

The Adventure Continues.... Disaster

By Tom Hudspeth

The section of space known as "The Triangle", where the Federation, Klingon and Romulan star empires all meet, is a place where civilizations and egos clash. It is a contested, and congested, area of space, with commerce vessels and warships roughly equaling each other.

Near the end of the Dominion War with the inhabitants of the Gamma Quadrant, the newly re-forged alliance of the United Federation of Planets and the Klingon Star Empire, decided to build a project to protect both of their interests in the Triangle, and to re-supply their ships in the war against the Dominion.

That project was Starbase 410, a giant "Guardian Class" space station. Located near the "ram qul", or Night Fire, nebula, and integrating the latest in Klingon-Federation technology, it was a totally self-sufficient bastion of peace, and a guardian of civilization in the troublesome "Triangle", where tempers were often short, and trigger fingers even shorter.

Captain T'Pina, the Vulcan Executive Officer on Starbase 410, sat down in the captain's chair of the U.S.S. West Point. The West Point was assigned to Starbase 410 as a training vessel, attached to the Deep Space Starfleet Academy. Even if it was an emergency, it felt good to be in a captain's chair again. Her Vulcan heritage surfaced as she suppressed the feelings, there was an emergency going on and she needed to save lives.

"Helm, take us out to 100,000 kilometers." T'Pina calmly ordered.

Major Madia Amme, sitting at the helm in place of the cadet that had been there, moved to comply with the order.

T'Pina turned her chair to the cadet behind her, "Comm, what is the status on the evacuation?"

Cadet 3rd Class Michael Hedley turned from his busy board and replied,

"Commander Warren reports 75% complete, Captain."

"Get her on screen, please."

"Aye, aye, Captain!" came the crisp reply.

On the main view screen, Starbase 410 rotated slowly like a child's top, little hinting at the chaos which reigned inside. Suddenly the view of the starbase was replaced by the image of a rather harried Lt. Cdr. Jeanette Warren.

"Commander Warren, what is the hold up on the evacuation of the station?" T'Pina asked.

"We are getting them out as fast as we can, Captain, but there is some kind of trouble on the promenade. I've got too many people trying to gather onto the transporter platform at one time, and they are packed together too tightly to transport otherwise. I've sent Lt. Commander Q'Squa down to sort things out."

"Very well, keep me informed."

On the promenade, Lt. Cdr. Q'Squa SuD'Sqania, a Klingon serving in Starfleet and Starbase 410's Chief of Security, was wading through the panicked press of bodies trying to reach the transporter platform. "Make way! Calm down!" He yelled, but his voice was lost on the mob. Finally, pushing and shoving, he reached the transporter platform. Turning to the crowd, he let out a loud Klingon battle cry. It momentarily broke through the panic and the mob stepped back to give him room. That's better, he thought, now to get some order.

"Everybody! You know the drill, women and children first, families, try to stay together. If you remain calm, we'll all live to see tomorrow, I promise."

"What good is your promise, Klingon?" A voice cried from the back.

"Starfleet is supposed to protect us!" Another yelled.

"We're all going to die!" screamed a woman.

Q'Squa pointed to a family of six in front. "You, get on the platform, now!"

"Hey, why should they get to go instead of us?"

Q'Squa turned to the crowd, "If you all will proceed calmly, six at a time, we can all make it to safety."

"To heck with this women and children stuff," a large Nausicaan said. The huge ugly alien shoved his way toward the platform. "I'm saying, everyone for himself."

Q'Squa braced himself. Nausicaans were known throughout the alpha quadrant as being notorious trouble makers. Q'Squa knew that this was just what he didn't have time for. Q'Squa stepped back for just a second, not because he was afraid, but because he needed room to swing his fist straight into the jaw of the rude alien. The Nausicaan went down like a rock.

"You promised we'd all get off the station!"

"If we've got so much time, why couldn't he get off now?"

"The Klingon's picking who gets to live, and who has to die!"

Unfortunately, this last statement started another panicked rush toward the transporter platform. Q'Squa, caught off guard, fell. People trampled him in a vain attempt to reach the platform. Q'Squa struggled to regain his feet until a kick to the temple laid him out cold. The people who reached the platform realized that there were too many other people on the platform for them to transport. They started to fight, trying to force each other off the over crowded area. The over stressed transporter pads finally gave way under the combined weight. The fact that the transporter was now smashed and useless went unheeded by the pressing mob. In transporter room 4, Lt. Commander Brian Starr helped an enviro-systems technician to gather his wayward children onto the transporter platform. He looked toward the door as it hissed open. Walking regally across the room was the Klingon Ambassador, Ke'reth Zantai Makura. One of b'Sel's children, KharlS, was in his arms. Brian noted that the ambassador never seemed to lose his cool, even in the middle of a station wide evacuation and carrying a crying child.

Behind him came b'Sel, the ambassador's chief of staff, with her two other children, Rhahl and K'regh. All three Klingon children were trying to keep a stiff upper lip.

Though only two were succeeding, it was evident that they were all scared.

Ke'reth stepped up to the now empty platform. Brian helped b'Sel and the children arrange themselves correctly.

"We're ready to transport you to the West Point ambassador."

"That won't be necessary," Ke'reth replied. "General K'batlh, we are ready." He said into his communicator.

The slightly off buzz of the Klingon transporters hummed and the Klingons were gone, safely transported to the IKV Hegh qaD, General K'batlh's Klingon battlecruiser.

Brian turned to the transporter chief and said, "Is that everyone assigned to us, Chief?"

"No sir, according to the computer logs, Lt. Cdr. S'ena has yet to leave the station. She failed to show up for transport."

"Well, Chief, I might know where she is. Report our status to Ops. If I'm not back in 5 minutes, leave without me." The door barely opened in time as Brian ran out.

Starr fought his way through the crowds on the promenade and into the quieter sections of the starbase, his destination, the science labs. Brian had a good idea that that was where he'd find S'ena. Along the way, he told people he ran into to go to transporter room 4 for evacuation.

At one point, he ran into some Ferengi looters. Recognizing one of them, he yelled out, "Quek! Don't you realize the station is about to explode? You don't have time for this. Get your people off the station now!"

"Do not have time to make a profit? Are yew crazy hewmon? When everyone else panics, that is the perfect time to make profit. That's rule number 198." Quek replied.

"Or at least, it should be."

Brian didn't have time to argue with him, so he left him to his fate. When he reached the Xeno-Biology Lab, sure enough, S'ena was there.

"S'ena, we have to go! The station is going to blow up any second now."

"Brian, go ahead without me. I've got to save a few more of my plants and animals. If I can get them all into stasis cages, they might survive the blast. That is if engineering can keep it down to 80 kilobars."

"S'ena, this is a warp core breach. When it goes, it's going to be a lot more than 80 kilobars. It is going to start a chain reaction that will tear the station apart."

"But Brian, I've got to save them!"

"S'ena, you can't. You don't have time!"

"Then leave without me!"

"No!" Brian yelled, "If you don't come with me now, I won't leave and you'll kill us both."

S'ena looked at Brian for a second which seemed to stretch out for an eternity. Finally, she made a decision. "Fine, just help me find Catastrophe first. I couldn't stand to lose him."

Brian and S'ena began to look for the hex-cat. They quickly found him in a bigelow tree, his body matching the pod like leaves. As S'ena held him, Brian contacted the West Point.

"Starr to West Point, two to beam out."

As the familiar hum of the transporter beam began to sound, Catastrophe panicked. Tearing himself away from S'ena, he jumped down out of her arms.

"Tass! No!" S'ena said as the lab disappeared. A moment later, the transporter room aboard the West Point appeared around them. As soon as they materialized, S'ena yelled, "Beam me back to the Xeno-Biology Lab!"

"Belay that order, Chief!" Brian said. Turning to S'ena, he said "It's too late, S'ena. We don't have enough time. I'm sorry, we've lost him."

"No!" S'ena cried as she ran from the room.

Commodore Jat was in engineering. She'd ordered a protesting T'Pina to the U.S.S. West Point to over see the evacuation of the station. Jat was sure that she could figure find out whatever was causing the core breach, or she'd die trying. Most of the engineers had been ordered to leave, but several had disobeyed, staying to help slow down the core reaction. Such was the stuff of Starfleet engineers, Jat thought. She thought to remember to award, and reprimand, each one of them if they lived through this.

Jat wasn't trying to stop the breach. Many more qualified engineers were trying to do that. Lt. Cdr. Saryena Remora was running from station to station in her attempt to eject the core. Instead, Jat was trying to find out who, or what, had caused it. The list of things that would stop a core breach were longer than your arm. It just shouldn't have happened. Not out of the blue. There had been no battle. There had been no catastrophic malfunction. Someone had deliberately worked hard to cause this emergency. But who and why? These were questions Jat had to know the answers to.

Time after time, computer commands to avert the disaster failed. Something was actively stopping them from saving the station. Of one thing Jat was certain, it was sabotage. If only she could find out who.

Wait, there she had it. A computer virus had been hidden in some code, hidden very well, too. Jat recognized Romulan code hidden in the virus. But a clue to the saboteur was in the station security logs. A security over ride that didn't belong. It wasn't right. It shouldn't have been there. Jat knew who had done this to her station. It was.....Brian Starr!

Everything went white.

On the promenade, Q'Squa became conscious to the wailing of the sirens. He hurt all over. Several bones were broken and his body was a mass of bruises. Painfully, he

opened his eyes. The panicked mob was gone. There was no one there now but the Nausicaan he had floored earlier, still unconscious. Q'Squa attempted to sit up. At first the pain was too great, it almost caused him to go unconscious again, but Q'Squa was a Klingon warrior, pain meant nothing to him. The second time he tried, he was able to stand. At least his legs weren't broken, though his feet and hands most certainly were.

The transporter platform beckoned him. His comm badge was missing, but if he could reach the platform, he would be safe. But first, he had to save the Nausicaan. With his broken hands screaming in pain, he hauled the unconscious alien to the platform. He noticed the pads were crushed and useless. Picking the Nausicaan up and throwing him over his shoulder in a fireman's carry, Q'Squa started down the promenade towards the next transporter room. As he staggered down the empty corridor, he hoped he would make it. He could only guess as to how much time he had left.

The Nausicaan was beginning to stir. Q'Squa set him down. As the alien's eyes opened, he took in the deserted promenade.

"You could have left me and saved yourself. Why would you risk yourself for me? You must know I'll never be grateful."

"I didn't do it for you," Q'Squa replied in a tired voice. "I did it for myself, for duty. Come on, we've got to go. We have little time left."

Suddenly, they ran out of time. Explosions racked the station. Q'Squa leapt up and yelled, a battle cry in defiance to the gods, warning them that he was on his way, as fire consumed them both.

At Ops, Jeanette Warren ordered, "Lt. Morris, Ensign Shepherd, evacuate the station, get to the transporter room."

"Sorry, Commander," Laura-Jean Morris replied, "I'm too busy coordinating with Engineering, I think we can save the upper half of the station."

"And I'm still trying to get all of the civilian spacecraft out of the potential blast zone," Laura Shepherd added.

Jeanette was too busy to argue with them, and they were doing their jobs. She just hoped they wouldn't wind up dying at their posts, they were both so young and held so much promise.

"Oh, my God!" Laura-Jean cried.

Jeanette understood what had happened without looking at the displays. She lifted the cover on a large blinking red button and pressed it. She hoped the Starfleet engineers had had a good day when they thought up this plan. It was their only hope. Huge clamps sent shutters through the Ops room floor. Lights dimmed all around them. Ensign Shepherd's eyes went wide with fright, the presumed immortality of youth warring with the realization that the end was near.

Suddenly, they were all pressed to the floor, the inertial dampeners only taking part of the shock. Huge chemical engines shot the Ops room up in the direction of the top of the starbase. Riding on rails, the whole room was sent up a shaft toward a hatch which was opening. Flames chased the capsule as it was headed for open space. But at the last second, something went horribly wrong. One of the rails that helped guide the rocketing Ops was twisted. The room lodged in place and stuck fast. The three Starfleet officers were sent crashing into the ceiling, plastered into oblivion only seconds ahead of fiery annihilation, or sweet safety.

Back on the bridge of the U.S.S. West Point, S'ena and Brian stepped out of the turbolift. "Captain, you've got to...." S'ena's voice caught in her throat as she saw the station blow up on the main view screen. The explosions raced each other up the spine of the mushroom shaped starbase, each one touching off the next in a string of destruction. Everyone on the bridge watched as the station they had worked so hard on for over a year disappeared in a bright light that rivaled the nearby Night Fire nebula.

There was a moment of stunned silence on the bridge of the U.S.S. West Point. Starbase 410 was completely destroyed. Slowly, reports started to come in from the surviving vessels. The IKV Hegd qaD, a Klingon Battlecruiser attached to Starbase 410, hailed them.

“Captain T’Pina,” General K’batlh said from the main viewer, “The ambassador and I would like to send our condolences for the death of Commodore Jat and the rest of your Starfleet personnel. They died fighting a good fight. We were honored to have served with them.”

The Klingon General paused, then continued, “We are heading to the Klingon colony of K’Dorn. Once there, we will off load our refugees and continue our mission in the triangle. We shall also attempt to find out who is responsible for the destruction of our starbase. If you are able to discern who it was, let us know.” K’batlh leaned closer to the screen and growled. “We would be very interested.”

“Good luck and good hunting, General.” T’Pina answered. “Be assured, we will let you know if we find out anything. T’Pina out.”

“Major Amme, please set course for Bajor and join me in the briefing room.” T’Pina asked. She turned to Brian Starr and said, “Commander Starr, please have any of the surviving Command Staff report to the briefing room in 10 minutes. Mr. Hedley, you have the Conn.”

With her orders given, T’Pina stood up and walked stiffly towards the turbolift, leaning more than usual on her cane. “We have much to discuss.”

S’ena was depressed. As a half Orion, her body contained scent glands, which tended to effect most of the others around her. If she felt an emotion, her body released hormones which duplicated that emotion in most humanoids. As she looked around the briefing room, S’ena noted that everyone else there was also in a funk. There were few of the command staff left. Major Media and Lt. John Broda were quietly talking on one side of the triangular table. Tech Ellie Barstow, while not really part of the command staff yet, was there, though more subdued than normal. S’ena laughed to herself, she was more subdued than normal herself. Her laughter threatened to overwhelm her, so she quickly suppressed it. If she didn’t get her emotions into line, she could disable everyone who was left. Everyone except Brian she noted.

Brian was working on the computer interface at the narrow end of the table. S’ena had wanted to alternately hate him for forcing her to leave Catastrophe behind, and to seek comfort in his arms. Undecided, she had approached him, but he had thrown himself into his work, completely ignoring her. With nothing to do, she just sat at the opposite end of the table and kept to herself.

Captain T’Pina entered the briefing room and took her chair. Leaning back, she let out an uncharacteristic sigh. “Commander Starr, please brief us.”

Brian took a deep breath. “As far as we can tell, we lost everyone in Ops when the ejection system failed. Commodore Jat and Lt. Commander Remora were in Engineering when it went. Presumably they were also responsible for holding off the explosion which allowed more people to escape. Reports from survivors place Lt. Commander Q’Squa in the promenade, where he was attempting to control the frightened evacuees. Though given the opportunity to leave, they all remained at their posts and were directly responsible for saving over 5,000 lives and 70 ships. Still, 1,111 people died, or are listed as missing.”

“Among the surviving staff, the only one not present is Dr. Strachan, who is administering to injured. Everyone else is here.” Brian looked up. “That is all.” Everyone looked around the table at each other, not seeing who was left, but seeing who was missing.

T’Pina cleared her throat. “Ladies and Gentlemen, I am about to engage in a highly illegal activity which, I hope, will bring back our lost comrades. I have deemed the action has a high probability of failure, and if that happens, I shall pay the cost. But it is a chance that I must take. You, on the other hand, do not. I can’t tell you any more than this. If you would like to leave, no one should hold it against you, but I suggest you decide now. Anyone who wishes to leave may do so.”

T’Pina paused a moment. When no one moved, she continued. “I have come up with a plan, but it must not leave this room or all is lost. Major Amme, please call in Vedek Sespirie.”

Major Amme rose from her seat and crossed to the door. She returned with a female Bajoran S’ena had only seen once or twice on the station. Madia showed the Vedek to a chair she pulled back from the table. S’ena couldn’t guess why the Bajoran religious leader was asked to join. The way Madia showed her respect, S’ena thought she must be someone of some importance.

T’Pina leaned forward, placing her hands together on the table. “Vedek Sespirie, we are glad you could join us.”

“Be assured, Captain, I sympathize with the loss you have suffered today. If it weren’t for your valiant sacrifices, many of my people on the station would not be with us.”

“Your words gladden our heavy hearts, Vedek, but I have learned from experience that the best way to deal with strong emotion is to learn something new. Specifically, we’d like to learn about...”

“Standard orbit, Bajor, Captain.” Maj. Amme announced from the helm. Her duties momentarily finished, she turned to face T’Pina with a questioning look.

“Captain, we are being hailed from the planet, and from Deep Space Nine.” Cadet Hedley said.

T’Pina stood up. “Please ask DS9 to wait until we have answered the hail from the planet. Tell them we will be with them as soon as possible.” T’Pina took a deep breath. “Place the Bajoran messenger on the main viewer.”

The view of stars and planet on the main screen dissolved and changed into the visage of an elderly Bajoran Vedek. The woman looked sternly from the screen at the entire bridge crew. She radiated authority. Captain T’Pina looked her in the eyes and asked, “Vedek Kirin, How does our request before the Vedek Assembly fare?”

“Captain T’Pina, I must tell you that your request was very unorthodox, and thus, was doomed from the beginning. I have the unfortunate task of telling you that your request has been denied. What you asked was just too dangerous. Perhaps you can find some other way?”

T’Pina appeared crestfallen. “We thank the Vedek Assembly for their time and for considering our request in the first place. We hope that the Prophets smile upon the people of Bajor.” T’Pina hesitated for a second. “Do you mind if we stay in orbit for a few days? We have no current orders, and some of my people would like to take shore leave after what we have been through.”

“Of course, captain. Your people are always welcome on Bajor.”

With that, Vedek Kirin ended her transmission and the view screen returned to its previous display of stars and the planet Bajor.

“Cadet Hedley, please send my regards to DS9.” Capt. T’Pina asked.

“Right away, captain.” Cadet Hedley said as he turned toward his board. “I have Colonel Kira. Transferring to main screen.”

An angry Bajoran female appeared on the screen. “Captain T’Pina, I presume? Why do I have Temporal Investigations in my office? Did you know that they were here hours before you arrived? They want to talk to you, captain. Would you be so kind as to transport yourself over to DS9 right away?”

“Of course, Colonel. I’ll be right over.” T’Pina signaled to Hedley that the conversation was over, and once again Bajor appeared on the screen. “T’Pina to command staff, please report to transporter room one.”

“Cadet Hedley, announce a 24 hour shore leave for all non-essential personnel. Then divide the essential personnel into three 12 hour shifts, one to commence right away, and the others to start shore leave after they return. I’ll be on DS9, you have the Conn. Major Amme, you are with me.”

Media kept to herself until they were both in the turbo lift. When they were alone she said, “Transporter room one.” Turning to T’Pina. “Well, I guess that tears it. We’re finished.”

T’Pina looked at Media. “On the contrary, we have only begun. I assumed that word of what we were attempting would leak out. If nothing else, Temporal Investigations always seems to know things before they happen. I have taken their interference into account.”

Media looked at T’Pina with astonishment. “You mean you’re going ahead with this plan after all? The Vedek Assembly turned us down! Temporal Investigations is already here! There is no way we can succeed!”

“Major,” T’Pina’s eyebrow rose, “You surprise me. Logic dictates that since Temporal Investigations is here, then we must have succeeded to some extent. Otherwise there would be no need for their presence. As for the Vedek Assembly, I assumed that they would turn us down. I only asked in case I was wrong. What they desire, or do not desire, is irrelevant to our plan. It would have just made things easier if they had agreed.”

The turbo lift came to a halt, and so did their conversation. The two went down the corridor to transporter room one. Inside, Brian Starr, S’ena, John Borda and Tech Ellie Barstow, waited.

T’Pina stepped up to the platform. “I am going to talk to Temporal Investigations. I will delay them as long as possible, but you must hurry. The plan goes on as before, just expect more resistance. Remember, the lives of everyone who died on the station depend on you. Transport.”

Ellie activated the transporter, and T’Pina disappeared in a shower of sparks and a familiar hum. Ellie then took some readings and said, “The temple is shielded from transport. I can’t get us inside. The closest I can put us is the front steps.”

“That wouldn’t work.” Maj. Amme injected. “We will have to disguise ourselves and come in from a location further away. I suggest we change clothes and have Dr. Strachan make cosmetic changes to those of us that need it. We’ll meet back here in half an hour.”

In an alley, not far from the main Bajoran Temple, 5 robed people appeared. If you had seen them, you would have instantly been suspicious by the furtive looks they gave the surrounding alley. Seeing no one was there, they relaxed.

“Remember, let me do the talking.” Major Amme said softly. “If we are going to get pasted the front gate, everyone take their cues from me and try to remember your Bajoran briefing. If anyone talks to you, look at me. I’ll answer for you.”

The party moved down the alley and into the street. Moving single file with their hoods up to cover their faces, they appeared as pilgrims from any part of the galaxy. Soon, they reached the main temple of the Prophets on Bajor.

Disguised as Bajoran pilgrims, Maj. Madia Amme, Lt. Cdr.’s Brian Starr and S’ena, Lt. John Broda and Tech Ellie Barstow climbed the steps to the main temple of the Prophets on Bajor. Nervously, they passed between the temple guards at the main entrance. Inside, they had little time to take in the wondrous beauty of the main gathering area. Columns supported arches high over head. Fantastic paintings on the ceiling showed a diorama of the Celestial Temple and the walls were covered with scenes of the various tales of the Prophets. Statues of notable Emissaries and First Ministers dotted the room, one of which appeared to be a human male. If the party of five had more time, or been there on personal business, they would have

been awestruck by the beauty and serenity of the place. As it was, none of them were able to appreciate it.

Following the major's lead, the party moved down a side passage exiting the main entrance. They continued through several passages, occasionally passing watchful Temple Guards. Major Amme was apparently well known on Bajor, because she was recognized several times.

"Madia Amme," one Temple Guard said, "Have you changed your mind and decided to join us at the temple?"

"No, Bartok." Madia replied recognizing an old resistance friend. "I'm only assisting some pilgrims to cut through the usual red tape. If they had to wait for normal channels, they would still be here during the Days of Atonement."

"Ha, ha. I know what you mean. Well, after you're done, stop by the dormitory and visit. More and more of us old-timers are seeking the peaceful life of the temple. Colonel Loral came in to give his vows last month, and should now be ready to receive visitors."

"Colonel Loral? Who would have thought that old bruiser would have settled down?"

"Madia, many of us scarred by the occupation have decided to seek healing within the temple walls. You should think about joining us."

"Well, with all of the old guard turning religious, who will teach the new pups? Besides, with everyone getting out of the militia, I'm hoping it will be easier to make rank."

"Madia, you make us all proud, but," Bartok added, "You are always welcome to visit."

"Thanks, Bartok."

The party continued on. Madia took side passages when she was able to, and boldly strode through the areas that she couldn't circumvent. It seemed to Brian that she was taking the long way to get to their goal, but he trusted the Bajoran major to know best.

Eventually, they came to a closed door in a hallway. It looked no different than many they had already passed. It was unguarded and plain, but Madia stopped and turned to the rest of the group. "This is the last door. Inside this room is the Orb of Time. Are you sure you want to continue?"

Brian stepped forward. "We have no choice. You heard what T'Pina said. The lives of everyone who died on Starbase 410 depend on us. We must see this through."

"Then you leave me no alternative but to place you all under arrest." Madia tapped her Bajoran communicator. "Gentlemen." Six Temple Guards appeared, three on either end of the corridor, Bajoran phaser pistols drawn. The group pulled their phasers in response.

"You traitor!" S'ena cried. "You led us right into a trap! We thought you were with us, helping us save all of those lives!"

"Believe me, I was!" Madia replied. "But after the Vedek Assembly turned us down, I knew that continuing on would be against the will of the Prophets." Madia took a step towards S'ena. "I'm sorry. I did lead you to the right door, and I asked if you still wanted to do this. You could have changed your mind. I hoped that you would. Please, surrender now. Don't make this any more difficult than it has to be. As you can see, you have no choice."

"I have a choice!" S'ena screamed. "And I choose to save Tass and the rest!" S'ena pointed her phaser at Madia and fired. Madia screamed as her body disintegrated. The rest of the Starfleet personnel dove for cover. S'ena, the only clear target for the Bajoran forces, went down in a lethal hail of fire.

Brian noted S'ena's death, but it remained outside of his thoughts. When the shooting started, Brian found himself in the "One", a meditative state the people of his home planet, Avalon, had developed after years of personal training and combat. For Brian, time had slowed to a crawl. The positions of the Temple Guards were

noted, and his unconscious mind put into action motions which would pick them off, one by one, in the minimal amount of time. Still, it wasn't enough. Behind him he could hear Ellie take two hits and go down. John got off two shots, taking out two of the guards, before a third guard nailed him. Brian spun in place, drew a bead on the last guard, and fired just as the guard turned toward him.

Brian took a second to make sure there were no more targets then released the "One". He stood up and ran over to S'ena. Even set on "stun", the combined energy of several shots together had been enough to kill her. Brian cradled her dead body in his arms. Inside him, a dangerous resolve hardened his heart.

Placing her delicately back on the floor, Brian went over to Ellie. She was also beyond help. Brian noted that John was still breathing though, and he dragged him toward the door.

The door. Brian hoped Madia had told them the truth when she said that she had led them to the correct door. If she hadn't, then Brian figured there was no way he could finish his task. He looked at the door carefully. It seemed just like the other doors he had passed in the temple. On the door sill was a touch pad. Placing John down next to the door, he put his hand on to the touch pad. Nothing happened.

Brian went over to the nearest Temple Guards. Except for S'ena's, all of the Starfleet phasers had been set to "stun". They were still breathing. Brian chose the highest ranking one, Bartok, and picked him up. He then took him over to the door and placed Bartok's hand onto the touch pad. The door opened.

Dropping Bartok, Brian pulled John through the door. He could find no way to close it. Inside, the room was softly lit. At the far end stood a pedestal with a box on it. Brian slapped John on the cheek. Groggily, John tried to fend Brian off.

"Come on John, wake up. I need you."

"What happened?" John replied.

"We fought them off, but I need you to guard the door. Can you do that for me?"

"Sure pal, just let me at them."

Brian wasn't too sure John had fully recovered from the phaser blast. "Look, John, hold this door. I'm going to go over to the pedestal. If you hear anything, let me know."

"Got it. I can do that." John answered tiredly.

"John, if I don't succeed, you'll have to try."

"I just hope they give me a few minutes to clear my mind. Go on, they'll be here soon."

Brian took one last look at John, and then scanned the door for some way to close it. Seeing none, he then turned and walked to the end of the room. On the pedestal was a ornamental box. Brian looked it over carefully, then opened it. Inside was...

Brian found himself in Engineering on Starbase 410. Around him, the technicians moved in a calm manner. Everything was normal.

"Brian Starr," Lt. Commander Saryena Remora said, "We don't see you down here very often. Tell me, what graces us with your presence?"

Brian was still taking in the transformation, but replied quickly. "Oh, just tracking down some information for Captain T'Pina. You know how much she likes complete reports."

"Well, tell me what you are looking for, and maybe I can help."

"I'm not sure, really. Something out of the ordinary."

"You mean besides seeing you here?"

"Ha, ha. Yes. If you can spare a computer console, I'm sure I can track down the information."

"Well, I was about to go off shift. You can use mine."

"Is there perhaps someplace more private? I wouldn't want to have your staff nervous because I was here, and I might need some quiet."

“There is a auxiliary engineering control room this way. I’m sure you won’t be disturbed there. Hardly anyone goes there anymore. I use it myself when I need to work alone.” Saryena led Brian down a passage from main engineering. She paused by a large double door. “Here it is. If you need any help, I’ll be around for a few more minutes. Just give me a call.”

Saryena left Brian standing in the hallway in front of the door. Brian turned toward the door and said, “Open.” Nothing happened.

Brian drew his phaser and said, “Computer, Security override, Brian Starr, 2B-R0-2B. Open auxiliary engineering control room door.”

The doors opened to reveal the darkened room. Brian was sure someone was already there. Cautiously, he stepped into the room. The auxiliary engineering control room was round, with 12 alcoves branching off. Within each alcove was a computer terminal displaying the status of the station’s various power systems. Brian embraced the “One”.

In a split second Brian confirmed the presence of someone in the room. One of the displays was in interactive mode. Had it just been left that way, it would have reverted to display status within 5 minutes. Brian could see, from where he was near the door, that the codes activated were to the core controls. Whoever had been here must have heard Brian and Saryena’s conversation outside the door.

The only alcoves Brian couldn’t see, were the ones to his right and left. Someone was hiding in either one, or both, of them. One thing was sure, Brian thought, standing in the doorway was one sure method of getting pegged.

Brian decided to try the alcove to the left. Spinning around the wall divider, he found the alcove empty. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the computer console across the room mimicking the commands being input from another location. He pressed himself against the wall, bracing himself for a move on the last alcove.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you.” A voice announced from the last alcove. “I have rigged this to go as soon as I touch this button, and I assure you, I will press it if you move on me.”

“Who are you? Why are you doing this?” Brian asked to gain time.

“Who am I? No one of importance. Why am I doing this? For a lot of latinum.” The voice replied.

Brian decided to try talking to him. “A lot of people will die because this. You will be hunted for the rest of your life. You’ll never be able to trust any one, always afraid someone will turn you in. Do you really want to live on the run, with the deaths of thousands on your hands? Is the Latinum worth it?”

The voice was quiet for a moment, then replied. “What did those people do to help my family when Cardassia arrived to claim their planet? Where were your precious Starfleet and Klingon Empire then? The Cardassians wiped us all out. If I hadn’t been off planet, I’d have been dead too.” There was a pause. “I’ve been living on borrowed time since.”

Brian could hear that he was running out of time. The voice was resigned to its fate. It almost sounded as if it wanted to die, to end its torment. “You can’t bring them back by killing more innocent people. You’ll just reinforce a vicious cycle of loss and revenge.”

The voice became angry. “You Federation types are so typical. You are so full of yourselves, so arrogant. You have things too easy. Perhaps the destruction of your mighty new space station will take you down a notch.”

Both of them were surprised when the door opened again. A new voice spoke to them. “Brian, don’t do it, you’ll fail.”

Brian recognized T’Pina’s voice. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“Your efforts to stop Technician Michael Wong from recoding the core controls will fail.”

“How did you know who I am?” the voice from the other alcove asked.

“That is irrelevant. The fact that I know will mean that you will never enjoy your latinum, which I might add, the Romulans that were going to pay you never meant to let you live to see.”

Brian was confused. Who was this T’Pina? Was she a current timeline T’Pina? Was she from the timeline’s future? Was she a co-conspirator?

“Damn! I have half a mind to push this button anyway.” Wong said.

“You will, in approximately 7.5 seconds.”

“T’Pina, I need to know. How will I fail?” Brian asked.

“Because I shoot you.” T’Pina replied matter-of-factly.

Brian swung out to confront T’Pina, but made sure his first shot went towards Wong. T’Pina shot him before he could get a bead on the saboteur. His body disappeared without a trace, erased from existence. Wong, on the other hand, had plenty of time to press his button, dooming the station to his prerecorded instructions.

T’Pina moved with a surprising speed for someone who was disabled. Her hands found the correct spots on the tech’s face by instinct.

“My mind to your mind. My thoughts to your thoughts.” T’Pina intoned in an ancient ritual from Vulcan. “Our thoughts become one.” The two of them stood frozen in place for a moment which, for Michael Wong, seemed to stretch forever as his mind was first taken apart, then reassembled. T’Pina felt his grief as he returned to his home to find his family all dead. Wong learned of the pain T’Pina had endured during the tragedy at Wolf 359, when she was injured beyond medical science’s ability to repair.

T’Pina released Wong and he fell to the floor. Armed with the information she needed, T’Pina began to reprogram the core control codes. Time, previously her ally, was now her enemy. She had only a few minutes to enter the corrected control codes and reverse the catastrophic destruction of the station. Behind her, Wong stirred. T’Pina took a second to take a computer disk from her pocket and insert it into the slot on the console.

She soon finished her re-programming and input the corrected codes. “Now, Mr. Wong...” T’Pina said as she turned towards him with her phaser drawn. Wong was pointing a strange gun at her.

“What you did to me... I don’t understand... It was worst than the Cardassians. You’re Starfleet, how could you?” Wong cried in torment. “I had to re-live the loss of my family again.”

“Your pain is inconsequential compared to the deaths you were about to cause. Soon, you will learn to live with it, where the innocent people you were going to kill would not. The needs of the many outweighed the needs of the one. With your plot to destroy Starbase 410 finished, their needs are met. Now your needs must be seen to. Allow me to help you rebuild your life.”

“I don’t think so.” Wong said, then he shot T’Pina.

The gun made a loud noise and a solid projectile tore through T’Pina’s chest. She fired her phaser at Wong in response. He and his strange gun disappeared. T’Pina looked at the hole in her chest, her life blood pumping out from the pressure of her two hearts, and spreading green across the floor. She fell, no longer able to stand from loss of blood.

“Oh, Temporal Investigations never said anything about this.” T’Pina said in a small childlike voice. She laid back, closed her eyes and relaxed.

Commodore Anarita Jat arrived at T’Pina’s office in the morning just like she did every morning. Her going to T’Pina’s office was one of the considerations Jat didn’t mind making to T’Pina’s injuries to keep such a good organizer and second in command. At least it got her out of her own office and into the station.

She entered T’Pina’s office to find her looking confused at her computer interface. Jat had very rarely seen any Vulcan looking confused, and was curious as to what would have such an affect on her friend.

"I think you are going to want to have a look at this message, Commodore." T'Pina announced.

"Why? Who is it from?" Jat asked.

"It appears to be from myself, though I have no memory of making it. It tells a rather strange tale."

Jat quickly perused the message, then re-read it once again more slowly. "Have you been able to verify any of this?" She finally asked.

"Lt. Cdr. Q'Squa reports that there is evidence of phaser fire in the auxiliary engineering control room and Technician 3rd Class Wong is missing. He also found blood, matching mine, on the floor. He says that preliminary analysis of cell tissue found in the phaser burns appears to be from Tech Wong, Lt. Cdr. Starr. Starr has no idea how his cell tissue might have gotten there, since he's never been, but there is a record of his using his security override to enter it. The security logs also show myself and Lt. Cdr. Starr sleeping in our quarters, and at the same time as being in the control room."

"Lt. Cdr. Remora reports that there are changes to the core programming consistent with the story. Nothing she can't fix. And Lt. Morris says that one of the Ops jettison rails is bent near the outer hatch. It's significant enough to compromise the system, but something easily overlooked in an inspection. As for the message its self, it contains private personal codes that only I know."

"Well," Jat said. "This might turn out to be quite the interesting morning after all."

"Oh, there is one more thing."

"Yes?"

"I got a message from Temporal Investigations. They want to interview everyone as soon as possible."

"Oh, frak!" Jat exclaimed. "There goes a whole day. Still, I wonder. What was that tech's name?"

"Michael Wong, Technician 3rd Class."

"Skinny guy? A human of Asian descent?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Ah, I remember him now." Jat looked at T'Pina. "I thought there was something Wong with him."

The Adventure Continues...