

Waiting For Death

Captain's Log Combat Date 52001.4:

I have just witnessed the destruction of the U.S.S. Fresno. My Senior Staff and I managed to escape in a runabout before the warp core breeched. My first officer, Kim R'Jor, continues to use long range sensors for escape pods; but I don't believe anyone else made it out before the explosion. I only hope the Dominion patrol vessel didn't pick up our warp trail, but it's too soon to know. End Log.

Captain John Burke was sitting in the runabout U.S.S. Blood waiting. The vessel was at warp heading directly for Federation territory. He hoped that at least someone besides the senior officers survived the loss of the Fresno.

Burke had never lost a ship under his command before. The Fresno was the first ship he had ever really called home. Sure, John had served aboard other vessels and even captained other ships in the fleet, but there was something special about the Fresno. He couldn't explain it, but for once in his life he felt at peace while on the Fresno.

That peace died when the Fresno went to the stars like so many vessels had in the past. John's mother, like most mothers, warned him about entering Starfleet. She told him he would be killed for an unnecessary cause.

Burke's father on the other hand supported his application to the academy. His father had been an admiral in charge of a very important sector during the Soian Wars. John wasn't at home the day his father's body was brought back to Earth. He had been on one of his first deep space assignments on the Sutherland. Once the news reached John, it was too late to go back to earth to see his mother; the war had intensified.

Burke kept promising himself that he would make it back to Earth, but the years kept going by. They kept in contact with each other through subspace, but it wasn't the same as talking to someone face to face in person. Maybe it was time to say hello and get re-acquainted with his family. He had the time coming to him.

Once the runabout reached Earth, the Senior Officers would be dismissed from their duties and a formal inquiry would take place on the destruction of the Fresno.

Captain Burke looked around the runabout, he looked at his senior officers. It had only been three weeks since Commander Dougless killed himself. John remembered he still hadn't found a fulltime replacement for the operations officer. Burke turned to the helm where Ensign Julie Tompson was sitting. "Ensign, what's our ETA?"

Tompson checked a few controls in front of her. "Five days fourteen hours, one minute sir."

Burke stood up, five days he thought. John walked to the aft of the cockpit and then back to the front. He stopped when he reached Commander R'Jor's chair. "Any signs of the patrol vessel?"

R'Jor shook her head. "No sir. I didn't pick up any escape pods either. If there were survivors, they would be in Dominion hands by now."

John looked over to a pillar that supported the ceiling. There was a replicator unit installed into the pillar on one side and a place for hand phasers on the other. "Herbal Tea, ciniman with a touch of mint." A steaming cup of tea appeared in the replicator slot. Burke picked up the cup and started to sip it slowly to avoid burning himself. He started to breath easy, but it was too soon for that.

"Red Alert." The computer voice said. "Jem'Hadar warship off port bow."

"Can we outrun them?" burke asked knowing the capabilities of the U.S.S. Blood. The runabout was a prototype for a new class of long range flight craft. She was designed to go up to warp speeds almost the same as a

starship. The top speed was warp eight point nine five. If needed, the speed could be increased to warp nine point seven six with a complete shutdown of the engines after an hour.

"We might be able to for a short time" answered Dobson. He tapped a few controls and looked back to the captain. "Tactical ready, ablative armor active on all frequencies."

"Alright increase to our maximum warp and engage." Burke said hoping they would make it out alive.

A few minutes passed, everyone in the cockpit were tense. They managed to get away from the Jem'Hadar for the moment. Burke and his crew were safe but John didn't know how long they could stay that way.

The computer cut into Burke's thoughts, he hated being interrupted. "Multiple warp signatures detected ahead."

John looked to his Chief of Security. "Mike, report."

Commander Dobson checked a few controls. "I'm reading several thousand Jem'Hadar vessels. They're heading directly for us."

Burke lowered his head and said a silent prayer. He then looked back to Dobson. "Have they detected us yet?"

Dobson shook his head "No sir."

R'Jor looked to her commanding officer and friend of nine years. "We need to get out of here quickly."

Burke nodded his head "Agreed. Are there any nebulas or plasma storms nearby?"

The senior officers checked their display screens. Mark Justan, the Chief Engineer, turned to face Burke. "Yes sir. There is a dark matter nebula two kilometers starboard."

Burke smiled, he had a way out. "Take us out of warp, set a course for the nebula and engage at maximum impulse."

"Sir." Justan said "It's the same nebula that Captain Sisko and his crew entered last year when they crashed on that planet."

Burke was not pleased at the news. All vessels that have entered the nebula have had electrical problems. He had two choices, either enter the nebula and have a possibility of survival or wait for the Jem'Hadar ships to arrive and get killed off. John felt like living that day. "Take us into the nebula ensign."

At the captain's command, the U.S.S. Blood entered the nebula and escaped death's grasp, at least for the moment. The runabout emerged on the other side of the nebula twenty minutes after entering. Inside the cockpit everything was going haywire. Systems were partially functioning. They were lucky to survive the experience.

"Is everyone alright?" Burke asked, concerned about his staff.

Doctor Taylor answered the question. "I've just taken scans. No one's injured too bad."

Burke nodded "How's the ship Mr. Justan?"

Mark checked his readings and reported. "We won't be going anywhere anytime soon captain. Almost every system is shot, it will take about four days to complete repairs."

"What percent are the sensors at?" Burke questioned.

Commander Justan checked his readings again. "Sensors are down to forty-seven percent." He paused "Sir, I'm picking up a Federation Starship."

Burke sighed, at least they weren't alone. "Identify."

"Sovereign-class, registry NCC-44687, U.S.S. Rockledge." Mark said.

Burke stood from his chair, the Rockledge, he thought. One of Starfleet's newest vessels. "Open a channel."

"Channel open." Tompson said.

"U.S.S. Rockledge, this is Captain John Burke in command of the Runabout Blood, please respond." Burke said enthusiastically. He expected an answer to come almost immediately but there was nothing, not even static. Burke repeated his message.

Ten minutes passed, there was still no answer. Burke picked up a phaser and holstered it. "Ensign Tompson, stay aboard the Blood. The rest of you, come with me." Everyone but Julie stood up. "Burke to computer, beam five directly to the Rockledge's bridge on my command." He turned to his officers "Hopefully nothing is wrong, stand ready." Each member of the away team drew their weapons. "Energize." They disappeared from the Blood leaving the sound of the transporter behind.

Dominion Internment Camp 447

Commander Steven Dougless and Lieutenant John Tommas were sitting in a detention area alone. Admiral Necheyev was not with them. The Vorta who called herself Eya had taken Necheyev over an hour ago. Dougless was getting irritated, intergoation sessions had never lasted for more than twenty-five minutes. He was concerned for the admiral's safety.

Lieutenant Tommas had noticed the length of time as well. He could come to only one conclusion. "She's probably dead by now sir."

Steve shook his head not wanting to believe what John was speculating. "No. She's a survivor. I'm sure the admiral's alright."

After a few more moments, the doors to the cell opened. Eya entered with Admiral Necheyev not too far behind. The admiral looked terrible. Her uniform had been ripped in several places. She had cuts on her face and arms. Her left leg was bruised and broken.

When Dougless saw what condition Necheyev was in, he immediately walked up to her. "What did they do to you?" Necheyev was about to respond to the question when Eya spoke up.

"She's been through a simple exercise. Nothing more."

"What?" Steve yelled in anger.

"Dominion conditioning I'm afraid can be brutal at times. But it was necessary." Eya said. She headed for the door and stopped "I will be back for her later." She exited the room.

Necheyev walked up to Dougless and collapsed to the floor exhusted from the torture she had been through.

U.S.S. Rockledge - Main Bridge

The bridge of the Rockledge was beat up pretty bad. Lights were fluctuating as well as every system display panel. As soon as the away team from the Blood beamed aboard, they were surrounded by ten Starfleet Security Officers with their phasers at the ready.

When Burke noted what was going on, he re-holstered his weapon. "Oh good, you're alright afterall."

A gray haired man approached Burke. "Who are you?"

Burke held out his hand. "I'm Captain John Burke of the Federation Starship... well, late Starship Fresno; and you are..."

The man shook Burke's hand "I'm Captain Scott." Scott paused, terrified by something. "Why did you beam over here?"

Burke looked to Scott "We tried hailing your vessel, but we didn't get a response. I assumed the worst and here we are."

Scott nodded. "I understand. Probably would have done the same in your shoes." An ensign approached him with a PADD. Scott looked over the PADD and shook his head. "That's not good enough ensign. We need the EPS manifold to at least seventy-five percent. If only our engineering chief weren't dead."

Commander Justan looked to Scott. "Excuse me for interrupting sir, but maybe I can help you with your engineering problems."

Captain Scott looked to the commander. "Who are you?"

Justan smiled "Commander Mark Justan, Chief Engineer of the Fresno."

Scott shook his head. "Well, I'm not sure if you could help us. Have you ever worked with an EPS system on a Sovereign-Class vessel before?"

Burke laughed out loud. "Captain, you're looking at the engineer who designed and tested most of these systems at the Davis Fleet Yards."

Mark nodded his head "I can have you up and running in four days."

Scott nodded his approval. "Of course I'll have you taken to Sickbay so we can do blood screenings."

"You think we're changlings?" Burke asked.

Scott shook his head. "No, Starfleet made a regulation three days ago. I'm surprised you haven't heard about it yet." He led the Fresno's Senior Staff to a turbolift.

As they were exiting the bridge, Burke said "We've been out of contact with Starfleet for a week or so. We'll have to swap stories on how we arrived here."

Dominion Internment Camp 447

Lieutenant Tommas was pacing around. He didn't like the Dominion, in fact he hated them with all his heart and soul. "We need a plan to get out of here commander."

Dougless was sitting on the floor resting against the wall. "Any ideas lieutenant?" He paused, "You haven't said anything constructive for the past two days." He stopped himself before getting on John's nerves and becoming unprofessional.

Tommas glared at Dougless and shook his head. "No. I would have to suggest we try to use equipment from the room to open the door but there's no equipment in here."

"Why would there be equipment in a holding cell John?"

Tommas sat down on the floor in front of his friend. "Because when I was held in camp 371, a Cardassian by the name of Garak used the barracks' life support system to send a message to their runabout in orbit." John paused letting Steve think about what he said. "The only problem here is that camp 447 has a totally different layout and design."

Their conversation was cut short when Eya walked into the room. She walked up to Necheyev who was lying down on a bench. "Get up!"

Necheyev didn't stand. She was exhausted from their last encounter.

"I don't have all day. Stand up!" Eya yelled as she hit Necheyev's broken leg. Admiral Necheyev started to stand from the bench clearly in pain.

"What do you want?" Necheyev asked with a look of stone.

Eya smiled "It's time for another exercise."

Necheyev started to limp towards the door when Lieutenant Tommas stood up.

"You have no right to do this to her." John objected.

Eya's smile quickly disappeared. "Of course I do. You are prisoners of war and prisoners don't have the right to live." She turned to Necheyev "Let's go." Eya and Necheyev exited the room.

John walked back over to a bench and sat down by Dougless. "We need a way out of here." He thought for a moment and came up with an idea. "The next time Eya comes back we'll make our move."

Steve shook his head. "We don't have anything to work with. Besides, I have a feeling the admiral will need our help."

In the Rockledges' sickbay, the doctor finished the blood screening of the Fresno's senior staff. Captain Scott was pleased with the results of the tests. "Captain Burke, if you'll accompany me to my ready room. We can discuss some things."

Burke nodded and turned to his crew. "Doctor Taylor, it appears there are many injured people on this ship. Help out where you can. The rest of you go down to Main Engineering, I'll be with Captain Scott." Burke and Scott exited sickbay.

When the two captains reached the ready room Scott offered Burke a seat, which he accepted. "Would you like anything to drink?" Scott asked.

Burke shook his head. He couldn't drink anything at a time like that. John's ship was gone never to come back. At least she died in battle the way vessels were meant to go.

Scott sat down in a chair opposite Burke. "How did you end up this far from the Federation captain?"

John smiled "Starfleet ordered us into Dominion territory to destroy a ship yard in the middle of construction." He paused, replaying the events in his mind. "Nine Jem'Hadar warships and three Cardassian Galor-Class Starships attacked us. The Fresno lasted for ten hours of battle before I ordered all hands to abandon ship. I regret not going down with her."

Scott shook his head. "Starfleet is in need of experienced captains during war time." He tried to cheer Burke up "I'm sure it was the right choice for you."

"What brought you to this nebula captain?" Burke asked.

Captain Scott rubbed his unshaven face and was surprised he let his face achieve the terrible state. "Last week the Dominion entered section eight four seven, their mission was to take it over. The Rockledge was ordered to the sector to wash them out. We had a few on the run when the Rockledge entered a highly unstable wormhole. When my crew regained consciousness, we figured out where we were. Your runabout appeared approximately three hours later."

Burke nodded his head. "Once we get our vessels repaired, we'll set a course for Federation Territory. Hopefully the Jem'Hadar won't pick us up."

Captain Scott looked down to a desktop terminal. "We might have a problem captain. There are lifesigns down on the planets' surface." He paused "Three appear to be human lifesigns."

Burke's head shot up. "Human? Are you sure?" He looked to the ceiling. "There are others down on the planet as well?"

"Yes." Scott said "There are also a Ferengi, a Cardassian, a Trill corpse, a human corpse and several Jem'Hadar corpses."

Burke stood up and started to pace the ready room. "It couldn't be Sisko and his crew, could it?"

Captain Scott nodded "It's the only possible answer."

"But they were rescued by General Martok."

"I know." Scott said "There's only one way to find out. Your transporter aboard your runabout is still operating."

Burke nodded and tapped his commbadge. "Burke to Tompson. Beam two down to the planets surface."

Julie's voice came through on the other side. "Understood. Energizing."

Burke and Scott disappeared from the ready room on the Rockledge and rematerialized on the planets surface. The face of the planet was barren rock. There wasn't any habitable vegetation or plant life to be found anywhere. Burke drew his phaser and then a tricorder. Captain Scott did the same. It took Burke a while to locate the lifesigns but once he did, they headed straight for a cave.

Captain Benjamin Sisko knelt down in an old cave that he came to recognize as home for the past year. Next to him was a comm unit the Vorta Kevin had given them. The unit was never strong enough to do anything. Chief O'Brien attempted on many separate occasions to repair the unit but without the right equipment failed in every attempt.

The comm system brought back many memories to Ben. Out of all of the memories, one memory seemed to always push through and make itself top priority. That memory was of his friend Jadzia Dax's death.

When the Jem'Hadar vessel crashed on the planet, Jadzia was mortally injured. Doctor Bashir managed to fix some of the damage done to the host, but not all of it. Four hours after Jadzia passed away, the Dax symbiont did as well. Sisko remembered the promise he had made her. He promised he would find a way to get them out of there safely. Ben couldn't keep his promise and he was angry at himself for a long time.

Sisko's thoughts were interrupted when Captain Burke and Captain Scott entered the cave. He immediately took his phaser out and pointed it at them. When Sisko saw who it was, he let his guard down a little. "John?" Sisko asked.

Burke nodded his head. "Yes. What happened?"

Sisko stood up to face his friend. "We've been stranded here for over a year. Where's the rest?"

John was confused "The rest of what?"

"I assume Starfleet sent out an entire task force looking for us." Sisko said with eager eyes.

"We will need to conduct a series of blood screenings." Scott said.

Sisko was starting to see the big picture. "You didn't expect to find us here. Changlings must be on Deep Space Nine."

Scott nodded "That's what it appears to be captain."

In the Dominion holding cell, John Tommas was pacing around again. He was becoming more agitated by the minute. The Vorta in charge was really annoying him. Dougless stood up and put a hand on John's shoulder to make him stop walking.

"Hey, calm down. I..." Dougless said as Eya entered the cell.

"Ah gentlemen. I have some good news for you."

Tommas and Dougless looked to each other, they were both thinking the same thing. Only good news from a Vorta was bad news for them.

"Admiral Necheyev is no longer with us. I need one of you to take her place."

John stepped towards Eya "I'll go with you."

Dougless shook his head "No, take me instead. I out rank him." He didn't want anything to happen to his friend.

Eya looked to Dougless and shook her head. "No, he spoke first. I will take him." Two guards entered the room and dragged John out the door.

U.S.S. Blood

Captain Burke and his away team materialized in the Runabouts small cockpit.

Ensign Tompson walked up to her commanding officer. "Captain, all systems are ready to go."

Burke looked to the ensign. "Who did the repair work?"

Tompson's face grew a big smile. "I did sir, we're ready to go."

Mark Justan checked over the computer for a moment. "She did a fine job sir.

Burke nodded his approval "Very well, set a course out of the nebula, maximum impulse."

A few moments later, the Blood and the Rockledge emerged from the nebula and changed course for Federation Space. Everything was going smoothly until three Jem'Hadar warships appeared out of nowhere.

On the Rockledge, Captain Scott was prepared for battle. "Report!"

An ensign at ops reported his findings from the computer. "We have three Jem'Hadar warships on our tail." "Status of the Blood?" Sisko yelled above the red alert klaxon.

Garak was sitting at Science Two. "She's cloaked. One of the warships is breaking formation to search for her."

Captain Scott nodded. "Hopefully they'll be able to get out of there. Set a course for Federation Station 94 and engage at maximum warp."

"Engines engaged." The ensign at conn said. "The two warships are following."

Back on the Blood, things were not going well. Burke was watching a sensor readout. He was looking for the Jem'Hadar. Everytime he found the warship, John ordered a course change. They couldn't go to warp, the Jem'Hadar would find them too quickly.

"Alright, bring us port thirty degrees." Burke said.

Ensign Tompson nodded, the runabout moved according to her commands.

All of a sudden the Blood was hit hard. As Burke stood from the deck, he looked to a sensor readout. "We've been found. The Jem'Hadar have us in a tractor beam. We're being brought in."

Outside, the runabout Blood was emersed in a purple tractor beam. She moved towards the warship and was soon docked in a large bay.

A Vorta walked up to the runabout, he had two Jem'Hadar guards behind him. When he reached the airlock access, it opened. Burke and his officers exited the runabout.

"Ah. Captain Burke. Welcome aboard. You and your men are prisoners of the Dominion."

To Be Continued...