sphere is making what looks like evasive maneuvers and there's a single, large lifesign on an intercept course. It just appeared out of nowhere!"

"Lifesign? What kind of lifesign?" asked the captain, on the edge of his seat.

"Dammed if I know, sir. There is a physical presence but I don't think it's entirely corporeal."

The counselor felt the blood drain from her face and a shiver shoot down her spine.

"Sphere is down." reported Lundt.

"And the lifeform?" asked MacLaren.

"There's too much interference in the atmosphere to obtain a detailed scan. The Sphere is most definitely on the surface." said the lieutenant.

MacLaren knew that there was little that could be done short of sending yet *another* shuttle to the surface. McCarris was down there at his own urging.

Kala felt like her heart was in her throat.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

It didn't take long for the snowmobile to reach the opening to the cave system that seemed to contain dozens of life signs.

What could not be missed were a number of larger-than-life footsteps originating at the cave mouth. "We don't have any reliable information on what those moving mountains of snow and ice were." Nadacic realized that there was a hint of weakness in his voice. It wasn't intentional and he didn't know where it originated from.

"Whatever they are; they're not here now. I think we should risk going inside." She raised her tricorder and passed it over the entranceway. There's a wider cavern 25 meters in, just past a series of branching passageways. Still wide enough for small vehicles to navigate."

"If you utilize the commandeered vehicle to progress into the cave system, I'll stay on foot." Nadacic had been on the vehicle long enough.

"Yea, we can do that." Dante said thoughtfully. A noise, as of someone approaching, broke through the quiet moment. Fearing that it could be one of the monolithic figures that she'd scanned earlier, she raised her weapon.

As he rounded the corner, Jet noticed two individuals pointing phasers directly at him. Jet instantly stopped walking and raised his hands. These individuals were also the ones he was looking for.

Dante recognized him immediately and lowered her weapon. "How did you get here?"

Jet chuckled. "Well, ol' Captain MacLaren asked me to come here to rescue you all. But I could have sworn that he said there were more than just two of you."

"The rest of the away team is at the settlement." The security chief explained as she replaced her phaser into the pocket on the outside of her own thermal gear. "We came out here to follow a lead."

~Just what we need.~ Dante thought. Having McCarris down here and actively participating in ship's business was a risk to the whole mission. "You used the Time Sphere to come after us." She surmised. But, there was a note of accusation in it as well.

"Well it's not like I was going to come down here without a means of getting you all back. The plan was to use these." He took the pack of transporter enhancers off his back and placed them in front of his feet. "You *do* want to get out of here, right?"

"We do." Dante replied, but there was still an icy tone in her voice; the perfect complement to the environment that the trio found themselves in. "However, there's far more going on here than we realized." She swung her arm until it was pointed in line with the cave entrance. "The people in there might be able to explain it. We need to get to them so we can find out exactly what's going on and render assistance."

Jet was excited by the prospect of a good search and rescue.

"The lieutenant will proceed in the vehicle. I will follow on foot. Do you have a preference?" The Andorian tactical officer preferred to move on-foot alone. Careful movement, observation and covering fire were the three principles that he could expect of Starfleet personnel. The man from the future would slow Nadacic down.

Jet took a second to think this one through. "I'll go with you if you don't mind."

"Very well then." Nadacic was going to take the time traveller's confidence at face value. Nadacic shifted his phaser rifle and relaxed his stance. He pulled off his toque. Despite his natural ability to resist cold, he wore a tight-fitting toque, a cap. Once on the move, there was no need to preserve extra body heat. "Lead the way, Lieutenant."

The engine made a soft purring sound. The rear tracks dug in and kicked snow out behind the snowmobile. She steered it towards the cave mouth, disappearing from the view of Nadacic and McCarris.

Nadacic began at a jog. "I have a strong signal from Lieutenant Dante."

Jet jogged along behind him.

It only took a few minutes for Dante to come to the large interior chamber. She had noticed some discrepancy from the tricorder readings, probably due to compounds with in the walls. She dismounted the snowmobile and proceeded the rest of the way on foot, with her phaser drawn, just in case. The last few meters were a series of swtichbacks, leaving the grand hall out of eyesight, though she could here sounds coming from within. She inched to the very edge of the last cave wall. She looked around carefully, trying not to be seen.

Nuk'ol sat near the central heat source in the common area of what had become the new home for him and his people. It had taken them several weeks to expand the cave that was nestled deep into the mountain. They had been able to pack themselves in and begin work on the power generator to make their habitation more of an existence and less of a survival. A figure came through the small opening that lead from the top of the long stairway. The man seemed out of breath and frantic. Nuk'ol quickly stood and and ran to the man, grabbed him by the shoulders and guided him to a seat. "It's ok." he said assuredly. "Tell me what the matter is."

The man's breathing began to slow to where he could start to utter actual words. "The entrance." he began. "It has been opened."

"The creatures?" asked Nuk'ol.

"They have gone, seemingly in a hurry. The door is open." said the man, looking up at Nuk'ol.

"I see. We should tell my brother of this."

"That is not all." said the man in continuation. "We are not alone. Three men have just entered the base. They will soon find the stairway which will lead them here."

Nuk'ol stood up, his expression serious. "Double the guard. I will go to Mul'Nar and bring him here. He will determine the course of action. Hurry!" Nuk'ol said, running off in the direction of Mul'Nar's makeshift

office.

The guard quickly ran off to round up another set of guards to take to the mouth of the stairway. He knew there was little time before these men would find their way to them. He hoped that Nuk'ol would bring Mul'Nar quickly. He was the best at handling these situations.

The guards took their positions and readied their weapons unsteadily. They were scientists, not warriors. They were unprepared for a fight, but were willing to defend themselves and their settlement if such would be required.

Dante saw the preparations and realized she was going to have to take action. She tapped her comm badge. "Dante to Nadacic. Where are you?"

"McCarris and I are a few minutes aback. Anything of note to your position?" asked Nadacic. His pace and breathing were steady.

"Halt!" called the lead guard nervously to the top of the stairs. "Remain where you are and identify yourself."

Nadacic heard the challenge relayed through the open comm channel. He raised his hand and signalled McCarris to stop and find cover. Dante was outside his field of view but he needed to take a bearing of his position before he closed the remaining distance.

Jet moved behind a boulder and knelt down behind it. He couldn't help but feel some excitement, but, at the same time, fear.

Nadacic was confident that Dante had encountered the advance guard of the colonists. He would be more vigilant covering the remaining distance in case Dante had been allowed to pass a first checkpoint and was now surrounded.

The lieutenant had to fight her instincts to be defensive. That would not help her here. She needed to show the colonists that she was on their side. Slowly, she raised her open hands palm outward and displayed them to the guard who had discovered her. "My name is

Lieutenant Danica Dante. I'm from the USS Discovery." she said clearly. "We have come to offer assistance to your team."

"Stay where you are." shouted the guard. The weapon was shaking from the nervousness the guard was feeling, translated through his hands. He did not want to fire on the woman, especially if they were there to help. It could be that their distress call had been heard, but he was not going to take chances that these could be raiders coming to relieve the colonists of their few essential possessions.

Dante smiled briefly. "I need to talk to your leaders right away. Can you make that happen?"

"You will speak with our lead scientist." responded the guard. "Until he arrives, you must remain where you are with your hands visible. How many have you brought with you?" he called up.

Nadacic scanned his surroundings. From the guard's challenge, he knew either he or McCarris had been detected. He started by scanning with his eyes only. He did not see any movement, no change in the colouration of his surrounds and no distortion that would indicate a cloak or camouflage. Perhaps McCarris was under observation. The man from the future was not as thoroughly trained as himself.

"Two!" Dante said, quickly. If she wanted these people to trust her she needed to come clean on all parts. "We came to help get you off this planet. If... that is your desire."

"Stand down. Stand down." called a voice echoing off the cave walls from behind the guard. Mul'Nar pushed his way through the line that defended the stairway. "Who are you and what has brought you here?" he asked.

"The name is Danica Dante, sir. Of the USS Discovery." The security chief called out, making sure that she had the man's full attention.

"We have been here for some time and seen no one. How did you come upon us?" asked the scientist. He knew that someone eventually would have discovered the distress call he'd set, but he did not want to

offer that information in regards to verifying this woman's story of what had actually brought them to this planet and to their cave hideaway.

"We responded to your distress signal. We found the settlement empty and we followed you here. We came to help. Our starship is in orbit now."

Satisfied that they were in no danger, "Please, leave your weapons and join us up here in our living space. There is much we should discuss."

"I prefer to remain here." Nadacic responded. He refrained from stating that he was unwilling to be unarmed in the presence of these colonists. They didn't appear particularly well armed nor aggressive. He would hold his position... armed.

Searching for a reasonable way to explain Nadacic's uncooperativeness, Danica leapt on the idea of the large ice creatures. "We spotted several large creatures who we must assume are native to the planet. Some were very near here. Mr. Nadacic is concerned that they will come back."

"Yes, we have seen them. They are the reason we were banished to this cave. We had to flee when they began to attack us. We were fortunate to make it here in one piece. They were so large and so violent. We had no idea that we had caused them any inconvenience until that day. Do they now fight with you and your people?" he asked, curious.

Lieutenant Dante looked concerned. "I have no idea, but they were headed in that direction. I would like to do whatever I can to make your recovery smooth and hopefully to clear off the planet before things get worse."

"Yes of course." replied Mul'Nar. He turned to Nuk'ol and spoke with him privately for a brief moment. "We will begin preparations to leave. How do you plan to evacuate us all?"

Jet raised his hand to get some attention. "We were gonna use transporter enhancers." He patted the pack on his back. Also, those

creatures that you're so afraid of, they're not a threat to you, I promise you that. They saved my life."

Mul'Nar was confused. Surely he could not be speaking of the same creatures that evicted him and his people from their settlement. "There is another creature?"

Jet nodded. "I'm afraid so. And it's the one you should be afraid of. Believe me, those are the good guys."

Dante again took the lead in the conversation. "I personally have not *met* any of these creatures, but from appearances I would say that these creatures were helping hide you.

How could the giant creatures be coming to their aid now after they had banished them before? "I don't understand!" said Mul'Nar.

Jet was confused. Those creatures saved his life. Why would they threaten the colonists? "Could you have been doing something here that they would consider some kind of violation? Mining, terraforming, anything like that?" Jet felt like he was interrogating the lead scientist but there had to be an explanation.

"No, no, no!" responded the scientist. "We have done nothing of the sort. We were unaware of the giant's existence until they were attacking us." he said, now unsure. He thought back to the spectacle they had made on that day. It was frightening. He had never in his life been so sure that he was about to meet death, and somehow, some way, they had narrowly escaped a bitter end. Ever since, they had been holed up in this cave.

Dante stepped squarely before Mul'nar. She smiled pleasantly. "Whether these creatures are on your side or not, they are out there and it would be best to get you aboard the *Discovery*."

"I suppose it matters little." replied Mul'Nar. "You can evacuate us from this place." said the scientist anxious to leave now that it seemed to be a possibility. Mul'Nar had stayed strong for his people, but, how he longed for sunshine and warmth.

“Well, I’ll need to inform our ship’s XO. She is in your settlement right now.” the security chief said.

“Our mission of scientific experimentation in this frigid climate has failed. We would like to go home. If you can make that happen for us, we will be forever indebted to you and your people.”

Dante nodded. “Gather your people together. The chief waved towards McCarris. “Mr. McCarris, please find a clear area and set the pattern enhancers.”

Jet nodded, and looked around the cave for a clear area.

“Ensign Nadacic.” Dante said turning to her companion. “These caves are still messing with our comm signals. Send your drone back to the habitat with information of our findings and our plan.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Nadacic had the drone circling overhead but there was no direct communication. He started jogging back through the cave they had entered and towards open sky. It was not convenience that the ice creatures had ushered the colonists into the cave system. Clearly there were protective traits such as inhibiting direct communication and scattering life signs.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Mel was afraid that if she stopped pacing, her body was going to freeze up on her. She'd lost track of the amount of times she walked a circle around the settlement's command room. Without removing her suit she couldn't visibly inspect the damage done to her from the crash, but she suspected that she had some wicked bruising. Each breath was becoming more difficult, but she consciously tried to take bigger breaths to keep her rib cage from wringing her lungs. Or at least that's what it felt like.

"Report." she said when the group of Patras, Bell and Armus came into sight. By this point the word was a mantra. The doctor looked about as well as she felt. Mel wondered if it was the cold or the injuries.

"Bell is working on communications, now." In a lower voice she added, "Armus isn't doing well."

Mel nodded. "Let's keep at communications. The second team is on the trail of the scientists. They are seeking shelter out in the caves."

"Hopefully we'll have things toasty warm for their return."

"Another thing," Mel said as the pilot turned, causing her stop in her tracks. "They reported something coming through the atmosphere."

"From Discovery?" Lina couldn't stop the slight lifting of her hopes. Did Liam find a way to locate them and send another shuttle down?

"It's too soon for that. We still have no idea why the shuttle crashed or why the scientists fled, but it appears that whatever it was is coming in our direction."

The engineer was staring at the controls, not doing anything. "The environmental system is initiated but it will take some time to feel the effect. I assure you that this place will feel toasty warm soon." he said, smiling as much as he could muster.

Jack didn't say anything. His eyes drifted shut.

“Doctor, stay with us. It’s going to be warm really soon. Tell me where you grew up. I like a good story.” In her head, Lina swore repeatedly. Was it warmer? How long would it take to heat the room? How long would it be until they felt heated themselves? If she was hit by enemy phaser fire, would she at least get to feel warm before it burned her up? If only she could feel her damn fingers.

“All over...” Jack muttered.

“All over what?” Lina asked, shaking her hands, trying to get blood flowing in her fingers again. “All over space?”

“All over the Caribbean. Mom moved around often.” Jack said, after a pause. “Warmer there.”

“Much warmer. I grew up in Greece. Not in the islands, but I used to spend some Summers in Santorini with my cousin. I’ve been to the Caribbean. Where did you live?”

“New Orleans, Martinique, Grenada, Cuba, Haiti...” Jack trailed off.

“New Orleans isn’t technically in the Caribbean.” Lina gave up shaking her hands and pushed her teeth together to keep them from chattering. Maybe talking about warm places wasn’t the best idea.

“Ieva liked New Orleans.” Jack said, not actually following the conversation at this point. “Took her to Mardi Gras on the holodeck.” Jack opened his eyes and looked around momentarily before closing them again.

“Wish we could’ve stayed in New Orleans. Hated Miami.” Jack muttered.

“I really have no idea what to expect. It’s not a conventional relay. It uses a satellite in orbit which is why we were able to pick up their distress call. When this place went black, for whatever reason, it was still transmitting. I can try to piggyback that transmission and get through to the ship.”

“Good, good.” Mel said, wishing that the warmth would come sooner. “How soon can we expect to have it online? I want to be able to update Discovery.”

The odds of getting another shuttle down here were slim. Bell was embarrassed that he was already thinking of leaving when they hadn’t even begun to achieve their mission goal.

“The captain will figure out a way. We just need to let him know that we’re here awaiting further orders.” Mel said.

Bell knew the commander was right. They had a job to do. Bell was the technician. His mind was always bothered with how things worked and problems that existed. “I will get to it then.”

Jack blinked slowly at Mel. His earlier ramblings had slowly faded into his own internal thoughts about his childhood in warmer climates.

Bell assessed the comm system. With a little experimentation, he was able to isolate the distress signal. A sense of hope welled up inside the engineer. It would take little effort to modify the system to transmit a signal that Discovery would easily identify. More than that, he could feel the warm air starting fill the room. Everything seemed brighter now. He did not envy Dante and Nadacic out in the cold.

“We really aren’t equipped for staying long term in such a cold environment.” Jack was saying to Mel. “In and out of the runabout, sure, but not without a warm location to stay in between bursts of outside activity.”

“It’s already a few degrees warmer in here.” Mel reassured him.

Jack shivered. “It doesn’t feel like it.” The engineer was injured, as was Dante, and he hadn’t been attending to them. He tried to get his medical tricorder out but fumbled it with his stiff hands.

Lina was amazed that she was able to catch the tricorder, though she could barely feel it with her hands. They still felt like giant mitts, despite all she’d been doing to get her blood flowing. It’s not like they

had to worry about running out of oxygen, but she still felt like she could not warm up. “Here you go, doctor. You’ll be needing this.”

“Th-Th-Thanks.” Jack said. He slowly took the tricorder from Lina and scanned the engineer as he worked. “How are y-y-you holding up, Bell?”

“Alright I suppose” said the engineer, his voice sounding strained. He sat at the satellite control interface, working as fast as his fingers would allow. The software was primitive but functional.

“He’s about fifteen minutes from becoming my personal hero, aren’t you?” Lina eyed Bell.

“We should have comm access shortly. Though, I’m not real sure how far it will extend. Hopefully the ship hasn’t wandered off since we’ve been loitering down here in paradise.”

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“Captain,” announced the rumbling voice from tactical. “I’m receiving a signal.

=/\=Discovery... Discovery... Come in. This is Bell. =/\= was now decipherable amid the static.

The captain slapped the side of the tactical console. =/\=Lieutenant, this be Discovery. Good to hear ye voice, son. =/\=

=/\=Captain!=/\= said the voice from below. =/\=I can hear you, sir, but not well. We’re runnin’ on low power down here.=/\=

=/\=Lieutenant, are ye all safe?=/\= asked MacLaren.

=/\=We’re alive. The doctor is a little worse for wear, though. It’s a bit chilly down here. Dante and Nadacic have located the colonists.=/\= reported Bell.

=/\=We’re going to get ye home, Bell. Understand?=/\=

"Aye, sir," responded the engineer. "It'll be good to get back. North Pole out."

The counselor made eye contact with MacLaren, conveying in that one look her cheerfulness and re-found serenity. She was immensely relieved to hear from them and she didn't even know them that well. She glanced around the room to see the faces of people who had just heard their friends were safe.

"Very good," replied MacLaren. "Tell transporter room we be waiting for confirmation from the surface."

"Aye, sir" responded Gerrard.

They would have the colonists and the crew onboard shortly. There were no reports of casualties and he could live with the loss of a shuttle. The stories of events on Mneventhia should prove to be quite interesting, when this was all over, he thought.

Chapter Thirty

"Nadacic to Bell." Nadacic tested the link. He was a relay between Lieutenant Dante and the drone which should have been able to reach the engineer.

"Bell here. Go ahead, Nadacic." responded the engineer.

"We have located the colonists. I'm patching you through to Lieutenant Dante, sir." Nadacic queued the engineer. "Nadacic to Dante. I have Lieutenant Bell on the channel."

"Excellent." Dante responded. "We'll be beaming the colonists directly to the Discovery from here, then we'll get the rest of us off the planet."

Bell was elated to hear the news of progress. He had visions of being stranded for days. With the colonists found and Lieutenant Dante setting up an enhanced transporter location, their primary mission would be resolved. The settlement's fusion reactor was offline and even if he could bring it online, it would take time for the settlement to be habitable. He was ready to go. The doctor would greatly benefit from a controlled medical environment. "That is mighty fine news, lieutenant. Should we expect you shortly then?"

"It's hard to say for certain, but I'm hoping to mobilize within the half hour." The security chief stated. "They'll be beamed up by then even if they *aren't* ready."

"Understood. I will inform the commander. I think it's safe to say that we're all ready to go home. We have comm access to Discovery. We're awaiting further orders." he added jovially.

"Roger that, Lieutenant. Dante out." "Mr. McCarris."

Jet was setting up the last enhancer when he looked over at the lieutenant. "Yes, lieutenant?"

The security chief waited patiently for him to finish, then she addressed him, calmly, so as not to upset him. “It’s very possible that we may need to abandon your sphere here on Mneventhia.”

“That’s not a good idea. Leaving that ship here could have very severe consequences. That ship is from another time. What could happen if that ship was to be picked up by someone passing through this star system?”

“Mr. McCarris, you would be risking your life. By your own accounting it’s right in the middle of the battle zone.”

“I just can’t leave it here. That’s not an option.” It was a little more personal as well. The vessel that was his only link to a life he’d forgotten, and may never remember again. He didn’t want to have to leave something like that behind. It was designed to make the kind of landing that it did. As daredevil-like as it seemed.

“Alright.” Dante said gruffly, aware that McCarris wasn’t about to abandon the Sphere. =/\=Dante to Discovery.=/\=

=/\=Go ahead, lieutenant.=/\= responded MacLaren.

=/\=Sir, our extraction plan is to transport the colonists, Nadacic and myself, then the remainder of the away team.=/\=

=/\=Very well, lieutenant.=/\= confirmed the captain. =/\=I don’t want you to spend any more time down there than necessary.=/\=

=/\=There’s a glitch in our extraction plan. Mr. McCarris would like an opportunity to recover the sphere.=/\= said Dante.

=/\=Jet—=/\=

=/\=If I don’t at least try to get the Sphere out of here, I’ll regret it, big time.=/\= Jet said with confidence in his voice.

=/\=Aye.=/\= said the captain. =/\=We want to have everyone off the planet and safe.=/\=

Nadacic eyed the man from the future. The gait in his step seemed tentative. A soldier stares fate down and waits for the latter the blink.

Chapter Thirty-One

“PREPARE!” Glarr shouted at the front of the mob. The mass of Sentinels raised their weapons to the ready, posturing themselves for an onslaught. There was not one that was not prepared for battle and he could sense no fear among his warriors. The Chief Sentinel stood at the forefront, raising his sword to the sky. The army now stood silent, their focus on the beast.

The war cries returned when Glarr’s giant sword fell swiftly towards the ground, signaling the start of battle. The front lines of Sentinels charged. Snow and ice splintered under their feet.

Gardok felt the ether turn cold. Gardok’s form had been the source of fear and dread amongst countless worlds. The small, terrified corporeal beings carved it’s likeness into stone.

The first blows were harmless.

Gardok coiled itself more tightly and it’s maw opened in preparation to strike. There was a deep, cold cyan in every direction. The core the planet was a warm red. These beings kept Gardok from retreating to the core of the planet.

“WAVE TWO!” ordered Glarr.

Another line of Sentinels moved forward, anchoring their weapons forming a firing line.

“FIRE!” exclaimed Glarr. A gray-blue blast emitted simultaneously from each of the anchored weapons.

Gardok sensed the prickle of cold against it’s carapace drawing away heat.

Gardok opened it’s maw and struck, phasing into normal space. Heat poured out of Gardok into the dark cyan beings.

“WAVE THREE!” shouted Glarr.

Sentinels, posed and postured with their bows, let fly their drawn arrows tipped with the same grey-blue lightning descending rapidly towards the beast.

The first wave closed on the beast's position again for a second assault. Their feet pounded and caused the ground to shake violently at their advance.

There were too many dark cyan beings. Gardok dissipated one more being and turned towards the hot red core of the planet.

A lone arrow flew from the large, glistening recurve bow held by a Sentinel perched high on a ridge above the others. It glowed a brilliant blue and sparkled with flashes of energy flashes trailed by a glowing field of light resembling an illuminated spider web. It flew with great speed and accuracy toward the serpent-like beast.

Something that had penetrated Gardok's plastron. Impossible! Gardok turned to shake the object loose. It began to glow a deep red. The frozen earth began to sublime from frozen ice to steam. Gardok would show these foolish beings that their power were a fraction that of Gardok!

"HOLD!" exclaimed Glarr.

The Sentinel leapt from his perch. He landed hard, causing a quake. He buried the end of the bow into the ground, anchoring the beam-web in place.

Gardok was preceeded by a head of steam that erupted from the surface. Gardok clamped it's maw on the beam-web. The blazing, hot green heat was Gardok's prize. It coiled more tightly.

Glarr clasped his hands together and bowed his head, uttering a solemn prayer to the Kaer-Wind. "ALL WEAPONS, ATTACK!" he called.

The Sentinels pounced forward. Their blows were swift and many. Their blades fell in constant repetition, kicking up a whirlwind of snow and ice. Their cries once rose through the air.

Gardok slipped from the universe of matter.

Jet was eager to get back to the Time Sphere. He was aware of the battle but he didn't much care as that ship was more to him than his own life. He needed to get it back.

"For what have you come? It is not safe for you here. Many of my brothers are become one with the great and mighty Kaer-Wind." Asked Glarr.

"I came back for the ship." he explained to the large creature.

Glarr was confused at this. This creature was so small, so vulnerable that it should have taken the escape. "It is important to you."

Jet nodded. "It's not something that I can part with. I wouldn't be complete without it. If that really makes sense. I'm not even sure it does to me."

"I would not deprive you of such a thing, friend." Glarr responded. "You are a strange little one." The Sentinel was reluctant to send his new friend into the fray of the battle with the ship being the focus of the great beast.

Jet's thoughts shifted to the beast, the Gardok, that had attacked him when he arrived. "The beast that you're fighting is more violent and more intent than before." He knew this had to be done, despite the risk.

The enormous Sentinel looked at Jet with compassion and understanding. He admired the conviction of this tiny one and wished that he could do more to keep him safe. "We will fight this beast with all of our combined strength and hold it while you make your escape. With the ferocity that we've seen here today, though, I do not believe we will be able to keep it indefinitely. It *will* break our binds and seek to devour your ship. I do pray that the mighty Kaer-Wind will bring you to this place again. The Sentinel bowed low.

Gardok sensed a small warm object moving quickly towards it. It was the creature that occupied the hot green ship. Its return meant it would begin emitting blazing heat again. Gardok returned to the universe of matter.

Glarr watched the gruesome beast, anchored by the icy, luminescent strands that would hold it as long as their strength would allow.

The creatures of ice and snow would not be allowed to claim the prize Gardok claimed for itself.

The intense rumbling was nearly enough to knock Jet off balance. He waived his hand as he closed in on the Time Sphere and the transparent door opened. "Time to go my friend." He stepped into the Sphere.

"Welcome back Mr. McCarris."

"We're getting outta here!"

Gardok sensed the small creature entering the ship that had remained cold since the its departure. It became an inferno of green heat. Gardok's patience was rewarded. The green heat was edged with gold and cast the cold creatures back.

The Time Sphere's engines activated and blasted off towards the sky. As it moved through the atmosphere, Jet looked back. "Computer, give me a detailed outer perimeter scan. Last time we saw that thing, we almost got sent to the netherworld."

Gardok felt the contrast of heat and the black coldness of open space.

The pressure started to build in Jet's chest and stomach. He knew that this was not a good idea. An instinct made Jet *have* to go back for the Time Sphere. Jet knew that, at this point, he was to bait the beast. There was not much more in the way of his mission, he only had to return to Discovery and his mission was complete.

Jet continued to manoeuvre in as erratic a flight path as he could come up with.

Gardok clung tighter to the small ship.

“Captain!” exclaimed the large Klingon at the tactical station. “I’m picking up the Time Sphere on sensors. It’s on a course away from Mneventhia and moving at an extreme velocity, sir.”

“Hail Mr. McCarris, lieutenant” ordered MacLaren. “McCarris!” said the captain over the comm channel. “This be Discovery, please respond.”

“Captain, this would take far too long to explain! But just trust me, I have a good plan here to defeat this creature. You just gotta trust me on this! Don’t follow me. At all costs, do *not* follow me! That creature might lose interest in the Time Sphere and go after Discovery. I need you to keep your distance!”

His vessel was a time ship. It used the Time Vortex to travel. That was the solution. The Gardok could by no means follow him in without being destroyed.

Jet activated the controls.

“Time Jump coordinates set. Stand by.”

Gardok loosened its grip. The cold blackness of space was permeating Gardok. Gardok raged.

“McCarris, what’s happening out there? Jet!” called the captain. “Brull, is he still out there? What was that?”

Jet laughed. “Sir, do I have a story to tell you.”

Chapter Thirty-Two

The first thing Mel noted when they arrived back on Discovery was the warmth. Despite Bell's best efforts to keep them from freezing to death, the cold was still bitter.

"Welcome back, commander." he said to his first officer, shooting a sideways glance at the rest, most notably the pilot that was the object of his affection.

Lina held back slightly, the last to walk off the platform. Thank the gods they were back. A half-smile tugged at her mouth and she raised an eyebrow at him, hoping to convey the message that she'd see him soon... and preferably without an audience.

"Welcome back, lad" he said, shaking Jet's hand firmly. "I'd like to get your take on what went down, but first, how are ye?" He knew there were a lot of questions and didn't want to overwhelm him, but it was important that Jet knew that his welfare was more important than the knowledge he possessed.

"Everything is fine. I'm still a little shaken up by recently being chased by a serpent space beast." Jet said.

"Perhaps ye should stop by Sickbay and get checked out. I sent every member of the team there before anything else." said Liam seriously. "You should join them. I want to thank ye for doing this. It was quite a selfless and courageous act and I very much appreciate your efforts."

Epilogue

“Another Porter.” Liam said to the Ten Forward Lounge manager. He pushed the empty glass forward to make room for the new one that was about to be set down in front of him. He turned to view the rest of the lounge where the crew was mingling with the colonists from Mneventhia. Everyone seemed to be overcoming their traumatic experiences, at least outwardly and, thanks to Ya Jung-Sook, appeared to be having a good time.

“Captain?” Ya came over with his drink, a London porter in a glass with a rich bubbly head.

“Glad ye could make it, lad.” he said, patting Jet on the back. “What ye drinking?” he asked, motioning towards Ya.

“I don’t think I’ll be having anything, sir.” He said to Captain MacLaren. “More to the fact that I don’t know what traditional drinks are around here.”

“No tradition required.” MacLaren put his hand on Jet’s shoulder. “I’m glad ye found your way to us, lad.” he said sincerely.

The time traveller looked out towards the stars to the endless void of the universe. There was adventure ahead, and he couldn’t think of a better group of people to experience it with, than the crew of the *USS Discovery*.