

The Underground: Section 31

Space. Endless in form. Endless in movement. Endless in beauty. Simply Endless.

Captain John Burke stood by an office window in a silent room. He stood alone, in the dark, allowing his mind to relax and wander.

Burke stared out the window toward the stars. ever since he had been a small boy, John had watched the heavens with wonder and great amazement. Burke recalled times past when he would sit upon his grandfathers knee and search the night sky with awe.

These memories always made Burke smile with joy. He believed it was the stars that helped him have interest in Starfleet. Throughout his years of service Burke had many experiences to be proud of, but there were also a few he wished to forget. Today was one of those experiences John wanted to get away from. As he stood there, watching the heavens, a battered and phaser scorched escape pod drifted in the distance. As the pod came closer, Burkes smile faded.

The module belonged to his most recent command, the Starship Tampa. As Burke gazed over the phaser scorched hull, memories and emotion flooded his mind. Burke could still smell the smoke that engulfed his bridge a day earlier.

The uniform he wore was covered with ash, sweat, and blood from officers he had known, worked with, loved, and trusted. Burke could still hear cries of death, cries that echoed throughout his inner most thoughts. These were cries that were sure to bother him when he slept, if he slept.

The Tampa had gone down in flames. Only two officers survived the incident, himself and Commander Stacey Robbins; the Tampa's Executive Officer. Burke had just spent the last day and a half in a court martial. He had witnessed as his future was fought over. At the present moment he was awaiting the courts final decision. Would they vote in his favor or would they strip him of rank and sentence him to life in prison. John was curious on how it would turn out in the end. Burke left the window and walked over to a desk that was cluttered with information.

There were several PADDs on the desk that contained classified information about the Tampa, her crew, and a final mission that put the vessel to rest.

Beep. Beep. The door chimed.

"Come in." Burke said as he turned to face the door.

The office doors parted allowing a tall slender red headed female to enter. Burke smiled when he saw it was Commander Stacey Robbins, a fellow survivor and wife of three years. As she entered the room, Burke greeted her with a soft kiss on the cheek and a long gentle hug.

Stacey smiled as she willingly accepted both from the man she loved.

"Are they ready?" Burke asked referring to the court martial.

Stacey slowly nodded her head. "Don't worry dear, we'll get through this."

Burke looked down to his feet, and then back up to his wife. "We're on our own. We were caught off guard and now Starfleet knows something's up." He turned back to the desk and picked up a PADD that held the information he wanted. Burke reached into a drawer, pulled out a Type Two Phaser and hid it under his sleeve.

"What are you doing? Their scanners will detect your sidearm."

Burke shook his head. "I altered a few circuitry nodes. It's modified, they won't pick it up."

"Are you certain?" Stacey said. "How did you figure that out?"

Burke smiled again. "Trust me." As he walked to the door he took Stacey by the hand.

"Besides, we're trained to be the best, aren't we?" They exited the office.

Outside the office doors stood two security guards who escorted the couple down a long hallway towards a transporter room. Burke couldn't stop thinking about the Tampa and what occurred over the past few weeks. As they entered the transporter room Burke and his wife walked over and stood on the transporter pad. The operator activated the sequence and Burke could only watch as the room shifted and they were transported to earth. After they re-materialized he took a long look around the courtroom. Several admirals filled the room apparently it was the high brass of Starfleet who were in attendance. Burke didn't recognize any of them. It had been a long time since he had visited earth. Burke and Stacey went to attention as an admiral entered the room and sat down at a desk in front of them. He was the judge of the proceedings. Burke didn't hold much respect for the admiral. Mostly because he was about to make a ruling that could destroy his career.

"Captain Burke, Doctor Robbins please be seated." The judge said with little emotion in his voice. "I have reviewed all of the evidence that has been presented on the matter at hand with the board. The only logical conclusion we can make is that you have not been entirely truthful to this inquiry. There are simply too many unanswered questions." He paused "And I doubt we'll receive answers anytime soon."

Burke knew exactly what the admiral was thinking, if the roles were reversed he'd be thinking the same thing. Starfleet had no record of the Tampa's final mission which was the cause of over 300 lost lives. Burke looked down to the PADD he held and thought. 'Starfleet would love to get their hands on this evidence.'

"If we weren't at war" the admiral continued "we would spend more time on this case." He paused, collecting a few thoughts before he resumed. "Do you have any information about your mission or the crew you were in command of?"

Burke looked to the admiral, thought about the PADD, and then to his wife. His mind was racing as he thought to himself. 'I can't believe I'm here. I shouldn't have to answer to this, they don't understand what's out there.' Burke felt the warm hand of his wife reminding him of a promise to her and the organization which he was loyal to. "No sir, I do not."

"Very well. Captain, Doctor please stand."

Burke and Robbins stood as requested. John felt the phaser against his arm, it was cold to the touch as it sent goosebumps up and down his entire body. The phaser was ready to go and he was prepared to use it.

"You are found..." The admiral paused as another admiral entered the room.

Stacey looked to her husband. "Who's that?"

Burke stared at the newcomer but didn't recognize him at all. "I don't know." The couple continued to watch as the two admirals talked. The admiral then quietly left the room the same way he had come.

The judge stood up. Although he showed no emotion, he appeared to be confused. "I have just received word from the Federation President and Council. All charges against Captain John Burke and Commander Stacey Robbins are dropped. This court stands adjourned." He exited the room in a quick cold silent pace.

Burke and Robbins looked to each other.

"They always come through for us." Robbins said.

Burke took Robbins by the hand and exited the room. Outside they were met by the admiral who had interrupted the court proceedings in their favor.

"Captain. Commander. Allow me to introduce myself. Admiral James head of Starfleet Security." The admiral said as he shook their hands. "I need to speak with the two of you. Meet me in Conference Room Omega in an hour, we need to discuss an important matter." James said in a calm serious voice. "Go home and get cleaned up, bring that PADD along too, we'll need it."

Burke and Robbins nodded. They walked down a hallway that led to a transporter room which would take them home.

* * *

An hour later Burke and his wife were walking down a street in Cocoa Beach Florida. They were dressed in clean uniforms freshly pressed. The sky was clear and blue as the Florida sun warmed the earth beneath their feet. As they passed a few houses Stacey heard small children playing in front yards. Her heart went out to them as she reminded herself of what had happened over the past few days.

"What do you think will happen?"

Burke shook his head and replied. "I'm not sure."

After passing a few more houses they stopped walking. Burke tapped his commbadge. "Burke to Omega 3 Computer."

"Computer active." A computer voice replied.

"Transport two." Burke said.

"Enter code."

Burke hated the clearance and red tape, but he understood the importance of it all. "Burke Omega Four Seven Delta." As he did so the line closed and they were transported from the street into a room several meters underground. The room was completely dark, the only light source was a holographic generated rotating image of the U.S.S. Tampa. The holograph let off a light glow allowing Burke to see two admirals seated at a table. Burke recognized one of them, it was Admiral James, the admiral that talked to them in the hallway. The other admiral he did not recognize.

Admiral James looked up from a monitor. "Lights." At his command the room lighted up to full strength. James stared at John and Stacey. "Identify yourselves."

"Captain John Burke and Commander Stacey Robbins, Section 31 Rockledge Division." Burke said at full attention.

James nodded. "Good to see you made it, please hand over your information to be downloaded; and sit down."

Burke set the PADD on the table in an access port for the computer to download its contents. He and Robbins took two empty seats across from the admirals at the table. He was about to be debriefed by his own men. It felt good to be among friends again, even though he didn't know these two operatives personally, they were all working for the same cause and he could trust them.

Admiral James read through the information as it came across the computer screen. As he did so the other admiral updated the holographic image of the Tampa, after a moment the image transitioned between the older image of the Tampa to the recent information. "Looks like you've been busy." He paused "We haven't been

properly introduced. I'm Admiral Clayton, I was the one who chose you and your ship for this assignment and look what happened."

Burke tapped his index finger on the desk, clearly the admiral was upset at how the mission had ended without the goal being achieved. "Yes sir." Was all Burke could say.

"All right captain, let's start from the beginning." James said cutting through the anger in the room that was emanating from Clayton.

Burke nodded and started to tell the story of the ill fated Tampa and her crew.

* * *

THREE WEEKS EARLIER

"Captain's Log, Stardate 49630

We have completed our sensor scans near the Romulan Neutral Zone without being detected and are headed to base Epsilon for some rest and relaxation. End Log.

Captain John Burke sat on a couch near a window in his ready room. As John watched the stars fly by at warp his thoughts were turned back to Earth, a place he hadn't had the opportunity to visit in the two years ever since he and his wife had joined the top secret organization known as Section 31. Burke moved from the window to a bookcase at the other end of the room. As he reached it, he picked up a book titled A Tale of Two Cities and read the first line to himself. 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.' "How true that statement is." John said out loud, he placed the book on the shelf and exited his ready room.

The bridge was for the most part silent with an occasional beep here or there from a panel. as Burke looked around the room he could only feel pleased with his present command and crew. The Tampa was a fine vessel, an upgrade of the Galaxy-class. She had certain systems that most Starfleet ships didn't have, of course the Tampa wasn't Starfleet's responsibility.

"Captain, here is a current status report." A lieutenant said as he handed Burke a PADD.

Burke nodded his head, scanned over the information, and put the PADD aside. "Good, where is Commander Robbins?"

"She said she would be in Holodeck Four sir." The lieutenant replied. "I can call her up her if you'd like..."

Burke shook his head. "No, that's all right, I'll find her. You have the bridge." He headed for the aft turbolift and exited the bridge.

"Holodeck Four." Burke said to the computer, the low hum of the lift was calm and gentle like the low roar of a car engine. After a few seconds the lift stopped at deck six and Burke exited. As he rounded a corner that would lead to the Holodeck doors an ensign bumped into him.

"Oh, I'm sorry sir. I didn't see you." The young man replied.

Burke slightly waved his hand. "Understandable ensign, carry on."

The ensign nodded his head and with a big smile replied "Thanks sir." He went on his way down the corridor.

Burke felt a sharp pain in his arm, the ensign must have bumped him a little harder than he thought. 'Oh well', Burke thought to himself, 'It probably isn't anything too serious'. John walked towards the Holodeck doors expecting them to open, but they didn't. He walked over to the control panel, pressed a few buttons, and scratched his head. "Computer, why is there s Security Lockout on Holodeck Four?"

"Unknown."

Burke cocked his head back, "You don't know?"

"Affirmative."

"Who placed the lockout?"

"Captain John Burke." The Computer replied. To Burke it was an accusatory tone, but that wasn't possible because the Computer wasn't alive.

"When did I do that?" Burke asked to the air.

"Unknown."

John keyed in a few more sequences into the computer and read down the list of files. "Exercise Program, Starfleet Tactical Training, Tampa Bridge Simulation." The list continued for several more items, then Burke reached the active file. "Utopia Planitia Fleet Yards."

Burke activated his commbadge. "Burke to bridge."

"Bridge here, what can I do for you captain?" The lieutenant asked.

"Run a scan on Holodeck Four and report anything out of the ordinary."

"Aye sir." The lieutenant replied. Over the commlink various computer beeps could be heard as the lieutenant conducted the scans. After a few moments he spoke up. "Nothing sir, everything is within normal operating parameters."

Burke nodded "Thanks, Burke out." He turned his attention back to the panel. "Burke to Computer, disengage Security Lockout Authorization Burke Delta 841."

"Working. Security Lockout disengaged."

Burke walked back towards the Holodeck, activated the doors, and walked inside. As he looked around the structure he noted several computer display screens lit up with information about the Tampa on them. "Stacey?" Burke called out to his wife wondering what was going on. He continued to walk around the hologenerated room for a few more minutes not finding his wife, after a while he was running out of places to look. "Computer, deactivate program Robbins 4." The Computer made a few beeping sounds and the program shut down. The room changed from a complex structure to nothing, it was full of yellow gridlines on a black surface.

A woman was laying in the middle of the floor with blood dripping down from her throat. Burke walked closer to the body and recognized it as his wife. Her throat had clearly been slit by a knife, her chest was slowing raising indicating that she was still partially alive. Burke knelt down to his wife and put his hand under her neck. "Don't worry, we'll get you out of her." He activated his commbadge. "Burke to Sickbay, incoming wounded. Computer transport two directly to Sickbay." The computer did as ordered and Burke found himself in Sickbay next to an empty biobed. Burke looked to the doctor in shock. "Where is she?"

"Computer." Doctor Cobb said. "What happened?"

"The holographic representation of Commander Stacey Robbins could not be transferred to Sickbay using the transporters, her pattern began to destabilize. Her file has been deactivated and the Holodeck is shut down."

Burke looked to Cobb with a blank stare. "That was a hologram? What's going on here!" He paused trying not to get overly excited. "Computer, locate Commander Stacey Robbins."

"Commander Robbins is in her quarters."

Even more questions rose in Burke's mind.

"Burke to Robbins." He said almost slapping the comm unit off his chest.

"Robbins here, what's up dear?" The voice of a groggy female came through the channel, it sounded like he'd just woken her up.

"Is everything all right?"

"Yes, aside from the fact you just woke me up, everything is fine. Why do you ask?" Stacey responded in a confused and still unawake tone.

Burke hesitated, was he dreaming? Was he going mad? What was going on? "I thought you were in Holodeck Four."

"Oh that. I decided to turn in early tonight, is there a problem?"

Burke shook his head "Um, no. Sorry for bothering you. Goodnight." He replied completely confused at what was happening.

"Sir, what's this?" Cobb asked pointing to the biobed, on it was a yellow piece of paper. He picked it up and read it outloud. "This was only a warning, next time it will be real."

Burke took the note and read it in his mind. "What kind of sick person would do this?" He activated his commbadge "Bridge, all stop, go to yellow alert. I'll be up there shortly to explain."

"Aye sir."

Cobb looked to Burke's arm "Captain, when did you do that?" He picked up a medical tricorder and started to scan the Captain's upper arm.

"Oh, I ran into an ensign on accident while I was walking to the Holodeck."

"Was he carrying a knife?" Cobb asked clearly concerned about the captain's condition.

"What?" Burke asked looking down to his arm, he was bleeding from what appeared to be a knife wound. "How did it happen?"

Cobb walked over to a cart that carried several surgical supplies on it. "I don't know, hold still." He picked up a round medical device that was only a few inches in length and passed it over Burke's wound several times. A moment later the blood and wound were completely gone.

"Why would someone want to hurt her?" Burke thought to himself.

"I don't know captain, but I suggest you hold a meeting." Cobb said.

Burke looked to Cobb almost in surprise, for a moment he had forgotten that his Chief Medical Officer was also a full telepath. "Prying where you shouldn't doctor?"

Cobb lowered his head. "Of course not sir, I'm just concerned like you are."

Burke nodded. "Yes I understand. You're right." He looked to the computer interface in the ceiling, "Senior Officers report to the Conference Lounge immediately."

* * *

The Conference Lounge was quiet, four people were seated around a long oak table with a glass top awaiting their captain to join them. As Burke entered, the four senior officers looked to him. Each had a puzzled expression. Burke walked over to a chair at the head of the table and sat down. He looked to the four people sitting around the table, Lieutenant Shipley his Security Chief, Dr. Cobb the Chief Medical Officer, Commander King the Chief Engineer, and Lieutenant Commander Torkev his Chief of Operations. The only person who was missing was his wife, Commander Robbins. Burke was about to inquire where she was when the door opened. Robbins entered wearing a robe, she had been woken from her sleep for the second time.

"Rather informal today are we Stacey?" Burke asked with a smile.

Robbins gave him a look that said, don't mess with me buddy, you're sleeping on the couch tonight. "This had better be important, we're suppose to be on vacation."

Burke looked to his wife, the one he loved and cared about so much. He had information that was upsetting to himself and would be to her. How to begin. He stood from his chair and walked around the table a few times trying to concentrate. After a few moments passed, he nodded his head. "Yes, it is very important. There has been a threat made on your life Stacey."

Stacey laughed thinking her husband was joking. "Oh Yeah Right. You're just angry because I didn't show up in uniform."

Burke shook his head, walked over to Stacey and put the yellow note in front of her so she could read it. He then walked across the room away from the table and stared out a window, a practice he had developed in tight situations.

Robbins read the note, her smile dropped and she put her hands in her lap not knowing what to say. She was speechless. This was the first time anyone had threatened her in any way. Why would someone do this to her? As far as she could tell, she had no enemies of any kind. There was no reason for this to be happening, especially to her.

Burke turned from the window. "I pulled the security log from Deck Six." He walked over to a wall viewer near the head of the table. "Here it is."

The screen showed the Holodeck empty ready for use. The Utopia Planitia Yards program activated. A Holographic representation of Robbins was walking around the complex checking systems among other things. Outside a window, the went from the floor to the ceiling, was a Galaxy-class vessel as large as life. The Holographic Robbins continued to make modifications. Another character's program activated, it was a Klingon, he walked over to the unsuspecting Robbins and cut her throat allowing her to 'die' slowly. The Holographic Klingon left the note for Burke to find and his program deactivated, his job was done. The view switched to the corridor where Burke was walking up to the Holodeck, showed him bumping into the ensign and the words they exchanged, and Burke's 'fight' with the computer over accessing the Holodeck. The scene progressed onward until Burke attempted to beam his 'wife' and himself to sickbay..

Burke pressed a few buttons and closed the file, the screen turned back to a rotating schematic of the Tampa with the words Yellow Alert in large bold letters underneath. "That's all we have. As you can see, the commander is unharmed because it was only a Holographic projection that I tried to save." He picked up a PADD form the table. "I need answers people. As of now we are at a dead stop. I'm not moving this vessel in the event that whoever is doing this might have a chance to escape. Until further notice we are not going to have a vacation."

"Captain, is there any residue on the note?" Lieutenant Shipley asked. "We might be able to find it from that."

Burke shook his head. "No, the note has not been touched by anyone besides myself and Dr Cobb."

"And it was your authorization that secured the Holodeck sir." Shipley continued.

Burke stared into Shipley's eyes. "I know that you're thinking, but it's not me. I would never do that to my wife."

Shipley smiled. "I know, but I would like to attach a security detail to your wife." He pressed a few buttons on a keypad which brought up another display on the viewscreen. Several names appeared on the screen. As Shipley scanned through the list he chose two officers for the job. "All right, they're chosen. I'll have them report to you immediately."

"What about that ensign you bumped into captain?" Torkev asked without emotion. "Where is he now?"

Burke frowned "I couldn't find him. The computer is searching using some DNA found on my uniform from him, but that will take some time." He pressed a few more buttons on the PADD "Then there's the problem with the Holodeck, the computer kept running a different program when I ordered it to shut down."

"I'll look into it sir." Commander King said, "In the mean time I suggest we de-activate the shipwide hologrid."

Burke nodded. "Agreed. Computer, deactivate holo-emitters on every deck. Authorization Burke Delta 841." "All right, that soun..." He was cut off by the computer.

"Computer to Dr. Cobb."

"Cobb here." The doctor replied.

"Sample 471 Beta is no longer registering. The analysis procedure has ceased."

"Explain." Cobb continued.

"Sample 471 was a section of Holodeck DNA from a replica of Ensign Ronald. As the holo-emitters were deactivated the file closed."

"That was a hologram too?" Cobb said with a puzzled look on his face.

"Affirmative." Replied the computer.

"This is strange." Burke said more to himself than to his crew. "Computer, locate Ensign Ronald."

The computer beeped, "Ensign Ronald is not on the ship."

"When and how did he leave?" Burke said tightening his hand.

"Unknown."

Burke looked to his crew with a serious face. "Find me answers. Dismissed." At his order, the senior officers of the Tampa except for Burke and Stacey exited the room.

Stacey stood and walked over to her husband, she was afraid for her life and was wondering what would happen to her. "What's going on John?"

"I wish I knew." Burke replied. He put his hand in hers and held it tightly. "Don't worry, we'll get through this."

"We always do, don't we." Stacey said squeezing her husbands hand. She loved her husband and didn't want to have to say goodbye anytime soon. She wanted nature to take it's course with her life and having it end early wasn't an option.

"Bridge, open a secure channel to Outpost 652. Label it from us and urgent." Burke said.

"But sir, what about the regulation?" Shipley asked.

"Don't worry, I'll take full responsibility."

"Aye sir, it's going to take a few moments." Lieutenant Shipley answered.

"Understood, Burke out." John turned back to his wife. "Go back to bed, get some rest."

Robbins stood at attention. "Yes sir." She replied with a hint of sarcasm. 'You want me to try and get some rest?! Yeah, like that's going to happen.' She thought to herself as she exited the conference lounge.

Burke sat in silence, his life felt like it was starting to fall apart. Nothing was going exactly the way he wanted it, his crew had completed a job and they wanted to relax, but that wasn't happening. No, instead he had to hunt down a terrorist who enjoyed using Holograms to do his or her dirty work. 'What a pathetic low uneducated person.' Burke thought. The wall viewer activated, a channel was open to his senior officer. Burke stood from his chair and walked to the viewer. "Admiral Johnson, it's good to see you."

An older gentleman appeared on the screen. "This had better be a good reason, you know you're not suppose to contact this station over a visual commlink."

Burke nodded "Yes, I know, I was the one who wrote that rule remember? The line is secure don't worry about it. I'm afraid we have a situation aboard the Tampa sir."

* * *

Two hours later Burke exited the conference lounge, crossed the bridge, and walked into his ready room. He was tired from the meeting with Johnson, tired from the day, and just simply exhausted. As he entered his ready room he noticed that his wife was laying on his couch, she had managed to fall asleep. Burke walked over to a drawer and retrieved a blanket which he put over Stacey. The two security guards were in the room. They were following their orders a little too close for comfort. Burke approached one of them. "I don't think you need to be in visual range of my wife 24/7 lieutenant, you can wait outside."

The two security officers looked to each other shrugged and exited the ready room. As they were leaving, Burke could hear one of them say "I told you so." He had to smile at that, at least some people still had a sense of humor after joining Section 31.

As the doors closed, Burke walked over to his desk trying not to wake his wife. As he searched through several PADDs he could only think of what might happen to his wife. Burke continued to look through several more PADDs and stopped when he came across a specific one titled urgent. He activated the file and the screen to his desktop viewer turned on. The image of Ensign Ronald appeared on the screen with a smirk on his face.

"Captain Burke," the message started "I have had the opportunity to serve under you for a few years now, long enough to dig up what I needed to. You and this secret organization is over with as soon as I reach Earth. I'm headed there as you listen to this, what about you? Enjoy your stay in this sector."

Burke hit his fist against a control button on the viewer closing the file and then went for his commbadge.

"Burke to Bridge."

Nothing but static entered his commbadge.

"What?!" Stacey awoke to hear her husband trying to contact several officers on the Tampa.

"Burke to King."

Nothing.

"Burke to any senior officer, report." He said getting more worried by the minute.

Stacey still barely awake responded. "I'm here."

Burke looked over to his wife afraid. "Something's wrong. Come with me." John walked over to Stacey and helped her stand up. They walked towards the doors to the ready room that allowed them access to the bridge. As Burke approached the door he almost ran into it. The sensor didn't respond to his movements and the door remained closed. He took a step backward and tried again. Still nothing. "What is going on?"

Stacey looked up to the computer interface. "Computer, run a diagnostic on the ready room entry door."

The computer's voice came through in its usual cold monotone synthesized voice. "Entry door is working within normal parameters."

"Why won't it open then?"

Again the computer gave another cold response. "A Level 5 Security Field is in place and the doors have been sealed."

Stacey shot a glance over to Burke. "What?"

Burke shrugged his shoulders "Computer, deactivate the security field and the lockdown on the doors."

"Enter authorization code."

"Authorization Burke Delta 841." John replied.

"Access Denied. Those command codes are no longer valid."

Burke hit his fist against the door forgetting about the security field and was thrown across the room. He landed near his desk with a loud thud. Stacey ran over to see if he was all right, which he was. Just a little dazed. With her assistance, John stood from the floor and sat at his desk.

"Guess I won't do that again." Burke said not believing what he just did. He turned to his computer terminal again and accessed a few files. After reading through some information he reported his findings. "Life Support has been lowered on all decks except the ready room, the warp drive is off-line, weapons and shields are down, a warp shuttle is missing..."

"Any good news?" Stacey said while she adjusted her robe.

"We're all still alive, just the rest of the crew is knocked out." Burke said trying to smile. "Ronald mustn't be allowed to reach earth. If he does our careers are over."

"What?" Stacey asked confused.

Burke shook his head. "No time to explain." He pressed a few more buttons. "All right, I've revived the crew. They should be waking up soon."

* * *

"Burke to Shipley, report." Burke said, he had been trying to raise his security chief for over ten minutes.

Stacey stood next to the door with a tricorder in her hand, she was trying to figure out a way to get passed the security field without much luck.

"Burke to Shipley, report please." Burke said again.

The voice of a not so alert officer came through the line. "Shipley here sir. We were caught by surprise. We didn't even see it coming."

Burke nodded his head. "Understood. Listen, find a way to get us out of here and restore warp power. Also patch me in through to our people on Earth, I need to talk with Admiral Ryan."

"Aye sir." Shipley responded and the line went dead.

Stacey keyed in a few more sequences trying to drop the field, but still nothing was happening. "I'm having no luck." Then without warning, the field dropped and the doors opened.

Burke and Stacey exited the ready room. "Good work lieutenant."

Shipley looked up from a console. "It wasn't me sir."

Burke looked to Stacey who clearly didn't have a clue.

"Then who?"

A commline opened and the computer voice came through. Ronald was again showing off his technical abilities. "Don't worry about who let you out, just remember I'm on my way to earth and you're not."

Burke squeezed his hand making a fist. "All right people, I need this ship operational as soon as possible. Lieutenant, where's my subspace channel?!"

"I have Admiral Ryan on the screen now sir."

Burke looked towards the viewer. "Admiral Ryan, we have another problem."

Ryan nodded his head. "Yes I know. Your ensign has informed me of the situation." He crossed his arms across his chest. "Captain, you have a new assignment. You are ordered to intercept that vessel at all costs, you're the only ship we have in range."

Burke nodded. "Understood."

Shipley looked to the viewscreen. "Excuse me sir, if I may."

Ryan nodded his head. "Yes, what is it lieutenant?"

"Why worry about one ensign?" Shipley said. "There have been threats made against us before, and to my knowledge nothing ever happened because of those accusations. I don't see him as a threat."

"Yes, but you don't know what information he has lieutenant. I do." Ryan replied. "He must be stopped at all costs. There will be no argument about it, you're the closest vessel. Get it done." The commlink closed shortly after Ryan had finished his sentence.

"We have our orders." Burke said. "We have records that Ronald stole a warp shuttle, they have a limitation of Warp Seven, we still have time." John tapped his communicator. "Engineering, I need those warp engines." He then turned to Shipley. "Get weapons and shields on-line," and then Burke turned to his wife. "And go get a uniform on."

The crew of the Tampa went to work, they had a job to do.

1/2 HOUR LATER

Burke was sitting at a science station on the main bridge, he hadn't left his post for a while now. John was too busy checking systems making sure everything, that wasn't damaged, was in order. As he scanned through the files, he kept thinking about two things, his wife's safety and an ensign that had information. A file began to flash on the screen getting Burke's attention. He pressed a few buttons and activated the file, as soon as he did so there was a minor power fluctuation.

"Hologrid active" the computer stated.

Butke stared at the screen. "Computer, de-activate hologrid." He said not wanting any more holographic tragedies.

"Unable to comply."

A warning beep came from the panel. "Warning, antimatter containment failure in two minutes."

Burke hit his commbadge. "Burke to Engineering, report."

Silence.

"Burke to Engineering."

More Silence.

Burke stood from the console, pulled out his phaser and headed towards an aft turbolift. "Commander Robbins, you have the bridge. I'll be right back."

* * *

Engineering was quiet, too quiet. As the turbolift reached it's destination, Burke exited and walked towards the warp core. It wasn't an easy trip, he had to walk over lifeless bodies. John kneeled down next to one of the bodies and searched for a pulse, no luck, they were all dead. He continued to make his way over to the warp core and pressed a few buttons on a panel checking the systems. There was something that didn't feel right.

"Computer, run diagnostic on warp core."

"Working." The computer beeped and then reported. "Warp core is within normal limits."

"Why was there a warning earlier?"

The computer beeped again. "No warning is on record."

Burke tapped his comm unit. "Commander Robbins, please report to Engineering."

"Aye sir." Stacey said through the channel.

Burke continued to look around the room noting whose bodies were on the deck. At last he came to the lifeless body of his Chief Engineer, Commander King. The body had type three phaser blasts, consistant with a Starfleet Phaser.

Burke felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned to see his wife. "As you can see, everyone's dead."

Stacey nodded. "Maybe we should activate the holographic engineering crew."

Burke shook his head. "I don't trust any hologram right now." He paused. "Computer, what is the status of the safties?"

"Holodeck Safties are engaged."

"How did they die?" Stacey asked. She walked over to a console in the late Chief Engineer's office and pulled up a security log.

Burke's face was lifeless. "Were they killed by holograms?"

Stacey shook her head "No. It appears that Ronald had a few allies on the ship."

"When I get a hold of Ronald, he's in deep trouble." Burke said, "I swear my life on it." He put his phaser back in its holster. "You have a Level Eight degree in Engineering, I want these systems on-line at all costs."

Stacey nodded. "Understood." She then started to work on the Warp Drive Systems when she noticed something. "Captain, the systems are up and running."

Burke looked to her in disbelief "Excuse me? I knew you were good, but..."

"I didn't do it, there hasn't been a problem with them." Stacey said. "We've been receiving false sensor images on the bridge."

Out of no where the ship rocked from violent weapons fire. Burke was knocked to the floor. As he stood up he called the bridge. "Report!"

The voice of his Operations officer came through the line. "Captain, we're being attacked by a Federation Warp Shuttle. It's Ronald."

The ship continued to receive more hits. "Stay here." Burke said to his wife. "Computer, activate a site to site transport. Beam me to the bridge." He de-materialized from Engineering.

As Burke re-materialized he went directly for his chair. "Open a channel." He paused waiting for the channel to open. "Ensign Ronald, this is Captain Burke. I order you to stand down."

No response. The warp shuttle continued to fire full spread on the Tampa.

"Return fire." Burke said.

"I can't sir, weapons systems are still off-line." Lieutenant Shipley yelled over the alert klaxon. He pressed a few buttons, "The backups are out as well. Captain, we have nothing."

Burke nodded. "Suggestions."

"I could take a warp shuttle and engage in closer combat." Shipley said.

"Do it." At Burke's command, Lieutenant Shipley exited the bridge and headed for the main shuttlebay. John stood from his command chair, hopped the horse shoe tactical station and tried to get power back on-line. After a few minutes, John saw a warp shuttle engage Ensign Ronald's vessel. The two vessels exchanged phaser fire allowing the Tampa a breath of 'fresh' air away from combat. The phaser fight lasted for a few minutes when Lieutenant Shipley lost and his vessel was destroyed.

'He's coming back'. Burke thought to himself.

A channel opened and once again the computer voice piped through. "Captain, stand down. You're dead in the water. I order you to stand down."

Burke tried to buy his ship some time. "Ronald, what are you still doing here? I thought you left for Earth."

"I lied." Ronald said "I've been monitoring your ships communicatinos finding the information I need, and now that I have that information, the Tampa will be destroyed."

The ship continued to rock more violently, after a few more minutes the computer belted out a warning. "Life Support destroyed on all decks of Saucer Section except Deck One." Another beep. "Warning, Warp Core Microfracture. Warp Core will breech in three minutes."

"Burke to Robbins, report."

Stacey's voice came in, she was mad. "I can't do anything, I can't save her. I suggest evacuation."

Burke nodded. "Understood." He tapped a panel, opening a shipwide communication link. "Burke to all hands, abandon ship. I repeat, abandon ship." More weapons were fired at the vessel, several panels exploded killing four other bridge officers, the only one alive on the bridge was himself. He looked around, there was no place for him to go, it appeared that he would have to die with his vessel. John walked down to his command chair and sat down. A bridge lighting panel fell and hit John in the head, knocking him unconscious.

* * *

John awoke to find himself aboard an escape pod with his wife. "What happened?" Burke said as he sat up. "How did I get here?"

Stacey put a cold cloth to her husband's head. "I transported you off the bridge." She paused, it was time to tell the distressing news. "The Tampa's gone."

"Survivors?"

Stacey shook her head. "Only us. Several escape pods were ejected from the Stardrive Section, but once Ronald saw those he destroyed them." She paused, "The Tampa exploded a half hour ago. We're adrift."

"How did we escape the explosion?" Burke asked trying to ignore a pounding headache.

"Ronald rigged a warp tow and moved us to a point just past the point of being destroyed with the ship." She picked up a PADD which had sensor readings on it. "After he dropped us out of warp, he engaged his engines towards Earth."

Burke scanned through the information, at the end was a file. He activated the file and Ronald's voice came through the escape pods sound system. "Ah Captain Burke I see you survived the explosion, that's too bad. Oh well, you win some you lose some eh sir? I'm headed for Earth this time it's for real. I've accomplished part one of my mission, and when part two is complete your life in Section 31 and the organization itself is over. You can try and stop me, but you won't get here in time. It was nice knowing you captain."

* * *

Captain's Log, Stardate 49634.1

Commander Robbins and myself have arrived in Earth orbit after being adrift in an escape pod for I don't know how long. We were able to find some eddys in space that helped us make the trip quicker. We cut our time down by five days. But there was still enough time for Ronald to get back three days before we did. He's probably talked to command by now and our career's are over.

Burke watched out the window of the escape pod. A small vessel came into view. "This is the Starfleet Vessel Orion to the unidentified escape pod. Please state your reason for Earth orbit."

Robbins looked to Burke and pointed a finger at him and then to her asking who should respond. Burke pointed back to his wife with a smile. She gave a disgusted look back at her husband. Usually they didn't come across this situation, they were gone before Starfleet could track them. "Runabout Orion, this is Commander Stacey Robbins we request you tractor us back to the moon, we..."

"I can't do that commander." The voice replied. "I just received reports that I am to escort you to Starbase Alpha One. You are under arrest."

* * *

THREE WEEKS LATER

"And that's what happened admiral." Burke said as he finished his statement several meters under Earth's crust in a Section 31 base.

Admiral James looked to Burke and Robbins. "Is that all?"

Burke and Robbins nodded.

"All right." Admiral Clayton said. "Ronald is still out there. He reported his findings to Starfleet Intelligence, as he claimed he would, we are still waiting to hear what they have to say."

"And then there's the problem with a death threat on Commander Robbins." Admiral James said.

"That threat is still active admiral." Burke said. "There are just too many things to worry about sir."

"I agree captain. We need to find Ronald and eliminate any possibility of them finding out more about us. For now all they have is a name of a possible secret organization. Find him." James continued. "Dismissed."

"Yes sir." Burke said. He activated his commbadge. "Burke to Omega 3 Computer."

"Computer active."

"Beam two back to the surface." Burke and his wife de-materialized from the room leaving the two admirals alone to talk.

"Was that wise to have them complete their mission?" Clayton asked. "I can have a team apprehend Ronald in less than a day."

"How else can we ensure their loyalty?" James replied. "Don't worry, they'll be fine. Just don't let Starfleet find out and we're home free."

Epilogue

Captain's Log, Stardate 49640
Recorded under security lockout Omega."

Starfleet let us off without a hitch, I suppose it's good to have friends in the chain of command... Actually the Federation President himself pardoned us from all actions relating to the loss of the Tampa. Commander Robbins and myself have a meeting with Admiral James, who claims to be the head of Starfleet Security.

On a happier note, Ensign Ronald has been apprehended. No one believed his accusations against the Rockledge Division of Section 31, so we are safe for now.

The End