

“FALLEN HEROES”

by Alex Lampe

PART I – CHAPTER III

The upgraded *Massal*-class Altonoid warship that has appeared in front of the *Kennedy* is an awe-inspiring sight. The Chief Engineer (the bald Lt. Cmdr. André Soeteman) is just as unhappy with its sudden appearance as everyone else on the bridge, but the unusual phaser system certainly has piqued his interest. “They’ve gotten rid of their torpedo bays and their spaceblaster. Instead, those yellow ‘wires’ around its hull seem to intertwine to form one incredibly powerful phaser array.” He’s having trouble keeping a fair portion of inappropriate enthusiasm from showing in his voice. “It covers almost fifty percent of the ship.”

Lt. Muntenaar stares at the viewscreen, which displays the *USS Satellite* attempting to dodge the incoming fire originating from the huge Altonoid vessel. “I’ve never seen such a weapon.”

“Neither have I,” Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman says with a subdued smile. “But I’m sure it can pack quite a wallop.”

“This is no time for idle chatter, Commander,” Lt. Sivar says with his typical Vulcan stoicism. “Ensign Parkin, open fire at the *Massal*.”

“*Massal*?” the young Trill Lt. Malin says. “I think we should call this one a *Uber-Massal*, sir.” Her remark raises an eyebrow on Sivar’s face.

Ensign Parkin presses several buttons on his tactical station and two photon torpedoes get propelled towards the *Massal*. The shields of the *Massal* consume the two torpedoes completely, as expected... However, it did draw the Altonoids’ attention! The *Massal* stops firing for a moment, as if deciding which target to pick on. After only a few seconds of rest, the ‘wires’ light up again and four phaser beams hit the bow of the *Kennedy*, making its bridge rumble and shake.

“Evasive maneuvers,” Lt. Sivar says calmly.

“Wow,” Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman says, though this time he sounds intimidated rather than enthusiastic. “Our front shields went down to ninety percent! In just one hit!”

Nearby consoles send a battalion of sparks flying in all directions. Lt. Sivar remains calm, despite the fact that a few sparks have landed in his hair. He takes out the developing flames with one well-aimed pat and says dryly, “Now would be a good time to return fire, Ensign Parkin.”

The *Kennedy* fires half a dozen photon torpedoes at the *Massal*. The *Wolf* and both parts of the *Sundance* join the *Kennedy* in the attack and back her up with photon torpedoes and phaser fire. Apparently, the combined attack is successful; the *Massal* stops firing at the *Kennedy*.

“It seems they’re not as tough as they appear,” Chief of Operations Lt. Sven Muntenaar says. It’s almost as if the Altonoids heard him, because they start firing again, making the bridge rumble and shake once more.

“It seems they’re also pretty damn stubborn...” Lt. Malin adds wryly.

Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman only has eyes for his engineering station and sees the shield readouts dropping rapidly. “Our forwards shields are down to seventy-five percent and falling.”

On the bridge of the *Defiant*-class *USS Satellite*:

Despite the fact that the *Satellite* has taken a little battle damage, the tall brunette Captain Suzan Reynolds appears unmoved. “I’ve had enough of this,” she says, annoyed rather than impressed by the *Massal*’s presence. “Initiate attack pattern Blue Theta. Keep our weapons hot and firing.”

Lt. Armand Callaway, the ship’s Chief Tactical Officer, complies. In front of the bridge,

seated behind the U-shaped HELM/OPS console, Lieutenant Bart Lynnson doesn't agree right away. "Attack pattern Blue Theta? This is risky, Captain." Captain Reynolds doesn't respond at all. Lynnson knows better than to press the issue. When the Captain's got her mind set on something, nothing will get in her way...

The *USS Satellite* breaks formation, speeds towards the *Massal*, and fires a barrage of phaser pulses with its rapid fire phaser pulse cannons. Unfortunately, the pulses don't have the intended effect on the *Massal*'s actions, because the Altonoids continue firing at the *Kennedy*. Nevertheless, the *Satellite* continues their assault. The *USS Wolf* and the two sections of the *Sundance* back the *Satellite* up by firing what they've got. Before long, the *Massal* finally starts to take a little damage to its shields.

"This is taking too long," Captain Reynolds says. "Initiate attack pattern Delta-12."

The *USS Satellite* moves closer to the *Massal* and makes an attack run over the Altonoid vessel. The highly maneuverable *Satellite* performs a nosedive and gives the *Massal* six quantum torpedoes to deal with. To make their attack even more effective, they bombard the shields of the Altonoid ship with phaser pulses. After that strafing run, the *Satellite* turns around and approaches the *Massal* from the aft, utilizing the time that maneuver takes to cool down the pulse cannons a little, only to let fly with them again once the maneuver is complete.

From the other side of the *Massal*, the remaining Federation ships unleash their weaponry. The *USS Wolf* fires two dozen photons at the *Massal*, both remaining sections of the *Sundance* fire full phasers at the *Massal*, and the *USS Kennedy* pushes her powerful, dorsal phaser arrays to the max.

That last assault seems to have a positive effect; the *Massal* finally stops firing. Now that there's some time to breathe, the *USS Satellite* gets back in formation alongside her Federation colleagues.

The bridge of the *USS Kennedy* is moderately damaged and an unfortunate Ensign is carried away by a medical team. Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman notices none of this, because he finds himself engrossed with the data his engineering station provides him. "The *Massal*'s shields are down to 65 percent."

"That means they're still quite intact," Lt. Muntenaar says. "So why have they stopped firing?"

"Perhaps they have realized they are no match for four Federation vessels," Lt. Sivar says.

"Wait..." Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman says. "Their phaser system has gone all funny."

"Funny?" Lt. Sivar frowns, but then something on the viewscreen catches his eye. The 'wires' of the *Massal* light up in a strange pattern. They seem to flash on and off, and streaks of light race through the phaser wires like fireflies through a straw.

"Perhaps we damaged them more than we thought," Lt. Malin guesses. The nervous look in her eyes betrays that she's not entirely convinced of what she's just said. When she looks to her right, she sees that Lieutenant Muntenaar isn't exactly comfortable with this sudden light show either.

"What is going on, Commander Soeteman?" Lt. Sivar asks.

The Chief Engineer presses a few buttons on his engineering station and looks puzzled. "I have no idea. Our sensors are having difficulties with this new technology."

Sivar replies only with a frown.

Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman gives his station another puzzled look. When his mind finally grasps what he is seeing, his eyes widen and his face turns pale. He turns around to face Ensign Parkin and shouts at the top of his lungs, "Evasive maneuvers! Evasive ma---"

The streaks of lights converge and explode into one massive phaser beam, hitting the *Kennedy* dead on. The impact is almost beyond description. The massive phaser beam sears

right through the shields of the *Kennedy* as if they were off-line. The lights on the bridge dim immediately. Consoles explode, and every single person on board the ship gets knocked off their feet.

Sivar gets tossed off his Captain's chair and Lt. Muntenaar topples over his station. A console on the left blows up, tossing a nearby Ensign across the bridge. Ensign Parkin gets chucked over his sparking tactical station and lands next to Soeteman, who has somehow managed to hold on to his station.

The right side of the bridge takes the most damage; the large wall display on the right is torn off the bulkhead along with two red alert pillars. One of those pillars crashes down and lands on the Science Ensign, who dies immediately. The collapsing remains of the nearby wall interface provide him with a quick burial.

Parts of the ceiling come down as well. One part crushes the Executive Officer's chair (which was fortunately empty) and the secondary tactical station behind it. The XO's console manages to escape most of the destruction, but it gets toppled over nevertheless.

Finally, the dreadful noises of scraping metal and exploding systems fade away. But it's not over just yet... Just when Ensign Parkin makes an attempt to stand up again, a loose part of the ceiling falls off and lands only inches away from his head. Stunned, Parkin holds still and waits for what might happen next, but the bridge has turned silent. It's over, for now...

Lt. Sivar has landed on the stations in front of the bridge and gets back on his feet. He overlooks the immense damage. And this is just the bridge... Many more sections of the ship must look this awful, or worse...

Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman wipes some blood from his forehead and accesses his console again. "Our shields are down... Engines are off-line. We're drifting. The ship's a complete mess..." He stands up slowly and sighs, "I'll go down to Engineering and try to repair whatever I can."

Captain Duvivier witnessed the sight with pain in his heart. To see your ship getting battered while you are utterly helpless is every Captain's worst nightmare. He practically has first-row seats to the whole battle outside, because the conference room he's being held captive in provides a full view of the battle through the room's large window. The *Kennedy* looks scorched, and that *Massal* looks practically unstoppable. What he'd give right now to stand on the *Kennedy*'s bridge. His place is on the ship, but instead he's stuck here with his First Officer, forced to watch the battle unfold without any control over it.

Admiral Van Aken knows what the Captain must be going through, since he's in the exact same messy situation. The *Wolf* hasn't suffered as much damage as the *Kennedy* yet, but there seems to be no defense against that upgraded *Massal*. Van Aken eyes Letor Fune, who grins at the present desperation. He must know exactly what they're feeling, and he seems to be enjoying it immensely.

Two Altonoids get shot almost simultaneously and land on their backs. Captain Stephan Rinckes passes them, carrying a heavy phaser rifle he snatched from a dead Starfleet officer earlier on. That handphaser he was carrying just wasn't good enough, Station A-12 is swarming with Altonoids.

His hopes of finding his beloved Commander Melanie Simons alive dwindles with every area he checks. She hadn't responded to his repeated attempts to contact her via their combadges. He checked the computer room where they split up, and found no sign of her. Wherever he goes, he only finds Altonoids to kill or slain Starfleet officers. He can't even try to contact her again, because he has gotten rid of his combadge to further avoid detection. If he ever wants to see her again, he'll have to keep looking for her.

He turns around the corner and sees several Starfleet officers lying on the floor, a sight he's almost getting used to. Most of them probably died before he even set foot on this

station. Anyone below the rank of Lieutenant Commander had to be shot, he recalls. That's practically everyone... Unbelievable really, that while he and his colleagues were dining in the conference room, a tragedy was already taking place. The Altonoids really left nothing to chance.

As he rounds another corner he encounters an Altonoid soldier who has his back turned away from him. With a quick headshot, Rinckes takes him down. The last thing he needs right now is for the Altonoids to signal his location.

Three dead Starfleet officers lie in the corridor in eerie silence. Rinckes slowly walks past them one by one. The first is an Andorian male who died clutching on to his medkit. The second is a human male security officer who lies facedown with a horrid phaser wound on his back. The last of them is a human female Lieutenant wearing a command uniform. She's leaning against the bulkhead in a slumped position, her blonde hair covering her face. She looks just like Melanie.

An ice-cold sensation creeps around Rinckes' heart as he closes in on the dead body. A damaged phaser rifle lies next to her. Is that the same rifle he gave her just a while ago? They all look alike. There are two rank pips on the dead woman's collar. Melanie had tossed away the third one to distract an Altonoid earlier on. The Altonoids must've thought she was a Lieutenant and shot her.

He wants to say something, but finds himself unable to utter even a syllable. Carefully, he moves the blonde hair from her face... It's not her. It's someone else. Rinckes sighs in relief, and immediately feels guilty for doing so. Whoever this woman was, she didn't deserve to die like this. He releases her hair, leaving it to cover her face again. He stares at her for a few more seconds, before leaving the area with more determination than ever. He's got to find Melanie, no matter what.

Lt. Norbert Hoper, the strong, black Chief of Security of the *USS Wolf*, marches down the corridors with nine of his colleagues. Several of these groups of six to ten Starfleet officers search the station in order to find the hostage room shield array. "Well, if this deck 51 turns out to be nothing worthy of our interest, we'll continue to deck 52 and join Lieutenant Appels' team," Lt. Hoper says in his gruff voice.

From the other end of the corridor, three Starfleet officers come running towards Lt. Hoper's team. "Ambush!" one of the fleeing officers shouts just before he gets hit by an Altonoid phaser beam.

Lt. Hoper and his team assume combat position and have to watch helplessly as the two remaining officers in front of them get shot by two beams that originate from an intersecting corridor.

Then there's silence. Only the beating of hearts and the shuffling of weapons. A few hour-long seconds pass. Suddenly, Hoper hears one of his officers screaming and he sees the officer landing on the floor next to him with a smoking phaser wound on his back.

"It's a trap!" Lt. Hoper shouts as he turns around and readies his rifle. He spots at least twelve Altonoids. They shoot two more members of his team in the blink of an eye.

The officer to his right –who has also turned around to face the dozen Altonoids– suddenly gets shot in the back! They're being attacked from both sides now!

Another joined team of eighteen Starfleet officers march through a relatively open area on deck 51. A large group of Altonoids catch them dead in their tracks. The Altonoids open fire and one Starfleet officer gets shot after another.

Somewhere on deck 38, a Starfleet officer makes the mistake of climbing on a container to give orders to his fellow officers. An eager Altonoid snipes him before the unfortunate officer could utter a word. Before the dead officer touches the ground, the rest of the squad get

mowed down by an oncoming wave of Altonoid attackers and fall to the floor with smoking phaser wounds all over their bodies.

Another united group of surviving Starfleet officers are pinned down by a large ever-growing group of Altonoids in a cargo bay on deck 46. They give up a good fight, but essentially they're all cannon fodder. There are just too many Altonoids...

Lt. Steven Appels, Cmdr. Tony Q, Dr. Rose Van Oers, and their accompanying six security officers are still busy searching deck 52, when all of a sudden they hear a thud. The group halts immediately and listens carefully. The armed members of the group sway their charged phaser rifles around, silently looking for a possible hostile contact.

With a loud clunk, a hatch on the bulkhead to the left of them opens. Tony Q is closest to it and points his rifle in a reflex at... Lt. Norbert Hoper. Hoper appears to be injured, and he doesn't look very cheery either. He exits the Jefferies tube and doesn't bother closing the hatch behind him. "Sorry if I startled you, kid," he says to Tony Q. He faces Lt. Appels. "We've got to move off this deck."

Dr. Van Oers opens her medkit and starts treating Lt. Hoper's wounds. There's a nasty gash on his chin, but the dermal regenerator does wonders in the capable Doctor's hands.

The young Tony Q raises his expressive eyebrows. "And who are you to be giving us orders like this?"

Hoper continues his speech to Appels. "The station is swarming with Altonoids, especially on decks 51 and up. They killed off my entire team before I could find a chance to escape. Those Jefferies tubes really can come in handy sometimes."

Doctor Van Oers doesn't appear to have listened to anything he's just said. She's only interested in getting her patient up and running again. "I managed to heal that gash on your chin, but it appears your elbow is bruised and your shins are chafed to the point of bleeding. If we can stay here a bit longer..."

"That can wait," Hoper replies curtly. "We have to get out of here while we still can."

"What if the shield array is on this deck?" Lt. Appels asks.

Lt. Hoper strokes his healed chin. "Small chance, according to our most recent scans. We can't stay here, the Altonoids can get here any second now. We've got to keep moving!"

Lt. Appels is a bit reluctant, but gives in nevertheless. "Alright. Then we'll do that. You're the Chief Security Officer of the *USS Wolf*, right?" Hoper gives him a brief nod. "So you know what you're doing," Appels continues. "We'll use the Jefferies tubes to go down to..."

"Deck 56. It should be safe enough to continue our search from there."

"Hello? Does anyone care to know what I think of this whole predicament?" Tony Q says. "I'm a Commander. I outrank you both!"

Hoper sighs and gives Tony an impatient look. "So what do you say?"

Tony looks around briefly and draws his conclusions. "Let's get the bloody hell out of here!"

Without saying anything further, Lt. Hoper turns around to re-enter the Jefferies tube. The group of nine officers follow suit. They climb down two decks, but once they reach deck 54, they are forced to a stop. The hatch leading to deck 55 is blocked by something on the other side, so the group has no choice but to enter the hallway...

Four continuous phaser beams keep plaguing the already damaged *Kennedy*. Sometimes the *USS Satellite*, *Wolf*, or both remaining sections of the *Sundance* manage to distract the *Massal* for a moment, but the *Massal* keeps targeting the *USS Kennedy*.

At last, the *Kennedy* stops rotating around its axis. But now the most vulnerable section of the *Kennedy* is facing the *Massal*. The section where the warp core is located: engineering.

With the bridge of the *Kennedy* now facing away from the Altonoids, the bridge crew are given some time to assess the extensive damage. Most of the lights have gone out, and large parts of its bulkheads are severely damaged. The right side of the bridge is so shattered that it can't even be used anymore. Only half of the present LCARS-panels work, and the bridge is shaking heavily. Lt. Sivar, Lt. Muntenaar, Lt. Malin, Ensign Parkin and another Ensign are the only ones present on the bridge. The only ones who are alive anyway...

Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman, having arrived in engineering, uses the comm system to give a detailed damage report. *"Our shuttle bays took heavy damage. Our forward phaser arrays are fried. Our deflector dish has been severely damaged, just like our sensor system. Our shields are down to about four percent, we're having hull breaches everywhere, and our structural integrity is down to a mere 28 percent. Large parts of the crew are cut off from communication, so I can't be completely accurate."*

"Why don't you tell us what actually *does* work?!" Lieutenant Malin says.

"Well, I somehow managed to fix the thrusters, so we're no longer spinning."

"We have noticed that, Commander," Lt. Sivar says, while he sits calmly in his shuddering Captain's chair. "However, we require more than that. It is unlikely we will hold out much longer under these circumstances."

Engineering is just as messy as the bridge. Fortunately, the warp core is still largely intact, but some of the nearby consoles, ladders, and wall panels are missing. Well, they're not exactly missing, they're just all over the place... Engineering is shaking heavily, like the rest of the ship. Crewmen swarm through the huge room in an attempt to repair the ship and help their wounded shipmates.

The tall, bald Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman stands next to the computer table in the centre of engineering. Only a few years ago, André Soeteman gained the honorary rank of Lieutenant Commander after having provided the Federation with vital information on the Altonoids. Having been born an Altonoid, Soeteman didn't agree with the militaristic, barbaric way of life propagated by the Altonoid leaders. He's certainly not the only Altonoid who disagrees with their ways, but he's the only highly skilled engineer who has ever blatantly defected.

After having cut all ties with his past, even by going as far as subjecting himself to plastic surgery in order to appear human, he has gained many friends among his new colleagues. His assignment as Chief Engineer of a *Sovereign*-class starship clearly shows he has gained everyone's trust. But now, as he attempts to get the forward torpedo launchers back on-line, he can't help but shake his head at the irony of getting attacked by his former brothers with a revolutionary weapon system that's quite a technological feat.

He casts away the bleak thoughts and concentrates on the torpedo system. "Can't you bypass the secondary circuitry, Ensign Adler?" he asks the engineer across the table. "We need to get the photon launchers back on-line, at least." The four Altonoid phaser beams seem to be targeting the warp core now and engineering shakes even more violently. Soeteman almost loses his balance. "I wish they'd stop doing that."

"This is no time for a strike, Commander," Ensign Adler says.

Cmdr. Soeteman replies with a toothy smile that disappears quickly when he looks at the computer table. "Structural integrity down to twenty percent and falling!"

Suddenly the rumbling and shaking stops completely... This surprises Soeteman so much that he doesn't notice the warp core's excessive hissing and steaming. "The Altonoids must've stopped firing for a moment," André Soeteman mumbles. "But for how long?" Then he notices that his fellow shipmates are staring at the warp core, and he abruptly looks over his shoulder. "This can't be good," he says when he sees the warp core is emitting a copious amount of smoke...

While shoving a few Ensigns out of the way, Soeteman runs over to the console closest to the warp core and accesses it. “Coolant leak!” he shouts as he views the data on the console. He thinks for a moment and sees no alternative. “We’ll have to eject the core!” His raised voice can’t hide a trace of disappointment.

The blue/red warp core’s smoking and hissing increases drastically, and André hurriedly makes the necessary preparations for a warp core ejection. Once the preparations are complete, he presses a large red button and the hissing warp core slides down until it completely disappears from view. In this case, the cold vacuum of space will cool down the warp core enough to prevent it from exploding, but it will also render it useless.

As Soeteman sags his shoulders and closes his eyes, he can sense the odd mixture of relief and increased anxiety from his colleagues around him. Without the warp core, their power reserves will drain much quicker, and they won’t be able to initiate warp drive. This is never a nice moment for any Chief Engineer...

On the damaged bridge of the *Kennedy*:

Lt. Sivar is eager to find out what the status is in engineering. He wouldn’t describe himself as being impatient at the moment. No, he’s merely... curious. “Acting Captain to the Chief Engineer.”

“*Soeteman here.*”

“The Altonoids have stopped firing for a moment. The *USS Wolf* has managed to distract them for a while,” Lt. Sivar says. “It seems we have finally managed to better our circumstances. We have had a ‘lucky break’, as humans would call it. What is your status?”

“*I just ejected the warp core.*”

For the first time in his life, Sivar doesn’t know what to say.

Captain Rinckes enters another corridor and immediately bumps into Commander Tony Q, who is accompanied by nine other officers. The sudden collision makes Tony Q jump half a mile into the air. After his heart starts beating again, Tony takes a few deep breaths and says, “Why do you all continuously persist in trying to scare me to a premature death just the *instant* I lose my powers?! I mean, just the fact that I’m probably still immortal doesn’t mean you should test that out at every opportunity!”

“Hello, Tony... What brings you here?” Captain Rinckes asks calmly.

Tony Q lowers his shoulders and sighs deeply. “It’s a long story.”

“A story we don’t need to hear right now,” Lt. Hoper adds. “We should move on to deck 56.”

“Decks 52 and 53 have already been overrun by Altonoids,” Lt. Appels explains. “We are to continue our search for the hostage room shield array a few decks lower to increase our chances of survival... and success.”

“Well, good luck,” Captain Rinckes says as he attempts to move past the group.

Lt. Hoper blocks his path. “Where are you going? It would be wiser to come with us. We could use your help.”

“I’ve lost my First Officer. I’ve got to find her,” Captain Rinckes replies.

“Haven’t you contacted her yet? The combadges are operational again,” Lt. Appels says.

Rinckes gives Lt. Appels a level stare. “She didn’t respond, so I will have to find her.”

Lt. Appels shakes his head. “This deck will soon be swarming with heavily armed Altonoids. It’s not safe here anymore.”

“Commander Simons should be perfectly capable of taking care of herself,” Lt. Hoper adds. “So, Captain, please come with us.”

The group of officers give Captain Rinckes an inquiring look. Rinckes looks back at them and sighs before saying, "Good luck." He readies his phaser rifle, walks past the group and disappears around the corner.

"It's always about a woman, isn't it?" Tony Q says to thin air.

On the bridge of the *USS Wolf*:

Lt. Cmdr. Leif Anderson was shocked to see the upgraded *Massal* demonstrate their massive phaser system's capabilities on the *Kennedy*. Luckily, the *Wolf* was able to distract the *Massal*, and now it has ceased firing altogether. Anderson's guess is that after such a heavy attack, the *Massal* needs to take some time to cool down their weapons, a window of opportunity he doesn't want to miss out on. "Open hailing frequencies to all of our ships."

Lt. Stephanie Grant nods and presses a few buttons on her console.

"This is Lieutenant Commander Anderson to all ships. We need to finish off that *Massal* once and for all. Everybody, perform an alpha strike! Give 'em all we've got!"

On the bridge of the *USS Kennedy*:

"Are we able to comply with this order, Ensign Parkin?" Lt. Sivar asks.

"Weapons are still out, sir," Ensign Parkin replies, shaking his head.

"Then we have no choice but to watch our colleagues obey," Sivar concludes.

The *Satellite*, *Wolf*, and both remaining sections of the *Sundance* gather around the crippled *Kennedy* and face the *Massal*. Well, if the *Massal* won't fire any of its weapons, the Federation ships will!

The *USS Wolf* fires a large quantity of photon torpedoes and phaser strikes, just before the *USS Satellite* sends out a short but extremely powerful series of phaser pulses and follows up with a dozen quantum torpedoes. The *Sundance* sections assist by launching torpedoes and firing their powerful Type XII phaser arrays.

The *Massal* takes the phaser strikes and suffers moderate damage, but the *Massal* repels most of the incoming torpedoes by simply shooting them all one by one before they have a chance of reaching the Altonoid vessel... After all the torpedoes have been detonated harmlessly in open space, the *Massal* goes completely silent again and sits there like a predator carefully calculating its next move.

On the bridge of the *USS Wolf*:

"That didn't have the desired effect..." Ensign Daniels says timidly. "Their shields are down to 35 percent, but the damage to their systems is minimal."

"Damn," Lt. Cmdr. Anderson says, not bothering to put any emotion in his voice because he's too busy contemplating his next course of action. "When will our little fleet have their weapons available again?"

"The alpha strike took a great amount of power, sir," Lt. Stephanie Grant says. "We won't be able to fire for several minu---" She stops in the middle of her sentence as she sees the *Massal* coming back to life.

All the bridge officers of the fleet see the 'wires' of the *Massal* light up in a familiar way. They seem to flash on and off, and streaks of light race through the wires like fireflies through a straw. Once again...

Onboard the *USS Kennedy*:

"They're targeting us again, sir!" Ensign Parkin shouts.

"Evasive maneuvers," Lt. Sivar says calmly.

Lt. Malin fruitlessly types in commands into her helm station. “Engines are still not responding!”

“I’m no engineer,” Lt. Muntenaar says as he turns around in his seat, “but I’d bet my bottom credit that we won’t survive another hit like this.”

Admiral Van Aken, Captain Duvivier, Cmdr. Jansen and Cmdr. Levine observe it all from the conference room. Duvivier and Jansen can hardly believe they’re about to lose their precious ship and the lives of their friends... Letor Fune sees their worried faces and smiles.

The bridge crew of the *Kennedy* look at the mighty sight of the charging *Massal*. The erratic light coming from the phaser wires shines on their terrified faces.

Lt. Sivar, however, looks like it’s any ordinary moment on any ordinary day. He has simply acknowledged the fact that they are all going to die soon. He presses a button on his armrest and says, “All hands, brace for impact.”

Lt. Muntenaar closes his eyes in terror. From behind his closed eyelids he can vaguely see the *Massal*’s phaser system growing brighter and brighter. With clenched teeth he waits for the inevitable, fatal blow. Yet suddenly, the light emanating from the phaser wires disappears completely. Surprised, Sven Muntenaar opens his eyes and sees that the *USS Satellite* has maneuvered itself directly in the line of fire, eclipsing the sight of the *Massal* in the *Kennedy*’s viewscreen.

The streaks of lights converge and explode into one massive phaser beam, hitting the *USS Satellite*’s bridge dead on. The shields of the *Satellite* -though quite intact before the impact-are completely nullified by the very powerful Altonoid phaser beam.

The entire bridge of the *USS Satellite* goes dark, and large parts of the bridge are torn off. Captain Reynolds manages to hold on to her Captain’s chair, but suddenly notices that a force is trying to pull her towards the ceiling. She can barely hold on to the left armrest as she flips upside down. It’s like the entire bridge has turned around! She can’t breathe anymore because all the air rushes away from her into the direction of the ceiling... The ceiling is smashed! A hull breach of at least three feet wide has formed in the scorched ceiling, and the emergency force fields are not responding.

Though Lt. Lynnsen is able to hold on to his OPS station, the OPS station is unable to hold on to the bridge! Lynnsen and his station get propelled towards the hull breach in the ceiling. The officer is small enough to go through that breach rather painlessly and enters open space. But his OPS station is too big to fit through the hull breach without any trouble. With unremitting dexterity, the rushing air damages the station until it finally gets squeezed through the hull breach and disappears from view.

Some bridge officers manage to hold on to something, but most of them can’t because they were already flying around due to the impact. They get blown off the bridge and are flung into space. Captain Reynolds still manages to hold on to her Captain’s chair while the debris that is flying towards open space scratches her face and hands. She can’t retain her grip on the armrest for much longer.

Then, finally, all the air on the bridge has rushed out and the bridge gets engulfed in a vacuum of darkness and silence.

On the bridge of the *USS Wolf*:

“Beam the survivors to our ship,” Lt. Cmdr. Anderson says firmly.

“But, sir,” Lt. Grant protests. “Then we’ll have to lower our shields. We’ll be defenseless for several seconds. I understa---”

“Do it! Now!”

Lt. Grant hesitates for a moment, and decides that Leif Anderson is right. “Dropping shields.” A twinge of guilt is audible in her voice. “Beaming the twenty-eight survivors to sickbay. Captain Reynolds is among them.”

“Twenty-eight survivors?” Anderson says. “That’s thirty-two dead...”

Lt. Grant bites her lower lip and shakes her head sadly. “The *Massal* will soon begin firing again, sir.”

“Status of our weapons?”

“Still inoperative.”

“Then we’ll need to find a way to stall the *Massal* a bit longer...” Cmdr. Anderson replies, and he thinks for a moment. “Of course! Perform the Bywaard maneuver!”

In the conference room of the station:

“It seems your precious ship hasn’t been destroyed yet,” Letor Fune says. “I am touched by the sacrifice of the *USS Satellite*. You must be glad you brought her along, aren’t you?” And Fune smiles at Admiral Van Aken. The Admiral doesn’t dignify that sardonic remark with a response.

Fune’s smile disappears as quickly as it had appeared. “Of course it’s only a matter of time. I expect a reply from your leaders soon. But just to let you in on a little secret.” Fune threateningly leans over to the Admiral. “We’re not interested in a diplomatic solution.”

On the bridge of the *USS Wolf*:

Lt. Commander Anderson is relieved to have found a way to finally do some real damage to that *Massal* ship. “Tractor the remains of the *Satellite* and shove it up the *Massal*’s throat,” he says with a determined grimace on his face.

“That’s one way of putting it,” Lt. Grant says with a smile.

“Well, that basically *is* the Bywaard maneuver,” Cmdr. Anderson says.

“I know what the Bywaard maneuver is, sir. Don’t worry,” Lt. Grant replies.

The *USS Wolf* approaches the remains of the *USS Satellite*. The defeated *Satellite* still appears to be quite intact, but its structural integrity is negligible and its hull has breached in several key areas. The *Wolf* engages a tractor beam and pushes the *Satellite* into the direction of the *Massal*.

“Override what’s left of the *Satellite*’s computer system and set her engines to overload,” Cmdr. Anderson says. “That should give the Altonoids what they bargained for.” On the viewscreen they can see the hulk of the *Satellite* being pushed ahead by a blue tractor beam.

Suddenly, something uncloaks between the *Satellite* and the *Massal*. The members of the bridge crew see it, but none of them actually believe their eyes. It’s another upgraded *Massal* ship! It loads its identical phaser array and destroys the remains of the *Satellite* with a single phaser strike! And to make matters worse, the new *Massal* is on a direct collision course with the *USS Wolf*!

Lt. Cmdr. Anderson jumps up from his seat. “Evasive maneuvers! Now!”