

"All hands to battle stations. No hostiles reported as of yet."

[illegible]

Arthur had been laying on his bunk, trying to sleep, unsuccessfully. He had taken to a shift on the bridge of the Raptor to get a feel for the ship, just in case. Unfortunately it flew like a brick through water compared to his Void Sphinx. His mind was filled with thought on how to streamline the ships movement and anticipation of the ship's mass. Granted they were traveling in space, but laws of physics still applied, and shifting the direction of such a larger ship required a great deal of energy and anticipation. It was a different kind of flying.

=^=Snoopy, you'll be scrambling to Knight 2 after a short mission brief in the cave. Meet me here in five.=^=

"Roger that," he replied.

[illegible]

Tegian sat at his station on the bridge, feeling very uncomfortable. He wanted to be in Main Engineering, but he had to trust Ensign Zowie and her ability to keep the Beta Shift ready for their first real test.

"Understood, Captain. Engineering is ready."

(Reply: Any)

[illegible]

"Mr. Gerard, status of the fighters?" Tempest snapped as she ducked into the control room that overlooked the launch bay.

"I'll do that, raise the shuttlebay force field and pressurize it."

"Aye ma'am."

As he turned to do just that she tapped the comm. "Snoopy, you'll be scrambling to Knight 2 after a short mission brief in the cave. Meet me here in five."

(Reply: Corday)

(USS Raptor - Deck 14 - Flight Control Center - FSXO, Lieutenant Tempest Grey Wolf - 2210)

Her arms were crossed as Arthur (Snoopy) Corday made his entrance, she didn't wait for questions.

"The captain wants us to recon the outposts in this system. I just got off the comm with him and there's no contact. There's a good chance we won't like what we find. are you ready to go?"

(Reply: Corday)

"No, he's not involved in this op, I'm taking Knight 1. Your target will be outpost 3 on the moon of planet 7. Get as close as you can and report your findings then await further orders. I'll be going farther out and on the far side of the system to the other observation post. As always, keep in direct communication, if you see an enemy report in and try not to be a hero. Anything else? If not, saddle up and get to work, conditions here are very, very bad and we don't have time for a circle jerk."

(Reply: Corday)

(Posted by Charles Gatling)

[illegible]

(USS Raptor - Deck 17 - Personal Quarters - Marine - 2LT Charles Temerity - 2206)

=^= Major Murphy, 2nd Lieutenant Temerity, you will be running search and perimeter duty during rescue efforts. Time to the planet is 53 minutes. ^=^=

Temerity held off responding for a few seconds to give Major Murphy a chance to respond. Afterall, he was the commander of the Marine detachment dubbed the Myrmidons; named after Achillies troops during the Trojan War. Once he counted to ten, Temerity tapped his badge and responded, "Temerity here, understood Captain. We'll be ready and at the pre-planned departure point in 40-mikes with max loadout."

(Reply: Sekal iyw)

Charles switched over to the Marine's communications net, "Temerity to all Myrmidons. It's time for us to earn our pay, boys and girls. Full armor with EV life support and jetpacks, HP (High Powered) loadouts for all projectile and energy weapons. Platoon Leaders, I want accountability and combat check results in 30-mikes."

Temerity rolled out of his bunk as the acknowledgements rolled in from all the Platoon Leaders. Charles snickered at himself as he started getting ready to go dirtside. With the exception of his last mission before his retirement from the corps, he had virtually zero combat experience. Then as a civilian freighter captain, he developed lots of combat experience fighting pirates, becoming a privateer (and be accused of piracy himself). Now, he is leading officers and NCOs that have more official actual combat experience than he does, fortunately they trust his judgement just the same. Though Charles does recognize that a lot of that has to do with his willingness to listen and adjust accordingly.

1LT Poole approached 2LT Temerity, “Chuck, we have a handful of Marines that have issues with parts of their suits of armor. We don’t have time to make repairs, and we don’t have replacement components. How do you want to resolve this?”

Poole looked at a note on his data-pad before answering, “Two shoulders, two upper arms, two thighs, groin, and neck armor components.” As pieces were named, Temerity removed them from himself.

(Reply: Sekal iyw, Murphy iyw)
(Posted By: Charles Raschen)

Arthur strode onto the flight deck to find Grey Wolf waiting there with arms crossed. She looked ready for business. Nobody else had arrived on the flight deck yet. He stepped over to Grey Wolf and nodded.

"The captain wants us to recon the outposts in this system," the Flight Squad Commander said. "I just got off the comm with him and there's no contact. There's a good chance we won't like what we find. are you ready to go?"

"No, he's not involved in this op, I'm taking Knight 1." Grey Wolf said.

"Your target will be outpost 3 on the moon of planet 7. Get as close as you can and report your findings then await further orders. I'll be going farther out and on the far side of the system to the other observation post. As always, keep in direct communication, if you see an enemy report in and try not to be a hero. Anything else? If not, saddle up and get to work, conditions here are very, very bad and we don't have time for a circle jerk."

Corday chuckled at the term. It was a term Vic might have used, but he did not expect from Grey Wolf. She had always seemed to have a bit more sense of decorum. It was why he had appreciated her as FSCO.

With that he turned and headed to the locker room. A few minutes later he re-emerged in his flight suit. He looked over to see Lt. Grey Wolf similarly dressed, and they both climbed into their cockpits. Pre-flight went quickly, then he switched on his comms.

=^=Affirmative Knight 2, you have clearance to launch. Good hunting Snoopy.=^=

"Knight 2 has cleared the Raptor," he announced. "ETA to outpost 3 fifteen minutes and current speed."

He thumbed the channel to Knight 1, “I find a little music helps pass the time and keep me focused on the interim time. Anything you care to hear, Lieutenant?”

(Knight 1 - Cockpit - FSXO, Lieutenant Tempest Grey Wolf - 2214)

She hit the ventral boosters which lifted the fighter from the deck then fed power to the aft thrusters.

"Knight 1 is on point, you are cleared for go."

"ETA to destination 12 minutes."

"Thanks Geet, changing frequency to scrambled comms."

=^= I find a little music helps pass the time and keep me focused on the interim time. Anything you care to hear, Lieutenant? ^=^=

Pilots fell into two groups normally, those that liked flying music and those that didn't, at least not long term, Tempest fell into the latter. She may have been flying a capital ship for two years but fighters were her first love and this type was just as sweet as any she'd flown. It was the responsiveness to the least input, whether speed or turning along with their weapons that made them lethal. Taking one out on an exercise like this however, wasn't a thrill ride, it was deadly business in a hazardous circumstance. And there were other reasons Montero wasn't on this flight that Corday didn't need to know about currently.

"I'll defer to your choices Snoopy, 10.5 minutes on my leg, turning 235 mark 3 now."

(Reply: Corday)

She settled back and listened to the rock music as her eyes swept continually over the sensor and nav data. Knight 1 passed within 100 kilometers of three pieces of debris as the craft swung outward toward the farthest outpost.

"Lots of vessel remains out here, keep eyes on your sensors Knight 2."

(Reply: Corday)

The translucent forward view may as well not have existed, as little attention as she paid to it. Everything that a pilot was interested in would be out of visual range, sensors would catch it long before the eye would.

(Reply: Corday)

(Posted by Charles Gatling)

[illegible]

(USS Raptor - Knight 2 - Cockpit - Pilot - Lt. Arthur 'Snoopy' Corday - 2217)

When Tempest gave him the choice of music he smiled. Many of the new pilots preferred more modern music, some even liked Klingon music, feeling that it put them in the mood. Arthur, on the other hand, preferred more classical music.

"Lucy," he told his AI, "how about my classical playlist."

[Oh Snoopy, you know how I love that music.]

“Hit it, Lucy.” Suddenly a staccato beat began to play over the comm channel as the AC/DC song “For those About to Rock, We Salute You” began to play. He took a deep breath and watched his sensors as he flew towards his designated coordinates. That song was followed by “Highway to Hell.” It was towards the end of this song that his sensors beeped.

“Lucy, kill the music,” he ordered. The AI sighed and the music suddenly stopped. His comm channel opened.

=^Lots of vessels remain out here, keep your eyes on your sensors Knight 2.=^=

"Affirmative Knight 1," he replied. "I'm reading it too."

He adjusted his flight path to get closer to the debris and get a good reading.

[illegible]

Although the Void Sphynx was designed for maneuvering in space it did have some capacity to fly in an atmosphere but was less... acrobatic. Arthur guided the ship down and skimmed the lower atmosphere, looking for the life signs they had detected from orbit.

[Life sign acquired.]

Corday looked at the sensor readings and found the red dot that indicated a life that was larger than a small animal.

"Knight 2 to Knight 1, I have found something alive down here," he said. "I'm going down to check it out."

He didn't give Tempest a chance to protest or warn him as he dropped to skirt over the ground to the coordinates on the sensors. The closer he got the more life signs he noted, but they were less complex. Clearly small animals. When he was within a kilometer, he began to look for a place to land.

The scene was not pretty. Buildings were crumbled, or crumbling. There were obvious signs of energy weapons deployed. Dead bodies littered the streets. Some were killed by energy weapons, others simply torn apart. The best way to describe it was grisly.

Corday landed his fighter on some flat ground and picked up his tricorder. Then he climbed out of his fighter and followed the red dot to the life sign. It appeared to be Romulan, but smaller. And the life signs were starting to fade.

He followed the path to a building that had somewhat collapsed. It appeared to have been a school. The reality of that made Arthur's heart skip a beat. He found the source of the life and it was covered by a layer of debris. Arthur knew he had to move quickly. He pulled up several layers of the debris until he uncovered the upper half of a Romulan child. A girl. Her head had contusions with green blood and dirt smeared over the face.

He was finally able to extract the body from the building. Then he noted something odd. There was a massive burn along her right arm and her chest. Once the weight of the building was off her, the girl began to stir.

He put a hand on her shoulder and said softly, "Easy now. You're safe but have been hurt."

The girl lay back but muttered something. When Arthur leaned forward all he could hear was, "M...m...m...monster." She was pointed to a spot a few meters away.

"I'll be right back," Arthur said, patting her shoulder. She was already unconscious.

He stalked over to the place she indicated and saw the shape as he got closer. He knelt down beside the dead Xenolithe.

"Well, this is a find," he said to himself. Then he tapped his comm badge. "Looks like we're bringing back a couple of passengers, Lucy."

=^=Roger that, Snoopy.^=

It took some time and effort, but he managed to drag the dead Xenolithe over to the fighter and secured it the tight space behind his pilot seat. Then he went back and picked up the girl. He climbed into the cockpit and sat the girl on his lap. She was still alive, which was no small miracle.

The extra weight made the lift off a little less ordinary but soon Knight 2 and Snoopy were back in space and headed back to the Raptor.

“Knight 2 to Knight 1,” he reported, “I have a survivor and a present. Headed back to the Raptor.”

(reply Grey Wolf)
(posted by Al Muir)

[illegible]

As Snoopy piloted his fighter back towards the Raptor a message came across his comms.

=^=I have 3 targets ahead, small craft. I'm not detecting weapons yet but I'm going in hot.=^=

~Going in? Alone?~ He was already feeling torn between what he should do. He began to ease his ship into a faster pace as he monitored his sensors. He noted Knight 2's shields and weapons activate.

=^=IFF inconclusive.=^= There was a momentary pause. ^=Unidentified craft, this is Federation craft 12458, code Knight 1. Identify yourself and hold position for inspection.=^=

There was no reply. He looked down at the unconscious little one in his lap. That was his priority right now. He increased his speed again.

"Knight 1, I have to deliver my package. Maintain a safe distance. I repeat maintain a safe distance. I will be back ASAP."

(reply Grey Wolf)

He cursed to himself, not wanting to utter that kind of language in front of a child, even if it was unconscious. Then he opened a channel to the Raptor.

"This is Knight 2 to the Raptor," he worked to keep his voice calm. "I have an injured and unconscious Romulan female child with me in need of immediate medical attention. Have medical ready for an emergency transport. I also have a special cargo in storage. It will also need to be transported to medical, but in a secure quarantine area. My cargo is dead Xenolithe."

There was a momentary pause before he heard T'Mur's reply. =^=We are so advised, Knight 2. We can receive both after you have landed in the shuttle bay.=^=

Snoopy shook his head, even though he knew that they couldn't see him, "Negative. No time for that. I need to go back to support Knight 1.=^=

There was another pause. =^=Affirmative. We will transport at the earliest moment possible.=^=

“Roger that,” Snoopy said and willed his fighter to move faster. As he came into range of the Raptor’s close range sensors he could feel the tingle of the transporter effect tingle at his crotch as the Romulan girl disappeared. Then he scanned his cargo space to find the Xenolithe also gone.

=^=Your guest and cargo have both been delivered to sickbay, Knight 2=^=

The trip to the moon took 12 minutes, but they were in no hurry. The trip back took a little over five. He turned the fighter and hit full speed back towards Tempest Grey Wolf and Knight 1.

"Roger that, Raptor. I am returning to Knight 1. Knight 2 out."

He left his comm on vox control and reached out with his sensors to find Knight 1.

“Ok Lucy, give me everything you’ve got,” he told his AI. “I don’t like the idea of Tempest being alone in a three to one scenario.”

[You've got it Snoopy.] Even the AI sounded concerned. [At top speed we should arrive in seven minutes.]

He switch his comm channel, "Knight 2 to Knight 1, I am on the return trip. ETA 7."

(reply Grey Wolf)

(posted by Al Muir)

[illegible]

(Kagera - Cockpit - Hestin Ivogny - 2233)

He was pushing the shuttle past its limits and knew it, the craft was threatening to disintegrate around him. The engine was verging on overheating and due to the earlier attack communications were down and scanners were degrading. Every once in a while he got a tell that showed the two ships still chasing. He was narrowly out of their firing range but the margin had been much greater at one time. He had done everything he could think of to shake them including sling-shotting away from the eighth planet using its gravity well, he had taken a near suicidal run through an asteroid field.

He had nearly died once already and death had felt cheated so it now was gaining on him inexorably, unwilling to let him go, desperate to finish him once and for all. Were the enemies that had attacked this system enjoying the chase? Were they gleefully anticipating his eventual liquidation? The larger ships had left hours ago and he had felt safe enough to expose himself... and been fired on as soon as he left the outpost. He had laid low, had waited thinking they had all departed.

Why had these craft remained? Had they been doing a final cleanup or search for something? Intending to depart after their mission was completed? Had he poked his head out as they were leaving? "Just couldn't resist one more kill could you?"

He cursed his luck as he forced the shuttle into another hard turn toward a meteor swarm, ducking deftly through the irregular bodies as near microscopic particles impacted against the navigation shield and caused a nimbus glow like ghost light in front of him.

His eyes dropped to the diagnostics again which read in romulan script, his upswept, gently pointed ears standing out starkly against his dark hair in the dim lighting of the cockpit.

He had been an engineer on the outpost and believed himself the sole survivor, how they hadn't found him there had been due to his quick actions once the defenses had been breached. He was also an experienced shuttle pilot, add the two together and they explained why he was still alive.

For now...

How much longer?

Maybe a few minutes more.

A tone from the scanners grabbed his attention and he saw another powered craft before him. Due to the damaged scanners there was no telling what it was, but he knew, knew it in the hollow pit at the bottom of his stomach...

They had called in another to cut him off, he was seeing the satisfied leer of death before him.

He was finished.

"Bloody hells NO!"

He jerked the shuttle in a side slip that would put an oncoming comet in the path of the new threat.

If he had time to make it.

His shields wouldn't do much to stop the next shot.

He had no working weapons.

He would be destroyed before he could ram and take the klemp out.

He waited for the inevitable as he tried to escape his fate and wasn't surprised when it fired.

But not at him!

At his pursuers!

The new craft streaked behind him as it moved to cut them off.

His gleeful shout can't be translated at this time. His throat burned from the sudden exclamation.

=^=This is Knight 2 to the Raptor, I have an injured and unconscious Romulan female child with me in need of immediate medical attention. Have medical ready for an emergency transport. I also have a special cargo in storage. It will also need to be transported to medical, but in a secure quarantine area. My cargo is dead Xenolithe.=^=

T'Mur raised an eyebrow and looked over at Sekal.

(reply Sekal)

"We are so advised, Knight 2," she replied. "We can receive both after you have landed in the shuttle bay."

=^=Negative. No time for that. I need to go back to support Knight 1.=^=

Again she looked to Sekal.

(reply Sekal)

“Affirmative. We will transport at the earliest moment possible,” T’Mur informed him.

She already began to scan the fighter craft to find the Romulan child sitting in Corday's lap. Once the fighter was within transporter range she locked onto the child.

"T'Mur to sickbay, prepare for incoming injured Romulan child," she announced.

Then she activated the transport, careful to only grab the Romulan structures. She scanned the cargo hold and transported its contents to a secure med bay.

"Your quest and cargo have both been delivered to sickbay, Knight 2."

=^=Roger that. Heading back for Knight 1.^=

“Bridge to medical, I have also transported what is, apparently, a dead Xenolithe to secure med bay 1,” she said. Then she turned to Taylor “Mr. Taylor, take over at tactical.” She stepped away and moved to the turbo lift. “Captain, request permission to investigate the Xenolithe?”

(reply Sekal)

She looked at Dogan, “Mr. Dogan, you are with me.”

Dogan nodded and stepped in behind T'Mur. He looked over at Galk. The two nodded to each other. An exchange of their services to protect the captain. Then the turbo lift door closed.

(reply Sekal, any on the bridge)

(posted by Al Muir)

[illegible]

(USS Raptor - Deck 5 - Sickbay - ACOMO - Dr. Kyllee Stev - 2237)

The medical crew had been prepared for the need of their services, but what came through surprised them.

"T'Mur to sickbay, prepare for incoming injured Romulan child," the Lieutenant commander had commed sickbay.

"Captain, request permission to investigate the Xenolith?"

"Granted, you have fifteen minutes."

The lift door had hardly closed behind her when William got his attention, Galk had moved to stand behind the command chair.

"Captain! I'm getting a weak signal from the outskirts of the main city."

"Main screen."

The picture that came up was grainy and with intermittent static. The romulan woman had unkempt hair and a darkly smudged face. Something smoked in the background and the visible wall was carbon scored.

=^= Someone help us, the Norkan colony was attacked and the prefect is dead along with most of his council. Councilor Welbin is in critical condition and we have numerous wounded. Most of the prime city is out of contact and we have many trapped in the rubble. If you can help, please respond.=^=

"This is captain Sekal of Starfleet. We have entered the system and are moving into position. What is your status?"

The woman looked like she was about to cry in relief as her shoulders heaved. ^= StarFleet, thank God! I am receiving you, what ship? ^=

"The USS Raptor, newly commissioned. We are mobilizing for emergency operations and I have received a notification from Starbase 4 that they are sending aid."

Her shoulders sagged from exhaustion and emotion. ^= We are sealed into emergency bunker 6, the tunnel beyond seems to have collapsed. I am unable to contact anyone outside. We have 136 hours of air and enough food and water to last well beyond that. Number of survivors here is 37.=^=

"Raptor will be in orbit in 25 minutes with minimal signs of enemy activity. Capital ships are not yet in evidence. If not in combat we will be moving to emergency operations as soon as we make orbit. Continue to leave this channel open for followup communications."

She gave a tired nod though with a ghost of a smile. ^= We will do so, please hurry.=^=

"We are making all speed. Raptor out."

The communication ended and he opened the ship wide com. "Orbit in twenty five minutes. Communication has been established with a group of survivors. Emergency teams will be transported to that location initially and fan out from that area. Marines, security and medical teams to the transporter rooms. Permission is granted to neutralize any hostile elements found. Bridge out." He signed off and motioned Galk to the tactical station.

The Klingon rumbled in reply and moved to it quickly.

(Reply: All)

[illegible]

Snoopy watched the readout on his sensors. As he got closer he could see what Grey Wolf had been seeing. Two unidentified craft in pursuit of a smaller Romulan craft. It wasn't that the craft didn't register, but it was as if it gave off a natural dampening field preventing an actual reading. All he could really tell is that there were two ships, or blips on the sensors. Everything else was masked.

She split the two craft and held their attention to allow the Romulan shuttle to find a good hiding place. Then it was hit and run. She hadn't had his experience with the modified Sphynx but he was impressed with her skills.

By the time he had visual contact he could see alien ships strategy. Grey Wolf had managed to play hit and run to keep them occupied but one of the ships had started to maneuver behind her.

"Watch your six Knight one. I'm on it. On my mark break right. Mark."

As the ship suddenly shifted direction Snoopy dropped in on top of the alien craft and opened fire. There was display of energy expenditure and the ship suddenly veered off.

[There is no apparent damage to the alien ship. It's configuration complies with the most recent data upgrade as a Xenolithe ship.]

(reply Grey Wolf)
(posted by Al Muir)

[illegible]

The pulse phasers thrummed as another salvo slammed into one of the xenolithe craft but the corkscrew maneuver she used had allowed the other to slip into her six. So far she had taken several hits from enemy weapons which were some kind of pale green beam but the contacts hadn't been long and her shields were still robust meaning she didn't fear taking a hit while she could deal some damage. The fighter dove under the enemy craft which would force her tail to either break off or wait until it had cleared its fellow to fire.

=^=Knight 2 to Knight 1, I'm on your six. I will be in the fight in less than 2. You're doing great.=^=

"It's about time, I thought I might get them both before you made it but they're pretty tough and it's difficult to get a reading on how much damage they are taking if any. They had a token shield that didn't amount to much and I think it's just to inhibit scans."

She rolled and banked right as the enemy beam sliced along her aft shield then throttled to high and shot away from the craft which was still in its turn.

"They aren't very agile or fast Knight 2, more like shuttle or transport craft than fighters, I've been running circles around them. Had they been better I doubt the romulan shuttle would have lasted as long as it did."

"Watch your six Knight one. I'm on it. On my mark break right. Mark."

"Observant as always, aren't you?" The one thing she was rusty on was flying cooperatively as part of a wing, the bulk of the simulator training she routinely ran were to keep her fighting skills sharp.

On his mark she whipped the fighter into a sharp turn and made a run toward the other which had hesitated at the appearance of Knight 2 and that was what she had been working for. The xenos were so intent on her that everything else had been forgotten and its hesitation cost it.

Tempest was just within maximum range of her pulse phasers and got off multiple attacks, a round of phaser blasts alternated with a photon torpedo, another phaser blast as she closed and the second photon torpedo in the instant before she banked away. She had taken hits as well and not all of her attacks had contacted as the enemy attempted avoidance but the second micro torpedo caught it full in the face. As her fighter screamed by it she caught a glimpse of it wallowing. Perhaps in pain, perhaps damaged, who knew with an alien entity that took the place of a ship?

The skirmish had suddenly changed with both unable to focus on her without exposing themselves to Knight 2 so it became two, one v one battles and the swift, agile fighters had the upper hand.

Tempest's enemy was also perceptibly slowed by her last attack, its turn was sluggish so she turned her fighter toward Corday's encounter and slowed to set up her shot.

"Knight 2, it's time to change tactics, do an overhead loop, when yours moves to meet you coming out I'm going to snipe it."

(Reply: Corday)

It was a simple plan and very effective, as Corday went into the overhead turn his opponent spun on its axis to target him coming in behind it which exposed its broadside to Tempest who cut loose on it. The panicked pilot then turned toward her which left it a sitting duck for Corday who was about to line it up for a full salvo.

(Reply: Corday)

[illegible]

(USS Raptor - Deck 5 - Sickbay - Lt. Commander T'Mur and Dr. Kyllee Stev - 2241)

Kyllee stood at the edge of the biobed and visually scanned the creature laying there. He'd seen his fair share of exotic species I. His time and thought that he'd pretty much seen it all. This was definitely something different.

“Computer, begin recording,” he called out.

The computer beeped in compliance then said, [Recording.]

He began to walk around the table to make his first impression observations.

“Subject is over two meters long. Humanoid. Bipedal. Two arms.” That seemed like an important detail. There was something about this Xenolithe that gave one the assumption that it would have more than two. It had an insectoid appearance to it.

He moved over to the blobbed sensors he activated the holographic imager. The initial scan showed that the body was safe to the touch, so he reached out to touch the chest.

At that moment the door to the room opened and T'Mur entered. The sound and the timing made the Bajoran jump back with a deep breath.

"I apologize, Doctor Kyllee," the Vulcan said. "It was not my intention to startle you."

Stev chuckled, “Not to worry. Timing is everything. I was really just beginning.”

"Please," T'Mur said with a nod, "continue."

“I was just noticing this chest piece,” Stev said. “At first I thought it was armor, but look... .” He poked at the chest with his finger, then picked up a tool and hit it with that. “It’s actually part of him. A strong exoskeleton... comprised of ...”

He stopped to look at the scan. His brow furled and he began to run a secondary scan.

"I must say, I didn't expect that," Stev said. He moved the data up to the holoprojected screen. "Look," he pointed to chemical makeup of the exoskeleton, "do you recognize the composition?"

T'Mur took a step closer to the display and tilted her head, "It looks like it's carbon, with a few elements I don't recognize."

“Look at how it’s structured,” Stev said. “A monolayer of carbon atoms bound tightly in a hexagonal honeycomb lattice. It’s like this exoskeleton is composed of organic graphene. No wonder it’s so difficult to damage.”

"Intriguing," T'Mur said, her mind already working on ways to counteract a compound that had a tensile strength of 130 gigapascals, roughly 200 times stronger than steel.

"Well let's get a closer look," Stev declared. He adjusted the scanner and found the results troublesome. "Apparently the medical scanners have a limited piercing of the exoskeleton. We're going to have to do this the old fashioned way."

His hand traced the lines of the exoskeleton to their connecting points on the chest. Then he pulled out a tricorder and scanned the head and face. The skull also had a layer of the exoskeleton, but there were open points, especially around the mouth area. He looked over his shoulder to T'Mur.

"Look at this mouth," he said. "If there was ever a connection to insects this would be it. It's a multipart mandibular mouth. Upper and lower labrum, with two powerful mandibles. The mandibles have flat, grinding protrusions, almost like molars, indicating that they eat plants. But these maxillae... they have sharp, almost serrated protrusions, giving them the ability to eat meat. Clearly an omnivore. Curious what we'll find in its stomach."

He changed his attention to the eyes. Those wide, black eyes. He had to look closely to see the multifaceted lenses. "Their range of vision must be incredible. They must have a near 300 degree visual range. And three sets of nasal passages. I wonder if they can talk. Not sure how. Rumor has it that they're telepathic."

He retraced the lines of muscle to the exoskeleton the the center of its thorax. Then he looked over at T'Mur again. "Well, here goes the icky part."

He grabbed his laser scalpel and attempted to cut through the fault line of the chest plate. There was a smell of searing material, but when he pulled the scalpel away all he had managed was a scarring on the joint.

"Hmmm," he mused. "This may take some even more old school work."

He moved over to the replicator and tapped in some commands. After a hum he came back to the table with a device that looked like a duranium tipped cutting tool. He shrugged at the security chief and got back to his work. This time there was a little more satisfaction. It still took some muscle and two new heads, but he finally got the chest plates to separate.

T'Mur had a hand on her phaser, uncertain as to what was about to happen when the plates pulled apart. It was a little anticlimactic, other than the smell. That assaulted her sensitive Vulcan olfactory senses. She had to turn her head slightly, to gain time to steal herself against the attack.

Stev was already scanning, "Well, the smell may be a tad offensive, but at least it doesn't have any hidden surprises."

"A 'tad offensive?" T'Mur mimicked. "I would hate to see what you considered extremely offensive."

Stev chuckled, "You'd be surprised."

Now his scanners were able to create a viable holographic image of the Xenolithe's internal organs. Kylee moved over to the model and began to manipulate the image so he could get a better look at the organs before actually touching them.

‘Interesting,’ he said, absentmindedly. T’Mur was not there any more as far as he was concerned. “A three chambered heart, but stacked chambers. Lungs. Esophagus. I’ll have to open the abdominal cavity to get at the stomach and intestines.”

At that T'Mur decided she'd seen enough. She'd gotten most of the tactical information she wanted. "Then I will leave you to your work, unencumbered by my presence. I look forward to your full report."

Stev barely nodded, "Ues, yes, as soon as I'm done."

At that T'Mur left, with Cal Dogan on tow, leaving the two security men to continue their vigilance outside the room.

(reply none)

(posted by Al Muir)

[illegible]

(Knight 2 - Cockpit - Pilot - Lt. Arthur 'Snoopy' Corday - 2242)

The tide had made a shift to one of balance. The Void Sphynx's were more agile and able to dole out the majority of the punishment. But the Xenolith ships were hardy, and seemed to absorb their attacks well. But even the strongest wall will begin to crumble under the constant assault that Snoopy and Grey Wolf were pouring on the enemy ships. Tempest had already dealt a damaging blow to one of the ship, but neither had managed to gain an overwhelming advantage. Now it was up to strategy.

=^=Knight 2, it's time to change tactics, do an overhead loop, when yours moves to meet you coming out I'm going to snipe it.=^=

That appeared to be the difference between the two sets of ships. Although the Xenoliths appeared to work together, they did not, exactly, work as a team.

"Roger that," he replied. "Initiating loop."

With Lucy's help he could have performed the loop with more efficiency, but he wanted to draw his opponent in. As he hit the apex of the loop Grey Wolf let loose on it. The reaction was almost predictable. It turned right into his new trajectory and fired at near point blank. The ship lit up and then went limp in space. Whatever happened to it, it was dead, if not destroyed.

Tempest was now on the heels of the last ship. He could hear her chuckling over the comms. Singing his ship round he came up on her left to watch as dispensed phased photonic energy at the now defenseless Xenolith ship. He thumbed his weapons button but held off. It was over, and Snoopy wasn't into firing on the helpless.

"I think that does it, Knight 1," he announced.

(reply Grey Wolf)

(posted by Al Muir)

[illegible]

(Kagera - Cockpit - Hestin Ivogny - 2243)

He had been brave enough to do this because of the ability of the pilot that had come to his relief and had been keeping them busy.

As he watched one was dealt a crippling blow then the new ships turned on the final one which attempted to flee but a flurry of shots sent it into an unpowered skid, as it went into a drift one of them turned and moved in his direction, weapons and shields still active.

What to do? What to do?

(Knight 1 - Cockpit - FSXO, Lieutenant Tempest Grey Wolf- 2244)

Power went down then came back up followed by a repeat of the cycle.

"Knight 2, it looks like their communications are down. Stand by and monitor the area while I investigate. I'm reading only 1 life form."

(Reply: Corday)

She coaxed the fighter to a stop then dropped her shields and powered down the phasers. As the 2 craft faced one another she unbuckled and left the cockpit, snagged a phaser and medical kit then moved to the two man transporter, set it then energized the control. Crouching down and with her phaser up she disappeared in the carrier wave.

(Kagera - Hestin Ivogny and FSXO, Lieutenant Tempest Grey Wolf - 2246)

"Don't shoot, I'm unarmed."

Tempest spun toward the voice and the romulan, with his hands held high cringed away from her. He was standing in a doorway and she was in a drab and somewhat shabby passenger compartment. Her eyes were searching everywhere, she even spared a quick glance behind her as she kept the weapon on him.

"That's the cockpit behind you?"

"The pilot control cabin." He nearly stuttered.

"Same thing." She shrugged and stood straight. "And you are?"

"Heston Ivogny, engineer for Norkan colony outpost 4." His throat was dry as sand all of a sudden. "I was being chased by those insectoids. They damaged my communications and sensors and the engine was nearly gone." The voice was female but she was wearing a helmet and smoked visor.

The woman visibly relaxed and lowered the phaser but kept a sizable distance between them.

"And the outpost?"

"I may have been the only survivor, I'm not sure. I avoided them until it looked like they had gone then made a run for the colony."

"Then you don't know?"

"Know what?" The question chilled his blood.

"Your world was attacked, possibly destroyed but certainly overrun. My ship is here on a rescue mission."

"Krelg!" He spat.

"There are a number of dead ships within the system, the xenolith hit hard and fast."

He sagged against the door frame. "How many ships?"

"We don't know but hope to find out?"

"What did you call them? Xenolithe? I've never heard of them."

"Many probably have not, the Federation bore the brunt in the war with them." Tempest relaxed just a bit.

"Outpost 4 was my destination. Can you confirm casualties?"

He shook his head slowly. "They murdered everyone they came across, I could hear some of their screams. The outpost is certainly wrecked and unpowered. I was barely able to get this shuttle out."

She gave a deep sigh. "Is this shuttle still able to fly or should I tow it? I could also transport you over."

"Let me check, I had to stop to allow the engine to cool." He started to move but saw her reach for her phaser. "Don't worry, I'll move slowly, you can follow me in to check."

"Sounds good." She stepped forward as he turned but kept her hand near her phaser and hovered just inside the door as he cycled through his diagnostics.

He looked back at her. "It will fly but I'm not as fast as you."

"No problems. You can follow me to planet 4 and rendezvous with the Raptor, Knight 2 will be behind you to protect you." ~And watch as well.~ Tempest wasn't a pessimist but she WAS careful.

He closed his eyes and gave a big sigh. "Thank you. I'll follow."

She tapped her comm. "Knight 2, I have one survivor and his shuttle is pretty badly beaten up. He is going to follow me to the ship. Outpost 4 is a loss but will have to be combed over later. Raptor, Grey Wolf here."

=^= Raptor here, go ahead Lieutenant.=^=

"I'm bringing in a survivor. ETA, 20 minutes."

=^=Captain Sekal here Lieutenant, the pilot can dock his craft in the shuttle bay, confirming eta of 20 minutes, Raptor will be in emergency operations. The colony is not a safe haven.=^=

"Yes sir, he understands. Will rendezvous with the ship."

Raptor signed off and she gave him a look. "You are welcome and expected, follow me in." She then hit the recall code into the device on her belt and returned to Knight 1.

Hestin dropped into the seat and cycled up power, relaxing as he did so, he had just picked up a powerful escort.

(Knight 1 - Cockpit - FSXO, Lieutenant Tempest Grey Wolf- 2250)

Tempest hurried to the cockpit and strapped herself into the seat then increased power and hit her comm.

"Knight 2, we are returning to the ship, I'll be lead and you follow us in. Let's go home."

(Reply: Corday)

She picked up the nav signal sent from Raptor and initiated the course, confirmed the shuttle was following and locked in a moderate speed, seeing the shuttle was able to keep pace she held it.

Today was not a good day for Norkan.

(Reply: Corday)

(Posted by Charles Gatling)

[illegible]

(Knight 2 - Cockpit - Pilot - Lt. Arthur 'Snoopy' Corday - 2246)

The two Xenoliths ships floated, lifelessly, in space. A quick scan showed that the Voids were fairly unscathed. They'd had a good mixture of teamwork and luck to thank for that.

Grey Wolf's voice broke over the comms. =^=Investigating the shuttle Knight 2 to see how the pilot and any passengers are doing.=^=

~Of course.~ “Affirmative. At last check it had disappeared into the tail of a comet. I’ve got you covered, just in case.”

As he monitored the comms he heard her call out. =^=What the hell?=^=

Then she spoke to him. =^=Knight 2, it looks like their communications are down. Stand by and monitor the area while I investigate. I'm reading only 1 life form.=^=

~Investigate?~ That meant one thing. He frowned and grumbled to himself about unnecessary risks, but nothing that would have been picked up on the comms. “Roger that. Be quick. And be careful.”

The next few minutes were agonizing as he watched the two dead ships and the area around them for any further activity. The comm channel crackled and Grey Wolf spoke.

=^=Knight 2, I have one survivor and his shuttle is pretty badly beaten up. He is going to follow me to the ship. Outpost 4 is a loss but will have to be combed over later.=^=

He followed the conversation between Grey Wolf and the Raptor as he brought his ship round to float beside Knight 1. A minute later his sensors beeped indicating that she had returned to her ship.

=^=Knight 2, we are returning to the ship, I'll be lead and you follow us in. Let's go home.=^=
Corday nodded, "Roger that, Knight 1, you have the lead."

As they set course Arthur had to wonder how much stranger this day could get. Then he cleared that thought from his head. Fate had a tendency to answer that question... and it was rarely a positive thing.

(reply Grey Wolf)
(posted by Al Muir)

[illegible]

End Compile