

## “FALLEN HEROES”

by Alex Lampe

### PART I – CHAPTER V

At the start of the battle, the *USS Sundance* initiated Multi Vector Assault Mode and split into three battle-ready sections. The middle section was destroyed embarrassingly early on and now the lower section seems to be next. It hangs motionlessly in space and a growing number of hull breaches betray that its structural integrity is failing. The bridge crews of the *Kennedy*, the *Wolf* and the saucer of the *Sundance* have to watch helplessly as the lower section of the *Sundance* bursts into flames. They see her hull tearing itself apart and the interior of the ship decompressing deck by deck, until she has to give in to the laws of physics and blows up to form an impressive but meaningless shockwave.

Onboard the *USS Wolf*:

“Three green bottles hanging on the wall...” Lt. Cmdr. Leif Anderson softly sings with an eerie tone in his voice. He has taken control of tactical again, now that Captain Suzan Reynolds has taken command of the small fleet. He looks at the tall Captain with her long chestnut hair and notices that she exudes enough confidence and leadership to make it look like she’s been in command of this vessel for years, even though she first set foot on this bridge about a minute ago.

“Open fire at the lead *Massal*,” Captain Reynolds says. Silently, she adds, “What is taking them so long?”

Her words were loud enough to pique the Swedish Lt. Cmdr. Anderson’s interest. “Excuse me?” he inquires.

“That information is classified,” Captain Reynolds replies briskly. The lead *Massal* directs its four phaser beams at the *USS Wolf*, making the bridge shudder dangerously. Another console gives up the fight and explodes in an unlucky Ensign’s face. “But I’ll tell you anyway, because you all have the right to know and I don’t think I’ll be facing a court martial any time soon.” She hasn’t lost her usual wit.

“We won’t tell anyone,” science officer Ensign Mick Daniels says with a subtle smile.

“There should’ve been a rather nice fleet just out of sensor range in case the diplomatic meeting went wrong,” Captain Reynolds says. “You don’t think my late *USS Satellite* was our only back-up plan, now do you?”

Another console gives up the struggle and dims as the bridge continues to shake. “Figures. But where the hell are they then?” the blonde Lt. Stephanie Grant asks while she holds on to her helm station in front of the bridge.

Captain Reynolds grimaces. “That’s what I’d like to know too. When the Altonoids sent out their first message, it should have alerted the fleet. This is taking way too long.”

“So much for the pending deus ex machina...” Lt. Cmdr. Anderson sighs.

“I hate to interrupt this little intermezzo,” Ensign Daniels says, “but I thought you might be interested in hearing our troop reports.”

“Another time, Ensign,” Captain Reynolds says. “We’re quite busy here.”

“I’d like to hear it anyway, Daniels,” Lt. Cmdr. Anderson says. When he sees the Captain is scowling at him, he adds apologetically, “It might be important.”

After the Captain gives Anderson a reluctant nod, Ensign Daniels begins to summarize the troop reports. “The remains of our troops still haven’t found the hostage room shield array, because they constantly find themselves struggling with an abundance of Altonoids. They’ve also encountered many dead Starfleet officers and identified some of them as crewmembers of Station A-12. They doubt they will be able to secure the station or find the shield array before it’s too late, but they will not give up.”

Everyone is silent for a moment, despite the hammering the *Wolf* is taking. Everyone watches Captain Reynolds to await her next move.

Finally, she speaks up. "Alright, guys. We don't want our troops to be fighting in vain. Initiate attack pattern Worf 4-Gamma."

It's all they needed to hear.

Captain Stephan Rinckes crawls through one of the station's many Jefferies tubes, until he reaches its end. He holds on tight to his phaser rifle and presses a small LCARS panel with his free hand to open the Jefferies tube's exit hatch. Immediately, he spots three Altonoids standing in the corridor. The sound of the opening hatch also makes sure that the three Altonoids immediately spot him...

Rinckes doesn't hesitate for one second and fires his phaser rifle at the closest Altonoid. Before that Altonoid can even hit the ground, Rinckes leaps out of the Jefferies tube. He absorbs the impact with the floor by rolling forward and then knocks the left Altonoid off his feet with a low spinning sweep kick. Once the Captain has finished that rotation, he stands up without losing momentum and shoots the other Altonoid without even looking at him.

Captain Rinckes is breathing rather heavily after this nice maneuver and his uniform is scorched and torn in places, revealing that he's had to fight more Altonoids along the way. His dark blond hair is somewhat of a mess.

But that look on his face... It shows both agony and sheer determination...

He looks around a bit, deciding whether to go left or right. Near him lies a dead female Starfleet officer. It's not Commander Melanie Simons. It's someone else; someone he doesn't know. It reminds him of the grim possibility that Melanie might have been killed already. The mere thought of her lying dead in some corridor—like this unfortunate woman—makes him grit his teeth. He *is* going to find Melanie Simons, even if he'll have to fight every damn Altonoid on the station to get to her.

He spots the Altonoid he just kicked off his feet. The Altonoid is lying on the floor, holding on to his painful shins. The Captain grabs him by the collar and lifts him up, fueled by adrenaline. "Tell me," Rinckes says threateningly, "have you seen Commander Simons passing through this area?"

"You must be Captain Rinckes." Despite the fact that Rinckes is nearly choking him, the Altonoid brings up a smile. "You won't get far. These decks are swarming with us."

"That's not what I asked!" Rinckes bellows. "I asked..." He tightens his grip around the Altonoid's collar and his tone of voice becomes even more threatening. "Have you seen Commander Simons passing through this area?"

The Altonoid can barely take in enough air to emit a simple cough. He manages to say, "I saw *her*." He looks over to the nearby dead officer. "And I shot her!" The pride in his voice is equaled only by his challenging tone.

Rage overrides all of the Captain's senses. "That's not her!" He shoves the Altonoid against the bulkhead without letting go.

"Alright, alright," the Altonoid shrills. "We're trying to track her down as we speak. We've received orders to do so."

"Go on," Captain Rinckes loosens his grip slightly.

"She was last seen in the observation lounge of this deck," the Altonoid says. "But you're too late anyway. I already called for back-up."

Rinckes' face fills with hatred again as he releases the Altonoid with such force that he smashes against the bulkhead and passes out. Without giving him a second glance, Captain Rinckes readies his rifle again and heads for the observation lounge.

The wounded Tony Q is the only one alive -or conscious, at least- in the large room he's in. He finds himself surrounded by slain Altonoids and Starfleet officers. The big door behind Tony hasn't opened again ever since Lieutenant Hoper shut it, so Tony is relatively safe. Safe... He doesn't feel safe...

He touches the phaser wound above his right hip and cringes in pain. Doctor Van Oers stabilized him before she left, and the wound isn't potentially lethal anymore, but it still hurts like hell. If he ever makes it out of this station alive, he will have to undergo surgery, that's for certain.

Now that he's lying there with some time to kill, he notices there are a few rather large gaps in the ceiling. It looks like there's some kind of maintenance room above this deck. Well, studying this area's architectural lay-out isn't exactly a priority at the moment.

With a great deal of effort, Tony sits up and leans his back against a crate that's had its share of phaser fire. He looks at the dead Starfleet officers lying around him. "Poor souls," Tony mutters. "Poor, mortal souls. Why did I have to become like you? All I did was help the Federation, help my friends in need. And what do I get in return? The Q Continuum strip me of my powers." There's a pained, frightened look on his face that betrays how young Tony really is, now that he finds himself bereft of all his usual bravado.

"Tell me, Q!" he raises his voice as much as the pain allows. "Why didn't you do anything?" His words echo into nothingness. "I know you tried to stop me... But what if my cause was worth fighting for? Do I really deserve lying here? Wounded. Defeated. Overcome... Human again!"

Silence...

"I didn't know what it was like to be human, fragile again," he says as he looks down at his phaser wound. "Why didn't you help me? Why did you let them shoot me? Why didn't you stand up for me when the Q Continuum kicked me out? Why don't you answer me?" The pain wins the battle against his lungs again. He grabs his phaser wound and continues to sob.

Suddenly, Tony spots a shadow moving across the room. Tony narrows his eyes and sees that it's an Altonoid who has regained consciousness! The Altonoid is aiming his rifle at him! With a lot of effort, the startled Tony rolls to the right. Pieces of debris stab him in the legs, but it's worth the pain because an Altonoid phaser beam misses him with millimeters to spare. After completing his painful evasive maneuver, Tony searches for his hand phaser. He grabs it from its holster, aims it and fires. The approaching Altonoid gets hit in the chest and slumps to the ground.

The shocked Tony doesn't move for a few seconds. He still has his rifle trained on the dead Altonoid. "Alright, that's it," Tony decides. "I'm getting out of here." He carefully plucks a piece of crate out of his leg and starts crawling towards the exit. He gives the shot Altonoid a lot of room, just to be safe...

He crawls over a rather large chunk of debris that belonged to a crate. Just when he shifts his weight onto it, he hears a moan. Startled, he immediately crawls back a bit and stays silent for a moment. Then, carefully, he presses a hand against the debris. Another sound! Tony slowly lifts up the chunk of debris and points his phaser at... Ensign Murphy! She's got scratches and bruises on her face, but it looks as though she has regained consciousness. Tony utilizes the little strength he has left to lift the remains of the crate and its contents off the unfortunate Ensign.

Ensign Murphy sits up. Her uniform is stained and scratched, and her long, brown hair is a mess. She coughs and greets Tony with a solemn, "Commander..."

"Are you alright?" Tony asks as he crawls closer to her. "Ensign... Ensign Murphy, right?"

"Ensign Emily C. Murphy, sir." She looks around. "Did I miss anything?"

Tony looks around too for a moment and sighs, "You might say that."

“Are we the only survivors?”

“No. Lieutenant Appels, Doctor Van Oers and Ensign Lucas are still running around somewhere... We better get out of here. It won't be much safer outside, but I've seen enough here. This place is giving me the creeps.”

“I know what you mean. It's not exactly filled with happy memories,” Ensign Murphy says with a faint smile.

Tony replies with a brief smile, before saying, “I must apologize for my lack of medical skills but I assume you can walk?”

“I can walk,” Ensign Murphy says as she stands up. When she sees that Tony makes no effort to stand up, she asks, “But can you? You're wounded!”

“No kidding.”

“I don't understand. Aren't you supposed to be a Q?” Ensign Murphy asks as she reaches for Tony.

“Not anymore...” Tony says with a bit too much regret showing in his voice. “Let's just get out of here, shall we? There's more I should tell you.”

Four massive phaser beams glide over the hull of the *USS Wolf*, inflicting some serious damage on that *Akira*-class starship. Yet, the four phaser beams cease attacking the *Wolf* quickly enough and find a new target in the last remaining part of the *USS Sundance*: its saucer section. To make matters worse, the first *Massal* has rejoined the battle and is attacking the *Kennedy*.

The bridge of the *USS Wolf* is still shaking from the last attack, and some of the lights go down. This makes the eerie light coming from the red alert panels stand out even more. The bridge is damaged, but remains largely operational.

Lt. Cmdr. Anderson regains his balance and says, “That last hit almost breached through our hull. Lining up port torpedoes.”

“Divert more power to the shields,” Captain Suzan Reynolds says. “Lieutenant, give me a casualty report.”

“Our casualties have been light thus far,” Lt. Stephanie Grant says. “Decks four and fi--- Wait. We're being hailed by the *Kennedy*.”

“Well, put them on screen,” Captain Reynolds says. She stands up, revealing once again how tall and slender she is.

The Vulcan Lt. Sivar and the severely battered bridge around him appear on the viewscreen. The bridge of the *USS Kennedy* is by no means brighter than that of the *Wolf*.

“Can you still keep the ship together, Lieutenant?” Captain Reynolds asks.

“Hardly, Captain, as you may have noticed by observing my immediate surroundings,” Lt. Sivar says, while Ensign Parkin topples over his tactical station in the background. The last sparks fly off a damaged wall panel due to a weapon strike, and Lt. Sivar can barely hold on to his Captain's chair. “Captain, I must advise you to order what remains of our fleet to withdraw.”

Captain Reynolds is somewhat surprised. “You mean we should give up?”

“That is one possible interpretation of my statement,” Sivar replies. “Logic dictates that if there is no possible way to win a battle, we should not risk the lives of our crews in a last desperate attempt to achieve the unachievable ”

“There's another battle being fought right now, Lieutenant,” Captain Reynolds sharply replies. “The battle on that station we're defending. Hundreds of Starfleet officers are fighting there for us. We won't abandon them. More lives are at stake here than yours and mine.”

“Captain. I did not mea---”

“I think I've made myself quite clear, Lieutenant.” Captain Reynolds sits down in her chair. As far as she's concerned, this argument is over. “The only way to guarantee a lost

battle is by giving up, and I'm not going to do that. The odds may be against us, but history has shown time and again that's never been a good reason to quit."

"As you wish, Captain," Lt. Sivar says with no apparent emotion. He ends the transmission and the viewscreen is filled with the fierce battle again.

A few Starfleet engineers are desperately attempting to fix the dark and quite shattered bridge of the *Kennedy* for at least a slight bit. Lt. Malin and Lt. Muntenaar are trying to keep up with the information their stations in front of the bridge keep feeding them, while Ensign Parkin is attempting every evasive maneuver he has ever learned at the Academy – not too long ago. Lt. Sivar is sitting on his chair as if it were any ordinary day, even though the bridge is shuddering violently enough to make even the most experienced hovercoaster tester feel a bit queasy.

"That first *Massal* sure is giving us a run for our money," Ensign Parkin says. "As if the second *Massal* isn't giving us enough trouble..."

"Direct your attention to your station, Ensign," Lt. Sivar says and he swivels his chair to face Ensign Parkin. "Use whatever weaponry we have left to attack that first upgraded *Massal*-class Altonoid starship." Lt. Sivar turns to face the viewscreen again. "Lieutenant Muntenaar, what is the status of the Altonoid vessel we are currently targeting?"

"It seems more like they're targeting us," Lt. Muntenaar replies, while a well-aimed phaser strike causes his console to spark. Sven Muntenaar bounces back, quickly runs a hand through his black hair to remove any smoldering sparks caught in it, and continues his report. "But their shields are down to below forty percent... I guess. I can't be sure. Our sensor arrays could use a little refit."

The *USS Kennedy* lines up its forward torpedo launchers and fires four elliptic photon torpedoes at the Altonoid vessel that was responsible for most of the *Kennedy*'s damage. The *Wolf* joins in on the attack; several photon torpedoes leave the *Wolf*'s weapon pod and race towards the *Massal*. After supporting the barrage of torpedoes with sufficient phaser fire, the *Massal* ceases fire.

The bridge of the *USS Kennedy* is still shaking after the last phaser hit. "They've stopped firing and their shields are almost down!" Lt. Muntenaar exclaims.

Before Lt. Sivar can give further orders, Chief Engineer Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman contacts the bridge again. "*That last phaser hit took our shields off-line. It will take a while to fix,*" they hear Soeteman's tired voice say. "*Our hull integrity is down to 12%. We are slowly losing power throughout the ship. Emergency force fields are going down one by one.*"

"Evacuate the affected sections," Lt. Sivar says.

"*That's the problem. We can't reach those sections. The comm system is down in some of the more damaged areas. Oh, there's one more thing: aft torpedo launchers have gone a bit awry. I recommend not to use them.*"

Lt. Sivar stares at the viewscreen, just like the rest of the bridge crew.

"Sir?"

Nobody responds. They're all staring at the *Massal* on the viewscreen. Its phaser wires are flashing on and off again. Streaks of light race through the wires...

Lt. Sivar is the first to break the silence, keeping his professionalism. "It would be wiser to get the shields back on-line, Commander." With a quick tap of a button, he expands the comm channel to every possible part of the ship. "All hands, brace for another Altonoid phaser strike."

"*I understand,*" Lt. Cmdr. Soeteman sighs, before closing the channel.

"Indeed," Lt. Sivar says and he raises an eyebrow. He turns to face Ensign Parkin again. "Fire everything we have got, Ensign. Focus the attack on one point of their phaser array."

Ensign Parkin hesitates for a brief moment, and then he complies with a resolute look on his young face.

Meanwhile, the *Wolf* and the *Sundance* are attacking the second *Massal*, but by now they have noticed that the first *Massal* is preparing for another colossal attack. The *Wolf* evades the second *Massal* and opens fire at the first one in an attempt to break off their potentially fatal phaser strike. The stationary *Massal* makes for an easy target, but its massive phaser array keeps charging.

“The *Massal*’s shields are down and its hull integrity has dropped to below 50%,” Ensign Daniels declares. “No change in their weapon status.”

“I can see that,” Captain Reynolds says as she witnesses the streaks of light racing through the phaser wires of the immense Altonoid ship. For some reason, though, the onslaught of photon torpedoes decreases in intensity and comes to a stop. “Keep firing those torpedoes, Commander Anderson,” Captain Reynolds calmly orders.

“Forward torpedo launchers on our weapon pod are completely empty now,” Commander Anderson replies. “Our bow torpedo launchers have a few torpedoes left, but they’ll need extensive repairs before we’ll be able to use them again.”

Captain Reynolds turns around to face Lt. Cmdr. Anderson, as if she cannot and will not believe what the Commander has just said. His reply in the form of a sad nod confirms his words. Momentarily defeated, Captain Reynolds faces the viewscreen with a worried look. She didn’t anticipate this...

On the damaged bridge of the *USS Kennedy*:

“Sir...” Lt. Muntenaar looks troubled. “Though our sensors still aren’t very accurate, I can confirm that the *Massal* is targeting us...”

“Needless to say we won’t make that, Sivar,” the blonde Trill Lt. Malin adds.

“Keep firing at the Altonoid warship,” Lt. Sivar says. “You all heard what Captain Reynolds said. We will not give up.”

Muntenaar raises his eyebrow at Malin, obviously impressed with Sivar’s newfound diligence.

The *USS Kennedy* rotates counter-clockwise to let every phaser array that’s still working unleash their fury on the *Massal*. The phaser strikes already start to knock hull plating off the buckling *Massal*, but the wires just keep on flashing.

“Turn us to port. Line up starboard torpedoes,” Captain Reynolds says, while she stands up on the dark bridge of the *USS Wolf*.

Cmdr. Anderson frantically types in the necessary commands. “Torpedoes lined up!”

“Fire!”

The two starboard torpedo launchers of the *USS Wolf* spit out four torpedoes each, which bombard the weakened hull of the *Massal* and blow up in fiery explosions.

“Their hull integrity is down to 28 percent!” Ensign Daniels shouts.

“Good. Line up aft torpedoes. Fire when ready,” Captain Reynolds says with apparent fighting spirit.

Ensign Daniels’ console starts beeping. “Now they’re targeting *us*!”

“I don’t know whether to laugh or cry,” Captain Reynolds says swiftly, beneath her breath. “Divert all power to aft shields!”

“Aft torpedoes lined up!” Lt. Cmdr. Anderson shouts. “Altonoid vessel is firing!”

“Fire aft torpedoes! Now!”

The streaks of light converge at one point on the *Massal*'s hull and form one enormous phaser burst. At that same moment, the aft launchers on the weapon pod of the *USS Wolf* unleash a salvo of photon torpedoes at the firing *Massal*.

The Altonoid phaser strike reaches the *USS Wolf* in a few milliseconds, and passes the photon torpedoes that are headed into the opposite direction. One torpedo grazes the phaser strike, upsetting the torpedo's guidance system, which causes it to make a few odd turns and explode harmlessly in open space.

However, The phaser beam slashes right through the aft shields of the *USS Wolf* as if they're non-existent, and it pounds on the *Wolf's* weapon pod that's still spitting out torpedoes. A photon torpedo that just left the pod gets struck and blows up. Its detonation adds to the already enormous power of the devastating phaser strike. Needless to say that the weapon pod can't handle this... It gets consumed by the resulting explosion. Every part of the pod that doesn't get vaporized instantly gets blown to pieces.

Everybody on board gets thrown off their feet. Some of them get sucked into open space immediately, while others crash into the nearest workstation or bulkhead. The closer the crewmembers are to the explosion, the smaller their chances of survival.

The fire caused by the exploding weapon pod gets extinguished rather quickly by the vacuum of space, but as the debris clears away, the severity of the damage becomes obvious. The weapon pod is just... gone. A very odd sight, since the missing pod changes the appearance of the catamaran-like hull drastically. This also does not have a positive influence on the structural integrity of the *Wolf*...

A dozen of photon torpedoes have made it to the *Massal*, however. They hit the *Massal* several seconds after the massive phaser attack, carve straight through the already damaged hull of the *Massal*, and explode from inside the enormous Altonoid vessel. The *Massal* can't take this battering. Consequentially, its structural integrity fails completely. The explosions from the detonating torpedoes are backed up by new explosions coming from within, which spread across the entire ship. Large sections of the outer hull tear off and the generated heat causes the enormous phaser wires to unravel themselves before they get consumed by flames.

Within seconds, the entire *Massal* disappears inside the sum of all the cascading explosions. In other words: the whole damn ship blows up!

Relatively small pieces of debris that manage to ride the shockwave escape the explosions and smash into the nearby ships and Station A-12, causing little damage. After the flames have drowned into nothingness, there is nothing left of the mighty Altonoid prototype but pieces of spreading debris and some dark stains on the surrounding ships.

Letor Fune curses while he witnesses the debris and dust softly impacting on the large window of the hostage room.

"It seems there is no such thing as false hope," Cmdr. Dennis Levine says as he stands up. Letor Fune takes a few mighty steps towards the Commander and forces him to sit down by pushing him over. Cmdr. Levine lands uncomfortably on the conference table. His blond hair is a complete mess now, but that only adds to his defiant look.

Commander Jansen checks to see if he's alright, while Letor Fune turns to face the fleet. "This changes nothing!" Letor Fune snarls.

Admiral Van Aken can't suppress a subtle, proud smile, even though his ship the *Wolf* has sustained heavy damage. Having your ship sustain heavy damage is always better than having it blow up altogether. Captain Duvivier, however, remains unmoved while he sits silently on the floor. He keeps his eyes fixed on his ship, the *Kennedy*, and waits for the inevitable continuation of the battle.

On the bridge of the *USS Kennedy*, Lt. Malin gives Lt. Muntenaar –who is seated right next to her- a cheerful look as she shakes her fist at the remains of the first *Massal*. “Yes! That’s one menace down!” Her optimism forms a great contrast with the dark and moody bridge.

“There’s still one left, unfortunately...” Lt. Muntenaar says. He keeps his demeanor professional as always, but he can’t suppress a modest smile.

“You are both correct,” Lt. Sivar says. “Though it is agreeable that one of the Altonoid vessels has been neutralized---”

“You mean blown to bits, sir.” Ensign Parkin smirks, and the rest of the small bridge crew excluding Sivar smiles too.

“---we must now focus on neutralizing the second upgraded *Massal*-class vessel,” Sivar continues.

*“This is Lieutenant Commander Soeteman calling the bridge.”*

“You may proceed, Commander,” Lt. Sivar says.

*“We’re ready for shore leave down here!”*

“We all are, Commander,” Lt. Malin says, still with a smile on her face.

*“However, I advise you to keep this ship out of battle for a while. We can’t take much more right now. We’re going to lose many crewmembers if those emergency force fields keep failing.”* Everyone listens carefully. *“And our main battery is still draining. We’re really missing that warp core over here...”*

“Alright, Commander,” Lt. Sivar says. “Please continue your efforts to contact crewmembers who are in hazardous areas. In the meantime, find a way to boost the main battery and allocate our resources to battle systems only. It would be wise to utilize the newly gained time by allowing our weapon systems to cool down.”

*“Yes sir. I’ll do the best I can here.”*

“Indeed. Time is of the essence.” Sivar looks to his right and sees an engineering Ensign trying to pick up a heavy piece of debris. “Let me help you with that, Ensign.” And with that, the Vulcan Lieutenant stands up and assists him.

Though the last massive phaser strike was aimed at the weapon pod, the bridge of the *USS Wolf* has also sustained a lot of damage. Most officers have retaken their stations by now and damage reports are flooding in. Multiple alerts go off simultaneously, but the crew are still a bit too stumped to do or say much of anything.

The first person to break the relative silence is the Captain, who’s hanging rather than sitting in her chair, still recovering from that major impact. “That’s it. It’s official: my hair is a mess now.” She sits up and requests a damage report, even though she knows it will consist only of bad news.

“Our weapon pod has been destroyed completely. Port and starboard torpedo launchers are the only launchers that are still functioning,” Lt. Cmdr. Anderson says as a wall console sends sparks at him. “Our shields are down and our hull integrity is down to eighteen percent.”

“Multiple decks have been severely damaged, especially the aft sections,” Lt. Stephanie Grant says, while she’s having trouble keeping up with the sheer number of casualty and damage reports coming in. “That phaser impact didn’t only take out your hair, Captain.”

Captain Reynolds smiles.

“Engines are off-line. We’re drifting,” Lt. Grant continues.

“Send every engineer to fix the engines,” Captain Reynolds orders. “And tell everyone on the ship that we’ve destroyed one of those Altonoid ships. We can all use a little morale boost.”

Lt. Grant replies with a nod. Suddenly, her console starts bleeping. “The *Kennedy* is hailing us. Text only. They are ‘forced to discontinue the current battle and have fallen back

for repairs'. They will 'offer assistance to combat the current predicament as soon as the status of the *USS Kennedy* improves sufficiently to be of valuabl---

"I get the main idea, Lieutenant," Capt. Reynolds interrupts. "That does sound like Lieutenant Sivar alright... It doesn't matter right now. We must repair our thrusters so we'll stop drifting. That's our number one priority right now."

Lt. Grant concentrates on her station again, but Cmdr. Anderson hesitates. "What about the *Sundance*?" he asks.

"They're on their own for now," Captain Reynolds sighs.

The saucer (and last remaining) section of the *USS Sundance* swoops past the *Massal* in a direct attacking maneuver. The *Sundance*'s surface is scorched in places, and visible hull breaches are beginning to form in vital areas.

The four Altonoid phaser beams create another hull breach in the belly of the *Sundance* and knock her out of control for a brief moment. The *Sundance* recovers quickly and lines up its bow to face the *Massal*. She fires four photon torpedoes, but it's a futile attempt. The four phaser beams keep pounding on the failing *Sundance*'s forward shields, until they go down entirely. This allows the four phaser beams to sear through the hull, and the single torpedo launcher on the bow of the ship gets blown to bits.

The Bolian Lieutenant Broitz has nothing to sit on anymore, since the Captain's chair lies broken on the floor. As a matter of fact, there are no chairs left standing on the entire bridge. The dark bridge is in shambles, just like the bridges of the *Wolf* and the *Kennedy*. Several officers remain lying on the floor or are silently hanging over one of the bridge railings. The normal lighting has gone off-line, so now the bridge is being lit by a strange mixture of light coming from the few working LCARS panels and the blue Multi Vector Assault Mode (MVAM) indicators. This combination of light makes Lt. Broitz's blue skin appear grey.

"Deflectors, shields and torpedo launchers are off-line!" Lt. Jena Roguez shouts. It's difficult to make herself heard with a nearby broken conduit hissing like an angry cat.

"Hull integrity?" Lt. Broitz shouts as he looks to his right, where the engineering officer should be. But he's not at his workstation; his motionless corpse lies next to the broken Captain's chair. Lt. Broitz also sees that the engineering wall panel isn't working anymore. It just... sparks a lot.

"What should we do?" the helm Ensign shouts.

Lt. Broitz has no idea, frankly. He never had to face a situation this dire in real life. Those simulations at the Academy weren't this stressful! His mind works like crazy for a moment while he frantically looks around and sees the chaos and destruction around him. Then he finally says, "Bring us about. Evasive maneuvers. Keep firing any working phaser array in range. Single bursts. Give them some cooling time." He turns around to pick up the Captain's chair and attempts to set it straight.

"Sir?" Lt. Roguez says as she sees the Bolian struggling with the chair.

"A commanding officer needs his chair," Broitz says. Sweat drips down from his forehead.

The saucer section of the *USS Sundance* turns around, fires an occasional phaser burst at the *Massal*, and attempts to avoid the four massive phaser beams by flying away in an erratic pattern. It's no use; the never-ceasing phaser fire breaches their shields with ease, and now the already weakened hull gets pounded on severely.

Then the arch-shaped aft lower hull plating collapses, and the four massive phaser beams slice right through the lowest few decks! The lights on the *Sundance* flicker as its lower warp engine explodes in a ball of flames. The ship itself appears to have remained largely intact, but that's only because most of the critical damage is obscured from view by the sides of the saucer.

Everyone (conscious or not) gets tossed around on the bridge of the *Sundance*. Lt. Broitz finds himself lying on top of his chair. He stands up carefully, looks around, and sees a lot of sparking consoles and few crewmates who return to their stations –or what’s left of it. The bridge is still dark as hell, with those ominous MVAM indicators as its only light source.

Broitz looks around, wondering how he’s going to clean up this mess they’ve gotten themselves into. He sees Lt. Roguez reaching for her wall panel workstation. “They’ve stopped firing at us!” She has to shout in order to be heard, with that ever-hissing conduit right next to her.

“Good,” Lt. Broitz says and he starts wrestling his chair again. “So why is the bridge still shaking?”

“I’m getting incomplete damage reports now,” Lt. Roguez says as she accesses the tactical wall panel in front of her. “Sir, we’re drifting and our lower decks have been blown off!”

“Oh dear...” Broitz says as he lifts his chair to where it should be.

“Hull breaches are tearing through the ship! Our decks are decompressing one by one!”

“Oh dear...” Broitz says as he fastens the chair. The bridge shakes more and more and an ever-growing rumbling sound is audible.

“Emergency force fields can’t keep up!”

The Captain’s chair is now quite adequately repaired.

“The hull breaches are tearing the ship apart! Soon they will reach the bridge! What should we do?!” Lt. Roguez screams. The hull breaches come closer, causing the rumbling to increase dramatically.

Lt. Broitz turns around to face the viewscreen with a determined look on his face. Somehow he has found new strength, while bulkheads, wall panels, and pillars around him are starting to show minor cracks. Lieutenant Broitz sits down, clutches both armrests of his Captain’s chair, sighs deeply, and says, “Alright...”

Just when he inhales to complete his sentence, the floor underneath his chair gives way and he and his newly repaired Captain’s chair sink right through it.

The *USS Sundance* drifts away from the *Massal* and the two other Starfleet vessels. All air, debris and the occasional crewmember are shoved out of the growing number of hull breaches that are spreading throughout the ship, and all lights on the ship go out one by one as the surrounding sections start to buckle.

Captain Stephan Rinckes looks even worse than he did when he fought the three Altonoids a little while back. His entire body aches, but that does nothing to stop him from searching for his First Officer. With his phaser rifle lifted, ready to take down any opposition, he opens a door that leads to a side room with a plain view of the stars outside. No battling starships in sight.

“Stars...” he sighs. “I must be getting close.” He checks if the room is occupied. No Commander Simons. No Altonoids. No nothing. Just an empty room with a nice view of the stars.

Then, from the left corner of the window, Captain Rinckes sees something moving. It’s the saucer of the *USS Sundance*, drifting and tilting forward! Rinckes sees that her hull is buckling. Some chunks of hull have already broken off in volatile explosions which are getting bigger and more destructive. The explosions spread further and further throughout the entire ship, until she can’t take it anymore. The top little warp nacelle is the last part that visibly breaks off before the entire vessel is torn to pieces in a final explosion. The *USS Sundance* is no more... Captain Rinckes has to watch helplessly as the remains of his ship spread outwards in a bright cloud.