

“FALLEN HEROES”

by Alex Lampe

PART I - CHAPTER I

Captain Duvivier sits in his ready room onboard his ship, the *USS Kennedy*, and stares at the small monitor on top of his desk. Captain Mathieu Duvivier is a not-too-tall man in his late thirties. His curly brown hair with few grey streaks accents his soft facial features. The Captain often sports a friendly smile, and always tries to make his crew feel comfortable around him. Don't, however, mistake his friendliness for a sign of weakness. He has proven time and again that he's a capable commanding officer when the going gets tough.

“Captain's log. Stardate 57485.7. The Altonoids and Loïdians have kept themselves in the background for a few months now, after they were caught 'red-handed' by our Chief Security Officer while attempting to alter history to their favor. Well... at least they never did anything hostile again since then. Not even one conflict... Given our somewhat problematic history with them, I can't help but feel a bit skeptical about the upcoming diplomatic talk. We've had some skirmishes in the past, but we've always managed to avoid an all-out war by brief displays of force and some careful diplomacy.

“So here we are. We, and the rest of our small fleet, are to rendezvous with several Altonoid ships at Station A-12, a station located near the Federation-Altonoid neutral zone.”

“We've arrived, Captain,” Cmdr. Jansen says as he barges in. Commander Grad Jansen is notably taller than his Captain, but he lacks his command presence. Partly to blame is his youthful appearance, his completely harmless face and that too-perfect haircut...

“You could've rang, Grad...”

“I'm sorry, Captain. It's just that this whole situation is making me anxious. Sure, it's a diplomatic mission, but... I really don't trust those Altonoids.”

“We have no reason to...” Captain Duvivier sighs. “But we will have to, for now... It's our only way of ever reaching peace.”

Cmdr. Jansen sighs and looks the other way.

“Speak freely, Number One,” Duvivier says, with a friendly, inviting smile that never fails to get his crew to speak their minds.

Once again, the smile has the desired effect. Cmdr. Jansen says, “When you think about it, the only thing we did 'wrong' was that we accidentally stumbled upon their territory. We didn't mean to invade their space, we were just exploring. We just can't make them understand for some reason.” He sighs deeply. “I really doubt the Altonoids want to talk. Past conflicts have shown that all they want is payback. Payback for something we've already apologized for. Whatever it is they're interested in, I doubt that it is peace.”

“We will soon find out,” Captain Duvivier says. He fiddles with a nearby PADD for a few seconds before saying, “There is one thing that worries me too, though. Captain Rinckes is also present...”

“You still dislike him for what happened during the battle of Wolf 359,” Cmdr. Jansen states. “That's over thirteen years ago, isn't it time t---”

“Does time make up for what he did?”

“He had to make the decision,” Cmdr. Jansen continues. “Close the hatch and save the occupants of the escape pod, or risk all their lives for the small chance of saving your mother. A command decision, Mathieu. A very tough decision, in which there's no right or wrong move. The fact remains: it wasn't Captain Rinckes who killed your mother. It was the Borg.”

The Captain looks his First Officer straight in the eyes, but doesn't say a word...

The three Federation starships (the *Wolf*, the *Kennedy* and the *Sundance*) drop out of warp.

The bridge crew of the *Akira*-class *USS Wolf* are staring at the viewscreen. They see the relatively small (about 500 meters in height), unarmed space station, and two *Explory*-class Altonoid ships flanked by two *Altonoid*-class ships.

Admiral Coen van Aken is seated in the middle of the modern bridge, and takes a look at his officers. There's his First Officer, Commander Dennis Levine, who looks like a surfer with his blond hair that's barely short enough to be within regulations, and his omnipresent smile that's destined to melt many alien hearts. There's his Operations Officer, young Lieutenant Stephanie Grant. His Tactical Officer, the Swedish Lieutenant Commander Leif Anderson, with his patented worried but dutiful look. There's the Science Officer, Ensign Daniels, just transferred from the *Enterprise-E*. And of course there's the Admiral himself. Admiral Coen van Aken looks a lot younger than he actually is. Just the touches of grey in his short, red hair betray that he's fifty years old.

"*USS Kennedy* and *USS Sundance* are standing by, Admiral," Lt. Stephanie Grant says, while pressing some buttons on her console.

"Well... It's time to beam down to the st---" Admiral Van Aken says, when suddenly the lights dim and the red alert claxons start blaring.

"Altonoid vessels are arming weapons!" Lt. Cmdr. Leif Anderson shouts.

"What the hell?"

"They're hailing us," Lt. Grant says with the same amount of disbelief.

"On screen!"

An Altonoid appears on the viewscreen of the *Wolf*, and also on that of the other ships. Altonoids are instantly recognizable by their outrageous haircuts and the fact that their heads are covered with multiple rings and piercings. They all have this air of charismatic arrogance surrounding them, especially this guy. Clearly the fleet's leader, this Altonoid has even more rings on his face than the average Altonoid, and the arrogant twist of his lips seems to have found permanent residence on the marked face that betrays he's had a rough life.

"You Federation scum! I should've known!" the Altonoid says. "You have no interest in peace! You just want payback for what happened in the past!"

"What are you talking about?" Admiral Van Aken asks. "We have done nothing to provoke your hostile posture."

"Is that so?!" the Altonoid asks. "And what about that cloaked *Defiant*-class ship?"

This is a classic example of a trick question. The *USS Satellite* is indeed present and cloaked, but the Altonoids could just be guessing about its presence, meaning that an affirmation of this accusation would give away the Federation's back-up plan and force them to admit they violated the treaty of Algeron. Or the Altonoids could have somehow picked up the *Satellite* with their sensors. They did guess its ship class correctly. Denying its presence would then mean that the Altonoids know that Coen van Aken is lying, deeming all further negotiations pointless.

Van Aken decides to be as diplomatic as possible. "We are sorry for that..." he sighs. "We needed a back-up plan."

"You are willing to neglect one of your own treaties in order to do this?"

"We are really sorry," Admiral Van Aken says. "But we've done this before, and it saved the entire Federation when you invaded our space with a large, cloaked fleet. We had to take our precautions."

The Altonoid is furious, which is somewhat understandable. "You do not trust us?"

"Trust is earned," Admiral Van Aken says, with an apologetic smile. "I deeply regret this situation. We should've been more open, despite what happened in the past."

"At least you seem to have regained some honesty... However, we must request the immediate departure of that vessel. And we will discuss this event later today."

"That is reasonable," Admiral Van Aken says, with a short bow of the head.

“Prepare to beam down. But I warn you!” The Altonoid raises his index finger. “No more surprises! Letor Fune out.”

Admiral Van Aken slouches back in his chair and lets out a big sigh. “That was close... And the meeting hasn’t even officially begun yet...”

On the brightly lit bridge of the *Prometheus*-class *USS Sundance*, the crew can see the *Defiant*-class *USS Satellite* uncloak and warp away.

“Altonoid weapons are powering down,” Lt. Broitz, the Bolian Chief Tactical Officer says.

“Thank goodness,” the attractive, young Commander Melanie Simons says. “Not a good start of our diplomatic meeting, is it?”

“No... Let’s hope things will finally be different at the station,” Captain Stephan Rinckes says. A barely noticeable twitch in his eyes betrays that he’s a bit nervous.

Captain Stephan Rinckes has a very charismatic and militaristic look. He’s a tall, strong man in his mid-forties. His hard face makes anyone follow his orders without a single doubt. He has this constant stare in his narrow eyes which makes him look like there are more things going on inside his mind than anyone is allowed to understand. But this time, the look is different. He looks nervous, more human.

“Beam-down to the station is commencing,” Cmdr. Simons says, after pressing some buttons on a station at the side of the bridge.

Captain Rinckes rises up from his Captain’s chair. “You have the bridge, Mr. Broitz. Commander Simons, if you’d please follow me to transporter room 3.” He walks over to the turbolift. Cmdr. Simons enters the turbolift with her Captain, and fails to notice that his nervousness has just picked up a notch.

“Good luck, Captain!” Lt. Broitz says.

“Thanks,” Captain Rinckes says, with a slightly higher pitched voice than normal, and he looks at Cmdr. Simons. She just stares at the bridge, not knowing that the Captain is looking at her. The turbolift doors close...

The remainder of the bridge crew all can’t suppress a smile.

“You have the bridge, Sivar,” Captain Duvivier says on the bridge of the *Sovereign*-class *USS Kennedy*, as he and Cmdr. Jansen enter the turbolift.

“Yes sir.” The Science Officer, Lieutenant Sivar, leaves his station, which is taken over immediately by an eager Ensign who will probably die very quickly.

Lt. Sivar settles himself in the Captain’s chair. Now that the Captain and his First Officer are leaving the ship, he feels the weight of command pressing on his shoulders. He doesn’t show it, of course. As a Vulcan, he has learned to control and repress any emotion he might experience.

“There’s a first time for everything,” Doctor Rose van Oers says when she looks to her right and sees Sivar sitting there.

The Doctor is a bit of an enigmatic character, with more change in hairstyle and hair color than your average Risian chameleon bird. She is highly regarded in Starfleet, which is shown by her high rank of Commander. She’s a skilled doctor and her patients are very fond of her.

As always, Sivar has his answer ready. “Although I have commanded this ship before, logic dictates that your typically human expression supports the fact that this is the first time I have commanded a starship during a diplomatic meeting.”

“Bet he can’t say that five times in a row,” Helm Officer Lt. Malin whispers to OPS Officer Lt. Sven Muntenaar, who grins at the thought.

“In fact, I believe I can, Ms. Malin,” Sivar replies dryly. “However, I do not believe this is the appropriate time for a demonstration.”

“No, sir. I- I’m sorry, sir,” Lt. Malin stutters.

Lt. Muntenaar's leans over to her with a wide smile, and softly says, "You forgot about the exceptional hearing of a Vulcan, Malin."

"Apparently, so have you, Lieutenant." Sivar joins in once again. "If you are done lecturing Ms. Malin about Vulcan physiology, I suggest you get back to performing your duty."

Now it's Muntenaar's turn to feel embarrassed. "Yes sir. Right away, sir." He tries to ignore the teasing smile Malin is giving him right now.

The young, blonde Trill Lt. Malin and the somewhat older, strong Lieutenant First Class Sven Muntenaar with his pitch-black hair, look like complete opposites of each other. But they get along just fine behind their stations in front of the bridge.

Cmdr. Jansen and Captain Duvivier enter transporter room 2 of the *USS Kennedy* and step onto the platform.

"This is going to be fun..." Captain Duvivier says as he gives Jansen a somewhat wry smile. "Energize."

The transporter room dissolves around them and is replaced by a large transporter room inside Station A-12. Some nasty looking Altonoids await them. They're obviously attempting to be courteous, but even without carrying weaponry they look menacing. "This way please," one of them says.

"It looks as if the Altonoids have taken over the station," Jansen whispers to Captain Duvivier as softly as possible, while they follow the Altonoids.

Captain Duvivier grins. "Already?" he whispers back. "I thought the takeover wasn't scheduled 'till after the buffet."

They both smile.

The Altonoids lead them to the main conference hall of the station. The room is quite large, with two exits: the one they came through, and another one on the opposite side. To the left they see the Federation and Altonoid banners hanging on the wall. To the right there's a huge window, from which they can see their vessels. Besides enough tables and chairs, there is also plenty of tasty food available. Several strategically placed buffet carts are to supply the attendants of the necessary nourishment. After all, you better not talk politics on an empty stomach.

In total there are six Starfleet officers and about fifteen Altonoids present. Not all of them look like diplomats. In fact, the only Altonoid here who looks like he has something to do with the upcoming talk is Letor Fune.

Captain Duvivier and Cmdr. Jansen walk over to Admiral Van Aken and his First Officer Cmdr. Dennis Levine.

"This place really gives me the creeps," Cmdr. Levine says, with a Southern accent that complements his Texan charm.

"Surprising how over a dozen of Altonoids can turn a Starfleet station into a 'creepy' place, Commander Levine," Cmdr. Jansen says, of course when there are no Altonoids in the near vicinity.

Captain Rinckes, holding a bowl of eggnog in his hand, spots the group from the other side of the room, waves and starts walking towards them.

"A dozen of Altonoids and Captain Rinckes..." Captain Duvivier softly says.

"Did you say something, Duvivier?" Admiral Van Aken asks.

Captain Duvivier quickly shakes his head.

"Anyway. I think we'd better break up," Van Aken continues. "Try to speak with the Altonoids. Show some goodwill."

Captain Rinckes joins the group. At that moment the group disperses to seek an Altonoid who is willing to talk, leaving Rinckes alone. "Eggnog anyone?" he says to thin air.

“Do you come here often?” Admiral Van Aken asks an Altonoid in an attempt to break the ice. The Altonoid just gazes back like the Admiral is completely retarded.

A few tables away, Commander Levine tries out one of his famous jokes. “And then the monkey told the Bolian...” Dennis Levine can’t even finish the joke, because he’s already laughing. The Altonoid in front of him looks at his bowl of eggnog, contemplating whether or not he should empty it on Levine’s head.

“You don’t happen to have a knife on you?” Duvivier asks another Altonoid, while attempting to remove a claw from a lobster.

The Altonoid looks at Captain Duvivier, thinking: ‘is this a trick question?’

“Or a phaser?” Cmdr. Jansen asks jokingly when he sees his Captain struggling with the lobster. The Altonoid walks away, shaking his head.

Cmdr. Simons on the other hand doesn’t seem to be having problems conversing with the Altonoids. Several Altonoids have formed a group around the pretty, blonde Commander. One might wonder why... Captain Rinckes observes it all, standing behind a buffet cart, with a touch of jealousy. “I wish they’d stop hanging all over her...” he mutters as he accidentally stabs his fork in a nearby Altonoid’s hand, instead of his tuna salad.

Captain Rinckes apologizes briefly and walks over to Cmdr. Simons and her ‘entourage’, leaving a cursing Altonoid behind. “Commander. Do you have a moment?” Captain Rinckes asks. Commander Simons turns around and smiles at Stephan Rinckes. Rinckes swallows some saliva, nearly chokes on it and emits a series of coughs. “Could you follow me please?” he continues with a higher pitched voice.

“Sure,” Cmdr. Simons says. “We’ll talk later, guys.”

They walk away and Simons waves at the Altonoids. “Those Altonoids are nicer than I thought,” she says as they exit the large room.

“Just wait ‘till they meet your mother...” Captain Rinckes mutters beneath his breath.

“Everything seems to be running smoothly.” Lieutenant Commander Henry Wilson, the commander of the station, appears content. The command room he’s in looks like the bridge of a starship, and contains five officers at present: Wilson himself, Security Officer Lieutenant First Class Natalie Wyobi, and three no-name Ensigns.

“The security teams should’ve checked in five minutes ago,” Lt. Wyobi says. “Odd...”

“It’s probably nothing, Lieutenant,” Lt. Cmdr. Wilson says, leaning back in his chair.

“I suppose you’re right. There are roughly 200 Starfleet officers plus the Federation-Altonoid delegation to protect. I suppose they’re busy enough as it is. I’ll give them a little more time.”

Cmdr. Simons and Captain Rinckes walk down the hallway and come to a halt on a quiet spot. There don’t seem to be any people in the corridors at all.

“There’s something I’ve wanted to tell you all along,” Rinckes says.

“Another poem?” Cmdr. Simons answers with a smile. A few weeks ago, Rinckes had surprised everyone by suddenly letting loose his artistic side. The poetry he had written became instantly legendary among the crew, because no-one had even the slightest idea what it was all about, and it was a very uncharacteristic thing to do for the stern Captain, to put it mildly.

Captain Rinckes laughs a forced (and painfully fake) laugh. “No... I’ve wanted to tell you this for a long time, but I never got around to it, and---”

“Strange...” Lt. Wyobi says. “The internal sensor readings indicate nothing unusual.”

“And that is strange?” Lt. Cmdr. Wilson asks.

“Yes it is. Normally, there are some random energy peaks in the sensor sweeps. But now they all occur at an exact interval of 4.7 seconds. Very strange...”

“...after the poem incident I had lost all my confidence...” Captain Rinckes continues.

“These readings are so consistent,” Lt. Wyobi says while reading from her console, “that you would almost say that they are fake.”

“Why would anyone create fake sensor readings for the security sca---” Lt. Cmdr. Wilson says. He gives Lt. Wyobi a terrified look when he realizes what the answer must be.

Lt. Wyobi turns to face Wilson, and instantaneously gets hit in the chest by a phaser beam. She falls off her chair. Dead...

Lt. Cmdr. Wilson jumps off his chair and turns around. A group of armed-to-the-teeth Altonoids exit the turbolift. They blast the three no-name Ensigns, who all collapse, leaving only Lt. Cmdr. Wilson alive.

“What it all comes down to is this...” Captain Rinckes says.

Lt. Cmdr. Wilson looks at the dead crewmen and then at the Altonoids. “RED ALERT!” he shouts at the top of his lungs.

“I love---” Captain Rinckes says, but suddenly the entire station goes to red alert. The lights dim slightly and red alert panels light up on the bulkheads. “Hell!” Rinckes curses.

“You love... hell?” Cmdr. Simons asks, confused.

Lt. Cmdr. Wilson runs over to the Security station in front of the bridge, and presses some buttons, opening a comm channel throughout the entire station. The Altonoids don’t know exactly what he’s doing. One of the Altonoids wants to shoot him nevertheless.

“No!” another Altonoid says. It can be heard throughout the entire station.

“Did you hear that?” Rinckes asks, happy to have a subject change at hand.

“Yes. You just took me to these corridors to tell me you love hell?” Cmdr. Simons asks.

“No, listen.” Rinckes points at the roof.

The Altonoid voice is clearly audible everywhere on the station. *“Our orders are to shoot the Security and Engineering officers, plus all officers below the rank of Lieutenant Commander. The rest we will have to hold hosta--- What is this? He opened a comm channel, the stupid Federation idiot. Secure him!”*

They could also hear it in the conference room. All Altonoids present grab a weapon from their uniforms. An additional eight Altonoids enter the room, fully armed...

“What the jellybeans?!” Captain Duvivier shouts.

“What is the meaning of this?!” Admiral Van Aken shouts, even louder. The Altonoids remain silent. They just point their rifles at the four Starfleet officers.

“Sit down!” Letor Fune orders, clearly taking control of the situation.

“Shouldn’t there be six of them?” another Altonoid, with a bandage on his left hand, says, pointing at the Federation quartet.

“Find the other two!” Letor Fune orders again.

“That’s really like Captain Rinckes. Running off like that...” Duvivier says. “I wouldn’t be surprised if he’d somehow be involved with this entire situation...”

“Hold on a minute. You’re saying Captain Rinckes is a traitor?” Admiral Van Aken says, unable to hide his disbelief.

“I’m saying I won’t be surprised if he turns out to be one.”

“And I’m saying we have bigger concerns here!” Cmdr. Jansen says, pointing at the heavily armed Altonoids who are keeping their rifles fixed on the Starfleet officers.

Onboard the *USS Kennedy*:

“Some kind of shield has formed around the station, preventing beaming in or out!” Lt. Muntenaar says.

“Why would they do th---” Lt. Malin asks, but the Chief Tactical Officer, Lieutenant Steven Appels, interrupts her.

“The Altonoid ships are raising their shields!” Lt. Appels shouts.

“I’m no expert in diplomatic meetings...” Dr. Van Oers says with a touch of sarcasm, “but I don’t think this is supposed to happen...”

“You are correct, Doctor,” Lt. Sivar says. “The presently occurring events are not enviable.”

“What do we do?” Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman, the *Kennedy*’s Chief Engineer, asks.

“We await the decision of the lead ship, which is in this case...” Lt. Sivar says as he frowns. “...the *USS Wolf*.”

Onboard the *USS Wolf*:

“We must act now, Commander!” Lt. Stephanie Grant says.

“Ease off, Stephanie,” Lt. Cmdr. Anderson says. He is in charge of the *Wolf* plus the small fleet consisting of the *Kennedy* and the *Sundance*, now that its flag officers are held captive at the station. “Hail them...”

“They’re already transmitting a message, sir. They’re sending it to Starbase 9,” Lt. Grant says.

“Put it on screen.”

Letor Fune, standing in the conference hall with the four Starfleet officers behind him, appears on the viewscreen. “This is Letor Fune representing all Altonoids. We have taken over Station A-12 and are holding the crews of this station and the three accompanying Federation ships hostage. Among the hostages are this area’s most prominent flag officers, including Admiral Coen van Aken and Captain Mathieu Duvivier. We will kill and destroy everyone and everything here if you do not obey our demands.

“Our demands are simple: withdraw all Starfleet activity in this region of space. We demand the dismantling of all your starbases along the Altonoid neutral zone. Also, we demand that you sign one of *our* treaties that will makes sure you’ll never interfere with us again. Obey these demands, or the hostages will die. We’ll give you five hours to decide. Letor Fune out.”

The bridge crews of the *Sundance* and *Kennedy* have also watched the message. Lt. Sivar stares at the viewscreen from his Captain’s chair, aboard the *Kennedy*. All he can say is: “Fascinating...”

“We have a situation on our hands,” Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman sighs.

“We have indeed,” Lt. Appels says, speaking quickly. “The Altonoid vessels are moving to intercept us. They’re powering up weapons!”