

Blake Adams felt the turbolift come to a halt. He looked at the display panel. Deck Three, Section Fourteen. The doors parted to reveal one of the *USS Providence*'s senior officers.

"You look good with four pips," Counselor James Goodman said as he entered the turbolift.

"Thanks James. I don't feel any different."

"Perhaps you'll feel different when you step onto the *Swift*'s bridge."

Adams smiled. He had recently been promoted to the rank of captain and been assigned to take command of the Pioneer-class *USS Swift*. He felt some regrets about leaving *Providence*, but it was the only way he could advance his career. "I'm sure I will, James," he said as he pushed the panel to close the lift doors. "Resume."

"So, Blake," Goodman said, "Are you looking forward to it?"

Adams shrugged his shoulders. "Yes and no." He didn't want to leave the relationships that he had made with his crew—his friends—over the last few years. But he knew that commanding the *Swift* would give him the opportunity to do more in-depth exploration instead of basic survey and mapping missions. "I wish I could take you and the rest of the crew with me."

"And who would be left for Jada to command?" Goodman asked with a grin, referring to the *Providence*'s First Officer and new prospective Commanding Officer. "It's bad enough that you're taking Lieutenant Kelly with you, but T'Les is leaving to take command of the Epsilon Gamma science outpost. There has to be some of the old crew left on board."

Adams nodded. "Then you and Mary have decided to stay?" James and Mary Goodman had told their CO that they considered taking other assignments back in the Sol Sector.

"We've committed to stay one more year," Goodman said.

The turbolift stopped and the two officers stepped into the corridor. They continued to talk as they walked toward the portside shuttlebay. "Is that what you and Mary want, James?"

"We want to start a family, but we can wait another year," Goodman replied.

"Why wait? You can have children and still serve on a starship."

"We'd rather not. I know others do it, but being on a ship this small, and frequently traveling to unknown territory..."

"Is not as safe as you would like it," Adams finished. "I understand."

They reached the entrance to the shuttlebay and stopped. Adams looked at Goodman and patted his shoulder. "I'll miss you, James. You're a great ship's counselor...and a great friend."

"Don't be premature, Skipper. We still have one more mission together."

Adams smiled and nodded his head toward the large doors. "Yes we do. Let's go welcome aboard our guest."

Space, the Final Frontier...

These are the voyages of the starship *Providence*!

## Star Trek: *Providence*

### "The More Things Change..."

By Cleve Johnson & Peter J. Koester

Based on a story idea by Peter J. Koester

*Captain's log, stardate 58621.2:*

*Due to the recent Kairn incursion into two Federation sectors, Captain Peter Koester of the USS Dauntless has come aboard as an advisor for this mission. Captain Koester is the only CO known to have escaped from a Kairn attack with his ship relatively intact. Sketchy reports indicate that the Federation colony on Nelbana III has been captured; therefore, we are on course for Sector 4-2-8 to observe Kairn activities in the Nelbana system and report what we learn to Starfleet Command.*

Captain Blake Adams, followed by Captain Peter Koester, entered the ready room. "Have a seat, Captain," Adams said as he pointed to the couch. "Can I get you anything to drink?"

"I normally drink coffee, but whatever you're having will be fine," Koester replied. "By the way, please call me Peter."

"It's a deal, if you promise to call me Blake," Adams said as he retrieved two beverages from the replicator and walked back to the lounge area of his ready room. "Here. I think you'll like this."

Koester accepted the glass of dark brown liquid from Adams and took a sip. He looked at Adams, pleased with the taste of his drink. "This is good. What is it?"

Adams smiled as he sat down on the couch next to his guest. "Vanilla Coke," he said. "It was popular in the twentieth century, especially in parts of North America."

Koester took another sip, then a big gulp. "Ah, this is truly outstanding. Can I get a copy of the replicator pattern?"

Adams's face brightened and his smile grew larger as he produced an isolinear chip. He handed it to Koester. "I was so sure you would like it that I made a copy already."

Both men sat momentarily silent as they drank the refreshing beverage from Earth's past. Koester then started briefing Blake on his starship's recent encounters with the Kairn.

"The Kairn have me worried, Blake," he said as he set his empty glass on the table.

Adams stood and began to pace in front of Koester. "What are their advantages?"

"Weapons," Koester replied. "Their torpedoes are similar to ours, but they also use some type of variable frequency disruptors that span virtually the entire spectrum."

"So every shot will penetrate our shields," Adams added.

"Exactly," Koester replied. "Even a rotating shield modulation won't help us."

"I'll see if my chief engineer can figure something out," Adams stated. "But we have one advantage over the Kairn."

"Your ship's holographic cloaking device," Koester said.

Adams nodded. "The Nelbana system has an asteroid field between the orbits of the third and fourth planets. We'll just blend in with all the other rocks."

"Good plan," Koester said. "If we can get into the system without being detected, that is."

"Once we come out of warp, we'll shut down all power except for life support and sensors. We'll have enough momentum to glide into the asteroid field unnoticed. We can activate our holocloak, which will also mask all readings from the Kairn sensors. To them, we'll just be one of the hundreds of thousands of asteroids."

Koester nodded his approval. "I think it will work. You know, Blake, this situation reminds me of a similar situation that happened during the Eugenics Wars."

"Don't tell me you were alive back then," Adams teased.

"Of course not," Koester said. "I read the personal journals of one of my ancestors who served on an American submarine during that time period after one of my first missions in command of the *Dauntless* a number of years ago. I'm named after him in fact. Ironically, the submarine he served aboard was the *USS Providence*."

"Well, they say that history repeats itself," Adams said. "Too bad we don't have a record of your ancestor's adventures."

"In spite of regulations, his journals were fairly detailed. I can tell you what happened if you want to hear it."

Adams's curiosity had piqued. "Sure, Peter. I'd like to hear what it was like to serve on one of the *Providence*'s predecessors."

Peter Koester leaned back on the couch and began to tell his tale.

\* \* \* \*

*Saturday, 17 June 1995, 0125Z – Somewhere in the Indian Ocean*

"All stations, conn, make preparations for coming to periscope depth. Helm, ahead two-thirds."

Amid a chorus of acknowledgements from various stations, Lt Koon, navigator of the American fast-attack submarine *USS Providence SSN-719* and mid-watch Officer of the Deck, glanced at the sonar repeater mounted at the front of the control room. The waterfall display of sound lines remained relatively unchanged since he had assumed the watch about ninety minutes earlier.

"Helm, right fifteen degrees rudder, steady course two-one-zero," Koon ordered.

As Seaman Rocky Wilson acknowledged and the 688-class submarine started turning right, the Quartermaster of the Watch, QM3 Peter Koester called out, "Two-one-zero is a good course for four-five minutes at this speed."

"Very well, Quartermaster," Koon acknowledged, keeping his eyes on the sonar repeater. Most of the lines on the screen, representing self-generated noise from the submarine itself, changed bearings as the boat turned. Only a few of the traces remained unchanged.

"Officer of the Deck, steady on two-one-zero," SN Wilson reported.

"Conn, sonar. After a thorough search of the previously baffled area, sonar continues to hold three sonar contacts. Sierra two-six, bearing one-six-eight, range twenty-four thousand yards. Sierra two-eight, bearing one-eight-two, range twelve thousand yards. And sierra three-two, bearing three-three-four, range nine thousand yards. All contacts classified as merchants."

"Sonar, conn, aye," Koon responded, then picked up the sound powered handset that connected the control room to commander John Halsman, the commanding officer of the submarine *Providence*. The OOD explained the contact picture to the CO, ending the brief with, "Request permission to come to periscope depth?"

"Come to periscope depth," Commander Halsman ordered from his stateroom just forward of control. Koon hung the handset back in its brass holder, and then took a position directly behind the #2 periscope.

"All stations, conn, coming to periscope depth. Helm, ahead one-third. Diving Officer, make your depth six-zero feet. Raising #2 scope."

In a well-choreographed display of repeat-backs and acknowledgements, the *Providence* slowed as it moved closer to the ocean's surface.

"One-two-zero feet," the Diving Officer who sat in the seat directly behind and between the helmsman and planesman near the forward port corner of the control room reported. "One-one-zero feet... One hundred feet... Nine-five... Nine-zero..."

Lt Koon placed his right eye against the eyepiece of the search scope. The ocean beyond was as black as night, yet still the OOD looked for the telltale shadow that would indicate a surface ship above them and an imminent collision.

"...Seven-zero... Six-eight... Six-six... Six-four... Six-two..."

"Scope breaking," Koon called out as the optics pierced the waves into the clear night air. Immediately the OOD started spinning the scope around and around, searching for any close vessels sonar may have failed to detect.

"Officer of the Deck, on ordered depth, six-zero feet," the Diving Officer reported.

"Hold no close contacts," confirmed Koon. "Radio, conn, mark time to next open window."

In a small room aft of control, three radiomen prepared their gear to receive the sub's passive broadcast. One of them grabbed the microphone that hung on the equipment stack and replied, "Two minutes to passive downlink."

Another ninety seconds passed as the control room crew went about their jobs in the total darkness. All normal lighting in control had been extinguished during the preparation for PD in order for the OOD's eyes to adjust to night-vision.

"Chief of the Watch," Koon ordered as he swept the scope around again for safety. "Raise #1 BRA-34."

"Raise #1 BRA-34, aye, sir," Chief Pono R. Kyman replied from his corner station to the left of the planesman. The Chief pulled a switch on the ballast control panel and in the sail directly above the control room one of the boat's radio antennas rose and pierced the surface.

"Downlink in progress," radio reported a moment later.

"Officer of the Deck, I have a figure merit one GPS fix aboard and plotted on the chart," QM3 Koester added, indicating the sub's current position had been confirmed.

"Conn, radio. Downlink complete. No longer require BRA-34 raised."

"Radio, conn, aye," Koon acknowledged. "Chief of the Watch, lower all masts and antennas. Quartermaster, sounding?"

As Chief Kyman confirmed all the antenna switches were in the lowered position, QM3 Koester turned around and activated the bottom-sounding fathometer.

"Sounding three-one-two fathoms, checks with chart."

"Very well. Dive, make your depth one-five-zero feet."

Slowly, the *Providence* took on a slight down angle, descending into the depths of the sea. Seconds later the scope disappeared below the waves.

"Scope's under. Lowering #2 scope," Koon announced.

"Depth one hundred feet... One-one-zero... One-two-zero..."

"Chief of the Watch, rig control for white."

Chief Kyman acknowledged the order, then sent the control room messenger, the newest and least experienced crewman in control, to the light switch near the room's forward entrance. A moment later, to the groans of everyone whose vision had become accustomed to the dark, the control room and attack center lit up in fluorescent white.

"On depth, one-five-zero feet," the Diving Officer announced. As the OOD acknowledged, both the forward and aft control room doors opened. In through the aft door, near the chart table where QM3 Koester continued to update the ship's track, one of the radiomen entered carrying a message board. Through the forward door next to the ship's control panel stepped the captain, who took the board the radioman offered, glancing at it quickly.

"Well, it's confirmed, Nav," CDR Halsman said, handing the messages to Koon. "Khan Singh's fleet is all in port. Our mission remains unchanged."

"Aye, sir," Koon replied as he too flipped through the pages of radio messages. "Helm, come left to course zero-five-zero, ahead two-thirds." He then off-handedly remarked as he passed the message board back to the radioman, "We have a fleet to observe."

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"We're approaching the Nelbana system, Captain," Lieutenant Commander T'Les stated.

"Prepare to drop out of warp on my mark," Blake Adams said from his seat in the captain's chair as Captain Koester stood silently beside him.

"Aye, Skipper," Lieutenant Kelly replied from the CONN. "Awaiting your orders, Sir."

"Now, Mister Kelly," Adams said. "Drop out of warp and set course zero-one-eight mark six." Adams pressed a button on the touchpad attached to the arm of his chair. "Bridge to engineering."

"Engineering. Go ahead, Captain."

"Cut all power except to sensors, life support, and the holocloak."

"Aye, Sir."

Adams turned around to face Chief John McKinney sitting at the OPS/Engineering station behind the center seat. "Mac, engage holocloak program A-3."

The lights dimmed as the *Providence's* exterior transformed its appearance. The small starship disappeared, replaced by an insignificant asteroid roughly two hundred meters in diameter.

"Inertia should carry us into the asteroid field in seven hours ten minutes, Skipper," Lieutenant Kelly said.

"Very good, Eric," Adams replied. He turned his head to his right, where Lieutenant Commander Jada Lightfoot sat looking at her display monitor. "Jada."

The first officer looked up to face her CO. "Sir?"

"You have the bridge. Let me know when we reach the asteroids. Captain Koester and I will be in my ready room."

"Aye, Captain," Lightfoot replied.

Adams rose from his chair and motioned the *Dauntless's* CO toward the door that separated the bridge from the captain's office. The two men entered and Koester sat down on the curved couch while Adams strolled toward the replicator.

"Can I get anything for you, Peter?"

"I think I'll have another one of those vanilla cokes," Koester replied.

"Computer, two vanilla cokes with crushed ice," Adams said. He retrieved the glasses from the replicator slot and walked to the lounge area of the ready room. He handed one of the glasses to Koester.

"Here you go."

"Thanks," Koester said as he took the drink. He took a sip and set the glass on the table in front of him. "This stuff is good. How did you come across it, Blake?"

"I used to drink alcoholic beverages, but I usually got in trouble when I did," Adams said. He saw Koester's quizzical look. "I didn't have enough control to stop at one or two," he added.

"What about drinking synthahol?" Koester asked.

"Don't care for the taste," Adams replied. "Some people say it's as good as the real stuff, but it doesn't have enough kick to it."

"So where did you find this drink?"

Adams swirled his glass around and focused on the sound of the ice clinking against the inside of the glass. "My sister took me to a restaurant in Chicago when I was home on leave a few years ago. It was one of those nostalgia places patterned after a typical 1950s diner."

"I'll have to visit there when I get back to Earth," Koester said. "What's the place called?"

"Ed Debevic's. I recommend the food, but you might want to stay away from the 'Atomic Burger.'"

"They irradiated their food?"

Adams laughed at Koester's confused look. "No, no. The 1950s was still the early period in Earth's atomic age. Lots of testing. They called it that because the sandwich was spicy hot...veeery hot."

Koester smiled and nodded. "Ah, I see."

Adams set his glass down. "So, what are these Kairn like?"

"I'm positive I'm the only person to have seen one and been able to report back to Starfleet," Koester said. "They're reptilian humanoids, not much larger than typical humans. And I don't believe they're any stronger than humans are. They certainly aren't as agile. But their ships are highly advanced, probably more advanced than anything that we currently have. The *Dauntless* barely survived a battle against them."

"How do we defend ourselves if it should come to battle?" Adams asked.

Koester shook his head. "I wish I knew. I guess that's what we're here to learn?"

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*Captain's log, stardate 58654.7:*

*We have been observing the Kairn's incursion into the Nelbana system for the past week, where we have commenced our surveillance of a new orbital base and monitored the arrival of several transports during the time that we've been here.*

Captain Blake Adams, followed by Captain Peter Koester, entered the bridge. "What is it, Commander?"

Lieutenant Commander Jada Lightfoot rose from the center seat to face her CO. "We've been monitoring Kairn transmissions and finally broke their code, Captain," the first officer stated.

"That will help us a lot," Koester commented, grinning at Blake. "What have you learned?"

"Four battlecruisers will arrive in a few hours," Lightfoot replied.

Adams shook his head. "They're not kidding, are they?"

"Four battlecruisers," Koester repeated. "*Dauntless* barely survived against one. And this ship's certainly no match against one of theirs."

"We may just be a small scout," Adams said, "but I'm betting we can outmaneuver whatever they've got...especially with a hotshot pilot like our Lieutenant Kelly."

"As long as they don't detect us, we shouldn't have to worry about that," Lightfoot said.

"The problem is getting a signal to Starfleet," Koester interjected.

"Right," Adams echoed. "We have to report the Kairn strength and plans."

"Perhaps we can send a tight beam transmission out of the system without it being detected, Captain," Lieutenant Commander T'Les suggested.

"Can you reconfigure the communications array to send a tight enough beam?" Adams asked.

"I believe so, Captain," T'Les replied. "With Lieutenant Goodman's expertise, I estimate reconfiguration should take approximately two hours, twelve minutes."

Adams smiled. "Approximately two hours and twelve minutes," he echoed. "Okay. Get started."

"Aye, Captain."

Adams turned toward Lightfoot. "Keep me in the loop, Jada. Captain Koester and I will be in my ready room."

"Yes sir."

Adams led Koester toward the entrance to his office. "Since we have some time on our hands I'd like hear more about the Eugenics War," Adams said as he patted Koester on the back.

\* \* \* \*

Wednesday, 19 July 1995 – 1422Z – Off the coast of Bombay, India

“Navigator, ship has crossed ten nautical miles from land inbound, time two-two,” reported QM3 Koester.

“Very well, Quartermaster. Officer of the Deck, ship has crossed ten nautical miles from land inbound. Modified piloting party is stationed.”

In the three years since Khan Noonien Singh, a product of genetic breeding intended to create a superior human, had taken power over most of the Asian continent, his rapidly built industries started cranking out the tools of war for use against both his genetically bred brethren, who all rose to power almost simultaneously in dozens of countries around the world in the early years of the 1990’s, and those other countries, like the United States and Great Britain, who opposed the so-called supermen. Khan’s influence now spread from China all the way west to Pakistan and parts of Afghanistan, overlooking the oil-rich countries of the Middle East.

Intelligence gathered by the CIA indicated Khan’s forces may have been about to go on the offensive once again. The *Providence* had been deployed to confirm the intelligence.

“Six-two feet,” the Diving Officer, *Providence*’s Chief of the Boat Master Chief Mike Tossling announced.

On the #2 scope, the Officer of the Deck, the Engineer, Lt Commander Spence, slowly turned the scope around and around, keeping an eye out for dangers, anything from a slow moving freighter to a fast patrol boat that might suddenly run over the submarine.

Almost every day for the past month, the *Providence* would sneak submerged into the coastal waters near Bombay harbor, Khan’s largest naval base on the western Indian Ocean, returning to deep water after sunset to ventilate the boat while receiving and transmitting the latest radio messages and simply allow the crew a few relatively stress-free hours.

Trailing the floating wire antenna, the cryptological specialists, or spooks as most of the crew referred to them, listened in on the transmissions around the naval base. Most of it was normal traffic, as ships came and went from the nearby commercial port, but occasionally a military transmission would be intercepted and deciphered. Meanwhile, pictures of the port, naval base and all the vessels present would be recorded by a camera mounted in the periscope.

“There’s something going on there,” the OOD commented as he paused for another look toward the naval base. “Lots of crane activity around those troop transports.”

So far during their observations, the crew of the *Providence* had managed to identify ten ships at the naval base. Among them were various destroyers, two large troop transports, the large battlecruiser *Conqueror* and the command ship *Napoleon Bonaparte*. It had caused some concern the previous day when one of the destroyers had gotten underway unexpectedly and began pinging with its sonar in what turned out to be a training exercise.

“Radio, conn,” Lt Spence said loudly enough for the control room open mic to pick up. “Are there any unusual transmissions on the military bands?”

“Conn, radio,” said a voice on the 27-MC speaker after a brief pause. “We’ve just deciphered a communiqué identifying objective Task Force Tango as Delta Golf. Task Force Tango is scheduled to get underway in nine days.”

Spence glanced once more at the ships in port through the scope, then said, “Captain to the conn, please.” Seconds later, CDR Halsman appeared at the forward door.

“The task force we’ve been watching load up for the last two weeks has just received orders to deploy in nine days,” Spence explained to the captain.

“Did they confirm an objective?” Halsman asked as he replaced Spence on the scope and took his own observation of the naval base.

“Unfortunately it’s in code,” Spence said. “Objective Delta Golf.”

Halsman looked past the scope at the Officer of the Deck for a moment, the gears obviously turning in his head.

“We need to inform COMSUBPAC and find out if Naval Intelligence can confirm the designation of Delta Golf, though I have my own suspicions.” Halsman stepped away from the scope, returning it to Lt Spence before ordering, “Take her deep, Officer of the Deck. Move us out past the twenty five nautical mile curve. We need to transmit as soon as possible.”

“Aye, sir,” the OOD replied as Halsman walked out of the control room. “Dive, make your depth one-two-five feet. Helm, right five degrees rudder, steady course two-six-zero.”

Slowly the *Providence* turned away from land and dove deeper in the shallow water, maintaining a minimum of only fifty feet to the bottom below the submarine’s keel.

“Sounding, five-one feet beneath the keel,” the fathometer operator, STS3 Mike Tucci reported as he maintained a careful watch on the bottom trace. Meanwhile a trickle of sweat dripped down the side of QM3 Koester’s face.

It took over three hours, during which time the bottom depth changed very little, to reach the twenty-five nautical mile curve.

“...One hundred feet... Nine-five... Nine-zero...”

Commander Halsman watched the black and white periscope monitor mounted near the sonar shack door as Lt Spence watched through the scope for close contacts.

“...Seven-eight... Seven-six... Seven-four...,” the COB called out, leaning forward and quietly ordering his helmsman and planesman, “Take charge of your planes. Make depth six-zero feet.” The Diving Officer’s eyes then returned to the shallow depth gauge above the helmsman’s control yoke and continued to call out, “Seven-two... Seven-zero... Six-eight... Six-six... Six-four...”

“Scope breaking... Scope clear,” announced Spence.

“On ordered depth, six-zero feet, sir,” Master Chief Tossling reported.

“No close contacts,” the OOD confirmed after his required three turns around on the scope. “Radio, conn, time to next open window?”

“Next open window in one minute,” the radioman replied on the 27-MC.

“Officer of the Deck, you have permission to transmit during the next open window,” Halsman told Spence.

“I have permission to transmit, aye,” the OOD replied, then ordered, “Chief of the Watch, raise #1 BRA-34.”

“Raise #1 BRA-34, aye, sir,” Chief Kyman responded, pulling up on the toggle. The slick, smooth, green antenna quickly rose out of the top of the sail and poked out of the water a few feet higher than the periscope.

“Radio, conn, transmit outgoing message,” Spence ordered.

A few seconds later, the 27-MC buzzed to life again as the radioman announced, “Conn, radio, have received satellite acknowledgement.”

“Radio, conn, aye,” Spence replied. “Now all we can do is wait for a reply.”

\* \* \* \*

“What is it, Jada?” Captain Adams asked as he and Captain Koester entered the bridge.

“The Kairn battleships just arrived, sir,” the first officer said. “And we picked up a transmission between the station and the lead ship.”

Adams saw the deep concern in Lightfoot’s eyes. It was a look of desperation and...Adams thought he saw fear. “Jada?”

Jada Lightfoot took a deep breath before giving her report. “They’re preparing a major assault against three Federation sectors. Four Federation planets and several pre-warp worlds are in danger.”

Adams turned to look at Koester. Both men remained silent, knowing what the other was thinking. Adams turned back toward his first officer. “Are we able to send an undetectable signal yet?”

As if on cue, Lieutenant Commander T’Les stepped out of the turbolift. “Yes, Captain,” the Vulcan stated. “Modifications to the communications array are complete.”

“Good work,” Adams said. He turned to face the security station. “Yoshi, inform Starfleet of the situation and include all relevant logs.”

“Aye, Captain,” Lieutenant Yoshiama Nakamara replied.

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Lieutenant Commander Jada Lightfoot paced back and forth in front of the main viewer. She stopped in front of the tactical station and stared at Lieutenant Nakamara. “Any response from Starfleet, Lieutenant?” she asked.

Nakamara looked up from his tactical/security console. “Not yet, Commander,” he said.

Adams strode toward his chief of security. “Anything new to report on Kairn activity, Yoshi?”

“Just some routine transmissions between the station and the ships, Skipper.”

Adams turned and faced Captain Peter Koester who sat in the first officer’s chair. “Any guess about Starfleet’s reply?”

“Hard to say,” Koester said, “but I wouldn’t be surprised if they expected the impossible.”

“Well, that would be consistent, wouldn’t it?” Adams replied with a mischievous grin.

Lieutenant Nakamara looked up to his CO, who still stood beside the console. “Message coming in from Starfleet, Skipper,” he said. “It’s coded priority one.”

“Decode and put it on the main viewer, Yoshi,” Adams said as he quickly walked toward the center seat and sat down.

The view of the Kairn station and four battleships in orbit around Nelbana III was replaced by the image of Admiral Martin Dean, the commanding officer of *Starbase 82*. “Blake, Peter, great job on gathering information on the Kairn’s plans. Starfleet has dispatched a fleet of twelve ships to your location to stop them and retake the sector. Unfortunately, they may not get there in time before the Kairn begin their incursion. I hate to put this burden on you, Blake, but if any of the Kairn battleships attempt to leave the Nelbana system, it will up to you to stop them...if you can.”

Adams turned and met Koester’s gaze. Both men realized what the admiral was expecting of them and the *Providence* crew—the impossible. “You called that one right,” Adams said. He turned back to face Admiral Dean’s image on the large screen that dominated the forward wall of the bridge.

“I’m sure you’re aware of what is at stake. I also know that you’re up against overwhelming odds. Just do your best, Blake. Good luck.”

“Well, gang, I guess this is no longer a research project,” Adams said lightheartedly. “Jada, if those ships so much as flinch...”

“Understood, Captain,” Lieutenant Commander Lightfoot replied. “May I suggest we go to red alert?”

Adams rubbed his chin for a moment before answering, “Make it so.”

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Several hours passed without incident. None of the bridge crew wanted to leave their posts, but Adams realized that exhaustion and impatience for the Kairn to make their move had begun to take its toll on the crew. He had ordered each person, with the exception of Lieutenant Commander T’Les who was left in command, to get a few hours sleep.

“Commander T’Les,” Lieutenant Maria Gonzalez said from the science station. “The Kairn battlecruisers are powering up their engines.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” T’Les said without emotion. She pressed the intercom control on the armrest console. “All hands to battle stations. Captain Adams to the bridge.”

Adams and Koester exited the turbolift within minutes of being summoned. Seconds later, the rest of the senior bridge crew—Yoshi Nakamara, Eric Kelly, Mary Goodman, and Jada Lightfoot—walked onto the bridge and took their posts.

“Report,” Adams said, looking at the Vulcan, who had replaced Lieutenant Gonzalez at the science station.

“The Kairn battlecruisers are preparing to leave orbit, Captain,” T’Les stated. “All departments report ready.”

Adams nodded and turned his attention to Lieutenant Nakamara at the tactical station. “Raise shields and power up the phasers, Yoshi,” he said. “Load quantum torpedoes.”

“Aye, Skipper.”

Adams took his place in the center seat. He turned his head to look up at Captain Peter Koester. “Ready for some fun?”

“Fun?” Koester shook his head. “We’re about to go into battle with little chance of survival and you call it fun?”

Adams smiled. “*Providence* may be small, but she’s proven herself against superior firepower before.” He turned to face the viewer. “Mary, disengage holocloak and transfer more power to the shields. Eric, take us out of the asteroid field and set course for those ships. Full impulse.”

Both Lieutenant Commander Mary Goodman and Lieutenant Eric Kelly acknowledged Adams’s order simultaneously.

The small starship smoothly exited the debris field and sped toward Nelbana III where the Kairn space station and four battlecruisers were in orbit. One of the battlecruisers had already broke orbit and prepared to enter warp.

“Target engines on that lead ship, Yoshi,” Adams ordered. “Fire torpedoes on my mark.”

“Aye, Skipper,” Yoshi said. Weapons are locked and ready.”

“Eric, prepare for evasive once we fire,” Adams said.

“Captain, I have a suggestion,” Koester said.



"I'm open for one, Peter," Adams replied.

"Once we disable the lead ship's engines we should concentrate all fire on the station," Koester said. "The other three battlecruisers should keep busy fighting defensively."

"And maybe if we get lucky enough to destroy one of them, it may damage the others if they're in close quarters," Adams added. "Good idea. Yoshi, as soon as we take out those engines on the lead ship, lock onto the station."

"Understood, Sir."

Adams and Koester stared at the large screen in front of them. The image of the station and Kairn starships, with Nelbana III in the background, loomed larger. The lead ship continued on course, but one of the other battlecruisers began to move away from the station.

"Captain, I think they've detected us," Lightfoot stated.

"I see them," Adams replied. "Yoshi?"

"Torpedoes locked on the lead ship's engines, sir," the tactical officer said.

Adams leaned forward and rested his chin on steepled fingers. He took a deep breath. "Fire." As the torpedoes sped toward the Kairn battlecruiser, Adams thought about the story of the other *Providence* that Koester had recounted earlier.

\* \* \* \*

*Thursday, 20 July 1995 – 1805Z*

The 1-MC general announcing circuit buzzed, prompting everyone aboard the *Providence* to pause what they were doing and listen.

"Attention all hands, this is the captain. Before we left Groton on this deployment I promised I would keep you all up to date on what was going on with our mission. Well, we've just received new tasking."

The captain looked around at the faces of the crew in the control room. They all seemed so young. The average age of a sailor in the US submarine force was 21. But Halsman was confident each man was fully capable of performing the job he was about to set before them. He allowed himself a smile before continuing.

"Military intelligence, based on information the *Providence* gathered over the last several days, has determined the forces of Khan Singh intend to invade and capture the Straits of Hormuz, the entrance to the Arabian Gulf, and from there occupy the oil fields of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries. Already there are two US carrier battle groups en route to the Straits of Hormuz, but they will not arrive before Khan Singh's fleet already establishes a foothold over the Straits. The only Allied asset that stands between that fleet and the Gulf is what the enemy refers to as Delta Golf. Intel has confirmed Delta Golf is the British base at Diego Garcia, where our B-52's and B-1's are forward deployed.

"Our mission has now been changed from observation to actively stopping that fleet before it ever leaves port. We have been tasked with conducting a T-LAM strike against the naval base at Bombay. We've trained hard for just such a mission, and I'm confident our performance will exceed expectations. That is all."

The 1-MC ceased buzzing for a moment. Down in crew's mess, QM3 Koester looked across the mess deck table at his friend STS3 Tucci, about to comment on the captain's announcement when another voice sounded over the speakers.

"Man battle stations strike!" announced Chief Kyman just before the gongs of the general alarm went off. Everywhere aboard the submarine the crew dropped what they were doing and rushed to their assigned battle stations. QM3 Koester almost flew up the ladder from middle level to the Nav Center, pausing at the inertial navigation console for a quick glance at the boat's current latitude and longitude, and was standing at the quartermaster plot in the darkened control room ready to relieve the watch before the final gong of the alarm had sounded.

"Man battle stations strike!" Kyman repeated over the 1-MC once more, and then began consulting his status board. In less than two and a half minutes since the initial order was passed, the *Providence* was fully manned for battle stations. It only took a few minutes more for the target tracks the *Providence* had received in the radio downlink to be entered into the fourteen missiles that would be launched during the initial strike.

"Spin up missiles in tubes 1, 2 and 5 through 16," CDR Halsman ordered. The order was relayed through the fire control consoles in the attack center, starboard of the periscope stand in control, and the gyros in each missile's guidance package came to life.

"Open outer muzzle doors, tubes 1 and 2," the weapons officer, Lt Bahno ordered over a sound powered phone headset.

Down in the torpedo room on lower level, the battle stations Torpedoman of the Watch, TMC Russ Nick, pressed the buttons on the torpedo tube control panel. Immediately the muzzle doors of the top two torpedo tubes, one on each side of the hull, slid inward to expose the rubber-capped end of the Tomahawk missile capsule.

The minutes slowly ticked away as every piece of equipment necessary for launching the cruise missiles was checked and re-checked. Finally the scheduled launch time of 1900Z neared.

“Two minutes to launch, tubes 1 and 2,” Fire Control Technician MacDougal reported. “Tubes ready in all respects.”

“Conn, sonar, have gained new sonar contact, designate Sierra three-nine, bearing zero-eight-one. Analyzing.”

“Sonar, conn, aye,” Lt Koon, the battle stations Officer of the Deck acknowledged.

QM3 Koester glanced up at the cesium-beam clock repeater mounted over the plotter on the other side of control, where a team called the geo-plot maintained a manually computed solution to all the contacts sonar reported. In less than a minute the quartermaster would be copying down the position information from both GPS, the global positioning system, and ESGN, the inertial navigation system for plotting on the chart taped down on his own plotter just as, if everything went as planned, the first T-LAM would be starting its flight toward Bombay Naval Base.

“Missile ready,” FT2 MacDougal announced.

“Shoot tube 1,” Halsman ordered.

MacDougal turned the lever on the weapons control console in front of him to the left, announcing its position over his own sound-powered headset to the crew in the torpedo room, “Standby...” He then turned the handle back one hundred and eighty degrees, announcing, “Shoot tube 1.”

In the bilge below the torpedo room, thousands of pounds of compressed air were released, forcing back a ram, which in turn drew hundreds of gallons of sea water under high pressure through the ejection pump and into torpedo tube 1. The sea water forced the cruise missile forward out of its steel capsule and fired the booster rocket.

As everyone in control watched either through the scope or on periscope, a bright glow formed in the water forward of the submarine’s bow. The glow became brighter and brighter until suddenly the Tomahawk missile burst out of the water on a tail of fire and smoke, climbing high into the night sky.

“Booster drop,” Lt Koon announced a few seconds later as he followed the missile’s progress through the scope. “Transition to cruise.”

Less than a minute later, the entire process was repeated as the missile in torpedo tube 2 was launched. There was an ironic beauty to the electric-blue glow of the water Koon watched just before the missile would come shooting out of the sea.

“Reload tubes 1 and 2 with UGM-109C’s,” CDR Halsman ordered before turning to the Officer of the Deck. “Nav, bring the ship about to course two-six-zero.”

“Helm, left five degrees rudder, steady course two-six-zero,” Koon ordered.

“Open muzzle doors, tubes 5 through 16,” the captain added. The order was relayed down to Vertical Launch Control, forward of the torpedo room on lower level.

When the *Providence* had been launched just over a decade prior, it was the first of the Los Angeles-class submarines equipped with the brand new Vertical Launch System, twelve Tomahawk missile tubes installed in the forward main ballast tanks. The system allowed a near doubling of the number of missiles a submarine could carry. Now with the flick of each switch on the missile interface console, the twelve missile tube hatches opened, ready to spew out their deadly contents.

“Officer of the Deck,” announced SN Wilson at the helm. “Passing course two-seven-zero to the left, ten degrees from ordered course.” Mere seconds after Lt Koon acknowledged the report, Wilson added, “Steady on course two-six-zero.”

“Missile tubes ready in all respects,” Lt Bahno announced.

“Ship ready,” confirmed Lt Commander Tim Pingal, the boat’s Executive Officer.

“On ordered depth, six-two feet,” added Chief of the Boat Mike Tossling.

“Stand by, tube 5,” Halsman ordered. Once again the weapons launch switch was turned to the standby position.

“Shoot tube 5!”

The launch switch was moved back to the right. Suddenly the entire boat shuddered, then bounced slightly as the missile in tube 5 shot out of the vertical tube on a column of compressed steam, its booster rocket propelling it high into the air. As Lt Koon watched it arc up and over the aft end of the submerged submarine through the periscope, the small booster dropped off, an intake vent dropped down and the missile’s turbojet engine revved to life.

“Transition to cruise,” Koon announced.

It took over fifteen minutes more to unload the remainder of the vertically launched T-LAMs. By the time the task was complete and the last hatch was shut, it was nearly 1930Z and the crew was starting to think about battle stations being secured.

“Conn, sonar! High speed screws, bearing zero-eight-nine. During the noise generated by our missile launches, Sierra three-nine apparently turned toward and increased speed!”

“Sonar, conn, have you classified Sierra three-nine?”

There was a second’s pause before the sonar supervisor replied, “Based on engine noise and screw characteristics, believe Sierra three-nine to be a Grisha-class frigate. Without a doubt they saw our missile launches and are moving in to investigate.”

“Chief of the Watch, rig ship for ultra-quiet! Rig ship for depth-charge!” Koon ordered. Seconds after the order was passed on the 1-MC, every piece of machinery aboard the boat not required to be running, from the galley equipment and refrigeration plants to the atmospheric scrubbers and ventilation systems were shut off. The pumps, which maintained the flow of coolant around the reactor core, were shifted to the slowest possible speed. All the crew not absolutely needed at their posts were sent to their racks while the entire submarine was made as secure and watertight as possible.

“Dive, make your depth one hundred feet, minimal use of planes. Lowering #2 scope,” Koon announced as he turned the bright orange hydraulics ring and the periscope lowered down into its well. Meanwhile, the boat steadily moved deeper to hide completely unseen below the surface.

“On ordered depth, one hundred feet, sir,” the diving officer reported in a quiet voice. The entire control room was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop.

At a depth of one hundred feet there was still only fifty feet of water between the top of the *Providence*’s sail and the surface. It left very little room if the submarine needed to maneuver away from the approaching Grisha.

“Conn, sonar, Sierra three-nine on a steady bearing. Recommend coming left to move off his track.”

“Sonar, conn, aye,” Koon replied quietly over the 27-MC. “Quartermaster, recommended course?”

QM3 Koester placed the plotter arm on his chart, aimed in the approximate direction toward good water left of their current course, then replied, “Officer of the Deck, recommend coming left to course one-eight-zero.”

The navigator ordered the recommended course change. As the boat steadied on its course south, the sonar supervisor was again heard over the 27-MC.

“Conn, sonar, Sierra three-nine is currently passing astern.”

Suddenly the sonar detector display mounted above the fire control consoles in the attack center bleeped loudly.

“Conn, sonar, Sierra three nine has just gone active, but they did it after passing astern of us. Low probability of detection.”

“Sonar, conn, aye,” Koon replied over the intercom. “He must have misjudged our range and thinks we’re still ahead of him. Let’s open range as quickly as we can.”

With slow, quiet maneuvers, the *Providence* moved away from Khan’s frigate, which started moving in a search pattern not far from where the submarine had launched its initial strike. Two hours later, the Grisha over twenty thousand yards behind, *Providence* secured from ultra-quiet and resumed her normal patrol.

\* \* \* \*

“Report,” Adams said, not taking his eyes off of the main viewer.

“First Kairn ship is disabled, Captain,” Jada Lightfoot stated. “The second ship is powering up weapons and approaching from dead ahead.”

“Yoshi, lock phasers and torpedoes on the station. Eric, try to keep us out of their line of fire.”

“All weapons locked on the station, Skipper,” Yoshi said.

“Fire all phasers, launch torpedoes,” Adams said.

The tiny Federation starship fired several volleys of torpedoes and multiple beams of phased energy at the station. *Providence*, expertly flown by Lieutenant Eric Kelly, dodged the energy beams of the Kairn battlecruiser that approached.

“I’d feel better if our reinforcements were here,” Captain Peter Koester stated.

“Jada?” Adams, with one word, requested information on the ETA of the Federation fleet that had been dispatched to Nelbana.

Lightfoot consulted her console and turned to look at her CO. “At least an hour, Captain.”

“We’ve been lucky so far,” Adams said. “But I don’t think we can do this for another hour.”

“Captain, I recommend that we give the Kairn more targets to fire at,” Lieutenant Commander T’Les said from the science station.

“Good thinking, Commander,” Adams said. “Mary, prepare a little surprise for our friends out there.”

“Yes, Captain,” Lieutenant Commander Goodman replied from the OPS/engineering station positioned directly behind the command chair.

“Captain,” Jada Lightfoot whispered, “we’ll have to lower shields to do what you’re planning.”

Peter Koester leaned close to his counterpart and spoke softly, keeping his concerns hidden from the other crew members. “What’s she talking about, Blake? Why do we need to lower shields?”

“We’re going to launch several probes that have been specially equipped with holographic generators,” Adams replied. “Let’s just say that our reinforcements from Starfleet are going to arrive earlier than expected.”

Koester gave a knowing look to Adams. “I bet you used to play practical jokes when you were a kid.”

“He still does,” Eric Kelly stated from the CONN position.

Adams smiled as he accepted Lieutenant Kelly’s comment as complimentary. “Kid, take us in close to the station and we’ll try to get in everyone’s blind spot while we launch the probes.”

“With pleasure, Skipper,” Eric said.

“Yoshi, keep firing at the station,” Adams said.

The starship evasively sped toward the station, still firing phasers and quantum torpedoes. It passed between the station and one of the Kairn ships, which fired at *Providence*. One of the alien disruptor beams struck the Federation ship, the other narrowly missed, but struck the space station. Debris exploded outwardly as a section of the station was ripped away by ‘friendly fire.’

The *Providence*’s bridge rocked and Koester grabbed the back of Adams’ chair to keep from tumbling to the deck.

“Minor damage on decks four and five, section twelve, Captain,” Mary Goodman said. “Shields are at ninety-four percent and holding.”

“What about our probes?” Adams asked.

“Programmed and ready to launch,” Mary replied.

“Eric?”

“We’ll be in a sensory blind spot in a few seconds.”

“Yoshi, on my mark prepare to drop shields and launch probes.”

Eric began to count down. “Four...three...two... one...”

“Now, Yoshi!”

The Starfleet scout ship ducked underneath the Kairn station and launched six probes. Each probe moved to positions surrounding the station, unobserved from the battleships’ sensors.

“Activate the holographic generators, Mary.”

Each probe disappeared and was replaced by a Starfleet vessel. Three Defiant-class starships, two Prometheus-class, and a Sovereign-class appeared and maneuvered to form a circular attack pattern around the Kairn station and battleships. The battleships began to fire on the holographic ships, giving *Providence* the opportunity to finish off the station.

“Yoshi, target the station’s reactor and fire,” Adams ordered.

“Locking on,” Yoshi Nakamara replied. “Firing.”

Four torpedoes left the forward launcher at the bottom of the *Providence*’s saucer and found their mark. The station erupted in a massive fireball and a large section of debris hit one of the Kairn ships engines. Within seconds, the Kairn vessel likewise exploded. Like one domino knocking down another, debris from the destroyed ship smashed into another Kairn battlecruiser that had been too close. Like the first, it erupted like an exploding star.

The bridge of the Starfleet vessel was illuminated and every officer was forced to shield their eyes from the brilliance of the explosions. While temporarily blinded, none of the crew could see the fourth Kairn battlecruiser moving toward *Providence*.

\* \* \* \*

Tuesday, 25 July 1995 - 1223Z

“Raising #2 scope.”

It was late in the afternoon the week following *Providence*'s missile strike on the Bombay Naval Base, and the submarine had again snuck in close to the coast to gather intel, snap pictures and assess damage. The captain had given the crew a few days out in the relatively deep waters of the Indian Ocean in order relax a little following their attack on the naval complex and also to allow the heightened security that had naturally followed the attack some time to calm. It had taken five days before the increased patrols would allow *Providence* to slip back within the perimeter.

As 719 moved north along the coast, Commander Halsman was on the scope, snapping shots of the entire waterfront for later analysis as he described the damage for those in the control room.

“Major damage on the headquarters building. The entire second floor has collapsed. Radio tower is gone. The maintenance yard took at least two direct hits. The heavy crane has buckled and tumbled over onto one of the destroyers and into the water. Drydock's flooded too. I think the caisson was broken open by the detonation.”

Halsman swept around once on the scope before returning his gaze to the naval base.

“I'm counting one... two... three... four destroyers out of commission... One... two troop transports... At least one cruiser... Lots of masts and superstructure sticking out of the water... They won't be sorting any invasion fleet out of this base for years to come.”

Halsman grinned as he turned the scope back over to the Officer of the Deck, the engineer Lt Cdr Spence.

“Orders, sir?” the Eng asked as he resumed safety sweeps around the boat.

“Continue to record the damage until sunset. Then take us out past twenty-five again so we can transmit our assessment. If you need me, I'll be in my stateroom.”

For the next hour or so, the *Providence* continued her mission, observing the damage, much of it still burning since in all likelihood the missile strikes had also probably broken the water mains to the base. Occasionally the Eng was forced to dip the scope as the electronics support measures, or ESM crew, who shared the space with radio, would warn of a radar, either ground-based or aircraft, that had the potential to detect the exposed scope.

“Conn, sonar, have gained a new sonar contact, bearing two-eight-two. Designate Sierra four-four. Analyzing.”

“Sonar, conn, aye,” the Eng replied as he turned the scope in the indicated direction. He saw nothing. “No visual contact on that bearing.”

Minutes passed while the Officer of the Deck continued to snap shots of the naval base. He kept counting the wrecks now sitting on the harbor bottom, many of them still smoldering, and each time felt more and more like something was wrong and he was missing something obvious.

“Fire control, how many ships were in port prior to the strike?”

FT2 MacDougel quickly reviewed the fire control log, trying to see if the requested information had been written down on it. Meanwhile, the sonar supervisor spoke over the 27-MC again.

“Conn, sonar, Sierra four-four has split into two separate contacts. Redesignating Sierra four-four and Sierra four-five. Continuing to analyze.”

“Officer of the Deck,” said FT2 MacDougel. “Logs indicate there were ten ships in port during our last observation last Tuesday.”

The Eng quickly turned the scope back toward the naval base and started counting over again.

“Even counting the wreckage where I can only see a couple of masts sticking above the water, I'm only seeing seven ships in there, maybe eight if we were lucky. And none are as large as the two battlecruisers we identified last week.” The Eng then quickly turned toward the last reported bearing of the new sonar contacts.

“Oh shi... Sonar, conn! I'm seeing three distinct smoke trails over the horizon on the bearing of Sierra four-four and Sierra four-five!”

“Conn, sonar, aye. We just picked up the third contact which was being masked by Sierra four-four. Designating new contact Sierra four-six. Estimated range, twenty thousand yards. No bearing change.”

“Lowering #2 scope!” the Eng called out as he twisted the orange control ring. “Helm, right 10 degrees rudder, steady course two-two-zero.”

“Officer of the Deck, that's the long way around,” the helmsman reminded.

“Understood. Right 10 degrees rudder,” the Eng replied.

“Aye, sir. My rudder is right 10.”

The *Providence* slowly turned away from the three ships approaching from the west, briefly moving closer to shore before finally steadying up on a course that took her away from both the naval base and the ships the Eng

now assumed were warships that had for some reason left the base before 719's missile strike and were only now returning. If the three ships did not know of the devastation already, the Officer of the Deck did not want to be in the vicinity when they found out.

"Sonar, conn, any change in course on our three contacts?"

"Conn, sonar, analyzing."

While he was waiting for the information he desired, the Eng decided to take the boat a little deeper and bump up the speed a few knots, to clear the area that much sooner.

"Dive, make your depth 100 feet. Chief of the Watch, to maneuvering, make turns for seven knots."

"Possible zig, Sierra four-six," FT2 MacDougel announced as the orders were relayed.

The Eng gazed hard at the sonar repeater on the forward bulkhead of the attack center, then ordered, "All stations analyze for possible zig."

"Believe zig may be due to own ship's increase in speed," the geoplottter announced a few moments later.

"Confirm zig, Sierra four-six," MacDougel contradicted. "Sierra four-six has come right to new course one-seven-five. Sierra four-six is now on an intercept course."

"Damn," the Eng growled. "Sonar, conn, is there any sort of layer to hide under around here?"

"Conn, sonar, negative."

Suddenly the WLR-9 indicator bleeped.

"Conn, sonar, Sierra four-six has just gone active. Probability of detection 60%."

"Helm, ahead two-thirds!" the Eng ordered.

"Possible zig, Sierra four-four," Mac Dougel announced.

"Fire control, do you have a solution for Sierras four-four, four-five and four-six?"

"Good solutions on Sierra four-five and four-six. Still working on Sierra four-four."

"Conn, sonar, Sierra four-four has turned toward!"

The Eng clicked on the 7-MC microphone.

"Torpedo room, attack center. Make tubes 3 and 4 ready in all respects."

Down in the torpedo room, the TM's jumped into action, using the control panel at the forward end of the room to first flood down the two ordered tubes, then equalize to the pressure of the surrounding water. Finally the two outer doors slid inward, exposing the dull black noses of the MK-48 torpedoes in their tubes.

"Tubes 3 and 4 ready in all respects," FT2 MacDougel reported to the Officer of the Deck.

"Conn, sonar, splashes! Believe we have weapons in the water!"

"Fire control, stand-by on tube 2! Captain to the conn!"

\* \* \* \*

The bridge rocked and the tactical console exploded in Yoshi Nakamara's face, throwing him to the deck. Jada Lightfoot ran to the fallen chief of security's side. She tapped her combadge. "Medical emergency," she shouted. "Doctor Hogan report to the bridge."

Blake Adams clutched the arm of his chair. He turned to see Peter Koester lying on the floor, a small cut oozing blood above his right eyebrow. Adams rushed to his side. "Peter?"

Koester propped himself up on his elbows and took Adams' hand. "I'll be alright," he said as Adams helped him to his feet.

"Damage report," Adams said as he moved back to the center seat.

"Shields are at sixty-two point seven percent," Lieutenant Commander T'Les said. "Phasers are offline and forward torpedo launcher has been damaged. There is a possible hull breach on deck seven, sections one through three. Damage control teams have been dispatched, Captain."

Another blast rocked the Federation ship.

Adams grabbed the arms of his chair once again. "This isn't good," he said.

"Captain, warp drive is down and the starboard impulse engine has been damaged," T'Les stated in her typical cold tone.

"Eric, set course for the asteroid belt, best possible speed," Adams ordered.

Lightfoot returned to her station to the captain's right once Doctor Hogan entered the bridge and started attending to Yoshi. She quickly configured her console to backup tactical mode. "We still have aft torpedoes, Captain."

Adams turned his head and smiled. "It's a good thing they're behind us, then."

Koester, once again standing beside Adams, marveled at how Adams could still make jokes and keep his sense of humor in the face of certain death. He had lost track of time during the battle, but still thought the Federation fleet was still too far distant to save *Providence* from destruction.

"Jada," Adams said calmly, "fire at your discretion."

The Kairn battlecruiser shortened the distance between itself and the small Federation starship. It continued to fire disruptors, but Eric Kelly's piloting skills kept *Providence* from being hit as it fled toward the asteroids. However, everyone knew the tiny ship would not be able to evade its pursuer indefinitely.

"Can we use the holographic probes to distract the Kairn?" Adams asked.

"Sorry, Captain," Lightfoot said. "All probes have been destroyed, either by the Kairn or when the station exploded."

Another blast rocked the starship. Small sparks exploded from several consoles and Adams looked at the science officer.

T'Les peered back at her CO. Her cool eyes confirmed what Adams feared. "Shields are down, Captain," she said. "We have also lost impulse engines."

Every officer on the bridge stared at Adams. He looked around, meeting each one's gaze. He expected to see fear in the eyes of his crew, but saw trust and confidence written on their faces. "Do we still have the aft torpedo launcher?"

"Yes, Captain," Jada Lightfoot replied. "But targeting scanners are down...and we only have three quantum torpedoes left."

"Target manually, Jada," Adams said. He turned to face the back of Lieutenant Kelly's head. "Eric, standby on maneuvering thrusters. As soon as Jada fires the torpedoes, I want you to take us straight down the Z axis."

"Aye, Skipper."

Adams looked at Koester. "I wish I could have heard how your great-great-etcetera-grandfather's *Providence* faired," he said.

"Perhaps you will still hear about it when this is over, Blake," Koester replied.

"You're more of an optimist than I am, Peter." Adams' optimism waned, although he tried not to show it to Koester...or the crew.

"The Kairn ship is within one thousand kilometers and closing, Captain," Lightfoot reminded Adams. "Torpedoes are ready to launch on your command."

Adams intently gazed at the viewer. He watched the Kairn vessel grow larger on the screen. "Fire!"

The first two torpedoes struck the battlecruiser's shields, taking them down. The third hit the hull, ripping a large hole in the port side.

"We got them, Captain!" Jada Lightfoot exclaimed.

"The Kairn weapon systems are still operational, Captain," T'Les said. "They are preparing to fire."

"Eric, engage maneuvering thrusters. Full burn," Adams ordered.

The *USS Providence* started downward, just as if it were a submarine that had performed a crash dive. The Kairn vessel fired its disruptors, narrowly missing the Federation starship.

"They are preparing to fire again, Captain," T'Les said. "They have locked disruptors on the bridge."

Sweat broke out on Adams' forehead. "I'm sorry, gang, but I'm all out of tricks," he said sadly. He faced Koester. "Maybe you can finish your story in the next life."

Peter Koester forced a smile, silently regretting he would never again see his daughter or the crew of the *Dauntless*. Then he looked toward Adams and said, "I'm glad I had a chance to know you, Blake."

"Likewise," Adams replied.

\* \* \* \*

Commander Halsman ran into the control room just as the Engineer ordered the launch of torpedo tube 3. A few seconds later the dark-green weapon shot out of the tube and started its propulsor, a long, thin mono-filament wire trailing behind it still connecting the weapon to the submarine's attack center.

"Torpedo running hot, straight and normal," MacDougel reported.

"Eng, go to battle stations!" Halsman ordered. Almost immediately the word went out over the 1-MC and the general alarm sounded throughout the boat. As the crew manned their battle stations, not-so-distant explosions could be heard through the hull.

"They're using some sort of hedge-hog type depth charge," Halsman commented as he tried unsuccessfully to count the number of explosions. "Is tube 4 ready in all respects?"

“Yes, sir,” the Fire Control Chief replied as he replaced MacDougel on the console.

“Stand-by, tube 4,” the captain ordered.

MacDougel, who had assumed his battle station at the weapons control console, next to the Chief who had replaced him, rotated the lever left to the stand-by position, repeating the order over the sound-powered phone circuit to the torpedo room simultaneously.

Halsman looked over the FTC’s shoulder at the solution generated for Sierra four-six one last time, watching another dot representing the target’s range, speed and heading stack right on top of the prior dots, filling him with confidence.

“Shoot tube...”

“Conn, sonar, torpedo in the water! Bearing one-eight-five!”

“Where the hell did that come from?” the Eng remarked as he looked as the sonar repeater where a new bright-green trace line now appeared.

“Never mind that now!” Halsman exclaimed. “We have a weapon to shoot first. Fire control, shoot tube 4!”

“Shoot tube 4,” FT2 repeated over his headset as he rotated the handle clockwise to fire. Again the sound of high-pressure air being released filled the forward compartment and the second torpedo started down track toward its target.

“Have the torpedo room stand ready to reload tubes 3 and 4 with MK-48 Adcaps as soon as our two weapons go active,” Halsman ordered. He then turned his attention to the incoming torpedo.

“Sonar, conn. Where did that incoming weapon come from?”

“Conn, sonar, we detected a submerged launch transient a second before the torpedo appeared on the sphere. Torpedo currently eight-thousand yards and closing.”

“Chief of the Watch, stand-by on countermeasures!”

Chief Kyman turned in the ballast control panel seat to look at the countermeasures control panel between the BCP and the BQS-15 fathometer console. The lights for both 3-inch launchers indicated loaded and ready.

“Standing by,” Kyman reported.

“Conn, sonar, torpedo 7000 yards and closing.”

“Captain, torpedo from tube 3 has just gone active!” the FTC reported.

“Stand-by,” Halsman said.

More seconds passed.

“Conn, sonar, torpedo 6000 yards and closing. Steady bearing.”

More seconds.

“Conn, sonar, 5000 yards.”

“Torpedo from tube 4 just went active. Torpedo from tube 3 is homing! It’s locked on a target!”

“Fire control, cut wires tubes 3 and 4. Shut muzzle doors. Reload tubes 3 and 4 with MK-48 Adcaps,” Halsman ordered. The remains of the control wire and its storage drum were removed and stowed while two more dark-green weapons were slowly pushed into the tubes by hydraulic rams.

“Chief of the Watch, launch countermeasures from the primary launcher! Helm, ahead flank!”

As Seaman Rocky Wilson rang up the order to increase speed, Chief Kyman pressed the launch button on the upper 3-inch launcher control. A loud pop could be heard through the deck just under QM3 Koester’s feet at the aft end of control and a device designed to fill the water with electronic sound and decoy the approaching torpedo away from the evading submarine shot out of the small tube.

“Passing 20 knots,” Master Chief Tossling, the Diving Officer, reported. “Rig ship for high speed.”

As 719’s speed slowly increased to maximum, faster than 25 knots, the helmsman and planesman shifted controls on the SCP which would help prevent a casualty at high speed that could potentially send the submarine plummeting to the bottom uncontrollably. Then in spite of the seriousness of the situation, the entire ship’s control party turned the ball caps on their heads backwards, a tradition while at high speed.

Thirty seconds after the first countermeasure had been launched, Kyman pressed the button to launch the secondary launcher. This time a device which reacted in sea-water like a giant seltzer pill, filling the water with noisy bubbles to mask the *Providence*’s screw noise, shot out of the other 3-inch diameter tube.

“Countermeasures, control, reload primary and secondary launchers,” the Chief of the Watch ordered over his sound-powered phone.

“Helm,” said the captain. “Right five degrees rudder, steady course two-seven-zero.” As Wilson turned the boat to the new ordered course, Halsman picked up a 27-MC mic. Sonar, conn, any contact on that sub out there?”



“Conn, sonar, negative. No plant, pump or machinery noise. We have to assume he’s a diesel running on batteries.”

“Officer of the Deck,” QM3 Koester said, drawing the Eng’s attention to the nav plot. The Quartermaster was thumbing through a large blue hard-covered book open on the plotter. “According to Jane’s, the Indian Navy had just received a delivery of two Russian-built Kilo-class submarines in the months before Khan Singh assumed control of the country and its military assets.”

“Damn,” Halsman cursed, overhearing the report. “Kilos are near impossible to track submerged!”

Suddenly a loud explosion could be heard through the hull. The FTC reviewed his console and smiled as sonar reported, “Conn, sonar, loud explosion from the bearing of Sierra four-five.” A few moments later the sonar sup added, “Secondary explosions and breaking up noises coming from Sierra four-five!” A subdued cheer went up around the control room.

“Conn, sonar, incoming torpedo now 3000 yards and closing. Bearing drift to the left. It may be going after the countermeasures.”

Everyone in control unconsciously crossed their fingers while a few started silently praying.

“Incoming torpedo 2000 yards...”

“Helm, all stop!” Halsman ordered. Startled glances all looked toward the captain but Wilson rang up all-stop on the engine order telegraph without question.

“Incoming torpedo one-five-hundred yards...”

“Sonar, conn, torpedo’s bearing?”

Halsman watched the sonar repeater, allowing himself a slight smile as the bright green track of the approaching torpedo moved slowly left, indicating it should pass behind the *Providence*.

“Conn, sonar, incoming torpedo now bearing one-six-zero. It appears to be homing in on the countermeasures. Range now one-thousand yards. Torpedo is entering the port baffles.”

Almost immediately a huge explosion rocked the entire boat, causing it to pitch forward, then roll side to side, first starboard, then port. QM3 Koester tried to brace himself against the plotter but slipped as the boat rolled to port, knocking his head against the towed array reel control panel. A trickle of blood wound down the side of his face.

As the boat finally settled on an even keel again, the explosion almost driving the massive cylindrical hull into the shallow, muddy bottom of the Indian Ocean, the crew resumed their duties, trying to track the two remaining surface ships while simultaneously searching for the enemy sub that had fired upon them. Except for necessary reports, the boat was completely silent.

“He’s out there somewhere,” Halsman whispered to the Eng, who was now also concentrated his attention on the same repeater.

“Conn, sonar,” announced the sonar sup’s voice over the 27-MC, softer than usual but still startling most of the crew in control. “Range to Sierra four-four and four-six is opening. Believe Sierra four-four and four-six are clearing the area at high speed.”

“Too many submarines shooting torpedoes,” Chief Kyman remarked from his post at the BCP.

More minutes passed in silence as the sonar sphere, the so-called eyes of the submarine, peered into the dark waters of the Indian Ocean for just the slightest glimpse of the enemy Kilo. It was a well proven fact that in submarine vs. submarine battle, the boat that gets off the first shot is generally the boat that will survive.

“Attack center, torpedo room. Tubes 3 and 4 are reloaded with MK-48 Adcaps,” reported the voice of TMC Nick over the 27-MC. Commander Halsman turned toward FT2 MacDougel.

“To the torpedo room,” the captain ordered. “Flood down and equalize tubes 3 and 4. Do not, repeat, do not open outer doors. Stand by for possible snapshot.”

As the captain’s order was relayed to the torpedo room over the JA circuit, Halsman returned his attention to the sonar. He was not sure, but he believed he saw a faint trace on the edge of the port baffles.

“Sonar, conn,” Halsman said quietly into the nearby microphone. “Report on trace bearing one-five-one.”

A few seconds passed before the sonar sup poked his head out of the sliding door that separated sonar from the attack center and addressed the captain.

“We’re barely hearing that trace, and it appears to be moving into the baffles. I would recommend turning the sphere toward the contact to get a better trace.”

“We’re barely holding steerageway drifting at three knots, and any attempt to put on some speed would likely get us detected,” the Engineer said.

“Then our best hope right now seems to be to continue to play possum and hope he eventually moves out of our baffles,” the sonar supervisor said.

"I've got a better idea," Halsman said, then looked across control at Chief Kyman. "Chief of the Watch, to maneuvering, as quietly as possible, cross-connect the main seawater system. Report when accomplished."

As Chief Kyman relayed the order to the Engineering Officer of the Watch back in the engine room's small main control room, the Eng gave the captain a curious look and asked, "What are you planning, sir?"

With a slight, almost invisible smile, Halsman said, "I'm going to turn the boat without using any propulsion."

"Captain," said Kyman a few minutes later. "Maneuvering reports the main seawater system is cross-connected."

"Very well," Halsman said. "Helm, full left rudder. Chief of the Watch, to maneuvering, shut port MSW intake valve and starboard MSW discharge valve."

Kyman relayed the captain's order. Back in the far-aft areas of the engine room, hydraulics slowly closed two of the huge valves that supplied cooling seawater to the propulsion systems. Now water was only sucked in on the starboard aft side of the submarine's hull and spewed out under pressure on the port aft side. Slowly and silently, the *Providence* began to turn toward the left.

"Passing course two-six-zero to the left," Seaman Wilson reported from the helm. Halsman grinned at the Eng, and then returned his attention to the sonar screen.

After a few more seconds, the trace line Halsman had been looking for reappeared on the left side of the baffled bearings. The trace appeared brighter, indicating the contact was louder and most likely closer.

"To the torpedo room," Halsman said over his shoulder to the Fire Controlman behind him. "Open outer door, tube 3."

At the captain's order, the outer torpedo tube door on the side of the boat furthest away from the contact Halsman was trying to track, and therefore less likely to be heard, slid open. The *Providence* continued to slowly turn left.

"Conn, sonar, new contact, bearing one-four-five, designate Sierra five-zero. Analyzing."

"Passing course two-four-zero to the left," SN Wilson reported.

More minutes passed, each second turning the bow of the *Providence* closer toward her quarry.

"Passing course zero-nine-zero to the left."

"Conn, sonar, Sierra four nine currently bears zero-nine-five. Designating Sierra five-zero as a possible submerged contact based on flow noise. Estimated range six thousand yards. Continuing to analyze."

"Sonar, conn, aye."

The tension in the attack center was palpable. Sweat dripped down the brows of most of the men seated in front of the console screens. Near the aft corner of the control room, the boat's Corpsman, HMC Hall, disinfected QM3 Koester's bruised head and wrapped it in a bandage while the Quartermaster continued to plot the boat's position on the chart.

"Passing course zero-four-zero to the left," Wilson reported.

"To the torpedo room," Halsman said to MacDougel once again. "Open outer door, tube 4."

Suddenly the sonar supervisor's voice rang out in control, "Conn, sonar, Sierra five-zero is flooding tubes!" Immediately Halsman jumped into action.

"Snapshot, tube 3, bearing zero-eight-zero!"

The order went out throughout the boat on the 1-MC. In less than thirty seconds, torpedo tube 3 was ready in all respects to fire.

"Shoot tube 3!" MacDougel ordered over the JA. Moments later the loud bang of high pressure air driving the torpedo impulse ram filled the forward compartment and another MK-48 streaked away from the *Providence*.

With the torpedo on its way, Commander Halsman turned his attention to the ship's control party.

"Chief of the Watch, launch countermeasures! Helm, all ahead flank cavitate. Steady course three-one-five!"

"Conn, sonar, torpedo in the water! Sierra five-zero has just counter fired!"

As the engineering crew threw the throttle fully open, the boat's huge screw started spinning wildly, causing bubbles to form on the blade tips which quickly collapsed under the water pressure, a phenomenon called cavitation. The *Providence* heeled to port from the torque as she gained speed, quickly passing 25 knots.

"Steady on course three-one-five," Wilson reported.

"Countermeasures launched," Kyman added.

Now it was a matter of hope and prayer and plain dumb luck.

"Torpedo, tube 3 has gone active," the Fire Control Chief announced a few moments later.

"Sonar, conn, range to incoming torpedo?" Halsman demanded.

“Conn, sonar, incoming torpedo is in the baffles. Estimated range based on solution to Sierra five-zero is 2000 yards and closing.”

Now Halsman turned his attention back to the nearby fire control console. He was about to ask a question when the FTC reported, “Torpedo, tube 3 has just gone to homing!”

The report was good news, since it meant the torpedo had found the enemy submarine and now was moving in for the kill. Unfortunately, no one in control could be certain the same was not true for the incoming enemy torpedo. Halsman counted down the estimated range in his head, and at what he hoped was the right moment, ordered, “Helm, left five degrees rudder, steady course two-two-five!”

The *Providence* heeled over to port again as she leaned into the turn like a huge, slow moving plane. In spite of the shallow rudder angle, the turn was quick due to the boat’s speed. The planesman had trouble keeping the bow from slamming into the ocean bottom, way too close for comfort.

Suddenly an explosion could be heard over even the loud flow sound outside the hull. The Fire Control Chief smiled as he looked at the captain and said, “We got him! Scratch one Kilo, sir!”

“No time to celebrate now, Chief,” Halsman replied. “Not with another fish shooting up our a...”

The captain never finished his sentence, as another explosion, this one huge and close, bucked the *Providence* very suddenly to starboard. Looks of fear covered the men’s faces. Chief Kyman reached up above the ballast control panel and grabbed the emergency blow valves, or ‘chicken switches,’ then looked over his shoulder at the captain. He hoped he would not have to use them. His hopes were quickly dashed.

“Emergency report, emergency report!” rang out a voice over the 4-MC emergency circuit. “Flooding in the engine room, flooding in engine room lower level, flooding in ASW bay!”

Suddenly a bell on the ship’s control panel rang.

“Captain, maneuvering requests all-stop,” Wilson reported.

Halsman silently prayed that the surface ships they had dealt with earlier were far enough away to not see what was about to occur, but the captain had little choice.

“Helm, all stop,” he ordered. “Chief of the Watch, emergency blow all main ballast tanks.”

Kyman nodded as he acknowledged the order, and then activated the two silver handles, forward first followed a few seconds later by the aft.

Forward near the capstan space and aft in shaft alley, large valves rolled open, admitting thousands of pounds of pressurized air into the three main ballast tanks at the bow and two at the stern, forcing all the water out of the tanks. Still carried forward by the boat’s residual speed, the bow nosed skyward and within seconds broke the surface in a spray of whitewater.

After a few minutes, the *Providence* finally stabilized on the surface, floating serenely cloaked in the darkness of night.

\* \* \* \*

The Kairn battlecruiser, although severely damaged, still had enough teeth left to inflict a killing blow to the *Providence*. The enemy vessel bore down on the tiny starship, about to fire one last shot.

T’Les, still diligent in performing her duties as science officer, looked up from her console. Her face almost betrayed the emotional control that Vulcans maintained. “There is another ship coming out of warp, Captain,” she said.

Adams looked at the chronometer display on one of the few still functional control consoles that remained around him. His heart dropped as he realized it was still much too soon for the arrival of the expected Federation fleet.

“The Kairn must have gotten off a distress call,” the *Providence*’s captain grumbled. “Here come their reinforcements.”

“No, Sir,” T’Les replied. “It is the starship *Dauntless*.”

“The cavalry has arrived,” Adams said as the entire bridge crew erupted in cheers.

Captain Koester watched with a wide smile on his face as his Sovereign-class starship dropped out of warp, taking up a defensive position directly between the badly damaged starship *Providence* and its Kairn attacker. The Kairn ship seemed to hesitate for a moment, as if unsure what to make of the sudden arrival of another Starfleet vessel, then again pressed its attack.

The bridge crew of the *Providence* watched as the Kairn fired its disruptors, which as expected, pierced the shields that protected the hull of the *Dauntless*, breaching a small opening on the larger vessel’s saucer-shaped primary hull, before the Federation starship returned fire with both phasers and quantum torpedoes. The phasers produced little damage, just a slight weakening of the Kairn battleship’s shields, but enough to allow the torpedoes

to do their job. The Kairn vessel's disruptors overloaded in a shower of sparks and a plasma leak formed near its impulse deck, threatening to blow the battleship wide open.

"Captain, the Kairn weapons have been disabled and their impulse systems are down to less than fifty percent," T'Les reported. Adams, also smiling from ear to ear, turned to his fellow captain and shook his hand.

"Kairn vessel is retreating," Lieutenant Commander Mary Goodman reported, grinning over her shoulder back at the two captains. "Shall we pursue?"

"Are you kidding?" Adams replied with one eyebrow raised as he watched the sole remaining Kairn ship jump into warp and out of the system. "Open a hailing frequency to the *Dauntless*."

Goodman quickly complied, responding, "Frequency open." Adams looked over at Koester, gesturing toward the screen.

"Koester to *Dauntless*. Not to sound ungrateful, but shouldn't my ship be in repair at *Starbase 82* right now, Mister Fry?"

The main viewer blinked to the image of the other starship's bridge. To Koester's surprise, sitting in the center seat was not Commander Kevin Fry, as he had expected, but his first officer, K'danz, her arm still encased in a cast.

"You can blame me for that, Skipper," K'danz responded. "I pulled rank on Kevin and assumed command. And from the looks of it, just in time too."

Captain Koester slowly shook his head, amazed at his first officer's uncanny sense of timing, and said, "Fine, I'll court-martial you for disobeying orders later. In the meantime, do you think you can give us a hand getting back to *Starbase 82*?"

K'danz grinned back and said, "I think we can help you out."

\* \* \* \*

*Captain's log, stardate 58656.2*

*Thanks to the timely arrival of the starship Dauntless, my ship and crew escaped destruction. Fortunately, we had no casualties and only minor injuries. Lieutenant Nakamara's injuries were the worst, but Doctor Hogan says that he is in stable condition and will pull through. The Dauntless is now towing us back to Starbase 82, where the Providence will undergo refit and repairs. At that time, I will turn command over to Commander Lightfoot and I will travel back to Earth for a week of shore leave before assuming command of the USS Swift. I only wish that I was leaving Jada with a ship that was in better condition.*

*Our mission was a success in that we were able to destroy the Kairn station and drive them out of the Nelbana system. I have read reports that the Starfleet task force has been able to retake all of sector 4-2-8, but the Kairn have built up their forces in the adjoining sector 4-2-9...and Starfleet is not prepared for an all-out offensive to drive them out at this time... It appears that the Kairn are here to stay... at least until we find a better defense against their variable frequency disruptors.*

The holodeck doors slid closed with a whine and disappeared into the scenery as Captain Koester lead Captain Adams into a re-creation of the control room of the 20<sup>th</sup> century submarine *Providence*. Without the exact pattern in the starship's computer records, it was as close as Koester could program it, almost a cross between the actual submarine he had found himself serving aboard years earlier and a movie set, with all it's blinking lights and polished surfaces, from one of Hollywood's 2-D entertainment films so popular at the end of that long ago century. It was here in the holodeck, in the calm that had followed their mission against the Kairn, that the two captains had finally managed to find some time to conclude Koester's story.

"According to my great-great-great-etcetera-grandfather's journal, by some miracle the submarine *Providence* remained undetected until the *USS Enterprise* battle group rendezvoused with them almost two days later. Apparently, after the devastating attack against their base, Khan's fleet decided to avoid the area they suspected a submarine to be lurking, not knowing she was disabled. One of the American destroyers towed her to Diego Garcia, and from there an ocean tug towed her first into the Med for emergency repairs in Italy, then all the

way back across the Atlantic to Groton, Connecticut. The entire trip took almost two whole months, but the crew was grateful to still be alive.”

Koester took another sip from the mug of coffee he was carrying before placing it down on top of the nav plot, and then added, “Once back in Connecticut, the Navy determined the damage the *Providence* had sustained would be too expensive to repair and decided to scrap her. They only authorized enough repair to eventually get the boat underway to where she would be decommissioned at a shipyard in New Hampshire. With the exception of one officer, the Navigator, and several of the enlisted men, such as my ancestor, most members of the crew were reassigned to new commands. By October of that year, everyone thought 719’s adventures had ended.” Koester’s smile turned conspiratorial. “However, fate and a miscalculated time travel formula had other plans for that submarine... But that’s a story for another time....”

**The End**