

Advanced Copy

Ice Queen

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Advanced Copy

Introduction

Saturday, October 03, 2246

The Starship *Saratoga* limped along towards Earth after completing a very dangerous mission to a planet called Inea-Four. There, Captain Shawn Hackett, his first officer Commander Bill Morris, his tactical officer

Lieutenant Daniella Larson, and his new navigator Lieutenant Commander Tamora Benson negotiated with the hostile Ineans for technology to save the Earth from a runaway climate disaster. A disaster brought on by years of devastating wars and Earth's own Sun tearing itself apart in space.

Hackett had to bend the rules and disobey orders from the head of the fleet, Vice Admiral Griffin. He would pay for that when the ship returned to Earth. He needed to bend the rules in order to get the agreement signed and the plans for the technology to save Earth. He also needed to save his crew from a humiliating and deadly torture at the hands of the Ineans.

Even still, Morris had a dislocated shoulder, Larson suffered from cracked ribs when their transport crash landed on the *Saratoga*, and Benson was recovering from her injuries that had her bed ridden for the previous day.

The *Saratoga* was also heavily damaged. It limped along at reduced speed towards Earth as system after system failed. This left Commander Vincent O'Toole, the ships head engineer, sleepless and stressed to the limit as he and his staff worked round the clock to keep the ship together long enough to make it home.

Add to all of this, there had been no communication with Earth since the planet was ravaged by the worst solar storm ever recorded. It was a storm where a portion of the Sun tore itself away and struck Earth head on. Fire scorched the planet across Africa and across the Atlantic Ocean into South America and much of both continents continued to burn. The storm was being blamed for millions of deaths and a tsunami set off by a volcanic explosion on the island of La Palma in the Canary Islands. This tsunami slammed into the east coast of the North American Union leaving massive devastation along the entire coast.

There was still no word from the orbiting space station, or from any Earth government after three days. This left Hackett's crew tense as they wondered what awaited them when they made it back to Earth.

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Saturday, October 03, 2246

Captain Hackett was seated at a table in the *Saratoga*'s officers lounge. He sipped on a glass of wine while reviewing logs from all of his department heads. He remained concerned about the status of his ship and whether they would make it back to Earth. He was also concerned as to what awaited them when they arrived. He put his PDA down for a moment as a shadow crossed his table.

Lieutenant Commander Benson walked up to the table, "Mind if I join you?" she asked.

"Go right ahead," Hackett replied as he watched her wince in pain while gingerly settling into the seat.

She was still nursing her injuries from the transport crashing a few days ago. She was also still confused by what she had seen when she was supposedly dead. The thoughts of God sending her back to complete some sort of task puzzled her and left her searching for answers. This search led her to the ship's chapel where she had just spend the last two hours meditating over her cause. Still there were no answers and she began to wonder whether it was just a dream.

"How are you feeling?" He asked.

"Like I was run over by a truck and for good measure, it turned around and ran me over again."

"Care for a drink?" Hackett asked.

"Well, the doctor gave me instructions to lay off the alcohol while I'm taking pain killers, but I find that doctors tend to over react to such things." She replied with a slight grin.

"So, I take that as a yes?"

The waitress landed beside them at that moment and Benson looked up at her. "Double Scotch on the rocks."

The waitress grinned and walked away. She was not a full-time waitress of coarse, she actually was assigned to climate controls and worked in the lounge during her off hours as did many of the junior officers and enlisted personnel.

Hackett glanced at Benson, "I take it that the pain killers are not working?"

"Not as well as I would like. That is for certain. Maybe the combination will to the trick."

"Or land you back in medical."

"Or land me back in medical. It is a chance I'm willing to take."

They both laughed slightly.

The waitress returned with Benson's double Scotch and a plate of hors d'oeuvres.

"Compliments of Harold." she stated and off she went to the next table.

Benson reached toward the plate and picked up a buffalo style chicken wing and dipped it in the bleu cheese dip and proceeded to eat it.

"You do know that one was mine." Hackett stated with a straight face as he grabbed the next one.

"Hey, if there's food on the table and you're slow, then I'm not waiting."

She licked her fingers, "Besides, I'm freak'in starving."

"I can see that. When will the doctor clear you for duty?"

“He thinks another day, or so. I’m getting bored already.” She said while reaching for another buffalo wing.

Hackett handed her the Inean ambassador’s PDA that they had taken while on Inea. The ambassador had alluded that he left it behind for them to find. “Take a look at this. The ambassador left this out for us to find and the information is quite damning of the president and vice admiral.”

She took the PDA from Hackett and started reading. She looked up at Hackett almost instantly. “This is in English!”

“Yes. It was quite easy to change the language settings.” Hackett stated. He was proud of himself for figuring it out.

“They have English programmed into their devices.” she read a few paragraphs. “Oh, this is bad.”

“I plan on giving this to Admiral Hodges when we return.”

“This will shake the entire political structure of the NAU and all levels of our military if ten percent of this is true.” she said while reading on.

“Some of it is. I know with near one hundred percent certainty.”

Benson went to hand it back to Hackett, but he held up his hand. “No, go ahead, take it and read it. Make a copy and save it in a safe place. Just in case.”

“President Wakefield is working with the Ineans to overthrow Earth and allow the Ineans to take over the planet. This is powerful information.”

Benson noticed a crewman lurking nearby. He was listening in on their conversation and she slipped the PDA beneath the table. Hackett saw her looking over his shoulder and he turned quickly.

The crewman saw him turn and walked away briskly.

“Who was that?” Benson asked.

“I don’t know. It is time we found out.” Hackett was out of his seat and sprinting towards the crewman who bolted for the hatch. Several others went after them and out into the corridor. Hackett caught up to the crewman who turned and pointed a laser at the captain.

Hackett skidded to a stop, but it was too late. The laser fired and hit him in the right shoulder, sending him flying backwards to the floor. The crewman fired at two others who followed the captain and struck them both.

Two marines came up from behind the crewman and subdued him with minimal struggle.

Benson hobbled gingerly into the corridor and she was speaking into her wristwatch communicator. “Medical! We need medics near the officers lounge. The captain is down!”

“On our way!” came the response over the small speaker.

She pressed the face of her watch again, “bridge! We have shots fired by the officers lounge. The captain has been hit!”

“Understood.” replied Morris.

Warning lights blinked on followed by three tones. “This is Commander Morris, we have shots fired by the officers’ lounge. Security to the officers’ lounge.” he clicked off and was followed by three tones over the speaker. The warning lights stayed on to alert the crew that a situation was still happening and to be on guard.

Benson leaned over Hackett with a groan and rolled him over.

He winced in pain as fire radiated from his right shoulder. It was a sensation similar to a high voltage shock. His whole arm went numb and twitched from the jolt and if it had been to the center of his chest, he would be dead. The other two that were shot, would be okay this time.

The medics arrived and took the three injured officers to medical to be evaluated.

“What should we do with this?” one of the marines asked Benson as he yanked on the crewman’s arm harshly.

Benson went to reply when Lieutenant Malcolm Desai, the ships head of security arrived on the scene with two other heavily armed marines. “Take him to the brig and search him for any other weapons and or drugs that he may take to kill himself before we get answers from him.”

“Yes, sir.” The marines replied and they took the crewman away harshly.

“Are you okay?” Desai asked Benson.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I got here later than the others.” She thought about that response for a moment and realized she could have been splattered on the floor if she was a hundred percent.

The marines took the crewman to the brig and tossed him harshly into a holding cell and closed the barred door, locking it securely.

“You can’t treat me like this! I have rights!” the crewman stated as he sprang to his feet.

“You shot the captain. Be glad to be alive.” One of the guards said while reaching for his Glock pistol.

“The captain was shot?” a voice from the next cell.

Ambassador Wilcox lumbered to the door and gripped the barred door with both hands. He stared at the guard and waited for an answer.

“Yes, luckily for the captain, this piece of shit is a bad shot.” one marine stated and both laughed.

“That’s too bad.” Wilcox stated and he went back to his chair.

Wilcox had been arrested by Hackett while heading to Inea-Four when he tried to take control of the ship. Some felt he did it intentionally to avoid going to Inea. His only hope now was leniency from the president of the NAU, President Wakefield. He would have to do some begging though with his recent track record of lies and abuses which was causing pressure on the president and Vice Admiral Griffin.

The marines remained in the brig and waited for Lieutenant Desai to return.

2

Saturday October 4, 2246

Hackett was laid back on the exam table. His right arm still twitching as the nerves and muscles reacted to the high powered laser shot he received minutes before. He was in and out of consciousness during this time as the nurse prepared him to be examined by the doctor.

Benson leaned against the wall beside the hatch to the corridor. Above her head the red warning light continued to flash. She winced in pain from her leg and back which was excruciating and would take weeks to heal. However, she waited for the doctors to evaluate the captain. Her hand was in her pocket, holding the Inean PDA that was now crucial evidence against the president of the NAU (North American Union) and the head of the space fleet, Vice Admiral Griffin. She needed to protect this information which would now make her a target as well. The sooner she could pass this off to Admiral Hodges the better.

The head of the medical department, Doctor Alice Williams received a PDA from a nurse as she walked towards the captain. She studied the information as she stopped at the side of the exam table. The captain was still in and out of consciousness, but now was more awake than not. His right arm still twitching as well. "Nurse Cerra, get me the portable nerve stimulator please."

"Yes Doctor," the nurse replied and she walked away to find the instrument.

The doctor gave Hackett a shot in the neck and within a minute he was fully awake and looked at the nurse. "Doc?"

"Yes captain. You have been shot with a laser pistol. Other than your arm is there any other pain?"

"Um, I don't think so. I think it is just my shoulder." he tried to flex his arm, but it would not move the way he wanted.

"The tingling and twitching will go away slowly. The nerves and muscles in your shoulder and arm have been overloaded with electrical charges and it will take some time for them to get back to normal." Doctor

Williams stated as she watched his vital signs on the monitor beside the bed.

“Anyone else hurt?”

“Two others were shot as well before two marines over powered the crewman. They will be okay as well.”

“What is the ships status?” Hackett asked, fully aware of the red warning lights flashing.

The doctor nodded toward Benson who saw the doctor look her way.

Benson put her wrist down and hobbled toward the captain. She had been in contact with the bridge about the incident and a moment later the red warning lights stopped flashing. She leaned on the exam table as pain shot through her back.

Hackett sat up.

The nurse had returned with the nerve stimulator which Doctor Williams applied to his injured shoulder. She turned on the device and it hummed. His shoulder twitched slower and stopped after a few minutes. Next the doctor injected a few ounces of a clear liquid into his shoulder and watched as his skin changed from a deep red color to a more normal flesh tone. It would take a few days for the swelling and remaining redness to go away.

Doctor Williams held up the next syringe in front of Hackett. “This one is for joint pain. It could have an effect on your battle with the Inean spiders, so I want you to report anything out of the ordinary. Even...”

Hackett rolled his eyes which got the doctors attention.

She continued, “Even, Captain, if you think it is insignificant. Do you understand.” she stated firmly.

“You know I do Alice.”

“I have to ask because you are like a five year old sometimes.”

“Wow, I’ve grown up. Last week I was a three year old.” Hackett grinned after his sarcastic remark.

“Laugh all you want. Remember, you need to report in and I am counting on the lieutenant commander to keep you in line.”

“That should prove challenging.” he continued to grin at the doctor.

“Captain.” Benson regarded Hackett which took his attention away from the doctor.

“Lieutenant commander, what is the situation?”

“Sir, the gunman has been taken to the brig. Desai is getting ready to question him in a few minutes.” She said.

“I want to watch him in action.”

“Why is that?” Benson asked.

“His last prisoner, CPO Stout killed herself before we got answers. I want to be there before something happens to this one.” Hackett stated as he flexed his shoulder. The nerves were beginning to respond to his brain once again.

Doctor Williams looked over his vitals one more time. “Take it easy for the rest of the day Captain.”

“I can’t promise you anything doc.” he said. “I will let you know if I experience anything weird.”

Hackett pushed off the exam table and landed on his feet. He was a little wobbly and he steadied himself before walking away.

Benson followed him out into the corridor and they walked together, slowly, towards the elevator that would take them to deck three where the brig was located.

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Hackett and Benson joined Commander Morris in the small room overlooking the interrogation room. They stood in front of the one way glass and watched the crewman, Chief Warrant Officer level 3 (CWO3) Jorge Fadick. He was a recent addition to the crew before the Inea mission and was assigned to particle deflector controls as a diagnostic specialist. His short stint on the *Saratoga* had been uneventful until now.

Benson groped behind herself for a chair and sat carefully with a grunt. Morris and Hackett both glanced back at the sound and returned to looking forward when the head of security, Malcolm Desai entered the interrogation room.

Desai did not say anything yet as he dropped the growing folder on the table across from Fadick. He then placed a recorder on the table facing Fadick along with a biometric camera and display so Desai could monitor Fadick's responses to questions.

Desai finally took a seat opposite Fadick who remained expressionless and quiet.

“So, shooting the captain of the ship is a serious crime, don't you think?” Desai asked, hoping to start off slow and then push for answers.

“I didn't shoot anybody. I am entitled to a lawyer being present.” Fadick stated.

“There will be no lawyer while the ship is traveling under the threat of a terrorist plot to destroy the ship and murder the crew.” Desai said as his voice rose slightly.

“I wont answer your questions,” and Fadick crossed his arms and sat back in his seat.

“Is that so. We can make you talk. You do know this. So I have to ask one more time before I call the doctor and have him dope you up. Why did you shoot the captain?”

“I told you I didn't do it.”

“Why did you run out of the officer's lounge and shoot the captain?”

“I did no such thing.”

“What were you running from?”

“I was late for my shift.”

Desai got up from his chair and walked around the table, stopping behind Fadick. He waited a few seconds before continuing. "You are aware that CPO Stout was beat up and died while being questioned. And what of the body found in the coolant pipe leading to the main reactor. Now that you are in custody, how long do you expect to live once the others you are working with know you are here?"

Fadick glanced up at Desai who knew he was finally getting somewhere.

"You do know that they will come for you and kill you under the assumption you tweeted like a little bird. So why don't you work with us and tell me who you are working for and where the rest of the bombs are located?"

Fadick turned completely towards Desai now and Desai could tell by the readings on the biometric scanner that Fadick was nervous. Desai returned to his seat.

"Why did you shoot the captain?"

Fadick went to speak and hesitated.

Desai was becoming annoyed with his prisoner and fought the urge to reach across the table and grab him by the collar and beat him.

"Time is running out for you. I will go on ship-wide speaker and tell the crew that you have willingly given details of who was involved and that we are rounding up your accomplices. I estimate you will live a few more hours."

"You have to protect me!" Fadick exclaimed.

"You will be protected IF, you cooperate." Desai stated while leaning on the table.

"I...I...don't know." Fadick stammered.

"Fine have it your way." Desai pressed the face of his wristwatch. "Bridge, put me on ship-wide."

"Giovanella here, you are on ship-wide speaker lieutenant."

Pong, pong, pong tones played over the ships speakers.

"No! Wait, I'll tell you." stated Fadick in a panicked tone while fidgeting in his seat. "Protect me."

Hackett watched the exchange from the other side of the one-way glass and pressed his watch, "Giovanella, cancel ship-wide broadcast."

"Aye, sir."

Three more pongs and there was no message.

"Now, talk!" Desai commanded.

"Okay," Fadick took a deep breath. "The president is aware of the PDA that has come into the captain's possession."

On the other side of the window, Benson gripped the PDA firmly in her hand.

"What is so special about this PDA?" Desai asked.

"It contains conversations between the Inean ambassador, Ambassador Wilcox, the president and the vice admiral."

“Why is that bad?”

“I don’t know the details. All I know is that my orders are to destroy it and who ever has read it.”

“Orders from whom?”

Fadick hesitated for a moment.

“Orders from whom?” Desai asked again.

“Vice Admiral Griffin.” Fadick finally offered.

Desai glanced towards the one-way mirror for a moment and turned his attention back towards CWO3 Fadick.

“So, your orders from the vice admiral were to kill the captain? Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“Who else is working with you on the ship?”

“I am working alone.”

“That’s bullshit! You got very nervous when I was going to broadcast to the ship that you were talking. So, tell me who else is involved on the ship?”

Fadick paused again as he wrestled with his response.

“Fadick?”

“Um, yeah, um, it is Lieutenant Commander Benson.”

“Do you know what you are implying?”

“It is her.”

Both Hackett and Morris turned to look at Benson who was shocked by Fadick’s response.

“Captain, I am not involved with these people.” she replied while still in shock at being thrown in the middle of this mess.

Hackett reached forward and pressed a button on the wall. “Ask him how the vice admiral knew I had it and ask him how he knew I would have it in the officers lounge earlier.”

Desai held his hand over the earbud while the captain spoke to him.

“How did the vice admiral know the captain had this device?”

“I don’t know. Maybe Benson told him.”

“How did you know the captain had the device in the lounge earlier?”

“Benson told me she was meeting him there to discuss it.”

Hackett turned towards Morris, “He’s lying. I never told her I had it with me or what it contained until after she arrived.”

“Then who?” Morris asked.

“And why?” Benson added.

“There is only one other person who knew I had this. He was the one who showed me how to put this in English mode.”

“Who then?” Benson asked as she pushed herself out of the chair against her bodies wishes.

“I showed it to O’Toole.” Hackett stated. He was briefly feeling betrayed by a man who he felt was a friend. Hackett had always been a good judge of character, could that have failed him this time. The short answer was no. It was busy in the engine room and perhaps someone else had heard the discussion.

Hackett pressed the button on the wall again. “Who in engineering tipped him off?”

Desai turned towards Fadick. “Lieutenant Commander Benson has confessed to the captain that she is here to kill him, but she said someone in engineering is involved. Who is it?”

Fadick went to speak when he was cut off by Desai. “Just so you know, we have a name, so I will know you are lying if you tell me someone else.”

Fadick closed his mouth and thought for just a second and Desai knew the first name would have been a lie just as implicating Benson was a lie. What Fadick didn't know was that Desai knew it was a lie.

“It is Ensign Vitiello.”

Desai pressed his wristwatch. “Lieutenant Stoehr.”

“Stoehr, here.” came the voice of a gruff male over the watch’s small speaker.

“Go to engineering and discretely bring Ensign Vitiello here to be questioned.”

“Aye, sir. On our way.”

“Who else?”

“There are others, but I don’t report to them. They go through Vitiello, to get to me, and they used to rely on Stout until you killed her.”

“Glad to see my reputation is still up to par.”

“What if someone else on the ship now had the PDA.”

“They would be targeted next.” Fadick replied.

“Would you destroy the ship?”

“If need be. Actually there are bombs set to go off very soon If I don’t make my rounds to reset them.”

“Where are the bombs?” Desai asked impatiently.

“Three around the ship. I want to make a deal.”

“You are in no position to make any deals.” Desai stated with an angry edge in his voice.

“Actually I am. You see the first one is set to go off in-” he glanced at the clock on the wall. “Say twenty minutes.”

Hackett pressed the button on the wall again. “What does he want?”

Desai looked at Fadick and folded his hands on the desk. “So you have us over a barrel. What is it you want?”

Fadick smiled. “To have all charges dropped and I can go back to my duties like nothing ever happened.”

“Your duties? You mean, kill the captain?”

“Well, no. Not exactly.” he replied.

Hackett spoke into Desai’s ear. “Do it. Let him go, but not right away. Tell him we have to hold him until the others are rounded up or he would be a dead man walking.”

“Well, the captain has agreed to your terms. However, you are to be held until the others are secured in the brig. You don’t want word that you squealed while one of them is out there to kill you, right?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“Fine where is the first bomb and what is the reset code?”

Benson handed the PDA back to Hackett while Morris watched. “Sir, you may want this back.”

“Afraid of having a target painted on your back?” Hackett asked.

“No, I would understand if you don’t trust me. That’s all.”

“You hold on to it and make a copy and then give it to Morris. The more people that make copies means it becomes much harder for them to stop the information from coming out.”

“Yes, sir.” she said with a pained voice.

“Are you alright?”

“No, I think I’ll go to my quarters and lie down for a bit. My back is killing and nothing the doc gave me is working.”

“Fine, we’ll walk you there.” Hackett said.

“Actually captain, I will go with Desai to reset the first bomb and see how we can dispose of it.” Morris said and he waited for Hackett’s permission.

“Go ahead commander. I’ll be on the bridge soon.”

Morris exited the room as two guards took Fadick to a holding cell in the brig. He joined Desai and they rushed towards Fadick’s quarters.

Hackett guided Benson toward the elevators and down to deck five where her quarters were. They walked slowly and arrived at her door.

“Lock your door, rest and keep me posted.”

“Aye, sir.” she replied as two enlisted women walked by.

Benson went into her quarters and placed the PDA under her mattress. She laid on her bed, but could not find a comfortable position.

Morris and Desai, along with two armed marines entered Fadick’s quarters. They searched the room and eventually found a portable nuke in the bottom drawer of his dresser. The timer had counted down to eight minutes. Desai took the scrap of paper from his pocket and typed in the numbers written. The timer beeped and reset to eight hours.

“Take this to the flight deck while we find the others.” Desai said to the two marines. “Three more to

find in the next half hour.”

He and Morris exited the room and went in search for the second bomb.