

PREVIOUSLY IN "UNITY UNDER FIRE":

Ambassador Skotek is missing in action and presumed dead. On Unity, Quirk and Browne are at Quirk's and Eris has been brought to the new Weyoun. On Betazed, Deltan, Borg, Klingon, Bajoran, Betazoid, and Breen have gathered to plan for re-taking the station. Tigri has had his own adventure and is on his way back to one of the two. The Cardassian was leaving station for unknown parts, the last we heard.

CHAPTER 1 Regrouping

Unity:

While in the command center, Eris is taking in the everything going on. She does so with ease as many in her station must be aware of things going on around them for survival. Luckily, she is near a monitor that normally she would not be able to see with the eyesight of most of her race, the Vorta. She sees that it shows inside Quirk's Bar. The monitor displays Quirk ending what looks like a holosuite program that Browne is in. Quirk seems to be laughing at Browne but because there is no sound, Eris cannot make out why.

Weyoun catches Eris looking at the display. "The Ferengi and Human are clueless. I just amaze myself at times," Weyoun says.

Eris looks at the title of the camera, "Holosuite 3." The monitor next to her shows the same Quirk's Bar but without anyone in it. The title of that monitor is "Quirk's Bar." Eris can tell by the real Quirk's Bar monitor that the holosuite is running.

"It will take them forever to get out of there," Weyoun smirks, " *if* they even can. Even if they do figure out they are in a holosuite, they will never realize they are in a holosuite *inside* a holosuite. Browne and the Ferengi will most likely kill each other long before they figure that out and I can just sit back and watch them," Weyoun tells Eris. "And I would if they weren't so *boring*. I can always look in later for the delightful sight of their dead bodies." He turns off both monitors and sighs. "But now, on to more important things."

Unknown:

In an unknown place, a figure paces, frowning. "Where has he gone? He said to stay here and everything would be fine."

"You worry too much. He is fine. Just trust him. After all, he is our ruler. If you cannot trust your ruler, who can you trust?"

"Yes, you are right as always. I must strive to be more patient."

Unity:

Eris looks at the Jem'Hadar in the command center. Something has been nagging at her since she first saw them and she suddenly knows what it is. (These do not look like any Jem'Hadar I have ever seen,) she thinks to herself. "Weyoun, why do these Jem'Hadar not have tubes for their ketricel white? How are they being controlled?"

"Eris, my poor dear Eris. They do not need the white. They live to serve their master...ME! They are positively lousy at conversation but they serve their master well." Weyoun eyes her with speculation. "Eris, you too could rule. You can be what Vortas

were born to be—rulers. Cast off what you have learned and open your mind to the truth. Vortas are superior to all other life-forms."

Eris is in shock. Vortas are superior? Only the gods, the Founders are superior. "No, you must not talk that way, Weyoun! What if the gods heard you?"

Space:

The dark shadowy ships hold back, eight of them, each with a predatory profile and a deadly grace, unique among their kind. The lead ship is by far the largest and most ornate. Long graceful protrusions belie a deadly elegance, and speak of raw, unbridled fury. Her seven consorts hang around her like twittering guards, each one dwarfed by their master's vessel, yet each capable of taking on a fully operational *Sovereign* class battleship. Aboard the lead vessel, the command bridge bustles with a hushed urgency, the darkened room suiting her occupants well. The green-blue glow of command monitors and tactical readouts highlight faces, all of which glance from time to time at the lone occupant seated in the center of the command bridge. Someone familiar with these faces might notice the slight strain and occasional flicker of well-hidden fear, but those same faces carry a cruel edge to them as well, each as capable of deadly acts of violence as any inebriated Klingon.

"They approach, Admiral," speaks one quiet voice from the darkness. A curt gesture from the seated commander cuts off any further comment. As the speaker retreats nervously to his station, the Admiral stands, facing his viewscreen, watching as another, smaller vessel approaches. The screen flickers, and the image of the ship is replaced with a face. Arrogance marks this face, and the calm assurance of a being who never expects to live out the day, yet every day he has. Yet his arrogance and self-assurance slide away at the sight of the Admiral. His eyes shift once, then settle back on the Admiral, finally speaking. "Scout vessel *Kalsaltore* reporting our findings."

The Admiral nods. "Send your findings."

The scout captain's eye twitches slightly as he nods off to his left, and the monitor behind and to the left of the Admiral beeps once. The Admiral steps over and begins reading the data and technical schematics being fed to him by the smaller vessel. After a few moments, he nods again. "Good, Captain, this information is adequate. Go and join the rest of the second force. We will be in contact very soon."

The scout captain nods himself, and his ship turns, following a predetermined course out of the sector as the Admiral gives the data one more glance. "This will be most satisfactory indeed."

The Admiral steps around the station and walks back to his command chair, leaving the image behind him for the moment. The screen flickers once, and then the image of Unity station fades away, awaiting its recall when the time comes.

Eight ships drift quietly through open space. Soon. Soon indeed, the galaxy would burn.

Unity:

"Are you referring to the Founders, Eris?" the enhanced Weyoun asks.

"Yes, of course!" (Who else would I mean?) she thinks. "We live to serve them. All Vortas do," she replies. "You should know this better than anyone, Weyoun."

Weyoun laughs at her. Eris is shocked at his reaction. "From now on," he says, "you will call me Governor. My transition of power in this sector is almost complete. Soon, all will be as it should be."

"Weyoun, there is something wrong with you. We must go to the homeworld and have the Founders help you."

Weyoun's eyes flare with anger. "You will refer to me as *Governor*! I am as I should be, a god above all others. The Founders are MY servants, as you shall be if you insist on fighting me."

Eris backs into a console. In doing so, she unknowingly shuts down the inner-most holosuite in Quirk's, the one that Weyoun had set up, leaving only one holosuite running instead of two.

Behind the bar, Quirk reaches for a bottle that suddenly isn't there, and he freezes. Now it's two meters to the left. And other bottles have shifted, as well. That one is five centimeters back, the one next to it is forward by one or two...and he knows that Saurian brandy level should be less; he and Michael drank some of it. (What...?...!)

"We've been tricked!!" he roars, loud enough to make Browne duck and look for an attacker. "Come on!!" He heads directly for the holosuite's exit, looking like a serious storm cloud ready to throw lightning at someone. Browne follows, his repeated inquiries of what's wrong are unanswered for the moment.

The Ferengi doesn't hesitate or slow his angry strides. "Out!" he shouts at the "entrance to Quirk's" and the holosuite doorway appears, already opening,

Browne catches on and while he's just as angry as Quirk, he stops in the doorway. "Quirk, wait!" The Ferengi stops and turns to him. "What if we're being watched? If we leave—"

"—whoever went to the trouble to set this up will know we're onto him," Quirk finishes. In spite of his anger, he sees immediately that now they have the advantage over Weyoun. (He is SO dead!) "So we keep this program running..." The cold smile that crawls slowly across his face is frightening. "And Weyoun will never know we've left. I've got a few tricks of my own. Stay there," he tells the Human as he steps outside. "Computer, activate Quirk Holo 1 and transfer to this location." A moment later, there are two Quirks, the second one is standing next to Browne. "Comes in handy when I want to be...elsewhere without anyone knowing."

"Who else you got?" Browne asks. "One of me, maybe?"

"Computer, activate Browne Holo 1 and transfer to this location."

"I see your Quirk and raise you two Brownes!" the original Michael laughs.

"Now we go back to my establishment—the *real* one—and do some planning of our own. Careful, though. We don't want to be spotted by any of Weyoun's clowns."

They are nearly to Quirk's when Browne asks, "Can we get something to eat? I'm starved!...oh, and a little something to wash it down with?"

Betazed:

Alanya straightens up with a smile of satisfaction. She hits the comm button on the console beside her. "Ruth, I have managed to rig a channel to Quirk's bar. Now all we have to do is let him know about it."

"Isn't that dangerous? They control the comm systems. Won't they hear any outgoing messages?"

"Ah, but that's the beauty of it. It isn't through the normal comm channels. This one goes to the replicator in his bar. We wait till we hear him ordering something from it, and—"

"The replicator??" Ruth laughs. "I see why you did it that way. People talk to replicators all the time. It won't look suspicious. But I'd like to be there to see Quirk's face the first time his replicator talks back!"

"And we can shut it off on this end so they can't hear us unless we want them to. Now all we have to do is wait for Quirk to place an order."

"Yes. Then we can get some much needed intel from him and Browne which will help us make plans to take back the station. I'll have someone monitoring the channel and let us know the minute Quirk's voice is heard."

Unity:

Quirk stops at the bar's replicator and orders synthehol for himself and Browne. They both deserve it after that ordeal with the holosuite. Then he debates what food he's in the mood for.

Betazed and Unity:

Excitedly, the Lieutenant hits the comm button. "Ambassador, you need to get here quick! Quirk is at his replicator!"

"On the way!" Alanya's filtered voice says. Mere seconds later, she appears next to the Lieutenant who bolts out of the chair.

As Alanya sits down, she hears Quirk's voice, "I am just not in the mood for tube grubs. What do you want, Browne—like I have to ask!"

Alanya switches the channel open. "Quirk? Can you hear me?"

"Huh?" She can almost see him looking around and grins. "Of course I can hear you—you're in the same room not ten feet away."

Browne looks confused. "What are you babbling about?"

"You," Quirk answers. "You just called me. What did you want?"

"I did not," Browne replies. "I'm thinking about what I want, like you asked me."

Alanya tries again. "Quirk!"

The Ferengi rounds on Browne. "Aha!"

"Aha' what??" Browne asks, getting annoyed.

"You just did it again! Don't tell me you didn't—I heard you!"

"Well, then, you're hearing things because I didn't say a word!"

(It figures,) Alanya thinks. She doesn't want to speak too loud in case there is someone else nearby, but she has to get their attention. "Quirk!!"

Quirk turns to Browne, ready to hit him. "If you don't stop it—"

Just when he notices the odd way the Hew-mon is looking at him...no, actually, past him, at the replicator, "Quirk! Browne! Stand down! That's an order!" hisses out of it.

They are so used to obeying "that tone of voice," they immediately snap to attention and shout, "Sir, yes, sir!" They hold it for several seconds, realize what they're doing,

exchange surprised looks, then stare at the replicator.

"Hey, wait a minute!" Quirk says. "That couldn't have been you—"

"Not unless I'm a female ventriloquist! And the last time I looked, I wasn't!"

Alanya is relieved. She doesn't know what the situation is on the station, how long she'll be able to talk to them. She hears noise as Browne and Quirk scramble to get to the replicator.

"Who is this?" Browne asks. "Or maybe 'what' is this would be a better question."

"I'm hurt, Michael. It hasn't been that long and you've forgotten me."

Quirk is practically jumping up and down as he yells, "ALANYA!!!"

"Shhhhhhhhh! Yes, it's Alanya," she confirms.

He is suddenly suspicious. "How do we know it's really you? What's your pet's name and what does it say?"

"How do I know it's you, Quirk? We've been talking for at least fifteen seconds and you haven't propositioned me. And Naya-Mirith says 'purrrrr'." She makes the sound uncannily like the sehlut, and Quirk and Browne nearly drool.

Quirk gleefully shouts, "It's her! Browne, it's Alanya!"

"May I assume from your neglect to watch your volume that there is no one around?"

"Yes," Browne answers. "The bar is closed right now."

"There was an incident earlier. My poor bar!" Quirk moans. "I may never get the guts out of the carpet!"

"Where is everyone?" Browne asks. "Are you all okay?"

"Yeah, we haven't heard anything until now," Quirk adds.

"We're rendezvousing at Betazed. I don't know how many got away. Tigri has vanished, and some others haven't been heard from. We're hoping they'll show up soon. Have you been able to identify the Unity personnel you found dead?"

"No," Quirk says. "They won't let us near them. Took all the bodies and loaded them into a storage area. We can't get to them yet because they're keeping it airless."

"That's one thing we need to know, who died there."

Browne says, "We'll try to find out. How do we contact you if we need to?"

"This channel will be open at specific times with someone monitoring it. It's as secure as I can make it but we don't want to take chances. We're working on a contact schedule. No one will think it strange if you talk to the replicator."

"Oh, that's clever!" Quirk grins.

"Whatever intel we get, we can pass to you," Browne says.

They make a few more plans, then she signs off. Quirk steps behind the bar, picks up a bottle and grins at Michael. "It's Green! A very good year." He pours for them both and as they clink glasses, he says, "To Unity—Round two coming up!"

Browne laughs, "To Unity—they ain't seen nothin' yet! I think I'll have to be near the replicator occasionally. God/Governor Weyoun does not know who he is playing with." Sipping slowly on their drinks, the two friends get up and proceed with operation "Foul Up The Governor's Plans."

"That was good thinking on Alanya's part, don't you think?" says Quirk to Browne. "Who would ever suspect us to be passing intel through the replicator?"

Browne snickers. "I'll have tube grubs, a Saurian brandy, and two Jem'Hadar to

go!"

Betazed:

During the discussions, all are encouraged to say what they think, to put forth any idea, no matter how impossible it may seem because it may trigger an idea in another that will help them win. He has mostly just listened but now Krim Los speaks up. "What about Weyoun? The ambassador, I mean. Couldn't he help us, give us some idea how the one on the station will react, what he'll do? That one is still a Weyoun, and from the little I know about the Vorta, clones of the same line should think alike. Granted that the one on the station is an enhanced version but it shouldn't be that much of a difference."

"Except in arrogance," Ruth says with disgust. "He's worse than ours ever was. Go on, Los."

The Vorta acknowledges the compliment with a nod.

"So whatever our Weyoun says the usurper would expect us to do, we go in some other direction, do something else. If we can be unpredictable, we can keep him off-balance and we have a better chance." Then with a nasty grin, he adds, "Anyone for the universe's biggest game of sentient being chess?"

The Vorta Ambassador says, "Yes, clones do think alike but only to a certain degree. Each clone has the memories of the ones before implanted, but how those memories are interpreted and acted upon by each is not the same. What I might see as an effort to co-exist in as peaceful a manner as possible might be seen as weakness by another. So I cannot tell you what that Weyoun *would* do. I can only tell you what he *might* do."

CHAPTER 2 Where Do We Go From Here?

Betazed:

In Jarkana, capital of Daron, on Betazed, the Unity Station ambassadors are discussing plans for what can be done to retake their station. Many ideas are being discussed and many ideas are rejected. Betazoid Ambassador and head of Unity Station, Ruth, is eating chocolate ice cream. "You cannot get chocolate to taste like this out of those replicators in Quirk's. Anyway, Quirk and Browne seem to be as clueless as we are about what is going on with the station. I would have loved to see their faces when you talked to them through the replicator, Alanya."

Deltan Ambassador Alanya laughs. "I, as well. You could just hear their confusion." Her face then shifts, revealing the Vulcan side of the ambassador. "It is not a logical plan which may be in our favor, but I think it has a possibility of succeeding."

"I think we should look at other suggestions, too," Ruth says. "I do not see 'dabo girls' being allowed on the station with the other Weyoun in control. We also cannot pull the station from where it is, as Curtis of Borg would like to do. I don't believe it could handle the stress structurally. It would end up destroying it."

The Betazoid ambassador looks around at the people at the table. There are the ambassadors from Unity that have escaped: Borg, Klingon, Deltan, Betazoid, Breen, Bajoran, and Weyoun (the Vorta representing the Founders). So much has happened in such a short time with the station. How did it come to this? Why did no one know? Skotek is missing and presumed dead. Quirk and Browne are alive for now, but stuck on the station. A stronger Weyoun has control of the station and is now considering it his, and himself the governor of it.

"If anyone can get into the station," she continues, "perhaps the Breen ambassador will be allowed in. After all, the Breen and Vortas do seem to have a working relationship. The drawback is that even if the other Weyoun lets the Breen ambassador in, he might be discovered to be working for us, and who knows what the other Weyoun would do? He might have the ambassador killed. This other Weyoun is so much like our Weyoun and yet much different, too."

She pauses a moment to let the others consider. "Ok, what other ideas do we have? Weyoun, you have been quiet. What ideas do you have running through that Vorta head of yours?" the Betazoid Ambassador asks.

Breen Ambassador Brak' Tul nods as the Vorta speaks. In his opinion, this idea has the best chance of succeeding, but there is always the possibility of something going disastrously wrong. He forms a contingency plan of his own as he listens.

Hearing the Vorta's plan that the Breen Ambassador go in and try to reason with the Weyoun aboard Unity Station, Krim Los speaks up once more. "If we go with this plan, there may be a way to get the Breen Ambassador some help in there. If someone went with him as his prisoner, it may make our ruse more believable to that Weyoun. I volunteer to act as his captive. But how would I get out of the holding cell to help him?"

"A detail to be worked out if this plan is chosen," Alanya says.

The Breen leans forward in his chair, just a little, but the others immediately turn their attention to him. "If it doesn't work, if this usurper cannot see reason or does not wish to give up his 'position,' I'll kill him myself and drop the station's shields for the rest

of you to come aboard." It is said so coldly, so emotionlessly, the others shiver. They have no idea that the Breen is seething with anger for the disruption this imposter has caused, the deaths of station personnel, and Skotek. He had always admired the Romulan's ingenuity as the Security Chief. It still makes him laugh to think of the station's felines being equipped with Borg technology. He could just imagine the shock when, the next time the Klingon and Borg ambassadors hunted them, the cats fired back.

Behind the helmet, no one can see his smile. It is gentle, but it is steel.

Klingon Ambassador Kathvaj studies the Breen. He has never truly trusted Brak' Tul; isn't sure that he does now. But something in the Breen's tone, his posture...there is more to him than the Klingon has previously thought.

"Are there any other ideas?" Ruth asks. No one offers another choice. "I think we would benefit from a break now. Consider the plans offered and we will choose the best one when we meet again in an hour."

The choice is finally made and long hours are spent trying to anticipate problems and provide answers for them. Curtis of Borg hasn't said much. He has listened to the talk and ideas, agreed with the choice, but he is always aware of the time it is taking, time which gives the imposter Weyoun a more solid hold on their home. At last, late at night, he speaks up. "I say let's go now. We can work out any details we've missed as we travel. I think it would be best to travel in small groups until we get to a preset rendezvous point. We can regroup there. I can open a transwarp conduit and some of the slower, less-well-armed ships can follow me through it. For that matter, you can all use it. But we need to move now."

"I agree with the Borg!" Kathvaj roars. He smashes his fist on the table. "Enough talk! Let's go hunting! For Vorta and Jem'Hadar!"

"That would get us in striking distance faster and with less chance of discovery by any scouts he may have out," Ruth says. She glances around at the haggard faces. Some look...odd, but she can't figure out why. "I would suggest we rest while our ships are being readied." As the others agree, she speaks to Alanya mentally. (Do you see what I see? The strange looks on some people?)

(Yes,) comes from the Deltan.

(Do you know why?) And Ruth sees the Deltan is looking strange as well; more Vulcan, somehow, as if she is concentrating on something. Even her mental voice is stiffer.

A nod this time. (There is no danger at the moment. But there soon will be. We must move quickly.)

The rest of the message makes the Betazoid sit up and stare. (You will use that?!)

(As you will use what you must. It is war.)

Ruth can't argue with that.

Unity:

Krim Los sits in his cell on Unity Station. "Why did I have to open my big mouth?" He realizes he is talking out loud and stops in case he is being monitored, which he is sure he is. (Great time for someone to actually agree with my suggestion. The trip from Betazed was fast using the transwarp conduit Curtis opened for us. I'm glad it didn't take

any longer. Breen sure don't talk much.)

The trip was an experience he wouldn't be in a hurry to repeat. The Breen ship was cold to him, both environmentally and personnel-wise, and the talking they did was not to him. What were they thinking behind those helmets? He shakes his head. (Why did I ever let Quirk talk me into coming to this station? "Sure, Los, you will like it. It's great being an ambassador, especially with the women there." Now look at me, sitting in a cell on a station that I was to be an ambassador to. And it's already been damaged by fighting. Who knows how much worse it's going to be when this is over? If--no, when--the ambassadors get Unity back, there will be a lot of repair work to be done.)

As the Breen ship approached the station, Krim Los had seen a spot in the cargo bay that looked like a large welded hole. He's pretty sure that's where he'd been blown out of the station. But he has no idea how it got there or what happened. He hadn't had a chance to ask on Betazed; there was too much to do...so many questions that he wonders if he will ever get answers to.

But the good news is Weyoun believed the ruse. "I cannot believe that 'Governor Weyoun' let us onto the station after Brak' Tul sent a message to him that he has captured one of the ambassadors. Then again, why not? Weyoun has no reason to suspect the ambassador isn't working with him."

Krim Los looks around his cell. He thinks to himself, (What is the Breen doing? It would be so easy for him to betray me and us, but I'm going to trust that he really is on our side. I let myself be locked away with no comms or weapons. How am I to get out to do anything? I need to try to figure out how to get out. Prophets, save me. Help me find a way.)

Unity:

Browne and Quirk listen as Alanya tells them the plan and are told that the Breen has already arrived at the station with a "prisoner," Krim Los.

Alanya signs off and Quirk turns from the replicator. "I happen to know a way to get Krim Los out of the brig," Quirk says, "without the 'governor' and his cronies knowing, but I must access the holo-panel before tonight's visit from the 'governor' and the Breen. How much about the transporter do you know? We will have to transport Krim Los to our location and put a holo-image of him in place. I happen to have such in my memory banks."

"You do, Quirk? You have holo-images of all of us?"

"Of course," the Ferengi grins. "I do have holos of everyone. They don't...uh... exactly know it, though. But you never know when something like that will come in handy. Such as now."

Michael's face shows dawning understanding. "So that's it!"

"What?"

"That's why, when I tried to kiss Alanya a little while back, I got nothing but a bland stare. And I do mean bland! That was weird. I kept expecting some kind of reaction but she didn't try to kill me or even knock me down. Now I know why. Whew! Thought I was losing my touch!"

"I'll have to add that to her programming, then, to make her more realistic," Quirk replies. "Other than that, what did you think of her? How real was she? Did she feel as

real as she looked?"

"When I kiss the real Alanya, I'll let you know."

Quirk immediately flares. "Hey! Don't even—"

"Just kidding!" the Genetically Enhanced Human laughs. "Besides, I don't have a death wish. Like I said, she'd kill me."

They look at each other and say at the same time, "But, oh, would we die happy!"

The longer he sits in the cell, the more thoughts of betrayal begin nagging. Los begins to think, (Maybe this wasn't such a hot idea. Quirk is a Ferengi after all. He may make a deal to save his own skin, and the rest of the ambassadors don't know me. How do I know Alanya wasn't just a fraction too late on transporting me? How do I know I can trust anybody but myself?) He shakes those thoughts out of his mind quickly, and begins to speak aloud to himself to chase away the nag, "They *will* save you! Quirk has never and will never abandon you, and the rest of these people are good people. Most are Starfleet Officers, the same as you. You did make the right choice trusting the Breen. But when I get outta here, I am PERSONALLY going to beat 'Governor Weyoun' to a PULP!! He may be bigger and stronger, but it's the fight in the dog that matters—"

A whine cuts off the rest.

"—and I got PLENTY to go around! Huh??" Los looks at his new surroundings. "What the...??"

Quirk hands Krim Los a drink, which the Bajoran accepts more from reflex, and says, "Hello, my friend. I trust you were not insulting your oldest friend. Forgive me for the bad manners. This is Colonel Browne, the Genetically Enhanced Hew-mon Ambassador. We are formulating a plan. Don't worry, you are not being missed in the brig." He chuckles. "As far as they know, you're still there."

Unity:

"Governor?" Eris says quietly.

"Yes?" Weyoun replies.

"Governor, Brak' Tul, the Breen ambassador, has placed the Bajoran prisoner in a holding cell as requested. He awaits your next order to prove his loyalty."

Weyoun produces a slightly evil-looking smile. Odd to see on a Vorta, let alone the ever-charming Weyoun, but then again, this is not the same Weyoun Unity Station knew. "Does he? Well, we will have to do something about that, then. Tell him..."

Weyoun whispers the rest of the message to Eris.

Eris turns and walks out of the room.

"Enough with the festivities, gentlemen," Quirk continues. "We need to work on getting back the station." Quirk casually hands Krim Los a handful of weapons that can be concealed as he speaks. "We need to assess what's going on with the 'Governor' and the Breen so we can assist the Breen in his plan." He looks at the Bajoran. "I know you don't really trust me. That is to be expected from what you have learned about my species. I would like to change that. Yes, I am a conniving person but that is for business purposes only, not for the safety and welfare of Starfleet and this station to which I have

taken the oath of an officer, as you did." He sighs. "I suppose I inherited that from my father. A conscience," he says with a sad grimace. "Gets in the way sometimes but—" he shrugs. "Now I suggest we get down to the business at hand."

"Okay, let's hear the plan," says Los. "I do want to make one request, though. I want a piece of 'Governor Weyoun'!! I owe him PAIN!!!" Los says with so much anger and hatred in his voice that Browne and Quirk are startled.

"We all want a piece of the 'Governor,' Krim," Quirk says. Looking at Browne, Quirk starts to smile. "You know, I bet Skotek has some of his toys in the security office. Now, who can we get to go into the office first?"

Browne joins in. "I'll second that and get me another one of these." He reaches around the bar to try to find a bottle.

"Quirk, we better sneak our way there if this going to work," Krim says.

Quirk smiles at Browne. "You want another one of these, you get it only after you get in that office of Skotek's and we get back here alive."

"WHAT???" Browne exclaims as he has not been listening to the plan.

Krim and Quirk leave for Skotek's security office, not knowing what they will find there. Browne follows, wondering what he just volunteered for.

Reaching Skotek's office, Browne pushes past Quirk and Krim Los. "I can get this door open. I have a screw driver. In fact, it's the same one I used to open the black box after I shot up all those Romulan ships that time."

"Wait a minute! You told us you didn't shoot them!" Quirk says.

"They shot first," Browne says, "so it was self-defense...sort of," he finishes in a mutter. For the next fifteen minutes, Browne tries his best to open the door with no luck.

Meanwhile, inside the office waits a surprise for the three men. On the other side of the door watching on the security monitors is an old friend...well, maybe not a friend. But soon they would be something they never were before: allies.

Being totally frustrated, Browne resorts to the only thing he can think to do next. He kicks the door and barks out a few words which doesn't work, either. Quirk and Krim Los, standing back and watching for any sign of intruders, are getting more than a bit frustrated by having to wait so long in the open. Out of total exhaustion from his ordeal over the past few days, Browne slumps forward to the wall beside the door of the security office. As he does, he brushes against the panel and, lo and behold, the door slides open!

In total amazement, Quirk pushes Browne into the office and Krim follows. The lights are off and the room is only lighted by the security monitors. As the door closes, the trio hears something from behind them. Turning, they see a silhouette behind Skotek's desk. "BOO! Did I scare you fellas? Been here bout six hours now. Been watching you boys most of the time, too. Betcha thought I done left this pop stand long before all them fireworks started, didn't y'all? Heck, I was layin' low long before that. I sent my ship outta here on autopilot just so I could keep a low profile. Now, before you get to takin' shots at me, I'm on y'all's side on this one."

Before the stranger can say another word, Quirk approaches the new-found ally and says, "Rosen! How do you Hew-mons say it? 'You Old Dog'! For once, I'm glad to see you!"

Rosen asks Quirk, "Well, you don't think 31 would leave you rookies to have all the fun, now, do ya? We need to first, come up with a plan to keep breathin' until the

cavalry gets back to help, and second, to throw a monkey wrench into the plans of that Vorta fella."

Quirk quickly introduces Krim Los to Rosen.

"No intro necessary, my friend. His superior, Sloan, tried to recruit me a while back but that's another story entirely," Krim says. "We make it out of here alive, I'll be sure to tell you about it."

"Mr. Krim, Sloan was not my superior. He was darn lucky to stay alive as long as he did. That fella weren't not near the caliber of myself," Rosen replies with distaste. "Good thing you turned him down. That ol' boy didn't do much but get folks dead."

"Now, let's get to the business at hand, shall we?" Quirk says.

"Yes, let's get to work," Krim Los agrees.

Rosen nods. "Now we get on to kickin' some Vorta butt! I think the first thing we need to do is get a comm line open to any of the folks that left outta here in a hurry when the ruckus started. I had a plan until Browne decided to start reworking every system that he came across. You fellas got any ideas?"

"They are all on Betazed except myself and the Breen Ambassador. The ones that got out, that is." Krim Los begins to fill in the other three on the plan formulated by the ambassadors.

When he finishes, Quirk says, "Mr. Rosen, I have a comm link that is open at my establishment. Mr. Browne can vouch for this statement. I have spoken to Alanya recently. Also, if you would be so kind as to allow me to use your image, we could fool the 'governor' into thinking we are about to give ourselves up."

"Personally, I think trying to fool him is not a good idea," Browne tells them. "If Alanya had suggested it, then I would probably go along with it. But Weyoun is not stupid. I don't think he'd believe that we want to help him." He shrugs. "Just my thoughts on it but we could ask Alanya what she thinks."

Somewhere:

A flash of white light and Tigri is surprised at what he sees. On Unity Station, he stares at the three amigos. "Q, why have you brought me here?" Tigri asks.

Q replies, "I thought you would get a laugh at your fellow ambassadors. They have been fumbling and bumbling around half drunk and half brain-locked. They really think that they will save the station. What a laugh! Personally, I'm betting they blow it up by accident."

Tigri says, "You don't give my friends any respect, do you?"

"Why should I?" Q asks.

"Because they have made it this far, even with their stumbling," Tigri answers. Q's attitude is already getting to him.

"Hmmm," says Q, mulling over their plans. "This just might work, in spite of the ones trying to pull it off. But time will tell. I guess we'll just have to watch and see."

"Ok, Q, if you aren't going to help—" Just as the words come out of Tigri's mouth, Q transports Tigri off the station...

Unity:

"Hey, boys," Rosen tells Quirk and Browne, "I kinda figure it's time I tell you I

been followin' that Breen and he's not on our side. Fact of the matter is he's in it all for his self. That ol' boy is kinda double-dippin', if you know what I mean. You know I ain't too awful sure what his game is, but he seems to be workin' the middle agin the ends, if ya'll know what I'm saying."

"Are you sure about that?" Quirk asks. "Do you have evidence of that? I mean, if you do, we need to let them know on Betazed. They're counting on Brak' Tul in a big way."

"I got enough to make it look real bad. And, Quirk, before you use my image, I need to know what you got bouncin' around in that over-size melon of yours. Then I'm thinkin' we need to git word of what we know to the folks at Betazed. They do need to know about the Breen."

Quirk grins craftily. "I had this idea that we could holographically confuse this so-called 'governor' with all kinds of sightings of the ambassadors and yourself all over the station. This will at least keep his minions, these new Jem'Hadar, busy for a long time, or hopefully, until the Breen can actually cause havoc to the 'Governor's' reign by doing the double agent bit. You should see the way he is playing the not-gov like a fiddle."

"Quirk ol' boy, your idea is sound but you seem to be a little slow on the up-take! I told you the Breen is not on our side, buddy! He's in it for himself. Besides, them fellas don't know I'm even here. This could prove to be an advantage for us. The way I figure it is we should put the Breen's image all over instead of mine. My way of thinkin' is that rascal Weyoun might kinda git the idea that ol' boy is tryin' to give him the ol' double-cross. Know what I mean? After all, if he seein' what he thinks is a small army of Breens wanderin' 'round this giant rubbish can, it just may git him to thinkin' he's been double-crossed by Mr. Freeze."

Betazed:

Ruth faces the ambassadors who are gathered in the conference room once again.. "Ambassadors, I have received word from Starfleet about Unity Station. We are on our own here."

"Of course we are," Alanya states matter-of-factly.

"I suggest we head back to Unity," Ruth says, "and stay just outside of sensor range. We will see what the situation outside is like when we get there."

CHAPTER 3 Almost Ready

Unity:

Quirk's eyes are alight with enthusiasm. "Rosen, for once, I agree. If he suspects the Breen has double-crossed him, it might distract him even more. Let's get back to my establishment and I can get to work on putting the holograms of Brak' Tul all over the station for the 'Governor' to see and hear. They will all be programmed to do different actions at the same time. Unfortunately, we can't appear with them or they'll know we're out of the holo-Quirk's."

Betazed:

"Quirk?" Alanya listens, waits for an answer. The bar should be closed at this hour so there is little danger of her being overheard by the wrong people. But she doesn't seem to be heard by the right one, either. (Where is he? Did something happen? Krim Los and Brak' Tul arrived a few hours ago. Did something go wrong? I'll just have to keep trying.) "Quirk? Michael?" Finally, she is answered.

Unity:

"Alanya?" Even though there's no one in the bar but Quirk, Rosen, and Michael, Quirk glances around and leans close to the replicator. "Good to hear your voice again."

Rosen shakes his head in amusement. (Who would'a thought? Ain't that the dog-gonedest thing—a talkin' replicator! I might need to talk to that woman sometime about 31.)

"Quirk, good to hear you as well."

"I have a surprise for you," the Ferengi goes on. "Section 31 is present and accounted for."

Alanya is indeed surprised. (WHAT?! Rosen??!) "Rosen?! Rosen!! You're there??" The odds just got better for the Unity ambassadors.

"Yes, Alanya, I'm here," Rosen says. "Can you give me the status of the rest of the muckity-mucks that high-tailed it outta here when the shootin' started?"

The Deltan's voice is a little stiffer. "We haven't heard from some of the ambassadors. We believe they may have been killed on the station, or simply left."

"Are you folks plannin' on tryin' to retake this floatin' garbage can? If so, how soon? We sure could use a tiny bit of help around here."

"No, Rosen, we will not 'try' to retake it. We *will* take back our home. We're working on a plan, parts of which are already underway. Quirk, do you know what is happening with Brak' Tul and Krim Los?"

"Oh, yes, I know," Quirk grins nastily. "Weyoun fell for that part of your plan. Los was in the brig but we got him out and replaced him with a hologram so they think he's still there."

"Excellent!"

"And they also think we're still in the phony Quirk's because I put holos of Michael and myself in there."

"Even better, Quirk."

"I'm going to program a lot of Breen into the holosystem. They're going to random-

ly appear all over the station. That should confuse Mr. Vorta Weyoun and his pets. Would that help?"

"It might do more harm right now. Brak' Tul must make Weyoun think he can still trust the Breen. Go ahead and prepare the holograms but keep that as a backup in case we need to buy Brak' Tul some time. We will be heading back to the station very soon but stop out of sensor range. From there, we will let you know what's next. Help Brak' Tul all you can."

"Now wait a minute," Rosen says. "I don't think it's wise to trust him so much."

"Why is that, Rosen?"

"I got evidence that he's not on our side at all."

"If you do, it's because he wanted you to have it. I assure you, he is completely loyal to Unity."

The Section 31 agent frowns. "I think it's a mistake and I hope you don't mind if I keep an eye or two on him."

"Keep all the eyes on him you like but the order stands, from Ruth and me: help him. His is the most dangerous assignment of this plan. He must succeed. Now, have you gotten into Skotek's quarters?"

"That's where we found Rosen," Michael says.

"I don't mean the outer office. There's a second one, hidden."

Michael and Quirk look at each other and mouth, "There's a second one?"

The Deltan continues, "I don't know how to access it. He shielded the door. It would be a good idea for you to find it. I'm sure Skotek had some things hidden in there that we can use. But you have to find it and get in. All three of you work on that. It could be important. I have preparations to make for the return journey. We'll be in touch. Alanya out."

Quirk immediately gets to work on the holograms.

"Quirk, I know where Skotek's inner sanctum is hid. I happened to stumble across it when I was layin' low. Little Miss Alanya is righter than rain. There be some good stuff squirreled away there. But just betwixt me and you, I think we oughtta not let Browne loose in there till you can take a look-see. How you makin' out on them holograms of that Breen fella?"

Quirk is making fine adjustments on the holo-programmer. "Coming along nicely, Rosen. Shouldn't take me long."

"While we are here, we should fill up a rucksack or two with some grub. This hiding out with no chow is gittin' kinda old. When you git done with them holograms, let me know. I'm gonna catch me maybe 20 winks over in the corner." Quirk nods and keeps working, and Rosen settles, out of habit, with his back to a wall and facing the door but out of sight of it. He yawns, then says, "Hey, Quirk, come to think of it, I really only found the entrance to Skotek's hidin' spot. Maybe a couple of you could go back and try to get in while you're workin' on the holos."

Quirk concentrates for a moment on the readings on the display panel, "Los, why don't you and Browne head for Skotek's office again? We'll join you soon as I get these set up."

There is one more brief contact from Betazed asking if they have gotten into

Skotek's office. Quirk decides it must be important if they keep asking so he wakes Rosen and they steal through the corridors until they get to the office. Browne and Krim are still attempting to find a way through it. Eventually, though none of them is sure just who did what, there is a click. They look at each other and grin. Then they are too busy falling down to congratulate each other.

The moment the door is breached, an alarm sounds, causing all in the immediate vicinity to fall to the ground, clutching their ears; the sound waves are on all frequencies, literally excruciating the closer to the doorway one gets. Those attempting entry scramble to get away. It's clear they will have to rethink this, find a way to get past this first trap defending the inner office. As soon as all personnel leave the immediate vicinity of the doorway, the alarm stops. But there are anxious moments while the four wait to see if anyone else heard or felt the alarm.

Meanwhile, the outer office computer screen lights up and Skotek's face appears. "Mr. Browne, and I assume that it's you because only you would try breaking into my office, I have placed a series of traps, security measures, and self-destruct devices in my quarters. I don't really appreciate intrusion, and my hope is this will dissuade you from entering. At best, I will have you in the brig. At worst—well, you might need to be mopped up. Do please reconsider your actions." The screen goes dark.

"Well, if he knew it was me, he knew I wouldn't be stopped by a little headache," Michael comments.

Rosen, Quirk, and Krim Los exchange looks. "Is he saying we don't have the nerve to try it??" Los asks.

"Gentlemen," Quirk says, "I think we've either been complimented—"

"Or insulted," finishes Rosen. "Quirk, I don't think I would be followin' that boy into that office if I were ya'll. That Skotek really has his inner office rigged up to do some damage to any feller that tries to git in there. If you don't believe me, then you need to sit back and ask yerself how's come ol' Rosen didn't go in there? You know darn well that I ain't no dummy! That's why! I say let Browne go fer it all by his lonesome. But I'm tellin' ya he ain't comin' out alive. That boy has been livin' on borrowed time since the day the doc smacked his bottom. As for me, I'm hightailin' it outta here about right now 'cause that siren is gonna be bringin' some of them Jem'Hadar of that new and improved Weyoun fella in here on the double. Besides, that would give us the chance to come up with a plan B while they are whippin' Browne's butt." With that, Rosen turns on his heels and makes a bee line for the door, not waiting to see if Quirk or Krim Los are following the trail he is blazing.

Space:

The trip back to Unity is a solemn one for Curtis and his crew. All aboard the sphere know that once back, there will be a fight the likes of which they could not even imagine. Someone would have to die and Curtis knows with their new-found independence, none of his crew want it to be them. But he also knows that they would die if they had to, not just to retake the station but to save anyone that was left behind that may still be alive. He feels little comfort in the fact that the crew has been practicing hand-to-hand combat with the Klingons while at Betazed. He hopes it will not come down to that, how-

ever. His only hope is that Browne and Quirk will not get in the way once the battle starts.

Then it comes to him like a bolt out of the blue! As he stands up, he calls out to his helmsman. "Mr. Starcher, open all channels. Send the following message. 'To any vessel carrying members of the Borg of Unimatrix Zero, this is the sphere now known as The Old Dog. We are requesting any assistance you can offer. We are in transit to Unity Station where we are going to attempt to retake the station by force. Any assistance would be welcome. Coordinates to follow.'" Curtis knows this is a long shot but he has to try.

"Mr. N'Vak, call up all data on the station. I want to know all her weaknesses and strengths. No surprises when we arrive there." N'Vak is Curtis's Executive Officer and formerly a Romulan before the Borg got hold of him; he would be the one Curtis could trust to find any tactical weakness that could be exploited. He stands up from his seat and as he turns to leave the Bridge, calls out to N'Vak, "If the need arises, I'll be in my quarters. I have a headache that needs some attention. Keep monitoring that transwarp conduit. We don't want it collapsing on any of our friends that are traveling back with us."

Unity:

They don't follow Rosen. "Alanya wants us to get in or at least give it a good try. That's what we're going to do," Michael says. "First thing we need is that door alarm off." He turns and runs through the doorway, setting off the shrieking alarm again.

All the noise is incredible. Quirk hears phasers and other electrical items going off, and wonders if they should have allowed Browne to enter the office alone after all. Not to mention, with his Ferengi hearing, it's giving Quirk a headache. Just to be on the safe side, Quirk joins Rosen outside Skotek's room. All of a sudden, all goes quiet. Browne calmly comes out of the room. His shirt is ruined and smoking, and his uniform pants are showing singe marks and rips. Browne says, "One down." He tugs the remains of his shirt down, takes one step, and drops to the floor.

Quirk runs to him, rolls him over. "Browne? You okay? Browne! Michael!" The Genetically Enhanced Human doesn't move.

"Is he gone?" Krim asks.

Quirk shakes his head but says, "A sad end to a brave Marine. I'll write his family. And salvage rights to all his stuff are mine." (If that doesn't bring him around, nothing will,) the Ferengi thinks.

Browne stirs. "Not yet they aren't!" He sits up. "I saw some stuff in there that frankly, even if we do get it, I'm not sure we can figure out how to use it. Skotek's got that place booby trapped to within an inch of our lives."

"Do we try again?" Krim asks.

Quirk nods. "I'll go."

"Be my guest," Rosen drawls. Buoyed by the thought of Browne's disabling of the security alarm, Quirk moves through the open doorway. Browne's groaning about having a bigger headache than a hangover at pub night with a Klingon sorority distracts Quirk for a moment, and he almost loses his face when eight phaser beams lance out in a grid pattern. Before the Ferengi has even registered the presence of the beams, Rosen yanks

him backward. "Well, that wily Romulan has some interesting tricks up his sleeve. I have a feelin' that little ol' noisemaker was the least of them."

Astonished at the quickness of Rosen and the almost loss of his beautiful features, Quirk gingerly touches his ears to make sure they're still there and unhurt. "That was a close call. Thank you. If we get out of this one alive, Mr. Rosen, I'm going to offer you something very un-Ferengi-like. You got a free tab at my establishment--"

"What?!" from Michael.

"--for a week," Quirk finishes. "What? Did you think I was going to say for life?? I'm grateful but I'm still Ferengi!"

Space:

Alanya watches the lights blinking on the control panel of her shuttle. Thanks to Curtis of Borg, the return trip to Unity through the transwarp conduit took far less time than it would have. They are only minutes away.

And yet...

She has been nagged by the feeling that she should have waited just a little longer before joining the ambassadors heading back to Unity space. She has no idea why that feeling has persisted but it has, as if she left something unfinished, or is waiting for something to happen. But what?

Naya-Mirith is on Betazed. This was no place for the sehlat. Naya was forever surprising her. She had expected a fight when she told the animal she was staying on Betazed. But Naya had calmly looked at her for a long moment, then went to the rug she had claimed as her own in their quarters, and made herself comfortable. So that, at least, was one fight she would not have.

The shuttle slows; only moments now. Her mind turns to the battle ahead...

She's in the mood for a fight.

CHAPTER 4 Whose Side Is He On?

Unity:

Eris looks around nervously. "If the Governor finds out, he will kill you without a thought. You should never come back here. You put me at risk helping you but the 'Governor' has such delusions of grandeur." She shakes her head. "Something must have gone wrong with the cloning process the last time. Here, go before we both get killed.

Eris hands Brak' Tul a package and leaves. The Breen Ambassador turns and also leaves.

Brak' Tul nearly sighs with relief when the door to his quarters closes behind him. This is the only place on Unity where he can comfortably remove his enviro-suit; the rest of the station is simply too hot. He has some delicate work to do for which he'd need his hands unencumbered by his gloves.

The Breen unlocks his helmet and lifting it off, sets it with his gloves on the table beside the package that Eris3 gave him. Strange how something so small would have such a huge impact on so many lives.

For him, it would be an undeniable declaration of where his loyalties lie. Now to set it and get it in place. Swiftly, he makes the necessary adjustments, knowing he would get just one chance. When he finishes, he rechecks his work. Perfect. Now he needs to get it to the proper place, then find a certain being and keep him occupied.

As he lifts his helmet to his head, he glances around his quarters. In his heart, this has been his true home. But after this, he wonders if he'll see it again. Helmet and gloves on, he picks up the package and leaves without a backward glance.

Space:

The last ambassador's ship has arrived at the rendezvous point. As the transwarp conduit collapses, Curtis hails Ruth. "How much longer?"

"His signal should be coming soon," she answers. That is, if nothing has gone wrong.

Unity:

He reaches his destination with only one encounter. The Jem'Hadar thought to block the Breen's path until Brak' Tul simply planted his feet and v-e-r-y slowly swivelled his head toward the soldier until he was looking directly at him, at which point the soldier had second thoughts and backed away. For some reason, most species are intimidated by his enviro-suit, a fact he is grateful for.

He sets the plasma charge, and as he activates the timer, he asks the computer through his helmet link, "Where is the Vorta Weyoun?"

The answer startles him. He expects to hear that Weyoun is in "his" office or Ops. Instead, the computer gives his location as "Engineering deck, section L, corridor 3—" That means he's 30 meters away and heading directly toward the Breen!

Fortunately, this is one of a great many scenarios the Ambassador rehearsed on the journey from Betazed. Calmly, he checks the timer to make sure it's functioning, then he

exits to intercept Weyoun. He needs to keep the Vorta occupied for—he checks the clock he has asked his helmet to display—three and a half minutes. Then it won't matter. Fifteen seconds after that, the bomb will explode, taking out the station's shield generator and allowing the Ambassadors to board and reclaim their own.

Approaching Weyoun (he refuses to call him Governor even in his own mind), he sees the Vorta is in no hurry; he's only ten meters closer. The Breen thinks with disgust, (He is probably surveying "his" territory, or more likely, gloating over it. Enjoy it while you can, Vorta clone!)

Weyoun sees Brak' Tul and smirks at him. The Breen wishes he could simply reach out and tear the Vorta's head off but he can't. Yet. "Yes, Brak' Tul? What is it?" he says pleasantly.

Sometimes one can take small compensations. He does by not even using the Vorta's name. "What about the prisoner?"

"Which one? There are many," Weyoun grins.

"The Bajoran. Krim Los." He speaks just a little slower than he normally does, adding time to the diversion, hopefully enough time.

00.02.59.

"I am planning a lovely and very painful death for him. Public, of course."

"How do you plan to execute him?" The Breen manages to sound a little blood-thirsty and eager to hear the details. Anything to keep him talking.

Weyoun begins to walk again but Brak' Tul stands where he is and the Vorta stops. "I haven't decided yet. There are several ways to go but be assured, they won't cause immediate death. But definitely death."

"I would like to be present. To see this Bajoran die. He has been a thorn in my side for too long."

"Of course. Why, I may even allow you to take part in it."

"I would be pleased to do so."

And the counter reads 00.02. 21.

Space:

Warning klaxons which began screaming on every ship nearly ten minutes ago are suddenly silent, though the flashing Red Alert signals continue. Soldiers wait side-by-side with Ambassadors in transporter rooms. Some carry a single knife along with their phasers; others, like Kathvaj and Curtis, literally bristle with weapons. Kathvaj's treasured *bat'leth* glitters in his hands.

Ambassador Green feels the strain of waiting for the signal to attack. She has been watching non-stop, eyes glued to the screen and sensors since they arrived. She is armed with more than a phaser as well, but her "extra" weapons are her Betazoid telepathy and empathic sense. To get Unity back, she intends to use them.

Alanya, too, watches for the shields to drop. She is at her shuttle's controls, her fingers poised to activate the transporter. She watches the sensors, eyes dark, face Vulcan. There is no trace of emotion there. This will be a war, and because all is fair in war, she will use her "extra" weapons without guilt: she is Vulcan...and she stopped taking the pheromone suppressors three days ago.

Any time now.

Unity:

A shocking thought hits Krim Los. "We forgot to secure something as a command post for the final assault!"

"We don't have to worry about that. I'm sure they have one already picked out. I have your back, old friend. Let's get going. Are the rest of you with us? Rosen, Browne, let's move out, Marines. You all know the drill—look out for anybody who may be suspicious." Quirk can't help wondering just how much the Breen is doing to save the station, but knows he is doing his level best. "We must assist in saving the station from tyrants like the so-called governor at all cost...even my establishment." He gets the reaction he wants; they grin at his notion of the ultimate sacrifice.

CHAPTER 5 Hero's End

The helmet chronometer reads 00.00.19 when the Breen finally allows himself to believe there's a chance this plan will succeed. He is tensing, ready. In just a few seconds, he will get his chance to take that scrawny Vorta neck in his hands and—

"Governor," a Jem'Hadar approaches from behind the Breen ambassador.

"Yes?" Weyoun asks, managing to sound bored and annoyed at being interrupted while discussing his favorite subject—himself.

"I found—"

Alarm bells go off in Brak' Tul's mind. He knows before he turns around what he will see and he is right. In the soldier's hands is—

"—this," the Jem'Hadar says.

And holds out the bomb.

The counter is now at 00.00.12.

There is no time to think. To his right, he sees Weyoun recognize the "package" for what it is. As the Vorta drags in a deep breath to shout, the blow from the Breen's fist lands with such force, Weyoun flies the length of the corridor, landing in a heap against the far wall. Brak' Tul can only hope he's dead.

Meanwhile, the Jem'Hadar has spent the last second-and-a-half of his life staring in surprise. When he reacts, it is too late. In one swift motion, the Breen turns on him; one hand closes on the bomb while the fist again lands full force, snapping the soldier's neck.

00.00.08.

He has never moved so fast in his life. He covers the distance to the shield generator with three and a half seconds to spare. He sets the bomb on the console—

00.00.02.6—

—turns, takes a step—

00.00.01.1—

—another, and dives away—

00.00.00.

He lies against a control panel near a wall. There is no pain and he is grateful for that. But did he succeed? He waits, listens.

On every ship, the same triumphant yell is heard. "He did it! Transporters—GO!"

The room is smoky from the explosion and every so often, several control panels spit spark showers into the air. He had thought at first that his enviro-suit may have saved his life. Now, however, he thinks it has merely prolonged it.

Now there is pain.

At the far end of the corridor outside, a dazed, bloody Weyoun staggers to his feet and needs a moment to orient himself. Then, leaning heavily on the walls, he heads for a turbolift.

A familiar whine fills the room, though it is muted. (My hearing or damaged audio sensors?), he thinks, then nearly laughs. (At a time like this...lucky I still have my head.) He has been resting with his eyes closed, hoping to live long enough to know. Now he

opens them, and does. Ambassadors Ruth Green, Curtis of Borg, the Klingon Kathvaj, and Alanya materialize along with two Borg whom Curtis sends to guard the doors.

They reach him in a breath. Ruth Green instantly hits her comm badge. "Medical emergency! Breen ambassador down! I need a med team NOW! Stand by to beam him—"

"No."

"Brak' Tul—"

Others are materializing here and all over the station. As soon as they are solid, they clear the way for the next group. More than one face here shows sorrow, and respect.

"No," he mumbles. "I will die here. In my home. With my...family."

"You aren't going to—" Ruth begins but she knows, as he does.

His helmet displays red warnings of systems shutting down. The suit's cooling system went right after the blast but he feels strangely cold. Not uncomfortably so but it is odd; he has never really felt "cold" before. "Have finished mission."

Blinking tears, Ruth smiles. "Yes, you did."

"None will ever...question loyalty again."

"I never doubted it."

"I know."

Curtis leans into the Breen's view. "Can we get you anything, Brak' Tul? Do anything?"

"Tired," he whispers. "Helmet."

"What about it?"

"Take it...off."

"Are you sure?" Curtis asks.

A tiny nod. "No harm now. Want to spend last moments...with you with no barriers."

As Curtis and Kathvaj remove the helmet, Ruth looks at the Vulcan Alanya. The Betazoid is struggling to handle the waves of pain her empathic sense is receiving from the Breen. (Alanya, please!—can you help him?)

Alanya feels it, too. (Yes. I can. I will if he will allow it.) She moves closer as Kathvaj sets the helmet aside. The craggy face tries to smile at her but he can't. "You are in pain, Brak' Tul."

"Yes," he whispers raggedly and it is there in his voice, heard for the first time without the helmet's filter.

"I can help," she offers softly. At his fractional nod, she orders every male out of the room except the Borg and the Klingon; they wouldn't go, anyway. To them, she says, "Do not forget why we are here. Look at him, not at me." In the next second, the Deltan Alanya emerges and the pheromones are staggering, even controlled as they are. "Him!" she hisses and the two males drag their eyes back to the Breen.

Alanya pulls off one of his gloves, gently takes his hand in hers, locks her dark eyes to his, and notices they are blue.

A second later, he relaxes, nearly pain-free. "You are beautiful," he tells her and the smile he gets back would have made him stumble if he'd been standing. With a tiny smile of his own, he goes on, "But you are not my type." She doesn't answer, doesn't have to. Can't afford to, but she allows a tiny smile of her own, and he knows she understands.

"Kathvaj. Favor."

The Klingon is still beside him. "What do you need, Breen?"

"Weyoun's head—be nice. Just get Unity back."

"We will. I swear it on the Sword of Kahless!" He has misjudged this Breen who has proven to be of the highest honor. "You have earned a place in Sto-Vo-Kor, Brak' Tul."

This strikes the Breen as amusing. "And will you howl me into the next world, Klingon?"

He nods. "They must know that a great and noble warrior approaches."

He can't help it; he laughs. "Can you—imagine that? A Breen in Sto-Vo-Kor?"

"When I get there, I will find you and we will sit by the fires and sing warriors' songs and hunt our enemies!"

(It ends.) Ruth hears the Deltan's warning in her head.

"So I will get to—hunt Weyoun for eternity!" He is slowly sagging. Kathvaj and Curtis hold him upright. "Thank you for giving me a pleasant thought to take with me."

It is suddenly too much effort to continue. The blue eyes they saw too briefly close. Only a few breaths remain. The last thing that Breen Ambassador Brak' Tul hears is the Klingon, then the others with him, howling loud enough to shake loose pieces of debris, to indeed be heard in Sto-Vo-Kor.

Alanya gently lays the Breen's hand on his chest. She stands and her expression, in spite of the pheromones, is so frightening, the others back away a few steps. Her phaser is on her belt but she doesn't draw it. Instead, she draws a sword, a nasty-looking, double-edged, razor-sharp blade. "Now we take back what is ours. They die—or we do."

She stalks out the door. She doesn't look to see if the others are following; she knows they are.

And the fight for Unity Station is on.

Hearing the explosions throughout the station, Quirk and his companions stop for a brief moment. They hear a loud unmistakably Klingon howl. Quirk's blood chills as he thinks, (What hero has gone to Sto-Vo-Kor?) Then he turns toward the sound and proceeds with caution, not knowing what to expect, only knowing his friends are there, and the time has come. "It's time to take back our home," says Quirk, a dangerous glint in his eyes, "no matter if I die in doing so. Let's go, Marines!" he bellows, and leaving behind all Ferengi traits, Quirk boldly takes on his Human half for the conquest of the Jem'Hadar and Weyoun.

Ruth thinks to herself as she follows Alanya down the hall, (I really hoped to never have to do this again. Betazoids hate violence. I guess all the telepathic warfare that Deanna Troi taught will be useful once again. I really hoped not to ever use this to kill again. Too bad Skotek is not here. He is—), and she is saddened as she changes the thought to past tense, (was good at this. He was the best chief of security we had. Wonder if he still has a few of his surprises still working on the station.)

Somewhere:

As the ambassadors invade the station with various teams from their worlds, they

seem to have forgotten one lone person with a huge ship. "Fools, I guess some things have to be done yourself if you want to get it done right." As he heads off the Bridge, he stops and orders the two nearest guards, "You and you. With me."

Unity:

A bloody Governor Weyoun is coming out of his daze as he reaches Ops. "HOW DARE HE?! THIS IS WHAT I GET FOR CARING, FOR MAKING *FRIENDS*!! HE TRIED TO KILL ME!!" He is so angry, he is literally spitting the words out. "What did I ever do to deserve this??"

A Jem'Hadar looks up from the console. "Governor, shields are down and we have signs of various alien races beaming aboard the station."

Governor Weyoun looks up, shocked. "NO!! Get those shields up!" He has never felt so betrayed. "You care for them and look what they do to you. He was working with *them* all along! Make sure no one gets into Command. Dispatch a patrol to meet these aliens and show them the way out."

The Jem'Hadar gives the order but he also sees the numbers of enemy who are beaming in. "I don't think--"

"That's right," Weyoun hisses. "You DON'T think. You're not here to think! You are here to obey MY orders. If you don't like your lot in life, say so and I will change it for you!"

"We live to serve!" the soldier barks.

"That's right--and don't you EVER forget it!" Governor Weyoun then adds, "Make sure the hatches on that level are all open." He thinks, (This is *my* station. All of my plans are ruined because of HIM! But I will be back to take what's mine!) He stalks out toward his office.

Quirk and his group make short work of the enemy troops they encounter. Michael surprises them by pulling an amazing collection of throwing knives from pockets, belts, boots, and sleeves. One of them slices through Krim Los's sleeve on its way to its target Jem'Hadar. When he sees the others' stares, he grins. "It's a hobby." At that moment, another Jem'Hadar starts around the corner, sees them, and goes the other way, with Browne in pursuit.

The Ferengi leads the group toward sounds of fighting. They find a mass of dead enemies and several bloody but very much alive ambassadors. Quirk, just as bloody, welcomes them home.. "Where are Ruth and Alanya?" he asks, thinking to himself, (And where is that [Ferengi expletive which cannot be translated to English] Weyoun? I want his head on a platter!)

Browne finally catches up with them but what a strange sight! He is carrying his right arm!

Krim Los exclaims, "Michael! You're hurt!"

"It's nothing," Browns says and shifts the arm to carry it over his shoulder. "It's the one the Klingon took off by accident a while ago. Jem'Hadar surprised me and cut it off so I surprised him back when I picked it up and threw it at him. He was so shocked, he never saw me throw the knife. Now I just need to find someone to put it back on again. Till then, I can give you a hand...but only one!"

As the ambassadors start down the hall of Unity Station, Ruth stays back and turns a corner, leaving the rest to continue on without her. She makes no attempt to tell them that she is leaving them. "This is best, that I leave without their knowledge. They would only want to come along and help. I cannot take that chance. I swore I would not do this again." (Twelve hundred Betazoids, four out of every ten Betazoid telepaths were killed from the strain of the empathic assault when taking back Betazed from the Dominion,)* she thinks as she heads down the lone corridor. "Skotek, why did you have to go and play hero? I hope it is where you said it was left."

RED ALERT-EVACUATE! SELF-DESTRUCT SEQUENCE STARTED. FIVE MINUTES TO SELF-DESTRUCT, RED ALERT. AUDIO COUNTDOWN WILL START AT TWO-MINUTE MARK. EVACUATE! EVACUATE!

"Great. Only way that could be triggered without my authorization is if someone entered into the very center of the station past all the traps and alarms. That is one reason Skotek put his inner office there, for security so no one but authorized people would be able to enter. Someone found a way to the door if not in. I hope it was not one of the ambassadors nosing around that tripped it. Must move faster. Even less time now. Ok, just down this hall..."

Ruth turns and sees two Jem'Hadar soldiers guarding the area. (These must be Governor Weyoun's soldiers—they do not have tubes for white.) "This day just does not seem to get better."

RED ALERT-EVACUATE! FOUR MINUTES TO SELF-DESTRUCT.

* The Battle of Betazed, by Pocket books.

CHAPTER 6 And Then There Were None

By the time Weyoun reaches his office, he is clear-headed but seething with rage at the Breen's treachery. He knows there are broken bones in his face, and blood is still oozing from his smashed nose. But that is secondary. His first priority is to escape so he can lie low and make plans to try again.

"Try again!!" he snarls. "It was PERFECT—it was MINE until that—that—" He is so furious, he can't even think of a word. He slams around the office, throwing things out of his way while he gathers personal things to take with him. The next time, he vows, he will trust NO ONE!

The door slides open while his back is to it. "WHAT??" he explodes as he turns around. There in the open doorway is—
Himself.

"Oh, you," he sneers. "I'm amazed that you have the nerve to show yourself, especially where there's real fighting." He continues throwing things aside, and a few things into a small travel case. "Come to take back your office?"

"Not exactly." The Vorta Ambassador—the real one—stares at the other. He is waiting for the right moment. (Just a little more, Weyoun. If you'd just turn a little more to the left.)

"Come to gloat about my failed plan, then?" comes out through clenched teeth. "Well, go ahead. But I warn you, 'Weyoun'," and the name sounds like a curse, "I will be back—make no mistake!"

(Not if I can help it!), the Ambassador thinks. At that moment, the usurper turns. (NOW!!)

Unfortunately, also at that moment, the comm system and Red Alert klaxon start shrieking at the same moment:

RED ALERT—EVACUATE! SELF-DESTRUCT—

Startled, the "Governor" jerks upright. "WHAT NOW?!?"

And the Vorta Ambassador misses. The hand aimed at the usurper's kill switch slams his shoulder instead, sending him over the desk.

Uh-oh.

RED ALERT, FOUR MINUTES TO SELF DESTRUCT.

Ruth sees two Jem'Hadar guarding the door she has to enter. "I hope this works on these different Jem'Hadar." Ruth starts to concentrate on the nearest Jem'Hadar. Projecting emotions of anger and despair into his mind, she pictures him strangling the other Jem'Hadar. The nearest Jem'Hadar looks at the other one guarding the door. An instant later, his hands are around the other's throat. This takes the Jem'Hadar by surprise as the other one takes his throat and twists with a snapping sound, instantly killing him. Ruth then projects even more despair and pictures the Jem'Hadar with his gun to his head. Sweating with the strain, Ruth visualizes the Jem'Hadar pulling the trigger. BANG. She opens her eyes and see the Jem'Hadar dead at the door. Staggering to the door, she punches in the secret code that only two—no, one—person would know. The door opens and she enters to find it right where Skotek said it would always be. Ruth puts on the personal phasing cloak and vanishes. She walks over to the wall and enters another code

and a secret panel opens. To anyone looking they would just see the wall open on its own. She takes out a bracelet and puts it on.

RED ALERT! TWO MINUTES TO SELF-DESTRUCT.

"Okay, I hope you are right, Skotek, that this will always work even with no power here." She touches a button and vanishes.

RED ALERT, 1 MINUTE 50 SECONDS TO SELF-DESTRUCT.

Ruth materializes inside the very inner part of Unity Station. She is inside Skotek's inner, inner office, which no one but Skotek and she knew about. The personal transporter did work after all.

1 MINUTE 30 SECONDS TO SELF-DESTRUCT.

Ruth hurries to the panel. She has only been here twice before and both times with Skotek. "Remember: should you ever have to come here in an emergency and want total control, it is set up to authorize you with a retinal scan and a password," he had said.

1 MINUTE 10 SECONDS TO SELF-DESTRUCT.

"I know! I know! What is the name of that Terran mythical bird that is believed to be reborn from ashes?" she mutters.

1 MINUTE 5 SECONDS TO SELF-DESTRUCT.

"Got it!". She types into the console ***** and lets the computer scan her eye after she takes off the phase cloak.

1 MINUTE TO SELF-DESTRUCT.

59

58

57

56

55

54

53

52

Identity confirmed.

50

49

48

Ruth hurries over the console. "Computer, cancel Red Alert. Authorization Beta-zoid Omega 7."

44

43

42

Computer does not answer.

41

RED ALERT. SELF-DESTRUCT CANNOT BE CANCELLED AFTER T -30 SECONDS.

40

39

38

Ruth hurries over to another panel and starts typing.

37

36

35

34

33

32

SELF-DESTRUCT SEQUENCE CANCELLED. BETAZOID OMEGA 7
AUTHORIZATION CONFIRMED.

Ruth slumps into the corner, allows herself a few seconds to breathe before reaching for the phase cloak again.

"You DARE?!" The "Governor" is so shocked, he can't yell; it's a mere whisper.

"Not bad for a weakling, was it?" the Ambassador replies. (So we do it the hard way.) He had a phaser when he beamed over but it was quickly used up and he dropped it.

"At least you showed SOME backbone before you die," the usurper sneers. He knows there was a phaser on his desk but in his rage, it's one of the things he swept aside. He is watching the Vorta and throwing quick glances around the room trying to find it.

The Ambassador knows the moment he sees what he has been searching for; the usurper's eyes stop scanning the room, lock in one place for a second longer. Following the gaze, Weyoun sees it, too, and knows he MUST stop him from reaching it. One or both of them will die in the next few minutes. (If that's what it takes,) he thinks.

He moves a split second after the usurper, cuts him off, knocks him aside to the floor. In the fight that follows, neither sees the figure that enters and stops in the doorway.

When pushed to desperation, every being will fight for survival. So it is with the two Weyouns. But being unused to physical combat, it takes less than a minute for both to pant with the exertion. So far, the Ambassador has prevented every attempt to reach the phaser, though he has not dared to take his eyes off the usurper long enough to reach it himself.

Finally, the enhanced Vorta feints one way; when Weyoun moves that way to block him, he abruptly changes direction and with a shout of triumph, dives past the Ambassador, reaching for the phaser—

—and feels a crushing blow on his back which knocks him flat, drives the air from his lungs. He fights to remain conscious, puts everything he has into pulling air into his lungs and tries to move—he knows he has just seconds before his adversary moves in for the kill—

But those seconds pass. Then a few more. His dazed mind wonders what the Ambassador is waiting for. He manages to turn his head enough to see him.

Vorta Ambassador Weyoun lies on the floor not two meters away. Unmoving.

He can hardly believe it. What happened? Did the fool break his own neck? He starts to smile but another figure moves into view.

"What—you—doing here?" he gasps.

"I so wanted to see him kill you," Eris3 answers, "but when he smashed into you

that last time, he fell backwards. Hit his neck, the back of it."

He starts laughing. "You mean—he actually—triggered his own—kill switch?"

She nods, and moves closer. Reaches down as if to help him up. "So I get the pleasure of doing it myself." She slips her hand around, finds the exact spot, and with a nasty grin at his look of horror, presses.

She knows the countdown has continued so she must finish what she must do and get out. Quickly she checks the Ambassador. He is indeed dead. Taking the few steps to the comm panel, she records a very brief message and instructs the computer to play it when one of the senior staff next accesses the comm system...if it isn't blown to bits. She has one more task which she completes as the computer announces 1MINUTE 50 SECONDS TO SELF-DESTRUCT. Now carrying a small sealed bag, she slips out the door at a run for the shuttle bay.

In an effort to stop the self-destruct, Alanya leads a groups of ambassadors and troops toward Station Ops. She hears running footsteps but knows time is short so she doesn't stop but raises her sword while those with her, Curtis of Borg and Kathvaj a step behind, lift their weapons. But the person runs straight past at the junction, doesn't even see them. Alanya recognizes Eris3 who appears to be carrying a very small bag.

"Emergency transport to Ops!" Alanya yells after slapping her comm badge; the computer marks 1 MINUTE 10 SECONDS TO SELF-DESTRUCT. They materialize at 1 MINUTE 5 SECONDS. Working feverishly, each tries to stop the countdown without success.

At 35 SECONDS, they know it's no use.

34...

The Deltan hits her comm badge. "Emergency transport! Everybody out NOW!"

33...

32...

The computer voice announces, "SELF-DESTRUCT SEQUENCE ABORTED VIA AUTHORIZATION OF BETAZOID AMBASSADOR GREEN."

They finally notice Ruth isn't with them. None knows when she left or how she did it. Or how she stopped the self-destruct. And for right now, they don't care.

Alanya looks at the group that surround her now. They are ragged, bruised, almost all are bloody, including herself. Her sword and Kathvaj's *bat'leth* drank deeply, and both she and the Klingon wear clothes now stiff with the drying blood of Jem'Hadar. Some are now sitting on the floor, their adrenaline rush gone and with it, the strength to stand. Some now cry quiet tears for the fallen; there wasn't time for them before the battle. She taps her comm badge. "Report, all units."

One after another, they report their positions secure. A few still have fighting going on, but it is not expected to last long. The Klingon grins at his Borg friend. "Curtis of Borg, we may not have an opportunity like this for a long while."

Curtis nods. "Better than hunting cats." They turn to Alanya and she nods agreement; they are out the door a moment later and Kathvaj's battle cry can be heard echoing through the corridor.

Alanya taps the comm badge once more. "Attention, all units. Unity Station is ours again!"

CHAPTER 7 Endings and Beginnings

Space:

<Confirmed, identity input>

Graceful wings fold back on themselves, opening up into a sort of X shape from the body of the ship.

<Lifeform detected in sanctum, password confirmed, Program Phoenix Alpha 1 initiated.>

Warp engines unfold from the body of the ship, extending out into space. The other ships nearby seem unaware of the changes; even the crew aboard seems unaware. Only one being knows what is going on—the entity at the very core of the ship, controlling the computer center with a sentient will. The ship is his body, the core fluctuating with power as the internal energy system springs to life.

Aboard the Borg sphere, Curtis is watching the progress of the battle. Reports are flooding in, and soon it will be his turn to strike. Suddenly, a technician at the science station jerks upright. "Ambassador!"

Curtis swings around, rushing to the computer screen even as the technician is giving his report. "There's an energy spike from the Phoenix...its a wave I've never seen before."

Curtis looks at the display and growls, "That's a Genesis Wave! It was in the Borg Collective database." This is not good, a Genesis Wave now... He begins to rapid-fire orders. "DORVAN! I NEED A SHUTTLE LAUNCHED TO ESTABLISH A TRANS-WARP CONDUIT AND I NEED IT OPENED NOW! K'Teliv, send the following message to all vessels within range: 'Attention, Unity Station, Ambassadors, and all ships! This is Curtis of Borg. We have detected a Genesis Wave from an unknown vessel. We are opening a transwarp conduit. When the conduit opens up, enter it without hesitation. We have no idea how long we've got until detonation.' Also, *stress* that this is their best chance for survival!

"T'Sket, I want Unity scanned for lifeforms, focusing on the ambassadors first. Have them all beamed to cargo bay 1. Also, I want you to make every attempt to locate the remains of the Breen ambassador and have them beamed aboard as well.

"Mr. N'Vak, take a security team to cargo bay 1. In the event we bring over any of the new Jem'Hadar, I want those hybrids secured and taken into custody, alive if possible.

"B'retacha, did you get an opportunity to attempt what we had discussed before boarding the station?"

The reborn Klingon turns toward Curtis and just shakes his head no.

"That's all right, my friend. Maybe we will get a second chance." After giving orders, Curtis turns back to the monitor to look at the wave, only to see it building faster and faster. Inside, he knows that time is short until the detonation occurs, and he is worried that not everyone would get away alive.

"Someone get me scans on that vessel that appeared. Odd...I have never seen anything like it before." On the off chance of finding something in the ship's records, Curtis taps away at the panels in front of him but there seems to be no record of a vessel like this. "K'Teliv, try to hail that incoming vessel and inform it we are on a mission of mercy and not a Collective Sphere, and that any help they could offer would be appreci-

ated."

Unity:

(Everyone's leaving. Explosions, fires, weapons fire, an' a whole mess of them alien ships around this station. I think it may be best if was gittin' my butt outta here 'fore sumpin' real bad happens. My work here is done for the time being. I'll be back when things cool down a wee bit.) Rosen touches the panel in front of him. "Computer, start fast launch sequence, beam me aboard. Authorization RO1-RO1-GO." There is a familiar whine...and the Section 31 operative disappears.

Outside Unity station, ambassador ships are leaving the station as fast as they can get out. Ships of all sizes and makes fill the sky, all heading for the conduit the Borg shuttle has made.

Inside the very center of the station, Ruth is awoken from her exhausted sleep by a male voice that she should know, but it would take too much effort to recognize in her current state, shouting, "Leave NOW!".

"What? Who?" she mumbles. She looks around and sees no one. She tries to get up but falls back down as the exhaustion tries to reclaim her. She pulls herself up to the console long enough to touch the transporter button that is installed there. Ruth materializes in the hallway right outside of the shuttle bays. She sees the last shuttle leave the empty bay as she slumps down to the floor. As exhaustion finally claims her again, there is no one around, or a ship left in the bays. She is alone on a station about to be swept by a Genesis Wave as she passes out.

In a flash of an eye, a bright light appears and is gone just as fast. Standing over Ruth is Tigri, along with Q. "Ruth," speaks Tigri, "do you require assistance? Please let Q and myself help you. What do you say? Ruth?"

"Tigri?" Ruth says blurry-eyed. "Help me"

"Mr. N'Vak, this is Curtis. Did we get any ambassadors with any of those beam overs?"

"Unknown as of yet, sir. I am still taking count of exactly who is who, and the total numbers of bodies here. We did, however, get three of the altered Jem'Hadar soldiers."

"Good. If any of those Jem'Hadar give you any problems whatsoever, you have permission to beam them at least ten meters outside of the ship. In fact, if anyone causes any problems, beam them out as well. Have a security detail get those Jem'Hadar to a secure area at once. We have a medical team on the way as I speak. Oh, and one more thing, Mr. N'Vak. If you call me SIR one more time, I will have *you* beamed ten meters outside of the ship. Curtis out."

Curtis issues orders to the security team, then turns back to the Science officer. "T'Sket, is there any way possible to get the exact location of the Genesis device, and can we get to it to disarm it before it goes off?" Curtis asks, already knowing the answer.

"Negative, sir. We can locate it but we have no way to disarm it. Once enabled, there is no way to stop a Genesis Wave from final build-up."

The response is not what Curtis had hoped to hear. But he knew before he asked there is no way to disable the device. Looking around the room, Curtis takes comfort in

knowing that he and his crew will make it out of the area in time, and that any ships entering the conduit will be saved.

But one thing...it's that one thing his mind keeps wandering back to...

"Curtis, this is N'Vak. We have a situation here. There is what appears to be a Human, small in stature, holding one of his arms. He is either drunk or has the worst concussion I have ever seen. This individual is very battered and he just mumbles, 'give me another round and I can take them all on! SEMPER FI!' When asked his name, he keeps saying something about dragonflies. Please advise."

Rolling his eyes, Curtis looks at the ceiling, almost positive who his XO is talking about, and responds, "Mr. N'Vak, has this person any sort of ID on him?"

"No, si...err, no, Curtis, but he is wearing the remains of what appears to have been at one time a military uniform. It would seem he has at some point donned a Starfleet Marine uniform."

"All right. I believe you have Ambassador Browne. Usually he is found in the very near vicinity of Ambassador Quirk so be on the look out for a Ferengi. In the meantime, if the 'Dragonfly' causes any problem, have him beamed twenty meters outside of the ship. No, ignore that. As soon as possible, I want to know how many ambassadors are on board and have them brought to the Bridge and made comfortable. Assign guest quarters, such as we have. Curtis out."

Curtis turns to T'Sket at the science station. "T'Sket, how long until detonation?"

"Curtis, there are approximately three minutes until detonation."

"Good. That should be enough time. I want beamed over to the last known location of the Breen ambassador. Give me two and a half minutes, then beam me back to this spot."

As Curtis stands up from his seat, T'Sket looks at him, reaches to the console in front of him, and activates the transporter. As he starts to dematerialize, he says, "T'Sket, you have the ship. See you in..." were the last words heard from Curtis.

Stunned at the sudden change in scenery, Quirk sits down next to his old friend Krim Los and says, "I really hate this, but I think we are in more trouble than we asked for. Ideas as to what to do now, my friend? I am open to suggestions." Looking around the new surroundings, he thinks, (This looks a lot like one of those Borg ships. Could it be Curtis's vessel, or another Borg ship ready to simulate everyone??) "Hello! Is anyone there?"

"Attention, please. As you may have noticed, you are on a Borg vessel. You will not be assimilated. My name is N'Vak, and I am First Officer of this ship, commanded by Curtis. Please cooperate with the security staff so we can get all personnel accounted for."

Unity:

Curtis runs through the station in a direct line to Weyoun's office. It's a good thing he knows the way. There is smoke and debris and he thinks sadly of the way the station looked the first time he saw it...no time now. He runs through the door, sees the bodies of both Weyouns on the floor. He kneels by the ambassador. He did come through in the end. But again, no time for sentiment right now. He drags the ambassador's body over to

the dead usurper, places them as close as he can, drops his comm badge on them and runs for the door.

Curtis looks around, squinting. It's hard to see with all this smoke. "He's got to be here somewhere. He fell in the shield generator room which is just up there." Walking as quickly as all the debris piles allow, he finally sees what he has been searching for. "Ah, there's his helmet. Now to find his body." (Damn, it's been two minutes—no time left! We placed him in this vicinity...I know we did.) Turning left, Curtis literally trips on the remains of the Breen ambassador. "Great! Got you now, and we've got to get out of here, my friend. T'Sket, lock on the Breen's comm badge and transport. I have what I came after."

As soon as he boards the sphere, it eases toward the transwarp conduit. It is almost all over now. "T'Sket, how long until detonation?" Curtis asks. The reply is 28 seconds. Curtis calls out, "Lock on to my comm badge and beam it to this location NOW!"

Without hesitation, T Sket hits the transporter controls. To the horror of everyone on the bridge, they see the remains of the "Governor" Weyoun materialize along with Ambassador Weyoun. They look at Curtis, their confusion obvious.

"You didn't think I was giving him another chance when that Genesis bomb goes off, did you?" Curtis says with a grin on his face. None of them has thought of that and they tell him so. More solemnly, Curtis says, "I've beamed the body of Ambassador Weyoun over, too. Partly for the same reason, but also because he proved himself a hero, unlikely as that is. We'll find out from Ruth or Alanya what to do with his body."

Curtis then calls out, "Mr. Starcher, set a course to the Breen home world. I don't know what their customs are but his people should at least be able to give the ambassador whatever it is Breen do for their dead. And get this dead Vorta off my bridge."

Aboard the *Phoenix*, the being sits contemplating the activity on the station. A panic has started for some reason, and the Station was nearly deserted. The being's head...or, rather, his eyes flick to the side, and another viewscreen appears to his mental command. This one shows the largish spherical vessel of Borg design that appears to be leading the evacuation. Ruined lungs draw in breath and the being speaks. "Attention, Unity forces. Report emergency and stand by to be advised," he begins. "A battle fleet of immense power is approaching, and will be here in less than a standard Day. Respond."

"Curtis, we are picking up a message from that vessel." He switches it to audio and lets them all hear it.

"Alien vessel, I am Curtis of Borg. What are your intentions? Friend or foe? Our station was taken hostage by a Vorta and his troops. We have removed the intruder but are in the process of a full evacuation. There is a Genesis device set to go off anytime now. Can you assist in any way? If not, then it may be wise for you to follow the retreating vessels into the transwarp conduit."

Unknown:

Menacing shapes float through the void, faint starlight flickers off of black hulls. These hulls, sharper, sleeker, more deadly than any Klingon or Dominion or Romulan vessels, ancient battle scarred shapes interweave through the larger shapes. Forty-four vessels in all, the largest nearly the size of a Borg cube; the smallest mere fighters. The

hulls are long, dark, segmented affairs, as sharp and deadly as a dagger, weapons ports trace along the edges of all of them, and their gracefulness belies their menacing deadliness.

Aboard the lead vessel, dark figures go about their business. Tactical displays light up the dark Bridge. Indeed, the entire Bridge is doubling as a tactical command center. Dozens of crew, officers and technicians swarm over each display, plotting, planning, and going over data, records and intelligence. The Bridge is dominated by a single holographic tactical display tank, showing the relative positions of each of the vessels, and, over at the far edge, another image in red lines flashes their intended target: the damaged and barely recovering Space Station Unity.

Turning the body of the Breen ambassador over to his own people is a different experience for Curtis and his crew. But each species has its own way of dealing with death. For the short time they are on Breen, Curtis and his crew are made comfortable and treated with courtesy and respect, but they can still sense their presence is tolerated and not wanted.

As expected, Quirk tries to acquire anything he can, at a good price, of course, to resell at his bar later. Michael gets separated from them and is found in a "bar." Amazingly, he tells the Breen patrons of Brak' Tul's heroism and has them drinking to the memory of him. Still, it is a great relief when Curtis and crew pulls away from the planet Breen.

While on the trip to deliver the ambassador's remains, the Chief Medical Officer B'retacha (a former Klingon) reattached Mr. Browne's severed arm.

This extra time together also gave Quirk time to talk Curtis into a refit of his Marauder, much in the same way he had done for the former Andorian ambassador. But now it is time to get back to business. "Mr. Starcher, best speed to Unity," Curtis says. "Scan ahead. I want no surprises."

The sphere's science officer T'Sket turns to his captain "Sir, I have been scanning in the vicinity of Unity and I still show a Genesis Wave. However, I still show the station is right where it was when we left."

Curtis looks at the former Vulcan, cocks his head to the left and asks for confirmation from his tactical officer. K'Teliv confirms the readings of T'Sket.

"Damn odd. Let me see what is going on with that wave. Look for anything out of the ordinary around the station." Curtis mutters as he approaches the console.

"Sir, I show that unknown ship that appeared shortly after the Genesis Wave. It's still in the same position as when we left the station. It appears that the wave is coming from that ship, sir."

"I want everyone to listen and listen good. The next person that calls me 'sir' will pay dearly for it. Now let me see that wave." Curtis looks at the screen, turns to T'Sket and says, "That wave is a Genesis wave...but it's being used as a power source, I only know one person that would put an idea like that to use." Curtis then turns to his guests who have assembled on the bridge, the rescued ambassadors, and asks if everything has been to their satisfaction thus far. Stupid thing to do and it is not until after he has asked that he realizes what he did.

The first to speak up is of no surprise to anyone. "Curtis, for a small sum, I could

have maybe two or three holosuites installed, or possibly you may be interested in..."

Curtis cuts Quirk off with a wave of his hand. "No, thank you, we don't really have a need for holosuites or similar items at this time." Curtis looks at Michael. "Is your arm working properly?"

"Just dandy," Michael says. "Long as it can lift a gun or a glass, it's fine."

The rest of the VIP passengers answer with a nod here and there.

Curtis moves to his chair and just as he starts to sit down, another one of those monster headaches that he gets hits with a vengeance. He slumps down into the seat and puts his head in his hands. But he knows that he must try to press on. "Starcher, try to reach the Klingon ambassador. Have him meet us at Unity. Tell him I need him. We have an old friend that may be in trouble and I may need his help. Then send the following message to the phantom ship at the station, tell them we are on the way back and I would like to have a discussion with their captain. When we get within transporter range of the station, let me know. I need medication and will be in my quarters. Mr. K'Teliv, you have the bridge."

Somewhere:

Ruth wakes up after sleeping for a day. She sees that she is in a sickbay but not on Unity. She sees a familiar face in the corner of the room. "Tigri, is that you? Where am I and what is going on with Unity?" She starts to get up but the fatigue pushes her back down.

Tigri is beside her a moment later. "Yes, it is I, Tigri. You are safe for now. Unity is in our hands again. Just rest. You will get back to the station in a few days. Computer, ready my Raider for travel." Tigri turns and leaves Sickbay as the doors close behind him.

The Sphere:

Alanya sits once again in darkened quarters. She locked herself in as soon as she came onboard the Sphere and asked Curtis to clear the area until she is in control again. She replays in her mind the events of the past few weeks: the plan to re-take Unity; watching the Breen leave with Bajoran Ambassador Krim Los; making the decision to stop the pheromone suppressors and having to use every ounce of Vulcan training to keep them under control; gathering a battle force near Unity; waiting for the shields to drop, then finding Breen Ambassador Brak' Tul dying...

She stares at the candle flame, murmurs softly, "I hardly knew him but there is sadness for the loss."

She remembers letting go of his hand, and then of her control of her pheromones and emotions. She knows the backlash staggered nearly everyone in sight. The exceptions were the Klingon and the Borg Ambassadors; their extreme anger and her own helped to buffer the effects a little, but not much. The enemy soldiers discovered that.

And Weyoun. Whatever else was said about him, she remembers he was so kind when she first arrived at Unity. He escorted her to lunch and was so charming, showed her around the station because her computer was malfunctioning and the map it had printed was completely wrong... "Another gone," she whispers to the candle.

Then there were the battles they fought to re-take the station, both in trying to stop

the self-destruct, and after. Her sword was blood from one end of the blade to the other. Her Vulcan half is coldly logical about the necessity of the killing, and yet, it is appalled by it; that she could become this other being who cut down enemy soldiers with such... efficiency, and used her Deltan side without guilt or hesitation. While they were stunned by the pheromone levels, they died.

(This, though, is the hard part,) she thinks. (I must once again bring my two halves together in harmony.)

She brings her fingers together lightly touching. (Deltan acknowledges the pain... and the grief.) She feels again Brak' Tul's pain, and end, and cherishes the tears that fall calmly. For him and for Weyoun. And Skotek. And all the others lost, both ambassadors and staff. (Breathe...slowly...calm...breathe...control...control...)

Space:

No response had been received from the lone vessel still beside Unity. "Curtis, we are within visual range of Unity."

"On my way. Use only maneuvering thrusters and take us within transporter range of that beast." As Curtis rises to his feet, he feels the medication. He is a little unstable but functional. Moving toward the bridge, he calls out to his XO, "Mr. N'Vak, put together a team to beam over to that mystery ship."

"Curtis, Starcher here. We still have no communications with the other ship, but they have lowered their shields. It's as if they knew we planned to beam over."

"B'retacha, have you checked on our passengers lately? I want the best possible care taken of them. That being, of course, with the exception of Alanya, since she has requested access to her quarters be restricted. She will let us know if she needs anything. Curtis out."

"Curtis, all passengers are in good spirits, except Browne. He is seeking good spirits to put in him," is the answer Curtis receives from his CMO B'retacha. Hearing this brings a slight smile to the face of Curtis. He thinks that maybe all Klingons should be assimilated and then unhooked from the Collective; it would give them a sense of humor. But no; he wouldn't wish that on anyone...almost.

Once on the Bridge, Curtis looks around to see his away team. Quirk is standing among them. "I'm sorry, Quirk, but until we know more about our 'friends' in that other ship I must insist you stay here. However, while we are gone, I want you to gather all the hand weapons we got with the last beam out of the station. Once you have them, get as many as possible in dependable working order, if you would, sir. Perhaps others can help."

"Happy to do it," Quirk says. He taps Browne's shoulder and they head off the Bridge.

Curtis looks in the direction of Dorvan and gives the order to start the transport.

It is dark and the noise level is almost non-existent. This ship is like nothing he has ever seen before. Curtis is certain that its design is not even known to the Borg. Being an engineer, he is in awe. The lights come up and the away team sees they are not alone.

Sub-Commander Taulek is waiting for the Borg landing party when they arrive in the transporter room. Nodding to the former Borg, he gestures politely with his free hand,

the other is holding a scanner of some sort. "Welcome to the *Phoenix*, Ambassador. I am Sub-Commander Taulek, commander of the Unification forces under Ambassador Skotek, and captain of the Warbird *Arasham*."

Curtis nods, several questions forming in his mind as he and his party step from the transporter, but he settles on the first one he thinks of. "A pleasure, Sub-Commander, but if I may ask, why did you not respond to our hails?"

"Well, " Taulek looks embarrassed, "to tell the truth, we still haven't got all of the systems figured out yet. We were never briefed on how to run this ship, and Commander Skotek died before we even knew it existed. Also, the ship itself seems to have a consciousness, and at times controls its own actions."

At that, Curtis's eyes widen and he looks around the ship with renewed interest. But the transporter, at least, seems to follow standard Romulan configuration. "If possible, I would love to inspect the ship further." he replies.

"Certainly. I had hoped you would. We would appreciate any help," came the reply.

Deeper in the ship, in a shielded compartment, the command center of the ship records the meeting, and scrutinizes the landing party. Anti-intruder defenses warm up, only to be silenced by the controller's will. Logging the landing party as allies, the ship's master turns its sensors out toward the galactic northwest. They were near, another few standard weeks at best. He would be waiting.