

STARDATE 58479.6

At the request of the Nazar Alliance, the U.S.S. *Trailblazer* had delivered a representative of the Nazar Trade Ministry to Oshanis IV. After the delegate beamed down, Captain Melanie Leeson left the transporter room and returned to the bridge. She exited the turbolift and took her position sitting in the command chair. “Prepare to leave orbit, Mister Campbell.”

Lieutenant J.G. Bryce Campbell started working the controls. “What course, Captain?”

“Neran V. It’s time that we paid them another visit and get to know them a little better.”

“Course is laid in, and we are leaving orbit,” Campbell said. “Ready for warp speed at your command.”

Leeson smiled. She loved the computer-enhanced streaking stars coming at her when she watched the main viewer. “Very good, Lieutenant. Eng...”

“Captain, long-range sensors are picking up a massive subspace explosion approximately fourteen light years away,” Lieutenant J.G. Anthony Zeller announced from the science station.

“Transfer coordinates to the CONN, Mister Zeller,” Leeson said. “Neran V will have to wait. Mister Campbell, Maximum warp.”



To Boldly Go: Beware the Gifar

A U.S.S. Trailblazer Story

By Cleve Johnson



The starship sped toward its destination at warp nine point five. The captain and senior science officer sat in the main conference room. Leeson had always appreciated that the designers of this ship class decided to put the main conference room in the forward section of deck one and included large windows to see the beautiful view. Other than the bridge, this was her favorite room on the ship.

Lieutenant Commander Jaeger handed a PADD to Leeson. “Here are the long-range sensor readings on the subspace event and the space ahead. The explosion happened about half a parsec from a star system.”

“Thank you, Nora,” Leeson said as she accepted the PADD. “Were you able to detect any planets?”

“Three gas giants and seven terrestrial planets. Two are class M,” Jaeger said. “From this distance, we can’t tell if there are any sentient life forms or not, but if there are, I’m afraid of what they will be going through in the aftermath of that explosion.”

“Keep me updated as more information comes in.”

“Of course, Captain.” Jaeger stood and started toward the exit.

Leeson pressed a touchpad on the desk communications panel. “Leeson to bridge.”

“Bridge. This is Commander Shrev.”

“What’s our ETA to the subspace explosion site, Exec?” Leeson asked.

“Four hours, forty-seven minutes,” the Andorian first officer said after a short pause.

“Commander Jaeger just informed me that the system ahead has two M-class planets. We don’t know if there are intelligent lifeforms yet, but I want to be prepared to render aid if there are, within the parameters of the Prime Directive, of course,” Leeson said. “Have OPS patch me through to *Gateway Alpha*, Fleet Captain Stuart’s office.”

“Yes, Captain. Right away.” The Andorian first officer paused but did not close the communication with his CO. *“Captain, are you going to request assistance before we assess the situation to see if it is warranted?”*

“No, but I want Captain Stuart to be aware of the incident in case we find sentient lifeforms, and if we can aid them in some way. One ship would not be enough, so I think it’s good to let the fleet captain know that there might be a possibility to call in other starships.”

“Understood, Captain. I concur. Shrev out.”



The U.S.S. *Trailblazer* approached the location of the subspace explosion. On the bridge, the captain had just sat down when the ship started shaking.

“We’re passing through a subspace shockwave, Captain,” Lieutenant Commander Jaeger announced.

“That didn’t seem too bad,” Leeson replied.

“That was just the first wave,” Jaeger said. “The second will hit us in less than fourteen seconds, and it has more force than the first wave.”

“Raise shields. Divert power from non-essential systems,” Leeson said. “Inertial Dampers on full.”

“XO to crew,” Shrev said. “All hands, brace for impact!”

“Hang on, Leeson said. Her voice was raised, but calmness overshadowed any hint of potential panic.

Jaeger kept her eyes on the science monitors. “Impact in three, two, one.”

The ship shook violently as the second wave contacted the starship’s shields. Those on the bridge grabbed their chair armrests or the edges of their station consoles. It was difficult for some of the crew to stay seated, but somehow, they managed.

After the shaking stopped, Leeson looked toward the science station. “Nora, any more waves coming?”

“Negative, Captain, but I suggest we exit warp and not get any closer to the event point.”

“Agreed,” Leeson said. “Lieutenant McFadden, take us out of warp. Full stop.”

“Aye, Captain, Beverly McFadden, the senior flight control officer replied. “Now answering full stop.”

Lieutenant Sukaren Dren, the Trill senior tactical officer, turned his head away from his console toward the center of the bridge. “Captain, shields are at eighty-three percent but starting to firm up.”

“Thank you, Mister Dren,” Leeson replied. “Commander Shrev, damage report.”

“Engineering reports an EPS conduit on deck six developed a small fracture. A damage control team has been dispatched. Two crewmen in the vicinity were injured, and Doctor Keegan is on the scene. He reports that both crewmen have minor plasma burns. The doctor will have them transported to sickbay for further treatment,” the Andorian first officer said.

“Thank you, Exec,” Leeson replied.

“Lieutenant Commander Jaeger?”

“Running full sensor scans,” Jaeger said. “We are approximately...four million, seven hundred thousand kilometers from the point of the explosion. The fabric of space seems to be weakened, and there is a possibility of a subspace fracture forming, especially if warp drive would be used within...I estimate one and a half light years distance.”

“Let’s make it two light years just to be safe, Commander.”

Jaeger was happy that she and the captain were on the same wavelength. “That would be prudent, Captain.”

“Captain, we are receiving a distress signal from the fourth planet of the nearby star system,” Lieutenant Heron Jaxx said.

“What frequency, Lieutenant?”

“It’s a subspace frequency in a lower bandwidth. Forty-seven point two six.”

“Subspace communications,” Leeson whispered. “Nora, scan the planet, please.”

“Scanning. The fourth planet is class M, slightly smaller than Earth. The population is approximately five billion humanoid life forms, and there appears to be an abundance of flora and fauna. Several cities as well. The atmosphere is showing signs of massive storms across the entire globe.”

“Caused by the subspace explosion?”

“Undetermined since we don’t know if that is the natural state of the planet or not.”

“I’m betting that it isn’t since we know that the energy wave would have reached it by now,” Leeson rubbed her chin. She looked at the viewscreen and the stars ahead. “Lieutenant

Dren, prepare a type one probe and launch it dead slow. We'll leave it behind to monitor the area of the subspace event."

"Aye, Captain," the tactical officer replied.

"Lieutenant McFadden, set course for the fourth planet and engage at full impulse until we reach two light years from the event and engage warp five."

"Course set and engaging full impulse," the CONN officer said.



The U.S.S. *Trailblazer* approached the planet and entered a high orbit. On the bridge, Captain Leeson stood up and walked toward the CONN station to stand behind Lieutenant McFadden. She turned her head toward the science station. "Nora, what is your analysis?"

"Scans show a highly developed civilization. I would say their technology is similar to late Twenty-first century Earth; however, it seems that they have developed more advanced communications." Jaeger continued to scan.

"And apparently, they have the ability to detect us, Captain," Lieutenant Herron Jaxx added. "We are receiving a transmission."

Leeson looked at the Bolian OPS manager. "Visual?"

"Audio only, sir. The universal translator is decoding."

"Open frequency."

"Aye, Captain."

"Alien spacecraft, this is High Minister Jahl Ku Relarmu. I am the leader of Ataris. Why have you attacked us?"

Leeson's surprised look could almost be felt by each person on the bridge. She recovered quickly. "Uh, this is Captain Melanie Leeson on the starship U.S.S. *Trailblazer* representing the United Federation of Planets. We did not attack your planet. We received your distress signal and are here to render assistance."

Silence permeated the bridge for several seconds before the alien leader spoke again. *"How do I know...telling th...ruth?"*

"Transmission is starting to break up due to atmospheric conditions, Captain," Jaxx stated.

"Do your best to clean it up, Mister Jaxx." Leeson turned to face the viewscreen even though it was an audio-only transmission. "We were investigating an explosion in space a few light years away, and we received your distress signal," Leeson said. "We are here to assess the effects on your planet and see if there is anything that we can do to help."

More silence permeated the bridge until Leeson broke it. "High Minister, do you want our assistance?"

"I must...eak with the council of...isters and will conta...ou soon."

"Transmission ended, Captain," Jaxx said.

"The first minister's mistrust might be his people's undoing," Commander Shrev said. "What are your orders, Captain?"

"We wait for the high minister to contact us," Leeson replied, "but assign personnel to rescue teams and have them stand by."

"Yes, Captain."

Leeson went to stand next to Jaeger's science console. "What is going on down there, Nora?"

"The atmosphere is heavily charged with neutrinos, and massive storms are ravaging the coastlines on all continents," the science officer said. "Cities and towns within fifty kilometers of the coastlines are starting to flood."

"While the planetary leaders meet to decide if they will accept our help," Lieutenant Commander Victor Jacobs said sarcastically.

Leeson crossed her arms. "Well, I would like to start evacuating the citizens to safer places, Vic, but the Prime Directive..."

"...Is sometimes more trouble than it should be," Jacobs interjected.

Leeson nodded her head in agreement, but she did not have the luxury of deciding the correctness of the Federation's highest law in every situation.

Lieutenant Jaxx looked up from his console. "Captain, the high minister has reestablished contact."

"On audio. Lieutenant."

"Captain Melanie Leeson, please for...distrust. When we sent the distress signal, we...not expecting an answer from aliens."

"Who did you expect to answer?"

"We have a colony world in a nearby...ar system," the high minister said. *"We expe... our people...help us."*

Leeson turned her head toward the science station. She immediately knew no help would come from the closest star system when she saw Nora Jaeger shake her head. "High Minister, I am afraid that...our sensors detected more damage to the planets in that star system than to yours. It was closer to the blast area."

The high minister remained silent.

"High Minister, we are here to render aid if you will let us. Many of your cities are flooding, and we have the means to help evacuate people to the inland areas," Leeson said.

"We thank you for your offer, Captain. Any help...an provide is welcome."

Leeson walked back and sat in the command chair. “Are you familiar with matter/energy transportation?”

“*Our scientists have theorized that it...possible, but the ener...required makes it im...actical.*”

“We have that technology, High Minister. May we send a few representatives to your location to coordinate the evacuation of your coastal cities?”

“*How long will...ake your...ip to descend?*”

“We will use our transporter to send a small group to the surface,” Leeson said. “They will arrive in a few minutes if you agree.”

“*Very well,*” the planetary leader said. “*How many people will you send?*”

“I would like to send an away team of six people to help coordinate the evacuation and provide medical assistance if necessary. We have other people that can be sent later if you authorize it.”

“*Thank you, Captain. I ask that...our people come unarmed.*” High Minister Jahl Ku Relarmu expected Leeson to object, so he offered her a guarantee before she had time to speak. “*I...ill provide a s...urity force to protect them and see that no harm...to them.*”

Leeson nodded. “It is your planet, High Minister. My people will abide by your rules, and I appreciate your guarantee for their safety. My people will be with you in a few minutes.” Leeson looked toward her first officer. “Commander Shrev, please take an *unarmed* away team.”

“Yes, Captain, but I think prudence dictates that our people be injected with subcutaneous transponders. Just in case.”

“I agree. Make it so,” Leeson replied as the Andorian got out of his chair and made his way to the turbolift.



The away team materialized in front of the government building in the capital city. The high minister, his personal aide, and several armed guards approached. Shrev did not know what to expect concerning the aliens’ appearance, so he had mentally rehearsed the various species that he had encountered over his years in Starfleet. He was surprised when he saw the aliens. The Atarisians were similar to his own species with similar antennae. The main differences between these aliens and Andorians were hair and skin color and height. The Atarisians’ hair was dark brown, but some members had jet black. The skin was a light red, almost a pink shade. As for height, the Atarisians stood, on average, about fourteen centimeters shorter than most Andorians.

“I am High Minister Jahl Ku Relarmu. My aide, Trena Ku Faloris. And my head of security, Hulari Kan Delimu.”

Shrev nodded to the high minister, his antennae twitching slightly. “Commander Shrev, first officer of the Federation starship *Trailblazer*. With me are Lieutenant Commander Michael Keegan, the ship’s chief medical officer, Lieutenant V’Taal, head nurse, Senior Chief Petty

Officer Michael Dolan and Crewman Adrel Pepian, medics, and Lieutenant Junior Grade Frances Graham, one of our science officers. We come to serve.”

“You are of different species.” The high minister seemed surprised. “And *you* appear to be kin to us.”

The winds were picking up speed, and the sky turned dark and cloudy. Shrev looked up and saw flashes of lightning followed by the sound of thunder. “There are many species within the United Federation of Planets. And I, too, am curious about the similarities between your people and mine, High Minister, but perhaps that can wait until after we begin to rescue your people from the coastal areas?”

“Yes, of course, Commander. Did I understand your captain correctly? That you can use your energy transportation technology to evacuate the people from one location to another?”

“Yes, sir,” Shrev said. “We should get started as soon as possible to rescue as many people as we can.”

“Let us go inside. We have prepared a room to coordinate the rescue.”

“High Minister,” Doctor Keegan said. “Where is the safest place inland to evacuate your people to? Do you have emergency medical personnel that can set up a temporary triage center?”

“Yes, but it will take some time for them to arrive at the site.”

“We can transport your medical personnel in seconds from anywhere on your planet once we know where the site is located,” Shrev replied.

The high minister seemed taken aback as he tried to imagine the workings of a device that could move a large group of people from one location to another in mere seconds, but he quickly recovered as he had moments before witnessed the arrival of the aliens that stood before him. “Come with me, and I will show you on our locator device where the more secure areas are for the evacuees to be sent.”

Shrev and the away team followed the high minister into the building with the Atarisian security contingent behind them.



After nearly three days of completing hundreds of site-to-site transports, most of *Trailblazer*'s energy reserves had been depleted. Hundreds of thousands of Atarisians had been transported to the interior cities of three continents. The storms continued to rage planetwide; however, most buildings in the interior were built well enough to withstand the wind and torrential rains. Doctor Keegan had called for the entire medical staff and the security crew members who had been trained as medics to beam down to assist the alien physicians and emergency medical teams at the main evacuation center. The Atarisian loss of life would have been thirtyfold higher if not for the *Trailblazer*'s help.

The high minister entered the room where the evacuation coordination center had been set up. He walked toward Commander Shrev and almost, but not quite, smiled. “On behalf of all



the people of Ataris, I thank you and your Federation for what you have done to help us. Many lives were saved because of you. Please convey this to your captain.”

“I will, High Minister. I only wish that more could have been saved,” Shrev replied. “Our science section is studying the effects on your atmosphere to see if it is possible to reverse them.”

“Our scientists have also been studying the damage and the effects. They have determined that the best course of action would be to do nothing and let nature heal itself.” The high minister walked to the window and looked at the rain and dark clouds. “Our top climatologists say that the storms will subside, and the atmosphere will return to normal in time.”

“Our scientists came to the same conclusion; however, it will take almost half a year for the atmosphere to stabilize,” Shrev said. Fortunately, the storms should lose their severity within four or five days.”

“Yes, that is fortunate.” The high minister turned back to face Commander Shrev. “Have you determined who attacked us?”

“We are not sure if you were attacked or if the subspace explosion was a natural occurrence, High Minister.” Shrev hoped that it was a natural occurrence rather than a deliberate attack. It would concern him greatly if someone had the technology to create subspace weapons. The Son’a had tried to destroy the *Enterprise* a few years ago with such weapons. Fortunately, the Baku had welcomed the surviving Son’a home, and they agreed to disarm their weapons and ships as part of the reunion.

“Captain Leeson would like to offer more aid from Starfleet if you would allow it. We can have Starfleet bring food and temporary shelters,” Shreve said. “*Trailblazer* can provide some, but we would need to request more supplies from our home base.”

“We are a self-sufficient people, Commander Shrev, but we are not too proud to accept your help.”



The next morning, Commander Shrev entered the bridge and sat in his chair next to Leeson. “Captain, Lieutenant Commander Petroni says that energy reserve levels are recharged to forty-seven percent, but two of our main transporters are offline due to damage to many of the major components, which is not surprising due to excessive use. She said that all the transporters need to be overhauled once we get back to *Gateway Alpha*.”

“How is the relief effort going?” Leeson asked.

“We have provided the evacuation centers with all of our emergency shelters and ninety-five percent of our emergency rations,” the first officer said. “I thought it prudent to not deplete our entire supply.”

“Good thinking.”

“Captain, a ship is coming out of warp.” Lieutenant Commander Jaeger quickly turned her chair toward the center of the bridge. Her face displayed deep concern as she frowned. “Configuration unknown.”

“Lieutenant Dren, raise shields. Charge weapons, but keep them on standby until we find out if they are hostile or not.”

The Trill tactical officer did as Leeson ordered. “Aye, Captain. Shields are up and weapons are charged and standing by.”

“We are being hailed,” Jaxx said.

“Open,” Leeson replied. “This is Captain Melanie Leeson of the Federation starship *Trailblazer*.”

The main viewer morphed from the image of the planet to the bridge of the alien ship. The alien was unlike any that Leeson had encountered. The person on the viewscreen had dark green skin, small ears, yellow eyes, and a short horn on its forehead. When the alien turned its head to one side to nod to another person not visible on the screen, Leeson saw that the alien’s elongated head sported a white ponytail; however, that was the only hair Leeson could see. The alien seemed to glare directly at Leeson. “*Your presence is not welcome. You have encroached upon Gifar space. We claim your ship and crew.*”

Jaeger checked the sensor readings. “They have locked weapons on us, Captain.”

“Return the favor, Mister Dren.” Leeson remembered the recent warnings from the Nazar and Batirians concerning the Gifar. “Beware the Gifar,” was what both races had said, and it echoed in her mind. Now she knew what they looked like. She imagined, from what little information she knew, that the Gifar were a fierce people. Their captain’s appearance certainly coincided with that assumption. Leeson immediately realized that her judgment was tainted by prejudice, which she regretted. Humanity should have grown beyond that type of thinking but she, for one, knew that humans still had a long way to go in eliminating all of the primitive attitudes that had led to thousands of years of hatred and war.

“Phasers and torpedoes locked, Captain,” Lieutenant Sukaren Dren replied as he stood ready to fire as soon as Leeson gave the order.

Leeson stood and took several steps toward the main viewer, facing the alien. “We came in response to a distress signal we received from the planet below. A subspace explosion a few light years from here created atmospheric and ecological damage to the planet.”

“*We know about the explosion,*” the alien said. “*It was the result of a weapons test.*”

“Weapons test? You are responsible for the damage to the planet then?”

“*We are not concerned with the planet nor the people on it. They are inferior, but they might pose a threat to us in the future if they continue to develop their technology. If the weapons test resulted in the planet’s desolation, all the better.*”

Shrev was on his feet and walked to stand beside his captain. “We should do whatever we can to protect Ataris, Captain.”

Leeson turned her head and whispered to her first officer. “We *will* do all we can.”

Jaeger looked at Leeson and Shrev. She then told Jaxx, whose station was directly behind the science console, to mute the transmission before returning her attention back to Leeson. “Captain, I have analyzed the Gifar ship. Their weapons are on par with type X phasers, but their shields are unlike any that I have seen. I’m not sure if our phasers will penetrate them.”

“Thank you, Nora.” Leeson turned around to face the tactical station. “Mister Dren, bring the phaser pulse canons online and prepare to fire at full power, but wait for my signal.”

“They are ready to fire, Captain.” The Trill smiled. “I anticipated that we might need them.”

Leeson nodded and turned back to face the Gifar captain. “Unmute.” She looked intently at her counterpart on the alien bridge. “We were unaware that we were in *your* space. We have provided all the help that we can to the planet for now, so we ask that you allow us to leave your space peacefully.”

The alien snarled. “*We do not allow those who enter our space to leave it. Prepare to be boarded.*” The screen went blank.

Leeson and Shrev returned to sit in their chairs.

“They are launching shuttles, Captain,” Jaeger stated. “Their shuttles have the same weapons as the mothership.”

“Target the shuttles’ engines, Mister Dren.”

Just then, the bridge shook violently. Everyone gripped the armrests or console edges to keep from being thrown to the floor. Leeson could not believe that the alien weapons had shaken the ship as much as they did. “I thought you said their weapons were similar to type X phasers.”

Jaeger recovered and did a quick scan of the alien ship. “They have particle beam disruptor weapons that must have been masked.”

The ship shook again. Leeson would have been thrown to the floor this time if Shrev had not reached over and grabbed her arm. “Dren, return fire! Target weapons!”

Phaser beams shot out from the emitter strips, and multiple photon torpedoes and phaser pulse cannons bombarded the alien ship’s shields. Dren’s mouth dropped open. “Their shields just seemed to absorb the energy, Captain.”

“Fire again and keep it up. Use quantum torpedoes if necessary, and don’t spare the yield!”

“Loading quantum torps and setting for one hundred percent yield.”

The ship shook once more, and the lights dimmed drastically. Dren was on the floor. Once he got up and got back to the tactical console, he faced Leeson with an incredulous look.

“Shields are down to fourteen percent. One more salvo and we will lose them. Pulse cannons are offline. Both forward torpedo tubes are damaged.”

The ship was hit by another particle beam, which did as the tactical officer had said—the shields were gone.

“Two of their shuttles are getting near to our docking ports,” Jaeger said.

“Vic,” Leeson looked at her head of security, who was already out of his seat. “Send security teams to port and starboard airlocks.”

“Already on their way. I’m going portside.” He rushed to the turbolift and disappeared in it as the doors closed behind him.

Leeson pressed one of the communication tabs on the armrest of her chair. “All hands, this is the captain. We are about to be boarded by a hostile alien force. Arm yourselves and try to take prisoners if possible; however, deadly force is authorized if necessary.”

Shrev had made his way to the nearest weapons locker and retrieved a phaser compression rifle and two hand phasers. He tossed one of the hand phasers to Leeson. “Computer, activate force fields on all entrances to the bridge, engineering, and auxiliary bridge.”

“Mister Jaxx, send a code Alpha alert to all Starfleet, Nazar, and Batirian ships and request immediate assistance,” Leeson said.

“All external communications are being jammed, Captain.”

“The Gifar shuttles have reached the docking ports and are locking on.” Jaeger tried to keep her voice from projecting the panic that she felt as she stared at Leeson.

“Security will handle them,” Leeson reassured the science officer. She then turned to the OPS manager. “Mister Jaxx, have the rear torpedo bay prepare an emergency beacon. Download all logs and our current situation, and have it start transmitting as soon as it leaves the vicinity. I’m hoping that it will get far enough from the jamming signal and get the word out that we need help before it gets shot down.”

“Aye, Captain.” Herron Jaxx made all the preparations from his console and launched the beacon as soon as the download was completed. He then focused his attention on scanning the docked shuttles.

Shrev, a former security officer, had taken charge of the internal security station shortly after Lieutenant Commander Jacobs had left the bridge. He focused his attention on the internal sensors. “Captain, Mister Jacobs’ team is keeping the Gifar forces from advancing at the portside airlock, but Lieutenant Srellan and his team are starting to lose ground. There are firefights in two corridors near the port airlock.”

“Commander, take Lieutenant Dren to assist Mister Srellan and his team.”

Shrev nodded to the senior tactical officer. Both started for the turbolift. “Computer, lower forcefield and reinstate after the turbolift car is below deck one,” Shrev said.

Leeson watched them go and crossed her arms. She had also been a security officer during her career, and being stuck on the bridge while a hostile force was on her ship was not where she wanted to be. But her duty as the commanding officer dictated that she stay right where she was.



Shrev and Sukaren Dren, the Trill senior tactical officer, arrived in time to give needed assistance to the assistant security chief and his team. Just as Shrev took position behind a structural post, barely avoiding a blast from one of the Gifar soldier's weapons whizzing past him. Another beam hit Dren's leg, and Shrev fired in the direction of the enemy as he quickly moved to help get the tactical officer out of the line of fire. "Lieutenant, how bad are you hurt?"

"It looks worse than it is," Dren said as he struggled to force the pain away.

Shrev smirked at the tactical officer. "You are a terrible liar, Lieutenant."

Forcing himself to smile, Dren nodded to the first officer. "I was able to bluff you more than once in our last card game, sir."

"You were not suffering from a particle beam injury at the time." The Andorian tore Dren's pants leg and ripped a couple of strips of cloth to use as a makeshift bandage, which he tied over the wound and started applying pressure.

"I can't argue with that, Commander," Dren replied, his pain clearly evident in his voice. "I hate to leave you, but is there any chance I can beam to sickbay? You are doing a fine job, sir, but you're not a doctor."

"Commander, I can take over," Petty Officer Logan James said as he pulled a medical tricorder and a hypospray injector out of a pouch attached to the belt he was wearing. Logan was one of the security crewmen who also had been certified as a field medic.

"Thank you, Petty Officer," Shrev said as he backed away and started to rise. Out of the corner of his eye, he detected movement to his right.

"Look out!" Sukaren Dren, though in pain, still gripped his phaser and pointed it toward a Gifar coming around the curved corridor toward the security team. Dren saw that the Gifar's weapon was pointing toward the first officer, so he fired his phaser and hit the alien in the chest, knocking the alien intruder against the corridor wall. Dren then looked at Commander Shrev. "What would you do without me, sir?"

Even during a heated battle, the Andorian offered a gentle smile. "Thank you, Sukaren."



On the bridge, Melanie Leeson paced across the width of the bridge and back again as she crossed her arms, becoming more frustrated. She quickly walked to the OPS station. "Lieutenant Jaxx, report."

"Most resistance is on the port side, but the alien shuttle on the starboard side moved off; another Gifar shuttle is moving toward the airlock to take its place." Heron Jaxx looked up into

his captain's face. "Lieutenant Commander Jacobs has called the entire security department to converge on either his location or the other airlock area. So far, the Gifar have been contained in those locations."

"The last shuttle is moving around to our aft and so is the Gifar mothership," Lieutenant Commander Jaeger said.

Melanie looked at Jaxx, "Lieutenant, put all personnel in or near the shuttlebay on high alert." She turned her head to face the science officer. "Nora, take command of the bridge. I'm going to the shuttlebay."

"Captain, your place is on the bridge," Jaeger protested.

"My place is defending the ship, and right now, the shuttlebay is where the enemy is coming." Melanie turned and quickly made her way to the turbolift. "Computer, lower forcefield to the bridge and re-engage after the turbolift reaches deck two." Melanie entered the turbolift car as soon as the forcefield disengaged and the door opened. As it closed behind her, she shot a slight smile in Jaeger's direction, knowing that the bridge was in good hands.



When Melanie Leeson entered the shuttlebay, she noticed that several members of the crew had taken defensive positions behind some of the shuttles. She saw Ensign Ziva Greensburg, one of the flight control officers, and all seven of the enlisted members of the shuttle flight and maintenance department and a few others from other departments. She looked up and spotted Lieutenant J. G. Bryce Campbell, another one of the flight control officers, and Crewman Raj Kahn of security in the flight control room with phasers drawn. She called up to the upper level. "Are you the ranking officer in here, Lieutenant?"

"Not anymore since you're here, captain," Campbell replied.

Leeson could not help but find his dry humor reminiscent of another person she knew. Blake Adams' image flashed in her mind, but she had to block it out so that she could concentrate on the situation at hand. She ran to one of the shuttles, the *Ramon*, and knelt next to Petty Officer Faloa Anishti, a Bolian shuttle pilot. "You didn't think you would be involved in a firefight when you signed aboard, did you, Anishti?"

"No, ma'am," the Bolian replied with a slight quiver in her voice. "But I knew that it would be an adventure just like the Starfleet recruiting posters said."

Leeson gave a quick pat on the petty officer's shoulder and then tapped her combadge. "Leeson to Campbell. Activate the atmospheric forcefield around the main door."

"Already done, Captain."

"Good." Leeson tapped her badge again and crouched behind the front of the shuttle. Raising her voice so everyone could hear, she gave her next order. "The Gifar ship will blast the shuttlebay door any moment now. Be prepared to shield your eyes, and when their shuttle lands, locate the hatches and fire at anything that comes out. Try to take them out before they have a

chance to take you out. I'm not sure if their weapons have a stun setting, but make sure that your phasers are set no higher than level three. I want prisoners if possible."

She barely finished her sentence when the large door at the end of the bay exploded inward. All of the Starfleet personnel closed their eyes and shielded their faces with their hands, but as soon as the flash subsided, Melanie and the others readjusted their eyes and watched the alien shuttle as it landed. "Get ready and take aim," Leeson shouted over the sound of the alien shuttle's engines.

As soon as the Gifar shuttle touched down, doors on both sides of the craft opened, and Gifar soldiers, particle beam rifles in hand, started rushing out.

Leeson raised her phaser and fired, stunning the lead soldier, and the others followed their captain's example. Lieutenant Campbell had a phaser pulse rifle and aimed at the shuttle's port engine. Firing several shots, the lieutenant's rifle pierced the engine casing and caused it to shut down, preventing the Gifar from leaving.

"Keep firing," Leeson yelled.

Several Gifar had piled up within a few meters of their shuttle, but some ducked behind their compatriots' bodies as protection. They returned fire, narrowly missing some of the Starfleet crew. The Starfleet shuttles that they hid behind took a lot of damage, and Leeson, not easily angered, started to take the attack as personal.

The energy beams continued to fly past, getting closer to hitting the *Trailblazer* defenders as Gifar soldiers rushed from their defensive positions and started firing wildly. A couple of shots hit shuttle 03, the *Aldrin*. A third hit Chief Petty Officer Todd Alistair, one of the shuttle pilots.

Leeson ran to Alistair's side to pull him out of the line of fire, but another Gifar fired, hitting her in the leg. She went down hard but rolled to her side to watch the same Gifar preparing to shoot again. Fortunately, a phaser beam came down from the upper level, throwing the alien unconscious to the deck. Leeson looked up and waved to Lieutenant J.G. Campbell, who nodded to his captain briefly before taking several more Gifar out of commission.

Petty Officer Anishti, who had been cross-trained as a medic, rushed to the captain's side as she tapped the Starfleet combadge on her uniform. "Computer, two for emergency transport to sickbay."



"Commander, the captain has been injured. She's in sickbay," Lieutenant Herron Jaxx said.

Lieutenant Commander Jaeger rose from the center seat. She forced herself to remain calm despite how worried she was. "What's her condition?"

"Doctor Keegan is working on her, but her injuries are not life-threatening."

Jaeger let out a sigh of relief. “Herron, contact Mister Shrev and inform him of what happened to the captain. Find out how his team is doing against the invaders.”

“Aye, Commander.”

“Commander,” Lieutenant J.G. Trevik interrupted from the tactical station. “Sensors are detecting two ships approaching at high warp. The estimated time to arrive is less than three minutes.”

“More Gifar,” Jaeger whispered.

“Negative, Commander. They are Starfleet ships,” Trevik said as his antennae twitched.

“Starfleet?” The science officer had been on the verge of panic, at least inwardly, but now she began to relax. “Hail them.”

“The lead ship is hailing us,” Lieutenant Jaxx replied. “Activating the viewscreen.”

The image of the starship *Republic*’s bridge came into focus with Fleet Captain Robert Stuart sitting on the edge of his chair. “*Captain Leeson, what is your status?*”

“Captain Stuart, this is Lieutenant Commander Nora Jaeger in temporary command of the bridge. Captain Leeson has been injured, but we don’t know her condition other than her life is not in danger.”

“*Where’s the first officer?*”

“At last report, he is in the middle of defending against a Gifar boarding party, sir.”

“*The Republic and the Cheron will do what we can to convince the Gifar to stop the attack.*”

“Thank you, Captain.” Jaeger almost smiled as the transmission ended.



The *Defiant*-class U.S.S. *Cheron* began firing the phaser pulse cannons at the Gifar mothership as the *Republic* concentrated on the alien shuttle that had previously disengaged from the *Trailblazer*’s docking port to allow one of the other shuttles to dock.

“On the *Republic* bridge, Stuart glanced at the readout on the console on his chair’s armrest. “Target the shuttle’s shield generator and engines. I want to cripple it, not destroy it.”

“Aye, Captain. Firing now.” Lieutenant Commander Cooper Barnsdale masterfully ran his fingers over the tactical controls, targeting the Gifar shuttle as it made its way toward its mothership.

Phaser beams hit their intended target and did not let up until the shuttle’s shields went down followed by a small explosion on the starboard engine. Another short phaser beam hit the port engine. It started to drift and tumble slowly through space.

The Gifar starship started firing at the *Republic*; however, the particle beam emitter on the enemy ship stopped as the *Cheron* came around firing multiple bursts along with a volley of

photon torpedoes. The *Republic* joined in by firing torpedoes and phasers simultaneously at the same area as the *Cheron*.

The enemy vessel's shields held but started to weaken under the two starships' bombardment. The Gifar mothership started moving away from the Federation starships and went to warp, abandoning the shuttles and soldiers to fend for themselves.

Stuart looked at his first officer, Commander Jerron Lexra. "I guess they had enough, Number One."

Lexra nodded. "Leaving their people behind says something about what type of people they are, doesn't it?"

"Let's see if we can help the *Trailblazer* with the hostiles on board," Stuart said.

Lexra nodded and turned his attention to the Bajoran CONN officer. "Mister Axred, take us closer to the *Trailblazer*."



Stuart entered sickbay and approached Doctor Michael Keegan and Captain Melanie Leeson, whom the doctor hovered over with a medical tricorder. "How's the patient, Doctor?"

Keegan lifted his head to face Stuart. "She's doing well for being shot in the leg, Fleet Captain, but she is wanting to assume her duties immediately. Of course, I'm not allowing that."

"Better listen to your doctor, Mel. Remember, he is the only member of your crew who can give *you* orders." Stuart smiled.

"I guess that you're siding with him. It's good to see you, Rob. Thank you for coming to get us out of a tough situation," Leeson said. "On behalf of my crew, I'm grateful, but how did you know we needed help? And how did you get here so fast?"

"You sent a message when you first detected the subspace explosion a few days ago, remember?"

"Of course, I remember, but I didn't request assistance," Leeson replied.

"The Batirians have been keeping an eye on the Gifar," Rob said. "They contacted *Gateway Alpha* a couple of days before you detected the explosion to let us know that the Gifar were planning to test a subspace weapon soon."

"So, you decided to come to our rescue before we needed to be rescued?"

"I didn't expect you to be in trouble, but I figured that you might need some assistance with planetary relief efforts for the inhabited star system that you mentioned." Stuart placed his hand on Leeson's shoulder as she sat up and swung her legs to hang off the side of the biobed.

"What do you think you're doing, Captain?" Keegan had only stepped away to attend to another patient momentarily, but he rushed back to Leeson when he saw her sit up.

Leeson frowned and narrowed her eyebrows. "I know that you haven't released me yet, Doctor, but I prefer to sit and face Captain Stuart while I talk with him."

Keegan also frowned, making a good imitation of Leeson. He nodded to her. “Okay, Captain, but please do not get out of that bed. If you mind your doctor’s orders, I might release you to partial duty in the morning.”

“Partial duty? Doctor...”

Keegan quickly put his hand up to stop any protests. “Argue with me, and you will be confined to that bed for forty-eight hours, Captain.”

Leeson did not say another word as she watched Keegan turn and walk away. She looked at Stuart and whispered, “He’s almost as bad as Jan.”

Stuart grinned widely but did not say anything. He knew that Melanie and Jan were close friends, and Mel would not hesitate to tell on Rob.

The doors separating sickbay from the corridor slid open, and the chief engineer, Lieutenant Commander Petroni, entered and approached the two captains. She handed a PADD to Leeson. “Captain, here’s the damage report. The forward launchers will take at least a week to repair, and the shuttlebay doors closer to a month.” She turned her head to Stuart. “Good to see you again, Fleet Captain.”

“And you, Commander,” Stuart replied.

Leeson resisted the urge to activate the device to start reading, but she saw the doctor attending to another patient. She handed the PADD back to the engineer. “Please give this to Commander Shrev, Carmen. I’m under strict orders by our tyrant doctor over there.” She nodded her head in Keegan’s direction.

Carmen smiled. “Understood, Captain. I will take this to the bridge. Get well, Melanie.” She turned and made her way to the exit.

As soon as the door closed behind Petroni, it opened again, and Lieutenant Commander Jacobs entered and strode toward the captains. “Fleet Captain, Mister Kilrain wanted me to tell you that the prisoners have been transferred to the *Republic* brig.”

“Thank you, Mister Jacobs.”

“How many did we get, Vic?” Leeson asked.

“Thirty-eight Gifar, Jacobs replied. “Kilrain said he had to program more brig space in the holodecks to hold them all.” The security chief seemed to think highly of Brian Kilrain, Stuart’s senior security officer.

“Thank you, Mister Jacobs,” Stuart said.

“My pleasure, Captain.” Jacobs reached for Leeson’s hand and held it gently. “Melanie, we had several people injured, but fortunately, no one was killed. These Gifar are vicious warriors. And the funny thing is that the shuttle pilots we captured were the only males. The soldiers were all female.”

“Women don’t make good warriors, Vic?” Leeson teased her long-time friend and surrogate uncle.

“I just think it will be an interesting study of this species’ culture,” Jacobs said. “I should get back to the bridge and assist Shrev with coordinating the cleanup. Get some rest.”

“Thanks. Good job keeping the Gifar at bay,” Leeson added as Jacobs walked toward the exit.

The security chief didn’t turn but held up his hand, waving. “Just doing my job, Melanie.”

“You have a good crew, Mel.” Stuart smiled at his former first officer, remembering how much he missed their time serving together.

“I think so.”

“I probably should let you rest before the doctor throws me out,” Stuart said. “Commander Johnston said that the *Cheron* will stick around a day or two after we leave in case the Gifar return. I talked with the high minister and offered Federation aid, and he accepted. I contacted Captain Grey to see how soon the *Monarch* can get here with more emergency rations and shelters. *Republic* will escort *Trailblazer* back to *Gateway Alpha* for the more extensive repairs.”

Leeson smiled as she laid down on the biobed. “Thanks, Rob. I’ll contact you tomorrow to give a full report, but I will say that their shields are far superior to ours. Their weapons are on par with ours, but they took our shields down pretty quickly.”

“Your energy reserves after the extensive transporter use might have contributed to that, but we will make Gifar weapons and shields a top priority of discussion. But now you need to rest, so follow your doctor’s orders.” Stuart left Leeson in the care of her medical staff as he exited sickbay.



The next morning, Captain Leeson entered the bridge. She had a slight limp as she approached Commander Shrev occupying the center seat. “Good morning, Exec.”

Shrev stood to face his CO. “I didn’t expect to see you on the bridge, Captain.”

“Doctor Keegan gave me a reprieve as long as I limit my time to no more than four hours per day.” She looked around the bridge, taking note of several stations being manned by officers that typically did not stand bridge watch during the Alpha shift. Lieutenant Dren was still in sickbay recovering from his injuries, so Ensign Bell was at tactical. Chief Engineer Petroni needed her entire department to assess the damage and work on what repairs they could before returning to the starbase, so Petty Officer Megan Smithers worked at the engineering station instead of one of the engineering officers. Leeson was aware that Petroni had a lot of confidence in Smithers, even though the young woman currently served as an engineer’s mate. Leeson also noticed Lieutenant Jaxx had been replaced by Lieutenant J.G. Caleb O’Rourke, who normally manned the OPS station during Beta shift. “Where is Mister Jaxx?”

“He is assisting Commander Petroni in engineering.” Shrev, uncharacteristically, smiled. “I’m glad that you are doing better, Captain.”

Leeson placed her hand on the Andorian’s shoulder. “Don’t you think it’s about time you called me by my first name?”

“Not yet,” Shrev replied. He had a dry sense of humor, but he occasionally made subtle attempts to tease a few of his fellow officers including the captain. “Will you be taking the chair, Captain?”

Leeson shook her head. “No, I need to read all the reports and review the logs from yesterday so I can make a report to Captain Stuart. I’ll be in my ready room. I’m expecting Counselor Eedo at 1230 hours, so send him in when he arrives.

“Of course, Captain.”

As Melanie Leeson turned and limped to the ready room, she thought about the events of the past few days, especially the attack. She understood what the Batirians had meant when they warned her to beware the Gifar.

The End