

The Hatred That Burns Within

A man was standing by a window at Earth Station McKinley. He looked at the hull of a ship scorched by phaser burns. The ship was only out of dock for five days and it already had seen the ugliness of battle. He looked down to his hands, on his wrists were Federation restraining locks. He remembered they used to be called handcuffs. His thoughts were interrupted when he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was his first officer.

"Captain Burke." The female voice said. "It's time."

Burke turned his head "They've made their decision?"

She nodded her head "Before we go in, I want you to know that It's been an honor serving with you."

Burke smiled, Kim had always been serious about honor, he had found it interesting that both Kim, the hose and R'Jor the symbiont had found common interests. "Thanks Kim, I needed that."

Burke and Kim exited the room and walked into a court room. They sat down at a long table. An admiral picked up a bell and rang it. "Captain Burke, stand please."

Burke did as he was told, his face showed no expression, he wasn't sure if he was ready for the results. The trial had taken a month to complete.

The admiral continued "Captain John Burke, the court has ruled in the following charges. One, for disobeying Starfleet orders, guilty. Two, for entering Cardassian/Dominion territory, guilty. Three, for putting the U.S.S. Fresno and her crew in unnecessary danger, guilty." The list went on for a while longer, after the sixteenth charge was read, the admiral looked into Burke's eyes. "Captain Burke, as of this moment, you are stripped of your rank and command. You will report to the Australian Penal Settlement where you will stay and work for the next twenty years. This court stands adjourned." The admiral picked up his bell and rang it three times.

Each ring felt like the blow of a bat upon Burke's head. His career in Starfleet was finished. Two guards walked up to John and escorted him out of the room. Outside, the senior officers of the Fresno went to attention when he came out. He looked towards them "I guess I'll see you guys in twenty years." The security guards stopped walking when the Federation News Service stepped in front of them.

One man asked a question "Mister Burke, do you have anything to say?"

Burke nodded his head "I'd just like to say I'm sorry for what I did." Every word was a lie, he was trying to continue Ben Maxwell's investigation of the Cardassians and the bases that they said were not there. It had been eight years since Maxwell made his first accusations, and Burke had set out to find if they were true. "I would also like to say the following to my crew. They might bind us, but in the end, we will always be free..." It was the ships motto on the dedication plaque. As soon as the words were said, Kim and the rest of the senior officers got to work. They activated site to site transporters. Burke and his officers vanished, leaving a transporter sound behind them.

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They materialized on the bridge of the Fresno, it was everything but simple. Every station could be configured to act as another in time of crisis. The CONN and OPS positions were directly in front, hooked together. On both sides of the captain's chair, approximately five feet away stood two stations, Tactical One and Tactical Two. The aft of the bridge housed the science, Environment, Mission Operations, and Engineering Control stations. There were four turbolifts, two aft and two forward. The aft turbolifts provided access to the rest of the ship. The forward turbolifts provided emergency access to the Fresno's second and third bridges.

The Fresno was the newest ship in the fleet, it was equipped with a cloaking device, holographic grids on all decks, and a multi-vectored attack mode which allowed the ship to separate into three pieces when an attack would occur. The three separate ships could either be controlled from the main bridge or each could be individually controlled from the bridges.

The senior officers took their respective stations. Captain Burke sat down in his command chair. Commander R'Jor took the left tactical post. The Security Chief, Lt. Commander Mike Dobson, a thin, blue Bolian took the right tactical post. Ensign Julie Tompson, a red headed kid straight from the academy took the helm. Lieutenant Commander Steven Dougless, a full telepathic Betazoid sat down at the OPS console.

Burke hit a key on his arm rest "Burke to Engineering."

A male voice came through "Commander Justan here."

Burke continued "Is the warp core on-line Mark?"

"Yes sir, the ship is ready." Justan paused "I also took the liberty to disable the stations systems."

Burke smiled "Thanks, Burke out." He looked towards Tompson's direction. "Helm, activate the cloaking device and set a course for Deep Space Nine, Warp 8." Tompson nodded and got to work. The bridge dimmed indicating that the ship was cloaked. John watched the main viewer, the stars were going by too slowly. "I thought I ordered the ship for warp, what's wrong?"

Tompson turned to look at Burke "Captain, Starfleet regulations have rules about using impulse engines only while in solar..."

Burke cut her off "In case you haven't noticed by now, we aren't Starfleet officers anymore." He paused "Now let's get out of here before they get their systems back on-line and find us!"

Tompson nodded, turned around and put the ship into warp. Burke looked back to the view screen, the stars were streaks of light. "Computer, patch me into sickbay and activate the LMH."

The voice of the LMH came through the comm system. "Please state the nature of the medical emergency... hey, there's no one here."

Burke sighed, this program definitely needed to be updated. "Doctor, this is Captain Burke, please turn on your bridge channel."

The viewscreen changed to a view of sickbay. A holographic representation of Doctor Beverly Crusher came on. "Yes captain? What can I do for you."

Burke smiled, he had always like Crusher's face, he was glad Starfleet decided not to model the LMH after Doctors Bashir or Pulaski. "I have to inform you of something. The Chief Medical Officer hasn't signed on board yet, so until she does, you'll be in charge of Sickbay, understood?"

The LMH nodded. Burke reached for a button to close the channel but stopped. "Please access and execute the file labeled two-alpha-zero-zero-one. Then deactivate yourself." Burke closed the channel.

R'Jor was confused "Captain, what does that file do?"

Burke looked over to her. "It erased some commands that the doctor would have to use in case she ever found out we stole the ship."

Burke stood up and walked to the side of the bridge. "Where did the doors to the ready room and conference lounge go?"

R'Jor smiled "The doors are still there, they've been hidden by holographic projections. Computer, disengage program R'Jor One." Two doors appeared on both sides of the bridge, to the sides of the tactical stations. The ready room was on the left and the conference lounge was on the right.

Burke looked at R'Jor with a smile and crossed the bridge to his ready room. "You have the bridge commander, inform me when we reach DS9." He exited the bridge.

In the ready room, Burke sat down at his desk which was in front of a long window. "Computer, bring up the most current files of the Federation News Service." The computer beeped, a file came up on a monitor that was sitting on his desk. "Switch to holographic view." The computer beeped again, an old style newspaper appeared on his desk. He picked up the paper and began to read it. It told about the events that had happened, and that the crew was 'at large'. Burke put the paper down and thought to himself, things are going according to plan. He hit his comm badge "Burke to Justan."

Mark's voice came through the channel "Justan here."

"Mark, disengage the primary ablative armor and get to work on it. While that's getting done, engage the secondary armor."

Justan's voice came back through. "Aye sir, Justan out." The comm line went dead.

Burke hit a button on his desk "Patch me through to DS9. I want to talk to Captain Sisko."

A few minutes passed, Ben Sisko's face came on the monitor. "John, it's good to see you, what do you want?"

Burke frowned "What makes you think I want something?"

Sisko smiled "You contacted me so I guess you need something."

"Well, I guess I do need something." He picked up a PADD and tapped a few controls. "I'm sending you our current damage report. When we arrive at Deep Space Nine, I would like to have the Fresno put in for repairs."

Sisko shook his head "From the latest reports, you're a renegade. Knowing that information, why should I help you?"

Burke sat forward. "With you knowing the information you have, you shouldn't, but you don't know the whole story."

Sisko remained still "Why should I believe you?"

Burke smiled "Listen, we've been friends for a long time. I think you owe me the right to explain."

Sisko reluctantly nodded his head "All right, when you get here I'll listen to you. Sisko out."

Burke looked to the ceiling "Computer, what is our ETA?"

The calm voice of the computer responded "Ten hours, twenty minutes at current speed."

Burke frowned, ten hours he thought to himself, this is almost as bad as convoy duty.

Military Log Combat Date 51631.2:

I have illegally stolen the U.S.S. Fresno from Earth Station McKinley. I know that more charges will be brought up against me, but frankly I don't care. Starfleet doesn't control me as long as I have the Fresno under my command. End Log.

He couldn't explain why he made the log entry, it just seemed the natural thing to do at the moment. All of that Starfleet conditioning was still a part of him, a part that he hoped he would leave behind. John looked down to

his wrist like he did at McKinley. The restriction bracelet was still on him. He pushed a button on his desk and a drawer opened. Inside the drawer were various tools, he picked one up and started to tinker with the bracelet. It took him almost an hour before he managed to get it off of his wrist. Once it was off, he put the tool back in the drawer, closed it and stared at the bracelet. Now I am really free, he thought to himself. Captain Burke set it on the table, picked up a phaser and fired. The bracelet was vaporized instantly.

"Computer, what is the current crew compliment of the Fresno?"

The computer processed the request and answered "Current crew compliment is four hundred and forty six."

Burke whistled "Over four hundred people under my command, all of these people will follow me."

The computer beeped "Unidentified vessel approaching."

Burke stood, alarmed at the news "Burke to bridge, what's going on?"

The voice of his first officer came through. "It's a Danube-class Runabout on an intercept course."

Burke tapped his finger on the table "Can you identify it?" He was never a person that enjoyed surprises. He'd been known to start fights for something as small as an unexpected birthday party. From the long pause, he could tell that Kim didn't have a clue what vessel it was. "Never mind, I'm on my way." Burke stood up from the table and exited his ready room. When he walked onto the bridge, he immediately went and sat down in his command chair. "Put the vessel on screen." The view screen showed a small Runabout heading for the Fresno. "What do they want?" Burke said out loud.

Dougless responded to a flashing light on his console "Captain, we're being hailed." His voice sounded uncertain and nervous. Burke couldn't blame him, none of them were expecting a vessel.

Burke stood from his chair and walked closer to the OPS position. "On screen" he said with a commanding voice.

The screen shifted again to show the face of Ben Maxwell. Burke relaxed once he saw who it was. "Captain Maxwell, how did you detect us with our cloak active?"

Maxwell smiled "I managed to tap into Utopia Planitia's files to see what frequency your ship was using. Before I forget, would you mind dropping out of warp so we don't collide?"

Burke put his hand to his head "What was I thinking. Helm, take us out of warp and lower shields."

Maxwell smiled "That's much better. Tell me, why were you heading for Deep Space Nine and not directly for the Cardassian front?"

Burke sighed "I was going to pick up my CMO and meet with Sisko, who agreed to talk with me."

Maxwell shook his head "Do you think he will listen to you?"

"To be honest, I don't know." Burke felt anger rise within him. "But I can tell you one thing, he isn't going to get in my way when I go after those Cardies!"

Maxwell smiled "I was like you once, I was so determined that the Cardassians were up to something against the Federation, but Picard didn't trust me. An inquiry was held and I was court martialed for my actions, and what do you know, the Cardassians eventually sided themselves with the Dominion."

"You know Ben, I've been thinking. Since both of us aren't in Starfleet anymore why don't you become the person that this ship reports to. You could be our leader, you could give us guidance and direction. What do you say?"

Maxwell smiled "That's exactly what I was thinking. I've got just the place for our headquarters."

Burke smiled "I hope it's not in the Badlands, the Dominion has been patrolling the area for some time now."

Maxwell shook his head "No, it's in the old DMZ. It's right on the border of Federation and Cardassian space." He checked a readout "I'm transmitting the coordinates to you now, after you pick up your CMO and have that chat with Sisko, meet me there. Maxwell out."

Outside, the runabout carrying Maxwell turned away from the Fresno and headed for the rendezvous point. On the bridge, Burke was ready to continue "Raise shields and set a course for Deep Space Nine, maximum warp."

Ensign Tompson recalled the fight plan from the computer and reported that the ship was ready. Burke walked back to his command chair and sat down. "Engage" at his command, the Fresno went into warp.

Eight hours later, the Fresno entered Bajoran space, she slowed down to impulse. Deep Space Nine came into view. "Lower shields, drop cloak and hail the station." Sisko's face appeared on the screen.

Sisko wasn't smiling when the channel opened. "Captain Burke, you're cleared for upper docking port three. I'll have a security detail accompany you to my office where we can talk."

Burke smiled "How about I just beam directly to your office, you can have anyone you want in the meeting."

Sisko knew he was probably walking into a trap, but he agreed. "All right, I'll be waiting for your arrival, Sisko out."

Burke looked towards the helm "Ensign, dock the ship on the upper pylon."

The ship slowly approached the pylon, when it reached it, an extension hallway and umbilical attached itself to her. "Docking complete." Tompson said.

Burke looked over to Dobson and then to his first officer. "Computer, transport me, Commander R'Jor and Commander Dobson to Captain Sisko's office on DS9." The three of them dematerialized with a glittering effect.

They rematerialized inside Sisko's office where he was waiting for them, he was sitting at his desk. "Welcome to Deep Space Nine, please sit down."

Burke sat at the captain's invitation. The others remained standing, assuming that Sisko was only talking to Captain Burke.

Sisko leaned back in his chair "All right John, you said that I should help you because of some information that I'm not aware of?"

Burke nodded "That's right. Several years ago on planet Ealilea Four, Cardassian Military Officers attacked and murdered several Federation citizens."

Sisko nodded his head "Yes, the Cardassian Government was annexing that world at the time."

"There was question of Obsidian Order involvement in the attack. The Order was questioned about it all but they claimed that they had nothing to do with it. They stated that the Cardassian Government was the only organization behind it."

Sisko nodded again. "That's correct, no evidence ever came up to prove otherwise."

Burke held up his index finger. "Ah, but there is evidence, and I know where it is."

Sisko's comm badge chirped "Kira to Sisko, Starfleet Command is hailing you. Shall I put it through in there?"

"Yes, thank you Major." Sisko replied.

The computer terminal lit up. "Screen or Holographic display?"

Sisko hit a few buttons and a captain's face appeared on the screen. "Ben, we have a problem. I assume you have been informed that the former Starfleet Officer John Burke stole the U.S.S. Fresno earlier today?"

Sisko nodded "Yes, I heard the news."

The captain continued "We have a sensor reading indicating that he was headed directly for you, have you seen him?"

Burke got Sisko's attention, when he looked over he saw Burke shaking his head and mouthing the word no. Sisko thought for a second, he could tell on Burke or he could lie to Starfleet.

"No, captain, he has not showed up." Sisko said, lying through his teeth.

The other captain had a disappointed look on his face. "Keep an eye out for him and inform me as soon as you see or hear from him. Starfleet out." The captain's face was replaced by the symbol of the United Federation of Planets. The words End Communique were underneath it.

Burke sighed with relief. "Thanks Ben."

Sisko frowned "I believe you were about to tell me of some information?"

Burke raised his index finger again as if to say wait a minute. "Before I give you the info, I would appreciate it if you would send a maintenance crew to repair the damage done to my vessel."

Sisko knew he'd better cooperate or he wouldn't get what he wanted. "Sisko to O'Brien. Send a maintenance and repair crew to upper pylon three, work on the Fresno."

Burke smiled "Thank you." He dropped the smile and went to 'serious mode'. "A few weeks ago on Combat date 51022.3, my chief engineer received a message from a Cardassian friend of his. This Cardassian sent him a written confession along with the thumb scan of a Cardassian that is high up in the Obsidian Order."

That information really got Sisko's attention. No one ever talked to members of the order. "Who was the person he talked to?"

"A man by the name of Tain." Burke watched as Sisko's mouth dropped open.

"That isn't possible, Tain died when he was in the Dominion's Internment Camp."

Burke shook his head. "The man that Worf, Bashir, and the others thought was Tain was actually a changling."

Sisko was still shocked "What? Could Tain be lying to your officer?"

Burke shook his head again. "I believe he's telling the truth."

Sisko picked up a baseball off of the desk and held it in his hand, it was worn from good use. "Why did you come here? Why didn't you head directly for Cardassian space?"

Burke looked down to his hands and then back to Sisko. "As you already know, I needed repairs and I knew that I could trust you. The other reason is because there is someone on your station I'd like to speak with."

Sisko stopped rolling the ball in his hands, he knew the person that Burke wanted to see. "Why do you want to talk to Garak?"

"I believe he can help me with certain information. Now if you'll excuse us captain, we don't want to be late." Burke stood up and exited the office with Kim and Mike behind him.

After they left, Sisko put the baseball on the ground. It went from the solid form to a liquid and then changed into Odo. "What do you think?"

Odo walked over to the door and looked out. "He seems determined to get revenge."

Sisko folded his arms. "Yes, but does he sound like he'll go through with it?"

Odo turned around and put on his best smile "I've worked with terrorists before, if he is determined as he sounds, he won't stop until he has what he needs."

Sisko opened a drawer on the desk and took out his real baseball. He placed it on top of the desk in its usual place. "Keep an eye on him."

Odo nodded slightly "Of course." He exited the office and headed for the nearest turbolift.

The Promenade was full of people going about their business. Burke was leading his team, each of them had one hand on a phaser and their eyes looking for possible trouble. They stopped by the security office where they found a directory. Burke ran his finger along the smooth reflective material. R'Jor and Dobson were still looking for any trouble that might occur. Burke stopped his hand on a certain spot. "Garak's shop is right there." He said pointing down the Promenade a little farther. "Let's go."

They continued walking, Burke stopped in front of a tailor shop. He motioned to his officers "Stay out here while I go in and talk with the Cardie." He entered the shop.

Garak's voice could be heard from the back room. "I'll be right there."

Burke decided to take a look around. The shop was of simple design, clothing racks lined the wall. A table in the middle of the room held various devices.

Garak came from the back room with what appeared to be a weapon in his hand. Burke immediately drew his phaser. Garak was surprised by what he saw. "You're not the person I was expecting." He walked over to the table and set his weapon on it. "I'm not going to need that am I?"

Burke shook his head "I don't think so." He put his weapon away. "I assume you are the Cardassian known as Garak?"

Garak smiled, "Let me guess, the ridges and dashing good looks gave me away?"

Burke was not smiling. "We need to talk."

Garak walked over to the door and locked it. He then walked back to Burke. "All right, what do you need?" His face was so calm, Burke couldn't detect any uneasiness from him.

"My chief engineer was contacted by Tain a short while ago."

Garak's face didn't change. "I know, he informed me of the exact information you were given."

Burke was shocked. "You know he was still alive? He told me to inform you that. So I wasted my time coming here."

Garak shook his head "No, I needed you to come. He wanted me to go over a few things with you before you went off on your first mission. If you can even call it a mission."

Burke calmed down a little, he wasn't sure if he truly believed and trusted Garak. He remembered his first day at the academy, an upper classman told him never to trust a Cardassian. Burke already knew that, he had seen his own family killed by Cardassian agents.

Garak could tell that Burke had gone to 'la la land', he waved his hand in the captain's face, trying to get him back to reality. "Hello? Are you still there or did you decide to go to lunch?"

Burke suddenly realized what was going on. "I'm sorry, you were saying that you had some information for me?"

Garak sighed "Yes, I took the time to gather information from my head and put it all on this chip." He handed Burke a standard Federation Isolinear Chip. "That should have all the information you will need for your 'war' that you are going to start. It's been nice doing business with you."

Burke was puzzled "Business? You haven't even gotten paid yet."

Garak smiled "Oh, but I have. Anything that goes against Cardassia is payment for me."

Burke pocketed the chip and headed for the door. Kim and Mark were standing outside as ordered. "Thanks for the info, see you around." He exited the shop and headed back to the Fresno. As before, they were walking cautiously, keeping an eye out for danger. They made it back to their ship. Burke was glad that nothing had happened.

They were about to enter the airlock when Odo came walking up to them. "Captain Burke, wait a minute."

Burke motioned for his people to board. He turned around to face the changling. I'm finished, he thought to himself. He put out his hands, prepared for another security lock to be placed on him.

Odo had a puzzled look on his face. "I'm not here to arrest you, Captain Sisko wanted me to give you this." Odo held out a bottle of Saurian Brandy which Burke took. "He also wanted me to tell you good luck."

Burke smiled, Sisko probably ordered Odo not to do anything. "Tell him thanks." Odo nodded and walked away. Burke turned back around and walked into the airlock that allowed access to his vessel.

When Burke entered the Fresno, his first officer was waiting for him. "What did he want?"

Burke lifted the bottle of Brandy so R'Jor could see "Kim, has the CMO signed on board yet?"

R'Jor nodded "Yes, when she came on she immediately went to sickbay."

He tapped his comm badge "Burke to bridge, clear us with DS9 to leave, then cloak the ship and set a course for the DMZ."

He turned his attention back to Kim "Commander R'Jor, let's pay the doctor a visit." They headed down the hall towards sickbay.

When they got to sickbay, Burke noticed two things, the Doctor and the LMH were having an argument, the other thing was the doctors origins were made clear by spots running from her head.

Burke decided to stop the fight. "Doctor, what's going on?"

Dr. Taylor stopped yelling to answer the question. "When I arrived, this woman was in here using my equipment!"

Burke laughed "That's not a real person, it's an LMH."

The doctor's face went bright red and her spots went a shade of purple. "Oh, I thought that you decided to get that thing from the Enterprise to take my place!"

The LMH tried to explain "I..." She was cut off when Burke ordered the computer to deactivate her.

Burke smiled "Welcome aboard the Fresno Dr. Taylor."

Kelly smiled back. "Thanks."

Burke stared at Kelly's spots, she noticed what he was doing. "Something interesting?"

Burke shifted his eyes to meet hers. "I was just noticing that you are a Trill, but Taylor isn't the type of name a symbiont would have."

Taylor's smile grew "That's because I'm not joined. Never got the chance."

R'Jor tried to clear things up. "She was head of the Symbiosis Commission when I went through. She was trying to become an initiate, but work always got in the way."

Burke hesitated, he never really liked un joined Trills, they always seemed to be nervous around people. "Oh, well welcome aboard again." He turned to his first officer. "Let's go to the bridge."

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Half an hour later, the Fresno was in orbit of the rendezvous. The cloaking device had been turned off and a shuttlecraft was heading down to the planet.

Inside the shuttle, Burke was having a difficult time flying. His hands were moving over the controls quickly trying to keep him from getting injured. He looked over to his chief engineer. "Mark, what's causing the problems?"

Mark Justan checked a few instruments and displays, he reported his findings. "The fourth moon is sending out high levels of isotonic waves. Those waves are causing problems with the engines."

Burke made another course correction. "Can we counteract the effect or at least soften it?"

Mark nodded "Yes, if we..."

Burke yelled at him. "Don't explain the procedure, just do it."

Mark nodded and got to work. After a few moments, the shaking stopped and Burke was able to land the shuttle.

Burke stood up, walked to the door and pressed a button labeled open. The door opened to reveal an empty barren wasteland. He looked over to Commander Justan "Mark, look at this."

Justan stood up and walked to the back. When he saw what was outside, his jaw dropped. "This is the base? What happened to it?"

Burke walked to the side of the shuttle and opened a compartment, inside were several type two Phasers, tricorders, and palm beacons. He took out two of each and handed a set to Mark. "Set phaser to maximum stun, also set your tricorder to scan for the Jem'Hadar version of a cloaking device."

Justan nodded and configured his instruments.

Burke and Mark exited the shuttle, entering the unknown environment before them. They were about one hundred feet away when Burke's tricorder started to act up. "I'm picking up... something, I can't explain exactly what it is."

Justan looked down to his tricorder and noted the same findings. "I see what you mean. It almost looks like there's a quantum singularity beneath us, but that's impossible so it must be something else."

"You are correct." A voice came from beneath them. Both Burke and Mark jumped back. A holographic image representing a stone disappeared to reveal Ben Maxwell standing on some steps leading downward. "It's a fake sensor image I set up so no one will bother me. I also created the isotonic waves that were generating from the fourth moon. I like my privacy, I don't want either the Federation or the Dominion to find us here. He paused, staring at Burke and Mark. "Where are my manners, please come in."

They followed him downstairs, the holographic stone reappeared. The stairs led to a cavern, it was surrounded by several pieces of equipment and wall stabilizers. Burke looked around for a while, he noticed an escape pod in a corner and pointed to it. "What's that for?"

Maxwell looked over to where Burke was pointing and smiled "Before I came here, I destroyed my runabout. Starfleet thinks I'm dead, I drifted in that for a half hour or so until I landed here."

Burke smiled, he felt honored to be in the presence of a great man. "So, where do you want to begin our attacks on the Dominion?"

Maxwell walked over to what looked like an OPS panel from a starship bridge. He pushed a few buttons and a map of Dominion space came up on a display screen. "This is the most current scan of Dominion space. You will start a standard patrol search in grid 47 Alpha."

Burke walked up to the screen and pointed to a blinking dot. "What's that?"

Maxwell responded. "That dot represents Alikla Prime, It's where the Dominion have been breeding their Alpha Quadrant Jem'Hadar."

Burke was confused. "Why don't we destroy the facilities on that planet? That we could eliminate at least one breeding ground."

Maxwell nodded "I'm not accustomed to planing missions against the Jem'Hadar, only Cardassians."

Burke smiled "Well, I fought along side Captain Sisko when he was trying to reach Deep Space Nine, after the Dominion takeover of the station. That planet should be our first target."

Maxwell nodded again. "All right, let's follow that plan, is your vessel fully repaired?"

Burke looked to Mark and then back to Maxwell, "Yes, DS9 fixed her up pretty good."

Maxwell smiled "Good. Well captain, get underway. After you finish, claim the sector Federation Territory and report back here."

Burke was shocked. "Federation Territory? If I do that, I'll still be working for Starfleet!"

"Yes, that's right. Listen, some friends of mine at Starfleet Command are actually in charge of this. Do you actually believe you got away from McKinley all by yourself?"

Burke frowned. "I guess I'll see you in a couple of weeks. Goodbye."

Having said that, he and Mark exited the cavern and headed back to the shuttle.

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The Fresno was in warp, she and her crew were heading for their first mission against the Dominion. Burke had ordered the ship to cloak in order for them to sneak easily into Dominion Territory. On the bridge, Burke was pacing back and forth. He hoped the Fresno wouldn't run into any Dominion vessels. It was a crazy thought, they would enter enemy territory in less than a half hour.

Burke went up to his command chair and sat down. "Computer, play a piece from Goldsmith please." The bridge went from silence to being filled with music. Burke always relaxed when music was around. After three songs had played, Tompson reported that they had arrived to their destination. Burke stood from his chair and walked up to the helm. "Standard Orbit, Computer, kill the music." The Fresno went to a standard orbit as ordered, the bridge was silent. "Tactical, scan for enemy ships in the area."

Dobson checked his console "I don't detect any Dominion or Cardassian vessels sir."

Burke smiled "This might be easier than I originally expected."

Dobson tapped his hand on his console "Sir, their vessels could be cloaked."

Burke shook his head "No, it's not the Dominion's way." He turned to OPS. "Scan the surface, what's down there?"

Dougless tapped a few controls, after he collected the data, he reported. "There are over ten thousand separate structures on the Northern Hemisphere. Life sign scans show over five hundred Vorta and over one hundred thousand Jem'Hadar."

Burke looked to the viewscreen and then back to Dougless. "Any sign of Founders?" He was hoping to get rid of some changlings on this mission as well.

Dougless shook his head "No sir, of course they could be other forms and we wouldn't be able to tell."

Burke nodded "All right, suggestions on how we get rid of this place."

R'Jor spoke up. "A few..."

She was cut off by the urgent voice of Dobson. "Sir! Three Jem'Hadar warships just entered sensor range. ETA twenty minutes."

Burke looked back to the viewer "On screen." The view switched from the planet to three dots. "Magnify" the dots increased in size to clearly show three Dominion ships heading for the planet. Burke's heart rate jumped "Red Alert." The klaxon went off and red lights started pulsating on the bridge. "Status of the cloaking device."

R'Jor checked her console "It's still active, we shouldn't be picked up by their sensors."

Burke was concerned, Jem'Hadar ships had a way around cloaking devices. "What if they try an anti-polon beam?"

R'Jor smiled "Don't worry, the cloaking device is one of the newest designs. A poleron beam can't detect us."

Burke hoped she was right. "I wonder what they are doing here..." He turned to Dougless "You're a full telepath, can you sense what they're up to?"

Dougless closed his eyes, he focused on the lead vessel, he thought harder, searching... for the mind of a Vorta. Several thoughts from Jem'Hadar warriors came into his mind, he let them go. Further concentrating for the leader, after a moment, a strong and powerful mind came in. Dougless had never felt a mind like that one. He came to the conclusion that it was a Vorta. The feelings were those of being relaxed. Dougless opened his eyes and looked back to the captain. "I made contact with the Vorta's mind, those vessels are transport ships."

Burke was confused, he never really understood how the Betazoid brain functioned. "How do you know?"

"An impression hit me from his mind, he's here to collect men to train for basic Jem'Hadar warships." Dougless turned his attention back to his console.

Burke looked to his security chief. "Dobson, are there any security shields down there?"

Dobson checked his console "No sir, it appears they were damaged when the Defiant tried to take this sector last week..."

Burke almost laughed. "They failed in their mission. We won't make the same mistake." He paused. "We'll wait for them to leave, then get to work."

"What exactly are we going to do?" R'Jor asked.

Burke raised an eyebrow. "I was thinking of beaming cloaked mines into the structures."

R'Jor looked at Burke. "Do we have any mines on board?"

Burke nodded. "They're waiting in cargo bay four. I had them made weeks ago." He looked at the viewer and wondered how long they would have to wait.

An hour passed and then another, and another. After six hours of waiting, the Jem'Hadar ships left the area. On the bridge, Burke was sitting in his command chair reviewing a PADD. "All right, let's get this show on the road. Dobson, beam the mines to the structures. Set them to detonate two seconds after they materialize." Dobson nodded and did as he was told. A few seconds later, explosions erupted on the surface of the planet. Burke smiled as he watched on the view screen. "My revenge has begun!" The bridge went silent, all eyes went to the captain. He didn't care what they thought of him.

Commander R'Jor broke the silence. "Captain? I thought your hatred were toward the Cardassians."

Burke looked over to her. "The Cardassians are members of the Dominion. So my hatred has grown." He stood up "Report."

Dougless checked his controls. "All life on the planet has been destroyed."

Burke's smile grew "Send out four buoy markers, claim this sector part of the Federation."

R'Jor objected. "There must be other planets with Dominion colonies in this sector."

Burke shook his head "Nope, this was the only one. Once the markers are deployed, set a course back to base, maximum warp."

The Fresno was about to enter warp when two Dominion ships started firing on her.

On the bridge, Red Alert Klaxons were going off everywhere. Burke's knuckles were turning white. "Report!"

Dobson answered "Weapons off-line, propulsion down to forty-seven percent. Shields are down to eighty-five percent."

"Evasive maneuvers, pattern Epsilon!" Burke yelled to the helm.

"Captain!" R'Jor started "A Jem'Hadar vessel has found a way to open a space in our shields. Sensors detect several boarding parties on board. One of the parties is heading directly for the bridge!"

Burke frowned, he was angry at what was happening. "Computer, activate a security lock down on all systems except for the hologrids."

The computer beeped. "Enter code."

"Authorization Burke-omega-zero-zero-one." After Burke gave the code, every system display went blank.

Burke looked to his bridge crew "Arm yourselves and get ready." They did as they were told, each person went and got a type two phaser and clipped them to their belts.

Twenty minutes passed, the Jem'Hadar hadn't gotten to the bridge yet. Burke's hear was pounding, it was hard enough for him to feel it through his chest. What's taking them so long, he thought to himself.

Commander Dougless walked up to the helm were Burke was hiding. "I couldn't help overhearing your thoughts sir."

Burke smiled "Can you tell how far away the Jem'Hadar are from the bridge?"

The Betazoid shook his head "I can tell you that they are confused with the ship. It's taking them time to get here."

Burke's smile grew. "I'm glad I was able to disable the ships systems before..." He paused, an idea had just come to him. "Computer, disengage hologrid safeties."

"Does the first officer agree?" The computer said in response.

R'Jor nodded "Yes."

"Holographic safeties disengaged."

Fifteen more minutes passed, Burke was starting to get restless. He was about to give up on the Jem'Hadar when he heard someone pounding on the aft turbolift to the left. He pulled out his tricorder and made a scan. "Ready Phasers, the party is about to begin!"

The bridge crew got ready. An ensign got into position by the lift door. One Jem'Hadar broke through the door. He was carrying some kind of bladed weapon. The handle was about two and a half feet long. The blade was another two feet. The ensign by the door pushed the fire button on his phaser, nothing happened. The Jem'Hadar First, swung his weapon directly at the man's head. The ensign couldn't move in time and his head was at the front of the bridge.

The Jem'Hadar First, walked up to the captain's chair and made his demands. "If you don't resist us, we will allow you to live and watch your trial."

Burke stood up and faced the Jem'Hadar officer. "Let me talk to my crew and we'll surrender." The Jem'Hadar nodded. "Burke to computer, patch me through to the rest of the ship."

"Channel open."

"All hands, this is the captain. As you know, the Fresno has been taken over by Jem'Hadar forces. I have spoken with the First, he has ordered us to surrender. I have decided to follow his demands. We wouldn't be able to defeat them, our Phasers are not functioning." He paused, hoping his crew would understand the message he was about to give them. "I don't know about any of you, but I'm not good at fighting hand to hand, even with the hologrid safeties disengaged. Go to condition green and report to your quarters. Burke out."

The Jem'Hadar First smiled "Now, release the computer lockouts."

Burke looked up to the interface. "Computer, Batleth, warriors configuration." A Klingon Batleth appeared in Burke's hands, he immediately struck the Jem'Hadar in the head. The Jem'Hadar when flying to the deck with a thud. Burke looked to his crew. "Each of you, replicate some kind of weapon, it's time to get our ship back."

The rest of the senior offices stood up. R'Jor walked up to Burke "I wonder why only one Jem'Hadar came to the bridge, don't they usually travel in two or threes?"

Burke nodded, "There must be others here, camouflaged." He faced the communications array again, "Computer, give me a night vision goggle equipped with a phaser pulse variance of point two-four." A piece of equipment appeared in his hand. He put it over his eyes. No more Jem'Hadar officers were on the bridge. Burke and the rest of his officers walked into one of the aft turbolifts. Once inside, he ordered the lift to take them to the Engineering section. The turbolift started to move downward, it stopped at Main Engineering. The doors opened to show the section empty.

Burke was still wearing the headset, there were at least thirty Jem'Hadar trying to get the main computer on-line. They didn't care about Burke or his senior officers. He motioned them to exit, when they did, their holographic weapons disappeared. Burke looked over to his chief engineer. "What happened?"

Mark looked back to his friend. "I don't know, they must have some kind of field set up to block the hologrid. At least they can't disable the security lockouts." As he said that, all the Engineering displays activated, showing the computer coming on-line. "Maybe I spoke too soon."

Burke hit his hand on a console in front of him. It was not turning out to be a good day. "All right, let's try and..."

He was cut off when he looked at a sensor display in front of him on a table. "If I'm reading this right, there are over thirty Jem'Hadar posted on every deck." He hit a few more controls, a schematic of the Fresno came up. "I have an idea, we'll just kill all life support and have the crew put on environmental suits."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you captain." A voice said from above. Burke looked up to see a Vorta descending from the upper deck. Once he got to the bridge crew, he walked up to Burke and faced him. "Besides, your crew is being executed as we speak."

Burke clenched his fists, he was getting angry. "Why are you killing innocent people? What did they do to you?" He already knew the answer, but wanted to hear it from the Vorta to confirm his hatred of the Dominion.

The Vorta laughed in Burke's face. "Because you are enemies of the Dominion, and enemies must die." He was loving that moment, he liked watching and thinking of what were going through his enemies minds. "Don't worry, you will be taken to Cardassia itself and will be executed there, in front of the Dominions most valued leaders, the Founders."

Burke felt like punching the Vorta, but didn't, he exercised self control. "What are you going to do with us in the mean time?"

The Vorta's smile disappeared. "You are going to pilot this ship to Cardassia Prime. We will go to the bridge now."

Burke slammed his fist down. "If you want to get to Dominion space, you'll have to get there by yourself. We won't help."

The Vorta nodded his head. "Very well, I'll have you escorted to the ships theater, you will wait there."

* * *

A few moments later, they were sitting alone in the ship's small theater. R'Jor was pacing around. "What are we going to do? We need a way out of this, the crew..."

Burke finished the sentence. "Are all dead by now, I've come up with an idea. Before I implement it, I need your approval." His friends nodded, giving him to go ahead no matter what it would be. "I plan to destroy the ship, hopefully we will take that Jem'Hadar warship with us."

Each member of the senior staff knew of the possibility of destruction, no one disagreed with him. Burke hit his comm badge "Burke to computer, set Auto Destruct sequence, ten minute countdown."

The computer beeped "Destruct Sequence set, enter authorization code."

Burke felt a chill run down his spine, as he gave the code. As he gave the death sentence for the remaining crew of the Fresno. "Authorization, Burke-delta-six, enable."

The computer beeped again and then stated to all decks a warning. "The ship will self-destruct in nine minutes fifty-five seconds."

Burke expected the Vorta to arrive within a few minutes to order him to stop the destruct sequence. He was wrong, minutes passed, the sequence was down to one minute. The Vorta finally appeared.

"Captain Burke, it appears we cannot stop your self destruct. You will stop it or you will die right here."

Burke smiled at the Vorta. "The way I see it, I'm a dead man anyway. I give you the code, I die on Cardassia. I don't give you the code, you will either kill me right now, or the time will run out and the ship will kill me. The sequence will continue."

The Vorta started to get angry. "You're bluffing. You wouldn't do this to yourself."

Burke stared at the Vorta. "I promise you, unless you leave, we will die together. It's your move, you only have thirty seconds to decide. Decide quickly."

The Vorta sighed and waited until the countdown was to five. The computer stopped the procedure when Burke ordered it. The Vorta had given up, he didn't want to sacrifice so many Jem'Hadar soldiers. He headed for the door. As they opened, he turned and fired a phaser at Commander R'Jor killing her instantly. Burke yelled after the Vorta "No!" He then turned to the computer interface.

The Vorta walked closer, "Say anything about that destruct sequence and you die."

Burke smiled, "Computer, resume."

The computer finished the countdown. "Five... four... three..."

Burke looked to the Vorta and bowed, "See ya."

"One." The cycle ended and the Fresno exploded into thousands of pieces. It took the Jem'Hadar vessel with it.

Both sides lost ships that day, fortunately the Dominion lost more people than the Federation.

In the DMZ, Ben Maxwell looked over some reports. They were accounts of the starship Fresno being destroyed. He hit the console, "When will they ever learn?" He pushed a button on the console, a vortex opened up and he left that universe. He didn't know where he was going, but at least he was going to get away from his enemies. After he left, a comm unit activated, "Captain Maxwell? Hello? Is anyone there?"

The End