

Welcome Aboard

Captain Burke stepped off the shuttle towards a small platform. He looked around the shuttlebay of his new command, a Galaxy-Class vessel. Burke remembered the day that Starfleet contacted him offering the newly designated ship and project to him. He remembered the last vessel named Fresno, an Intrepid-class that went down in flames. Starfleet had cleared his officers of all charges placed against them declaring they did everything under their power to stop the Fresno from being destroyed. After the trial, an admiral approached John and offered him another vessel.

Burke recalled the expression on the admiral's face. It wasn't that of complete trust, considering how many vessels John had lost over the years and the circumstances under each loss. He would have to prove to Starfleet that he would be up to the task.

Shuttlebay Two was full of officers in dress uniform waiting for Burke to take command. Some of them had been with him aboard his last vessel, there were too many new faces that he needed to get to know. Burke expected their loyalty. Ever since he left Section 31, Burke found it took time to grow accustomed to the way Starfleet wanted things done. But over the years, he was able to fall back into the routine of being a regular Starfleet officer again.

Too-wee-ooo. An ensign blew a small whistle. The room stood at attention.

Burke picked up a PADD and read from it. "To Captain John Burke. You are hereby requested and required to take command of Project Alpha One as of this date. The newly designated starship U.S.S. Fresno NX-14785 is cleared for this project. It is recommended that you use the Fresno for your research. Signed Vice-Admiral Alynna Nechayev, Starfleet Command."

Burke walked up to his senior officers. "Report."

Commander R'Jor looked to her husband. "The Fresno is ready for your inspection sir."

Burke looked to Commander Justan, "Even the engine room?"

Commander Justan smiled, "Yes sir."

Burke smiled back, "Dismissed." At his command his officers exited the shuttlebay leaving him alone. Burke looked around once more, it didn't feel like home yet. It would take time for the vessel to become familiar. Burke exited the bay to explore his new vessel.

Captain's Log, Stardate 53124.6:

I hereby take command of the newly commissioned Project Alpha One along with the likewise newly commissioned Galaxy-Class Vessel U.S.S. Fresno NX-14785. At first Starfleet was going to give the Fresno another registry number. After a brief talk that lasted for three days with the head of Starfleet, I managed to convince them to keep the name and registry number the same as the last vessel I commanded.

All of my Senior Officers from the former Starship Fresno have transferred over to this vessel with me. I am grateful that each of them took the opportunity to continue to serve under my leadership.

I only hope this Fresno will not meet her sister's fate.

The inspection didn't last long. In fact it went by rather quickly for the captain. He was sitting in his ready room looking over schematics for the Fresno, getting to know the vessel better. It was a tradition of his ever since his first command. Burke got lost on his first vessel and decided not to let it happen again.

"Bridge to Burke." His first officer's voice came though the commline.

Burke tapped his commbadge. "Go ahead."

"Engineering is reporting minor power fluctuations in the main impulse drive." R'Jor said, "I thought you might want to be informed."

Burke nodded, "Understood. Burke out." The impulse drive, he thought. Guess this ship's not perfect after all. Burke exited the ready room.

The Fresno's Engineering Section was full of activity. As Burke entered the section, several engineering crew members from McKinley station came from another direction.

"Report." Burke said.

Commander Justan approached his commanding officer. "The main impulse drive is having complications. I wanted you to know before we started running Speed tests." He paused, "She's not quite space worthy, yet."

Burke sighed, "How much time will it take you to complete your repairs?"

Justan walked towards the master situation monitor and called up a few readings. "About an hour. These guys from McKinley will help out a lot."

Burke nodded, "Keep me informed." He exited the section and headed towards the nearest turbolift. This was not the way he wanted this command to begin. You'd think that after all of their years in service, McKinley station would have been able to detect this problem and prevented it.

The turbolift stopped on deck 12. Burke stepped out of the lift and walked down a corridor. As he was walking, a young ensign bumped into him.

"I'm sorry sir." The ensign said, "I should have watched where I was going."

Burke smiled, "It's all right, ensign. Just be more careful." Burke didn't recognize the officer, probably stright from the academy he thought.

"Computer to Captain Burke."

Burke tapped his commbadge, "Go ahead."

"Incoming transmission from Starfleet Command"

Burke sighed, what did Starfleet want now? "Transfer it to the holo-buffers, I'll take it in Holodeck 3."

The computer beeped, "Transfer complete."

Burke walked down the hallway until he reached the holodeck. The doors opened allowing him to enter. A holographic projection of a captain was standing before him.

"John, good to see you again." The officer said.

"Captain Saunders, what an unexpected surprise." Burke responded.

Saunders nodded, "It has been too long." He paused, "I know Starfleet assigned you to what was termed Project Alpha One, but I'm dismissing those orders. The Fresno is on active duty. Your first..."

"Excuse me captain, but under what authority do you do this?"

Saunders smiled, "Sloan contacted me personally."

Burke was astonished, he hadn't received orders from Section 31 for almost four years. "Why didn't you warn me to go secure?" He said, "Computer, secure this channel and seal the doors. Make no record of this conversation, authorization Burke Lambda 4."

The computer beeped in response "Acknowledged."

Saunders continued to smile. "Don't worry about it captain, I've taken care of it, there have been a few improvements in Section 31 technology since you were last with us." He said, "I've encoded your orders and are waiting for your eyes only in your quarters. Brief your senior staff but no one else."

Burke nodded, "Understood."

"Any questions?" Saunders asked.

Burke stopped to think. "Yes. If Sloan knew my status in the Rockledge Division of Section 31 would be reactivated, why give me such a large ship? Last time, it didn't work out that great..."

"You'll see. Saunders out." The holographic image disappeared.

Burke exited the holodeck and headed towards a turbolift that would take him to his quarters.

Captain Burke was seated at the head of a conference table in the Fresno's conference lounge. Around the table were his senior officers. As Burke looked to them, he could feel their loyalty to him and the Federation. He wondered how they would respond to working for Section 31. Burke's staff knew about Section 31, but they didn't know how deep he had been involved in the past. None of his officers had served with him during his days of Section 31, but soon they would be.

Burke looked to his officers. "What I am about to say might offend some of you. We've been together for a little over a year now, and I feel as though I can trust you to do the right thing." He picked up a glass of water from the table and took a drink. "If any of you feel you might be offended, please leave the room now and you will be reassigned to another vessel."

Burke waited for a few seconds to see how they would respond. He watched as his officers exchanged looks of confusion, but no one made any attempt to stand from their chair.

"Very well" Burke continued, "Computer. Run program Burke 471 Authorization Burke Lambda 4."

"Doors sealed." The computer said.

Burke's senior officers continued to exchange uncertain looks at each other.

Burke looked at the glass of water in front of him, it was half full in his eyes. It was possible that his crew would think otherwise. Burke passed out PADDs to his officers. "I am offering you positions with Section 31, read over these, ask any questions you have."

One by one his officers took the PADDs and started to read through them. It was a short briefing on Section 31, the general idea behind the organization. Burke watched as their mouths hung open in disbelief. It was the normal reaction to learning about Section 31 for the first time.

Ensign Tompson broke the silence. "So it is true..."

"Yes ensign." Burke said. "I need to know how you all feel about this. Under normal circumstances, each of you would have been tested to see if you're ready for Section 31, but these are not normal circumstances." He looked around the table to his officers.

Doctor Taylor continued to read through the information. Commander Justan just smiled, he didn't care one way or the other. He would follow Captain Burke, and that was that. "I'm with you sir."

Commander Dougless looked to Burke probing his thoughts. "This is for real?" He asked.

"Yes."

Dougless sighed, "I always thought you were hiding something from me sir."

Burke nodded, "It wasn't easy to avoid your telepathic powers." Burke said to the Betazoid, "But my years in Section 31 taught me discipline."

Dougless looked to the PADD once more, "I'm in."

After that the other senior officers fell into line, except for Ensign Tompson who still had a few more questions up her sleeve.

"Captain." She began.

Burke looked to the end of the table where Tompson was seated, "Yes ensign?"

"It's not logical sir." Tompson said, "I mean, how many members of the crew know about this?"

Burke pointed around the room, "Just us ensign."

"You won't be able to keep it secret sir, from what I've heard Section 31 is pretty... unorthodox compared to Federation standards."

"And how do you know that ensign?" Burke asked, tapping a few fingers on the table.

"I've heard things sir." She said.

Burke didn't want to have to clear her memory and send her to another post, but he would if necessary. "I need an answer ensign, now."

Julie looked at the report, picked a sentence and read it aloud for all to hear. "Starfleet Command doesn't acknowledge or deny the existence of Section 31. What's that suppose to mean?"

Burke pointed to the PADD, "I think it's all self explanatory ensign, I need an answer."

Tompson read over the report a few more times and then finally nodded, "All right, I'm in." What would it hurt? She had been with these officers for a little while and learned to trust them. One question did stick in her mind though. "Captain, why would we have such a large vessel?"

"That's the question I had too ensign." Burke said, "Once our mission's complete we get a smaller vessel a fourth the size and a different class. This vessel is specified for this mission only." He said.

"What is our mission?" Dobson, the Fresno's chief of security asked.

Burke stood from his chair and walked to a wall viewer at the end of the room. As he activated the viewer, several maps appeared. "We are to investigate a possible Dominion threat near the Neutral Zone." He said, "We've received reports that a Jem'Hadar Warship has crossed the zone into Federation territory."

Taylor looked to Burke with shock. "The Jem'Hadar? There shouldn't be any Dominion vessels in the Neutral Zone, let alone the Alpha Quadrant."

Burke nodded, "Yes I know. The war has been over for a little over a year. If it is a Dominion vessel, we are to either escort it back to the Gamma Quadrant, or destroy it." Burke looked to Commander Justan, "Where are we at with the impulse drive?"

Justan nodded, "It checks out sir. We're ready to go."

Burke looked to his officers "You are not to disclose this information to any of the crew, I've been assured that they will follow my orders without question.

Commander R'Jor, the first officer, looked to her husband. "And what if they don't?"

"Then they will be dealt with. Dismissed."

The other senior officers stood from their chairs and started to leave the room. Burke walked over to Tompson "Ensign, a moment please."

Julie stopped in her tracks. "Yes sir?" She turned to face the captain.

Burke looked to the ensign, there was more to her past than she knew. Burke had only received word of it before the briefing when he got the orders. "Ensign, what do you remember before we met in that hospital room at Starfleet Medical?"

Julie shook her head, "I still don't recall the shuttle accident, if that's what you mean." She said.

Burke nodded. She had been trying to remember the accident ever since he told her that day in the hospital room. He wasn't sure how she would respond to the information he was about to give her. "Ensign, there's something you don't know." Burke began, "You weren't in a shuttle accident. Your first assignment was aboard a Section 31 vessel, the Fearless."

Julie sat down in a nearby chair. "What?"

Burke picked up a PADD from the table and handed it to the ensign. "Here are the full details, if you care to take a look."

Tompson accepted the PADD and looked through it. "They erased my memories?!"

Burke nodded, "Yes. When I met you, there were too many unanswered questions. I guess the admirals did their best to cover up what really happened, but didn't do that great of a job. It took me a while, but I was able to find out the truth."

"Why are you telling me this?"

Burke had asked himself that question before and could only come up with one conclusion. "I wouldn't be a good commanding officer by keeping anything else from my crew. My involvement with Section 31 was one thing, but when it comes to the personal lives of my Senior Officers, that's a different story, at least to me."

Tompson handed the PADD back to Burke, "What do you expect of me?"

"To perform your duties as you always have." Burke said, "Set a course for the Neutral Zone and engage at Maximum Warp."

Tompson nodded, "Aye sir." They exited the conference lounge.

Burke was pleased his officers accepted their new positions. He didn't want to dismiss any of them from their duties aboard his vessel. Of course that was putting it mildly. If his crew had decided not to join him, they too would have had memories erased as well as a new assignment in ore processing on the other side of the Federation.

As Burke entered the Bridge, he took a long look around. It was typical of a Galaxy-Class vessel. The horseshoe-like tactical station, the aft duty stations, and the forward stations Conn, and Ops. He walked down the ramp and sat in his command chair. It had been a while since John had been aboard a Galaxy-Class vessel, he had grown use to smaller ships half the size and a bit more maneuverable, but this would do.

Three hours later, the Fresno dropped out of warp. Burke was still sitting in his command chair on the main bridge, he hadn't moved at all during the entire trip. Burke looked to Commander R'Jor, "Let's see what we've got."

R'Jor nodded, "Commander Dougless, run long range scans of the area, report anything out of the ordinary."

Dougless, at the operations console, nodded, "Aye." After a few minutes passed, the vessel went to red alert.

Burke stood from his chair, "Report."

"A Romulan Warbird is decloaking directly in our path." Commander Dobson, who was standing at tactical, reported. "They are hailing."

"On screen." Burke ordered.

The face of a Romulan commander appeared on the screen. He didn't look too pleased to see the Fresno so close to his home.

Burke spoke first, "Romulan vessel, I am Captain Burke in command of the Federation Starship Fresno, why have you crossed over into our territory?"

The Romulan's stare was blank. "Captain Burke, it is you who have violated our territory. We know about your patrol vessel from the Dominion, it will not be tolerated!"

R'Jor stood from her chair and approached the main viewer, "Our patrol vessel?" She asked in a low tone.

Burke looked to Dougless as if to ask him to probe the Romulan's thoughts. The officer looked back and nodded as if to say the Romulan believed what he was saying. "We have reports that the vessel was crossing the Neutral Zone from your space into ours." Burke responded, "It is not under our control."

The Romulan laughed, "Come now captain, you must do better than that. Do you honestly want me to believe that you didn't have anything to do with those attacks on our outpost earlier this year?"

Burke nodded his head, "We are the first Federation Starship to have entered this region of space since the war with the Dominion ended. I promise you, we have no plans on attacking your territory." He hoped the Romulan would believe him, for it was the truth; but Burke didn't think that would happen.

As the Romulan Commander was about to continue with another accusation, he was thrown across the deck of his vessel. The commlink closed. Burke watched with disbelief, "Report."

"A Jem'Hadar vessel just fired on the warbird sir." Dobson said.

R'Jor walked back to her chair and accessed the sensor logs. It was true, the Jem'Hadar came out of no where. "The Romulans are in retreat back to their own territory." She said, "They probably think the Jem'Hadar came to our aid."

Burke walked back to his chair and sat down, "Ensign Tompson, evasive maneuvers pattern Delta."

"Aye."

Captain Burke leaned forward in his chair as the Fresno was hit by a weapons blast. R'Jor checked her console, "Aft shields down to 95 percent."

"Return fire." Burke said, "Target their weapons platform." As Burke continued to issue orders, he opened a communications channel "Dominion vessel, this is Captain Burke of the Federation Starship Fresno, you will state your reasons for being in the Alpha Quadrant. I order you to stand down."

The Jem'Hadar fired again. "Life support failing on deck thirteen," R'Jor said, "Nonessential systems affected as well. Looks like McKinley needed to run another systems check..."

"Helm, move us to coordinates 153 mark 4. Tactical, keep firing on their weapons array." Burke ordered. "Dougless, keep trying to open a channel."

After another minute or two, the Jem'Hadar's weapons array finally went down. They were defenseless, for the moment.

"They are hailing us." Dougless said, "They claim we are in violation of their territory."

Burke stood from his command chair. "Open a channel."

The viewscreen flickered as a Jem'Hadar warrior appeared. "I am First Dutakiklan, you are in Dominion held space." He stared at Burke straight in the eyes. The warrior meant business.

Burke stared back at his new opponent. There was no reason for a Jem'Hadar vessel to be at the Fresno's location. Was the Dominion trying to take over the Alpha Quadrant again? "The war is over," Burke said "You have no claim on this territory, not anymore." He paused, "Let me speak to your Vorta."

"He's dead." The Jem'Hadar replied.

Burke sighed, why do they always have to be dead? "What are you doing in this region of space?" He walked closer to the main viewer hoping to show the Jem'Hadar that he wasn't afraid of him. Burke wanted to show as much confidence in his vessel and crew as he could, which would be an easy task.

"You have violated Dominion held space, and must be destroyed." The commlink closed.

Burke turned to face his tactical officer, "Very well. They want a fight, they've got one." With their weapons array down, it shouldn't be too difficult to destroy them.

Dobson nodded, "Aye." He was about to fire again, but noticed something out of the ordinary. "Captain, I just ran a scan on that vessel. There are several Romulan citizens aboard, as well as Humans, Bajorans, Klingons..." The list continued on with a dozen more species.

Burke nodded, "Now we know why we have a big ship." He said sarcastically. The Fresno was clearly meant to transport the survivors from the Jem'Hadar's grasp. "What is the status of their weapons array, how long will it take them to repair it?"

"About an hour." Dobson replied.

Burke tapped his commbadge, "Burke to Taylor."

The doctor's voice came through the line, "Taylor here."

"Doctor, in an hour or less we will be swamped with prisoners of a dozen different species. I want blood screenings run on all of them. After they're cleared, have someone from your staff find quarters for all of them."

"Understood, Taylor out."

Burke looked around the bridge, "Burke to transporter room six."

"Transporter room here."

"As you may not know, there is a Jem'Hadar vessel off our port bow filled with people we need to rescue. What kind of transporter lock can you get on them?" Burke asked.

The transporter chief paused for what seemed the longest time. "There appear to be forcefields in place where the prisoners are being kept" he said, "right now I can't get anything. You'd need to bring down the fields."

Burke nodded, "Understood, Burke out." He tapped his commbadge again, "Burke to engineering, report."

Down in Main Engineering, commander Justan was monitoring the engines. "Justan here." He answered to the captain's call.

"What is the engine status?" Burke asked.

"Funny you should ask." Justan replied, "I had to take the engines off-line. The main impulse drive started acting up again, and flooded the main nacells with some sort of radiation."

"How's that possible?"

Justan shrugged his shoulders, "I'm not sure sir. I was surprised myself. It's going to take at least a half hour to correct the problem."

"Understood, keep me informed, Burke out."

Burke walked up to the ops station. "Commander, what level of force fields are they using?"

Dougless ran a quick sensor scan, "Level five."

Burke paced around, "What kind of defense do we have against a level five field?"

Dobson looked up from his tactical station. "I could do it with a type four phaser."

Burke hesitated, "You would have to be in close contact with the field." He said.

Dobson nodded, "Right next to it actually." He paused, "I'm ready sir."

Tompson, out of concern, stood from her chair, "You can't let him go alone sir."

Burke pointed to the helm, "Take your station ensign. It's no time to be a hero." At his command the ensign sat back down.

R'Jor stood, "I'll go with him captain."

Burke nodded, "If you don't get it down within a half hour, get back here." He said, "And be safe."

R'Jor smiled, "Of course." She looked to Dobson, "Let's go."

The two officers exited the bridge.

Dobson and R'Jor materialized aboard the Jem'Hadar vessel. They could hear screams down the corridor. The Jem'Hadar were probably torturing their prisoners.

As the two officers turned a corner, they ran into a Jem'Hadar. R'Jor fired her phaser and watched as the warrior incinerated before her eyes. "There might be others." She said.

Dobson nodded, "Agreed."

They walked a little further until they found one of the holding cells. It was full of Romulans. A man approached the two officers, "Who are you?"

R'Jor pulled out a phaser, "A friend. Stand back." The Romulans did as she ordered. R'Jor fired the phaser, after two minutes the field went down.

"We need to find the other." Dobson said, he pulled out a tricorder. "This way."

R'Jor tapped her commbadge, "R'Jor to Fresno, we have one field down. You can start beaming, R'Jor out."

After another few feet, several Jem'Hadar officers turned the corner, Dobson and R'Jor were trapped. The Jem'Hadar didn't fire, they just stared at the officers.

R'Jor looked to one of the guards. He was staring at her as if he was scrutinizing her appearance. What was he so interested in? R'Jor raised her weapon, ready to fire.

The Jem'Hadar officer spoke, "You are here to free them?"

R'Jor nodded, "Yes."

"Let her through." He said to his men. Dobson and R'Jor exchanged looks, why were they doing this? R'Jor watched as the Jem'Hadar officers lowered their weapons and allowed room for Dobson and R'Jor to pass.

Dobson looked to the officer, "Why?"

The Jem'Hadar showed no look of concern for them. "The first is wrong in staying in this quadrant." He said, "That is all you need to know." The Jem'Hadar paused, "Whatever you do, do it quickly."

Dobson and R'Jor continued with their task of freeing the prisoners and soon were back aboard the Fresno.

As R'Jor entered the bridge, Burke looked to her. "Good work commander." He said, "How did you do it without detection?"

R'Jor sat down in her chair, "We had help sir." She was about to explain what happened when a comm channel opened. On the viewscreen was the face of the Jem'Hadar officer who had helped the away team.

"Captain Burke." The officer said, "On behalf of my vessel, I offer an appology." He said, "The actions of the First were wrong." It was difficult for him to admit that the Dominion were wrong, but he had to.

Burke nodded, "We'll give you an escort back to the Gamma Quadrant."

The Jem'Hadar shook his head, "That won't be necessary." The commlink closed. On the viewscreen, the Jem'Hadar vessel exploded.

"Report!" Burke said.

Dougless scanned his console. "I'm reading a Federation signature from what appears to be a photon bomb." He said.

Burke looked to R'Jor who shook her head. "It wasn't us sir."

The forward turbolift doors opened. "No it wasn't." A man said as he walked out. "Captain, if we could talk in private."

Burke nodded, "You have the bridge commander." He pointed to the ready room. Both men left the bridge.

Tompson looked to Dougless, "I wonder what that was all about."

Dougless shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know."

In the captain's ready room, Burke sat down at his desk. "What do you want Sloan?" He asked.

Sloan only smiled, "You've already done what I wanted captain. You and your senior officers have proved themselves." He said, "Welcome aboard Section 31, you are assigned to the Rockledge Division."

Burke shook his head, "It was a test. I should have known."

Sloan nodded, "We have been watching your senior staff ever since you were first together. And after we terminated the Intrepid Alpha project and your other Fresno, we continued to watch." He paused, "You and your officers passed with flying colors captain."

"Was there ever a real threat to the Federation?" Burke asked, "Or was all of this fake as well?"

"Oh there was a threat captain, we didn't have time to plan a holographic mission for your crew." Sloan said, "The only thing fake were those officers aboard the Jem'Hadar vessel."

Burke was confused, "What?"

Sloan smiled, "The vessel was real, but the Jem'Hadar were other possible Section 31 operatives undergoing their testing." He said.

Burke hesitated, "You killed them?"

Sloan nodded, "Let's just say they failed the test." He walked over to the desk, "Your new vessel is outside." Sloan said pointing to the window. "I expect you to take command within the hour."

Burke was still a little confused, but allowed it to go for the time being. "What about the prisoners?"

Sloan smiled again, "I'll take care of them." He said, "Goodbye captain, see you around." Sloan activated a device on his uniform and transported away from the Fresno.

Burke stood from his chair and exited the ready room. As he entered the Bridge, another man wearing the rank of captain approached him. "Captain Burke?" He said.

Burke nodded. "Yes."

The two men shook hands, "I'm Captain Donaldson. I've come to take command of this vessel."

Burke nodded, "Understood. Computer, recognize Burke Alpha Two clearance."

"Recognized." The Computer said.

"Transfer command of the Fresno to Captain Donaldson."

The computer beeped in response, "U.S.S. Fresno now under command of Captain Richard Donaldson."

Donaldson tapped his commbadge "Computer recognize Donaldson Alpha Two Clearance."

Again the computer beeped, "Delete the following crew records from all Starfleet files. Captain John Burke, Commander Kim R'Jor, Lt. Commander Mike Dobson, Lt. Commander Steven Dougless, Lt. Commander Mark Justan, Commander Kelley Taylor, and Ensign Julie Tompson. Also, delete the Fresno from all Starfleet records and change this vessels designation to Sacramento Registry Number NCC 94875."

"Enter authorization code."

"Authorization Donaldson Delta Six." Donaldson said, "There are to be no records of any of these officers."

"Acknowledged. This is the Galaxy-Class vessel U.S.S. Sacramento under the command of Captain Richard Donaldson."

Burke tapped his commbadge, "Senior officers report to transporter room six." He looked to Donaldson, "Safe travel captain."

Donaldson smiled, "You too captain."

Captain Burke sat in his ready room aboard his new ship. Sloan had been right in his orders, his new vessel was smaller than a Galaxy-Class ship, a lot smaller. He looked forward to getting to know what she was capable of.

Captain's Log, Supplemental:

I am back where I belong. I have just taken command of the U.S.S. Fresno, again. This vessel is a Fresno-Class starship, newly constructed. I can only hope that we will be able to protect the Federation as well as those that have come before us. End Log.

The End

Space. Endless, simply endless. These are the adventures of the U.S.S. Fresno under the command of Section 31, Rockledge Division in an effort to protect the Federation at all costs. So Federation Citizens may continue to live in peace and harmony.